$4.00

Winter 1987
19

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

Rice Design Alliance
Rice University
P.O. Box 1892
Houston, Texas 77251

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Houston, Texas
Permit No. 7549

Cite

Cover: *The Federal Land Bank (1929) meets Heritage Plaza (1987). Photo by Paul Hester.*

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The opinions expressed in *Cite* do not necessarily represent the views of the Board of Directors of the Rice Design Alliance.

Publication of this issue of *Cite* is supported in part by grants from the Brown Foundation and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston.

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OverCite

OA&D (the Office for Architecture and Design) was omitted from the list of underwriters for the Fight for Cite gala (see *Cite*, Fall 1987, page 6). OA&D and 3D/International were responsible for the wonderful environment. *Cite* regrets the error.

Big Cité Beat

Project for Commencement Hall, Rice Institute, c. 1910, Bertram Goodhue, architect

Palace of Abraxas, Marne-la-Vallee, 1978–1982, Ricardo Bofill, architect

☛ Bo-philia: Catalán architect **Ricardo Bofill** has been inked to design the new $16-million **Shepherd School of Music** at Rice. A visit to Bofill's super-columniated housing projects in and about Paris cinched the selection. The school will occupy a site beyond the Rice Memorial Center that was originally intended for Bertram Goodhue's mosque-like auditorium, aligned on axis with the sallyport of Ralph Adams Cram's administration building. Bo-peeks: Schematic designs may be in hand early next year and will be shown at the Farish Gallery. In the meantime, *cineastes* can gaze at Bofill's brave new villes and looming aeries in *Brazil* (which will be shown at The Museum of Fine Arts, 27 March, 7 PM, as part of the RDA film series) and in Eric Rohmer's just-released *L'Ami de Mon Amie*.

☛ Sic-transit: **O. Jack Mitchell** concludes his second five-year term as dean of the School of Architecture at Rice in June 1988. A longtime supporter of the Rice Design Alliance and *Cite* magazine, Mitchell will devote increased time to teaching as well as professional and civic activities. A search committee has been formed to seek a new dean.

☛ Eminence domain: The **Texas Society of Architects** conferred an honorary membership on arts patron **Dominique de Menil** at its 48th annual meeting in Houston. De Menil was cited for her vision in renewing the area of Montrose that encompasses the University of St. Thomas, Rothko Chapel, and The Menil Collection, and for the architectural company she has kept, from Philip Johnson to Renzo Piano. Investment-builder **John Hansen**, whose projects include improvements to Poe Elementary and Lanier Middle schools and the development of the Central Church of Christ to house the Montrose Branch of the Houston Public Library, was also made an honorary member. The **Armand Bayou Nature Center** was awarded a Citation of Honor. Elsewhere, **Leslie Davidson**, a former member of the RDA Board of Directors, received the **Young Architects Award** of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for 1987.

☛ Côte d'Bayou: **Robert A.M. Stern** is the current architect for developer **Gerald Hines**'s on-again, off-again swankienda planned to overlook Buffalo Bayou in River Oaks. His scheme, reported to share Mediterranean propensities with Ralph Adams Cram's nearby villa for Blanche and Cleveland Sewall of 1925, succeeds an earlier project by **Michael Graves** (see *Cite*, Winter 1984, page 3).

☛ Block-buster: November's tour of houses in Broadacres hosted by the **Rice Design Alliance** netted more than **200 new members** for the RDA. Kudos to Susan B. Keeton, Anne S. Bohnn, and Robert Morris who organized it.

Citelines

Trapping the Unseen Letting It Go

"Marking," cloister of Physics Building, Rice University, 1987, Robert Irwin

Robert Irwin prefers to find himself in the flux of visual phenomena. Resisting the easy categories of art labels, he is in a constant dialogue with issues that span across painting, architecture, urban planning, psychology, and philosophy. This dialogue flows with great ease from concept to reality, from Plato to Freud, to specific works of his own which often find their place in the environment of civic spaces.

Irwin is this year's Craig Francis Cullinan Visiting Professor of Fine Arts, Architecture, and Urban Planning at Rice University, a chair created by Nina Cullinan to honor her brother. Irwin recently visited the Rice campus to deliver his introductory lecture, "On the Nature of Abstraction," the first in a series of lectures that will continue in March, 1988 (see Winter Architecture Events, page 4). As a part of his involvement with the Rice community, Irwin proposed to devise some "interventions" for the campus grounds. After touring the campus, he settled on a project to "complete" some of the cloisters around the Academic Court using his "trademark" scrim material. Scrim is a transluscent fabric used in the theater to create a kind of visual veil which obscures and softens objects by catching and reflecting light on its surface. Irwin has been using scrims for the last seventeen years. One of his most memorable installations was at a project site in Venice, California in 1980; but as early as 1970 he had installed an interior scrim in a retrospective show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The scrims hung by Irwin at Rice in October are the beginning of a work that will expand, move, and change, according to William A. Camfield, chairman of the Rice Art and Art History Department. In the spring the installations are expected to move into the interiors of some buildings. Already there is a hint of things to come in the Dean's Conference Room in Anderson Hall, where Irwin has placed a dark adhesive translucent film simulating an opening in an existing window pane.

Irwin likes to respond to the changing conditions of the sites he chooses – to create what he calls "site specific" works. The architecture on the Rice campus, with its well-ordered intervals of volumes and voids, and the rhythmic punctuations afforded by doors and windows, inspired him to vary the use of the single panel scrim by incorporating into them windows, doors, and lines. Irwin likes to surprise himself with these new perceptions that are revealed by a new set of circumstances. Irwin chose the name "markings" for his works at Rice, perhaps because it has a less aggressive connotation than "interventions." Ironically, even though each of the installation sites was carefully selected so as to not interfere with the students' circulation, one of the scrims was torn down, as if in protest. According to Camfield, it became apparent upon closer examination that the scrim was blocking the flow of an obscure path, which was not obvious at first, because one had to duck under a bush to pass through the arch. Always open to suggestions and interventions from real life, Irwin decided to make a door through that scrim when it was reinstalled.

While Irwin was working on campus, the students chatted with him. Some asked, "What is it?" – a question he refuses to answer. He says naming a thing doesn't make it any clearer. "What is it?" is simply not the right question for an art which resists interpretation and calls for direct confrontation and experience.

Irwin is more interested in dialogue than in set concepts and that dialogue involves people, structures, and spaces with perception, change, time, reality, and conception. Using minimal means he seems to trap a threshold of invisibility. But in trapping the almost invisible aspects of phenomena, he does not fix them, as most traditional artists would. Intensely aware of the changing essence of the phenomenal works, he chooses to reveal its passage through time and circumstance, inviting continual discoveries by the viewer.

Surpik Angelini

"Marking," cloister between Lovett Hall and Sewall Hall, Rice University, 1987, Robert Irwin

"Marking," cloister between Fondren Library and Anderson Hall, Rice University, 1987, Robert Irwin

Winter Architecture Events

Rice Design Alliance
P.O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251-1892, 713/524-6297
10 Jan-27 March – "Cinemarchitecture," a film series organized by the Rice Design Alliance and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Sundays at 7 PM; fee is $2 for RDA and MFA members, students, and senior citizens; $3 others.
10 Jan: *The Belly of an Architect* (Peter Greenaway, 1987).
17 Jan: *Gaudi* (Hiroshi Teshigahara, 1985); *Mammame* (Raul Ruiz, 1985).
24 Jan: *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914).
31 Jan: *The Fountainhead* (King Vidor, 1949).
7 Feb: *Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967).
21 Feb: *Dodsworth* (William Wyler, 1936).
28 Feb: *Fury is a Feeling Too* (Cynthia Beatt, 1983). *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927).
6 March: *L'Architecture D'Aujourd'Hui* (Pierre Chenal, 1931); *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (Jean Renoir, 1935).
13 March: *The Architecture of Mies van der Rohe* (Michael Blackwood, 1986); *Strangers When We Meet* (Richard Quine, 1958).
20 March: *L'Inhumaine* (Marcel L'Herbier, 1924).
27 March: *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam, 1984).

1988 Shartle Symposium – Presented by The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in cooperation with the Rice Design Alliance, the Shartle Symposium will focus on buildings for art museums. Pontus Hulten, director of the Palazzo Grassi museum of modern art in Venice, and founding director of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and the Pompidou Center in Paris, will give the keynote address Friday evening, **25 March**. The following day will be devoted to presentations by architects Hans Hollein, Arata Isozaki, and Charles Moore and panels including critics and museum professionals. The symposium will coincide with the exhibition of new museum architecture from the Federal Republic of Germany at the Farish Gallery.

For information about both events, telephone the Rice Design Alliance.

Farish Gallery
M.D. Anderson Hall, Rice University, 713/527-4870
7-31 Jan, 1988 – "Alexander Rodchenko: Works on Paper." Drawings, collages and photographs by the Constructivist artist from the Shchusev Architectural Museum, Moscow, and other collections.
4 Feb-2 March – Exhibition of color photographs of buildings in northern Italy by Danny Samuels.
8 March-15 Apr – Exhibition: "New Museums in the Federal Republic of Germany." Models, drawings, and photographs of buildings by Stirling, Hollein, Ungers, Meier, and others. Organized by the Museum of Architecture, Frankfurt, and circulated by the Goethe Institute.

School of Architecture, Rice University
713/527-4870
Dean Search Lecture Series – Ten nationally recognized architects and academics will give presentations on successive Mondays from late January until April (exact dates to be announced); 8 PM, Sewall Hall, Room 301, Rice University campus; admission free.
7, 14, 21, and 28 March – Craig Francis Cullinan Visiting Professor Robert Irwin Lecture Series, 7 PM, Sewall Hall, Room 301; admission free, open to the public.


Waltraud Krase

New State Gallery, Stuttgart, 1977–1982, James Stirling and Michael Wilford, architects; interior of rotunda with sunken porch, from exhibition at the Farish Gallery, 8 March–15 April.

Greater Houston Preservation Alliance
Guided walking tours of the Main Street-Market Square Historic District usually scheduled the third Wednesday of every month; group tours available upon request. Fee is $1; meet at noon at the corner of Preston and Milam. For more information, call Barthel Truxillo at 713/861-6236.

Reclaiming Houston Downtown: New Directions for the Main Street-Market Square District
21-22 Jan, 1988 – Public conference. Economic diversification and promotion of new investment opportunities in downtown commercial historic districts will be addressed. Participants include Dana Crawford (Larimer Square, Denver), Paula P. Turner (West End, Dallas), Don S. Vaughn (Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Council), Richard Andrews (National Endowment for the Arts), and Anice Read (Texas Main Street Office). Concluding the event will be a series of discussion groups focused on specific problems and potential of Main Street-Market Square district, coordinated by private and public sector leaders, in which attendees will participate. Organized by Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, Houston Archeological and Historical Commission, Houston Chapter/AIA, RDA, DiverseWorks, Central Houston, Inc., and Downtown Houston Association. Registration fee $25. For information, telephone Houston Chapter/AIA, 622-2081.

Cinemarchitecture

Cinemarchitecture, a film series organized by the Rice Design Alliance and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston will be viewed every Sunday at 7 PM from 10 January through 27 March 1988. The 11-week series proposes to examine the theme, architecture in cinema, from three points of view.

First is the architecture of set design: the illusion of past, present, or future as conveyed by the sets is often a compelling and dramatic element of the story. In Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) the great Italian operatic tradition informs the exquisite re-creations of ancient Carthage and Rome in which the original macho-man, Maciste, is given room to flex. The romance and horror of a future in which the man-made environment takes over is a recurring film theme, initiated most strikingly in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and brought to a paroxysm in Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1984). Modern styling, giving a film the feeling of being "more now than now," was successfully introduced by Marcel L'Herbier in *L'Inhumaine* (1924), with decor by Rob Mallet-Stevens, Pierre Chareau, and Fernand Leger. A decade later Hollywood got caught up in an art direction of streamlined modernism; films such as William Wyler's *Dodsworth* (1936) were particularly successful at developing character through environment. Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967) uses architecture as the plot device by satirizing the foibles of modern construction. Two avant-garde films, *Mammame* (1987) by Raul Ruiz and *Fury Is A Feeling Too* (1983) by Cynthia Beatt, rely on a piece of architecture as a structuring device for the narrative.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Film Still Archives

Set for *L'Inhumaine*, 1924, Rob Mallet-Stevens, designer

The second theme is less common: the architect as hero. The prime example is King Vidor's *The Fountainhead* (1949), in which Gary Cooper plays the architect Howard Roark, Ayn Rand's vessel for the philosophy of egotism. The "modernist" sets outraged many American architects. The dialogue, a weird blend of dogma and melodrama, makes this the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* of architecture films. Richard Quine's *Strangers When We Meet* (1960), set in a contemporary suburb, is a much more realistic portrayal of the problems with loving an architect. Peter Greenaway's *The Belly Of An Architect* (1987) mixes the glories of Rome and the French 18th-century visionary Claude-Nicolas Ledoux with the chaos of a contemporary American architect's life in America.

The final theme is architecture in the documentary. In Pierre Chenal's *L'Architecture D'Aujourd'Hui* (1931) Le Corbusier lets loose his strident doctrine for the reform of architecture and urbanism. Michael Blackwood has produced some of the best films about contemporary architectural luminaries, including *Mies* (1986). Perhaps the best architectural documentary ever filmed is Hiroshi Teshingahara's *Antonio Gaudi* (1984), a film without a text that relies solely on the union of camera and subject.

A piano accompanist will perform for the silent films. RDA and MFA members will receive a discount on series tickets; please see "Winter Architecture Events," page 4, for the film schedule.

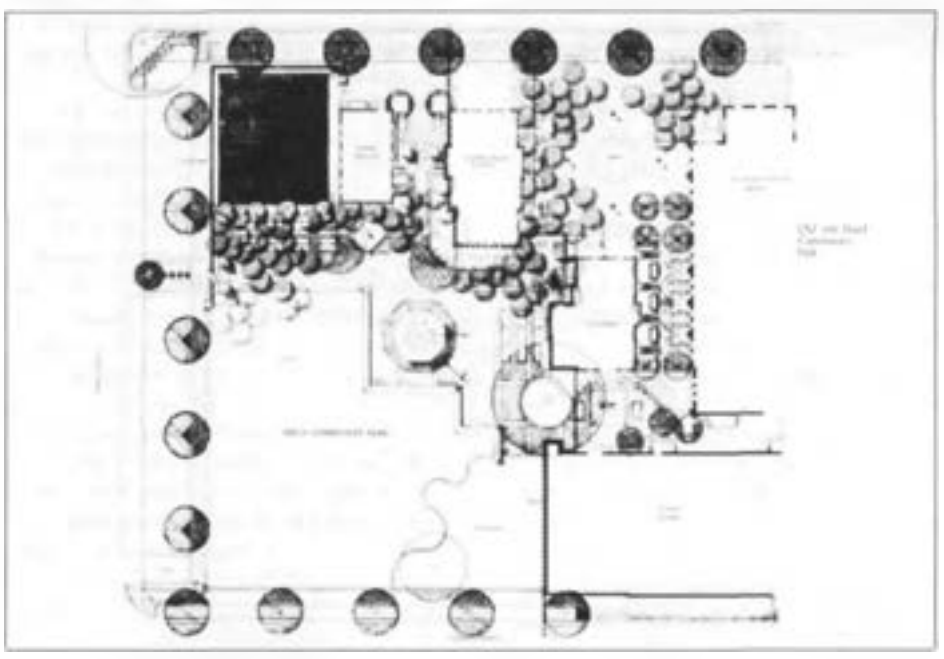
Richard Ingersoll

Sixth Ward Park

With slow and steady determination, Sixth Ward, the historic neighborhood composed of Houston's oldest extant Victorian houses, is making progress towards the creation of a new public park. The park both commemorates the past and envisions the future. The site has been officially designated as an "art park," a showcase for public art such as the monumental mural, "A United Community" (Sylvia Orosco and Pio Pulido, 1985), next to St. Joseph's Church, which is presently its focal point. Projects planned for the future include sidewalk art, a sculptural fountain, more murals, and a pavilion stage for performances.

The idea of an "art park," however, is just another prop on a stage already impressively set. The boundaries of the Sixth Ward offer a panorama of significant periods in the history of Houston's settlement: to the east, Allen's Landing, Market Square, and the soaring corporate towers of downtown; to the north, Washington Avenue; to the south, Memorial Drive and Buffalo Bayou; and to the west, Glenwood Cemetery, the burial ground for members of some of Houston's oldest families. The park itself, bounded by Kane, Lubbock, Trinity, and Houston streets, shares a block with St. Joseph's Church, the oldest church building in the Sixth Ward.

The real drama of Sixth Ward Park is found in the unlikely collaboration of many generous and talented persons, which began two years ago. Instead of developing the site as a commercial venture (i.e., a parking lot), St. Joseph's congregation decided to give the lot to the neighborhood for a park. The church leased the land to the Multi-Ethnic Cultural Arts Committee (MECA), a social outreach group that organizes special education programs for the Hispanic community. A class of landscape architecture students from Texas A&M University developed a program and schematic design for the park based on information gathered from the neighborhood's residents. The students addressed themselves to a larger project than simply the design of the park itself, integrating the church grounds and buildings into the park site. The students' plan transformed the block into a multipurpose community center, serving as a meeting place and playground, combining in the design aspects of the ceremonial and informal. The concept was made a reality through design services donated by Scott Slaney, of the Slaney Santana Group, and the contributions of numerous other consultants. MECA turned to the Sixth Ward for manpower and enthusiasm, resourcefully using the park as an opportunity to train and employ young people in the neighborhood. So far, these efforts have resulted in the completion of a basketball court, the renovation of two small houses donated to MECA for the park, and the construction of several colorful entry pavilions.



Sixth Ward Park, Slaney Santana Group, landscape architects, 1987

After a long period of neglect, the Sixth Ward, which has been at one time or another home to every ethnic group that ever settled in Houston, is finally beginning to be rehabilitated. Private homes, shops, and institutions are being rejuvenated. Long before St. Joseph's Church was built, the Diocese of Galveston-Houston had established a presence for a church in the neighborhood by setting up a school in an old house on the present site. The school became a meeting place and a parish, surviving the hurricane of 1900, the Depression years, and later, the flight of its white, middle-class congregation from the inner city. The spirit of preservation and restoration in the Sixth Ward was reborn ten years ago, in the midst of rapid commercial displacement in the neighborhood, with the institution of the St. Joseph's Old Sixth Ward Multi-Ethnic Festival. Annually the church grounds and surrounding streets become the site for a city-wide celebration of Houston's cultural diversity.

The completion of Sixth Ward Park will reinforce and solidify the sense of social cooperation fostered by the festival, symbolizing the efforts of MECA to involve the community in the planning and construction of this vision. The area around the park portrays a different vision: a synagogue turned into a bail-bonds business, speculative office buildings, parking lots interrupting the fabric of the neighborhood, and metal shed buildings standing on weed-choked lots. History in Houston is indeed a series of sharp discontinuities, of the abandonment and subsequent rediscovery of ideals.

Sixth Ward Park is fortuitously located in the heart of the neighborhood it serves. Its siting demands that the park be more than just a piece of greenery. Furnished with the ruins and the monuments of the neighborhood, it promises to be a reminder of the Sixth Ward's history, as well as a focal point of public art and social change.

Ingrid Go

Pope and Circumstance

Event-specific structures occupy a rarely discussed sector of architectural production. Such structures, set in the context of an incident or episode of public importance, usually exist for only a short period of time. Yet they often exhibit uncommonly forceful architectural ideas.

The realized, but sadly never used, background for the Papal Mass in San Antonio was just such a structure. The "tower scheme," designed by Alamo Architects and McChesney Design of San Antonio, challenged the reductive way most buildings are designed at a time when the social significance of figuration is receiving less and less attention.

The frontispiece was erected for the nationally televised Mass of Reconciliation celebrated by Pope John Paul II during his visit to the Archdiocese of San Antonio. It was essential that the design express regional architectural traditions and at the same time recognize symbolically forms that evoked Roman architectural traditions.

The flanking towers imply familiar European church forms while embracing the regionally derived mission form of the central section. Scaffolding and banners avoided the problem of mimicking permanent construction with impermanent materials and reinforced the double reading of the structure: backdrop-building and Rome-San Antonio. The linearity of the scaffolding, which appeared "as a drawing in the air," was modulated by the fabric banners. This created a stained-glass window effect that worked well to anchor the platform and make it seem bigger on the flat, open site.

The colorful, cut-paper, folk-art imagery of the banners contributed to the meeting of European and New World traditions. Roses, a universal symbol of welcome, referred to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of the New World; they cascaded down the banners to the center cross which represented the Holy Spirit. Hands – helping hands – represented "unity in the work of service" and referred to one of the most salient aspects of mass, the manual action of the hands of the celebrant. It was an unusually powerful collaboration of graphic and architectural design. All forms were inflected toward the center of the platform and were scaled to present a consistent visual impression from many distances.

Forty-eight hours before the arrival of the Pope a freak wind tumbled the towers but spared the platform. An earlier design,

Frontispiece for the Papal Mass, 1987. Alamo Architects and McChesney Design, architects

constructed from pylon banners intended to mark access to the site, was substituted as a replacement for the backdrop. Although it stood for only a couple of days, the ingenuity of the "tower scheme" extracted more from less without a sacrifice of coherence and meaning.

D. Andrew Vernooy

Banner District

What began out of a concern for the uninspired tinsel trees that have adorned Houston's central business district every holiday season for many years, has, through much lobbying, fundraising, and design effort, given downtown its present corridors of color. The banner program, brainchild of Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc.'s Street Decorations Committee, headed by Antony Harbour, managing principal of Gensler and Associates/Architects, was inaugurated two years ago during the holiday season. The original intent to improve city-owned Christmas decorations was coupled with a desire to unify downtown's diverse streetscape and provide a festive atmosphere throughout the year. Since its inception, the program's scope has tripled its original 40-banner set to the present collection of six different graphic design iterations.

There is a long history of using fabric and color to decorate streets. Pictorial evidence of tapestries adorning streets on special occasions survives from as far back as the 16th century. Museums and theaters have long used on-site banners as advertisements. Chicago was one of the first cities to install banners announcing events at public institutions along city streets. But in Houston, with the new sign ordinance, there was initial sensitivity toward allowing "signs" in the public right-of-way, especially if they could be construed as carrying an advertising message. For this reason, the city's legal department closely scrutinized the parameters for banner design, and determined that words would be allowed only if they constituted an essential part of the graphic design and could not be construed as advertising. Houston City Council passed an ordinance establishing the "Banner District" concept, overriding the sign ordinance within designated areas.

For the most part, the banners have been event oriented. The initial holiday set of December 1985 was followed by banners coinciding with the Olympic Festival, the Wortham Theater Center opening, the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, and the Italian Festival. A "Celebrate Houston" set, which is not event specific, was in place during the Houston Festival.

The program has been subject to some technical difficulties. The wind, which can be violent along the Louisiana Street corridor, consistently shreds banners in front of the Tenneco, One Shell, Allied, and Interfirst buildings, resulting in an unfortunate gap in the visual continuity of banners along that street. The sun also has a deleterious effect, causing color fading, a problem exacerbated by requiring a background color which is not available in the most durable acrylic fabric.

Financed entirely by private-sector monies, solicited and coordinated by Central Houston, Inc., the banner program has grown substantially in the past two years. There is talk of expanding the installations to the Market Square area, as well as creating a banner district for the airport corridor. One possibility currently under discussion creates a tax assessment district, assessing all downtown building owners for the maintenance and expansion of the banners. This would ensure perpetuation of the program and spread the cost equitably within the district.

An evaluation of the the current banner program yields these thoughts. The banners are most effective when they create a visual compression of a street's axis. This requires positioning in tight succession on both sides of the street for several blocks. Strong field colors generally work better than pastels or white; the latter can be lost against sky and buildings. The bilateral composition of the banner framework makes symmetrical designs problematic, as the center of the composition is occupied by a light pole.

There are many challenges for this form of street decoration. Beyond the technical problems – the continual requirement for financial sponsorship and the trial-and-error nature of the production process – there is also the need to cycle the banners.

Santa Claus arrives at Smith and Texas

At best, the banners provide a sense of newness, change, and excitement downtown. These qualities may be less forthcoming in the near future, as a period of major public-building openings and centennial celebrations comes to a close. One current proposal shifts the design orientation of the banners from events to seasons. Such an approach could provide a continual source for renewal.

Suzanne Labarthe

Around the Bend

On 27 September, Dreyfus Construction Company began breaking ground on the banks of Buffalo Bayou just below the Wortham Theater Center. In roughly two years, according to schedule, the initial phase of Houston's Sesquicentennial Park will open, and the city's first public project awarded through a design competition will become reality (see "The Sesquicentennial Design Competition, *Cite*, Fall 1986).

Team Hou, the winning architects, have designed the park as a series of "episodes." At The Grand Entrance, sited adjacent to the Wortham's Ray C. Fish Plaza, a path, beginning at The Buffalo Pavilion, proceeds along The Promenade at the base of the theater's west façade, encircles The Commons at the rear of the house, and crosses the bayou over the Preston Avenue Bridge to end, on the opposite bank, at The Bicentennial Drum.

The Grand Entrance, constituting the park's initial phase, has undergone a few changes since the competition. The Buffalo Pavilion, which defines this main entrance, initially contained the sculpture of a white buffalo for which, according to tale, the bayou was named. However, the final design for the sculpture has not been determined, and it will not be in place when Phase I is completed. A gatehouse offered as an additional package to the initial phase has been funded and will serve to orient entrance from Texas Avenue to the pavilion as well as to mark the landing for bayou craft.

Phases I and II of the park are undergoing study and are being revised.

In the catalogue of the Sesquicentennial Park Competition (published by Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc., the non-profit group managing the park's design), Robert Campbell, architecture critic for the *Boston Globe*, points out that the bayou, in its present state, is so different from downtown Houston that they create a dialogue with each other. This complexity, typical of the unaddressed city edge, is an essential characteristic of Houston. As the Buffalo Bayou Task Force and Central Houston, Inc. continue to develop the Linear Park Plan along the bayou and construction continues on the Sesquicentennial Park, it will be interesting to see to what extent this complexity and the mystery of Buffalo Bayou remain.

Douglas Sprunt

The UH Drawing Collection

For the past nine months, members of the faculty of the College of Architecture at the University of Houston have been working to establish an archive of drawings by significant architects. Funds for the collection are a part of the budget from the university's art acquisition program, which sets aside 1 percent of the construction cost for new buildings for the purchase of works of art. The majority of the Architecture Building's art allocation fund was used to purchase the pair of pink Laurentian granite benches by Scott Burton, which flank the entrance to the building. Although the collection of drawings will provide an opportunity to see significant art work for those who use and visit the building, its primary goal will be that of a teaching tool. Students will be able to view different drawing techniques, resulting from a variety of issues and design processes that are a part of important architectural projects.

The faculty has been contacting internationally recognized architects who have made important contributions to the College of Architecture, to the City of Houston, or to the profession of architecture, through their classroom or professional work. Each architect is being asked to donate a drawing of his or her selection, while the college pays for framing and curatorial costs.

To date, 38 drawings have been acquired from 29 architects (some donating more than one drawing). Commitments from an additional 23 architects also have been received. The college's goal is to achieve a collection of approximately 120 drawings, representing the leading architects from around the world.

The Drawing Collection will be exhibited in the spring, and a symposium in architectural drawing will be held. The college has received a $6,500 grant by the Braitmaier Foundation to be used for a catalogue of the collection.

All of the drawings are placed in secure frames in public places (the library, studios, student commons, and corridors), making them accessible to student and faculty on an everyday basis as a resource for developing a deeper understanding of how architects shape their work.

Robert Timme

View south, Kirby Drive

Walking Houston

View north, Kirby Drive

And just as one inhabits an apartment, and makes it comfortable, by living in it instead of just using it for sleeping, eating, and working, so one inhabits a city by strolling through it without aim or purpose. . .
– Hannah Arendt

Walkers exist in Houston, but from the city's point of view they are negligible and don't count since they are mostly accidents and mistakes: the stubborn, the inconvenienced, the poor.

In this sense, in the way in which Hannah Arendt means it, Houston is a mostly uninhabited (and perhaps uninhabitable) city, since almost no one seems to stroll through it either by day or by night, taking one's time to explore and enjoy it, leisurely looking around and peering into windows and arcades. The central emblematic figure of Walter Benjamin's work, the 19th-century Baudelairean character of the flâneur – the aimless walker, the man committed to purposeless strolling – seems obsolete and faintly suspicious in a city like Houston. The two climates (one natural, one economic) make the walker in this city seem like an old-fashioned concept, slightly comical or even vaguely European, an outsider, a tourist of our reality. To be on foot is to be miniaturized and noticeable, something to be remarked upon, an isolated figure in a grand, man-made landscape. The city tends to extend out into wide-open space or else to veer skyward suddenly – in either case, it dwarfs the person on foot and makes him seem out of place. To be sure, walkers exist in Houston, but from the city's point of view they are negligible and don't count since they are mostly accidents and mistakes: the stubborn, the inconvenienced, the poor. Sidewalks may exist, but Houston doesn't lend itself easily to aimless strolling.

It seems that even our neighborhoods, supposedly our most habitable places, are ambivalent about walkers. In my own neighborhood, for example, on the outer skirts of The Village, the sidewalks extend only in one direction. They run east and west but not north or south, as if we were meant to promenade one way and not the other, to go up and down our block but not to cross into other people's. Does this mean that we are only half a neighborhood? To get to The Village itself – that nostalgic, one-story, commercial emblem of a previous time – one has to brave the intermittent traffic on Morningside on foot, or else decide to get into the car and drive. Most people choose to drive.

Of course, most of us do like to walk in the city at one time or another. I myself like to stroll into The Village late at night, though only the photocopy place and the drugstore stay open 24 hours. In the daytime, I sometimes like the mildly perverse pleasure of walking the strip on Kirby, between Holcombe and Richmond, a man with a briefcase moving alongside the traffic past the low commercial structures and the drive-in banks, the gas stations, and the long row of fast-food joints, the tiny strip shopping centers that once were wooded areas. I like the energy and the relentless urban quality of walking on Kirby, but it's certainly not an inviting or a common walk. In fact, aside from a few desultory teenagers, I seldom pass anyone else on the sidewalk.

My point, obvious to anyone who either visits or lives here, is that Houston doesn't belong to the walker; it doesn't give itself up to him. This isn't a value judgment; it's a reality we have created. We drive everywhere – even to take our walks. We drive, for example, to walk in the park or through the zoo. We drive in order to stroll through the bird sanctuary behind the church on Memorial Drive. We drive so that we can linger amongst the stone angels in the beautiful little gated cemetary on Allen Parkway. We drive to go on architectural tours of downtown.

To find a reasonable number of other walkers, one almost has to join the hip teenage sideshow that bottles up Westheimer on Friday and Saturday nights (a special case), or descend into the maze of downtown tunnels on a weekday lunch hour (though, even then, the nature of the shops discourages lingering), or drive to one of the shopping malls on a weekend afternoon. (I am thinking of leisurely strollers, not those intent quasi-athletes in headphones who walk for exercise, stretching out along the bayou or circling the Rice campus like joggers moving in slow-motion.) Though I personally prefer the low-level strip center, the large indoor shopping mall is clearly one of the genuine places of refuge for other people who like to walk – teenagers, women with small children, retirees. It is a place where people congregate in order to stroll around idly. If, as Walter Benjamin thought, the department store is the last practical joke on the flâneur, converting his leisurely curiosity into commodity circulation, then surely the Galleria is a full-fledged, five-act comedy.

After we leave the mall, we usually get back into our automobiles and drive through the city. And maybe that is the way we really inhabit our place – through windows. One sees Houston best from moving cars or from the windows of office buildings, singular moments of steel and glass, a radiant, moody, opaque, postmodern beauty looming up in the distance or declaring itself dramatically from the highway.

Edward Hirsch

Citesurvey

The Texas Commerce Tower

Joel Warren Barna

Wolfgang Hoyt

Aperture at top

The Texas Commerce Tower at 2200 Ross Avenue in Dallas is a 55-story, 1.2 million square-foot tower designed by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill of Houston and built by the Trammell Crow Company. Begun in 1984 and officially opened in September 1987 (a few weeks after Cadillac Fairview's big, bland Momentum Place, designed by John Burgee Architects with Philip Johnson), it probably will be the last major building to go up in a Texas downtown for some time. All the better, because Texas Commerce Tower, while not entirely on target from top to bottom, is a remarkable building.

Start at the top: its sculpted glass-clad curves and its racy 74-by-27-foot keyhole. None of the classical or neo-Gothic references employed by other postmodernists here – SOM went straight for a more viscerally entertaining effect, somewhere between sci-fi fantasy (like its unsuccessful entry in the Southwest Tower Competition in 1982) and the Japanese Metabolist school of the 1960s. It is a riskier, but more successful, top than the pyramid of glass adorning the nearby LTV Centre, designed by SOM for the same clients and completed in 1984. One wonders, though: Who is supposed to look through the void at the top? And at what?

The middle stretch of tower, between the top and the six-story, mahogany-colored granite base, finished precisely and soberly in rose-gray Salamandra granite and pinkish glass, is perhaps a trifle broad and boxy in front elevation, although the side elevations are pleasingly slim. The base and mid-tower section, with their SOM-signature precision, work well in balancing the vaudeville of the roof. And they incorporate a number of references to the context of the building that make it a little less idiosyncratic looking. These include columns set at a 45-degree angle to the surface of the base, which, like the angled vertical stripe of glass rising from base to top on the front and side elevations, recall the prismatic skin of the LTV Centre; a concave glass façade element above the entrance and rondels echoing features of The Crescent, facing Texas Commerce Tower across the southern edge of downtown; and window proportions that harmonize with the adjacent St. Paul Tower. At ground level, there are even chunky concrete flag-pole pylons that recall those at Dallas's City Hall, at the opposite end of downtown.

Along with these flag poles, the best and most problematic features of the building are at ground level. In a 1.5-acre plaza between Ross Avenue and the tower base, topiary gardens (with what will one day be 12-foot-tall hedges) are carved by paths and seating areas, and a grass lawn slopes toward an 11-foot-high, 50-foot-long water wall. At the southwestern corner is a 17,000-square-foot domed rotunda, planned for a restaurant. The building's connections to other buildings, through skyways and underground tunnels, are dramatized by curved exterior stair ramps, to attract and stimulate foot traffic (a basement-level subway station also has been contemplated). This landscaping forms an important link in the chain of public spaces along Ross Avenue, including the sculpture garden of the Dallas Museum of Art, with its powerful fountain wall; the welcoming oak grove at Southwest Life Insurance, dating from 1964; the slightly too-imposing sculpture garden at the LTV Centre; the 1986 Lincoln Plaza, with its grove of oaks; and the water gardens at Allied Bank Tower at Fountain Place. Together these features make Ross Avenue, which forms one edge of the emerging Dallas Arts District, the most humane downtown street in the state.

But the ground-level features of the Texas Commerce Tower, on a recent rainy Monday, with the plaza and building all but unoccupied, seemed raw and strangely proportioned, the concrete elements grossly overscaled, and the metal elements a blunt paint-can blue-green. Habitation and use should change that: it's a site with a carnival atmosphere, and needs some activity to work.

A prediction: in 10 years Texas Commerce Tower will look dated, but then so does everything a half-generation away. People used to chuckle at the excesses of the Neils Esperson Building and Philip Johnson's University of St. Thomas campus. In 20 years, however, people will point to Texas Commerce Tower and say, "That was Dallas in the good old days." ■

Wolfgang Hoyt

Detail of entrance

Wolfgang Hoyt

Texas Commerce Tower, Dallas, 1987, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, architects

Citesurvey

From Neiman's to Macy's

Albert Pope

Neiman-Marcus Galleria store, 1969, Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum and Neuhaus and Taylor, architects

Macy's Galleria store, 1986, Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum, architects

The opening of Galleria III last year marked the end of a number of things: the end of the growth of the Galleria complex itself, now stretching the full extent of its 1,200-foot superblock, as well as the end of the period of rapid economic growth over which the complex was developed. From the Galleria's first "anchor" building to its last, the distance between Neiman-Marcus and Macy's also marks the end of a radical re-evaluation of architecture that has taken place over the past 20 years. For more than anything else the new Macy's seems to mark the victory of postmodern architecture as it has come to be embraced by corporate development in Houston. Having put up so many buildings in recent years, Houston has become *the* city of postmodern architecture. It seems important to begin to evaluate this "new" style, and judge its idea in light of realized construction.

The Galleria offers a unique opportunity for such an evaluation. In one of the seminal theoretical tracts of postmodernism, *Learning From Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Stephen Izenour cite the then (1972) newly completed Neiman-Marcus as an example of the impoverishment of modern architecture. There is a short section entitled "From La Tourette to Neiman-Marcus," in which the adaptation of the profile of Le Corbusier's monastery is traced through a succession of rather vulgar copies, ending with what is for the author the most vulgar of them all – the Neiman-Marcus Galleria store by Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum and Neuhaus and Taylor (1969). The section is, as it was intended to be, an alarming instance of trickle-down Brutalism that Venturi naturally suggests to be a misappropriation of Le Corbusier's work. At the end of the section he offers an alternative – a kind of prescription for a postmodern department store:

We do not criticize these replications of a classical masterpiece (La Tourette) in a different place for a different use, although we suggest the replication would have been done better if it had been accepted philosophically and used wittily; as in the case of a Beaux Arts Department Store designed after an Italian Palazzo.

It has taken a remarkably short amount of time – 15 years – for Venturi to get his palazzo department store: the new Macy's appears to have followed the prescription. The recent overhaul in the profession to its new "post" period is thus given physical form in the Galleria. In the short walk from Neiman-Marcus to Macy's, from monastery to palazzo, from "duck" to "decorated shed," from modern to postmodern, there are tangible lessons to be learned about the final effectiveness of the stylistic overhaul.

Or, one should immediately say, the *ineffectiveness* of this overhaul. For it is striking that, having walked from Neiman-Marcus to Macy's, one seems to have arrived at the same place. The first and most obvious impression is that the banality characteristic of the suburban department store has in no way been architecturally overcome. The differences in the real experience of these two "anchors" is almost negligible. How one accounts for this in a period of allegedly significant change in professional attitudes is important. Post-*what?* is the question that is raised by the comparison.

No one could argue about the persuasiveness of Venturi's argument concerning trickle-down when faced with the trivialization of one of Le Corbusier's most important accomplishments. In its translation from a Dominican monastery to a retail outlet, much was lost as the crassness of consumer society and, in this case, a very poignant spiritual leveling came into play. In pursuing Venturi's alternative, however, the replication of another, more appropriate, masterpiece seems by now highly suspect. If the association of an upscale Houston shopper with a monk is acknowledged to be inappropriate, one can hardly say that association with nobility is any more desirable or true, at least as far as architecture is concerned. One suspects however, that the silliness of such an argument might be concealing a larger problem.

Standing on the corner of West Alabama Avenue and Sage Road, surveying the new Macy's tripartite division, monumental portals, simulated stone quoins, massive staircase to piano-nobile (perfume counter), moulding profiles, and fake rustication, there is a great doubt about the architectural merits of this palazzo department store cum "decorated shed." At best, the awkward translation from palace to store seems in no obvious way superior to the translation made from the monastery 20 years ago. The trivialization of the "masterpiece" that is architecture, has not been avoided. On the contrary, the high kitsch of Macy's makes an even grosser caricature of the model, if only because it is more explicit in its reference. One finally must say that Venturi's argument for an alternative model appears to be entirely naive and ineffectual in the face of those forces that determine the architecture of our day. It now seems that such arguments are false, as they essentially avoid the more difficult issues of an inevitably reductive trickle-down process.

I would like to suggest that this naivité goes beyond this specific instance and applies to postmodernism as a whole as it has come to be built, particularly within a corporate milieu. Architecture's long and professionally difficult march from Neiman-Marcus to Macy's seems hardly to have been rewarded. For all the upheaval in the state of the art, gallons of ink spilt, symposiums, colloquiums, heated debate, careers ruined, heroes slain, and new prophets raised, trickle-down remains trickle-down with very little that is architecture surviving. The not-so-surprising fact that both Neiman-Marcus and Macy's were designed by Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum only confirms the fact that nothing of substance has changed here. Academic and professional circles can argue themselves silly over modernism versus postmodernism and palazzo versus monastery, but the demands of the "operation" continue and it seems clear from the present examples that these demands are hostile to architecture.

What can, perhaps, be learned in the journey from Neiman-Marcus to Macy's is the profession's recent preoccupation with false problems. It is now apparent that debate over appropriate models, or superficial changes in style, are irrelevant to the reductive demands of the market, and this irrelevancy ought to give thinking architects cause for concern. The failure of the new Macy's indicates that the demand for legitimate architectural and urban expression, if serious, must shift outside the bounds of recent debates. ■

The Last Skyscraper

If the top of downtown Houston's recently completed Heritage Plaza seems like a Mayan cenotaph, the inside, which is less than 10 percent occupied, is even more like a tomb. Though missing tumbleweeds in the elevators, it is unmistakably a high-rise ghost town.

Richard Ingersoll

Project for Heritage Plaza, 1981, Kohn Pederson Fox, architects

The bizarre style of the building has caused mainstream critics like Douglas Davis[1] and Paul Goldberger to pick on it as a symbol of overindulged postmodernism. Goldberger claims that "it sums up everything wrong with American skyscrapers today," essentially because "... it looks like a bad imitation of Michael Graves hurled on top of an equally bad imitation of last season's work by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill."[2] Such a fashion-conscious conclusion, however, seems to reveal more about what is wrong with architectural criticism than with Heritage Plaza. Has Goldberger ever stepped inside the building, considered what it is made of and how it was built, or what economic factors were involved? Postmodernism has been a blessing for art historians eager to practice connoisseurship, and, in all fairness to Goldberger, he has dutifully identified the obvious contradictions in the building's style. But there are much more interesting contradictions in the building's process, and an understanding of them, while it might not mitigate the aesthetic outcome, can at least help explain why it looks the way it does.

The 53-story Heritage Plaza has 1.2 million square feet of leaseable office space and 1,000 parking spaces. It belongs to a set of high-rise offices that have sprung up all over the country during the last six years in a spree of overbuilding. The demand of the advancing services sector only partially can explain the building boom, which is more directly the product of a Reagan re-election policy, the "Accelerated Cost Recovery System," initiated in 1981. This change to the tax law allowed developers to double their returns on real-estate losses. It has led to a speculative bubble in office construction with hypertrophic consequences for the market. The tax reforms of 1986 have rescinded the policy and eliminated favorable tax shelters in high-rise construction, making speculative deals such as Heritage Plaza impossible.

When construction began on Heritage Plaza in 1984, it was the only major office building undertaken in Houston after 1982, and due to the new tax laws probably will be the last one for a long time. Since 1982, the office vacancy rate of Houston has been on a steady rise, reaching 26.8 percent in June, 1986. Amid such inauspicious local market conditions, it is not the style of the building that should seem so strange, but its very existence. Against all odds, the developer, Richard W. Wortham III of Wortham, Van Liew and Horn, miraculously found financing for the project and heroically kept construction going in downtown Houston to countermand signs of the city's depression. The deal depended on two factors: the participation of oil magnate Prentis Tomlinson and a projected, but unfortunately erroneous, economic forecast for Houston's future demand in downtown office space. It was predicted that the slump would end in 1987-1988, thus giving Heritage Plaza the best advantage for renewed demand.

In better times, Wortham, with Tomlinson as chief investor, had planned an even taller, 80-story, project on the parking-lot site across the street. Tomlinson, who demanded that the building have a high recognition factor, lobbied for the New York firm of Kohn Pederson Fox to be hired. When the site for Heritage Plaza became available, Tomlinson's quick access to capital allowed them expeditiously to acquire the $53 million site. At $750 per-square-foot, it was the highest price ever paid for downtown property. It is indeed a choice location, being adjacent to the Civic Center and directly across from Sam Houston Park. The new building is a terminus to Allen Parkway and a gateway to the city.

Wortham first had his own architect, Moe Nasr, who had built his two other high-rise projects in downtown Houston

Federal Land Bank (1929) meets Heritage Plaza (1987)

(1010 Lamar and Unitedbank Plaza), do an initial study, but Tomlinson, who also was going to be the chief tenant of the project (leasing nearly half of the office space), insisted the project be given to the much more prestigious (and costly) KPF. The developers, in a benign move uncharacteristic in a city that has very little tradition of architectural preservation, opted to save the 1929 Federal Land Bank, but the principal lender, the Bank of America, then insisted that, to maximize floor space, the footprint of the tower fill the oblong rectangle that was left over on the site. KPF's first design, finished in 1981, was for a 37-story glass box with a single granite façade on the north and a classicizing top. A new program requirement for internal parking called for a redesign, but KPF was unwilling to accept the short time limit of three months, and Wortham returned to his trusted architect, Moe Nasr. It was around this time that Tomlinson began having financial trouble and would soon bail out of the project, leaving Wortham without his chief tenant.

Nasr came on to this precarious project with certain givens: while Tomlinson was still involved the developers wanted to maintain a KPF "look," but with a budget of $50 per square foot, which greatly limited the amount of steel and revetment material that could be used for structure and dressing. The major program decisions as to floor plan and envelope, parking, the fate of the Federal Land Bank building, and a decorative top (made of fiberglass!) to hide the antennae equipment already had been determined and deals for the materials already struck, so that, as Nasr puts it: "I felt I was renovating an existing building." The 38-year-old Nasr specializes in high-rise buildings, having worked on about 75 of them for such offices as Mitchell/Giurgola, I.M. Pei, and Copeland, Novak and Israel. His own office, which opened in Denver in 1978 and began operating a branch in Houston in 1980, has built seven of them so far.

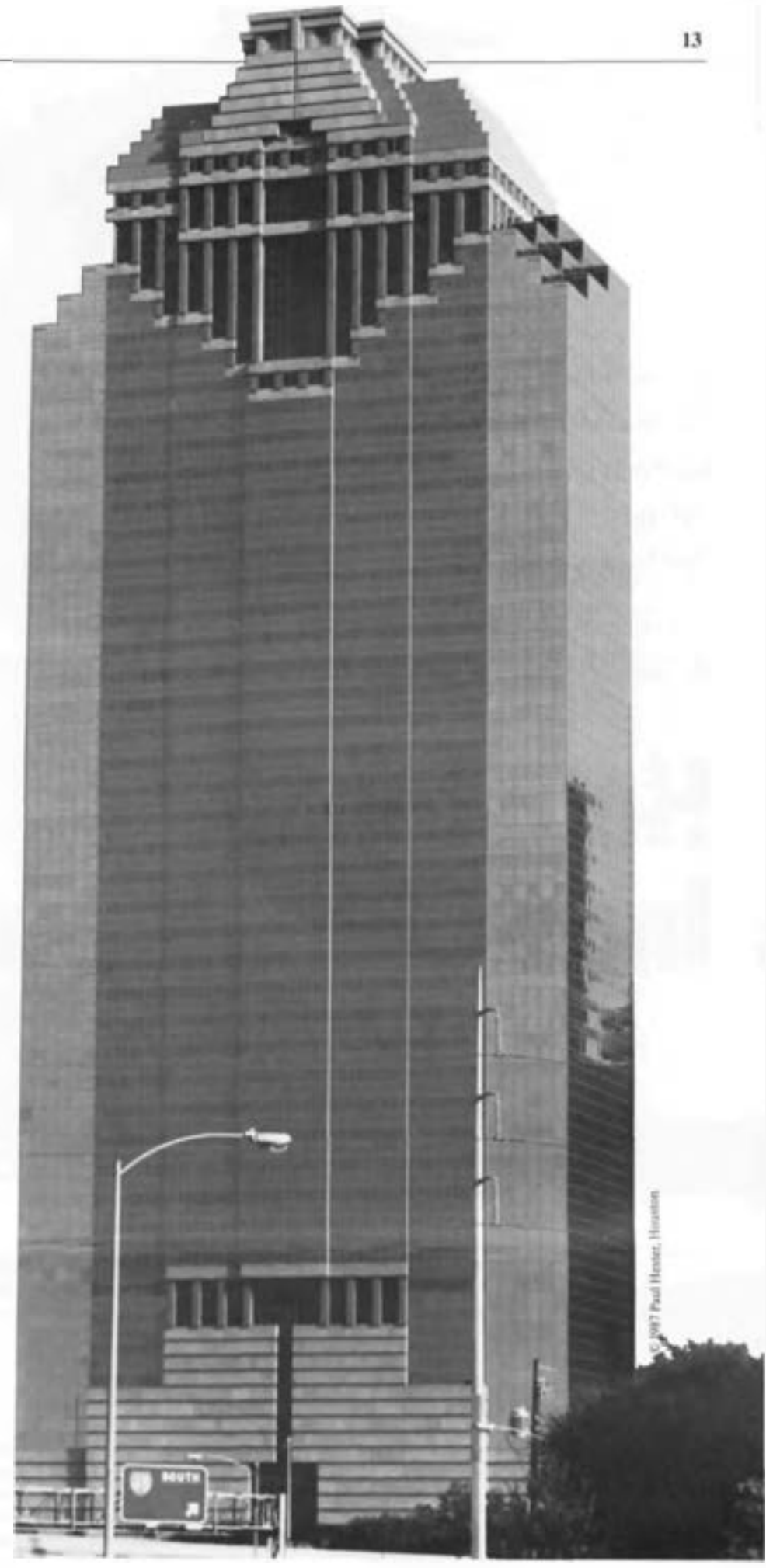
The two Houston buildings that Nasr designed for Wortham bear little resemblance to each other but even less to Heritage Plaza, which is his first use of historicizing motifs in a high-rise. The stepped-up top relates to some sketches he produced after a vacation in the Yucatán, and its incongruous position over the fragile reflecting-glass shaft will no doubt gain it the sobriquet "Montezuma's revenge." It is a truly fine example of the inherently surreal practices of American commercialism, and should be appreciated as such rather than condemned. Both at ground level, and from top to bottom, the elements are juxtaposed in such a way as to imply transition – the building seems caught in the act of metamorphosis, and the most common reaction is to wonder if it is finished. Most of the moves that resulted in this "permanently unfinished" dreamscape were more "sachlich" than meets the eye. The pre-ordained quota of inch-thick granite cladding was distributed as far as it would go to the bottom and top levels of the building according to an economic decision: the stone rises 110 feet

from the ground and descends 100 feet from the top because these are the limits to which cranes can reach in either direction before the cost of assembly doubles. There is no attempt to echo the proportions or style of the Federal Land Bank on the front of the building, but at the back of it another fantastically surreal effect occurs with the grafting of the wall of the bank onto the concave lobby, confounding the order of the first with the second. The pedestrian plaza was meant to have a line of pylon lighting fixtures, which were scrapped for trees that soften – to the point of camouflaging – the façade. This southern entry is pulled out in a concave shape to minimize the area covered by revetment. Throughout the project the things that yield formal discord originate from attempts to harmonize the budget.

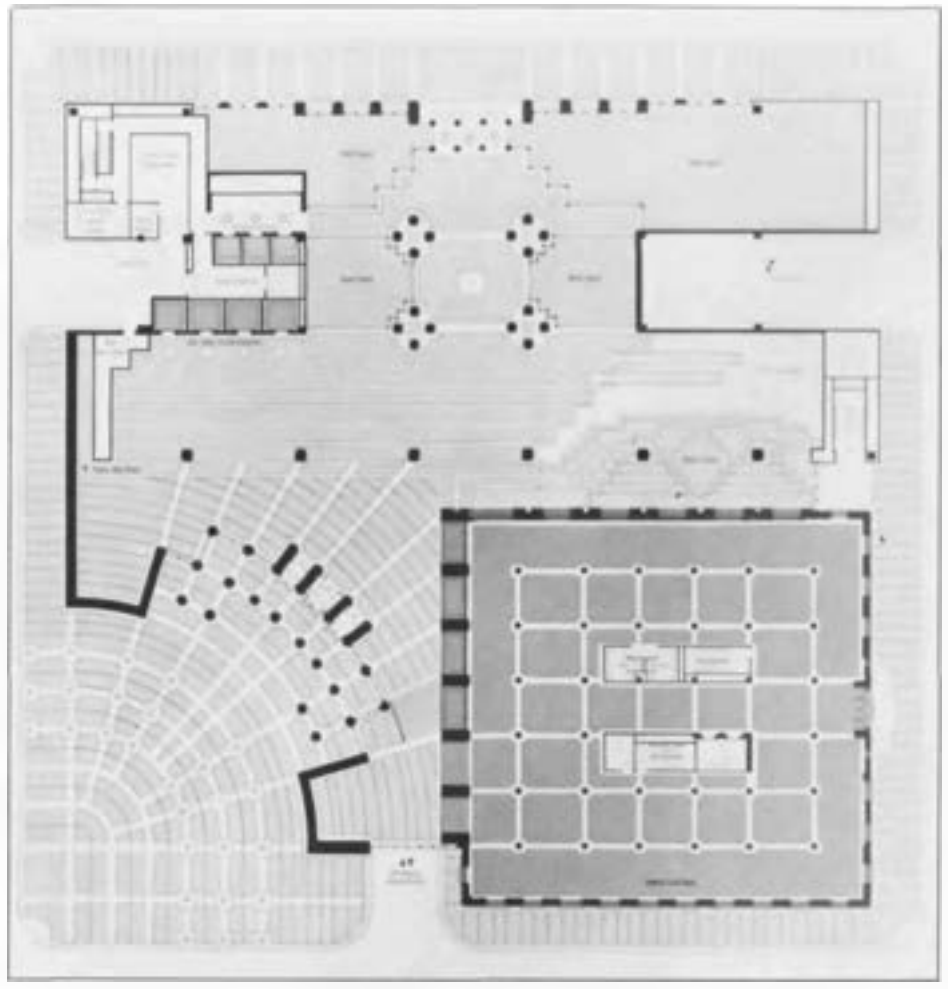
Occasionally Nasr made purely aesthetic gestures, such as using darker glass with narrower mullions in the central glazing to increase the sense of verticality and make the shaft look less broad. The vertical fluting of the shaft steps back from the center in a rippling fashion. This design trope establishes the ripple effect, carried out in every direction, giving a nervous unity to some otherwise uncompromising features. The granite joints of the base have been banded with rippling reveals to make the rustication look thicker. The southern pedestrian entry ripples inward as its portal ripples upward. The idea of the rippling reveal continues into the lobby to a near paroxysm of jogged surfaces: rippling column shafts, rippling window surrounds, the rippling fountain (or "water feature," as it is called), rippling ceilings, rippling soffits near the elevators, and even rippling paneling in the elevators themselves. All of this is to keep one from noticing the disjuncture of the high concave atrium meeting the low orthogonal elevator lobby. These ceilings had to be kept low to accommodate the garage ramps directly above.

To avoid interrupting the open plan of the ten stories of parking, the elevators to the upper floors are accessible from a sky lobby, which also allows for better security since entrants can be surveilled at this level. The sky lobby, which eventually will include retail space, is less than grand and deserves to have a double-height ceiling (which would not be too difficult to retroactively install), at least in the area reserved for panoramic viewing. The office spaces, which were presumably designed for a large tenant working with an open plan, are deeper than in most spec buildings, forcing nearly half of the offices to windowless positions.

Some evidence of the diagonal bracing of the structure can be seen in the lobby, but is not visible externally. The so-called K-braces are used on the two short sides like bookends to make a partial tube structure. This greatly reduced the necessary amount of steel to 19.5 pounds per square foot. The structural designer, Joe Colaco of CBM Engineers, who co-designed the structural system of the Hancock Center in Chicago and is a strong proponent of cross-braced tube construction, says Heritage Plaza is the only such structure in downtown Houston. Despite the structural efficiency and greater economy of cross-braced structures, developers have resisted using them, believing they are less marketable than column-based structures. At Heritage Plaza the choice of cross-bracing was an economic necessity that was glossed-over by its shiny veneers.



Heritage Plaza, 1987, M. Nasr Associates, architect



Plan, ground floor, Heritage Plaza, M. Nasr Associates, architect

Wortham's well-publicized bankruptcy (he filed Chapter 7 in 1986), preceded the completion of the building. Heritage Plaza, however, was *not* the direct cause of his financial demise.[3] It had, in fact, been sold in the previous year to the Houston-based Alfanco, Inc., owned by Saudi Prince Abdul Rahman Faisal who had been a partner in the enterprise from the start and who retained Wortham's firm as the project manager. The project that broke him was the Humble Building (now 1212 Main), again with Tomlinson as a major investor. This was to have been an innovative scheme to rehabilitate a fine building of the 1920s while joining a high-rise addition to it. It might have proven to be a lesson in how to salvage Houston's architectural patrimony at a time when great buildings, such as the Shamrock Hotel, are gratuitously being slaughtered.

Heritage Plaza is a surreal building, a symbol not of "confused ambitions" but of contrary processes by which the benefits of the "Accelerated Cost Recovery System" seemed to outweigh the dictates of the market. The building is an intriguing hybrid, and the uncertainty of whether it is masonry or curtain-wall unconsciously reflects the economic doubts of its origins. The design or style of the building is not what is keeping it empty, nor is its downtown location – there are dozens of other buildings in Houston, both inside and outside Loop 610, that are likewise unleased.[4] Like most hybrids it is the last of its species and remains a prominent totem of the belief in a metropolitan Houston and the upward cycles of past markets – the last squeeze out of the tube of speculative prosperity. ■

notes

1 Douglas Davis, "Late Postmodernism: The End of Style," *Art in America*, June 1987.
2 Paul Goldberger, "In Houston, A Symbol of Confused Ambitions," *New York Times*, 12 July 1987, Section H, p. 17.
3 Patricia Manson and Carl Hooper, "Developers File Bankruptcy Petitions, Observers Blame Overextension in Soft Market," *Houston Post*, 15 August 1986.
4 Carl Hooper, "72 Office Buildings Empty, Study Finds," *Houston Post*, 4 July 1986.

As each work week ends, a transfusion begins: Houston slowly drains itself. By Sunday morning the process is nearly complete—the city utterly still, silent, and nearly empty. But 10–12 blocks south of downtown, and east along Jefferson or Webster avenues, dense clusters of Indochinese shops and restaurants begin to rouse, infusing the city with sounds, strange smells, and movement.

Houston's Indo-Chinatown

The First Generation

Deborah Jensen

Entire families cruise through restaurants and shopping centers: children play, men talk, and new-wave teens loiter in pool halls or video shops. The women shop the markets carefully – scrupulously – for the week's groceries. Shoppers are mostly Vietnamese, but there are also Laotians, Filipinos, Indonesians, Malaysians, Thais, Cambodians, and Chinese.

There are an estimated 40,000-60,000 Vietnamese, 3,500 Cambodians, 1,100 Laotians, and 700 Thais living and working in Houston – four to six hundred times the number a decade ago. While this massive influx has injected new life into the city's decayed limbs, its adrenalin effect is countered somewhat by traditional immigrant nostalgia. For many Indochinese refugees, emotional and economic investments here are tenuous. Building renovation and new construction are rare; businesses reflect the Indochinese struggle between present survival and future hope: returning to Vietnam. For some, a commitment to stay would be an admission of defeat.

The change came in 1975. Refugees had been trickling out of Saigon since the American troop withdrawal in 1973. After communist troops took the city in 1975, it grew into a tidal wave. By late 1977, a third of America's half-million Indochinese refugees settled in California. The next largest group came to Texas.

A central "corridor" of Vietnamese businesses extends southward from Drew Avenue to West Alabama, zig-zagging between Main and Milam streets. Aged shopping centers, small businesses, and restaurants are clumped together in tight, pod-like formations, flourishing in the older, vacant buildings of Houston's commercial orphanage.

The Milam Center

The Milam Center, Trung Tâm Thuo`ng Mãi á Dông, is situated at the corridor's northern end, between Drew and Tuam, and Milam and Travis streets. Milam Center remains one of the largest and most popular shopping areas for Houston's Indochinese community. The 64-year-old building – a recycled-American, strip shopping center – occupies a single city block. Neither renovated nor updated, the building's exterior is simply encrusted with layers of the center's past: a sweeping theater marquee with remnants of an outdoor clock, walls plastered with Vietnamese posters and painted advertisements, paint peeling away multiple layers of ice-cream colors. Only the signboards – bright, dense, and heavily accented – reveal the center's current identity: Khai Thu's income tax service, Kim Hoan jewelry, Van Hu videotapes, Dr. Dung A. Nguyen, pharmacies, book stores, restaurants, market, shoe stores, and gift shops. In this single city block, the social, commercial, and cultural threads are woven tightly together – a maximum use of space that is characteristically Indochinese.

Milam Center shops and restaurants face out towards the street on three sides, with additional interior stores opening to a central, bench-lined hallway penetrating the center from the north. The T-shaped hall has access doors to the center's east and west sides. Vietnamese Muzak floats through the hall and into the interior spaces. One entire side of the corridor is a long window, revealing Hoa Binh (pronounced "Wah Been") Market. Just inside, huge slabs of meat and whole chickens hang, suspended over a steam table. The narrow aisles are crowded and the shelves over-stocked. Its merchandise reflects the market's diverse patronage: clear jars of pickled papaya and sweet bananas from the Philippines, Lotus nuts in syrup from mainland China, cans of ground bean sauce from Hong Kong, and French-Vietnamese coffee with chicory. Gigantic stalks of sugar cane lean against a front wall and little jelly candies from Japan, shaped into delicate seashells, win the prize for clever packaging. Glittering

Holy Rosary Church's Father Anthony Dao, a refugee, is widely respected for his extensive knowledge of both American culture and the Vietnamese experience.

Buddhist paraphernalia shares precious space with mystifying cookware. There are infinite varieties of tea and homey trays of plastic-wrapped, sticky rice cakes. The latter sit atop cartons of cigarettes below the roach spray. It seems unlikely Hoa Binh Market would be mistaken for Safeway.

Lan Thi Pham, a tiny, delicate woman of 36, is one of Hoa Binh Market's regular shoppers, carefully calculating the week's food budget and menu long before venturing out with her family to faraway Milam Center. Lan and her husband, Son Nguyen, live and work in Southwest Houston, but most weekends, the family will shop in and around Milam Center, socializing and spending the day together. Like many Vietnamese refugees here, Lan and her husband work long hours, leaving little time for anything but the most immediate concerns of job, money, and security for their three children. Milam Center, both a commercial and social vortex, attracts Indochinese from all areas of the city.

Lan Thi Pham and Son Nguyen arrived in Houston on 4 August 1983, moving immediately into a two-bedroom apartment on West Main Street with Lan's grown brother, two sisters, and her three young children. They came separately, each refugee sponsoring the next. Lan's elderly parents remained behind. Lan is now employed by Foley's. Son Nguyen is a mechanical engineer by day and an auto-parts salesman at night. Both struggle with the isolation, exhaustion – and the language.

The terrifying escapes, long months of waiting, and painful assimilation are common experiences of uncommon terror shared by most of Houston's Indochinese. In 1980, most of these were "boat people:" 65 percent were Vietnamese, 21 percent Laotian, and 7 percent Cambodian. Frequently, escape attempts failed and were repeated several times. A single escape consumed several ounces of gold – often an entire family's savings. Over 30,000 died in the attempt, either from illness, pirate attacks, starvation, or boat sinkings. As Vietnamese priest Father Anthony Dao explains, many felt it would be "fresher to die at sea, rather than on land."

Chronicles of refugee experiences are found in the poetry and prose at The Milam Book Store on the center's west side. After browsing through the Milam Center's Book Store, one could walk across Drew Avenue, one block north to the Nam Thanh gift shop, then over Milam Street to Saigon Dich-Vu Center, dining at the Saigon Cafeteria after a fitting at Chinh's Tailor. Traveling two blocks east along Dennis Avenue, a walker arriving at Thu Do Plaza on Main Street could take a self-defense class upstairs, pick up "beer to go" at the Yen Gift Shop, and plan a vacation in the travel agency downstairs. Milam Center is surrounded by small, satellite shopping centers and restaurants huddled within blocks of one another. Buildings, like abandoned mollusk shells, are recycled and reinhabited. Often of single-story brick or cinder-block construction, these shopping centers are frequently unified by nothing more than paint color or camper-like aluminum roofs. They offer compact, multifunctional containers for multipurpose stores containing multiuse products – Vietnamese one-stop shopping.

Holy Rosary Church

At the south end of this Indochinese business corridor, a chorus of Asian voices – high-pitched and slightly sing-song – drifts faintly through the doors of a church out into the Sunday afternoon street: songs of devotion and worship, a traditional Catholic mass. One non-Asian visitor confesses that while he does not understand Vietnamese, he comes each Sunday for the high, sweet singing of the church choir.

Holy Rosary Church is a large edifice of Bedford stone built in 1933. It faces Milam Street on the west, sandwiched between Berry Avenue to the north and Holy Rosary Hall on Winbern Avenue to the south. The Church holds mass in English, Latin, and Vietnamese.

Each Sunday, Father Anthony Dao conducts Holy Rosary's two Vietnamese masses. In contrast to the gentle austerity of Holy Rosary's dimly lit interior, the incessant activity is startling: there is human traffic throughout the service – parents come and go with crying babies and restless children, teenagers scout for friends. Father Dao begins with a ritual plea for child control, asking parents to refrain from bringing infants. He is ignored. Families share every activity – shopping, eating, socializing, and worshiping together. Filial devotion is central to the Vietnamese culture.

Some hands move rapidly over rosary beads while others are clasped to foreheads with rapid bowing – a strangely Buddhist gesture in this setting. The atmosphere is relaxed, comfortable, and tolerant of this Eastern intonation. The congregation is a cross section of Houston's Vietnamese population: young, affluent couples with infants, spike-haired teens and elderly, withered women clothed in black pajamas. Many arms are folded across chests – a Vietnamese gesture of respect. There are surprising numbers of young men, reflecting the city's five-to-two ratio of Indochinese men to women.

Father Anthony Dao is a tall, charismatic man of 36 with a quick, boyish grin and broad stride. One of Houston's ten Vietnamese priests, he is known as the "spiritual advisor" of the Vietnamese community, widely respected for his extensive knowledge of both American culture and the Vietnamese experience. Like many of his parishioners, he was a refugee, escaping from Vietnam in 1978. Active in community and university affairs, Father Dao promotes complete assimilation for Houston's Indochinese. Yet he admits that this social integration may take at least a full generation before the Indochinese accept Houston – and Houston accepts them.

Father Dao credits Holy Rosary Church with the surrounding business expansion in downtown Houston. He notes that when Holy Rosary held the city's first Vietnamese Catholic mass in 1975, the parish had a largely social function for the Vietnamese – attracting non-Catholics and Catholics alike in their need for cultural and social contact in a strange new environment. He asserts that over a period of time, Holy Rosary's growing Vietnamese congregation catalyzed the introduction of surrounding businesses, catering to the new community of church-going immigrants.

The relationship between church and commerce seems ironic. Milam Center and Holy Rosary Church – at opposite ends of the Indochinese corridor here – are like metaphors for the divergence of business and spiritual concerns in the Indochinese culture, where commerce is valued least and education most. This hierarchical distinction stems from the role of Buddhist monks as highly respected teachers – virtue equated with wisdom. Later, this regard was transferred to priests and other spiritual leaders.

There is little doubt that Houston's Roman Catholic diocese is a well-organized and influential force within the Indochinese community. Last June, Holy Rosary Church drew nearly 2,000

Below, from left to right:

Advertisements form a collage in the window of Van Hu'u videotapes and books. Van Hu'u attracts many of the Milam Center's younger shoppers, while interior markets draw more traditional customers—like the woman seen leaving Hoa Binh.

The Tan-Hung photo studio located inside Milam Center. A yellow-and-red sticker on the door reads "Help Liberate Vietnam."

The entrance to Hoa Binh Market in Milam Center. The sign above the door says "welcome customers."

A view of Milam Center's interior corridor, from the north entrance: Hoa Binh Market on the right, gift stores, clothing, and fabric shops on the left. A Vietnamese fast-food deli ahead is flanked by more stores.

Southeast Asians to its Marian Year celebration. Processions of women in traditional Indochinese dress were followed by rows of Western-suited elders, stumbling clumps of flower-festooned children in white gowns, Dominican nuns, and church dignitaries.

A rainbow-colored votive statue of the Virgin Mary was held aloft while the silent, somber procession circled the city block, crowding into the parking lot. As high-pitched, Vietnamese music blared through the speakers, people began to sing.

Father Dao calls the Vietnamese mixture of Confucionism, Buddhism, and Taoism as an "art of living," explaining that religious fusions are common, found in the Vietnamese indigenous religions. "Hoa Hao" (translated as "solidarity," or peaceful coexistence), and "Cao Dai" (meaning "high tower" – a combination of all religions). "Asians," he says, smiling, "are very religious. They accept religion – but not always governments."

Vinatown and Vietnam Plaza

Ten to twelve blocks east of Main Street, surrounded by vacant lots and boarded houses, a large, elegant structure of corrugated metal stands alone. This beautifully simple, rectangular building at 2501 St. Emanuel Street is adorned by a single sign, painted in saffron gold with red letters: "Buddhist Association for the Services of Humanity in America – Chu'a Dai Giac." Like Holy Rosary Church, the temple shares its neighborhood with Indochinese shopping centers and businesses.

Several blocks north of the temple, Vinatown and Vietnam Plaza shopping centers lie in a area long considered Houston's Chinatown. Both are defined and bisected by freeways: Vinatown, south of I-45 and west of US-59; Vietnam Plaza, north of I-45 and east of US-59.

The two-part Vinatown Center on Webster and Jackson streets is made from the same aesthetic dough as the nearby freeways. Design interest is limited to the lively play of Asian letters and words across bland concrete surfaces. Vinatown I includes Anh Hong Restaurant ("7 courses of beef"), Le Croissant D'Or French Bakery, and the enormous An Dong Supermarket, ("agent of Tai Ming Wah Rest Hong Kong White Lotus seed paste mooncake" written over the entrance). Tape and record stores carry both American and Vietnamese popular music; beauty shop posters portray Asian models wearing western hair styles.

Giao Ngoc Nguyen, 63, is owner and general contractor of the Vinatown Shopping Center. He is a slight, self-effacing man in white shirt, khaki pants, and generic gray spectacles. He smiles continually. Nguyen displays a 20-year-old construction license, newspaper articles, and photographs of massive, concrete housing projects in Saigon: Vinatown's aesthetic antecedents.

However, Nguyen's concerns are not aesthetic, but social. He employed Vietnamese refugees for the construction of Vinatown in 1981, and now, desperately seeking financial backers, he hopes to establish an economic base of Vietnamese self-reliance. He will begin with an Indochinese credit union. He also dreams of constructing nearby housing projects for elderly Indochinese – increasingly a problem in the community. Life in Houston, as elsewhere in America, has wrought drastic changes upon Indochinese families. The elderly, traditionally revered in Vietnamese culture, are isolated by new lifestyles and language barriers. Entire families work, leaving older parents and grandparents alone. Television offers no solace and the elderly are considered too old to learn English. Vinatown II houses the city's only Vietnamese Senior Citizen Association, to which elderly travel great distances for meals, conversation, and companionship. Unable to attain a tax-exemption, the association is virtually helpless to provide more.

Surrounded by freeways and empty warehouses, five-year-old Vietnam Plaza occupies the former home of Finger Furniture. It is, according to a former manager, one of the only exclusively Vietnamese centers in the city. Across the street, an L-shaped, single-story, cement shopping strip is embellished with Chinese-red columns, pseudo-French green awnings, and a Tex-Mex, plastic "tile" roof: an extraordinary polycultural statement.

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Nhan Ngoc Luu, serious and intense, sits in an upstairs office of Vietnam Plaza at Jefferson Avenue and Hutchins Street. He speaks passionately of his commitment to freeing Vietnam from communist domination. Luu unlocks a nearby door, revealing another dingy office filled with conference table, stained carpet, artificial cherry-blossoms, and Vietnamese flags: three red bands across a brilliant yellow-gold. Grim black-and-white photographs of jungles and soldiers line the walls and stacks of political literature cover the floor. The room, a quasi-political shrine, houses local meetings of the National United Front for the Liberation of Vietnam, a Washington, D.C.-based organization. A banner with "Tin Tuong hoi cac anh" is draped across one wall. Luu points to the photographs of soldiers and translates, "We believe in them."

Resistance is the organization's monthly publication – a slick, eight-page newsletter printed entirely in English. On the back page, an explanation: "The National United Front for the Liberation of Vietnam (NUFRONLIV) was formed in 1980 by the Vietnamese people inside Vietnam and abroad to liberate their country from the Viet Cong and to build a free and democratic nation . . .To promote our just cause, your financial contributions are welcome."


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Nam Nguyen: Vietnamese colonel, French lawyer, shrimper, editor, and political organizer. Nguyen is considered by many to be the political voice of Houston's Vietnamese community.

In August 1985, Nhan Ngoc Luu quietly left Houston to return to Vietnam after more than 10 years. Knowing the dangers of the trip, he did not tell even his wife of the journey. As a Vietnamese refugee, he understood the risk of imprisonment or death.

Luu walked through steamy, wet jungle for six days, traveling to a freedom-fighters' campsite. As a supporter of the National United Front organization, he wanted to see the resistance effort himself. After two weeks in Vietnam, he returned – more determined than ever, he says, to see his country free.

The Political Community

Nam Nguyen sits behind a dusty glass store front facing Fannin Street, three blocks east of Holy Rosary Church. It seems unlikely the store has been touched for 25 years. Nguyen, 54, is surrounded by tall, thick stacks of Vietnamese newspapers, a few chairs, and litter everywhere. The small, two-room office is hot and humid. Nguyen, a large, thick man dressed in brown slacks, white starched shirt and a tie, twitches uncomfortably.

Nguyen stares directly at his visitor – a strangely un-Vietnamese act. He explains that this office, which he personally finances, is a distribution center for the journalistic literature surrounding us. As if to illustrate his point, Indochinese men come and go, exchanging stacks of newspapers.

Nguyen, considered a political spokesman for Houston's Vietnamese community, is articulate and emphatic about his country's current political state. Concerned with the same adjustments as other Houston refugees, he also is obsessed with his vision of a free Vietnam – and his dream of someday returning. He hopes only to live long enough to help with the country's reconstruction efforts. Nguyen believes the issue of Vietnam's struggle is very much alive for the vast majority of Houston's Indochinese population. Many still hope to return "home."

Nguyen, a retired colonel in the Vietnamese army, was responsible for 50,000 communist prisoners-of-war during the Vietnamese war. He took part in the 1970-1973 Paris peace negotiations and helped formulate post-war prisoner agreements. Nguyen holds a French law degree; publishes and distributes a newspaper, Thô´ng Nhâ´t (translated as "Unity"); and is a former chairman of the Vietnamese Community Organization of Houston. As a shrimp fisherman in Seabrook between 1979 and 1981, Nguyen was involved in the famous battle with the Ku Klux Klan. After a long siege of harassment, that battle ended when the Vietnamese obtained a federal court injunction against the KKK in May 1981.

Nguyen's conversation is riddled with anti-communist commentary. He explains that his country's economy has regressed some 30 years under the communists, adding "our families [are] still there – our friends [are] still there – in concentration camps." His voice crescendos: "*That* is why we fight to liberate my country."

When pressed for information about the estimated eight to ten Indochinese political groups in Houston, Mr. Nguyen gently explains that these are not actually "political," but *community* groups. He quietly adds that American laws prohibit certain political organizations. A small rodent runs across the room behind, as though signaling the interview's conclusion. Nguyen lumbers to his feet, and talks of his three children, ages 22, 10, and 6: "We ask them to learn two things. First, he has to believe in the United States, respect the law and be fair; but also, he must know their father and mother and homeland is Vietnam. He must know that he has two countries – he cannot say 'I do not recognize Vietnam.' He is a citizen of *two* countries."

A sense of transience prevails throughout Houston's Indochinese community: urgency permeating conversation; businesses occupying buildings uneasily, like tight-fitting clothes; individuals waiting silently, and working ferociously. Lan Thi Pham explains, "We do not know for how long we have *anything*."

In the interim, Houston is awakened, enlivened – and enriched. ■

Hobbitzelle Theater Arts Library, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin

The atmospheric interior of Houston's Majestic Theatre (John Eberson, architect; razed) simulated an Italian courtyard.

Once, *where* you saw a film was as important as the film you saw.

Losing It At the Movies: From Palace to Multiplex

Beatrix S.A. Flynn

In the days of the great picture palaces, going to the movies was an "other worldly" experience. For the most part, picture palaces were built in the 1920s when ostentation was king and the big studios were in their heyday. Downtowns across the country became dappled with re-creations of ornate European palaces, Gothic cathedrals, and grand opera houses. Americans, always on the prowl to claim a historic past, became busy architectural bees, ravaging countries and cultures of their monuments. Time-honored artifacts were re-created and assembled anew as fanciful embellishments on fantastic designs. Inspired by the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, Egyptian styles phoenixed before architects set their sights on the dynasties of the Far East and mock temples such as Grauman's Chinese flourished in Hollywood.

In essence, the great picture palaces were emblematic of the democratic ideal, the common man's Shangri-la, where he could lean back in an opera box, elbow-to-elbow with blue bloods, tapping his foot to the swells of the Wurlitzer organ. There were plushy seats that gave with every scream and belly laugh. Late patrons were escorted by flashlight-bearing ushers, trained in the fine art of trailing the slanted beam so that it scattered over fleur-de-lis carpet, never spilling on the hurried patrons' footfalls. Waterfall curtains ascended and gave way to the magic of the big screen where larger-than-life images transported the movie-goer away from the world of the common day.

In the southwestern corn belt, architect John Eberson built his fabulous atmospheric theaters. San Antonio's Majestic (still standing) is reminiscent of an abandoned Moorish castle replete with turrets, trellises, hanging vines, and pine trees with stuffed doves at their roosts. The Houston Majestic (1923, since razed), catering to 2,116 seats, simulated an Italian courtyard with all the romantic appeal of the Mediterranean. Although the atmospheric theaters weren't picture palaces per se (in the grand old style), the audience must have been razzle-dazzled by the curved plaster ceilings with their star-filled azure skies on which projected doves danced and wisping clouds wandered. Surely, if nothing else, the patron was offered a psychological reprieve from the Texas heat.

In the 1930s when the Depression dug its long fingers deep into the pockets of the studio moguls, the idea was to create theaters with all the showy glamour of a palace but with a less costly price tag. Extravagant use of marble and crystal went out of style and were replaced with decorative plasters, mirrors, and indirect lighting. By virtue of its richness of design, yet relative simplicity, art deco surfaced as the whimsical hallmark of theaters like New York's Radio City Music Hall.

Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

The opening of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 inspired Egyptian interiors such as this one in the Metropolitan Theater, 1926, Alfred C. Finn, architect

In the late 1930s and '40s, as people started to radiate out from the downtown areas, theater owners met the challenge by building in strip shopping centers. In the Southwest (Alabama and Texas), a chain of 200 ABC Interstate theaters dotted neighborhoods and outlying areas. In Houston, on 28 November 1939, the River Oaks Theater (Pettigrew and Worley, architects), billed in local papers as "Houston's newest neighborhood theater," opened with Ginger Rogers and David Niven starring in (an obscure but surely a swell little film) *Bachelor Mother*. According to River Oaks management, the theater always has been the home of a mish-mash of styles: "semi-atmospheric cove lighting, and sort of art deco, but not really art deco – didn't quite sort out the interior – maybe art moderne, but plainer than that."

Feelings run high among dug-in and long-standing Houstonians that the River Oaks has always harbored intellectual ambitions – a place to see serious "art" pictures. Perhaps in 1941 one such patron saw an aged and money-soiled hand holding a glass paperweight. Within the glass ball, snow swirled and fell dreamily on a meager log cabin. Then there was a tight shot of Orson Welles's (a.k.a. Citizen Kane's) lips whispering the last words of a dying man – "Rosebud . . . Rosebud." So began the classic American tragedy of money, greed, and despair. Not unlike the plot of *Citizen Kane* is the story of the neighborhood movie house – where simple values and humanist aesthetics have given way to the multiplex: the fast-buck, bigger-is-better burgeoning trend of gigantomania in America.

A couple of years ago, hard economic times fast on its heels, the River Oaks succumbed to the embrace of Darwinian dynamics and became a triplex. Structurally, the concern was to maintain the integrity of the main auditorium, and by walling up the balcony two new theaters were created. The new balcony auditoriums (not to disparage the savoir-faire of survival) are essentially stripped-down black boxes with few amenities and meager screens.

This evening in Houston, when your average couch potatoes unleash themselves from their lush-puppy TV or VCR existence and venture forth to a movie house, what remains, what is changing, and how does the run-of-the-mill Houston movie theater rouse the ordinary viewer to an extraordinary state on a typical evening? Consider, if you will, the case of the River Oaks, the Bel Air, and the Meyer Park 14.

The sociology of going out to a movie probably hasn't altered a great deal. Among other things, you still have the

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Meyer Park 14, 1987, Fullerton, Carey, and Oman, architects. It offers 14 theaters, 14 concession registers, and long lines.

Not unlike the plot of *Citizen Kane* is the story of the neighborhood movie house—where simple values and humanist aesthetics have given way to the multiplex: the fast-buck, bigger-is-better burgeoning trend of gigantomania in America.

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River Oaks Theater, 1939, Pettigrew and Worley, architects

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Bel Air, 1948, Darrell P. Walling, architect; rehabilitated in 1987 by Archi Texas

juggler's act of getting to your seat while nibbling on popcorn and not spilling your drink. But for some of us, going to the movies these days implies a certain amount of cultural literacy – "have you seen such and such," by definition, implies being in the "know."

Thus, bespectacled hunter-gatherers of information, seeking yesteryears' art pictures, inevitably find themselves under the neon ice of the River Oaks marquee. "Ars Longa, Vita Breva and all – bring on Antonioni, Bergman, and Bunuel!"

Happily the River Oaks remains a neighborhood theater, one of the few where you can still buy a book of movie passes, pick up a film schedule (a must for an icebox door), and read a newsy bulletin board for the goings on around town. It is a place where invariably there is a nod and wave from passersby and friends coming and going. The concession people, wearing their bow ties and aprons with aplomb, are as quirky, informed, and good-hearted as ever. "Bravo!" we call, cheering the very spirit of the place from our seats.

When the Bel Air (originally the Bellaire, Darrell P. Walling, architect) was built in 1948 it was billed as "Space Station 1950." Today the Bel Air, under the directional ownership of John Coles and the interior design of Archi Texas (of Dallas's Inwood Theater fame), has been "re-deco-ed" and revamped into a fiveplex and can rightly be viewed as a high-tech "Space Station 1987."

Like the River Oaks, the Bel Air has a word-of-mouth clientele and is largely frequented by those, who with hands cupped and ears pressed to the ground, are on the alert, listening for snatches of foreign dialogue. In film-fare terms, the Bel Air offers a wide range of first-run foreign and domestic films. Their multiplex advantage is in having several mid-sized theaters. They are able not only to specialize in "small films" (those made by independent film makers such as John Sayles), but also can accommodate private screenings as well as hold over such swells as Sweden's *My Life as a Dog*. Besides entrancing the viewer with state-of-the-art equipment, the Bel Air offers something a bit more: substances for adults. Instead of nibbling on popcorn in the lobby, you can stash yourself in the bar where, in a hipper-than-hip atmosphere, you can imbibe ambrosia-like concoctions with tags like "Orgasm" and "Deep Throat." See and be seen at your trendy best (always the serious moviegoer's concern) and sit at Champs Elysée cafe tables, taking in a soundless film behind glass partitions. One fully expects to see Tama Janowitz (to say nothing of the whereabouts of Arthur Schlesinger) at a nearby table knocking back the Cuervo and writing serious fiction, inspired, to be sure, by the hologram on the wall. These amenities, in collusion with an eclectic range of very good, but loud (louder than loud), music ("avant- garde music for an avant-garde theater"), lend the place the air of a highly self-conscious nightclub. Fine by me, all is good and well, until the throb(?), pulse(?), beat(?) ultimately intrudes into the nearby auditoriums, where in the midst of a larger-than-life tender moment, dialogue is suddenly obscured by the clash and clang of a steel guitar (or was it a synthesizer?). You did, after all, come to see a film.

If the Bel Air is a space station, then the Meyer Park 14 (Fullerton, Carey, and Oman, architects) is an apocalyptic satellite. When it opened in May, 1987 it was the largest theater in the world. Its 3,081-seat capacity has since been superseded – nevertheless, on a good business day, turnstiles roulette at 8,500. Monitored by upwards of 80 employees, the Meyer Park is the home of computerized everything – air conditioning, 14 concession registers, and ticket counters. Popcorn, like an Ollie North shredder, zips, tumbles, and passes between hands at three concession stands. Forget about big box office, teen slashers, the Rat Pack, and Michael Caine – the concession stand is where the real money is made.

Finding the Meyer Park 14 can induce a crisis of mind. It is truly an adventure in wandering the wild, loop-de-loop of the Houston freeways. Recently, armed with a map, compass, and speed limit of 55, a carload of friends (hounds of popular culture – avid subscribers of *People* magazine) set forth to see a movie. Each of us, by virtue of a college education, felt uniquely qualified to serve as exit-spotting co-pilot. Havoc ensued:

"Get Off – Bellaire Boulevard."

"Wrong, it's Beechnut."

"I'm telling you, I've been to Meyerland one million times."

"Absolutely Wrong."

"Keep going, onward ho and all," one of us shouted.

The tender shoots of friendship slightly tattered but nonetheless intact, we arrived in a parking lot the size of a football stadium and perused the aisles for a space.

While waiting in the 20-minute New York line, it is best to be sporting a reliable watch so that you can chat it up with strangers and muse about whether they (who are they, anyway?) are going to start the film without you. Once inside, having made your way past multitudes of teenagers whose designer-appareled bodies are pressed against video games, the lobby has the hustle-and-bustle feel of an airport or Grand Central Station. Naturally, locating the auditorium of choice is like being in one of those jokes where you have to select the right door. . .oh, these and other traumas lead to the suspicion that what you are doing is rehearsing for a role in *Waiting for Godot*.

Besides the fact that the serious pop culturist can drift from film to film and never see them all in one day, what is truly an amazing bit of business at the Meyer Park 14 is that from wherever you may be seated you can see the film. Necks are not needlessly craned, giants can sit in front of the short, and every seat is equipped with a marvelously convenient cup holder. Amazing! What a concept!

Needless to say, people go to the movies for a host of reasons: simple escape, to wander in dreamlike foreign landscapes, and to purge their souls by Aristotelian catharsis. Regardless of private compunction (on the part of the moviegoer or maker), modern film is modern myth, and just as ancient myths once helped to bridge necessary psychological gaps between life and the harsh realities of nature, so be it with modern film. Simply put, all of this rigamarole may be neither here nor there, but what is important is that for multivarious reasons (people radiating from the downtown areas to the suburbs, the advent of TV in the '50s, VCR in the '80s, and so on) screens in a good many palaces and semi-palaces have gone and are going black. Many, like the once fabulous Majestic, have been razed. The Tower Theatre (1936, W. Scott Dunne, architect) is being reused as a showplace, and some, like the Alabama Theater (1939, W. Scott Dunne, architect; rehabilitated in 1984 by Morris*Aubry Architects), have been creatively reconciled. Be it landmark picture palace or neighborhood theater, the buildings are tangible community assets – therefore, we must cheer them on. Cultural memory, after all, bonds us with a place and helps us to keep our seats. ■

Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr.

1915–1987

Courtyard, McAllen State Bank, 1961, Cowell and Neuhaus, architects, and David Haid, associate architect

Paul Hester, Houston

Interior courtyard, Nina Cullinan House, 1953, Cowell and Neuhaus, architects

Anderson Todd

To be given so much, to take so little, to give so much: this was the life of Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr. His life seemed to flow smoothly – controlled, and, apparently, without effort.

Hugo Neuhaus appeared to be ordained by birth and society to steward the world about us, quelling its unruliness and bringing order to its complexity. He was committed to lofty endeavor and the exercise of exquisite taste. A true gentleman, he was kind yet strong in conviction, and generous of spirit. Hidden was a fervent disgust with personal aggrandizement at the expense of the world around us and a disdain for all that was phony and self-serving.

Hugo Neuhaus, who died on 21 July 1987, was a native Houstonian and, even more rare, a fifth-generation Texan. Having graduated from Yale University in 1938, he arrived at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University shortly after Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. With their appointment in 1937, Harvard was to shed its eclectic tradition and Beaux-Arts affinity, joining Princeton under Jean Labatut and the Armour Institute in Chicago under Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in the embrace of the modern movement in architecture.

His timing was fortunate. It was as if modern architecture, and its engagement with the demands and possibilities of our society and technology, was ready-made for Hugo Neuhaus. In it he discovered what it was that he had always wanted, what *he* was, and what he was destined to do.

Returning to Houston after World War II, following service in the United States Air Force, where he reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel, he joined the firm of Kenneth Franzheim. He worked there until he was licensed and, in 1948, he formed the partnership of Cowell and Neuhaus with C. Herbert Cowell. In the 14 years that followed, the firm designed numerous buildings across the state of Texas that obtained national, state, and local design awards. He was associated with Magruder Wingfield from 1962 to 1969, and practiced as the principal of Neuhaus Associates from 1969 until 1980. In the early '70s, at a time when young architects were beginning to fall away from the exigencies of the modern movement, lured by the more inclusive affects of the postmodern movement, Hugo Neuhaus was forced to curtail his practice due to a heart attack. However, as late as 1978, he completed a stunning and spacious residence on the scale of a Hadrianic villa for Mr. and Mrs. Dudley C. Sharp. It was a demonstration of his vision, his spatial generosity, and his acute attention to detail. It stands, in Houston, as a one-man resistance movement against the surrender of architecture to exterior decoration, to operatic stage sets.

Hugo Neuhaus enjoyed a unique reputation among architects in the Southwest. From diverse personalities and well-known local architects, such as John F. Staub and Howard Barnstone, it was not unusual to hear said that Hugo Neuhaus never did a bad building, a rare accolade to receive from another architect. His concern for his clients, the meticulous care he gave to his work, and his unimpeachable ethics when the issue of quality arose combined to make him an outstanding example for our entire profession. It assured him a reputation that he wore with an off-hand grace that belied his dedication. His humility made it easy for other architects to praise him.

When Hugo Neuhaus was elected in 1972 to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects, it was fitting that he was invested when the National Convention was being held in Houston, the city where he had been the architectural paragon among young architects for over 22 years.

It is disappointing that so many architects never became familiar with Neuhaus's work, since most of it was done before 1971. It is a sad fact, too, that much of his *oeuvre* has been severely altered or, even, demolished.

As a testimony to the diversity of scale and quality of his work, and as a way to represent it, two buildings are described here. They are chosen not only for their quality, but because neither will be seen again unless it is rebuilt.

The first was a modest-sized house for another well-known and beloved Houstonian, Nina Cullinan. Finished in 1953, it became the place for innumerable gatherings of Houstonians and people from all over the world who were drawn to the house by Miss Cullinan's love of people, gracious entertaining, and breadth of interests. Neuhaus provided the perfect background for the diverse collection of people of all ages and almost every walk of life that came up her driveway from Willowick Road.

Poised on a brick podium-foundation, the walls cantilevered out, the house seemed to float in space among the arching trees. The delicate, warm-colored stucco was a perfect counterpoint to the dense grey-green woods. The house was banded by a fascia of wood, painted white, topped by a deep tobacco brown cant strip and gravel guard. This beautifully proportioned box wrapped itself around an inner court like a square doughnut. It was open to the sky and the tops of trees, a view broken only by delicate laths of wood that were sandwiched with plastic sheets and bent into tunnel vaults supported by steel gutters that channeled the water onto the roof.

But the thing that Neuhaus achieved, aside from its generous well-proportioned space and beautiful detailing, was the framing beyond the glass wall of the great unbroken tapestry of woods that receded down toward Buffalo Bayou. This is what Miss Cullinan treasured and what people, speaking of the house in Amsterdam or Hong Kong, so clearly remember. Somehow, it embodied all that was best about the modern movement. It not only released architecture from the confines of bearing walls which interrupted the free-flowing space of interiors but united all space, making the individual one with his

Paul Hester, Houston

Cullinan House

world. It was an architecture that bespoke a confidence, an optimism, for what lies beyond, in place and in time. It was an expression of hope and expectation for the future, with a view of the world that could comfortably encompass various trappings and leftovers from the past. Here, in Miss Cullinan's house, one could see the exercise of critical judgment in things and people, the seeking of what was good, and the employment of the constant selective process that is sometimes called taste. It was a house that contained many diverse things, that let so many good things happen in it. And yet, after her death, someone bought the lovely house from her estate and tore it down to build an imposing pillared monster in Nina's beautiful woods.

The other memorable building, finished in 1961, was also built around a court. The McAllen State Bank Building, in south Texas's Lower Rio Grande Valley, was a low, flat, substantial-looking rectangular box, standing clear on its site, with a self-contained, modest monumentality. One came upon it on a principal corner in the center of town. The bank was raised on a low podium surfaced with Roman travertine and screened with planting, behind which one could walk in some shade. The building had a quiet reserve, pulling itself back from the heavily traveled thoroughfares whose bounding sidewalks were strangely devoid of pedestrians. Crossing the broad street and stepping up onto the raised platform brought one to the entrance at either end of the building. Here one moved easily between the flanking, buff-colored brick walls into the cool, glareless, spacious interior.

Once inside, the first things that drew one's attention were the eight spare, freestanding, black columns that soared up, defining the 24-by-36-foot bays that supported the roof deck. Suspended within the steel girders forming the bays were panels, apparently floating, that contained the lighted ceiling, air-conditioning, and acoustical treatment. Walking across a light-colored marble floor, a depositor would be drawn to the rich English oak panels facing the low teller's counter. At the other end of the banking room one could see the enclosed court with its dark green carpet of ground cover, a black pool, and a Jacaranda tree, whose delicate, orange-colored blossoms caught and softened the hard light. And beyond, one could see the similar, opposite entrance of the building at the far end.

The total effect spoke eloquently of Neuhaus's ease in handling large spaces and structures, something that has become an uncomfortable prospect for many architects in recent years. For them, it is an uneasiness that does not welcome the challenge of making great spaces in simple forms, framed by clear structure. Present-day architects, in the forefront of fashion and responsive to the demands of entrepreneurs, apparently feel impelled to dress up their building with folds, frills, and stylistic furbelows. And beneath the superficiality of exteriors are interiors with funny shapes that are divided into home-like rooms, proclaiming a retreat from the larger, often overwhelming, demands of modern life.

So, what is it that made the McAllen State Bank Building such a good building in so many architects' eyes? It was the spacious and comfortable atmosphere, clear in the way the enclosure was put together, that rendered a satisfying and serene entity that was harmonious in proportion.

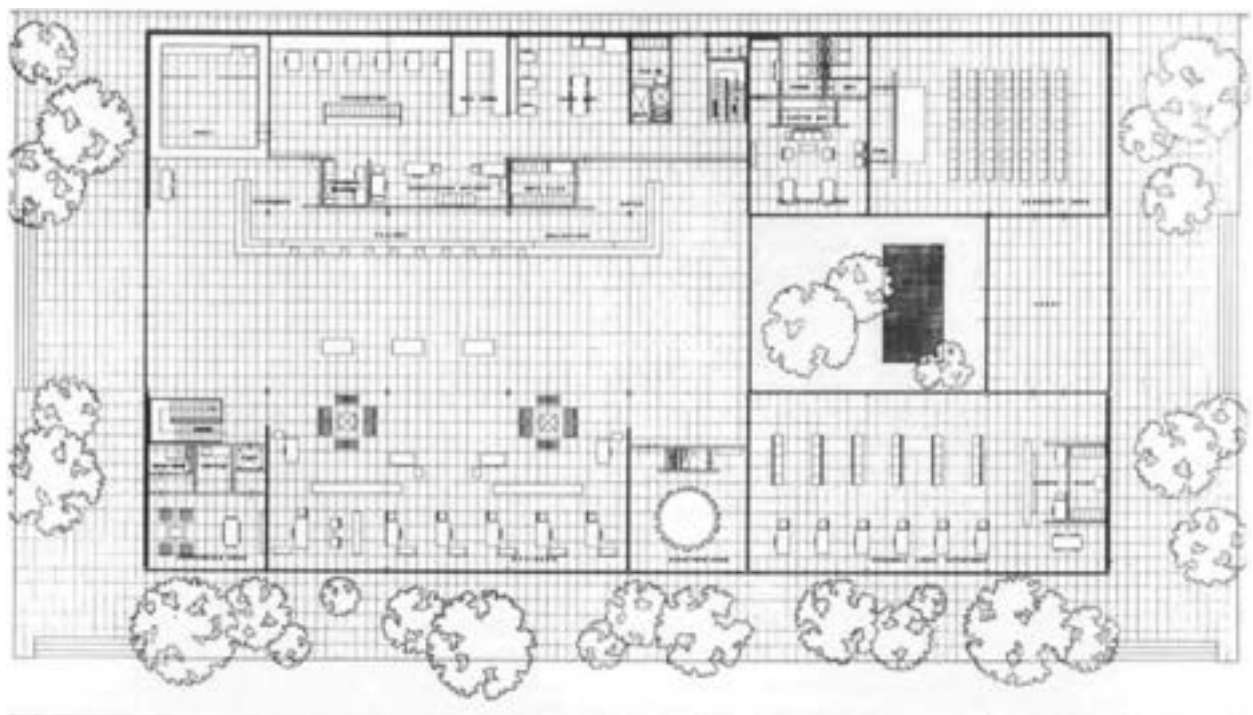
What follows is a story about how the building came about. It tells more about the architect than the building, but finally, it tells us why and how some buildings turn out to be good.

Late in the process of making the construction drawings for the bank, a substantial revision was made in the program. Encouraged by the level of competence brought to the firm by his new associate, David Haid, Hugo Neuhaus made a bold move. He stopped work on the drawings, contacted the bank, and requested an extension of time, at no expense to the owner, so that his firm could revise the design. The drawings were redone quickly, with everything falling into place in the way that a good building seems to go together by itself. The design had been altered by using a court to provide the bank with a separate entrance to both the lucrative small-loans department and the meeting hall, which allowed entry at all hours for use by the public in a way that would not disrupt the operation or violate the security of the bank. It was an unusual sight to see a bank building lit-up and in use, with people moving in and out, at all hours. This building remained a bright spot for architects visiting the Rio Grande Valley until new owners saw fit to add on to one side of the building and to reface the exterior.

In his role as trustee of numerable institutions and a member of their building committees, Hugo Neuhaus was the leader in many building programs, in which he took the responsibility for selecting architects and coordinating their work. Notably, Neuhaus worked on two buildings of international stature. He worked with Mies van der Rohe on the design of the Master Plan of The Museum of Fine Arts, shepherding the construction of the first phase (Cullinan Hall) and continuing on the building committee during the design of the second phase (Brown Pavilion) until Mies's death in 1969, then continuing through the construction and opening of the wing in 1974, working with the Office of Mies van der Rohe. The trust that he engendered in the institutions and such benefactors as Nina Cullinan, Oveta Culp Hobby, and Alice and George Brown is without parallel. During the years 1964 to 1968 Hugo Neuhaus was chairman of the building committee of the Alley Theatre, participating in the selection of the architect, Ulrich Franzen, coordination, and serving in the often difficult position of liaison between the board, Nina Vance, the architect, and the Ford Foundation, which matched donations from local sources. Before his death, the board of the Alley Theatre fittingly announced that the Arena Stage, the theater-in-the-round similar to the type where the Alley made its world-wide reputation, had been named the Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr. Stage.

We cannot know what Hugo Neuhaus will be remembered for. Notable mathematicians are remembered for their children's books, postmasters-general for their novels, and great adventurers go down in history for throwing a cloak over a mud puddle; architects become actors and actors can become president. Even if Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr. had not been an architect he could not have served his city, Houston, more conscientiously and usefully. But because he was an architect, nobody could have served better. ■

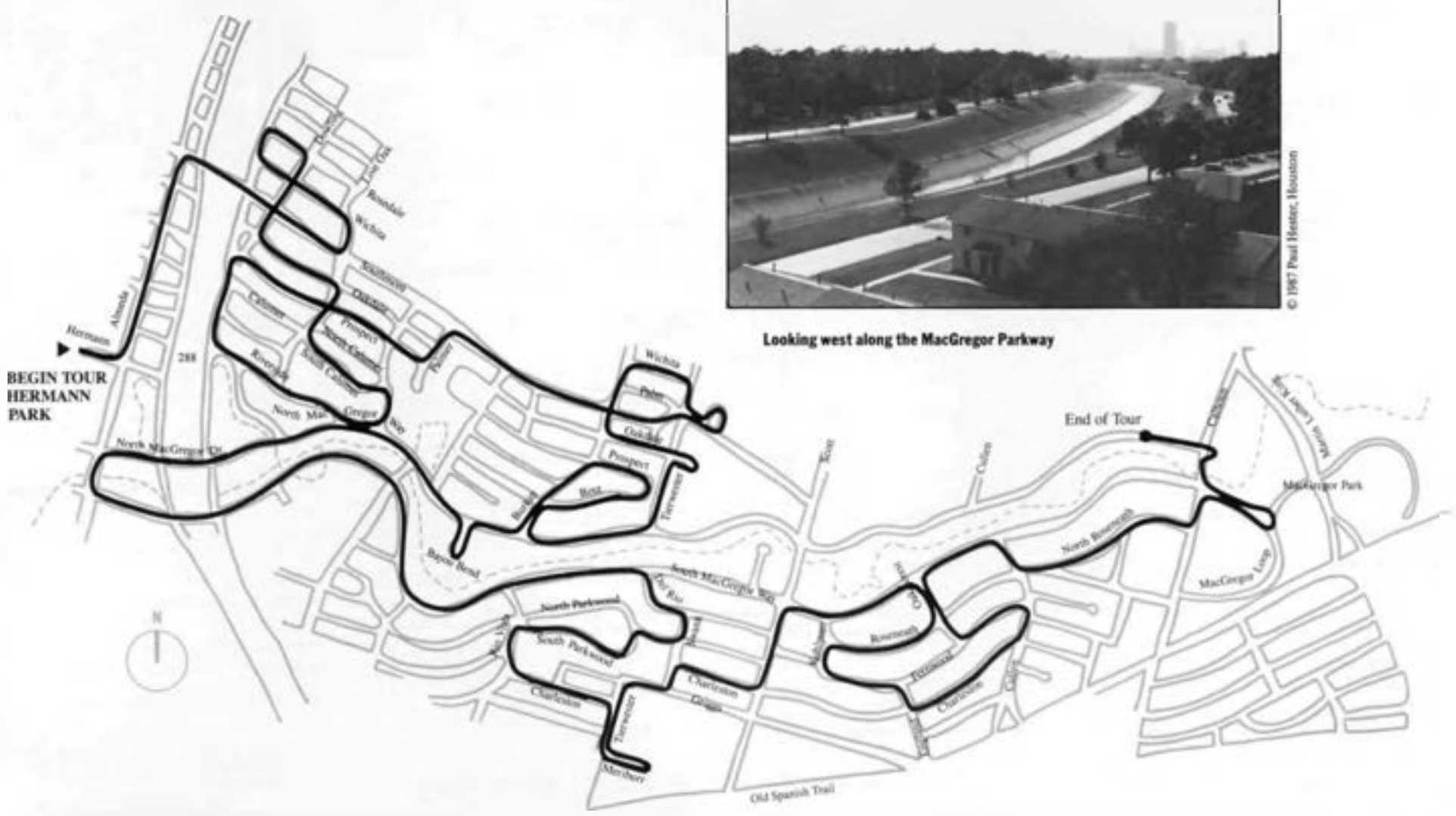
Plan, Cullinan House



Plan, McAllen State Bank

CiteSeeing

Looking west along the MacGregor Parkway



Riverside Terrace and Environs: An Architectural Tour

Stephen Fox

Historically, Riverside Terrace has been Houston's "other" River Oaks. It first attained this equivocal status in the 1930s when members of Houston's wealthiest Jewish families chose to build houses there. It maintains this identity today as the foremost neighborhood of Houston's black elite.

Riverside Terrace itself comprises 23 subdivisions platted between 1924 and 1946, which extend discontinuously along either side of Brays Bayou and the MacGregor Parkway from Almeda Road on the west to Calhoun Road on the east. These all were developed by Clarence M. Malone (1885-1960), cofounder and eventual president of the Guardian Trust Company, which financed much of this real estate activity. Several other developments flanked the northern sections of Riverside Terrace: Crescent Island (1926), along North MacGregor Drive, almost completely obliterated by SH-288; North MacGregor Oaks (1936), developed by Ben Taub to the east of Riverside Terrace, and Timber Crest (1940), which lies east of North MacGregor Oaks and is still marked by triumphant stone piers.

This area contains a notable array of houses, the work of such familiar figures in Houston architecture as John F. Staub, Birdsall P. Briscoe, and Joseph Finger. Particular to it are a group of spirited and distinctive modern houses of the early 1950s, notably those produced by the office of Bailey A. Swenson.

Special thanks for assistance in the preparation of this tour to W. H. Linnstaedter.

1 2020 Hermann Drive
Jewish Community Center
(now Hermann Regional Center)
1950/Lenard Gabert with W. Jackson Wisdom

Gabert had worked with MacKie & Kamrath on Temple Emanu-El and he and his design partner, Jack Wisdom, seem to have absorbed Kamrath's Wrightian inclination, evident especially in the center's horizontal emphasis.

2 5516 Almeda Road
Third Church of Christ, Scientist
1929/Henry F. Jonas & Tabor

J. Rodney Tabor leaned rather heavily on Elmer Grey's Christian Scientist church in Palo Alto, California when designing this exceptionally well-maintained Mediterranean number, with its recall of Ravenna.

3 5314-5302 Almeda Road
Patio Shops
1931/H.M. Sanford and B.W. Holtz

Almeda's answer to Main Street's Isabella Court: an exuberant Spanish-Mediterranean shopping center.

4 5202 Almeda Road
Houston Turn-Verein
1929/Joseph Finger

A triumph of art deco detailing, Finger's clubhouse for the city's oldest social club is in a reprehensible state of decay.

5 2426 Southmore Avenue
1928/Katharine B. Mott and Burns & James

Katharine Mott and her husband Harry came to Houston from Indianapolis in 1927 and set to work building a series of speculative houses of manorial style in River Oaks, Riverside Terrace, Edgemont, and Devonshire Place. Mrs. Mott designed the houses with the assistance of the Indianapolis architects Burns & James.

6 2504 Wichita Avenue
1930/W.D. Bordeaux

Bordeaux, best-known as the architect of the Isabella Court, here produced a trimly designed brick house, one of the first Houston examples of the Monterey style popular in the 1930s.

7 2221 Rosedale Avenue
1929/Joseph Finger

This block of Rosedale seems to have been the high-end district within the first section of Riverside Terrace. Finger's arcaded house makes up in scale and massing what it lacks in refined detail.

8 2620 South Calumet Drive
1936/Burns & James with Lenard Gabert

Among the survivors of Section 5, the most elite (and now most devastated) of the Riverside Terrace sections north of the bayou, is this elegant, asymmetrically massed French spread, built by the retail merchant Louis Leon. It is Burns & James's only Houston house not associated with Mrs. Mott.

9 2626 South Calumet Drive
1940/Robert C. Smallwood

A late, rather stripped-down example of the suburban manorial, which Clarence M. Malone had established as the preferred architectural genre in Section 5 with his own house at South Calumet and Live Oak, built in 1927 and pulled down in 1963.

10 2619 North Calumet Drive
1930/J.M. Glover

The '30s successor to the medieval manorial was the Southern manorial: the columned plantation house. Built for A.C. SoRelle, it now houses a neighborhood institution, The Groovy Grill.

11 2555 North MacGregor Way
1929

Occupying a pivotal site at the confluence of the parkway and Riverside Drive, this is one of the most engaging examples of the Riverside pastoral mode.

12 2627 Riverside Drive
1929/Katharine B. Mott with Burns & James

Mrs. Mott's characteristic mixture of stone and ornamental brick work is evident here.

13 2623 Riverside Drive
1936/Birdsall P. Briscoe

Briscoe's only house in Riverside Terrace was his last essay in the medieval manor house genre. Built for Israel Friedlander, founder of Gibraltar Savings & Loan Association.

14 2620 Riverside Drive
1928/Katharine B. Mott and Burns & James

A good example of Katharine Mott's adaptation of the picturesque manorial house to the exigencies of Houston's climate, with rooms pulled-out in long, thin wings to facilitate cross-ventilation. Occupied from the mid-'30s to the mid-'50s by specialty store cofounder Tobias Sakowitz and family.

15 2612 Riverside Drive
1929/Katharine B. Mott and Burns & James

The LaDet Motel, an emblem of Riverside Drive's unwelcome identity as Sugar Hill, is a late '70s adjunct to Katharine Mott's turreted Norman house.

16 2608 Riverside Drive
1936/Lenard Gabert

Gabert designed prodigiously in Riverside Terrace from the 1920s through the 1950s. Here he produced a gabled stone manor house, now obscured by a high wall. Across the street, at Riverside and Live Oak, once stood Joseph Finger's impressive Wesley West House, built in 1938 and demolished in 1963.

17 2521 Riverside Drive
1929/Charles A. Dieman

The corner turret and the three-story *mirador* make this house a local landmark.

18 2506 Riverside Drive
1936/Bailey A. Swenson

The first in a series of houses that Swenson designed for Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Proler and their children, this is a modernistic delight, complete with horizontal speed lines and a bull-nose corner that artfully acknowledges the Riverside-North MacGregor Way intersection.

19 5401 Palmer Street
1941/MacKie & Kamrath

The refreshing modernity of this slit-windowed, flat-roofed house has not been spoiled by later alterations.

20 3129 Southmore Avenue
St. James Church
1940/Dunaway & Jones

A small parish church souped-up with additions by Clovis Heimsath Associates (1972). The adjoining parish school is by Haywood Jordan McCowan.

21 3501 Southmore Avenue
Congregation Beth Yeshurun Synagogue
(now Lucian L. Lockhart Elementary School)
1949/Finger & Rustay

Of Joseph Finger's ambitious "Out-of-Phase" scheme for Beth Yeshurun, only one of the two wings that were to have flanked the central synagogue block was built.

22 3450 Wichita Avenue
1939

A compact, severely-detailed, flat-roofed brick house in the modernistic vein.

23 3401 Oakdale Avenue
1939/Claude E. Hooton

Hooton virtually reproduced here his 1937 house for Virginia and Randolph C. West on Dryden Road in Southgate.

24 3512 Oakdale Avenue
1959/John S. Chase

The architect's own house, it features a central well.

25 3504 Oakdale Avenue
1948/Wilson, Morris & Crain

Horizontality, which was the theme in this house by Ralph Anderson, premiated in the 1949 Houston Chapter AIA design awards. Dig the corrugated siding. Behind it, at Oakdale and North MacGregor Way, formerly lay the estate of Ann and Bernard Sakowitz (1940-1967).

26 3423 North MacGregor Way
1951

With its second-story, shed-roofed appendage, its contrast of horizontal strip and big picture windows, and its brick pylon wall staying the lateral thrust of its continuous eaves line, this Timber Crest contemporary is a genre classic.

27 3401 North MacGregor Way
1955

Flat-roofed bays faced with limestone and wood siding fan-out in a complexly stepped sequence.

28 3402 Binz Avenue
1968/John S. Chase

A late but contextually deferential example of flamboyant contemporary design.

29 3315 North MacGregor Way
1948/Bailey A. Swenson

A '40s Swing-style version of the turreted Norman manorial.

30 3303 North MacGregor Way
1950/Milton Foy Martin

This '50s contemporary was built by Cynthia and George P. Mitchell.

31 3226 North MacGregor Way
1949/MacKie & Kamrath

An austere house whose boxy masses are abruptly eroded by glazing.

32 5808 Bayou Bend
1950/MacKie & Kamrath

This discreet one-story house, like that at 31, lacks the overt Wrightian detail one expects of Kamrath.

33 2221 North MacGregor Drive
1942/MacKie & Kamrath

One of the few houses left in the Crescent Island subdivision. When published in *Architectural Record* in 1942, it was described as having excited neighborhood controversy for being *so* modern. Dreadful repainting obscures the salmon-colored brick.

34 3028 South MacGregor Way
1936/Robert C. Smallwood

The Wright F. Morrow House occupies one of the few estate-sized parcels remaining along the

parkway. Lavishly documented in *Architectural Digest* upon completion, it more recently was used in the filming of "Liar's Moon."

35 3126 South MacGregor Way
1952/Bailey A. Swenson

Extensive glazing and counterthrust shed roofs make this a nifty '50s contemporary.

36 3302 South MacGregor Way
1937/John F. Staub

This Regency style house for Mr. and Mrs. Sellers J. Thomas appears rather stiff in comparison to Staub's customarily dexterous relation of massing and siting.

37 3314 South MacGregor Way
1984/Haywood Jordan McCowan

Like much of HJMcC's work this wood-sheathed, shed-roofed, three-story house reflects the influence of the San Antonio architect O'Neil Ford.

38 3448 South MacGregor Way
1954/Bailey A. Swenson

Another of the big contempo land cruisers.

39 3701 Rio Vista Drive
1982/Haywood Jordan McCowan

The addition of a freestanding garage in 1987 has compromised the clarity of this brick-faced, metal-roofed house.

40 3615 Parkwood Drive
1940/Joseph Finger

For the eldest of the Battelstein brothers, Abe, Finger produced this asymmetrically massed, classically detailed house.

41 3612 Parkwood Drive
1938/Joseph Finger

A companion house to 40 across the street, for the grocery company executive Abe Weingarten, in what was described at the time of its completion as a Charleston style.

42 3611 Parkwood Drive
1953/Bolton & Barnstone

Howard Barnstone described this contemporary style house, with its odd, pop-up clerestory band, as a "brick cottage."

43 3530 South Parkwood Drive
1952

The ultimate '50s rambler, exhibiting the characteristic second-floor protrusion that Bailey Swenson called the "mother-in-law room," plus split-faced limestone facing, picture windows, a carport, and hulking horizontality.

44 3430 South Parkwood Drive
1942/Lenard Gabert

Gabert's entry into the big-biggy league was this austere house with its bowed classical portico.

45 3418 South Parkwood Drive
1938/Henry A. Stubee

The Lufkin lumberman Joseph H. Kurth, Jr. built this Southern plantation type house, the first house in the Parkwood district of Riverside Terrace.

46 3402 South Parkwood Drive
1951/Philip G. Willard

A low-slung contemporary house set far back on its luxuriantly undulating site.

47 3403 North Parkwood Drive
1953

One of the most exuberant '50s modern houses in Riverside Terrace, this concrete-framed number, built for furniture company executive Samuel Finger, looks as though it is about to take flight.

48 3403 Charleston Circle
1952/Bailey A Swenson

The retirement home of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Proler (18), this was Swensen's homage to the Prairie school.

49 3417 Charleston Circle
1950/Bailey A. Swenson

A structural tourette-de-force in tubular porch struts.

50 3605 Merlburr Lane
1956/Herb Greene

This extraordinary house – triangular in plan, built around a tree, its walls hung with roofing tiles – has been allowed to fall into a woeful state of deterioration.

51 3707 Charleston Street
1939/C.D. Hutsell

The Dallas architect-builder Charles D. Hutsell and his brother A.E. constructed this house in C.D.'s quirky Mediterranean manner. Enclosure of the front porch conceals one of Hutsell's distinctive egg-shaped arched windows.

52 3711 Charleston Street
1940/C.D. Hutsell

Also altered, this house nonetheless gives a clearer demonstration of Hutsell's idiosyncratic Mediterranean cottage style.

53 3716 Charleston Street
c. 1905

Theo H. Kuhlman, a carpenter, belonged to a family whose dairy farms covered much of what became the southern sections of Riverside Terrace. Being in the right place at the right time, he was able to have his cottage incorporated into the subdivision.

54 3734 Charleston Street
1940/MacKie & Kamrath

Before Modernism, MacKie & Kamrath occasionally designed historically informed period houses. Like several others that they did, this one evinces a distinctly mannered approach to the Georgian colonial look.

55 3807 South MacGregor Way
1953/Flatow, Moore, Bryan & Fairburn

The Albuquerque architect Max Flatow designed this house for his brother's family. Its flat roof could be flooded to provide evaporative cooling. Note the jaunty cantilevers and the infill panel façade.

56 3819 South MacGregor Way
1954/Bailey A. Swenson

This was one of Swenson's best houses, designed for his patron, contractor, and business associate Leon Green to take advantage of its sloping site. Bland repainting diminishes its vigor.

57 3904 South MacGregor Way
1936/John F. Staub

One of Staub's first efforts in the Texas farmhouse genre. Built for J. Coulter Means, uncle of Treasury Secretary James A. Baker III, it has not been treated kindly by its present occupants, who remain here in violation of the single-family provision in the deed restrictions

58 4000 South MacGregor Way
1939/Joseph Finger

Weingarten grocery-chain founder Joe Weingarten had Finger design for his family the largest house in Riverside Terrace, a French manorial style suburban chateau, located on an estate-sized lot.

59 3934 Roseneath Drive
1949/Bailey A. Swenson

Another of Swenson's Proler houses, this features an aggressively bowed picture window bay. Across the street, in the dense vegetation, lies the old Kuhlman family cemetery.

60 3939 Roseneath Drive
1978/O'Neil Gregory, Jr.

The architect's own house, a discreet cluster of wood-sheathed boxes.

61 3912 Roseneath Drive
1956/Leo Kern, builder

Kern, a home builder, constructed for his family the ultimate '50s ranchero dream house, replete with zany cantilevers, Quién es más macho? picture windows, multiple floor levels, interior planting troughs, and a glass-block bar on axis with the front door.

62 4216 Charleston Street
1950

Cranked in plan in response to its corner site, this house combines brick and concrete-block construction. The garage is at basement level.

63 4216 Fernwood Drive
1949/Bailey A. Swenson

Long and low, this – another of the Proler houses – is an expanded version of the house at 62.

64 4102 South MacGregor Way
1949/Irving R. Klein & Associates

A brick and shingled contemporary style house, it has been slightly compromised by subsequent alterations.

65 4210 South MacGregor Way
1939/Dehnert & Vesey

A substantial neo-Georgian house.

66 4505 North Roseneath Drive
1950/Bailey A. Swenson

The expressed stair pops the mother-in-law room up above the long, low eaves line of the first story.

67 4511 North Roseneath Drive
1952

The same formula as at 66, only here carried out in stone, aluminum, and curved corrugated glass. The glazed void of the stairwell is especially well handled and the palm trees lend just the right touch.

68 4506 North Roseneath Drive
1954/Bolton & Barnstone

The mother-in-law room becomes the maid's quarters atop the garage while the one-story house encloses a central garden court. Major rooms are oriented toward a south-facing rear garden.

69 4619 North Roseneath Drive
1953/Bailey A. Swenson

Movemented massing, multiple materials, and bright polychromy are the distinguishing traits. The deck above the carport is an addition.

70 South MacGregor Way and MacGregor Loop Drive
MacGregor Park Clubhouse
1931/A.E. Nutter

In the spirit of Nutter's Mediterranean clubhouses in Hermann and Mason parks.

71 South MacGregor Way and MacGregor Loop Drive
Henry F. MacGregor Monument
1937/William Ward Watkin

Watkin designed this cenotaph commemorating the real estate developer Henry F. MacGregor, in whose memory the 110-acre park and the bayou parkway properties were donated to the City of Houston in 1926. Watkin also was responsible for the stone piers that mark the park's several entrances.

72 5069 Calhoun Road
1939/Lenard Gabert

Gabert's version of the Texas farmhouse, located on the one estate still left on the north side of the bayou.

End of Tour. For a thorough account of the history of Riverside Terrace and surrounding neighborhoods, see Barry J. Kaplan, "Race, Income and Ethnicity: Residential Change in a Houston Community, 1920-1970," *The Houston Review*, 3 (Winter, 1981), 178-202.

Citeations

This is Our Home—It Is Not For Sale

A documentary produced by Jon Schwartz, music by Arnett Cobb, 180 minutes. Premiere December 11, 1987, 7 PM, Rice University Media Center, to benefit the Media Center and the Southwest Alternative Media Project.

Reviewed by V. Nia Dorian Becnel

Jon Schwartz has produced a significant documentary film on the trials and tribulations of Houston's Riverside community located in the southeast section of the city, along Brays Bayou. Riverside boasts spacious, manicured lawns, winding, tree-lined streets, and stately houses which have been and continue to be the homes of many of Houston's leaders. Some of those leaders are the subjects of this nearly three-hour long film, giving testimony through oral interviews on how the issue of race can affect the development of a community.

The film begins with an informative and well-presented glimpse of Brays Bayou as it appeared during the early stages of its development after 1836. Historical photographs along with the perspectives of German dairy farmers, the area's first settlers, are used effectively to create a portrait of the area's early settlement. The photographs show the bayou as it was: a lush, almost tropical waterway, with dense overhanging foliage along the irregular natural banks of the slow-moving water.

Upon this historical base, the film moves to the 1920s, describing the events that culminated in the establishment of Riverside Terrace. At this point, the film begins to rely heavily on oral interviews, and one of the major flaws in the film's format becomes apparent immediately: the viewer is not privy to the questions to which the person being interviewed is responding. Thus the viewer constantly faces the task of attempting to infer the question from the content and tone of the response. Despite this annoying flaw, the film begins to use the interviews to construct the historical narrative.

The Guardian Trust Company, developer of Riverside, offered spacious lots with an abundance of trees along the natural banks of the bayou. Although the earliest residents of the newly formed community were not primarily Jewish, Jews soon became a visible presence within it. Wealthy Jewish families congregated in Riverside partly because of their de facto segregation from River Oaks, Houston's most exclusive residential neighborhood. Schwartz uses this historical tableau as a backdrop for interviews with former residents and, in some instances, their now-adult children.

Surprisingly or not, there was reluctance on the part of former residents and their children to admit that Riverside's growth was attributable to the fact that they were excluded from River Oaks. Other reasons, such as not having the sun shining in their eyes as they drove to work in downtown, were given as a justification for having "chosen" Riverside over River Oaks. Only after several interviews did one of the former residents frankly admit that Riverside was primarily a Jewish community, and that realtors usually would not even respond to requests from Jews for available listings in River Oaks.

The affluence and quiet comforts of the community were apparent as former residents sat on their resplendent lawns and extolled their classic middle-class values, nostalgically discussing the "wonderful" lifestyle that existed in Riverside. At this point one begins to wonder if the style of living was so wonderful, why the former residents elected to sell and move to other areas?

The answers become evident as the film moves to events of the 1950s, the decade during which there was an influx of black professionals into the nearby and recently established Texas College for Negroes, now Texas Southern University. These upwardly mobile blacks desired a higher standard of living and had the funds required to purchase homes in an affluent area. And inevitably, they pursued the acquisition of residences in the nearby Riverside community. As anti-Semitism had lurked beneath the surface, blocking Jewish entry into River Oaks, racism raised its ugly head first to impede and later to advance the transition of Riverside from a primarily middle-class Jewish community to one inhabited principally by the black middle class.

Members of the Jack Ceasar family were the first black residents in Riverside Terrace. Ceasar was a successful cattleman who moved his family to Riverside in 1953. The film goes to great lengths to chronicle the shock and apprehension registered by white residents, in part because the Ceasar family moved into their new home in the middle of the night.

The film provides valuable insights into the factors that caused the subsequent white (Jewish) flight from the community. The interviews expose the "block-busting" tactics of real-estate brokers who manipulated the area by actively soliciting listings from apprehensive residents. They also exposed the shame and fear of owners who often showed and sold their houses to blacks after dark, shielding the transaction from neighbors. Once a tranquil and idyllic community, Riverside suddenly found itself embroiled in the dilemma of attempting to preserve the community as it was, while at the same time accommodating the radical changes occasioned by the arrival of black families.

Out of this stressful situation a movement was launched to foster the peaceful integration of the area. Residents gave testimonials declaring their intentions to stay in their homes, and posted signs stating "This is Our Home, It Is Not For Sale." But the flight continued, and, slowly, Riverside became primarily a black community.

Schwartz then focuses on the return of whites to Riverside in the late 1970s and hints of its possible gentrification. New white residents cited the low cost of luxury housing and the quality of life as reasons for returning to Riverside. Several black residents voiced concern about this influx of whites back into the area, showing the similarity in the response of people of different races when faced with a similar threat to their homes.

Using the controversy surrounding the location of the Harris County Psychiatric Hospital on the southwest edge of Riverside, the film then examines the conflicts that accompany encroachment. Again, the issue was divided along racial lines. At this point, the film begins to lose some of its clarity. The interviews fail to provide a clear understanding of the issues or the justifications for maintaining given positions relative to them. The segment rambles; coming at the end of a very lengthy film, it is rather tedious to sit through and diminishes the overall impact of the presentation.

Although the film provides some very poignant interviews, the format creates several unnecessary problems. In addition to omitting the interviewer's questions, it also fails to provide the names or occupations of residents being interviewed.

(Continued on page 24)

(Continued from page 23)

This knowledge would have been useful to interpret correctly the information and perspectives given by the residents.

Despite these deficiencies, *This Is Our Home – It Is Not For Sale* gives solid historical information on the Riverside Terrace and Brays Bayou area and documents the conflicts that have beset the community. As a case study, Schwartz's historical footage provides social historians with an excellent educational resource. ■

Frank Lloyd Wright and the Johnson Wax Building: Creating a Corporate Cathedral

Courtesy of Johnson Wax

Great Workroom viewed from south mezzanine, circa 1959, Frank Lloyd Wright, architect

An exhibition organized by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University
Farish Gallery, Rice University, Houston
24 August - 11 October 1987

Reviewed by William F. Stern

For all of Frank Lloyd Wright's deserved fame and status as a pioneer of the 20th century, much of his work is little known, often rarely seen, and not easily grasped. The most widely known of his buildings, the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, was designed and completed late in his career and is not, by most critical standards, his finest work. Other famous buildings, such as Falling Water, the Robie House, or the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo (now demolished), are known to us mostly through a photographic image.

If we cannot visit Wright's buildings directly, the next best opportunity is for part of the building to come to us. Just that happened in Houston recently when a segment of the Great Workroom at half-scale from Wright's 1939 Johnson Wax Administration Building was assembled in the Farish Gallery in the School of Architecture at Rice University. Under the umbrella of "mushroom" columns, the workplace was replicated complete with a sampling of the desks and chairs Wright designed for the workroom. Drawings, models, and samples of letters which passed between the architect and client filled the Farish Gallery space, offering a complete picture of the making of the building. The exhibition was curated by Jonathan Lipman for the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University and is accompanied by a book-length catalogue published by Rizzoli.

The story that unfolds to us through the exhibition and catalogue is a fascinating one which serves to explain how the Johnson Wax buildings were a seminal event in Wright's career and among his most influential buildings in advancing the cause of modern design. We learn, for instance, that the Research Tower, an image that has become indelible as the signature for the Johnson Wax complex, was actually a later addition (1950) to the earlier completed Administration Building (1939). Although Wright was opposed to architecture as monument, with the Research Tower he created a strong and distinctive symbol for the complex and the Johnson Wax Company by reworking inventions and creative strokes realized in the earlier completed Administration Building. Still, Wright never intended a monumental expression for his corporate cathedral and begs us to see it otherwise. We learn through a comparative examination of two earlier office buildings, the Larkin Soap Company in Buffalo, New York (1904) and a design for the *Capitol Journal* newspaper in Salem, Oregon (1931) that Wright already had set the stage for the Johnson Wax Administration Building. The exhibition neatly clarifies the diagramatic order of these three buildings through the use of three-dimensional, see-through Plexiglas floor plans. Like Larkin and Capitol Journal, the Administration Building for Johnson Wax is inward looking. If we previously associated Wright's work and its relationship to its setting as outward stretching, clearly the position he took with his houses, we now realize that when Wright felt separated from a natural setting he chose to make an internal world quite apart from anything outside. This is the position Wright would later take in the design of the Guggenheim Museum, and, through an examination of the Johnson Wax Administration Building at this exhibition, we gather a much clearer understanding of Wright's attitude towards public and corporate buildings.

It is not only our understanding of Wright and his work that is sharpened. The collection of artifacts and documents also provide a look into some of the problems in constructing this innovative building. We see Wright and the relationship with his Medici-like patron, Herbert Johnson, through their often heated correspondence. There is a movie that dramatically shows load-testing of a freestanding mushroom column with Wright and Johnson looking on as well as photographic images of construction in progress. Other projects that relate to Johnson Wax are shown through lithographic plates, and a house Wright designed for Herbert Johnson in 1937, Wingspread, is also documented.

The greatest joy of this exhibition, besides the scaled version of the Great Workroom and its furniture, comes from seeing firsthand the original sketches, renderings, and construction drawings for the buildings and furniture. The perspective drawings, in both sketch and finished form, capture the architect's intentions and as the sketches evolve we come more and more to feel the effect of streamlining and movement that would come to express the building form and its furnishings. We see the development of construction details from sketch to final drawing, gaining an understanding of the inner relationship of the buildings' architecture to the furniture design.

Wright's dream of a workplace in the bucolic setting of his visionary town, Broadacres City, would have to wait, eventually to be realized by others. But the

Johnson Wax Administration Building became the model for the post-World War II suburban office building. Moreover, Wright anticipated the open office plan and the modular furniture that eventually would populate offices throughout the nation.

With the Johnson Wax buildings Frank Lloyd Wright achieved an unparalleled inventive brilliance through a complete synthesis of all the parts of the building: design, program, and technology. It is that piece of creativity that this exhibition captures, and though we are still far away from the actual place and buildings, we are able to come a little closer to understanding the mind of America's master builder of the 20th century. ■

Architecture as We Approach the 21st Century

Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, Southwestern Region, Annual Meeting
22-23 October
Texas A&M University

Reviewed by Peter Wood

From the keynote address to the meeting's end, the ACSA annual meeting stayed true to its title and tried hard to look to the future. In separate sessions devoted to history, technology, practice, and education, papers by faculty from within the region (Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas) and beyond were presented to an alert but seldom contentious crowd.

Paul Leinberger, a veritable jack-of-all-trades from Minneapolis, started things off by letting the group in on his underway book – a sequel to, and subsequent tracking of, the subjects of *The Organization Man*. With a number of stinging observations, Leinberger let everyone know that not only do the design professions need to worry about the future, they are not all that much in tune with the present. He illustrated his point by citing that the design professions – particularly architects and planners – are still designing for the "Ozzie and Harriet" family while only 14 percent of us live that way. He suggests that the design professions want us to return to that idyllic age but warns that "Americans can never go back" and that perhaps the architects need to begin to design environments that fit a new sense of reality.

After that, the remainder of the sessions were smoothly interesting. A highlight of the evening session was a presentation of a 15-year labor of love, "The Plan of St. Gaul: A Master Plan for Monastic Settlements of the 9th Century A.D.," by Walter Horn. The scholarly lecture was followed by a visit to an exhibition of the reconstruction model and drawings of St. Gaul at the Exhibit Hall of the J. Earl Rudder Complex.

As with all discussions and presentations of the future, this conference tended to get one thinking, but not much else. The reluctance of the presenters to risk a forecast was evident in almost every presentation and there was very little suggested about the future that isn't already obvious. But, since this year's kindergarten class will wear high-school class rings with '00 on them, maybe the year 2000 is not really that far away – maybe the conference was only speaking to tomorrow. ■

The Woodlands: New Community Development, 1964–1983

George T. Morgan, Jr. and John O. King, College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 1987, 162 pp., illus., $27.50

Reviewed by Peter Wood

The Woodlands (the place) is a collection of people (22,500), houses (9,600), bike paths (40 miles), jobs (6,350), and land (25,000 acres) located about 30 miles north of downtown Houston. *The Woodlands* (the book) is a 162-page effort that doesn't tell us a lot more than that.

Written by two history professors, this tidy little volume chronicles the development of The Woodlands in a concise, easy-to-read, magazine-like journalistic style. The book takes us through the life of George P. Mitchell from his days on the tennis courts of Texas A&M to the thoughts that brought him to building a new community – "If you were going to take Memorial and wipe it all out and do it over again, how would you do it better?" In subsequent chapters the authors take us through the land acquisition and planning, the opening, the struggles with the economy, the problems with the funding sources in Washington, and finally some tales about the continuing activities and the social goals of the community.

The book is an easy read and it captures and documents much of the history of The Woodlands that might have otherwise been lost. The book also presents a reasonable bibliography as a good starting place for those interested in new communities and it does try to make some sense of the intricacies and problems within the federal programs that supported the new communities.

But with a prologue that begins, "Visitors to The Woodlands, Texas, leave Interstate 45 approximately ten miles south of Conroe. . ." the reader has to wonder why and for whom this book was written. (There are a lot of people in Houston who don't have a firm fix on where Conroe is.) Lamely supported by numerous, uninspired, black-and-white photographs of questionable value (i.e., page 148, "George and Cynthia Mitchell and Ian and Carol McHarg at The Woodlands' tenth anniversary celebration, October 20, 1984"). The book does not offer enough depth to be of much use to anyone seeking more than a superficial understanding of the community. The historic setting, physical plan, development problems, precise financial accounting, economic context, and the people who caused The Woodlands to be built remain as mere skeletons with no flesh. Lacking a clearly stated purpose, *The Woodlands* (the book) leaves one feeling cheated of any sense of the realities of The Woodlands (the place).

In all fairness, it's hard to write a book about a continuing story. At its present population, The Woodlands is only about 12 percent on the way to its "final population" of 150,000-175,000. This state of change and growth means that even the epilogue becomes flawed by the passage of time and changing events when it speaks of the completion of a major shopping mall in the spring of 1987 which has, as yet, not suffered its ground-breaking ceremony.

So what we have here is a book of good scholarship and good reading, but lacking in depth. While not providing the epic volume on new towns in America, nor even on The Woodlands itself, the slim volume won't take up much room on your shelf. But if you want many of the same pictures in color, a lot of the same words, and the history (without the detail), there is one of those "hotel room" books (complete with corporate advertising), *The Woodlands: New Town in the Forest* (Pioneer Publications, Inc., 1985) for about $10 that will more than suffice. ■

Liquid City: Houston Writers on Houston

Rita Sayers, editor; photography by Paul Hester; San Antonio, Corona Publishing Co., 117 pp., 29 illus., $14

Reviewed by James Hoggard

One of the nerviest things a civic-minded organization can do is to commission a group of well-seasoned writers to address the place they're in. That is exactly, however, what the board of the 1987 Houston Festival did. The result is a provocative, coolly reflective, yet many-voiced anthology that warrants repeated attention. Although several pieces substitute mannerism for sensibility, far and away most of the work was done by writers who were honorable enough to push themselves toward depth of insight as well as excellence of execution.

As a unit this collection of prose, verse, and interpretive photography defines Houston as a complex of incipient identities. Both jagged and contemplative, the book suggests that Houston's fortunes have been too varied, raw, and transient for it to have become nostalgic about itself the way, for instance, a major portion of Dallas has.

Pieces in the book, however, move obliquely rather than directly from specific detail to generalization. Similarly, Paul Hester's illustrative photographs blend reportage with art.

A number of the works – in particular those by Rosellen Brown, Phillip Lopate, Beverly Lowry, and Susan Wood – are studiedly contemplative, whereas the works by Donald Barthelme, Vassar Miller, Ntozake Shange, and Lorenzo Thomas are more aggressive in tone, sometimes even jagged. Gentle but satirical, Max Apple's "Venice" forms a tonal transition between the other voices. Poems by Cynthia Macdonald and Stanley Plumly evoke a guarded, even self-protected, approach to their subjects.

In keenly focused personal essays, Phillip Lopate and Rosellen Brown evoke a range of visual textures, from those one sees driving to those one has to kneel in weeds to find. In these works, one moves from a sense of anonymity to recognition of connection with presences outside self.

In her sometimes archly studied "Us," Beverly Lowry names the dimension of apartness created by Houston's movable identity. "We are no longer essentially Texan or Southwestern," she writes. "We never were Southern. There is no Sunbelt, never was." Her notions are debatable, but her insistent, distinctive voice is authentic.

Parallel rhythms echo throughout the collection, even in pieces as different from each other as Donald Barthelme's wonderfully entertaining and slyly incisive "Return" and Ntozake Shange's funkily oppugnant "Ridin' The Moon In Texas." A repatriated expatriate, the narrator of Barthelme's story shoots an azalea in the heart but plans to make amends for the slaughter with a 900-foot-high stainless steel commemorative statue. Shange's sassy, multivoiced piece also handles social criticism indirectly, as intimated by the beginning of one of its sections: "Houston Rodeo & Livestock Show ain't never seem the same since we come riding in from Arcola. All colored and correct."

Similarly, the peroration closing Max Apple's "Venice" undercuts a common contemporary limit, namely the smallness

"Pedestrian Bridge, Texas Medical Center," by Paul Hester

of spirit that comes when a society defines itself exclusively in secular terms: "We drink to Yemen. We drink to Houston. We drink to the cities named for gods and to the cities where no divinity has wandered. We drink to Venice. We will be our only shrines."

In both meditative and whimsical modes, the works in *Liquid City* remind us that reflection is necessary if vision is to develop in the polis and vitality is to grow. A symbolically valuable gesture of self-knowledge, *Liquid City* shows interesting minds articulating their city's growing self-awareness: wholeness in tension with assortments of parts. ■

HindCite

George O. Jackson

Luminarie, Hermann Park, Valerio Festi, designer

Illuminations of the Ephemeral City

Bruce C. Webb

It's 9 PM on a Monday evening in downtown Houston, and something is going on. To the 9,000 or so travel agents who are in town for a convention, it must seem that something is not quite right. After all, the book on Houston has it that downtown is *nowhere* after dark. Even with all the big-draw performance centers grouped together – the Alley, Jones Hall, the Music Hall, the Wortham – the patrons slip in invisibly from underground parking lots and leave the same way as though they were being delivered like city utilities in hidden conduits. If you are looking for a crowd in the evening you better head out to the bright lights of one of the suburban shopping centers rather than risk the feelings of fear and loathing in the nighttime milieu of downtown Houston.

Yet here it is a Monday night and the usually invisible plateau of Holcombe Plaza is fairly swarming with a party crowd basking in the spectral glow of a light show which looks like it has been mistakenly redirected from its intended destination at Astroworld. The crowd spills over into other downtown spaces – City Hall Square, Tranquility Park – where similar displays have relined the city for nighttime use. Cars circle the block at a crawl, passengers craning to catch a glimpse. Someone passing through might wonder if a band of clandestine, metaphorical pranksters had snuck into the city and were working on a diabolical plan to convert the stern-faced, functional city into a frolic.

The real culprits were the Italian government and their Ministry of Tourism and Performing Arts who gave Houston one of the best Octobers ever. The small spectacle they included in the downtown plazas was showing just how easy it is to get Houstonians out after dark. Valerio Festi delighted the city with his baroque fireworks display for the September opening of the George R. Brown Convention Center. Set to music provided by the Shepherd School Symphony Orchestra, Festi's fireworks lit up the nighttime sky with a gracefulness as different from our multi-megaton, Fourth-of-July power shows as an NFL blitz is from a performance of Swan Lake. Here Festi had frozen his pyrotechnic art in a collection of light sculptures set up in five locations around the city and had fashioned his nighttime magic into a more prolonged event.

The sculptures, on view from 12-18 October, were an enticing combination of the tawdry and the magnificent: thousands of tiny colored lights strung out along rickety wooden frames created fantastic pointilistic drawings in the night, recalling in their shapes architectural themes and ceremonial banners of the traditional *luminarie* used to celebrate saint's days and town festivals in the Publia region of southern Italy.

The displays in City Hall Square, Tranquility Park, and Holcombe Plaza made an illuminated, strolling circuit in the downtown; a fourth near Miller Outdoor Theatre provided the most surreal experience – a procession of lighted arches in forced perspective, leading from nothing to nowhere, incongruously discovered in the terrifying darkness of Hermann Park. The smaller crowd at this location was more reverential and studious. One man, who was obviously an architect, was pacing off the spacing between the arches and explaining to anyone who would listen how the diminishing sequence in their spacing caused the procession to appear longer in one direction and shorter in another.

For seven days, Festi's lights redefined a portion of the city, lining ordinary and familiar spaces with an extraordinary collection of tiny, lighted jewelry. It was a delight to know that the grey-suited, self-important business buildings and formal spaces in the downtown could be glitzed up and made into characters in a street entertainment. It reminded me of my hometown in Pittsburgh where the meanest looking houses in the neighborhood frequently were decked out with the biggest extravaganza of Christmas lights and decorations, and for a short time the streets were transformed into a Christmas village. Even when the lights came down and things fell back to normal, there was anticipation of the next Christmas and the renewal of the ritual of transmutation.

Festi's lights showed the magnifying potentials of the smallest scale of things and the catalyzing powers of the transitory event. I have always had the belief that a feeling for the ephemeral is a big part of the Houston psyche – a city that prizes events more than places. In Houston things are where they are for no symbolic reason – the price of a piece of real estate or the facilitation of business dictates location. Like most modern cities, Houston is a diagram, a calculus of locations. But the *spirit of place* is carried around like a medicine show – set up, taken down, moved to a new location – subtly redefining the urban maps we all carry around in our heads. The most spectacular example of place being worked over by an event was Jean-Michel Jarre's super-sized concert two years ago, which used a big chunk of the downtown skyline as a stage. The audience stretched for three miles along Allen Parkway, bringing the city's form into a momentary conjunction with itself as a work of performance art. And all those things lost to pernicious function and utility – lights, energy, tall buildings, even the highways – became again pure phenomena.

Musing about these things has led me to a modest proposal. Perhaps we should stop making our public places and our public monuments in concrete and steel. We have enough of them already. Instead, let's set to work turning the city into a continually evolving festival, one which will catalyze and recipher what is already there. Give the local artists and architects, and sometimes an invited outsider, the chance to make the city over and over again with projects which re-use, re-view, and re-line the functional city. Then when someone asks for the locations of Houston's great civic monuments and ceremonial spaces, the city tour guides, having lived through no periods of great beliefs or enduring accomplishments, would refer him to both a map and a calendar and tell him he missed a great one last week, but if he hurries he may still be able to catch something going on in the parking lot at Almeda Mall.

Festi's lights, and the real gift of the Italians, is a little metaphor for the spirit of Houston, a city much like Italo Calvino might have written about in *Invisible Cities*: a place that never repeats itself and is never seen to be quite the same. ■