$4.00

# Cite

25 • Fall 1990

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

**Fourth Ward and the Siege of Allen Parkway Village**

**Metro's Park-and-Rides**

**A Mummers' Tale**

**Public Art in Houston**

**John Zemanek's Gibson House**

# Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

*A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance*

25: Fall 1990

Cover: *Jean Dubuffet*, Monument au Fantôme, *1977. 1100 Louisiana Building, 1100 Louisiana. Photo by Paul Hester.*

InCite





**Managing Editor** Linda L. Sylvan
**Assistant Editor** Molly Kelly
**Editorial Assistants** Leo C. Boucher, Apryl Sherman
**Advertising** Carol Moffett
**Graphic Design** Bales Design
**Printing** Wetmore & Company

The Rice Design Alliance, established in 1973, is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to the advancement of architecture and design.

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





**Notes on Contributors**

**Alan Balfour** is dean of the School of Architecture at Rice University and author of *Berlin: The Politics of Order* (Rizzoli, 1990).

**Joel Barna** is editor of *Texas Architect*.

**Geoffrey Brune** is a practicing architect and assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston.

**John Kaliski** is principal architect for the Community Redevelopment Agency of the city of Los Angeles, teaches urban theory at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, and is a former editor of *Cite*.

**William Howze** makes movies for museums. He moved to Houston last year from Fort Worth, where he was director of special programs at the Amon Carter Museum for 12 years.

**Barbara Koerble**, an art historian who lives in Fort Worth, has written on architectural subjects for *Architecture, A+U*, and *Texas Architect*, the latter as a contributing editor, and is a contributing author to *American Architecture of the 1980s* (AIA Press, 1990).

**Rafael Longoria** is an architect and an assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston. He serves on the board of directors of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance.

**Elysabeth Yates-Burns McKee** is assistant professor of architecture at Rice University.

**Deborah Morris** teaches architecture at the University of Houston and is an associate with the firm of William F. Stern & Associates.

**Patrick Peters** is assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston and a partner in the firm of Longoria/Peters.

**William F. Stern** is principal in the firm of William F. Stern and Associates and an adjunct professor of architecture at the University of Houston.

**Rives Taylor** is a lecturer in architecture design at the University of Houston and an architect with the firm of Hoover & Furr.

**Bruce C. Webb** is professor of architecture at the University of Houston.

# Big Cité Beat

☛ Aloha to **Drexel Turner**, ex-*Cite* editor and doyen of Rice University's Farish Gallery since 1981, who was spirited off to Boston this summer when his better half, arts exec **Mary Anne Piacentini**, was named director of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. From afar, Drexel eminence grise'd the Rice Design Alliance's "Wonderworks" series this fall, featuring **James Parks Morton**, dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. *Progressive Architecture*'s **Mark Alden Branch** waxing sardonic on Disneydesign, **William H. Jordy** on the Tennessee Valley Authority, **Karal Ann Marling** wisecracking her way past wacky roadside attractions, and **David Nixon** of Future Systems.

☛ The **American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter** will present its biannual design awards on 17 January 1991. Jurors Rodolfo Machado, William Pederson, and Cathy Simon premiated 15 submissions in the categories of architecture, interior architecture, and urban design. Honor awards in architecture were given to **Natalye Appel, Kenneth Bentsen, Carrie Glassman Shoemake,** and **Taft Architects,** with citations going to **William F. Stern & Associates,** the **Wittenberg Partnership, CRSS, Val Glitsch,** and Taft Architects. Two interior projects by CRSS and one apiece by **Gensler and Associates/Architects** and **Albert Pope & William Sherman** were honored, as were urban design projects by CRSS and **Llewelyn-Davies Sahni/Jay Baker.**

☛ *Dream houses:* Within blocks of each other in the museum district, architects **William T. Cannady** and **William F. Stern** are putting finishing touches on their own pads. Cannady's house for his family is a postmodern palazzo, Stern's a skyscraper bungalow. Not to be outdone by house-proud architects, artists **Karin Broker** and **Frank Zeni** have built studios for themselves in the Brunner neighborhood, near the Heights. Broker's is a well-lit backyard barn (she staged a studio-raising party to facilitate its construction; there were no casualties), Zeni's a postindustrial Ionic temple shed that has to be seen to be believed.

☛ *Power of the Press:* A salute to the *Houston Press*, which tells it all, especially through the investigative journalism of senior editor **Tim Fleck** and contributing editor **David Theis**. Fleck's interview with Bob Lanier on the politics of fast-tracking at Metro (28 June) and Theis's article on the politics of redeveloping Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward (30 August) reveal the intimate connections between "public" planning and economic power. Under editor **John Ashby Wilburn**'s direction, the *Press* appears to be dedicated to the proposition that a properly informed public is competent to judge complex critical issues. By mainstream media standards in Houston, this is pretty radical stuff. Keep it up!

**Brady Place, circa 1870.**



***Light Spikes*, 1990, Llewelyn-Davies Sahni, Jay Baker, designer.**



☛ *Project: Houston:* Houston's major architectural event last summer was not the 1990 convention of the American Institute of Architects but **Project: Houston,** a multimedia exhibition of visionary projects organized by **Deborah V. Brauer** at DiverseWorks. Artists, scientists, composers, engineers, dancers, and architects produced 23 entries that ranged from the tough-minded to the far out. **Nia Becnel** and collaborators proposed a preservation-sensitive community rehabilitation process for Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village. **Charles Boone, Scott Bernhard,** and **Greg Snyder** looked and listened to Houston from their *Inhabited Monitor*, a peripatetic drum stand. **Josefa Vaughan** and **Walter Richard Black** fabricated pieces of giant furniture that became kiosks for spontaneous exchange (pinned to the chair was a resounding put-down of the exhibition by Louis Dobay in *Public News*). **Christopher Genik** proposed a lyrically activated transit station for Metro, **Geoffrey J. Brune** and his brother **William** a series of ecologically ameliorative interventions in the city, and **Eduardo Robles** a museum of Texas toxic wastes beneath a freeway interchange. **Malinda Beeman** and **Robert Robinowitz** modestly proposed a mountain chain for downtown. **Rafael Longoria** chose downtown as the site of a plaza–amphitheater–alligator pit, and **Patrick Peters** converted the Blue Ribbon rice elevators into civic columbariums. Art Gui **Michael Galbreth** took his case before city council in a series of seriously outrageous presentations. And **Jay Baker** and **Natalye Appel** submitted a "late" entry on opening night, drawing directly on the wall (curatorial types effaced it the next day). The opening on 22 May concluded with a mesmerizing performance of architecturally specific choreography coproduced by **Sarah Irwin** and **Greg Harper**. *Project: Houston* attracted the largest attendance at DiverseWorks ever.

☛ *Mirror, mirror, on the wall, which will be the next to fall?* **Brady Place,** the J. T. Brady family's circa 1870 Greek Revival homestead in the East End, was destroyed in August by arsonists. It was one of two Greek Revival houses left in Houston. The future looks uncertain for two houses that ought to be considered landmarks, the **Redbird House** at 3237 Inwood in River Oaks (built in 1926 by the River Oaks Corporation and designed under **Ima Hogg**'s supervision by **Birdsall P. Briscoe**) and **Frank Lloyd Wright**'s **Thaxton House** of 1954 on Tall Oaks Road in Bunker Hill Village. The Redbird House's only owner,

**Redbird House, 1926, Birdsall P. Briscoe, architect.**



Mrs. William T. Campbell, Jr., left the house in virtually original condition at her death earlier this year. The Thaxton House, Wright's only work in Houston, is being marketed for sale as a teardown, drawing expressions of concern from the Frank Lloyd Wright Conservancy, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance.

☛ *Making book:* Hitting the shelves in your better bookstores are **Alan Balfour**'s *Berlin: The Politics of Order* (Rizzoli) and **Mark Alan Hewitt**'s *The Architect and the American Country House* (Yale University Press). **Juan Ignácio Barragán** inaugurated publication of the architecture and planning journal *Del Noreste de México* in Monterrey this past summer; *Noreste* will concentrate on design issues in northeast Mexico and South Texas. **Albert Pope** and **William Sherman** were profiled in *Progressive Architecture*'s latest Young Architects survey (July 1990). And the AIA convention in Houston brought recognition in *Architecture* (April 1990) of new buildings by **Team HOU, Natalye Appel, Jay R. Baker, Peter J. Zweig,** the **Wittenberg Partnership,** and **Gerald Moorhead** and **Gregory Harper,** along with projects in design or construction by **Pope Sherman, Tim Cisneros, Taft Architects,** and **LaBarthe Rogers**.

☛ Wedding bells are ringing for lawyer **Michelle Martin** and Greater Houston Preservation Alliance president **Charles D. Maynard, Jr.**, married 20 October in historic San Agustín de Laredo Church on San Agustín Plaza in downtown Laredo (Michelle, a border beauty, is descended from Laredo's founder, Don Tomás Sánchez). Notables in attendance included the bride's paternal grandparents, former Laredo mayor and Mrs. **J. C. Martin, Jr.,** super-photographer **George O. Jackson, Jr.** (who has just become a grandfather), mermaid maven **Barbara Hill,** L.A. design dynamo **Lorraine Wild** and planning tsar hubby **John Kaliski,** along with Houston art critic **Susan Chadwick**. Two weeks later, on 3 November at Mission San José in San Antonio, Susan's sister, *Texas Monthly* senior editor **Catherine Chadwick,** tied the knot with the rising star of SA architecture, **Ted Flato.** Guest **Wanda Ford** reminisced about her marriage to Ted's mentor, the late **O'Neil Ford,** at Mission San José 50 years ago. Artist **Terrell James** and architects **Cameron Armstrong, Douglas Sprunt,** and **Carlos Jiménez** were prominent members of the Houston delegation. From NYC comes word that **Phillip Lopate** will soon take the big step with painter **Cheryl Cipriani.**

☛ Thirty-six years after **Philip Johnson** presented his initial plans for the University of St. Thomas, he is at it again. On 24 October Johnson met with university administrators to display his preliminary proposal for the university's chapel, to be located at the north end of the academic mall. Johnson described the chapel as being equivalent in height to a six-story building.

☛ The sketchbooks of **Carlos Jiménez** are featured in *Architectural Adumbrations*, an exhibition organized by the **Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities** in Santa Monica. Texas ex **Carol McMichael Reece** is curator of the exhibition, which also features sketchbooks by Frank O. Gehry, Steven Holl, Mark Mack, and Antoine Predock.

# RDA Spring Events

**Rice Design Alliance**
*P. O. Box 1892*
*Houston, Texas 77251-1892*
*713/524-6297*

**24 January 1991** – Fireside Chat: "Learning From the Eighties – Lessons For the Nineties." Joel Barna, editor of *Texas Architect*, will moderate this informal discussion between architect Richard Keating, sociologist Stephen L. Klineberg, preservationist Vincent Hauser, and consultant/investor Clayton Stone. Rice Faculty Club, Rice University, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

**6 February** – Alan Balfour, dean of the Rice University School of Architecture and author of *Berlin: The Politics of Order, 1737-1989*, will discuss Berlin's architectural monuments of the last 250 years. Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 8:00 p.m.

**6 March** – Mark Alan Hewitt, a practicing architect and historic preservationist, will discuss the subject of his recent book, *The Architect and the American Country House*. Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 8:00 p.m.

**Spring Lecture Series** – "Silent Shadows: Japanese Contemporary Architecture and the City," a five-part lecture series that will explore the architectural traditions in Japan and their contemporary interpretations in the modern Japanese city. Botond Bognar, professor of architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and author of *The New Japanese Architecture*, will give the introductory lecture and be followed by four leading atelier architects in Japan.

**3 April** – Botond Bognar
**10 April** – Itsuko Hasegawa
**17 April** – Toyo Ito
**24 April** – Hiromi Fujii
**1 May** – Hajime Yatsuka

**18-19 May** – RDA Architectural Tour to be announced.

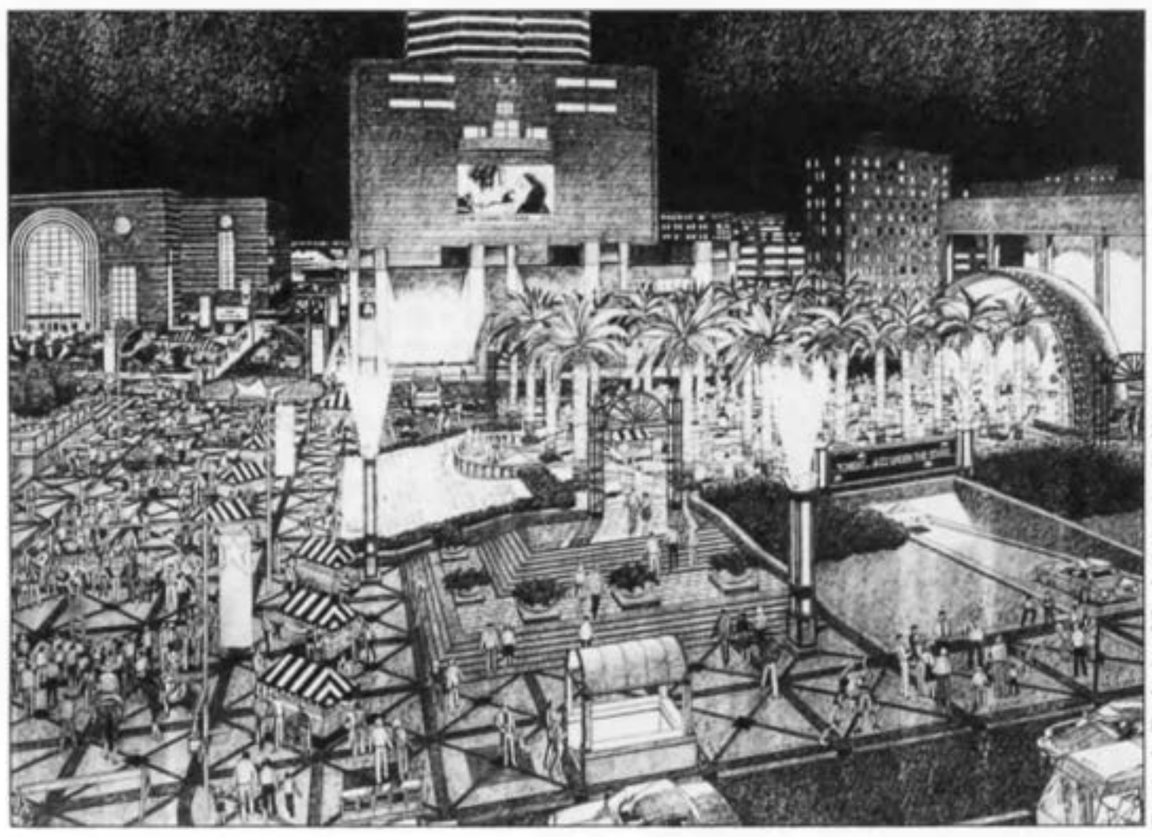
For more information, telephone the Rice Design Alliance, 713/524-6297.

# Streetscaping the Theater District

The tiny constellation of theaters and concert halls in downtown Houston's northwest corner seasonally boasts a broad spectrum of live performances and events. But if you were one of the 1.3 million people who visited one of these downtown performance centers last year, you probably did so without ever setting foot on a public street. Abetted by underground parking and seduced by the convenience of the tunnel system, you probably made your way to your final, festal destination underground, unmolested by heat and humidity.

The absence of street life in downtown Houston has been the subject of frustrated comment ever since the lack of diversity that results from increased land costs, the commitment to an ever-expanding network of subterranean walkways, and the florescence of the suburban shopping mall drained the last life blood from the central business district. From fireside chats to wholesale colloquia, the discourse continues as a stubborn ostinato in the overtures toward change.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Houston's heavyweight performing arts organizations – Houston Grand Opera, the Houston Symphony, the Houston Ballet, the Alley Theatre, the Society for the Performing Arts, Pace Theatrical Group, Theater Under the Stars, and the Da Camera Society – working in conjunction with Central Houston, Inc., a civic improvement organization that sponsors Party on the Plaza, Sesquicentennial Park improvements, and the Main Street Project, have decided to take action. In an effort to create a more focused cultural and entertainment center for the city, they invited 60 architectural and urban design teams to submit qualifications. Four teams, headed by Gensler and Associates/Architects; Sikes, Jennings, Kelly & Brewer; Slaney Santana Group; and Team HOU, have been selected to make proposals.



Drawing by Tim Justice of Gensler & Associates/Architects

**Artist's conception imagines throngs of people in a Theater District transformed by streetscape design. From a promotional brochure, "Theater District: Creating a Pedestrian Scape."**

The Theater District, as both place and organization are known, states its goals and objectives clearly: to transform streets, walkways, and parks into a cohesive, secure, and exciting pedestrian scape that will attract people and stimulate wholesome new businesses by making "strategic physical improvements, repairs and modifications." To help define an agenda, the Theater District retained as urban consultants the Project for Public Spaces, a New York firm with extensive experience in evaluating and reprogramming public spaces. Using such space-use study techniques as activity mapping and pedestrian and vehicular flow analysis, PPS established criteria for evaluating master plan proposals. Among the problems cited for amendment are poor or insufficient lighting, lack of visual definition and information sources, impeded access to Tranquillity Park and Jones Plaza, and an overall lack of connection between the cultural center, Sam Houston Park, the Main Street – Market Square Historic District, Market Square (whose new park design is slated for completion by spring 1991), and the Albert Thomas Convention Center (currently up for grabs since the collapse of the Luminaire project).

The challenge to the design teams is to create nothing less than a schematic for an instant living city, offering a dazzling milieu of street vendors, street performers, street furniture, lights, and music – in short, a sumptuous stage for the spontaneous drama of human interaction, and one commensurate with the quality of the performances one might encounter within doors. With a projected budget of $5.5 million – $4.7 million of which is designated for improvements to the street and public areas – the initial phase is under way.

By virtue of its desire to enliven a small but significant part of downtown, the Theater District addresses the larger issue of the nature of public space in a city that finds itself, after decades of rapid and unbridled growth, with none to brag about. Can it work? Why not? Nearly every attempt to lure Houstonians out to celebrate almost anything has met with success. Fireworks, festivals, and live entertainment are among the frolics that consistently bring throngs of people into downtown. An ongoing party may be just the ticket, and the necessarily cosmetic nature of the prospective changes may have appeal even beyond the group's highest expectations. Creating the active public places in the city has never been the sole prerogative of architects and urban designers. It requires the cooperation of all constituents, who must do more than cross their fingers and hope. The real success of the Theater District initiative will be tested by the extent to which it brings about the repopulation of the area by commercial establishments that can attract and hold a nighttime crowd.

*Deborah Morris*

# RDA Thinks BIG!

**On 3 November 1990 the Rice Design Alliance presented its second annual Award for Design Excellence for outstanding achievement in architecture and design to Cynthia Woods Mitchell and George P. Mitchell, chairman and president of Mitchell Energy & Development Corporation. George Mitchell is renowned for his founding of The Woodlands, a new town 28 miles north of downtown Houston, and for becoming, along with his wife, Cynthia Woods Mitchell, a major force in the preservation and restoration of the 19th-century architectural heritage of his home town, Galveston, Texas.**

**Spirits that evening were as high as the 50 six-foot helium-inflated balloons that soared up to 14 feet in the lobby of the NCNB Center in downtown Houston. The event was organized by chairman Mary Collier, with assistance by underwriting chairman Thad Minyard, auction chairman Ursula Felmet, and environment designer Jay Baker. RDA president James E. Furr made the presentation to the Mitchells, which was followed by a superb dinner by Byron Franklin Catering and music by Rockin' Dopsey. The gala raised over $55,000 to fund RDA programs.**

**The Rice Design Alliance thanks the underwriters, contributors, and tireless volunteers who made the evening such an outstanding event.**

**Benefactor**
Pace Management Corporation

**Sponsors**
Arthur Andersen & Co.
Browning-Ferris Industries
Constructors & Associates, Inc.
Cullen Center, Inc.
Douglas Harding Group
Enron Corp.
Eubanks/Bohnn Associates
Ford, Powell & Carson, Inc.
Gensler and Associates/ Architects
Ann Gray and Associates, Inc.
Gerald D. Hines Interests
Hoover & Furr
Interfin
Karol Kreymer, AIA, and Dr. Robert J. Card
Liddell, Sapp, Zivley, Hill & LaBoon
H. A. Lott, Inc.
McCoy Inc.
Miller Judson & Ford, Inc.
PDR
REFF Inc.
Ellen C. L. Simmons and Matthew Simmons
Spaw Glass/Cahaba
Dancie Perugini Ware Public Relations
The Woodlands Corporation

**Patrons**
Amoco Production Company
BANK ONE, TEXAS
W. S. Bellows Construction Corporation
Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Brochstein
Cushman Realty Corporation
L. Barry Davidson Architects AIA, Inc.
Houston Chronicle Publishing Co.
Irvine Associates Architects, Inc.
Janita Lo & Associates
Alvin Lubetkin
Manhattan Construction Company
Montrose Veterinary Clinic
Morris Architects
Office Pavilion
Prince St. Technologies Ltd.
Steelcase, Inc.
William F. Stern & Associates, Architects
Structural Consulting Company, Inc.
Herbert Wells

**Contributors**
Art Attack
Big Three Industries, Inc.
Linda Broocks and Michael Wilson
David Brown Floral Designs
Carpet Services, Inc.
Cunningham Engineering Company
Gael Cunningham
Suzanne Delehanty
Duff and Grant
Sally and Harold Eisenman
Byron Franklin Catering, Inc.
Hines Interests Limited Partnership
Interface Flooring Systems
Frank and Lynda Kelly
Kymera
Muscle Beach T-Shirt Company
Neiman Marcus
David A. Ott
Jim Sanders Creative
The Spencer Company

Phyllis Hand

**Gala honorees George and Cynthia Mitchell *(left)* with Jo Furr and RDA president Jim Furr.**

**Silent Auction Contributors**
Alexander's Fine Portrait Design
Architectural Supplements
Artist Services
Jay Baker
Barksdale-Rudd Leather
Big Three Industries, Inc.
Body Rock Houston
Bollen & Associates/M&M Lighting
Brayton International
Business Accessories
Sue Carr, Carr Gallery/Neil and Fran Kraynek-Prince
Centeq Realty Agents
Chantal Cookware Corporation
Cody's on the Strand
Commercial Furniture Services, Inc.
Creative Office Furniture, Inc.
Dauphin Construction Sales
Nash d'Amico's Pasta and Clam Bar
DIFFA/Houston
Joan Dodd, R.M.T.
Dolce & Freddo
Entertainment for the Blind, New York
Etui/Edith Hempel
Etui/Jan Zandt
Florists and Balloons
Framework
Byron Franklin Catering, Inc.
French Gourmet Bakery
Cate Gardner
Gilbert International
Elizabeth Glassman
John Glenn Appearance Center
Goode Company Hamburgers and Taqueria
Lynn Goode Gallery/ Annell Livingston
Lynn Goode Gallery/ Jack Boynton
The Gunlocke Company
Dana Harper, D.C./ Harper Chiropractic & Associates
Heng-Hui Tiffany Lee
Harris Gallery, Houston
Max and Isabell Herzstein
Hickory Business Furniture
Jackson Hicks, JAGS Restaurant
The Houston Ballet
The Houstonian Club
In Bloom, Inc.
International Contract Furnishings
Kathleen James/ James Gallery
Kauffman Galleries
Kinetics Furniture, Inc.
The Kipling Company
Andy Klein
Knoll International
Knoll Textiles
Lackawanna Leather
Lamesa/Wyn Estes
Leisure Collections
Le Panier, Inc.
Lucia's Garden
Gwynne Mayer
Mayfield
McMurtry Gallery
Ruth Meric Catering
Milliken & Company
Betty & Dan Montgomery
Moody Gallery/ James Orellana
Barry Moore and Barbara Dillingham
Charles Moore
Natural Colors
Parkerson Gallery
Pyro Media
Ritz-Carlton, Houston
The River Cafe
Janice Rudy
The Ruggles Grill
Sanctuary Health and Beauty Spa
Beth B. Schneider
Sharpe Expressions by Anna L. Sharpe
Ski Houston
Southwest Airlines
Space City Travel/A Division of Lifeco Travel Services
Rex Spencer
Spinneybeck
Steelcase, Inc.
Stendig International
Stratford Hall Textiles
Tandy Design
Tenneco
Texas Limited
Tiffany & Co.
Tremont House
Underwater Wildlife Photography
Andrea Vadner
Manuel B. Velazquez/ I.D.E.A.
Victoria's Fine Linens
Gay Waldrop & Associates
Westside Tennis Club

Citelines

# Preservation Update: Downtown Houston

**Mrs. Esperson entertains guests for tea in her private roof garden atop the Niels Esperson Building, February 1926.**

There are few things as good for architectural preservation as a real estate bust, but in Houston's case the bust came too late. Fifty years of wild economic growth have almost completely erased a century of downtown Houston's history. Lewis Mumford once wrote that the unrestricted proliferation of parking lots was more damaging to our cities than the bombs that devastated London during the Blitz.[1] In a recent aerial photograph of downtown Houston the truth of this observation becomes painfully graphic. Dozens of blocks of the city grid have been cleared to patiently await the next boom as surface parking lots. The result is almost surreal: gleaming skyscrapers emerge from fields of asphalt and weeds, while at their feet some of the city's most engaging buildings slowly deteriorate. A number of turn-of-the-century commercial structures have managed to survive along the northern edge of downtown, but without any legal mechanism to prevent their destruction their future is uncertain. Buildings as significant as the Rice Hotel (1913) and the Houston National Bank Building (1928) have been vacant and in peril for more than a decade.

Market Square, one of Houston's two original public squares laid out in 1836, has been the beneficiary of considerable efforts spearheaded by the Downtown Houston Association and DiverseWorks, whose heroic plans to transform the square with works of art and a performance space are about to bear fruit. However, a plaza is no more than a void in a city when it lacks the perimeter-defining walls that give it spatial character and the human inhabitants that are the very reason for its existence. Market Square's perimeter buildings have been falling at a disastrous rate since the late 1960s, robbing it not only of historical and spatial identity but also of vitality. On its western and southern edges not a single original building is still left standing. Last year's fire in the W. L. Foley Dry Goods Company Building endangered the square's most important corner and caused the relocation of DiverseWorks away from the neighborhood. And the corner building once occupied by the Stage Door Cafe is about to be demolished.

In 1988 a task force was formed to find ways to revitalize the Main Street/Market Square Historic District. Its efforts resulted in a master plan by Team HOU Architects that addresses the many vacant blocks in the area and a comprehensive marketing and financial strategy pieced together by a group of devoted volunteers.

One piece of good news is the imminent reopening of the Ritz Theater half a block from the southeast corner of Market Square. Completed in 1926 by William Ward Watkin, first director of Rice's Department of Architecture, its austere classical façade was a sharp contrast to the exuberant fantasies of the great Houston movie palaces of the 1920s, which have, sadly, all disappeared. The building is being rehabilitated by developer Gary Warwick with the help of designer Kirk Eyring and architect Barry Moore as consultant. It will be renamed the Majestic Metro (in order to take advantage of an existing sign) and will initially function as a nightclub and conference center. While the rehabilitation work now nearing completion has been carried out on a very low budget and is sometimes lacking in refinement, the undertaking is admirable, and the increased traffic in the area will be enormously beneficial for neighboring restaurants.

A few blocks to the east, the reconstruction of the Pillot Building has just been completed. Built in 1860 and located diagonally across the street from the county courthouse, the building was destroyed by the neglect and indifference of the county government. The ground-floor cast-iron storefront is all that remains of the original, but the three-story brick exterior has been recreated by Morris Architects. While one may argue that a fake building is preferable to another surface parking lot, the decision to incorporate a "crumbling brick wall" design on its west façade adds insult to injury. It is ironic that the building whose intended demolition prompted the creation of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance in the seventies has now acquired the quality of an amusement park replica.

***Above:* The Pillot Building in 1983. *Right:* Pillot Building reconstruction, 1990, Morris Architects with Barry Moore, restoration architect. Only the cast-iron architectural elements of the 1860 building remain in place.**

In a time when Disney-style versions of urban settings are proliferating, it is essential for historic districts to retain their integrity, since authenticity is their greatest strength. The many empty sites should be filled with buildings respectful of their place and faithful to their time, not mindlessly imitative of their neighbors.

Across the bayou, the conversion of the Houston Terminal Warehouse and Cold Storage Building (1927) into a county jail is a greater example of the county government's insensitivity toward historic preservation. This is not because of the new "Main Street, Texas" brick skin by Morris Architects, but because a new jail, though indispensable to the county, is the last thing the struggling warehouse-bayou district needs to encourage its development into a city attraction or viable residential and office area. No amount of expensive landscaping could possibly counterbalance the jail's detrimental effect on the future of its neighbors.

Perhaps the most significant current rehabilitation project involves the Niels Esperson Building (John Eberson, 1927), once the tallest building in Houston, and the adjoining Mellie Esperson Building (John and Drew Eberson, 1941). Suzanne LaBarthe and William E. Boswell, Jr., of Gensler and Associates/Architects are reconfiguring the ground-floor lobbies and storefronts close to the original plan and redoing the upper-floor corridors in period style. There are no plans yet to reinstate the dramatic double-height main lobby of the Niels Esperson Building, but one hopes the owners will decide to restore this once exuberant entry. A delightful secret of the building is Mrs. Esperson's 13th-floor office, maintained since her death as a virtual time capsule.

Houston desperately needs a legal mechanism to preserve historically significant buildings. Presently there is nothing that can legally prevent an owner from demolishing even a designated historic landmark, and the penalty for demolishing any building without a permit is an insignificant fine. It is imperative that every legal avenue be explored in order to decelerate the destruction of the city's architectural heritage. A significant increase in the penalties for demolishing buildings without a demolition permit, combined with a moratorium on the granting of such permits for historic landmarks, could be a useful interim safeguard until a strong preservation ordinance is enacted.

*Raphael Longoria*

**Notes**

1 *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), p. 47.

## V. Nia Dorian Becnel

*1949-1990*

Veronica Nia Dorian Becnel, assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston, died Saturday, 10 November 1990, at St. Joseph's Hospital after suffering a stroke. She was 41 years old. Nia Becnel was a leader in the preservation movement in Texas. Since 1985 she had directed the preservation studies program at the University of Houston's College of Architecture. She served on the Minority Heritage Task Force of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Task Force on Preservation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the City of Houston Archeological and Historical Commission, and the board of directors and advisory board of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance. Her broad interests were reflected in her memberships on the boards of directors of DiverseWorks Artspace, the Acres Homes Community Development Corporation, and the Rice Design Alliance. At the University of Houston she was a member and former chair of the University Undergraduate Admission Review Committee, president of the Black Leadership Network, and a member of the university's Undergraduate Council. At the time of her death, she was involved in the organization of the Freedmen's Town/Fourth Ward Neighborhood Association.

Nia Becnel was a passionate advocate of preserving the historic heritage of African-Americans. Much of her scholarly research was devoted to tracing continuities between West African ornamental design and building typologies and those of Texas and the southern United States. She was instrumental in numerous efforts to document, preserve, and interpret the African-American cultural heritage of Texas, including the history of slave-built buildings on the Legg-Ervin Plantation near Nacogdoches, and of African-American-built buildings relocated from Liberty County to the plantation and ranch museum at Baylor University. During 1988 and 1989 she supervised the reconstruction of the Reis log cabin on the campus of Kolter Elementary School in Houston. She had in preparation a book on slave-built architecture in Texas, which Texas A&M Press will publish. Mrs. Becnel was a graduate of the University of Houston. As a student, she participated in the organization of SHAPE Community Center.

Nia Becnel's dedication to preservation was activist rather than antiquarian in nature. As Omawali Lithuli observed in a eulogy delivered at her funeral, "Nia Becnel was not a bystander." She bitterly opposed the efforts of the city of Houston and the Housing Authority of the City of Houston to destroy Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village, and she organized opposition to these efforts by bringing together concerned members of the Fourth Ward community with students and professionals who shared her recognition of the critical importance this neighborhood holds for Houston. Mrs. Becnel's intense sense of community loyalty grew out of her connections to Acres Homes, the lower-income, semi-rural black community on Little York Road where she grew up. In 1989 she, her husband, Edwin Robert Becnel, and their children, Sheshe Malkia Taylor and Anza Falme Becnel, moved from Third Ward, near the University of Houston, back to Acres Homes. Her funeral, held in the crowded confines of the Boyd Funeral Home, was followed by burial in the Dorian family plot at Paradise Cemetery in Acres Homes.

*Stephen Fox*

# Fourth Ward and the Siege of

**Rives Taylor**

The stalemate in the city's Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village appears to be reaching a conclusion of sorts in late 1990. On one front, the joint efforts of Cullen Center, Inc., and American General Investment Corporation in the Founders Park Venture have precipitated the beginnings of a community participation process in the formulation of plans for the neighborhood's 600-plus acres. The city, in general, seems to be waiting on the sidelines of this current process. Meanwhile numerous city agencies, when questioned, are being very circumspect in describing their past actions in the area because of a lawsuit pending against the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH), brought by residents of Allen Parkway Village. The community groups of the area, divided in allegiance, patience, and means, continue to try through a number of efforts to preserve, or at least save a bit of, their neighborhood.

Ruling in April 1989 against the housing authority in an injunction sought in conjunction with the lawsuit, federal judge Kenneth M. Hoyt assumed an admonitory tone:

*The evidence shows that the HACH commenced destruction of the APV [Allen Parkway Village] apartments in 1983. Ever since the HACH's application for the renovation was rejected by HUD, the HACH has ceased to actively repair and improve APV apartments. Indeed, its policy of no-renovation has admittedly contributed to the uninhabitability of over 90% of the available units. The HACH's 1984 formal application to demolish the APV apartments simply memorializes a de facto policy to raze the apartments. . . . As a matter of policy, funds should not be used to study and plan an activity which activity cannot be legally accomplished by those funds. It is clear that the HACH has set out on a course of conduct that creates a hazardous, uninhabitable environment for the tenants at APV apartments. It is equally clear that the purpose of the Frost-Leland Amendment was to stop that course of conduct.*[1]

That legal action should be necessary to protect the complex underscores the disparity between the ideals and goals of the city housing authority and the aspirations of a dwindling number of African-American residents in Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward. The issue is a much larger one, however. While a number of city officials are outspoken in separating the fate of Allen Parkway Village from that of Fourth Ward, events in the last 15 years, and more specifically the last two, have shown that the area bounded by downtown, Taft Street, Buffalo Bayou, and the West Gray vicinity is in fact an area with a common future – a future of great importance to the entire city. These disparate neighborhoods are at the epicenter of a complex array of private and public forces vying to fashion a vision of Houston for the 1990s. Planning this valuable acreage has tested and will continue to test the new balance of power in the city following its years of economic upheaval. Whereas Houston was a closed field of endeavor for private capitalism, a new era of community-based participation and vision has swept across the country, compelling even Houston, along with its private sector, to face the prospect of forming and building community consensus.

Up to this time, as witnessed by HACH's attempts along Allen Parkway, the city as a larger entity has not seen fit to be part of that process. The private sector, as demonstrated in the recent efforts of American General Investment Corporation and Cullen Center, Inc., in the Founders Park Venture, is making good-faith attempts at learning how to work with this reality. Nonetheless, the trust of the neighborhood residents in either the public bureaucracy or the profit-driven corporation is minimal.

The efforts of the past year on the part of the Founders Park Venture to acquire portions of Fourth Ward and all of Allen Parkway Village and create a master plan for a large mixed-use development there make this a propitious moment to reexamine the physical and political landscape of these neighborhoods. In August 1990 a community forum was held and a neighborhood steering group formed, both orchestrated by Gary Hack of Carr Lynch Hack and Sandell of Boston and Frank Kelly of Sikes Jennings Kelly & Brewer of Houston, both urban design planning and architecture firms. In the first section of this article, the efforts of city agencies to solve the neighborhood's problems are examined in a chronological form that identifies the various actors and their intended policies. The alternative approach, urban policy made by eliciting community participation in order to formulate a coordinated master planning process, is apparent in the private sector's nascent efforts, mentioned above. The second installment will examine this formulation of urban policy and the origins and viability of the various Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village community activist groups.

Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward continue to be the testing grounds for a number of urban principles. A joint public-private partnership, more common in this age of limited government monetary largesse and expertise, will have to develop an effective inner-city urban renewal program along with its design principles and logistical and economic guidelines.

The need for an effective and comprehensive city master plan, possibly including notions of land use controls or zoning, is nowhere more apparent than in Fourth Ward. With the listing in the National Register of Historic Places of both Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward, the efficacy of this designation in general is largely unrealized and essentially unrecognized by the city as a great urban potential. The demolition and sale of Allen Parkway Village and the slow disappearance of Fourth Ward neighborhoods, whether the result of malevolent intention or not, raise the question of the validity and wisdom of dispersing the disadvantaged and elderly from homogeneous communities to smaller settlements scattered throughout the wider city. The improvement of vital road and service infrastructure, key throughout the city, is essential in Fourth Ward. Its antiquated water and sewer systems have stifled most new growth and rehabilitation on any scale and have given the city cause to adopt an unstated policy of outright condemnation in the area. There are even allegations, forwarded by community activist Virgil Knox, that this area will become the site for a Metro station built in conjunction with a proposed bullet train terminal across Buffalo Bayou.[2]

In terms of the political landscape of the city of Houston in the next decade, no emerging facet of the current debate will have more far-reaching ramifications than the concept of community control of a neighborhood's development. The question is no longer simply what the power structure wants, but rather how and to what end the community, the city, and the private realm will reach agreement. This is a new power-sharing and community-oriented decision-making process. Most planners would emphasize that a triangular dialogue between private interests, community participants, and public policy makers has to exist in order for the community-based process to function. A combined effort, a combination of resources, is needed to manage the complex interaction of agency priorities, public priorities, and market realities. By all accounts, what is missing from this triad in Houston is a coherent public policy on the part of the city, from its mayor, its city council, its planning department, or its housing authority. Such a policy could establish a context and framework for communication between the community and the private developer; the staff of a city planning agency could assure the free flow of information and create a prototypical process of interaction. Lacking such a policy, the private developer has taken on the conflicting roles of both developer and broad urban policy maker. Further, the citizens cannot turn to the city as the arbitrator between their own and the private sector's interests.

In the light of HACH's actions at Allen Parkway Village and the various city agencies' work in Fourth Ward, there is little possibility that city representatives would be trusted in these neighborhoods in the first place.



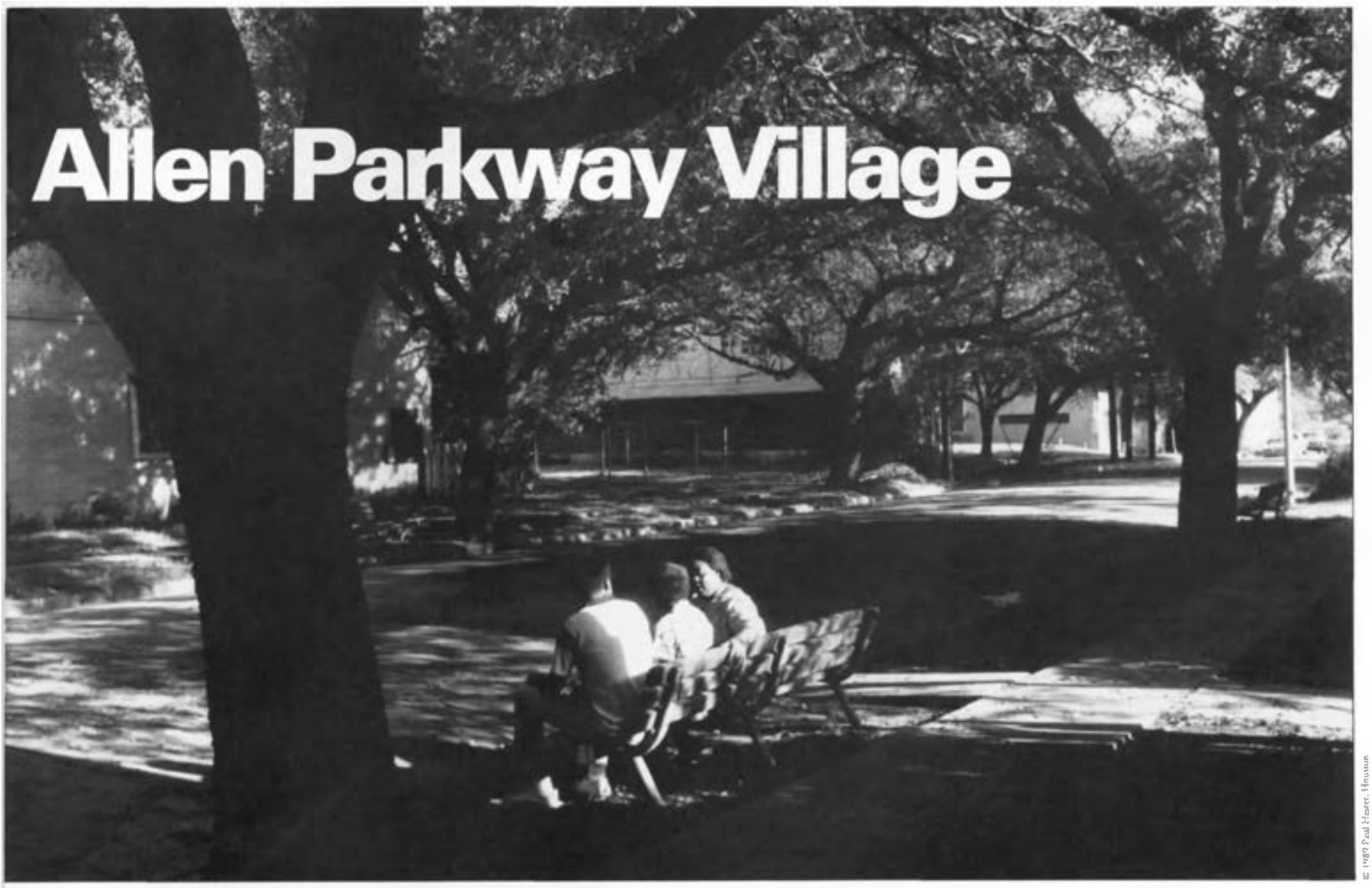
**Aerial view looking west from downtown along the axis of West Dallas Avenue. Allen Parkway Village and Buffalo Bayou are to the right of West Dallas; Fourth Ward and the Freedmen's Town Historic District are to the left. The group of three towers, center top, is part of the American General Insurance Company complex, 1989.**

**Notes**

1 Kenneth M. Hoyt, 12 April 1989, United States District Court, Southern District of Texas, Houston Division, *Residents' Council of Allen Parkway Village et alia* vs. *United States Department of Housing and Urban Development et alia*, Civil Action H-89-0292.

2 David Theis, "Bad Connections," *Houston Press*, 30 August 1990, p. 12.

# Allen Parkway Village





View along Valentine Street in the center of Allen Parkway Village–San Felipe Courts Historic District, 1989.

**AGENCIES AND ENTITIES**

**CITY**

- Mayor and City Council
  - City of Houston Planning Commission
  - City of Houston Planning and Development Department
  - City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department
    - Building Conservation Division*
- Housing Authority of the City of Houston

**STATE**

- Texas Historical Commission

**FEDERAL**

- U.S. House of Representatives
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- U.S. General Accounting Office
- U.S. District Court, Southern District of Texas, Houston Division

**PRIVATE SECTOR & INDIVIDUAL**

- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Houston Housing Concern
- Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council
- Pro bono activists
- Developers
- Architects and planners

* In Public Works Department until 1989.

## The Public Sector, Part 1: *What HACH Hath Wrought*

The Housing Authority of the City of Houston is an independent authority created by state and local statutes. Funded primarily by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and to a lesser extent by grants from the city, the corporation of the housing authority is in budget and operation theoretically independent from the city.

However, the mayor of Houston appoints the five members of its board of commissioners. These are citizens from outside the public agency who have an interest in and commitment to housing problems. One of the five commissioners is appointed chairman by the mayor and approved by the other commissioners. Zinetta Burney, chair of the commission since 1984 and a lawyer, recently described the board's purpose as creating policy for what is "essentially a regulatory agency." While HACH manages a citywide network of units, Allen Parkway Village has become the most visible symbol of the authority's policies.

More than 20 percent of the housing authority's inventory of 4,443 units are in Allen Parkway Village.[1] The critical situation of the complex becomes evident when one consults housing authority statistics to find that, as of September 1990, the complex had 96 units "out of service" and 862 units designated "unleasable." Thus out of a total of 1,000 units, only 42 were leased and occupied. The vacancy factor of Allen Parkway Village, by a statistical sleight-of-hand, is therefore zero.

The position of director of the housing authority can be a turbulent one. HACH's current executive director, chosen by the housing authority board, is Joy Wardlaw Fitzgerald, who succeeded the flamboyant Earl Phillips as director in December 1989. Each was selected after a nationwide search. Phillips, reportedly well connected with Reagan administration HUD officials, headed the authority from August 1982 until his resignation in early 1989. According to Burney, he "reversed the poor condition and status of HACH" that he inherited from William McClellan, who was director from 1979 to early 1982. McClellan, an appointee of Mayor Jim McConn, was fired from the position by the housing authority board at Mayor Kathy Whitmire's urging when she first took office; the board then resigned. Whether this was an admission of complicity in the running of a shamefully disorganized agency or a protest of the new mayor's strong-arm tactics is not known. Burney was one of Mayor Whitmire's new appointments to the board; she took office in 1982.

When interviewed, Burney refrained from discussing the pending lawsuit and HACH's current policy regarding Allen Parkway Village. She did restate the authority's overall philosophy, as articulated in an article written by Earl Phillips for the *Houston Post* in August 1987: "Our society no longer applauds the notion of warehousing the poor in sprawling mini-cities of public housing within larger cities, encouraging them to remain in low-income communities where few role models for change or upward mobility exist."[2] Burney reiterated that the children of disadvantaged families, "learning by experience, exposure, and education," need to be integrated into the larger community, in smaller complexes that are designed not to have the stigma of public housing. One such complex is the 100-unit Forest Green in northeast Houston, acquired by HACH in 1978. The success of public housing dispersal, Burney emphasized, belies arguments that HACH opponents put forward. Their arguments, she stated, put too much emphasis on proximity to downtown as the key to viable public housing. Accessible employment, ease of transportation, and a close-knit ethnic community, all essential for the group's continued well-being, can be features of public developments scattered throughout the city, according to Burney.

### Divide and Conquer

Yet the voices of opposition allege that HACH is simply following an old strategy of divide and conquer. The late Congressman Mickey Leland, a Democrat from Houston's 18th District, in another August 1987 *Post* article targeted Allen Parkway Village as an "example of the failure of the Reagan administration to develop housing options for the poor."[3] Of course, one problem with demolishing the 1,000 Allen Parkway units is that the housing authority, with 13,000 applicants on its waiting list, must quickly build one-to-one replacements for all units that are disposed of.

Pursuant to HACH's policy of public housing dispersal, Allen Parkway Village has for the last 13 years been the target of three concerted but ill-conceived applications made to HUD by the Houston housing authority for permission to demolish the complex and sell its 37-acre site. As late as 1977, 95 percent of Allen Parkway Village was occupied, with thousands on the waiting list.[4] Even at this date the complex had been "allowed to deteriorate," and "very little if any preventative [sic] maintenance had been done on the property over the last 10 to 15 years," said H. J. Tollett in 1985.[5] Tollett, chairman of the HACH board of commissioners from 1982 to 1984, favored demolition and disposition of the Allen Parkway Village property, as had many commissioners over the years. It was under the directorship of Robert Moore (1976-78), during Fred Hofheinz's administration, that the housing authority in November 1977 forwarded the first of three "secret" requests to HUD to demolish Allen Parkway Village. In the proposal, demolition was the only course of action advocated by HACH, the authority having estimated that rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village would cost $11 million. This was "far too much" for what was currently available for such expenses, stated the HACH proposal. Also, Allen Parkway Village's property values had "escalated beyond a cost where housing is the highest and best use." The proposal valued the 37-acre site at between $17 and $26 million, and Moore mentioned that one or two developers were interested as well. What he did not mention was that an unnamed developer had met with the commissioners of HACH and strongly urged them to demolish the units and sell the land. This developer had left a $1 million check to "show his good faith."[6] The commissioners had kept the demolition request secret to avoid the "problem" of explaining their actions when they themselves did not have all the answers.[7]

The response from the Carter administration's secretary of housing and urban development, Patricia Roberts Harris, and HUD's regional director, Tom Armstrong, was negative. The alternative housing sites were in the far suburbs, and Harris apparently (according to Armstrong) had a policy against disposing of low-income housing if it could be rehabilitated. Armstrong related, "She was not going to let the developers profit at the expense of low-income people."[8] HUD instead encouraged HACH to apply for federal funds to rehabilitate the complex, and in 1979 HUD made $10 million available for that purpose. Sometime in that period HACH started to receive directed funding, in the neighborhood of $1 million a year, for the maintenance of Allen Parkway Village. Moore stated some years later in retrospect that when the housing authority took the money it was with the idea that any sale of the complex was out of the question." The following year HACH went so far as to pay an architectural firm to estimate the cost of rehabilitation. The figure was $11.6 million, or $11,600 per unit.

Eleven years after HUD made its allocation, the bulk of the $10 million remains untouched. By 1985, with 13,500 qualified applicants on the waiting list for public housing, only $700,000 had been spent at Allen Parkway Village, none of it for rehabilitation. In fact some $337,000 was spent on administrative expenses and $40,000 in boarding up units.

Mayor Jim McConn in the late 1970s spearheaded the effort to dispose of the housing project and arranged a sale to Kenneth Schnitzer, who was developing the Allen Center complex on the other side of Interstate 45. The deal is reported to have gone as far as arrangement of financial terms before the real estate market cooled off.[10]

In Washington, the new Reagan administration and HUD secretary Samuel Pierce encouraged HACH to take a second look at the future of Allen Parkway Village. With this impetus, a second "secret" demolition request was sent to HUD in late 1981, just after Mayor McConn was defeated by Kathy Whitmire. In the request HACH admitted that although Allen Parkway Village was "not in excess to [sic] local needs of low-income housing" (which would make it ineligible for demolition under HUD guidelines), HUD should waive this requirement. Further, the HACH request stated that current funds were not adequate to improve the complex significantly. This seems to be a mistake, given the $10 million HUD allocation of 1979.

The request was warmly received in Washington nonetheless, so warmly that HUD not only allowed HACH to bypass the agency's area and regional offices (where holdovers from the Carter days might detect the same problems as before), but also overlooked the mounting evidence of HACH's own financial mismanagement, if not outright fiscal ineptness. Criticism from HUD auditors, who cited huge cost overruns, focused on unjustifiable travel expenses and large salaries paid to an excessive number of administrators. At the same time, citywide public housing management and maintenance had become a low priority. The 1980 HUD investigation simply stated that HACH "routinely violated federal fair-housing laws and [its] own guidelines.[11]

However, in March 1982, two months into the new city administration and just before McClellan was fired, the Housing Authority of the City of Houston sent a finalized demolition proposal to HUD that included the confidential disclosure of an undisclosed party's offer of $60 to $70 million for the Allen Parkway Village property. This apparent boondoggle incited the regional HUD agents, who knew the land was worth much more (a confidential HACH appraisal of March 1982 pegged it at $250 million),[12] to advise the new mayor that HACH's financial improprieties and mismanagement required the dismissal of McClellan and the board of commissioners. Mayor Whitmire took the advice.

**Forty families remain in the 1,000-unit Allen Parkway housing complex, despite the city's repeated efforts to remove them. The neglected project represents 20 percent of the housing authority's inventory.**

### Whitmire's Opportunities for Reappraisal

Her administration now had the opportunity to break with unsuccessful past policy. On 27 September 1982 the new director, Earl Phillips – hired in the previous month by the new board of commissioners at Mayor Whitmire's instigation – sent a letter to HUD requesting emergency appropriations from the $10 million renovation fund. The request contained an estimate that HACH needed $5.67 million to restore safe and sanitary conditions at Allen Parkway Village. Yet the letter is tagged with a peculiar reference to the complex's uncertain future: "Be advised that no final decision has been made by our Board relative to the selling or the complete rehabilitation of this development. However there is a need for immediate emergency repairs totalling $5,676,300." Phillips continued, "We recognize that if we do not obligate these funds at this time that the remaining dollars would be returned to the HUD central office." The sum included utility repairs, architecture and engineering fees, and over $2 million for roof repairs and building remodeling.[13] The reference to the "remaining dollars" being returned apparently stems from a HUD policy freezing funds for a project if those funds were not used for rehabilitation: earlier in the year HUD threatened to freeze the remainder of the original 1979 appropriation.

In response to this rather indecisive letter, HUD on 27 January 1983 disapproved the request: "The majority of the items in your request were either for long-range improvements, or the items were of the scope that can currently be maintained in your Operating Budget."[14] The latter budget was now $1 million per year solely for the maintenance of Allen Parkway Village. HUD admonished HACH, stipulating that requests for such additional "maintenance" funds could be made only if the funding was beyond the financial limits of the HACH operating budget, if the funds were necessary to maintain the minimum number of habitable dwelling units required, or if the work was beyond the capability of HACH's maintenance staff to perform. The implied question was, Why spend in excess of $5 million on the complex when Houston's housing authority was still considering tearing it down?

A 1982 HACH appraisal made in connection with the demolition request had pointed out to HACH the potential value of selling the property. Even with Houston's slowing economy, the housing complex acreage could potentially draw $250 million; so stated a "confidential" housing study of March 1982. Assuming top-end assembling and construction costs of $50,000 per residential unit, the authority could build approximately 5,000 new units with the windfall. These new units also could be scattered around the city to conform to HACH's antiwarehousing policy.

In order to smooth the way for demolition, in the ten years between 1976 and 1985 HACH began a program of changing the composition of the population of Allen Parkway Village that might organize to oppose it. That, in the eyes of certain HUD officials, appeared to be a planned attempt to foster internal antagonism, divisiveness, and interracial hostility within the complex. Inspection of tenant rolls shows a decrease in the percentage of black families from 66 percent in 1976 to 35 percent in 1985, with an increase of Indochinese families from 5 percent in 1976 to 60 percent in 1983. Poor white elderly tenants, many longtime residents, all but disappeared, because apartments left vacant by a tenant's death were not filled.[15] HACH denied this "steering," or skipping over eligible black families. Then in 1985 nearly 40 percent of the Indochinese families in Allen Parkway Village were evicted, in a scandal involving HACH staff practices of issuing invalid leases. As reported in both local papers, the tenants, who had no money for a legal challenge, chose to move out. The empty units were boarded up; whole blocks of Allen Parkway Village began to be abandoned.

It was at this juncture, 1980 to 1984, that the efforts of the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council and its chairman, Lenwood E. Johnson, attained the credibility and authority to become known in the larger city community, beyond the project, Fourth Ward, and HACH.

By 1983 a number of factors pushed the authority to rethink a demolition proposal. The city had just hired Efraim Garcia as director of the Department of Planning and Development. His mandate was to plan the redevelopment of Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village; he later recounted that this modern urban renewal effort was "fairly cut and dried. . . . the decision to demolish Allen Parkway Village had been made in advance."[16] The theory of action was succinctly stated in a slogan adopted by the Allen Parkway Residents' Council: "As goes Allen Parkway Village, so goes Fourth Ward."

The majority of the HACH board of commissioners continued in 1983 to see the economic benefit of demolishing Allen Parkway Village and selling the land. To that end, Phillips hired a housing specialist from New York, Robert Aprea, in May 1983 to research the area and, among other things, ascertain the cost of rehabilitating the housing complex. After field research and meetings with a select steering committee, Aprea produced a figure of $36,200 per unit, or a total of $36.2 million. Aprea's study was probably the first comprehensive survey of the urban infrastructure and the demographic, architectural, and cultural components of the area. It took into account the need for a master plan to reflect existing conditions and resident aspirations,[17] but what stood out was the enormous Allen Parkway Village figure. The figure's magnitude is even more apparent when it is compared to rehabilitation costs at two other HACH projects, Clayton Homes and Kelly Village, both of the same age and construction type as Allen Parkway Village. Their rehabilitation price tag was $10,000 per unit, a range that HUD usually authorized. The sum to rehabilitate Allen Parkway Village was "far too large to justify it."[18]

### $36,200 Rehabilitation Price Tag

Following the publication of the $36,200 figure, opponents to demolition claimed the cost was in fact inflated by 100 percent to 600 percent. Such items as $385 doors, jogging trails, elevators for the three-story blocks, and paint jobs of $1,400 per unit were pointed out as excessive. There was some question about whether Aprea had included interim construction interest and HUD financing costs, to a tune of $3.5 million, to bolster the size of the renovation budget. These numbers were usually built into the standard HUD loan and not part of the actual "renovation request."

**Individual garden plots in one of the many green spaces between apartment blocks at Allen Parkway Village, 1989.**

Lenwood Johnson and the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council, assisted by community activist Barry Klein, countered with a critique of Aprea's conclusions and their own "research" that showed the job could be done for $14,500 per unit. They also pointed out that HACH itself had estimated that to buy the land and construct 1,000 replacement housing units anywhere in Houston the housing authority would have to spend close to $50 million, more than the Allen Parkway Village renovation cost of $36 million. A statement by Charles Taylor, former head of HACH's rehabilitation cost estimating section, in a court deposition in 1985 supported their accusations of cost inflation. Taylor testified that Phillips had indeed instructed him to "manufacture the hell out of them [the itemized costs]" to support Aprea's numbers. Taylor's staff had in fact established a figure for a "Cadillac design" at $27,000 per unit. Taylor also related that Aprea had confronted him in the HACH offices with the admonition that Taylor's figures were too low to "justify demolition." Phillips denied all the inferences, and Aprea said the charges were the work of a disgruntled employee.[19]

By August 1984 Earl Phillips and the housing authority had processed the third and final demolition and disposition request.[20] The request went through several resubmissions. The first version of the submission of 1984 followed a November 1983 vote by the board of commissioners authorizing the executive director to seek HUD approval for demolition of the project. On 1 August 1984, city council and Mayor Whitmire finally went on record favoring demolition with a vote supporting the authority's request.

Public opinion, influenced by Lenwood Johnson's success at enlisting the aid of professionals outside Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward, had by 1984 begun to swing from apathy to a more critical stance. Editorials during June in both local papers called for a closer look.[21] Dana Cuff, assistant professor of architecture at Rice University, put together a student design charrette in April 1984, which was followed by an issue of *Cite* devoted to Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward (Winter 1984). John Kaliski of the University of Houston, Diane Ghirardo of Texas A&M University, and other faculty members from area schools of architecture collaborated with Cuff on these efforts; the group solicited Aldo Rossi to participate as a juror in the charrette. In 1985 Cuff published a review of the events and the results of the design charrette in *Places*, a journal with a national design audience.[22] In early 1986 DiverseWorks presented the multimedia exhibition *Architecture and Culture: The Fourth Ward*, organized by Neil Prince and Deborah V. Brauer, which included another weekend design charrette, this time organized by the Young Architects Committee of the Houston chapter of the American Institute of Architects. A symposium followed featuring Renzo Piano. During the exhibition the KUHT-TV film *Who Killed Fourth Ward?*, produced in 1978 by James Blue, Ed Hugetz, and Brian Huberman, gained an even more appreciative audience. Architectural and cultural historians Kenneth A. Breisch, Nia Dorian Becnel, and Stephen Fox began the slow process of nominating Fourth Ward and then Allen Parkway Village to the National Register of Historic Places. A major point these pro bono efforts made was that the economic viability and cultural uniqueness of the neighborhood could be conserved with some modicum (as yet undefined) of public assistance.

There was renewed hope for groups favoring rehabilitation when the initial 1984 application for demolition of Allen Parkway Village and sale of its land was not approved. HUD had doubts and needed HACH to clarify two key points. While HUD noted that HACH focused mainly on the demolition and sale of the project, valued between $98 million and $114 million by HUD in December 1984, the HACH application did not tell how demolition would provide more efficient and effective housing. Nor did HACH outline how it would act to preserve lower-income housing within the larger city. Plans to repay development costs and existing debt were also vague. The second area of concern for HUD was that HUD "did not believe that the housing authority had sufficiently described and evaluated comments received from project tenants."[23]

HACH responded with two more revisions, dated March and October 1985, that addressed these points. It is in these revisions that the authority established the housing goals and the time frame still in force today. The 1,000 replacement housing units would be distributed in smaller complexes around the city, with 400 housing units for the elderly to remain in Fourth Ward. The authority targeted 19,000 units of foreclosed property owned by the city that HACH might purchase for low-income housing. The applications also mentioned an indeterminate number of city-controlled properties available for new housing. These plans did not seem to include details of when, or how, the new units would be created. HACH also estimated that it would take three and a half years to relocate existing tenants, to demolish the structures at Allen Parkway Village, to develop a detailed request for proposals for disposition of the land, to solicit, receive, and evaluate bids, and to negotiate a final agreement. The authority in fact only finally commenced the RFP process in the late spring of 1990.

In each of the two revisions HACH used the figure of $120 million as the potential sale price. The General Accounting Office (GAO), in a 1986 report, estimated that $6 million of this would be used to liquidate the indebtedness of the project (that is, the original funds loaned by the federal government to HACH in the 1940s to build Allen Parkway Village), relocate the tenants, and demolish the building. HUD estimated that the remaining $114 million would allow for the construction of more than 2,000 units.

In January 1986 the HUD regional office in Fort Worth, which had given HACH such troubles in the early 1980s, at long last recommended that the national HUD office approve the request. Earl Phillips's connections with the Reagan administration and HUD officials finally seemed to be working.

### Events in Washington

Yet there remained a gadfly. A few months earlier, in November 1985 and then again in January 1986, U.S. Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez, a Democrat from San Antonio, requested that the General Accounting Office study and review the HACH application on three points: did HACH meet the letter of the federal law for replacing demolished units; had the tenants been meaningfully consulted; and what was the basis for the $36 million figure to rehabilitate the project? The GAO presented its findings in September 1986 in "The Report to the Chairman [on] the Proposed Sale of the Allen Parkway Village Project in Houston, Texas."

Congressman Gonzalez also issued in March 1986 the first of three requests to HUD to delay action on the demolition and sale of Allen Parkway Village. He had investigated the project's situation at the urging of Congressman Mickey Leland, who wrote in his August 1987 *Houston Post* article about the sad state of affairs at HACH. Gonzalez first requested a delay in order to allow time for the House Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development, which he chaired, to receive the GAO's report on the proposed sale. He next requested a delay when the GAO released the report, so his subcommittee could hold hearings on the audit. The final request, at the end of the year, asked for a delay until February 1987, because of the need to investigate another recent government audit of the application. Gonzalez continued to question whether the full letter of the law in demolition procedures had been followed. His concern was "the implications for future demolition and disposition of public housing units in the nation."[24] HACH's response to the press was that this was one more delay in the inevitable process, and that the GAO's report had vindicated its action.

In brief, the 1986 GAO report found that the November 1985 revision met the letter of the law, as prescribed in Section 18 of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937. The five criteria were that the plans provide more efficient and effective housing; that lower-income housing stock be preserved; that HUD be reimbursed for existing project debt and development costs be covered; that the redevelopment plan outline how tenants would be assisted in relocation; and that the city of Houston certify that the latest application conform to the city's housing assistance plan. With regard to consultation with tenants, the GAO found that notification and setting aside a period for comments had in fact taken place on a number of occasions throughout 1983 and 1984. The authority had also on numerous occasions made clear its intention to sell the complex. The third contested point that the GAO report addressed was the housing authority's $36 million rehabilitation figure. Although it differed greatly from HUD's 1984 estimate of $14 million, the figure was not an issue, "since a rehabilitation estimate is not required under law or HUD regulations as the basis for approving or disapproving the housing agency's disposition application."

Even with this vindication HACH did not get final approval from the national office of HUD. Gonzalez and Leland in effect stalled the decision through the early part of 1988 by asking for further studies and clarifications. The tactic caused the now infamous HUD secretary, Samuel Pierce, to send a scolding note to Gonzalez insinuating that Allen Parkway Village's dangerous condition was in large part due to the congressman's delays![25] During this 1987-88 period articles in the guest editor pages in the *Post* and *Chronicle* attempted to sway public opinion. Presidential candidate Jesse Jackson toured Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward in March 1988 and compared the city's policy in the neighborhood with the policies of South Africa. Jackson also pressed HUD secretary Pierce to oppose demolition. At the same time, Congressman Leland disclosed Mayor Whitmire's proposal to spend $25 million in community development funds for a convention center hotel while the city still lacked a credible plan and funding for the rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village.

It was during February 1988 that the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council, with the help of Nia Becnel and Stephen Fox, was successful in having the complex listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

### Legal Roadblocks

In the presidential election year of 1988, which led to a change of administrations and the eventual removal of Samuel Pierce and his cronies, a sea change took place in the fortunes of Allen Parkway Village. In mid-1988 an amendment to the Independent Agencies Appropriation Act of 1988, the Frost-Leland Amendment, was passed, prohibiting the expenditure of federal funds in any step on the path toward destruction. With this new directive, HUD became increasingly hesitant to act on HACH's unclear and ever-changing intentions. After all, the housing authority by 1988 had not found a prospective buyer for the Allen Parkway Village land, valued by

Architectural Record, April 1942

**Detail of cast-in-place concrete canopy shielding first-floor window, Allen Parkway Village, 1942. The designing architects, MacKie & Kamrath, ingeniously combined ordinary building materials to give the apartment blocks much richer surface finishes than were customary for U.S.H.A.-built public housing complexes.**

Architectural Record, April 1942

**An apartment block at Allen Parkway Village, 1942. Associated Housing Architects of Houston, architects.**

the residents' council's lawyers at only $28.2 million; nor did Earl Phillips have much time to spare, as he was having a good deal of trouble in other quarters of his personal and professional life. (One thorn in his side was Memorial Plaza, a HUD-funded project to turn a defunct Holiday Inn, across Buffalo Bayou from Allen Parkway Village, into a complex to house elderly tenants.)[26] By May 1989 not only did HUD's director of public housing, under new secretary of housing and urban development Jack Kemp, want to know what HACH's long-term plans were, but there were hints that HUD wanted to see Allen Parkway Village rehabilitated. Eventually HUD would release the remaining $9 million, funds originally forwarded to Houston in 1979 and then withdrawn in the wake of the 1984 HACH demolition request. In 1989 HUD began six months of repeated inquiries to the new acting director of HACH, Joy Fitzgerald, and her legal counsel about long-term plans. In a June 1989 letter Fitzgerald claimed that the housing authority had no clearly defined position for or against demolition and disposition.[27]

By December 1989 HUD opposed anything but rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village. The 1984 request for demolition was finally denied. The letter from HUD's director of public housing, Thomas Sherman, stated firmly that HACH had to submit a plan within 45 days "outlining its future intent for the project."[28]

The year 1989 saw a flurry of legal and political activity as the tide turned against demolition. In conjunction with its lawsuit against HACH, the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council in January obtained a restraining order against HUD and HACH prohibiting use of federal funds to pursue demolition. Federal judge Kenneth M. Hoyt based his decision on the Frost-Leland Amendment and barred the housing authority from spending federal monies in any way to further the cause of demolition; the order is still in force. Led by Rodney Ellis and Anthony Hall, city council rescinded its support for demolition four and a half years after it was approved. This occurred after years of protest marches on council chambers by the residents' council and activists of the Houston Housing Concern.

From mid-March through mid-April 1989 Judge Hoyt heard testimony from the residents' council against HUD and HACH in the injunction hearings. Dating from February 1987, the lawsuit is an attempt by the residents of Allen Parkway Village to make HACH abide by the restrictions of the Frost-Leland Amendment (HUD Regulations Section 415) and use the $9.3 million already appropriated by HUD and the $1 million annual maintenance fund for the legally mandated maintenance and rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village. After the first hearing, the residents' council withdrew its request for an injunction against HUD, as it was apparent that HUD was no longer pushing for demolition or withholding funds for rehabilitation.

In the midst of the lawsuit and the resignation of Earl Phillips in mid-1989, HACH moved ahead with its request for proposals for the disposition and reuse of the Allen Parkway Village property. A request for proposals (RFP) in general is a document submitted by a developer team stating the team's ideas for development and the way it proposes to accomplish them. In this case the RFP had to outline the developers' plans to replace low-income housing and relocate the tenants as well as state what the payment schedule to HACH would be. The request asked for a rough outline of public and private funding sources and schedules that would be used to pay for the development. In late April 1990 the authority released its first RFP; after almost ten years of applications, this seems to have been HACH's first attempt to follow the prescribed process and advertise for developer proposals. Either the authority had never before gotten that far, or it previously had decided to circumvent the process. In order to pay for the processing and administrative costs of the RFP while abiding by the court order not to spend any federal funding or any of HACH's own funds, this first RFP required a $10,000 fee from all proposers before releasing project specifications.

The HACH board of commissioners met with little interest in the development community and declared that the few responses – including one from the Founders Park Venture group – were not in compliance. Later, in August, a second RFP was released, with a 9 November 1990 deadline; a $10,000 fee was required to submit proposals. Apparently no complete proposals were submitted at all. In both RFPs the HACH board of commissioners linked the sale of the Allen Parkway Village property to a requirement that the developer himself build 150 low-income public housing units on site and 850 units elsewhere, a number that developers view as prohibitive.[29] The public agency seemed to have failed to understand what a profit-driven developer can accomplish.

As of fall 1990, the lawsuit against HACH is still pending. The residents' council remains hampered by lack of funds and, as Lenwood Johnson relates, less-than-enthusiastic pursuit of the case by its pro bono legal counsel. Prehearing motions continue before the trial date, originally set for 30 July, then pushed back to 30 September, and then pushed back again to the end of October; at publication no date had been announced. There has been a good bit of negotiating between the parties, although public officials remain elusive about any aspect of the court case. A late September 1989 memo to the mayor suggests that HACH expected at least 120 units in Allen Parkway Village to be rehabilitated and brought up to HUD standards, bowing to community activists. A point in this review to the mayor promises that the housing authority will "review successful plans in other U.S. cities."[30] This is encouraging from an organization whose myopic policies, the unfortunate result of internal disarray, have wasted 15 years and millions of public dollars. Today the majority of Allen Parkway Village's 1,000 units – which at one time provided decent housing – remain boarded up, the culmination of a decade of neglect during which Houston's need for public housing has only grown.

*Editor's note: Mickey Leland's successor, Craig Washington, was reported in mid-November to be considering trying to repeal the Frost-Leland Amendment.*[31]

**Notes**

1 This figure included 3,733 "conventional" units, public housing for low-income tenants and the elderly, and 300 Section 8 units, subsidized but privately owned apartments.
2 "Allen Parkway Problem: It simply outlived its usefulness," *Houston Post*, 23 August 1987.
3 *Houston Post*, 19 August 1987, p. 3B.
4 The chronology of Allen Parkway Village from the late 1970s through 1985 was gathered in a series of articles by Craig Flournoy, "The Houston Project," in the *Dallas Morning News*, 9 June 1985, pp. 1A, 28-30A, 10 June 1985, pp. 1A, 6A, 7A. The dates are corroborated by a United States General Accounting Office document of 1986, "Proposed Sale of the Allen Parkway Village Project."
5 Flournoy, "The Houston Project."
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.; quoting Frumencio Reyes, "We anticipated more problems bringing that out publicly than answers we had at the time."
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Regelio R. Santos for James Wilson, Supervisor 6.87, to Phillips, 27 January 1983.
15 Flournoy, "The Houston Project."
16 Ibid.
17 Economic Research Associates had prepared a working paper, "Phase A: Reconnaissance," in October 1979 that was an economic and quasi-social overview of Fourth Ward in the context of rapidly growing Houston. This document chronicled the existing infrastructure, housing, and public facilities, and discussed the social cohesiveness of the neighborhood and its "private-sector participation potential." Skidmore, Owings & Merrill assisted in preparing the report.
18 Flournoy, "The Houston Project."
19 Ibid. Another interview "scoop" in Craig Flournoy's *Dallas Morning News* series; what should have caused sensation and scandal in Houston did not because local news media gave it scarcely any press.
20 In Flournoy's timetable this date is March 1984, while the GAO's 1986 report on the "Proposed Sale of the Allen Parkway Village Project" says August 1984. The date difference is key, as the GAO's date would have the HACH submission after city council's pro-demolition vote. The dates and submissions of HACH's efforts for the years of 1983 and 1986 come from this GAO report.
21 "A Question of Timing," *Houston Post*, 7 June 1984; "Need some clear answers on Allen Parkway plans," *Houston Chronicle*, 5 June 1984, sec. 1, p. 12; Bob Sablatura, "Allen Parkway Village should be renovated," ibid., 29 June 1984, sec. 1, p. 27; see also "Housing Authority should explain itself. Forthwith," ibid., 7 August 1984, sec. 1, p. 14.
22 "Beyond the Last Resort: The Case of Public Housing in Houston," *Places*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1985), pp. 28-43.
23 "Proposed Sale," GAO report, 1986.
24 Katherine Kerr, "Delay Sought," *Houston Post*, 11 December 1986.
25 Kathy Kiely, "Allen Parkway Village May Dodge Demolition," *Houston Post*, 25 February 1988, p. 12A.
26 See Tim Fleck, "House of Cards," *Houston Press*, 14 June 1990, pp. 6-14.
27 Fitzgerald's letter of 15 June 1989 is cited in Thomas Sherman, HUD Director of Public Housing, to Fitzgerald, undated (received December 1989).
28 Sherman to Fitzgerald, ibid.
29 James Robinson, "Private sector turns back on housing project," *Houston Chronicle*, 10 November 1990, p. 31A.
30 Joy W. Fitzgerald, 16 October 1990, "Allen Parkway Village Status Report to Kathryn J. Whitmire, Mayor, and City Councilmembers."
31 Robinson, "Private Sector." Robinson notes that repeal "would not necessarily guarantee that the government would approve the demolition."

# The Public Sector, Part 2:

## *The Planning Department and Fourth Ward*

© 1984 Paul Hester, Houston

**Looking north on Wilson Street in Freedmen's Town Historic District in Fourth Ward, 1984. These houses have since been demolished.**

© 1984 Paul Hester, Houston

**A shotgun cottage in Fourth Ward.**

In very much the same manner as Earl Phillips, Efraim García's power of personality, experience, and ties to the HUD hierarchy in Washington, D.C., made him appear well suited for the job of what one observer described as "packaging the Fourth Ward for sale to private interests."[1] He was known as a specialist in urban design block grants from his previous tenure as manager for planning in the San Antonio redevelopment agency. He had established his own consulting firm in San Antonio when in late 1982 one of Mayor Whitmire's assistants asked him to become director of the newly reorganized planning department, a post that included overseeing creation of the city's (as opposed to the housing authority's) housing policy. García saw his actions as director as justified by the notion that "we have the responsibility to be the leveraging mechanism."[2] To that end, García from the very beginning of his tenure in March 1983 worked to assemble and sell large tracts of Fourth Ward to a single developer in order to promote García's phrase, "orderly development."[3] He also saw the fates of Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village as inextricably linked, a belief he shared with the residents of both places.

Much has been written about the cultural and architectural heritage of Fourth Ward's Freedmen's Town Historic District and the rapid disappearance of the fabric of the area. Technically, neither "Fourth Ward" nor "Freedmantown" (the original name of the settlement) describes a legally distinct area of the city; the appelations simply refer to an African-American community and its strong historical and spiritual presence. A number of resident and preservation groups have for years actively tried to save the area. The 40 blocks of the Freedmen's Town Historic District, within the larger 70-block Fourth Ward area, is an outgrowth of the original neighborhood that was founded in 1865 by freed black men and women. In 1985 the area was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, a designation that, although not officially recognized by any city agency, has found its way into the thinking of some developers and even into García's plans.

The more recent history of Fourth Ward is as lively as its beginnings, yet from the 1930s the neighborhood has been declining. Four interwoven political forces and social factors have shaped the character of the ward. During the 1920s and the Depression a number of families from Sicily who had settled in the area at the turn of the century began to buy land inexpensively from the original families, who were now destitute. As a result, the African-American landowner who lives in the area is scarce; more than 80 percent of the land is privately owned by absentee families or family-owned companies that hold five or more properties. Thus by 1984, 95 percent of Fourth Ward residents were renters, and poor.[4] The absentee landlords, to their credit, have attempted to hang on, yet any sale of their land for a good price still makes economic sense to them.

The second reality to shape the ward is the migration of the population out of the neighborhood. African-American families who could afford to leave began to move away as early as the 1920s. The demolition of the most blighted part of the ward for the construction of the all-white housing project (as it was categorized at the time of construction in both housing authority press releases and architecture periodicals) of San Felipe Courts, now Allen Parkway Village, occurred in 1940. The 1950 census showed 9,000 residents in Fourth Ward. By 1980 that figure had dipped to 7,000, a decrease of 8 percent from 1970; the city's population expanded 29 percent during the 1970s. The median income was $4,755. Fifty-six percent of the population lived in what the city still defines as overcrowded conditions.[5]

Meanwhile, a number of churches remained in the neighborhood, the third significant force in the community. Their pastors, joining with precinct judges and the homeowning residents most often involved with Freedmen's Town rehabilitation projects, strengthened their political stewardship of the ward. These groups, however, have not been unified in their aspirations and goals.

### City Policy of Condemnation

The fourth factor is the city of Houston's policies toward the area. Mayor Whitmire hired Efraim García expressly to handle the redevelopment of the area through the city's planning and development department. His efforts were hampered by the lack of a comprehensive city plan for the future. Also, García and Phillips quickly began to contend for superiority in their efforts to redevelop the larger area, a competition that led to mistrust and miscues.

After 1985 the city needed to face the issue of whether to recognize or ignore the designation of Freedmen's Town, and later Allen Parkway Village, as a National Register historic district, but instead it has avoided the question. In 1990, however, city council designated the Main Street–Market Square National Register historic district in downtown Houston a local historic district, the first municipal recognition of any special district other than scenic districts, where billboard size and location are restricted. Whether this will set a precedent for other National Register historic districts in Houston is not clear. Whether the city's seeming neglect is willful or due to a tight planning budget is debatable.

By 1984 the city's water, sewer, and public works agencies had announced that the infrastructure of Fourth Ward was in hopeless condition. New construction was banned until the city, or some other group, upgraded that infrastructure. Meanwhile the city's building code enforcement arm, the building conservation division, has been zealously enforcing a set of new building ordinances. These were adopted by city council in 1982 to set minimum standards of health and safety in new construction on a citywide scale with citywide application: setback, off-street parking, and right-of-way requirements are uniformly applied across the city, regardless of the character of the individual area. Fourth Ward's narrow streets with 19th-century dimensions, its dense accumulation of wooden houses, and its subdivided lots make the area an easy target for code violations and subsequent condemnation. Planning commission chairman Burdette Keeland points out that here again, with "the city running on zero budget, it's difficult to give any extra effort to solving individual human needs – it won't happen until someone is paid to look at it." Keeland continues that "any neglected area is due to the lack of a comprehensive plan for the city. . . . Without directional guidance in a drawn form, every area in the city can fall into this dilemma." In a more conspiratorial vein, a report reached Lenwood Johnson in late September that a special city inspector from the building conservation division may recently have been assigned solely to Fourth Ward.

In the Winter 1986 issue of *Cite*, Douglas Sprunt reported an example of how such condemnation can affect historic structures. The historic Smith House was cited for code violations. Rather than face stiff penalties or be assessed the cost of demolition by the city, the owners chose to demolish the house. Issuing such citations to landowners almost inevitably brings buildings down. Had the city in fact proceeded with the demolition, it would have had to obtain environmental clearance from the Texas Historical Commission, since the Smith House was listed as a contributory structure within the Freedmen's Town Historic District. Other examples of heightened enforcement include the requirement of an unusually thick foundation slab for a two-story addition to Mount Horab Missionary Baptist Church, and the requirement of often onerous fireproofing work in small business establishments whose owners can ill afford it.

Absentee landlords are also quick to demolish if code violations are found. Research by the Houston Housing Concern (HHC), presented in an open letter to Mayor Whitmire of 21 January 1990, first documented the unusually high number of demolitions in the ward. This group saw the demolitions as a result of a consistent effort on the part of the city in the last five years to force land-use change by making it easier for developers to gobble up residential territory. "Few tenants want to wait for eviction because of code violations, [which results in] an atmosphere of dead ends, . . . so the house is abandoned," says the HHC letter. Landlords faced with a long list of expensive repairs also have no choice but to demolish the house – "a sensible policy on the owner's part if they are convinced that tenants can't afford higher rents to cover improvements," concludes the HHC.

This downward spiral plays into the city's development plans, Houston Housing Concern alleges. The policies discourage reinvestment in existing properties, so even more properties are threatened with demolition for code violations, and even more landlords demolish their buildings themselves rather than face legal proceedings. In addition, the talk of city redevelopment and García's efforts at a package deal in 1983 led absentee landlords to suspend repairs on rental property in anticipation of being "bought out" by the city or a developer.

A question inherent in the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council's lawsuit against HACH is used to conclude the Houston Housing Concern's letter. The query remains unanswered – are federal block grant monies being used to pursue Fourth Ward demolition?

### García Enters the Fray

Efraím García entered the arena in 1983 and almost immediately embarked on the two projects that would be his hallmarks, El Mercado del Sol and the Fourth Ward redevelopment effort. He reorganized the planning department to concentrate power. To supplement the department's original task of platting he added a community development section and a long-range and comprehensive planning section. He also established 25 community development commissions, whose elected representatives on citizens' advisory committees have with varying degrees of success been responsible for allocating the $25 million a year coming to the city from federal Community Development Block Grant funds.

By November 1983 García had created a plan to redevelop the 296 acres of Fourth Ward, a plan characterized by Jacqueline Beckman in *Houston City Magazine* as "reminiscent of the urban renewal projects used during the 1960s and 1970s to 'eliminate blight.'"[6] This was a plan of

*(continued on page 31)*

## METRO'S PARK-AND-RIDES

# *Busing Up to Rail*

Bruce C. Webb


**Southeast Transit Center, Scottcrest at Old Spanish Trail, 1986, Metro with Nathelyne Kennedy and Associates, architects.**

Something there is that doesn't love the bus. Workhorses of most metropolitan transit systems, they appear as prosaic, Third World versions of public transportation; representing a relatively small investment and low public commitment to permanence, they also rarely contribute much to a city's picture of itself (London's distinctive red double-deckers are the exception). Riding the bus can be a real slice-of-life experience, in a public piazza on wheels where the inquiring demographer can pick up snippets of conversation on everything from politics, sports, and the weather to personal fortunes and misfortunes above the grunting, chugging, jangling background of bus noises. I heard one man hold forth on umbrellas from his side seat at the front, talking nonstop to just about anyone who would listen. When one listener got off, he picked up the same conversation with the next passenger who climbed on. He claimed there was a room full of lost umbrellas somewhere in the Metro organization – umbrellas left behind on the Metro buses. "They say you can go there," he continued, using that tone of voice people use when they're sharing a secret, "and if you can prove you're poor, they'll give you one free." One of the passengers asked the driver if this was true. The bus driver said he didn't know, but it wouldn't surprise him.

There are books celebrating the romance of rail travel (including subways) and clubs dedicated to sharing the nostalgia, studying the engineering, and collecting the memorabilia of machines that ride the rails, but the bus usually slips through the imagination like a coordinating conjunction in an awkward, malformed compound sentence.

Buses are an interfering presence on city streets, where they clearly do not belong. Carrying the burden of the city's public transportation load, not to mention serving as the primary agent of social reconstruction plans for the public schools, they ply the roads like mechanical bull elephants – clumsy, noisy, smelly, menacing, and always in the way of their sleeker and more nimble road mates. Part of the bus's problem is simple physics: the big mass of the bus creates incredible inertia that must be overcome in starting, stopping, or turning a corner. And starting and stopping are what the bus is all about in the city: there's a red, white, and blue signpost at every corner. The driver applies the brakes, steers the bus over to the curb, and – fighting all that protesting inertia – brings it to a noisy, bone-rattling stop. As you ride you build up an automatic reaction, shifting weight, flexing counterbalancing muscles, to keep your seat. Then, starting up again, the strain of the revving engine and the inevitable road bumps vibrates through thousands of loose metallic parts, setting up an interior din like a discordant one-man band. Since they move among the other vehicles on the city's streets, subject to delays, traffic jams, accidents, and stoplights, buses have a reputation for unreliability and tardiness. Unlike railbound vehicles, which shuttle along on their own predetermined rights-of-way – smoother territory designed for their special needs and scale – the bus is made to wander through labyrinthine routes loosely grafted onto the city's street and highway map.

Recognizing some of these problems prompted the Metropolitan Transit Authority in the late seventies to embark on a plan to make a place for the bus. The plan called for the creation of a set of separate transitways, paralleling major freeways, along which express buses could whisk unimpeded by rush-hour traffic, shuttling long distances between remote park-and-ride lots and transit centers within the city – in effect, an attempt to make bus transit behave like a rail system. Presently there are four transitways in the Metro system, which take their names from the freeways they support: Katy, Northwest, North, and Gulf.

The system works well, at least until the buses leave the privileged territory of the transitways and disgorge into downtown or other congested areas of the city, where their efficiency falls off rapidly. The situation shows the logic behind Metro's long-range plans: buses would navigate the vast suburban hinterlands, where a lack of density militates against the use of rail. The confluence of routes along the major freeways would be handled on high-speed express lanes, linking to transfer centers inside Loop 610. Once inside the denser and more congested urban core, a rail system supported by local buses would take over: passengers would transfer to rail cars, which would traverse the densest urban corridors on grade-separated rights-of-way. Leaving aside the difficulties of persuading Houstonians to forgo their automobiles for a commute that would involve at least three modal changes – car to bus to rail (and probably a hefty walk by this city's standards) – the composite system has a large measure of engineering logic.

One of the key elements in the Metro bus plan has been the development of suburban park-and-ride facilities that will coordinate with six transfer stations ringing downtown, thus avoiding the congestion that would result if all bus transfers were targeted in the center city. Metro's first park-and-ride lots were opened in leased facilities in the 1970s. Since then the program has grown to include 21 lots, with several more planned for the next five years, making Houston's park-and-ride system one of the largest in the country. The Kuykendahl lot is the most frequently used, with nearly 5,000 passenger trips recorded daily. Lots on the Katy Freeway at West Belt and on the Southwest Freeway at Bellaire Boulevard presently show the least passenger traffic. Metro's planning staffers have been diligent in evaluating the lots, in a sense writing their own manual on what makes a park-and-ride program successful. Among the most important factors are competitive bus-versus-auto travel times, the lot's visibility from the freeway or a major street, its accessibility from residen-




**Greenway Plaza Transportation Center, on the underground parking deck in Greenway Plaza, 1990, The Whitney Group, architects. The architecture and graphic design suggest a kinship with the London Underground.**

tial areas, and its location in relationship to critical congestion points along the commuter route.

New Metro transit facilities are developed from detailed engineering studies and design criteria prepared by Metro staff, then let out to various engineering and architecture teams, which provide the designs. Metro's bare-bones criteria, stressing cost control and functionalism, left the designers little to work with, particularly in the case of the early, turnkey park-and-rides, each little more than a large, fenced parking lot with a security tower and small sheltered waiting area. The more recent transfer stations also subscribe to the functionalist axiom that a transit station should look like a transit station, but with much better results. Most of the shelters are based on a highly resolved engineering approach composed of a tectonic vocabulary of coordinated struts, frames, and connectors supporting light-weight canopies of various materials and configurations. The problem for the designers is a miniature of the dilemma facing designers of any transportation facility: they must seek to express on the one hand a kinship with the technology of the system and on the other a sense of the locale, be it city, region, or neighborhood. It's a problem that got a good workout in the first hundred years of railroad architecture, when the point of view of the architect was at war with that of the engineer. The resulting railroad stations were a hybrid building type combining wide-span train sheds demanding the best engineering skills available with passenger service buildings designed in the picturesque or Beaux-Arts tradition – in a sense combining a house for the train with a house for the passengers.

But romance has always endowed the railroad with a sense of wonder and adventure, and railroad stations in the 19th century became the symbols of the age. The reincarnation of mass transportation in the form of the bus in 20th-century Houston leaves the architects and engineers with a much less ambitious program and philosophical agenda. Although sometimes, as in the case of the Victorian station proposed for the Heights, the architects have pulled together a theme design related to the prevailing architectural aspirations of the surrounding neighborhood, the stations are for the most part engineered solutions – unadorned, cost-conscious technical constructions set in their asphalt drives and landscaped gardens. While the worst of them have an ad hoc, temporary appearance – the kind of sensibility you might find on a military base – the best exhibit a no-nonsense style, clarity, and sense of purpose that make them stand out to advantage against a context of inchoate strip development and ersatz settings. The near-in transfer stations, particularly the Southeast Transit Center on Scottcrest at Old Spanish Trail (Metro with Nathelyne A. Kennedy and Associates, 1986) and the Eastwood Transit Center on Lockwood near the Gulf Freeway (Metro with Morris Aubry Architects, 1988), are as orderly as a timetable, presenting an image of convenience, safety, and legibility that well serves Metro's aspirations to become known for providing first-class bus service. Unlike the little signposts marking corner bus stops, these stations seem capable of engendering more expansive thoughts of a real future for mass transit in Houston.

Metro's passenger facilities seem to have made the most of their extremely limited programs, showing a concern for ease of use (park-and-ride lots provide generously sized parking slots and wide accessways), safety, ease of orientation, and protection from the elements. But where there would seem to be a natural relationship between transit stations (some handling as many as 5,000 commuters a day) and a whole range of amenities and symbiotic businesses and concessions including coffee bars, fast-food restaurants, dry-cleaning outlets, and newsstands, even day-care centers and car repair shops, Metro's approach has been to focus purely on transit, with the result that the stations all share the feeling of estrangement and disconnectedness that is endemic to Houston's urban composition. Officials cite studies that show there is not enough traffic to support these businesses, but they leave open the option to create such concessions in places that can serve both the transit stop and high-volume roads nearby. The Edgebrook park-and-ride is already temptingly close to a McDonald's and a donut shop next door, but is separated from them by a tall and forbidding wire-mesh security fence.

Metro's approach runs counter to the prevailing principle for successful mass transit planning: recognizing the symbiotic relationship between transit and centers of activity and the concomitant economic benefits that accrue to properties located adjacent to transit stations, the federal Urban Mass Transit Authority (UMTA) has in recent years emphasized the importance of public-private partnership projects in transit development. As loosely defined by UMTA, joint development is any private-sector contribution toward public transportation that either reduces the system's operating or construction costs or increases its ridership. Such partnerships can be important in helping to integrate transit into the life of the city, facilitating the creation of major mixed-use urban places by building upon the accessibility of transit routes and stations. UMTA's publication on joint development describes several such projects in which transit undertakings have provided an impetus for urban development and redevelopment, plugging the system more directly into the city through a variety of urban design projects including housing, major office complexes, and shopping centers.

The new transit center that opened at Greenway Plaza in mid-September comes closer to realizing these objectives, as it ties the transit network to an existing employment center. The $600,000 center, financed by a $400,000 federal grant and the rest coming from private interests, has been hailed by city officials as a model for the next decade's transit projects. Located on the parking deck, the 4,300-square-foot station interconnects parking with the Underground Concourse level of the Greenway complex and offers, in addition to Metro service, nonstop shuttle service to the city's airports, ticketing service for Continental Airlines, bus pass sales, and direct phone lines to hotels and car rental agencies. Patrons from surrounding neighborhoods who wish to use Greenway as a park-and-ride can park underground for three dollars a day.

But for the most part Metro has viewed transit as a reactive measure, developed independently from strategies for economic growth and development – not surprising in a city that has no tradition of comprehensive planning. Even more, Metro seems obsessed with the kind of orderliness and neatness that comes from reducing complex problems to simple terms of systems engineering and cost efficiency. This shows in the lack of such simple amenities as rest rooms (often inserted as an afterthought, as were the portable toilets positioned in the unshaded park-and-ride lots), drinking fountains, or soft drink machines at the stations as well as the stringent rules outlawing food and drink in Metro facilities in order to reduce cleanup costs.

The result is transit facilities as neat and clean as any in the country. But if Metro takes the same purified approach to the planning and design of its rail stations, the hoped-for urban design improvements and place-making potential of the rail system will be minimal. Metro's development of bus transit as a warmup for a major rail system shows the need for comprehensive planning and more ambitious urban design schemes to fully integrate the system into the city. A serious commitment to planning will no doubt show an increasingly important role for public transit as well. Metro's technical staff has demonstrated an ability to create an efficient system and to commission attractive public architecture and graphic design with which to make the system more visible. But unless the system is considered as an urban design and place-making enterprise rather than simply an engineering problem, it will never achieve an integral relationship with the city. Instead it will remain a more or less elegant conduit, drifting through the city and linking noplace to nowhere. ■




**Eastwood-Lockwood Transit Center, adjacent to the Gulf Freeway near the University of Houston, 1988, Metro with Morris Aubrey Architects.**

# *A Mummers' Tale*

## A True-Life Story

**Barbara Koerble**

John Johansen's Mummers Theater is not a polite building. Not polite, either are the stories surrounding its contentious birth and subsequent tumultuous history. The backstage theory for its troubled saga is that Mack Scism, the theater's ousted founding director, cursed the building when he left Oklahoma City, where both his career and his dream of establishing a professional acting company had foundered. Bitter though Scism may have been about the political and financial struggles that brought an end to his 23-year-old acting company and cost him his job, years later he admitted that he missed "that glorious theater" whose creation he had proudly midwifed.[1]

There is no question that the quixotic structure has reaped its share of curses locally. While the building was showered with international acclaim at the time of its completion in 1971, no one bothered to explain its unusual design to the hometown audience. Local antagonism has dogged the theater since its opening. Even some local architects are critical of the structure, designed by an out-of-towner: "The Mummers is a great theater, but it is not a success. It has been a divisive element in the community from day one. It is architecture that has divided the public and it has hurt us," according to Oklahoma City architect James Loftis.[2] Although the theater has been closed for the last three years, the Mummers may yet experience a rebirth if local fundraising efforts are successful. The Oklahoma City Arts Council has raised nearly $2 million in pledges so that a major refitting and remodeling of the Mummers can begin, perhaps as early as January 1991.

**Mummers Theater, plan, stage level.**

The theater's management problems might well suggest an ill-starred history – one local source recalled at least five different groups that tried and failed to keep the theater open – yet the theater's inception was most auspicious. The Mummers was funded in part by a $1.2 million challenge grant from the Ford Foundation in 1962, one of only two such grants for theater construction awarded nationally;[3] the other led to the creation of the Alley Theater in Houston. Ultimately, Ford's investment in the Mummers amounted to nearly $2 million. The challenge grants brought in architect John M. Johansen, paired with stage designer David Hays, for the Mummers, and Ulrich Franzen with Paul Owen for the Alley. Johansen's design was emblematic of the sixties. A confrontational assemblage of industrial components, it was architecture that shocked the public and delighted architects. With the Mummers design Johansen broke with his previous neo-brutalist work, such as the Mechanic Theater in Baltimore (1967), and developed a more expressive approach in which light and heavy elements were delineated through the use of contrasting materials and eye-popping primary colors. Johansen explained that he was looking for "a kind of slang. . . . I want my things to look brash and incisive and immediate. They should respond to what people actually need, the way slang and jargon respond to quick needs in communication."[4] Formally derived from the organization of electronic circuitry, the Mummers represented the culmination of his exploration of the prototype in the Goddard Library at Clark University in Worchester, Massachusetts (1968), and was the capstone of his career.[5] In addition to the electronics model, Johansen cites other influences on the design: "The ramped tubes [are derived] from grain and quarrying lifts, the bright-colored sheet metal from the derelict cars piled up for recycled metal, and the open, loose assembly of parts [is] similar to sculptures of that time."[6]

The Ford Foundation grant did much to permit the full flowering of this novel design, for W. McNeil Lowry, vice-president of humanities and the arts, provided a shield for Johansen by threatening to withdraw financial support if the architectural integrity of the design was compromised by a skeptical board in Oklahoma City. Ultimately, the design was reproduced and reviewed extensively in the international architectural press, where Johansen had frequent opportunities to expound on his new philosophy.[7] Robert Hughes described the Mummers as an "exquisitely human building in its scale, organization and intriguing unpredictabilities."[8] Peter Blake observed, "It is clearly a building one cannot ignore; it either infuriates, or it blows your mind."[9] A model of the Mummers Theater is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, a gift of the Mummers board.

In 1972 Johansen received an American Institute of Architects Honor Award for the Mummers, as did Franzen for the Alley.[10] He recalls stepping down from the awards platform at the institute's national convention in Houston to be informed that the celebrated one-year-old building was rumored to be in danger of demolition – the Mummers' company had gone bankrupt for lack of $178,000 in uncollected local pledges, and both the local newspaper publisher and the bank holding the loan had expressed an interest in clearing the site.

In accepting the terms of the Ford grant, the Mummers board was under pressure to come up with matching funds. Construction costs escalated during a delay in clearing the site. The discovery that the site had an underground stream bed meant that much of the initial construction money went into concrete pilings. Fundraising lagged during an extended design development period (1966-70), while Johansen worked out the all-new detailing of the structure, devising what was then a novel architectural vocabulary. Ultimately, John Kirkpatrick, a local arts patron, balked at providing his promised share of the matching funds, and the Mummers Theater, saddled by a heavy debt, went bankrupt after its first season.

Lowry recalls that Kirkpatrick gained control of the building by offering to relieve the Mummers trustees of their debt if they would agree to replace their board with his own nonprofit group, to be known as the Oklahoma Theatre Center.[11] Thus the Mummers Theater was dissolved, Scism lost his job, and Kirkpatrick abandoned Ford's goal of establishing a professional equity company for a succession of what Lowry describes as "educational" but "amateur productions. . . . It was a great disappointment to us to have this wonderfully modern and exciting, imaginative theater design turned over as a playpen for amateurs." At this point, Lowry relates, the Ford Foundation seriously considered bringing suit against the board of the Mummers but decided that the adverse publicity resulting from the world's largest foundation suing the board of one of its projects would be "very harmful for any meaningful utilization of that wonderful space." A lawsuit was not initiated, but construction of the building was never completely finished, leading Blake to describe the inside of the Mummers as "a bit of a dump. . . . His workshops, rehearsal areas, dressing rooms and storage spaces are concrete parking garages lit with bare fluorescent tubes and decorated with wall-mounted conduit and graffiti."[12]

By 1985 the Oklahoma Theatre Center was having serious financial difficulties. At the same time, the Oklahoma City Arts Council was moving its offices into an adjacent rehabilitated fire station, with the intention of creating a downtown arts district. Also relocated was the arts council's primary fundraiser, the annual Festival of the Arts.[13] After the Theatre Center folded in 1987, concern mounted that the vacant building would become an eyesore. Demolition might have again loomed as a possibility, but it was discovered that according to the original covenant on the property imposed by the Urban Renewal Authority's master plan, the site must be occupied by a theater until the year 2000. Observed Johansen, "It's like the perils of Pauline."

**Bird's-eye view of the model for the Mummers Theater complex, now in the Museum of Modern Art, New York; 1971, John Johansen, architect. *Clockwise from upper left:* 600-seat thrust theater, children's theater, and arena theater surrounding central court with elevated cooling tower.**

Photograph by Louis Checkman courtesy of John Johansen

The theater occupies a block on the southern periphery of the central business district. Its site was cleared of pawnshops as part of the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority's extensive redevelopment plan, devised by I. M. Pei in 1965. More than 500 buildings, some of historical significance, eventually disappeared within the 220-acre area of the downtown core.[14] Although several projects have been completed in the central business district, the Mummers' immediate surroundings have changed little since John Pastier surveyed the area in 1981.[15] Conklin & Rossant's Myriad Gardens was finally completed last year, although it is somewhat scaled down from the original proposal.[16] Myriad Gardens is a delightfully edenic retreat, offering a soothing counterpoint to Johansen's vigorous gymnastics across the street. However, Frank Gehry's planned shopping center for the Galleria site on the north side of Sheridan Avenue never got off the ground, and a subsequent proposal by Forest City Enterprises for a festival marketplace on the four-block site also was put on hold because of the slow local economy.[17] The only vestige of this development is the exposed concrete footings and ramps leading down into a massive underground parking garage. The city is interested in building a new art museum and library on a portion of the site, but a recent bond election for this purpose was defeated.

Of immediate concern to the arts council is the large homeless and transient population that frequents the area, which adjoins a bus station. One often sees derelicts perched on the ramps leading to the theater. Crime has increased as prostitution and drugs have become more prevalent in the block of flophouses and bars immediately west of the theater. The city is taking strong measures to curb this activity, as the Urban Renewal Authority has extended its original boundaries to this block, and demolition of the offending properties is even now taking place, following relocation of the residents to improved quarters. The newly razed area is designated as part of the cultural district, but there are no immediate plans for development.

Back in 1987, the security issue was only one problem the arts council had to solve if it was to resuscitate the theater. After considerable study, the council decided that the best response was to purchase the property, which was renamed Stage Center. As the theater's new landlord, the council faced the challenge of operating a building described as a "prodigious consumer of energy," with a history of failed tenants in a neighborhood with a less-than-savory reputation. It wisely decided to complete its fundraising prior to beginning construction and so avoid going into the building carrying a debt, which had contributed to the failure of previous tenants.

The council decided at the outset not to hire the original architect for the rehabilitation. In explaining why only local architectural firms were considered for the commission, facilities manager Liz Eickman explained simply, "We needed a local perspective." James Tolbert, chairman of the executive committee, elaborated further: "I think we were all very reluctant to start with John [Johansen] because John's lack of perception of the problems the building created in the community was part of the problem. . . . But we wanted without question to retain the architectural integrity of the structure and for John to be happy with it." However, Johansen was not notified of the arts council's plan, and he would later pointedly observe, "The honorable thing would [have been] to inform me at the outset."[18]

Among the 16 local firms vying for the refitting commission was Elliott & Associates, headed by Rand Elliott, 40, the current president of the central Oklahoma chapter of the American Institute of Architects.[19] The firm specializes in interiors and renovations and is currently designing interiors for the new Oklahoma Publishing Company Building, which ironically is the headquarters for the theater's longtime nemesis, the local newspaper publisher. Elliott was well known to the arts council as a volunteer, and he was industrious enough to have undertaken a telephone survey in preparation for his interview, polling people on the theater center's mailing list for their responses to the building. While the survey was admittedly unscientific, its conclusions, drawn from the responses of 60 residents, would play a major role in subsequent decisions about the refitting of the building. The survey convinced the arts council that "Rand had done his homework" and clinched the commission for him, according to Liz Eickman.

Elliott's survey and presentation were instrumental in motivating the arts council to go for a "solution" rather than a simple "fix," escalating preliminary estimates of $500,000 to $1.6 million. The "solution" primarily addressed functional improvements and the necessity of decreasing the operating cost of the facility. But in addition to fixing the roof, removing asbestos, making energy conservation improvements, and providing handicapped access, the arts council also decided to tackle the theater's image problem by including cosmetic alterations to "increase the comfort level" and to make the facility more "user-friendly." Also, to help the facility pay its own way, the arts council decided to add a lounge with cash bar and catering facilities in what was formerly a rehearsal room, and will rent out office space in the basement. Stage Center will become a multi-use facility, used primarily for performing arts but also for meetings and lectures. There will be no dominant tenant, so the former Mummers will not house a resident theater company, at least for the foreseeable future. Says Tolbert, "One of the problems in having a resident company is that they tend to be excessively possessive. . . . The costs of operating the building just can't be absorbed by the limited number of nights that a resident theater company would use it."

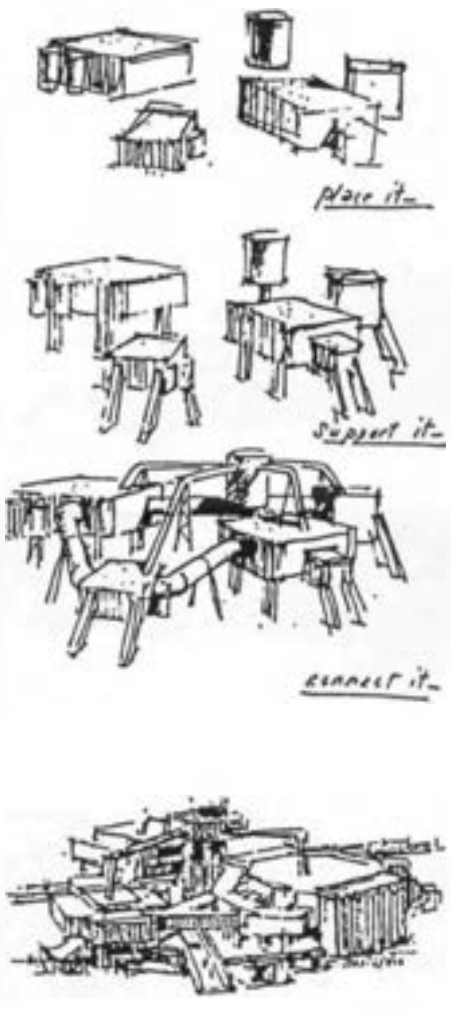
Elliott traces his interest in the theater to a "very early and very in-depth" study he did of the building while a sophomore in the architecture school at the University of Oklahoma. "I felt I was the most qualified and capable of handling this dynamic a building because I understood its form. I understood what John was trying to do with it. There are certain projects that are meant to be. . . . This was one of those projects that you can just taste." Elliott apparently knew so well what Johansen's intentions for the building were that he did not feel the need to make an initial call to Johansen either. Elliott clearly does not intend to take the part of a supernumerary in his remodeling of the building: "What we are doing is embellishing it. I think we're making it better than it was before." The younger architect recognizes the historical significance of the Mummers Theater, but cannot resist adding that its creator "has had his 15 minutes of fame." For his part, Johansen describes Elliott as an "aggressive young architect trying to hit a home run with the building. That's understandable but inexcusable. . . . It's not the time to promote yourself."

Arts council executives, who admit they are new to the world of property management and capital campaigns, have been methodically tapping federal, state, and local sources in turn for funds. They believe the original architect would eventually have had his role to play, but much to their chagrin, the headstrong Johansen did not wait passively for his cue. Tipped off about the renovation by a former student, Johansen was not only indignant that he had been kept in the dark about the proposed plans, but also suspicious of the council's intentions. "They obviously planned to bypass me from the beginning," he later asserted. Johansen wasted no time in collecting letters of support in New York from Museum of Modern Art curator Stuart Wrede and critic Brendan Gill, bought his own plane ticket to Oklahoma City, and arrived unannounced to find out for himself what the arts council was up to.[20] After compiling a list of architecture critics to contact around the country and enlisting the aid of several sympathetic local architects and members of the architectural faculty at the University of Oklahoma, Johansen contacted James Tolbert. "I never worked so fast in my whole life," says Johansen. "There were no threats, but a lot of firepower." A meeting of the respective architects and a hastily planned cocktail party in honor of Johansen were arranged by the board. The image of the proud 75-year-old architect arriving on the scene armed with his drawings suggests a venerable King Lear prepared to grapple once again with the local enmity that he perceived as being poised to compromise his crowning work.

For their part, arts council representatives assert their respect for the building and for its creator. They attributed their delay in notifying Johansen to "naïveté" and insist that they had intended to do so once they had formulated their plans. Yet they in fact did not notify the architect, and it is not clear when they intended to bring him into the process. A local architect who contacted an architect in Elliott's office to inquire whether Johansen would be involved in the remodeling was told very frankly that they were deliberately delaying notifying Johansen because he would just interfere with their plans. At this writing, Johansen has not received even a set of preliminary drawings to review.

Photograph by Balthazar Korab; courtesy of John Johansen

**Mummers Theater, entrance causeway as it appeared in 1971 shortly after the building opened.**




**Johansen's sketches illustrate the assembly process used to design the theater complex. In a 1968 article, "The Mummers Theater: A Fragment Not a Building" (*Architectural Forum*, May 1968), Johansen wrote:**

*"The design process, if the term can be used at all, is not one of composing but of rigging or assemblage. Each element, whether enclosed functional space, conveyor tube, or structural member, goes about its work directly and independently; sometimes with utter disregard for the other elements, or for occupants it is not required to accommodate at that place or moment. The way of dealing with functional elements then might be to 'position' them, i.e., to satisfy functional relationships; to 'prop' them, i.e., to support with structure; to 'connect' them, i.e., to provide circulation and distribution."*

Good intentions or not, the arts council very nearly botched the relationship with Johansen. Yet even though the gaffe was reported in the local press,[21] arts council leaders and the local architect tend to gloss over the fumbled relationship with Johansen, insisting that he was properly consulted. While a collaboration did eventually take place, this does not justify their misrepresentation of events, particularly to the national media. One of the editors of *Architecture* was assured that the delicate situation involving the two architects was handled in an exemplary manner, and it was cited in a November 1990 article for this reason.[22]

A truce was declared, and Johansen and Elliott began in earnest to examine the preliminary plans. One major objection Johansen raised was to Elliott's placement of a glass-walled elevator tower as an independent element on the north end of the site near Sheridan Avenue, connected by a covered ramp to the original structure. The elevator, which is necessary for handicapped access, was eventually repositioned behind an existing stairwell off the entrance lobby; it will open onto the basement, the first-level lobby, and the Cabaret cocktail lounge (formerly the rehearsal room) on the second level.

The only aspect of the plans that approaches a restoration is the treatment of the building's exterior. Many years ago, a local business donated ivy and hundreds of trees in an effort to cover up the building. The ivy will be removed from the concrete components, and the now-faded colors of the people tubes and other ramps will be repainted in the original brilliant primary colors. In addition to the new elevator tower, a detached concrete porte-cochère will be placed in front of the Sheridan Avenue entrance, primarily in response to the perception that people do not know where the main entrance is. For protection from the elements, the two open, stepped walkways leading from each theater up to the new cocktail lounge will be enclosed in sheet metal, so they will look like the people tubes. One of these walkways will also be widened and ramped for wheelchair accessibility.

Kate Leader, an actress and teacher who appeared with the Mummers in their new theater, recalls, "There were so many things about that theater that were designed well, but we never got the equipment to make it work." A disputed and uncompleted part of the original design for the thrust-stage theater was a hydraulic lift for the front portion of the stage. David Hays, the original stage designer, recalled that both he and Seism decided that the lift was unnecessary. The Washington, D.C., consultant hired for the current refitting, Kenneth B. Dresser, concurs. Hays also complains that he was never consulted about the current renovation plans. For Hays, the significant part of the original design of the experimental theater that has been lost was the notion of the stage as a floating island in space, surrounded by a large open moat (a similar stage was designed for the Mechanic Theater). This design allowed for great flexibility in moving both actors and sets onto the stage, as well as for the construction of a variety of stage levels. The moat, however, was long ago boarded across. As in Baltimore, conventional proscenium staging has proven more practical for most productions.

In the present arrangement, moving scenery from storage has proven to be a chore: large sets were cut up and taken first out of the building and then back in through narrow hallways to get them onto the stage. Since the old scene shop will be converted to a dance studio in the current plans, sets will be constructed in a nearby building leased by the arts council and then transported to large loading dock doors that will be added to both theaters. This obviously will not be more efficient, but will free space inside the theater for other purposes.

The mechanical systems will be completely renovated, with an underground thermal storage system added to increase the efficiency of the cooling system. The Mummers, always too hot or too cold, like the low-budget Mechanic Theater suffered from inadequate zoning of its air-conditioning system; this will be corrected in the renovation.

The buzzwords of the remodeling efforts are "soften it" and "warm it up." To this end, the bare concrete walls forming the two theaters will be sandblasted to remove water stains and to create a "velvety" texture. Encircling the ambulatory halls are metal walls that were never furred out. Once these are Sheetrocked, they will be covered with acoustical fabric and serve as gallery hanging spaces. The concrete walls may also be covered with acoustical fabric. According to Eickman, the colored interiors of the building will be "neutralized." She explains, "These colors were only popular during the sixties." The offices in the unfinished basement level, one of which is designated for the local AIA chapter, will be Sheetrocked and covered in wall carpet.

While Johansen has little objection to these changes, the softened look and overall homogenization of the interiors will alter his original interest in playing off contrasts in materials and the notions of denial and reward. He explains: "There are times when you are purposefully uncomfortable, or dangerous, or hurt a bit. I like to put occupants through this and then of course reward them at the end. Without any denial, there's no feeling of rejoicing in life. And nothing should be all perfect and lovely." One alteration that is disturbing to Johansen is the proposed skylighting of the people tubes. The feeling of extrusion through the dimly lit tubes is intended to evoke the experience of passing through an artery[23] and moving upward to the promised light at the end of the tunnel, and therefore to enhance the experience of attending an experimental theater.

Elliott feels that his forte is lighting, and he insists: "We're going to energize this building. It's never been lighted properly."[24] Elliott's proposal for neon lighting encircling several of the exterior concrete components seems a curiously static lighting technique with which to "energize" the building. While an effective lighting scheme could certainly punch up the building's nighttime presence and satisfy security concerns, using simple floodlights and spots to play upon the sculptural form of the center might be more dramatic and appropriately theatrical. Blue and green neon will be used in the entrance lobby to outline and differentiate between the people tubes leading to each theater.

The most radical physical changes were proposed for the component housing the lobby on the first level and the rehearsal space above, which is to become the Cabaret, a lounge/bar/kitchen/meeting room. Elliott intends turning it into a "people place": "It needs to be a very festive area. We'll add string lights to give it a really sparkly quality. The issue is to make it an exciting place." Elliott's sectional rendering shows a circular hole cut into the second floor so theater patrons in the bar would have a view down into the lobby. This change was vetoed by Johansen for structural reasons, but the other proposals remain. Some of the concrete walls forming the inner, circular room will be removed to encourage people to circulate and sit in the perimeter area, where an existing cantilevered open balcony will be enclosed by sloped glazing. Strings of small lights will be drawn up in fan shape to a new skylight in the center of the room.

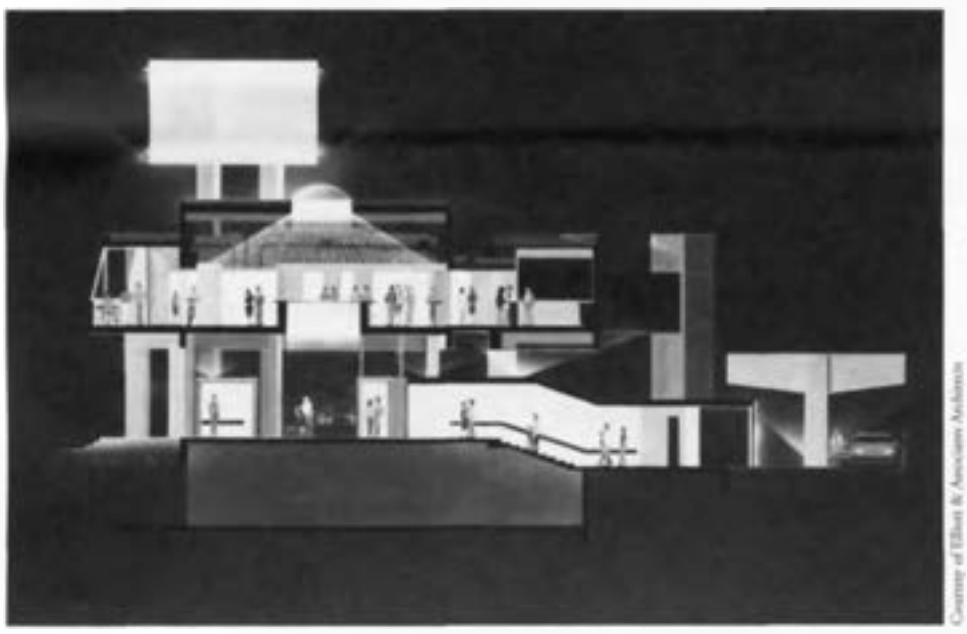
Elliott's interior proposals all play upon the idea of adding "drama and excitement" with new lighting effects, "a feeling that is enhanced inside by the warmth and wonder provided at [sic] 100,000 18" long pieces of string hanging from the ceiling in all public areas."[25] This "string ceiling" is to be created of lengths of cotton fiber tied to chicken wire. Elliott believes that the string effect, enhanced by special lighting, will "soften" the concrete and glass lobby enclosures and create memorable spaces that will aid in orientation.

All warmth and wonder aside, it is clear that the Mummers is undergoing a far more extensive transformation than simple functional improvements. Can this radical and confrontational building be made more mannerly, and will a polite Mummers still be the Mummers? A warmed-up Mummers could be as exciting as lukewarm chili, its bite, edge, and raw-boned gutsiness effaced by a Velveeta touch. Any architectural icon can have instant popular appeal with the addition of a cabaret and a cash bar, but how will the overall changes affect the architectural experience?

Elliott bristles at questions about the reversibility of his alterations, whether cosmetic or functional. He considers all of the changes to be necessary to make the building "usable," and terms such questions "odd" and "ridiculous." This is surprising, given Elliott's careful delineation between new construction and original structure in his renovation of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, which received an AIA central Oklahoma chapter component award in 1988.[26] One might hope that the Mummers is deserving of the same careful thought that the Cowboy Hall of Fame received, and that the principle of reversibility be applied that today guides many other addition and rehabilitation plans.

Johansen once stated his notion of a "building as a palimpsest, the record of time and change. . . . I never liked permanent solutions."[27] He saw the Mummers someday accommodating additional plugged-in components. Yet he clearly finds it difficult to reconcile his previous commitment to this sort of fluidity with the addition of twinkly lights and a string ceiling to a building that he views as the best of his career.

Johansen lets a few adjectives slip when reacting to these proposals, such as "outrageous," "horrifying," and "silly," but once his major objections were resolved, he assisted the council with its fundraising. Even he concedes that the arts council deserves applause for its efforts to breathe life back into this vanguard design of the experimental 1960s. Johansen was never offered a fee by the arts council for his consulting work, nor did he want one; he acted as an unpaid adviser. He also wrote a letter for the arts council to use in its fundraising efforts. While not being specific, Johansen declares in the letter that he came to agree with a series of changes in



Courtesy of Elliott & Associates Architects

Photograph by Robbert Forde, courtesy of John Johansen

***Above:*** **Section rendering of proposed alteration, showing addition of string lights suspended from the ceiling of the lobby and entrance canopy. Architect for the renovation is Rand Elliott of Elliott & Associates Architects.**

**Interior of 600-seat theater in three-quarter-round configuration showing audience seating divided into trays.**

the building that he thought were reasonable or necessary. "I suppose they take that to say that everything that is put there is totally with my approval, which is of course not so at all," he rejoins.

For many architects, Johansen's Mummers has been a compelling and influential source, occupying a special niche in the history of 1960s design. Is it inconceivable that in 50 years' time there will be a movement to restore the Mummers' original appearance? The case of the Mummers and the recent furor over the now-canceled Kimbell Art Museum addition underscores the need for landmark recognition of significant buildings that are fewer than 50 years old by the National Register. The arts council would do well to consider during its renovation that this intervention is but the beginning of a new act in the continuing history of this much-loved and much-maligned building.

The vulnerability of monuments of modern architecture is an issue that has recently been addressed in Europe at the inaugural conference of Docomomo, held in September in The Netherlands; this European pressure group was formed to grapple with the problems of documentation and conservation of important modern buildings. The need for a similar organization in the United States is all too apparent. If and when it is formed, perhaps its first conference could be held in Oklahoma City.[28] ■

*Many thanks to the people who provided visual materials or other special assistance with this article: Drexel Turner, John Johansen, Karen Merrick, Liz Eickman, and Margaret Culbertson.*

**Notes**

1 Mary Jo Nelson, "His Life Plethora of Crises, Defeats, Challenges, Triumphs," *Sunday Oklahoman*, 18 April 1982, news section. Mummers stage designer David Hays founded the National Theater for the Deaf in 1967 in Waterford, Connecticut, and Scism joined him as a member of its staff. Scism died in 1986 of cancer.

2 Mary Jo Nelson, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," *Sunday Oklahoman*, 24 March 1985, real estate section. The Oklahoma chapter of the AIA did at least declare it as one of Oklahoma's ten best buildings in 1983. Mary Jo Nelson, "Architects Select State's 'Best' Buildings," *Sunday Oklahoman*, 16 October 1983, business section.

3 The prototype for the program was the Ford Foundation's Program for Theater Design, a group of models for innovative theater proposals, including one by David Hays and Peter Blake, that was prepared and circulated as a traveling exhibition under the title *The Ideal Theater: Eight Concepts* by the American Federation of Arts, which also issued a catalogue under that title (New York, 1962).

4 Robert Hughes, "Toward a New Slang," *Time*, 31 May 1971, p. 68.

5 See "John M. Johansen Declares Himself," *Architectural Forum* 124 (January-February 1966), pp. 64-67, in which he compares his designs to contemporary developments in the arts. See also Abby Suckle, ed., *By Their Own Design* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1980), pp. 66-77, for his discussion of electronic circuitry and ad hocism. Another possible influence was Johansen's trip to the Gulf of Mexico in the 1960s to study the prefabricated Grand Isle island mine; interconnecting towers and bridges were subsequently proposed for New York in his 1966 "Leapfrog City" concept. See Johansen, "New Town," *Architectural Forum* 127 (September 1967), pp. 44-53. Johansen's explorations in the 1960s certainly paralleled those of the Metabolists, and he admired the work of Archigram (Hughes, "Toward a New Slang," p. 68.

6 "Statement on the Oklahoma Theater Center," John M. Johansen to author, 28 September 1990.

7 See Peter Blake, "The Mummers Theater," *Architectural Forum* 134 (March 1971), pp. 30-37. The Mummers was cited in Nikolaus Pevsner's *A History of Building Types* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976) and in Arthur Drexler's *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979). From 1970 to 1972 the Mummers was published in *Architectural Record, Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, L'Architettura, Architectural Design*, the *AIA Journal*, and *Casabella*. Johansen was recognized as one of 45 international "Great Builders of the 1960s" in 1970. See *Japan Architect*, no. 165 (July 1970), p. 67. For Johansen's comments on the Mummers, see his "The Mummers Theater: A Fragment Not a Building," *Architectural Forum* 129 (May 1968), pp. 64-69; "An Architecture for an Electronic Age," *American Scholar*, 1966.

8 Hughes, "Toward a New Slang," p. 68.

9 Blake, "The Mummers Theater," p. 35.

10 "AIA Honor Awards," *AIA Journal* 57 (May 1972). See Mummers Theater, p. 34, and Alley Theater, p. 32. The Alley Theater received the Bartlett Award.

11 "Theatre Center Completes Plans to Take Over Mummers," *Oklahoma Journal*, 28 May 1972.

12 Blake, "The Mummers Theater," p. 33

13 Mary Jo Nelson, "Culture Zone Plan Will Assemble Many Arts Agencies Downtown," *Sunday Oklahoman*, 13 January 1985, business section.

14 Mary Jo Nelson, "Old Buildings, History Disappear as City Gets New Look," *Sunday Oklahoman*, 7 July 1983, real estate section.

15 John Pastier, "Something Else Altogether in Oklahoma City," *AIA Journal* 70 (August 1981), pp. 40-46.

16 "The Twentieth Annual P/A Design Awards," *Progressive Architecture* 54 (January 1973), pp. 70-73.

17 Mary Jo Nelson, "Urban Renewal Projects to Top $1 Billion," *Sunday Oklahoman*, 30 November 1986.

18 John Johansen, 75, is currently teaching a seminar at the Pratt Institute and is a critic in its graduate program. He lectures in the U.S. and abroad. He has retired from active practice, but he prefers to say that he has "graduated" into the investigation of purely conceptual design work. He describes this body of work as "experimental – using advanced technologies projected 40 or 50 years into the future." See John M. Johansen, "The New Modernity," *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 228 (September 1989), pp. 47-58.

19 Elliott & Associates' work has been published in several interiors magazines, and *Architecture* briefly cited the firm's work in May 1988 and August 1990, and reviewed a bank design in the October 1990 issue. See also *Architects of the United States of America, 1989-1990* (Melbourne, Australia: Images Publishing Group, 1989), pp. 52-53.

20 It is not surprising that Johansen moved quickly. He has witnessed the demolition of two of his houses, one in New Canaan and one in Westport, Connecticut. See Susan R. Winget, "Donahue's Demolition," *Progressive Architecture*, September 1988, p. 24; see also *Progressive Architecture*, May 1962, pp. 181-86. The Mechanic Theater in Baltimore underwent a major modification of its thrust stage without Johansen's collaboration, and he later found himself to be the butt of a critique of the altered building. See Allen Freeman and Andrea O. Dean, "Evaluation: A Troubled Theater Anchors Baltimore's Downtown," *Architecture* 67 (February 1978), pp. 32-37.

21 Mary Jo Nelson, "Arts Council Bows to Architect's Wishes," *Sunday Oklahoman*, 17 April 1988, business section.

22 Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, "Renewing Our Modern Legacy," *Architecture 79* (November 1990), p. 69.

23 The combined compositional analogies of electronic circuitry and arteries derives from Johansen's interpretation of Marshall McLuhan's book *Understanding Media*, which states that with electronic communication "we have extended the central nervous system itself in a global embrace abolishing time and space." See Johansen, "John M. Johansen Declares Himself," *Architectural Forum* 124 (January-February 1966), p. 66.

24 Nelson, "Arts Council Bows to Architect's Wishes."

25 *Architects of the United States of America, 1989-1990*, p. 53.

26 "AIA Component Awards," *Architecture* 77 (May 1988), p. 82.

27 Hughes, "Toward a New Slang," p. 68.

28 Docomomo's first conference was attended by 170 participants from 20 countries. See John Allen, "Instruments for Icons?" *Architectural Review*, no. 1125 (November 1990), pp. 5, 9.

Claes Oldenburg, **Geometric Mouse X**, 1971. Central Library Building, Houston Public Library, 600 McKinney.



# Why a Mouse?

## PUBLIC ART IN HOUSTON

**William Howze**

Houston exhibits public art in all its varieties, functions, and range of meanings. Surveying public art here is remarkably easy, much easier than one might expect in view of Houston's reputation for urban sprawl and traffic congestion. These conclusions will not surprise *Cite* readers and longtime Houston residents. The overall value of public art in Houston cannot be obscured even by the easily solicited – and thought-provoking – accounts of the controversies that attach themselves to virtually every piece.

The city may sprawl and the freeways may be clogged, but public art is concentrated inside the Loop, south of I-10, within the overlapping zones of the museum district, the Texas Medical Center, the universities, and downtown. If time is limited, it is possible to see a wide range of work, without too much driving, in less than two hours – especially with the help of the Cultural Arts Council of Houston's brochure *A Cultural Guide to Houston*, the American Institute of Architects' *Houston Architectural Guide* by Stephen Fox, and the University of Houston's pamphlet *Art on Campus*. The list that accompanies this article attempts to bring the works mentioned in those guides together in one place with works on other lists provided by Paul Winkler of the Menil Collection, William Camfield of Rice University's Department of Art and Art History, and Marti Mayo, director of the Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston.

It is easier to point to examples of public art than to define it: the water wall adjacent to Transco Tower; Claes Oldenberg's *Geometric Mouse X* in front of Houston Public Library's Central Building; Rufino Tamayo's mural *America* in the second-floor banking hall of Bank One, Texas. Public art is found in places where one might come upon it in the course of routine activities, even driving around town. It is a manifestation of the belief that art is good for us, that works of art enrich our lives by heightening our sensitivity to our surroundings and making us aware of their expressive qualities. We are surrounded by concrete and steel. What is their expressive potential? Look at the works of Mark di Suvero – not in a museum but in a park, in the context of the city, in the midst of daily life. This aspect of public art, its location in places people do not frequent deliberately to see art, is at the heart of all the controversies surrounding it. Location is therefore an essential consideration for an appraisal of public art.

Location offers a useful way to categorize public art and to think about its functions. Where is it found? In Houston, four types of locations account for virtually all the public art in the city: the grounds of museums, college campuses, the plazas and lobbies of major commercial and public

## INDEX OF PUBLIC ART IN HOUSTON

### DOWNTOWN

Unknown artist
**Untitled [Battle of San Jacinto]**
Stained glass. Texas Commerce Bank Building, 712 Main Street, interior.

John Alexander
**Lily Pads**
Oil on canvas, 1977. Music Hall, 810 Bagby, interior.

Louis Ameteis
**Spirit of the Confederacy**
Bronze, 1908. Sam Houston Park, 1100 Bagby.

Dennis Ashford
**Begin Odd-Even Tomorrow**
Acrylic on canvas, 1979. First City National Bank Building, 1001 Main Street, interior.

Tim Bailey
**untitled**
Forged steel, 1988. One Allen Center, 500 Dallas.

John Biggers
**The Quilting Bee**
1981. Music Hall, 810 Bagby, interior.

Mike Biggers
**Cambria I**
Painted steel. Allen Center Plaza, Smith at Clay, through June 1991.

Mike Biggers
**Various works**
Forged steel, glass, and aluminum. One Allen Center, Sculpture Gallery, 500 Dallas, through June 1991.

Jerry Bywaters
**Buffalo Bayou**
1941. Federal Office Building, 515 Rusk, interior.

William Conton
**Red Shift**
Acrylic on canvas, 1975. First City National Bank Building, 1001 Main Street, interior.

Jean Dubuffet
**Monument au Fantôme**
Polychrome polyester resin and fiberglass, 1977. 1100 Louisiana Building, 1100 Louisiana.

Helen Frankenthaler
**Blue North**
Acrylic on canvas, 1968. First City National Bank Building, 1001 Main Street, interior.

Emilio Greco
**Grande Baigneuse No. 2**
Bronze, 1957. Bank One/Texas drive-in branch, Preston at Louisiana.

Barbara Hepworth
**The Family of Man**
Bronze, 1970. First City Tower, 1001 Fannin.

Alexandre Hogue
**Buffalo Bayou**
1941. Federal Office Building, 515 Rusk, interior.

Ellsworth Kelly
**Green Angle**
Acrylic on canvas, 1971. First City National Bank Building, 1001 Main Street, interior.

Robert Kushner
**Architectural Arabesque**
Bronze, 1986. Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1201 Louisiana.

Richard Lippold
**Gemini II**
Stainless steel, 1965/66. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana, interior.

Morris Louis
**Delta Epsilon**
Acrylic on canvas, 1960. First City National Bank Building, 1001 Main Street, interior.

Jim Love
**Area Code**
Metal, 1962. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas Avenue, interior.

Daniel MacMorris
**Allegorical murals**
1939. City Hall, 901 Bagby, interior.

Vincent Maragliatti
**Modern Houston and other murals**
Fresco, 1929. Texas Commerce Bank Building, 712 Main Street, interior.

Marcello Mascherini
**Ballet Dancer**
Bronze, 1950. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana.

Enrique Miralda
**Figures**
Steel core, iron, concrete, and cement, 1982. Sawyer Building, Lubbock at Hemphill.

Joan Miro
**Personage and Birds**
Polychrome bronze, 1970. Texas Commerce Tower, 601 Travis.

Henry Moore
**Large Spindle Piece**
Bronze, 1968, 1974. Allen Parkway across from Jefferson Davis Hospital.

Louise Nevelson
**Frozen Laces**
Black painted steel, 1979. Enron Building, Four Allen Center, 1400 Smith.

Kenneth Noland
**Graded Exposures**
Acrylic on canvas, 1967. First City National Bank Building, 1001 Main Street, interior.

David Novros
**Untitled**
Fresco. Pennzoil Place, 700 Milam, interior.

Claes Oldenburg
**Geometric Mouse X**
Painted steel, 1971. Central Library Building, Houston Public Library, 600 McKinney.

Claes Oldenburg
**Inverted "Q" Prototype**
Black epoxy-coated rigid foam. First City Tower, 1001 Fannin, interior.

Albert Paley
**Untitled (heroic banners)**
Painted steel, 1987. Wortham Center, 550 Prairie, interior.

Charles Pebworth
**Garden of the Mind**
Polished aluminum sculptural relief, 1971-72. Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1200 Louisiana, interior.

Pio Pulido and Sylvia Orozco
**A United Community**
Tile and brick. Sixth Ward Community Park, Kane Street at Trinity Street.

Peter Reginato
**High Plains Drifter**
Cor-ten steel, 1973. Allen Center II, 1200 Smith.

Tony Rosenthal
**Bronco**
Stainless steel, 1980. 1010 Lamar Building, 1010 Lamar, interior.

Naomi Savage
**One Step for Mankind**
Photographic etching in stainless steel, 1979. Tranquillity Park, Bagby between Walker and Rusk, east wall.

Carroll Simms
**The Guitar Solo**
Bronze, 1981. Music Hall, 810 Bagby, interior.

Ned Smyth
**Palm Columns**
Mosaic tile and masonry, 1986. Entex Building, 1201 Milam, interior.

Frank Stella
**York Factory B**
Acrylic on canvas, 1970. First City Tower, 1001 Fannin, interior.

Rufino Tamayo
**America**
Acrylic on canvas, 1955. Bank One/Texas, 910 Travis, interior.

Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1986, Isamu Noguchi with Fuller & Sadao, architects. Anthony Caro, **Argentine**, 1967, foreground; Ellsworth Kelly, **Houston Triptych**, 1986, background.

David Smith, **Two Circle Sentinel**, 1961.

Mark di Suvero, **Bygones**, 1976. Menil Collection, park between Menil Collection and Rothko Chapel.

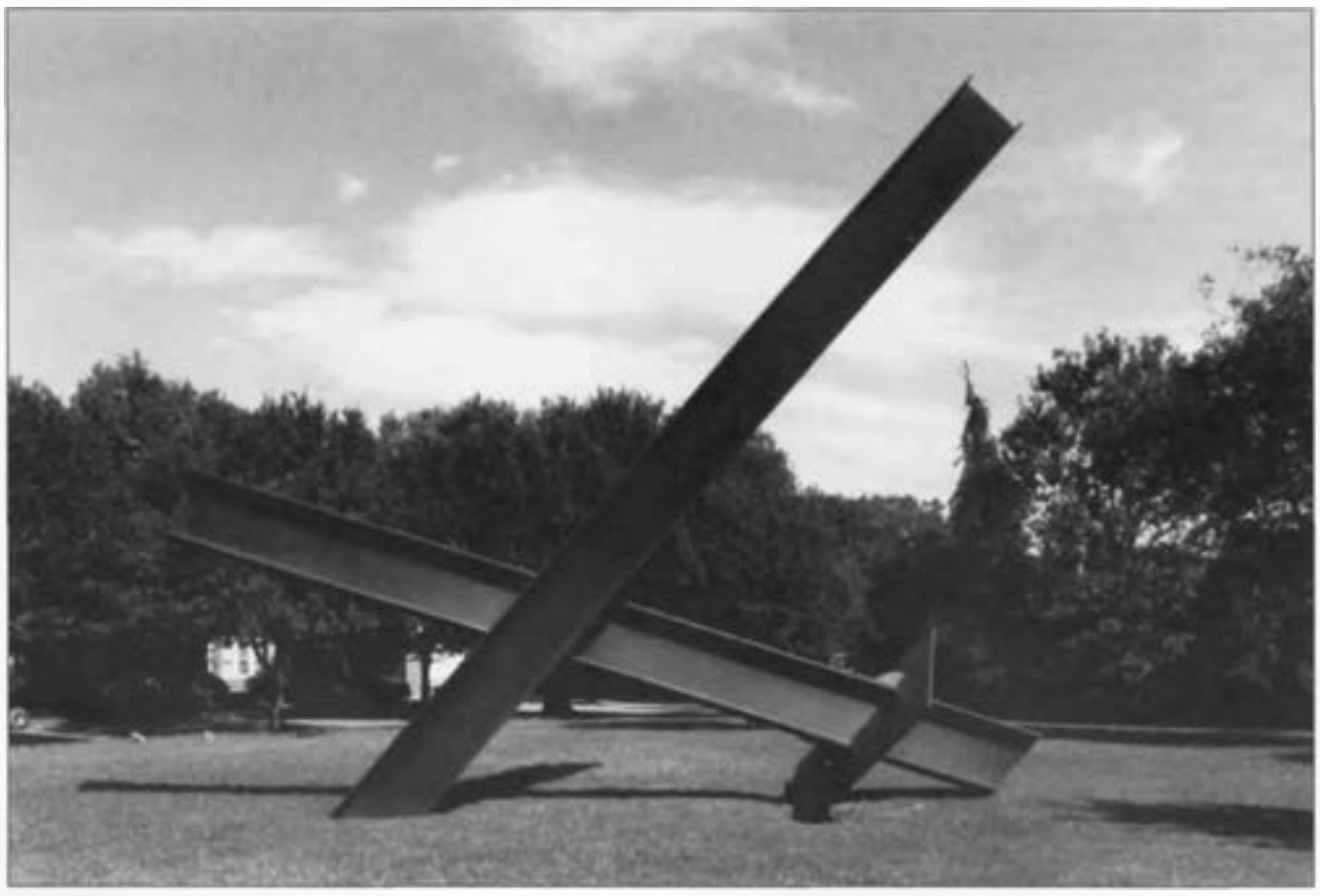
buildings, and city parks. In terms of the relationship of the art work to its setting, these locations range from the intimate and carefully arranged museum grounds to the vast and less ordered parks, with campuses and building plazas falling in between.

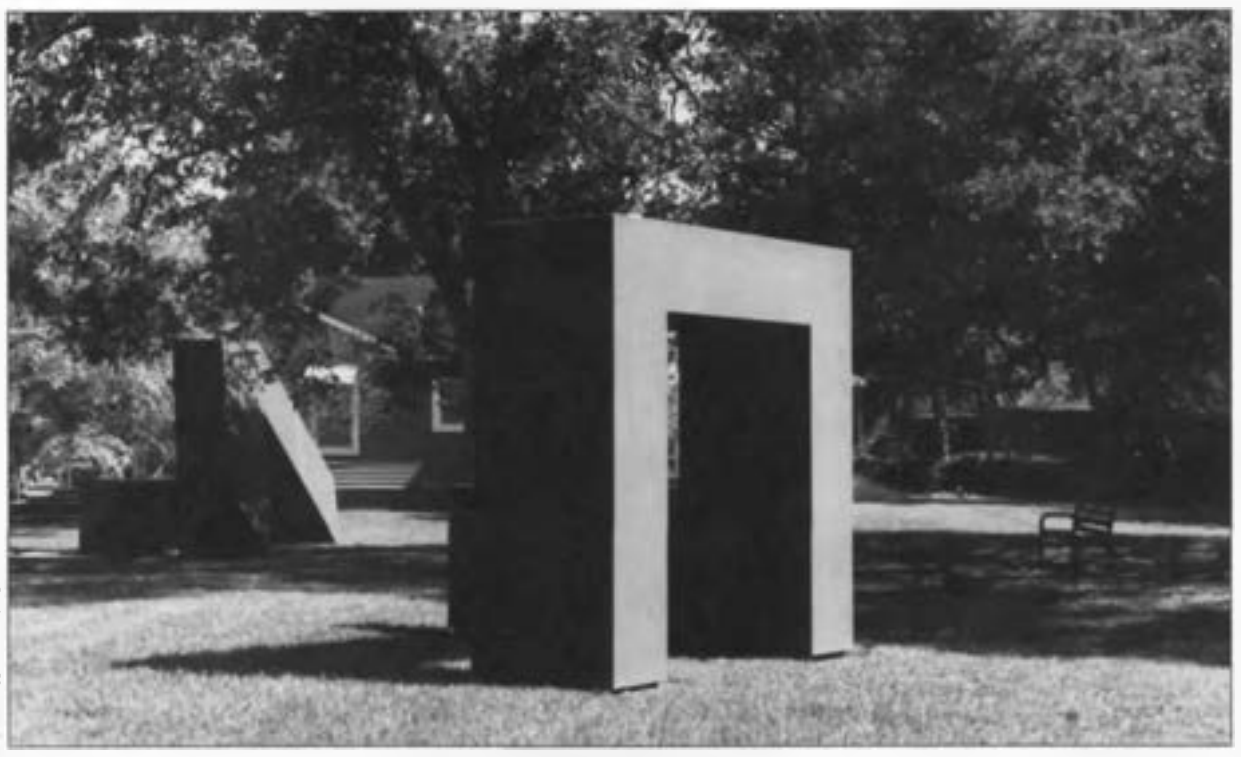
The most controlled location that can still be considered public is the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, on the northeast corner of Montrose and Bissonnet. This is a place surrounded by art institutions: it is in front of the Glassell School of Art, across Bissonnet from the Museum of Fine Arts, and across Montrose from the Contemporary Arts Museum. Isamu Noguchi's enclosure of grassy berms and concrete walls is the work of art encountered by most of the public as they drive through the intersection, but the opening in the wall on Montrose and the curving entrance on Bissonnet make it clear that this is no secret garden. It is an inviting one, although the invitation is clearly formal.

What is inside? As much as anything else, the garden creates a subtle, almost concentric sense of being enclosed, especially when one enters from Bissonnet. Berms and walls enclose the viewer; the crowns of trees enclose the walls; buildings – the dark curve of the museum's Brown Pavilion and the silver flank of the CAM close by, church spires and apartment and office towers farther away – enclose the trees; and ultimately the great blue Texas sky encloses all. (This is arguably one of the ten great pieces of Texas sky, especially looking east toward a clearing thunderstorm.)

The next impression the garden provides is one of textures – granite, concrete, gravel, and grass – and their ordered arrangement. Noguchi's garden is about texture and proportion as much as anything, the hidden dimension made visible. The enclosing sky, buildings, trees, and walls create a perceptible perimeter around what at first seems to be an open space. But freestanding walls and low earth berms subtly break up the space. One has a clear sense of a perimeter from which one is cut off, and this creates a spatial paradox: an open labyrinth. The labyrinth is occupied by challenging objects, if not a minotaur. In such a setting one has to ask, What do these objects have in common? Certainly the large sculptures that command attention – the Matisse *Backs*, Ellsworth Kelly's *Houston Triptych*, and Anthony Caro's *Argentine* – create a sense of metamorphosis, of forms arrested in the midst of change. This feeling is reinforced as one moves around the garden: everything seems to undergo a metamorphosis. Spatial relationships and the objects change in one aspect or another; Pietro Consagra's *Conversation With the Wind* actually moves. One is forced to confront the fact that the more one tries to gauge the relationship of the objects to each other and to the space, the more complex that relationship becomes. Among other rewards, the sculpture garden provides a place to sharpen one's perception before encountering works in less controlled environments, such as one can find just a block away on the south lawn of the Museum of Fine Arts. That spit of land divides a stream of traffic that distracts one's attention from such fine works as Paul Manship's *Hercules Upholding the Heavens* and Eduardo Chillida's *Abesti Gogora V.*

The Menil Collection has managed to project its aesthetic of passion and intellect from inside its galleries to an area of several blocks that includes the Rothko Chapel and the campus of the University of St.







*Left:* Tony Smith, **Marriage**, 1962, foreground, and **Spitball**, 1966, background. Menil Collection grounds.

*Below:* Carroll Simms, **The Tradition of Music**, 1986. Texas Southern University, central plaza.



Thomas with remarkable skill and subtlety. Of course, chronologically it might be more accurate to say that the aesthetic first manifested at St. Thomas and the chapel has been concentrated in the Menil.

Surrounded by small houses painted a uniform gray, like so many well-behaved parochial school children in matching jumpers and slacks, the grounds of the Menil are hardly less controlled than the MFA's sculpture garden. It is amazing that this obvious aesthetic gambit works, but the effect is actually pleasing, perhaps because little houses are part of the fabric of the whole district, only here the weft has been dyed grey. The sensibility that judged that effect so nicely was clearly at work in the placement nearby of Mark di Suvero's *Bygones*. Though made of two massive steel I-beams, *Bygones* is mostly hidden from view by trees until one is practically upon it. The trees, which create a roughly square perimeter around the sculpture, obviously mark the site where another small house once stood. What happened to the house? Who lived here? Did these intersecting beams form a cross, erected to memorialize the place, that has fallen in its turn? Or are the beams part of the former structure itself that has been partially excavated? Were there buildings here of heroic proportions before these little houses were built? In this aspect, *Bygones* recalls 19th-century photographs of the great Sphinx at Giza, before the body was excavated, when the head alone rested mysteriously on the sand.

The trick of hiding a work of heroic scale in a residential neighborhood is repeated on the adjacent lot, where Barnett Newman's awesome *Broken Obelisk* soars out of a small pool beside the Rothko Chapel. Here is another work one might associate with Egypt and the ancient world and, as the break implies, with its ruin and our present fallen state. But how can an object that at first glance appears so august also be relatively unintimidating? This response exposes an ambivalent view of the past and its monuments: one can be awed by them and at the same time feel superior, simply because those who made them have vanished. The irony here, of course, is that this is not an ancient monument but a work of our own time. *Broken Obelisk* repays extended contemplation; the setting is perfectly complementary.

More amusing but no less calculated is the Menil's placement of two pieces by Tony Smith where Mulberry Street runs into Branard: *Marriage* and *Spitball*. Here again is a residential lot, vacant except for a small building, probably a remodeled garage apartment, on the back corner. The sculptures are roughly the same size as the little building; their juxtaposition encourages one to make comparisons. From the northeast corner, across the street, *Marriage* perfectly frames the door of the house. Is there some sort of equivalency between the sculptures and the building? Is this a demonstration of the differences between real structures and ideal structures? Formally, the Smith pieces are similar to Pennzoil Place; they could be maquettes for alternative versions of the twin towers.

Perhaps that is why they seem so much at home near Philip Johnson's University of St. Thomas campus. However, the little house asserts its own vernacular aesthetic from the back corner of the lot. If one were to combine the aesthetic of the little house with that of Smith's works, would the result look like something by Robert Venturi?

The next step in location is the campus of Texas Southern University. In the central plaza stand three works by Carroll Harris Simms, *African Queen Mother, Jonah and the Whale*, and *The Tradition of Music*. Prominently placed on this traditionally African-American campus, these sculptures are as unambiguous as the bronze portrait of The Founder by John Angel in the academic court at Rice – but how much more challenging and rewarding Simms's pieces are. Angel's portrait of William Marsh Rice can be associated with seated portraits of founders on any number of American college campuses, with seated figures of statesmen (notably Washington and Lincoln), and ultimately, of course, with ancient Egyptian stone sculptures of seated pharaohs. On the other hand, *Jonah and the Whale* near the tennis courts at the University of Houston, for example, or the artist's *Guitar Solo* in the lobby of the Music Hall downtown. But in the center of the campus, where the association with the mission of Texas Southern University is clear, they are inspirational.

The University of Houston displays the benefits of a policy that dedicates a percentage of building funds to public art. In the courtyard of the Fine Arts Building on the main campus there is a bronze figure of Orpheus by Gerhard Marcks that represents the best qualities of public art. In a simple and direct way, it clarifies one's expectations of public art by raising the question, What would this space be like if this sculpture were not here? For one thing, the space would be virtually indistinguishable from many similar courtyards in garden office buildings and hotels. So on a very fundamental level, this figure, which holds a violin, functions as a sign: this space, it signals, has something to do with music and with art. And it has something to do with performance, not that the figure is in the act of playing his instrument. He



Simms's figures evoke the forms and textures of African cultures and the integration of those cultures into the American experience. *The Tradition of Music* presents an abstract figure that could be either an opera singer or a gospel singer, overlaid with shapes that suggest Victorian puffed sleeves as well as the textures of African textiles, sculpture, and even ritual scarification. Simms celebrates this rich mixture of traditions, and anyone looking upon his sculptures can share in that celebration. His works can hold their own in any setting – see another example of

Michael Heizer, **45°, 90°, 180°**, 1986. Rice University, Court of Engineering.

Ruth Pershing Uhler
**The First Subscription Committee**
1935. Julia Ideson Building, Houston Public Library, 500 McKinney Avenue, interior. Murals by other Public Works Art Project artists are elsewhere in the building.

**MENIL COLLECTION/ UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

Mark di Suvero
**Bygones**
Cor-ten steel beams and milled steel plate, 1976. *Menil Collection, park* between Menil Collection and Rothko Chapel.

Michael Heizer
**Isolated Mass/ Circumflex (#2)**
Mayari-R steel, 1968-72. Menil Collection, front lawn.

William Kohl
**The Young Obelisk**
Cor-ten steel, 1971. University of St. Thomas, 3921 Yoakum, garden.

Clark Murray
**Untitled**
Primed and painted welded steel pipe, 1973. University of St. Thomas, Jerabeck Activity and Athletic Center.

Barnett Newman
**Broken Obelisk**
Cor-ten steel, 1963-67. Rothko Chapel, 1409 Sul Ross.

Tony Smith
**Marriage**
Painted milled steel, 1962. Menil Collection, Mulberry at Sul Ross.

Tony Smith
**Spitball**
Painted milled steel, 1965. Menil Collection, Mulberry at Sul Ross.

Tony Smith
**New Piece**
Painted milled steel, 1966. University of St. Thomas, Academic Mall.

Tony Smith
**The Elevens Are Up**
Painted milled steel, 1963. University of St. Thomas, Academic Mall.

Tony Smith
**The Snake Is Out**
Painted milled steel, 1962. University of St. Thomas, Academic Mall.

Hannah Stewart
**Passage**
Steel and cast concrete, 1972. University of St. Thomas, West Main at Mount Vernon.

**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON**

Emile-Antoine Bourdelle
**Adam**
Bronze, 1889. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Louise Bourgeois
**Quarantania I**
Bronze with painted steel base, 1947-53. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Alexander Calder
**The Crab**
Painted steel, 1962. South lawn.

Anthony Caro
**Argentina**
Painted steel, 1967. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Eduardo Chillida
**Abesti Gogora V**
Granite, 1968. South lawn.

Pietro Consagra
**Conversation With the Wind**
Painted steel, 1962. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Mark di Suvero
**Magari**
Welded steel, 1977. South lawn.

Raymond Duchamp-Villon
**The Large Horse**
Bronze, 1914. Main Street entrance lobby.

Lucio Fontana
**Space Concept Nature I and II**
Bronze, 1965. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Alberto Giacometti
**Large Standing Woman I**
Bronze, 1960. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Robert Graham
**Fountain Figures**
Bronze, 1983. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Barbara Hepworth
**Bryher II**
Bronze, 1961. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Bryan Hunt
**Arch Falls**
Bronze on limestone base, 1981. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Ellsworth Kelly
**Houston Triptych**
Bronze, 1986. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Alexander Lieberman
**Around**
Painted steel, acquired 1970. Off exhibition.

Auguste Maillol
**Flore Nue**
Bronze, 1910. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Paul Manship
**Hercules Upholding the Heavens**
Bronze, 1918, acquired 1939. South lawn.

Marino Marini
**The Pilgrim**
Bronze, 1939. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Henri Matisse
**Backs, I-IV**
Bronze, 1909-30. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

William McVey
**Painting, Music, Sculpture, and Flower Arrangement**
Indiana limestone, 1935. South lawn.

Mimmo Paladino
**The Sound of Night**
Bronze, 1986. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Auguste Rodin
**Walking Man**
Bronze, 1905. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Joel Shapiro
**Untitled**
Bronze, 1990. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

David Smith
**Two Circle Sentinel**
Welded stainless steel, 1961. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Frank Stella
**Decanter**
Stainless steel, bronze, and carbon steel, 1987. Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.

Charles Umlauf
**Pieta**
Bronze, 1947. South lawn.

**RICE UNIVERSITY**

John Angel
**Founder's Memorial: William Marsh Rice**
Bronze, 1930. Academic Court.

Michael Heizer
**45°, 90°, 180°**
Granite and concrete, 1986. Court of Engineering.

Jacques Lipschitz
**Portrait of Gertrude Stein**
Bronze. Fondren Library, Alice Pratt Brown Art Library.

Jim Love
**Paul Bunyan Bouquet II**
Lovett College courtyard.

William McVey
**Man Drawing Power From the Sun and Transforming It Into Energy**
Abercrombie Laboratory.

Carl Milles
**The Sisters**
Bronze, circa 1950. Ellen Hale Lovett Memorial Garden at Jones College.

## TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER

Mark di Suvero
**Pranath Yama**
Cor-ten steel, 1978. Baylor College of Medicine, Michael DeBakey Center, 1200 Moursund, interior.

Nancy Graves
**Ten lithographs based on geological maps of lunar orbiter and Apollo sites**
Lithograph, 1972. University of Houston College of Pharmacy Building, 1441 Moursund, interior.

Walter Hancock
**Arion**
Bronze, 1980-87. Methodist Hospital, E. Lillo Crain Garden, 6565 Fannin.

Bruce Hayes
**The Extending Arms of Christ**
1959. Methodist Hospital, 6565 Fannin, façade of west wing.

Peter Hurd
**The Future Belongs to Those Who Prepare for It**
Tempera, 1952. Houston Main Building (Prudential Building), 1100 Holcombe, interior.

David Novros
**Untitled**
Fresco, 1981. Baylor College of Medicine, Michael DeBakey Center, 1200 Moursund, interior.

Wheeler Williams
**The Family**
Indiana limestone, 1952. Houston Main Building (Prudential Building), 1100 Holcombe.

Ben Woitena
**Mirage II**
Welded and painted steel, 1986. Baylor College of Medicine, Michael DeBakey Center, 1200 Moursund.

## HERMANN PARK

Enrico F. Carracchio
**Sam Houston**
Bronze, 1925. Northwest corner of park.

Bob Fowler
**Elephant**
Houston Zoological Gardens entrance, 1513 Outer Belt.

Jim Love
**The Portable Trojan Bear**
Wood, 1974. On zoo train route.

Hannah Stewart
**Atropos Key**
Bronze, 1972. Atop hill in front of Miller Outdoor Theater.

Frank Teich
**Dick Dowling**
Granite, 1905. North MacGregor Drive at Hermann Loop.

## TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

John Biggers
**Web of Life**
Mural, 1978. Texas Southern University, Samuel M. Nabrit Science Center, interior.

Carroll Simms
**African Queen Mother**
Bronze, 1968. Texas Southern University, Martin Luther King Humanities Center.

Carroll Simms
**Jonah and the Whale**
Bronze. Texas Southern University, School of Education and Behavioral Sciences.

Carroll Simms
**Man and the Universe**
1958. Texas Southern University, Samuel M. Nabrit Science Center.

Carroll Simms
**The Tradition of Music**
Bronze, 1986. Texas Southern University, central plaza.

## UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Unknown artist
**Nigerian head, court of Benin**
Bronze, 19th century. Student Life Building, International Student Lounge.

Various artists
**America: The Third Century**
Collotype, lithograph, and silkscreen, 1976. Computing Center lobby and hallways.

Scott Burton
**Benches**
Granite, 1985. Architecture Building entrance.

Mark Clapham
**Cougar**
Bronze, 1970. Hofheinz Pavilion lobby.

Mafou Flato
**Untitled**
Ceramic tile, 1985. Cougar Place lawn.

Peter Forakis
**Tower of the Cheyenne**
Cor-ten steel, 1972. Anne Garrett Butler Plaza.

Bob Fowler
**Untitled**
Cor-ten steel, 1966. University Center Arbor.

Charles Ginnever
**Troika**
Cor-ten steel, 1979. West lawn, Science and Research Building 2.

Joseph Grau-Garriga
**Evocacio Oriental**
Woven fiber, 1967. Isabel C. Cameron Building, interior.

Willi Gutmann
**Big Orange**
Painted steel, 1971. General Services Building lawn.

Linda Howard
**Round About**
Brushed aluminum, 1978. College of Optometry Building lawn.

Manashe Kadishman
**On 1969**
Cor-ten steel. Entrance 14 esplanade.

Lee Kelly
**Waterfall, Stele, and River**
Stainless steel, 1972. Cullen Family Plaza.

William King
**Collegium**
Aluminum, 1984. Walkway between Communications and Fine Arts buildings.

Ron Kleeman
**The Four Horsemen and the Soho Saint**
Serigraph, 1976. Isabel C. Cameron Building.

Scott Burton, **Benches**, 1985, at the entrance to the Architecture Building at the University of Houston. In the background, Brian Wall, **Affi**, 1978.



Gerhard Marcks, **Orpheus**, 1958. University of Houston, Fine Arts Center courtyard.



stands as if waiting for a cue, resting his instrument against his shoulder. He holds the bow vertically in front of him, lightly touching his forehead with its tip, a posture of reflection and preparation that creates a certain amount of tension. The placement of the figure within the courtyard enhances the sense of performance: it stands to one side, in front of a blank brick wall that could serve as a stage curtain. Because the center of the courtyard is essentially empty, a viewer standing there is in effect in the wings of the auditorium where Orpheus is about to perform. In this arresting way the figure commands the entire space – no less magical than the mythological Orpheus' ability to charm beasts and rocks and trees with his music.

Walking out of the Fine Arts courtyard into the central campus reveals an antidote to the perhaps overly sentimental *Orpheus:* large-scale sculptures made from steel beams, plates, and cylinders. Here is a different world. What are these objects about? They are a puzzle; and it seems perfectly appropriate for a college campus to be littered with puzzles. The campus resembles one of Saul Steinberg's cartoons in which ampersands, question marks, and equations dominate a landscape populated by tiny human stick figures. Such works as Clement Meadmore's *Split Level* can be seen as an analog for statistical tables, philosophical statements, and the formal qualities of literary texts. These aesthetic and physical manifestations of intellectual challenges dominate the campus. Most of the university's sculptures are large enough – bigger than a car – to be seen at a considerable distance, and they are interesting enough to command closer inspection, so one is drawn from one part of the campus to another in search of them, an enjoyable way to spend a Saturday morning. Though much larger in scale than the areas dedicated to outdoor sculpture at the Menil or the Museum of Fine Arts, the campus still functions much as the sculpture garden does.

Like the recent graduate, one is faced beyond the campus with the real world, where the relationship between art and its setting cannot always be so carefully controlled. This is the realm where art becomes really public. Nevertheless, the lessons learned from the figure of Orpheus still apply. What would the downtown library plaza be like without *Geometric Mouse X;* what would the plaza of First City Tower be like without *The Family of Man;* what would Hobby Airport be like without *Call Ernie?*

Why a mouse? In front of a library, a replica of Jiminy Cricket singing "E-N-C-Y-C-L-O-P-E-D-I-A" to entice children into the world of books might seem more appropriate. But libraries are complex institutions, not exclusively for children – especially a downtown library – and *Geometric Mouse X* is a complex work of art. Of course the

Mark di Suvero, **Pranath Yama**, 1978. Baylor College of Medicine, Michael DeBakey Center, 1200 Moursund.


Barbara Hepworth, **The Family of Man**, 1970. First City Tower, 1001 Fannin.

Jim Love, **Call Ernie**, 1985 Hobby Airport, between terminal and parking garage.

association with Mickey Mouse is irresistible, but what prompts it? The disks that represent ears? And what else? The color? The size? The material? A cartoon mouse is already an abstraction, but what do the chains have to do with Mickey Mouse? And the flaps or doors to which the chains are attached, where the eyes would be – how can they be related to Mickey? Everyone has different associations with these elements. The chains could suggest an anchor; the flaps look like inspection ports of some sort, or theater projection windows – a tenuous connection with Mickey Mouse cartoons. This is not a piece to be labeled simply and dismissed. Even in its current distressed condition – faded, rusted in patches, and evidently battered by its own chains and steel disks – *Geometric Mouse X* manages to retain its delightful qualities and demand repeated, thoughtful examination. It complements the library, which has many similar qualities as an institution as well as a building.

The same mental process that transforms orange-painted steel plates into a mouse easily turns Barbara Hepworth's abstract bronze totems on the plaza of First City Tower into *The Family of Man*. The simple interpretation is that the family of man (allowing for Hepworth's prefeminist phrase) consists of a wide variety of types, represented here by abstract shapes. But what shapes these are. One could make endless lists of forms evoked by Hepworth's "family": Maya glyphs, Cycladic figurines, totems of the Northwest Coast and Oceania, the forms of Klee and Miró rendered in bronze, even the monolith in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. No doubt many of these associations are reinforced by the collections at the Menil, but Hepworth has not just created an inventory of shapes, and they do not merely stand for or represent the diversity of humankind. They stand for Hepworth's belief that forms themselves are part of the family of man. In this way *The Family of Man*, perhaps more than any other piece of public art, reinforces the fundamental premise of the public art movement.

It is hard to imagine a better urban location for Hepworth's *Family of Man* than the First City Tower's triangular marble plaza at Fannin and Lamar. At a pedestrian level, in every sense of the phrase, these pieces function as a sign of accessibility and democracy. Their eternal or timeless quality seems particularly desirable for a financial institution at the moment. Hepworth's sculptures lend the bank many of the same values associated with Greek temples before the modern era in architecture.

If a discussion of public art in Houston and the importance of location leads anywhere, it is to Enrico Cerracchio's bronze equestrian portrait of Sam Houston and its magnificent location at the entrance to Hermann Park. The interpretation is straightforward. Even for those unfamiliar with Texas history, the elements are easy to read: a man, a horse, a gesture, a triumphal arch, an elevated site that terminates a prominent boulevard: here is a victorious leader of unrivaled civic prominence. The sculpture and its location work together to create meaning as effectively as any of the other pieces discussed in this essay. Particularly notable is the fact that it manages to address itself equally well to passing cars and to people on foot in the park.

Joan Miró, **Personage and Birds**, 1970. Texas Commerce Tower, 601 Travis.

*Sam Houston* demonstrates that public art has as much of a history in Houston as many other cultural institutions. Clearly, much has changed in the neighborhood of Hermann Park since Cerracchio's monument was erected, and the changes have not always been for the better, but the mounted figure of the city's patron hero has probably defended the park and its environs as effectively as anyone could. The well-placed pieces of great public art elsewhere in the city have equally beneficial effects. ■

Luis Jimenez, **Vaquero**, 1980. Moody Park, 3725 Fulton.

Gerhardt Knodel
**Gulf Stream**
Wool and mylar, 1976. M.D. Anderson Library lobby.

Jim Love
**Landscape With Blue Trees**
Steel pipe and plate with bronze, 1982-83. Courtyard between Cullen College of Engineering Building and North Wing.

Gerhard Marcks
**Albertus Magnus**
Bronze, 1955. Law Center Plaza.

Gerhard Marcks
**Orpheus**
Bronze, 1959. Fine Arts Center courtyard.

Clement Meadmore
**Split Level**
Cor-ten steel, 1971. Esplanade at Conrad Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management.

Richard Miller
**Sandy in Defined Space**
Bronze, 1967. Science and Research Center, east entrance plaza.

Jesús Bautista Moroles
**Lotus**
Granite, 1982. School of Social Work courtyard.

Reuben Nakian
**Leda and the Swan**
Bronze, 1977. LeRoy and Lucile Melcher Hall, courtyard.

Peter Reginato
**Luncheon on the Grass**
Welded steel, 1979. University Center Underground plaza.

Tom Sayre
**Contemplation**
Cor-ten steel, 1979. Near University Center Satellite east lawn.

Salvatore Scarpitta
**Manhole Uprising Sled**
Mixed media on canvas, 1978. Art and Architecture Library, interior.

Carroll Simms
**Jonah and the Whale**
Bronze, 1973. Tennis courts.

James Surls
**Flower Woman**
Pine, oak, and gum wood, 1977. Wortham Theater Complex lobby.

Masaru Takiguchi
**Orbit I**
Camphor wood, 1968. Science and Research Building lobby.

Masaru Takiguchi
**Orbit II**
Camphor wood, 1968. Law Center, Frankel Room.

Solu Teshigahri
**Iroku**
Wood and aluminum alloy, 1965. Agnes Arnold Auditorium lobby.

Brian Wall
**Ali**
Painted steel, 1978. College of Technology plaza.

Francisco Zúñiga
**Mujer con las Manos Cruzadas**
Bronze, 1972. Charles F. McElhinney Hall.

Bronze and marble, ca. 1920-30. **Peggy's Point**
Fountain, corner of Richmond and Main Street.

Marcel Bouraine
**Solitude**
Stone, 1926. Glenwood Cemetery, 2525 Washington Avenue

Mel Chin
**Manila Palm**
Steel, fiberglass, burlap, and rope, 1978. Contemporary Arts Museum, 5216 Montrose.

Charles Ginnever
**Pueblo Bonito**
Cor-ten steel, 1977. Knox Triangle, Waugh Drive at Feagan.

Luis Jiménez
**Vaquero**
Molded fiberglass, 1980. Moody Park, 3725 Fulton.

Jim Love
**Call Ernie**
Steel, 1985. Hobby Airport, between terminal and parking garage.

Frank McGuire
**Axis**
Painted Cor-ten steel, 1978. West End Multi-Service Center, 170 Heights Blvd.

Doug Michels, Hudson Marquez, Chip Lord
**Save the Planet**
1963 Ford Thunderbird, 1987. Hard Rock Cafe, 2801 Kirby Drive.

Robert Murray
**Tikchik**
Painted steel, 1972. 4200 Montrose.

John Orth
**Christ of the Workingman**
Oil on masonite panel, 1952. Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, 4411 Dallas Avenue, interior.

Beverly Pepper
**Polygenesis**
Cast ductile iron, 1982. Four-Leaf Towers, 5100 San Felipe at Post Oak.

Tom Sayer
**Red Shift**
Steel, 1979-80. Brookhollow Complex, Loop 610 at Highway 290.

Carroll Simms
**Jonah and the Whale**
Bronze, 1975-79. Fifth Ward Multi-Service Center, 4014 Market.

Leo Tanguma
**The Rebirth of Our Nationality**
1972-73. Continental Can Company Building, 5801 Canal.

Rolf Westphal
**East of the Pecos**
Painted steel, 1973. 3410 Montrose.

Rolf Westphal
**West of the Pecos**
1974, 1976. Houston Intercontinental Airport, Will Clayton Parkway.

Mac Whitney
**Houston**
Painted steel, 1983. Stude Park, 1031 Stude Drive.

James Wines
**Indeterminate Façade**
Brick, 1975. Best Products Company showroom, 10765 Kingspoint Road.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

John Biggers
**The Negro Woman in American Life and Education**
Mural, 1953. Blue Triangle Branch YWCA Building, 3005 McGowan, interior.

Ilya Bolotowsky
**WPA mural**
1939; liquitex on canvas, 1980 reconstruction. Houston Intercontinental Airport, Terminal C lobby.

Gutzon Borglum
**Untitled**

Ben Woitena
**3/4 Time**
Painted Cor-ten steel, 1975. Memorial Park, Woodway at Memorial.

Ben Woitena
**Archway**
Welded and painted steel, 1983. Greenway Plaza between Buildings 9 and 11 (3700 block of Richmond Avenue).

Ben Woitena
**Cibolo**
Welded and painted steel, 1977. Three Riverway off Woodway. ■

Floor plan.

# HOME ON THE RANGE

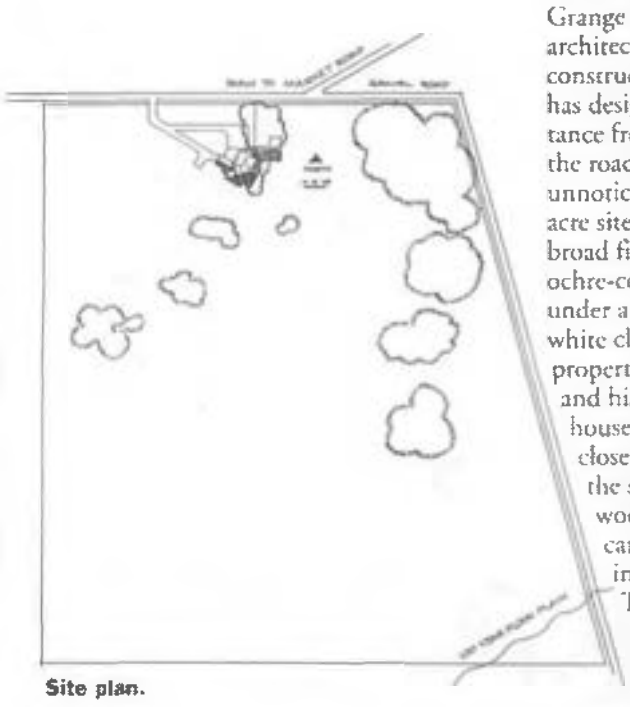
## *The Gibson House by John Zemanek*

Raised pine plank entry walk navigates through a stand of live oaks to the entry porch.

**William F. Stern**

Somewhere west of Katy along Interstate 10 between Houston and San Antonio, the monotony of endless suburbs melts into the landscape of the Texas countryside. Suddenly the scene is dominated by big trees hovering over rolling fields and pastures stitched together by open wooden fences. Every so often appear clusters of farmhouses, outbuildings and tall metal silos reflecting the bright white sunlight. Traveling along the county roads that crisscross open countryside, we are once again reminded of rural America's steady, unchanging character and how different these carefully tended lands are from the chaotic, abrasive landscape of urban America.

Between Schulenburg and La Grange in Fayette County, clumps of live oaks, plain wooden farmhouses, and tin sheds are settled comfortably on the land. A couple of miles west of Route 77, south of La Grange along Farm Road 956, Houston architect John Zemanek is supervising the construction and completion of a house he has designed for Betty Gibson, an acquaintance from childhood. Though not far off the road, this unusual house could easily go unnoticed. From the county road the 11-acre site slopes gently to the south across a broad field of tall grass, wildflowers, dusty-ochre-colored earth, and occasional trees under a sky of pure blue and massive white clouds. Rather than building on the property's abundant open land, Zemanek and his client chose instead to locate the house within a grove of mature live oaks close to the road, leaving the majority of the site in a natural state. As a result the wood frame house is intentionally camouflaged, receding and blending into the sheltering stand of trees. This modest gesture toward the natural setting necessitated a building plan that would accommodate the random pattern of trees. Approaching the house along the gravel drive from the north, it is apparent that not a branch has been disturbed. Indeed, the house appears to weave through the trees, with two tall oaks directly adjacent to the front door seemingly appropriated as natural columns penetrating the raised porch and overhanging galvanized metal roof.



Site plan.

The Gibson homestead is reminiscent of the architect's own house in Houston, completed in 1968. Located on Colquitt Street near the Menil Collection, this house received recognition at the time for its tight yet spacious plan, innovative detail, and use of inexpensive natural and industrial materials. John Zemanek, who is an architect, garden designer, and professor of architecture at the University of Houston, reveals in this house the strongest influences on his work: the sheds and barns of rural Texas that fascinated him in his youth and the traditional Japanese architecture he has experienced on his many trips to the Far East. In an article entitled "Lesser Materials, More Labor" (*Progressive Architecture*, June 1969), the editors praised the house for its craftsmanship and imaginative use of common materials usually not associated with residential building, such as exterior cement wall panels, particle board interior panels, and varnished plywood floors. Exquisitely composed courtyards in the front and back of the house exude the kind of harmony found in Japanese gardens.

Like Zemanek's own house, the Gibson House is organized in two parts that are joined at the entry. Both houses are built on raised foundations and entered through a forecourt. However, in the Houston house the suburban context of neatly ordered rows of turn-of-the-century one-story bungalows and two-story houses must have strongly determined the orthogonal geometry of a plan that otherwise departs from the conventional house plans of the teens and twenties. Where the two-story Houston house is necessarily compact, the country house, with virtually the same number of rooms and square footage, meanders. In the rural isolation of boundless land, the country house spreads out with a geometric order that preserves the trees by rotating the living room wing 30 degrees at the entry hall and staggering rooms within the opposite wing inside two interlocking squares. Again like Zemanek's own house, the Gibson House accommodates one person, but with slightly different requirements. In addition to the usual rooms for a one-person house – living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, and bath – the Gibson House contains a guest bedroom adjacent to the living room and a sewing room near the master bedroom.

The short entry drive from the road divides just above the house, with one leg leading to a one-car garage projecting from the west side of the house and the other continuing to a parking area adjacent to the forecourt entry. The irregularly shaped forecourt is bounded by the garage, the entry porch, and a four-foot-high, open horizontal cedar fence with a gate. The gate swings open to a pine decked walkway that ramps up at an oblique angle to the porch and front door. Zemanek is clearly at home with the indigenous farm buildings of this part of Texas. He has adapted building practices, materials, and details that have served local builders for 150 years, but instead of simply designing a picturesque farmhouse, he has given new form and expression to incredibly flexible building techniques. Standard building components of vertical cedar siding with battens built on a light wood frame, square cedar posts, overhanging fir rafters, and a bright, galvanized metal roof are brought together in such a way to appear familiar but, as in his own Houston house, unconventional, even exotic. This impression of the familiar and the unusual is most keenly experienced at the entrance ramp. Against a backdrop of natural cedar siding, the relaxed composition of deck, roof, exposed rafters, rough cedar columns, and protruding tree trunks produces an architecture related as much to Zemanek's sense of traditional Japanese forms and spatial relationships as to the rural Texas farmhouse. A wall of glass block that joins the two halves of the house at the entry enhances this relationship between the familiar and the exotic by introducing a thoroughly modern building material to a composition made up of traditional, indigenous parts. Like a Japanese Shoji screen, the wall of glass block filters the light penetrating the inside while also assuring interior privacy.

From the contained intimacy of the entry court, the front door, set within the glass block screen, opens into an entry hall that looks out to a vast panorama of the natural countryside beyond. The entry vestibule serves as a bridge between the two wings of the house: the living room, canted 30 degrees off the orthogonal axis, on one side, and the dining room, kitchen, master bedroom, and sewing room on the other. While perhaps coincidental, this split plan is reminiscent of the Texas "dog-trot" house, a 19th-century house form whose design maximizes cross ventilation with separated living quarters and sleeping quarters joined by an open entry porch. The separation of building volumes in the

John Zemanek

View from the southwest.

John Zemanek

Living room opens southwest to an expanse of pasture and uncultivated land.

John Zemanek

Entry hall looking toward living room. Glass block forms a translucent screen.

Gibson House achieves this same effect with the resulting increase of exterior wall surface, thereby expanding options for window openings and cross ventilation.

The vaulted, rectangular living room presents the most idealized space in the house. One long side of the room opens to a view of the open field to the southwest through a series of equally spaced double-hung metal windows. On the two other open sides the room connects to the outside through glazed double doors leading onto wooden decks. Hardly noticeable, the guest room adjoins the living room on the northeast corner, shifted off center and turned at a right angle to minimize interference with the shell of the living room. A covered deck fills the void left at the corner intersection. Like all the other rooms, the living room walls are sheathed in gypsum wallboard with the unfinished fir rafters and plywood decking of the ceiling exposed. Even though the gypsum wallboard is separated from the exposed structure by painted wood trim, it seems at odds with the unfinished cedar of the outside and the fir rafters of the ceiling. Part of the success of Zemanek's own house in Houston comes from his continuing experimentation with alternative methods for cladding interior walls through surface treatment other than standard gypsum wallboard, a refinement missing at the Gibson House. Still, the spareness of detail and the predominance of natural materials and unadorned finishes reinforce the serenity and directness found both inside and outside the Gibson House.

The private wing of the house is formed by two interlocking pyramidal cubes that step away from the living room wing and connecting entry foyer. Grouping the rooms of this wing within interlocking squares allows each of the major rooms to occupy a corner, thus maximizing exterior wall area for both view and ventilation. Again the ceilings are vaulted, exposing the rafters; however, the uninterrupted volume found in the living room gives way here to an irregular play of space: interior walls randomly meet the ceiling rafters, according to plan rather than geometry. A judiciously placed deck at the corner where the kitchen and master bedroom meet brings these two rooms together, economizing as well on the overall outside decking. Like an eyelash, the roof projects over the deck to frame and tighten views from the kitchen to the expanse of farmland beyond.

Leaving the Gibson House from the kitchen deck and walking through grass and shrubs to the property's edge, the house comes into full view. From afar it appears guarded, surrounded by columns of tree trunks supporting a green canopy that shades and shelters the structure beneath. The comfortable, graceful union of dwelling and place is clearly revealed from this vantage point. Nature in its most vulnerable state has been preserved, harmoniously harboring a manmade structure. Learning from preceding generations who have cultivated the land and built in rural Fayette County, architect John Zemanek has quietly contributed a house that settles in as if it always had been there. ■

John Zemanek

Live oaks and native prairie grasses make a natural garden setting for the Gibson House.

***Below:*** **The architect's own house in Houston, 1969, combines readily available natural and industrial materials, including unfinished fir rafters and posts, cement wall panels, and corrugated galvanized metal siding and roof.**

© 1990 Paul Hester, Houston

# *Cite* Interviews Planning Commission Chairman Burdette Keeland

Joel Warren Barna

*"You don't find either the intellectuals or the peasants in The Woodlands or other planned communities. Houston is what is left out of areas like that."*

**Given Houston's reputation as an unzoned and unplanned city, many people are surprised to learn that the city has an official planning commission that regularly meets to decide on development issues. Since the late 1960s, that commission has been headed by architect Burdette Keeland, a Houston-born graduate of the University of Houston and Yale University who is the proprietor of Keeland Associates Inc. and who has taught since 1961 as a member of the University of Houston College of Architecture faculty.**

**Keeland's longevity as head of the planning commission is testament to skills that have allowed him to weather the political winds of no fewer than four mayoral administrations and a dozen changes on the Houston City Council. Gradually the commission and Keeland have gained influence. Under Keeland's leadership, a number of planning commission initiatives – the setback ordinance, the off-street parking ordinance – for the first time have the force of law.**

**But these ordinances shrink to insignificance compared to what Councilman Jim Greenwood and others are now proposing: that Houston, all 2,500 square miles of it, be zoned. As part of the ongoing debate over zoning, *Cite* contributor Joel Barna interviewed Keeland to get the planning commission chairman's thoughts on Houston's form, its strengths and weaknesses, and the prospects for zoning in the city's future.**

**JB** You have been a member of the Houston Planning Commission since the 1960s. What is the most important action the commission has taken since you joined it?

**BK** I have been on the Houston Planning Commission for 26 years, since 1964. Mayor Louie Welch appointed me vice-chairman; the chairman then was Emmett Walters, of the *Houston Chronicle*. Mr. Walters took ill after I had been on the commission for four years, and he decided to resign. He talked to me when he was going to leave the commission. He said, "Boy, I've been working on getting Chimney Rock extended [to link the Southwest Freeway with the Katy Freeway] for 20 years. I want you to be the next chairman, and I want you to promise you'll get it done."

The extension of Chimney Rock was needed since the 1940s, but since it passes through Tanglewood, the second-richest suburb in Houston, none of the mayors wanted to get behind it. The 610 Loop was created, and that was supposed to relieve the traffic congestion in the area, but of course it had the opposite effect – it became the number one congested freeway in Texas, because there was no Chimney Rock or Voss to get people north and south of that area.

All that was known when I came on the commission. Jim McConn, when he was mayor, told the commission he supported starting public hearings on extending Chimney Rock. The people in Tanglewood hired Joe Jamail, the lawyer, to help them block it.

I remember March 17, 1982, was the worst day of my life. Part of the day went nice enough: at two p.m. I met Philip Johnson and John Burgee for groundbreaking for the University of Houston architecture building. But I had to rush from there to a planning commission hearing, which I had rescheduled. There were busloads of people there with protest signs. Jamail started in on me right away, blustering about how I'd changed the meeting to try to prevent people from taking part. He asked me, "Mr. Keeland, are you a communist?" I told him I wasn't. "But your actions are those of a communist," he said. He told me to stand up and empty my pockets, so that the people could see how much money Gerald Hines had paid me to go through with this treacherous assault on a neighborhood of upstanding citizens. He lambasted me up and down, and I thought it would never end.

Then, when the vote came, it was unanimous [to extend the street.]

For me, that was a turning point in Houston history. It was the point when the need for real planning first got dealt with seriously.

**JB** So it took from the 1940s to the 1980s to get this one project agreed to and completed?

**BK** That's right.

**JB** What does that mean for the prospects of creating a zoning system for Houston, as some city officials are proposing?

**BK** It should show just what kind of job we're talking about. If it takes 40 years to get one road, a badly needed road, extended, imagine what it will take to create a workable planning and zoning system.

**JB** In the case of the extension of Chimney Rock, it was opposition from neighborhood groups that blocked the project for so long, but aren't just those sorts of neighborhood groups most interested in seeing zoning exacted?

**BK** That's true, but that's not enough to get zoning passed, and it's certainly not enough to put together a system that makes sense. Houston isn't one city; it's 187 medieval cities glued together. Every neighborhood and subdivision is looking out for its own interests, and that is going to have to change if planning and zoning are going to work in Houston.

The real reason for all the talk about zoning now is that when the city started to get sick [in the economic downturn of the 1980s], people felt that the value of their homes wouldn't have been hurt so badly if there had been zoning. But that doesn't follow in my mind. The problem with oil prices affected everybody, and having zoning in Houston wouldn't have changed that. When oil is $12 a barrel, everybody is hurt.

**JB** But didn't houses in controlled areas, such as West University Place, hold their values better in the 1980s?

**BK** Yes. And George Mitchell will tell you that houses did better in The Woodlands because the land use in the area was controlled. Gerald Hines will point to First Colony. But it's fantasy to think that establishing the same controls will help the city of Houston. These are neat places, but they are not the answer to planning for Houston. They are artificially segregated places – you don't find either the intellectuals or the peasants in The Woodlands or other planned communities. Houston is what is left out of areas like that.

**JB** If the types of controls used in The Woodlands should not be duplicated for the rest of Houston, what should planning for the city focus on?

**BK** The first thing would be sidewalks. The freeways of this city were planned logically, and they work beautifully for what they are supposed to do. But we just totally left out planning for people to be able to walk anywhere. Tanglewood doesn't have any sidewalks. In the planning commission we are discussing an ordinance requiring developers to plant trees, and I have been pushing for an ordinance requiring sidewalks in all new developments. But I lost on that. To builders, it's just an extra expense. Before World War II, the city required sidewalks; because of the concrete shortage during the war, it was dropped, and the developers won't let it back.

**JB** Do you favor instituting zoning in Houston in the near future?

**BK** I don't know. I've been thinking, since the discussion surfaced in the last mayoral election, about what would have been different if we had zoned the city when I came on the planning commission in 1964. I can't think of any important differences that would have been made. I think Hines would still have built a mall with a skating rink; it would have gotten a variance, if it was in violation of rules covering densities, because that property couldn't have been used for anything but commercial development.

The problem with a lack of zoning is that there is always confusion. Nobody knows what to do with property. That's particularly a problem for architects, who like uses to be defined before they start designing. I think the design profession in Houston failed miserably in the 1970s and 1980s when developers brought raw land deals to them and said, "What should I put here? A hotel? Apartments? Warehouses? Office buildings?" Designers just didn't have the vision to come up with the right answers, the answers that would have been good for the city. They weren't trained to plan for something to make money in 50 years, instead of 15 minutes. Zoning wouldn't have changed that. It's planning that matters, planning that has to come before zoning. Zoning is just a law that enacts a plan. It's just an oven that you cook your plan in. If Houston is going to be made a better city, the profession is going to have to show that it believes in planning. The sickening thing, and I've been as guilty as anyone, is that with all the experimenting with the city that's been going on for years, there is no grand plan. There's not even an understanding of what we can do. Think about the parks downtown. The city is building a park around the jail. There's a park at the University of Houston downtown. There's the Sesquicentennial Park. All separate.

**JB** Are there parts of Houston, like downtown, that represent nodes or cores that planning and zoning should be organized around?

**BK** Sure. You can proudly point to Rice University, the Civic Center, Hermann Park. The problem is, in a city of 2,570 square miles, that amounts to nothing. There's the bayou, also, but it's so beaten up that people can't see how important it could be to the psyche of the city. We captured the bayous by building freeways along them and ditching them with concrete.

**JB** What should architects and planners be doing?

**BK** What I really hope is that the city planning commission and planning department can for the first time get down to some thoughtful ideas on city form that are appropriate to Houston. At the University of Houston, starting with the fall semester of 1990, the whole College of Architecture is spending the year on the city as a laboratory, looking at a range of issues from housing to office towers to parks. There have been other exercises like this – two at the University of Houston alone – but the ideas are just out there in the air, with no record and no connection to the reality of the city. Part of the responsibility of the two university architecture schools here should be to deal with these planning issues, working with the practitioners in the city. There won't be any imaginative proposals from the politicians. All they can do is respond, and we have to be the ones to come up with the proposals. One thing I think we'll have to come to terms with is giving up on living downtown as a goal. The idea of working in the city and fleeing to your home in the woods is a good one for Houston; it's ingrained, and it works for us. The constant demand to make the city alive at night just isn't going to pay off. Patterns are set: people want to go to a safe place at night and watch TV. When I was a kid, we used to go downtown and run around Main Street on Halloween. When Victor Gruen created the first mall in Michigan, that was the end of Main Street as a center for shopping and living. People would rather have air conditioning and tasteless streets and the feeling of safety that they get in malls. And they are used to having plenty of space and low density. That's what people move to Houston for: you can buy a house that's surrounded by dirt, with a backyard and a side yard.

I don't think you can create a city center that's safe enough and exciting enough to get people out of their easy chairs. George Lucas gave up [on the proposal for redeveloping the Albert Thomas Convention Center as Luminaire Houston, an entertainment mall]. I think the only option is to keep downtown as an architecture museum.

**JB** Should downtown just be abandoned, then, so that offices as well as residential

areas are evenly spread through the suburbs?

**BK** No. The analogy is to the heart: if the heart dies, the body dies. You need downtown as a center for the city. We just need to think differently about using it, particularly for living. If you're going to have housing, build it outside the inner freeway loop, so that people can look out their windows at the buildings as scenery, the way people in New Jersey can look at Manhattan.

I think, if we're talking about entertainment, that it should be applied to transportation. We should get Lucas to do one of the freeways, or better yet a transit line. That would be better than the Metro approach: put people in a tube and extrude them into the city center. If the transit system was conceptualized as a thrill ride, it would be more fun than getting on the bar car for a long ride to the suburbs.

**JB** What else would help?

**BK** The main thing would be to study the successful neighborhoods in the city, and to think about improving the linkages between them. That will preserve both the neighborhoods and the freedom to change that has worked for Houston in the past. There's usually a reason for a change in land use, and it's almost always unforeseen and unforeseeable. The idea should not be to block change but to link the successful parts of town with more successful connections. In the Third and Fifth wards, for example, linkages could focus on bringing jobs to those areas, and with establishing ways for people to get back and forth. That would help bring them back to life.

**JB** The City of Houston Planning Department has undertaken some community development projects, such as El Mercado. And the department recently increased its personnel substantially. Will this help with the effort?

**BK** That's an illusion. They just moved a bunch of plan checkers from the public works department over; as far as real planning effort going on, there is nothing new. The real burden, for now, is going to be on the design professions to lead the way. ■



CiteSurvey

# I-MAXING OUT

## *Addition to the Houston Museum of Natural Science*

**Houston Museum of Natural Science, Cullen Entrance Hall, east face, 1989, Hoover & Furr and 3D/I, architects; Dushan Stankovich, designer; Charles Brookshire, project architect. Latest addition to the museum joins planetarium *(left)* and exhibit halls *(right)*.**

Museums in recent years have found themselves in a competitive fray for the public's entertainment dollars. In a world increasingly dominated by high-tech media and the hyperrealities of theme parks, museums have had to shift their emphasis from being passive, collecting institutions to becoming active learning centers featuring extravagant new attractions that combine learning and entertainment.

One of the most popular of these new attractions is the IMAX theater, the large-format, verisimilitudinous movie experience created by IMAX of Toronto. IMAX installations at museums in other parts of the country have produced dramatic increases in both attendance and revenues. When the board of the Houston Museum of Natural Science decided to bring the IMAX experience to Houston as part of the museum's expansion plans, they realized they would be competing with the proposed NASA Visitors Center, which was to include an IMAX theater among its many attractions. Progress on the NASA center has been seriously delayed, but, in an effort to be first in the Houston market, the museum had already expedited its fund-raising and building activities. The design and the construction process were hostage to this race.

The new facilities – the Wortham IMAX Theater, the Cullen Grand Entrance Hall, and the Memorial Sundial, Fountain, and Garden – represent the latest chapter in a series of additions to the Houston Museum of Natural Science. In 1963, the Burke Baker Planetarium was the first building to occupy the museum's site in Hermann Park. Designed by George Pierce–Abel B. Pierce in association with Staub, Rather, and Howze, this Saturn-like building represented the beginning of the Pierce firm's relationship with the museum. An addition to the exhibition hall designed by George Pierce–Abel B. Pierce was completed in 1969. The museum was expanded again in 1980 by Pierce Goodwin Alexander. The current project by Hoover & Furr and 3D/I, completed in September 1989, was influenced by the continuing presence of George Pierce, now a member of the museum's design review committee.

Courtesy of Hoover & Furr

**Site plan, east entrance court, with memorial sundial, fountain, and garden.**

The organizational diagram for the project respects and builds upon the bar-node concept of the Pierce design. The formal and material expression of the IMAX theater node reflects the design idiom of the original museum block, although earlier schemes called for a pyramidal roof and dark-stone, horizontal banding of the façades. While the handsome stone facing reinforces the quiet reserve of the Pierce firm's museum building, it also masks the museum's new preference for interactive, kinetic, and fast-paced action on the inside.

The Cullen Grand Entrance Hall is a large, mall-like space that collects and organizes entries to the museum's various functions including the information and ticket kiosks, the exhibition areas, the Burke Baker Planetarium, the IMAX theater, a restaurant, and the museum gift shop. The space is 42 feet wide and 200 feet long, with a ceiling height of 33 feet. The 82,000 square feet of floor area on the main level are contained by a steel-and-glass wall with an exposed structure and a metal deck roof. A lower level, reached by stairs, provides an entrance lobby for the IMAX theater. Patrons proceed down from the main lobby level to enter the theater, moving up to their seats, and then exiting through the rear onto the main level.

The IMAX theater presents a motion picture experience unlike any other. Its 400 seats ascend in such proximity to the huge screen (80 feet wide and 59 feet tall) that the visual experience of seeing a movie becomes a physical one; sophisticated multispeaker sound enhances the sensual involvement. The high-tech elements of this cinematic environment are unfortunately cloaked by a corporate-looking interior. The complex projection system is not directly visible. The original scheme called for a bridge for observation of the second-floor projection room, but because of budget constraints it was replaced by a video presentation of the system in the lower theater lobby level.

The concept envisioned for the grand hall included the organization of the museum facilities and the visual connection of the museum with surrounding Hermann Park. Museum director Truett Latimer and several board members visited the Wyndham Hotel lobby at Greenspoint, which became a model for the project. IMAX sent theater consultants to work with the architects. However, travel to other IMAX installations was not undertaken. The original design scheme contained a number of elements that were omitted through budget review and value engineering as design and construction went forward. In the original design, the lobby extended the entire length of the museum exhibition block, with a large canopy providing protection for the entry; the lobby arcade had a vaulted glass roof, making it totally open to the park; and the below-grade entry to the IMAX theater was flanked by a cascading garden, which would have brought light and visual relief to the stairway. Besides these omissions, the exposed air-conditioning system (air columns) was modified and altered several times, interior finishes were downgraded, and the existing restaurant was not significantly changed. Although modifications to the design altered the architectural quality of the space, Truett Latimer maintains that the changes were not thought to be detrimental to the museum's goals. In fact, the IMAX theater has changed the way the public uses the museum. Visitors now often make it a day there, taking in the IMAX and the museum exhibits before lunch at the museum cafe, the planetarium and a park visit after lunch. Attendance and membership have dramatically increased. Last year 900,000 people visited the museum; as of August 1990, attendance was well over 1.5 million.

The Memorial Sundial, Fountain, and Garden are the focal point of a comprehensive landscape and site development plan for the museum's grounds. The design consists of a 46-foot-8-inch-square podium rotated on a 72-foot-square plaza opposite the major museum entrance. The plaza's resulting corners are filled by two planting areas, a pool and fountain, and the steps to the sundial podium, where a ten-foot polished-granite gnomon casts its shadow across numerals and radiating lines, indicating the hours and months, made of stainless steel bars embedded in the travertine paving. Granite pyramids in the corners of the podium mark the compass coordinates.

This garden entrance greets visitors with a successful marriage of science and architecture. Patricia Rife, professor of space physics at Rice University, and Carolyn Sumners, director of astronomy and astrophysics at the museum, collaborated with the architects to incorporate an accurate demonstration of scale in our solar system on the entrance walk, where stainless steel circles are embedded to represent the size of the planets relative to the sun, itself represented by the planetarium dome. The sundial marks time by casting its shadow on the series of radiating lines marked on the podium's surface; sunlight passing through holes in the sphere found at the point of the gnomon marks the seasons. The edge of the fountain pool simulates the profile of the Texas coast (originally intended to be in Texas granite, but constructed of colored concrete). This scientific landscape is one of the most interesting entry plazas in the city, providing a unique connection between the park and the museum.

As a city built around strong technical and scientific interests, Houston has long needed a more ambitious and larger science museum. The expansion of the museum's facilities has certainly resulted in renewed public interest. But planning for future growth will require a better balance between the expediency of budget considerations and the need to build for posterity. Design decisions should be made for the long term and with concern for the next generation of visitors. ■

*Geoffrey Brune*

© 1990 Paul Hester, Houston

**Interior, Cullen Entrance Hall, looking east.**



**Carraro House, 1990, Lake/Flato Architects, architects. *Above:* The main house is tucked inside large screened-in pavilion on right. Pavilion on left serves as garage. Central bay, clad in corrugated metal, houses study and, upstairs, master bedroom and bath. *Left:* Opposite elevation through carport canopy.**

# Cement Plant Reused as House

Industrial buildings have held a particular allure for architects at least since Le Corbusier identified them as reservoirs of America's architectural genius. Particularly in Texas, where the suave volumes of a grain silo or the rippling skin of a cotton gin provide the strongest – sometimes the only – vertical intrusion on a hungry horizon, these vernacular buildings are regarded as touchstones of a world of pure form and innocently powerful structures, and schemes abound for saving them when they are threatened.

In the early 1970s, the firms of Pratt, Box and Henderson and the Architects Partnership converted an airport hangar into Olla Podrida, an arts-and-crafts mall in north Dallas. Few Texas architects, however, have saved a favorite industrial building as convincingly and pleasingly as has the San Antonio firm Lake/Flato Architects in its design of the Carraro House. The house, recently finished near Buda (population 597, between Austin and San Marcos), is built out of pieces salvaged from an abandoned cement plant. Formed in 1986, Lake/Flato Architects has already won a fistful of awards for residential and commercial projects from the state and local chapters of the American Institute of Architects and has published projects in *Domain, Metropolitan Home,* and *Progressive Architecture.* With the Carraro House the young firm builds on an already solid reputation.

Ted Flato, who with his partner David Lake heads the firm, says that the clients (a writer and her husband, a computer consultant) wanted a new house for a site overlooking a dry riverbed. At an early meeting, Flato recalls, they talked about a stone barn with big loftlike spaces that they had seen in Round Rock, but worried about squeezing such a design into the constraints of a $100,000 budget. Then the husband mentioned that he had recently traded a truck for a metal commercial building with a low-pitched roof and suggested that the frame could be clad in stone.

"I knew the slope of the roof would be ugly, and I didn't like the idea of changing a metal building into a stone building," says Flato. "But the idea of a metal frame got me thinking about the Alamo Cement Plant, and I said that since he was such a scrounger – he had also scrounged the wood for the floor of their old house from another building – he should meet me there for a look."

The site of the Alamo Cement Plant in northwest San Antonio had been acquired recently by the developer Lincoln Properties; a commercial development was planned. A friend scouting for movie locations had told the architects that the site was about to be cleared. "It was such a shame that they weren't going to use the buildings [in the new development]," says Flato. "They were going to just cut them up and send them to Mexico. We figured we could get the pieces cheap and reuse them in Buda."

The clients took to the image of the building immediately, and Lake/Flato set to work on a design using the steel framework and other parts of the building (the metal cladding itself had to be replaced). As an influence on the design one might have expected the Taller de Arquitectura offices in Spain, built into the spaces of an abandoned cement factory. Not so, says Flato: "I had an image of the construction that Frank Gehry did for the show at the National Building Museum, a big single volume with a structure in the middle of it. It didn't end up much like that, though."

A scheme that accommodated all the volumes required by the program in a single shed made the space too crowded, so the architects broke the Alamo Cement frame into three separate pavilions. The main house is a two-story volume with bearing walls of creamy limestone from a quarry in Sisterdale and sharply punched openings. Living room, dining room, and kitchen are downstairs; a guest bedroom, at the top of a steep industrial stair, will be finished later as the clients' budget permits.

The pavilion is positioned not in the center but in the corner of the largest shed, which itself becomes a four-bay-deep screened porch with a brick floor, lit by tall fiberglass clerestory panels at the roof peak. The frame is painted a faded blue. The architects abandoned an idea from an earlier design of using reworked ventilator hoods from Alamo Cement to bring light into the living room ("The effect would have been too fussy, and we didn't want to mess up the simple shape," says Flato). Also dropped was a planned outdoor fireplace in the porch space that would have reused the firebox of a furnace from the plant. Instead, a shallow fireplace with a tall brick-arched inglenook became part of the solid masonry wall the architects designed to ward off northerly winds in winter. "Having such a tight budget meant that we couldn't have a lot of air-conditioned space," says Flato, "but pulling the kitchen–living-room part back to the corner makes the screened-in area really dramatic."

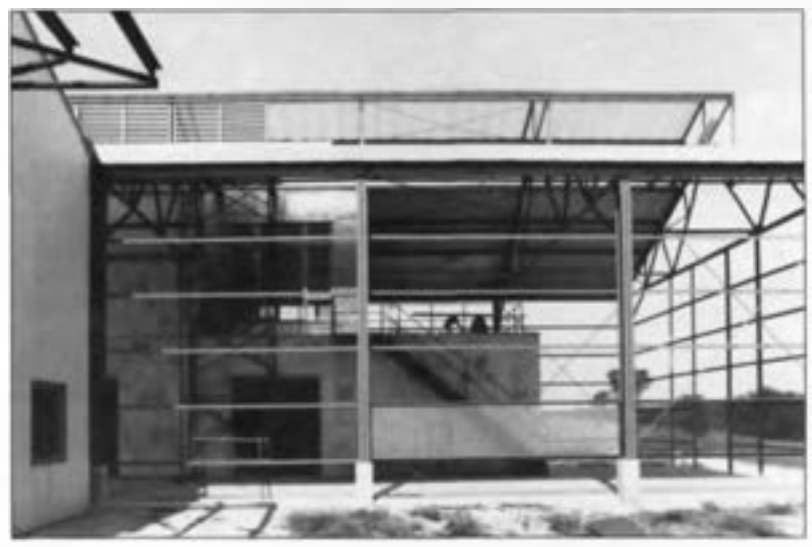
The second pavilion of the house, one structural bay wide, is clad in new corrugated metal, with bright yellow awnings shading its square windows. Housing a ground-floor study and, upstairs, the master bedroom and bath, it provides a connection from the main pavilion to the garage, which is three bays deep. (The garage's skeletal red-painted frame, lacking the stiffening effect of the walls in the other two pavilions, is laced with steel tie rods, which form a high ceiling plane that helps give the space a sense of enclosure.) Together, the three pavilions form a court that twists to embrace both the riverbed (with its prevailing breeze) to the southeast and an automobile arrival area to the northwest.

Lake/Flato has worked before with the contrast between open and closed, solid and transparent volumes. In the Lassiter weekend house in South Texas, for example, designed while the pair worked at Ford, Powell & Carson in San Antonio, they designed a tall, heavy-walled central volume containing the kitchen and family room, which is also set into wide screened porches with bricked floors (and an outdoor fireplace). In a recently completed house for Deborah Salge built on Canyon Lake, the architects inverted the relationship of these spaces: the central volume lacks porches, and its walls have become thick enough to contain five separate bedrooms.

In the Carraro House, the space is enlivened by the particularly animated quality of the industrial details salvaged from the cement factory, which range from the forge converted into an outdoor fireplace to the open-treaded metal staircase, the rotating roof ventilators, and the light steel handrail that passes delicately through circles in its supporting posts. As Adrian Forty argues in *Objects of Desire: Design and Society From Wedgwood to IBM,* the main effect of industrial design since the 1930s has been to recast the meaning of housework (and office work) by creating objects stripped of their associations with manual labor. From Raymond Loewy to frogdesign, designers have responded by creating ever smaller and ever smoother utensils that promise to implant a piece of tomorrow's perennial vacation into today's home. The problem is that these products combine to bring a numbing blandness to the domestic landscape. It is in this context, at least partially, that industrial buildings, with their looming personalities, have become such icons. In the Carraro House, by contrast, Lake/Flato Architects is integrating this personality into the details of the house's interior spaces.

Although he confesses to being pleased with the Carraro House, Flato cautions that his firm is "not doing only metal-building houses" but prefers instead "to work with whatever is available when the project comes in." In the Carraro House, Lake/Flato Architects has managed to turn the quirks of coincidence into convincing architecture. It's a risky strategy, but one that other Texas architects might consider more often. ■

*Joel Warren Barna*





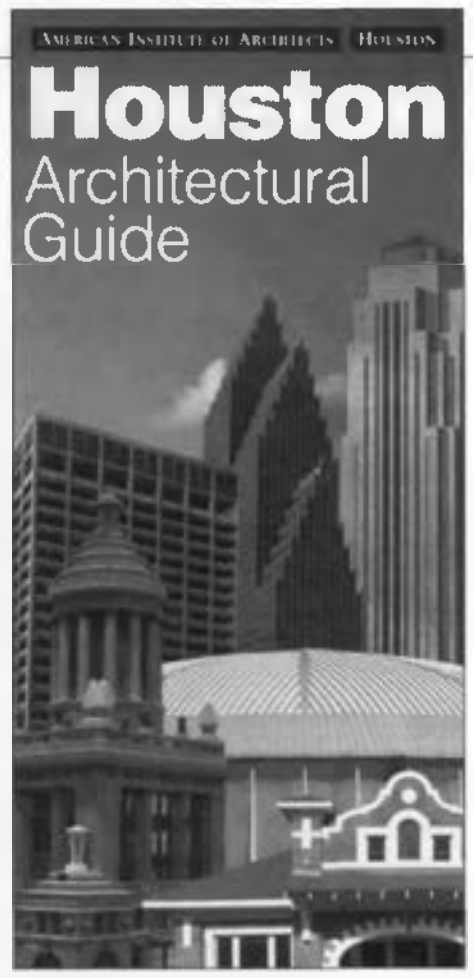
**View into main pavilion.**

Citeations

## Houston Tour de Fox

Houston Architectural Guide. *Text by Stephen Fox; photographs by Gerald Moorhead. Houston: American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter and Herring Press, 1990. 318 pp., illus., $15*

*Reviewed by John Kaliski*




Whenever I go to a city I have never visited, upon arrival I always follow the same routine. First I inquire as to the location of the best bookstore. Regardless of its location, near or far, I immediately seek it out. If I am lucky and the city is walkable, I pick up a transit map and plot my route on bus or tram. In lesser cities I pray that the rent-a-car map is detailed, for often the good bookstores are off the main thoroughfares. Finally, the store found, I search the shelves for that quintessential record of a city's character – the guidebook.

City guidebooks come in all shapes and vary widely in intent. Some are pure literature and through worldly description create a backdrop for more cosmic musings. A good example is James Morris's *Venice*, with delicate descriptions of the daily life of plazas, ducal ghosts that haunt palazzos, and the habits of the locals. Aptly revealing the romantic character of the canal city, the book dwells on the inevitability of Venice's physical as well as human decay.

Architects more typically purchase city guidebooks that are pictorial, though sometimes still rakishly literary. In this regard one is reminded of Rem Koolhaas's erotic tour through *Delirious New York*. However, I usually have little choice but to settle for the conventional architectural tour guide that notes the formal landmarks and high points of the urban scene as well as the built history of a place.

This latter type of guidebook is often horribly dry and boringly descriptive. Gebhard and Winter's guides to northern and southern California are exemplary in this regard. Replete with factual information, small photographs, and unreadable maps, these books were originally designed as pocket guides to California's built environment – but in fact you need overalls to carry them about.

Other architectural guidebooks take on an iconic significance that reflects the personality of a city's recent architecture. A recent guide to Frankfurt, Germany, features a white vinyl cover that, unfolded, reveals two white squares and a white double-square map. Fumbling to keep all these disparate pieces in place, I walked right by Richard Meier's Museum for the Decorative Arts – a white villa of white squares in plan, section, and elevation overlooking the Main River.

Stephen Fox's *Houston Architectural Guide* takes a middle course between the poetry of description, à la *Venice*, and the description of poetry, à la the Gebhard and Winter guides. The book covers Houston's major monuments, providing a wealth of information and attention to architectural detail. At the same time, it strives to reveal Houston's mythic character. It is populated with the personalities, stories, and feelings that provide a conscience to a city that rarely looks back.

Fox's premise is that Houston's built environment is first and foremost a reflection of the individual property owner. In his introduction Fox states,

*The desire for a fixed, dependable order that guarantees the possibility of voluntary, individual change but exacts no demands and initiates no action illuminates the Houstonian conception of the proper role of public authority, as well as its blind faith in the conviction that individual initiative is superior to collective wisdom.*

While the collective result is a "mess," the quirkiness of the individuals leads to all sorts of follies that add up to architectural theater clamoring for attention even as it is first consumed and then neglected by the locals. Environmental amnesia results. Each individual provides his own mental map of the city, and visitors need to be initiated into private histories and private maps before they can accurately see the place. Fox, our tour guide through Houston's private mysteries as illustrated by buildings, subdivisions, and physical infrastructure, allows us to see the whole, warts and all, in the hope that we will "take responsibility for the future by learning about the past."

Given the author's goal of making us see the whole, it is not surprising that he offers the low as well as the high. Strange juxtapositions result – just as they do throughout the city. For instance, Gwathmey, Siegel & Associates' 16 Crestwood Drive, a tasteful modernist exercise done for a client with good taste, is followed in the text by the Beer Can House, a structure that undoubtedly tastes good. Following this inclusive path, Fox sometimes too generously describes architecture, such as the buildings that make up the campus of Texas Southern University, that he didactically wants Houstonians to confront. Architecture is built politics, and Fox wants the reader to experience the truthful yet at times ugly results of democracy.

*Houston Architectural Guide* is full of wonderful facts, from the place notable Houston architects are buried (Glenwood Cemetery) to the location of Nabisco's first Houston plant (Chenevert Street). While purists might complain that the book's plurality necessitates the relative neglect of work that deserves to be recognized, this book is ultimately about the city as a collective experience much more than it is a collection of architectural masterpieces. In this regard Fox strays from the genre of descriptive architectural guidebooks. He makes the reader laugh, feel angry, ponder, or remember; at times he exaggerates, has tongue in cheek, is guileless or scheming – a Houston individual. Yet he always makes the reader look again and again at the city. Stephen Fox loves the city of Houston and wants us all to love it as much as he does. This is the strength of his book. I have only one complaint: given the literary conception, the book is unfortunately laced into the straitjacket of the most banal standard-architectural-guidebook format. Fox's wit deserves an equal graphic design intellect.

*Houston Architectural Guide* is an important addition to an understanding of Houston's topos as well as a literary work that further defines the phenomenal language of this particular place. Read this book carefully and look again. ■

## Country Pleasures

The Architect and the American Country House, 1890-1940 *by Mark Alan Hewitt; photographs by Richard Cheek. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990. 312 pp., illus., $45*

The American Country House *by Clive Aslet. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990. 302 pp., illus., $45*

*Reviewed by Stephen Fox*

Preparation for reading the two books that Yale University Press has issued simultaneously on the American country house, one by former *Cite* editor Mark A. Hewitt, the other by the English architectural historian Clive Aslet, might include a perusal of Kevin Phillips's *The Politics of Rich and Poor in America* and Nelson W. Aldrich's *Old Money: The Myth of America's Upper Class*. Phillips describes a series of economic and political cycles in 19th- and 20th-century America that concentrated wealth disproportionately in the hands of the privileged few. Aldrich meditates on the effect this wealth has had on those who inherited it. Both establish a context – external and structural in the first case, introspective and psychological in the second – for comprehending the paradoxical condition that the "country house" represents as an American domestic institution. It appeared as the ostensible turn-of-the-century successor to British and American antecedents. Yet as Hewitt observes, it was radically different. Not only was the new American country house not a political institution, as were those of Great Britain; it was rarely even part of an economically productive enterprise, as were houses connected with plantations of the American South or ranches of the American West. The American country house was instead the focus of sumptuary display, where the beneficiaries of industrially generated wealth sought to represent architecturally a status in life into which they hoped to insert themselves.

Hewitt's book, the more ambitious of the two, clarifies some of the ambiguities that cluster around the use of the term "country house" to describe these establishments. He identifies three distinct although chronologically overlapping stages through which the country house passed between 1890 and 1940: the stately home, the country place, and the suburban house. The first stage produced the showiest, most ostentatious houses, such as those associated with the architects Richard M. Hunt, McKim, Mead & White, and Horace Trumbauer. Of these Hewitt concludes:

*The central idea behind these palaces was the institutionalization of the individual: the captains of industry, realizing the fleeting nature of recognition within their enterprises, wanted permanent monuments to their names. . . . unfortunately, as Henry James and Edith Wharton observed, even palaces of stone could crumble if a society did not institutionalize the wealth and patrimony behind them. Unlike England, America tended to resist such edification.*

The country place took form in reaction to the pretentiousness of the stately home in a series of more modestly conceived houses, often designed as integral parts of comprehensive garden settings. Charles A. Platt and Wilson Eyre were the architectural progenitors of this episode. As Hewitt discerns,

*America's romantic country places sprang from an idealistic desire to commune with the land but also to possess it. The individualist impulse to retreat to the country seemed to some critics no less anachronistic than the wish for aristocratic trappings of the stately home. . . . Threatened by higher land costs as the century progressed, the country place was just as short-lived a tradition as its forerunners.*

Of the last phase, which was broadly diffused throughout the United States and is most poignantly captured in the suave neo-vernacular houses of Mellor, Meigs & Howe of Philadelphia, George Washington Smith of Montecito, and John F. Staub of Houston, Hewitt documents the transition from palatial grandeur to suburban propriety and repose in the 1920s:

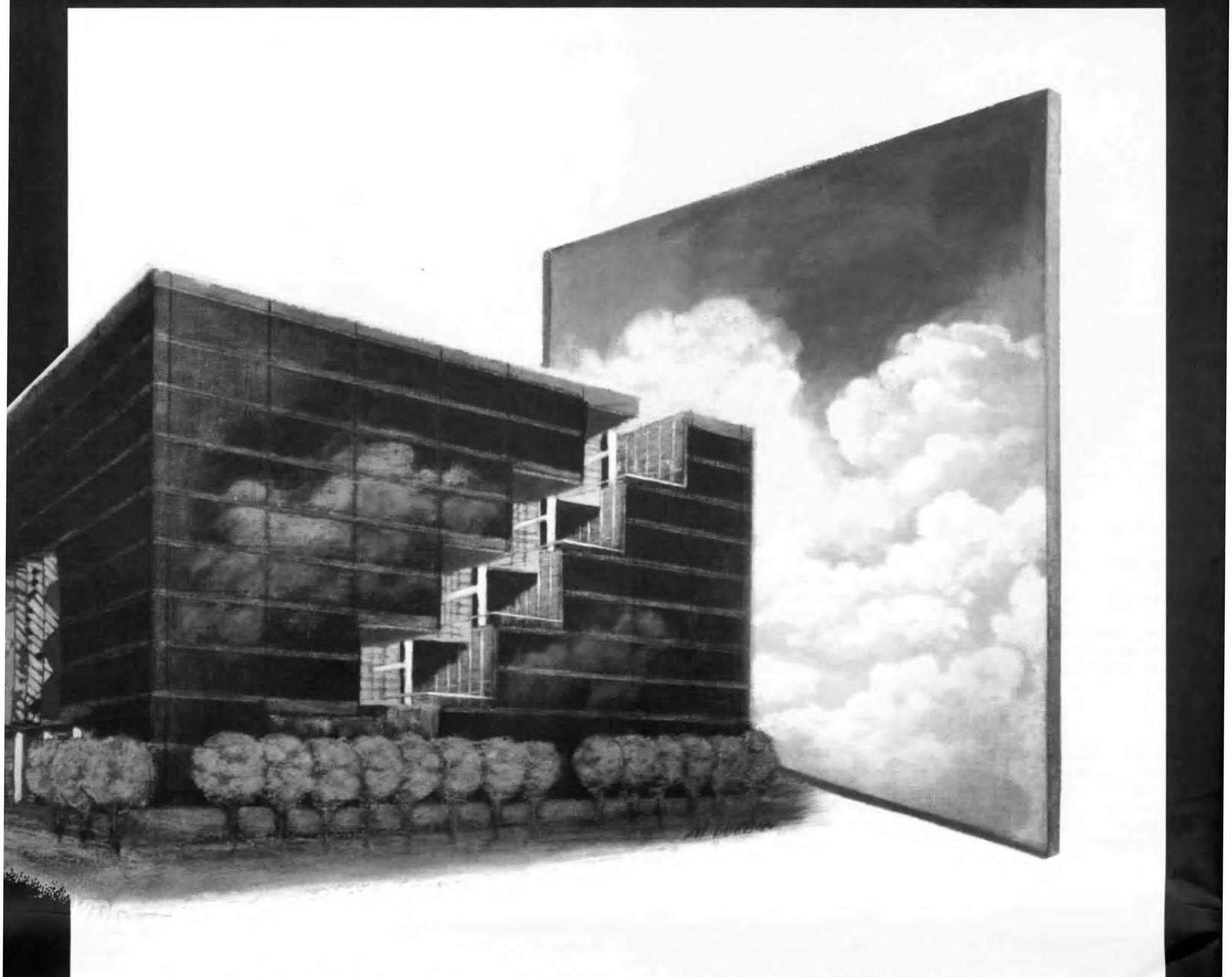
*The smaller country house with its attached garage became the dominant domestic type for upper-middle-class Americans. Most homes of the upper-income class were built in country enclaves or garden suburbs tailored to the car. By building a house in a regional [stylistic] idiom, with an architect who had established expertise in the style, the patron was able to identify more closely with the way of life and society in a new locale. The most ardent exponents of these historical revivals and reappraisals were often those who had come from elsewhere, finding economic or social opportunity in a new place.*

Hewitt surveys a large body of country houses from each of these three periods. He identifies the major styles and types within phases and the major architects associated with the country house movement, and includes chapters on the planning and servicing of country houses and modern-style country houses of the 1930s by Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard J. Neutra, George Howe, and William Lescaze. His foremost contribution, however, is to examine this phenomenon in the context of American cultural preoccupations of the period and to identify the contradictions inherent in the movement, both social and architectural. Yet Hewitt's probing of these unacknowledged tensions does not lead him to devalue the superior quality of the best country house architecture. His sympathy for these buildings and his skill at explicating successive trends in turn-of-the-century architectural eclecticism and garden design are conveyed in fluent, incisive writing. This sympathy and insight are reinforced by the superb photography of Richard Cheek, whose ability to use the camera as an interpretive medium is exceptional.

Clive Aslet's *The American Country House* neatly complements Hewitt's *The Architect and the American Country House* rather than duplicating it. Aslet discusses many of the major houses that Hewitt analyzes, yet the thematic organization of his book manages to place the subject in a somewhat different perspective. Rather than examining these houses in historical sequences, Aslet looks at them in the context of different venues (the mountains, the shore,

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

**Houston's country house: Bayou Bend, 1926, John F. Staub, architect.**



# I N N O V A

***Now managed by ADCO, owners of the San Francisco Mart***

- ❑ Visit the premier design resource in Houston
- ❑ Manufacturer showrooms open Monday through Friday featuring more than 200 lines of furnishings, accessories, floor and wall coverings
- ❑ Conference and event facilities available for public use
- ❑ Home of The Healthcare Pavilion, The American Institute of Architects, The American Society of Interior Designers, The Design Industries Foundation for AIDS, The Institute of Business Designers and the International Facility Management Association
- ❑ AVONNI, 10th floor atrium cafe, open for lunch weekdays
- ❑ Free covered parking in building garage

20 Greenway Plaza Houston, TX 77046
(On Cummins between Norfolk and Portsmouth, one block west of the Summit)

Call Wende Lewis for leasing information
713/963-9955 or 1-800/231-0617

***Showrooms and related businesses***

Add Interior Systems
Adjustable Steel Products
Ambiance Textiles, Inc.
Antigua
Apollo Computer
Arc Com Fabrics, Inc.
Arcadia Chair Company
Architectural Supplements
Areacon
Armstar
Atelier International, Inc.
Aurora Steel/MaxStor/Times 2
Barksdale-Rudd
Barrit
Benedetti
Berco Industries
Bernhardt
Blockhouse
BPC
Brayton Intl. Collection
Brayton Textile Collection
Brickel Associates, Inc.
Business Accessories, Inc.
Carnegie
Cartwright, Inc.
Cerdisa Tile
Chairmasters
Cleator
Coldspring Granite
COMPUTER currents
Cortina Leathers
Council Business Furniture
Cumberland Furniture Corp.
D B Associates
Data General
Davis Furniture
deca bois
Deepa Textiles
Dowcraft Corporation
Egan Visual
Ergo Systems, Inc.
Ferguson/Rice, Inc.
Fixtures Furniture
Florida Tile
Geiger International
Geostone by Tarkett
Gianni
Gilbert International
Glassform
Grahl Industries, Inc.
Group III Marketing
The Gunlocke Company
Halcon
Hickory Business Furniture
Human Arts Custom Rugs
ICF
Indal Furniture Systems
Interface Flooring Systems
Interiorwoods
Intrex
Jack Alexander
jmc Associates
Johns & Hausmann
Johnson Industries, Inc.
Kasparians, Inc.
Kelleen Leathers
Kinetics
Krueger International
Lackawana Leathers
Leather-Link
Ludowichi Stoneware
Lux Steel Seating
Magna Designs
Maharam/Vertical Surfaces
Master Tile
Matel
Matteo Grassi
McDonald Products
Meridian
Metairie
Metropolitan Ceramics
Metropolitan Furniture Corp.
Millstone Business Accessories
Monocibec
Mueller
Nevins
Office Specialty
Paschal
Peter Pepper Products
Peterson Design
Porcelanosa Tile
Pranswall
Prince St. Technologies
Progressive Resources
Prominence by GTE
Pronto Chair
Pyro Media
D. Reeves & Associates
Reff, Inc.
Ricchetti
RPI
Rudd
Sant 'Agostino
Savoia
Schenck-Sanford/SW
Scope
Seneca Pavers
Seymour Mirrow & Co.
Shaw Walker Corporation
Smith Metal Arts
Southwestern Bell Telephone
Spec'built
Steelcase, Inc./Stow & Davis
Stilgres
Storwal International
Stratford Hall Textiles
Stylex/Datra
System 2/90 Inc.
Taylor Companies
Thrasher Group
Unika-Vaev USA
Vecta
Versteel
Voko U.S., Inc.
The Wells Group
Westinghouse Furniture Systems
Westnofa USA Inc.
Winburn Mosaics
Woodrite, Inc.
Xception Design Ltd.

the farm, or the ranch), the sporting pastimes of the leisure class, and the equipment and administration of the country house. Aslet tends to concentrate on larger houses and does not really address the general suburbanization of the country house that occurred in the 1920s. His prose is charming and graceful, making the book a pleasure to read.

What these two books reveal is the richness of an American architectural subject that heretofore has been examined almost exclusively in monographs on individual architects. Hewitt and Aslet make it clear that the subject warrants more exposure. The value of their books is that now a scholarly foundation exists to support such broadened research. ■

## 'Architectures capitales à Paris'

*College of Architecture*
*University of Houston*
*6 July – 16 September 1990*

*Reviewed by Patrick Peters*

More than a hundred years ago in his *Entretiens sur l'architecture*, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc described for his students at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts the essential principles of their discipline. Architecture, he wrote,

*must be true according to the* programme *and true according to the* methods of construction. *To be true according to the programme is to fulfil exactly and simply the conditions imposed by need; to be true according to the methods of construction, is to employ the materials according to their qualities and properties. . . . purely artistic questions of symmetry and apparent form are only secondary conditions in the presence of our dominant principles.*[1]

The range of possible interpretations of this dictum comes to mind when viewing the works recently exhibited at the University of Houston College of Architecture under the title *Architectures capitales à Paris*. The installation of photographs, drawings, and elaborate models presented ten recent monumental public projects sponsored by the French government for the city of Paris. These works indicate that, while the structural rationalist legacy of Viollet-le-Duc lives on in Paris under the patronage of President François Mitterand, it has assumed various guises, from the "deconstructed" landscape at La Villette by Bernard Tschumi to the timeless abstractions of I. M. Pei's pyramid at the Louvre and Johan Otto von Spreckelsen's cube at La Défense.

With these presidential commissions Paris has once again gained international acclaim through national building, on a scale unparalleled since the time of Napoleon III. Consistent with the Parisian tradition of continual self-contradiction, of admitting outrages such as the Eiffel Tower and the Centre Beaubourg in order that they may eventually become constituents of the city, these works do not reflect the subtle tempo or texture of the Parisian back street. Instead they live up to their pseudonym, Les Grand Travaux: major landmarks, structural tours de force, formal monuments destined to become tourist fare. While their presentation at UH was flamboyant rather than thorough, the exhibited works suggest a process of city building exemplary for Houston in two ways.

First, they demonstrate the practice, long evident in the capital, of each political regime leaving its monuments as gifts to the city. Today in Paris one finds the squares of royalty, Napoleon's monuments to his military victories, neighborhoods restructured by the boulevards of Baron Haussmann for Napoleon III, and the Centre Beaubourg sanctioned by Georges Pompidou.

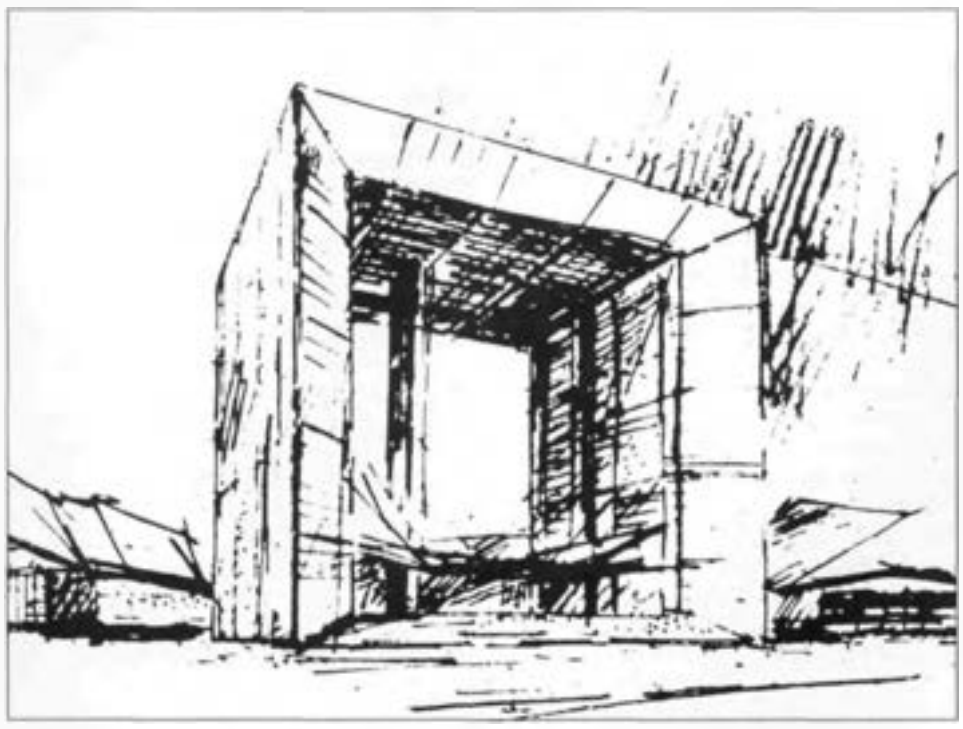
Second, they demonstrate that, from the outset, President Mitterand sought to elevate the quality and stature of French architecture for an international audience, and to refresh his own country's awareness of contemporary architecture. He aimed his program at cultivating a public that might again support city building that proved sensitive to urbanism and civic life. Consequently, Les Grands Travaux, with the exception of the Finance Ministry buildings at Bercy, were conceived to house diverse cultural institutions. And through various consultations and competitions, they not only gave recognition and exposure to a number of talented French architects but also stimulated French production by introducing contributions from internationally recognized foreign architects. As in Houston, these public works express an untenable thirst for renewal; as is not the case in Houston, they demonstrate the positive influence that governmental monuments can exert on the long-term quality of city life. In fact, the site models reveal that, in a few cases, these monuments were carefully inserted within the fabric of existing buildings. This is especially true of Jean Nouvel's Institut du Monde Arabe, which, by inflecting toward circumstantial site features and neighboring buildings, avoids the overt formalism present in some of the other works, such as Dominique Perrault's Bibliothèque de France and Francis Soler's Centre des Conférences Internationales beside the Eiffel Tower.

Ironic, then, is the fact that it was precisely the thin veil of formal French classicism borrowed by Philip Johnson from Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's House of Education that served as the lightning rod to draw two heads of state to the College of Architecture during the 1990 economic summit. Through the agency of delicate instruments of international protocol and the overt intercession of Kenneth Lay, cochairman of the Houston Summit Committee and chairman of the University of Houston Board of Regents, the College of Architecture provided an amiable setting for both a private reception hosted by President Bush and an informal presentation of a doctorate of humanities and a distinguished professorship in architecture to President Mitterand while he viewed the exhibition.

During a 1983 seminar at the Sorbonne, the French president explained that his enthusiasm for the mission of Les Grands Travaux "stems from the conviction that the industries of culture are the industries of tomorrow." Given the nature of current public bulding in Houston, one wonders what faith leaders in this city hold in either one. ■

**Notes**

1 Quoted in Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 64.



**Johan Otto von Spreckelsen, Grand Arch at La Défense, sketch for March 1983 international architectural competition.**

## Sky-Fi and Battery City

The Skyward Trend of Thought: The Metaphysics of the American Skyscraper *by Thomas A. P. van Leeuwen. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988. 176 pp., illus., $25*

Charleston: Antebellum Architecture and Civic Destiny *by Kenneth Severens. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988. 316 pp., illus., $49.95*

*Reviewed by Stephen Fox*

Two recent works of architectural history examine their subjects in ways that depart from, but can reinvigorate, standard forms of architectural historical discourse. Thomas A. P. van Leeuwen's *The Skyward Trend of Thought* is a collection of short, dense, provocative, and frustrating essays. It illuminates what he describes as the "metaphysics of the American skyscraper." Van Leeuwen asserts that, historiographically, the "how" of American skyscraper development has been confused with the "why," a confusion exploited by mid-20th-century historians who sought to annex certain elements of American skyscraper development to a selective, syncretic history of modern architecture. As this conspiracy-theory deduction may suggest, van Leeuwen's correction of the record has a gleefully demented undertone. His intentional wackiness is in fact an open tribute to *Delirious New York*, Rem Koolhaas's "retroactive manifesto of Manhattan."

Van Leeuwen's desire to reveal the "mythical structure of 'The History of the Skyscraper'" (sic) is inhibited by failures in the literary structure of his book. The five essays – on the skyscraper as an embodiment of specific mythemes, on an architectural analysis grounded in myth types, on the skyscraper as representational usurper, on the rituals of city building that the skyscraper initiated, and on the search for a compelling natural metaphor to inspire the formation of skyscrapers – are a chaotic assemblage of outrageous assertions, curious facts, and startling, often profound, insights. They abound in redundancy and display little effort to construct a coherent, logical argument. This is a misfortune and, for van Leeuwen, a decided miscalculation. The essays fragment into anecdotal digressions, abetted by the MIT Press's unconscionable failure to edit the manuscript properly. Van Leeuwen's attempt to subvert the complacent assumptions that govern positivist architectural historiography appears as nothing more threatening than personal idiosyncrasy. One regrets that van Leeuwen did not attend more carefully to *Delirious New York*, in which outrageousness of content was never allowed to compromise clarity of presentation.

In comparison to *The Skyward Trend of Thought*, Kenneth Severens's *Charleston: Antebellum Architecture and Civic Destiny* might at first glance seem entirely conventional. This is not the case, however. Severens grounds his history of Charleston architecture from 1820 to 1861 in a closely analyzed account of economic, political, and social cycles in the city's history. He strives to read architecture as an ideological reflection of its times and the circumstances of its coming into being. Severens uses period documents to determine how Charleston's chief public institutional and commercial buildings were evaluated (or whether they were evaluated), whether and why any excited controversy or special praise, and whether they contributed to, or were isolated from, broader urban, economic, and architectural trends. Severens does not reject the standard style history of 19th-century American architecture. Rather, he precisely correlates stylistic developments with specific events and personalities in the history of a specific place, weighing stylistic transformations against public expectations, dominant building typologies, the evolution of the architectural profession, and the shaping of a city's image. Severens should pursue this methodical examination of architecture as evidence into the realm of housing and especially into the built world of African-Americans in Charleston, who made up over half of the city's population in some decades of this time period. The book does presume a wider knowledge of Charleston and South Carolina history than the casual reader is likely to have, and the illustrations are not always numerous enough, well chosen, or adequately descriptive. Nonetheless, *Charleston: Antebellum Architecture and Civic Destiny* is a work whose scholarship ought to stimulate more intense critical inquiry into the history of American architecture. ■

# Pompeii Rediscovered

Rediscovering Pompeii
*The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*
*11 November 1990 – 27 January 1991*

*Reviewed by Elysabeth Yates-Burns McKee*

***Reliefs With Theatrical Masks*, 1st Century A.D.**

In his introduction to *Rediscovering Pompeii*, the catalogue of the splendid exhibition that arrived this fall at the Museum of Fine Arts, Ennio Presutti writes:

*The fascination of Pompeii cannot be explained merely by the beauty of its paintings, the variety of its buildings, the wares of its shops, or the surprising discoveries that are still being made as the excavations proceed. Pompeii is a city that returns today to live the rhythms of its daily life in all its aspects. . . . The fascination lies . . . in the extraordinary possibility of reestablishing a dialogue, contact between modern man and the people of almost two thousand years ago.*

Pompeii and Herculaneum, rediscovered by accident in 1738, fired the imaginations of late-18th- and 19th-century architects, and the excavations of these cities stimulated the formation of the self-consciously antiquarian and neoclassical cultures of western Europe. While the impact of the finds was evident in all fields associated with the arts and archaeology, architecture and the decorative arts were most affected: in fact, it was through these discoveries that a new relationship between the decorative arts and architecture took shape, eventually culminating in the volatile discussions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries regarding their origins and purpose. The decorative arts, in particular the so-called minor arts of metalworking, ceramics, and weaving – the techniques that produce the artifacts of daily life – were and still are regarded as highly problematic, having been judged to be of "lesser" stature than the high art of architecture. But it is precisely the strength of this exhibition – which showcases the simple and lyrical beauty of the minor arts in daily life – that it recalls the complex interrelationship and mutual dependency of the "minor" and "major" arts, the culmination of which is the site that architecture suggests. In other words, architecture becomes the stage (as does the exhibition design) for everyday living, which is facilitated by the variety, specificity, and aesthetic qualities of the objects at hand.

The Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were destroyed in A.D. 79 by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Pompeii, a middle-class mercantile city of approximately 150 acres, was buried beneath 15 feet of ash and debris. During the three days of the eruption, most of its 20,000 inhabitants died. Today, 50 acres still remain to be excavated; in comparison, Herculaneum, a resort city for the upper classes, remains virtually untouched by archaeologists. Given the overwhelming beauty of many of the objects unearthed in Pompeii, one only wonders at the treasure still to be discovered in the wealthier city.

For those who saw this exhibition in New York, a second visit is in order. Jack Eby, the Museum of Fine Arts' in-house architect, has expertly elaborated on the architectural spirit of the period with an enfilade of four rooms that become telling elements in their own right. Perhaps most powerful is the startling color of each room – coats of "pure pigment" reminiscent of the polychromy of Gottfried Semper and other 19th-century architectural theorists whose speculations were archaeologically grounded, or even of Matisse's *Red Studio* (1911) or *Harmony in Red* (1908-1909). The rooms furnish a stunning rejoinder to the Neoclassical fiction of a purified white Classical architecture.

Also of particular interest are the fresco wall paintings *Landscape With Seaside Villa*, *Marine Landscape With Architecture*, and *Room With Garden Paintings*, which suggest an entirely different conception of perspectival space than our own. Prefiguring the iconic architectural "backdrops" of the 14th-century masters Duccio and Lorenzetti, the Pompeiian wall paintings represent rhythmic continuity and figurative depth. The master artists of the period, all of whom remain unknown, were skilled in illusionistic measures, including the modeling of surface textures. The trompe-l'oeil of the various paintings, in particular those suggesting architectural scenes and landscape vistas, creates an ultimately ambiguous sense of reality – an idea relevant to contemporary discourse on the nature of representation in architectural space.

Though the exhibition includes the requisite specter of the Lady of Oplontis – the resin cast of a young woman trapped in an endless instant of death – it is most striking for its overwhelming emphasis on life and the creative energies. If these resurrected objects are any indication, daily life for the Pompeiians was lived in a state of heightened aesthetic awareness and consequent enjoyment. One recalls Semper's assertion of the bounty and worth of the objects of antiquity, contradicting the 19th century's perception of the "obsolescence" of the methods and objects forged by ancient civilizations. Modern eyes, too, might be amazed by the uncontrived yet sophisticated lyricism of the frescoes, sculptures, lamps, tableware, jewelry, and silverware.

*Rediscovering Pompeii* is a once-in-a-lifetime event. Sponsored by IBM Italia and IBM America, it came to Houston from the IBM Gallery in New York City and will return to the custody of the Italian Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Assets in Rome. IBM, the major underwriter for the modern excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum, has also developed software programs that aid in archaeological digs. A key component of the exhibition is the showcase of interactive computer technology, including a number of programs for museum visitors' participation. The exhibition's stay in Houston was made possible by IBM's grant to the Museum of Fine Arts. ■

## Fourth Ward

*(continued from page 11)*

public and private sector partnership. García appealed directly to the Property Owners Association, which he had been instrumental in organizing. Under his direction the owners were to amass their properties, a total of 80 to 90 acres, with two city-owned tracts of land – the 37 acres of Allen Parkway Village and 13 adjacent acres – in order to make a large, attractive parcel for sale to a single developer. García aimed to sell Allen Parkway Village for $46 per square foot, a total of $100 million, and the private lands for $15 to $20 per square foot. García saw that it was essential that Allen Parkway Village be part of the Fourth Ward deal. The assembly would have to be successful in order to avoid the random sales that would frustrate a total effort; any "chance for a comprehensive redevelopment of the area would be lost" otherwise, said García.[3]

A mechanism was created, the Metropolitan Development and Real Estate Association, to orchestrate the Fourth Ward land sale. This "independent" association was a quasi corporation that could both purchase and amass land currently held as rental properties. It could also act as agent for the Sicilian absentee landlords in the negotiations with potential block buyers. By 1986 this association had grown to 225 landowners, mainly the white absentee landlords who controlled in excess of 80 percent of the area.

These 1983 plans called for a multi-use development and a new utility infrastructure and street grid, to be paid for by a federal grant for which the city of Houston would apply. The planning director also foresaw the need for the city to allocate funds to defray development costs and the costs of relocating existing low-income residents, most of them African-American tenants. Even before the state and federal historic district designations became official, García envisioned a token six-block historic district for Freedmen's Town. Founders Park and the adjoining Beth Israel Cemetery would remain as open space. This plan also would accommodate the 200 to 300 subsidized units for elderly renters from Allen Parkway Village that the developer of Fourth Ward would be obligated to build in the area. This was the same number of units that HACH had stipulated any developer would have to build in order to demolish and dispose of Allen Parkway Village.

### García's Mistakes

What Efraím García did not anticipate, as Burdette Keeland relates, was the vast number of actors involved who needed to be satisfied. His first mistake was to appeal primarily to the absentee landlords, excluding the 20 powerful neighborhood churches, 104 resident homeowners, and owners of the scattered African-American businesses left in the ward. All of these groups had, in Keeland's words, "staying power and the commitment to the neighborhood."

He also did not anticipate that the overlap of authority between him and Earl Phillips would lead to a power play. Both city agencies had "viable" plans for the Allen Parkway Village site, and each recognized the land as the linchpin to its own success. The two directors' goals were not incompatible: García wanted the essential Allen Parkway Village parcel linked with the Fourth Ward sites, and Phillips wanted the millions a sale would bring to pump back into HACH projects elsewhere. But neither strong-willed leader wanted to take a back seat to the other. Phillips was determined to ensure that, whatever happened on the Allen Parkway Village site, the resulting condition would not repeat the indignity that Fourth Ward had suffered in the early 1940s, when HACH displaced African-Americans to build the originally all-white San Felipe Courts.

When hostility boiled over in midwinter 1983-84, Mayor Whitmire stepped in to referee, giving García authority over Fourth Ward and Phillips authority over Allen Parkway Village. She appointed R. Alan Rudy to act as mediator. (Jacqueline Bechman's *Houston City Magazine* article also names Rudy, one of the mayor's longtime advisers, as the man behind the redevelopment plan in the first place.)

García also overlooked the strength of outside support for the Fourth Ward community. During the 1983-84 period, the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council, as García would relate, had elicited support from "vocal blacks and do-gooder whites." Having stated that "historic preservation is a rich man's hobby," he ignored both the funding that owners of historically designated properties can receive and the solidarity that a cause can bring. It quickly became apparent that, with the exception of the absentee Property Owners' Association, few of the neighborhood's residents or owners needed Efraím García to broker a better future for them.

By 1985, Houston's real estate market had become too soft to absorb 140 acres, and the timing was wrong to capture $200 per square foot for the Allen Parkway Village parcels. Plans had to be put on hold as HACH tried to get permission to demolish and sell Allen Parkway Village. The deal fell apart completely in late 1986 when HUD rejected HACH's latest application for demolition, and the subsequent residents' council restraining order and lawsuit halted the process altogether. In mid-1987 Efraím García was asked by the mayor to resign as director of the department of planning and development.

During the 1988 and 1989 fiscal years an increasing number of grants were procured from HUD to rehabilitate groups of buildings in Fourth Ward. The Greater Houston Preservation Alliance early in 1989 was awarded a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to help implement a "Freedmen's Town Community Credit Union Preservation Fund," which was to be used to rehabilitate substandard houses for low-income residents.[8] Throughout the last two years the Texas Historical Commission has been sending inquiries to the city about the demolition of listed buildings in the Freedmen's Town Historic District. It seems that a state agency has to step in to protect the historic elements of Houston.

In May 1989 the Metropolitan Development and Real Estate Association went bankrupt. At the end it had amassed 70 rental properties, covering 12 of the 115 privately owned acres in the neighborhood.

As was the case with Earl Phillips, Efraím García's golden touch and connections to the Washington piggy bank were not sufficient to overcome local obstacles. The successes of the urban renewal programs of the 1950s and 1960s, when federal money supported grand visions often designed by out-of-town designers and economists and implemented over the objections of the local residents, were not to be repeated here in Houston. It has fallen to the private realm (as usual in Houston) to create and implement the policy necessary for a feasible development – one linked, it is to be hoped, to a careful rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward. ■

#### Notes

1 Flournoy, "The Houston Story."
2 Quoted in James Peters, "Houston Gets Religion," *Planning*, August 1985, p. 7.
3 Ibid.
4 These dates and figures are taken from Jacqueline Beckman, "Fourth Ward – A $100 Million Ghetto," *Houston City Magazine*, May 1984.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Peters, "Houston Get Religion."
8 *Preservation News*, June 1989, p. 1, 6.

HindCite

# Houston's R/UDAT Redux

**Alan Balfour**

Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) is a program sponsored by the American Institute of Architects to provide guidance to cities on issues of urban design and planning. Teams come from outside the city being visited and typically consist of ten or so individuals representing a broad range of expertise. They conduct their task in an intense workshop setting that lasts three or four days, concluding with a public report.

The R/UDAT team that visited Houston between 20 and 23 April 1990 included land use attorneys, transportation and environmental planners, and authorities on constitutional law and public policy from across the nation. Their charge, agreed to in discussions with community groups, city officials, and representatives of the mayor, was to consider the question, "How will Houston create a flexible, comprehensive planning system?"

The final report – available from the AIA – calls on the city to "implement a comprehensive planning process at the 'Sector' scale with land use regulation determined by the sector" and to "establish a process for city coordination of metropolitan systems (transport, utilities, open space/environmentally sensitive areas) and capital improvement programs." It recommends that the mayor's Land Use Strategy Committee lead the strategic planning effort and establish a strategic planning workshop to prepare an "action agenda" for the city that would include such issues as forming a "metropolitan vision," stabilizing threatened neighborhoods, and implementing sector planning.

In response to Mayor Whitmire's statement – "I see the Houston of the 1990s as a place of prosperity, of new growth, of a solid and diverse economy. We'll assume our place of prominence, as one of the world's leading cities" – the team felt that such optimism suggested the need to create "a broad vision-setting process" that should engage Houstonians in thoughtful dialogue about the region's overarching growth goals and principles. The results of such a process could become the road map to guide debate on ways to fulfill economic development objectives to create economic vitality that will serve all sectors of its community.

The report is, perhaps by necessity, too general and does not reflect the many creative exchanges between team members and city and community leaders, yet the overall result of the R/UDAT visit has been to complement and inform the several ongoing debates on the control of land use.

Let me try to add some perspective and challenge to the "broad vision setting process" that the report calls for.

Consider the art of making the American city – the provision and division of what are still seen as limitless fields of enterprise to accommodate the aspirations of an infinity of free wills, and the development of these fields into states of highest and best use, a relative condition whose only effective measure is profitability, and whose necessary condition is freedom from constraint. The American city has evolved to become the most vital as well as the most perplexing instrument of the political and social project – yet I believe that the underlying character of cities such as Houston is potentially much closer to Jefferson's dream of freedom in order than the history-burdened cities of the East.

These old cities of the East share with Europe a sense of a present always in the shadow of the past; Houston and other new American cities are formed in the potential of a continually unfolding future. The European city uses architecture as an instrument to establish the rule of governments, gods, and kings. Once constructed, such structures maintain their influence long after their original significance has waned. The American city demands that architecture offer a continually changing experiment in the ennoblement and extension of the potential of the individual and the community. Where some regret the disorder and the fragmentation and the extremes of wealth and decay that mark so many American cities, they fail to realize that such qualities are inherent in the nature of the beast. The American city should never look like Paris or Rome. To be so constrained by the figures of history would be antithetical to the necessary dynamism of urban America.

However, much as one can enjoy the raw enterprise and vitality of the new American city, it does, at its worst, contain a serious flaw. This is when the sum fails to be more than the parts, when the public realm is diminished by overly selfish private enterprise. The idea of the public realm is more than the provision of parks and plazas; it is both the spatial and institutional infrastructures that support civic life. The dominance of private enterprise tends to form the city into isolated collections of corporate fiefdoms that produce an almost medieval sense of fragmentation. And citizens, unless they are threatened, are unaware that there are very few institutions or professions or public leaders who are at all concerned or imaginative about the evolution of the city's public realm. Some complain that the power brokers in Houston do not encourage broad participation in the shaping of the city. Whether participation is actively suppressed or simply not desired is unclear. Desire for public life must be provoked before the demands will be felt, and the major developers have little to gain by such stimulation. So where does the responsibility lie? It is an unhealthy situation when the majority of citizens in a population reaching two million is unaware of or uninterested in its power to demand the creation of inventive and responsive planning agencies, staffed by gifted individuals who are committed to improving and enhancing the quality of public life.

The great cities in America's future must represent a creative balance between private good and public good, between private enterprise and public enterprise. The same field of competition that exists within cities exists between cities, and those that fail to improve the quality of public life will suffer. The cultures of great cities are shaped publicly and actively, and to allow Houston to assume, as the mayor states, a "place of prominence as one of the world's leading cities" will require a much more intelligent and informed commitment within city government to the shaping of public culture.

The R/UDAT visit came to Houston during a time of unprecedented concern for the state of the city, surely the healthiest sign of recovery and new confidence. And R/UDAT and LUSC (the wonderfully breathy acronym for the Land Use Strategy Committee) and the Greenwood Committee have with wise professional advice considered all the legal and policing strategies that can be used to effect the formation of the city. Such a concern with means is appropriate, but it is the ends to which they are put that must concern us all. As a companion to these special-interest committees, wouldn't it be exciting for coalitions to be formed out of the diverse groups in the city? All the Little League organizations could come together with the runners and the Sunday basketball players to dream about the perfect sports and leisure environment that Houston could support; RDA members could join with the different players in the design community – from the architects to the florists – to nurture in all our imaginations landscapes of desire appropriate to the promise of this great sprawling city. They could be joined by a brigade of passionate retailers committed to bringing the same exuberance and invention to public life that they promote in their Fiestas and Le Peeps and on the terraces of Goodes.

However, these issues go much further than lifestyle. Houston is a mess of a city, more exciting than most, perhaps, but also uglier and more decayed than it need be. Unless there are arrangements that focus the energies of all the city's diverse and lively communities on strengthening the quality of public life – not for just better schools, better parks, better leisure facilities, but for stronger newspapers, stronger public institutions and agencies, and the means to provoke courageous and inspired visions of the possible – it will remain a city of unfulfilled promise. Just remember what Frank Lloyd Wright said about Houston. ■

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

Rice Design Alliance
Houston, Texas 77251-1892

25 • Fall 1990

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