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HOUSTON STYLE

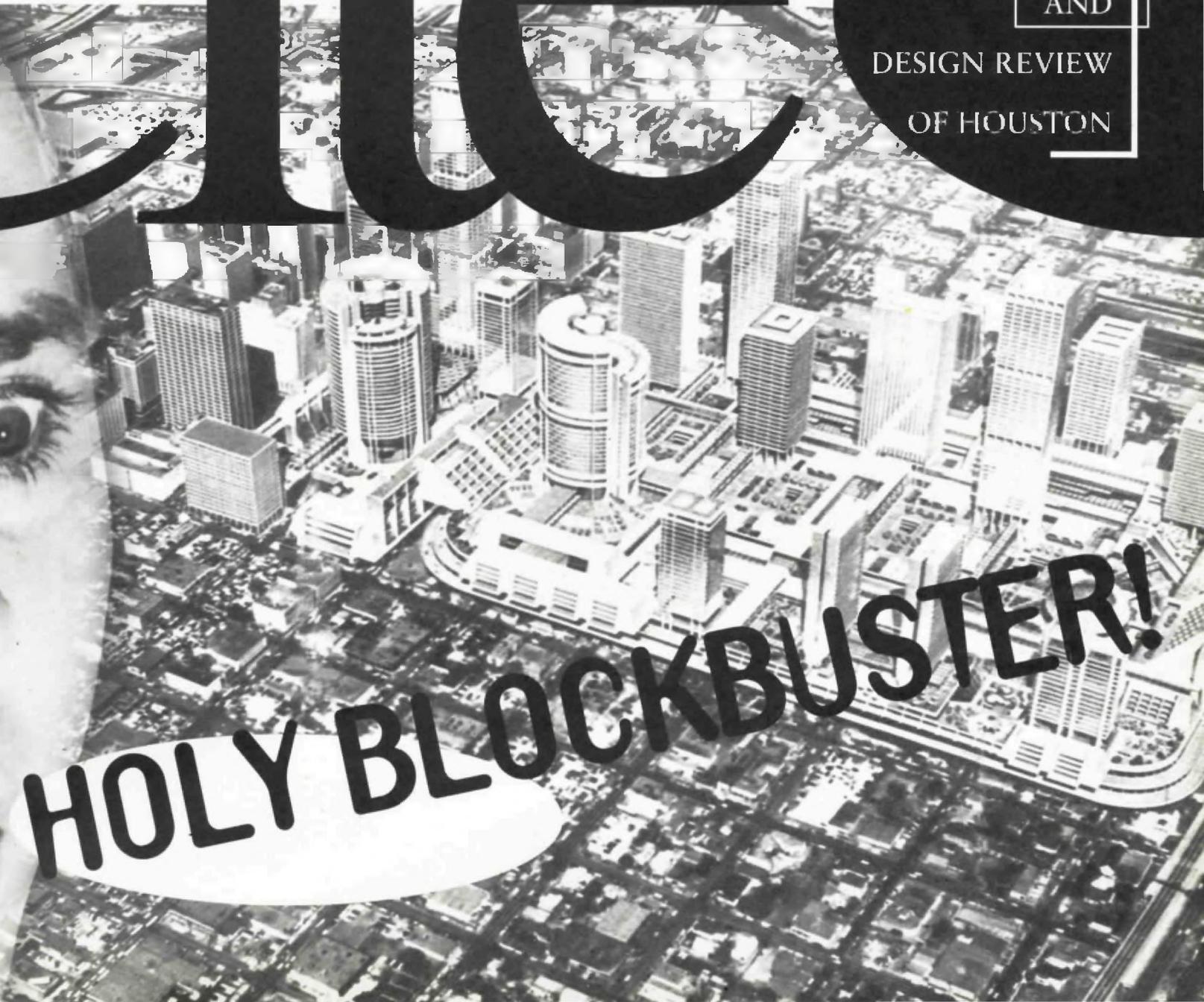
NO ZONING BUT MANY ZONES  
PROJECTS IN THE CENTRAL CITY  
HERMANN PARK MASTER PLAN  
POLITICS OF PUBLIC ART  
GRASS ROOTS ENVIRONMENTALISM

# Qrite

THE  
ARCHITECTURE  
AND  
DESIGN REVIEW  
OF HOUSTON



**HOLY BLOCKBUSTER!**



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# Cite

The Architecture  
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of Houston

A Publication of  
the Rice Design Alliance

32: Fall 1994 - Winter 1995

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*Cover:* One of the more audacious proposals for dealing with the unzoned city, dating from the heady days of economic prosperity in the late 1960s. The Texas Eastern Corporation gained control of 33 blocks in downtown Houston and hired William L. Pereira Associates to produce a master plan for this quintessential effort at urban megastructuring, which Stephen Fox in his *Houston Architectural Guide* calls an example of "that perennial 20th-century urban fantasy, the city-within-the-city." Pereira's design would have privatized the pedestrian domain, placing it atop four contiguous stories of parking decks spanning the vehicular streets below and connecting a chessboard collection of sculpted towers. Construction of the first-phase towers was barely completed before the failing economy and public concern over ventilating problems and the dreariness of the decked-over downtown streets brought the project to a stop. *Montage by Minor Design Group. Inside covers: Harper Leiper.*

# CONSTRUCTION CHIC REIGNS AT RDA GALA,

## "SHEETROCK AROUND THE CLOCK"

The Rice Design Alliance's eighth annual fundraising gala, "Sheetrock Around the Clock," was held on Friday, 11 November, at the First City National Bank Building. The gala, chaired by Jory Alexander and Carolyn Walne, drew more than 700 RDA supporters, who gathered to recognize Houston's construction industry for its contribution to the city's remarkable architecture.

The RDA Award for Design Excellence was presented to Warren S. Bellows, Jr., chairman of the board of W. S. Bellows Construction Corporation.

Bellows Construction, founded in 1914 by Warren S. Bellows, began building in Houston in 1924. Since that time, Bellows has built many of Houston's landmark buildings, including the San Jacinto Monument (Alfred C. Finn, 1936), the Houston Club (Alfred C. Finn, 1940), the Bank of the Southwest Building (Kenneth Franzheim, 1956), the First City National Bank Building (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1960), the Tenneco Building (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1963), One Shell Plaza (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill with Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, 1971), and the Wortham Theater Center (Morris Aubry, 1987), as well as the restoration of Bayou Bend (Graham B. Luhn and Kirksey-Meyers Architects, 1993). RDA president Barrie Scardino presented the award, a Steuben Illusion glass bowl donated by Neiman Marcus, to Warren S. Bellows, Jr.

Environment chairman Jay Baker specified a stage constructed of bright orange scaffolding and used orange construction fencing, yellow-and-black caution tape, blinking lights, barricades, and construction signage to carry out the theme. Baker & Botts donated 180 bright-yellow-and-white Mighty Tonka construction toys, including cranes, dump trucks, loaders, backhoes, and mixers, that decorations chairman Adele Howell Bentsen selected to place on the black-draped tables. (Following the party, Baker & Botts donated the toys to children at Scott Elementary School, the firm's Business/School Partner through the Houston Independent School District's Adopt-a-School Program.) Guests received yellow hard hats and carpenter's aprons at their places as favors, an effort chaired by

Sharon Tyler. Truffles & Flourishes prepared the stunning buffet and the fabulous Sheetrock Cake, garnished with sheets of white chocolate and silver Sheetrock nails made of dark chocolate. Music was provided by the Harry Sheppard Trio and Brave Combo. The crowd was entertained by a stylish silent auction organized by designers Cathie Johnson and Priscilla Blohm. During dinner, guests were treated to a slide presentation prepared by RDA



Left to right: Gala chair Carolyn Walne, RDA president Barrie Scardino, honoree, Warren S. Bellows, Jr., gala chair Jory Alexander, and Thomas F. Bellows.

president Barrie Scardino that documented some of the most significant Houston buildings constructed by the ten Houston construction firms that were recognized that evening: W. S. Bellows Construction Corporation; Tellepsen Corporation; Fretz Construction Company; Marshall Construction Company, Inc.; Meyerson Builders, Inc.; Schneider Construction Company, Inc.; Linbeck Corporation; The Miner-Dederick Companies; D. E. Harvey Builders; and The Lott Group, Inc.

The net gala proceeds of \$135,000 will help fund RDA educational programs and *Cite* magazine. The Rice Design Alliance would like to thank gala chairs Jory Alexander and Carolyn Walne, underwriting chair Paul Chapman, graphics chair Deborah Brochstein, student chairs Lonnie Hoogeboom and Christopher Hight, and all other committee chairs and volunteers who helped make the evening possible. RDA also thanks the following generous contributors.

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Several guests opted for "tool belts" rather than luxes. Left: Rice students Vi Tran (wrench) and Christopher Hight (screwdriver). Below, left to right: Chris Brown, Elaine Neyland, Sylvia Crispin, Kirk Wilhelmus, and Andre Crispin. Bottom, left to right: Rice students Lonnie Hoogeboom, Brett Terpeluk, and Ben Thorne as Miss Makita.



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## RDA SPRING ARCHITECTURE EVENTS

The Rice Design Alliance has organized a series of events for spring 1995 to assess the impact of modernism on Houston, explore the controversial issue of preservation of modern landmarks, and study the work of practicing architects from around the world who continue to work in the modern idiom.

### Symposium

#### 25 January – *Modern Preservation: Back to the Future*

This symposium will focus attention on endangered modern landmarks, and panelists will discuss the imminent redirection of preservation efforts in this country from prewar to postwar buildings and sites. Participants include Diane Wray, founder and executive director of the Modern Architecture Preservation League in Denver, Colorado; Ellen Beasley, author and preservation consultant; and Richard Longstreth, an architectural historian and director of the graduate program in historical preservation at George Washington University. Rafael Longoria, assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston, will serve as moderator. 7:30 p.m., *Jones Auditorium, University of St. Thomas.*

### Spring Lecture Series - *Still Modern*

This lecture series presents the work of four architects from different parts of the world who continue the search for modernity. The series will be introduced by Thomas Fisher, editorial director of *Progressive Architecture*, whose cover article, "Escape From Style" (September 1994), examines the current debate between style and philosophy in architecture.

22 February – Thomas Fisher, editorial director of *Progressive Architecture*.

1 March – Glenn Murcutt, Glenn Murcutt & Associates Pty Limited, Mosman, Australia.

8 March – Françoise-Hélène Jourda, Jourda & Perraudin Architectes, Lyon, France.

15 March – Mark Mack, Mack Architects, Los Angeles, California.

29 March – Markku Komonen, Heikkinen-Komonen, Helsinki, Finland.

All lectures will be given at the Brown Auditorium, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 8 p.m. This series is made possible by support from the Corporate Members of the Rice Design Alliance and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County.

### RDA Architecture Tour and Lecture

18 April – *Texas Modernism*. A lecture by Stephen Fox, architectural historian and fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas. 8 p.m., Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

22–23 April – *Modern Landmarks*. The RDA's annual architecture tour will feature modern residential architecture in Houston.

For tickets and information about the symposium, lecture series, and tour, please call the Rice Design Alliance at (713)524-6297.



Howard Barnstone and Partners, architect, Maher House, 1964.



Heikkinen-Komonen, architects, Finnish Chancery, Washington, D.C., 1994.

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### The Rice Design Alliance

The Rice Design Alliance, established in 1973, is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of architecture, urban design, and the built environment in the Houston region through educational programs; the publication of *Cite*, a biannual review of architecture and design; and active programs to initiate physical improvements. Membership in the RDA is open to the general public.

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Iris Todd,  
Bill Stern.

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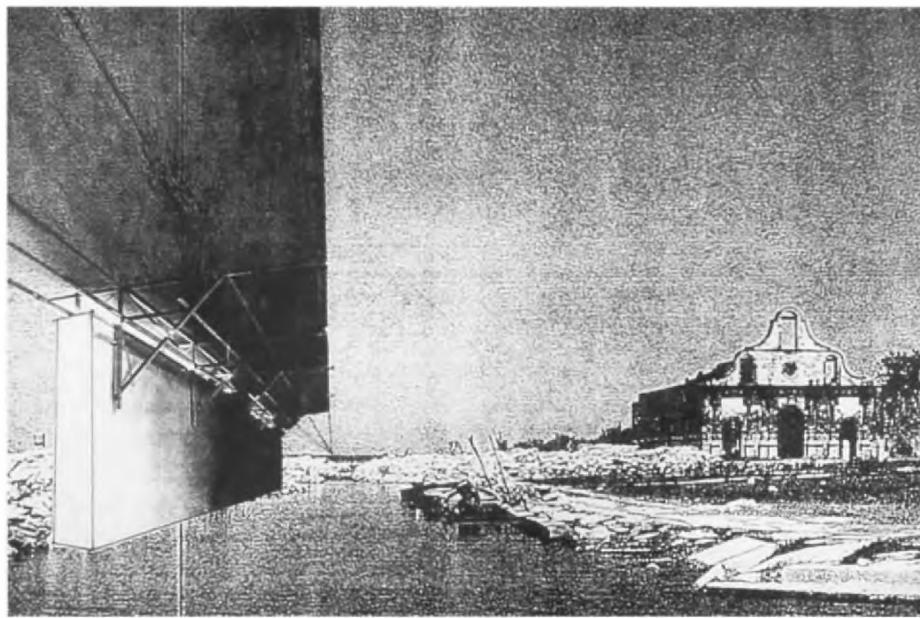
An acrylic on linen/fiberglass paper  
45 3/4" X 72 1/4"

This abstract piece has been framed  
in white metal leaf with plexiglass glazing.

Valued at \$10,500.

Contact Louise R. Guerrero  
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## HISTORIC BORDER TOWNSITE TO BE SUBJECT OF INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM



Proposal for Guerrero Viejo by Olga Vazquez, University of Houston architecture student.



Sophisticated Cherokee Addition home  
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Templo de Nuestra Señora del Refugio, Guerrero Viejo, Tamaulipas.

Michael Tracy and the River Pierce Foundation are planning a colloquium, "Culture, Water, and Money: The Passion of the Frontier," for 14 and 15 April 1995. It will focus on preservation of the townsite of Guerrero Viejo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, an 18th-century town located on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, downstream from San Ygnacio, Texas, headquarters of the River Pierce Foundation. In 1953, the population of Guerrero was relocated to the new town of Nueva Ciudad Guerrero by the Mexican government so that the reservoir of Falcón Dam could expand into the historic townsite, which lies on the banks of the Río Salado. On the U.S. side of the border, residents of the small town of Zapata, Texas, county seat of Zapata

County, and surrounding ranches were expropriated and displaced (but not resettled) by the International Boundary and Water Commission. Old Zapata was destroyed prior to its immersion by Falcón Lake. Guerrero Viejo was not destroyed, however. Because it lies at one edge of the reservoir, it is only partially flooded, even when the water is highest.

In the flood-prone portion of the townsite only two structures survive, the early-20th-century church of Nuestra Señora del Refugio and a two-story handstand, centered in the plaza in front of the church. The church is a sandstone shell, only partially roofed. The portion of the townsite that does not flood contains the shells of simple but very solidly construct-

ed one-story houses whose precise alignments mark off Guerrero's grid of unpaved streets. All of the surviving buildings in Guerrero Viejo are built of locally quarried sandstone. Only traces of the stucco with which they were surfaced remain. Most houses are roofless; some still retain double-leaf wood street doors, grilled window cages, and in one case a TV antenna. Fragments of two public buildings, the Hotel Flores and the *parián*, the public market building, also survive. Although the townsite is owned by the Mexican government, a number of houses are occupied informally by members of two extended families who earn their livings fishing in the Río Salado. There are no public utilities, services, or institutions in Guerrero Viejo.

Guerrero is threatened by deterioration and decay from exposure to Falcón Lake, which has bleached the dark sandstone that it inundates a chalky white. Exposure to the elements and unrestrained vegetation are eroding the building shells that do not flood. Theft of architectural artifacts and vandalism are also a problem. Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, which is responsible for the site, has posted signs asking visitors not to disturb its integrity. But the town's two cemeteries are vulnerable, especially the older one, whose walls have been breached and which has been invaded by vegetation.

In March 1993, a cleanup effort sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Mexico, with the city of Guerrero Nuevo and Los Caminos del Río, A.C. de México, as cosponsors, was organized to remove trash and cut back vegetation. This drew more than 300 Mexican and Texan volunteers from as far away as Monterrey, San Antonio, and Dallas. Some of the participants were returning to the town site for the first time since its initial flooding 40 years ago. Many families, not only in Guerrero Nuevo but in Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, have ancestral connections to Guerrero Viejo, which was the foremost urban center in the region until it was eclipsed by the two Laredos in the 1850s. José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara, one of the leaders of the Mexican independence movement in Texas, was from Guerrero, as was Antonio Zapata, the African-Mexican rancher for whom Zapata County, Texas, was named.

Representatives of the World Monuments Fund visited Guerrero Viejo with preservationists from Mexico and Texas in May 1993 to inspect the town site in order to develop a conservation plan that would preserve Guerrero Viejo as a heritage park. Work on the plan has not yet begun, however, as funds are still being raised to finance the venture. Meanwhile, the National Institute of Anthropology and History is evaluating a proposal to designate the site a *zona patrimonial*, which would extend federal preservation

protection to it. The University of Houston's Atrium Press is publishing a book of images of Guerrero Viejo. And the revised and expanded edition of the Texas Historical Commission's award-winning book *A Shared Experience: The Architecture, History, and Historic Designations of the Lower Río Grande Heritage Corridor*, published in November, contains a new chapter on Guerrero Viejo, according to Mario L. Sánchez, director of the Texas Historical Commission's Los Caminos del Río Heritage Project. Like *A Shared Experience*, the Atrium Press book will include historic maps, historic photographs, and contemporary photographs of the townsite.

On 14 May 1994, Michael Tracy hosted a presentation in San Ygnacio by architecture students from the University of Houston and the University of Texas at San Antonio. Students presented projects that dealt with practical issues of architectural conservation in Guerrero as well as the more elusive theme of preserving cultural memory. Joining Tracy in an animated discussion of what might (or should not) happen at Guerrero Viejo were UH architecture professor Rafael Longoria, who is from Nuevo Laredo and is a descendant of one of the Guerrero families; Laredo architect and UTSA architecture critic Frank Rotnofsky; Dwayne Bohuslav and Gevork Hartoonian, both on the architecture faculty at UTSA; Henry Estrada of San Ygnacio; and Betsy J. Gill, Sam Johnson, and Peter Glassford of Laredo.

The exchange revealed cultural differences in the ways Mexicans and Americans reacted to Guerrero and, consequently, in what they identified as problematic about the site. The U.S. recommendation – decisive action to protect artifacts – contrasted with the Mexican view, which located issues of conservation in a broader cultural perspective that acknowledged the much more conservative (and, by default, conservationist) attitudes of Mexicans and the bonds of personal connection that joined so many families on both sides of the Río Grande to the region's history. The provocative and challenging nature of the discussion – the range of alternatives went from leaving the site untouched to reconstructing the town completely – prompted Tracy to issue what he called the San Ygnacio Resolve: to convene a meeting of Mexican and U.S. historians, preservationists, scholars, artists, and architects, who will be asked to define and debate alternative visions for Guerrero Viejo. The colloquium is intended to dramatize the cultural significance, and the vulnerability, of the 245-year-old Guerrero townsite.

Stephen Fox

# The Galveston That Was

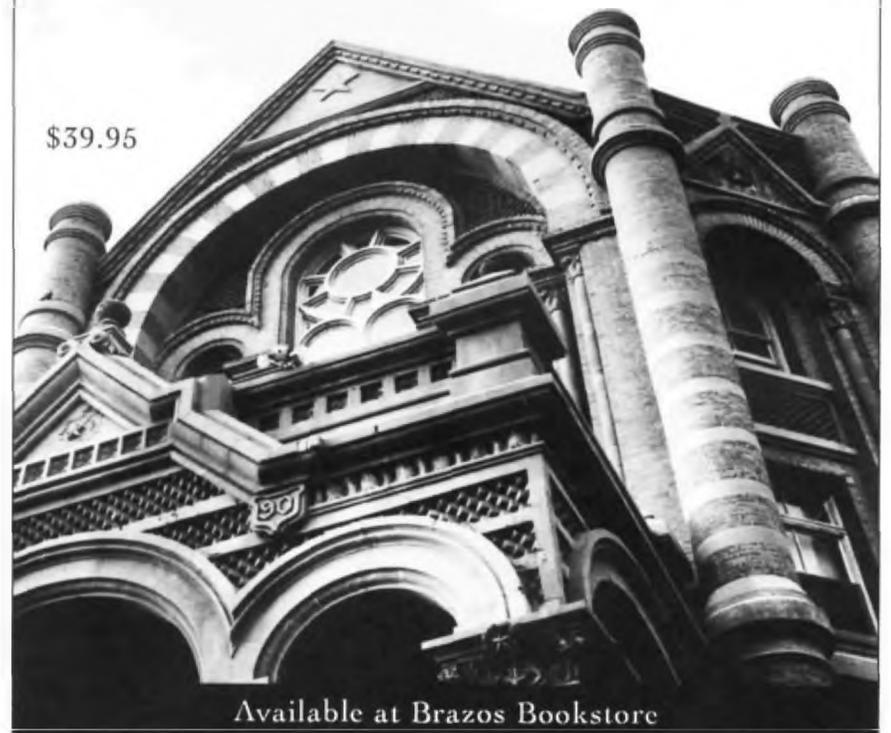
HOWARD BARNSTONE

Photographs by  
Henri Cartier-Bresson  
Ezra Stoller

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## THE TEXAS RANGERS

Notes from  
the Architectural  
Underground

Alexander Caragone

"*The Texas Rangers* reconstructs the peculiar conjuncture of high formalism, modernism, revived historicism and regionalism that informed this group, and pieces together the original curriculum they forged. It is a history of critical interest to the subsequent development of architectural teaching, theory, and practice in England and the United States." – Anthony Vidler, University of California, Los Angeles

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## WILLIAM E. BOSWELL, JR. 1950 — 1994



William E. Boswell, Jr., 1991-92 president of the Rice Design Alliance, died 15 June 1994. Until his death, Bill Boswell was

director of interior design at Irvine Associates Architects. Boswell received his degree in environmental design from the Pratt Institute. During a distinguished career that included positions at Hoover & Furr, Architects and Gensler & Associates/Architects, he received awards from the American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter; the Institute of Business Designers; and the American Society of Interior Designers. Boswell's projects included the Oasis Resort, Cancun, Mexico; the Putra World Trade Center, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Continental Airlines President's Clubs in Paris, Denver, and Honolulu; the Anadarko Petroleum Corporation Building, Houston; Browning-Ferris Industries, headquarters building, Houston; the AIA Library, Houston; and the restoration of the Niels and Mellie Esperson buildings in downtown Houston.

Jeff Bray, Boswell's friend and fellow choir member at St. John the Divine Episcopal Church, made the following remarks at Boswell's memorial service: *To those of us who knew him, it was apparent that the order and beauty he created . . . were merely an extension of the grace and quality he chiseled from the chaos of the world around him. . . . His was a philosophy of living. A cool, clean, white world where the only complexity was the shadow play of sunlight upon natural surfaces. . . . Bill lived his philosophy more completely than anyone I've ever known. Never once did he sway from his crisp, beautiful world. It was a world created purely from his own will. It was a world that promised a healthy and brilliant future for all.*

Bill Boswell died of AIDS at 44. Contributions in his memory may be made to the William E. Boswell, Jr., Memorial Fund, in care of the Rice Design Alliance, P.O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251. ■

## QUASIMODO RETURNS JOHN OUTRAM'S COMPUTATIONAL ENGINEERING BUILDING AT RICE

One of the most beloved ironies of the romantic imagination is the condition of willful ugliness, an epithet that seems appropriate for the new Computational Engineering Building to be built on the Rice University campus by British architect John Outram. Quasimodo, the horribly disfigured and ill-proportioned hero of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, was a literary representation of the anticlassical theory that beauty is an arbitrary consensus of society, while all things in nature are pleasing to their creator. Outram's building, with its awkwardly proportioned six-foot-wide piers,



Mockup of partial wall section showing skin treatment and pseudo-Chinese bracketed rafters.

eccentric details elements such as Chinese-style brackets under the eaves, and hideous skin patterns of black and white ceramic tiles interspersed with conventional St. Joe brick (currently visible in a mockup of the wall section near the campus kitchens), will transmit a "Quasimodo effect" to the campus. Much like the grotesque works of 19th-century Philadelphia architect Frank Furness, the scheme for the Computational Engineering Building has a monstrous quality that will challenge most people's sense of beauty and will perhaps create pathos, or at least inspire pity.

At 112,000 square feet and with a budget of \$16 million, the Computational



Engineering Building will be one of the largest and most expensive buildings per square foot on campus. The footprint of Outram's design has been scrupulously worked out to complete the symmetry of the Engineering Quadrangle to the north while echoing the massing of the Physics Building to the south, and in this respect is safely, if not too conventionally, within the classical ordering system implied by the initial campus plan. The building design is then dictated by a bay system marked by abnormally thick piers, which turn out to be hollow, nonstructural service cores for pipes, mechanical paraphernalia, and electrical conduits. The piers alternate with square and round sections, but the pattern of their alternation is not regular; it seems that square piers are deployed at points of accent, such as the corners and major entries, and round piers at secondary or more passive points. That one of the piers is doubled only contributes to the illogic of their distribution. The same sort of discord governs the treatment of the two blocks that project in symmetry on the major southern façade: they have identical profiles, but one presents bays that are completely filled in, except for a double-height terrace in its center, while the other is voided, with open arcades hollowed from the first two floors and roof terraces above the entire third floor. The overall sense of disproportion in the southern façade is guaranteed by the treatment of the piers, which vary in height from a single story to two and three stories; yet unlike classically proportioned columns, all have the same width and terminate with the same scale of big, black, vase-shaped capitals. At a few points the capitals are left exposed and will be used as planters for some mitigating, quick-growing foliant.

The inside is as generous with space as it is cluttered with ornament. Running the length of the building is a 12-foot-wide interior street cut open to all three floors of offices and naturally lit by round clerestories. At the eastern end are a large auditorium and two lecture halls served by a 3,000-square-foot atrium, enclosed by an overbearing rind of 50-foot service shafts. Despite the openness of the corridor and the atrium, the orientation to the four different departments housed in the building will not be self-evident, nor will these static spaces breed a sense of flexibility. Meanwhile, the flashy banding on the interior columns, the diagonal grilles of the balconies, the vermiculated swirls on the blue rafters, and other such unrelated decorative flourishes will heighten the incoherence and magnificent ugliness and put to shame Ricardo Bofill's meager attempt at such for the Shepherd School of Music.

Outram has attempted to emulate the nested asymmetries of Ralph Adams Cram's medievalizing façades for Lovett Hall, but the awkward proportions, as well as the incompatibility of current materials (such as the thin mullions of the aluminum strip windows set in the thick frames of molded concrete), make his building a parody of late Victorian artifice. Much could have been learned by observing the discreet manner of another British architect, James Stirling, who with Michael Wilford designed the addition to Anderson Hall, which is far superior aesthetically and functionally, not to mention economically. The intersecting old and new wings of Anderson Hall meet in a bridged-over, double-height space that can be expanded or contracted at will, creating a fluid sense of space as well as a truly convivial social setting.

Furthermore, one of the great lessons of programming found in architectural history has unfortunately gone unheeded by Outram and the programmers of the new building: Louis I. Kahn's design for the Richards Building at the University of Pennsylvania also was organized around vertical service shafts, which proved to be much less flexible than horizontally arranged services. Thus the willful ugliness of the Computational Engineering Building is not even conceived of as serving some higher duty toward function, economy, or environmental efficiency. Quasimodo has returned as an ossified gargoyle, unable to prove his virtue.

*Richard Ingersoll*

**John Outram & Associates, architects, proposed Computational Engineering Building, perspective elevation showing double-height arcades on south and upper terraces.**

The site selected for the Computational Engineering Building was once occupied by the **Bonner Nuclear Laboratory** (George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce, architects, 1953, demolished 1994). One of the few "modern" buildings on the Rice campus, its distinctive tower housed a Van de Graaff accelerator, at the time one of the best installations of its type in the world. When the building no longer served its original function, it was successfully adapted as laboratories and music classrooms. Its recent demolition was a senseless and costly waste of a structure that could certainly have been adapted for further reuse.





Leo Carol Hardway &amp; Paul Hester, Photographers © 1994

## CLOSE QUARTERS

The yup-scaled, code-sanctioned apartments of The Park at Westcreek at River Oaks, now nearing completion on Houston's West Loop, offer the same thinly sliced views as the Gotham Court, a "typical" wooden tenement illustrated as an inducement to reform in the 1866 *Report of the Council of Hygiene and Public Health of the Citizen's Association of New York*.



Architectural Forum, January 1938

## MISSING IN ACTION

Absent from this year's retrospective of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright organized by the Museum of Modern Art was his unbuilt aircraft-carrier-like swankienda for Stanley Marcus in Dallas, which succumbed to a terminal case of sticker shock. Designed in 1935, the same year Wright began Fallingwater for a more indulgent merchant prince in Pittsburgh, the Texas tour de force was published in the January 1938 *Architectural Forum* with a commentary by Wright explaining that since the house was estimated to cost "between 30 and 35

thousand dollars" instead of the "20 to 25 thousand" stipulated by the client, the architect had "reluctantly laid the plans aside and the job went local." According to Marcus's autobiography, the bids ranged from \$90,000 to a final \$150,000, attributable in part to the novelty of Wright's scheme and the trepidation of Dallas contractors (Fallingwater ultimately cost \$145,000).

"Texas is yet young and architecturally Texas is yet untouched," Wright observed in hindsight, adding that "perhaps construction as permanent as contemplated [for the Marcus house] is unnecessary for the climate." The chill increased when, according to Brendan Gill's biography of Wright, Marcus mailed his ex-architect a photograph of the completed and no less expansive house he had commissioned from one Roscoe Plimpton Dewitt of Dallas, the artistry of which Wright could have admired just as easily by thumbing through the December 1939 issue of the *Architectural Forum*. Wright wrote back, "Dear Stanley: I didn't think you would be satisfied with so little."

## DREXEL TURNER



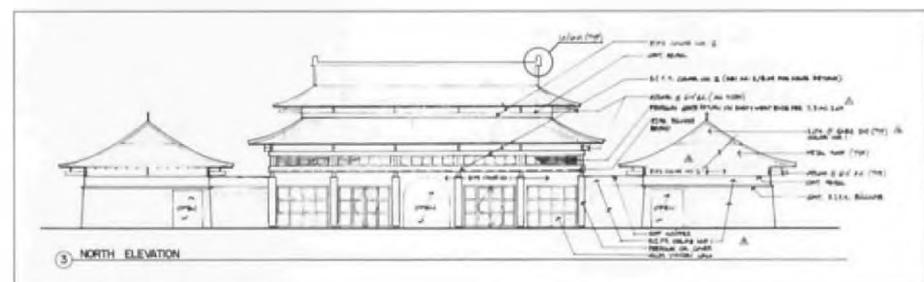
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## CHIN-WAS-ARY

For those whose connoisseurship of Chinese building and garden art extends no further than the flowering of the mid-to-late-20th-century Hemphill dynasty in Houston's neartown bedroom community of West University Place (*above*), the most is yet to come. Forbidden Gardens, a 70-acre, \$20 million "Chinese cultural theme park" unlike anything this side of Orlando's Great Wall of China (see *Cite*, Winter-Spring 1994, p. 25), is even now moving the good earth near the intersection of I-10 and the Grand Parkway in Katy, Texas, just west of the Houston city limits. According to Pete Wittenberg of the *Houston Post* (26 September 1994), Forbidden Gardens is "the brainchild of . . . Ira Poon of Seattle, who immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong about 10 years ago" and whose "dream was to share with the American public – for the price of admission – some of the historic and archeological treasures of his culture." The first phase, which Poon's Green Ever Company intends to open in June, will "present scale replicas of two of China's most famous ancient attractions – The Forbidden City, home to centuries of emperors, and the Tomb of Emperor Qin. The real tomb is the site of the 1974 discovery by a . . . farmer of an army of life-size terra cotta soldiers buried with their ruler. Plans call for display at Forbidden Gardens of full-scale replicas of Qin, his 32 generals and their horses in the military formation of that time, plus models of 8,750 soldiers, with horses, carriages and weapons."

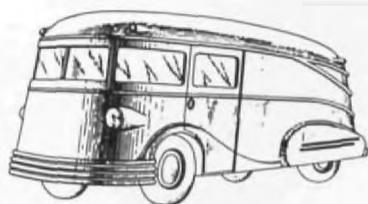


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Courtesy, Architects

## g e i s t



Baker, Great Inventions (Chronicle, 1990)

1



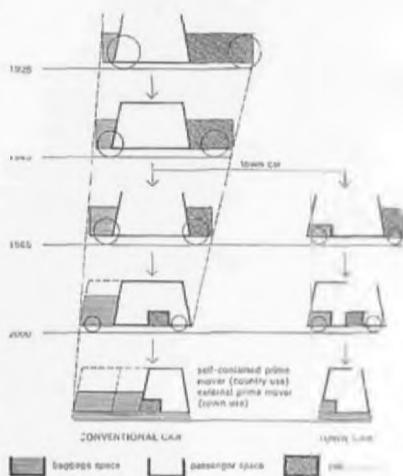
Ambasz, Taxi Project (MOMA, 1976)

2



Ambasz, Taxi Project (MOMA, 1976)

3

Source: *Automobile* (October 1967)

4

## NOW VOYAGER

Oscar F. Jackson's patented 1937 design for a vehicle with an abbreviated, buslike body attached to the low-riding chassis of an automobile (1) is a seriously ungainly precursor of the modern minivan, the unstreamlined inevitability of which French technology maven Gabriel Boudalon charted in 1967 (4). The following year, Pio Manzù produced a prototypical, if by American standards undersized, Fiat "City Taxi" complete with sliding door (2), a project based in part on work he had done as a student at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm.

In 1973, Emilio Ambasz of the Museum of Modern Art, abetted by the U.S. Department of Transportation and Mobil Oil, set out to reinvent the London taxi or else pump up Manzù's prototype. This four-year undertaking, called *The Taxi Project: Realistic Solutions for Today*, in fact produced an uncanny facsimile of the minivan of tomorrow through the efforts of the American Machine and Foundry Corporation — a novice in such matters (3). The big three of Detroit declined to participate in the project at all. Besides AMF, prototypes were also built for MOMA by Volvo, Volkswagen, Alfa-Romeo, and another American group, Steam Power Systems. The vehicles were exhibited during summer 1976 and elicited strenuous objections from the presidents of the taxi owners' associations (one of whom had to be ejected from a preview of the show) and from taxi mogul (and megacollector of pop art) Robert C. Scull, Jr., who complained in a letter to the *New York Times* that "the monies expended in the 'Taxi Project' . . . is [sic] one of the most disgraceful wastes of our cultural times. Huge sums were handed to giant corporations to play with on a project that has no relation to the realities of the taxicab situation in New York or anywhere else."

The *Times*' reviews of the project, by Paul Goldberger and Ada Louise Huxtable,

were praiseful, as were its two editorials on the subject, although Goldberger could not refrain from likening the AMF prototype to a "bloated Paecer." Huxtable concluded her appreciation with the modest proposal that "if we get the new cabs, there should probably be a picture of Mr. Ambasz on every medallion." As it happened, Ambasz's *vanguardism* was less than a decade ahead of its time. In 1984, the Chrysler Corporation began mass production of minivans as family taxis — an innovation that helped assure Chrysler's profitability in the wake of its near-fatal financial crisis of 1979–80. The new vehicles also found a lucrative niche in the taxi fleets of most American cities, including Houston, although New York still includes itself out.

Strangely enough, according to Richard

M. Langworth and Jan P. Norbye's *Complete History of the Chrysler Corporation, 1924–85* (New York: Beckman House, 1985), the design of the Voyager/Caravan minivans "had been initiated way back in 1973" as a project of the Dodge truck division, for lack of a more appropriate unit to assign it to. But "product planners delayed introduction, having concluded that the market wasn't ready for a minivan. By 1980, when the market was ready, Chrysler was struggling, and there was simply not enough money for getting [it] into production." Even so, by the end of the year, the decision had been made "to overhaul the Windsor, Ontario, plant with new automated production equipment" and to utilize a slightly longer version of the K car chassis as an underpinning for the new product. More than half a billion dollars and three years later, the "initial sales targets proved conservative. . . . Once the minivans hit dealer showrooms [in mid-1984], Windsor couldn't keep up with the demand."



© Paul Hester (1984)

## D R E X E L T U R N E R

*"Austin is a happy place, sort of; foreigners and easterners surrender their affections to Austin more readily than to any other place in the state. They come reluctantly, drawn by the fragrance of our cash, and a great many of them stay. It is a pretty, sunny town, the climate warm, the sky blue and unsmogged."*

Larry McMurtry, "A Handful of Roses"



Moore/Andersson Architects, Charles W. Moore House, Austin, Texas, 1984-87, gallery.

## C h a r l e s M o o r e

*"Almost all of us are new-comers in the place where we are, wanderers bringing what used to be called a Yankee ingenious responsiveness to our dealings with a new place but we also bring dreams and maybe even homesick fantasies about some place far away from which we've come or some place far away in both time and space about which perhaps we've read."*

Charles Moore, "The Temple, the Cabin, and the Trailer"

No architect in recent memory has been as compulsively peripatetic as Charles Moore, nor as consumed by the nesting instinct. In the space of slightly more than three decades, Moore built four new houses and radically reconfigured two others for his own day-to-day use, in addition to two vacation retreats. These *pieds-à-voie* were scattered in places as far apart, geographically and culturally, as southern and northern California, Connecticut, and finally Austin (*Cite*, Spring 1986), where

he was appointed O'Neil Ford Centennial Professor of Architecture at the University of Texas in 1984. Moore's Austin house, which he occupied from 1985 until his death last year at age 68, is "in many ways his finest," Paul Goldberger wrote not long ago in the *New York Times* in an effort to call attention to its uncertain future.<sup>1</sup>

The Austin house is actually part of a compound that includes a small professional office and a junior partner's house,

blending vernacular and more rarefied themes with Moore's indelible sleight of hand – ranch on the outside, Borromini and Schinkel on the inside. It also serves as a repository for the architect's prodigious collection of toys and folk artifacts culled from flea markets worldwide, as well as his drawings, library, and more than 80,000 slides. Moore's U-Soane-ian trove and its container – "a glowing example of a great architect's passions" in Goldberger's words – is now at risk, even though it may well "contain more joy per square foot than any other building in Texas [and] is also one of that rarest of breeds, a first-rate house designed by a first-rate architect for his own use." For emphasis, Goldberger takes another sentence to run through "the short list" – Jefferson's Monticello, Sir John Soane's house in London, Frank Lloyd Wright's two Taliesins, Philip Johnson's Glass House, and Frank Gehry's house in Santa Monica – "all buildings that carry an importance in the history of architecture that far outweighs their size."<sup>2</sup>



© Photo by Wayne N. T. Figg of CA Photographers

In Austin, Charles Moore's last, and many say best, house for himself and its amazing collection of folk art, drawings, and models are endangered unless money can be raised to retire the mortgage and furnish an endowment.

Out Domain"), but it also proved lamentably burglar prone.<sup>7</sup> At the turn of the decade, Moore abandoned the horrors of Elm Street for a milder-mannered, smaller redo in Essex, Connecticut (1970–75), best remembered for the *coup de théâtre* of its attic-filling, split-pyramid display-case bed box, whose proto-Memphis showmanship by then came naturally to the author of "Plug It In, Rameses, and See If It Lights Up, Because We Aren't Going to Keep It Unless It Works."<sup>8</sup>

When Moore moved to Los Angeles in 1975 to head the architectural program at UCLA, the real estate market was especially forbidding: "private houses near the campus [were] as expensive as any in the United States," and "vacant building lots [were] nonexistent," in the testimony of David Littlejohn's biography, *Architect: The Life and Work of Charles W. Moore*. For three years, Moore was obliged to camp out in "a series of rented apartments, each filled to overflowing with his library, his papers, and warehouse loads of treasured trivia: the toys, the models, the Mexican ceramics, the tin soldiers, the wooden chests."

The triplex was not among the four examples of Moore's work singled out in his characteristically inclusive guide to Los Angeles architecture, prepared for the series *The City Observed* with Peter Becker and Regula Campbell.<sup>10</sup>

In truth, the California that Moore as a youth had visited every year or so with his parents, where he had begun his professional life in various Bay Area offices (1947–49), and where he had first achieved national recognition as chairman of the Department of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley (1961–65), and as the designer, in partnership with Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull, and Richard Whitaker, of the Sea Ranch Condominiums (1963–65), was no longer as free or open or affordable as before.<sup>11</sup> By the early eighties, even the "tall, narrow town house" he had willed into being in Westwood seemed to be "fitting rather too tightly, . . . [its] walls pressing closer and closer."<sup>12</sup> So when the opportunity came to relocate to Austin on more advantageous terms while still retaining his professional ties with the firm of Moore, Ruble & Yudell in Los Angeles, Moore took it – pausing only to scan the *Official Airline Guide* for signs of life at Austin International (by the grace of Mexico) Airport. Nor was he the first well-known architect of midwestern birth to find the charms of Los Angeles subsiding in later life and to eventually take refuge in a less cluttered corner of the American Southwest.

The first glimmers of the house Moore came to build in Austin can be found in a project for a U-shaped courtyard house for himself in Essex (with Marvin Buchanan, 1970) and in a sketch plan for the unbuilt Goodman House (Montauk, Long Island, 1969), in which the cavity of an L-shaped, essentially open (except for bedroom and bath) first floor is filled in with an elliptically curved deck (bedrooms also sprout upstairs at either end of the interior L).<sup>13</sup> But the Austin "spread," as Moore sometimes referred to it, actually begins to approach its finished state only with the design of a house for a hypothetical Texas site that Moore prepared (with the help of Jim Winkler and Michael Bernard of the Urban Innovations Group at UCLA) for the exhibition *Houses for Sale*, held at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1980. By Littlejohn's account, although the gallery

## Slept Here

In one sense, Moore's conception of his Austin treasure house began when, as a precocious teenager in Battle Creek, Michigan, he drew up plans for special built-in units to display an already considerable inventory of "souvenirs, projects, collections and junk" in his new room taking shape over the garage of "his parents' 1932 colonial-style house."<sup>3</sup> The small, two-story house on Elm Street, c. 1860, in New Haven that Moore essentially gutted and reformed inside (1966) while serving as dean of the School of Art and Architecture at Yale no longer survives in its altered state except in the photographs of John T. Hill and Norman McGrath. It remains, however, one of Moore's most extraordinary realizations, theatrically introverted in response to an "alien turf" embellished only by a "panoramic [backyard] vista of the adjacent Holiday Inn."<sup>4</sup> The shell of the dark, unassuming house was converted to a single barnlike room filled to almost overflowing with three demonstratively cut out plywood towers, amplifying notions first explored, on a more

limited basis, in the vacation condominium Moore had built for himself at Sea Ranch in Sonoma County, California (1963–65).

As choreographed in New Haven, the tight vertical spaces, illusionistic special effects, and avid display of architectural fragments of mostly wrecking-yard provenance, alongside "photographs, drawings, statues, favored objects, and especially toys inhabit[ing the] . . . layered and interweaving walls at every available scale,"<sup>5</sup> shared a bargain-basement kinship with the cramped wizardry of the Soane museum, which Moore admired in *The Place of Houses* (written with Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon) for its "disciplined abandon" and "collector's passion . . . too strong to be constrained by conventional precedent or regular arrangements of space."<sup>6</sup> Moore's saber-saw prodigy was featured in glossy magazines from *Art in America* ("Chaos as Architecture") to *Playboy* ("Amid Connecticut's Early Americana, a Bachelor Architect Flips a Flipped-

In what seemed at the time an act of self-preservation, he put together a syndicate of two other UCLA faculty members and their wives to develop a three-unit condominium on a 50-by-100-foot lot, across from a Mormon temple, that "became available when the house on it was demolished 'by accident.'" Although Moore "managed to fit three separate and very different residences – plus little gardens, the mandated set-back, and a space for six cars" onto the site "by interlocking rooms, stairways, passages, and levels like a Chinese wooden puzzle," the result was, by Littlejohn's account, more ingenious than satisfying:

*a mountainpass of a building, at once soaring and cramped, . . . defy[ing] repose or domesticity and offer[ing] little clear working space, unless one work[ed] in bed [the pyramid and its wiring had survived the trip out West] or at the dining table. It is hard to believe that many buildings have been designed here, many articles and lectures have been written here, many guests have been welcomed.<sup>9</sup>*

insisted that the plans and drawings were in fact available for clients to buy and build. . . . the contributions of several of the participants better known for their theoretical than their actual houses, [were] certain to remain 'art' and not architecture. . . . Moore . . . came up with a house design I can actually imagine building and happily living in. . . . a house that maintains a lively, livable tension between classical archetypes and the forms of a comfortable southwestern ranch house.<sup>14</sup>

In Moore's nevertheless unsold "House for Sale," the arcuated L of the Goodman project was restocked with three bedrooms, a study, and a curving glass-roofed conservatory that, together with a pair of small, square pavilions, formed a picturesque compound in the shape of a U with one side slipped forward. The pavilion closest to the dormitory L was a detached living room analogous to the freestanding "ornamental salon" of Schinkel's gardener's house at the Schloss Charlottenhof near Potsdam (1834); the other was a two-car garage. A long, narrow pool bisected the compound's sunken, amphitheatrically terraced courtyard (which Moore, significantly, referred to in Castelli's prospectus-catalogue as a "semi-circular piazza") before emptying into a nearby creek. In further explanation of the Texas "House for Sale," Moore likened it to

*those 'delicacies' in New Orleans with double sources [in that it] relies on two traditions, the ranch house and the Renaissance model, with occasional surprise inventions that would have to be described as 'modern.' It is made of ordinary stuff – stucco or smooth boards, painted; a roof of metal (I'd like it to be ordinary corrugated aluminum, not painted; but I have never yet been able to talk a client into that); wood windows; 6-by-6-inch wooden porch posts; a floor of concrete. Karl Friedrich Schinkel serves as a source for the pleasures at the head of the windows in the living room pavilion, where (as in Schinkel's Pavilion at the Charlottenberg Palace) a tiny incised line and in this case a change of color make an ordinary wall a classical quotation, with giant pilasters and entablature that will wash out, in the bright southwestern sun, into an ordinary wall again.<sup>15</sup>*

(Alternate color schemes devised with Tina Beebe were illustrated in two pairs of dioramic shadow-box models. One pair, with walls rendered in the Romanish ocher of Schinkel's gardener's house, sold from the exhibition; the other, cast in gray, did not and was later installed in a place of pride near the entrance to the house in Austin.)

Settled on little more than an acre on Quarry Road on the fringes of Tarrytown, a once-again-fashionable part of west Austin, Moore's



Entrance portal to Moore's compound in Austin, which he called the Lazy O.

Texas spread (designed and developed with his partner in practice, Arthur Andersson, as mortgagee of the second, smaller house, 1984–87), retains the notion of a U-shaped, three-building compound from the "House for Sale," as well as the long, skinny pool. The court is no longer terraced and sunken, and the pool is a self-contained "tank" such as Moore remembered from the office of the architect Geoffrey Bawa in Colombo, Sri Lanka.<sup>16</sup> As if to compensate for this topographic reserve, a giant ellipse is sent careering around the courtyard and through two of the constituent buildings (Moore's thick, L-shaped unit and Andersson's compact, prismatic one) with the abandon of the rogue oval from the discarded first scheme for the Piazza d'Italia, New Orleans (Moore, Grover, Harper, 1975). (Borromini had done something of the sort in a project of 1642 for the Palazzo Carpegna near the Trevi Fountain in Rome, employing an oval courtyard to straddle the street between the initial block purchased by Ambrogio Carpegna and a second block Carpegna had managed to acquire once planning had begun.)<sup>17</sup> Dominant though the ellipse is in plan – Moore named the compound the "Lazy O" after it in cattle brandese – its progress is scarcely perceptible out of doors.

In fact, the feeling of the compound as a whole is noticeably relaxed compared with much of Moore's work. As Moore told a group of Yale students in 1980:

*Most architecture must be normative so that you can be quirky against it. And even when I'm quirky against it, it seems to me I have to do my bit by making more of the normative stuff than I am accustomed to. . . . In this choreography of the familiar and the surprising, it does seem to me as I get older that a little bit of surprise really goes a long way. That is, it's alright to do almost everything familiar. I think there has to be a little bit of*



Entrance passage, Lazy O.

*surprise if it's going to interest anybody. I think that we as architects would be untrue to ourselves if we didn't look for the places where the surprise ought to be, but I think the surprise can come in a familiar and comfortable body of stuff.<sup>18</sup>*

As at Elm Street, Moore's personal slice of the Austin compound is carved almost entirely out of a preexisting structure, in this instance a lackluster cottage built in 1936 and added onto in 1949. (Borromini had incorporated the preexisting Palazzo Vaini into the plans for the Palazzo Carpegna.) But unlike Elm Street, Moore approached the pre-enlarged cottage with a frugal and curious "kind of archaeologist's morality. . . . Awful as I thought it was, I didn't want to cover up anything or to change anything unless I had to. . . . Most of the remodeling was very selective erasure." The ceilings were opened up, revealing the underside of a roof that was "complex, contradictory, and mostly just confused" but that struck the architect as "a suitable foil to the single-minded sweep of the enveloping ellipse." All but two of the original windows were left as they were; Moore

"added only one big one. A pitched roof was added over the flat one" of the 1949 addition. The original 1936 wood and 1949 concrete floors were also kept and painted all over with "a net of colors in a pattern of squares and circles" suggested by "the handsome patterns of mastic left after the green asphalt tile was peeled off."<sup>19</sup>

The exteriors of the three buildings of the compound proper (an innocuous overflow studio was later added at a far end of the property) alternated gray stucco with Yankee-Texas board-and-batten, also gray, although the courtyard faces have since been painted blue and

panels of trellis have been applied selectively to both outside and courtyard faces of the compound. The roofs are galvanized but standing-seam, presumably in deference to the mortgage company, while the overflow studio is clad entirely in sheet metal. The ceremonial entry into the courtyard is not arched like that of the "House for Sale" by spanning chimneys in the manner of Stratford Hall (Westmoreland County, Virginia, c. 1725), but takes its cue from the wagon entrance to the Sherwood Ranch in Salinas, California, known to Moore from "an old Roger Sturtevant photograph." This portal is customized with a cutout "lintel" supported by triangular brackets – a motif earlier used for the mock tower gates of Kresge College at the University of California, Santa Cruz (MLTW/Moore-Turnbull, 1966–74).<sup>20</sup> The sequential arrangement of rooms in Moore's L-shaped unit is for all intents and purposes a reflected version of the plan of Alvar Aalto's summer house at Muuratasalo, Finland (1952–53). The curve of the conservatory of the "House for Sale" is moved indoors as a small wonderwall, defining the only continuous edge of an abbreviated long gallery and screening it from everything else in the house like an elongated, three-dimensional parenthesis. The other longitudinal edge of the gallery jogs at right angles along the courtyard face of the L, producing a succession of small, double-exposure alcoves in the manner of the Ninomaru of the Nijo Castle (Kyoto, early 17th century), which Moore et al. commend in *The Place of Houses*.

The most striking aspect of Moore's gallery ("as precise in its own way as anything designed by Mies van der Rohe," in Goldberger's estimation) is the procession of armorial "pilasters" lining the wonderwall – trophy cases derived more or less explicitly from the spear-framed, trophy-decked acroteria of Schinkel's second project for the Neue Wache, Berlin (1816).<sup>21</sup> (Moore's napkin

diagram of the Austin premises, felt-tipped for the benefit of Heinrich Klotz, is inscribed "Neue Wache III.")<sup>22</sup> The breastplates of Moore's pilasters, cut from plywood and painted by his students, contain niches for statuettes of Texas heroes, giant kachina dolls, and the like. Above, where Schinkel hangs a helmet, Moore fixes a tribal mask or the stuffed head of a deer or a cow; below, where Schinkel attaches centurion-length armored skirting, Moore experiments with a pattern language of off-loom harlequinades and eyedazzlers; a light bulb and reflector are "ensconced" in each belt holding the strands of the skirt together. Schinkel is also present in the deft alcoving of the (kitchen) corner and the application of reflective surfaces to the lower half of the pilasters, corresponding to the study alcove and mirrored pilasters of Schinkel's redecoration of the Crown Princess Elisabeth's private drawing room in the Königliches Schloss, Berlin (c. 1825).<sup>23</sup>

Moore prized his Austin house as not only somewhat larger (2,300 square feet) but "more comfortable [and] inhabitable than its predecessors."<sup>24</sup> But it is also plainly a house in search of a museum. Discussing the phenomenon of the English long gallery in *The Place of Houses*, Moore et al. wrote that, unlike most rooms, which "are meant to be places to be in, to do something alone or with other people, . . . a long narrow room may generate an unsettling sense of motion."<sup>25</sup> Moore's curving of his own gallery around a compact promontory loft subdivides the space just enough to effect a countervailing stasis without cutting off the flow of the room entirely. "Awash with objects," the gallery of the Austin lodgings fabricates an ancestral illusion of its own, not too far removed from what Moore appreciated as the Soane Museum's "poignant exaltation of the almost trivial."<sup>26</sup> "From earliest youth," he confided to the readers of *House and Garden*,

*I have collected the things that appealed to me: miniature buildings and figures and objects, puppets and cars and ornaments, kachina dolls and pictures – mostly toys. They are souvenirs of places I've been, they form pieces of miniature cities*

*or of little scenes with staggering contrasts of scale. I used to see myself as a pack rat, and only lately has anyone called me a collector. So the next step is to figure out how to insinuate into this house miracles of organization: vitrines, glass-top tables, and new ways to look at little objects made into miniature worlds. If I don't take charge, they will. Or maybe they have.<sup>27</sup>*



Crown Princess Elisabeth's private drawing room, Königliches Schloss, Berlin. Remodeled by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, c. 1825. Watercolor by Eduard Biemann, 1828.

The spell of Moore's concave museyroom and the compound to which it belongs is still, for the time being, unbroken, although the future of the Lazy O, as Goldberger reported, is far from certain. A mortgage balance of approximately \$350,000 remains against the property, which even so could be profitably sold for redevelopment. (Moore had himself wrested the land, with the help of several dozen occupationally litigious residents of Tarrytown, from the clutches of developers who planned to build 17 condominiums there.)<sup>28</sup> Should the property be sold, the contents of Moore's house and studio would be transferred to one of several universities – Yale, UCLA, UC Berkeley, and Michigan (where he studied as an undergraduate) – that have already expressed an interest in establishing a Moore archive. Although Moore's heirs and his Austin partner, Arthur Andersson, wish to avoid such a disposition, the University of Texas has rejected an initial proposal to pay off the mortgage and preserve the compound as a study center and museum complete with guesthouse–caretaker's cottage and the added inducement of Moore's library, slides, drawings, and astonishing collection of "statues, favored objects and especially toys."<sup>29</sup>

The university, with an institutional wisdom all its own, has countered with an offer to simply take the contents of the house and studio and install or otherwise accommodate them on campus in a spe-

cially dedicated gallery "renovated in the style of Charles Moore," which the president of the university, Robert Berdahl, promised would "recapture the personality that's expressed in the house." This, he admitted, would be "hard to replicate. . . . But I truly believe for students it's preferable to have these objects as a resource on campus than in a house two miles away."<sup>30</sup> It must also be admitted that the University of Texas is not inexperienced in such matters, having reconstructed the study of Erle Stanley Gardner and the office of Fleur Cowles, founding editor of *Flair* magazine, in its Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, as well as a 7/8-scale replica of the Oval Office of the White House in the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

Absent a sufficient endowment for the upkeep and operation of the compound (or maybe even with it), the University of Texas seems unlikely to overcome its "reluctance to accept residential property off campus," a reluctance that the University of Chicago somehow managed to overcome in the case of Wright's Robie House, as did the State University of New York at Buffalo with Wright's Martin House and the University of Southern California (in partnership with the city of Pasadena) with Greene and Greene's Gamble House.<sup>31</sup> The Austin chapter of the American Institute of Architects has formed a task force to explore options for saving the property as is and would be amenable to occupying one of the studios as a long-term tenant. The School of Architecture would also be inclined to add to the stream of income by using the smaller house for visiting lecturers and taking additional space to house part of its research program.

In the hope of holding everything together, Moore's cross-country network of collaborators, friends, and admirers has organized the Charles W. Moore Foundation as a vehicle for retiring the mortgage and raising an endowment for operations and maintenance of approximately \$1.5 million, an amount roughly equivalent to the investment needed to

## HELP WANTED!

THE CHARLES W. MOORE FOUNDATION, A CHARITABLE TRUST INCORPORATED IN 1994 IN THE STATE OF TEXAS, IS ACCEPTING CONTRIBUTIONS AND PLEDGES TO RETIRE THE \$350,000 MORTGAGE BALANCE ON THE LAZY O AND TO SET UP AN ENDOWMENT FOR THE PROPERTY'S MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT THE FOUNDATION, 2102 QUARRY ROAD, AUSTIN, TX 78703, (512) 476-5780.



Schinkel, trophy acroterion, Neue Wache, Berlin. Second project, 1816. Pen and ink drawing by Schinkel.

sustain a distinguished professor or half a football coach.

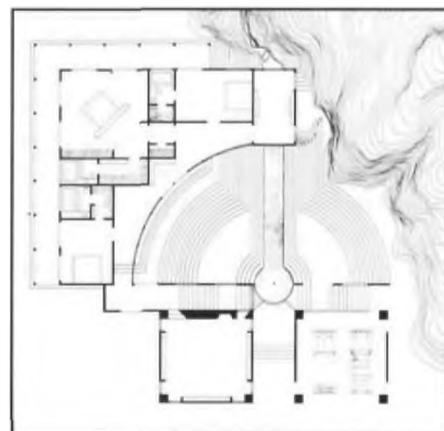
Few architects have had the resources to ensure the survival of such specimen houses as they infrequently make for themselves. Sir John Soane was able, over the objection of his heirs, not only to endow his remarkable warren of rooms in Lincoln's Inn Fields but to have it established by act of Parliament as a national museum (a denouement that does not go unmentioned in *The Place of Houses*); Philip Johnson has been similarly privileged to deed his Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut, to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, along with an ample seven-figure endowment comprising the residue of his estate. But most architects, including the gentle conjurer of the Lazy O, can best be described as fiscally "challenged" rather than "enabled."

The odds against a domicile as erudite and enchanting as the Lazy O falling to earth in Austin, Texas, are exceedingly long – indeed, there is no house remotely comparable anyplace in Texas. But Moore, who so conspicuously ornamented the architecture faculty of the University of Texas while still at the height of his powers, was a realist as much as a fantasist. While he certainly would have been dismayed, neither would he have been completely surprised by the present turn of events, counseling as he did from experience that one does better to trust people, not institutions. If the eyes of Texas are blind to the unique opportunity presented by the Lazy O, perhaps others will point the way. ■

1 Paul Goldberger, "Design Notebook: Trying to Save the Legacy of an Architect Called Home," *New York Times*, 20 October 1994, pp. B1, B4.  
2 *Ibid.*, p. B4.  
(continued on page 48)



Lazy O plan, 1984. (1) Moore house; (2) studio; (3) Andersson house.



Charles Moore, house plan, 1979, from the exhibit *Houses for Sale* at Lea Castelli Gallery, 1980.

The defeat of Houston's comprehensive zoning referendum in fall 1993 dealt a serious blow to the ambitions of the city's Planning and Development Department. By nullifying the extensive work that had gone into preparing the ordinance, voters deprived the planners of the public authority necessary to bring about comprehensive planning and instead left the city with a vast, inchoate collection of poorly coordinated development ordinances. It also left neighborhoods that lacked viable deed restrictions unprotected from intrusive and incompatible development. On the other hand, this setback has given the city another chance to devise an approach that better responds to the needs of a metropolis that is by now a complex matrix of interrelated sprawl rather than a conventionally planned city of large, homogeneous, and easily zoned blocks.

of this issue), sponsored by a nonprofit citizens' group, the Friends of Hermann Park, proposes ways to better organize and expand the park's usable land with suggestions for improved access and parking. Wisely, the master plan's author, landscape architect Laurie Olin, has provided directions for implementing the plan over a number of years as funds become available. But the plan would never have developed if the Friends of Hermann Park had not stepped in to propose an alternative to the Parks and Recreation Department's piecemeal measures, which had failed to maintain or build upon the qualities in the original plan for this historic public park. Now citizens and city departments are working together in a partnership that promises to yield long-overdue improvements.



# H O U S T O N — S T Y L E

THE LOSS OF FAITH IN BOTH OF THE AGENTS OF URBAN SALVATION, CITY GOVERNMENT AND THE DEVELOPER HERO,

HAS ACTIVATED THE CREATIVE ENERGIES OF THE CITIZENS THEMSELVES.

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The impetus for zoning Houston at such a late date came from a grassroots movement of homeowners and neighborhood associations trying to protect their turf through a less tenuous legal framework than that afforded by deed restrictions. The referendum probably failed because the Department of Planning and Development tried to take on too much in too little time, producing a proposal that fell short of expectations and lost the support of many of the people who had originally championed its cause. But this constituency has not gone away. In the wake of the ordinance's defeat, a surprising number of neighborhood associations, business alliances along with other private groups, and government agencies have begun to formulate initiatives for planning within the boundaries of their own districts or interests.

But a look elsewhere in the city shows how unchecked private interests can create chaos. Although discussions of the downtown stadium proposal championed by Houston Oilers owner Bud Adams have been tabled for now, the fact that such a massive redevelopment project got as far as it did points out the shortcomings of the city's ad hoc approach to planning. Besides the dubious value of such a stadium,

the proposal raises other serious issues, foremost among them the impact of the increased volume of traffic pouring onto downtown streets during sports events and the acres of new parking space that would need to be provided.

The long list of projects described by Rives Taylor and Joe Douglas Webb in this issue (page 22) shows how many planning initiatives are focusing on the inner city alone. Their very number suggests deep reservations about the ability of the city government to plan the city, or even whether city government can be a primary, proactive player in guiding Houston's development through the critical years ahead. The mandate to initiate comprehensive, top-down planning with the necessary political tools for its implementation was not given to the city's planning department. At the citywide scale, the planning agenda implicit in the zoning ordinance was too abstract and unwieldy for some and too insensitive to individual property rights for others. But reconfirming these traditional Houston suspicions may have cleared the air of false optimism about just how much zoning can do for a city. And the cool reception and subsequent withdrawal of the

**B R U C E C . W E B B  
& W I L L I A M F . S T E R N**

On the bright side, the recently announced master plan for Hermann Park (reviewed by Barrie Scardino on page 16

downtown stadium proposal – the kind of mega-project that might have captured the public's imagination only a few decades ago – is an indication that Houstonians are not so easily convinced of the civic value of this kind of high-profile project, especially if the cost benefits and potential impacts are not carefully laid out for them. The loss of faith in both of the agents of urban salvation, city government and the developer hero, has activated the creative energies of the citizens themselves, who believe that by joining together around specific interests and pooling their expertise and resources, they can overcome the lack of government initiative and the problem of limited venture capital.

Such a situation does not necessarily negate a role for the Department of Planning and Development, but it does

complex political conjunction of local, county, state, and federal jurisdictions. Rigorous planning is not only imperative but likely to be mandated by higher levels of government; the city's need to develop plans for conforming to new federal air-quality standards is an example. The challenge will be to make such mandates serve as the foundation for creative planning, rather than treating them as obligatory nuisances or bureaucratic problems. As Barry Moore's article on the Houston environmental movement points out (see page 20), consensus building may be easier to achieve in this area than in the messy territory of politically or economically derived land-use regulations.

Planning activity of a second type will result from the efforts of numerous private and quasi-public organizations, each pursuing its own projects in support of its

district could funnel back into the district any new tax revenues associated with rising property values resulting from planned improvements.

Both of these projects raise questions about the degree of control the city will be able to exercise over these privately sponsored initiatives. Particularly with regard to the Uptown developments, the city has set a troublesome precedent by allowing the design of the public environment to be largely privatized, without adequate public review or exploration of better alternatives. Stronger guidelines for planning and review need to be developed beyond the purely financial incentives associated with the special improvement or tax increment financing district if they are to become a primary vehicle for future city redevelopment.

Given proper guidance, aid, and encouragement (and some luck), many of these projects can make a difference, giving shape and substance to the Houston collage. But while each is focused on a specific target, be it a neighborhood, public park, or commercial district, the city is still a complex, interrelated system, and such activities can succeed or fail on the basis of how well they relate to things outside their own immediate cone of vision. Ultimately the city will inherit both the benefits and the problems of these projects. The Planning and Development Department can be a useful partner to these groups and at the same time protect citywide interests. It can help to develop a broader view, coordinating efforts with municipal agencies, and assisting citizen groups in making good use of available expertise. An untested model of how this might work is the plan authored by University of Houston law professor John Mixon and recently advanced by Mayor Lanier that allows neighborhoods to form their own mini zoning districts and work with the planning department to develop regulations and enforce them. This balkanization of planning, however, does not address the edge problems of planned neighborhoods, a concern raised during the zoning debate, nor does it provide ways for dealing with the vast, marginalized areas that would fall between these neighborhoods.

The city's need to repair, augment, and expand its infrastructure is an unglamorous technical necessity, akin to working on the plumbing in a house, yet the infrastructure constitutes the most pervasive (if often hidden) part of the public environment. Most American cities have pushed the infrastructure problem into the background, relying on buildings to create the city's postcard image. But inattention to the quality of our streets, parks, transit systems, drainage systems, and utilities is the ultimate form of urban denial. Houston's failures in this regard are notorious, and efforts to improve the situation will not be helped by short-term solutions or by considering infrastructure to be a

compartmented series of technical problems to be solved. Rather, improvements and expansions of the city's infrastructure should be thought of as opportunities for collaborations between engineers, designers, and planners sensitive to the needs and desires of the city's districts.

Finally, the city needs to respect the advice and opinions of its charter review groups, panels, commissions, and advisory boards. These groups are both broad-based and close to the citizens of the city; frequently they have been impaneled to marshal citizen expertise and use it to direct decisions that will have a direct impact on the quality of the public environment. A case in point is the Municipal Art Commission, a citizen group appointed by the mayor to advise the city on art in public places. But because its recommendations are subject to approval by city council, too often its advice is challenged or disregarded. The city must give the Municipal Art Commission a clearer mandate. In a city lacking zoning, advisory groups can be primary agents for promoting urban order, continuity, and citywide environmental quality.

The buzz word during the zoning debate was something called "Houston-style zoning," which purported to build on Houston's unique identity while avoiding the bureaucratic problems, ineffectiveness, and forced homogeneity that have accompanied zoning in other cities. Unfortunately, the document that was offered to the public last year looked more like old-fashioned, American-style zoning of a couple of generations ago. As numerous commentators have pointed out, Houston is not so different, in outward appearance at least, from other Sun Belt cities; so how much does zoning really affect the physical form of cities? Economic determinism and the typological sameness of modern urban buildings may be far more significant factors than zoning. The difference is the Houston way of doing business, which is to leave city development largely in the hands of the private sector, with few impediments to individual initiative and little normative intervention by government. Having failed to invent a planning instrument custom made for this style of thinking, Houston may have found its own style of planning by default in the spate of projects and initiatives that are filling the vacuum. Whether this is a case of Houston just acting like Houston, or a genuinely fruitful approach to planning, will depend on how effectively the city government can collaborate with its citizen entrepreneurs and citizen planners, and how successfully government and citizens working together can raise planning decisions from the level of special-interest initiatives to real civic-mindedness. ■

## PLANNING

pose challenging questions for planners who would like to treat every city problem within a comprehensive framework and exercise top-down control in making broad projections about land use and development based on the abstract formulations of a highly centralized system. Instead, as Richard Sennett argued in the 1960s in his provocative little book *The Uses of Disorder*, the planning community will need to learn that

*it must take responsibility for its acts in a historical, unpredictable society rather than in a dream world of harmony and predetermined order. Instead of planning for some abstract, urban whole, planners are going to have to work for the concrete parts of the city, the different classes, ethnic groups and races it contains.*

Sennett's admonition is remarkably appropriate to Houston's current situation. But his thesis is also dangerously casual in its understanding of the technology of cities, the problems of infrastructure, and the importance of improving and maintaining the natural environment. His defense of "creative anarchy" as a planning style, while on the one hand potentially more genuinely democratic, may also doom a city to live in a perpetual state of "ad-hocism."

Just how Houston will forge its own planning alliances remains a pressing challenge. Whatever the outcome, several distinct levels of activity will need to be considered.

To begin, a broad set of environmental-quality issues must be addressed on a regional scale, for the protection and preservation of sensitive natural sites and resources are tasks not easily circumscribed by political boundaries. These issues can only be approached within a

own limited objectives. Often these groups are an outgrowth of confrontational politics and seek to redress grievances arising from governmental indifference or the excesses and presumptions of the powerful. But too often they also represent private interests that are hoping to turn a profit while selling their projects as having significant benefits to the city. Still others are put together by or in behalf of identifiable social groups, neighborhoods, or commercial districts using strategies that mimic the advocacy planning of the sixties and seventies.

Seeking to use the leverage of enabling legislation that supports the creation of publically sanctioned improvement districts, various groups have adopted large segments of property within the city and embarked on ambitious plans for their transformation. One of these, the streetscape redevelopment presently under way in the Galleria area (see page 31), will spend \$11 million on an elaborate package of landscaping and improvements (tree planting and burying utility lines) and glitzy decorative hardware designed by Communications Arts of Boulder, Colorado. Intended to affirm the existence of Uptown Houston as an identifiable district rivaling (according to its promoters) Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles or Miami's Miracle Mile, this project, which has proceeded outside the public review process, is being funded by bonds supported by a tax levied on property owners in the district under the aegis of Harris County Improvement District No. 1, created by the Texas Legislature in 1987. Similarly, the Midtown Redevelopment Association, a private development group, has received approval from city council to form a tax increment finance (TIF) district to support its ambitious plans to redevelop 600 acres of property south of downtown. The TIF

BARRIE SCARDINO

DOING THE CITY'S WORK

# Hermann Park Master

HOW PRIVATE

GROUPS GOT

IT DONE



Landscape architect  
Laurie Olin of  
Hanna/Olin, Ltd.,  
Philadelphia.

*The Hermann Park master plan is driven by a desire for equity and justice, for beauty and delight, both in the place, and in each other's company. The renovated park will provide a common ground for people from many varied neighborhoods. It will provide a respite from urban life, a change of air and scene and a chance to reconnect with nature. The Hermann Park envisioned in the master plan will be a large, open, accessible park, verdant with life and nature, generous in*



Proposed wildflower meadow along Brays Bayou.

*the amount of trees, lawn, flowers, water - full of sun and shade and those animals conducive to human pleasure.*

Laurie Olin  
Hanna/Olin, Ltd.



Kessler's Grand Basin expanded with new plantings, islands, and boating.



Proposed Civic Plaza and fountain at southern end of reflecting pool.

# Plan



With the inferiority complex of a younger sibling, Houston likes to compare itself to the older cities of the Northeast. At almost every opportunity, Hermann Park is referred to as "Houston's Central Park," and maybe it is. But can it be more? Frederick Law Olmsted's Manhattan masterpiece is the quintessential American urban park, and Houston's Hermann Park was conceived from the same 19th-century planning principles and landscape ideas. But parks such as these in

Park project with the usual prejudices about Texas. But he found a "collective will and shared vision" in a city where he least expected it. "You don't get it until you go there," he says, and continues, "I don't know another city in America where the mayor is so on the ball. [Mayor Lanier] is very bright and really interested." His surprise at the cooperation and enthusiasm with which his team has been met in Houston elicits a smug "we knew it all along" attitude. But these comments by Olin reveal the reason he was hired and the reason he has been so successful. Not only is he, like Lanier, very bright and really interested, but he has an appealing warmth and a genuine ability to conciliate.

After some thorough research on the history of Houston and Hermann Park, Olin and his associates jumped into a series of meetings with groups interested in the park. As conflicting agendas emerged, Olin took all opinions and options seriously, often reworking again and again some element of the plan. Olin is a good listener, but does he compromise creative solutions to meet the needs of his audience? It seems not. It seems that he understands Hermann Park in the context of Houston instead of New York and Central Park. Olin also knows that the natural and cultural must be interwoven; that his job is not merely to put a new face on Hermann Park, but to knit people and institutions into the environment in a coherent urban relationship.

If Olin was amazed at the level of sophistication and receptiveness he found in Houston, he must have been equally flabbergasted when he took his first look at Hermann Park. As the planning report points out, "Hermann Park has been loved almost to death." What Olin saw

was a parking and traffic nightmare; underplanted grounds compacted by overuse; serious drainage problems that have created, among other things, a successful mosquito-breeding farm; overflowing trash barrels; inadequate facilities and security; and a devastating loss of tree canopy. Over the last 40 or 50 years, the park has grown in usage and declined in acreage.<sup>1</sup> Deferred maintenance and no overall coordination of activities or individual construction projects have seriously compromised the park's potential.

Hanna/Olin's report identifies three main design principles upon which the master plan recommendations rest: reorganization of park circulation; reinforcement of the historic armature of the park; and reforestation of the park.

Relocation and reconfiguration of parking lots is the first order of business for the reorganization of park circulation. Olin proposed an entirely feasible idea to take back the center of the park for recreation and disperse parking areas around the perimeter. Each activity zone — playground, golf course, garden center, zoo, etc. — would end up with parking areas more accessible from the main arteries leading to Hermann Park (Hermann Drive, Fannin, and Almeda) and closer to the user's destination than in the current configuration. The proposed scheme increases the overall number of parking spaces and increases vehicular entry points from 3 to 14.<sup>2</sup> An expanded network of footpaths and trails would be developed in conjunction with the new parking sites, making it possible to enter the park on foot from all sides and walk safely through it. These trails would be enhanced by the addition of pedestrian amenities such as restrooms, water fountains, benches, and concession stands. A



The Great Lawn at the center of the park is Hanna/Olin's simplest, but perhaps best, idea.

third component of the new circulation system is a park trolley or shuttle, which would cut down on vehicular traffic within the park.

Addressing the second design principle, to respect the history and legacy of the park, the plan calls for reinforcing both early landscape plans and the natural features and contours of land and water. Olin sees Kessler's Grand Basin as a central defining feature of the park and believes that it could easily become something "more generous, romantic, and beautiful." Extension of the lake would increase recreational opportunities as well as provide additional sources for irrigation and storm water detention. Often overlooked are the potentially attractive sections of Brays Bayou that are actually part of Hermann Park. Olin believes that a new generation of hydraulic engineers will be able to employ alternative methods of flood control, making it possible and desirable to restore the bayou as a wetland channel like Buffalo Bayou. The master plan embraces this possibility with suggestions of how to reconnect this portion of the park, now cut off by intrusive roadways.

The third design principle, which might have been first in the minds of many, emphasizes the necessity of a comprehensive replanting scheme for all areas of the park. Since the buildings of beloved institutions occupy a good deal of park land, every remaining square inch should look like a park, not a barren wasteland or mall parking lot. As Houston's urban congestion becomes denser, it is imperative for the city to nurture what Barry Moore calls the "great green lungs" at its center.<sup>3</sup> Olin's plan misses no opportunity to make the park greener, with allees and formal gardens, wildflowers and meadows, woodlands and wetlands.

the country were created for trolley and trail traffic, polite picnics, and Easter parades. A nostalgic return to this genteel ambiance is not likely. Furthermore, Houston is not New York City.

The challenge of reclaiming this worn-out public space while respecting the grace with which it was planned and at the same time creating a new place for a new century has been handed to Laurie Olin of Hanna/Olin, Ltd., of Philadelphia. A bit of a romantic, Olin is also realistic about what can be done in Hermann Park. He has made it his business to figure out what Houston stands for, what the city needs, and what it wants.

Olin readily admits that he started the Hermann



Aerial view of Hermann Park and environs, 1994.



Hermann Park master plan, 1994, by Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

Hanna/Olin's master plan for Hermann Park, as of this writing, is in the final stages of development. In addition to handsome maps and watercolor renderings, the text of the plan now encompasses 74 individual projects. Project



Hermann Park has been loved "almost to death."

Hanna/Olin, many components will be completed when funds are available for each project. In other words, money talks, a fact that has, until now, been responsible for the haphazard development of new park elements. With the master plan in



Current state of southern end of reflection pool.

the bottom of the park. Although this solution would eliminate North and South MacGregor where they now enter the park from the east and reestablish North MacGregor as a carriage trail, it has the disadvantage of creating a four-



The oak allees will be strengthened and reinforced.

descriptions include type categories, objectives, prerequisites, scope of work, estimated budget, and estimated contract period. Cleverly, naming opportunities and funding options are also included for many projects. Project types – infrastructure, planting, facilities – are vaguely analogous to the design principles.

The Rice Design Alliance's Heart of the Park design competition, which got the

place, donors may choose which project to fund, but they will not be able to dictate an idea, a site, or a design.

The master plan project descriptions are sufficiently detailed to give a clear image of what can be. For example, the main feature of a new Civic Plaza at the southern edge of the reflection pool is described as "a playful fountain, designed to entice children on hot summer days with jets of water spouting from the pavement at irregular levels. The plaza will be flanked by seating areas under the shade of taller canopy trees, and the edge overlooking the lake [Grand Basin] will be defined by balustrades and steps down towards the water."

When asked how involved he wants to be in the design of such new hardscapes and structures, Olin modestly responded that he would enjoy having a hand in an "odd pavilion here or there," but he would encourage the Parks and Recreation Department to "look for young people." When pressed to name an architect whose vision might coincide with his own, he suggested Santiago Calatrava, a Spaniard whose magical train station in Zurich Olin admires. Olin hopes new structures in the park will become landmarks. Four are called for in the master plan: a new parking garage for the zoo; an interpretive nature center near Brays Bayou; a new golf clubhouse; and a high-flying bridge from Highway 288 over Almeda, creating a grand entrance to the Texas Medical Center.

Early on in the planning process, Olin understood that the medical center is the "giant economic engine that runs the whole area," and without the support of president Richard Weinerdi and its major institutions, no master plan would work. One of the most difficult and most often redesigned segments of the plan involved the connections that would lead employees and patients into and out of the medical center. The compromise that has been hammered out creates a major ramp coming off 288, perhaps over property now occupied by the vacant St. Anthony's hospital (which would be demolished), along a widened Dixie Drive, and across

six-lane highway through part of the park. Olin believes that this section of road could be designed so that it would add interest to the park, bring some order to traffic in the medical center, and unite sections separated from the park by the present location of the MacGregors. However, one wonders why the off ramp could not have been placed a little farther north, out of the park, connecting with Holcombe, which could be rebuilt as a grand boulevard.

A more successful idea is the reconfiguration of the golf course and building of a new clubhouse. Plans call for rehabilitating the charming, but inadequate, 1933 Spanish colonial revival building as an upscale public restaurant. This would work. The 18-hole golf course itself would be redesigned and substantially improved with extensive new plantings; an added advantage is that by moving some of the holes around, the course would no longer cut the park in half.

While the golfers are supportive of improvements to their turf, some garden center users are not so comfortable with change. Plans for the garden center area call for replacing the front-door parking lot with formal gardens. The garden center building, designed in 1938 by William Ward Watkin, is a stately piece of architecture that deserves restoration and a more sympathetic setting. The parking lot, like most of those within the park, might seem necessary and convenient to a few people, but it is truly unsightly and inappropriate. Alternative parking and a new rear entry will work fine, and the Garden Center will become, as it should, an integral part of the park.

The Great Lawn at the center of the park that will replace the vast zoo parking lot is the simplest, most straightforward idea from Hanna/Olin, yet it may be the best. A large, green open space for throwing Frisbees, picnicking on a blanket, and kicking around a ball is sorely needed in Hermann Park. As flat as the park site is, it has no meadow; the only large, open grassy areas are on the slopes around Miller Theater, and these are plagued with drainage problems and overuse.

Below: Proposed grand entrance to Texas Medical Center.



The Great Lawn behind Miller Auditorium will replace the zoo parking lot, returning valuable green space to the park.

ball rolling in 1992, encompassed the backbone of Kessler's original plan for Hermann Park, from the Sam Houston Monument to the Grand Basin, including the oak-lined reflection pool. Hanna/Olin's report reiterates the competition goals – "to unify and anchor the diverse elements of Hermann Park, enhance and strengthen the existing elements of the main axis, create a place to commemorate Houston, and make a relaxing, welcoming environment for all people." Olin makes it clear that these goals remain fundamental to the master plan for the whole park. He also likes to talk about "connectivity," the theme of the winning design.<sup>4</sup> The winning team of Melton Henry/Maurice Robison, Architects Inc.; Peter Brown, Architects/Planners; and Scott Slaney and Steve Harding are working with Hanna/Olin to ensure that their ideas mesh with infrastructure needs. Construction of their modified design for the heart of the park will happen. When it happens depends on fundraising.

Although phasing of some individual projects will be recommended by

Plans for the Miller Theater hill call for two new features – a ramp reaching to the entry of the Museum of Natural Science, and a smaller woodlands theater on the back of the hill.



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Now neglected, Hermann Park has enormous potential for redevelopment.

In today's cities, infrastructure is the key concept redefining urban design. If the roadways and parking lots in Hermann Park are not realigned, Olin's plan is doomed. Likewise, utilities must be upgraded, and drainage and irrigation problems must be solved. Olin's remarkable master plan addresses these needs in thoughtful ways. However, there is no specific proposal to bury electric and telephone wires, which must be done. Another shortcoming of the plan is the lack of any proposal to deal with the west side of the park between Fannin and Main Street, other than recommending a new pedestrian entrance directly connected with the main gate of Rice University. The plan ignores the possibility that this edge could be a graceful continuation of oak-lined Main Street, Rice, and Shadyside. Why not depress Fannin if it must go so boldly through this sensitive area? The pavement and the traffic noise would be mitigated if this busy artery were below grade. San Jacinto, where it splits off from Fannin, should be taken out altogether.

It seems almost blasphemous to criticize a plan with an abundance of genuinely good solutions to a desperate situation. But it seems that Laurie Olin, the realist, stopped short of recommending some of the most visionary and expensive possibilities. Depressing Fannin probably falls into that category. So does recommending extensive land acquisition. The plan does call for adding two small sites at the corner of Hermann Drive and Alameda, but there is vacant land across Hermann Drive that also should be acquired by the city. Likewise, privately owned property near Brays Bayou and even on the other side of Alameda should be in the parks department's sights. Finally, can't we have some fantastic lighting scheme that could transform Hermann Park into a nighttime attraction too? Can't we look to places such as Tivoli Gardens, not just Central Park?

All players admit that lack of project coordination in the past has led to the construction of some unfortunate and unsympathetic elements within the park. The master plan tries to address most of

these in a tactful way. Suggestions for upgrading and enlarging the Grand Basin are good ones, but what about the off-axis aquarium on its shore? Can't it be sufficiently screened, if not razed? The same questions arise with the Cancer Survivor's Plaza on park land between Main and Fannin.

If all, or even most, of the proposals come to pass, Houston will be on its way to a much more wonderful and workable park. Laurie Olin emphasizes that the plan, even after it is published, will keep evolving as implementation goes forward. The Friends of Hermann Park have made it clear that Olin will be retained as a permanent consultant. If he is to do his job, Houston must follow through with a greater degree of commitment and self-confidence than it has shown in the past few decades.

The lost mythic vision and competence with which Houston built a port 50 miles inland and air-conditioned a baseball field may have been found. The renaissance occurring in Hermann Park is an indicator of the city's economic stability and progressive administration as well as a case study in how the community works at its best. ■

1 Hermann Park, dedicated 4 July 1915, once included 535 wooded acres. Through deaccessioning of property and roadway expansion, the park now has only 40<sup>+</sup> acres. For an extensive history of Hermann Park, see Stephen Fox, "Big Park, Little Plans: A History of Hermann Park." *Cite*, Spring 1983, pp. 18-21.

2 The number of peripheral parking spaces will be increased by new lots on the edges of park land and by creative use of existing parking resources such as on-street parking and nearby garages that open onto the park.

3 Barry Moore, "Hermann Park Gets a Little Help From Its Friends," *Houston Life*, 17 April-14 May 1994, pp. 72-75.

4 The Heart of the Park competition was judged by five local jurors and five nationally known jurors; 117 designers submitted entries. The plan is currently being revised by the winners in cooperation with Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

## HOW A COMPETITION SPARKED A PLAN

O. Jack Mitchell died on 18 February 1992. Because he was the longtime dean of the Rice University School of Architecture and an advocate for Hermann Park, it seemed appropriate to memorialize his accomplishments and dreams by doing something for the park. Jay Baker, then president of the Rice Design Alliance, persuaded the RDA board of directors to organize, promote, and finance a national, open competition in honor of Mitchell to redesign the heart of Hermann Park. Representatives from the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Texas Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the South Main Center Association, the Rice School of Architecture, the Friends of Hermann Park, and the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department met weekly throughout the summer of 1992 to produce the Heart of the Park design competition. By involving those with a common link to Jack Mitchell's life, the project from the outset induced a cooperative spirit and sense of commitment.

In the end it was not so much the success of the competition that mattered, but the bringing together of interested groups to discuss the future of the park. The enthusiasm and support for Hermann Park that emerged overwhelmed the competition planners. And the publicity surrounding the Heart of the Park competition also heightened public awareness of the degenerating fabric of Hermann Park.

At the same time, the parks board was planning a new, improved playground; Truett Latimer, director of the Museum of Natural Science, was guiding Houston's most popular attraction (and the fourth most visited museum in the U.S.) toward the 21st century with amazing speed; Jones and Jones of Seattle had been hired to develop a master plan for the zoo; the Japanese Garden was brand new; and plans for refurbishing Miller Theater were on the drawing boards. However, all this activity and interest, essentially by grass-roots organizations and individuals, was not being coordinated in any way.

The Friends of Hermann Park, a new group forged in 1992 from a South Main Center committee and concerned residents of the Warwick Towers, which overlooks the park, was being held together with little more than commitment and determination by a core group headed by Bill

Coats. As a partner of the RDA in the Heart of the Park competition, the Friends of Hermann Park had enough self-confidence (or sheer chutzpah) to promise to take over when the competition ended, raising the \$4 million budgeted for construction of the winning plan. The Friends have been politically astute, involving key players from the city and the private sector. This maneuvering allowed the Friends to do what no other group had been able to accomplish – persuade the city that what Hermann Park really needed was a master plan. The support of Mayor Bob Lanier and his wife, Elyse, has been crucial. The decision to commission a master plan before building Heart of the Park saddled the Friends of Hermann Park with an even greater financial commitment.

In another advantageous move, the Friends hired urban planner Mary Anne Piacentini (former executive director of the Cultural Arts Council of Houston) as its executive director. Piacentini's experience and professionalism catapulted the Friends into a higher echelon that included major Houston foundations. When significant grants were awarded by Houston Endowment Inc. and the Wortham Foundation, the master plan was up and running. A gift from Exxon brought the corporate sector on board. A Friends luncheon honoring Elyse Lanier for her support of Hermann Park brought about 700 politicians, park users, garden club members, designers, and Friends out of the woods. The roots of this new coalition are broad and deep.

Hanna/Olin, Ltd., of Philadelphia was commissioned by the Friends of Hermann Park after a nationwide search to create the new master plan. Three finalists were interviewed extensively, and Laurie Olin's firm was chosen. Having turned this much-expanded project over to professionals eminently equipped to do the right thing for Houston, the community faces one final task: to raise the \$75 million (\$38 million of it traffic and transportation related and thus possibly available from government agencies) to fully implement the plan. ■



Terry Hershey, leading environmental activist and founding member of the Bayou Preservation Association.

"It was amazing," says environmental activist Terry Hershey, "to move here in 1959 and see all the opportunities thrown away in the name of

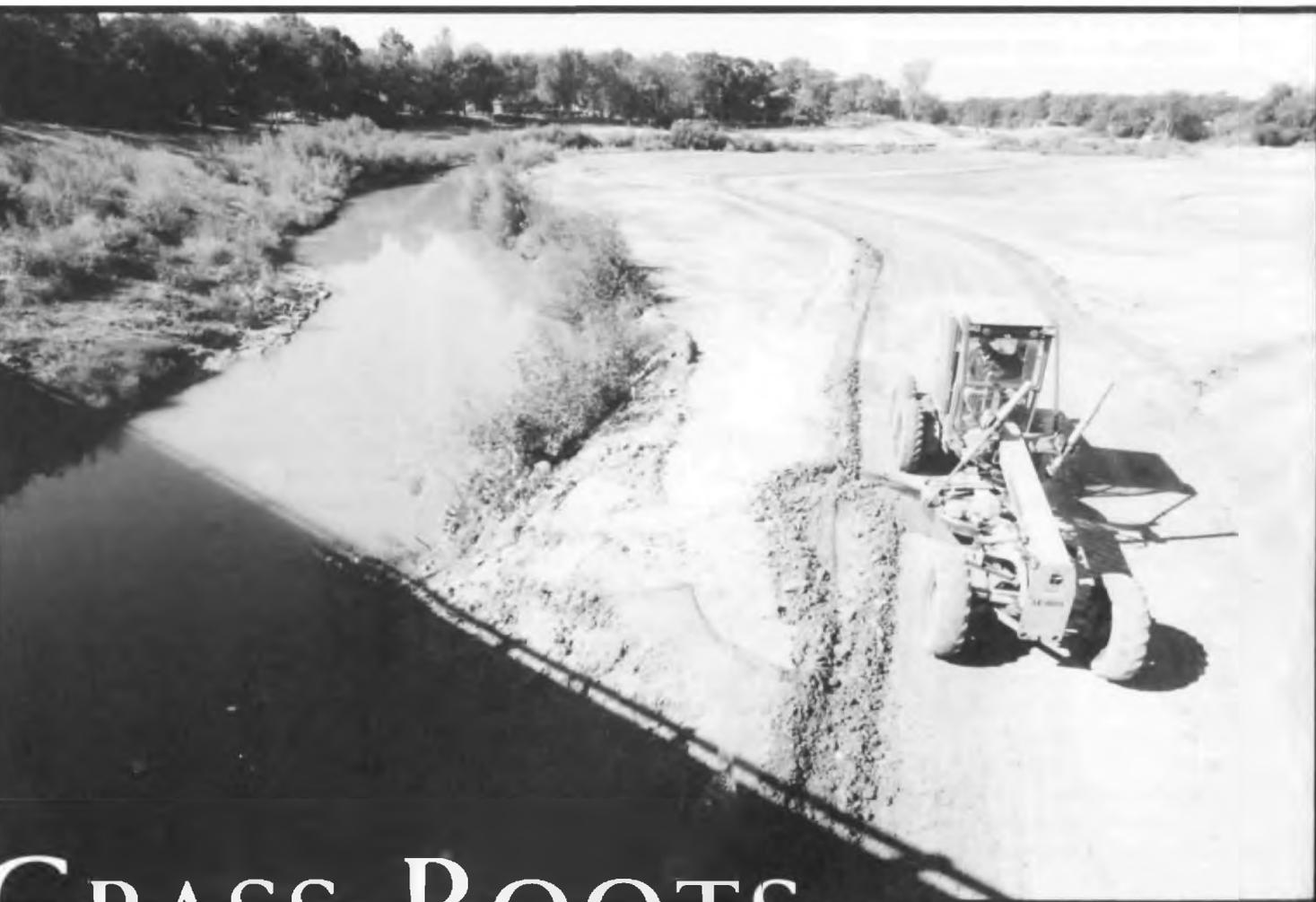
bayou 'channelization.'" That amazement soon turned into the beginning of the environmental movement in Houston, through the energy of Hershey and her friends. Previously, issues of the environment were strictly the domain of Old Guard ladies and their garden clubs, or longtime community activists such as Nina Cullinan and Ima Hogg.

The single event that galvanized Hershey and her friends was learning, in 1966, that the Army Corps of Engineers, with the sponsorship of the Harris County Flood Control District, was planning to "rectify" Buffalo Bayou with a concrete channel from Chimney Rock to downtown – literally in their own back yards. They quickly formed the Buffalo Bayou Preservation Association, in the absence at that time of other conservation groups such as the Sierra Club or the Audubon Society.

Within a year the BBPA had successfully enlisted the help of then congressman George Bush (it was his district) and encouraged him to ask a stunned Corps to stop what they were doing and restudy the entire plan. Besides halting the concrete, the BBPA had for the first time created a public audience for the environment. That original group never lost its momentum, and went on to do battle to save the Houston environment.

Shortly after the Buffalo Bayou victory, the BBPA changed its name to the Bayou Preservation Association and turned its attention to the other waterways in Harris County. Over the years the BPA has reorganized itself by committee to represent each of our major streams: today there are active committees for Buffalo, Sims, Brays, Greens, and White Oak bayous, Cypress Creek, Clear Creek, and Dickinson Bayou. This organization over the years has done an exceptional job of figuring out what is the next best move.

The BPA's accomplishments in 25 years include starting the Harris County Flood Control Task Force (with the assistance



# GRASS-ROOTS ENVIRONMENTALISM

## Houston's Green Movement

of former county judge Bill Elliott), the Buffalo Bayou Mayoral Task Force, and the Houston Waterways Task Force. The organization played a principal role in creating the Park People, the White Oak Bayou Association, and the Buffalo Bayou Coalition. BPA is the strongest advocate for pollution controls on upper Buffalo Bayou and for better management of the reservoir dams. And it is responsible for the adoption of floodplain delineation and erosion control guidelines.

The most recent activity of the Bayou Preservation Association is the Bayou Savings Committee, a land trust that provides for conservation easements for property owners along Houston bayous. One of the earliest successful spinoffs of the BPA was the Armand Bayou Nature Center, Inc. Hanna Ginzburg, a Bellaire resident and bayou activist, successfully rallied support to preserve Middle Bayou (now Armand Bayou); Friendswood Development Company was planning a subdivision in the floodplain surrounding it. With the assistance of Museum of Natural Science curator Armand Yramategui and others, the corporation finally came to the table to discuss donation of the land immediately surrounding the bayou for a nature preserve, since it could not be built upon. During these negotiations, Yramategui was murdered while changing a tire on the new Southwest Freeway. Shortly after his

death, Friendswood president John Turner canned the deal and sat on the land. Energized by the martyrdom of one of its premier ecologists, the BPA started building public support and raising money; in four years the organization had raised \$5 million to buy the preserve from Friendswood, which could not be persuaded to donate the land. Having saved it, the BPA sponsored a brand new organization to direct the development of the natural areas around newly renamed Armand Bayou.

The early seventies saw an impressive array of federal environmental legislation, and the founders of the BPA began to envision a broad and far-reaching Citizens Environmental Coalition (CEC) as a local umbrella organization, strongly backed by downtown business interests, to attract funding to Houston. The original CEC board, composed of Maurice McAshan, George Butler, and Mike Wright, soon discovered that Old Houston corporate and chamber interests had little interest in a movement with the potential for reining in the oil and gas or real estate business. The board did collect enough "go away" money, however, to seed the organization.

The CEC decided to become an organization supported entirely by individuals and organizations, modeled roughly on the League of Women Voters. Its new purpose was simple: to publish a monthly

calendar of what environmental groups were doing, and to publish an annual directory of member groups, of which 103 in Harris County are listed in the 1994 edition. The CEC in addition conducts hearings or symposia in which all sides of an issue are aired, but the organization itself does not take stands. It fills the very necessary role of community clearinghouse and remains today the single most effective organization fulfilling that purpose.

One other seminal event equaled the 1966 Buffalo Bayou victory in terms of community response and spinoff: the creation – a result of a rare cooperative effort between local, state, and national environmental activists – of the Green Ribbon Committee in 1979. Made up of volunteers from environmental organizations and ably assisted by staff from the city and county parks departments, the committee published its final report in 1983. The history of the Green Ribbon Committee actually began in 1978 with the arrival in Houston of Chris Delaporte, President Carter's under secretary of the interior and head of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Delaporte had come to town, literally, to help. Word was out on the federal level that Houston was park poor – some said 117th in city ranking. Delaporte hoped to stimulate community action, which could trigger federal funding.

This construction, along Sims Bayou at Broadway, is part of a 19.3-mile Army Corps of Engineers flood control project. To preserve as much as possible of the natural habitat, the project's design is more environmentally sensitive than the usual channelization treatment, shown below.



© 1997 Paul Hester

Brays Bayou after the Corps of Engineers altered the waterway's natural border with a concrete channel for flood control.

As a result of the federal initiative, County Judge Jon Lindsay and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department signed on in a joint federal-state-county-city effort to develop strategies to achieve a superlative urban park system. The feds contributed office space, the county and city professional staff. The community provided more than 100 volunteers representing every possible environmental interest group.

The Green Ribbon Report, more than anything else, turned Houston into a proactive, parks-conscious community. Its results were astonishing (although by the time of its publication the Reagan-Watt administration had killed the old Land and Water Conservation Fund). Here is what it accomplished:

- For the first time, the city and county produced current inventories of open space and park land.
- For the first time, overlays were developed that combined city, county, subdivision, and private recreational open space.
- For the first time, the city was able to pinpoint the areas that needed parks most.
- And, at last, it focused the attention of a lot of people on the loss and inadequacies of Houston park land.

The Green Ribbon Report's recommendation of major land acquisition for a park-poor city spurred a sleepy Houston Parks Board to urge that a broad-based, pro-park citizens' organization be formed, and the Park People soon organized itself. It suggested that school playgrounds could become park playgrounds with minimal effort, and the SPARK program soon found a willing and effective sponsor in council member Eleanor Tinsley. It suggested that magnet parks such as Hermann should have a development board made up of motivated constituents, and today the Friends of Hermann Park are well on the way to sponsoring a thor-

ough redevelopment of that popular attraction. And the report gave a powerful stimulus to Trees for Houston, which today can claim responsibility for the planting and maintenance of over 20,000 street trees in ten years.

The Houston Parks Board was conceived in fall 1974 by Mayor Fred Hofheinz, City Attorney Jonathan Day, and assistant to the mayor Barbara Dillingham as a conduit for people and businesses to donate and bequeath assets for city parks. They correctly assumed that people would prefer to give to a city-created foundation rather than a political entity. But in its early years, gains were modest and sporadic.

The Green Ribbon Report's effect on this organization cannot be overestimated. An early media campaign, "Give a Park to Houston," attracted national attention, especially its slogan, "Houston - The Fastest Growing Park in the Nation." That campaign was prophetic. Parkland has tripled in ten years, 90 percent of which the parks board can claim. Since 1984, park acreage has grown by over 2,000 acres, and gifts have exceeded \$17 million; in addition, Cullen Park, the formerly unusable land behind Addicks Dam, added another 10,000 acres to the inventory and \$7 million to the development budget. The two biggest chunks of the 2,000-acre total are the 750-acre George Brown Park in northeast Houston and the soon-to-open 750-acre Oyster Creek Park in far southwest Houston.



Park at Travis Elementary in the Houston Heights, one of 76 parks developed through the SPARK ("school park") program, which inexpensively adds to Houston's parks inventory by converting school playgrounds into neighborhood parks open after school hours.

## B A R R Y M O O R E

(Oyster Creek was acquired in part with funds from the first major bequest the board received, \$5 million from the estate of Nina Cullinan.) This lengthy list of acquisitions has put Houston near the top of American cities in terms of park acreage per capita - a radical change in a single decade.

The Park People, Inc., is probably the most popular of environmental organizations, with over 1,300 members. In the view of chairman Bill Bradshaw, the organization has a fivefold purpose:

- To be a watchdog for parks, keeping an eye on the city, the county, and Metro to be sure that parks are inviolate. When the Texas Department of Transportation proposed to widen Loop 610 through Memorial Park, the Park People led the successful opposition.
- To push for park improvements and an increase in maintenance budgets.
- To give park land to the city through the parks board.
- To see that parks are used properly. The Park People led the charge to prohibit mountain bikes in Memorial Park.
- To support the parks director and share ideas and information with his department.

The actual activities of the Park People include a multitude of projects and

programs that emphasize development of badly needed park facilities. The group's past achievements are highlighted by civic enrichments of all kinds: a plant rescue project to move trees from construction sites to parks, events that attract Houstonians to parks, workshops and seminars on many park-related subjects, and the Harris County Tree Registry, which recognizes the largest, the rarest, and the most historic.

Other organizations are out there developing and growing on the environmental horizon, including the Galveston Bay Foundation, founded by environmental lawyer James Blackburn, and the Katy Prairie Land Conservancy, which seeks to preserve wetland habitat west of Houston. It is no coincidence that local environmentalists are becoming increasingly aware and active in the ecologically sensitive regions beyond our political boundaries. It all is, ultimately, connected.

Some of the most dramatic changes in attitude about the environment in the public sector - a result of growing public activism and awareness - are to be found at the Harris County Flood Control District. This agency was created in 1937 after the devastating floods of 1929 and 1935 for the specific purpose of sponsoring, in partnership with the federal government and the Army Corps of Engineers, major flood control projects. Over the years the district has completed projects at Addicks and Barker dams and on Buffalo Bayou (which is wider and deeper than it used to be), White Oak Bayou, Brays Bayou, Sims Bayou, and Clear Creek. Much of the district's work was channelizing in concrete, a solution the Corps seems to have hit upon in 1937.

Now, with \$500 million in approved, Corps-sponsored construction projects ready to go, and another \$1.5 billion under study, the flood control district is the biggest player in town in terms of making an impact on the environment. The district's mission remains what it always was, to sponsor major projects, even though at times one could believe it was to drain land for the benefit of developers instead. ■

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# Projects in the Central City

## Still Looking for the Sum of the Parts

Rives T. Taylor and Joe Douglas Webb

*A surprising variety of groups have begun to recognize that Houston's central city, especially downtown, needs sustained and focused attention leading to a long-overdue comprehensive and strategic plan.*

The idea of coordinating and exercising control over urban change runs against the local business community's belief that autonomous personal property rights supersede all else. But a growing perception that property rights are attended by community responsibility is creating interest in the concept of a central, perhaps quasi-governmental facilitator in private and public development projects. Increasing numbers of downtown stakeholders, who now see the necessity of coordinated efforts to reverse the central business district's slide from economic and cultural preeminence, find themselves trying to sell the importance of downtown itself to an apathetic metropolitan region.

Mayor Bob Lanier has taken the first step in community consensus building with Imagine Houston. It is uncertain whether Houston's leaders understand that this is only the first step, not an end in itself, of a process that should lead to a comprehensive plan for the city as a whole. While Mayor Lanier and just about everyone else at City Hall talk about revitalizing downtown, they have provided few incentives to make that rebirth happen. They have not realized that City Hall's resources can provide the very fabric that binds downtown efforts together. Nowhere is the current uncertainty more clearly manifested than in the continued and disastrous decline of the city's Planning and Development Department.

One need not look very far to find cities where public and private entities have joined to revitalize their downtowns:



Aerial view of downtown Houston, 1989, looking northeast.

Portland, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, St. Louis, Denver, even San Antonio and Dallas. Small or large, these efforts share the common denominator of a broad, public vision and a well-developed implementation plan.

Seeing both the local void and successes in other cities, many groups here are engaging in downtown planning, among them Houston Downtown Management Corporation, Harris County, the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, the city of Houston's agencies

responsible for public safety, the federal government, the state of Texas, the Texas Department of Transportation, the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau, Cullen Center, the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, the Houston Chinatown Council, the institutions of the Theater District, and private developers. These, along with many others, have made downtown the center of their activities, initiating planning efforts intended to contribute part of a complete solution to the problem of downtown revitalization.



Harper Lanier

### Capital Planning

The number and complexity of private, quasi-public, and public entities at work in downtown underscore the need for a coordination of efforts. Founded in 1983 by downtown business leaders, Central Houston, Inc., was the first attempt at quasi-public planning coordination to help the center of the city remain competitive with the rapidly growing "edge cities." A voluntary membership organization, Central Houston was established

as a 501(c)(6) nonprofit membership association seeking to maintain downtown as a real and symbolic focus for the community, a mission summed up in the slogan the group introduced last year, "Downtown - Capital of Houston." Headed by president Robert M. Eury, educated as an architect and urban designer, this 60-member umbrella organization has become a recognized voice for downtown businesses, landowners, and office workers.

A number of focus organizations have formed under the umbrella of Central Houston, Inc., with charters based on specific problems and potentials in downtown. Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc., founded in 1984, has been the vehicle or fiscal agent for such projects as the creation of mounted police patrols, the design competition and implementation for Sesquicentennial Park, the Theater District identity program, holiday decorations, the Main Street Proud campaign, and the Hermann Square beautification in front of City Hall. Similarly, the Houston Downtown Management Corporation (HDMC) was founded and authorized by city council in 1990 to operate the Houston Downtown Public Improvement District. Set up as a 501(c)(3) public nonprofit Section 115 corporation, the 30-member HDMC board represents property owners in seeking improvements in the downtown district. To support HDMC's five-year plan and daily operations, an assessment of 6 cents per \$100 land value was levied in 1991 on 705 acres of downtown property. The board quickly adopted policy goals for increasing the public's attraction to downtown. HDMC has been responsible for improved public safety, street and sidewalk beautification, cleanup, and maintenance, and general identity and signage campaigns. Contracting with numerous local design firms, director Guy Hagstette, an architect and urban planner, has combined his own team's knowledge with community vision in major development projects, the formulation of a series of neighborhood plans, and collaborations with Metro's massive street improvement projects. HDMC, which to a degree is independent of Central Houston and is staffed under contract with Central Houston, has no real sanctioned power beyond the force of its vision and its strength as the advocate of landowners' interests. It has been a catalyst for public discussion and partnerships but cannot force issues to a resolution. This role is usually performed by a city's planning department, but in Houston this has rarely been the case.

Another active participant in downtown's future is St. Joseph Hospital. This charitable institution, Houston's oldest hospital and with a staff of more than 2,500, is a major landowner; its 11 full blocks and 3 to 4 partial blocks lie not just in the vicinity of the primary complex but throughout the downtown area. The hospital has recently begun the process of reevaluating its physical facilities in relation to health care reform and changes in medical technology and service delivery. Emphasizing its commitment to stay in its present location, St. Joseph wants to encourage housing downtown for both staff and patients. It is exploring the possibility of creating a buffer along the Pierce Elevated (I-45) and developing a campus precinct that would be an integral part of a rejuvenated downtown district.

Preservation of the downtown environment, often initiated or assisted by the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, drives a number of visible planning efforts. These often face public apathy or the kind of outright opposition provoked recently by the attempt to get the city to adopt a preservation ordinance independent of a zoning code (see page 49). The effectiveness of this effort remains to be seen. Currently, downtown preservation efforts are centered on rehabilitating existing commercial buildings into new residential enclaves, among them the Hogg Building, the W. L. Foley Dry Goods Co. Building, and the old Union National Bank Building, in or near the Main Street-Market Square Historic District. The Houston National Bank Building may become a mosque under Houston Rockets superstar Hakeem Olajuwon's stewardship. With mixed success, the Market Square Alliance has tried to preserve the fabric of this historic square while helping sympathetic commercial and residential initiatives on a shoestring budget. Harris County has started rehabilitation of the First National Bank Building for a new courts and administrative facility, and Houston City Council member Lloyd Kelley and Mayor Lanier have announced the funding of design work on the redevelopment and rehabilitation of Allen's Landing. Farther south, at 1200 Travis, the city is preparing to purchase the 1967 Houston Natural Gas Building, which will become the new headquarters for the Houston Police Department.

The Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau is the quasi-public group with the greatest potential for effecting immediate major facilities development downtown. Its pending (if not overdue) decision on the development team and location for a new convention center hotel will have significant impact on the city's ability to attract future conventions and special events. The decision will also lay the groundwork for a proposed convention center expansion, with the possibility of an adjacent sports arena. The group's commitment to downtown was affirmed when it relocated its offices to the Market Square area in 1993.

### Metro and Inner-City Mobility

The vital issue of urban mobility faces an even more diverse cast of competing players. Beyond the oversight and funding of the federal Department of Transportation, the regional and marginally independent Metro organization works with a shifting number of city departments, including Public Works and Engineering. Add to this coordination challenge any number of utility concerns, such as city sewers, Houston Lighting & Power lines, Bell/AT&T lines, or Entex mains, that can be encountered when roadways are reconstructed. The challenge is multiplied by Metro's dealings with private landowners, the myriad local jurisdictions beyond the

**1 Federal Empowerment Zone**

The city submitted its application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development in June to become the site of one of the first of six "empowerment zones" nationwide. The project area includes downtown, the Port of Houston, and portions of each of the original six wards and the East End. The award includes \$100 million in federal social service funds, along with other benefits, and up to \$3,000 in tax credits to businesses for every new job offered to a resident of the area.

**2 Main Street-Market Square Historic District**

In Houston's oldest entertainment area, Market Square property owners and retailers have shifted their emphasis from survival to redevelopment through formation of the Market Square Economic Development Corporation. Bright spots include new brewpubs and cafes and a New York-based restaurant looking at the Stegman



Building (Main at Prairie). The State National Bank Building has reopened, and the Kiam Building has undergone

new rehabilitation. Proposed Metro service improvements and special events should make Market Square a major center of after-hours activity. Improving the identification of the historic district's physical boundaries has been one of the Houston Downtown Management Corporation's recent accomplishments.

**3 Theater District Wayfinding**

A team from HDMC and Gensler & Associates

Architects has begun to tackle the difficult problem of making the Theater District-Civic Center labyrinth of tunnels and underground parking garages comprehensible



This design effort by Gensler will organize both the tunnel and street levels

**4 Wayfinding and Environmental Graphics Strategy**

An HDMC initiative to provide a consistent graphic image and place markers along routes from welcoming gateways at freeway exits to primary and secondary destinations identified by downtown users themselves.



**5 Albert Thomas Transformation**

The Albert Thomas Convention Center, now being called Bayou Place, will be converted in two phases into what is touted as the largest entertainment facility under one roof in the country. The developer, David Cordish, recently applied for permits for interior and exterior remodeling. One rumored use for the second, western half of the facility: a casino. Construction was slated to begin by the end of 1994 and be complete in approximately 18 months. More than \$50 million will be spent beyond the cost of abatement and other preparatory work paid for by the city.

**6 Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall Site Amphitheater and Casino**

Maxxam, Inc., is continuing lease negotiations with the city for immediate construction of an amphitheater that could be followed by development of a grand casino and hotel - if casinos are legalized by the state. Maxxam would be responsible for demolishing the Coliseum and constructing both of the proposed facilities. With casino legalization, the project could reach \$300 million.

**7 University of Houston Downtown**

Two new buildings are in the immediate future: the eight-story Academic/Student Life Building, containing classrooms and physical plant and located along Buffalo Bayou, and a recreational building to the north.

Value of the first building is approximately \$22.5 million. Future development includes skywalks crossing the bayou to two additional new buildings on Main Street south of the bayou.

**8 South Texas College of Law Library**

Hoover Architects has completed the schematic design of a new library the size of a city block for the downtown law school, to complement its existing building east of Main Street.

Construction is anticipated for 1995-96, contingent on the success of fundraising, with a goal of \$25 million.

**9 St. Joseph Hospital**

Encompassing more than five city blocks (and owning at least three times that many downtown), the campus has led the way in using vacant space under the Pierce Elevated Freeway for parking

**10 Houston Industries Plaza at 1111 Louisiana (now 1100 Milam)**

Houston Lighting & Power's parent company is relocating its headquarters to a 23-year-old, 47-story building with 1.4 million net rentable square feet that is receiving five new floors of communications facilities at its crown, new skin treatments on the main shaft, and a fully reconstructed interior. With removal of the building's sloped glass skirt and reconstruction at the ground floor, HL&P will give back to the city an

expanded street-level plaza. Keating Mann Jernigan Rottet of Los Angeles is handling the reconstruction, with Ziegler Cooper, Inc., and Lehman Smith Wiseman directing interior architecture. HL&P will also set an energy conservation example with its cool-storage (ice or water) systems. An ambitious schedule calls for the company's Greenway Plaza divisions to move in during July and August 1995 and the remainder in spring 1996. Construction costs are approximately \$100 million.

**11 City Hall Rehabilitation**

Ray Bailey Architects with MAS & Associates and D. Y. Davis Associates have led the complex revisions to address safety issues as well as plaza reconstruction at the City Hall complex. The archi-



tectural rehabilitation of the main lobby, council chambers, and the mayor's office and chambers is awaiting

final approvals. The City Hall Annex has been completely overhauled and temporarily houses council chambers and the offices of council members, the mayor, the controller, and other officials from City Hall until the rehabilitation is completed. The cost is in the \$11 million range.

**12 City of Houston Public Safety Facility Assessment**

Approximately two million square feet of space is being reviewed for current, long-term, and alternative uses. Gensler & Associates Architects with John S. Chase, F.A.I.A., Architect aims to house city departments in city-owned buildings and consolidate the Houston Police Department in a central building.

**13 New Houston Police Department Headquarters**

City council recently discussed purchasing the 26-story Houston Natural Gas Building at 1200 Travis to consolidate HPD's operations



**14 The Rice Hotel**

During July, the Rice Hotel was sold to Christian Wolfer of Euro Investors Property, Inc., an out-of-town developer who may rehabilitate or sell to another developer. While several developers, notably Morgan Hill, have put considerable effort into reviving the hotel, its future is very uncertain even after years of design studies. Among those looking into its rehabilitation are Jim McIngvale and an unnamed partner, whose \$17 or \$18 million offer was rebuffed.

Estimates for redevelopment have ranged from \$50 million to \$85 million. The October rains caused the entertainment floor's roof to collapse.

**15 The New Convention Center Hotel**

The proposed hotel, pursued by two developer and design teams, has been under review by the city and its financial advisers since last spring. With a \$150 million total project cost, this 1,200-room building could provide a competitive advantage to the downtown convention center. The request for proposals stipulates that the hotel be within 1,500 feet of the convention center.

**16 Convention Center Expansion**

The original design concept and master plan provided for expansion of both the north and the south ends of the center, doubling its current size and with the potential for more.

**17 The Biggest Game in Town?**

Bud Adams and the Dome's supporters have proposed a flexible \$245 million project to house a 71,000-seat football stadium and a 24,000-seat basketball and hockey arena designed by HOK Sport of St. Louis. Supporters claim that the vast public-private expense would be offset by future downtown economic benefits. The proposal is currently on the shelf.

**18 Sam Houston Park**

With the recent addition of the Yates Homestead to the seven existing historic houses and one church, three sites remain for the Heritage Society's expanding collection of uprooted Houston history. Efforts continue to provide site improvements and enhanced museum facilities.

**19 Sheraton-Lincoln Hotel**

Slated for transformation into 350 luxury apartments by 711 Polk Street Associates Ltd., led by Neal Zaniboni of Los Angeles. The building will include commercial uses on the four bottom floors. Estimated renovation cost is between \$25 and \$30 million.

**20 Dakota Lofts**

Recently completed and fully occupied, developer Randall Davis's first adventure into the downtown housing market is a rousing success.

**21 Houston Studios**

Currently Houston's largest sound and film stage, used in several feature-length films. Developer Milton Howe's proposal calls for an expanded complex containing the existing film facilities attached to existing production company offices and loft apartments.

**22 W. L. Foley Dry Goods Co. Building**

Recently sold, the building will be converted to art galleries on the ground floor and residences above by a group that includes Jamie Mize, Dan Tidwell, Minette Boesel, Guy Hagstette, and Doug Lawing.



**23 Hogg Building Lofts**

Remodeling will create 85 new residential units. Will be developed by Randall Davis, January to March 1995.



**24 Union National Bank Building**

This 12-story building, capable of conversion into as many as 80 loft units, attracted the attention of Camden Property Trust last year, now another organization may be looking at the property.

**25 Houston National Bank Building Rehabilitation**

Hakeem Olayuwon has bought the Houston National Bank Building (also known as the Franklin Bank) and its parking lot, perhaps for a downtown mosque.



The Rockets' star center has also taken a ground lease on the Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks Building.

**26 New Hope Housing**

A single-room-occupancy residential building located at Preston and Hamilton, this is an outgrowth of Christ Church Cathedral's street mission program. Designed by Jackson & Ryan Architects, the three-phased project will ultimately result in 150 rooms with private baths and minimal cooking facilities. Common kitchen facilities will be provided. First-phase groundbreaking took place in September 1994 for 43 rooms, slated to cost \$1 million. Rents are anticipated to be \$250 per month, and the residence will have both female and male occupants.



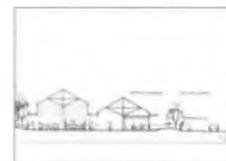
**27 SRO Hotel at 1414 Congress Avenue**

The Houston Area Community Development Corporation, affiliated with Advocates for Housing, has purchased an existing 1920s three-story hotel at 1414 Congress and plans to provide 57 SRO units in the three floors. HACDC is awaiting final approvals from HUD for the rent supplements program and from the Texas Historical Commission (to ensure that the proposed renovations do not destroy historically significant features of the hotel) for construction to commence. Total value approximately \$1.9 million.



**28 Homeless Gateway Pavilion**

HDMC is proposing an open-air pavilion encompassing an entire city block in the northeast corner of downtown that will accommodate 300 homeless men and 100





women in separate areas. Designed by Rey de la Reza AIA Architects, the structure will consist of permanent umbrella-type structures with changeable canvas roofs on a grid system. A removable canvas partition system will subdivide spaces, on a slab with integral heating coils. There will be separate modular pavilions for sleeping, eating, laundry, and toilets. Controlled entrances are set within a perimeter of low fencing for security combined with berms and landscaping. Counseling and health care will be provided. Estimated cost: \$1.2 million.

**29 East End Buffalo Bayou Segment**

A consortium of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership and the East End Area Chamber of Commerce has called for a greenbelt linking existing parks along Buffalo, White Oak, and Brays bayous. Funds have been secured for phased implementation of hike-and-bike trails from Allen's Landing to the ship channel's turning basin, resulting in a green corridor that would link the Harrisburg and Navigation neighborhoods and provide a catalyst for neighborhood renewal.

**30 Museums in the East End Segment of Buffalo Bayou**

Development of sites along Buffalo Bayou will highlight the multiple lives of the waterway by rehabilitation of existing industrial and commercial buildings: a technology museum in the Willow Street pump station, an energy museum in the Gable Street power plant, a Hispanic arts center near El Mercado del Sol; a railroad museum in the Velasco Street incinerator complex, and a nautical museum in the Long Reach docks.



**31 White Oak Bayou Improvements Into Allen's Landing**

Already completed are waterway edges and hike-and-bike trails linking the existing White Oak Bayou trails (up to Houston Avenue) into downtown to the UH-Downtown campus (by Charles Tapley of Tapley Associates Architects and Pate Engineers), to Allen's Landing, and to the adjacent Willow Street pump station. The project was completed by the county and the Harris County Flood Control District in spring 1994.



**32 Allen's Landing and Main Street Viaduct**

In early September, at Councilman Lloyd Kelley's request, the mayor's office proposed spending \$400,000 for design and feasibility studies for the rehabilitation of this historic precinct, part of the Main Street-Market Square Historic District. Potential projects range from a minimal \$750,000 for restoration to over \$8 million for tourist destination attractions. Joint public and private funding is anticipated.



**33 McKee Street Bridge and James Bute Park**

The perseverance of private citizens and a motivated grass-roots alliance made possible the preservation of the McKee Street Bridge and the purchase and creation of the adjacent park site.



**34 Sesquicentennial Park, Phase 2**

This Harris County Flood Control District and Houston Parks and Recreation Department project tackles both



flood control (\$5.6 million) and park improvements (\$4 million) on 9.5 acres behind the Wortham Theater. Supported by private funding, the design, led by Team Hou and landscape designer Lauren Griffith, includes an amphitheater and continuation of the bayou's hike-and-bike trails. Completion is slated for next summer.

**35 Linear Park for Midtown Area**

A spinoff from work done for the HDMC by a team led by Kevin Shanley of the SWA Group, this design exercise calls for connecting Buffalo Bayou at the McKee Street Bridge and Bute Park in northeastern downtown to Hermann Park and Brays Bayou to the south by means of a winding linear park. The park would envelop a grand boulevard extending the Alameda axis through downtown, linking future residential and low-scale commercial neighborhoods.

**36 The County's "Campus" and New Courts Building**

Tentatively located on San Jacinto near the county courthouses, this vast new courts complex will be a mixed-use development with more than 40 courtrooms, jail cells, and support spaces in one block. Commissioners court has also acquired the First National Bank (Lomas & Nettleton) Building and plans a \$43 million rehabilitation to house the law library, county clerk's office, and support functions, with a new, multistory office tower and garage appended to its southern side.

**37 Peden Community Correction Facility**

Scheduled for completion in March 1995, this project extends the county's system across the bayou with a midrise 360-bed women's supervised probation facility inside the 1930s Peden Iron & Steel Co. Building at 600 North San Jacinto and Baker Street. At the end of Baker Street, Community Correction Facilities Nos. 4 and 5,



developed by North Village (Cedar Street Corporation) and opened last year, house more than 1,100 male inmates on supervised probation.

**38 State Jail on Top Street**

This 667-bed medium-security prison, also developed by North Village (Bayou City 2 Limited Partnership), is scheduled for completion in January 1995.

**39 The Federal Detention Complex**

Hoover Architects will design this midrise or highrise tower for more than 500 inmates. The Federal Bureau of Prisons has selected a site adjacent to Christ Church Cathedral. The drive to locate the jail downtown was motivated by the need for it to be close to the federal courts.

**40 Midtown Redevelopment Association**

An example of private initiative and vision that needs to seek public support on a huge scale, the volunteer Midtown Redevelopment Association approached city council for a tax increment finance district to rehabilitate the 600-acre Midtown area and received approval in early November. A 25-year plan projects an investment of several hundred million dollars in midrise commercial and residential blocks. The first phase will develop the northwest quadrant, which stretches east-west from Bagby and Main and north-south from I-45 to Westheimer-Elgin.

**41 Allen Parkway Village**

The village residents' council is attempting to secure \$300,000 for a study of the now largely abandoned complex. Future planning is based on the notion of a community campus—a combination of sustainable housing projects and an educational and vocational campus for the community. With the promised but pending funding and with support from Henry Cisneros at HUD, the residents' council hopes to hire consultants to plan this concept and tackle the contentious issue of how many units will be rehabilitated.

**42 Fourth Ward/Freedmantown**

The Freedmen's Town Association successfully petitioned city council for \$805,000 to begin the rehabilitation of the Freedmen Town Historic District, with an Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act grant

as source for \$644,000 of the funding. The plan calls for a people mover in the form of a rubber-wheeled trolley—to emulate the electric trolleys here at the turn of the century—that will link the historic district bounded by West Dallas, Wilson, and Andrews streets with downtown. Targeted improvements include repairing the brick roadway on Andrews and Wilson, rebuilding sidewalks, reopening small commercial ventures along the trolley route, and supporting other neighborhood businesses, all consistent with the association's overall effort to recharge the area's residential and commercial mix by luring tourist dollars.

**43 Chinatown**

Chinatown Architects (Peter Brown, Sye Tatar, and R&T Architects) and the Houston Chinatown Council are planning the community development of low-scale



residential blocks, senior citizen housing in existing warehouse space, and a two-story open-air farmers' market between Chartres and St Emanuel. The group hopes to apply for a tax increment finance district designation.

**44 Metro Downtown Transit Streets Program**

By far the most all-encompassing downtown effort, Metro's plans call for \$130 million in construction for downtown and less-involved Midtown transit street improvements to both carriageways and sidewalk environments, including new bus shelters and street trees. A number of north-south streets from Smith to San Jacinto and three east-west pairs (Congress-Preston, Lamar-McKinney, and Jefferson-Calhoun) will have modifications in their roadways in order to widen sidewalks, primarily on the transit side.

**45 Metro Light Rail Link to the Texas Medical Center**

Metro says thinking is too premature to define either the applicable transit technology or the service route. The medical center is working on the planning of its own internal transit circulator, potentially tied into the Metro line.

**46 Downtown Circulator**

This past summer, Galveston developer George Mitchell resurrected the 1970s call for a light-rail circulator system for downtown, ostensibly connecting the scattered downtown transit ridership with Union Station, in northeastern downtown, and its potential commuter rail connections to the south. Unfortunately, the notion quickly disappeared from discussion.

**47 Metro North and South Transfer Stations**

Schematic design is under way on a southern transit center in the vicinity of the Pierce Elevated (I-45). Rey de la Reza AIA Architects' one- or two-block schemes accommodate the technically complex bus operations and the need for secure waiting areas. All of the schemes feature enclosed waiting areas with some retail, are tied into the sidewalk pedestrian system, and can accommodate a future light-rail system. Work on the northern complex is pending.



**48 Metro Buffalo Bayou Facility**

On the northeast side of downtown (NoHo) between North San Jacinto and McKee is a staging area for buses, the former Southern Pacific freight-transfer yard, now surrounded by jails. Metro has promised to turn the second floor into a transportation museum that will plug into the Buffalo Bayou East Sector-Heritage Corridor redevelopment.

**49 CBD Transfer Station (Block 139)**

Unique in tying the street-level pedestrian and transit system with the ever-growing tunnel system, this project is for a block bounded by Lamar, McKinney, Main, and Travis. Designed not as a Metro project but rather as part of HDMC's master planning by Zimmer Gunsul



Frasca and Elbasani Logan, firms with worldwide experience in transportation and infrastructure planning, it uses a phased approach to develop not only the

connector between surface and subsurface life, but also the knuckle of the two major cross axes of downtown. In the first phase, the block becomes a green space with a transit plaza accommodating on-street bus dropoff connections to the underground. Some retail would play off the green space. In the later phases, as the transit system and the downtown real estate market pick up steam, the mixed-use facility would grow in density and height, using lease revenue to pay for increased civic amenities and possibly subsidizing certain retail activities. This creative and atypical Houston approach comes from designers who see the potential of coordinated physical and economic planning.

**50 Freeway Ramps and Interchanges**

The redesign of the Elysian Viaduct—Maury Expressway to extend the Hardy Toll Road from Loop 610 into downtown, as well as the ongoing design of new northbound and southbound ramps to U.S. 59 and the complete redesign of the I-10/U.S. 59 interchange, all Texas Department of Transportation undertakings, are proceeding at very different paces. Interchange and ramp designs are in the schematics and design-development phases. Construction for the Elysian Viaduct improvement was to begin this decade, but the effort is sliding for want of negotiation and coordination between the state, the city, and Metro.

**51 U.S. 59 (South Shepherd to Spur 527) Redesign and HOV**

The final leg of the southern "better bus" service approach to downtown on U.S. 59 will deal with the stretch from Greenbriar to Spur 527 that leads to downtown. The scheme calls for two central HOV lanes towering above a rejuvenated elevated 12-lane freeway. Metro consultants have been challenged by their client to package and sell this behemoth to skeptical residential neighborhoods.

**52 Making Main Street Happen, Inc.**

A group of planners and civic thinkers, organized by Houston Life's Mark Inabnit, leading proponent of the "livable city" effort, are focusing attention on the possibilities of a two-block corridor along Main Street between the Pierce Elevated (I-45) and the Mecom Fountain. A separate 501(c)(3) organization from the Midtown Redevelopment Association, its preliminary architectural symbol is a Texas version of the Eiffel Tower astride Main. This group's notions of an international commerce and consulate sector have made headway at City Hall and have gained some popular support.

city of Houston, and the needs and desires of the transit customers themselves.

As the most all-encompassing planning effort in the region, Metro's \$178 million transit streets improvement program (\$130 million in construction costs) in downtown and Midtown illustrates some of the problems of planning and implementation coordination. Having selected the "better bus" mobility paradigm for mass transit for the 1990s, Metro set about in the late 1980s to remake downtown as the hub from which spokes radiate to form a regional system. Metro's planners faced two operational challenges: first, to accommodate the successful park-and-ride, long-haul buses that cater primarily to affluent suburban riders going to work downtown via the ever-increasing HOV lanes and grade-separated viaducts; second, to accommodate crosstown bus transfers and interconnections to other radiating routes, which often means catering to a much less well heeled clientele. An initial concept called for the creation of a \$100 million Main Street mall, closing Main in most of downtown to all but bus traffic and using it as a major destination and crosstown transfer point. By eliminating the "obstruction" of other vehicular traffic and minimizing turns by creating a single straight-through operation downtown, Metro sought to improve operational efficiencies. Also, a densely populated pedestrian bus transit mall, with sidewalks widened to attract pedestrians, was seen as an impetus for commercial revitalization on the inactive parts of Main – an idea that has dubious precedent, since experience with mall concepts elsewhere has shown that commercial stretches completely separated from the private automobile and spontaneous drop-by and easy parking rarely survive. Further complicating the plan was the logistical issue of transporting the park-and-ride bus customers from the Main Street mall to their scattered final destinations. Metro proposed a separate system of people movers or shuttles, but this would require bus transfers, which often diminish ridership. Houston commuters want to leave their cars, get on the bus, and be delivered within two blocks of their offices, according to Metro. As soon as rumors of the Main Street mall hit the press, seemingly the entire Houston community, including the HDMC representing its landowner members, began to voice serious objections.

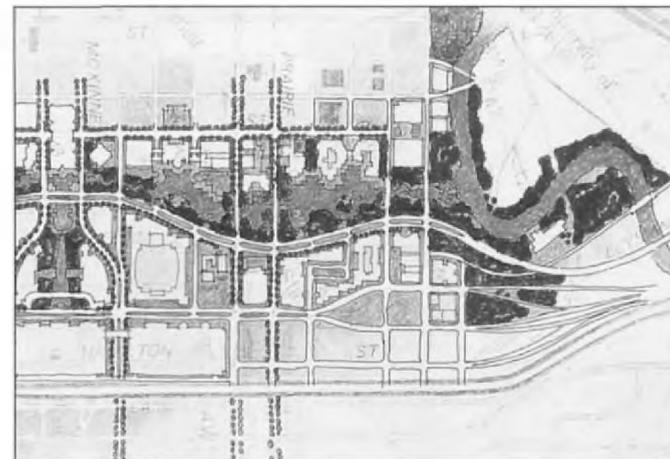
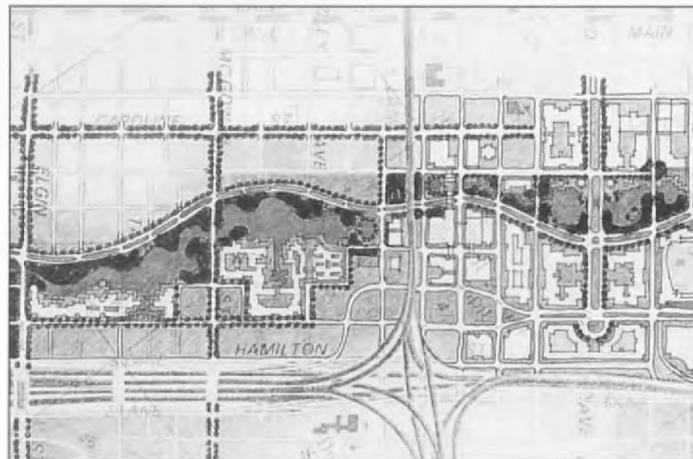
Another kink emerged quickly in Metro's early deliberations. Already facing a polarized user population downtown (office workers use the tunnels, and the population that is not part of the corporate world uses the streets), Metro planners concluded that suburban commuters could not be mixed with the crosstown transfers if ridership were to be maintained. Additionally, store owners around the bus stops used for transfers complained about the huge numbers of bus riders waiting to transfer to connecting buses, and their bothersome habits. These concerns led Metro to the conclusion that separate, secure, and remote transit centers would be the best solution downtown. This would also keep the slower and more numerous crosstown buses from interfering with the operations of the faster, sleeker park-and-ride buses. The Metro planners amended the Main Street mall concept to include a north and south transfer center at either

potential for "another Richmond Avenue," where Metro's intervention actually killed businesses.

What came next was a multiplicity of duplicated and often tenuously coordinated planning efforts on the part of the city of Houston (through its individual departments), Metro, and the Houston Downtown Management Corporation. While the Metro board agreed to wait through fall 1992 and spring 1993 for further studies of the downtown transit concept, HDMC advertised for its own designers and selected a team led by the SWA Group, Rey de la Reza AIA Architects, nationally known transit planners Elbasani Logan Architects and Zimmer Gunsul Frasca, the urban marketing collaborative Lestin Dwyer Williams, and the economic development strategies panels of the International Downtown Association. The team was augmented by economists, retail experts,

the first place. Federal funding for the project fluctuated because of political and technological preconceptions, adding to the uncertainty of the planning direction. HDMC's team was and remains interested in the broader revitalization of downtown, with the transit street improvement efforts as the major catalyst; they hope to increase street parking (rather than eliminate it), improve neighborhood signage and wayfinding in the district, and improve the quality and safety of the pedestrian environment, including widening sidewalks. Both efforts rapidly came to the same conclusion: the Main Street mall concept was dead.

Over a period of months stretching into years, the two groups met informally and formally. They struggled to bring together the diverse constituency and urban service information necessary to make the plan work. Metro, with stipulated approval by HDMC, has come to



Thinking big, Kevin Shanley, landscape architect and urban designer with the SWA Group in Houston, produced this extensive plan for a linear park linking downtown to Hermann Park. Described in *Houston Life* (August 21–September 17, 1994) as "still a fantasy in the minds of urban planners," the scheme would unify many separate redevelopment target areas by providing a natural edge for projects in the Binz, Midtown, and downtown. Since its appearance a short time ago as a monthly magazine insert to *The Houston Post*, *Houston Life* has given space to several similar proposals by local architects and designers, seeking to establish a place for itself as purveyor of a City Pretty movement.

end of the downtown segment of Main Street. (This concept remains viable today; the southern transfer center is more likely to be built.)

The Main Street mall concept had reached the environmental impact statement stage before representatives of Central Houston, Inc., and Houston Downtown Management Corporation, the local design community, and the city got involved in what to this point had been exclusively a Metro show. HDMC moved to open the proceedings to public discussion, and, following widespread debate at the official release of the Main Street mall concept, the downtown stakeholders condemned the project, seeing the

and other downtown planning specialists who could provide a basis for understanding issues in other than transit terms. Meanwhile, Metro selected its own team, led locally by Pierce Goodwin Alexander & Linville. The two groups and their clients came at the problem from opposite directions, representing their different service concepts. Metro saw the design as a means of ensuring ridership through speed and ease of service as well as optimal economics of operation – a problem of adequate but effective pickup and drop-off spots and bus motion. Metro was also constantly challenged by the federal government's transit authorities, who questioned the efficacy of a bus mass transit system in

embrace the idea of dedicated transit streets that crisscross downtown, both north-south and east-west, providing service more effectively while not overloading any one street or removing private vehicles. The Metro planning process has established design standards for both civil engineering and urban design, while the design of transit shelters, signage, and other street furniture has come about through an often tenuous collaboration between the HDMC and Metro planners, who must work within the downtown standards already established. The number of details – shelter maintenance and security, graphic consistency, sidewalk and curb design, street lighting and traffic light design, compli-

# ROAD KILL

ance with the plethora of codes, street tree selection and maintenance – is staggering. The entire gamut of public and private agencies is involved, not only in setting standards but also in providing some portion of the funding.

At the end of the summer of 1994, design teams were awarded contracts to complete the implementation of the design guidelines. The debate continues about such issues as increasing on-street parking. Backed by national commercial expertise, HDMC is convinced that on-street parking will do more to help street-level retail activities than any other design recommendation. The extent of innovative streetscape improvements, in the face of shifting signals from the federal funding authorities, is uncertain.

In other cities, such an undertaking would have been handled through elaborate coordination and management efforts together with regular public communication. The diversity of the interested and affected parties and the project's long time-frame would necessitate this. Under Metro's and HDMC's dedicated but novice stewardship, coordination of all the public authorities, as well as affected private landowners, is indeed ongoing, but no one has yet begun to talk about down time for landowners and their commercial tenants during construction, when streets will be closed for months by both utility and transit reconstruction.

Schematic design is concurrently proceeding on the other downtown transfer installation, the southern transit center in the vicinity of the I-45 Pierce Elevated. Having executed a number of successful and architecturally significant suburban transit centers, Rey de la Reza AIA Architects has developed schemes for one- or two-block configurations to accommodate the technically complex bus operations and provide secure waiting areas. From the outset on this project, Metro and its architects have worked with and responded to HDMC and surrounding property owners. All of the schemes are being designed with sensitivity to the requirements of an urban rather than suburban location; enclosed waiting areas, with some retail activities, are tied into the pedestrian system, although none of the schemes is close to the tunnel system. The architects have provided for possible accommodation of a light-rail system in the transit centers, should Houston elect that option in the future.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Harris County Improvement District No. 1, a quasi-public appendage of the Uptown Houston Association, is spending approximately \$11 million in bond money on a flimsy and mostly ineffectual scheme to permanently alter the streetscape of the Post Oak–Galleria area. The most conspicuous part of the package of street decorations is a gantlet of six pairs of three-story-high stainless-steel arches spanning Post Oak Boulevard from Richmond to Hollyhurst. Looking like floorless, dysfunctional pedestrian bridges, the arches meet the ground on either side of the boulevard in what are called “pocket parks.” Eschewing mention of accommodation, the *Houston Chronicle's* reviewer described these minuscule pedestrian contrivances as “part conversation piece and part art – all built with a Texas size sense of humor” and “fully decorated with four-foot-high cowboy boots inscribed with Texas legends, a gigantic stainless-steel sofa, and a 200-foot Texas tarpon complete with sound effects,” among other ersatz objets d'art. Other parts of the hardware package are giant stainless-steel “gateway” rings strung over major intersections as street markers, and custom-designed traffic signals and stainless-steel streetlights – all embellished in effusive press descriptions by the wanton use of adjectives such as “modernistic” and “futuristic.”

The authors of this “unique and distinctive family of elements,” as the street decoration scheme is described in their promotional materials, are Communication Arts of Boulder, Colorado, who cut their teeth on projects for Disney and the Rivercenter mall in San Antonio before accepting the challenge to give “Uptown Houston a strong identity to rival the Magnificent Mile in Chicago, Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles, or the Miracle Mile in Miami.”

The least problematic, if scarcely unique, aspects of the improvement district's program are the planting of street trees along most stretches of the area's principal streets and the relocation of telephone and power lines underground. The first accords with Colin Rowe's reasoning that Houston can never have too many trees; in fact, planting trees is probably the only means of imparting any substantial sense of unity to the diffuse and random assortment of office and apartment towers,



The arches recently installed on Post Oak Boulevard, by Communication Arts of Boulder, Colorado, 1994.

department stores, arcades, strip centers, parking lots, garages, and vacant land that makes up the Post Oak/Galleria area, which the Uptown Houston Association describes as the “nation's largest suburban activity center [and] thirteenth largest business district – comparable in size to downtown Denver.”

What confounds the planners is the haphazard, spaced-out, and congenitally pedestrianless reality of the place. No family of stainless-steel Band-Aids, no matter how well intended, will make it seem otherwise. What might make a reasonable difference is several more attractions comparable in appeal and magnitude to the Transco Fountain and park, an oasis that Houstonians actually drive to in the evenings or on weekends. Laser displays could also be managed, since we now have the technology to realize the kinetic “virtual volumes” Lazlo Moholy-Nagy photographed at night in Blackpool, or

the “standing” waves Naum Gabo devised at a small scale with rods and motors in the 1920s. Or, taking a cue from the popularity of the district's twinkly-light Christmas decorations, the designers might have thought in terms of a yearly calendar of seasonal displays –

which would at least have the advantage of coming down at some point – by a changing cast of artists and designers, allowing the district to experiment until it hit on something that worked.

Good intentions and the ability to float bonds are not by themselves enough to make good, or in this case even passable, public art. Those who have the welfare of the Post Oak

Boulevard–Galleria area most at heart should look again and explore other options for improvement, taking as a mantra Pugin's injunction that it is permissible to decorate construction but never to construct decoration.  
*The Editors*



Back to the future: Guy Sabron's “Traffic Patterns for the Future” used Post Oak–like arches as a symbol of things to come in this 1934 magazine illustration.

### Midtown Efforts

Long the subject of scrutiny and theoretical design effort, Houston's Midtown has recently been getting closer attention because of a focused group effort. An example of private initiative, expertise, and vision that needs to seek public support on a huge scale, the Midtown Redevelopment Association recently received approval from city council for a tax increment finance (TIF) district for a portion of the 600-acre Midtown area. During two years of concerted efforts, a small core group of local businesses and landowners, allied with the driving force of the Reverend Stephen Bancroft of Trinity Episcopal Church, has worked to assemble a larger community consensus, define the community target area, entice yet-to-be-identified developers to the area, and secure other funding for redevelopment projects. The core group's efforts were augmented early on by the pro bono (to this point) talents of the private sector in tackling complex issues of land law, real estate transactions, and urban infrastructure. A complete planning team had to be assembled in order to produce the area's master plan as well as the economic pro forma required by the TIF submission. The wide array of dedicated consultants includes Hall Barnum Hughes Architects, Vernon G. Henry and Associates, Carter & Burgess, and Arthur Andersen Real Estate Advisory Services.

The midtown area is bounded to the north by the Pierce Elevated (I-45), to the east and south by U.S. 59 (taking in the northern South End neighborhoods) and the Texas 288 culvert, and to the west by Bagby Street. The area is almost desolate in spots, but a few beautiful trees and historic houses, standing alone amid open lots, herald its vibrant past. A number of civic institutions, commercial patches, and pockets of determined residents continue to exist in the area and have become part of the effort; others, as is the case in the South End neighborhoods, have chosen to be excluded.

The proposed 25-year plan projects an investment of several hundred million dollars. The planning process and current urban design scheme gained public exposure this past summer with their publication in *Houston Life* magazine for 17 July–20 August 1994. The planning team assigned a patchwork of land uses around the armature of a more

developed, two-block-wide Main Street commercial corridor. Having surveyed similar redevelopment projects elsewhere for the best mix of land use and density of development, the team believes that the central spine should have buildings 8 to 12 stories in height, with the lower floors dedicated to retail and commercial uses. Radiating from Main Street, a string of green east-west pedestrian boulevards would stretch back into the neighborhoods along narrowed street rights-of-ways. Closing some of the east-west streets would produce more economically developable tracts for lower-scale, four-story residential blocks serviced by back alleys. The thorough design vision aims to produce a district that has not only a pedestrian vibrancy at least 12 hours a day, but also a mixed socioeconomic residential base. A further challenge for the design and planning team is to redefine Houston's residential unit with reference to speculative models of 21st-century urban living and to increase the lifespan and quality of urban residential construction.

The first phase will take in the northwest quadrant of the Midtown area, stretching from Bagby to Main and from I-45 to Westheimer. This development would satisfy the commercial and residential needs of the Vietnamese community, with a larger block configuration (and thus a better scale for development) that links it to Montrose. Security is a major obstacle for the whole area in attracting residential investment, and this subdistrict is also perceived as being safer. A concurrent, privately supported design vision, amicably co-opted by the Midtown Redevelopment Association, has been developed for the Houston Downtown Management Corporation by its design consultants. It calls for connecting Buffalo Bayou at the McKee Street Bridge and Bute Park in northeastern downtown to Hermann Park and the Brays Bayou area with a winding linear park (archly scrambled to "Lanier Park" by some). The park would envelop a grand boulevard extending the Alameda axis through downtown, linking the future residential and low-scale commercial neighborhoods. It also would add another leg to the hike-and-bike trail system. Perhaps most challenging to endow and maintain would be the proposed string of water features, lakes, and water gardens that would dot the sinuous, four-block-wide green swath. The interplay between the orthogonal street grid and the gentle curves of the new linear park could

provide picturesque, unique block configurations and green parks around which residential enclaves would develop. As Kevin Shanley of the SWA Group, one of the design consultants, logically states, "To compete with The Woodlands, this suburban curve is the residential client's preference, as so many suburban developers have discovered." The tax revenue and investment for infrastructure improvements in this proposal seem to be no greater than those required for any other comprehensive renewal plan for the area.

In the same geographical area, and with some coordination with the Midtown Redevelopment Association, is another group developing a vision and a plan of action, Making Main Street Happen, Inc. Led by Mark Inabnit, publisher and editor of *Houston Life*, this group of planners and civic thinkers is focusing attention on the possibilities of Main Street between the Pierce Elevated and the Mecom Fountain. Following the February 1994 publication in *Houston Life's* first issue of a series of conceptual ideas – a number paralleling those of an American Institute of Architects design charrette for the whole stretch of Main several years ago (see *Cite*, Fall 1991) – the 501(c)(3) organization has gotten financial backing from the Anchorage Foundation of Texas and has formed a board representing citywide participation. This past fall the group published a sketch in *Houston Life* of its preliminary architectural symbol – an Eiffel-like "friendship tower" astride Main Street – in conjunction with a call for Main to become the avenue of consulates in this NAFTA gateway city. The idea of emphasizing Houston's status as an international commerce center has real merit. However, the group's proposal to raise \$20 million and garner the support of the mayor, while civic minded, points up the inefficacy of multiple competing efforts. And it raises a larger question: Is this another instance of Houston's propensity for confusing private speculative vision with civic mandate in making grand plans?

### Eastern Buffalo Bayou and Chinatown

Another partnership forged outside the agencies of city government has concerned itself with the development of the Houston Heritage Corridor, or East Sector, along Buffalo Bayou from Allen's Landing to the turning basin of the

Houston Ship Channel. Two years of collaboration between the Buffalo Bayou Partnership (an HDMC ally) and the East End Area Chamber of Commerce, through a public forum that addressed art and culture, historical preservation, housing and economic development, parks and open space, and mobility, resulted in a publication called *Houston's Heritage Corridor: East Sector Buffalo Bayou Redevelopment Plan*.

The vision and implementation plan were supported by local corporate funding and leadership, together with dedicated community participation. These core volunteer organizations realized that only through community initiative would the East End's natural and historic resources and its neighborhoods be properly managed. The Buffalo Bayou Partnership, created in 1984, is a volunteer community body of public and private interests charged with developing and overseeing improvements to the Buffalo Bayou corridor. The group's efforts began with a 1985 comprehensive master plan of the entire watercourse. Some projects, mainly in the western sector, have already been completed. The East End Progress Association has been active for more than 30 years in affecting change in the East End through community development and civic improvement efforts. Its 1990 community planning initiative (published as *Progress Through Planning*) identified strategies to improve access into the area, to develop Buffalo Bayou's eastern sector as a community resource, and to promote the area's industrial and cultural heritage. The East End Area Chamber of Commerce was established in 1991, concurrent with the inception of the Houston Heritage Corridor Project, to represent the area's business interests by revitalizing commerce, to improve business networking opportunities, and to implement the eastern sector plan.

Orchestrated by project consultants John Rogers Architects and Janet K. Wagner of J. K. Wagner and Company, Inc., the ambitious plan calls for "a coordinated greenbelt system" linking existing parks along Buffalo, White Oak, and Brays bayous that "clearly realizes the interdependency of the Bayou's commercial, recreational, and cultural resources." A system of hike-and-bike trails would be developed along the bayous, Harrisburg and Navigation boulevards, and abandoned rail right-of-ways, such as the Sunset and Harrisburg rails-to-trails

projects. The approach is similar to those in dozens of other cities that have successfully linked underused transportation corridors, natural watercourses, industrial archaeology sites, cultural resources, and renewing neighborhoods. Selected development of sites along Buffalo Bayou will highlight the many lives of the waterway while creatively rehabilitating existing Houston industrial and commercial buildings. A technology museum will be located in the Willow Street pump station, and also on the boards are an energy museum (at HL&P's Gable Street power plant), a Hispanic arts center (next to the defunct Mercado del Sol), a railroad museum (at the city's Velasco Street incinerator), and a nautical museum (at the Long Reach docks). The green corridor would link neighborhoods, serving as a backdrop for ethnic events and providing a catalyst for neighborhood renewal.

Since the preliminary publication of its plan almost two years ago, the ad hoc organization has been searching for implementation funding. In summer 1994 Anne Olson, the executive director of the East End Area Chamber of Commerce, led a team in securing federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) funds for the Harrisburg and Sunset trails projects – the beginning of the long process of piecing together funding for the entire project. The ISTEA funds will be used to purchase and improve old railroad right-of-ways for trails that conform to the city's Parks to Standards Program. Procurement of property along the bayou, as well as funding for the stabilization of Allen's Landing, is still distant.

The community activists working for neighborhood improvement within the Heritage Corridor initiative are struggling, not only to fund the various projects but to bridge the vast differences of vision between the city and county, and to a lesser extent Metro. They have faced a frustrating lack of planning coordination and lack of official policy: the county has one agenda, the city another, and private parties will not step in until they get some assurances from public officials. Other ongoing projects along the bayou attest to the difficulties of communication and coordination. For example, the placement of the planned 1,100-bed Community Correction Facilities for Harris County on the bayou virtually blocked any future hike-and-bike trail linkage. Only last-minute negotiations with the

county by the Buffalo Bayou Coalition and the East End Chamber of Commerce persuaded the county to have its architects rethink the corner that would impact the trail system. Without a public agency to steer the consensus-building and coordinating process, it is difficult to assemble such a large-scale project.

Smaller projects such as the redecorated McKee Street Bridge and the adjacent James Bute Park illustrate what can be accomplished through the perseverance of individual citizens and the power of a motivated grass-roots effort. From a shifting cast of public and private officials, a loose but effective alliance was formed to tackle the preservation of the area: the East End Area Chamber of Commerce's Anne Olson, who provided strategic oversight and marshaled forces; local artists, including Kirk Farris, who first gave the McKee Street Bridge its colorful renovation; a private philanthropist, who bought the park site from a bank and made it available to Harris County Commissioners' Precinct 2, which will provide maintenance; and representatives of the American Society of Landscape Architects and Clean Houston, who held a cleanup day early this summer, aided by assistant county attorney Terry O'Rourke's dispatch of a probationer workforce. Successful volunteer efforts like this have historically not been initiated by local government agencies, and more often than not they face almost complete public apathy.

A smaller community effort whose urban renewal efficacy is yet to be tested centers on Houston's Chinatown. A consortium of design professionals called Chinatown Architects has joined forces with the Houston Chinatown Council and its commercial development corporation in attempting to use a common plan of action to link diverse private, commercial, and residential investment with public lands, infrastructure, and services. With the north-south axis of St. Emanuel Street as a pedestrian spine, the community team is working with the Houston Belt & Terminal Railway Co. to use its property for a northern civic park. Developers hope to build low-scale residential blocks to the east and west of the spine, while the council is investigating local private grants to develop senior citizen housing in existing warehouse space. The planners hope to locate a farmers' market between Chartres and St. Emanuel on a vacant lot owned by the

*Houston Chronicle*. This two-story, open-air structure would sit within a landscaped parking lot that would serve as the center of the community's civic life and could be closed for festival use. Linkage to the enlarged convention center precinct to the west through improved pedestrian streets lined with ceremonial gateways would also stimulate growth. Still eyeing the possibility of a TIF district, the group hopes that the limited utility capacity that has slowed development will be remedied within two years.

### Imagine Houston

In the wake of last year's defeat of the zoning proposal, City Hall and the mayor have articulated the need to "create a forum to maximize communication and dialogue, to forge new partnerships, and to foster new civic initiatives" to address urban issues. The result, Imagine Houston, has been advertised as "a non-political, public interest, community-wide and strategic planning process that seeks to reach out and engage all neighborhoods and livelihoods in a planning process centering on the issues of critical importance to the community." Downtown appears to be a relatively small but not neglected portion of this ongoing brainstorming process. The effort is, rather, citywide and primarily volunteer (with some city funding), orchestrated by a community-based steering committee to "bring people together to share information, learn about each other's viewpoints, and develop consensus on the issues, goals and opportunities that will form the Vision for Houston." Engaging in the envisioning process and theoretical discussion are the mayor, the city council, members of the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Department of Planning and Development, other public officials, and representatives of a number of citizen groups.

Thus far, focus groups have been charged to meet regularly to discuss their assigned topics: Where We Work, Natural Resources, In Service of the Public, Where We Meet, Where We Live, Taking Care of Ourselves, Learning for Life, Fostering Our Cultural Resources, and Community Safety. In spring 1995, the steering committee will consolidate all the focus group reports into "The Houston Plan," which will be forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Commission and city council for review.

If the planning groups can overcome the handicaps of a complex bureaucracy, the difficulties of coordinating a widely dispersed effort, the urge to micromanage, and the suppression of spontaneity that results from a long, drawn-out process, the fruits of their deliberation will become the first steps in developing a comprehensive long-range plan for Houston.

### Downtown Strategic Initiatives Planning Effort

The American Institute of Architects-Houston Chapter has embarked on a year-long examination of the Houston Downtown Management Corporation's current plan for downtown by more than 20 teams drawn from individual design firms, committees of the AIA chapter, and individual members. By building upon or modifying the HDMC plan, the AIA-HDMC collaboration aims to point out the potential for revitalization and diversification of downtown, both long and short term.

The plan's geographical areas of concentration span the downtown area. Individual studies cover Leeland Place (the St. Joseph Hospital area), the George R. Brown Convention Center, the Theater District-Sesquicentennial Park-Post Office area, Union Station and the district northeast of it, Main Street (divided into three parts), NoHo (the district of warehouses, many now artists' lofts, northeast of the bayou), Courthouse Square, Market Square, the Houston Civic Center, Sam Houston Park, the CBD core, Cullen Center, Upper Main, Midtown, Chinatown, and Fourth Ward. The process will culminate in a fall 1995 community symposium and exhibition, the collaborative updating of HDMC's development plan with the AIA, and publication of the results in a community action workbook. *Houston Life*, a new vehicle for community awareness, has offered to publish monthly reports on each team's results, beginning in December 1994.

### Loose Cannons

Development of independent mega-projects can shape an entire urban precinct. Even when these projects are subject to public coordination and control, whether in the form of City Hall development approval processes, city ordinances including zoning-type restrictions, or citizen review processes, they have their own impetus and

momentum. In Houston, the pace of a project's announcement, planning, and development is completely independent of public review and even public support. Any one multimillion-dollar speculative effort can effectively become a loose cannon, with the potential for wreaking havoc upon or strengthening downtown's fledgling and fragmented planning efforts. Houston's central business district presently faces at least half a dozen such large-scale projects.

One such scheme calls for replacing the Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall with a land-based casino in a deal put together by the Maxxam Corporation. Currently negotiating with the city, the speculators plan to demolish the Coliseum as soon as possible to make way for an outdoor amphitheater that would back up to the Music Hall, the home of Theater Under the Stars. If casino gambling is legalized in Texas, Maxxam will demolish the amphitheater and construct a new casino on the banks of the bayou. Little discussion has focused on whether downtown really wants a casino, or on the appropriateness of the proposed location in terms of parking, infrastructure, or impact on the Civic Center, the Theater District, the bayou, and Sesquicentennial Park. All of the ongoing urban and transportation planning efforts in downtown could be literally be undone overnight.

Similar speculations center around the surplused Albert Thomas Convention Center, a facility in a difficult location. A series of speculators has called for the phased development of theater space (to be run by Pace Entertainment Corporation) in the western end of the two-block 1960s structure, following the eastern end's renovation into a multi-attraction entertainment club. Recently, developer David Cordish has proposed converting the second-phase development of the western end into a casino. The existing contract with the city did not address such a use, and downtown could face two casinos in short order, with no investigation of their financial advantages or disadvantages to the city.

In a third major proposal, Bud Adams and the Houston Oilers organization spent summer 1994 advocating a flexible stadium downtown that could accommodate football, hockey, and basketball. Originally dubbed the Dome and designed by HOK Sport, a firm with extensive experience in designing sports arenas, the

\$245 million complex would have covered approximately six downtown blocks and intervening street right-of-ways, encumbering the equivalent of eight blocks. The public discussion, press coverage, and proponents' feasibility studies all focused solely on financial issues and not the physical impact on downtown and the inhabitants of its eastern neighborhoods. Adding to the uncertainty of the proposal, the Houston Rockets basketball franchise refused to join the stadium consortium but left open the option of building its own arena in conjunction with the convention center complex. Downtown could still end up with a sports complex containing both an arena and a stadium. Although Adams seems to have abandoned his proposal, it is significant that the current downtown planning concepts do not fully address either possibility, leaving unanswered many important infrastructure, parking, transportation, and physical impact questions that would certainly be relevant if other stadium proposals are made in the future.

Recently proposed state and federal highway projects would also affect downtown. Given their shifting parameters, neither the city nor downtown developers know how traffic will flow, or how it will affect real estate values. For example, on the northeast side of downtown in the Union Station district, the design of a relocated U.S. 59 access ramp by the Texas Department of Transportation could drastically alter traffic patterns throughout the area. New ramps will feed incoming traffic into downtown on Jackson and Hamilton and departing traffic on Chenevert and Chartres, with Metro HOV lanes added for good measure. Houston Belt & Terminal's Union Station blocks the flow of all these streets to the south at Preston. Add to the ten-year developmental time frame the possibility of new facilities and their traffic in the district – sports arena(s), a convention center expansion, new convention center hotel(s) – and the lack of a planning strategy for interlocking multiple agencies becomes even more serious. Who, for example, is looking into the possibility of mass transit service for these high-population destination points?

Slightly to the west is the complex Elysian Viaduct (Elysian-Maury Expressway) and Loop 610 interchange. A proposed redesigning will extend the Hardy Toll Road into downtown and further increase

the accessibility and economic viability of the area. However, in another example of the problems associated with the split authority and lack of foresight of the responsible governmental agencies, the Toll Road Authority wants the project, the state has designed the interchange, the city of Houston owns the right-of-way, and everyone wants Metro to pay for it. Construction was to begin during this decade, but the timetable is sliding because of lack of negotiation and coordination. The potential impact on the slowly awakening commercial and convention district, Buffalo Bayou, and the McKee Street Bridge and Bute Park is, as usual, uncertain. The process is not far enough along for anyone to discuss the plans publicly, much less review the environmental impact.

Finally, northern downtown has also become, almost without notice, the correctional facility capital of Harris County, soon to house a projected population of more than 12,000 inmates. County and state prisons have proliferated, primarily around Buffalo Bayou in the NoHo warehouse area. Two large judicial and correctional facilities loom on the downtown planning horizon, located even closer to the central business district. The new Harris County Criminal Justice Center, tentatively located on San Jacinto near the existing county courthouse, will be a mixed-use development packing courtrooms, jail cells, and support spaces in one oversized building of over 500,000 square feet. The Federal Bureau of Prisons Detention Center, recently awarded to Hoover Architects, will feature a mid- to highrise tower housing more than 500 inmates; a site adjacent to Christ Church Cathedral has been announced. Two other sites on the east side of downtown were considered, in the area where the convention center expansion and hotel, as well as any sports facilities, would be located. Another site was adjacent to the Main Street–Market Square Historic District. Such a large downtown jail, with its security-conscious design, may not be a complementary neighbor for other downtown developments (although Christ Church has raised no objections). The combined costs of land and facility are likely to make this project more expensive than most luxury apartment complexes.

### **"Downtown – Capital of Houston"**

When Central Houston, Inc., introduced its new moniker for downtown last year,

more than one witness to the debut wondered if anyone understood the ramifications of the new title and the questions it brings to mind. If downtown really is the capital of Houston, why doesn't the community, much less City Hall, treat it as such? In the recent past, Houston seemed to have forgotten downtown, leaving it adrift in a swamp of parking lots while speculators bulldozed what little history remained. Now some stakeholders are starting to take responsibility for the impact of their projects on the whole of downtown; yet the community has no one to coordinate, catalogue, orchestrate, and direct these efforts. City Hall should be a leader in the process. It could provide the leadership necessary to integrate each of the community's disparate projects into a thriving, organic whole, making downtown a capital example of urban planning and redevelopment. ■

# DOWNTOWN



Main Street looking north from Preston Avenue, 1858.

## 1865–1890

At the foot of Main Street, extending up to Commerce Avenue and stretching between Milam on the west and Caroline on the east, is the wharf, warehouse, and wholesale district. Railroad development keeps to the north side of Buffalo Bayou and east of downtown. Therefore, railroad tracks and the development associated with them (warehouses, industry, and working-class residential neighborhoods) do not penetrate downtown. Market Square is rebuilt with new brick buildings to serve the food trades. Two elaborate City Hall–Market Houses are constructed, one after the other, on Market Square. The center of downtown remains the intersection of Main and Franklin, which becomes the corner where Houston's first banks cluster. Two- and three-story brick buildings replace the earlier generation of commercial buildings. A retail shopping district emerges along Main between Congress and Prairie avenues. Dwelling houses built in the 1830s and 1840s near Main and Prairie are demolished for replacement by new business buildings. Construction of the Capitol Hotel in 1883 (eventually the Rice Hotel) marks Texas Avenue as the upper end of the Main Street business district. South of Lamar Avenue, Main becomes the Victorian grand avenue of Houston, the town's most fashionable residential street. The introduction of mule-drawn streetcars and efforts to pave Main Street make downtown easier to get to and easy to move about in.

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

## 1837–1865

Main Street is the spine. Main at Franklin is the center of downtown. At the foot of Main Street is the wharf. Connected directly to it are warehouses and wholesale houses. Retail businesses are located on the three blocks of Main between Commerce and Preston, occupying the first generation of brick business houses, which begin to be built in the mid-1840s. These spill over to the west to surround Market Square. There is only limited commercial incursion around Court House Square, which is chiefly residential. The church and school reserves on Texas Avenue both become the site of churches.



Main Street looking south from Franklin Avenue, 1894.

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

## 1890–1920

Main Street is the axis of Houston. The center of downtown moves three blocks south, from Main and Congress to Main and Texas. The foot of Main Street remains the public wharf until construction of the Houston Ship Channel, completion of the Main Street Viaduct, spanning Buffalo Bayou above the old waterfront, opens downtown to access from the north. The electrification of the streetcar system in 1891 makes possible a great expansion of the public transportation network, which reinforces the primacy of downtown as the city's operational center. The Main Street axis is reinforced with new development and redevelopment. Skyscraper offices and hotels begin to be built. The retail district expands southward up Main, stopping first at Capitol, then moving two blocks south to Walker. Department stores (such as Kiam's, Levy's, and Foley Brothers), movie theaters (the Isis and the Queen), and metropolitan hotels (the Bender of 1911 and the new, 17-story Rice of 1913) are introduced. The tallest building in Texas, the S. F. Carter Building, is built at Main and Rusk in a single-family residential neighborhood in 1911. Highrise luxury



New construction on Main Street, looking south from Rusk Avenue, 1911.

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

apartment houses (the Savoy and the Beaconsfield) are built on the neartown end of the Main Street grand avenue at Main and Pease. After 1910, wealthy families abandon the Main Street residential district. Main at Franklin remains the center of the financial district. Commerce Street becomes Produce Row, center of the wholesale grocery trade. North of Buffalo Bayou, a new warehouse and factory district is developed. The establishment of the

International & Great Northern Railway Freight Depot at Commerce and Caroline and of Union Station at Crawford and Prairie destabilizes the established Second and Third Ward neighborhoods just east of downtown, identifying them as eligible for absorption into the expanded commercial district. Milam Street emerges as the African-American main street, stretching from Prairie and Louisiana, near Market Square, up to Milam and Clay, near the eastern edge of the African-American residential district in Fourth Ward. Police harass African-Americans in order to exclude them from the Main Street retail district.

## 1920–1945

The center of downtown shifts up Main beyond the Allen brothers' original townsite, to Main and Rusk, where Houston's tallest skyscraper, the Gulf Building, is built in 1929. This period marks the apogee of downtown Houston. But problems are already sighted. Especially crucial is automobile access, circulation, and parking. Main Street is the prime retail district, although efforts are made in the 1920s to develop Texas Avenue as a competing thoroughfare of skyscrapers. The center of the downtown retail and entertainment district moves up the street to Main and McKinney, thanks to the efforts of Houston's biggest real estate developer, Jesse H. Jones, who builds the Metropolitan and Loew's State theaters on the same block, two blocks from Mellie Esperson's Majestic Theater at Travis and Rusk. Office buildings are constructed as far south as Main and Clay. Main Street, from Lamar 39 blocks south to Portland, is redeveloped with retail and institutional buildings as an uptown suburban corridor more easily accessible by car than is downtown. This decimates what is left of the Victorian grand avenue. The financial district remains entrenched at Main and Franklin, but skid rows emerge around Market Square and eastward along Franklin Avenue. Establishment of the Civic Center around Hermann Square and the new Central Library, in the old Fourth Ward neighborhood southwest of downtown, in 1926 causes Market Square's decline as an institutional center. Construction of the Farmers Market, Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall, and the new City Hall in the Civic Center between

1836

## 1836 – The Allen Brothers' Plan

The Main Street spine is balanced midway along its six-block extent by two public squares, Market Square to the west and Court House Square to the east. At the south edge of town, facing what would become Texas Avenue, two half-squares are set aside for high-minded pursuits: a church reserve and a school reserve.

# HOUSTON:

## A Timeline

Stephen Fox

1929 and 1939, in conjunction with the opening of Allen Parkway in 1926, begins to pull new development westward off the course of Main Street in the late 1930s. The Great Depression halts the real estate boom of the late 1920s. Commercial construction slowly resumes in 1935. By 1937, a new boom in retail construction is under way downtown, but the skyline remains dominated by the set-back towers of the 1920s. The streetcar system is replaced by buses in the late 1930s. Public transportation remains centered on downtown, but its impact shrinks in the face of massive reliance on the automobile.



"What's Happened to Main Street?," advertising image, 1928.

1950

### 1945-1950

This marks the final episode of downtown's supremacy as the operational center of Houston. Construction of the last major retail buildings in downtown—Foley's, Joske's, Battelstein's, The Fashion (later Neiman Marcus), Sakowitz Brothers, and Woolworth's—occurs. Main and Lamar is the center of downtown Houston.

### 1950-1960

Downtown stagnates in the midst of Houston's biggest real estate boom. Between 1955 and 1961, Palms Center, Gulfgate, Meyerland, Northgate, and Sharpstown shopping malls are built, occupied by suburban branches of downtown stores. A new uptown hotel and highrise office district emerges adjacent to the Texas Medical Center. Only a handful of tall buildings are constructed downtown; the largest are headquarters for banks exiting the Main-Franklin financial district. Demolition of 19th- and early-20th-century commercial buildings is widespread north of Texas Avenue and on the peripheries of downtown. Cleared land is not redeveloped but used as parking lots. The prospect of crisis is imminent. The agreed-upon solution is to stabilize downtown real estate by building up the Civic Center on the west side. Sam Houston Park becomes the site of an open-air museum of restored 19th-century Houston buildings.

### 1960-1970

The primacy of Main Street is broken. A series of new corporate office towers (First City, Humble, Tenneco, Cullen Center) reverses the declining image of downtown, but all except First City are built to the west of Main Street. The Humble and Cullen Center buildings are built far outside the boundaries of the pre-World War II downtown, their location influenced by the construction of a freeway loop around the city center that redefines the "downtown" core as a greatly expanded area. New office building in the later sixties gravitates toward Smith Street and the Civic Center. The Electric Tower (1968) and One Shell Plaza (1970) establish Smith as the new avenue of skyscrapers. A cultural center is developed as a northern continuation of the Civic Center, incorporating Jones Hall, the Albert Thomas Convention Center, and the Alley Theater. For a brief period (1967-75), Market Square becomes active as a downtown nightlife district.



Welton Becket & Associates, architects, master plan of Cullen Center, 1960.

1970

### 1970-1983

The center of downtown is Louisiana and Lamar. Main Street is slowly deserted by retail trade, as Joske's, Neiman Marcus, Battelstein's, Sakowitz, and Oshman's leave downtown or go out of business. Intensive demolition of the pre-World War II fabric continues. The Rice Hotel closes (1978), but the Cotton Exchange, Hogg, Kiam, and Paul buildings are rehabilitated. Harris County expands around Court House Square, prompting long-term conflict over the preservation of the historic Pillot and Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks buildings. The last banks vacate the Main-Franklin financial district. Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation buys 32 blocks east of Main Street in 1970 on which to develop Houston Center, but the corporation abandons its master plan in 1975. Allen Center is developed on the eastern third of the old Fourth Ward African-American neighborhood. The street and block pattern there is completely erased in favor of a landscaped superblock development. All major Fourth Ward buildings, including the Carnegie Colored Library, are demolished, leaving only Antioch Baptist Church. Between 1976 and 1983, a phantasmagorical skyline of shaped and colored office towers emerges, beginning with Pennzoil Place. These speculatively built towers impress downtown with a striking new "Emerald City" image and identity. Linking the office towers is an expanding pedestrian network of air-conditioned underground tunnels and over-the-street bridges.

### 1983-Present

The collapse of the international oil market in stages between 1982 and 1986 results in Houston's worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Most new office buildings are foreclosed. Vacancy rates soar. Most downtown hotels close. All but two major banks fail. The Main Street retail district loses all remaining major stores except Foley's, and the center of the downtown retail and hotel district moves to Westheimer and Post Oak. Controversial proposals for a fixed-rail public transit system focused on downtown are defeated. As a result of national economic and social policies,

1995

homelessness becomes a highly visible problem in Houston, with many of the city's homeless living on the streets of downtown. For the first time since the 1930s, publicly funded construction dominates downtown: the George R. Brown Convention Center, the Gus S. Wortham Theater Center, Sesqui-centennial Park, and the expansion of the Harris County jail complex. The Main Street-Market Square Historic District is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Small buildings are rehabilitated, but lack of a local preservation ordinance results in the continued loss of historic buildings. Grass-roots, incremental planning results in numerous community-scale reclamation projects, especially in the warehouse and theater districts and Sixth Ward, and in rehabilitation of individual buildings. Attempts at large-scale public planning (e.g., Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward redevelopment, the Albert Thomas Convention Center redevelopment, and El Mercado del Sol) are fiascoes. ■



Main Street, 1993.

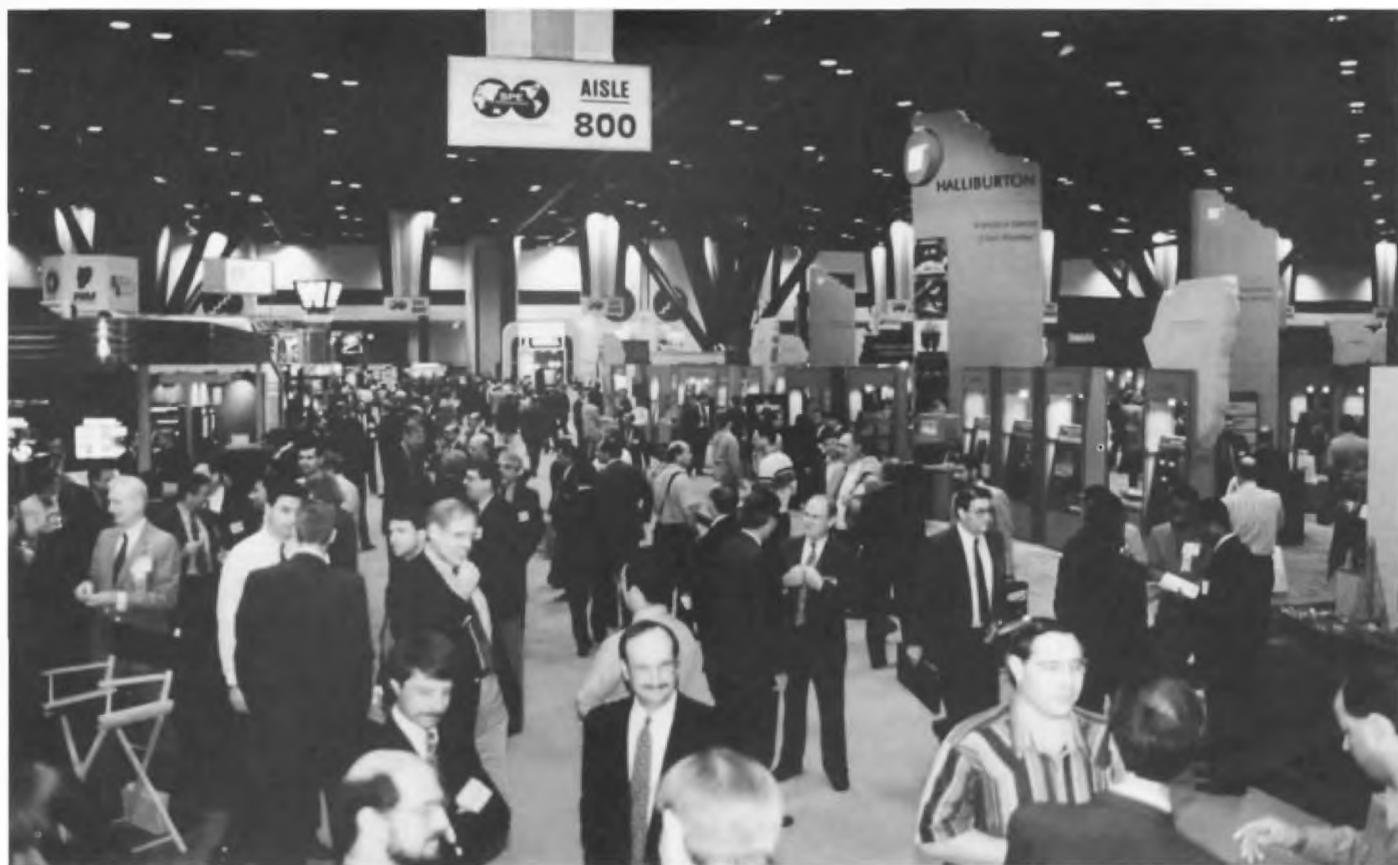
Ben DeSoto

Alex Hecht

# Convention City:

*Not Yet Ready for the Big Time*

**O**n the evening of 26 September 1987, a fireworks display lighting up the sky, the people of Houston celebrated the opening of the George R. Brown Convention Center. With open arms they prepared to welcome the 700,000 new visitors and \$430 million their \$104.5 million facility would attract each year. But more important to Houstonians was the belief that the George R. Brown had finally cemented Houston's place as a "world class" convention city. "Look out, America," beamed Civic Center director Gerard Tollett, "here comes Houston."



The Society of Petroleum Engineers' Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition, held in October 1992 at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

**S**parked by the George R. Brown's completion, in 1989 Houston attracted 562 total conventions, drawing over two million visitors and \$454 million in gross revenue. But the convention game is very much a survival of the biggest. With so many expanding facilities, the top ten (space-wise) change on a weekly basis. According to the 1989 *Major Exhibit Hall Directory*, the George R. Brown, with its 601,100 square feet of exhibit space (it was then ranked ninth in total capacity), could house only 80 percent of the existing trade shows and conventions. In 1992 Houston drew only 450 conventions, and revenue fell to \$273 million.

While the George R. Brown remains competitive for small- to medium-sized conventions, the big fish continue to get away. In 1994, several of the larger conventions – including the National Association of Television Programming Executives and the Association of Operating Room

Nurses – have dismissed Houston as a convention town. Since 1990, local convention backers have pushed for expansion. According to Jim McConn, director of sports development for the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau and a former Houston mayor, "an additional 400,000 square feet would do the job."

Of course, Houston did attract the 1992 Republican National Convention. But the George R. Brown was too small for that event: then Houston Astros owner John McMullen arranged for the RNC to be held at the Astrodome (which, together with the Astrohalls and Astroarena, exceeds the George R. Brown by nearly 300,000 square feet of exhibit space). Although the convention was a success for the city, McMullen later had to justify sending his team on the road for a month to an irked Major League Baseball players' union. A repeat of that hiatus is, at best, unlikely.

Houston's chances at evolving into a world-class convention city are equally remote. A major part of convention culture is all-night partying, and a good convention town must provide a safe and accessible entertainment district. Downtown San Antonio offers the Riverwalk, Dallas the centrally located West End. For intrepid George R. Brown conventioners, a dangerous walk under I-59 leads to an Asian business strip with plenty of good lunch buffets but not much in the way of topless bars and tequila. Most conventioners find themselves following the centripetal nighttime surge to hot spots on the far west side, an expensive cab ride away from downtown.

About the most fun to be had in downtown is in the Market Square area. But the crowds at night are sporadic, and the rowdiest scenes are often the weekday lunch crowds. This wasn't always the case. "Market Square used to be like New

Orleans," remembers John Bennett, who from 1965 to 1970 ran the Galleria nightclub, then located at 307 Travis Street. The city's white elite flocked to the square after a hectic workday, where they could find soothing, even operatic entertainment. The Galleria, one of several bars in the area (including the original Four Seasons), featured black performers from Texas Southern University.

During this period the Main Street area also boomed. Oil execs dined at the Petroleum Club or Maxim's. There were three theater houses, as well as the Rice and Lamar hotels. "People flocked down there like crazy," Bennett says. "The sidewalks were always packed with people."

With racial unrest festering across town, the police offered protection: it was a common sight for white partiers to see police cars full of policemen with shotguns across their laps, headed towards Elgin



This attractive couple at the Upstairs on the Square consists of Ann French and the Houston Legal Foundation's Jack Bodiford.



Nightclubbing on Market Square, 1968. Upstairs on the Square (top), Mother Blues (bottom).

Market Square Gazette, 23 August 1968

Street to keep the rioters from disturbing the downtown peace. But in the 1970s, then mayor Louie Welch and the city council shifted their focus from downtown to the developing Astrodome area. Exit police protection, enter crime. "We had the idea of saving downtown Houston," says Bennett, "but the city didn't want to."

"You can't just do it with clubs," explains Houston Metropolitan Transit Authority chairman Billy Burge. "You must have something to draw the people downtown." In answer to the critical publicity about revitalizing downtown that has dominated the headlines in recent months, Burge supported the Bud

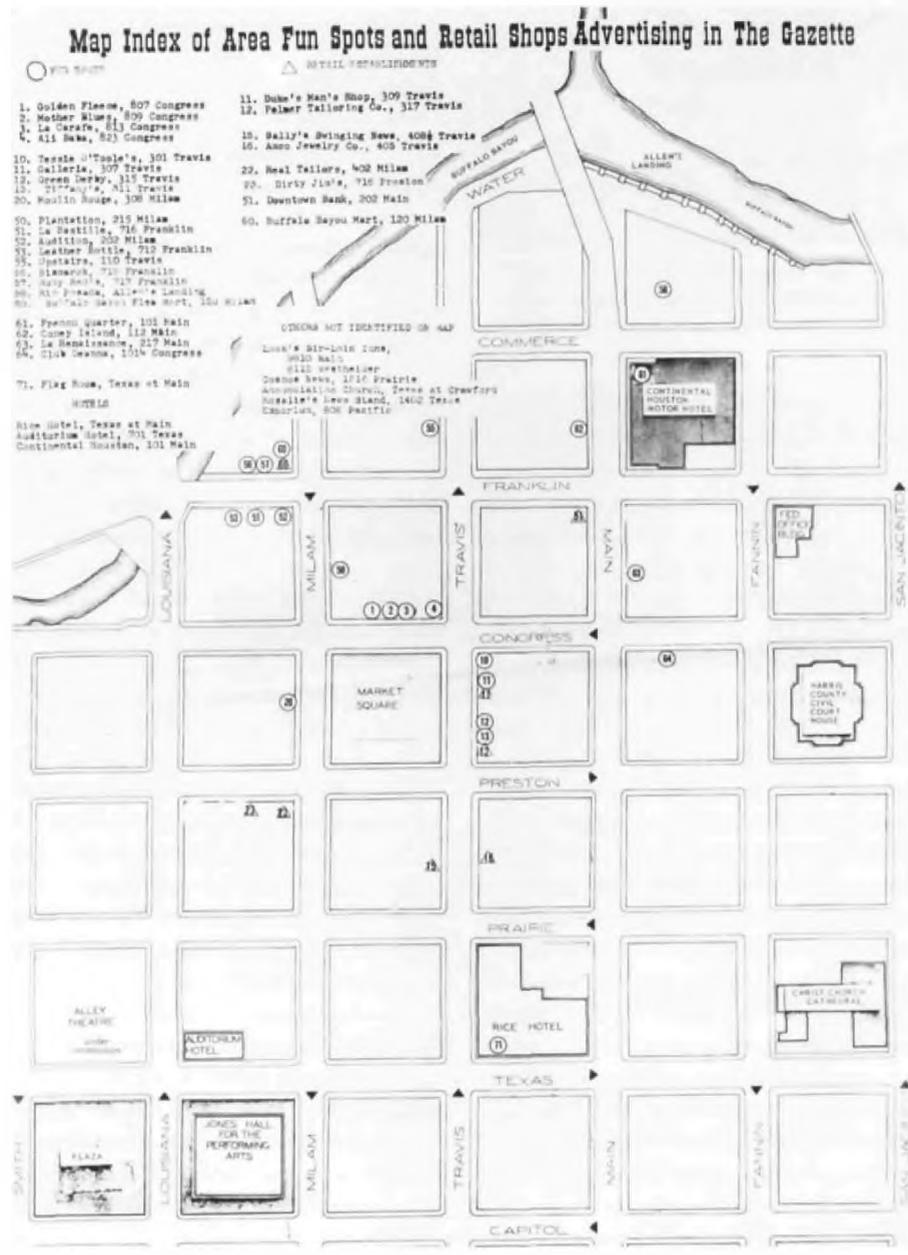
Adams-backed downtown stadium. Burge is no stranger to revitalization. In 1974 his Ayrshire Corporation was active in the redevelopment of the land surrounding the New Orleans

Superdome. He compares that area of vacant slumland and railyards to the destitute area east of Houston's Main Street. In a 15-year period, Ayrshire developed 2.5 million square feet of office space, a 1.25-million-square-foot retail plaza, and a 1,250-room Hyatt hotel. Would that kind of development make Houston more viable as a convention town? "Absolutely," says Burge.

Now that Adams has withdrawn his proposal for a downtown dome, other ways of revitalizing Houston as a convention city will have to be found. Foremost among the unsolved problems is the lack of downtown hotel space, which has forced major events like the Republican National Convention to book delegates into rooms all over the metropolitan area, dissipating the excitement and energy of the large gathering by changing it into a commuter event. The problem was evident even before completion of the George R. Brown. In early 1987, when the Democrats chose Atlanta for the site of their 1988 convention, the party compared Atlanta's 9,600 downtown hotel rooms to Houston's 2,476 and made its decision. Houston's principal convention

rivals continue to hold a decided edge in hotel space - Dallas has over 4,500 rooms, New Orleans 11,000. (Realizing the importance of increasing the number of hotel rooms in the area, the Convention and Visitors Bureau is reviewing three plans for a new convention center hotel.)

In the eyes of small downtown business owners, Houston's path to convention success lies not in additional hotel rooms, the legalization of casino gambling, or a new stadium, but in getting more people to move back into downtown from the suburbs. Only if this happens will downtown be able to sustain a reputable entertainment area like Austin's Sixth Street or New Orleans's French Quarter. Already several private firms are developing downtown living spaces, including a project at the W. L. Foley Dry Goods Co. Building, 214-218 Travis, and an 85-unit remodeling of the Hogg Building, 401 Louisiana at Milam. "That will help tremendously," says Caroline Wenglar, owner of Warren's Inn in Market Square - the location of the original Galleria. "It will bring people down who will hopefully stay here." ■



Can downtown rise again? An artifact from a livelier era: map of the Market Square area, 1968.

Market Square Gazette, 23 August 1968

### The George R. Brown Top Ten

The following are the ten largest conventions held at the George R. Brown Convention Center, and the number of delegates attending.

1. American Rental Association, 1988	6,376
2. National Association of Television Program Executives, 1989	7,700
3. Economic Summit, 1990	9,000
4. American Public Transit Association, 1990	15,000
5. National Business Aircraft Association, 1991	16,249
6. Republican National Convention, 1992	49,000
7. Diving Equipment Manufacturers Association, 1992	12,000
8. Instrument Society of America, 1992	33,000
9. American Welding Society, 1993	15,223
10. Society of Petroleum Engineers, 1993	9,325

### America's Top Ten Convention Cities\*

1. New York	6. Dallas
2. Las Vegas	7. Anaheim
3. Chicago	8. San Francisco
4. New Orleans	9. Washington, D.C.
5. Atlanta	10. Orlando

\*Based on trade shows. Source: The American Society of Association Executives

### Convention Center Rankings\*

1. McCormick Place, Chicago	1,873,283
2. International Exposition Center, New Orleans	1,683,000
3. Las Vegas Convention Center	1,300,000
4. Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta	1,180,000
5. Astrodome U.S.A., Houston	1,130,000
6. Kentucky Exposition Center, Louisville	1,068,050
7. Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, New York	900,000
8. Dallas Convention Center	860,000
9. Cobo Conference-Exhibition Center, Detroit	800,000
10. Anaheim Convention Center	720,000
15. George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston	601,100

\*By total square feet of current exhibition space.

Susie Kalil

# the art of politics and the politics of art



*Cancer . . . There Is Hope*, Victor Salmones's bronze figures at the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivor's Plaza, 1993. Prominently located on Hermann Drive between Main and Fannin streets south of the Museum of Fine Arts, this privately donated commemorative plaza raises questions about who determines the selection and placement of public art in Houston.

Lisa Carol Hardaway and Paul Heiser, Photographers © 1994

Public art begins in the democratic urge to bring art to a broad, unspecialized public.

There is no consensus today about what public art should look like, or certainty about what a monument is. Public art has served concurrently as landmark, symbol, monument, functional element, architectural embellishment, isolated aesthetic object, and cultural artifact. A century ago, public sculpture glorified the ideals or triumphs of an entire community by presenting familiar figures or symbols; alternatively, it glorified the person or group who paid for it. But public art isn't just a hero on a horse anymore. Bronze memorials gave way to the large-scale abstract sculpture that flooded the public domain when the National Endowment for the Arts launched its Art in Public Places program in the 1960s. Then the explosion of new forms in the 1980s – street art, video, billboards, protest actions, environments, graffiti, murals – radically changed the face of contemporary public art. Economists, historians, and urban sociol-

ogists have discussed the meaning and political uses of public spaces, the impoverishment of public life, and the possibilities for its rehabilitation and revitalization through art, architecture, and more creative city planning. But despite a general trend toward involving artists in the process of designing buildings and public areas, public art is often applied like Band-Aids to predetermined sites, as after-the-fact attempts to remedy poor planning or as extraneous baubles, monuments to good intentions.

The public must be puzzled by these efforts. It struggles to understand, or ignores, and can end up destroying the work. To succeed, public art has to transcend the laws that offer it a rightful place in the built environment as well as specific issues that legitimate it. It must invest itself with the collective understanding of the place and recognize the ideals of its audience. In our fragmented contempo-

rary society, rarely does any one work or program accomplish this almost impossible task.

What makes public art public? There is a difference between art that is intrinsically public (art produced with partial or total public funding) and art that is public essentially because of its location (privately financed projects placed in publicly accessible areas). Public art in the first sense implies that the work must have a significance that is commonly recognized and respected.<sup>1</sup> As one critic points out, "Recognizability means that style and subject matter can't be obscure or personal."<sup>2</sup> Privately owned sculpture and paintings found outside museums and galleries in places accessible to the public do not necessarily constitute public art, as is illustrated by the sale and removal of *America*, the majestic, 46-foot-long mural by the late Rufino Tamayo that hung in the lobby of the Bank of the

Southwest for nearly 40 years.<sup>3</sup> "Art in public places" may be a more appropriate designation for works belonging to museums, universities, or corporations.<sup>4</sup>

What role should the public play in public art? The issue has become more urgent as works of contemporary artists appear with increasing frequency in corporate plazas and city parks. Perhaps public sculpture's problem lies in its very publicness. It inherits the difficulties implicit in its funding label, "art in public places," raising the disturbing yet necessary question of whether "art" and "public art" are not very different things.<sup>5</sup> If public sculpture is subject to the definition implicit in its name – if it is designed to be seen outside the cordoned-off viewing area that the exhibition system provides – then it enters a sphere that is unfocused, unspecialized, and unmediated by traditional aesthetic norms. It engages an audience that is broad and heterogeneous. And it enters an environment that removes art from its privileged status to an ancillary one, involving new roles within a wider realm of entertainment, politics, and economics. All of these, of course, are consequences of the desire to make public art useful or usable by a new and larger audience.

Public art begins in the democratic urge to bring art to a broad, unspecialized public. To this ethical vision of art's transforming social power – its capacity to alter the communal mind – has been added a corresponding vision of its economic function. Therefore site can be interpreted in many different ways, from spatial to social to financial.<sup>6</sup> Increasingly, public art must be held accountable both to political and eco-

conomic forces and to society's concerns. Even so, private and public demands tend to coexist uneasily within the sphere of civic art. For "public" is not a passive, fixed idea: it has to be continually invented and constructed. Public life assumes many forms, and the advice of experts is no guarantee that more than cluttered mediocrity will result from the combination of development dollars and aesthetic pretensions. Public dialogue on the subject has been stuck on one question for years: Do we put cerebral, hard-to-understand works in public places for the educational experience they can offer, or do we opt for the middle ground — works essentially aspiring to the condition of Muzak? In general, the successful public art projects have been those in which the community was fully involved in the selection process, and they were deemed successful because they generated no controversy. From a developer's or institution's viewpoint this may be the bottom line, but for an artist it can be disastrous.

Writing in *Art in Public Places* (1981), John Beardsley argued that "because the forms of art have evolved and diversified so dramatically in the last several decades, there is a disparity between contemporary artistic practice and public expectations of what art should look like."<sup>7</sup> Often the "disparity" can be smoothed over by a mixture of careful preparation and community participation, sensitivity to attaining the best possible work for the appropriate site, and a civic consensus that paying for and supporting such art is the right thing to do. Do artists have a responsibility to their audience as well as to their art? Sculptor Richard Serra was faulted when his *Tilted Arc* (1981), commissioned by the General Services Administration for Foley Square in New York City, was greeted with such hostility by those who had to look at it and walk around it that after a lengthy process of petitioning and public hearings it was removed in 1989. Along with several tons of Cor-Ten steel, a whole battery of assumptions about public art was tossed into the dustbin: who makes it, why it gets made, who it is for. Before *Tilted Arc*, Serra commented that "after the piece is built, the space will be understood primarily as a function of the sculpture."<sup>8</sup> Since that debacle, however, the discussion has shifted away from the notion of site specificity as a response to the formal dynamics of the site toward a concern for community as context.

A similar controversy erupted in Washington, D.C., over the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, designed by Maya Ling Lin. After significant negative response from some public figures and veterans' groups who called the piece unpatriotic, a compromise was reached with the placement nearby of two "heroizing" statues, Frederick Hart's battle-weary male soldiers dressed in fatigues and Glenna Goodacre's Vietnam Women's Memorial.

But as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial proves, education of the community must be an integral part of any plan to bring art to civic places. Almost 13 years after it was erected, this gravely beautiful work of art ranks as the single greatest



John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, *South Bronx Sculpture Park*, 1991, detail. In the wake of strong community objections to the implied characterization of neighborhood residents, the lifelike cast figures were removed shortly after their installation.

monument built in our time. With its seemingly unending scroll, a powerful ritual of naming is enacted, individual experiences occur, and collective meaning is generated. The controversy that surrounded its creation arose from an awareness that such generation of meaning would take place and might have political implications. Perhaps the first mandate for attributing meaning to a work of public art is to recognize that meaning-making is a shared activity between artist and observer.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, can one go too far in the direction of consensus and community? Take the recent controversy over John Ahearn's *South Bronx Sculpture Park*. In the wake of community objections, the figural sculptures, painted casts of neighborhood residents by Ahearn and his partner, Rigoberto Torres, were removed just a few days after they were installed. Community members believed that the subjects for the lifelike cast figures negatively represented their neighborhood. Ahearn's willingness to listen to the community is commendable, but the removal of the work raised distressing questions. If we reduce public art to the role of promoting community self-esteem, have we

come that far from the false consensus implied by the traditional war memorial or public statue? Moreover, the tendency to romanticize community may prevent some artists from acknowledging the tensions and conflicts that exist in any group. The Ahearn case highlights all the crushing issues for public artists: Should pleasing the local neighborhood be the artist's primary goal? Should works necessarily be decorative? Should artists be encouraged to provoke debate on relevant issues? We feel torn by the ease with which one can undermine anything that is unorthodox and experimental. But if public art is one of the most active areas of artistic "research and development," it is because the average pedestrian has become passionate about what goes up

ence, context, and meaning. The problem is that the dialogue surrounding public art in Houston has been too closely circumscribed. By asking more far-ranging questions, we can consider not only public art but perhaps the very nature of art in our contemporary situation. And this goes beyond discussion about the merits of abstract versus representational art, "plop" art versus collaborative action, or whether public money should be spent on works that may offend public taste. Something more fundamental is at issue: the very identity of Houston. Four recent examples plainly illustrate the problems surrounding public art in the city.

Last year, controversy erupted over Moody Park's *Vaquero*, designed by prominent Mexican-American artist Luis Jiménez. The gun-toting statue is an exuberant homage to the Mexican cattlemen and horsemen of two centuries past. Installed in 1981, three years after the Moody Park riot, the vividly painted fiberglass sculpture of a Mexican cowboy riding a bucking blue horse with red eyes has always had its detractors and its defenders. It became the focus of new public attention when some area residents, thinking that the sculpture depicts a drunken Mexican, collected hundreds of signatures and petitioned the city to remove it from the park. These groups perceive the statue as a poor representation of Hispanic heritage and as a symbol of violence in a violence-plagued area. They believe the sculpture was commissioned by the city in an attempt to appease the riot-torn neighborhood. However, just as many residents view the *Vaquero* with pride and respect, as a valuable enhancement of the community. Not only is the Houston *Vaquero* the artist's first public sculpture; it is the first in an edition of six, another one of which was acquired by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art in Washington. Jiménez typically uses images and techniques drawn from popular culture, particularly Mexican-American culture and Mexican myth. Based on traditional monuments of historical figures on horseback, the statue powerfully conveys the spirit of the vaquero in the taming of the West, but at the same time raises the problem of how such a work is perceived in the changing life of a community.

A more difficult area to grapple with critically is that of accountability and ethics. In the past few years, some of the

on his or her block or in his or her mall. According to critic Lucy Lippard, a progressive artist's job is

*to produce an image that expands the public's expectations of what they may get from public forms, to provoke thought, and help people look around them with fresh eyes. The more permanent public art must offer an experience that is intimate, complex, and enduring, as well as decorative and acceptable to its sponsors.<sup>10</sup>*

The relationship between art and environment, art and context, artist and audience remains at the heart of any public art worth its turf. But the great and still elusive questions surrounding public art are, Which public? Is there an exchange between art and audience? Does art in the public interest really interest the public?

These are just a few of the knotty questions that public art raises in Houston. The questions concern not only aesthetics, but also the fine line dividing exploitation and collaboration in the relationship between artists and their communities. It takes more than an outdoor site to make sculpture public. To consider the public nature of art is to undertake an analysis of artmaking that highlights issues of audi-



Lisa Carol Hardaway and Paul Hester, Photographers © 1994

Luis Jiménez, *Vaquero*, 1980, Moody Park, Houston. Members of the Hispanic community have recently objected to the imagery of this molded fiberglass sculpture, going so far as to suggest its removal from the park.

city's most visible sites have been given over to permanent works that aspire unsuccessfully to lofty ideals of collective experience and the common good. Dedicated in 1992 after seven years of planning and the investment of \$1.2 million in private funds, the Houston Police Officers Memorial, a forbidding pyramidal granite monument on the banks of Buffalo Bayou beside Memorial Drive near downtown, is neither the family playscape nor the serenely meditative site that sculptor Jesús Bautista Moroles envisioned. This memorial to police officers who lost their lives in the line of duty, one of the largest contemporary public sculptures in the country, consists of five stepped pyramids, each 40 feet square at the base. Each has steps of Texas granite and terraces of grass. A central ziggurat rising 12½ feet from ground to apex culminates in a slab of carved granite bearing the names of the officers. Four inverted pyramids seemingly plunge into the earth, creating modest amphitheatres around the central structure. Accessible only from a small parking lot beside the westbound lanes of Memorial Drive and guarded 24 hours a day by Houston police officers, the isolated site neither welcomes people nor serves as a retreat for spiritual renewal. Moroles intended to create a place where children and parents would want to spend time – an interactive monument, perhaps, that would work as seamlessly with the landscape as Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial does. But the result is an example of public art that has not met the planned criteria of site and context. A major thoroughfare linking Houston's residential and downtown areas, Memorial Drive is more conducive to "drive-by" than interactive sculpture. Neither the site nor the massive work are friendly to the viewer. After parking their cars, people must first pass through a small plaza featuring benches carved with donors' names, a police bunker, and a

blue portable toilet before setting out on the walkway to the tomblike monument. The sculpture itself is ominous, perhaps dangerous. Its grassy levels and stairs must be climbed on circuitous routes. The pathways are narrow and uneven, and the sharp edges are too precipitous for adults, much less small children. Even worse, the view of downtown and adjacent Allen Parkway from the top of the pyramid is unrewarding and reveals few perspectives of the landscape other than those already drawn from the street. Significantly, the four below-grade plazas are too small to function as individual amphitheatres.



Lisa Carol Hardaway and Paul Hester, Photographers © 1994

Jesús Bautista Moroles, *Houston Police Officers Memorial*, 1992, located off Memorial Drive outside downtown.

On an even more prominent site, the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivor's Plaza should set off a red alert in the design community. He is the "R" of H & R Block, headquartered in Kansas City, and was so grateful for surviving lung cancer that he decided to build Cancer Survivor's Plazas in the 52 largest cities in the U.S. and Canada. In Houston, with the support of Peter Marzio, director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Bloch chose a nice little triangle of grass and trees at the northern edge of Hermann Park, between Fannin Street, Hermann Drive, and Main Street. Adjacent to the Museum of Fine Arts and the Warwick Hotel, the piece was intended to bring together park visitors and cancer survivors alike. The overall design works well as a contemplative pedestrian plaza, with a low circular wall and benches on the inside. A three-columned fountain that the Women's City Club gave Houston in 1944 is still in situ, but it is overpowered by a flowery sculptured tempietto – a mishmash of garish architectural styles and decorative elements, including brand new classical columns, lacy ironwork, and an abundance of sources of nighttime illumination. Bits of advice about cancer are cast in bronze and attached to posts. Worse, a computer encased like a shrine (or funer-



Lisa Carol Hardaway and Paul Hester, Photographers © 1994

Joe Incrapera, *Christopher Columbus*, 1992, donated to the city of Houston by the Federation of Italian American Organizations of Greater Houston and installed in Bell Park on Montrose Boulevard over the objections of the Municipal Art Commission, whose decision was successfully appealed to city council.

to Columbus that looks like it was made two or three centuries ago is an illustration, not a work of art.

For years there have been safety nets, checkpoints, and committees intended to ensure that we, the public, receive great works of art from donors. Like most major cities, however, Houston has some intelligent and adventurous works, such as Claes Oldenburg's *Geometric Mouse X* and Jean Dubuffet's *Monument au Fantôme*, but also its share of public art that can be described as innocuous at best. Unlike that of most major cities, almost all of Houston's public art has come from private sources. There is no municipal budget for art acquisition. Some works have been donated by the artists who created them; other pieces have been commissioned by corporations or foundations, accepted by the city council on the advice of the Municipal Art Commission, and installed at the donor's expense. Corporate and philanthropic largesse, which brought Houston some major pieces of blue-chip public art in the central business and museum districts, proved that Houstonians can accomplish great things, but the private initiatives and programs scattered throughout the city also hindered the development of any public plan. Significantly, 190 cities in the U.S. have a public art program, but Houston does not.

ary box) offers cancer information. Tipping the scale far past bad taste is Victor Salmones's bronze rendition of a family gamboling through bronze rectangles, looking happy to have made it out alive. The \$1 million maintenance endowment that Bloch paid to secure this prime real estate smack in the middle of one of Houston's most heavily trafficked intersections was a bargain. What Houston received in return is an insulting interpretation of a terrible disease.

After a successful appeal to city council to overturn the ruling of the Municipal Art Commission, the intimate garden areas of Montrose's Bell Park were compromised by a schmaltzy bronze statue of Christopher Columbus by Galveston artist Joe Incrapera. The Federation of Italian-American Organizations of Greater Houston donated the piece to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the explorer's voyage to America. Columbus holds a nautical map in one hand and points due west with the other, either symbolically aiming toward uncharted lands or merely gesturing at the Italian Community Cultural Center across the street. A monument to Columbus may be appropriate in the right context, perhaps in the federation's front yard. But a public monument

What the city has is pieces of a process. The Municipal Art Commission (MAC) consists of a group of citizens, appointed by the mayor, that serves as Houston's conduit for receiving gifts of artwork to be displayed in the city. More importantly, it is charged with the authority to approve any work of art to be placed on public property. MAC also solicits funds for the purchase of art, promotes beautification of public spaces through displays of art, and advocates further development of the arts in Houston. Unfortunately, MAC's authority can be too easily challenged, because its decisions are only recommendations that must be approved by city council. Another agency concerned with public art is the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County

(CACHH), an independent, nonprofit arts group that contracts with the city of Houston to provide services and disburse city funds to the local arts community. More specialized programs include the SPARK ("school park") program, which enables artists, landscape architects, and neighborhood residents to create parks on HISD school playgrounds. SPARK is sponsored by HISD and funded by the city of Houston, individual schools, and neighborhood organizations and businesses. Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts (MECA) assists the artistic development of low-income families, mainly in the Sixth Ward, by sponsoring student murals in HISD buildings.

What Houston has lacked over the years is the implementation of some shared vision. With the recent publication of a cultural arts plan from the Houston/Harris County Arts Task Force, there is promise that the future will be better. Among other things, the task force recommended that by 1996, a full 1.75 percent of the money for city and county capital improvement projects be allocated to art. Most of the proposals will be the responsibility of Jessica Cusick, the newly appointed director of CACHH's public art program. Before her position with CACHH, Cusick was director of the public art project of Los Angeles's Metropolitan Transit Authority. In Houston, her goal is to develop and coordinate guidelines, processes, and methodologies for a public art plan.

Can we have a public art program here? Or does public art benefit and serve only a few people? After all, Houston is a car-centered city with sprawling suburbs. Multilayered, pluralistic, and roughshod, it has an electrifying spirit, but for a city its size, Houston has an amazing lack of convivial places where people congregate by choice – not schools, malls, or community centers, but the in-between spaces for the public's enjoyment, such as squares, fountains, and promenades. Unlike other cities with successful public art programs, such as Seattle, Phoenix, Philadelphia, or Chicago, Houston has neither a remarkable landscape nor the amenities that residents of older cities view as their birthright. In what circumstances will people appreciate public art and consider it part of their city's identity? Who is the audience for public art in Houston, and what is public art's significance in Houston at the end of the century? Depending on one's point of view, such questions may conjure up the image of the public realm as a kind of experimental laboratory, even a labyrinth. The survey of selected Houston cultural leaders, artists, and professionals that follows indicates the conflicting ideas that arise regarding public art.



**Project Row Houses, 1994, at 2500 Holman in the Third Ward. This community-based project brings together neighborhood revitalization, preservation, and public art. Eight of the ten restored 1930s shotgun frame houses will have revolving art installations by regionally and nationally selected artists.**

Lisa Carol Hardaway and Paul Hester, Photographers © 1994

## Viewpoints

**Peter Marzio, director, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; chair, Public Art and Urban Design Committee, Houston/Harris County Arts Task Force.**

I don't believe there's been a lot of thinking here about public art. What we tried to do in the task force report was to get away from the narrow, elitist concept of just a few sculptures standing around and deal instead with everything from thinking of the bayou as the spine of the city to thinking of landscape design and making additions to the landscape that enhance the individual's interaction with it, like the walking and running paths along the bayous, so that you see the whole city as a big interactive sculpture. The fact that this was the first report of its kind is significant. Even if only five percent of its proposals are accomplished in twenty years, the next committee will have our report as a base to work from.

It seems to me that a lot of the neighborhood-based work is most important. I include sidewalks, curb design, and signage, so that public art is the boundary of the private sector. It makes life nicer, enhances the value of the land, and instills pride.

The Project Row Houses is something that I would call a significant public art project. Oftentimes historic preservation can create neighborhood pride. Obviously I'm not against the great sculptures, but at times we've asked a sculpture to do too

much. I've often heard criticism of the Henry Moore piece on Allen Parkway. I run by the Moore every day, and I think it's a handsome sculpture. But because there's not a lot of that kind of work in Houston, you tend to get a group that's very critical. I find their criticism extremely destructive. What we need is tolerance toward different approaches to public art and getting the neighborhoods involved. That way, the people who are going to be looking at the work and involved with the environment every day will have had some say in what it is.

What I like about the Cancer Survivor's Plaza is that it is endowed for maintenance. I saw that as a precedent for any kind of public art here. There's no sense in having public art that's going to deteriorate and the city isn't going to keep up. I think the Cancer Survivor's sculpture itself is kind of corny, but truthfully, I'm not violently against it. I'll bet if you polled the people of Houston, that piece would not come out as one of the more unpopular sculptures in town.

I also supported the Christopher Columbus statue in Bell Park, and there was a big hubbub about that. I don't see what's wrong with it. There's a lot of mediocre sculpture in Rome, for example. But somehow it gives life, a sense of activity. It reflects the variety that makes up the society. I'm not defending bad art; I'm just saying there's got to be some toler-

ance. It's the layers of the city, to be able to peel away and see what was important at different times. We can have that in Houston.

**Paul Winkler, director, Manil Collection.**

The whole idea of sculpture and how it plays a role is very interesting. If you think of Rome and its marvelous piazzas, everything is geared toward walking. Then you come to cities at the end of the 20th century that are geared toward the automobile, and yet we try to do something in a traditional manner called public sculpture.

In a city like Houston, where it can rain nearly 60 inches a year, we have an abundance of water, and yet we don't use water at all, basically. I can think of just two or three fountains. A fountain is a beautiful thing, because it can work as a point of organization for a city or a street scenario. It works from the car, it works for pedestrians, it works from every point of view. And yet we tend to not even think about fountains.

To come up with a plan of boulevards and fountains takes a real vision of the city, with the community behind it. How much should be sculpture and how much should be city planning and architecture? Sculpture is a very specific thing, and sometimes we want to use it for the wrong reasons.

We are about to take down one of the most interesting forms in Houston, the Blue Ribbon Rice elevators. You'll never be able to build a sculpture of that scale, one that represents the last piece of the city's agrarian history in the memory of its citizens. Do those things count for anything? I think a lot more needs to be done first in urban planning – how we get around, how we spend our time, where we go to spend our time – before we can have any really wonderful plan for art.

What are the public spaces in Houston that are really used and where people come together? Hermann Park, the jogging track at Memorial Park, the Transco water wall. Those are our public spaces. The greatest public space for years has been Miller Theater, yet we haven't taken care of it, and we failed to make it visually stimulating. What people have to realize is that there are sites that have a priority to the overall city. The notion of "site specific" is an extremely difficult and delicate thing and means something far beyond what we've seen so far in this city. It's very hard to put an object anywhere. There are only a certain number of important sites, and great care has to be taken in what's done with them. We're at a point in our growth when we can take a little time and really look at some things. We are going to survive. We are going to be a city. How do we want to look? What do we want to be?



Lisa Carol Handway and Paul Hester, Photographers © 1994

**Mel Chin, *Manila Palm*, 1978.** Located behind the Contemporary Arts Museum.

**Marti Mayo, director, Contemporary Arts Museum; former director, Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston.**

Houston is such a new city that, unlike New York or Washington, D.C., cities that really came into their own in the 19th century, there's no tradition of public art here. Washington is full of 19th-century sculptures of generals on their horses, and we know what that kind of art symbolizes. In Houston, we don't have much older public art, so everyone thinks we need some. What I think the public in Houston doesn't always realize is that those generals were commissioned and sited at a time when realist sculpture was the prevailing aesthetic.

The best art, the art that survives in the public mind over time, is the best art of its time. Today, we need to focus on work that represents the best artists working now, and a breakdown occurs here because contemporary art is so distant from the public's eye and understanding. Nonetheless, we need to make serious efforts to educate the general public so that it sees art as a necessary and important part of everyday life. And to do this, we need great works that are permanent and that can become part of the visual fabric of the city. I'm not sure I want a program that consists only of temporary, socially aware installations. We need variety and experimentation of all kinds. There's a lot of good work and a lot of trash done in all styles. And we need to realize that public art is going to be uneven, depending on the broad constituencies involved in choosing it.

I think one of the most successful pieces of public art in Houston in terms of function and performance is Mel Chin's *Manila Palm*, behind the Contemporary Arts Museum. It has turned out to be a kind of logo for the building and is visually a part of what we think about the CAM. The Museum of Fine Arts sculpture garden is entering the visual fabric of the city in a way I did not anticipate ten years ago. The garden is a tribute to the MFA, because it is so well used. People are truly

at home there among the art works. The public art at the University of Houston is also a great success story. To have any sculpture at all in a public agency is a miracle: the fact that UH and its board of regents have been consistently supportive of such a program is a measure of commitment to excellence that you find no where else in this state. Of course, not each and every piece out of fifty on the UH campus is absolutely brilliant, but as work that people can relate to, I think the art on the campus is very successful.

In the end, we need to remember that Houston is not a pedestrian city. Public art here has to be something you can see and understand as you drive past it. Or it has to be in a situation, as at UH, where people commonly walk around as they go about their daily lives.

They understand that a segment of the population doesn't want public money spent on anything having to do with the Confederacy. Sam Houston needs a tremendous amount of work. We'll have to go through fundraising and an adopt-a-monument program. But we've got to start taking care of what we have before we start adding other works. I think MAC has always been reactive rather than proactive.



Rick Gardiner

**Matt Mullican, untitled sculpture, 1991, at the Houston Science Center Building, University of Houston.** Since 1966, the University of Houston has set aside one percent of the construction budget of all new or renovated buildings for art acquisition. The city of Houston is considering a similar program.

**Artie Lee Hinds, chair, Municipal Art Commission.**

Our mandate is to review, screen, approve, or disapprove anything going on city-owned property. Then we send our recommendation to the city council. They're the ones who make the final decision. We don't always have the full authority we're supposed to have. We have to get in there and educate new department heads whenever the administration changes. I am the member of longest standing – a total of 22 years.

One of the problems we're up against now is maintenance. When people want to donate works, they need to give an endowment for maintenance. Some cities reserve 10 percent of the overall cost of a work for a maintenance fund. Maybe some bronzes need washing down every three to five years. But what do you do when a sculpture gets graffitied? The parks department doesn't have any budget for restoration. I'm trying to get a proper restoration program into effect. We're going to be spending money very shortly on three major historical monuments – Dick Dowling, Sam Houston, and the *Spirit of the Confederacy*. The Daughters and Sons of the Confederacy are raising money for matching funds.

**Gael Stack, artist; professor of painting, director of the art graduate program, University of Houston; former six-year Municipal Art Commission member.**

What MAC does is make recommendations to the city council, and they're generally gone along with, although not always. MAC has a separate function. It says yes or no to things going on city property. It doesn't commission art, it doesn't buy art, it doesn't have a budget. It isn't a public art program. If somebody in the city – like the mayor or city council – really wants something, then the city gets it. The city council can override MAC. A case in point is the Columbus statue in Bell Park. MAC voted against it; an issue was made of the work because it's figurative.

What happens is that some people tend to see contemporary art, particularly abstract art, as elitist. In favoring figurative work, such individuals don't make visual distinctions, even when a figurative work isn't successful. In their view, if you oppose a particular figurative piece, then you are against figurative sculpture. But that's not the real issue, of course. You run into problems because there are people with things very dear to their hearts, and MAC tries to steer them toward

something of quality that would better serve them in the long run.

I think MAC has a place. It's not really a culprit, but it has been an easy mark for people. It has said no to the endless gifts that people want to give to the city. MAC is valuable because without its input, city council decides. MAC was started in the sixties, by the way, because city council was rejecting really good works of art. As long as they keep artists on the MAC board – and there are terrific people on the commission now – it can continue to function quite well, have a variety of inputs, and keep the aesthetic level high.

**Marion McCollam, executive director, Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.**

CACHH is a catalyst, nurturer, and cultural planner for the city and county. Local arts agencies like CACHH have had to step up to a larger community responsibility in recent years. The agencies that connect with a lot of different resources are the ones succeeding. CACHH is the designated arts agency of the city and the county and is responsible for supporting the arts and developing partnerships that leverage new resources. We are connecting with the city and other public entities in numerous ways. To justify money for the arts when there are such issues as education, youth at risk, and homelessness, it is necessary to establish the crucial relevance of the arts to city life. In a changing society, where few values are generally agreed upon, issues of diversity and community are especially visible in tangible public art projects. We see ourselves as a lightning rod of sorts. Part of our agenda has to do with the visual character of the city: public art, urban design, and historical preservation. The various studies, whether Main Street or Buffalo Bayou, are pieces of a puzzle. Public art as part of the city-building process could begin to bring some linkages.

Some of the things that excite me about Houston are also some of the things that delay certain types of activity. The very individualistic approach to things does not always lend itself to looking beyond a particular building that may be magnificent in itself. Take some of the structures downtown: they hit the sidewalk and that's it. There may be a beautiful piece of art in the plaza, but there's no sense of planning beyond the individual project. How will that plaza be used? How does it relate to the streetscape? The idea of doing comprehensive planning is new here. It means looking at things more broadly, looking at their impact. This is a critical time for Houston, and everyone senses that. I knew what a key position a public art director would play in our future. We needed someone who could work with the disparate interests and involve the community. The mayor is saying "Imagine Houston," and public art must be part of that vision.

**Jessica Cusick, director of public art, Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.**

I can't stress enough the necessity for dialogue and process. I think that people have a right to question what they're going to bump into every day on the way to work or taking their children to play. That's why public art isn't right for all artists, not right for all sites, not all things to all people.

A public art administrator and a public art plan have to put together situations that foster dialogue and interchange. But it's also important to have sites and locations where there's long-term thinking, a point where government needs to step in and take civic responsibility. There need to be times when we commission great monuments that may not be loved now but will be in forty years' time. It's the issue of acknowledging the plurality of our society.

On one level, public art is a great way to decorate, but that's the least of the things it can do. It's one more way of rethinking our society, which we desperately need to do. If our cities are going to be successful places where we want to live, then we need to rethink how we live in them, design them, maintain them, and interact in them. Public art is a part of that understanding.

Houston is not like other cities, which is the first thing you have to acknowledge when thinking of a public art program. At this point we don't have a program to implement. What we have is a voluntary resolution on the part of city council. But we are going to need to draft guidelines and develop a process for implementing projects.

Somebody asked me once what was the best thing I could guarantee in terms of a public art program. I said I can't guarantee that everybody is going to like it, or that it will make everybody happy. I can guarantee an accountable process, and I think that's the most important thing. The most obvious way to connect the public and art is to put together a real public process. There are workshops I want to do with artists, input I want to get from the arts, planning, and design communities. Out of all this will come a public art plan, one that establishes a framework for public art and urban design in Houston.

But public art planning is like any other process: you need to set up opportunities for dialogue and review. It's not going to happen overnight. It gets back to the question, Is public art of any interest to the public? You create a program that's flexible, accessible, that's doing different types of things in different areas. You do it with a public art program that makes room for projects that are totally community generated and community oriented, and projects that are about the best artists of our generation creating new focal points for our city. You don't want a program that's biased one way or another. You want a full spectrum that creates possibilities, both structurally and in terms of funding.

**Barry Moore, architect and *Houston Life* contributing editor.**

Who is the audience for public art? I guess that depends on where it is. The audience for public art in the Galleria is high school kids with cars who get out at the Transco water wall.

Houston is not a public art kind of town. It's not an environmental kind of town. I think there's a knowledgeable, verbal, tasteful audience for public art, but it's not a very wide one. Chicago is one of the most wonderful places in the world because it has an incredible audience for architecture. Cab drivers have opinions. They discuss it and get in heated arguments. But in Houston there's a lack of public awareness. Chicago has an atmosphere that says your opinion is



Jim Love, *The Portable Trojan Bear*, 1974, Hermann Park.

valuable whether you're a homeless person or a CEO. That's what public art is – it's something that people have opinions about.

Probably one of the best pieces of public art in Houston is Jim Love's *Portable Trojan Bear* in Hermann Park. It's for everybody, and kids love to climb on it. The bear is an example of public art that all kinds of people relate to quickly and positively. It's also in a place where lots of people can enjoy being around it.

But Houston doesn't have a central place or a central boulevard. We're really good at designing buildings but terrible at designing the places they go in. Since we don't have public spaces, we don't have a very well formed idea of public art. We don't even have a public discourse. One of the reasons zoning was going to be a challenge and potentially a real problem is that Houstonians have never learned to have a public forum for discussion and debate. You can't have a city with a spirit of public art like Seattle, Chicago, or New York unless you've got a community that really knows what being citizens in a city entails. We're just a big town. It's the most interesting town in the world. This is like São Paulo North. You never know what you're going to run into.

**Paul Kittelson, artist; assistant professor and interim coordinator of sculpture, University of Houston.**

Public art works on so many different levels. More and more artists are seeing it in terms of public dialogue or raising issues that incorporate the community and people's interests. The key is the temporality of more current work, the fact that it's only there for a short period of time. It changes and creates a more active dialogue with the people around it than the piece of "plop" art that's there forever, which people come to know and ignore.

We have the seeds of a really dynamic public art program here, if we could just support and coordinate some of the efforts going on. Rick Lowe's Project

group of people can appreciate. In Houston, you'll see more and more projects going on. But unless artists start to turn in a new direction, we're going to end up with bronze cowboys.

**Rick Lowe, artist; founder, Project Row Houses; Municipal Art Commission member.**

There are some things that a lot of artists don't like to deal with. But when you throw the public into it, you have to deal with the issue of relevance. Is a work relevant to a group of people? When you start dealing with public art, you have to take that into consideration. The Project Row Houses will be very easy to get ordinary people involved in and create dialogue. The physical houses have relevance to people in the area, those who grew up in the houses or lived near them. Getting the local people involved will increase public awareness of the project as public art and will definitely increase its lifespan. I hope each time artists come in to do projects they can address different concerns about the houses, and years down the line we can regenerate those questions people have dealt with. These are spaces that have a lot of historical significance, and the challenge is for the artist to use that as a basis for creation.

We tend to think of art as an inside-the-loop thing. But if we want to broaden support, broaden the awareness of art, we have to realize that most of the Houston population lives out in the suburbs. I would like to see temporary, or in some cases permanent, works of public art in different neighborhoods around the city. The freeways are prime public space. We stand to gain a lot by strengthening our focus on those areas rather than continuing to build monuments to corporate buildings. ■

1 Rosen, Nancy, "Public Art: City Amblings," in *Ten Years of Public Art, 1972-1982*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Doris C. Freedman Gallery, 1982), p. 11.

2 Goldin, Amy, "The Esthetic Ghetto: Some Thoughts About Public Art," *Art in America*, May-June 1974, p. 31.

3 A series of bankruptcies in the 1980s placed ownership of *America* in question, with MCorp, Aetna Realty, and Bank One engaged in litigation. In 1992 the work was sold at auction for \$2.6 million.

4 For a detailed overview and comprehensive treatment of art in public spaces in Houston, see William Howze, "Why a Mouse? Public Art in Houston," *Cite*, Fall 1990, pp. 17-21.

5 Linker, Kate, "Public Sculpture: The Pursuit of the Pleasurable and Profitable Paradise," *Artforum*, March 1981, p. 64.

6 Although the interjection of real estate into the cultural market is beyond the scope of this article, its effect of making the builder a patron of the arts deserves mention. Out of the construction boom of the 1960s and early 1970s came various redevelopment programs that exploited art's roles as symbol, lure, advertisement, and emblem of urban prosperity.

7 Beardsley, John, *Art in Public Places: A Survey of Community-Sponsored Projects Supported by the National Endowment for the Arts*, ed. Andy Harney (Washington, D.C.: Partners for Livable Places, 1981).

8 Quoted in Robert Storr, "Tilted Arc: Enemy of the People," *Art in America*, September 1985, p. 92.

9 Lacy, Suzanne, "Fractured Space," in Arlene Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 299.

10 Ippard, Lucy, "Moving Targets/Moving Out," in Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest*, p. 209.

# EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES

## The Rice School/La Escuela Rice by Taft Architects

Ray Don Tilley



Taft Architects, The Rice School/La Escuela Rice, Kirby at North Braeswood, 1994. Entrance canopy.

Educators and architects have turned “overflow” into innovation with the Houston Independent School District’s recently completed Rice School/La Escuela Rice. Tucked into Project Renewal, the Houston Independent School District’s most recent construction package, this nugget of educational opportunity is officially an overflow K–8 to relieve overenrollment at Pershing Middle School and West University, Poe, and Roberts elementary schools. It will serve as well as a laboratory for teaching investigation by Rice University. Add to these combined impetuses a design process that drew its energy from teachers’ descriptions of how the building should meet the program, and the result is a funky synergy that Taft Architects rode and tamed into one of precious few examples of superb school buildings today.

This does not mean that Taft simply took its design from an inspired group of teachers. Rather the architects, working with their first public building in Houston since the Metropolitan YWCA of 1979, reined in and refined the teachers’ ideas through an interactive design development to create clarity in form and organization from a flexible template of teaching spaces whose uses can shift to match changes in both student population and teaching principles. In this way, the building is a leap ahead of Taft Architects’ formally rigorous but spatially overly specific design for an elementary school in Hope, Indiana, of 1989.

In its plan, the Rice School owes more to the architects’ recent residential work, particularly the Rothwell House in River Oaks, than to Hope Elementary. Spaces are layered across the site from public to private uses, from assembly and administrative spaces to a linear block of workrooms and specialized classrooms to a sawtooth collection of ten classroom clusters on two levels. Like the Rothwell House, too, a central circular pivot – the entry court at the house, the library at this school – anchors two colliding and intermeshed plan grids. These can be extracted as a major plan grid that underlies most spaces and a violating minor grid that slashes across the plan at a 30-degree angle and is expressed mainly through the workroom block. In this school, Taft Architects agree, their evolution away from historically inspired and often symmetrical plans and volumes

toward energetic and abstract geometries has matured.

At the library, the architects’ inspiration is its strongest. Students and teachers first glimpse the library as they emerge from the constricted entry passageway off the grand public portico. Painted the traditional yellow of a number two pencil, its curved stucco walls slope upward toward expansive skylights. Its walls are punctuated by slot windows inserted between U-shaped shelf units, offering shifting views into and out of the library that make the library seem omnipresent to an observer walking through the school. If the school were City Hall, the library would be the council chambers; if a newspaper, it would be the city desk. The library, symbol of Knowledge, is the physical and spiritual hub.

Also at the library, Taft Architects’ subversion of corridors to create community space reaches full flower. As elsewhere in the agitated plan, triangular pockets replace hallways. The classroom blocks, each with five classrooms opening onto a common space, are especially free of “tunnel vision.” Taken as a whole, these anti-halls knit together a necessarily com-



Library interior.

Lisa Card Hendon and Paul Healy, Photographers © 1994

Lisa Card Hendon and Paul Healy, Photographers © 1994

compact plan on the prominent ten-acre site on North Braeswood, west of Kirby Drive.

Outside, the school's geometric assemblage is less apparent, masked along its entry façade by a heroic suspended canopy that runs the length of the red-brick administrative, cafeteria, and gymnasium volume, connecting to the austere, curving buff-brick auditorium façade. Only a hint of the diagonal workroom volume, faced in rust-colored, split-face concrete masonry units, is visible from the street. And the jagged blue stucco classrooms with their ribbon windows are nicely shielded from view by a wooded ravine, now a nature trail, preserved during construction.



Commons area surrounding the library.

Throughout the building, finishes – brick, split-face CMU, terrazzo – are substantial, products of a modest budget in a favorable bid climate, the architects say. The school is a model community anchor, marked by the restrained use of its resonant materials – the little red schoolhouse for 1,300.

As times goes by, happily, architecture will likely be the school's secondary success. First will be its answer to the challenge that Stephen Fox posed in "Elementary Analysis" (*Cite*, Spring 1992): Will the school succeed as a teaching laboratory or simply handle

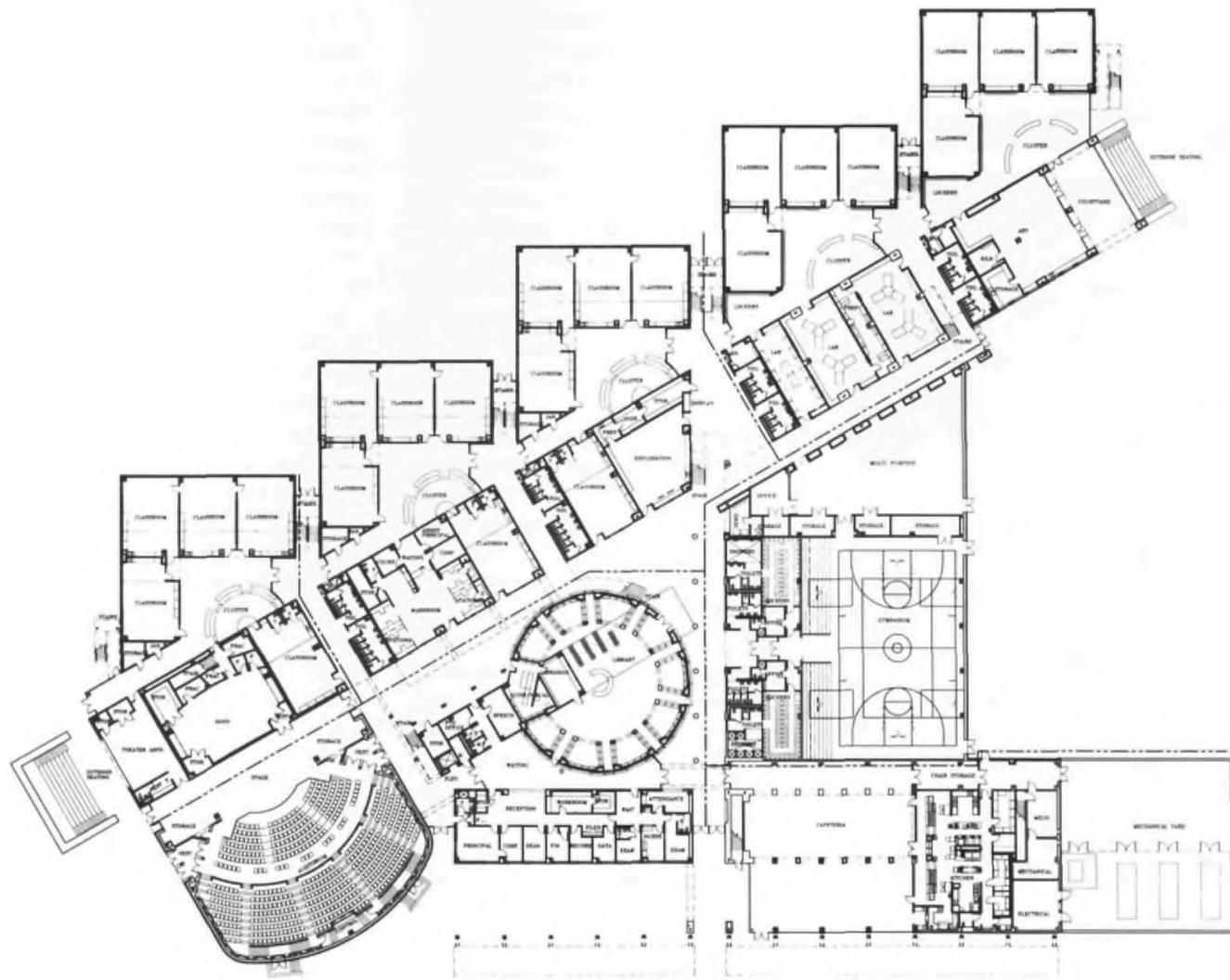
overflow enrollment? The answer, at least in its inaugural year, is that the school is brimming with the drive to experiment with a new paradigm for primary schools.

The first bright light is Kay Stripling, HISD assistant superintendent for staff development, with 30 years' experience in education and a new title: principal. She pushed for an experimental new school and now leads its crucial early implementation. Her task has been enhanced and pressured by advance billing: 7,000 HISD students applied in the districtwide lottery that provided a third of the school's students; 700 teachers nationwide applied for 70 faculty spots. Stripling's promise to them is involvement. Teachers played a major role in determining the school's open-ended design, says Stripling, and they will participate in developing its curriculum and experimenting continually with new teaching approaches.

Among the innovations Stripling points to with pride is the "action lab," a collection of workstations that introduce students to the various careers an information-based society will offer. The action lab is really the old vocational/agricultural shop class reborn, with computers replacing table saws. This school is wired to be full of computers and audio, video, cable, and other technological support.

"Our assumption is that all kids are gifted," says Stripling. "We do not 'track' kids," labeling them early and limiting their options in education and in life. Stripling suggests that the hope for public schools lies in the Rice School's spirit of experimentation, a point borne out by her observation that "many students who applied – at least 1,000 – were from private schools."

If the school lives up to Stripling's expectations, look for more schools like this one. Project Renewal may have included a token nebulous "overflow lab school," but her hope is that the next bond issue, buoyed by HISD administrative and community enthusiasm, will include similar new schools. Thousands are watching to see whether the Rice School is indeed a pearl among the grains of sand in education. ■



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## WRITINGS FROM GEORGES BATAILLE

Translated by Richard Howard

*This brief text by Bataille (1897-1962), at the time of its writing one of the least known of French intellectual figures, is part of a vast lyrical discourse that is probably as influential today as that of any thinker between the two world wars. Poet, philosopher, novelist, sociologist, religious thinker, critic of art and literature, Bataille - more than Breton or Blanchot, more than Sartre, even more than Foucault - is the most numinous of modern European writers.*

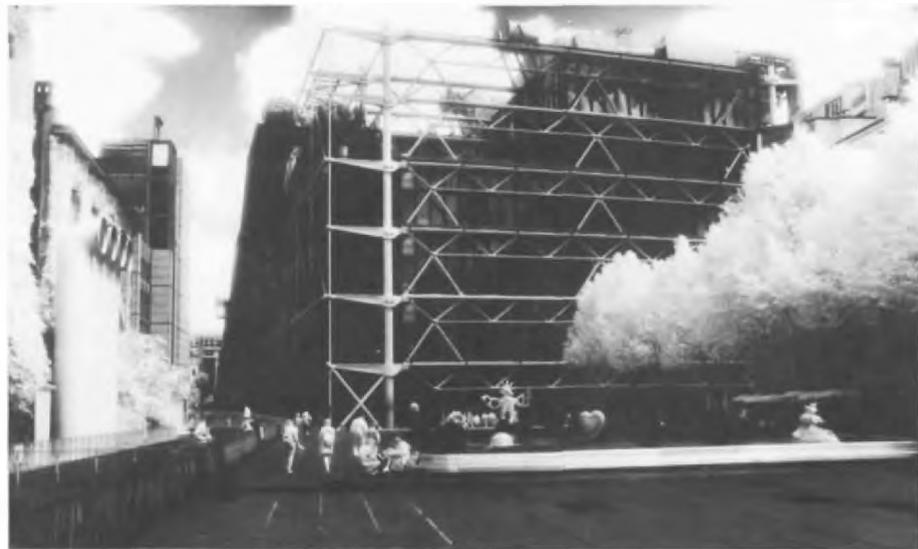
Architecture is the expression of the very being of societies, just as human physiognomy is the expression of the being of individuals. Yet it is chiefly to the physiognomies of official persons (prelates, magistrates, admirals) that such a comparison applies. Only society's ideal form is expressed, strictly speaking, in architectural compositions. Thus the great monuments loom like dikes, setting the logic of majesty and authority against all disturbing elements: it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State address (and silence) the multitude. There can be no doubt that such monuments inspire social obedience and often real fear. The storming of the Bastille is difficult to explain except in terms of the people's animosity toward those monuments that are their real masters.

Moreover, each time architectural composition is encountered elsewhere than in monuments - in physiognomy, in costume, in music, in painting - we may infer a predominant taste for *authority*, human or divine. The great compositions of certain painters express a will to compel the viewer's mind to an official ideal. The disappearance of academic construction in painting, on the other hand, opens the gates to the expression (and thereby to the exaltation) of those psychological processes most incompatible with social stability. This largely accounts for the intense reactions provoked for over half a century by the gradual transformation of painting, which was hitherto characterized by a sort of concealed architectural skeleton.

It is evident, moreover, that the mathematical organization imposed upon stone is none other than the final evolution of earthly forms, whose meaning is granted,

in the biological realm, by the transition from simian to human, the latter already presenting all the elements of architecture. Humanity apparently represents, in the morphological process, no more than an intermediary stage between ape and edifice. Forms have become increasingly static, increasingly dominant; hence the human order is *ab initio* united with the architectural order, which is merely its development. Wherever we attack architecture - whose monumental productions are at present our real masters, grouping the servile masses in their shadow, imposing admiration and amazement, order and constraint - we in some sense attack man himself. Today one human activity the world over - and no doubt the most brilliant there is in the intellectual realm - trends moreover in this direction, betraying the inadequacy of human predominance. Hence, strange as this may seem with regard to creatures as elegant as human beings, a way opens - indicated by the painters - toward bestial monstrosity; as if there were no other hope of escaping the architectural chain gang. [From the review *Documents*, May 1929.] ■

## PARIS IS DEAD. LONG LIVE PARIS



Richard Wall

Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1976. Paris. Built near the site of the old city market, Les Halles.

*The Assassination of Paris* by Louis Chevalier. The University of Chicago Press, 1994. 274 pp., illus., \$29.95

Reviewed by Marie-Pierre Stien

Unless you are a devoted francophile with a subscription to *Le Figaro*, a love for Balzac, and a taste for literary quotations, *The Assassination of Paris* may not be your next bedside book. Written by an eminent historian from the Collège de France, this book sets out to explore the economic, social, and political factors that contributed to the radical urban changes that deeply modified the Parisian landscape from the late forties to the mid-seventies.

However, what could be an enlightening analysis by an observer close to the intellectual and political powers of the time turns out to be an angry, and at times obscure, compilation of tableaux that culminates in a halfhearted account of the final destruction of the meat and vegetable market of Les Halles, which Louis Chevalier identifies as the event that marked the city's passage into a new era of doomed modernity.

It is obvious from the start of the book that the author is a prisoner of both his own style and the culture of the elitist pre-1968 higher education system. Chevalier is a painfully tortuous writer who cannot resist long-winded sentences, random quotes, and sarcasm, as if he were submitting the reader to one of those frightful oral exams that French literature professors so enjoy giving their students. Chevalier is a member of an intensely intellectual elite bred on classi-

cism – men who read Greek and Latin in the text and consider the enjoyment of modern art class treason. Until 1968, this elite also formed the core of political power in France, but was progressively evicted in the 1960s by a new wave of technocrats trained in administration, engineering, and political sciences. It is therefore no coincidence that Chevalier should dedicate three full chapters of his book to a spiteful description of the decline of the philosophers and the ascent of the scientists.

The most interesting part of the book is devoted to the late president Georges Pompidou. A personal friend of the author, Pompidou was the last poet to govern France as well as the first president to open it so blatantly to modernity. This is a particularly poignant tale of inconceivable treason to the classical ideas the author holds so dear. While Chevalier clung to a fading past, his friend and former classmate marketed Paris as the international capital of the world. For a few pages one can almost feel sympathy for the historian who not only witnessed these events but was forced to participate in the irremediable changes.

The angry style soon yanks the reader back to the sore reality of the elitist academic. Like Octavio Paz,<sup>1</sup> Chevalier believes that literature is an essential source for historical narrative. He is torn between the romanticized beauty of a city at work in the old Les Halles market and an irrational fear and hatred of the working class. An ardent critic of the social sciences, he does not bother with statistics or scientific objectivity to prove his

points. His glorification of the homeless *clochard*, the tramp, as the last philosopher in Paris perpetuates a myth of homelessness-by-choice that has long served the French bourgeoisie. His descriptions of the “dangerous” working class always ready to invade the capital, or the youths of Paris lurking in the subterranean corridors of the new Les Halles, are particularly alarming and ill-informed. When it comes to the working class, elitist French academics tend to dwell on clichés, and Chevalier is no exception.<sup>2</sup>

The account of Les Halles' last moments is undeniably painful – not so much because a thriving business district was irrevocably reduced to nothing more than a collective memory, but because it is dryly recalled by a man who cannot turn his eyes toward the future.

What was for Chevalier the assassination of Paris was for me and many others the beginning of a new era. As a child I accompanied my parents through the elated street demonstrations of May 1968; later, the Beaubourg was the land-

mark of my discovery of the city. I still remember my excited anticipation as I explored what everyone described as a monster: the thrill of walking down the plaza, climbing into the escalator tubes, getting lost in the libraries of the Centre Pompidou. For a whole generation, the new Les Halles is a new territory in a way that people like Chevalier cannot understand. While the traditional bourgeoisie clung to the image and feeling of prewar Paris, Les Halles became precisely the open wound that welcomed the tourists, provincials, robbers, and artists, who had long been kept out. As a cultural center, an international attraction, and the hub of the metropolitan transit system, Les Halles is the throbbing heart of a modern, international metropolis that bears little resemblance to the city Balzac described. It is a symbol of hope rather than death, of urban regeneration rather than failure. ■

<sup>1</sup> Octavio Paz, *El opo filantropico: Historia y Política, 1971-1978* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983), pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> For a particularly fine example of this type of social analysis of the French working class, see Pierre Sansot, *Les gens de peu* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991).

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## PHILIP REVEALS ALL: IT'S NOT ENOUGH

**Philip Johnson: Life and Work** by Franz Schulze. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. 496 pp., illus., \$30

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

In his new biography of Philip Johnson, Franz Schulze appears torn between a sense of his obligation to chronicle the life and work of his subject and a barely concealed disdain for Johnson. His designation of Johnson throughout the book as "Philip" is telling. The convention of English-language biography is to use a male subject's given name when writing about his childhood and adolescence, then switch to his surname when the subject attains maturity. Schulze's implicit judgment on "Philip" is obvious. At 88, Johnson has yet to attain maturity.

Schulze dutifully details Johnson's privileged childhood in Cleveland, where his wealthy, gregarious father and intellectually inclined mother lived when not wintering in North Carolina or traveling in Europe. They are depicted as well-intentioned and indulgent but emotionally remote. Predictably, little "Philip" was winning, precocious, and a perennial misfit.

Schulze fills in the blanks on the two facets of Johnson's life that were expunged from his architectural record between the late 1940s and the early 1970s: his homosexuality and his involvement in the 1930s with right-wing U.S. and German Nazi politics. Readers' prurient curiosity about Johnson's liaisons and domestic life will be richly rewarded by this book. Schulze's account of Johnson's Nazi enthusiasm elicits a close analysis of the architect's character as Schulze tries to understand the logic motivating Johnson to forsake the Museum of Modern Art (where he had firmly established himself as a cultural force by the time he was 25) for political misadventures that would haunt him for the rest of his life. Johnson's impetuosity, the invincible naiveté that privilege instilled, an enthrallment with authority born of emotional neediness, and his bravado are deduced as a fatal combination of factors. Terms like "snob," "spoiled," "trifler," and "dilettante" indicate Schulze's opinion of the maddening, irretrievable foolishness of Johnson's excursion into politics. What especially troubles Schulze, though, is the way that images from this part of Johnson's life infiltrate his later observa-

tions. Johnson's likening his Glass House to "a burnt wooden village I once saw" is, as Schulze documents, a veiled reference to the Nazi destruction of Polish towns that Johnson witnessed in 1939, when he accompanied the German army as a reporter for the right-wing American journal *Social Justice*. Johnson, in his favorite meta-lecture (a version of which he presented when he and John Burgee spoke to the Rice Design Alliance in 1981), calls for a demonstration project of comprehensive, coordinated urban planning and monumental urban architecture, usually restricted to a designated precinct (Johnson thought that 15 acres downtown would be sufficient for Houston), that clearly would require concentrated, centralized authority for its realization. The dark side of Johnson's engaging and irrepressible personality emerges in his childish, contrary evasion of responsibility for the implications of his actions and pronouncements, whether these involve past political decisions or silly, offhand, but extremely durable buildings. Schulze concludes that disillusion with the politics of philosophical commitment propelled Johnson back into the milieu of architecture and art, because these exist in a realm where meaning is contingent and can be construed rather than patiently deduced and rigorously constructed, as in science and philosophy.

For those who know Johnson's architectural career, the balance of the book covers familiar territory: Johnson's return to Harvard in 1940 to study architecture at the Graduate School of Design, a humiliating plunge into the real world as an army conscript in 1943-44, then the beginning of his professional career as an architect in 1945, cushioned by a second term as director of the department of architecture at the Museum of Modern Art between 1945 and 1953. Schulze identifies the significant periods in Johnson's career, describing significant buildings and identifying significant clients. He references the multiple, overlapping contexts with which Johnson is identified: the arts-and-letters end of New York society, the Museum of Modern Art, the intellectual-academic-media circles of New York architecture, the New York art scene, and New York's homosexual subculture. What fascinates Schulze is the nimbleness with which Johnson maneuvers among these worlds.

Schulze acknowledges the important role that Texan patrons and buildings have played in Johnson's career. Yet here a weakness of the book becomes quite apparent, one that casts a pall of uncertainty over the rest of the text. Schulze clearly relies on Johnson's own recollections as a primary source of information about buildings and clients. However, one need only review Johnson's published writings and remarks to see how his account of the same event can change over time. This should have alerted Schulze to Johnson's unreliability as sole witness and interpreter. Thus — unbelievably — John de Menil is never mentioned. Schulze states that the Schlumberger-Menil family connection was important for Johnson's career, but he gives little evidence of it. Schulze discusses the first Boissonnas House and the University of St. Thomas back to back without noting the Menil connection. He seems rather confused about who I. S. Brochstein is (Brochstein secured Johnson's first commission from Gerald D. Hines) and is not clear why Brochstein insisted that Johnson be retained to design Post Oak Central. These imprecisions all have the earmark of Johnson's "impatient" memoir (Vincent Scully's inspired characterization), which Schulze does not always clarify, expand on, and readjust with further research and interviews. This does not so much compromise the accuracy of Schulze's account as it does foreclose a more comprehensive understanding of how Johnson has affected the course of 20th-century American architecture.

Again, a local example will suffice. Schulze does not address, and perhaps was not aware of, the extraordinary impact that Johnson had on Houston's modern architecture scene in the 1950s. Schulze does not acknowledge the Houston architects affected by Johnson's Miesian proselytizing, nor the role some of them played in securing for Mies van der Rohe the commission to expand the Museum of Fine Arts. Johnson's associations with John de Menil (who became a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art in 1959), Ruth Carter Stevenson of Fort Worth (who not only had Johnson design the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, but got him to serve several terms on its board of trustees), and Patsy Dunn Singer of Corpus Christi (she and her husband, at John de Menil's recommendation, hired Johnson as architect of the Art Museum of South Texas, then got

Johnson's companion, David Whitney, to organize the museum's opening exhibition) suggest the breadth of his influence as an architectural and artistic impresario in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>1</sup> These wider dimensions of Johnson's career are ignored because Schulze adheres so closely to Johnson's own point of view.

What is missing from this account of Johnson's "life and work" is the "critical biography" appended as subtitle to Schulze's justly praised book on Mies van der Rohe. Historical interpretations of the political significance of modern culture and taste criticism in the United States in the 1950s, such as Jackson Lears's,<sup>2</sup> or R. E. Somol's provocative linking of formalism to an end-of-ideology program in considering the intellectual development of Colin Rowe,<sup>3</sup> suggest that Johnson's roles as architect, wit, cultural arbiter, and gay blade have a historical dimension and historical significance that transcend the limitations of his sometimes odious twit personality ("harlequin" is Schulze's elegant and insightful term). What is required, as Scully prescribed for Johnson in 1969, is a "less impatient analysis" of the historical "problem"<sup>4</sup> that Philip Johnson represents for historians and critics of 20th-century American culture. ■

1 Frank Welch is preparing a book on Johnson's career in Texas, to be published by the University of Texas Press, that will document much more fully the social history of his influence on the state's modern art and architectural scene from the 1950s to the present.

2 Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," in Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 38-57.

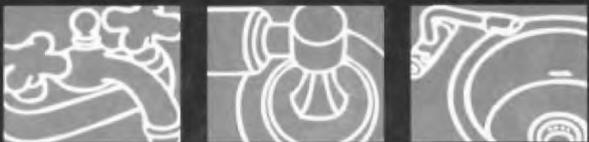
3 R. E. Somol, "Oublier Rowe," *ANY* 7/8 (1994), p. 11.

4 Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988), p. 196.

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## TRAVELS IN LARGE (AND SMALL) TOWN TEXAS

*Architecture in Texas, 1895–1945* by Jay C. Henry. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993. 364 pp., illus., \$49.95

Reviewed by Malcolm Quantrill

It used to be said that if you drove 50 miles anywhere in Europe you would pass at least five miles of architecture, but if you drove 50 miles in Texas you would be lucky to get out of the gas station. University of Texas architecture professor Jay C. Henry's excellent study of half a century of Baukunst in Texas clearly demonstrates that this old saw is at least partially unfounded. Naturally, your chances of being exposed to Texas Baukunst will depend on the route you take, and the direction in which you travel. Jay Henry aims to take as much chance as possible out of the architectural tour (a pity, then, that he doesn't give us any maps). His book desperately wants to be a gazetteer, but someone apparently decided against that, perhaps on the grounds of academic respectability. Instead, we have something that is almost a catalogue.

If you want to enjoy the major delights of Texas architecture for the period spanning the end of the 19th century to the end of World War II, visit the larger cities: Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Galveston, and Houston. But a random selection from the buildings illustrated here reveals that James Knox Taylor's U.S. Post Office for Mineral Wells of 1912, the Carnegie Museum at Belton (1904) by Smith and Moore, Roy L. Thomas's City Hall and Fire Station for San Marcos (1915), the Beaumont City Hall and Auditorium by F. W. and D. E. Steinman (1927), Mood Hall at Southwestern University, Georgetown (1906), by C. H. Page and Brother, and the Baylor University Administration Building in Waco (1938), by Birch Easterwood and Son, are all worth a visit. There are other treasures, for example on the campus of Texas A&M University at College Station – known locally as “a parade ground occasionally interrupted by buildings” – where F. E. Giesecke's (Old) Academic Building of 1912 is as good an example of turn-of-the-century classicism as can

be found in the region. In addition, visits to places with such exotic names as Paris and Palestine are clearly worthwhile.

The chapters on “The Survival of Past Traditions,” “Academic Eclecticism,” and “Regional Eclecticism” are particularly well written and worthwhile. “Modernistic Modes of Design” reveals poor connections between Texas and the rest of the architectural world in the 1930s, an impression that arises partly as a consequence of Professor Henry's decision to distinguish between “modernistic,” “domestic,” and “public” architecture. In the midst of this confusion there are quite startling surprises, such as the link between Wilem (not William, as Henry has it) Dudok's Hilversum Town Hall (1930) and Walter C. Sharpe's Lincoln High School of Dallas (1939). Dudok, a follower of Wright, was certainly an influence on Alvar Aalto; if he penetrated the architectural consciousness of Texas in the thirties he must have had truly universal appeal at that time. The work of Karl Kamrath is also rightly celebrated, and is not a surprise.

This book has many good qualities, but design and layout are not among them. The size of the illustrations is largely arbitrary, their reproduction often poor. Clearly, the problem was one of conflict between broad scope and narrow budget. The choice of format only made things worse; if the book were redesigned as a traveler's guide, it would be extremely useful and undoubtedly popular. ■

(continued from page 13)

- 3 David Littlejohn, *Architect: The Life and Work of Charles W. Moore* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1984), p. 103.
- 4 Charles Moore, Gerald Allen, and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), p. 62.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 7 Franz Schulze, “Chaos as Architecture,” *Art in America* July 1970, pp. 88–96; “New Haven Haven: Amid Connecticut's Early Americana . . .,” *Playboy*, October 1969, p. 126.
- 8 Charles Moore, “Plug It in Rameses,” *Perspecta* 11 (1967), pp. 32–43.
- 9 Littlejohn, *Architect*, pp. 85, 86.
- 10 Charles Moore, Peter Becker, and Regula Campbell, *The City Observed: Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1984). The condominium is, however, included in David Gebhard and Robert Winter's *Architecture in Los Angeles: A Complete Guide* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1985), p. 132. The deferential entry focuses on its rather jumbled outward appearance, with the caveat that from the outside “it is close to impossible to know what is going on inside.”
- 11 [Drexel Turner], “Reflections on a Less Critical Regionalism and Other Burdensome Matters: A Conversation With Charles Moore,” *Cite* 17 (Spring 1987), p. 12.
- 12 Charles Moore, as told to Elizabeth Sverbeyeff Byron, “More, More, Moore! Architect Charles Moore Describes the Eighth House He's Built for Himself – The Crowded Center of a Crowded Life,” *House and Garden*, May 1988, p. 184.
- 13 The plan of Moore's Essex courtyard house project of 1970 bears a skewed, out-of-body relationship to Louis I. Kahn's project for a courtyard house for M. Merton Goldenberg, Rydal, Pennsylvania, 1958–59 (*The Work of Charles Moore*, *A+U*, extra issue, 1973:5, p. 93). Moore prepared at least one other scheme in 1970 for a new house of his own in Essex, using a bow-tie plan illustrated in Eugene Johnson's essay “Performing Architecture: The Work of Charles Moore,” in Johnson, ed., *Charles W. Moore: Buildings and Projects, 1949–1986* [New York: Rizzoli, 1986], p. 77.
- 14 Littlejohn, *Architect*, p. 320.
- 15 B. J. Archer, ed., *Houses for Sale* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), p. 61.
- 16 Moore and Byron, “More,” p. 184.
- 17 Anthony Blunt, *Borromini* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 164–66.
- 18 *Yale Seminars in Architecture 2* (New Haven: School of Architecture, Yale University, 1982), p. 18.
- 19 Moore, “More,” pp. 184–85.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- 21 Goldberger, “Trying to Save the Legacy,” p. B4.
- 22 Heinrich Klotz, “Charles Moore in Miniatures,” in Johnson, ed., *Charles Moore: Buildings and Projects*, p. 41.
- 23 Both sources were available to Moore only through reading. The Neue Wache as built dispensed with the armorial sentinels; the Königliches Schloss was devastated by bombing and demolished after the end of World War II.
- 24 Moore and Byron, “More,” p. 183.
- 25 Moore et al., *The Place of Houses*, p. 85.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
- 27 Moore and Byron, “More,” p. 185.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 184. The figure Goldberger reports has been Texanized to 26. Paul Goldberger, “We Can't Wait Forever,” Says Moore's Executor,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1994, p. B4.
- 29 Moore et al., *The Place of Houses*, p. 64.
- 30 Goldberger, “We Can't Wait Forever,” p. B4.
- 31 Goldberger, “Trying to Save the Legacy,” p. B4.



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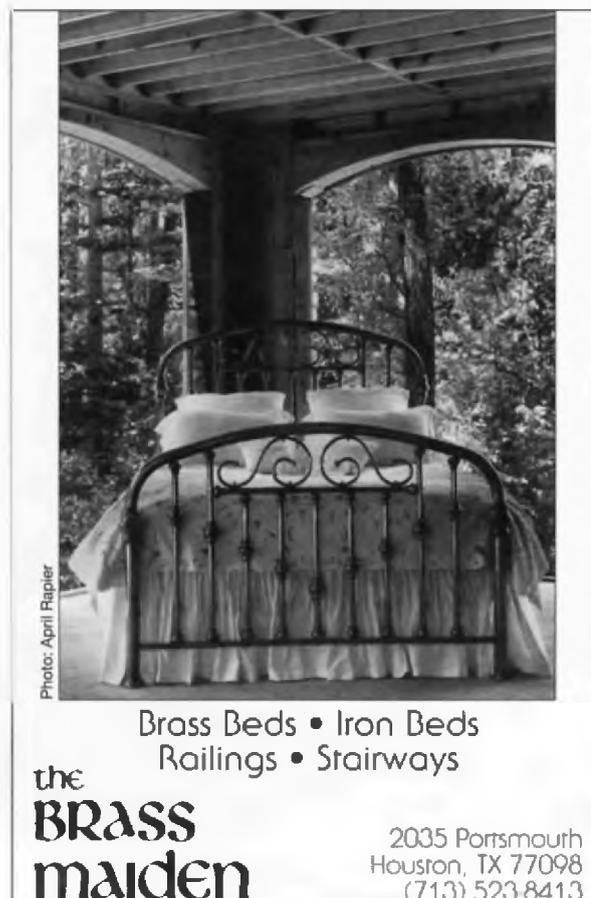


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## WHERE'S THE FRONT DOOR?

**Best Laid Plans: Buildings and Projects by Houston Architects and Designers**  
Lawndale Art and Performance Center,  
20 May – 1 July 1994

Reviewed by William Howze

Visitors to the exhibition *Best Laid Plans*, jointly sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance and Lawndale Art and Performance Center, stepped through the door in the Art Deco façade of Joseph Finger's 1931 Barker Brothers Building, now Lawndale's home, into a freshly refurbished white space filled with poster-like 30-by-40-inch panels. At first glance, *Best Laid Plans* seemed to be an exhibition of posters, 76 of them, that lined all four walls and two free-standing screens in the large, high-ceilinged main room, as well as the walls of a smaller adjacent room. But these were not posters. Though many featured bold typography and bright colors, the panels did not project their messages across the room like images of chocolate-dipped cones in a Dairy Queen. Each one required close scrutiny.

As design objects, many of the panels displayed an ingenious graphic exploitation of the limited format, even whimsy. Common to the group was a tendency toward didacticism, a desire on the part of the artists to explain themselves as much as their work. Plan, elevation, and section, after all, are implicitly instructive, and when the designers felt the need to be explicit they added text, in some cases several dense paragraphs. The combination expressed genial openness in some cases, condescension in others. Where do so many designers learn to write project descriptions that are both stuffy and coy? It would be refreshing to read how clients express their wishes, to get some idea of the sort of person who would occupy the spaces depicted.

In the catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition, Leslie Barry Davidson, president of RDA, and MaryRoss Taylor, executive director of Lawndale, convey the admirable enthusiasm, generosity, and spirit of collaboration that produced *Best Laid Plans*. In his foreword, Joel Warren Barna suggests that a relatively limited audience might share the enthusiasm of the organizers, while calling the exhibition a "significant step" toward including more people in the process of building our city. Stephen Fox's lucid historical survey of architec-



Volunteers from the Rice Design Alliance and Lawndale Art and Performance Center transformed the Lawndale gallery space for the exhibition *Best Laid Plans*.

tural exhibitions in Houston documents the need for the "confrontations that exhibition can offer."

The catalogue, designed by graphic designer Craig Minor, presented the exhibitors with another challenge: to squeeze the essence of their 30-by-40-inch boards into a 5-by-5-inch space, and whatever they had to say into 50 words. Minor's sly wit, evident throughout the catalogue, is most evident in the out-of-register second color on the cover that visually completes the aphorism in the title.

The participants have retrieved their boards to decorate their offices and added the catalogues to their bookshelves. Many who submitted boards – and others who did not – sustain the hope that *Best Laid Plans* will become an annual or biennial event providing, in Davidson's words, "a forum for architects to get together to share ideas, show new projects, and discuss new design concepts." According to Taylor, architects, designers, their clients or prospective clients, architecture students, "the RDA crowd," and middle-school students made *Best Laid Plans* "most successful in terms of attendance." In spite of the hurdles, to use Barna's term, that plan, elevation, and section might present to the general public, Taylor observed that visitors did not hesitate to examine the

boards and models closely enough to ask "Where's the front door?"

If there are to be future exhibitions like *Best Laid Plans*, the organizers can continue to challenge architects and designers, perhaps by revising the format or calling for submissions on specific themes. To engage a larger public, however, they need to take into consideration people for whom plan, elevation, and section are hurdles. They need to bring before the public a sense not simply of the architects themselves, but also of the "community of clients" (another one of Barna's useful terms); and they need to reveal, and promote discussions of, how architecture is practiced and purchased, and how it affects the community. ■

Lisa Carol Hardaway and Paul Hester, Photographers © 1994

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# The Historical Preservation Ordinance

Margie C. Elliott

*The preservation movement has one great curiosity. There is never retrospective controversy or regret. Preservationists are the only people in the world who are invariably confirmed in their wisdom after the fact.*

John Kenneth Galbraith

The rational and emotional sides of Houston's collective nature have become badly mixed up and defining architecture preserved are being duped.

Acting on Mayor Bob Lanier's administrative initiative, city council voted in December 1993 to have a preservation ordinance drafted. The first version appeared in March. After undergoing review, public comment, and evisceration at the hands of the developer-friendly Planning and Zoning Commission, the draft ordinance appeared on city council's agenda on 28 September 1994. There it currently languishes, along with several amendments proposed by council member Lloyd Kelley to mitigate the damage inflicted by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

City administration officials have asked preservationists and property-rights advocates to meet with Marvin Katz, chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission, to work toward a compromise on several contested provisions of the ordinance. Meanwhile, Houston's "rugged individualists," public- and private-sector proponents of the status quo, are busy promulgating their usual specious arguments against establishing a public policy that could make a difference to local preservation efforts. For example, advocates for a proposed tree preservation ordinance can expect to see arguments like this one, recently printed in the *Houston Chronicle's* Viewpoint column:

*It is incredible that he would even consider taking private property [in the name of historical preservation] without paying for it, much less advocate it. How in the world can City Council try to fight crime when one of its own members is advocating "stealing" property? Not only is it immoral, it is an unconstitutional taking of private property, prohibited by both the state and U.S. Constitutions.*

Two themes underlie most of the antipreservation sentiment. One is that the city should not be able to designate properties as historic without the consent of the owners. The second is that historic

designation would harm property values and place stringent limits on maintenance and future alterations to the property. These themes are reflected in allegations, jeremiads, and time-tested propagandist statements intended to erode public support for an enforceable, effective preservation ordinance, and thereby to sway the eventual council vote.

Neither of these assertions is true, although, to the unwary, the argument that designation should be voluntary rather than mandatory may seem valid. If the ordinance were to allow only voluntary designation, it would presumably be acceptable to owners, perhaps even to self-styled libertarians. Such an ordinance, however, would be inherently flawed. A single property owner who decides not to comply with voluntary controls can destroy their effectiveness. Those who destroy historic landmarks often reduce the value of properties in the surrounding area. In Houston, where preservation has always been voluntary, the principle speaks for itself: approximately 250 buildings located in National Register of Historic Places districts or listed individually on the Register have been demolished since they were originally listed. In the Market Square Historic District, absence of an enforceable public policy to provide predictability and stability is obstructing revitalization efforts. Fearing loss of their investment, many businesses are reluctant to open offices or new commercial enterprises in a historic district the city refuses to protect.

Historical preservation is a valid public purpose and should not require owner consent. The U.S. Supreme Court has long recognized that designation of a property as historic is not an unconstitutional "taking" that requires compensation, any more than government enforcement of building codes, parking ordinances, or property taxes. Property owners have a right to a reasonable return on or use of their land, but the Constitution does not guarantee them the most profitable use and does not require compensation for a loss of speculative profits resulting from the government's doing its job to protect the public welfare.

Some opponents of an ordinance without owner consent and owner "opt out" provisions argue that the city should use carrots instead of sticks, a program of incentives rather than restrictions to



Edward J. Duhamel, architect, Burns Building, 421 Main Street, 1883, demolished 1993.



C. D. Hill, architect, South Texas National Bank Building, 213 Main Street, 1910, with wings added by William Ward Watkin, 1922, demolished 1986.

encourage preservation. Preservationists agree that incentives are valuable and that the city could use them to encourage preservation activity. However, Houston's record clearly demonstrates that incentives alone do not stimulate a significant level of preservation activity. Federal rehabilitation tax credits for historic buildings and a property tax abatement approved in 1981 have been available for more than a decade for local preservation projects, but without the critical framework of a protective ordinance they have done little to stimulate restoration and rehabilitation projects.

While the ordinance has been under consideration, city council has voted several times to extend the 1991 moratorium against demolishing historic buildings. Owners of protected properties have protested every extension. Ironically, demolition of these buildings could be accomplished more easily under the much-debated ordinance, even as it was originally drafted, than under the moratorium, which was originally intended as a stopgap. As the *Houston Business*

*Journal* observed recently, "this never-ending moratorium is far more burdensome to property owners than a strong, reasonable historic preservation ordinance would be."

While preservation in Houston has sometimes been disparaged as the trivial pursuit of dilettantes, the social and economic benefits of local preservation programs elsewhere have been confirmed by numerous studies, including a 1987 National League of Cities survey that identified preservation as one of the tools most often used for economic development. Far from being a "frill," preservation in towns and cities throughout the United States has made good economic sense. The fundamental building block of all these preservation programs is a strong local ordinance, and every major American city other than Houston has adopted such an ordinance as a matter of public policy. ■





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