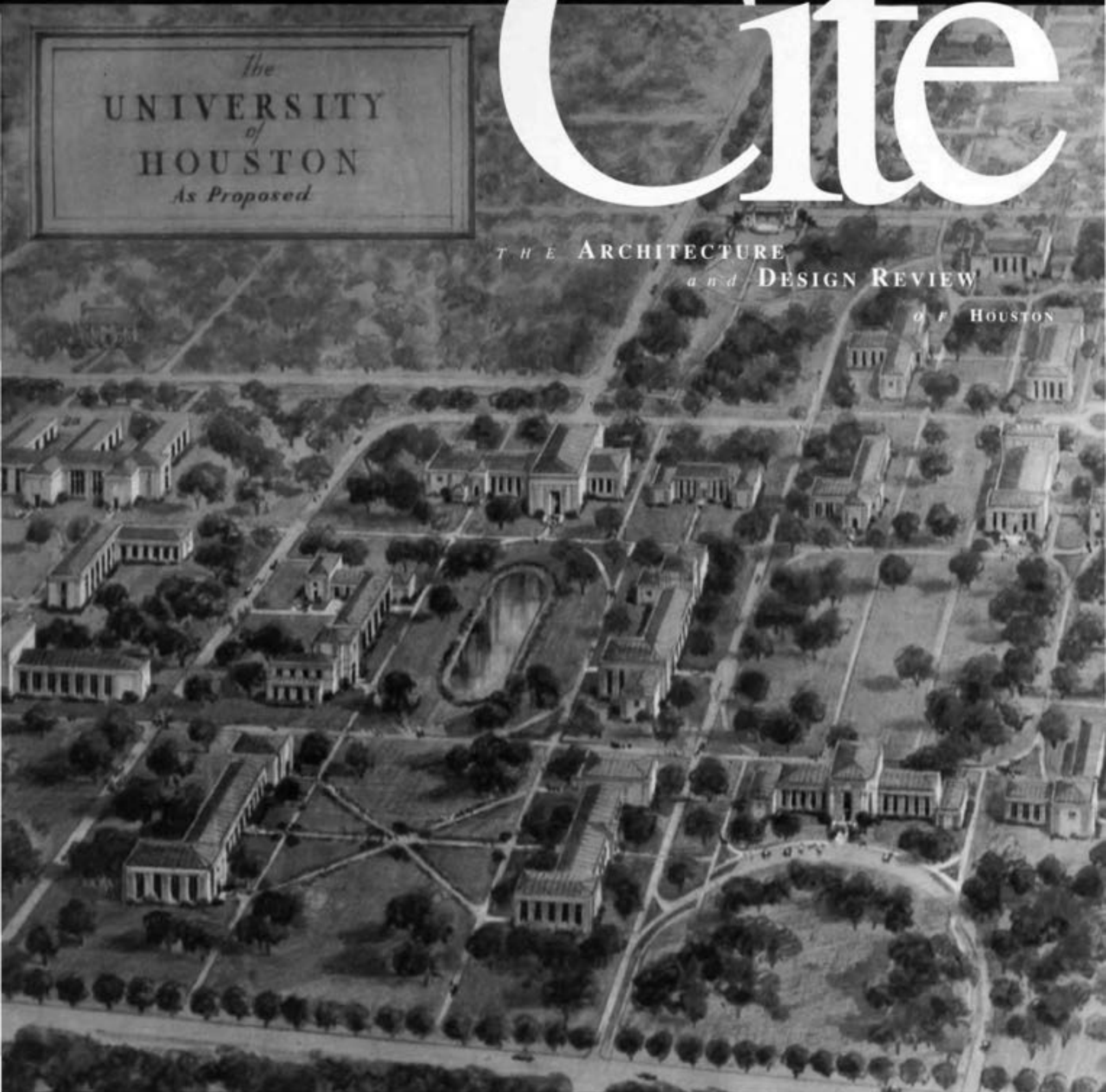


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HOUSTON
As Proposed

THE ARCHITECTURE
and DESIGN REVIEW
OF HOUSTON



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Cite

The Architecture
and Design Review
of Houston

A Publication of
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35: Fall 1996

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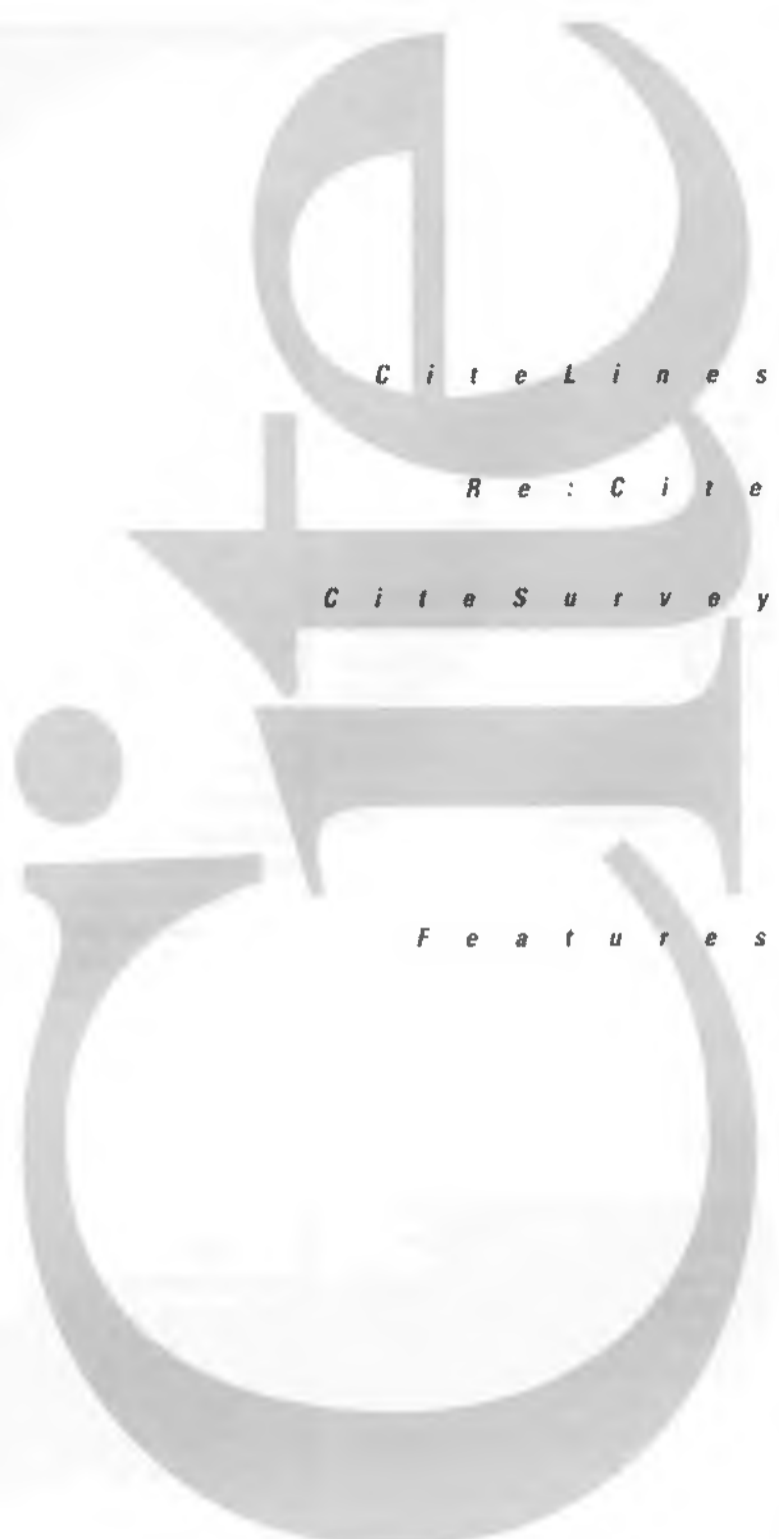
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Cover: Site plan for the University of Houston prepared by the Kansas City landscape architects Hare & Hare, 1937. Drawing by Buck Schiwetz. Plan courtesy of the University of Houston.

Rice Design Alliance Events

Fall Lecture Series

American Dreams

RDA will explore the idea of the utopian community as it has evolved in the United States over the past century, with topics ranging from the 19th-century company town to the virtual city of tomorrow. *Wednesdays, September 25 through October 16.*

September 25

THE DISAPPEARING CITY: FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S UTOPIA AND OUR REALITY
Robert Fishman, professor of history at Rutgers University, author of *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier*.

October 2

ARCHITECTS AND WORKERS: DESIGNING THE COMPANY TOWN
Margaret Crawford, chair of the history and theory of architecture program at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, author of *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns*.

October 9

AN AIRPLANE IN EVERY GARAGE: HOUSING AND THE WAR YEARS
Donald Albrecht, curator for architecture and design exhibitions, contributor and editor of *World War II and the American Dream: How Wartime Building Changed a Nation*.

October 16

BRAVE NEW WORLDS: MODERN AMERICA AND THE UTOPIA OF CONSUMPTION
Bruce C. Webb, dean of the College of Architecture at the University of Houston and co-editor of *Urban Forms: Suburban Dreams and Constancy and Change in Architecture*.

All lectures will be held in the Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 8 p.m. Series tickets are available in advance at the RDA office. RDA and MFAH members \$20, students \$10, nonmembers \$30. If available, single tickets will be sold at the door: RDA and MFAH members \$7, students \$3, nonmembers \$10. For further information, please call 713.527.4876.

Cinemarchitecture VI

A film series, in collaboration with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, held in conjunction with *American Dreams*. The films to be featured are:

BAUHAUS IN AMERICA. Directed by Judith Pearlman (U.S., 1994, 86 minutes). The story of the U.S. Bauhaus and its influence in the sweep of history from the height of the Great Depression to the dawn of the millennium.

*Friday, September 13, 7:30 p.m.**

*Saturday, September 14, 11 a.m.**

Friday, September 20, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, October 10, 1 p.m.

**Judith Pearlman will introduce these screenings and answer questions afterwards.*

THE WORLD OF TOMORROW. Directed by Tom Johnson and Lance Bird (U.S., 1985, 83 minutes). An engaging documentary appraisal of the legendary New York World's Fair of 1939 and the more than 40 million people who glimpsed the future there.

Friday, September 27, 7:30 p.m.

THINGS TO COME. Directed by William Cameron Menzies (U.S., 1936, 92 minutes). Raymond Massey and Ralph Richardson star in this elaborate science fiction film, a stunning visualization of H. G. Wells's depiction of the future with spacious sets (created by Vincent Korda with Moholy-Nagy), fabulous costumes, and vibrant music.

Friday, September 27, 9:30 p.m.

BUCKMINSTER FULLER: THINKING OUT LOUD. Directed by Karen Goodman and Kirk Simon (U.S., 1995, 96 minutes). An affectionate and admiring portrait of the visionary inventor and philosopher who is considered a genius by some and a crackpot by others.

Friday, October 4, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, October 5, 7:30 p.m.

All films in the Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Evening admission: RDA, AIA, MFAH members, students, and seniors (55+) \$4; nonmembers \$5. Matinees: RDA, AIA, MFAH members, students, and seniors (55+) \$3. Double features (both films): RDA, AIA, MFAH members, students, and seniors (55+) \$5, nonmembers \$6. For information, please call 713.639.7515.

Lecture Series

The Houston Talks

Fall 1996 and Spring 1997

The Rice Design Alliance, the Rice University School of Architecture, and the University of Houston College of Architecture will for the first time collaborate on a series of three lectures this fall

and spring, 1997. The speakers will also spend time informally with architecture students at both Rice and UH. Speakers will be:

October 23

Spanish architect Enric Miralles, Barcelona.

February 3, 1997

David Chipperfield, David Chipperfield Architects, London.

February 13, 1997

Architect Will Bruder, New River, Arizona.

Looking Ahead to Spring . . .

Spring 1997 Lecture Series

Northern Lights: New Canadian Architects

RDA will invite four Canadian architects to present and discuss their work.

Speakers include **John Patkau** (March 5) and **Peter Cardew** (March 12), both of Vancouver.

Wednesdays, February 26 through March 19.

April 1997: Annual RDA Members-Only Architecture Tour

Rancheros Deluxe

The ranch-style house, which had its heyday just after World War II, is newly eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The annual RDA tour will look at Houston's best examples of this house type.

April 1997: An Exhibition of the Work of Houston Architects and Designers

The Rice Design Alliance will be calling for entries for an exhibition at Lawndale Art and Performance Center of work by Houston designers, including furniture, interior and landscape design, and architecture.

Veneer to Eternity: 1996 RDA Gala to Honor Raymond Brochstein

Reserve Saturday, November 9, for the annual RDA gala, this year to be held in the newly retrofitted Houston Industries Plaza, 1111 Louisiana. The building was chosen specifically because its lobby features beautiful bird's-eye-maple veneer millwork crafted by Brochsteins Inc., whose president, Raymond Brochstein, will be presented the 1996 RDA Award for Design Excellence at the gala.

Raymond Brochstein has demonstrated a deep commitment to making Houston a better and more beautiful place to live through his involvement and generous support of many civic, educational, and arts organizations, including the Rice Design Alliance, of which he has served as president. A graduate of the Rice University School of Architecture and a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Raymond Brochstein is president of Brochsteins Inc., the family business established in 1935. As one of the leading manufacturers of architectural woodwork and custom-designed furniture, Brochsteins has made an enormous contribution to the built environment by bringing impeccable craftsmanship to the interiors of law offices, banks, retail establishments, hotels, museums, and corporate headquarters, including Houston Industries. Working with some of the nation's most outstanding architecture firms, Brochsteins has demonstrated a sensitivity to the requirements of architects and interior designers alike.

Gala proceeds will support the 1996-97 programs of the Rice Design Alliance, including the publication of *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston*.

VENEER TO ETERNITY is being chaired by Julie Baker, with assistance from David T. George, underwriting; Sarah Balinkas and Judy Kugle, auction; Charley Kifer, environment; and Annette Schatte, invitations.

Tables for ten and tickets are available in the following categories: \$10,000 Underwriter; \$5,000 Benefactor; \$2,500 Patron; \$1,000 Sponsor (four tickets); \$250 Friend (one ticket). A limited number of tickets are available for \$125 each. For further information, please contact the Rice Design Alliance at 713.527.4876.

Editorial



Cite's first editorial committee [in 1982] had varying ideas and approaches, but it was united in the belief that the city of Houston was unique, full of potential, and more than a little audacious. . . . The discussions were marked by an optimistic desire that the publication would reach those who cared about Houston and thus would make a difference in the continued building and rebuilding of the city. . . . The themes [of Cite articles] have been diverse and not necessarily connected, expressing the interests of the editors and writers at a particular moment. . . . [We] hope that Cite will always be a place of youthful idealism and that its vitality will never stagnate.

William F. Stern, *Cite at Five*
(*Cite* 18; Fall 1987)

The postmodernist idea underlying Cite was that the "reality" of Houston was a purely social construction, and that to tell the city's true story it was necessary to look beneath and behind . . . the public understanding of architecture. Such inspection, according to postmodern theory, could provide a way to rediscover and reestablish the shared, even archetypal, forms of building and landscape that had been lost in modernism's rupture with historical patterns. . . . But by clinging to its roots — to the ideas that Houston is not a thing but our ongoing fabrication, and that the city's true story lies in structures hidden by surface events — Cite is still creating a necessity for itself.

Joel Warren Barna, *Cite at Ten*
(*Cite* 30; Spring-Summer 1993)

Cite encourages its readers to let us know what you think. We welcome letters to the editor responding to *Cite* articles or expressing opinions about architectural and design issues. Send correspondence to Editor, *Cite* Magazine, 1973 West Gray, Suite 1, Houston, Texas 77019 or fax us at 713.523.6108.

Cite 34 party, June 20, 1996, hosted by Mesa Grill



Left to right: RDA executive director Linda Sylvan and *Cite* editorial committee members Bill Stern and Jay Baker.



Cite graphic designers Craig Minor (center) and Cheryl Brzezinski-Beckett (right) of Minor Design Group with Phil Beckett (left).

Assuming the chairmanship of *Cite's* editorial board is a daunting prospect, especially in light of its 14-year continuing success story. From the start *Cite* has been a collaborative effort forged, and sometimes forced, through the professional dedication and community spirit of many individuals. Common purpose, not unanimity of opinion, has characterized this publication. Two of my mentors, from whom I take these reins, have fostered critical, professional journalism along with a self-proclaimed youthful idealism and vitality. Bill Stern and Bruce Webb have served as *Cite* editorial co-chairmen since 1991. Both have been involved with the magazine since its inception, and together or individually they have edited 14 of the 35 issues. During their leadership, *Cite* has been recognized with numerous awards, including grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Houston Endowment Inc., and the Susan Vaughan Foundation; a Citation of Honor from the Houston Chapter, American Institute of Architects; the Texas Award for Historical Preservation; the Art Directors Club of Houston Bronze Medal; inclusion in *Print* magazine's Regional Design Annual; and a nomination for the prestigious Chrysler Award for Design Excellence.

The foundation of *Cite's* growth and success is the flexible (some say chaotic) relationship between the *Cite* editorial board, guest editors who shape each issue, managing editor Barrie Scardino (now in her second issue), RDA executive director Linda Sylvan (*Cite* managing editor for 12 years), the RDA front office, photographer Paul Hester (who has been shooting Houston scenes for *Cite* for 14 years), talented guest editors and writers, and a series of outstanding graphic designers: Herman Dyal, Lorraine Wild, Alisa Bales Baur, and now Craig Minor with associate Cheryl Brzezinski-Beckett. *Cite's* high standards of writing and illustration, review and publication are maintained through the successful fundraising of the Rice Design Alliance's board of directors and staff, whose support of RDA publications remains unequivocal.

Whenever the *Cite* family has stepped back to look at its efforts, from Gordon Wittenberg (editor of the first issue in August 1982), to Bill Stern at the fifth anniversary of the publication, and Joel Barna at its tenth anniversary, the emphasis has been on a grass-roots, proletarian style, emphasizing critical commentary and ideas over glossy treatments. In retrospect, *Cite* regularly sought to encourage new writers, many of them local architects, teachers, and planners, who at times wrote opinionated articles, risking their own professional advancement.

To build on this success is our challenge. We seek to get the word out with new voices, more regularly, and in potentially a more manageable electronic and hardcopy format, but *Cite's* mission — to provide high-quality architectural and design news — will not change.

- We plan a regular release of smaller issues. Occasionally we will have thematic "block-buster" issues with our recent 60-plus-page format.
- With a regular quarterly publication schedule, our articles will investigate more late-breaking events and urban issues.
- We will solicit reader response in both letters to the editor and comments to our Web site: <http://riceinfo.rice.edu/projects/RDA>
- We will seek wider circulation of the magazine throughout Texas and the United States.
- We will continue to seek promising editors and writers new to *Cite*.
- We will use the power of the Internet and modern mechanics of publication to document issues of *Cite* on our Web site.

Cite, while expanding its geographical focus, will remain tied to the city it examines, seeking out the good and the bad, and raising public awareness about the intricate link between the quality of life and the quality of the environment. In revealing and examining conditions that underlie this most anomalous and perhaps most modern American city as well as reporting regional news, *Cite* serves as a continuing chronicle of how cities come to grips with the evolution of the modern world.

Rives Taylor
Chairman, *Cite* Editorial Committee

Lofty Living

Since 1993, one of the hottest Houston real estate trends has been the conversion of vacant commercial space into residential apartments marketed as "lofts." As this misnomer suggests, the loft (a large, unpartitioned floor area in a commercial or manufacturing building) has acquired high-concept status in Houston real estate. Invested with the images (and prose) of upscale lifestyle — urban, improvised, glamorous, with a frisson of danger — the loft concept has proved a winner for developer Randall Davis. In 1993, Davis and builder David Weekley converted the four-story James Bute Building, a 1910 paint-manufacturing plant at 711 William Street in the warehouse district north of Buffalo Bayou, into 53 apartments called the Dakota Lofts. TriBeCa Lofts, 25 units at 1210 West Clay in the ex-Clarke & Courts printing plant, a 1934 modernistic one-story landmark west of Montrose Boulevard, was Davis's next project. The market response to these new-old loft living spaces was so positive that Davis took on conversion of the eight-story 1921 Hogg Building on Market Square downtown into the Hogg Palace Lofts, comprising 77 apartments (Kirksey & Partners, architects), as well as the five-story Clarke & Courts Building in the Strand Historic District in Galveston. In each instance Davis made use of federal tax credits for the certified rehabilitation of a building listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Preservation and rehabilitation have been integral to Davis's financial design.

Randall Davis is the sort of high-profile developer who captures the attention of Houstonians. He has astutely capitalized on the appeal of the loft lifestyle to reach out and identify a market ready to pay for a downtown alternative to ranch houses, townhouses, and a double-car garage of one's own.

Davis took another giant step forward in June 1996, when the city's Houston Housing Finance Corporation agreed to buy the Rice Hotel and lease it to Davis for conversion into 350 apartments. The \$3 million purchase price, with an additional \$7 million in bonds to be sold by a tax-increment-financing district authorized by city council to benefit the project, represents just under one-third of the reported \$32 million cost of the conversion.

Such a generous subsidy from the city was not available to the early entrepreneurs responsible for smaller-scale residential and studio conversions.

These range from the rehabilitation of the Foley Dry Goods Building, an 1889 Victorian survivor near Market Square that suffered serious fire damage in 1989 when it was home to DiverseWorks ArtSpace, to the Commerce Street Lofts, which has been rehabilitated as living and work spaces for artists. Architect and preservationist Guy Hagstette (who is also director of capital projects and planning for the Houston Downtown Management District) rehabilitated the three-story Foley Building with two ground-floor art galleries, a pair of second-floor apartments, and space on the third floor for two more apartments. Hagstette was an investor in the project and is one of the residents. Another investor, preservationist Minnette B. Boesel, has joined developer Doug Crosson and Threshold Interests, Houston, to convert the eight-story Hermann Estate Building (F. S. Glover & Son, architects, 1916), next door to the Foley Building, into the Hermann Lofts condominiums (Gensler, architects).

The Hermann Lofts at 204 Travis will have 30 units ranging in price from \$98,000 to the penthouse price of \$247,500. Because the Hermann Estate Building, adjacent to the Houston Cotton Exchange, was built for cotton brokers and traders, large industrial windows, to be retained and restored, were installed across the rear of the building to increase natural light for cotton grading. The front-door façade on Travis Street was designed to look more formal. A new rooftop terrace will have a 360-degree view of Houston, and parking will be located in the building's basement.

Architect and artist Jack Stenner and his wife, artist Stephanie Stenner, were



Hermann Lofts condominiums, 204 Travis Street. Gensler, architects; restoration will begin this fall.

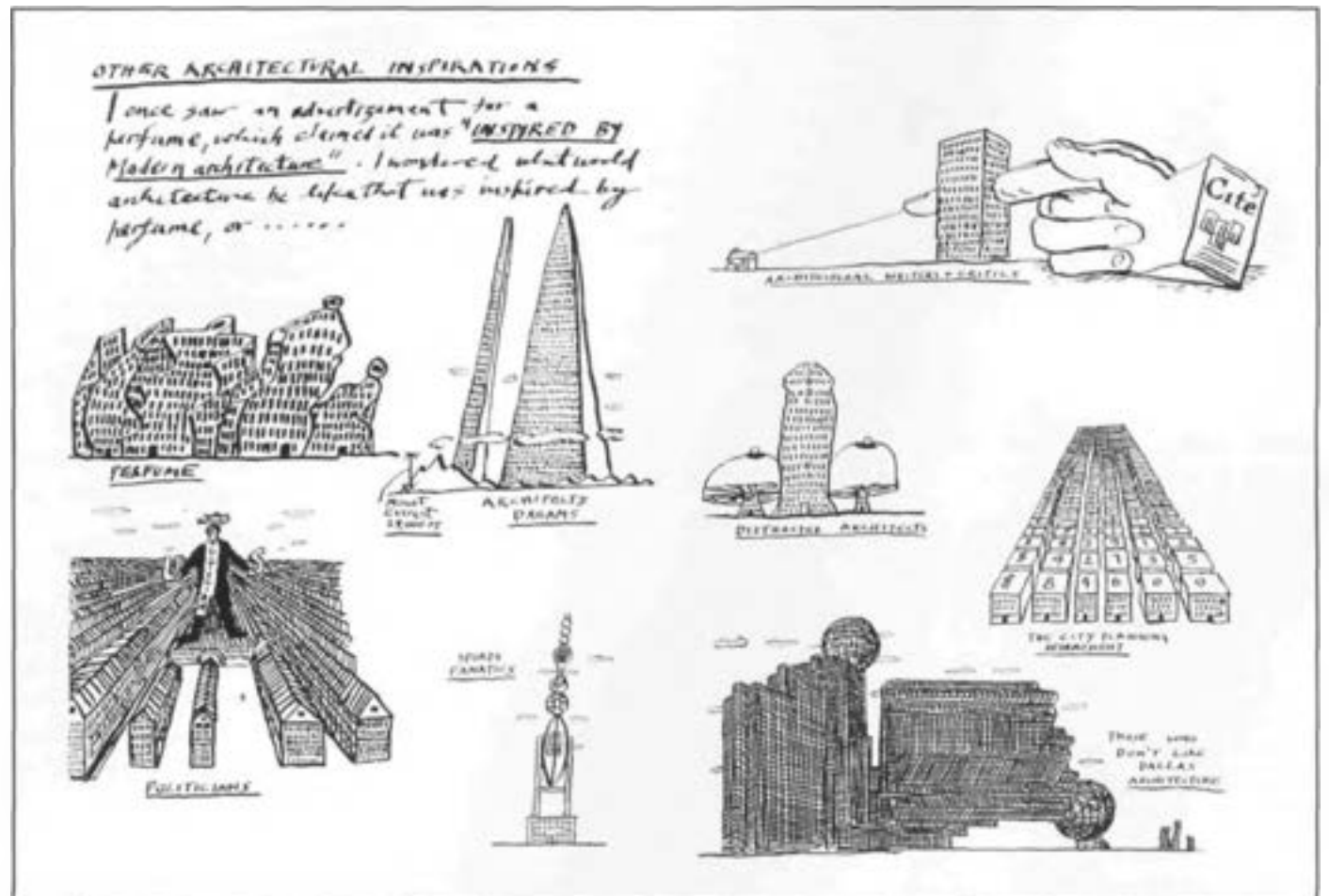
responsible for transforming the three-story J. L. Jones Warehouse at Commerce and Jackson into 13 studios. The Stenners rent space only to artists, who use the space as work studios, although several have made their spaces into studio-apartments.

Three historically and architecturally significant downtown office buildings recently have been bought for conversion into apartments. But only at the 12-story Union National Bank Building (Mauran, Russell & Crowell, St. Louis, architects, 1912) at 220 Main Street near Market Square has work begun (Fehr Grossman Cox, architects). Asbestos and lead abatements have been completed and, according to architect Steve Grossman, the project is moving along rapidly with both the required presales for final financing and architectural design. Owners of the

Union National Bank project eschew the "loft" label, emphasizing the high-end finishes that will be used in their project. Other landmarks, the 13-story Texas Company Building (Warren & Wetmore, New York, architects, 1915) at San Jacinto and Rusk and the nine-story Humble Building (Clinton & Russell, architects, 1921) at Main and Polk, have been acquired for residential adaptation.

One established Houston developer who looked seriously at converting the block-square Humble Building into apartments in the fall of 1995 could not find financing to make the project work economically. This suggests that developers must have public financing on the scale of the Rice Hotel project. Even with the establishment of the Market District Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone, which will freeze property taxes for 30 years and provide for reinvestment of revenue from new development inside this district, making downtown Houston into a thriving residential neighborhood will take a while.

Perhaps to hedge his bets, Randall Davis has announced plans to build a brand-new warehouse-loft apartment building designed by Page Southerland Page. Rather than being downtown however, the four-story, 32-unit building is slated for construction in the 1700 block of West Gray at the corner of Dunlavy, next to the River Oaks Shopping Center. *Stephen Fox*



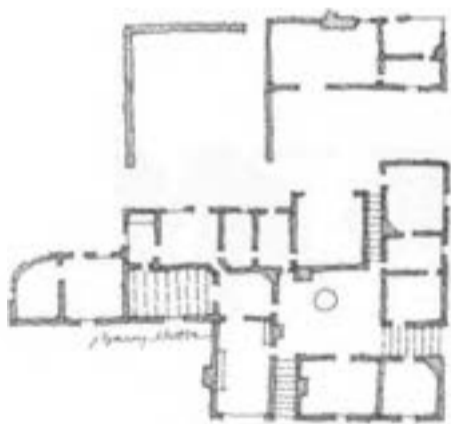
Popular English artist Durek Bashier lived in Houston for 15 years (1980-95) and was a member of the art department faculty at the University of Houston. In 1995 the Contemporary Arts Museum presented a retrospective of Bashier's paintings made during his years in Texas. Bashier created this cartoon for Cite magazine in 1995.

Georgia on My Mind

The Center for Historic Architecture at the University of Houston College of Architecture has completed documentation of the Georgia O'Keeffe House and Studio in Abiquiu, New Mexico, for the Historic American Building Survey (HABS).

The team of 11 graduate students and three instructors, under the leadership of Barry Moore, incorporated new computerized surveying technology, photography, historical research, and traditional measurement techniques to record the complex of adobe structures occupied by O'Keeffe from 1946 until her death in 1986. Many of her most famous works were painted at the site. The project was undertaken in partnership with the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, headed by former Houstonian Elizabeth Glassman, and was made possible by the generous support of many friends and the Susan Vaughan Foundation of Houston.

The O'Keeffe Foundation is in the process of building an \$8 to \$10 million endowment for the artist's house, which is open to the public by appointment. The O'Keeffe House will eventually be transferred to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



Code Blue

Chapter 42 of the Municipal Code of Ordinances (a.k.a. the subdivision ordinance) has been an integral part of development in Houston since 1982. Houston and its extraterritorial jurisdiction (beyond the city limits) have changed dramatically since 1982, while Chapter 42 has changed minimally. In light of Mayor Bob Lanier's focus on redeveloping the center city, the Houston Planning Commission has embarked on the first major retooling of Chapter 42 in order to create a document that no longer solely focuses on suburban-oriented development. This past May, policy committees were formed to address specific issues that affect both urban and suburban development. They will determine how Chapter 42 is to be modified to provide clear, user-friendly policies that encourage center-city along with whole-city development.

The Urban Policy Committee is currently addressing setbacks, rights-of-way, lot size, and compensating open space. The Suburban Policy Committee is investigating development access, compensating open space, utility easement requirements, and design standards for major thoroughfares. Other issues to be addressed are review of technical standards; incorporation of current planning commission policies; elimination or standardization of differences between subdivision and development plats and processes; moving technical engineering requirements to more appropriate venues; planned unit developments; variances; definitions; reconstruction after casualty; minor plats and site plans; and standardization of all development-related codes.

This ambitious undertaking, scheduled for completion at the end of 1996, should provide the drastic resuscitation Houston development codes need STAT.

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Competition III: On Your Mark



Douglas/Gallagher, First Place Winner, *On Your Mark*.

A full decade ago, the Rice Design Alliance took the lead in organizing the first national architecture competition ever held in Houston. In 1986, with Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc., RDA sponsored an open, national, two-stage design competition to celebrate Texas's sesquicentennial. *Competition I: Sesquicentennial Park*, won by Team-HOU (Guy Hagsrette, John Lemer, and Robert Limer with David Calkins, Lauren Griffith, and Mark Yoes), resulted in the improvement of a ten-acre tract of city-owned land along Buffalo Bayou adjacent to the Wortham Center downtown.¹ The second phase of this project is now under construction.

RDA next ventured into the competition arena in 1992, this time soliciting entries for the redesign of Hermann Park's reflecting pool, another public area needing attention and improvement. *Competition II: Heart of the Park* received 117 entries from 29 states, Puerto Rico, Japan, and Italy — another successful RDA architecture tournament. The winning team was Melton Henry/Maurice Robison, Architects Inc.; Peter Brown, Architects/Planners; and Scott Slaney and Steve Harding.² Friends of Hermann Park (FHP), cosponsor with RDA and the City of Houston, used the momentum generated by the competition to raise funds to commission a master plan for the entire park from Hanna/Olin of Philadelphia. This move, supported by RDA, temporarily postponed construction of the Heart of the Park improve-

ments. These are now in the final design phase, and, according to Mary Ann Piacentini, executive director of FHP, construction will begin before the end of the year.

And now *Competition III: On Your Mark* — a match of graphic skill — also has been won by local designers, the firm of Douglas/Gallagher. The juries for all three RDA competitions were made up of experts from around the country, and entries were judged anonymously. This time RDA teamed up with the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance (GHPA) and the City of Houston, through the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) and the Houston Planning and Development Department (HPDD), looking for a marker to designate districts,

buildings, and sites of historical importance in Houston.

On Your Mark received 55 entries from across the country. Jurors were Peter Brink of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Cheryl Brzezinski-Beckett, creative director of the Minor Design Group; Vicki McIntosh, interior designer and architect; Larry Speck, dean of the School of Architecture, University of Texas at Austin; and Bart Traxillo, HAHC chairman. Stephen Fox served as the jury adviser, and Barrie Scardino was competition manager.

Deliberation began early on June 6. After two rounds, only five boards were retained for serious consideration. The second-place winner was decided first: the simple and elegant three-dimensional star designed by Herman Ellis Dyal, Steve Stamper, and Curtis Roberts of Fuller Dyal & Stamper, Austin, was pronounced a "good example of less-is-more." All jurors responded to its "power and symbolism" and liked the range of materials specified: "mirror-finished chrome, cast bronze, stone, or polished black anodized aluminum." As much as the jury appreciated this entry, its members were concerned about the lack of a text plaque, concluding that to add anything to the design would ruin it.

The colorful third-place winner by Donald A. Quaintance, Public Address Design, and William Harman, Exterior Design Office, Houston, was called "very striking" and was admired for its ability to differentiate between building types. But

jurors thought the photo reproduction, a central design element, was unnecessary and would be problematic to produce and regularize. The Quaintance-Harman entry was fondly dubbed the "Manhole Cover."

Houston architect Hill Swift's entry was beautifully delineated, appropriate, and easy to produce. Some felt that it would be the "least controversial" and "sell the best." The jury liked this marker because it was "not overly designed" and was "self-effacing" in the way a marker should be, not upstaging the building it might mark. But, in giving it fourth place, jurors agreed that Swift's design might be a little too traditional for Houston.

Frank Lawyer's "archaeological" bowed-II medallion with lines representing the bayous and town-plan grid was the only honorable mention awarded. The jury felt that any of the final five, on another day, might have been the winner. Lawyer's design, nicknamed the "Roman Coin," was thought to be "appropriate," "very interesting," and possessed of "a good deal of design originality." But in the end, the jurors felt it might be too stylized and ultimately not as compelling as the Douglas/Gallagher entry, which had it all.

Douglas/Gallagher's winner was called a "stunning medallion." Its ability to be positioned in varying ways was clever, and the design was "unique." (It had no Texas star, which a dozen or so entries featured, but a compass rose — close enough.) The design won in large part because it is so flexible (it could be a medallion with or without the information plaque) and because the jurors liked its clean, contemporary look combined with traditional and historical associations. Some jurors believed that the plaque portion was too large in comparison with the medallion. Others were worried by the date 1800 and suggested that the sequence of dates should begin with the founding of the city in 1836. Assuming that the designer would be willing to work with GHPA to produce the best possible marker for Houston, the jury unanimously agreed that this carefully prepared entry should be designated Houston's official historical marker.

Before the final vote, each juror was allowed to reintroduce favorites regardless of their initial score. Levity led to tongue-in-cheek "mentions." The Texana Award went to Kennan Smith, AIA, of City Lights Design Alliance, who submitted what the jury called the "Belt Buckle" — "cool" and "definitely the most Texan." Hoots broke out in the jury room when the envelope on the back was opened and it turned out that the Texana Award had been given to a Californian. In a more serious vein, the Quotation Award went to Christopher Cortes of Houston for the text on his medallion, which read:

*This structure is a small piece of
The history of Houston
A history of constant change and evolution
A history of people both common and uncommon
A history to learn from, both good and bad
The history of a city that is still making history.*

Even though Cortes's entry was not a finalist, all the jurors felt "we should find somewhere to use those words."

The Photoshop Award, referring to the computer software capable of producing complex overlaid design, went to the most famous out-of-town entrants, Steve Izenour, John Izenour, and Dianne Golomb of the Philadelphia architecture firm Venturi, Scott-Brown Associates. Shane Zuchero of Spring, Texas, won the Send It to the Rockets Award for his spaceships.

And the Fuller Dyal & Stamper team of Austin, who submitted three outstanding designs, won the Cheekiness Award for an entry that, more than any other, showed that the designers understood the reason for the *On Your Mark* competition: a movable sign that undoubtedly referred to the shameful demolition of historic buildings still occurring in Houston. Historic preservation has never been given its rightful place in Houston's advocacy system. As the city matures, it may finally be beginning to understand the wisdom of experience, the beauty of patina, and the emotional dependence we all have on our personal and collective histories.

RDA will now bow out to the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission, which will establish criteria, review applications, and be "keeper of the record" for Houston landmarks. The Greater Houston Preservation Alliance will provide assistance to applicants as well as handle ordering, selling, and erecting the new markers. Since the competition, HAHC has recommended and the city council has approved the Courtlandt Place Historic District, the Julia Ideson Building, and the Magnolia Brewery as local historic sites. These will be the first buildings and district to receive the new marker. ■

1 John Pastier, "The Houston Sesquicentennial Park Design Competition," *CITE* 15 (Fall 1986), p. 8.
2 Barrie Scardino, "Creating a Central Axis: Houston's Hermann Park," *Competitions*, Spring 1983, pp. 30-38.



Fuller Dyal & Stamper, Cheekiness Award.



Fuller Dyal & Stamper,
Second Place.



Natalye Appel Architects.



Curtis & Windham.



Robert Morris and Joyce Rosner.



Christianna Raber.



Jacqueline Merlini.



Hill Swift,
Fourth Place.



Steven Isenour, Jahn Isenour,
Diana Galamb,
Photoshop Award.



Kenan Smith, AIA,
Texana Award.



Mark A. Victor.



Shana Zuchero,
Send It to the Rockets Award.



Steven R. Ward and
Christopher Fuller.



Gensler.



Donald A. Quaintance and
William Hartman,
Third Place.



Frank Lowyer,
Honorable Mention.

Acknowledgments

Several Houstonians committed to the notion of architectural preservation, each representing a player in the game, helped organize this competition: Minnette B. Boesel (GHPA), Sheila Condon (HAHC), Bill Curtis (RDA), Anita Garten (GHPA), Paul Guariglia (HPDD), Roy Nolen (RDA), Randy Pace (preservation officer, City of Houston), Linda Sylvan (executive director, RDA), and Caro Ivy Walker (HAHC). The American Institute of Architects' Houston chapter lent the exhibition lighting, which was generously installed by Pollock Electric. Krist Bender installed the exhibition. The Houston Public Library provided jury and exhibition space — particular thanks to Florenzio Briones and Andrea Lapsley. The competition was generously underwritten by Gamma Construction Co., McCoy, Inc.; the City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council; and the Corporate Members of the Rice Design Alliance.

Entrants

The Rice Design Alliance would like to thank everyone who entered the competition. All entries were exhibited during the month of June in the Julia Ideson Building of the Houston Public Library. Entries considered in the last round that did not receive awards were those from Mark A. Victor (San Antonio); Mary Le Johnson, Larry Martin (Houston); Joey Shimoda (Los Angeles); Melissa M. LaRose (Houston); Ryan D. Gordon (Houston); Kirk Baxter (Houston); Bob Helton (Houston); Jacqueline Merlini (Houston); Fuller Dyal & Stamper entry 2 (Austin); Robert Morris, The Studio of Robert Morris, Architect and Joyce Rosner, Rosner Studio (Houston); Carla I. Shamon (Galveston); Peter Boyle, Danni Sabota, Antonio Herrada (Houston); Christopher J. Bach, William H. Michels (Burbank, California); Donald R. Tucker (Houston); and Jerry Alexander, Clyde Logue, and Dick Lew of Gensler (Houston).

Other entrants were Mark E. Kwiatkowski (Detroit); Christianna Raber (Alexandria, Virginia); Lillian Hon (New York); Kevin P. McClellan, Vincem T. Spencer (College Station); Patricia M. Glaeser (League City); Jabir Al-Hilali (Houston); David R. Bennett (Houston); Chuck Hagemeyer (Houston); Pamela Brannan (Houston); John G. Holland III (Houston); Tom Wilson, Tom Wilson and Associates, Architects (Houston); Brent Nyquist, Geraldina Interiano Wise, ATTICUS Architecture & Design and Jim Mousner, Tribe! Design (Houston); Alan Krathaus, Fiona McGettigan, Core Design Studio (Houston); Burdette Keeland (Houston); Tom Breits, Sarah Breits (Houston); David Connally (Houston); Per Sterud (Houston); Leslie Elkins, Ben Thorne (Houston); Rick Lowe, David W. Robinson (Houston); Stephen B. Klimas (Houston); Natalye Appel, Lee Olvera, Shannon Strasser, Tony Hartin, Donna Kacmar, Natalye Appel Architects (Houston); Bret Peters, David Mellnay, David Michael Rogers (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania); Russell C. Volmert, ASLA (St. Louis); Kara Noelle Kautz, Kristin Lynn Kautz (Miami); Peter Rockrise (Bellaire, Texas); Steven R. Ward, Christopher Fuller (Louisville, Kentucky); Paul Bobko (Houston); Kamlesh Parikh, Architect (Pebble Beach, California); Kenji Asakura (Houston); William Curtis, Russell Windham, J. D. Truelove, Curtis & Windham Architects (Houston).

DONALD BARTHELME

1907–1996



Donald Barthelme, ca. 1960.

DONALD BARTHELME, ONE OF HOUSTON'S BEST-KNOWN ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTURE TEACHERS, DIED ON JULY 16, 1996. HE WAS 88 YEARS OLD.

BARTHELME WAS BORN IN GALVESTON. HE ATTENDED THE RICE INSTITUTE AND WAS A GRADUATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, WHERE HE STUDIED UNDER PAUL PHILIPPE CRET. BARTHELME WORKED IN PHILADELPHIA FOR CRET AND FOR ZANTZINGER, BORIE & MEDARY BETWEEN 1930 AND 1933, PRACTICED BRIEFLY IN GALVESTON, THEN FROM 1934 UNTIL 1939 WORKED AS A DESIGNER, FIRST FOR TEXAS CENTENNIAL ARCHITECTS AT THE TEXAS CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION IN DALLAS, THEN FOR THE DALLAS ARCHITECTS DEWITT & WASHBURN, THEN FOR THE HOUSTON ARCHITECT JOHN F. STAUB. BARTHELME DESIGNED THE HALL OF STATE AT THE TEXAS CENTENNIAL (1936), DEWITT & WASHBURN'S MODERN HOUSE FOR STANLEY MARCUS (1936), AND JOHN F. STAUB'S SUPER SERVICE STATION PROTOTYPE FOR THE HUMBLE OIL & REFINING COMPANY (1938). BEGINNING WITH A HOUSE FOR HIS FAMILY, BUILT IN HOUSTON'S WEST OAKS IN 1941, BARTHELME ABANDONED TRADITIONAL STYLES FOR MODERN ARCHITECTURE. HE ASSISTED ROSCOE P. DEWITT, DAVID R. WILLIAMS, AND RICHARD J. NEUTRA WITH THE DESIGN OF AVION VILLAGE IN GRAND PRAIRIE, TEXAS (1941).

BARTHELME FIRST WON RECOGNITION WITH HIS SCHOOL AND PARISH HALL FOR ST. ROSE OF LIMA CATHOLIC CHURCH IN GARDEN OAKS (1948). THE PARISH HALL, WHICH INITIALLY FUNCTIONED AS A WORSHIP SPACE, WAS THE FIRST MODERN CHURCH IN HOUSTON. IN 1949, THE FIRST YEAR THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS HAD A NATIONAL AWARDS PROGRAM, ST. ROSE OF LIMA RECEIVED AN AWARD OF MERIT. BARTHELME'S MOST FAMOUS BUILDING WAS THE WEST COLUMBIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN WEST COLUMBIA, TEXAS (1951–52). THIS INFLUENTIAL SCHOOL COMPLEX WAS FEATURED IN THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART'S *BUILT IN USA: POST-WAR ARCHITECTURE* EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE (1952) AND THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS' CENTENNIAL EXHIBITION, *ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA* (1957). IT WON FIRST PRIZE FOR SCHOOLS AT THE SECOND SÃO PAULO BIENNALE (1954). IN 1957, BARTHELME AND HAMILTON BROWN COMPLETED THE FIRST PHASE OF THE ADAMS PETROLEUM CENTER ON FANNIN STREET, WHICH IS NOW SLATED FOR DEMOLITION.

BARTHELME WAS THE FIRST PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, WHERE HE TAUGHT FROM 1946 UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT IN 1973. FROM 1959 TO 1961 HE WAS WILLIAM WARD WATKIN PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE AT THE RICE INSTITUTE AND CHAIRMAN OF ITS ARCHITECTURE DEPARTMENT.

IN 1930, BARTHELME MARRIED HELEN BECHTOLD. THEY WERE THE PARENTS OF FIVE CHILDREN: THE WRITERS DONALD, FREDERICK, AND STEVEN BARTHELME, AND JOAN AND PETER BARTHELME. *STEPHEN FOX*

“Participants in Architecture” A Donald Barthelme Sampler

In the summer of 1984, Jan O'Brien and Stephen Fox met with Donald Barthelme to discuss architecture and his career. The long transcript of the interview was to have been molded into an article for publication in Cite. At the end, Mr. Barthelme wrote: “I was ambivalent throughout the interview — to its detriment. I gave you anecdotes time and time again instead of the meat of the subject.” The interview was never published. Following are excerpts from the interview and subsequent correspondence that Cite believes capture the spirit and meaning of Mr. Barthelme's ideas at that time.



Barthelme House, exterior, 11 North Wyndon Drive, Houston, Donald Barthelme, architect (1940).



Barthelme House, interior.

Letter, July 22, 1984

The conclusions I now hold were not reached in a short time — they came out of the 10 to 15 years I spent preparing for a course at the University of Houston. . . . The course was called “Concepts” and was later expanded to two years with another course called “Human Studies.” I invited guests from all disciplines each week. Over that 15 years there was an immense change in my thinking. The subjects of those courses included space, enclosure, change, chance and choice,

form, symmetry, order, sequence, the object, art, symbolism, unity, perception, the preconscious and subconscious, sublimation and turning off, the design process, human reactions, “parts” versus “wholes,” the experiencing process, and many others. I went wherever the subject led. Our criterion: Did it make sense?

We found many things about architecture that did not seem to make sense. There were concepts and paths that did make sense but were not being explored, examined, or tested. There were too many

fixed ideas, well founded in history and by example, but focused on goals that were peripheral to what seemed to be the obvious and real objectives met by architecture. This was exciting. I realized that all architecture was enclosure — even the open squares are an enclosing form. All architecture based on a single concept?

I had one class block the campus buildings of their choice — but no plan, no walls, just the spaces shaded in charcoal on the paper. When those submissions were hung on the wall and I first walked in the room, I was in shock. "My God," I said, "isn't that awful?" People live and work hour after hour in those rigid, choking surroundings. Structure, of course, has determined the space. I once saw a student plan that intrigued me. The spaces were all five-sided. As I drew the students around to examine it, we began to find a special delight in imagining our progress through those spaces — just one little change but a vast alteration of experience. Five-sided spaces mean no paralleled surfaces — hence no enclosure. . . .

I have a lot of faith in architects, and I have a lot of faith in the human race. They are, together, quite capable of developing new and differing approaches to design, just as soon as they relinquish concern with the building object and concern themselves with what the building does, what it adds to the environment instead of what it destroys. Architecture should get out of the way of people. . . .

I have no manifesto. I want a general realization of what happens when you build a building — to its surroundings and to its people. . . . Architecture should evolve, with increasing knowledge of how people work, what handling of space works, what we can substitute for walls. We should try to concern ourselves with how people feel, react, and respond to the things we can do with structure, surface, material, etc. An architecture should develop with many inventors rather than one leader. Photographs and models inhibit invention more than they stimulate it.

Letter, July 30, 1984

I am convinced that architecture is overly concerned with the object or objects it produces. . . . When James Marston Fitch said that we were *participants* in architecture, he was aware of the kind of thinking that amounts to a rejection of aims, directions, standards, and values that have been happily accepted by both client, architect, and press for years. Under such generally held doctrines, we architects find ourselves victims as well. As I see it, the errors stem from the inherited concept, the involvement of architecture with art, and that requires an object. Let's say nothing about pride or ego, symbols, and the lush satisfaction in the company we keep.

. . . on Frank Lloyd Wright

Wright was doing a house for Stanley Marcus in Dallas [see *Buy Design*, page 28 of this issue]. When I went to work for



West Columbia Elementary School, West Columbia, Texas, interior court, Donald Barthelme & Associates, architects (1951-52).

Roscoe DeWitt, the first job I headed was to do this house for Stanley Marcus, the follow-up of Frank Lloyd Wright. Good Lord! How would you like the job of following Frank Lloyd Wright? I couldn't understand the plans. He had a column that was in the shape of a star, and he had marked a little note that said "stock column." So far as I knew there was no such stock column. He also had six panes of glass about six feet wide each that were slipped into adjacent tracks with no frame around the end. I can just imagine trying to slide those doors open. We had an engineer look at these cantilever arms that went out above the roof; a screen was rolled up over the top of that and dropped down to screen the terrace. That was before air conditioning became general, and it was to keep the bugs out.

I was trying to work out a scheme for the house and had a little trouble placing the library. I fought it, and I fought it, and I fought it, and finally I got it. I called Roscoe and said, "I got it, I got it!" He came and looked at it. I said, "There, that's where the library goes." He said, "Uh-uh." I said, "What do you mean? This is the only place for it — right there." Then he said, "You can't do that because that is where Wright had it." I had to find another place for it.

Wright did give a criticism on one of my designs. Mr. Marcus had a site on the top of a hill, and he gave one of my sketches to Wright. Wright came back with the one comment that was important to me: "You shouldn't enclose space." On the hill there was nothing but space; you were pushed into a prow with water on either side. To put a structure cut off two dimensions of that space. Human beings appreciate and enjoy everything about space — space in which to breath, space in which to move. When

you take space away from them, you deprive them. But what do we do? We live in boxes.

. . . on Richard Neutra

I have a quote file I have kept over the years, things that fascinated me that people say. Richard Neutra and I were on a panel in El Paso in 1952. He spoke English, but I couldn't understand a word he said. Later on I read his book, which he had on legal pages at the time. I was amazed and very much impressed. I have some quotes from Neutra that are wonderful — "A designer is responsible for what he can do to people."

Roscoe DeWitt had a housing project outside of Dallas and called me to come up and help, so I commuted three days a week. It was Avion Village, one of the Roosevelt programs [see *Cite* 33, pp. 20-21]. At any rate, they wanted some more power, so they got Neutra to come and consult. In he comes with a whole raft of photographers and newspaper reporters and starts saying we are going to do this, we are going to do that. I went to Roscoe and said, "That guy is out there telling them how this is all being designed and done — is that what you want?" He said, "Hell, no, I don't want that." I went back and said, "Wait a minute, if you know how all this is going to be done, what am I doing here?" "Oh," Neutra said. I said, "Well, I didn't know it had all been decided. I thought we should study the damn thing and see what we could find out." Neutra backed down completely, which he should have. He had no business walking in and taking over, you understand. He turned out to be what I thought was a nice guy.

We worked day and night, and about 11 o'clock Roscoe would send out for great big platters of hamburgers and some

whiskey. Neutra, on the first night, said, "Whoa, I don't think my stomach can stand this. Do you have a little sherry?" Two nights later, he grabbed a hamburger and a glass of whiskey, and we said, "Well, pal, you made it."

Richard Neutra said to me, "You know, I envy you." I said, "For crying out loud, why?" "Because you have got some work. I have no work." I said, "Do you mean to tell me you have a house in *House and Garden* and *House Beautiful*, you have won two first prizes, what do you mean you have no work?" "We have nothing else to do," he murmured.

Somebody fired me, or I quit that job. Twenty-five years later I sat in the University of Houston auditorium and heard Mr. Neutra talk about how he had designed Avion Village and show pictures on the screen. Never mentioned any of the architects. He should have mentioned DeWitt, who was the architect for it.

. . . on punch lists

I really quit practicing because I could not get competitive bids. You are supposed to be able to deliver a competitive bid. But with the last couple of jobs, it was evident that I was not able to get that. On one job the glass was supposed to be 7/32, but it was 3/16-inch glass. They had to rip it all out and buy new glass. About the same time [1952] on the West Columbia job, I had a weld specification, but four welds didn't test out. I told the contractor that he had to put a man down there and test every single joint; with four test welds showing bad, this is going to fall on school kids. You can't take a chance like that. But then on the next job I don't get a glass bid, and after that I can't get a steel bid. It gets around the trade real fast that Barthelme is an s.o.b.

At West Columbia I had a long list of



Adams Petroleum Center, 6910 Fannin Street, Donald Barthelme and Hamilton Brown, architects (1957).



Adams Petroleum Center, interior.

things, "Barthelme's Checklist," sometimes six pages long and with 30 to 40 items a page, saying things like "tile in the 45th row from the south and 18 over from the north wall needs replacing," or "dirty mark on the north wall, northeast corner." The roofer on that job, a real prominent guy, walked over the whole roof with me. I found an expansion joint that was not according to plans, and some edge flashing too loose. He turned to me at the end of the thing and said: "You are not a son of a bitch. You just want what you called for. Most architects don't know if it's done right or not." I said: "Well, it doesn't do me much good. All I get is trouble."

... on surfaces

Concrete walks are abominable. My specifications called for rock salt to be put in the finish coat — pour the concrete, and before you trowel it down, sprinkle it with rock salt. The salt dissolves and leaves random holes. In Mexico they take a chip hammer to concrete like that and make a beautiful texture, just by breaking that hard surface. People don't like hard surfaces. Do you like hard or soft surfaces? The important thing is how people feel about a surface, not how it looks. It is only a device if how it looks makes them feel something. A building is a tool that architects use to affect people. They don't have any choice in the matter. This isn't something they pick out to do; it's fixed by virtue of what they do. If a surgeon goes to cut on you and he uses a beautiful knife, let's admire it, let's put it in a museum. But what the hell, the important thing was what the surgeon using the knife did to you.

... on sparkle

Up in Oklahoma, Fay Jones took me around. That night we were sitting on his balcony outside the second-floor living room. At ground level there was a massive boulder with water streaming down. He told me that when they started excavating they ran into foundation difficulty. I said, "You sure did." The balcony shook. But inside the living room we could see a fire

in the fireplace, and the ceiling was sparkling. I said, "I've got to see how you did that." "It's simple; all you need is a spray can of gold paint." And that is what he had done — gone in and just psst! psst! — all over the damn ceiling. I never saw it in daylight. Maybe it looked like hell. But here you are at night out on a balcony looking in, and I'll be damned if you don't have the stars in your living room. Just a simple thing. But he didn't do that casually. He foresaw what was going to happen. This is what I'm saying architects can do. It is not impossible — having the sparkle.

... on Mies van der Rohe

Every time we see a Mies building, we see photographs with no people around; everything has been cleaned up, and it looks like you couldn't touch anything or you would ruin it. Mies gave me a lesson. He said, "Mr. Barthelme, I find that I can make things beautiful, and that is enough for me." Slam, bang, Mr. Barthelme. That is as modest a reply as I could possibly imagine.

I knew he was looking for a local associate for the Museum of Fine Arts job. I thought maybe I could be useful, so I went home and put down a list of architects in Houston that I knew. Then over to the right I noted certain things that Mies was concerned about — beautiful materials, etc. Then I checked off my estimate — good, fair, or poor — for each architect on the list. I asked Mies, "Do you want that list?" He said, "By all means." So I pulled out this folded list on a yellow sheet from a legal pad. Mies studied it down to the end, then said, "Who is Staub?" Mies picked John Staub out of that list of 20 architects I had organized for him.

Years later I talked to Staub and said, "I want to tell you a story about how you, partially at least, got that museum job." He said, "I never knew where that job came from." I made it clear that I didn't pick Staub; Mies did the judging from the calibrations I had made. Then Staub said: "Now I'll tell you something. I turned down that job." "The hell you



DONALD BARTHELME, architect: "Everything good ever done was done by people who followed their own ideas. Walk alone, if necessary. Don't walk the beaten path."

Advice for the new year: Cartoon published in the *Houston Post*, January 1, 1956.



St. Rose of Lima Parish Hall and School, 3604 Brinkman Road, Houston, Donald Barthelme & Associates, architects (1948).



St. Rose of Lima classroom.



Sweeney Elementary School, Sweeny, Texas, Donald Barthelme & Associates, architects (1950-52), demolished.

did," I said. He said, "Yeah, the fee wasn't big enough." Well, that is a capper. But Staub did tell me that he went up to Chicago later on and went over the whole thing again and that the fee was completely adequate. Staub said, "We went ahead and had a very happy association." Isn't that wonderful? The story had a capper.

... on selling architecture

Two young fellows who were just starting in practice wanted to make a pitch for a church somewhere down in the country. They needed a little more weight, so they asked me to help them. I went down there with them and talked to the church board. Coming back in the car, one of them said: "You know, I never heard architecture sold as architecture. I have heard it sold as economy, I have heard it sold as this, that, and the other thing, but that is the first time in my life I ever heard architecture sold on its own merits, and I like that very much." I told them it was a nice tribute, but that the board was going to interview someone else tomorrow. The point is, the tribute was not to me, but to architecture. I want to see architecture stand on its own merits.

... on freedom

My own buildings do not seem unsatisfactory to me, talking now at age 76. When I was in my twenties I never questioned my buildings. Now I have two vantage points, the self-assured one from my twenties, and the one I have now since I stopped teaching. When I was teaching it was always a stimulus. One time I asked the students to tell me how they react to a straight line, for example. A straight line by itself has no architectural connotation. I put down a straight line and a non-straight line, and we took a vote. The vote was against the straight line. They all voted for the non-straight line. Off the cuff, I said, "What about order?" I put down four dots, making a square, again with no connotation. Order versus non-order. They voted for non-order. We tried again — form versus something that was not a form. There were one or two holdouts but the majority voted non-form. Now the hair was beginning to rise on the back of my head — what's going on here? Let's try enclosure — a circle is the best example. So we voted on enclosure versus non-enclosure. And they voted — non-enclosure. I got down off the dais, and I stood there looking at them. "There are forty of you

in here, you are all architecture students, and you have just voted against all four of the basic elements of architecture. How come?"

One student raised his hand and said, "Mr. Barthelme, we didn't believe that was just off the cuff." I am amazed. Then I think, there is rigidity in a straight line, there is rigidity in form, and order, and enclosure. I said: "I would say that as a human being, you don't like rigid things. People want freedom." I repeated that exercise 40 or more times with all different groups, and it came out the same every time but once.

... on experience

You have to show somebody a picture of what he is going to get, or he won't buy it. You can't show a picture of experience. Do you know what a city would be if the people designed it from the standpoint of experiences that were going to occur within it? It wouldn't be like it is today. Did you ever realize that if you took all the wonderful things in the world and put them on city blocks one after the other, you would run like a rabbit from it?

... on reading lists

In all my courses I had a bibliography. Freshmen, juniors, whatever, I told them, "Damn it, here is a list of books, you read them." And they weren't all about architecture. One book about dolphins and how they were trained and communicated with their trainer struck me. In the foreword, the author wrote that in order to write the dolphin book he should have been a physiologist, a biologist, a this and a that. Architects are in the same situation — they should be a lot of different things. ■



Helen and Donald Barthelme.

Houston's Academic Enclaves: Four Campuses in Three Acts

Richard Ingersoll



Despite the enduring sanctity of American individualism, those who are fortunate enough to attend a major university participate in an exceptional atmosphere of collective life. The college campus, a parklike setting for buildings with high architectural standards, reflects the sense of propriety and elite identity of this transitory academic community. In many ways the contemporary university resembles the social order of the ancient Greek polis, or city-state: the university councils and boards of trustees, the review processes of faculty committees, the constant evaluation by teachers of their students and by students of their teachers, the regular production of public lectures and performances all contribute to a climate of vigilant critique, dialogue, and mutual awareness within the restricted confines of the campus. The university enclave arguably provides the most participatory and direct political experience that college-educated people will ever encounter.

As with the ancient polis, the nature of campus politics can range from democratic to autocratic to theocratic. But whatever its ideological tinge, the limited population and the high degree of participation ensure that the university behaves as a collective body. Plato recommended 5,020 citizens as the proper size for his ideal, proto-fascist polis, while Aristotle would allow for twice that number, reasoning it to be the limit of people one could recognize in a lifetime. Today, after the great period of university expansion of the 1960s and 1970s, the largest American student bodies have reached a plateau of 30,000 to 40,000 (about the same number as those who had citizen's rights in Athens at the time of Pericles). Compared to European or Latin American universities, which often have 10,000 students enrolled in a single department, these are still relatively small student populations.

The American college campus, starting with Thomas Jefferson's "academical village" at the University of Virginia, has been charged with a utopian mandate: to vindicate the ideal of a self-contained rural alternative to the city. Since the 1950s, university-trained elites with a preference for living in the suburbs have exported the campus model to new enclave environments such as corporation headquarters or congregate living communities, while stripping it of its critical dimension. The appeal of the university campus is no doubt partly aesthetic — the built environment is treated as a single, well-planned landscape — and partly environmental, since most campuses are exemplary, verdant pedestrian zones, planned with the criterion of no greater than a 15-minute walk between buildings. No matter how innocent it might appear, however, the true appeal of the campus model derives from an insidious exclusionary agenda that is antithetical to the civil liberties of the city. Elites are attracted to the class homogeneity that they felt in college and seek to perpetuate it for their working and living environments. From the high-minded polis of the university, the various spinoffs of the campus tend to become defense-conscious mini-police states, places that are anathema to the free exchange of the city.

The proliferation of campuslike enclaves generates a patchwork kind of urban fabric full of inaccessible zones. Houston during the past three decades has become a crazy quilt of limited-access, neofeudal domains that include such corporate environments as Cullen

Center and Houston Center in the heart of downtown, Greenway Plaza and the Galleria near Loop 610, and the Fluor and Compaq headquarters in the outer districts, as well as the aggregate of health institutions at the Texas Medical Center and the formidable series of master-planned communities such as Cinco Ranch and First Colony in the city's hinterland. While the transfer of the college campus model to other programs enhances the efficiency of production and the loyalty of dependents, there can be no doubt that it also legitimates a new form of social segregation that keeps the riffraff beyond the hedges. Enclaving has led to the production of some handsome landscapes, such as Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo's Conoco headquarters, ringed with its heroic sun visors and set in a mosquito-free moat. But such well-defended monofunctional compounds, while they might make sense in terms of company productivity objectives, create formidable obstacles in the urban pattern and contradict the public nature of the city.

The four major university campuses in Houston (Rice University, the University of Houston, Texas Southern University, and the University of St. Thomas), each about three to four miles from downtown yet far enough inside Loop 610 to be considered part of the so-called "inner city," occupy sizable swathes of the city. The Rice campus is about half the size of the entire downtown area, while the combined campuses of UH and TSU, which are nearly adjacent to each other, are almost the same size as downtown. The universities are comparable in size to preindustrial city-states and set the example for the first ring of neofeudal enclaves in the city. At all four campuses, recent

planning decisions and architectural additions encourage a stiffening of the university enclave, reinforcing boundaries and in some cases closing public through streets in order to assert the autonomy of the campus as a landscape while reducing the possibilities of casual interactions with the city.

ACT 1

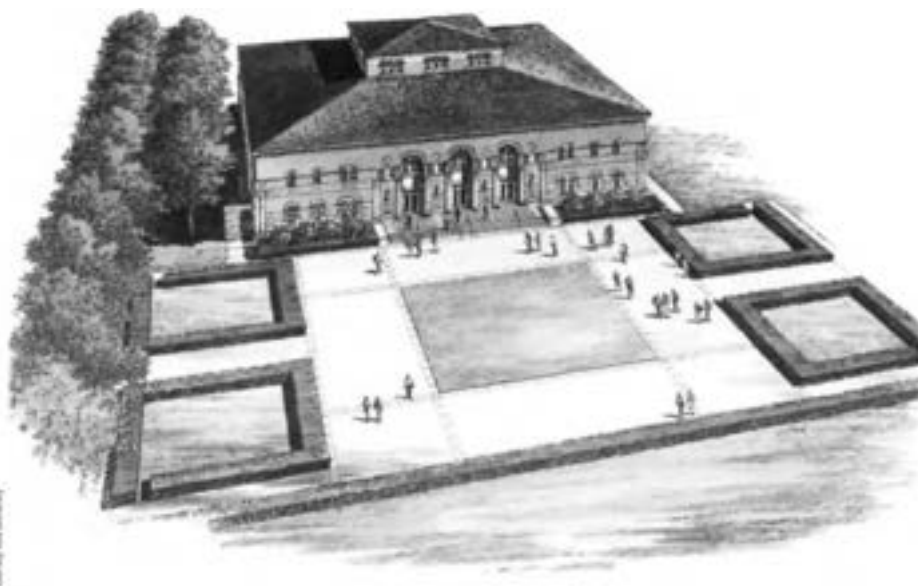
WILLIAM MARSH RICE UNIVERSITY

William Marsh Rice University, the most prestigious and oldest college in the city, possesses one of the most admired campuses in the country. As a small, extremely selective institution it is close to Plato's recommendations in scale, with a little more than 4,000 students. Rice has followed a course of slow growth and fairly coordinated expansions since the first general plan (1910) by Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson. The two initial

Mediterranean-style buildings by Ralph Adams Cram and the accompanying landscape of oak-lined axes established a commanding language of narrow, brick-faced, arcaded volumes arranged in courtyards and connected by tree-lined paths — a lexicon that has rarely been contradicted in successive building campaigns.

In 1983, Cesar Pelli, who had already been engaged as the architect of Herring Hall, built to house the graduate school of administration, was asked to produce a new master plan to update the original, and in it he specifically insisted that the new additions conform to the original language. Although Pelli's plan was only a set of recommendations, it has been followed fairly assiduously in the siting and massing of subsequent new buildings including Mechanical Engineering (1985); Pelli's addition to the Rice Memorial Center (1987); Ricardo Bofill's Alice Pratt Brown Hall for the Shepherd School of Music (1991); Cambridge Seven Associates' biosciences and bioengineering building, George R. Brown Hall (1991); Thomas Beeby's James A. Baker Institute for Public Policy (under construction); and John Outram's Computational Engineering Building (under construction). The only additions that were not anticipated in Pelli's plan are Antoine Predock's Center for Nanoscale Science (under construction), set adjacent to the Space Science Building, and the new police department headquarters (1992) across from the Media Center, an anonymous tilt-up building that guards the only campus entrance open after 2 a.m.

Most of the new commissions at Rice involved the selection of an internationally known architect, a practice that began



James A. Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, Hammond, Beeby & Bakko, architects (completion 1997).



Top: Center for Nanoscale Science and Technology, Rice University, Antoine Predock, architect (completion late 1997).

Above: Computational Engineering Building, Rice University, John Outram Associates, architects (completion 1996).

with the addition to the School of Architecture by Stirling & Wilford (1981). The Board of Governors' building and grounds committee from 1979 to 1994 was presided over with charming determination by Josephine Abercrombie, whose own real estate interests included an unbuilt project by Cesar Pelli and the development of Cinco Ranch. The taste for historicist details found in the Bofill, Beeby, Outram, and Cambridge Seven projects can be traced as much to Abercrombie's personal postmodernist inclinations as to the inherently conservative nature of the campus plan.

In addition to Pelli's plan, Rice is guided by a general landscaping plan, submitted in 1990 in anticipation of the Economic Summit of Industrialized Nations by Stuart Dawson of Sasaki Associates. Like Pelli's plan, the landscaping suggestions sensibly build on the existing patterns of tree-lined axes, strengthening the courts and edges, and projecting to the eventual greening of the vast stadium parking lot. Additional gates and thickened perimeter hedges are among the suggestions being acted upon. Dawson's planting scheme subtly strengthens the primacy of the inner loop road and emphasizes the intersections of the three secondary cross axes of the original plan, both of which instill a superb system of orientation. One of the recommendations in Pelli's plan that has yet to be fulfilled is the tracing of an outer loop road just inside the hedges for services such as food delivery.

Another idea that could be easily acted upon would be to provide articulated bike paths like those at Stanford University, an improvement that could become a model to extend to the surrounding neighborhoods. While two of the new buildings on campus will include showers as an incentive to those who brave pedaling to work in 100-degree weather, there is currently no plan for bike paths or bike parking, and nei-

ther Rice nor any of the city's universities has cooperated with the various municipally backed plans for city bike paths that have attracted federal funding during the past three years. Likewise Rice could be much more involved in the city's public transportation programs: would it be so barbaric to allow Metro buses to drop people off close to the center of campus? Rice is one of the few places in Houston where planning has had positive results. If the university took the initiative to offer well-organized transportation options such as bike paths and bus programs, it could greatly influence the rest of the city toward weaning itself from the automobile.

Since 1988, Dean Currie, Rice's vice-president for finance and administration, has been the pivotal player in negotiations between Abercrombie's committee, the donors (who of course have a significant say in determining the architectural products), the celebrity architects, the local support architects, and the institutions that must be served. Rice's planning succeeded because both clients and consultants were educated about the needs, traditions, and goals of the campus. Currie maintains that it is Rice's desire to hire the best possible architects to represent the specific moment of architectural discourse, while encouraging use of the existing campus language, in the hope that the architectural results will "elicit strong criticism while contributing to a coherently great collection of buildings." This strategy of balance has produced a very subtle kind of growth in which nondescript buildings such as Mechanical Engineering, or overly expressive designs such as Bofill's and Outram's, are subsumed in an overall context, a consequence of the formal power of the landscaping and the unifying texture of St. Joe brick. The recently unveiled drawing for Predock's Center for Nanoscale Science, which displays very subtle asymmetries in the placement of the fenestra-

tion but almost obsequiously reiterates the typological and material palette of the other Rice buildings, is a case in point of the strength of the campus's conventionality in disciplining the most nonconformist of architects. Rice has been expanding in an organic and seemingly inevitable manner that forces both stodgy and avant-garde architects to be deferential.

ACT II UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

By contrast, the University of Houston is a much larger, public institution that is currently suffering from state budget cuts and using most of its building funds for deferred maintenance. UH is by definition less selective than Rice in its enrollment, with a student body at the main campus about eight times the size of Rice's, one of the largest in the country. Aside from its central campus it has branches downtown (currently undergoing an impressive expansion of 600,000 square feet), at Clear Lake City, and in

Victoria. Due to the lack of strong orientation patterns and the absence of formal landscape devices, the diversity of buildings on the UH campus tends to be exaggerated, and architects have further accentuated this with their mismatched choices of volumes, cladding, and fenestration, making the campus appear as exogenous as a world's fair. To the same degree that Rice displays a concerted aristocratic cohesion, UH conveys the open, awkward, and inharmonious tendencies of democracy.

The initial plan for the Settegast-Taub donation of 110 acres of land, prepared in 1937 by the St. Louis landscaping firm of Hare & Hare (authors of a never-



Athletics/Alumni Center, University of Houston, MOK Sports Facilities Group, architects (1995).



John and Rebecca Moores School of Music, University of Houston, The Mathes Group, architects (completion spring 1997).

adopted 1929 city plan for Houston), seems to have emulated the organization of the Rice plan. The administration building, the Ezekiel Cullen Building, was placed at the head of an entry axis, followed by a loop road lined with parallel buildings. A minor cross axis on the south was left for a courtyard of student residential halls. Unfortunately the primary axis of the plan was directed in the short, east-west dimension of the site, and the subsequent growth was forced along an informal lateral axis to the north. In 1966, when the campus was replanned by Caudill Rowlett Scott, the roadways through the campus were eliminated and some of the implied cross axes of the original plan were blocked, confounding any clear axial orientation. Automobiles currently must skirt the perimeter of the campus and are only allowed to penetrate it at the edges.

A persistent ambiguity plagues UH: is the campus entrance located at the original site, off Calhoun Road, or is it to be approached from Cullen Boulevard, which is closer to downtown? The construction of the Gulf Freeway in 1952 created a strong attraction to Cullen Boulevard and the northern side of the campus, where Philip Johnson's Architecture Building (1987), a smug simulacrum of C.-N. Ledoux's 18th-century design for a House of Education, now greets freeway motorists, its redundant tempietto competing with billboards for cheap motels and vasectomy reversals. SWA's Kevin Shanley was asked in the mid-eighties to improve the freeway approach to Cullen Boulevard with a significant threshold. The resulting split obelisk, whose elements on either side of the road are joined at the top by laser beams, appears like a stranded relic of postmodern carnival ephemera, attempting to establish an axial order that refuses to congeal.

In 1992 Gerald D. Hines was commissioned to develop a new plan for the campus, and Hines in turn hired the architectural firm of Kendall/Heaton. This most recent UH plan foresees the closing of Cullen Boulevard between Holman and Wheeler avenues, the closing of Calhoun Road, and the shifting of emphasis to the original entry axis, which will soon feed into a new freeway extension of Texas 35. By closing these streets the campus will add about 30 percent more bulk to its already formidable enclave, but the problem of internal orientation and circulation will probably be aggravated: the perimeter



University of Houston, aerial view ca. 1955, when the campus more closely adhered to the Hare & Hare plan of 1937 (see the cover of this issue).



Commuter campus: University of Houston from the Gulf Freeway. The College of Architecture, by Johnson/Burgee with Morris Aubry, architects (1987), is the most prominent building in the background.

loop for automobiles will be enlarged rather than shrunk, making the connection to the center ever more unclear. Instead of dreaming of reinventing Rice with its clear axis, UH needs remedial, adaptive strategies to tie its landscape together. One example can be found at the University of Caracas, where a variety of buildings in different modern styles are linked by freestanding porticoes that extend from the perimeter parking lots to the central spaces. These shaded paths

create much-needed orientation as well as social spaces; some of them are even fitted with blackboards to be used as teaching areas. As at Rice, a combination of bicycle paths and bus stops could also give a new order to the campus, making it more accessible to the rest of the city.

In 1994, UH made national news with the announcement of a \$50 million donation by Rebecca and John Moores. This type of windfall is one of the reasons why the campus does not evolve in an orderly

manner. In this case the patrons specified that the money had to be spent on sports facilities, at a time when endowments were needed for educational buildings and the clarification of the center of the campus. Later the package was reassembled to redistribute some of the donation toward the construction of a new concert hall and music school. HOK Sports, specialists in sports facilities, has already completed the Athletics/Alumni Center, with a 120-yard indoor football field simulating the conditions of the Astrodome, an indoor track and field, and, positioned triumphantly at the entry, a Cougars Hall of Fame. The façade of the enormous complex has been slathered with a tawdry postmodern portal that greatly detracts from the purity of the building's semi-elliptical shed roof, whose beauty can still be appreciated from the rear elevation. It also houses the alumni center, and attached to it is a new baseball diamond. Mary Miss, the artist commissioned to create a sculptural enhancement to this project at the intersection of Cullen and Elgin, has designed a casually arranged collection of chairs in different scales set against an ivy-covered backdrop, a vision inspired by Houston back yards. The randomness of her project echoes the democratic incoherence of the campus and offers a contextualist suggestion to campus planners as to how to perceive their inchoate collection of buildings.

Across Cullen Boulevard (the part that will remain open), Houston architect Barry Moore and The Mathes Group have designed the new building for the Moores School of Music, which will have a Baroque-scale opera theater that seats 800 (under construction). The building will be approached from the northern parking lots by a shaded entry court with amphitheater steps. Its façades will carry very low relief pilasters reminiscent of the limestone pilasters on the Ezekiel Cullen Building. Some interior decoration will be designed by Frank Stella. Neither the athletic center nor the music school counteracts the tendency for each building to have its own style and volumetric character. The music building promises to establish a more coherent arts courtyard with the Wortham Theater and the Blaffer Gallery, but there is no corresponding landscape improvement to enhance the idea.

The probable demolition of one of the only buildings on the campus that has an endearing style, the limestone-clad Technology Annex, and the possible



demolition of Jeppesen Stadium to make room for a professional-size replacement seem unnecessary sacrifices to the idea of an ever-bigger future. Bruce Webb, dean of UH's School of Architecture, offers a much more sensible direction of development, noting that since UH owns the equivalent of 16 blocks on both sides of the approach from the split obelisks to the northern parking lots on Cullen Boulevard, it might be time to consider developing this site as a sort of academic new town, comparable in scale to the Rice Village, providing a mix of residential and commercial buildings for the substantial community of 35,000 who use the campus and have housing, shopping, and other commercial needs. Such a project would generate a strong focus of orientation and would ultimately enhance the flowing, democratic nature of the campus.

Two blocks west of UH lies Texas Southern University, founded as a state-funded institution in 1947, before desegregation, as a college "for Negroes" on the model of Tuskegee Institute. It currently has a student population of 10,233, of whom 79 percent are African American. Although "for Negroes" has been dropped from its name, the institution still strives to provide higher educa-



Texas Southern University fraternities have claimed trees on the Wheeler axis in the center of the campus by painting the trunks.

tion for the minority that has been most excluded from the universities. Rice, which has a 22 percent minority enrollment among undergraduates, is the social inverse of TSU.

The TSU campus is centered around a six-block stretch of Wheeler Avenue, which was originally open to vehicles but was closed to traffic in the 1970s to become a strong pedestrian spine. The major buildings, including the Martin Luther King Humanities Building (1969); the Ernest Sterling Student Center (1976); the Robert J. Terry Library (1958), which hosts the Barbara Jordan Archive; and the Thurgood Marshall School of Law (1976), all designed by Houston architect John S. Chase, give

onto this axis, which is strengthened by a row of plane trees. The Greek fraternity system is particularly important at TSU, and since there are no fraternity houses, members have claimed these trees along the Wheeler axis as their meeting places, painting the trunks with the fraternity's colors and symbols. While this has not been very healthy for the trees, it has created an exceptionally colorful street scene. In the center of the campus is a paved plaza that is shaped by the tall columns of Mack H. Hannah Hall (Lamar Q. Cato, architect, 1950), the auditorium and administration building, one of the earliest buildings on the campus and by far the handsomest, rendered in Texas limestone. This was the site of Houston's only race riot during the 1960s.

Since the adoption of a master plan in 1978, TSU has torn down about 350 buildings in the adjacent neighborhood, which has tended to isolate the perimeters of the campus. Half of the student housing has been demolished as substandard and has not been replaced. Cuney Homes, the second-largest public housing complex in Houston, forms the northern border of the campus and is currently undergoing rehabilitation. The campus is in fact permeable along this shared edge, and the easy access between Cuney Homes and TSU represents what other institutions would consider a dangerous alternative to the enclosed enclave. As always, the best defense is the presence of responsible people.

TSU is directly on the itinerary of one of the four projected public bike routes in Houston, the Columbia Tap Rail-to-Trail. The potential site, which is currently awaiting public funding, would use the abandoned Houston & Columbia rail line right-of-way that runs from the beginning of State Highway 288 downtown through Third Ward to Brays Bayou, where it links up with another bike trail. TSU, midway on the route, could become a key player in facilitating this alternative form of transportation, and could supply articulated local bike paths, safe bike racks, and showers. As the poorest of Houston's universities, TSU has the least potential to make major changes by constructing buildings and the greatest potential to change things through landscape intervention.

ACT III UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

The University of St. Thomas, the smallest of Houston's university campuses, has half as many students as Rice and the lowest tuition of any private college in town. Founded in 1946 by Catholic priests of the Basilian order, the school had the good fortune to be patronized by Dominique and John de Menil, who engaged their favored architect of the time, Philip Johnson, to create one of the best works of his career, a diminutive Modernist version of Jefferson's arcade-lined lawn at the University of Virginia,



Street-closing "planter," University of St. Thomas on Mt. Vernon Street.



Chapel of St. Basil, University of St. Thomas, Philip Johnson, Ritchie & Fiore, architects, with Merrimon Holt Architects (completion 1997). Top: View from the academic court. Above: Aerial view showing the chapel as the terminus of Johnson's academic court.

rendered with spindly black steel for the columns of the two-level colonnades and St. Joe brick cladding for the attached boxy volumes. For three decades this colonnade extended on the north into emptiness as a mysterious grid without attached volumes, evoking the stunning beauty of a Sol Lewitt sculpture. Only recently has a new academic building been hitched to the walkway to complete the symmetry of the court.

Construction is currently under way on what promises to be one of the silliest works of Philip Johnson's long career, a chapel that terminates the arcaded axis and cuts the court off definitively from the surroundings. A rectangular box with a small golden dome in its center, the chapel is intersected by a diagonal wall that carries carillon bells. The chapel will be entered through outward-folding flaps reminiscent of the gap at the bottom of a monk's robe. In both scale and style this frivolous design promises to overwhelm the subtle order of the original buildings, almost as if the architect were seeking revenge on himself — a perverse privilege that could only be granted to someone of Johnson's status.

The campus of St. Thomas was surreptitiously woven into the surrounding neighborhood, integrating existing wood-framed houses with its boxy brick volumes. Unlike other campus enclaves it was truly permeable, and until recently one could drive through it on city cross streets. The new additions and street closings effected in 1996 will prevent this promiscuity. Partly because of declining

enrollments and the need to better market the school, and partly because of the initiative of Stanley Williams, the local developer of a neighboring commercial center, who thought the school grounds needed more cohesion, St. Thomas hired SWA's Kevin Shanley in the late eighties to come up with a solution for defining the campus's edges, resulting in new yellow brick fences and enclosed parking lots that demonstrate the connection of the Link House on Montrose Boulevard with the 11 city blocks that make up the campus. Since then the campus planners have closed Mr. Vernon Street, one of three cross streets that continued the city's grid through the campus. Slowly the borders are hardening, destroying what was once a pleasant ambiguity between university and neighborhood.

The university campuses in Houston are extremely important, both to the cultural quality of life of the city and as examples of planning that the city (the world's most famously unplanned one) is unable to pursue. As a client for architecture, Rice offers an extremely important process of educating both the clients and the architects about the qualities that have worked and new conditions that are emerging. But Rice represents a poor model as a participant in the city, having from the start closed itself off and insulated itself from all contact with auxiliary urban functions. The other three universities, which at times have shown a better integration with the city fabric, are now pursuing analogous isolating strategies without considering permeable alternatives. While planning bureaucrats will usually argue that defensive structure is necessary for public safety because of the threat of crime, it can be shown that the presence of people, not walls, is the best deterrent to crime. While the universities have served as the model for legitimating enclaving for other institutions, they should now seriously consider reversing that isolationist tendency for the health of the city's fabric and the survival of urban values. The best place to start is with a new attitude to public transportation and nonpolluting forms of transportation. It is here that all four campuses, blessed with young, intelligent, and idealistic populations, could shed their neofeudal attitudes and produce a sustainable model of urbanity for the rest of the city to follow. ■

Is Rice a City?

Terrence Doody



Statue of founder William Marsh Rice at the center of the Rice University campus. Fondren Library (Staub & Rother with William Ward Watkins, architects, 1949) is in the background.

Is Rice a city? This question is the topic of the second paper in English 401: The City in Literature, a course I have been teaching to upper-level English majors and architecture students at Rice for the last 15 years. It is a good topic because it has no answer, and the essays are usually interesting because the students are doing a couple of different things at once: organizing their sense of a city's defining characteristics and thinking about Rice in an unanticipated way as they use each of these exercises to refine the other. The syllabus for the course changes all the time, but early on every reading list are Lewis Mumford's *The City in History* and Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Mumford supplies the basic vocabulary and models, Jacobs a critique of why the abstractions that work to explain a city's history do not work to plan a city's life. It is her work that is most useful in interpreting the novels we read, his in providing the ideas necessary to establish a common ground of discourse. And, as the students learn, Mumford's ideas of the city offer Rice a number of possible identities.

With the tomb of its founder-god to center it, Rice resembles ancient cities of Mesopotamia in surprising ways. Flanked

on the east by the palace that houses the city's rulers (Lovett Hall) and on the west by the citadel that contains the treasures (Fondren Library), the tomb establishes a physical axis, a historical continuity, and a sign of Rice's entailment in more than material concerns. With the addition of the four classroom buildings, however, and the crosswalk that fulfills the cruciform, the center of Rice begins to resemble the monastic settlements of late antiquity that preserved the urban culture of the Classical world as its political orders were disintegrating. With its wall of hedges and its faculties, which originated in the guild system, Rice also resembles the medieval towns that gave rise to and grew to surround the early European universities. The tomb of the founder-god, with this shift, becomes the statue of the patron saint.

Mumford argues that cities are not simply places and populations but sites of urban order, systems of functions and relationships. The city that Rice resembles most in his scheme of things is the city Mumford values most highly, Athens. In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., Athens was small, relatively poor, distinctly secular, and specifically different from the cities of Cos, Delphi, and

Olympia. Its gymnasium, sanatorium, theater, and agora were public spaces unrelated to the citadel of centralized power. Talk in Athens was more important than money; eloquence was valuable in itself; participation in the city's processes was more important than submission to a rule.

In the most interesting essays, the students begin to understand a complexity to Rice's organization that they had not recognized. In the least interesting, they utter an easy "no" and argue that Rice in no way resembles a large modern city like Houston. With this kind of argument the undergraduates typically reveal that they have made two important decisions about Rice's nature. Many decide that only they are the population. These students argue that Rice is not a city because it has no old people, no children, no families, and no one here in the summer (which is true of Paris, of course, but they don't know this). This means, however, that in their minds there are no staff, administration, graduate students, or faculty. Intelligent as these students are, they are sometimes undistracted by experience, and their own attitude makes Rice an ivory tower. On the other hand, some decide Rice is not a city because it is too dependent on outside



Halls of ivy: Main entrance to Rice University from South Main Street through an allée of live oak trees. Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, architects, general plan (1910).

sources for food and power, goods and services. In this construal, a real city is independent, self-enclosed, autonomous — a kind of ivory tower, or one of Italo Calvino's impossible *invisible cities*. Yet, as the best essays remark again and again, Rice has a post office, a police force, a bus system, two restaurants and a coffeehouse, at least two bars, an art gallery, a cinema, a theater, several performance facilities for its musicians, a bank of sorts, parks and playing fields, neighborhoods even, "bedroom communities," and a crime problem. And although it does not have some of the things Houston has — a representative government, a port, the Galleria — it does have amenities that Houston lacks, such as sidewalks, patient and generous bus drivers, and a football team.

The complex relationships that the institution and its faculty have with local, regional, and national economies need not be apparent to these students, who have not yet applied for NSF or NEH grants, sought consulting fees, or worked with Shell, NASA, or Baylor College of Medicine. But the students who see the greatest complexity in Rice's order are often those who have lived in several different places or, like the architects, have traveled in Europe and seen older, famous, powerful cities that seem to us remarkably small, such as Venice or Versailles. Versailles, in fact, inspired one of the most interesting papers recently, from a student who argued that Rice's urban order is Baroque — geometrically clear, relatively uniform, focused on specific functions, and exclusive. Neither



Right: Arcade, Physics Building, Rice University, Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, architects (1914).

Venice nor Versailles evolved from anything else; both were founded and set at a distance that still distinguishes their special use and deliberate inaccessibility.

I like this idea of Rice as a Baroque capital, as fully *intended*, removed but not alienated, open in many ways but hierarchical and elitist in others. But more so than any city I've ever walked around in, Rice is quiet, spacious, and green: it is a formal garden, with more trees than people — which is trees enough to soften both its Baroque geometry and the noises off Main Street. It is, in fact, not a good place for walking if you like visual texture and variety, but it is a good place to remain undistracted if you want to concentrate. Its emptiness on early summer mornings and the thick gold light of late spring and autumn afternoons can be very

beautiful; at other times the emptiness of this urban garden makes it as eerie as any de Chirico painting. The friends of mine who are most taken with Rice's tranquil beauty are the ones who are on the campus the least. For those of us who are here every day, the loveliness can be lulling. The eye and the surface of the skin need the density and salience of contrasts. A little more Jane Jacobs, in other words, and less Ebenezer Howard. ■



Lovett Hall, gateway to the Rice University campus, from the academic court, Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, architects (1912).



Baker College, Rice University, Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, architects (1914).

Halls of Lively: University of Houston Central Campus

Phillip Lopate

I moved down to Houston in 1980 to join the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program, which was expanding euphorically, in line with the city's economic boom at the time. During the subsequent eight years I taught at UH I tried to give serious thought to the physical layout and architectural properties of the central campus, in order to understand why it remained such a mysteriously receding, unaffected environment to me. It seemed odd that, while I could and did pour some passion into my teaching and my relations with colleagues and students, the place itself — the buildings, plazas, fountains, landscaping — never felt like more than a ghostly cipher, an un-present scrim.

These years happened to coincide with an education in architecture and urbanism that I was receiving from the *Cite* crowd: Drexel Turner, John Kaliski, Bill Stern, Bruce Webb, and, above all, Stephen Fox. It was Fox who tried to explain to me the shortcomings of the original 1939 layout of the central campus and the even more egregious mistakes of the 1966 plan, something about axes and quads . . . In any case, I took his word for it that the central campus had not just grown like Topsy but had followed an intentional, if botched, set of planning decisions, which resulted in the Big Blah it was.

I don't mean to be more insulting than the situation deserves. UH was not offensively ugly; it was just ordinary, non-impinging and not very vivid. The strongest impression the campus made was of a system of parking lots and roadways — with a collection of undistinguished institutional buildings, mostly from the forties, fifties, and sixties, that served as *raison d'être* for the parking. The parking lots around the perimeter were like orifices that allowed you to penetrate the tense, resisting body of the campus. But if you tried to get close to



University of Houston central campus with downtown Houston in the background.

the heart, you would come up against metal bars, culs-de-sac, speed bumps, and tire piercers. I remember the sense of transgression with which we would sometimes drive as far into the campus as possible and park below the Hilton "Hotel" (or, as it is properly named, the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management and Continuing Education Center — itself a contradiction of one's traditional image of the groves of academe), to scramble to one of the central buildings on foot. We would pass through oddly abstract "gardens," self-conscious transition areas with a few concrete benches and slender trees that looked as if they had been recently repotted from an architectural drawing.

I toiled in the Roy Cullen Building, a three-story, low-slung structure that housed the English department and which, like many of the older buildings on campus, had a shell limestone façade. I used to peer at the fossil forms embedded in the pocked stone and wonder why the aqueous imagery. Houston is not by the sea — though it pretends to be, having "stolen" the port from Galveston

via the ship channel in a Jacob-Esau artifice. Did it have something to do with oil, the region's (and the university trustees') source of wealth? Or was it simply the most distinguished façade material available at the time? Whatever the reason, the limestone absorbed the oceanic Texas sun and reflected it back as a mocking, shimmering *fata morgana*.

The interior of the Roy Cullen Building I experienced as a hallway, with classrooms and faculty offices spiking off its spine. The professors with seniority had the roomiest, best vista'd offices, while the others (like me) were trapped in cinder-box specials. I remember contemplating how many would have to die or retire before I could inherit a better office. There was also a paucity of seminar rooms and a hen's-tooth scarcity of seminar rooms with windows. I was assigned a succession of workshops in the basement, an environment as joyless as an airport baggage claim area. Sometimes one of the more enterprising students would scout around looking for a more appealing venue. But everybody faced the same problem: there was simply a shortage of amenities — classrooms where you could look out a window (much less open one), auditoriums, comfortable lounges, or places to hang out. There were no useful public spaces of any kind.

None of this was specific to the

University of Houston. It was, in fact, a classic situation for commuter colleges built in the second half of the 20th century. Students would hold down one or more jobs, drive to school, park their cars, attend a class or two, then skedaddle. It was always a question whether you could attract a big enough audience for a poetry reading, movie screening, or play. If you scheduled the event in the thick of



University of Houston entrance, Cullen Boulevard. Split abelish, The SWA Group, landscape architects (1985).

classes no one would come; and if you chose the wrong off-hour, everyone would be at work.

I used to fantasize about UH developing a more attractive system for luring townies into its cultural activities through a more magnetizing design at its edges. Whenever I went over to Rice, it was easier to find things; the layout of Rice was more like an extension of the streets surrounding it, and the *flaneur* in me was appeased. Here may be the place to con-



Ezekiel Cullen Building, University of Houston, Alfred C. Finn, architect (1950).

less that I always felt guilty, disloyal to my employer, for loving the architecture and layout of Rice so much. The allée of trees culminating in the Moorish fantasia of Ralph Adams Cram's Lovett Hall was all so logical, articulated, and sensuous.

As it happened, I preferred my colleagues and the University of Houston students, who seemed more variegated and less privileged than the ones at Rice; but no amount of mental jujitsu could get me to prefer the UH campus as a *place*.

If UH had a harder time drawing Houston's moneyed and cultural elite to events, this was undoubtedly in part because of its proximity to black neighborhoods. The ghetto near Texas Southern University and the more stately area of Riverside, occupied largely by black, middle-class families, abut and practically surround the UH central campus, a fact that the university seems to ignore. As Stephen Fox put it in his *Houston Architectural Guide*: "The University of Houston has encapsulated itself from urban demographic changes. Through purchase and exercise of its power of eminent domain, it has surrounded itself with a swath of territory that buffers the campus on all sides. Displaced neighborhoods and apartment complexes have been replaced with suburban institutional landscaping, a non-committal approach to urban design typical of Houston's largest university."¹

Once, toward the end of my stay in Houston, I was put on a committee to make recommendations on how to "beautify" the university. My suggestions all had to do with creating a more lively urban texture in the streets immediately surrounding the campus. Could not the university use its powers to support a more intriguing walking environment, of the sort that surrounds the University of Texas in Austin or the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor? Might this not encourage its own citizenry to linger after classes longer and attract postgraduate "slackers" from around the city? For instance, a good movie theater with a cafe? A first-rate bookstore, maybe a branch of the Brazos? Better restaurants, a shoe parlor, a dry cleaner, a savvy photocopy business? The administrators listened to me with a constricted air before moving onto ideas they preferred, such as building an arch that would serve as university logo and entrance. Their suggestions were, for the most part, symbolic, reinforcing the sense of the university as a self-encapsulated fortress.

It is, finally, this refusal of contact with a surrounding urban world (except for the thinnest of engirding commercial/retail environments) that helps explain the bodiless, abstract, unmemorable — or, I should say, willfully antimemorable — quality of the campus itself. All this, I repeat, relates to the look of the place. What occurs pedagogically inside it may be an entirely different story. ■

¹ Stephen Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide* (American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter, 1990), p. 144.

Heart of Third Ward: Texas Southern University

Alvia Wardlaw



Martin Luther King Humanities Center, Texas Southern University, John S. Chase, architect (1969). In the foreground: *African Queen Mother*, Carroll Sims, sculptor (1968).



School of Education and Behavioral Sciences Building, Texas Southern University, John S. Chase, architect (1981).



Thornton B. Fairchild Building, Texas Southern University, attributed to Alfred C. Finn, architect (1947-48), the first permanent building on the campus.

The campus of Texas Southern University was established in 1947 when the state of Texas allocated \$3.2 million to build and operate a segregated college for black Texans in Houston — an outgrowth of the bittersweet *Sweat v. Painter* ruling that denied Herman M. Sweat, an African-American college graduate and World War II veteran, admission to the University of Texas Law School in Austin. Since its first building, the Thornton B. Fairchild Building (1947-48), was constructed, the TSU campus not only has

served its university but also has been the cultural and community center of Third Ward.

The Fairchild Building housed everything at first — classes and administration. Early faculty members recall the wilderness in which the campus evolved, complete with raccoons, opossums, and an occasional alligator. The faculty was provided housing in temporary buildings on campus, while the surrounding neighborhoods were undergoing a rapid transition from white to brown. These housing

pattern changes had a major impact on the social structure of Third Ward and its schools — Johnston Junior High, Sutton Elementary (later Miller Junior High), and Turner Elementary.

In the midst of this transformation, Texas Southern steadily began to take on a physical presence in its neighborhood. Following the Fairchild Building, the three-part Mack H. Hannah Hall and Auditorium (Lamar Q. Caro, architect, 1950) was constructed in what was then the center of the campus. Early on we thought of Hannah Hall as imposing, with its high, broad stairs, hard Texas shell limestone sheathing, and great industrial steel-sash windows (now bronze solar glass). The north colonnade connecting the administration building and the auditorium is still one of the most serene spaces on campus. During the fifties the north campus on Cleburne was the site of commencement exercises beneath the pines.

Two major factors have defined TSU's identity: the physical boundaries that mark the periphery of the campus and divisions within it; and the arts program and the widely acclaimed art it has installed throughout the campus.

During the presidency of Dr. Samuel Nabrit, several new buildings were constructed, including two dormitories, Lanier Hall for Men and Lanier Hall for Women, and the Student Union. These were quickly joined by the Science Building, now named the Samuel M. Nabrit Science Center (Wyatt C. Hedrick, architect, 1958), which became, after Hannah Hall, the major building on campus. The new library (John S. Chase, architect, 1958), added near Hannah Hall, enclosed a cloisterlike area that created a formal outdoor public space for the first time, but one that was unfortunately weakened by its use for faculty parking. After student protests in 1968, Wheeler Avenue was closed. Without the intrusion of through traffic, TSU became more of a pedestrian campus. The construction of the Ernest Sterling Student Center (John S. Chase, architect, 1976) facing Hannah Hall completed the enclosure of the "quadrangle" in front of Hannah Hall, giving the campus a useful space for student gatherings and other outdoor events.

Just as closing Wheeler Avenue created a sense of wholeness on the campus, the removal of the railway track separating the east and west ends of the campus created more cohesion. That the arts were always "on the other side of the tracks"

was an ironic situation that was not lost on the fine arts faculty. Still, many of us miss the railroad track because of the way it defined the Third Ward experience. It was down that track that I walked to visit my father after school, and it was, down that track that I would later walk to talk to John T. Biggers about teaching art history at TSU.

It was Biggers who began the astounding mural program at TSU. More than 114 murals exist on the campus today, and they are viewed frequently during the academic year by elementary and high school groups and visitors from around the world. The murals that John Biggers created — *The Web of Life* on the interior of the Nabrit Science Center and those in the Sterling Student Center — are among Houston's art treasures. Similarly, Carroll Simms's relief sculpture, *Man and the Universe*, next to the main entrance of the Science Center, and her sculpture, *African Queen Mother*, in front of the Martin Luther King Humanities Center (John S. Chase, architect, 1969), are familiar. These art works define the Texas Southern campus as a unique community.

The addition of the Health and Physical Education (HPE) Building (Haywood John McCowan, architect, 1989) has provided a second structure on campus that allows for massive public gatherings. Hannah Hall during the fifties was the site of many events — concerts by pianist Phillips Steels and Don Shrilly and the University Lyceum, the eagerly awaited Ebony Fashion Fair, and the annual Shakespearean productions. Because there were few auditoriums open for public performances by African American artists, Hannah Hall assumed this role in Houston, bringing the black community together on the TSU campus. Now the HPE Building, with its spacious sports arena, has become the center for African American cultural and political events. It has in recent years seen memorable appearances by Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, and Louis Farrakhan, and has been the site of poignant memorial services for United States representatives Mickey Leland and Barbara Jordan that were attended by international dignitaries as well as Third Ward residents.

There really is no clear division between TSU and the community, and that is a good thing. The recent renovation of Cuney Homes by the Housing Authority of the City of Houston and construction of the TSU lab school make that community an even more visible extension of the campus. A TSU student mural painted on the side of a Cuney Homes unit is an inspiring symbol of the fundamental relationship between TSU and Third Ward. ■



Hannah Hall mural painted by TSU students under the direction of John T. Biggers (ca. 1965).



At Cuney Homes, adjacent to the TSU campus, a mural painted by TSU students is a symbol of the close relationship between TSU and Third Ward.

Flashback to the Sixties: University of St. Thomas

Karl Kilian



University of St. Thomas academic court showing Jones and Strake halls connected by the two-story arcade, Philip Johnson, architect (1958-59).

For me, the University of St. Thomas was an unexpected, exhilarating accident. Unhappy with my Alabama college and uncertain about the New England school I planned to attend the next fall, I lay out the spring semester of my sophomore year in Houston, waiting to spend the summer of 1963 in Belgium on the Experiment in International Living. My sister was a student at St. Thomas, as were some friends from high school. I figured I could take anything for one semester.

St. Thomas was constructed when I was in elementary school, and I watched it go up building by building. The Basilian fathers who founded the university in 1947 also staffed my church, St. Anne's, and parish solidarity occasionally led us over to Montrose to view the university's expansion. These were routine

visits until the trio of buildings (Welder, Strake, and Jones halls) designed by Philip Johnson began to rise along Yoakum at West Alabama in 1958, signaling something new. The de Menil family, whose Philip Johnson house led to the St. Thomas commissions, initiated radical change, not only by spearheading the new campus plan, but also by endowing an art department that, during the 1960s, made St. Thomas the center of vanguard culture in Houston. Jermaine MacAgy, who had come from San Francisco to be director of the Contemporary Arts Association, headed the department from 1959 to 1964. When I transferred to St. Thomas, my sister and one of my closest friends highly recommended "Jerry's" art history classes. That semester the department offered a course in Dutch

and Flemish art, great preparation for my trip to Belgium.

This art history class, my first, was a revelation. It met in the late morning in the auditorium of Jones Hall, where, upstairs, the art department adjoined the small gallery that MacAgy transformed twice a year with exhibitions that set a high standard and left an indelible mark on museum installations in this city. Students drifted into the class, bringing large glasses of iced tea along with their notebooks. The lights went down, and for the next hour we were transported by the beautiful paintings, sculptures, objects, and buildings that flashed onto the huge screen. That you could get credit for participating in something so exciting and pleasurable was remarkable. I decided to finish my degree at St. Thomas, and gradually I learned that this

and framed the eastern side of a grass-filled court. Science classrooms and labs, like much of the school, occupied converted houses or older buildings around and alongside the Johnson spine. Back then, the campus was interrupted by east-west streets, and buildings bunched up against each other as the school's expansion program progressed. Every Friday at noon the entire school gathered in Jones Hall for the equivalent of a town meeting.

connection between disparate parts — the strong art history department, the Friday schoolwide gathering, the small, open-minded classes, the endless conversation in Welder Hall — we thought of ourselves as a unique experiment in academic democracy. In this outdoor theater we, like ancient Greeks, would meet to produce plays, hear music, and plot our destiny. The Bauhaus-Jeffersonian architecture of St. Thomas, remarkably inti-

the tail was wagging the dog and wondered if, as the de Menils sought to turn St. Thomas into the next Black Mountain College (John de Menil had invited John Cage to sit on the school's board of trustees), the school was losing its way as a Catholic university.

It took a few years for this tension to surface into full-scale confrontation, but there were many irritants along the way, like the arrival of Andy Warhol and his retinue. During the screenings of his movies in Jones Hall, the doors were locked to keep out anyone — priests? police? — who might find the content of the films morally offensive. John de Menil wanted to secularize the school, drop the theology requirements, and turn the Thomistic philosophy program into one that studied issues of the moment. When he and the priests finally came to loggerheads, the de Menils lost. Their entire enterprise — the art history department, the media center, various professors who had come to teach in (some believed to infiltrate) other departments — packed up and moved to Rice. There the programs continued in two corrugated tin "barns" built at a safe remove from the rest of the campus until another set of circumstances moved the de Menils back to their old Montrose neighborhood for construction of the Menil Collection.

In its heyday, St. Thomas marked students and public alike, introducing them to a world of art that was energizing and new. When MacAgy was alive, and later under Dominique de Menil, the St. Thomas art gallery drew a glittering cross section of Houston to its openings. The art in those shows knew few cultural boundaries, and its installation suggested an approach to beauty that was simultaneously relaxed, challenging, and necessary. Students from that era remember the ad hoc quality of the campus; the incompleteness of the quadrangle suggested a work in progress, in which cosmetic details would be corrected at the appropriate time. Shortly after the de Menils left, a new wave of construction began that closed streets crossing the campus, extended the outdoor arcade, and (in an act of revenge?) gave the art history building to the theology department. (In perhaps a symbolic echo, the de Menils' departure from Rice saw the Rice Museum turned into the NROTC building.)

During those days in the 1960s, St. Thomas was a marvelous jumble of day trippers from the community, progressive students, and area Catholics. As appealing as this mix was, conflicting agendas were bound to emerge. For a while, rivals coexisted peacefully and effectively, but in the end this attempted marriage of art and theology was forced. If the former was the bride, she clearly was too strong a partner for her traditionally cautious mate. Still, those of us who were the offspring of that brief union will happily carry the marks of the era with us for a long time to come. ■

experience was emblematic of the whole school. It is easy to romanticize St. Thomas as it was during that period. There were several quintessential experiences going on simultaneously in the sciences, in the humanities, and in art history.

The core of St. Thomas, regardless of what you studied, was Welder Hall. The Welder we knew (whose interior volume was destroyed in 1977 for a business school) was open, double-height, floor to ceiling, to the western light. A giant Calder mobile hung above the Breuer tables and chairs, where we ate and lingered to enjoy the social and intellectual camaraderie that marked those years. A second-story arcade stretched along Welder's east wall; classrooms were on the south; and an open lounge on the north side overlooked the dining room. Gothic statues populated the arcade along with, at various times, Warhol flowers, Surrealist canvases, and four quattrocento Florentine panels now owned by the Museum of Fine Arts; American folk art portraits of a man and a woman hung in front of appropriate rest rooms. The weekend René Magritte came to St. Thomas, his paintings dominated the Welder dining room. When the visiting Chilean artist Marra came to lunch, either tact or distraction kept him from noticing the Jell-O that had landed on a painting of his that hung over the food-tray return line. Buckminster Fuller talked without end in this room; Jean-Luc Godard watched as the projector devoured the film he brought to show in Houston; Marcel Duchamp, father of much of 20th-century art, sat quietly there, trying to coax cowed undergraduates into conversation.

Nearly everyone — faculty, visitors, boarders, even auditing students — met in Welder for lunch. Jerry MacAgy shared her chair with two small dachshunds and her table with Louise Ferrari, her indispensable assistant, and a group of art history majors hungry for her conversation. MacAgy hung the art in Welder Hall, most of it from the collection of John and Dominique de Menil. About the only person who *never* ate there was the chairman of the English department, Father Edward Lee, who daily served up lunch in his kitchen-equipped building, called Shadwell. Invitations to his table were prized.

Humanities classes met in Strake Hall, the southernmost of Philip Johnson's three buildings. An outdoor two-story arcade connected these Miesian buildings



Welder Hall, University of St. Thomas as originally designed, Philip Johnson, architect (1958); Calder mobile hangs above Breuer furniture.

School business concerning the students was aired, and occasionally a visitor was invited to speak. Louis I. Kahn came to discuss his ideas about the architecture of the St. Thomas campus.

In a monograph on his work, Philip Johnson revealed that his sources for the University of St. Thomas master plan were Mies van der Rohe's campus for the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago and Thomas Jefferson's for the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Those of us who discovered this monograph in the St. Thomas library pored over the minimal plan, seeking details about what might be next for our campus. At one end of the mall, for example, Johnson had placed an outdoor amphitheater. Striving to make a

mate and human in scale, played an essential role in our undergraduate education and provided a sylvan retreat in a city about to explode into the petroleum boom.

Jerry MacAgy's sudden, unexpected death from diabetes could have stopped the steady growth of the art department, but Dominique de Menil moved quickly to fill the void. She herself taught classes, and she recruited a first-rate faculty that now is the core of Rice University's art history program. Having operated largely behind the scenes, the de Menils, both Dominique and John, moved front and center into campus affairs, bringing, in the minds of some, new life and prosperity to the small university. Others thought



Chapel of St. Basil, under construction at the University of St. Thomas, overwhelms the delicate scale of Philip Johnson's 1950s campus. Chapel designed by Philip Johnson, Ritchie & Fiore, architects, with Morrison Holt Architects (completion 1997).

The Campus Idea

Stephen Fox

Campus is an innocent term. It's also an ideological code word. That's what makes it so seductive. Who doesn't think of trees, lawns, ivy-covered buildings, fondly remembered people, and good times when the concept of the campus is invoked? Parking lots, garbage disposal bins, utility grids, or house- and grounds-keeping personnel are not what comes to mind, but an Arcadian imagery of pastoral settings — nature-intensive, secluded, protected — even if you didn't happen to go to a college with all the above. The concept of campus is intrinsically linked to college. It is an American word, or at least the Americanization of a Latin word that inverted the political connotation of the Latin original. In American use, it means the grounds of a college, university, or school. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (which did not even include the word in its earliest edition), the term was used as early as 1774 at Princeton. The original Roman *campus* was a field where public events requiring space took place: games, demonstrations, military parades.

The campus was the ex-urban counterpart of the forum, the open space in a Roman city reserved for public exchange and ceremony. In its Americanized sense, the campus reproduced aspects of the Roman original. What was different was that the word appropriated for the benefit of a specific institution a spatial condition that in antiquity had a public connotation. Campus connotes a bounded property under single control, akin to the cloister of a monastery, the historical model of the European university. It is this subtle, almost invisible territorial distinction between us and them that has caused the campus concept to be invoked

in nonuniversity situations as a modern paradigm of spatial order.

In Houston, the campus model was almost always associated with schools until the 1960s. Houston's earliest college, Houston Academy, an African American institution founded in 1885 by the Reverend Jack Yates, established a small campus at West Dallas and Tirrell in 1890. By 1905, the college had three buildings on four acres. The Rice Institute opened its 285-acre campus on the south edge of the city in 1912. The University of Houston opened the 112-acre nucleus of its present campus on what was then the southeastern edge of Houston in 1939. What all three campuses shared was — literally — a marginal relationship to the city. All lay on the edge, at (or just beyond) the point where the town dissolved and the country commenced.

That a college campus might serve as a model for urban planning was a proposition that the Rice Institute dramatically spatialized. The development of Houston's Main Boulevard civic arena between 1914 and 1924 involved the extrapolation of formal elements of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson's General Plan of the Rice Institute to the newly envisioned Main Boulevard, Hermann Park, and a series of elite residential enclaves adjacent to the campus. Houston was recreated in the image of a Progressive Era garden city. Institutions of high culture, religion, and healing were combined with master-planned parks, parkway boulevards, and restricted residential neighborhoods in a suburban City Beautiful. The residential enclaves explicitly represented with their gate piers (and implicitly, but more

forcibly, with their restrictive covenants) an underlying exclusionary theme that perhaps seemed innocuous to those who belonged, but clearly got the message across to those who did not. In a rapidly expanding city that refused zoning, a model that promoted real estate stability and predictability was required. Yet the university campus, with its unified ownership and management of real estate, initially seemed a less pertinent model than the restricted residential subdivision, whose deed restrictions and property owners' association allowed for common purpose with multiple ownership.

The New Deal introduced urban spatial models to American cities that were campuslike in organization, especially the low-income public housing complexes built by local housing authorities under the auspices of the United States Housing Authority between 1937 and 1942. The USHA mandated use of "superblock" site planning, often achieved by razing so-called slum neighborhoods and totally reconfiguring street and block patterns to reduce the amount of real estate dedicated as public streets. In Houston, all of the complexes built by the Housing Authority of the City of Houston adhered to this model. At the authority's flagship complex, Allen Parkway Village, this model had the desired effect of abstracting the complex from its former neighborhood setting in Houston's African American Fourth Ward. The alignment of new housing in parallel rows of apartment blocks and the resolute channeling of circulation toward Allen Parkway and Buffalo Bayou Park, away from Fourth Ward, were complemented by the housing

authority's decision to settle only white families at Allen Parkway Village. A unified architectural theme and splendid landscaping were campuslike attributes, as were singular ownership and management, restricted settlement, and restricted access. The idyllic image of the campus was constructed at Allen Parkway Village to block the views of blighted and black Fourth Ward from white motorists passing between downtown and River Oaks on the parkway. Urban space was reorganized in a big block as beautiful scenery that was politically and racially neutral.

The site planning of the Texas Medical Center between 1945 and 1947 represented the critical formulation of the campus metaphor as a model for urban precinct planning in Houston. Herbert A. Kipp, the Houston civil engineer who planned River Oaks, laid out the Texas Medical Center. Kipp's genius was to create a new Houston hybrid by fusing the model of the restricted subdivision with the image of the university campus. Since the Medical Center was to house many autonomous institutions, each owning its own property, deed restrictions were used to define common purposes and conditions for ownership, and the Texas Medical Center, Inc., was created as the corporate equivalent of a property owners' association to enforce the restrictions. As represented in perspective drawings of various stages of Kipp's plan, the Medical Center was to consist of symmetrically organized institutional buildings occupying landscaped lawns along a network of internal lanes, much as one might envision a college campus. That the institutions occupying those buildings would adopt an industrial model of growth and change, rendering



The Rice Institute, 1924, built on the edge of town.





Entrance to Conoco's 62-acre campus, 600 North Dairy Ashford Road, Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo & Associates, architects (1955).



Texas Medical Center's 675-acre "campus," 1995 aerial view.

architectural symmetry and completeness irrelevant, and that the parklike settings of the original buildings would give way to surface parking lots by the late 1950s should not obscure the prophetic nature of Kipp's master plan. It established the image of the campus as the spatial representation of intelligent urban planning in unplanned Houston.

The Texas Medical Center did develop a reciprocal relationship with the city. Since the Texas Medical Center, Inc., was legally obligated to sell property within the Medical Center only to not-for-profit institutions, for-profit businesses (mostly office buildings) lined up on the west side of Fannin and the south side of Holcombe in the 1950s. This resulted in an edge condition similar to those of urban college campuses (of which the Drag along Guadalupe Street, across from the University of Texas at Austin, is a classic example). The lack of urban edges distinguished Rice and the University of Houston. Texas Southern University (planned in 1948) and the University of St. Thomas (planned in

1957) did have edge conditions, because their campus sites were much shallower than those of Rice and the University of Houston. Although both were set in neighborhoods that were predominantly residential, this meant that their buildings and grounds did exhibit some sense of spatial reciprocity with off-campus neighbors.

During the 1960s, planning at an urban scale enjoyed very little prestige in Houston. This was especially true in the realm of entrepreneurial development, the major exception being the restricted residential subdivision. Although the concept of the suburban "corporate campus" had been formulated in the mid-1950s, the few examples that existed in Houston (such as the Prudential Building on Holcombe across from the Medical Center, and the Schlumberger headquarters on the Gulf Freeway) were not immediately influential. The Buffalo Speedway corporate corridor of the 1950s and 1960s (home to Exxon, Magcohar, Texas Instruments, and Great Southern Life Insurance) and the nearby Richmond

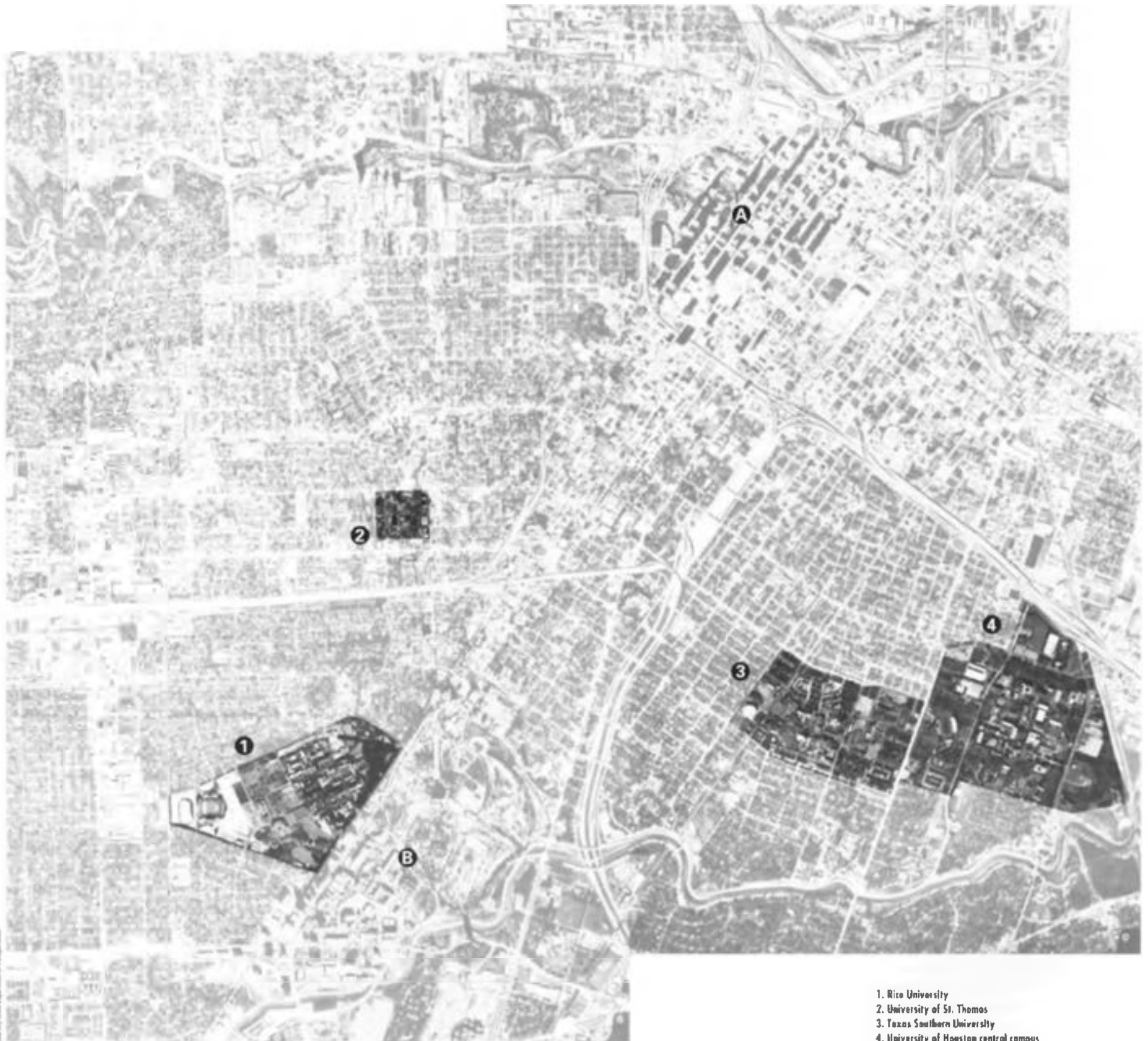
Avenue Office Park corridor of the 1960s, where Gerald Hines and Kenneth Schnitzer got their starts, were strips. Individual buildings faced the street. The complexes along Buffalo Speedway were campuslike in appearance, with their generously landscaped sites. But on both streets the buildings were still part of the city, although it was a very suburbanized city.

Two public "campuses" forecast the popularity that the campus concept would begin to have for entrepreneurs in the 1970s: NASA's Johnson Space Center at Clear Lake City (opened 1964) and Houston Intercontinental Airport (opened 1969). Although both were under single ownership and management, they demonstrated that it was possible to achieve spatial control in nonacademic settings by applying the image of the campus. By the time IAH opened, Kenneth Schnitzer had begun to expand and replan Greenway Plaza (where the Buffalo Speedway corporate corridor intersects the Richmond Avenue Office Park corridor). Working with the

Houston architects Lloyd, Morgan & Jones, he applied the campus image to an office development under single ownership. In the boom real estate market of the late 1970s and early 1980s, such suburban office developments as Westchase, Park Ten, and Westlake Park internalized the campus image to promote themselves as planned islands of order in the sea of real estate chaos that was west Houston.

The consequences of reorganizing urban space as an imaginary campus can be gauged from the experience of the Museum of Fine Arts. When the museum opened in 1924, it was an integral part of the Main Boulevard civic arena. Its identity as a cultural institution was inseparable from this civic landscape. During the 1950s and 1960s, the immediate setting of the museum changed from one of elite residential neighborhoods to a mixed-use, mixed-income, mixed-race area. In the late 1960s, the museum began to acquire surrounding properties in order to expand its operations. This real estate buffer compensated for the instability and unpredictability of the surrounding city





1. Rice University
 2. University of St. Thomas
 3. Texas Southern University
 4. University of Houston central campus
- A. Downtown Houston
B. Texas Medical Center

by forming a defensive enclave, further reinforced when the Brown Foundation, which had facilitated a number of the museum's key real estate purchases, bought a site across from the museum for the Contemporary Arts Museum. What emerged was what the Museum of Fine Arts began to refer to by the 1980s as its campus. Use of this term seemed to create expectations on the part of museum officials about the spatial consequences of being a campus: concern for institutional identity expressed through architectural unity, and clarity of internal circulation between the museum's various properties. The sense of belonging to the larger civic landscape of the 1920s contracted, even as the "Museum District" blossomed with a new generation of cultural institu-

tions in the mid-1990s. The introverted character of Rafael Moneo's design for the Beck Building of the Museum of Fine Arts is a logical outcome of the practice of redefining city space in terms of an imaginary campus. The internal circulation system Moneo proposes — underground pedestrian tunnels linking a parking garage with the principal museum buildings — reproduces with chilling precision an authentic Houston spatial context, experienced daily in local office buildings and shopping malls, as Albert Pope has observed.

The steps by which the Museum of Fine Arts moved from city to campus were repeated downtown, where Houston Endowment Inc. created a cultural enclave in the mid-1960s by building

Jones Hall and donating an adjacent site for the Alley Theatre. Bolstered by the Wortham Theater Center and redefined as the Theater District, this entertainment campus is also home to the still incomplete remodeling of the Albert Thomas Convention Center, whose conversion to an enclosed entertainment mall is heavily subsidized by the city of Houston. As the cultural institutions of the Theater District campaign aggressively to claim a disproportionate share of city and county funding for the support of arts programs, one can see the ideological consequences of the campus mentality coming into play. In reterritorializing themselves as an enclave, these institutions defensively claim superior and exceptional status, even at the

expense of the cultural life of the city that sustains them.

The layered introversion that Moneo promises to spatialize so provocatively in his Beck Building for the Museum of Fine Arts can also be seen in the Albert Thomas Convention Center, although essayed there with less architectural finesse. The Albert Thomas promises to become, metaphorically, a campus within a campus. Following the insular logic motivating the arts organizations of the Theater District, it disdains any responsibility for promoting the conservation and reuse of the Main Street–Market Square Historic District downtown. At the Texas Medical Center, the hermetic impulse of the campus ideal is especially visible. Inside the opulently surfaced, skylit court

of the Dunn Tower at Methodist Hospital, one experiences the disorienting internalization that the campus ideal seems to trigger. The typology of the glass-vaulted Galleria mall is present here as the architectural code image for public space in the 1990s. Back-lit, wall-mounted diagrams — labeled “Methodist Hospital Campus” — are omnipresent to help orient bewildered visitors. Here the campus metaphor forsakes any imaginary associations. The maps do not show the Texas Medical Center, only the complex of buildings owned by Methodist Hospital. “Campus” here seems to represent a nostalgia for order and coherence, perhaps intended to console confused visitors trying to get to the sky bridge between the Dunn Tower and the Smith Tower so that they do not have to go outside and walk across Fannin Street.

The farther the image and ideal of the campus migrates from its origin as college grounds, the more it becomes an ambiguous metaphor for spatial order achieved by a process of defensive exclusion, a devolutionary cycle that Albert Pope also identifies and analyzes. Is this inexorable? No: the Menil Collection provides a powerful counter-example. Although in many respects campuslike, it is an anticampus. What Dominique de Menil, Paul Winkler, and other museum officials have chosen to pursue is a spatial policy that adopts the city as its guiding metaphor. The reciprocities that exist between Renzo Piano’s museum building and the neighborhood bungalows that Mrs. de Menil preserved and rehabilitated, the dispersion of museum buildings and facilities (such as visitor and staff parking lots) amidst the houses, even the rejection of a unifying architectural theme for the museum buildings and chapels stress the heterogeneity and openness of the city over the homogeneity and insularity of the campus. On a much more modest scale, Project Row Houses rejects the campus premise to integrate with the neighborhood, even as it seeks a citywide constituency and national recognition.

The campus ought not to be demonized. It is a useful spatial type. As one can see in Houston, it has much to contribute to the city. It becomes problematic when it is applied uncritically as a surrogate for the city and when its ideological (and spatial) consequences are not acknowledged. ■



University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Thomas Jefferson, architect (1817–26).



University of Chicago, master plan by Henry (vas Cobb (1893).



Columbia University, master plan by McKim, Mead & White (1894); rendering by Charles F. McKim, 1895.

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BUY DESIGN

Stanley Marcus on the Architecture of Merchandising

Barbara Koerble

At 91, Stanley Marcus remains the quintessential example of upscale American retail know-how. After assuming control of his father's successful specialty retail establishment at the age of 44, Marcus honed an innate flair for showmanship, utilizing clever promotional tactics to bring Neiman Marcus into the national and international spotlight. Neiman's went beyond simple advertising copy to undertake such lavish store promotions as the extravagant Christmas catalogue, featuring such offerings as his-and-hers camels, Beechcraft planes, and mummy cases, which has become a national media event.¹ At the same time, Marcus sought to underscore the store's carefully cultivated image of elegance, refinement, and discerning taste through architecture and interior design, commissioning a series of notable architects including Philip Johnson, Kevin Roche, Gyo Obata, John Carl Warnecke, and Edward Larrabee Barnes to design branches around the country.

A summary of Marcus's philosophy accompanies an exhibit in the original downtown Dallas store: "All Neiman Marcus stores are designed by well-known architects to be spacious and aesthetically pleasing. Merchandise is never allowed to overwhelm customers. Neiman Marcus doesn't just stock goods. It presents them with taste, authority, and a sense of permanence. Fine paintings, sculptures, and living plants are integrated into the display of merchandise as well as into each store's decor. The goal is to stimulate customers, while affording them a sense of well-being."²

Following his graduation from Harvard in 1925, Marcus went with his father to Europe and in Paris saw the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, which gave its name to the design movement known as Art Deco.³ Marcus considers this a seminal experience: "I had been suspecting that there was a revolution going on in architecture, but I didn't know a damn thing about architecture. That exhibition was like a bombshell coming at a time when I was very impressionable and tending toward contemporary design, and that sealed it. . . . Gradually, I educated my father that contemporary design was here to stay

and that it was a much better backbone for [merchandise display]."⁴

As the senior Marcus's health declined, his son oversaw additions and renovations to the store in 1933, 1941, and 1953 that gradually transformed it into a more contemporary expression, at least on the interior. The 1933 expansion was designed by George Dahl. The other expansions and the first suburban branch store — the Preston Center store (1952) — were designed by Dallas architects Roscoe DeWitt and Arch Swank, with New York interior designer Eleanor Le Maire.⁵ These early commissions established the conditions for Le Maire's future collaborations with other Neiman Marcus architects.

DeWitt became embroiled in the controversial aborted house design that Marcus commissioned from Frank Lloyd Wright. After Marcus asked DeWitt to function as the local consulting architect, Wright accused the Dallas architect in a scathing letter of "undermining" him as the relationship between Wright and Marcus deteriorated. In one of the more humorous exchanges, Marcus complained to Wright that the closets in the house were too small. Wright retorted to the president of Neiman Marcus, "Well, you shouldn't have so many clothes!" When the initial bids came in at four times budget, Marcus fired the famous architect. "Not a pleasant experience," Marcus remembers. "But I got a Ph.D. in architecture just as a client. I learned a lot from Mr. Wright — learned a lot about him. Unfortunately I never got a house from him." In the end, DeWitt designed the house and Le Maire did the interiors. "The resulting house was nowhere near as great a house as Mr. Wright would have done, but a lot more comfortable," Marcus says [see Donald Barthelme on Wright, page 9 of this issue].

Marcus took on the role of architectural consultant in the mid-1930s, when an executive with the Magnolia Petroleum Company asked him to help select an architect for the company's building at the Texas Centennial Exposition. Marcus's friend, the American industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss, suggested a lounge building where people could rest and offered the names of several contemporary architects. Marcus interviewed



Stanley Marcus at the mall entrance to the NorthPark Neiman Marcus store, ca. 1966.

Richard Neutra and William Leseaze, and Leseaze was selected. The Magnolia Lounge, completed in 1936, was the first International Style building in Texas and an anomaly among Paul Cret's Art Deco fair buildings.

One of the few details that Stanley Marcus is unable to recall is exactly when or how he first met Eleanor Le Maire. As he puts it: "It seemed to me that she was part of my life forever. . . . She was a tremendous source of inspiration — she helped establish principles that I've never forgotten." Le Maire graduated from Parsons School of Design in New York in 1920 and studied as well at the Columbia University School of Architecture and the University of California at Berkeley. Her initial success came quickly, when she completely redesigned the interior plan, furnishing, and lighting of Bullock's Wilshire department store in Los Angeles in 1929, after being on the store's staff only a short time. Forty years later, *Interiors* recalled the Wilshire store as "a revolutionary interior in its openness, airiness, accessibility to daylight, unification with the landscape, and its clear and vivid colors — colors then unknown in commercial interiors."⁶ Marcus describes Bullock's Wilshire store as "the single

most important retail design of the century."

By the time Stanley Marcus encountered her in the mid-1930s, Le Maire had a well-established office in New York. Although interiors for major banks would become a staple of her later practice (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Manufacturers Trust Company on Fifth Avenue was the first), Stanley Marcus was one of her earliest and most loyal clients; their collaboration spanned 35 years and lasted up to her death in 1970. Le Maire had an excellent understanding of the retailer's needs. She expressed her credo in an exhortation to other designers that appeared in a 1964 issue of *Interior Design*: "You will focus interest in the store, without distraction, on the merchandise you have to present. Backgrounds must be kept as backgrounds; the foreground belongs to merchandise. You are not the star in this production — the client's merchandise is. Your plan, design, color treatment, lighting — all these, if they are right, will do that. Good use of space, a bit of air, correct use of materials, lighting and color, all together, can create a scene, a mood, a warmth, which will be just right for the merchandise and most inviting to the public."⁷



Neiman Marcus, Dallas, grand staircase to the mezzanine, 1930. The original store, built in 1914, was expanded and rededicated in 1926 (above) under the direction of Stanley Marcus, Sr.

Le Maire spurred Marcus's commitment to contemporary architecture and helped guide his plans for a major expansion program. "I made a decision, encouraged by her, not to produce a prototype store and reproduce it all over," he says. "She thought this was an opportunity to capitalize on diversity instead of standardization." Hoping to encourage a number of architects and let the new stores express the character of their locations, Marcus, armed with clippings sent by Le Maire of new architectural works, sought architects who he thought had a "feeling" for stores. "The truth of the matter was," he now says, "that none of [the name architects] had much of a feeling for stores. They had never done stores. Some of them never did learn it."

Marcus first approached Eero Saarinen to design a Neiman's branch in Fort Worth. Saarinen, however, had already committed to design the CBS tower in New York City and told Marcus that it would consume all of his time. With Saarinen unavailable, Marcus turned again to Henry Dreyfuss for advice. Dreyfuss had worked with Edward Larrabee Barnes during World War II designing prototype prefabricated housing units. However, as Marcus recalls, "Barnes had never been in a store. His wife did all of the shopping, so he had no basic understanding of the economics. . . . I don't think Ed was willing to really learn anything about stores."

Barnes proposed a design in which Neiman Marcus was the central store, ringed by peripheral small shops; in the more traditional mall concept, two or more anchor stores are placed at opposing ends, with small shops arranged in between.⁸ While Barnes's solution gracefully accommodated the sloping site, with the perimeter shops stepping down around the central block, the shops were largely unvisited by foot traffic and "died on the vine," as Marcus describes it. The design provided for a one-level expansion, but this was insufficient for the company's long-term needs. Although the store was financially successful, it ultimately was abandoned, largely because of the problem with the surrounding shops. After this expensive learning experience, Marcus stayed with a traditional mall design for future stores.

Saarinen had promised Marcus that he would design the next Neiman Marcus store, but he died before Dallas's NorthPark Center came to fruition in 1965. Kevin Roche, Saarinen's successor,



Neiman Marcus, downtown Dallas, Eleanor Le Maire Associates, interior designers; DeWitt & Swank, architects (1953). The expansion and redecoration under the direction of Stanley Marcus, Jr., included this tucked-away escalator.

designed the Neiman's at NorthPark for developer and art collector Raymond Nasher, who also engaged Lawrence Halprin as landscape architect and Farrell & Hamilton (Omniplan) as project architects for the rest of the shopping complex. Neiman Marcus was integrated into an attractive, spacious ensemble of shops unified through the use of brick and the incorporation of a series of interior courtyards. Writing in 1985, architecture critic David Dillon described NorthPark as a "notable exception to [Dallas's] freeway monstrosities; . . . 20 years later [it is] still the most polished and sophisticated of the area's major shopping malls."⁹ Besides much positive attention in the architectural press, the NorthPark complex received the Dallas chapter of the American Institute of Architects' 25-year award in 1992.¹⁰

Recalling his experience with Roche, Marcus comments, "We found ourselves educating most of the architects as to what the philosophy of a store was. One of the things we had to teach them was that we were positive of only one thing with any store — that we would want to change it within ten years." Marcus fought Roche's design for a concave ceiling that defined a specific department. Marcus felt certain that this would restrict the department when it needed to expand, but he ultimately lost the battle with Roche, who "was very convincing that a building had to have some discipline even if you did have to change it a little." The concave ceiling has been removed. "It cost us a fortune to change it," says Marcus.

While Neiman's at NorthPark was part of a highly unified ensemble, in general Marcus preferred that his stores look distinctive instead of slavishly relating to the center. In St. Louis, the local planning board compelled him and his architects to integrate their store into a colonial-style shopping center "more befitting the 18th century than the present," Marcus recalls. "So we asked them if they flew in airplanes of that same design. We lost that battle, but I made up my mind that I would never again be bludgeoned by a short-sighted committee or city planners."

Of all of the Neiman Marcus stores, the 1971 Bal Harbour, Florida, store, designed by Miami-based architect Herbert H. Johnson, is Marcus's favorite. The palette of materials reflects seaside colors and the store has a casual feeling, so that strolling vacationers in bathing

suits feel comfortable. The design of the octagonal building features skylit octagonal stairwells, two surmounted by towers that mark the entrances. A three-story skylit atrium court with hanging gardens contains glass-enclosed elevator cages that offer panoramic views of the store.¹¹ (One feature common to all Neiman Marcus stores, except the original Dallas store, is a skylit escalator atrium.) Circulation areas are paved with the same material throughout to unify all of the levels. The Bal Harbour store was the last that Le Maire worked on; she died before it was completed.

The first Neiman Marcus store in Houston was downtown where The Fashion had been before going out of business. For a number of reasons the arrangement was unsatisfactory, and Marcus prepared to open a suburban store when that lease expired.¹² He and Gerald Hines were concurrently planning two different malls within blocks of each other; Hines approached Marcus about becoming his anchor tenant in the Galleria, to which Marcus readily agreed. "It was a very warm and friendly relationship," remembers Marcus, and Hines "was always very responsive to architectural requirements we were insisting he incorporate into the areas leading up to our building. We didn't want kiosks, for

example — we fought kiosks, and for twenty years, we won, but eventually kiosks got into the mall. But Gerry is one of the most delightful developers I know, with a real understanding and respect for good architectural design." Marcus is far less effusive about Gyo Obata, the architect for the Houston store: "I think Obata was intent upon his career and the importance of the building to his career rather than the importance of the building to our career." Obata's design is more monumental than most Neiman Marcus façades but was criticized as a hand-me-down version of Le Corbusier's La Tourette.¹³

Following the Houston Galleria store, opened in 1969, John Carl Warnecke designed a series of Neiman Marcus branches, including stores in Atlanta (1972), St. Louis (1975), the Chicago suburb of Northbridge (1976), and Washington, D.C. (1978). However, Marcus was clearly not happy with his working relationship with the architect. "When we got down to working sessions on a new store, Warnecke was never around," Marcus said. "We didn't expect him to do the drafting work, but certainly expected him to do the critical work." One reason Marcus continued the association was that he had persuaded Warnecke to absorb Eleanor Le Maire



Neiman Marcus, NorthPark Center, Dallas, Eero Saarinen & Associates, architects (1965).



Neiman Marcus, Bal Harbour, Florida, Herbert H. Johnson, architect (1971).

Associates after Le Maire's death, since Warnecke had no interior design division.

Marcus's reputation as a local authority on architecture won him a place on the committee selecting an architect for the Dallas City Hall. "They were prepared to build a beautiful colonial building," recalls Marcus, but Mayor Eric Jonsson asked Marcus to "educate" the committee by showing them the work of 20 architects. I. M. Pei was ultimately selected to design the building, completed in 1978. "Now, whether that was a good design or not, I don't know," Marcus says. "I've never been terribly keen about the building inside." Several years later, Marcus chaired the architect selection committee for the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center. Although a similar process was followed, the committee was not satisfied with the presentations. This time Pei had declined to participate, and when Marcus contacted him and asked why, Pei said he thought it would be a waste of time, since Dallas already had two of his buildings. Marcus convinced him to try, and Pei won the commission, producing "probably the best building of his career," in Marcus's estimation. "I feel that that was one of my most rewarding ventures into architecture outside of my own business."

Marcus's most controversial commission was the San Francisco store, built on a corner of Union Square in 1982. He encountered organized opposition to demolition of the building that occupied the site, the 1908 City of Paris department store. He countered with engineering reports stating that the building was unsafe and out of code and pointed to the difficulty of retrofitting the old store for modern uses. To pacify the public, he agreed to save the building's rotunda and stained-glass dome, "not realizing I had made a million-dollar commitment."

Warnecke, who was to have designed the store, was unceremoniously dumped when, according to Marcus, the architect's daughter showed up at a public hearing on the proposed demolition and lambasted her father as a bad architect. Wishing to avoid a cause célèbre, Marcus turned to the less controversial Philip Johnson, who, Marcus believed, had a "national reputation that would impress the hidebound people of San Francisco." Apparently Johnson felt he would prevail through reputation alone. The most enduring anecdote about his involvement in the commission was reported by San Francisco newspaper columnist Herb Caen, who claimed that Johnson sat reading *The Hound of the Baskervilles* during a public hearing, then cheerfully quipped, "Loved the book, hated the hearing."¹⁴

Johnson's store-as-gift-box imagery was not greatly appreciated in San Francisco, as a 1985 survey revealed. Most disliked was the façade, whose checkerboard pattern of pink granite was criticized as "flat and cardboardy" and derisively compared to both a clown's costume and argyle socks.¹⁵ Johnson, naturally, had a loftier artistic vision of the granite veneer, describing it as a



Neiman Marcus, NorthPark Center, Dallas, Eleanor Le Maire Associates, interior designers; Enro Saarinen & Associates, architects (1965). This exhibition hall was unique to the NorthPark store. New York architect Charles Forberg designed the canopy, and the opening exhibition (above) displayed the sculptures and contraptions of New York artist William Accorsi.

"Mondrian-like" pattern. "Since the building was a blank box we used the wall like canvas," he explained.¹⁶ Criticism was also leveled at the awkward caging of the rotunda and the stained-glass dome that remained from the City of Paris building, and at the lack of contextual reference to any of the building's neighbors.¹⁷

In retrospect, Marcus's decision to avoid a signature or prototype store was well advised; the resulting array of designer-architects produced work that paralleled Neiman's top-flight designer labels in quality. Still, Marcus found working with famous architects to be a trial at times: "During the past 30 years, there has been so much opportunity for architects all over the world, . . . and as a result, they were never around when we were. We would be held up by Kevin Roche being in India, Obata being somewhere else. I was at the point of saying, 'I don't want a famous architect anymore, I want somebody who is resident.'" He also faults his architects for failing to understand the program. "Too many of them built with preconceptions rather than basically studying how stores are done. Now, if Barnes had studied the problem, he would have known that there was a

reason that malls have been successful. . . . It was an old solution that works, and other solutions don't work. . . . But the architects we worked with were all fairly stubborn about that. None of them said, 'Look, I'd like to work in the store and put one of my men in for a month as a salesman just to observe the function of the store.'"

In general, the "designer" stores are competently designed but do not exemplify the best work of these architects. Marcus acknowledges that his own interests lay elsewhere: "I put more emphasis on interior architecture, and in doing so I made some mistakes by not insisting on more distinctive exteriors." His best decision was to retain Eleanor Le Maire's design services for so many years. As *Interiors* recalled her: "Though she was a modernist on the whole, it is not modernism as such for which her works will be remembered, but for comfort, exhilaration, opulence [and] elegance."¹⁸ The clean-lined, spartan, modern exteriors served as a foil for the elegance and richness of the interior fixtures and decoration, and for the luxurious merchandise they supported.

Marcus's relative lack of interest in the stores' exteriors no doubt affected his

architects' commitment to the projects, and few of the high-profile firms met his exacting standards of service. In fact his encounters with architects seem to have anticipated the architectural marketplace of today, where service is often valued more highly than quality or originality in aesthetic expression. Merchandising remained Marcus's first love, and only the interior design played a strong enough role in the display of merchandise to merit Marcus's unconditional support. ■

1. *His and Hers* (New York: Viking, 1982), pp. 82, 112, 137.

2. From a panel included in an in-house historical exhibition organized by Larry Leathers, Neiman Marcus archivist.

3. H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), p. 332.

4. This quotation and all that follow, unless otherwise noted, are from personal interviews conducted by the author on August 14 (telephone) and August 31, 1995.

5. "Larger Quarters Leased by Neiman's for Men's Store," *Dallas Morning News*, February 25, 1934, p. 12; "Discreet Expansion of a Famous Store," *Architectural Forum*, February 1955, pp. 120-21; "Station Wagon Store," *ibid.*, January 1952, pp. 136-43; and "Neiman Marcus to Establish \$1,500,000 Suburban Branch," *Dallas Morning News*, January 9, 1949, sec. 5, n.p.

6. Olga Gueft, "Eleanor Le Maire — The Most Unlikely Pioneer," *Interiors*, March 1970, p. 97.

7. Eleanor Le Maire, "What Does the Interior Designer Expect From the Client?" *Interior Design*, June 1964, p. 140.

8. Marian Page, "A Dallas Institution Captures Rival Fort Worth," *Interiors*, August 1963, pp. 58-67.

9. David Dillon, *Dallas Architecture, 1936-1986* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), p. 115.

10. Marian Page, "Eleanor Le Maire Creates a Euphoric Atmosphere for Shopping," *Interiors*, December 1965, pp. 92-101; "Shopping Centers and Stores: NorthPark Regional Shopping Center," *Architectural Record*, Building Types Study no. 357, April 1968, pp. 151-59.

11. John Anderson, "Neiman Marcus in a Holiday Mood," *Interiors*, August 1971, p. 83-93.

12. Stanley Marcus, *Minding the Store* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 158.

13. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Lenzon, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972); Albert Pope, "From Neiman's to Macy's," *Cite*, Winter 1987, p. 11.

14. Jon Burns, "Piercing the Walls of an Urban Room," *Architecture*, November 1983, p. 65.

15. Kathryn H. Anthony, "Public Perceptions of Recent Projects," *Architecture*, March 1985, pp. 93-94.

16. Philip Johnson and John Burgee, *Architecture 1979-1985* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), p. 181.

17. Anthony, "Public Perceptions," p. 93; Burns, "Piercing the Walls," p. 63.

18. Gueft, "Le Maire," p. 97.



Neiman Marcus Galleria, Houston, Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum and Neuhaus & Taylor, architects (1969-71).

THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY: Leathers Community-Built Playgrounds

Brad Tyer



Top: Rhonda Gregg behind the wheel during construction, Schreiber Flagship Park, Galveston, April 1995. Above: Schreiber Flagship Park, July 1996. Leathers & Associates, Inc. (1995).

Architect Robert Leathers designs children's playgrounds in an unexpected way, by committee, and gets them built the old-fashioned way, with a week-long community barn-raising effort.

It is a strategy Robert Leathers hit upon in 1970 when he helped to build the playground at Henry St. John School in Ithaca, New York, where his own children attended school. A Maine native with a bachelor's degree in architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design and a former graduate student in film at the University of Oregon, Leathers launched his firm in Ithaca in 1976 with plans to specialize in residential design and construction, but public interest in a community-built school playground he had

helped construct six years earlier steered him into playgrounds for good. Leathers & Associates, Inc., still tackles the occasional assignment in residential or commercial architecture, but playgrounds are the firm's bread and butter, with more than 1,000 designed and constructed throughout the United States and around the world in the past 20 years.

The Houston area has finally gotten two Leathers parks of its own. The first was Galveston's Schreiber Flagship Park, erected in April 1995 on a pre-existing park site at 3401 83rd Street near Moody Gardens. The process began in August 1994, when Galvestonians Rhonda Gregg and Sheila Zwischenberger saw a Leathers-built playground in San Marcos. Struck by the playground's dense Fantasyland profile, and even more impressed by its magnetic effect on the dozens of children busily climbing, swinging, and hiding all over it, Gregg contacted Leathers's office to see how she could get one of these parks in her neighborhood.

The community-built method in which Leathers specializes casts the architects as consultants on everything from design to budget to construction, but much of the real work — from procuring tools and lumber to actual construction — is done by community volunteers. Gregg and Zwischenberger signed on as Galveston coordinators and recruited an organizational team of 12 volunteers, each with a specific responsibility in areas that included public relations, fundraising, tools, donated materials, food, child care, and volunteers.

With the committee in place, Leathers sent designer Dennis Wille to Galveston to draft the community's wish list. What emerged from interviews with hundreds of kids at local elementary schools was a consensus that they wanted a park with a strong sense of place, reflecting some of Galveston's unique monuments and architectural elements. The committee's request for such an individualized play space encouraged Leathers — who cannot be personally involved in all of his company's hundred or so annual projects — to take on Schreiber as his annual Special Design Project.

Leathers & Associates went back to Ithaca, drafted a schematic plan, and prepared a materials list for construction. Responsibility then fell to Gregg and the coordinating committee to enlist community support in the form of donated lumber and materials, tools, and construction volunteers. Building the park required a total of \$163,000 in cash, countless in-kind donations, and 4,000 volunteers. The playground itself was constructed over the course of six labor-intensive days, April 25-30, 1995.

Photographs that were gathered and architectural research led to Galveston-specific attractions such as the Victorian Village, whose façade mirrors the city's gabled architecture. Schreiber Park also features a miniature causeway, an oil rig,

a small-scale "haunted" Hotel Galvez, and a sunken ship, complementing the standard playground fare of swings, bridges, and slides. There is a "communications system" of underground PVC piping that acts more or less like a tin-can-and-string telephone connecting different areas of the playground. The entrance "causeway" symbolically leaps a blue rubberized area, and an ocean-blue skating track surrounds the installation, making the playground, like Galveston, a self-contained island.

A similar park is presently being developed at the underutilized Donovan Park site in the Houston Heights. In mid-January 1996, Leathers designer Steve Lawson held a mind-bogglingly expeditious "Design Day" at Harvard Elementary School. After meeting with groups of 45 children in 15-minute segments all morning (more than 650 kids from seven area schools participated), Lawson spent the afternoon drawing and unveiled the draft design at a town hall meeting that night.

Like Schreiber Flagship, the new Heights Playground will be tailored to its environment—three residential lots abutting a railroad track in the 700 block of Heights Boulevard. The train theme suggested by the schoolchildren will extend to a play track, a station, covered trestle bridges, and an observation platform overlooking the real tracks. A treehouse, a turreted castle, a rocket ship, and a water-mist play area round out the dense park.

Anne Culotta is the general coordinator of the Heights effort. A 25-person steering committee largely composed of members of the Heights Neighborhood Association owns the property. Construction is scheduled for October 16-20, 1996; Culotta estimates that the Heights Playground will require up to 800 volunteers and \$80,000 in donations and services, making the park a slightly more modest effort than Galveston's Schreiber Flagship.

But the end result will be the same. With the generous support she has received so far, Culotta is looking forward to what the Leathers method promises and what Galveston's Rhonda Gregg says she got: "a unifying community experience and a playground." ■



Parque de la Amistad, Hidalgo Park, Houston, Leathers & Associates, Inc. (1987).



Hidalgo Park, J. W. Peavy Drive and North 70th Street; Parque de la Amistad in background.

...and What About Parque de la Amistad?

The Heights Playground inadvertently has been misadvertised as Houston's first Leathers park, which Anne Culotta had confirmed with Leathers & Associates. But in late June, Culotta says, she started hearing about Parque de la Amistad (Friendship Park) in Hidalgo Park on Houston's east side at 7000 Avenue Q. That playground, as it turns out, was community built according to a Leathers plan in 1987, and Leathers himself was on site during construction. Culotta wonders why Leathers & Associates sent her to look at Leathers parks in Port Neches and Galveston, yet Houston's first Leathers park seems to have been forgotten.

Hidalgo Park was purchased by the city of Houston in 1927 but had fallen into disrepair when the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, Frito Lay, Inc., and community residents embarked on a joint effort at rehabilitation that culminated in the construction of the Leathers playground in late October 1987.

Barry Segal, a project manager with Leathers & Associates, confirms that Parque de la Amistad was one of Robert Leathers's Special Design Projects in 1987, and he guesses that Culotta was not referred to this site because community organizers responsible for the park had fallen out of touch and off the firm's database. Hidalgo Park is city owned, and thus maintenance for the park is the responsibility of the City of Houston.

A midsummer visit to Hidalgo Park revealed Leathers's trademark lumber turrets and dense footprint, but the playground itself was empty. While play equipment such as swings and hand rings remains in place, several broken boards have rough, splintered surfaces, and much of the playground's wood surface has been defaced with graffiti. The wood does not appear to have been resealed recently; Leathers maintenance guidelines recommend doing this annually. Of the six people present in Hidalgo Park on this particular afternoon, two were adults lurching on a park bench and four were teenagers climbing trees on the playground's periphery. Children do play here, but are they safe? The city of Houston should do better. *B.T.*

About Face

Industrial Façades by Bernd and Hilla Becher. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995. 271 pp., illus., \$75

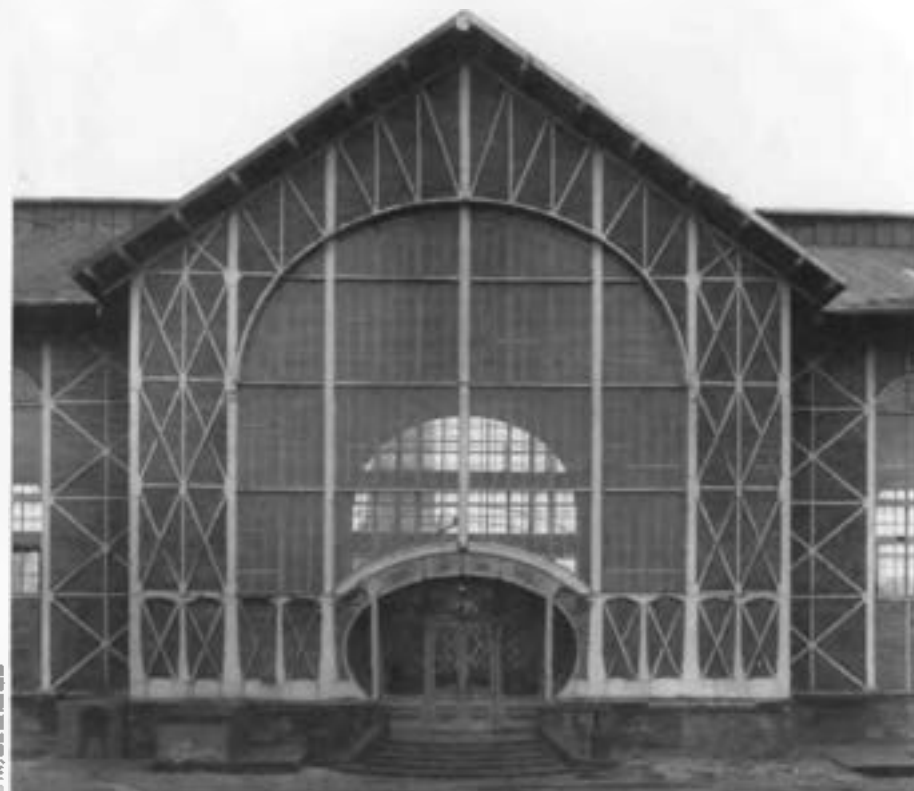
Reviewed by Nonya Grenader

Bernd and Hilla Becher are archivists who meticulously photograph and collect images of industrial structures. Since their earliest collaborative exhibition of German half-timbered workers' houses in 1957, they have focused their unwavering regard on industry's artifacts: water tow-

flat, cloudless sky that the Bechers insist upon has the effect of pushing each building face slightly forward. Oddly, the stark rendering often anthropomorphizes the façades: openings in a brick, metal, or glass face take on a range of human expressions.

The Bechers are not unique in their typological format. Eugène Atget's extensive record of the street façades, doorways, and windows of turn-of-the-century Paris is the model for serial photography. Placing his photographs in thematic albums, Atget realized the strength of a selective grouping. In a more casual mode, Edward Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (1962) describes the route from Los Angeles to Oklahoma City as experienced from the gas stations along the way. As dissimilar as these photographers are, they, like the Bechers, do not seek a "decisive moment" but rather hope to create an ensemble piece in which the method and the documentary aspects are inseparable.

Viewing the Bechers' work via book



Zeche Zollern II, Dortmund, Germany (photographed 1971).

ers, blast furnaces, gas tanks. The Bechers' style is one of unadorned directness. Rigorously free of strong shadows and human presence, the resulting images provide as clear a reading of the facts as possible, emphasizing the variety of profile, infill material, and detail inherent in this building type. "We do not attempt to turn old industrial buildings into relics, but we would like to memorize the chain of their different aspects as completely as possible," the Bechers stated in 1976.

Their most recent photographic typology, *Industrial Façades*, studies this building group in a range of locations, dates, and styles. The buildings are photographed in an unchanging frontal view, vantage point dead center, creating a collection of austere and striking images. As in earlier studies, the Bechers often use scaffolding to achieve this camera position, about halfway up each structure. The

format can be frustrating. In their earlier gallery installations, a three-by-three grid presentation often reinforced the repetitive nature of the images; the individual photographs could be compared as the variations emerged. Later exhibitions used entire rooms as a means of grouping, which still allowed the viewer to process multiple images simultaneously. In the book, the large and exquisitely precise images are presented one per page, so comparing more than two photos at a time becomes impossible. Some of this significant taxonomic effort is lost.

Although the Bechers' visual record is expansive, it is by no means an exhaustive history of the type. Except for a brief introduction by Klaus Bussmann, the museum director who selected the Bechers' work for the 1990 Venice Biennale, the book has no text and only place-and-date captions. Unlike the



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Bechers' other collections of photographs, in which the chutes and cylinders of water towers and blast furnaces clearly announced their function, the faces of these factory buildings, warehouses, and depots are enigmatic, masking the variety of industrial processes that take place within.

The façades, however, reveal an approximate historical sequence. The substantial brick buildings with step-gable roofs evolve into gently canted metal sheds; the early arched windows with elaborate surrounds are a stark contrast to the glass curtain walls of more recent structures. The photographs capture the texture of the building type, but the viewer must sort and compare, making temporal groupings. In his introduction, Bussmann notes, "References back to great historical models are rarely explicit, and requirements for prestigious exteriors are the exception, but it does seem that, as in everyday design, 'the spirit of the times' made itself felt even in the most obscure industrial provinces in the choice of materials, the formal structure, and certain fashions and preferences."

It is everyday design that the Bechers seek to preserve. They document and pay homage to the efforts of the anonymous engineers, designers, and laborers who created these utilitarian buildings. Many of these industrial structures, with their broken panes of glass and signs of aging and neglect, will soon be replaced. Though often described as "objective" photographers, the Bechers in their methodical visual records convey a solemn respect for these industrial edifices. Like elegiac collectors they capture the complexity found in the ordinary and present the façades as portraiture, each singularly unique yet collectively related. ■



Top: Harrison, New Jersey, USA (photographed 1994).
Above: Werdahl, Seveland, Germany (photographed 1985).

New and Forthcoming Books About Texas Architecture

Compiled by Karl Kilian

An Architectural Life: Memoirs and Memories of Charles W. Moore. *Written and edited by Kevin P. Keim.* At his death, Moore (1925-1993), who had been associated with universities and architectural firms in Berkeley, New Haven, Los Angeles, and Austin, left behind this first-person account of his career, his thoughts about architecture, and the Austin home that served as a laboratory for his ideas. (Bulfinch, 75 color, 150 black-and-white illus.; \$45.) Available.

Lake/Flato Architects. *With a preface by Oscar Riera Ojeda.* Established in 1984, the San Antonio firm has completed projects — among them ranch houses, banks, schools, and libraries — in Texas, California, Colorado, and New Mexico that have won numerous state and local awards and a 1992 national AIA Honor Award. (AIA Press, 72 color, 60 black-and-white illus.; \$19.99 paper.) Available.

The Domestic Architecture of H. T. Lindeberg. *With a new essay by Mark Alan Hewitt.* Harrie T. Lindeberg (1879-1959) trained in the offices of McKim, Mead & White and quickly became a sought-after designer of country houses for America's elite. This reprint of a classic 1940 monograph includes Lindeberg's work in Houston's Shadyside neighborhood. (Acanthus Press, 300 black-and-white illus.; \$75.) Available.

Carlos Jiménez. *With an essay by Stephen Fox.* The first American monograph on the Costa Rica-born Houstonian — with a foreword by Rafael Moneo and a postscript by Lars Lerup — presents eight projects including Jiménez's house and studio and recent museum buildings for Williams College and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. (Rice University School of Architecture/Princeton Architectural Press, 16 color, 112 black-and-white illus.; \$40.) Due 1997.

The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston by Ellen Beasley. In a work that ties together architecture, urban history, and African American studies, preservation consultant Beasley considers the carriage houses, servants' quarters, stables, and other buildings that have lined the alleys of Galveston since its earliest days. (Rice University Press, 47 black-and-white illus.; \$39.95.) Due fall 1996.

Galveston Architecture Guidebook by Ellen Beasley and Stephen Fox. Galveston contains the largest and most historically significant collection of 19th-century buildings of any Texas city. Here's a guide to both the historical work and more recent structures, each with photograph, map, and historical, descriptive, and critical commentary. (Rice University Press, 450 black-and-white illus.; \$32.50 cloth, \$17.95 paper.) Due fall 1996. ■

BIG

New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial by Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman. New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995. 1,374 pp., illus., \$125.

S, M, L, XL: Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau. Edited by Jennifer Sigler; photography by Hans Werlemann. New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995. 1,344 pp., illus., \$75.

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

The Monacelli Press last year produced a pair of bibliographic blockbusters, two 1,300-plus-page books that look critically at architecture and city building of the recent past and present. Robert Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman's *New York 1960* completes the trilogy that began with *New York 1900* and included *New York 1930*. Their concluding volume is enormous, impressive, and flawed. The authors conscientiously define architecture and urbanism as broadly as possible, and to that end they include chapters on interior design, historic preservation, and the movies. They deal not only with the architectural highlights of the period — the United Nations, the Seagram Building, Lincoln Center, Jane Jacobs, Citicorp Center — but all of the in-between buildings. This means, for example, that they devote considerable space to the economics, politics, design, and construction of low-income public housing complexes, speculative offices, and apartment buildings.

New York 1960 is important because it forcibly makes the point that building projects of this nature definitively reshaped so much of New York in the 30-year period under study. By sheer weight of examples cited, the authors make readers aware of how marginal the Chase-Manhattan Bank Building, the TWA Terminal, and the Whitney Museum (just to cite three celebrated works of the period) were to the production of characteristic post-World War II urban space in New York. The book's tragic flaw is that the authors are overwhelmed by their data. The chapters, arranged by urban sectors for the most part, read like a narrative listing of note-card references to individual buildings: how the project came about, description of the building, what the critics of the time had to say. The authors make virtually no attempt to



Top: The General Motors Building from Central Park Edward Durell Stone, architect, (1966) with the Hotel Pierre and the Sherry-Netherland Hotel. Above: One and Two World Trade Center, Minoru Yamasaki and Emery Roth & Sons architects, (1973).

summarize and interpret their findings. This is to be regretted; however, their data are very valuable. I found the coverage of public housing development especially rewarding. The authors reveal how the provision and design of public housing were systematically driven by political and economic factors external to the families who would live in the complexes, and that critics of the day foresaw (and vigorously denounced) all the potential problems that such misconceived complexes portended. Yet the authors never quite get around to being explicit about this. They fail to take advantage of the material they have amassed to give readers the big-picture interpretation that

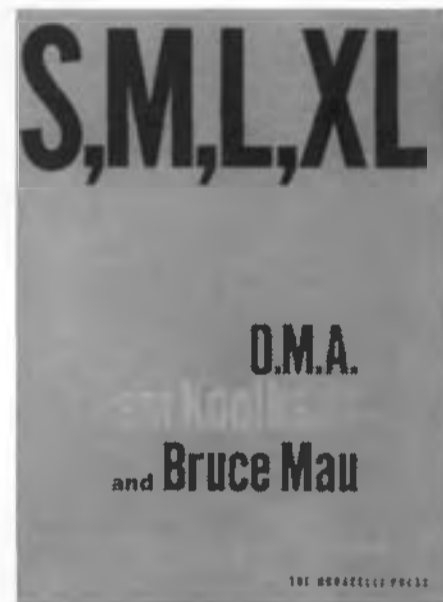
would clarify the underlying patterns, which makes the rank-and-file buildings of *New York 1960* seem not only mediocre and banal but, from an urban point of view, deadening. Stern, Mellins, and Fishman do cite the contributions of Houston architectural firms Caudill Rowlett Scott and Howard Barnstone & Eugene Aubry; Dallas architect Thomas E. Stanley; Texas-born interior decorator William Pahlmann; and the philanthropic Lasker sisters of Galveston to the architecture, design, and urban design of New York during the 15-year study period of *New York 1960*.

S, M, L, XL is intriguing to read (and look at) because it brings *New York 1960* up to date, so to speak, with an international perspective. Rem Koolhaas, his Office for Metropolitan Architecture, graphic designer Bruce Mau, and editor Jennifer Sigler help us to make a smooth transition into the present (and the foreseeable future) in a format that is much more entertaining than the Stern, Mellins, and Fishman production: loads of pix, BIG printing, and a running dictionary of curious definitions that echoes Benjamin and Borges. Tomas Koolhaas and Louis Price's comic-strip chapter about the torments of practicing architecture under developer- and politician-imposed constraints could have been excerpted right out of *New York 1960*, except that in this cautionary tale, the politician is a socialist. Attitude and style count for a lot here. Rem Koolhaas and his distinctive brand of ambivalent humor are omnipresent. Bruce Mau visually reinforces Koolhaas's exploration of the urban consequences of global postmodernization with bravura graphics: transparent overlays of imagery and text that relentlessly superimpose "information."

Koolhaas inquires about the kinds of places that cities have become since the time of the U.S. bicentennial. He contemplates modern Japan, Karlsruhe, Atlanta, and Singapore, among other places, in a sequence of hyper-illustrated essays organized under the rubrics S, M, L, and XL, which breaks this thick book into manageable units. While smugness can lead him to observations that may seem ethnocentric, Koolhaas tries to theorize what cities are today and whether architects can intervene responsibly in shaping them. I found Koolhaas most engaging in his essay on the Lille Grand Palais, when he drops the voice of ironic detachment to describe with enthusiasm the experience of carrying out a large public-works project involving many of the issues that for him are pertinent to contemporary architecture and urbanism. I found him at his most obscure in "Bigness, or the Problem of Large," which I could make sense of only by substituting the word "penis" for "big," then reading the essay as an updated version of Adolf Loos's classic architectural satire "Ornament and Crime." There is in Koolhaas's observations a pervasive sense of despair. The fact that he commits himself to spatializing through architecture the very

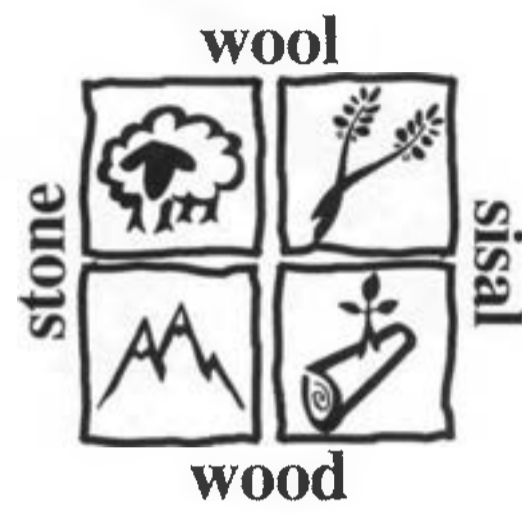
forces that he sees as responsible for the dreariness of contemporary urbanism is a contradiction. Koolhaas's critiques adhere to a narrow architectural perspective. He seems to see no alternatives to the present state of affairs. This gives his architecture, however antic it sometimes is formally, a pessimistic, disillusioned sense that is clearly communicated through *S, M, L, XL*.

New York 1960 and *S, M, L, XL* collect abundant evidence of the transformations that modernization and post-modernization have made on urban life in the last half of this century. Houston itself is a notorious example of many of the phenomena these books describe. Yet embedded in Houston's worst-case experience are alternatives, however minor or marginal, suggesting that the world is not doomed to become Sixth Avenue or Singapore. That is why Stern, Mellins, and Fishman's failure to analyze, reflect, and interpret the phenomena they report is so critical: they deprive readers of a clear understanding of the forces at work in shaping the modern city. It is also why Koolhaas's implicit pessimism seems premature. Hopeful change does not usually come from the precincts of power and privilege that global architectural practices customarily serve. ■



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Gresham in the Classroom

Michael Benedikt



Accounting classroom, ca. 1951, Ezekiel Cullen Building, University of Houston, Alfred C. Finn, architect (1950).

Let X represent the amount of training required and the level of neural activity involved in doing arithmetic in one's head. Let Y represent the training required and the level of neural activity involved in doing arithmetic using a calculator. X is clearly greater than Y . X is more costly than Y , too, in terms of time and trouble. If all that matters in the classroom, and in the workplace, is that the correct answers to arithmetical problems be produced as quickly as possible, then the capacity for doing mental arithmetic will soon disappear in the culture as whole. The use of calculators will drive out a skill that very likely has invisible, as-yet-undocumented benefits in other areas of cognition.

Let X be a tailored suit, with all its parts and refinements. Let Y be a T-shirt and jeans. If in the name of individual freedom and egalitarianism both become equally acceptable wear at the symphony, the opera, a fine restaurant . . . then, more or less slowly, more or less surely, T-shirt and jeans at concerts and fine restaurants and other venues once regarded as formal will become universal.

If leather seats are a mark of quality in expensive cars and we cannot easily tell the difference between leather and leather-patterned vinyl, then cars with "leather seating areas" — i.e., cars that economically mix real and simulated leather here and there in order to capitalize on our inability to tell the difference — will come to be the norm.

If in their hiring practices, for any number of reasons (including fear of transgressing antidiscrimination laws), employers do not distinguish between academically high- and low-achieving high school graduates, then the academic performance of high school students not bound for college will decline — or, rather, will have one more reason to

decline. Once these young people are hired, if a smaller set of skills will produce the same product as a larger set of skills, then employers will neither train workers to have any more skills than absolutely necessary nor pay more to anyone who is "over qualified" for the job.

All these are variants of Gresham's Law, first proposed by Sir Thomas Gresham in 1560 but known to Aristophanes in the fifth century B.C. Gresham's Law states that "bad money drives out good money" — that is, over time, cheaper coinage drives more valuable coinage out of circulation, the more valuable coinage either being hoarded as a collectible or returned to the mint for replacement with larger quantities of the cheaper-to-produce coin. And so it has gone throughout history, silver coins replacing gold ones (of the same denomination), alloy coins replacing silver, paper money all but replacing coinage. Soon computer bits will replace them all, and money, once the paragon and symbol of material worth, will become — more completely than it already has — a cipher, a mark, a digital wisp, an object no more material, finally, than it has to be to fulfill its function with maximum efficiency.

Biological and cultural evolution differ in several ways. In biological evolution, information is transmitted from generation to generation by genes; in cultural evolution it is transmitted by ideas and practices, or "memes." In biological evolution, change may take place in a handful of years or over centuries. Not many of us, however, remember this: that whereas in biological evolution harmless and useless genotypic traits are as happily passed along as useful ones (useful, that is, to biological reproduction), in cultural evolution under a strict

economic and technological regime, all "species" of goods are reduced to their least physical, least-difficult-to-produce configuration. Those traits and qualities that are not sufficiently valued by enough consumers are as mercilessly removed as harmful ones; that they cost time and/or money to produce is "harm" enough. Waste is not tolerated; performance is all.

Indeed, where nature qua nature is profligate in generating variations, is extravagant in expending energy, and fairly bursts with accidental and unnecessary finery, the fruits of modern human economies and mass culture are unripe, miserly. Under downward price pressure from users and consumers, the superfluous qualities of a product are stripped away until only those that are "selling points" remain. Nature knows nothing of Gresham's Law.

But what has all this to do with computers and education?

If X is the set of all things that a bank building is, or a lecture room, or a campus, and Y is the set of all things that are clearly done there — withdrawal and depositing of money, negotiation of loans, attending to a teacher or lecturer, going from class to class — then electronic banking by computer, telephone, and ATM, and "virtual" schools and universities with TV and on-line classes, both of which ostensibly perform the same functions that are outlined in their respective Y sets, will replace the concrete and stone banks, the musty lecture halls and classrooms, the eye contact with tellers and teachers, and the tree-lined campus avenues, with all of their putatively irrelevant traits and qualities.

Similarly, educational multimedia CD-ROMs are easier to read — or should I say "funner to interact with"? — than books, and claim to convey the same information. Actually they fall far short of the comparable book's comprehensiveness, ease of use, and pictorial resolution. But as we grow convinced that they do, so our children will soon spend the better part of their school days clicking through screens full of impoverished images and reduced paragraphs — mere captions — and constructing in their minds a very loose picture of the subject matter, a picture pieced together, if it is together at all, from the collage of "hyper-linked" data that they experience in an arbitrary order of snatches. So immediately rewarding is the process of clicking to get a whole new screen, or to get something to happen, that we can expect multiple-choice exams, already a degradation of active, problem-solving written exams, themselves to disappear, to be replaced with some sort of procedural tracking of mouse-clicks through a database judging "intelligent" or not in a statistical way.

The World Wide Web on the Internet represents a similar cheapening. Ask people who use the Web if they actually study what they come across. Although they may not admit it, chances are that they race to the first underlined phrase or blinking icon and click! — are gone from

the scene. Besides, with every passing day, "web space" itself resembles more and more the shallow pages of a drugstore magazine rack, all slogans and advertisements.

I have no objection to the whir of a hard drive replacing the sound of paper, or to the glow of a phosphor computer screen replacing the sheen of a paper page. Both computers and books have their charms. But the elimination of difficulty (in reading, calculating, understanding, building, dressing, speaking, doing) frequently betokens the elimination of a beneficial complexity, of real content and nuance, of longer-term usefulness, of higher-quality experience. Elimination of difficulty often involves the elimination, in other words, of those traits and qualities that run up production and learning costs, to be sure, but that we rely upon, unwittingly perhaps, to constitute the fullness of the experience itself, and that provide the source of our pleasure in mastery and connoisseurship.

In sum, any impoverishment of the set of attributes, qualities, and characteristics understood to be of value in any thing will sooner or later lead to a corresponding impoverishment of what is produced in the name of that thing, as that thing. This is cultural devolution. This is Gresham's Law at its most universal, and chief among its casualties has been architecture in the second half of this century.

It is sometimes argued that what goes on in college classrooms, studios, laboratories, libraries, and offices, and on the lawns and in the coffee shops nearby is hardly physical. What goes on, rather, is the transmission of ideas and practices — of memes — in an environment sheltered from the exigencies of the marketplace. In this view, because education is about "information," the replacement of old-fashioned classrooms, chalkboard lectures, chair-creaking seminars, and doorstep textbooks with computers and bright CD-ROMs, with virtual classrooms and "distance learning," is to be applauded. The new tools can get the job of education done while providing more freedom to both student and teacher.

But none of the assertions in the previous paragraph are proven. An enormous amount of tacit, qualitative, accidental, and educationally essential information is transmitted in classrooms, seminar rooms, studios, and coffee shops, face-to-face, and face-to-printed-book. If only for want of being able to match the gigabytes of data flowing into our skin and eyes with every step through the real world, it will be a long while — perhaps 20 years — before cyberspace can match the serendipitous outcomes of strolling a campus or browsing a musty library aisle or, for that matter, the enlightenment that comes from journeying through and dwelling in a serious text.

Do computers have a place in schools and universities nonetheless? Of course they do, and a major one. Accounting, payroll, purchasing, facilities management, course schedules and descriptions,

class registration, financial aid administration, library reference and book-lending management, "phone book" and biographical data dissemination, general e-mail . . . the list of basic institutional functions being carried out with computers is long and growing. The use of computers for research and writing also is growing, and it should: no one need throw away that word processor or spreadsheet program, that mail or CAD

software, that mass spectroscopy or statistical analysis package. But with Gresham's ghost peering over my shoulder, I would caution against relying too soon on the wonders of multimedia, of hypertext, of the Internet, and of "virtual classrooms" to replace traditional formats of teaching and learning. Learning is not easy; never was; never will be. That correspondence schools, now in existence almost a hundred years, still cannot

deliver the experience or the education — let alone the cachet — that a physical school or university can deliver ought to be a lesson to us. That extension courses on cable television are tedious and forgettable and only nominally effective ought to be a lesson to us, for their modern, computer-aided counterparts will not do much better for a long time to come.

Indeed, the risk of experiential impoverishment for the sake of economic efficien-

cy will not lessen until every student and every teacher has a teraflop-power computer with a gigabyte-speed connection to a terabyte-speed network on his or her desk. Until cyberspace is in its fullest flower, and even then, may we meet and learn in the air of this world. And pay for it uncomplainingly. ■



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