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Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE
and DESIGN REVIEW
OF HOUSTON

CULTURE ZONES MUSEUM DISTRICT / THEATER DISTRICT / FIFTH WARD / EAST END

also in this issue LUIS JIMÉNEZ / SLEEPING PORCHES / WEST SIDE BALL PARK

Notes on Contributors

Larry Albert is a graduate student in architecture at Rice University. "Bright Lights Strip City" was completed for a studio taught by Robert Mangurian, Mary-Ann Ray, and Erick Ragin.

Margaret Culbertson is librarian of the William R. Jenkins Art and Architecture Library at the College of Architecture, University of Houston.

Shaila Dewan is the art critic for *The Houston Press*.

Nonya Grenader is an architect and visiting critic at the Rice University School of Architecture.

Gabriella Gutierrez is an assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston and principal in the firm of Morris Gutierrez Architects, Houston.

Richard Howard, University Professor of English at the University of Houston, is a poet and translator and poetry editor of *The Paris Review*.

Susie Kalil is a freelance writer living in Houston.

Peter C. Papademetriou, a past president and board member of RDA, was a member of the Rice architecture faculty and lived in Houston for 20 years. He is currently professor and graduate program director in the School of Architecture at the New Jersey Institute of Technology and lives in Manhattan.

Alberto Pérez-Gómez, an architect and historian, is the Bronfman Professor at McGill University in Montreal, where he directs a graduate program in the history and theory of architecture.

Patrick Peters is director of graduate studies and an associate professor of architecture at the College of Architecture, University of Houston, and principal in Longoria/Peters.

Danny Samuels is a principal in the firm of Taft Architects and is a visiting lecturer at Rice University.

Ann Walton Sieber, former managing editor of *Cite*, is a writer and editor in Houston.

Ruth J. Simmons, former vice-provost at Princeton University, assumed the presidency of Smith College on 1 July 1995. A native of Houston and a 1967 graduate of Dillard University in New Orleans, Dr. Simmons received a Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures from Harvard University in 1973.

William F. Stern is principal of William F. Stern & Associates, Architects, and adjunct associate professor of architecture at the University of Houston.

David Theis is a freelance writer in Houston.

Drexel Turner, a city planner, is assistant to the dean and visiting critic at the College of Architecture, University of Houston.

Bruce C. Webb is dean and professor of architecture at the College of Architecture, University of Houston.

Frank D. Welch is a Dallas architect. He is preparing a book on the architecture of Philip Johnson in Texas.

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance

34: Spring 1996

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Cover: Southwest Freeway billboard advertisement, "Paul Revere Appearing Daily," for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston exhibition *John Singleton Copley in America & John Singleton Copley in England*, 4 February to 28 April 1996. *Photograph by Paul Hester and Lisa Carol Hardaway, Fayetteville* © 1996.

To the editor

Your Fall 1995–Winter 1996 issue provides an excellent overview of public housing in Houston and the United States. I do quarrel with the characterization of the Department of Housing and Urban Development's policies as "slash and burn" in Jacqueline Leavitt's article, "Reassessing Priorities: 60 Years of U.S. Public Housing."

I am enclosing a copy of HUD's latest "reinvention" document, *Renewing America's Communities From the Group Up.* The public housing section describes our efforts to stablilize public housing across the nation. Over the past three years, much has been done to transform HUD in all areas — internal and external.

It is my hope that the policy and program changes outlined in the enclosed document can serve as the basis for bipartisan legislation. I would like to see a renewal of our core values: demanding personal responsibility, rewarding hard work, promoting self-sufficiency, harnessing the forces of the free market, and expanding individual opportunity.

A return to these values means changing incentives so people are encouraged to work, cracking down harder on gangs and drug dealers, evicting irresponsible tenants, suing corrupt owners, and seizing mismanaged public housing authorities. Essentially, we hope to create a framework of supports, incentives, and rules so people and community leaders can help lift themselves beyond government assistance.

I was moved by what I read in *Cite* to push harder for action at HUD. Keep up the great work!

Henry G. Cisneros
Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

After reading Curtis Lang's "A Depleted Legacy: Public Housing in Houston" and Brad Tyer's "Update: Allen Parkway Village" in *Cite* 33 (Fall 1995–Winter 1996), we were compelled to respond on behalf of the Housing Authority of the City of Houston. Your article would lead one to believe that HACH has done nothing well in over 57 years of existence. It is true that our agency, not unlike many other large companies, has had its share of problems with administrations and some of its administrators in the past. However, when they were identified and clearly substantiated, decisive actions were taken by the board of commissioners or the mayor to remedy the problems.

To once again drub HACH over mistakes made and corrected is a vain attempt by these writers to imply these same conditions *might* still exist. In spite of our previous setbacks, we are very proud of the accomplishments we have made in improving the quality of life for the thousands of families we have served over the past 57 years. It is interesting to note that with all of the "investigative" effort put forth by your reporters to dredge up negative aspects of our history, they failed to include other facts which clearly indicate the major positive strides we have made to upgrade and improve our operating efficiency and effectiveness.

Facts such as: since 1991, HACH has been awarded $4,440,000 to be used for operating a Crime and Drug Elimination Grant program. This program has been extremely successful in providing positive alternatives to drugs and criminal activity for our families and youths. The programs have helped dramatically reduce the incidence of crime in all of our developments. In August 1991 the Office of the Inspector General began a 22-month audit that resulted in five findings. By June 1995 every one of the findings was remedied and certified as "closed" by the Office of the Inspector General.

Our agency's performance is measured by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development annually under the Public Housing Management Assessment Program (PHMAP). Annually since 1991, our performance score has steadily improved and currently is at 80.72 percent on a scale of 100.

Another fact not well documented is that HACH, in spite of the Allen Parkway Village issue, has successfully managed and modernized virtually all of the remaining properties and currently has modernization programs under way. Cuney Homes, Wilmington House, the Ewing Apartments, Clayton Homes, Oxford Place, and the Bellerive highrise for the elderly have all undergone substantial rehabilitation resulting in revitalized communities, while Allen Parkway Village sits practically vacant.

It was briefly noted that Allen Parkway represents approximately one-fourth of our public housing stock. It is extremely difficult to make progress toward rehabilitation and revitalization of Allen Parkway Village when years of legal battles, attempts at mediation, and even personal audiences with the secretary of Housing and Urban Development have failed to persuade Lenwood Johnson and his staunch supporters to reach a mutually satisfactory compromise. The prevailing attitude of Mr. Johnson and his supporters of "all or nothing or else we'll litigate the matter" serves no useful purpose other than to keep people homeless.

Any learned historian will agree that

history is documented to serve as a guide to future generations and should help prevent us from committing the same mistakes our forefathers made. The history of constructing monstrous public housing developments has been a terrible failure and enormous waste of taxpayer dollars. Smaller, well-designed, low-population-density developments, however, have shown just the opposite to be true. Residents' self-esteem, sense of belonging to a larger neighborhood, and upward mobility opportunities markedly improve.

The last golden opportunity to revitalize and rehabilitate Allen Parkway Village may soon disappear. Unless we are able to proceed with the Urban Revitalization Demonstration (URD) Grant, which promises to bring over $36 million to Allen Parkway Village, Congress can and will rescind these funds. The URD plans, currently being developed with opportunities for input from all of the Allen Parkway Village residents, other HACH public housing residents, and residents from the surrounding community as well, will make available drastically needed affordable housing for eligible citizens of Houston.

One need not be a Rhodes Scholar to see that the future of public housing is very precarious at this time in our history. HACH fully intends to diligently work on insuring that our public housing stock will be maintained for the future years as funds diminish.

Joy Fitzgerald
Executive Director,
Housing Authority of the City of Houston

With this issue of *Cite*, Barrie Scardino (left) assumes the position of managing editor. She is co-author of *Houston's Forgotten Heritage* (Rice University Press, 1991) and past president of both the Rice Design Alliance and the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance. Former managing editor Ann Walton Sieber (right) will remain on the *Cite* editorial committee.

Cite layouts by Minor Design Group's Craig Minor and Cheryl Brzezinski-Beckett are featured in *Working With Computer Type* by Rob Carter (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1995), pp. 120–23. *Cite* was also nominated in 1995 for the Chrysler Corporation's prestigious Innovation in Design Award.

RDA Gala Honors Stanley Marcus for His High Style

(left to right) Gerald and Barbara Hines, Stanley Marcus, and Phoebe and Bobby Tudor.

Gala decorations by Elizabeth Byrd.

RDA president Charles Maynard and his wife, Michelle.

The ninth annual Rice Design Alliance fundraising gala, *High Style*, was held at the Neiman Marcus Galleria store on Sunday, 5 November 1995. The benefit, chaired by Phoebe and Bobby Tudor, drew 600 RDA supporters, who gathered to recognize legendary retailer Stanley Marcus. The party extended across three levels of the Neiman Marcus store — cocktails at the garden level, silent auction on the main level, and seated dinner by Truffles & Flourishes on the second floor. Guests danced to the music of the Michael Carney Orchestra until midnight.

As one of the most significant patrons of architecture and design in Texas during the 20th century, Stanley Marcus was recognized by RDA for his long commitment to architectural excellence in both his personal and his commercial life. By recommending William Lescaze to design the Magnolia Lounge for the 1945 Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas, Marcus introduced modernist architecture to Texas. His decisions to retain Eleanor Le Maire to design the Neiman Marcus store interiors for 30 years and to employ architects to design his stores were of enormous consequence to retail design and architecture throughout the nation. When Neiman Marcus began its suburban expansion he sought out talented architects to design the stores: Roscoe De Witt, Edward Larrabee Barnes, Kevin Roche, and Gyo Obata. "The variety of architecture that the stores embodied was tremendously beneficial to the whole spirit of Neiman Marcus in fighting the trend toward standardization in both architecture and merchandising, in thought and everything else," Marcus acknowledged.

Marcus was presented with the RDA Award for Design Excellence by honorary gala chairs Barbara and Gerald D. Hines. Gerald Hines has been a personal friend as well as a business associate of Marcus for more than 30 years. Underwriting cochairs Sally Avery, Ellen Simmons, and Isabel Wilson were responsible for proceeds of nearly $200,000, which will help fund RDA educational programs and *Cite* magazine.

RDA would like to thank Neiman Marcus Galleria manager Gayle Dvorak and public relations director Lynda Dory for their support and cooperation; Judy Kugle and cochair Sarah Balinskas for the unique silent auction; Louis DeLaura for enhancing the store's stunning environment; Deborah Brochstein for designing the handsome invitations; Paul Hester for photography; Stephanie Milligan for coordinating the invitation mailing; and Rice University architecture student Matt Seltzer for organizing student volunteers. RDA also thanks all the gala volunteers who helped make the evening possible, as well as the following generous contributors.

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Conceptions
Constructors & Associates, Inc.
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Damian's Cucina Italiana
Patrick R. Davidson, The Montrose Veterinary Clinic
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Eddy Refining Company
The Empire Cafe
The Empty Vase
Edwin A. Eubanks, AIA
The Four Seasons Hotel Houston
Stephen Fox
Jay Francis
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Don Glentzer
Lynn Goode Gallery
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Harding Design

RDA Spring Architecture Events

Hilary Harmschfeger and Jory Alexander
Harris Gallery
Dan Hasselbrock
Heng Hui Tiffany Lee
Hotel Crescent Court
The Houston Architecture Foundation
The Houston Ballet Foundation
The Houston Center Club
The Houston Museum of Natural Science
The Houston Symphony
The Houston Yacht Club
The Hyatt Regency Houston
Interface Carpet
George O. Jackson
Jerry Jeanmard
Burdette Keeland
Kinko's
The Annie Klein Collection by Patrick Robinson
The Knoll Group
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Looking at Art
Bud Luther
J. M. Lynne, The Wallcovering Company
The Mansion on Turtle Creek
Maxim's Restaurant
Mitchell Energy & Development Corp.
Moody Gardens
Christopher R. Moore, Artist
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Steve Neel
Emily Ballew Neff and Alison de Lima Greene
Neiman Marcus
Melissa L. Noble
Omnitek Kitchen Designs
The Orange Show
Ouiste's Table
Park Place Motor Cars
Judy Pesek and Ron Skipper
Prestige Wine Cellars
The Rice University Press
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Steelcase
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Sweetwater Country Club
Tatt Architects
Theatre Under the Stars
Toby Topek
Treebeard's on Market Square
Truffles & Flourishes Catering
Phoebe and Bobby Tudor
Tricia Tusa
Village Clothier
With Design In Mind, Inc.
Wood-Mode Custom Cabinetry
The Wyndham Warwick
Frank Zeni

RDA 1996 Annual Gala
Saturday, November 9,
7:30 p.m. until midnight

Join us for an evening of dinner, dancing, and a silent auction at the annual RDA fundraising event. The 1996 RDA Award for Design Excellence will be presented to Raymond Brochstein, one of the nation's leading manufacturers of custom woodwork and furniture. 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 efforts. The gala will take place in the newly renovated Houston Industries Plaza, 1111 Louisiana, where the architectural millwork of Brochsteins Inc. is featured in the lobby.

Symposium
The City as a Cultural Place
31 January
Held in collaboration with the Contemporary Arts Museum and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County, this program examined how each element of the city, from the utilitarian sewage treatment plant to the dignified museum building, contributes to our cultural and visual experience.

Spring Lecture Series
Making It
A series of five lectures focusing on the art and technology of building things. Speakers included historians of technology, practicing engineers, and the builder of one of Louis Kahn's most elegant structures.
6 March – Tom F. Peters, director of the Building and Architectural Technology Institute at Lehigh University
13 March – Guy Nordenson and Mahadev Raman, structural engineer and mechanical engineer with Ove Arup & Partners, New York
20 March – A. T. Seymour III, P.E., C.C.I., construction manager of the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth
27 March – David Leatherbarrow, *author, with Mohsen Mostafavi, of On Weathering,* and director of the Department of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania
3 April – Henry Petroski, professor of civil engineering at Duke University and author of *The Pencil, The Evolution of Useful Things,* and *To Engineer Is Human: The Role of Failure in Successful Design*
This series was supported by W. S. Bellows Construction Corporation; cerd partners; Compaq Computer Corporation; Constructors & Associates, Inc.; Haynes Whaley Associates, Inc.; Houston Chapter, Associated General Contractors of America; Marek Brothers Systems; Matrix/Structural Engineers; Karen Rose Engineering & Surveying; Structural Consulting Company; Thomsen Company; the Corporate Members of the Rice Design Alliance; and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.

Lecture
Robert Irwin
8 April
Environmental artist Robert Irwin discussed works he has executed for public places.

RDA Architecture Tour
Loft Horizon
18 and 19 May
This year's tour featured lofts and other intriguing spaces around downtown Houston. Spaces that were on the tour:
- 808 Travis Street, Niels Esperson Building, cupola
- 214 Travis Street, W. L. Foley Dry Goods Building, two living spaces
- 1105 and 1109 East Freeway, photographer's studio and art preservation studio
- 2409 Commerce Street, living space and artists' studios
- 1701 Commerce Street, living spaces and artists' studios
- 3909 Main Street, Isabella Court, apartment and courtyard

The 1996 tour was made possible by Creative Flooring Resources, Treebeard's on Market Square, University of Houston–Downtown, Windham Builders, the Corporate Members of the Rice Design Alliance, and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.

Competition
On Your Mark
The Rice Design Alliance, the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, the City of Houston Archeological and Historical Commission, and the City of Houston Department of Planning and Development cosponsored a design competition for a Houston Historical Marker that will reflect the history of Houston, educate the public, and be a symbol of Houston's heritage. The winners were announced the evening of June 6. An exhibition of selected entries will be on view at the Julia Ideson Building, Houston Public Library, during the month of June.

Jurors for the competition were Peter Brink, vice-president for programs, services, and information, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C., and former director of the Galveston Historical Foundation; graphic designer Cheryl Brzezinski-Beckett of Minor Design Group, Houston, an associate professor at the University of Houston; interior designer and architect Vicki McIntosh, chief financial officer, Spencer Partnership Architects, Houston, and former president of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance; Larry Speck, dean, School of Architecture, University of Texas at Austin; and Bart Truxillo, chairman, Houston Archeological and Historical Commission, an architect and owner of historic properties in Houston.

Winner, "On Your Mark"

Winner, "On Your Mark" design competition. Douglas/Gallagher of Houston. 2nd place: Herman Ellis Dyal, Steve Stamper, and Curtis Roberts of Fuller Dyal & Stamper, Austin. 3rd place: Donald A. Quaintance, Public Address Design, and William Hartman, Exterior Design Office, Houston. 4th place: Hill Swift, Houston. Honorable Mention: Franklin D. Lawyer, Houston.

Fall 1996 Lecture Series
American Dreams
Wednesdays, 25 September through 23 October. This series of lectures will examine American utopian concepts, past, present, and future, in order to reach a better understanding of why our future stands in such dark contrast to these visions and what may be shaping our next American dream. Speakers include Robert Fishman, Margaret Crawford, Donald Albrecht, and Bruce Webb.
For tickets and information about these programs, please call the Rice Design Alliance, (713) 524-6297.

Houston Dialogue
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 four lectures that will occur both in the fall and the spring. Speakers, dates, and location to be announced.

Annual Membership Meeting
Sunday, June 9
Spend an afternoon in the country at artists James Surls' and Charmaine Locke's studio in Splendora, Texas. View the artists' works, enjoy music and country fare, and meet other RDA members. New RDA board members and officers will be installed at the business meeting.
3 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Cite Survey

Home Stretch

Since 1987, the University of Houston College of Architecture's chapter of Habitat for Humanity has helped build Habitat units sponsored and designed by others in multi-unit projects in the Fifth Ward (Brewster Street, Rawley Court), Fellowship Forest (U.S. 59 near Little York) and Woodglen. But when Habitat came into a single donated site in the East End, assistant professor David Thaddeus and his students (background in photograph) decided to design and construct a house as a class project. The class divided into five teams last fall to produce plans that were reviewed (and passed on first submission) by the Building Permit Section of the Public Works Department of the City of Houston.

The 1,200-square-foot, three-bedroom house the class built this spring at 201 Delmar is the 94th unit to be completed as a Habitat project in Houston. It was occupied on 15 May by Martina, Leyda, Tomas, and Vanessa Zavaleta (left to right in photograph), who previously rented a 400-square-foot shotgun unit in Magnolia Park.

Tomas Zavaleta, an asbestos removal worker for the Houston Independent School District and a proficient amateur carpenter, put in long hours at the site after work and on weekends. The rest of the family pitched in too, although they had already more than fulfilled their 300-hour volunteer obligation to Habitat by working on other houses. When the Zavaleta house's sponsor withdrew at the last moment, Thaddeus's fingers walked miles through the Yellow Pages, gathering donations of all kinds of building materials and services in a never-to-be-repeated frenzy. Thaddeus hopes to continue to have students design and build houses on nearby sites, only next time with a sponsor that will stay nailed down.

Welcome Wagon

The Rialto Theater in the High Plains town of Brownfield, Texas (population 9,606 counting Joseph Carillo but not his dog Rocky), is going through a drought of its own despite the happy face painted above the marquee by Walter B. Burnett. This photograph, taken in 1994, is included in a collection of photographs of the High Plains by Peter Brown to be published next year, with an essay by Kathleen Norris, by the University of New Mexico Press.

Soft Touch

Claes Oldenburg's 1995 lithograph of the Presidio County Courthouse in Marfa, Texas (Alfred Giles, architect, 1886) "Soft Rotating Capitol," is available for $1,200 in a limited edition of 100 from the Chinati Foundation. Proceeds will benefit the preservation of large-scale installations by Donald Judd and other artists at the former Fort D. A. Russell near Marfa, and other programs sponsored by the foundation. For further information contact the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, TX 79843; telephone (915) 729-4362; fax (915) 729-4597.

Down and Out

The Blue Ribbon Rice elevators at Studemont Drive and Washington Avenue, relics of the late 1950s, were demolished this spring. The pre-dawn detonation times of implosion charges were announced in the press and, in between, conventional cranes and wrecking balls chiseled away at what refused to come tumbling down at once. In ruin, the elevators were almost as impressive as when they had been intact.

122 ■ MUFFLERS–MUSEUMS CALL Swbp's CONSUMER TIPS FOR HELPFUL INFORMATION

Museums

A FS Training 415 Barren Springs----------876-9152
AMERICAN AIRLINES INC
C R Smith Museum
4601 Hwy 360----------817 967-1560
American Funeral Service Museum
415 Barren Springs----------876-3063
Antique Car Museum The
505 North Loop West----------868-2243
BAYOU BEND COLLECTION AND GARDENS 1 Westcott----------**520-2600**

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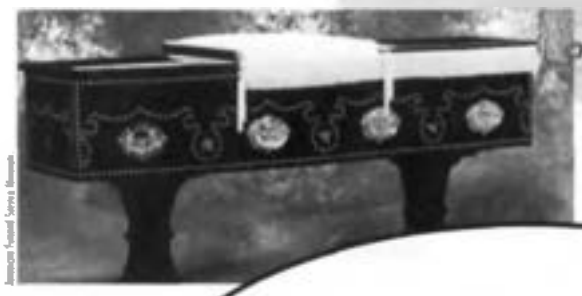


American Funeral Service Museum

Houston's wide variety of museums is scattered geographically and intellectually. Yellow Page listings include such zany amusements as the American Funeral Service Museum in north Houston, with the country's largest collection of funeral memorabilia, from antique horse-drawn hearses to basket caskets.

Museums -(Cont'd)

Brown Frank J Heritage Museum
108 Skyview----------482-7390
CHILDREN'S MUSEUM THE
1500 Binz----------**522-1138**
Confederate Museum The 2740 Fm 359----342-8787
Contemporary Arts Museum
General Information 5216 Montrose----526-3129
Daughters Of The Republic Of Texas Log House Museum The
1513 N MacGregor Dr----------522-0396
Diverse Works Inc
1117 East Frwy----------223-8346
Fort Bend Museum
Program Office 500 Houston Ric----------342-6478
Business Office 500 Houston Ric----------342-1256
Heritage Society Museum
Yesteryear Shop 1100 Bagby----------655-9114
HERITAGE SOCIETY MUSEUM
HISTORIC HOME TOURS DAILY
TEA ROOM • MUSEUM • GIFT SHOP
1100 Bagby----------**655-1912**
Holocaust Education Center & Memorial Museum of Houston 2425 Fountain View—789-9898
Houston Center For Photography
1441 W Alabama----------529-4755
Houston Fire Museum 2403 Milam----------524-2526
HOUSTON MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE
Wortham IMAX Theatre, Burke Baker Planetarium
Cockrell Butterfly Center, George Observatory
Challenger Learning Center
One Hermann Circle Drive----------**639-4629**
Lawndale Art & Performance Center
4912 Main Houston----------528-5858
Las Palmas Ice House 7204 Wallisville——673-2535
Lone Star Flight Museum
2002 Terminal Dr
Galveston Tx----------Apollo Tel No 480-7722
Menil Collection-Cy Twombly Gallery
1519 Brevard----------525-9450
Menil Collection The
Parking At 1515 West Alabama
1515 Sul Ross----------525-9400
Military Museum Of Texas 6012 Centralcrest-957-1007
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
1001 Bissonnet----------**639-7300**
Museum of Fine Arts 1 Westcott----------520-2600
Museum Of Printing History 1324 W Clay——522-4652
Nature Discovery Center
7112 Newcastle----------667-6350
Orange Show Foundation The 2402 Munger —926-6368
Proctor Museum Of Natural Science
630 Uvalde----------453-8363
Railroad Museum Of Gulf Coast Chapter
NRHS 7390 Mesa Dr----------631-6612
Rothko Chapel The 1409 Sul Ross----------524-9839
Science Center----------365-4175

Mushrooms

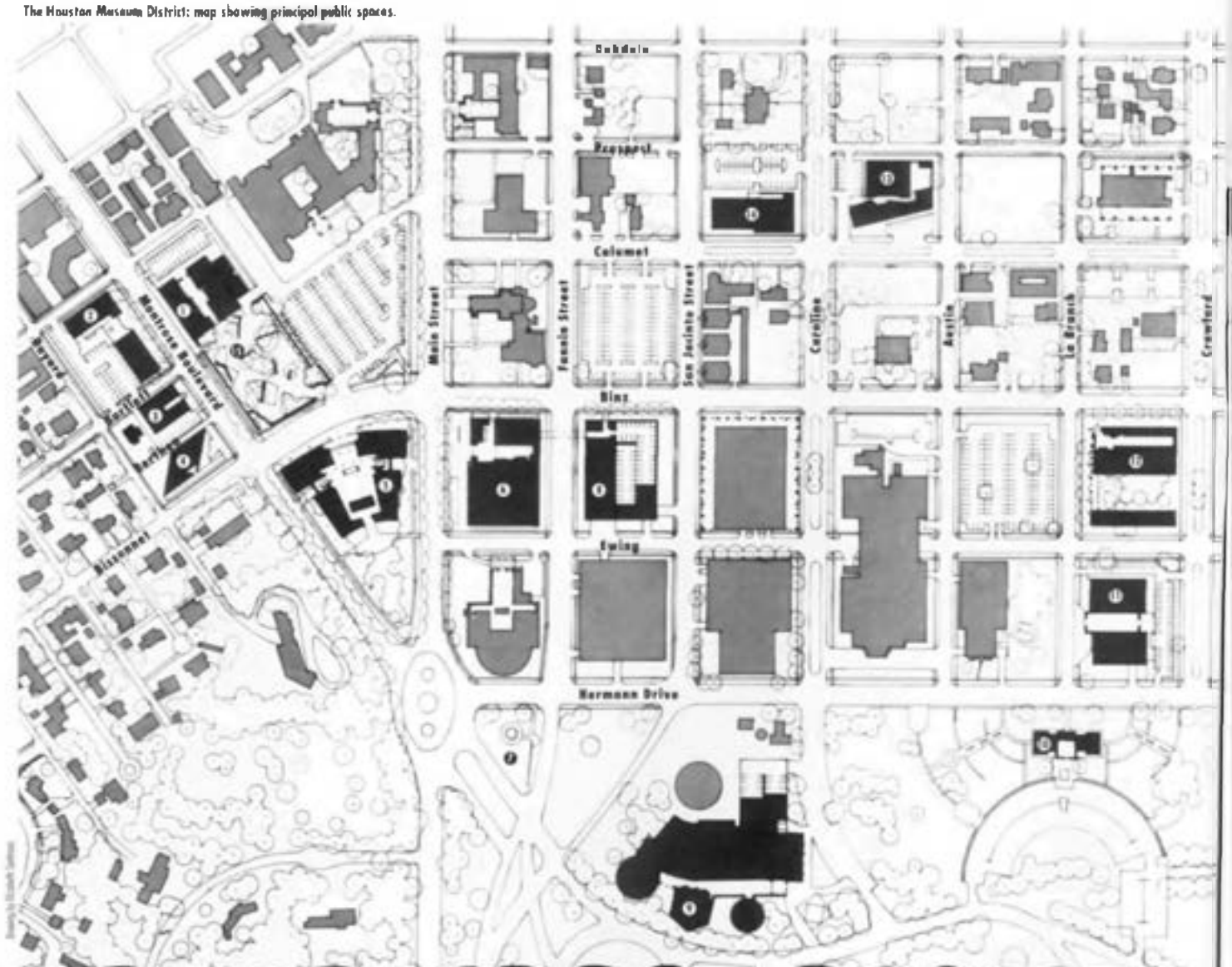
Houston Framework

The Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County has announced a new project, *Houston Framework*, funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Houston Endowment Inc., the Houston Architectural Foundation, the Susan A. Vaughan Foundation, and the Fondren Foundation for a total of $110,000.

Houston Framework will be a compilation of existing urban design and cultural plans. Over the course of this year, the project team will study physical and social qualities of the region, analyzing existing plans, resources, and current initiatives. Finally, this information will be organized into three broad categories: "places & linkages as catalysts," "public policy & legislation as catalysts," and "communication & education as catalysts."

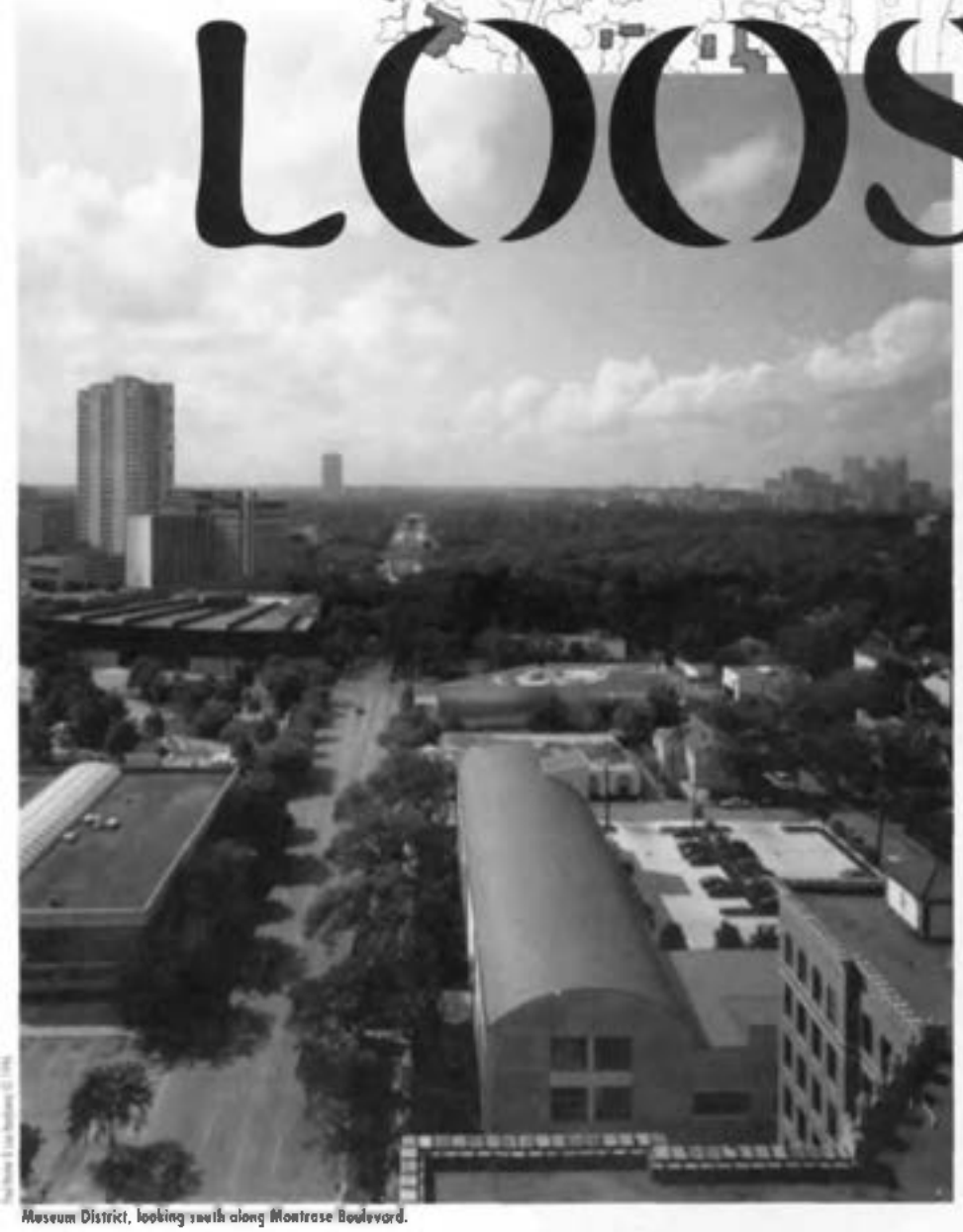
CACHH executive director Marion McCollam and Jessica Cusick, director of CACHH's Public Art and Urban Design Program, will head the project. A team of consultants includes William R. Morrish and Catherine R. Brown, respectively director and coordinator of special projects at the Design Center for the American Urban Landscape of the University of Minnesota; Houston visual artist Fletcher Mackey; and landscape architect Kevin Shanley, of the SWA Group, Houston. Rafael Longoria, associate professor of architecture at the University of Houston and principal with Longoria/Peters, serves as leader of the consultant team and liaison to the CACHH board of directors, of which he is a member. *Gabriella Gutierrez*

The Houston Museum District: map showing principal public spaces.



LOOSE FIT

THE HOUSTON MUSEUM DISTRICT



Museum District, looking south along Montrose Boulevard.

Peter C. Papademetriou

In the past five years, the area north of Hermann Park from Jackson Street to Montrose Boulevard has been the site of a succession of institutional initiatives that account for its designation as a "district." The coincidence of independent decisions has resulted in the relative proximity of a dozen or so similar institutions. In a city devoid of zoning this does not precisely constitute de facto zoning, but it certainly has resulted in a clearly identifiable zone. The Lawndale Art and Performance Center at 4912 South Main Street and the campus of the Menil Collection, west of Montrose four blocks, bordered by West Alabama on the north and Richmond Avenue on the south, are sufficiently close to be associated with this district. The perception of this area as the Museum District is intensified by the brief time span in which this growth has occurred; during the past three years, and the next three years coming, six new buildings, including the Beck Building of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, will have been completed.

1 Glassell School, MFAH
2 Administration and Junior School Building, MFAH
3 Jung Institute
4 Contemporary Arts Museum
5 Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
6 Audrey Jones Beck Building, MFAH
7 Richard and Annette Bloch Plaza
8 Fannin Service Building, MFAH
9 Houston Museum of Natural Science
10 Garden Center, Hermann Park
11 Museum of Health and Medical Science
12 Children's Museum of Houston
13 Houston Holocaust Museum
14 Clayton Genealogical Library
15 Cullen Sculpture Garden, MFAH

Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, I. Noguchi, designer, Fuller & Sadao, architects, 1986. Brown Pavilion, MFAH, Ludwig Mies van de Rohe, architect, 1974, in background.

The Museum of Fine Arts is, in fact, the historical reason for the area's potential and a primary agent of its future coherence. Yet there are some disturbing decisions that may well undercut the success of this fragile district, illustrating the lack of a bigger picture, of a vision that extends beyond the needs of separate institutions. Yesterday's back door could be tomorrow's address. History shows that assumptions easily can get inverted without a larger plan or broader, inclusive intentions.

The Museum of Fine Arts (William Ward Watkin, architect, 1924, 1926) originally formed part of a 1920s ensemble that grouped it with the (then) Hotel Warwick, Shadyside subdivision, the oval sunken garden at the oblique intersection of Montrose Boulevard and South Main, and the axis from Montrose into Hermann Park. Its "front door" was architecturally delineated by the treatment of its south façade. As architectural historian Stephen Fox illustrated in "The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: An Architectural History, 1924–1986,"[1] as late as 1948, expansion plans reiterated this grouping, including a study by consultants Hare & Hare of Kansas City for additional museum facilities in a cultural center sited on the Cullinan estate property within Shadyside, which borders directly on the site of the museum's original front yard. This all changed with a provocative master-plan proposal from Kenneth Franzheim in 1952. Franzheim proposed recognizing Bissonnet Avenue's new presence in the city (resulting from a realignment through to Binz, east of South Main) by giving the museum a new front door, as well as, more tellingly, by locating a one-way drive-through between Montrose and South Main, effecting service and public access internally, particularly to an auditorium. The Mies van der Rohe master plan of 1954 and eventual realization in Cullinan Hall (1958) and expansion in the Brown Pavilion (1974) pragmatically completed transferral of the front door to the Bissonnet side of the building; 1001 Bissonnet became the museum's address.

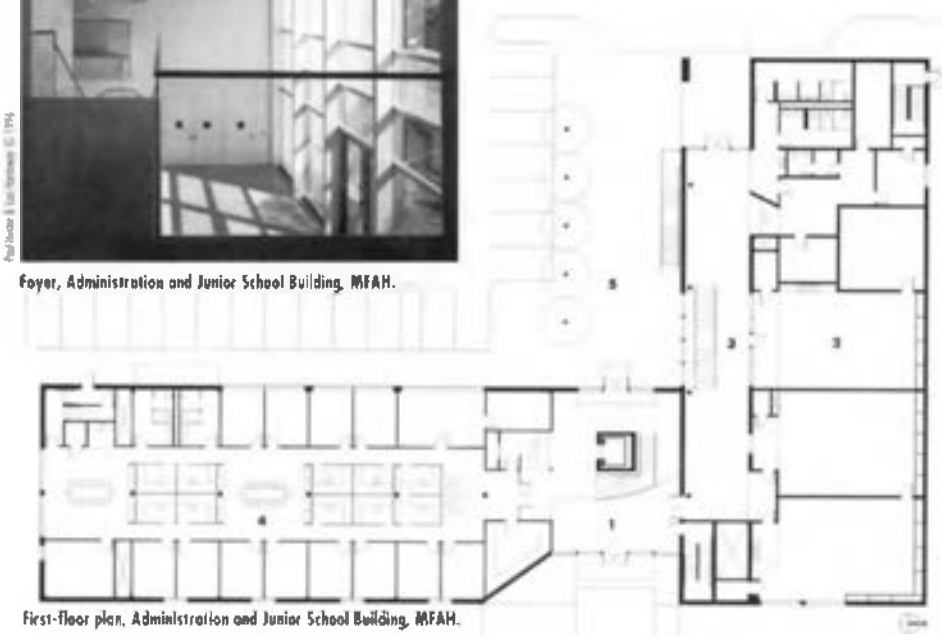
If expansion of museum facilities had been an issue in the mid-1950s when there were 4,000 objects in the collection, the collection's tripling to 12,000 works in 1970 and then more than doubling again to 27,000 works by 1992 heightened the difficulty of a managed expansion. Excluding Bayou Bend and Rienzi, which house important portions of the museum's collection in residential settings, a campus has essentially developed due to the exigencies of available properties near the original facility. The Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., School of Art (1978) was the first obvious satellite to the campus, in part a means of gaining more internal space by pulling the museum school program out of the original building. Curiously, the school's entrance and its associated on-site parking face north, toward Bartlett Street, away from the museum itself. Funding initiatives involved in establishing the permanent home for the museum school also set the stage for the resale of the corner property at Montrose and Bissonnet to the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department to advance the development of the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden (1986). This loose chain of facilities along Montrose has resulted in a curious urban condition. The Cullen Garden, designed by Isamu Noguchi, has its primary entrance at mid-block on Bissonnet between Montrose and South Main, across the street from the central front door of the museum's Brown Pavilion. The parking lot at the Bissonnet–South Main corner belongs to First Presbyterian Church but is used by Museum of Fine Arts patrons. The expansive, block-long curving façade of the Brown Pavilion, whose form echoes the curve of the street, implicitly borders an urban space, only half of which is actually part of the Museum of Fine Arts precinct. The real museum parking lot is the so-called north parking lot, some four blocks up South Main. A prominent sign directly facing the entrance to the museum on Bissonnet, posted by the church, confirms the good-neighbor relationship but makes the real ownership of the territory perfectly clear.

West entrance, Administration and Junior School Building, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Carlos Jiménez Architectural Design Studio, architect; Kendall-Heaton Associates, Inc., associate architects, 1994.

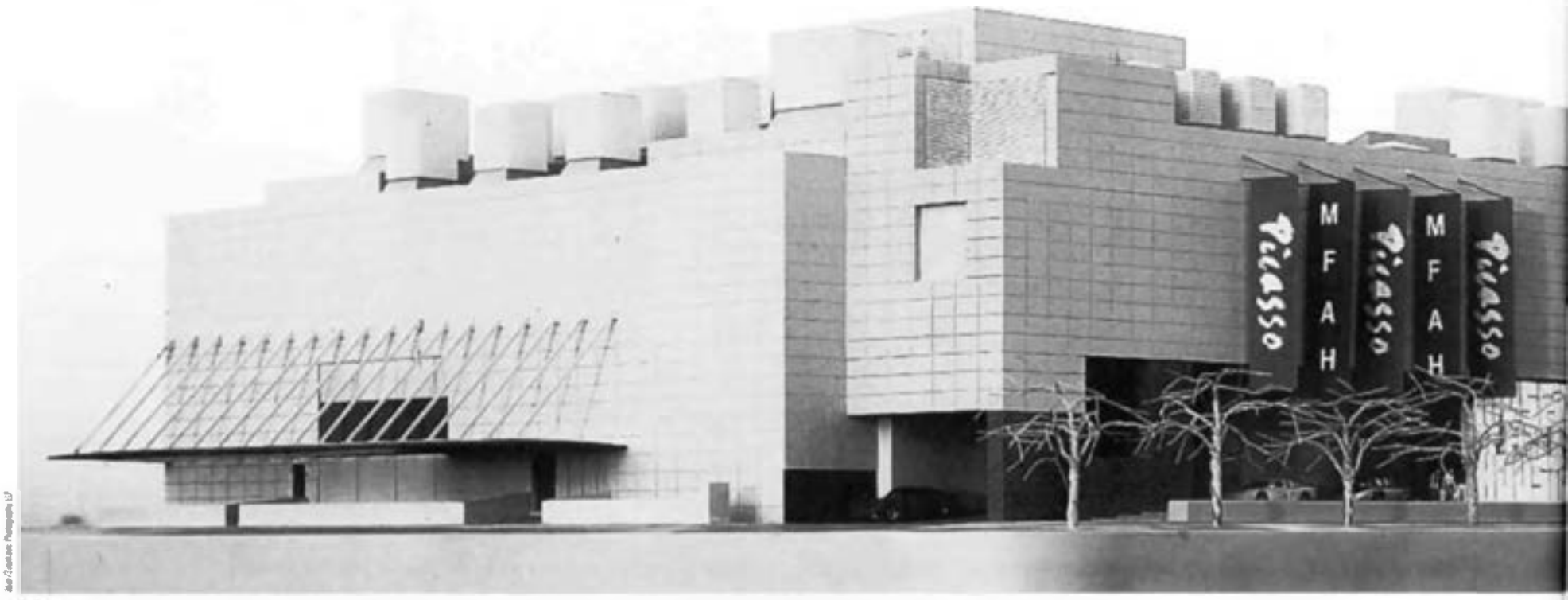
The most recently completed facility for the campus is the museum's Administration and Junior School Building (1994), which is "out in left field," so to speak, across Montrose on the block bounded by Berthea and Bartlett. Designed by Carlos Jiménez (with Kendall/Heaton Associates), it is a taut composition that shows it can conceptually belong to a larger context through controlled adjustments in its form. The site Jiménez was given provided a situation demanding clever corroboration with the other Museum of Fine Arts buildings to reappropriate a presence within the group. The education and administrative components are operationally separate, but both had to be housed in the new L-shaped building. The school was organized in a two-story wing facing Bartlett Street, making north light available to the studios. The administrative offices occupy the three-story block fronting on Montrose, where a barrel-vaulted, rounded metal roof gives added scale to the princi-

Montrose Boulevard entrance, Administration and Junior School Building, MFAH.

Foyer, Administration and Junior School Building, MFAH.

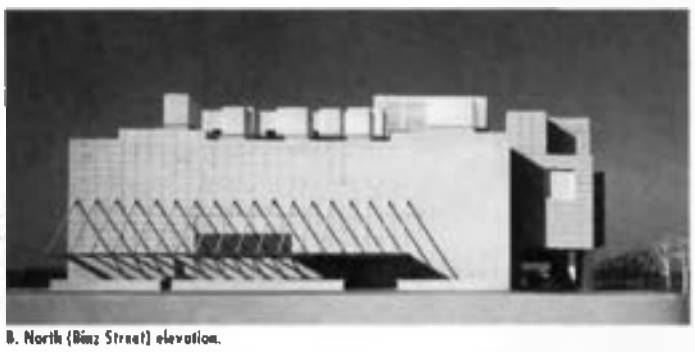


First-floor plan, Administration and Junior School Building, MFAH.

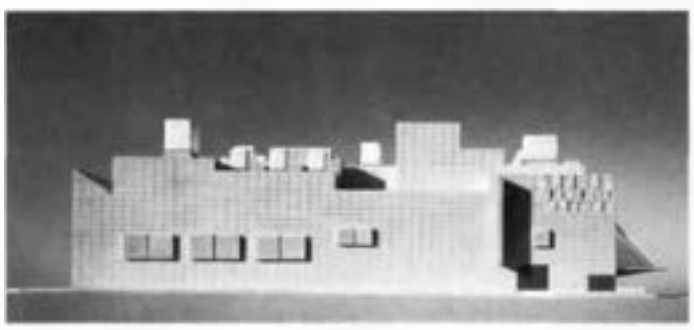


Audrey Jones Beck Building, MFAH, Rafael Moneo, architect; Kendall-Heaton Associates, associate architects, 1994–96. Perspective view of model looking southeast from the corner of Binz and South Main streets.

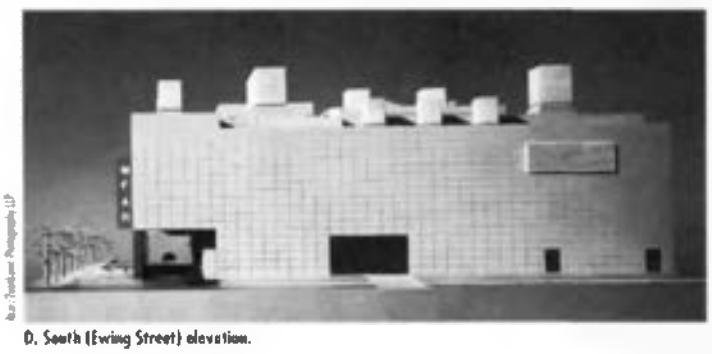
A. West (Main Street) elevation.



B. North (Binz Street) elevation.



C. East (Fannin Street) elevation.



D. South (Ewing Street) elevation.

kept separate through this internal division. The two building blocks are interlocked on the third level, where the graphics and publications offices sit atop one end of the school block.

The site design is notable for having clearly zoned parking bands that channel circulation to the reentrant corner of the L form. Such a corner entry is one of the most difficult formal problems in design, but by the iconological "weighting" of the primary block, the main entrance is properly placed perpendicular to and directly into the corner. Both street entry and parking entry are directly aligned within the main lobby; they are separated by the vertical circulation core, a free-standing curved staircase wrapping around the elevator, which is displaced off center to assert the symbolic "pressure" and importance of the Montrose entrance. This entry is monumentalized as a three-story space. Entry to the school is a parallel "slot" that incorporates a proper school bus dropoff and lay-by lane with a setback porch and overhanging canopy. A second fire exit from the school is articulated as an exterior metal staircase whose shadows enliven the south façade. A mini-plaza softens the parking lot's relationship to the building. The building front is set back from Montrose, effectively preserving a row of established live oak trees, and is more or less in line with the building setbacks of the Jung Center and Contemporary Arts Museum to the south, clearly tying the group together.

The Montrose entry of the Jiménez building is monumentalized by its external representation as a pure three-story element, set in from the exterior face of the block with an obliquely canted wall (behind which are service rooms). It is the precise placement of the entrance that knits Jiménez's design to context: facing east, the entrance is virtually centered perpendicular to the entrance face of the Glassell School, and its seemingly casually angled wall, something like 37 degrees, is rigorously constructed to align with the Montrose entrance to the Cullen Sculpture Garden, and, by geometrical extension, with the center line of the garden's entrance across from the Museum of Fine Arts entrance on Bissonnet. Materially, the composition of anodized aluminum, limestone, standing-seam metal, and occasional sections of glass block refers to elements in the other campus buildings. The result is an elegantly proportioned, precisely detailed building that is visually interesting yet simple and clear in design, embracing complexity without being complicated.

It is with the projected Audrey Jones Beck Building and its associated Fannin Service Building that the substantial needs of the Museum of Fine Arts will be met. Currently still in design by Spanish architect Rafael Moneo (again with Kendall/Heaton Associates of Houston), the Beck Building reveals some fundamental repositioning of the museum's address, one more time.

The 185,000-square-foot facility will double the gallery capacity of the Museum of Fine Arts and provide space for traveling exhibitions. The existing museum building will be renovated to house works from the permanent collection spanning 1910 to the present, including its Texas collection of 500 pieces by living artists. Thus freed from the need to house everything, the Mies building can be restored to its original spatial intentions. The Brown Auditorium will remain as the museum lecture space, and the museum store will be expanded, as will the Hirsch Library. The director's office and administrative areas will remain in the original building. Oceanic art will be placed in the former cafe area opening onto the Alice Pratt Brown Garden. The Beck Building, in turn, will feature the permanent collection. It will also house

permanent collection. It will also house curatorial offices, scholarly research functions, and technical areas, as well as the new museum café, a catering kitchen, and museum service areas. When its spacious galleries open, Houston will more readily become a venue for traveling exhibitions, particularly those of the "blockbuster" variety.

The Mies design was never really symmetrical: a "slot" between the original Watkin building and the Mies expansions on Montrose allows for a loading dock, a few upper-level administrators' parking spots, and the staff entrance. On the other hand, the South Main entrance is the after-hours entry (and in some of our minds the RDA entry, because for some two decades of joint evening programs we have used this door). What was probably an aesthetic move on Mies's part — to resolve the insertion of paired stairs between the older building and his additions by articulating the separation with a physical "notch" — has provided a key to functional and gestural moves by Moneo.

Moneo's design must be seen in light of the 1988–90 master plan by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, a critical-needs-assessment program as well as a study of physical form alternatives. The report recognized that, "given the S-shaped configuration of the Museum's properties and the strong axial relation of the Museum to property it does not own, making a coherent campus . . . becomes one of the . . . most intriguing challenges." It clearly argued against a focus along South Main and warned, "Do not rely on underground tunnels for public access, and do not provide tunnel access under Main Street." Instead, the report pushed for reinforcement of the Bissonnet front through its extension across South Main along Binz. The proposed *parti* suggested an arcaded gallery, which would extend the Mies design and be formally completed with the front of the Fannin Service Building in the next block between Fannin and San Jacinto. The report stressed the importance of extending without replicating the one big move of the Mies design, the prominent façade along Bissonnet. An appendix expanded the argument against the tunnel, citing the problems of city utilities, the need for vertical elevator connections at each end, and the cost of basement space in Houston given the local groundwater conditions. "Underground pedestrian tunnels will be extremely difficult to make lively," it further observed.

Of course, Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates were not given the job . . .

As a kind of archipelago of facilities separated by city streets, the Museum of Fine Arts campus has serious functional constraints. The Moneo proposal reflects clearly the museum board's view of how these must be resolved, but it seriously ignores, or at least devalues, the larger scale of the urban experience. Moneo's design, in a kind of good ol' boy inversion of the cosmopolitan urbanism his architecture has represented, gives precedence to humidity, heat, and drive-in ease in lieu of reinforcing the potential of the Bissonnet-Binz corridor.

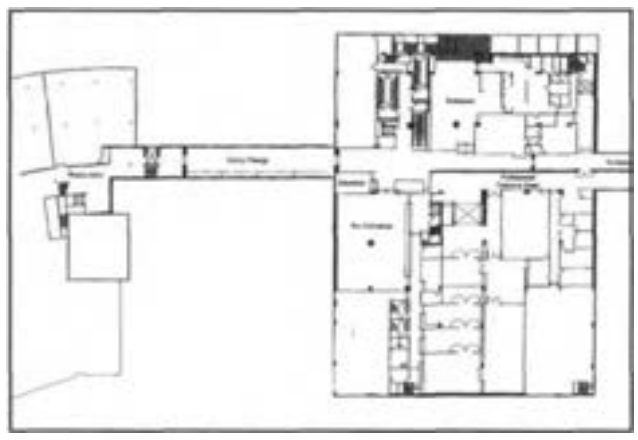
The Beck Building's west elevation, along South Main, will be the principal façade, with the institution's name incised in huge letters, although the museum's published address will not change. Recently an array of the ubiquitous perpendicular museum banners has been proposed along with the 24-foot sculptural columnar portico for cars and a sheltered two-lane, covered drive-in-drop-off. Four pairs of doors admit into the main lobby, while a secondary grouping of two pairs of doors connects off to the side to a secondary corner entry from Binz. Internally, public circulation centers on a three-story vertical atrium that parallels the Binz front, bookended by a three-section public stair and a pair of long escalators leading past a mezzanine level (where public access is primarily for scholars "by appointment") to the main gallery group on the second floor. It is these upper rooms that are illuminated by the cluster of lanterns that populate and characterize the building's roofscape.

The Binz façade of the Beck Building has a more normal-size sidewalk, in part by virtue of the moat that creates a light court for the new museum café on the lower level (dare we say basement?), from which it is possible to enter or exit the facility via an exterior stair parallel to the sidewalk. At this level a 23-foot-wide "underground gallery passage" (dare we say tunnel?) connects, under South Main, to the lower level of the Brown Pavilion, more or less directly into the lower-level gallery in front of the Brown Auditorium. Moreover, this subterranean spine extends completely through the Beck Building, under Fannin Street, and into the Fannin Service Building, which is in part a public facility for 600 to 700 cars. Such infrastructure suggests that the museum chose to provide physical comfort and convenience for its patrons, and that the north lot has been something of a bogus proposition. However, this processional is essentially a linear, two-block underground trek to the existing museum, with little lateral horizontal visual relief (half the journey is paralleled by a second service tunnel from the Fannin Service Building to the Beck Building), and no vertical extension to punctuate if not modulate the journey, let alone provide any visual connection to, or sense of, the world above.

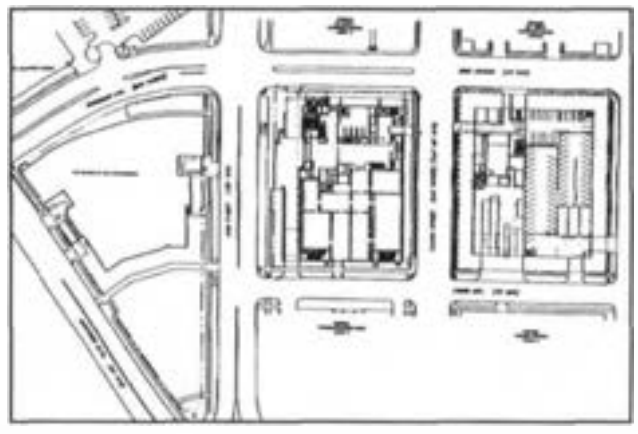
Since this entire "gallery" is underground, it is curious that its shape had to be a straight line. Why not a curve, to alleviate some of its apparent length, or a series of spaces modulated as rooms *en suite*? As it is designed, the only objects that might be displayed in the gallery passage would be small ones. While a large 1960s canvas might possibly make sense in the plan dimension, in fact, the viewing distance back would be inadequate. Moreover, the proposed connection into the Brown Pavilion is a less than graceful intersection of geometries.

Binz has been gratuitously recognized by a suspended canopy along the north face of the Beck Building, where one may enter the lobby through a set of double doors. Its south façade, directly facing the raised lobby of the Wyndham Warwick Hotel, comprises two fire exits and a loading dock; this blankness will be brightly illuminated by sunlight because of its orientation and will certainly glare into the Warwick's lobby. The east (Fannin Street) side is exactly that: a side. Moneo has set the building mass and bulk to approximately emulate that of the existing museum building; its limestone cladding matches the original Watkin building and the stone base of the Mies pavilion. In this way, a new urban spatial dialogue is established across South Main, but any urban experience is limited to the corner street crossing, or effectively eliminated by the provision of the underground gallery passage.

The skeleton in the closet is the Fannin Service Building, about which little is known at this writing.



MFAH, Brown Pavilion and Beck Building connection, basement plans.



MFAH, existing structure, Beck Building, Fannin Service Building, first floor plans.

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Contemporary Arts Museum, looking north from Montrose Boulevard. Gunnar Birkerts & Associates, architects; Charles Tapley Associates, associate architects, 1972.

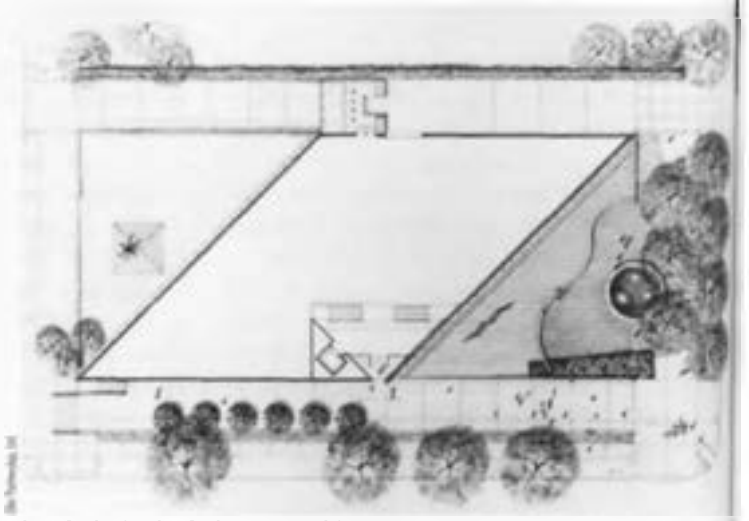
It will be on the order of a four-story mass, set back from the street, and containing, in addition to 600 to 700 cars, a museum service center. It will use Binz for public car access, and Ewing as a service street. Since its alignment is offset from that of Moneo's building, it will not continue the sense of an urban frontage along Binz, either spatially or functionally. In fact, Moneo has had little to do with the building, curiously so given his long-standing interest in urban design. There is no suggestion that a landscape theme will enhance whatever pedestrian experience there could have been, and everything to suggest that this is an oh-by-the-way design to be visually enhanced by the foundation-planting school of landscape architecture.

Such is not the case with the Contemporary Arts Museum's modest program of rehabilitation, expansion, and exterior space enhancement. Architect William F. Stern, who is himself a collector of works by artists such as Sol Lewitt, has opted for understated minimalist erasures to simplify the rabbit warren of lower-level spaces added over the years to Gunnar Birkerts's design. William F. Stern & Associates devised a core of critical service spaces, including a long-needed elevator. Otherwise the lower level will provide a large space for mixed uses, including a projection room, and a gallery that enlarges the museum's downstairs exhibition space by nearly 50 percent. A cottage at 5201 Bayard Lane, rehabilitated by Stern, will provide offices and staff parking. The main gallery of the parallelogram museum remains essentially the same, with a new elevator concealed within what had been part of a triangular piece completing a solid-void mini-parallelogram in the entry vestibule. The Contemporary Arts Museum (CAM) has always had something of an address aberration: its Montrose Boulevard address was a slip-down-the-side-street (Bissonnet) front door marked only by a vertical slot between two metal wall planes. Stern has addressed this problem by proposing a triangular prismatic canopy projection into the exterior space over the entrance.

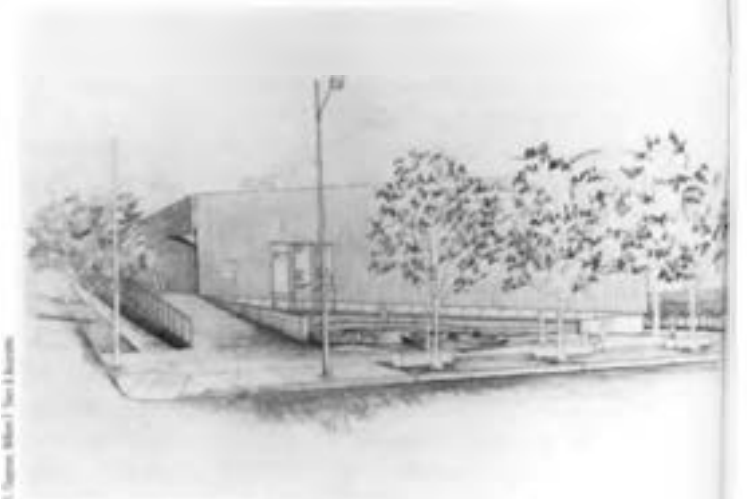
The CAM's front yard has been at best a residual space, activated only on occasion, such as Meg Webster's provocative environmental piece three years ago. The new CAM proposal, developed in collaboration with Philadelphia landscape architect Laurie Olin, whose firm the Olin Partnership Ltd., formerly Hanna/Olin, authored the visionary 1995 master plan for Hermann Park, injects a public space at the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet. Stern and Olin's plan appropriates the CAM lawn, injects a staggered row of Mexican sycamores along a reconfigured east-facing sidewalk, and unifies the ground plane with a band of granite gravel containing concrete benches, in turn shaded by the trees. A circular fountain 19 feet in diameter will add a measure of psychological cooling. The composition, a kind of Modernist collage, is completed by several revised elements. A serpentine, guitar-form parapet, high enough to serve as seating, bisects the lawn, which slopes ever so slightly downward from the sidewalk at its northeastern edge. Since the entry to the CAM is, in effect, halfway down the block, this plan will energize the corner, extending the museum's front door almost to the street. Such a commitment on the part of the Contemporary Arts Museum enhances the external life of the street as a means to amplify its own institutional presence.

Assuming that the vitality of this modest corner park may be seen as a contribution to Houston's cityscape, the question arises, What about the perception of the Bissonnet-Binz corridor as a public artery? This corridor is reinforced if the Children's Museum of Houston is considered to anchor the eastern boundary of the Museum District. The Children's Museum formally set a precedent when its architects, Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates and Jackson & Ryan, Architects, oriented the building to reinforce Binz as an approach.

While the Children's Museum has been the subject of lengthy review in *Cite*,[2] its site plan was largely ignored. Venturi made a great point of the fact that today's buildings often require parking lots of a size equal to, or sometimes greater than, that of their own footprint. In his *Cite* review, Drexel Turner observes that the museum's west elevation, a low-tech metal-shed arcade populated by the now-famous "caryakids" and connecting the shop building on the south to the more figurative building on the north,



Upper level and garden plan for renovation of the Contemporary Arts Museum, 1995 - 1996: William F. Stern & Associates, architect; Olin Partnership Ltd., landscape architect.



Contemporary Arts Museum renovation - perspective view at the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet.

creates a shielded edge to the interior courtyard. Turner's discussion of this arrangement was principally in terms of making the museum visually accessible "by the opportune placement of its parking lot, which intercepts the principal flow of traffic proceeding east from Main Street along Binz Avenue."[3] In fact, the Children's Museum parking lot is a subtle urban landscape designed as an integral part of the building *parti*.

Parking geometry is very specific, the basic unit being the car and its turning radius, and works best as a clear, simple, repetitive diagram. The Children's Museum lot saved a half-dozen trees of substantial proportion whose existing locations randomly modulate the repetitive grid of car slots. Entry is from Austin Street, and exit-entry from the Ewing Avenue side. This diverts car activity off Binz Avenue, reinforcing its potential as a pedestrian approach, and off La Branch Street, which is the seam between the parking and the building blocks. Austin would probably be the main approach; in this way, handicapped slots are directly available, as close to the building entry as possible. The majority of bands of parking are oriented north-south, like those of the Museum of Fine Arts' Administration and Junior School Building. This suggests that a patron would park and walk to the north edge of the site at Binz. While a single layer of car slots edges the site on three of its sides, there are no slots on the north edge, which facilitates direct access to the pedestrian plaza, expanding the Binz sidewalk nearly fourfold. This also effectively keeps a row of parked cars away from a vista looking east along Binz to the museum's temple-front entrance. The double striping of La Branch at the crossing underscores the importance of this link.

What is important is that this connection, the south side of Binz, establishes the visual position of the Children's Museum as an anchor to one part of the Museum District. However, the proposed Beck Building and Fannin Service Building of the Museum of Fine Arts do little to sustain this public domain by failing to enhance the potential of an occupiable urban streetscape. Even environmental realities fail to convince because this pedestrian route would have been along north-facing elevations, where the buildings would comfortably shade the sidewalk. If the intervening city blocks were enhanced and sidewalks developed, the vista to the main entrance of the Children's Museum would visually

Entrance to the Amazing Body Pavilion, Museum of Health and Medical Science.

connect the district's western point of origin at the CAM. With its placement, orientation, massing, and most assuredly its color scheme, the Children's Museum would be an appealing goal.

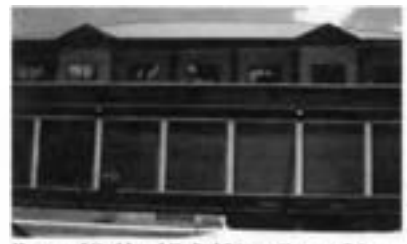
The idea of street activity is extended even through the interior of the Children's Museum, whose central, streetlike arcade, the Kids' Gallery, has been appropriated by activity and project areas, to the side of which "street" vendors such as a dairy bar and a museum shop have been added.

Although it is a direct neighbor of the Children's Museum on the adjacent city block, the Museum of Health and Medical Science (a joint venture of Marilyn P. McCarnes, Architects, and Billy D. Tippit, Architects) vitiates any further urban design potential. When the Children's Museum established La Branch as a principal street, it extended the connection south to the Houston Garden Center, which lies on its axis as the termination of the vista. There are, however, three entries to the Museum of Health and Medical Science. The honorific entry is clearly on La Branch, with a gestural entry plaza grafted onto the sidewalk; parking and school bus dropoff are on the east side of the building, facing Crawford Street; and, curiously, the official address is 1515 Hermann Drive, the south side of the building, which is essentially a blank façade with car access into the basement parking area. The formal language of a pseudo-Classical architecture speaks of a visual hierarchy that reinforces this reading: front door on La Branch through a temple front that is woefully underachieving in contrast with that of the Children's Museum next door; side door, but actual entrance, on Crawford; and back door, garage entry, but building address, on Hermann Drive. Externally, the building is a jogged cluster of two pavilions abutting a central spine; internally, the building's 28,000 square feet of public education areas are kept at grade, but administrative offices and the Harris County Medical Society offices are on the upper floor, joined through the central grand hall by a pair of glass vaulted tube-bridges between the two pavilions. The south pavilion contains the labyrinthlike Amazing Body Pavilion as well as a clear exercise in kiddie crowd control: gift shop, children's restrooms, a snack exchange (no preservatives, low-fat, no cholesterol, low sodium/sugar?), and a separate lobby for herding the li'l darlins back into buses. The Amazing Body Pavilion features an incredible entrance element: an open-mouthed child's head that is a viewing window into the dental-and-mouth section. This glossy, colorful giant is made even more outstanding by contrast with the architectural sobriety of the grand hall, which separates the two sides of the building. The north side contains support functions as well as the

Kids' Gallery, Children's Museum of Houston, Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, architects, Jackson & Ryan Associates, associate architects, 1992.

Grand Hall, Museum of Health and Medical Science, Marilyn P. McCarnes, Architects, and Billy D. Tippit, Architects, joint venture, 1996.

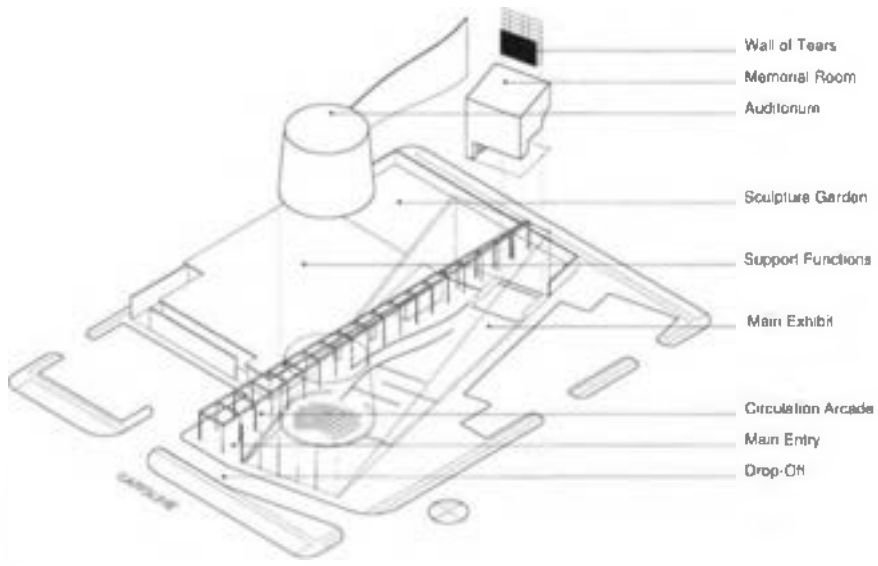
Museum of Health and Medical Science, main entrance, LaBranch Street (west) elevation.



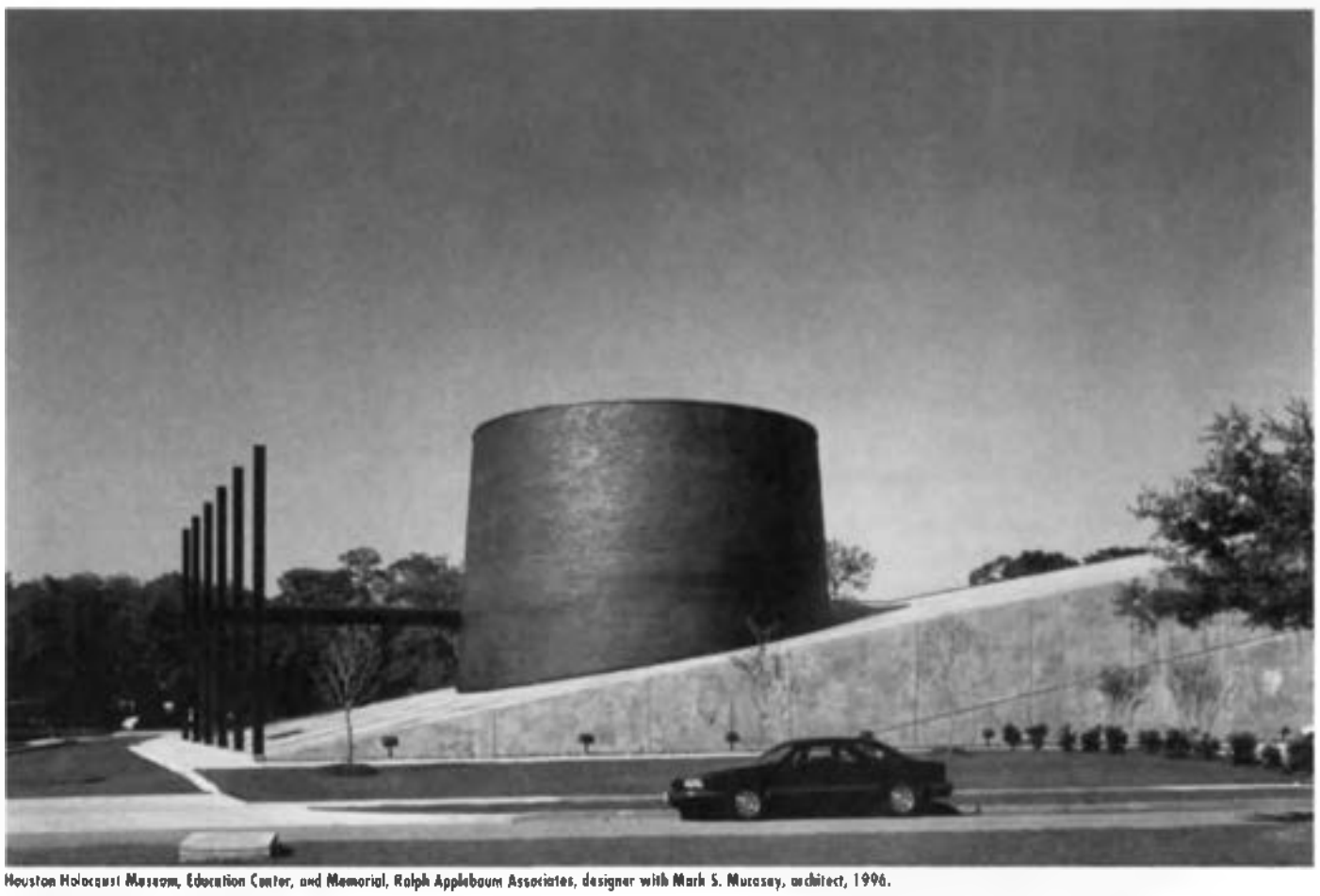
Museum of Health and Medical Science, Hermann Drive (south) elevation, facing Hermann Park.

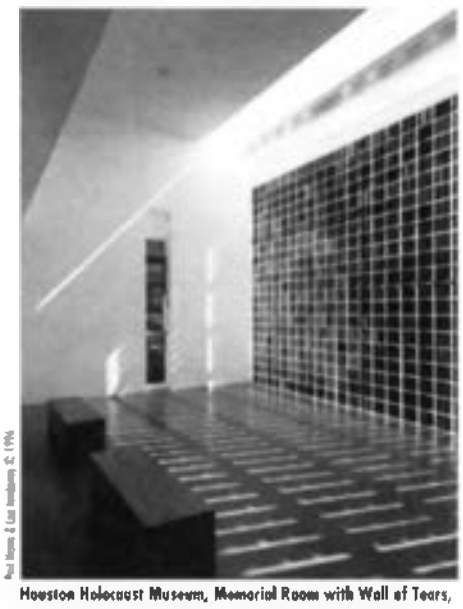
Museum of Health and Medical Science, Crawford Street (east) elevation.

Cite 34 Spring 1996



Houston Holocaust Museum, exploded axonometric drawing.


Houston Holocaust Museum, Education Center, and Memorial, Ralph Appelbaum Associates, designer with Mark S. Mucasey, architect, 1996.


Houston Holocaust Museum, Memorial Room with Wall of Tears, Murphey Mears Architects; ceramic installation, Patricia and Robert Moss-Vreeland.

tains support functions as well as the Transparent Anatomical Mannequin Theatre and the Michael E. DeBakey Science Laboratory and Learning Center. The Grand Hall, which one envisions as primarily useful for receptions of the medical society, is so inherently empty that it is clearly not a space in which to linger: keep those little guys out of sight!

Another new component of this cluster is the Houston Holocaust Museum, Education Center, and Memorial. North and two blocks west of the other museums, at the corner of Calumet and Caroline, the Holocaust Museum is fortuitously sited across from the Houston Public Library's Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research at 5300 Caroline, a complex that includes the renovated William L. Clayton House, designed in 1916 by architect Birdsall P. Briscoe. While the Clayton Library is not a museum, it is a publicly owned, accessible, and interesting component of the district.

The Holocaust Museum, which opened in March 1996, was initiated locally within Houston's Jewish community, and then expanded in program when Ralph Appelbaum Associates of New York, designers of the exhibition in the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., were brought in. What had been a renovation to an existing one-story building by Houston architect Mark S. Mucasey, became a substantial addition to the same building. Additionally, a national competition for a separate memorial room was won by artists Patricia and Robert Moss-Vreeland of Philadelphia in collaboration with Murphy Mears Architects of Houston. The Mucasey scheme had its entrance on Prospect Avenue, a reasonable connection to the siting of the existing building; fortunately, the insertion of and connection with a more distinctive exhibition hall made it logical for the entry to be at the conjunction of the two pieces, fronting on Caroline Street, which makes better sense in urban design terms. The final design comprised reworking of the existing building into an administrative center, support functions, multipurpose classrooms, a substantial gallery for changing exhibitions, and the library resource center (which will house materials from Holocaust survivors within the Houston community). The new building, whose wedge form is displaced on the site, contains an orientation auditorium, a permanent exhibition on the Holocaust, the memorial room, and an exterior garden. The Mucasey firm produced all documents for construction and interior finish; Appelbaum Associates controlled the exhibition design; Murphy Mears separately designed the memorial room in collaboration with the Moss-Vreelands. The construction documents bear a dedication to the memory of Mucasey's wife's grandparents, who were victims of the Holocaust.

Imagery indeed dominates form in the Holocaust Museum. The wedge-form roof seems to be a roadway to nowhere but is in fact a recollection of roads paved by the Nazis with Jewish gravestones; the displacement of forms reflects the displacement of European Jewish life; six vertical piers with wires between them recall both the Six Million (a second series down the interior hall leading to the resource center repeats the metaphor) and the death-camp fences; the conical form of the auditorium recalls the crematoria; the circulation arcade, which tapers to a point, suggests the trestle of a death train. The interior detailing is deliberately harsh: steel lintels and brick details, a six-inch steel channel baseboard with exposed bolts.

The memorial room is a separate kind of architecture. The thickness of its walls emphasizes its isolation from the exhibition area; in fact, it appears as an object inserted within the space. Natural light dominates the interior volume, formed by Murphy Mears. The focus of the room is on the Wall of Tears, the memorial piece by the Moss-Vreelands. An intense space, it is also a place of hope.

Potentially, Caroline Street, an esplanaded boulevard built up with medical and residential buildings, could be enhanced as a connector between Hermann Park and the Holocaust Museum, and vice versa. The Clayton Library could expand public awareness by introducing an exhibition presenting a didactic explanation of its collections and their use; the Houston Public Library is always interested in increasing patronage of its branches and ought to budget promotion and marketing in this area.

Caroline Street has become an important entry point for the expanded Houston Museum of Natural Science.

Houston Museum of Natural Science, south entrance hall, Hoover & Furr and 3D/International, architects, 1989.

Cockrell Butterfly Center.

Transformed within the park from a street into an access road, Caroline serves public parking and the museum's east entrance court, regarded as the major entrance. Recent additions to the museum include extensions to the exhibition halls on two levels; a traveling exhibition hall on the third level (with a functioning Foucault pendulum through all three levels); collection storage and support spaces; a new entrance plaza and foyer; and the most dramatic expansion of all, the Cockrell Butterfly Center (Hoover Architects, 1995).

If the location of building entrances is a response to and recognition of external urban forces, then the design of the Houston Museum of Natural Science may be seen not as a deliberate urban strategy, but rather as a reactive condition. The new Cockrell has the largest and most visible entry, but it is as far away from linkages to the larger Museum District as one could imagine. To be fair, the municipal water tank, reconstructed in 1991, that occupies a prime corner of the adjacent site was a barrier that designs for both the parking structure and the museum expansion had to work around, literally. Yet wayfinding at the site is as dislocating as it is disjointed, while the entry hall itself evokes a kind of shopping-mall experience. Destination informs the decision of where to enter (butterfly center, IMAX theater, science exhibition halls, planetarium), but a new museumgoer, unsure of which entry leads where, will be at a loss. While the parking structure is a popular facility, one is confronted in its small at-grade lobby with signs on doors reading "NO ENTRY" and arrows pointing outside in order to get inside. On the exterior, no real signage program gets you around to the east entry from Hermann Park on the south or from the Museum of Fine Arts on the west. To find the "main entrance" on the east, you must bypass the butterfly center (if you haven't already tried to get in through the service door at the western corner of its pavilion). The only intervening and inviting set of steps, up to the old planetarium, is roped off; only a low barrier of chain fence directs you around.

The Cockrell Butterfly Center is a great addition to the vocabulary of park structures and to the experience of nature. Being able to move up through its glass interior is one of the more satisfying spatial experiences within the museum, and the tropical world of live butterflies fluttering by is simply wonderful. The transparent, tapered, and segmented conical form stands in marked contrast to the other beads on a string — the IMAX theater and the planetarium, both inherently solid, closed forms. The Cockrell pavilion works architecturally, as a shimmering solid during the day and as a glimmering beacon at night.

There is an alternative pedestrian route, for the adventuresome, from the Contemporary Arts Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts to the Museum of Natural Science. This is one marked by water features and round markers: the Mecom Fountain, at the intersection of South Main and Montrose; the rounded south façade of the Wyndham Warwick Hotel, ringed by a line of fountains; the Bloch Cancer Survivors Plaza with its wrought-iron frou-frou domed gazebo and small fountain, for better or worse a stopover destination on the path to the science museum; and the circularized colonnade of the original Miller Outdoor Theater (William Ward Watkin, architect, 1923), now resituated around a lighted fountain with an abundant water-spray. This streetscape with residual landforms (parklets) results from the engineering of roadways sorting out traffic on Fannin and San Jacinto. The aforementioned water tank could be an element in a conscious continuation of this theme, although camouflage appears to have been the main response to its presence. The towerlike butterfly center is the visual anchor that completes this progression from art to science.

Is there a district in all this?

Laurie Olin was engaged to address the issue in the Houston Museum District Study Draft Summary Document, submitted in April 1995. Where the study is clear is in its recognition of the obvious clusters, the recommendation of incremental improvements such as "a gradual repair and relocation of sidewalks along with additional street tree planting, . . . installation of a comprehensive system of signage, . . . new street furniture . . .[to] provide a range of basic facilities along the streets to sustain a visitor." The report goes on to suggest that "the area streets . . . should become vital places full of life and activity in their own right." This is expanded into a concept for a Primary Street, featuring a canopy structure "that would provide shade and weather protection for market vendors [and] could contain utilities such as electricity, and possibly drainage." In addition, the study advocates a program of public art, as well as a schedule of specially designed everyday items such as manholes, parking meters, trash cans, and so forth. There is talk of a shuttle bus among the museums, extending north up South Main to include the Lawndale Center and up Montrose to include the Menil Collection campus.

My own analogy for the most appropriate strategy came through my old pair of Bugle Boy jeans. Not intended to give a precise contour to a form that has become, shall we say, somewhat less defined in time, the cut is what Bugle Boy calls "Loose Fit." This casual model may be the best analogy for the Houston situation: enough has already been done ad hoc to mitigate any rigorous cohesion that might have resulted from a strategy arising from consensus, if the institutions had actually anticipated the opportunities their separate actions would generate. The perceived relationship between the museum groups requires substantial physical intervention to make it all clear — which seems unnecessary. Yes, reinforce the principal corridors, particularly with a tree-planting program, and clarify them as arteries; develop a system of consistent signage; and provide some street amenities for pausing and resting. Maybe some people will actually walk between the clusters, but the proposal should work for those in cars as well as the few brave souls on foot. Perhaps it's enough to know what the options are, and where they are, to achieve a sense of a district. In fact, in program, content, and intent the museums appeal to diverse audiences. The likelihood of combining visits is probably remote. As for street activities, cultural geographer J. B. Jackson once observed, "Street life in America is a sign of poverty."[4] Oh, there may be occasions when the dozen city blocks involved could sustain a festival-type atmosphere, but Houstonians don't need a heavily tailored infrastructure to perceive a sense of identity for the area — just a loose fit. The pity is, some of the seams, as currently laid out, might ultimately be a bit crooked. ■

1 Stephen Fox, "Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: An Architectural History, 1924–1986," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, April 1992, p. 49.

2 Drexel Turner, "Little Caesar's Palace: The Children's Museum of Houston," *Cite*, Spring–Summer 1993, pp. 29–35.

3 Ibid.

4 Conversation with author, La Cienega, New Mexico, 1976.

Twombly Gallery, Renzo Piano Building Workshop, architect, with Richard Fitzgerald & Partners, associate architect, 1995.

The Twombly Gallery and

William F. Stern

The 1995 completion of the Twombly Gallery in an early-20th-century Montrose neighborhood continues a contemporary pattern of building that was established with the Rothko Chapel in 1971. Like the Rothko and the nearby Menil Collection, the Twombly Gallery is the result of an unusual three-way collaboration between artist, architect, and patron.

For the 1987 opening of the Menil Collection, the collection's founder, Dominique de Menil, with the Menil's first director, Walter Hopps, and its current director, Paul Winkler, had hoped to mount an exhibition of paintings and drawings by the American artist Cy Twombly. Not until 1989, however, was such an exhibition presented. The Menil Collection already owned works by Twombly, and for the exhibition these were augmented by paintings and drawings from the Dia Art Foundation and from private collections. The Dia Art Foundation, founded by Dominique de Menil's daughter Fariha (Philippa) and her husband, Heiner Friedrich, owned Twombly paintings and drawings collected in the 1970s and additional pieces purchased for Dia in 1980. At the time of the Twombly exhibition in Houston, discussion began about a collaboration between Dia and the Menil for a permanent Twombly installation in Houston, with a smaller installation in New York. In fall 1990, Paul Winkler, Dominique de Menil, and Fariha and Heiner Friedrich visited Twombly at his home in Rome to solicit his support for the project. Twombly was receptive, producing a conceptual sketch that would later become the basis for the Twombly Gallery plan. He also offered to give works he owned to both spaces. The Dia and Menil representatives agreed that a new building would be constructed in Houston for a major installation of Twombly's paintings, drawings, and sculpture drawn from the Menil and Dia collections, along with more than 35 works donated by the artist himself. The Menil took title of six paintings from Dia and in so doing helped the foundation to purchase a building on West 22nd Street in New York, across the street from the foundation's existing four-story loft building. When renovated, the new building will be used for single-artist installations drawn from Dia's collection, with part of one floor designated for a permanent installation of works by Twombly. With this determined, in November 1991 the Renzo Piano Building Workshop in Genoa began to develop a design for the Twombly Gallery in Houston.

Thirty-five years earlier, in the mid-1950s, John and Dominique de Menil came to the neighborhood that would eventually house their extensive collection of art through their association with the University of St. Thomas, a Catholic liberal arts university founded by priests of the Order of St. Basil. The de Menils' architectural influence would first be felt when they were asked by the university to assist in the selection of an architect for new buildings. Among those recommended, Philip Johnson, who had designed the de Menil house in River Oaks in 1950, received the commission to draw a master plan for the St. Thomas campus. The de Menils underwrote the costs of the master plan and soon became actively involved in helping to form a new art department for the university.[1] Fashioning his plan after Thomas Jefferson's academic village at the University of Virginia, Johnson proposed a series of two-story block buildings laid out around an elongated court, interconnected by a U-shaped covered walkway. The design, a boldly modern composition of exposed black steel frames inset with panels of dusty-colored brick and floor-to-ceiling glass, demonstrated Johnson's allegiance to the International Style of

Mies van der Rohe. Without upsetting the balance and scale of the older neighborhood, these buildings stood comfortably among the picturesque bungalows, frame houses, and live oaks, setting a pattern that would be adopted by a succession of architects.

At the time of the St. Thomas master plan, the area surrounding the campus was in decline. The Montrose subdivision and its adjoining neighborhoods had been developed in the teens on open farmland by entrepreneurs intent upon providing modest middle-class housing. With its tree-lined streets and parklike landscape, Montrose was typical of America's first suburbs. Restricted for residential use and planned with uniform building setbacks, the neighborhood had matured during the 1920s into a harmonious pattern of one-story Craftsman bungalows and larger two-story houses set among graceful live oaks. After World War II, as a younger generation sought housing in newer suburbs, the planning restrictions in Montrose and many of its surrounding neighborhoods lapsed, leaving the area vulnerable to apartment construction and small-scale commercial development.

houses are the Da Camera chamber music society, Writers in the Schools, Texas Accountants and Lawyers for the Arts, and Inprint, Inc., the fundraising and promotional arm of the University of Houston creative writing program. The bungalows and frame houses acquired a particular distinction and the neighborhood was unified when the architect Howard Barnstone suggested painting all the houses a medium gray with white trim. Another Menil property, Richmond Hall, located on Richmond one block south of the Menil Collection, has been used as a supplementary exhibition space for the Menil and most recently for FotoFest.

The trio of cultural buildings constructed within the neighborhood between 1971 and 1995 shows similar patterns of site planning and general relationship to their surrounding neighborhood. The first, an ecumenical chapel designed to house commissioned paintings by the great American abstract painter Mark Rothko, was built by John and Dominique de Menil to the west of the University of St. Thomas between Sul Ross and Branard. Based on plans by

Entrance to Twombly Gallery with Menil Collection across the street.

Philip Johnson, who had earlier been retained to design the chapel (then intended for the south end of the St. Thomas mall), the completed building was designed by Howard Barnstone and Eugene Aubry. Like the Twombly Gallery, the Rothko Chapel is turned away from the street in favor of a self-contained site plan. Backing up closely to Sul Ross on the north, this centrally planned, octagonally shaped building faces a rectangular reflecting pool on axis with Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk* and is screened from Branard Street to the south by a dense stand of bamboo (see neighborhood plan). The main approach to the entrance is from a side street, Yupon, along a walkway that enters at mid-block and leads to a paved plaza between the building and the reflecting pool. This unconventional relationship of building to street effectively allows the Rothko to stand both comfortably and independently among its residential neighbors at the edge of the University of St. Thomas campus.

The much larger building for the Menil Collection, designed by Renzo Piano and completed in 1987 to house the de Menil art collection, follows a similar pattern of siting to produce a compatible relationship with the smaller surrounding houses. Occupying an entire block, the rectangular building is asymmetrically positioned on the site. By adjoining Branard on the south and Mandell on the west, the building leaves a wide expanse of lawn to the north along Sul Ross, and a narrower space on the east that joins with park space across Mulberry Street (see neighborhood plan). The building's main entrance, from Sul Ross, and the secondary entrance, from Branard, are placed slightly off center, further diminishing symmetrical formality. While the use of gray-stained cypress siding and white steel structure help relate the Menil to the neighboring bungalows, it is the asymmetrical siting that moderates the impact of the greater building mass on the residential neighborhood.

The Twombly Gallery, located across the street from the Menil on Branard, strategically aligns with the 1920s bungalows to either side. Unlike the bungalows, with their eccentrically articulated gabled front porches, the gallery turns a blank wall to the street, its entrance rotated 90 degrees to the east, facing onto a grassy plaza anchored by a single mature live oak. Like the siting of the Rothko Chapel, a block down the street, this maneuver effectively mitigates the formal impact of the entrance. By establishing the movement from street to building entrance through the private space of a pocket park, the experience becomes relaxed and intimate. As the termination of Mulberry Street, this space is also linked to the two open spaces on either

the Making of Place

Paradoxically, the loss of the restrictions and the uniformity they maintained set in motion an unusual transformation of the neighborhood that continues to this day.

During the 1950s and 1960s the de Menils began to acquire property west of the St. Thomas campus, at first for the future expansion of the University of St. Thomas and later for the building of what would become one of Houston's richest cultural enclaves. In retrospect, their activity in this neighborhood can also be seen as the first and most comprehensive program of historical preservation in a city that cared little about its building past. The majority of the bungalows and houses acquired by the de Menils in this period were saved. When new buildings were proposed, older houses were often moved to new sites rather than destroyed. Over the years, these houses have been rented at modest rates to artists, scholars, and nonprofit organizations. Among the organizations leasing

Neighborhood Plan.
Key
1. Rothko Chapel
2. Menil Collection
3. Twombly Gallery

side of Mulberry, enhancing the parklike setting of the museum buildings. Both the Rothko Chapel and the Twombly Gallery are monumental masonry buildings, barely penetrated by windows or doors, but because the formal relationship to the street is played down, their mass does not disturb the delicate and informal fabric of the residential neighborhood. Although the Twombly Gallery displaced one small house (which was moved intact to an empty lot a few houses east on Branard), this late-20th-century building is perfectly at home with the Craftsman bungalows, not through architectural style but through compatible scale and thoughtful site relationships.

The Rothko Chapel and the Twombly Gallery also share certain internal planning strategies, particularly their simplicity and directness of plan. A single gallery space, the Rothko Chapel is centrally planned and is entered through a foyer that serves as a threshold where visitors can pause before moving left or right into the ethereal volume occupied by Rothko's panels of color, which are installed on four opposing walls of the octagonal room. At the Menil Collection the visitor also arrives into a receiving area, larger in scale than the more intimate Rothko foyer and open to the outside. Through the simple idea of a centrally planned foyer with a transepting hallway that extends the length of the building and contains galleries on one side and a restricted service zone on the other, Piano assured a clarity of organization that makes the experience of the Menil building relaxed and unencumbered. The wide, graceful hallway, open on either end to the outside light, connects the museum interior to the lush greenery of Houston and the neighborhood beyond.

The conceptual plan of the Twombly Gallery that originated from the sketch drawn by Cy Twombly during the early planning discussions shows a rectangular block containing five connected galleries. Piano significantly elaborated Twombly's concept by laying out galleries within a plan based on a nine-square grid, adding at one end of the building block a narrower rectangular volume for the entry vestibule. Where the foyer of the Rothko is substantially closed, the foyer of the Twombly Gallery, like that of the Menil Collection, opens to the outside through a wall of glass and glass doors framed by a poured-concrete portal. On the opposite side of the building, the required second means of egress has been treated like the entrance, opening through an identically framed glass wall to the outside. The foyer itself occupies the center bay along the three-bay width, with an archive room on one side and a service area and stair to the basement mechanical rooms on the other. The vestibule might be compared to the porch of a Greek or Roman temple, framed by a tripartite portal with perfectly proportioned poured-concrete columns and lintel standing in for an ordered Classical structure. Although born and raised in Virginia, Twombly has spent the last 40 years in Italy, and many of his paintings make reference to the ancient world. Italian architect Renzo Piano has subtly incorporated references to that world into the building, respecting as well the intentions behind the Twombly sketch that generated the plan.

The entry foyer leads to eight separate galleries laid out within the geometry of the nine-square grid. Taking advantage of the multiple combinations inherent in that geometry, Piano designed one of the outer galleries as a double square to accommodate larger and longer paintings. All of the galleries save the center one open on two sides to adjacent galleries, allowing uninterrupted circulation in either direction. Portal openings between galleries align but are not necessarily centered, creating variations in wall lengths to accommodate paintings of different horizontal dimensions. In the middle gallery facing west, on the opposite side from the foyer, the space is brightly illuminated through windows and glass doors, producing a sensation so dramatic that in moving into this gallery it is as if one has actually stepped outside. This transitional space compares to the Menil Collection, where one is constantly brought to the outside. And like the Menil, the logic of the plan and the clear sequence of spaces provides for an easily perceived path between galleries, with subtle variations giving each a slightly different spatial quality.

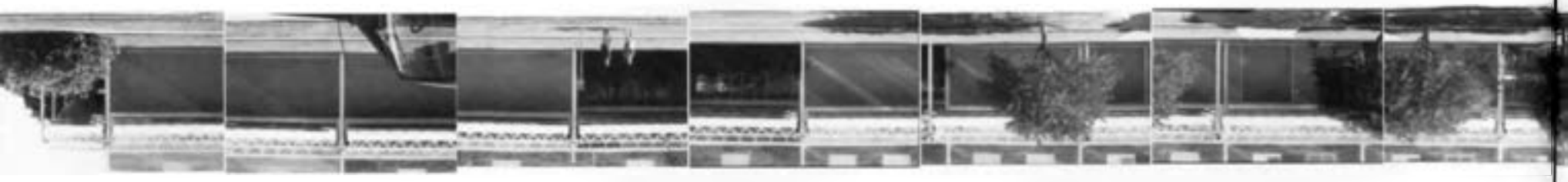
Beyond these planning and spatial continuities, what most closely unites the Rothko Chapel, the Menil Collection, and the Twombly Gallery is the use of overhead natural light as a means of illuminating spaces. From the Rothko to the Twombly Gallery one encounters a drive to achieve perfect natural lighting, and while the effect in each case is different, the results are equally astonishing.

The paintings and interior of the Rothko Chapel are illuminated from a roof-mounted pyramidal skylight centrally positioned over the chapel space. After the initial installation, it became apparent that too much direct sunlight came through the unprotected glass, and a cloth scrim was soon added underneath the glass pyramid. Later, to diffuse the light further, the scrim was replaced by a concave baffle suspended beneath the skylight that allows light to drift in softly along its edges, delicately washing the paintings.[2]

The experience with natural light at the Rothko Chapel served as a lesson for the Menil Collection. Acknowledging overhead illumination as an ideal, though difficult to control, light source, Renzo Piano designed a system that would accept natural light and at the same time diffuse the light as it entered the galleries. Ranks of ferroconcrete baffles, suspended beneath coated skylights, are angled to filter sunlight from the north, providing a cool white glow that reflects into the galleries, most strongly illuminating the south walls. This light is supplemented by the expanse of glass openings at the entrance and either end of the wide hallway, by narrow slit windows along the perimeter walls, and by light from an interior atrium on the east end of the building. The overall effect is a remarkable use of daylight to gently illuminate the art and, in Piano's words, "bring life to the space."

Working with a single-artist gallery, Piano was confronted with an even more specific program of natural light for the design of the Twombly Gallery. To achieve the appropriate levels and desired quality of light, the architect designed a roof system that filters light in stages through four screens placed over the outer galleries, with opaque flat roofs covering the center gallery and the entry vestibule. The uppermost layer of this intriguing filtration system is manifested on the outside by a bright white steel canopy, supporting a mesh of fixed aluminum louvers, that appears to float over the building mass. While lighter and more delicate, the light-filtering louvered canopy makes friendly reference to the white concrete baffles of the Menil Collection across the street. But unlike the Menil, where the curved baffles are exposed beneath the skylights, the louvered canopy of the Twombly Gallery is intentionally obscured on the inside. Beneath the canopy, a double-glazed, clear-glass hipped roof seals the interior from the outside elements. Barely visible from the outside, the glass roof has a nickel coating to filter ultraviolet light in the range most harmful to art objects. Beneath the glass roof and inside the building, operable louvers supported by a steel frame provide the third layer of protection. Mechanically controlled and operated with a light-sensitive photoelectric cell, the louvers automatically adjust their apertures according to changes in daylight. Directly below the mechanically controlled louvers, a stretched cotton scrim fabricated by a Galveston sailmaker forms a ceiling and provides the final layer of Piano's light-filtering sandwich. For night lighting, custom-designed fixtures attached to light tracks suspended from the steel frame discreetly poke through the cloth.

This technological tour de force produces light virtually without shadow, a condition so rarely experienced that the initial sensation is a kind of dizziness. The perfectly even natural light is different from the Menil's light, which varies subtly, or the Rothko's, which changes in intensity from top to bottom. As light

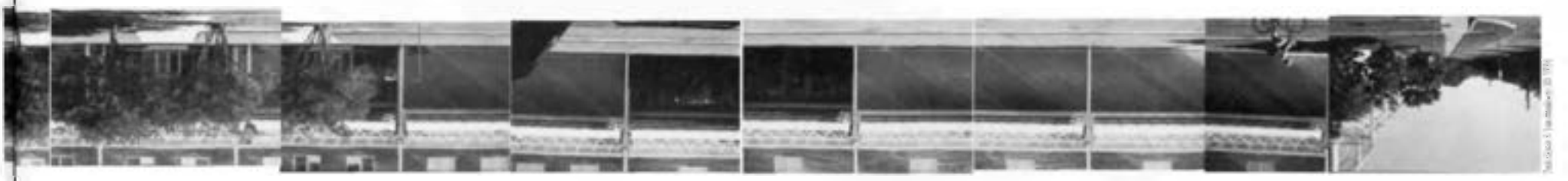


filters through the sailcloth it takes on a warm tonality, filling the space with a lantern-like glow that quietly varies when outside conditions shift from clear to cloudy. The light softly reflects from the crisp plaster walls, providing near perfect illumination for Twombly's paintings, particularly those with pale backgrounds and intricate markings that weave in and out of the surface. These paintings, subtle in content and delicately expressed, are seen at their best in the airy, shadowless light that filters into the galleries. Appropriately, paintings more vibrant in color and thicker in surface are displayed in the gallery on the opposite side of the entrance, where filtered light is mixed with daylight coming through windows and doors. Only the center gallery and the archive room next to the entrance, both intended for the display of more delicate works on paper, receive no daylight. Selected galleries in the Menil Collection are also closed to outside light and provided with controlled, often dramatic, artificial lighting. It is no exaggeration to claim that the lighting of the Twombly Gallery, particularly under natural conditions, is as beautiful and unusual as can be hoped for in any space intended for the exhibition of art.

While the Rothko, the Menil Collection, and the Twombly Gallery share essential qualities, the three buildings are articulated as individual works of architecture, each building like a member of a family in a shared precinct. Whereas a campus of museum buildings singular in style, material, and character would have dominated the neighborhood, each of these structures is a separate work, invested with the inventive spirit of modern architecture. Relating the Rothko Chapel to the University of St. Thomas, architects Barnstone and Aubry adopted the same light-colored, iron-spotted brick that Johnson had selected in the 1950s for the new buildings of the University of St. Thomas. While separate from the campus, the Rothko Chapel might appear to the stranger to be a part of the university. Renzo Piano's building for the Menil Collection in some ways harks back to Johnson's St. Thomas buildings. Both architects utilized an exposed steel frame structure with in-fill panels, brick at St. Thomas and horizontal cypress siding at the Menil. Whereas Johnson was clearly influenced by the work of Mies van der Rohe, Piano, as architectural historian Reyner Banham has observed, seems to have taken as his point of departure the work of California architect Craig Ellwood and others who participated in the Case Study Houses program of the 1940s and 1950s.[3] But Piano goes far beyond Johnson, whose 1950s design seems almost imitative of Mies van der Rohe's buildings at Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology. For the Menil Collection Piano designed an exceptionally innovative work of architecture whose elegantly detailed steel frame, painted white, embraces the gray-stained cypress panels and supports the white ferroconcrete sun baffles, consciously joining the Menil to the neighboring bungalows by echoing their painted gray clapboard and white trim.

The Twombly Gallery and the Menil Collection are composed of simple boxlike forms, exquisitely put together with precise detailing and richness of material. But in the Twombly Gallery, Piano departed from the expression of the articulated frame, designing a building dominated by mass and weight. The building is essentially a concrete-block structure with concealed perimeter poured-concrete columns and concealed interior steel columns. The outer wall is made up of a double concrete-block wall comprising an interior eight-inch-thick block and a custom-cast six-inch block on the outside. Concrete-block walls are often clad with another facing material such as brick or stone, but Piano realized that concrete block could emulate the richness of stone without disguising its materiality. Both color and profile were customized for the precast outer blocks. While stone varies in color, the process of precasting yielded a uniform light sandy color, giving the building a singular resonance. Departing from the flatness and perceived thinness of stone cladding, Piano expressed the thickness of the facing blocks with a 3/4-inch joint, producing a finely scaled rectangular grid derived from the dimensions of the block's face, 34 inches wide by 17 inches tall. The white, louvered metal canopy, hovering over the block, provides a counterpoint to the heaviness of the masonry structure and suggests the chamber within. By carrying the masonry materials into the foyer and adjacent side rooms, the inside and outside are brought together at the entrance. The purity of the exterior is reiterated inside, where the 15-foot-high rooms are finished with plaster walls that meet natural oak plank floors. Rooms fold into one another through the wide, square portal openings in the thick walls. While monolithic in form, the building is graciously proportioned and never overwhelming in scale, fulfilling Twombly's desire for a building that would be a timeless expression of architecture.

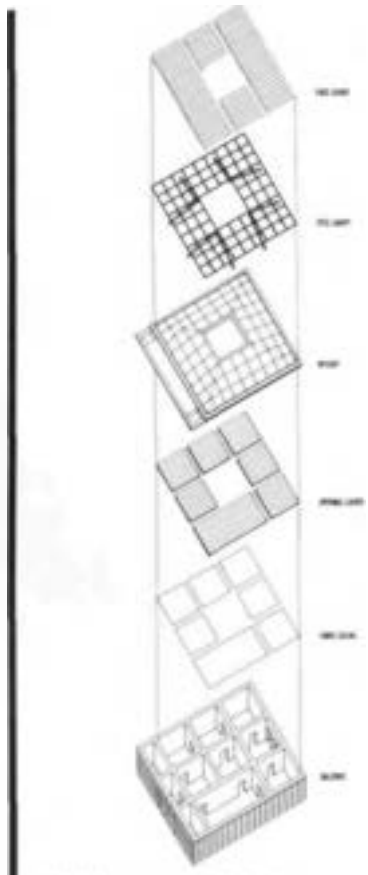
The collaboration that brought about the Twombly Gallery fulfills an intention articulated 40 years earlier, when John and Dominique de Menil began planning the University of St. Thomas campus to promote art and architecture as a source of cultural and civic enrichment. Taken together, the St. Thomas campus, the Rothko Chapel, the Menil Collection, and the Twombly Gallery in their neighborhood of historic bungalows and modest houses form a place of lasting significance, reminding us that a city at its best is an evolving work of art. While privately planned and funded, this enclave is a vital center of Houston's public realm. ■



1 Susan J. Barnes, *The Rothko Chapel: An Act of Faith* (Houston: Rothko Chapel, 1989), pp. 41–42.

2 Ibid., p. 84.

3 Reyner Banham, "Klarheit, Ehrlichkeit, Einfachkeit . . . and Wit Too!: The Case Study Houses in the World's Eyes," in Elizabeth A. T. Smith, ed., *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 195.



Exploded isometric Twombly Gallery.

Twombly Gallery Interior.

Twombly Gallery Plan.

Cite 34 : Spring 1995

Snow biz: A youthful extra inspects fake flakes covering the sidewalk in front of Jones Hall, standing in for Lincoln Center during the filming of Larry McMurtry's *Evening Star*.

Neighborhood o

The Houston Theater District

DREXEL TURNER

IT IS A STRANGE THING, THE LIKE OF WHICH, I THINK WILL OCCUR TO ONE HARDLY ANYWHERE ELSE THAN IN TEXAS, TO HEAR TEAMSTERS WITH THEIR CATTLE STAKED AROUND THEM ON THE PRAIRIE, HUMMING AIRS FROM "DON GIOVANNI"...

Frederick Law Olmsted, *New-York Daily Times*, 24 April 1854

Majestic Theater, Mauran & Russell, architects, 1911.

City Auditorium, Mauran, Russell & Crowell, architects, 1913.

Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall, Alfred C. Finn, architect, 1937.

f Make Believe

When Frederick Law Olmsted, then a 32-year-old journalist, visited Houston on the return leg of his journey through Texas in spring 1854, he observed that the town of not yet 5,000 showed "many agreeable signs of . . . wealth accumulated, in homelike, retired residences, its large and good hotel, its well supplied shops, and its shaded streets." Among its cultural assets he counted "several neat churches, a theatre (within the walls of a steam saw-mill), and a most remarkable number of showy bar-rooms and gambling saloons."[1] Today the prim churches have been reborn as suburban tabernacles the size of sports arenas; the showy bar-rooms have multiplied and migrated, also much enlarged, to the outside-the-Loop forum of Richmond Avenue; and the converted sawmill has given way, on the south side of the downtown bend in Buffalo Bayou, to what is said to be the second greatest concentration of theater and performing arts seats in the United States — 10,501 by actual count.

The Theater District is a conspicuous if still somewhat disjointed sign of wealth accumulated and invested on behalf of an audience no longer primarily composed of cattle. After a false start in 1890 when the Sweeney and Coombs Opera House (and office building) opened on the west side of Courthouse Square, the city's performing arts organizations have tended to gravitate toward the right angle in the bayou, which, at the turn of the century, also included a farmer's market, a small hotel with an open courtyard (the Brazos Court), and several breweries (Magnolia, American) that flourished until Prohibition intervened. The Houston Symphony offered its first concert on 21 June 1913 in the original Majestic, later Palace, Theater on Texas Avenue (Mauran & Russell, 1911), a vaudeville house that was first bridged over, then eventually swallowed up by the expansion of the Houston Chronicle Building. In 1931 the symphony moved to the budget Beaux-Arts *luxe* of the all-purpose City Auditorium (Mauran, Russell & Crowell, 1913), a hall so adaptable that it was converted into a school for the more than 500 children of servicemen stationed at Camp Logan during the First World War. In the early 1950s my parents watched the touring company of *South Pacific* in un-air-conditioned comfort in the auditorium, which was also the site of Friday night wrestling matches.

The symphony next moved to the air-conditioned Music Hall (Alfred C. Finn, 1937), a Public Works Administration project with a face only a commissar could love. Built in tandem with the Sam Houston Coliseum, it shared a connecting proscenium with the Coliseum as a concession to theatrical Calvinism. The Music Hall was remodeled in 1955 with the addition of a fan-shaped lobby, wedge-shaped auxiliary seating areas on either side, and a one-way stage by Hermon Lloyd and W. B. Morgan. So improved, it persisted as the city's venue of choice or default through most of my childhood. My parents eventually took me there to see a road company performance of *My Fair Lady* complete with revolving sets; on other nights, Leopold Stokowski presided over the Houston Symphony in his post-Philadelphia diminuendo. Next door, the Coliseum served up rodeos, revivals, wrestling matches, and, on the Fourth of July 1962 — as Tom Wolfe relates in *The Right Stuff* — 30 barbecued animals to the seven Mercury astronauts and a thundering horde of "5,000 businessmen, politicians and their better halves, fresh from the horrors of downtown in July."[2] Also on the menu was the fan dancing of sexagenarian Sally Rand, then regularly engaged in stretching the envelope of occupational age discrimination at the Stork Club on Texas Avenue.

The 3,000-seat Jesse H. Jones Hall, shoehorned onto the former site of the City Auditorium in travertine-clad splendor by Caudill Rowlett Scott, replaced the Music Hall as the city's premiere venue in 1966. The construction cost of $6.6 million was contributed by Houston Endowment Inc., the philanthropic heir to Jones's fortune, which included considerable real estate holdings in the immediate vicinity. Jones Hall took in the Houston Symphony, the Houston Grand Opera (which had produced its inaugural season in the Music Hall in 1955), the Houston Ballet Foundation, and the Society for the Performing Arts (SPA), a nonprofit presenter formed to fill the gap left by the death of the impresaria Edna B. Saunders, who for many years was Houston's answer (telephonically as well as figuratively) to Sol Hurok.

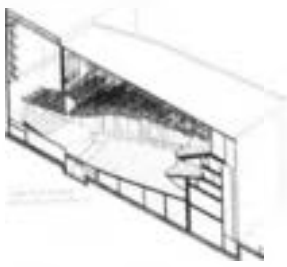
The functional characteristics of Jones Hall were determined by the theater consultant George Izenour; its design, otherwise the work of Charles E. Lawrence of Caudill Rowlett Scott, was schematically not unlike Le Corbusier's hall for the Palace of Assembly at Chandigarh (1956). The exterior also displayed an inadvertent 1930s Italian neoclassical-rationalist finesse, as comparison with Giuseppe Vacarro's Town Center Savings Bank for the town of Lugo (1935) discloses. Like its contemporary, the Astrodome, Jones Hall was a variable-configuration novelty, although, unlike the Dome, variation was achieved by "stopping down" the size of the interior to a mere 1,800 seats for greater intimacy by means of an elaborately counterweighted, though rarely used, movable ceiling.

As an accessory to Jones Hall and the aesthetically challenged Albert Thomas Convention Center one block west (Caudill Rowlett Scott, 1968), the city also built a three-level, 1,750-car underground parking garage lodged beneath the convention center and a residual one-block "plaza" separating Jones Hall and the convention center. Jones Hall Plaza (also designed by CRS) featured an awkward truncated pyramid mounted on some sides by backward-sloping steps and topped with lollipop-sized trees in a not very convincing attempt to disguise two double-lane entrance ramps to the parking below. The convention center followed a footprint promulgated by the econometricians of the now-defunct Stanford Research Institute in 1962 as part of a comprehensive plan for the Houston Civic Center. It spread over three city blocks at a cost of $12 million with the grace of a centipedal box-culvert, enveloping more than 200,000 square feet of clear-spanned exhibition space together with a lobby that doubled in its promoters' dreams as the National Space Hall of Fame. Not only was the convention center too small to be viable the day it opened, it was sufficiently hemmed in to preclude expansion except by spanning Buffalo Bayou, as the farmer's market that once occupied part of its site had managed to do. Albert Thomas was vacated upon completion of the George R. Brown Convention Center on the east side of downtown in 1987, only later to become the unlikely object of one of the most costly preservation efforts ever contemplated within the city limits.

The Alley Theatre, a small but accomplished repertory company formed in 1947, for years made do in a converted electric-fan factory on Berry Street across from a pink-tableclothed trattoria called Portofino, an early and symbiotically positioned outpost of valet parking in the city. In 1968 the Alley moved downtown into striking if improbably castellated new quarters designed by Ulrich Franzen on the north side of Jones Hall Plaza. Two-thirds of the $3 million construction cost of the new building was provided by the Ford Foundation as part of a program to aid and abet the proliferation of regional theater; the site — three-quarters of a block — was donated by Houston

Savings Bank for the Town Center, Lago, Italy, Giuseppe Vaccaro, architect, 1935.

Jesse H. Jones Hall, Caudill Rowlett Scott, architects, 1966.



Cutaway drawing of Jones Hall showing adjustable ceiling from George C. Izenour, *Theater Technology*, McGraw-Hill, 1988.

Map of Theater District.

1 Wortham Theater Center
2 Alley Theater
3 Jones Hall
4 Jones Hall Plaza
5 Bayou Place
6 Music Hall
7 Coliseum

Smashing pumpkin: Cecilia Bartoli gets out of the house in the title role of *La Cenerentola*, video-fed 10 November 1995 to spectators in Ray C. Fish Plaza in front of Gus S. Wortham Theater Center, Morris Aubry Architects, 1987.

Endowment. The Alley's inner workings were, as in the case of its neighbor, Jones Hall, masterminded by George Izenour. Its special features included a lighting system controlled by an analog digital computer using "stapled cards rather than the hole-punch varitey" and ergonomically accommodating chairs specially designed in the Electro-Mechanical Laboratory of the Yale School of Drama. The 800-seat main theater was conceived as a "multi-genre" stage with caliperlike extensions embracing the sides of the fan-shaped seating area, a peripheral detail appropriated by Nina Vance, the Alley's founder and director, from the runways of Japanese Noh drama.[3] When plans were first published, the building was described as "programmed to attract pedestrians during non-theater hours. An arcade running through the building will house stores, an inexpensive restaurant, and a cafe. The large-scale elements of the building [i.e., the castle turrets] having been placed on the side of the freeway, serve to attract the attention of the approaching motorist from a considerable distance. In addition, a drive-in box office has been provided."[4]

The Alley also included a smaller, 300-seat arena stage in the basement replicating the Berry Street location sans four-poster columns, where my better half and I watched Spalding Gray drink pitchers full of water while dilating on the trauma of home ownership. But the shops and eating places failed to materialize as promised. Whereas the Berry Street location had managed a marquee of sorts, Franzen made no such undignified provision, even though Jones Hall was endowed with a demure backlit signboard ["PDQ Bach . . . Tonite . . . 8 P.M. . . Don't Fuguet!"]. The Alley management soon took to slipcovering the southeast ramparts with banners advertising events ["*Greater Tuna* — Limited Engagement — Dolphin Friendly"] and the names and trademarks of patrons, corporate and otherwise.

By the mid-1970s, Jones Hall could no longer satisfy the demand for performance dates generated by the symphony, opera, ballet, and SPA. A Lyric Theater Foundation was chartered to break the seat jam, beginning with a campaign to spread the news that the city's theatrical resources compared unfavorably with those of Newark, New Jersey, locally esteemed as the hub of People Express. Philip Johnson, whose experience included the design of the New York State Theater in Lincoln Center (1964) for the New York City Opera and the New York City Ballet, prepared an initial scheme in 1978 for a two-theater complex on two bayou-side blocks the city owned touching the northwest corner of Jones Hall Plaza.[5] His generic proposal, tentatively following the Alley's cue, was a jumble of robust, round-cornered towers with intermittent boxes for lobbies and auditoriums. The smaller theater — included as a venue for "community" organizations to make the project more palatable to the City Council (which would have to approve the allocation of the site to the theater project) — was placed on the block tangential to Jones Hall Plaza. The larger house occupied the more distant block, where it had room to accommodate full side as well as back stages like those of the Metropolitan Opera House in Lincoln Center. A common lobby spanned Prairie Avenue — a sacrosanct outbound conduit to the suburbs of near west Houston — while a stepped entrance beckoned from the complex's toehold on Jones Hall Plaza. The estimated cost of $100 million, however, precipitated a case of sticker shock that purportedly cost the architects the commission.

As ultimately configured (and built for $72 million) according to the plans of Morris Aubry Architects, 1979–87, the Wortham Theater Center disposes its two houses, the 2,225-seat Brown Theater and the 1,102-seat Cullen Theater, side by side on the block farther from Jones Hall Plaza, with the stage loading docks backing onto Preston Avenue along the north side of the block.[6] The Siamese-twin arrangement of the two houses, following the less exalted example of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, is achieved at the expense of a second full side stage and conventionally deep backstage for the opera house, so that, for example, Air Force One cannot enter stage left and then exit stage right for *Nixon in China*, but must practice the deception of emulating the helicopter in *Miss Saigon*. The block itself is almost completely filled by the stage and audience areas, causing the ceremonial entrance and principal lobby to be forced over Prairie Avenue and onto the block closer to Jones Hall Plaza, assuming the shape of a peninsula in plan and a (partially escalatored) stile in section.

The entrance to the lobby is marked by a supercolossal, round-arched opening on the scale of that of Paul Bonatz's Stuttgart train station (1928), but derived, according to the architects, from the eleventh-century Benedictine abbey church at Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire. This dominant glazed aperture stares across the leftover part of the site into the side wall and loading docks of the former Albert Thomas Convention Center. The formidable bulk of the theater block is

Sidewalk scene, Jones Hall Plaza, with preparations for a Party on the Plaza, 23 May 1996. Alley Theatre (Ulrich Franzen, architect, 1968) can be seen with banners in background.

Tundra and lighting: A wider view of the sidewalk in front of Jones Hall iced for filming of *Evening Star*, 12 December 1995.

solidly clad in dark brown brick except for a few slit windows serving offices along the backstage side and granite trimwork around the base. The brick veneer extends across the bridge and onto the main entrance face, pausing for an occasional large window, such as the pair that penetrate either side of the lobby bridge. A freestanding, lowriding, backlit signboard is planted on the east side of the plaza in lieu of a marquee, while a phalanx of six large, copper-colored, immobile metal balls keeps stretch limos at bay. By virtue of its somewhat sheltered sidewise orientation, the plaza provided a serviceable setting for trill seekers to take in the free outdoor simulcast of last fall's production of *La Cenerentola* with Cecilia Bartoli, but it is seldom so happily engaged.

The Wortham has proved an undoubted boon to the operation of the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet, as well as the Society for the Performing Arts and Da Camera, a more recently formed chamber music and recital presentor. But its architectural and urbanistic qualities remain problematic, as Ann Holmes and Stephen Fox have pointed out.[7] One can rationalize its deficiencies, as Carl Cunningham attempted in the *Houston Post* by observing that "the world is full of great-big, chunky-looking, utilitarian opera houses. That's the nature of the beast."[8] But to arrive at this consolation, one must ignore instances where large, unwieldy houses have defused the problem of monumentality altogether through the deus ex machina of hybrid programs — as in the case of Schinkel's projected theater for the merchant city of Hamburg (1825–27), with its perimeter bank of offices and street-level boutiques; of Adler and Sullivan's steadfast Chicago Auditorium, wrapped in a thick skin of hotel rooms and offices (1886–89); of William B. Tuthill's Carnegie Hall, mingled with the studios and offices of Henry J. Hardenbergh's companion tower (1891, 1894); and of J. C. Cady's original Metropolitan Opera House (1883), which contained both commercial space and an apartment hotel.[9]

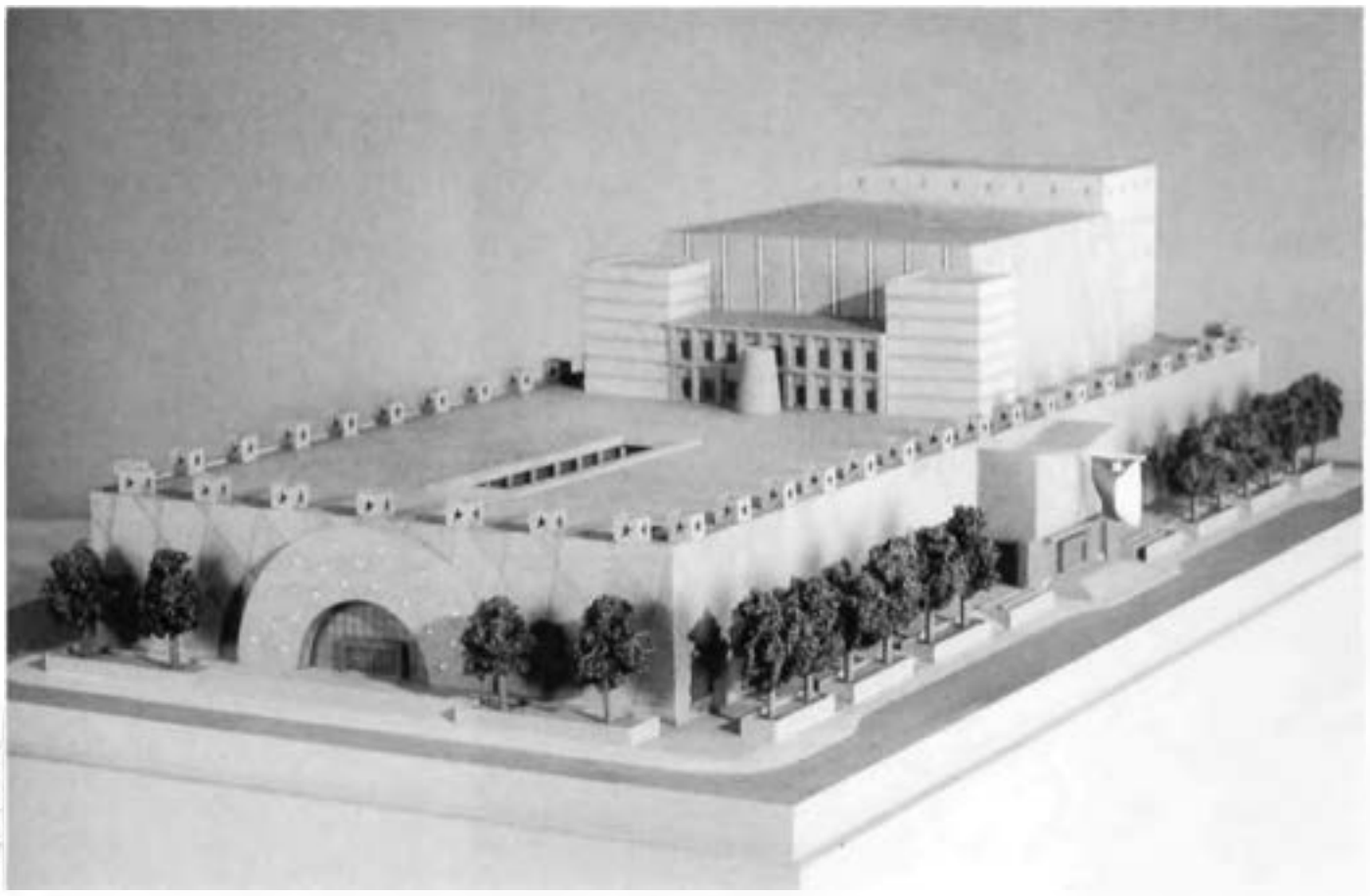
Perhaps something of the same sort would suffice as a way of both amending the Wortham and providing a modest stream of income by "filling out" or "in" the site with uses that would contribute some street life to the district. The rebirth of the small Lancaster (nee Auditorium) Hotel at the corner connecting Jones Hall and the Alley and the conversion last year of the Hogg Building, another block away, to residential apartments already suggest that the neighborhood is able to reward such entrepreneurship, at least in small doses, as does the success of Charley's 517 restaurant around the corner from the Lancaster and Birraporetti's in the garage behind the Alley Theatre.

To return to Jones Hall Plaza, another less-than-ideal multipurpose fixture of the district that, even so, shows occasional signs of life and transformational aptitude: bereft as it is, the plaza was the site that Central Houston Inc. — a special-purpose downtown improvement association — fixed on for its Thursday-evening block parties for lonely urban professionals [Single Female Accountant seeks Single/Divorced Male Arbitrageur to enjoy endlit sppts, smmr cruises, Wll St Jrnl — no hostile takeovers, shared modems or debit cards]. This feat of matchmaking also brought the portable-toilet industry to the district on a regular basis. The plaza proved no less compatible with the installation in October 1987 of *luminaria* — intricately contrived displays of nightlighting produced by the Italian Ministry of Tourism and Performing Arts. This special effect was one-upped in December 1995 by the thin fringe of snow manufactured across the street for the filming of *Evening Star*, Larry McMurtry's sequel to *Terms of Endearment*, in which the colonnade of Jones Hall was made to simulate a wintry Lincoln Center.[10]

Plazas are not something most Americans — let alone Houstonians — take to gladly. As Paige Rense, the long-running editor of *Architectural Digest* and not one to be easily outfauxed, observed, there should "be a law requiring that the person who invented concrete pedestrian plazas get his [or her] head examined. Walking across those expanses of hot, glaring concrete is one of the most alienating things imaginable. . . . The shadeless, sickly trees are particularly depressing, sticking up through the pavement. But I do feel a certain comradeship with them as fellow living things: I greet them across the plaza as though they had arrived in the land of concrete on the same space-ship with me."[11] William Whyte, whose voyeuristic fascination with the public life of small urban spaces made bedfellows of one-way-mirror, time-lapse photography and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, offered a similar view of the plaza at Lincoln Center, originally to have been planted with large trees, graphically depicted by Hugh Ferris but ultimately clearcut by Robert Moses as a cost-saving move before ground was broken for the plaza and garage below. "The loss was a great one," Whyte contended, for notwithstanding the plaza's appeal at night, "during the day it is a glare box, sometimes a virtual oven, and with umpteen thousands of feet of travertine bouncing light, footcandle readings are extraordinary." As a consultant, Whyte recommended retrofitting the plaza with trees of sufficient size to make possible daytime use. Philip Johnson provided sketches to demonstrate the practicability of the scheme, but in the end Whyte's trees fell victim "to the cost of a new granite floor."[12]

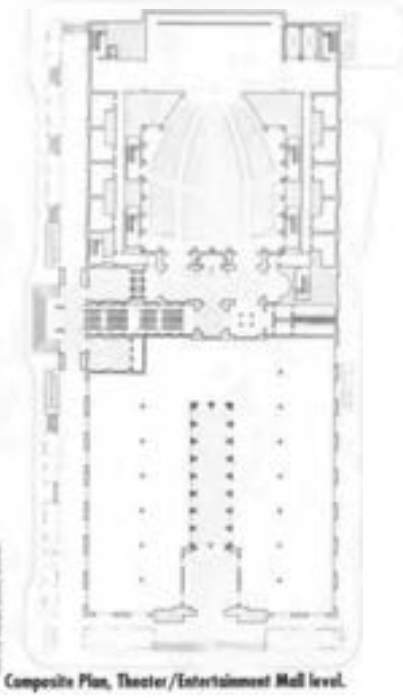
Jones Hall Plaza — riven by parking ramps, exposed on all four sides to traffic, and irradiated by the Texas sun — is more incorrigible but arguably still this side of hopeless. With adequate funding one or both of the ramps could be relocated to the near side of the former Albert Thomas Convention Center, thereby eliminating the need for the pyramidstile and allowing a cascade of steps to descend more or less directly the ten or so feet from the site's high southeast corner to the low point diagonally across from the Wortham Center. Adequate below-grade accommodations for large trees — if trees are wanted — could be gouged from the recesses of the garage, even at the cost of a few score parking places. Water features might be introduced as well, adding blue noise to muffle the sounds of traffic. The stubby ventilation shafts that presently stake out the four corners of the plaza could also be moved offsite with some creative rerouting of ducts and fans. Disencumbering the site and expanding its basic capabilities are preconditions, not substitutes, for the application of the talents of a designer who could make Jones Hall Plaza perform as well as the companies around it do.

In a well-meaning if inherently strained attempt to capitalize on the "festival market" phenomenon pioneered by Benjamin Thompson and James Rouse for the salvation of Boston's venerable Quincy Market, the administration of Mayor Kathryn J. Whitmire solicited proposals from developers in 1988 hoping to wring similar benefits from the Albert Thomas Convention Center. Whitmire's previous experience in joint-venture commercial development was



Bayou Place Theater conversion of Albert Thomas Convention Center (project), Michael Graves, architect, 1992. Model looking west.

Bayou Place Theater project, section.



Composite Plan, Theater/Entertainment Mall level.

Albert Thomas Convention Center and James Hall Plaza, Caudill Rowlett Scott, 1968, aerial perspective.

limited to the already troubled El Mercado project near the northeast corner of downtown, and few developers bothered to submit proposals. The Rouse Company passed, among others, and the dubious concession was granted to Century Development and George Lucas's Skywalker Development corporations. Century/Skywalker proposed a vaguely futuristic entertainment mall called Bayou Walk, a landlocked pleasure pier designed by Jon Jerde of San Diego, whose experience included Horton Plaza in downtown San Diego and City Walk at Universal City Studios in Los Angeles.[13]

In the months that followed, Century/Skywalker was unable to attract financing and withdrew. David Cordish, a Baltimore-based runner-up in the Albert Thomas imitation of "Jeopardy" and developer of similar attractions in Salt Lake City, Detroit, Niagara Falls, and Charleston, South Carolina, was given the opportunity to proceed in late 1991, during the final days of the Whitmire administration. In 1992 Pace Entertainment Corportion, a Houston-based producer of attractions from musical theater to tractor pulls, commissioned Michael Graves to devise a plan to convert the east and middle blocks of the exhibition hall into a small commercial arcade and a 3,000-seat, super-size "Broadway-type" house for musicals. Graves's plans served as the basis for what proved to be unfruitful negotiations between Pace as a prospective prime tenant, and Cordish. Among the selling points of the scheme, aside from its Harlequinesque conflation of commedia dell' arte and Texanic totems, was "a VIP loge level between the orchestra and upper balcony" that could be marketed like luxury suites are at sports arenas.[14] Graves's scheme also eliminated the west block of Albert Thomas, along with an elevated connecting section over Bagby Street, as had been recommended in a study prepared for Central Houston Inc. by Dennis Frenchman in 1984.[15]

Whitmire's successor as mayor, Bob Lanier, and the city controller, George Greanias, questioned, among other things, the terms extended to Cordish for the Albert Thomas venture as overly generous, but to no avail. After a prolonged period of hesitation, Cordish proceeded to make good his 60-year lease by announcing plans in March 1995 to develop an entertainment mall featuring a country-western "anchor" nightclub in the approximate location of Graves's theater, to be operated as part of a chain called Denim and Diamonds by the Graham Brothers of Odessa, Texas, and prefaced by a gantlet of 12 subvenues and several theme restaurants where Graves's plan had indicated a similar arcade. Cordish's arcade was inauspiciously labeled "Bourbon Street" in the final plans for the project prepared by Luis Bodmer.[16] The Graham Brothers opted out of the agreement in early 1996, causing a previously scheduled August 1996 opening to be postponed while Cordish sought another prime tenant and co-investor.[17] At that point Cordish was reported to have spent $4 million toward what was publicized as a $22 million project. With no other financing in sight, he renegotiated the terms of the lease in May 1996 to secure $8 million of direct city financing in return for substantial revenue "give-backs" — assuming there might someday be positive cash flow to share.[18]

For the time being, Cordish's none-too-transformative remodeling of Albert Thomas will continue according to essentially the same formula. Rather than look to the revival of the Covent Garden Market or some other remotely consonant model that might exploit an overlooked market niche, Cordish has chosen to replicate, on a smaller scale and with parking extra, the already abundant honky-tonk delights of the Richmond Strip. Whatever the merits of this grand ol' multiplex, even the best stomping grounds for urban cowpersons are remarkably transitory propositions, witness Gilley's (now playing to tour buses in Branson, Missouri) and the continual turnover on Richmond. All of which suggests that *Clueless* rather than *Urban Cowboy* may have provided the cinematic inspiration for Cordish's makeover, and that the city may well have flushed another $8 million into the bayou in a futile attempt to avoid repossessing Albert Thomas in its asbestos-abated reincarnation.

The bayou edge of the Theater District has already been altered by the partial development of Sesquicentennial Park, a two-phase, public-private project orchestrated by Central Houston Inc. following a design won in a competition (sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance) by TeamHOU (Guy Hagstette, John Lemr, and Robert Liner with David Calkins) in 1986.[19] The second phase, now under construction, includes the landscaping of a slender strip along the west wall of the Wortham Theater Center and the entire block immediately to the north of the Wortham. Mel Chin and Dean Ruck have been selected to provide additional embellishments through the art-in-public-places program of the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.

In May 1996, Mayor Lanier endorsed the plans of the Houston Music Hall Foundation to redevelop the site of the Music Hall and Coliseum at a cost of $60 million, to include a 2,700-seat theater and a smaller 700-seat hall.[20] The original plan had been to partition the site between a reconstituted Music Hall and a gambling casino that would replace the Coliseum — a pairing that recalls Charles Garnier's Theater and Casino at Monte Carlo (1878–82). The Texas Legislature, however, declined to pass enabling legislation, and all bets were put on hold long enough to discourage potential investors. In the latest scenario, Theater Under the Stars (TUTS), a nonprofit musical theater company that began operation in Miller Outdoor Theater in Hermann Park in 1968, will be the primary tenant, with the Society for the Performing Arts' Broadway Series, produced in association with Pace Entertainment, accounting for a substantial portion of the remaining dates. The smaller hall is to be used for children's programming and emerging companies. As luck would have it, a plaza also figures into the scheme, "possibly in the form of a grassy park," to set the complex back from Bagby Street and the not-so-grassy Tranquillity Park on the other side of Bagby (Charles Tapley Associates, 1979), which spreads across yet another city-owned underground parking garage. Funds are being raised and a short list of prospective architects has been settled on, though not made

"Plan recommendations to reinforce [Buffalo] bayou amenity corridor." Dennis Frenchman et al., *Design Plan for Downtown Houston*, Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc., August 1987.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Theaters of Balbus (left) and Marcellus (right), both 13 B.C., and neighboring architecture, with Tiber River in foreground.

public. The city expects to contribute approximately $1 million each year toward the project, a commitment that can be used to secure construction bonds.

The directors of the Music Hall Foundation have been afforded the opportunity to retain an architect of national or international distinction for a pair of theaters that will occupy a place of pride within the greater civic center at the edge of Buffalo Bayou Park, one of Houston's most appreciable, if freeway-scarred, legacies of the City Beautiful movement. But the problem is more than one of sifting through the right set of resumes — crucial as that will be. For although the site does offer sufficient room to accommodate all elements of the program without bridging streets or scrimping on wings, it is also four blocks removed from the main cluster of theaters around Jones Hall Plaza. This estrangement is compounded by the disposition of the ex-Albert Thomas Convention Center, the tail end of which effectively forecloses any direct communication between the proximate north edge of the Music Hall site and the rest of the Theater District via the bayou walk.

The bayou could in fact become the thread that gives a connective and scenic fluency to the district, like that enjoyed by the theaters of Balbus and Marcellus alongside the Tiber in Piranesi's reconstruction of ancient Rome. Such a strategy would require demolishing the west block of Albert Thomas and the section spanning Bagby, as earlier proposed by both Frenchman and Graves. Neither part figures in Cordish's immediate plans. The opening so gained could be redeveloped as a series of broad steps ascending from the bayou walk to the foyer of the new Music Hall. The theater and casino at Monte Carlo are approached from below in somewhat the same manner. This maneuver could be reinforced by developing an ampler loggia/sheltered promenade along the north side of Albert Thomas, extending the original attenuated peripteral arcade out into the zone once reserved for backing trailer trucks into loading docks. A bayou walk ascension to the new Music Hall would also provide a merciful exemption from the compulsion to produce a plaza of any kind; any residual inclination for public hospitality could be satisfied by the development of a congenial indoor space for casual assembly, comparable to Garnier's atrium at Monte Carlo or the wintergarden the architects of the Wortham considered at one point.

Before the Second World War, downtown Houston accounted for almost all the city's tall buildings, specialty retailing, and nonresidential hotels as well as its major performing halls. Today downtown enjoys a monopoly only of halls. If, as Jane Jacobs maintains, "the natural neighbors of halls are restaurants, bars, florist shops, studios, music shops, all sorts of interesting places," it is also the case that these cannot flourish on theatrical traffic alone without special nurturing, even subsidies, in the nine-to-five downtown of a spread-out city such as Houston has become.[21] Nor do the parking arrangements help much. "Even with the big-draw performance centers grouped together," Bruce Webb observed, "patrons slip in invisibly from underground parking lots and leave the same way, as though they were being delivered like city utilities in hidden conduits."[22]

Realizing that more intensive cultivation is necessary to convert the district to what it foresees as a "full service entertainment complex," a nonprofit coalition of Theater District interests sought to have the last Texas Legislature approve a rental-car tax that could be used in part for such a purpose. House Bill 2447, sponsored to that effect in the 74th session by Houston representative Garnet Coleman, did not pass. Inasmuch as this particular "vehicle" is now viewed as a potential means of financing a share of the recently proposed $625 million in new or improved sports arenas essential to retain the city's major-league bragging rights, other options may have to be explored.[23] Last year, the Theater District's resident companies drew in excess of 1.5 million paying customers, more than the Astros and the Oilers combined. None is threatening to leave Houston any time soon nor asking for heroic efforts to double season ticket sales or add more luxury boxes to shore up bottom lines. But neither are they just whistling *Don Giovanni* when it comes to the need for relatively modest levels of investment to help make the district's artificial turf user-friendly and economically fertile. In seeking to extend and actively promote the range of experiences the district offers, its proponents have come to the same realization Charles Moore did several decades ago in observing the workings of Disneyland: "You have to pay for the public life," whether you buy your tickets at an outer gate or not.[24] ★

1 Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas; or, a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (New York: Dix, Edwards, 1857), p. 361.

2 Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979), p. 298.

3 William C. Young, "Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas, Opened November 28, 1968," in *Documents of American Theater History*, vol. 2: *Famous American Playhouses, 1900–71* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), pp. 160–63.

4 "Alley: A Director's Dream," *Progressive Architecture*, October 1967, p. 172.

5 Stephen Fox, "A Report on the Wortham Theater Center," *Cite*, Winter 1984, p. 10.

6 Ibid., pp. 8–13.

7 Ann Holmes, "A Crazy Salad of Disappointment," *Houston Chronicle*, 21 July 1983; Fox, "Report." An appreciative if indelicately titled account of the Lyric Theater Foundation's fundraising success recently appeared in a Canadian newspaper: Robert Crew, "If They Can Do It: How Houston Put It All Together to Build An Opera/Ballet House," *Toronto Star*, 27 January 1996, pp. G1, G14.

8 Carl Cunningham, "Wortham Theater: Time and Needed Funds Are Running Short," *Houston Post*, 17 August 1983, pp. 1H, 11H.

9 In appraising Cady's Metropolitan, which stood at the northwest corner of Broadway and 39th, Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer wrote that it would "manifestly be unjust . . . to ask for monumental grandeur in [this] house, or even for an adequate degree of external expressiveness. We can only congratulate ourselves that we have got as much as we have — an honest, unaffected, scholarly, dignified pile, as well designed in mass as was possible under the circumstances." Van Rensselaer, "Recent Architecture in America, II: Public Buildings Continued," *Century*, July 1884, pp. 323–34.

10 Bruce Webb, "Illuminations of the Ephemeral City," *Cite*, Winter 1987, p. 28; Bruce Westbrook, "Snow in Houston? Wintry Movie Scene Shot Near Jones Hall," *Houston Chronicle*, 13 December 1995, pp. 1D, 11D. "The street scene shot outside Jones Hall required shutting down one block of Louisiana [Street] from around 5 AM until 10:30 AM. The crew arrived about 3 AM to prepare. The fake snow was made with crushed ice, although some snowy backgrounds were achieved by covering the ground with white cloths. . . . Cabs and limos were choreographed to roll up and down the block on cue, and extras bustled by on sidewalks carrying Christmas packages. A hot dog stand offered weiners, and a Salvation Army Santa sought donations. Director Robert Harling called it 'a typical New York City scene.'"

11 Paige Rense, quoted in Lisa Taylor, ed., *Urban Open Spaces* (New York: Rizzoli/Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 1979), p. 30.

12 William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (New York: Doubleday, 19888), pp. 136–37.

13 Bruce Webb, "Hollywood Does Houston," *Cite*, Spring 1989, p. 23.

14 "Bayou Place Theater, Houston, Texas, 1992," in Karen Nichols, Lisa Burke, and Patrick Burke, eds., *Michael Graves: Buildings and Projects, 1990–94* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), pp. 210–13.

15 David Frenchman et al., "Plan Recommendation to Reinforce Bayou Amenity Corridor," in Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc., *Design Plan for Downtown Houston* (1987), p. 14.

16 Barbara Mendel, "Complex to Give City New Gathering Place," *Houston Post*, 11 March 1995, pp. A1, A23.

17 Julie Mason, "Albert Thomas Redevelopment May Be Delayed," *Houston Chronicle*, 5 March 1996, pp. A11, A15.

18 Julie Mason, "Council OKs Amended Lease for Bayou Place," *Houston Chronicle*, 16 May 1996, p. A26.

19 John Pastier, "The Houston Sesquicentennial Park Design Competition," *Cite*, Fall 1986, pp. 8–11, 22.

20 Julie Mason, "Downtown Arts Facility Proposed: Both Music Hall, Coliseum Would Go," *Houston Chronicle*, 21 May 1996, pp. A1, A6. The alternative of building a new hall for the Houston Symphony and turning Jones Hall over to TUTS and Pace was raised in a subsequent letter to the editor of the *Chronicle* by a symphony musician. Such a hall would be better suited to the needs of an orchestra, as the letter suggested, and also less expensive if a traditional rectangular configuration like that of the Boston Symphony Hall were to be employed. Robert Deutsch, "New Hall for Symphony," *Houston Chronicle*, 26 May 1996, p. C3.

21 Jane Jacobs, quoted in Alexander Garvin, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995), p. 86.

22 Webb, "Illuminations," p. 28.

23 John Williams, "Stadiums May Put Bite on Public," *Houston Chronicle*, 21 May 1996, pp. A1, A6.

24 Charles Moore, "You Have to Pay for the Public Life," *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* 9/10 (1965), pp. 57–97.

Ruth Simmons, age eight, now President of Smith College.

My Fifth Ward

A recent visit to Houston's Fifth Ward after an absence of more than two decades brought back a torrent of memories of a childhood bountifully nourished by the spirit of this community. I grew up in Fifth Ward, from 1952 to 1963. I attended Atherton and Langston elementary schools, E. O. Smith Junior High School, and Phyllis Wheatley High School. In retracing the steps of my childhood, I returned to the foundation of a lifetime of expectations. Fifth Ward was a source of many proud memories during the years I spent away from Houston: of neighborliness and community, of help and hope. It saddens me to hear of Fifth Ward's present notoriety. I will always remember my neighborhood as it was for me during my childhood.

Fifth Ward was a place where my sisters and I walked to school, lingered at area convenience stores and ice cream and candy shops, and joined other children in finding shortcuts for our incessant meanderings. This was a neighborhood that offered opportunities to live fully and to learn. School activities were supplemented by community centers, such as Hester House, which introduced many children to the arts and cultural activities. Our Sundays were as full as our weekdays, spent in one of the wonderful houses of worship that were plentiful in the area.

The houses of Fifth Ward were amazingly diverse in the fifties. For some years, my family lived in a large white house that was embraced by a capacious semicircular veranda. Beginning at the front door and wrapping around the right side of the house, this porch was gracious and welcoming; I loved to sit there and watch the world. A friend lived in a great Victorian-style house not far from Liberty Road — a ready backdrop for our childish ghost stories. There were also the endless square, one-story frame houses — two rooms on the right and two on the left — that seemed to be home to most of the families of Fifth Ward.

This was my neighborhood. While I know now that it was one of the most economically deprived areas of Houston, as a child I saw Fifth Ward as a place to belong, a place with an identity, a place that inspired loyalty. For my family, refugees from East Texas sharecropping, it was a place promising hope. Everything about it made us feel that we belonged somewhere in the world: the predictable geometry of its streets, the serendipity of its façades, the families who had found a home there over the years assured us that this was a place we could come to know and understand. To my amazement, I find I rarely ventured outside of Fifth Ward. All my needs were met there. The spirit of that place and time has remained steadfastly with me over the decades. *Ruth J. Simmons*

Fresh Start Community Garden, on the southwestern corner of Mowry and Lorraine.

Photo: Rob Holmes © 1996

DAVID THEIS

FIFTH WARD

During last September's punishing heat wave, I was driving through Fifth Ward on the north side of Buffalo Bayou in search of artist Jesse Lott's handmade, pie-shaped, wire-mesh-walled workshop at the corner of Lyons and Opelousas. When I finally spied it I pulled over, already tantalized from the street by the outsized metal figures I could see through the mesh, such as one that looked like an African conjurer from the 21st century.

But the thrill was gone when I felt the right tires of my old VW van sink quickly and definitively into a mystery quagmire. I had thought I was stopping on a damp stretch of grass, but suddenly I was down to my axle in muck. I got out on that nearly abandoned stretch of Lyons, once one of the most celebrated streets of all black America, and wondered if I hadn't sunk into some metaphor for America's urban ills.

The green weeds along the deserted street were waist high, and almost every building in sight was boarded over. I walked down the street to a freestanding pay phone (it worked!) in front of the long-since-abandoned Atlas Radio and Record Shop, its old Art Deco sign hanging from the nearly collapsed building. The sign was missing a few letters but retained a shadow of its old class. As I waited for Triple A, I sought shade beneath the tree-high weeds where McCall Street had once intersected Lyons. I say "once" because a literal urban jungle has completely claimed the street. All that remains is a street sign proclaiming the 1300 block and a useless stop sign facing Lyons. Had anyone *ever* driven a car through these woods?

Much later, after the tow truck pulled my van out of the ooze, I thought that I had my story. *Fifth Ward wilts under the intense sun of neglect. Former liveliness now a distant memory.* In other words, I would write a piece celebrating Fifth Ward's colorful past, describing how, as community activist Bob Lee puts it, "when black people got off the bus in Houston, they headed straight for Lyons Avenue. It was Houston's 125th Street [Harlem's main drag]." In the 1940s and 1950s, the Club Matinee was, Lee said, "Houston's Apollo Theater," and Lyons Avenue was so busy that "you had to walk in the street because the sidewalk was too crowded." My story would be the contrast between the Fifth's former glory and its current cheerless state.

But that's not the story. Fifth Ward is deceiving to a stranger. I'm glad I kept driving around talking to people, because I soon learned that my first impression, perhaps inevitable given the area's physical decay, was facile. The internal drive to "Keep Five Alive," as community activists exhort, is too strong to be ignored. Fifth Ward is making a serious effort to reclaim itself from the weeds.

Official neglect is nothing new here. Fifth Ward was formed by urban pioneers who began moving in after the Civil War. In 1874 residents of the "City North of Houston" petitioned to be allowed to secede, complaining that the ward was "mudbound and without public utilities."[1] Historically Fifth Ward was racially mixed, an unusually cosmopolitan neighborhood of Jews, Italians, Irish, Asians, and African Americans living together in some degree of harmony. In 1870 there were 561 whites living in Fifth Ward and 578 blacks.[2] Nearby rail yards and sawmills attracted working folk, while shopkeepers of various backgrounds tended to live either above or behind their stores.

After a second secession attempt, Fifth Ward was awarded a few city buses and

Looking south under the Elysian Street viaduct, Elysian at Lyons Avenue.

Pleasant Grove Church

With its 5,000-seat circular sanctuary topped by a geodesic roof, Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church is the Astrodome of Fifth Ward churches. Located on Jensen Drive near Interstate 10, Pleasant Grove is one of the largest predominantly black churches in the South. Partially because of the church's age — 130 years — and partially because of its nearly 20 years of televised services, Pleasant Grove claims an enrollment of 16,000 congregants from all over greater Houston. The church's numerous programs include one that has been widely imitated: half-day GED and remedial classes for dropouts, suspended or expelled students, and juvenile offenders, offered in association with the Houston Independent School District.

The sanctuary's stuccoed exterior is painted a crisp Islamic white and pinstriped with narrow stained-glass windows. According to assistant pastor Sheldon Jackson, the circular floor plan was a longtime dream of the head pastor — Jackson's father, Charles L. Jackson assumed the post from his uncle, the Reverend A. A. McCardell, Sr., who in the 1950s began Pleasant Grove's aggressive construction program with 45 new classrooms and initiated a street crusade to proselytize among the criminal element on Lyons Avenue. Completed in 1978, the dream sanctuary was originally separated from the earlier church building, a traditional limestone edifice, by a small street. Pleasant Grove purchased the street in the early nineties and built a tinted-glass gymnasium that links the two older structures, creating a motley trinity of styles. The sanctuary, designed by California architect Frederick Booker, originally had a butterfly roof of wood beams sheltered by acrylic-coated foam. On Good Friday 1994, while the roof was undergoing drastic repairs, a fire devastated the heavy structure. Working day and night, church members made sure an Easter service would be possible. The roof was replaced with a much lighter geodesic dome featuring central skylights. Sheldon Jackson says of the church's plan that the sanctuary is used for "inspiration," the former sanctuary "education," and the gymnasium "recreation." Future plans include an AIDS hospice ("medication"), followed by a highrise for seniors and the homeless ("relaxation"), both of which will be built on nearby church land. ***Shalla Dewan***

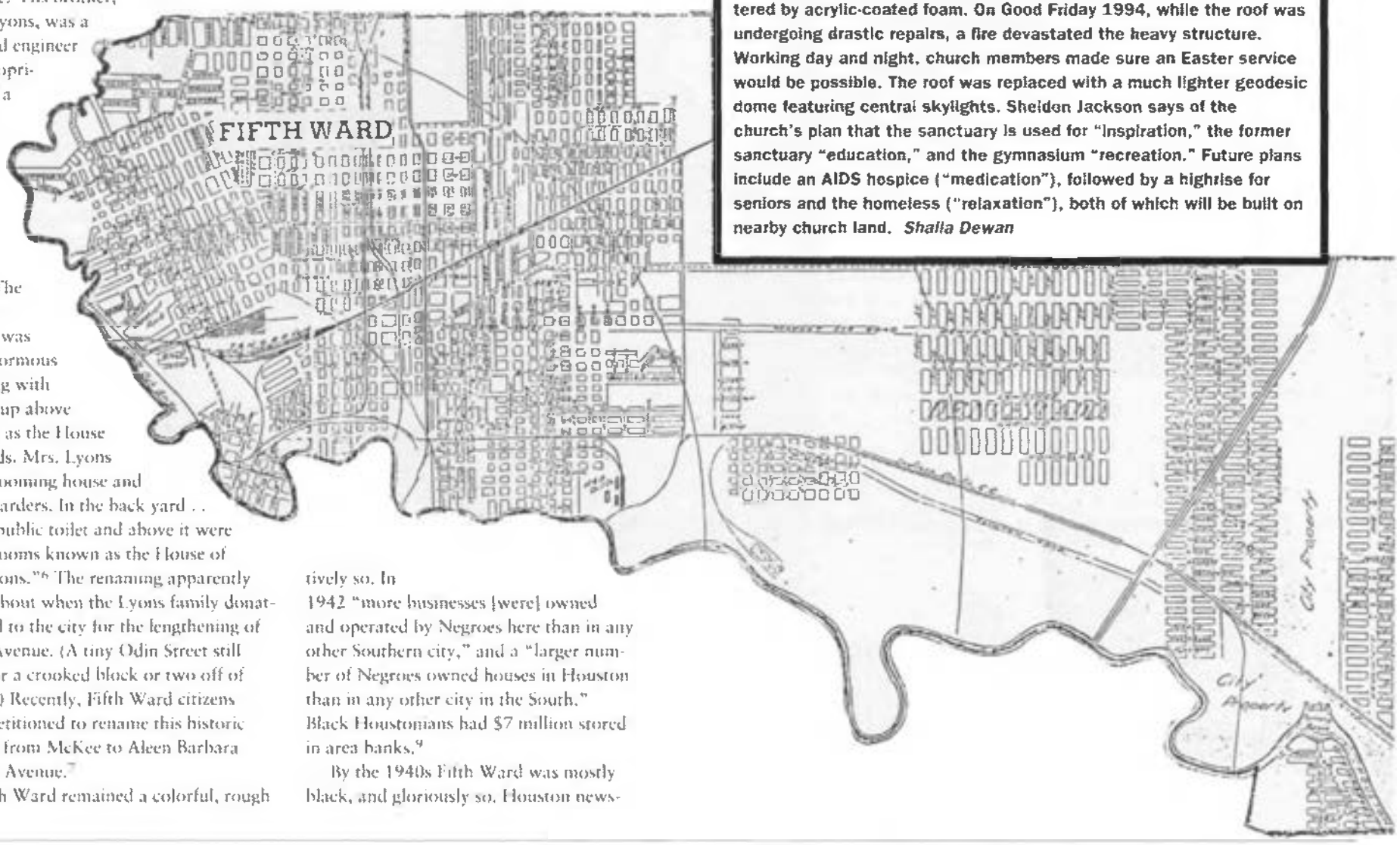
an order for construction of a bridge across Buffalo Bayou at the foot of San Jacinto.[3] But the paucity of services persisted. In 1891 a fire broke out at the Phoenix Lumber Mill that "swept through twenty acres of urban property and shut out the sun with its smoke."[4] The Houston Water Works' Fifth Ward pipes were too small to provide firemen with adequate pressure, evidence that the city continued to view the ward as a stepchild. The following year, Fifth Ward resident John T. Browne was elected mayor of Houston, bringing new promise to the underserved area.

Lyons Avenue was originally known as Odin Avenue, named for the first Roman Catholic bishop of Texas, Bishop Jean-Marie Odin.[5] In 1894 the street was renamed for the Lyons family. Irishman Michael Lyons was married to Elizabeth, the daughter of Mayor Browne. His brother, John Lyons, was a railroad engineer and proprietor of a saloon at the corner of Odin and Carr. The Lyons House was "an enormous building with rooms up above known as the House of Lords. Mrs. Lyons ran a rooming house and had boarders. In the back yard . . was a public toilet and above it were more rooms known as the House of Commons."[6] The renaming apparently came about when the Lyons family donated land to the city for the lengthening of Odin Avenue. (A tiny Odin Street still runs for a crooked block or two off of Lyons.) Recently, Fifth Ward citizens have petitioned to rename this historic stretch from McKee to Aleen Barbara Jordan Avenue.[7]

Fifth Ward remained a colorful, rough and-ready neighborhood through the turn of the century. In 1905 the city passed a law prohibiting "any male person" from making "goo-goo eyes" at members of the opposite sex. That same year, Carry Nation paid a visit to the "Carry Nation Saloon" in Fifth Ward at Wood and Willow and chopped the place up, as she had warned Barkeep O'Brien she would if he didn't take her name off his sign.[8]

After World War I, the great migration of Southern blacks from the countryside to the cities affected Fifth Ward's racial makeup. As blacks moved in, whites moved out. However, African Americans prospered in Houston, at least comparatively so. In 1942 "more businesses [were] owned and operated by Negroes here than in any other Southern city," and a "larger number of Negroes owned houses in Houston than in any other city in the South." Black Houstonians had $7 million stored in area banks.[9]

By the 1940s Fifth Ward was mostly black, and gloriously so. Houston news-



Kelly Village

Nestled up against the north side of I-10, Kelly Village is a grid of green lawns, tidy sidewalks and 44 simple masonry buildings with brick veneer. Built in 1939, many of the 333 one- to four-bedroom units have been renovated since 1988. Like the Housing Authority of the City of Houston's other 14 housing developments, Kelly Village will soon become a gated community. A controlled-access wrought-iron fence will, the housing authority hopes, deter drug dealers and other criminals who come to Kelly Village to do business. "It's not the residents who are dealing drugs and all that," says resident Mae Nell Farrow. "That's why nothing can be done about it. They [the dealers] don't live here."

Farrow, who has been at Kelly Village since 1988, is president of the development's resident leadership organization, which oversees the community center and programs activities for youth. She is also president of the new Kelly Village Resident Management Corporation, formed after the housing complex received a $100,000 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grant to explore entrepreneurial opportunities. Kelly Village is funding training for a catering program, now headquartered at the nearby Kennedy Place development because Kelly's kitchen was not up to code. Residents from any housing project can participate in the training project. The corporation also plans to start a business service center to provide copy and fax machines along with resumé and notary services to customers who would otherwise have to trek downtown.
Shalla Dewan

Fixer-upper: Bystanders, workers, and organizers of the De Luxe exhibition, summer 1971. Standing: second from right, Mickey Leland; fifth from right, Helen Winkler-Fosdick. Below: The De Luxe, minus marquee, empty and for sale, 1996.

paper columnist Sig Byrd described the spot where I had forlornly called the tow truck: "The Corner of Lyons and Hill: the heavy traffic clogging Lyons Avenue, main cut of the Fifth Ward, . . . the cats lounging in front of the Atlas Radio and Record Shop, just across the avenue, Dualeh the Holy Man, with his long black beard, his swallowtail coat, and his satchel of bottles filled with dark brown liquids . . ." Another story told of a legendary disk jockey. "Perched at the corner of Lyons and Hill in the early 1940s, 'Stan the Man' . . . broadcast live and recorded everything happening among the 4,000 people who lived within one square mile of the Roxy."[10]

No doubt acclaimed detective novelist Walter Mosley was thinking of this potent atmosphere when he decided that his hero, P. I. "Easy" Rawlins, would hail from Fifth Ward. In his novel *Black Betty*, the Los Angeles-based Rawlins recalls seeing the infamous Betty back in Houston. "I had seen her sashaying down the wooden sidewalks of Houston's Fifth Ward. I was a raggedy twelve-year old and she was more woman than I had ever seen in one place."

My on-the-street Fifth Ward education began a few days later, when Bob Lee and Patricia Prather met me at Frenchy's Chicken at the Waco exit of Interstate 10. A former student of Saul Alinsky, Lee is the brother of county commissioner El Franco Lee. Bob Lee, by profession a sociologist with the Harris County Hospital District, is also a community activist and the self-proclaimed mayor of Fifth Ward. He and Prather, who has written a biography of Joshua Houston, former slave and manservant to Sam Houston, formed the Texas Trailblazers, an organization dedicated to unearthing the stories of Houston's prominent early African Americans.

For more than an hour the ebullient Lee and the demure Prather recounted the history of their neighborhood and famous Fifth Warders from Barbara Jordan to Mickey Leland. Constance Houston Thompson, known as Miss Houston, was the granddaughter of Joshua Houston and perhaps the leading member of the ward's black bourgeoisie. The list went on: jazz greats Illinois Jacquet and Eddy "Cleanhead" Vinson; George Foreman; and Dr. Ruth J. Simmons, president of Smith College (see sidebar, p. 26).

Prather, Lee, and I were only scheduled for an hour's interview, but, as I had

Basic Meal Groups: "The Diner," 1818 Jensen Drive.

hoped, excitement led to a tour offer. So I hopped into Lee's car and we set out, Lee and Prather intent on showing off their Fifth Ward.

Lee pointed out the old hot spots: the vacant lot where the Club Matinee once stood, and, across the street, the abandoned De Luxe Theater. He remembered when John de Menil reopened the De Luxe to serve as an art exhibition hall. According to Lee, he, El Franco Lee, and Mickey Leland were supposed to be the guiding lights of the new De Luxe, "but we were too young to understand what John de Menil was doing. We couldn't carry that idea," and the project went under. Now, the 23,255-square-foot De Luxe is up for sale for $50,000. It is rated as a number four building, one step up from the bottom of the scale.

Lee and Prather pointed out the site of Lee's mother's business, Lee's Congo Club, as well as the grocery store at Benson and Lyons, above which Barbara Jordan had her first law office. Jordan's old house is long gone. "I was in awe of Barbara Jordan," Lee said. "In those days there were no women lawyers or doctors. But there she was, carrying her briefcase."

Prather showed me the Lonnie Smith House at 4600 Noble. Smith was a local dentist who sued to open the Texas Democratic primary to black voters, and, with the help of Thurgood Marshall, took his case to the Supreme Court in 1944 and won. "I can just imagine Marshall and Mr. Smith sitting in there, mapping out their strategy," Prather said.

We passed Hester House, a community service organization that takes care of preschoolers and senior citizens alike. Prather became an award-winning swimmer in its pool, and George Foreman had his first boxing lessons there. The 50-year-old Hester House is an anchor point for the ward. Its workers typically provide some 500 people with emergency food supplies each month. They take school children on Texas history bus tours that last summer included a meeting with Governor Bush at the Governor's Mansion in Austin. The center is home to a strong senior citizens' group. The elders are still the backbone of the community, providing the nucleus that holds Fifth Ward together in spite of its apparent problems, (see sidebar, p. 31).

I noticed that Fifth Ward was seriously short on restaurants, bars, and other public gathering places. Prather and Lee agreed, acknowledging that even the area's most integral restaurants, the Lockwood Inn and Phyllis's, bit the dust in recent years. Prather's expression was pained as she recounted how the Lockwood burned in spring 1995 — "Now I don't have any place to take my tours!" Phyllis Jarman's restaurant was the most elegant soul-food restaurant in town until the widening of Highway 59 in the late 1980s shut her down.

Even more painful memories lay ahead. St. Elizabeth Hospital, where many current residents of Fifth Ward were born, is now a drug rehabilitation center. For Prather and Lee, the tour's low point came at "Miss Houston's" old home at 1303 Bayou. A tidy Victorian house with a wraparound porch, Miss Houston's housed visiting black dignitaries such as Duke Ellington during the long years when respectable hotels were segregated. Miss Houston hoped the house would become an African-American museum upon her death. With steady vision, Lee and Prather tried to comply with her wishes. But when the

The Fan Man

When folk artist Bob Harper, a.k.a. the Fan Man, died last December, he left behind the beginnings of a wonderful new art environment on Altoona in Fifth Ward. His original "Third World" creation was in Third Ward, but after the fire that killed his mother, destroyed his house, and leveled his original environment, Harper moved to Fifth Ward to be closer to his brother Quincy and to rent a house from him. Harper commuted from Fifth Ward to Third in order to rebuild his original site, but during his spare time he began decorating his Fifth Ward home as well. After Harper (who was already diagnosed with lung cancer) was evicted from the Third Ward site last fall, the Orange Show helped him move his striking assemblages made from skis, Oscar de la Renta signs, abandoned televisions, and the other debris of our disposable society — as well as his signature fans. Harper began building in earnest on his Fifth Ward lot, and worked almost up to the end. For now, at least, his Fifth Ward environment is one of Houston's neighborhood treasures. ***David Theis***

Houston Recovery Campus

After 40 years of operation, St. Elizabeth Hospital shut down in 1985, unable to fill its beds. When attempts to revive the building failed, it seemed as if the owners, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, would have to close the doors for good. But in 1991 a $27 million federal grant gave St. Elizabeth a new lease on life — as a free drug abuse treatment center that will serve 4,000 to 6,000 adults and adolescents this year. Although the federal grant money ran out in 1995, the Texas Legislature has opted to fund the center for two more years, and the University of Texas has come on as administrator of the project.

The Houston Recovery Campus operates on the maxim that "what keeps clients clean and sober is their empowerment," says assistant clinical director Robert Dotson, adding that the clinic is unique in the number of services it offers under one roof. During their three- to five-week stay, clients can take advantage of literacy training, Houston Independent School District and Houston Community College classes, job training and placement, housing placement, a computer lab, a medical clinic, and a recently remodeled kitchen. One special program is housed in the nuns' small but cheery former quarters, where 16 young mothers live with their infants, learning parenting skills while they combat addiction. Anxious to become more self-sustaining, HRC is considering starting businesses that would hire clients who have completed the program.

The neighborhood was initially uneasy about hosting HRC, whose barbed-wire perimeter fence is designed to keep crime out rather than clients in. But it is fair to say that the area has benefited from the Lyons Avenue campus. Many of its clients — 30 percent of whom are homeless — come off the streets of Fifth Ward, and the campus claims its Houston Police Department security has kept crime down. Those factors probably at least contribute to the fact that since 1991, according to HPD figures, violent crime in Fifth Ward has decreased significantly more than in the rest of Houston. ***Shaila Dewan***

Habitat for Humanity houses, 4200-4300 Rowley Street at Waco, 1989–90.

Stearns monument in abandoned cemetery at the northwest corner of Market Street and Lockwood Drive.

"Lloyd Cowells' Sports Wall of Fame," Bust Down Car Care, 4620 Lyons Avenue.

Fifth Ward CRC

Resettling a community with homeowners and businesses is a balancing act — each is difficult to attract without the other. But the nonprofit Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation seems to know how to keep more than one platter spinning. Using a combination of tax credits, public funds, and nonprofit grants, as well as the proceeds from home sales, the CRC has put many facets of its 15-year master plan into action.

Led by Stephan Fairfield, a commercial developer by trade, the corporation has restored a historic home, repaved streets and sidewalks, demolished hazardous buildings, and put in new streetlights, water lines, and playground equipment. It has restored the St. Elizabeth Clinic, donated by the Sisters of Charity, and leased it to a home health service providing neighborhood jobs. Its workers have painted or repaired 67 homes of elderly or disabled residents. The CRC has even conducted "empowerment training seminars." The Reverend Harvey Clemons, Jr., president of the board and pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, has acted as peacemaker to soothe racial discord in the area.

But the backbone of inner-city redevelopment is home ownership. And, perhaps because the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act is finally being enforced, banks are looking for loan prospects in unfamiliar territory. With the help of the United Way and numerous city organizations, the Fifth Ward CRC has built 45 homes for people with annual incomes of $13,000 to $55,000 and packaged mortgages for 35 existing houses. Because many people on their waiting list are suburban residents wanting to return to the ward, the CRC built a "homeowner incubator" complex of 312 low-income units in Alief, complete with a Head Start program, youth activities, and swimming pools. In order to encourage good habits, the Fifth Ward CRC is experimenting with incentives. Tenants can earn points toward their down payment by volunteering, exhibiting financial responsibility and neighborliness, or having children who get good grades. How will the CRC measure some of these characteristics? "We don't know yet," Fairfield says. "We're making everything up as we go along." *Shaila Dewan*

grande dame died, her heirs, who do not live in Houston, "got dollar signs in their eyes," according to Lee. They did not want to donate the property, and as the haggling went on, the house was vandalized. All the historic artifacts they had hoped to preserve were stolen. As we pulled up to the house, Prather observed that the once elegant porch had caved in. "It must hurt to think about what you lost here," I remarked, and Lee answered, "You don't even know."

Mickey Leland's old house at 1614 Sam Wilson brought back more melancholy memories. "He never cut his ties with Fifth Ward," Lee said. "That's why people loved him."

From there we headed over to the old Frenchtown area along Collingsworth, where Doris McClendon still hangs on at the legendary Continental Zydeco Lounge. Frenchtown had already lost much of its flavor when the U.S. 59 widening wiped out almost a hundred homes. "Only the old folks" still speak the Creole French of their native Louisiana, Lee said.

Lee and Prather are still enthusiastic about Fifth Ward's potential, but it seemed to me that at every corner we found more loss and unreversed decline. I ask Lee how he stays optimistic. "After the Civil War, freedmen and women came and slept in tents along the bayou here," he answered. "That's all they started out with, and they built all this up."

Perhaps inspired by my question, Lee drove us to the intersection of Lockwood and Lyons, where Fifth Ward becomes Denver Harbor. In the early part of the century, Denver Harbor was populated with working-class whites who didn't leave the neighborhood when integration came, as the leading blacks of Fifth Ward did. So more money stayed in Denver Harbor.

"Just look at this," Lee said as we approached the traffic light at Lockwood. "You go through this light and over these railroad tracks, and you're back on the Lyons Avenue of the 1950s." He was exaggerating a bit, but in the now largely Hispanic Denver Harbor, we were suddenly surrounded by functioning, freshly painted retail stores. Seeing the clean white walls with business names in bold reds or blues made me realize how my eyes had ached for color, for variety, while driving through the Fifth.

Prather and Lee pointed out the Lockwood branch of Texas Commerce Bank. Although it is unusual to find a bank in an inner-city neighborhood, here the parking lot was crammed with cars in mid-afternoon. "This is one of Texas Commerce Bank's most successful branches," Lee told me. John Hernandez, the branch manager, confirmed this: "We open more accounts and make more loans per capita than any [branch] bank in the city." Hernandez also told me that the Walgreen's across the street is one of the top performers in the entire drugstore chain.

Lee, Prather, and I turned around and drove back across the tracks to old Fifth Ward. There the only sign of commerce was some furniture and other knickknacks set out for sale beside the street. "That's the kind of business we have!" Lee exclaimed, laughing bleakly at history's little joke.

As we drove, Prather and Lee also filled me in on Fifth Warders who, without achieving more widespread fame, had been instrumental in the area's development during segregation. When I asked how it was that so many people had thrived under what must have been limited circumstances, Prather cited the quality of the schools. "Our schools are all

Hester House

Julia C. Hester House, 2020 Solo, has been serving Fifth Ward for more than half a century. Built on five acres of land donated by Susan McAshan, the community center is named for Julia Hester (1881–1940), a teacher and community leader, who began inviting neighborhood children to come to her house at 1702 West Street rather than play in the streets. Once established, the community center moved into a larger building on Lyons Avenue, and in 1945 Hester House moved to its present location.

Interim director Beverly Brownlow admits that the term "community redevelopment" can seem abstract or grandiose. But sometimes it is the little things that provide the glue: hot meals, warm clothes, and school supplies that many Fifth Ward parents can ill afford. Hester House often provides the last safety net between its members and the street. It has an emergency food pantry for the many families whose funds run out before the end of the month, emergency clothing distribution, and even one-time rental assistance for those who have lost their jobs.

In many lives Hester House, funded largely by the United Way, is a daily presence — a welcoming environment that caters to children and senior citizens. The low building is located on a quiet side street off Lyons Avenue, surrounded by modest grounds and bordering park acreage. Each day, about 50 seniors play dominoes and socialize over a free lunch provided by the city; that number can double when medical professionals conduct vision, hearing, and dental screenings. Preschoolers play noisily, joined in the evenings by older children from schools such as Atherton Elementary across the street. On Saturdays, kids congregate in the gym or by the swimming pool for supervised sports. Adults use the gym, too, for the occasional zydeco supper dance. In summer, parents rest easy knowing their kids are taking their first look at NASA or Corpus Christi in Hester House summer camp. ***Shaila Dewan***

named for educators," she said. Indeed, Mabel Wesley (Wesley Elementary) and E. O. Smith (Smith Middle School) are two of the Texas Trailblazers she and Lee have written about.

Prather explained that during segregation, there was little for an educated African American to do other than teach public school, so early Wheatley High teachers were often M.A.'s and Ph.D.'s. The teachers had to maintain high standards in their classrooms. Thanks to segregation, they had to live where they taught, and if they slacked off they would hear about it from their neighbors, who were the parents of their students.

"It was said that if you graduated from Wheatley High you had the equivalent of a junior college degree," Prather said as we drove over I-10, headed for Wheatley. The high, intimidating fence around the school, and the higher one in front of the apartment building across the street, even more like a prison, told me how times had changed at Wheatley, and in almost every other inner-city school. "After integration, HISD took our best teachers," Prather said, "and scattered them all over town."

Which is not to say that there are no fine teachers left at Wheatley. After Prather came to the school to talk about Texas Trailblazers, the students got so interested in studying local black history that history teacher Elise Austin began including such information in his lesson plans. Under his guidance, Wheatley students also began tending the sadly abandoned cemetery that sits only a block from the school. In fact, Lockwood cuts through the cemetery. The street-makers must have dug up or paved over graves to get through.

Austin has a funny story about how the cemetery project began. "Kids were telling me stories about ghosts they were hearing. They said something would grab at their feet while they stood at the bus stop." So he led a class over to the cemetery to clear up these mysteries, only to step into a hole that was completely overgrown with weeds. He fell in, disappearing from sight. "The kids started screaming," he recalls, laughing at the memory. But when he climbed out and

A Spin down Peacock Alley

The Bronze Peacock Dinner Club at 2809 Erastus Street, now the educational building of Charity Baptist Church, was the birthplace of Peacock Records, the legendary Fifth Ward record label formed in late 1948 or early 1949 — no one is quite sure when — by Don "Red" Robey, the proprietor of the Bronze Peacock, and Evelyn Johnson, who managed Robey's Buffalo Booking Agency. Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Peter "Guitar" Lewis, Amos Milburn, Elmore Nixon, Sonny Parker, "Little Richard" Pennimen, Memphis Slim, Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, and Andrew Tibbs all recorded for the Peacock label.

Peacock merged with Duke Records of Memphis in 1952 and was sold to ABC/Dunhill in 1973. Before Motown, Duke/Peacock was the largest black-owned recording company in the United States. MCA, which subsequently acquired ABC/Dunhill, issued two compact disc retrospectives in 1992: *The Best of Duke/Peacock Blues* and *Duke-Peacock's Greatest Hits*. Duke/Peacock alumni Bobby Blue Bland, Johnny Brown, Joe "Guitar" Hughes, and Milton Thomas were reunited this spring, along with Evelyn Johnson, as part of the 1996 Houston International Festival's "Salute to Peacock Records." ***Drexel Turner***

Rappers in Fifth Ward

There aren't many nightclubs left in Fifth Ward, but that doesn't mean the music has died. It just turned to rap. The nationally known Geto Boys make frequent references to Fifth Ward in their songs — often under its street name, "the Nickel" — and their record label, Rap-A-Lot, began in Fifth Ward.

Today Rap-A-Lot still has an unofficial Fifth Ward presence at Jammin' Records on Lyons. Dewey Forker owns Jammin' Records and the Underground Records recording label and is the discoverer and manager of the two Fifth Ward rap acts that come closest to following the Geto Boys onto the national scene: the Fifth Ward Boyz and the Fifth Ward Juveniles.

After Forker opened Jammin', the young rapper who later became the Fifth Ward Boyz' 007 brought a demo tape he had made with another would-be rapper. Forker liked the tape well enough to sign the act, but when 007's accomplice proved insufficiently professional, Forker fired him and hired E Rock and Low Life, and the Fifth Ward Boyz were born, largely as an opening act for the Geto Boys.

According to Forker, the Fifth Ward Boyz have reinforced Fifth Ward's identity, bringing together young people from the various streets and 'hoods, such as Frenchtown, Kelly Court, the Bottom, and Finnegan Park, and in so doing have reduced gang tensions. Not that Forker thinks that crime itself has much decreased. "I see these fifteen-year-olds who come into my store. They do things we would have never even thought about when I was their age [in the late seventies]."

His teen act, the Fifth Ward Juveniles, consists of Mr. Slim and Daddy Lo. According to Forker, they can only rap for him if they keep their grades up and are respectful to adults. He notes that Daddy Lo is an A student.

Jammin' Records is something of a neighborhood hangout. Intensely disputed domino and card games break out almost daily, as Forker awaits the latest shipment of demo tapes, which now come from aspiring rappers all over the country. ***David Theis***

In the Paint

In fall 1968, John Zemanek of the University of Houston College of Architecture conducted a fourth-year studio in a storefront in the Pearl Harbor section of Fifth Ward to help remodel a vacant building on Lyons Avenue near Jensen Drive as a youth center for the Reverend Earl E. Allen's HOPE (Human Organization for Political and Economic Development) ministries. The resourcefulness of Zemanek and his students at designing, scavenging, painting, and fixing up attracted the notice of C. Ray Smith, the Vasari of supermannerism, who featured their handiwork in the November 1970 issue of *Progressive Architecture*, under the heading "Urban Renewal With Paint."

Renovation was completed that spring with with the help of a second class, marshaled by Gene Grosholtz and John Perry, that joined Zemanek and his already seasoned crew. The front of the main building was emblazoned with a supergraphic comet in Charles Coffman's best eye-pop manner. Track-lit, larger-than-life, slide-projected portraits of black luminaries and neighborhood children picked up the pace inside. The adjoining asphalt parking lot was fitted out with sports equipment and a garden-variety assortment of improvised playground accessories, from swing sets to a cable-spool obstacle course. State senator Barbara Jordan, whose law offices were still open down the street, spoke at the dedication ceremonies in May 1968, commending the volunteer efforts of Zemanek and his students and colleagues. *Drexel Turner*

De Luxe Treatment

The first adaptive reuse of a movie theater in Houston — before Bookstop invaded the body of the Alabama, or Discovery Zone the Bellaire, or Hollywood Video the Tower — took place in Fifth Ward. During the summer of 1971, Dominique and John de Menil rented the De Luxe Theater at 3303 Lyons Avenue for three months. Crews from the contracting firm of Jones and Bynam, augmented by Fifth Ward residents, worked double shifts to convert the interior of the derelict movie house into a pristine gallery space. The exhibition, *Hard Art at the De Luxe Theater*, opened 22 August and extended its run by a week and a day through 25 September, closing with a Wheatley High School alumni celebration. The gallery was open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 1 to 10 on Sunday. Mickey Leland, then a community organizer and teacher at Texas Southern University, served as coordinator for the project.

The show, assembled by Peter Bradley, associate director of the Perls Gallery in New York, and Helen Winkler Fosdick of the de Menil–sponsored Institute for the Arts, consisted of 40 paintings and sculptures, including works by Bradley, Anthony Caro, Richard Hunt, Daniel Johnson, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Larry Poons, and William Williams. The catalogue was written by Steve Cannon, a novelist and poet and the editor of *Self Images: An Anthology of American Poetry*. The critic Clement Greenberg, a leading exponent of "post-painterly abstraction," attended the opening, as did Noland. Short films were shown in the walled-off upstairs balcony, where the seats remained intact. The exterior of the movie house, which first opened in April 1941 as a "family" alternative to the nearby Roxy and Lyons theaters, was left undisturbed. Efforts to find a long-term sponsor for the gallery were unsuccessful. *Drexel Turner*

the kids calmed down, they began investigating the often broken and nearly illegible grave markers. To his amazement, they found markers for 11 "buffalo soldiers." This was treasure to a history teacher. For the past several years he and his senior classes have been taking care of the private cemetery, which is no longer officially claimed by anyone. Not that they keep it manicured — it is too big and too far gone for that. After four years they are still finding markers in the weeds.

Looking through this nameless cemetery, which abuts the back of an EZ Pawn shop on the I-10 feeder and has heavy traffic roaring through it, is a mournful way to spend an afternoon. Broken marker after broken marker proclaims that the person beneath is "Gone But Not Forgotten." Alas, it isn't so.

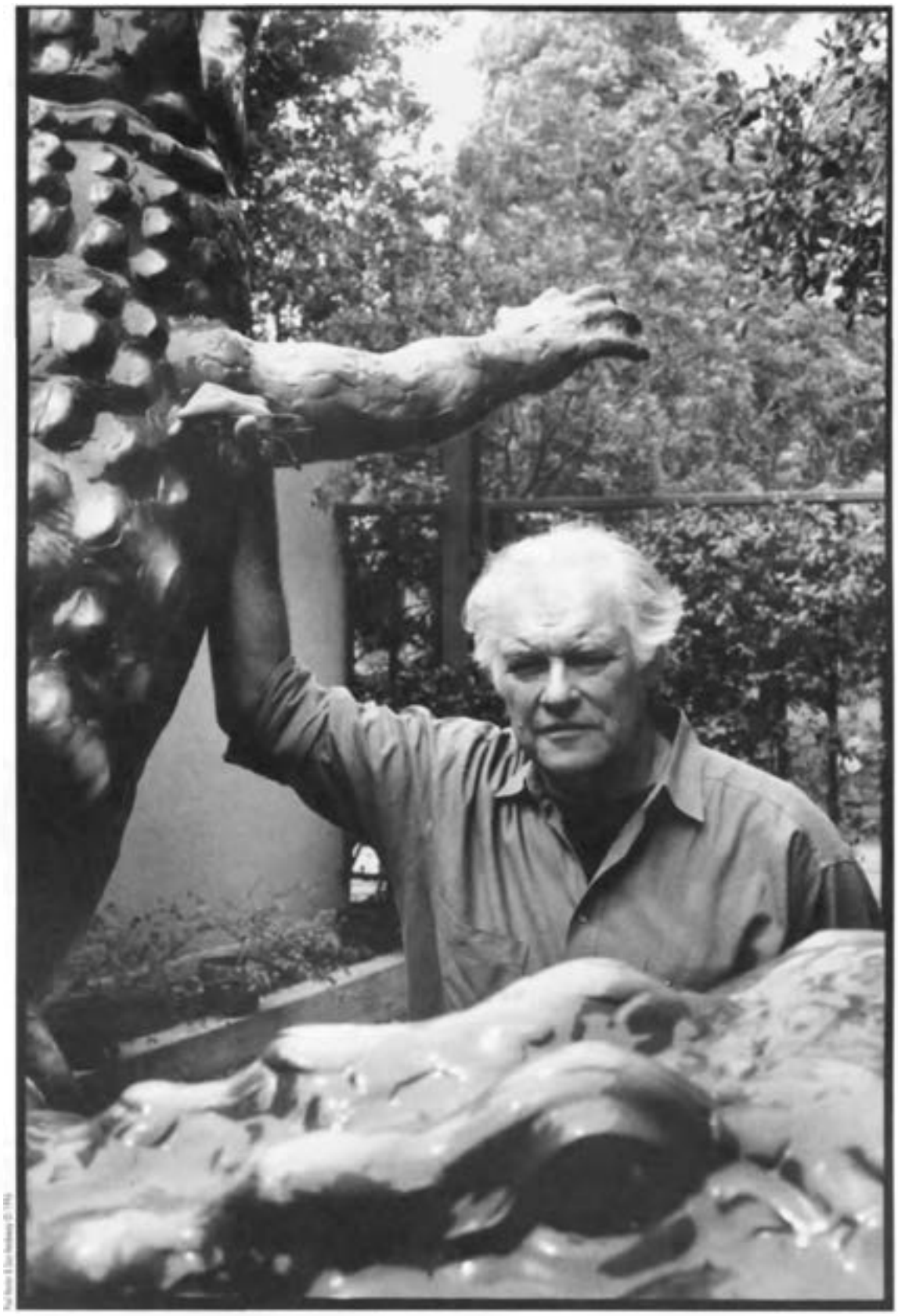
I left my conversations with Bob Lee and Pat Prather convinced of Fifth Ward's rich past, but doubtful about the viability of its future. Lee, Prather, and virtually every organization head I talked to said that the strength of the area's families and its general social glue are strong enough to hold the ward together. I wanted to see physical proof of this cohesiveness and evidence of a potential reversal of fortune. So I was thrilled to get a strong dose of optimism from the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation (FWCRC), headed by Stephan Fairfield. Along with community leaders such as the Reverend Carl Clemons, Jr., and N. Joyce Punch, who has led the fight to keep at least two highway exits for Fifth Ward in the ongoing widening of 59, Fairfield has been patiently implementing a redevelopment plan.

They began with housing. First, Habitat for Humanity came in to build a series of attractive houses on Brewster, the first new-home construction in Fifth Ward in more than three decades, according to Habitat's executive director, Mike Shirl. Fresh paint and nicely kept gardens provide one of the area's rare splashes of color. Since Habitat for Humanity couldn't focus its efforts on the Fifth Ward exclusively, the FWCRC began its own construction program, thinking that individual home ownership was a key to neighborhood stability. After questioning area residents as to what kind of house they would like to buy, the FWCRC began building houses with multiple gables, running perpendicular to their street rather than parallel, so as to avoid appearing like rent houses. Buyers with incomes from $13,000 to $55,000 have moved in near each other.

With this promising start in housing, the FWCRC turned next to making the area safer and bringing street conditions up to code in conjunction with Mayor Lanier's Neighborhoods to Standards program. The corporation is now trying, with some success, to fund small businesses and attract larger retail centers. Getting a grocery store, perhaps an HEB, to move into Fifth Ward is high on the agenda.

Fairfield's plans are still quite ambitious given the state Fifth Ward was in when he began working there in the early 1990s. But he has a cheerful exuberance that makes the FWCRC's plans all the more believable. Fairfield is white, and I could not resist asking him what part of town he lived in. He surprised me a little by saying, "Well, technically the Fifth Ward." By that he meant the warehouse district. "But I'm buying a piece of land in the poorest part of Fifth Ward, near Wheatley and the cemetery, and I'm going to build a house there."■

1 Workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration in the State of Texas, *Houston: A History and Guide* (Houston: Anson Jones Press, 1942), p. 89.
2 David G. McComb, *Houston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 60.
3 WPA, *Houston*, p. 93.
4 McComb, p. 88.
5 Monsignor Anton Frank, "Fifth Ward," Texas Room, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.
6 *Houston Chronicle*, 8 May 1996, pp. 3A,4A.
7 *Houston Chronicle*, 18 May 1996, pp. 1A, 16A.
8 McComb, pp. 106–107.
9 WPA, *Houston*, p. 98.
10 *The* [Houston] *Defender*, 21 May 1971, "Open Art-Movie Show Sunday," p. 8.



VISIBLE CONNECTIONS

The Public Art of Luis Jiménez

A CONVERSATION
WITH DREXEL TURNER
AND BRUCE C. WEBB

The voluptuous sculptures, drawings, and prints of Luis Jiménez (born El Paso, Texas, 1940) are represented in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Collection of Fine Arts, the National Museum of American Art, and the Hirshhorn Museum among others. One of his first commissions for a public sculpture was the "Vaquero" for Moody Park in Houston (1977).

Jiménez joined the faculty of the University of Houston as professor of fine art in 1994 and now divides his time between Houston and his studio and home in a converted six-room WPA elementary school in Hondo, New Mexico. His work was the subject of a retrospective exhibition and catalogue, "Luis Jiménez, Man on Fire" (Albuquerque Museum, 1994); the Moody Gallery of Houston exhibited a selection of his recent work in spring 1996. The following is excerpted from a conversation with Drexel Turner and Bruce Webb in February 1996.

Q: When you first became involved in art, was it through your father's work, or was it through school?
A: I've been making objects, what I thought was art, since I was a kid. I'm a good example of the son living out the father's dream. My father was a frustrated artist; he always wanted to do art himself but somehow felt that it wasn't a reasonable thing to pursue, based on his own experiences. I received a lot of encouragement early on to make artworks, and yet, when it was time to go to school, he was strongly opposed to my studying art. His feeling was that I should study something I could make a living with. There were some real contradictions.

I was raised in a neon-sign shop and was trained to be a sign man. And yet he felt that it was good to get an education. The question became, What would I study to be a sign man to take over the business? I studied architecture, but I had to make a decision about my focus. It was then that I began to turn my attention to sculpture. That seemed to be a way that I could work at everything I liked. I liked working in the trades with my hands — the physical aspect of it. I also was able to incorporate color and draw. So at that point, after I had gone to architecture school for about four years, I made a clear decision to focus instead on making sculpture.

Q: Were you exposed to art in elementary school?
A: When I went to first grade, I didn't know how to speak English; both my parents' families were from the other side of the border. But the teachers took me to the second grade so I could show other students how to make a wolf out of clay. So evidently I was already fairly competent at making things, and other people seemed to reinforce it. That was gratifying.

Q: Did you get reinforcement from both of your parents?
A: No. I certainly had much more positive reinforcement from my moth-

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er. There was never any real reinforcement from my father. He saw me as competition. It was a complex problem for him.

Q: What sort of art was available in El Paso for you growing up?
A: The Tom Lea mural on the Federal Building was the closest I came to seeing any art in El Paso firsthand. I was fortunate that my father had some art books around, and I remember spending a lot of time reading them. I remember he had a set of Muybridge's books of photographic motion studies.

My early exposure to art really wasn't in El Paso; it was down in Mexico. We had family in Mexico City, and we would go down every year. The year I turned six, we spent about three or four months there. I saw all the murals. We went to all the museums, including the archaeology museum. I saw more stuff firsthand in Mexico than I ever did in El Paso.

Q: What impressed you the most?
A: At that age? Probably the dinosaur bones.

Q: When you were growing up, was Tom Lea still a working artist?
A: He still is, though he's quite old now.

Q: Do you know him?
A: No, no. When I was about seven or eight years old, we moved from where I'd grown up, in the southern part of El Paso, to a house my parents bought in the central part that was across the street from Tom Lea's stepmother's house. We knew her and his stepsister, but I never knew him. I knew of him, of course, and I knew of the murals and couldn't help but be affected by them. But he was never a role model for me in the sense that some of the Mexican muralists were.

Q: Considering what El Paso was like then, you seem to have ambivalent feelings and some less-than-pleasant memories. What was it like growing up there?
A: You summed it up! In some ways you can only feel sorry for a city like El Paso. It had a rich Mexican heritage, as did San Antonio. Yet the city went to great lengths to cover that heritage up, instead of plugging into it. It had to do with racism — they didn't want to acknowledge that heritage. So in a sense we were left to grow up in a kind of vacuum, not acknowledging the Mexican side of our heritage. There were some real contradictions that I think El Paso still has trouble dealing with.

Q: Were there any particular mentors or teachers, other than your father, during this time?
A: There certainly were important mentors. My first-grade teacher came at a very important time for me, and I have fond memories of her. She reinforced my ability to learn but also encouraged me artistically. I won a citywide first-grade art contest with a big rabbit or something like that. Throughout school there were teachers that were supportive. In junior high, I had an art teacher who was very supportive, but after that I was not allowed to take art. I had to take a more practical elective.

Q: And that was?
A: Mechanical drawing, of course. But I had a really outstanding teacher in junior high.

Q: Can you remember her name?
A: Her name was Ms. Sandrock. She was a divorcee, and in retrospect I think she probably had problems where she was teaching. She was seen as being maybe a little too progressive to be teaching in junior high; there were all these rumors. They finally hired somebody else, but I wasn't taking art anymore.

Going back to the early experiences, I also have to say that I had influences from my mother's side, not just from my father. My uncle, my mother's brother, also worked in the shop. It was a small shop, but the entire crew was like a big family; I started working there when I was six. At a certain point, because my father was always out anyway, he left me in the care of my uncle, a highly skilled metalworker. He made letters out of sheet metal for buildings like banks. I worked with him. That aspect of my education was really about craft. It was not making art necessarily, but it certainly was important.

Q: What does a six-year-old do in a shop that makes signs — or an eight- or ten-year-old?
A: Well, I helped my uncle. So I was raised with the traditional apprentice program, which is not very common in this country but was very common in Mexico. Every journeyman has a helper, and that helper starts out by sweeping the floors. It's like in Japan, you start sweeping the floor, then, eventually, you're like a gofer — you go bring things, you mark things. After a while, if the apprentice has been at it long enough, the journeyman is supervising the apprentice, and the apprentice is doing most of the work. I think by the time I was 16, I could do everything in the shop. I could spray, I could weld, I could bend sheet metal, I could bend the neon.

Q: Can you point out signs, say in El Paso, that are yours?
A: No, most of them have gone. I have one that I picked up out of the sign junkyard and kept — I'd worked on it when I was 16. It's a rooster. But what happens to buildings happens even more so with signs. Everybody wants the new sign out there, and so most of the old signs are scrapped, even the ones that were really great. Some were made out of porcelain enamel and could've lasted forever, especially in that climate. They didn't wear out; they went out of fashion.

Q: When you go to the city, do you still pay particular attention to the signs?
A: No, I'm not totally conscious. I had a difficult problem with El Paso. I have very fond memories of the shop and the workers, but my feelings about my own father and about the sign business are conflicted. I was never in a position of collaborator in the business or in the design. That was always his thing.

Q: You went to architecture school?
A: Yes. I finished four years of a five-year program at the University of Texas at Austin.

Q: What led you to that? Was it the mechanical drawing teacher?
A: No, that was the training my father felt would be good for me. If I was going into the sign business, or if I was going to use my art ability, he felt it should be in something practical. I got out of high school and had to make some career choices, so he lined me up to talk to a commercial artist and some of his friends that were architects with the idea that "these are choices I'll support." Since I was a very obedient son, I talked to his friends and decided I didn't want to make commercial art. So the logical choice was architecture school. As I progressed I took mostly art courses as my electives. I finally decided not to continue with architecture. I made art objects even while I was in architecture school and even won a prize in an art contest at the university with a limestone carving.

Q: Did the design projects you did in architecture look like the work of someone interested in art? Were they different from those of the other students?
A: It was hard to be different because there was a lot of pressure to conform. There were a few instructors who were different. Mr. Montenegro, who taught design, was an artist who had gone to the Art Students League. He approached beginning design as if it were a three-dimensional art course. I was totally energized by that class — I felt as though I were doing art projects. But Montenegro was really an exception; most teachers thought like engineers.

Q: Were they doing orthodox modernism at that time?
A: Very. Frank Lloyd Wright was not okay — too far out.

Q: Who were the architects you were drawn to while you were a student?
A: Louis Kahn, Paul Rudolph. And I liked Wright's work. I think he had a real special feeling for space. I was drawn to people like him and this crazy guy who lives out in the desert.

Q: Soleri?
A: Soleri. I even talked to some of his assistants. I was so frustrated, sometimes I would write these long letters to people like Soleri and Henry Moore.

Q: Did you send them?
A: No, I never did. Eventually I went to New York and worked as an assistant to a metal sculptor, Seymour Lipton. I called him and said, "I'd like to work with you." I guess everybody finds a role model, but, without seeming too cocky, I'm not sure I ever had one. I just wanted to do what I wanted to do.

Q: While you were working for Lipton, did you make friends with him or others in the art community?
A: Lipton, never. I went in as an apprentice; he never socialized with me; he was not particularly generous that way. He was very generous in terms of talking about his work and asking my opinions. He was not a very social person; I didn't get into the art community though him.

Q: Do you think it was time well spent?
A: It was important for me to see how an artist operated. His support system was very small — his wife and his assistants. Harry Rand, now curator at the National Museum of American Art, also worked as Lipton's assistant. He didn't work there at the same time, but I met him later and our experiences formed an interesting bond.

Q: At some point after New York you were a Rome Prize Fellow.
A: Not exactly. It was a mid-career grant, through the National Endowment for the Arts, for only three months. The grant included some travel money.

Q: Was that some kind of epiphany for you?
A: It really was. Before going to Europe, I had a very narrow focus, wanting to work only with American images. Going to Rome that very first time made me realize how universal so much of that imagery is.

Q: I saw your drawing of the elephant and obelisk.
A: Right, Bernini's elephant in S. Maria sopra Minerva.

Q: Were there other things that particularly attracted you while you were there?
A: When I went to school, Baroque was thought of as sort of the decadent period that followed the Renaissance. And when I went to Rome, where I was in a position to evaluate on my own, I

went crazy. I mean, my God, this guy Bernini was incredible. I saw every Bernini in Rome, which is not easy to do. I went into churches that were closed, even if I had to bribe people.

I had been in Rome three months, walking past the Pantheon all the time, which I never bothered to go into because in art history they said it was stripped. One day I finally decided to walk inside. And staring at the center of that space, it was just . . . my god. That space is just incredible. So yes, it was really an eye-opener. I haven't gone back to Rome, but I had a similar opportunity to go to France, and then from there to Spain and more of Italy. I'd like to see a lot more, but I have trouble making the time.

Q: Your first big splash was the series of sculptures with automobile-related imagery and things of that nature. Was that when you really found your voice — if that's a fair question?
A: I first, as you say, found my voice, with those series of shows in the late sixties in New York. The response within the art community was immediately very positive. A recent show in New York in November focused on the work I did in the sixties and seventies. After my first show, I got into two Whitney shows, which gave my work a lot of visibility. In fact, I got a lot of attention early on that I probably don't get now with the public art. The New York museum shows gave the work a kind of stamp of approval and visibility that public works don't necessarily get.

I left New York in the early seventies and came out west to develop a way of looking at public art. At that time there were not a lot of great examples of contemporary public artwork. The one that everybody can bring to mind is Alexander Calder's piece, *Flamingo*, from about 1968 for Grand Rapids, Michigan, but the response, even to that, was not overwhelming. I wanted to develop a new approach coming out of popular culture. The public pieces I do now speak in a kind of public language. That is where I've gotten attention in recent years.

Q: To what extent do you get involved with the siting of your public work — the Denver airport, for instance?
A: The spaces for art at Denver had already been planned out, so it didn't seem that interesting. They weren't where I would have put them — they weren't focal points, so I decided to go to the committee and tell them, "Look, I think what we really need is something going on outside."

I thought it would be nice to have something to identify the site out on the knoll, an important focal point as you're entering or leaving the airport. I said, "You've got a natural site here. What if we call it *Mustang Overlook* for the wild mustangs that use to be out here, and have a mustang sculpture

Mustang Overlook, Denver International Airport, proposal, 1992.

with eyes that light up?" I also wanted to have some historical plaques leading up a trail to the mustang. They liked the idea and went along with it.

Q: Had you thought about a sculpted interior design for the airport before they went along with the mustang?
A: I turned in some very preliminary drawings. I thought, "What could be more American than the corny stuff like cowboys and Indians and stuff like that?" So I thought on one side I would have a buffalo hunt, and on the other side I'd have a stampede with the cowboys. However, what I really wanted to make was a horse.

I used to tell people that my work was totally dictated by the site, but now I realize it's really not. I have a personal agenda — certain images that I want to work with. When I go to work somewhere, I'm sort of dovetailing my personal agenda with the character of the place and the site, and trying to make this all work together.

Q: Do you often feel constrained by the client or the audience for a public piece?
A: It's interesting that you refer to the client relationship with the artist. I've been very fortunate with public commissions, pieces funded with public money, because they were either NEA projects or General Services Administration. There was never any direction given to the artist, whom they trusted as a professional. They gave you the budget, and expected you to take the ball and run with it. What I do is work out drawings and models, then work with the community. I say, "Look, this is what I want to do, and what do you think?" At a certain point they do have to approve the project, but there's nobody there to say, "Gee, you have to make a big blue horse with eyes that light up."

Q: The piece of art that maybe has a little spunk, or has a tendency to engage you, may be much more controversial.
A: That's absolutely true, and the problem that we face as we run into more controversy is that there will be more generic work. I think that's really a danger.

Vaquero, Moody Park, Houston, 1977.

Q: Your work seems to have a real spirit. But one person's idea of spirited can be provocative to another person, or even lurid. Some people have complained that in *Border Crossing* in San Diego, the skirt was too tight, the man's pants were bulging suggestively, and the color was not realistic. How do you respond to that sort of criticism?
A: I don't think that one work of art is going to do it for everybody. The solution is to have more art out there. When I talk to communities I say, "Look, not everybody's going to like it." Politicians are lucky if they get 51 percent of the vote. My works are not created with the intention of pleasing an audience. I think the worst thing that can happen is for a work to be ignored. Sometimes what initially repels people becomes something they later learn to embrace.

Q: We have this picture of a polar bear that looks like a soap carving. Could you tell us about it?
A: It's part of a sign my father made, and in fact when my dad was young, he

Alligator pond, San Jacinto Plaza, El Paso, ca. 1910.

Alligator fountain, El Paso, proposal, 1987.

did a lot of soap carving. He won a national soap-carving contest sponsored by Proctor & Gamble with the models he made for that bear. He was supposed to win a scholarship to the Chicago Art Institute, but it was during the Depression, so he didn't get it.

Q: How do you distinguish between art and craft — between the polar bear carving and the polar bear sign?
A: It's in the perception of the viewer and in the perception of the person who makes it. A lot has to do with conditioning by society. For instance, in the 1500s or 1600s, Europeans were taking pre-Columbian works and melting them down. The artists that mentioned seeing them — Dürer was one of them — thought they were art. Everybody else thought they were just curious objects; they didn't see them as art at all.

Luis Jiménez, Sr., sign for Crystal Cleaners, El Paso, 1985.

What I think distinguishes art is that it is not derivative. Art should be unique in some way. Now, I have seen other polar bears from the mid-1940s. In my father's case, I know the way he worked. He went to the library and found pictures of polar bears, then copied what he thought was the best one. He worked from pictures and didn't try to go beyond what he was looking at. Where he was really creative was, of course, in his use of neon for the northern lights behind the polar bear. Another time he made a washerwoman for a laundry and cleaning sign — she actually moved, scrubbing on a washboard. That was pretty creative and innovative. But is it art?

Q: You talked about your interest in images coming out of popular culture. At what point does that happen?
A: Now that you point out the bear thing and my interest in popular images, I realize that I have tried to focus on what I thought were clichéd images that were clichéd because they struck a nerve with a lot of people. There is always a reason why people identify with certain images and they become popular. What I try to do is to make you look at the cliché again. If you see one more bronze cowboy, it doesn't register anymore because you immediately classify it as bronze cowboy. I wanted to do something that not only made you look at the cliché again, but look at it in a new way.

Q: During the sixties and seventies, Andy Warhol's type of pop art came out of popular culture. Would something like that only interest you if it's been there long enough to be banal?
A: I would say pop art is, for lack of a better word, very cool. Of all the pop people, the ones I relate to, in terms of what I do, are Nancy and Ed Kienholz, because content was important for them. For most pop artists "the medium is the message" — the image, devoid of content, is the message. Whereas the content for Kienholz and for me is very important. That's a good distinction. I will say that it was the pop artists who enabled a whole generation to accept images out of popular culture.

Q: The alligator fountain you did in El Paso — has that had an effect on the way the fountain is used or the way people regard it? Has it been a magnet?
A: When we unveiled that piece, there were a couple of thousand people there — people who had not stepped into that plaza for 20 or 30 years. But art can't do it all. This is not going to totally energize downtown El Paso, where six out of ten stores have folded because they relied on the peso. The alligator piece works really well in that space, even though it's an awkward piece on its own. A fog system is part of the project, so that the alligators sit in this mist or fog. In addition to doing something really nice visually — giving the alligators a kind of motion and activity — it cools the area off in the square, where it gets to be 110 degrees in the summer.

The day after we installed it, the mayor turned the water off because he was afraid of someone slipping on the tile and suing the city. I met with the city people, and we worked out a low-cost solution to use a swimming pool coating on the tiles that has grit. The mayor vetoed that idea.

What he wanted was a planter all the way around the piece. Reporters called and asked me about it, and I told them that my work was very much about making art accessible to the people. I'd rather run the risk of vandalism than create a barrier between the work and the people

Q: Are there alligator T-shirts? Have any of your pieces ever made it onto T-shirts?
A: Oh, yeah, we've gone that whole route. I once had a postcard of the Fargo piece sent to me from a collector in Arizona. There was no mention of the artist, it just said, "*Sodbuster*, Fargo, North Dakota." The sculpture has developed a life of its own.

Q: What sort of proprietary interest do you think the artist retains after a work has been put in place? What if the piece or its site is changed somehow?
A: About all an artist can do is remove his name from it, so it's not associated with him anymore. I had one piece like that — for Horton Plaza in San Diego. I was selected as the artist after a com-

petition. I proposed a piece that I would do as a collaboration with my dad — I wanted to do a piece with him before he died — and with the workers I grew up with in the shop. I proposed a 90-foot illuminated obelisk in the center of a fountain about 34 feet across. I wanted to have sea creatures from the area as a sculptural element that would support this very static obelisk, like Bernini's *Four Rivers* fountain in the Piazza Navona. My dad and I collaborated on the design of the obelisk, then he designed all the lighting for it, and the workers built it — they came in after their regular jobs and built it. This was really rewarding for me, and there were no problems — everything worked well.

This was a public piece, but the money came from the developer, and before I finished the project, he declared bankruptcy. I had to sue him, and I only got 80 percent of my money. Because he went bankrupt, all the electricity was never supplied to the site. The temporary line was left, but that was it, which means that all of the pumps can't run. If the pelicans that are supposed to be spraying water in are on, you can't have the center fountain on. There's not enough electricity to ever have the thing run properly. They don't maintain it, either, so I've never wanted my name out there. This was the most complex project I've ever done. It was very frustrating.

Q: Can I ask you how much a project like that costs?
A: Yes — $150,000, which I felt like was a lot of money back then.

Q: You mean the materials, the building, everything for $150,000?
A: I didn't make any money on that one.

Q: What do you submit to a competition like that? A drawing?
A: Drawings and a little model.

Q: Have you ever thought about making a truly kinetic piece, like the washerwoman your father did? Does a place like Las Vegas have any attraction for you?
A: As a matter of fact, I was called in to make a proposal for Las Vegas. It was a curious situation. They wanted a piece instantly. I told them I couldn't produce a piece instantly. They decided to buy a *Vaquero* to put a piece in right away, while I made a larger piece. The way so many of these public things go, after they bought the *Vaquero*, they decided they didn't even want to see my proposal.

Q: Are there themes that you're playing with now that you're storing up in your image bank? Or themes you haven't had the opportunity to investigate yet?
A: Yes, that's true of any artist. Because every project takes so long, I'm always several years ahead in developing things. I've got the armature fabricated for the Denver project, but I haven't really started making it yet.

Q: What about the Firefighters' Memorial in Cleveland?
A: In Cleveland, Claes Oldenburg's *Free Stamp* is on one diagonal half of the park, and I have the other half. The courthouse sits on the west side, Lake Erie is on the north, and the Oldenburg sculpture, this three-story red object, sits in the southwest corner of the site. My half of this site drops off sharply toward the lake. And what I've designed is a somewhat triangular base with a triangular berm that goes around and drops off sharply. This is the main street grade. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame sits between Lake Erie and the site. So this is a primary thoroughfare on the east side. The reason the base for the sculpture is triangular is that I want to have a triangular paved area that is bermed, going up to the sculpture. The firefighters will meet two or three times a year to have ceremonies at the memorial, so the sculpture has to function as a place to have these ceremonies right in front of it. The sculpture is actually a long flame that goes up, in fiberglass, with a firefighter at one end of the flame pointing to the Oldenburg sculpture and toward City Hall.

They have an okay budget to work with, but it's a real challenge to make the sculpture and elevate that end of the park. Now we've got to look at the money; the amount allocated was for the sculpture, not landscaping.

Q: How high is the flame?
A: Oh, probably about 30 feet, so visually it will work with the Oldenburg. The site is interesting because the grade is so steep. It's not the kind of grade you would normally walk up, but you can, from this walkway, which then opens up into the ceremonial area.

Colonnade of workers, Hunts Point Market, South Bronx, proposal, 1991.

Q: I wonder whether you sense great differences among American cities. You talk about architecture as a sign, as a way of giving a place identity. When you go in and you're asked to make a piece for a city, you must develop a sense of the place, an idea of what the people are like.
A: When I was invited to propose a piece for Fargo, I was told, "You might not be interested in it because you aren't going to be dealing with any art people." In fact, my experience in Fargo was totally positive. They lived up to all their commitments. When I arrived, they said, "Oh, you want to see what the site looks like without snow?" They worked through that whole night with equipment to remove like 20 feet of snow off the site so I could see it. They were absolutely wonderful. When I said, "I think we need to go higher with the base," they said, "Doesn't it work better at this height?" And I said, "Yeah, but we have to think about vandalism." And they just looked at me and said, "Vandalism in Fargo?" They obviously don't have vandalism in Fargo. There I got a sense of the people and the city.

Q: Speaking of places where they do have vandalism, you're working in the South Bronx now too.
A: I was selected to do the Hunts Point Market there. They invited five artists to submit proposals and chose mine. But that's been on hold because of Mayor Giuliani's budget. It's all approved; I just can't start on it.

Q: What's it like?
A: A man carrying a pig. What I originally proposed was a colonnade of workers like the old Roman senators, but marching out of the market carrying foodstuffs. Most of the traffic is vehicular now, and when we see food carried around, it's all in white boxes, whether it's beef or vegetables or whatever. But the people in the market said, "Oh, you can't leave those sculptures out there because somebody will steal them and sell them to the junkyards or something. You've got to get rid of the colonnade idea and maybe just bunch up one or two figures over here at the entrance." By the time we reached the end of our conversation, I decided if they really didn't want the colonnade, I could put a couple of figures over at the entrance, which disappointed me, because I liked the idea of a colonnade somehow extending that experience. You know, like the old Burma Shave ads as you're traveling along the highway.

Q: A lot of your work in cities makes conditions visible that are under-recognized. The iconography of Pittsburgh wasn't about Joe Steelworker, and certainly the alligators aren't part of the iconography of El Paso. These are like hidden or lost parts of cities, the cultural connections back to the way something used to be — like the way food was delivered to the market in New York.
A: I try to connect with the myth; the images are not always reality. Myths may at some point grow out of reality. The image of the American cowboy has become mythical. For all the talk about cowboy hats and boots, there are no real cowboys in my part of the country. They all drive pickup trucks now. It's a business, like farming is now agribusiness; there's no longer a guy out there with his plow digging up the dirt. That's the myth, but somehow we all buy into it. ■

Bright Lights Strip City

Larry Albert

In 1982, when this map was drawn, this part of Northwest Houston was pretty sparse

Now it's a lot more developed. I drove around the area to see what I could see.

I was hungry, so I drove to Fiesta. But I did a stupid thing. I locked my keys in my car.

Inside the store, a man with a guitar was singing songs in English and Spanish from a balcony overlooking the shoppers. He sang and played loudly, but I couldn't hear anyone applaud him when he finished.

I ate three egg tacos and some salad from the salad bar. There was a sushi bar there too, but I didn't feel like trying it. Later, I had a hot chocolate.

While I waited in front for the man from AAA to come, Tony, who was selling newspapers, told me about his experiences as a drug dealer in Kansas City. After he got out of the business, some men killed a friend of his.

Tony was shot too, in the upper thigh. You can see Tony in this picture, barely.

Later, while the locksmith tried to break into my car, I noticed that the parking lot was pretty social. The locksmith took a long time to figure out my lock. He was from Iceland, but had lived in Texas for a while. He showed me a picture of his low-rider truck. He said he paid $800 a month to keep it. He also told me some things about the area. He said people in the north parts are better off, and more white. He said people from the north and south parts of this area both shop at Fiesta, though. He said there was no real need to go south, inside the loop, for anything. "Pretty much anything you might want is up here," he said.

The next day I found some other places I thought were

interesting, too. At the edge of the Willowbrook Mall was this place called MountAsia, where they had pinball and video games. I watched, but didn't play any. There was also a McDonald's inside, and bumper cars and miniature golf out back. The miniature golf was on a hill at the edge of the mall parking lot, and it had lights

Many of the video games focused on big cities and killing. "In a megalopolis, a

huge city mixed with new developments and old ruins," said the introduction of one, "violent fighting games were sponsored covertly by highly placed political figures. The merciless death matches would make the public go wild with excitement." Here's a picture of another game that had realistic scenes of a sprawling countryside:

I read some magazines in a bookstore in a shopping center across the street. Then I saw what looked like a day-care center nextdoor, with a big jungle-jim type thing outdoors next to it. It was closed at night, though, so I couldn't be sure.

This structure, sitting out in the mall parking lot, was closed too. It's a mobile play space for children that's run by Hallmark.

Several other freestanding buildings or complexes were arrayed at the perimeter of the mall parking lot. One was The Enclave, an apartment house. Another was a health club called Q.

An extremely low-key salesman named Troy showed me around the Q for a few hours.

The Q has a dress code, and caters to people who are not especially fit but just want to work out and then leave. Troy had lived in this area for a long time, and was sick of it. This is a view of the inside of the Q, from a brochure he gave me. Actually, it's the interior of the Austin Q, but this one is exactly the same, down to the tiles, Troy told me.

There was no curb at the edge of the lot which made the lot and the road that ran around it seem like one big concrete landscape, planted with stores and a few trees.

I spent a few hours talking with a woman named Pat, who was working at a makeshift cafe inside the mall, near the entrance. Only a few people stopped by. First, some men from the mall management company stood in front and seemed bothered by the sign. (The "A" from "Cafe" had fallen down, and was sitting on the counter inside.) And one of the few customers ordered a "steamer". Pat didn't know what that was, so the woman settled on a cappuccino with amaretto syrup, then swore about it after her first sip.

Pat gave me a free decaf cappuccino, and told me that what she liked most abut her job was the daytime hours, which gave her more time with her kids. She would have preferred to be making and selling gift baskets, but the store's owners knew she could make cappuccino, so they had her work here. The cafe's location was only temporary, Pat said. She has to go to the store across the way to get hot water.

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Pat let me take this photograph from behind her counter.

I forgot to mention that sometime before this I passed a lot in back of Fiesta where people were building apartment houses. They had these big prefabricated trusses stacked up in front.

A few days went by. I used my camera to take some pictures of my roommate Al and his dog, Barney, a shar-pei. Al was moving to Phoenix. Many people know Al.

Compaq Computer's headquarters is a huge office park off the Tomball Parkway. I drove around the buildings and took pictures, but I felt a little nervous, like I was trespassing. I wasn't watching the road as carefully as I should have, and several cars honked.

Later, I found this picture of Compaq from the company's promotional material on the Internet.

In a residential development called Tallow Wood, I walked into a model home and met Staci, a salesperson for Espree Homes. Staci said she belonged to the Q health club, but she didn't like the dress code.

The model we were in was called the Arlington

Staci's friend, Emily, worked for a real-estate company that owned Espree Homes. Emily said she was sure she had met me, or at least seen me somewhere before. With her was a young couple, who had decided that they wanted the house they had just seen.

Staci said that Tallow Wood had been started by US Homes before the oil bust, and that her company had picked up the property cheap, from the FDIC. That made the prices low. She said that's a typical pattern all over Houston.

On my way out, I noticed something funny about the garage doors and the garden.

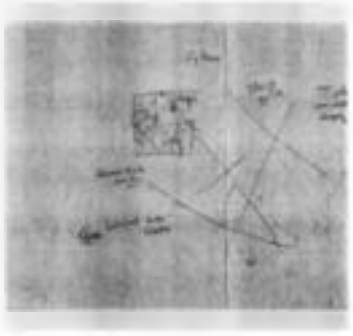
In the parking lot of a Jones Road shopping center, a group of people was having a car wash. By the time I got up the courage to talk to them, they were almost finished.

It was a girl's volleyball team, and they were raising money to travel to Las Vegas for a tournament. This is Karen. She told me her daughter was on the team. After we talked for a while, she told me something about one of her sons, too: he plays guitar at Fiesta.

I thought that was a funny coincidence.

The volleyball team had taken over a whole section of the parking lot. But as I talked with Karen they packed up and left, and soon all that remained was some soapy water on the ground.

I bought a roast beef sandwich at the Texas Roast Beef Company, which used to be an Arby's and which was on the parking lot next to the soapy water. Inside I met Erica, who was on the volleyball team, and her mother Sheryl. Erica said that there had been an accident earlier at the entrance to the parking lot, and that she and her teammates had joked that they had caused it.



Her mom told me about the area I was exploring, and tried to describe what the various neighborhoods were like. She talked a lot about schools. I drew a map on a napkin to help explain by questions. She drew on the napkin to explain her answers. I also took notes on it.

Sheryl had lived in the area for 18 years. She said she liked how things had been growing so much.

She also said she had had to fight a freeway that was planned to go right through her house.

On the way home I passed a gas station that also sold TCBY

Downtown Houston, looking west, ca. 1940.

Nonya Grenader

WEST SIDE STORY

WHEN HOUSTON PLAYED BASEBALL AT THE WEST END BALL PARK

The West End Ball Park, ca. 1920.

Before the Astrodome, even before Buff Stadium, the West End Ball Park provided a setting for professional baseball in Houston. Built about 1905 and located on what is now the edge of downtown at Andrews and Heiner streets, just west of the YMCA and Allen Center, the former ball park claimed an area now taken over by the Pierce Elevated segment of Interstate 45. Its location marked the intersection of two city grids, one formed by downtown blocks and the other by residential lots in neighboring Fourth Ward.

With the completion of the West End stadium, games no longer had to share the fairgrounds at McGowen and Milam. The new ball park was constructed entirely of wood and seated approximately 3,500. A central grandstand behind home plate was elevated over the concession stand. Slender columns supported a generous canopy that covered most of the seating along the first- and third-base lines. Home plate was in the northwest corner, so fans could catch the prevailing southeast breeze.

The Houston team was known as the Buffaloes, a name annexed from the bayou just blocks away and more integrally linked to Houston history than those of such previous local teams as the Red Stockings, the Babies, or Moore's Marvels. The Buffs would endure for six decades, winning numerous Texas League pennants and spanning a period of profound change in the structure of both baseball and the society that embraced the game.

The West End stadium nurtured many players at the beginning of distinguished careers. Tris Speaker, who would spend 23 years in the majors and be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, signed a contract with the Buffaloes in 1907 for a record $100 per month — then one of the highest salaries ever paid to a Texas League player.

Beginning in 1909, Houston spawned a pennant dynasty, winning championships in five of the next six years. As with most winning streaks, a lapse followed, and owners Otto Sens and Doak Roberts sold the club in 1919. The stock was dispersed among a variety of owners. Although some was retained locally, the St. Louis Cardinals quietly began acquiring a majority interest in the Buffaloes, with the result that Houston became the first Texas League franchise to be controlled by a major league club. Independent owners vehemently objected, and the Cardinal acquisition was not publicly admitted until 1925.

The park's equipment and policies underwent change as well. Unstructured gloves evolved into enormous modern-day mitts, enabling fielders to make one-handed catches with dazzling reliability. Spitball pitching was banned in 1923, following the national trend, but because the Texas League permitted nine pitchers to continue the practice, the last (legal) spitball was thrown in 1932. Games were made more accessible to younger fans with the formation of the "Knot Hole Gang," which, as described by Buff officials in 1922, "admitted any white boy from age 7 to 16 to become a member by signing an agreement of clean sportsman-

ship and high ideals and morals. A membership card costing twenty five cents gave admittance to all games except Sundays and holidays."[1] America's pastime was not immune to prejudice; the game excluded as many as it included. Texas League teams, like the viewer seating, would remain segregated for years to come.

The park's long history was not limited to baseball. According to the WPA guide to Houston, published in 1942, "Collegiate football was inaugurated in Houston in 1912 when Rice Institute played its games in West End Park, the players 'furnishing their own shoes, socks, and uniforms, and doing their own laundry work.'"[2]

The West End Ball Park was superceded in 1928 by the new Buff Stadium, built on St. Bernard Street (now Cullen Boulevard) on a site just north of Interstate 45 where the Finger Furniture Company now has a showroom. The

In an attempt to pacify the many Houstonians upset at the loss of their stadium, the company installed a small baseball museum in its new building, purportedly at the location of Buff Stadium's home plate.

At a time when team owners are charging that the Astrodome is no longer adequate and that public money should be spent for a new facility, it is interesting to recall the simple West End stadium, a structure that typified the promise of a growing city. Today, downtown's edge is delineated by the irrefutable concrete barrier of the Pierce Elevated. How much more congenial it must have been when business district segued into neighborhood around the grassy diamond and wooden bleachers of the West End Ball Park. ■

West End field continued to be used and enjoyed for years by community teams and high school players. Buff Stadium — with its Spanish-style entrance, decorative buffalo motif, and seating for 14,000 — was thought by many to be a minor-league showplace; others complained that it was much too far out of town. Finger Furniture demolished the arena in 1963.

1 *Four Score and More: The Autobiography of Fred N. Ankenman, Sr., 1887–1979*, ed. Stanley Siegel (Houston: Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, 1980), p. 39.

2 Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Texas, *Houston: A History and Guide* (Houston: Anson Jones Press, 1942), p. 219.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Airing Out


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Sleeping Porches and the Turn-of-the-Century Fresh-Air-Sleeping Movement

Margaret Culbertson


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In a world of air pollution and air conditioning, sleeping porches have almost disappeared from our houses as well as from memory. Nonetheless, they were a common and much-enjoyed feature of American domestic architecture during the first 40 years of this century. My grandparents' sleeping porch made bedtime an adventure during my childhood visits. Deliciously cool and filled with the nighttime sounds and smells of their farm outside Waxahachie, it was such a marvelous means of making Texas summer nights bearable that I was surprised to learn that sleeping porches were originally meant for year-round use, for snowy nights as well as sultry ones. They were in fact the architectural manifestation of a widespread health movement of the early years of the 20th century, when the age-old fear of night air gave way to a fascination with fresh-air sleeping.

Fresh air had been considered healthful at least as far back as the time of the ancient Greeks, and 19th-century scientists sought to improve health by improving the circulation of fresh air within buildings. However, fresh air at night was another matter. It was thought to contain poisonous atmospheres called miasmas, formed by rotting vegetable matter or sewage, that could carry diseases such as malaria, typhoid, and yellow fever. The dampness that often accompanied night air was believed to cause colds and chills. A well-known physician and educator echoed accepted medical thought when he wrote in 1850 that "in summer or autumn, it is right to let down the sash, or otherwise close up the windows, before we go to sleep. . . . This rule is especially necessary in the south, and along our great watercourses, where bad air and fogs so much abound."[1]

Florence Nightingale was in the vanguard of medical opinion in 1859 when she called the dread of night air an "extraordinary fallacy." Her popular book *Notes on Nursing* laid the new idea before the public: "What air can we breathe at night but night air?" she demanded. "The choice is between pure night air from without and foul night air from within."[2] Enthusiastically received on both sides of the Atlantic, *Notes on Nursing* went through several editions in America. Catherine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe echoed Nightingale's ideas in their 1869 book *The American Woman's Home*, where they wrote, "Tight sleeping rooms, and close, air-tight stoves, are now starving and poisoning more than half of this nation."[3]

However, the widespread use of sleeping porches would never have come about without the specter of tuberculosis, for which the medical establishment prescribed fresh air as both a treatment and a means of prevention. Tuberculosis had reached epidemic proportions in the 19th century and was popularly referred to as the White Plague or the Great Killer. In 1900, when the death rate had already begun to fall from its high in the mid-1800s, tuberculosis killed in the United States at a rate three times that of cancer, striking young and old alike, not just in tenements but in the homes of the middle and upper classes as well.[4] Scientists struggled to find a cure, but antibiotics were not available to treat the disease until the 1940s. For nearly a hundred years, fresh air, night and day, was one of the most widely accepted treatments.

Some of the first sleeping porches in the United States were created for the treatment of tuberculosis. An early example was the small porch added to the home of a patient in Hanover, Massachusetts, in 1898.[5] It is a minimal, very obvious add-on, but soon sleeping porches became an essential element in the planning of sanatoria, most of which were distinguished by extensive verandas or multiple balconies used for outside sleeping. The cure cottages at the famous Lake Saranac sanatorium in New York State featured "sitting-out porches" where ambulatory patients took the air in cure chairs during the day, and sleeping porches for use at night, usually on an upper floor, with at least two sides that could be fully opened. Glass storm windows could be installed in winter, but the sleeping porches were unheated.

By the early 20th century, a nationwide movement to cure tuberculosis and prevent its spread was under way, using publicity and propaganda to an unprecedented extent and reaching the public through magazines, newspapers, posters, speakers, and programs in the schools. A major component of the message was that fresh air, day and night, was as important in the prevention of the disease as in its cure.

Around the same time, the earlier fears of night air were finally being banished as scientists proved that mosquitoes were agents in the transmission of malaria and yellow fever. When window screening became available at reasonable prices in the late 1890s, all the elements were in place for a full-scale fresh-air-sleeping movement.

Not surprisingly, the first examples of sleeping porches not strictly associated with the treatment of tuberculosis can be found in houses designed for locations where fresh air had long been held to be beneficial, such as the seaside and the mountains. Since "porch" traditionally referred to a projecting, covered entrance, these earliest structures were called "loggias" or "balconies." Two second-floor loggias appear in a design for a house in the Adirondacks published in the July 1903 issue of *The Craftsman*, the popular magazine that featured the designs and philosophy of the American Arts and Crafts movement. The accompanying text clearly states that the loggias were intended for use as "sleeping porches," indicating that the term was already in common usage.

After 1903, rooms labeled as sleeping porches can be found in a growing number of house plans. Many of these houses were built in southern California, a center for health-seekers at the turn of the century. The Pasadena-based architects Greene & Greene began including sleeping porches in their house designs in 1904; the Pasadena home they designed for David B. Gamble, of the Proctor & Gamble Ivory Soap empire, has three. Sleeping porches continued to be an important element in southern California houses well into the 1920s and 1930s, with R. M. Schindler and Richard Neutra both designing notable examples.

Frank Lloyd Wright was another sleeping-porch pioneer. The Westcott House of 1904 included two, balancing the symmetrical garden façade. Wright's drawings for the Robert D. Clark House of 1904 presented a split-level plan with a large porch accessible by short flights of stairs from both the dining room and the bedrooms. In the text accompanying this design in the Wasmuth portfolio, Wright stated that the porch could be used for outside dining or as a sleeping porch.[6] Other Wright houses of the period, such as the Little House of 1902, also include porches connected to bedrooms; these were probably intended for use as sleeping porches, although this was not specified in the plans.

By 1908, such popular periodicals as *Country Life in America*, *House Beautiful*, and *Collier's*, as well as general health manuals, began to extol the benefits of outdoor sleeping. *Country Life in America* correspondent Thomas McAdam bore enthusiastic witness: "I can truly say that outdoor sleeping is the greatest luxury of my life, because it has made a new man of me and enables me to enjoy life as never before."[7] Another article described a father who reluctantly slept outside with his baby when the doctor recommended outdoor treatment for the child's throat infection. Converted after the first night, he soon moved his whole family onto the sleeping porch.[8]

The magazines provided practical advice for surviving winter nights on a sleeping porch without freezing to death, such as the use of double mattresses, multiple down comforters, nightcaps, and carefully wrapped blankets. A properly wrapped bed for winter sleeping was referred to as a "Klondike bed."[9] Sleepers bothered by the early morning sunlight were advised to rub their eyelids with burnt cork.[10]

The sleeping porch of the Staiti House in Houston, as photographed in 1920, embodies all the features of a proper sleeping porch, as recommended in periodicals and health manuals of the period. A sleeping porch should be roofed, and open on at least two sides. Those sides should be solid for three to five feet up to keep drafts from reaching under the beds and to give some privacy, then screened to the ceiling. Canvas blinds could be installed for use during rainstorms, preferably to be raised from the bottom up. Furnishings were to be kept simple due to exposure to the weather. Some later sleeping porches, much more elaborate in their decoration and correspondingly more enclosed to protect the interior, began to look like rooms with multiple windows rather than porches.

For those who could not afford a sleeping porch, inventors devised low-cost alternatives. The *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1908 featured several versions of "window tents," essentially awnings attached

Illustrations opposite page:

1. Bundled children on a family sleeping porch, 1909. *Country Life in America*, May 1909, p. 45. *Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.*

2. Window tent developed by Dr. S. A. Knopf. *Ladies Home Journal*, September 1908, p. 27. *Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.*

3. The Porte-Air, 1908. *Ladies Home Journal*, September 1908, p. 27. *Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.*

4. Henry T. Staiti House, Houston, Alfred C. Finn, architect, ca.1920. *Courtesy Harris County Heritage Society, Houston.*

5. Dione Neutra, wife of architect Richard Neutra, reading on her sleeping porch at the VDL Research House, Los Angeles, ca.1940. *Courtesy Dion Neutra, Architect.*

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to the inside of a window and fitted over the head of a bed to separate the sleeper from the tainted interior air. In another version, the head of the sleeper is pushed outside the window and protected by the tent. Cross-ventilation from open windows would have worked as well as either arrangement. The strangest variation, called the Porte-Air, actually reduced access to fresh air; luckily, its claustrophobic appearance probably discouraged most would-be purchasers. Designed for rooms where the bed could not be placed directly against a window, it connected the sleeper's head to the outside air by means of a long cloth tube stretching to the window.

The *Bungalow Magazine* of 1913 presented more elaborate alternatives to sleeping porches. The "modern fresh air bed" required that a hole be cut in the bedroom wall so that the bed could be pushed onto a platform outside. Another variation provided a metal canopy that could be swung out over the sleeper to protect him from rain, a screen to keep insects away, and a curtain to "shield the occupant from the sun or from prying eyes." When it came time to make up the bed, it could be rolled inside.[11]

Real sleeping porches were far preferable to such labored alternatives, and they were added onto existing houses as well as included in new houses, large and small, all over the country. There was no universally recommended location for the porch other than on an upper floor for greater purity of air, privacy, and security. There were sleeping balconies above front entrances and sleeping porches on the sides and the backs of houses. They perched like proud cockpits on top of the wide-spreading roofs of bungalows that consequently became known as airplane bungalows, and were tucked discreetly in the far back corners of small, one-story cottages and bungalows. They were even incorporated in avant-garde modern architecture when R. M. Schindler included them in several of his projects of the 1920s, including the Lovell beach house and his King Road house, where he referred to them as "sleeping baskets."[12]

By the early 1920s, a sleeping porch was an important component of any proper, middle-class home. Sinclair Lewis's Babbitt was as proud of the porch in his up-to-date home as of his ability to sleep there on all but the coldest nights. But Americans of the 20th century have tended to look for comfort in their daily lives, even at the expense of health; and, in truth, many of the health claims made for sleeping porches were overblown. As a result, the sleeping porch eventually became the province of summer sleepers. The availability of powerful attic fans and then air conditioning led to its demise. Today, "fresh" air has begun to seem less healthful. We now install air filters to combat pollen and pollution, and proceed to work, play, and sleep in protected interior environments. Most sleeping porches in older homes have been enclosed and incorporated as full bedrooms or sun rooms.

For 40 years sleeping porches provided a welcome alternative to stuffy bedrooms, probably improved the health of some people who slept on them, and made summer nights more comfortable for many. Their special atmosphere of protected freedom — derived from their hybrid character, neither indoors nor out — meant that sleepers could enjoy the sense of exposure to nature while maintaining easy access to domestic comfort and technology, incorporating a taste of the natural world into a civilized daily routine. Those of us who experienced the pleasures of sleeping porches owe a large debt of gratitude to the turn-of-the-century health-seekers who popularized them. ■

Illustrations

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7. House, Hanover, Massachusetts, with sleeping porch added for tuberculosis patient, 1898. Knopf, *Tuberculosis*, p. 62.

8. Airplane bungalow with sleeping porch. *Modern Home* (New Orleans: Southern Pine Assn., 1921).

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10. Sleeping porch, The Pines. *Gabriel Moulin's San Francisco Peninsula*, from the archives of Gabriel Moulin Studios, San Francisco (Sausalito: Windgate Press, 1985), plate 136.

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1912 NORTH BOULEVARD
A.I.A. Award, 1994
Restoration & Renovation by William F. Stern
$495,000 Kathy Wetmore

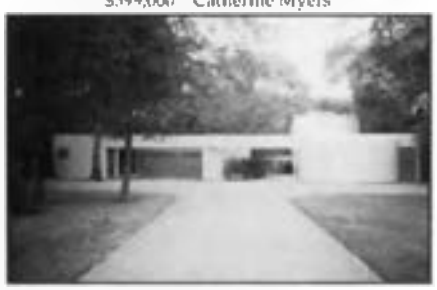
RICE - MUSEUM
Exquisite Custom Contemporary by Tom Wilson
Private & Serene, Spectacular Interior
$1,295,000 Kathy Wetmore

1611 BANKS
Fabulous Renovation, 4 BR, Den,
Super Master Suite, Stainless Steel Kitchen
$365,000 Kathy Wetmore

MONTROSE - MUSEUM
Sensitively Restored, National Historic Registry,
Arts & Crafts Home
$300,000's Jay Monroe

BRAES HEIGHTS - MED CENTER
Custom (88) One Story on Double Lot
Gracious Interiors Designed for Entertaining
$599,000 Catherine Myers

WEST UNIVERSITY - BROMPTON
Custom Home by Carmichael Dame, 1990
Formals, Library, Media Rm, Wine Rm, 5BR, Pool
Mary DeHomme & Pam Wilson



16 CRESTWOOD
Gwathemy-Siegal Renovation, 1979
Wooded Ravine Setting, 1+/- Acre
$895,000 Kathy Wetmore

MUSEUM AREA
Singleton Designed Townhome Features
3 Bedroom Suites & High Ceilings
$259,500 Kathy Wetmore

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Anderson and Iris Todd House, Anderson Todd (above), architect, 1995.

At Home With Anderson Todd

Frank Welch

Anderson Todd, professor emeritus of architecture at Rice University, has begun his academic retirement with a bang by building a sparkling new house for himself and his wife, Iris, at Bolsover and Hazard. It is the second house he has designed for himself, and in both formal style and execution it perfectly reflects the talent and philosophy of this architect and educator. That means a structure that adheres closely to the precepts identified with Mies van der Rohe.

While a student at Princeton, Andy Todd met Mies, who would serve as his architectural and philosophical mentor. Todd recalls his first personal encounter with the newly emigrated architect: "Mies came to Princeton when I was a freshman. No one would help him hang the exhibit of his precise drawings of bricks, so I did. Little did I know what the future with this man held for me." Todd, in turn, served his teacher in 1956 by helping see to it that Mies received the commission to design Cullinan Hall and later the Brown Pavilion for Houston's Museum of Fine Arts.

If Mies was Todd's architectural lodestar, Jean Labatut was his inspiration as an educator. Born in France and educated at Paris's Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Labatut joined the Princeton faculty in 1928 and remained there until his retirement in 1967. The Princeton teacher inspired his students in the manner of the humanist-liberal tradition with analysis, knowledge, and sympathy for all periods of architecture. "He was the greatest teacher and meant everything to me, he was my *patrone*," Todd recalls. On his first visit to Labatut's office, in 1939, Todd saw a photograph of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion. The professor explained, "It is one of the ways architecture will be built in the future." The two great influences on Todd's architectural and academic career merged in this one moment of revelation, Labatut wide-ranging and inclusionist, Mies strict, rigorous, and methodical.

There was a third important figure: Todd's maternal grandfather, John Hampton Barnes, in whose Philadelphia house Todd first heard architecture discussed. A successful Philadelphia lawyer, Barnes hired his best friend, Wilson Eyre — a prominent Philadelphia architect — to design the family house on Waterloo Road. Later, as chairman of his bank board's building committee, Barnes was instrumental in approving the choice of George Howe and William Lescaze as architects for the country's first modern skyscraper, the Philadelphia Savings Fund Building in Philadelphia. Todd's paternal grandfather and his father's brother were both architects in North Carolina.

"I have never," Todd declares, "said to a student: 'Do it like Mies would do it.' Never. Never!" Some longtime Todd observers understand that he actually feels this in his heart, but in truth Todd's passionate beliefs lead directly to Mies. Former student John Casbarian thinks Todd really believes that he teaches without bias: "His love and respect for Mies van der Rohe is so embedded in him he doesn't recognize it. It's like being so close to something, one can't see it. Early in his career Andy found the philosophy that suited him, and he totally absorbed it into his being." Todd asserts emphatically, "I try to inspire [students] with certain basic principles: how to organize space in a rational manner, how to conceive a structure with logic and directness, and how to assemble its parts with common sense and grace!" If God is in the details, for Todd it is a wise, analytical God of *Sachlichkeit* — directness, objectivity, and realness.

Todd House, Bolsover Street elevation.

Todd House, front court

Todd House, plan.

Todd's new house at 1932 Bolsover is located on property that had been used as a site for house design projects in Todd's Rice studios for more than 20 years. "The lot is not quite long enough north-south for the sort of modular organization I was asking the students for, but nobody caught the discrepancy in all those years except one fellow." In spite of the site's dimensional intransigence, his new house strictly adheres to Todd's familiar principles of modularity and respect for the clarity of planning, the roles of materials and their exact assemblies. In concept it is a junior version of the house Todd designed for his family at 9 Shadowlawn Circle in 1959, but as Houston architect William Stern says, "more youthful, less Miesian, more like the 1950s California Case Study houses." Todd himself describes his new house as "quirky, quaint, and cozy."

The older Shadowlawn house is larger than the Bolsover house, richer in tone and execution, and more somber in mien. It is likewise a courtyard house but with high walled courts on its east and west sides bracketing a rectangular, block plan. After a visit many years ago, Philip Johnson described Todd's award-winning house as "more Mies than Mies." There is a grand sweep to the central spaces, which lock around the walnut-sheathed core. The larger house finds a muted echo in the more intimate Bolsover structure. The Bolsover furnishings are mellower: Windsor and Tugendhat chairs coexist.

Key to both houses is the element Todd considers of paramount importance in planning the modern house: the centralized kitchen. "There are no servants anymore, very few even in River Oaks," he asserts. "I grew up in a big three-story house in Philadelphia with two acres of lawn in front, served by a staff of nine taking care of everything from gardening to chauffeuring. Now, with servants at a minimum, it makes extraordinary sense to locate the kitchen right in the center of a house." While the Shadowlawn kitchen is hemmed in between the living and sleeping areas, its only natural light coming from a smallish skylight, the Bolsover kitchen benefits from a glazed north wall facing the house's inner court.

A high-walled court, reminiscent of one at the earlier house, on the south side of the Bolsover house runs along Hazard to form an entry alley, centered on steel gates facing Bolsover. Part of what gives the new house its youthful feeling is the buoyancy of the light-reflecting white steel structure, white drywall interior, grey-flecked white terrazzo floor, and light grey-brown brick. The details are similar, though sharper and more articulate at the Shadowlawn house: the black steel fascia has a crisp channel reveal dear to Todd that is missing from Bolsover. "It cost too much to repeat that," Todd notes regretfully as he gently segues into a mantra concerning masonry modularity. Otherwise the diverse parts of the assembled new structure are as carefully and thoughtfully ordained as in the earlier, more expensive house. He is well known for his passion on the subject of the performance of materials. He draws full-scale details, with every brick in wall elevations and dimensioned plans as precise and succinct as his intentions. He sketches and slaps his extended hands together at right angles, illustrating how wood members should relate and fit. Suddenly he asks: "What size does Sheetrock come in?! Aha! 'Eight foot and ten foot' — every architect gives the same answer. None of them know there is nine-foot Sheetrock!" The Bolsover ceiling height is 9 feet 2⅛ inches high with a ⅛-inch reveal at the ceiling and a 1½-inch recessed base at the floor.

Many architects from his two generations of Rice design studios still see Todd regularly. Members of his first graduating class of 1955 meet once a month in Houston for lunch. Mel Hildebrandt, one of the '55 regulars, comments on Todd as a teacher: "Three things about him stood out. First was his enthusiasm for architecture. He made you believe it was important. Second was his interest in each person individually; there was the sense that one had personal value. And third, he made me believe that I could achieve. I owe him a lot."

Another member of Todd's first class is Benson Ford, who through Todd's encouragement and tactical help went on to the wider world of Princeton on a scholarship. "Yes, Andy made the Princeton experience possible because he believed in me, a kid from Pasadena, Texas. First Andy at Rice and then Jean Labatut at Princeton were the great influences on my life. I vividly remember Todd sitting with a group of students holding this block of wood, mahogany, I believe, turning it over in his hand and asking: 'What is this piece of wood all about? What do you do with it?' We were stumped, of course. It was an oarlock from a Venetian gondola. He was pushing us to analyze, visualize, and seek answers based on the evidence. This bone-lean oarlock was very beautiful and puzzling but, secretly, perfectly functional. That was his and Labatut's way: charging us to find our own answers about truth, clarity, and simplicity." (Ford later was the contractor for the Shadowlawn house.)

"What we tried to teach were *principles* of good architecture in its various guises," Todd explains. "Then, in Labatut's words, we told them to 'close the book and create a forgetfulness' and move on. I wanted them to find out what was *good* and learn to like it. There are things that make good architecture that you don't see. There must be a moral framework. Yes, sure, virtue is its own reward — it's the only reward you really get." ■

CASA LUCIDA

TWO HOUSES TRANSFORMED INTO EPHEMERAL ART INSTALLATIONS

Patrick Peters

ALCHEMY HOUSE

Alchemy House

Sigmund Freud's definition of the uncanny — "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" — well describes two sites sculpted in Houston's cottage neighborhoods. Their media were not the traditional sculptors' worked surfaces of stone, steel, or bronze, but rather the rupture of the familiar tissues of two ordinary houses. These buildings, each scheduled for demolition at the time of its transformation, drew potency from their ephemerality. They endure in memory through the force of their jarring resonance with the modest neighborhoods that surrounded them, which are themselves threatened by speculation and neglect.

Each of the two sites, *Alchemy House* and *O: A House Installation*, was the project of a team of collaborating artists. The person common to both teams is Dan Havel, a sculptor who moved to Houston from Minneapolis, where he had already been involved in site-specific installations. Through a residency at P.S. 1 in New York he had worked as a crew member with Japanese sculptor Tadashi Kawamata on one of his whirlwindlike installations. Upon arriving in Houston, Havel moved into 5419 Blossom Street, an old house nestled among modest cottages. When his landlord informed him of her intention to demolish the building in three years, Havel proposed using it as the site of an extended installation that would make the familiar disquieting. This work became *Alchemy House*, which ceremonially opened on two occasions before being literally split open to celebrate the vernal equinox in 1994.

Taking alchemical practices as its theme, the installation was composed of five rooms, each of which was dedicated to specific materials and material transformations common among alchemical processes. These were the earth room (the former living room), transformed by soil-coated walls and a living cornfield cut into the floor; the salt and lead room, with live arms and legs hanging mannequin-like through ceiling cut-outs (with participants' bodies hidden above); the mercurial bathroom, whose silver tub was occupied on opening evenings by a bearded female bather; the copper and sulfur room, with walls clad in pennies; and the kitchen, rendered as a cosmic furnace by Houston sculptor Toby Topek.

The final stage of the work was done in collaboration with Kelli Scott Kelley, a Houston painter and performance artist, who wrote the performances, and Amy Ell, a Houston dancer and performance artist, who created alchemical images through her choreography. Like the diurnal movement of the sun, the performances created by Kelley and Ell were closed cycles, infinitely repeatable. They occurred on three ritual occasions marking the autumnal equinox and winter solstice of 1993 and the vernal equinox of 1994.

The final performance on the evening of 18 March 1994 signaled the closing of *Alchemy* with the house's vivisection. Or that was the intention. Three artists, attacking the candle-lit empty house with circular saws, severed the porch and main roof supports, anticipating that the house would ceremonially implode before the streetside audience. However, the network of supports and the sheathing of its platform frame proved too structurally redundant to yield such a dramatic conclusion. Only later was *Alchemy House* fully demolished.

O House

While Havel worked on *Alchemy House* for two and a half years, work on *O: A House Installation* was, by necessity, compressed into a much shorter period of time. Also, Havel believed that the performances at *Alchemy House* had taken priority over the experience of the sculptor's entropic construction, so in *O House* he sought to avoid that problem.

O House opened on 27 April 1995 and existed for less than four weeks. The team of Havel and Houston sculptors Kate Perley and Dean Ruck was permitted to act on the dilapidated cottage because the building's owner planned to clear the site for future development. Behind the boarded-up façade of 707 Lester Street in Houston's West End, surrounded by metal sheds and sagging clapboard cottages, they revealed an unlikely space.

"I had just seen some kivas in New Mexico in the Anasazi ruins," Havel says. "It struck me that they [the Indians] wouldn't build a site without a round room or kiva. I was interested in reconstructing architecture back to its archetype." In an endeavor to reformulate the traditional kiva type, the team's plan called for a circular room — the "O" room — with a spiral entrance so that the center space could be very dark.

The team began by tearing out all interior walls and measuring the void to "find the center," as Havel describes the process. Next they tore out floor boards and found foundation beams that roughly framed a square almost exactly where their imposed order had centered the now-hollow shell.

In order to introduce unmediated nature into the house, they moved in eight cubic yards of earth, muffling the sounds of footsteps and speech and distancing the visitor from domestic associations. Next, the spiral concrete-on-wire-mesh wall was built from floor to roof structure and colored with acetylene soot. Lastly, they dug and flooded a pit at the center and planned to cut a hole in the roof above the pit.

All the work was done without a city building permit, so it was important to maintain an anonymous façade to avoid detection during the construction process. Therefore they made no changes to the cottage's exterior except to securely board up its doors and windows. The blind exterior led to a significant discovery that changed the original idea.

The opaque walls of the kiva created a very dark central room. In order to get some natural light into the space, the collaborators drilled holes through the roof, unintentionally turning *O House* into a camera obscura. The penetration of sunlight reflected from clouds and the large willow oak behind the house caused the projection of layers of images of various scales and movements into the central space. These were inverted images, not shadows, that appeared on the walls and surfaces in varying sizes and degrees of distortion. In the center of the earthen floor at the middle of the kiva, the pit filled with blue-black water constructed a metaphysical allusion to infinity. The

CASA OBSCURA

TWO HOUSES TRANSFORMED INTO EPHEMERAL ART INSTALLATIONS

O House, dangerous building sign. [4]

trio originally had planned to open the front wall to deconstruct the house, but they grew to prefer the mystery held within the dilapidated exterior.

As a means of redressing the ugliness of this little house, the collaborators removed its interior lining of gypsum wallboard. The resulting bared structure crystallized several ideas. Not only did the building's simple framing present an unselfconscious beauty, but the history of the structure was also rendered more vivid. Marks where a fire had destroyed its headers and the level of decay and dissolution to its fabric were now readily apparent.

While *Alchemy House* had resisted destruction as a publicly enacted ritual, *O House* was privately leveled by a backhoe in 23 minutes. The developer who had planned to demolish the existing house was persuaded to retain the large oak tree, the image of which had been projected into the heart of the installation. It still occupies the site as a silent witness. Havel finds direct correspondence between the ephemerality of these installations and Buddhist sand paintings: they require significant commitment for their conception and execution but, due to their fragility, disappear in a moment.

O House lacked such modern amenities as faxes, voicemail, e-mail, cellular phones, video games, and microwaves that tend to reduce direct physical contact with real time and space. Can one find refuge from the "mediascape"[1] by merely stripping off the trappings of consumer culture at one or two sites? Perhaps not. But these two works suggest another possibility: that by embracing profound materiality and by recognizing the accelerated decrepitude common to most postmodern cities,[2] one may seek to resist the supplanting of lived experience by signs. Havel suggests that *O House* lives on because it found ownership among its visitors,[3] including one group that came there on four occasions to meditate until the sun's projections faded to darkness.

O House and *Alchemy House* challenge consumptive desire by their ephemerality. They turn attention away from art as collected objects and toward the individual's autonomous experience and its lasting record of personal memories. Here the anti-sign is a subtraction, an erasure, or more properly a hollowing out of comforting domestic associations, allowing an alternative, even uncanny, reality to filter in. The inside is challenged by the outside, the private by the public, the man-made by the natural, and the tectonic by the geological, creating a crisis of boundaries that dissolves conventional limits.

1 Paul Christensen, "Mediation and Return: Ambiguous Identity at the City's Edge," in Malcolm Quantrill and Bruce Webb, eds., *Urban Forms, Suburban Dreams* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1993, p. 9.

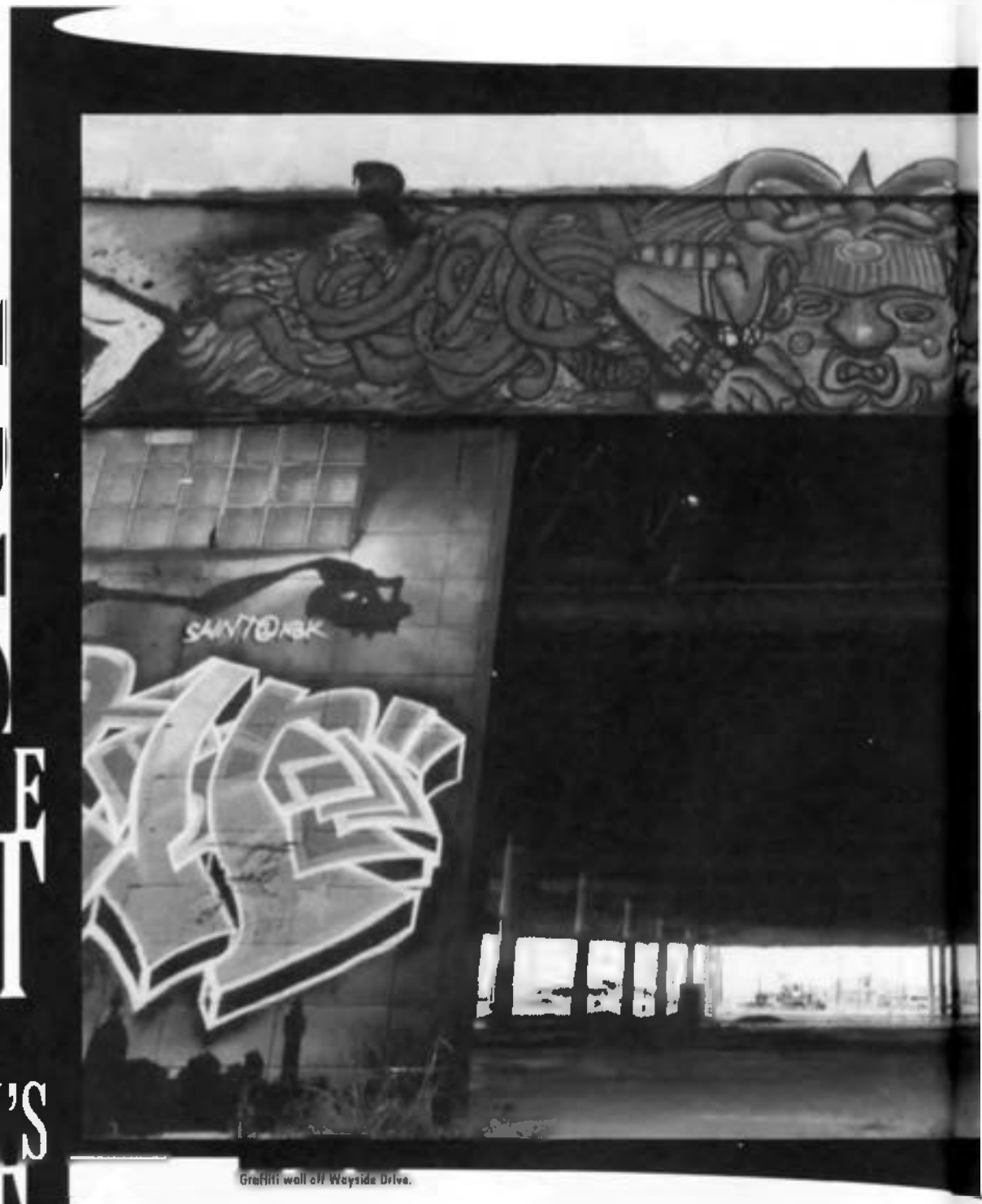
2 Giuliana Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*," *October*, Summer 1987, p. 63.

3 Interview with Dan Havel, Kate Petley, and Dean Ruck, 23 September 1995.

4 Because all the interior detritus formed a significant curbside mound, Arthur Cobb, an alert city inspector, cited *O House* as a dangerous building, thereby assuring that the project would live on in the public record: "D/B 2.20.95 A Cobb."

GRAPHIC DETAILS

THE WALL ART OF HOUSTON'S EAST SIDE



Graffiti wall off Wayside Drive.

On Houston's burgeoning east side, a growing assortment of eccentric and decorative wall paintings is transforming undistinguished, blank walls into delightful and sometimes magical façades using a vocabulary of vernacular images embedded in the common visual culture of the area. Particularly in the murals of Eastwood Park, Harrisburg, and Magnolia Park, a quirky mixture of contemporary images (snowcones, soccer balls, baby bottles) and national symbols (cacti, flags, eagles, sombreros) are combined with elements from Mexican folk art, pre-Columbian gods, and hieroglyphs. The colors are festive, with lush, stark chromatic contrasts. Although many of the projects are socially concerned, artistically captivating, and collectively produced, a few seem to have been designed as slick high-concept pieces. Some businesses are capitalizing on the mural movement by transforming incisive vignettes of social protest into dulled, pretty scenes from mainstream history. These more commercial projects aim to foster self-esteem in the youthful painters and establish better relationships between businesses and residents, but at their worst may function only as coloring books for the working class.

Muralists often face the choice of expressing themselves honestly in the ghetto art-world or designing a mural template on which people recruited from the community will fill in the colors. In order to make art that is accessible, educational, yet aesthetically alive, the successful muralists in the East End must keep one eye on images and how to play with them, and the other on the unemployment line. Environmental change depends, not just on the landscape, but on the people who live and

El Panal Radiator Shop, 7140 Canal Street.

SUSIE KALIL AND ANN WALTON SIEBER

work and enliven public spaces.

New directions in America's mural movement toward community art continue to be thrust from below, from a life begun quite literally underground by graffiti artists (or "graffiti writers" as they tend to call themselves) who stake out their claim on this postindustrial world. Beyond the subways that link Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan to the streets and the underpasses of Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, neighborhoods have been transformed overnight by the crazy characters and wild-style lettering of mysterious hands bearing names such as Phase 2, Dondi, Kase 2, and Fab 5 Fred.

With graffiti writers the name is the thing, as they elaborately repeat their graffiti monikers on wall after wall. Naming power is supreme power; it creates value and even takes on mythic significance. "It really tells people how they feel about themselves," says Houston graffiti writer Adrian de la Cerda (a.k.a. "Bristle"), who at 24 is one of the elder members of the graffiti scene. "It's about power — I'm bold, I'm strong — that's the reason for the bold letters. All of the pieces in Houston are signed by the graffiti writer. He's saying, 'I'm out here; I'm alive. Look at my colors. Look at my sharp edges.'" Like the mural artists, local writers such as Gonzo, Kex, Enemy, and Berserk tie together snatches of folkloric images, emblems of the Chicano movement, and quirky commercial signage from the neighborhood in a colorful, dense, overall mass of *placas* (symbols) and graphisms. Both writers and artists share a desire for reconstructing a different set of social relations that will connect art with the neighborhood.

Bristle is solid in appearance, laid back, and avid in his speech. He's been "bombing" for four years, starting with tags — just a quick scrawl of his name — then moving up in color and size and artistry. Bristle's first legal graffiti was commissioned by ColorTile. Located on the feeder road of Interstate 45, the building's large, windowless west side was a favorite for gang tagging. "I took a photo of his [the store manager's] wall with all the graffiti, and I took a photo of one of my walls and I said, 'Which would you rather have?'" The store manager hired him. Bristle studied art for two years at Houston Community College and San Jacinto College, as well as taking art courses at the Glassell School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, but didn't like it. "It was too much 'I'm an artist,'" he says, making air quotes. "I've done drawing and painting, but nothing satisfies me as much as graffiti art," he says. "Why? I guess the fact that everybody got to see it, got to see me, a piece of me — the size, the colors — and it was me bringing it to them. So it was a gift. Going out and risking your butt just to give something away. . . . Some of those price tags on those paintings — five hundred dollars! You should make it easier to obtain them. Regular people should have access to art."

But the perennial question is impossible to answer: Is it really art? Is graffiti an authentic form of community art or a destructive excess of culture gone haywire? Such questions have hindered graffiti's integration into the art world ever since East Village artists such as Crash, Wasp, and Lady Pink in New York City changed private behavior into a commodity. Some believe that graffiti is nothing more than deface-

El Torito Lounge, 6208 Harrisburg Boulevard.

Community mural at Thompson's Sling Co., 6601 Harrisburg Boulevard, Jeff Garcia, lead artist, Hugo Pedraza, Dante Rodriguez; Magnolia Youth Corp., Harrisburg-Wayside Revitalization Project, August, 1994.

ment of public property, symbolizing violation and social anarchy. For them, the presence of graffiti increases the sense of lawlessness and danger. Still, graffiti is radical — radical art with a radical methodology — because it is illegal. Its vitality springs from the indigenous situation as much as from the creativity of the artist.

Paradoxically, crossing the border into criminal behavior may be necessary to give graffiti its authenticity. To the uninitiated, graffiti can look like so much nasty scribble-scrabble, at best a hermetic babble of hieroglyphs. "Graffiti speaks to a certain community that knows the code, or to those who try to find out what it says and what we're doing," according to Bristle. "If you don't care to find that out or relate to it, then graffiti isn't for you. When a piece is finished, it's art — form, composition, and location all tie in. You can look at it purely in terms of color, abstraction, and dimension — and enjoy it for that. But it also conveys a message, which can be very simple or extremely intense."

Although Bristle maintains that graffiti is accepted in Houston more easily than in other cities, it is still associated with violent gang tagging. "I used to do some tagging as a kid during the mid-eighties," says Bristle. "But I was told it was for bad people, for *cholos*, for gang members. It was wrong, so I stopped. In 1992, I did my first big piece, right down the street from my house. I did the first part between one and two in the morning. When I was through, I wasn't very happy because I didn't have the tools I needed as far as tips, knowledge. I went back the next day and worked until I was satisfied with it. From then on, I was hooked. It said 'Bomber,' which is the act of doing a piece illegally. I remember walking to the store and seeing a bunch of kids hanging out, smoking cigarettes, sitting in front of the piece, looking at it, trying to feel like they're a part of that piece. The kids don't know who did it, but they assimilated themselves. 'This is for me,' they say. 'It's put here for me to feel good about my area.' That's how it all starts." Bristle's palette of pink and green is rooted in the cheap, bright paint that has been used to distinguish buildings in his neighborhood for years. Similarly, his Latin-influenced characters have been informed by the folkish pictographs that advertise products on the exterior façades of sidewalk cafes, bars, car repair shops, and beauty parlors. The 1973 Leo Tanguma mural of death, poverty, and destruction at the Continental Can Company building on Canal Street *(The Rebirth of Our Nationality)* meant a lot to him. "When I was growing up, the paint was very fresh," he says. "I guess that was why, subliminally, I got involved." Frequently his pieces incorporate Aztec and Mayan images, which he transforms into complex layers of archetypal expression. Letters are not separated but crunched together and interwoven, evoking the animated rhythms of Celtic or Arabic writing.

When Bristle first became a writer, there were no more than ten graffiti artists in Houston. By his estimate, that number has grown to over 100 writers whose turf extends from the East Side to Humble and Katy, to Rosenberg and Bellaire. Last year he organized a Texas-wide convention that drew writers from all over Texas for a legal graffitithon on an exterior wall of an old car lot near Wayside. Bristle can drive the city streets and read them like a book. "Gonzo's been here," he says, laughing at a black scrawl in a parking lot off Wayside. "Look, a new tag!" he says, pointing out a freeway pylon under Interstate 45. "I haven't seen that out before." He can tell who scaled the Blue Ribbon Rice elevators (recently demolished) on Studemont, and who's been hopping the fence at old Jefferson Davis Hospital on Allen Parkway, the latest hot wall.

As graffiti injects itself into the public domain, the competition increases between the writers, who go by aliases to conceal their identity from the police. Rather than remain committed to their hit-and-run tactics and the potential consequence of being jailed, however, many will stop taking risks. Bristle is part of this crossover crowd, but with reservations. "A lot of the kids say if it ain't legal, it isn't real," he says. "I still do illegal too. It helps you keep your edge. But I'll take as much time as when I do a legal. I'll take my time and take some risks." Commissioned graffiti does have the potential of going flaccid, being too bland, too civic. Bristle often covers up gang graffiti, but his commercial work is alive and upbeat. "What it is, it's a hip-hop mentality, while Houston is more gangsta, more violent." Many of the graffiti writers are picking up on the "reprogramming," as Bristle calls it. Their pieces proclaim, "Depth not Death"; "Increase da peace!"; "Graffiti is art, not a crime"; "Every act of creation is an act of destruction (Picasso)."

Graffiti art can be seen as the out-

Yorkorio, near the Houston Ship Channel.

"The Rebirth of our Nationality," Leo Tanguma, artist, 1973.

growth of a genuine aesthetic impulse, the personal expression of an oppressed and disenfranchised group. Denied control of their landscape through legitimate channels, graffiti writers are grabbing their place at the table. Their powerful, in-your-face messages and headlong, wild style declare, in no uncertain terms, an authority-floating voice that will not be hushed. For writers like Bristle, graffiti will always represent unrestricted freedom and a chance to give something back to the community; it reinforces one's identity, creates a sense of common purpose, and lends an upbeat appearance to the immediate environment. "It can bring the community together, as far as the young kids who are lost, unloved, uncared for," says Bristle, who currently has three young apprentices. "These kids will be teenagers in no time and faced with the decision of stealing a car, beating up a kid for his shoes, or joining a gang. But with graffiti, we're working in a positive way. We're a different kind of gang. We show these kids support. We give them time." ■

The great Mexican muralists — Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros — painted their people struggling for freedom in patterns so brutal, so explosive that the power of their work remains one of the greatest Mexican contributions to the art world. The tradition these muralists began spread during the late 1960s to American cities with large Chicano populations, including Houston, where an artist named Leo Tanguma painted the anger around him and the frustration he felt.

The son of a migrant farmworker, Tanguma joined the militant Mexican-American Youth Organization, which met in the Casa de Amigos on Gano Street. With La Raza Unida making organized bids for political office in Houston and the Voters' Registration Project coalescing Hispanic voting-booth power across the state, it was a period of restlessness turned vocal, and for Tanguma it was a stimulus to prove in huge paintings that a Chicano could make his presence known outside of the barrio. Tanguma's attitudes strengthened when he met David Alfaro Siqueiros in 1972 in Mexico City. The master impressed upon his Texas visitor that human history is a monumental experience. Tanguma began to feel that Chicano art had been grossly misdirected, relegated to portraying such subjects as Pancho Villa and the Aztecs. He felt his people should be seen as having gone beyond a folkloric culture into a new, often combative variety of United States citizenship.

With these ideas, Tanguma approached the Continental Can Company on Canal Street with plans for an 18-by-240-foot mural depicting the history of Spanish-speaking people in America. Originally meant as a community statement for the 1972 Main Street II show, The Rebirth of Our Nationality was not completed until a year later by Tanguma and his collaborators, Remigio Garcia and Janie Galvan. With images of death, poverty, and slavery, this forceful, dynamic painting shocked many. "My theme of the emerging Chicano depicted too much struggle," Tanguma said a few years after its completion. "It didn't glorify the system but glorified the people instead. And this has thrown fear into the establishment, which assumes everyone is corrupt. But the truth of the matter is, the Chicano cannot be bought off. We have special qualities as a people that are just now awakening."

Murals like Tanguma's can act as catalysts, making the community stronger, more visible. But this calls for a redefinition of common values, even a revaluation of a history previously ignored or suppressed. Community murals are often controversial, for this formulation of values not only serves as symbolic social action, but also implies a possible alternative world. For over two decades, viewers have identified with Tanguma's mural because it tells the story of the viewers themselves. They see their lives reflected in the massive figures' powerful, thrusting movements cast on a heroic scale.

Simply Complex

Danny Samuels

Combination restaurant, bar, and real estate office, near Yucca, Arizona. Bill Wood (Dyna Domes), designer-builder, 1988.

The Architecture of the Jumping Universe, A Polemic: How Complexity Science Is Changing Architecture and Culture *by Charles Jencks. London: Academy Editions, 1995. 176 pp., illus., $20.*

How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built *by Stewart Brand. New York: Viking Penguin, 1994. 243 pp., illus., $30; $20 paper.*

Reviewed by Danny Samuels

In recent decades, a significant new cross-disciplinary synthesis has developed in science that addresses the basic question, How do order and complexity emerge from chaos? After centuries of predictable, confirmable, linear science based on reductionism — breaking things down into their smallest constituent parts in order to examine them — some scientists have again started looking at the wholes that are greater than the sum of their parts, at the overarching "patterns which connect."

Drawing together the diverse disciplines of physics, mathematics, biology, information theory, and computing into a synthetic approach commonly known as "the sciences of complexity," the new paradigm offers insights into how complex systems — such as an oak tree, an ant colony, a wetland, a brain, an economy, or a city — arise and evolve. In essence, complexity theory shows that all such systems are generated by, and evolve according to, similar kinds of rules.

Complexity doesn't simply happen. Simple elements in simple relationships build up in hierarchical layers, simplicity upon simplicity, until eventually, unpredictably, a system organizes itself and new, complex orders emerge. Once established, a complex system continually draws energy and information from its environment in order to maintain its characteristic form and structure, seeking stable configurations in a context of continual change. Sometimes it will evolve toward ever greater complexity, but the more precisely adapted it becomes to its environment, the more vulnerable it is to a sudden change in the context. In effect, a system coevolves with its environment, one changing and the other responding elaborately to those changes, which then cause more changes, and so on.

Darwinian evolution is a central mechanism in the development of complexity and has now been seen to operate, not just in biology, but in the development of intelligence, culture, and even technology. Evolution is a means of generating vast numbers of alternative designs that are then selected according to their usefulness. The philosopher Daniel Dennett makes the point that every conceivable design, whether natural or artificial, can be seen as existing somewhere within a vast (not quite infinite), continuous space of all possible designs, and that evolution, whether biological or intellectual, is a process for generating possible designs, "for finding good ways to solve the problems that arise," within that space. Furthermore, designs bootstrap themselves to ever-higher levels of complexity.[1] Kevin Kelly, editor of *Wired* magazine, in a book currently making the rounds of the design studios describes how the adaptability, resilience, and autonomy of living organisms are becoming the models for understanding complex man-made systems that are beyond human control, such as the global economy or the Internet. Kelly predicts that in the future, more products, systems, and technologies will be "grown" through distributed evolutionary processes rather than centrally manufactured.[2]

What, if anything, do these trends in scientific thought have to do with architecture? Is a building a complex system? Does it, in any sense, evolve? Of all the foreign banners under which architecture has marched, from existentialism to historicism to semiotics to deconstruction, this, it would seem, is the first that directly addresses issues of form and structure that are intrinsically architectural.

Charles Jencks, ever the evangelist of the next wave in architecture, certainly thinks so. *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe* is intended "to change architecture, not just interpret it." Jencks argues that architecture should represent and interpret our view of the universe; since the universe is now seen to be complex, dynamic, and evolutionary, architecture should at least look (if not be) that way, too. He envisions an architecture "of undulating movement, of catastrophic folds and delightful waves, of billowing crystals and fractured planes, of layered glass and spiraling growth." His approach is to discuss, topic by topic, various areas of complexity science (fractal geometry, nonlinearity, folding, emergence, chaos, Gaia), then to find examples of buildings by contemporary architects (mostly the usual gang, Eisenman, Gehry, Koolhaas et al. — and Jencks, who discusses his own work at length) that seem to embody that idea. Yet his discussion focuses almost entirely on what these buildings look like. What Jencks advocates here is, as usual, an architecture of surface and appearance rather than substance or process.

On the other hand, Stewart Brand's *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built* really could change architecture, if only students of architecture would read it. Brand, protege of Gregory Bateson, polymath, media guru, inventor-designer, was a founder in the sixties of *The Whole Earth Catalog*, later of the *CoEvolution Quarterly* (now the *Whole Earth Review*), and recently of The WELL (the Whole Earth computer conference network), and is the author of *The Media Lab: Inventing the Future at MIT*. He lives on a rebuilt tugboat and writes in an office installed in a freight container. Brand has now turned his attention to buildings.

Although he only glancingly refers to any scientific underpinnings for his ideas, Brand exhibits a much deeper understanding of the implications for architecture of current scientific thinking than does Jencks. Brand looks at the real processes involved in creating buildings — design, financing, construction, occupation by the users, energy exchange with the environment, adaptation to changing circumstances, maintenance, expansion, renovation, and reuse — and sees buildings as dynamic, evolving entities that progressively, through the actions of their occupants, "learn" how to adapt to their environments and uses.

Brand traces a number of buildings through their life histories, using historical photographs taken at different times from the same angle to illustrate how astonishingly a structure can change. One comparison that exemplifies his argument focuses on two research buildings at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Building 20, a sprawling "temporary" wooden structure built in haste during World War II, and the 1985 Media Lab by I. M. Pei. Building 20, funky, well loved, impossible to destroy, has proved flexible and adaptable to changing research demands over the decades. In contrast, Brand finds Pei's building inflexible, sterile, and pretentious. It has inhibited social exchange among the scientists who use it, thereby locking into a fixed pattern the activities of one of the most innovative research centers in the United States, Nicholas Negroponte's Media Lab (the subject of Brand's 1988 book). This "magazine architecture," says Brand, is meant to look good in photographs — precisely what Jencks admires — but lacks a life of its own. Needless to say, Pei, representing most design architects, comes off as a villain.

Brand's arguments echo and elaborate some of the ideas of Lloyd Kahn, an early cohort who, through his *Domebooks* I and II,[3] almost singlehandedly promulgated the hippie dome-building fad of the

sixties and seventies. The domes employed a radical structural technology; every possible new material was investigated to enclose them and seal all the cracks. Unfortunately, nothing really worked well. The inflexible domes were difficult to expand, furnish, heat, and use, leaked like sieves, and too quickly fell apart. In a 1973 essay, "Smart but Not Wise," Kahn made a public mea culpa and disavowed such "whiteman technoplastic prowess," advocating a return to traditional materials and vernacular building technologies. If you want to build shelter, he said, study how the farmers in the region build, and build just like they do.[4]

In Brand's updating of this pragmatic approach, the first responsibility in building is to provide shelter for human activities. Design the structure and the enclosure to last a long time, with interiors and technical systems that can be changed many times over the life of the building. Trust not high-tech materials and solutions, but rely on what we know works. Keep the water out; make roofs that work for a long time. Maintain and preserve and reuse what we have. Brand argues for common sense in architecture: build buildings that can accommodate multiple scenarios of future uses, can grow, adapt, and evolve. No "delightful waves, billowing crystals, or fractured planes" for Brand; "Be square," he admonishes, because the rectangular, cellular plan is the one that can accommodate change and grow in unpredictable directions. Ironically, being square in building results in being open, fluid, and adaptable.

This idea of architecture is quite conservative, and certainly unglamorous, by current standards. It does not necessarily lead to novel and radical concepts of space and form. Instead, exactly like biological evolution, it follows the wisdom of tried-and-true solutions to problems and makes continual marginal improvements: keep what works and build on it, rather than reinventing everything every Monday morning.

Thus, it occurs to me, a building begins life simply enough. Essentially it is a cellular construction that meets the minimal requirement of maintaining a sheltered, homeostatic internal environment for diverse human activities such as living, working, or shopping. It should be designed in a simple, efficient, and elegant way, incorporating flexibility and adaptability into the design. Then, in time, responding to the needs of its occupants and its changing milieu, it acquires unanticipated and diverse qualities, thereby becoming enriched, with a life and character of its own.

Consider, then, that this simple unit is multiplied many times and woven together, over long periods of time, layer by layer, into a fabric held together by webs of movement, servicing, communication, and flows of capital, and energy. This pulsating fabric is the city. It is emergent, distributed, evolutionary, always in flux, out of control, adapting, shedding exhausted parts of itself, renewing others, growing new parts. In short, the city is alive, and it does indeed evolve toward increasing complexity.

This view of architecture requires a new and synthetic understanding of the relationship of the building and the city: the city as an evolving space of extensive webs and continual flows, the building as a necessary and integral conduit that acquires its changing form by modulating those flows locally. City and building exist together, organism and ecosystem coevolving, continually influencing one another. The dilemma of the architect is that, on the large scale, it is futile to try to control or plan such a complex ecology, while at the local scale, simply to invent unique and novel forms is insufficient and scarcely relevant. Instead, to influence evolving design, we must place ourselves directly into the flows of history and evolution. Only by understanding the intricate forces that shape the forms we find can we hope to inflect them in ever-so-subtle but significant ways. Thus, complexity emerges. ■

1 Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 586.

2 Kevin Kelly, *Out of Control: The Rise of Neobiological Civilization* (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley Publishing, 1994), p. 521.

3 Lloyd Kahn et al., *Domebook One* (Los Gatos, CA: Pacific Domes, 1970) and *Domebook II* (Bolinas, CA: Pacific Domes, 1971).

4 In Kahn, *Shelter* (Bolinas, CA: Shelter Publications, 1973), p. 176.

Texas Exes

Alberto Pérez-Gómez

Faculty of the School of Architecture, University of Texas, Austin, 1954-55. (left to right): H. L. McMath; L. Hirsche, J. R. Baillie, G. Goldsmith, H. Leipziger-Pierce, J. Hejduk, H. H. Harris, G. G. Roessner, R. Slutzky, C. Rowe, B. Hoesli, M. Kermocy, K. Nuhn, R. L. White.

The Texas Rangers: Notes From an Architectural Underground *by Alexander Caragonne. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995. 442 pp., illus., $50.*

Reviewed by Alberto Pérez-Gómez

This lengthy book is an account of the curriculum changes implemented by a group of young faculty who came to teach at the University of Texas School of Architecture in Austin between 1954 and 1958. It describes the academic and political circumstances of the school, the interests and background of the faculty, and their influence as they dispersed to teach at other centers of architectural education in the United States and Europe. The names are familiar to anyone involved in architectural education in North America — particularly Bernhard Hoesli, Colin Rowe, John Hejduk, and Robert Slutzky, the most notable writers and theorists — yet the "program" as such, contends the author, has not been generally recounted.

The changes, mostly to the design curriculum, are carefully described by Caragonne, who was an undergraduate at the time. His insider perspective is revealing in its detail and texture but makes him almost blind to larger issues. The new courses produced a predictably adverse reaction from the older, tenured faculty — a story hardly unique to the School of Architecture at Austin. What is special about this instance, the author claims, is that the program was truly innovative. It posited architectural design as something that could be taught, contradicting some of the mystical tendencies of Bauhaus and Harvard Graduate School of Design education; it concentrated on process (at Bernhard Hoesli's instance) rather than following the product-oriented Beaux-Arts tradition; and (Colin Rowe's particular contribution) embraced historical precedent as a useful guide to contemporary design, forsaking the rejection of history that the Bauhaus and other technologically deterministic schools of architecture theory held in common. Furthermore, profiting from their understanding of Cubism and Gestalt psychology, the new arrivals brought about the recognition of space as the essence of architecture, defining the task of the architect as the aesthetic manipulation of space.

Caragonne provides a respectful account of the professional trajectory of the personalities involved in the Texas school. Many ideas common in architectural education today were clearly and perhaps initially articulated there (at least in the methodological forms that have become familiar). Caragonne devotes special attention to Rowe's architectural theories and Hoesli's pedagogical principles, producing useful and well-documented synopses. It is the subtext behind the book and its assumptions that I find more problematic.

The author is obsessed with establishing a genealogy (he includes a graph that extends for six pages) that captures in its net literally hundreds of architectural educators who are very diverse in their outlook, implying that the "Austin program" was the kernel of it all. Curiously, as Caragonne himself remarks, Harwell Hamilton Harris, the director responsible for hiring such excellent faculty in the mid-fifties, had no clear vision of his program. After everyone had left UT, a few of the protagonists (John Shaw, Lee Hodgden, and Werner Seligmann) came together again at Cornell and implemented a more dogmatic version of the courses. Colin Rowe never wanted to associate himself with the Cornell program. Neither did John Hejduk, who wrote: "After the Texas thing reached Cornell, it just dried up. It became academic. They took Corb, analyzed him to death, and they squeezed all the juice out of him. . . . The warm Texas breeze hit the chill of Ithaca and then rained itself out."

Indeed, of all the major original participants in the Austin drama, only Hejduk and to an extent Rowe maintained an open attitude and had the courage to question the old positions. Hejduk in particular became critically aware of the philosophical premises behind the seemingly self-evident concepts in the air at the time of the Austin episode (architecture as space, architecture as syntax). The result has been, as Caragonne suggests, the extraordinary and enduring vitality of the Cooper Union School of Architecture, "where (even) the devil is invited to dinner," in contrast to some of the other programs that have simply perpetuated a dogmatic, formalist dialectic. If, as Caragonne argues, what transpired in Austin in the mid-fifties can be construed as a first sign of a postmodern critique of architecture (in a cultural rather than a stylistic sense), Hejduk's branch of the family tree was better poised to bear fruit. His emphasis on discovery through making and his stand against the reduction of architecture to the status of instrumental methodologies has made it possible for late- 20th-century architecture to acknowledge cultural differences while remaining wholly modern in its epistemological grounding and faithful to its poetic vocation.

The questioning of hegemonic narratives, of a single (His)tory of architecture, is one of the main characteristics of cultural postmodernity. To do this without denying our historicity is crucial. Paradoxically, Caragonne construes (or unearths?) a program and makes it appear to be a master narrative of architecture's progress. Greater insight into the history of architectural theories might have revealed that the dialectic between the history of architecture as "typological precedent" and the scientific-technological mentality of "form-follows-function" (the economy of form that must exclude a concern for character or meaning) was present already in J. N. L. Durand's influential works in the early 19th century, and that the influence of these theories in North America can be traced back to Jefferson. Furthermore, the problem of character, of which much is said in this book, has its origins in the European 17th and 18th centuries. The curious blind spot about these matters in Colin Rowe's own historical constructions is uncritically inherited by Caragonne.

On the other hand, the understanding of architecture as space, space as a Kantian a priori, may possibly have been introduced to North American students for the first time in Austin. But that hardly qualifies this conception of space as a *fact*. After Gestalt psychology, there followed a whole slew of inquiries into the issues of spatiality and vision that demonstrated the limitations of such a notion. Our experience of architectural meaning is not the experience of objectified space. Architecture is not a discipline for the aesthetic enjoyment of other architects and initiates; the question is always one of broader participation.

Slutzky and Rowe brought to the attention of North American students the fruitful possibilities of a relationship between painting and architecture, to be seen particularly clearly in the work of Le Corbusier. It was also crucial to reiterate the importance of history for design. To reduce these insights to instrumental methodologies, however, was perilous. The conception of architecture that emerged from the most dogmatic faculty at Austin remained a merely formalistic battle of styles, caught in the old dialectic. The issue is how to translate the mystery of depth (kindred to the ambiguity of "phenomenal transparency") into the lived experience of inhabitation and political participation, rather than aesthetic contemplation. Again, Hejduk has emphasized the importance of temporality in the perception of architectural meaning: the relevance and authenticity of the architect's program that is always an integral part of the act of imagining a possible architecture.

Reciprocally, the history of architecture is much more than the history of buildings reduced to neutral projections. It is a history of intentions that involves worlds and situations. Its stories are invaluable, for through them we can learn to act appropriately and ethically. The forms of architectural representation are themselves historical. There are no "axes" or "spatial concepts" in Palladio's villas; a Roman plan is not identical to the horizontal sectional projections in Le Corbusier's *Oeuvres Completes*.

Many years after the Austin episode, John Hejduk went back to Texas to teach at the University of Houston. There he came to appreciate (as I do, being a former Texas resident) the true Texas gift: "the skull of a Texas longhorn, . . . a mystical object, . . . a fragile and brittle thing. The Texans know how to offer but not to insist." In Texas I learned, as did Hejduk, about communion, about work, and about generosity. Teaching in Houston after two difficult years at Werner Seligmann's School of Architecture in Syracuse University (one of those places Caragonne names as having evolved from the UT program), I experienced in reverse the liberating geography of his story. I found my voice through colleagues and students, and rediscovered that the poetics of architecture is not a formal method but an insight, an understanding — true culture. This must remain the ultimate goal of architectural education: to share with students our legitimate questioning, learning in turn from each other, rather than pretending that there are answers. ■

"The City Is a Book"

A new translation of excerpts from Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*

Richard Howard

Victor Hugo's fundamentally pessimistic view of the fate of architecture is manifested in the chapter "Ceci tuera cela" ("This Will Kill That"), which he withheld from the original edition of *Notre Dame de Paris*, published in March 1831, but restored to the definitive second edition, published in December 1832. At the begining of the chapter the archdeacon Claude Frollo declares: "This will kill that. The book will kill the building." Hugo offers the reader two meanings: either "The book of stone, solid and enduring, was about to be supplanted by the paper book, which would become more enduring still;" or "One art would dethrone another art. . . . Printing will destroy architecture." In Hugo's telling, with the advent of the printing press in the 15th century, "the store of strength hitherto spent by the human mind on buildings is now to be spent on books. By the sixteenth century, the press, grown to the stature of its fallen rival, wrestles with it and wins. . . . And besides, if, by chance, architecture be revived, it will never be mistress [of the arts] again."

In his *Autobiography* (1932) Frank Lloyd Wright says: "Hugo wrote the most enlightened essay on architecture that exists to this very day. . . . I was 14 years old when this chapter, usually omitted from most editions of *Notre-Dame*, profoundly affected my sensibility and my image of that art to which life was to destine me: architecture. His account of the tragic decline of the great original art has never left my mind."

Poet Richard Howard's fascination with Hugo's text has prompted a new translation of "Ceci tuera cela," excerpts of which appear below. Ed.

Our gentle readers will permit us to pause a moment in order to ascertain the idea hidden beneath the Archdeacon's enigmatic words: *This will kill that. The book will destroy the building.*

But beneath this first and doubtless simplest idea we discern another, newer one: the presentiment that human thought, by changing form, would change its mode of expression; that each generation's central idea would no longer be written with the same substance and in the same fashion; that the book of stone, so solid and so lasting, would give way to the book of paper, solider and more lasting still. In this regard, the Archdeacon's vague formula had a second meaning: it signified that one art would dethrone another. It meant: The printing press will destroy architecture.

Indeed, from the beginning of time down to and including the 15th century of the Christian era, architecture has been the great book of humanity, man's chief expression in his various stages of development in terms of either power or intelligence.

The first monuments were mere boulders *that the iron had not touched*, as Moses said. Architecture began like all writing: at first it was an alphabet. A boulder was planted upright in the ground,[1] and this was a letter, and each letter was a hieroglyph, and upon each hieroglyph rested a group of ideas, like a capital resting upon its column.[2] So wrought the earliest races, at the same moment of their development, the world over. We find the equivalent of the Celtic menhirs in Asian Siberia, in the American pampas . . .

Later, words were formed. Stone was set upon stone, these granite syllables were linked: the word attempted certain combinations. The Celtic dolmen and cromlech, the Etruscan tumulus, the Hebrew galgal are words. Some, the tumulus in particular, are proper nouns. And occasionally, when there was a great deal of stone and a vast expanse, a sentence was written. The enormous conglomeration of Karnak is already a whole magic formula.

Finally, books were made. The traditions had given birth to symbols, beneath which they lay hidden like the tree trunk beneath its foliage; all these symbols, in which humanity believed, increased and multiplied, interlaced, and grew ever more complicated; the first monuments no longer sufficed to contain them and were engulfed on all sides; indeed these monuments could no longer express the original tradition, which like them had once been simple, naked, prone upon the earth. The symbol needed to flower within the edifice. It was then that architecture developed, in company with human thought; it became a giant with a thousand heads and a thousand arms and fixed in an eternal, visible, palpable form this whole indeterminate symbolism. While Dedalus, who is power, measured; while Orpheus, who is intelligence, sang; the Pillar that is a letter, the Arcade that is a syllable, the Pyramid that is a word, simultaneously impelled by a law of geometry and by a law of poetry, grouped, combined, amalgamated, mounted, sank, and juxtaposed themselves upon ascending to the skies until they had written, according to the dictation of the general idea of an epoch, those marvelous books that were also marvelous buildings: the pagoda of Eklinga, the Ramesseum of Egypt,[3] the temple of Solomon.

Meaning and Architecture

That mother-idea, the word, was not only at the heart of all these buildings but inherent in their very form. The temple of Solomon, for instance, was not simply the binding of the sacred book, it was the sacred book itself. And not only the form of the buildings but even their siting revealed the idea they represented.

Thought was free then only in this fashion, hence it was written completely only in those books called buildings. Thus, down to Gutenberg, architecture is the chief form of writing (we can distinguish two historical forms in the first universal script: the theocratic architecture of caste and the architecture of the people, richer and less sacred).

Popular Architecture

The general characteristics of popular masonry are variety, progress, originality, opulence, perpetual motion. They are already sufficiently detached from religion to conceive and to cultivate their beauty, continually to correct their adornment of statues or of arabesques. They are secular. They have something human about them that they continually mingle with the divine symbol beneath which they are still produced: whence buildings accessible to any soul, any intelligence, any imagination, still symbolic yet as easy to understand as nature itself. Between theocratic architecture and this kind there is the difference between a sacred language and a vulgar tongue.

The Printing Press

In the 15th century, everything changes.

Human thought discovers a means of perpetuating itself that is not only more lasting and more resistant than architecture but even simpler, readier to hand. Architecture is dethroned. Orpheus's letters of stone will give way to Gutenberg's letters of lead.

The Book Will Destroy the Building

The invention of the printing press is the greatest event in history. It is the mother-revolution. It is the mode of expression in which humanity totally renews itself, it is human thought that sloughs off one form and assumes another.

Hence from the moment print is invented, we see architecture gradually withering, atrophying, denuding itself. It is this decadence that we call the Renaissance. A magnificent decadence, though, for the old Gothic genius, that sunset behind the gigantic press of Mainz, still permeates with its last rays that vast hybrid pile of Latin arcades and Corinthian colonnades . . .

It is that sunset that we take for a dawn.

Decline

Yet as soon as architecture is no more than another one of the arts, as soon as it is no longer the total art, the sovereign art, the tyrant art, it no longer has the power to retain the other arts. They free themselves accordingly, breaking the architect's yoke, and proceed each on its own course. Each art gains by this divorce. Isolation enlarges them all. Sculpture becomes statuary, imagery becomes painting, the canon becomes music.

Yet once the sun of the Middle Ages has set completely, architecture no longer expresses anything, not even the memory of the art of another age.

Paris

In the 15th century, Paris was not only a beautiful city; it was a homogeneous city, an architectural and historic product of the Middle Ages, a chronicle in stone. Since then, day by day, the city has proceeded to distort itself, to corrupt itself. Gothic Paris, beneath which Romanesque Paris had vanished, was to vanish in its turn. But can we say what Paris has replaced it?

Present-day Paris has no general physiognomy. It is a collection of samples, patterns, styles. Our capital grows only house by house — and what houses! Hence the signification of its architecture daily vanishes.

Let there be no mistake: architecture is dead, dead without recall, killed by the printed book, destroyed because it costs more. Imagine now what investment would be necessary to write the architectural book once more, to engender upon the earth once more authentic buildings in their thousands.

The great accident of an architect of genius may occur in the 20th century. The great poem, the great building, the great work of humanity will no longer be built, it will be printed. ■

1 Cf. Exodus 20:25: "If thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it."

2 Cf. Genesis 31:45: "And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar."

3 The funerary temple of Ramses II at Thebes, in Upper Egypt.

FULL CIRCLE

Bruce C. Webb

Astrodominium, project by David Bucek, 1990.

Two conspicuously disgruntled tenants of the Houston Astrodome, one already Nashville bound, have left the city in a quandary about how to refill an unusually large piece of air-conditioned real estate. Originally proposed as a novel incentive to attract a professional baseball team to the muggy Gulf Coast, the "eighth wonder of the world" — as the Astrodome was then touted — featured an innovative, changeable seating configuration, more or less adaptable to both baseball and football as well as a host of other spectacles. Some of these, like motocross racing, tractor pulls, and the Houston rodeo, seemed custom-made for the miniature biotope; others, such as the occasional blockbuster concert or the 1992 Republican national convention, were simply cases of playing the biggest indoor room in town.

History will view the Astrodome as merely one step in the evolution of the modern sports stadium — a short-lived expedient, briefly favored, with certain characteristics that were discarded or improved upon in the succession of models that followed elsewhere. Today the Dome looks like a case of yesterday's dreams proving inadequate for today's needs and desires. Accommodations for its two primary tenants are less than ideal: it is too small for professional football, too large for professional baseball. As the owner of the Houston Oilers, Bud Adams, escalated his demands for increased revenues to meet the rising costs of fielding a National Football League team, the Dome began to look like just another real estate deal in the round. Now, with the Oilers assured a custom-built arena in Tennessee, the five years remaining in their lease at the Astrodome have become little more than a bargaining chip in the NFL's own game of extortion: release the Oilers from their contract, and we may give you another franchise in a few years; make them stay, and we may get around to you in the next millennium. Meanwhile, the Astros, usually the silent wheel among the Dome's homeboys, have also become uncharacteristically vocal about their dissatisfaction with hometown support and the Dome itself. Drayton McLane, the Astros' owner, wants and may well get a purpose-built stadium of his own like the ones bringing fans back to the new, old-fashioned ball parks in Baltimore, Cleveland, and Arlington, Texas. The deal being worked on at this writing calls for separate and better treatment for both football and baseball to enable Houston to remain a major-league city.

Prior to construction of Houston's Dome, cities built baseball parks and universities usually built football stadiums. One of the innovations of the Astrodome was to provide for both sports in a single capital project, creating the multipurpose sports stadium. Despite its flexibility, the Dome's circular configuration was problematic: it wasn't just a matter of how many seats there were, but where those seats were located in relationship to the action on the field. Attempts to mollify the Oilers' owner when he threatened to move to Jacksonville resulted in excision of the marvelous vintage scoreboard and Judge Hofheinz's Xanadu-like apartment in the right-field wall to make room for 10,000 new seats. But this addition did little to alleviate a fundamental problem for football — too few seats along the sidelines and too many in the corners. Even the sky boxes, an innovation that offset long-distance views in peanut heaven by providing redolent hedonism for the upscale corporate crowd, became outmoded. Today such high-priced seats would be much lower, closer to the field. The NFL wants a new oval configuration; baseball wants a diamond; and even the rodeo, the Dome's third major tenant, is complaining that it needs a tighter, better-focused arena.

Houston and its Dome never developed a real attachment to one another. The Dome sat impassively, looking like a huge, out-of-order UFO, in a neighborhood-size concentric parking lot, a vast marshaling yard for cars bringing customers to Astrodomain attractions. Inside the chain-link boundary there was almost nothing but concrete — nowhere to hang around before or after the game. Sports bars and other enterprises that would have been reasonable companions for the Astrodome lined up six or seven miles away on Richmond Avenue. The Dome grew old the way plastic does, with no patina or richness, always new but less interestingly so. Deprived of the graciousness of age, it remains an unwanted prize in a game of high-stakes Monopoly.

Anticipating this void a few years ago, University of Houston architecture student David Bucek produced a scheme for refilling the Dome with a mixed-use development of apartments, shops, and an extraordinary (Astroturf) park that would boast three things Houstonians long for: a constant temperate climate; plenty of free parking; and hypoallergenic air. Then, even if baseball or football continued to lay claim to the field, game tickets could include a maintenance fee, thus helping to ensure a full house (of full houses) for every game.

The abandonment of numerous Houston landmarks in recent years shows how a city is made up of both its living institutions and the buildings and places they once inhabited. When we lose the Oilers, the Blue Ribbon Rice Company, the Rice Hotel, or the Goodyear blimp as enterprises, we do not immediately lose the Astrodome, the rice elevators, the hotel building, or the blimp hangar. One of the challenges facing cities today, with their fickle patterns of resettlement and pragmatic disloyalties, is the prospect of capitalizing on the stock of abandoned buildings. The bigger and more eccentric the building, the greater the challenge to keep it. But if these monumental structures succumb, the greater the loss will be to the city's orientation in time and space. This point was underscored in Houston when the majestic towers of the rice elevators along Memorial Drive, which served as dignified markers of the city's past, were imploded. Recycling the elevators was a perennially popular project in local schools of architecture, but attempts at saving them failed the bottom-line test. If Houston can put together a deal to recycle the blank, relentlessly dull, and intrusive Albert Thomas Convention Center, we should be able to do the same for far more deserving structures. A city that had the moxie and ingenuity to build the Dome in 1965 should be able to find a way to give it more than a ghost of a chance of sticking around. ■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Rice Design Alliance - MS 51
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