

# City



401 Winter 1997-98

*T H E* **ARCHITECTURE**  
*a n d* **DESIGN REVIEW**  
*O F* **HOUSTON**

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## Cite

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**and Design Review**  
**of Houston**

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## Letters

### TEXAS PLACES



Cite

### LOOKING HARDER

When I received the issue of *Cite* titled "Texas Places," my first thought was: "This issue is not for me."

But the pictures drew me in; I read the text with growing fascination, and I discovered my first thought was dead wrong. I am writing to congratulate you on one of the most impressive editorial achievements I've encountered in a long, long time.

What impresses me most about the issue is that it really achieves remarkable variety and beauty while always getting deeper into the profound themes of the small town and its loss. There is a special mix of voices in the interviews and articles that reinforces what you call "the concept of the authentic, the original." And, as a "word" person myself, I have a particular admiration for the way the wonderful black-and-white photos interact with the texts — always serving the texts, always enlarging them.

The issue has made me reflect as I really never had before on the energy that created the rural landscape and on the civic sense that make the towns into real places — only to be swallowed up or marginalized by our metropolitan regions. For example, I certainly want to search out McMurtry's Houston novels. I have written about suburbia from the perspective of people moving from ethnic urban neighborhoods to the fringe. But, as McMurtry points out in your interview, there is another story, perhaps even more significant in the larger history of this country: the movement from country to suburb, "country kids trying to

become urbanites or at least suburbanites," the whole displacement that of seemingly-eternal rural and small-town world by Webber's "non-place urban realm."

I don't think the world is ready for "New Jersey Places," but I've already begun seeing the Eastern megalopolis differently. Even here we have our equivalents of Blue Star Highway 59; as you say, you just have to look a little harder to see it.

So I thank you again for a beautiful and thoughtful piece of work that has already taught me where and how to look.

Robert Fishman  
Professor of History  
Rutgers University

### TEXAS MOVIES

I find it remarkable that in his article in *Cite's* Texas Places issue (no. 39), Jon Schwartz makes no mention of the pioneering work of Don Graham (especially *Cowboys and Cadillacs: How Hollywood Looks at Texas*), and I want to congratulate him on his research.

Don Graham  
English Department,  
University of Texas at Austin

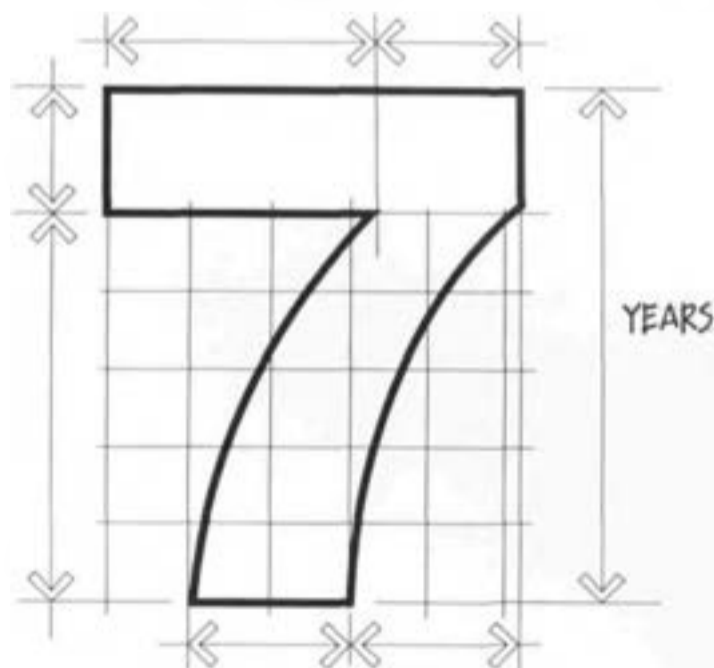
### THE FREE MARKET RULES

Rarely do we get to read true words of wisdom about Houston as a 21st-century city. Larry McMurtry's comments about Houston's strengths were wonderful for a native Houstonian to read.

Houston's success lies in the fact that we have no zoning. In addition, the fact that we can annex unincorporated population areas has kept the core of our city alive and well. The free market rules in Houston, and thus it is a people's city, not a zoning committee's plan.

Kenneth M. Williams  
Houston

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## HISD RESPONDS

Although there were several articles of interest in *Cite* 38, I found two particularly relevant to the mission of the Houston Independent School District. The article "Houston, We Have a Problem" by Drexel Turner that outlined the beauty and history of school design shows the level of commitment toward education once held by Houstonians. As progress to becoming an international city occurred, citizens made sure that the educational marketplace kept pace. Today, there appears to be some question of our commitment. I am proud to say that HISD has made great strides in providing efficient and effective educationally associated services to the children of our city. I can only hope that we will recapture the public's trust in our ability to make

sound business decisions and perhaps garner their support for improving existing facilities as well as building much-needed new schools.

The article entitled "Eastwood Elementary" by Elisa Hernandez Skaggs, pointing to the Mission style of school construction embraced in 1916, also showed how school population growth contributes to facility expansion. Inside the article (p. 12) there is an illustration listing five occasions of adding classrooms to the original 1916 campus. Drexel Turner's article (p. 8) spoke about concerns over the number of children housed in transportable classrooms. Combined, these articles document the challenge HISD faces as we try to educate a mobile citizenry. Transportable classrooms allow us the flexibility to educate increasing enrollments in various parts of town as populations shift. It is difficult to project a need for school expansion, due to growth and demographics, when apartment complexes housing hundreds can be built so rapidly. As you know, HISD does not have the revenue to set aside enough funds for building a new school or expanding an old school to keep up with population instabilities. Thus, transportable classrooms give us an acceptable alternative.

I wish you continued success with the review of architecture, urban planning, and design. It appears that after 16 years, RDA has done much to advance the theory of educational facility planning through discussion. Your editorial contributions to the welfare of HISD are appreciated.

Rod Paige  
Superintendent of Schools, HISD

C o m i n g i n

Cite

Cite 41 Spring: Architecture of Bryan-College Station

Cite 42 Summer: Summer in the City

Cite 43 Fall: Spiritual Spaces

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Havelock Ellis, 1923

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## RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

RDA LECTURES  
FURNITURE, FASHION, AND DESIGN

Wednesdays, March 4 through April 1  
8:00 p.m., Brown Auditorium,  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.  
713.527.4876.

Furniture, fashion, and design are ruled by what is temporary vs. timeless, what is useful vs. excessive, what is signed vs. anonymous. Chairs, dresses, or buildings are all similarly produced by teamwork, the use of models, and the pursuit of technological innovation. They are also consumed in similar ways through wide distribution, imitations, and constant transformation according to stylistic demands.

The architectural implications of furniture and fashion offer renewed sources of inspiration for the practice of architecture and provide designers with new resources for their education.

March 4  
MASSIMO VIGNELLI  
Principal of Vignelli Associates  
Designers, New York

March 11  
CARL MAGNUSSON  
Design director, Knoll

March 18  
RICHARD MARTIN  
Curator of costumes,  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

March 25  
GAETANO PESCE  
Furniture and industrial designer

April 1  
ANN COLEMAN,  
David & Roberta Logie curator  
of textiles and costumes,  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

RDA WALKING TOUR  
MUSEUM DISTRICT

Sunday, March 17  
2:00 p.m., Museum of Fine Arts,  
Houston, 713.527.4876.

In conjunction with FotoFest '98 the RDA is sponsoring a tour of the museum area, which contains a series of Houston's major cultural institutions grouped together in a landscaped setting of remarkable urban beauty. This tour will focus on the

planning and architectural history of the area. It will begin at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, progress along Bissonnet to the Broadacres Historic District, then return to the Cullen Sculpture Garden through the Turner Addition.

RDA TOUR  
MODERN HOMECRAFT:  
KATHARINE & HARRY MOTT HOUSES

Saturday and Sunday, April 25 and 26  
Annual members-only tour.  
713.527.4876.

Katharine B. Mott began her career designing houses in Indianapolis in the 1920s. When she and her husband, Harry L. Mott, moved to Houston in 1927, she brought her carpenter and brickmason to maintain her high building quality. Mott, with Burns & James Architects, eventually built more than 20 houses in River Oaks, Riverside Terrace, Edgemont, and Devonshire Place. RDA will feature several of these houses on its 1998 tour.

RDA LECTURE  
HOUSTON'S MOTT HOUSES

April 22, 8:00 p.m.  
STEPHEN FOX, Brown Auditorium  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
713.527.4876

FILM  
GAUDI

April 4, 7:30 p.m. and April 5, 2:00 p.m.  
Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 713.527.4876.

Directed by Hiroshi Teshigahara, this beautifully photographed, delicately scored (by Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu) film is a study of the cathedral that has a deliberately slow pace. An interview with Gaudi's assistant provides the only dialogue. Co-sponsored with the MEAH.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON  
HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTUREUH EXHIBITION  
VISIONARIES IN EXILE

January 27 through February 20  
Gallery, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston  
713.743.2400.

# END AR

Interactive CD ROM presentation of the work of 19 Australian architects who emigrated to the United States before the Second World War. Sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Institute.

## UH LECTURES

Auditorium, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston.  
713.743.2400.

January 27, 8:30 p.m.

ADOLPH STILLER, Visionaries in Exile

February 5, 6:30 p.m.

RAIMUND ABRAHAM, Recent Work

February 11, 3:15 p.m.

MERRILL ELAM, Recent Work of Scogin, Elam & Bray

February 28, 6:30 p.m.

EDWARD SHAW AND TOMAS SHAW, Saving Salamone

## UH EXHIBITION

### SAVING SALAMONE

February 28 through March 21

Gallery, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston  
713.743.2400.

Photographs by Edward Shaw and Tomas Shaw of buildings by the Argentine architect Francisco Salamone (1898-1959). Organized by the Pan American Cultural Exchange. [See this issue of *Cite*, page 8.]

## UH JEFFERSON SYMPOSIUM

### JESSE H. JONES HALL

April 16, 7:00 p.m.

Auditorium, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston.  
713.743.2400.

Charles Lawrence, design architect of Jones Hall for CRS; James Gannon, project manager for CRS; Tom Bullock, president, CRS; and Ann Holmes, fine arts critic, *Houston Chronicle* will participate in the fourth annual Jefferson Symposium sponsored by the Center for Historic Architecture, University of Houston.

## RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

### RSA LECTURES

Spring 1998, 7:00 p.m.

Farish Gallery, 713.527.4864.

Stan Allen, Jan. 12; Aaron Betsky, Feb. 16; Sheila Kennedy, Feb. 23; Ted Krueger, Mar. 9; Sulan Kolatan, Apr. 13.

## CHINATI SYMPOSIUM

### ART and ARCHITECTURE

April 25-26, 1998

Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas  
915.729.4362

## Speakers:

JAMES ACKERMAN,  
Professor Emeritus, Harvard University

MICHAEL BENDIKT,  
Professor of Architecture,  
University of Texas, Austin

FRANK GEHRY, Architect, Santa Monica

JACQUES HERZOG & PIERRE DE MEURON,  
Architects, Basel

RONI HORN, Artist, New York City  
ROBERT IRWIN, Artist, San Diego

CLAES OLDENBERG &  
GOOSJE VAN BRUGGEN,  
Artists, New York City

## Moderator:

WILLIAM E. STERN,  
Architect, Houston

## In Memoriam



## Jonathan King, Hon. A. I. A.

Former partner and officer of Caudill Rowlett Scott, director of CRS's construction management subsidiary, CM Inc., and most recently director of the CRS Center at Texas A & M University, Jonathan King died at age 71 of cancer on November 19, 1997. Mr. King was born in New York City and graduated from Columbia University.

In the 1960s Mr. King was vice-president and treasurer of Educational Facilities Laboratories in New York, established by the Ford Foundation. EFL grants subsidized the first geodesic dome for school athletic facilities, the first open-space schools, the first schools with movable walls, and a broad systems development program that used economical, standardized, industrial elements to build nonstandard schools. Construction of thousands of schools throughout North America resulted from these EFL-funded innovations.

Mr. King was the author of more than 40 articles published in national journals and magazines such as the *Harvard Business Review* and *Architectural Record*. During his years at CRS he was also an adjunct professor of architecture at Rice University. From 1976 to 1986 he was professor of architecture at the University of Michigan, and he directed the Architectural Research Laboratory there until 1983. In 1992 Mr. King returned to Texas as visiting professor at Texas A & M's College of Architecture where he served until his retirement in 1996 as the first director of the CRS Center. In July 1997 he completed the manuscript *CRS: The Autobiography of an Architecture Firm, an Oral History*.

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## The Rice Design Alliance

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

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Hi-Yo

## Silver

A sellout crowd of more than 700 people, dressed in black tie and silverwear, attended the 25th anniversary celebration of the Rice Design Alliance on Friday, November 14. The annual fundraising gala, "Hi-Yo Silver," was held in the Petroleum Club of Houston on the 43rd floor of the Exxon Building. RDA president Gwen Goffe and gala chairs Jo and Jim Furr greeted the guests as they arrived upstairs to the beautiful 360-degree views of the Houston skyline. During the cocktail hour Steve Draper entertained, and a silent auction was held. A hundred items were gathered by a committee led by Cindy Toles.

Guests seated in two ballrooms danced during dinner to the music of Commercial Art and Ezra Charles and the Works. The environment, coordinated by Wynne Phelan, featured silvery table decorations with shining silver-covered programs designed by graphic artist Deborah Brochstein. Handcrafted luminarias of the Houston skyline were made from tin flashing by students at the Rice School of Architecture. For party favors, guests were given a set of cookie cutters depicting the Transeco Tower, the San Jacinto Monument, and the Astrodome, designed especially for the evening by Kathy Heard.

Past presidents of the Rice Design Alliance served as an honorary committee and were each given an engraved silver medal. Past presidents attending the gala were Drexel Turner, Anne Bohann, Bill Stern, Jim Murdaugh, Raymond Brochstein, Frank Douglas, Elizabeth Glassman (who flew in from Santa Fe), Edie Archer, Jim Furr, Jay Baker, Leslie Davidson, Barrie Scardino, Charles Maynard, and Louis Skidmore.

In its first 25 years the RDA, established in 1972 by David A. Crane, then dean of the Rice School of Architecture, has brought to Houston leading designers, critics, theorists, and planners to participate in its educational programs. Through October 1997, RDA has sponsored nearly 250 lectures, 49 panel discussions and symposia, 26 architecture tours, 16 exhibitions, 7 film series, 3 national design competitions, and 40 issues (including this one) of its award-winning publication, *Cite*.

A special 25-year award was presented posthumously to Jesse H. Jones (1874-1956). This year marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of Jones's foundation, Houston Endowment Inc., and 1998 will be the centennial of his

arrival in Houston. Jesse Jones more than any other single individual was responsible for initiating the growth and expansion that Houston has experienced throughout this century. From 1908 until the present time, his name has been synonymous with development and civic leadership, and his prophetic optimism continues to influence significant architecture and design in the city of Houston today through Houston Endowment Inc. Descendants of Jesse Jones were hosted by his great-niece, Susan Booth Keeton. Houston Endowment Inc.'s Steven Fenberg and Ann Hamilton also attended. Steven and Barrie Scardino produced trading cards picturing 25 of Jesse Jones's Houston buildings, and gala guests scrambled to collect an entire set.

The 1997 Award for Design Excellence was given to Anne Schlumberger Bohann Brown, one of the moving forces behind the formation of an architectural culture in Houston. Through the Anchorage Foundation of Texas, which she founded and over which she presides; the Rice Design Alliance, of which she is a past president; the Orange Show Foundation; the Houston Center for Photography; Inprint; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Anne has given her energy and inspiration to Houston architecture.

Anne Bohann grew up in Houston and began her architectural associations as a patron, working twice with Howard Barnstone to remodel her own residences. She moved on to a serious study of architecture, graduating from the University of Houston's College of Architecture. In 1984, with Ed Eubanks, she founded the architectural firm Eubanks/Bohann, of which she is a principal. Interested in historic preservation since her student days, Anne was responsible in 1980 for the listing of one of Houston's epic neighborhoods, Broadacres, in the National Register of Historic Places. With her husband, architect and urbanist Peter H. Brown, Anne backed the planning initiative "Making Main Street Happen."

Through the Anchorage Foundation of Texas, Anne has been instrumental in the production of architectural guidebooks to Houston, Galveston, and San Antonio; in the inclusion of a substantial number of entries on Texas architects in the 1996 *New Handbook of Texas*; and in making it possible for innumerable visitors and journalists to receive architectural tours of Houston. Anne and the Anchorage Foundation have been a sustaining presence in the publication of *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review*

of Houston since its founding in 1982. She began a new project of the foundation in 1995 with Houston photographer Richard Payne and graphic designer Mark Judson — the Anchorage Press. Its first two books, to be released this year, will be co-published with the University of Chicago Press.

RDA president Gwen Goffe presented the award to Anne Bohann, a handsome "Magnolia" Steuben glass bowl donated by Neiman Marcus. Anne, in turn, congratulated RDA for its continued commitment to the city, through educating the general public about the importance of design and the built environment.

Underwriting chair Tom Bellows and his committee broke all records with this year's event. More than \$265,000 were raised from table sales and the auction to support the educational programs of the Rice Design Alliance and the publication of the RDA journal, *Cite*. The RDA board of directors would like to thank all of the gala committee chairs and volunteers as well as the RDA staff for making this such a successful event. We would also like to recognize our generous underwriters and auction donors, whose contributions will help make possible the 1998 programs of the Rice Design Alliance.

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## Cite Survey



Municipal Cemetery, Balcarce, B. A., Argentina, Francisco Salamone, architect, 1936.

#### SAVING SALAMONE

The bizarre architecture of Francisco Salamone (1898–1959) will be the subject of a photographic exhibition at the University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture during FotoFest February 27 through March 7, 1998. Salamone, a civil engineer and architect, worked for the government of the Province of Buenos Aires in Argentina from 1936 to 1940, designing an incredible collection of town halls, slaughter houses, and cemetery portals.

Photographer and architectural writer Edward Shaw has mounted a campaign in Argentina to recognize, restore, and preserve over 60 Salamone buildings that have been neglected and forgotten.

Francisco Salamone was born in Catania, Sicily and graduated as an architect and engineer from the National University

of Cordoba, having won prizes at international expositions in Barcelona and Milan. After moving to Argentina, Salamone developed political ties with the ambitious conservative governor of Buenos Aires, Manuel Fresco. Intent on leaving a mark, Fresco commissioned official buildings in more than 25 towns and villages. His favored architect, Salamone, was able to enhance the image of both Fresco and his province's municipal infrastructure by giving these buildings a dominating monumentality with emotionally expressive forms.

Now the government of the Province of Buenos Aires, through its cultural department, has begun to recognize the importance of Salamone's work and is sponsoring the traveling exhibition of Shaw's photographs. The Pan American Cultural Exchange in Houston will bring this show to the United States.



Municipal Cemetery, Saliqueló, B. A., Argentina, Francisco Salamone, architect, ca. 1937.



#### UH BIG CUBE

The Big Cube project, a life-sized basic design exercise by first year students at the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, adorned the campus for two days in November 1997. Working in teams of five, the students created the site specific projects as a means of animating the campus. The designs which began as a desk-size, variations on a cube exercise were constructed in cardboard donated by Williamette Industries, Inc.



#### RICE ROW HOUSE

The Rice School of Architecture Building Workshop is constructing a small, cost-efficient home at Project Row Houses in Houston's Third Ward. The goal of the design/build class, taught by Nonya Grenader and Danny Samuels, is to use the small house as a studio project and at the same time to provide a dwelling for a community resident. Students participated in the entire process: designs, construction documents, shop drawings, fabrication,

and on-site construction. The modular proposal selected was designed by 1997 spring semester students Kim Neuscheler and Kathy Dy. Both graduate and undergraduate students fabricated the building panels at Rice and are installing them on site. Local design professionals, contractors, and suppliers have contributed their resources and knowledge helping students to translate ideas into built form. Construction will continue in the spring of '98 as a new class designs a second house to be built next door.



#### WITCH'S HAT HOUSE

The last house in what was once a prosperous residential district just south of downtown Houston has been demolished. The Allen Paul House, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, was designed about 1907 by Houston's preeminent Victorian architect, George E. Dickey. Located at 2201 Fannin, the Paul House has been of concern to preservationists for almost 20 years since the longtime owner (1948-80), Hallie Pritchard, closed her dance school. The building was rehabilitated, but its fragile and high-maintenance wood frame finally gave way to the elements and then the wrecker in November.

The remarkable 30-foot-high needlelike pinnacle atop the corner turret was the architectural feature that made this house a landmark for almost a century. The pinnacled *chapeau*, rescued by Cary Pasternak of The Emporium, awaits a new witch.



Max Ernst, portrait of Dominique de Menil, 1934.

Dominique de Menil had extraordinary talents that she used with grace and wisdom in the fields of art, religion, human rights, and education to enrich the world. As she often reminded us, many of her activities would not have been possible without the material gift of inherited wealth. But, as everyone knew, that wealth would have been of little consequence without her internal gifts of character.

The magnitude of Dominique's accomplishments was so great that any effort to reflect upon her life seems insufficient. I offer here a few observations and personal experiences with the hope of indicating bits of a far bigger, richer whole.

One feature that characterized Dominique from our first meeting was the element of surprise. In 1963, my wife, Ginny, and I traveled from Yale (where I was a graduate student) to New York to meet someone described only as "a patron of the University of St. Thomas in Houston." We speculated about a Texan with a pied-a-terre in New York, but the reality was far from our speculations. We encountered Dominique de Menil in an East Side townhouse filled with an eye-opening collection of art. She was charmingly ill-at-ease, gracious, and, at the end of the meeting, concerned about our late return to New Haven without dinner. Accordingly, she packed what we came to call the "First Brown Bag Lunch" — a grocery bag of sandwiches, fruit, and French

to Jerry MacAgy. As we drove on toward Memphis later that day, the dreary, flat land of eastern Arkansas was miraculously transformed into a Magritte world — his blue sky and puffy white clouds; crisp, basic forms and trees in a row. In our family lore, we refer to this experience as "The Apotheosis of Arkansas." Dominique continued to work her exhibition magic for another 30 years.

She directed the details, too, as was manifest when I first observed her designing a "simple" program and accompanying announcement. Never had I seen anyone so exacting about everything from the conception of the program to the wording and design of the announcement; from her concern for the audience to the effect of her standards on her co-workers. It was a veritable course in graphic design, communication, and management for the staff, as well as for local printers and photographers.

Some of the work took place in the de Menil House on San Felipe, and that home was another surprise. It was an understated Philip Johnson building — on the front, a long low, unadorned brick wall punctuated only by a plane of glass containing the front door and a small strip of windows, high up to the right of the door. It did not look at all like what one expected of a wealthy family in the River Oaks section of Houston. That doorway led into an exquisitely proportioned foyer, installed with art and furni-

# D o m i n i q u e d e M e n i l

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cheeses that provisioned us for two days.

Subsequently, I accepted the position at St. Thomas. But we had hardly unpacked before the death in February 1964 of Jermaine MacAgy, the Art Department chair who first recruited me. In the aftermath of that shocking event, Dominique was appointed chair of the department. She assumed Jerry's projects with little experience in exhibitions or administration, insofar as I knew. Wondering how my new job would work out, I found that her surprises continued. The first pending project Dominique took over was an exhibition of the work of Rene Magritte for the Arkansas Art Center in Little Rock. On the trip north to receive my Ph.D. from Yale, Ginny and I stopped to visit the exhibition. It is riveted in my memory. In matters of conceiving and installing exhibitions, Dominique clearly possessed the magic that had attracted me

ture but open on the left to a glass-walled interior garden that provided a glimpse through to the living room beyond. That living room — an ample yet intimate space — was also filled with art and furniture, including an inviting ottoman in the center of the room and a desk piled high with diverse publications on art, literature, philosophy, and religion. This home was a serene, intimate museum-library-garden, where one could share John and Dominique's excitement over a recent acquisition or browse among the art and books.

On other occasions, the de Menil House was an electric gathering place for civic and business leaders, artists, writers, clerics, politicians, and civil rights activists. At that time, in the mid-to-late 1960s, the burning issues in politics and human rights revolved around the war in Viet Nam and racial integration. Domi-



The Menil Collection, 1515 Sul Ross, Renzo Piano architect with Richard Fitzgerald and Partners, associate architects, 1987.



© Phil Neale, courtesy of the de Menils

Interior, de Menil House, 3363 San Felipe, Philip C. Johnson Associates, architects, Landes Gorn and Cowell & Neuhaus, consulting architects, 1950. Dominique and John de Menil broke with tradition becoming pioneering patrons of modern architecture in Houston.

nique and John worked unrelentingly for peace in Viet Nam and for social justice in America, opening their home to people of good will from every community in the city during scores of local and national campaigns. They were among the first to perceive the potential of young Mickey Leland, urging him to run for Congress and providing both moral and financial support as he developed into a beloved representative for this city and a symbol for the national Black community. But they also supported Citizens for Good Schools, Barbara Jordan, Eugene McCarthy, Ann Richards, and many others. This devotion to human rights and social justice evolved into a global effort in 1986, when Dominique joined former president Jimmy Carter in establishing the Carter-Menil Awards.

In the context of the truculent 1960s, art was all the more susceptible to question as a luxury for the elite. More than once, I observed Dominique address questions about justifying expenditures for the arts. Such questions, though received as earnest, were seen as naive. She did not regard art as a discrete entity but as an integral part of life. To set art aside during times of trial was, for her, tantamount to suspending faith, justice, or the quest for knowledge under the same conditions. Art and religious faith were inseparable in the de Menils' project for the Rothko Chapel; art and social justice came together in the project for the Deluxe Theatre on Lyons Avenue and in the multi-volume study *The Image of the Black in Western Art*. Art and education were synonymous in numerous de Menil undertakings.

Dominique had enormous respect for scholarship and teaching. She would abandon almost any task at hand to grapple with a knotty French-English translation or a puzzling question of interpretation. And she and John built a program of art history, film, and photography in a city that theretofore had no such programs. When I joined that fledgling pro-

gram at the University of St. Thomas, we had one three-drawer metal cabinet of slides, one case of books, and, a little later, a handful of cameras. We moved to Rice University in 1969 with seven faculty members in art history, film, and photography, a well-equipped Media Center, approximately 20,000 books, and 20,000 slides. We merged handily with Rice's largely studio art department, while Dominique founded The Institute for the Arts at Rice. The latter provided her the vehicle and the space (the Art Barn) to continue at Rice a program of exhibitions and publications, the Print Club (to encourage and enable private collecting), and the tradition of visiting artists and scholars established at St. Thomas. The opening exhibition at Rice was a memorable show from the Museum of Modern Art titled *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*. Visiting artists and scholars included Magritte, Ernst, Duchamp, Tinguely, Matta, and Warhol, film makers Roberto Rosellini and Jean-Luc Goddard, and art historians Rudolf Wittkower, George Heard Hamilton, Robert Goldwater, Leo Steinberg, Charles Sterling, and Robert Rosenblum.

In addition to the *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, the de Menils completely underwrote catalogue raisonnés for Max Ernst and René Magritte, and they provided invaluable assistance for countless additional studies by supplying free bed and breakfast in their homes in Houston, New York, and Paris for students, professors, and museum curators from around the world. As one recipient of that generosity, I looked forward to breakfasts that might include a Catholic priest from Lebanon, a graduate student in art history or anthropology from California, and a curator from the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

This incredible traffic of artists, students, religious leaders, and scholars was a stimulus for Dominique, not a drain. However, in her openness to people of

all cultures and callings, she did have a bias for people who could reach her something, nourish or enlarge her. That nourishment could come in many forms — through knowledge or examples of courage or faith or love — and from anyone. The giving of it was fostered by Dominique's ability to personalize her moments with others, conveying the gratifying experience of being responded to as an individual, unencumbered by reputation or by stereotype as a member of some group, class, or profession. That warmth functioned with Goran Milutinovic as naturally as with Andy Warhol. After her first meeting with Andy Warhol, Dominique conveyed to me with a few words and a radiant face that she was grateful for the opportunity to discover that Warhol was a person of sympathy and integrity.

Goran was a Yugoslavian student in England who wrote us to ask for a scholarship. We had no scholarships at that time, and he had a mediocre record, so I turned him away. But he persisted (later he revealed that my response was the only one received from letters to over 200 schools), and Dominique decided to gamble on him on the basis that anyone so determined must have something worthy of cultivation. A gangling, sweet-natured, lethargic guy showed up who fared poorly the first semester. However, he was so likable that each professor went out of his way to help Goran, and he improved substantially in energy and grades the second semester. At the end of the year, the art historians were congratulating themselves on the effectiveness of their extra work with Goran when Dominique firmly announced that Goran's progress was her doing. "I've been giving him vitamins," she said. Goran went on to graduate and do good work in film making.

On the face of it, this is simply a sentimental story of "Goran's Scholarship," but on a deeper level, it illustrates Dominique's far-reaching concern for the people around her. She was sensitive to their needs and helped, whether that meant vitamins, a morale boost, or professional counseling. She likewise had a keen eye for talent and character. She kept in touch with some students and later called on them to take on major jobs. This included Paul Winkler, a student from St. Thomas days, who was recruited to shepherd the construction of The Menil Collection building and, later, to serve as its second (and current) director.

Of all the de Menils' accomplishments, the most celebrated is The Menil Collection, a museum that encompasses their extraordinary art collection and the Renzo Piano building that houses it. The Menil Collection is at the center of a campus with the Rothko Chapel, the Cy Twombly Gallery, and the Byzantine Fresco Chapel set amid open green spaces and outdoor sculpture. These Menil structures are surrounded by bungalows of the 1920s and 1930s acquired by Dominique to protect the immediate residential context of the museum in a city without zon-

ing. The Piano building is a product of prolonged thought and research. It is meant to be inviting, accessible, and compatible in scale and materials with the neighborhood. It is also designed to offer, on a public scale, the serenity and intimacy of the de Menil home. Like that home, the museum building is long and low, with an elegant glass-walled foyer and a big ottoman for rest and conversation. Again, like the home, there are interior gardens and walls of glass (for the conservation lab, the frame shop, kitchen, and library) that open the "white box" of the museum providing natural light and a connection between inside and outside and between the staff and visitors. Every feature of the interior — architectural detail, lighting, and installation, without explanatory labels — is intended to foster direct, personal contact with the art objects. In this rare museum, art reigns. The Menil Collection is not a monument to the architect or to the de Menils, but a place for a personal collection that more than merits the attention given it.

The de Menil art collection is selective and personal, freed from a concern to be encyclopedic. It has notable strengths in 20th-century art, especially Surrealism; Byzantine art; and the arts of Africa and Oceania. There are also smaller but striking alcoves and vitrines of Northwest Coast art; the metal work of migratory peoples; Celtic objects; and Cycladic sculpture. Many individuals have contributed to the formation of this collection — Father Marie-Alain Coururier, family members, friends, and curators of the museum — but the vast majority of the works is the product of decisions by John and Dominique themselves, and many observers have sought to identify the taste that informs this remarkable collection.

Like others, I feel that there is a spiritual basis to Dominique's collecting which is easier to sense than to articulate. A striking number of works originally had a religious function, and most still convey something of that original purpose. Or, when the works are not manifestly religious — as in most of the Surrealist objects — they deal with mysterious, irrational realms of experience that share something of the truth and power of art with a religious function.

Dominique de Menil did not begin her adult life or her art collection with a vision of The Menil Collection, the Carter-Menil Awards, the Rothko and Byzantine Fresco chapels, and the arts programs at St. Thomas and Rice. She did, however, accept her gifts, her passions and power, and, with them, the expanding opportunities and responsibility to make of them a tangible legacy. It is our good fortune to have not only this legacy but the example of her committed life. ■



First City National Bank Building, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects, 1960, with Wilson, Morris Crain & Anderson, associate architects. Ezra Stoller © ESTO.

## The Post-War Years Remembered

The rapidly expanding post-industrial American city too often has shared an uncomfortable relationship with its architectural heritage. When the past is viewed as an impediment to the future, buildings that have become functionally or economically obsolete are treated with indifference under the callow rules of economic determinism. The wholesale sacrifice of older buildings in the name of progress greatly diminishes the role of the city as a place of memory and a physical record of the evolution of urban culture. This circumstance has begun to threaten the viability of buildings from the recent past — the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, an era that evidenced the vibrant vision of the modern movement. These buildings are particularly vulnerable since they have neither the historical distance to certify their importance nor the sentimentality to engender nostalgia.

This issue of *Cite* brings together articles that describe aspects of Houston's culture and architecture from the first generation following World War II. This was an optimistic time, when architects were sure of their direction, and buildings were conceived with a confidence that modern technology and rational design could best serve the evolving needs of society. These beliefs took many forms, from the organic principles of Frank Lloyd Wright to the cool, crisp functionalism of modernism's International Style. Yet the architects who worked in this time were united by a belief that architecture could and would improve the living conditions of humanity. For this prosperous city on the verge of enormous growth, leaders and entrepreneurs, certain of their faith in the modern city, capitalized on progressive design as a way to fashion a new Houston. Downtown office buildings, suburban centers of commerce and business, schools, hospitals, houses, and apartment buildings, born of the spirit of their time, embraced an architecture driven by innovation and freshness, unencumbered by academic theories and historicism.

As a quintessential practitioner of 20th-century urban capitalism, Houston promotes its identity through an unquestioning belief that the future holds unlimited promise and that the city's greatness can best be achieved by continuously embracing the new. Predictably, what is fresh or exciting to one generation can too quickly become old-fashioned or obsolete to the next. Newness in the late 1970s and 1980s, for example, was delivered as a pastiche of historical styles that overwhelmed the stock of modern, innovative buildings that had given identity to the city during the vigorous and imaginative period of growth in those years following World War II. The famed Astrodome, a remarkable engineering feat hailed by the city's boosters as the Eighth Wonder of the World when it opened in 1965, now seems destined to become the stadium nobody wants. In its place, city leaders are zealously promoting a new downtown stadium to placate big-league baseball with a venue that can conjure the nostalgic romance of older open-air ball parks. Similarly, Gulfgate Mall, one of Houston's first modern shopping centers, has found its fortunes falling to newer and larger malls and is now moving toward a date with wrecking ball.

Indeed, the fate of dozens of other landmark buildings from the post-war years is tenuous. Some buildings have already been lost and others insensitively altered. The Great Southern Life Building, a handsome 1965 icon of modern design by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, was recently razed to ready its valuable land on Buffalo Speedway for another of the stamped-out apartment developments that have become ubiquitous in the contemporary urban landscape. From the same period, notable architect-designed houses are in even greater jeopardy. One of Howard Barnstone's residential masterpieces, a glass, steel, and brick pavilion overlooking Buffalo Bayou in River Oaks was recently remodeled beyond recognition, and the nearby elegant courtyard house designed by Hugo Neuhaus in 1953 for Houston arts patron Nina Cullinan was torn down to make way for a new Tudor-style mansion.

If the architecture of the past, in this case the recent past, is so readily dismissed, then the architecture of the present will very likely face a similar fate. Fortunately, many post-war buildings remain relatively untouched, and others have been respectfully renovated to provide a permanent record of Houston's architectural and cultural awakening at mid-century. Clearly, however, the viability of buildings from this era is at a critical point. If they are treated with the same neglect that befell many of Houston's turn-of-the-century structures, then another chapter of Houston's architectural history will be confined to photographs and the written word.

# DESIGN INDUSTRY AND ARCHITECTURE

## Houston at Mid-Century



1950 Studebaker Land Cruiser designed by Raymond Loewy.

Vincent P. Hauser



Foley's Department Store, 110 Main Street, Kenneth Franzheim, architect, 1947.

The architectural and industrial design of the mid-20th century constitutes a virtual narrative of cultural exuberance and an unequalled faith in science, engineering, and technology. In part, this faith was the result of effective industrial practices developed during World War II and applied to the production of consumer goods and construction after the war. But industry was not completely removed from American craft traditions and sensibilities, the mark of the human hand was evident in welding, riveting, and finishing, blessing automobiles and toys, furniture and buildings with slight imperfections that make them familiar even today. Experimentation with form,

an exploration of its relationship to function, and the use of new, engineered materials such as aluminum and thermoplastics are hallmarks of this period.

As I looked up from the sidewalk along Lamar Avenue just west of Travis Street, I realized that the difficult charm of downtown Houston had begun to have its effect on me. Having worked my way past postmodern towers, shiny bank buildings, and parking garages along Louisiana and Smith streets, I approached the heart of Houston's mid-century *agora*: Foley's Department Store. Along with a handful of other buildings constructed from the late 1940s through the 1960s, Foley's frames a conceptual view of an exceptionally robust epoch in Houston's architectural and cultural history.

Foley's is the result of a collaboration between the Houston architect Kenneth Franzheim and the industrial designers Raymond Loewy and William T. Snaith.<sup>1</sup> Snaith directed the interior space-planning design, including an early version of just-in-time delivery, in which goods flow from the delivery dock via mechanized conveyors to the sales floor. Furniture and appliances, stocked at a remote warehouse, were shipped after the customer selected merchandise from the floor samples, saving valuable downtown space for sales rather than storage. Today little of Loewy and Snaith's interior remains, with the notable exception of the escalators. Trimmied in a continuous

plaster soffit concealing a strip of white neon, wrapped with an aluminum band, and punctuated at each floor level by a square, modernistic clockface, the escalators are easily identifiable from most of the sales floor.

On the exterior, a gigantic windowless block of orange Kasota stone and brick rests on a thin awning that looks squeezed out above the street-level storefront like the first layer of icing on a very large cake. This creates a visual tension that leads the eye directly to the window displays, transforming the pedestrian into a window shopper and, hopefully, the window shopper into a buyer. The solid-box construction of Foley's, an innovative approach in 1947, allowed interior merchandising demands to control the design of the building, expressing functional need in a direct, minimalist way. This solution was made possible, of course, by mechanical engineering advances that provided year-round climate control for the entire building.

The expanding postwar economy of the United States seeded a corporate culture that rebuilt and reinterpreted the skyscraper. One result of this dynamic was the demand for ever-growing floor plates and larger column-free spans. Structural engineering expertise made these new floor plates possible, and changing styles of corporate management made such expansive spaces desirable. The plan of the 1929 Gulf Building (Alfred C. Finn, Kenneth Franzheim,

and J. E. R. Carpenter) was influenced as much by limitations in structural and mechanical engineering as by management that believed in the compositional importance of a traditional square tower. By contrast, the 1956 Bank of the Southwest Building (Kenneth Franzheim), now Bank One, Texas represents the full-block development type that characterized the 1950s.

Recent remodeling efforts at the Bank of the Southwest Building, motivated by the attempt of Aetna Realty Investors to reposition the building in the real estate market, illustrate some of the issues encountered in the rehabilitation of a 1950s office tower. Fortunately, in this case the design of the floor plate is a desirable one in today's complex real estate market. Compared to many of the towers of the 1980s that employed a very deep floor plate to accommodate large, multi-floor tenants, the Bank of the Southwest Building is well suited to smaller tenants. The dimensions of the tower and the ratio of the length to the width make desirable interior spaces available to more tenants. From an investment perspective, this flexibility makes the building attractive not only as an individual property, but also as part of a larger real estate portfolio for Aetna, providing investment diversity, a shock absorber of sorts in the real estate market, which, in this case, determined the scope of the rehabilitation effort.

The reconstructed tunnel level at the Bank of the Southwest was designed by Gensler & Associates in 1993 and renamed Mid City Shops. It adds the retail identity needed for tenant recruiting as well as providing economically desirable activity in one of the earliest sections of Houston's downtown tunnel system. The redesign features column cladding that alludes to the colorful anodized aluminum tumblers popular in the 1950s. The color and shape of the columns, the quality of their construction and finish, and the design of the patterned terrazzo floor appropriately interpret symbols of the 1950s in an energetic way.

The redesign of the main floor and the exterior granite base of the building by Morris Architects is less compatible with the spirit of the original design. The recladding of the base in a postmodern style diminishes the visual weight of the

base. Such a muddying of the intent of original composition will likely recur as other buildings from this period are remodeled, unless we work a bit harder to understand the value of the original.

There are several aspects of the Bank of the Southwest Building design that are historically interesting. One is the participation of Florence Knoll as the designer of the bank interiors. A second is the deletion of a notable sculpture that was to have been placed above the Travis Street entrance façade. The stark base of the building was intended to feature a giant *bas relief* by William Zorach — a partially clad woman, symbolizing Texas's post-war rise, executed in cast aluminum, one of the richest and most extravagant materials of the day. The installation became embroiled in controversy related to the reported blacklisting of the sculptor and never came to fruition. Such a sculpture would have qualitatively changed the building's scale and enlivened a relatively featureless composition. The sculpture's importance to the composition suggests a passing of the baton from the *bas relief* tradition of the heroic buildings of Texas's centennial era to those of the modern period. If the original design had been realized during the recent remodeling, the texture and size of the aluminum sculpture, placed in partial relief over the entrance, would have been a stunning addition.

The original interior banking lobby, designed by Knoll with her associate Joseph Whited, contained a cool, museum-like space. A sweeping wall of teak behind a bank of teller windows, the huge Rufino Tamayo mural, *Americas*, and the taut, floating ceiling plane depicted in a 1956 issue of *Architectural Forum* presented a thoroughly modern banking hall.<sup>2</sup> The tradition of incorporating significant art in major corporate public spaces represented the bank's participation in the social contract. Combined with the integration of architectural and engineering design, public art and its importance to the architecture represented the best design of this period. In the same



Promotional brochure cover for Bank of the Southwest, 1955. The design of the building and the name of the bank changed before construction was completed.

Bank of the Southwest Building, 910 Travis Street, Kenneth Franzheim, architect, 1956.



Bank of the Southwest, drawing of interior, 1955 advertisement.

way that engineering advances took form as steel columns or air conditioning, engineering-process design influenced the floor plan directly.

At the Bank of the Southwest, Knoll's industrial design aesthetic was exhibited in the sweeping escalators that brought customers up to the second floor banking lobby, and the Tamayo mural became the sign as well as the art, directing customers upward. This clarity of linking space and the role of art, symbols, and sightlines to suggest movement and procession illustrates the application of engineering principles that infused mid-century culture. The industrial-inspired clarity of space and simplicity of movement that permeated the best design of the 1950s has been reduced to cliché in current descriptions of space: intuitive way-finding, which has been applied much like a poultice to save otherwise banal designs. Unfortunately, Rufino Tamayo's mural was dismantled and sold in the recent remodeling, which eliminated the banking hall as an uneconomical redundancy.<sup>3</sup> In our efforts to refit the architecture of this period for today's needs, we might do well to heed one of medicine's funda-



Prudential Building, 1100 Holcombe Boulevard, Kenneth Franzheim, architect, 1952.



Petroleum Club, Exxon Building, 800 Bell Avenue, Walton Becket & Associates with Goleman & Rolfe and George Pierce • Abel B. Pierce, architects, 1963.

mental principles: First, do no harm.

Another example of the importance of corporate identity and its contribution to the design of highrise structures of this period is the 1952 Prudential Building (Kenneth Franzheim), now part of the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Hospital and Cancer Center. Its dramatic skylit porte-cochère spatially acknowledges the automobile as the ideal form of

transportation and begins a sequence of spaces that opens to the elevator lobby and the corporate garden beyond. The garden featured terraces that stepped down to an oasis, where a swimming pool and exotic plants once floated on a huge lawn. The lawn and the automobile became literal and symbolic elements of the new order, connecting the corporate realm to the suburban castle, small though it might be, and to the tennis court and golf course, where corporate play became part of real work.

As one of the first corporate high-rises to be built outside of downtown, the Prudential Building anticipated the character of much of Houston's subsequent suburban development. The 1965

American General Building (Lloyd, Morgan & Jones) on Allen Parkway is a part of this continuum as well. The thin radiatorlike quality of the American General tower places it in the same design family as the downtown Humble Building (Welton Becker & Associates), now the Exxon Building, constructed two years earlier. The *brise-soleil*, intended to shade the glass curtain wall from the sun, gives both buildings a pleasant visual lightness. In the case of the Humble Building, the corporate garden was moved from the lawn up to the Petroleum Club penthouse on the 42nd floor.

With the same dramatic impact it had on the day it opened, the Petroleum Club's two-story curtain wall frames a stunning view of the city. The glass extends to within six inches of the floor, causing many an executive with vertigo to retreat more than a couple of steps. The decorations and furnishings in the Petroleum Club have survived a 35-year stream of parties and lunches. Bronze

dense, relatively small-scaled cotton and lumber center to the booming Space City that built the Astrodome. Older buildings such as the Rice Hotel, the Gulf Building, and the Niels Esperson Building were rooted to the street in their architectural design and pedestrian orientation. This was due to the tradition of retail use on the street level and the fact that the city block was occupied by an aggregate of several buildings rather than a single structure. The scale of downtown Houston was described by this pattern of multi-building blocks. The integration of parking garages into the design of Foley's and later buildings heralded full-block development, the most significant change in the scale of Houston's urban pattern since the late 19th century.

Full-block development in the 1950s resulted in a vertical tower over a horizontal base that covered most of the block, as in the case of the Bank of the Southwest Building. Competition between the automobile and retail for use

## In our efforts to refit the architecture of this period for today's needs, we might do well to heed one of medicine's fundamental principles: First, do no harm.



Bank of the Southwest tunnel corridor remodeled by Gensler & Associates, 1993.

panels depicting the fossilized flora and fauna that are the source of the oil industry's wealth decorate the dark-stained walls, just as stone friezes represented the cotton kingdom in Houston buildings of the 1920s. Travertine panels set in a thin grid of black granite provide the backdrop for the dining rooms and lounges, where cases of crystals and geodes frame banks of executive portraits.

During the fifties and sixties, the downtown changed dramatically from a

of the base resulted in the demolition of adjacent 19th-century buildings for garages and surface parking. As these smaller buildings — the visual ground plane of the city — were torn down, the design of new tower bases became more visually and culturally important, because pedestrians no longer had access to the traditional architectural rhythm and variety of activities and shops along the street. One big store such as Battelstein's (1950, Finger & Rustay) or Foley's kept you moving down the street long enough to get you into the store entrance. Although one store may have replaced perhaps ten different shops, retail use of the street and an essential pedestrian character continued.

However, in designing the Tenneco Building in 1963, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill abandoned the retail identity of

the street and replaced it with a plaza of unspecified public space. The tower-on-a-plaza began to supplant the 1950s tower-on-a-base. Prior to the 1960s, the sidewalk space was public to one degree or another. Even though one might not be a paying customer, it was acceptable to enter a store or bank lobby to enjoy a brief respite from bad weather outside. The Tenneco Building, intentionally or not, stratified the public realm by building a wall, complete with lobby security, between one public realm and another. By eliminating retail use on the street and elevating formal concerns above practical ones, the tower embodies one of the most significant failings of modern architecture. Despite the architectural success of the tower itself, the building fails in its treatment of the pedestrian at the ground plane, particularly when compared to earlier SOM efforts such as the Chase Manhattan Bank Building in New York of 1961. With cars passing over the plaza to drive-in bank tellers, the traditional automobile and pedestrian separation was compromised producing the kind of anxiety usually reserved for street crossings. At the street level of the Tenneco Building, the monolithic brownness of the granite paving is unrelieved and joyless and works against the visual lightness of the tower. In this instance, the architecture requires submission rather than offering invitation.

Beyond the edges of downtown Houston, numerous buildings from the two post-war decades face a disturbingly uncertain future. For example, the Adams Petroleum Center (Donald Barthelme and Hamilton Brown, 1957) located on Fannin Street in the Medical Center, has been lost among sprawling medical towers and skywalks. Along the Gulf Freeway, the Schlumberger Well Services Headquarters (MacKie & Kamrath), a landmark of remarkable design since its completion in 1953, sits empty and forlorn. In concert with industrial architecture nearby, the Schlumberger Building anchors this period in Houston's architectural as well as economic history. Some outstanding mid-century buildings already have been lost, the Great Southern Life Building (SOM), for example, was imploded just last year.<sup>4</sup>

Cultural history embedded in these mid-century buildings gives meaning that extends beyond bricks, mortar, steel, aluminum, and granite. The industrial design aesthetic, the corporate commitment to public art, and even sometimes the social stresses related to the contemporary politics of communism played important roles



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

in shaping buildings of this period. The stolid beauty of the architecture assumes a transparency that allows us to connect with a history that exists as a residual black-and-white image and a realistic, full-color present. Architecture can be as telling as a family snapshot. Sociologist Dolores Hayden has compellingly explored the roles of social and cultural experience in assessing the value of architecture and public space in her book *The Power of Place: Urban Landscape as Public History*. In her descriptions of neighborhoods, architecture, and patterns of use and habitation, Hayden associates public history and place with personal history. In this way, our personal histories become associated with the cultural landscape, enlivening it and giving place and buildings meaning that exceeds architectural quality and value. As the urban landscape, of which architecture is a part, changes or is lost, we lose an important part of our personal history, as well as the artifacts of the culture.

To successfully adapt these buildings, we must look to such creative thinking as that which has led to renovation of the Hermann Lofts and the Rice Hotel. Despite substantial market, building code, and finance problems, these projects have gone forward in large part due to the tenacity of individuals with both vision and a sense of historical continuity. The potential for destruction or irreparable alteration of Houston's mid-century landmarks is disturbing. Their beauty is stunning because they fuse architecture, engineering, and art in a way that reflects the unique partnership of hand and machine that marks this period. It is unfortunate that the contributions of structural engineers and industrial designers such as Loewy and Snaith are often overlooked, given their remarkable contribution to the design.

What is not often apparent in pho-

tographs of the buildings of this period is that the details and materials give the architecture its visual complexity and tactile quality. The causative relationship of form and content is more readily apparent in industrial and product design of this period: the Olds Rocket 88 assumes not the form of a mere automobile, but the form of an automobile powered by booster rockets. Its content, powerfully shaped by its marketing, is pure rocket. Raymond Loewy's design of the 1950 Studebaker Land Cruiser sets a standard of functional beauty that anchors it in time. The furniture designs of Charles and Ray Eames exist on the same continuum. The molded birch side chair of the late 1940s and later molded polyester chairs are icons of form fused with function.

The industrial design of this period helps us to understand its architecture because it employs an accessible primer on design intention and vocabulary that adds depth and texture to our discussion of form and our understanding of content and meaning. At the scale of a building, this aesthetic is easy to miss — if it is hidden among the distractions of the urban streetscape, if we don't search for it, or if we simply fail to look up. ■

1. While Loewy is perhaps best known for his industrial design, including designs of streamlined automobiles and trains, he began his career designing window displays in New York in the 1910s and continued to be involved in this aspect of design for much of his career.

2. *Architectural Forum*, September 1956, p. 138.

3. The Tamayo mural is currently on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.

4. *Cite* 38, Summer 1997, p. 5.

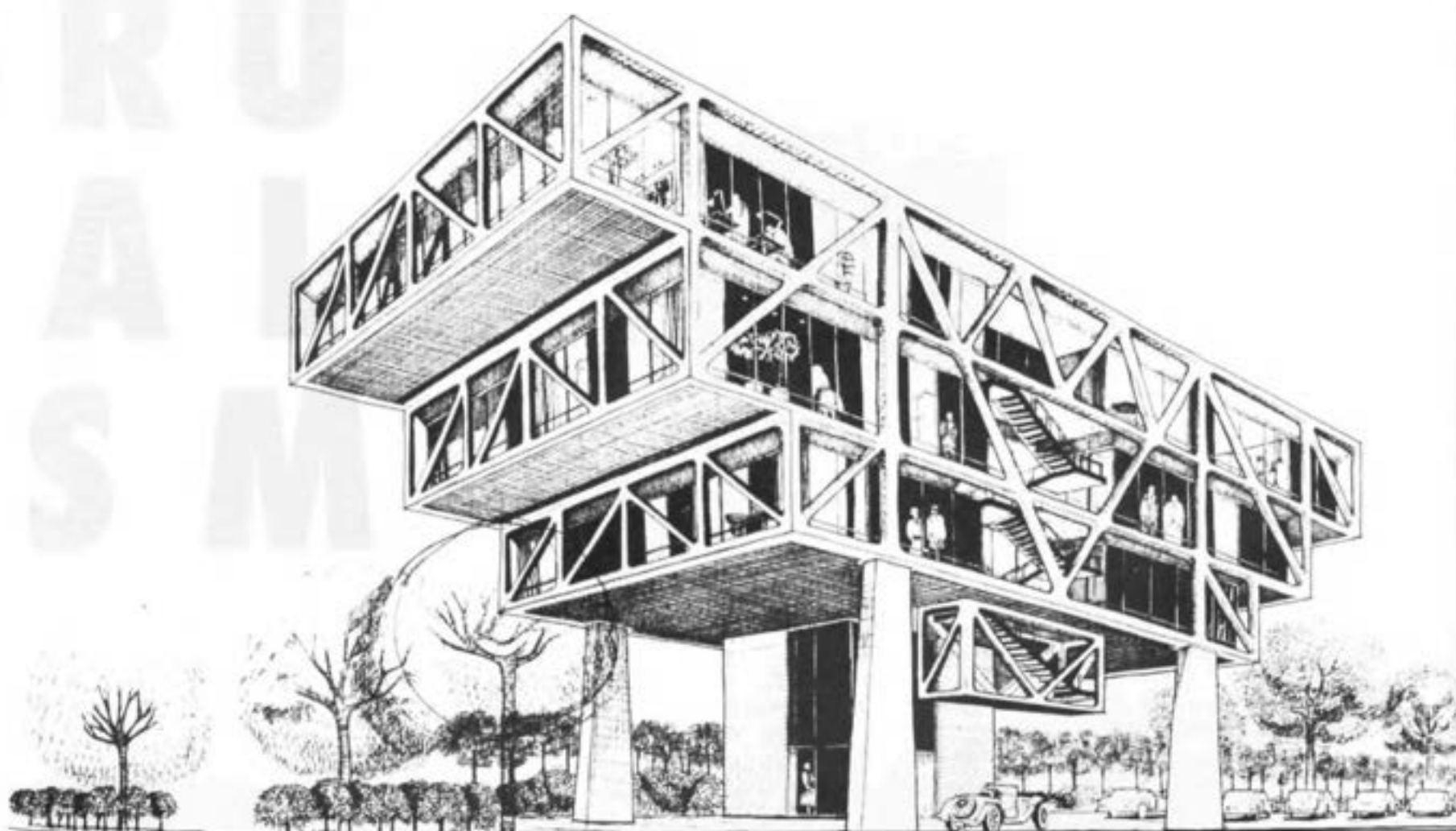


Adams Petroleum Center, entrance. Asbestos is a serious obstacle to refurbishing mid-century buildings.



American General Building (now Wortham Tower) 2727 Allen Parkway, Lloyd, Morgan & Jones, architects, 1965.

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Office building designed by Howard Barnstone and Burdette Keeland, Jr., Houston, 1963, unbuilt project.

# NEW BRUTALISM

The Houston Interpretation

Stephen Fox



Essex-Huack Building, 3917 Essen Lane, Burdette Keeland, Jr., architect, 1962; demolished 1992.



Malyoke Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Sert, Jackson & Associates, architect, 1965. In the fifties and sixties reinforced concrete was powerfully expressed in the work of José Luis Sert at Harvard and Paul Rudolph at Yale, influencing a generation of American architects.



Pinney Point Elementary School, interior.

Pinney Point Elementary School, 8921 Pagewood, Howard Barnstone, architect, 1962; altered since completion.



The New Brutalism was a trend that affected U.S. architecture in the 1960s. Its curious name evokes hard-edged buildings punctuated with aggressive, protruding shapes. In his book *The New Brutalism, Ethic or Aesthetic?* (1966), the British historian Reyner Banham offered a provocative interpretation of the Brutalist movement. He contended that the New Brutalism began in 1950 not as an aesthetic, a mere style, but as an ethic — “a programme or an attitude to architecture” — aimed at exploring new spatial and technical possibilities in the face of postwar architectural confusion. In Banham’s account, this liberating possibility had been foreclosed by 1955, when the New Brutalism was formula-rized into a style.<sup>1</sup>

Banham’s moralistic presentation of the decline from ethic to aesthetic puts Houston’s Brutalist buildings in an awkward position. The first examples were not built until the early 1960s; they so postdate the fall from grace that they can have little significance in terms of Banham’s paradigm. But Banham’s interpretation of the New Brutalism raises the question of what Houston’s Brutalist

architecture meant in its local context. In Houston, the New Brutalism initially represented the effort of some of the city’s brightest young architects to retain their positions at the cutting edge of the local profession. They sought legitimization by affiliating themselves with a trend that, around 1960, was especially associated with the School of Architecture at Yale University.

Paul Rudolph, chairman of Yale’s architecture program from 1958 to 1965, brought key British exponents of the New Brutalism, such as Alison and Peter Smithson and Colin Wilson, to New Haven as visiting critics, and he appointed another Anglo-Brutalist luminary, James Stirling, to Yale’s faculty. The Philadelphia architect Louis I. Kahn, whose work during the 1950s was aligned with New Brutalist tendencies, taught at Yale until 1959. And while his design work was slow to reflect Brutalist tendencies, Philip Johnson, a frequent visitor to Yale and the arbiter of modern taste in Houston in the 1950s, signalled, in such buildings as the Amos Carter Museum in Fort Worth of 1961, that it was time for the disciplined modern architecture of

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, which he had promoted since the 1940s, to be eclipsed by the new.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, the New Brutalism acquired meanings quite different from those it possessed in Great Britain, where it represented a challenge to both socialist and conservative cultural policies. In the U.S. it became the style of the post-Miesian consensus. The New Brutalism was assertive, non-decorative, and anti-suburban. It represented an alternative to the organic and regionalist camps of American architecture, to corporate formalism, and to kitsch. Brutalism reached its American apogee in the urbane buildings of the Cambridge, Massachusetts, architects Sert, Jackson & Associates, which were extremely refined adaptations of the late work of the French modernist Le Corbusier, untainted by the arid rationalism that haunted even the most accomplished buildings of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

Brutalism attained its most theatrical expression in the work of Paul Rudolph, which grew increasingly florid during the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> In Louis Kahn, the New Brutalism attained an American hero. Kahn’s



Houston Lighting & Power Co. Energy Control Center, 1313 LaBranch, Caudill Rowlett Scott, architects with Robert O. Biering, associate architect, 1972.



Park IV, 3614 Montrose Boulevard, Jenkins Hoff Oberg Saxe, architects, 1963.



Houston Center for the Retarded, 3636 West Dallas, Barnstone & Aubry, architects, 1966.

profoundly moving buildings (culminating in such masterworks as the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth of 1972) integrated exposed construction, services, and circulation in clear diagrams of spatial order, poetically animated with infusions of natural light. Sert (dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Design), Rudolph (at Yale), and Kahn (who settled at the University of Pennsylvania after leaving Yale) gave an implicit, unintended Ivy League pedigree to what began in Europe as working-class, democratic, anti-establishment modernism. In its U.S. incarnation, the New Brutalism looked rough and strident. But, paradoxically, it symbolized sophistication and class; it was at the forefront of modern taste in 1960.

Houston's vanguard of the 1950s was Miesian. Howard Barnstone and Burdette Keeland, two faculty members at the University of Houston and the most publicized young Houston architects of the 1950s, had received the discipline of Mies from Philip Johnson in a kind of apostolic succession. Barnstone was a graduate of Yale. In 1958, he and Philip Johnson encouraged Keeland's admission to Yale's master's of architecture program.<sup>4</sup> Upon Keeland's return to Houston in 1960, he and Barnstone produced Houston's first two examples of the New Brutalism.

Keeland's Essex-Houck Building of 1962 represented a typical Houston commission of the period: a two-story speculative suburban office building. Keeland

clustered services and circulation in solid brick towers arrayed in front of a two-story block of unpartitioned space. The brick towers and top-heavy sunscreens gave the Essex-Houck Building a weighty presence, in contrast to the slender columns, hovering planes, and decorative screens with which Neuhaus & Taylor embellished their small office buildings. With its overtones of Louis Kahn's widely admired Richards Medical Research Laboratory of 1961 at the University of Pennsylvania (Keeland had visited the building with Kahn during construction), the Essex-Houck Building represented a clever adaptation of the New Brutalism to the conditions of speculative office building in Houston.<sup>5</sup> Like the most celebrated of Neuhaus & Taylor's Richmond Avenue office buildings, the Essex-Houck Building accommodated the automobile. The second floor of the steel-framed office block, which spanned nearly the entire front of the site, was cantilevered 12 feet at each end, bridging driveways to a rear parking lot.<sup>6</sup>

Barnstone adopted a hard-edged Brutalist approach for his first public commission, Piney Point Elementary School, also completed in 1962. Piney Point was located in a low-income neighborhood on Fondren Road (not the Memorial village of Piney Point) and was segregated for African-American students only. Barnstone exposed the building's precast concrete frame inside and out. Precast sunshade panels were projected forward of recessed bands of classroom windows to give the long classroom walls a sense of rhythm and depth. Photographs highlight the austere precision of Piney Point's interiors and the careful detailing of its concrete structure. They suggest a connection to the first English Brutalist building, Alison and Peter Smithson's Hunstanton School of 1954, and its rhetoric of sincerity. Yet they fail to conceal the blandness of long walls of aluminum-framed windows, and the arbitrariness of outfitting all the north-facing classrooms with sunshades.<sup>7</sup>

Barnstone's uniform treatment of the school's north and south window walls, as well as the extent to which the exposed structural frame constituted the architecture, bespoke his debt to Houston's Miesian-Johnsonian architecture of the 1950s. At Piney Point School, one sees Miesian frame-and-fill translated into reinforced concrete, with a shift in emphasis to rough solidity, expressive profiling, and abrasive surfaces. Sunshading, notably absent from Houston's Miesian



Houston Post Building, 4747 Southwest Freeway, Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, 1970.

buildings, became the medium for endowing flat-fronted buildings with vigorously projecting chunks of concrete held aloft on concrete finger connections.

Keeland and Barnstone deployed the New Brutalism for tactical advantage within Houston's architectural fraternity, competitively positioning themselves against the organic camp (represented by MacKie & Kamrath), the corporate formalists (ranging from the SOM-inspired "good design" of Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson to the decorative eclecticism of Neuhaus & Taylor), and the purveyors of kitsch (the applique of historical styling themes exemplified by William F. Wortham's Westbury Square of 1960, James Dalrymple's Lovett Townhouse Apartments of 1965, the skyboxes of the Astrodome of 1965, and the Celestial Suite of the Astroworld Hotel of 1969).

Barnstone and Keeland asserted stylistic leadership by reproducing an architectural trend associated with Yale, Kahn, and British sources not seen in Houston before. Their buildings exhibited the material properties identified with the New Brutalism and appeared to engage its discourse on constructional, material, and spatial authenticity. Yet ultimately it was the secondary associations — newness, stylishness, and prestige — that recommended the Brutalist trend to its competitively attuned Houston advocates.

In 1963 Barnstone and Keeland collaborated on an unbuilt project that would have asserted the primacy of the New Brutalism on a near-downtown site facing Memorial Drive and Buffalo Bayou Park. They designed a bridgelike three-story office building of steel trusses infilled with glass that spanned between four tall concrete piers, stepping up and out in a reverse step-section that projected the diagonals of the trusses to the scale of the landscape. Barnstone and Keeland's bridge building proclaimed the transformation of the Miesian steel frame from sedate container into a dynamic landscape activator, an example of what the Boston architect Gerhard Kallman called "action architecture."

The New Brutalism was taken up as the post-Miesian successor style by Barnstone and Eugene Aubry, his partner after

1966. They designed two of the outstanding examples of Brutalist architecture built in Houston, the grandly austere Maher House of 1964 in River Oaks (which incorporated story-high, glass-filled steel trusses engineered by R. George Cunningham) and the Center for the Retarded on Allen Parkway of 1966. Both buildings shocked with their raw materiality, which had not been an attribute of Miesian architecture in Houston, and both embodied Barnstone's contention that "the new expression should be that of the car in urban society."<sup>8</sup> The Maher House and the Center for the Retarded took advantage of sloping sites near Buffalo Bayou to incorporate *promenades architecturales* for cars.

Barnstone and Keeland sanctioned the Brutalist trend among former UIH students, some of whom had also been exponents of Miesian architecture.<sup>9</sup> One, William R. Jenkins, had connections to developers and politically astute engineering firms that enabled him to get much larger jobs than Barnstone or Keeland. His firm, Jenkins Hoff Oberg Saxe, designed a pair of 12-story apartment towers, Parc IV (1963) and Parc V (1965), for Wayne B. Duddleston on Montrose Boulevard. Jenkins and his designer, Roy Gee, exposed the towers' concrete frames, articulating their structural connections, concrete balconies, infill panels of brick or glass, and adroitly framed openings. Yet they sited Parc IV and Parc V like Mies's 860-880 North Lake Shore Drive apartments in Chicago to shape urban space along Montrose.<sup>10</sup>

Another UIH graduate whose early work had been marked by Miesian influence was Kenneth Bentsen. Bentsen's Houston Police Department Credit Union Building of 1966, facing Memorial Drive in Sixth Ward, was a Brutalist rendition of a one-story Miesian pavilion, constructed with thick gray concrete piers, spandrels, and fascias. Bentsen's six-story Agnes Arnold Hall at the University of Houston, a classroom building, juxtaposed the regular, rectangular bays of the exposed concrete frame with brick-faced towers containing stairs, toilets, and vertical chases, relying as Keeland had done on Kahn's Richards Med-

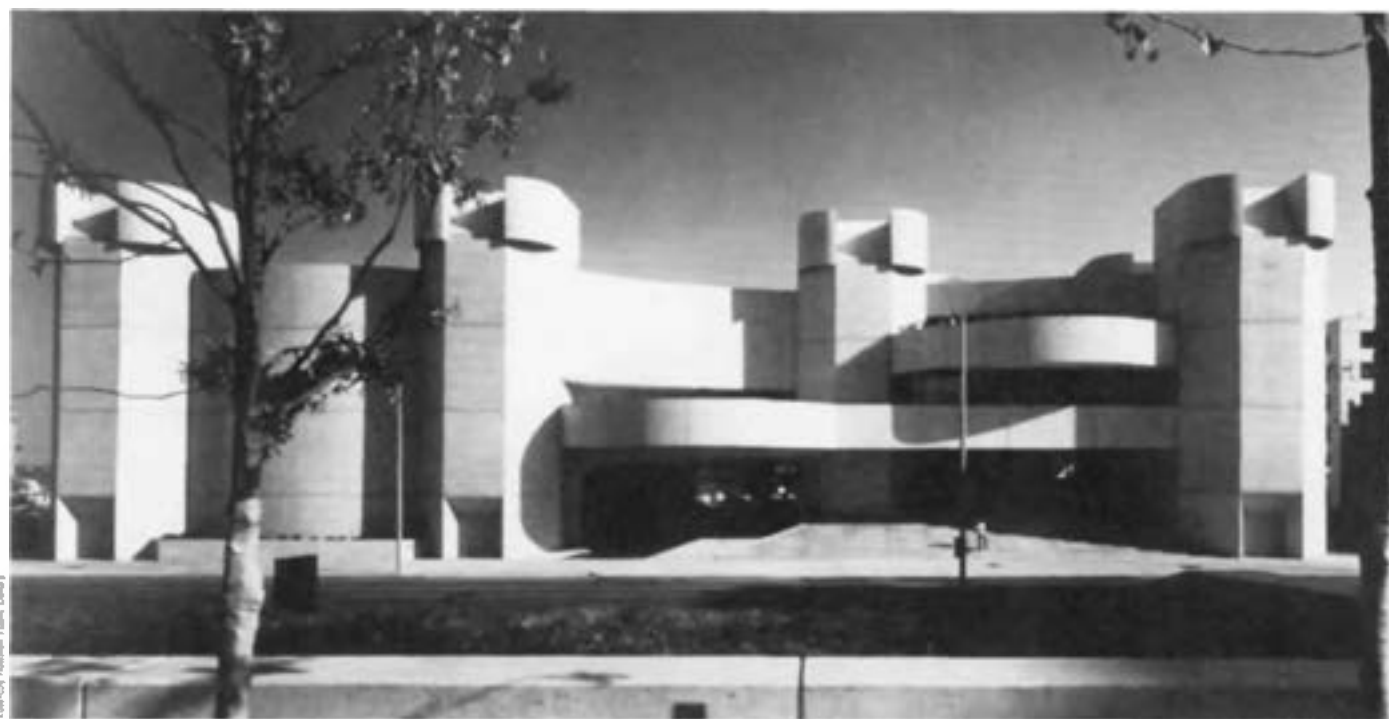


Houston Independent School District Administration Building, interior, 3830 Richmond Avenue, Neuhaus & Taylor, architects, 1969.

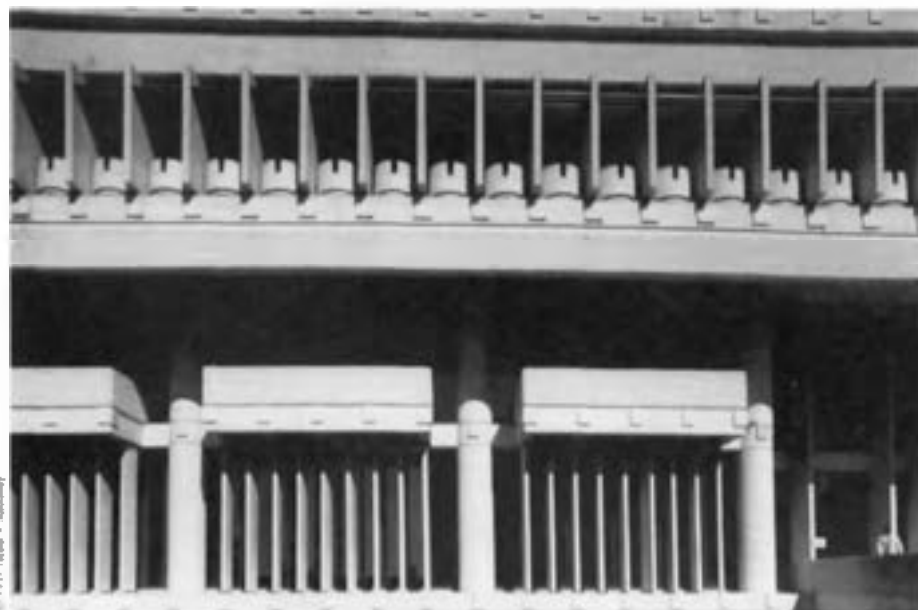
ical Laboratory as a model.

John B. Van Ness, Jr., and L. Kendall Mower, Jr., designed two crisply detailed exercises in frame-and-fill, cast-in-place concrete construction: the Bates College of Law at the University of Houston (1969) and Mary Gibbs Jones Hall, a dormitory for Texas Women's University in the Texas Medical Center (1969). Clarity, precision, and classic repose marked the Jones dormitory as Miesian in conception, its Brutalist detail notwithstanding.

The residue of what Colin Rowe called Miesian "convention" visible in these buildings indicated how fundamental Mies's architecture was in shaping the imaginations of a generation of Houston modern architects.<sup>11</sup> This Miesian undercurrent gave Houston Brutalist buildings an urban presence. The contrast of big-scaled frames and their interspatial contents, the rhythmic repetition of framed bays, the deliberate containment of the buildings, and the firm contours of adjacent exterior space caused these buildings to function as agents of urban spatial coherence. Urban-scaled proportion (made visible in the exposed frame) and



Alley Theatre, 615 Texas Avenue, Ulrich Franzen & Associates, architects with MacKie & Kamrath, associate architects, 1969.



Houston Independent School District Administration Building, 3830 Richmond Avenue, Neuhaus & Taylor, architects, 1969.

the reinforcement of urban space were conservative attributes of Houston's earliest Brutalist buildings, which sought to arrest the dissolution of pre-modernist conventions of urban spatiality, even as urban space seemed to melt in the intensity of Houston's low-density sprawl during the 1960s.

At the end of the 1960s, a series of high-profile buildings marked the ascendancy of the New Brutalism as the power style of Houston architecture, replacing not only the organic and Miesian approaches but the eclectic formalism of the early and mid-1960s. The Alley Theatre (1969, Ulrich Franzen with MacKie & Kamrath), Terminals A and B at Houston Intercontinental Airport (1969, Golemon & Rolfe and George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce), Neiman-Marcus at the Galleria (1969, Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum and Neuhaus & Taylor), the Houston Independent School District Administration Building (1969, Neuhaus & Taylor), the Houston Post Building (1970, Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson), and Houston Lighting & Power's Energy Control Center (1972, Caudill Rowlett Scott) were public monuments. Built of exposed

concrete construction, they made their presences felt with bold scale and thrusting profiles.<sup>12</sup>

These buildings achieved formal singularity at the expense of urban spatial reinforcement. They were parts of special-use precincts (IAH and the Alley Theatre), or their locations compelled them to function symbolically at the exploded scale of the expanding city (HISD, Neiman-Marcus, and the Houston Post Building), where exaggerated formal gestures were required to guarantee visibility. The sculptural overstatement of Houston's Brutalist monuments can be interpreted as a reaction to the effects of urban spatial meltdown: their bulging shapes registered anxiety about new roles that architecture was being pressed to play in the suburbanizing city. At Neiman-Marcus, for instance, it was the look of fashionable modernity that was prized. The lack of connection between Neiman's scenographic profiles and loftlike interiors violated Brutalist claims to spatial authenticity, but not the ethics of economic functionalism.<sup>13</sup>

The campus of the University of Houston illustrates how new attitudes about building management began to undermine Brutalism's claims to constructional and material authenticity. The projecting angular bays, oversailing upper stories, and inflected wall planes of Caudill Rowlett Scott's Fine Arts Center (1972) were derived from Le Corbusier's late architecture. However, what in Le Corbusier was a masterly spatialization of cast-in-place concrete construction became in the Fine Arts Center enervated shapes, made by revetting panels of brown brick onto a concealed structural frame. The problems encountered in maintaining exposed structural members led institutional clients to insist that construction be veneered over. Neuhaus & Taylor's Science and Research Building II at UH (1977) turned again to Kahn's Richards Labs as its model. But all that remains of the original is a contrast of brown brick verticals with deep-set channels of aluminum-framed bronze

solar glass. Lloyd Jones Brewer's Wortham Theater Complex at UH (1977) represented the metamorphosis of Brutalism into what Charles Jencks called Late Modernism. The building's surface was reduced to a flat brick skin that enveloped the building's one gesture, a giant right triangle containing the theater fly tower.

By the second half of the 1960s, Houston's emerging generation of young architects, such as Clovis Heimsath, a Yale graduate, and William T. Cannady, a graduate of Berkeley and Harvard's Graduate School of Design, displayed far greater interest in the centralized, introverted buildings of Louis Kahn than the extravaganzas of Paul Rudolph.<sup>14</sup> The Rothko Chapel (1971), begun by Philip Johnson and completed by Barnstone & Aubry, rejected structural assertiveness for an architecture of interiority and light. Barnstone & Aubry's Art Barn at Rice University (1969) — like the Rothko Chapel — abandoned even Kahn to explore a vernacular tradition of corrugated-iron shed construction. Barnstone & Aubry's use of air-conditioning condensers to rhythmically punctuate the long side of the Art Barn was a witty play on the Brutalist use of sunshades. Had either of Louis Kahn's two Houston projects — an arts complex for Rice University (1969) and an arts complex for the Menil Foundation (1974) — been built, it is possible that the Brutalist current in Houston architecture would have been reinvigorated.<sup>15</sup> Without further external stimulus, the New Brutalism continued to give shape to Houston buildings until Late Modernism (especially as represented by Philip Johnson's Pennzoil Place), then postmodernism, supplanted it.

What did the New Brutalism mean to Houston? Was it merely a new style that was consumed when fashionable, then cast off after it had passed through a series of less and less discriminating appropriations? To an extent, fashion accounts for its local appeal, but it overlooks finer nuances. The direct connection of several of Houston's most ambitious architects to a center of style transmission (Yale) and its network of associations indicates the extent to which personal connections were crucial in this transmission. The role of recognition through publication in the national architectural press was also critical. Publication represented legitimization, which could only be conferred by outside sources of cultural authority. Houston's

architectural vanguard was dependent on such symbols of legitimacy to confirm and sustain its sense of purpose and self-worth. The desire to be, and remain, the style leader of one's community attests to the powerful influence Philip Johnson exerted on the imaginations of Barnstone and Keeland, even though Johnson never endorsed the New Brutalism. This instrumental explanation presumes a greater interest in the "aesthetic" of a new architecture than its "ethic." Had Kahn, for instance, been the *eminence grise* of Houston's vanguard, one might be less likely to detect opportunism. Yet the buildings Barnstone, Keeland, Jenkins, and Bentsen produced were not pastiches. They rigorously explored a set of constructional, material, and spatial precepts to produce works of architectural value. What they did not often do was venture beyond these precepts, as Kahn had done, to think structurally, to imagine spatially outside a set of formal conventions that defined the architecture of the New Brutalism as a style, and ultimately a commodity.

The value that Houston derived from the New Brutalism was its use of modern architecture to reinforce urban space. Where Brutalist buildings continue to serve this purpose — as at Parc IV and Parc V, the Center for the Retarded, and Mary Gibbs Jones Hall — they demonstrate their long-term value. Some of the last Brutalist buildings constructed in Houston adhered to this obligation. The Warwick Towers (1983), designed by Allen G. Rice for Golemon & Rolfe, is one example, as is the Houston Telephone Employees Federal Credit Union Building (1979) on Main Street in midtown, by Urban Architecture and Sanders & Sanders. Paul E. Martin and Hossein Oskouie of Urban Architecture (both, like Allen Rice, UH graduates; Oskouie had worked for Aubrey and Barnstone) recaptured the spirit of Barnstone's and Keeland's first Brutalist buildings through its spatial reinforcement of Main Street as an urban boulevard.

Not all of the Brutalist buildings have survived to await the re-urbanization of Houston. Keeland's Essex-Houck Building was demolished in 1992 and replaced by a Jenard Gross apartment development. Barnstone's Piney Point School is no longer recognizable due to defacing. The same is true of Barnstone's Maher House and Kenneth Bentsen's Police Credit Union Building. Van Ness & Mower's Jones Hall dormitory is crowned by a grotesque penthouse addition and has had



Bates College of Law, University of Houston, John B. Van Ness, Jr., and L. Kendall Mower, Jr., architects, 1969.



Agnes Arnold Hall, University of Houston, Kenneth Bentsen, architect, 1967.

its concrete frame painted brown. The monumental buildings remain well cared for, although the Post Building is empty and the H&P Energy Control Center is technologically redundant.

It is perhaps tempting to dismiss the New Brutalism as quixotic in its effort to socialize and urbanize modern engineering, much as one might dismiss kitsch for its effort to humanize engineering. Yet what Brutalism represents has proved to be an enduring challenge to 20th-century architects: the search for spatial formations to shape the project of a democratic society in an industrial economy. Underlying and, as Banham intuited, perhaps undermining this challenge is the ideological mechanism that style masks: the competitive assertion of personal or corporate power through taste-making, trend setting, and exclusion in a vanity fair of symbols. ■

1. Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism, Ethic or Aesthetic* (London: The Architectural Press, 1966), p. 134.

2. Robert Stern, "Yale 1950-1965," *Oppositions* 4, (October 1974), pp. 46-48.

3. Rudolph was responsible for two Texas buildings during the Brutalist heyday: One Brookhollow Plaza (1969), a 15-story suburban office building in Dallas; and the Sid Richardson Science Building at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth (1970).

4. Burdette Keeland, interview with author, October 21, 1997.

5. Ibid.

6. The Essex-Houck Building was published in *Architectural Forum* (October 1954); *Arts & Architecture* (July 1956); and in Reinhold Hohl, *Office Buildings. An International Survey* (1968).

7. Piney Point Elementary School was published only once, in the same issue of *Architectural Forum* as the Essex-Houck Building, but it was carried only in a news report. See also Emily Grota, "Whatever Happened to . . . Unique HSD School?" *Houston Post*, February 22, 1982.

8. Esther McCoy, "Young Architects in the United States, 1963," *Zodiac* 13, 1964, p. 186.

9. Most of the Houston Miesians (as well as Philip Johnson and Mies van der Rohe) were included in the exhibition catalogue "Ten Years of Houston Architecture," by Howard Barnstone and Burdette Keeland, for the exhibition of the same name held at the Contemporary Arts Museum in 1959.

10. Keeland interview. Jenkins Hoff Oberg Saxe's Hillcroft Professional Building in southwest Houston (1967) made use of the Corbusian vocabulary that Serl & Jackson incorporated into their buildings,

while their Houston Firemen's Training Academy near Hobby Airport (1967) comprised a Brutalist landscape that took advantage of program requirements for tough, above-resistant buildings.

11. Colin Rowe, "Neoclassicism and Modern Architecture," *Oppositions*, 1 (September 1973), p. 5.  
12. Peter C. Papademetriou analyzes the unintended use of modern "monuments" as models for Houston buildings in his essay "Aspects of a New Urban Vernacular," *Harvard Architectural Review*, 3 (Spring 1980), p. 128.

13. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour criticized Neiman-Marcus for treating Le Corbusier's La Tourette and the Boston City Hall, a major American Brutalist monument, as models which it inappropriately replicated in search of a distinctive image. William T. Cannady and Jonathan King examined the real estate tactics behind what they described as its "top quality-bottom dollar" architecture in their article "Galleria," *Architectural Design*, 43 (November 1973), pp. 695-697.

14. Clovis Hemmick's Fire Station 57 on Memorial Drive (1967) and William Cannady's St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in southeast Houston (1968) are examples of their interest in centralized design.

15. On Kahn's Houston projects see *The General Plan of the William M. Rice Institute and Its Architectural Development: Architecture at Rice 29* (Houston: Rice School of Architecture, 1980) pp. 80-82; and Richard Ingersoll, "Pianissimo: The Very Quiet Menil Collection," *Texas Architect*, 37 (May-June 1987), pp. 45-46.



Kamrath House, 8 Tiel Way, Karl Kamrath, architect, 1953.



Lloyd Lewis House, Libertyville, Illinois, Frank Lloyd Wright, architect, 1939.

S. Reagan Miller

## The School of Frank Lloyd Wright



Karl Kamrath and Frank Lloyd Wright in 1949.

When Frank Lloyd Wright, the 79-year-old dean of American architecture, received the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal, he said: "[Such an honor] has reached me from almost every great nation in the world. . . . It has been a long time coming from home. But here it is at

last and very handsome indeed. I am extremely grateful."<sup>1</sup> The silver-haired American icon, who was not a member of the American Institute of Architects, received his medal nearly 50 years ago on March 18, 1949, at a ceremony in the overflowing banquet hall of Houston's Rice Hotel. At the convention, the theme of which was "American Architecture in the Atomic Age," Wright's acceptance speech was not only inmodest but full of his usual candor. On architecture: "in the gutter." On democracy: "We profess it but where do we see it?" On civilization: "We have no civilization — it's a state of mind."<sup>2</sup> But he saved his most pointed barbs for the Shamrock Hotel, the recently completed Moderne structure financed by legendary oilman Glenn McCarthy, which was celebrating its grand opening that same evening across town. Referring to the Shamrock, Wright declared that "it ought to be written in front of it, in great tall letters, in electric lights —

'Why, Why?'"<sup>3</sup>

In the audience for the award ceremony were Karl Kamrath (1911–1988) and Fred James MacKie (1905–1984), two architects who had established the Houston firm of MacKie & Kamrath in 1937. Under the design leadership of Kamrath, the firm promoted Wright's principles of an organic architecture, producing some of their finest work in Houston between the end of World War II and the time of Wright's death in 1959. The term "organic" was broadly defined by Wright as a natural method of interrelated and coordinated design in which "the part is to the whole as the whole is to the part." A number of local architects joined MacKie & Kamrath to explore for a brief period the tenets of Wright.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, at times these architects seemed more influenced by MacKie & Kamrath than by the master himself. This second generation of Wright devotees not only rode the wave of Wright's popular appeal during the 1950s but also tapped into the individualism and economic determinism that characterized Houston during that era.<sup>5</sup> The romanticism and nationalism of Wright's architecture appealed to many Houstonians who cherished and promoted their self-made independence, seeking to express themselves through the individualism that Wright represented.

The suburban house was an experimental laboratory for Wright and his followers. The publication of Wright's so-

called Usonian houses during the 1950s in such popular magazines as *Life*, *House Beautiful*, and *House and Home* met a broad audience. In Houston the postwar housing boom provided ample opportunity for local experimentation. While Frank Lloyd Wright designed only one house in Houston, the William L. Thaxton House of 1955 at 12024 Tall Oaks Road, his influence was reflected, if not replaced, in the work of local architects and home builders who perpetuated modern residential design primarily through consumable features such as redwood siding, the barbecue patio, the family room, the picture window, the pass-through, the carport, the deck, the storage wall, ranch house styling, the split level, and so on, appropriated as the bywords (or rather buywords) of the builder.<sup>6</sup> Spatial and stylistic innovations introduced by Wright quickly were diluted and ultimately became oppressive in the hands of the builders. Among architects who distinguished their work as influenced by Wright, subtle stylistic variations, use of materials, and manipulation of clichéd features marked most projects. A notable exception to these tendencies, however, can be found in the work of MacKie & Kamrath.

Frank Lloyd Wright's work was the singular force guiding the firm's design leader, Karl Kamrath. Throughout his career Kamrath felt an ethical imperative to uphold Wright's principles of architecture, and he aspired to the high level of

Schlumberger Well Services Headquarters, 5000 Gulf Freeway, MacKie & Kamrath, architects, 1953.



M. D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor & Research Center, 1515 Holcombe Boulevard, MacKie & Kamrath, architects, 1954.



Hilversum Town Hall, The Netherlands, Willem M. Dudok, architect, 1930. Dudok's work influenced MacKie & Kamrath's large-scale projects.

## THE ROMANTICISM AND NATIONALISM OF WRIGHT'S ARCHITECTURE APPEALED TO MANY HOUSTONIANS WHO CHERISHED AND PROMOTED THEIR SELF-MADE INDEPENDENCE, SEEKING TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH THE INDIVIDUALISM THAT WRIGHT REPRESENTED.

excellence established by Wright. Kamrath thus assumed a great responsibility in representing Wright in Texas.<sup>7</sup> While the majority of MacKie & Kamrath's work before World War II was residential, the firm's post-war work included commercial and industrial projects. From 1949 through 1959 MacKie & Kamrath designed more than 20 houses, 7 churches, 24 office buildings, and facilities for the University of Texas, Dow Chemical Company, Borden's, and the State of Texas. The breadth and scale of this work exceeded not only that of most Houston firms but also of other Wright proteges. MacKie & Kamrath's extension of Wrightian principles to larger projects distinguishes them from the vast number of architects influenced by Wright.

MacKie & Kamrath's residential, ecclesiastical, and small suburban office buildings were influenced by Wright's Usonian houses, whereas their large-scale work looked to European modernists, particularly the Dutch architect Willem M. Dudok, whose best-known project is the Hilversum Town Hall of 1930.<sup>8</sup> Wright, in turn, influenced Dudok's

work, which combined the formal attributes of the De Stijl movement with the spatial and material qualities of Wright. Not surprisingly, Kamrath gravitated toward the work of Dudok both stylistically and theoretically in such projects as the 1949 Phyllis Wheatley High School, 4910 Market Street, and the 1953 Schlumberger Company Headquarters Building, 5000 Gulf Freeway. Indebted to Dudok for their articulated massing, these buildings also reflect Wright's organic principles. In both cases, the elongated brick buildings emphasize horizontality, reinforced by ribbon windows, canopies, and copings that contrast with strong vertical massing. Neither building, however, manifests the integrated spatial order characteristic of Wright. For MacKie & Kamrath this integration was typically limited to the lobbies, where materials, light, and plantings are skillfully composed to dissolve spatial boundaries.

Unfortunately, one of MacKie & Kamrath's finest buildings, the M. D. Anderson Tumor & Research Institute (1954) at 1515 Holcombe, has been obscured by additions and alterations, some designed by MacKie & Kamrath

themselves. The original design of M. D. Anderson marked a stylistic synthesis for the firm, thoughtfully combining organic and modern influences in a programmatically and technically difficult building. The program for M. D. Anderson included areas for teaching, research, and patient care. MacKie & Kamrath separated these functions into three tall, slablike buildings that were extruded from one another. The broad face of the inpatient wing faced south, providing abundant light; the medical services wing was connected on the north side of the patient wing; and the smaller research wing extended from the west side of the medical services wing. The vertical masses rose from a flat, horizontally spread base, and each façade was designed to take advantage of its orientation. On the south, deep balconies were faced in bronze aluminum panels that acted as sunscreens. Eyebrow overhangs and tiny planted balconies cast shadows and reduced the scale of the large building. A dramatic roof overhang unified the adjoining wings. The building was clad in Georgia Erova pink marble, a material suggested by the hospital director, Dr. R.

Lee Clark, Jr., who admired buildings at Emory University faced with the same material.<sup>9</sup> When completed the M.D. Anderson Tumor & Research Institute presented a striking modern silhouette rising from the canopy of trees below it.<sup>10</sup>

Although much of MacKie & Kamrath's work during the 1950s was large in scale, both members of the firm most enjoyed designing houses. The best of these Kamrath produced for his own family at 8 Tiel Way, a circular street off Kirby Drive bordering Buffalo Bayou, where five other houses designed by MacKie & Kamrath were constructed. Taken together, this collection of MacKie & Kamrath houses proposes a vision of suburban life in Houston influenced by the design principles of Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>11</sup> The site for the 1953 Kamrath House fronts a steeply sloping ravine, which led Kamrath to stretch the plan along an undulating east-west ridge. Constructed of a light pinkish-colored brick and lapped redwood siding, the house bridges the unevenness of the site with its persistent horizontality. The elongated spine of the four-bedroom house is ordered with a six-by-six-foot grid, interrupted by a rotated square containing a family room, dining room, kitchen, and service core. The entry, concealed in shadows beneath the deep eaves at the intersection of the wings, is approached by ascending to a compressed outdoor vestibule that leads into an intimate, low-



Robert C. Durst House, 323 Tynbrook Lane, Bruce Goff with Joseph Krakower, architects, 1958-60.



3611 N. Braeswood Boulevard, Herb Greene with Joseph Krakower, architects, 1957.

ceilinged wooden hall. Leaving the seven-foot-high entry, the ceiling rises to reveal dramatic views of the site from the glass-walled living room, which projects over a landscaped terrace facing the bayou. The living room is anchored by a massive stone fireplace that interrupts the glass exterior wall. Beneath the children's bedrooms, which are elevated above the terrace facing the ravine to the south, is a game room built into the slope of the site at the terrace level. The secluded master bedroom, firmly planted in the ground, feels like a pavilion in the woods bordered by dense plantings on the south and a serene clearing on the north. Kamrath, with the assistance of landscape architects Eckbo, Royston & Williams, was also responsible for the extensive exterior hardscape, including wooden decks, planters, and retaining walls. The house engages the site with both drama and intimacy, convincingly demonstrating Kamrath's understanding of organic architecture.

While MacKie and Kamrath chose to work within Wright's formal and philosophical vocabulary, other architects sought to expand these ideas. One of Houston's most unusual houses was designed by the Oklahoma architect Bruce Goff (1904-1982) for Robert C. Durst at 323 Tynbrook in 1958. Goff also worked on subsequent additions to the Durst House: in 1970 a bedroom was added above the garage; in 1976 another room was added and interiors were reno-

vated; and in 1981 Goff completed another set of interior renovations. Bruce Goff was a legendary University of Oklahoma teacher who sought to reconsider the language of modern architecture. He assimilated a variety of sources, particularly the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, yet he developed his own idiosyncratic language and approach to architecture. Goff delighted in exploring unusual geometric compositions and used the circle as the guiding geometry in the Durst House in plan, elevation, and section. The exterior, clad in cedar shingles, conforms to the barrel-shaped rooms, which are capped by thin floating roofs. The interior is a mixture of faceted windows, shag carpet, mosaic tile, and off-the-shelf items from the hardware store. It is a sincere combination of camp and culture and demonstrates why Goff was such an original.

Supervising the construction of the Durst residence was a young architect named Herb Greene who was then working in the architectural office of Joseph Krakower. Greene studied architecture under Goff and E. Fay Jones at the University of Oklahoma and, before graduating in 1952, worked briefly for the Los Angeles architect John Lautner. Greene moved to Houston in the early 1950s and worked from 1954 to 1957 with Joseph Krakower, whose small firm gave Greene considerable design responsibility. His hand is evident in a number of buildings that display a playfulness absent

from other Houston architecture of the period. The Southwestern Bell Telephone Company Building (1958) at 3333 Fannin Street was built for short-term (five years) use by the telephone company. Consequently Greene designed a windowless concrete-block building with "knock-outs" for a future glass storefront that might be desired by later tenants. This imposing two-story structure is anchored by a dramatic entry, delightfully relieved on the upper floor with a variety of U-shaped concrete blocks reminiscent of Wright's Barnsdall House in Hollywood.<sup>12</sup> The Houston Typewriter Exchange Building (1956) at 2201 Caroline Street exhibits the same inventiveness with a peculiar sculptural plaster soffit that marks the corner entry. The now demolished Long Point Clinic (1957) at 7410 Long Point Road was the one project in which, in Greene's words, he had a "willing" client.<sup>13</sup> The one-story brick building featured ribbon windows set high in the wall beneath an overhanging roof shaded by insectlike sunscreens made of tubular aluminum frames and green corrugated fiberglass. Like his mentor, Goff, Herb Greene delighted in using cast-off or mass-produced items in unusual ways and contexts.<sup>14</sup> Greene also designed three notable houses while in Krakower's office: 3615 N. Braeswood Boulevard (1957); 3611 N. Braeswood (1957); and 7 Pine Forest Circle (1956). Like his office buildings, Greene's houses conform to conventional rules of architec-

tural planning and design, but upon closer inspection they stand out because of their quirky detailing. Greene's only solo project in Houston was the now demolished Catherine Lyne House at 3605 Meriburr Lane. The Lyne House, built around a tree, was triangular in form with a thin carport roof supported by cables forming one corner of the triangle. Exterior walls were surfaced in barrel roofing tiles.

Leonard Gabert (1894-1977) and his partner W. Jackson Wisdom also produced a number of Wrightian buildings. Gabert was a graduate of the first architecture class at Rice University in 1916 and opened his office in 1922. His early work was primarily residential and traditional in style, with a notable exception—the streamlined Eldorado Ballroom (1938) at 3206 Dowling Street. After World War II his work expanded to commercial and religious projects. As primary designer, Gabert was responsible for a number of office buildings, including the now-demolished Triangle Refineries (1951) at 2600 Nottingham Road and the former Meyer Bros. Department Store (1950) at 2525 University, described at the time as "ranch style architecture."<sup>15</sup> Both projects used thin, horizontal Roman brick with raked horizontal joints, ribbon windows, stone copings, planter boxes, and projecting roofs. Gabert and Kamrath had great respect for each other's work. Fred MacKie was quoted as saying that "Len was one



Dr. Ray F. Wilson House, 3502 Arbor Avenue, John Chase, architect, 1959.



Triangle Refineries Building, 2600 Nottingham Road, Leonard Gabert and W. Jackson Wisdom, architects, 1951, demolished.

architect who could give Karl advice without Karl biting back."<sup>16</sup>

John Chase was the first African-American member of the Texas Society of Architects (1954) and the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (1957), which had denied him membership four times. He attended Hampton University and received his masters' in architecture from the University of Texas in 1952. Chase moved to Houston after graduation only to discover that no one would hire him because of his race, so, as a result, he opened his own firm. Chase's early work was decidedly influenced by the formal and spatial qualities of Wright's architecture. Examples in Riverside Terrace include his own house at 3512 Oakdale Court and the house at 3502 Arbor Court, both completed in 1959.<sup>17</sup> For his family, Chase designed a taut two-story brick house with an expansive north-facing glass wall. The thin, flat roof has wide eaves articulated with a pronounced dentil course that recalls detailing found in Wright's Usonian houses.

After 1959, the work of architects influenced by Mies Van der Rohe came to dominate progressive architectural design in Houston, leaving MacKie & Kamrath to represent the indigenous organic school of Frank Lloyd Wright. In a 1959 exhibition entitled *Ten Years of Houston Architecture*, mounted at the Contemporary Arts Association (designed by MacKie & Kamrath in 1949), Henry-

Russell Hitchcock acknowledged the exceptional Wrightian work of MacKie & Kamrath.<sup>18</sup> It was that firm's commitment to Wright that allowed organic architecture to take root in Houston and be nurtured by many other architects who quietly perpetuated the promise of Wright's vision. ■

1. "Wright Given Highest Award," *Houston Chronicle*, March 18, 1949.

2. "Wright Still Shows His Old Fire," *Houston Post*, March 18, 1949.

3. "Wright Given Highest Award," *Houston Chronicle*, March 18, 1949. Fay Jones recalls his tour of the Shamrock Hotel with Frank Lloyd Wright in the monograph *The Architecture of L. Fay Jones*, FAIA (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects Press, 1992).

4. Many architects experimented with organic architecture in Houston whose work is not explored in this article. They include Michigan architect Alden Dow (Dow Chemical Headquarters, Freeport, Texas, 1940; Lake Jackson town plan, 1943; and the Reed House, 111 Carnarvon Drive, Houston, 1960); Travis Bruesche (Faith American Lutheran Church, 4600 Bellare Boulevard, Houston, 1959); David Red (Red House, 1802 Sunset Boulevard, Houston, 1951); and Wylie Vale (38 Tiel Way and 40 Tiel Way, both 1951, and 3723 Knollwood, 1955). See also John Kaliski, "The Wright Stuff: Houston's Natural House," *Cite* 7, Fall 1984, pp. 16-18.

5. Stephen Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide* (Houston: Houston Chapter, American Institute of Architects and Farring Press, 1990), p. 13. Fox describes the tendency for Houston architecture to reflect current trends in part due to the lack of an "old guard charged with perpetuating the proprietary myths of an established elite, or at least appropriately indoctrinating newcomers." See also Stephen Fox, "Geologies, Mies, and Mainstream '50s Tendencies," *Texas Architect*, July-August 1985, pp. 46-53.

6. William Jordy, "The Domestication of the Modern," *American Buildings and Their Architects*, (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 174. See also Gary Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991). Hildebrand suggests this type of "renaming" was a means of "conceptual liberation" for Wright.

7. "Karl Fred Kamrath," *Who's Who in America 1988-89*, p. 1622. "As an architect I have endeavored to carry out, in the Texas area, the principles of Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architecture, since few of my colleagues, if any, are doing so."

8. Kamrath first met Dudok in November 1953, when Dudok addressed the Texas Society of Architects. He later visited the Dutch architect in Hilversum in October 1954, while reviewing the postwar reconstruction of Europe. The last meeting between the architects was in Houston in 1958 when Dudok received an honorary AIA medal. There are relatively few publications on Dudok, the best still being *Willem M. Dudok* (Amsterdam: Bussom, 1954).

9. Karl Kamrath to Dr. R. Lee Clark, October 25, 1978, written on the occasion of Dr. Clark's retirement. MacKie and Kamrath were introduced to Dr. Clark by the vice-president and dean of the University of Texas Dental Branch, Dr. Frederick C. Elliot. Dr. Elliot had recently commissioned MacKie & Kamrath to design the new Dental School in the rapidly expanding Texas Medical Center and hoped to architecturally unify the Dental School, M. D. Anderson Hospital, and the proposed University of Texas School of Public Health.

10. M. D. Anderson earned MacKie & Kamrath a great deal of recognition. It was featured in *Time* ("Anderson Hospital," December 13, 1954, p. 47), *Architectural Forum* ("The Hospital Behind the Gown," December 1954, p. 141), and *Architectural Record* ("M. D. Anderson Hospital," September 1958, p. 209) and received a Medal of Honor from the Houston Chapter, American Institute of Architects in 1955.

11. The other houses are 2 Tiel Way (1961), 48 Tiel Way (1957), 59 Tiel Way (1951), 67 Tiel Way (1951), 950 Kirby Drive at Tiel Way (1952).

12. Greene undoubtedly visited Wright's Barnsdall House during his tenure in Launer's Hollywood office in 1951.

13. Herb Greene, telephone interview with author, September 3, 1997.

14. Ibid. Greene's only expressed regret about this period of his career was his lack of "technical skills." This has particular relevance for Goff and his followers because buildings using experimental materials and forms were often exceedingly difficult to construct.

15. Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide*, p. 135.

16. Leonard Gabert, Jr., telephone interview with author, September 15, 1997. As a member of the Temple Emanuel building committee in 1947, Gabert recommended MacKie & Kamrath, who were chosen to design the new synagogue at 1580 Sunset Boulevard, completed in 1949. W. Jack Wisdom first met Gabert while working on the synagogue as an employee of

MacKie & Kamrath.

17. John Chase, telephone interview with author, September 6, 1997. In addition to the influence of Wright, Chase cites the African-American architects Paul Williams of California and William Moses of Virginia, the latter Chase's instructor. Chase's early work consisted primarily of churches for African American congregations, including the neo-Romanesque Greater Zion Missionary Baptist Church (1955) at 3201 Trulley Street.

18. Gerald Moorhead, "Wright Face: The Work of MacKie & Kamrath," *Cite* 21, Fall 1988, pp. 19-20.



Jacobs House, Madison, Wisconsin, Frank Lloyd Wright, architect, 1936. The Jacobs House was the first of Wright's Usonian houses.

Phoenix Insurance Company, 3323 Richmond, Neuhaus &amp; Taylor, architects, 1961.



## THE BUSINESS STRIP

### RICHMOND AVENUE IN THE 1960S



Fred Winchell Photography Studio, 1924 Richmond Avenue, Burdette Keeland, Jr., and Harwood Taylor, architects, 1953.



Jefferson Chemical Company, 3336 Richmond Avenue, Neuhaus &amp; Taylor, architects, 1965.

## Rives Taylor



Villa Savoye, outside of Paris, France, Le Corbusier, architect, 1928-30.

In the 1960s Houston witnessed the beginning of a significant dispersion of corporate life from the downtown cluster of highrise office buildings to linear suburban strip centers. At the same time, small service companies began to give way to large national or international corporations. During this period of transition, lowrise development along major arteries attracted companies looking for affordable property and a more amenable environment for their employees.

The Fred Winchell Photography Studio at 1924 Richmond Avenue, a small project designed in 1953 by Burdette Keeland, Jr., and Harwood Taylor, was Houston's first International Style suburban commercial building. Like the buildings that succeeded it farther out Richmond, it served automobile suburbia and provided a fresh, modern image. Receptive to these two transforming ideas, Houston was out in front of most American cities, ready to invest heavily outside of downtown. Gerald D. Hines and Kenneth L. Schnitzer

led the migration with new buildings on Richmond west of Kirby Drive.

In a recent interview, Hines recalled that the Richmond projects reflected his attempt to probe an effective urban unity, while trying to make a positive contribution in a city seeking to interpret the implications of a suburban commercial life.<sup>1</sup> Ten new buildings along Richmond were either owned by or developed for Gerald D. Hines Interests during this time. His success in creating an appropriate response to the confusing and less cohesive patterns of development that had occurred earlier in the nearby Alabama corridor influenced the spread of low- and midrise office buildings, first to property along the Southwest Freeway and later in all directions outside of the inner city.

While the Richmond projects were milestones of the growing development expertise of both Hines Interests and Schnitzer's Century Development Corporation, the Richmond strip was also an

early battleground between their empires. Hines controlled most of the property fronting Richmond from Wakeforest to Buffalo Speedway. Then Century Development leapfrogged over Hines and purchased the next four blocks west on Richmond from Buffalo Speedway to Wesleyan for Greenway Plaza (1969-73). The architectural firm of Neuhaus & Taylor worked both sides of the street. For Schnitzer they designed the four-story Jefferson Chemical Company (1965) at 3336 Richmond. Hines's first collaboration with the firm from 1961 to 1963 resulted in three single-floor, slablike office buildings hovering on slender piers above ground-level parking and reminiscent, albeit at some distance, of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1928-30). The Phoenix Insurance Company Building (1961) at 3323 Richmond, the Pontiac Motors Building (1961) at 3121 Richmond, and the Oil Base, Inc. Building (1963) at 3625 Southwest Freeway began a trend that spread throughout

Pontiac Motors Building, 3121 Richmond Avenue, Neuhaus & Taylor, architects, 1961.



3100 Richmond Avenue, Neuhaus & Taylor, architects, 1964.



3000 Richmond Avenue, Wilson, Morris Crane & Anderson, architects, 1964.



3118 Richmond Avenue.



Oil Base of Venezuela, Inc., 3625 Southwest Freeway, Neuhaus & Taylor, architects, 1963.

the city, especially along the developing freeway system.

Century Development began construction on Richmond at the dawn of the sixties as did Hines. Caudill Rowlett Scott designed the low, modernist Dow Center (1960–61) at 3636–3660 Richmond for Century. Significantly, CRS planned the Dow Center around their own headquarters space, acting as their own clients, even though Schnitzer owned the building. In 1966 Century again commissioned CRS for the nine-story Richmond Building next door to the Dow Center.

While Hines Interests started its suburban development on the north side of Richmond with a relatively small stilt building designed by Wilson, Morris, Crane & Anderson in 1963, they foresaw that larger companies would enter the suburban market and built three much larger midrise buildings each with 20,000-square-foot floor plates. Hines correctly predicted a growing need for “most flexible spec office space at competitive

rentals.”<sup>2</sup> Within one year (1964) the firms of Neuhaus & Taylor and Wilson, Morris, Crane & Anderson each designed a five-story office block on adjacent Hines properties at 3100 Richmond (Insurance Company of North America became anchor tenant) and 3000 Richmond (Union Texas Petroleum became anchor), respectively.

A third midrise building, the 2990 Richmond Building, was reported in *Texas Architect* to “be located on the last unimproved tract on a street with approximately 12 similar projects — the client, who owns the majority of the other buildings, had become conscious of a need for compatible design to enhance adjacent structures and unify the general street scene.”<sup>3</sup> Thus the 1966 building for Hines by Neuhaus & Taylor was an attempt to complete the architectural continuity begun by the adjacent buildings.

The varied speculative office buildings constructed along the Richmond corridor in the 1960s resulted in a comfortable

urban cohesion. This in-town strip with a suburban ambiance was informally called “Office Park.” Using thematically consistent architectural vocabularies, formula-rized parking-to-street-to-building relationships, and functional floor plans, the Richmond strip buildings present a paradigm for suburban corporate construction that holds its place in both the architectural history of Houston and in the continuing pattern of development outside the center city. ■

1. Gerald Hines, interview with author, September, 1997.

2. *Texas Architect*, February 1969.

3. *Ibid.*



Photo by Thomas Miller, courtesy The Board Collection

*Totems Not Taboo: An Exhibition of Primitive Art*, 1959, Jermaine MacAgg, curator, Cullman Hall, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1001 Bissonnet, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Staub, Rother & Howze, architects, 1958.



Photo by Tom Blum

Contemporary Arts Association (now the Contemporary Arts Museum), 302 Dallas, Mackie & Kamrath, architects, 1949, demolished.



Photo by Thomas Miller

*Romantic Agony: From Goya to de Kooning*, 1959, Jermaine MacAgg, curator, Contemporary Arts Association.

# SEEING WAS BELIEVING: INSTALLATIONS OF JERMAYNE MacAGG AND JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY

L y n n M . H e r b e r t



courtesy The MFA Collection

The Heroic Years: Paris 1908-1914, 1965, James Johnson Sweeney, curator, Cullinan Hall, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

On October 10, 1958, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston opened Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Cullinan Hall, a new wing situated on the north side of the original building. This was more than just another new wing added on to yet another ambitious and burgeoning urban museum. From a curatorial point of view, that day carried with it all the thrill and anticipation one might experience at the opening of an Olympic Games, when a state-of-the-art arena opens its doors to the very best athletes for 16 days of glory. In this case, it was to be nine years of glory. Jermaine MacAgy and James Johnson Sweeney, two curators in their prime, were poised to create a series of unforgettable exhibition installations in that magnificent hall.

Four years earlier, Nina Cullinan, daughter of Texaco founder J. S. Cullinan and a prominent patron of the arts, announced her intention to donate the funds for a major architectural addition to The Museum of Fine Arts in memory of her parents. Her gift had two stipulations: the addition was to be designed by an architect of outstanding reputation, and it was to be made available to the Contemporary Arts Association (known today as the Contemporary Arts Museum) for occasional exhibitions. Both stipulations were honored.

The museum chose Ludwig Mies van der Rohe as its architect, and he designed a hall that was at once big, bold, and

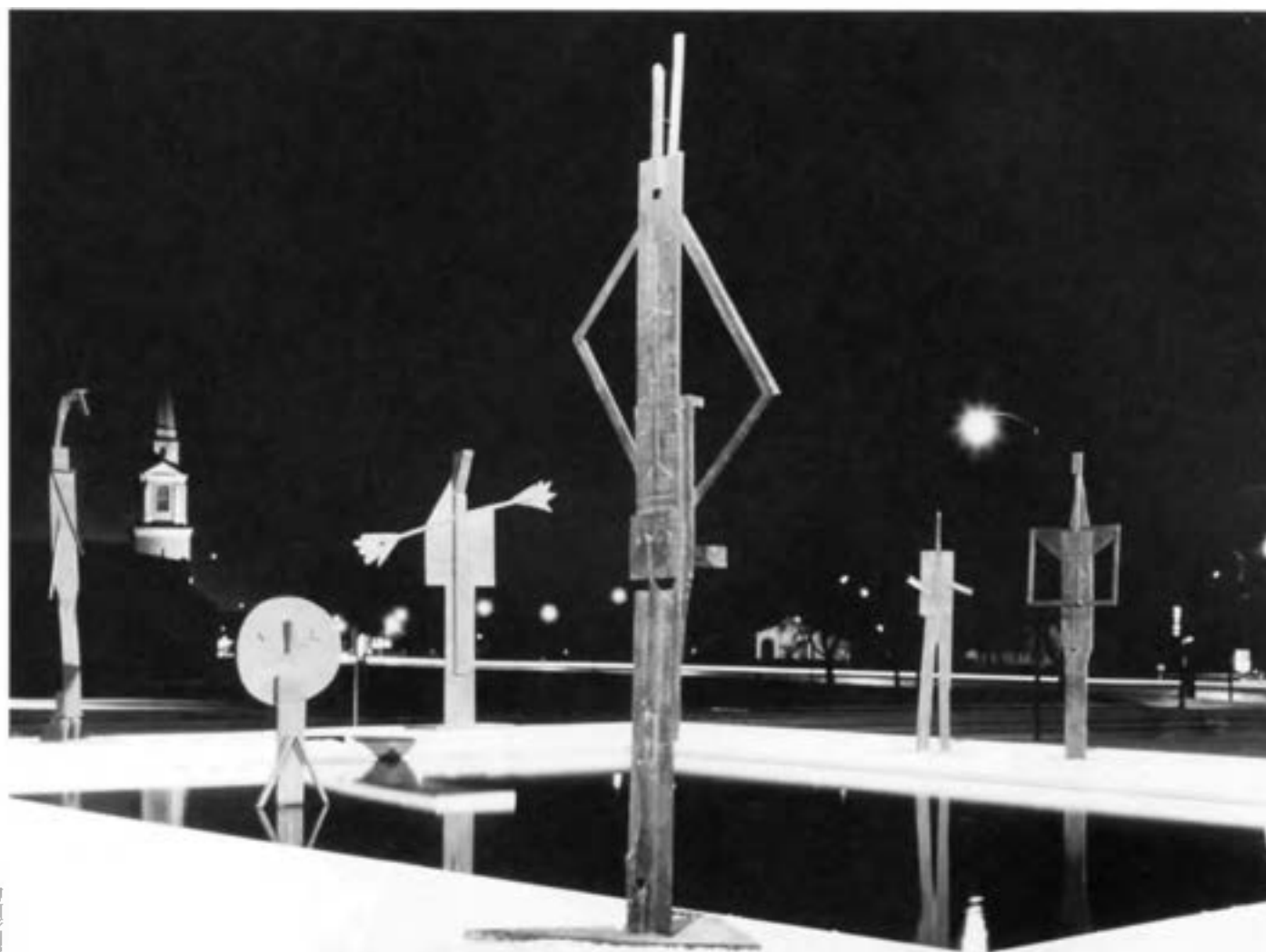
magnificent as well as a jewel of exquisite proportions. Mies brought the majesty of the outdoors inside with a voluminous hall of 10,000 square feet and 30-foot ceilings, a north façade of floor-to-ceiling windows, and a green Venetian terrazzo floor that seemed to flow directly into the front lawn. Edward Mayo, the museum's registrar from 1961 to 1986, has remarked, "There was a certain joy that came from just standing in Cullinan Hall."<sup>1</sup> Architectural historian Vincent Scully praised its "noble volumes of unthreatened space," and art historian Dore Ashton wrote that it was "proportioned so finely that the room itself is like a work of art, a sculptured concept of voids."<sup>2</sup> Such high praise for the architect, in effect threw down the gauntlet for curators who would come to work in the hall. How was one to install an exhibition in a hall that itself was a finished masterpiece? After a few less than successful fits and starts, *Houston Chronicle* critic Ann Holmes determined, "The hall is going to demand a more dramatic approach to exhibitions than any museum in these parts has been allowed to consider before."<sup>3</sup> Enter Jermaine MacAgy.

MacAgy came to Houston as director of the Contemporary Arts Association in 1955. Previously she had spent 14 years at the the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, serving in positions ranging from curator to acting



photo by Barbara Miller, courtesy The MFA Collection

Totems Not Taboo, 1959.



courtesy the Museum of Modern Art

Three Spaniards: Picasso, Miró, Chirico, 1962, James Johnson Sweeney, curator, with Pablo Picasso's *Barbers* around a pool in front of Cullinan Hall.

photo by Maurice Miller

The Common Denominator: Modern Design, 3500 B.C.-1958 A.D., 1958, Jermyne MacAgy, curator, Contemporary Arts Association.

director. There she became known for her catholic and unerring eye, her dramatic installations, and her prescient vision for the educational role of exhibitions. In Houston, MacAgy hit the ground running with one memorable exhibition after another.

At that time, the Contemporary Arts Association was housed in a small temporary building designed in 1949 by MacKie & Kamrath, whose work was strongly influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright. Despite the building's assertive sloping roof, MacAgy reinvented the space again and again with her dramatic and eclectic flair and her unique repertoire of installation devices that included potted plants, beds of gravel and bark, temporary partitions, scrims, theatrical lighting, and pedestals of all shapes and sizes combined in unusual ways.

With such exhibitions as *Mark Rothko* (1957), *The Trojan Horse: The Art of the Machine* (1958), *The Common Denominator: Modern Design, 3500 B.C.-1958 A.D.* (1958), and *Romantic Agony: From Goya to de Kooning* (1959), MacAgy transformed the A-frame building like a skilled theatrical set designer. As Dominique de Menil pointed out, "Each of her installations produced an atmospheric miracle, which set the work of art in such a light that it would shine and talk to anyone who would care to look and listen."<sup>4</sup>

*Totems Not Taboo: An Exhibition of Primitive Art* (1959) was MacAgy's first installation in Cullinan Hall, and under her direction the hall came alive. Objects

garnered from around the world stood like proud sentries at multiple levels on tall pedestals amid elevated walkways and islands of gravel floating in the hall's green sea of terrazzo. Lit up at night, it looked like a staged grand finale, with the whole cast of characters present, proudly waiting to take a bow. The exhibition was so popular that its closing date was extended. Rene d'Harnoncourt, director of the Museum of Modern Art, said it was one of the three most exceptional installations he had ever seen.<sup>5</sup> Buckminster Fuller sent MacAgy an enthusiastic telegram in his inimitable prose: "Unable to reach you [by] telephone to tell you your *Totem-Not-Taboo* occasioned my personally most excitingly important exhibition experience in respect to total associative conceptioning and competence of mounting, cataloging and comprehensive environmental considerations and event anticipations which went right out through its walls into the community and the nation and our historic times. . . . You celebrate the opening of a new era of man's enjoyment of knowledge concerning his whole history around earth."<sup>6</sup>

In 1959, MacAgy left her post at the Contemporary Arts Museum to teach art history and curate exhibitions for the University of St. Thomas. From there she curated three more exhibitions in Cullinan Hall. Her installation for *The Lively Arts of the Renaissance* (1960) suggested a Renaissance garden. In the catalog, MacAgy wrote: "It is hoped that this installation immediately suggests to the visitor the ambience — rather than a detailed rendering — of the setting in which the objects existed. We have not transformed Cullinan Hall into a Renaissance ANYTHING: We have merely put objects intimate to the Renaissance man and woman in a simple installation, which contains some basic elements of Renaissance architectural design — just enough to put a feeling in the bones of the viewer."<sup>7</sup> Because Cullinan Hall's entire north face was glass and its ceilings were 30 feet high, the lighting of exhibitions was always a problem, but in *From Gauguin to Gorky* (1961) MacAgy collaborated with architect Howard Barnstone to create a system of rooms within the hall with dramatic lighting emanating from the floor. And for *Rene Magritte in America* (1961) MacAgy added occasional boulders (not unlike those found in Magritte's paintings) and used temporary walls and scrims to set the tone.

Each MacAgy installation was

unique, and its understatement belied her thoughtful and demanding approach. As she herself explained: "An exhibit should be more or less like a well-dressed woman — not clothes for the clothes' sake, but for the further illumination of the lady's distinguishing characteristics. To create an aura, an atmosphere belonging personally to the objects, rather than merely building an edifice against which the objects look well, is the purpose of the Museum's installation plans. And yet this is not to say that the setting should not look well, perhaps even handsome, sometimes elegant, sometimes commanding, but at all times subservient acting with and always evoking the innateness of the things exhibited. . . . To use the same installation for one exhibition and for the one immediately following was like a person wearing someone else's shoes."<sup>8</sup>

James Johnson Sweeney came to Houston in 1960 as the third director of The Museum of Fine Arts and soon began to generate his own form of excitement in Cullinan Hall. An internationally known figure in the arts, Sweeney had been associated with the Museum of Modern Art almost from the time of its opening in 1929 and was the director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture there from 1945 to 1946. Russell Lynes noted that at MoMA, Sweeney "was widely known in the art world not only as a critic and scholar but as a fiercely meticulous arranger of paintings and sculpture for exhibition."<sup>9</sup> Sweeney went on to serve as the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum from 1952 to 1960, and upon his resignation there he came to Houston.

Challenging spaces were not new to Sweeney, who had battled Frank Lloyd Wright during the building of the Guggenheim. "I have had a little experience with difficult buildings. I admire Mies and find his hall inviting by comparison."<sup>10</sup> For Sweeney's first show in Cullinan Hall, *Derain: Before 1915* (1962), he used the platform and partition system that Mies's office had designed for Cullinan Hall's opening. His dissatisfaction led him to try other methods of exhibiting art in the challenging hall, and, with *Three Spaniards: Picasso, Miro, Chillida* (1962), he debuted a method of installing works that worked magically in Mies's voluminous space — hanging the paintings from the ceiling. "As a result, in the dense space of Cullinan Hall, the paintings appeared to transcend the force of gravity and float free



The Olmec Tradition, 1963, James Johnson Sweeney, curator. Olmec head installed in front of Cullinan Hall.

in its numinous volume."<sup>11</sup>

Floating paintings in Cullinan Hall became a Sweeney trademark, as did spare installations with a few meticulously chosen works. These often showcased works Sweeney hoped to add to the museum's collection, as in *Six Master Paintings, Two Glasses, One Sculpture* (1963). Such minimal installations tookchutzpa, and Sweeney proved to have plenty. For *Three Spaniards*, Sweeney installed a pool in front of Cullinan Hall complete with diving board. The 30-by-18 foot pool looked "deep as the ocean" and Sweeney arranged Picasso's bronze *Bathers* in and around it.<sup>12</sup> Sweeney was also notorious for his use of plants. For each installation, Sweeney's plant man would back up two or three trucks to the museum, unload around 100 plants, and move them around the gallery for Sweeney, who would then pick only five or six. An extravagance, perhaps, but he always chose just the right ones.

As part of his 1963 exhibition *The Olmec Tradition*, Sweeney placed a 16-ton, nine-foot-tall Olmec head on the lawn in front of Cullinan Hall. This was no easy feat physically or politically. The head was the last of such La Venta-style heads still *in situ*, and the National

Museum of History and Anthropology in Mexico City wanted it. Angry villagers and the rainy season aside, an undaunted Sweeney enlisted the U.S. and Mexican governments, the Mexican navy, and engineering muscle from Brown & Root to bring this national treasure to the corner of Bissonnet and Montrose.<sup>13</sup> The head was breathtaking and unforgettable, and Sweeney found a way to convey its magnificence far from its original site.

*The Heroic Years: Paris 1908–1914* (1965) and *San Francisco Retrospective* (1967) were among Sweeney's last installations in Cullinan Hall. By then he had mastered the hall, activating every cubic inch, playing it like a virtuoso, and living up to his own criteria for any exhibition: "It should be immediately sensuous, superficially decorative, and fundamentally critical. I want it to hit you in the eye and hold you, so you look at the pictures, whose selection and arrangement is a critical act."<sup>14</sup>

James Johnson Sweeney resigned as full-time director of the MFA in 1967, and Jermaine MacAgay died an untimely death in 1964. By 1971 construction was under way for the Brown Pavilion, the next step in Mies's plan, which enclosed the north end of Cullinan Hall, changing

it forever and marking the end of an era. These had been heady days for the visual arts in Houston. MacAgay and Sweeney, two celebrated practitioners of their craft, had put Houston on the cultural map with one memorable exhibition after another. How fortunate it was that during their brief time in Houston, they had a playing field as magnificent as Cullinan Hall.

Today Cullinan Hall is in some ways like an old racehorse that has been put out to pasture. It still has a job to do (exhibitions, galas, shop sales, and blockbuster queues), but its days of glory with MacAgay and Sweeney at the helm are now the stuff of legend. ■

1. Edward Mayo, conversation with the author, September 17, 1997.

2. Stephen Fox, "The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: An Architectural History, 1924–1986 — A Special Bulletin," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, April 1992, vol. XV, nos. 1–2, p. 95. Also Dore Ashton, "Sweeney Revisited," *Studio*, September 1963, p. 111.

3. Ann Holmes, "Cullinan Show Short on Impact," *Houston Chronicle*, October 24, 1958.

4. Dominique de Menil, "Jermaine MacAgay," in *Jermaine MacAgay: A Life Illustrated by an Exhibition* (Houston: University of St. Thomas, 1968), p. 10.

5. Eleanor Freed, "A Life Illustrated," review, *Houston Post*, November 24, 1968.

6. Buckminster Fuller to Jermaine MacAgay, February 28, 1959, Menil Collection Archives.

7. *The Lovely Arts of the Renaissance*, exhibition catalog (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1960).

8. Jermaine MacAgay, *California Legion of Honor Bulletin*, May–June 1953, vol. 11, nos. 1 & 2, as quoted in *Jermaine MacAgay: A Life Illustrated by an Exhibition*, p. 21.

9. Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 272.

10. Ann Holmes, "Now, Sweeney's Slant on Houston," *Houston Chronicle*, January 11, 1963. Sweeney had known Mies since 1933, when they were introduced by Philip Johnson.

11. Fox "Museums" p. 95; Ashton, "Sweeney" p. 101.

12. Edward Mayo conversation with author, September 17, 1997. The pool was somewhat problematic, as the jagged bits of gravel surrounding it pierced the plastic lining, causing leaks. The pool had to be refilled every day and was refilled two or three times during the course of the exhibition.

13. Tom Beauchamp, "James Johnson Sweeney and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: 1961–1967," master's thesis, the University of Texas at Austin, August 1983, p. 105. The Olmec head was returned to Mexico in 1964 and is in the collection of the National Museum of History and Anthropology in Mexico City.

14. Aline Loucheur, "A Museum Takes on a New Life," *New York Times*, March 1, 1953.



Buildings by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill dominate Houston's 1980s west-facing skyline. From left to right are One Shell Plaza, Allied Bank Plaza, Teanero Building (behind Allied and First International), and First International Plaza.

## S O M I N H O U S T O N

Kevin Alter

After 40 years of practice in Houston, the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill has left an indelible mark on the corporate identity of the city. SOM's high standards of efficiency and design frame the lineage of mid-20th-century American modernism. After the critical frenzy of the postmodern generation, it now appears tenable to consider modernist accomplishments with a view toward refreshing our own contemporary agenda. Since its founding in Chicago in 1936, SOM has produced a variety of building types, interior projects, and urban designs. Among these, it is the highrise office tower with which

the firm is most notably identified. Many of the most beautiful and provocative modern office towers in the United States were designed in one of SOM's major offices, including the Inland Steel Building in Chicago and Lever House in New York City.<sup>1</sup> SOM is responsible for many of Houston's most significant buildings, which, in sequence, trace the development of modernism's faith in the rational as the vehicle of design.

Houston's urban development, unregulated by zoning, might be understood as an act of collective will, and the relationship of the city to its natural resources has always been oblique. Shaped more by

desire than by geography, Houston, as a quintessential 20th-century American city, was born of the ambitions of entrepreneurs. Historically, Houston has placed enormous value on highly capitalized infrastructure. The successive development of water, rail, highway, and air transportation networks is a measure of both individual vision and community commitment.

The post-World War II period defined Houston's reputation for untempered fervent growth. Houston's image of itself as the "city of the future" began when it was chosen as the site for NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center in

the early 1960s. Louie Welch, elected mayor in 1964 (and reelected for four consecutive terms), directed city government in a way that facilitated real estate development. During the 1970s the southwestern United States saw a spectacular spurt in urban growth and construction, and, by 1980, Houston's skyline was overshadowed only by those of Chicago and New York.

In this context of confident economic expansion, SOM arrived as the purveyor of high modern design. Although Houston's SOM buildings were the products of various designers associated with different offices, and variety definitely perme-



First City National Bank Building, 1001 Main Street, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects with Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, consulting architects, 1960.



Tanneco Building, 1010 Milam, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects, 1963.



One Shell Plaza, 910 Louisiana, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects with Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, associate architects, 1971.

ates the work. Certain salient characteristics are generally present. The buildings consistently display an extreme degree of rationalization often derived from engineering. Consequently, architectural identity was linked to structural and service systems. SOM designed buildings with controlled environments in which everything fit together in a systematic, integral manner, and the work was promoted via its practical appeal and modern magic. Rather than reacting to the vicissitudes of circumstance, SOM's Houston work is dedicated to carefully reasoned spatial organization and construction and to elegant aesthetics as the cultural responsibility

of architecture. SOM's buildings are clear, forthright, and bold. They extend the discourse of the modern masters, orchestrating the free organization of space within a rational framework that is materially refined, precisely detailed, and abstractly rendered.

Consistent with national corporate trends toward suburbanizing the workplace, the Texas Medical Center established a significant challenge to Houston's downtown in the 1950s. Contributing to this vision of multistory buildings amid green space was SOM's first Houston building — the Medical Towers Building of 1953–57 at Dryden and Fannin. As

consultants to the Houston architects Golemon & Rolfe, SOM designed this 18-story building as a version of the Lever House formula adapted to Houston and its automobile culture. An office slab rises from a lower block — a floating base filled by a parking garage — in contrast to the social space that occupies the base of New York's Lever House. The base, covering the site, creates a street-wall next to generous sidewalks consistent with those of the neighboring blocks on Fannin and Main streets. The first floor of the Medical Towers contains street-front shops and an elevator core that services both the parking levels and

the office tower.

While not comparable to SOM's principle Southern buildings of the 1950s (the Pan American Insurance Building in New Orleans and the Reynolds Metals Company headquarters in Richmond), the Medical Towers Building yields insight into what might be described as essential characteristics of the firm's work. Grid-like surfaces, exact profiles, crisp detailing, a high degree of apparent order, and slight inflections in plan create an image of superior rationale, and a place that is dramatically modern. By the mid 1950s, modernism was becoming synonymous with the height of corporate style in the



Medical Towers Building, 1709 Dryden Street, Sldmore, Owings & Merrill, consulting architects to Goleman & Rolfe, architects, 1957.

United States. The Medical Towers Building represented an enthusiastic foray into this exciting elite world. Like the other SOM buildings that followed, this modern building was imminently compatible with Houston. Imagine how liberating it must have seemed to middle-class Houstonians in 1957 to stroll from the sidewalk into an air-conditioned lobby, or to step off the elevator to arrive in an office of expansive views made possible by the large panels of glass and the building's position in the middle of the block.

In contrast to this suburban trend, the First City National Bank Building of 1961 reversed the downtown construction stagnation that had dogged Houston throughout the 1950s. Designed by Gordon Bunshaft of the New York office of SOM, the First City National Bank epitomizes the intense development of design derived from extreme discipline and order, and it eloquently presents itself as a sophisticated modern image. Significantly, hiring SOM was stipulated as a condition of the construction financing because of the firm's reputation for expertise with tall buildings. First City's essential stylishness and purity of form were as much a reflection of SOM's efficient track record as of its precisionist aesthetic.

The First City National Bank consists of three buildings collected on a continuous terrazzo terrace — a 32-story office tower, an adjacent 34-foot-high banking hall, and six drive-through stations (now demolished) — and, on the adjacent half-block, an 800-car parking garage. The complex deftly accommodated the program throughout: 75 banking tellers and 36 staff members on the banking floor; administrative and executive offices on the first and second floors; speculative rental space in the rest of the tower; drive-in tellers located discreetly behind the banking hall; and parking conveniently connected by an air-conditioned, underground tunnel.

The welded steel frame of the tower,

clad in white Vermont marble, carries the gray-glass aluminum-frame window wall, which is set back five feet for sun-shading and window cleaning. The elegant marble-clad tower is relentlessly expressed, rising directly from the ground unfettered by the banking hall, which is connected via two glass-enclosed passages. The top three floors of mechanical space are incorporated in the continuous frame, yielding a tower of remarkably bold composition and an image of rational structure wrought with some degree of regional sensitivity to orientation. The clear-spanned, open banking hall is fitted with an aluminum curtain wall of huge glass panels and a continuous, luminous ceiling containing fixtures ingeniously arranged to cast light both downward and up towards the ceiling. The vastness of the room, its openness and continuity with the out-of-doors, and the precise detailing of hundreds of building components, including furnishings, make it an exceptional space. Even today, in its unoccupied state, this room has become the generous host to extravagant private occasions.

Like a breath of fresh air, the clarity, openness, and essential abstractness of First City invigorated downtown Houston and marked a sweeping move into the modern world. Following the example set by First City National Bank, Edward Charles Bassett and the San Francisco office of SOM were hired to design the 33-story Tenneco Building, completed in 1963, for the Tennessee Gas and Transmission Company and the Tennessee Bank and Trust Company.

Bassett's Tenneco Building design was refined into a more vigorous version of the First City type. Like First City, Tenneco is isolated in the middle of a block. The comparatively low ground-floor core is set back 42 feet on all sides from the outside face of the building, so that a spacious plaza is created. Solely a tower, Tenneco is emphatically rational and abstract in both appearance and conception. Here the image of Tennessee Gas took precedence over that of Tennessee Bank, and the banking hall, unlike that at First City, was pulled into the building and left spatially squeezed. Down ramps to underground parking and a line of drive-in bank kiosks (now demolished) were discreetly integrated into the plaza design.

Above the plaza level, the building treats orientation neutrally, as each side faces direct sun at some point during the day. With sunshades on all four sides,

design expression is relegated to elements that involve the steel structural frame, which is clad in anodized aluminum. Touching the ground with monumental piers extending from the frame, the Tenneco Building is eminently rational, abstract, and pure, overtly designed as a logical diagram of its engineering and construction. An insulated glass curtain wall is set back from the projected frame to articulate its distinction and aid in sun-shading. Unlike First City, the Tenneco Building asserts its position as a monument at both its base and top, and presents an image of awesome scale.

First City and Tenneco represent SOM at its peak: Bunshaft's and Bassett's crystallization and monumentalization of modernist technique. The casual rationality of the Medical Towers Building is here transformed into the high solemnity of modern engineering — timeless, transcendent, ceremonial.

In the 1970s SOM's work in Houston displayed a different emphasis. The 50-story One Shell Plaza of 1965–71, designed by Bruce Graham and Fazlur R. Khan of the Chicago office, reflected the SOM tradition of modernist rationalism in a new light. Built by developer Gerald D. Hines and leased to the Shell Oil Company, One Shell Plaza was an effort to achieve luxury with economy and still appear corporate.

The grand scale and elegant forms of the high-modern towers by Bunshaft and Bassett were made possible by the welded steel frame. With the elevator core providing stiffness, the steel frame was defined by the widest possible bays and the most slender steel sections feasible. However, as the frame got thinner, the steel had to become more resistant, which carried a price. Similarly, the large sunshading overhangs of the external steel frame, while expressing the grace and power of First City and Tenneco were, from a developer's perspective, an extravagance that sacrificed potential leaseable floor space.

In contrast, Bruce Graham and Fazlur Khan (SOM's Chicago engineering partner) conceived of One Shell Plaza in a radically different manner to significantly reduce the cost of construction. Graham and Khan reconceived the frame and curtain wall as an integral solid, employing Khan's invention of the "tube within a tube" building. The exterior, a reinforced concrete structural system clad in travertine marble, is framed by a series of closely spaced columns and high spandrel beams, which together form a load bear-

ing rectangular tube. The increased depth of the columns at eight points around the building provides supplementary wind stiffening, while giving the impression of undulated walls and an unconventional system of statics. This outer tube is further stiffened by the sheer walls of the interior elevator core. As a consequence, Hines was able to build the 50-story One Shell Plaza — at the time the tallest reinforced-concrete building in the world — for the cost of a conventional steel-framed 35-story tower.

Like First City and Tenneco, One Shell Plaza is situated in the middle of a block, surrounded by an open plaza. However, the careful reassessment of the interrelationship between the cost and speed of construction, the value of rentable space (beyond concerns of home and corporate identity), and the construction system employed here led to a building of a markedly different character. The rationale which in Bunshaft and Bassett gave rise to an elegant, monumental corporate identity is extended through Graham and Kahn to the inexorable expression of a building's structure.

Philip Johnson and John Burgee's mid-1970s Pennzoil Place reacted to the look of engineering rationalism that One Shell Plaza embodied, radically changing the expectations and aesthetic predilections of developers in Houston. Because of a phenomenal market response to Pennzoil Place, developers pressed their architects to devise more eccentric shapes and appealing curtain walls. Highrise design was primarily commissioned by developers concerned with profit margins on rentable space. Instead of corporate clients seeking an emblematic home office building, SOM became more likely to work with developers interested in getting a full return on capital by reducing unrentable space and maximizing construction and operational economy. However, in a competitive marketplace, financial wisdom suggested that developers could engage in competition for tenants through architectural imagery.

In this world of investment office towers SOM's reliance on rational, universal systems of organization metamorphosed again. Lessons learned in efficiency and cost effectiveness through the interrelationship of engineering and architecture were maintained. But the high-minded aesthetics of SOM's rationalism gave way to the effort to make more shapely buildings. In deference to this economic determinism, Richard Keating of SOM's Houston office stated



First International Plaza (now 1100 Louisiana Building), 1100 Louisiana, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects, 3D/International, associate architects, 1980.



Allied Bank Plaza (now Wells Fargo Plaza), 1000 Louisiana, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects, Lloyd Jones Brewer & Associates, associate architects, 1983.



Tenneco Building, corner at ground level with garage entrance at left.

in 1981, "I'm presently exploring, as many of the other partners are too, the tube system, like the one in Allied Bank Plaza, which gives us the opportunity to relax the form." This marked a radical change in the firm's trajectory — and the nature of architecture's collaboration with engineering. Two buildings of this period — Allied Bank Plaza of 1983 designed by Edward Bassett and Laurence Doane of SOM's San Francisco office with Richard Keating of SOM Houston and First International Plaza of 1981, designed by Doane and Bassett — reflect that change.

The 71-story Allied Bank Plaza (now Wells Fargo Plaza), designed for Century Development Corporation, is set back from the street in the middle of a block adjacent to three other SOM buildings — Tenneco to the east, One Shell Plaza to the north, and First International Plaza to the south. Its structural system of steel columns, set at 15-foot centers in a radius that describes its plan-shape of two quarter-circles, is so structurally effective that no additional interior columns or bracing walls in the core section were required. Allied is an immense building: its 1.8 million square feet of rentable space are made possible economically by this creative structural system, but its expression is derived from a different desire. Unlike its predecessors, Tenneco and First City, a sheathing of green glass neutralizes the distinction between structural surfaces and window openings. Sheetrock coffers in the lobby ceiling and other lively theatrical details stand in contrast to the firm's structuralist philos-

ophy of design.

Similarly, the 55-story First International Plaza was designed less from SOM's history of modernist rationalism than from developer's budget-driven agenda. Informed by the manner in which developers determine income — that rentable floorspace is calculated to the inside edge of the glass — First International was willfully shaped to give a variety of configurations; each elevation is rendered visually different. Here the framed tube system was adapted to a shaped building. Configured with respect to the edges of its full-block site rather than from the middle, it departs from SOM's other Houston towers in addressing differing site circumstances with distinct formal responses and in conceptualizing the plaza in a traditional manner. Signaling this dramatic change in approach, Larry Doane stated: "In the design of First International Plaza, it was important for us to respond to the city yet contribute to its development in a special way, and I think we achieved this as the two strengths of the building are its varied exterior form and large pedestrian plaza."<sup>1</sup> The plaza, though, is the weakest part of the design.

Six SOM towers illustrate the firm's trajectory from a rational systemization of an entire building, to rational structure, to a rationally engineered building in the service of economic considerations. In all of SOM's Houston buildings, the effort of the architectural project to lay claim to a sophisticated future distinguishes the buildings from their milieu with unbridled optimism. Moreover,

their underlying values respond to the ethical heart of modern architecture. Unsurprisingly, the collective impact of this work on the character of the city is left unconsidered. Beyond a collection of willful, monumental edifices, the most provocative urban gesture of SOM's Houston towers was the introduction of the modern plaza. Unfettered by precedent and facilitated by a network of underground tunnels that siphoned off uses typically associated with downtown streets — coffee shops, shoe repair shops, dry cleaners, interbuilding access, and service areas — the modern plaza came into being as an abstract space unconcerned with the exigencies of use, serving only to offset the buildings that rise from it.

The recent demolition of the Great Southern Life and United Carbon buildings in the late 1990s, the tentative status of First City and the Medical Towers buildings, and the departure of Tenneco from its building suggest that the value of these buildings' refined aesthetic and their importance as cultural artifacts does not hold against their value as real estate assets. But as postmodernism and its critique of the modern fades from fashion, a reconsideration of the modern experiment and of its tangled set of relationships between motive, form, structure, and circumstance, seems timely. ■

1. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill maintained offices in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, Portland, and, for a brief time, Houston.

2. "Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's New Directions in High-Rise Design," *Architectural Record*, March 1981, p. 114.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

## SOM IN SUBURBIA

While a number of the high-profile office buildings in Houston's downtown skyline were designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, it is little known that an additional 18 structures were also designed by the firm outside of the central business district. In chronological order they are as follows:

- **United Carbon Co. Research Laboratory**, 13401 Katy Freeway, 1962, demolished 1997.
- **Great Southern Life Insurance Co. Building**, 3121 Buffalo Speedway, 1965, demolished 1997.
- **Ranger Insurance Co.**, 5333 Westheimer, 1971, designed for Gerald D. Hines Interests.
- **Control Data Corporation**, 2000 West Loop South, 1971, for Hines.
- **Post Oak Row**, 1801 Post Oak, 1972, a linear strip mall that includes the famous Tony's Restaurant.
- **Stewart Title**, 2200 West Loop South, 1974, for Hines.
- **Kaneb Building**, 5251 Westheimer, 1976, a strip mall.
- **Bechtel Building**, 5400 Westheimer Court, 1981.
- **9494 Southwest Freeway**, ca. 1982, an 8-story triangular building near Beltway 8.
- **19801 Westheimer**, ca. 1982.
- **Galleria West**, 2610-2670 Sage Road, ca. 1982.
- **Guest Quarters Hotel**, 5353 Westheimer, 1982, now the Doubletree Guest Suites.
- **Westlake Park Two**, 500 Westlake Park Blvd., 1982, for Hines, part of SOM-planned West Lake Park.
- **Amoco Center**, 501 Westlake Park, 1983, for Hines.
- **Westlake Park Three**, 550 Westlake Park Blvd., 1983, for Hines.
- **Centre One**, 9800 Centre Parkway, 1983, for The Farb Companies.
- **Retail Centre**, Centre Parkway at Bissonnet, 1984, for Farb.
- **San Felipe Plaza**, 5847 San Felipe, 1984, for Farb. Louis H. Skidmore, Jr.



# E I C H L E R   H O M E S : M O D E R N   D R E A M   H O U S E



Laura Furman

On view at the University of Texas School of Architecture from October 1 through October 27, 1997 the exhibition entitled *The Eichler Homes: Building the American Dream* paid homage to an unusual moment of care and taste in mass housing development in America. The exhibition featured photographs and other artifacts from the design, construction, and

marketing of the Northern California tract houses developed by Joe Eichler. It was co-curated by UT faculty members Paul Adamson and Kevin Alter, with a lucid commentary by Alter.<sup>1</sup>

Everything about the 12,000 modernist houses built by Eichler in the 1950s and 1960s smacks of efficiency and durability (slab-on-grade foundations, post-and-beam construction).

"Beams vary in depth commensurate to their span, and plywood cladding forms a lightweight diaphragm." Alter's commentary informs us. The post acts as a "universal joint to which glazing, paneling, and door frames can be interchangeably secured." Architects of the Eichler houses turned Federal Housing Administration and Veterans' Administration loan restrictions into virtues: "Construction method remains evident in the final product and the ubiquitous module generates rhythm and meter in the space. The compelling presence of these constructional and fiscal concerns in the completed houses imbue them with a character beyond their identity as minimal dwelling."

The word "character" is the key to appreciating the achievement of these structures. Though minimal by legal definition and built within strict budgetary constraints, the dwellings were not mean in feeling or vision. These modernist houses offered space and style at a price affordable to the middle-class buyer. Eichler chose Quincy Jones and Anshen & Allen, significant architects for such projects, to design his prototypes. Unlike William Levitt's houses in Levittown, New York, also built for World War II veterans and to which Eichler's houses are often compared, Eichler Homes embodied a contemporary aesthetic ideal, not Cape Cod-type houses of the East but Case Study-type houses and the California modernism of Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler.

Each house was entered through a landscaped courtyard, and, because of the abundance of glass, the outdoors seemed part of each room. The open plan and multipurpose central room, which incorporated kitchen and social spaces, encouraged togetherness, yet doors and drapes afforded privacy. The visual continuity in the relatively small space (starting at 1,200 square feet), made the houses seem larger than they were. Against all odds the mass-built Eichler Homes maintained individuality, a challenge that the more lavish and expensive houses of their aesthetic forebears did not face.

Every inch was thought out, and if some of the finish details were not fine, still, great care was taken. A swing-out kitchen table helped transform the family kitchen into a place for entertaining. The radiant heating cast into the foundation slabs made the floor a comfortable place for toddler and adult. Eichler Homes advertised that the floors would "warm your slippers and bathrobe as you slept."

Cork flooring, mahogany veneer walls, cabinets painted in Zol-o-Tone paint (durable, easy to clean, and formulated for Eichler Homes), custom stains specially produced by Cabot — all these details were built into the houses. Joe Eichler, his architects, and his hand-picked construction crews went to a lot of trouble for the houses and the neighborhoods they built. Clearly, Eichler wanted his buildings to make it possible for gracious family living to take place within them. His consistency, practicality, and taste made his developments popular — as they still are nearly 50 years later.

To market his new houses, Eichler formed a talented team of art director Matt Kahn, who still lives in an Eichler house, and photographer Ernest Braun, who produced a series of photographs of the construction process (heroic portraits, almost like Soviet Realist posters of noble workers) and of the finished product to be used in the sales office and for advertising. These photographs make up the bulk of the exhibition along with contemporary shelter magazines; Joe Eichler's business card and stationery; and a sample of post-and-beam construction. The installation is clever: partitions broken by frosted glass, and full-scale images blown up to mimic the walls of the Eichler Homes.

Another type of ad included in the exhibition appears radical even now: instead of a picture of a house, there is a flower, for example, or a vase, and a single evocative word. The exhibition also contains delightful drawings by UT architecture students Ernesto Cragolino and William Jackson (à la David Macauley's madly detailed drawings for his children's books), showing two Eichler houses in current usage, one of them Matt Kahn's. The drawings are playfully detailed down to Kahn's African masks and menorah and express the true flexibility and livability of the original houses.

Ernest Braun's black-and-white photographs have a life of their own, apart from the moment they portray in architectural history. The photographs do not show buildings as empty architectural objects but as houses lived in by admirable, yet familiar, people in ideal, yet possible, activities. Kahn chose good-looking models, well designed furniture (James chairs and cabinets, for example), and other props to articulate the best features of the house and to narrate stories of life within them. The crisp and beautifully composed photographs are not the still equivalent of home movies, for they are



Eichler Home, Lucas Valley, California, Quincy Jones and Frederick Emmons, architects, ca. 1960.

deliberately posed, nor are they overextended fashion photographs. They do their job, pulling us into the life in the house, expressing a way of life made possible by the buildings. The buildings themselves are not the dominating objects. The photographs instruct us not to desire the house as a beautiful object, but to want it for the life it frames and perhaps makes possible. The life portrayed is, for those who grew up in the fifties and sixties, a familiar yet idealized post-war hopefulness, chillingly accurate. The people in the photographs feel on top of the world, ready to make a sophisticated, self-fulfilled, slightly avant-garde, and wholly unironical life in their new neighborhood.

In one nighttime scene, photographed from outside, one sees two generations of a family — a young couple with a friend, or perhaps a younger sister, and visiting parents — singing together to the accompaniment of a guitar slung over the shoulder of the young husband. In another, a teenage girl in a nasty shag haircut lies on her bed, her back to the rest of the house, and talks on the phone. She is apart from the family, but she is still safe at home. As another expression of the possibilities of middle-class life, a young wife in Toreador pants, pony tail, and an odd ear-muff-like hairdo sits weaving at her loom. She has leisure time. She is able, in her Eichler house, to express herself. In another photo a man is painting, his finished canvases resting on the wall behind his easel. Through the open doorway the multipurpose room, the fireplace, the shag rug are visible. He is a Sunday painter par excellence, nurtured within the house. In an outdoor shot, a young couple is decorating the fence of their tiny yard with abstract cut-outs.

In a party scene no children are in evidence, only adults, together in the kitchen area of the multipurpose room. The grilled chicken and potato salad, the stack of Russel Wright dinner plates are ready for dinner. For cocktail snacks there are olives, pickles, and celery sticks. Everyone is drinking highballs. Many of the people are laughing. There is an atmosphere of freedom, sexuality, and the possibility of being interrupted at any moment. These are not single people, after all. These are

men returned from war, women turning their hands to raising children and keeping house. In the same kitchen, but opened up to show the rest of the house, a different scene, the lighting of a child's birthday cake.

Most interesting of all is the message the photographs send about family life. One would hardly expect a marketing campaign based on photographs of family fights, but there is a mute acknowledgment of the strains of family life. Often family members are in one another's line of sight yet stay apart, in separate rooms. In the foreground of one photo, which might be titled "Sunday Afternoon," a mother (a dead ringer for Jeanne Crain) sits, mending basket in her lap, sewing in hand. Next to her is her young daughter. Mother and daughter look at each other, engaged. Beyond them, in the same room, the young son watches television, his eyes on the tube, his body across a bench. In the next room, Father reads the paper. He can see his family and his family can see him, but he doesn't have to talk to them.

The people in Braun's photographs are looking through the house at other family members in their solitude or togetherness or looking through the entrance courtyard at nature enclosed by the house. Photographs are silent, of course. In reality, the ensemble separateness of family life would have been impinged on by the smell of dinner in the oven and by sound: Daddy's new hi-fi, the boy's TV, and possibly Elvis on an unseen teenager's radio. In the silence of the photographs the family is at peace in their Eichler Home, together and apart simultaneously, the perfect solution to family life. ■

1. No catalogue was produced for this exhibition. Kevin Alter's comments were in the form of legends accompanying items in the exhibition.



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# P R O L E R   C H A P E L

at Woodlawn Cemetery



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Proler Chapel, Solomon Inc., architects, 1997.

"Only a small part of architecture belongs to art: the tomb and the monument."

Adolf Loos

This has been the year of the chapel in Houston. Architects Daniel Solomon and Gary Strang of Solomon Inc. have created the environmentally attentive Proler Chapel in the newly partitioned Beth Israel section of Woodlawn Cemetery. And two distinctive chapels dedicated earlier in the charmed St. Thomas-Mend district — Philip Johnson's St. Basil's Chapel at the University of St. Thomas and François de Menil's sophisticated encapsulation of a Byzantine fresco — both received significant critical notice. The *Houston Press* even created a special chapel category for its annual "Best of Houston" issue and named the Proler Chapel the popular favorite. Each of Houston's three new chapels pursues a different muse with determination bordering on the paradigmatic. None does so more unabashedly than Johnson's, which fills the empty north end of the meticulous, Miesian academic mall at St. Thomas (Philip Johnson, 1958) with a wildly figurative building that seems to question the timelessness and universality of the architect's earlier work for the university, at least when it comes to expressing the spiritual dimension in contemporary terms. The other two chapels go about their business in a quieter manner, less concerned with formalistic transformations and post-rational geometries than with the Zen of construction.

In the Judaic rejection of representation given in the second commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image nor any manner of likeness of any thing. . . ." (Exodus 20:4) Daniel Solomon found the invocation for a building that is starkly abstract and representative of an intuitive spirituality. The centerpiece of the three-acre Jewish cemetery garden in Woodlawn Cemetery, the Proler Chapel, assembles a concept of place as a gathering of sensuous phenomena that emphasizes the thermal properties of materials and site. Indeed, the entire structure can be thought of as an instrument of perception, enhancing and making visible a philosopher's cosmology consisting of air (breezes), fire (the sun), earth (the masonry construction), and water (the pools, water taps, and oversized gutter structure). The massive, battered north wall evokes a feeling of coolness that is enhanced by water trickling from thin finger pipes tapped into the body of the wall, recalling how spring water issues from a rocky hillside. On the south side of the gathering space, a series of curved aluminum screens forms an

entry arcade that both admits the breezes and represents them in undulating, perforating forms that seem to billow and dance.

A large, shallow, arching roof, the most prominent feature of the chapel, makes an iconic response to climate conditions at the site. The north-south section portrays a textbook example of a wind scoop, designed to pull southern breezes in under the canopy and out through the slit where the roof crosses the north wall. A thin slit in the hollow roof canopy admits a narrow shaft of sunlight that strikes the concrete wall behind the place where the casket is placed during services, emphasizing the sheltering function of the roof and distilling the sunlight into a symbolic contributor to the interior sensorium. Solomon also dramatizes the rain-sheltering aspect of the roof with the oversized gutter, which also serves as canopy for the entry arcade. Rainwater cascades from the roof into the gutter, then pours into a pool, where it animates the reflected light entering the chapel.

Solomon and Strang's design emphasizes the importance of comfort as a part of place-making in the oppressively hot Gulf Coast summers, but the low-tech environmental tempering may prove to be more psychologically than physically satisfying. Provisions for evaporative cooling, a phenomenon that occurs when warm breezes pass over water, may not, finally, be well suited to Houston's humidity-laden climate. And the efficacy of the breeze-scooping roof has yet to be proven. Equally problematic may be the orientation of the concrete wall on the north side of the pavilion, which leaves the west open to prevailing winter winds. Still, overhead paddle fans suspended from the ceiling should keep the air moving, and the vented-cavity roof structure, a device that should be more widely emulated, will ameliorate the heat load from the relentless summer sun.

There is a connection between the material composition of the chapel and the way architecture students, particularly in their early years of study, are often taught to consider the material elements of construction in abstract terms as having essential properties such as thickness and thinness, heaviness and lightness, static and dynamics, ephemerality and permanence. Students learn to represent these properties in paper or wooden models, which depend less on material representation than on material behaviors. The translation of these pedagogical

techniques into the verities of real construction is a step few architects master, since real construction doesn't behave with the relative pliability or ease of technical and aesthetic joining of studio materials. Often the differences between a thin wall or a thick wall becomes a matter of greater or lesser hollowness between thin sheets of a constructed diaphragm in which a homogeneity of surface appearance neutralizes materiality so that the actual building resembles the studio model.

The architects' approach establishes a direct correlation between abstract qualities of roof and wall and real construction expressed as a kind of architectonic lexicon, where materials are used as the equivalent of morphemes in a poem. The Proler Chapel represents a special case of architectural construction, where enclosure and boundary are metaphorically defined in distinct elements of walls, screens, and roof gathered rather than joined. The heavy, battered concrete wall belongs to the earth and embodies constancy and stasis; the canopy hovers like a puffy air foil; and the curved, perforated screens contribute an active, lyrical presence. Wooden benches and the wooden screen that hides the utility core fill the enclosure with a warmer, organic character. Like the elements in a constructivist composition, these separate components retain their essential properties rather than surrendering them through material joining.

The Beth Israel Cemetery site, outside the Loop and a few blocks north of the Ikea superstore, is inauspicious. Behind the lining of freeway buildings, in the midst of a low-density suburban residential area, the large Woodlawn Cemetery tract is a contrasting respite of orderly premises under a canopy of mature oak trees. The other major building on the grounds, a neocolonial mortuary, resembles a house that has escaped from the surrounding subdivisions. The Beth Israel portion of the property is encumbered by a large water tank and slough located on the edge of the building site and by noisy traffic on four-lane Antoine Drive just behind to the east. The elements of the chapel are positioned to screen out views of the utility structure and the sights and sounds of the adjacent highway.

In defining Beth Israel Cemetery within the larger Woodlawn precinct, Solomon created a figural landscape of tightly organized elements that extend the chapel into the site through a series of monolithic, Neoplatonic mausolea con-

structed of concrete with overlaid metal trellises arranged in a measured north-south progression parallel to the cemetery's internal road. The stasis of these weighty objects, true houses of the dead, contrasts with the vigorous tactility of the chapel, a place for the living. In front of the walk along the internal road, a stand of new trees is tethered by cables to tensioned poles. The garden's composition is a figure of precise and coherent order, as simple as a parti diagram. Strong formal order is a response to the need to give clarity to Beth Israel's small but distinct place within and apart from the larger cemetery grounds.

But there is a larger mission — to create a sanctuary as a polemical act of withdrawal and contemplation within the modern world. Solomon cites Rabbi Eugene Borowitz's book, *Renewing the Covenant*, which describes "how the longings for spirituality in our times have come about through the collapse of faith in enlightenment, rationalism, and progress." "Houston," Solomon continues, "is perhaps the world's most spectacular symbol of modernist optimism, . . . a city built with incredible vigor and real belief in the messianic age of the technocrat — life made better by the car, the air conditioner, the elevator, and reflective glass."<sup>1</sup> For Solomon, the chapel is a clearing not only in the forest but also in a technologically saturated world. In his book *Rebuilding*, Solomon writes about how the making of things and the making of places are often two different and contradictory endeavors: "The critical object may be a treasure, even a necessity, but critical objects do not address, inherently cannot address, the ravages of placelessness."<sup>2</sup>

In the Proler Chapel and cemetery gardens the architect has managed to resolve this dilemma by first reducing the object to fundamental elements and then using them to embody the poetics of place making as both constructed reality and transcendent metaphor. As the Beth Israel Cemetery grows with an expanding matrix of mausolea and maturing greenery, the Proler Chapel will become embedded in its own precise landscape — a place that embodies a sense of what it means to dwell in nature. ■

1. Eugene B. Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991).

2. Daniel Solomon, *Rebuilding* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

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## LUIS BARRAGAN: RECENT STUDIES

Reviewed by John C. Ferguson

*Barragán: The Complete Works*. Edited by Raul Rispa. Essays by Antonio Toca Fernandez, Jose Maria Buendia Julbez, and Luis Barragán. Photographs by Mariana Yampolsky, Armando Salas Portugal, Lourdes Grobet, Frederique Lagrange, and Gabriel Figueroa. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996. 224 pp.; color and black-and-white illus.; \$65.00

*Luis Barragán: Mexico's Modern Master, 1902-1988* by Antonio Riggen Martinez. New York: The Monacelli Press, 1997. 254 pp.; color and black-and-white illus.; \$65.00

*Luis Barragán: Búsqueda y Creatividad* by Louise Noelle. Photographs by Alberto Moreno Guzman. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996. 267 pp.; color and black-and-white illus.

Although it has been almost a decade since the death of Mexico's most famous modern architect, Luis Barragán, there has been no lessening of interest in his career and his designs, at least judging from the recent spate of new books. Until now, the most available study of Barragán's work was *Luis Barragán* by Emilio Ambasz (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976). The Ambasz book is famous for its use of the legendary Armando Salas Portugal photographs of Barragán's work rather than for any detailed discourse on the architect and his buildings. In focusing almost entirely on projects after 1945, Ambasz ignored the great or part of Barragán's architectural output, especially the early work in his native city of Guadalajara and his work in Mexico City prior to 1945, which was heavily indebted to the International Style as practiced by Le Corbusier.

The reassessment of Barragán's career underway in Mexico since his death has coincided with the preservation of Barragán's house in Mexico City and his personal library, now in Guadalajara, by the Fundación de Arquitectura Tapatía. The Fundación successfully untangled the architect's complex will, and now both the house and library are accessible to the public.

*Barragán: The Complete Works* would not have come to be were it not for the Fundación. In his brief preface, editor Raul Rispa declares: "This book is first and foremost about architecture.

Hero worship and elaborate theorizing have no place here." Rispa is to be credited for fulfilling that statement. The essays by Antonio Toca Fernandez and Jose Maria Buendia Julbez are refreshingly free of the sort of hagiography that has been so much a part of writings on Barragán. The book is beautifully laid out and designed, with newly drawn plans for the majority of the buildings illustrated. While the drawings lack a scale of measurement, one can at least compare plans. Perhaps in an effort to ensure their graphic quality, none of the plans contain room labels, making it difficult to understand them. For readers not familiar with Barragán's early career in Guadalajara, this book will prove a revelation: all of his work from the 1920s is presented, including demolished work. Barragán was one of a number of Guadalajara architects who were in the process of creating a local style based on the architecture of Moslem Spain and North Africa as well as that of colonial Mexico. The integration of internal and external spaces in these houses would remain a part of Barragán's approach to architecture throughout his life.

The middle phase of Barragán's career, in which he had to rely on his architectural practice to make a living, illustrates his response to the tide of International Style modernism that had begun to reach Mexico in the 1930s. Barragán met Le Corbusier in 1931, and there is no doubt that he was profoundly affected by visiting the houses that Corbusier had designed for Michael Stem and Madame Savoye in France. The photographs of Barragán's works from this period show them to be uneven and do not predict the direction Barragán's architecture would take after 1945. The latter phase of his career is presented with a minimum of text but with numerous new or previously unpublished photographs, including some superb black-and-white images by Mariana Yampolsky. In particular, the images of Barragán's work for the Capuchinas Sacramentarios del Purísimo Corazón de María convey the beauty and emotional power of the chapel design.

Antonio Riggen Martinez's *Luis Barragán: Mexico's Modern Master, 1902-1988* is the most pretentious in scale and presentation of these three books and suffers from an attempt to make a coffee-table book with serious content. Of the five major chapters, the ones on Guadalajara and the Jardines del Pedregal are helpful, while the others suf-

fer from both flowery verbosity and an awkward translation from the Italian of the original edition. The illustrations are of lesser quality than those in *The Complete Works*; some images are out of focus and others have poor color separations. Given the significance of color in Barragán's later work and the fact that one of the chapters is devoted to color and water, this is a major problem. Martinez includes a chronological survey of Barragán's work that contains illustrations from Barragán's office archive, now in Switzerland and not accessible to scholars. This section illustrates images from the last stage of Barragán's career, his partnership with Raul Ferrara, which lasted from 1979 until 1984. The use of illustrations from the Barragán archive is unprecedented and gives the reader some impression of Barragán's design development process.

Louise Noelle is one of Mexico's most respected architectural historians, and her contribution to the field of Barragán literature, *Luis Barragán: Busqueda y Creatividad*, is both balanced and carefully researched, using Barragán's personal correspondence as a source for her narrative. Noelle, associated with the Instituto del Investigacion es Estericas at the National University of Mexico, follows the architect's career chronologically, with a general introductory chapter. This chapter should be required reading for those interested in Barragán, for it presents an excellent summary of his life along with a discussion of architects and ideas that

influenced his work. Noelle illustrates letters of introduction from Le Corbusier to Michael Stein and Madame Savoye that enabled Barragán to visit two of Corbusier's most important houses. Her chapter on Barragán's International Style work is also excellent, enhanced by a fine collection of new photographs by Alberto Moreno Guzman that features interiors, including that of Jose Clemente Orozco's Mexico City residence. Guzman's photographs are better documents of Barragán's work than the more famous images by Armando Salas Portugal. The panoramic view of Barragán's legendary stables for the Egerstrom family is the best image of this building ever published. Noelle's catalogue of Barragán's work is the most complete to date, although it does not deal with the years of Barragán's partnership with Raul Ferrara. Her bibliography is equally comprehensive, including several articles not cited in previous publications. While *Busqueda y Creatividad* may not be readily available in American bookstores and may never be published in English, it should be in the library of anyone with a serious interest in Luis Barragán.

Other books on Barragán, including one that will deal in detail with his famous suburban development, Jardines del Pedregal, are forthcoming. Unfortunately, until the Barragán archive is accessible to scholars, we will have to wait for a definitive study of this fascinating architect. ■

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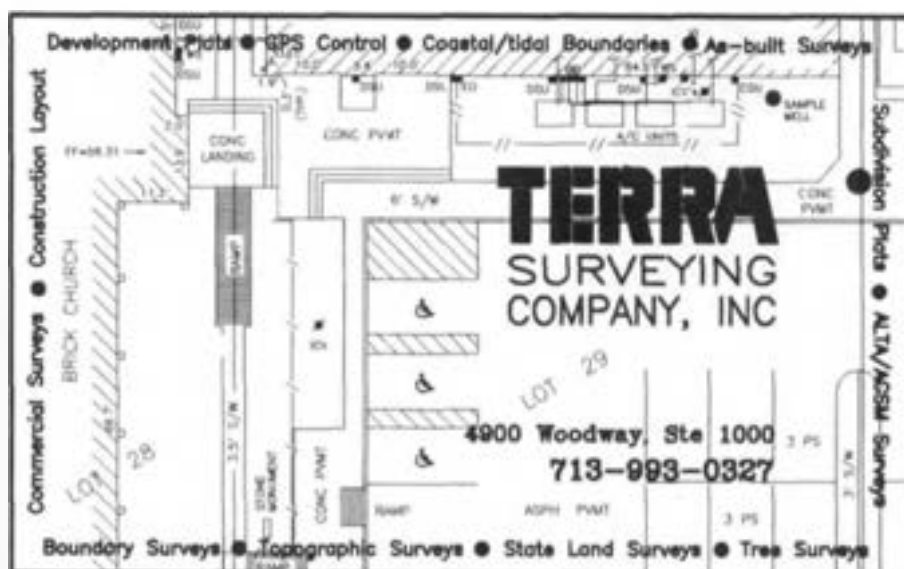
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## Coming to America ALDO ROSSI (1931–1997)

Aldo Rossi preferred tradition to individual talent in architecture, as did his teacher and mentor Ernesto Rogers. Yet there is scarcely a school of architecture in the world today where the mention of an Aldo Rossi building is not readily understood as shorthand for a melancholic remembrance of type, neoplatonic in form and poetic in feeling. He was also, like Rogers, willing to challenge the architectural dogma of the modern movement and to, as Rogers himself insisted, affirm the propriety of a "building's life being connected with the past," such that it might "breathe the atmosphere of the place and even intensify it."<sup>1</sup>

If there was a single architectural intellect Rossi found most compelling, it was that of Adolf Loos, who admonished architects that "the best form is always already given and no one should be afraid to use it, even though it may have come almost entirely from someone else."<sup>2</sup> It was of the prompting of Rogers, as Rossi relates in his *Scientific Autobiography*, that he "read Loos for the first time around 1959 in the beautiful first edition published by Brenner Verlag and given to me by Rogers. . . . Without doubt I owe to this reading of Loos the profound contempt I have always felt for . . . the confounding of form and function. Through Loos I discovered . . . also the great architecture of ancient Rome and an America which I would come to understand only much later."<sup>3</sup> Up to then, Rossi's ideas of what America might be like had come mainly from watching movies; in fact, he chose to study architecture only after abandoning plans for a career as a filmmaker.

Rossi became, in due course, "the most watched and discussed [architectural] 'case' both in Italy and on the international scene," as Manfredo Tafuri was obliged to admit.<sup>4</sup> Even so (or perhaps for that very reason), Rossi experienced a far more hospitable critical reception in America than at home, as Kurt Forster noted when Rossi was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 1990.<sup>5</sup> Tafuri, his colleague on the faculty at the University of Venice, found in Rossi's oeuvre only "surly indifference . . . resorting to . . . a geometric elementarism reminiscent of Durand's tables." But Vincent Scully at Yale discerned a laudable "passion for structural and spatial types, evolved from vernacular and classical traditions that make sense of the environment and hold it together."<sup>6</sup> Whereas Francesco Dal Co, Tafuri's occasional collaborator at the University of Venice, censured Rossi for "veer[ing] toward a mannerist practice, apparently replacing stubbornness with repetition," Peter Eisenman of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies took a contrary view, commending the built evidence of Rossi's search for "an alternative to functionalism [while] also looking for an alternative to a rationalism that, based on reason and logic, simply replicates the progressivism of the Modern Movement."<sup>7</sup>

Rossi took comfort in the relative permissiveness of the New World — "the fact that, in a large country such as America, all types of architecture exist without anyone complaining." What he found most debilitating in "the disease of modernism (or at least one of its diseases, resulting in the ruin of large areas of our cities) is its moralising, that is to say the intrusion of the question of morality into the architectural sphere. . . . When I say that I am not modern I am declaring my rejection of moralising in architecture, a moralising that rages like this in no other artistic discipline. . . . If one finds a Doric column beautiful or ugly, if one likes it or not, that is a decision that has nothing to do with morals. . . . Yet a supposedly democratic Europe regards an architectural style as democratic (and it is moreover hideous), simply because it made use of glass and . . . flat roofs. . . . I make use of what is good, wherever I can find it."<sup>8</sup>

Architectural tourists from Loos to Le Corbusier have managed to find something to marvel at in America, whether it be plumbing, grain elevators, or the Renaissance revivalism of lower Manhattan. Rossi was no exception. "In all my projects and drawings, I believe there may be a hint of . . . naturalism which transcends their oddities and defects," he wrote at the beginning of *A Scientific Autobiography*. "When I saw the complete work of Edward Hopper in New York [in a 1980 retrospective at the Whitney Museum organized by Gail Levin], I realized all this about my architecture: paintings like *Chair Car* or *Four Lane Road* took me back to the stasis of . . . timeless miracles, to tables set for eternity, drinks never consumed, things which are only themselves."<sup>9</sup> Still later in the *Autobiography*, he reflected on Loos's project for the *Chicago Tribune* competition as "his interpretation of America, and not, of course, as one might have thought, a Viennese *divertissement*: it was his synthesis of the distortions created in America by an extensive application of a style in a new context."<sup>10</sup>

Rossi's fascination with American places and themes is one of the persistent revelations in the *Autobiography*. "In this country," he wrote, "analogies, allusions, or call them observations, have produced in me a great creative desire and also, once again, a strong interest in architecture. For example, I found walking on Sunday mornings through the Wall Street

area to be as impressive as walking through a realized perspective by Serlio or some other Renaissance treatise-writer. I have had a similar experience in the villages of New England, where a single building seems to constitute the city or village, independent of its size."<sup>11</sup> He found the "industrial archaeology" of Manhattan especially alluring, sending his students to the no man's land "near the West Side Highway,

where . . . the old wood and iron piers enter the Hudson and are separated from the city by the old and often collapsed highways," to design projects in which "houses are built on the piers, and at times the old buildings are left standing, long warehouses of iron and brick with incredible Palladian heads."<sup>12</sup>

At the time of his death Rossi had already, with Morris Adjmi, his American collaborator and former student at IAUS, realized a large office complex for Celebration, the Walt Disney Company new town near Orlando, Florida (1991–95), and had completed plans for its expansion as well as the design of a large backlot building for the Disney studios in Burbank, California. The American work also includes a ceremonial arch for the Strand in Galveston (1987–90); vacation houses in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania (1988–89) and at Seaside, Florida (1996–97); and an unrealized addition to the School of Architecture for the University of Miami (1986–89), a diminutive acropolis-cum-tower with "colorful, geometric, Mediterranean forms" that Scully predicted would "go well with the more or less Spanish, limestone and stucco vernacular of the region."<sup>13</sup>

But arguably the most impressive reminder of Rossi's intermittent visits to America, independent of size, is destined to reside in the sliver of a building that will begin construction this summer at 557 Broadway, between Spring and Prince streets in the SoHo-Cast-Iron Historic District, to augment the offices of the educational publishers Scholastic, Inc.<sup>14</sup> What Rossi and Adjmi devised is a ten-story duplexed *etagerie*, 50 by 200 feet, that will extend west through the block to Mercer Street — the very "synthesis of distortion created by the application of a style in a new context." On its pilaster-gridded Broadway front, the new Scholastic Building mediates between its next-door neighbors, the predominantly masonry Rouss Building (Alfred Zucker, 1888–90) and the terra-

cotta and ironwork "Little" Singer Building (Ernest Flagg, 1902–04). On Mercer, a street of warehouses, it manufactures its own "industrial archaeology" with an exo-skeleton of tapered, ribbed-steel, gantry-cranelike supports stacked one atop another.

Paul Goldberger, reviewing the plans for the new Scholastic Building in the *New York Times*, called it "a textbook example of how to design in a historic district: subtle, brilliantly inventive . . . a testament to the highest values of urbanism."<sup>15</sup> Scholastic is at once a quintessential New York and Rossi building — no Milanese *divertissement* but an affectionate intensification of place, made to measure by an architect who liked his cities "constructed out of preexisting elements that are then deformed by their own context"; by a traveler for whom "perhaps no urban construct in the world equals that of a city like New York . . . a city of monuments such as I did not believe could exist."<sup>16</sup> ■ *Drexel Turner*

1. Ernesto Rogers, quoted in Oscar Newman ed., *New Frontiers in Architecture: CIAM '59 in Otterlo* (New York: Universe Books, 1961), p. 93.
2. Adolf Loos, "Heimatkunst," 1914, collected in Loos, *Trutzdem 1900–1930* (1933; reprint ed., Vienna: Prachner, 1982), p. 130.
3. Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT/IAUS, 1981), p. 46.
4. Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture, 1944–1985* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1986; Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1989; Jessica Levine, transl.), p. 135.
5. Kurt Forster, "Aldo Rossi's Architecture of Recollection: The Silence of Things Repeated or Stated for Eternity," in *The Pritzker Architecture Prize: 1990 Aldo Rossi*.
6. Ibid., p. 138. See also Vincent Scully, "The End of the Century Finds a Poet," in Peter Arnell and Ted Bickford, eds., *Aldo Rossi: Buildings and Projects* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), p. 12.
7. Francesco Dal Co, "1945–1985: Italian Architecture Between Innovation and Tradition," in *A+U Italian Architecture: 1945–1985* (March 1988 extra edition), p. 21; See also Peter Eisenman, "The House of the Dead as the City of Survival," in *Aldo Rossi in America: 1976 to 1979* (New York: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1979), pp. 8–9.
8. Aldo Rossi, interviewed by Bernard Huet, 1992, in *Aldo Rossi: Architect* (London: Academy Editions, 1994), pp. 26–27.
9. Rossi, *Autobiography*, p. 5.
10. Ibid., p. 76.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 64.
13. Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism* (1969; New York: Holt, 1988, 2nd edition), p. 265.
14. Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes: Charles Rouss and 555 Broadway — Broadway, His Middle Name," *New York Times* (August 11, 1996), 9:7. See also Paul Goldberger, "Architecture View: Primers in Urbanism — Written in Cast Iron," *New York Times* (September 22, 1996), 2:36. "Work to Start on New Rossi Building," *Architectural Record* (October 1996), p. 13.
15. Goldberger, op. cit., 9:7.
16. Rossi, "Introduction to the First American Edition (1978)," *The Architecture of the City* (1966; Cambridge, MA: MIT/IAUS, 1982), p. 15.



Building for Scholastic, Inc., New York (1994– ). Broadway elevation.



Scholastic, Inc., Mercer Street elevation.



American General Building, 2727 Allen Parkway, Lloyd Morgan & Jones, 1965. © 1997 John & Anthony



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