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Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE and DESIGN REVIEW of HOUSTON

A TALK WITH MAYOR BROWN

SHADOW PLANNING

FILLING THE DOUGHNUT

MODERN HOMECRAFT

Notes on Contributors

Joel Warren Barna, formerly the editor of *Texas Architect*, is a long-time contributor to *Cite*.

David Dillon is the architecture critic of the *Dallas Morning News*.

Stephen Fox is a fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas.

George Greanias served on the Houston City Council and as Houston's city controller. A former faculty member of the Jones Graduate School of Management at Rice University, he has long been active in community planning issues.

Enid E. Jiménez is publication and marketing coordinator for Rice University's School of Continuing Studies.

Barry Moore, president and managing partner of SJKB/Houston, is an adjunct professor at the Gerald Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston, and directs its Center for Historic Architecture.

Dan Searight is director of architectural design for 3D/International's Houston office and chairman of the AIA's Urban Design Committee.

Mitchell J. Shields is managing editor of *Cite*.

William F. Stern is principal of William F. Stern & Associates, Architects, and an adjunct associate professor at the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston.

Rives T. Taylor is the campus architect for the University of Texas Houston Health Science Center and a lecturer at the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston.

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance

42: Summer-Fall 1998

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Cover: Houston's former convention center, reborn as Bayou Place, brings night and day activity to the heart of downtown.

Cite is printed on recycled paper.

Cite

Downtown dog walkers in Market Square.

CALL

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

FALL LECTURE SERIES
CHANGING FOCUS: PHOTOGRAPHERS VIEW PLACE

September 16 through October 21
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
713.527.4876

From their experience and personal perspectives, the five speakers in this series will explore the relationship between architecture, the environment, and photography. They will show how, through the process of selection, framing, and editing, the photographer captures time and place, forming an image more exacting than memory itself.

Wednesday, September 16, 8 p.m.
EUGENIA PARRY, art historian and author of *The Art of French Calotype*, speaks on "The First Photographs of Architecture — A French Romance."

Thursday, September 24, 8 p.m.
JOHN SZARKOWSKI, author of *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* and former director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, speaks on "Photographs and Buildings."

Wednesday, October 7, 8 p.m.
JULIUS SHULMAN, best known for his definitive record of the California Case Study House Program and subject of the monograph *A Constructed View: The Architectural Photography of Julius Shulman*, speaks on "Architecture and Its Photography."

Wednesday, October 14, 8 p.m.
TIMOTHY HURSLEY, recipient of a 1990 Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects for architectural photography, speaks on "Light and Form: Photographing Modern Buildings."

Wednesday, October 21, 8 p.m.
ALEX MACLEAN, an aerial photographer who documents the profound changes forced upon the land by development, and co-author of *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, speaks on "Transitions on the Landscape."

DOCUMENTING HOUSTON: THE WORK OF PAUL HESTER

October 16 through January 3, 1999
Menil Collection.
713.527.4876

The work of long-time *Cite* photographer Paul Hester will be featured as part of the 25th anniversary celebration of the Rice Design Alliance. This exhibition will contain approximately 40 black and white prints that will provide a chronicle of Houston since 1978.

CINEMARCHITECTURE VII

October 16 through 31
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
713.639.7530

A film festival focusing on works about architects and architecture. Co-sponsored by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Friday, October 16, and Saturday, October 17, 7:30 p.m. ***Concert of Wills***, directed by Susan Froemke, Bob Eisenhardt, and Albert Maysles (USA, 1997, 110 minutes). Twelve years in the making, this film chronicles the conception, construction, and completion of the Getty Center in Los Angeles. Maysles Films, veteran documentarians whose oeuvre includes *Gimme Shelter* and *Grey Gardens*, enjoyed unparalleled access while documenting this billion-dollar project.

Preceded by ***Two Impossible Films***, directed by Mark Lewis (Canada, 1995, 28 minutes), which examines the possibilities of superimposing movies' closing credits over architectural and landscape sites; and ***Guggenheim Museum Bilbao***, directed by Ultan Guilfoyle and Allison Lane (USA, 1997, 10 minutes), which includes interviews with artists and critics on the design of the new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

Sunday, October 18, 5 p.m.
Louis Kahn: Silence & Light, directed by Michael Blackwood (USA, 1995, 58 minutes). Architects, critics, and clients express appreciation for the work of architect Louis Kahn (1901–74), whose works include the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. The film includes rare scenes of Kahn in action.

Preceded by ***Bitings and Other Effects***, directed by Clara van Goo (the Netherlands, 1995, 30 minutes, subtitled), which uses the landscape and architecture of Palermo, Sicily, as a stage set for a dance inspired by the bite of the tarantula; and ***Carlo Scarpa***, directed by Murray Grigor, (UK, 1996, 57 minutes), which explores the design philosophy of the Venetian-born Scarpa (1906–78).

ENDAR

Friday, October 23, 7:30 p.m.
Mary Jane Colter: House Made of Dawn, directed by Karen A. Bartlet (USA, 1997, 90 minutes). American architect and interior designer Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter (1869–1958) designed hotels, curio shops, and rest havens along the route of the Santa Fe Railroad. A proponent of the Arts and Crafts philosophy, her designs drew inspiration from the West's Spanish and Native American cultures.

Preceded by ***Walls of Mexico***, directed by Guido de Bruyn (Belgium, 1993, 55 minutes, subtitled), which profiles Mexican architect Luis Barragán (1902-88).

Saturday, October 24, 5 p.m.
Frank Lloyd Wright, directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick (USA, 1998, 146 minutes). Burns documents one of the most intriguing figures of our time and offers insights into both the history of architecture and the broader sweep of history from the 1890s to the 1950s. The film interweaves Wright's extraordinary career and his equally extraordinary life. Of the 460 Wright-designed buildings that still stand, Burns features the Johnson Wax Building in Racine, Wisconsin; Taliesin, Wright's estate in Wisconsin, and Taliesin West in Arizona; the Guggenheim Museum in New York City; and Wright's home and studio and Unity Temple, both in Oak Park, Illinois.

Friday, October 30, 7:30 p.m.
Peter Eisenman: Making Architecture Move, directed by Michael Blackwood (USA and Germany, 1995, 56 minutes). Colleagues and critics speak about this American architect's work and ideas, which have prompted debate, as have his collaborations with German architect Albert Speer, the grandson of Hitler's architect.

Preceded by ***A Vision Built: Zaha Hadid***, directed by Boris Penth (Germany, 1994, 45 minutes, subtitled), which traces the quirky style of Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid; and ***In Search of Clarity: Gwathmey Siegal***, directed by Murray Grigor (USA, 1995, 45 minutes), which examines the rise of Siegal's modernist architectural firm.

Saturday, October 31, 7:30 p.m.
Jorn Utzon: Clouds, directed by Pi Michael (Denmark, 1994, 72 minutes, subtitled). The Sydney Opera House has become an international icon, yet its architect remains relatively obscure. This Danish TV production, including interviews with Utzon, explores the history of the building and the contretemps that led to the resignation of its visionary architect before its completion.

Preceded by ***Il Girasole: Una Casa Vicino a Verona***, directed by Christoph Schaub and Marcel Meili (Switzerland, 1995, 17 minutes, subtitled), in which the daughter of the engineer of the Italian Casa Girasole recalls how her father designed the house modeled after the sunflower for which it is named; ***Charléty: Un Stade dans la Ville (A Stadium in the City)***, directed by Oliver Horn (France, 1996, 26 minutes, subtitled), which follows the father/son team of architects who designed the major sports stadium within the dense urban context of Porte Gentilly in southern Paris; and ***Nemausus I – Une HLM des Années 80 (Public Housing for the '80s)***, directed by Stan Neumann and Richard Copans (France, 1995, 26 minutes, subtitled) which explores the development of 114 public housing units in the city of Nimes.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE 1998 GALA

Saturday, November 7, 7 p.m.
Edwin Hornberger Conference Center.
713.527.4876

The 12th annual RDA gala, supporting 1998–99 RDA programs and publications, will include dinner, dancing, and a silent auction. The 1998 Award for Design Excellence will be presented to S. I. Morris, who through a series of partnerships and associations extending over decades has been involved in the design of many of Houston's significant buildings.

HOUSTON TALKS: DEAN'S LECTURE SERIES

RDA and the schools of architecture at Rice University and the University of Houston co-sponsor this program, which features international architects who give public lectures and spend time with students of both schools.

Wednesday, November 18, 8 p.m.
Jan Kaplicky, of Future Systems, London, speaks at the Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
713.639.7530

SPRING 1999 LECTURE SERIES PORTUGUESE ARCHITECTURE

March 3 through 31
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
713.527.4876

This lecture series will present the work of four nationally known architects who practice in Portugal. Kenneth Frampton will open the series with a lecture discussing the importance of this work in a historical context.

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE FALL 1998 LECTURE AND EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

All lectures are held at 7 p.m. in the Farish Gallery at Rice University School of Architecture. For gallery hours, call 713. 527.4864 or check http://www.arch.rice.edu.

LECTURES

Tuesday, September 8
Josep Muntanola, "Dialogics of Architecture: The Catalán Experience."

Wednesday, September 9
Magda Saura, "The Architecture of Urban Form."

Monday, September 21
Peter Cook, "Tongue, Claws, and Tail."

Wednesday, October 28
Kevin Daly and Chris Genik, "Catalog."

Monday, November 2
James Corner, "Disposition."

Monday, November 9
Dana Cuff, "Globalization."

Tuesday, December 8
Michael Maltzan, "Recent Work."

EXHIBITIONS

September 18 through October 2
"Tongue, Claws, and Tails," a survey of Peter Cook's work.

October 23 through November 6
"Eichler Homes Exhibition."

Dialogue in Marfa

Art and Architecture

at the Chinati Foundation

By David Dillon

Installation of Donald Judd's concrete pieces at the Chinati Foundation.

Attendees enter the Ice Plant, site of the symposium's talks and lectures.

Panelists James Ackerman (left), Frank Gehry (center), and Robert Irwin (right).

Sculptor Donald Judd went to Marfa to escape the frenetic New York art scene, and to make cool, pristine objects in the clear desert light: objects that would reveal everything about themselves and almost nothing about the artist; objects with no historic or metaphoric content, no meaning beyond materials and construction and the viewer's impressions of both.

As Judd, who died in 1994, later explained, "I liked open land, and cactus, and wasn't very interested in trees. Marfa was perfect."

For two decades, Judd quietly, almost secretively, transformed this tiny West Texas ranching town into a mecca of his minimalist art. For the members of the East Coast art world, it's easier to get to Paris or Berlin than to Marfa, which is a three hour drive into the wilderness from El Paso or Midland. That's precisely the way Judd wanted it. What's the point of a pilgrimage if it's easy?

"If you want to see Giottos, you go to Padua," he once remarked. "If you want to see Judds, you go to Marfa."

During the last weekend in April, more than 600 art-minded pilgrims — from both coasts as well as Europe, Asia, and Australia — did just that. They came not only for Judd's art, but also for a high powered symposium on collaboration between artists and architects sponsored by the Chinati Foundation, which Judd founded in 1976. This was the second in what's intended to be a biennial series of symposia sponsored by the foundation; the first, in 1995, had been on art and the landscape. This year's conferees were particularly interested in Marfa — population 2,424, setting for *Giant*, home base of the Marfa lights. Who could pass up a chance to sit on folding chairs in an unair-conditioned ice plant looking at slides? It was Outward Bound for the culturati.

As an event, the gathering provided an entertaining airing of an important subject, without reaching consensus or conclusions.

"Artists shouldn't do architecture and architects shouldn't do art," proclaimed Swiss architect Jacques Herzog. "But fusing the two makes better projects." Herzog was one in a lineup of lecturers that included artists Robert Irwin, Roni Horn, Claes Oldenburg, and Coosje van Bruggen, as well as University of Texas architecture professor Michael Benedikt and architects Frank Gehry and William F. Stern.

In his presentation, Herzog showed slides of his recent work, including the conversion of a huge, abandoned power plant on the Thames into an annex to the Tate Gallery of Modern Art in London, a project on which he has collaborated extensively with artists, photographers, and graphic designers.

"Collaboration is a nice idea but not very well developed," Robert Irwin countered in his talk. "It's the buzzword of the nineties. Basically, you're thrown into a pit and told to fight it out."

The artist, known for his masterful use of light and space, then gleefully recounted his battle with architect Richard Meier over the garden at Los Angeles's J. Paul Getty Center, in which his topiary trees and serpentine shapes provide a kind of sardonic commentary on Meier's cool white grids.

"Architects talk about intimacy but don't really practice it," Irwin said. "That's what I brought to [the Getty Center]. I was asked to go to war with Richard Meier, which is not the way you usually think of a collaborative project."

And so it went in Marfa. For the two days of the conference, discussions ricocheted back and forth between enthusiasm and disenchantment, with nobody saying flat out that collaboration was a waste of time, but nobody offering firm guidelines for making it work either.

Claes Oldenburg and his wife, Coosje van Bruggen, described their collaboration with Frank Gehry on the Chiat/Day advertising building in Venice, California, the entrance to which is a gigantic pair of binoculars.

"Frank gave away part of his facade to us," said van Bruggen, "and he's regretted it ever since."

While both Oldenburg and van Bruggen said they were constantly looking for interchanges with architects, they conceded that the process was a slippery one.

"The crossing over from art to architecture is very dangerous," Oldenburg said. "There is a line that you don't want to cross. But it's also that tension that attracts us."

A constant point of light in the dialectical fog was the example of Judd himself. For someone who generally despised architects, particularly those who designed spaces for his art, he managed at Marfa to integrate art and architecture, objects and space, in ways that would be inconceivable in a museum.

In a pair of renovated artillery sheds at Marfa's Fort D. A. Russell, 340 acres of which are owned by the Chinati Foundation, Judd installed 100 milled aluminum boxes, each measuring 41 by 51 by 72 inches. On the surrounding prairie he placed 15 concrete sculptures — some open, like gigantic picture frames, other dense and closed like bunkers, but all the same size and all sited with Euclidean precision.

"The whole project blurs the distinction between art and architecture," observed symposium moderator William F. Stern.

Donald Judd considered himself a renaissance man, and — as Harvard architectural historian James Ackerman pointed out in the symposium's opening lecture — in the Renaissance the distinc-

tions between painter, sculptor, and architect were virtually invisible. Everyone took the same basic course of study; the differences emerged through one's talents for drawing and invention.

Over time this sublime synthesis of art and architecture dissolved into bitter contentiousness, reaching its nadir in 1989 with the forced removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* from a plaza in New York City. Serra's sculpture, a giant wall of curved steel, didn't simply ignore its architectural setting, it attacked it. Critics claimed the work affronted visitors, architecture and the whole tradition of public art; supporters insisted that the real affront was the neighboring building, and that it, not the art, should have been removed.

"The public doesn't want art and the government doesn't respect it," groused artist Roni Horn. "Without that respect there are too many compromises and no real invention."

Tilted Arc was just one of the things debated in Marfa. And if two days of discussion didn't lead to any rousing consensus, it did yield a few helpful half-truths: architecture is about space and habitability and art is about self-expression; art is simpler structurally but more complex conceptually than architecture ("It doesn't have windows and toilets," quipped Oldenburg); most significantly, artists and architects speak different languages. Artists think through sketches, while architects rely on plans and blueprints. Artists are trained to nose around a site, studying details, while architects prefer to take the long view. To collaborate, to make something good happen, both have to be willing to give up turf.

Given the lineup of speakers, the symposium predictably focused on museums, and the inescapable question of whether they should be neutral containers of works of art, or works of art themselves. Frank Gehry, whose Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, obviously falls into the latter category, noted that early in his career he'd believed that a museum shouldn't compete with the art it houses, but now he realizes that "artists want to be in an important building, not a neutral one."

Still, as Robert Irwin noted, the frame of reference has changed. It's no longer just art and buildings, but art and buildings in context, art interacting with architecture, and both interacting with their landscape.

Recent federal highway legislation has propelled public art beyond the plaza and the town square into subways, freeways, dams, and recycling centers. Seattle artists have collaborated with local utility companies to turn electrical substations into sculptures and gas works into public parks. In Phoenix, artists have been hired to convert a nondescript recycling center into a civic building with an educational mission. Cities with light rail systems are employing artists to help design stations and transfer centers.

The artist's role in these projects is not simply to add bits of color and texture, but to ask questions that generate good solutions to real-world problems. They can become pivots around which new ideas revolve, and the means by which a project crosses the line from a mere utilitarian structure to a cultural artifact.

One of the more intriguing interactions of art and architecture on the Texas horizon is the proposed Nasher Sculpture Garden in the Dallas Arts District. Here, an architect and a landscape architect will "collaborate" mostly with dead artists to create a major civic space. They'll have to answer such questions as, How should the land be shaped? How large should the buildings be? How many? Which pieces should go where?

Once again, Donald Judd provides a valuable insight. Though he claimed that there was only an accidental connection between Marfa and his work ("The land is the land and the art is the art. The pieces would look just as good in Switzerland"), that was modernist posturing. Marfa is all over Judd's late work. It is a place of simple elemental shapes where the light turns everything into crisp edges and stark volumes. The land taught him horizontality, and animated his abstractions. Arranged in neat soldierly rows, Judd's aluminum boxes seem as varied as the desert sky: golden in the early morning, blue-black in the midafternoon, now shimmering, now enveloped in shadows.

The art was informed by the spaces, the spaces were made for the art. For those who came to the symposium in search of answers, Marfa gave them at least one to take home: it is not this piece or that that matters, but the totality. That's a useful working definition of collaboration, one that Donald Judd combined with a stunning example of its possibilities. ■

Pritzker in the (White) House

By Enid E. Jiménez

Throughout the evening of June 17, the White House had been filled with famous architects. They had been drawn to the nation's capital to watch one of their own receive the pinnacle of architectural awards. Now, as the exterior lights dimmed to a sultry yellow glow, those who had just attended the awarding of the 20th Anniversary Pritzker Prize to Italian architect Renzo Piano contemplated their return to normal life. Piano puffed on a congratulatory cigar and chatted with Rafael Moneo, the 1996 Pritzker winner, and a small clutch of dazzlingly dressed well-wishers. No one seemed to want to make the first move to leave.

The auspicious occasion was made even more auspicious by being hosted by President and Mrs. Clinton and being held in the White House, a first on both counts. Piano, whose only built American projects to date are Houston's The Menil Collection and the Twombly Gallery, had won the 1998 Pritzker Architecture Prize at the age of 60. Born and raised in Genoa, Italy, Piano could count himself among the 20 architects to receive this coveted award, which includes $100,000 and a bronze medallion and was established by the Hyatt Foundation in 1979. He joins the seven other Pritzker laureates whose work can be found in Houston: Philip Johnson, James Stirling, Kevin Roche, I. M. Pei, Gordon Bunshaft, Robert Venturi, and Rafael Moneo.

That evening, the feeling of being enveloped by the White House was overwhelming. Designed by Irish immigrant James Hoban in 1792, this iconic dwelling is perhaps America's most renovated house. It's a place where Americans can sense the rich (if not particularly lengthy) history of their country, and it was an ideal setting for the prize ceremony.

For the mostly architectural guests, just getting to the White House from the nearby Hyatt Hotel was an event. They were whisked the short distance in a motorcade of large buses that ended up stacked like so many beached whales in front of the White House's South Lawn. The buses sat there for about an hour. Dressed in their scrubbed up best, the attendees began to display a certain degree of chagrin and despair as yet another bomb dog approached to sniff the bus tires.

When finally welcomed inside, the guests were allowed to filter from one famous room to the next, soaking in music from military band trios and duos doling out Vivaldi, Mozart, and selections from *Porgy and Bess*. At dusk, everyone was ushered out onto the expansive lawn and then into a billowing, air-conditioned tent. When President Clinton appeared, there was a hush before the band broke into "Hail to the Chief."

The four-course meal was interspersed with a variety of short speeches, the first being Hillary Clinton's passionate comments on the need for a civic architecture. Following her introduction, architectural historian Vincent Scully delivered a perplexing diatribe on subjects unrelated to the evening's honoree. Despite this, Renzo Piano just seemed delighted to be there. After he was introduced, he humbly described his journey as an architect in a world that had supported his methodical work. As he talked about his life in architecture, the enthralled crowd of his peers hung on his every word.

President Clinton spoke last, succinctly addressing the many contributions made by architecture to the cultural foundation of the "American dream." And as he spoke, the crowd spooned up the evening's last course — an homage to architecture made of chocolate and passion fruit mousse with raspberries and kiwi sauces, all constructed to look like miniature buildings. ■

Renzo Piano's two American buildings: Houston's Twombly Gallery (left) and The Menil Collection.

Cite to Remember

Few people have been more closely associated with *Cite* during its decade and a half of publication than photographer Paul Hester. From the second issue on, his pictures have provided an ongoing record of both Houston's past and its relentless drive into the future. Now, as part of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Rice Design Alliance, which publishes *Cite*, an exhibit of Hester's work will be on display from October 16 through January 3 at The Menil Collection, 1511 Branard. The show will contain some 40 black and white prints, among them the photo of shoppers at a lavishly stocked Fiesta, bottom, and the picture of the garishly decorated business, below, that was shot for a series of images illustrating the concept of signs as buildings, and buildings as signs.

Coming in

Cite

Cite 43: Spiritual Spaces

Novelist Paula Webb quizzes priest and therapist J. Pittman McGehee on what makes a space spiritual.

CAM associate curator Lynn Herbert muses on the connections between art, architecture, and the sacred.

Barbara Koerble examines the church architecture of Gary Cunningham.

Walter P. Moore, Jr. 1937–1998

Admired engineer and educator Walter P. Moore, Jr. died June 21 from injuries suffered as the result of an April 4 automobile accident. He was 61. Moore, who had been chairman of the Houston-based consulting firm Walter P. Moore and Associates, Inc., was born and raised in Houston. He graduated from the Rice Institute with a B.A. and B.S. in civil engineering, then received his M.S. and Ph.D. in structural engineering from the University of Illinois. After serving as a captain in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, he joined the firm his father had founded in 1931.

Under Moore's direction, Walter P. Moore and Associates became nationally known for its design of high-rise buildings, sports facilities, and other large projects. In Houston, Moore was involved with the 49-story First City Tower, the Summit, and the Houston Center. He also had a guiding role in the design of the Miller Outdoor Theater in Hermann Park. Over the years, his firm had an impact on the built environments and the quality of life in numerous cities.

Moore was not only an engineer, but an educator. In 1994, he joined the faculty of Texas A&M as an instructor in both engineering and architecture. He held the Thomas A. Bullock endowed chair and was director of the Center for Construction Education and the Center for Building Design and Construction. His honors included induction into the National Academy of Science, receiving the Distinguished Alumnus award from both Rice and the University of Illinois, and being named 1995 Master Builder by the Houston chapter of the Associated General Contractors.

Stan Kawaguchi, past president of the American Consulting Engineers Council, recalls Moore working hard to bridge the sometimes contentious gulf between architects and engineers. And Raymond F. Messer, the current chairman of Walter P. Moore and Associates, has noted that his predecessor was a man for whom "engineering was much more than calculations — what was more important was how engineering served society." ■

Future Shock

Probably no other city in America is undergoing change as explosive as that now taking place in Houston. Wherever you turn, you see the dust of development, the framing of new houses, the shadows of cranes lifting girders into place. In downtown and Midtown alone, a reported $1.2 billion plus in new construction is underway. The city is flush with possibilities in a way it hasn't been for nearly two decades. And yet this torrent of growth throws off the eerie glow of lessons unlearned from Houston's past booms and busts.

The hallmark of Houston development — unfettered market forces embedded in the sacred tradition of laissez-faire property rights — has certainly allowed for rapid response to a phenomenal growth in personal wealth. Neighborhoods, especially those within the Loop, have changed character seemingly overnight. Fed in part by the welcome rediscovery of the downtown trilogy of work, residence, and play, inner-city property has again become dear, and there has been a rush to develop almost any available open space to its highest capacity, often using the same lot-busting scale as was used in the houses in West University during an earlier boom.

In the midst of this activity, planning seems to have been left behind. While discussion of the perils and pleasures inherent in the new construction takes place within the professional architectural and planning communities, this discussion has done little to spark a broader public discourse, and has had little impact on the actions of the developers whose work is changing the face of the city.

This is of more than just academic concern. Because what we build today we build for the next 30 years, for a generation that will be nothing short of revolutionary. Yet while we talk of the new millennium, of new technologies, and of the infrastructure of digital communication and commerce, Houston seems frozen in dated preconceptions and free-market inhibitions. For instance, we have only recently begun to move beyond the aging approach of buses and resurrect the idea of a rail system as an answer to our mass transit needs. Houston faces a staggering range of issues that a frozen mind-set cannot address: Beyond the promise of a 21st-century mass transit strategy and the urban impact of Metro's Downtown and Midtown Transit Streets Project, how will we move around the city? Can we have a historic preservation ordinance with teeth? When will there be public strategies for housing the families who have been stranded by the destruction of Allen Parkway Village and escalating inner-Loop property values? What is the place of city planning and design, much less zoning, in the public realm? How do we generate public discourse about the quality and character of civic space, including the place of public art in the city? And how do we deal with the crucial issue of the increasingly challenged, degraded environment that surrounds us in all the city's neighborhoods?

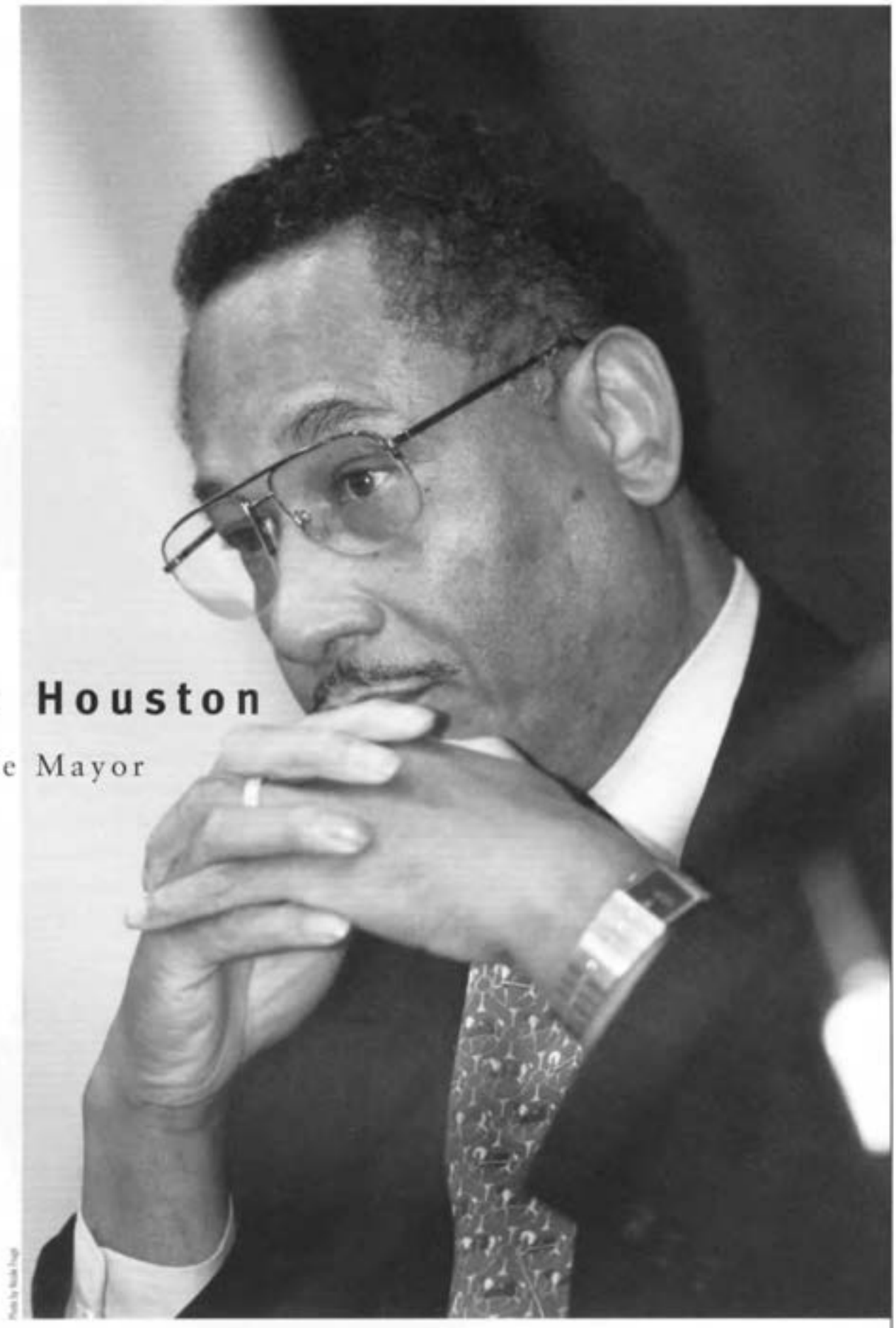
In this issue of *Cite* we try to come to grips with some of these issues — and, perhaps, spark public discourse along the way. In the hopes of Mayor Lee Brown and the concerns of former city controller George Greanias, in the dreams of those who see a downtown throbbing with around-the-clock activity and the dread of those who see the character of their streets being destroyed by careless construction, we can perhaps seek a holistic strategy, one that can tie together large city issues such as transportation, environmental stewardship, civic amenity, and modern communication technologies.

Houston's urban challenges won't be satisfied by quick fixes. We can't afford the short-term mind-set that too often marks the city's developers and, increasingly, corporate builders. In this era of fast growth the city's leaders have to move beyond mere caretaking, or minimal and reactive regulation. What Houston needs is a fully developed and long-lasting armature for growth and stability — something that's unlikely to arise out of unfettered market forces. Instead, such an armature will require political courage, thoughtful analysis, and careful reflection on the part of developers, planners, and government officials working together within the framework that defines this city.

Rives T. Taylor, Guest Editor

Lee P. Brown's Houston

A *Cite* Talk With the Mayor



When Lee P. Brown first moved to Houston in 1982, he was attracted by what attracts many people to the city: the offer of a job. Then-mayor Kathy Whitmire had invited Brown to be Houston's police chief, a post he held for eight sometimes contentious years. When Brown returned to Houston in 1995, after serving as New York's police commissioner and President Clinton's director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, he was also, many people thought, in search of a job, and it wasn't a position as a professor of sociology at Rice University that he was after. Though Brown taught at Rice for a while, what he had his eye on was becoming Houston's mayor. In January, following a December runoff with businessman Rob Mosbacher, he got his wish, being sworn in as the city's first African-American chief executive.

Brown, an Oklahoma-born, California-raised son of migrant farm workers, took over Houston's top position at what may well be a crucial time in the city's history. Under the business and developer friendly rule of his predecessor, Bob Lanier, Houston began a spurt of growth unseen since the height of the oil boom. Almost every part of the city can boast some form of new construction — as well as, and problematically, some form of new destruction. The building up of the new and the tearing down of the old promises to dramatically reshape the look and feel of Houston for decades to come, and much of it will happen on Lee Brown's watch.

In June, frequent Cite *contributor William E. Stern and* Cite *managing editor Mitchell J. Shields sat down with the mayor to discuss the state of the city. The talk began with the problems and opportunities Brown sees ahead.*

C *Cite:* The current wave of downtown and inside-the-Loop development has left some people feeling that the city is evaporating beneath them, while others, following a Houston tradition that goes back to the Astrodome and the Johnson Space Center, are celebrating what they see as Houston's next step into the future. That raises the question of just what is it that makes this city what it is. What are your feelings about Houston? What is it that grabs you, what is it that you think is important, what is it that we ought to be thinking about as we go into the next decade?

B *Brown:* Well, surely I think that the things we should be thinking about are the things that I'm thinking about, and that's reflected in the priorities I've set for the city: neighborhood oriented government, preserving the neighborhoods, solving problems in the neighborhoods, forming a partnership between the city government and the people who live in the neighborhoods. All of this is designed to improve the quality of life for people who live in different neighborhoods throughout our city, whether the neighborhood is downtown, or whether it's a commercial district, or whether it's a residential district. What I'm interested in is making city government accessible to the people, and that's why I started our town hall meetings and the mayor's night in.

Second, I think we should focus on our young people, because they represent the future of the city. We need to make sure that, in the context of the neighborhood, they can get a good education and walk our streets safely, have good parks, and other things of that nature that allow children to grow up and reach their full potential.

The third thing to focus on is transportation. I see Houston, both in perception and in reality, becoming a first class, world-class city. Every world-class city I've gone to has had a world-class mass transit system. So I'm going to develop a year 2000 transportation plan that looks into the future of transportation for Houston.

Beyond that, I want to make sure that we continue our economic development, that we not only keep the ball rolling in terms of what we're doing now, but also recognize that there's an untapped potential for our city in the global marketplace. Houston could become much more of an actor in the global marketplace.

And finally, I'm interested in continuing some of the developments that we have going right now. Improving the infrastructure, continuing in terms of my concern about integrity of government, continuing in terms of just promoting our city both domestically and internationally. Those are five priorities that I have.

C *Cite:* To hit on one point that you mentioned, transportation: there have been complaints in the past that funding meant for Metro was being diverted in order to subsidize other city services, in particular the police. Though you've already reduced the amount of money taken from Metro, and talked about reducing this Metro subsidy even more, do you think that the use of the Metro funds for other purposes has hurt Houston's transportation picture?

B *Brown:* It prevented the city from having a rail system, because the decision was to instead have a bus system as the primary means of transportation. Now, there's often a misperception about using the money to fund the police; I think that happened only one year, and it was probably the right thing to do, considering where the city was at that time. Since then the money has been used for general mobility. And the law allows 25 percent of Metro funds to be used for general mobility — for streets, roads, and other things that get people around.

In fact, though my decision is to cut back on the subsidizing of other services, I still want some of that money — the city gets about $50 million for Metro — to be used for general mobility purposes. But by the same token, I have directed Metro to take another look at rail. One of the things I think is very viable for Houston right now is to have a light rail system going from downtown out to the Medical Center and the Astrodome. We're going to be doing a study to determine what's the best way to address transportation in that corridor — we have to do a study by law in order to get federal monies — and while we can't go into the study with any preconceived notions, I can tell you that I have a bias, which is that I think it would be good for the city to have that rail system going down there.

I also think we should look at commuter rail. If we look at some of the corridors, whether it's I-10 or the West Beltway or U.S. 59 or I-45 out to Galveston, we have to look at not only what's needed now, but what we will need 15 or 20 years from now. So I see my role as not only solving the immediate problems, but also looking out for the future. If we're going to have a rail system in 15 or 20 years, we have to make that decision now. If we don't preserve the right-of-way today, it won't be possible. The decisions made a few years ago about the bus system meant that if we wanted to do a rail system right now, we couldn't, because we don't have the money. So we have to be careful about the decisions we make today so that we preserve our options.

C *Cite:* Is a rail system likely to be expensive?

B *Brown:* It doesn't necessarily have to be. We could probably do the Main Street system for $300 million. Now, if you're going to do heavy rail, yes, that is expensive. It's very expensive in terms of the dollar per mile that it takes to build.

"Every world-class city I've gone to has had a world-class mass transit system. So I'm going to develop a year 2000 transportation plan that looks into the future of transportation for Houston."

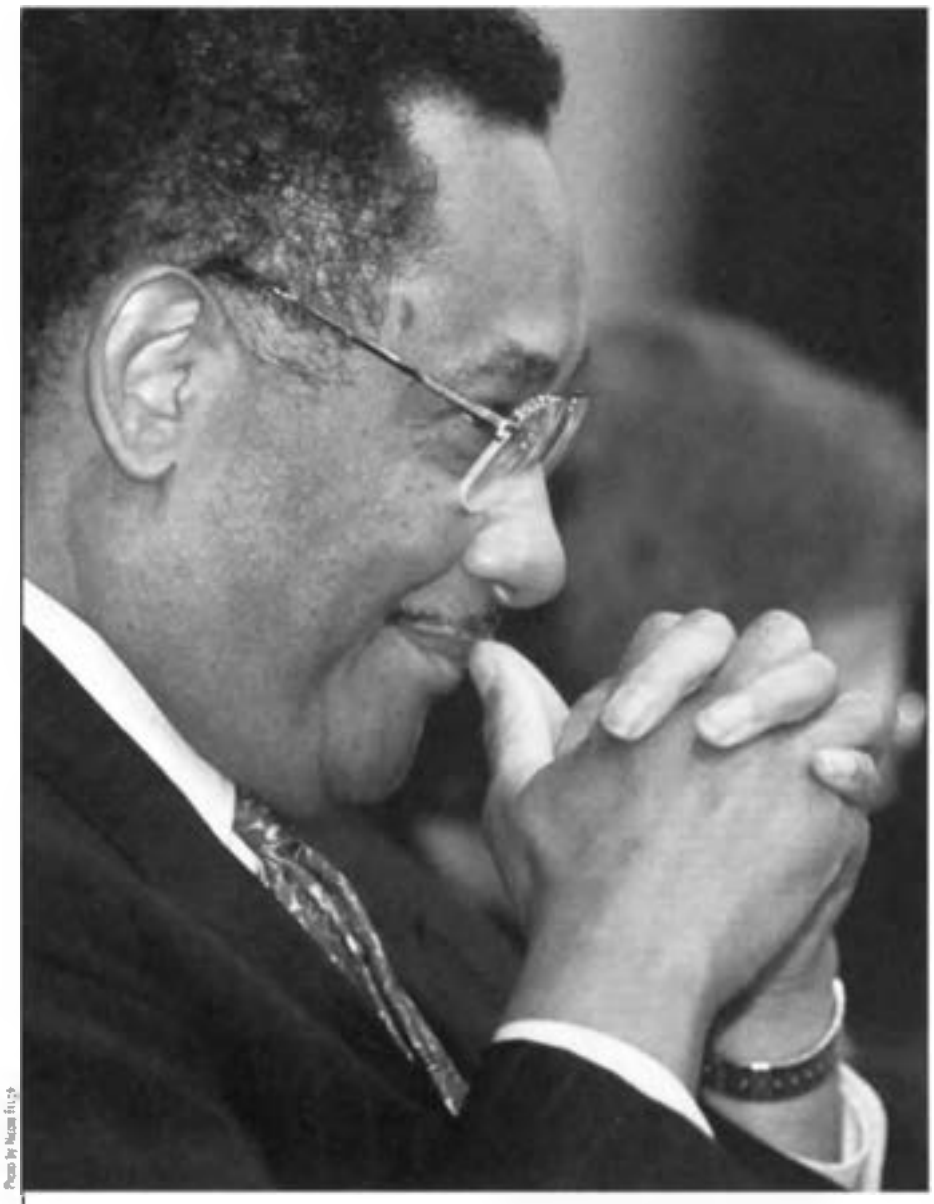


Photo by Nicole Hill

C *Cite:* Does the new federal highway transportation bill include funding for rail transportation that Houston will be able to tap into?

B *Brown:* What that does is bring more federal funds into the state, which controls it, and what we have to do is make sure that the people in Austin give us our share. Houston does have some dedicated funds coming out of the Federal Transportation Administration, but the plan Houston is getting money for now is the better bus plan. What we've gone to Washington with are buses, and that's what they're funding. We do not have anything earmarked for a rail system. And so what we are doing is taking another look at the issue. By January 2000 I'll have a completely new transportation plan that will involve not only the city of Houston, but also the county and Metro and the state as well.

C *Cite:* In terms of transportation, there has been a debate about whether it's more important to make it easier to move point to point within the city or to build roads going out to the suburbs. Whether, in essence, it's better to cater to the urban or suburban traveler. That obviously affects downtown, because in one case you might want streets that are smaller and more pedestrian friendly, and in the other you might want larger thoroughfares that allow for more traffic flow. In Houston, intown residents have often complained that the road interests ruled, and that bigger was always better, even if it disrupted neighborhoods. Where do you think the priority should be?

B *Brown:* I think you have to be concerned both with getting people to the city and with moving them around easily once they're here. Initially, if we want to have a successful rail system, we have to start where you have the density of the rider population, and that's Main Street.

But I also think we have to look at commuter rail, bringing people into the city, then have a means of getting them to the workplace. I can see that if we do the light rail downtown, once we get to the Astrodome there's no reason we can't then go over to the University of Houston, to Texas Southern, even out to the airport.

C *Cite:* Another area of concern is parks. One of the things that defines Houston is that it is so heavily forested, and tree preservation and the conservation of green space is for many a crusade. So far, you've gotten high marks from parks advocates, both with your choice of Oliver Spellman to replace Bill Smith as the director of the Parks and Recreation Department and with your expansion of the parks department's Urban Forestry Division. Could you talk a little bit about that?

B *Brown:* First of all, I want to develop a master plan for parks in our city, and I've given that responsibility to our new parks director. But too, I am expanding our look at our urban forests. As important as trees are to the sense of our city, we don't have a good understanding of the resource. We don't know how many trees we have, we don't know who's responsible for taking care of them. In order to get a handle on that, and make sure we keep an update on it, we have to have the resources in our Urban Forestry Division. That's the purpose of expanding in that area.

C *Cite:* Are they doing a survey of Houston's tree population?

B *Brown:* They will be doing a survey. That's in my budget right now. If we don't preserve it, we lose it, and that's the bottom line.

C *Cite:* The current tree ordinance protects trees that are in the right of way and also those in the building setback zone. But our understanding is that even though there is an ordinance on the books, it's been very difficult to enforce, and that there has been a substantial loss of trees in areas that are being developed, which has created a lot of frustration.

B *Brown:* The ordinance is hard to enforce because we don't know a lot of things. We don't know how many trees we have, where they are. I think that part of what I'm doing with the urban forestry expansion is making sure that we do have an inventory, so we will know what we need to protect. And if anyone comes in to develop an area, we can see through the computer what we already have there.

C *Cite:* So all the trees that would be in the public right of way, or that would be covered by the ordinance, will in some way be recorded?

B *Brown:* That is correct.

C *Cite:* According to the Park People, some developers, even before submitting a plat, will take down a tree, and when the tree is no longer there, it doesn't have to appear on the plat. Things like that have been going on, and it's becoming something of a crisis. Is there a short-term way to address this? Because a tree survey will take a long time.

B *Brown:* Well, adding more resources to urban forestry helps us monitor this as well, and that's part of what we're doing.

C *Cite:* That leads to another issue, which is the enforcement of ordinances in general. Enforcement is the responsibility of the planning department, which shrank in size when the push for zoning failed. We've heard from some planners that the planning department simply doesn't have enough people to do its job, that it doesn't have the resources to monitor what it should be monitoring. Do you have any new plans for the department?

B *Brown:* I haven't heard what you're hearing. The planning director did not come to the table during the budget process saying he did not have enough people. What he asked for, and what I think is important for him to receive, is the technology to get the job done. We have a capability that we're not taking advantage of in terms of computer technology. The planning department has the responsibility now to help implement neighborhood oriented government by developing plans for every neighborhood in the city. We've created a map to show the city's identifiable neighborhoods. We're up to about 90 right now, and what we will do is develop a plan, not just for the city, but more so for the people who live in the neighborhood, and we'll

depend on them telling us what they want their neighborhood to be. Once we have that information, we can then use our resources to work with them in making sure that what they want to happen actually happens.

C *Cite:* How large will these neighborhoods be? Looking at your map, they seem to be very large areas, and we think sometimes of neighborhoods as much smaller entities.
B *Brown:* There are different ways to look at it. To come up with the neighborhoods we did an overlay of about everything you can think of: council districts, police beats, subdivisions, you name it. And the size varied. Some on our map are small, some are large. Within one of the big neighborhoods we may have smaller neighborhoods. The Heights, for example, is considered to be a neighborhood, but in the Heights you have a lot of sub-neighborhoods as well, and we've already put together a plan that recognizes more than one neighborhood in what we call the Heights.

C *Cite:* So what will the planning department do? What is the procedure?
B *Brown:* Well, first of all, it involves not just the city doing it, it involves all the people who live in the neighborhoods through their organizational representation. The planning department will be the expediter to bring everyone together, and then the people will decide what they want their neighborhood to look like in terms of the infrastructure, in terms of whatever they want. That becomes their input into city government. And then once we have a plan, it is our objective to help them implement that plan. It could be capital improvements, it could be parks, it could be you name it, whatever the neighborhood wants. So what you would have is a partnership between the neighborhoods and the city departments.

C *Cite:* To clarify, say you live in Meyerland; rather than coming down to City Hall with everyone else, there would be someone you know in Meyerland who would then be your conduit to City Hall?
B *Brown:* We would have, for lack of a better term, a neighborhood liaison for that neighborhood who knows about everything that goes on there, someone who everyone in the neighborhood knows. That person would also have contacts in city government. If there's a problem with some potholes, basically they can call this one person and he can get it taken care of. I see our government as dealing with the problems that we're responsible for — getting the garbage picked up, taking care of the roads and parks, working on school issues, and things of that nature. But to make it easy, access becomes important. In my first town hall meeting, for example, a lady got up and said, "I've had this problem ten years." Well, it was a stoppable problem. It was a police problem, and I had my police chief there, so the problem was taken care of, because she was able to talk to someone who makes the decisions.

C *Cite:* Will that neighborhood liaison come out of the planning department, or are you going to set up a new department?
B *Brown:* I'm not creating any new bureaucracies. Planning can do what they're best at doing, which is planning, not delivering services. We have mechanisms for that, whether the issue is solid waste, public works, parks, whatever. We already have departments for that. And we already have the Mayor's Assistance Office, which provides liaisons. And that office will be broadened.

C *Cite:* Sometimes what a neighborhood wants is to maintain its historic appearance. But without zoning, legally there may not be much that can be done if someone wants to come in and, say, tear down a house and put up a couple of townhomes. If you were to find in going to a neighborhood that their top priority is "We want deed restrictions" or "We would like some mechanism to better preserve the quality of this neighborhood," how would you address that?
B *Brown:* Well, absent deed restrictions, you have a problem. We do have the mechanism to help them develop deed restrictions. Our legal department can help them accomplish that objective. And where there are deed restrictions, we help in terms of their enforcement. But our historic preservation ordinance doesn't have any teeth in it. I think we need to strengthen that ordinance, and we're taking a look at that.

C *Cite:* People are becoming increasingly aware of the power that ordinance could have, and the weakness it has now. What would you like it to become?
B *Brown:* I don't know what it should become right now, because I'm just beginning to focus on it. I do know that it doesn't accomplish what many people want, and it probably will not unless

there's a strong political movement to make it happen. We hear people talk about archaeological and historic preservation, but there's no movement to make it happen.

C *Cite:* You believe this has to become more of a grassroots movement?
B *Brown:* Yes, I do. It has to go before City Council and get approval. It becomes a political decision at some point in time, and therefore there has to be some movement from the people to make it happen.

C *Cite:* But Houston has probably the weakest historic preservation ordinance to be found among the nation's major cities. Don't you think there's a way to use political leadership to speed up reforming it?
B *Brown:* Sure, we can do that, and that's what I'm looking at right now. Keep in mind, though, that the city has a history of growth. That's the environment that's here, and that's why I say there has to be some political movement to bring about a much stronger ordinance.

C *Cite:* With the destruction of Allen Parkway Village and the loss of many houses in Fourth Ward, one concern has been about affordable housing. Historically, there has been a long waiting list for public housing in Houston. Do you have any ideas on how to prevent Houston's poor from being be left behind by the current boom?
B *Brown:* There are some things that we

"The planning department has the responsibility now to help implement neighborhood oriented government by developing plans for every neighborhood in the city."

Photo by Ric del Rosal

"The arts, in my estimation, are extremely important, not only in terms of cultural enrichment of our city, but also economically. Our city should be an arts/cultural destination, a place to which people travel because of our symphony, opera, ballet, the performing arts."

can control, and some we can't. We can't control private development. We can control where the city is doing something, such as in our tax increment financing districts. Fourth Ward is a good example. We will ensure that there will be affordable housing in Fourth Ward. Anyone who comes before us with a request for a TIF [tax increment financing district] must have a component of affordable housing.

C *Cite:* what would you consider affordable? To one person affordable housing might mean a $150,000 house as opposed to a quarter-million-dollar house. But to people who are working on the lower end of the economic scale...

B *Brown:* To my mind affordable housing is not a $150,000 house. We're trying to have something that people can afford. There are some guidelines we use that are based upon the poverty line. I don't know the exact formula off the top of my head, but it's a certain percentage of the poverty line.

I will continue to place a great emphasis on affordable housing. It is extremely important. But again, there are things we can't control. For example, we're investing in Fourth Ward, and that investment will change Fourth Ward. But we have no control over private developers coming into the areas outside of where the city is investing. They can come in and develop whatever they want to. That's the free enterprise system. We can't make them do anything in terms of affordable housing.

C *Cite:* Could you expound a little bit on how your administration is investing in Fourth Ward?

B *Brown:* Oh, the Renaissance project out there, they're land banking, they're doing it with public funds. Then there's another group, the Fourth Ward Coalition, that's looking at development. If we put our public funds in it, then we have some say-so in terms of what the final outcome would be by mandating that you have X number or a certain percentage of affordable housing in addition to high-end housing. But also I'm going to ask City Council to approve Fourth Ward as a tax increment financing district, which then gives us control of land use in that area.

C *Cite:* At one time, Fourth Ward boasted the largest enclave of historic shotgun houses in an urban setting in the South, a legacy that, over the last 20 to 25 years, has slowly been destroyed. This is an important African-American neighborhood that has deteriorated, and there's a sense in some circles that in the past the city almost promoted the loss of some of this property because the land, sitting on the doorstep of downtown, was so valuable. And then there was the destruction of Allen Parkway Village. This seems to be a very sad story. There are a lot of people who are concerned about what will happen to Fourth Ward as a neighborhood. It seems to be on the verge of being lost. How do you feel about that?

B *Brown:* Well, a couple of observations. I've been in those homes, and the people there should not have to live in the conditions they live in. There's nothing desirable about those shotgun homes if you've ever been inside of them. We've been trying to build affordable housing in this city ever since I've been here. We now have the opportunity to do that. The big problem is, what happens outside of the zones that the city can control? There's nothing that the city can do in terms of telling home builders what they can do with their money. This is a free enterprise system, pro growth, but in the areas we're putting together as tax increment financing districts, then we do have control in terms of how the land is used.

C *Cite:* There have been other cities that have instituted programs of restoring these kind of houses. I understand their condition now is appalling, but Houston could come forward with a program, as other cities have done.

B *Brown:* We do that, and we're doing that in some parts of Fourth Ward, but some of those houses are not restorable. Again, I think you have to go there and do what I've done, walk through some of those places and see the deplorable conditions that people are living in. And we have absentee landlords; they recognize the value of that property, and that's why they didn't do anything to take care of it for years and years and the houses have deteriorated, in a lot of respects have

On the Rail Track

Re:RAIL

When the Rice Design Alliance held its "Re: Rail" Fireside Chat on May 14, who showed up was as meaningful as what was said. The panel assembled for a public discussion of rail as a possible element of Houston's mass transit included one guest that, a year before, few people would have expected to see in such a group: the city's mayor.

Of course, the year before the mayor had been Bob Lanier, who was outspoken in his opposition to commuter rail. This time the mayor was Lee Brown, who, until this point, had been ambivalent on the subject. In the weeks following the Fireside Chat, Brown would make it clear that his ambivalence had given way to enthusiasm for a light rail demonstration project running down Main Street, but when he was invited to participate in the RDA event his position was still largely unknown.

Still, says Rafael Longoria, an associate professor of architecture at the University of Houston and, along with state representative Jessica Farrar, one of the main organizers of "Re: Rail," the moment the idea of having a Fireside Chat on rail and mass transit surfaced in an RDA program committee meeting, it was decided that the mayor should be part of the package. "Since Lanier was gone, that removed a psychological block, and we were, so to speak, back on track to consider [rail] as an option," Longoria says, adding that the RDA had hoped that Brown would

use the Fireside Chat to "officially communicate how he felt about rail."

Mayor Brown did just that, making it clear that he would like to see a light rail system running out of downtown in the direction of the Medical Center and the Astrodome by 2005. The other panelists — Farrar, Longoria, Metro chairman Robert Miller, sociologist Stephen Klineberg, and former Dallas Area Rapid Transit chair Kathy Ingle — were equally enthusiastic about rail's possibilities, resulting in less of a debate over rail's pros and cons than a laying out of all the reasons why rail should be a part of Houston's immediate future.

The 100-plus crowd who had come to Rice University's Baker Institute to listen also seemed composed largely of rail advocates, leaving DART veteran Ingle and sociologist Klineberg as the only ones to offer up a few cautionary comments. While unwavering in her advocacy of rail, Ingle noted that 13 years had elapsed between DART's founding and the opening of Dallas's first light rail line, and suggested that it might be unrealistic to expect Houston to have a line in place on Main Street by 2005. She offered up a list of lessons Dallas learned in the drive for rail. First, be patient; rail can take time. Second, don't start construction until you've cleared all your right-of-ways and dealt with issues of noise mitigation and the like; trying to take care of that while building a line can be expensive. Also, don't make promises you can't keep; overselling makes you an easy target for rail opponents. At the same time, don't set your sights too low; in Dallas, ridership has exceeded projections. And never discount the possibility of being a victim of your own success. In Dallas, Ingle noted, once the first rail lines began running, DART was besieged by those who wanted rail out to their communities immediately. Only by having a long-term mobility plan in place, she said, were they able to persuade people to wait their turn.

Klineberg's cautions came only at the end, and at the specific request of moderator Jessica Farrar. Earlier, Klineberg had noted that his annual Houston Area Survey, which he began in 1982 to track Houston residents' opinions on a variety of topics, had started to show indicators favorable to rail. A growing number of Houstonians, he said, are concerned about traffic; not since 1986 has his survey turned up so many people who consider traffic and mobility the city's primary problem. At the same time, he added, more respondents are focused on the need for a revitalized downtown, which makes selling a downtown-oriented rail system easier.

Still, as the Fireside Chat drew to a close, Klineberg agreed to play the devil's advocate and come up with an anti-rail argument. Houston, he said, is a city with mobility needs that won't respond to a single fix. More alternatives are need: better bike trails, an improved pedestrian system, intelligent street lighting to make traffic flow more efficiently, an increased emphasis on telecommuting, flexible work scheduling so that not everyone travels the streets at the same time. "There are all kinds of solutions and alternatives that keep faith with the great Houston experience," Klineberg concluded, "which is individual choice and freedom and variety and unpredictability of the future."

The audience applauded his quick thinking. But even the devil's advocate, they couldn't help but notice, hadn't ruled rail out. He hadn't said rail wasn't *an* answer, just that it wasn't *the* answer. And on that point, everyone seemed to agree.

Mitchell J. Shields

become a hazard to live in. People pay $100, $150 a month for rent, but it's not a good place to live.

C *Cite:* What are the plans for the vacant land that was once Allen Parkway Village?

B *Brown:* We're going to build more public housing there. That was always part of the plan. That's ongoing right now. The only thing that's been delaying it has been the finding of the remains of a grave site there.

C *Cite:* But the Allen Parkway Village site is being developed not just for affordable housing, but also for market housing. Correct?

B *Brown:* You have a mixture of homes there, which I think makes good sense. I think it was a terrible public policy that this country entered into when you put all the poor people in the same place. You should have a mixture.

C *Cite:* If not all those displaced units are going to be replaced with public housing, where is the affordable housing to take their place being built?

B *Brown:* Most of the units are being replaced at the Allen Parkway Village site, and others are being built as affordable housing in Fourth Ward. We've done an inventory of everybody who's being displaced in Fourth Ward, so we pretty well know the impact of the units that are being demolished. And there is some mechanism in place now — and that was not the case before — to insure that we do not just kick people out. That was an issue that came to the surface since I've been mayor. There were no plans before; now we have plans. If the city's involved in redevelopment with public funds, then the developers must have a replacement program, must have affordable housing.

C *Cite:* On a different subject, Houston has some of the nation's most prominent arts organizations. It has one of the country's leading opera companies, a widely admired ballet, and great museums. These are all popular, and they bring in a tremendous amount of revenue. But historically the city hasn't provided much financing for these organizations. The city has begun construction of a new baseball stadium, which is a very expensive endeavor, and yet we've watched as the symphony suffered through serious financial problems, and as the Museum of Fine Art builds its expansion almost solely with private funds. Do you see the city becoming more of a participant with these cultural institutions?

B *Brown:* The answer is yes, and let me add another dimension. The city participates much more now than is generally recognized in terms of the infrastructure for the arts in the city. Millions and millions in city funds go into the arts right now.

C *Cite:* You mean for the maintenance of buildings such as Jones Hall and the Wortham Center?

B *Brown:* Right. Here we're talking about millions of dollars. On the hotel occupancy tax, there's 19 percent that could go to the arts. Under the past administration that was capped at a certain amount of money. I've removed the cap, and they'll be up to their full amount in about a year. The arts, in my estimation, are extremely important, not only in terms of cultural enrichment of our city, but also economically. Our city should become an arts/cultural destination, a place to which people travel because of our symphony, opera, ballet, the performing arts. We have more theater seats here than any other city outside of New York City. That's really a jewel in our city. So that will get more support from me.

C *Cite:* One final question. How do you get the public interested in planning? How do you get them involved in the idea that what happens now has results down the road, in realizing that unless you plan now, ten years from now you might look around and discover that the city you loved has disappeared and been replaced by a city that you're not quite as fond of?

B *Brown:* You make the changes understandable. Conceptually, what I'm doing is what I did as police chief. I implemented neighborhood oriented policing, where we assigned the police to a neighborhood to work with the people to solve the problems. I think it's been extremely successful, and I use as an example the fact that it has now been adopted all over America and most parts of the free world. To me, the next logical step is to have all of government do what we have the police do: Work in neighborhoods, form a partnership, solve problems in neighborhoods, and make the quality of life better. As an analogy, if I wanted to solve crime in Houston, to say I'm going to solve crime in Houston doesn't have much meaning. I live in Meyerland, and if I want someone to solve crime in Meyerland, then I can measure the crime problem, tell you what we're doing, and fill the void and make the difference. The same thing is true with neighborhood oriented government.

I have a chart in my office with the heading Houston Networks that shows the many structures that exist to let people know what's happening in their city: civic associations, apartment associations, business associations, homeowner associations — they're already out there. And then on the other hand we have the city services, what we're delivering. If you bring those together in a manageable geographical area, and have the people having a real partnership with the city and the power to say what's important to them, and then the city uses its resources in conjunction with the resources in the community, I think we can make a tremendous difference. ■

Filling the

Clearing for new townhouse and apartment construction southwest of downtown.

By Joel Warren Barna

It wasn't all that long ago that someone driving through the neighborhoods inside the Loop would have noticed an air of, if not necessarily decay, at least stagnancy. Houston's energy was to be found elsewhere, out along the rim, where planned communities bloomed and new commercial complexes carved out space next to the freeways. But now that's changed. Anyone cruising the real estate circumscribed by Loop 610 today can't help but be struck by the suggestion of a city being reborn, for good or ill. The area within two miles of the center of downtown Houston has been experiencing growth rates of nearly 33 percent per year in the number of dwelling units being built, a boom that is fast transforming what was only recently a struggling business district into one of Texas's fastest-growing residential neighborhoods. One statistic makes the point: in early 1995, there were some 900 apartment and condominium units available in Houston's central business district. By the end of next year, that number will grow to almost 2,000.

The change is dramatic throughout the city. Between January and June of this year, Houston's Planning and Development Department recorded applications for 3,819 new multi-family dwellings inside the Loop, and 2,921 more outside. In addition, 695 applications for single family structures were logged inside the Loop, and 1,432 outside. This influx is touted by some as bringing new life to a number of historic properties, and, more important, bringing renewed vitality to several threatened neighborhoods. Others, less sanguine, have complained that too many of the changes are destroying history rather than saving it, and that the new Houston that's being birthed is not a particularly pretty one.

In terms of size, the sections of downtown and Midtown undergoing the most rapid growth are only a small part of an awesomely sprawling whole — little more than 12 square miles out of a total geographic area of 617 square miles. In urbanistic impact, however, the current change in downtown and midtown is the most important shift of pattern since the creation of Loop 610 in the late 1950s.

Factors as diverse in scale as a rebounding national economy, an activist mayoral administration, and the end of the sewer moratorium inside 610 have combined to stimulate an interest in the central city among both builders and buyers, creating the first major centripetal force for development in Houston in more than 30 years.[1]

DOWNTOWN'S DECLINE: 1960–1994

The creation of Loop 610, which linked the spokes of Houston's radial north-south and east-west freeways, made vast tracts of land accessible from high-speed motorways, opening huge areas for new suburban subdivisions by providing fast connections to the rest of the city.

Loop 610 turned Houston from a fragmenting but still centrally focused spatial entity into something more like a doughnut, with the field of development and growth focused at its edges, and it took only a few years from the Loop's construction for the center of the doughnut — downtown — to start turning into a hole.

Interchange connections between 610 and Interstates 45 and 10 and U.S. Highways 59 and 290 afforded a huge jump in accessibility for each of those junctions, giving them the same status as centers for retail and office development that downtown had previously enjoyed. Downtown became just another node in a multinode grid, and a has-been at that, with already established high densities and high land prices. Although signature high-rise buildings continued to be built downtown throughout the seventies and early eighties, after 1970 the volume of office space outside the city core outranked that downtown by more than three to one. Downtown began a decline that turned precipitous in the mid-eighties, when the bank and savings-and-loan crisis drove the high-dollar name tenants of the downtown towers first into retrenchment and then, in many cases, completely out of business. The economic bust hurt the suburban real estate market too, of course: The statistics for suburban office vacancy were almost always higher than for downtown. But those figures masked a deeper abandonment of the central city. By the late 1980s, almost 35 percent of downtown Houston was given over to surface parking.

Similar scary conditions developed just outside the downtown core, where increasing numbers of properties went vacant. Residential and small commercial properties on and around Main Street south of the Pierce Elevated were abandoned; many burned, leaving gaps in the city fabric. The decline, already pronounced in the Scott Street area east of downtown, moved westward from the central busi-

Doughnut

ness district, clearing away blocks of Fourth Ward and traveling through Midtown along Dallas and West Gray, up through the eastern ends of Westheimer, Alabama, and Richmond, into Montrose and across Waugh Drive to finally lap at the edges of River Oaks along Shepherd Drive.

DOWNTOWN BACK AGAIN

It is in reversing this trend that the present resurgence of development is so significant. The nodes of Loop 610 have almost filled in, and now that Beltway 8, some five to seven miles farther out, is nearing completion, it seems that a sizable market of home buyers and renters who want to escape the suburbs and the time demands of commuting has developed. It's as if Houston had stretched out so far that its sprawl began doubling back on itself. The hole in the doughnut has turned into a city edge on a par with the edges outside Beltway 8, and is now open for the big shifts in density that used to be the sole province of suburban tracts. Builders and buyers have discovered that the downtown skyline is a unique amenity, something that turns the intown segment of the multinode grid into a memorable, affecting place.

> This is a historic moment for Houston, albeit one that is not unique (similar interest in downtown living has been developing in Fort Worth, Dallas, and Austin). Not only are the young and the hip gravitating in increasing numbers to inner-city loft spaces, but they're also being accompanied by a sizable number of older "empty nester" buyers uninterested in suburban schools and bored by suburban sameness. Still, these trends have existed, at least in an attenuated form, for a long time. The real surprise is that a major suburban residential developer is doing a booming business within a stone's throw of downtown, selling the equivalent of regular suburban houses to people very much like regular suburban buyers.

This is a remarkable change, and it's worth tracing the factors that have combined to stimulate the market for housing in and near downtown Houston. First, at the national scale, the economy recovered from the recession of the early 1990s, and Texas, now much more closely aligned with the national economy than before, completed its recovery from the effects of the real estate and oil busts of the 1980s. Interest rates for commercial and residential loans fell. Then, for reasons that are still being debated across the country, crime rates began to fall. The fear of walking on downtown streets began to decline. Throughout the city there was confidence in the economy, money available to finance construction, and a new perception about Houston's safety.

So all of a sudden, young couples, single people, and empty nesters could contemplate living in one of those hip loft spaces that were in the news and not feel that they were placing themselves in danger.

MAKING NEGATIVES POSITIVES

Given the state of the inner city, however, a falling crime rate was not in itself enough to induce a flood of new residents. Simply decreasing one negative aspect wasn't sufficient. There were other issues to deal with, from the presence of the homeless to the area's many empty blocks and buildings. What was needed to attract people downtown was something new and positive.

Over the years, many attempts had been made to come up with any number of positive changes downtown. The American Institute of Architects, the Rice Design Alliance, and the architecture schools at Rice and the University of Houston were among a number of groups that sponsored a steady stream of design workshops, shows, and thinkathons aimed at helping developers and the city government see the potential for redevelopment in particular properties and various neighborhoods.

What may have turned the tide were the transformations of two hulking derelicts: the Rice Hotel and the Albert Thomas Convention Center. Both had long been the subject of protracted brainstorming and negotiations that went nowhere. The turning point for these two projects, and for the attractiveness of downtown residential property in general, came with the election of Bob Lanier as mayor. A suburban apartment developer whose antipathy toward a mass transit rail system was an important part of his campaign, Lanier wasn't expected to be particularly interested in the fate of the inner city. That expectation turned out to be wrong.

"Bob Lanier was very focused from the first of his administration to the last on inner-city redevelopment. For the first time ever, he directed city resources to rebuilding central-city neighborhoods," claims Guy Hagstette, who as director of capital projects and planning for the Houston Downtown Management District has a particular interest in seeing downtown grow. "He deserves a huge amount of credit for the good things that are happening downtown now."

Lanier's point man in pushing the rebirth of downtown was Michael

The Metropolis, a Randall Davis loft development at Waugh and West Gray, Page Southerland Page, architect (1997).

Ubiquitous housing developer Perry Homes readies the block at Team and LaBranch for a 44-unit townhouse project.

Stevens, who was tapped to head the Houston Housing Finance Corporation (HHFC), a city agency that had been created to use federal funds to build affordable housing. Stevens, a real estate developer who left city government following the election of Lee Brown, and who is now pushing the creation of new arenas for basketball and football, says that he began at HHFC by "scouring the HHFC's outstanding bonds." The agency, he says, had borrowed lots of money for projects in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and was still paying for the bonds at high rates of interest. "We refinanced those bonds," says Stevens, "and generated $20 million in liquidity for HHFC."

That bankroll enabled HHFC to buy 2,500 abandoned apartment units around the city, rehabilitate them, and sell them to developers for a profit of $9 million. Though some critics claimed that the city was getting too deep into being a real estate developer and forgetting its commitment to affordable housing — restrictions on the apartment sales were supposed to keep 30 percent of the units affordable, but there was some debate over how seriously those restrictions were enforced — Stevens says that "my concept was to only do the deals that needed doing. If a building is having a positive or a neutral impact on its surroundings, don't get involved in it. But if it's having a negative impact, hurting tax revenues from property values around it, that's the type of project where involvement by the public sector can have the maximum benefit on public funds."

Stevens brought this concept, funds from the HHFC, and his experience with financing commercial projects to bear on both the Rice and the Albert Thomas Convention Center. The latter was metamorphosed into Bayou Place, which, while not exactly perfect (there's lots of interior space that remains unfinished), is already a remarkable success in urban terms. The Angelika Film Center is bringing in moviegoers from across the city, while the center's restaurants and music clubs provide ancillary attractions. The result at Texas and Smith is, at least in the early going, one of the most successful public spaces that Houston has seen. The connection between Bayou Place's sidewalk cafes and the formerly all-but-dead plaza in front of the Wortham Center crackles with energy by day, and by night, with a full complement of people on the street, it's even better.

When the Rice renovation is finished — something that's projected to happen this fall — it promises to have a similarly stimulating impact on downtown life.

The Rice Hotel project will have 312 lofts, but equally important, it will have 25,000 square feet of retail space, meaning, at least potentially, services for residents who will be able to shop for groceries without getting into their cars to drive outside downtown. The hopes for this retail space are big, perhaps unrealistically so. But it's clear that the interest in properties in and around Market Square is having important spin-off effects. For example, some 25 new restaurants have opened in the area in the past year.

"The number of restaurants that have opened in the north end of downtown is amazing," says Steve Flippo, associate director of the Downtown Historic District. As someone who works to give historic buildings new uses rather than see them cleared by the wrecker's ball, he is delighted that restaurants have opened in the street-level spaces of the Brashear Building (1882), the Hogg Building (1921), the Hermann Estate Building (1916), and the Roco Building (1870).

WHO IS BUILDING WHAT, WHERE?

The perceived success of high-profile projects such as Bayou Place and the Rice Hotel add cachet to downtown living, and have helped encourage a broader residential boom, something that has been building since the early 1990s, when the Houston central business district contained just under 900 dwelling units in four high-rise apartment/condominium projects: the Beaconsfield, built in 1908; 2016 Main, built in 1964; Houston House, built in 1965; and Four Seasons Place, which opened in 1982. In 1993, however, Randall Davis, who went on to become the developer of the Rice Hotel, opened his Dakota Lofts project, 53 converted industrial/warehouse spaces on William Street north of downtown. He followed this in 1995 with the Hogg Palace on Louisiana, with 79 loft spaces. The loft concept — high ceilings and tall windows, open plans with floating interior walls, exposed brick walls and ductwork, and industrial flooring — has been a staple of artists' live/work spaces throughout the country since the 1960s. Indeed, that's part of what makes them attractive to a wider market today. With the opening of Davis's properties, the loft apartment concept took on a new marketability in Houston. It formed the basis for the redevelopment of the Rice, and it provided the pattern for scores of smaller projects, either of conversion or new construction, built or planned north and west of downtown, with high windows turned to the Houston skyline. (Davis himself developed the most visible of these projects, the Metropolis at Waugh and West Gray, a new building in a loft style with silly-looking gargoyles, but with huge expanses of glass facing downtown.)

Other high-dollar loft residences under way for downtown include 220 Main, a 30-unit condominium project developed by Q Ratio Texas; Bayou Lofts at 907 Franklin, developed by Spire Realty, which will have 107 units; Main Street Plaza, a 110-unit project at 705 Main, developed by Randall Davis; and the 90-unit Humble Building at 1212 Main, developed by URI. All these projects are set to open in 1999.

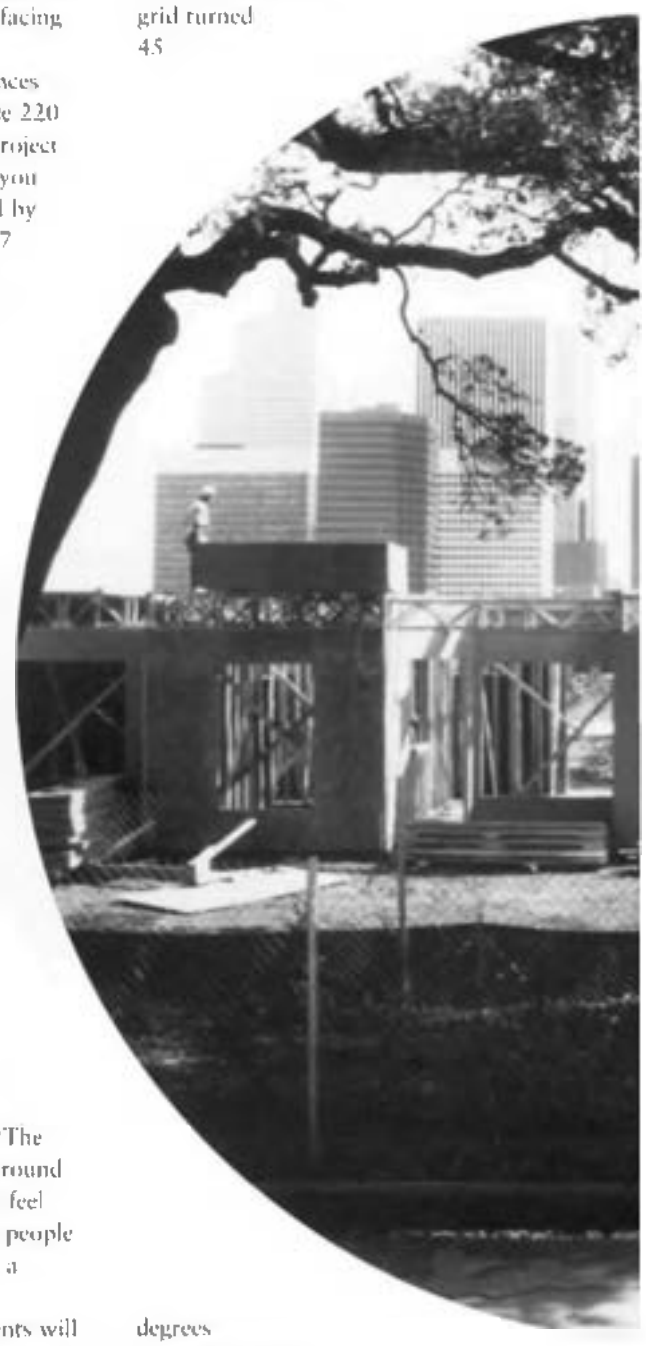
At the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of price, but no less significant for downtown, are four projects developed by New Hope Housing, Inc., and Houston Area Community Development Corporation. These are single room occupancy residences at 320 Hamilton and 1414 Congress that are designed to house the formerly homeless.

As significant as this stream of projects is, the numbers are almost certain to change drastically over the next year as the Rice Hotel comes on line. As Michael Stevens notes, "The more people you have walking around downtown, the more people will feel comfortable there, and the more people will feel that living downtown is a viable option."

In addition, other developments will add to the interest in downtown. The Houston Downtown Management District's Guy Hagstette, who lives downtown, says that four of his neighbors moved into the building where he lives when their employer moved its offices to the central city from the suburbs. Hagstette says that he expects to see similar effects later this year, when Continental Airlines moves its headquarters downtown.

FILLING IN MIDTOWN

All the factors that contributed to downtown's decline, and all the factors that are now contributing to its resurgence, have also affected the Midtown area, the section of the city south of downtown and west of Interstate 45 and U.S. 59. Like downtown, Midtown has a street grid turned 45



degrees from the north-south grid of neighborhoods to the west. And like downtown, Midtown has a lot of open land.

There is a special factor at play in Midtown and the neighborhoods to its west — the lifting of the city's sewer-connection moratorium. Previously, builders were limited by the local sewer capacity to the density of previous uses of a given

In Houston's Midtown, apartment developments follow a tried and true suburban model.

Even when decades-old live oaks are left in place, they can still be threatened if buildings encroach on their root systems.

piece of land (or to the number of sewer connections they were able to buy elsewhere for use with the land), but now they're free (for a fee) to develop properties at much higher densities.

The effect of this change can already be seen in four projects that occupy no more than a tenth of Midtown's area. Post Properties is developing Post Apartment Homes of Midtown, a project in three phases with some 600 units on the Bland Cadillac property at the corner of West Gray and Bagby. Design for the project is being provided by RTKL Associates of Dallas. Jenard Gross, who built the Rincon, a 1996 apartment project on Dunlavy at Allen Parkway, is building the Oaks, a 190-unit complex, three blocks away from the Post Properties project. JPI Texas, a Houston-based firm, is constructing the Jefferson at Oak Place, designed by Kaufman Meeks Associates, on property situated between that belonging to Gross and that belonging to Post Properties. Four blocks away, Camden Realty Trust is planning a project that will take up the equivalent of six city blocks.

As construction on these projects goes forward, improvements to the streets, sewers, and water services are being undertaken with the support of the Midtown Tax Increment Finance Reinvestment Zone, or TIF, another quasi-governmental entity using the improved tax revenues from new development as seed money to get the projects the infrastructure and services they need. As those improvements are made, the rest of Midtown will be primed for even more development.

Another significant factor in the area south and west of downtown has been the work of the Perry Homes company. This residential builder, best known for suburban developments, has since 1994 built scores of townhouse projects in the River Oaks Shopping Center area around Fairview Street west of Shepherd Drive.

Barbara Brown Tennant, vice president for planning and design at Perry Homes, says that she moved into the area, a neighborhood of 1920s-era bungalows with numerous rental properties, in 1992. At the time, it had seen only a few small-scale conversions to townhouses.

"We saw the opportunity to deliver a new product with efficiency," Tennant says. "There was no new housing in the area at all, and I could see that there was a real market for new townhomes."

The projects built by Perry Homes and others have featured townhouses ranging in size from 2,500 to 3,900 square feet. They are built on vacant lots or on the sites of houses that, according to Tennant, can't be remodeled for new buyers.

Typical townhouse buyers, she adds, are older people, many of whom have second homes. "They want a simpler lifestyle than they had in the suburbs," says Tennant, "and a townhome is easier to maintain — [it's] something you can lock up and leave for the weekend to go to the country or the beach."

Perry Homes's newest project is Baldwin Square, a 44-unit townhouse project near the intersection of Tuam and LaBranch, adjacent to Elizabeth Baldwin Park. "This is a pioneering project for us," says Tennant. Indeed, Perry Homes is creating a significant expansion of the housing stock in an area that hasn't seen any new residential construction in perhaps 65 years. Two other projects are also on the drawing boards, Tennant says. All told, Perry Homes plans more than 100 units in the area. The units will sell in the $130,000 to $160,000 price range, and will be between 1,600 and 2,000 square feet in size.

The Midtown TIF played an important role in stimulating Perry Homes's interest in the area, notes Tennant. "The TIF is reimbursing us for the streetscape improvements in the right-of-way we are putting in: street trees, landscaping, sidewalks, streetlights, benches, and so on," she says. "This reimbursement helped spur all the development that is going on the area, and it's going to have a real impact on quality of life. We're not just doing sidewalks and grass. It'll be a lot nicer, because of what the TIF is willing to pay for."

A QUESTION OF QUALITY

The financial assistance and urban-design guidance of the Midtown TIF could help the Baldwin Square area avoid the problems that have plagued some other townhouse projects. Indeed, more financing for infrastructure and lots more design guidance will be necessary in the future as Midtown and downtown develop if these areas are to become the vibrant population centers that are hoped for rather than the sea of dull townhomes some fear.

One has only to look at the development around Fairview and Shepherd created in recent years by Perry Homes and others to see what should be avoided. There, the modicum of urbanity attached to the previous fabric of 1920s-era duplexes, with their classical massing and uniform setbacks, and to the bungalows from the same period, with their porches and gardens, has been replaced by inexpensively built stucco and pseudo-masonry townhouses that crowd the street, turning streetscapes of measured expansiveness and layering into areas of high density and blunt juxtaposition.

This doesn't have to be repeated; there are well-known ways to deal with the types of problems that townhouse development can create for the urban texture, and the presence of TIFs as mediators and facilitators for new development holds our hope for Midtown and neartown Houston. Still, all that is required for the triumph of the really dreadful will be for the TIF oversight mechanisms to relax.

For now, I would argue that the mere fact that residential developers want to create residences in these close-in neighborhoods, many of them otherwise perilously close to abandonment, is a positive factor that should outweigh design-related concerns, at least for the present. Although concerns about the type and quality of development in these areas have been voiced and should be pursued, overall, this is an enormously positive change for Houston.

However the development is carried out, one thing is for sure: it will be carried out. Further construction is taking place, linking the central city with the more stable residential areas west of Shepherd Drive. Within the next few years, downtown Houston and many of the close-in neighborhoods will be vastly different places than they have been for the past two decades. Residential and commercial development, fostered by the Lanier administration and carried forward by the tax increment districts and other entities created during the past ten years, will increase the uses of downtown land and property to the west to form a zone of relative high density that stretches from the central business district to the Galleria/Post Oak area. In effect, Houston's core will be redefined to embrace everything in between those two nodes, giving the city a new, bipolar center. Houston is filling the doughnut. ■

1. The sewer moratorium was the subject of an article, "Trading Toilets," by William H. Anderson and William O. Neuhaus III, in the first issue of *Cite* 16 years ago.

Typical three-story townhouse development in the Museum District demonstrating stairway projection into the citywide ten-foot setback zone.

Tools of the Development Trade

Interpreting Building Codes and Planning Ordinances

By William F. Stern

The building boom of the late nineties has dramatically altered the character in many of Houston's near-downtown neighborhoods. Hundreds of cottages, bungalows, and modest two-story houses built earlier in the century have been demolished in the last few years to make way for an onslaught of townhouse and apartment developments. Montrose and its adjoining neighborhoods are quickly becoming a hodgepodge of three-story townhouses mixed in with single-family houses on what is becoming increasingly valuable land. Lacking deed restrictions, these communities will continue to change as long as the market demands. And while the repetitive architecture of the new housing might be disturbing for its sameness in neighborhoods that were previously characterized by a richness of variety, the density of the developments has an even greater detrimental effect, because precious open space is all too often sacrificed.

Rarely do the developers of the new infill housing projects incorporate much public or private open space, opting instead for housing blocks that virtually fill a lot, with separations of five feet or less between adjacent property lines. Today's builders are primarily interested in maximizing their financial return, and they have found a winning formula for doing so. But it is not solely their business sense that has produced success. New and, some might well argue, questionable interpretations of city ordinances and codes have unleashed developers on land that previously would have been economically unfeasible for dense townhouse construction.

Although the city lacks zoning, development and building in Houston are regulated through other means. Over the years City Council has passed a number of ordinances that regulate everything from parking to the location of sexually oriented businesses. Without the framework of a comprehensive zoning law, Council must rely on this patchwork of ordinances, each passed as a need arises. The

The city's interpretation of the Uniform Building Code allows townhouse developers to build three full stories without a second means of egress from the third floor, a boon to those who want to maximize square footage on narrow inner-city lots.

enforcement and interpretation of the ordinances is left to the city's Department of Planning and Development and the Planning Commission. Additionally, the city regulates building through building codes administered by the Department of Public Works and Engineering. As any homeowner who has built or remodeled a house knows, a building permit, based on architectural and structural drawings, must be obtained before construction begins, and through periodic inspections the construction is monitored by the Department of Public Works.

The interpretation of two simple rules — one from a planning ordinance and the other from the building code — has had a startling effect on how Houston's developers build and plan, yielding densities that heretofore were inconceivable. Adopted in 1982, the so-called development ordinance (Chapter 42 of the Code of Ordinances) required citywide building setbacks for the first time in Houston's planning history. Building setbacks have been utilized as an instrument of planning in the city since the turn of the century, but only in deed restricted neighborhoods, where a front setback from the property line of 25 feet was not uncommon, along with shallower side and rear setbacks. For purposes of both opening the public right-of-way and allowing for future street widening, the 1982 development ordinance established building setbacks of ten feet for properties facing local and interior streets and 25 feet on major thoroughfares for "all structures and improvements."[1]

In separate conversations, two planners in the Department of Planning and Development confirmed that the city will allow landscaping, driveways, walkways, and a wooden fence under eight feet in the setback zone but will permit no other structures. That, at least, is the rule. But observation of many new townhouse developments reveals what appears to be a clear violation of the ordinance. On any number of new townhouse projects the primary stair, which leads to a second floor main entrance, projects well into the setback zone. With only a two-car garage entrance at the ground floor, this allows the developer to optimize building frontage and justify the construction of townhouse units on property that would otherwise be too narrow to economically accommodate both pedestrian and vehicular entrances at grade for multiple units. By projecting the primary entrance — and thereby the primary means of egress — into the setback zone, the developer gains the extra space needed to build multiple units economically on property formerly occupied by a single dwelling unit.

When asked about this seemingly obvious violation, one of the city planners explained that it would not be possible for a plat to be approved with a stair in the setback zone, and suggested that this information might not appear on drawings until they are submitted to the Department of Public Works, which is only responsible for issuing a building permit and does not review plans for ordinance compliance. Alternatively, for properties not required to have a plat reviewed by the Department of Planning, a developer could easily bypass the scrutiny of that department by submitting solely to the Department of Public Works for review of code compliance. This explanation raises serious questions about the process of plan review and ordinance enforcement.

Equally astounding is an interpretation of egress and square footage as found in the 1994 Uniform Building Code, the code used by the City of Houston. In Houston, the typical two-story residence is required to have only one means of egress, which means a ground floor exit and one set of stairs from the second story to the ground floor. However, in a three-story dwelling two exits (or two continuous stairways to the ground floor) are required when the area of the third floor exceeds 500 square feet.[2] The additional stairway can be on the exterior of the dwelling.

This rule applies to both freestanding residences and townhouse developments. But in apparent disregard for the language of the code, hundreds of three-story townhouse units have been built in recent years with only one stairway where the space on the third floor clearly exceeds 500 square feet. How is this possible? Simple — building officials have interpreted the 500 square feet to encompass space that is "habitable," even though the term "habitable" is not included in the language of the code that addresses egress from a third floor.

By code definition, habitable space in a structure is defined as space for "living, sleeping, eating, or cooking" but "bathrooms, toilet compartments, closets, halls, storage or utility space, and similar areas are not considered habitable space."[3] According to one former building official, when this particular egress provision was incorporated into earlier versions of the code, the 500 square feet of allowable space was calculated as actual square footage no matter what the usage: i.e., bathrooms and hallways were included. One might ask why the code limits space on a third floor if a second stairway is not included. Like many items in the Uniform Building Code, this provision deals with safety in the event of a fire, ensuring safe egress to the ground floor with two ways out when occupied space on a third floor exceeds 500 square feet.[4]

This is not the case in Houston, however, where the code has been interpreted to the obvious advantage of the townhouse developer. By allowing more than 500 square feet of space on a third floor through the definition of "habitable" space, the developer can essentially build out the entire third story with not just one bedroom but two. Once again valuable land becomes more desirable for development, because in the numbers game a larger townhouse can be built, selling for enough money to justify the high cost of land. Without the Department of Public Works' generous interpretation of egress requirements from a townhouse with a full third story, many inner-city lots probably could not be economically developed.

Planning regulations are passed to protect the common good, which is the purpose of Houston's ordinances and codes. If these are left to interpretation or procedural violations, then the common good can be easily ignored, and in the two examples cited exactly that appears to have occurred. Individuals frustrated with the overbuilding of their neighborhoods need look no further than instruments of planning and building law as a way to enforce more conscientious building. While such laws might only marginally affect density and have no effect on architectural quality, they have been implemented to provide a minimal means of development control and guidance. These rules were established for the safety and welfare of the public at large, and when they are loosely interpreted or not enforced, they produce a gain for the developer that comes at the expense of the people and their city. ■

1. Code of Ordinances, Chapter 42, p. 2865.
2. 1994 Uniform Building Code with City of Houston Amendments, Chapter 10, section 1003.1, p. 175.
3. Ibid. Chapter 2, section 209, p. 16.
4. In a two-story residence, only one stairway is required because one could presumably exit or jump to grade through a window from the second story in the event that a fire has blocked the stairway.

Houston's historic Rice Hotel, transformed into a 312-unit loft apartment building.

Urban Glue

Getting people downtown is one thing.

Making them stay is another.

By Dan Searight

For one day in early May, downtown Houston looked like its promoters have long claimed it could. The streets were filled with people; families strolled along Buffalo Bayou; restaurants were bursting with patrons. The central business district glowed with life that continued deep into the evening. In fact, it wasn't until midnight that the crowds thinned and the city fell quiet.

The catalyst for all this energy was the official opening of phase two of Sesquicentennial Park, 8.2 acres of green space on the western side of the Wortham Center. Of course, special events have always managed to breathe some vitality into downtown, however ephemerally, but this one was particularly instructive. Even though there were activities such as the Buffalo Bayou Regatta, the dedication of seven 70-foot-tall "Pillars of the Community" created by artist Mel Chin working with local schoolchildren, and WaterFire Houston, in which 30 bonfires were set ablaze down the middle of the bayou, the point was not simply to create a new spring festival. Rather, the point was to suggest that downtown had become an appealing place to be regardless of whether or not a festival was in the offing, that the area could be engaging on its own. Further, it was suggested that one of the reasons for this was such new amenities as Sesquicentennial Park.

But later in the week, after the remains of the opening ceremonies had been cleared away, it appeared there might be a problem with that suggestion. On this particular downtown day Sesquicentennial Park was almost empty. Only a few people wandered next to the bayou, while a few others walked along the edge of the Wortham Center, unsure of how to make it to the park they could see beneath them. It was hardly the crowds that had been visualized. True, it can take time for unfamiliar projects to settle into the city's fabric, but the nearly vacant park did raise a question: just how effective has all the attention given to downtown really been in terms of creating a sustainable urban community? In creating, that is, a community in which people go to work, spend time on the street, and enjoy all the amenities of traditional suburban life: the grocery store, movie house, schools, and recreational opportunities? Once all the touted central city projects are completed, will downtown Houston resemble Sesquicentennial Park at the height of its dedication — full and bustling — or will it be more like the park in the week following — a well built monument all but bereft of life?

The answer to this question depends in great part on how well the city fills the spaces between signature structures such as the Ballpark at Union Station and Bayou Place. There have been encouraging signs. The growing activity in the theater district, with lines snaking out of new Market Square restaurants such as Tasca, Cabo, and Solero, give off a strong sense of life. But can this last?

In 1996, Dena Belzer, an economist with San Francisco's Bay Area Economics, offered up a few guidelines for people interested in tracking how well their city is doing in restoring vigor to its urban center. In an address to the Mayor's Conference on Urban Planning held in her home city, she struck at the heart of Houston's current downtown redevelopment effort when she noted that "when starting to revitalize a community you usually start with a place that has no 'there' there. The problem becomes, how do we make a 'there'?"[1] Belzer defined four key factors that combine to yield a successful urban revitalization effort:

- **Context**
  Know the community or the context and have a vision plan within which projects are created;
- **Scale**
  Match the level of investment with the level of risk. Don't risk beyond what the private sector will support;
- **Diversity**
  Projects must occur in a broad context; no one project will solve all the problems in a neighborhood or community;
- **Image**
  Good projects will fit the vision for the target neighborhood or city.[2]

Belzer's four criteria are something of a test for the urban revitalization process. And on her first point, at least, Houston doesn't fare particularly well. It lacks both a formal master plan and a well defined public policy to guide planning efforts, the only major U.S. city that can boast of such a dubious honor. This could be a problem, since any real estate venture, private or public, that seeks to develop land to its best use needs to understand the market in which it's working, or as Belzer puts it, its context. Since Houston has no master plan, as well as no zoning laws for creating use policy, the Houston Downtown Management District (HDMD), a private organization, has served as de facto planning department for the city's downtown redevelopment. Working in conjunction with elected officials, representatives of both the Metropolitan Transit Authority and the city's Public Works and Engineering Department, and various professional and civic groups such as the American Institute of Architects, the Cultural Arts Council of Houston, and the Downtown Historic District, HDMD has developed a vision plan for downtown. Currently, that vision plan designates nine districts. Three of these — the Theater District, the

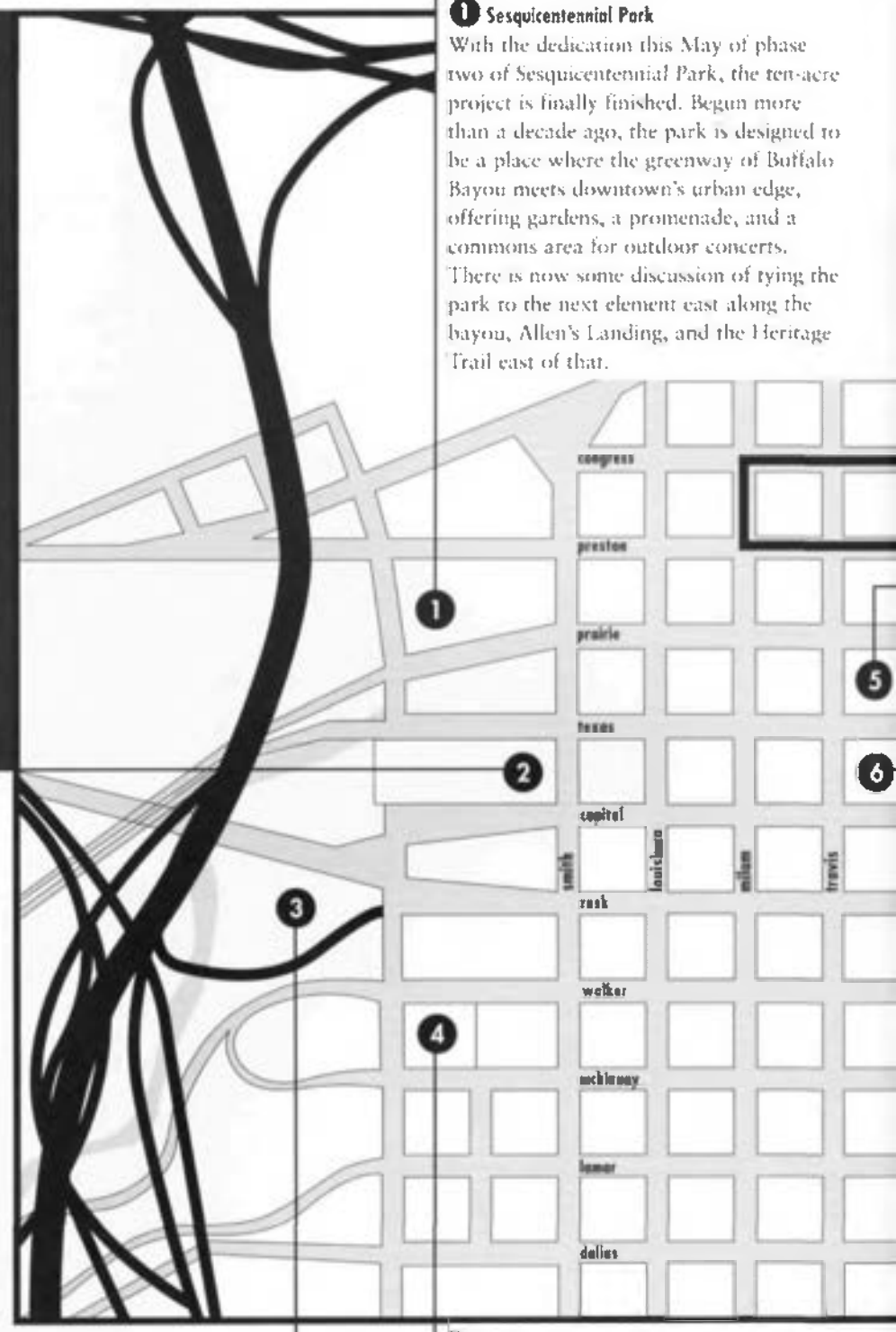
URBAN GLUE Continued on page 26

A Walk Through Downtown

What a difference a few years makes. In early 1995, *Cite* presented a survey of downtown projects either underway or on the drawing board, and while the list was impressive, it lacked many of what have come to be seen as signature examples of Houston's inner-city revival. As recently as three years ago, the Rice Hotel was still a question mark, the Ballpark at Union Station had yet to be proposed (though Bud Adams and his then Houston Oilers were pushing for a downtown football arena), the Sam Houston Coliseum was being touted as a possible casino site (as was the western half of the Albert Thomas Convention Center), and Cotswold still referred only to a region of England. If anything, the rapid changes between 1995 and today make it clear how even the best laid plans can often turn in unexpected directions — something that should be remembered by those promoting the new downtown as a pedestrian's paradise just waiting to be born. Still, even the most skeptical observers have to admit that there seems to be a new spirit animating the central city, and crucial to that spirit have been the projects detailed on these two pages.

1 Sesquicentennial Park

With the dedication this May of phase two of Sesquicentennial Park, the ten-acre project is finally finished. Begun more than a decade ago, the park is designed to be a place where the greenway of Buffalo Bayou meets downtown's urban edge, offering gardens, a promenade, and a commons area for outdoor concerts. There is now some discussion of tying the park to the next element east along the bayou, Allen's Landing, and the Heritage Trail east of that.



2 Bayou Place

Like many other downtown projects, Bayou Place was late in being completed. It was four years late, in fact. But in this case the delay proved propitious. On the recommendation of the Houston architectural firm Gensler, an inward-looking mall was changed into an outward-looking retail complex that has already given a boost to the street life in the Theater District. As downtown revitalization's most visible success to date, Bayou Place has raised hopes for, and enthusiasm in, other downtown ventures. But what remains to be seen is what will be done with the still empty sections of the old Albert Thomas Convention Center. That second phase of Bayou Place remains on hold.

3 Hobby Center for the Performing Arts

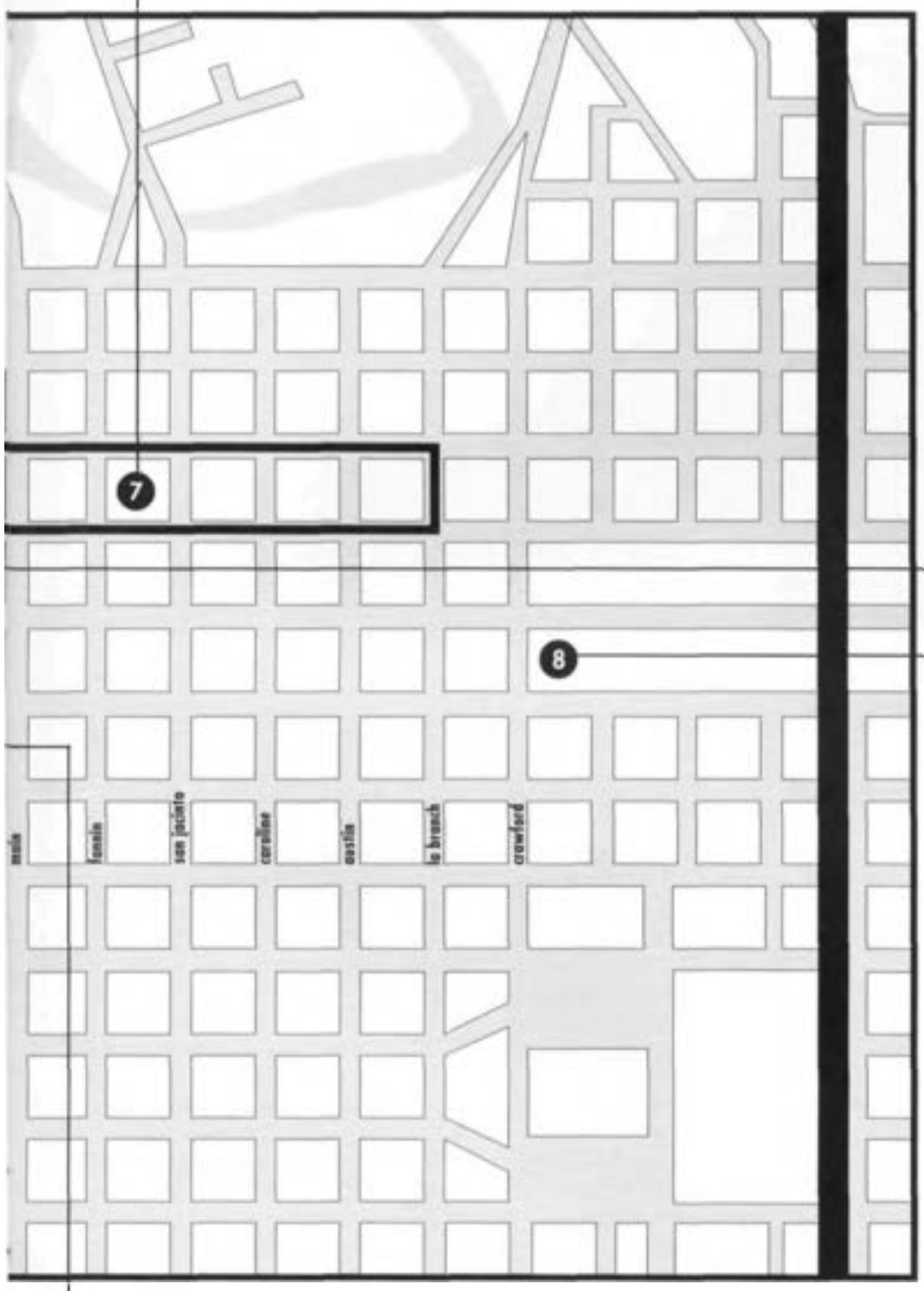
What was planned a few years back as a $25 million renovation of the Music Hall by Theatre Under the Stars has become, instead, a $75 million performing arts center designed by New York architect Robert A.M. Stern and Morris Architects in Houston. The new facility, to be located on the old Music Hall and Sam Houston Coliseum site, will contain two performance halls, one that will seat 2,650 and another that will seat 500, as well as rehearsal studios, the offices of Theatre Under the Stars, and the Humphreys School of Musical Theatre. Demolition of the old Music Hall and the Coliseum began in June, following the May closing of *Victor, Victoria*, the final show to play the hall. The site is slated to be cleared by October, when work will start on the Hobby Center, which is scheduled to open in 2001.

4 City Hall

The mayor may be back in the old City Hall building at 901 Bagby, but City Hall isn't completely back in action. Though the mayor's offices are basically completed, much of the public space is still under construction. The project began in 1994 when City Council approved $13 million to renovate the 1939 building in order to address safety issues. At the time, work was scheduled to be finished in two years; it's now four years and counting. In June, the Brown administration began a probe of the delays in response to allegations of spending irregularities. And at the moment, the project has no firm completion date.

7 Cotswold Project

Two years ago, the Cotswold Project was touted as an urban miracle that would, through a series of fountains, ponds, and a pedestrian mall along Congress Avenue, tie Market Square to the new Ballpark at Union Station. Now it's struggling to keep its head above the very water with which it was identified. Part of the problem was that Cotswold was a private plan that wanted to use public space, and the city couldn't see its way to turning control of the area over to the foundation that would run Cotswold. Too, the talk by Cotswold boosters of closing Congress conflicted with Metro's downtown transit plans. Recently, Mayor Lee Brown has pushed the idea of the city taking over the project, which has been scaled back to focus on narrowed rather than closed streets, broader sidewalks, diagonal parking, and tree-lined blocks, along with a reduced number of fountains. The cost is estimated at $40 million, which Cotswold supporters say could be financed by increased income from area parking.



5 The Rice Hotel

Much of the hopes for downtown revitalization have been vested in this $32 million project, which is scheduled to open officially this fall. Already, though, more than 80 residents have settled into the historic structure, and the ground floor ballroom has hosted some public events. When finished, the Rice will have 312 rental units and 25,000 square feet of retail space.

6 Metro Downtown and Midtown Streets Transit Project

After close to two years of delays resulting from a federal court ban against the Metropolitan Transit Authority's affirmative action program, Metro this June finally began a five-year, $215 million project to rebuild some 300 blocks of downtown and Midtown. Plans are for the streets to be repaved in concrete and given designated bus lanes, brick sidewalks, improved bus stops, informational kiosks, and new landscaping. The first stage is the reworking of seven blocks of San Jacinto from Walker to Leeland, a $5.5 million contract handled by MEB Engineers Inc, and according to Metro, by December the work should extend to 12 more street segments. Fifty percent of the project's funding is being covered by Metro, while the Federal Transit Authority is picking up 32 percent, the city 16 percent, and the Houston Downtown District 2 percent.

8 The Ballpark at Union Station

This year's drought may have been a bane to farmers, but it was a boon to the builders of the Houston Astros' new home. The dry weather meant that construction was able to keep well on schedule. As of early September the facility was almost 25 percent complete, putting the $249.5 million stadium on track to open at the start of the 2000 baseball season. Fans have been able to follow work on the ballpark on-line courtesy of Houston Sidewalk (houston.sidewalk.com/ballpark), which has set up a camera to record the stadium's move toward the millennium. A $201 million bond issue has been issued to cover the bulk of the construction costs. But some questions remain, among them, where will all the cars park?

Twenty-four-hour life for downtown: Residences (the Rice Hotel, rear) and restaurants (Cabo, front).

URBAN GLUE Continued from page 23

Main Street Corridor around Foley's Department Store, and the Historic District, which includes Market Square and Sesquicentennial Park — have been targeted to receive priority treatment. Lighting, banners, and special decorative street furniture are being used to give the various downtown districts discrete identities.

HDMD's vision plan views the street as the framework and backbone of Houston's redevelopment effort. With that in mind, planning for downtown considers pedestrians to be as important as drivers. Metro's Downtown and Midtown Streets Transit Project, coupled with private funds from HDMD, seeks to knit together the central city's various districts through both a vehicular and a pedestrian network, with distinctive paving and landscaping being used to designate which zones belong to vehicles, and which to walkers.

The pedestrian network is being created in part by widening sidewalks to encourage street interaction and retail activity. When building a walking community, creating a lively street environment is as key as giving people a place to go. In essence, the trip needs to be made as intriguing as the arrival. People need places to sit and work, play Hearts on a laptop computer, enjoy a beverage, and otherwise feel a connection with their surroundings.

Various downtown developments have attempted to create a sensitive interaction with the street. One contributing factor to this has been HDMD's grant program, which has been in effect since 1992 and has distributed more than a half-million dollars to 39 projects.[3] The program began with small grants for cleanup and refurbishment with the intent of changing public perception of the downtown target districts. But it has also given larger grants to such ventures as the Hogg Palace at 401 Louisiana, one of downtown's first and most interesting success stories. A conversion of an historic office building to loft housing and retail, the Hogg Palace received a grant of $15,000, which allowed developer Randall Davis to turn what might have been ground floor parking into the Palace Cafe and, more recently, the Hogg Grill.[4]

Many current downtown ventures are following this model of using the street as an anchor for building a sense of place. Two of the city's most ambitious projects to date, the metamorphosing of the Albert Thomas Convention Center into Bayou Place and the renovation of the Rice Hotel, focus a great deal of their attention on their connection with the street.

It might not have been that way, particularly with Bayou Place. Located in the heart of the Theater District and developed by the Cordish Company of Baltimore, Bayou Place as an idea goes back to 1987. At first, the plan was to make the project into a downtown mall, with all the retail outlets facing onto a central court and presenting their backs to the street. But money problems stalled the venture. According to Michael Stevens, then head of the Houston Housing Finance Authority and the city's financial overseer on the Bayou Place project, Houston was offering the wrong kinds of incentives. The city, he says, had written a contract guaranteeing Cordish payments of $1 million per year for 50 years. Though that's a lot of money to guarantee, it didn't do the developer any good in getting the financing needed to undertake the improvements required to get Bayou Place occupied, Stevens says. At the same time, the city had no say in what type of tenants went into the project. "It could have been one giant shoeshine stand," says Stevens, "and that would have met the terms of the deal the city was offering."

The financing problems stalled work on Bayou Place. So Stevens restructured the deal by focusing on what the developer needed to make the improvements that would attract high-quality tenants. The answer was $13 million in up-front financing at a favorable interest rate. Stevens says he arranged the loan from a Houston bank, to be paid by Cordish but guaranteed with parking revenues from adjacent city garages, which would benefit from Bayou Place. At the same time, the deal was rewritten to decrease the payments to Cordish to $900,000 per year, and the payment stream was limited to 13 years. This change, says Stevens, saved the city more than $25 million. In addition, the city gained the right to oversee what types of tenants went into Bayou Place.

But the most important result of the financial problems was that Bayou Place was basically turned inside out, with the businesses facing the street and separate entrances for most of the tenant spaces. In May, David Cordish told a development conference that the decision to do this was dictated by cost-consciousness, as it wasn't possible to attract the tenants he wanted and still charge them the high shared-space-maintenance fees that typical mall development required. But much of the credit should also go to the architects from Gensler, Bayou Place's designers, who helped encourage their client to think outside the conventional Houston big box mentality.

Bayou Place is strictly a retail venture. Its tenants include the Angelika Film Center, a multi-screen movie theater; a pool hall; several restaurants; and the Aerial Theater, which features live music. It has been a great success, and phase two is currently in the planning stage. Some have argued that part of the reason for Bayou Place's success is that it seems to sit on a pedestal, a "retail Parthenon" resting on a plinth of concrete, and is thus an easily visible destination. And indeed, it's hard to argue with the crowds that descend on the location. Still, if the project has a single shortcoming it is that it fails to link directly with the street. The underground parking and phalanx of valet parking drops make it car friendly, but not necessarily as pedestrian friendly as one would like.[5]

struction remains to be seen. In recent years the Houston economy has been so strong that it seemed almost impossible to overbuild. But as the past has shown, that can change quickly. Urban revitalization is, if anything, a slow process and one in which momentum is built gradually over years by changing attitudes and by creating psychological and economic consensus for the transformation. If all the townhomes being thrown up in Midtown and Montrose suddenly had trouble finding buyers, or if the new lofts across from the Ballpark at Union Station remained empty, then the momentum carefully developed since the early nineties could wither, and with it wither some of the grand hopes of downtown.

But for now, revitalization appears to be operating at a manageable scale. As for diversity of development, Belzer's third criterion, that has also been a component of both the public and the private redevelopment push. As connections between the large scale projects that act as anchors for the nine downtown districts identified by HDMD are established, a variety of smaller projects, from stores and restaurants to offices and housing, is expected to spring up. Again, it is the street that is the armature for investment. Without proper planning of pedestrian and vehicular linkages between downtown's various parts, no project, large or small, has a chance of succeeding.

As for image, Belzer's final criterion, that may be more properly defined as a firm connection between a place and the people who live in it. If a project is to fit the vision of a neighborhood, then it has to be part of that neighborhood; residents' images of who they are and where they are need to be congruent. As simple as it sounds, people need to be able to identify with their surroundings. They need to feel a sense of community. With all the hype of our digital age, human beings remain social animals. We all need interaction and a sense of connectivity with others. Thus, open space or common ground, as some planning professionals call it, remains a key element in the redevelopment puzzle. Places that allow for serendipitous interaction become vital.

Open space and greenbelts are listed in HDMD's literature as a vital component for the revitalization of downtown and the adjoining areas of Midtown, Washington Avenue, Second Ward, and Chinatown. Buffalo Bayou, within which downtown nestles, is targeted for a major transformation so that Houston can reconnect with its waterfront. The Rails to Trails project, which is partially funded by the federal government, creates hike and bike paths that will link several miles of green space along Buffalo Bayou and Braes Bayou and connect neighborhoods along the way. Setting aside land for pocket parks within the densely developed area of downtown is important as well.

In her speech in San Francisco, Belzer also touched on one other crucial notion that downtown's developers need to remember. "Making a good place is so hard to begin with," she noted, "let's not throw away anything that's already okay." The point, of course, is that redevelopment shouldn't always mean tearing down and starting over. Many of the elements already in place in Houston are valuable, and to avoid leveling the good along with the bad, it's necessary to carefully survey and assess the quality of existing buildings and open spaces.

The adaptive reuse of many downtown buildings as loft residences and restaurants has been a positive sign that the good from the past has not been overlooked. Still, Houston has a sad history of not always cherishing the buildings it should. One example of this was the razing this spring of the banking hall of the First City National Bank, an international style building designed by the legendary Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in 1961. Located at 1001 Main, the bank was linked to its companion high rise office tower by a glass walkway; it was demolished in order to make way for a new parking garage. Such a story is symptomatic of what can happen when redevelopment becomes a slash and burn process. One can only hope that the owner has plans to provide space for retail businesses at the garage's ground level. This would take advantage of the high foot traffic along Main Street, and assist in pedestrian flow down this key downtown artery.

In the final analysis, one has to ask what, exactly, Houston's downtown wants to be. Buffalo Bayou will never become a San Antonio River Walk or rival Baltimore's Inner Harbor. Main Street will likely never match Chicago's Miracle Mile. Still, through downtown can be seen the bones of a great urban place, one that can attain its own image over time. Some have already taken to calling the area bounded by the Theater District and Buffalo Bayou NoDo, for north downtown. They're following the lead set by such well known urban areas as New York's SoHo (for south of Houston Street). Names and labels are important. They give people a sense of ownership in the places they live.

Louis Kahn once said that "spaces evoke their use." Even though a project may be designed for a certain use, once it's built people almost always find a use for it beyond what was first imagined. In terms of urban planning, it is the creation of a good "space" that may best define the essential element needed for Houston's downtown to thrive. Granted, the majority of the population may always prefer a suburban plot of land. Traditional urban life is certainly not for everyone. However, a growing number of young professionals, empty nesters, and even families are seeking an environment like that promised by the promoters of downtown. They are seeking a walking environment, one in which home, work, entertainment, neighbors, and the corner grocery store are all closely entwined, are all elements of a round-the-clock community. Perhaps this is the grandest and most ambitious promotional scheme in Houston's history: the birth of an urban core in which the journey is as interesting as the destination. ■

Making a good place is so hard to begin with, let's not throw away anything that's already okay.

In contrast to the purely business focus of Bayou Place, the Rice Hotel project combines both housing and retail components. The landmark building's rooms have been reconfigured into lofts, while the remainder of the space will include support amenities such as a grocery store, a newsstand, restaurants, and clubs. With its ground floor shops spilling out onto Texas Avenue, the Rice Hotel will tie directly to the street. Its residents will be able to enjoy both the grand lobby of old and updated retail amenities. The building, which is listed on the National Historic Registry, has recently been under scrutiny for going too far with its alterations. The bad news is that the same renovations that have helped make the project more attractive to prospective tenants may end up causing the loss of key tax breaks that assisted in the Rice Hotel's original financial viability.

The success of Bayou Place and the potential success of the Rice Hotel suggest that, despite the lack of an official master plan, Houston's downtown revitalization is nonetheless taking place within a context understood by both the city and its developers. So to a degree, at least, it succeeds in meeting Belzer's first criterion. As for her second criterion — not risking beyond what the private sector will support — HDMD and others appear to have been effective in their efforts to match levels of investment with levels of risk. Whether the economy can sustain the ever increasing pace of con-

1. Dena Belzer, "Creating Place to Create Value," the Mayor's Institute on City Design: West, November 14-17,1996, Berkeley, California.
2. Ibid.
3. Downtown Houston Management District, Development Concepts, Fall 1997.
4. Ibid.
5. Additional research information on Bayou Place provided by Joel Warren Barna.

By George Greanias

Shadow

Houston is commonly noted for its lack of planning. But in fact, lots of planning goes on in the city every day. In a healthy community, after all, what is needed gets done. When people perceive they need something, they may first look to their elected officials, but if those officials fail to respond, they then take other steps to meet their need. One term for those steps is shadow planning, which is defined as planning done by entities other than a community acting through its government.

Shadow planning happens when a group or individuals come to perceive the need for planning so strongly that they push past the inaction or ineffectiveness of the political structure. Shadow planning is what Thomas H. Ball, Kenneth Womack, and William Stamps Farish did when they created River Oaks. It's what Frank Sharp did when he laid the foundations of Sharpstown, and what Gerald Hines pursued when he became the impetus for transforming a two-lane road called Post Oak into the Galleria. These were private acts of commission with large public consequences. And today, shadow planning remains part of the way Houston works. Like our own shadows, it is always with us. Like a shadow, it is not quite the real thing. And to put another twist to it, much of Houston's planning takes place in the shadows.

Of course, some of this is common in other big American cities. That the private sector plans and executes and has major impact in large communities is hardly news. The difference is one of degree. When it comes to planning in Houston, the voice of the community acting through its government is far weaker than elsewhere. Even in a perfect world shadow planning would fill the interstices left untouched by the community as it plans. What makes Houston stand out is the belief of many in power that government cannot and should not be engaged in the process of responding to the market.

But if the elected officials hesitate, the private sector does not. It is constantly planning. To implement what they want, developers seek government action. That, in turn, has larger implications for the community. For example, closing Amherst between Morningside and Kelvin may have helped move the second phase of the Village Arcade forward. But the private decision also affected public traffic patterns, going against the city's longstanding reluctance to close streets. A private plan, abetted by government concurrence, carried short- and long-term consequences for the community at large.

Management districts are further examples of shadow planning. In the central business district and the Galleria, property owners and developers saw unmet needs. They became convinced the city would not take the steps required to meet those needs. Their solution? Create entities to do the things the city would not. Likewise, the decision to seek tax abatement financing, whether on an individual project or an entire area, is shadow planning. Abating taxes on a case by case basis affects the availability and allocation of the city's financial resources, favors one project or area over another, and creates entities with the ability to engage in planning on an ongoing basis. Such shadow planning has two critical implications for Houston. One is immediate, the other longer term. But both will affect the city's future.

The first implication grows from the fact that shadow planning usually reflects narrow perspectives. The results may not be best for the community as a whole. The single best example of this is public transportation. Twenty years ago, the people of Houston made a far-sighted decision: they committed themselves to the goal of creating an efficient and effective region-wide public transportation system. To sustain that effort, they agreed to tax themselves an extra penny on many of their purchases. The consequent revenue stream was substantial, but well justified given the enormous amount of work to be done. What followed is well known. An organized and persistent opposition defeated one referendum. Political missteps by those charged with carrying out the mandate of a second, successful referendum allowed those same opposition opponents to undermine and stop that effort as well. In the end, public transportation in Houston was reduced to a bus system and a cottage industry of creativity in defining what constitutes an expense on behalf of "public transportation."

This is where shadow planning took over. Those who opposed the Metropolitan Transit Authority may have done away with the agency's ability to create and execute a comprehensive public transportation plan, but they did not manage to do away with the need for greater mobility in an increasingly dense urban community. The consequence? Efforts to improve mobility without a long-term mobility plan. Reliance on street widening, reconstruction, and resurfacing. More lanes of freeway to address needs already surpassed before the construction was finished. And in some instances, such as the debate on what to do with the West Loop or the Katy Freeway, impasse and inaction.

The second implication of shadow planning arises from the fact that, ultimately, it seeks to make use of tools formerly thought reserved to government. Those who reject community planning as a wrongful intrusion by government into the private sector now seek to exercise the very powers they would deny the

Planning

It's the way Houston works, for good — and for bad.

community at large. Up until recently, those opposed to community planning through government have tended to limit themselves to keeping the community a largely ineffectual player. In this process, the private sector has developed increasingly sophisticated techniques for maintaining the status quo.

For instance, Neighborhoods to Standard, Parks to Standard, and now Libraries to Standard are all good programs. They repair streets and add sidewalks, put in street lamps, and fix up neighborhood parks. To the extent that these programs make the infrastructure more useful and more attractive, or to the extent that they put in infrastructure that was not there before, they are good. When coupled with the occasional initiative by city government to fix a particular problem causing irritation to neighborhoods — the presence of sexually oriented businesses, the siting of cellular towers — the package is one that satisfies many neighborhoods' immediate needs. But they are programs for maintenance, not planning.

At the same time, these programs have focused each neighborhood on itself. They have removed much of the incentive to look beyond a neighborhood's borders and consider larger issues. Neighborhoods that are happy about their own situation worry less about an overall plan for streets and roads, the lack of good and extensive public transportation, or the ability of private developers to affect the nature of a neighborhood without significant involvement in that decision by that neighborhood.

Those who have long held the reins of planning in Houston have learned to disarm their opposition by meeting their most immediate concerns. True, when mandated by law — often because of the financing issues — they have gone to the community to seek authorization for a particular project. But once that authorization has been secured, community participation usually comes to an end. Again, the private sector asserts its dominance.

For the private sector to engage in shadow planning as the natural consequence of those acts within the range of appropriate private activity is one thing. For the same private sector to transform shadow planning into the equivalent of community planning and to arrogate to itself the powers of government is quite another.

The clearest examples of this phenomenon are the management districts, tax increment financing districts, and redevelopment corporations that have increasingly been approved by the city, often at the behest of private development interests.

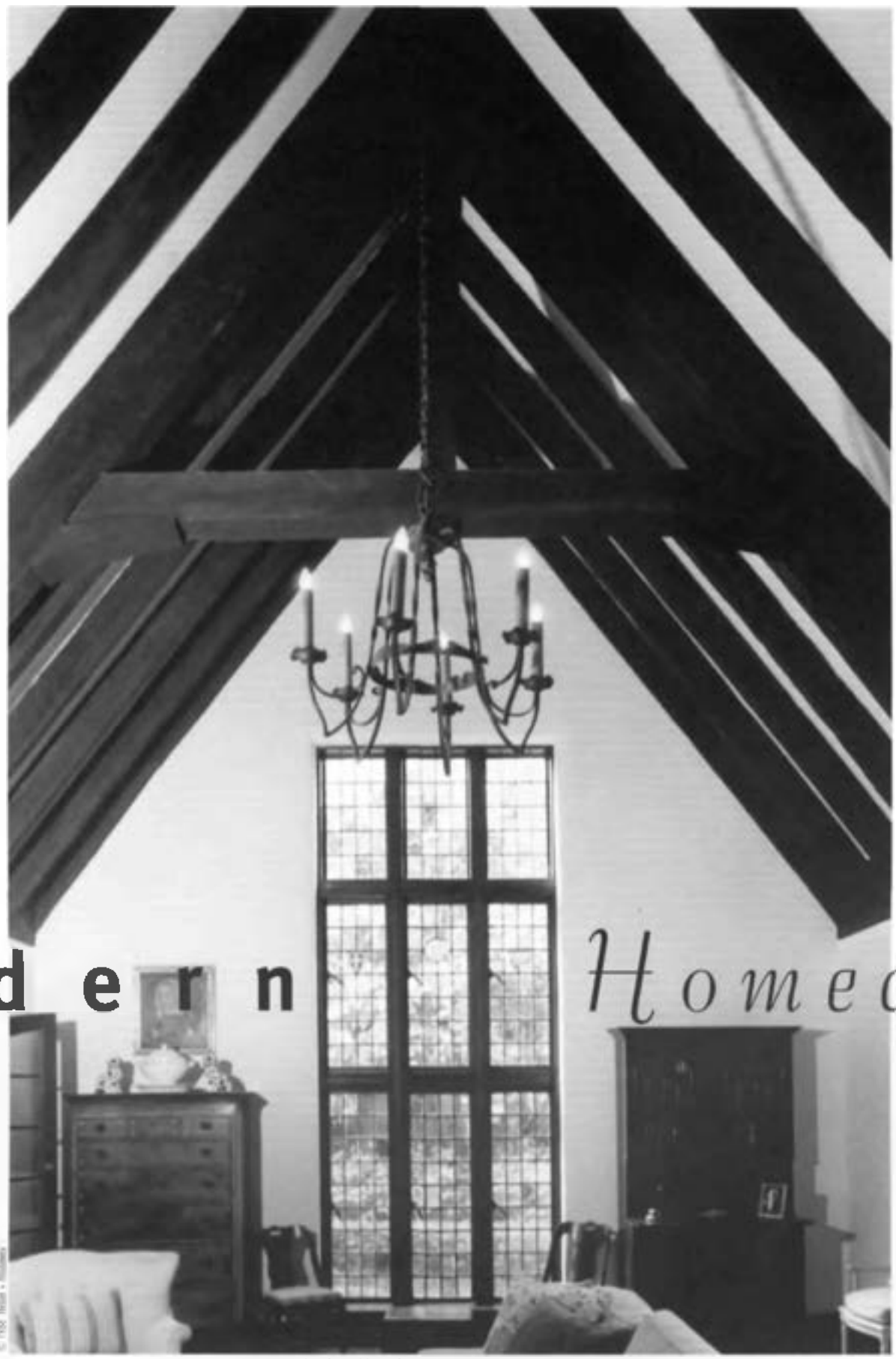
Today the management districts are actively planning their futures; they levy additional taxes to implement those plans. Redevelopment corporations increasingly ask for authority that the private sector has opposed giving to the public sector: the power to zone and the power to condemn through eminent domain.

The very people who defeated zoning on the argument that the market regulates land use better than the government does now seek the powers of government to zone. The same people who oppose government using the power to condemn for redevelopment seek that power for themselves. Why? Because the market demands it. Banks will not lend without the assurance of stability they believe zoning provides. Redevelopment areas will not be attractive to potential investors without the promise eminent domain offers that conflicting land uses will be eliminated. Such public power privately exercised makes shadow planning something very close to the real thing, but without one crucial element: direct accountability to the citizens of the community.

This brings us to the challenge shadow planning presents Houston. In a balanced planning environment the public and private sectors are equally vigorous in exercising their planning roles. Shadow planning is a necessary, natural, and appropriate counterpoint to the community's planning decisions as expressed through government. Community planning as expressed through its government acts as the counterweight to shadow planning's shorter-term focus on individual needs rather than a longer-term view of the community's best interests.

But in Houston, where the community's voice in planning is weak, there is no such counterweight to the shortcomings of shadow planning. Just as important, shadow planning in Houston increasingly seeks to play its own role as well as that of the government. Those engaged in shadow planning more and more seek to exercise the powers of government, with one critical distinction: the lack of public involvement. Shadow planning in Houston is becoming a question not just of who plans, but who governs.

Houston's current revitalization efforts will slowly but surely put this question before us. Our current growth forces those who have opposed a broader role for the community acting through its government to face a serious contradiction: they want for themselves powers they do not want for government. More precisely, they want for themselves those powers they are not willing to give the community. Arguing that those elected by the community are not wise enough to exercise those powers prudently, they seek to give those powers to the unelected and the unaccountable. They seek to make shadow planning shadow government. If they succeed, the implications will be profound. ■



Casement window framed by timbering at 1419 Kirby, built by Katharine Mott in 1930.

Modern Homecraft

The Houses of Katharine B. and Harry L. Mott

By Stephen Fox

A contradictory combination of new and anti-new animates the houses that Katharine Mott built.

As a woman operating in what was generally considered a man's world, Katharine B. Mott represents an anomaly in the history of Houston real estate and architecture. A speculative builder active in the city between the end of 1927 and the end of 1930, she was responsible for only a handful of houses. Yet these houses were so distinctive that 70 years ago they made her reputation. Today, they perpetuate her name.

In an advertisement from a sales album published by the River Oaks Corporation in 1929, Mott chose to represent herself as providing "modern homecraft." The rhetorical formulation is intriguing. It combines the prestige of the new (the "modern") and anti-modern nostalgia (the Arts and Crafts-inspired term "homecraft"). This contradictory combination of new and anti-new animates the houses that Katharine Mott built. In the River Oaks Corporation ad, dreamy soft-focus photography complements the picturesque manorial style of a Mott-built house on North MacGregor Way. Below this, Art Deco graphics imply that there is no contradiction between being modern and being anti-modern.

This play with contradiction can be seen in the way Katharine Mott presented herself professionally when she came to Houston, as a lady of leisure who took up house-building as an amusing avocation. Born in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1890, the then Katharine Bok studied music at St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana, before her marriage to Harry L. Mott. The Motts settled in Indianapolis, where Harry worked for the Indianapolis Title Company. A profile published in the *Houston Post-Dispatch* after the couple moved to Houston detailed the circumstances that brought Katharine Mott into the world of speculative building in Indianapolis in the early 1920s. Written in a breezy style, the account is illuminating because it demonstrates how Mott constructed a professional identity that enabled her to bridge the contradictions between being a lady of leisure and an entrepreneur:

> *Mrs. Mott drifted into her profession simply. When her baby girls were six, eight, and ten and away at school all day, she began to be bored with a life that was nothing but morning golf, noontime luncheons, afternoons of bridge, and dinner dances. The urge to "do something" began to make itself felt. Like most women who loved their homes, Mrs. Mott had often daydreamed of ideal houses. But it wasn't until her husband showed her a block long street he had to develop, a street that somehow appealed to her imagination, that she thought of putting her dreams into action.*
>
> *"I'd love to build some little houses right there," she said — and she is the charming sort of person who is rarely refused anything. So Mr. Mott gave her the grass-grown little Indianapolis block to play with.*
>
> *Starting with three small cottages there, Mrs. Mott built 12 houses in the following 12 months. Since then she has completed 18 more, most of them now being owned by young homemakers from the circle of her friends in the Junior League of Indianapolis, who knew her taste and had faith in the value of houses she erected.... By the end of the first year, Mrs. Mott had added success as a builder to her success as a wife and mother.*[1]

This account of Katharine Mott's transition from homemaker to home builder implies that she was motivated by a mixture of enthusiasm and adventure, not by the pursuit of profit. The identity being constructed sought to balance the obvious contradiction between Katharine Mott the charming wife, mother, and slightly bored club woman, and Katharine Mott the innovative, empathetic, and reliable home builder. It is interesting to observe how undefined Harry Mott's role was in this transition. He is portrayed as the indulgent husband, humoring the whim of his vivacious wife. Throughout the Motts' brief Houston career, Harry Mott remained in the background, even though he, too, was a house builder. The houses that Harry Mott built are indistinguishable from those that Katharine Mott built. Yet Harry was never portrayed as her partner or associate. She was presented instead as an independent, if accidental, businesswoman.

One of the Motts' daughters, Ellen Mott Howell, recalls that what brought her parents south was the chronic colds her sisters suffered. They wanted to get their children away from the severe Midwestern winters, and so in 1924 the Motts moved to Miami Beach. Howell remembers that her mother built several houses and at least one picturesque manorial style commercial building in south Florida before the hurricane of 1926 led to the collapse of the region's real estate market. Howell recalls that her parents then visited southern California before coming to Houston, where they were impressed by the robust vitality of the real estate market and, says Howell, the friendliness with which they were received. In 1927, Katharine and Harry Mott and their three daughters moved to Houston, into an apartment at the Warwick.

During the second half of the 1920s Houston was booming. By 1930, it had surpassed Dallas and San Antonio to become the largest city in Texas. Its expanding economy was mirrored in the city's extension across the flat coastal plain. The suburban neighborhoods where Katharine and Harry Mott would build lay, for the most part, on the edge. Riverside Terrace, on the southern margin of the city along Brays Bayou and the MacGregor parkway, had opened in 1924. Its development was financed by the Guardian Trust Company, which backed some of Houston's most ambitious suburban development in the 1920s. Farther upstream lay Devonshire Place, developed by Mayor Oscar Holcombe. The Guardian Trust Company also financed the small Edgemont subdivision in the 1600 blocks of North and South boulevards. At the far west edge of the city was Houston's most ambitious suburban development of the decade, the planned garden community of River Oaks.

As small-scale entrepreneurs, Katharine and Harry Mott targeted these subdivisions for building speculative "luxury" housing. Their earliest houses were priced in the $20,000 range, though the houses they built in 1930 sold for between $32,000 and $35,000, which placed them in the upper tier of new speculative housing in Houston. By way of comparison, the houses John F. Staub designed on North and South boulevards in the late 1920s cost between $40,000 and $75,000. The large houses in Shadyside, built in the first half of the 1920s, cost in excess of $100,000. Bayou Bend, of 1928, cost $218,000. The Motts' houses, while expensive in comparison to the "average" middle-income Houston house of the later 1920s (which probably ran around $6,000), were less expensive than custom-designed houses. One of the reasons the Motts' houses attracted the attention they did was because they accrued value in excess of their actual cost by virtue of their sophisticated architectural design and detailing.

While Katharine Mott was unusual as a female real estate entrepreneur in Houston in the 1920s, she wasn't quite as singular as her carefully constructed professional persona suggested. Other women were building as well. What was for a time the tallest skyscraper in Houston, the Niels Esperson Building of 1926, was built by Mellie Keenan Esperson. And what had also been, for a time, the tallest building in Houston, the 11-story Scanlan Building of 1909, was constructed and owned by a female real estate investor and developer, Kate Scanlan. Scanlan's father and Esperson's first husband had been the catalysts, respectively, for their involvement with Houston real estate. This tradition goes back as far as 1837,

1659 South Boulevard, one of the Motts' early Houston houses, completed in the fall of 1928.

2421 Brentwood, built by Harry Mott in 1929.

3263 Del Monte, built by Katharine Mott in 1930.

when Charlotte Baldwin Allen, the wife of A. C. Allen, one of the founders of Houston, platted the Mrs. A. C. Allen Addition in what is today the Warehouse District.

Katharine Mott was also linked to her husband. But what sets her apart from Houston's other female real estate entrepreneurs is that Harry Mott remained inconspicuous in order that Katharine Mott might feature more prominently.

What enabled the Motts to establish themselves in Houston's residential real estate market was not Katharine's gender, but the architectural distinctiveness of the houses they built. American architecture of the 1920s is known for its stylistic eclecticism, an eclecticism especially apparent in the realm of domestic architecture. Within this realm, there were several dominant stylistic tendencies. One was the Georgian, based on historical models of 18th-century British and American provenance; this was identified as a formal style. Another, especially popular from 1924 until the early 1930s, was the Mediterranean, most often based on Spanish models but capable of incorporating Italian references as well. The Mediterranean could be formal — which usually implied a symmetrical front elevation — but more often it was valued for its picturesque potential. A third alternative was the picturesque manorial style. This was the genre in which all of the Motts' Houston houses were designed. Based on medieval British and French models, the picturesque manorial style enjoyed a surge of popularity along with the Mediterranean style in the 1920s. Such architects as Harrie T. Lindeberg of New York and Mellor, Meigs & Howe of Philadelphia provided authoritative modern interpretations of this genre. Their echoes can be seen again and again in American garden suburbs of the 1920s.

One needs to look at the Motts' houses in the context of the picturesque manorial style in Houston to understand why their houses exerted the impact they did. Birdsall P. Briscoe's Neville House in Courtlandt Place represents what was for Houston a sophisticated rendition of the picturesque manorial genre when it was built in 1914. However, its frontality, symmetry, and lack of decorative subtlety would have appeared provincial in a broader context. This is precisely the realignment that occurred when, in 1917, Harrie T. Lindeberg was commissioned to design the Neuhaus House in Courtlandt Place. The Neuhaus House, which in 1923 was constructed in Shadyside rather than on the lot for which it was originally

designed, set a new standard for ambitious domestic architecture in Houston.

The influence of the Neuhaus House was immediately apparent. Architect Maurice J. Sullivan was attuned to its lessons, as his own house, completed in 1923 on Southmore Boulevard, attests. One can see Birdsall P. Briscoe coming to terms with the implications of the Neuhaus House by stages in the mid-1920s.

John F. Staub, who was sent to Houston from Lindeberg's New York office to administer construction of the Neuhaus House and remained to begin his own practice, displayed his skill at handling the picturesque manorial style with the Chew House of 1926 on Inwood Drive in River Oaks.

The houses of Sullivan, Briscoe, and Staub were designed for the clients who occupied them. By the mid-1920s the picturesque manorial genre began to appear in speculative houses marketed to an upper-middle-income clientele in Houston. Those built in Edgemont in 1924 and 1925 by the Russell Brown Company, one of the most prolific residential architect-builders in Houston from the 1900s through the 1930s, exhibited a formulaic application of frontal gables and sloped roofs. The use of sash windows rather than casement windows, the restless composition of awkwardly related shapes, and the lack of integral decoration (such as brick bonding patterns) marked these as builders' houses. Charles W. Oliver, staff architect for the River Oaks Corporation and a former designer for the Russell Brown Company, varied the formula in a house on Pelham Drive, incorporating a cylindrical stair tower with a one- and two-story organization, but economizing with sash windows. Carl A. Mulvey, staff architect for the Braeswood Corporation, had the budget to be able to design a reduced version of a John Staub–type picturesque manor for one of Braeswood's model houses on Bluebonnet Boulevard of 1929. As competition increased during the 1920s, the architectural skillfulness of speculatively built housing likewise increased. This was the architectural and economic setting of Houston residential real estate development when Katharine and Harry Mott arrived.

The *Houston Post-Dispatch* story that welcomed Katharine Mott to town noted that "Mrs. Mott boast no highly specialized training for her work. She is not an architect or interior decorator."[2] All but one of Katharine and Harry Mott's Houston houses were designed by the Indianapolis architects Lee Burns and Edward D. James. The title blocks on Burns and James's surviving architectural drawings for their Houston houses identify them as Mott House Numbers 14, 16, and 28. Based on the number of houses the Motts built in Houston, this sequence implies that Burns and James designed houses for the couple before they came to Houston. Photographs of some of Katharine Mott's houses in Indianapolis suggest that they were designed by Burns and James, since they possess the distinctive proportions, composition, and ornamentation of her Houston houses.

The house known as Mott Number 14 was built on Brentwood Drive in 1928–29. The Motts' first house in River Oaks, it displays the steeply pitched roofs, clipped eaves, and stepped massing that characterize her houses.

The floor plans of this house display the organization of internal space in one-room-deep configurations, with a loggia projecting off the end of the living room and the dining room and kitchen locked together with intervening pantry and breakfast rooms. Upstairs, bathrooms and closets separate the bedrooms. There was no back stair in the house, a characteristic that showed up in all but one of the Motts' Houston houses. The lack of a stair represented one of the economies they observed in deciding what the market could live without. The use of wood stud construction surfaced with brick veneer, a construction technique introduced to Houston in the early 1900s that did not become commonplace until the 1920s, represents another of the Motts' economies. Expensive Houston houses of the 1920s were typically of hollow-tile-block-bearing wall construction.

The shaping of second-story bedroom and bathroom spaces was an important attribute of the Motts' houses. By pulling the eaves lines down and inserting second-story rooms under the slope of the roof, Burns and James consistently created a spatial ambiance or coziness in bedrooms and bathrooms that complemented the houses' picturesque manorial style. This complementarity between exterior image and interior spatial feel was a very important factor in giving the Motts a competitive advantage in the Houston market.

One of the earliest of the Motts' Houston houses was the "Edgemont" at 1635 South Boulevard in the Edgemont subdivision, completed in June 1928. It was followed by the "Inglenook" at 2620 Riverside Drive in Riverside Terrace in the fall of 1928. Also completed in the fall of 1928 was the house at 1659 South Boulevard. Not only in their external appearance, but also in their spatial organization, these three houses were variations on a single design, a trait of developer-built houses. The side elevation of the 1659 South Boulevard house, where it tapers down to a loggia and a recess off the master bedroom above, reveals the single-room depth of the structure and the insertion of the second-floor rooms underneath the slope of the roof. The spatial clarity with which these houses were shaped compensated for their repetition.

Harry Mott built 2627 Riverside Drive in 1929. It is a variation on the T plan of the previous three houses, although its dining room is to one side of the front door rather than in a rear appendage. Harry Mott also built the first of the Mott houses to incorporate a round tower — at 2612 Riverside Drive — in early 1929. A checkerboard pattern of brick and stone insets was first used on this house.

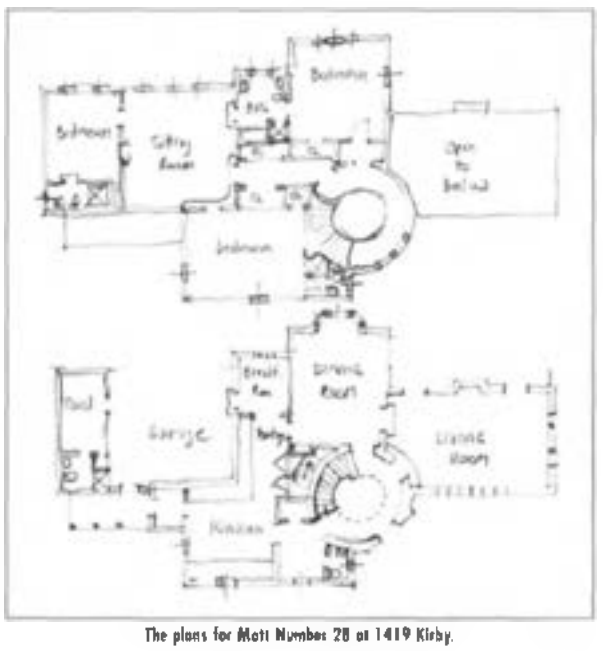
Harry Mott built 2421 Brentwood, and Katharine Mott built 2413 Brentwood next door, in the first half of 1929. The house at 2421 Brentwood was also a T-plan house, with the dining room next to the front door. The roof was pulled so low over the entrance bay that the house appears to be only one story high. The house at 2413 Brentwood, which was demolished in 1993, was intriguing because it had a floor plan unlike any of the other Mott houses. All of the major rooms were oriented to the south-facing rear garden.

Harry Mott built the house at 1660 South, completed in mid-1929. It is an L-plan house and incorporates the garage in the body of the house, a spatial progression registered in the west-side roof line.

Katharine Mott built a house for her family at 3325 Inwood Drive in River Oaks that was completed in the spring of 1930. In terms of internal spatial organization, this was the model for most of her houses built in 1930, which were larger than her previous houses. She also built the house at 3263 Del Monte. Harry Mott built the house at 1920 Woodbury in Devonshire Place in 1930, and Katharine built the house at 3027 Inwood in River Oaks, which represents a variation of the Motts' own house. Katharine Mott completed one more house in the fall of 1930, the house at 1419 Kirby Drive. Harry Mott built his last two houses during that same time, at 3196

Casement windows, 3263 Del Monte.

Spiral staircase, 3263 Del Monte.



The plans for Mott Number 28 at 1419 Kirby.

Del Monte Drive and at 2947 Inwood Drive. All were organized spatially like the Motts' own house. What this organization entailed was the incorporation of a double-car garage in the house, which expanded the amount of floor space on the second floor. Katharine Mott took advantage of this to add a spacious upstairs sitting room, a forerunner of the family room of the 1950s. The house at 2947 Inwood is the only one in which this spatial organization is completely intact. In place of the rear garage-apartment building, Katharine Mott built small back yard cottages containing a servants' apartment and an extra garage stall. (At her own house, this back cottage was her studio. It no longer exists.)

As do their exteriors, the interiors of the Motts' houses exhibit a high degree of consistency. Entrances are detailed to condense the architectural character of the house, as are the unusual loggia at 2421 Brentwood and the timbered door jamb at 2413 next door, which feature a bottle-glass panel. (Howell recalls that this was a favorite detail of her father's.) The early houses had scissors stairs railed with wrought iron. Typically, the stair was against an outside wall so that the stairwell was washed in natural light. The house at 2421 Brentwood introduced a spiral stair. At 3263 Del Monte, the spiral stair is in a tower, around which the entrance hall bends to take visitors from the front door to the living room. Vaulted ceiling bays spatially accentuate this long passage. In the Motts' later houses spiral stairs were developed with considerable spatial drama.

Interior doors between major first-floor rooms were aligned to create spatial vistas and perceptually enlarge the house. The use of casement windows with floor-level sills was especially effective in creating the illusion of spatial expansiveness. It was a trait that one sees often in the houses of John Staub and Birdsall Briscoe, and was one of the more sophisticated techniques that builders of the period usually did not pick up on.

At the house at 1419 Kirby, the second story does not extend over the living room, so the ceiling rises up underneath a steeply pitched roof. Here, Burns and James spatially juxtaposed the floor length casements and the low eaves line with a tall, mullioned window inserted in the gable end of the room. These give the living room a magical feeling. It looks like it ought to be gigantic, yet it feels spatially intimate. The step down from the entrance hall into the living room was a spatial shift repeated in every one of the Motts' houses. Burns and James's ability to manipulate scale, proportion, and perception were skills that significantly added to the value of the Motts' houses.

Interestingly, only a few of the houses have libraries. Loggias or garden rooms provided the extra sitting room. One is tempted to deduce that the Motts found that libraries (which would require custom cabinet work for shelves) did not add significant value to their houses.

Upstairs, the Mott houses contained multiple bedrooms, insulated from each other by bathrooms and closets. The long central hall of the house at 1659 South Boulevard retains its built-in storage. Across the street at 1660 South, the typical configuration of a Mott bedroom under the eaves can be seen. The house at 1660 retains its original bathrooms. These interconnect with bedrooms, enabling one to move from bedroom to bedroom without walking through the hall. Such parallel lines of movement were also a feature of many of John Staub's houses. It was an organization he explained in terms of security.

Decorative details gave substance to the design of the Motts' houses. This is especially true of the extraordinary brickwork. Burns and James's decorative brickwork was both exuberant and subtle. The house at 1660 South Boulevard displays their hierarchical gradation of decoration. At mid-range it is the contrast of brick and stone that is visible, at a scale that integrates the window opening into the composition. Random-pattern brickwork is reserved for expanses of wall that are not pierced with openings. The variations in color, pattern, and projection do not compete with the checkerboarding around the living room windows. At 2947 Inwood Drive, the low-relief brick diapering is not immediately apparent. Sunlight falling obliquely on the north facing street elevation at certain times of

1419 Kirby, built by Katharine Mott in 1930.

the year and day highlights the shifting depths of the wall surface, subtly animating the front elevation.

At her own house, Katharine Mott was attentive to the texture of the panels of brick nogging and stucco framed between timbered bays. Ellen Mott Howell recalls that her mother sought a weathered look, and mixed buttermilk with paint to create colors and textures to achieve this.

Interior detail was restrained. Stained-glass panels were used to accent large expanses of glass. Wide plank floors, and ceiling timbers carved with low-relief decorations, create a dark, reflective armature that modulates the planes of light-colored plaster walls and ceilings. Occasionally, carved door panels were installed, as at the house at 1419 Kirby Drive. The early houses contain simple plaster molding. Carved wooden mantles were elegantly inset at the larger houses, although the house at 1920 Woodbury in Devonshire Place possesses a simply profiled stone mantelpiece. This house is the only one of the Motts' houses to retain what was probably a feature of many of the others: iron grilled gates between the entry hall and the living room.

The Great Depression destroyed the Motts' house-building business. Within a year of moving into their house on Inwood, Katharine and Harry Mott had to sell it. According to Ellen Mott Howell, her parents sacrificed the fruits of the success they had achieved in Houston. Their daughters were taken out of Hockaday and Kinkaid and sent to public school; they had to give up their membership in the River Oaks Country Club. The family moved to apartments, first in Montrose, then in the South End. Personal misfortune compounded Katharine Mott's business reverses. She was diagnosed with breast cancer and had to undergo sequential mastectomies. Harry Mott was able to secure a position with the River Oaks Corporation as a real estate salesman, and in 1936 the Motts moved out to 20 acres they acquired in what is now the Memorial village of Piney Point, just west of Radney Road and the present Kinkaid campus. There, Katharine Mott built her last houses: humble, almost rustic houses on which she worked with a carpenter named Sauer who lived in Memorial. Although Houston's residential real estate market rebounded sufficiently in late 1935 for speculative builders to become active again, Katharine Mott never reentered the business world. She lived at Mottville — as the Mott family humorously referred to their compound on Mott Lane — until her death in 1979.

Katharine Mott remains an enigmatic figure. More research is needed to illuminate her personality and the role she and Harry Mott played in shaping their Houston houses. Katharine and Harry Mott's houses, though few in number, have stood the test of time. Intelligence, responsibility, grace, and beauty operate as they should: these attributes inspire us and command our respect, admiration, and affection. These houses demonstrate that money-making speculative buildings, when thoughtfully and imaginatively designed, possess value that far outlives their initial profit performance. At a time when speculative building is transforming Houston with a vengeance, it is time that we paid careful attention to the lessons the Mott houses teach. ■

1. "Mrs. Katharine B. Mott Extends Home Building Operations Here," *Houston Post-Dispatch*, February 10, 1929.
2. Ibid.

All the World a Stage

Henry Dreyfuss, Industrial Designer: The Man in the Brown Suit *by Russell Flinchum. Rizzoli International Publications, 1997. 224 pp., illus., $50.*

Joseph Urban: Architecture, Theatre, Opera, Film *by Randolph Carter and Robert Reed Cole. Abbeville Press, 1992. 272 pp., illus., $65.*

Reviewed by Barry Moore

Last year, in conjunction with the Cooper Hewitt Museum's exhibition *Henry Dreyfuss Directing Design*, Rizzoli International released what is, surprisingly, the first book to comprehensively document the life and work of this pioneer of industrial design, who died a quarter of a century ago. But then again, there's a precedent for being slow on the uptake when it comes to acknowledging in print the importance of innovative designers: In 1992, when Randolph Carter and Robert Reed Cole's *Joseph Urban: Architecture, Theatre, Opera, Film* was published, it was the first extensive survey of *its* subject, who had passed away in 1933.

These otherwise unrelated books are connected by more than being overdue studies of creative geniuses who, a generation apart, influenced many around them; they're also linked by the fact that, early on, each of the men pursued a successful stage design career. Both Henry Dreyfuss and Joseph Urban were formed by the theater. And both carried away to their greater triumphs a crucial lesson of scenic design: that the control of the entire design process results in the physical embodiment of an intellectual idea. But where Dreyfuss profited from the theater mainly by learning to work very thoroughly and very fast, Urban brought a deeper sense of architecture and light and color to the stage than it had ever seen before. And that work informed his architecture as well.

For Urban, work as a stage designer allowed him to accumulate the capital he required to establish an architectural office in New York and pursue his first love. For Dreyfuss, experience and connections in the theater, along with a regular income, gave him what he needed to begin his industrial design career. Both men were superb in their theatrical endeavors and could have been known for that alone. Urban, however, went on to design some of America's best examples of Art Deco buildings and interiors. And Henry Dreyfuss, of course, evolved into a giant in the industrial design field, creating everyday objects seen and used by millions of people the world over.

Joseph Urban's life combined great talent propelled by enormous energy, and it spanned two worlds. He was born in 1872 in Vienna, where he also trained, and the first half of his career was steeped in the spirit of *Jugendstil* (as Art Nouveau was designated in Germany). In his home city he designed books, furniture, fabrics, buildings, interiors, costumes, sets for avant-garde operas, and, with the most astonishing results, pavilions for Emperor Franz Joseph's 50th anniversary in 1898 and his 60th anniversary in 1908.

Although first and foremost an architect, Urban was a consummate man of the theater. Because of his groundbreaking scenic design in Europe, especially for visionary director Max Reinhardt, in 1912 he was hired by the Boston Opera and brought the "new stagecraft" to America. For Urban, the aim was to fuse all the elements of a theatrical piece — sets, costumes, lights, movement — into a unified whole for maximum effect, a concept Richard Wagner named *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

The Boston company failed to survive beyond the outbreak of World War I, a fortunate turn for Urban, since it left him free to take advantage of the attention his work had drawn from the era's great Broadway impresarios, most notably Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. When Ziegfeld, eager to elevate his already successful Follies to the highest theatrical art, first approached Urban, the designer was apprehensive about doing "girlie shows." But soon he was happily immersed in creating a distinctive architectural look for Ziegfeld's extravaganzas. The "Great Follies" date from 1915, Urban's first; the collaboration continued through 1931 and included the first production of *Show Boat* in 1927. Reviewers were always unstinting in their praise. In the years preceding the Great Depression, the Ziegfeld Follies became a symbol for America, and it was Urban who raised them to a high level of sophistication and art.

Urban enjoyed an equally long and successful collaboration with the Metropolitan Opera, for which he designed more than 50 productions, building the scenery in his studio, overseeing its installation, and designing the lighting as well.

In the flush of his Follies triumphs, Urban met William Randolph Hearst, whose mistress, Marion Davies, had been a Ziegfeld Girl. At the time, Hearst was running a motion picture studio in New York, and he soon asked Urban to be his scenic designer. Not only did the three-dimensional quality of the movie sets make them more architecturally challenging than those of the stage, but Hearst's deep pockets allowed Urban to at last earn and save enough money to establish his first architectural office in Manhattan.

The quality of the architectural output of this poorly remembered man is astounding: superb Art Deco penthouses for millionaires, a clubhouse in Palm Beach, Fifth Avenue shops, an experimental (and unbuilt) theater for Max Reinhardt, the overwhelming Ziegfeld Theater with its egg-shaped interior. Most notable, perhaps, is New York's New School for Social Research — a superb 1930 modern building, and one of only two of Urban's works still standing.

Urban's last commission was to consult on the design of the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress. He contributed the fair's two most memorable elements: the color and the light.

Henry Dreyfuss also produced prodigiously on Broadway. In 1923, barely out of school, he was engaged by the Mark Strand Vaudeville Company to design sets, costumes, lighting, and equipment. He executed 52 shows a year for five years, for $50 a week. He was well trained for the work, having studied at New York's Ethical Culture Society's Arts High School from 1920 to 1922. It was the last of his formal education, though his intellectual pursuits never abated.

Briefly, Dreyfuss worked for that other stage designer who turned to industrial design, Norman Bel Geddes; he always referred to Bel Geddes as "genius number one in my life."

By 1928 Dreyfuss had begun his transition to the still new field of industrial design. Work was slow at first, probably because Dreyfuss was unwilling to compromise. When an executive at Macy's offered him an opportunity to redesign anything and everything sold in the department store, Dreyfuss was intrigued, but ended up refusing the job because he wouldn't be able to consult with the people responsible for manufacturing the products. Without the manufacturers' cooperation, he knew, his design ideas could too easily be compromised. Again in 1930, when he was invited to join in a competition to create a new telephone for Bell Telephone Laboratories, he declined because he wasn't allowed to consult with the phone company's engineers. But when none of the other designers were able to come up with something Bell liked, they hired Dreyfuss anyway, and he is credited with the design of the 1937 Model 302 telephone. Dreyfuss went on to create Bell's 500 series phone, over 93 million of which were manufactured between 1950 and 1982, the most numerous technological object ever shaped by one person's aesthetic.

Throughout his long career — which included designing New York Central Railroad's iconic 20th Century Limited (and everything in it), Westclox's Big Ben, Honeywell's thermostats, and John Deere's tractors — Dreyfuss never lost sight of these design parameters: safety and convenience of use, ease of maintenance, cost, appeal, and appearance. For Henry Dreyfuss, this mantra was a road map rather than a blueprint, and the prioritization of these human values made his designs both universal and timeless.

One of the pleasures of *The Man in the Brown Suit* is its profusion of illustrations; the same is true of *Joseph Urban*. With both books, there is an irresistible temptation to first look at all the pictures and read the captions before plunging into the carefully researched texts.

But the texts have their own joy, if only as a reminder of how Henry Dreyfuss touches us everyday, through the way he reshaped his field of industrial design, and of how Joseph Urban's work can still inspire and delight — he was the last Renaissance architect of the 20th century. No library of architecture, design, or theater should be without this pair of books. ■

Entrance to Jones Plaza parking garage, a relic of planning from the 1960s.

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