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OF HOUSTON

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Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance

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Something old, something new: The Friedman Clock Tower, composed of elements from the 1904 City Hall that once graced Market Square, and Philip Johnson's modernistic Republic Bank Center.

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C A L

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE SPRING LECTURE SERIES: LOOKING SOUTH — RECENT ARCHITECTURE FROM LATIN AMERICA

January 26 through February 23
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
713.348.4876

Latin American architecture is entering a period of design excellence unseen since the glory days of the 1950s. Leading the renaissance is an exciting generation of architects who combine the region's long-standing devotion to modernism with a newfound concern for the urban environment. This series will showcase the work of architects from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico.

Wednesday, January 26, 7:30 p.m.
MIQUEL ADRIA, editor of the architectural journal *Arquine* in Mexico City, will speak on "Latin American Architecture: A New Generation."

Wednesday, February 2, 7:30 p.m.
MATHIAS KLOTZ, an architect from Santiago de Chile, will speak on "South Pacific, Works and Projects."

Wednesday, February 9, 7:30 p.m.
CECILIA RANGEL and JAMES MAYEUX, principals of Rangel Mayeux Arquitectos in Monterrey, Mexico, will speak on "En El Aire: Spirit of Place Where Cultures Collide."

Wednesday, February 16, 7:30 p.m.
MARIANO CLUSELLAS, an architect from Buenos Aires, Argentina, will speak on "Rio de la Plata, Houses."

Wednesday, February 23, 7:30 p.m.
ANA LUIZA NOBRE, architectural historian and critic in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, will speak on "Parallel Worlds: Houses and Housing in Brazil."

HOUSTON TALKS: DEANS' LECTURE SERIES

RDA and the schools of architecture at Rice and the University of Houston cosponsor this program, which features international architects who give public lectures and spend time with students of both schools. All lectures held in the atrium of the UH College of Architecture. 713.348.4876

March/April (Date to be announced)
ZAHA HADID, a member of the top tier of internationally renowned architects, speaks on her recent work. Hadid's designs rank among the most inspired of recent years.

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE SPRING LECTURE SERIES

Unless noted, all lectures are held in the Farish Gallery at Rice University School of Architecture. For more information, please call 713.348.4864 or check the lecture listing on the school of architecture's website, www.arch.rice.edu.

Monday, February 21, 7 p.m.
HOWARD DAVIES, of Atelier Big City in Montreal, Canada, speaks on "Spectacular Subtleties."

Wednesday, March 1, 7 p.m.
ROBERT MANGURIAN and MARY-ANN RAY, of Studioworks in Los Angeles, speak on "Some Directives for Moving Into [this] Next Century."

Wednesday, March 22, 7 p.m.
LAURIE HAWKINSON, of Smith-Miller+Hawkinson Architects in New York, speaks on "Between Spaces." Lecture will be held in the Jury Room, Anderson Hall.

Monday, March 27, 7 p.m.
ERIC OWEN MOSS, of Eric Owen Moss Architects in Los Angeles, speaks on "Through a Glass Darkly." Lecture will be held in the Jury Room, Anderson Hall.

Thursday, April 6, 7 p.m.
KRZYSTOF WODICZKO, a New York artist, speaks on "Critical Vehicles." Lecture will not be in Farish Hall; call for location.

Wednesday, April 26, 7:30 p.m.
NORMAN BRYSON, chair of the History and Theory of Art department at Slade School of Fine Art, University College, London, speaks on "Seurat and the Scene of Drawing."

RICE ENVIRONMENTAL CONFERENCE: PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES, THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORTATION

Saturday, February 12, 9 a.m.–5:15 p.m.
Rice University Student Center

Transportation and city planning will be the focus of this year's Rice Environmental Conference. Among the topics to be covered in the day's panel discussions are air quality, smart growth, and future transportation technologies. Scheduled speakers include former Houston mayor Bob Lanier and John Johnson of the Texas Transportation Commision. For more information, please check the conference website at www.ruf.rice.edu/envclub/conference-home.html.

CALENDAR

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE SERIES

All lectures are held in the College of Architecture Lecture Theater. For more information, please call 713.743.2400.

Thursday, January 27, 3 p.m.
ELLEN WEISS, an architecture professor at Tulane University whose research concentrates on American vernacular architecture, speaks on "An American Space: The Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting."

Tuesday, February 1, 3 p.m.
STEVEN IZENOUR, co-author of *Learning from Las Vegas*, speaks on "Learning to Love What You Love to Hate: Excursions in the Everyday Vernacular."

Tuesday, February 8, 6 p.m.
JOHN PATKAU, a principal of Patkau Architects in Vancouver, Canada, will speak on his recent work.

Thursday, February 10, 3 p.m.
ROGER RIEWE, a principal of the office of RieglerRiewe in Graz, Austria, speaks on "Conditioned Openness." Riewe teaches at the ESARQ (UIC) Barcelona. This lecture is sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Institute, New York.

Thursday, February 17, 6 p.m.
JACQUES BOULET, an architect and theoretician teaching in Paris, France, speaks on contemporary criticisms. This lecture is sponsored by the French Embassy Cultural Services.

Tuesday, February 22, 3 p.m.
NUNO MATEUS, an architect who practices in Porto, Portugal, speaks on his recent work. Mateus' work is among the finest of the young Portuguese generation of architects that emerged after Alvaro Siza. Mateus is guest critic for the College of Architecture's Honors Studio.

Tuesday, February 29, 6 p.m.
JENNIFER SIEGAL, a principal in the Los Angeles-based Office of Mobile Design and an architecture professor at Woodbury University, speaks on "Office of Mobile Design." Siegal's research explores the architectural potential of inhabited vehicles.

Tuesday, March 7, 3 p.m.
ADOLPH KELZ, an architect who practices in Graz, Austria, will speak on "DenkenBauen/ThoughtConstruction." Kelz's buildings are rooted in a critical reading of the site, an analysis of societal conditions, the realization of humanistic-scientific ideas, and artistic positions.

Tuesday, March 28, 6 p.m.
HERMAN HERTZBERGER, a doyen of Dutch architecture whose work is rooted in modernism and concerned with social issues, speaks on his recent work. Hertzberger is guest critic for the College of Architecture's Honors Studio.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITS

All exhibits presented in the College of Architecture Gallery, except where noted. For more information, please call 713.743.2400.

Thursday, February 10, through Friday, March 3
Keeland, a retrospective show of the work of Houston architect and educator Burdette Keeland.

Sunday, March 5, through Friday, April 7
Michael Thonet — Furniture from Austria, an exhibit of the classic work of Thonet, the Viennese furniture company that invented the bentwood chair more than one hundred years ago. Sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Institute, New York.

Sunday, March 19, through Sunday, June 11
Organ Grinder, an installation by Dwayne Bohuslav + parasite, will be installed in and transform the atrium space of the college of architecture. Presented in the context of the "Houston 2000 International Sculpture Conference," and with the special support of the GDH College of Architecture.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE EVENTS

For more information, please call 713.743.2400.

Thursday, February 3, through Monday, February 7
Arcstage, a design competition for a mobile jury room/exhibit space for the atrium of the College of Architecture. An opening lecture will be given on the evening of February 3.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE HOMETOWN TOUR: SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

March 30 through April 2
713.348.4876
Architectural historian Stephen Fox and Savannah native Barrie Scardino will guide RDA members through this seductive Southern city at the height of its spring bloom. The four-day trip includes tours of private historic homes, dining in private clubs and four-star restaurants, and side trips to 18th-century plantations. The tour is limited to 25 guests.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE 2000 ANNUAL ARCHITECTURE TOUR

Saturday and Sunday,
April 8 and 9
The 2000 members-only architecture tour will feature several townhouses reflecting a unique Houston style. Not a feature of the Houston landscape until the early 1960s, townhouses challenge Houston architects to plan ingeniously on small sites. The RDA architecture tour will explore the ways in which these constraints and possibilities have stimulated architects to design houses that are inventive and beautiful. A lecture by architectural historian Stephen Fox will precede the tour.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE/HOUSTON ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION SALLY WALSH LECTURE

Wednesday, May 10, 7:30 p.m.
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

MARGO GRANT WALSH, vice chairman and managing principal of Gensler, New York, will speak on her work. Co-sponsored by the Houston Architecture Foundation, this program focuses on interior architecture and design.

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS/HOUSTON

Please call 713.520.0155 for more information.

March 25-26
The AIA presents its annual architecture tour, focusing on new and remodeled homes designed by AIA/Houston members.

Friday, April 14
"Celebrate Architecture," AIA/Houston's annual gala.

Saturday, June 3
Sand castle competition at East Beach, Galveston.

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LETTERS

WORDS OF PRAISE ...
Congratulations to *Cite* on its recent awards and well deserved grants and honors!

For years, *Cite* has offered generations of Houstonians and other readers a wonderful narrative of Houston's architecture. *Cite* 45 is a superb illustration of this narration. Each article in this issue makes its unique contribution to the story, from the evolution of and then spiraling demise of Houston's garden apartments to the future plans for Main Street and Jones Plaza. From super-cooled buildings to Houston á la Mies and ending with the poignant and insightful summary of Houston's built environment during the last quarter century, William F. Stern's "Boom, Then and Now."

Accolades to all who contributed to and worked on this issue and issues past.

D. Jean Krchnak
Houston

... AND OF REGRET
Reading your Summer 1999 issue [*Cite* 45] verified a very disconcerting feeling that's been overwhelming me the past couple of years. Reading "Extended Stay, Limited Service: The Rise of a New Hotel Type," "Rooms With a View: In Praise of the Vanishing Garden Apartment," and the Hindcite "Boom, Then and Now" confirms what *Cite* fails to state explicitly: architecture is dead in Houston.

There is a mind numbing banality with which most new projects are designed and built in Houston these days. Except for the historical preservation happening in some parts of the inner city, there is little activity worth noting except Rafael Moneo's addition to the MFAH and the new Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. Let's face it, the plan to Make Main Street Happen, like the plans to rejuvenate Allen's Landing, is folly at best, being led by one of our greatest offenders, Ed Wulfe. My cynical best guess is that the City of Houston will have a difficult time Making Decent Bus Stops Happen.

Cite used to explore, critique, and exult in the architecture and design movement in Houston. Now, it simply eulogizes it.

James Rowland
Austin

BORDER TALK
Stephen Fox's review of *Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico* was enjoyable, as was David Theis' review of *Guerrero Viejo* ["In the New World," *Cite* 45].

The "magical realism" viewpoint of *Guerrero Viejo* writer Elena Poniatowska probably disallowed her telling how the Mexican government finally forced the inhabitants from Guerrero: Soldiers tore the roofs from their homes! Not very magical, but plenty real.

It's so sad about Guerrero. I don't think the water ever reaches those beautiful old buildings and their cobblestone streets up on the bluff. The water is not even visible today from Guerrero Viejo.

I also enjoyed Stephen Fox's "recent" publication on architecture along the Rio Grande, especially the information on Alan Taniguchi's works ["On the Border: An Architectural Tour," *Cite* 30]. I was surprised (and disappointed), however, that you missed Alan's original neighborhood in Harlingen, where all six homes were designed by him. Though Alan's home is totally butchered, there remain three homes (mine included) that are untouched externally.

Mine is surely the smallest home Taniguchi has ever done, at only 1,100 square feet, and insignificant. But the other two homes are really, really neat. Come see us. We're three proud homeowners.

Michael Dailey
Harlingen

Have a criticism, comment, or response to something you've seen in Cite? *If so, the editors would like to hear from you. You can mail your comments to Letters to the Editor,* Cite, *1973 West Gray, Suite 1, Houston, Texas 77019; fax them to 713-529-5881; or e-mail them to citemail@ruf.rice.edu.*

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The Mosque on Main

In the five years since Rockets star Hakeem Olajuwon purchased the opulent 1928 Houston National Bank Building and announced plans to transform it into an Islamic education facility, downtown watchers have been wondering what would become of the showpiece structure. As elements of the 202 Main Street property were removed, rained on, stolen, and, in some instances, even sold to local antique dealers, preservationists became alarmed. Since last spring, renovation has appeared to be at a standstill, and more recently, rumors have circulated that perhaps the mosque project had been moved to another part of the city, and even that Olajuwon was considering selling the historic building.

The rumors have spread in part because plans for the National Bank Building, which is officially owned by the Hakeem Olajuwon Islamic Da'wah Institute, have been purposefully kept under wraps out of what representatives of the institute say is fear of anti-Muslim sentiments.

Unfortunately, by keeping quiet, the institute has further inflamed the apprehensions of preservationists. In November, though, the silence was at least partially broken when the project's architect and engineer, Anon Quaddumi of Interfield Engineering Company, said that buildout of the National Bank Building had been scheduled to begin before the end of 1999 and would be completed by the end of 2000 — opening to the public for the first time in 25 years one of the city's most important buildings.

Still, officials at the Downtown Historic District, the principal watchdog group shepherding downtown preservation issues, remain skeptical that the project is actually underway, and that all will be done with a careful eye to preservation. "Honestly, I've heard everything," says DHD executive director Jim Maxwell. "I've learned very quickly that unless you actually see someone moving in, you never know what's really going to happen."

A large part of the problem has apparently been a lack of communication. The DHD claims they've had trouble reaching the Da'wah Institute; they say they've even gone so far as to have one of Olajuwon's bodyguards deliver a letter of appeal to the basketball player during a game. But the problems that have surrounded the National Bank Building also reflect the conflicts that can arise whenever a historic structure is renovated for a use different from its original one. Preservationists, looking to history, may push for minimal changes, while the new owners, looking to current concerns, may want more extensive alterations.

From a temple of commerce to a temple, plain and simple: The Houston National Bank Building at 202 Main.

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AS THE HOUSTON NATIONAL BANK BUILDING IS PREPARED FOR A SPIRITUAL LIFE, PRESERVATIONISTS WORRY IT MIGHT LOSE ITS SOUL

BY ANN WALTON SIEBER

To allay concerns, Quaddumi and the Da'wah Institute offer assurances that all will be carefully tended when the doors of the National Bank Building open again at year's end. And if completed as described, the Islamic facility could make a significant contribution to the richness of downtown's cultural landscape. While many traditional mosques are closed to non-believers, the Da'wah Institute plans to make the National Bank Building into a multi-purpose Islamic educational facility open to all.

"It is a very sensitive project, and we have potential enemies," Quaddumi says. "Islam doesn't have the best image in the West — there are a lot of stereotypes. That is what this building is going to try to alleviate, try to remove some of those stereotypes.... It addresses the multicultural fabric of the city, representing a primarily immigrant group that up until now has not been that involved in civic affairs or viewed as an integral part of the society.... It will be as much an educational facility for non-Muslims as for Muslims."

"We're trying to build bridges between us and other religions," adds Fayez Ghwari, general secretary of the Da'wah Institute. "We want to open up to other communities and build cooperation."

Although the facility will include two separate mosques, one for men and one for women, they will make up only part of the building's overall structure. According to Quaddumi, the bank's spectacular, 6,000-foot domed lobby will be kept largely intact, and its space given to the public for prayer or quiet contemplation. The main entrance will be moved to the rear of the building and face onto a Travis Street parking lot that is part of the property. "It will be very open to the public," Quaddumi says. "I would say that similar to Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York, it will be a quiet area in the middle of the city."

•

The building Olajuwon and his organization plan to offer as a temple to Allah began its life as a temple to money. The Houston National Bank Building was built in 1928 by Humble Oil co-founder Ross

To make the bank's ornate interior suitable for a mosque, all representational images had to be removed or covered.

Sterling. Designed by Sterling's son-in-law Wyatt C. Hedrig, and Hedrig's Houston partner R.D. Gottlieb, to be a showplace of 1920s high-flung wealth, the bank has a massive exterior that sports limestone, black granite, and a perimeter of huge, five-foot-wide fluted Doric columns. Inside, a large, silver Texas star surrounded by intricate gold leaf designs presides over a huge, 56-foot-high domed hall lined with royal purple marble imported from Europe. Located near the foot of Main Street, the Houston National Bank Building was built in what was then the heart of Houston's financial district. It was to be the last great bank building in Houston for decades to come, thanks to the stock market crash the following year.

The Houston National Bank remained at its Main Street location until 1964, when its operations were moved into the Tenneco Building. Six years later, Franklin Bank took over the property and occupied it until 1975, when Franklin was shut down by the FDIC. Developer Harvin Moore bought the building in 1978, but could not come up with a successful use for it. Since it is basically a huge lobby, the building cannot easily be carved up into offices or apartments, which limited its redevelopment options. In 1988, the Houston Pops floated a plan to turn the building into a theater, keeping the grand hall as a lobby and building an addition with a stage and seating in the parking lot out back. But financing was never secured, and in 1991 Dick Knight bought the property. His City Partnership group tried to find a suitable restoration project, but also had no success. The space was used as a set for a few movies, *I Come in Peace* (1990) and *The Trust* (1992) among them, and some organizations used its grand backdrop for their galas. But basically, the building languished.

So when Olajuwon announced in April 1994 that he was going to buy the property, preservationists were jubilant. They were happy that the National Bank Building was to be purchased by what appeared to be an appreciative patron with enough money to do it justice. Olajuwon, reportedly overwhelmed by the bank's interior, was quoted as saying, "That building is like a museum... I will buy this for God." "Rescued from Ruin," announced a *Houston Chronicle* headline, while another story proclaimed, "Downtown revitalization got a slam dunk!"

But the first hint of trouble came only a few months later, when the new owners removed the 15 round bronze medallions that lined the bank's exterior frieze. The bronze disks portrayed scenes of Greek gods and heroes; the Da'wah Institute said they conflicted with Islam's religious strictures, which forbid animate figures representational of humans or animals on or within a religious building.

Because the Houston National Bank Building is part of the city-designated Main Street/Market Square Historic District, changes to its exterior are not supposed to be made without the approval of the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission or the Texas Historical Commission. A member of the commission says they've been told that the removed medallions are being stored in a warehouse, but that as of late last year commission representatives and representatives of the Da'wah Institute had not been able to coordinate a visit to see them. According to the institute, five of the medallions are gone, stolen from the building. In addition, the lighting sconces that were on the columns in the lobby have been stolen.

There have been other concerns as well. Preservationists have been alarmed by the removal of certain items from the building during renovation. When the basement was gutted, a hand-carved white marble staircase was taken away to clear space for classrooms. As of late last year, the stairway was for sale at Pasternak's Emporium on Morse, as was the bank's revolving brass door. Such discoveries do little to calm preservationists. "Parts of that building are in every chop shop in Houston," laments Courtney Key, associate director of the DHD.

Key and others have also expressed concern about broken windows in the building that allow rain and humidity to pour in. Key has been particularly worried about the murals that surround the lobby's interior dome; one has already fallen, and another has been threatening to follow suit.

Whether the planned increase in construction activity at the Houston National Bank Building will alleviate or deepen these concerns remains to be seen. Now that the buildout has been announced, preservationists wonder what will be done with the representational figures that are inside the bank building. For his part, Quaddumi says that all taboo figures will be covered up in such a way that they can later be restored, should the bank building at some point no longer be an Islamic institution. "It will stay totally intact," he says of the bank's interior. "Very little will be changed."

If that's the case, then some prayers will have been answered. "This is probably one of the most important buildings in the state of Texas, both historically and architecturally," says DHD board member Minnette Boesel. "When you buy something like that, you are the owner, but it's an artwork, and you're a public custodian of it." ■

More Good Bricks

In 1979, when the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance came up with the idea for the Good Brick Awards, it was working with a simple premise — if you pat people on the back a bit for rescuing buildings rather than tearing them down, then perhaps more of Houston's architectural heritage would be saved.

At the time, combining the words "Houston" and "Preservation" seemed something of a stretch. But today, while it's still not uncommon for a valuable piece of history to fall to the wrecking ball, the idea that rehabilitating buildings is generally better than razing them has gained a foothold in the city. Renovation has become the mantra of downtown's rebirth, and as a result, the judges for the 1999 Good Brick Awards, which were awarded November 29 at a ceremony in the Brown Auditorium of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, had an unusually large selection of projects to choose from. They included everything from the redesign of a pair of shotgun houses in the Fifth Ward, to the restoration of 912 Prairie Avenue, to the repaving of the 1500 block of Michigan Street with historically accurate brick pavers.

The Good Brick Awards are presented annually in recognition of leadership and excellence in historic preservation, including project planning, publications, renovation, restoration, and adaptive reuse for commercial and residential structures, historic monuments, parks, and landscapes. For 1999 there were ten winners, among them the Prairie Group, L.L.C., for the façade restoration of 912 Prairie; Pentasafe, Inc., for its corporate commitment to preservation in the restoration and adaptive reuse of 530 Lovett Boulevard; Tripoli Development Ltd. and the Mirador Group for the facade restoration of 306 Main Street (the Guaranty National Bank Building); Kyle D. Smith for the restoration of the 1915 Italianate-style Macatee House at 1220 Southmore Avenue in the Binz subdivision; the Houston Area Urban League, Inc., for its commitment to the 1921 Federal Reserve Bank at 1301 Texas Avenue; Ostlind Thomas, Inc., for building compatible new housing in a bungalow and cottage neighborhood at 448, 452, and 456 West 24th Street in the Heights; and the residents of the 1500 block of Michigan Street for neighborhood preservation of the historic landscape by pressuring a developer to replace the brick pavers removed during infrastructure work.

The President's Award went to John Hannah, who helped start the Endangered Buildings Fund, for his commitment to preservation efforts in the city, while the Stewart Title Award was presented to Brett Zamore for his adaptive reuse of two shotgun houses at 4739 Buck Street, cited as an example of community building and building a cross-cultural partnership in the context of historic preservation. The winner of the Preservation Program Award, given for research, education, and creating a climate for historic preservation, was the Texas Trailblazer Preservation Association, which researches and documents the history of African Americans in Texas. ■

Class of 2000

Despite all the activity downtown over the last few years, the rejuvenation of central Houston has been marked by surprisingly few new buildings. While there has been plenty of residential construction around the city's edges, at the city's core the rebirth has been mainly rehabilitative. Unlike the boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when new skyscrapers were the order of the day, the current boom has been primarily identified with breathing life into dead structures such as the Albert Thomas Convention Center and the Rice Hotel. Indeed, were it not for government funded projects such as Enron Field and the Harris County Criminal Justice Center, Houston's skyline at the end of the 1990s would look very much as it did at the decade's beginning. More vibrant, perhaps, but still basically the same.

As we enter a new century, though, that promises to change. On the boards are four new buildings for downtown: three skyscrapers and the first new major performance hall to be built since the Wortham Center. Yes, one of the three skyscrapers is a government building, but the other two mark the first privately funded office towers to be built downtown since the 1980s. Does this mean a return to the go-go spirit of two decades back? Probably not. Still, this particular Class of 2000 may suggest that as Houston enters the 21st century, a flicker of that spirit remains. ■

1000 MAIN
Main at Lamar

Architect: Gensler/Houston
Cost: $150 million
Projected completion date: July 2002
Developer: Century Development
Height: 38 stories
Square footage: 800,000

ENRON BUILDING
1500 Louisiana

Architect: Cesar Pelli
Cost: $200 million
Projected completion date: March 2002
Developer: Hines
Height: 40 stories
Square footage: 1.3 million

HOBBY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
800 Bagby

Architect: Robert A.M. Stern, New York,
with Morris Architects, Houston
Cost: $85 million
Projected completion date: Spring 2002
Developer: Century Development
Height: 10 stories (with three-story glass-fronted lobby)
Square footage: 250,000

HARRIS COUNTY CIVIL JUSTICE CENTER
Caroline between Congress and Franklin

Architect: Pierce Goodwin Alexander & Linville
Cost: $119 million (includes furnishings)
Projected completion date: January 2003
Developer: Harris County
Height: 15 stories
Square footage: 650,000

RETURN TO ALLEN PARKWAY VILLAGE

Houston's best known, and most troubled, housing project reopens

A magnificent skyline view hasn't made critics any happier about the suburban appearance of the new housing units at Allen Parkway Village.

For a place that has generated so much controversy over the last few decades, Allen Parkway Village received suprisingly little attention in November when, after months of delay, it welcomed its first new residents in almost four years. There was a small article in the *Chronicle*, a tiny comment on television, a brief mention on the radio, and that was it.

Of course, by this time it's likely that many Houstonians are weary of hearing about the 1942-era housing project and its various woes. Since the late 1970s, when the city officials first began trying to empty and sell off the property on Allen Parkway near downtown, through the 1980s, as tenants fought the city on redevelopment, and into the 1990s, as the housing project was emptied anyway and a bargain struck to retain a third of its historic units while demolishing the rest, Allen Parkway Village has been a thorn in the side of Houston's sense of itself. To some, it was an area of blight that needed to be cleared away for the city to move into the future; to others, it was a reminder of a heritage that needed to be saved so the city wouldn't lose an important connection to its past.

So when the first group of tenants began unpacking their boxes in the renamed Historic Oaks of Allen Parkway Village, what they were unpacking them into was of more than passing interest. Part of what they were moving into was a still very active construction site; of the 500 units ultimately planned for the new Allen Parkway Village, only about 80 were ready for occupancy in November. They were part of the 222 units that have been built into the outer shells of what remains from the modern, flat-roofed structures designed in the 1940s with the assistance of MacKie & Kamrath architects. Though the exterior appearance of these rehabilitated units retain what architectural historian Stephen Fox has described appreciatively as "precisely defined contours, cantilevered concrete canopies, and artful brick and tile banding," the insides were almost completely new.

According to Horace Allison, acting deputy director of the Housing Authority of the City of Houston, about all that was retained of the original interiors were the mail slots to each apartment — an affectation, since mail will not be delivered door to door, but rather to boxes in a common lobby — and the crank windows, which were repaired by artisans imported for the task rather than replaced. Otherwise, everything had been gutted and redone. Central air-conditioning had been added, among other amenities, and the floor plans reworked to increase the size of apartments. Under the old floor plan, Allison, said, the average space per unit was less than 500 square feet. The new floor plans in the rehabilitated buildings — the "historic" part of the Historic Oaks at Allen Parkway Village — average 600 square feet and above, with some apartments reaching 1,100 to 1,200 square feet.

Three stories high and designed with single-loaded corridors on the upper floors, the rebuilt units are paired, with every other one having a common lobby, mail room, and laundry room with coin-operated washers and dryers. Outside, the white picket fences that once defined the streets have been removed and the streets themselves widened, though in the historic section of the project, at least, the majority of the trees have been retained, leading to what Allison wryly refers to as "$20,000 oaks" because of the cost of fitting roads around them.

Outside the historic section, which sits near the center of Allen Parkway Village's 37 acres, there are few trees, however. Riding along the ring road that connects the rehabilitated units to the 280 units of completely new construction can be jarring; though some of the new units have been given façades intended to act as a transition from the 1940s architecture to that of the 1990s, the impression is still of two eras clashing instead of combining. Whether landscaping and the addition of people will change this or exacerbate it remains to be seen, but for the moment Allen Parkway Village looks like exactly what it is, something caught in a struggle between the past and the present.

From the outside, the rehabilitated buildings at Allen Parkway Village look as they long did. But inside, much is different.

Floor plans of "historic" one-bedroom units: Rebuilding the older interiors resulted in fewer apartments, but larger ones.

The rehabilitated units were to be reoccupied in three phases, the first the one that began in late 1999 and the remaining two by spring of 2000. The first residents are projected to move into the all-new units sometime in the spring as well, with the entirety of the project being populated by December. Given past delays, this schedule may well change. But even if it does, no one is expressing much doubt that this year will see Allen Parkway Village brought to life in a way it hasn't been for nearly a quarter of a century.

Horace Allison, for one, is eager to have that happen. Showing some visitors around the site late last year, he stopped by a rehabilitated unit to show off what he claimed was one of the best sights in the city. In a second-floor unit, he raised the blinds on a window that looked out on a panoramic view of the downtown skyline. It was a view that seemed full of promise and possibility, two things that have long been lacking at Allen Parkway Village, and two things the housing project's new residents can only hope will return. — *Mitchell J. Shields*

Below: A kitchen in one of APV's newly opened units.

Cite Takes Planning Prize

In December, the Houston section of the American Planning Association awarded *Cite* and writer John Kaliski its Highest Honor in Journalism prize for the article "The Main Idea: A Competition for Remaking Main Street." Kaliski's article, which was the cover story in *Cite* 45: Summer 1999, detailed the results from a design competition for Main Street that had been sponsored by Making Main Street Happen, Inc. According to the award announcement, the journalism prize is for increasing "public awareness of planning by fairly and accurately reporting on an important planning issue." A second place Merit Award went to the *Houston Press* and writer Brian Wallstin for "Placed on the Discard Pile," an October 28, 1999, story about problems in public housing. ■

Courtesy University of Texas at Austin

View of the University of Texas campus through the protective crown that now encloses the UT Tower's observation deck.

Tales of the Tower

Combining beauty and safety isn't always easy. But that was the task given architect and artist Lars Stanley last year when he was asked to create a protective crown for the observation deck of the 307-foot tower that rises from the center of the University of Texas campus in Austin.

The tower has a long and conflicted history at the university; designed in 1937 by French architect Paul Cret to be the school's central icon, what he hoped would be "the image carried in our memory when we think of the place," the tower took on a more grim identity in 1966 when gunman Charles Whitman used its observation deck as a perch from which to rain bullets and terror down on the campus. The tower's conflicted place in the UT landscape continued through the early 1970s, as people bent on suicide took to jumping from it. In October 1974, following the seventh such death, the tower's observation deck was closed to the public, and it stayed closed for the next quarter century.

Then in the fall of 1998 UT students began pushing for the tower to be reintegrated back into campus life and the observation deck reopened. The university administration agreed to the request, with the caveat that something be done to prevent the tower from again becoming a site for suicides. The solution chosen was to enclose the observation deck; the question was how to do so and retain both the tower's architectural integrity and the clarity of the view it offers of Austin.

Stanley, who graduated from Texas A&M with a degree in architecture and later studied under well-known architect Charles Moore at UT before becoming a blacksmith and sculptor, was chosen for the job. In an effort to avoid making the deck seem like a cage, Stanley created a seemingly delicate stainless-steel lattice curtain that curves over the 27-floor high platform; to avoid damaging the tower's historic limestone, he installed brackets to attach the lattice to the building at existing masonry joints. The intent was to contain while still providing a sense of openness. The work was finished by late summer, and on September 15 the observation deck had its grand reopening. The following day public tours began, and a sky-high view of the Texas capital shuttered for nearly 25 years was made available once more. — *MJS*

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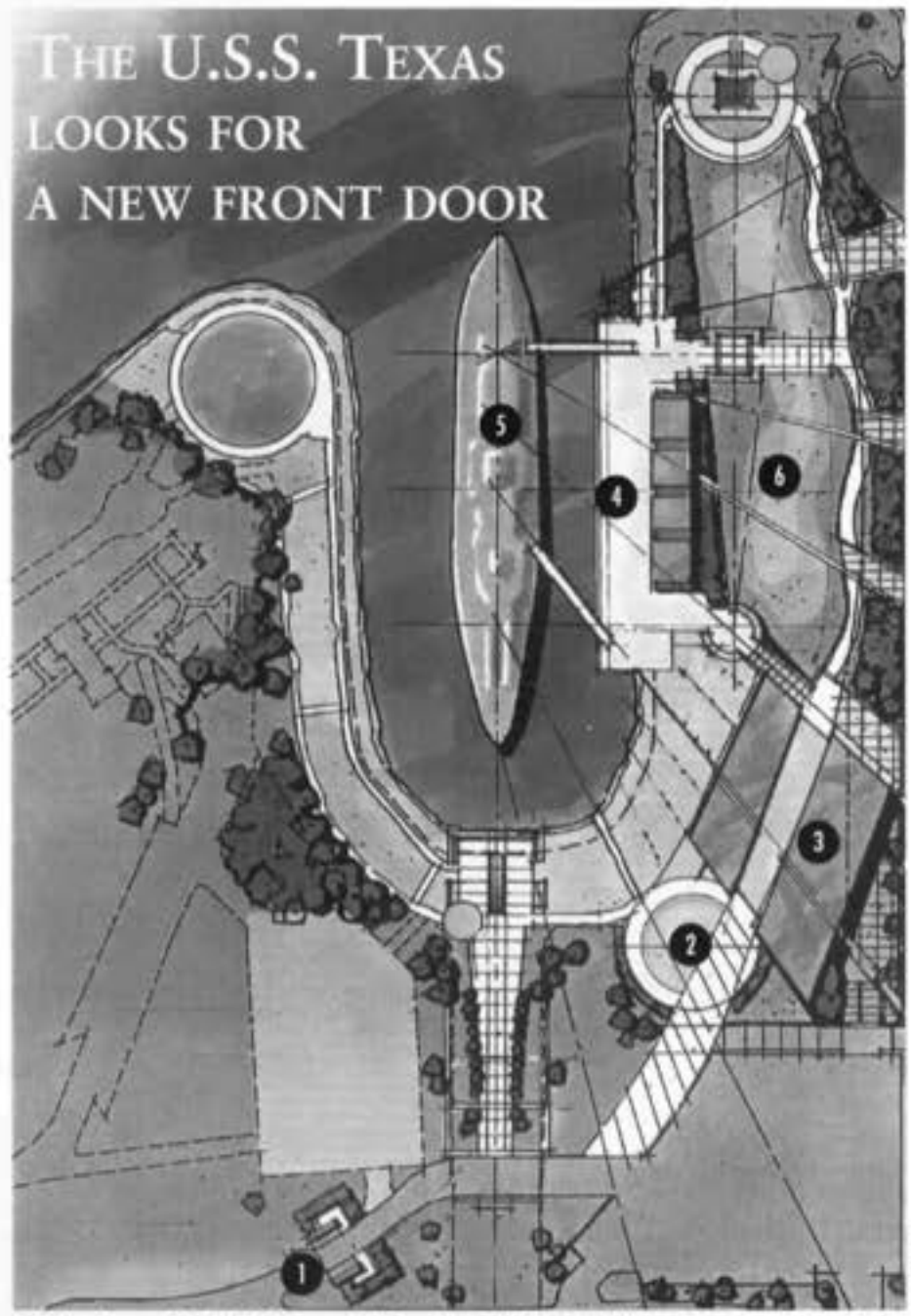

Site plan of proposed Battleship Texas surroundings, showing the location of: (1) sentry entrance; (2) memorial plaza; (3) interpretive center; (4) 1945-era wharf; (5) U.S.S. Texas; and (6) artifact park.

What does a 20th century battleship have to do with the Texas War of Independence? Historically, nothing. Geographically, a lot, at least in the five decades since the U.S.S. Texas was berthed in a small inlet near the San Jacinto Monument. For generations of Houston schoolchildren, the Battleship Texas has been an integral part of trips to the San Jacinto Battleground, leading some of them to wonder which general had the use of the ship's big guns, Sam Houston or Santa Anna.

As amusing as that conflation of eras may be, it pointed to a long-standing problem: dividing the space at San Jacinto State Park in such a way that both the truth of the 1836 battle that freed Texas from Mexico, and the truth of a naval vessel that was commissioned in 1914 and fought in two world wars, could both be presented without one trampling on the other. The issue came to a head about a decade ago, when a concerted push began to restore the San Jacinto battlefield to a more natural state, one closer to what it was like in the early 19th century. To do that would require planting knee-high prairie grass where the battle was actually fought, recreating a marsh that blocked the escape of the Mexican army — and planting an oak grove where Sam Houston's soldiers camped the night before the battle.

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Today, that campground is home to the entrance ramp to the Battleship Texas, rest rooms, and a parking lot.

At first, representatives of the San Jacinto Museum of History suggested moving the battleship, but backed away from the notion when area community groups objected. Instead, it was decided to try to use landscape architecture to create a separation between the park's two historic elements, to basically create two parks within one. To help do this, a new organization, the Battleship Texas Foundation, was formed, and proposals for reworking the battleship site solicited. The idea that rose to the top came from Acumen, a young Houston architectural and design firm that saw the abandonment of the Battleship Texas' current entrance as an opportunity to completely rethink the way the ship is presented to visitors.

One of the requirements of the new approach to the battleship was that it be moved from the starboard, or right, side to the port side, which today faces an abandoned restaurant across a small stretch of water. Acumen's plan called for turning the land the restaurant sits on into something of a theme park time machine that would move people from the present into the middle 1940s, when the Battleship Texas was returning from its service in World War II. The redesigned access to the ship would begin with sentry posts to suggest to visitors that they're entering a military facility; it would lead through a memorial plaza complete with flags and sounds of the '40s broadcast over loudspeakers, a preshow for what follows. From the memorial plaza a ramp would lead to an interpretive center organized along a timeline to show the ship's history, and the history of the world into which it fit. Next would be a wharf designed to replicate a wharf from 1945 and lead into the battleship itself. Finally, there would be an artifact park anchored by various items from the ship, including a propeller, a 14-inch gun, projectiles, and an anchor, among other items.

Compared to what's currently at the Battleship Texas, it's a grandiose scheme. And it carries a fairly grandiose price tag of $7.7 million. Still, compared to the cost of the San Jacinto Battleground restoration, which has been estimated at between $45 and $67 million, it's almost modest. And the state, through the auspices of the Parks and Wildlife Department, has already given its nod of approval and a seed grant of $600,000. With that in hand, the Battleship Texas Foundation commissioned a feasibility study to determine if the remaining $7 million plus is a reachable goal; once that's done, fundraising will begin in earnest. If all goes as the Battleship's supporters hope, construction could get underway in a couple of years. It is, they know, an uphill fight. But the U.S.S. Texas has faced battles before, and so far, at least, it has won them all. — *Mitchell J. Shields*

Grant Program Targets Historic Courthouses

Texas' historic courthouses were given a boost in November when the state legislature agreed to ante up $50 million to help restore and revitalize the often endangered structures. The money will be distributed under the aegis of the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, which will be operated by the Texas Historical Commission. The Courthouse Preservation Program will provide partial matching grants to groups attempting to restore one of the state's approximately 220 historic courthouses. The first round of grants will be awarded in April, and it's hoped that restoration projects will begin shortly thereafter.

Though the funding is substantial, it's still considerably less than most experts think it will take to breathe new life into the state's courthouses. THC architects estimate that the cost to repair and restore all of the state's historic courthouses could be upwards of $750 million. Still, it's a start and, the THC hopes, may help generate other funds.

To the THC, courthouses older than 50 years are considered historic; in Texas, they range in architectural style from Romanesque to Art Deco. Preserving them has been a concern since at least 1972, when the legislation requiring that all work on historic courthouses be approved by the THC was passed. Texas is the only state that requires counties to secure clearance from state preservation officials before making changes to historic courthouses.

A turning point in the drive to save the state's courthouses came in 1993, when a fire severely damaged the Hill County Courthouse in Hillsboro. Reconstruction there was difficult because of the lack of current or original architectural drawings. In response, the THC created the Courthouse Alliance to research and document 55 of the state's historic courthouses. The plight of the state's courthouses gained national attention in 1998, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Texas courthouses to its list of America's 11 most endangered historic places.

The deadline to submit a master plan for the first round of grants is February 1, 2000, with an application deadline of March 7. Contingent on additional funding from the legislature, the THC plans to continue the program with several more rounds of grant opportunities. — *MJS*

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ENGINUITY!

1999 Rice Design Alliance Gala Honors Walter P. Moore Jr.

In what has almost become an annual tradition, the Rice Design Alliance fundraising gala this year broke all previous records for attendance, underwriting contributions, and auction receipts. The 13th annual gala, held in November at the El Paso Energy building, raised more than $320,000 to support RDA programs and *Cite* magazine in the next millennium.

The evening honored admired engineer and educator Walter P. Moore Jr., who until his death in June 1998 was chairman of the Houston-based consulting firm Walter P. Moore and Associates, Inc. Under Moore's direction the company became nationally known for its design of high-rise buildings and sports facilities, among other large projects. Moore was also professor of civil engineering and architecture, director of the Center for Building Design and Construction, director of the Center for Construction Education, and holder of the Thomas A. Bullock Endowed Chair in Leadership and Innovation at Texas A&M University.

In recognition of Moore's achievements, his wife, Mary Ann Moore, was presented the RDA Award for Design Excellence, a "Magnolia" Steuben glass bowl donated by Neiman Marcus Town and Country.

Gala co-chairs Jennifer and Burke Windham, along with RDA president Jory Alexander, gala underwriting chairman Larry Whaley, and Mary Ann Moore, welcomed 900 guests to the rehabilitated 30,000 square-foot mezzanine level of the El Paso Energy building on Saturday, November 6. The venue of the gala was formerly the Tenneco building; designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in 1963, the building set the architectural standard against which all subsequent Houston skyscrapers have been measured. According to architectural historian Stephen Fox, it has never been surpassed. When El Paso Energy took over the building, Gensler was retained to restore the executive floors and the mezzanine level, transforming the latter from a banking hall into El Paso Energy's main reception and exhibition space. El Paso Energy CFO Bob Cavnar was on hand at the gala to receive kudos for returning one of the most imposing modern spaces in downtown Houston to public accessibility after a 16-year hiatus.

Gala environment chair Randall Walker designed the evening's centerpieces, which consisted of twinkle-light-festooned disks that held a bowl of floating flowers. Rice University architecture students constructed the centerpieces. Walker was also responsible for the large banners on which were depicted the El Paso Energy building as well as several buildings engineered by Walter P. Moore Jr., among them Miller Outdoor Theater and Rice University's Duncan Hall. Fiona McGettigan and Alan Krathaus of Core Design designed the gala invitation and program and the graphics for the event.

The crowd of architects, design professionals, and urban dwellers bid hotly on 153 items featured in an auction organized by designer Joan Miller and her committee. Some of the more popular items up for bid were a week-long stay at a private estate in San Miguel D'Allende, a week at a restored 300-year-old French farmhouse, a progressive dinner in award-winning houses in Houston's West End, and a table designed by Richard Meier and built by Brochsteins Inc.

Chef Tim Keating of the Four Seasons supervised the memorable dinner presented the guests, while Commercial Art provided the evening's entertainment.

The RDA's board of directors would like to thank all of the gala committee chairs and volunteers as well as the RDA staff for making the gala such a success. We would also like to recognize our generous underwriters, contributors, and auction donors for their generous contributions.

1. Andrew and Gretchen McFarland.
2. El Paso CFO Bob Cavnar (left) and John Anderson.
3. Fiona McGettigan and Alan Krathaus.
4. Left to right: Jory Alexander, Mary Ann Moore, Jennifer and Burke Windham.
5. Left to right: Peter Scardino, Minnette Boesel, and Barrie Scardino.
6. Bob and Gracie Cavnar.
7. Bobby and Phoebe Tudor.
8. Raymond and Deborah Brochstein.
9. Rice students Miriam Bentley, Bri Headley, and Nancy Grisham.
10. Mary Ann Moore.
11. Left to right: Jeff and Pat Ryan and Claire Jackson.
12. Mary Ann Moore and Bruce Fehn.
13. Pam and Carl Johnson.
14. Joan Miller and Gabriel Sarmiento.
15. Danny Samuels and Elizabeth Hamilton.
16. Cindy Tales.
17. James and Kimberly Burnett.
18. RDA president Jory Alexander with RDA vice president Larry Whaley, underwriting chair.

Photos by Phyllis Hand


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Houston Museum of Natural Science
Houston Polo Club
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Koelsch Gallery
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La Madeleine French Bakery & Cafe
La Mora Cucina Toscana
The Lancaster Houston
William B. Lanigan, AIA
Last Concert Cafe
Lawing Gallery
Heng-Hui Tiffany Lee
Lars Lerup
Lieber Photography
Looking at Art
David Lowe
Joseph G. Sunu Lucito
Main Street Theater
Mark's
Kaye Marvins Photography
Maxim's Restaurant and Piano Bar
Mayer, Brown & Platt
Robert McClain & Co.
McCoy Inc.
Cristy McKinney
The Mercury Room
MFAH Films
Mia Bella Trattoria
Michelangelo's Italian Restaurant
John Miner
Miss Saigon Cafe
Jesus Bautista Morales
Moody Gardens
Dr. James G. Moore DDS
Mosquito Café
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Ocotillo Gallery
Office Pavilion
Park Plaza Warwick
Passport Luggage
Patrenella's Cafe
Paula Fridkin Designs
Paulie's
Charles Pebworth
Peckerwood Garden Foundation
Persona
Laura Stude Peters
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Rice Cinema
Rice Design Alliance
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Rivoli
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Rosenbaum Fine Art
K. Sachar Photography
Saint Arnold Brewing Company
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TURNING A PAGE

THIS ISSUE OF *CITE*, APPEARING AS WE TURN THE CORNER INTO Y2K, HAS THE FEEL OF A BOOKMARK — A LARGE ONE THAT MAY CAUSE US TO STOP AND LOOK BACK OVER THE TRIUMPHS AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES OF OUR URBAN PAST, AS WELL AS FORWARD TO WHAT COULD BE.

WE'VE CHOSEN TO USE THIS PAUSE BETWEEN MILLENNIA TO MULL OVER SOME OF THE THINGS THAT HAVE TENDED TO SET HOUSTON APART. AMONG THE MORE OBVIOUS DISTINCTIONS IS THE CITY'S INSEPARABLE CONNECTION TO WATER, AND HOW THAT HAS SHAPED ITS GROWTH AND FORMED ITS CHARACTER. WE ALSO LOOK AT THE VARIOUS NICKNAMES THAT, OVER THE YEARS, HOUSTONIANS HAVE GIVEN THEIR HOMETOWN IN AN ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THAT CHARACTER. TO NAME SOMETHING PROPERLY, AFTER ALL, IS TO CAPTURE ITS ESSENCE, AND IF WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE CITY'S NAMES, PERHAPS WE CAN ALSO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE CITY ITSELF.

OF COURSE, SUCH AN UNDERSTANDING REQUIRES KNOWING WHERE WE CAME FROM, AND TO THAT END WE CAST A BACKWARD GLANCE AT SOME OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF QUALITY AND WONDER THAT THE CITY HAS LET SLIP THROUGH ITS FINGERS. SIMILARLY, WE HAD NOTED SCULPTOR JIM LOVE AND LONGTIME MUSEUM CURATOR ED MAYO REMINISCE ABOUT THAT PERIOD IN THE 1950S AND 1960S WHEN, FOR BETTER OR WORSE, THE HOUSTON ART WORLD WAS EVOLVING FROM A COMMUNITY OF VOLUNTEERS INTO A REALM POPULATED BY PAID PROFESSIONALS.

TO PUT ALL OF THIS INTO A CONTEXT, BEGINNING BELOW AND RUNNING ALONG THE BOTTOM OF THE NEXT FIVE PAGES WE HAVE A 20TH-CENTURY TIMELINE ORGANIZED TO HINT AT THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONAL EVENTS, HOUSTON CIVIC EVENTS, AND THE ARCHITECTURE WE SEE OR REMEMBER. IT STOPS, AS ALL TIMELINES MUST, IN THE NOW. BUT IT IS EASY TO IMAGINE IT STRETCHING OUT OVER INFINITE FUTURE PAGES.

HAPPY NEW MILLENNIUM, READERS. USE YOUR BOOKMARKS WELL.

BARRY MOORE, *GUEST EDITOR*

TIMELINE

1900 1900 1900 1900 1900 1900 1900 1900 1900 1900 1900 1900

1900

HOUSTON CIVIC EVENTS

1900 - City Park (Sam Houston Park) opens, first in city
1904 - First sewage treatment plant goes on line
1907 - Courtlandt Place platted
1910 - Groundbreaking at Rice Institue

ARCHITECTURAL EVENTS

1902 - Houston City Hall and Market (demolished)
1904 - Commercial National Bank
1909 - Scanlan Building
1910 - Harrris County Courthouse

NATIONAL EVENTS

1901 - Discovery of oil at Spindletop
1903 - Wright Brothers fly at Kitty Hawk
1905 - Nation's first movie theater built
1908- Henry Ford introduces Model T

Collage by Polly Ledvina and Rome Schelbert Hruska

The

By Bruce Webb

1910 1910 1910 1910 1910 1910 1910 1910 1910 1910 1910 1910 1920 1920 1920 1920 1920 1920 1920 1920 1920 1920 1920

1910

1913 - Houston Symphony organized
1914 - Hermann Park given to city
1914 - Opening of Ship Channel
1915 - Last No Tsu Oh festival
1917 - Camp Logan race riot

1911 - Union Station (now part of Enron Field)
1911 - Southern Pacific Building (now Bayou Lofts)
1913 - Rice Hotel
1914 - Arthur Comey park plan for Houston published
1915 - Texaco Building

1913 - 16th Amendment establishes income tax
1915 - Panama Canal opens
1915 - Alexander Graham Bell places first transcontinental phone call
1917 - U.S. enters World War I

1920

1925 - KTHT, first radio station
1926 - First airmail service to Houston
1928 - National Democratic Convention
1929 - Zoning Commission report voted down

1925 - Hermann Hospital, first building in Texas Medical Center
1926 - Houston Public Library (now Julia Ideson Building)
1927 - Niels Esperson Building
1928 - Bayou Bend, River Oaks
1929 - Gulf Building

1920 - 19th Amendment gives women the vote
1920 - America's first commercial radio station goes on the air
1927 - Lindbergh flies across the Atlantic
1929 - Stock market crash begins Great Depression

Name Game

WHAT'S IN A NAME? FOR HOUSTON, A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN ITSELF TO ITSELF.

Every city as it grows creates its own myths, or, failing that, at least a collection of interpretive metaphors, adjectives, or second names to describe itself to itself and to the world. Houston has plenty of myths; some of them, such as the story of Judge Roy Hofheinz's building of the Astrodome, aspire to the level of country and western allegory in personifying the city's entrepreneurial spirit. But it is the names that have become attached to the city, with their higher abstraction and economy of concept, that are of greater interest.

Second names, nicknames, are often pure poetry. Giving a second name, a label, to something is a way of shaping its contents and giving it an essence. In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* metaphorical names — "Isaura, city of a thousand wells," "Leonia, the city that refreshes itself every day," "Octavia, spider web city" — become surrogates for geographical places, describing cities of pure concept situated in the imagination.

Second names are like the names in a novel. They are never neutral. "They always signify," novelist David Lodge writes. "The naming of characters is always an important part of creating them, involving many considerations and hesitations." That is the kind of problem facing Houston as it enters the new millennium faced with the task of what to call its new National Football League franchise now that the old name has been carried off with the team and buried somewhere in Tennessee. It's not a small matter. Does the team (and hence the city) want to be identified as a working man's town (Steelers, Packers, Oilers, Cowboys)? An animal (Lions, Bears, Rams)? A bird (Eagles, Falcons, Ravens)? By its history (Forty-niners, Patriots)? Or its machismo (Pirates, Buccaneers, Gladiators, Titans)?

"The pell-mell of nicknames that accrues to a city in the course of time is a forceful reminder of metropolitan complexity," cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes. "In any large urban center, multifarious interests exist and each will push for a label that suits it purpose." To put its own official spin on the issue, the city often has its own public relations wonks come up with slogans they hope will stick. Some of them, such as two recent ones for Houston — "Houston's Hot" from the 1980s and the current "Houston, Expect the Unexpected" — drip with heavy irony. Both are statements of uninspiring fact presented as virtues. Both are true, if not authentic.

But other nicknames stand out as a part of the genius loci. The eight that follow are by no means a complete list of the labels that have been slapped on the city, but they do show how different people at different times have labeled Houston as a way of giving it an identity that they could possess.

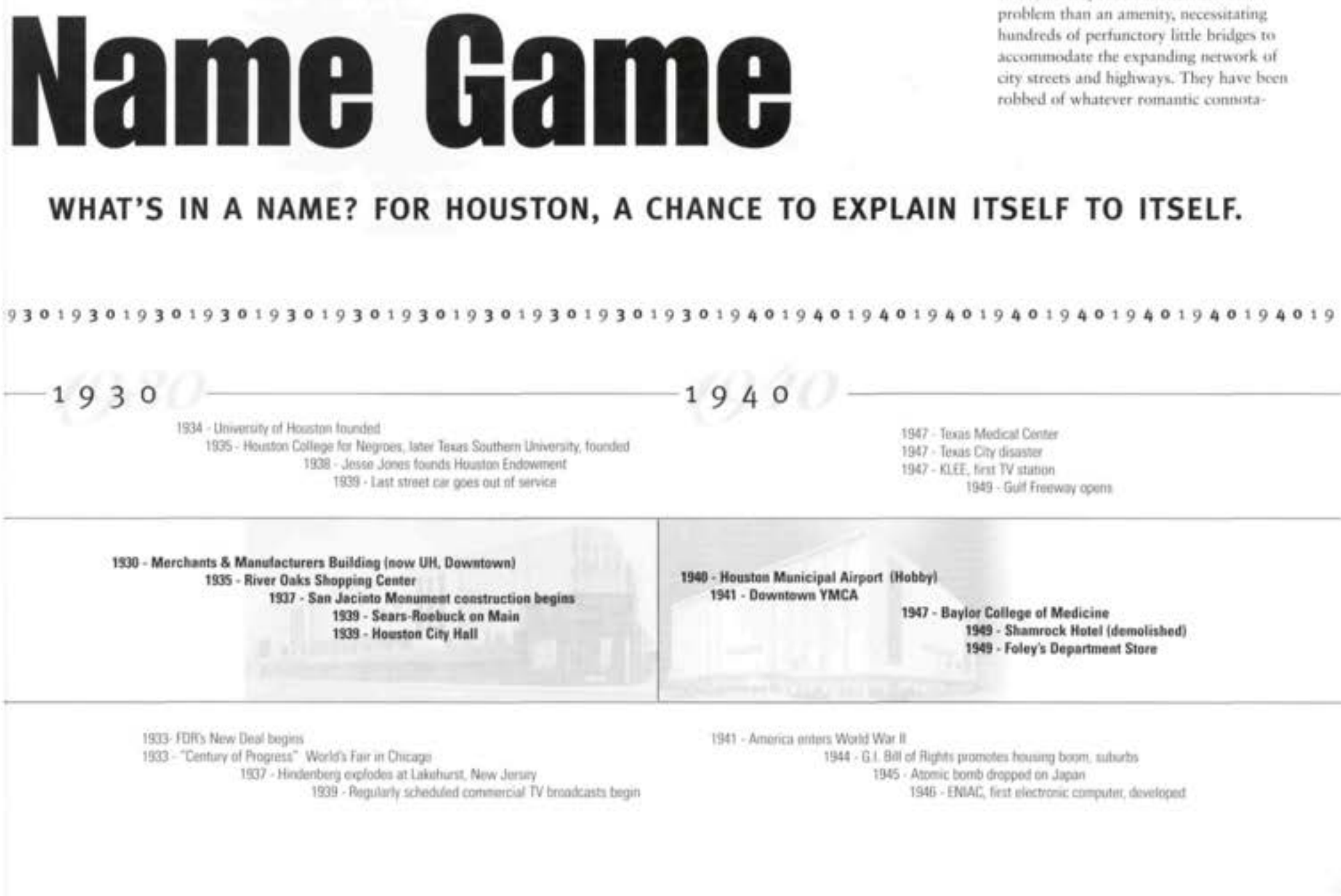
BAYOU CITY

Like Magnolia City, one of the city's earliest nicknames, Bayou City is a link to Southern culture in tune with Louisiana, our neighbor to the east. It's an association that modern Houston has attempted to dump in favor of a more cosmopolitan and progressive sense of itself, although the name Bayou City remains attached to more than 150 Houston businesses, and still shows up regularly in the city's newspapers as the only identifier editors can think of that will be easily recognized by the reader.

Houston's natural site and its formation recall the surrealist Marcel Duchamp's definition of collage. "What is the mechanism of collage?" Duchamp asked. "I think it amounts to the chance meeting on a non-suitable plane, of two mutually distant realities." The non-suitable plane in this case was described by the Allen brothers as a picture of "jungle and swampy woods" on the Gulf Coast, a hot, steamy region of expanding an contracting, clay-bottom land that shares the 30th parallel with the Sahara Desert and is somewhat south of Algiers and Baghdad.

The natural site was never sufficiently romanticized to exclude remaking it into something more temperate and more accommodating. To that end, the city embraced technology, guided by an ethos that said no problem loomed so large that it couldn't be altered. Displacement was the norm. The natural city was swallowed by the industrial city. The industrial city by the post-industrial city. Little residential neighborhoods were swallowed by big apartment complexes and sprawling subdivisions; little downtown buildings were hidden by glass towers. The street system was overshadowed by high-powered freeways, the outdoors by the air-conditioned indoors. Houston outgrew its roots, emerging in the 20th century as a city flavored by Texas but not exactly contiguous with it. That may be why I rarely hear anyone in Houston employ the Bayou City sobriquet in ordinary conversation.

Houston is crisscrossed by an intricate network of sleepy capillaries, but anyone who has gone looking for them finds out that they are not very much a part of the city's consciousness. Not quite rivers, the bayous have been more a problem than an amenity, necessitating hundreds of perfunctory little bridges to accommodate the expanding network of city streets and highways. They have been robbed of whatever romantic connota-



tions they may have once harbored by the Army Corps of Engineers, which lined them with concrete and made them into a backyard plumbing system. They are also evidence to the city's abhorrence of natural water, a breeding ground for mosquitoes, and a reminder of just how low-lying much of Houston is, especially during a serious rain storm, when the bayous prove to be inefficient ways of dealing with run-off and the whole urban enterprise seems fragile and precarious.

However, Houston's bayous did inspire writer Max Apple to "imagine what Houston might be like if we turned the bayous into canals, and we became the Venice of Texas, moving about to the slow rhythm of water instead of the slower than water-torture traffic." But with the exception of occasional special events — the rubber ducky races, for example — the bayous have remained uncelebrated. Modern buildings have not opened themselves to the bayous as sites, and insurance maps help to keep it that way. The network of linear parks overlaid on the bayou ways, envisioned in a 1920s city plan, has been implemented only in pieces, primarily as hike and bike trails that reach a kind of crescendo at Sesquicentennial Park, where the flank of the Wortham Theater Center meets up with the drab edge of Buffalo Bayou.

But the bayous do infuse Houston with lines of greenery, untamed for the most part and much of the best of it visible only from a canoe. And they harbor an impressive collection of mostly abandoned industrial sites and buildings from an earlier era that mutely remind us of the important role they once played in the city's life. As testament to the low regard with which bayou land is viewed, these places are frozen in time, offering a considerable record of how things once were. The section north of downtown along Buffalo Bayou in particular is a de facto, if undesignated, historic and nature preserve that attracts the imagination of artists and architecture students, who admire it as a gritty nether land that stands in contrast to the city's newer development.

SPACE CITY

Space City was the name given to Houston during its ride out of its wild west past following the coming of the NASA Manned Space Center to Clear Lake. And for a brief time in the 1960s nothing captured the imagination like venturing to the moon and beyond. The Space City connection begat the Astros, the Astrodome (whose site, especially when viewed from the air, looks more like a colony in the inhospitable environment of the moon than an earth-bound building complex), and the costuming of the grounds crew in Halloween space suits to replace the western-themed Colt 45s. It also created the city as mixed metaphor with the conjunction of cowboys and astronauts, frontier heroes of different eras, as described by critic Peter Papademetriou.

The implication in the name Space City was that Houston was on its way to becoming a high-tech town modeled on NASA. But while technology has been a definer of Houston's modern condition, the city doesn't celebrate the fact. Today, it is hard to find examples of Houston architecture that approach the marvels of the raw technical constructions on view at local refineries, not to mention the space-age wonders being engineered close by at NASA.

But if Houston failed to become the Space City of science-fiction tales, it is nonetheless a Space City of sorts. Space is an elastic word — outer space, inner space, urban space, architectural space, personal space, empty space. In Houston, space is the background, infill condition of the non-place realm. Houston is not exactly a garden city; gardens appear as figures against an unattended emptiness. There is enough of that emptiness to create a second city in the interstices without having to advance another foot into the prairie. Space as it is understood by NASA is a void unmarked by sign posts, unfathomable distances of vacuum between one cosmic destination and another. Space that must be navigated by technical coordination. And it is precisely that kind of space, in miniature, that exists in much of Houston. Navigating is vectoring through space: "Just two exits past the Westheimer interchange on the West Loop. Ten minutes if you don't get into traffic." Space in that sense is a region of mystery: a place where you don't want to get lost, where you don't want to run out of gas.

PATCHWORK CITY

University of Houston architecture professor Burdette Keeland coined the term Patchwork Quilt City as an affectionate way to describe Houston's fragmented and often incongruous land use patterns, a crazy mosaic of enclaves, strips, corners, and mini-districts that represent the city's culture of heterogeneity. Programming the city has been left to chance — or economic opportunity. As George Trow observed a few years ago in the *New Yorker*, "People live all over the place in Houston. It's the only American city without zoning, and almost anything can happen anywhere."

Houston is certainly something less than the sum of its parts. Ever since H.R. Cullen went toe to toe with Jesse Jones over zoning, Houstonians have consistently resisted land-use controls, and the city still lacks comprehensive planning. What has been put up instead are settings that range in scale from well protected backyard gardens of Eden to whole controlled subdivisions and commercial districts. They include the authentic charm of many older neighborhoods unified and held together over time, themed subdivisions created de novo, and unabashedly Disneyesque backgrounds such as those found at Uptown Park on the West Loop near Post Oak. The collection of settings is like the back lot of a movie studio. You go to one place and it's a little world with its own population held together by a measure of internal consistencies. But it is always threatening to come apart by invasion, or by a nibbling away at the edges, or from lifting your gaze and looking out to whatever is beside it. Internal cohesion (abetted by deed restrictions and, more recently, TIFs) helps to hold things in a semblance of order and gives political sanction to the bits and pieces. A planned city is like an allegory, but a city of settings, a patchwork city, is a place for the novelist. The jigsaw puzzle theme permeates down to the smaller scale, where blocks are subdivided into little fiefdoms of residential prototypes that never get longer than a few lots before they are interrupted by someone else's speculative three-block budget.

MONOPOLY CITY

Following a visit in the 1970s, British critic Reyner Banham described Houston as a full-scale Monopoly game, a training ground for right wing entrepreneurs. To Banham, the condo with a mansardic roof (or some other stylistic embellishments) was the prime game piece "on a clear site, or backed up against a giant refinery or the 50-foot wall of greenery that marks the edge of what remains of the Big Thicket or even buried in replanted sections of the Big Thicket."

Banham even uncovered a localized

1950 1950 1950 1950 1950 1950 1950 1950 1950 1950 1950 1960 1960 1960 1960 1960 1960 1960 1960 1960 1960 1970

1950

1953 - KUHT/Channel 8 goes on air as nation's first public broadcasting station
1954 - Metropolitan population reaches one million
1954 - Preservation movement starts with founding of Harris County Heritage Society
1954 - Gerald Hines develops first buildings on Richmond Avenue

1950 - Rice Stadium
1956 - Gulfgate Shopping Center, first mall
1958 - University of St. Thomas Master Plan
1958 - Cullinan Hall, Museum of Fine Arts
1959 - Sakowitz, Post Oak (demolished)

1950 - America enters Korean War
1954 - *Brown v. Board of Education* outlaws segregation
1956 - Interstate Highway Act funds interstate system
1959 - Alaska Statehood. Texas no longer largest state

1960

1960 - Integration of Houston's schools begins
1961 - NASA moves manned space center to Houston
1961 - Colt 45s, Houston's first professional baseball franchise
1967 - Corps of Engineers drops plan to channelize Buffalo Bayou

1964 - Houston Intercontinental Airport begun
1964 - Galleria
1965 - Astrodome
1966 - Jones Hall
1969 - Alley Theater

1963 - President John F. Kennedy assassinated
1964 - LBJ declares War on Poverty; Great Society programs begin
1964 - Tonkin Gulf Resolution; start of Vietnam War buildup
1969 - First man on the moon

version of the venerable board game called Houston Scene (manufactured for a time by Groovy Games, Inc.), which upped the ante and the profits but retained the same objective: to accumulate wealth.

The game of Houston began as a business deal with the Allen brothers, the New York sharpies who successfully promoted the "jungle and swampy sweet gum woods that a good portion of the city is built upon" as the great, interior commercial emporium of Texas. Either as a game or a city, modern Houston is wide open and impenetrable at the same time. "Property wheels and deals there with less restrictions than anywhere else in the Anglo-Saxon world," Banham wrote, and as a result, "Los Angeles in the Chinatown epoch seems like a socialist economy by comparison."

In Monopoly the game eventually comes to an end; the board is developed, someone has all or most of the money, and everything is swept up and put away. But in Houston there are infinite numbers of additional phases, and the game becomes ever more complex, suggesting a need for an authenticating sequel, the Post Monopoly Game, in which the objective would be to tidy up the board and make it behave like a city.

MOBILITY CITY

New York Times architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable was not the first to be a bit awestruck by the degree to which the automobile had invaded the Houston experience when she penned a paean to the city's kinetics in an article titled "Deep in the Heart of Nowhere," describing Houston as "freeway city, strip city, mobility city." Mobility City does much to capture the Houston spirit, though it doesn't entirely explain the city's dedication to the private automobile, a dedication that is as much an expression of Houston's culture of personal freedom and identity as anything else.

Houston's road system has marked the landscape in powerful ways, providing a determined economic and social partitioning of the city and spawning aggressive commercial development along its flanks. It is Autorama from the 1939 World's Fair, but with a heavy layer of glitz and neon missing from that Norman Bel Geddes vision of the city of the future. In their sheer vastness, Houston's roads have become, like Reyner Banham's description of the Los Angeles freeways, "a single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life, a fourth ecology."

Houston was a benefactor of the freeway building mania that overtook the country during the Eisenhower administration. Francis Turner, chief administrative planner of the interstate highway system and a product of Texas A&M, was a freeway advocate of the first order whose lines-of-desire maps became the work orders for paving contractors' forays into country and city. (Among the people whose lives were disrupted by the spreading network of freeways were Turner's own parents, who had a home near I-45 south of Houston.) As it spread its spiderweb linkages of concentric and radial lines outward from the city, the freeway allowed the city to metastasize in an even density urban sprawl.

Indeed, much of the urban experience in Houston occurs in a maladroit space between two points of view — one, the view from the road looking outward; the other, the view from the fringe looking at the road. It's a space mediated by little buildings with big signs. And the freeways are its amusement park rides. Out on the highway, it's God burgers, sex burgers, hamburgers, as David Green, the poet of the English design group Archigram, put it. You just ride along and need. And the search goes on for a building that looks perfect at any speed.

> Houston is a city built around rapid change, obsolescence, indeterminacy, and a culture of style and instant gratification.

LIQUID CITY

The title of a fine poem by Lorenzo Thomas in a little book of writings by Houston writers on Houston by the same name, the term Liquid City was inspired by the shimmering glass ("Glass is a shifting liquid in disguise") in Houston's new architecture: "City of glass, a place of material dreams/Bestowed in plain sight and transparently denied."

Houston owes its prosperity to the conjunction of two liquid conditions, the Ship Channel and the liquid gold discovered nearby at Spindletop. They come together in a liquid atmosphere, a thick soup congealing out of the superheated air that causes shapes to lose their starch.

Houstonians may be indifferent to water, but the city thrives on liquidity. It's the descriptor of convertible capital that fuels speculative investments and the conversion of old land into new developments. Liquid City describes the changing state of things: some degree of heat causes Houston to lose its solid state, its permanence, giving way to a molten, amorphous condition. Houston always seems to be melting; liquidity is its atmosphere, both literally and figuratively. Liquid City marks a period of development somewhere between the classically abstract structure of the modern city and the nonplace realm of the communication city of bytes. Even the Net may be only a physical metaphor for the universal flow of liquid information in which money, property, community, organization, and identity are as virtual as they are real.

EPHEMERAL CITY

Houston is a city built around characteristic features of modern life: rapid change, built-in obsolescence, indeterminacy, media orientation, a culture of style and instant gratification. It is an urban-scale example of artist Gyorgy Kepes' description of the runaway pace of our times, which he described in a maelstrom of dynamic images. For Kepes and his collaborators in the book *The Art and Science of Motion*, the problem of motion had thoroughly invaded modern experience, posing a formidable challenge to

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1970

1970 - Elvis plays the Astrodome
1972 - Fifth Circuit Court rules magnet schools an allowable alternative to forced busing
1978 - Voters approve creation of Metropolitan Transit Authority

1971 - Rothko Chapel
1971 - One Shell Plaza
1972 - Contemporary Arts Museum
1975 - Best Products Company Showroom (demolished)
1976 - Pennzoil Place

1973 - Last American ground troops leave Vietnam
1973 - *Roe v. Wade* legalizes abortion
1974 - Nixon impeached, resigns presidency
1977 - Apple introduces first personal computer

1980

1980 - Movie *Urban Cowboy* released, helps define Houston nationally
1981 - Orange Show opens
1982 - Slump in the oil industry stops the boom, starts the bust
1987 - First Art Car parade

1981 - Texas Commerce Bank
1983 - Transco Tower (now Williams Tower)
1987 - The Menil Collection (Piano)
1987 - George R. Brown Convention Center

1980 - Reagan elected, Reaganomics and downsizing follow
1980 - CNN begins broadcasting
1986 - Space shuttle *Challenger* explodes
1989 - Berlin Wall comes down

concepts of order that belonged to an earlier, slower scale of existence.

Houston's stability is literally attacked by time and motion; it is a city formed in a series of conjunctive episodes that hold their relationships for relatively brief periods. Buildings come and go. Businesses come and go. Displacements of traditional patterns of stability and urban rituals have become the norm. Time has become a prime variable in determining the genius loci.

It was in recognition of this truth that, in a 1998 essay for the *Southwest Review*, I characterized Houston as the City of Short Lived Phenomena. Today, I would shorten that to Houston as the Ephemeral City. Houston's public life has come to resemble the "instant city" concept that, in the 1960s, Archigram proposed as a way to bring color and eventfulness to England's new towns. In Houston, the Ephemeral City appears in the form of parades, art fairs, craft festivals, food fairs, international bazaars, and trade shows, not to mention outdoor performances of every description. The architecture is the architecture of the temporary: tents, banners, pavilions, inflatables. Festivals are set up on marginal sites, empty acreage, parking lots, and nondescript grassy spaces between buildings and the freeway. Taking a cue from the success of these festivals, I proposed in my *Southwest Review* article that we should stop thinking of our public life in terms of permanent places. Instead, we should set to work turning the city into a continually evolving festival, catalyzing what is already here. Give the local artists and architects and sometimes an invited outsider the chance to remake Houston over and over again, to develop projects that reline and reinterpret the functional city. Then when someone asks for the locations of our great civic monuments and public spaces, the tour guides can refer him to both a map and a calendar, and tell him that he missed a great one last week on the lawn of the design center, but that if he hurries he may still be able to catch something going on in the parking lot of Gulfgate Mall. The festival is a metaphor for the spirit of Houston, a city Italo Calvino might well have written about in *Invisible Cities*: a place that never repeats itself and is never seen to be quite the same.

As it enters the 21st century, Houston grows ever more elusive. Its unique qualities are being dismantled, razed, and marginalized.

ELUSIVE CITY

A trump card of a name, Elusive City was the title of writer Doug Milburn's catalogue essay for a 1999 exhibit of photographs by *Cite* photographer Paul Hester. In his essay, Milburn illustrated the difficulties of the name game: "From my earliest days of thinking and writing about Houston, I have played a little game. I ask people to describe the city in one word, with one restriction: the word cannot be hot, humid, or flat." Milburn's collected responses included "reticulated," "fetid," "boring," "festive," and "demanding." His own conclusion: "Elusive. Take the urban complexities and contradictions, racial and economic, so visible in every other American city, add certain peculiar elements of geography, climate, and history, and you have city as conundrum, chameleon. Hard to pin down. Hard even to perceive."

Every city likes to think of itself as a mystery, a kind of labyrinth that can only be understood existentially, by living there and getting a feel for it, finding your own beats, your own circuits, your own city. A city has moods, tempos, that make it change with amazing regularity. Maybe it's the light, maybe the temperature. Perhaps it's the events that shift across the city. Maybe it's the way you string it all together in an endless sequence.

With a voracious appetite for annexing whatever settlement appears on the distant horizon, even if the intervening distances seem decidedly un-urban, Houston leaves the 20th century at an astounding 620 square miles, large enough to absorb several of the nation's largest cities. As Houston grew it became more and more of an urban anomaly, a puzzle, still struggling to find the difference between "building a great city or merely a great population," an admonition included in a 1929 report of the City Planning Commission.

As it enters the 21st century, Houston grows ever more elusive. Like all modern cities, its unique qualities are being dismantled, razed, and marginalized, then replaced by universal forms belonging to the heterotopia. As Italo Calvino writes, "Cities begin to resemble one another in a labyrinth of reflections." But until all the forms are used up, the age of the city will continue. The nickname of Elusive City may be an evasion, a tactic to keep Houston in reserve and open to new interpretations. Elusive City makes a case for not knowing as a part of the urban adventure.

In a modern city there may no longer be anything like a sense of place as it has been understood in the past, but instead only place metaphors that drift across the city, giving it names. As Japanese architect Assushi Kitagawara put it, "The city is not streets, buildings, crowds, and freeways. It's just that metaphorical condition we call the city." But in Houston, behind the corporate city reaching for seamlessness, there are still lazy bayous harboring mysteries as they move in a different time frame. There is still the liquidity and transformative properties of the city as it melts, flows, and congeals into new formations. There are still the distinct chunks of the patchwork quilt, recalling the city eternal — places named and without name, that exist in the cracks and grooves and margins. There is still a city of profit, a monopoly city expressing the calculus of speculation beyond civic control. There is still a city of mobility, always restless, always on the move, slipstreaming through space in pursuit of a million individual dreams and destinations. There is still a city half empty, part garden, part wilderness, where a persistent background technology makes temperate biotopes in a lunar landscape. There is a city where time makes a sense of place. ■

1990 1990 1990 1990 1990 1990 1990 1990 1990 1990 2000 2000 2000 2000 2000 2000 2000 2000 2000 2000

1990

1992 - Republican National Convention
1995 - *Houston Post* folds, Houston becomes one newspaper town
1997 - Lee Brown elected as Houston's first African-American mayor
1999 - Metro requests funding for light rail
1999 - Houston passes Los Angeles as ozone capital of U.S.

1992 - Children's Museum of Houston
1996 - Holocaust Museum
1998 - Rice Hotel reopened as Rice Lofts
2000 - Enron Field

1991 - Gulf War
1991 - Soviet Union collapses
1993 - North American Free Trade Agreement
1994 - "Contract with America"; Republicans take control of Congress

Lost Houston

Images from a century of erasure

By Steven R. Strom

In the late 1930s, reporters from *Architectural Record* toured 16 American communities to ask lay people (i.e., non-architects) which among the recently constructed buildings in their cities were their favorites. In Houston, 24 leading citizens were polled, and their top choices (in descending order of votes received) were the new City Hall, the Oil and Gas Building, the Houston Fire Alarm Building, Mirabeau B. Lamar High School, the River Oaks Community Center, Jefferson Davis Hospital, the Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall, and St. Joseph's Hospital's Maternity and Children's Building.

Though the arbitrary nature of those chosen to participate in the poll might call into question the actual importance of their favored structures, in fact almost all of the named buildings won some architectural recognition at the time of their construction. And they proved to be lasting: in the six decades following the November 1939 publication of the poll's results the buildings became comfortable fixtures in Houston's cityscape. Then, in a tragic twist for the city's architectural history, three of Houston's eight top vote-getters were demolished during 1998-1999: the Sam Houston Coliseum, Jefferson Davis Hospital, and St. Joseph's maternity wing.

Those demolitions were part of Houston's periodic need to reinvent itself at the expense of its past. The redevelopment of downtown has exacted a heavy historical price: the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts meant the destruction of the Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall, while Enron Field required the demolition of the Metropole Hotel.

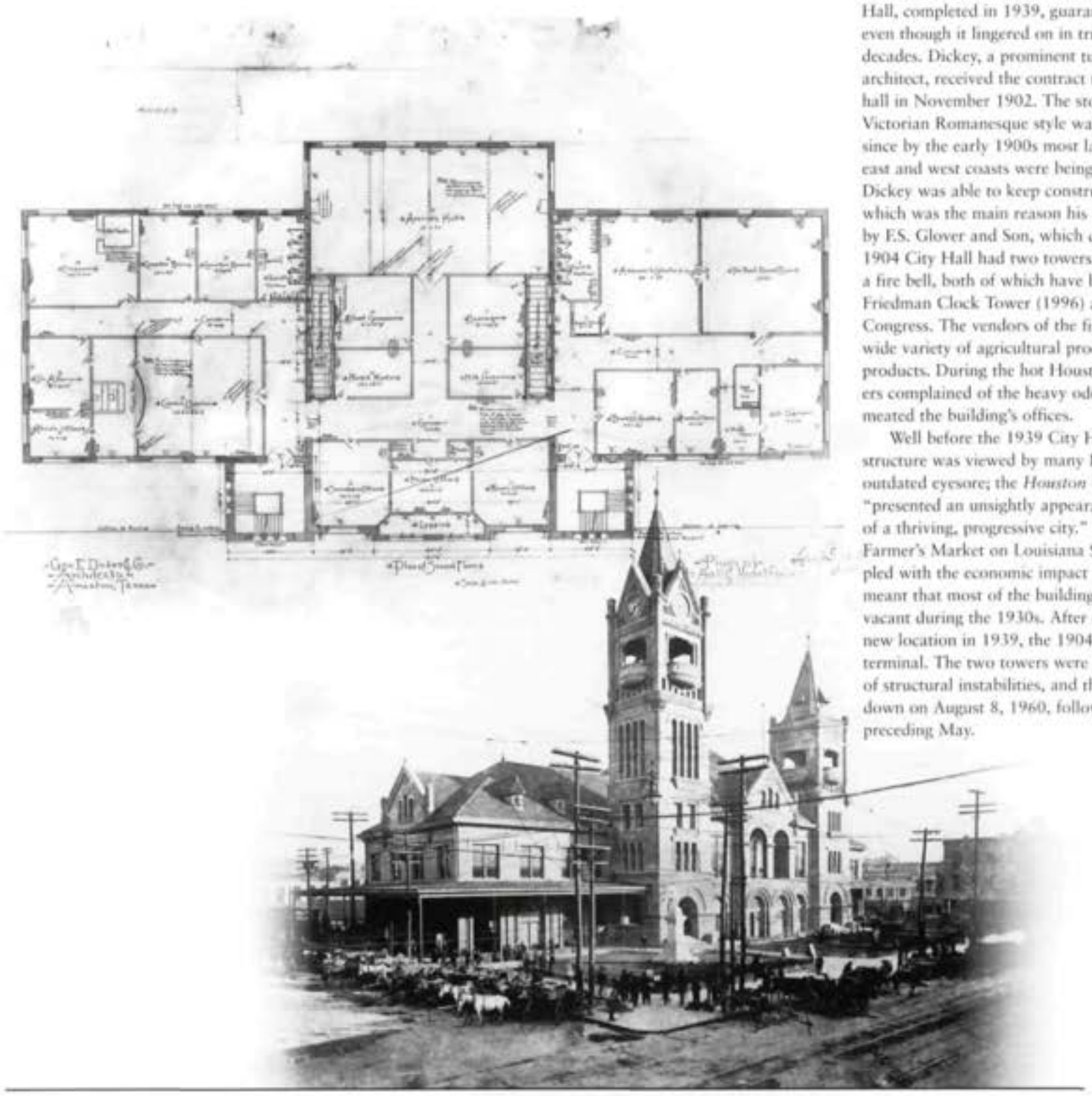
This frenzy of demolition is a sad capstone to a century that in Houston has been notable for the number of significant civic, commercial, and residential structures that have fallen to the wrecking ball. Despite the gains made by the local preservation movement, it is the destruction of Houston's architectural heritage, rather than its conservation, that truly marks the past 100 years. The cycle of this destruction can be surprisingly quick. I have friends who, in the late 1970s, lived in areas of the city that consisted entirely of new construction. Yet when these friends returned to visit after an absence of as few as 15 to 20 years, they were able to recognize only scattered landmarks from their past neighborhoods.

Even to those who have never moved, the pace of the city's change can be overwhelming. Of course, feelings of dislocation are anything but new for Houstonians. In 1910, Salvation Army Major John T. Milsaps, who was born in Houston in 1852, returned to the city after an absence of several years. Milsaps visited his childhood haunts and noted in his diary that, "I scarcely recognized the locality, so great has been the change."

As that change has progressed, the communal memory of place so necessary for a cohesive public attachment to urbanitas and a sense of civic identity has been virtually eliminated. My job as architectural archivist for the Houston Public Library's Archives Department has given me a heightened awareness of the depth of the obliteration of Houston's architectural past. Dense, complex layers of the city's infrastructure have vanished with scarcely a trace, or no trace at all, remaining. Even highly knowledgeable researchers who utilize the library's archives are often totally unaware, to use just a few of dozens of examples, that Main Street and the South End were the locales of a fabulous residential area in the early part of the century; that Eugene Heiner and George Dickey created beautiful and impressive Victorian-era buildings, both public and private; or that Joseph Finger's and Alfred Finn's now-isolated Art Moderne buildings once dominated the city skyline. (Unfortunately, the archives can be a double-edged sword. While its architectural drawings have enabled architects to redevelop the Rice Hotel and other historic buildings, they also showed demolition crews just where to place the dynamite when the Sam Houston Coliseum and the Jefferson Davis Hospital were imploded.)

In recent years, the feelings of loss over the destruction of familiar and beloved architectural landmarks worldwide has been exemplified by a proliferation of books on "lost" cities: *Lost London*, *Lost Boston*, *Lost Chicago*, and, in Houston, forgotten being as good as lost, *Houston's Forgotten Heritage*. At the same time, a good deal of recent historical scholarship has focused on what has been described as, to use Norman M. Klein's term, the "history of forgetting," the attempt of present-day society to recreate the past in order to recapture lost communal feelings. It is in that spirit that the following images of demolished 20th-century buildings of Houston are presented. While it is impossible to actually recreate the past, these photos and drawings impart some idea of the wide variety of notable structures that we once had, but no longer do. Remarkable for their style and range, the buildings seen on the following pages give some idea of the scope of what we have lost during the past 100 years. And, perhaps, they might remind us to be careful of what we could lose in the next 100. ■

(Except where noted, the photos on the following pages are courtesy of the Houston Public Library, Houston Metropolitan Research Center.)

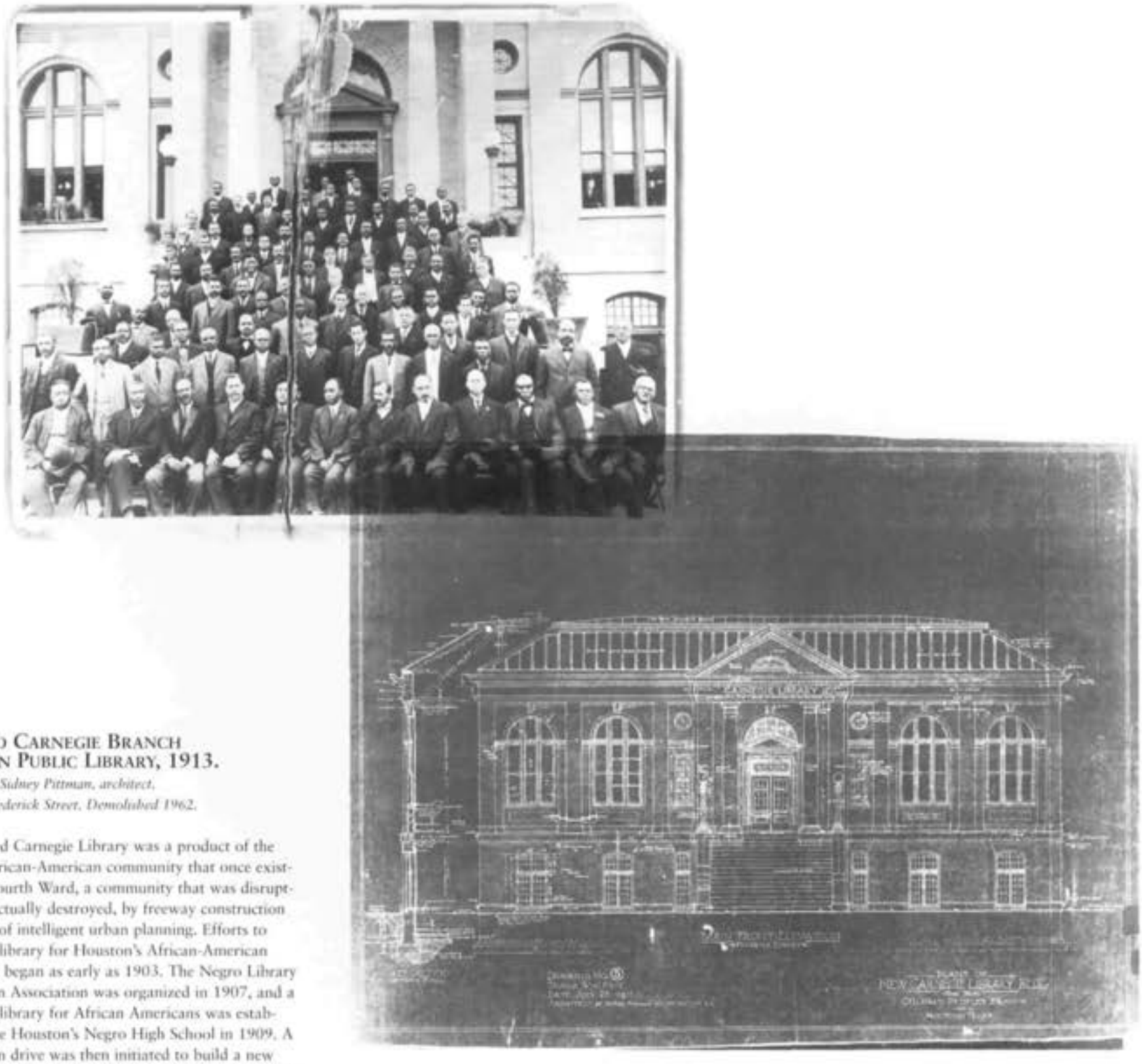


Houston City Hall and Market, 1904.

George E. Dickey, architect.
Market Square. Demolished 1960.

For many years after its completion, George E. Dickey's grand Victorian City Hall and Market dominated Market Square. But the construction of Joseph Finger's current City Hall, completed in 1939, guaranteed the building's demise, even though it lingered on in truncated form for two more decades. Dickey, a prominent turn-of-the-century Houston architect, received the contract to build Houston's fourth city hall in November 1902. The stone and brick edifice's Victorian Romanesque style was stylistically anachronistic, since by the early 1900s most large public buildings on the east and west coasts were being built in the classical style. Dickey was able to keep construction costs below $100,000, which was the main reason his plan was accepted over a bid by F.S. Glover and Son, which came in at $250,000. The 1904 City Hall had two towers, one for a clock and one for a fire bell, both of which have been reinstalled in the Friedman Clock Tower (1996) at the corner of Travis and Congress. The vendors of the first-floor market stalls sold a wide variety of agricultural produce, meat, fish, and retail products. During the hot Houston summers, City Hall workers complained of the heavy odors from the stalls, which permeated the building's offices.

Well before the 1939 City Hall was finished, the Dickey structure was viewed by many Houstonians as an unseemly, outdated eyesore; the *Houston Chronicle* editorialized that it "presented an unsightly appearance for the government seat of a thriving, progressive city." The city constructed a new Farmer's Market on Louisiana Street in 1929, and that, coupled with the economic impact of the Great Depression, meant that most of the building's first floor stalls were vacant during the 1930s. After city government moved to its new location in 1939, the 1904 City Hall was used as a bus terminal. The two towers were demolished in 1948 because of structural instabilities, and the rest of the building came down on August 8, 1960, following a devastating fire the preceding May.

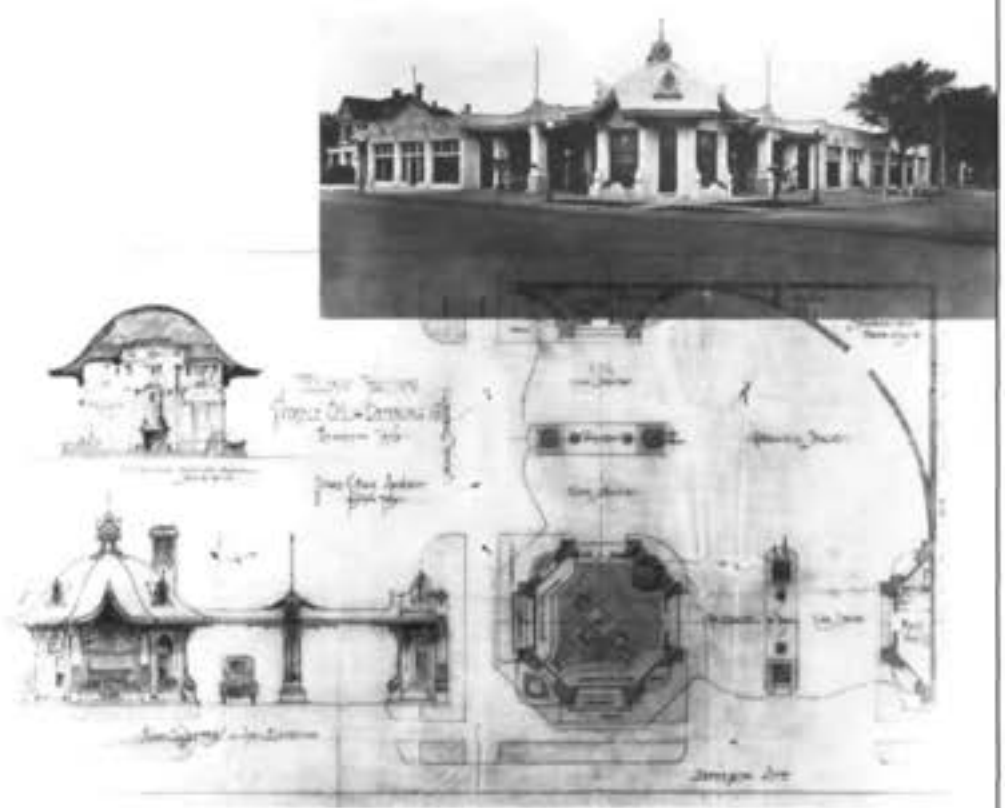


Colored Carnegie Branch Houston Public Library, 1913.

William Sidney Pittman, architect.
1112 Frederick Street. Demolished 1962.

The Colored Carnegie Library was a product of the thriving African-American community that once existed in the Fourth Ward, a community that was disrupted, if not actually destroyed, by freeway construction and a lack of intelligent urban planning. Efforts to establish a library for Houston's African-American community began as early as 1903. The Negro Library and Lyceum Association was organized in 1907, and a circulating library for African Americans was established inside Houston's Negro High School in 1909. A subscription drive was then initiated to build a new "colored" library, and although a moderate amount of money was obtained from local supporters and the City of Houston, Emmett J. Scott, a Houstonian who had once worked as Booker T. Washington's secretary, appealed to Washington to ask philanthropist Andrew Carnegie for assistance. Carnegie donated $15,000 and promised an additional yearly appropriation of $1,500; construction of the library began in 1912. The library was formally dedicated on April 11, 1913, and operated independently until 1921, when it became a branch of the Houston Public Library.

William Sidney Pittman was probably given the commission to design the library because he was Booker T. Washington's son-in-law, although Pittman had previously worked on Carnegie-financed projects in Washington, D.C., where his office was located. The classical library's exterior was faced with buff-colored bricks; its roof was green. It contained an auditorium that seated 250 people. In 1962, the Colored Carnegie Library was demolished. What was lost when it became rubble was a focal point for African-American educational, social, and cultural functions, such as the circa-1926 meeting of Houston's African-American teachers and educators seen in the photo above.



Humble Oil and Refining Company Filling Station #4, 1919.

Alfred C. Finn, architect.
1802 Main at Jefferson. Demolished 1983.

The Humble Oil and Refining Company Filling Station #4 served as something of a prototype for local petroleum companies, which were eager to develop a standardized method for selling name brand gasoline. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, automobile drivers usually purchased gasoline from hardware stores, transferring it to their cars from cans using a funnel, a process that could be inconvenient, messy, and sometimes dangerous. Following the opening of the nation's first gas station in California in 1907, gasoline began to be dispensed from an upright stand. Just three years later, gas was delivered for the first time to cars by pump and hose from an underground tank. Following this development, curbside pumps began to appear, which created considerable traffic problems in large cities. In 1913, to reduce traffic and to promote its own gasoline, Gulf Oil opened the first off-street filling station in Pittsburgh.

While Humble Oil was not especially eager to enter the retail gasoline market, the company had acquired the Dixie refinery, which operated curbside pumps. The construction of Filling Station #4 was intended to spotlight the Humble corporate name and serve as a showcase for the sale of the company's gasoline. Built at a cost of $50,000, the station contained elements of both Art Nouveau and Beaux Arts styles when it opened on April 1, 1919. Subsequent Humble Oil stations were not constructed in such an elaborate manner. The explosion of automobile ownership after World War I and a ten-fold increase in the number of filling stations during the next decade required the development of a standardized, cheaper, and utilitarian architectural style.

Majestic Theater, 1923.
John Eberson, architect.
908 Rusk. Demolished 1971.

Dallas entrepreneur Karl Hoblitzelle, owner of the Interstate Amusement Company, opened the Majestic Theater on January 29, 1923. The Majestic gained national notice as the first "atmospheric" motion picture theater (with ceilings of stars and clouds) designed by noted Chicago architect John Eberson. It was also the first of the major movie palaces to be constructed during Houston's theater building boom of the 1920s. Hyperbolic advertisements in the local papers trumpeted that the Majestic's debut would be a "social event that all Houston will celebrate." Professor Stockton Axson of the Rice Institute helped inaugurate the theater by delivering an outline of the history of drama to the opening night crowd. The Majestic was principally Italian Renaissance in style, although it contained Greco-Roman decorative elements as well. On the building's terra cotta façade were two ceramic-tile inscriptions written with classical lettering.

The fourth level of the exterior façade contained a pink-tinted frieze of frolicking children. The Majestic's interior was designed to create a garden-like atmosphere, and the theater was replete with hanging vines and trellises and floral motif decorations on the entry ceiling. The auditorium was intended to give theater audiences the impression that they were seated in the outdoor garden of an Italian palazzo. The ceiling had twinkling lights to give the effect of shimmering stars, and drifting clouds were projected to add to the illusion of being outdoors.

The Majestic specialized in elaborate live productions and vaudeville shows, with silent films being almost a sideline entertainment. By 1970, the theater was showing X-rated films; the site was sold in April 1971 for $1.4 million, and in September it was closed. Shortly thereafter, the Majestic was razed.

Metropolitan Theater, 1926.
Alfred C. Finn, architect.
1018 Main. Demolished 1973.

The entrance of the Metropolitan Theater was adjacent to the neighboring Loew's Theater, both of which shared space in the Metropolitan Block complex constructed by Jesse Jones for Southern Enterprises. Construction costs for the Metropolitan, which opened on Christmas Day of 1926, reached $2 million. The theater's outstanding feature was its hydraulic orchestra pit, which lowered and raised the Metropolitan Grand Orchestra. The Metropolitan was also known for its giant Wurlitzer organ, reputedly the largest in the South. The balcony alone seated 700 people, and the theater had a total seating capacity of 3,000.

The Metropolitan was widely hailed in both architectural and theatrical circles, even being chosen as one of country's outstanding new theaters in the 1927 publication *American Theaters of Today*. Nonetheless, Finn's interior decoration for the Metropolitan has been described as "Egypt gone amok" and "an Egyptian nightmare." Although the use of Egyptian Revival architecture peaked in the United States in the mid-19th century, the use of various historically eclectic styles gained widespread acceptance in theater interiors during the 1920s.

Houston Turn-Verein Clubhouse, 1928.
Joseph Finger, architect.
5202 Almeda Road. Demolished 1993.

The Houston Turn-Verein is Houston's oldest German-American organization. Founded in 1854, the "Turners," primarily a cultural, social, and fraternal group, occupied three buildings before Joseph Finger was selected to design a clubhouse to mark the Turn-Verein's 75th anniversary. For their fourth move, the Turners sought a suburban location, one removed from their previous downtown sites, and bought a parcel of land on Almeda Road adjacent to newer South End subdivisions.

The Austrian-born Finger, who was largely responsible for introducing the Art Moderne style to Houston, utilized elements of Viennese Secessionism and Art Nouveau in his zigzag Moderne design for the Turn-Verein Clubhouse. The two-story building was constructed of brick, stucco, reinforced concrete, and hollow tile at a cost of nearly $200,000. The first floor contained a reception hall, the principal men's clubroom, and a women's meeting hall. A rear wing contained a bowling alley, bowling being one of the group's favorite recreational sports. The second floor held a ballroom and stage for the club's social functions. A promenade also extended above the bowling lanes.

Perhaps the building's greatest appeal was the delightful ornamentation that Finger used to decorate the exterior facade. Over the entrance, an eagle sat above the inscription "Turn-Verein," which was flanked by the club's founding date and the date of the building's completion. Art Nouveau stylized floral reliefs decorated the plaques that adorned a one-story terrace extending along the front exterior. On the second floor, plaques displayed a stylized bowler and bowling pins. Even the drainpipes were embossed with an "HT" monogram.

In 1969 the Turn-Verein moved to a new location near Sharpstown, abandoning their old clubhouse. Following years of neglect, the building was placed on the city's "dangerous buildings" list in 1991; it was demolished two years later. A Walgreen's drugstore now occupies the site.

Grand Central Railroad Station, 1934.
Wyatt C. Hedrick, architect.
329 Franklin. Demolished 1960.

The Southern Pacific's Grand Central Railroad Station and its adjoining rail facilities were designed by Wyatt C. Hedrick and built at a cost of more than $4 million. It subsequently served as a model for railway stations built in other U.S. cities during the 1930s. The 392-foot-long station was four stories high and faced a parking "plaza." The exterior of Grand Central Station was built of Texas Cordova Limestone; its base was Texas pink granite. The main passenger waiting room, which seated 176 people, had a two-story ceiling and was flanked on either side by murals painted by John McQuarrie. One of the murals can be seen in the photo inset above; it depicts Stephen F. Austin, Baron de Bastrop, and other settlers beginning the Anglo-American colonization of Texas in 1823. The second mural portrayed Sam Houston entering Houston on horseback in 1837.

The station, which with its adjacent railyards occupied an area extending two blocks from Washington north to Girard Street and for six blocks parallel to Washington Avenue, replaced the Central Depot of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad. At its height, Grand Central saw about 30 trains arrive and depart daily. The station was demolished in 1960 to provide a site for the downtown post office. Its destruction symbolized the passing of the passenger train era.

Oil and Gas Building, 1939.

Kenneth Franzheim, architect.
Louisiana at Lamar. Demolished 1971.

The design of the Oil and Gas Building of the Continental Oil Company was praised in the March 1940 issue of *Architectural Record* as being successful in an effort "to create office quarters attractive enough to draw desirable tenants from the center of the city." The walls of the six-story building were faced with light brick, with granite trim. The general color scheme was comprised of tan and black. On the ground floor was a garage, a filling station at the rear that sold the company's Conoco gasoline, and retail shops. The top floor consisted of a penthouse, home to the Ramada Club, an exclusive private venue that restricted its membership to 75 oil company executives. For the convenience of the building's oil company tenants, who generated a large number of drawings in their real estate and engineering departments, the ground floor had a blueprint copying service. The structure was razed in May 1971.

Architect Franzheim made an enormous mark on Houston architecture from the 1930s through the 1950s. In addition to his 1930s work on the Oil and Gas Building, the Humble Building, and Lamar High School, Franzheim designed the downtown YMCA, Foley's downtown, the Prudential Building, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Blaffer Wing, and the Bank of the Southwest.

Shamrock Hotel, 1949.
Wyatt C. Hedrick, architect.
6900 S. Main. Demolished 1987.

With a star-studded opening that was broadcast live to the nation on the ABC radio network, the Shamrock Hotel became firmly fixed in the American mind as an example of owner Glenn H. McCarthy's can-do brand of Houston entrepreneurship. The fame came largely from the spirit of the hotel's excess and grandiosity rather than its architecture, of which Frank Lloyd Wright was reported to have commented after entering the lobby, "I've always wanted to know what the inside of a jukebox looks like, and now I know." Nevertheless, the imagination of the entire country was riveted by the Shamrock's St. Patrick's Day debut on March 17, 1949, which was in many ways the city of Houston's debut to the United States.

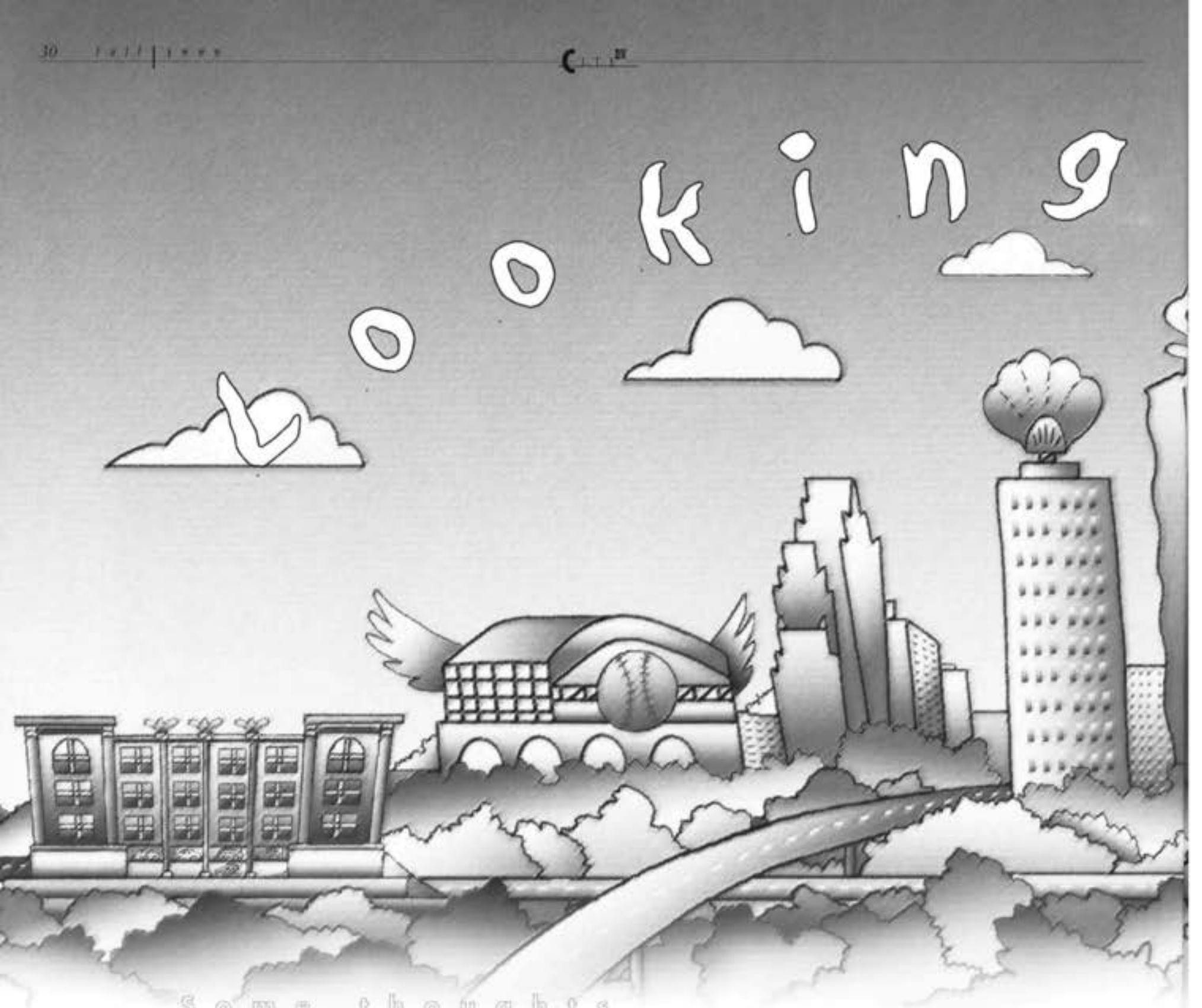
McCarthy had a vision of relocating the nucleus of Houston from its traditional downtown center to a point farther out along South Main — a daring concept at the time. The Shamrock was originally envisioned as being one part of a Rockefeller Center-like suburban complex. Although this concept was eventually abandoned, the Shamrock alone still managed to generate interest for decades after its opening.

Ultimately, the cost of the 18-story, 1,001-room Shamrock reached $21 million. Architect Wyatt C. Hedrick utilized an uninspiring version of stripped classicism with stepped pyramidal massing for the hotel's exterior, but inside the building Irish-American McCarthy's tastes ran rampant. Practically every fixture in the hotel, including the ashtrays and wastebaskets, were decorated with shamrocks, while dinner plates were emblazoned with a green "S." In all, 63 shades of green were used in the Shamrock's interiors, which were largely designed by Los Angeles interior decorator Robert Harrell. A sculptural panel of the Three Graces above the entrance was done by Edward Z. Galea, and Brochsteins Inc. produced the custom millwork.

After the publicity of the hotel's opening, economic reality began to face McCarthy. A downturn in oil prices forced him to sell the Shamrock to the Hilton Hotels Corporation in 1955. In 1986, the Shamrock was purchased by the Texas Medical Center, and despite spirited, vocal, and well-attended protests, the hotel was torn down in 1987.

First City National Bank Banking Pavilion, 1961.
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects.
1001 Main. Demolished 1998.

The preservation of recent modern landmarks has often been a hard-sell for preservationists. Baby boomers frequently have a difficult time comprehending the fact that the homes and buildings they grew up with are now approaching the 50-year minimum age necessary for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. As a result, there was an insufficient public outcry when First City's modernist banking pavilion was threatened with destruction in the late 1990s. First City National's free-standing banking pavilion, with its glass-walled, naturally lighted, open interior, clearly set the bank building apart from its competitors. The free-spanned lobby, with its high-quality finishings by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, became a fixture in the daily routine of many Houstonians who worked and banked downtown. The widespread acceptance of First City's banking pavilion helped facilitate the spread of modernism throughout the city. In 1998, the banking pavilion was demolished to make way for a parking garage. ■



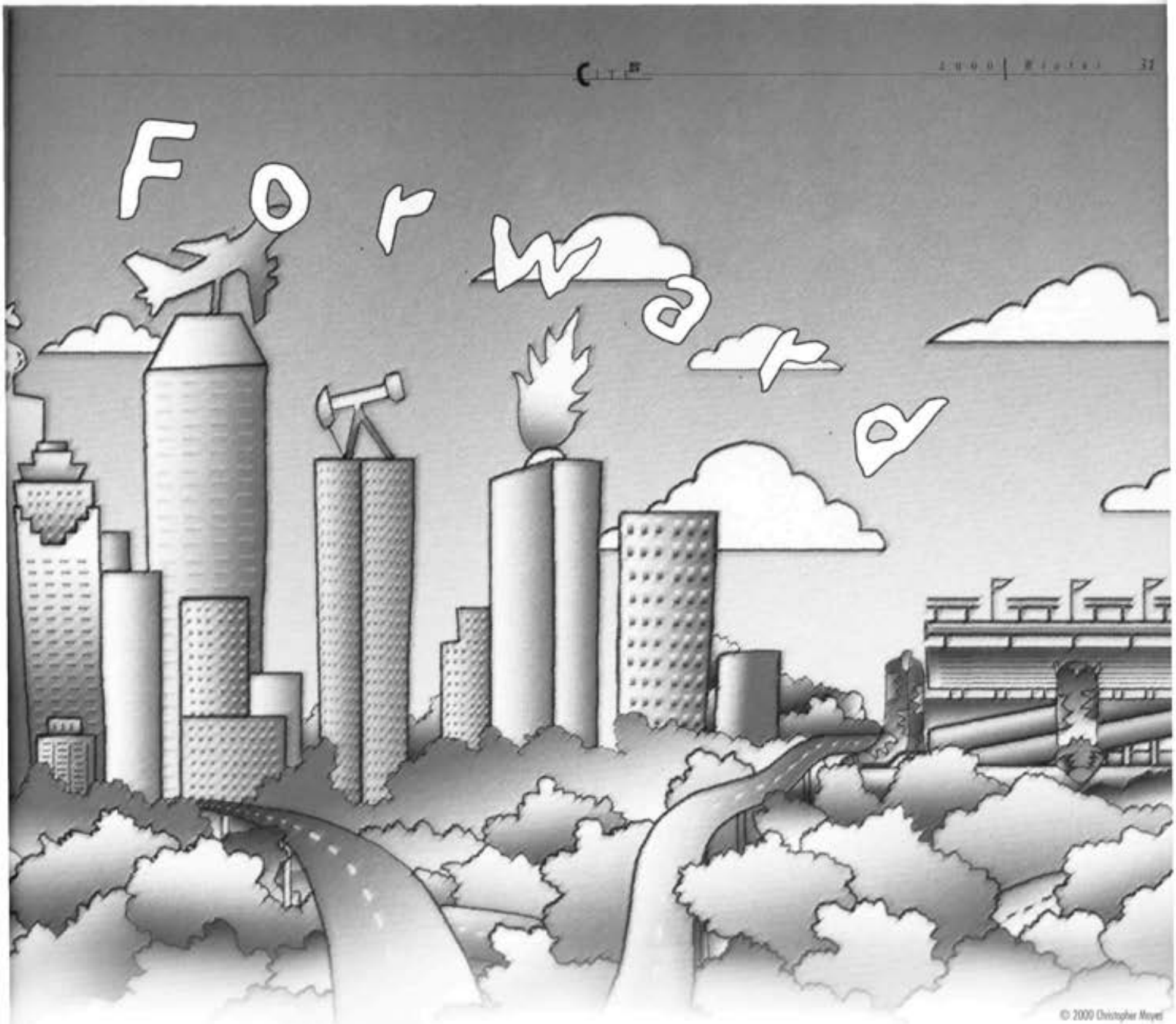
Some thoughts on the shapes of things to come

"What Houston possesses to an exceptional degree is an extraordinary vitality. One wishes that it had a larger conceptual reach, that social and cultural and human patterns were as well understood as dollar dynamism."

Ada Louise Huxtable[1]

By Drexel Turner

However serviceable Houston may be beneath the surface, it is not the kind of place that makes air travelers want to stay over a Saturday night, or which rewards its captive audience with much in the way of a public life, assuming they want it. The extraordinary success of Philip Johnson's Transco Fountain as an unair-conditioned people magnet, suggests they do, and are even willing to fight the traffic on the West Loop to get to it (or for that matter, just to drive by it, as Deyan Sudjic noted appreciatively in *The One Hundred Mile City*). What was developed by the Hines Interests as a corporate lawn ornament for a 64-story office building next to the Galleria has been transformed, by uncommon usage, into a case for the outsourcing of the public realm, complete with wedding parties, taco vendors, and horse-drawn-carriages-for-hire. No publicly-contrived attraction in the city remotely approaches the fountain's concentrated everyday appeal, save for the well-lighted, curbside jogging trail in Memorial Park,



© 2000 Christopher Meyer

which daily serves as the setting for an evening-long, Nike-town *passeggiata*.

Nor does the city afford much in the way of neighborhoods that demonstrate any conspicuously town-like feeling, either as ensembles on the variety-within-unity model cultivated from Bedford Square to Seaside, or as harbingers of the small-world-at-one's-doorstep multiplexity celebrated from the West Village to Notting Hill. For residential precincts of special cohesion and convenience, the Houston list usually begins and ends with the surreally unified (by dark gray paint) close-set bungalows that enfold The Menil Collection. This museum attracts architectural aficionados, cameras in hand, at as steady a clip as it does devotees of painting and sculpture. But more to the point, it serves to confirm Lord Llewelyn-Davies' proposition that "In the last resort, architecture is that which changes land-use." Or, at the very least, solidifies it.

Several background developments are worth mentioning as useful upgrades in civic amenity: the wholesale planting of trees sponsored by Trees for Houston and the related city ordinance mandating street trees at regular intervals for all new commercial and residential construction; the building set-back ordinance precipitated by the mirror-glass walls of the Woodway (Drive) canyon; the reclamation of the floodway of Buffalo Bayou from Shepherd Drive to downtown; and the Texas Department of Transportation's decision to replace the Southwest Freeway viaduct that runs through Montrose and the Museum District with a depressed roadway.

Of course, simply tidying things up is not going to increase Houston's entertainment value, either in the everyday sense or the air-traveler-ensnaring one. Indeed, as Sudjic noted in 1992, apart from its "shimmering, sculptured and faceted skyscrapers … [t]he city has yet to create any other sense of itself.... Planning, as it is practised in Houston, has no remedies for this … what planning does try to do in Houston is to instill the sense of parade-ground neatness so beloved of middle America. What Houston's planners think of as good planning is the landscaping of parking lots, to insist on trees, and earth berms along their frontages, and small discreet business signs."[2]

Real remedies are difficult to come by — especially for a city already so spread in its ways, whose citizens are more self-sufficient in the air-conditioned comfort of their homes, via television and the internet, than anyone could have imagined 50 years ago. Real remedies require real ingenuity and investment, as opposed to merely substituting private opulence and public tidiness for the "private opulence and public squalor" John Kenneth Galbraith deplored in the mid-century

In Dallas, Pegasus has been returned to the roof of the Magnolia Building. Could similar signage perk up Houston's skyline?

affluent society. The problem of Houston, as Ada Louise Huxtable discerned a quarter-century ago, was that of providing "an anchor to time and place where neither is defined. All of those values that accrue throughout centuries of civilization — identity, intimacy, scale, complexity, style — are simply created out of whole cloth, or whole prairie, with unabashed commercial eclecticism. How else to establish a sense of place or community, to indicate differences where none exist?"

Extra Toppings

Roland Barthes has written that skyscrapers are "the city's great commonplace ... what is astonishing about the skyscraper is that it does not astonish." As if to prove the point, in 1982 the curators of the Cooper Hewitt Museum assembled a series of 30 skyline views of American cities and presented them without captions in a publication on the subject, *Cities*, defying readers to tell them apart. Downtown Houston is no exception. Though Philip Johnson began to point the way out of this identity crisis with the ski-slope tops of Pennzoil Place, with few exceptions — the tempietto-capped Niels Esperson Building and the nesting Rathauses of Johnson's Republic Bank Center — most of the downtown skyline is still beset by a numbing sameness.

In order to literally project a distinctive image, Continental Airlines last year proposed to beam its corporate logo onto the upper face of its 52-story headquarters building in Cullen Center, thereby provoking the indignation of Central Houston Inc. and dozens of other equally unamused corporate citizens. Not that anyone should be particularly charmed by Continental's logo, a gridded partial globe that is less vivid a representation of flight than the Pegasus that brands the Magnolia Building in Dallas. (The original 30-foot-high sign, which rotated on a derrick-like pediment, was added as an afterthought in 1934; today it's a museum piece, though a duplicate was recently placed atop the Magnolia by a Dallas civic group.) Even by the standards of Dallas — "cleaner than Houston ... more tightly controlled," in novelist Larry McMurtry's reading — Continental's desire to distinguish its corporate presence in the sky would seem an entirely reasonable attempt at product differentiation, a potentially diverting concession to the imperative of a market economy where products tend, like the buildings their producers occupy, to be inherently the same.

"In Manhattan," Colin Rowe reflects, "the earlier skyscrapers (almost everything built before 1950) are still obedient to the principles [of rooftop adornment] observed in Rome. No doubt New York City is a vertical excess, but, until very recently, almost every skyscraper behaved approximately like Sant'Agnese in Piazza Navona. The Woolworth, the Chrysler, the Empire State buildings all behave this way ... At street level they are quiet ... The set piece, the celebration of object, the *fioriture*, belong up top."[3]

As a means of overcompensating for the general disarray (others might say messy vitality) of its public ground and air space, Houston has tended to react harshly against billboards and other signage. But if, as Marcel Duchamp surmised, art might be the last refuge of scoundrels, Continental could perhaps think of declaring its corporate symbol an artistic creation as a community-standards-proof way to make its presence known among the upright cigar boxes of downtown. The glimmer of such a strategy can be detected in the hat trick of Claes Oldenburg's rolled-up *Plain Dealer*, tossed across the puddle of Lake Erie onto the roof of Frank Gehry's unbuilt Progressive Insurance Corporation Tower for Cleveland. Closer to terra firma, one might also reflect that Big Daddy Wade's giant saxophone, made from VW parts for Billy Blues on Richmond, thwarted the sign police by claiming special dispensation as art, a distinction that also applies to Ant Farm's Thunderbird ready-made impaled on a pylon in front of the Hard Rock Cafe on Kirby.

If artful Thunderbirds and saxophones can slip through the radar of community conformitarianism, and if Frank Gehry can attach a real Lockheed F104 Starfighter jet to the facade of the California Aerospace Museum, ("an inspired piece of advertising" in the judgement of the Walker Art Center's retrospective catalog), then what's to stop a Boeing 747, or its fiberglass body-double, from perching atop Continental's pylon at 1600 Smith Street? If the city fathers should manage to annul this marriage of art and commerce, Continental could still adopt the functionalist approach of Christine's in Pendel, Pennsylvania, in which a Super-G Constellation is parked on the roof, however decoratively, to serve as a cocktail lounge. As an operable restaurant, Continental's 747 would surely be entitled to the same protection as the restaurant atop the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

A more general retrofitting of the tops of Houston's downtown skyscrapers might begin with One Shell Plaza, the upper reaches of which enjoy a permanently unobscured (by the grace of City Hall) westerly exposure. It also combines a sturdy countenance with an iconically suggestive prime tenant. In fact, the architectural adaptability of the Shell Oil Company's symbol has already been road-tested in a series of service stations built according to a shell design patented in 1930. One can imagine the top of One Shell Plaza morphing into a Chrysleresque headdress in emulation of those freestanding giant-Shell service stations — the architectural equivalent of big hair, pumped up to conform to the scale of a 50-story building. (To Henry-Russell Hitchcock, writing a short time after the patent for the shell-design stations was granted, "the combination of strict functionalism and bold symbolism in the best roadside stands provides, perhaps, the most encouraging sign for the architecture of the mid-20th century."[4])

Not every tall building needs a talking head, but some clearly invite it. Enron, whose core business is natural gas, might light up the range as a torchère on the

order of the 40-story Pharos of Alexandria. Something of the sort was contemplated in 1966 for the "lamp" of the Aladdin Casino and Hotel in Las Vegas, in the form of a 40-foot-high, gas-jet-fueled flame that was to flicker atop a 200-foot pylon sign. What is needed here, however, is an un-natural gas effect, perhaps a liquid-crystal-enhanced nocturnal flare that no real flame could match.

Nor should one forget the once-revolving Spindletop restaurant of the terminally sober Hyatt Hotel downtown. Recall also that in her inspection of the city's freeways, Ada Louise Huxtable was fascinated by the "revolving neon piano" that provided a grace note between the giant roach and the mummy's head on the Southwest Freeway. Surely no hotel anywhere has a piano bar, revolving or not, at the scale the platform presented by the Spindletop suggests.

All of which is not to suggest that downtown's towers should function simply as product placement opportunities — although when the connection is apt there is no reason not to go public. In fact, the "spires of Zenith" can also look like spires, or any other species of ornament, or folly, that suits: the metallic helmet of the Chrysler building, the buttressed roundabout of Hood and Howell's Chicago Tribune tower, the broken pediment of Philip Johnson's AT&T Building, and Siah Armajani's 127 foot-high open-work tiara for Cesar Pelli's unbuilt Yerba Buena Tower all suggest, with varying degrees of success, other non-product-specific means of establishing an aerial identity.

Drive-ups

Closer to the ground, most outsiders seem amazed by the ubiquity and enormity of our parking garages — one horizontal cigar box for every upturned one, or nearly so. While garage tops occasionally double as platforms for tennis clubs (Allen Center, Galleria), employee cafeterias/gyms (Tenneco), or, in the case of the garage behind the Alley Theater, a still vacant shell of a theater, these plateaus are seldom used for anything more than parking another layer of cars.

In McMurtry's *Terms of Endearment*, Vernon Dalhart, a self-made business man, was in the habit of driving his Lincoln up to the 24th floor of a garage he owned to spend the night. He "parked the Lincoln in a little niche he had cut out in the west wall ... At night no one but him was allowed to park on the 24th floor. It was where he slept — more than that, it was his home, the one thing money had bought him that he loved completely and never tired of."

In a similar vein, Le Corbusier developed schemes in 1926 for the entrepreneur Joseph Mege to construct a small "colony" of studio houses on top of the seven-story Garage Raspail; two densities were studied, one for 28, another for 46 units, all arranged back to back with a peripheral garage-top "sidewalk" providing access, in what amounted to an airlift of his light-weight "student housing" project of 1925. (Possibly, Le Corbusier was aware of a group of apartments constructed in the early 1920s on top of a garage at 22 rue Barrault by the Citroen automobile company to house Russian taxi drivers, a development that remains intact today, though presumably the occupants have changed.) Garage-top condominiums could, one suspects, find takers here, perhaps even Houstonized in the manner of the Hogg bungalow/penthouse atop the old Great Southern Building (now the Hogg Palace Lofts). Also, learning from Le Corbusier and the crèche on the roof of the Unité d'habitation, it is conceivable that the tops of garages would make viable work-place linked day-care sites so that parents could park their cars and preschool-age children at the same coordinates before shuffling off to work.

More Sleepers

Except for the upper-income towers that spike the leafy fringes of River Oaks, Briargrove and the Museum District, apartment construction in Houston has been mostly a manifestation of what Walt Whitman called the "pull-down-and-build-over-again-spirit" of New York in the mid-19th century. Typically, sub-high-rise apartments and condominiums are meant to pay out in as few as six years, so the results tend to be flimsy.

The Isabella Court, located north of Sears on Main Street, is one of the few sub-highrise Houston apartment buildings to combine firmness, commodity, and delight. The Isabella's 18 units, some of which are split-level demi-studios, have always been in demand, but its promise was never really exploited as a pattern for "citified" housing in Houston, and it is doubtful that its example would provide an economically viable model in today's economy.

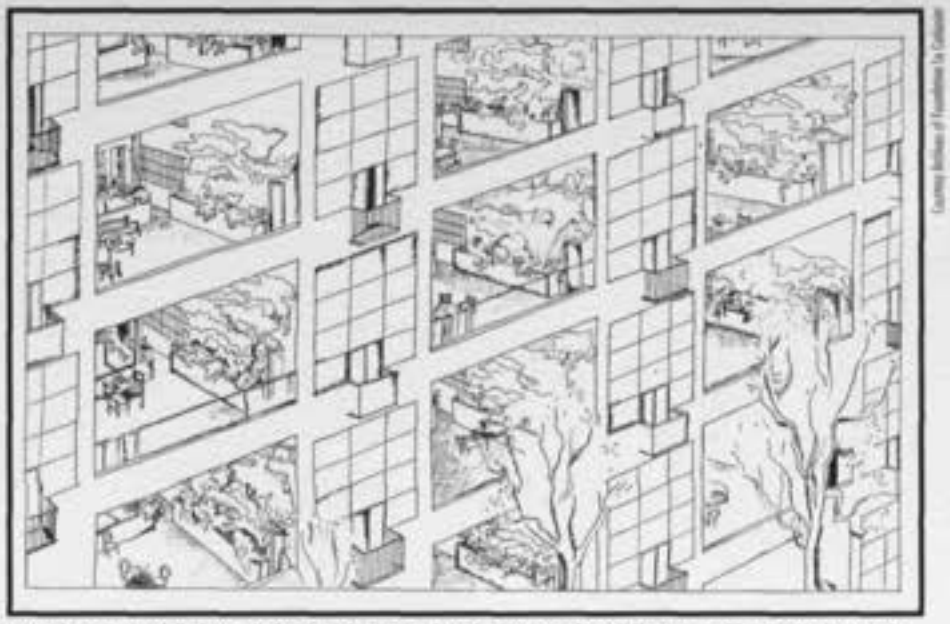
However, another promising, if so far underachieving, concrete-framed and urban-scaled proposition has appeared in the form of purpose-built loft apartments, duplex units with at least one double-height space somewhat analogous to the

Cass Gilbert's Rodin Studios in New York (1918) presented a model that later studio and loft builders could aspire to.

studio apartments built in New York around the turn of the 19th century. In New York, apartment buildings of this type sometimes affected the names of artists, as did Cass Gilbert's 14-story Rodin Studios on West 57th Street (1918) and the Gainsborough (1908) on Central Park South. All were in essence amplifications of Richard Morris Hunt's Tenth Street Studios, which he introduced in 1856 as a new building type, and which survived for more than a century. A contemporary account in *Architectural Review* extolled the duplex apartment with double-height studio as "exhilarating" and possesed of "a feeling of amplitude ... such an abundance of light and air ... so big and yet so intimate, so spacious and yet so economical." In some cases, developers were either obliged or foresightful enough to purchase "light" and "view" easements from adjoining properties to safeguard the enjoyment of the building's occupants, a nicety that has yet to enter the equation in Houston.

A more down to earth — and perhaps more feasible — variation of the New York model can be found in Le Corbusier's lower-rise, block-filling *immeubles-villas* project of 1922, which first combined, as Reyner Banham has noted, both the notion of "vertically stacked duplex apartments ... [a type] almost without precedent in Europe" and the idea of "pair[ing] ... each unit with a duplex-height garden terrace within the shelter of the block." Constructed in reinforced concrete and stacked four-high (plus a set-back penthouse range) above basement parking, Le Corbusier's "freehold maisonettes" — villas in the sky — were prefaced by deep, double-height, very un-French balconies ("each ... completely shut off from its neighbor") to present a "hanging garden" facade to the street. Otherwise the block of 120 units was arranged like a giant palazzo, with the backs looking onto a tennis-court courtyard. As an added attraction, Le Corbusier proposed that the units be marketed to potential occupants through "a great rent-purchase scheme." Ten years later, he realized a fragment of this vision in the slender, ground-floor parking plus eight stories Maison Clarte in Geneva, where 45 duplexed units enjoyed shallow clip-on, rather than deep hanging garden, balconies.

Reinforced-concrete *immeubles-villas* loft projects at the scale of Randall Davis' Metropolis or Gotham (four units with double-height balconies stacked on top of ground-level parking) are already viable in Houston. Another Davis project is called



Some purpose-built lofts going up in Houston, such as the four-unit-high Metropolis (1997), above left, reflect ideas expressed more gracefully by Le Corbusier in his 1922 plans for low-rise, block-filling *immeubles-villas*, above right.

the Renoir in the manner of early 20th-century Manhattan, though it shows a pavilion of the new Louvre as its design concept in pre-construction advertising.

Problematic as the exterior treatments and street friendliness of these projects may be, they nevertheless provide a market-tested armature that could readily accept cosmetic upgrading of the kind Edwin Lutyens applied, at the behest of the Westminster Estate, to the outsides of apartments and offices otherwise built to the plans of "specialist" architects in London in the late 1920s and early 1930s. A string of such cosmetically enhanced, street-friendly lofts could provide the basis for a potentially pleasurable transformation of Main or Montrose. As a bare-bones expedient, even the maximally glazed, balcony-gridded elevations now associated with the type could accept a "Majolica House"-like (or hanging garden?) patterning all over through application of the see-through dot-matrix sun screens/scrims now employed for advertising over bus and taxi windows.

Sporting Chances

Sometime before the middle of the 21st century, Houston's population will be primarily of Latin-American extraction. Already, Mexican League soccer teams regularly draw capacity crowds to Robertson Stadium at the University of Houston, and one would hope that the stadium that will be built to accommodate the Rodeo and the city's entry-to-be in the National Football League will also be soccer-compatible. (Houston is more likely than San Antonio to be awarded a major league soccer franchise.)

As presently conceived by HOK Sports of Kansas City, the design for the new NFL stadium envisions an enormous box with glazed end-zone "lobbies" and glazed containers for out-board ramps attached to the long sides like saddlebags. Rather than dissimulate the bulkiness of the whole, this window-wall skirting simply demonstrates that transparency is not always a public virtue.

Though the attempt to avoid duplicating the gray-washed, cinderblock charm of the Astrodome is understandable, the enclosed, barn-like nature of the stadium precludes any real chance of simulating the shapely, quasi-floating quality of open-air arenas such as Rice Stadium. Since neither the view in (to the underside of the grandstand) nor out (to the desolation of the parking lot) are worth cultivating, the better part of valor would be to forgo the expense of a thermally-suspect window wall and instead decorate four utilitarian masonry facades as audaciously as possible.

As a thematic basis for such a diversionary once-over, one might begin by recalling that it was the participation of the Rodeo — a cash-cow of more than franchise player proportions — that ultimately made the new stadium attainable. Whereas "NFL officials initially wanted an open-air stadium for football only," the former chairman of the sports authority, Jack Rains, was obliged to explain "that if there was going to be a stadium … it was going to accommodate both the rodeo and the NFL, and it had to have a roof on it … if the city and county [had] to make a choice, the rodeo [would] be the favorite child."[5]

That being the case, it would seem that the four faces of the stadium should not only acknowledge, but celebrate, this marriage of convenience. Nor would it hurt, in the process, to recognize the roots of longhorn cattle and cowboying, which extend in back to the Spanish settlement of Texas, without also neglecting the parallel invention of ranching in the back country of Virginia. The ticket, so to speak, is something that might measure up to the Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota, as an exposition of uncritical regionalism. What is needed is a Cow Palace outfitted with something more bodacious than the solemn, pioneer-pageant tile friezes of the Will Rogers Coliseum in Fort Worth, something more in the spirit of the Bartlett Street face of Jim Goode's Hall of Flame, with its outsized, tall-tale-picture-post-card broadside. What is needed is a curio-encrusted wrap-around wonder-wall brimming with patterns, brands, murals, and a jumbotron screen or two, plus beefy ledges to accommodate such dioramic possibilities as might be suggested by Red Groom's Ruckus Rodeo or Luis Jimenez's "Progress" series. Here, the division of labor between the sports specialist architects and those better equipped to cope with the romancing of the stadium's public face is in order.

If the rodeo theme itself were not enough to set the venue apart from the ponderous herd of other NFL stadiums, it would also be possible to add other attractions to create a kind of year-round horse-opry land on the order of what Judge Hofheinz produced seasonally in the Wild West midway of the temporary Colt stadium. A reincarnation of Gilley's might take the place of the Judge's Long Branch Saloon, in company with a revival of Kiddie Wonderland, the long-playing purveyor of pony and carousel rides that once occupied the corner of Main Street and Kirby Drive.

Moving downtown, it is tempting to wonder if the basketball/hockey arena bond proposition failed to pass because of the breathtaking banality of HKS Architects' proposed design rather than the opposition of the potential owner of a NHL hockey franchise and the low voter turnout. Faced with the possibility, however remote, that the swing votes might have been architecturally motivated, the Sports Authority should take no chances the next time. As things stand, Frank Gehry's practice rink for the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim outclasses any arena currently in the NBA or NHL by leaps and bounds. Not that the type itself is inimical to the application of architectural talent, as demonstrated by Renzo Piano's unbuilt project for the Saitama (Japan) Sports Center a 45,000-seat indoor arena that Piano describes as "inserted into a disorganized urban fabric … with the force of a geographical feature," and Eero Saarinen's Ingalls Hockey Rink at Yale, "a marvelous space in many ways, swooping like hockey" in the view of Vincent Scully.

Reaching further back, it is worth noting that at the time of its construction in 1890, Stanford White's Madison Square Garden, was considered one of New York's principal civic ornaments, although only its abbreviated life-span (it was demolished in 1925) conforms to present-day expectations for such buildings. "If I should try to name the most beautiful building in New York," Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer wrote in 1894, "Madison Square Garden asserts itself without a rival." No one in their wildest hoop dreams could make such a claim for the downtown arena proposed by the Sports Authority, though there seems to be a effort to attend to business better than usual in Miami, where Arquitectonica was paired with HOK Sports to provide the salsa for the just-opened American Airlines Arena.

Pumped Up

Houston has a long history of making only the least costly and least imaginative provisions for flood control, in contrast, for example, to the Prussian countryside of the early 19th century. As M. Norton Wise has documented in "Architectures for Steam," the Hohenzollern royal family had numerous gardens in the naturalistic "English" style built in Berlin and Potsdam, dotting which were elaborate structures built to shelter and disguise the enormous steam-driven pumping equipment required to make the artificial hydrology work in "these immense works of art [that] exist today as public parks, somewhat like Kensington Park or Regency Park in London, but even more like the great estates at Windsor Castle or Stowe."

In Houston, the standard approach to flood control involves little if any pumping or other special technology to create water features of esthetic and recreational value. On a small (and private) scale, the Hines Interests' office park that adjoins Transco Tower, The Lakes on Post Oak, feature a group of small detention ponds. These are kept partially filled with water and, like the Transco Fountain, have attracted a steadfast following, with families arriving on weekends to picnic in this land of mini-lakes.

Water features for golf courses are managed in essentially the same manner, but the currently preferred public technology is that of shallow dry-bottom earthworks, whether at the scale of many thousands of acres as in the low-levee-walled

HOK Sports' plans for a new football stadium near the Astrodome lack the sense of play and regional identity found in such memorable structures as the Corn Palace (1921; minarets and domes added 1937) in Mitchell, South Dakota.

Barker and Addicks reservoirs, or the innumerable chain-link-fenced vest pocket depressions that developers may elect to scrape out and fence off on an individual basis for every tilt-wall store or small apartment complex they build. One might hope that these detention obligations could be banked in zones and satisfied through the construction of sizable water features sprinkled throughout the city. And just as the sewers of Rome were begun by simply enlarging the transverse section of and covering over existing gullies, one might consider increasing the carrying capacity of some bayous in this fashion, perhaps providing a shallow, more domesticated water tray on top for scenic and recreational purposes.

To imagine what Houston might be like with water pumped around to all kinds of useful and ornamental places, one needn't look as far as the Prussian countryside, but only several hundred miles west, where beginning with the small dams and aqueducts of the first Spanish mission settlements San Antonians have shown how water can be collected and redistributed to noticeable effect. The becalmed loop of the San Antonio Riverwalk, a bit of bypass surgery performed by the WPA in 1939-40, is the basis for one of the deftest urban transformations anywhere. The Riverwalk has since been expanded, while the continued manageability of the entire watershed has been assured by the recent construction of a major storm diversion tunnel, with demonstrative water features installed at both its inflow and outfall points. Intelligent and modestly heroic measures of this kind could exert an immeasurable effect on the topos of the sprawling settlement that sometimes promotes itself as the Bayou City.

Dramatizing water in the three-dimensional mode of the Transco Fountain would be a relatively affordable means of investing the city with a sense of vaporous delight. The Mecom Fountain in the elliptical traffic circle at the intersection of Main and Montrose would be a likely place to start, consisting as it does of three giant, neo-Brasilia saucers that have been likened to the "bidets of the gods" by Zelda Dvoretsky. Before the fountain appeared in the early 1960s, the site was occupied by a sunken flower garden, which suggests the possiblity of filling the basins with enormous, translucent flowers in the spirit of Raul Rodriguez's 1976 porte-cochere for the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. Since the Mecom Fountain is a strictly drive-by proposition, it requires a bigger splash than conventional civic art can usually muster. The treatment should be legible at night, from a considerable distance, and at 40 miles per hour — the bouquets of the gods, so to speak, constantly misted.

Village People

Augustus, the emperor who by his own admission found Rome a city of brick and left it one of marble, is also, in a way, the inventor of neighborhood-based municipal administration, having divided his capital into 14 regions and those regions into subsections called *vici* — ward-like precincts consisting of "a street and the neighborhood spreading around it into alleys and little squares," as John Stambaugh describes them in *The Ancient Roman City*. The *vici* acquired names in a remarkably eclectic fashion, just as real-estate ventures do today, some taking their name from a landmark such as an oak grove, and others being named for the type of tradesmen who worked there.

Although Houston has no similarly fine-grained structure of municipal governance, the *vici* might be said to correspond, at least in matters of scale and sources of identity, to neighborhood civic associations, which are concerned primarily with preserving, and occasionally effecting modest improvements to, the status quo. Another model of sub-municipal organization that has proved capable of fostering neighborhood conservation as well as periodic upgrading, can be found in the residual fiefdoms of the large London "estates," of which Lutyens' employer, the Westminster Estate, was but one example, and of which the Menil Collection neighborhood and Gerald Hines' ville radieusse at Galleria/Post Oak are Houston's closest analogues.

The grip of the estates "on London's West End is still strong," Sudjic writes, citing the example of the Grosvenor Estate, whose "policy ever since the 18th century … has always been to hold on to freeholds and sell leases. Development in this sense is closer to farming than trade. It aims to produce a rent roll that provides a regular income, not to accumulate capital by selling assets. Of course, this means taking a long view on the economic health of the properties and the artful managment of tenants.… It amounts to a private system of zoning."[6]

Viewed in this light, the Menil Collection neighborhood is actually an accidental "estate," with much of its property initially assembled to accommodate a projected expansion of the University of St. Thomas, and only afterwards reconceived as a campus and *cordon domestique* for a museum and its satellite galleries and chapels. As such, the neighborhood has developed according to its own at once altruistic and pragmatic logic, in a way that conventional municipal zoning would have precluded. Unlike the London estates, the primary focus of The Menil Collection is museological, and its resources are concentrated primarily on the acquistion, conservation, and preservation of art, rather than realizing the neighborhood's potential for housing more fully — although Renzo Piano's 220-unit, moderate-cost Rue de Meaux housing provides a model that could be gracefully applied to outlying parts of the Menil holdings, perhaps with investment builders providing the capital and the Menil interests the architectural guidance and use of the land.

Indeed, the fruits of such an arrangement could also help underwrite the cost of developing and especially operating a small park on the block just east of The Menil Collection, which might include the maintenance-intensive Tinguely "fountain" machines that are now only rolled out onto the museum lawn for special occasions; a small demountable refreshment pavilion along the lines suggested by Piano's expansible structures for IBM; actual chairs; a single environmentally-scaled installation on the order of Richard Serra's Torqued Ellipses to mediate between the park and the Rothko Chapel; and a little light magic for night prowlers. Cedric Price once suggested that, as a rule of thumb, half the capital cost of any park should be allocated to the yearly expense of its maintenance — a proposition that might be worth testing at least once.

Getting There

Ada Louise Huxtable was not unmindful of the potency of Houston's "unabashed commercial eclecticism" as a means of filling the void in a city where "no one seems to feel the need for the public vision that older cities have of a hierarchy of places and buildings," a place where the "visitor accustomed to cities shaped by rivers, mountains, and distinguishing topography, by local identity and historical and cultural conditioning" could feel some sense of having arrived somewhere. "One might say of Houston," she wrote, "that one never gets there. It feels as if one is always on the way, always arriving, always looking for the point where everything comes together."

Perhaps some unabashed *civic* eclecticism is both necesary and desirable to confront this enigma of arrival, something that might also yield postcards worth sending back home. (Try the test yourself the next time you're at the airport or a drugstore: Which will it be, the Astrodome or the downtown tunnels? Nope, the giant armadillo.) This, together with some filling-in, of and around, certain areas of special promise with second and third stages of growth, might produce at least a semblance of the kind of depth and resonance, memory and invention, that can make city dwelling — and visiting — a pleasure rather than an enigma. ■

1. "Deep in the Heart of Nowhere," *New York Times*, February 15, 1976.
2. Deyan Sudjic, *The One Hundred Mile City* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1992), pp. 97 and 102.
3. Colin Rowe, "The Present Urban Predicament," *Architectural Association Quarterly*, volume 2, number 4 (1979), p. 46.
4. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The Architecture of H.H. Richardson and His Times* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), pp. 302-303.
5. Rad Salley, "Rodeo Bucks Old Home, Too," *Houston Chronicle*, October 7, 1999, p. 24A.
6. *The One Hundred Mile City*, pp. 34-35.

Courtesy Harris County Flood Control District

Alameda Plaza Drive near Brays Bayou during a 1960 flood.

H2OUSTON

In Houston, water has been as much obstacle as opportunity.

As both, it has shaped the face of the city.

By Barrie Scardino

Paris has the Seine; Boston, the Charles; Memphis, the Mississippi; London, the Thames. Houston has Buffalo Bayou. Even the little San Antonio River makes us look bad. Chicago has Lake Michigan; Los Angeles has the Pacific; Miami has the Atlantic. Houston has the Lake on Post Oak.

Most great cities are easily identified with some body of water. The reasons aren't hard to understand. Until 19th-century industrialization brought railroads and 20th-century ingenuity perfected the automobile, watercourses were the fastest and safest means of transportation for people and cargo. Even more important than commercial reasons for planting a settlement on a waterway has been the practical human need for drinking and bathing water. But the most subtle and perhaps most powerful draw for situating oneself near some form of water is an emotional one. Poets and theologians have for all time pondered water as the central life-giving force.

So it was with good reason that Houston's founders greatly exaggerated its water features. In the famous *Telegraph and Texas Register* advertisement of August 30, 1836 (six months before there actually was a town), promoters audaciously claimed that Houston was situated at the "head of navigation" on Buffalo Bayou and went on to say that "Tidewater runs to this place and the lowest depth of water is about six feet.... It is but a few hours sail down to the bay, where one may take an excursion of pleasure and enjoy the luxuries of fish, fowl, oysters, and sea bathing."

In fact, Harrisburg, at the confluence of Brays and Buffalo bayous just east of Houston, was the closest thing to the head of navigation, if indeed Buffalo Bayou could have been considered a serious navigable waterway. Today, the turning basin of the Ship Channel is near Harrisburg, not downtown Houston. The Allen brothers initially tried to buy the site of Harrisburg, founded in 1822, but were unable to complete a land purchase there. Good promoters that they were, the founders never let on that the site at Buffalo and White Oak bayous was not their first choice.

Although tidewater does technically reach Houston, the water is brackish and in no way aids navigation. Nor was it a pleasant sail from Houston to the bay, given the tangled vegetation and dangerous stumps as well as obstructive overhanging trees draped with bug-infested Spanish moss and snakes. Furthermore, alligators ruled the swampy shores and freely swam wherever they pleased. Galveston Bay did and still does provide the luxuries of seafood and pleasant recreation, but it was not an easy destination from Houston in the city's early decades.

At the time of its Anglo settlement, Harris County had a substantial watershed from the San Jacinto River and 22 natural streams that included 44 miles of bayous, in addition to uncountable gullies. Once part of the ocean floor, this part of Texas is not sufficiently elevated above sea level to promote effective runoff, and dense clay soils exacerbate poor drainage. The elevation in Harris County rises from zero feet above sea level to barely 100 feet at the northern tip of the county. Rainfall in the Houston area, while not excessive (on average, there are 100 days per year with some rain, for a total of 48 inches) is problematic given the makeup of the vast watershed.[1] So Houston began its history paradoxically touting water features that were, in fact, its main detraction. As this truth dawned on residents who experienced mud and flood almost annually, Houston developed a reputation as a place shaped by water. However, that water has shaped Houston in any profound way is far less intriguing than the way in which Houston has shaped its water.

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That Houston was founded on myth and greed is no secret. The great mystery is that it succeeded so wildly. One writer has bluntly stated, "Houston has never been so much a maker as a beneficiary of history, and disaster has often served it well."[2] The first of those disasters was the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836 from which the Republic of Texas emerged with the war hero Sam Houston as its president. Harrisburg, the more established and better located spot for a capital, was destroyed in the fighting. So the Allen brothers, through political manipulation (the usual promises and personal favors), managed to make Houston the Texas capital. The lawmakers and their entourages swelled the infant town for only two years, leaving in 1839 for two reasons: politics and climate.[3] Houston was an impossibly unpleasant and unhealthy swamp.

When Sam Houston was reelected president of the Republic of Texas in 1841, Houston bid to move the capital from Austin back to Houston. At issue were the archives of the Republic, which Houstonians believed were unsafe in Austin because of the threat of Indian attack. What became known as the Archives War ensued when the people of Austin bitterly opposed the removal of the archives, seen as symbolic of the whole government, to Houston. On December 30, 1842, a contingent of Houston "soldiers" mounted a secret foray into Austin in which they filled wagons with the archives and escaped under cover of darkness, only to be apprehended by Austinites on the way to Houston. Under armed guard the papers went back to Austin. It was lucky that happened, for in 1843 Houston endured it first major flood, which would have utterly destroyed the archives, as the entire town was submerged.[4]

Despite such problems, Houston devotees, with totally unreasonable optimism, had begun almost from the start planning to deepen and widen the channel of Buffalo Bayou, determined to make their city into a commercial emporium. Since Houston was poorly suited for agriculture (with the exception of rice plantations in northwest Harris County), the settlement attracted merchants and artisans instead of farmers and ranchers. In 1840, Houston received authorization from the Texas Congress to build and maintain wharves, and in 1841 the Port of Houston was established at the confluence of White Oak and Buffalo bayous. For a brief time the port charged wharfage fees and taxed boats using the channel, but it discontinued the practice when it became evident that captains would rather put off goods and passengers at

Allen's Landing in 1910: Early in the century, Buffalo Bayou thrived with commerce all the way to Main Street.

When the rains come, as they often do in Houston, the bayous can't always contain them. The result, as seen in this mid-century aerial, is a submerged city.

Harrisburg (which had been rebuilt after its destruction during the Battle of San Jacinto) than pay for the privilege of docking in Houston. Sporadic dredging occurred, but only shallow-draft vessels could navigate Buffalo Bayou until after the Civil War.

An 1851 newspaper article summarized the town as a place with a "warm, wet climate, poor drainage and sluggish bayous."[5] After the flood of 1843, drainage ditches were dug throughout the town, which helped somewhat, though ladies still tiptoed across streets and wore dresses permanently mud-stained at the hems. Raw sewage was dumped into the bayous from which Houstonians obtained most of their water. Cisterns and barrels in every yard collected rainwater for household use, but these were not always full. Though Houston held its own, managing to grow and thrive despite yellow-fever and cholera epidemics, which were directly linked to wet climate and poor drainage, there was little evidence that the city could realize its vision for a grand future.

But then another disaster, the Civil War, worked to Houston's benefit. Just as the Battle of San Jacinto had destroyed the challenge of Harrisburg, the War Between the States gave Houston an advantage over its rival Galveston. Unlike Galveston, Houston was not occupied by Federal troops, and Buffalo Bayou provided a fine waterway for blockade running. Houstonians, including William Marsh Rice, made fortunes supplying inland troops. Following the war, Houston, having been spared the devastation that occurred in much of the South, emerged with considerable capital brought to town by war profiteers. Such civic projects as dredging Buffalo Bayou could be comfortably financed. By 1870, it was clear that Houston's relationship with water was based not on recreation or quality of life issues, but on money.

In 1866 Houston municipal officials had established the Houston Direct Navigation Company with the hope of dredging Buffalo Bayou to a depth sufficient for ocean-going vessels. In 1870 the Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company began dredging, and the federal government declared Houston a port of entry, establishing a custom house. In 1872 Houston received its first federal grant of $10,000 to aid in completing the dredging project, one designed to create a 100-foot-wide channel nine feet deep. Work was slowed by a hurricane that hit Houston in September 1875 and caused $50,000 worth of damage. During this storm all but one bridge across Buffalo Bayou were swept away. Nevertheless, in April 1876 the first ship sailed through the new channel. The iron-clad *Clinton*, a schooner-rigged side wheeler, came into Houston with 750 tons of freight and left with 250 cattle. Although it took a full ten years to realize the first "ship channel," the effort was but a baby step toward the dream of establishing a great port in Houston.

During Reconstruction after the Civil War, Houston fared well despite continued high water and poor drainage. In a second effort (after construction of drainage ditches) to improve these conditions, the city began to build large open channels to direct and control the flow of excess water. The two largest, along Caroline and Congress avenues, emptied directly into Buffalo Bayou. At the same time paved roads were built across the swampy plain into which Houston continued to expand. By the 1880s, ditches, channels, and both plank and gravel roads crisscrossed the town, creating a more or less effective drainage system. In 1878, James M. Lowerce of New York was awarded a contract by the city to build the first waterworks to supply Houston with water from Buffalo Bayou. Loweree installed a dam above the Preston Street Bridge and laid pipes throughout the city. This water was not purified, and the water pressure proved too low for a consistent supply or for fighting fires.[6] It was not until 1891 that a successful water works company supplied city water from 14 wells.[7]

During the last quarter of the 19th century Houston developed and prospered as a commercial rather than manufacturing community, in large measure due to the fledgling water channel and the establishment of important railroad connections. By 1890, the Deep Water Committee was busy planning further improvements to the ship channel. Houstonians had enjoyed the Gay Nineties with the rest of the country, and on New Year's Eve 1899 there was much to celebrate, including the fact that the U.S. Congress had approved the construction of a yet deeper channel.

Then came the Great Storm of 1900. This tragedy nearly caused Galveston's physical and economic demise, but it left Houston, Galveston's chief commercial competitor, in an advantageous position to take over Gulf coast shipping. Plans were underway to widen and deepen Houston's ship channel yet again, and Houston already had a railroad network that enhanced its port position in a way that could not be duplicated on the Island. Galveston's spirit had been crushed while Houston's continued, perhaps naively but indomitably. No historian analyzing the city of Houston should underestimate its brash can-do attitude, which for more than 150 years has shaped and reshaped its natural resources to great advantage.

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With increasing sophistication and leisure time, well-to-do Houstonians concentrated on the pleasures of dining, dancing, and water sports. Boating and fishing, once necessities and chores, became diversions, and several male-only clubs were established: the Redfish Boating, Fishing, and Hunting Club (1865), the Andrax Rowing Club (1874), the O.O. Boat Club

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The Flood Next Time

Kevin Shanley thinks he can solve Houston's flooding problems. If, that is, he can solve the problem of getting his ideas tried.

By Barry Moore

When Kevin Shanley agreed in 1990 to help the Sims Bayou Coalition fight the Army Corps of Engineers' 30-year-old scheme to line the bayou with concrete, he didn't realize that he was beginning a decade-long association that would result in an elegant plan to eliminate flooding disasters in the whole of Harris County.

The Corps wanted to pave Sims Bayou top to bottom, 300 yards wide — twice what they had accomplished on Brays Bayou. Shanley, a landscape architect and planner with the Houston office of the SWA Group, and his client group looked at the land acquisition required to accomplish that and discovered that it couldn't be done with just pieces of land parcels along the right-of-way line. Instead, the parcels of land would have to be bought completely by the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFC). Shanley and the Sims Bayou Coalition then concluded that all the surplus land beyond the right-of-way created a huge opportunity to alter the conditions that contribute to flooding in Houston.

Rather than convert Sims Bayou into a standard Corps drainage ditch designed to scoot water downstream as fast as possible, Shanley and his clients argued, why not dig a deeper channel, one that could hold excess water long enough to allow it to percolate down to the water table? Nothing in the streamway was pristine; Sims Bayou had been rechanneled in the 1940s and had only a smattering of second growth trees, so nothing attractive would be destroyed by the extra digging. At the same time, Shanley and the Coalition suggested, why not revegetate the upper slopes around the bayou to create new urban forests? The HCFC liked the idea of the forests, since it would mean less grass mowing along the bayou. And environmentalists were encouraged about growths of cypress and pecan trees — something that had never appeared in a Corps project in Houston. For its part, the Corps couldn't believe that a citizens' group thought the channel it had proposed was too small.

Still, though the Sims Bayou Coalition had come to the conclusion that they could succeed in proving that water detention was a workable solution to flooding, the Corps said no. They calculated that the channel deepening would generate nine million cubic feet of dirt, and that in turn would require 50 years to get off site, given the restriction in the number of trucks available to do the work. But as Shanley and the coalition pointed out, the Corps had missed the obvious: for a fraction of the cost of trucking it away the dirt could stay on site, where it would be stacked up on the quarter of the site not affected by water in the streamway. There is a great deal of undeveloped land south of Loop 610 near Highway 288 ripe for acquisition to put the detention plan into action. The Sims Bayou Coalition had started out by focusing on a Sims flooding problem and ended up with an idea with a much larger impact: mitigation of flooding throughout Harris County by utilizing deeper channels and a new, dramatic geography — hillside, waterfront property — that could have an astounding impact on Houston's future.

But formulating an innovative solution to an age-old problem was one thing. Far harder was solving the problem of getting the political and financial backing needed to execute that solution.

Brays Bayou, meanwhile, as any long-time Houstonian realizes, is a disaster waiting to happen. Brays, the nearest neighboring stream to Sims, has behaved very badly in the recent past during times of flood, inundating large stretches of Braeswood and threatening havoc in the Texas Medical Center. For years, the Corps in its master planning for Harris County has visualized an early warning system for Brays that would allow them to divert flood waters from Brays into the Sims channel — a project called on paper "The Diversion Plan." A fatal flaw with the proposal is that, in the mainly African-American neighborhoods that border Sims Bayou south of the South Loop, it's seen as a system for "putting the white man's water in the black man's living room."

Shanley, meanwhile, calculates that his plan for the Sims Bayou Coalition would provide 20,000 acre feet of water storage — enough to protect the neighborhoods around Sims with a lot left over. Based on the way Houston is growing, Shanley's approach would provide a 22-year level of protection for Sims Bayou; much more detention area would be required regionally to get to a 100-year level, or to take on any more Brays water.

The Sims Bayou Coalition realized that partnering with Brays Bayou citizens groups would increase their clout when seeking federal flood control money to put Shanley's ideas into action. Too, a joint effort could argue that experimenting with detention on Sims Bayou could provide valuable information for the larger watershed. Before long, everyone, including the HCFC, was ready to go ahead with the coalition's alternative to the old Corps plan. Even the Corps conceded that Shanley's idea could work. Then the details were worked out: plans for additional land acquisition along a significant portion of Sims Bayou and for providing a deeper stream, contoured banks, and reforestation.

Next, Shanley's firm, the SWA Group, got Brown & Root involved, along with the HCFC, with specific plans for funding the project. Two possible scenarios soon developed. In one, the State Water Development Board would pay for 50 percent of the study if the other 50 percent was paid for by local public funds. In the other, proposed by the HCFC, Harris County would provide 100 percent of the funding, with the flood control district as the conduit for money and contracts.

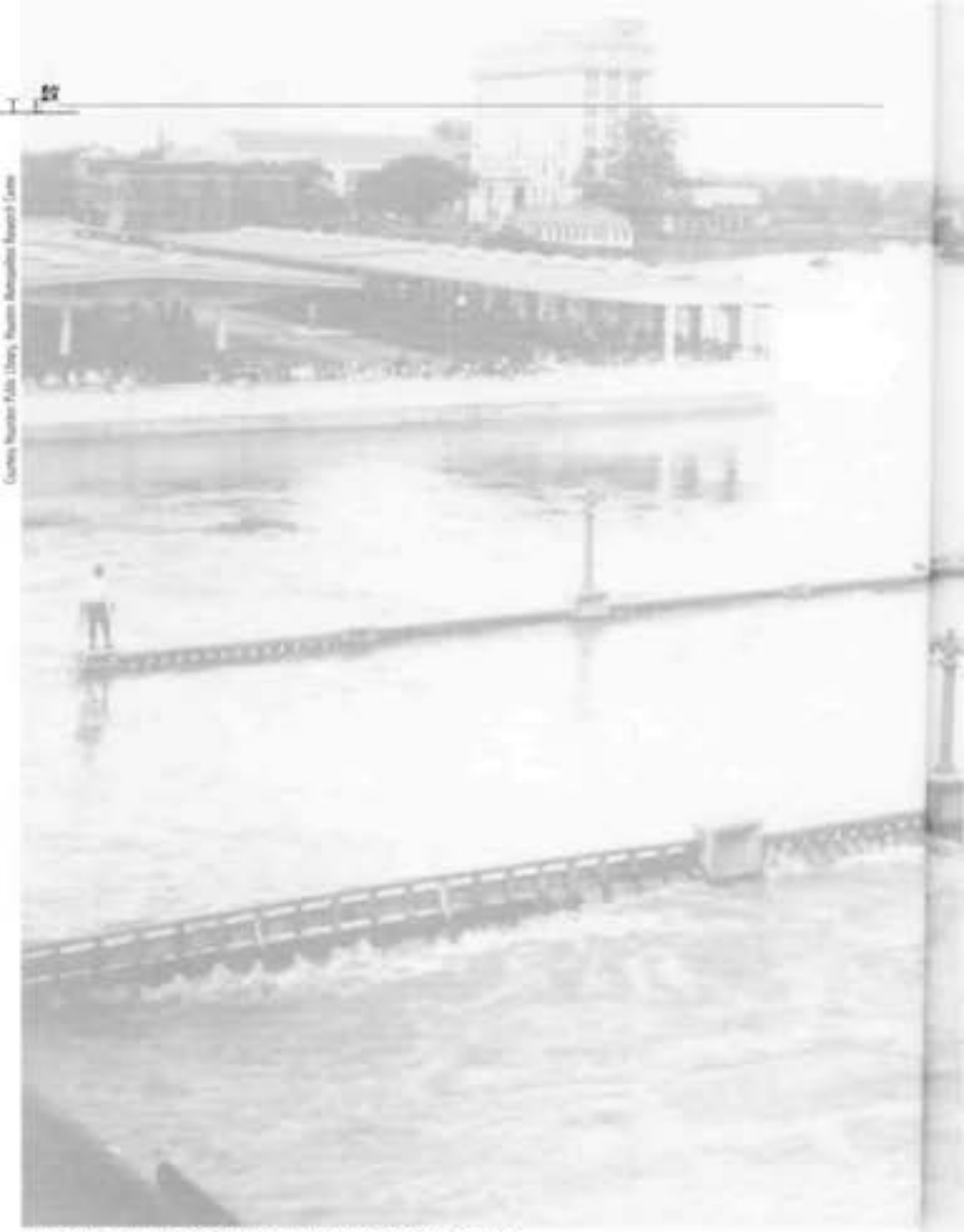
Top: Sims Bayou following the Shanley treatment.
Above: Sims Bayou in the process of receiving that treatment.

Everything now appears to be ready to go, except for one thing: Harris County Commissioner's Court has never blessed the project, no doubt influenced by then-city councilman Al Calloway's objections to it.

For the time being, then, Shanley's and the Sims Bayou Coalition's flood control project appears stalled. Meanwhile, property in the flood plain and watershed is being sold and developed, shrinking the potential land available for water detention.

But while the larger project waits to get underway, the HCFC has already completed a Sims Bayou demonstration project downstream from where Shanley and the coalition propose to begin. Those having a hard time visualizing what a deeper and wider reforested stream channel with hike and bike trails would look like need only slow down the next time they take the Broadway exit for Hobby Airport. From the bridge there the half-mile demonstration project by Brown & Root and the SWA Group for HCFC is easily visible.

It's a pleasant view, but only a small part of Kevin Shanley's broader vision. That vision takes in a future with a water detention greenbelt all around the Houston metropolitan area, one that provides a 100-year-level of flood protection and thousands of acres of new park land. All that's required to make the vision work is a lot of money, and a lot of expert politics. ■



Courtesy Houston Public Library, Houston Metropolitan Research Center

The Preston Avenue Bridge under water during the flood of 1929.

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(1882), the Houston Yacht Club (1898), and the Aquatics Club (1900). The Houston Yachting Club (1903) met on a houseboat on Buffalo Bayou at the foot of Travis Street, and the Houston Yacht and Power Boat Club (1905) was organized to encourage scientific navigation.[8]

Those who did not belong to clubs or own fancy boats also had a recreational relationship with the bayous. For health and safety reasons, city ordinances had since the 1840s forbidden bathing and swimming in local streams. And even though daring youngsters had always defied the rules, swimming in the bayous, for obvious reasons, never became popular. And, curiously, neither did sport fishing. Until late 20th-century pollution decimated their ranks, fish abounded in the inland waters around Houston. But local fishermen preferred the smaller creeks and bayous, usually catching only enough to provide supper for their families. Until the 1930s even crawfish were plentiful and easy to catch in swampy areas away from downtown. As for Buffalo Bayou, it was too full of commercial boat traffic to make a good fishing ground.

But the local bayous, including Buffalo, were not too overwhelmed with boats or fish to deter another group from using them. Christian sects that required baptism by immersion understood the sacredness of the local waters. For these baptisms an entire congregation would gather on the bayou banks to welcome new members, and often after the religious service most people remained for a picnic.[9] Even so, Houstonians' recreational and religious relationship with local waters has been and still is limited. It was commercial promise that captured official recognition. With a pervasive "we can overcome anything" spirit, local citizens were determined to conquer the swamp and build a mighty river. That the inland city had withstood strong wind and high water in 1843, 1875, and 1900 while nearby cities were destroyed was a selling point that profoundly affected Houston's future.

Only in Houston has it been proven that oil and water mix. After the founding of the Texas Company in Beaumont in 1902, its director, J. S. Cullinan, began looking along the Texas coast for the best site for his headquarters and refineries. What he wanted was large acreage, fresh water, deep water shipping, and protection from storms and floods.[10] He chose Houston, convinced that a sufficiently deep channel was under construction in Buffalo Bayou and that the threat from flood and hurricane was a thing of the past. This 1905 move to Houston of the oil giant that became Texaco is considered critical in the establishment of Houston as the oil and gas capital of the nation.[11] In 1908, redredging of the Ship Channel was completed to a depth of 18 feet, with a turning basin just above Harrisburg.

Many writers have credited the oil industry with the development of the Ship Channel, but it well may be the other way round. Influential residents had decided long before Spindletop that a channel with a depth adequate for large ocean-going vessels was a must for Houston. As oil companies stacked themselves along the bayous, advances in marine technology produced vessels that required deeper drafts, making Houstonians once again question the sufficiency of their ship channel. They created a navigation district to control the watercourse and issued bonds to finance an even deeper channel. With the approval of Congress, the federal government matched local investment and construction began in June 1912. On November 10, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson pushed a button in Washington that fired a cannon at the new turning basin, opening the 25-foot deep channel with great fanfare.[12] This event ushered Houston into position to become a lucrative port and an economically stable city.

Before oil products became Houston's chief export, though, the wharves at the foot of Main Street and then from the port near Harrisburg were stacked high with bales of cotton. A local cotton carnival, the social event of the year, began in 1899. "According to an elaborately devised mythology, No-Tsu-Oh (Houston spelled backward) was the capital city of the Kingdom of Tekram (market) in the realm of Saxet (Texas). King Nottoc (cotton) emerged annually from the depths of the sea, or rather Buffalo Bayou, at the foot of Main Street to rule over his Court of Mirth."[13] His arrival began a week-long commercial exposition and non-stop carnival activities. In 1914, the name of the carnival was changed to the Deep Water Jubilee to celebrate the opening of the Ship Channel; however, the festival was discontinued the following year.

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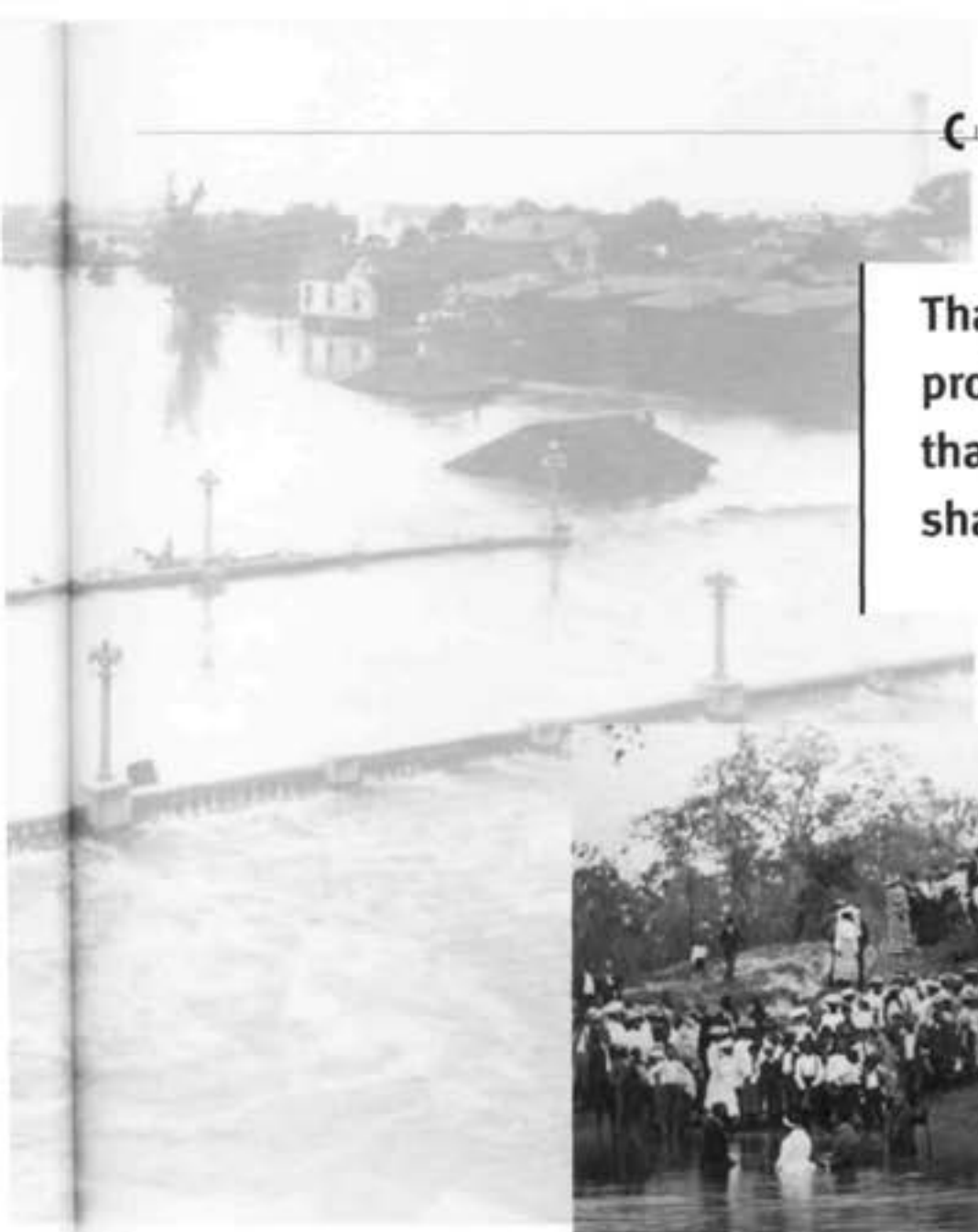
In August 1915 a hurricane with 80-mile-an-hour winds struck Houston, killing three people. But the idea that Houston was not safe from high wind and water still did not sink, as it were, in. After Brays Bayou was hard hit by major flooding in 1919, the first serious flood-control measures were begun in Harris County. In 1923, a project to drain the 80,000-acre watershed of Brays Bayou started with the presumption that this would control flooding in Houston. It didn't. In 1929, after a 14-hour rainstorm, all of the bayous around Houston, including Brays, overflowed, and the San Jacinto River rose 30 feet above its normal channel. Although losses in Houston were close to $1.5 million, this sum did not touch the losses six years later from the most devastating storm in Houston's history.

In 1935, the buildings and streets of 25 blocks downtown flooded along with 100 residential blocks. Seven people were killed, and the Port of Houston was crippled for six months due to submerged docks and a ship channel clogged with tons of mud and wreckage. Uprooted tracks disrupted vital railroad connections. And nature finally got Houston's attention.

Politically, the timing of the hurricane was perfect. Federal works projects, particularly huge water infrastructure programs, were being created all over the country during the 1930s. In 1936, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stepped in to begin planning a limited flood-control program that would move high water away from Buffalo Bayou. To facilitate interaction with the Corps and process requests for federal grants, the Texas legislature on April 23, 1937, created the Harris County Flood Control District. Two years later, taxpayers in Harris County approved the first bond issue ($500,000) for an expanded drainage program. Meanwhile, federal and county programs were approved, adding over $35 million for the project. In February 1940, a comprehensive flood control plan was announced that called for the retention and diversion of floodwaters (Addicks and Barker dams) and two canals, one to extend from White Oak Bayou to the San Jacinto River, the other to run from a detention dam on Buffalo Bayou to Galveston Bay. These canals were "designed to protect the city and harbor from 'superfloods.'"[14]

The story of this massive plan was basically an attempt to move Harris County's excess water out into Galveston Bay with little regard for the natural environment. The arrogance of Houston planners once again raised its head with the notion that technology could fix anything. Not only did the storms and high water refuse to desist in the face of concrete channels and the like, they seemed to continue at a heightened pace. For example: heavy rains drowned 10,000 head of cattle and displaced 400 families (1940); Hurricane Audrey and another heavy thunderstorm caused flooding in



That water has shaped Houston in any profound way is far less intriguing than the way in which Houston has shaped its water.

Houston's bayous have long been places to gather and, as seen in this circa-1904 photo, to be baptized.

Championship Park on White Oak Bayou entering downtown demonstrates how some waterways have been tamed.

Houston (1957); Hurricane Carla caused heavy flooding in southeast Harris County (1961); Texas Medical Center flooded and eight drownings occurred in three major thunderstorms (1976); a new U.S. 24-hour rainfall record of 45 inches was set in Alvin (1979); Hurricane Alicia and three major hurricanes caused severe flooding throughout the county (1983); and a major storm sent many bayous over their banks, flooding 1,500 houses and putting I-10 underwater (1992).[15] It has been five years since significant flooding has occurred in Harris County, but officials warn that it is only a matter of time until the next big one comes.

What's going on? Claiming that all this recent flooding is new, environmentalists blame developers for paving over so much land in the county's watershed areas. Houston's rapid and often near-sighted development *does* retard natural runoff, but the gumbo soil that has been paved over was little help in absorption anyway. The hard, cold fact is that Houston has dangerous and destructive rainstorms, just as the Midwest has tornadoes and California has earthquakes. No one, not even rich Houston boosters, nor well-meaning engineers, nor tree-hugging naturalists can stop the water. Gary Green, operations manager of the Flood Control District, says that we have only three choices to deal with excessive water: move it, park it, or get out of its way. The move-it school had its day with channelization. And the park-it school continues to build dams and huge retention areas (such as the Barker and Addicks reservoirs). The get-out-of-the-way philosophy has established a federal buy-out program in Harris County that encourages those who live in the most flood prone areas to sell out and move on. Rather than a program of flood control, which is impossible, Harris County now has a much more realistic program of flood management.

Even if the environmentalists are wrong in their assessment of the reasons for flooding, they appear to have won the day. Since Arthur L. Storey Jr. took over management of the Harris County Flood Control District in 1989, the way in which Houston deals with water has changed. Much of the work has become privatized, allowing resources and time to be spent on careful planning.[16] Young planners and engineers responsible for current flood management programs seem much more sensitive to nature than their predecessors from the Corps of Engineers. For example, instead of channeling water in concrete culverts from natural wetlands, flood managers are planting marsh grasses that will filter standing water (which could be unhealthy) and stop erosion (which could lead to flooding). New detention basins are now designed to retain as much established vegetation as possible. Concrete channels are being removed in some areas, and new approaches tried (see "The Flood Next Time," page 39). The idea of straightening out bayous and creeks to enhance drainage speed is no longer considered a good one.

Houston's developing ability to deal effectively with its own peculiar characteristics, including humidity, mud, and flooding, is a sign of its growing maturity as a city. Houston was founded on the myth that its location and natural resources were good things. It was also founded as a real estate venture, ironically one from which the Allen brothers never profited. Despite the fact that neither a beautiful lake nor a wide, high-banked river sits by its side, Houston has emerged at the end of this millennium as a great city because of the unrelenting arrogance of successive generations of leaders who have understood how to capitalize on external disaster and how to control the natural environment. They have effectively managed heat and humidity with air conditioning, and managed commerce through manipulation of the waterways. The masters are still in the process of gaining control of rains that cannot penetrate the non-porous soil or easily run off the flat land. But stay tuned. ■

1. Gary M. Green, P.E., Director of Operations, Harris County Flood Control District, interview with author, November 15, 1999.
2. Jerry Herring, *Guide to Understanding and Enjoying Houston* (Houston: Herring Press, 1992), p. 14.
3. Margaret Sweet Henson, "A Brief History of Harris County," in Houghton, et al. *Houston's Forgotten Heritage* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1991), p. 6.
4. *Houston, A History and Guide*, compiled by workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in Texas, (Houston: Anson Jones Press, 1942), pp. 56-60.
5. David McComb, *Houston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 60.
6. Ibid., pp. 87-88.
7. *Houston, A History and Guide*, p. 92.
8. Ibid., p. 341.
9. Dorothy Knox Houghton, "Domestic Life," in *Houston's Forgotten Heritage*, p. 259.
10. McComb, p. 80.
11. Marta Galicki, "The Architecture of Oil," *Cite* 39, Fall 1997, p. 47.
12. Henson, p. 10.
13. Houghton, p. 312.
14. *Houston, A History and Guide*, p. 124.
15. "Riding the Waves of Change: 60 Years of Service," (Houston: Harris County Flood Control District, 1998), pp. 7-15.
16. Green interview.

The Art of the Matter

The MFAH's Edward Mayo and sculptor Jim Love recall a critical era in Houston's arts

Edward Mayo, left, and Jim Love, right, reminisce atop Love's *Portable Trojan Bear* (1974), a site sculpture in Hermann Park.

The middle of the 20th century was a crucial time in the history of Houston's arts community. It was in the 1950s and 1960s that the city's artists and arts professionals began making the transition from a group consumed by local concerns to one with national and international aspirations; in many ways, it was during this time that Houston's arts, for better and worse, grew up. And it was in this period that a number of the seeds of Houston's current art scene were planted.

To get a sense of what those decades of change were like, Cite *sat down with two witnesses from the era, sculptor Jim Love and former Museum of Fine Arts, Houston registrar Edward Mayo. Love, a native of Amarillo, attended Baylor University, where he studied theater, and the University of Houston, where he took courses in architecture. Beginning in the mid-1950s, Love became known in Houston first for his stage designs for the Alley Theater and Houston Grand Opera, and then for his distinctive metal sculpture. Today, his pieces are prominent in Hermann Park, at Hobby Airport, and in the MFAH's sculpture garden, among other places. Mayo is a Houston native who attended Rice University as an architecture student, but who made his mark in the city's art world through a quarter-century of work at the MFAH.*

Together, Love and Mayo share an intimate understanding of the arts in Houston. Last October, they met with Cite *editorial board members Lynn M. Herbert and Karl Kilian for a conversation, excerpts from which follow.*

Cite: It was in the 1950s that the Contemporary Arts Museum was founded, partly in reaction to what was going on at the Museum of Fine Arts. Why did that happen? What was the mood in the art world then?

Edward Mayo: The reason CAM got started is that the artistic community in Houston felt that James Chillman,[1] who was then director of the Museum of Fine Arts, was not doing anything for contemporary art. So a number of people like Walter Farmer, Alvin Romansky, John de Menil, and Carol Straus got together and got CAM going.

Jim Love: In the early days of the Contemporary Arts Museum it was mostly volunteer activity. The only two paid people were Ellen Sharp, who was the secretary, and Frank Dolejska, who was the technician.

Cite: Edward, you were one of those volunteers, is that right?

Mayo: In the late 1940s I went to work for the architect Thompson McCleary. Then when my mother died, that gave me an excuse to take a leave of absence, from which I knew I would never return. For two years I lived in a fool's paradise of not working, and that's when I did most of my volunteering. I volunteered at the Contemporary Arts Association, as it was then called. It was downtown at 302 Dallas when we started. Then in 1954 the CAM building was cut in two and moved to the corner of Holcombe and Fannin.[2]

Love: I was here when they did that, though I wasn't working for the CAM at the time and so didn't go on that little trip. It was after midnight, I think.

Mayo: They *had* to move it after midnight because of the traffic.

Cite: During the time that you were a volunteer at CAM, was there the kind of enthusiasm you can get when you've launched something new?

Mayo: There was a lot of enthusiasm for the volunteers. The volunteers loved doing it. I got so I spent my full time there. It was great fun.

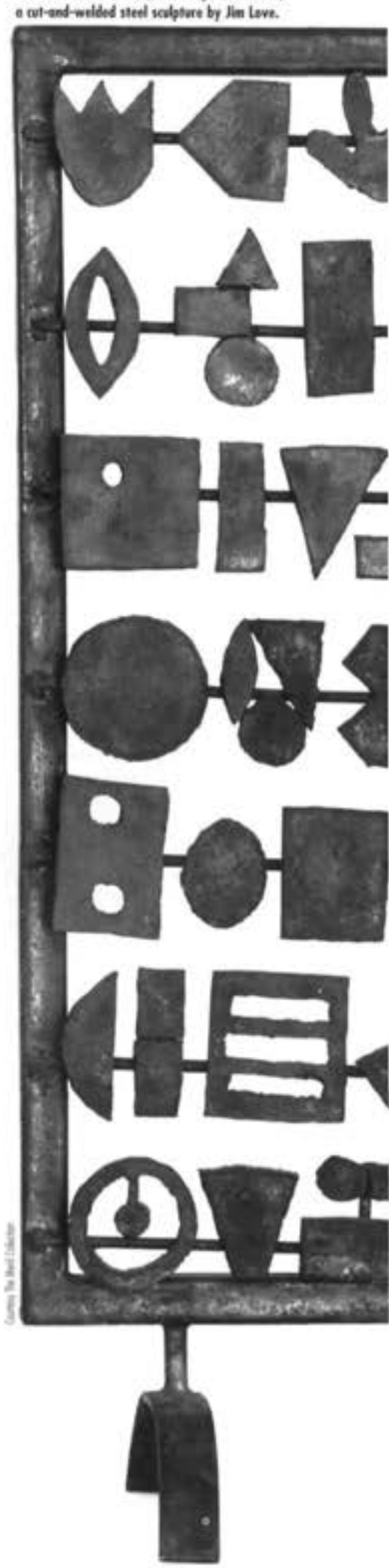
Love: There was a lot of fun in those early days. The volunteers would pick a show and be responsible as chairmen of the show.

Mayo: They would assemble the idea of the show. Someone would have the idea, and then they would put it together. I was only involved with one idea I remember — it was always someone else's idea. But a certain group decided we would do modern art from Houston collections. Today, if you saw what was in the exhibition, you'd wonder why it was called modern art; it surely didn't look like modern art as we think of it now. But it got to be a lot of fun for a lot of people, and it was a serious project for the de Menils, who knew what they wanted in the way of art.

Cite: So the de Menils were involved from the very beginning?

Mayo: They were involved in the early

Detail of *Screen* (1957), 31¾ by 19½ inches, a cut-and-welded steel sculpture by Jim Love.



Courtesy The Menil Collection

Right: Jim Love's set for for Houston Grand Opera's *Salome*, 1956. Far right: Love (face to camera) welding the set for the Alley Theatre's production of *The Glass Menagerie*, 1955.

years when CAM was downtown. John de Menil left CAM on two occasions. As I recall, he once gave the CAM a check for $5,000 and resigned.

Cite: It was around this time that Jermayne MacAgy, CAM's first paid director, was hired, wasn't it?[3]

Love: John and Dominique de Menil brought her to Houston in 1955. She had been working in San Francisco, at the Palace of the Legion of Honor. When she was hired there was a large piece of friction. A lot of those who were at the CAM in the volunteer era resented her. MacAgy wanted to be in charge of everything, and that didn't sit well with some people.

Cite: Were they resentful because the de Menils were the ones who hired her, or because MacAgy was a strong person, or because she was the first paid director?

Love: They resented it because there was no more room for volunteer action. There were volunteer workers, so to speak, but that faded out because, in my experience, they were not particularly dependable. When I worked at CAM somebody would say they were going to come and paint at such-and-such a time, and I would have to get the paint ready, I would have to put it in the roller and pan and so forth, I'd clean up after them. It ended up being easier to do it myself.

Cite: How active were the de Menils in things then?

Love: They were pretty active. MacAgy was pretty headstrong — she made decisions about what to show and so forth, and they were just backing her up. When I entered the picture, the de Menils were paying for a lot of what the CAM did. They paid for some of the salaries, mine included. MacAgy wanted to do catalogues, and the de Menils paid for them. MacAgy's catalogues were always expensive, and she got more and more ambitious with them. There was also no space at the museum for crates, packing or unpacking — that was my job — and it finally got to the point where we were having boxes delivered to the de Menils' house.

Cite: The de Menils' house?

Love: They had a three-car garage, with three spaces there. And I unpacked and packed in that little garage for a lot of the time, because that was the only covered space available.

Cite: It's been written and said that Jermayne MacAgy's exhibitions generated tremendous enthusiasm. Could you feel that at that time, working with her? Could you sense a change in the Houston arts community?

Love: Well, I think that it got more sophisticated. I think there were more people buying art. Personally, I was fortunate in that the de Menils were buying my things from the first, and what I felt that did was give other people permission to do the same. I guess the people who were hesitant sort of wanted permission to like something. Not everyone, of course, but a lot. And I think that when the de Menils were enthusiastic about something it served that purpose. Although they were always resented by certain — I never did know what the element was that was resentful, but there was that, always. But I think that in the main, the town was appreciative, because there were some fantastic shows, both at the CAM and at the University of St. Thomas. The de Menils and MacAgy both ended up at St. Thomas because of fights they had at CAM. They finally got tired of the CAM fighting, and John de Menil sort of threw up his hands and said, "Okay, we'll leave." And the de Menils offered MacAgy — it sounds cruel, but they offered MacAgy to the MFAH, but the MFAH had to have a board meeting, and it was going to take a year to decide. Chillman was gone, and there was no director at this moment, and they couldn't make up their minds. Then whoever it was in charge of St. Thomas said, "Would you like an art department?" and John said "Yes," and it got settled in five seconds, so they all ended up there. There in Jones Hall at the University of St. Thomas was where their gallery was.

Cite: Was there much of a gallery scene in Houston then?

Love: MacAgy and Katherine Swenson were friends, and Swenson already had a gallery going called New Arts. When she started she had used New York art dealer Andre Emmerich as a source of material, because what she was showing was pre-Columbian. It was on consignment from Emmerich, all those pieces. Then when MacAgy came to town Swenson decided she'd like to spread out, you know, get a little more art involved. Some of it was local art, which MacAgy would pick.

Cite: Was the gallery always called New Arts?

Love: No, it was called the Andre Emmerich Gallery when I first got involved with it. I had my first show there in 1958, and Swenson had other people as well. MacAgy was familiar with a number of West Coast artists such as Hassel Smith and Walter Kuhlman, and Swenson started having shows with those people. Andre Emmerich complained because they were not the same artists he was showing in his gallery in New York, and said he didn't want his name involved anymore. That's when she started calling it the New Arts, after he wanted his name removed.

Cite: What about Ben Dubose? He had the gallery at the Bute Paint Store?

Mayo: Dubose started at the Bute Paint Store downtown, and then he moved out to West Gray, and then he finally took the store over and got rid of the paint.

Love: For a long time there was sort of a two-space place there on West Gray, and the paint was still on the right side. That was when Dubose was selling work by David Addickes. I think he was determined to put an Addickes in every house in Houston, and I suspect he came very

Courtesy Ray Smith

A certain group decided we would do modern art from Houston collections. Today, if you saw what was in it, you'd wonder why it was called modern art. Edward Mayo

close to it. Dubose called everybody "chief." That way he didn't have to remember any names.

Mayo: He was a character. He didn't sell a wide variety of art. He sold only the kind of art he liked, and it was mostly decorative.

Love: But he was good. Boy, was he a salesman.

Cite: Was there a sense of community at this point? Would people go to openings? I mean, was there a network building or in place?

Love: There were about 30 people who went from place to place. They'd go to the same places every time.

Cite: When did that group of 30 start growing?

Mayo: It was growing at this time, I really think it was. Though it might not have been growing very fast.

Cite: Were there crossovers? Were people who were going to the Alley Theatre or to the Houston Grand Opera also going to art openings?

Mayo: I don't think we knew, but there probably were.

Cite: Was there cognizance of a pecking order in the art galleries?

Mayo: Well, we all thought there was a pecking order, whether it was right or not. I believe that probably the New Arts was considered the top purveyor of contemporary art. And then there was the Cushman Gallery. Lucy Smith was the brains behind the Cushman Gallery. The Cushmans had the money, but Smith picked what they had to sell.

Cite: Was it a mixture of local artists and people who had been brought in?

Mayo: I don't think there were any local artists at the Cushman Gallery. There were some less well-known artists, people we don't know at all now.

Cite: Did any new galleries open in that period?

Mayo: Polly Marsters had a gallery. It was on Main Street. Her gallery was called the Houston Artists Gallery. It was the first gallery in town that specialized just in Houston artists.

Cite: How long did that last?

Mayo: I doubt it lasted more than five years.

Love: Marsters was strong in the contemporary arts, and she was strong against Jermayne MacAgy.

Cite: MacAgy as carpetbagger, or as strong-willed woman?

Love: MacAgy as the replacement of the old idea.

Cite: Was there interaction among artists in Houston then? Were there groups or gatherings, or were people doing their own thing?

Love: There were never any of that to my knowledge. If artists ever got together, it was not related to art. We didn't congregate.

Mayo: There was some later group that used to meet at Chaucer's, which was in the basement of the Plaza Hotel. It might have included David Jones, who did beautiful calligraphy all over his paintings, often lots of writing. He taught at Rice.

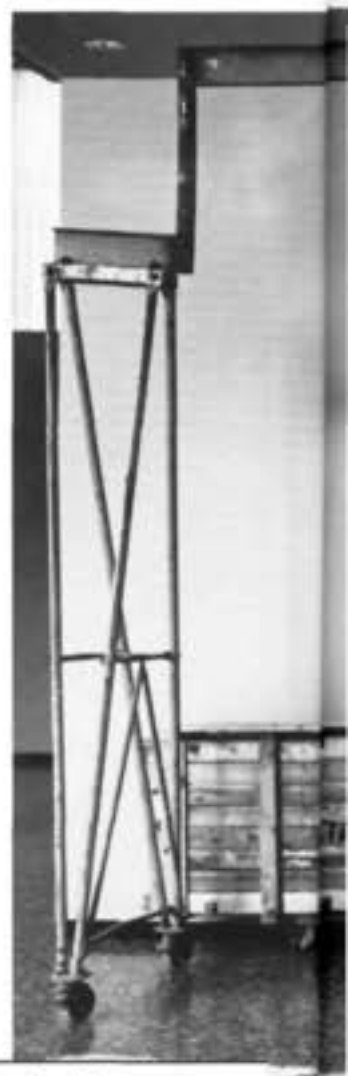
Cite: Jim, how did your career as a sculptor start? Wasn't that around this time?

Love: Women have always gotten me involved in things. A girl got me involved in the theater at Baylor, and then there were these two sisters living in the same compound as me in Houston, and they were doing ceramics. They were involved in the Contemporary Arts Museum and so forth.

Mayo: Yes, the Howard sisters, Sally and Jane. I always saw them together because they did their ceramics together. They did big ceramics, some wonderful things, all of which have been destroyed.

Cite: So these ceramics got you interested in making sculpture?

Love: That, in combination with a set I built for the Alley. In about 1955 I went to the Alley Theatre. Nina Vance at the



Alley needed somebody to do lighting, and I told her I didn't know a thing, not one thing, about lighting. And I was hired to do lighting. Then I stayed a couple of years. But they didn't pay, so I finally got disgusted and quit. Before I got around to it, Vance called me and wanted to know if I would do sets, which I didn't know about either. And I agreed to that, so I did sets at the Alley for about a year or two.

I can remember I did *The Rainmaker* and a few other plays. I remember that for one I decided to paint the entire floor of the Alley bright red, starting when you came into the first two doors. The whole floor was painted red, and I was well at it one day when Nina Vance came in. She got sick and had to go home. It just destroyed her, but it worked for the play very well. It was a comedy, and people were in a very festive mood right from the beginning.

The first time I unpacked a Mondrian, all I could say was "Goddamn, that is ... good stuff." Jim Love

Cite: This was an early act of artistic expression, you think?

Love: I don't know. But the last set I did was for *The Glass Menagerie*, and I wanted to do that out of steel. I had no money, but I talked a welding company into coming in and doing the welding in exchange for tickets and advertising in the program. So this outfit sent a welder over and was there for several days, and they furnished the material, and we did this set out of steel, and then I had drapes, gauze dipped in different colors draped over it. Anyway, I got curious about welding at that time, and bought a little acetylene rig. And that got me working in metal. And so there was a local show at CAM, the Art Rental they called it, and I decided to make something for it. I made a little screen thing.

Mayo: It was about two and a half feet...

Love: Freestanding, yeah, it was on its own. It had little legs.

Cite: The big sculpture that's on view at the Alley, *Area Code* (1962), was it the same sort of thing, except a lot larger?

Love: I did that to enter in a show judged by James Johnson Sweeney of the MFAH and a painter, and it got rejected. It was an area show. A large area, not just Houston.[4]

Cite: What was your first public commission?

Love: I guess the *Portable Trojan Bear* (1974) in Hermann Park. It was given to the city by the Main Street Happening, which is now the International Festival. But the bear was a commission, in a sense. Dominique de Menil talked me into doing it. I was trying to figure out whether or not I wanted to do it, and she said that I should make something for the kids to play on. And I did.

Cite: How did your commission at Hobby Airport, the airplane made out of oil drilling equipment, come about?

Love: That was Isabel Wilson. She must have been the president or chairman of the Municipal Arts Commission. She asked me to do something for Hobby.

Cite: And the piece that's in the MFAH sculpture garden, the enormous ball?

Love: That came through my dealer at the time, Janie Lee. I just made a smooth ball to put out there to show what it would be physically like. Roughly the size of the finished piece. And then MFAH board member Caroline Law agreed to pay for it.

Cite: Is there anything about those times, any aspect of the art scene, that when you look at Houston today, that you miss?

Love: When Jermayne MacAgy died, that was an enormous loss for me, as much as John de Menil's death. Because she and I had a working relationship that was very smooth. Somehow we really clicked. We fought a couple of times. In fact, we hung a show once without speaking. But we really worked well together, and that was very rewarding. That was my art education, because I didn't have any, as was unpacking and packing and seeing things. The first time I unpacked a Mondrian in person, all I could say was "Goddamn, that is ... good stuff." I was so fortunate because of the quality of stuff I was around all those years.

For left: John de Menil (standing left) and Jim Love (standing right) display paintings at an Art Investments dinner in the early 1960s.
Left: Edward Mayo (left) and MFAH curator Thomas P. Lee prepare for the installation of *Anthony Caro*, an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, December 1975.

Mayo: And she was the cause of the quality.

Cite: Edward, is there anything that you miss from that era?

Mayo: Let's see. I miss being young, how about that? Well, there were MacAgy's lectures at the University of St. Thomas. She was a first-rate lecturer. The fact that there was this public person who was doing these sort of continuing education lectures that artists, potential collectors, students, all kinds of other people went to, this whole community catching up at once kind of thing, kind of epitomized a sort of a vortex which we don't have anymore. We have lots of lectures now, but not that central force. MacAgy knew it all. She was involved with contemporary art, but she knew her art history without question, and her lectures showed that. And she had an ornate, individual method of expression that made you feel at home at her lectures. She had good slides, and Jones Hall at St. Thomas was a good place to give a lecture. It had good natural acoustics.

Love: The de Menils brought a lot of people to Houston in those years, too.

Cite: Didn't they bring in Marcel Duchamp?

Love: Yes. On a weekend in 1957, New York came to Houston for the American Federation of the Arts conference, and that weekend Marcel Duchamp was here. The fact of Duchamp showing up simply to give a lecture, that was something.

Cite: There was a group called Art Investments in the early 1960s. Can you talk a little about that?

Love: There was a time when John de Menil was trying to get other people to buy art. He got together ten people, and they put in $10,000 apiece, as I remember. And then de Menil would buy ten things, and then each one of these people could have one of the pieces for a period of time. They would have a meeting at dinner every so often, I don't know whether it was every three months or what, and I'd hang the stuff around where the dinner would be, and each person would pick a new thing. And then in some cases I would go out to whoever's house and put it up. I don't know if it was ever considered a success, I don't know if any of those people turned into buyers on much of a scale or not. I don't remember even who very many of them were.

Cite: What do the two of you think about what might be called the de Menil invasion? When did they quit being seen as outsiders?

Mayo: They never have. I think they were always considered kind of outsiders.

Cite: Did some of that let up when John de Menil died, and Dominique was doing things on her own? Were they perceived differently in the city by the time The Menil Collection was about to emerge?

Love: I've had a feeling for a long time that that place is dearly loved by the people of Houston, after The Menil Collection got built and there were a few shows in it.

Mayo: You're talking about the building?

Love: Well, not the architecture per se so much as the going in there and seeing the sculpture and things.

Cite: Edward, when did you start at the Museum of Fine Arts?

Mayo: January 15, 1961. James Johnson Sweeney started as director in March of that year. I didn't know a lot about being a registrar. James Chillman, who hired me, handed me a book, *Dorothy Dudley's Museum Registration*, and I had to have a hernia operation at that time, so I read it while I was recuperating. I finally met her, Dorothy Dudley. She was the real deal, a doyenne of museum registrars at the Museum of Modern Art. Wonderful lady.

Chillman hired me at almost the exact time that the board of trustees hired Sweeney. Sweeney was involved with a course he was giving at Harvard with his own works of art, things that he owned, as examples of what he was teaching. Some of those pieces stayed at Harvard as long as he was teaching there, and then when he moved to Houston, some of them moved here, into his apartment. Sweeney really picked up the Museum of Fine Arts and turned it around. He gave it a — you know, a lot of the people who resented him had no idea that this was really happening. But it did happen. I think a lot of people who resented what he was doing at the time now appreciate that it happened, because it was really a giant step forward.

He had one problem, which was that he didn't have enough money to do what he really liked to do. He had his printing designed by Herbert Matter in New York, which was all right, but he also had Sterlit Press print it all, and the local board members couldn't understand why he couldn't get things printed in Houston. I remember he showed me two invitations — he had had one printed in New York, and then had another printed here, and he said, "They cannot see the difference." And I must say, the difference was very, very subtle. But it was there. He had an absolutely phenomenal eye. And Sweeney was a one-man band. He had no curator, didn't want any. He did it all.

Cite: And the museum got rid of him because he wasn't out in front shaking hands?

Mayo: I think it was because they were tired of the kind of art that he was purveying.

Cite: For his 1962 show *Three Spaniards: Picasso, Miró, Chillida*, he had a beautiful pool built in the front of the museum for Picasso's *Bathers* to be placed around.

Love: And that Olmec head, that was .... That took the Navy and several governments' involvement. There was a crane out in front of Cullinan Hall, and the crane had to hold the head all night while the base was being installed.[5]

Mayo: While the cement was setting.

Love: To nest it, you know, the crane let it down there to form its little nest, and then picked it back up and let the cement set for however long, however many hours.

Mayo: It was a heroic level for Houston. ■

1. James Chillman served as director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston from 1924 to 1953.

2. At the time, the Contemporary Arts Museum was housed in small, slope-roofed structure designed in 1949 by MacKie & Kamrath.

3. Jermayne MacAgy was born in Cleveland in 1914. She attended both Radcliffe and Western Reserve University, and also studied museum management with Paul Sachs at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum. In 1941 she began working at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco. She served as both assistant and acting director there prior to moving to Houston.

4. Prior to moving to Houston in 1960 to become the third director in the history of the MFAH, James Johnson Sweeney was director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Earlier, he had been director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

5. The Olmec head was a nine-foot-tall, 32,000-pound stone carving placed on the lawn in front of Cullinan Hall. Part of the 1963 MFAH exhibit *The Olmec Tradition*, the massive head was shipped to Houston from Mexico with the assistance of the U.S. government, the Mexican government, and the Mexican Navy.

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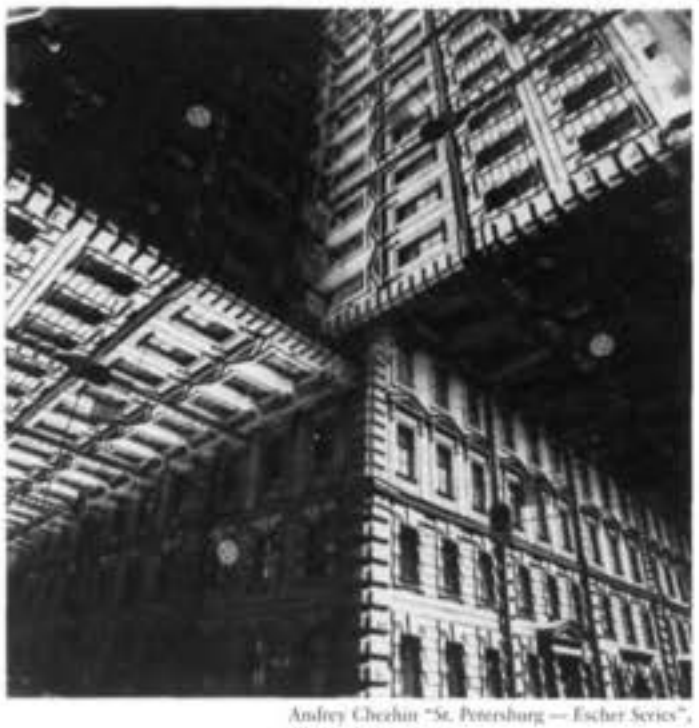

Andrey Chezhin "St. Petersburg — Escher Series", Silver gelatin print.

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Down on the Corner

Top: Arminio Cantini corner store in Galveston, circa 1919.
Bottom: Sebastiano Mencacci familiy in their Galveston store, circa 1910.

BY BARRIE SCARDINO

Before the middle part of this century, when people went shopping for groceries they headed for the corner. In almost every community across America the corner store was not only a place to get bread, it was also a neighborhood gathering spot. Then came the car, the supermarket, and the suburbs, and the corner store began to recede into memory.

Now, though, thanks to the work of Galveston historian Ellen Beasley and *The Corner Store*, an exhibit she has curated for the National Building Museum, we are reminded of just what a crucial and connective part of our history the corner store was. As she did in her 1996 book *The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston*, Beasley has with this exhibit taken a small slice of Galveston history and created from it an interesting commentary on both vernacular architecture and the lifestyles of the not-so-rich and not-so-famous.

With the exception of a large streetscape mural at the entrance that looks as if it had been painted for another show, perhaps one on Charleston in 1954, *The Corner Store* has been thoughtfully and imaginatively designed by Joseph Rosa. Across the "street" from the odd mural are photographs of the exteriors of several corner stores mounted on a white clapboard storefront. At this point, having been presented with the exhibit's subject matter, the viewer is led onto a stoop under a wooden canopy that protects an authentic-looking chamfered doorway that might have led into a 19th-century corner store. Here, photographs and text point out how important such overhangs or sheds were as commercial signage. Such a feature would differentiate the corner store from houses up and down the street that would have been otherwise architecturally similar to it.

Through the doorway is the show's first room, which displays a number of interior pictures of Galveston corner stores. In one such shot, a 1910 photo of a corner store at Avenue O1/2 and 21st streets, the proprietors, Mr. and Mrs. Mencacci and their three children, stand

on a washed plank floor surrounded by shelves of canned goods, household items hung from a high ceiling, a glass display case with cigars, and bushel baskets of potatoes, onions, and the like. (Interestingly, almost all of the Galveston stores were owned by Italian families.) As one moves along, a chronological history of Galveston stores is supplied with locations of the earliest stores overlaid on C. Drie's famous 1871 bird's eye view of the city. Beasley cross-referenced city directory listings, advertisements, photographs, and maps to identify and understand the stores she was researching. Images from all of these documents are enlarged and displayed, telling their story through a lively combination of items.

To illustrate the residential nature of the corner stores, Beasley includes floor plans of both one- and two-story buildings, along with some architectural generalizations that help solidify the image of a typical corner store. Most were utilitarian buildings not embellished architecturally. They were of wood construction, usually rectangular with a hipped roof, and in keeping with the style of the surrounding neighborhood. Street facades were flush with sidewalks, and a shed or suspended awning extended to the curb. Most stores had a corner entry with a single opening at a chamfered corner or openings on each side of the corner. Separate rear or side entrances to the owner's living quarters were usual.

Although Beasley is not a sentimentalist in her view of history, the exhibit does create a nostalgic view of "the good old days," when moms and pops worked together in the store with kids playing underfoot or doing homework in a back room. In one case study, she traces the family business of Arminio Cantini, who came to Galveston in 1910 at age 19 from northern Italy. He opened his first grocery store in 1912. The Cantini story is illustrated with his 1919 wedding photograph, pictures and locator maps of his three successive corner stores, and family photographs. A charming "day in the corner grocery store," as told by Elena Cantini, begins its narrative when the store opens at 5 a.m. She kept the store in the afternoons, while Mr. Cantini took an after-lunch nap and then went out to buy produce and provisions. When he returned, Elena would go upstairs to be with the children and fix dinner. They both worked in the store after their evening meal until it closed at 9:30 or 10 p.m.

The exhibition tries to go beyond Galveston with images of a handful of corner stores in other parts of the U.S., but as the title of the exhibit's catalog admits — *The Corner Store, An American Tradition, Galveston Style* — Galveston is the focus. Though Beasley does include some historic photographs, mainly exteriors, from New England towns, the show would have been fuller had more examples from the rest of the nation been included. Toward the end of the exhibit is a wall painting of a map of the United States with snapshots of corner stores that were solicited from the public attached to their appropriate sites. Early on, only a few examples were in place, but time should yield a more effective display.

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The 48-page, illustrated, soft-cover catalog written by Beasley adds extra dimension to the National Building Museum exhibit, giving the reader a chance to ponder the significance of the corner store in the continuum of American architectural and social history. This modest building type almost always provided not just commercial space but living space as well. The proprietor's family life centered, both physically and emotionally, around the store. Neighbors came, often daily, to shop and gossip, creating what Beasley calls the neighborhood parlor. These buildings anchored the street corner, providing "connective tissue that held small towns together."

In the catalog's last chapter, titled "Continuity and Change: Preserving the Legacy," we're told that despite all the changes in the culture, some corner stores still operate, particularly in older neighborhoods where loyal customers continue to patronize them. Other stores, meanwhile, have become convenience stores. Because of their prominent locations, writes Beasley, "the importance of corner stores goes beyond their original use. Many have acquired not only physical but also associative values that make their preservation critical." (p. 43) Finding new uses for these landmarks can often help revitalize a neighborhood. Restaurants, florists, bookstores, gift shops, and similar small commercial enterprises are finding that the ubiquitous architectural spaces adapt easily to new uses. While such reuse isn't a direct continuation of the whatever-you-need market, it does allow for an ongoing commercial presence in a residential neighborhood, providing for the sort of diversity that communities enjoyed before restrictive-covenant suburbs became common.

For the past three decades, Beasley has documented corner stores through both her own camera lens and archival study and interviews. Her purpose has been to nudge people to start seeing and appreciating these often ignored buildings. It's a purpose well fulfilled by this comfortable exhibit, and its equally well-done catalog. ■

The Corner Store *will run through March 6 at the National Building Museum, 401 F Street NW, Washington D.C. For more information, call 202.272.2448, or check the museum's website at www.nbm.org.*

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Life in the Suburb of a Theme Park

The Celebration Chronicles *by Andrew Ross. Ballantine Books, 1999. 340 pp., $25.95.*
Celebration, U.S.A. *by Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins. Henry Holt and Company, 1999. 342 pp., $25.*

Reviewed by Malcolm Quantrill

The final chapter of *Celebration, U.S.A.* gives a good idea of these two inquiries into Disney's latest practical joke on the American public. Under the banner of "Truman Did Not Sleep Here," we learn of a carload of tourists who turn up in the central Florida town of Celebration asking, "Can you tell us where Truman lives?" It was not the home of Harry S. Truman they sought, however, but the house occupied by the hero of the recent movie *The Truman Show*. The disappointed tourists were told that, "(Truman) was just a character. It was all make-believe. And anyway, it wasn't filmed here ... [but] over in Seaside, on the panhandle." Perhaps those hapless tourists cannot be entirely blamed for their confusion of place. Even though the events of *The Truman Show* were fictitious, the fact that they were seeking a real location for Truman's house is simply a reminder of how easily a movie can offer a simulation of reality, and of how enticing such a simulation can be.

In its own way, Celebration — a New Town which sprang from early ideas for EPCOT, that affected sidekick to Disney World — is just such a simulation. Intent upon creating a "model community" and testing the underlying concepts of New Urbanism, the Disney Corporation sought advice from architects and urban planners, including such gurus as Yale's celebrated professor of architecture emeritus Vincent Scully. Eventually, Celebration was built adjacent to the Disney World theme park just outside Orlando.

The authors of *Celebration, U.S.A.*, Douglas Frantz (a *New York Times* reporter), and his wife Catherine Collins (a freelance writer who was formerly with the *Chicago Tribune*), became residents of this Disney World suburb. In the course of their investigations they stuck close to the trail of Monsieur Mouse and his shaping of a "habitat for humanity" in Florida. Their avowed intent is to share with us their evolving experiences of this latest exercise in New Urbanism. They seem to be converts from the outset, viewing this Disney endeavor as the biggest thing in social engineering since Levittown (at least equal to sliced bread, therefore), and they couldn't wait to become part of it. What exactly is this New Urban phenomenon? The answer given by Vincent Scully is that "Celebration is the most important thing happening in architecture. It marks a return of community."

Communitas, however, implies a sharing; a spirit of "oneness," the collective will and enjoyment of what has been gathered for mutual benefit and enjoyment. How could any of those prerequisites possibly apply to a Walt Disney design for a town that never was? If Celebration represents some kind of New Urbanism, then we clearly need to hurry back to the fundamental sources of urbanism to be found in medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment prototypes. For in Celebration, the masters of Hollywood fantasy have only retailed a transparently celluloid dissemblance of a town.

•

Andrew Ross took a leave from his job as director of the American Studies program at New York University to spend 12 months as a Celebration resident while researching his book. He opens the first chapter of *The Celebration Chronicles* by addressing the profound American desire to seek an alternative hand, one that is different and, one hopes, better than that which we have been dealt: "I live in a country that never runs out of promises. There is always a fresh start, a new frontier, a shiny next step, opportunity or bargain for which enough people will put down some cash, or pick up all their things and go for broke. Even in the rosiest of times, the prospect of satisfaction is not much better than the chances of coming out on top after a casino visit. Running such odds, the long-distance stamina of the American Dream is pretty impressive."

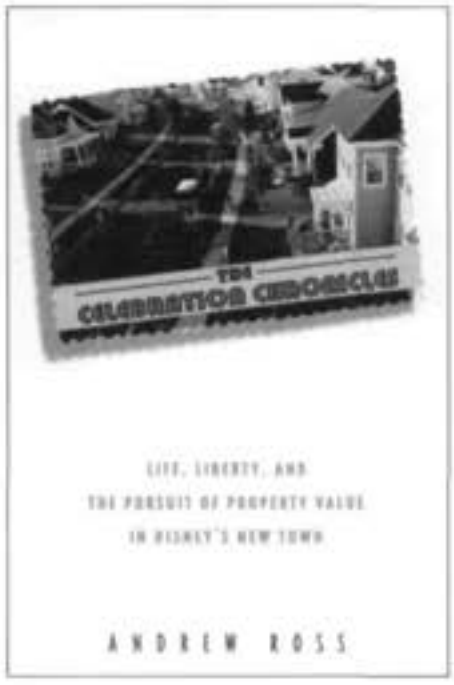
Ross goes on to say that his book has a lot to do with dreams, "because it is about people who regularly used that term when they spoke to me or each other about their recent lives." So in looking at the stamina (continuity) of the American Dream, we are also considering a population whose character is marked by inconstancy, a nagging desire to shift gears, perhaps back to earlier forms of family life and traditions, or to escape from the trap of long employment with a soulless organization in a faceless place. In other words, to find a more promising life with fresh vistas on "a new frontier."

Those who bought into Celebration, however, were not just a homogenous colony of frontier-seeking migrants. Once they settled in Celebration, most townsfolk became acquainted with the term New Urbanism, although Ross found them reluctant to grant its local relevance, noting their awareness that "urbanism is associated with big-city life, whose density and anonymity are seen as undesirable for the most part." Celebration's New Urbanism provides for mixed-use (residential and commercial) with mixed housing types and embraces an identifiable center and edge, all in a walkable town built on small lots with interconnecting streets. Ross points out that, "Architects aside, there are few nonprofessionals in town who actively sought out a New Urbanist community to live in."

Views of how people came to live in Celebration and what they found when they got there vary considerably. The wife of a retired doctor referred to Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between the traditional community (*Gemeinschaft*) of full and open relationships and a dispersed modern society of individuals in partial relationships with each other (*Gesellschaft*), adding "[Celebration] is a *Gemeinschaft* and not a *Gesellschaft* place." Ross observes that "such views were common among residents with a healthy romantic streak but who never sought to live in a time capsule."

If a formula to design a *Gemeinschaft* habitation exists, however, on the evidence of Celebration it remains an undiscovered secret. Celebration is no Saltaire, no Pullman. Nevertheless, it has its roots in the company town. Indeed, it is in essence a company town, for while there is a component of residential ownership, the principle of company control is vested in house purchase covenants that restrict individual freedom. The question therefore remains, how can you achieve *Gemeinschaft* in a company town? To do so, you have to imagine trade union leaders sitting down amicably with their industrialist employers. That scenario does not ring true, yet we may readily understand it as a reflection of a movie style romance, an extension of a five dollar matinee thrill for the masses.

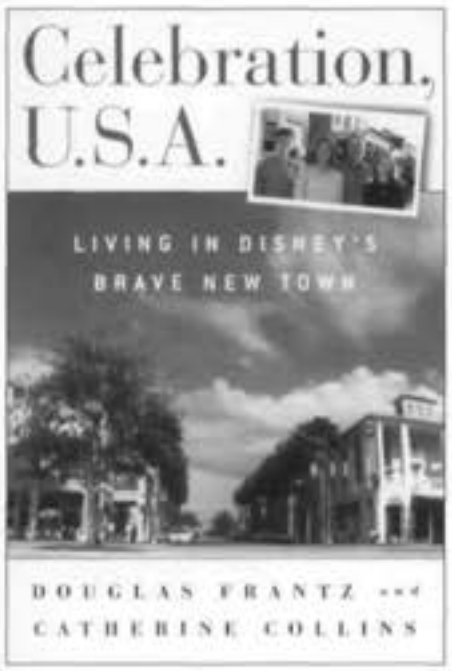
Frantz and Collins, for example, report that, "From the outset, the Walt Disney Company had insulated its huge



Florida holdings from most outside governmental interference through the Reedy Creek Improvement District, which provided Disney World with the autonomy and centralized control of a private government.... If parks needed new sewers, the company did not need to seek approval through a voter referendum. When Disney put up a new building, the only construction codes it met were its own."

The authors are quick to point out, however, that the Disney codes and standards were high, and the construction quality was generally good. For verification, they suggest that the careful and controlled development of Disney's property be compared with that of "the tacky commercial strip that connects Orlando to Disney World." The persistent question remains, though, just how people manage to sense any *Gemeinschaft* in Celebration? To which must be added the fact that the label of "company town" just won't go away, and indeed some would rather it did not.

Ross reports what followed when, in the early fall of 1997, Disney began removing its name from billboards advertising Celebration. This happened 17 months after the town became inhabited, and came in response to newspaper articles describing "trouble in paradise." Most conspicuously, Disney took its name off the water tower marking the main entrance to Celebration from Route 192. There were mutterings among the town's merchants, who were distraught at the loss of revenue accompanying the apparent divorce from the high-revenue brand name. At the same time, there was talk among disgruntled homeowners about picketing the sales preview center, with the intention of alerting prospective home buyers to the fact that Disney was not honoring guar-



antees made in its contracts.

These rebellious outbursts prompted the town's community manager, Brent Herrington, to write in the November 1997 issue of his Town Hall newsletter, "Is Disney happy with Celebration? I raised these issues in a recent meeting with management and the answer was an emphatic 'Yes.'... In terms of marketing strategy, the company has been eager for the public to begin recognizing Celebration as a real, thriving community with its own unique identity, separate and distinct from the entertainment-oriented images of Mickey Mouse, the Magic Kingdom, and so on."

Herrington went on to report that Disney's vice-president of business planning and development hoped, in the future, to read about " 'The Town of Celebration' in big letters and 'Disney' in small letters.... Thus, future advertising and marketing materials will include less emphasis on 'Disney' and more on 'Celebration.' The company plans to market Celebration on its own merits, featuring all the special things that give the community its warmth and unique character."

Ross records that not everyone liked Herrington, but that he continued to administer strong doses of boosterism, in parallel with Kathy Johnson, director of the non-profit Celebration Foundation. These two organized numerous public events aimed at "keeping up morale and stoking the flames of volunteerism." They became the town's model Mom and Pop, and were responsible for town meetings held to "to promote stakeholder pride and the sense of ownership." These various efforts were of considerable importance to the home owners, residents, and proto-citizens, because, as Ross notes, "[they] kept the town's sense of itself on track during the turbulent formative years, when support from the company itself appeared to fall off."

As with all matters of home ownership and real estate, it was not only a question of image. There were practical, everyday problems, too. For example, there were difficulties with the air-conditioning installations. In this case the resident authors, Frantz and Collins, were on the receiving end of Disney's self-granted license to avoid building regulations and inspections. After their second-floor unit had frozen up and they had called two repairmen in two days, the second man told them, "This is our worst nightmare. The lines are buried in the walls and in the concrete floor. I can see us taking the whole house apart." Apparently, the contractor had allowed himself this labor- and cost-saving plumbing technique on the false premise that, since it never froze in Florida, it would never be necessary to access the buried air-conditioning pipes.

Furthermore, in spite of all Disney's "smart," labor-saving construction techniques, the company had enormous difficulty getting the Celebration homes built on time. Frantz and Collins report the case of an ex-Marine captain who had become the golf professional at the Celebration club. He bought a three-story town house located a short walk from both his children's school and the golf course, but with his wife and two children he had for six months occupied a cramped apartment while they waited for the house to be finished. Captain Metcalf became red in the face when he expressed his dissatisfaction. "You can't believe the way we're getting jerked around on our town house," he's quoted as saying. "We have a wall that is bowed out and many other problems.... They put the wrong carpet on the stairs and the wrong cabinets in the kitchen."

Both *The Celebration Chronicles* and *Celebration, U.S.A.* provide a wealth of intriguing detail. What they tell of life in Celebration, however, constructs scenarios as disturbingly bizarre as those of any B-movie. Of the two, I prefer the Ross book for its more detached approach and superior style. But each gives us timely reminders that we are extremely unlikely to discover a new urban utopia in a film director's backyard or based on some poorly researched script. They offer varied paths through an utterly unmagical hinterland, where the terrain is frequently amusing, though not of course for Celebration residents. Indeed, those who are not insulated by mouse-ears must be wondering just what there is to celebrate. ■

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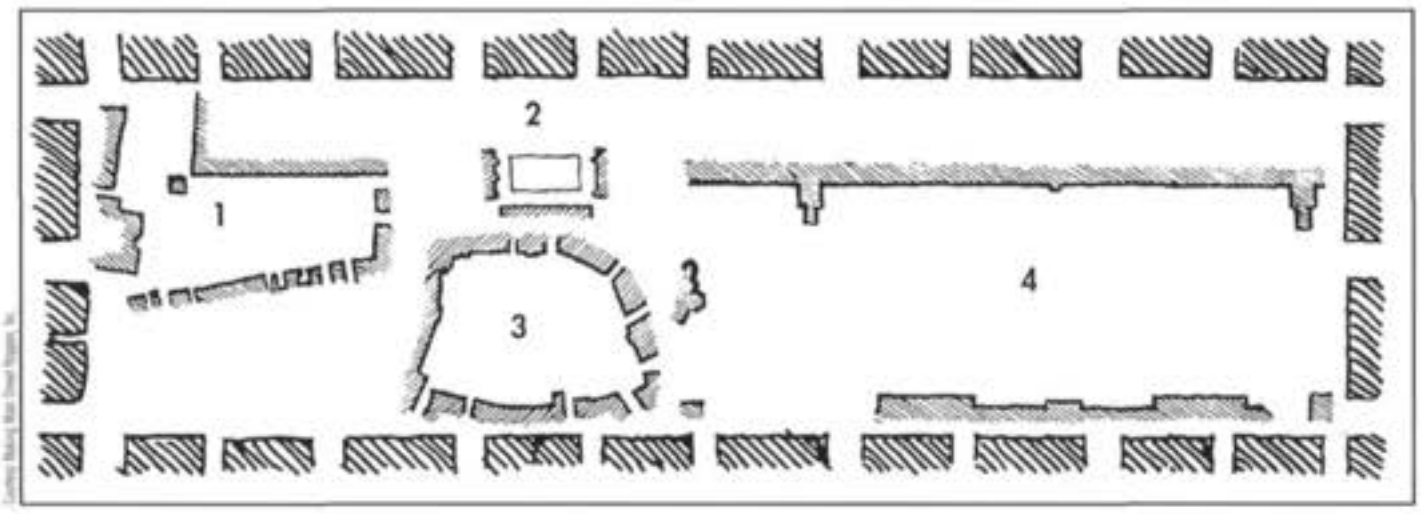
Coming in
Cite 47

A review of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's new Beck building.

A visit with architect and bayou preservationist Charles Tapley.

An examination of the Medical Center's plans for expansion.

Plus, Terrence Doody muses on what creates our sense of place.



Courtesy Making Main Street Happen, Inc.

The ten-block-long, two-block-wide expanse of Stampede Square would dwarf most public spaces. In this EEK drawing created to show just how big Stampede Square would be, it envelops four historic locations: (1) the Piazza San Marco in Venice; (2) the skating rink at New York's Rockefeller Center; (3) the Piazza del Campo in Sienna; and (4) Red Square in Moscow.

Sizing Up Stampede Square

When it comes to public spaces, bigger is not necessarily better

By Drexel Turner

Beginning in the mid-1970s, some sections of Houston acquired area-specific organizations devoted to advocacy planning and promotion, the first of which was the South Main Center, established through the efforts of David A. Crane, then Dean of the School of Architecture at Rice University. But only recently have street-based advocacy groups come into being, the most conspicuous of which are the Main Street Coalition and its alter ego, Making Main Street Happen, which last summer sponsored a competition to re-plan more than seven miles of Main Street from Allen's Landing to the Astrodome. (See "The Main Idea," *Cite* 45.)

Faced with the vacuum that besets Main Street between downtown and the museum district, and laboring in the absence of any clear cut program of replacement parts, the planners engaged to direct the street's revival, Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn, resorted to the crutch of plazas. The largest of the three they've prescribed for Midtown alone is a hyper-extended rectangle called Stampede Square that would measure 3,000 feet in length — the approximate distance required to halt a stampede of cattle, according to EEK — by 550 feet in width. Spread over 20 city blocks, Stampede Square would occupy an area sufficient to accommodate the Piazza San Marco, the Piazza del Campo, Red Square, and the sunken plaza at Rockefeller Center with room left over. It's a miscalculation of mythic proportions rooted in the "quantity-quality confusion" that Larry McMurtry described more than three decades ago as "something most Texans have come by naturally.... 'Best' is the superlative Texans usually tack onto those things they can allow themselves to be sentimental about (i.e. the best little woman, best damn horse, best little town), while 'Biggest' is reserved for a more serious category (biggest ranch, biggest fortune, biggest failure, biggest deal)."[1]

On the matter of supersizing plazas, Camillo Sitte, the Viennese urban empiricist, cautioned in his *City Planning According to Artistic Principles of 1889* that, "From 190 to 470 feet is the average dimension of the largest plazas in ancient towns. The larger the space, the less impressive, as a rule, is the effect of its buildings and monuments, because they cannot in the end prevail against it.... One naturally feels very cozy in small, old plazas, and only in our memory do they loom gigantic, because in our imagination the magnitude of the artistic effect takes the place of actual size..... R. Baumeister in his handbook on city planning ... criticizes the overly large, open plazas for bringing no benefit to health, but only causing heat, dust, and occasional traffic jams. But in spite of all this, one outdoes oneself these days in the staking out of such colossal squares." (pp. 45-46.)

Stampede Square is balanced in the planners' dreamscape by yet another mega-plaza, an ovoid to be called Astro Square set on the north shore of the vast asphaltic sea that surrounds the Astrodome, a place of collective memory and celebration "designed to better accommodate the great spectacles so [sic] unique to Houston and Texas" and to otherwise ensure that "the Astrodome will be returned [returned?] to its rightful place in the city's urban fabric." (As to exactly what that place might be, it is difficult to say. Part of the charm of the Astrodome has been that, except for appearing on a telephone directory cover or two, it never really got in the face of the city, unlike the Superdome in New Orleans or the Metrodome in Minneapolis. Though Peter Papademetriou and Peter Rowe once compared the Astrodomain of Judge Roy Hofheinz to the Rome of Sixtus V, the comparison was purely conceptual and is likely to remain so.)

The simple truth is that, as a consequence of culture and technology, plazas just do not work in even the most temperate American cities. But even were these obstacles overcome, there remains the trump-all of Houston's climate. The Astrodome, deprived though it may be of "its rightful place in the city's urban fabric," would seem hard to ignore as a reminder of the withering effect that Houston's weather exerts on any outdoor activity from spring to fall. Even the Academic Court at Rice University, perhaps the most advantageously disposed and manageable "plaza" in the city, is scarcely used to more than scenographic advantage, save for commencement exercises. The regionally celebrated Texas courthouse square — Harris County's included — is not an open space at all, but a once centrally located block occupied by the courthouse, which was in turn, as J.B. Jackson has noted, surrounded by other establishments vital to the life of the community, "customarily the best restaurant, the only hotel, the movie theater, and the one department store.... Old men sit on its steps or in the shade of the trees; there are monuments on the lawn surrounding it." It was a composition of buildings and edges rather than openness, and one that no longer serves as a locus of communal life as it once did.

The problematic nature of plazas of whatever size in America is a truth rarely acknowledged. *New Yorker* writer Brendan Gill, a compulsive urban do-gooder as well as a critic, advanced "the proposition that when open spaces in cities come into existence by chance they nearly always prove more satisfactory than open spaces that are the consequence of foresight and careful planning," echoing Jackson's belief that "city planning is chiefly justified when it helps preserve and foster informal communal activities." Realistically assessing the prospects for remodeling the perpetually underperforming Copley Square in Boston, Robert Venturi wrote, "Another crutch of modern architecture is the piazza compulsion derived from our justifiable love of Italian towns. But the open piazza is seldom appropriate for an American city today except as a convenience for pedestrians for diagonal short-cuts. The piazza, in fact, is 'un-American.' Americans feel uncomfortable sitting in a square: they should be working at the office or home with the family looking at television.... We are in the habit of thinking that open space is precious in the city. It is not. Except in Manhattan perhaps, our cities have too much open space in the ubiquitous parking lots, in the not-so-temporary deserts created by Urban Renewal and in the amorphous suburbs around."

Even San Antonio, a city that comes by its plazas honestly, has not experienced much success with them over the last century. Once the setting for daily markets, red-hot chili stands, and the occasional gunfight, San Antonio's plazas have mostly been converted into parks with trees and grass, except for Alamo Plaza, which has been transformed from an asphalt-paved wasteland to a flagstone-covered one. Sometimes in city planning, what you don't do can be just as important as what you *do* do — perhaps even more so. ■

1. The two other plazas EEK proposes for Midtown seem modest by comparison: an eight-block clearing called Grackle Square for the black birds whose leavings once threatened to white out both the Rice campus and Martha Hermann Square in front of City Hall, and Church Square, four blocks set aside for "religious events or personal contemplation" in front of the South Main Baptist Church.

A Houston for the 21st century? In the early 1970s, an architect working on plans for the Texas Eastern project thought this is how we might look as we entered the new millennium.

Courtesy Harmon Public Library, Houston Metropolitan Research Center

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