Cite
THE ARCHITECTURE and DESIGN REVIEW OF HOUSTON

the Main Idea

A DESIGN COMPETITION RETHINKS HOUSTON'S MAIN STREET

plus THE GROWTH OF THE EXTENDED-STAY HOTEL

REMEMBERING THE ORIGINAL GARDEN APARTMENTS

and MIES VAN DER ROHE'S HOUSTON HERITAGE

45 : Summer 1999 $5.00

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Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance

45: Summer 1999

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Cover: Images of Main Street as it looks today. © 1999 Hester + Hardaway

WebCite:
http://riceinfo.rice.edu/projects/RDA

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Cite

Life along a remade Main Street, as conceived by TEN/SLA Studio Land for the Making Main Street Happen Competition.

CAL

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE FALL LECTURE SERIES: SPECULATIONS ON THE FUTURE

September 22 through October 12
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
and the University of Houston
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture.
713.527.4876

This lecture series celebrates the millennium by examining the future-looking myths of the past — recalling the way we thought things would be — as well as speculating on new scenarios for tomorrow.

Wednesday, September 22, 7:30 p.m.,
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
CHRISTIAN THOMSEN, professor of literature, University of Siegen, Germany, and author of *Visionary Architecture from Babylon to Virtual Reality* speaks on "New Media's Challenge to Architecture."

Wednesday, September 29, 7:30 p.m.,
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
DANIEL LIBESKIND, principal, Architectural Studio Daniel Libeskind, and author of *Radix-Matrix: Works and Writings of Daniel Libeskind* will present a lecture entitled "Beyond the Image."

Thursday, October 7, 7:30 p.m.,
University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Theater.
JEAN-LOUIS COHEN, chair for Town-Planning History, Institut Français d'Urbanisme, University of Paris VIII, and author of *Scenes of the World to Come: European Architecture and the American Challenge 1893-1960* speaks on "America vs. Europe: One Century of Transatlantic Misunderstanding and Its Legacy."

Tuesday, October 12, 7:30 p.m.,
University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Theater.
M. CHRISTINE BOYER, professor of architecture, Princeton University, and author of *CyberCities: Visual Perception in the Age of Electronic Communication* speaks on "CyberCities: Playing with Information."

HOUSTON TALKS: DEAN'S LECTURE SERIES

RDA and the schools of architecture at Rice and the University of Houston cosponsor this program, which features international architects. Location to be announced.

Monday, December 7: Michael Graves.

BOOK SIGNING

Wednesday, September 15, 7-8 p.m.,
Brazos Bookstore.
713.523.0701
The RDA and Brazos Bookstore jointly sponsor a reception honoring Margaret Culbertson on the publication of her book, *Texas Houses Built by the Book*. Books will be available for purchase and signing.

FIRESIDE CHAT

October 20, time and
location to be announced.
713.527.4876

Using Bush Intercontinental Airport as a case study, the RDA will present an informal discussion on creating art in public spaces. Panelists will include representatives from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County, Gensler, and the Department of Aviation, as well as two of the artists whose work has been incorporated into the airport's interior.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE 1999 GALA

Saturday, November 6, 7 p.m.
El Paso Energy Building.
713.527.4876

The 13th annual RDA gala, supporting 1999-2000 RDA programs and publications, will include dinner catered by the Four Seasons Hotel, dancing to Commercial Art, and a silent auction. The 1999 Award for Design Excellence will be presented posthumously to Walter P. Moore Jr., admired educator and engineer. Dr. Moore was president of Walter P. Moore and Associates, and under his direction the company became nationally known for its design of high-rise buildings, sports facilities, and other large projects. Dr. Moore was also a professor at Texas A&M University and held several directorships there.

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE FALL MONDAY LECTURE SERIES

All lectures are held in the Farish Gallery at the Rice University School of Architecture. For more information, please call 713.527.4864 or check the website at http://www.arch.rice.edu. There will be a short film following each lecture from the gelatin film series sponsored by the Farish Gallery.

Monday, September 20, 7 p.m.
BERNARD KHOURI, architect, Beirut, talks on his recent work.

E N D A R

Monday, September 27, 7 p.m.
MARK LINNEMAN, NL Architects, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, presents "A Modest Proposal."

Monday, October 4, 7 p.m.
GEORGE RANALLI, architect, New York City, talks on his recent work.

Monday, October 11, 7 p.m.
TOM BURESH, Guthrie+Buresh Architects, Los Angeles, a Craig Francis Cullinan Visiting Chair in Fine Arts, Architecture, and Urban Planning, talks on his recent work.

Monday, October 25, 7 p.m.
JAVIER PEREZ-SALCIDO, architect, Mexico City, talks on his recent work.

Monday, November 1, 7 p.m.
RENNY RAMAKERS, Droog Design, Amsterdam, a Craig Francis Cullinan Visiting Chair in Fine Arts, Architecture, and Urban Planning, talks on his recent work.

Monday, November 8, 7 p.m.
JAVIER SANCHEZ, Higuera + Sanchez Architects, Mexico City, speaks on "1999 in 1926."

Monday, November 15, 7 p.m.
JOSE ANTONIO ALDRETE-HAAS, architect, Mexico City, speaks on his recent work.

Monday, December 6, 7 p.m. (or immediately following last review)
CONSTANCE ADAMS, Johnson Space Center, NASA, Houston, speaks on "Space Inflator."

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE FALL 1999 CRAIG FRANCIS CULLINAN VISITING CHAIR LECTURES

Except where noted, all lectures are held in the Farish Gallery at the Rice University School of Architecture. For more information, please call 713.527.4864 or check the website at http://www.arch.rice.edu.

FREDRICK TURNER, University of Texas, Dallas, will speak on the following:

Tuesday, October 5, 7 p.m. "Beauty, the Cosmological Constant."

Wednesday, October 6, 7 p.m. "Art in the Age of the Charm Industries."

Thursday, October 7, 7 p.m. "Ecological Turbulence and the New Arcadia."

EDWARD DIMENDBERG, International Institute Assistant Professor of Architecture, Film, and Video, and Germanic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, offers a series of lectures on "After Night Falls: Post-1939 American Urbanism and Film Noir." Individual topics include the following:

Thursday, November 4, 7 p.m. "Core Reflections."

Friday, November 5, noon, "Film Noir." (This lecture will be held in Anderson 117.)

Thursday, November 11, 7 p.m. "Naked Cities."

Friday, November 12, noon, "Peripheral Visions." (This lecture will be held in Anderson 117.)

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

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

Wednesday, October 20, 3 p.m.
WOLFGANG TSCHAPELLER, architect, Austria, speaks on his recent work.

Thursday, November 4, 7 p.m.
STEVE IZENOUR, principal, Venturi, Scott, Brown & Associates and co-author of *Learning from Las Vegas*, speaks on "Learning to Love What You Love to Hate: Excursions Into the Everyday Vernacular."

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE BLUEPRINT BALL

Saturday, October 23, 7:30 p.m.
Architecture Building, UH Campus
713.743.9557

The UH School of Architecture's fifth annual Blueprint Ball will honor world-renowned architect Cesar Pelli, whose Houston buildings include the St. Luke's Medical Towers, the Four Leaf condominium towers, and Rice University's Herring Hall. The evening will include an architectural exhibit, an awards ceremony, and a silent auction of drawings, photographs, furniture, and lighting fixtures by local and nationally-known designers.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE SPRING 2000 LECTURE SERIES: "BETWEEN 40-S AND 30-N — NEW ARCHITECTURE FROM LATIN AMERICA"

January 26 through February 23
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
713.527.4876

Latin American architecture is entering a period of design excellence unseen since the glory days of the 1950s. Leading the renaissance is a generation of architects who combine the 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, Costa Rica, and Mexico.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE HOMETOWN TOUR: SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

March 30 through April 2, 2000
713.527.4876
Architectural historian Stephen Fox and Savannah native Barrie Scardino will guide visitors 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. Call RDA for a tour brochure and registration information.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE 2000 ANNUAL ARCHITECTURE TOUR AND LECTURE

Saturday and Sunday,
April 8 and 9, 2000
RDA's first members-only architecture tour of the new century will be held in April and will feature six Houston townhouses. A lecture by architectural historian Stephen Fox will precede the tour.

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS, HOUSTON

Please call 713.520.0155 for more information.

October 4-November 12,
Two Allen Center
"75 That Made A Difference," an exhibition celebrating 75 years of the Houston Chapter of the AIA.

Friday, October 8.
Smart Growth Conference: In conjunction with the Citizens Environmental Coalition, the AIA, Houston, will sponsor a day-long discussion of smart growth issues.

LETTERS

DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN

It's always interesting to see new generations rediscovering Houston, but the article "The Bridges of Buffalo Bayou" [by Christof Spieler] in the spring 1999 issue of *Cite* [44] suggests that history is repeated because Houston may still have no memory of itself.

Houston does have a bibliography, however.

My own article "Bayou City Bridges," an over two-decades old feature which appeared in the January 1978 issue of *Houston Home & Garden*, made essentially the same points and included most of the examples in the *Cite* 44 piece, but went further west (including the footbridge to Bayou Bend), suggesting that the bayou still has a remnant of its once natural state, a glimpse of which may still be seen, and which was a public amenity in the pre-oil days when Houstonians would even swim in the Ship Channel.

Perhaps progress may best be seen by keeping one eye on a rear-view mirror.

Peter C. Papademetriou, AIA
Professor and Graduate
Program Director
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Newark, New Jersey

LOOKING GOOD

Thank you for letting me see *Cite* 44. I am muchly happy with the results, the interview, and the presentation of my photographs ["A Singular Vision: *Cite* Talks with Julius Shulman," by Nonya Grenader and Danny Samuels]. The frieze with my face as the page is framed was a clever, attractive element for my talk with the students at Rice University. Thank you for the idea.

I would be happy to visit Rice once more. I genuinely enjoyed my session there and feel that students profit by listening to and touching base with those in the outside world.

Thank you once again. You made me look good.

Julius Shulman
Los Angeles, California

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 letters 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.*

IN MEMORIAM

Mary Lynch Kurtz
1944-1999

Interior designer, collector, and philanthropist Mary Lynch Kurtz died June 27, 1999 at her apartment in London. She was 54. A founding member of the Rice Design Alliance, Kurtz served as president of the RDA in 1977 and 1978.

Following her marriage to symphony conductor Efrem Kurtz in 1981, Mary Kurtz divided her time between New York, Monte Carlo, and London. After her husband's death in 1995, she returned to Houston frequently and resumed an active role in the city's cultural activities. She was a member of the board of directors of the Houston Seminar, a trustee of the Contemporary Arts Museum, and a former trustee of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. A collector of modern art, photography, and art furniture, Mary Kurtz was also an enthusiastic proponent of modern architecture and design.

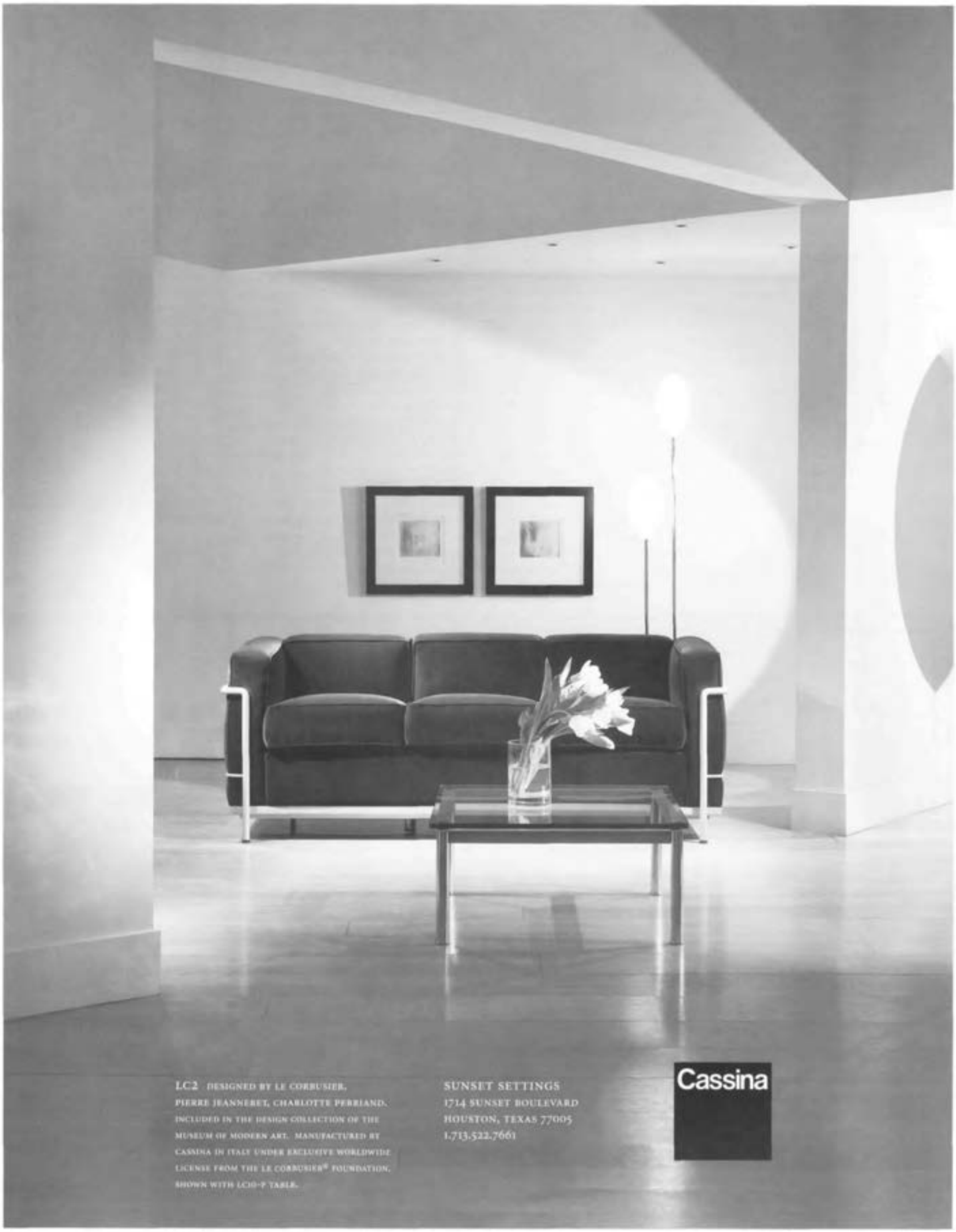
James C. Morehead Jr.
1913-1999

James Caddall Morehead Jr., architect, author, and professor emeritus of architecture at Rice University, died on July 4, 1999 in Houston. He was 85.

A native of Bradenton, Florida, Morehead was a graduate of Princeton University and the Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 1940 he accepted an offer from William Ward Watkin to teach architecture at the Rice Institute in Houston. From 1953 until 1961 he was director of Rice's architecture department, and from 1965 to 1979 he was the registrar of Rice University.

Morehead was most active as an architect in the 1950s, when he designed houses for Rice professors T. W. Bonner and Radoslav Tsanoff, as well as his family's house in Piney Point Village (1951), for which he won an Award of Merit from the Houston Chapter AIA. He was the first and long-time chair of the planning and zoning commission of Piney Point Village, a member of the Houston Philosophical Society, and a member of the board of directors of the San Jacinto Girl Scouts.

With his father, Morehead wrote *A Handbook of Perspective Drawing*, which was published in 1941 and republished in both English and foreign language editions as late as 1960. Following his retirement, Morehead wrote the popular illustrated *Walking Tour of Rice University*. James Morehead is survived by his wife, their three children, and five grandchildren.



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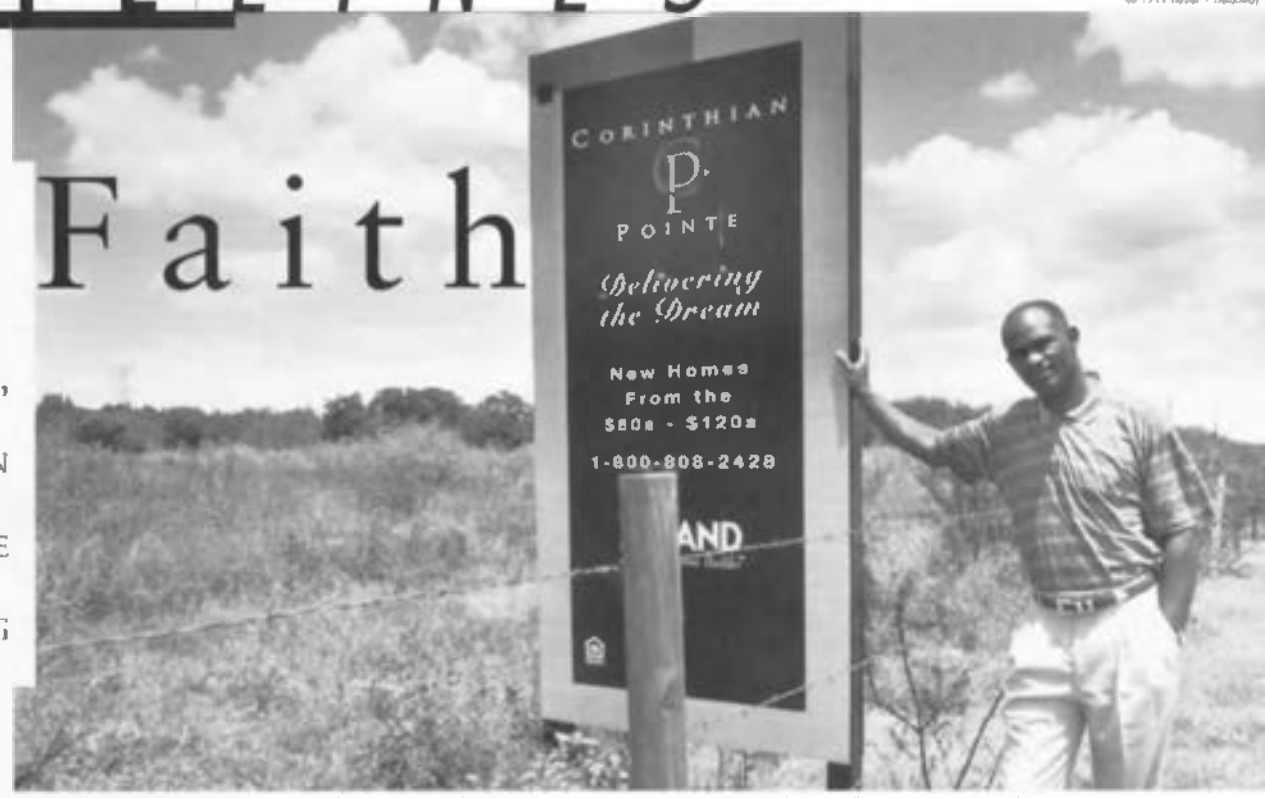
CITE LINES

Built By Faith

In Southwest Houston, the Reverend Kirbyjon Caldwell preaches the gospel of housing

By Bill Mintz



The Reverend Kirbyjon Caldwell has plans for this stretch of land in Southwest Houston, plans that he hopes will create community where none now exists.

Outwardly, Corinthian Pointe will be like many of Houston's new production home neighborhoods: 440 brick-accented houses sitting on small lots landscaped with young trees and seasonal plantings, a place where young families can go to fulfill their dreams of suburban tranquillity.

But inwardly, Corinthian Pointe will be different. It will be a product not just of bricks, but of belief, one of a growing number of examples in Houston of how the idea of good works is moving from the pulpit to the street. What sets this particular subdivision apart is the vision of its driving force, the Reverend Kirbyjon Caldwell, pastor of Windsor Village United Methodist Church. It was Caldwell who marshaled the enthusiasm and capital of his congregation to create the Pyramid Community Development Corporation. And it was Caldwell, a business school graduate, who allied Pyramid's resources with those of Ryland Homes and Chase Bank of Texas to create a neighborhood setting that has been out of reach for most families with low to moderate incomes.

The result promises to be something unique and, if it works, perhaps a model for other area religious institutions to follow. Although Houston now has about 30 community development corporations seeking to rebuild distressed neighborhoods, Pyramid is the first to use the tools of revitalization to build an entirely new neighborhood from scratch. "Kirbyjon is a faith-based community developer," says Richard Celli, senior vice-president and manager of community lending at Chase, on whose board Caldwell sits. "He is using the strength and infrastructure that the church provides and correlating that into real estate."

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For decades, African-American pastors such as the Reverend William Lawson of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in the Third Ward have led efforts to revive their communities by stepping in when government agencies or private sources of capital would not. But Caldwell represents a new twist on this old idea. He is one of a emerging generation of entrepreneurial African-American pastors who are taking advantage of a newly found focus on community development among politicians and the banking industry by combining that energy with the energy of their congregations. Nationally, the best known exemplar of this is New York's Reverend Floyd Flake, whose church in Jamaica, Queens, is referred to as a nonprofit corporation about as frequently as it's referred to as a religious institution. In Dallas, the Reverend Zan Holmes has made a name for himself by mixing business with the gospel. And in Houston, the Reverend Harvey Clemons Jr., pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, established one of the city's first community development corporations in the Fifth Ward, a corporation that developed Pleasant Hill Village, an independent living facility for the elderly. Similarly, the Reverend James W.E. Dixon II, pastor of Houston's Northwest Community Baptist Church, established Visions of Hope Center, a 100-bed drug-and-alcohol treatment facility for women.

But Caldwell's Corinthian Pointe, construction on which was expected to begin this September, takes those ideas a step further. The subdivision, planned for a location on West Orem, just west of South Post Oak, is located in a part of Houston that was left behind by the city's economic revival. The last development here was built before the 1980s oil bust. Many area homeowners lost their homes to foreclosure, and the remaining houses became rental properties.

Corinthian Pointe is designed to reverse that trend. Its houses, to be constructed by Ryland, one of the nation's largest home builders, will be priced so that they're within the reach of young families. One third of the houses built in the first phase will be priced so that families earning 80 percent of the median income — about $40,000 per year — can afford them. Despite the low cost, Caldwell's models for his community-to-be are Cinco Ranch and Kingwood, Houston's larger master-planned communities. "We want to defy the stereotypical conception of low- to moderate-income housing," he says.

Caldwell borrows his definition of an entrepreneur from the neoclassical economist Joseph Alois Schumpeter: "The initial purpose of entrepreneurs was to attract intellectual capital; it had to do with galvanizing intellectual capital in order to address a certain need in the community," Caldwell says. "I am not a real estate developer, but from that standpoint, I am a 21st-century entrepreneur."

After his youth in northeast Houston, Caldwell entered the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. He graduated in May 1977, then a year and a half later gave up a promising career in finance to become a minister. He was assigned to Windsor Village, a congregation with only 25 members and its ongoing existence in doubt. Now, the church has more than 10,000 members. And through its Pyramid Community Development Corporation, Windsor Village has launched a thriving private Christian school, Imani School, and transformed an abandoned K-Mart into what's known as the Power Center, a home for Imani School, a branch of Chase Bank, a clinic, a pharmacy, a Houston Community College branch, social services, and 7,000 square feet of leased office space.

To create the Power Center, Caldwell took a building donated by Fiesta Mart Inc. and then leveraged Windsor Village's resources with donated funds, bonds, and federal grants to complete a $4.3 million renovation. The seed money for Corinthian Pointe, in contrast, came from heavyweight boxing champion Evander Holyfield, who pledged $1.2 million for a prayer center that will be part of the development. Caldwell then leveraged that pledge to finance the rest of the development.

From the city he received approval for a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone, which means the taxes from increased property values will stay in the 234-acre subdivision to help pay for underground utilities and amenities such as landscaping. Because of the TIRZ financing, Ryland will be able to build homes that will have features — more bricks and steeper roofs on the outside and larger bathrooms on the inside — usually found in homes that cost $15,000 more than the homes in Corinthian Pointe.

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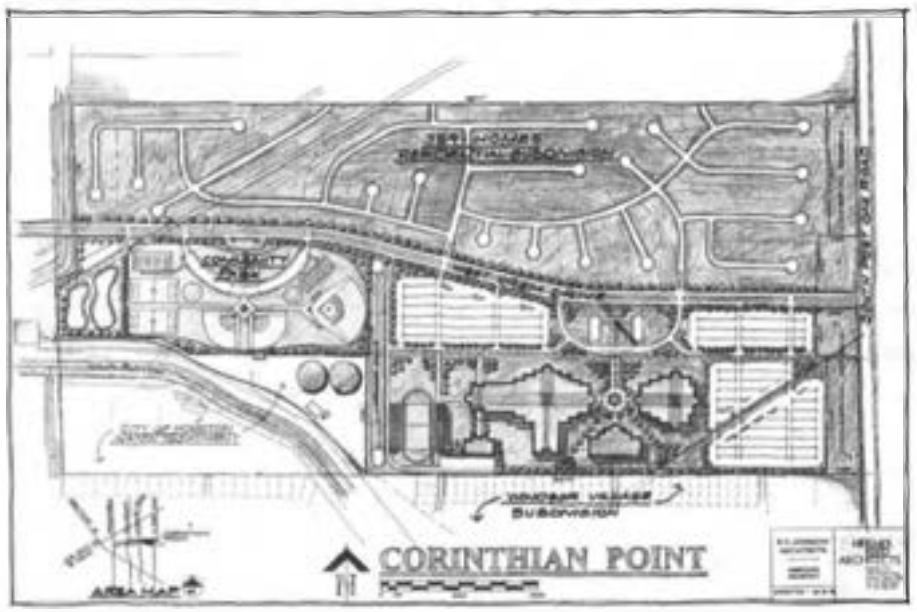
One of the things that has helped to advance the number and size of faith-based community development is the Clinton administration's strengthening of the Community Reinvestment Act, which requires financial institutions to make more loans in traditionally underserved areas. As a result, Chase and other banks must seek out partners in communities that are often short on seasoned entrepreneurs. Frequently, the strongest institutions in economically neglected neighbor-



The plans for Corinthian Pointe draw on ideas from more expensive developments such as Kingwood and Cinco Ranch.

hoods are the churches, and the pastors are the strongest leaders.

Inevitably, though, mixing church and state raises certain questions about where the line of separation between the two is to be drawn. Caldwell insists that his and Windsor Village's role in the development does not mean that Corinthian Pointe will be a church encampment. By philosophy and design, Caldwell says, the subdivision will not be a place where life is ruled by his church; the houses will be sold to buyers regardless of their religious beliefs. "This isn't Jonestown," he says. "It isn't some clandestinely controlled housing development where preachers and deacons are moving around pulling strings."

Still, about half of the 1,500 people who have expressed interest in living at Corinthian Pointe are members of Caldwell's congregation. And Caldwell, a tall man who modulates his answers in conversation much like he delivers a sermon to his congregation on Sundays, is not shy about remarking that "my vision for communities is to create an environment where children can become what God is calling them to be. I don't think children should have to say no to a drug dealer; they should not have to walk on broken sidewalks or no sidewalks at all to get to school."

The hope, however, is that families will be attracted to Corinthian Pointe by quality of life issues that cross religious divides. "Houston does not have a lot of communities where you can buy a house for $72,000 and the streetscaping and the landscaping are nice and where the deed restrictions are strictly enforced," Caldwell says. "This will be that kind of place."

On the south side of West Orem, and reachable via a pedestrian walkway, will be a community park with athletic fields, the Holyfield-funded prayer center, a community center, catfish ponds, and facilities that offer a continuum of care for elderly residents.

Caldwell's description of Corinthian Pointe — a place where the residents of elderly housing will help care for the children of younger families — sounds much like the extended family that helped raise him in Kashmere Gardens in the 1950s and 1960s, something he described in his recent spiritual self-help book, *The Gospel of Good Success*.

But while he wants to recreate the good of that era, Caldwell hopes to avoid the bad, eliminating the burglaries that plagued his father's tailor shop, the drugs, the prostitution — the presence of Satan. Or, as he notes when talking about the commercial enterprises he hopes to attract to the land surrounding Corinthian Pointe, "Obviously, there are some tenants we won't pay any attention to. We got a call from a liquor store; that's out — we won't do that." It's just not the sort of thing you do, Caldwell realizes, when you're trying to develop in good faith. ■

Cite Receives NEA Grant

The National Endowment for the Arts has awarded *Cite* a grant of $30,000 to help fund four issues to be published this year and next. The grant, the fifth from the NEA to be given *Cite* since 1991, is in part recognition of the magazine's importance as a source of information on Houston's architecture and urban planning. The NEA funds will help *Cite* continue its critical examination of Houston's current growth, as well as chronicle important aspects of the city's architectural heritage.

Cite maintains a base circulation of 5,000. It is distributed to subscribers, Rice Design Alliance members, schools of architecture, selected libraries through the country, and nationally to some 100 bookstores and outlets. ■

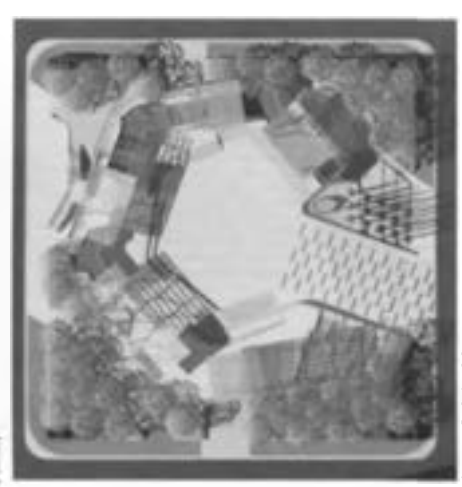
A PLAZA TO COME TO

Among other amenities, the new Jones Plaza will feature permanent shelters covered with perforated steel and plastic.

AT THE HEART OF THE THEATER DISTRICT, JONES PLAZA WAITS TO BE REBORN

The plaza's main entrance, seen above, flows toward Jones Hall.

Exploded schematic of Jones Plaza plans.



Aerial view showing relocation of greenery to the edges of the plaza.

By Mitchell J. Shields

Had it not been for an accounting error, Houstonians might well have welcomed the new millennium at a party in a refurbished Jones Plaza. But an accounting error there was. Someone made the mistake of putting a figure in the wrong place on an official form. As a result, this May, when construction was slated to begin on the $5 million renovation of the square that sits at the heart of the theater district, the project instead had to be sent out for new bids. Now work on the plaza isn't expected to start until late fall at the earliest, and it will likely be at least December 2000 before a reborn Jones Plaza is unveiled.

Still, if the plans prepared by the Houston architectural firm of Willis, Bricker & Cannady come to fruition, the wait may be worth it. Already, the firm's scheme for bringing life to what has for decades been a dead spot in the center of downtown has won the accolades of critics at *Architecture* magazine, who bestowed on it a Progressive Design award. It has also generated support from those most distressed by the plaza's lack of amenability, among them the City of Houston, which is funding the work, and the managers of the Alley Theatre, Jones Hall, and the businesses of Bayou Place. They all seem to recognize a truth voiced by former *Houston Chronicle* architecture critic Ann Holmes in 1972 when she called Jones Plaza the "most hostile square block in Houston."

Much of that hostility comes from the large, concrete staircases that envelope each corner of the plaza; another problem is that the plaza's center is more than seven feet higher than the surrounding sidewalk, making it hard for people standing at the edges to see and be attracted by anything that may be happening on top. As a result, unless there is a planned event taking place, the core of Jones Plaza tends to be barren even as the sidewalks around it are filled with people.

"Everyone is so intimidated by the exterior that they never move to the interior," notes William Cannady, who was design principal on the project. To solve this problem, says project design architect Mark Wamble, the decision was made to turn the plaza inside out. The greenery that now marks Jones Plaza's center will be moved to its edges, creating small pocket parks of trees, wild flowers, and indigenous grasses where the staircases presently stand. Benches will surround the landscaped areas, providing places for people to rest and watch the passing parade. Moving the trees to the corners eliminates the need for tree wells, Cannady notes, and allows the whole plaza to be lowered a few feet, bringing it closer to the visual plane of the street. Smaller staircases and other gradual approaches such as secondary paved and lighted walks will lead people into the plaza's interior, which will be enlarged from approximately 20,000 to 30,000 square feet.

The main approach to the center of the new plaza comes from a broad, gently sloping walkway angled to match the entrance to Jones Hall across Louisiana Street. At the terminus of the walkway an open area large enough for gatherings of up to 2,000 people is planned; five permanent canopies made of steel tubing and covered with perforated steel and a specially treated polycarbonate plastic will partially encircle the area. Aside from providing a place of shelter from the sun or the rain, the canopies add a sculptural element, framing the plaza and enhancing its scale.

Other amenities include a water fountain as part of the stairs that flow down to the intersection of Texas Avenue and Louisiana Street; the decorating of the air vents and stair housings that rise from the parking garage below Jones Plaza with poster boxes to hold advertising for theater district events; public restrooms; a permanent stage with dressing rooms and storage areas; and a concession stand that will be open daily rather than only during special events.

Psychologically, that last change may be among the most important planned. When he and his associates first began thinking about the Jones Plaza project, Cannady says, they turned to the work of William H. Whyte, who had initiated the renovation of New York's Bryant Park. One of the points that Whyte made was the need for what he called "eyes on the site" — an official presence that said the area was a safe place to be, and which invited passersby in. Something as simple as a concession-stand employee could fill that role, and perhaps make Jones Plaza not the hostile face many have seen since the 1970s, but a welcoming part of a revived central city. ■

Metro's new bus shelter at the corner of Smith and Lamar is a prototype for others yet to come.

A leaf pattern filters light through the new shelter's canopy.

Give Me Shelter

Though most of the talk swirling around Metro in recent months has centered on light rail, the agency hasn't forgotten that buses are still its bread and butter. So in mid-summer, at the corner of Smith and Lamar, it unveiled the first of what Metro has said will be a series of new bus-stop shelters spaced along Main Street as part of the Downtown Transit Streets Improvement Project.

The shelter was designed by Pierce Goodwin Alexander & Linville in conjunction with Houston artist Rachel Hecker. Open, rather than enclosed like many current Metro shelters, it features a swooping, wing-shaped canopy fitted with a pattern of green leaves in translucent glass. Underneath are two metal benches whose supports echo the appearance of the columns that hold up the canopy.

How quickly the Smith and Lamar shelter will be joined by others like it is a question of funding. Originally scheduled for unveiling long before this summer, the new bus stop was delayed by the problems that put the whole Transit Streets program on hold. Now that the program is back on track, the hope at Metro and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County, which is managing the art component of the project, is that more new shelters will settle into place soon. — *Mitchell J. Shields*

Press Club Recognizes *Cite* for Design, News

This April, *Cite* took first place honors in magazine layout in the Press Club of Houston's Excellence in Journalism Awards. It was the third year in a row that *Cite* was awarded first place in magazine layout, and the second time in three years that it took home both the first and second place prizes.

This year *Cite* tied with itself for first place. The judges declared *Cite* 40 (Winter 1998) and *Cite* 42 (Summer/Fall 1998) joint winners of the top award in magazine layout, while *Cite* 41 (Spring 1998), the only other issue eligible for the contest, was awarded second place.

Craig Minor and Cheryl Beckett of Minor Design Group designed all three of this year's winning entries, as well as the previous years' winners.

Another winner was *Cite* contributor David Dillon, who was awarded second place in magazine news for his story "Dialogue in Marfa" in *Cite* 42. Dillon, an architecture critic for the *Dallas Morning News*, reported on a Marfa, Texas, conference on the interaction between art and architecture. ■

the Main Idea

What would it take to give Houston a signature boulevard? A design competition for Main Street offers some suggestions.

By John Kaliski

For almost 100 years, Main Street was exactly what its name suggested: the place that Houstonians identified as the center of their everyday as well as ceremonial lives. From the wharf at Allen's landing, through the business core of downtown, past the grand residences of local burghers, and to the cluster of cultural, open space, and educational facilities around Rice University, Main Street served as gathering space, home, place of work, and recreational resource for the city. Even with the advent of the automobile, Main Street, at least in the beginning, was able to adapt. Historical photographs show a rich diversity of approaches to both parking and building typologies respectful of the older 19th-century urban fabric and accommodating of early 20th-century locomotion. For perhaps 30 years, from 1920 to 1950, the physical scale and form of Main Street matched well the dimensions of the pedestrians, workers, residents, shoppers, and motorists who used the street.

The building of the interstates did not so much kill Main Street as slowly strangle it, making obsolete much, though not all, of the thoroughfare's uses. By the 1980s large blocks of land lay vacant in Midtown, while Main Street downtown was a fume-filled transfer point for buses. Even well-maintained destinations such as the Museum of Fine Arts and the Texas Medical Center increasingly turned their backs to Main. The street became unfriendly to pedestrians, more of a traffic conduit than a place, and its urban purpose in the framework of the city was ambiguous.

During the 1990s there have been a series of efforts to deal with the deteriorating situation along Main. In 1992, moved to action by Houston's brief flirtation with zoning, the Houston chapter of the American Institute of Architects organized a workshop that brought together the city's schools of architecture, politicians, and professionals to contemplate visions for Main Street's future.[1] The organizers saw an opportunity to codify order along the corridor, and their publications are infused with optimism about a planning tool that Houstonians had traditionally eschewed. But the defeat of zoning at the polls rendered the spirit, if not the ideas, of this exercise moot.

At about the same time a private group of property owners in Midtown formed a Tax Increment Revitalization Zone for their area of Main. The TIRZ is designed to freeze the tax base, then capture a percentage of the rise in tax payments beyond the base for revitalization efforts. Thus far, though, the Midtown TIRZ has resulted in little visible public improvement along the corridor. Instead, there has been construction of mostly banal apartment complexes that have done little to improve Main Street's situation.

Meanwhile, a third group of private individuals arose with the idea of combining the visionary approach of the AIA workshop and the practical considerations of those who pushed for the Midtown TIRZ. Ultimately, they formed Making Main Street Happen, Inc., a not-for-profit volunteer organization dedicated to realizing a comprehensive vision, as opposed to a series of uncoordinated plans, for this key Houston street. As part of their efforts they sought the attention of Mayor Lee Brown, who encouraged Making Main Street Happen to not just continue with their planning, but to help form a public/private coalition that might be able to implement any ideas that were generated.

The result was the Main Street Coalition, which includes those with private interests along Main as well as the City of Houston, Harris County, and, most important, Metro. Metro, with its mandate to improve transit, is an important source of potential funding for any Main Street revitalization, but only if a case can be made for transit and its attendant improvements along the corridor. Earlier this year, working closely with the Main Street Coalition, Making Main Street Happen reached back to its beginnings as a vision group and proposed a design competition for Main Street that would show what could be done along the corridor, and how transit could be a key aspect of the street's revitalization.

A request for qualifications was sent out to 25 national and international architectural firms, and in February of this year five finalists were chosen to develop a master plan for the 7.5 miles of Main running from Buffalo Bayou to the Astrodome. The competition culminated in an early summer exhibition of the finalists' proposals at the Lawndale Art Center and, in June, a juried selection of a scheme and an architect by representatives from the Main Street Coalition and a group of outside professionals. The challenge presented the five finalists was a difficult one: Provide a vision "so powerful and compelling that a public-private partnership is mandated to provide a framework for making the vision a reality."[2] Choosing a winner surely prompted the jurors, who ranged from Metro CEO Shirley A. DeLibero to *Governing Magazine*'s executive editor Alan Ehrenhalt to Making Main Street Happen's Peter Brown, to ponder age-old questions.[3] What makes a great city? What makes a great street?

The Context

In the great cities and streets debate Houston is like other places. In its quest to be "world-class" it sometimes pretends to be something it is not. Houstonians too often apologize for the city's unique combination of humidity, heat, swamp-like flatness, protective blanket of oak trees, and automobile culture. But great urban places somehow manage to weave such local factors with location, history, and culture into unique expressions of urban form. The Making Main Street Happen Competition was an opportunity to examine city-making visions in Houston's quest for greatness. At the same time, an examination of the opportunities and constraints of city-making suggests challenges that must be addressed if the organizers and the selected design team are to succeed in realizing their vision of Main Street greatness.

The Teams

With one exception, each of the competition teams was led by a well-established firm with strong urban design credentials. Among the entrants was the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill (SOM), known since the 1950s for their high-rise office towers and business parks. At a more modest scale, they developed renown for their reconstruction of State Street in Chicago and the crafting of neighborhood guidelines in Orlando. Another entrant was the Portland office of Zimmer Gunsul Frasca (ZGF), which is known for the design of their city's successful light-rail system, the model for virtually every light-rail transit system in

the U.S. The selection of Atlanta-based Cooper Carry Associates, who partnered with Stull & Lee of Boston, must have been based on their work on successful neo-traditional communities such as Mizner Place in Florida and Harbor Town in Memphis. Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn Architects of New York and Los Angeles (Eckstut) is well known for the urban design of New York's Battery Park City. More recently, the firm has specialized in the design of super-scale urban retail/entertainment centers.

All four of these firms were clearly qualified to present urban design visions utilizing normative standards of professionalism. Given these firms' maturity, the choice of TEN/SLA Studio Land (TEN) as the fifth competition finalist was curious. Enrique Norten, lead designer of the Mexico City-based TEN, is known for his rigorous contemporary and experimental architecture. He is of a newer generation of designers that is critical, if not dismissive, of normative standards of practice. His presence in the competition was a wild card.

Also surprising was the exclusion of landscape architects as competition team leaders. The vastness of the assignment, the relative emptiness of the territory, and the desire to rapidly implement ideas that change the identity of an entire sector of the city suggest the importance of starting with the landscape in the immediately available public right-of-way. The inclusion of a lead landscape architect or two would have presented the competition's judges with a wider range of possible approaches. Perhaps landscape architecture as a profession has dropped off the urban design radar screen; perhaps the organizers did not feel there were any landscape architects glamorous enough to move the hearts and actions of the decision-makers who will need to commit public dollars to Main Street improvements. In any case, the power of the urban landscape to poetically and pragmatically shape city-making in advance of development was not the primary interest of most of the architectural teams pursuing the competition's mandate for big picture architectural visioning.

The Big Ideas

One could argue that the Rome imagined by Sixtus the Fifth and the Chicago of Daniel Burnham are the bookends of a shelf of big design concepts that continue to spark the imaginations of urban designers. The sponsors of Making Main Street Happen requested big picture thinking, and the designers responded in kind. On the whole the projects suggest transformations of Main Street and its environs that would fundamentally alter familiar scenes.

SOM proposed the establishment of two huge parks acting as anchors at either end of Main Street. The first would encompass Allen's Landing. To reestablish the visibility of this location, SOM suggested removal of the Main Street Bridge (a National Register of Historic Places Monument), completely rerouting traffic and vastly expanding the existing parklands to encompass the downtown campus of the University of Houston and environs. At the south end of Main, a new regional park twice the size of Memorial Park was proposed to mark the intersection with Loop 610.

Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn likewise suggested expanded open space at Allen's Landing. Their scheme proposed a technology theme for Houston's birthplace and set within it the world's tallest observation platform and "dining experience." Eckstut also proposed clearing approximately ten blocks of land on either side of Main between Webster and Elgin streets. Eckstut suggested that this plaza's length was in part predicated on the distance it takes to stop a herd of running cows; they aptly named this space Stampede Square. They also suggested combining Hermann Park, the Texas Medical Center, and Rice University into one vast campus by closing Main from Mecom Fountain to North MacGregor and rerouting traffic to Fannin, which in this area would be renamed Main. Eckstut explained that this would expand Rice University's campus to include a great promenade along the old Main Street and create a better Main Street front door to the Texas Medical Center. At the south end of Main would be another open space named Astro Square, which would establish a major gateway to the Astrodome.

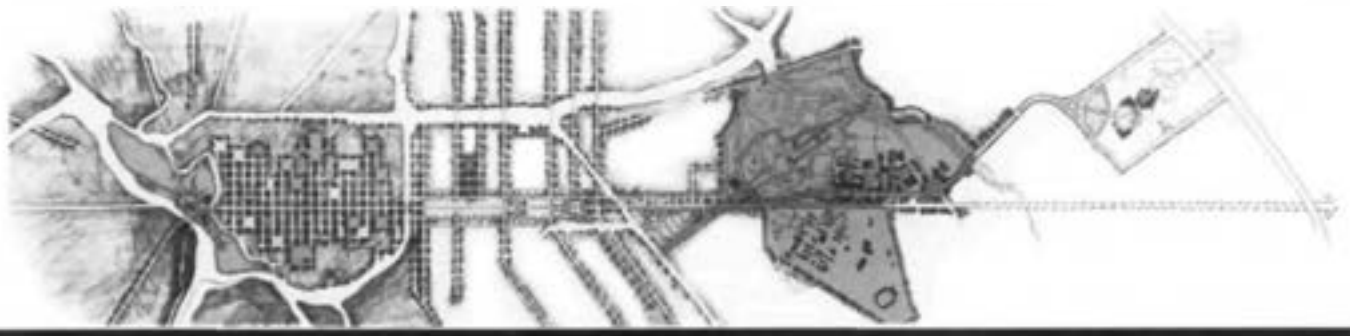
The Astrodome was also the concept focus of TEN. They proposed turning the Astrodomain into a vast multi-level pleasure park with direct access to Loop 610. Multi-story buildings full of entertainment, exhibit, hotel, and parking uses topped off by an undulating, park-like roofscape would cover the existing parking lots. The Astrodome would, in essence, be surrounded by a pleasure-filled girdle of structure and become a surreal hybrid beer garden, shopping mall, convention center, and fairground.

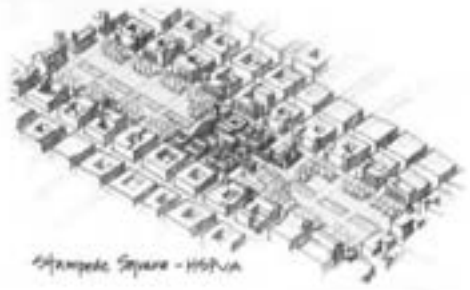
Exaggerated spectacle similarly informed the Cooper Carry scheme. Carrying the moniker "From Symphony to Texas Two-Step," these architects idea for Main concentrated on establishing the big feeling or big narrative that would organize the redevelopment of the street. From the "classic" culture of downtown to the rodeo culture of the Astrodome, Cooper Carry relied upon a carnivalesque scenario that would inspire people and organizations to gather together under the big tent of redevelopment. The specifics of what their project entailed seemed at times less important than the feel-good narrative that would convince everyone that the big something was okay.

The scheme that focused the least on establishing a script of big ideas was ZGF's proposal. Taking to heart the competition organizers' desire to understand how light-rail could be implemented, ZGF proposed a disciplined fixed-rail transit system running the length of the Main Street corridor. Unlike the other schemes, which reached out to embrace either regional scales beyond the control of the organizers or hyper-experiences that would need to become destinations of national interest to succeed, ZGF's scheme confined itself to the blocks immediately adjacent to Main — all seven-plus miles of the street. Only in the context of the other finalists' ideas could the ZGF proposal be construed as modest.

The Role of Transit

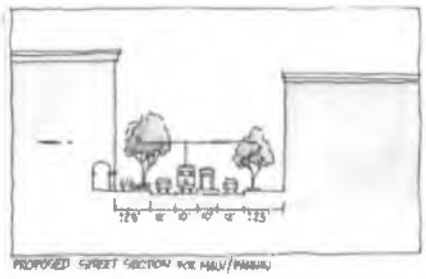
Main Street is blessed with vital destinations of regional importance such as the Astrodome, the Museum District, and, of course, downtown. People naturally imagine public transit connecting these places. While transit includes bicycles, buses, and boots (pedestrians), Making Main Street Happen is clearly more than a little curious about the potential of light rail. Three of the competition entries — those by Cooper Carry, Eckstut, and TEN — more or less accepted Main Street light rail as a mandate and then





Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn's winning proposal, which calls for creating large units of open space along Main Street. The largest of these would be a ten block long, two block wide landscaped square between Webster and Elgin streets just north of a new home for the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. The name of the space would be Stampede Square since, according to Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn, its 3,000 foot length is approximately the distance it takes to bring a herd of stampeding cows to a halt.

GATEWAYS THROUGH MIDTOWN THAT ADD TO THE LANDSCAPE OF MAIN STREET & PAULINE STREET – SIMILAR IN SPIRIT TO THE MONTROSE/HERMANN PARK FOUNTAINS



PROPOSED STREET SECTION FOR MAIN/PAULINE

RIGHT RAIL & HIGHWAY BUS SYSTEMS SHOULD BOTH BE INTRODUCED TO MAJOR BOULEVARDS. BUSES SHOULD BE INTRODUCED WHERE POSSIBLE

In their plan, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill suggested that the character of Main Street would depend on the vitality of the surrounding communities. While proposing a number of block-size parks, SOM also paid close attention to neighborhood level detail, concentrating on the physical design approaches needed to nurture existing places.

TWELVE NEW RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS IN MIDTOWN - EACH IDENTIFIED WITH ITS OWN PARK & COMMUNITY BUILDINGS. FAMILIES ARE WELCOME

moved quickly on to architectural visions. Of these three, only TEN devoted detailed, as opposed to big picture, attention to the design of a future Main Street transitway.

TEN proposed a complete street-furnishing program that could flexibly accommodate the demands of a transitway. The team challenged the standard use of historically inspired, off-the-shelf streetlights, benches, and trash cans. Instead, they proposed a futuristic panoply of computer-generated designs for these often prosaic elements. They proposed pedestrian-scale poles for residential areas, tall poles for commercially oriented locales, poles that morphed into trash cans, poles that transformed into benches then trash cans, and endless other variations. The resulting richness of Main Street's "furnishing zone" stretched the paucity of functions that these programs typically address. TEN's proposal challenges city designers to recognize that just as there are many overlapping uses along the length of a street, so there should be many ways to light a street, sit on benches, or throw away garbage. Unfortunately, this same team's neglect of actual organic elements such as shade-providing street trees undermined the subtlety of their everyday approach to making a useable sidewalk.

ZGF's take on the transit challenge included a series of dimensioned cross sections that showed how Main would change from district to district as the train passed by. These sections were based on an analysis of changing curbside conditions, width of available right-of-way, and a review of adjacent land use. In combination with their proposal to place block-square parks at each train stop, ZGF demonstrated that rail could be technically accommodated throughout the proposed transit corridor in a commodious manner.

Of all the schemes, SOM's was the only one that flirted with the possibility that rail would not be implemented on Main Street. Like ZGF, but without as much detail, they proposed that rail could ply Main, but they also pointed out that, for the same money, buses could equally and elegantly serve not just the Main Street corridor, but additional corridors as well. Extensive landscaping of these corridors, SOM pointed out, would not only make them connectors to the city's bayou system and parks, but also make them green alleys that could be designed to accommodate an entire system of rapid buses. SOM specifically pointed out the potential of running an enhanced bus system along Almeda Street as well as Main. By touching both streets with this type of investment, a more extensive wedge of the city would be served by transit, particularly those neighborhoods along the Almeda corridor that have been ignored for decades by Houston's power players. In the Making Main Street Happen competition, SOM seemed to be suggesting a smart alternative to Houston's decades-old rail debate: Use the same amount of money to improve the physical appearance and function of many boulevards and communities rather than only one.

Unfortunately, buses do not have a good image for the vast majority of middle class commuters considering public transit. For recalcitrant automobile drivers, rail is sexier than buses. Nevertheless, if one considers the relationship of dollars spent to the number of riders served, buses almost always prove to be more efficient than rail in North America's spread-out metropolises. To achieve an efficient result for enhanced buses in Houston, someone would have to step up and design a smart system that is technologically sophisticated and transcends existing perceptions. SOM hinted that such a possibility exists if one seeks to design it. An enhanced bus system for Main (as well as for inside the Loop) may yet prove to be an intelligent, feasible, and transformative direction for Houston to pursue should the current plans for light rail on Main suffer the same fate as earlier rail plans, and be discarded.

Main Street Topos

Several of the competitors' schemes attempted to directly address the uniqueness of Houston's "topos" — the character of the city's topography, climate, light, altitude, longitude, latitude, and fauna. TEN, taking advantage of the large number of vacant parcels of property that exist in Midtown, proposed the creation of a myriad of helter-skelter open spaces. The opportunistic set-aside of these mini-spaces for parks and other public uses would allow existing businesses and new projects to orient around attractive green space where there is currently nothing but empty land. In contrast to existing plans for Midtown that proposes a minimum scattering of parks,[4] TEN realizes in their design a "deconstructed" and virtually continuous open-space network that reveals a past order of abandonment yet projects a cooler future under a canopy of oak trees. If implemented, the TEN proposal would result in an intimate pedestrian-scale layering of the old and the new. Imagine North Boulevard mutating from a quiet residential street into an urbanized district seamlessly connected by surprising courtyards, alleys and mews, and you get a sense of what TEN envisions for the area around Main in Midtown. The end product could form the framework for one of the most desirable and walkable neighborhoods in Houston.

SOM also proposed the establishment of a large number of block-size parks. However, instead of relying on the circumstance of vacant parcels, SOM suggested the establishment of an open-space order based upon the mechanics and typological patterns of traditional neighborhoods. These patterns include utilization of one-quarter-mile walking radii as the basic building block of pedestrian neighborhoods and the use of traditional

architectural typologies such as front porches and sidewalk entrances to low-rise residential buildings — something the current crop of multi-unit apartments sprouting up along Main Street eschews. SOM also utilized the Houston precedent of great alleys of oak trees, linked the bayou system to neighborhoods, and acknowledged the scale of existing block-size parks in their proposals for new open spaces. SOM seemed to be asking Houstonians to recognize the wisdom of responding to, rather than fighting, Houston's climate.

Not all of the schemes handled Houston conditions with as much aplomb. For instance, the large size of the Eckstut open-space proposals, particularly the 600-foot by 3,000-foot Stampede Square, would not result in a space one would want to casually hang out in during a Houston summer. Its large expanses of paving and great length would challenge all but the hearty. Equally difficult to imagine is Eckstut's proposal for back and forth pedestrian activity between the Museum District, Rice, and the Texas Medical Center, even with the creation of a shaded green promenade where Main Street now courses. Once again, given the heat and Houstonians' lack of tolerance for traditional urban walking, this type of formal City Beautiful expression seems ill-suited for anything but visual pleasure.

ZGF also proposed a transformational greening of Main Street. However, their response to the climate was more inventive. Rejecting live oaks as the preeminent street tree, ZGF suggested instead inviting the East Texas piney forest into the city and sheltering Main with great stands of fast-growing loblolly pines. The pines would follow the linear path of the light rail, and punctuating their linearity would be fountains placed along the length of the tracks. Oncoming trains would trigger fountains of water, the spray of a cooling mist through the humid air, and the sound of bubbling jets from between the trestles as the trains approached. ZGF's scheme would not only be a unique solution for the design of station stops, but one that grew out of specific climatic conditions found in Houston. On an intimate level, the tactileness of ZGF's fountains in relationship to the light rail would almost invite one to explore Houston's long, hot summer.

In the ZGF scheme, Main Street, especially in the Midtown area, would be turned into an intricate weaving of trees, open space, and water that is primal in its recollection of an older urban forest, yet new in its unexpected use of water. It carries one's imagination beyond the more standard and literal contextual place-making tactics of the other schemes by proposing a user experience that depends upon a complex response to and interpretation of Houston landscape, air, water, and light. This type of response is subtle, poetic, and, in the best sense of the word, critical. It allows the user to understand and judge the specific quality of a place by gradually revealing and contrasting the elements of its topos. This is the type of creatively poetic response to the land that the other entrants' schemes were missing.

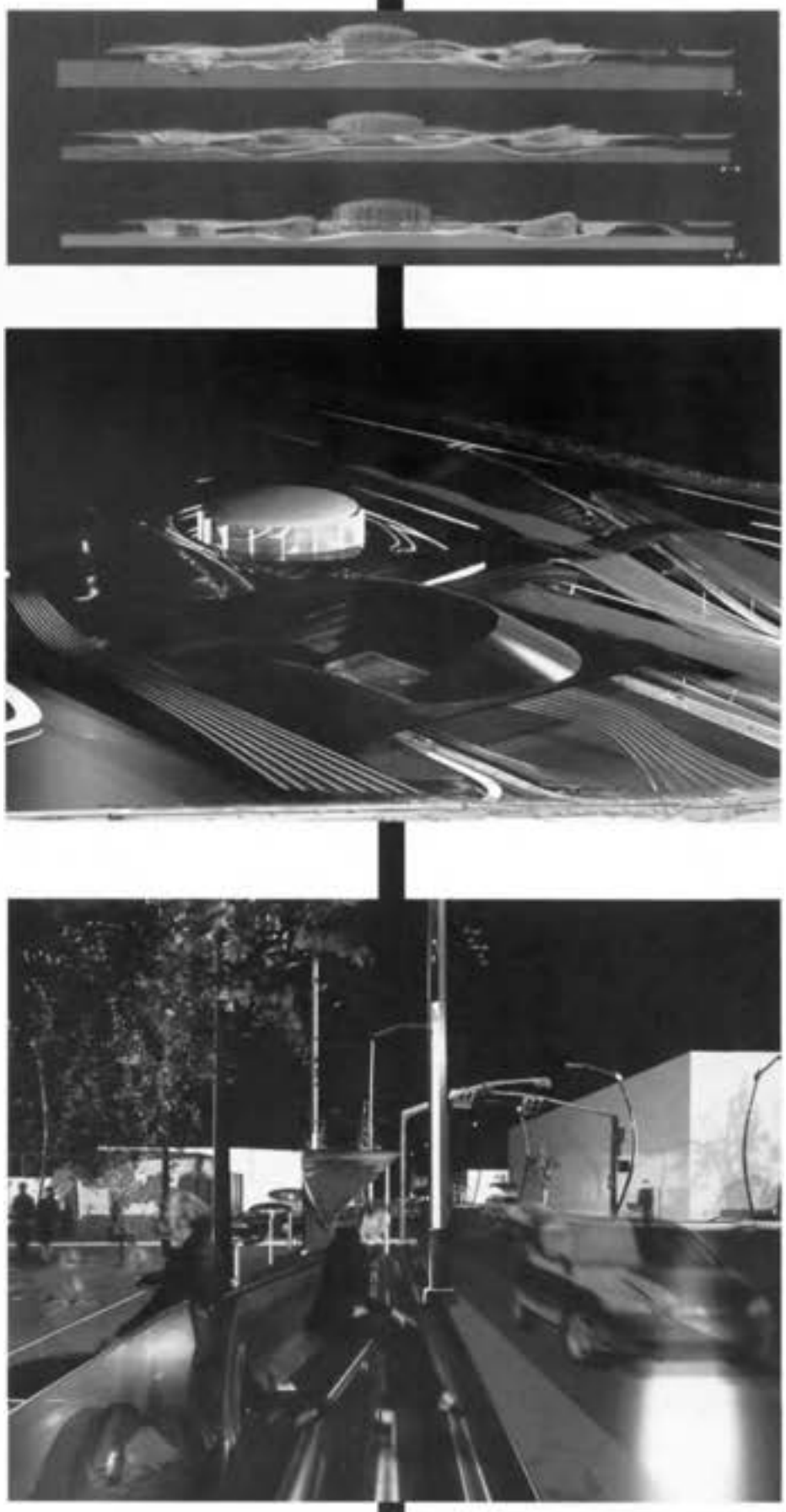
Houston Identity

If the Main Street schemes were as a whole underdeveloped with regard to poetic visions of landscape specific to the conditions of Houston, they certainly did not have the same difficulty projecting sensibilities with regard to establishing a sense of architectural identity. For example, TEN rendered a hardscape world of three-dimensional folds and complex curves that clearly symbolized the current fascination with both digital methodology and chaos theory. Particularly intriguing, if economically improbable, was their creation of a manmade topography of hills and dales that act as retention ponds at the Astrodomain. In contrast, all of the other entries relied on historic architectural precedent to either create or reinforce a sense of place.

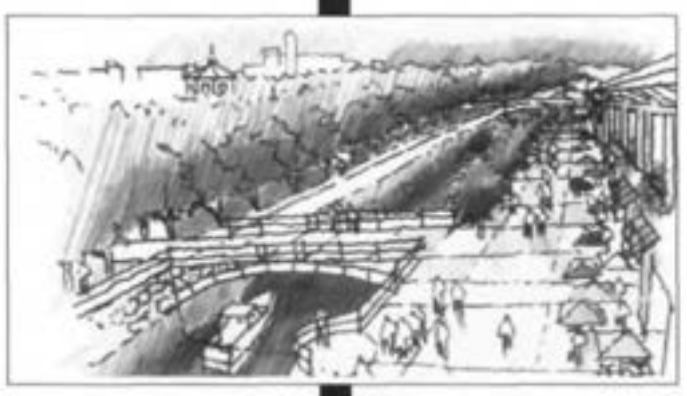
Cooper Carry and Eckstut both suggested that Main Street's identity should be formed by the themed architecture that is associated with festival marketplaces and cineplexes. Both of these firms provided an architectural framework for commodified experience as the core component of Main Street identity. For these types of experiences to work they need to be highly scripted and art directed, like operas or movies. People need to be transported in their imaginations to a real place even as they know they are in a simulated environment. To help achieve this flight of the imagination, Cooper Carry suggested that that the signs and symbols of Houston's multiculturalism inflect the standard formulas that lead themed projects to look and feel at once like every place and no place.

Eckstut went even further and clothed their entry in a rich panoply of vernacular imagery. They carefully documented old signs, favorite outdoor cafes and barbecues, scenes of oak tree-lined streets, and other Houston ephemera and collaged them into their drawings and plans. There was an attractive and clever specificity to the Eckstut proposal that spoke directly of Houston, even if that remained a veneer masking an otherwise normative 1990s development strategy.

SOM suggested that Main Street's character would depend not upon spectacular attractions arrayed like rides in a theme park, but rather on the vitality of the corridor's surrounding communities. At the neighborhood level they concentrated on the physical design tactics needed to nurture existing places and make them work for the variety of groups that already live in the area. Rather than propose a large-scale gesture such as a formal square or entertainment center as the first Making Main Street Happen project, they, with the assistance of Houston landscape architect James Burnett, suggested the improvement of



TEN/SLA Studio Land produced the competition's boldest scheme. In its computer generated images, TEN rendered a world of three-dimensional folds and complex curves, one in which Main Street would be lined with futuristic benches and streetlights. TEN also suggested turning the Astrodomain into a multi-level pleasure park filled with entertainment, exhibit, hotel, and parking uses, on top of which would sit an undulating roofscape.



Cooper Carry's proposal, above, concentrated less on specifics than on the "big feeling" or "big narrative" that would organize the redevelopment of Main. Their scheme suggested themed architecture of the sort associated with festival marketplaces, but tied in this case to signs and symbols of Houston's multiculturalism.

Elizabeth Brown Rice Park.

This neglected, though still lovely, block-square open space isn't even on Main Street, but it is surrounded by a viable neighborhood that, with care and infrastructure investment, could be the starting point for a piece-by-piece revitalization. At the core of SOM's community identity concept was the notion that improvement through neighborhood-based revitalization is just as important, if not more important, than the strategic top-down strategies suggested by all of the other entrants. SOM pointed out that it does indeed take a village, in fact many villages working together, if you want to make a character-filled, everyday city that the residents identify as their own.

A Main Street of urban spectacle surrounded by dormitory neighborhoods will fail to reach the potential envisioned by its champions. Everyday identity cannot be bought or themed or dictated. It has to grow as a culture from within. Everyday culture and identity is what draws people to all of the most enduring destinations. SOM was the only team to begin to express this essential city-making viewpoint.

And The Winner Is...

While the jury was closed to outsiders, and only the jurors know what happened behind closed doors, the selection of Eckstut's proposal as the winning one was not surprising. Of all the teams, Eckstut best met the Making Main Street Happen's mandate to provide a powerful and compelling scheme that could be implemented by a public/private partnership. The reality is that the mechanisms are not in place in Houston to tackle parcel-by-parcel, block-by-block, and street-by-street neighborhood revitalization on a large-scale basis. In any case, this was not a competition about establishing a vision suitable for ground-up revitalization. This was a competition about inventing a big idea that, if necessary, can sustain a transit component. Eckstut deeply understood this reality and addressed it.

Eckstut's scheme utilizes familiar project types that developers want to build in 1999. That is just what the competition's organizers need — a team that can jumpstart a development process with a vision that local and national financiers will clearly understand and seek as an investment opportunity. The Eckstut scheme was the best at mitigating this economic forthrightness. Eckstut's architectural imagery was both the most specific to Houston and the most reassuring. Their proposal, better than any of the other entries, demonstrated that if massive change is going to occur to Main's building environment, the end result could still be familiar to Houstonians.

In addition, Eckstut showed a subtle understanding of the means by which public dollars can be leveraged to fulfill private purposes. For example, their suggestion to place the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts between the proposed Stampede and Grackle Squares cleverly utilizes school funds to facilitate private investment. Public monies can be used to assemble and clear land in a Main Street location for a needed school facility. In addition, clearing the site of "blight" just happens to be of interest to any developer that might be induced to build a retail/entertainment venue in this area.

This type of manipulation of public monies to serve private redevelopment purposes can be castigated. There is a long history of redevelopment benefits flowing to private entities that are far in excess of the long-term benefits the public gets in return. Nevertheless, Eckstut's pragmatism is smart. It knowingly combines an understanding of space making principles with development purposes. It recognizes that combining public and private resources as opposed to government sponsored guidelines, standards, and zoning is the key to implementing partnerships that allow projects in risky locations to move forward. And Main Street, particularly Midtown, remains a risky location.

Being part of a development deal is, in fact, a powerful means for cities to actively control the shape and benefits associated with development. A strong local government can negotiate a hard bargain that results in a better designed project. Without zoning or many of the other land use controls that other cities utilize, this is probably the best means Houston has to actively shape large-scale projects. The city can always ask, how much do you want it, and how much are you willing to give me for it? Eckstut, better than most architecture and urban design firms, knows how to play this game on behalf of their clients. Their proposal inherently offered the clearest path to strategies that link capital sources to quality development deals. Perhaps the Main Street competition's organizers saw in the Eckstut scheme a vision that was at once physically big picture, diagrammatically clear, visually reassuring, and economically pragmatic. This is what the original request for qualifications called for, and the jury delivered the goods requested. Are they the right goods? Time will tell.

An Additional Opinion

What makes a great city? What makes a great street? These are the two questions that began this essay, and further reflection on them in light of the five Main Street proposals, and especially the winning scheme, suggests that the forces of a great competition project are not always the same forces that create a great street or a great city. Great cities and great streets typically happen over a long period of time. They are the result of a host of individual decisions made in the context of a strong framework of commonly shared values.

The strongest aspect of the Eckstut scheme is its vision of large open spaces

generated by association with development spectacles. Perhaps this is appropriate for Houston. However, the very economic drives that create these spectacles shift and change with each season. This year luxury movie theaters are the rage; last year it was in-town big-box retail; next year who knows? One has to fairly question those who would allow this type of economic whirlwind to be the prime motivating force for crafting a great city. One also has to remain suspicious that the overwhelming scale of Eckstut's proposed spaces will be defeated by the reality of Houston's climate. For the Eckstut design to successfully evolve, it must find a way to address the actual institutional and physical history of places along the Main Street corridor. Most important, given the large-scale condemnation and clearance required to implement the scheme, community enthusiasm may be difficult to obtain. Assuming that all of these factors are intelligently confronted, as they surely will be, what will be left of the original scheme?

Some of the other Main Street proposals seemed more accepting of Houston's climate, more adaptable to the types of economic whirlwinds that occur over time, and more fine grained in relationship to the surrounding neighborhoods. TEN literally used chance as a design device. If their results were obscurely academic, their point was well taken. Great cities and great streets are not so much willed into existence as they accrue. They result from many unpredictable social, political, and design decisions made over time. SOM implicitly accepted this point when they proposed the nurturing of existing neighborhoods as a key starting point. ZGF, by concentrating their resources on improvement along the Main Street corridor, created a framework that real estate decisions both large and small could react to in a host of ways over a long period of time. They established a flexible context where most of the blanks are filled in over time rather than by design.

All three of these schemes accepted that a great city or a great street is an open-ended endeavor where the story cannot be completely illustrated or told in advance. In contrast, the Eckstut scheme did not so much preclude surprise as script it out of existence. Eckstut told the whole story, and when it was over, like a blockbuster movie, you either liked it or did not like it, but regardless, you were ushered out of the theater. In the end, a city is not a script, nor a narrative, nor are you ushered out of the theater. In the contemporary city the citizens remain to discuss the future. They are called upon to anticipate the unanticipated over and over again. This sense of surprise and unscripted adventure is the prize captured in the stone, glass, steel, and asphalt of great contemporary cities and great contemporary streets. And it is the democratic and discursive open-ended element of surprise that is missing in the Eckstut scheme.

Adding urban surprise, unscripted adventure, and democratic uncertainty as criteria (and admittedly they were not) and retaining the request for qualification's mandates would suggest further study of the strong points of three of the five Main Street proposals. TEN's mechanics of chance are theoretically important and a wave of the very near future, even if they are as yet too unformed to merit serious consideration when real dollars are on the table. ZGF's compression of effort into the improvement of Main Street may be the best way to maximize the benefits of a rail scheme.

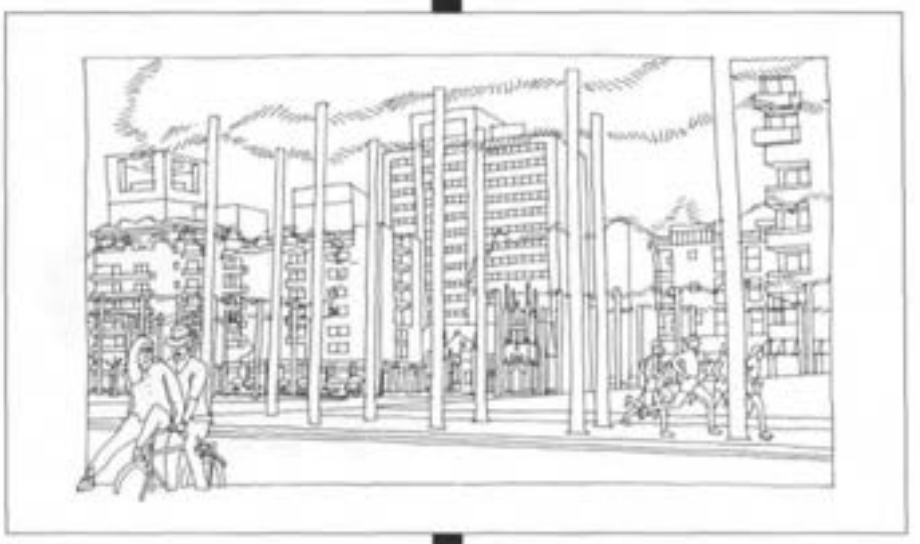
As the Main Street Coalition and Eckstut move forward, they will necessarily consider again the constructive role that neighborhoods contribute to the revitalization of Main Street. They may also need to consider the intelligence of developing a transit system that is smart and sexy and serves more than one street. They will also, in ways small and large, acknowledge the climate, land, and regional situation within which they find themselves situated. Finally, all the entities will surely need to compromise and adjust their visions to accommodate the reality of implementing overly big ideas. As these situations occur, the energy and public-minded spirit that led the Main Street Coalition to risk considerable time on the revitalization of Main will hopefully not be deterred. At these moments the neighborhood-based organizational principles, regional specificity, transit flexibility, and everydayness of the SOM entry should be recalled and acted upon. Remembering these directions, as well as the sparkle of Eckstut's urbanism of spectacle, will lead to the making of a livable community of everyday existing places, as well as a happening destination and street that all will enjoy. ■

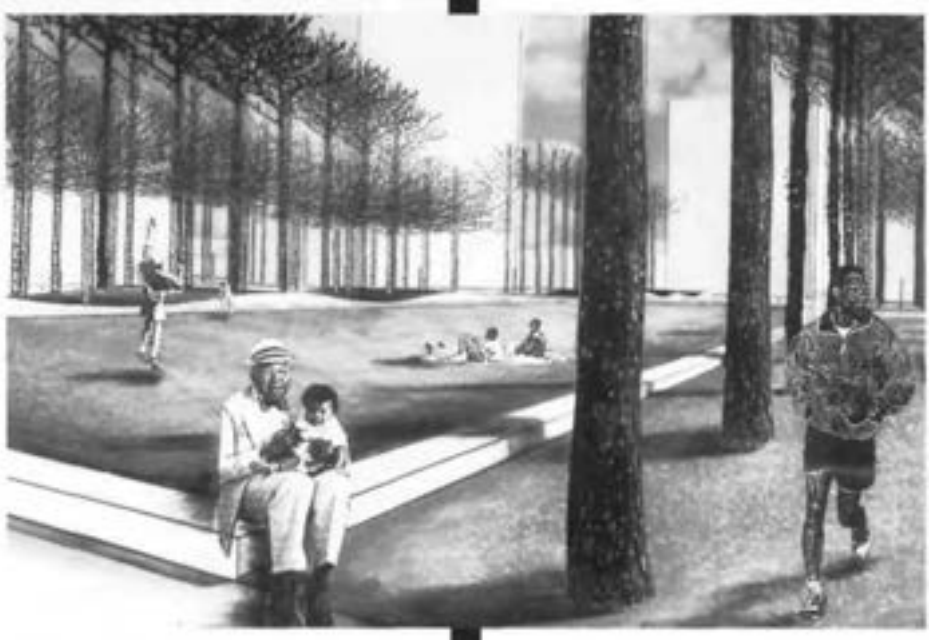
1. Gerald Moorhead, *Main Street Houston: An Urban Design Charrette and Exhibition* (American Institute of Architects et. al, Houston, 1992).

2. "Request for Qualifications: Planning and Urban Design Consulting Services," Making Main Street Happen, Inc., page 3.

3. There were a total of 11 judges for the competition, led by Jay Brodie, executive director of the Baltimore Development Corporation. The other jurors were Peter Brown of Making Main Street Happen, Inc.; Shirley DeLibero, president and CEO of Houston's Metropolitan Transit Authority; Alan Ehrenhalt, executive editor of *Governing*; Jim Hill, president of the Houston chapter of the American Institute of Architects; the Reverend William A. Lawson of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church; Bob Lanier, director of the Houston Department of Planning and Development; Art Storey, Harris County engineer and head of the county's public infrastructure department; Barron Wallace, chairman of the Midtown Redevelopment Authority; Bob Eury, president of Central Houston, Inc.; and E.D. Wulfe, chairman of the Main Street Coalition.

4. *Project Plan and Reinvestment Zone Financing Plan, Reinvestment Zone Number Two, City of Houston, Texas, Midtown* (May 1997, amended October 1997). See illustration on page 13.





More than the other competitors, Zimmer Gunsul Frasca focused on transit, including a series of cross sections (above) showing how areas of Main Steet would change as a light-rail train passed by. ZGF also suggested echoing the rail line's linearity by placing stands of loblolly pines along Main, thus bringing the East Texas forest into the city.

EXTENDED STAY LIMITED SERVICE

By Joel Warren Barna

Combined, the terms sound less than inviting. But in the 1990s, hotels of this type have become America's hotels of choice.

Over the past five years, while urban planners have focused their attention on the city's inability to get a single new convention hotel built near the George R. Brown Convention Center, a fresh building type has quietly arisen to dominate the hospitality landscape in Houston. Perhaps because it has taken place on the city's fringes rather than in its center, this change has attracted little notice. But noticed or not, the change has been dramatic, with more hotel rooms being built in Houston during the last half decade than at any period since the 1960s.

According to PKF Consulting, which does the annual hotel report for the city of Houston, 118 new hotels, accounting for more than 26,000 rooms, have been built in the Houston area since 1994. They've sprung up like mushrooms on I-10, Beltway 8, I-45, US 290, and US 59, clustering at exits and filling up available space on feeder roads. All these new hotels have been one of two types, the limited-service hotel or the extended-stay hotel. Together, these two types represent a kind of building that didn't exist before about 1990. Not that there's no precedent for this sort of lodging: limited-service hotel and extended-stay hotel are in fact explanatory terms for what would have once simply been called motels — informal lodging places with moderate room rates, limited (if any) dining facilities and public spaces, suburban locations, and easy, drive-up access.

The guest rooms of both these new hotel types are only subtly different from those built in previous decades. Limited-service hotels feature the tight bedroom-and-bathroom units that have always typified motels, with the difference that today's rooms are slightly longer in plan to accommodate a small desk with a telephone and extra phone jacks for hooking computers up to the Internet. In extended-stay hotels, on the other hand, a suite is formed by separating the bedroom from the work area, which has a small kitchen counter on one side and a small sitting room with a couch, a table and chairs, and a television on the other.

On the surface, it's a familiar motel-type arrangement. A major difference, however, stems from the changed psychological climate that surrounds travel these days: Where motels were traditionally organized around courtyards, with exterior entry to each guest room, limited-service and extended-stay hotels cluster their rooms on interior double-loaded corridors and permit entry only through one or two points, to give the guests a greater sense of security. It's part of the overall landscape of threat we all inhabit.

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With all its recent spate of construction, Houston has been a leading player in a national trend toward limited-service and extended-stay hotels. According to Professor Clinton Rappole of the University of Houston Conrad Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant management, since 1990 the only full-service hotels — those with full dining facilities, lots of public space for meetings and gatherings, big lobbies, and relatively high room rates — built have been in cities that are themselves tourist destinations, such as Orlando, San Antonio, and New York, or near the nation's theme parks.

But while new full-service hotels have been few and far between, the number of limited-stay and extended-stay hotels has exploded: In Houston, says PKF Consulting, the limited-stay and extended-stay rooms added since 1994 now account for 36 percent of the city's available hotel space. Nationwide, industry analysts report, the upsurge in limited-stay and extended-stay hotels has led to a

While downtown hotels have been few and far between, on Houston's outer edges hotel construction has boomed in the 1990s, with more than 100 extended-stay and limited-service facilities opening their doors along the city's interstates.

30 percent increase in hotel space.

It's a crowded field: hoteliers competing for the limited-stay and extended-stay customers include Southwood, La Quinta, Days Inn, Wingate, Candlewood, Marriott (with brands including Marriott Courtyard, TownePlace Suites, Residence Inn, and Springhill Suites), Drury Inn, and the French company Accor (with its six brands: Minitel, Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure, Ibis, and — surprisingly, since its ads used to mock other hotels for offering such unnecessarily expensive luxuries as French milled soap — Motel 6.)

And that crowded field can create a crowded roadside. At the intersection of I-10 and Beltway 8, five limited-stay and extended-stay properties have been built in the last two years. On a stretch of the Sam Houston Tollway, eight limited-service and extended-stay hotels can be found within a mile of each other. Nationwide, these new hotels have tended to spring up where population and employment are growing fastest, and where there has been the longest drought in hotel construction. Ergo, the growing suburban edges of Houston and other Sunbelt cities have been where they've clustered.

They cluster in other ways, as well: Marriott has started building as many as four of its properties on a single block — TownePlace Suites for extended stays, Courtyard for one-to-two-night stays, Residence Inn for longer stays at a lower price than TownePlace, and Springhill Suites, priced between TownePlace and Courtyard. Each of these hotels caters to a different type of traveler and a different price point.

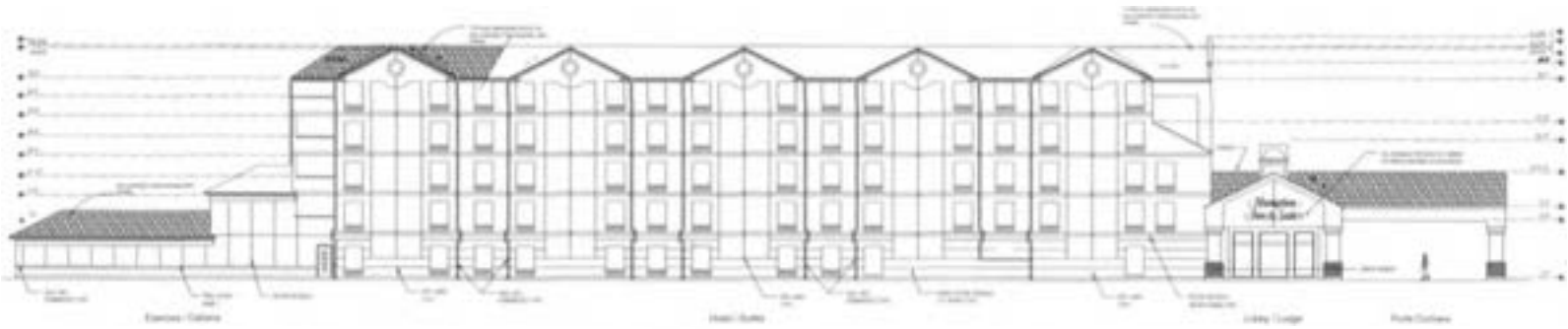
As the Marriott example shows, the limited-stay and extended-stay hotel types were born out of a move to greater and greater segmentation in the hospitality market. No longer can a single type of hotel serve vacationers, conventioneers, and all levels of business travelers. Divisions, by price and location, within each of those groups are also important. Some convention-goers want a location in the city center, while others look for nearby theme parks or industries that the hotels have clustered around. Some vacationing families want an upscale hotel, while others are squeezing budgets. Some business travelers want first-class accommodations, while the more numerous "road-warrior" salesmen, service personnel, and consultants, constantly on the road to see clients and prospects, are routed to cost-saving limited-stay and extended-stay hotel properties. The hotel industry has been sorting itself out to provide for them all, with the limited-stay and extended-stay hotels emerging as the most flexible and efficient types.

Aside from the market pressure, several other factors have led to what industry analysts routinely refer to as a frenzy of limited-stay and extended-stay hotel building since 1994. First is their low cost of construction. Says Clinton Rappole, "the rule of thumb for hotel pricing is one dollar in room rent for each $1,000 in construction cost per room." Houston architect C.C. Lee of STOA International, whose clients have included Wingate, Hampton Inn and Suites, Comfort Inn, and Days Inn, points out that while construction costs for a typical full-service hotel will run more than $100,000 per guest room, construction costs for typical limited-service hotels range from $40,000 to $50,000, while extended-stay hotels come in at around $75,000 per room. Such savings stem partly from low land prices, says Lee, but they are also related to the project type's typically lightweight construction.

Some limited-service and extended-stay hotels are built to be operated by a parent company, and those tend to be solidly constructed. Wyndham Hotel's extended-stay hotel properties, for example, have poured-in-place concrete frames. Newer La Quinta hotels have masonry walls.

But those are exceptions. Most limited-stay and extended-stay hotels are built by investors or speculators who are seeking a rapid resale. At these hotels the emphasis, with dreary predictability, is on holding down first-dollar costs by using the lightest construction methods and flimsiest finishes and fixtures allowed by the building codes. Most limited-service and extended-stay hotels are wood-framed in a style indistinguishable from apartment or tract house construction, even though they may hold more than 250 rooms and stand up to four stories tall. They are usually skinned with insulating panels and sprayed-on stucco or clapboard siding. Residential imagery and reminders of residential scale, intended to convey familiarity, friendliness, and accessibility, are important parts of the appeal of these hotels, and they make possible the use of low-cost construction and materials from typical suburban housing.

Though one might think that a little architectural distinctiveness would go a long way toward establishing an identity



in a crowded market, the emphasis on holding down costs has resulted in little thought being given to architectural amenity. Sited beside freeways and major streets and fronted by acres of parking, these buildings are almost completely divorced from the landscape and the surrounding urban fabric. Some have car-shading canopies, but most do not. There is neither the informality of a 1950s-era motel nor the stunted monumentality of a mid-rise 1970s-era feeder-road Holiday Inn. The design features that do show up tend to focus on making the hotels look as much as possible like suburban tract housing, with the sort of multiple-pitched rooflines found on recent houses throughout Sunbelt suburbs and windows clustered into readable units.

The second factor that explains the boom in limited-stay and extended-stay hotels is the efficiency of operation they offer. The lack of kitchens and dining facilities (properties that do provide breakfast for their guests typically do so in their lobbies, with service limited to a single counter for packaged foods with a coffee urn and a microwave) cuts not just construction but also operating costs. The lack of large single-purpose meeting spaces and public spaces maximizes the square footage devoted to revenue-producing guest-rooms. It is also striking to note that nearly every extended-stay and limited-stay hotel one sees features individual room air-conditioning units. Since the window units are cheaper than an equivalent amount of central-air equipment, foregoing central air saves up-front costs. The window units save in other ways, too. They are easy to service, maintain, and replace, and they lower space requirements and the expense of insulation and ductwork. Too, when guests aren't in their rooms, they are shut off, reducing power costs. Central air, on the other hand, has to work for the whole enclosed space continuously.

But perhaps the most dramatic efficiency of limited-stay and extended-stay hotel designs shows up in their employee count. According to industry figures, in 1987 the hotel industry averaged 86 employees per 100 guest rooms, while in 1998 that figure stood at 74 employees per 100 guest rooms. In a 1998 industry newsletter, analyst Bjorn Hanson of PriceWaterhouseCoopers attributed this change to "greater limited-service, employee empowerment, and technology."

According to architect C.C. Lee, the employee empowerment Hanson cites usually translates into more job duties. "Whereas in the old-style hotel, you might have one person for each job, now one person may have three jobs," Lee says. He adds that the design of the limited-service and extended-stay hotels reflect this multi-tasking environment. For example, he notes, the front desk and management office are now typically adjacent to each other and linked by a large window, meaning a single employee, sitting in the office to work on employee records, can keep an eye on the front desk and check customers in or out as they appear. Previously, the maintenance-area work room and laundry room would be located at the far end of a hotel or motel; now they, too, are located near the office, so that front-desk staff can share in the tasks performed there. Most of the extended-stay and limited-stay hotels operate with fewer maids than traditional hotels; they simply allot a greater portion of the day for cleaning up rooms, meaning that for some guests they may not be available until 3 or 4 in the afternoon, rather than before noon.

Another factor, one that's aided particularly in the growth of the extended-stay hotels, has been the burgeoning ranks of traveling salesmen, consultants, and service personnel. As the number of regularly out-of-the-office employees has increased, many companies have reduced their own office space, and begun treating it like hotels of kind, with workers who have returned for a while to their headquarters using temporary spaces that will later be used by yet other workers. In 1995 it was reported that Aetna Insurance has some 30 percent fewer office spaces than it has people to use them. Thus those extra phone jacks in extended-stay hotels. As the home office has become more like a hotel, hotels have, with very little capital investment, recreated themselves as suites of offices.

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Even such a strikingly efficient new concept as extended-stay and limited-service hotels would not have exploded so rapidly had there not been money to finance the expansion. For limited-service and extended-stay hotels in Houston and throughout the country, that money has come from Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), corporations that are sheltered from corporate income taxes as long as they invest only in commercial real estate and meet certain other tests. Though authorized under legislation first passed in 1968, until about 1992 REITs played only a limited role in commercial real estate. In 1986, Congress altered the law governing REITs to allow them to not only own property, but to manage it as well. The previous situation, in which managers could act contrary to the interests of owners, had scared off investors, and it was hoped that the change would increase commercial construction. But a national real estate recession dampened the effect of this rule change, and it wasn't until the early 1990s that things began to improve. In 1992, there were 142 REITs with $15.5 billion in market capitalization; the following year that jumped to $32 billion in market capitalization, and by May of 1999 the capital available to the 219 publicly held REITs was $145.5 billion.

Courtesy STOA Associates

Top: Elevation showing typical suburban appearance of extended-stay and limited-service hotels. Above: This floor plan makes clear how a lack of large public spaces allows for an increased number of revenue-generating guest rooms.

Much of that money flowed into the hospitality industry, particularly into its hottest sectors, the low-end (limited-service hotel) and mid-range (extended-stay hotel), which routinely generated returns ranging from 20 percent to 35 percent annually for the first four years.

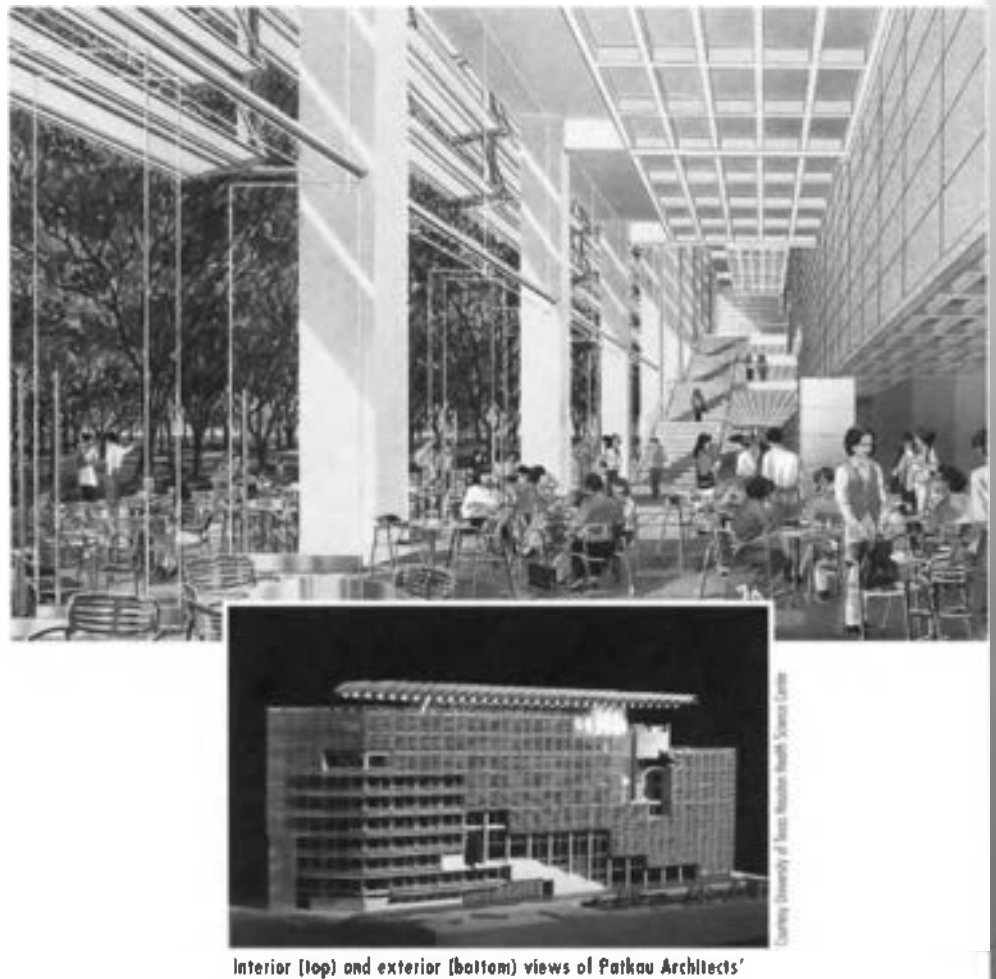
Still, for all the construction over the last half-decade, the day of the limited-service and extended-stay hotel boom may already be over. In 1997, annual returns for hotel REITs fell to 10 percent. And in 1998, the U.S. Treasury department announced proposed rule changes to curb the practice of creating "paper-clip REITs" in which ownership and management companies were joined for stock purposes, while continuing on their own as individually operated entities. Although industry analysts wrote that the rule changes would have little effect on the hotel market, it combined with fears that the limited-stay and extended-stay hotel sectors of the market had become saturated, and investors started bailing out of REITs. In 1998, the amount of money coming to REITs specializing in hotels fell from the 1997 level by 44 percent.

At the moment, what money remains for investment in hotels is being directed to full-service and luxury hotels. In Houston, the effect of this shift has already become apparent: the Whitehall Hotel, near the Hyatt Regency downtown, is to be reopened soon, and Starwood Corporation, the country's largest hotel proprietor and king of the paper-clip REITs, bought the old Ritz Carlton Hotel, refurbished it, and renamed it the Luxury Collection.

But even as the money heads elsewhere, the effect of the extended-stay and limited-service hotel frenzy of the last five years remains. Industry analysts project the average life-expectancy of the country's extended-stay and limited-service properties at 40 years — which, to anyone who has seen some going up, seems a little optimistic — while the more solidly built projects could well last longer. So as ephemeral as they look, extended-stay and limited-service hotels will probably be here for quite some time to come. ■

GETTING COMFORTABLE AT THE MEDICAL CENTER

A NEW BUILDING PROMPTS A NEW LOOK AT HOW TO KEEP COOL



Courtesy University of Texas Houston Health Science Center

Interior (top) and exterior (bottom) views of Patkau Architects' winning entry in the design competition for UT-Houston's new Nursing and Biomedical Sciences building. In the process of planning the building, issues of air conditioning have come to the fore.

By Rives T. Taylor

As an architect in Houston, I've watched the local building industry attempt to surmount the environmental conflict of constructing super-cooled and sealed masonry boxes in a semi-tropical environment. And I've also watched as we ignored better ways of accomplishing the task while dismissing the unintended consequences of the current technology. While no one debates the necessity of air conditioning, there's also no debating that these sealed buildings have a number of unfortunate characteristics: rarely do they create healthy environments; the workspace environment is never truly controlled by, much less comfortable for, those actually inhabiting the building; and the operational costs to maintain an often unpredictable and complex mechanical system are huge. Finally, the design of the full building systems often occur either in a vacuum or independently from each other.

My perspective is colored by my role as campus architect for the University of Texas Houston Health Science Center in the Texas Medical Center, a campus composed of classrooms, offices, and research labs. In the current process of designing our new Nursing and Biomedical Sciences Building, our UT-Houston team has uncovered surprising strategies for air conditioning that, like so much in our recent building history, are not really new. The Nursing and Biomedical Sciences Building, though a classroom structure, faces problems similar to those found in office buildings around the city. Among these is the fact that Houston's climate precludes the use of natural ventilation; the humidity works against using the chimney effect — the fact that hot air naturally rises — to draw cool air into the building through open vents and windows. But that truth doesn't give us license to forget that operable windows have positive effects on the inhabitants of our building. Students, faculty, or staff are happier when they can open the windows on a pleasant day to get fresh breezes and a sense of the natural movement of the outside air. More than that, we've found that operable windows have an unexpected effect on the demand for cooling. In a key discovery, we learned that when building users feel they can control their environment, they are happy to work in warmer offices.

We also learned that the standard approach to supplying dehumidified, cooled air needs to be rethought. In most office buildings, whose very design and method of construction lends itself to tenant space flexibility and ease of reorganization, cool air is supplied from ceiling grills. (Note that this is not *fresh* air, since most office buildings recirculate their air, occasionally mixing in some "fresh" outside air that has been cooled with recooled air pulled back from the office spaces.) The problem with cool air supplied from above is that it requires a mechanical system with fans to push the air through all the duct work as well as down into the habitable space. Thus the hiss and the drafts and the noise many people associate with air conditioning. Additionally, though cool air does naturally sink, when it's supplied from the ceiling it has to sink through the heated and often fouled air that's rising upward. To combat this, our designers are looking at a raised floor approach, a strategy used in older computer rooms and now finding increased acceptance in the speculative commercial realm. It is possible that a sealed floor plenum could end up letting us dispense with expensive metal ducts, while providing the cooled air at ground level, where it's closer to the building's inhabitants. The raised floor would also supply the air more slowly and quietly. Since the air grills are close to the inhabitants, they can be easily directed or turned off, once more giving the building's occupants the sense that they can control their own environment and not have to suffer through someone else's notion of what constitutes a comfortable interior climate.

While Houstonians know that dehumidification of the air brought into our buildings is as critical as the cooling of it, most assume that air conditioning simply makes that happen. Indeed, in residential mechanical units, which simply cool the air recirculating through the house and assume that outside air seeps in through a myriad of cracks, the condensation around the cooling coils is collected and drained. But larger commercial applications need to dehumidify air more quickly; outside air at much larger quantity is pulled directly into the building at a much faster rate. In these cases, dehumidification traditionally uses a method of super-cooling to cause the air to give up its water, since cold air holds less moisture than hot. Then the super-cooled air is heated up to return it to a human comfort zone.

In other cities whose climates are less tropical than Houston's, interior humidity is kept down by only bringing fresh air into a building at night or in other periods of decreased humidity. Since that doesn't work as well here, at the UT-Houston Nursing and Biomedical Sciences building we are looking to try another approach, one that uses desiccant wheels. The wheels are filled with a recyclable silicate material similar to what's found in the small desiccant packets with which most products are shipped to ensure dry storage. When a section of the wheel is placed in the intake air stream, the silicate material absorbs humidity. As the large wheel is rotated, the saturated section is removed from the air stream and then subjected to both a small drop in temperature, one that requires a much smaller amount of recirculated cooled air from the building, and a bit of gravity. The material drops its load of moisture, and then can be turned again into the air stream to pick up some more. We hope to harvest the captured water for such uses as site irrigation and, possibly, flushing commodes.

Such integrated design of all the building pieces we think gains some distinct advantages in the stewardship of both taxpayer dollars as well as energy resources, making keeping our people comfortable not only easier, but more efficient. ■

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

In praise of the vanishing garden apartment

By Nonya Grenader and Stephen Fox

Their names alone often indicated what they were about: Parklane, Parkwood, Allen Parkway Village. Before apartment complexes began to be built behind security fences on lots cleared of trees, and before the economics of construction led many developers to question the value of green space, it was common for multi-family dwellings in Houston to embrace the land on which they were sited. Dignified and congenial, these garden apartments, popular from the 1930s through the early 1960s, were advertised as being "like living in one's own home." Although their tenants may not have been able to afford a plot of land, they could afford a view. And as the apartments matured, those views were filled with a lush collage of green that was a tangible reward for living in Houston's relentless heat and humidity.

The typology of the garden apartments varied, as did the actual appearance of the apartments themselves. But whether manorial or modern style, U-shaped around a common yard or in a seemingly random placement among the trees, what these living spaces shared was an undeniable relationship with their surrounding landscape. Open to the street, their shaded courtyards or expanses of grass and ground cover served as a transition to entryways individualized by stone surrounds, glass block detailing, or distinctive metal grillwork. Individual units often had more than one orientation, and more than one view, which offered not only practical cross ventilation but a chance to enjoy ephemeral changes in light throughout the day. Apartment dwellers' claim to the vistas was further extended by picture and corner windows.

Today, apartments tend to turn inward rather than outward, and when there are large windows, the view they offer is often more streetscape than landscape. In the midst of this, what is to become of Houston's gentle machines in the garden? The Parklane is gone, as is all but a sliver of Allen Parkway Village. The Parkwood, now owned by Baylor College of Medicine, remains intact, though its future is uncertain. The Windward Court Apartment on Rosalie in Midtown, designed by distinguished architect William Ward Watkin, is vacant and deteriorating. Next to Gramercy Gables, near the museum district, is a sign that reads, "Coming soon, Museo Lofts, high-rise living with classical turn of the century architecture." If this project is realized, four of the Gramercy's seven buildings will be razed. In spite of their promising locations, or perhaps because of it, Houston's garden apartments are endangered.

Still, there are some, such as the Kirby Court and Hawthorne Street Apartments, that remain filled with appreciative residents. They coexist uneasily in a rental market more and more typified by mega-complexes such as the one presently going up on the two city blocks bounded by Binz, Hermann, Jackson, and Crawford. This complex is stacked four stories high at the sidewalk; most people will not remember that the site was once crowded with oaks and pines rather than square footage. When the apartments open, many will no doubt be attracted to their new amenities and fresh appearance. But in 50 years, will they still be looked on with affection?

In a city rapidly building its way into the next century, that's a question worth considering. It's unlikely that many of the new complexes will age as gracefully as Houston's venerable garden apartments, with their good design, quality materials, generous foliage, and serene open spaces. And it's unlikely that, if photographed in their dotage like the apartments on the following pages, they will exhibit anywhere as much charm. — *Nonya Grenader*

(The text accompanying the photos was written by Stephen Fox and Nonya Grenader.)

Bayou on the Bend Apartments

1959

5201 Memorial Drive
Anthony Luciano, architect

Here on the curve of Memorial Drive, just west of Shepherd, is one of the few places in Houston with an expanse of topography. Luciano took advantage of this to turn the apartments away from the street to face a large, rolling common area — more country club than apartment — that drops down to Buffalo Bayou. Modern touches such as the elegant steel entries, balconies, and spiral stairs offer lightly scaled transitions to the outdoor spaces. The shaded swimming pool and the cookout area, paved with tile shards, pay further tribute to Los Angeles as the ideal of Houston's modern apartment builders in the 1950s.

Gramercy Gables and Cotswold Manor

1928

4801 Montrose and
242-302 Portland Avenue
F. Stanly Piper, architect

Charles C. Bell Jr., who built Gramercy Gables (which faces Montrose) and Cotswold Manor (which faces Portland), treated the construction of apartments as urban design. He and his architect integrated the multi-building complex with Portland Street, a miniature boulevard, and adopted the manorial architectural theme already established there. They also integrated the car into the complex with a driveway through the Gramercy building and covered parking. The landscaped outdoor spaces function like exterior rooms. The buildings have individual identities, expressed through orientation, relation to the street, and entry conditions, yet are united by shared materials and design features.

Hawthorne Street Apartments

1949

1302-1310 Hawthorne Street
Wilson, Morris & Crain, architect

Talbott Wilson, S. I. Morris, B. W. Crain, and Robert W. Kurtz built the 16-unit Hawthorne Apartments under the Federal Housing Administration's 608 program as a condensed version of Wilson's and Morris' pre-war Parklane complex. Floor-through apartments, access breezeways, and generous courtyards make these true garden apartments. The U-shaped flats, two pairs of duplexes, and Wilson, Morris & Crain's former architecture studio are embraced by massive oak trees and expanses of ground cover. The brick base of the buildings' first floor changes to grayed green shakes on the second, so that the complex appears chameleon-like against the dense foliage of the trees.

Vassar Place Apartments

1965

1303 Vassar Place
Howard Barnstone & Partners, architect

Barnstone took advantage of a crescent-shaped site at the end of the esplanaded Vassar Place to configure this intricately composed ten-unit apartment complex. It contains two efficiencies, four flats, and four three-bedroom duplexes, each with a private outdoor courtyard or terrace. The complex responds sympathetically to its neighborhood setting and reinforces it, while being completely different. Crape myrtles and aspidistra mute the edges between the apartments and the street. Barnstone built and owned the Vassar Place and at times lived and worked there. He knit inside and outside, layering space so that at the rear of the property, the apartments open via courtyards and pathways to a swimming pool and shared green.

Parkwood Apartments

1949

7331 Stafforshire
William G. Farrington Company
(Raymond Brogniez, designer)

Developer-builder William G. Farrington, who began the development of Tanglewood the year the Parkwood opened, expanded the scale of this FHA 608 housing complex to 300 units spread over 30 intensively planted acres. Fifty-five two-story buildings of four or eight units each line the complex's pair of curving streets. As at the Gramercy-Cotswold, Farrington and his in-house architect Raymond Brogniez treated apartment design as urban design, although by this time (and thanks to the impact of FHA guidelines) the emphasis was becoming more and more suburban. Adhering to what had become the established Houston custom, resident parking was behind units in shared carports. In the 1959 edition of the World Book Encyclopedia, the Parkwood was used as a representative example of contemporary American housing.

Josephine Apartments

1939

1744 Bolsover Court
F. Perry Johnston, architect

The Josephine represents the transmission to a suburban location of the U-plan employed in 1920s apartment "courts" such as the Windward Court on Travis Street by William Ward Watkin of 1922. The strong-space characteristic of the U gives the building an urban presence on its corner site, as do the horizontal and vertical bands of dark brown brick, steel casement corner windows, and parapets masking the roof. In conformity with FHA guidelines, the Josephine is set back from the sidewalk so that it maintains the lawn landscape of the neighborhood. Cars are kept to the back of the site, with the parking spaces accessible from individual rear entries. The corner windows illuminate solariums, which make an indoor-outdoor connection from the apartments to the garden-like lawn. The original owners, Mamie and Charles F. Restelle, equipped the apartment with air conditioning to give the Josephine, named after their daughter, a competitive edge.

Kirby Court Apartments

1949

2403-2410 Steel Street
Robert W. Clemens & Associates, architect

The 64-unit Kirby Court Apartments, which Clemens designed for developer-builder William N. Dickey, was just one of many apartment complexes for which he was responsible. The Kirby Court Apartments occupy facing blocks that are lined with mature live oaks. The oaks form a canopy over the street, resulting in a sort of everyman's North and South boulevards. Clemens introduced an inverted U-shape into the site plan to vary the buildings' relationship to Steel Street. The site plan is carefully layered, from the brick-screened entries, to private rear gardens and second-floor access decks, to the rear parking garages.

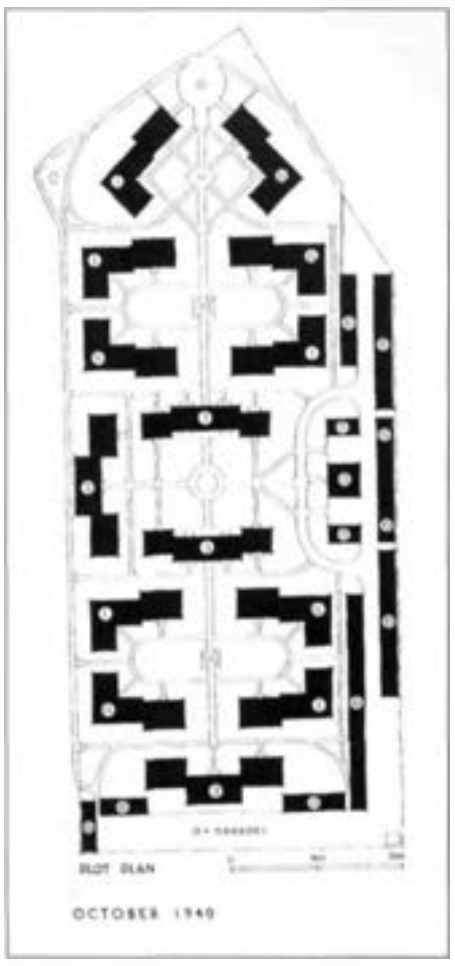
Lake Street Apartments

circa 1951

3310 Lake Street
William N. Floyd, architect

This small apartment complex, occupying a single lot on Lake Street, represents the impact of Los Angeles on the imagination of Houston apartment designers in the early 1950s. Designed by Floyd and his associates Harwood Taylor and William R. Jenkins, it was among the first of a series of apartments built in Houston in the 1950s that employed courtyards and balconies to provide units with individual outdoor spaces. Two of the four compact apartments open through walls of glass into private entry courtyards; the other two span the open carport at the rear of the site. The emphasis on private, rather than communal, outdoor space and the treatment of this space as an extension of the apartments' interiors were characteristics of Los Angeles. Burdette Keeland and, especially, the firm of Brooks & Brooks, excelled in designing similar economically planned, meticulously detailed apartments as in-fill construction. ■

The Parklane Apartments as they looked on their opening in 1940. Since demolished.



The plot plan for the Parklane, showing how the units were oriented around central courtyards.

Life in the Shade

By Terrence Doody

I felt rich the night I moved into number 907 of the Parklane Apartments. It was located at 1700 Hermann Drive, and had 140 units spread among 14 two-story structures organized around four courtyards. S. I. Morris and Talbott Wilson designed the complex in 1940 on seven-and-a-half acres that flowed into Hermann Park; at the time, Hermann Drive stopped at Jackson Avenue and the golf course had not yet been developed. Because the Parklane was built in the days before central air conditioning became common, the siting of the buildings for cross ventilation and the role of the trees in keeping things cool were very important. This was a garden apartment made for the shade.

I moved into 907 in the late spring of 1972. I had been living happily enough in another of Parklane's apartments, but 907 was different. Its living room/dining area was 35 feet long and 13 feet wide. I had been renting furniture, and what I brought with me made hardly a ripple on the surface of that room. But what may have looked empty to others felt spacious to me, and the second floor was even better. Because they extended over the arch that framed one of the entrances to a central courtyard, the bedrooms were wider than the floor below, and each had a bath. I grew up as one of seven children in a nine-room house that had a powder room on the first floor and one bathroom on the second. The morning rush hour and Saturdays when we all had plans were prodigies of scheduling. To live now in a place with more bathrooms than people was rich indeed.

My apartment looked out on a large rectangular courtyard that was itself centered on a quiet fountain and its fat fish. There were white lawn chairs everywhere; I had more places to sit outside than in. And that first night in 907, I sat out there long into the cocktail hour, feeling for a rare moment completely in place in Houston. The Parklane was made for its location and the weather. There was no pretense that we were all elsewhere.

This was the most artlessly elegant home I had ever lived in, and once, at least, I lived up to it. I had returned from a trip and found that the apartment looked disappointing, dull. I knew what was wrong, and that night ripped up the wall-to-wall carpet, a dirty mustard, short-napped, synthetic legacy of the 1950s that covered the original hardwood parquet. Over the next several months I pulled nails, filled holes, stained and buffed the wood. My idea of manual labor is usually turning the next page of a novel, but this was the happiest hard work I had ever done, because it felt like a gesture of recognition.

My other lasting memory of 907 and the Parklane also involves hard work, but of a different kind. It was the summer of 1977, and I had to finish a book by that September in order to get tenure. However, I remember the anxiety of the deadline much less than the peacefulness of working in front of the second-floor windows and watching the way the yellowy morning light turned into the hard white tin of the afternoon, which then rose back into the softness of the blue dusk. It rained every day that tropical summer. The rain cooled nothing, but it did lift the aroma of the grass and sounded, as it washed through the pines, soothing. I came to love those trees, tall old gods discussing among themselves matters over my head. The whole setting made the Houston summer not merely bearable, but pleasant. Imagine! And I finished the book on time.

The garden and its buildings are gone now, banished by development. Today, the Parklane is the name of a high-rise condominium that stands on the southeast corner of the property on about five percent of the land. The rest is razed, empty, and grown over, behind a high wire fence. What the fence keeps in and keeps out, I can't imagine. But when I drive by now, I feel like I am passing the scene of a terrible accident in which many, many lives have been lost, including some of my own. ■

The Brown Pavilion of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (below) was the last building completed to Mies van der Rohe's design. It opened in 1974, five years after Mies died.

Framing the New

Mies van der Rohe and Houston Architecture

Menil House, 1950, Philip Johnson, architect. Houston's first Miesian house established a standard for what would follow.

By Stephen Fox

The Houston architecture of Mies van der Rohe and those whom he influenced represents an attitude toward building that now seems immeasurably distant. But in the 1950s, Mies' integration of construction, architecture, and the poetics of spatial experience proved so compelling that a generation of young Houston architects committed themselves to his discipline. In a way that is not stylistically explicit, their architecture resonates with Houston history, suggesting narratives that involve such significant personages as Mies, Philip Johnson, and Dominique and John de Menil; the divergent preoccupations and motivations of Houston's Miesian architects and their clients; and competition among local modernists for cultural hegemony. When compared to Chicago or Los Angeles, where, as the British architectural historian and critic Reyner Banham noted, Miesian architecture also exerted special influence, what distinguishes Houston's "school" of Miesian architecture is this exploration of the place of history in modern life.[1]

It was John de Menil, and his wife, Dominique Schlumberger, who brought Miesian architecture to Houston, although they did not bring Mies van der Rohe. During World War II, Dominique and John de Menil became acquainted in New York with the French Dominican priest Father Marie-Alain Couturier. Father Couturier introduced them to their vocation as collectors, and through him they met modern artists. One was the sculptor Mary Callery. When asked to recommend an architect to design a house in Houston for the Menils' expanding family, Callery suggested her friend Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. James Johnson Sweeney later implied that the Menils found this suggestion a bit intimidating. Callery's second recommendation was another close friend, Philip Johnson, whose Glass House in New Canaan was

Right: Dominique de Menil and Philip Johnson in November 1949. Menil and her husband, John, introduced Miesian architecture to Houston when, in the spring of 1949, they commissioned Johnson, a Mies disciple, to design their house, the floor plan of which is seen below.

Gordon House at Braeswood, 1955, Bolton & Barnstone, architects. The Gordon House positioned Miesian architecture in Houston as a defender of modern standards and forms.

then under construction. The Menils took this suggestion to heart, and in the spring of 1949 they commissioned Johnson to design their Houston house.[2]

By the standards of Houston in 1950, the Menil House was without precedent.[3] The discipline of Johnson's mentor, Mies van der Rohe, was reflected in the house's slab-sided composition, flat roof, elongated fascia, and glass walls. The house's carefully studied proportions, apparent in the expansive, lofty feel of its interior spaces, were similarly Miesian. Johnson incorporated an internal courtyard, which Mrs. de Menil filled with lush tropical vegetation. James Johnson Sweeney later ascribed this to her "nostalgia," as he called it, for a house in Caracas in which the Menils had lived temporarily in the 1940s. As one passed through the opaque exterior plane into the house's transparent interior, the courtyard afforded a surreal contrast. This contrast induced an intense sensual and emotional reaction that the house's reticent wall planes and flat roof did not forecast.

The Menil House lacks the exquisite clarity of Johnson's Glass House and the other Miesian houses he designed in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The floor plan suggests Johnson's struggle to organize the varied spaces required by a family with five children into a one-story configuration. Remarking its "modernity" in terms of American domesticity of the 1950s, the house dispensed with a formal dining room in favor of a "play room." A three-car "carport" was incorporated in the body of the house. Perhaps for reasons of economy, the structural design of the house was not as rigorous as in Johnson's publicized early houses; the Menil House is of brick cavity wall construction. Steel beams are used to span major spaces, but the joists, decking, and fascia are wood.

Nonetheless, the architectural detailing of the house is tectonic. In the major rooms of the house, a panelized division of the wall surface was applied, particularly to the detailing of doorways. Panelization implied that the design was based on a modular planning grid, rationally and economically regulating all aspects of construction, as Mies customarily did with his buildings. At the Menil House, where no planning module is evident, this practice seems to have been followed for aesthetic reasons. Crisp, right-angled millwork makes door frames, especially those with inset transom panels, stand out, imbuing wall surfaces with a plasticity not apparent in photographs, as moldings would do in a classically detailed interior.

Compensating for the house's awkwardness in plan are its spatial serenity and amplitude. Johnson achieved these attributes with a ten-foot, six-inch ceiling height that prevails throughout the house and the big scale of glazed openings (the wood-framed sliding glass door in the living room is ten-feet, one-inch wide). Johnson also opened vistas through the house that underscore his quest for "freedom and order," the subject of a polemic he published with Peter Blake in 1948.[4]

For Johnson, freedom and order were embodied in the modern architecture of Mies van der Rohe. Johnson adopted and adapted the architecture that Mies invented with great skill. In doing so, he was bound to observe certain limits beyond which his architecture would cease to be Miesian. Johnson demonstrated the way in which young American modernists — without, perhaps, quite understanding what they were doing — formularized the visions of the masters of modern architecture into competing stylistic alternatives. Dominique and John de Menil, in their persistent curiosity and disinclination to subscribe to one formula or another, implicitly challenged this reductive approach. They seem to have been attracted to Mies' architecture because it provided spaces that were clearly defined yet liberating, authoritative yet uninsistent. For them, such architecture represented a beginning rather than an end.

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In Houston, the Menil House was unquestionably a beginning. The "school of Mies" that developed in the city by the mid-1950s stemmed from Philip Johnson and his work for the Menils. Hugo V. Neuhaus Jr., a young Houston architect who had been a classmate of Johnson's at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in the early 1940s, supervised construction of the Menil House. The impact of Johnson's Miesian modernism on Neuhaus was immediate. The house Neuhaus designed for his family in the Homewoods section of River Oaks, completed in 1951, was his refined and perfected version of the Menil House: a garden pavilion of serene, glass-walled spaces carefully adjusted to its site and made to seem luxurious because of Neuhaus' orchestration of views, day lighting, and proportion.[5]

In such details as the lattice screening of the pool house, Neuhaus made nostalgic connections to the kind of traditional screening devices he would have known from the Houston houses of his childhood. Rather than dismissing such connections, as modernists impatient with the past were inclined to do, Neuhaus made modern architecture that engaged the past. Unlike the Menil House, which was not published in the national press until 1963, the Neuhaus House secured national recognition through publication almost immediately.

Neuhaus continued to draw on the past in the small, courtyard-centered house he designed for Nina J. Cullinan in the Tall Timbers section of River Oaks in 1953. There, Neuhaus finished the exterior walls with pale pink stucco, the same material and color that Birdsall Briscoe

Architect Hugo Neuhaus finished the exterior of the Cullinan House with pale pink stucco, which John Staub and Birdsall Briscoe had used for their River Oaks houses of the 1920s.

Cullinan House, 1953, Cowell & Neuhaus, architects. Like the Menil House, the Cullinan House incorporated an internal courtyard.

and John Staub had used on their River Oaks houses of the 1920s. With exquisite delicacy, Neuhaus used the most rigorous of modern architectural alternatives to evoke personal memories and resonances. The proposition that Neuhaus ventured with the Cullinan house — that modernism could engage history dialectically — expanded upon the eclectic scheme of furnishing pursued by the Menils, who to the displeasure of Philip Johnson had filled their house with a mixture of European antiques and upholstered pieces designed not by Johnson or another modernist, but by the flamboyant couturier Charles James. The resulting combination of shapes and textures was unusual in the context of postwar American modernism, which tended toward all-modern furnishings for modern houses.

It was through association with Neuhaus' modern yet subtly nuanced houses as much as with the Menil House that Miesian architecture acquired the identity it would assume in Houston in the 1950s as the patrician style of modernism. This class-specific terminology is not how Neuhaus or the Menils would have described such architecture. Yet it is how the architect Howard Barnstone, at least in retrospect, characterized it. Barnstone and his partner, Preston M. Bolton, became the most publicized young architects in Houston during the 1950s on the basis of their flat-roofed, slab-sided, glass-walled houses in the Mies-Johnson style. Their first important house, the Gerald S. Gordon House in Braeswood of 1955, was steel-framed. Its interiors were designed by the Knoll Planning Unit and its landscape by the San Francisco landscape architect Thomas D. Church. Barnstone, however, maintained that the Gordon House was as Eamesian as it was Miesian. Analysis reveals the extent to which Barnstone Miesianized the Eames Case Study House in his spatial organization of the Gordon House. The Gordon House formalized and stabilized the Eames' whimsy, positioning Miesian architecture in Houston as a defender of standards and forms, albeit modern forms.

As an architecture instructor at the University of Houston, Barnstone exercised persuasive influence on his students, several of whom had become colleagues by the mid-1950s. Burdette Keeland, an early UH alumnus, produced his first steel-framed Miesian buildings at the same time Bolton & Barnstone did. What is intriguing about Keeland's architectural career is the extent to which his tectonically and spatially rigorous buildings were integrated into the mainstream building economy of 1950s Houston.

Keeland collaborated with Harwood Taylor on the photographic studio and apartments built for Fred Winchell on Richmond Avenue in 1954. The site was

Above: University of St. Thomas, 1958, Philip Johnson, architect. In his master plan for St. Thomas, seen at left, Johnson looked not only to Mies, but to Thomas Jefferson.

Jones Hall, University of St. Thomas, provided a perfect backdrop against which to display art.

a former residential lot on what had become a busy street. Keeland and Taylor used steel frame construction to create a pair of cages — one two stories high, the other a pavilion — separated by a gridded garden designed by the landscape architects Bishop & Walker. What seems so remarkable about the photographic studio, which for 30 years was the interior designer Sally Walsh's house, is its generosity of scale and sense of calm. Keeland manipulated planar walls, big openings, controlled views, and the admission of natural light to compose an unusually serene space within the armature of the structural frame.

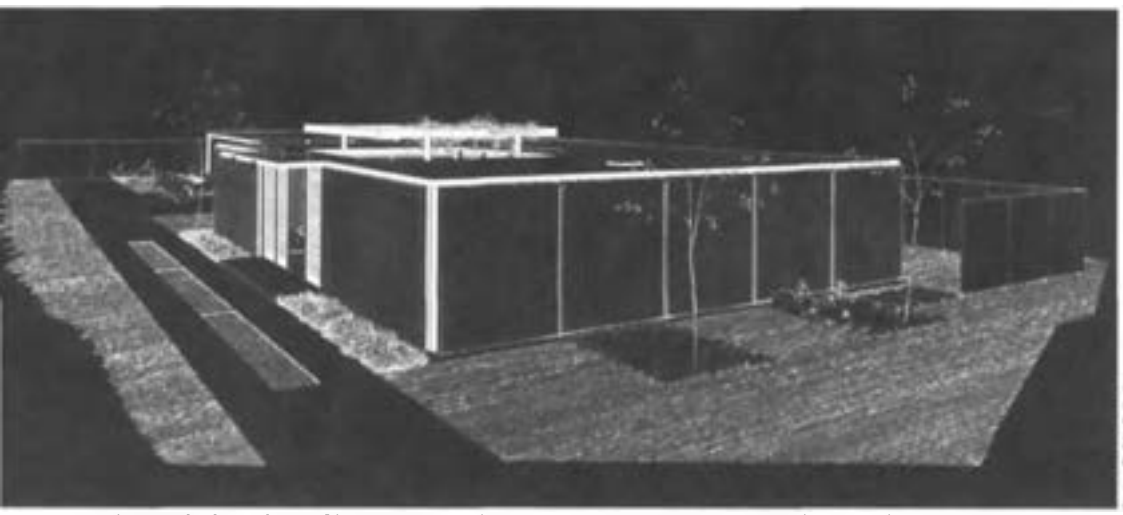
For the Houston Home Builders Association's 1955 Parade of Homes in the subdivision of Meyerland, Keeland designed a steel-framed Miesian courtyard house for the builder Buck King. The Parade of Homes House was Houston's nearest equivalent to the steel framed houses that the Eameses, Pierre Koenig, and former Texan Craig Ellwood built in Los Angeles as part of *Arts & Architecture* magazine's Case Study program. Keeland condensed the courtyard plan into a compact, but not confining, interior organization. The complete exposure of the house's steel frame structure and insulated panel roof deck, and its use of hard red paving brick (associated with Caudill Rowlett Scott rather than with Johnson), gave it a tectonic character that was rigorous, yet appropriate to a domestic setting. The tectonic detailing of the house was so refined — the drywall panels appear to be set in individual frames — that the exposure of construction is not abrasive. The integration of the courtyard into patterns of use meant that it functioned as the center of the house rather than as a sealed landscape installation viewed from within.

Keeland's Spring Branch Savings & Loan Association Building of 1956, designed with Clyde Jackson, brought the authority of Miesian architecture to the Long Point Road suburban strip. Through Keeland's buildings, Miesian architecture began to address the suburbanizing city as well as Houston's elite residential suburbs. By the end of the 1950s, the influence of Mies was visible at the City of Houston's Garden Villas Park Recreation Center of 1959 by William R. Jenkins, a UH alumnus; the South Park National Bank complex of 1960 on Martin Luther King by Kenneth Bentsen, also a UH alumnus; and the Willowbend Medical Clinic of 1961 by Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson.

The prestige of Miesian architecture in Houston was confirmed by two important projects. The first came in 1956, when Mr. and Mrs. de Menil prevailed upon Houston's newest college, the University of St. Thomas, a small Roman Catholic liberal arts school, to retain Philip Johnson to prepare a master plan for its new campus on a three-block site in Montrose. It was typical of John de Menil's largesse and enthusiasm that he proposed to pay Philip Johnson's fees for the master plan and the design of the first building to be built. John de Menil assured the university's somewhat apprehensive trustees that Johnson worked fast, could build cheaply, and was not dogmatic. He also emphasized an argument advanced by Father Couturier: the Catholic church had once called on the greatest architects and artists to carry out its building programs, and it must continue to do so in the 20th century. That meant embracing modernism, because the greatest artists and architects of the 20th century were modernists.[6]

When the University of St. Thomas' first two buildings, Strake and Jones Hall, were published in the American architectural press in 1959, they seemed to confirm Johnson's role as Mies' primary American interpreter, although Johnson himself drew attention to an unexpected historical reference implicit in the master plan: Thomas Jefferson's master plan for the University of Virginia of 1817, where walkways connect a series pavilions lining a central lawn. Johnson described the walkways as analogous to a monastic cloister enframing a space of community. "Formal" was the word that Johnson chose to characterize this space, a word that in the 1950s was most often used in modernist discourse as a term of opprobrium.[7]

Johnson's descriptive terminology encoded layers of reaction to the modern architectural scene of the late 1950s in the U.S. Comparing his master plan to the most famous university campus plan carried out in Texas in the 1950s — at



Burdette Keeland's rendering of his 1955 Parade of Homes House, showing the use of steel framing and paving brick. The house was so popular, Keeland notes wryly, that seven years passed before he was offered another commission to do a residence.

The compact layout of the Parade of Homes house makes clear the efficient use of space in a Miesian design.

Trinity University in San Antonio — clarifies Johnson's polemical use of "formal." Trinity, designed by O'Neil Ford of San Antonio with the planner Sam B. Zisman and the San Francisco modernist William W. Wurster, was anti-formalist. Its buildings were organized with respect to its sloping site rather than to enframe space. As at St. Thomas, the architecture of Trinity's buildings was constituted by their construction. But instead of emphasizing the structural frame, Ford and his collaborators emphasized the horizontally aligned concrete floor and roof slabs, recessing the structural columns so that the buildings appeared to float above their site. The double-level system of walkways used in the dormitory group at Trinity was made independent of the buildings, so that the walkways too appeared floating rather than grounded as at St. Thomas.

At St. Thomas, Johnson employed Mies' architectural approach as an urbanizing architecture. He used it to shape a sequence of clearly demarcated outdoor spaces and to sympathetically relate a new institutional complex to its setting, a neighborhood of substantial 1910-era houses set on landscaped lots. Following Mies' example, Johnson emphasized the integration of structure into architecture, in contrast to Ford's deliberate exposure at Trinity of the process of construction.[8]

In stylistically undemonstrative ways, Johnson explored at the University of St. Thomas the problematic relation of history and modernity. Dominique and John de Menil also pursued this exploration when, in 1959, they arranged for Jermayne MacAgy to become head of St. Thomas' art department. In the second-floor gallery of Jones Hall, as well as with occasional installations in the double-volume space of Johnson's third campus building, Welder Hall (now floored over), MacAgy repeatedly challenged the stability of categorical definitions and conventional expectations in order to entice Houstonians to engage works of art. In the context of such exploration, the virtue of Johnson's Miesian architecture was its autonomy. It achieved its fulfillment in framing human activities rather than in trying to compete with them.[9]

The second project to confirm the prestige of Miesian architecture in Houston proved even more momentous than the University of St. Thomas. This was the master plan for completing the Museum of Fine Arts, which was produced by Mies van der Rohe in 1954. Hugo Neuhaus' client, Nina Cullinan, presented the museum with funds to build a new gallery for traveling exhibitions. Cullinan required the museum to commission an architect of international stature to design the addition as part of a master plan. The museum's ad-hoc building committee — whose members included Neuhaus, Preston Bolton, and Anderson Todd, a young architecture instructor at Rice — recommended Mies.

The first phase of Mies' master plan, Cullinan Hall, opened in October 1958. It was an awesome demonstration of the rigor of his architecture. What it also exhibited, although it was accomplished in such an undemonstrative way that Mies made it seem almost commonsensical, was an abiding regard for maintaining continuity between the new and the existing. Mies' addition extended the original museum building's plan geometry and patterns of circulation, architecturally engaging the history-modernity dialectic with exceptional subtlety and precision.[10]

Mies also incorporated an extraordinary, spiritually moving spatial experience in the 30-foot high, glass-walled interior of Cullinan Hall. With Cullinan Hall, Mies revealed to Houstonians that modernism was not simply an exercise in rejecting the past or imposing obvious systems of constructional and visual order. Rather, it was about creating spaces of discovery with simple means yet profound imagination. Cullinan Hall radically externalized the ideal space of the art museum, which was no longer represented as a temple of art but as an art agora.

As had happened with Philip Johnson and the Menil House, the connections Mies made while working for the Museum of Fine Arts extended his influence in Houston. The effect of working with Mies on Cullinan Hall transformed Anderson Todd into a Miesian architect of exceptional rigor and poetic skill, as the house he completed for his family in 1961 demonstrates. David Haid, a young Canadian architect who worked on Cullinan Hall in Mies' office, came to Houston in 1960 and for two years was a design associate of Hugo Neuhaus', working on such projects as the Letzerich Ranch House near Friendswood and the McAllen State Bank Building in McAllen of 1961.

By the early 1960s, the Miesian modernism that Dominique and John de Menil and Philip Johnson had introduced in 1950 emerged as the representational style of modern Houston. Downtown's first high-modern skyscraper, the First City National Bank Building of 1960, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, projected its Miesian frame 32 stories above Main Street alongside a 30-foot-high glass-and-aluminum pavilion. The 33-story Tenneco Building of 1963, by Charles Edward Bassett of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, affirmed in even more rigorous and monumental terms the prestige of Mies' architecture.

The modern architecture of Mies van der Rohe as it was interpreted by Philip Johnson, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and Houston's cohort of young Miesian architects represented a protest against the suburbanizing impulse that its advocates saw embodied in Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture and other modern trends current in the early 1950s. Yet as most of the Houston Miesian buildings demonstrate, they too were implicated in this trend. Suburbanization was the dominant theme of American — and Houstonian — city development in the 1950s. No single modern architectural tendency, nor all of them combined, was capable of arresting what was a pervasive phenomenon. This is what makes the University of St. Thomas so intriguing as a demonstration of a potential Miesian urbanism. Johnson's university campus fit its neighborhood context; it was not totalizing. Preston Bolton's most important project, 5000 Longmont Drive of 1961, is another example of Mies' urban potential. A street of courtyard houses that shapes urban space, its likeness to Mexican urbanism seems to have encouraged the decoration of facades with framed openings in place of the tectonic rigor and spatial subtlety with which Johnson shaped space at St. Thomas.

The suburbanizing imperative is evident in the vicissitudes of Miesian architecture in Houston in the 1960s. Harwood Taylor and his partner, J. Victor Neuhaus III (Hugo Neuhaus' cousin), developed a more formally assertive architecture out of Miesian design for their early 1960s office buildings in the West Alabama and Richmond Avenue corridors. Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson and George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce derived the pavilion organization of their own offices from Miesian architecture.

These buildings did not explore the full range of tectonic and spatial attributes of Miesian architecture. Since the language of architectural detail that modulated and lent resonance to Houston's Miesian buildings of the 1950s derived from tectonics, the result of this diminution was buildings and spaces that seemed bland, or were decorated with materials and shapes meant to add "warmth" and interest. Because of the increasing pervasiveness of systems of pre-engineered building components, curtain walls, partition systems, and ceiling and lighting grids could be ordered from catalogues. As a result, the kind of individual design that Keeland and Taylor had produced for the Winchell Studio became the exclusive province of such firms as Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, whose top-of-the-market clients were willing to pay a

Todd House, 1994, Anderson Todd and Iris G. Todd, architects. The Todd House is evidence that Mies van der Rohe's influence continues to be felt in Houston.

premium for prestige design.

During the 1960s some Houston architectural firms continued to adhere to Mies' discipline. Anderson Todd's firm, Todd Tackett Lacy, produced such refined buildings as the City of Houston Fire Station 59 on South Post Oak in 1969. Todd's Suit House of 1970 near Rice University is another variation of the courtyard house. Its planar wall engages the curvature of the street in a subtle play, spatializing the curve. Hugo Neuhaus and his partner during the 1960s, Magruder Wingfield Jr., produced such intense designs as the Rice Hotel Laundry near the Houston Ship Channel and a courtyard house in River Oaks for Mr. and Mrs. Louis Letzerich that, like Anderson Todd's Suit House, is an intelligent model for a compact but spacious feeling urban house. Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson's partners were responsible for a series of steel framed demonstration houses off Stella Link and one of Houston's most notable Miesian buildings, the pavilion of the Bank of Houston on Main Street of 1967.

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The last building to be completed to Mies van der Rohe's design was the Brown Pavilion of the Museum of Fine Arts, which opened in 1974, five years after Mies' death. By the time of its completion, 20 years after Mies had proposed it, the Brown Pavilion seemed out of step, especially given the postmodern critique of modernism then in the ascendant.[11] But 25 years after the Brown Pavilion's completion, it is its virtues that stand out. The rigor of the steel-and-glass construction of the principal exhibition hall, Upper Brown Gallery, its amazing spatial breadth, and the urbanistic responsiveness of Mies' design to the curvature of Bissonnet Avenue, which the Brown Pavilion faces, seem so obvious that the effort required to integrate these attributes into a single design remains inconspicuous. Mies achieved classic precision in his treatment of the Brown Pavilion's surfaces, but it is the sense of spatial liberation that the Upper Brown Gallery contains, rather than its architectural surfaces, that is the addition's most important characteristic.

The extraordinary identification of Miesian architecture with exalted spaces and ingenious tectonics reappeared with Renzo Piano's Menil Collection museum of 1987. Reyner Banham praised the Menil Collection museum, in part, because he saw it as being in the tradition of the Case Study houses in Los Angeles. One need not go as far afield as Los Angeles to see that Piano also paid tribute to the Menil House in his design. The museum's interior proportions, its courtyards, and its elegant linearity are even more fully appreciated when one understands how embedded they are in the vision of modern architecture and culture that took shape at the Menil House.

Architectural reflections of the University of St. Thomas and Mies' additions to the Museum of Fine Arts can also be sensed in Piano's use of encircling ambulatories and exposed steel framing. Like Hugo Neuhaus' early houses, Piano's rigorous architecture contains echoes that resonate with the architectural inclinations of Dominique and John de Menil. The Menils remained true not to a Miesian style, but to the essential experiences that Johnson's Miesian architecture of the 1950s embodied. In the Menil Collection, Piano reincarnated those essential experiences because they were profoundly relevant to building a public art museum in contemporary Houston. Piano, Mrs. de Menil, Walter Hopps, and Paul Winkler achieved in this building what it seems so difficult to achieve in American architecture, implicated as it is in a cycle of fashion that insists on novelty and change: They developed and clarified an idea with which Mrs. de Menil had become involved 40 years earlier.

The same can be observed of Anderson Todd and of the small courtyard house in Southampton that he and his wife and partner, Iris G. Todd, completed in 1994.[12] Anderson Todd insists that the house's architecture does not represent a Miesian style, but a Miesian practice. This involves an exploration of limits in planning and construction, one embedded in the use of a planning module and vertical dimensions based on standardized material lengths. The purpose of this exploration is to achieve a sensation of the illimitable by challenging material limits with the rigorous, inventive resolution of problems of design and building. In this respect, the Todd House reveals what is most compelling about Mies van der Rohe's modern architecture, and about 20th-century modern architecture in general when it is practiced with conviction and imagination.

Miesian architecture in Houston represents more than a local chapter in the dissemination of modern architecture in the U.S. By virtue of its association with certain personalities and settings, it acquired strong local connotations. It was the patrician style of modernism, which appealed because of its composure, containment, and restraint. In its effort to formalize and stabilize, Miesian architecture in Houston was positioned as a conservative antidote to the spatial dissolution of the suburbanizing city. Yet it concealed a surreal experience of spatial liberation that charged it with an energy that its architectural elements did not expressively portray.

The implicit urbanism of the University of St. Thomas seems to lead to the surreal urbanism of the Menil Collection neighborhood; the Mexican-Miesian urbanism of Preston Bolton's 5000 Longmont suggested the possibility of strong-form, modern urban space based on the courtyard house typology. The attributes of Houston's Miesian buildings — their serenity, amplitude, and what Anderson Todd describes as their "generosity" — represent a set of values that were not characteristic of what Houston was becoming but what it might be. These paradoxical associations culminate in Miesian architecture's dialectical engagement with history, suggesting that Miesian architecture functioned as a critical inversion of mainstream Houston, spatializing a forum for staging alternative presents where value was not restricted to financial calculation and where speculation involved the imagination. It framed the new as offering the possibility of a transformation in awareness and sensibility. ■

1. Mark A. Hewitt, "Neoclassicism and Modern Architecture — Houston Style," *Cite*, Fall 1984, 12-15, and Reyner Banham, "In the Neighborhood of Art," *Art in America* 75 (June 1987), 126-127.

2. James Johnson Sweeney, "Collectors' Home: In the John de Menils' House a Great Ranging Art Collection," *Vogue* 147 (April 1, 1966), 184-191. Frank D. Welch will document Johnson's contribution to Houston's Miesian movement in his forthcoming book *Philip Johnson and Texas*, to be published by the University of Texas Press.

3. Kathleen Blood, "Glass House Builder Expands on Ideas," *Houston Post*, January 11, 1950.

4. Peter Blake and Philip C. Johnson, "Architectural Freedom and Order," *Magazine of Art*, 41 (October 1948) 228-231: "Architects like Mies van der Rohe believe that they are coming close to creating an objective architecture — a large-scale unhampered environment, whose orderly spaciousness is full of the air and the open freedom necessary for human development."

5. "Roman House," *House + Home* 2 (July 1952) 68-73. The text of the article implicitly contrasted Neuhaus' house to spatial arrangements associated with the contemporary ranch houses, stating, "This house does not ramble, for Neuhaus felt that large rambling plans could easily dissipate themselves in formless confusion." It is intriguing to note that the article ends by observing, "While the special needs and problems of this plan called for a very special solution, architect Neuhaus has demonstrated one way of merging the entirely modern esthetic developed by men like Mies van der Rohe, with the classical formality that gave the Roman house its characteristic elegance. This successful blend of modernity with tradition gives his house a sense of style that has been lacking in much modern work in the past."

6. Report on Meeting of Building Committee with Mr. and Mrs. de Menil, typescript, 20 July 1956, University of St. Thomas Archives.

7. "First Units in the Fabric of a Closed Campus," *Architectural Record*, 126 (September 1959) 180. What went without saying because it was so evident at the time was Johnson's dependence on Mies' buildings at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, especially Alumni Memorial Hall (1946). The University of St. Thomas campus design was Johnson's last undiluted example of Miesian design.

8. Kevin Alter performed a comparative analysis of Ford's and Johnson's architectural articulation of construction in his paper "O'Neil Ford at Trinity University," delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians, Houston, April 16, 1999.

9. "Two Ways of Looking at Art in Houston: I. The Museum of Fine Arts; II. The Gallery of Fine Arts, University of St. Thomas," *Interiors*, 123 (November 1963), 92-98.

10. Celeste Marie Adams, "The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: An Architectural History, 1924-1986," *Bulletin of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*, 15 (nos. 1 and 2), 1992, 66-96.

11. Peter C. Papademetriou, "Varied Reflections in Houston," *Progressive Architecture*, 56 (March 1975), 52-57. When *Progressive Architecture* published Papademetriou's comparative critique of the Brown Pavilion and the Contemporary Arts Museum, the editors treated the article as though it were exclusively about the CAM building, evidence of how passe Mies seemed in the mid-1970s.

12. Frank Welch, "At Home with Anderson Todd," *Cite* 34, Spring 1996, 48-49.

IN THE NEW WORLD

Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico *edited by Edward R. Burian, foreword by Ricardo Legorreta. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. 220 pp., illus., $19.95.*

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

Fascinated with the rich and distinctive architecture documented in such classic books as Esther Born's *The New Architecture in Mexico* (1937), I. E. Myers' *Mexico's Modern Architecture* (1952), and Max Cetto's *Architecture in Mexico* (1961), architect and Texas A&M instructor Edward R. Burian edited this collection of eight essays and one interview to critically examine the development of modern architecture in Mexico during the first half of the 20th century.

Burian uses the interview, a dialogue with contemporary historian and theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez, as his book's introductory chapter. It might better have served as its concluding entry. The placement of the interview highlights one of *Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico*'s major shortcomings: the apparently random sequencing of its essays. The order in which the essays are arranged confuses rather than clarifies a broad perspective on Mexican modernism, especially for readers with no prior exposure to the topic.

One misses an essay contextualizing the career of Luis Barragán, the architect now regarded as Mexico's greatest, because it might have more sharply illuminated the cultural politics of early and mid-century Mexico City, something that needs to be made explicit for non-Mexican readers. "Mexican" modern architecture is Mexico City modern architecture; the capital totally dominated representations of Mexican modernism, marginalizing the country's two other large cities, Guadalajara and Monterrey. From the late 1920s on, architectural culture in the capital was dominated by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the political party that produced the public officials who commissioned the most important building projects. Barragán was tainted with political, religious, and personal attributes that consigned him to the margins of Mexico City's official architectural culture. His career occurred outside the arena of state patronage, and the distinctive style he developed in the late 1940s emphasized introversion, intimacy, and discovery, in contrast to the boldly exclamatory work of officially favored architects.

One of *Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico*'s highlights is Celia Ester Arredondo Zambrano's essay on the planning and construction of the Ciudad Universitaria in Mexico City between 1950 and 1952, which concisely explicates the PRI ideology — the creation of a "new man," fully modern and fully Mexican — as translated into architecture. Similarly, William J.R. Curtis condenses these issues in his masterful analysis of the spatiality and materiality of architect Enrique del Moral's house (which is across the street from Barragán's Mexico City home). And Antonio E. Méndez-Vigatá's overview of the modern scene in the first half of the 20th century explicitly links shifts of emphasis and style to the administration of successive Mexican presidents and their cultural arbiters.

Similarly noteworthy are Burian's essay on the professional trajectory of Mexico's first important modernist, architect and painter Juan O'Gorman, and Alberto Kalach's essay on the Estadio Olímpico at the Ciudad Universitaria. These pieces, like those of Zambrano, Curtis, and Méndez-Vigatá, historically contextualize the architects and building projects they examine. Less successful in this regard are Carlos G. Mijares Bracho's essay on interwar architect Carlos Obregón Santicilia, Antonio Toca Fernández's examination of the work of interwar architect Jean Segura, and Louise Noelle Merles' look at PRI favorite and leading postwar modernist Mario Pani.

Even though the title of Burian's book promises more than the essays deliver, *Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico* constitutes a welcome series of texts. It challenges the insularity of American architectural historiography and provides an English language forum for presentations by Mexican, U.S., and European historians, critics, and architects. And it insists on the relevance of a body of extraordinary 20th-century architecture that, thanks to Burian, may once again have the chance to become known and critically appraised in the U.S.

Guerrero Viejo *by Elena Poniatowska and Richard Payne. Anchorage Press, 1998. 100 pp., illus., $45.*

Reviewed by David Theis

In the early 1950s, the U.S. and Mexican governments decided to undertake the massive Falcón Dam project on the Rio Grande (or Rio Bravo, as the river is known in Mexico). The dam would benefit nearly everyone in the area, controlling flooding and bringing power and tourism to the Rio Grande Valley. The only apparent downside was that the small Mexican town of Guerrero would be flooded and destroyed by the new lake. But the loss was considered a reasonable price to pay — for everyone who didn't live there.

Founded in 1750 (as Revilla) by settlers forging northward out of central Mexico, Guerrero was a beautiful example of Mexican city planning and architecture. In the early 19th century it became a prosperous outpost of civilization and, in its carved stone buildings, of simple refinement. Bypassed by railroads late in the 1800s, Guerrero's star faded. But it remained an elegant and much loved town, one full of history and life.

All that apparently ended with the construction of the dam.

It was to document both what had happened at Guerrero, and what remains of the town, that Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska and Texan photographer Richard Payne collaborated on *Guerrero Viejo* (literally "Old Guerrero," to distinguish it from Nueva Ciudad Guerrero, a new town built by the Mexican government to which the residents of the old town of Guerrero were relocated in 1953). The general consensus for what would happen to the old town was voiced by Doctor Rubén Flores, a prominent citizen quoted by Poniatowska. "Within ten years," Flores said, "Guerrero Viejo will be nothing more than a pile of stones."

He wasn't quite right. Guerrero Viejo wasn't completely drowned; instead, depending on the rains, the lake waters come and go, and at times much of the ruined city is on dry land. Despite being relocated, a handful of the town's citizens returned to live there. As a result, Guerrero Viejo has held onto a kind of life, or has at least entered into an afterlife.

Both Poniatowska's text and Payne's photographs capture the otherworldly aspect of Guerrero Viejo's remains. These include a field of bleached white rocks that presumably were the building blocks of houses. Now the rocks make a kind of boneyard. In language reminiscent of the great (if largely unknown in the U.S.) Mexican writer Juan Rulfo, Poniatowska writes, "Stone the memory, stone the hunger, stone the destiny, and stone the end [of Guerrero]."

Payne's photographs capture a cemetery, now overgrown with shrubbery and cactus, as well as signs of what used to be life: workspaces, including kitchens and a saddle shop, and the tenderly carved stones of the houses that remain upright. In a way, the town that Payne's pictures record looks like any other ghost town. But as Payne notes in an introduction, Guerrero Viejo has this difference; it didn't die a natural death, but was murdered. And it's the knowledge that "a crime was committed" that haunts Payne's photos.

As evocative as *Guerrero Viejo* often is, if you don't bring some prior knowledge of Guerrero's history, and of the recent efforts to preserve its remains, the book might finally be a bit obscure. Poniatowska is a talented writer, but her work here is somewhat in the tradition of Latin American magical realism. That can be fine if you don't need more basic information about Guerrero. But for those who do, another, more prosaic essay that better explained the preservation efforts would have been welcome. As, for that matter, a map would have been.

New and Notable: *Houston Architectural Guide, Second Edition* (AIA/Houston and Herring Design, $20), by Stephen Fox, text, and Gerald Moorhead, photos. It's been nearly a decade since the first edition of this book appeared, and years since a copy could be found in area bookstores. For those who have searched in vain for this useful guidebook, the second edition — which has some 200 more entries than the first — should be a godsend. The neighborhood-tour organization of the first edition is maintained, and a special section on buildings lost to demolition, as well as a list of buildings on the National Register of Historic Places and the Texas Historical Register, has been added.

Texas Houses Built by the Book (Texas A&M University Press, $39.95), by Margaret Culbertson. This examination of mid-19th century to early 20th century Texas homes based on designs published in magazines, books, and catalogues of the era began almost two decades ago as a simple research project, then blossomed into this. Readers got an early glimpse of the book's contents in an article that Culbertson, a longtime *Cite* contributor, wrote in 1990 for *Cite* 24. ■

BOOM Then and Now

By William F. Stern

The last boom left Houston with memorable architecture. Can the current boom do the same?

New apartments in Houston's Midtown.

More than 20 years ago, in a pair of articles appearing in successive Sunday editions of the *New York Times*, architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable discovered Houston during its 1970s boom with a mixture of awe and admiration. In her first article, entitled "Deep in the Heart of Nowhere," Huxtable marveled at the energy of the city, describing it as the "place that scholars flock to for the purpose of seeing what modern civilization has wrought."[1] Houston was indeed making the most of its booming economy, a city on the move, a place of limitless possibilities. Gaining attention as a freeway city, a space city, a strip city, and a speculator city, Huxtable wrote, "it is being dissected by architects and urban historians as a case study in new forms and functions. It even requires a new definition of urbanity."[2]

Huxtable commented effusively on the new architecture that the city was building. Registering admiration for Houston's recent modern architecture, she singled out the Tenneco Building and One Shell Plaza, both designed by Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill; the Mies van der Rohe additions to the Museum of Fine Arts; the Alley Theater by Ulrich Franzen; the Contemporary Arts Museum by Gunnar Birkerts; and Philip Johnson's "delicate Miesan arcade at St. Thomas University."[3] In her second article, focusing attention on the recently completed twin towers of Pennzoil Place, she wrote, "New York architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee have completed one the best big buildings in the country not in New York, but in Houston. That is not surprising. Houston is the place where money, power and patronage are coming together in a city of singular excitement and significance for the 1970s."[4]

There were other notable works of architecture during this expansive period of building: Republic Bank and the striking Transco Tower, both products of the collaboration between Gerald D. Hines Interests and Johnson-Burgee; Cesar Pelli's twin high-rise condominiums, Four-Leaf Towers; Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill's Allied Bank Building and First International Bank Building. The ambitious standard set by prominent national firms also encouraged some of the best work of Houston architects, including S.I. Morris Associates' addition to the downtown public library and their 1981 First City Tower and Lloyd Jones Brewer & Associates' sleek downtown tower at Four Allen Center, now occupied by Enron. This memorable era of building culminated with the 1987 opening of the Menil Collection designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, a building commissioned by Dominique de Menil, Houston's foremost patron of art and architecture. Not only was the city advancing its reputation as a mecca for architecture, it also put forth a bold plan to redress mobility problems, passing a 1 percent sales tax to fund a transportation plan that was ultimately to be directed at making the most advanced rail system in the country.

Huxtable had found Houston in the midst of a sustained and extraordinarily productive period of growth that would terminate abruptly just a little more than a decade after her 1976 visit. But the boom of the 1970s and early 1980s would secure a place for Houston as an emerging American city, the golden buckle in the Sunbelt or, as Kirkpatrick Sale described it in his 1975 book *Power Shift*, the logical choice for the capital of the country's southern rim.[5]

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What would Ada Louise Huxtable think a generation later in the midst of the '90s boom? Has the city lived up to its anticipated promise? The answer is mixed, and with some notable exceptions, the building quality of the '90s boom has been unremarkable, producing nothing like the consistent array of exceptional buildings that captured the imagination of architects and planners from around the country just 20 years ago.

If the boom of the '70s was good for individual works of architecture, the present seems more heavily invested in city building and planning, particularly downtown, which has been dramatically transformed from a moribund nine-to-five business center into one of Houston's trendiest places to live. Neglected older commercial structures have been reborn as loft-apartment buildings, most prominent among these the Rice Hotel. Not only have the loft conversions brought new residents to downtown, but buildings that might otherwise have been demolished have been preserved. The best new project downtown is the redevelopment of the Albert Thomas Convention Center into an entertainment emporium called Bayou Place. Credit the architects, Gensler of Houston, for encouraging the developer, the Cordish Company of Baltimore, to abandon an early interior mall proposal in favor of a plan that directs restaurants and theaters to the surrounding sidewalks and streets. This intelligent plan, coupled with a well-conceived design, results in a truly urbane building that brings day and night activity to Houston's performing arts district.

But just a few blocks south of downtown, in the area known as Midtown, the news is less encouraging. There, a publicly sanctioned tax reinvestment program has spawned a multitude of housing developments, many of which are modeled after the suburban apartment complexes found on Houston's peripheries. Lacking any sense of place making, the housing blocks by and large look temporary, with slapped together garage structures abutting equally thin looking apartment buildings featuring rows of individual air conditioning units aligned along the sidewalks — surely, a middle class urban ghetto in the making. City Council, which had a hand in approving and monitoring the plan for this Tax Investment Refinancing Zone, should have more strongly questioned the Midtown plan and insisted on a higher standard of urban development in what is essentially the front door to downtown Houston. Surprisingly, not a single developer of large scale apartment buildings here, or in other inner-city locations, has offered an alternative model to what are clearly stamped out buildings seemingly designed once and repeated often.

On the east side of downtown one can hardly miss the steel trusses flying over what will be Houston's new ballpark. The Ballpark at Union Station, now called Enron Field, all but replaces Houston's famed Astrodome. Aside from the questions of whether or not the downtown stadium is needed, one would have hoped that this "Millennium" structure would evoke a similar spirit of imagination as the 1965 Astrodome. Except for a massive retractable roof, the design by HOK Sport lacks the adventuresome thinking that marked the making of the Astrodome a generation ago, when the projected image of Houston was the city of the future. In place of the future, HOK Sport has presented Houston with the past in the form of a fashionable "neo-traditional" design that plays on a nostalgic turn-of-the-century theme, adapting their recent, successful schemes for other cities, including Baltimore's Camden Yards and Coors Field in Denver. But Houston is not Baltimore or Denver, nor is its core fabric 19th century. Unfortunately, there was never a chance for something else. HOK Sport was the only firm seriously considered by the Houston Sports Authority, and while their track record was convincing, other more progressive architects should have been interviewed. It is doubtful that Enron Field will have any particular distinction except for its size, or be anything more than one of many new baseball stadiums throughout the country.

Elsewhere, Houston's historic neighborhoods, its earliest suburbs, are reeling from uncontrolled, dense housing development. Referred to by their developers as "affordable," these three-story townhouse developments are marketed and sold to individuals in the wealthy middle- to upper-income brackets and are only inexpensive in their construction costs, not in their sales cost. Overnight whole neighborhoods have been scarred by rows and rows of "townhomes" with repetitive building designs multiplied

block after block, regardless of location or adjacencies. Built virtually lot line to lot line, few of the 1990s townhouse developments have utilized open space as a way of mediating between higher and lower densities to form property separation, or as a way of providing the neighborhood with a usable landscaped street zone. Recently, the city's Department of Planning and Development responded to some of the most egregious problems arising from these developments by amending the city's 1982 development ordinance, requiring garage setbacks, a density cap of 27 units per acre and, best of all, a mechanism that would allow neighborhoods on a block-by-block basis to petition Council for a prevailing front-yard setback, thereby preserving the all-important green space facing streets. These kind of planning guidelines sound a bit like zoning in the making, and indeed this sort of incremental planning has elements of what was proposed and defeated in the city's zoning referendum of 1993. The defeat of the zoning referendum was a watershed event in Houston's recent history, and while it was not the perfect ordinance, its passage would have put in place a cohesive structure for dealing with planning issues rather than the ad-hoc mechanisms that must be relied upon today.

The housing picture in 1990s is not a total loss. The so-called tin houses, frame houses with galvanized metal siding, concentrated in the West End neighborhood north of Memorial Drive represent a housing typology that is unique to Houston, and has been recognized as such in the national press. Likewise, a number of innovative houses designed by talented Houston architects have been built in a variety of economic ranges, and the architecture schools at Rice University and the University of Houston have developed design-build studios for exploring the real potential for true affordable housing.

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The best building and planning in Houston has more often than not come from the commitment of individuals or groups who have held a wide, optimistic view of the city's potential and a belief in the city as the source for its future. This kind of patronage is represented in the preserved neighborhood and buildings of the Menil enclave, the successive additions to the Museum of Fine Arts, and the stunning high-rise structures that Ada Louise Huxtable wrote about. That tradition of patronage is being carried on in two remarkable urban projects, one well underway — the restoration of Hermann Park — and one in its infancy — the grand proposal for the redevelopment of Main Street from downtown to the Astrodome. These projects exemplify a cooperative approach to Houston's future development and planning, providing models that others might adapt. In the early 1990s a concerned group of citizens joined in the formation of the Friends of Hermann Park with the intention of restoring this neglected inner-city park. The Olin Partnership, a prominent Philadelphia landscape architectural firm, developed a complete master plan for the park, proposing a number of project areas that are now being implemented with funding provided privately through individuals or foundations and publicly through the City of Houston.

The non-profit group Making Main Street Happen, Inc. recently announced the winner of its invited competition for a "vision" plan of Main Street from downtown to the Astrodome (see "The Main Idea," page 12). The group that organized the competition is made up of a coalition of concerned citizens who believe that Main Street has the potential of really becoming Houston's "main" street, and just in time, given the changes occurring on either side of Main Street in downtown, Midtown, and beyond. Moreover, Mayor Lee Brown is determined to implement the first leg of a long awaited light rail public transit system in Houston, running along the Main Street corridor. The challenge to the winning team, Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn Architects of Los Angeles, and the sponsoring group, Making Main Street Happen, will be to work with an array of public agencies, including Metro and the Texas Department of Transportation, developers, property owners, and business owners to bring about a cohesive plan and guidelines that will produce over time what is hoped to become Houston's most celebrated street.

In some ways Houston has grown up a bit, becoming like many people more conservative in adulthood than in youth. The fluidity and gutsiness that Ada Louise Huxtable admired a generation ago is not necessarily a thing of the past, but for now the vision is too often architecturally normative or copied. Unlike the last boom, when a high standard of architecture was set through individual buildings, this boom has been characterized by a filling in, with developments built on the scale of larger urban models. However, the architecture that completes these schemes need not always be drab or lacking in imagination. And given the galloping pace of development, there is now a greater urgency to redress the patterns of lackluster design. The Hermann Park master plan, Bayou Place downtown, and the Main Street plan can be beacons pointing the way to a new kind of Houston development that is both urbane and architecturally inspired. If Houston is to regain its position as the city of architecture and America's city of the future, there must once again be the kind of commitment that promotes visionary building. The city's emerging desire to create its future in urban terms will only achieve real success if its architecture embodies the kind of ambition it once had. ■

1. Ada Louise Huxtable, *Kicked a Building Lately?* Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., page 143. Reprinted from an article in the *New York Times*, February 15, 1976
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, page 147.
4. Ibid, page 67, reprinted from an article in the *New York Times*, February 22, 1976.
5. Kirkpatrick Sale, *Power Shift*, Random House, 1975.

Main Street early in the century, when it was downtown's main artery, and its premier address.

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