THE ARCHITECTURE
and DESIGN REVIEW
OF HOUSTON

Cite

SPIRITUAL SPACES

THE CHURCHES OF GARY CUNNINGHAM + SACRED ART + DEATH AND DESIGN + HERMANN PARK + S.I. MORRIS

43 : Winter 1999 $5.00

Notes on Contributors

Lynn M. Herbert is curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston.

Paul Hester is an architectural photographer living in Fayetteville, Texas, and a longtime contributor to *Cite*. *The Elusive City*, an exhibit of his photographs of Houston, was recently shown at The Menil Collection.

Barbara Koerble is an art historian, journalist, contributing editor of *Texas Architect*, and director of historic preservation for the Fairmount Association in Fort Worth.

J. Pittman McGehee, an Episcopal priest and Jungian analyst in Houston, lectures and writes extensively on psychology and religion.

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

Barrie Scardino was formerly managing editor of *Cite*. She now lives in New York, where she is completing *Clayton's Galveston*, which will be published this fall by Texas A&M University Press.

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

Paula J. Webb is author of the novel *Domestic Life*. She organizes and teaches writing workshops through the Writers Collaborative.

Jim Zook is a Houston-based writer and a contributing editor for *Metropolis*.

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance

43: Winter 1999

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Overcite: In the article "Houston's Drive-In Apartments" in *Cite* 38, it was incorrectly stated that the Deerwood Apartments were designed by Kaufman Meeks + Partners. Instead, the apartments were designed by the Houston firm Wallace Garcia. *Cite* regrets the error.

Cover: Interior of Prince of Peace, Plano, Texas. Cunningham Architects, 1992.

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Cite

Sanctuary of Houston's Second Baptist Church, designed for television broadcast.

CALENDAR

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

SPRING LECTURE SERIES
PORTUGAL: FOUR ARCHITECTS

March 10 through April 7
Brown Auditorium,
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
713.527.4876

Modern Portuguese architecture has entered the international forefront through the presence of Alvaro Siza. This lecture series both features Siza's work and introduces the work of three other emerging architects to present a cross section of recent Portuguese architecture.

Wednesday, March 10, 8 p.m.
ROBERT LEVIT on the work of Alvaro Siza. Levit is a professor in the college of architecture, University of Michigan Ann Arbor. He has worked in Alvaro Siza's office and is organizing an exhibition on contemporary Portuguese architecture.

Wednesday, March 24, 8 p.m.
JOAO LUIS CARRILHO DA GRAÇA, principal, Joao Luis Carrilho Da Graça, Arquitecto, discusses his work.

Wednesday, March 31, 8 p.m.
NUNO AND JOSÉ MATEUS, principals, ARX PORTUGAL, discuss their work.

Wednesday, April 7, 8 p.m.
EDUARDO SOUTO DE MOURA, principal, Souto Moura — Arquitectos, Lda., discusses his work.

FIRESIDE CHAT

Chapter 42, Planning the Inner City: Density, Setbacks, and Open Space
Tuesday, February 16, 7:30 p.m.
Jones Hall,
University of Saint Thomas.
713.527.4876
RDA will present an informal discussion of the proposed revision of Houston's Chapter 42 development ordinance.

CINEMARCHITECTURE: SATURDAY MATINEES

February 6 and 13
Eleanor and Frank Freed Auditorium,
Glassell School of Art.
713.639.7531

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Rice Design Alliance present free Saturday matinees of films focusing on contemporary architects and architecture.

Saturday, February 6, 3 p.m.
A Vision Built: Zaha Hadid, directed by Boris Penth (Germany, 1994, 45 minutes, subtitled). The quirky style of Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid and her influences from Russian Suprematism are traced.

Also ***In Search of Clarity: Gwathmey Siegel,*** directed by Murray Grigor (USA, 1995, 45 minutes). The rise and international reputation of the modernist architectural firm of Gwathmey Siegel is examined.

Saturday, February 13, 3 p.m.
Peter Eisenman: Making Architecture Move, directed by Michael Blackwood (USA and Germany, 1995, 56 minutes). American architect Peter Eisenman speaks about his work.

Also ***Charlety: un stade dans la ville (A Stadium in the City),*** directed by Oliver Horn (France, 1996, 26 minutes, subtitled), which follows the father/son team of architects who designed the 20,000 seat stadium near the Porte Gentilly in southern Paris; and ***Nemausus 1 — Une HLM des Années 80 (Public Housing for the '80s),*** directed by Stan Neumann and Richard Copans (France, 1995, 26 minutes, subtitled), which looks at the development of 114 public housing units in the city of Nimes by Jean Nouvel.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE ANNUAL ARCHITECTURE LECTURE AND TOUR

After Mies: Modern Houses in Houston
Thursday, April 22, 8 p.m.,
Jones Hall,
University of Saint Thomas.
713.527.4876
In conjunction with the RDA's 1999 Architecture Tour, architectural historian Stephen Fox will lecture on modern houses in Houston that were inspired by the work of Mies van der Rohe.

Modern Houses Tour
Saturday, April 24, and Sunday, April 25
713.527.4876.
The RDA's 1999 members-only architecture tour will focus on six houses that reflect the influence that Mies van der Rohe had on the style of modern houses built in Houston between 1950 and 1960. The tour will feature the following houses (memberships will be available on the tour, and include a complimentary ticket):

• 3363 San Felipe, Menil house (1950), Philip C. Johnson Associates, architects;
• 1955 Richmond, Fred Winchell Photography Studio (1955), Burdette Keeland Jr. and Harwood Taylor, architects;
• 5146 Jackwood, Parade of Homes house (1955), Burdette Keeland Jr., architect;
• 1638 Banks, Ralph Anderson Jr. house (1960), Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson, architects;
• 1932 Bolsover, Todd house (1994), Anderson Todd, architect.

HOUSTON TALKS: DEANS' LECTURE SERIES

Atrium,
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture,
University of Houston
713.527.4876

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

Tuesday, March 30, 7:30 p.m.
Austrian architect Wolf D. Prix, principal of Coop Himmelb(l)au.

ROOM: AN INSTALLATION OF WORKS BY LARS LERUP AND SOHELA FAROKHI

The Menil Collection
713.525.9400
March 18, 7 p.m., opening reception.
March 19, show opens.

RICE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES

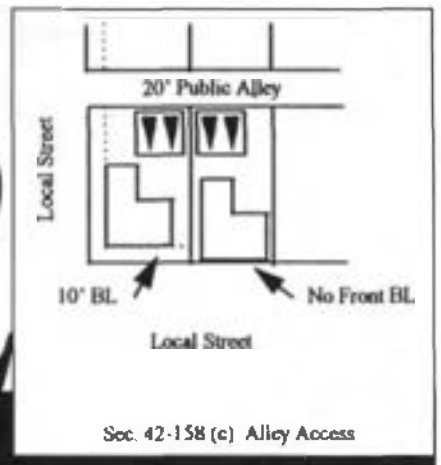
713.527.4803, ext. 122; www.rice.edu/ses.
Courses of interest to architects and individuals who appreciate architecture.

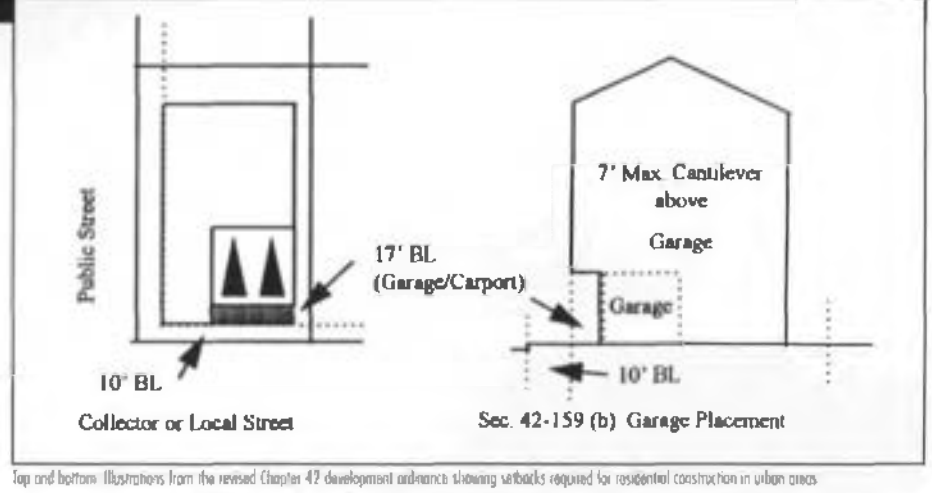
The Future of Planet Earth: Cause for Alarm or Reason for Hope?
Wednesdays, February 17
through May 12, 7 to 8:30 p.m.
Fee: $135
Rice University architects, engineers, sociologists, philosophers, and others will share their views on human interaction with the environment.

Introduction to AutoCAD for Designers
Mondays and Wednesdays, March 1
through 24, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Fee: $395
This hands-on short course will introduce professionals to the fundamentals of computer-aided design (CAD) technology.

A Sense of Place: Historic Houston Neighborhoods
Mondays, April 6 through May 18,
7:30 to 9 p.m.
Fee: $79
Learn how the neighborhoods that comprise Houston's heart were created.

REVISING CHAPTER 42





Top and bottom: Illustrations from the revised Chapter 42 development ordinance showing setbacks required for residential construction in urban areas

AFTER THREE YEARS OF WORK, HOUSTON READIES A NEW DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

BY MITCHELL J. SHIELDS

In late February or early March, almost three years to the month after discussion of it began, a revision of Chapter 42 of Houston's Code of Ordinances is expected to go before City Council. If the ordinance, known popularly as the development ordinance, is rejected, then the city will return to square one in its attempt to take control of much of the burgeoning construction within Loop 610. But if, as almost everyone anticipates, the ordinance is passed, then a new set of rules will be established that will help control the look of the city well into the next century.

Despite the critical importance of Chapter 42, the debate over what it will include has garnered surprisingly little attention. Aside from members of the development community and neighborhood activists, few people have paid it much notice. Still, the involvement of those groups has served to extend discussion of the ordinance well beyond the time it was originally thought it would be completed. Though City Planning Director Robert Litke says there was never an actual schedule for finishing the new Chapter 42, when the initial plans for revision were announced in May 1996, it was also suggested that a new development ordinance would be in place by that year's end.

That it wasn't is evidence both of just how much updating there was to be done, and the intensity of the feelings of those involved. As Gail Ramsey, who as chairperson of the Neartown Association's Chapter 42 Task Force spearheaded much of the neighborhood involvement in the revision process, has noted, how people felt about Chapter 42 was generally a direct reflection of how they felt about the city in which they lived. Did they want Houston to retain much of its present character, or did they want it to look brand new?

Though the revised Chapter 42 is filled with a variety of regulations controlling everything from the submission of plats to street layouts, perhaps the most important thing it does is divide the city into two zones, one suburban — which includes most of what is outside of Loop 610 — and one urban, consisting of everything within Loop 610, as well as certain pockets of development outside 610. As basic as this would be in most cities, in Houston admitting that one size doesn't necessarily fit all is close to revolutionary. The purpose of this change, planning director Litke says, was to make development within Loop 610 easier by lifting certain restrictions that made sense in a suburban context, but not an urban one. As a result, few of the changes in Chapter 42 affect suburban development, while the majority would have an impact on Houston's urban core.

Another revelation to arise from the revision of Chapter 42 was the growing power of Houston's neighborhood groups. In its earliest form, the revised development ordinance was seen by many neighborhood activists as too developer-friendly — not surprising, perhaps, in a city that has a long history of being cordial to developers. But a coalition of neighborhood organizations managed to push through changes to make the ordinance more amenable to individual homeowners. For one of the first times in the city's history, neighborhoods went toe to toe with developers and, if they didn't exactly score a complete victory, neither did they suffer a complete defeat. For the most part, they held their own.

The result is an ordinance that, while still having problems, is one that many observers seem to feel is a step in the right direction. Among the crucial things the ordinance would do are:

• Set residential setbacks in the urban area at the existing ten feet, with a caveat for a 17 foot setback for garages and carports in order to prevent sidewalks from being blocked by parked cars. However, a five foot setback line would be allowed if a development, such as a series of townhouses, has rear vehicular access, a separate common parking area, or a shared driveway with garage doors perpendicular to the street. Commercial setbacks on major thoroughfares less than 80 feet wide have been altered to allow for as little as zero setback if parking is provided behind or to the side of a structure. This, Litke says, is an attempt to rid the city of the sea of parking lots that face many major urban streets and replace them with storefronts that would allow for window shopping and enhance foot traffic. A process has also been established to allow a block by block setback that depends on prevailing established building lines. For instance, where a prevailing 20 to 25 foot setback exists on a block face, the property owners could petition City Council to fix that as the legal setback, thus allowing neighborhoods to maintain the character of their street fronts. This has been one of the more contentious parts of the Chapter 42 revision, with neighborhood groups objecting that the process required to protect their block faces is too cumbersome.

• Reduce minimum lot size from the suburban standard of 5,000 square feet to 3,500 square feet in urban areas. Through the use of compensating open space, the minimum lot size could be decreased to 1,400 square feet. What constitutes a proper density limitation on the number of units per acre has been another area of contention. In an August 1997 draft of the Chapter 42 revisions, the number of units to be permitted per acre was only 15. That number was bumped up to 30 in the March 1998 draft, only to be reduced in the latest version of the proposed ordinance to 24. Effectively, a 24 unit per acre restriction would limit development on a standard 50 by 100 foot lot to no more than two units, rather than the current practice of three or more units. Compensating green space has also been an area of contention, with neighborhood activists pushing for the option of neighborhood pocket parks.

• Make definitions in the ordinance clearer, and through the use of charts and diagrams explain criteria in a way that average people can understand. According to Litke, one of the motivations behind the revision of Chapter 42 was that the existing development ordinance was incomprehensible to anyone who wasn't part of the system. "We wanted," Litke says, "to write it in a way that you did not have to hire a consultant or a lawyer to tell you what it said." In general, this appears to have been accomplished. While certain sections of the proposed new ordinance can still seem arcane to someone not in the building trades, for the most part it's easily comprehensible. The advantage of this, of course, is that it helps reduce the number of loopholes through which objectionable development can slip.

While much of the debate over the revisions to Chapter 42 has been settled, there are still points of contention over issues such as parking. Too, the Neartown Association has raised the issue of how the increased urban development permitted by Chapter 42 will impact the city's infrastructure. More residences inside Loop 610 will increase sewage and water needs, while more building on existing open space will affect the ability of the soil to absorb rains and perhaps increase runoff problems.

Though not every infrastructure issue can be addressed in a single ordinance, the revision of Chapter 42 raises concerns that might otherwise have lain dormant, but will now demand to be addressed. City Council is planning a public hearing for February 17 to give people one more chance to voice any lingering objections, and the Rice Design Alliance has organized a February 16 Fireside Chat at the University of Saint Thomas to examine in even more depth what impact the revision of Chapter 42 would have on Houston.

After three years, Bob Litke is ready to get the ordinance on the books. "There was no way to satisfy everyone, and not everybody is happy with the final result," he admits. Still, Litke adds, "I think that if we get passed what we have now, it will be a major, major improvement for the city." ■

RETHINKING MAIN STREET

In an effort to prevent Houston's downtown boom from ignoring the importance of Main Street in tying the city together, Making Main Street Happen Inc., a five-year-old non-profit organization committed to the revitalization of the Main Street corridor, is sponsoring an invited design competition to create an overall urban vision for the street from its terminus at the Astrodome to its beginning near Interstate 10 and Buffalo Bayou.

The competition, which was announced in late December, is open to Houston AIA firms, planning firms, and landscape architects; a request for qualifications has also been sent out to 25 national and international architectural firms, among them Duany Plater Zyberk & Company of Miami; Venturi Scott Brown and Associates of Philadelphia; Robert A.M. Stern Architects of New York; Cesar Pelli & Associates of New Haven; TEN of Mexico City; Renzo Piano of Genoa, Italy; Leon Krier of Claviers, France; and Nicholas Grimshaw & Partners Limited of London. Qualification statements were due by early February, when the number of entrants was to be whittled down to the four or five finalists who would go on to create complete design proposals.

According to Making Main Street Happen's Executive Director Emily Stadnicki, the genesis for the competition stretches back to Bob Lanier's final term as mayor. It was then that the board members of MMSH began to recognize that in the rush to rebuild downtown the character of Main Street could be lost, and that rather than being reborn as a major urban thoroughfare it was threatened with becoming just one more city street.

Mayor Lanier, however, proved less than enthusiastic about involving the city in any overall planning for Main Street, and it wasn't until Lee Brown was elected that government support was put behind the idea of creating a comprehensive vision for the corridor. At first the notion was to keep things local and fairly small scale, says Stadnicki. But then Jim Royer of Turner, Collie & Braden Inc. suggested that the best way to generate interest and attract fresh ideas was to open the design competition to architects from across the world. Not only would that pull in more talent, it would also raise the stakes for anyone in Houston who wanted to get involved.

The competition covers a distance of 7.5 miles in a corridor that's up to four blocks wide, but given the mixed nature of the development along Main Street the plans aren't expected to call for major renovations in every area. Indeed, the request for qualifications suggests that, save for the transit ways and pedestrian improvements, the segment of Main Street that ties together Hermann Park, Rice University, and the Medical Center remain largely untouched, with larger scale redevelopment being aimed at Midtown and the Astrodome area.

The schedule for the competition calls for a fairly quick turnaround of ideas. Following the early February selection of finalists will be an orientation to the Main Street corridor. Design proposals would then be due by late spring, and the design winners would be announced by the beginning of summer. Phase one of the winning concept plan would be expected by mid-summer, and phase two of the plan by early fall. Then if all goes well, the competition winner would be commissioned for a prototype concept to be completed in the spring of 2000. MMSH will divide $100,000 among the competition finalists to cover their services and expenses, as well as reimburse the design teams up to $3,000 in travel expenses. MMSH has also budgeted between $600,000 and $1 million for planning and design fees for the competition winner to bring his or her plans to fruition.

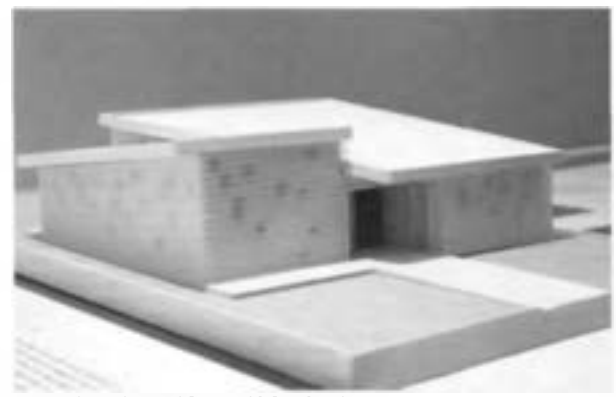
That last is, of course, the rub. Plans are one thing; results are another. As the MMSH's request for qualifications admits, any grand idea for Main Street will only come about through "shared vision, careful planning, a consensus based concept plan, and detailed urban design. Houston has not excelled in such efforts in the past...."

Still, there are examples in Houston's history of design competitions that ended up as more than just academic exercises. Most notable, perhaps, was the Heart of the Park competition in 1992 that led to a major effort to restore Hermann Park. (For more about this, see "The State of the Park" on page 32.) Whether the Main Street competition will have similarly satisfying results remains, of course, to be seen. But according to MMSH's Stadnicki, hopes are high. Representatives of the city, Metro, and Harris County have all expressed interest in examining the ideas developed in the competition process. And where's there's interest, action may follow. *Mitchell J. Shields*

AFFORDABLE IMAGINATION

Glass House @ Two Degrees, by Michael Bell.

Domestic Topographic Package, by Keith Krumwiede with Carol Treadwell.



Hopscotch Trot, by David Brown with Bert Samples.

Untitled, by Stanley Saitowitz with Federico Devesa.

16 Houses: Owning a House in the City, installation at DiverseWorks, November 6 through December 19, 1998.

Variable House, by Sze Tsung Leong and Judy Chung with Hoa Son Chang.

16 HOUSES

Early last year, Mardie Oakes, who works as project manager for the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation, happened to run into an old friend from her days as a student at the Rice University School of Architecture. That friend was Michael Bell, who had gone on to teach architecture at Rice, and as the two caught each other up on what had been happening in their lives, they found they shared a common concern — how to bring architecture and good design to affordable housing.

The results of that chance meeting ended up on display last November and December at DiverseWorks as *16 Houses: Owning a House in the City*. Bell, with the backing of the Fifth Ward CRC, the Rice School of Architecture, and DiverseWorks, commissioned 16 architects to design single family dwellings that would fit into Houston's Fifth Ward. As a starting point, they were given the budget breakdown of a typical Fifth Ward, mid-range house of approximately 1,100 square feet and told to keep their costs to around $65,000 (the price of one of the Fifth Ward CRC's more popular housing types). The house would have to fit on a 50 by 100 foot lot and conform to Fifth Ward setback regulations. But beyond that, the architects were allowed to let their imaginations run free.

According to Oakes, when deciding who to ask to participate, an attempt was made to get a mix of young and old, established and upcoming, local and national architects. In some cases, the architects collaborated with artists, which added to *16 Houses'* visual appeal, if not always the practicality of the designs. Still, the show presented an intriguing selection of structures that ranged from variations on the conventional — such as William Williams and Archie Pizzini's *Flip Flop House*, which added a profusion of narrow windows to a basically standard floor plan — to something more unusual, such as Mark Wamble and Dawn Finley's *Binderhouse*, in which modular sections are clipped together to create what looks like a futuristic trailer, and Lars Lerup's *The House That Roared*, which uses the notion of a river running through the house to create a fluid flow of space.

16 Houses proved to be a popular show, says DiverseWorks director Emily Todd, and not only with the gallery's regular crowd. Residents of the Fifth Ward came by not just out of artistic interest, but to see what might eventually pop up in their neighborhood. By the end of January, the board of the Fifth Ward CRC was to have chosen six out of the 16 designs for construction. A proposal has been submitted to a lending institution for $75,000 to fund a site superintendent to oversee the work, though any actual building would have to wait on buyers for the houses. Mardie Oakes, though, is confident that by year's end the houses will be, if not all completed, at least started.

Meanwhile, *16 Houses* is moving to Austin, where it will be on display at the University of Texas School of Architecture through February. *Mitchell J. Shields*

S.I.ber SPACE

1998 RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE GALA *Honors* S.I. MORRIS

On Saturday, November 7, 830 guests were welcomed to the Rice Design Alliance's 12th annual fundraising gala by event co-chairs Laura and Tom Bellows and Erminie and Dave Chapman, along with RDA president Marilyn Archer. This year's event, which broke records both in the number of people attending and in the amount of money raised, honored Seth Irwin — better known as S.I. — Morris, a man who for the last six decades has been involved in the design of many of Houston's best known and most notable buildings, among them the Astrodome and the Wortham Theater Center.

In keeping with Morris' history of looking toward the future, gala environment chair Roger Soto transformed the Edwin Hornberger Conference Center into what was designated S.I.-ber-Space. The colorful setting for the RDA gala was inspired by multi-colored Hoberman transforming spheres, which were used as centerpieces for the dining tables. Bright satin cloths in red, orange, green, purple, yellow, and blue covered those tables, and equally bright banners using the S.I.-ber-Space logo were hung from the ceiling.

Prior to sitting down to dinner, the crowd of architects, design professionals, urban dwellers, and Morris family friends bid hotly on 140 items featured in an auction organized by designer Vicki McIntosh and her auction committee. Some of the more popular items up for bid were a replica of the playhouse at the Children's Museum donated by CE Ward Constructors, a two-week stay in a 19th-century French farmhouse donated by Grace Pierce and Lise Liddell, a stay in Frank Lloyd Wright's Seth Peterson cottage on Wisconsin's Mirror Lake compliments of Mayer, Brown & Platt, and a dinner of wild game prepared by Charlotte Rothwell.

Richard Brown's Swing Orchestra provided music throughout the evening. Following a memorable meal prepared by the Stone Kitchen, S.I. Morris was presented the RDA Award for Design Excellence, a "Magnolia" Steuben glass bowl donated by Neiman Marcus. When the award was announced, Morris was given a standing ovation. Cheering him on were his wife Susie; daughters Maria Morris Hambourg and Laura Morris Walls with husbands Wirt and Robert; sons Peter, David, and John with wives Fan, Anne, and Susannah; granddaughters Sara, Lizzie, and Ali; and many family friends.

A consummate businessman, S.I. Morris was a major factor in the building of not only the Astrodome (1965) and the Wortham Center (1987), but also the Houston Country Club (1957), the First City National Bank Building (1961), the U.S. Post Office (1962), the Electric Tower (1968), the Houston Post Building (1970), the Tin Houses (1974), the Houston Public Library (1975), the Texaco Office Building (1977), the First Baptist Church (1976), the Glassell School of Art (1978), One Riverway (1978), Three Riverway (1980), and the Inn on the Park (1981). Morris also was instrumental in accomplishing the construction of the last work designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Brown Pavilion.

The Rice Design Alliance Award for Design Excellence is one of many awards given Morris over the years, among them Fellow designation by the American Institute of Architects (1962); the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Rice University (1981); the Gold Medal Award from the Association of Rice University alumni (1991); the Llewellen Pitts Award from the Texas Society of Architects (1992); and the Master Builder Award from the Association of General Contractors (1992). (For more about S.I. Morris, see the story on page 30).

The gala's underwriting co-chairs Guy Jackson and Jeff Ryan and their committee exceeded all expectations with 1998's event. More than $300,000 was raised to help support the Rice Design Alliance's educational programs and the publication of the RDA journal *Cite*. The RDA board of directors would like to thank all of the gala committee chairs and volunteers as well as the RDA staff for making the gala so successful. We would also like to recognize our generous underwriters, contributors, and auction donors for their generous contributions. ■

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1. Banners with S.Heber-Space logo
2. Susie Morris with granddaughters Ali, Lizzie, and Sarah Morris
3. Ellen and Roger Soto and Charlie and Karen Boughn.
4. RDA board member Susan Keeton with Peter and Fan Morris
5. Gala co-chair Dave Chapman, RDA president Marilyn Archer, honoree S.I. Morris, and gala co-chair Tom Bellows.
6. Evan Hopkins, Garry Fehn, and Loretta Fulvio
7. Patty and Richard Everett.
8. Cameron Armstrong and Terrell James.
9. Ann Schwapps Ashmun and Louie Morris Wells
10. Gala co-chairs Laura and Tom Bellows.
11. Kimberly and James Burnett, RDA secretary.
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Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Church of the Light — Tadao Ando*, 1997.
Gelatin silver print, 20 by 25 inches.

SOMETHING SACRED

Maybe it's the fact that in a few short months we'll be facing a new millenium. Perhaps it's that the Baby Boomers, that self-absorbed bulge in the nation's demographics, have entered middle age and can see the inevitability of life's end looming before them. Or possibly it's just that the cultural pendulum, having swung deep into secular territory, is ready for a trip back in the other direction. Whatever the reason, there's no question that, after a long hiatus, spirituality has made a comeback. For a growing number of us, it's right there on the front burner, bubbling away, demanding our attention.

This issue of *Cite* responds to that demand by examining how everyone from architects to artists to priests deal with the concept of the divine, a concept that raises a number of intriguing questions. One of the first is the basic question of what distinguishes the sacred from the secular. In the following pages, novelist Paula Webb and priest and analyst Pittman McGehee wrestle with that topic in a far ranging conversation, while Dallas architect Gary Cunningham confronts it in the churches and temples he has designed. A look at how fine art can be folded into and enhance religious settings shows another way in which the secular and sacred meet, and how each can influence the other.

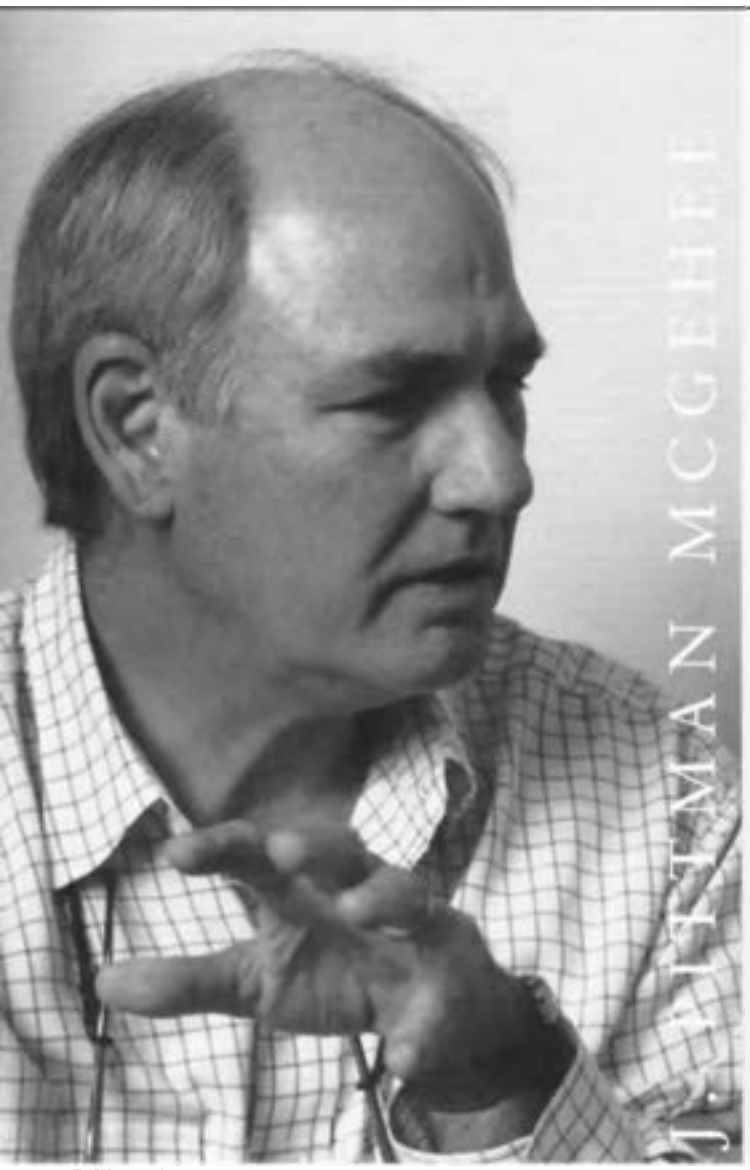
Of course, spirituality isn't necessarily limited to formal religion. Many people, Frank Lloyd Wright among them, found spirituality in nature, which in a way makes our update on what's happening in Hermann Park, Houston's largest expanse of natural parkland, fitting. Fitting, too, is the appreciation of S.I. Morris, who many know as the man behind a number of the city's most notable landmarks, but whom I remember for the kindness shown me as a young teenager looking for her first summer job. If you're looking for the sacred, it seems to me, kindness isn't a bad place to start.

Lynn M. Herbert
Guest Editor

Photo courtesy the artist and Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

LOOKING FOR

A priest and a novelist ask each other, what makes a place sacred?



What makes a building religious? What distinguishes a church, a temple, or a mosque from any other structure? What, in short, separates the secular from the sacred? A century or so ago, that might have been an easy question. But as we bid farewell to one millennium and welcome another, few questions are easy anymore. To try to answer this one, *Cite* asked novelist Paula J. Webb to sit down with priest and psychoanalyst J. Pittman McGehee and wrestle with the nature of sacred places. • McGehee served for 11 years as the Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in downtown Houston and now practices as a Jungian analyst through Broadacres Center. He is also a professor of analytic psychology at the University of Houston, a regular lecturer at the C. G. Jung Educational Center, a frequent speaker in the fields of psychology and religion, and a published poet. • Webb, an essayist as well as a novelist, teaches writing workshops through the Writers Collaborative. Her novel *Domestic Life* was published in 1992. She's currently at work on a second, as well as a collection of short stories entitled *All I Know*. • Both McGehee and Webb are Episcopalians, longtime Houstonians, and filled with ideas about the definition, form, and function of what is and what might be a sacred place.

Paula J. Webb: About this God thing, Pittman, you're for it, right?

J. Pittman McGehee: Well, I used to carry around this quotation from Jung in my billfold. It came from a letter, in which he said, "My raison d'être consists in coming to terms with that indefinable being we call God." So, I'm a wrestler with that concept as much as anything.

PW: In the way that you celebrate your faith, what role does place play? I mean, where do you go, and what do you do?

PM: Well, this is very complicated. Traditionally, there are four ways that people experience God. One of them's in nature, and the second one is through creativity — people have an experience of what they name God through art, through literature, through what we call creativity. The third is through ritual process, and the last one is through other people, through love.

Now, under the experience of God through ritual process, there are objective and subjective understandings of sacred space. It's the *temenos* idea, which comes from the healing tradition. The idea was to draw a circle, and that was the temenos, and inside that circle, it was sacred. Inside that *temenos* healing and incubation and change could happen, and really that's our earliest understanding of sacred space. So we have this consensus reality that the intention of this space is to point toward the fact that mystery is available to be experienced in this place.

Then you come into what is called a sacramental principle, which means that we set aside one thing to represent another. It's like bread. We say that this bread is set aside to symbolize the incarnation of God, that God is in the human experience, and we say that this bread represents that.

Now in this sacramental principle, we don't believe that any thing that's set apart for something is an exclusive arena for it. In other words, this bread is the representation of the incarnation of God, but that doesn't mean that this is the only place that this happens.

So one of the things that sacred space would say to me is that it is not an exclusive space. Christ Church Cathedral downtown is only there to represent that mystery is in the world.

PW: To remind us that the doors are open?

PM: Yes, and the space does always have to, it seems to me, have the purpose of pointing beyond itself.

PW: So imagine that you are an architect who has gotten this incredible commission to build a sacred space. There is no budget. Just whatever you want. Tell me what that might be like. What makes it work?

PM: Well, I'd first try to discern the soul of the people. How do they project their soul?

PW: But what if they were you?

PM: What if they were me? Well, it would be a house with a lot of room to do everything from art to drama to music. A lot of open space, not predetermined space. What you'll see in most churches is predetermined. That is, we're going to walk up here to communion, and then we're going to file around, and the choir's going to sit here. I'd rather have an undefined space where we could be dynamic and change as we do our worship. I'd do like they do on college campuses: wait and see where the students walk, and then build the sidewalks.

And I'd build a space to see if I could capture something of the mystery. I'm an Anglican and mystery's big, and I'm a postmodern person, so I don't want a lot of definition. I'd want a lot of openness and a lot of inclusiveness. I'd think about intentional space but not defined space.

PW: But isn't defined space important to a lot of people?

PM: Well, sure. You go to a Protestant church and you'll find the pulpit right in the middle of the church. Well, that says what that church is, what the soul of the people is there. It's the word, the preaching. The liturgy is basically the spoken word. It's a rational kind of religion, everybody proof-texting things, wanting to prove God.

With other liturgical traditions such as Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism, the altar is the center, and the pulpit is over on the side because the sermon is really just one piece of the drama. The real drama is inside the sanctuary at the Eucharist.

So you see, the definition's right there. We define space as mysterious and Eucharistic, or as word. So between sacrament and word, you can look at the architecture and see what that community emphasizes.

GOD'S HOUSE

The other thing that we find in contemporary Christianity, particularly American Christianity, is that it's less about mystery and more about entertainment. These big megachurches in Houston are theaters. They're not sacred, and they haven't been designed to capture the mystery. They're called auditoriums. They're not called sanctuaries.

PW: And what are those places like?

PM: It's just like going to Jones Hall. It's theater seats, where the audience is passive. It's staged for media, TV. It's really a stage with an audience, it's not a congregation, but that's what the soul of those people seem to desire. They want to be entertained.

PW: And sacred spaces aren't for entertaining?

PM: Well, you've got this sort of consensus reality about what objective sacred space is. It involves an understanding of the intent or soul of the people, and it needs to contain symbols, the symbols of the people, whether it's a star and crescent, or whether it's light, or whether it's crosses, or whatever.

But subjectively, I find I bring my own sort of sacredness with me. It's portable, and I can worship or find some meaning in a lot of different kinds of spaces, like at a Rolling Stones concert or a Rockets game or fishing down at Port O'Connor.

Now I do think place has some influence. I personally am going to be more likely to have enthusiasm — which means "God within" — in, say, Chartres rather than a place with an electric organ and shag carpeting.

PW: So how do you court or woo or put yourself in the path of a real spiritual experience?

PM: I think the Buddhists are really so far ahead of Western Christianity in their idea of living mindfully, which means the ability to see the sacred in the mundane, the extraordinary in the ordinary, the miraculous in the everyday. They say that you can experience God or the numinous in chopping wood and hauling water. That's living mindfully, so if I have been taught by sacred space that the sacred is available, then I don't just go to sacred spaces looking for it. That's what the sacred place teaches me, that sacredness finally is inside me, therefore portable.

Jesus kept saying things like "those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear." Well, that's that kind of consciousness we're talking about. I can see a lot of space as sacred, but I can't expect to have a numinous experience in every sacred place. You can't control that.

PW: Do you think it's easier if you're by yourself?

PM: I think there's a difference, but I don't think it's easier. In times of transition, loss, change of one kind or another, a lot of people will seek out a sacred space as a symbol of the availability of some new energy, something to help them make a decision. I think that's an individual process.

At the same time, when Jesus said that "where two or three are gathered together, I will be in the midst of them," the idea was that much of our experience is born out of community. Generally in Christianity, the tradition is that the priest has to have the community there, which means one other person, in order to celebrate the Eucharist.

PW: Built structures tend to be communal structures rather than individual havens. There are people who go out and build their own chapels in the woods, but you could argue pretty soundly that the great sacred buildings were designed for communal activities.

PM: But remember also that in the great cathedrals are a plethora of chapels, small spaces within the large space for more individualized experiences. Go to any of the great cathedrals, and you'll find all these side chapels. It's so awe inspiring in there, and you might want an individual experience, and that's made available.

PW: But what does that say about so many people being drawn these days to these Astrodome-like kinds of religious experience?

PM: That it's exciting, and one of the things that we mistake for numinosity is excitement. There's such hunger for the spiritual now, that people have it confused with excitement.

You know, even if we could come up with a list of objective criteria for what sacred space is, I don't think we would capture the idea of sacred space. It's a combination always of objective and subjective stuff. It's like art, and certainly it depends on what you bring to it, like your personality, your socio-economic level, your educational stuff. There are a lot of factors.

Some people go to those great cathedrals, like Saint Paul's in London, and they go totally as tourists. They don't make any differentiation between that and the big palace they went to, or Shakespeare's home. Now I go to Saint Paul's and have Evensong, and I'm elevated to some celestial place. For me, it's a real sacred place, but for others it's a kind of historic monument. I think if a space is really sacred, it has to be alive, it has to be dynamic. That's why I was saying I wouldn't want so much definition in the space, so it could stay alive.

PW: When I talk to people about their sacred experiences, they often mention events at the beach or on mountains. What's that all about?

PM: I think nature is just closer to the source in a way. One of the earliest God images is what we call animism, which is that we project soul into objects. Trees have souls. Rocks have souls. That's animism.

One thing that is interesting is that in nature there are no straight lines. It's only in the artifact that you see that. Nature is of the authentic, its own imperfection, and it doesn't purport to be perfect. You know the tradition of the great cathedrals where the narthex is always off center with the altar? That's just the architect's witness to the fact that there is no perfect building.

For most of us most of the time, experiences that are moving and transformative are unconscious. From the choice of spouses, to the clothes we wear, there's a lot more going on than conscious choice. In the same way, in worship or in sacred spaces, probably most of the communication goes directly to the unconscious. That's why people keep coming back and don't know why. Why does somebody leave church and say they just feel better? Well, there is stuff going on there. The non-rational experience may be the experience that draws us back, not the rational experience. Most of my true religious experiences, I cannot articulate. They

sound really paltry when I try to describe them. That's why I shut my mouth. I mean, when we begin to talk about what makes space sacred, it may be a non-rational thing that we can't word.

PW: Yeah, but sometimes a space works, and sometimes it doesn't.

PM: Well, there is this idea that if the community has said for a long period of time that a space is sacred, then we begin to believe it. People begin to project into the space their own subjective sacredness. It attracts that. It's like a lightning rod.

PW: Time is a defining factor?

PM: It has to survive. That would be one of the criterion it seems to me, that it's got some stability and longevity to it.

There is this Jungian term called *participation mystique*, which is actually a term from anthropologist Levy-Bruhl. He said there is this energy or numinous stuff that is in each of us, and there are certain objects that will attract the projection of this. We do it with the Eucharist. We do it with rabbit's feet. It's a primitive sense — and primitive to me is not a pejorative term; it's a purer form, not unsophisticated, but undefiled — that this is sacred space. I project into it my own sacredness, and it comes back to me.

PW: In even the most primitive cultures, there is a impetus, a desire to build a sacred spot, to designate a particular space as sacred ...

PM: It's a very natural impulse.

PW: What about in Houston? What and where are our spaces?

> I FIND I BRING MY OWN SORT OF SACREDNESS WITH ME. IT'S PORTABLE, AND I CAN WORSHIP OR FIND SOME MEANING IN A LOT OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF SPACES, LIKE AT A ROLLING STONES CONCERT.

PM: It's just so subjective. I think it would be presumptuous of me to say what a sacred place would be for anyone else. I think the new Chapel of Saint Basil at the University of Saint Thomas will become a sacred space, but I think that it still has to be tried and tested and lived in. Similarly, I predict, the Menil Byzantine will become a sacred space for this community, just as the Rothko Chapel has. The Rothko Chapel has passed the test of time.

PW: I do think there is something about walking into Christ Church Cathedral where you really are hit in the face with the fact that it's been around for more than a century.

PM: I think a sacred space has to earn its attraction.

PW: But if you think about people who want to build things that allow and encourage the sacred, what's on the checklist? And where does the checklist come from?

PM: I think that comes from the idea that Jung had of archetypes. That maybe there's just certain sort of archetypal things that get brought out and appear to be checklists, but they actually are images of things that are deep in the collective unconscious. And one of those images has to be maternal. The church is the womb. It's the mother, and a sacred space architecturally has to have some expression of that. It has to be a container. It contains numinosity, it contains community, it's a place of nurture, of transition, of transformation, of creativity. We also have to have a phallus. Steeples, what are those about? Yeah, they point toward God, but they also really have that father thing.

PW: So you're saying that if someone is trying to create a sacred space, they cannot make it simply by personal expression?

PM: Yes. In addition to being about the community's soul, it's about the unconscious of the community, which is where the archetypal strata is.

PW: What about the megaplex entertainment churches? Where do they fit into this?

PM: You know the writer Annie Dillard's work? She says instead of having signs up on churches that say, "Enter, rest, and pray," we ought to put up signs that say, "Enter at your own risk." Meaning, you see, that a lot of these places are not risky. They want to eliminate the possibility for any autonomy. They want the mind of the collective.

PW: But isn't there something to be said about these megachurches growing up at a time when community in other types of ways is disappearing? It used to be that the church was a part of a community, an element of a community, and then the community dispersed. These megachurches are not a part of the community, they're the entire community.

PM: Well, they want to be so. They want cradle to grave.

PW: You not only go to church there, but you have your recreation there, your schools. It's your whole world, and there's something comfortable in that. It's a small town in one contained place, and it provides you with people who share a faith that you share, maybe a religious faith or maybe simply a faith in a way of living. I see that to some degree this is answering a need, and most religion works when it answers a need, right?

PM: Mystery, I think, is important to this conversation, because we still have this kind of modern view that mystery is that which has not yet been discovered. That's the science idea, and the religion idea is that it's undiscoverable. It's not going to be discovered. Paul Tillich defines mystery as reason driven beyond itself, and he says we experience that subjectively as ecstasy and objectively as miracle. I think that if you're going to talk about sacred space as I define it, as I'm interested in it, there has to be a context that gives possibility for the experience of mystery. And one of the things I'm trying to say about the mega church is that it really doesn't provide a lot of opportunity for mystery.

There's a think tank that does studies on church work, and they've arrived at the idea that the less religious a place is, the more popular it is. So you'll notice that these mega complexes don't define themselves; they leave themselves in a kind of ambiguity. They don't put crosses up, because they want people to come in for other reasons. They don't want to be controversial, they want to make people comfortable.

PW: Okay, so say you're on the freeway and you need to go someplace to think about things. One of the functions of a sacred place is a place to go to. Where are you going to go?

PM: You know, the old cathedrals were actually shopping malls. People had stalls in there, and that was part of why they had all the bells. They'd ring the bells and that meant that everybody should get quiet, because this is the moment of the consecration. There was theater in there, everything was in the cathedral, but that was when the community was small and geographically defined.

PW: It was the biggest building in town. It was the place that people came to from the outlying villages.

PM: We don't really have that kind of sociology anymore.

PW: Your original idea was to build a rec house...

PM: I don't like that reference. I said an undefined space.

PW: Okay.

PM: Look at the great cathedrals. Saint Paul's in London is basically undefined space. They have cathedral chairs. You take the chairs out, and you can do a whole lot of things. I'm talking about pews when I talk about undefined space. When you get pews in a church, you're going to do one thing, which is to sit passively. You do get up to go to the altar, but you can't do anything else ...

PW: But you know, when you go to older churches and see those folding chairs, they look so impermanent.

PM: It's a tradeoff. But if I were to start from scratch, I would not put anything permanent in. It may appear to be permanent, but it wouldn't be. Like the altar would not be attached to anything, or you could move the pulpit, everything would be ...

PW: Moved to the center? The circle thing?

PM: Well, of course. But I mean practically, if you wanted to have someone come in and do African dances, you might want to get the pulpit out of the way. I'd want the space more flexible.

Let me make one other point. It's about the future of sacred spaces, which I'm very concerned about for a couple of reasons. One is that there is a new phenomenon in the world called narcissism. I mean, it's on everybody's lips now. Christopher Lasch wrote an important book called *The Culture of Narcissism* that says consciousness and ego are a dynamic, evolving part of the human psyche, and the primitives — once again not a pejorative term, but a descriptive, and maybe even an enviable, term — always saw themselves as a part of something greater than themselves. Their idea was that "I belong to the tribe, and I give myself to the tribe, and my job is to serve the tribe." I think even in rural America there was much more of that sense of "I belong to the church" or "I belong to something bigger than myself that I give myself to."

That's dying, because instant gratification is one of the definitions of narcissism. So nobody's going to wait for a sacred space. In a culture of narcissism, I worry about the future of sacred spaces because nobody's willing to give themselves to the creation of one. It will all be temporary things, all shopping centers and Jack in the Boxes.

You know the great story of the glazier working in Lincoln Cathedral? Maybe it's apocryphal, but this guy yells up to the glazier, "You know, nobody will ever see that piece of glass up there," and the glazier says, "God will."

That's a kind of sentimental story, but the point is, the glazier wasn't working for himself, and he wasn't working for even his community. He was working for something bigger than himself. Who does that these days? I mean, who has the vocation to create sacred space?

PW: If you define yourself as a singular person, not hooked up in a constant sort of way, your spiritual experiences are singular. I think I trust the individual's experience over the community's. That's what I do for a living, try and write about the individual experience butted up against the community standard.

PM: But one thing doesn't necessarily preclude the other. There's always that paradoxical relationship between the two. I think there is an objective sacred space and a subjective sacred space. Still, too often it's this contrived idea. There's this labyrinth in the basement of Chartres, and you can trace it on canvas, and put in some parking lot. And then you can ask people to walk the labyrinth. Now, under the autonomy of God, you can have an experience with God wherever God chooses to mysteriously place God's self. So it can happen on a canvas labyrinth in a parking lot. But I think that's unlikely. It's too contrived. It's the idea that just because this was a sacred space at Chartres, we can put it on a canvas, and haul it around the country, and put it in parking lots, and have people walk the labyrinth, and that's a great experience. Give me a break. Context is a lot, isn't it?

PW: I wonder how we need to participate in controlling sacred places. If they're important to us, how do we keep them together without screwing them up? My own experience with traditional churches or art institutions or whatever, is that the energy that starts the whole idea, the idea of wanting to do something really fabulous and original, dies a pretty fast death, because early on the bureaucrats take over and want to putty all the windows shut. I'm interested in keeping things open, in encouraging individual ideas and development, and in my experience that's hard to do within any sort of community group.

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PM: I don't know, but to me the problem is still about this narcissism.

PW: We haven't talked as much about ritualistic behavior as I wanted to.

PM: We talk about ritual process when we talk about going to church on Sunday, or doing baptisms, but we have ritual process in our limbic systems, you know? The whole jet lag thing is about interrupting our ritual processes. The sacred places where we experience God aren't at all limited to formal religious ritual. They're about our rituals, and where the rituals are done, we tend to consider sacred.

PW: It's more than just the repetitive?

PM: Repetitive and ritual are similar, but they're not the same. A guy working on an assembly line is doing repetitive stuff, but that doesn't mean that that's ritual. For it to be ritual, it has to have a conscious meaning to you. Now I don't attach that much meaning to every morning, but I see my bathroom as a sanctuary in a way, where I do things that are very meaningful to me, daily private ritual processes of elimination, cleansing, adornment, meditation. So all I'm saying is changing consciousness about our daily rituals may be sacred too. The places we do them, therefore, can be sacred space.

In our beds, where we sleep, make love, die. Those are sacred spaces too. Our houses are sacred, you know?

PW: Well, even I can amen to that. ■

ART AND THE

Annabel Livermore's Meditation Chapel, 1977, R.E. Thompson General Hospital, El Paso.

Photo courtesy Houston Chronicle

Jennifer Bartlett's stained glass door, 1998, Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church, Houston.

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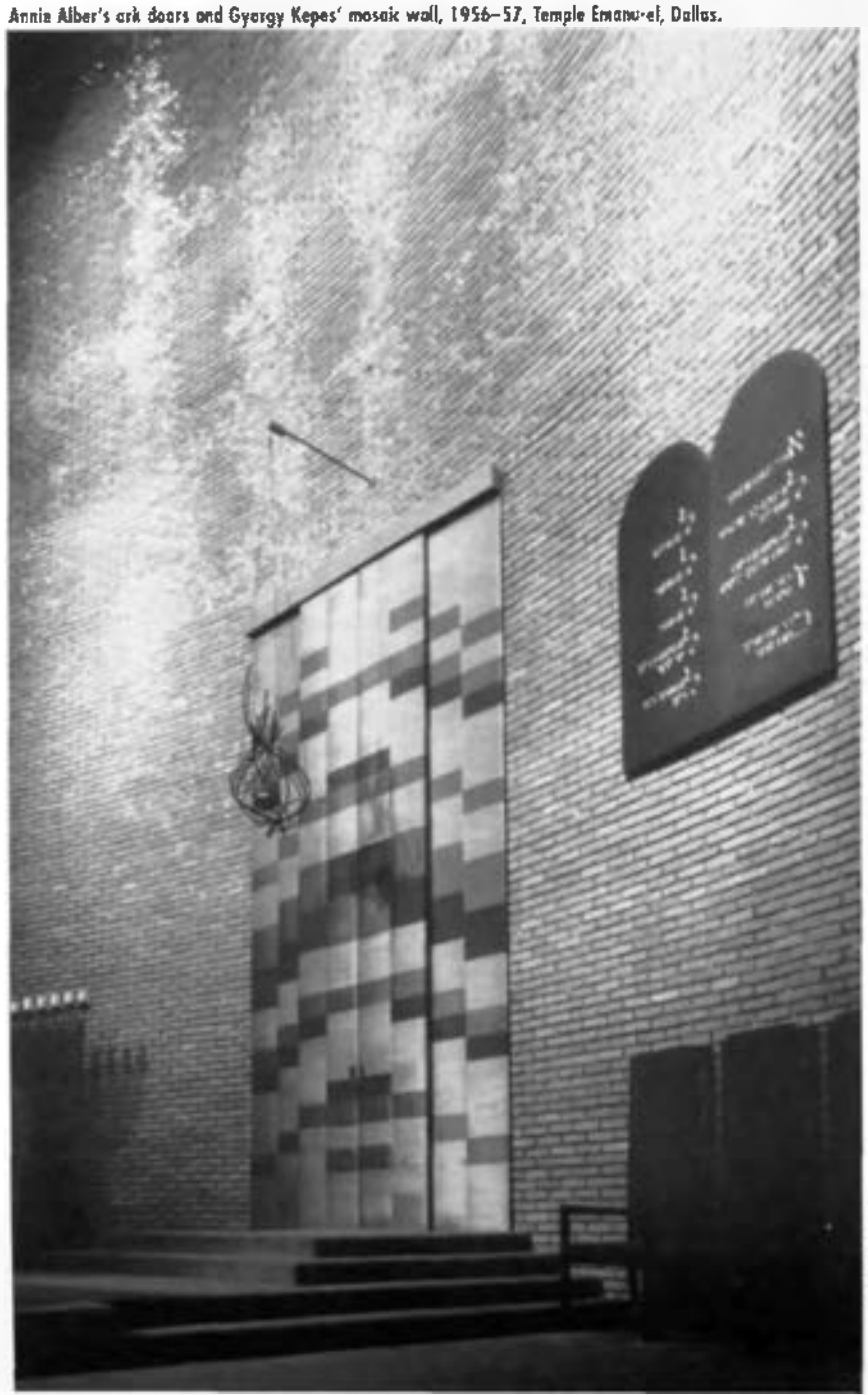
By Lynn M. Herbert

SACRED

Annie Albers's ark doors and Gyorgy Kepes' mosaic wall, 1956–57, Temple Emanu-el, Dallas.



There was a time when religion and art were inextricably linked. Artists were invaluable to the development of religion, bringing sacred stories and visions to life, and religion was invaluable to artists, providing them with patronage on a grand scale. Through the centuries, the relationship grew into a thriving partnership. One has only to look at Italy during the Renaissance to see the impact: young hopefuls such as Michelangelo, Bernini, Raphael, and Giotto were transformed into cultural forces thanks to their church commissions.

Times have obviously changed. As theology professor Langdon B. Gilkey has noted, "the day of organized religion being at the center of things has long since passed."[1] Church and state have separated, and religious institutions seem to have lost the cultural confidence that once emboldened popes to trust artists to create monumental works. That, as Gilkey points out, is a shame, not just for the artists who have lost a source of funding, but for religious institutions, which have lost an important ally in dealing with the transcendent. In our technological age of "virtual experience," Gilkey reminds us that one of art's greatest gifts is to enhance direct, immediate experience: "The event of our encounter is for itself, a significant enjoyment, an experience of seeing, here, at this moment. And we are deepened, refreshed, challenged to reorder ourselves to see in a new way our world and ourselves — we are re-created."[2]

Art *does* afford opportunities for powerful, even spiritual, experiences. Unfortunately, there are many who see that very power as threatening, and so resist having it in their place of worship. In some circles, namely among Protestants, history makes the situation even worse. As a colleague of Gilkey's has pointed out, "Protestantism has lived so long without the visual that the loss of that human and spiritual resource is not even recognized as an issue."[3]

The history of art in the last century hasn't done much to bring the two sides together either. As the succession of artistic movements indicates, over time artists' interests have ventured further and further away from those of the church.[4] The prospects for a link between religion and art were made even less promising by the conflicts in recent years between those on the religious right and the supporters of the National Endowment for the Arts over such works as Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987).

The surprise, however, is that despite all the apparent obstacles there have been instances in recent decades where contemporary artists have found a home for their work in spiritual settings. In Texas that has ranged from the works of James Magee in El Paso to that of Michael Tracy in Corpus Christi and James Turrell in Houston. The instances have been far too few to even come close to constituting a movement, but they make clear that if art and religion aren't always compatible, then neither are they always combative.

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Not surprisingly, the union of art and religion has tended to occur when a dynamic individual emerged to serve as a driving force. In France in the 1950s, Father Marie-Alain Couturier was just such an instigator. He wrote critically of the decline of culture within ecclesiastical circles, vilifying their ready acceptance of academic art. Bringing the work of important contemporary artists back into the church became something of a crusade for him.[5] His indefatigable efforts led to such treasures as Henri Matisse's Chapel of the Rosary (1951) in Vence. For this project, Matisse planned everything from the stained-glass windows to the vestments, liturgical accoutrements, ceramic murals, spire, and even a pattern for the roof. The commission came to Matisse late in his life, and he spoke of it as the culmination of his life's work.[6] He dropped everything he was doing to focus on the project, which he saw as renewing the forms of sacred art. Of the chapel, Matisse said, "I want those who come here to feel purified and relieved of their burdens."[7]

For Notre Dame de Toute Grâce in Assy, a city sanatorium in the Alps, Father Couturier commissioned works by Pierre Bonnard, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, Fernand Leger, Jacques Lipchitz, Jean Lurçat, Henri Matisse, Germaine Richier, and Georges Roualt. He was also the driving force behind Le Corbusier's Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp and the commission of Leger's stained-glass windows and Jean Bazaine's mosaic for Audincourt, a small parish church built for Peugeot workers. Couturier later remembered the day he received approval for those two projects as a "red letter day in the history of the renewal of Christian art.... When such projects, representing what is purest and strongest in living art, can be accepted by high ecclesiastical authority, we can be sure that something has changed in the Church of France."[8]

At about the same time that all this was happening in France, in America painter/sculptor/architect Tony Smith was working on a speculative design for a Catholic church in collaboration with artists Jackson Pollock and Alfonso Ossorio.[9] With such a threesome in place the potential was enormous. Unfortunately, they lacked a champion such as Father Couturier, and their plans were never realized.

Art historian Miriam Freund, on the

The Rothko Chapel, 1971, The Menil Collection, Houston.

Jean Lacy's stained glass windows, 1996, Trinity United Methodist Church, Houston.

other hand, proved to be a champion on the order of Father Couturier. During the time she served as head of the Jewish women's organization Hadassah, it commissioned Marc Chagall to create a series of windows for the synagogue at Hebrew University Medical Center in Jerusalem. As was the case with Matisse, Chagall's 1959 commission came late in his life (he was 72). But many felt the windows to be his greatest work, so much so that before they were installed in Jerusalem they were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and, in a pavilion specially built for them by the French government, at the Louvre in Paris.[10]

Father Couturier's spirit has also been felt in Texas. In the early 1930s Couturier took John and Dominique de Menil under his wing in France, sharing with them his passion for the arts. When they moved to Houston, the de Menils brought with them Couturier's lasting influence, and in 1964 they commissioned Mark Rothko to create a series of paintings for a chapel.

Rothko, who more than once had described his work as religious, had longed for years to find a chapel-like space for his works.[11] The hurdles associated with the completion of the Rothko Chapel, however, make one marvel that it ever materialized. At first, the chapel was to be a Catholic one at the University of Saint Thomas, the culmination of architect Philip Johnson's work on the campus. Rothko was to be an equal collaborator with Johnson, but both men had strong ideas and couldn't find a common ground. So after much arguing, Johnson bowed out. The university eventually bowed out as well.

Rothko's chapel then almost found a home in the Houston Medical Center before finally landing on Menil property near the University of Saint Thomas as an ecumenical structure, with the Houston firm of Barnstone and Aubrey called in to complete the architectural work. Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk* (1963-67), eventually installed outside the chapel, had meanwhile jumped through a few hurdles of its own. The de Menils had tried to give it to the city of Houston as a memorial to Martin Luther King Jr., but the city refused it for political reasons.[12] So the obelisk wound up in front of the chapel in a reflecting pool designed by Johnson.

The chapel was finally dedicated in 1971, a year after Rothko's death. Though he never saw his paintings installed, the commission was a formative one for the artist. As he wrote to the de Menils, "The magnitude, on every level of experience and meaning, of the task in which you have involved me, exceeds all my preconceptions. And it is teaching me to extend myself beyond what I thought possible for me."[13]

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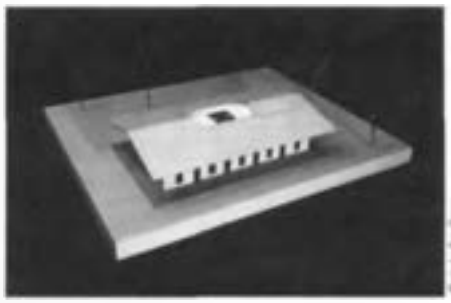
Years earlier in Dallas, Temple Emanu-el had demonstrated a similar commitment to the importance of contemporary art within its walls. As the synagogue embarked on a building project in 1951, Rabbi Levi Arthur Olan told his board that the new temple "must express, in art forms and in symbols, the religious ideas of our faith ... a religious service must be a moving emotional experience ... encompassing art, music, and liturgical expression ... which will send the worshipper out exalted, courageous, and confident."[14] An unusually open-minded art committee and architectural team enthusiastically involved artist Gyorgy Kepes in the design of the sanctuary and chapel. Kepes ultimately designed an ingenious mosaic wall, as well as furniture for the pulpit. He also involved other artists, Annie Albers among them, in the design and execution of other aspects of the chapel. Temple Emanu-el was dedicated in 1957.

Dallas is also home to another innovative sanctuary. In 1992, the Reverend Zan W. Holmes Jr. of Saint Luke Community United Methodist Church approached artist Jean Lacy about creating a series of 53 stained-glass windows. Holmes had taught theology with Lacy's former husband and had been impressed by the Biblical images she had created for educational packets used in Sunday school. Lacy, who had never worked with stained glass or on such a monumental scale, admits to having been a bit frightened at the outset. Holmes was interested in an Afrocentric look at the Christian story, and Lacy answered the call by creating a series of windows that breathe new life into the stories of the Bible by incorporating elements from African and African-American experience and history.

So successful were Lacy's windows that in 1994 the Reverend Robert McGee of Trinity United Methodist Church, Houston's oldest African-American church, commissioned the artist to do 12 windows for Trinity's sanctuary. Those windows were dedicated in 1996. Both churches were unusually progressive in their desire to connect the past with the present, to make the Bible more relevant to their congregations' experience. Inevitably, certain elements of the imagery proved to be inflammatory to some members of the church, but Lacy credits the commitment of the two pastors in helping to overcome such obstacles.

While the spark for these projects came from within the religious community, two recent projects in Houston have resulted instead from the commitment of someone in the art world. In 1992, while marching in a gay rights demonstration at the Republican National Convention in Houston, art dealer Hiram Butler had an epiphany of sorts. The hatred and lack of acceptance he saw emanating from the convention was, he felt, in contravention not just of certain fundamental tenets of Western civilization, but also of religion as he knew it. Butler set out to bring art and religion together in an effort to make enduringly manifest religion's accepting and inclusive nature.

Michael Tracy's Emmanuel Chapel, 1985, Corpus Christi Cathedral.



Model of Live Oak Friends Meeting House, Houston. Leslie K. Elkins, architect, with James Turrell's skyspace, 1998.

Butler was invited to serve on the art and architecture committee of Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church, which is located only a few blocks from the Rothko Chapel. He took committee members out to see the work of various artists, and when they decided to look for someone who had worked with stained glass, Butler introduced them to New York artist Jennifer Bartlett. Bartlett found she had much in common with both Saint Stephen's rector, Helen Havens, and her congregation, and together they discussed everything from a master plan for the church to more specific items such as tile work for the nave, a font, and a lectern. In 1996, Bartlett started a series of eight stained-glass panels for the doors leading to Saint Stephen's new columbarium, collaborating with Leslie Elkins, a Houston architect known for her ability to work with artists. At the time of the doors' dedication in 1998, Rector Havens noted that, "The doors ... symbolize entrance into the nearer presence of God, as well as opening our parish life into the neighborhood in which we live."[15]

In 1998, Butler was also on hand for a groundbreaking ceremony for the Live Oak Friends Meeting House of Houston. Some years before, Butler had introduced the Live Oak Friends to James Turrell, an artist known for his work with light who, like the Friends, is a Quaker. Light is integral to the Quaker faith, and Turrell had long dreamed of having one of his pieces in a meeting house. The Live Oak Friends were moved by Turrell's ideas, and commissioned him to create something for their new meeting house before most of them had even had an opportunity to see his work. Butler then introduced Turrell and the Live Oak Friends to Leslie Elkins, who was subsequently hired as the project's architect. When it opens in 1999, the Live Oak Friends Meeting House will, like the Rothko Chapel only a few miles away, undoubtedly become a pilgrimage site.

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Farther south, along Texas's border with Mexico, two very different artists have created spiritual spaces without the aid of champions such as Father Couturier, the de Menils, the Reverend Zan W. Holmes Jr., or Hiram Butler. One of them is Michael Tracy, an artist of international renown who settled in San Ignacio, a small town along the Rio Grande. For Tracy, there has always been a connection between art and religion. In 1966, as a young man, he sought out and interviewed Rothko, who was then working on his chapel paintings, and years later, for a 1981 exhibition, Tracy created his own chapel-like environment.[16] A get-together with a friend in 1984 led Tracy to design a chapel for the Chemical Dependency Unit of South Texas, a medical facility in Corpus Christi.

Tracy's design for the unit's interdenominational chapel included an altarpiece and furniture that he collaborated on with Mexican craftsmen. Unfortunately, the chapel no longer exists, having been in place only from 1984 to 1987. In 1985, though, Bishop Rene Gracida of the Corpus Christi Catholic Diocese commissioned Tracy to collaborate with architect James Rome on the Emmanuel Chapel in the Crypt of the Bishops at the Corpus Christi Cathedral. For this subterranean chapel, Tracy created a moving environment with architectural arches, furniture design, a spare but intense use of color, and a monumental 18-foot gold triptych in the form of an altarpiece. Friar James Harris of Alice, Texas, became familiar with Tracy's Emmanuel Chapel, and years later invited the artist to create a chapel in a two-car garage on his church grounds. The work, Saint Michael's Chapel of Perpetual Adoration at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, was dedicated in 1992. The Emmanuel and Saint Michael's chapels still exist, but they're no longer products of just Tracy's imagination. Their original austere beauty has been altered by the addition of devotional and decorative objects by those who worship there.

Farther west along the Mexican border, artist James Magee has created two very different spiritual spaces. In the late 1980s, Magee's studio assistant was hospitalized for a time at the R.E. Thomason General Hospital, a trauma center in El Paso. Moved by the work being done at the hospital, in 1989 Magee established the Annabel Livermore Floral Fund, which makes sure that once a year each patient in the hospital receives a flower with a note wishing him or her health and happiness. Magee wanted to do more for the hospital and approached the director of the facility, Jim Booher, about another project. With the support of the hospital's board, the two men carved out a small space within the hospital for a meditation chapel. Under the persona of Annabel Livermore, a pseudonym he has used for years, Magee created a series of floral watercolors for the chapel and painted a skyscape filled with birds, clouds, and the sun, moon, and stars in its barrel-vaulted ceiling. Magee's architectural and furniture designs were executed by the hospital's carpenters, and today his chapel — with the soothing sound of trickling water, its homage to nature, and a small desk where visitors have taken to writing and leaving prayers — is an oasis of calm in an otherwise charged surrounding.

A much more private project is Magee's ongoing work *The Hill*, which he considers the culmination of a lifetime of art and "his final line of defense on this earth." *The Hill* is composed of four monumental chambers aligned on a cross axis, standing alone in a vast, empty prairie 63 miles east of El Paso. Magee began the project in the early 1980s by purchasing 100 acres of land; he has since amassed 2,300 acres in an effort to ensure that views from *The Hill* remain unobstructed. He has completed three of *The Hill*'s four chambers. Behind each one's towering steel doors can be found a chapel-like environment that contains Magee's massive sculptural work in metal and glass. *The Hill* is private and unphotographed, and is an unforgettable experience for those who travel there.

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Sadly, it is the exception rather than the rule to find innovative art by important contemporary artists in spiritual settings. Even when an artist is invited to contribute to a religious building, that doesn't guarantee his or her involvement through to the end. Building committees, assorted constituencies, numerous meetings, and the need for consensus can all work against an artist's participation. Most artists are used to working alone, and to operate within such a forum is more than many are willing to take on. And there are risks for the religious institutions as well. Collaboration with a contemporary artist requires a tremendous leap of faith on their part, and as so many have found, it much easier and safer to simply mail-order official or traditional religious art.

So, are we going to have to continue to rely on museums as stand-ins for art-filled chapels? Through the efforts of the individuals listed here as well as others, what Father Couturier called the "tradition of courage and mutual confidence" has been kept alive — but just barely.[17] It is encouraging, therefore, that for the upcoming millennium, the Catholic church has initiated a number of art-related building projects. One of the most notable is Robert Rauschenberg's commission to create a massive, 36-panel interpretation of the Apocalypse for a cathedral in Fogia, Italy, being designed by Renzo Piano. An undertaking with such tremendous potential, involving two internationally acknowledged masters in their fields, hearkens back to the church's glory days, and leads one to hope that the new century might bring with it a revitalized union of art and religion. That would be for the greater good, because, as Thomas Merton wrote, "In art we find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time."[18] ■

1. Gilkey made his comment as part of his 1981 commencement address at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. A revision of the address, "Can Art Fill the Vacuum?," appears in *Art, Creativity and the Sacred: An Anthology of Religion and Art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), pp. 187-192.

2. Ibid, p. 189.

3. John Dillenberger, "Artists and Church Commissions: Rubin's The Church at Assy Revisited," in *Art, Creativity and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), p. 195.

4. Looking down a chronological list (ie: mannerism, neo-classicism, impressionism, surrealism, dada, pop art, conceptual art ...) one might easily conclude that religious concerns are becoming less and less directly relevant to artists' work.

5. Marie-Alain Couturier, "To the Great Men, the Great Works," in *Sacred Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press in association with the Menil Foundation, 1983), p. 34.

6. John Elderfield, *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992), p. 419.

7. Marie-Alain Couturier, "Vence," in *Sacred Art*, p. 94.

8. Marie-Alain Couturier, "Audincourt," in *Sacred Art*, p. 102.

9. For more, see John Keenen, "Architecture," in *Tony Smith: Architect•Painter•Sculptor* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), pp. 44-45.

10. For more, see *Miriam Tremal, Jewels for a Crown: The Story of the Chagall Windows* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

11. Sheldon Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings: Origins, Structure, Meaning* (Austin: University of Texas Press with the Menil Foundation, Inc., 1997), pp. 39-40.

12. Ibid, p. 75.

13. Mark Rothko to John and Dominique de Menil, January 1, 1966, The Menil Collection Archives, Houston.

14. Levi Arthur Olan quoted in Gerry Cristol's *A Light in the Prairie: Temple Emanu-el of Dallas 1872-1997* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1998), pp. 163-64.

15. Press release, Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church, April 20, 1998.

16. The exhibition, entitled *Off The Wall*, was presented at the San Antonio Museum of Art September 12-November 1, 1981.

17. Couturier, "To the Great Men, the Great Works," in *Sacred Art*, p. 36.

18. Thomas Merton quoted in *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas P. McDonnell (New York: Image Books, 1974), p. 387.

THE CHURCHES AND SYNAGOGUES OF GARY CUNNINGHAM

BY BARBARA KOERBLE

Front facade, Cistercian Abbey Church, Dallas, Cunningham Architects, 1992.

Architect Gary Cunningham in front of the Cistercian Abbey Church.

Interior, Cistercian Abbey Church. Light enters the sanctuary through vertical windows and skylights.

Side and front facade, Cistercian Abbey Church. A 13th-century church in Hungary provided a model for Cunningham's use of light and dark stones.

At nine o'clock on a warm August morning, a small group of visitors from Austin's Texas Fine Arts Association gathers in front of the Cistercian Abbey Church in Irving, Texas. They are there to admire the work of Gary Cunningham, a Dallas architect who in recent years has become known as one of the state's finest designers of religious structures. And the Cistercian Church, imposing and starkly impressive, is one of his best designs. The church's 40-foot-high stone facade is composed of stacked rectangular limestone blocks, each a weighty 5,000 pounds. On this morning, the massive stone wall is bathed in a sunlight so strong that one can see delicate veining in each block; some are stained with sooty streaks. The scars of the drill that split the rock face ring the top of each stone like a crown of thorns.

As the visitors look on, Cunningham tells how each huge stone was hewn. It's been many years since the work was completed, but his description makes it sound as if it happened yesterday. It's not just that he's told the story many times; it's also that he spent hours walking the quarry site near Midland, watching the cutting of the stones that would be reassembled in a simple nave form dating back centuries.

Such attention to materials and process is a Cunningham characteristic, as is his appreciation of religious tradition. He obviously relishes making historical connections, yet he also employs modern structural details.[1] The combination is just one of the things that has helped distinguish his church designs from those of his peers. Although he chafes at the constraints of stylistic labels, Cunningham might be described as an unorthodox modernist. Aesthetically, he favors volumetric forms and the honest expression of structure and materials. However, he also frequently pushes the limits when it comes to manipulating materials. He can enthusiastically enrich a plain concrete wall with willow branches, cast a bronze bell in the dirt, or crawl to the top of a church in the middle of the night to install a handmade cross. As Richard Ferrier, associate professor in the University of Texas Arlington's School of Architecture, notes, "What people recall about his works is his unique and very profound way of using materials. He gets out there and gets dirty. He wants to understand the process of building."

Cunningham first gained notice not for his churches, but for an office building. He established his Dallas-based firm in 1981, and by 1983 his first office building commission — Benchmark in Longview — had won a Texas Society of Architects Design Award. In 1986, Sharon Odum, who has been a stabilizing influence in the firm as it has grown to around ten employees, joined as a design principal. Cunningham Architects garnered more accolades in 1988 with a Dallas AIA Design Award for the Sesler residence in Dallas.[2] This was followed by an unusual house remodeling commission from Morton H. Meyerson, the namesake of Dallas' symphony center. Meyerson's home, originally a 1923 electric substation, was converted by Cunningham with an exhuberance bordering on the manic. Dubbed the "Power House," it provided ample opportunity for Cunningham's wit in the development of its electrical thematic subtext.

Grace Lutheran Church

During this period Cunningham was engaged to design his first church, Grace Lutheran in the Dallas suburb of Carrollton. Carrollton is filled with large brick homes squeezed on tiny lots; the dominant visual impression is their massive, shingled roof peaks projecting above brick privacy walls. Even the mailboxes are encased in brick. Within this bland setting was a barren rolling hill where Cunningham sited the church.

The design is spartan in its simplicity: the primary worship space is a square room topped with a wood-framed pyramidal roof bolted to exposed steel supports. Cunningham carefully differentiated spaces with materials. The 6,500-square-foot worship hall is built of concrete block with a copper clad roof. A brick classroom wing on the western side frames the sanctuary entrance, while support spaces on the north side were covered in clapboard siding. In Cunningham's master plan, the square sanctuary was to become a multi-purpose room, and a larger sanctuary and school eventually would be built within an axial plan. The high pitched roof of the worship hall projects above the L-shaped wings and calls attention to the significance of the sacred space. In future phases of development, Cunningham planned to continue the expression of significant spaces through their height, volumetric form, and use of singular materials.[3]

This first religious commission was a groundbreaking experience for the firm. With Grace Lutheran, Cunningham chose to bring the entire small congregation into the design process. Most of the congregation stayed after church each Sunday while Cunningham showed them images and discussed ideas. Rather than just working with a building committee, Cunningham was working with a community. Ever since Grace Lutheran, the firm's practice has been to bring clients as fully into the process as possible.

Though additions by others have tempered Cunningham's vision for Grace Lutheran in the ten years since it was built, its core design remains clear. The church's current pastor, Justin Kvanli, personally likes the spartan aesthetic. "The high ceiling is beautiful," he notes. "It brings to mind the loftiness of God."

Cistercian Abbey Church

For Cunningham, the inception of work on the Cistercian Abbey Church in 1990 must have seemed like coming home. He had attended the Cistercian Abbey's Preparatory School for Boys from third grade through high school, from which he was graduated in 1972. As a result, he was well-versed in the history of the abbey and the lifestyle of the Cistercian monks.

Our Lady of Dallas Abbey was established in 1957 by a group of monks from Zirc, Hungary, who in the 1940s had fled persecution by the Communists. To investigate historic precedents for the abbey, Cunningham visited monasteries in Italy, Hungary, and Austria, spending nights in small, austere cell rooms. From his travels, Cunningham gleaned as much as he could about these simple load bearing structures. (A specific 13th-century Cistercian church in Belapátfalva, Hungary, served as a model for the alternation of light and dark stones in the church's facade.) They also led to Cunningham's resolve to make his own design "very humble, very plain."

The Cistercian Abbey Church is sited to complete the north end of a monk's cloister, a modern 1962 international style structure by Dallas architects Adams and Adams. Visitors attending services ascend stairs from a parking area at the foot of the property to the summit of the hill. The steep ascent through a wooded grove provides an implicit processional, and a transition for the visitor from the nearby Highway 114 interchange.

The church's sanctuary is one of Cunningham's most stunning interiors. Within the nave, square, cast-in-place concrete columns support the load-bearing stone walls. The play of light enhances the rough beauty of the split-faced stone. Illumination enters the church from vertical

The Epstein Chapel at Temple Shalom, Dallas, Cunningham Architects, 1991.

A rendering of the plans for Prince of Peace Catholic Community, Plano, shows the extent of the commission, which included a main worship space, two small chapels, offices, a library, and a school.

Grace Lutheran, Carrollton, 1988, was Gary Cunningham's first religious commission.

windows above the altar and the entrance and clerestory openings inserted in the upper courses of the side walls. Skylights fill a continuous void along the top of the side walls, where the roof nearly intersects but does not touch the walls. Raking light enters though the skylights to wash the side walls.

The windows and skylights are filled with thick cast-glass tiles containing pits and bubbles that underscore their handmade qualities. In a similar gesture, the interior walls of the side aisles are covered with hand-troweled gray gypsum plaster enhanced by the streaking of added pigments. It's important to the Catholic liturgy, Cunningham notes, that materials in the church be handmade whenever possible.

The forces inherent in the structural system that supports the church's roof exhibit a sublime drama. While it may appear that divine intervention is holding up the roof, in fact it is high-tech engineering. The budget was insufficient for a stone vault, and Cunningham didn't want to use trusses, nor did he want the church's wooden roof to touch the side walls. As Cunningham explains, to deal with roof forces that could push the side walls over, steel knife plates were inserted between joints in the top course of stones to transfer the load. Tie rods prevent the stones from flipping up. The roof is further anchored by half inch stainless steel cables. Such high-tech flourishes, which were developed through consultation with structural engineer Jim Smith, are a trademark of Cunningham's firm. Conversely, the team members, with the assistance of Dallas sculptor David Synes, also engaged in low-tech fabrication of bronze chapel objects such as the cross and the bells. The downlights are simple welded cylinders, and the round knobs serving as handgrips at the entrance to the choir from the vestry were cast from potatoes.

The monks indicated their satisfaction with Cunningham's work by commissioning him to design a new library and classroom for the day school, which was dedicated in March 1998.

Temple Shalom

When Rabbi Kenneth Roseman and his building committee for Dallas' Temple Shalom began their search for an architectural firm to design a small chapel, their primary goal was to find one that would not bring preconceived ideas to the project. "We walked in there with zero knowledge ... and we got the job because we said they would have to teach us about all this," says Cunningham. "It was really a very sincere exchange of culture." The committee wanted a chapel to complement their main sanctuary, which seats 482 in theater style seating. The large worship space worked well for events such as High Holy Days, but an intimate space was needed for smaller gatherings.

Originally, it was assumed that the chapel would be attached to the main worship space, but after some discussion Cunningham persuaded his client to set the chapel apart and create a courtyard space between the two buildings. The chapel was developed as a circle bisected by a glass wall. Through that wall the courtyard can be seen, which serves to bring nature into the worship. A white partition wall provides a backdrop for the essential components of the services: the bimah, a raised platform from which the Torah is read, the Ark containing the Torah, the Eternal Light, and the reading table. The semi-circular space designed for the chapel served the committee's charge to bring congregants close to the bimah and the Ark. And with the use of pew seating rather than auditorium seating, the result was a very intimate chapel that seats 175.

A 100-foot passage connects the vestibule of the main sanctuary to the new chapel. Upon entering the hallway, an angled window on the left side directs one's gaze across the courtyard to the chapel itself; through a slotted opening, the Eternal Light can be glimpsed. The corridor is designed as a progression through time and space. A series of vertical windows allow views of the courtyard to the left; the corridor leads toward a glass wall at the end. Cunningham incorporated into the left wall rectangular pieces of colored cast glass that gradually change in hue from clear blue to dark sapphire, deepening the corridor's mood-enhancing aspects. At the glass wall, one takes a sharp turn to the left, then after a short passage, another sharp turn into the chapel itself. Upon entering the chapel, one follows a corridor along a curving wall. Vertical windows in this wall are filled with green cast glass tiles that give this portion of the interior an almost aqueous feeling.

For all of its subtle qualities, the Epstein Chapel, named for the family that funded it, also displays Cunningham's structural skills. The roof of the chapel is supported by wooden gluelam beams that radiate from the load-bearing outer walls and converge at the center of the half circle. They are supported by a steel beam formed in a half circle; the ends of this cantilevered beam rest on two concrete columns, and are connected with one inch steel rods to piers sunk 20 feet into the ground.

Countering this high-tech detailing is the chapel's emphasis on nature and community. The courtyard is planted with parallel rows of yaupon holly trees that echo the rows of pews within the chapel. The courtyard's lush foliage provides a balance to the cool tonalities of the chapel interior.

Prince of Peace

Flush with the success of the Cistercian Abbey Church and Temple Shalom's Epstein Chapel, in 1992 Cunningham and Sharon Odum ventured into what seemed like familiar territory, accepting a first phase design commission for the Prince of Peace Catholic Community in the north Dallas suburb of Plano. The commission included a large worship space to seat 1,000, two smaller chapels, offices, a library, and a first phase of a school. It was their largest religious commission to date.

For Cunningham and Odum, Prince of Peace proved to be both their most

Prince of Peace Catholic Community, Plano, 1994. Top: Concrete panels for Prince of Peace's school building were textured with rock salt and willow branches. Bottom: Prince of Peace's conical roof is supported by tree-like steel columns on the interior.

multi-layered and complicated project. "Prince of Peace [involved a] school and a suburb and a set of raw land — a very, very rich set of parameters," Cunningham says. "I mean, it was all a blank canvas and starting from scratch." He and Odum took Vatican II, which in 1962 had called for liturgical reforms within the Catholic Church, as their bible, but their clients appear to have been divided about some of these tenets being applied to the new buildings. Father James Balint and others on the building committee dedicated to Vatican II reforms requested that the architects follow the guidelines contained in *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. According to this document, "A good architect will possess both the willingness to learn from the congregation and sufficient integrity not to allow the community's design taste or preference to limit the freedom necessary for a creative design. The architect will look to the congregation and clergy for an understanding of the character and purpose of the liturgical assembly. With that rapport, it is the architect's task to design the space, using contemporary materials and modes of construction, in dialogue with consultants who are expert in the areas of liturgical art, rites, acoustics, and other specialized issues."[4]

With that in mind, Lyle Novinski of the University of Dallas was hired as a liturgical consultant, and with his assistance symbolic design elements were developed. The most obvious example can be seen in the use of water as metaphor, beginning with the baptismal font, which is the first feature encountered when entering the church. Dallas sculptor Brad Goldberg was selected to carve the font out of stone, and as Cunningham explains, "water became the organizing element of the whole project."

It is typical of Cunningham's approach to make a thorough inventory of the site, and when he did so he discovered that a creek had once existed on the property. So he designed a very organic, curvilinear concrete drainage channel to collect water runoff. Drawing an analogy to the "different species in nature" that once came to the creek to drink, Cunningham says he based his design concept on the idea that the water that originated from the baptismal font fed and nourished all who came to know God.

Cunningham proposed that cars not be parked close to the church, but that congregants walk along an outdoor pathway that he termed the "Processional Way." This would give people a short time to prepare for worship. For Cunningham, this was a natural development of the processionals in both the Cistercian Abbey and Temple Shalom. All of the significant buildings in the Prince of Peace project, including the library, faced onto the Processional Way. In Cunningham's master plan for phase two, a cafeteria was planned for the area south of the church. The intent was to complete a courtyard enclosure in front of the church. Much of this design work was related to Cunningham's desire to create an "internal village" for the congregation, which had previously met in movie theaters and school buildings. Later, after Cunningham's involvement with the project ended, this area became a parking lot.

The church building itself is a dramatic structure. Its conical shaped roof is supported by interior tree-like steel columns. Cunningham liked this geometric form, commenting that the "volume has a level of importance and heroism." An advantage of a circular church with a round plan was the development of seating that brought congregants as close to the altar as possible.

Some of the problems Cunningham and Odum encountered were caused by the budget of $110 per square foot for the church and $55 per square foot for the school. (The budget for the Cistercian Abbey Church was $200 per square foot.) To save money, the pair spent hours fabricating many of Prince of Peace's handmade objects, such as the light fixtures. Odum observes, "It's a way for us to get richness in projects that the client couldn't afford." Also because of the tight budget, it was decided to use tilt-up concrete construction for the school building.

Cunningham, Odum, and their clients participated in texturing the tilt-up panels for the school building with rock salt and willow branches. The branches came from trees on the site, and were dragged through the wet concrete. Delicate impressions of leaves are also imprinted on many of the panels. Despite this, the view of a concrete wall from a nearby parkway, and the rough and ready character of the school, caused controversy. As a result, when time came for phase two of the Prince of Peace project to begin, Cunningham Architects was passed over in favor of Corgan Associates of Dallas.

Cunningham has little to say about the Corgan addition, but it's obvious that he thinks it disrupted the conceptual planning underpinning his phase one. With its liberal use of brick veneer and appropriated forms, Corgan's second phase not only blurs Cunningham's distinction between sacred and secular spaces, but also encases much of Cunningham's school building, concealing some of the tilt-up panels.

Since Prince of Peace, Cunningham Architects have completed two smaller religious commissions, one a renovation/expansion project for Saint Peter's Episcopal Church in McKinney and the other a renovation of the Arapaho United Methodist Church. In these, as in his earlier designs, Cunningham's reductive aesthetic has been a blessing. The firm's dedication to honest expression of function and use of materials also makes it sympathetic to religious structures. Cunningham's idealism seems to have served him best when working with clients steeped in tradition, such as the monks of the Cistercian order and the Temple Shalom building committee. He's found newer congregations such as Prince of Peace more challenging, as there may be no consensus among the congregants about the nature of the church.[5]

Still, Cunningham's next religious commission, a master plan for the Faith Episcopal Church in Allen, Texas, sounds like a good fit. The congregation uses a rock band and video projectors in their services. He's very taken with the site: "It's a beautiful site in a grove of hackberry trees ... a floodplain, with bits of prairie." It's not surprising that Cunningham would get excited about something as mundane as hackberry trees. "They're not fancy trees in themselves," he says, "but they have a lot of strength."

In other words, faith grows where it's planted. ■

1. In her page 8G story for the *Dallas Morning News* on March 16, 1996, reporter Alison Hamilton noted that an interesting complement to Cunningham's sometimes irreverent modernity is his utter respect for listening to "what the rules are" when it comes to the requirements of church liturgy.

2. Cunningham's religious architecture has also won a number of awards, among them the 1990 Dallas AIA Design Award for Grace Lutheran; the 1992 Texas Society of Architects Design Award and the 1993 Dallas AIA Design Award for Cistercian Abbey Church; the 1992 Dallas AIA Design Award for Temple Shalom; and the 1995 Dallas AIA Design Award for Prince of Peace, Phase 1.

3. Unfortunately, those plans were never completed. Today, the purity of the church's form is somewhat marred by exposed air conditioning units and accretions such as metal service buildings. Cunningham's original conception has also been altered by a brick wall that was layered over the clapboard siding on the north side.

4. *Environment and Art In Catholic Worship* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1977), p. 23.

5. Some of the difficulties stemmed from the fact that Cunningham and Odum were not the first choice of the church's building committee, which spent a year working on a design with Phillips Swager Associates of Dallas, who brought in Chicago architect Ben Weese as design consultant. Then Phillips Swager Associates was fired, and Cunningham Architects hired. Odum feels that the committee may have been burned out by this point, and that this may have exacerbated later problems. In hindsight, Odum wishes that she and Cunningham had requested a new building committee. For a detailed examination of the controversy see "From Bauhaus to God's House" by Mark Branch, *Dallas Observer*, October 26, 1995.

HOUSES of the HOLY

PHOTO ESSAY BY PAUL HESTER

SRI MEENAKSHI TEMPLE, 1982
Hindu
17130 McLean Road

The third traditional Hindu temple built in in the United States, and the first devoted to a goddess (Sri Meenakshi), this Brazoria County landmark has become a place of pilgrimage for Hindus from across the Southwest. Designed by two noted Indian temple architects, Padmasri S.M. Ganapathy Sthapathi and Padmasri Muthiah Sthapathi, it was built by artisans imported from India.

It wasn't really that long ago that Houston, like the state and nation it's a part of, could be fairly accurately described as a Christian community. It's not that Christianity was the only religion practiced in the city — Judaism, of course, was present, as well as other faiths — but its dominance was unquestioned. This was particularly true in terms of physical presence. Churches could be found almost anywhere you looked, from the neo-gothic spires downtown to the sprawling mega-complexes beyond Loop 610. Other traditions tended to be less obvious, their adherents meeting in rented auditoriums or renovated business space. The architecture that marked their history was nowhere to be seen.

Since the mid-'80s, though, that's changed. While Christian churches are still by far Houston's most common religious structures, mosques that would not look out of place in the Middle East and temples that would fit easily into the landscape of India or China can also be found. Richard Vara, the *Houston Chronicle*'s award-winning religion reporter, remembers that when he started working his beat in the mid-'80s he had to look hard to find non-traditional stories. But by the early '90s, he could drive around Houston and see the city's newly emerging faiths in newly emerging buildings.

Rice University sociologist Stephen Klineberg points to the immigration boom of the last two decades as one possible reason for this change. During the 1970s, when Harris County grew by 38 percent, most of the new Houstonians were Anglos from other parts of America. But between 1982 and 1990, when Harris County grew another 17 percent, the Anglo population grew only 1 percent. The Hispanic and African-American populations grew 75 and 12.5 percent respectively, but the most astonishing increase was that of the Asian population, which expanded 129 percent. The influx of non-European immigrants has continued throughout the 1990s, says Klineberg, putting Houston, along with Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Miami, at the forefront of America's transformation into what Klineberg terms the first truly "universal nation."

Part of the culture these new Houstonians bring with them is the culture of their religion, and as their numbers grow to sufficient size, that culture is expressed in religious structures — structures that often, like the immigrants themselves, end up in the city's suburbs. Already, Houston's followers of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Taoism have made their presence known through their houses of worship. That these temples tend to follow traditional designs isn't surprising; for many of the faithful, these holy places are ties not just to the infinite, but to an ancestral home. They are buildings both of belief, and of memory.
Mitchell J. Shields

Teen How Temple, 1987
Taoist
1507 Delano Street

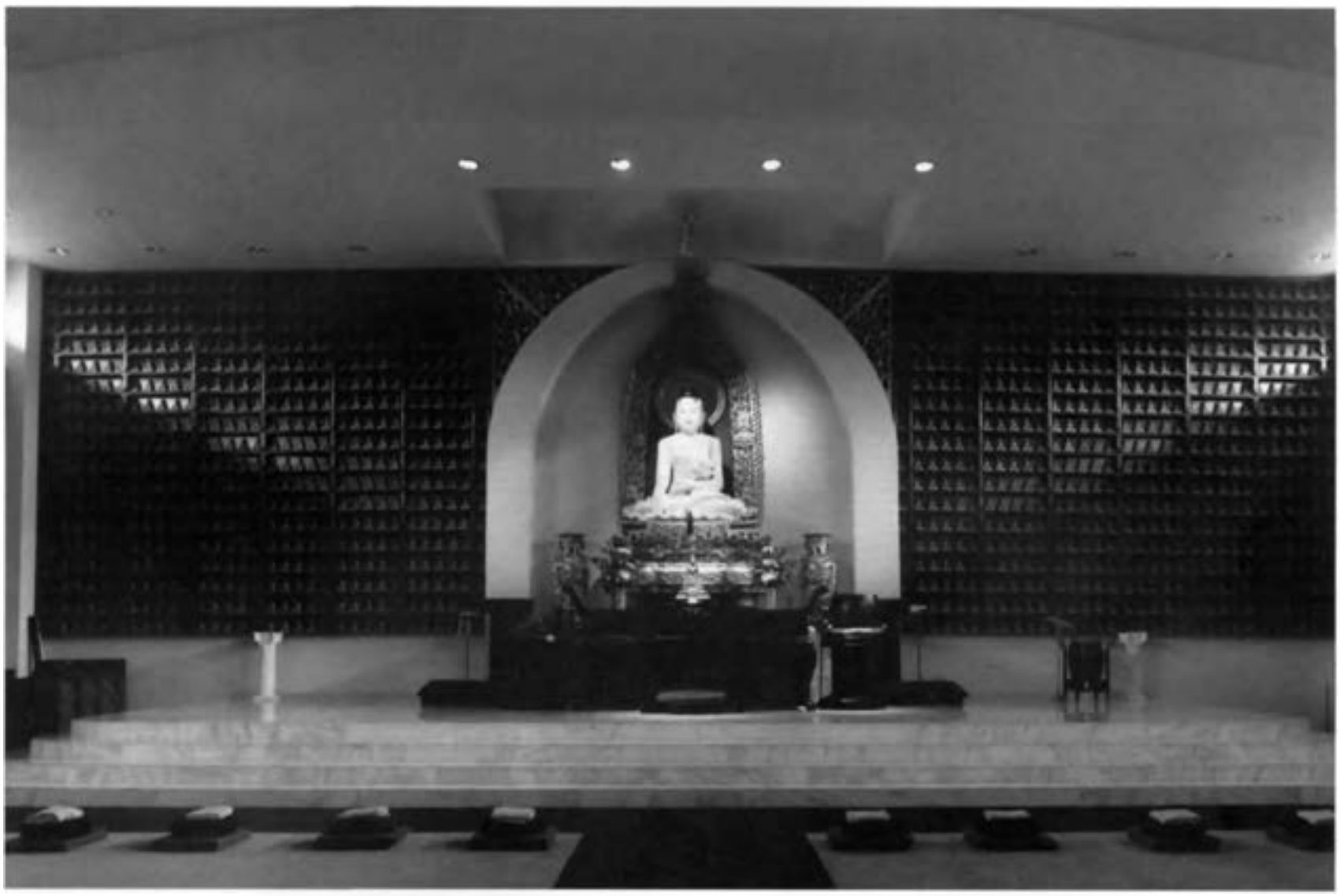
On most mornings, passersby in this industrial neighborhood in Houston's East End can hear the sound of gongs as the Teen How Temple comes to life. Construction material for the temple was imported from Taiwan, though some of the carving was done by local Chinese artisans.

Synott Mosque, 1989 (top and bottom left);
Al-Farouq Mosque, 1998 (bottom right)
Islamic
10415 Synott Road, Sugar Land, and 1207 Conrad Saur

The Islamic community has been one of the fastest growing in Houston. At the start of this decade, it was estimated that the city's Islamic faithful numbered around 50,000. Recent estimates put the number closer to 100,000. This increase has led to the construction of a few traditionally designed mosques with recognizable minarets.

JADE BUDDHA TEMPLE, 1989 (TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT);
VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST CENTER, 1991 (BOTTOM CENTER AND BOTTOM LEFT)
Buddhist
6969 West Branch and 10002 Synott Road

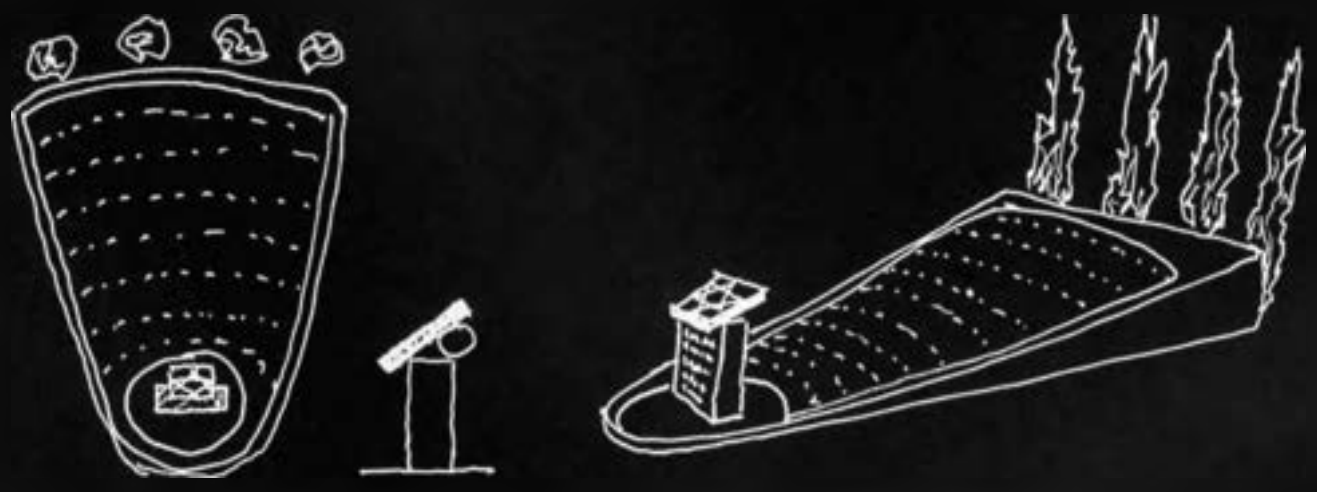
The Jade Buddha Temple complex covers two-and-a-half acres in southwest Houston and, with more than 1,000 participating members, is one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Texas. The Vietnamese Buddhist Center, while primarily serving the city's large Vietnamese community, has also begun attracting more non-Asian American adherents, evidence of how faiths once seen as foreign are making themselves part of the regular fabric of Houston.



TO DIE FOR

Cameron Armstrong and his plain pine coffin, designed in the form of an art crate.

IN DEATH, DESIGN MATTERS

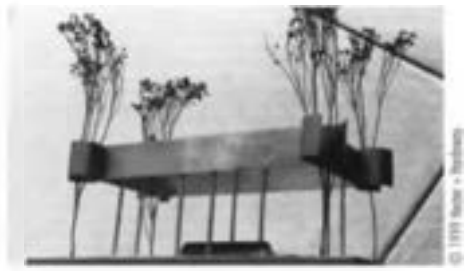


Burdette Keeland's original design for the grave of conductor Efrem Kurtz. The family loved it, but the cemetery refused it.

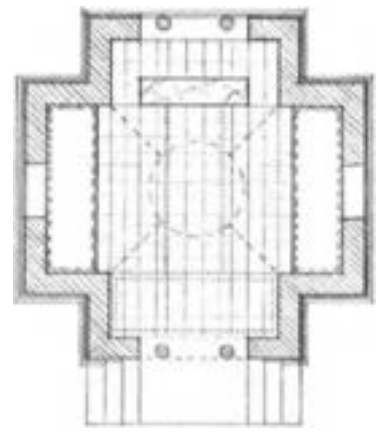
BY MITCHELL J. SHIELDS

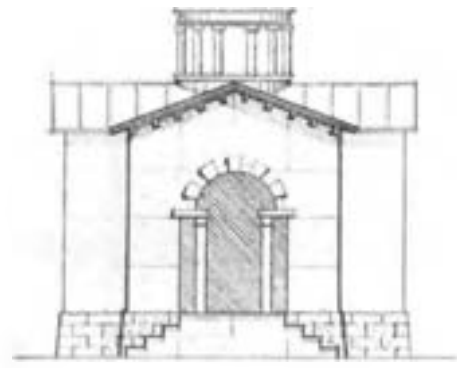
Efrem Kurtz's grave, as allowed by Mount Carmel Cemetery.
A basic lectern form can still be seen in the headstone.

A Burdette Keeland tombstone design. The markers would hang at the head of the grave like a mobile, moving in the wind.



In this Keeland design, a metal frame around a family plot guides the growth of sheltering trees.





Elevation of "Pasis," an as yet unbuilt mausoleum Burdette Keeland designed for AGM Memorials in Austin.

It was, almost everyone involved agreed, a lovely idea. Efrem Kurtz, a former director of the Houston Symphony, had died, and his family wanted Houston architect Burdette Keeland Jr. to design his gravesite.

Keeland was a reasonable choice for the undertaking; over the last four decades he has become something of an expert in funeral matters. In the 1960s, as Keeland tells the story, he was wandering the city of Milan with his wife when they decided they were too footsore and weary to continue. Keeland was dispatched to call a taxi, and from the upper floor of the building where he found his phone he saw an unexpected vision: 400 acres of cemetery in the very middle of Milan's urban expanse. In front of him stretched a vast city of the dead that closely mimicked the cities of the living. There were obviously rich neighborhoods and middle-class neighborhoods and poor neighborhoods, all distinct, all separate. Keeland, interested in what this sort of urban planning might teach his architecture students at the University of Houston, snapped a few photographs. Back home, he slipped pictures of the cemetery into his lectures, and was surprised at the response they drew. So the next time he traveled he sought out more graveyards, and took more pictures, and eventually his slide shows on the design issues surrounding death gained some small fame.

"The point I was trying to make," Keeland says, "is that people shouldn't be afraid of looking at death as an opportunity for an architectural statement." Efrem Kurtz's grave definitely offered an opportunity. His family wanted something that reflected the man's life, and after a few preliminary sketches and discarded ideas, Keeland came up with a concept he felt was particularly appropriate. Rather than have the tombstone at the head of the grave, he would put it at the foot and design it like a conductor's stand. Then the grave itself would be raised to suggest the spread of a concert hall, with different flowers planted to represent the people in the audience. Anyone coming upon this particular plot would know, without doubt, that here lay a musician.

The family loved it. But then Keeland sent his plans up to the cemetery in Glendale, New York, where Kurtz was to be buried, "and they just laughed me out of the room." Headstones had to be at the head of a grave, he was told, and the plot itself had to be as flat and level as those around it. Keeland tried to at least get the headstone-as-conductor's-stand accepted, but even that was turned down. "I was used to the architectural restrictions of cities and zoning and all this stuff," he sighs, "but I didn't have any idea that the cemetery business would be so difficult to deal with."

What Keeland had learned was the same lesson that a handful of other architects and craftsmen who have attempted to bring new elements of design to the funeral process have been taught: people are resistant to change when it comes to death. When Keeland designed a series of mausoleums for AGM Memorials in Austin, using traditional patterns but opening the mausoleums up to light and the elements to make them more cheerful and attractive to visitors, they were widely admired, but to date not a one has been sold. (Of course, the price of the mausoleums — $1 million to $1.5 million — may have had some affect on that.) And his various updates on tombstones, many of which look as much like modern art as they do grave markers, have had a similar fate. They exist in models and sketches, but not in cemeteries.

Similarly, Cameron Armstrong's coffins have yet to make it to the grave. Armstrong, a Houston architect, had little interest in funerals until his mother died. A year after her passing, he was suddenly stricken with profound depression, a delayed reaction to his grief over her death. He also felt guilt that he, as an architect, had not designed her coffin, and that as a result she was permanently entombed in a commercial product "I just have a horror about."

"In some ways," Armstrong says, "designing caskets fits in exactly with what an architect does — designing useful spaces. And it is a piece of real estate as well. It's the sort of thing architects should think about; it's part of their territory."

But when Armstrong began thinking about it, he found it more complicated than he'd imagined. At first he thought he would simply let his creativity run wild. As he delved into the issue, though, he kept running into constraints. "I was confused about how easy it would be," he says, "and when I discovered I couldn't just whip out a design, I focused on the problem of the correct proportions." Those proportions had to take into account the dimensions of the hearse that would transport the coffin, the limitations of the vault it would be lowered into, and, perhaps most important, the issue of comfort — not of the deceased, but of those who viewed the deceased's body. "You have to be able to fit a person and some upholstery into the casket and not make it look too crowded," Armstrong says. "If you build a casket that's too constrictive, the people viewing it will get a little bit nervous, a little tense."

With caskets, Armstrong discovered, every change took on unexpected significance. Designing a casket wasn't just about creating a container for a body, it was about the rituals related to death. When he designed a casket with no handles, for example, the question became, how do you lift it? If with ropes, what do you do with the ropes afterward? Cut them up — cut the final bonds, as it were — and distribute them to the mourners? And on and on. "The minute you diverge from the conventional casket, you end up in a whole new world of psychodrama," Armstrong says. "Even the smallest thing can suggest an whole new world."

Eventually, Armstrong came to believe that simple design was best, though it was far from easy. One casket, which now resides behind a couch in his living room, was inspired by a plain pine box, which in the late 20th century, as Armstrong notes, "is a remarkably exotic kind of carpentry. To make one, you have to get wood that is generally not available, and you have to find a fairly sophisticated carpenter." Armstrong created his plain pine casket with the help of artist Terry Andrews, cobbling it together in the basement of Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum, where Andrews worked. Another Armstrong casket was made of sheet metal with the assistance of sculptor Ed Wilson; that casket sits in the entranceway to Armstrong's home, where it doubles as a table for stacking papers and magazines.

Though Armstrong has worked with artists to construct his coffins, he had originally hoped to create prototypes that could be replicated with relative ease. Early on, though, he discovered there wasn't exactly a burning demand for his caskets. To date, he has made half a dozen coffins, all for people who are still living.

Perhaps the most successful of the new funeral designers has been David Pipes, a woodworker in San Antonio who in the mid-1980s added caskets to his line of heirloom furniture. His first casket was designed for a client in Paris, Texas, whose house he was renovating. The mother of the family wanted her son to have a proper vessel in which to leave this world, and asked Pipes to design a casket for him. Since the son was still very much alive — it was, Pipes recalls, a fairly eccentric family — he and Pipes created the casket together, making it so that it could serve as an armoire or bookshelf until it was time to lower it into the ground.

Since, Pipes has built other dual purpose coffins, but most of his caskets are created for the sole mission of containing a body. He makes between one and three a month, following traditional patterns but using wood, mainly long leaf yellow pine, rescued from old houses. His very traditionalism may explain why Pipes has a steady supply of customers, while designers such as Keeland and Armstrong have more ideas than commissions.

Still, Keeland argues, something needs to be done. When he travels to Russia, he says, he sees cemeteries that look distinctly Russian. When he journeys to Indonesia, he finds thatch roof tombs of unquestionable Indonesian design. But when he visits new cemeteries in America, he sees nothing of distinction. "My concern about this country," he says, "is that we're just taking a stamped out version, a cookie cutter deal, and say that's death." Today, people visit cemeteries that are 100 years old and find them a memorable reflection of their time. Will people 100 years from now be able to do the same with modern day cemeteries? Maybe, but not, Keeland suggests, until someone figures out a way to breath new life into America's approach to death. ■

S.I. Morris (left) with his first partners, F. Talbott Wilson (center) and B. W. Crain.

In 1952, S.I. Morris designed this clean, modernist house at Bissonnet and Waverly Court for his family.

BUILDING A HOUSTON PRACTICE

THE CAREER OF S.I. MORRIS

BY BARRY MOORE

Time and again over the years, Seth Irwin (S.I.) Morris has insisted that the only building he ever designed was a house built in the late 1950s at the corner of Bissonnet and Waverly Court. For those who know S.I. Morris just from the mammoth civic projects his architectural firm has been involved with, projects ranging from the Astrodome to the Wortham Theater Center to the Houston Public Library, that may sound like a startling admission. But for those more familiar with Morris, the remark is telling in a different way. It points not just to Morris' modesty in the midst of success, but also slyly makes the point that in architecture, design is only part of the equation. You also have to get the commission, and get a building erected. And on those fronts, S.I. Morris has had few peers in Houston over the last half century.

In some ways, Morris has been Houston's great enabler where architecture is concerned. He brought together clients, designers, and builders, and in the process created an architectural firm that changed the way Texas's largest city looks. At the same time, he and his partners acted as a post-graduate school for two generations of architects. The roll call of those who have passed through Morris' firm includes many of Houston's most successful practitioners. And while doing all this, Morris found time to actively support his university, his community, and profession, and, with his wife Suzanne, raise a large, talented, and loving family. S.I. Morris' is not your typical architectural success story.

Morris was born into a hardworking family of modest means in Madisonville, Texas, on September 1, 1914. When he was two years old, his mother announced that the family was packing and moving to Houston; she had read that the recently opened Rice Institute offered a free education to qualified young people, and she wanted her son to be one of them. Sixteen years later, after being graduated from San Jacinto High, Morris applied to Rice as an engineering hopeful. When told that all the engineering slots had been filled, he agreed to shift his attention to architecture, where there were more places available. Engineering's loss was Houston architecture's gain.

At Rice, Morris began making the friendships and connections that would serve him so well in the future. One of those friendships was with F. Talbott Wilson, who eventually became his partner; another was with Burns Roensch, an engineering major who hired Morris as a designer following Morris' 1935 graduation from Rice.

Houston in the late 1930s was a good place for an ambitious young architect. Among Morris' first jobs was a new house in Courtlandt Place for banker William Kirkland. (Years later, when Kirkland was among those influencing the selection of the architects for the Astrodome, this would prove to be a critical alliance.) The Depression was receding, and Houston's population was expanding, mainly because of growth in the oil and petrochemical industry. Housing was in short supply, and the talented and energetic new firm of F. Talbott Wilson and Irwin Morris, founded in 1938, was ready to do something about that. Their first commission was the Park Lane Apartments on the edge of Hermann Park, and numerous residential commissions followed. About this time land developer E.L. Crain engaged the young men to design a series of houses in his new Garden Oaks Subdivision, and also helped them win a contract in 1940 to design the Garden Oaks School.

Just prior to World War II, Morris and Wilson embarked on a development scheme of their own. In Crestwood, a pretty area on the east side of Memorial Park, the architects bought eight lots, designed and built houses for them, and then sold the houses to friends. Following the war, the firm again tried building and selling homes, this time in Pine Shad-

S.I. Morris' office, 1976.

S.I. Morris (third from left) examines a model of the Museum of Fine Arts' Brown Pavilion in 1971 with, from left to right, Earl Pierson, Benjamin Woodson, Alexander K. McLanahan, Edward Rotan, Mrs. George R. Brown, John Beck, and museum director Philippe de Montebello. S.I. Morris' firm provided local architectural services in collaboration with design architect Mies van der Rohe for this addition to the museum.

Seth Irwin (S.I.) Morris

ows, a subdivision created by them and a few friends.

Though World War II brought a halt to business as Morris and Wilson entered the service, with Morris going behind enemy lines in mainland China for Naval Intelligence, it did have one positive result: it resulted in Morris' meeting Suzanne Kibler of Columbus, Ohio. They married late in 1945.

After a distinguished wartime career, Morris rejoined Wilson and they added a new partner, B.W. Crain. The postwar housing shortage meant that couples with kids or pets weren't wanted in most apartment complexes, so in 1947, Morris and his partners built their own at the corner of Yoakum and Hawthorne. It was Houston's first co-op apartment, and provided living quarters for the firm's partners, a few friends, and some office associates. The Morrises moved in the day their oldest son, Peter, was born. Daughter Maria arrived in 1949, and son David soon after. So in 1952 Morris purchased a lot on the corner at Bissonnet and Waverly Court for a new house — and engaged in what he would later claim was his only actual design work. (Children Laura and John arrived soon after.)

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Wilson, Morris & Crain became known as club specialists. Besides projects in Lake Charles and Longview, the firm designed the Forest Club in 1949. That same year they designed a house for Ernie Cockrell, a lifelong friend and schoolmate. By 1953, the Houston Club had moved to a new building, and Wilson, Morris & Crain — with the backing of board member Cockrell — received the commission for the new interiors. By the end of the year, the prestigious Houston Country Club had decided to build a new clubhouse on the west side of town. Wilson, Morris & Crain were selected as architects along with Hamilton Brown, not only because they were experts in the field, but also because Morris sent a personal letter to everyone he knew in the club asking for his or her support. Morris admits that the one crucial turning point for the firm was this commission. As he understated, "When you build a club, you get to know a lot of people who run things."

And the big new commissions started to come: dormitories at the University of Texas; Hanszen, Baker, Will Rice, and Lovett colleges at Rice University; the Gerald Hines's residence and scores of projects for his company; the Kelsey Leary Seybold Clinic; high-rise corporate headquarters for Southwestern Bell, Texaco, and Houston Lighting and Power; the University of Texas Medical Branch Basic Sciences Building; the University of Houston College of Education; the Houston Post building; and the Bank of Houston.

In 1958, shortly after Ralph Anderson became a principal in Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, the firm was selected as associated architect with Skidmore Owings and Merrill for the First City National Bank Building at Main and Lamar. Board Chairman Judge James A. Elkins Sr., a native of Huntsville, liked the fact that Morris was born in nearby Madisonville. Morris evaluated the project as follows: "What I learned was how they did a job in the big city, how they did their production." Many profitable associations with out of town architects were to follow.

When the Houston Sports Association won a National League Baseball Franchise in 1961, treasurer and old Morris client Bill Kirkland saw to it that Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson was hired. The project entailed all the planning for the Astrodome — a challenging effort that required dealing with unique architectural, structural, and mechanical problems. The project lasted seven years and was so stressful for Morris that he stopped playing golf to avoid the relentless questions from other golfers about the success of this new building. Early into the project, eldest son Peter asked, "Dad, how far will we have to move when the Dome falls down?" But of course it didn't fall down. Instead, the Astrodome resulted in the largest fee the firm ever earned, and was one of its most successful projects.

After 1970, when Eugene E. Aubry joined as design principal, the firm was engaged to design the Houston Public Library, the First Baptist Church, the University of Houston Clear Lake campus, the Glassell School, the First City Tower, and the Wortham Theater Center. The 1970s also saw Morris' greatest civic energies devoted to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Rice University; the Houston Parks Board; the American Red Cross; the Boy Scouts of America; the Center for the Retarded; and numerous other philanthropies. Prior to S.I. Morris' retirement from what became Morris Architects, the firm had moved beyond Houston and Texas to design such major urban buildings as the Wyndham Greenspoint, the Windsor Court Hotel in New Orleans, and DuPont Center in Orlando.

It may seem odd that a man who got into architecture school by accident ended up senior partner in one of the largest and most respected firms in the region. But it may have been that very chance beginning that sparked Morris' success. Among other things, it helped him be appreciative of talented peers such as Talbott Wilson. Unlike them, he never quite saw himself as a designer who had answered a calling. And perhaps as a result, Morris perfected his skills as the one who brought in the challenging projects, and the one who set the tone for the highest standards of design and delivery of services.

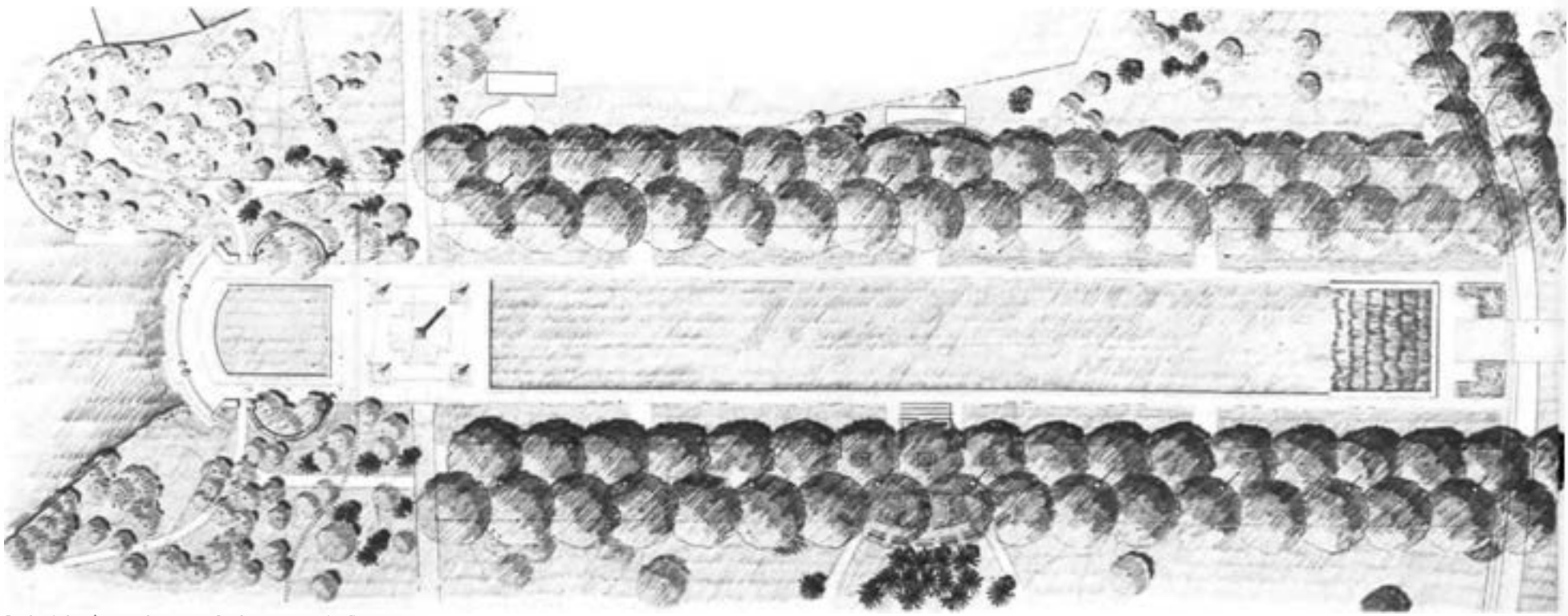
S.I. Morris had the skills and intuition that could have made him a success in any number of fields. It is the great fortune of Houston that he chose the profession of architecture. No one else has better shown how to build a large, profitable, and talented firm — and along the way change a city's face. ■

ALUMNI FIRMS OF S.I. MORRIS

Adams Architects, Inc.
Browne Penland McGregor Architects, Inc.
Pleas Doyle Associates
Leslie K. Elkins Architects
Philip Ewald Architecture, Inc.
Gabriel Achitects
Griffin Architects, Inc.
Hall/Barnum Architects
Dennis R. Hancock
Jackson & Ryan Architects
R. C. Johnson Architects
Kendall/Heaton Associates, Inc.
Jim McReynolds Architects, Inc.
Morris Architects
Alsey Newton Architect
William F. Stern & Associates, Architects
Urban Architectural Group
Watkins Hamilton Ross Architects
Willis Bricker & Cannady, Architects
Wilson Architectural Group, Inc.
The Wingfield - Sears Group, Inc.

MORRIS ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS

Houston Country Club (1957) with Hamilton Brown
First City National Bank Building (1960) in association with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
US Post Office (1962)
Astrodome (1965) with Lloyd, Morgan & Jones
Electric Tower (1968)
Houston Post Building (1970)
One Shell Plaza (1971) in association with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Two Shell Plaza (1972) in association with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
One Allen Center (1972)
KPRC Channel Two Studio (1972)
Tin Houses (1974)
Central Library Building, Houston Public Library (1975)
Pennzoil Place (1976) in association with Johnson/Burgee Architects
One Houston Center (1977) with Caudill Rowlett Scott and 3D/International
Texaco Office Building (1977)
First Baptist Church of Houston (1976)
Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., School of Art (1978)
One Riverway (1978)
Brown & Root Southwest Houston Office Building (1980)
Three Riverway (1980)
First City Tower (1981)
Inn on the Park (1981)
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture building, University of Houston, in association with Johnson/Burgee Architects
Transco Tower (1983) in association with Johnson/Burgee Architects
Wortham Theater Center (1987)



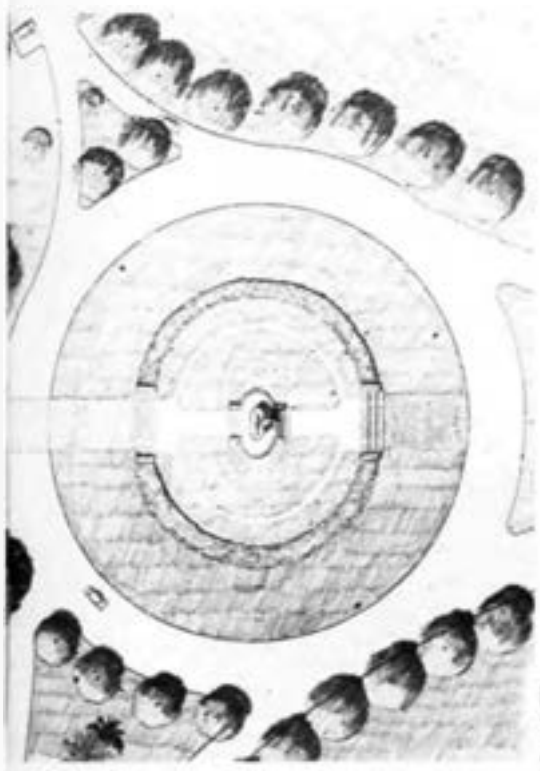
Rendered plan of proposed renovation for the Hermann Park reflection pool.

THE STATE OF THE

The old... the muddy edges of the reflection pool still await the enhancements that will turn the pool into the well-formed corridor seen in the illustration above.

BY JIM ZOOK

In 1995, a grand plan was launched to restore Hermann Park's faded luster. Now, a year from the millennium, how much has been accomplished?



PARK

It was almost four years ago that the Philadelphia-based Olin Partnership, a nationally renowned landscape architecture firm, unveiled its master plan for Hermann Park. That plan envisioned the green space just south of downtown as the sort of multifaceted urban oasis that city dwellers long for, but that Houston has historically been unable to muster. It called for Hermann Park to become "a park both greener and bluer — a park you can reach with less difficulty, leave your car, and move about with ease."[1] While the park and its surroundings had long been home to some of Houston's most popular institutions — among them the Houston Zoo, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Rice University — Olin's master plan foresaw a revitalized Hermann Park that would be a more desirable destination in and of itself.

There was no question but that the park needed some attention. When the 1990s began, Hermann Park had none of the sparkle and allure that should mark the flagship park of a major city. Poor maintenance, inadequate facilities, neglected vegetation, and a host of other issues had conspired to give Hermann a shabby, shopworn appearance. The park was a gray lady badly in need of a makeover.

And the now... fresh landscaping and covered walkways are just two of the improvements that have given Miller Outdoor Theater added appeal. Architecture by Ray Bailey Architects, Inc. Landscape architecture by Olin Partnership.

Then in 1992 a design competition started Hermann Park's renascence. The Rice Design Alliance, city officials, and the then-fledgling Friends of Hermann Park solicited proposals to breathe new life into the heart of the park, a corridor running 1,200 feet from the Sam Houston Monument at the northern extremity to the Grand Basin at the south. The competition (which was dedicated to the memory of O. Jack Mitchell, a former dean of Rice University's school of architecture) served as a springboard for the commissioning of the master plan to restore all 445 acres of the park.

Today, despite some turmoil over such matters as the selection of a golf course concessionaire, the public/private partnership between the City of Houston and the Friends appears to have gotten off to a smart start in implementing the master plan. To a degree, the union is patterned after New York City's Central Park Conservancy, a non-profit organization that contracts with the City of New York to maintain the nation's most famous urban park land. The division of labor enables each partner to take advantage of its greatest strengths. For Hermann Park, the City of Houston takes the lead on rough construction work, while the design-oriented membership of the Friends of Hermann Park typically takes the lead on aesthetic and planning matters and finish construction work.

Though chronic problems that have long dogged the park remain in evidence — namely, poor drainage, spotty maintenance, an absence of planning for the green spaces, and, most significantly, traffic congestion and the concentration of parking at the park's heart — eight projects presently on the boards promise tremendous improvement on all those trouble spots. Except, that is, for the most vexing, parking and traffic. The stubborn nature of some of Hermann's problems became clear when the master plan's sound proposal to replace most of the park's existing interior parking lots with smaller lots ringing the park's perimeter succumbed to resistance from many of the institutions with a stake in the park. As a result, the parking issue remains a serious challenge to just how successful the makeover of Hermann Park will ultimately be.

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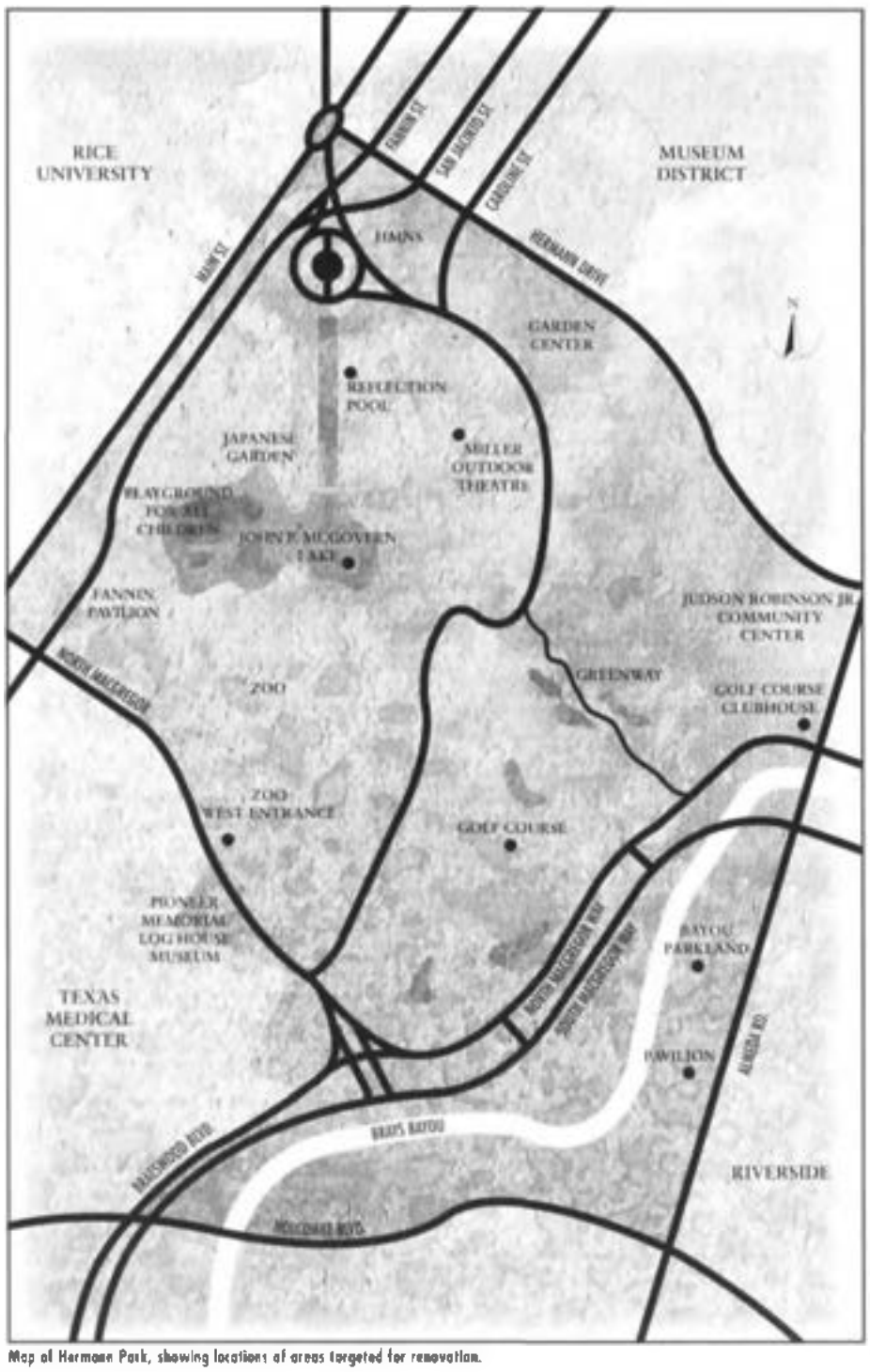
Still, the lack of a solution for the parking problem isn't slowing down progress on a host of other fronts. A quick survey of Hermann Park shows it to be marked at the moment less by shades of blue and green than by the transitional colors of upheaval — earthen brown and road sign orange. The golf course has been closed for a year for a full-scale redesign and the addition of a walking path that connects Bayou Parkland on the east with the park's center. City road crews recently finished the reconstruction of Fannin Street along the park's western boundary, and are continuing the widening of North MacGregor Way. In March, construction will begin on a new entrance for the Houston Zoo. Eventually, all this roadwork will improve access to the park and facilitate emergency traffic to the Medical Center. But for the moment, it has transformed the park's southern boundary into an obstacle course.

The most notable progress to date, though, can be found at the Miller Outdoor Theater. The focal point of the theater's first phase of construction was the renovation and expansion of the backstage area — including a new ticket office, expanded storage space, and an overhaul of all utilities and support systems under the direction of Ray Bailey Architects. The addition of modern, handicapped-accessible restrooms finally gives the theater adequate public facilities for large-scale events, as well as providing the entire park with centrally located, badly needed restrooms for day visitors. The restrooms can be found along a landscaped, pedestrian plaza that adds a new dimension to the park by offering a suitable site for festivals and other outdoor events. The $5.4 million price tag for those enhancements was split by the city and the Friends.

The work at Miller is not yet finished. A planned second phase would provide a new food concession building, re-grade the grassy hillside overlooking the stage to improve lines of sight, and construct a 150-seat amphitheater near the reflection pool.

The successful transformation of the Miller Outdoor Theater into an eminently more usable facility shows that the public/private partnership model can work well. But the real test of this union remains the matter of access to the center of the park. Anyone who has tried to visit Hermann Park on a sunny weekend knows that the traffic backups can rival anything found on Houston's freeways during rush hour — which is hardly an inducement to head to the park for a relaxing Saturday outing.

"Traffic and parking remain the biggest functionally driven, utilitarian issues that could compromise what this urban park ought to be," says architect Jay Baker, chairman of the Friends of Hermann Park. "It's critical that we have a course of action so that traffic and parking can respond not like a Wal-Mart,



Map of Hermann Park, showing locations of areas targeted for renovation.


Of all the problems confronting those trying to bring new life to Hermann Park, traffic and parking remains the most intractable.

but in a way that is appropriate to an urban green space."

"Regardless of what we said [in the master plan] should happen, it clearly doesn't work at the moment," adds Richard Newton, project architect with the Olin Partnership. "It is frustrating. We would like to have seen more happen in the center of the park, but the whole underlying principle of the master plan is that it's a cooperative effort. You can't unilaterally do things."

When asked about matters of parking and traffic, Houston Parks and Recreation Director Oliver Spellman acknowledges the problems but remains non-committal. The Friends and the city want to examine the feasibility of an underground garage topped by a vast green space in the vicinity of the parking lots for the zoo. However, surface street access to such a garage may not be adequate, and the cost of underground construction in Houston will likely make it too expensive to be a viable option. Another option that offers some potential for relief involves greater use of Medical Center garages on the weekends, although the Friends' executive director, Roksan Okan-Vick, says prospects for that option appear increasingly dim.

While the search for parking solutions continues, the next stage of development in the park will be crucial for the Friends' fund-raising efforts and the continued success of the public/private partnership. While work so far has tended to focus on infrastructure, the upcoming projects will make changes to Hermann Park that will be more visible to the typical visitor, and thus offer greater potential for transforming and expanding the range of experiences available to those who use the facility. The plans now under development need to succeed in order to maintain public faith and the momentum required to raise funds for future improvements.

In the coming months, Hermann Park should witness the following:

• Groundbreaking in early 1999 on Bayou Parkland, a project that will reclaim about 100 all-but-forgotten acres straddling Brays Bayou in the park's southeast quadrant. The site will include urban forests, wildlife habitats, and a multi-use pavilion for educational and recreational purposes. The Harris County Flood Control District has agreed to allow once-native wildflowers to be replanted in the easement along the banks of the bayou. This effort will be fueled in large part by a $1.5 million grant from the Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Foundation.

If successful, the Bayou Parkland project could serve as a valuable example of how planning and design could enable Houston's network of bayous to serve a stronger aesthetic role within the urban landscape.

• Bids this winter on a $3.7 million project to double the size of John P. McGovern Lake in the center of the park, with an eye toward making it a more appealing destination for serious walkers or families out for a weekend stroll. The expansion would flesh out the "meandering grand basin" envisioned by Hermann Park's original architect, George Kessler. Kessler originally intended a 13-acre lake, but only about half of that was built when work got underway in 1925.

Current plans include landscaping and shoring up the banks of the lake; construction of a fishing pier, a boathouse and a boating alcove for the lake's paddleboats; and the addition of three islands intended to serve as a wetland, meadow habitat, and safe nesting grounds for migratory birds. The lake's expansion would consume a parcel of land that includes one of the park's dead zones, a green space just west of the water that has too many trees for recreational use but too few to be considered urban forest. (All trees that don't remain in place will be transplanted elsewhere.) The western edge of the lake expansion has been designed to engage with the Playground for All Children, and thus improve both amenities. By softening and grading the edges of the lake, drainage in the center of the park should be improved.

• Beginning of the renovation of the reflection pool, once funding is complete. This potential gem has long suffered from inattentive maintenance and indifferent planning. The pool comprises much of

the park's north-south axis; calling the 1992 design competition to restore the pool the "Heart of the Park" competition conveyed the significance of the pool to Hermann Park's overall design scheme.

It's not unusual to find the pool littered with fallen limbs from the nearby live oaks. The banks of the pool, which should be a verdant green, are largely worn down to the soil and muddy from rains. Like much of the rest of Hermann Park, the reflection pool shows its age.

The $7.5 million plan to renovate the pool includes fountains that would invite frolicking children, a rapids-like effect that adds an element of sound, and a plaza at the pool's south end that will extend the park's north-south axis all the way to what should be its natural terminus at the shore of John P. McGovern Lake. At present, the area designated for the plaza is an undefined gap that serves only as a part of the route traveled by the park's miniature train. This awkward oversight forces park visitors to tote toddlers and baby strollers across the train tracks, which will be re-routed by the lake's expansion and will travel through more of the park. The Olin Partnership's Newton calls the new plaza "a natural area for people to congregate."

Several smaller projects designed to spruce up the park's landscaping and general appearance are moving ahead as well. The ongoing addition of live oak plantings will ultimately produce an allee surrounding the entire park, extending a pervasive element of the neighboring Rice University area. The Friends commissioned the Minor Design Group and the Olin Partnership to develop signage and furnishings — including benches, trash cans, and light fixtures — that will help give Hermann an identifiable image. The Friends and the city's Parks and Recreation Department are also collaborating on a master plan for maintenance in hopes of upgrading the level of care. Friends chairman Jay Baker believes such a plan can pave the way for more specialized upkeep of the park grounds, such as the addition of a horticulturist with expertise in the care of new plantings and landscaping.

Though traffic and parking remain headaches, progress is being made on other problems that have long dogged the park and its constituents. For example, last fall's deluge from Tropical Storm Frances underscored the need for improved drainage. Several days after the storm passed and the floodwaters receded elsewhere, standing water remained around several clusters of picnic tables. While Houston's terrain will always pose drainage problems, Newton says drainage improvement is integrated into each project within the park.

•

The timing on Hermann Park's upcoming projects depends to a large extent on the success of the Friends' fundraising efforts. The Friends and the city are taking on varying shares of the cost of each improvement, and construction on a project doesn't begin until the necessary funds are in the bank. Okan-Vick says the funds are in hand for work on expansion of the lake and the first phase of the bayou park land. More than $2 million is needed for the reflection pool, while more than $1.5 million is needed for the second, larger phase of the bayou park land.

Compared to its condition at the start of the decade, Hermann Park will close the 1990s as a vastly enhanced asset for Houston. That said, it's still too early to tell whether that means the dream of remaking Hermann Park into one of the nation's great city parks can be fulfilled.

The core reason remains the same: the automobile. At present, phase one of the Friends' capital projects schedule does not include plans for addressing traffic issues, a reflection of the thorny intransigence of the problem.

The Friends did complete an extensive traffic and parking study in 1997, and the group continues to work with a committee of park institutions and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department in search of a way to deal with the cars an improved park would attract. But it is clear that award-winning design and impeccably manicured grounds could count for nothing if visitors have to be turned away because parking lots are overcrowded.

As a matter of local politics, the intractable nature of the problem brings to mind this observation from the Olin master plan: "The existence of a 'master plan' at any scale is no guarantee that short-term solutions can be avoided or that natural systems can be restored. Its success requires vision, cooperation, flexibility, and continual commitment to examine each small detail in light of the whole."[2] ■

1. "Renewing Hermann Park: A Comprehensive Master Plan," 1995, p. 5.
2. Ibid, p. 33.

Example of new signage developed by Minor Design Group, Houston.

Cite 44

Coming next issue

Gordon Wittenberg
examines a foam home.

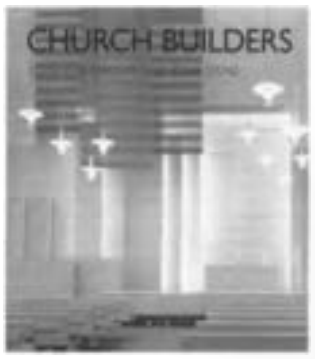
Christof Spieler
surveys the bridges of Buffalo Bayou.

Bruce Webb
checks into the Rice Hotel.

&

Julius Shulman
reflects on his career as an architectural photographer.

PLACES OF PRAYER



Church Builders
by Edwin Heathcote and Iona Spens. London: Academy Editions, 1997. 224 pp., illus., $75.

Reviewed by Barrie Scardino

In this secular century, religion is difficult to discuss, and, for the same self-conscious reasons, religious architecture has taken a backseat to corporate and institutional projects. Even though renowned architects receive religious commissions (Raphael Moneo is working on Our Lady of Angels Cathedral in Los Angeles, and Frank Gehry entered the competition for the Church of the Year 2000 in Rome), we seem to ignore new church buildings, both large and small, as though to critically judge them would be blasphemous. New titles abound on such crucial building types as cafés and barns, but it has been some time since a serious look at churches has appeared.

Edwin Heathcote and Iona Spens' *Church Builders* is, therefore, as courageous as it is delightful. In their preface, these two English architectural writers acknowledge that we live in an era in which the church's place as part of the community fabric has been challenged. *Church Builders*, they promise, "attempts to take a broad look at some of the symptoms of this questioning,... and the changing nature of sacred space in the Christian world." Heathcote tackles the first issue, and Spens deals with the second, both with engaging success.

Beautifully designed, *Church Builders* is a pleasure to browse through. One in a series published by Academy Editions, the book is organized like its siblings on museums, theaters, libraries, and airports: a background essay precedes descriptions of a series of individual projects. Heathcote's "The Twentieth-Century Church: The Enigma of Sacred Objectivity" provides background in its discussion of the Christian theological and liturgical upheavals of this century, and Spens' lavishly illustrated "Movements of the Spirit" provides an in-depth examination, in this case of the religious work since 1955 of 15 international architects and firms. Spens' section, filled with images of her choosing, is the more personal view of the subject. She eschews familiar churches such as Le Corbusier's Pigrimage Chapel at Ronchamp (1952-55) in favor of fresher and lesser known works, a good decision that exposes the reader to a variety of relatively new church projects that could have been squeezed out by the superstars.

Heathcote begins his essay with an analysis of the late 19th-century debate in England on liturgical form and architectural function. The neogothicists of the Oxford Movement "rediscovered" the Roman sacraments and insisted on traditional Catholic architecture — narthex, nave, choir, and altar. In opposition, more egalitarian Protestants clung to a plainer preaching-house form. But it was the neogothicists whose impact was most obvious; in Europe and America at the turn of the century, grandchildren of the great European cathedrals appeared in large churches and parish chapels.

But as Heathcote notes, before long new technology and modern thought formed by Marx, Freud, and the philosophy of Functionalism brought radical architectural change. Iron, then steel bracing, reinforced concrete, and other engineering advancements gave architects a new vocabulary with which to work at the same time that Modernism gave them a new mind-set. As early as 1908, Adolf Loos wrote that "ornamentation, which arises in such arts as tattooing, belongs to the infancy of the world ... it will disappear from our architectures as it has from our machinery." (p. 14)

Loos appears to have been wrong about tattooing, but about architecture he was correct. In this century, church design has been influenced as much by secular thought as by liturgical reform. For example, German Expressionism as practiced by the Bauhaus and others led in the ecclesiastical realm to a new kind of worship space that allowed for increased participation by congregations. At the same time, new liturgical mandates in both Catholic and Protestant churches gave congregations a more central role both in the service and physically in the worship space. In Catholic and Anglican churches altars were turned, allowing priests to face their parishioners, and church size was reduced, allowing for more intimacy and better acoustics.

Le Corbusier's French Pilgrimage Chapel, according to Heathcote, "is the fundamental turning point of the modern movement; the point at which a kind of expressionism, a sculptural approach to architecture, found its way back into the fold." (p. 46) Since Ronchamp, art, through abstract expressionism, has become a thoughtful part of modern church architecture. The altar, cross, and hundreds of traditional icons and symbols have filled Christian churches always. But Iona Spens makes clear in "Movement of the Spirit" that light and water, line and form have become increasingly important as expressions of the sacred.

Spens begins her examination of specific church projects with an astounding acknowledgment: "Even after almost a century of reform the 'modern' churches of today are less readily accepted than their traditional counterparts." (p. 66) Her purpose seems to be to enlighten her readers beyond such a viewpoint. The structures and architects she reviews are innovative, meaningful, and, in some cases, amazing.

In looking at Spens' examples, the reader may draw several conclusions about current church design. Most strikingly, the churches illustrated are generally contextual. In his Mityana Cathedral (1972) in Uganda, Swiss architect Justus Dahinden created a church recognizably inspired by the rounded forms of traditional African huts. In Malta, Richard England built a church at Manikata (1962-74) that is based quite literally on an ancient Maltese megalithic temple.

Tadao Ando's Japanese sensibilities are evident in his Church of the Light (1989) in Osaka, a small double cube of concrete with a cruciform aperture at the front that extends side to side and top to bottom. The building is austere and meditative. The year before he designed the Church of the Light, Ando created the Church on the Water (1988) in Hokkaido. It is likewise a serene and evocative place, where the congregation faces a reflection pool from which rises a steel cross. These churches illustrate abstract expressionist ideas that bring light and water, the great symbols of Christianity, into dominance within a building.

Two Finnish firms, Suomalainen Architects and Siren Architects, have also produced churches filled with light. Siren Architects' Chapel in Otaniemi (1957) is a small woodland chapel built of glass, brick, and wood. A monument to Finnish modernism and ecclesiastical simplicity, it is detailed over eight pages, which include four full-page photos. Such generosity of images gives *Church Builders* both magnificence as a publication and intellectual depth as a history.

As a whole, the projects Spens examines not only give the sense that the architects of new churches pay attention to context and geographical tradition, but also have set their focus outward, as opposed to the inward-looking focus of traditional churches designed by their predecessors. Also, there is a serious organic aspect to most of these new churches. Many use stone and wood or look to trees and sky. The most bizarre projects illustrated are those of Imre Makovecz, a Hungarian architect who is quite literal in his animal and bird forms. Both his Lutheran Church in Siofok (1990) and his Roman Catholic Church (1991) in Paks are frightening.

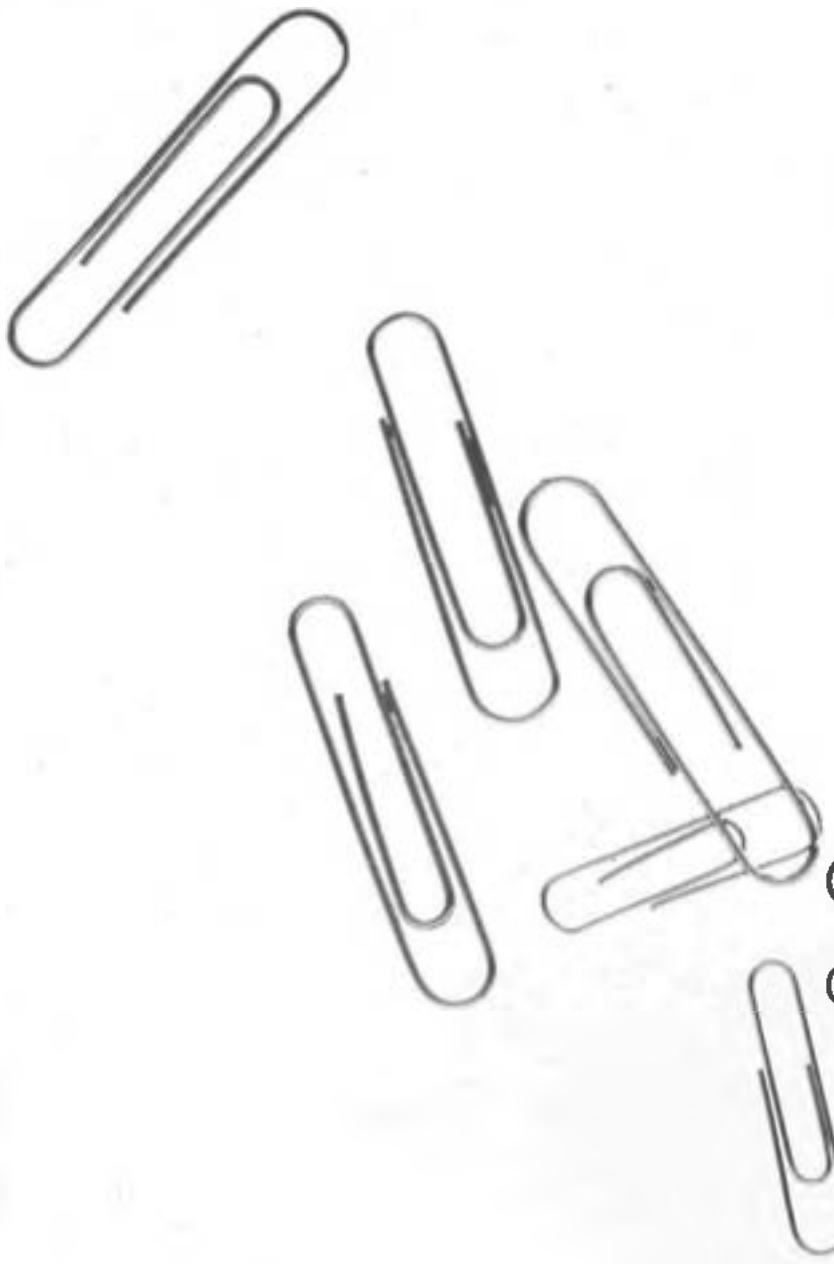
In America, Spens examines Fay Jones' Thorncrown Chapel (1981) and Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel (1988), both in Arkansas. These buildings could stand with the well-known churches excluded from *Church Builders*; however, it is satisfying that Spens included them, for the large color pictures and detailed drawings of Jones' innovative projects take one's breath away.

The only other U.S. architect whose work Spens explores is Philip Johnson; his Crystal Cathedral (1980) and its Chapel and Bell Tower (1990) in Garden Grove, California, are the book's centerfold. Johnson's huge Cathedral of Hope in Dallas is scheduled for completion in 2004. In the published design, at least, this windowless project looks like the iceberg that sunk the Titanic.

Lest Johnson be seen as the prophet for churches of the 21st century, *Church Builders*' last chapter is an essay on the Vatican-sponsored competition for the Church of the Year 2000 in Rome. The proposals of six entrants are discussed: Tadao Ando, Gunter Behnisch, Santiago Calatrava, Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman, and winner Richard Meier. The competition called for a "place of welcome, a place of convocation, a churchly place," and perhaps as a result all of the entries are more or less in the continuum of 20th-century churches that respond to community and to the natural world.

The desire driving the Vatican's search for a modern church seems in direct contrast to Le Corbusier's statement that, at Ronchamp, he wanted "to create a place of silence, of prayer, of peace and of internal joy." Indeed, the question of intent will be the crucial one as worshipers and architects continue to search for architectural solutions to spiritual needs. Many of the innovative projects in *Church Builders* seem able, in spite of complex programs, to provide both a useful gathering place and a space of transcendent serenity — a useful revelation of possibility. ■

Walmer B. Cooper Memorial Chapel, Bella Vista, Arkansas, Fay Jones, 1988. From Hearthside and Spence' Church Builders.



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