47 : Spring 2000 $5.00

Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE
and DESIGN REVIEW
OF HOUSTON

inside

THE BECK

Shedding light on Rafael Moneo's addition to The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Plus:

Expanding the Texas Medical Center,
John Fairey's Garden,
and Digging in the Dirt with Charles Tapley

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Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance

47: Spring 2000

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Cover: Architect Rafael Moneo examines the art in the Audrey Jones Beck Building.

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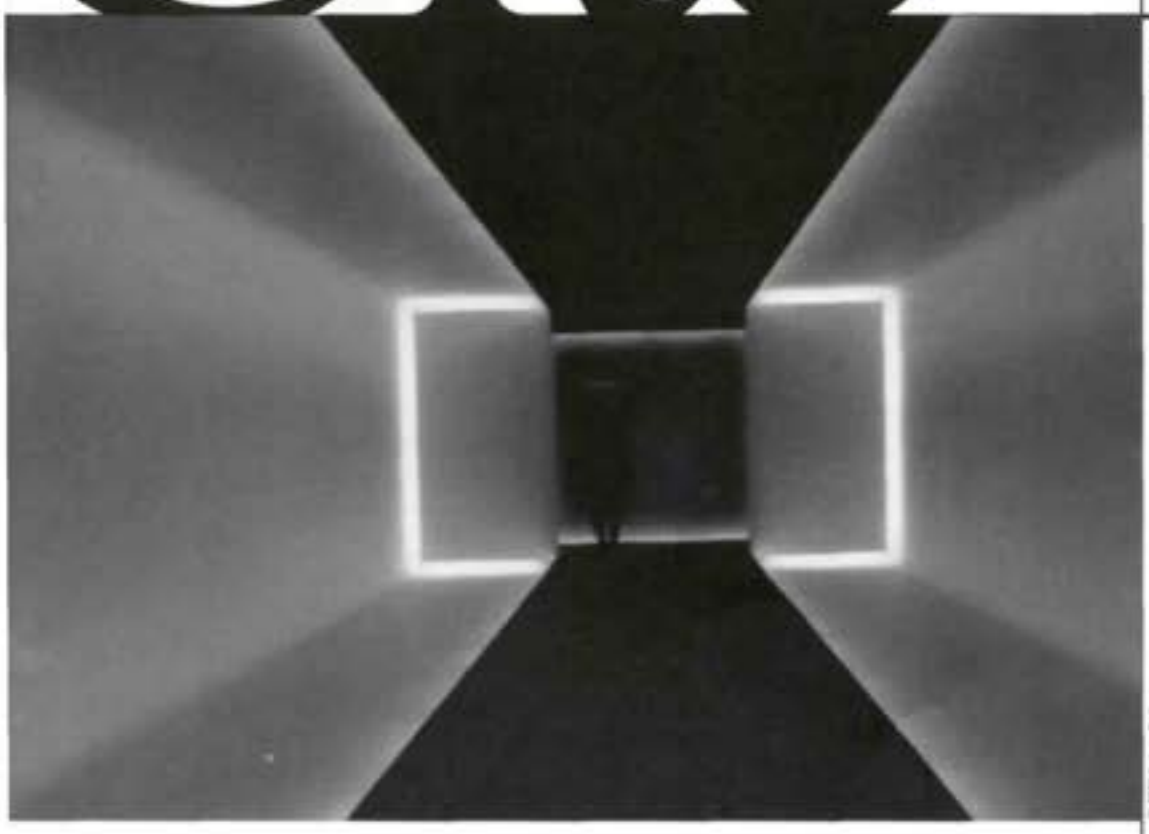

James Turrell's installation *The Light Inside* transforms the tunnel connecting The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Law and Beck buildings into a work of art.

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

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The Rice Design Alliance
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Checks should be sent to Rice University, Rice Design Alliance – MS 51, PO Box 1892 Houston, Texas 77251-1892. Telephone: 713.348.4876

CALENDAR

HOUSTON TALKS: DEAN'S LECTURE SERIES

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

Tuesday, April 18, 7:30 p.m.
ZAHA HADID, considered a member of the top tier of internationally renowned architects, speaks on her recent work. From Hong Kong Peak to the Vitra Fire Station to the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center, Hadid's designs have constantly ranked among the world's most challenging.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE/HOUSTON ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION SALLY WALSH LECTURE

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

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

HOUSTON SCULPTURE 2000 SITE/WORKS/PROJECTS

May 21 through June 3
In conjunction with the 18th International Sculpture Conference, this exhibition of indoor and outdoor works will showcase the crossing of customary boundaries between architecture, art, and urban planning.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE FALL LECTURE SERIES: SPREAD STREETS — THE FREEWAY IN AMERICA

September 13 through October 13
University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Theater

This lecture series will examine the U.S. interstate highway system and how it has changed the American landscape and lifestyle. A symposium co-sponsored by the University of Houston College of Architecture and the Duncan Foundation will follow the lecture series on October 14.

A POPULAR MODERNISM: MACKIE AND KAMRATH

June 1 through July 31
Central Library Building,
Houston Public Library
500 McKinney
713.247.1661

The Houston Public Library will exhibit plans and photographs of some of the major works of MacKie & Kamrath, a Houston architectural firm known for the Wrightian, organic-style buildings it designed throughout the Southwest in the 1950s and 1960s. Among the buildings featured will be the Schlumberger headquarters, Temple Emanu El, M.D. Anderson Hospital, and two of the personal residences of Karl Kamrath, one of the firm's founders.

FROM ABOVE: ALEX MACLEAN'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF HOUSTON

September 8 through January 14, 2001
The Menil Collection
1515 Sul Ross

Shooting pictures from the vantage point of his single engine plane, photographer Alex MacLean has created a unique vision of America from the air. Last October he took to the skies above Houston at the behest of the Rice Design Alliance, producing images that will appear in the Summer 2000 issue of *Cite* and also be exhibited through the fall at The Menil Collection. MacLean's pictures are distinct from traditional aerial photographs, both in their artistry and in their concern with small details as well as large overviews.

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

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

Wednesday, April 19, 3 p.m.
BILL GREEN of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, will speak on the history of Industrial Design.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITS

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

Through fall
La Petite Maison de Weekend, an installation of a "self-sufficient" outdoor living module by Patkau Architects, Vancouver, on the southwest lawn of the Architecture building will be on display through the summer into the fall. The name of the exhibit is a play on Le Corbusier's weekend retreat on the outskirts of Paris.

September
John Clagett — Central European Baroque Ecclesiastical Architecture, a photography exhibit, will be on display.

Mexico City and Preservation, drawings and photos documenting the student work of University of Houston Professor Barry Moore's Historic Preservation Studio, will be on display at the College of Architecture Archives.

October
Innovative Austrian Architecture, a show featuring young Austrian avant-garde architects and their recent work, will be on display. The exhibit will be co-sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Institute, New York.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE EVENTS

For more information, please call 713.743.2400.

Tuesday, April 25, 7 p.m.
Richie Huebscher and the Easy Credit Theater, a self-proclaimed post-nuclear dance company, will perform as part of the "further activation" of *Organ Grinder*, Dwayne Bohuslav + parasite's installation in the Atrium of the College of Architecture.

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS/HOUSTON

Please call 713.520.0155 for more information.

Wednesday, May 17
AIA/AGC golf tournament at the Kingwood Country Club.

Saturday, June 3
Sand Castle Competition at East Beach, Galveston.

LETTERS

RE-SIZING STAMPEDE SQUARE

We are most appreciative of now the second article in *Cite* about the Main Street Redevelopment Plan. [Hindcite, "Sizing Up Stampede Square," by Drexel Turner, *Cite* 46.] In all fairness to the authors of Stampede Square, in the design competition the firms were asked for bold, innovative, out-of-the-box concepts for Main Street. Stampede Square is a design competition concept,

not part of the plan, which is now in the process of becoming.

However, I am reminded that its inspiration is not the Renaissance Italian Square or Spanish Plaza Mayor, but rather a grand linear commons — i.e. the Tuileries Gardens in Paris, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia, Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, or Central Park in New York. It would be sad if the message of 21st century society is that urban squares and great public spaces are obsolete, as people sit isolated at computer screens or encapsulated in suburban media rooms, deprived of interactive face-to-face public life. It's precisely places like Union Square in San Francisco or Bryant Park in New York, or even the Plaza in Santa Fe, that not only excite all kinds of people, but inform us about what it means to be human. All of these places work quite well in very hot weather. Our Jungian archetype perhaps, a still frontier land, could well be the old courthouse square, a place where Americans instinctively feel "comfortable." It is understandable that spending too much time "learning" in Las Vegas, one could miss the beauty of Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia.

Peter H. Brown
Making Main Street Happen, Inc.
Houston

SPECTACULAR 2000

I always enjoy my *Cite*. But this latest issue, "Houston 2000" [*Cite* 46], is spectacular.

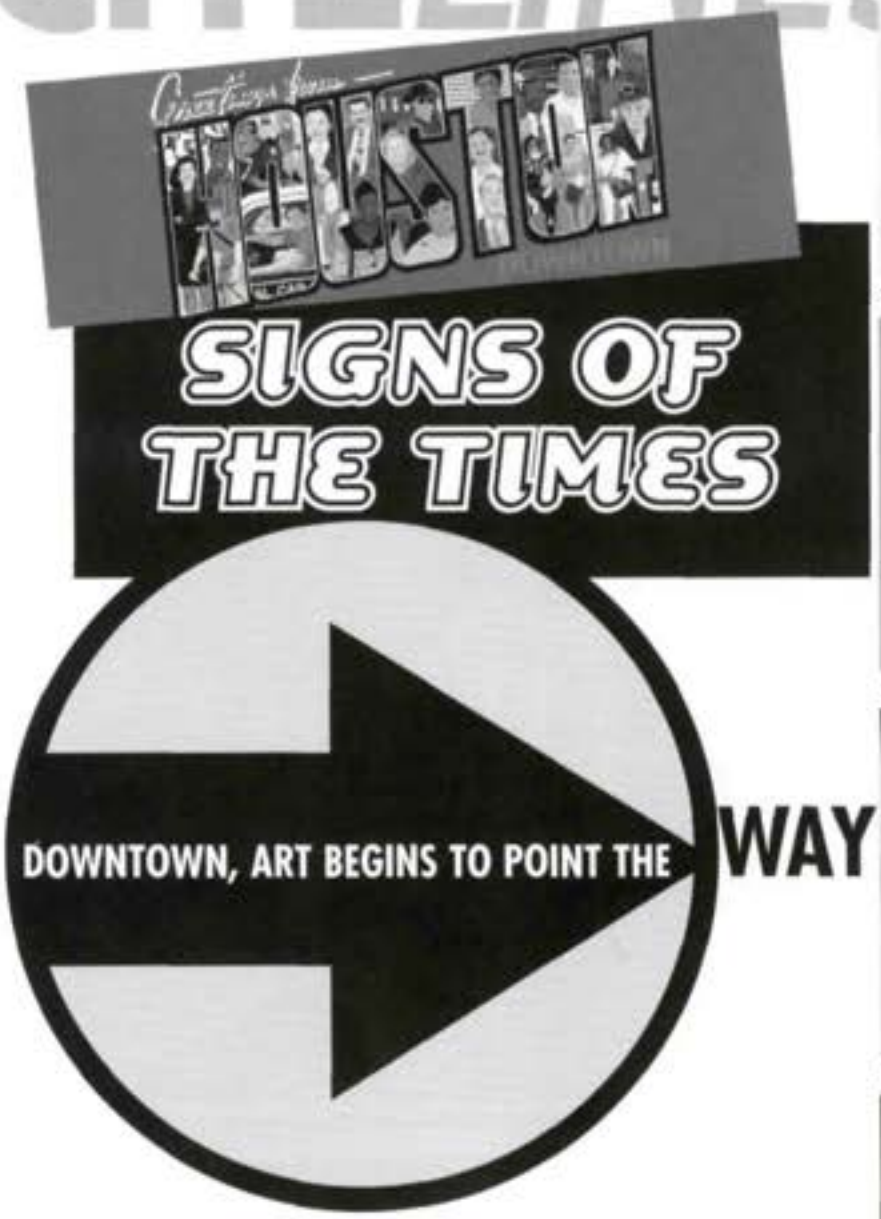
Thanks for a valued resource.

Bruce Nichols
Houston Bureau
Dallas Morning News

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

Correction: Due to an editing oversight, the rendering of the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts that appeared in the Cite *46 article "Class of 2000" was printed backwards. As shown in the correct image, left, the Hobby Center's roof will rise from right to left when viewed from the front, not left to right.*

CITELINES



The postcard from Houston (top of page) was the first Wayfinding art to be put in place. By Kelly Joe Klaasmeyer, it can be seen on a sign on Texas near Milam. Above, a Wayfinding sign seen from the front, where the directional panels are located.

All images of Wayfinding artwork courtesy Streetz.

St. Joseph's Parkway near Crawford. Isabelle Scurry Chapman, artist.

St. Joseph's Parkway near Austin. Andy Feehan, artist.

St. Joseph's Parkway near Fannin. Wanda Tinsely, artist.

Crawford near (not surprisingly) Enron Field. David Lozano, artist.

Milam near Franklin. Thomas Hughes, artist.

Congress near Louisiana. Richard Glen Smith, artist.

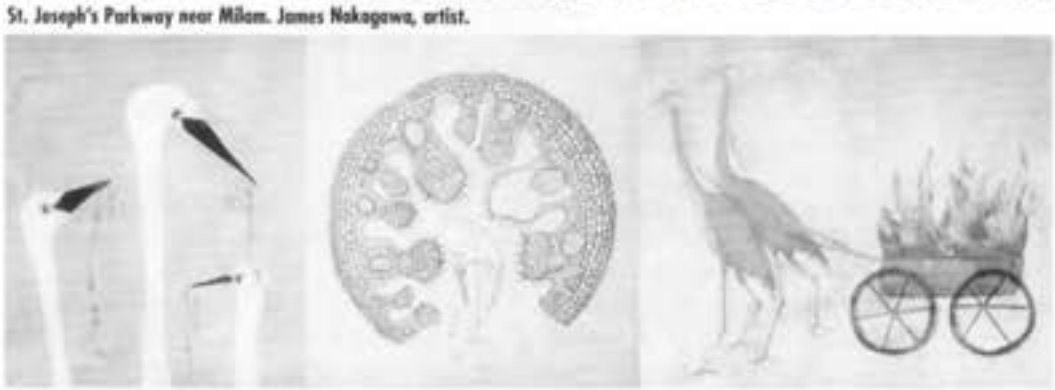
Crawford near Preston. Zita Giraldo Lang, artist.

Jefferson near Main. Willie Mae (Moore), artist.

Jefferson near Austin. Bonnie Lambourn, artist.

Smith near Congress. Charles Mary Kubricht, artist.

St. Joseph's Parkway near Milam. James Nakagawa, artist.



Smith near Prairie. Isabelle Scurry Chapman, artist.

It began as something practical, then became something artistic. And then, as often happens, it turned into something controversial.

Still, despite some last minute problems, just as Enron Field was getting ready to open, a baker's dozen of art-enhanced directional signs went up downtown. Part of the Downtown Management District's $1 million Wayfinding Project, the signs were erected along St. Joseph's Parkway, Milam, Congress, Smith, Jefferson, and Texas. Five feet tall and with a 15-foot cantilever over the street, the signs have three directional panels on one side pointing the way to such destinations as Market Square, the East End, or the Convention Center. On the other side are billboard-sized pieces of art.

It is, says Debbie McNulty, who helped coordinate the project for the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County, a unique way to mix public art with public information. Though other cities have incorporated art into their directional signs, none have done it on quite this scale. The very size of the art makes it stand out, both literally and figuratively.

But it was the size that disturbed some members of Scenic Houston when, in early January, the very first of the signs, sporting a postcard inspired "Greetings from Houston" design by artist Kelly Jo Klaasmeyer, was installed near the intersection of Texas and Milam. Though Anita Brown, Scenic Houston's executive director, says that her group never objected to the idea of the signs, they felt that they were too big for their surroundings. "What we wanted," she says, "was to find something that works aesthetically with the Texas Avenue project."

Part of the problem, admits Guy Hagstette, director of capital projects and planning for the Downtown Management District, is that his group didn't do a good enough job letting the people at Scenic Houston know what the signs would ultimately look like. In the beginning, the signs were intended to be somewhat smaller, and to be placed along Preston rather than Texas. That, at least, was the plan in 1993, when the Wayfinding Project got off the ground. Originally, the Wayfinding Project was intended only to help direct people around downtown with uniform signage. But early on it was decided to augment the signs with art. Then, as the construction of Enron Field cut off Preston at the end, it was decided to move the signs that were to go on Preston over to Texas.

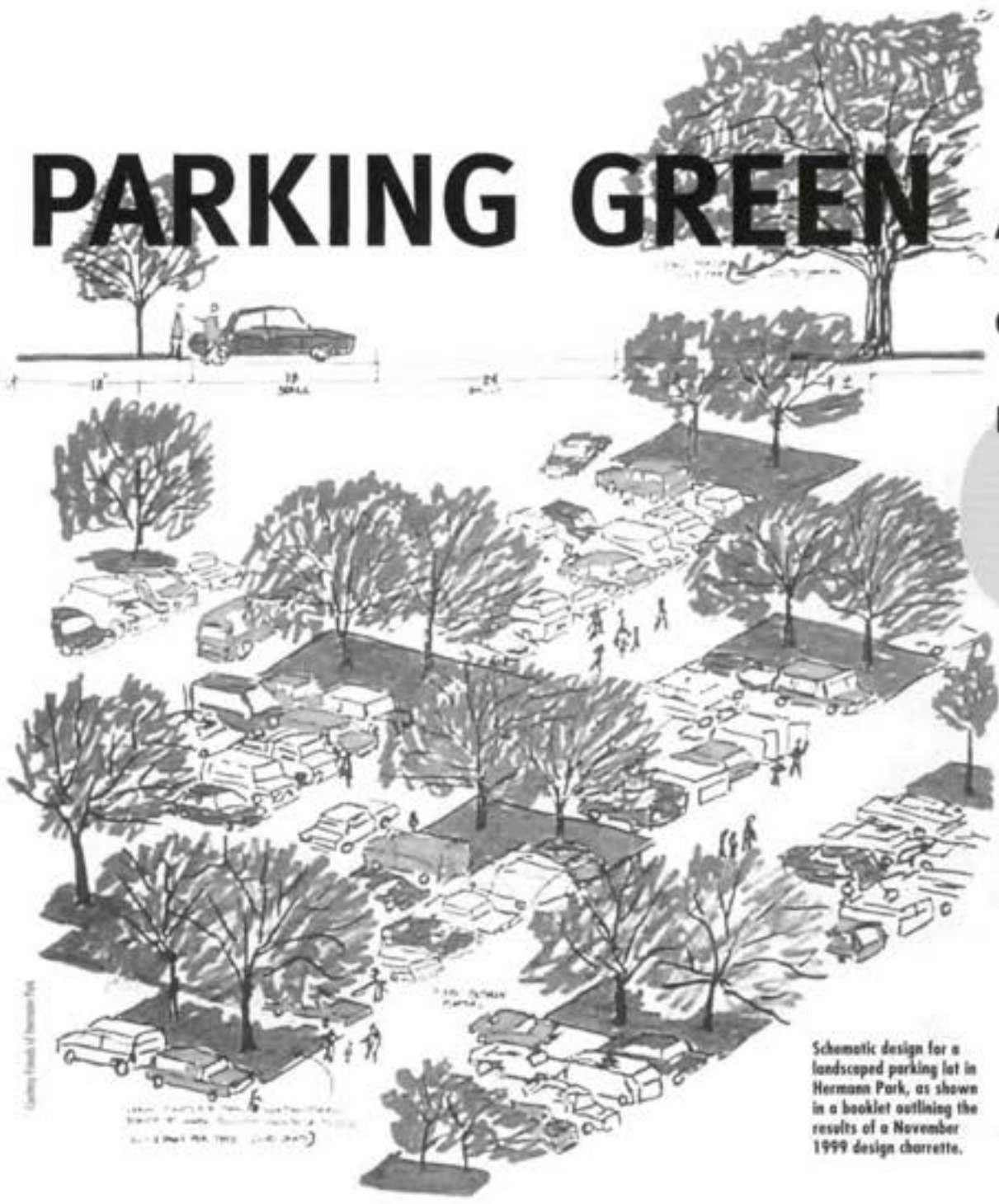
That move caught Scenic Houston by surprise. In response to their complaint that the art-enhanced signs didn't fit with other redevelopment being done on the Texas, the Downtown Management District decided to hold off installing three other such signs that had been planned for the street. The hope had been to have 16 signs up by the time the new baseball stadium began luring fans downtown. Instead, only 13 were erected, and those, Hagstette says, were placed "on the periphery of downtown, where the environment isn't as sensitive." (The art for the signs that were put into place can be seen on this and the preceding page.)

So what's next? Plans for the Wayfinding Project had called for some 29 signs to be installed downtown by the end of the year. Those signs will still be erected, Hagstette says, but they may be smaller than earlier envisioned. The Downtown Management District and Scenic Houston have agreed to test two other versions of the signs, both of them two panels big rather than three, with one version hanging horizontally over the street, and the other stacking its panels vertically.

Ultimately, however, art-backed directional signs will be spread through much of downtown, says Hagstette. "This approach is pretty much new, and I think it's pretty clever," he notes. "We weren't prepared for the criticism, but overall, I think people will appreciate it." — *Mitchell J. Shields*

PARKING GREEN

A DESIGN CHARRETTE TAKES ON ONE OF HERMANN PARK'S BIGGEST PROBLEMS — CARS



Courtesy Friends of Hermann Park

Schematic design for a landscaped parking lot in Hermann Park, as shown in a booklet outlining the results of a November 1999 design charrette.

Cars have long been a major conundrum for Hermann Park. Though it can't survive without them — the organizations that are the park's lifeblood wouldn't last long if they had to depend on walk-in visitors — at times it seems that it can't survive with them either. Crowded parking lots, traffic jams, and hovering exhaust fumes are hardly the attributes park proponents would choose to promote the virtues of urban green space.

Nonetheless, they are the attributes that have to be dealt with. In November 1999, for the first time in Hermann Park's history, a design charrette was held for just that purpose. The idea for the charrette came from the Friends of Hermann Park, a group that knows from experience how difficult the issue of cars and parking in the park can be. In 1994, a master plan for Hermann Park commissioned by the Friends suggested that most parking be moved from the center of the park to smaller perimeter lots. Reasonable as that sounded, it was anathema to such institutions as the Houston Zoo and Miller Outdoor Theater, which didn't want their patrons to have to walk long distances. Disagreement over what to do about traffic and parking led to no action. For the second half of the 1990s, while work began on restoring portions of Hermann Park, the issue of what to do about cars remained unresolved.

Last year, the Friends decided it was time to put the issue of parking back on the table. It was, says Roksan Okan-Vick, Executive Director of the Friends of Hermann Park, a good time to do so. "All of the institutions that are part of the park had matured a bit," she says. "They had come to realize that they weren't going to solve the problem individually. So we needed to come up with a compromise we could all live with." With Houston Endowment providing the funding, invitations to join in a charrette were issued to all the park's stakeholders. Included were the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, the Houston Zoo, Miller Outdoor Theater, the Garden Center, the Judson Robinson Center, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, Metro, and the Texas Medical Center, among others. Despite their sometimes contentious relationships, none of the organizations declined to attend.

The charrette was held November 2-4 at the Hermann Park Clubhouse, and it didn't take long, Okan-Vick says, to be reminded that everyone had sacred cows they hoped to protect. The Friends wanted as much green as possible; the zoo didn't want to give up front door access; Miller Theater wanted to make sure that show delivery vehicles could easily get where they needed to go. At the same time there were some surprises. Going in, everyone had assumed that the zoo was, in Okan-Vick's phrase, "the 800 pound gorilla, the real issue to deal with." But the charrette revealed that the most severe parking problem belonged to Miller Outdoor Theater. The zoo had more visitors, but they came at different times, and were relatively easy to accommodate. Miller's patrons, on the other hand, came and went in a group, and put more of a strain on parking.

In the end, the charrette settled on 18 proposals. Among the major proposals was one to retain parking in the park's center, but to consolidate the scattered parking lots into two major and two minor lots that could be landscaped. To that end, it was also suggested that Golf Course Drive, which now separates parking lots, be realigned to lose its current curve. Instead, it would run along the west edge of the park next to the golf course, allowing the lots to be combined on the east side of the street.

Among the other suggestions; designate a lot for school buses, so they could be all parked together rather than along perimeter roads; work with Metro to establish a shuttle bus system for use at major events; consider relocating the Garden Center parking to be more efficiently served from Hermann Drive; and go to fee-based parking and parking meters during the day to help prevent the lots being filled by area workers looking for free parking.

One of the simpler proposals was to appoint a traffic and events coordinator. "What we found is that often the problem is less a lack of parking than a lack of coordination," says Okan-Vick. "People weren't talking to each other, and they ended up scheduling their special events at the same time, when everyone would be competing for a parking space. We realized we need to stagger the peak days, stagger the peak hours. And that meant we needed someone who could keep an eye on the schedules of all the different organizations and help manage them."

In March 2000, a booklet outlining the charrette's suggestions was sent to Mayor Lee Brown and members of City Council, as well as Parks and Recreation Director Oliver Spellman Jr. Spellman, whose support is crucial if the charrette's ideas are to make it to reality, says he likes much of what he's seen, though he cautions that money could be an issue. "When you talk about addressing the three parking lots adjacent to the old clubhouse, and straightening the road, that's a $2-$3 million project," he says. "So the first thing I want to do is sell the administration on the fact that this is a priority that we have to really start targeting funding for."

Still, notes Okan-Vick, at least now it's known what needs funding. "We have the road map, we have something we've all agreed on," she says. "Now the issue will be how well we can follow it." — *MJS*

ATRIUM ART

SINCE MID-MARCH, *Organ Grinder*, a large scale, interactive installation, has hung in the atrium of the University of Houston College of Architecture. *Organ Grinder* is the work of Dwayne Bohuslav + parasite, a collaborative of present and former students led by Bohuslav, a visiting architecture professor at UH. The latest and largest of Bohuslav's projects exploring animated, bio-technolgical forms, *Organ Grinder* treats the college's formal atrium space as a body cavity, within which a trio of capsules, constructed of screen wire stretched over a wood and metal frame, are suspended from eight metal, rib-like struts attached to third floor columns. Inside the capsules, electro-mechanical organs respond to ambient light, movement, and sound, acting out metaphorical interpretations of respiration, circulation, and reproduction. *Organ Grinder* will be on display at the College of Architecture through Sunday, June 11. — *Bruce C. Webb*

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Greenwood King Properties ❖ 713.524.0888

1201 Berthea

Edie Archer

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A MOVING STAGE

GROUND LIGHT WINS UH ARCSTAGE COMPETITION

Tom Fogel

A model of the proposed *Ground Light* stage: The panels can be rearranged to hold art or to be a backdrop.

IN THE SPRING of 1998, Filippo Castore, then a third-year student at the University of Houston College of Architecture, became concerned about the limited space the college had to show student work. He and his friends had spent considerable time on the models and designs they created for their classes, and it would be good, Castore thought, if others could see them. But where? "What I wanted was a way to confront people when they walked in the door of the college," Castore says. And that meant creating a display space that could fit into the school's soaring atrium space.

Finding just the right display space took two years of planning and, early this February, a few days of intense work by six design teams that included UH students, UH professors, and local architects. The winning result, from a team led by the Wittenberg Partnership, was *Ground Light*, a raised, glowing platform topped by movable partitions that could be used either to hang work or frame the stage for presentations.

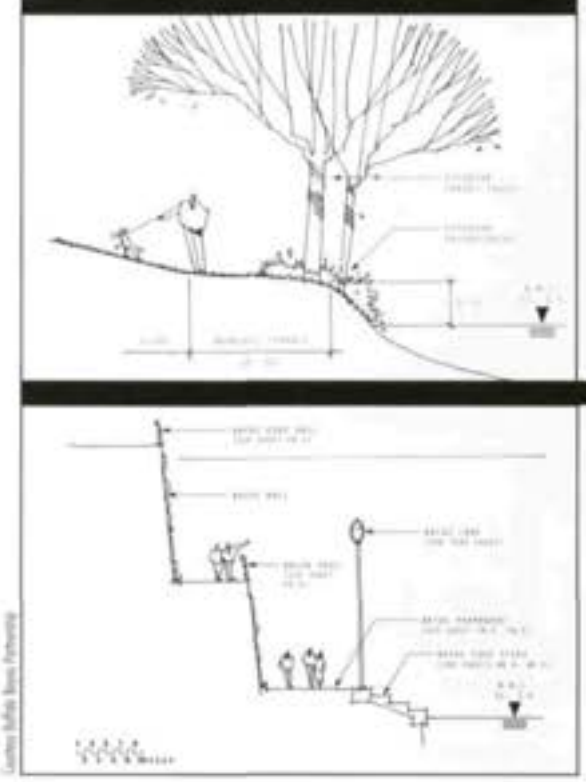
The path toward *Ground Light* began when Castore enlisted the help of another UH architecture student, Andy Nguyen. Together, the pair laid out a plan for what they titled the Arcstage (for architecture stage) Design Competition, then gathered support from UH professors and UH dean Joseph Mashburn. The organizing of the competition continued through late last year, by which time some 20 firms had been invited; six responded quickly, among them the Houston firms MC2, Wittenberg Partnership, Natalye Appel, Carlos Jiménez Studio, and Scott Strasser Design. On Friday, February 4, representatives from the firms showed up at the UH College of Architecture to be paired with their student partners. A discussion Saturday laid out the project requirements, and then the teams began their designs.

The only out-of-town firm to participate was Richter Associates of Corpus Christi, but the design their team presented Sunday afternoon — which featured a canopy supported by wires — was one of the two most praised by the judges. Despite its admirable appearance, however, the judges decided that the Richter stage could be too complicated to build, a major consideration given that the Arcstage was not to be a permanent installation, but rather something that could easily be put together, used, then taken apart for storage. "Ground Light" had the advantage of relative simplicity. But its look, too, drew admiration. Judge Donna Kacmar, a visiting assistant professor of architecture at Texas A&M, noted that the stage's "lifted and glowing plane is an interesting way to bring focus to the area."

With the design in place, the next step is to build the stage, something Castore and Nguyen hope to accomplish in time for this May's graduation, when the stage could be inaugurated. Barring that, they hope to have it done in time for the Blueprint Ball this fall. — *MJS*

More information on the Arcstage project can be found at uharcstage.org.

RULES ON THE BAYOU



Courtesy Buffalo Bayou Partnership

Pages from the booklet created to encourage consistent design standards for development next to Buffalo Bayou show, at left, proposed guidelines for a natural edge design, and, at bottom left, guidelines for a bayou edge promenade design.

When some members of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership saw the original plans for the new Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, they were appalled. Their concern had little to do with the look of the new auditorium but rather with *where* it looked — away from Buffalo Bayou, with little notice at all of the stream that flowed behind it.

Such architectural dismissals of the bayou have been common in Houston's history, but this one particularly stung. With the revived interest in downtown and, in particular, the success of Bayou Place, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership had assumed that the people planning the Hobby Center would pay attention to their backyard waterway. Hobby Center officials, when contacted, countered that they had assumed that if the issue were so important, someone would have approached them about it. It was a wake-up call for the Bayou Partnership, which realized that it couldn't simply assume builders would treat the bayou in a friendly manner. They'd have to be encouraged to do so.

The exchange with the Hobby Center's developers opened up the possibility of moving a parking garage away from the bayou to allow room for landscaping and a footpath, as well as a connection to the Hobby Center itself. But more than that, the exchange pushed the Buffalo Bayou Partnership to create a set of development guidelines for Buffalo Bayou's downtown sector from Shepherd Drive to McKee Street. The guidelines, which were released in January, came about following a year of meetings between local politicians, real estate brokers, people who own land along the bayou, members of the downtown development community, and Houston-area environmental groups. Covering such topics as bayou edge treatment, setbacks, trails, planting criteria, and walkway and railing designs, the guidelines have three main purposes: to create a continuous pedestrian walkway along Buffalo Bayou's downtown waterfront; to transform the bayou's waterfront into a high-profile visitor destination and recreational amenity; and to establish the downtown waterfront as a development corridor that promotes quality urban design.

To push the idea of a uniform waterfront, says Bayou Partnership Executive Director Anne Olson, developers will be provided a 16-page booklet that details many of the guidelines; they will also be offered advice on how to implement them. One factor in favor of the guidelines, notes Bayou Partnership Chairman Mike Garver, is that some 80 percent of the land lining the bayou's banks is publicly owned, which allows the city to set a standard that private entities might then follow.

Still, for all the work put into creating the guidelines, and all the different groups that have signed on in support of them, the fact remains that they're voluntary. And as has been seen in the past, sometimes good intentions can be overwhelmed by bad economics. To put teeth into the guidelines, the Partnership is encouraging the city to enact an ordinance to back them up. That, though, could take time. And with all the work taking place downtown, time is at something of a premium. For the moment, though, bayou supporters are encouraged to at least have guidelines, hoping that will be enough until such time as the suggestions can be transformed into rules. — *MJS*

Copies of the Buffalo Bayou development guidelines are available from the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, 713.752.0314.

Top: Rendering of Machado-Silvetti's design for Wiess College at Rice. Above: Michael Graves' Martel College.

RICE TO ADD TWO NEW COLLEGES

When Rice University decided that it was time to add new residential colleges to its campus, it tapped two nationally known architectural firms for the job. Machado-Silvetti was chosen to come up with a replacement for the 1950 Wiess College, which has long been deemed to be failing structurally, while Michael Graves was selected to create the brand new Martel College (named after the Marian and Speros Martel Foundation, which gave $15 million toward the building). While each of the colleges, which are now under construction, reflects the aesthetic of the firm behind it, they also pay homage to early ideas about the university.

The new Wiess and Martel colleges are conceived as low buildings with enclosed courtyards, more like student housing from before the 1950s than Rice's newer high-rise colleges. Martel features large round columns, reminiscent of adjacent Jones College (1957), a prominent circular stair tower, a sally-port (Rice's third), and a vaulted dining hall. At Wiess, a glass curtain wall was deflected around a tree that the architects deemed worth saving. Alas, a horticulturist thought otherwise, and in February the tree was bulldozed. Students have been assured that it will be replaced.

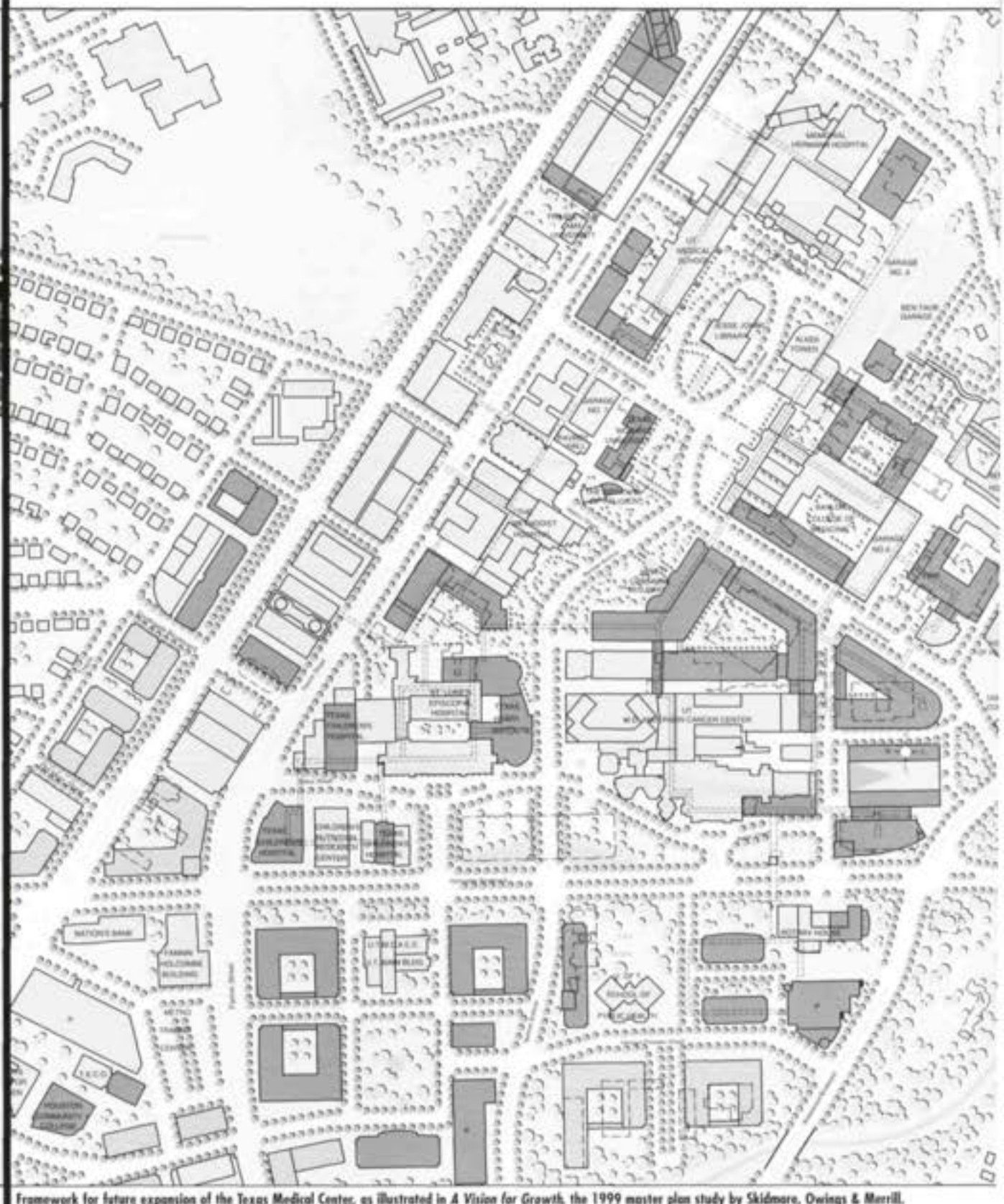
Administration dictates and student pressure toned down a few novel features of the new colleges. Rice requires all buildings to use its traditional St. Joe's brick, so more modern cladding materials such as the precast concrete Machado-Silvetti used in their recent dormitory at Princeton were not an option. More austere early designs for Wiess were softened in response to trustee comments.

Other compromises are clear only to those familiar with Rice. Each residential college has always had its own dining facilities, and though a study concluded that combined cafeterias would provide a better quality of food, students objected to the idea of mass dining out of fear that it might weaken the community of each college. Thus the idea of combining dining halls was dropped in favor of sharing kitchens and serving lines between colleges, but keeping the dining rooms separate.

Similarly, students who lived at Wiess College treasured the fact that their rooms opened directly onto two grassy courtyards. The university, however, had been trying to place three locking doors between student rooms and the outside for security reasons. That standard will be met upstairs — where students will need to pass through locked doors on the stairways and elevators — but ground floor living rooms will open directly outside.

The two new colleges are part of an expansive building campaign at Rice. A new baseball stadium, by Jackson and Ryan, opened in February, and a new humanities building, by Alan Greenberg, is scheduled to open in time for the fall semester. Meanwhile, William Ward Watkin's 1925 chemistry building is being renovated as bioengineering labs, and the Fondren Library will be reworked by Robert Venturi and Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbot. The library's original 1949 building will be partially gutted and a 1969 addition at the rear demolished to make way for a new section. A new business school building is also on the drawing boards. — *Christof Spieler*

Prescription for Growth



Framework for future expansion of the Texas Medical Center, as illustrated in *A Vision for Growth*, the 1999 master plan study by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

By Michael Berryhill

The Texas Medical Center plans its expansion for the next 50 years

In the heart of the Texas Medical Center, near the intersection of Bertner Avenue and Moursund Street, sits what appears to be a nondescript parking lot. Known as K Lot, it is seven acres of open space flanked by four of the best known medical entities in Houston. On one side is the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center; on another is Methodist Hospital. Baylor College of Medicine sits to the northeast, and to the southeast is St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, home to the Texas Heart Institute. In recent years, each of these institutions has, with varying degrees of passion, lusted after K Lot, and for good reason — it's the last piece of open ground in the Medical Center's historic core.

In the past, the battle over who gets control of K Lot might have been complicated and unpleasant. The various institutions that make up the Texas Medical Center have not always seen eye to eye, sometimes being more concerned for their own expansion than for how they relate to their neighbors. Every decade for the last half century, the Texas Medical Center has experienced phenomenal growth. And for 50 years, growth seemed to be its own reward. But today the TMC, founded on 134 acres, occupies 675 acres and is running out of dirt. The hospitals and research facilities in its historic core are jammed shoulder to shoulder and jostling for more room. Yet for most of its history, the TMC's member institutions have not shared their growth plans. That philosophy helped lead to what Richard Ingersoll, writing 11 years ago in *Cite* 22, described as "an inchoate snarl of parking structures, unclear points of egress, and difficult connections between structures," all of which combined to "make the Medical Center an aesthetically and experientially unpleasant place that seems to promote a feeling of illness rather than relieve it."

In the increasingly competitive world of medicine, there was a danger that such insularity would continue. But surprisingly, rather than being an area of conflict, K Lot has become an area of cooperation. What will replace the cars that now fill the lot is not a building owned by any one TMC institution, but rather a 2-million-square-foot research complex that will be shared by rivals Baylor College of Medicine and the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. Also planned for construction is a commons building designed to, as one description puts it, "promote inter-institutional collaboration."

Something new is going on at the Texas Medical Center — planning. Working with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, the TMC has created a master plan titled *A Vision for Growth*. Announced last spring, but revealed in detail only in the last few months, the plan is designed to help address the problems that have arisen during the Medical Center's five decades of unchecked development. Among other thing, the plan calls for improved green space, cooperative ventures for the use of scarce land in the heart of the center, and better coordination with local government to control flooding. At the top of the list, as might be expected, are issues of transportation and access — or to put it more directly, parking.

The Texas Medical Center was founded in 1942 on a simple premise: lower the cost of building new nonprofit medical institutions by providing them free land. The first parcel of land, cut from the southern edge of Hermann Park, was sold to the Medical Center in 1943 with the approval of the city's voters.

The need was evident. A Minneapolis consulting firm hired to study the region's medical needs pointed out that nine of the 15 local hospitals were not accredited. The death rates in the "Negro hospital" were high. And high infant mortality rates suggested the need for a children's hospital. There was a nursing shortage. A medical library was needed. There was no training in the state for dietitians, physical therapists, or social workers, and there was no school of public health in the Southwest. The Texas Medical Center was intended to redress these problems.

Free land worked its magic, and the TMC embarked on the growth spurt that continues to this day. The priority was to expand, not to plan. The medical entities attracted to the TMC were not eager to give up their independence in exchange for acreage, and so the organization of the Medical Center became a bit like the Articles of Confederation: a weak central executive served at the will of the member institutions. The chief executive officer of the Texas Medical Center controlled parking, but the TMC board, consisting of top officials from the various medical institutions, controlled practically everything else. Each institution was run by a strong-willed director with his or her own board to answer to. As a result, running the Medical Center was a bit like herding cats — not impossible, but hardly easy.

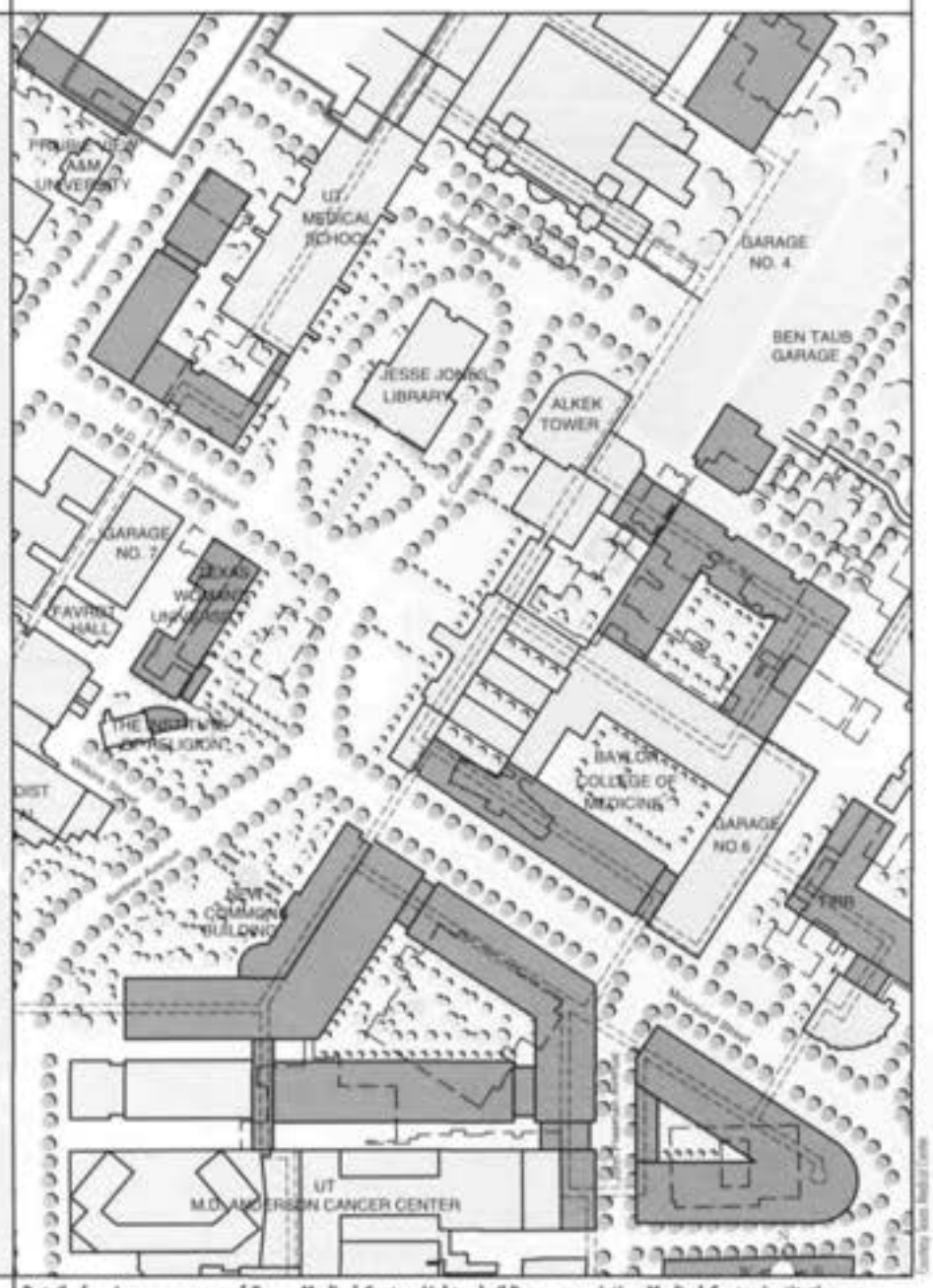
Then in the mid-1990s came a turning point. By charter, all the institutions on Medical Center land have to be nonprofits. This does not mean that they don't make any money; far from it. Some make a great deal of money, a percentage of which is supposed to be plowed back into indigent care. But under the tremendous cost pressures of managed care, St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital attempted to merge with Columbia HCA, a for-profit hospital chain with a reputation for ruthless behavior. The TMC's other member institutions banded together to fight the merger, charging that the deal would be a violation of St. Luke's charter, and the two sides squared off in what could have been one of the nastiest lawsuits in Texas history. But before going to trial, St. Luke's backed down. It had wanted the merger to help ensure a steady supply of patients, but decided that the patients could be found through other means.

There's nothing like a legal conflict to bring people together. After the St. Luke's battle was over, the TMC board began to think about the need for planning. A merger with an outside institution might be a mistake, but cooperation between the institutions inside the TMC might be a good idea. In 1998, the TMC hired Gensler and Walter P. Moore and Associates, Inc. to prepare the way for a master plan. It wasn't hard to figure out what the most pressing problem was — parking. In a city of low population densities, the TMC is an anomaly: it is, at least during office hours, one of the more densely populated urban centers in the country. More than 110,000 people flow through it every workday. During a year's time it averages 4.5 million patient visits; most of these people arrive and depart by automobile.

And the Medical Center is getting bigger. So much new building is going on at the TMC that it rivals the construction in downtown Houston. During the next 15 years the TMC will grow almost half again in size, adding 10 million square feet of building space to its current 21 million square feet. Nearly $1 billion in new construction is under way, and construction totaling some $600 million is in the pipeline. Included among the current projects are:

- Hermann Pavilion, a $200 million, 12-story, 800,000-square-foot space to replace outdated facilities. Construction is

Site plan of K Lot and surrounding institutions, showing location of proposed research center (gridded) and commons building.



Detail of main campus core of Texas Medical Center. Lighter buildings are existing Medical Center institutions; darker buildings indicate proposed areas of expansion.

slated to be finished this spring.

• The Basic Science Research Building, a $137.2 million, nine-story structure being built by the M.D Anderson Cancer Center. This will be the first building in the new Texas Medical Center Research Campus, the shared facility to be located on K Lot. Construction is to start this fall, and be completed in 2003.

• Denton A. Cooley/Texas Heart Institute Building at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, a $112 million, 277,000-square-foot building scheduled to be finished next year.

• UT-Houston Health Science Center Nursing and Biomedical Sciences Building. Ground is to be broken later this year for this $64 million, 225,000-square-foot building.

• M.D. Anderson Faculty Center. Some 325,000 square feet of office space is under construction at a cost of $49 million.

• Texas Children's Hospital. In excess of a million square feet of space in three buildings is being added or renovated. Cost is estimated to be $345 million, and the completion date is anticipated to be in 2002.

Dr. Richard Wainerdi, president of the Texas Medical Center, can't talk about what he calls his "health city" except in superlatives. With 13 hospitals, two medical schools, four nursing schools, and schools of dentistry, public health, and pharmacy, the TMC is the largest medical center in the world; more than 52,000 people work there. "It is the largest health complex," Wainerdi emphasizes, "that has ever existed in history."

The Medical Center is often compared to a campus, because so many medical students study there. But that Wainerdi terms it a city is more than just rhetoric. In the *Vision for Growth* master plan, one of the main points made is that because of the Medical Center's size, and because of the number of institutions — 42 — that comprise it, the planning issues it faces have more in common with a major urban downtown than a university. To that end, the master plan suggests recognizing that the TMC is composed of different districts that should have different identities. For example, the Main Campus, bounded by Fannin, North MacGregor, and Brays Bayou, would be for patient care, education, research, and administration; the Main Street District, bounded by Main, Fannin, and the bayou, would be for mixed use, including outpatient clinics, hotels, offices, retail, and residential; and the South Campus, bounded by Braeswood, Fannin, Cambridge, and El Paseo, a newer district, would be for research, patient care, support uses, and student housing. Four other districts are envisioned — the Veterans Affairs District

off Old Spanish Trail, the W. Leland Anderson District near State Highway 288, the South Leland District near Greenbriar Drive, and the H. Markley Crosswell District between the Main Campus and Veterans Affairs — with the point being that the different institutions can't view themselves in isolation,

DURING THE NEXT 15 YEARS THE MEDICAL CENTER WILL GROW ALMOST HALF AGAIN IN SIZE, ADDING 10 MILLION SQUARE FEET OF SPACE.

and plan offices or support facilities accordingly. They have to view the TMC as a whole, with different areas for different functions.

Similarly, the master plan calls for enhancing sustainability, in particular by promoting pedestrian-oriented infill development by providing convenient access to retail and services, by developing active uses at street level, by investigating shared uses between institutions — and by encouraging transit-oriented development. In almost every instance, transit becomes a major issue in the master plan. Over the last ten years, the TMC has made significant efforts to improve access and transportation — signage is dramatically better; maps are freely and widely available at the parking garage elevators and major walkways — but still the problem of transportation won't go away. Dr. Wainerdi fairly bristles when parking is mentioned as the most obvious problem in the Medical Center. Parking, is after all, one of the few things that falls directly under his control, and, he insists, there is adequate parking to meet the needs of the public and employees. The problem is not the number of spaces, but their convenience. Medical researchers and physicians expect a close-in spot. Relatives of critically ill patients, not to mention the patients themselves, want the same. So do the TMC's employees.

"Employee parking, and its effects on recruitment and retention, is an urgent issue for many member institutions," Gensler and Walter P. Moore and Associates noted in their August 1998 *Joint Planning Strategies Report*, the study that preceded the SOM master plan. "There is a concern that suburban centers are able to compete advantageously on the basis of cost and convenience of parking. There are almost no suburban centers which are forced to resort to transit to convey employees from their car[s]to their work location and back. Therefore, the quality of the parking space, its ease and access, its cost and its linkage with the work site are fundamentally important. Almost every member [of the task force] asked for consideration of a rail transit system to convey employees to and from parking. Underlying this request is the sense that this linkage must be fast, efficient, clean safe and comfortable — which is not the image most respondent have of the current bus service to parking."

Such a people mover system would be expensive, and it seems unlikely. (Unless, that is, Metro steps in and builds it with federal funds.) But moving TMC employees away from private cars toward mass transit has become a major goal, one on which much of the success of the master plan hinges. By 2015, the Medical Center hopes to get 30 percent of its employees on mass transit. Since the majority of those employees live in southwest Houston, Metro's proposed light rail system along Main Street would not provide much help in meeting that goal. To meet the goal, more people would have to ride the bus, and to encourage that, Metro is planning a major transit station near the Shriners Hospital and the new Houston Community College building at South Main and Galen Drive.

But the problems of reaching a 30 percent ridership are manifold. If you're hiring high-skilled, service oriented professionals, they're likely to want to drive to work. It's safer and more comfortable, even if it means a long ride on a shuttle bus from the remote parking lots that the TMC is building. The Medical Center is faced with two choices: make transit better, or make parking more difficult. In Houston, it has been unthinkable to make parking difficult, so more garages are being engineered. The TMC requires 1.8 parking spaces per thousand square feet of built space; with 10 million square feet of new buildings planned, that would mean 18,000 new spots. The automobile is obviously going to continue to be one of the TMC's major problems.

Along with addressing the car, a key part of the master plan is its strategy for the growth of major institutions in the crowded core of the Medical Center. Among the proposals are:

- Provide room for growth for St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital and Methodist Hospital by redeveloping Methodist's utility plant and the nearby parking garage.
- Provide future growth of four major hospitals — Texas Children's, St. Luke's, Methodist, and Memorial Hermann — through expansion across Fannin and South Main.
- Use the old Ben Taub hospital site for expansion of the Baylor College of Medicine.
- Plan the addition of research space for the UT-Houston Health Science Center next to its existing medical school.
- Redevelop Texas Institute for Rehabilitation and Research and to prepare for its future growth.
- Encourage land exchange between the UT-Houston Health Science Center and the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.
- Develop a 200,000 square-foot World Center for Health Information.

Of the 10 million square feet of construction projected in the master plan for the next 20 years, more than a fourth will be added by one institution: UT-M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. The other major builders will be Baylor College of Medicine, Texas Children's Hospital, UT-Health Sciences Center, Memorial Hermann Hospital, and St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital. These six institutions alone will account for almost 8 million square feet of construction.

One day this spring I watched an elderly couple walking out of a TMC parking garage and into the crowded cross street between Main and Fannin. They were clearly disoriented, ill, and stressed out. The week before, a pedestrian had been killed while crossing Fannin.

It was a reminder of what the master plan had tried to make clear: the Texas Medical Center isn't just its individual buildings, but the way those buildings connect, and the way people connect to them. And much of that happens on foot. I decided to take a long walk in the Medical Center to see what it feels like as a place. I parked in one of the garages on Main Street that are linked to the professional buildings and came out on the sidewalk where I had seen the troubled couple. There is a kind of hustle and bustle in the bank buildings and restaurants on the first floors of the professional buildings that line Main Street. Crossing the street is an adventure.

There is something rather dazzling and intimidating about the wall of institutions that have grown and melded together at the TMC, like the walls of those gigantic orbiting cities floating in outer space in the science fiction movies. It is an intimidating but fascinating façade, but not one that could be called coherent.

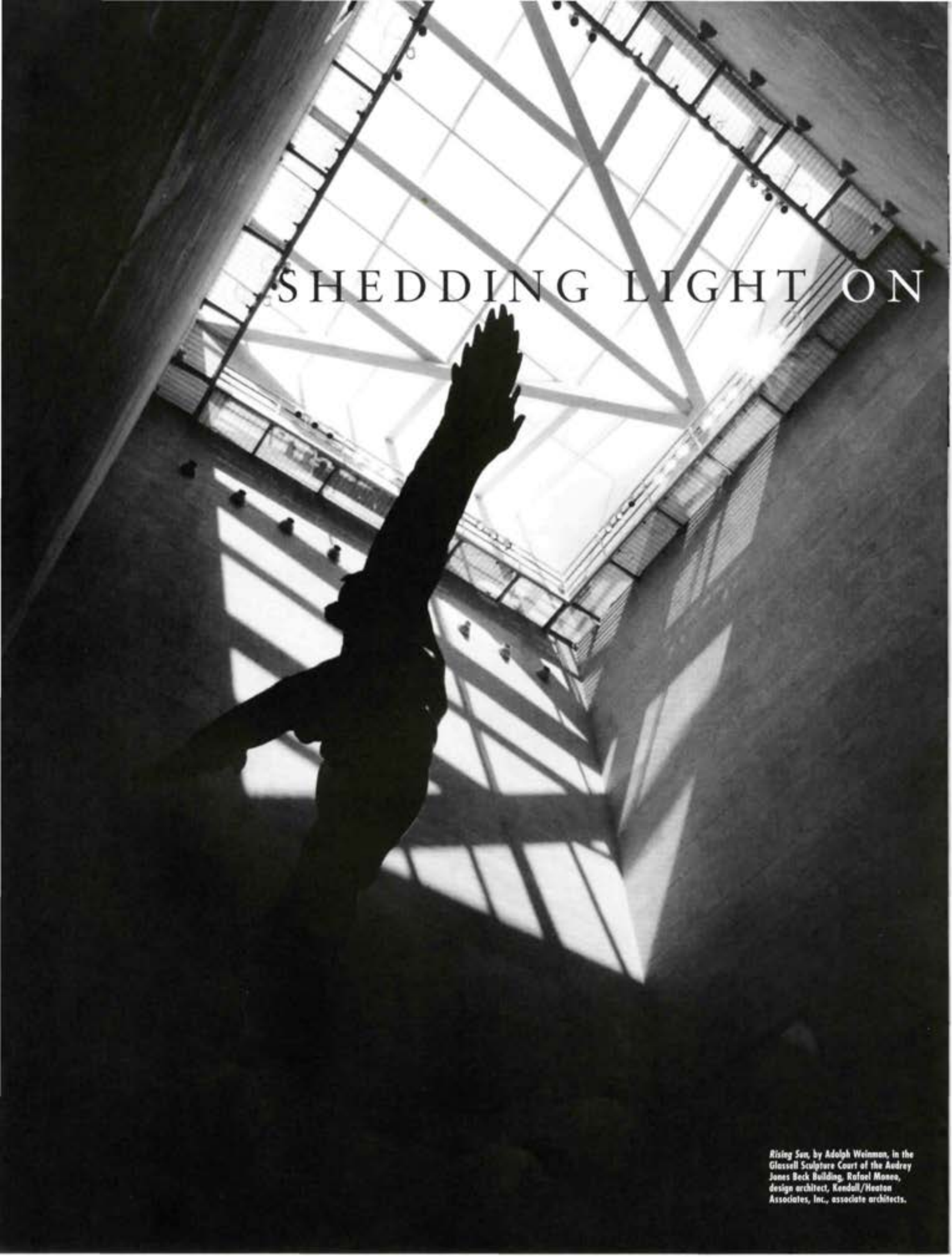
Earlier, I had been taking tours of some of the new construction at the Medical Center. The new Houston Community College for health care workers opened in September 1998 two blocks south of Holcombe on the edge of the TMC and adjacent to a proposed Metro transit center. The five-story building cost $20 million to build and another $5 million to equip. It offers associate degrees in 16 different options for health care assistants, the people who run the technology of health care: sonograms, MRIs, X rays, nuclear medicine, and the like.

Situated on a small site, the HCC building is simply arranged, with a five-story-high atrium. Its classrooms and labs are organized on the edge of the building and are wrapped around an interior core of faculty offices. Waiting areas are lit from the balcony overlooking the atrium. It's an attractive scheme in a building whose appointments had to be kept modest and functional. The building, with "HCCS Health Center" in large, bold letters on its side, makes a statement, says the center's president, Norma Pérez. Now that people know the college is there, it's getting calls from people in the Medical Center proposing classes.

On another day I toured the new Hermann Pavilion. It was interesting to see the original hospital, built in 1925, preserved as a ceremonial entrance and meeting space. It's a good and decent thing, and makes one realize how far we have come in terms of medical care and medical spaces. Just moving from wards to private rooms was a major step. Now the rooms at the Texas Children's hospitals are being replaced by new ones almost double in size, going from 300 to more than 500 square feet. The increase is, in great part, to accommodate new technology.

In my walk I had arrived at K Lot. I was standing at the core of the Medical Center, where the new Texas Heart Institute, a tribute to Dr. Denton Cooley, will be constructed. It struck me that over the years the Texas Medical Center has proven it can create medical miracles. And it also occurred to me that if it can successfully manage its growth, it could create a miracle of an altogether different kind. ■

SHEDDING LIGHT ON



Rising Sun, by Adolph Weinman, in the Glassell Sculpture Court of the Audrey Jones Beck Building, Rafael Moneo, design architect, Kendall/Heaton Associates, Inc., associate architects.

By Farès el-Dahdah

THE BECK

Rafael Moneo's Audrey Jones Beck Building is a lesson in opacity — and a connection to the architectural past of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Designed by the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo, the Audrey Jones Beck Building seems to fulfill the desires of its curators, who see it, no doubt, as having set new standards. If it has done so, however, it is not without a tacit return to standards set by The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's earlier efforts at building gallery space. Moneo's latest addition follows the work of three architects who were previously commissioned to design the museum in successive stages — which together were recently named the Caroline Wiess Law Building. The original structure, facing Mecom Fountain, belongs to William Ward Watkin (1924), who produced the central portion of an otherwise larger though never completed neoclassical edifice. In its earliest form, the MFAH had been planned as a trapezoidal courtyard building that was to be constructed in increments. Galleries were thus added in 1926, but by 1953 Watkin's plan was abandoned, and Kenneth Franzheim was asked to expand the existing building. Franzheim designed the Blaffer Memorial Wing, and then in 1954 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was asked to complete the museum's original building with two subsequent additions, Cullinan Hall (1958) and, posthumously, the Brown Pavilion (1974). Having the Beck Building as its most recent addition, this eight-decades-long history has finally resulted in two adjacent structures, each occupying city blocks of relatively equal size.

Complex programming aside, the difficulty for Moneo was undoubtedly the presence across the street from his project of Mies' Brown Pavilion, whose historical significance and formal virtuosity set a standard that even a Pritzker Prize-winning architect would find daunting. Moneo, who was awarded the Pritzker in 1996, seems to have opted for a counter-strategy that not only avoids stylistic and formal references to Mies, but also intervenes in an existing dialectic between the two sides of the Law Building's Janus-like profile. With Watkin on one end and Mies on the other, the Law Building is laden with an opposition as ideological as it is formal. It is a dyadic relationship that is less about Watkin's neoclassicism versus Mies' modernism and more about notions of opacity versus transparency that riddle the entire history of the museum. Stylistic difference and independent merit aside, Moneo's Beck confronts the Brown Pavilion's transparency while corroborating a conceptual trajectory that governs not only the history of the museum, but that of 20th-century architecture as well.

On its own terms, the Beck Building is deliberately distinctive. It qualifies as a monolith in terms similar to those set by Rodolfo Machado and Rodolphe el-Khoury in a recent exhibition on the subject entitled *Monolithic Architecture*.[1] According to the exhibition curators, an architectural monolith is defined by its "extreme economy and simplicity of overall form... [its] capacity to deliver tremendous eloquence with very limited formal means."[2]

The Beck Building does indeed belong to this kind of monolithic production, wherein planimetric and sectional complexities are strictly held within the volumetric restraint of shell-like elevations that are characteristically abstract and show no particular registration of a building's interior. This definition of the architectural monolith coincides with Moneo's use of the term "compact" in his own description of the Beck. "It is always desirable to enclose the largest possible volume in the smallest possible surface area," Moneo notes. "Compact architecture gives rise to saturated, dense floor plans that make use of the interstitial spaces to encourage movement...." Moneo even adds that the substance of such an architecture "is found in the interior space."[3]

The Beck is in plan undeniably masterful in its ability to cluster so many rooms with such ambulatory ease. The distribution of exhibition space is reserved to two principal floors that almost imperceptibly sandwich between them a vast administrative level. Circulation is marked and calibrated by grand bronze doors whose width equals their threshold while sepa-

Courtesy The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Stages in the life of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Top: Original building and first wings, William Ward Watkin, architect, 1924-1926. Middle: Cullinan Hall, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, architect, 1958. Bottom: Brown Pavilion, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, architect, 1974.

Audrey Jones Beck Building, center, with Visitor Center and parking garage, left rear, and Brown Pavilion, right front.

rating galleries from each other. Exits are indicated by the usual code-mandated red sign, but in this case inventively concealed in wired baseboards on either side of the doors. With only one exception, all the upper galleries let light in through giant lanterns, and some of the lower galleries get their natural light via vertical shafts open to the sky or through occasional windows hidden on the exterior behind radiator-like grills. This diffused light strategy is even carried over to the public bathrooms, whose ceiling sections conceal fluorescent light sources. Artist James Turrell's installation "The Light Inside" in an access tunnel between the Beck and Law buildings also contributes to the variety of atmospheric qualities employed by the building — fluorescence, in Turrell's case, bordering on magic. Tunnels are among the many different ways one can enter the Beck Building, which as a monolith tends to resist penetration. In a building that insists on formal consistency, the usual appendages that mark an entrance are sources of design tension that require particular treatment. One can, therefore, enter the building through architectural devices that are there not only to let people in, but also to overcome breaches in the building's otherwise impervious surface. Tunnels easily solve this problem, yet it takes a giant porte cochère on the Main Street side and a bridge on the Binz Avenue side to provide access to the building at ground level.

In terms of its adjacency to the Law Building, the monolithic muteness and hermetic consistency of Moneo's project tends to resist interpretation, yet one can determine why the Beck Building looks the way it does by interpreting it in relation to what it seems to stylistically ignore, i.e., its predecessors across the street. After all, projects by Moneo are riddled with lessons on architecture that usually have less to do with general contexts and more to do with immediate ones. The lesson in this case resides in the bilateral opposition between things hidden behind Watkin's stones on one end and things revealed through Mies' glass on the other. Aside from being a recurring paradigm in most of Mies' architecture (an opaque element exists in all of his transparent buildings), the transparent/opaque dyad can also be found in the history of architecture's first half of the 20th century. Calls for transparency in architecture were made at precisely the same time as the MFAH was being built. What is curious is not just that it took 30 years for this architectural tendency to

Continued on page 20

A three-story atrium anchors the circulation in the Beck Building. Sculpture shown center is a third-century portrait of a Roman ruler.

The open, light-filled design of the galleries in the new Audrey Jones Beck Building (left) reflects an aesthetic found in the Sculpture Hall of William Ward Watkin's original museum building (right in c. 1926 photo).

Continued from page 18

materialize in the form of Cullinan Hall, but that the opposition between the opaque and the transparent had already been introduced in Watkin's original design only to be stressed by Mies, and now picked up again by Moneo.

In its early form, the opposition between transparency and opacity was less political than it was typological. Watkin modeled his museum on a building type that was two-storied, with top-lit and windowless upper galleries stacked above galleries lit from either side through windows. Skylights were meant to produce optimal lighting conditions, and to facilitate an arrangement thought well suited to the display of sculpture in the upper galleries and painting in the lower ones. (After the museum opened the arrangement was reversed, with paintings being placed in the upper galleries.) This accounts for the museum's original elevation, which was fenestrated on the ground floor and "blind" above. Watkin's building, however, began to lose its binary significance in the 1930s with the introduction of new lighting and air-conditioning technology. Compounding the change were curatorial trends that called for the exclusion of daylight altogether. With each remodeling, the Watkin building was gradually rendered opaque. High-watt incandescent and long-life, low-heat fluorescent light fixtures rendered natural light obsolete; ceilings were lowered to allow for new air ducts and to minimize the volume of air that needed to be cooled or heated. To help ensure controlled ventilation and humidity levels, windows were walled in and skylights sealed off. This trend toward the hermetic was most radical in the Blaffer Memorial Wing, a windowless building with an upper exhibition gallery whose environment is controlled by a mechanical room below. Such an optimal space for viewing art simulated an 18th-century domestic interior that had been propped up and wrapped with air ducts and electrical wires. At the time, most museum extensions relied on this windowless strategy, which in the case of Houston gave way to its exact opposite in 1958 with the opening of Cullinan Hall.

The 30-foot-high glass windows of Cullinan Hall were counter to then accepted museum practices, which insisted on blocking out natural light. Cullinan Hall's first floor was raised six feet above ground level so that even the basement could be naturally lit with a continuous band of windows. Architectural imperatives superseded the then-declared optimal need of curators, who had to contend with a radical structure and invent their displays accordingly. Just as in the subsequent Brown Pavilion, the strategy became that of transparency, whereby the building would not only let light in, but would also acquire a nocturnal dimension through which gallery space could be externalized and displayed to the street. Exhibitions were compelled to adopt modernist strategies in which, for example, paintings were hung from the ceiling, free-floating in a room without partitions so that they could be experienced in ways until then unprecedented.[4]

Transparency was also achieved by contrast, as the Watkin wing was almost totally sealed off, with only traces of its former fenestration left on its elevations. Mies had, in fact, been invited to help remodel the older parts of the museum, and the decision to seal off all existing windows was probably made on the basis of need for more hanging space. This decision, however, ultimately served to promote Cullinan Hall as modern in contrast to the now archaic looking Watkin wing. After all, windowless buildings that hold art collections are as old as architecture itself and usually go by a name other than museum: mausoleum, a term used by Franzheim when describing his own Blaffer Wing.[5]

French philosopher Régis Debray once noted that museums and mausoleums have a great deal in common; they are both depositories of images that guard secrets in their crypts while isolating artifacts within the civic space of their grand architecture.[6] Moneo's Beck Building is undeniably mausoleum-like, and for good reason, since it recalls the image of what Mies helped construct in order to oppose. By looking like a mausoleum, i.e., by having (almost) no windows, the Beck Building asserts its connection with Watkin's building through

Continued on page 22

Courtesy Davis Museum and Cultural Center

MONEO'S MUSEUMS

BY MARTHA THORNE

In 1992, when Rafael Moneo was commissioned to design the MFAH's Audrey Jones Beck building, he had already completed four museums and was involved in the construction of a fifth. Taken together, Moneo's museums fit comfortably within his overall body of work; examined individually, each of his museums reveals some of his fundamental concerns. In this age of signature architecture, when the stamp of the architect is often readily apparent in formal aspects or decorative elements, Moneo's architecture conveys a subtler, less boastful style. His apparent rejection of "type" speaks to the careful reader, encouraging multiple layers of interpretation. This is not meant to suggest that Moneo approaches each work arbitrarily, but rather that the underlying concerns and interests are ever present, while — as is made clear in his museums — their formal expression assumes a range of articulation.

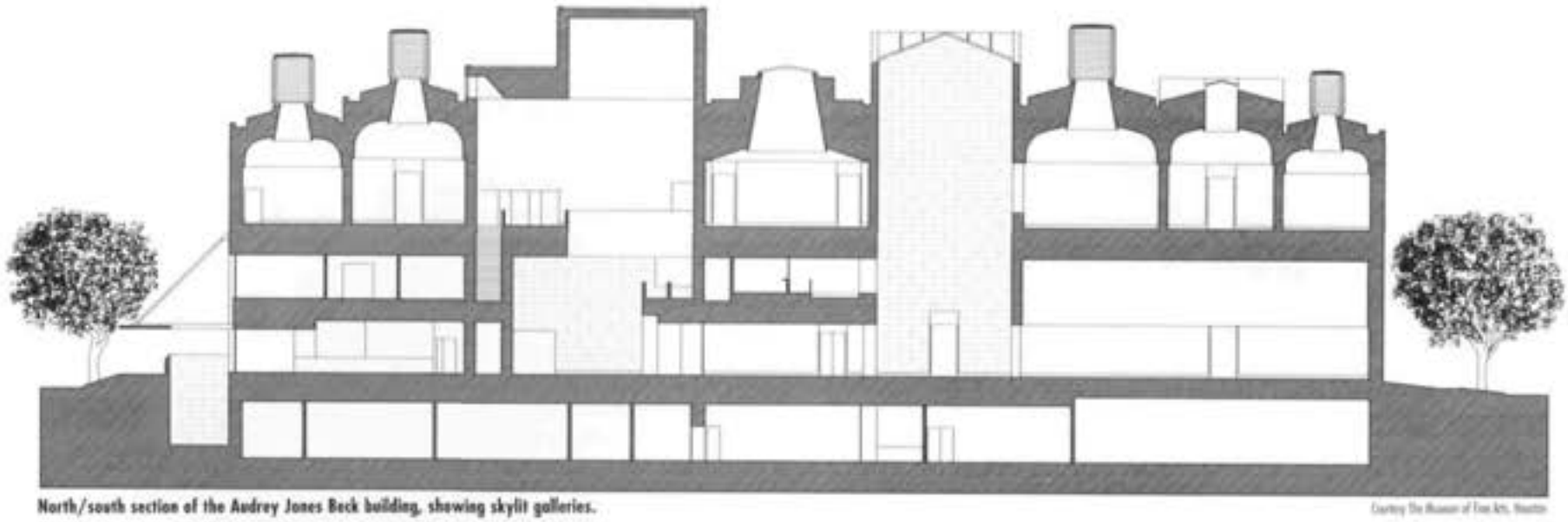
Courtesy Moderna Museet and Arkitekturmuseet

Top: Atrium of Moneo's 1993 Davis Museum at Wellesley College.

Left: Light lanterns on the Moderna Museet and Arkitekturmuseet, Stockholm, 1998.

Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 1986: The Museo Nacional de Arte Romano in Merida, Spain, was built from 1980 to 1986. To date, it remains one of Moneo's finest achievements. Constructed on an archaeological site, the museum is built around the existing ruins. Through this work, Moneo creates an eerie yet powerful juxtaposition of the ancient and the new. Immediately inspiring to all who enter the main exhibition hall and encounter its dramatic arches, this building also has subtle complexities. Constructed of brick and evoking the spirit of Roman building, the rather large museum fits within the modest scale of the city through Moneo's careful handling of the different façades. The exterior of the main hall is distinguished by a series of buttresses, indicating the rhythm of the arches inside. The windows along the upper edge imply natural light. Although the building's structure is concrete faced with brick, in no way does it seem false. The dimensions, color, and positioning of the brick grant a sense of permanence and timelessness to the interior spaces. No special gallery finishes have been created; the works of art rest naturally against brick surfaces in the bays. Elevated walkways lead visitors to view the works on the upper level while offering the opportunity to experience the entire nave. The light that enters through the windows at the roof line adds to the drama of the main hall and intensifies the visitor's understanding of space and time.

Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró, 1991: This museum building in Joan Miró's hometown of Palma de Mallorca, Spain, consists of two main parts that are highly differentiated: a linear portion that houses a study center, and a star-shaped gallery. A modest white wall, which is the back façade of the study



North/south section of the Audrey Jones Beck building, showing skylit galleries.

Courtesy The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

center, leads visitors toward the entrance and the stairs to the garden. This path continues on to Miró's studio. From the museum's entrance, one sees water, not in the distance but within the compound, on the roof of the gallery. Pushing up out of the pool are prismatic skylights.

The star-shaped gallery has little to do with the surrounding constructions; it is independent and fortress-like. When one enters the museum, a new environment is revealed. From the entrance, which opens at the highest level, the visitor can look down onto irregularly shaped, flowing exhibition spaces that are illuminated by natural and artificial light. Daylight is mediated by concrete louvers, alabaster membranes, and overhead skylights. Moneo's architecture ensures that one is not distracted by the surroundings and can focus on the garden and Joan Miró's sculpture through the open, low windows.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 1992: In Madrid, to house the art collection of Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza, Moneo undertook the reorganization of a palace designed in the 18th century, with Neoclassical façades dating to the 19th century. If one calls out the exceptional features of this work, the list would include the preparatory spaces, the organization of space and circulation patterns, the use of light, and the scale of the rooms as they relate to the artwork. Moneo placed the new entrance within a small garden on the building's north side; visitors make the transition from a bustling urban street to a semi-private area, and upon entering the building find a large space lit from above. From here, one can begin to understand the size, scale, and organization of the building before ascending to the top floor to commence viewing the collection.

The organization of the top-floor galleries creates a combination of intimacy and procession. The openness of the rooms, sized for viewing small groups of paintings, is particularly comfortable. Natural light enters through the windows, and their rhythm enhances the rhythm of the gallery spaces. Light also enters the inner galleries from above through a series of lanterns located in the central portion of the museum's roof. The auditorium and auxiliary services are located below ground level, segregating these utilitarian aspects from the inspirational experience of viewing art.

Davis Museum and Cultural Center, 1993: The Davis Museum at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, marked Moneo's first U.S. commission. He has stated that "the cubic volume of the Davis Museum is like a coffer: the artworks of the collection are like the memories of those alumnae who lived here, therefore I wanted the museum to be like a treasury." Moneo's first concern was the siting of the museum. Respectful of both Paul Rudolph's nearby Jewett Art Center and the intentions of the campus' Frederick Law Olmsted landscape design, Moneo located his building to create a view of the Jewett and honor its place within the campus. This decision allowed an existing stair to be connected to the new complex by creating a piazza, thus energizing and defining a space to be used. In response to the small site, the new museum building is a cube that rises five levels and is crowned with skylights.

Inside, the staircase is a fundamental element. It works functionally, splitting the cube into two parts and forming two different sizes of gallery space. The staircase also contributes to the viewing experience, creating a procession from one gallery to another, allowing the visitor to make a thoughtful transition from one artistic experience to the next. Although Moneo claims that the building is not lavish, the defined spaces, the choice of materials — a brick exterior, simple white interior walls, maple casework, and staircase paneling — and the effects of the overhead lighting make it visually rich.

Moderna Museet and Arkitekturmuseet, 1998: The Moderna Museet and Arkitekturmuseet are on the island of Skeppsholmen in Stockholm, Sweden. The site for the art museum is an elongated stretch of land next to a building that was once an old ropery; the architecture museum is partially housed in a building previously reserved for modern art as well as in a new adjacent building. The intent was to affect minimally the delicate existing architecture of the island. Moneo proposed an architecture that is "discontinuous and broken, as is the city of Stockholm." The result is an irregularly shaped building, held together on one side by a long spine that provides the main circulation route for arriving at the entry-level galleries.

Because of the requirements for housing highly diverse holdings, the flexibility of the interior spaces became a crucial factor. Moneo's solution was to create clusters of rectangular and square galleries that change in their proportions as well as in their dimensions. The gallery ceilings on the main floor are pyramidal and contain skylights, again demonstrating Moneo's concern for using both natural and artificial light for viewing art. As they do in the Audrey Jones Beck building, the skylights in the Swedish museum bob up from the roof and indicate the variety of the interior spaces. However, the skylights do more than illuminate the interior. In the Nordic climate, known for its extended absence of daylight, the lanterns become beacons in the dark, and the light emitted enhances the exterior and the overall presence of the museum. ■

Excerpted from Rafael Moneo: Aubrey Jones Beck Building, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston *by Martha Thorne, text, and Joe C. Aker and Gary Zvonkovic, photographs. (Edition Axel Menges, Stuttgart/London, 2000.)*

During the day, the lanterns atop the Beck Building capture light for the galleries. In the evening, they glow.

Donor wall in Beck's atrium, displaying names of major contributors to the museum's construction.

Continued from page 20

Mies' mediation. It is a genial way of firmly associating the building with its predecessors without having to make any stylistic concessions.

Moneo relied on the only option possible when confronted with Mies' transparent strategy. He is, after all, a hard-core structuralist who sees the world in binary terms — an example of which can be found in the title of the course he currently teaches at Harvard University on design theory, "Solidity versus Fluidity." The structural relation with Mies is further reinforced when one realizes that the stone and pattern used in the Beck Building — Indiana limestone — repeats the only opaque surface of the Brown Pavilion, its stone base. The Beck's lapidary opacity is subsequently overcome with occasional sectional cuts that reveal the offices of the museum's curators, thereby highlighting their presence and presumably the power they hold. The building's opacity is also made pervious to light through oblique penetrations in the form of various configurations of skylights. Even the large sign near the Main Street entrance, the sign that announces the institution's name, is made as opaque as typographically possible, with barely a few slits separating fat and compact letters. An earlier version of this sign, which proposed that the letters be made of both stone and glass stacked alternately, was even more explicit about the opacity versus transparency notion. Moneo also introduces a nocturnal dimension to his building by having it transform at night into a gigantic pedestal carrying a collection of illuminated, prism-like lanterns, just as Mies had succeeded in transforming Cullinan Hall into a giant vitrine.

As a deliberate counter-strategy to Mies' openness, Moneo's Beck is closed onto a complex interiority organized around a three-story atrium. A monumental stair and escalator lead to the upper galleries, in which one can find only two locations where it is possible to see out. One window frames Houston's downtown — the emblem of the city whose treasury this museum after all is — while the second overlooks Watkin's original building. The choice not to look back at Mies seems deliberate, for if the Brown Pavilion stands as the masterpiece with which any architect is inevitably forced to compete, the Beck Building seems to relate far more directly to Watkin's wing. It is as if a complicity exists between Moneo's building and the original museum in order to somehow gang up on Mies. The Beck's upper galleries, which will undoubtedly be considered the building's *pièces maitresses*, in fact replicate the section of Watkin's original sculpture hall: blank walls up to a cornice line topped with a vaulted ceiling interrupted by skylights lined with light fixtures. Such a 19th-century museum section — an early version of which can be found in Munich's Alte Pinakothek of 1836 — ultimately facilitates the conservatism of curators, who can now go back to hanging paintings on walls rather than having to suspend them from ceilings.

At a time when transparency is back in vogue, be it in the form of state-sponsored French architecture or in the Museum of Modern Art's 1995 exhibition on the subject, Moneo's choice of the ambiguously opaque cannot pass unnoticed. Arguments against modernist transparency have, after all, been made by architects of Moneo's inclination. One should not, however, limit the Beck Building to a postmodern versus modern perspective. Moneo's Beck looks the way it does not only in pursuit of a perfect alignment with its Museum of Fine Arts, Houston predecessors, but also in terms of a preference to conceal, rather than reveal, the museum's collection. Moneo's 19th-century inspired galleries may be the inevitable outcome of conservative curatorial imperatives, but his opaque elevations, unlike Mies' transparent ones, resurrect a museum's ancestral and mausoleum-like dimensions. The hidden, after all, tends to fascinate, and fascination is a museum's undeclared primary objective. Moneo's opacity works in much the same way Poppea used her veil: his walls conceal the collection's presumed beauty only to make it more desirable. ■

1. Rodolfo Machado and Rodolphe el-Khoury, editors, *Monolabs: Architecture* (Munich: Prestel, 1995).
2. Ibid., p. 12.
3. Rafael Moneo, "The Audrey Jones Beck Building," Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1999.
4. One of the more memorable uses of Cullinan Hall was the MFAH's 1963 show "The Heroic Years: Paris 1908-1914," in which the paintings were suspended on wires, and appeared to float in the air. See Lynn M. Herbert's "Seeing was Believing: Installations of Jermayne MacAgy and James Johnson Sweeney" in *Cite* 40.
5. Celeste Marie Adams, *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: An Architectural History, 1924-1986* (Houston: MFAH, 1992), p. 62.
6. Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 17.

A TALK WITH RAFAEL MONEO

THE BECK'S ARCHITECT FINDS IN HOUSTON A PLANE TRUTH

By Carlos Jiménez

In the years since he was chosen to design the Audrey Jones Beck Building, Rafael Moneo's profile in America has risen considerably, thanks in part to his winning the Pritzker Prize in 1996, and also to his selection that same year as the architect for the Cathedral of Los Angeles. Moneo is known not only for his buildings, but also for his academic profile; he has been a professor at Barcelona's School of Architecture, and from 1985 to 1990 was chairman of the architecture department at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, where he still teaches. In March, Carlos Jiménez met with Moneo while he was in town for the opening of the Beck to discuss his current and future projects, his thoughts on Houston, and his ideas about architecture. Excerpts from their conversation follow.

Cite: Congratulations on the completion of the Beck Building. During the more than eight years you've been working on this project, you visited Houston numerous times. Although your stays have often

"Houston's horizontal presence is so complete and overpowering," says Moneo, "that it gives one the sensation that there are no limits to the city."

been brief, you have no doubt accumulated many impressions of the city. What are the most singular ones?

Moneo: The most striking image that I preserve is the city's horizontal planarity. Its almost infinite quality is truly extraordinary, a horizontal presence so complete and overpowering that it gives one the sensation that there are no limits to the city. Here one becomes fully aware of the horizontal plane's undeniable force. What is equally striking is to see this plane covered by another plane: the mantle of live oaks. This mantle gives the discordant city an element of continuity, of cohesion, transforming Houston's multiple grids into a very special place. Cities such as Houston, developed primarily with the automobile in mind, unleash the horizontal grid infinitum. The grid in Houston operates almost autonomously, contrary to, say, Los Angeles, where one sees the city's topography and landscape intertwined with the urban grid.

Cite: What can you say in general about Houston's architecture?

Moneo: Well, let us talk for instance of Houston's downtown, in my opinion one of the most pristine and beautiful in the United States, precisely because it enjoys the condition of being so new. In Boston, a city with which I am more familiar, the downtown suffers from having to always support the prevalence of an older city, which diminishes the potential for the skyscraper to develop its full energy. In Houston, one senses that in its lack of historical obligation, the city is always enunciating that the best is yet to come. This feeling that the past does not press over the city we have to ultimately understand as a positive thing, certainly one that in the case of Houston helps maintain a vital optimism.

Cite: The Beck is only the second building that you have completed in the United States. Do you have other works underway in the U.S.?

Moneo: Actually, I'm involved in a few. Under construction is the residence for the Spanish ambassador in Washington, D.C., a project I have been working on since 1990. Although it is not a complex facility, the building's program calls for a multitude of rooms, among them reception rooms, apartments for high dignitaries, and, of course, the house for the ambassador. Due to the site's strong sloping section, the design creates a series of interrelated level changes between the various programmatic elements as they move from the site's crest toward the property's frontage on the Potomac River. The result is a series of platforms, terraces intertwined with gardens. I would like to imagine that when finished, the embassy's gardens will elicit echoes of certain Andalusian gardens.

I am also working on a project at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, which has not yet begun construction. The interesting thing about this project is that it is in strict continuity with a museum that Eliel Saarinen built at Cranbrook. Our building literally extends the legacy of Saarinen's building. It is a challenging project when having to deal with such an illustrious neighbor as Saarinen, an architect for whom I have always had great admiration and respect.

Lastly, we are doing a very small, yet most satisfying work, an extension to the house of a Harvard professor, located on a beautiful parcel of land in Belmont, not far from Cambridge. As with the Spanish embassy, the site is a steep section with a waterway at its end, in this case a creek. We are practically duplicating the square footage of the original 1950s house, thus creating two houses. The new house boldly ventures into the wooded site, creating the feeling of being inside the forest.

Cite: It's interesting that you have not yet mentioned the Cathedral of Los Angeles, your largest commission to date in America. What is that project's status?

Moneo: The Cathedral surely has given me the most headaches. We have now completed all of the foundation work, and soon we will see the walls emerge and render the building's profile. I anxiously await the unfolding of this project, for its importance to the city of Los Angeles, for its public character, and for the immense challenge of having to answer what constitutes a sacred space today. Really, it is the project that keeps me in full alert. I am constantly conscious of the importance of this project to its community.

Cite: Following on a similar scale of public works, you recently mentioned a market you have been designing in Beirut. Is this an ongoing project?

Moneo: Sadly, the circumstances for this project have not been the most favorable. Even though Lebanon is making every effort to reconstruct its brutalized urban conditions, the economic realities are still very difficult. I have confidence, though, that the project will proceed, as it is a most crucial work for Beirut. This city has been fundamentally a market, and it is precisely in the market where encounters between diverse peoples occur. Undoubtedly, this type of space will contribute to mending, to healing, the city's broken and interrupted social life.

Cite: Last year you were chosen to design an addition to Madrid's legendary Prado Museum. When visiting the city last year, I found you mired in the politics that such projects inevitably engender. I admired then your patience in dealing with the controversies this project has unleashed. What have been some of the most recent developments?

Moneo: The Prado Museum addition has given us as many headaches as the Cathedral for Los Angeles. Both projects were won in rigorous competitions, a fact that would seem to guarantee a degree of settlement through the jury's selection. But the truth is that once the project is presented to the public, disagreeing voices multiply, some from curators dissatisfied with the museum's new agenda, others from museum neighbors worried by the arrival of a new density at the front of their doors, and others from colleagues who are not in agreement with the aesthetic direction that the project has taken. These are inevitable consequences any time anyone has to work with such an iconic public institution. When working on a building such as the Prado, there is a need to continually explain or acknowledge the multitude of suggestions. That is not an entirely negative situation, nor does it bother me. I simply accept this ongoing dialogue. I know that the presence of diverse opinions will eventually enrich the project. The project does not suffer, it simply follows its evolution, gradually becoming more reconciled with its objectives. To speak of the architecture for the Prado Museum addition as a reconciliation, I consider a virtue.

Cite: What are your thoughts on the changing condition of time in architecture, more specifically, the diminishing amount of time given to design, development, or construction of a work?

Moneo: We are going through a period dominated by the impression that everything is in continual change, that everything is in perpetual motion. In any effort we undertake, we want to see fast and immediate results. Therefore, time is converted into a highly pressured commodity, one in which architecture is pushed to reduce the margins between the beginning of an idea and its eventual execution. This sensation of moving faster might suggest that reality can be as fortuitous as images rambling across a computer screen. It leads to the thinking that architecture must somehow be imbued with this immediateness, or that it might be produced with the same speed at which images appear and disappear in front of our eyes. But the act of construction continues to demand enormous time and vigilance. The great effort and cost that it takes to build leads one to view the design process as a slow and reflective practice.

Cite: What are your thoughts regarding the architect's role in the ever changing society you make reference to?

Moneo: Although society's perception and relationship toward the spaces that it uses has dramatically changed in the last few years, I believe that we still require someone who can be responsible, who can structure and give form to that which is built. Naturally, today the occupation of architect does not imply the same contact with a supreme technical knowledge that might have been expected of a medieval architect. Most likely an architect in the Middle Ages was the most capable person to deliver the orders that would make a construction possible. Today an architect is certainly aware of the key elements of a construction, but he or she is not in full dominion of all of the technical imperatives. Nonetheless, the ultimate definition of the role of the architect still centers around the notion that the architect must assume responsibility for what is built. In my opinion, this responsibility should demand the following: the study of contemporary formal problems, the ability to build within a variety of urban mediums, the knowledge of new programs, a keen knowledge of technical issues, and, lastly, a deep investment in the world of culture while grasping the pregnancy of a moment. All of these things are essential in the making of an architect, and all of these things comprise the reasons why we can still talk about the indispensable role that the architect continues to play in our society. ■

Courtesy Dianne Tapley

DOWN IN THE DIRT

CHARLES TAPLEY DIGS DEEP TO FIND HOUSTON'S SOUL

Left: As seen in the original model, Tapley's plan for Tranquillity Park envisioned a space museum that would cross Rusk.

Far left: Championship Park near the University of Houston Downtown. Before Tapley began landscaping the embankment with the help of local prisoners, the area was little more than a sea of weeds.

By David Theis

It was late January, one of the bitterly cold days of Houston's brief winter, and Charles Tapley was thinking of spring. The 69-year-old architect was visiting Rice University to see how work was coming on the Lynn R. Lowrey Arboretum that he is designing on the Main Street side of the campus, behind the track and field bleachers. At 10 a.m. the windswept university was all but deserted, yet as Tapley leapt easily over mud puddles left behind by a recent downpour, the lack of people was not what he noticed. Instead, his attention was focused on the lack of plants. In his mind he could see a green future where others might see only empty ground.

"In spring, the granny gray beards will have these beautiful, pendulous white flowers that hang almost to the ground," he said to a 20-year-younger companion who was struggling to keep up. "Then many of the natives will color in the fall. They can be red or brilliant yellow. The black gums turn in August — ruby red. Sweet gums turn later in fall, coloring first at the top then working their way down. They're like Roman candles."

On this gray day, it was hard to envision the bursts of East Texas color that Tapley saw so clearly. It was easier to imagine the problems he had been having working the arboretum into Rice's campus plan, especially after hearing him talk about the epic battles he has fought with city planners and other authority figures throughout his professional life. More than one local architect describes Tapley as having been ahead of his time. He designed a master plan for Buffalo Bayou in the early 1970s, an era in which Houston's Parks and Recreation Director wanted to pave the bayou over and use it for parking. He designed projects as high profile as downtown's Tranquillity Park. And he designed a master plan for the redevelopment of Main Street — in 1983. But always Tapley came up against obstacles, most of them in the form of bureaucrats who viewed with suspicion anything that couldn't be poured out of a concrete mixer.

Compared to those reactionaries, the Rice entities he's dealing with in his quest for an arboretum are hardly daunting. When asked how hard a sell his green space is, Tapley laughs and says, "It's medium hard." Of course, having to fight for one's vision is a condition common to ambitious architects. In that respect, there's nothing unique about Charles Tapley. But I suspect not many architects would answer a question about how quickly some recently planted trees could be expected to grow as Tapley did. First, he talked about getting the trees planted in the right place, so that the roots can get to water quickly, and then, as part of the same answer, he ventured into more personal, even eccentric, ground. Every night, he said, he goes out to bid goodnight to the trees at his house. One particular evening he noticed that a hickory seemed to have shot up a couple of feet in a day. It reminded him that if you plant carefully enough, things can grow very fast. It's a lesson with broad meaning.

"Some of my best friends are trees," Tapley said. "They get it!"

What's the "it"? That's not altogether clear, although it may have to do with the notion that trees understand the importance of nature, of the environment, since they're part of nature. But people are part of nature too, so why don't more people get "it"? A few decades back, Tapley "got it" so clearly that he took a personal and perhaps revolutionary step. After years of dealing with "parks directors who didn't love parks," Tapley said to hell with it and took to working Houston's bayous with his own hands, and the hands of state prisoners assigned to work beside him.

But that's getting ahead of the story.

Tapley was born in New Orleans in August 1931, and even though his family moved to Houston when he was six, they still considered Louisiana home. It was there that they spent holidays and summers, and it was there, on the banks of the Mississippi, that Tapley took his first interest in waterways.

That interest took a while to be made evident. Early on, Tapley considered a career as a journalist. When he was accepted to Rice in 1950, journalism would have been his course of study had the university offered it. But Rice didn't, so Tapley instead found himself first in electrical engineering, and then in architecture, where he routinely butted heads with the faculty.

"I used to get in trouble for including landscaping in projects," he recalls. "Juries would say, 'You shouldn't have drawn those trees.' "

Retired professor emeritus Anderson Todd remembers Tapley as having been a "talented" but somewhat difficult student, one who didn't take well to criticism. "He wanted," Todd says, "to go his own way and do it his own way."

Tapley kept his interest in writing alive by working as the *Houston Chronicle*'s Rice correspondent; he helped pay his way through school by filing campus reports and working as a copy boy. It was at the newspaper that he met his future wife, Charlotte. Though she later became an award-winning home furnishings editor, at the time she was the mortuary editor, and Tapley was her copy boy.

After graduation in 1955, Tapley traveled around Europe for nine months, taking in the architecture — Gaudi, especially — and reveling in the bohemian life. He sometimes had only enough money to buy a single egg. Though plump and well-fed when he'd left home, he was nearly emaciated on his return. His father greeted him with tears, thinking he had some wasting disease. Back in Houston, Tapley turned his attention to an architectural career, starting out with Pierce and Pierce, then moving to Hamilton Brown's office, and eventually working with landscape architect Fred Buxton. In 1960 he opened his own firm, Charles Tapley and Associates, with Charles H. Pagan as partner.

At this point he'd been married for two years and "was willing to do anything." He laughs now, recalling an early garage remodeling job. Other, more interesting, early projects included the conversion of a filling station and laundry at Waugh and Allen Parkway into a short-order restaurant and private club for the Townehouse Motor Hotel.

Tapley's breakthrough job was a 1967 commission to design the Oblate Retreat Center, now the Christian Retreat Center in Dickinson. The retreat center was to be

The Oblate Retreat Center, Dickinson, Texas, 1967.

built on an old landing strip with forest on either side. Dickinson Bayou formed the north border. The Oblates, a Roman Catholic religious order, "wanted a lot on a little budget," Tapley recalls. "I'm from New Orleans, and I was always aware of the river running up in the sky above me as a child." In other words, he was flood conscious, and much of the little budget was spent on "getting them up in the dry" — raising the chapel, dormitories, and other buildings above flood level.

Tapley worshipped with the Oblate priests before completing his designs. "I wanted to know what it meant to kneel for communion with them," he says. "I wanted to know how 'X' corresponded with their beliefs."

Tapley has been a practicing Catholic throughout his life, and many of his most significant structures — the ones that he talks about most eagerly — are churches. Architect W. O. Neuhaus III, who worked in Tapley's office from 1969 to 1972, describes the Tapley aesthetic as being "about open space and light — never about the photos" that could be taken of his designs. And while open space and natural light are desirable attributes in almost any building, in a church they become part of the fabric of reverence, an ethereal but physical evidence of what worship is about.

Tapley's spiritual nature — he still thinks off-handedly about becoming a priest — revels in commissions such as Saint Cecilia's Catholic Church off Bunker Hill, the building he seems to take the greatest pride in, and Christ the King Lutheran Church in the Village near Rice University. Most of the buildings he works on now are churches, including a new church in Littleton, Colorado, that was commissioned before last year's high school murder spree.

His work on the Oblate Center won him an award from the Texas Society of Architects, and he and his firm, which now included his future partner Jerry Lunow and Neuhaus, among others, took off. The firm's range of projects in the late 1960s and early 1970s was wide enough to enthrall a variety of tastes. For Lunow, whose greatest strength is landscaping and environmental work, such projects as the nature trails and orientation center at Kenai Wildlife Refuge in Alaska seem to bring the happiest memories. He and Tapley got to make "three or four trips into bold, great country." Also memorable, but for very different reasons, was a hospital project in the Haiti of Baby Doc. For that project, which was never completed, they were driven to work by armed guards.

For Gerald Moorhead, who collaborated with Tapley on the building of Saint Cecilia's and Christ the King, it's the memory of the intellectual struggle with liturgy and church history that is most compelling. Moorhead was drawn to the attempt to reinvigorate the one while respecting the other, especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which called for new relationships between priests, worshippers, and sacred elements.

Christ the King Lutheran Church, 1982, in the Village.

But for Tapley, the most memorable project of the period was the one initiated by a phone call from S. I. Morris, who asked him if he "wanted to do a park downtown." The park was Tranquillity, to be built in honor of the first manned landing on the moon. His work on Tranquillity Park led Tapley into the richest, but also the most maddening, phase of his career. As a sort of add-on to the Tranquillity Park project, Tapley was asked to look into the beautification of a short segment of Buffalo Bayou downtown.

With his love of waterways and open space, both projects were thrilling prospects for Tapley. But the commissions brought him closer than he would have liked to the levers of political power. The man who had successfully defied his architecture professors would find Houston's establishment a considerably tougher nut to crack. As Morris notes, "Tapley did everything pretty well, but he wasn't big enough to get everything done."

Tapley got his first taste of how political waters could be dirtier than the city's much-maligned bayous when, before awarding him the contract to work on the park, then-Mayor Louie Welch's parks and recreation director asked him point blank, "Did you support the mayor?" In his naiveté, Tapley answered, "Well, I voted for him." The parks director didn't get in Tapley's way; after all, Welch himself wanted Tapley. But in time Tapley understood the real point of the question: "Did you contribute financially to the mayor's campaign?"

Simply put, Tranquillity Park is a roof garden, one built over an underground parking garage. The first problem that Tapley had to solve was how to provide the garage air and exhaust. The solution was the park's signature stainless steel stacks, which stream with water, are beautifully lit at night — and have the thoroughly practical function of ventilating the garage.

But Tapley had to go well beyond the practical in conceiving the park, which was, after all, designed to commemorate history on a grand scale in the moon landing. (In some respects, however, he had to be very practical: In the wake of the urban riots of the late '60s, he was instructed to design the park in such a way that people could not gather there in order to storm City Hall.) Tapley's early plans called for a space museum and restaurant to be built on the site. This was before the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, and before NASA built its own visitor center, so it had the potential to be a major attraction for downtown. But in stark contrast to today, city leaders of the time wanted nothing to do with federal funds to help build the museum. Though the funds were available, the politicians were suspicious of the interference from Washington they could bring. Instead, the city tried to raise the needed money for the park on its own. When those efforts came up short, so did Tranquillity Park.

Tapley ran into other disappoints with the park as well. He presented his design to Buzz Aldrin in the hope of getting from the astronaut some sense of what it was like to walk on the moon. Tapley wanted to incorporate some of that overpowering experience in the park's feel. But Aldrin took only a cursory glance at Tapley's drawings, which he found too abstract and exuberant. "There was nothing abstract about the moon program," Aldrin said. When Tapley protested that he'd seen Aldrin bouncing gleefully on the lunar surface, Aldrin replied curtly that none of the celebrating was spontaneous, that it was all scripted in advance.

Then came the Henry Moore affair, which has entered local cultural lore.

Interior view of Oblate Retreat Center.

Original plans for Tranquillity Park called for a display of public art. Tapley had hoped to make the art ever changing, to lease sculptures that would be shown for a time and then replaced by other art. When the Knox Foundation, which was funding the art, expressed a desire for a permanent installation, Tapley suggested they talk to Luis Jiménez. When that idea was rejected, he suggested the great British sculptor Henry Moore. Everyone agreed, and a sculpture was purchased.

But when Moore arrived in Houston to view the park where his art would stand, he recoiled from it. In front of a crowd assembled for a press conference, the renowned artist declared, "I want to speak to the architect," then strode away. A very nervous Tapley followed. It turned out that Moore had not looked at the photos of the park that Tapley had sent, and now refused to contemplate setting his sculpture down in the middle of so many tall buildings. The sculpture eventually wound up on the banks of Buffalo Bayou.

Tapley has other regrets about Tranquillity Park. He wishes he'd been able to put in more space where people could walk over the water. There's also one change he wishes the city would make right now. They insisted the walkways needed railings, Tapley says, and installed the ungainly pipes that now stand between the pedestrian and the water below. "They should at least saw the top segment off to create a long bench that people can sit on," he says. He's also sorry that the city banned swimming and skating in the park. His favorite picture of Tranquillity Park shows a multi-ethnic melange of kids frolicking in the cool-looking water. "It's supposed to be a people's park," he says now, with regret.

But Tapley's problems with Tranquillity Park were soon overshadowed

A Tapley Tour

By Stephen Fox

by the excruciating, and sometimes briefly exhilarating, battles he fought over development of Houston's bayous, in which he confronted both the city's indifference to its natural habitat and the limits of his own power.

The Buffalo Bayou that Tapley began working with in the early 1970s was not the same semi-developed stream that today wends through downtown. As Tapley recalls, only a few amenities existed between the Shepherd and Sabine bridges. A primitive jogging path ran along the banks, and the River Oaks Garden Club had sponsored plantings along the part of the bayou in its neighborhood. But from Sabine Street east and through downtown, the bayou was an eyesore. "The word 'derelict' doesn't begin to describe it," Tapley says. To get down to the water, you had to hack your way through a grove of tall weeds and then cross a steep, treacherous slope. Where there was concrete plating, weeds broke through in such profusion that the concrete was hidden from view.

When Tapley presented plans to landscape the bayou and develop trails along its bank, then city parks director Bill Schiebe took him to the U.S. Corps of Engineers office in Galveston, ostensibly to discuss the idea. But to Tapley's amazement, before he could begin describing his drawings, Schiebe put his hand over the schemes and said to the Corps engineer, "This is exactly what we don't want to do." What Schiebe wanted was to pave over the bayou and use it for parking.

Tapley was alarmed to see the depths of the resistance he faced. But he was also determined to defy the city bureaucracy. More important, on that silent drive back from Galveston, Tapley "decided that my true clients were the people of Houston. Not the politicians."

In later years, Tapley grew more philosophical about the challenges he, and others interested in Houston's environment, faced. "I realized that the politician would be out of office in two years," he says, "but that the bayou would always be there."

He continued to push for a downtown park on Buffalo Bayou. But various city agencies told him that they wouldn't even talk to him if he insisted on referring to his plans as a "park." The word evoked deep suspicion in bureaucrats, who were threatened with losing part of their territory to the Parks and Recreation Department.

Best known for his park designs and church architecture, Charles Tapley has left his imprint on a number of Houston buildings. Among the more notable ones are, top to bottom, the following:

The Bookman, 2243 San Felipe Road (1965): Designed for Dorman David (for whose free-spirited mother, Grace David, Tapley designed two houses), the Bookman represents Tapley's early involvement with the imaginative rehabilitation of existing buildings. The Bookman was a rare books gallery; its lofty, book-lined interior was so magical that Robert Altman used it as a setting for his Houston-based movie *Brewster McCloud*.

Post Oak Park Townhouses, 1317 Post Oak Park Drive (1966): Although the developer insisted that the house fronts be stylistically varied, Tapley compensated with understated rear elevations of cedar-surfaced planes. He grouped the row houses along greenway corridors to preserve existing trees on the heavily wooded site. The Post Oak Park Townhouses have aged gracefully. They work much more comfortably with their site than new mega-townhouse complexes now being built in the nearby Briar Hollow district.

Trailwood Village greenbelt system, swimming pool, and sales office, Kingwood (1971): Tapley and his associates Charles Keith, Edward Hall, and W. O. Neuhaus III were involved as planners, landscape architects, and architects for two projects of the Friendswood Development Company: Trailwood Village, the first phase of Kingwood, and Woodlake, a mixed-use commercial and residential development at Westheimer and South Gessner. The Trailwood Village trail system represented a strategy for preserving the natural landscape in the midst of heavily engineered suburbanization. The tense geometries of the subdivision's wooden pool enclosure and changing pavilion complemented the airy openness of the temporary, glass-walled sales office; both were integrated with the trail system. The design won a *Progressive Architecture* design citation in 1971. Despite this, only the trails survive. The architecture does not.

Block House, 443 Hunterwood (1972): Tapley and Joe Mashburn designed this house for a family of four in the painfully conventional Hunterwood subdivision in Hunters Creek Village. Rather than a styled façade, the house presents a blank wood plane toward the street. The front yard is so overgrown with indigenous vegetation as to render the house front almost invisible. Angled plan geometries and glass bays liberate interior space. They also liberated the client, Gay Block, who gave up the life of a suburban matron to become a well-known photographer.

Northwoods Presbyterian Church, 3320 Farm-to-Market Road 1960 (1983): In the raucous environment of the Highway 1960 strip, Northwoods Presbyterian Church stands out as a moment of tranquillity and spiritual repose. Tapley and his associate Gerald Moorhead designed the simplest of exteriors — the street front is a composition of gabled volumes — surfaced with russet-toned stucco, which plays off the bark and needles of surrounding pines and the church's pine-shingled roof.

"In Houston," Tapley says about that time, "if it didn't move traffic and make money, people would say, 'What good is it?' "

Tapley's bayou crusade eventually led to a fight over Fantasy Island, as *Texas Monthly* dubbed his plan to reroute White Oak Bayou where it joins Buffalo Bayou and carve out an island. The idea was only part of his plan — the flood-control portion — to develop the bayou, but other architects, among them S. I. Morris, saw enormous possibilities in the so-called Fantasy Island. If, that is, the city helped pay for its infrastructure.

Suddenly, Buffalo Bayou was transformed from a weed-clogged drainage ditch to a potential gold mine, and the idealistic Tapley was pushed to the side. When the project collapsed in the face of newly-elected Mayor Kathy Whitmire's refusal to play ball with the developers she had campaigned against, bayou development, either largely commercial or largely aesthetic, suffered a powerful setback.

Still, Tapley didn't give up. Temperamentally unsuited to being an insider, Tapley would probably never have the clout to make the city see the natural light that so moved him. But he was nonetheless "determined to have a bayou park, even if I had to do it myself."

By this time his wife had died, and his two sons were away at college. Alone, Tapley found himself at loose ends. "I had been a worker since I was a teenager," he says now. "I had been a provider almost all my adult life. Suddenly there was no one to provide for."

Though he didn't quit working to grieve, or even slow down much, Tapley did allow himself to deepen his explorations of his inner self. He'd practiced Transcendental Meditation since the 1960s, and Zen meditation since the '70s. Now he strengthened his investigations of self and God, taking courses at the Jung Center and studying under Episcopal priest and analyst J. Pittman McGehee.

Unlike some men who have a mid-life crisis, Tapley didn't decide he needed to completely change his life. Instead of changing, he deepened. He became "a more reflective person," one who worked less from gut instinct. "I finally knew who I was," he says now.

That person, he discovered, was more doer than talker. Tapley became essentially a one-man office, and he went down to the bayou to begin working it with his own hands as an unpaid and self-programmed volunteer. So began perhaps the most remarkable phase of Tapley's career: his work on the bayou with probationers and prisoners from Harris County.

Tapley got the idea of working with convicted criminals after doing jury duty in the court of Judge Mary Bacon. Impressed with her, Tapley talked to Judge Bacon about designing a window for her courtroom. When he told her about his one-man efforts at cleaning up the bayous, she suggested he make use of probationers who needed to perform community service.

So he began taking ten to 20 at a time down to White Oak Bayou, where it feeds into Buffalo, just across from the University of Houston Downtown, and digging with them through 18 inches or so of asphalt, broken glass, scrub trees, weeds, and more, until they reached usable soil. Then they began to plant trees and wildflowers.

Eventually, Tapley took on state prisoners. Tapley is a firm believer in the value of collaboration — he's as happy talking about the contributions that craftspeople and tradespeople have made to a project as about what he's done — so he had allowed himself to hope that the bayou work was having a positive effect on his helpers. With the probationers, since he didn't see them over a long period of time, he couldn't be sure. But with the prisoners, who came back day after day, he became certain that he was not only working their bodies, but touching their spirits.

As Tapley recalls it, the guards would stand back while he and the prisoners worked. "I was spooked at first," he says. "We were down there with machetes, blades glistening, rising and falling."

The prisoners would ask if he was a developer, and when he answered that he was an unpaid volunteer, they began to take a deeper interest. "Can we come every day?" some asked. Older hands yelled at the new guys to not step on the wildflowers.

Tapley eventually managed to have the area below and across from the University of Houston Downtown's Main Street entrance declared a park. He had wanted its name to be something that would allow the men and women who worked there to feel proud of their accomplishments. He came up with Championship Park, choosing it while walking on a moonlit California beach after listening to the Rockets win their first NBA title. Much to Tapley's delight, then-Mayor Bob Lanier showed up for the park's inauguration.

But that didn't mean that Tapley or his park were home free. For eight years he went down to the bayou one or two days a week, hauling water up by the bucket to water his plantings. But he never got any real institutional help. This despite the fact that the park's wildflowers were such a success that Channel 11 News used pictures of them as the backdrop for their credits crawl for some time.

When the idea for the Lynn R. Lowrey Arboretum (named for the naturalist and native plant enthusiast who died two years ago) was first floated, Tapley went to representatives of the University of Houston Downtown, hoping to place the arboretum near the bayous and continue his plantings of native trees along the bayou banks. But university officials did not follow up on his call, so eventually the Friends of the Arboretum set their sights on Rice. One Friends of the Arboretum member, Tapley remembers, said that he would veto any plans to plant downtown, where "undesirables" might move in. Though the person voicing the objection had no real veto power, Tapley didn't feel like fighting him. So when Rice showed an interest, the decision of where to locate the arboretum was quickly made.

Having the arboretum at Rice will be a wonderful thing, certainly. But if you go with Tapley down to the bayou where he and the prisoners worked, it's hard not to feel that an opportunity was squandered here. The site is on a stretch of the bayou that is little visited, even by local standards. But new housing construction is underway on San Jacinto, just above the bayou's banks, and the residents there, along with students at the University of Houston Downtown, will have need of some green space. What's more, the site is beautifully situated, facing UHD across the water. Just to the south is a magnificent view of downtown. The scene is so inviting that it's hard to understand why gondolas don't ply the waters, and why trees don't line the banks.

Instead, the site is once more overgrown with weeds, and garbage is all too prevalent. But things aren't quite as bleak as they look. The trees that Tapley and his irregular associates planted — the white oaks, the swamp chestnut oaks, the gums — now creep skyward.

Tapley has an itch to get back to work here with a new set of prisoners. He says that as soon as the arboretum's funding and planning is all in a row, he'll be back with a pickax and bucket, trying once again to wake the slumbering beast that is Houston, to which he remains irrationally committed, after all these years of pounding his head against concrete-cased bayous.

Other architects are happy to discuss Charles Tapley's legacy. William F. Stern thinks of the lessons on mentoring that Tapley taught him. Leslie K. Elkins says that "the way the light comes through a roof is more his trademark" than any specific building. Jerry Lunow recalls him as giving off "a spirit of enlightenment and an excitement about the work, instead of constant worry about codes."

But Tapley himself is not comfortable using words like legacy. For one thing, he's a modest man. For another, such talk implies he's just about done. "I'll never retire," he says. "They'll have to drag me away."

It's not much easier to get him to talk about his personal vision for Houston, because, once again, he's modest. But if pressed, he will eventually prophesy.

"This could be a city that's a pleasure to experience," he said the other day, as he sat in the pleasant, warmly lit clutter of the new office he's constructing on Harold Street. "It's not now, because we've opted to follow the example of other cities. We need to risk being different from New York and Denver and Chicago. To have the city be as unique as the people that live here."

"How would you do that?" I asked.

"Let's say that Houston is this urban core, and in all directions we have the diversity of the Big Thicket, the rice fields, the Hill Country. Why isn't the Big Thicket evident in the city? Why not the Hill Country? Wouldn't it be different if they were?

"No matter how nice we make the Galleria, or however many retractable-roof stadiums we build, it's never going to fully satisfy us. So then when people have had enough of Houston, they move away, and we lose our greatest resource.

"Making the environment part of the city — part of us — is the answer. When we remove the concrete liners from the bayou, we'll have parks of such scale that part of the integration I talked about will naturally happen. And it will happen. Not in my lifetime, but some time. Because it has to."

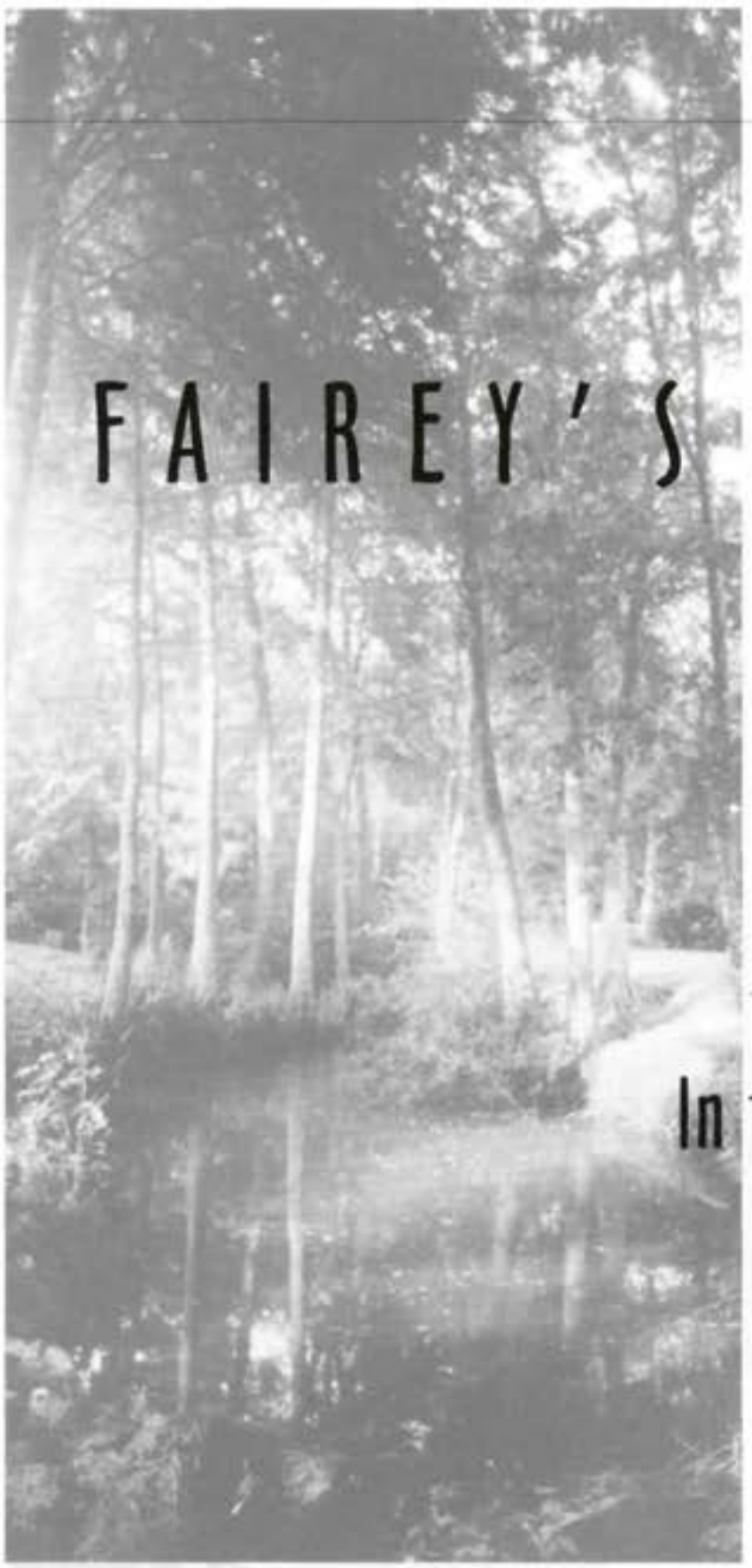
Tapley loves to tell stories, so this wasn't the first time I'd heard him speak at length. But this was the first time that he'd worn his heart so obviously on his sleeve, and revealed himself without a trace of irony or storyteller's art.

He might have embarrassed himself a bit by speaking so passionately. So he looked relieved when asked a more mundane question: What would he do if given a sabbatical?

"Study natural phenomena," was his quick reply. I responded with a puzzled look.

"Dirt," he said, and broadly grinned. "I love dirt." ■

For eight years Tapley went downtown one or two days a week to haul water up bucket by bucket from White Oak Bayou. He was watering plantings he'd made in an effort to create a park.



Above: Cypress trees line a natural pool on a spring-fed stream at Peckerwood Garden.

FAIREY'S GARDEN

A BOTANICAL WONDER TAKES ROOT BETWEEN HOUSTON & COLLEGE STATION

"To make a garden, one must be a dreamer, but a dreamer with fortitude."

John G. Fairey

In 1971, when John Fairey purchased seven acres of Waller County, it wasn't with the idea of creating the garden that eventually took root there. He chose the land simply because of its location halfway between Houston and College Station. What Fairey wanted was a manageable commute to his job — he had accepted a teaching position at Texas A&M's School of Architecture — and good light for a studio in which to paint. Fairey found the commute and he found the light. But he also found something else — a calling to cultivate. Over the past 30 years John Fairey has transformed his rough acreage into an epic poem of horticulture, nurturing a living library of rare and interesting plants. His creation is so unique and significant that it drew the Garden Conservancy into expanding its predominantly bi-coastal conservation efforts into Texas and helping create a trust to shepherd Fairey's garden into the next century. And no wonder: that garden is one of the most fascinating in the state, a complex experience that is at the same moment delightful and incomprehensible.

By Jane Anderson Curtis
Photos by Paul Hester

Left: A trellis with white wisteria vine shading a west-facing porch of John Fairey's house.

Below: Entry into a dry garden on the north side of a stream, with dasylirions, yuccas, and agaves.

Fairey's path to creating a garden oasis in Hempstead, some 50 miles northwest of Houston, began with the land. His property had the advantage of a spring-fed stream that divides the site, a stream running with a calmness that belies the savagery of a sudden downpour, when its level rises several feet. Fairey's first priority was to stabilize the stream banks with young trees and to establish a screen between his new home and a nearby county road. The mature trees were cleared of native grape vines and honeysuckle, and then Fairey turned to searching for new trees, shrubs, and perennials. His frustration at being unable to find any truly remarkable plants locally, let alone a broad selection of native plants, began what has turned into a lifelong passion for horticultural collecting. Fairey started by not only seeking plant specimens that would thrive in the east Texas climate, but also those that would remind him of his boyhood home in South Carolina.

In 1983, his early efforts were accelerated by a whirlwind — a particularly destructive tornado that topped all the mature trees, removed the high canopy, and drastically altered the filtered light conditions that he had come to love. It wasn't until several years after the storm that Fairey realized that he had moved into new territory, that he was doing something far more than simply rebuilding what had been lost. For Fairey, gardening had become an act of healing the damage left by the storm, a way to re-invent a sense of the place as he would have wished it from his first viewing. Somewhere along the way Fairey named his garden Peckerwood, a reference, he says, both to bird life (woodpeckers) and, tongue-in-cheek, to a character from the musical *Auntie Mame*. Whether he also meant to make a sly allusion to another definition of Peckerwood, that of poor white trash, he doesn't say. But it's clear that the double, or triple, meaning of Peckerwood delights him still.

Right: The view from Fairey's living room window, with *Dasylirion longissimum* and *Agave pottatorum*.

Below: A stone relief from Spain showing the logo of the Peckerwood Garden Foundation.

In the years that followed the tornado, Fairey branched out from mail-order plant acquisitions to leading expeditions into Mexico to collect seeds and cuttings from rare plants. The result of his growing interest and expertise is that Peckerwood Garden has become something more interesting than a reflection of its creator's passion. For an experienced plantsman, it is a trip to a horticultural Mark's and Spencer, with each sight more compelling than the last, endlessly fascinating and frustrating in its ability to overwhelm with new information. For a novice, the garden opens the eyes to the possibilities of gardening as a purely creative act, with painterly gestures of color and light, shadow and mystery. For any soul lucky enough to walk through the garden with Fairey himself, it is a remarkable gift to be shown a specific plant and hear of its unique journey to Hempstead, Texas.

In his dry gardens — mounded beds of rubble and gravel that host plants from Mexico and beyond — Fairey sees an allegory of the mountains where the seeds were collected, a miniaturized version of the world outside his hedges. In this vision he is the inheritor of the gardening traditions of the Renaissance, those walled, protected spheres in which the wonders of the world could be ordered in a way that made the threat of chaos less persistent. Building a garden and filling it with plants collected from other regions is one way of making the world seem less large. The cultivation of rare plants from so many different places at Peckerwood allows us an opportunity to perceive the limitations of our knowledge of our own region, and of its bounty.

The souvenirs in John Fairey's garden represent both the places he has been and the relationships he has made with other plantsmen. He will be the first to tell you how deeply he felt the loss of legendary Texas native plant collector Lynn Lowrey, who died in 1997. But Lowrey and others live on in Peckerwood Garden. The plants they shared with Fairey survive, as do the stories, recorded in his journals, that describe the moment, place, weather, and season that a rare plant was located. Peckerwood is at once the creation of a single man, and an enduring eulogy to all the contributors whose gifts of labor, plants, and knowledge have been incorporated into the ever-evolving whole.

Above: A stone relief from Spain surrounded by *Opuntia 'Old Mexico'* and *Yucca johnsoniana*.

Part of Peckerwood's beauty is found in its apparent disorder, and the way in which the experience of it is shaped by a slow waltz through wooded paths and sinuous vales. From the moment you turn into a narrow gravel lane that leads to the garden, you are taken away from the world you expect to see and understand and set free to wander among surprising shapes, textures, color, fragrances, and sounds. Peckerwood Garden is arranged in a manner that appears to ignore the normal tenants of garden hierarchy and design. There are moments, quietly composed, when a greater order can be appreciated, specific areas in the gardens that have been elevated and contained, featuring walls, a pool, a single plant drawn apart to be noticed and idealized. But these moments are ones of discovery, and after five more steps are forgotten as you wander away to the next. One hopes no one makes a map of Peckerwood Garden; to do so might imply a single reading that would overshadow the multitude now possible. To orient the visitor would be a disservice.

Simple, comprehensible snapshots are a product of our time. We live in an era of affluence and haste, one in which gardening has become just one more domestic task to be out-sourced and packaged. Houston is a particularly vivid example of how the landscape can become commodity — the essence of curb appeal is summed up in neatly trimmed rows of azaleas, over-pruned crepe myrtles, and flawless St. Augustine grass. The list of plants sold in Houston nurseries has been sanitized by the nearly constant heat and high humidity, and the potential for severe winter freezes. No one wants to guarantee anything that won't survive at these extreme poles. As a consequence, there are fewer and fewer plants of note available to the general trade. John Fairey remarked to me that all of Houston looks as if it were maintained by a landscape company. The net effect of this may not be a threat to modern civilization, but it represents a sad narrowing of the visual palette.

Above: A dry garden on the north side of a stream with silver palm (*Sabal uresana*). Cypress trees planted in 1974 line the stream in the background.

Helpers at Peckerwood Garden clean palm seeds.

Below left: John Fairey pauses at the door to his home.

Below right: A woodland garden viewed from the north side of Fairey's house. The view is framed by large Snow Ball (*Styrax japonica*), Satsuki azalias, and clipped native *Youpon vomitoria*.

Now a landscaping device, these rocks were collected by Fairey during various plant hunting expeditions to Mexico.

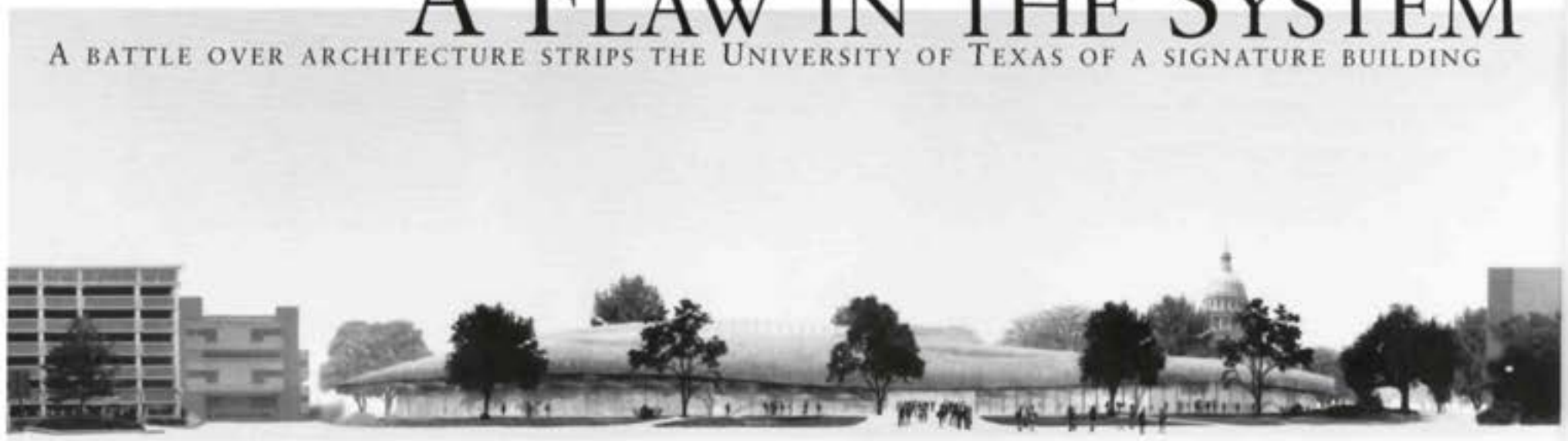
What John Fairey has accomplished at Peckerwood Garden is all the more amazing in this light. In a region that seems to make a mockery of gardening, he has made a garden that defies all the constraints. He has juxtaposed plants that we know with their foreign cousins in a loosely threaded series of vignettes that allow the appreciation of the native plants to remain primary. His passion has moved him to become a quiet leader in the field of collecting rare plants, many of which are available through Peckerwood Garden's companion nursery, Yucca Do. And by entering into an agreement with the Garden Conservancy, an organization dedicated to saving significant private gardens from decline upon the passing of their creators, he has made a clear gesture towards his garden's future.

On a recent visit, Fairey pointed out a significant planting that was done in memory of the husband of one of the new board members of the garden's Conservation Trust. It is an allee of Mexican sycamores, grown from seed and broadly spaced to allow the trees to mature fully. The focal point of the allee is the lone live oak to survive the 1983 tornado. Today, it is almost impossible to see this allee as it eventually will be; the baby trees are no more than five feet high, nearly dwarfed by the field grasses around them. As the trees mature, the stark white of the exfoliating bark will stand in bright contrast to the evergreen background. To contemplate the allee's true meaning, however, is staggering. Sycamores are one of the tallest deciduous trees in North America, and by planting this particular tree, Fairey must know that his design will not be fully appreciated for at least three generations. Planting the trees was a clear statement by Fairey that his garden will not only endure through the coming century, but improve and expand. It is an amazing gesture of optimism, and an enduring memorial to his vision. ■

Peckerwood Garden is located in Hempstead, Texas, and will have open days for the general public the first two weekends of May, every weekend in October, and the first weekend in November. Group visits can be arranged by appointment at other times. For information, please write the Peckerwood Garden Foundation, Rt. 3, Box 103, Hempstead, Texas, 77445-9309, or call 409.826.3232.

A Flaw in the System

A battle over architecture strips the University of Texas of a signature building



North elevation of Herzog & de Meuron's second scheme for the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, October 1999.

Courtesy University of Texas at Austin

By Mark Gunderson

In November 1999, when the Swiss architectural firm of Herzog & de Meuron walked away from its commission to design the new, $70 million Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art on the University of Texas campus in Austin, it sparked a public furor. Students draped the School of Architecture in black as a sign of mourning; Lawrence W. Speck, the school's dean, resigned to protest how Herzog & de Meuron had been treated. The controversy was aired in a series of stories in the *Austin American-Statesman*, and nationally, an *Architecture* magazine editorial derided the University's Board of Regents as a "shortsighted, xenophobic pack of yahoos."

Indeed, the Facilities Planning and Construction Committee of the University's Board of Regents was widely painted as the villain in the affair, and for apparent good reason: In the last meeting between the architects and the regents' committee, one of the regents, a businessman from Laredo named Tony Sánchez, had presented his own plan for what the new museum should look like, a plan he'd had drawn up by a hometown architect. The representatives of Herzog & de Meuron were taken aback, and a month later the architects tendered their resignation.

What was unclear, however, was how things had deteriorated to this point, and what the clash over the Blanton meant for the future of architecture in the university system. Were the regents, vested with responsibility to act on behalf of the university, out of hand when they disregarded advice obtained through a process established and directed by the university itself? Is a professional who stands by his convictions inflexible? And is there a point at which the regents are obligated — to the university or otherwise — to abstain from decisions they may not be qualified to address? To determine the answers to those and other questions, one had to return to the beginning.

On February 1, 1997, the University of Texas at Austin announced its intention to build a new home for the art collection that Archer M. Huntington had established at the university in 1927. Known as the Huntington Art Gallery, the collection had existed for the last 35 years in two separate locations on the Austin campus; the new museum building would consolidate the holdings. It would also get a new name, in honor of Jack S. Blanton, a Houston businessman and former UT Systems regent who chairs the Houston Endowment, a philanthropic foundation that gave $12 million as a gift to help initiate the project.

The new museum, to be located on the university campus at the corner of Red River and 26th streets, was initially presented as a grand opportunity. Then-president of the university Robert Berdahl expressed a desire for "a cathedral to the visual arts." To help ensure that this would be the case, a committee was created to select a suitable architect. Sitting on the committee would be Jack and Laura Lee Blanton; Hal Box, former dean of the university's school of architecture; Austin Gleeson, chair of the university's faculty building advisory committee; Jessie Otto Hite, director of the museum; John Rishling, associate vice-president for campus planning and facilities management; Charles Roeckle, acting dean of the college of fine arts; and Lawrence W. Speck, dean of the school of architecture. Lee Jamail of Houston, Deedie Rose of Dallas, and Lissa Wagner of Midland — art and museum supporters — were also on the committee. James Broaddus, director of facilities planning and construction, and Reed Kroloff, editor of *Architecture* magazine and a UT alumnus, were asked to be ex-officio members.

Notably missing were any current members of the board of regents. This was only the second time in the university's recent history that an architect selection committee did not include a regent. Indeed, only on one prior project had the regents allowed architects to be interviewed without their participation. Still, a regent could have been invited to join the Blanton

committee. But after several meetings it was decided that it would not be necessary to do so. That decision would prove later on to have enormous ramifications. The committee would recommend a ranked list of architects to the university's new president, Larry Faulkner, who would then, if the list were approved, forward it to UT System Chancellor William Cunningham.

This procedure was an innovation for the UT System. Still, there was some precedent: the selection of the architect for the university's new Austin campus master plan had utilized an approach similar to that employed in the Blanton search. A request for qualifications had been issued, open to any architectural firm, and a committee authorized by the regents made recommendations from the submissions received. Notably, there were also no regents on the committee that chose the architects for the master plan.

The architect that committee settled on in October 1994 was Cesar Pelli and Associates of New Haven. Pelli completed the plan in 1999; the Blanton Museum would be one of the first projects to be designed under its guidelines. The Pelli master plan suggested parameters for building footprints, materials, relation to open space, and pedestrian circulation. It advocated an aesthetic derived from the campus buildings by New York architect Cass Gilbert of the 1910s and Philadelphia architect Paul Philippe Cret of the 1930s. Many architects were involved in planning the University of Texas over the years, but Gilbert's master plans of 1909 and 1914 gave the campus its cardinal, orthogonal framework and its Spanish-Mediterranean vocabulary. Gilbert's designs for Battle Hall (1911) and Sutton Hall (1918) are still considered paradigms for campus buildings. The university's ubiquitous material palette of limestone, buff-colored brick, red roof tiles, and terra cotta derive from these works.

However, it was the master plan produced in 1933 by Paul Cret, that gives the university its qualitative and compositional character. When Cret was hired to prepare a development plan for the campus it consisted of 18 buildings. He designed ten additional buildings and consulted on another nine. His elaboration of the relationships between campus buildings and open space determined the intimate, pedestrian environment that exists today. It is the hierarchy of external spaces and human-scaled courtyards that give a woven aspect, a reciprocity between structure and site, to the university. It's a quality strongly stressed in the Pelli master plan.

The Pelli plan also made note of how specific Cret had been regarding the aesthetics of the university, reprinting comments he made in his 1933 *Report Accompanying the General Plan of Development*. "The modern university has to be, on account of its size, a grouping of several compositions, related to be sure, but independent, and requiring a certain variety of treatment to avoid the monotony and the institutional character inherent to the repetition of similar units," Cret wrote. "The origin of the state of Texas and the proximity of Mexico were an inducement to get some inspiration from the Spanish architecture, although a faithful archaeological reproduction was neither advisable nor possible. An academic building of the 20th century ought not to attempt to pass for a Spanish palace or a Medieval town hall."[1]

UT alumnus Fred Clarke, a partner in the firm of Cesar Pelli and Associates, was principal in drafting the new master plan. Compliance with the plan, and its references to context and Cret's aesthetics, would become major issues in the conflict over the design of the Blanton. Clarke's position is that the plan is an "open" document, and that it allows for a certain flexibility in interpretation and, in special instances, for exceptions to the guidelines. As the Pelli master plan noted, the architectural language of Paul Cret's original works was intended as a "point of departure for the design of new structures."[2]

By February 1998, the proposed site of the new Blanton Museum had been moved to the south edge of the UT campus in order to create a tie to the proposed Texas State History Museum across the street. The new gateway site, at the intersection of Speedway and Martin Luther King Boulevard, was considered higher profile than the original. The 1999 master plan calls for the enhancement of the intersection of Speedway and Martin Luther King due to its axial alignment with the Capitol building to the south (Speedway is the northern extension of Congress Avenue, on which the Capitol is located). The center of the campus and the Capitol occupy Austin's two highest hills. This dialogue is of considerable urban importance, and reflects the two street grids extant in the center city.

The request for qualifications for the Blanton Museum was issued on February 4, 1998. The 18 page document, written by the selection committee, stated that the university desired "an important work of architecture." The idea was that the Blanton building should "provoke curiosity and inquiry." The request made reference to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth and The Menil Collection in Houston, stating that the "integrity and excellence of those buildings is a standard we aspire to for the Blanton Museum of Art."

By April, 63 proposals had been received. The selection committee narrowed that to seven firms: Herzog & de Meuron of Basel, Switzerland; Steven Holl of New York; Antoine Predock of Albuquerque; Snøhetta of Oslo, Norway; Thompson and Rose of Cambridge, Massachusetts; Rafael Vinoly of New York; and Tod Williams/Billie Tsien and Associates of New York. By mid-May, all seven had made public presentations at the school of architecture. Further deliberation narrowed the list of seven to three: Predock, Holl, and Herzog & de Meuron.

During the next few months the selection committee visited museums and art-related facilities designed by the finalists in order to judge the quality of their work firsthand, and also to ask intensely pragmatic questions of the owners. Finally, on December 18, Herzog & de Meuron was named as the committee's choice. This would be the architects first museum in the United States (although they subsequently acquired the commission for the $120 million de Young Museum in San Francisco). Herzog & de Meuron had completed the Dominus Winery in Yountville, California, and in 1997 the firm had been finalists in the competition for an addition to the Museum of Modern Art. The recommendation was approved by President Faulkner and Chancellor Cunningham. The regents were not required to vote on the choice, and they did not.

Pierre Herzog and Jacques de Meuron are recognized as two of the most outstanding architects in the world. Their philosophy regarding tradition as an architectural determinant was expressed in a 1988 lecture by Herzog, in which he stated that "the relationship to pre-existing architectural and building form is unavoidable and important. Architecture has never arisen out of nothing. But there is no longer a mediatory tradition. This can be seen in the way that contemporary architecture so often tries to fabricate a relationship to historical forms by means of quotation and with this practice penetrates no further than the surface of the eye's retina."[3]

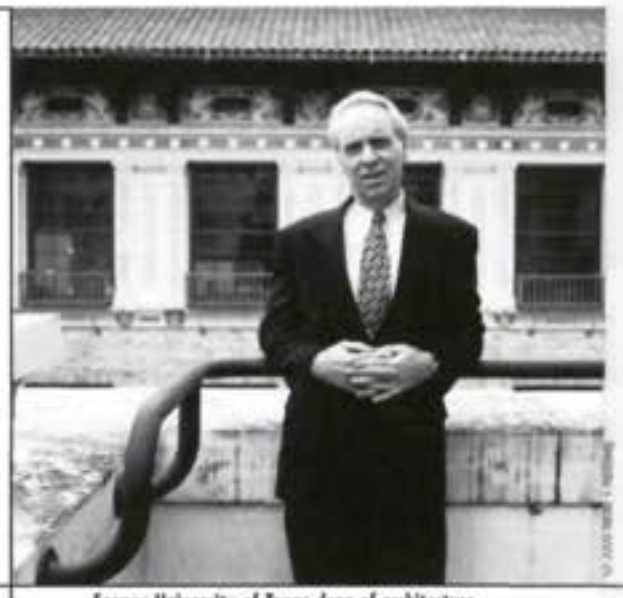
The selection of the Swiss firm generated a sense of excitement; Jack Blanton expressed a "staggering expectation for what we'll have."[4] Anticipated opening date was January 2002.

However, signs of trouble surfaced in the architects' first meeting with the regents. At what was intended as an introduction of their philosophy and work to the regents' Facilities Planning and Construction Committee, the architects presented their design for the Tate Museum in London, a rehabilitation of an enormous industrial complex on the Thames River. This commission had been won in a competition involving hundreds of architectural firms worldwide, but Regent Tony Sánchez of Laredo seemed to pay little attention to the presentation. He was seen talking at the rear of the room, and those attending described a degree of tension regarding the architects.

On July 6, 1999, the architects made their first actual presentation for the Blanton to the Facilities Planning and Construction Committee. Herzog & de Meuron partner Harry Gugger presented the firm's initial concept for the museum, which Gugger described as a "non-building" and "landscape solution." It consisted of a series of five parallel, single-story, flat-roofed limestone "bars" intended to respond directly to the new campus master plan's suggestions for building forms and the integration of open space into the built fabric. The concept opened to the south with a generous porch. Rich watercolor renderings showed the intended marriage of roof overhangs with surrounding live oaks. The volume of the building totaled about 150,000 square feet. Lawrence Speck's first reaction to the scheme was one of admiration. "I've got to say I'm blown away by this scheme," he said. "I think it's brilliant. I wish I had thought of something like this." In the proposed structure Speck found allusions to the flat-roofed Texas Memorial Museum, a Cret building on the UT campus.

1

Herzog & de Meuron's first proposal for the Blanton Museum, July 1999. Two regents objected to the use of flat roofs.



Former University of Texas dean of architecture Lawrence Speck resigned to protest how the Blanton Museum's architects had been treated.

2

Herzog & de Meuron's second proposal for the Blanton Museum, October 1999. The softly curved tile roof was controversial.

3

This study of a three-story museum was one of two presented to a regents committee in October 1999 as an example of what not to do.

4

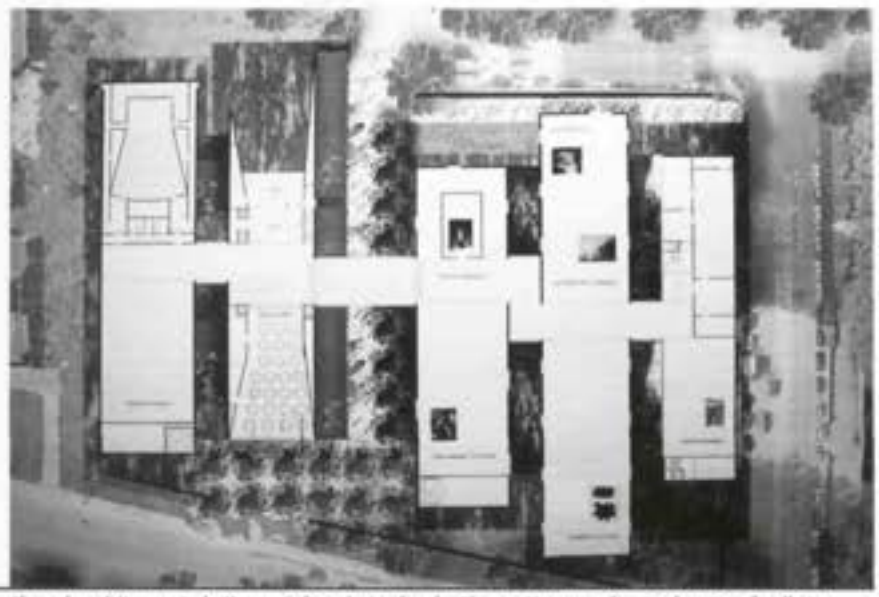
Herzog & de Meuron's second cautionary example from October 1999 was this two-story courtyard study.

Regents Tony Sánchez and Rita Clements, however, felt differently. One overriding complaint concerned the flat roof. (The master plan stipulates that new buildings use flat roofs "sparingly".) Almost immediately, Sánchez requested that the architects provide additional schemes for consideration. He felt "at a big disadvantage" by the lack of other ideas to compare with, he said, and Chancellor William Cunningham added that "we're significantly handicapped without having several designs to look at."[5] The regents subcommittee also expressed a desire for a taller building, in opposition to the architects' desire for ground-level access to all galleries.

The committee didn't reject the concept they'd been shown, but President Faulkner did request that Herzog & de Meuron explore additional concepts. Returning to Switzerland, the architects spent the next three months reassessing the project. In late August, Faulkner traveled to Basel to meet with Herzog & de Meuron in an attempt to reconcile the divergent positions.

On October 12, the architects returned to make a second presentation. At this meeting, Pierre de Meuron and Harry Gugger presented three models to the regents committee. The models were a distillation of at least 14 study models of various programmatic formats and their corresponding built forms. Two of the three models represented studies that the architects intended as examples of what should *not* be done, while the third was the actual scheme they proposed for the museum. In hindsight, this academic strategy for showing how they had arrived at their proposed concept backfired on the architects.

The two studies for what *not* to do consisted of multi-story versions of the museum. One was a three-story building referred to as Waggoner Hall for its resemblance to an existing building on campus; the other was a two-story courtyard design that was rectangular in plan with an open, west facing arcade. The studies were meant to indicate the



Floor plan of Herzog & de Meuron's first design for the Blanton Museum, showing location of galleries.

ungainly mass of such strategies and, in addition, how the courtyard typology would require upper-level galleries. In addition, the ground floor would have to remain unfinished until further funding was obtained.

In contrast, Herzog & de Meuron's recommended scheme included a softly curved tile roof, with clerestories, over single-story limestone walls in the masonry vocabulary of the campus. The low profile would allow for top lighting of all galleries. Three interior courtyards provided spatial counterpoint.

The architects' intention in presenting the trio of models was to educate the client through use of a graphic, three-dimensional comparison. But Tony Sánchez liked the courtyard study. Rather than see its intrinsic problems, he saw something that suggested the aesthetics he desired. He pushed the architects to agree to pursue that direction, but they refused, emphasizing the design they had created following months of study. This refusal to work with his preference later led Sánchez to describe the architects as not being "flexible" in dealing with the regents.

Rita Clements, chair of the board's Facilities Planning and Construction Committee, stated that the concept preferred by the architects was, like their prior concept, incompatible with the campus master plan and other UT building designs. Sánchez agreed, remarking that "I haven't seen any undulating roofs on the master plan."[6] Added Regent Donald Evans, "Isn't it going to be hard to see? As I drive down the street it would be nice to see it."[7]

The Herzog & de Meuron proposal was rejected by the committee, and at the end of this second meeting Sánchez requested that the architects follow him into an adjacent kitchen. There, unbeknownst to the other regents, he presented renderings he had commissioned from an architect in Laredo. The drawings showed his intentions for the aesthetics of the Blanton Museum, which he felt should imitate the characteristics of the earliest campus buildings more literally. The architects were not amused by the unsolicited advice. Those in attendance, noting the look on Harry Gugger's face as he left the kitchen, predicted the worst.

The architects were asked to hold on their work, and meetings were held in Dallas that included Fred Clarke of Cesar Pelli and Associates, who was asked to clarify the intentions of the campus master plan with regard to context, Cret, and the compliance of Herzog & de Meuron's scheme for a museum with an undulating roof.

President Faulkner and Regent Clements visited the firm in Basel a second time in late October to try to resolve the dispute, but no solution was found. On November 16, after further discussion with Faulkner, Herzog & de Meuron resigned from the project. In a letter to Faulkner, Harry Gugger wrote that "we are sure you understand that we feel we could not bridge these differences of interpretation and still remain faithful to the principles of design that have been the hallmark of our international success to date... We do hope that by our resignation, we have opened the way for a successful resolution to the design of the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, and that the building will become the landmark the UT community wishes it to be." In a statement, President Faulkner said, "We regret that this partnership will not continue to the successful result that we had mutually envisioned. We continue to hold the firm of Herzog & de Meuron in the highest respect."

The words were polite, but the results were not. On November 22, after serving as dean of the School of Architecture for more than seven years, Lawrence Speck announced his resignation. "The departure of our architects was not a simple matter of personal difference," he noted. "They were treated badly and were put in positions that compromised their professional integrity in a manner that no top-flight architect should tolerate. They took the very unusual step of resigning this commission because they felt the circumstances here precluded their creating a great museum. I, too, feel current circumstances prevent my accomplishing goals I have as dean and violate standards I have vowed to support. I resigned because I felt it was the right thing to do on principle. I know it is not fashionable these days to operate on principle, but I still believe in it."[8] (Speck has agreed to stay on as dean until the end of this year.)

UT architecture students protested publicly and formed a new student organization, "Advocates for Innovative Campus Architecture," with the hope they could influence future policy.

The regents appeared unfazed. Though it was estimated that $200,000 to $300,000 had been spent on architectural services, Regent Sánchez said he was happy with the firm's resignation. "I am glad they have made this decision so that we can get on with the process and select an American architecture firm that can work with us and understand the cultural significance of the project," he told the *Daily Texan*. "We [the regents] are going to take whatever time is required to make a good decision on the selection of the next architectural firm."[9]

The quest for that next architectural firm began in February, with the announcement by President Faulkner that a new, and "advisory," search committee had been appointed. Many of the members of the first search committee were named to the new one. Notably, the committee this time included a pair of regents — Rita Clements and Tony Sánchez. In March, work began on a new request for qualifications, and it was hoped an architect might be found by summer. The Blanton Museum, originally slated for a 2002 opening, was now projected to be ready no sooner than 2003.

Faulkner's notice of a new Blanton search committee was given at a February 2 meeting of the board of regent. At that same meeting, the selection process for architects on University of Texas System projects was completely revised. The new process gives total control back to regents on any project they may wish to be involved with in the university's 15-campus system. In future projects, should the regents desire involvement, the chair can name two regents to an advisory committee charged with recommending architects. The remaining members of the architect selection committee will be chosen by the president of the campus where the project is to be built. The task of such a committee will be to recommend about four (the number has been left vague) architects to the regents' facilities planning and construction subcommittee. This sub-committee, of which Clements and Sánchez remain members, is free to ignore those names, ask for new names, or select any other architect who may have responded to the request for qualifications. No longer could anyone mistake the committee for an actual architect selection committee. "This addresses a flaw in the system," Clements noted following the change, "because it confuses the architects... when one committee selects them and another one has jurisdiction over approving the plans."[10]

At the same meeting the regents approved new rules that require all future buildings on the Austin campus to conform to the 1999 campus master plan. The determination of what does and does not "conform" is, presumably, still up to the regents. ■

1. Cesar Pelli and Associates, *Campus Master Plan*, 1999, pp. 22-23.
2. Ibid., p. 33.
3. Herzog & de Meuron, "The Hidden Geometry of Nature," (Wilfred Wang, Artemis Verlags AG, 1992), pp. 142-143.
4. Lisa Germany, "Mercurial Surfaces Mark Architects' Work," *Austin-American Statesman*, December 18, 1998.
5. Michael Barnes and Mary Ann Roser, "UT Regents Balk at Museum Design," *Austin-American Statesman*, July 9, 1999.
6. Michael Barnes, "Round 2 on UT Museum Design; Architects Offer New Building Options," *Austin-American Statesman*, October 13, 1999.
7. Ibid.
8. Averl Seale, "Culture Clash," *Texas Alcalde*, January/February 2000. Lawrence Speck is a tenured professor at the university and will remain on the school of architecture's faculty.
9. "Swiss Architects Quit Over Museum Dispute," *The Daily Texan*, November 17, 1999.
10. Mary Ann Roser, "Regents Control Building Designs," *Austin-American Statesman*, February 11, 2000.

A SENSE OF WHERE WE ARE

Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity *by J. Gerald Kennedy. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. 269 pp. $17.*

Reviewed by Terrence Doody

Though I have lived in Houston for more than half my life, I still don't feel comfortably in place here. If I disliked the city, this would make perfect sense. But because there are things about Houston that I like a lot, this feeling of dislocation has long puzzled me. It's made me think hard about how it is that we come to establish a sense of place, a sense of being where we are.

Reading Proust has given me one way to think about how I deal with my past and present, my sense of where I was and where I am; Eavan Boland's *Object Lessons* gave me another. However, J. Gerald Kennedy's *Imagining Paris* has perhaps done the most to focus my ideas about why I react to Houston as I do, and it has done that by giving me an argument to oppose.

In *Imagining Paris*, Kennedy examines the ways Paris appears in the works of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller, and Djuna Barnes. Stein lived in Paris for 30 years without mentioning it in her work until *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. For Stein, Paris was the art scene of the School of Paris and her stage for claiming that, with her friend Picasso, she was one of the founding geniuses of modernism. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (really Stein's own autobiography and bid for fame) is a book of inventions and omissions — it omits that Joyce and Proust were also in Paris inventing modernism — but Stein's tics suggest the kind of freedom Paris has meant to many artists and Americans in search of their destiny.

The freedom Stein found, however, was not there for Fitzgerald's characters. In *Tender Is the Night*, Paris does not hold for Dick Diver the magic that New York held for Nick and Gatsby. The alienation that characterizes the post-World War I era and modernism's point of view is in Fitzgerald's book endless, anxious wandering, and Kennedy reminds us of how much violence Fitzgerald's novels contain. Much more, in fact, than the few fights in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, which casts the City of Light in biblical darkness. Kennedy's treatment of place in Hemingway is different again and one of his book's strengths. With a street guide in one hand and the novel in the other, he follows Jake Barnes step-by-step through Paris, explicating for us exactly what Hemingway's style excludes: Jake's affect and any interpretation of what these places mean to him. I found Kennedy's account unexpectedly moving, a new way to read a book that had become old.

But close reading, even of such high quality, isn't enough anymore, and Kennedy's subtitle, "Exile, Writing, and American Identity," suggests his effort to widen his compass. Like many recent literary titles, however, Kennedy's is not quite true: his is less a book about imagining place than describing it. Not all five writers he examines felt exiled, and they don't exhaust the varieties of American identity particular even to modernism. But Kennedy feels it necessary to make his claim in order to develop a theory of place. He wants to abstract these writers' versions of Paris from narrative time in order to propose that place itself has no intrinsic meaning, and is subject to the many interpretations that are symbolic of the writers' psychology.

This is an extreme position, which even Kennedy questions when he writes, "But this … leads us back to an earlier, more basic question: what is a place? Does place exist 'out there' in a purely objective form susceptible to empirical analysis, or does it lie within the human mind, as a set of internalized images always already contained and determined by language?" Because it overstates both sides of the question, this passage asks for some distinctions. So, I would like to start making some — between space and places, between our active and passive experience of places, our verbal and sensory experiences — and insist that the element of time — when in your life you experience a place — can't be excluded. Kennedy loses too much when he limits our sense of place to its verbal record, and tries to reduce the physical world to language merely.

First of all, it seems to me that Kennedy is really talking about space, not place. Space is timeless and ideal, a conceptual realm in which relationships are perceived or made. Space exists between things and is arranged by the meanings we project. Places have names and contain things, which are already there before we are. Kennedy's five writers prove that point: They went to Paris because Paris contains things London and Rome do not. It contains cafés and

the freedom of *la vie Bohème*, a tradition of sophisticated luxury, a cultural "spaciousness" that neither the Vatican nor the Tower of London holds. Moreover, they chose Paris as adults, conscious of its *difference* to them as writers. So, they provide a very narrow model of place's nature.

For places are experiences too — experiences before they are interpreted or become the idea of themselves — and what we experience of places often goes on beneath the full notice of consciousness. What the light is like, the breeze, sounds and textures — we can experience all of these, without speaking them out loud, as motive enough to return somewhere on the way to work or on our evening walk. In cities I like, I feel another layer palpable on the surface of my skin, which means nothing other than that response to place is also sensory and kinetic. The French painters who responded to Paris decades before the Lost Generation arrived did so, I'm sure, without the lenses of what Kennedy calls "internalized images ... already ... determined by language."

Kennedy surveys many other theories of place, from those of academic geographers to Gaston Bachelard's in *The Poetics of Space*, and he quotes Proust, who has described better than anyone how we experience places, what they can mean, and how that meaning changes. In a passage Kennedy doesn't quote, Proust writes of his childhood place, "But it is pre-eminently as the deepest layer of my mental soil, as the firm ground on which I still stand, that I regard the Méséglise and Guermantes ways. It is because I believed in things and in people while I walked along those paths that the things and the people they made known to me are the only ones that I still take seriously and that still bring me joy. Whether it is because the faith which creates has ceased to exist in me, or reality takes shape in the memory alone, the flowers that people show me nowadays for the first time never seem to me to be true flowers."

The faith Proust cites here is closer to everything we mean by imagination than it is to anything Kennedy means by the writing he examines, for his writers do not write of being formed by an experience of place that they then form the meaning of. And we can measure the depthlessness of their descriptions by comparing them to the Irish poet Eavan Boland's in her memoir *Object Lessons*.

Boland is unbearably poignant in describing her desire for the Proustian experience she didn't have. When she was five, her father, a diplomat, was posted to London and New York. Boland didn't return to Dublin until she was 14 and old enough to know what she had missed.

"I returned to find that my vocabulary of belonging was missing," she writes. "The street names, the meeting places ... I had never known them. I had lost not only a place but the past that goes with it and, with it, the clue from which to construct a present self."

"As I learned these things, the last unwanted gift of exile came to me," she continues. "I began to watch places with an interest so exact it might have been memory. ... I could imagine myself there, a child of nine, buying peppermints and walking back down by the canal ... a house I entered which I wanted not just to appreciate but to remember. ... I had been 11 here. ... I had been six."

But it can't be done like this: places described from a conscious distance are not like the places we first experience as ourselves, which are there before we are and give us our ground and boundaries. Whether we name this primary experience faith, imagination, or memory, it is not the kind of experience Kennedy examines in *Imagining Paris*.

It is, however, the kind of experience Hemingway himself had in Paris. Jake can't imagine himself in the City of Lights, but Hemingway could, as he told us in *A Moveable Feast*. He was much happier than Jake ever was because he took what Paris had to give him: the cafés to write in, the Cezannes, the weather and wine, even Gertrude Stein's advice. In Paris, he could imagine himself a writer. And he didn't have to flee to Spain to go fishing; he knew if he wanted to, he could fish in the Seine.

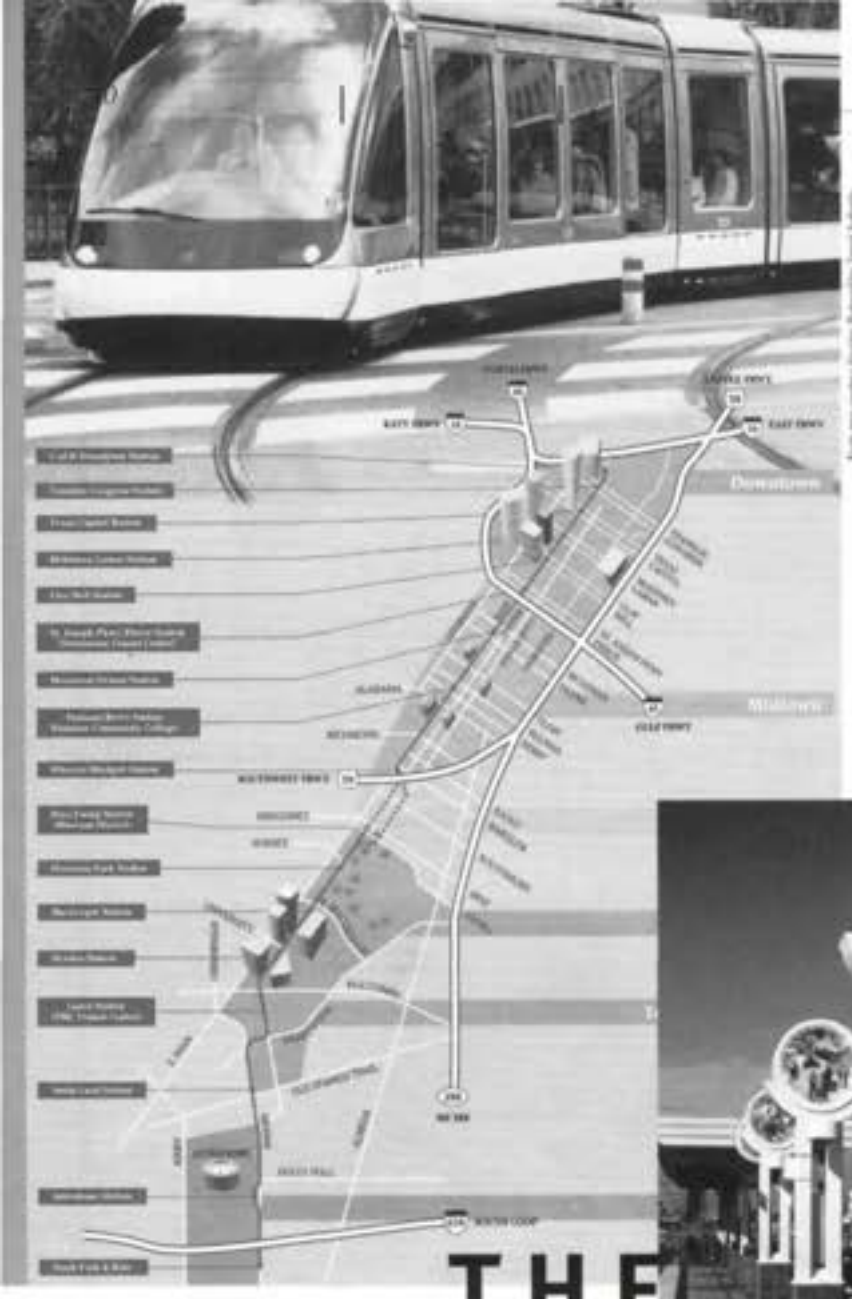
I think about this as I drive north up the West Loop and get to the rise over the intersection with U.S. 59. I am still somewhat dislocated, but beside me my 12-year-old daughter tells me she loves Houston, loves the way it looks from this perspective. She is starting to imagine herself in place; she will always feel herself here. And she tells me she doesn't understand why I can't. ■

Coming in Cite 48

Barrie Scardino examines the Wharton County Courthouse.

Gerald Moorhead reviews Rice University's Nanosciences building.

And in a special event, *Cite* goes full color to reveal Houston from the air though the photographs of Alex MacLean.



THE TRAIN STOPS HERE

AND WHEN IT DOES, WHAT WILL RIDERS ON THE MAIN STREET LINE SEE?

BY DAN SEARIGHT

The year is 2004, and a Metro train pulls into a transit stop in the Museum District. Light reflects through a steel and colored-glass canopy; nearby, classical music accompanies video clips of the latest cultural and entertainment events around town. The paving underfoot is inset with bronze figures of varying design. The stop blends seamlessly into the surrounding community. In Houston, riding mass transit is not just a means of getting from one place to another, it is a journey of delight.

That, at least, is the promise being offered by some supporters of the light rail system that Metro has proposed to run along the 7.5 miles of Main Street from the Astrodome to Buffalo Bayou. And it's a promise that should not be allowed to fade away once the public has been sold on the project and construction gets underway. What has to be remembered is that transit is about more than just transportation. If transportation were the only issue, then buses would be enough. But transit is also about how you get where you're going — the comfort of the trip — and what you see when you get there — the ambiance at the end of the ride.

That ambiance will matter particularly if, as Metro has claimed, transit is to work as a tool for development. The architects, planners, and engineers for the light rail project have been hired. City Hall, the planning department, Metro, and all the coalitions and private interests are queued up. Now implementation is at hand and things are getting interesting. The way in which this small portion of light rail, with its 16 transit stops running through commercial, residential, and entertainment districts, is inserted into the city is critical. The rail line and its stations can either be a key unifying element that inspires as well as functions, or it can be an afterthought.

For a short time it seemed possible that the latter would be the case. Some in Metro were talking about the possibility of using off-the-shelf designs for the rail stops, in part for economy, and in part to help create a uniform identity. But the goal of individuality got a boost late last fall when City Council passed the Civic Arts Program, an ordinance requiring all eligible public projects to set aside 1.75 percent of their construction budget for the integration of art into the design. This opens the door for each light rail station to become a collaboration between artist, architects, and engineers; to become, in effect, a work of art in itself.

To find an example of where this has worked, and worked well, one need only look west to Los Angeles. That city's Metropolitan Transit Authority began construction of a subway and light rail system ten years ago. From the beginning, Los Angeles adopted a set-aside program similar to the one recently approved by Houston, and that program has led to an admirable integration of art into public projects.

Over the last decade in Los Angeles, some 175 artists have been commissioned to create works along the 59.4-mile system. Though some of the more elaborate Los Angeles installations are found in below-grade stations, and so aren't comparable to what might be done in Houston, the city has a number of notable at-grade stations that could serve as beacons of what's possible here. At the Baldwin Park Metrolink Station the pedestrian canopy and platform recall Native American rhythmic dance and iconography as part of artist Judith F. Baca's *Danza Indigina* (Native Dance). The Blue Line Anaheim Station is punctuated by 12 light totems, entitled *Local Odysseys*, that depict California regional history. Los Angeles' art initiative, the nation's largest, has helped the city's subway and light rail system become what one *Los Angeles Times* writer termed a "giant art show." The city's efforts are a model of the heights to which the integration of art and transit can be taken.

John Sedlack, vice-president for planning of the Houston Metropolitan Transit Authority, has said that it is Metro's intention to "have some form of individuality for each of the stops" along Main, adding that it's "very important that this first line be put in a place and help shape redevelopment of the corridor in a pedestrian friendly, sustainable way." Houston's individuality may not meet that of Los Angeles, which spent an average of $320,000 for the art component of each of its five new Red Line stations. But Los Angeles' simplest at-grade stops show that you can take design and engineering plans and guidelines and, through manipulating such fundamental items as paving, a canopy, or construction materials, create something unique. The point is that good design does not have to be grandiose or expensive. It just has to be thoughtful and well executed.

According to City Planning Director Robert Litke, Main Street can't be viewed in isolation; one has to remember that it is "the spine, a 100-foot right of way," with which surrounding streets and neighborhoods will be aligned. Not much press has been given to the connections or linkages that will be made to Main, but the consideration of how the light rail project inserts itself into to the various communities along its route is critical to the project's success. According to Jennifer Ostlind, principal planner for the city's Long Range Planning Department, "Enhancing the area around the stops will encourage infill [economic] development, especially in blighted areas."

Ultimately, mass transit is just not about mobility, it is about the creation of pedestrian friendly neighborhoods. From a design standpoint, it is a fantastic opportunity. From an economic perspective, it can be an armature for intensive redevelopment. The development community has finally bought into the fact that pedestrian friendly design, or the "livable community" concept in which people live, work, and play without slavish dependence on the automobile, is good business.

And now the task is to make it good design as well, and help set a precedent for what might follow. Even before the first shovel of dirt has been turned for the Main Street line, expansion of the rail system is being considered. This year Metro will undertake a major investment study that could test the waters for public support of extending rail to the airports. Next would come a line to the Galleria and along Westpark to Beltway 8. Subsequent lines could extend northwest to Tomball. All of them would have their own stops, their own identities to create, their own art to encourage. But first comes the stations along Main. These 16 transit stops along this 7.5-mile route could become ground zero for a new way of looking at the city, and a new way of connecting to where we live. ■

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