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Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE and DESIGN REVIEW OF HOUSTON

Hidden Houston

There's more to the city than meets the eye

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Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

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Cover: Evan Mirwis and family stand near the river — a symbolic wall identified here by fishing line tied to the top of a pole — that bounds their Houston on the Sabbath. Photo by Michael Stravato.

Cite is printed on recycled paper.

Photo by Michael Stravato

Sign of the times: A worker puts up the titles of the films showing at the West Bellfort Cinema 5, one of two Hindi language movie theaters in Houston.

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The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

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The Rice Design Alliance, established in 1973, is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of architecture, urban design, and the built environment in the Houston region through educational programs; the publication of *Cite*, a quarterly review of architecture and design; and active programs to initiate physical improvements. Membership in the RDA is open to the general public.

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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. Lecture held in the Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. 713.348.4876.

Wednesday, April 11, 7:30 p.m.
PETER EISENMAN, an architect and educator who has created one of the most controversial and acclaimed bodies of work in contemporary American architecture, will speak. Eisenman's work is active and polemical, and his buildings, whether executed or not, are ingenious essays on the way humans and inert materials occupy and control space.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE HOMETOWN TOUR: PITTSBURGH

Wednesday, April 25, through Sunday, April 29. 713.348.4876.

RDA members will discover Pittsburgh's architectural legacy on tours of historic downtown landmarks and neighborhoods as well as corporate skyscrapers; the Strip District, with its ethnic diversity; and Oakland, with its beautiful college campuses and museums. The five-day tour focuses on the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, with a visit to his masterpiece Fallingwater; Benno Jannsen, architect of the William Penn Hotel; and H.H. Richardson, designer of the Allegheny Courthouse.

RDA EXHIBITION: SNAPSHOT

May 4 through June 9
Lawndale Art Center
4912 Main Street
713.348.4876

In the tradition of "Best Laid Plans" and "Houston Works," the Rice Design Alliance, in conjunction with Lawndale Art Center, will present "Snapshot: Current Houston Design on View," an open-call exhibition to showcase architecture, urban planning, preservation, landscape architecture, interiors, furniture, and graphics by Houston architects and designers.

The exhibition presents an opportunity to make Houston design the focus of critical inquiry and insists that architecture and design are too important not to be exhibited for public discussion and debate. With the exception of entry size, no restrictions have been imposed on the entries. It is hoped that in an open forum such as this exhibition the works can be shown and seen in a bright light, and that all can appreciate Houston as a working architectural and metropolitan organism.

A catalogue will accompany the exhibition and will include an image submitted by each designer or firm in the exhibit. The catalogue also will feature an essay written by Frank Welch, author of *Philip Johnson & Texas*. A preview of the exhibition will be held May 3. Tickets are $25 with advance reservations.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Tuesday, May 22, 6 p.m.
Hobby Center for the Performing Arts
800 Bagby

RDA members will be treated to a reception and tour of the under construction Hobby Center following a brief business meeting. For membership information, please call the Rice Design Alliance, 713.348.4876.

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

These lectures have been coordinated with the Rice Design Alliance's Green Spring series. All lectures are held in the College of Architecture Lecture Theater. For more information, please call 713.743.2400.

Tuesday, April 3, 6 p.m.
MEL CHIN, the award-winning sculptor who carved the metal-filagreed columns that flank the Wortham Theater Center, will speak. Chin's art is always engaging. Sometimes it directly engages the individual as in his "Inescapable Histories" exhibition, and sometimes it engages the environment, as in his "Revival Field" bioremediation projects. Among Chin's recent projects are the collaborative design of a 22-acre park in New York City that includes the ecological rehabilitation of the former Penn Central rail yard and "Blueprints at Addison Circle" in Addison, a small town near Dallas, which Chin created in collaboration with Michael Van Valkenburgh. Chin's artistic process deals in a concrete manner with the idea that science and technology serve simultaneously as contributors to ecological preservation and destruction.

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 April 20
Ten Shades of Green, an exhibition organized by the Architectural League of New York, will be on display. The exhibition, which focuses on architectural excellence and environmental responsibility, seeks to help move those issues to the center of American discussion.

Featured in the show will be nine buildings from Europe and Australia, and a selection of U.S. houses that serve as examples of regionalist architecture and together illustrate the link between the American tradition and current work. The nine highlighted buildings are: Beyer Foundation Museum by Renzo Piano Building Workshop; Commerzbank Headquarters by Foster and Partners; Cotton Tree Pilot Housing by Clare Design; Götz Headquarters by Webler + Geissler Architeken; Hall 26 by Herzog + Partner; Minnaert Building by Neutelings Riedijk Architecten; Mont-Cenis Training Center by Jourda & Perraudin Architects, HHS Planer + Architeken; Slatford Green Millenium Project by Andrew Lee for Hackland + Dore Architects; and the University of Nottingham, Jubilee Campus by Michael Hopkins & Partners. The American houses featured include the Cotulla Ranch House by Lake/Flato Architects; Palmer House by Rick Joy Architect; Westcott-Lahar House by Fernau & Hartman Architects; and the Howard House by Brian MacKay-Lyons Architecture.

Monday, April 30, 6:30-10 p.m.
film.installation.metropolis, a site-specific media-activated temporary installation, will be on display for this one day only. Twenty-five architecture and fine arts students from the University of Houston will projection-activate installations at the Blaffer Gallery, Project Row Houses/Ana Dupree Sculpture Park, and Buffalo Bayou ArtPark near the Sabine Street Bridge. Videos and still images will be projected on temporary constructions/installations at the three sites. The installation is free and open to the public. Shuttle buses will be provided for site visits. For more information, contact Dwayne Bohuslav or Dietmar Froehlich at 713.743.2400.

LETTERS

SIGN OF INTEREST

I found the article about Continental Airlines' corporate logo in the downtown skyline very interesting [Citelines, "Signs on High," by Mitchell J. Shields, *Cite* 49]. It was interesting not only because it covered the controversy, but also because it gave the reader a background on the issue. I wasn't myself aware of the 42.5-foot rule, and now that I know about it I really appreciate what it has done for Houston's skyline. I have, though, been more aware of the signage in the CBD, and I have noticed a few buildings that weren't mentioned as part of the approved exceptions. I wonder if you know why or how they got away with it.

The Rice Hotel, the Bayou Lofts, and the Houston Chronicle all seem to have their signs higher than 42.5 feet above the ground. One could guess that the Rice's sign is older than the ruling, but I'm not sure about the other two. Do you have any insight? Thank you, and great magazine!

Andrés F. Cueto
Ziegler Cooper Architects
Houston

Two of the buildings you mention, the Rice Hotel and the Houston Chronicle, had their signs grandfathered because they were already in place when the new sign ordinance was passed in 1993. Though the Bayou Lofts sign was not up at the time, it received a pass because it replaced a sign that was up prior to the new ordinance, and replaced it using the same size letters and same brackets as the previous sign. Although the 1993 ordinance controls new signs in the Central Business District, requiring them to either abide by the height restriction or obtain a variance, it has no impact on previously existing signage. — The Editors

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*

MacKie & Kamrath Catalog Available

The Houston Public Library and the Houston Metropolitan Research Center have released a 50-page catalog that lists the MacKie & Kamrath drawings available for viewing in the library's architectural archives. MacKie & Kamrath was one of Houston's most influential architectural firms in the 1950s and 1960s, promoting a Frank Lloyd Wright-influenced design aesthetic in such signature buildings as the Schlumberger Headquarters, San Felipe Courts (known today as the original Allen Parkway Village), Temple Emanu El synagogue, and the M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute.

MacKie & Kamrath Guide to the Architectural Collection contains an introduction by former library archivist Louis J. Marchiafava and an essay on architects Fred MacKie and Karl Kamrath by former library architectural archivist Steven R. Strom. It joins two previous catalogs that listed the archives' holdings of drawings by architects Alfred C. Finn and Harvin C. Moore.

The *MacKie & Kamrath Guide to the Architectural Collection* is free to the public while copies last. Information on obtaining a copy is available from the Houston Public Library Archives Department, 713-247-1661. ■

BUILDING *BRICKS*

AT ENRON FIELD, THE GOOD BRICKS AWARDS *remember the best of the past*

Among the 2000 Good Bricks Awards winners were (clockwise from top): Enron Field, seen top with restored section of Union Station, and top left the same area prior to restoration; the 1905 Penn B. Thornton Home in the Heights; the 1924 apartment building at 1218 Webster Street; the 1951 Blue Triangle Branch YMCA building; and Addie Dixon, author of *East of the River*.

IN EARLY FEBRUARY, members and guests of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance gathered in one of the concourses that circle the stands at Enron Field for the Good Bricks Awards, the annual event in which attention is paid to the people and projects that best represent the spirit of preservation in Houston, however faint or flickering it may seem at times. The setting was unusual. In the past, the awards have tended to be handed out in auditoriums and meeting halls. But on this occasion an object of preservation — the old Union Station that had been transformed to become part of the Houston Astros' new home field — was chosen as the site where the idea of preservation would be honored.

Still, given that this was the first Good Bricks Awards of a new century, perhaps something a little different was perhaps called for. Certain things, though, remained the same. From the beginning, it has been clear that the Good Bricks Awards are about more than simply honoring old buildings; they are also about honoring memory, and a connection to the past. And the ten awards that were presented for the year 2000 — given to projects ranging from apartments rescued from the wrecking ball to a book that rescued the memory of a community from obscurity — made that dual purpose clear.

The first award went to the Mid-Continent Companies, Limited, and Patrick van Pelt for the restoration and adaptive reuse of 1218 Webster Street, a 1924 apartment building by architect Alfred Finn. When van Pelt first saw the building a few years ago, it was, he remembers, "sad looking." Still, it had a certain grandeur about it, enough so that van Pelt decided it deserved saving. Though modest, the building is important in that it represents a way of life common in Montrose in the 1920s and 1930s. Other buildings like it are scattered through Midtown and Montrose, but so far few of them have captured the public's imagination. The restoration of 1218 Webster, the Good Bricks jurors felt, might serve as an example for others to follow.

Another example was found in the winner of the second Good Bricks award, Harry Gendel Architects for the adaptive reuse of the Philip M. Helfrich House in the Sixth Ward. The house was built in 1885 as a four-room Victorian, but had been remodeled in 124 to a Craftsman-style bungalow. Harry Gendel decided to restore the house to its 1924 state and move it to Decatur Street, where it became the new office for his architectural firm.

The evening's third award went to Norman Kirk Speck for the restoration of the Penn B. Thornton Home at 327 West 16th Street in the Heights. Speck, a third-generation Houston dentist, bought the house in 1989 when it was in a sad state of repair. Over the next decade he carefully returned it to its original 1905 appearance, removing inappropriate improvements, no matter how recently they had been made, and replacing them with period details that he discovered in historic photos.

Buildings were not the only things recognized by the Good Bricks jurors; organizations received their due as well. One award was presented to the Proctor Plaza Neighborhood Association for its work in establishing the Norhill Historic District, a picturesque community located just north and west of downtown. Filled with bungalows and cottages, the Norhill neighborhood was developed in the mid-1920s by Varner Realty. In 1996, the residents of the area decided they wanted a historic designation, beginning a four year struggle that, on June 14, 2000, resulted in Norhill becoming Houston's seventh, and biggest, historic district. By pushing for the creation of this district, the Proctor Plaza Neighborhood Association helped double the number of historic properties now desig-

nated under the City of Houston Preservation Ordinance.

A similar decisive doggedness could be found in the Avenue Community Development Corporation, which was honored for its Move Home project, which rescues, relocates, and revitalizes small, vintage homes that have been targeted for destruction, then makes them available to low- and moderate-income first-time homebuyers. Begun in 1996, the Move Home project has rescued 18 houses, brought a preservation ethic to areas in which it had not been present before, and helped create a market for preserved houses.

Unlike the Proctor Plaza Neighborhood Association or the Avenue CDC, Addie Dixon didn't rescue houses. Instead, she rescued memory. But she did that so successfully in her book *East of the River* that it moved some on the Good Bricks jurors to tears. *East of the River* is the story of freed slave Harrison Barrett and his descendants. In June 1875, Barrett, together with 12 other former slaves, settled east of the San Jacinto River near Crosby, Texas, in a community that came to be known as Barretts' Settlement. The settlement had only a spring and Ricket's Gully for water, and the families who had settled there doubted that they would survive.

Yet survive they did, and seven generations eventually traced their roots to what emerged from Harrison Barrett's vision of life as a free man. Then it appeared that a road might pave over both the community and its memory. That threat, though, spawned a preservation movement. As Dixon, a granddaughter of Harrison Barrett, says in the preface to her book, "The history of a family or a community cannot survive for a century solely on the basis of its oral traditions.... We needed historical preservation." And she set out to get it, researching, documenting, and recording the family's story — finding out who the people were, their dreams, and their fears. Their interactions with family, neighbors, and townspeople evolved into the "great stories" of Barretts' Settlement, 20 of which are retold in Dixon's book.

As part of her research, Dixon asked her interview subjects to draw the homestead as they remembered it, and the resulting artwork is now on display in a museum that she established on the surviving Barrett homestead. Through her work, Dixon preserved that most intangible piece of the past — the history of a family and a people. In the process, she made clear that preservation is not only about buildings, but also about people and their lives.

The last Good Bricks Awards of the evening were awarded to Bart Truxillo for Outstanding Service or Leadership in Historic Preservation and the Blue Triangle Multi-Cultural Association for the renovation of the 1951 Blue Triangle Branch YWCA Building in the Fourth Ward, a building designed by Hiram A. Salisbury and Birdsall Briscoe. The AIA's Houston 25-Year Award, designed to honor enduring architectural landmarks and presented for the first time in concert with the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, went to the City of Houston for Miller Outdoor Theater in Hermann Park.

Which left only the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance President's Award, given to an individual or organization that has made an exceptional contribution to preservation in Houston. The recipient for 200 was, not surprisingly, Drayton McLane of the Houston Astros and the members of the Harris County Houston Sports Authority for the restoration and adaptive reuse of Union Station as part of Enron Field. It was an award for an awards venue, and in this case, it seemed appropriate. — *Mitchell J. Shields*

Public Library's Archives Director Retires

After two decades in the position, Louis Marchiafava has retired as the manager of the Archives Department of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

Marchiafava obtained his Ph.D. from Rice University and worked with the HMRC from the time of its founding in 1974, when it was housed in the Fondren Library of Rice University. He became the manager of the department in 1980 after HMRC had moved to its present location in the Houston Public Library's Julia Ideson Building. One of the principal components of the Archives Department is the Architectural Archive, which is one of the two largest depositories of architectural records in the state of Texas, the other being the Alexander Architectural Archive at the University of Texas at Austin.

As of press time, Marchiafava's vacant position had not been filled. — *Steven R. Strom*

For 50 years, the Menil House has been regarded as an architectural icon. Now an effort is underway to conserve it for future generations.

Preserving the MENIL

Taking stock of the house that pioneered MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE in Houston

THREE YEARS AFTER ITS OWNER DIED, and five decades after it was built, the house on San Felipe that was home to long-time Houston art patrons Dominique and John de Menil is being prepared for a small facelift.

In February, the Menil Foundation hired Stern and Bucek Architects, along with preservation consultant Ellen Beasley, to work with Menil Collection curators in examining the Menil House, cataloging its condition, and determining what should to be done to guarantee that the residence remains in good shape. Once an assessment is made, any needed repairs will begin.

"One thing we're trying to make clear is that this is not a renovation, or remaking of the house," says Ned Rifkin, director of The Menil Collection. "We're characterizing this as a conservation effort. There's going to be great sensitivity exercised in trying to not make the house look brand new. What we hope is that people who are familiar with the house will be able to visit once the project is completed and notice almost nothing different about it."

Still, as Rifkin notes, the house is a half century old, and anything that age in Houston's climate will begin to show wear. By uncovering that wear now and dealing with it, he says, more serious future problems can be avoided.

When Dominique de Menil died in December 1997, she left her house to the Menil Foundation, which runs The Menil Collection. In the time since, the Foundation has mulled over what use to make of the bequest. In the past year, says Rifkin, the house has been host to a series of lunches and to receptions following openings at The Menil Collection. But what its ultimate use will be is still uncertain. The only thing he's confident of, Rifkin says, is that the house "will not be an extension of The Menil Collection. It will certainly never be a public facility. We intend to maintain its residential status."

Designed by architect Philip Johnson in 1949, and completed in 1950, the Menil House is one of the most important residential structures in Houston, as much for its history and influence as for its actual appearance. It was not only the starting point for what eventually became The Menil Collection, it also introduced modernism as espoused by Mies van der Rohe, Johnson's mentor, to Houston. In the words of architectural historian Stephen Fox, the Menil House is "the modernist equivalent of Bayou Bend."

"It's an exciting project," Rifkin says of the Menil House work. "If we're going to enhance and augment our legacy, we need to take care of our history. And the Menil House is where, for us, it all began." — *MJS*

HOUSE *and* Garden

RDA architecture tour highlights the connection of landscape and architecture

For right: 5201 Blossom, the Studio of Robert Morris, 2001.
Middle right: 6522 Haskell Street, Nattalye Appel + Associates, 1994.
Right: 823 Byrne Street, Peter D. Waldman, 1992.

Top: 2214 Fairview, Stern and Becak Architects, 2000.
Bottom: 3735 Gramercy, Marshall Reid, AIA, 1998.

Despite its tropical climate and expanses of foliage, Houston is not widely known as a place filled with houses, landscapes, and gardens that merge to make a single, enchantingly connected living environment. This spring, though, the Rice Design Alliance, in its 2001 Architecture Tour, showed that that need not be the case, taking visitors through seven Houston houses in which building and environment are integral to one another, producing *indoor/outdoor* spatial combinations all too rare in the city.

The tour, held March 31 and April 1, presented a wide array of design possibilities, from luxuriantly planted gardens to minimalist landscape design, created in the last decade. The oldest design belonged to a 1992 house at 823 Byrne Street by architect Peter D. Waldman. The landscape designers in this case were the homeowners themselves, an artist and a writer whose house was planned to preserve a live oak tree near the front of the lot. The two-story house, configured in an L-plan to frame a side garden, was pushed to one side of the site and set far back from the street. Waldman designed the interior as an architectural landscape, with high ceilings, long interior views, and multiple sources of daylight to give the house a sense of spaciousness. By not treating the landscape as a visual extension of the interior, Waldman made this town lot seem mysterious and multifaceted, and he made the inside of the house seem like a landscape of its own.

In 1993, at 2106 Persa Street, Taft Architects and landscape designers Laura Jackson and Will Fleming created a house and landscape that recalls a rustic south Texas ranch house in its austere finishes — walls of exposed concrete masonry units, a polished concrete floor slab on the ground floor, exposed roof trusses in the living room, and aluminum doors and awning windows that open to the outside. To the south is a garden, inspired by the landscapes of south Texas, centered on a swimming pool and overlooked by a two-story-high loggia, an open-air room that demonstrates the attractiveness of living outdoors in Houston.

Another house on the tour in which a swimming pool and living quarters intersect was 6522 Haskell Street, a 1994 project of Natalye Appel + Associates Architects and landscape architect The Office of James Burnett. Here, a lot facing an edge of Memorial Park was redeveloped with a long, narrow house that contains a two-story-high living space flanked by linear outdoor spaces. The space on the east is a courtyard with a lap pool and an outdoor eating and cooking area. On the west, the courtyard is a garden planted with grasses, vines, and trees, overlooked by a second-floor balcony. Lush plantings that screen the glass walls of the living area from the western sun were installed in this courtyard. The front yard of the house is planted with a grove of river birch, which screens the house from the street.

The Office of James Burnett was also involved with the landscape design of 3735 Gramercy, which won a 2000 honor award from the American Society of Landscape Architects. The garden at this 1998 collaboration with architect Marshall Reid is developed from the spatial rhythms of the two-story house, which consists of a series of one- and two-story interior volumes oriented toward the south-facing back yard. The Office of James Burnett developed the front garden as a series of low planes of planting that end in a concrete masonry unit wall sheltering the entrance and studio courtyard; the back garden continues the theme of spatial layering with staged planes of ground cover, irises, and flowering grasses silhouetted against freestanding screen walls. The serenity of the garden mirrors the calm, composed planes of the house.

At 1423 Harold, architect Charles Tapley used his office, a much-remodeled bungalow in the Montrose Annex, to play with ideas of how house and garden should intersect. The Tapley office is nei-

ROTHKO CHAPEL

WINS HISTORIC DESIGNATION

This February, the Rothko Chapel reached a milestone as it celebrated its 30th birthday. But that celebration was made even more notable by the Rothko's receiving a gift that buildings normally can't expect until they make it to 50 — being named to the National Register of Historic Places.

The decision to waive the 50-year rule and list the Rothko Chapel in the National Register was made last year, but wasn't announced until early 2001. It was the culmination of an effort that began with a documentation of the building's history, then a presentation last spring to the Texas Historical Commission. Once the Texas Commission deemed the Chapel significant enough to enter the register early, a request was passed along to the National Parks Service in Washington, D.C. In August, the Parks Service decided to grant the designation.

Aside from being an honor, the listing grants the Rothko Chapel a level of protection unusual in a city with one of the weakest historic preservation ordinances in the country. "The listing helps guarantee that the Chapel won't be torn down or changed," notes Suna Umari, the Chapel's executive director. "And it helps us get funding for future work on the building, since some foundations will give only to places with a historic designation."

The listing follows a period of major renovation work on both the Chapel and the 14 Mark Rothko paintings it was built to house. A few years ago, the north side of the building began to sink, which caused a large crack to appear along the west wall of the interior. Meanwhile, the Rothko paintings started exuding a white

ther a house nor a garden: It is architecture conceived as a landscape. Within the bungalow's wood-framed interstices is a landscape of platforms, passageways, and attic aeries. Tapley closed the house on its west elevation, which faces a side street, but burrowed into it on its east side to create a garden court that seems to invade the interior. Nature as a metaphor has been a commonplace of architectural practice since antiquity. Tapley has used this metaphor to excavate dreamlike spatial sequences within an unassuming bungalow.

Perhaps less unassuming, but no less intriguing was the tour house at 2214 Fairview, built last year as a personal office and guest house adjacent to the owner's townhouse. Stern and Bucek Architects were the architects and landscape designer, while Thompson + Hanson, Inc. did the planting design. This three-story dwelling has a free interior plan. The ground floor is focused on a central cooking/entertaining area. Above it is a second-floor platform containing a workspace, with guest rooms on the top floor. All three levels open onto south-facing decks connected directly to a walled front courtyard. In this complex, customary roles are reversed. The guesthouse seems spatially open and free; the courtyard appears to be divided into a suite of rooms.

The most recent house on the tour, 5201 Blossom, is described by its architect as a "living machine." A 2001 project whose architecture and landscape design is by the Studio of Robert Morris and whose planting design is by heirloom gardener Camille Waters, this steel-framed, steel-sheathed West End house explores the application of sustainable techniques. Air spaces within the insulated walls draw air from the ground level and discharge it through roof vents in order to aid cooling. Canopies on the east wall protect interiors from the winter sun, but can be removed in summer. The beam ends that support the canopies also channel rainwater into steel tanks, from which it is distributed to irrigate the garden. Working with the owner and architect, Camille Waters installed raised beds to cultivate edible plants. A small fruit orchard is along the rear fence line; aromatic plants are grown at the garden's southeast corner so that the breeze will fill the area with their pleasant odors. It was evidence to those on the RDA tour, if any were needed, that an intelligent melding of landscape and buildings can result in something that smells sweet. — *Stephen Fox/MJS*

A panoramic view of the Rothko Chapel's interior shows the simplicity of the chapel's design, and the subtle quality of the art it contains.

film that gave a pale cast to their large, dark, seemingly monochromatic surfaces. The culprits, aside from age, were determined to be Houston's humidity and natural light, both of which had too easy access to the artwork.

Since the wall-sized paintings had been lowered in from the roof when the Chapel was built, new doors had to be installed so they could be removed for restoration. While the paintings were being treated, a series of 55-foot piers were sunk to re-level the Chapel and reinforce the foundation. A glass partition was installed near the entrance to help control temperature and humidity, and an air-handling system was added. The roof was repaired, and the clear panes in the skylight replaced with a milky glass.

Now, says Umari, the repairs are finished, the paintings returned to their original appearance, and, with the historic designation, the Chapel afforded a level of protection it hasn't had before. "It was good timing," she says. "It means we're now set for a long future."— *MJS*

WHAT SIMPLICITY CONCEALS, THE LIGHT REVEALS

James Turrell and Leslie K. Elkins open a Friends meeting house to the sky

Photo: Joe Ben Davis

BY PATRICK PETERS

AT 1318 WEST 26TH STREET IN HOUSTON'S WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD OF SHADY ACRES, just within audible range of the hum of cars speeding along the North Loop, an austere but refined worship space has been completed for the Live Oak Friends Meeting. Set among modest wood-frame cottages, auto repair shops, and the odd mobile home, all shaded by a heavy tree canopy, the Quaker group's meeting house offers those within it an unexpected opening to the sky through a bright galvalume roof.

To the few passersby on this fringe of Houston's Heights, the outward appearance of the meeting house presents a simplified representation of the complex visual, social, and spiritual phenomena taking place within. The exterior of the meeting house is distinguished by its self-effacing effort to nest, despite its large mass, within its humble surroundings. Symmetrical in its long east-west axis and employing broad overhanging eaves, cement clapboard siding, and strict platonic geometry punctuated by equally-spaced, alternating windows and doors, the spiritual house has a plainness that unapologetically invites association with the straightforwardness of nearby utility sheds while recalling the deep shade of distant ranch houses. Alternatively, it also demonstrates the complex synthesis of intentions possible when the utilitarian expectations of a Society of Friends meeting seeking a permanent home embraces a well-known artist's minimalist aesthetic. The organizing principle of this joint pursuit was the elusive Quaker ethic of overt simplicity embodying inner spirituality.

The 100-plus members of the Live Oak Friends Meeting, an itinerate group who have grown accustomed to gathering in appropriated spaces such as community centers, dance halls, and borrowed churches, had no desire to erect a "steeple house" — their term for a worship space that transcends its purpose to become a religious monument. Nor did they intend to build a destination for art pilgrims. However, when they were approached in 1995 by Houston gallery-owner Hiram Butler, who represents the work of Arizona-based James Turrell, they were open to the consideration of a gift by the world-renowned light artist, who is himself a Quaker. For the new meeting house, Turrell evolved the simplest of intentions: to open the ceiling and let the outdoors come in. Seeking the opportunity to merge his artwork with a renewed spiritual interest in his childhood Quaker upbringing, Turrell developed what had been an ongoing project of his, the creation of what he terms a Skyspace. Where a steeple might be found objectionable because it focuses too literally on man's aspiration to reach the cosmos, the Skyspace — effectively a void or anti-steeple — erases the element of human intervention and opens the meeting house for direct perception and contemplation of creation.

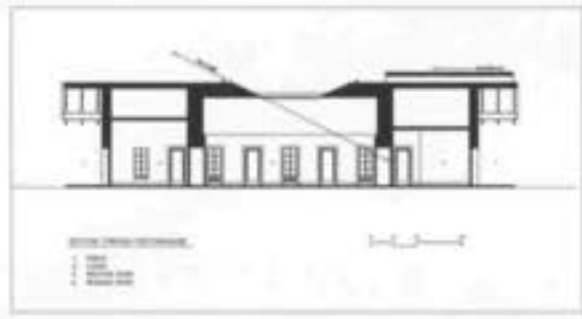
What the outward simplicity of this newest of Houston's artwork/worship hybrids conceals is the complex cross-pollination of a religious ministry with the desire to bring into being a major new work of art. This desire, felt by patrons and foundations in Houston's visual arts community, enabled the Live Oak Friends to leverage their modest fund-raising potential into major outside gifts that totaled two-thirds of the approximately $1.5 million required for the ambitious building/artwork.

Turrell's Skyspace satisfies the two, often contradictory, agendas of faith and art. It frames the sky to bring its light into the central room of the 80-foot-long, 40-foot-wide meeting house. In his precise manner of shaping this light, the artist created two visual phenomena. Due to its angled path, the sun's movement through the sky produces dramatic phenomena of changing color and spatial perception from the 30 minutes before through the 30 minutes after sunset. The first phenomenon is an uncommon deepening of the sky's hue from a robin's egg blue to deep violet, all while the saturation of color intensifies. The second phenomenon is a progressive flattening over time of the depth of the sky's vault, which eventually collapses within the dematerialized Skyspace. This happens in part as a result of a dynamic contrast of the changing cool color of the sky when seen against the constant level of a warm, pinkish light that issues from a cold-cathode-tube cove illumination on the interior. The square central room, flanked at either end by two smaller rooms, is twice as wide as its 19-foot height, a horizontal emphasis that enhances the spatial effect.

The experience leads the viewer toward meditation. The slow and patient movement of celestial and atmospheric elements through the central room's aperture induces one to consider the world beyond its four walls. Likewise, the influx of fresh air and the accompanying

James Turrell's Skyspace, a void in the ceiling of the Live Oak Meeting House, gives the building a direct connection with the outside world.

Drawings courtesy Leslie K. Elkins



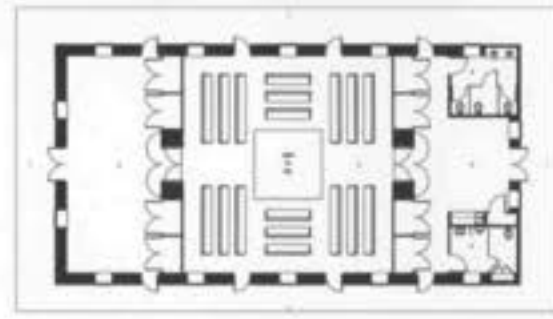


Photo by Jon Thomas

Photo by Jon Thomas

Top: Renderings of the Live Oak Meeting House show the artful simplicity of its design, and the careful consideration of the angles at which light enters the central meeting hall.

Middle: The shed-like appearance of the Meeting House belies the complexity of its construction, which entailed a rigorous consideration of structure, climate control, lighting, and waterproofing.

Bottom: Despite its mass, the Meeting House makes an attempt to fit quietly into its humble surroundings.

change of temperature within the room due to the outside elements entering through the open void offer a way of grounding one's visual experience of the celestial within a tactile experience of ambient temperature and current weather conditions. Although simple to perceive, the structure's ephemeral experiences are difficult, if not impossible, to capture in pigment or on film.

While the use of daylight in the Live Oak installation invites the metaphor of divine presence, Turrell employs light as a material without bias regarding its source. Since all light is the product of combustion — whether of hydrogen in a distant star or of tungsten in a glass globe — it is all equally available as a medium for use. Turrell's work for the Live Oak Friends Meeting joins an earlier permanent installation of his work in Houston, one that employs only electric light sources. That 2000 installation, "The Light Inside," commissioned by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, capitalizes on an underground tunnel connecting the Caroline Wiess Law Building and Rafael Moneo's Audrey Jones Beck Building. Like the Friends Meeting House's Skyspace, "The Light Inside" operates around a basic concern for simplicity.

What is required to fulfill the promise of this simplicity, however, is anything but simple. In the meeting house, Turrell's intent to create a featureless frame surrounding a 12-foot-square piece of the sky demanded a rigorous consideration of the prosaic elements of structure, climate control, lighting, and weatherproofing, elements that can often undermine a minimalist sensibility. Traces of this struggle are found in the construction documents calling for the ceiling of the meeting house to taper magically to a knife's edge at the Skyspace opening. Architects and builders alike understand the difficulty associated with trying to eliminate visual clutter in pursuit of a refined and minimal visual experience. This effort was supported at the meeting house first by concealing the structural steel frame, air conditioning, and indirect lighting in a two-foot-thick mass, thereby reducing the visual palette on the interior to plaster walls, a shallow vaulted wallboard ceiling, pine floors, and maple trim. Secondly, the effort was sponsored by the careful handling of the intersection of these materials. Architect Leslie K. Elkins, whose previous work with minimalist director and designer Robert Wilson at his creative compound in Watermill, Long Island, provided beneficial training for this challenge, collaborated closely with Turrell to effect this simplicity. Frank Briscoe, project manager on the building for W.S. Bellows Construction Corporation, was also instrumental in accomplishing the project. Briscoe shared Elkins' commitment to the intellectually and physically demanding practice of refined material handling.

Further contributing to the viewer's perception of the accomplishment achieved at the Live Oak Friends installation is Turrell's insistence on preserving the pure spatial illusion of the light art. The Live Oak Friends have been told to keep visitors from viewing the interior of the central room while the motorized cover for the roof aperture is being opened or closed. This suggests the price paid to be the custodians of a work of art. Further, all interruptions to the line of sight from the interior to the sky were obsessively eliminated, both by acts of architectural detailing and by the removal of three mature trees whose branches could be seen through the open Skyspace, this last a fact that proved troubling to many among the Friends Meeting. The merger of art and faith is not without some compromises.

The drama played out by Turrell's open roof reveals his sophisticated understanding of the physics of light and human optics. It demonstrates natural light's capacity to both locate a person in a particular place and time and, simultaneously, connect a person to the universal structure of the solar system.

Beyond the presentation of the aperture, the demands placed upon the meeting house are somewhat more limited. The Live Oak Friends Meeting is what is known as an "unprogrammed" congregation, with no clergy and a service that consists of an hour-long atmosphere of silence. Infrequent breaks to the silence are provided by "leadings," incidental acts of members moved by God to speak. These functions require no specific spatial configuration. Architect Elkins' understated design works to ennoble this coming together in fellowship by its straightforward but dignified clarity of organization, construction, and use. The power of the Skyspace lies in its capacity to transcend the steeple house tradition, putting those gathered together into a communion with their inner voice. ■

HIDDEN HOUSTON

The city you see on the surface is not all the city there is

Houston is too big, too much, to be taken in by a single glance or a single idea, and its parts are hidden from us in many ways. They are obviously hidden by space and time, by the city's sheer size and complex history. But they are also hidden by the space and time that each of us defines in the routes and routines of our daily lives.

The city most of us know best lines the paths we take to and from work, the carpool circuit, the weekend errands, the shortcuts to our favorite places for fast food and slow, and whatever it is we follow over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house. These versions of the city are utilitarian, intimate, and fragmentary. They have boundaries we maintain and boundaries we are unaware of. And bounded by our routines, we don't know what we are missing — in the same way we don't know the inside of someone else's history, in an old neighborhood that's disappeared, until they map it for us in conversation.

Other parts of Houston are hidden in plain sight, their surfaces clear to view but the values and the contexts they create invisible. The unexceptional looking Thai Xuan apartments near Hobby Airport enclose a Vietnamese village, one defined not by its physical spaces but by its relationships, practices, and historical attitudes. This apartment complex is a community, as are the Walden Internet Villages, though the communal values that inform these two places are radically different from each other.

And yet those communities are more like each other than any name we might have for the patrons of the Guatemalan bakery in southwest Houston or for the seekers who come to the Villa de Martel convent in the city's southeast. "Community" is probably too strong a word, but what else is there to name their aggregate? The bakery's customers are not really a neighborhood, and the Villa's customers are not really a congregation. According to Sister Olive Bordelon, those who are drawn to the Villa don't even all share the same faith. But what they all value is the same sequestered peace. And what they expose is both the hope and the emptiness in the builder's phrase "planned community."

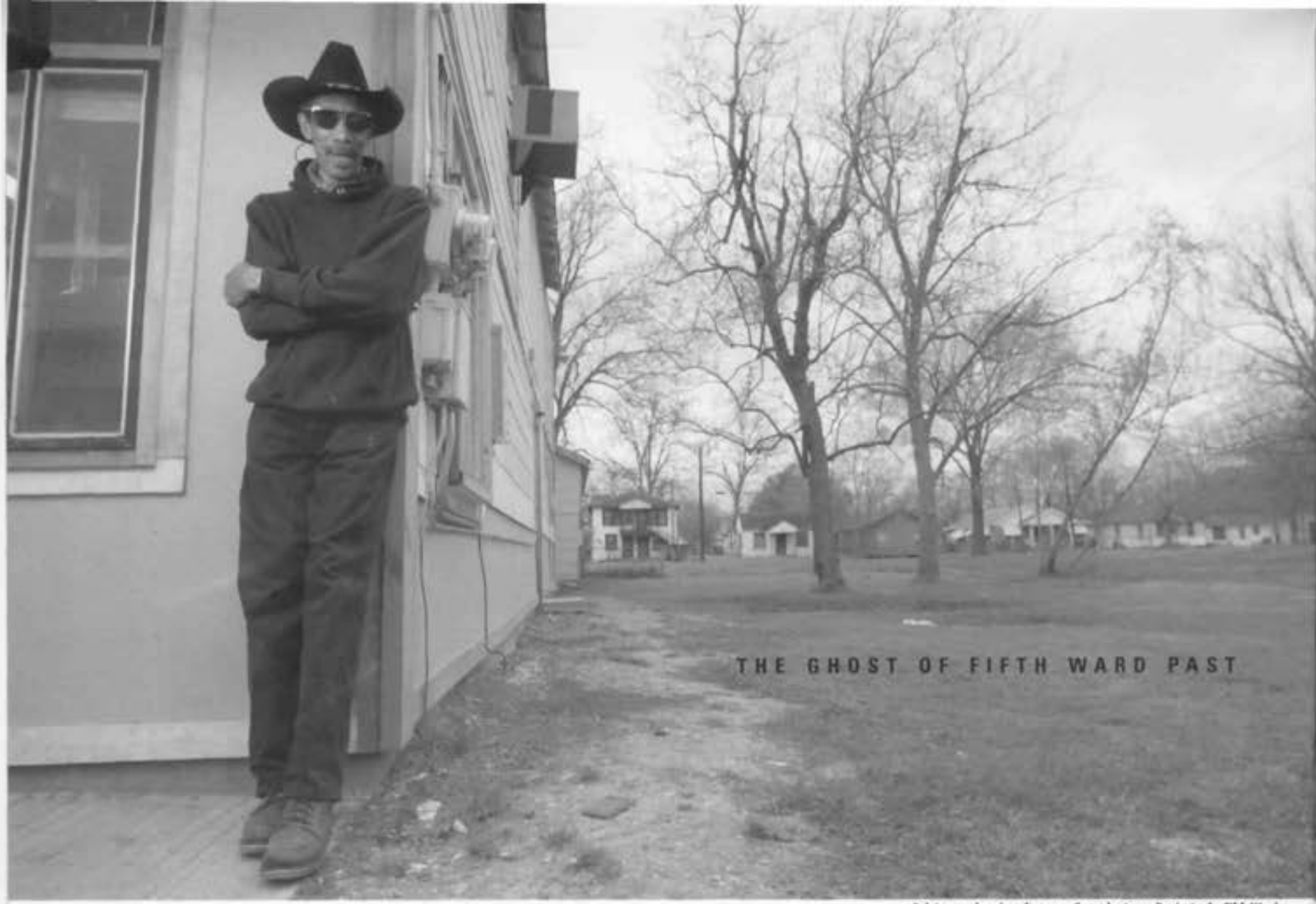
When we speak of the city that is Houston, we mean, of course, several different things. In audible caps, The City is an idea to which we often attribute order and intention: it has an architectural culture and a visual style; it has made progress or failed to. Or The City, at this late date in its long history, is part of nature, an organism with its own intelligence and ecological law. Nothing in The City is hidden, because The City is an ideal entity rather than a series of disparate places, a totality without actual parts. But the city that exists without audible caps, the city that is experienced on the streets rather than as a pristine ideal, does have parts. They come into view in social, political, and personal terms — neighborhoods and districts, tax zones and facilities, my block and yours — and these places are set in opposition to each other by the rules of function, class, and color. Using these rules, we can hide the poor from the rich and work from play, and the city we are takes its texture from the ways in which these rules play out.

It is not enough, however, to simply see this real city. You have to hear its voices telling their own stories, and that's what we have sought out in this issue of *Cite*. What we call "hidden" here is not a secret anyone is keeping from anyone else. It is only that the stories tend to not move far from their source. Some of the stories come from the pen of the person talking; others come via interviews. But they all come with their own sound, and reveal their part of the hidden whole.

In presenting the hidden Houstons that follow, we are not addressing issues of urban order or disorder. The River Oaks that Robin McCorquodale remembers has not been wiped out by change in the way that the old neighborhood Jack Lapin remembers has. And the planned neighborhoods of Fondren Southwest weren't planned to accommodate the Orthodox Jewish families who now mark the boundaries of their Shabbat "city" by an eruv, a wall, that the rest of us can hardly see because we do not know what we are looking at. Money, beliefs, and development have all played a role in defining the nature of these different places, but not the kind of role that provides a single explanation for their differences.

Neighborhoods are not necessarily communities; the social orders defined by the Guatamalan bakery or the Indian cinema aren't even neighborhoods. Hiddenness seems to bring with it a difficulty in language, too. But these place-related relationships have analogues. On the one hand, they are like money found in the pocket of a jacket we haven't worn in a while — not so much a secret as a surprise. But they are also like the kind of conversation we sometimes have with a stranger who informs us of something we didn't know and, therefore, tells us something about ourselves. Strangers are the city's natural citizens, and perhaps one of our strangers here is talking directly to you. — *Terrence Doody*

Photographs by Michael Stravato



THE GHOST OF FIFTH WARD PAST

Bob Lee on the edge of a once vibrant business district in the Fifth Ward.

Bob Lee *is a social worker and labor organizer who lives in the Fifth Ward. He is a brother of county commissioner El Franco Lee.*

Desegregation all but ruined the Fifth Ward. Now, you can't really say anything good about segregation, and nobody with any sense would want to go back to that, but the simple truth is that in a lot of ways Fifth Ward was better off before desegregation than after. Houston is the fourth largest city in America, yet the Fifth Ward seems like it's in a Third or Fourth World country, and a lot of that is because of desegregation.

Segregation forced us to build our own businesses, because we weren't allowed to go to downtown Houston and shop. The first institutions we had after slavery were the church, and then the barbershop, because many of the barbers were blacks who had worked for their masters. From that point you had bakeries, restaurants, funeral homes, then what people negatively called the Red Light District. The black gangsters, many of them were people who said they'd never work for a white man again. They opened up enterprises — nightclubs, gambling, prostitution, bootlegging — that provided an economic base for the black community.

In the Fifth Ward during segregation you couldn't get loans from white bankers, so community development was based on the black gangster. The black middle class won't admit it, but things like the numbers racket played a very important role in building the neighborhoods. The black middle class, they didn't make any money during segregation, I don't care how many degrees they had. The black middle class was middle class mostly in name. The gangsters had the income. In the 1930s, Lyons Avenue was filled with nightclubs, and the nightclub owners would loan people money.

During segregation, our money went in a circle. Now it goes in a straight line, from us to other areas. My wife and I go shopping in Montrose. If we want good coffee, we have to go there. If we want clothes, we have to go elsewhere. I don't like that one bit.

From World War I, when a lot of money started flowing, up until the 1960s, we were self-sufficient. All the things that organizers are talking about now — self-determination of the community and all that — in the Fifth Ward we already had it. Doctors lived here, teachers lived here. The black middle class during segregation lived with the black working class. That was the thing about segregation: We all had to sit together.

They're reviving Lyons Avenue right now, and that's a good thing. Fifth Ward is getting ready to go through the same sort of renaissance that Harlem went through at the turn of the last century. We have so much room for redevelopment. But before desegregation it didn't need to be redeveloped. It was cooking. One of the newer projects is Lyons Village, a mixed-use development with business and housing. But that's really nothing new. Where Lyons Village is now there used to be the Club Matinee, which was like the Cotton Club of Houston. If we went back into the 1960s, you would see an all-black cab line right in front of it. Crystal Cab was the company's name. Men would be washing cabs right next to the beautiful Club Matinee, where Count Basie and Duke Ellington and all of them came. It filled the whole block. It was more than a club. It was a restaurant, and it was also a hotel, because when the big bands came to town, they may have played for the white folks, but they couldn't stay in their hotels.

During segregation, when you had a nightclub, people would build other businesses around it. Barbershops, grocery stores — across the street from the Club Matinee was the Deluxe Theater. We had four movie theaters in Fifth Ward then: the Lyons, the Deluxe, the Jensen, and the Roxy. Now we don't have any.

My mother and father had a nightclub, Lee's Congo Bar, that was at the corner of Lyons and Featherstone. We had eight, nine people working for us. My father's from Henderson, Texas, my mother's from Jasper. My father was real slick; he stayed in the background and let my mother be the public face of the club. He said, nobody's going to come to the club to look at me, but they'll sure come to look at your mother. I started working in the club when I was eight years old, and worked there up until I was 18. I met all the lawyers, teachers, working class poor, sex merchants, and hustlers. They all came through our club.

Dr. King wasn't a sociologist. He was altruistic, a minister, but he wasn't a sociologist. He didn't realize that an action would have a reaction. I remember many arguments here between the black middle class and the black hustlers when desegregation was about to happen. The black hustlers were against it. They predicted what the results would be. Because when integration came, the black middle class packed up and left.

I knew something was changing when this girl came up to me and said, Bob, let's go to the Loews and see a movie. We had four movie theaters right here in the Fifth Ward, but because integration made it possible, she wanted to go over to Main Street to the Loews. That's the first time I realized that people really thought the grass was greener on the other side, when I knew the truth my uncle had told me: Grass is grass. I wouldn't take her. — *Interview by Mitchell J. Shields*

Tran Thi Dao and her husband tend their garden.

THE GARDENS OF VIETNAM

Tran Thi Dao *is from My Tho, a city in the former South Vietnam. In 1981, she and her husband took their seven children, boarded a boat they had built, and left their homeland for America. They arrived in Texas in 1981. Today, they live in Thai Xuan Village at 8200 Broadway, not far from Hobby Airport. The apartment complex is occupied almost solely by Vietnamese immigrants, and although it is in disrepair, many residents cherish it for the sense of community created by their shared origins, customs, and the tiny gardens of Vietnamese vegetables they grow.*

My whole life takes place in Thai Xuan Village. To me it feels like a real village. I've got people from Vietnam all around me; I've got my husband and my daughters nearby. I'm going to live here forever, and I'm going to die here.

Every morning, at the same time, the first thing I do is check my plants. The lettuce is for the old man and me, the old lady, to eat. When it's windy, I pick up the plants that are tipped over, prop them up with a stick, and tie them. Next I check for bugs. I kneel down to get a good look at each leaf, and if I see one I'll get a scissors and snip the whole leaf off.

My garden makes me feel at home. It's a little different here: the weather is different than in Vietnam, where you can plant anything anytime. And we don't have much space. But I plant what I can. For winter, I grow lettuce, cilantro, onions, and elephant ears — a kind of green that you use with pho and soups. That's a papaya tree out front, left over from the previous resident. For the summer I put in basil, lettuce, and water chestnuts. And I go around to talk about the garden with other people in the village. We ask, "How do you get this to grow?" Or, "How did you do that?"

Every day I also visit other old people. When I'm sick, they come and visit me. If we still lived in Vietnam, we'd do it the exactly the same way. Each morning we call each other on the phone, to see how everyone's doing.

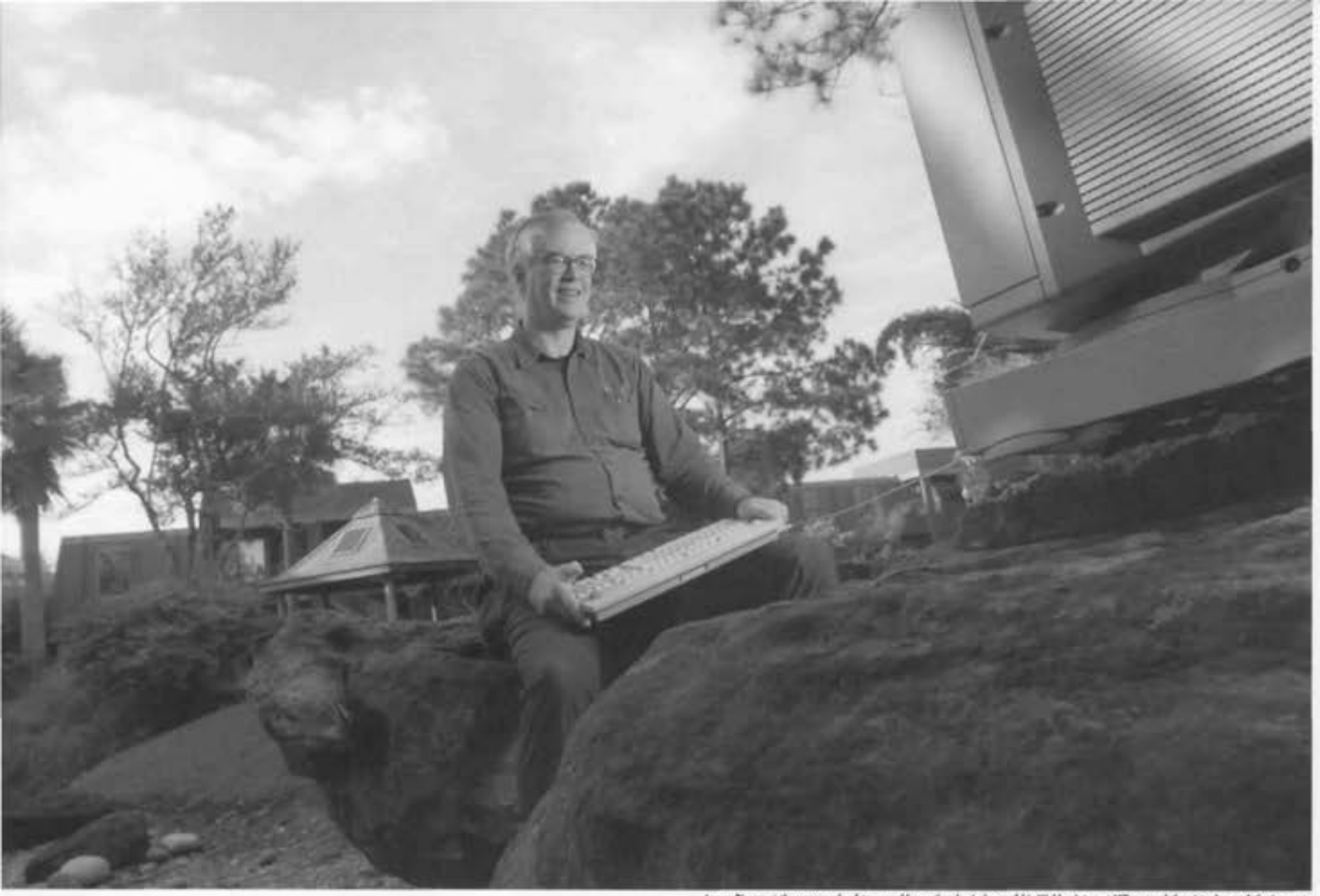
In mid-autumn, we have a traditional festival for the children. There are lantern shows, lantern contests. At New Year's we give cake or candy to the children. And we have a little Catholic chapel, where you meet people. There are about 60 Catholic families in the village. Altogether, about 360 families live here. The residents are all different ages — many times, children who can't take care of their parents like them to live here. It's like they've brought them to Vietnam.

We've lived here for a year, but some of our kids have lived here for over six years. For years, we lived in Port Arthur with our son, but he died of cancer. So we came to Thai Xuan to be with our other children. They like having us in the village — it's safer.

Living here feels like Vietnam. You can visit and play and yak with the neighbors. You can leave your house for a whole month, and people will watch it for you. I can't leave the village because I can't drive or go out very easily. Outside, I'm scared. But here I can walk around anytime.

Once a week one of my children takes me to a Vietnamese market downtown, to buy things like meat and eggs. We have a little store here, but it's only for things you need at the last minute — noodles and fish sauce. There's also a little hair salon here, where my husband gets his hair cut.

We usually don't talk much about the past. Only when someone comes back from a trip to Vietnam, we ask questions: What's it like? Also, you know, even old people here are still very busy. They baby-sit. You see someone, you say, "How are you?" Then they rush home to baby-sit their grandchildren. — *Interview by Claudia Kolker*



James Birney at the crossroads of two worlds — the physical one of his Walden Internet Village, and the virtual one of the Internet.

LIFE IN THE WEB

Colorado native James Birney *is the owner of Walden Internet Villages, three Houston apartment complexes he bought in 1989 and transformed into a gathering spot for the technologically adept. The Walden Villages offer residents a T-3 Internet connection, high-speed access usually found only at major corporations or large universities. They have been designed to appeal to those for whom the Internet is not the future, but a crucial part of life today.*

The Walden idea came about mostly because my son and I were in love with the idea of the Internet. Early on, people used to call it the "World Wide Wait." The question was, how to afford a faster connection? So we came up with the idea of distributing it throughout an apartment complex, and building a community — a challenging, creative, entrepreneurial environment and a learning environment. Until we came up with the Walden Internet Villages thesis, these apartments had been conventional rental complexes.

At Walden, we offer something that's unprecedented, both in speed of connection and the nature of the environment. People really get incredibly attached to the community aspect. The thing about young, technically oriented, aggressive people is that they're mobile. They tend to come, learn a lot, gain a lot, and move on.

There's been a bit of fallout from the tech crash. There is still an extreme demand for technologically oriented people, but before it was a frothy bidding market. People were changing jobs nonstop. Now certain residents who rely on grants and consulting sometimes have trouble paying the rent. Some have to get jobs. So they're starting to dress differently: get haircuts, wear suits, be polite for interviews.

The Rogerdale complex was where we got everything started. There are 200 units here. Maybe six or seven of them are unoccupied. For about three years, we've struggled with defining this community, with summarizing what it is we offer. We look at ourselves as an advanced lifestyle of the future. We've tried to evolve the community carefully. That probably chases some people away. But we end up getting a fairly interesting group.

When we first started out, it was a geek-oriented community. Up to a couple of years ago, it was 95 percent plus males. Now we're getting much broader. I think it's now about 70 percent men, 30 percent women. Not that there was any resistance to women from the residents — they were looking for them! And we're getting more families. Major progress, actually.

There are a lot of gamers here. They pursue that with a totally incredible passion. Actually, it's worse than being on drugs. At a LAN party, six or seven people play at night, until 5 or 6 the next morning. There have been cases where — in Everquest — they stay at it for two or three days steady.

Over time, we learned it was necessary to develop rules. One was be a good neighbor. You can't do something with broadband that impedes others' work. The average person here has about four computers; some have 16 plus. They have the capacity, if unleashed, to absorb our bandwidth in the blink of an eye. Onsite, it's 100 megabites per second. So you can't go around stealing other people's IP addresses; you have to peacefully coexist.

Two, you have to have reasonable ethics and moral standards. You have to be reasonable to your neighbor. What that has meant, especially during the geekiest of our stages, is ... well, put it this way. Geeks are not social. They actually have been more or less social rejects over time. In college they were hermits. And afterward, they actually had a lot of challenges. You get a tech job, you get shuffled around continuously. So not only are you not socially adept, but you're being moved around the country. When they came here they found like minds. In fact, they formed a kind of elite guard, running around town, doing things together. They really felt they were part of something. The Internet trains people to have an outlook of instant gratification, total freedom. In the beginning at Walden, they loved it and lived it with a passion — drugs, drinking, flaming [sending aggressive e-mail messages]. Being extremely assertive.

One of the most interesting things is when you see the residents face to face. They're very pleasant. But then you get them on e-mail.... In any case, we've moved to a much rounder and fuller community than existed at that stage. Very intentionally, we stepped in and laid down some rules. It didn't all happen at once. We get an idea, we work on it, nothing happens, and eventually, sooner or later, it seems to click. At first, that bothered me. Then I realized that cultures develop slowly. — *Interview by Claudia Kolker*

Esteban Benito Chanas at his El Quetzal bakery in southwest Houston.

BAKING MEMORIES

Esteban Benito Chanas *runs a southwest Houston bakery that serves as one center of a community that, according to Nestor Rodriguez of the University of Houston Center for Immigration Research, continues traditions that stretch back to the Mayans of Central America, predating the discovery of the New World. Chanas makes no such claims. He sees himself as simply a baker from the highlands of Guatemala.*

I have a wife, three sons, and a daughter. We came to Houston in 1980. We had a bakery in Guatemala, in San Cristobal Totonicapan, a very small town. My parents were bakers, and they taught me how to make bread.

That was the time of the guerrilla. San Cristobal was near a war zone. We worked and sold products in the town fairs. The guerrillas always approached us, and they scared people. Life was dangerous. We were in between the two sides. Lots of people died. That's when we decided to come to the U.S.

It's an adventure when you come. You don't know where you'll wind up. Five of us came together, children, cousins, nephews. I was 32.

We went to work for Randall's. Randall's was a very good company for us. First we had to work in the floor crew, doing clean up. Then after three or four years I went to work in the bakery. We didn't make any Hispanic bread. We did make sweet bread, cinnamon rolls. If you can make Guatemalan sweet bread, you can make donuts.

I worked in lots of stores, especially Number 19, at Fondren and Bissonnet. We were the first Guatemalans to work there, and that store opened the door for lots of other Guatemalans. Nearly all my family has worked for Randall's.

And the Guatemalans helped Randall's. Then, Randalls had 15 stores. Now it has 70, in part because of the Guatemalan help.

Three years ago I opened this bakery. At first I was a little afraid, but my kids were grown, and they helped. All the family helped.

We were successful almost right away. I had a lot of friends. I don't know exactly how many Guatemalans are here, but there's a lot. The majority of our customers are Guatemalans. We help people remember their homes. We make Guatemalan breakfasts. Tostadas guatemaltecos.

Now I've opened more locations. Number Two and Number Three. Number Two, on Long Point, is a taqueria, too, because there are more Mexicans on Long Point. Here we mostly serve Central Americans: Hondurans, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans. In terms of bread, the different nationalities mix well. Now I see the Central Americans as more or less the same. That's what I learned in Houston, from getting to know people from different countries. But it's rare for a South American to come here. Their bread is different. The cultures are different. The food is very different.

We've kind of lost our customs. Here, business is hard. We only rest like an American. Only on Thanksgiving, Christmas. In Guatemala you have fiestas for everything. Holy Week, you take the whole week off.

Actually, we still observe customs that have to do with food or bread. For Holy Week we make pan grande, also called pan dormido, because it takes so long for it to rise. The Virgen del Rosario is the patroness of Guatemala. But we don't observe her feast day. I've even forgotten when it is. But for Christmas we do make the tamal de la navidad. It's with rice, tuna, cherries, pork.

I go to Guatemala more often now. The economy there is really bad. In 1980, the quetzal was one to one with the dollar. Now it's 7.80 per dollar.

My mother is almost 92, so I need to see her more. And she's the one with the recipes. People come here to ask for bread that we're not making, so I have to learn to make it. For example, las milojas, which is like a cheese pocket. And she gave me a recipe for xacas negras, a wheat bread.

I miss my country, and I think about going back. I want to spend my mother's last years with her. I'd probably open a bakery. — *Interview by David Theis*

Small Town River Oaks

Robin McCorquodale *is the author of the novels* Dansville *and* Stella Landry.

She still lives in River Oaks.

Robin McCorquodale in the shadow of the Huntington, which fills a field from her childhood where native plants once flourished.

When I wakened to the beginning of memory, I was living in River Oaks, 2920 San Felipe Road, in a time when, without exception, the accent on "Felipe" fell on the first syllable. From my nursery, I heard cars, not yet the fathers driving to work downtown in one of the city's two skyscrapers, but trash men, milkmen, or the newspaper boy, who arrived at the corner of Kirby and San Felipe in an open-bed truck. Saturdays, that boy came to our front door to collect for the *Houston Post*. Evenings, we received the *Chronicle* and the *Press*. The front page of the *Press* was pink, the *Chronicle* green, the *Post* without color.

To get the breeze from the south side of Westheimer, we opened our windows. We shut them only against the severest cold and rain. Electric fans buzzed on their stalks and the attic fan drew air from the prairie into our bedrooms. Fridays, after breakfast, the green grocer came in a wagon. When he blew his whistle, we stopped whatever we were doing and ran outside. He owned a farm beyond the railroad tracks and past the Gun Club. It was on the other side of Post Oak Road, in what is now the south edge of the Galleria. What interested me were not his vegetables, but his fat, gray mare, Clemmie, who wore blinders so she would never shy and bolt. Mondays, a knife and scissor sharpener crossed Kirby Drive on a big tricycle with a bell on the handlebars. He let us take turns ringing it.

My sister went to school across the street at River Oaks Elementary. The building was long, but it had only one story. Houses in River Oaks were required to have two stories and be set back at least 30 feet from the sidewalk. Residents could not build a wall around the front of their places. They could not be Jewish.

Our house had three bedrooms, a garage with a servant's quarters, and two bathrooms. In the back yard we had a playhouse, two swings, a sand pile, and a sliding board. In the summer, we played in aluminum tubs filled with water from the garden hose and invited Stuart and Maria Phelps from 3020 San Felipe to play in the tubs with us. Sometimes we walked to the Phelps' house and tried to catch butterflies with their net. Our friends Mary Anne and Carol Settagast lived on Mimosa. To get there from our house we had to cross Kirby and then an open field. We had to walk down a tunnel of Queen Anne's lace, nut grass, and milkweed. If we forgot to hold our arms close to our sides, red ants stung us and made us swell.

To the west of 2920 San Felipe was a path that led north from our house to Chevy Chase, to friends there, whom we could reach without crossing a street. Mrs. Langham lived immediately behind. Clark Gable had married her. She was older than he, his drama teacher. When they divorced, she married Mr. Langham. She owned a black tomcat, and to see him we knocked at the back door. In River Oaks, servants and children used the back doors. No one lived in the front of the houses. Next door to us on the east side lived the Sealys. From the top of our sliding board, we could see when Mrs. Sealy returned home, and when we went there, she listened to our stories about the men who came to our back porch looking for work and a hot meal. We had no work, so we gave them part of our lunch and a dime.

When I left River Oaks I was seven. Since then, I have lived in other parts of Houston, as well as in Austin, Oakland, New York, Versailles, and Paris. In 1974, home from an overseas assignment, my husband and I returned to River Oaks, to a house at 3470 Locke Lane. While we were living in New York, the membership of the River Oaks Country Club had remodeled their original building, designed by John Staub. The first time my three sons saw it, fresh from spending four years among the monuments of France, they asked, "Is that the Hotel de Ville?" The only horses I have seen in River Oaks are Shetland ponies in the front yard that abuts the country club. If you want your knives and scissors sharpened, you go to Buffalo Hardware. Indigent men no longer come to the back door or eat a hot meal on the back porch. We have no back porch; when my childhood house was remodeled in 1970, the porch was sacrificed for a garden room. Sometimes when I attend an event at St. John the Divine, I remember that I am praying on the site of the drug store where Patsy Leach and I drank ice cream sodas. Children do not cross Kirby now with their dogs loping freely beside them. I am not sure children walk anywhere in summer. Perhaps, acclimated to air conditioning, they can no longer tolerate heat.

Each morning I take a walk with Angelika Stillman, who lives on the corner of Locke and Clairmont. As we do Piping Rock, Meadowlake Lane, Wickersham, Overbrook — all of which were open fields when I was born — we watch as the mid-1930s houses are blasted and carried away. New ones, twice the size of the old, replace them. The cottage at 3459 Locke Lane was displaced by 6,000-square-feet of design, sans landscaping. A stucco house dominating the entire lot, save for a circular parking pad in front, replaced the '50s bungalow at 3440. Cars remain there all night. Even in River Oaks, people now park in their front yards.

The Settagast house is gone. The River Oaks Bank and the Huntington Condominiums now fill a field where native plants once thrived. The Hamill's Natchez plantation house on the Boulevard has been expanded, and it is lopsided. Last year, Connie Marmaduke sold her Mediterranean house on Olympia. She feared the buyers would raze her treasure, and they did. Angelika and I dread the time when, at the passing of its present owner, who is more than 90, the house at 3376 Inwood, with its gently classic Mount Vernon façade, the first John Staub house in River Oaks, gets the wrecking ball. What would it be like, we ask, to be a child today in a house on San Felipe Road? The weather here hasn't changed, but everything else has. — *Robin McQuorquodale*

Joe CT Chow greets namesakes at the annual Gee Tock Sam Tock family dinner.

A Family Affair

Joe CT Chow *works for the city of Houston's planning department and is treasurer of the Gee Tuck Sam Tuck Association.*

The Gee Tuck Sam Tuck Association is what we call a family association. It's members all share a family name, or a family tie, that goes back to China. Gee Tuck Sam Tuck actually has five family names — Chow, which can also be spelled in English Chou or Jeus or Joe; Wu or Woo; Tsai or Choy or Toy; Yung or Weng; and another Chow, which is spelled the same in English but is different Chinese characters, which can also be Tsao or Cho. There are about 12 family associations in Houston, all of them connected by their names. The biggest are the Lee, Chang, Wong, and Po family associations.

The whole idea of the family association was for people who were away from China, and who felt isolated. When I first came to Houston in 1965 as a student, I was that way. I think in 1965 there were about 3,000 Chinese in Houston. I happened to work for a gentleman who is a part of this association, and he sort of took me under his wing. He said, you're Chow, right? I said yes, but I'm from Hong Kong, and most of the organization members were from Canton. But he said they wouldn't know anyway, because I speak very good Cantonese. So I started hanging around with him. If you're a Chow, and you meet another Chow, because you have the same name, even though it's a national name, you go, "Oh, you're from the village next door to me." So you feel a little bit closer to them than to, maybe, the Wong who is from two villages away.

At that time they had the On Leong Association building downtown, right off McKinney and Chartres. Every family association would lease a little room in it and make that the association office. There would be the Gee Association, and then two doors down in the same building would be the Wong Association. On Leong means "trying to settle the people," and when new Chinese would come here, if they didn't know where to go, they'd go to On Leong. If they had language problems, somebody from there would help them out, that kind of thing. And then On Leong would direct them to their own family association, which would take much better care of them.

The Gee Tuck Sam Tuck Association had an area with a kitchen and a dining room, and on Sundays the ladies would cook while the men would play mahjong. That's how they would socialize, because on the other days everybody would be working.

At the On Leong Association on the third floor was a big meeting room, and the meeting room could hold about 400 people. So the family associations decided they wanted to do something to meet other Chinese in other family associations, and they said, well, Chinese New Year is the best time. We can cook a big dinner and invite people. So each family association would take one Sunday after the New Year and say, okay, this Sunday we're going to have a banquet in the meeting room and invite everybody. One week might be Wong, the next week might be Chan, the next week might be Gee Tuck Sam Tuck. For about two and half months, every Sunday you would have a banquet.

On Leong still exists, but they don't have their building anymore. About three years ago they decided to sell it, and the family associations had to move, because the new owner didn't want to rent out the rooms. Some associations got other offices, some just use the home address of one of their officers, like Gee Tuck Sam Tuck uses my home address.

One problem with the family associations today is language. A lot of the second and third and fourth generation don't speak Chinese. The Gee Family has completely turned over to the second generation, who speak only English. Chinese is a very limited second language. But in other associations the elders are in charge, and they want to hold on to the Chinese. A second problem is finances. A lot of the second and third generation don't feel they need to get together with this group of people so much. They're part of the American culture, they have friends who are American. So the only time they really get together is New Year's, when the father says, hey, we're having a family association dinner, you guys got to go. There are still first generation Chinese coming in, but they are more likely to be professionals, well educated, who can speak the language. These are not the sort of people who need much assistance, not the sort of people who would have to search out a family association.

We've been lucky that the tradition of spring banquets has continued. In the 1970s, when the Chinese restaurants got better, a lot of the family associations started moving out to them. At one time we would have 500 members attend, and we'd have to seat people in two shifts to get them all in. This year we had 200.

But we had more at the family dinner this year than last year. There seems to be a little resurgence, because of younger people going back to their roots. It's like with Bobby Moon, who works for Metro. He came over to Mississippi when he was two years old. His father's name was Chow something Moon, and the American immigration official thought, your last name is Moon, when his real last name was Chow, because in China the last name comes first. So Bobby became Bobby Moon instead of Bobby Chow. And I didn't even know he was a Chow, until he came to me and said, "I'm a Chow." And I felt like, we're family. — *Interview by Mitchell J. Shields*

Sister Olive Bordelon loses herself in the vastness of the Villa de Matel.

Mothers and Sisters

Sister Olive Bordelon *is the General Superior — the modern term for what used to be called the Mother Superior — of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word Congregation, headquartered in the Villa de Matel, on Lawndale Road in southeast Houston.*

The Villa de Matel was built for the congregation's move to Houston in 1925. This location was so far out of town, they wouldn't deliver the mail. It was rather swampy here. The young sisters sat at the gate and counted the number of trucks that came in to deliver dirt, to make sure we got all the soil we'd paid for. One of the sisters who did that counting just died.

The Villa, the building itself, is our center point. It reminds us of the women we're in communion with, and of our commitment to serve God's people. The whole building and environment is incarnational. They remind us of God's living presence. The chapel absolutely speaks of beauty, the way light comes through the stained glass windows. It calls us to prayer.

The porches are very important as well. I'm from the South, where you'd sit on the porch to say important things. When I told my father I was becoming a nun, we sat on the front porch to talk. Night is beautiful here too, when you can see the moon and stars. It's wonderful to have this much space, this many trees. What better way to see God's presence on earth than in nature?

This is a beautiful place, a holy space, an oasis in the middle of Houston. Anyone who treasures and values the holiness of God's presence is welcome. I see very spiritual people come in, including non-Christians. I see the reawakened need for silence, which we're learning so much about from the Eastern religions.

Our congregation was founded in Galveston. Texas was missionary territory then. I suppose it still is. The first women who came were from France. They came with the constitution and rules from another congregation. They were told to take that spirit, but to start a new congregation.

Those were courageous missionaries. In the first year, the first Mother Superior, Mother Blondine, contracted yellow fever and died. And in those days, when the sisters said goodbye to their parents, they knew they would never see their family again. That was policy. That's changed now. But they made that sacrifice to serve God.

We survived the 1900 Galveston storm. Every year we remember the ten sisters and 90 orphans we lost. The 1900 storm symbolizes the commitment of the sisters, not only the ones who died, but the sisters who survived. They didn't sit there and do nothing. They were part of the rebuilding of the city. Every year on September 8, all the sisters in the worldwide congregation stop what they're doing to sing "Mary, Queen of the Waves."

Mother Placidus Mulcahy, who was Mother Superior when the Villa was built, had a big say in its design. The architect, Maurice Sullivan, and she had a very good relationship. He was a wonderful architect, but Mother Placidus would have had her view heard. She insisted they drill through each column and fill it with concrete, to make sure the chapel would never fall. That wasn't in the original plan, but she had her mind set. You didn't say "no" to Mother Superior.

The Villa is the focal point of our congregation worldwide. Last December, we had

sisters from Kenya, El Salvador, Guatemala, Ireland, and the U.S. come for a meeting. About 176 came. Worldwide we're a small congregation, only 217 in total, so that was a great gathering.

About 70 people live here. Approximately 50 are in retirement. And the people who work in the various ministries, the hospitals and so on that we run, live here too. We have our archives, our heritage center. We have legislative advocacy programs for the poor. We're aggressive in pursuing the abolishment of the death penalty, Third World debt reduction, a number of advocacy programs. The sisters who direct these programs live here as well. I live in a little house down the street, so that at the end of the day I can get away from my work.

We're particularly interested in women's issues. We help women in every country get as much education as they can. So we're very involved with the world, but also very contemplative. That's the balance that we need: to both turn in and look out.

People are terrified of making lifetime commitments now, but I live my own vows one day at a time. It's very helpful to live in a community. It's more than just sharing a house with others. You become part of each other's lives. That's the goal.

In 1967, when I joined the congregation, my sister was living in Houston. She drove me here on that first day, but she was really afraid for me. "You can turn around. You don't have to do this," she kept saying. We saw the big lions by the front steps, and when we rang the bell, we heard a big key unlocking the door. The big door pulled back, and here was this very sedate sister all in black. I'm from a Cajun family, so you can imagine that this place with no noise seemed very strange to me.

They took me upstairs to put on my black uniform, with a little net on my head. Then we went back down to see my sister. She looked stunned. She was sitting right here in this parlor. That was the only room open to the general public at that time.

But my sister actually died here. She developed cancer at 46, and the congregation allowed me to have her at our retirement center. So the congregation became her family too. It was a beautiful experience of community. — *Interview by David Theis*

***Monica Fontenot-Poindexter** is president of the Houston chapter of Jack and Jill of America, a members-only social service and cultural club for African-American children ages two through 19. Founded 62 years ago by a small group of Philadelphia mothers, Jack and Jill today has chapters across the United States. Fontenot-Poindexter grew up in Jack and Jill, and today her two sons participate in it.*

Growing into Society

Jack and Jill was one of the reasons why I had a great childhood. It instilled the importance of volunteerism, and of giving back. And for a child, it was also about camaraderie — being around children whose parents all shared the same philosophy, about being successful, giving back, trying to be the best at whatever your vocation was. It gave you a sense of your individual importance to society.

Jack and Jill is a children's organization, but the membership goes to the mother, not the child. There is no major underwriter for the monthly activities. If we want to do some quality programming, we have to do it ourselves. That's just how it is.

I started when I was about four. The mothers prepared activities for us. A lot of times we got dressed up. I probably have a picture of myself in a cute velvet outfit with a lacy collar, standing in front of Jones Hall sometime in the 1970s. We'd go to the opera, the ballet, then afterwards we'd go to the Green Room. You had a sense of, "I'm special, I'm part of a special group of people who do fun things." That's why they stressed volunteerism so much. We learned at an early age that "to whom much is given, much is expected."

As a teen in Jack and Jill, you're responsible for raising money for our charitable foundation. Our favorite method was to have a teen dance instead of, say, a car wash. So everyone knew about us, because our parties were great. There might also have been some animosity, unfortunately. Some children might have wanted to be members, but it isn't simply a matter of saying, "Hi, I'm interested in Jack and Jill, I want to join." If the mother wasn't interested, or didn't have the resources, or whatever, then it wouldn't happen. There are some who are devastated, saying, "They're elitist.," and don't want any part of it. But others become part of Jack and Jill as adults.

In June the teens will have their annual conference. All the kids in the region will get together and elect officers. It 's like a miniature political convention. In 1978 I was at a national convention in Florida and met Jesse Jackson for the first time. The mayor of Dallas, Ron Kirk, grew up in Jack and Jill and was a regional teen president. Dr. Cornel West, a professor at Harvard, also grew up in Jack and Jill. So did Debbie Allen.

In 1980 the National Convention was in Houston at the old Shamrock Hotel. There were at least 300 teenagers there. They always had teen speaking contests. It was one of those things your mother forced you to do. You picked your theme, you wrote your whole speech. It usually included references to African-Americans who had made contributions to society. Someone taught you about delivery and presentation, how to make your entrance.

The first time I did it, I remember thinking, "I've created something I'm proud of. However, if I could get a proxy I would definitely get out of this!" But after you finished, even if you messed up, you weren't jeered. And then there were those children who would get up and mesmerize the crowd. You'd say, wow, she's going to be the next Barbara Jordan. And often those kids would go on to be prominent.

In the Houston chapter, we have our debutante ball every two years. It is a culminating event. There are lots of teas, luncheons, and parties honoring the debutantes. One of mine was at the Brownstone. At the ball, each girl makes a bow as the master of ceremonies reads about her high school accomplishments, travels, the name of her college, her major. It was a major moment.

Now that my sons are in Jack and Jill, a lot of the values are still the same. It's a traditionalist organization. Teens still have parties and picnics. You still know there are these high standards that are not ideals, but something you have to achieve or surpass.

With the advances in technology, though, some of our activities changed. For example, we're all given the task to find activities connected to computers so the children can get more exposure to them. And when I look back at *Up The Hill*, which is the Jack and Jill yearbook, a lot of those pictures had us in little suits, all dressed up. If there was an Easter Egg hunt, the little girls would be in frilly dresses, Maryjanes, and bonnets. The boys would be in knickers. Now that my sons are in Jack and Jill, they understand if they're going to a reception, they get their suit out. But if it's a picnic, they're going to be wearing jeans. — *Interview by Claudia Kolker*

Monica Fontenot-Poindexter and her two sons at the Houston Children's Museum.

Our Lady in the Second Ward

Petra Guillen *has lived in the same house in the Second Ward for more than half a century, and more than half her life. Born in Mexico, she came to Houston with her family in 1921.*

Petra Guillen at the Second Ward house that has been her home for half a century.

I remember when they laid the first stone for the new building of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in 1923. We had a big fiesta. People were working to get money to build the church. The people would make tamales and sell them to make money. Our Lady of Guadalupe has been the center of my life. Nobody better touch Guadalupe.

I can't imagine the neighborhood without the church. It's why I'm here. When I got married, I told my husband, "You have to promise to never take me away from my mother or from Guadalupe." Living with my mother, we had four kids. Our family was growing, and my husband wanted to buy a home. He wanted a better house, a better neighborhood. When my mother died, my husband said, "Now it's time to move." I said, "If you can move Guadalupe brick by brick, let's go."

My grandmother and mother were very devout. My grandmother would say, "Get up and get ready, let's go to Mass." We'd go to 6:30 Mass. Then we'd come back and get breakfast, then go to Guadalupe school. My husband went to Guadalupe school too, and so did my 13 children. Now five generations of my family has graduated from Guadalupe.

I was born October 19, 1919, in Matehuala, San Luis Potosi, Mexico. My mother brought me and my sister and my grandmother here when I was a year and ten months old. We came first to be with my uncle, my mother's brother. He had come in 1918. At the end of World War I they were bringing people to work at the Humble refinery. They cut the trees and cleared the land to build the refinery. We went to Baytown to live with him, but it was so far to go from Baytown to Houston to go to church that we decided to move to Houston. This was in 1921. There was no church in Baytown. We were already going every Sunday to Guadalupe, in the old building.

We had a nice neighborhood around here then. There were a lot of houses. Across from Commerce, they had a factory to make burlap sacks to pack potatos in. My mother used to work there. We used to have the A&P on Canal, but we called it "El Colorado" for the red fringe on the building. There was a drugstore, Canal Pharmacy. But there was nothing for kids to do. Mexican kids couldn't go farther than Delano Street, at Settegast Park. Our kids weren't allowed to go there.

There were a lot of whites living here then. I've lived in this house 54 years; I bought it from Jews named Sigfield. Whites lived next door too. First it was an all-white neighborhood. But by the 1920s and 1930s there were a lot of Mexicans living here. By the 1940s you could say that it was a Mexican neighborhood.

The Sociedad Mutualista started on this block. My uncle belonged. They'd have dances and meetings. But my mother wouldn't let me go. I didn't go to movies. I didn't even have a radio. We only had a Victrola. We'd play Mexican music and comedy records. When I was 16 or 17, my uncle took me to the movies, but he'd get the third degree from my mother. She was very protective. She wouldn't let me work. You could say she was very strict, but that's how things were.

We played outside in the yard with friends. My uncle did take me to the Azteca theater on Congress. And there were nightclubs. Mexico Bello was here the longest. It was on the north side. My uncle bought me a beautiful dress to take me to a dance. Grandma said, "You better ask her mom." Mom said, "You'd better return that dress."

They didn't let me have a boyfriend. When I got married in 1940, we went to live with my mother. The priest had to come and ask for my hand. They used to do that. I remember the priest coming to ask for my sister's hand when she got married. I got married in Guadalupe. After church there was food in my mother-in-law's house. It was very private.

After I got married, my husband and I used to walk to the Azteca and go to the movies. But my husband wouldn't let me work. He said, "There's a lot of discrimination out there, I don't want you to experience it." He said he was run out of a restaurant once. They told him, "We don't serve Mexicans here."

We used to have big, beautiful pastorelas in church. This was back in 1926, 1927. We'd have devils, angels, everything. A parishioner did this, Mr. Gonzalo Lopez. He also made plays about Our Lady, and about the good thief who died with Jesus. But after he got up in age, nobody did it anymore. We didn't do a posada this year. We're getting old, and the younger people are very busy.

My grandmother kept the traditions. But my mother was working, so we let some traditions go. They used to give candles to people when they came to church on Candelaria [February 2], but Father Steffes doesn't know that. He doesn't know all the traditions, and nobody reminded him to bring the candles. But it's still a very Mexican church.

People come from Tomball, Conroe, Pearland, Pasadena to attend our church. I think they come because of the fact that it honors Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of Mexico. It was the first church in Houston to honor her. I stayed in church all night the last December 12 [Guadalupe's feast day]. I told my husband not to look for me. I wanted to stay all through the night, to see what happens. — *Interview by David Theis*

Abdul Bhegani waits for the South Asian crowds in the ticket booth of of his theater.

A Visit to Bollywood

Abdul Bhegani *manages the West Bellfort Cinema 5, one of two Houston theaters that feature Hindi and Urdu language movies from India and Pakistan.*

In California, you have Hollywood. In India, you have Bollywood. And in Pakistan you have Lollywood.

Bollywood is what they call the movie industry in Bombay; Lollywood is near Karachi. Movies are important in South Asia. They make more of them there than anywhere else in the world except America, and maybe Hong Kong, though I think we have more than Hong Kong. Indian and Pakistani movies are popular not just in their own countries. Countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka depend on Indian movies, too. They're also big in Arab countries. The culture there finds a lot of the American movies too racy. The Indian movies are more family oriented. There are a lot of musicals, with singing and dancing.

Houston is a very big market for South Asian movies. New York is very big, and California is too. Generally, those are considered the one and two markets. But in some cases, when we call the movie distributors to give them our week's attendance, we rank right behind New York. In the U.S., when it comes to attendance at Indian and Pakistani movies, it's generally either New York, Houston, California, or New York, California, Houston.

There are two movie theaters in town that show South Asian movies exclusively. The other one is the oldest, it's been around for 20 years or more, but we're the biggest. When my brother came to this theater about three years ago, it was part English, part Hindi. He saw that there were hardly any people at the Hindi movies, and thought that was an opportunity. He knew that there are around 200,000 to 250,000 South Asians in Houston. My brother basically looked at the location and saw five big screens, and thought he could make something of it. So he talked to the owner, who was looking to make some changes, and offered to take over, and he did. We made it all Hindi. In the first two or three months there were maybe seven or ten cars parked outside every night. Recently, we had a movie that was sold out for two weeks straight. Every single show was full, the parking lot was full, and the side streets were full. So it has come a long way in three years.

We don't say we're an Indian theater or a Pakistani theater. We say we're South Asian, because it's Pakistanis, Indians, people from Bangladesh, people from Nepal and Sri Lanka. They all come, because there's a common bond in the language and the culture. Even though somebody may not be from India, they love to see Indian and Pakistani movies.

We're like a hub for the South Asian community. We provide them entertainment, which is a number one priority in their lifestyles. The reason for that is that it's the only way they can keep in touch with the culture, and keep in touch with each other. They go to their schools, work, jobs, and all that, and they get spread out. The American life is so fast, that if someone lives on the west side of town, and somebody else lives on the north side of town, they don't have a chance to get together. So they'll say, why don't we get together at the movies? So it's a meeting point in that sense.

It can be hard to know just how big the South Asian community is. In the late 1800s, people from India and Pakistan migrated; they went to Africa, to Arabia, to South America, to places like Trinidad. Then a lot of those migrated to America. So what happens is that when people give you numbers, when they say that the figure for South Asians is 175,000 or so, they're just looking at those who came directly from India or Pakistan, not at another 60,000 to 80,000 who stopped in another country along the way, but kept their Indian identity. We try to cater to that population as well. I'm part of that population. I have never been to India or Pakistan. My parents migrated to East Africa before I was born, then we left Africa in the 1970s to come to the United States.

On average we have a new movie once a week. Sometimes we get two a week. There's no way we could show them all, because there are so many that are made. Recently, though, because of the earthquake in India, production has slowed down; all the stars are out raising money for charities. So they actually stopped making movies in certain sections of the country.

We get very few people from non-Indian backgrounds who want to see Indian movies. There are some; I recall one case where a man was planning to travel to India, so he came to see the movies to get an idea of what the country was like. He was jumping from movie to movie.

When you look around Houston, you see people who are in a Western mode of thinking. They send their kids to Western schools, their kids take up Western culture. They want their children to be part of the Western world. But when it really comes down to it, they want the best of both East and West. Mom and pop remain attached to their roots. And they'd like a way to let their kids know about them. The movies play a big part in that. — *Interview by Mitchell J. Shields*

Jack Lapin on the site where his parents' delicatessen once stood.

Houston's Lower East Side

Jack Lapin *is a real estate lawyer who has been active in national Jewish affairs. He now lives in River Oaks.*

I arrived in Houston from Poland in October of 1938 with my parents and my brother. I was seven, and the Houston in which I found myself was still essentially a small town, having a population of approximately 375,000. We immediately moved into what was then the city's equivalent of the Lower East Side of New York, an area now south of I-45 bounded by McGowen, Holman, Austin, and Hutchins streets. It was a part of town inhabited primarily by immigrants, lower middle-class Jews, and blue-collar workers.

We originally lived in the upper story of a small duplex on Chenevert across from Elizabeth Baldwin Park, and every Monday night during the summer there was a free movie shown in the park. I still remember how thrilled I was with the movies, which were essentially serials, and which left us hanging at the end of each episode, breathless for the next Monday night to see how the characters would get out of their predicaments. In addition to the movies, the park was equipped with Ping-Pong tables —I became quite a good player — and a basketball court.

After living on Chenevert for several years we moved to a bungalow at 1710 Dennis, which was across the street from a tiny delicatessen that my father bought and which he operated during World War II. A substantial number of Jews lived in this area, and my life was bounded by what was essentially a Jewish neighborhood. I attended Allen Elementary, located at the corner of Chenevert and Cleburne, and then Johnson Junior High. At Johnson, after my regular classes were done I attended Hebrew classes in the same building; I also attended Sunday school at Congregation Beth Israel, which was at the corner of Holman and Crawford. My parents did not own a car, nor was there a need for a car, as I was able to walk to all of these places.

The tiny store in which, except for the Jewish holidays, our entire family worked seven days a week, and where in the back we ate all of our meals, was not just a place I worked every day after school, on weekends, and during school vacations. Rather, as I think about it now, it was an additional classroom. During World War II, we had the only delicatessen in the city. Grocery stores in those days did not have deli sections, and our store was truly a miniature Jewish community center, a meeting ground for Houston Jews from all walks of life. I can still vividly remember the crowds on Saturday and Sunday mornings. You could hardly get into the store. In its own way, our store was as much a Jewish institution and fixture in Houston as Lindy's was in New York.

It was in that store that I listened daily as Jews gathered together and talked of plans to help other Jews — this one to escape to America, that one to overcome an unexpected financial crisis, and a third one to recover from some other of life's bitter experiences. My entire life was bound up in this neighborhood: public school, religious school, Sunday school, work, and all my friends. Everything was done in the neighborhood, and there was no thought of any need to go outside it for anything. The area in which I lived had its own motion picture theater, the Sunset Theater, drugstore, and barbershop. Even our family physician had his office in the neighborhood.

The only time I can recall leaving the neighborhood was to get on the bus and go to the Public Library downtown. From my earliest years I was fascinated by books, and I remember vividly how proud I was to have a library card and to come home on the bus from the main branch of the library with a stack of books. Other than this one adventure, I don't recall going downtown for any reason until I became at least 13. The idea of going to a restaurant outside the neighborhood was unheard of.

As I reflect now upon the lives my children have lived, I realize that the Houston I remember has disappeared completely. All of the grocery stores now have deli sections, and the Jewish community itself is spread through the city and beyond. The idea today of a young person walking to school, Hebrew School, or Sunday school, is beyond belief. The neighborhoods in this city are few and far between, and the close-knit community life that I led as a youngster has disappeared. In almost every respect, it was truly a different life. — *Jack Lapin*

Learning to Be British

Grainne O'Reilley-Askew *is headmistress of the British School of Houston, which opened last September at 4211 Watonga Boulevard.*

The British School of Houston is part of a private, for-profit organization that has two other schools in the United States. The first was in Washington, and the second was in Boston. Houston was not expected to be the third, but when people learned what we were doing, there was a considerable clamor to have us open here. There has been a problem, primarily in the oil companies, in getting British senior executives to relocate here, because the executives didn't want to live in an area where there wasn't a British school.

Almost anywhere in the world you move you can find schools that operate using the British system. The only exception has been the United States. The chap who came up with the idea of opening British schools in America, Bob Findley, owned an education relocation company in England. He had been the head of two British schools abroad, and he began to realize there were considerable problems trying to place senior executives in America because of the lack of British system schooling. He approached the British department for education about this, and they were very supportive of the idea morally, but there was no money. The French fund education abroad, but the British don't. So he realized if he came to America, he would have to do so as a private venture.

The British school system is not really terribly easy to dip in and out of. There are certain building blocks that one has to have. If a child has been outside the system for a while, it can be difficult for him or her to slot back in, and that's what concerns a lot of parents. They want to know that if after a few years in Houston they return to the United Kingdom, their child can slot right in at a U.K. school.

According to the local consulate, at any one time there are about 40,000 Brits living in Houston. These are citizens of the United Kingdom who will be staying here for a period of time and will then most likely either go back to the U.K. or move on to another country and continue to be part of the international community. Those are the people we serve. Our students are about 70 percent British, and the other 30 percent is international and American. I think about 12 percent of our students are American citizens, which is much less that in our other two schools. The Washington School is about 33 percent American, 33 percent international, and 33 percent U.K. And Boston is nearly all American. So in that way, Houston is unusual.

We have just over 100 students at the moment. We opened with 75, and we have over 150 registered for September. So we're growing incredibly quickly. I've already had to make two trips back to the U.K. this year to recruit staff. The class teachers are pretty much all British, because they have to know the system. My French specialist is a native speaker, so obviously she couldn't be either British or American. My music teacher is American, and a couple of my assistants are American. But that's about it. Everyone else on the staff is British.

All of our resources and supplies are ordered from the U.K. and shipped over. The classrooms look like British classrooms. When we bought this school, that wasn't the case. Its environment was not typically British. It had been a high school, and it was painted battleship gray. There wasn't much natural light, and there were corridors and corridors of lockers. Well, we don't have any of that at home. We tend to have light, airy classrooms. Even our older buildings, our Victorian buildings, were built with a lot of natural light. They have very long, multiple windows in each class. So we had to do a lot of work to really make the building appropriate for teaching young children, to give it that sort of welcoming feel that a British primary school in particular would have. We repainted the walls with lots of bright colors, added windows to classrooms, took out the lockers and put in open storage cubicles at the child's level. As much as we could, we tried to make it look like a school you would walk into in the U.K. The only thing we don't do here that we would do at a similar school in England is RE, religious education. There, we have to do it by law. Here, we can't do it by law.

We really do have delightful children here. And it's interesting, because they've all shared the same experience. They have all come from either the U.K. or somewhere in Europe, somewhere in the world, and they all know what it's like to be uprooted. All the children have to wear a school uniform — it's shorts or trousers for boys and girls, and polo shirts and a cap. The girls may wear a little summer dress instead if they choose. And there's a red cardigan. So it's red, white, and blue. It's a nice uniform, very practical.

We feel that we are beginning to be a focal point for the British community. There hasn't really been a focal point before, because we're an assimilated group, generally speaking. What we tended to find was that one would have a large group of parents who knew each other socially, but only because they all happened to be with the same oil company. But now people are making links through the school rather than just through their professional groups. Also, the Daughters of the British Empire are discussing making us a focus of their activities, you know, using our site. Obviously, we are still very new, but we're hoping that we will become more and more a center of the community, a little island of something British in Texas. — *Interview by Mitchell J. Shields*

Grainne O'Reilley-Askew greets some new and future members of the British Empire.

Shirley Viray in the corridors of LBJ Hospital.

The Manila Symphony

Shirley Viray, *a native of the Philippines, is assistant nurse manager of labor and delivery at LBJ Hospital. Some 28,000 Filipino nurses came to the U.S. in the late 1980s and early 1990s under a visa program meant to ease a nationwide nursing shortage. Those who came to Houston joined other Filipino nurses who had already made themselves an integral part of the city's medical community. The profusion of Filipinos working in area hospitals led one medical student to term the sound of their voices Houston's Manila symphony.*

There are maybe 50,000 Filipinos in Houston. We're all scattered. There's a few Filipinos in every subdivision. There are quite a few in my neighborhood. They work in different fields.

I was one of the first Filipino nurses in Houston. I came to Jeff Davis Hospital in the early '80s with four other nurses. There were not many Filipinos living here then. We all four lived together, but we were so lonely, so homesick. After eight months my husband came too.

Every year after that they recruited more and more, and the groups got bigger. The groups would have maybe 20 nurses. Most of them went to Jeff Davis and Ben Taub. The groups kept coming until maybe the late 1980s. Then they stopped hiring unless you already had a visa. They didn't want to go to the trouble of getting you a visa.

There was a shortage of nurses here then, and there are a lot of nurses back home, lots of nursing schools. Maybe they say we're good nurses. We work in labor and delivery a lot, and mostly on the night shift. There are only three Filipinos on day shift with me.

We speak Tagalog at work only if the group is all Filipino. Sometimes Tagalog is useful when we speak to a Spanish patient. Tagalog is almost like broken Spanish. We say "kumusta," which is "como esta." I am from the north of the Philippines; the dialect of the south is more like Spanish. Still, people tell me I speak good Spanish because we also say "cabeza" in Tagalog. I just say "What?"

We have associations to help us stay connected to Filipino life. They started to form in the mid-'80s. My husband and I belong to the Filipino-American Association. There's also a Tagalog Association. During big holidays we have picnics in the park. We have a Christmas party. It's nice to be away from work and to socialize. Most of my friends are Filipino. They are my extended family.

We have two or three Filipino newspapers printed here in Houston, and now the papers from back home are on the Internet, so it's much easier to stay in touch. My parents live here now, so I only go back every five years or so. If I go back in summer it's really bad. It's much hotter and more humid than here, and now I'm used to air conditioning. Only the people with money have air conditioning in the Philippines.

We still keep some traditions. We go to church and parade our patron saints. During Christmas season we go from one church to another until Christmas day. That's called Simbang Gabi, and it starts on December 15. We're Catholics, but there are no churches in Houston that cater mostly to Filipinos.

Some businesses do, though. There are Filipino restaurants near the Medical Center, because of the nurses. On the north side, where I live, there are two Filipino restaurants, and three stores owned by Filipino businessmen who sell all kinds of things. I mostly cook Filipino foods, like adobo, which is chicken or pork and soy sauce with some garlic. The one Americans like is pansit, noodles with vegetables and shrimp. And they love our egg rolls. It's easy to find the ingredients.

And there are alot of videos. You can watch Tagalog movies all day if you want to. One restaurant even has karaoke in Tagalog. But Houston is home now. We became American citizens. It was an easy choice. — *Interview by David Theis*

Safe within the confines of an eruv, an Orthodox woman wheels her baby down the street on the Sabbath.

A World Contained

Etan Mirwis, *a native of Brooklyn, owns a property management company. He and his wife Valerie, together with their five children, (seen on the cover) live in Houston's South Braeswood Orthodox Jewish community.*

On all the other days of the week, I'm a typical American. Then my whole life changes on the Sabbath, which starts at sundown Friday. The exact hour changes each week; I have it in my Palm Pilot. I plan each Friday in advance so I leave work with plenty of time to get out of my car before sundown. On a typical Friday, you'll get home and see other Orthodox people walking throughout the neighborhood — walking, because they can't drive, work, or create anything new on the Sabbath.

People will be hurrying to drop off cakes or presents at each other's houses. In summer, everyone has been baking challah [bread for the Sabbath] and the air smells delicious. Then it becomes like a Broadway show: you'll see one person on the sidewalk, then a couple, then more and more join them shoulder to shoulder on the way to synagogue. They had to make the sidewalk extra wide on this street because of all the people who walk together.

You don't see kids out playing or biking anywhere. They're all bathing and getting ready to go to synagogue. The adults are also bathing, and shaving. The lights in everyone's houses are set to go on automatically. The water goes into an urn because you can't boil water on the Sabbath. A warming pan goes on the stove to heat food, because you can't turn on the burner on the Sabbath.

Back in the early 1980s, Fondren Southwest was loaded with Jews. There were Jews in the oil and gas industry, South African Jews, Reform and Conservative Jews. But there was no Orthodox enclave. Then at one point, about ten young Orthodox families from another part of Houston got together, and with a local outreach rabbi, said, "There's a new, trendy area, with gorgeous houses, why don't we start an Orthodox Jewish synagogue?" That's when they began moving here, to the Northfield subdivision.

Today the South Braeswood area has three Orthodox synagogues within walking distance of each other. There are probably 175 Orthodox Jewish families in this community altogether. I work in the Memorial area, but it doesn't matter where I work; the point is that I have to live within walking distance of my synagogue. I even know a guy who works in San Antonio but commutes here because he has to be here for the Sabbath.

The reason is that in order to have a functional Orthodox Jewish community, you need certain amenities. At the absolute minimum, you need at least ten Jewish men — a minyan, which is a quorum according to Jewish law. You don't even need a rabbi; you can get together and pray in somebody's house. For community longevity, though, you want a rabbi. And you need good Jewish day schools, access to Kosher foods, Orthodox synagogues. And you need something called an eruv. To understand what that is, you have to know the difference between Orthodox and other forms of Judaism. We believe that Moses didn't spend 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai only receiving the Ten Commandments. When he came down from Mount Sinai there was written law, but there was also an oral law, given directly from God, because Moses had a million questions. These laws are like addendums or oral traditions. These traditions were handed down over the centuries until they were finally codified in year 200 of the Common Era.

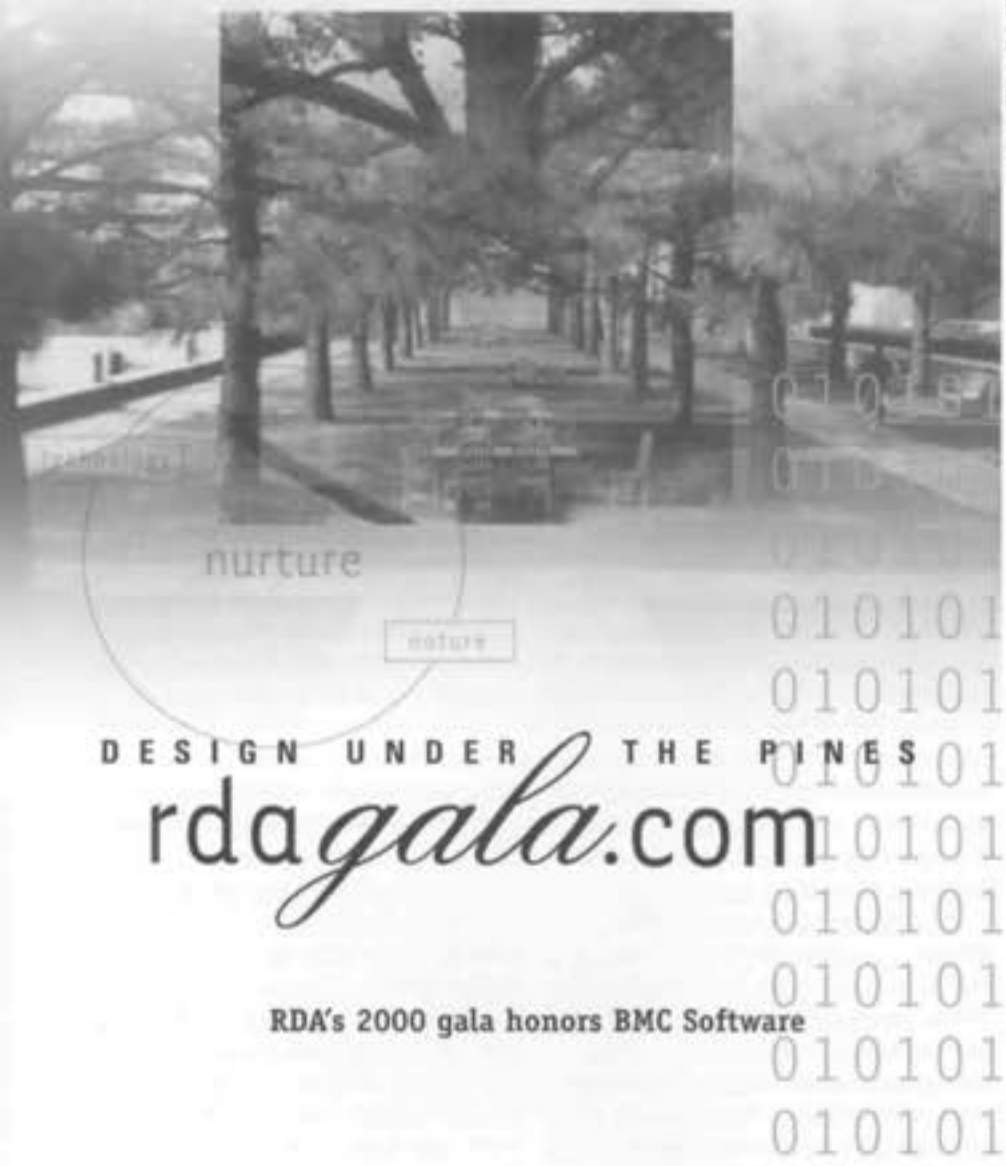
Part of the oral law concerns keeping the Sabbath: you weren't allowed to leave the city limits. Within the limits, you could do certain things like carrying, as long as you didn't work. The details are intricate, but basically within the city limits some of the strictest Sabbath rules could be relaxed. In ancient times those limits were set by a wall. Today, we don't have walled cities. So instead an eruv is constructed to permit people to carry on the Sabbath outside their homes. The eruv functions as a symbolic modern-day wall.

In our community, the eruv is defined by a closed circuit of wires, telephone poles, gates, and other off-ground barriers. This resolves the number one issue on the Sabbath: women who want to push baby carriages. Outside an eruv, you may not carry or transport anything. Without an eruv, Orthodox women with kids are essentially stuck at home for 25 hours!

When I start home from work, I cross the eruv right near my house. You can see the string at the top of a pole — it's a fishing line. That's part of the eruv. I put it up the week I moved into the neighborhood, about five years ago. Normally, there will be a sign or flag to say that the eruv is up. In Brooklyn, there's an eruv hotline you're supposed to call if you see it's down anywhere. But here, because it mostly follows telephone lines and other natural boundaries, it's hardly ever down. The rabbi has an e-mail list, and on Thursdays he sends out an e-mail to let the community know if the eruv is up or down.

We've got about an hour before Sabbath starts tonight. Just now, a friend called me. He needs a computer-generated prescription. They wanted to find out if my non-Jewish housekeeper could come over later to push the "enter" button on their computer. How did they know this was permissible? They called the rabbi first.

I see my neighbors seven days a week in some capacity. You'll see them at the five or six Kosher restaurants in town, especially the King David Deli or Saba's pizzeria. You see the same people the next day at synagogue — it's not just a religious center, it's a community center. And because the Orthodox Jews who live in Houston are often far away from their families, we are always eating at each other's houses. At Sabbath dinner we sit here at the table, which faces the street, and see neighbors walking by constantly. Even if it's 100 degrees out, they're always walking, and I'm waving, waving, motioning them to come in: "Come join us. Have some tea." — *Interview by Claudia Kolker*



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DESIGN UNDER THE PINES

rdagala.com

RDA's 2000 gala honors BMC Software

BY LINDA L. SYLVAN

Photo by Phyllis Steed

A slight November chill in the air didn't keep the Rice Design Alliance's 14th annual fundraising gala from being the hottest event in Houston last fall. The 2000 version of the gala, dubbed RDAgala.com and held "under the pines" on BMC Software's beautifully landscaped west Houston campus, once again broke all records in terms of attendance, underwriting contributions, and auction receipts. More than $400,000 was raised to support RDA programs, among them *Cite*, in the new millennium.

The evening honored BMC Software for design excellence in a workplace environment. Tables for dining were set up outdoors in a venue that reminded many guests of a European park setting, while California heaters and a tent that covered items being offered up for a silent auction provided warmth for the gala's attendees.

Concern about possible rain showers led W.S. Bellows Construction, which is working on two new buildings for BMC, to prepare an entire floor of one of their under-construction towers to house the gala's guests in case of a downpour. The worries, though, turned out to be unnecessary. The Saturday, November 4 evening was cool and crisp, but it was never wet.

More than 900 guests were welcomed to BMC by gala chairs Kimberly and James Burnett, along with RDA president Tom Bellows and underwriting chairmen Marilyn Archer and Bill Donovan. Burnett, a landscape architect who has long admired the landscaping at BMC, was among those who first decided that outdoors on the company's campus would be a perfect location for the RDA Gala. RDA president Bellows then clinched the deal with then-BMC president and CEO Max Watson. At the gala, Watson was presented RDA's design excellence award, a "Magnolia" Steuben glass bowl donated by Neiman Marcus Town & Country.

The gala's setting was the heart of BMC Software's 25-acre campus, which offers the company's employees opportunities for recreation to go along with their work. One of the primary goals of BMC's building and campus design was to create a facility that would attract and retain talented personnel, something vitally important in the highly competitive software industry. The corporate headquarters complex features two high-rise buildings, Phase I by Keating, Mann, Jernigan & Rottet and Phase II by DMJM Keating. Phases III and IV of the complex, designed by DMJM, are under construction. When completed, they will double BMC's current facilities. The campus grounds contain mature live oaks and pine trees, granite fountains and sculptures, slate walkways, and herb and flower gardens. BMC employees enjoy state-of-the-art facilities in addition to amenities such as a basketball court, a fitness center, outdoor recreation areas, and two restaurants with four resident chefs.

Environment chair Larry Lander was assisted by Rebeka Johnson in designing the "high-tech, high-touch" theme that had been specified by the Burnetts for the gala. The pines were hung with cascading flowers on candelabras, while the centerpieces on the dining tables featured orchids, lilies, and natural grasses in bamboo containers. Fiona McGettigan and Alan Krathaus of Core Design designed the gala invitation and program as well as the graphics for the gala's environment, graphics that included a colorful "RDAgala.com" logo projected on the BMC parking garage that acted as a beacon for the gala's guests.

The crowd of architects, design professionals, and urban dwellers bid hotly on more than 200 items featured in a silent auction organized by Dee Ann Rogers and her talented committee. Interior designer Joan Miller, artist friend Pam Johnson, and her husband Carl lent their designer touch to the presentation of the auction items. Among those items was a fine selection of furniture gathered together by Andrea Crawmer from the lines she carries at the ofis by Powell. Some of the more popular items up for bid were getaways to Puerto Aventuras, Mexico, Steamboat Springs, New Orleans, Big Bend, Galveston, and any one of the Omni Hotel resorts. Rice architecture students assisted in setting up the silent auction and acted as spotters at the brief live auction of works by artists Jesús Bautista Moroles and Edward Lee Hendricks.

Both artists are represented in BMC's art collection. Moroles' sculpture, *Chinese Ocean Mist*, was snapped up by Max Watson for his company's new campus, and Audrey Marnoy was the winning bidder on Hendricks' kinetic sculpture, *1999 XVI*. Gallery owner Robert McClain of Robert McClain & Co. facilitated the artists generous donation of artwork.

Jackson Hicks of Jackson & Company supervised the delicious dinner for the guests, which began with a steaming bowl of cream of mushroom soup. Yvonne Washington and the Mix provided the evening's entertainment.

The RDA board of directors would like to thank all of the gala committee chairs and volunteers as well as the RDA staff for making the 2000 gala such a success. We would also like to recognize our underwriters, contributors, and auction donors for their generous contributions.


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1. Max Watson, Kimberly Burnett, Tom Bellows
2. Larry and Charlotte Wholey
3. Deborah Brochstein and Steven Hecht
4. Guy Hagstette and Sylvia and Randall Walker
5. Robert McClain and Cynthia Cage
6. Jaimes and Kimberly Burnett
7. Regina Ramirez and Jesús Bautista Morales
8. DeeAnn and Yandell Rogers III
9. Jeff DeBevec and Sarah Baliuskas
10. Edward Lee Hendricks and Jo Massey
11. Kay Watson and Laura Bellows
12. William F. Stern and Rick Keating
13. Carrie Shoemake and Carl and Pam Johnson
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17. Stewart Robinson, Marilyn Archer, and Lindsey Robinson
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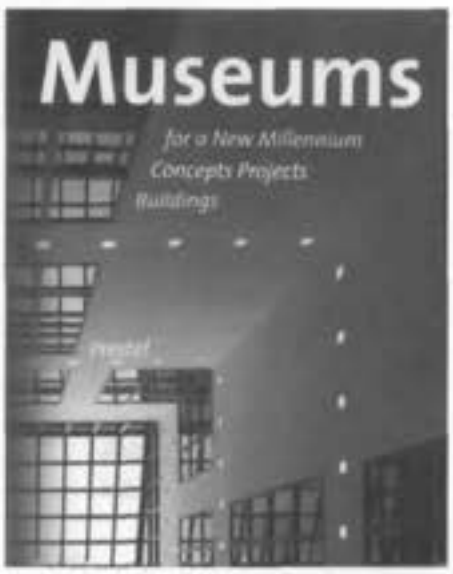
Michaelyndino on the Blvd.
Michelangelo's Italian Restaurant
Mode, Inc.
Mogbell Energy & Development
Moody Gardens Hotel
Jane Moore Interiors
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston & Rienzi
National Shade L.P.
Neumann Rousse/ Public Relations
93 Q 92.9
Office Furniture Marketing
Office Furniture Unlimited
Office Pavilion
The ofis by Fossil
OMNI Hotel
Ounie's Table
Paoli Furniture
Pappas Design
Pecketwood Garden Foundation
Pier's Italian Restaurant
Planetary Cycle
Plus Klaus, Inc.
Prego
Kathleen Pressler
The Radney Day Spa
The Raven Grill
Redwood Grill
Dick Reeves
Cindy and Marshall Reid
Reidy's Antiques
Rizzo Marocci Gallery/Cunningham Art Services
Rice University Athletics
Rice University Campus Store
Ridgway's
The R.W. Calhoun Rose Hall Junkanoo
River Oaks Bookstore
Charlotte Roberts and J. Schumacher & Co.
Dee Ann and Yandell Rogers III
Rosenbaum Fine Art
Rachel Dillaz Wright Inc.
Ruggles
Nolan Ryan Foundation
Karen Sachar Photography
Saint Arnold Brewing Company
St. Louis Cardinals
Saint Street Swim School
Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort
Joseph G. Santo Lucito/Follett Ventures
Schenck & Company
Mary Shannon and Dwight Scott
Sarah Shoemake
The Silver Shop
Six Flags Houston
Mr. and Mrs. Louis H. Skidmore Jr., AIA
Sloan/Hall
Society for the Performing Arts
Solero — A Tapas Restaurant and Bar
Spinneybeck
The Stables Restaurants, Inc.
Stages Repertory Theatre
Star Pizza
Ste. Genevieve Wines
Steelcase Inc.
Sterzel & Associates
Trish Straugmeyer Photography
Sunset Settings
Superior Furniture
Surroundings
Teala's Mexican Restaurant
Terminal C
Texas A & M University Press
Texas Gallery
Theatre Under the Stars
Thompson + Hanson
Tootsies
Tracey Amanda Jewelry
Gabriel Tran Photography
Travel Agency in the Park
Treebeards on Market Square
Tricia Tuta
Anne Tucker
Tuohy Furniture/Hart Tovar/Jim Mezzacappa
Tutto Bene! Italian Family Restaurant
The University Club
Uptown Houston
Uptown Limousine Service
Vitra Furniture/Don Collier
The Warwick
Watkins Schatte Culver Gardner
Ira Webb
The Westin Galleria & Westin Oaks Houston
Whole Earth Provisions Company
Windsor Court Hotel
The Women's Institute of Houston ■



The Art of the Museum

Designing the New Museum: Building a Destination *by James Grayson Trulove. Rockport Publishers Inc., 2000. 192 pp, illus., $50.*
Museums for a New Millennium: Concepts, Projects, Buildings *edited by Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Angeli Sachs. Prestel, 2000. 224 pp., illus., $65.*

Reviewed by Barrie Scardino

Contemporary museums can be compared to medieval cathedrals for the art they hold, their iconic architecture, their mission of enlightenment, their public function as a gathering place, and the community spirit and pride that leads to their construction. And for the first time in years, they can also be compared in terms of popularity: in the United States alone, more than 50 new museums are currently under construction. Add on what's happening worldwide, and it's clear that museums are a booming business. Appropriately then, two new books take a serious look at museums built in the last decade. Though the authors of each chose to discuss approximately two dozen outstanding museum projects, there is no overlap. Both books examine museum buildings one by one, and both are beautifully illustrated. But beyond those surface similarities, the books are quite different. One takes us through a quick gallery tour of new museums, while the other goes further and actually helps us understand what we see.

The tour comes in *Designing the New Museum*. (The book itself is rather preciously designed. The cute graphics that sprinkle the pages are distracting, and when they contain information such as page numbers or photo captions, the type is too fine, small, and difficult to read.) The subtitle, "Building a Destination," and the publisher's statement that museums have emerged as major tourist meccas imply that *Designing the New Museum* is a travel guide, which it thankfully is not. Its appendices do include a directory of the museums shown, with addresses, information on days and times open, admission fees, and the like, but the book is more essentially a collection of lovely pictures. Descriptions are brief and don't contain consistent information, which can be frustrating. Dates of construction are missing, square footage is sometimes there sometimes not, and building materials are either detailed in an overly explicit manner or not mentioned at all.

The forward, by David Levy, director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., is an interesting, well-written piece, but one that has little relation to the rest of the book. After a concise overview of museum design since 1950, Levy talks about Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, then discusses the development of a large addition to the Corcoran, also by Gehry. Both Bilbao and Gehry, though, are missing from the text of *Designing the New Museum*.

As superficial as the book can be, it has value in the museums author James Grayson Trulove chose to examine and the opportunity it provides to "read" ample photographs, which in themselves say a lot about new museum design. Trulove has divided the book into three sections: art museums, specialized art museums, and other museums. The inclusion of little known and small projects is a plus. Places such as the North Carolina Pottery Center, the tiny Rodin Gallery in Seoul, Korea, and the new wing of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam are worth seeing, and surely would not appear in most museum anthologies.

Trulove also includes several interesting examples of adaptive reuse, where a large addition has been made to an existing structure or a new museum is housed in an older building. William P. Brueder's Gerard L. Cafesjian Pavilion at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona is stunning in its new curving facade in front of an old theater, which was gutted, leaving exposed timber trusses and open galleries that can be reconfigured for special exhibitions. Bruner/Cott adapted and added to a 19th-century industrial complex in North Adams, Massachusetts, to create Mass MoCA, a museum campus of 13 acres. Some galleries of Mass MoCA have been left as unimaginably huge spaces, perfect for contemporary art; others combine high-tech lighting with warm, exposed brick.

Polshek Partnership Architects (which is currently designing the Clinton library in Little Rock) created a new arts center for Stanford University by blending a late 19th-century neoclassical building with new construction. As with many of the museums shown in this book, curving walls and skylights dominate the new architecture. Bohlin Cywinski Jackson created exhibition space for the Pittsburgh Regional History Center in a warehouse once used to store ice cut from Lake Chautauqua. And in Columbus, Ohio, Arata Isozaki wrapped a monumental 1920s neoclassical museum with a concrete curved shell ribbed with steel, creating what might be the most interesting and innovative building included among those Trulove presents.

The Audrey Jones Beck Building of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is among the new museums Trulove considers worth notice. Of Rafael Moneo's creation, Trulove says, "The porte-cochere and elegant bronze doorframes at the entrance, in essence, bow to the original building. Pass this limestone box and wonder at the monolithic architecture. Walk inside, though, and feel exhilarated."

The Beck, however, doesn't make it into *Museums for a New Millennium*. Why? Because even while claiming to highlight "the most important and expressive art museums designed or built in the last decade," the book limits itself to only one project per firm. For Moneo, that project was his Museums of Modern Art and Architecture in Stockholm, which was completed in 1998.

Contrasting the discussions of Moneo's Houston and Stockholm museums points up the differences between *Designing the New Museum* and *Museums for a New Millennium*. In his book, Trulove devotes four short paragraphs of discussion to the Beck, ending with, "Moneo devised a unique system of overhead lanterns to provide a consistent amount of daylight to the galleries while filtering out damaging ultraviolet rays. From the exterior the lanterns resemble old-fashioned air-conditioning units." Discussing almost identical skylights found on Moneo's Stockholm building in *Museums for a New Millennium*, writer Rita Capezzuto notes that the architect's "interests seem to have been translated into an increasingly in-depth investigation of the use of natural light. And yet, paradoxically, perhaps one of the most obvious signs of his Stockholm museum's integration into the urban landscape is provided by a nighttime view of the artificial light from the lantern skylights scattered throughout the roof of the building. It is an easily recognizable lighting scheme, but it is homogenous with that of the adjacent buildings and more generally, of the city." Seven of *Designing the New Museum*'s eight pages on the Beck are devoted to glitzy interior and exterior photographs. *Museums for a New Millennium*'s six pages on the Stockholm museum include a considerably longer discussion, preliminary sketches, site and floor plans and sections, and an important aerial view showing the museum's urban context. Interior and exterior photographs are small, but no less informative.

Museums for a New Millennium initially served as the catalog for an exhibition initiated by the Art Centre Basel. However, its scholarly tone and illustrative materials stand on their own. This book contains thoughtful essays by eminent architectural historians and critics on each museum selected for inclusion, providing a good deal more text and, consequently, more information. In his introduction, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani presents the idea that museums should be designed to show art, adding that, "Looking at museum architecture of the 1980s, it becomes obvious that the

requirement of creating space for exhibitions was often treated as the poor cousin next to the primary importance of architecture as urban, typological, and form-giving experiment." As projects in this book show, such neglect may not have ended with the '80s.

And as at least one of the book's essays make clear, not everybody thinks that's such a bad thing. Kurt Forster's piece on the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is particularly fascinating in its argument that Gehry's giant circus-tent sculpture, standing at the most recent end of a continuum of museum design, is everything it should be. Gehry's museum appears to be a good example of what Lampugnani complains about; it has been criticized as a terrible place to show art even while being a wonderful piece of art itself. Forster, though, suggests that such an argument is no longer relevant. He argues that the Guggenheim has ushered in a new era of "franchise" museums, museums designed not for collecting and hoarding, but for showing and telling in a continually transforming way. He calls museums the "unsuspecting heirs of the theater," a view that echoes Trulove's ideas about cultural tourism. Forster also claims that Gehry's Guggenheim revives an architecture of excess that has lain dormant since the Borromini's lavish Renaissance buildings. "Overweight, overdone, and overwhelming" become compliments to this theatrical architecture.

Museums for a New Millennium's final few highlighted projects are still in design or under construction. Computer simulations and drawings, though, give a good idea of what they will likely become. Tadao Ando's Fort Worth museum, Steven Holl's museum in Bellevue, Washington, and, finally, Zaha Hadid's plans for the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, while all very different, illustrate new geometries made possible through computer design, a tool that will continue to transform monumental architecture in the 21st century.

Museums for a New Millennium manages to include work of many of the most celebrated architects of our time, and concludes with brief but relatively complete biographies. This volume, then, doubles as a cogent analysis of new museum design and a general reference work as well. *Designing the New Museum* may be an attractive publication, but it should be considered a supplement to *Museums for a New Millennium*, the current standard on recent museum design.

Knowing Los Angeles

Iconic LA *by Gloria Koenig. Balcony Press, 2000. 120pp., illus., $29.95.*

Reviewed by Barry Moore

Iconic LA is not exactly the book its title and appearance might lead one to expect. Though at first glance it seems to promise little beyond slick photos of the city almost everybody loves to visit displayed in a coffee-table array, *Iconic LA* turns out to be more than that, more than just a splashy presentation of the cool, the weird, and the kinky. What it is instead is a carefully focused look at 13 notable buildings spanning two centuries, well illustrated with pictures both current and historical, and topped off with succinct text sufficient to whet the appetite of the Los Anglophile and architectural historian alike. Koenig, a former editor and writer at the University of California Los Angeles, has selected buildings that represent different eras and architectural types: the mission San Fernando Rey, the Bradbury Building, the Hollyhock House, Watts Towers, Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles City Hall, Grauman's Chinese Theatre, Griffith Observatory, Union Station, LAX Theme Building, Case Study House #22, the Getty Center, and Disney Concert Hall. Each project is broadly described and documented, and the photographs — many of them rare — are sublime.

My first question was, why these particular 13? Why not include the Wayfarer's Chapel, the Los Angeles Public Library, or the surprising Max Factor building in Hollywood? But after some thought I think I understand the rationale behind Koenig's choices: the criterion was

obviously buildings that are recognized by everyone as quintessentially LA. Some are indelibly associated with motion pictures and television, such as the Bradbury Building (*Bladerunner*), City Hall (*Dragnet*), Hollywood Bowl (television specials), Grauman's Chinese (footprints of the stars in the sidewalk), and Griffith Observatory (*Rebel Without a Cause*). Others, specifically Union Station and LAX, have served as iconic gateways for millions coming to the Promised Land over two or three generations. And yet other choices represent the origin of a style or approach to architecture, among them the Mission, which influenced California Spanish Mission Revival, and the Case Study House. Surely everyone remembers the famous photograph of this house, the picture showing a steel-framed glass cube projecting out of the Hollywood Hills, with a blonde on one side of the living room coolly surveying the Los Angeles nightscape at her feet. Koenig is apparently betting that the Getty and the Disney will attain similar status as icons, and she may well be right.

Some surprises await the reader of this book: for example, how important a fixture on the Los Angeles' architectural scene Lloyd Wright was, from the time he came to complete his father's Hollyhock House in 1920, to his seminal designs for the Hollywood Bowl, and on through the 1940s. A reader can also develop a new appreciation of how much Frank Gehry is an architectural product of LA; it's probably for that reason that he was asked to supply the book's introduction.

It is also a revelation to realize how many of Los Angeles' great projects took years to be fully realized. Through multiple design competitions the Los Angeles City Hall became ensnared in tough politics; Union Station was greatly delayed due to the railroads fighting the city in court over the question of who was going to pay for what. It took forever to translate various temporary pavilions at Hollywood Bowl into something permanent. And the 1912 bequest that was supposed to clear the way for the Griffith Observatory was stalled for 21 years, in great part because of a scandal involving Colonel Griffith W. Griffith, the observatory's namesake benefactor (he tried to kill his wife). And everyone knows what a journey in time the Getty Museum turned out to be. Might there be a lesson here for those of us in Houston interested in light rail?

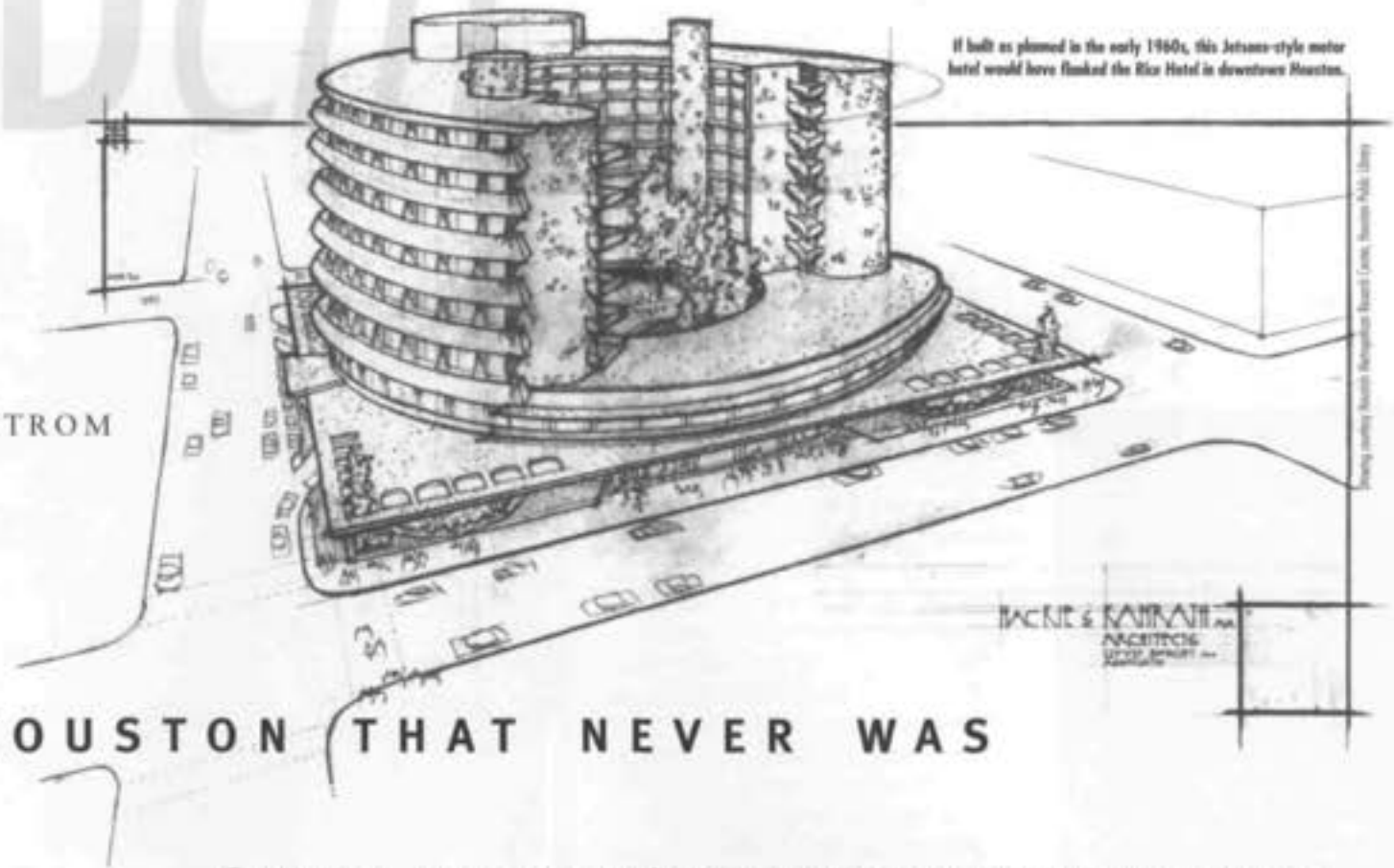
I have a growing bookshelf dedicated to Southern California, and *Iconic LA* has an important new place on it. It nestles comfortably next to Reynard Banham's *Los Angeles, the Architecture of Ecologies*, with its revelation of the London-like characteristic of a metropolis that grew up and around a series of small villages and towns, and Charles Moore's *Experiencing Los Angeles*, with its delightful chapters on Western Avenue, Wilshire Boulevard, and the Pacific Coast Highway, which teach us how to be a space-time-movement architectural pilgrim — in an automobile, naturally. Its overview of immediately familiar structures and the insights they offer into the city's culture make *Iconic LA* a good companion to these. In his introduction to the book, Frank Gehry notes that "LA is a city of instant recognition." He's right, and *Iconic LA* is where that recognition gets its due.

NEW AND NOTABLE

Parallax *by Steven Holl. Princeton Architectural Press, 384 pp., illus., $40.* In this volume, author Holl — the architect of the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki and the Chapel of St. Ignatius in Seattle — traces his ideas on topics as diverse as the "chemistry of matter" and the "pressure of light," and shows how they emerge in his designs. Holl reveals his working methods in a part treatise, part manifesto, and part, as he writes, "liner notes" to 15 recent projects, some never before published.

Gigon/Guyer Architects: Work and Projects, 1989-2000 *by Christoph Burkle. Gustavo Gili, 384 pp., 397 illus., mostly color, $80.* This beautifully produced, richly illustrated mongoraph is the first on the work of this young Swiss practice, taking readers from its early efforts in Switzerland to more recent projects for the City of Culture competition in Santiago de Compostela and at Kansas' Nelson-Atkins Museum.

40 Architects Under 40 *by Jessica Cargill Thompson. Taschen, 560 pp., illus., $39.99.* In this volume, Thompson attempts to uncover the Norman Fosters and Tadao Andos of tomorrow. Spanning the globe, she highlights her choice of the world's best young architects. Among them are Berger + Parkkinen, Studio Archae, Mathias Klotz, Vincent Van Duysen, and Shigeru Ban, along with some lesser known names. *40 Architects Under 40* features biographical information and details of each designer's work, along with a wealth of photos and floor plans. — *Michael Kimmins/Karl Kilian*



If built as planned in the early 1960s, this Jetsons-style motor hotel would have flanked the Rice Hotel in downtown Houston.

BY STEVEN R. STROM

THE HOUSTON THAT NEVER WAS

SOMETIMES, WHAT YOU DON'T BUILD IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT YOU DO

IN 1926, ARCHITECT ALFRED FINN came up with a grandiose proposal for Houston's City Hall. What he had in mind was a civic skyscraper that would reach toward the clouds and be crowned by a statue of a heroic figure. Who that figure would be was never determined — Sam Houston was one politician's suggestion — but there's no question that had Finn's city hall been built, the great man crowning its top (great women weren't part of the equation then) would have added considerable flair to the city's civic center.

The Great Depression prevented Finn's dream from reaching fruition, but in the years since it has joined a list of "might have beens" that some architectural historians like to sigh over. It's a tendency not limited to Houston. Over the past decade, architectural exhibits have been held in cities as diverse as Cincinnati, Ohio, and Melbourne, Australia, to spotlight sometimes visionary, often highly imaginative, and occasionally futuristic unbuilt architectural projects. As architect Leon Van Schaik has noted, "Unbuilt architecture congregates in the imagination of its creators, and of historians and critics, aggregating into the secret cities of the mind."

Implicit in the catalogs and captions accompanying these exhibitions is the notion that it's a shame that these never-realized projects remain only a dream, that if these creative visionaries had been given full range (and perhaps funding) to complete their projects, our urban environment would somehow be a better place. What is less often addressed is the other side of that coin — that sometimes, perhaps more often than architects might like to admit, it's a blessing that a project never moved beyond plans on paper.

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There are more than a handful of examples from Houston's history that make just that point. Anyone who longs for a revitalized, thriving, downtown Houston should be ecstatic that at least some of the architectural proposals that were touted as the wave of tomorrow never made it past the drawing stage. Not all unbuilt projects would have been good for Houston's urban health. And some of the projects that mercifully fell by the wayside could serve as cautionary tales for the planners now spinning out future visions of the city.

One such large-scale project that no doubt seemed good at the time was a 1960 proposal by MacKie & Kamrath for a motor hotel abutting the rear of the Rice Hotel. A perspective drawing for the project has the Wrightian look that was typical of MacKie & Kamrath's work; the Rice Motor Hotel certainly had the outward appearance of some of the large-scale commissions from Wright's second major career phase, and would have been right at home plopped down in the midst of the Living City Project that Wright envisioned in the 1950s. The Rice Motor Hotel project is also suggestive of a very familiar apartment building — the one occupied by George Jetson in the animated TV series *The Jetsons*, which premiered in September 1962.

In a metropolis that, in the early 1960s, was on the verge of becoming known as "Space City," the Rice Motor Hotel would have been seen as a notable addition to the skyline. But its completion would only have contributed to an even more rapid de-evolution of the city's downtown. The very fact that it was intended to be a *motor* hotel meant that its designers were attempting to suburbanize a downtown urban area by bringing even more automobiles into the city center. A trend toward suburbanizing downtown Houston would quite likely have accelerated the destruction of existing buildings and, ironically, ultimately prevented the rebirth of the existing Rice Hotel, which has done so much to revitalize the city's historic core. And who knows? The Rice Motor Hotel, rooted in a 1950s vision of the future, may have even prevented the initiation of other urban renewal efforts, such as the Cotswold Project.

Texas Eastern's proposal for the vast, mega-scale Houston Center, a dream of the 1970s that would basically have made much of downtown an enclosed mall, would also have militated against everything that advocates for a revitalized, livable downtown Houston are currently struggling to achieve. This unrealized idea was not the vastly scaled-down project we know today that exists on the eastern edge of downtown, but one that would have doubled the size of the central city. Like the Rice Motor Hotel, Houston Center would have contributed to the accelerated death of downtown, but on a scale so much more vast that it can only be conceived of in fantasy. In addition to shifting the entire epicenter of central Houston to the city's eastern edge — which is precisely what its backers hoped for — Houston Center would have multiplied on an unimaginable scale all of the reasons that downtown residents and businesses alike fled to the suburbs in the first place: traffic congestion, thanks to multiple overhead lanes of roadway; air and visual pollution; and a continued lack of the basic infrastructure services that most residents of central cities around the world expect to have on a daily basis. Fortunately, a lack of funding that coincided with the economic recession of the mid-1970s prevented the Center from becoming a reality, leaving the eastern section of downtown to eventually begin a different type of renewal in the late 1990s with the construction of Enron Field.

It's easy today to raise an eyebrow at such schemes and believe that our own expansive proposals for Houston's future are much better thought out, much less rooted in the blindness of our times, than were the Rice Motor Hotel and Houston Center. Maybe so. But maybe not. It wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing if some of the unbuilt projects of the past sounded a small cautionary note for a city currently awash with grand architectural ideas, from the master plan for Main Street to the commercial-entertainment district proposed for the east side of downtown.

Houston is a city is used to getting things done, and to doing them quickly. However, history shows us that it is sometimes better when great schemes are slowed down, or at times allowed to die completely. "Large scale" and "grandiose" do not necessarily equal "good." Even a great man peering down from the top of a skyscraping city hall could probably see that. ■

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