54: Summer 2002 $5.00

Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE
and DESIGN REVIEW
of HOUSTON

HOUSE

home

small houses · affordable houses · ready-cut houses · a Frank Lloyd Wright house · a house superstore · and more

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Schatz/Eamon house.

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The American dream: See page 22.

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The Rice Design Alliance, established in 1972, 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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RDA NEWS

RDA in L.A.

In late February, the Rice Design Alliance Hometown Tour took 35 RDA members to Los Angeles — which the RDA proclaimed "Where the Architects Are Stars!" Jory Alexander, Barbara Amelio, Brian Malarkey, Rusty Bienvenue, Donna Kacmar, Joan Lipuscek, Karen Lantz, Andy Farkas, and Craig Minor led a star-spotting mission to Spago, the restaurant made famous by celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck. Puck himself greeted the group and signed copies of his cookbook, *Pizzas, Pastas, and More*. Informed that the visitors were Houston architects and designers, Puck told them that Frank Gehry was in the restaurant — then sent Gehry to pay his regards. "I'm highly overrated," Gehry told the table.

The group encountered many other Los Angeles star architects. Urban planner and former University of Houston architecture professor John Kaliski led a tour of the Wilshire corridor and downtown. Architect Kevin Daly and his wife, Dana Cuff, arranged a reception at an award-winning residence designed by Daly and his partner, Chris Genik. Campus planner and architect Stephanos Polyzoides gave a tour of the Cal Tech campus and Pasadena. Legendary architectural photographer Julius Shulman arranged a tour of two privately owned Case Study houses, then hosted a reception at his house and studio in the Hollywood hills. And Rick Irving offered a "behind the scenes" tour of the Getty Center; Irving, of Meier & Associates, designed the Getty's interiors, which feature fine woodwork by Houston's Brochsteins Inc. ■

Stargazing in L.A.: The 2002 RDA Hometown Tour group.

Studying the Case Study houses: RDA tourists recreate Julius Shulman's famous photo.

Initiatives for Houston

In May, the Rice Design Alliance announced the winners of its third annual grants program, Initiatives for Houston. Those winners are:

• Taryn Kinney, a recent graduate of the Rice School of Architecture, who was awarded $5,000 for her proposal "HiRes (Residual Highway)." She plans to explore alternative uses for the residual spaces created by Houston's vast freeway infrastructure.

• Keith Krumwiede, the Wortham Assistant Professor of Architecture at Rice University, who was awarded $2,500 for a lecture and exhibition titled "Education Through Form: The Schools and Home of Donald Barthelme."

• Patrick Peters, associate professor of architecture and director of the graduate Design/Build Studio at the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston, who was awarded $2,500 to create a manual for other schools and nonprofit organizations hoping to adopt the tactics of the Design/Build Studio. ■

Shigeru Ban (center) delivered RDA's Sally Walsh Lecture in April — and was entertained by RDA Executive Director Linda Sylvan and outgoing Board of Directors President Larry Whaley.

Correction

In "Small Wonders" (*Cite* 53, page 11), a CiteLines piece about D.D. Smalley's Miniature Museum, the photo captions and credits included several errors. The man pictured in the museum was Frank Smalley, not D.D. Smalley; the photo was by John Lee Simons. The business card shown was created in 1973 by Frank Smalley and Helen Fosdick, and the photograph of the model should have been credited to Helen Fosdick. *Cite* regrets the errors.

CALENDAR

RDA FALL 2002 LECTURE SERIES
TOWN AND COUNTRY:
INVENTING THE AMERICAN CITY

Brown Auditorium
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

This series will focus on American city form in the 19th and early 20th centuries and will explore the ways in which conventions of urban development were reformulated in response to popular pastoral ideals.

Wednesday, September 25, 7:30 p.m.
WILLIAM CRONON, author of *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, will speak on the economic relationships of cities and their countryside in 19th-century America.

Wednesday, October 9, 7:30 p.m.
CHARLES E. BEVERIDGE of American University will examine the remarkable career of Frederick Law Olmsted, who virtually invented the professions of landscape architecture and urban planning in the United States.

Wednesday, October 16, 7:30 p.m.
CHRIS WILSON of the University of New Mexico will demonstrate how a group of artists and anthropologists invented a distinctive city form for Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Wednesday, October 23, 7:30 p.m.
KAREN KINGSLEY of Tulane University will discuss the urban development of New Orleans in the first three quarters of the 19th century to show how a new form of urbanism — the "garden district" — emerged.

RDA 2002 GALA

Saturday, November 2, 7 p.m.
Reliant Park, 8400 Kirby Drive
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

The 16th annual RDA Gala, supporting 2002-2003 RDA programs and publications, will celebrate RDA's 30th anniversary and the 20th anniversary of *Cite*.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE EXHIBIT

September 12 — October 12
College of Architecture Gallery
and Archives
www.arch.uh.edu/news

"Design France: Generation 2001"

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE FALL 2002 LECTURE SERIES

College of Architecture Theater
713.743.2400 or www.arch.uh.edu/news

The "Sense of Place" series will cover building in Houston, building in Texas, and building anywhere. Specific dates and lecturers to be announced later. The talks are free and open to the public.

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE FALL 2002 LECTURE SERIES

All lectures are free and will be at 7 p.m. in Anderson Hall's Farish Gallery at Rice University. For more information and updates, see www.arch.rice.edu.

The Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral (Olle J. Lorehn, 1912) as it looked in 1940.

Courtesy Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Sacred Heart(Breaking) News

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the completion and dedication of Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral, one of Houston's oldest religious structures. Unfortunately, it appears highly unlikely that the current Sacred Heart will survive to celebrate its centennial. In May 2001, Joseph A. Fiorenza, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Galveston-Houston, announced plans for the construction of a new cathedral that will replace the existing Sacred Heart. The site for the new church was cleared in spring 2002. Designed by Ziegler Cooper Architects, the new 2,100-seat edifice will cost an estimated $50 million and be constructed on property adjacent to the current cathedral. A 2004 completion date is projected. At the same press conference in which plans for the new cathedral were unveiled, it was also announced that the 1912 cathedral would be demolished to provide room for a plaza and increased parking space. The pastor of Sacred Heart, the Rev. R. Troy Gately, reportedly described the decision to raze the existing Sacred Heart as "difficult." The building, he said, "has severe structural difficulties that would have cost millions to repair."

Completed in 1912 as a parish church serving the south end of Houston, Sacred Heart was designed by Houston architect Olle J. Lorehn in a neo-Gothic style and was constructed for less than $100,000. The cathedral's original interior was altered during a 1964 renovation, but the buff pressed-brick exterior remains much the same as it was at the time of its dedication. In 1959, the administrative offices of the Diocese of Galveston were moved to Houston. Sacred Heart was selected to serve as the co-cathedral (along with St. Mary's in Galveston) of the renamed diocese of Galveston–Houston. Its name was formally changed to Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral on December 24 of that year.

Besides its value as a historic structure, Sacred Heart is important to Houston's architectural history for another reason: it is one of the few surviving buildings designed by Lorehn, one of the city's most important architects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in 1864, Lorehn immigrated to the United States from Sweden as a young man, and arrived in Houston from St. Louis in 1893 to supervise construction of the American Brewing Company complex. Less than two decades after his arrival in Texas, he had become a leading figure in the movement to professionalize the practice of architecture in the state, and had also designed civic and commercial buildings that constituted an important part of Houston's cityscape. Besides Sacred Heart, his works include the Binz Building (1894, demolished), regarded at the time of its completion as Houston's first skyscraper; Houston Fire Station No. 7 (1899), which survives today as the Houston Fire Museum; and the Noyce Hart House (1910) and W.T. Carter Jr. House (1912), both still extant. The existing buildings are all listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Fortunately for the historic record, Sacred Heart was documented this spring as a Historic American Building Survey project. The documentation includes measured drawings, photographs, sketches, and a narrative history of the cathedral. With Houston's extremely weak preservation ordinance offering scant protection for landmark buildings, such a project is virtually the only option remaining open to historians, architects, and preservationists hoping to preserve some recorded memory of Houston's demolished historic structures.

The project is a joint effort by volunteer members of the Historic Houston organization, directed by Lynn Edmundson, and students from the University of Houston's Workshop for Historic Architecture, led by instructor Jim Arnold. Historic Houston recently received a $1,500 grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to assist with the documentation. In addition to Sacred Heart, the volunteers and students also plan to document two endangered historic residences, the W.L. Foley House and the A.B. Cohn House. A virtual tour of the documented buildings will be available on Historic Houston's web site, www.historichouston.org.

—Steven R. Strom

Pole-ish joke?: Parking-meter poles block the Rice Village's sidewalks.

© 2002 Robert Reichle

Meter Madness

In April the city of Houston surprised storekeepers in the Rice Village by announcing plans to install curbside parking meters; the storekeepers' uproar halted the project until June. But while business owners and city officials wrangled over the pros and cons of pay parking, the metal poles that would support the meters were installed in the middle of Village sidewalks, where they inconvenience pedestrians and obstruct wheelchairs and baby strollers.

Why block the sidewalks of one of Houston's rare pedestrian-friendly districts? The walkways in question lay adjacent to the curb, and Joel Albrecht, assistant chief clerk of the Houston Municipal Court, explained that in order for car doors and bumpers to extend over the curb, it's the industry standard for meter poles to stand two feet away from the street.

"It just so happens," Albrecht said, "that the sidewalk had to be perforated because it happened to be in that place."

—Robert Reichle

Above: The intersection of St. Mary's and Houston, circa 1925.
Right: The planned Hotel Valencia.

Retail Revival

A private developer restores San Antonio's Houston Street

Once San Antonio's main stem for shopping and entertainment, Houston Street fell on hard times after the mid-'60s as competition from the suburbs dimmed its neon signs and shuttered its shops.

Scattered signs of life reappeared starting in the late 1980s. With city help, the Majestic and Empire theaters were restored as live venues and their office towers converted to market-rate apartments. A former dime store became the San Antonio Children's Museum, and the old J.C. Penney store is now home to Bromley Communications, a major advertising agency. Still, much of the street remained derelict, a virtual ghost town a block from the teeming River Walk.

Then in 1998 Federal Realty Investment Trust of Rockville, Maryland, a national developer of suburban and "main street" retail projects, bought 11 properties on three crucial blocks of Houston Street between the River Walk and North Presa Street. Federal and its architects, the San Antonio office of 3D/I, envisioned two new hotels and redevelopment of most of the existing retail buildings for use by restaurants, retailing, apartments, and offices. Projecting $150 million in private investment, Federal persuaded the city to prime the pump with a new parking garage, landscape enhancements, and improved pedestrian links between Houston Street and the River Walk.

The most visible result thus far is the 213-room Hotel Valencia, now under construction at Houston Street and the river. Several small historic buildings were razed to make room for it, but the San Antonio Conservation Society persuaded Federal to wrap the structure around an 1890s Alfred Giles building, whose façade is to be restored. The hotel's romantic Italian-villa styling may be pastiche, but its complex 12-story massing effectively addresses the River Walk, steps back from Houston Street, and honors nearby precedents. A Mission Revival balcony from one of the demolished structures is to be expanded as a freestanding pavilion on a terrace very near its original location.

Economic realities have not been kind to Federal's redevelopment hopes. High costs for structural repairs pushed residential use off the table. A site pegged for a "boutique" hotel remains a parking lot. Retail tenants have proved elusive, though several restaurants have been signed. The upscale Pal steak house chain opened in 2000 and has seen conspicuous success.

Federal has pressed on with redevelopment. Now ready for office occupancy is the five-story former Vogue fashion store, its dowdy gray paint stripped away to reveal snazzy red brick and ochre terracotta. The copper-faced canopy was reconstructed, and alternating blank bays on one façade were given new windows to match the originals.

Well under way are modifications to the former Frost Bros. and Carl's fashion stores and construction of a courtyard and connecting building between them. New windows and street-level entrances are being cut into the blank walls abutting the courtyard, and the street façades are being restored — Frost Bros. has a particularly elegant Deco Mayan front. Designed by Rialto Studio, the courtyard is to incorporate tile work by Twyla Arthur, metal sculpture and railings by George Schroeder, and punched-metal light fixtures by Judith Maxwell — a distinguished team signaling Federal's high design aspirations. The upper floors of this cluster of buildings are slated for office use, including the future offices of 3D/I.

The public improvements are all nearing completion. One block north of Houston Street, a parking garage by Alamo Architects includes street-level retail space, and the façade design draws from the rhythm, scale, and materials of nearby historic fabric.

The ambitious Presa Street river linkage, by Beaty and Associates, is a wide staircase and terraced water garden terminating under the Presa Street bridge, which sacrificed a strip of pavement to make the connection possible.

The other new pedestrian linkage, by Rialto and 3D/I, is incorporated seamlessly into the river and street levels of the Hotel Valencia. Streetscape improvements, by Rialto, 3D/I, and Lake-Flato Architects, include some new sidewalk, additional street trees, and a dramatic focal point in the form of a dense grove of palms at the intersection of Presa and Houston.

The touristic tilt of Federal's tenant mix thus far troubles some observers, but it is hard to find fault with the physical transformation. Even if much of the redeveloped space is still searching for uses, Houston Street has regained much visual and architectural luster. It's starting to look once more like the city's glamorous and inviting living room, all set for the guests to arrive.

— *Mike Greenberg*

ENDANGERED CITY

Bank on it: The Farm Credit/Federal Land Bank Building (Hedrick and Gottlieb, 1929).

Notes on Preservation

One of Houston's best small office buildings from the 1920s may soon be enjoying new leases on life. The Farm Credit/ Federal Land Bank Building at the corner of Lamar and Brazos was designed by architects Hedrick and Gottlieb in 1929 in the Spanish Renaissance style first defined by Ralph Adams Cram's and William Ward Watkin's Julia Ideson Building, part of the Houston Public Library, across the street.

The bank building has been vacant since monster neighbor Texaco Heritage Plaza closed its leasing office on the first floor. Clarion Realty Services has begun infrastructure renovation prior to putting it on the lease market. At four stories and a total of 50,000 square feet, the building would seem ideal for a single office tenant. The building is hooked to the Heritage Plaza lobby, and connects by tunnel to the Doubletree Hotel.

The outlook for the Robinson Public Warehouse at Montrose and Allen Parkway may not be so sanguine. This former Sears, Roebuck & Company store was built in 1928-29 on what was then Buffalo Drive. Sears moved out to South Main in 1939, but you can still see the bricked-up show windows facing Montrose.

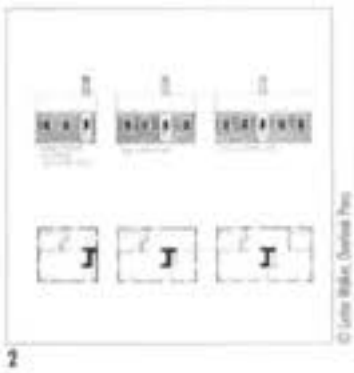
Land value only: The Robinson Public Warehouse (1928-29) is available for a low, low price.

Stan Creech Properties has placed the property on the market for land value only, presumably because the first floor was severely flooded by tropical storm Allison last year. The flooding of the original store a week before its grand opening in 1929, followed by a repeat flooding in 1935, is what convinced Sears to move to Main Street.

— *Barry Moore*

THE (small) HOUSE


1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3


4


5

BY NONYA GRENADER

"Notwithstanding all efforts to improve the product, the American small house is still a pressing, needy, hungry, confused issue."
— Frank Lloyd Wright, *Architectural Forum*, 1938

Though the new American house grows ever larger, the small dwelling continues to engage our domestic imaginations and challenge our design instincts. You know the type — two bedrooms, one bath, a starter home for some and a lifetime house for many. Whether because of a tight budget, a need to build quickly, a confined site, environmental concern, or the desire for simplicity, the small house has endured as a distinguished if humble form of shelter. The small house is a dwelling reduced to its essentials; the insightful editing required to reach that state has intrigued both architects and historians.

The roots of the small house might be traced back to 1753, when Abbot Marc-Antoine Laugier presented an extreme version of the idea: a primitive hut "pared down to four columns that supported an inclined roof of leaves to keep out rain and sun." He argued for a reduction to the essential components and warned against any item "added by caprice." The hut was a miniature proscenium where the beginnings of domestic drama could play out — an archetypal house form full of possibility. The descendants of the hut are plentiful, and though the walls have been filled and the footprint enlarged, the scaled-down program is still valid.

6

7

1. Primitive hut, Abbot Marc-Antoine Laugier, 1753.
2. Cape Cod variations.
3. Levittown, New York, 1948.
4. Marcel Breuer's and Walter Gropius' Chamberlain Cottage, 1941.
5. Le Corbusier's Le Cabanon, Cap Martin, 1950.
6. Charles and Ray Eames' prototype for the Expandable Little House, 1959.
7. Project Row Houses, Houston, 1939/1994.

In 1845, Henry David Thoreau spent $28.12 to complete his 150-square-foot treatise on self-sufficiency next to Walden Pond. He hand-built the cabin of rough-hewn lumber, and its crafted detail and pastoral setting gave it a presence that exceeded his goal of simplicity achieved independently.

In the 18th century, the Cape Cod house was ingeniously conceived to expand incrementally, a precursor to the prefabricated, expandable home. The half Cape Cod, known as the "honeymoon" cottage, transformed into the three-quarter model when children arrived, and then a full Cape Cod as the family grew.

After World War II, Cape Cod variations and "complete communities" such as Levittown, New York, provided the sought-after two-bedroom, one-bath model to accommodate growing families. Although their houses were relentlessly similar, Levittowners embraced the idea of a defined space to call their own, a plot of land, and an open (if monotonous) view. In fact, there was something admirable in the sameness: a democracy of size that fostered a neighborly attitude of equality.

These are just a few of the investigations in which builders and owners responded, for various reasons, to the lure of reduced square footage.

Early modern architects also embraced the idea of paring down a dwelling to its essence. For 20 years following the Depression, Frank Lloyd Wright developed his Usonian houses, offering planning innovation and new construction techniques in spite of material shortages. In the 1,340-square-foot Jacobs house, built in 1936 for $5,500, Wright placed the hearth and kitchen as the center hinge of public and private wings — with all interior spaces open to an expansive garden.

In 1941, Marcel Breuer, assisted by Walter Gropius, designed a screened, wood-clad dwelling that appeared to float above its rock base, re-defining the traditional cabin and porch in crisp modern vocabulary. A freestanding fireplace, the only built interior element, divided the public and private zones.

Far from Walden Pond (and a century later), Le Corbusier built a one-room cabin in France. Clad in a more rustic palette than his familiar pristine buildings, the retreat nevertheless offered insight into his thoughts on proportion, with the modular man inscribed boldly on the vertical wood façade. For the single room, Le Corbusier designed furniture that both defined the spaces and directed a precise choreography of interior circulation.

In the 1950s, Charles and Ray Eames conceived of an "expandable little house" not unlike the Cape Cod — grids of space that could be strung together horizontally or stacked vertically. As a planning tool, the limited kit of parts offered a nearly limitless variety of configurations.

What is the lesson of the small house, its lean and elegant legacy? Historic Houston offers a range of models. A series of houses built in 1939 on Holman Avenue demonstrates a modified form of the classic shotgun-style house — one room wide and several rooms deep. Each room flows to the next, with no square footage squandered on entry rooms and hallways. Instead, transition comes in the form of front and back porches, which extend the simple volumes to the streets and shared yards of the larger neighborhood.

This type of rowhouse became the celebrated subject of artist John Biggers. He said, "As I came upon this special potency, I told myself, hey, I've got to show this whole community as it is, with women on their porches, and show their meaning, that what they see and do truly is dynamic."[1] Biggers understood that these small houses were enlivened by their inhabitants. He placed importance on the house as a backdrop to daily routine and ritual, and he realized that the rowhouses gained power through repetition. They were enlarged by their sheer number and ability to form an urban ensemble.

In 1994, artist Rick Lowe led a group effort to rehabilitate the (by then abandoned) 22 houses on Holman. Project Row Houses found a fresh use for the historic dwellings, converting them into a vital, lively community of gallery spaces, housing, and neighborhood services.

In a very different mode, Fredrick Leon Webster built a three-story villa on Hyde Park Boulevard. He named his Mediterranean-style tower "L'Encore," likely a reference to his position as director of the Little Theater of Houston. By the elegant name, Webster showed aspirations to fashion a grand home in spite of the confines of a 20-by-22-foot lot. In the *Architectural Guide to Houston*, historian Stephen Fox observed, "It is a prime example of the fascination with the quaint, the diminutive, and the exotic that typified American architectural eclecticism in the 1920s."

What is the fate of the small vintage Houston house? Architect Dillon Kyle has worked for five years on an existing house in the Southampton area, where many small houses are replaced rather than renovated. This compact house — now Kyle's own home — was originally designed by Harvin Moore and Hermon Lloyd in 1940. Kyle's thoughtful insertions and deletions have resulted in a collection of modern details seamlessly stitched into well-worn brick and siding. With limited prospect for resale, his reinvented small house is a questionable investment. But as houses continue to expand, requiring greater resources to build and operate, Kyle's house serves as an admirable example of quiet reuse, proving that less can be exquisitely enough. ■

200 ▪ 500 ▪ 700 ▪ 900 ▪ 1350 ▪ 1450 ▪ 1600 ▪ 1700 ▪ 1950 ▪

THE (new small) HOUSE

1983-2002

In Houston, a city that reveres the Texas model of "bigger," today's small houses offer a legacy of restraint — a mix of careful proportion and an abundance not of space, but of ideas.

Tony Zemola

Tony Zemola

▪200 SF

In 2000, the Petite Maison de Weekend appeared to have landed on the lawn at the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture. It was a primitive hut for the new millennium. The architects, Patkau and Associates, note that the name alludes to Le Corbusier's weekend retreat on the outskirts of Paris. This compact machine for living is housed under a 20-by-15-foot steel-and-glass roof. The unit contains a composter toilet, a propane-fired cooking unit, a photovoltaic system that converts solar radiation into electricity, a sink and shower that use water collected from the roof, and a sleeping loft with storage for two.

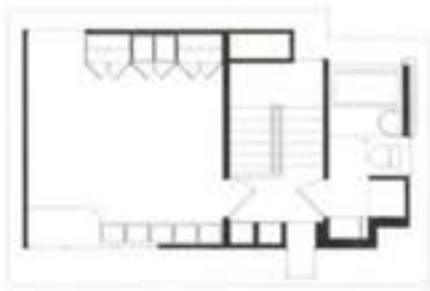
The Petite Maison is currently in storage and will become part of the University of Texas Urban Ecology Research Park.

Courtesy Carlos Jiménez

500 SF

Few have demonstrated the merits of the small house as effectively as Carlos Jiménez in his first project, his own house and studio, built in 1983 and 1984. Jiménez chose to emphasize the importance of arrival and procession, usually a prerogative of large houses. Stark white columns, set against a salmon-colored concrete block, framed an entry porch. Inside the square volume of the house, a vivid blue storage unit defined living and dining areas, and a sleeping loft floated above, with a view of the living space below. Like many ingenious small spaces, the areas were defined but overlapped, allowing the smaller parts to share the whole. The house and its free-standing studio (an additional 200 square feet) embraced a courtyard that naturally became an outdoor living space.

"As my first built work," Jiménez has said, "this house contains both my initial and ongoing concerns: the search for language of simplicity and clarity, the exploration of spaces that allow for an intimate relationship with nature, and the restorative qualities of light and serenity."[2] As his practice grew, new studio space enveloped the little house, but the ideas that informed Jiménez's first domestic investigation endure as a record of innovative and restrained design that transcended a limited budget.



2

Courtesy Ann Eamon and Mark Schatz

1

700 SF

In a shady garden off Griggs Road in southeast Houston, Anne Eamon and Mark Schatz are completing work on their handcrafted 700-square-foot house. As architecture students, they were inspired by a need to create an affordable house for themselves as well as fulfill several University of Houston class requirements. They borrowed, scavenged, camped, and built their way into a house of skillfully collaged materials, carefully placed views, and interior spaces full of sectional play and invention.

Eamon and Schatz took their cue from two prominent trees on the site, structuring a vertical concrete tower behind a formidable oak and thrusting the curved roof in response to the arching canopy of an adjacent pecan. More than a unique house to call their own, this four-year experiment has been a record of their emerging architectural concepts — as they call it, "a fragmentary scrapbook of ideas."

900 SF

In 1999, the Rice School of Architecture Building Workshop designed and built the Six Square House at Project Row Houses. Inspired by concepts and materials found in the neighboring houses, this modular structure (six over six squares) can be configured in a variety of ways. The initial prototype includes a small study overlooking a double-height living area, but a third bedroom may be substituted for the high space. The drilled pier footing at each module corner incorporates a screw-jack, which not only allows simple leveling during construction, but also periodic adjustment to Houston's constantly moving soil. The front porch serves as a functional extension of the living area as well as a visual connection to the rest of Project Row Houses. The screened back porch commands a view of the Third Ward community and the downtown skyline.

1

2

1,350 SF

Cameron Armstrong, an architect strongly identified with the metal houses in Houston's West End, paid homage to Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses when he developed a 1,350-square-foot home for Jeri Nordbrook and Terry Andrews. The zigzag layout contains public and private wings that view garden courtyards by landscape designer Sarah Lake. As in many of Wright's Usonian houses, living and dining spaces are combined; a grid of open kitchen shelving telescopes into the dining and living spaces. Armstrong says the series of spaces has "interlocking margins, set more by visual cues than physical obstructions like walls or doors — making the house, although small, seem full of room."

The house was completed in 1996. Recently Armstrong designed a small studio for the house's second owner, attorney and artist Lucy Anderson. Currently under construction, the addition tests the small house's ability to adapt as needs change.

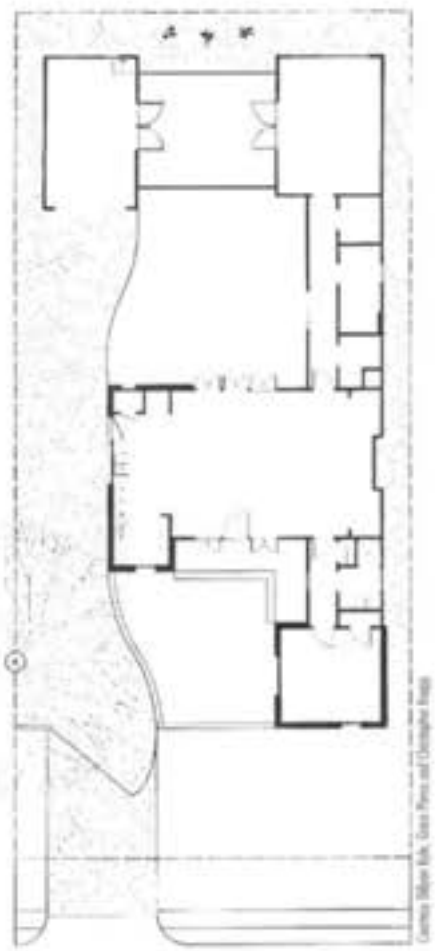
1,450 SF

The Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation developed two demonstration houses as prototypes for use by Habitat for Humanity. They are located just northeast of downtown Houston on Gillespie Street, facing Swiney Park. Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates of Philadelphia donated the plans, and the houses were built in 1999 with the help of students from the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture and the school's chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

Although the two units' plans and basic envelope are virtually identical, the second-story gable fronts are varied, employing two of six different elevations devised by the architects. The houses are planned to be almost maintenance-free, with Hardiplank siding, painted aluminum roofs, aluminum porch posts and railings, and aluminum-clad wood windows.

1,600 SF

The Chadwick House is one in a series of dwellings (Duesterhoft house, 1987; Saito house, 1993; the second Jiménez House, 1994) in which Carlos Jiménez explored the two-bedroom house in 1,600 square feet or less. For Jiménez, these houses provided "an ongoing investigation into the expansive qualities that can be found within small structures and their volumetric plasticity."[3] Unlike the typical boxes of Levittown or the small ranch-style homes of the 1940s and '50s, Jiménez's houses take advantage of vertical stacking. The Chadwick house, with three levels, optimizes sectional possibility as high-ceilinged spaces mingle with more intimate volumes. The skillfully constructed elevations serenely enclose interior spaces while simultaneously offering generous views of the immediate landscape and the far-off downtown skyline.



1,700 SF

As inner-city land prices soar, it becomes more difficult to avoid overbuilding, which is commonly justified in the name of resale. A dine-in kitchen, family room, study, and master suite are standard. So a new one-story, two-bedroom home — designed in 1999 by Dillon Kyle, Grace Pierce, and Christopher Knapp in the Alabama Place subdivision as a prototype for the speculative house market — shows impressive restraint. The design team wanted to preserve Alabama Place's character and scale without simply copying older forms. They chose metal and St. Joe brick — low-maintenance, high-quality materials. In some areas, a Hardiplank screen protects the wall from rain and sun, and creates a play of depth and shadow.

1,950 SF

In 1992, the early days of West End redevelopment, architect Natalye Appel designed a metal house that clearly indicated the vision of new homeowners in the area while respecting the modest scale of the existing neighborhood. Ingeniously sliding two shed-roof volumes apart, Appel defined public and private areas while simultaneously creating intimate outdoor areas. A garden wall that has weathered to a warm gray-green is the first of the house and garden's several layers of privacy. Collections of artifacts weave through the house, filling the compact volume with memories and meaning. The combined kitchen, dining, and living area recalls the great room as the focus of all activity. Exposed wood trusses reveal the clarity of the structural system.

— Nonya Grenader

1. Robert Farris Thompson, "John Biggers, Shotguns of 1987: An American Classic," *The Art of John Biggers: Views from the Upper Room*. Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1995.
2. *Casas Internacional, Carlos Jiménez*. Edited by Oscar Riera Ojeda. Kliczkowski Publisher, 1996.
3. Ibid.

View from the inside: John and Judy Mixon (and the Rice Village) as seen from the Kirby house's third floor balcony.

View from the outside: The Kirby house, as seen from the Rice Village.

Building: A Life Together

ONE MARRIAGE, THREE HOUSES

In the late '70s, John Mixon taught a Rice University class about zoning and lending law. Toward the end of the class, two of his pupils, architecture graduate students Scott Ziegler and Michael Cooper, told John that they planned to use what they'd learned to go into business for themselves. They were going to design and build houses. "Scared the hell out of me," says John. If they lost money, he'd feel responsible.

So he bought a house from them — a very modern townhouse duplex at 2330 Albans, far more elegant than the Montrose townhouse he'd been living in. "It was marriage bait," explains John. He hoped to snare tall, elegant Judy Lindley.

Judy took the bait. She and John had the architects change only a few details of their design — the closet doors, that sort of thing — and moved into the townhouse in 1980. They invited their friends to a housewarming brunch, then suprised them by getting married on the house's tiny cantilevered balcony. Scott Ziegler stood nervously in the freshly sodded yard. The little balcony hadn't been designed to support an entire wedding party. He worried that it might collapse.

But the balcony held fast. And so did the marriage.

John and Judy adored the townhouse on Albans, but after a while, it began to feel cramped. Judy's teenaged daughter lived with them, and the three of them needed more closet space, and more room for parties.

Judy approached the new house as an adventure; she liked the idea of building something entirely new every few years. John bought 3211 Pittsburgh Street, a skinny lot in West University Place, and the couple interviewed architects. They picked Taft Architects mainly because they liked its principals: John Casbarian, Danny Samuels, and Robert Timme.

This time, the Mixons worked with the architects from the beginning. Judy told Taft that she wanted "a beach house in town" — not to mention three bedrooms, more closet space, and a balcony big enough to hold a group. John still favored the three-story arrangement of the old townhouse. Taft translated their ideas into models, and the Mixons picked their favorite.

The new house was decidedly postmodern — shocking among West U.'s stodgy brick Georgians. A piece on it ran in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine, but the neighbors still didn't quite understand. Sitting on one of the house's four balconies, John and Judy laughed to hear passersby ask, "Is that a house?"

It was, decidedly, a house: a great place for parties, and a great place for being alone. Judy especially loved the light in the "big room." Every time she walked into it, she gasped. Even after twelve years, the room's beauty still surprised her.

Judy's daughter grew up and moved to Manhattan, and after visiting her in 1994, Judy returned to Houston with a new house in mind. This time, she told John, she wanted to be "where the action is," as close to the walk-around, hustle-bustle, shop-and-eat city as is possible in Houston. As soon as she'd unpacked her bags, they got in the car and began scouting for locations.

John soon found a promising for-sale sign: A small, termite-infested rental house sat right on busy Kirby — just outside the western edge of the Rice Village, across the street from the La Madeleine bakery; but just inside the boundary of West U. Judy climbed onto the little house's roof and looked east. She could see all of the Rice Village. Behind it lay Rice Stadium, the Texas Medical Center, and downtown. She knew she'd found the right place. They bought the land.

Once they had the lot, the question was what to do with it. What on earth could you build on the borderland between quiet, residential West U. and the whizzing traffic of Kirby? John posed the question to a friend, architect Gordon Wittenberg. Wittenberg said that he'd kill to design that house.

John and Judy were even more involved in the design of this house than they'd been in the house on Pittsburgh. Judy told Gordon that she wanted "a Tuscan villa in the city." John said that, once again, he wanted three stories. The first would be for parking and little-used interior space, like the guest bedroom; the second floor would hold the kitchen, dining and living areas; and the third floor would contain the master bedroom suite. As it happened, that three-story arrangement solved many of the problems of the borderland site. The second and third floor would float above the traffic and noise, and offer the stunning views that Judy craved.

Wittenberg and the Mixons decided to use a mix of modern and traditional materials — brick, but also concrete — and to give the house an unusual second-floor loggia that could be closed easily during bad weather. That indoor/outdoor space would not only be pleasant for parties and reading the Sunday paper; it would solve a problem created by West U.'s building codes, which dictate that a house can have no more than two and a half stories, and that the third floor can be only half as large as the second. If West U. counted the loggia as enclosed second-floor space, then the third floor could be bigger.

But how, exactly, do you find gigantic windows that open and close easily? The solution came to John while he was driving past the Mexican restaurant Two Pesos: Big glass garage doors. In Gordon's design, they gave the house a friendly, distinctive exterior. Later, when John found out how much the doors cost, he tried to talk Gordon into something cheaper. Gordon knew his friends well enough to speak frankly. He didn't pretend that the doors were actually cost-efficient or the only possible solution. The doors, he said, needed to stay because they made the design work. Cost-conscious John finally agreed.

Now John loves to show off those doors. He and Judy like the way that the glass doors — and the whole house — glow at night, lit from within. They're happy in this house: happy with its high-rise view, happy with its kitchen window that looks out onto West U., happy that it's liked by people who don't usually like modern architecture.

But already, Judy says, she's thinking about their next house. ■

Courtesy Ann Rosenwinkel

Howard Rosenwinkel, the author's father, in 1962.

The Wright Start

GROWING UP IN THE GALE HOUSE

BY ANN ROSENWINKEL

In 1962, the year I was born, my parents purchased the Mrs. Thomas Gale House by Frank Lloyd Wright in Oak Park, Illinois. Its brazen cantilevered balconies had fallen off. Its previous owners, the two maiden daughters of Mrs. Thomas Gale, were said to be drunken old spinsters who bet on the ponies. It was the haunted house of the neighborhood. My grandparents were not at ease with my parents' rash decision to throw their money and young family into the project.

My father, though, was a brave new architect. My mother was his Jackie O. By the time I was nine months old, the house was ready for the now five of us. My earliest memories are of sunlight streaming in through the ribbons of casement and leaded glass windows, ricocheting off the white plaster walls and the babies' towheads. I stood at the top of the open stairway gazing back at this sight while my mother dashed to the basement to start a load of laundry.

The author at age 2.

The Mrs. Thomas Gale House (Frank Lloyd Wright, 1909).

The basement was my mother's albatross. I never heard her complain about this famous house of ours until she recently confessed that she woke up one icy morning to two crying, wet babies and no diapers. She ran down the stairs to the cold, concrete basement where the diapers hung to dry. She banged her head on a low beam. After dragging herself back upstairs to the loud, miserable children, she lay down on her bed and wept.

Years later, when we were out playing in the street, tour groups came by. We would sneak up behind them and crack great jokes like "... you mean Frank Lloyd Wright never built his houses with basements? What is that room we go down into when the tornado siren blows?" My parents were a little more passive-aggressive about streams of the devoted peering into our lives. They just hung bright green-and-white zigzagging Marimekko curtains in the windows that spanned the front façade.

In the mornings my mother would come into my room and open those curtains. The continuity between the interior and exterior was a private delight in the summertime. Outside my window, year after year, we observed a squirrel's nest with generations of families in it. I woke up to the song of sparrows that had roosted in the ample overhangs, and to warm rays of sun rousing my sleepy adolescent body.

In the winter we were just grateful that the snow didn't drift in with the wind through the quarter-inch-wide gaps between the lead and the glass or where the casements sagged. The melting snow on the balconies did drip through the ceilings. In that season, the massive fireplace of long, flat Norman bricks became the heart of our family life. We would roast marshmallows there and drink apple cider and agree with Wright that leaks were just something the dignified put up with. And because the house was so earthy and lovely, my parents could not bring themselves to have a TV in any of the common rooms. So we, as a family, really did gather around the hearth and watch the flames, even into the '60s and '70s.

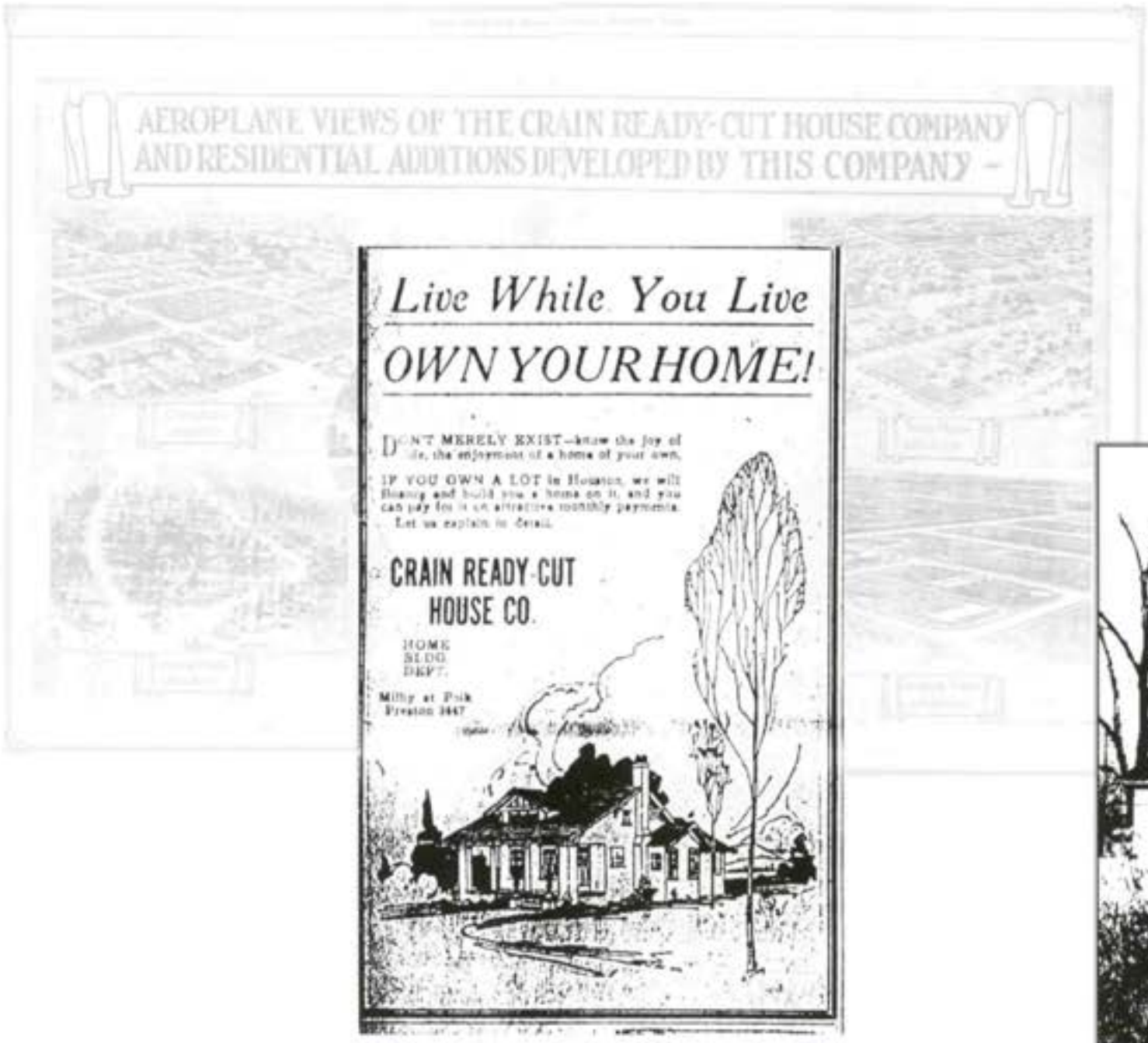
The dimness of those short winter days was accentuated by my father's trading out all the bulbs in the exposed wall-socket fixtures downstairs for transparent orange globes. There was no other built-in lighting besides these few sockets. Frank Lloyd Wright was committed to uninterrupted planes. I appreciated this when I spun around on the drafting chair that served as the piano bench. I would imagine I could walk on the ceiling in my mind and not run into any fixutres. The trim was a path, simple and beautiful.

On the outside of the house a fatter trim ran all along the base. As kids we challenged each other to "walk the trim." We made it all the way around, hugging the rough stucco, scraping our tender bellies. That was a fine way to spend a seven-year-old's summer morning. Later on during the long evenings we would jump out of the first-floor balcony like jacks-in-the-box, running to kick the can and set the neighbor kids free.

They did need to be set free, of course, because all those poor little children lived inside loathsome Victorian boxes that Wright's house argued with. We lived in the open space of the prairie, outside the box. When we would turn around, and look back across those wide Oak Park lawns, we saw the pointed witches' hats and caves under the long, sloping porch sheds. And then we saw our house, a chest of drawers left open by someone sure to be scolded. To children there was no argument at all, just good hiding places. ■

Some Assembly Required

E.L. Crain's company proved that ready-cut houses could be efficient, cheap, and ... charming



BY MARGARET CULBERTSON

Drive through the tree-lined streets of Cherryhurst today and you will find picturesque bungalows of the 1920s surrounding a small park where children and dogs play. It does not look like a neighborhood of pre-fabricated houses. Even if you take the time to walk in this area, just north of Westheimer and east of Mandell, it is impossible to tell that most of the original houses were actually built from pre-cut lumber according to standard plans. They vary in design, size, and style. In fact, they look just like conventionally built houses of the period.

In the 1920s, houses all over Houston were built by the same local company that produced these: the Crain Ready-Cut House Company. Edward Lillo Crain's company built thousands of houses and also developed entire subdivisions from scratch before his death in 1950, but Crain left only one street name that serves as a subtle memorial to his involvement in the city's growth: Edloe Street, named for his son, Edward Lillo Crain Jr., merges the first and last syllables of their shared first and middle names.[1]

Born in Longview in 1885, E.L. Crain came to Houston in his early twenties and initially found work as a bank clerk. By 1913 he had established his own real estate business and begun to buy scattered lots in Montrose and other new subdivisions, building one or two small houses at a time. Successful sales helped his finances, and his marriage in 1915 to Annie Vive Carter, daughter of lumberman and banker S.F. Carter, could not have hurt either, for in 1917 Crain purchased the T.J. Williams House Manufacturing Company.[2]

Established only two years before, the Williams company had produced small one- and two-bedroom bungalows, ready to be assembled on-site with pre-cut lumber and materials. Sears, Roebuck & Company had been selling ready-cut houses through catalogues for almost ten years before Williams started his company, but Williams was the first Houston company of any size to do so. Its catalogue claimed that Williams' "single thick wall" construction techniques produced stronger, tighter houses than traditional construction.

With the Williams plant, located at Harrisburg Road and Baker Street, Crain could build his speculative houses more cheaply than before, in addition to selling houses through catalogues. Crain changed the name of the company, eventually settling on the Crain Ready-Cut House Company. He moved the plant to the corner of Milby Street and Polk Avenue, increased the variety and improved the quality of the designs, and produced more substantial catalogues for their display. His catalogues distinguished between sectional buildings, made from pre-fabricated panels, and ready-cut houses, made from pre-cut lumber that then was assembled using traditional construction methods. Sectional buildings served primarily in industrial and commercial settings, while the ready-cut houses went into a wide range of residential neighborhoods.[3]

Crain significantly expanded the company's activities when he established a real estate department. The company bought land, developed subdivisions, and sold lots in addition to producing houses. By combining these separate functions within a single company, Crain was in the forefront of expanding the traditional role of the developer. In the early 20th century, house-building was generally separate from the physical development of the land, streets, and utilities. The developer of a subdivision prepared the streets and the lots, which were then sold either to individuals or to real estate developers, who would build the houses. The original developer could influence the character of the neighborhood through deed restrictions and by providing architectural and construction services to buyers, but those buyers were free to hire their own architects or builders. The real estate developers who bought lots almost always used their own builders. The construction of entire neighborhoods of speculatively built, uniformly designed houses, which later became common, was unknown.

Over his career Crain worked to integrate these two aspects of development. He started with Cherryhurst, a small subdivision between Westheimer and Fairview that D.B. Cherry platted in 1908 and revised in 1916. Perhaps World War I slowed Cherry's development plans, for he sold very few lots. In 1921 Crain bought the major portion of Cherryhurst for $94,380, and Cherry deeded the remainder to the Houston Land and Trust Company. In addition to providing the building and design services

606 Teetshorn, in the Woodland Heights: Built in 1921 for Beatrice Arrington.

1511 North Boulevard: Designed by Briscoe & Dixon, but constructed by Crain Ready-Cut in 1925.

of the Crain Ready-Cut House Company to buyers, Crain provided financing. County records have preserved several of his mortgages and contracts. One — a typical mechanic's lien dated April 12, 1922 — is for a five-room brick veneer bungalow (Plan no. M266) and 12-by-22-foot garage in Cherryhurst. The cost was $5,555, a typical 1920s price for the house of a middle-income Houston family.

In 1922, Crain bought a tract east of downtown, north of Harrisburg Avenue at Milby Street, known as the John T. Brady Home Place, and filed his first plat with Harris County for a subdivision called the Brady Home Addition. As with Cherryhurst, Crain bought the land in his own name and sold houses through the Ready-Cut House Company. But with his next subdivision, Pineview Place (platted in 1923), the Crain Ready-Cut House Company was the official owner. Located just south of Harrisburg Avenue at 75th Street, the site for Pineview Place was fairly unpromising, bordered on its two long sides by railroad tracks. However, Crain visually camouflaged the tracks with housing and plantings, creating a picturesque bungalow neighborhood that he advertised as "The Rose Garden of Houston." The original entrance gateposts and the many remaining bungalows have suffered from lack of maintenance over the years. However, the neighborhood survives and demonstrates a higher level of planning and design than much of the surrounding area.

The Crain Ready-Cut House Company was also the official owner and developer of Southside Place, at the intersection of Bellaire Boulevard and Edloe Street. The company filed the subdivision plat with Harris County in 1924 and revised it in 1926. Few of the Crain Ready-Cut bungalows survived the transformation of this neighborhood into an upper-middle-class enclave during the '80s and '90s, but the generous community space at its center remains from the original plan. Southside Place was probably the first Houston subdivision to provide a swimming pool and tennis courts for the use of property owners. Maintenance of these amenities was covered by an annual fee of $50 per lot that was included as a provision in the deed, an early example of a subdivision maintenance fund.

In addition to its development activities in the 1920s, the Crain Ready-Cut House Company built houses for individuals in neighborhoods throughout Houston. Mechanic's liens in the Harris County Clerk's archives record that Crain Ready-Cut Houses were built in more than 35 different Houston subdivisions. The Texas General Contractors Association's monthly bulletin recorded additional construction activity by the company in Houston. Since Crain offered a wide range of sizes, styles, and finishes, its customers and building sites were equally varied. For example, in 1925 bookkeeper Fred P. Yeager and his wife contracted to pay the company $6,500 to build a six-room brick bungalow (Plan No. M-6472) at 1906 Wroxton in Southampton Place.

One of the most expensive houses that the company built was the house at 1511 North Boulevard for Crain's engineer, Edgar G. Maclay. Although the house was designed by Briscoe and Dixon, the Texas General Contractors Association's monthly bulletin recorded that Crain Ready-Cut House Company was awarded the $20,000 contract for construction of the two-story Mediterranean-style stucco house.

On a more modest scale, in 1921 widow Beatrice W. Arrington paid $2,500 for a four-room frame house (Plan No. M239) to be built in Woodland Heights at 606 Teetshorn. The company sold houses to African-American clients as well, including Veola J. Redick and his wife. The Redicks contracted in 1921 to pay $1,288 for their five-room frame house to be built on Herkimer Street, in the Houston Heights, within an area that the original Heights planners had set aside for African-Americans. Redick worked as butler for the James L. Autry family on Courtlandt Place.

Crain Ready-Cut house designs generally were not exceptional, but they reflected popular stylistic trends. The catalogues never credited designers of the early Crain Ready-Cut houses, but architect Charles O. Bovee worked for the company from 1923 until his retirement in the late 1950s. Born in 1891 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, Bovee studied and practiced architecture in Buffalo, New York, until World War I, when he was drafted into the Army. The Army brought him to Texas, where he was discharged from Camp McArthur at Waco in 1919. He worked in Dallas until January of 1923, when Crain offered him the position of chief architect in his company. Bovee married the next year and designed and built a house for his family at 4709 Clay Avenue in Eastwood.[4]

When the Depression halted the 1920s boom in house construction, Crain Ready-Cut had to find alternative construction work in order to survive. Bovee's son Charles remembers his father's projects from this period — a distinctive portable ice cream parlor for the Dairyland Ice Cream Company and a portable short-order-restaurant building that the Houston-based Toddle House adopted for its chain. (An example of the latter still survives at the intersection of

1906 Wroxton, in Southampton Place: Built in 1925 for Fred P. Yeager, a bookkeeper.

1718 Cherryhurst: Built in 1921 for C.W.D. Ferrell in Crain's first development.

South Shepherd and Harold.) The oil industry's need for pre-fabricated, sectional workers' housing and the construction of a number of camps for the Civilian Conservation Corps also helped keep Crain and his re-named Houston Ready-Cut House Company going.[5] In addition, Crain responded to new government programs designed to help the housing industry. In fact, after the passage of the Federal Housing Act, Crain began the most ambitious project of his life: the development of Garden Oaks.

In March 1937, the Garden Oaks Company, with E.L. Crain as president, purchased a 750-acre tract of land northwest of the Heights, outside Houston's city limits. Only four years later, Crain wrote that the company had platted 1,150 building lots, constructed ten miles of concrete roads, created parks and playgrounds, and constructed 681 houses, most of which were financed under the FHA program.

Though the development offered relatively inexpensive lots and houses for the middle class, Crain strove to incorporate the latest advances in planning, including curving streets and extra-long blocks laid out by the Kansas City landscape architects Hare & Hare. He kept many of the original oak and pine trees and gave a crape myrtle tree and rose bushes to each homeowner. Recognizing that some homeowners might use their own architects or designers, the company retained design control by requiring that plans for any improvements be submitted for approval. Since Garden Oaks was just outside the Houston city limits, Crain used the latest legal means to provide services for residents, including the creation of a water district. The property deeds included provisions for a maintenance fund to care for the streets and parks.[6]

J.C. Suttles took over as president of Houston Ready-Cut House Company when Crain started the Garden Oaks Company, but the House Company was still intimately involved with the Garden Oaks development, and offered a series of plywood homes designed to qualify for FHA financing.[7] Even as the Houston Ready-Cut House Company converted to war work during World War II, producing workers' housing, army barracks, and ammunition crates, it also planned for post-war housing work. Those plans were included in a 1944 article about prefabricated houses that ran in the influential design magazine *Arts and Architecture*.[8]

When Crain died in November 1950, his vision of a thriving Garden Oaks community was finally reaching fruition.[9] The entire pattern of suburban development was also changing, taking his practices of vertical integration and efficient building to extremes that led to a loss of the design variety and picturesque planning that Crain had incorporated into his own developments. ■

1. Edward Lillo Crain Jr. Telephone interview by Margaret Culbertson, May 21, 2002.
2. *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1917.
3. Surviving catalogues include T.J. Williams, *Better Built Homes for Less Money*, Houston, 1915 (private collection); Crain Ready-Cut House Company, *Crain Ready-Cut House Company, Catalogue 6*, Houston, n.d. and *Crain Ready-Cut and Sectional Houses, Catalogue 5*, Houston, ca. 1925 (Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library); and *Crain Ready-Cut House Company, Ready-Cut Homes, Catalogue No. 4*, Houston, n.d. (Library of Congress).
4. Charles Bovee, "Recollections of My Father." Typescript, 2001.
5. Harry H. Steidle. "A Statement from the Prefabricated Home Manufacturers Association." *Arts and Architecture* July 1944, p. 42.
6. E.L. Crain. "Creating a Well-Integrated Subdivision," *Insured Mortgage Portfolio*, 6, no.1, pp. 10-12, 37-39.
7. "Preview of a Post-war Prefabricated Home," *Prefabricated Homes 1*, no. 5, pp. 8-11, 21.
8. Steidle.
9. "Rites Saturday for Home Builder Crain," *Houston Post*, November 3, 1950.

Three bedrooms. $86K. Really.

BY DANNY MARC SAMUELS

WHAT COULD BE MORE OXYMORONIC than "affordable house"? Nobody, rich or poor, thinks houses are affordable. In fact, houses are expensive, whatever scale you put them on. Building them commands enormous resources of land, labor, energy, materials, and credit, and the cost reflects that. A house is almost always the largest investment a person makes; as a rule of thumb, you can afford a house that costs three times your annual income. You pay it back by literally mortgaging your future — often 30 years of it. And more than half of what you pay back is interest (see sidebar, page 27).

But interest, as costly as it is, has been at a moderate rate for an extended period. And this, more than any other factor, has made houses more affordable to more households, and to households with lower incomes, than ever before.

In addition, Houston homebuyers are fortunate: Housing is more affordable here than in any other major market in the U.S. In 2001, the median home price in Houston — $122,400 — was only 82 percent of the national average. The median house in San Francisco costs four times as much; in Boston, three times as much; and in Seattle and Los Angeles, twice as much. Houston boasts low land costs (even in some areas of the inner city), low construction costs, and a generally laissez-faire regulatory environment, which means shorter approval times and lower compliance costs.

The combination of low interest rates and low costs means that a large percentage of Houston households are able to own their homes, and that proportion has been increasing despite rising house prices. The Texas A&M Real Estate Center estimates that in 2001, 65 percent of Houston households could afford a median-price house, up from 58 percent in 1989. So even though the median house price more than doubled in that period — growing 8.6 percent in only the last year — two-thirds of households are able to afford the cost.

But what about the remaining third? What can they afford? Assistance programs are commonly targeted to households with incomes in the range of 50 to 80 percent of median. The median income for a Houston family of four is $59,600; using that number, the HUD website "affordability calculator" shows that a household with half that annual income ($29,800) and a modicum of other debt (payments of $300 per month) can afford a house costing about $85,500, while a family with an 80 percent median income ($47,680) can afford almost $140,000 — more than the median price.

The primary form of help for households earning 50 to 80 percent of median income comes from a program funded by HUD and administered by Housing Opportunities of Houston and the City of Houston Department of Housing and Community Development. This program offers down payment and closing-cost assistance of up to $9,500 to a qualified buyer of a new house. Other grants can sometimes enhance the terms of financing. The result is that buyers, who are often short on cash, can get into a new house for as little as $500.

But all those numbers and programs can be confusing, and most first-time buyers need education, counseling, and plenty of one-on-one assistance in navigating the complexities of home-buying. Whether in the public or the commercial realm, everybody who wants to get affordable houses into the hands of deserving buyers spends plenty of effort helping those buyers.

But numbers and abstractions tell only part of that story. What, I wondered, can a family making half of the median income actually buy? I set out on a *tour d'horizon* in search of new, three-bedroom houses that cost between $85,000 and $100,000. And I found some possibilities out there.

In Wal-Mart land up past the airport, in the sales office of Millennium Mobile Homes, President Robby Edmonston is in the doldrums and plenty angry. Sales have been scarce since January 1, when Texas House Bill 1869 took effect. Under this legislation, a mobile home placed on property belonging to the home's owner is no longer considered chattel, but real property, and must be titled and combined into a single deed with the property. Buyers who own their own land can no longer take out a personal loan, but must apply for the more complicated property loan, which requires land title, survey, closing, and other time-consuming and costly operations. A lien against the mobile home also becomes a lien against the property. If you miss some payments, not only is your home repossessed, but your family farm goes too.

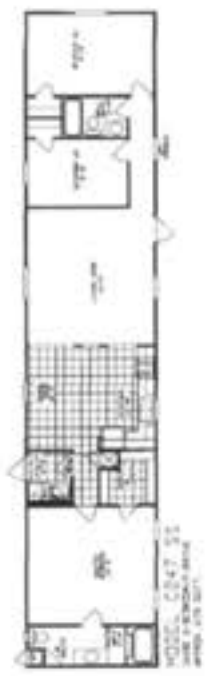
This legislation, intended to protect buyers from aggressive and expensive financing, cuts many marginal buyers out of the picture, along with the companies that financed them. The law excludes hardship cases and houses on rental property, such as mobile home courts, but even so, it has devastated the mobile-home market. Edmonston estimates that about 70 percent of Millennium's previous sales fell into the category affected. The manufactured housing industry has embarked on a lengthy process of hearings and lobbying, and aims for eventual amendments to the legislation.

Nonetheless, if you wanted to buy a manufactured home today, you'd begin by choosing your model and picking materials, colors, and finishes from a catalog in Millennium's showroom. Single-wide units come in three widths — 14 feet, 16 feet, or 18 feet — and they range from 900 to 1,200 square feet. The most popular models are 16-feet-by-80-feet single-wides that accommodate three bedrooms and two baths in 1,200 square feet. They cost $29,000 to $36,000. You'll pay about $350 per month, and you can expect to pay another $180 to $200 per month to rent a 40-foot-by-100-foot lot in a mobile home park. A more luxurious double-wide — that is, two units connected side by side — stretches 28 feet across and offers up to 2,600 square feet — enough room for five bedrooms and three baths.

After you place your order, your manufactured home is produced at a factory within a few hundred miles of your site — maybe in Athens, Texas, or in Burleson or Seguin. The house is built on a metal chassis, with walls and roof made of conventional wood framing. The factory does most of the finishing work and even installs the kitchen appliances.

Two weeks after you place your order, your new custom house rolls up to your site. Millennium's contractors place the home on a block foundation or, if you selected a gypsum-board interior, on a poured concrete runner that provides more stability. The house is tied down, and its wheels are removed. If it's a double-wide, its joint is patched. After the utilities are hooked up, the house is ready for furniture.

If you want to live on your own lot inside the Houston city limits, though, you'll have to choose a more expensive option. City building codes tend to



WHAT	Manufactured home
WHERE	Wherever you want
PLAN	Model 247
WHO	Redman Homes
SQ FT	1,200 square feet
COST	$32,000
COST/SF	$26.67 *not including land*

WHAT	Habitat for Humanity house
WHERE	Carverdale Community
PLAN	Standard Plan
WHO	Houston Habitat for Humanity
SQ FT	1,050 square feet
COST	$59,000
COST/SF	$56.19

discourage regular mobile homes, relegating them to mobile home parks or lots of more than one acre. The manufactured housing industry counters by providing HUD-code "modular homes," products that meet urban building code requirements in areas such as storm-resistance, plumbing, and wiring, but which otherwise look pretty much like mobile homes, with identical floor plans and options. A modular home costs about $20,000 more than its mobile sibling, and averages about $45 per square foot compared to $25 per square foot for a standard mobile home, not including land.

A recent visit to Habitat for Humanity's site at Carverdale Community, at Gessner and Hempstead Highway, found no construction activity on a sunny Saturday afternoon, but there was plenty of evidence of past activity. In the last three years, Habitat volunteers sponsored by institutions and corporations have built more than 50 homes on sites scattered through the neighborhood. Habitat for Humanity seeks to make homeowners of buyers with household incomes between $18,000 and $29,000 (30 to 50 percent of median income) — a group that falls beneath most other organizations' radar.

To produce ultra-low-cost houses that these families can afford, Habitat relies on volunteer labor to build houses quickly, and it does this very well. To begin with, the houses themselves are very simple and standardized. A typical Habitat house has three bedrooms, one bath, and no garage, and it occupies less than 1,050 square feet. (Variants include a two-bedroom model at 1,000 square feet, and a four-bedroom, two-bath model at 1,100 square feet.) Construction is wood frame, slab on grade, with vinyl siding and composition roof. Over the course of five or six weekend work days, volunteers raise the frame and trusses, then install roofing, windows, and siding. Contractors complete the interior finishing as well as the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing work.

To sponsor a house, an organization pays about $50,000, which covers land, site development, materials, contractors and Habitat construction assistance. Buyers are carefully selected and coached. A typical Habitat house last year sold for $59,000 plus 300 hours of "sweat equity" — which is to say that the buyer helps build new Habitat houses. Not counting sweat equity, the buyer pays about $400 per month with a zero-percent-interest loan.

According to Development Director Dave Daniels, Habitat of Houston builds 45 to 50 houses per year, which places the group among the five top Habitat producers in the U.S. For more efficiency, the group is now consolidating its activity at a single site. This spring, Habitat kicked off a spring-summer round of 42 houses in northeast Houston's Wood Glen. The 25-acre site will eventually accommodate 118 houses.

Meanwhile, out on the prairie horizon of far west Houston, at Fry Road and I-10, in the sales office of Cypress Meadows, Royce Builders markets an entry-level suburban dream. Families are waiting in line to see sales counselor Gus Garcia, who tells the would-be customers how to buy homes that start just under $100,000. Garcia has sold 28 of these houses in the last 40 days.

At Cypress Meadows, bigger is a bargain. A one-story, 1,197-square-foot house with three bedrooms, two baths, and a two-car garage costs $94,990; a 2,107-square-foot two-story, with three bedrooms and two and a half baths, costs $112,990. The smaller house factors out to about $80 per square foot; the larger, about $54 per square foot. Garcia explains this discrepancy: Both houses have the same slab and roof area, and the same kitchen and bathroom costs. As the size increases, building costs drop significantly.

But the smaller house is right for some buyers — the ones who can qualify for a loan with payments of $850 per

WHO	Royce Builders
WHERE	Cypress Meadows
PLAN	Plan 1197
WHO	Royce Builders
SQ.FT.	1,197 square feet
COST	$94,990
COST/SF	$79.35

WHO	Fifth Ward CRC
WHERE	Finnegan Park Place Court
PLAN	Plan 3. "The Peavy"
WHO	EDI Architecture, Inc.
SQ.FT.	1,105 square feet
COST	$89,188
COST/SF	$80.71

month, but not $860 per month. To qualify for a $100,000 house loan, a buyer must have a family income of $26,000 to $34,000 (50 percent of median), and can expect to pay $900 to $1,040 per month, including taxes, insurance, interest, and principal. Garcia spends most of his time matching his potential buyers to suitable assistance programs.

The area's larger homebuilders (such as Royce, NuHome, Meridian Homes, Parkside, Texas Colonial Homes, KB Home, Beazer Homes, Fox & Jacobs, and US Homes) are rushing to supply the enormous market for houses that cost less than $100,000.

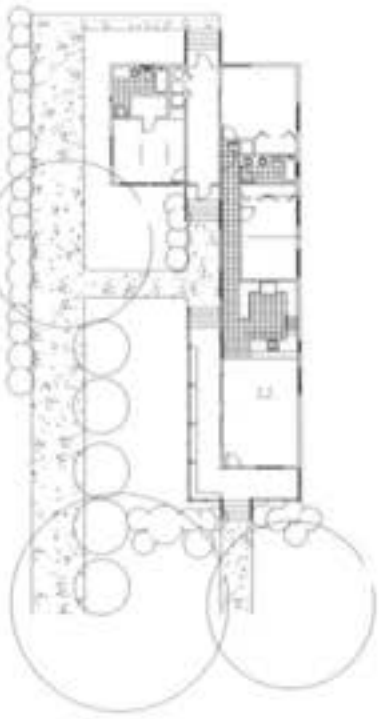
How can they sell a house so cheaply and still turn a profit? These builders start by developing land themselves, rather than buying it from a traditional developer, and by doing so save up to $6,000 per lot. The lots are small (generally 40 feet wide, rather than the 55 to 60 feet commonly seen in suburbia); six to eight houses will fit on an acre. In general, the houses are built in 80 days rather than the usual 90 to 110; prefabricated wall panels are often used to speed construction. Plans tend to be squarish, with no costly projections on the side or rear. Ceilings are eight feet high; a 10-foot ceiling would cost $2,200 more. Sometimes garages are not included in the base package — but when they are, the garage door tends to dominate the street front of the house.

Of course, the merchant builders are working at the fringes, 30 to 40 miles outside the 610 Loop, where land costs are relatively low, and where they can control the development costs. These products are very attractive to homebuyers — what they see is good value for the price, new neighborhoods with good schools, and maybe even proximity to the buyer's workplace. But looking at the same developments, urban planners see a car-dependent lifestyle that leads to a low-density, spread-out city form that eats up land and resources at an unsustainable rate.

What are the options for buyers who prefer to live in the central city? Land often costs four or five times as much as at the city's edge, and development costs are at least doubled. To squeeze the maximum number of units onto the land, developers build townhouses, up to 27 per acre, typically three to four stories high. And people in the middle income brackets buy them.

Perry Homes has built block after block of three-story townhouses, transforming inner-city Houston. Perry tries to create an "urban environment" by developing large tracts of land, several blocks in area, where it can build a hundred or more units at a time. Its "market-affordable" townhouse is designed for a buyer of modest income — a teacher or a fireman. At Baldwin Square, in east Midtown, Perry offers a three-story model with two bedrooms, two and a half baths, and a "library" that can be used as guest room. At $210,000, it costs $116 per square foot — about twice what it costs to buy a house on a large lot 40 miles farther west. You pay a premium to be at the center of things.

Henry Cisneros, former mayor of San Antonio and HUD Secretary in the Clinton Administration, wants to apply his insights to affordable houses in the inner city. His American City Vista has joined forces with builder KB Homes in an effort to combine mass production methods and New Urbanist principles and bring them to neglected inner-city sites. They develop urban villages on vacated and often remediated industrial sites. Such a village would include 80 to 100 two- and three-story houses that sell for $85,000 to $120,000. With successful projects in San Antonio, Dallas, California, and Georgia, the team is now developing a project in Houston, near Hobby Airport.



WHO	Fifth Ward CRC
WHERE	5013 Pickfair
PLAN	Garden House
WHO	Morris Gutierrez Architects
SQ FT	1,780 square feet
COST	$120,000
COST/SF	$67.41

WHO	Habitat for Humanity
WHERE	Carverdale Community
PLAN	Architect's version
WHO	Gensler
SQ FT	1,152 square feet
COST	$59,000
COST/SF	$57.22

The other major builders in the inner city are community development corporations, which aim to revitalize inner-city neighborhoods rather than make a profit. Many CDCs have had trouble building houses, but some have been notable exceptions to that rule. Kathy Payton, the new president and CEO of Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation, has a high-energy presence and a formidable command of facts and figures. The Fifth Ward CRC, she says, has built more than 220 single-family houses in its ten years, and 45 more are scheduled for 2002.

To avoid a concentration of low-income housing, the Fifth Ward CRC seeks a broad range of buyers — families earning anywhere from 30 to 115 percent of the median income. The CRC's houses are generally built from 14 designs done pro bono more than ten years ago by EDI Architecture, Inc. The houses range from two to five bedrooms, 700 to 2,200 square feet, and sell for $65,000 to $120,000. The most popular plan is the Peavy, 1,105 square feet with three bedrooms and two baths, which sells for $89,188. Lot costs are $7,000 to $10,000, and development (that is, providing access and services such as water and sewer hook-up) costs up to $7,000 per house. The CRC's own construction company builds at $40 to $52 per square foot — about the same as commercial builders, but with the added benefit of distributing the money to neighborhood tradespeople.

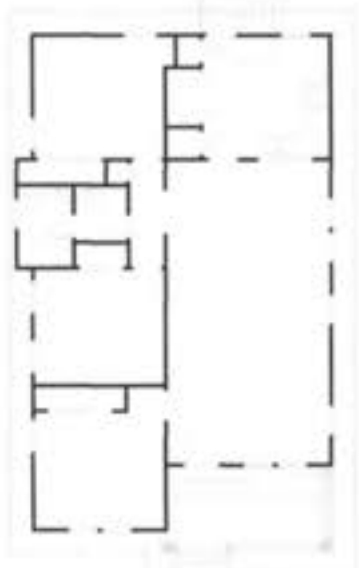
Because land continues to be cheap in some inner-city neighborhoods, CDCs have been able to continue offering affordable single-family houses on their own lots. It's an odd situation: In the central city, only the very rich and the very poor live in detached houses; middle-income families long ago reconciled themselves to occupying one-third of an urban lot and living on three or four floors, right up against their neighbors. But in the low-cost end of the market, "everybody wants single-family," says Payton.

Will higher land costs eventually cause CDCs to consider higher-density alternatives? Cost escalation has already driven Avenue CDC beyond its original Washington Avenue area, and the Fifth Ward CRC is being squeezed north of I-10. But beyond these close-in areas, there remain vast neighborhoods with plenty of potential sites. As long as the CDCs continue to develop on scattered sites, we will continue to see the urban anomaly of single-family detached houses for a while to come.

My search around Houston showed that the marketplace has provided lots of affordable housing at the low end of the price scale. The housing may not be where the buyer wants it, but it's there. All the options — manufactured housing, houses built by Habitat and the CDCs, and merchant builders' products — are in great demand. Highly developed mechanisms deliver the housing to grateful buyers, and even buyers with marginal credit are able to find someplace to own.

So what is missing? An architect might say "architecture" — even as nobody else seems to notice or care. Of course, the same could be said about any level of the housing market, almost all of which seems to get by very well without benefit of architects. The question arises: Do architects have anything relevant to contribute to affordable housing?

The Fifth Ward CRC wanted to find out. In 1998, Mardie Oakes, the Fifth Ward CRC's special projects manager and a recent Rice graduate, and Michael Bell, a Rice assistant professor of architecture, organized a design charrette among 16 architects from Houston and other cities. (The charrette was sponsored by DiverseWorks, the Fifth Ward CRC, Rice University, and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County.) The architects were charged with designing houses that would qualify for down-payment assistance — which meant they could sell for no more than $103,000. DiverseWorks displayed the



[illegible]	Avenue CDC
[illegible]	Gano and Anderson
[illegible]	Gano Housing
[illegible]	McIntyre + Rabinowitz, Architects
[illegible]	1,210 square feet
[illegible]	$85,500
[illegible]	$70.66

resulting ideas in the exhibition *Sixteen Houses: Owning a House in the City* (see "Low-Cost Design," *Cite* 49). A jury of Fifth Ward residents and architecture professionals selected seven of the plans, and the CRC commissioned their architects to prepare construction documents. The CRC found buyers, and the houses were slated for construction.

For the houses to sell for $103,000 or less, the construction could cost no more than $80,000. The architects struggled to meet that figure, and there has been a constant tension between architects' intentions and builders' budgets. Architects are reluctant to use the conventional materials and details that would make the builders' numbers work. To make matters worse, the unexpected cost of a required city water service added about $8,000 to the cost of developing each lot — and a year to the construction time.

After three years, four of the original seven houses remain in development. Their construction costs have come in around $100,000, which means that they will be sold for about $120,000 — too much to qualify for the voucher program that originally inspired their design.

Still, bringing a house to market for $120,000 is no mean feat. The first of the designs, an elegant garden house on high piers by Deborah Morris of Morris Gutierrez Architects, is in construction. Houses by Keith Krumwiede, Carlos Jiménez, and Williams+Pizzini are slated to follow. Kathy Payton is diplomatic. "The architects have had some challenges," she says. "Architects have creative minds, but creativity drives cost. The challenge still is to build a house without losing the creativity, but at the same time maintaining the affordability."

Other architects' experiments, with more modest intentions, developed designs to blend into the surrounding neighborhoods. At the same time as the Sixteen Houses effort, Gensler celebrated its selection as American Institute of Architects Firm of the Year by designing and constructing a Habitat house. Thirteen designs were submitted to the office competition; Paul Homeyer's was selected. The two-story scheme departs from Habitat's customary one-story, volunteer-friendly designs, but otherwise stuck close to Habitat's standard practices: aluminum windows (but larger ones and more of them), vinyl siding (but wider trim sections), a porch (but one that wraps around two sides of the house and has simple Craftsman brackets). The plan is 24 feet square, providing 1,152 square feet of interior space. The living room, dining room, and kitchen are on the ground floor; the three bedrooms and one bath on the second.

Meanwhile, Avenue CDC is building four new houses designed by McIntyre + Rabinowitz, Architects. Here the architects adopt the developer tactic of applying four different elevations to one floor plan. Each 1,210-square-foot house has three bedrooms and a bathroom with two sink compartments, what Rabinowitz calls a "one and a quarter bath." The scheme is a take-off on a traditional bungalow, with pier-and-beam construction, front porch, cement fiberboard siding, aluminum windows, and no garage. The architects worked closely with the contractor, who scrutinized every aspect of the design, but they were still able to provide front porches, wood floors, nine-foot ceilings, and some variety among the houses' exteriors. The construction cost is about $53.50 per square foot, or $64,000 per house. Nicole Miller at Avenue CDC reports that although the houses will be priced at $85,500, a package of two to five grants can bring the cost as low as $56,000.

Stephan Fairfield, the founding director of the Fifth Ward CRC and an experienced player in the field of affordable housing, has an intriguing idea to make architectural design more readily available. As president and CEO of Covenant Community Capital, he would like to establish a large library of house designs available at a nominal charge to CDCs, builders, and buyers. Covenant would act as a purchasing co-op, gathering workable existing designs or commissioning architects to develop new ones, paying the architects' fees, and spreading the cost over a wide base. He foresees that all the plans would be based on a common menu of details, materials, and fixtures, and that each would come with material take-offs and price information by contractors.

John K. Spear, AIA, has had years of experience with affordable housing. The Houston architect is also a realtor, housing advocate, and past chair of the American Institute of Architects' national housing committee. For him, the key to affordability is not initial cost, but the house's long-term viability and appreciation. To build wealth for its owners — most of whose net worth is represented by their home — a house must be durable, energy-efficient, and adaptable to future expansion. "If we are not to build future slums," says Spear, "we must not compromise long-term maintenance or energy efficiency for initial cost." Equally important is the house's ability to grow and adapt as its owner's needs change. Thus, the owner's investment in the house retains and builds in value over time. In 20 years, a house should be worth substantially more than its original cost.

Such design goals are noble, but at the same time modest. They call for a certain kind of design intelligence that relies on incremental evolutionary steps rather than grand design solutions. Affordable housing should respond to user needs, understand and respond to its context, enhance its neighborhood, and be built to last. Spear has worked on a web site, Affordable Housing Design Advisor (designadvisor.org), a joint project of the AIA, HUD, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and others, that espouses just those goals to community housing providers. (Yes, Design Advisor does recommend retaining an architect.) A checklist describes 60 key "design considerations" in the areas of parking, public open space, private open space, landscaping, building location, building layout, and unit layout. All of these are simple and practical considerations, each illustrated by numerous built examples. For example, a picture of an entry patio shows that it can comfortably handle plants, bikes, furniture, and people coming and going.

The site is reminiscent of the builder's pattern books that guided developers in the early 20th century, resulting in the modest houses and cohesive neighborhoods (such as Montrose and the Heights) that have served generations of families very well, that have appreciated in value, and that we now love so much. Architects would do well to study such examples. ■

The High Cost of Financing

By far the largest portion of a mortgage payment represents the cost of credit. John K. Spear, AIA, an expert on affordable housing, offers several examples. He points out that for an average new merchant-builder house costing $226,680 (National Association of Home Builders statistics), 24 percent of the price covers the cost of the finished lot, while 55 percent represents its total construction cost. The remaining 21 percent represents interim financing, marketing, commissions, and profit.

If you pay 20 percent down, and finance your purchase with a conventional 30-year mortgage at a 7 percent interest rate, you will pay principal and interest of $1,206.50 each month for a total of $479,676. Interest represents 53 percent of what you pay over the life of the mortgage plus the down payment; the cost of construction is only 26 percent. At an 8 percent interest rate, 57 percent of your payments plus down payment cover interest. Because of the structure of the typical mortgage payment schedule, almost everything you pay in the early years after closing is only interest.

If you buy a typical "affordable" house, interest claims an even higher percentage of the total cost. For a house costing $100,000, with a 5 percent down payment (sometimes assisted through various programs), you will pay $632.04 per month at 7 percent; 57 percent of the total payback is interest. At an 8 percent interest rate, a full 60 percent of your payment covers interest. If you buy a "starter" home that you outgrow in seven to ten years, you pay mostly interest and do not achieve much equity increase other than through inflation-driven appreciation.

The obvious conclusion: The affordability game is more about soft costs than hard costs.

— *Danny Marc Samuels*

The False Promise of Technology

Architects have often seen the problem of affordable housing as a problem in the technology of making houses, especially as applied to the structure and envelope of the house: If only we could make houses with new systems, they could be produced more efficiently at less cost. Unfortunately, the historic path of building is littered with hopeful but failed experiments in this vein. Success has come instead with incremental, evolutionary development of the wood-frame system used in most American houses for the last 150 years.

Some of us may remember Operation Breakthrough, an optimistic 1970s effort of Nixon's HUD Secretary George Romney, fresh from American Motors, to promote the industrialization of housing. Using federal grants, architects and builders looked for the amazing new material, joint, procedure, or design that would revolutionize the building process. Concrete systems, component systems, box systems, on-site, and factory systems were conceived and tried. Within a few years, the effort collapsed, with no lasting effects.

Trying again in 1998, Clinton's HUD sponsored the Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing, bringing together manufacturers, builders, code officials, research sponsors, and government agencies to coordinate research and development investments. The goals were lofty: reduce monthly housing costs by 20 percent; cut energy use and environmental impact by 50 percent; improve durability and reduce maintenance costs by 50 percent. The technology "road maps" identified were actually realistic: advanced panel construction; information technology to streamline the building process; and faster and better construction through systems methods and industrialization of the building process.

But within two years, the PATH Committee of Oversight and Assessment pointed out the impossibility of reaching its ambitious goals. Reducing housing costs by 20 percent solely through new technologies was nearly impossible, noted the committee. Since less than half of monthly housing costs are related to construction, construction costs would have to be cut in half. The committee also observed that energy and environmental effects are so complex and interrelated that a measure that might be positive in one regard might be detrimental in another (for instance, increased energy efficiency by reduced air infiltration might diminish indoor air quality), or that to achieve real cuts in energy usage would necessitate higher first cost, rather than lower.

The old wood framing system, however, has proved to be an evolutionary survivor, and has continued to adapt well to the American building environment. If you look at an 1890 photograph of a western boom town under construction, or Architectural Graphic Standards from the 1930s, you will see fundamentally the same system being used today. It is strong, light-weight, low-cost, readily available, generally understood, and easily erected by a small crew with minimal training. If periodically maintained and protected from water, fire, and termites, it is indefinitely durable. Over its history, numerous refinements have been introduced: slab on grade, plywood decking and sheathing, engineered trusses and beams, fast-grow lumber, metal connectors, aluminum windows, more efficient insulation, and on and on. But the main line of development has continued.

— *Danny Marc Samuels*

SuperModel Homes™

BY KEITH KRUMWIEDE

"We offer homes and lifestyles ..."[1]

On Highway 290, in northwest Houston, superstores offer everyday low prices for everything needed to stock the average American home and fuel the average American lifestyle. Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Target, Academy Sports and Outdoor, and others populate a big-box landscape of high volumes and deep discounts. In 1997, a new player entered the big-box game. David Weekley Homes™ opened the David Weekley New Home Center™, a 17,000-square-foot superstore.[2] This "one-stop home shop" turned the superstore concept inside out: It sold not household goods but the houses themselves; not the small goods, but the container.

David Weekley™ positions his home superstore to be, like its big-box neighbors, a category killer. The New Home Center™ capitalizes on big-box innovations, adding personal service to consumer choice and competitive prices. "Designed to service the needs of customers from start to finish,"[3] it incorporates almost every conceivable component of the home-buying process: a map room of Weekley communities, on-site model homes, a showroom of finishes and fixtures, and even a mortgage and title company to assist in financing and closing the deal. This combination of service and selection generates an atmosphere of exclusivity by offering what seems to be a customized experience.

Homebuyers can choose from over 100 floor plans and, through consultation with a Weekley designer, "personalize their home [in one of more than 25 different subdivisions] with hundreds of design options ... and thousands of decorator selections."[4] After selecting a home plan, buyers meet their designer to finalize finishes and fixtures and are assigned a Personal Builder™ who supervises construction of their "custom" home. The buyer can check construction status daily via a personal, password-protected Homebuyer web site.

In the Build on Your Lot program, a critical component of the New Home Center™, buyers can even choose to build their David Weekley™ home anywhere in Houston. Weekley — the largest homebuilder in Texas, and the second largest in the U.S. — sells almost 1,000 homes per year in the city.[5] That volume creates an economy of scale that allows Weekley to compete across multiple sales brackets.[6] More important, it creates an economic position that allows the builder to work on individual, scattered lots. The necessary economies of scale, previously available only in large subdivisions where houses are constructed in a factory-like manner, are now distributed lot by lot across Houston. Essentially, every neighborhood becomes a potential David Weekley™ subdivision.

Marketing offers the consumer an entire philosophy of living at the New Home Center™. The homes are presented as the product of "over 20 years of research into how people live."[7] According to sales literature, LifeDesign™, Weekley's residential ethos, is "an art, a science, a unique ingredient in each home we build that enhances its value."[8] LifeDesign™ spins David Weekley™ product out of the ordinary cycles of suburban marketing and into the world of custom construction, "ensuring that your home will live as well as it looks."[9] The sales experience transforms a more or less typical suburban home into an "innovative design" achieved through "incomparable choice" with "inspired service."[10] The buyer is not just purchasing a house, but a perfectly crafted and carefully marketed lifestyle.

Marketing as Planning

Marketing is everything — and not just at David Weekley Homes™. It shapes both our products and our relationships to products. It effectively and efficiently transforms our world through formulas that connect consumers and producers in complex socio-economic equations, determining not only the style of individuals' lives but the appearance and performance of their collective environment — the city — as well. As everything is reduced to marketable product, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish any values not directly related to increased financial return. In cities, the results are clear: Collective civic interests — cultural, social, or environmental — are swept under by waves of private development, immune to any value save the bottom line.

This is not to say that other values disappear. In fact, they're touted, espoused, and, of course, capitalized upon every day. You can't market anything — save perhaps stocks or bonds — by transparently presenting its effect on the producer's profits. Added, apparently market-free values — patriotism, family, Main Street Americana, neighborliness — provide the necessary camouflage to shepherd products safely to market. All manner of goods and services, from pharmaceuticals to cities, are commonly clothed in co-opted value systems that construct visions of the good life, free from everyday struggles.

Cities — as marketplaces, the traditional domain of marketing — are now literally constructed through marketing. Planning is dead. And not just in Houston, which is notorious for its lack of zoning, but is frankly no better or worse than any other sprawling American metropolis. Notwithstanding the recent popularity of lifestyle magazines — *Wallpaper**, *Surface*, *Nest* — that sell visions of jet-set urbanity in plush, sexed-up environs, the suburban dream and its attendant value structure still drives most current marketing. Since World War II, the private, bucolic realm of the single-family home set among like-minded neighbors has symbolized comfort, success, and security in an otherwise unstable (and presumably unsightly) world. That suburban image, once limited to a city's edges, increasingly invades all territories, both rural and urban. The suburban product world now shapes virtually all private development (for the most part, the only game in town), turning every place, except perhaps Manhattan, into a suburb. For the marketer as for the consumer, the suburban sylvan ideal displaces a dirty urban reality.

Never mind that as cities expand our parents' suburban becomes our urban, as ours will most likely be our children's. In Houston, arguably the country's most suburban city, recent private development has reconceived the older, more urban core — including yesterday's suburbs — as a new territory ripe for suburban colonization. In the constant search for new fields of operation, private developers are

Attention Houston shoppers!
Blue-light special in the Midtown section: spacious neo-Georgian townhomes available near signature Parisian boulevard!

now backfilling the Inner Loop with development products and lifestyles born on its outer shores. Small city lots are stuffed with oversized McMansions or multiple townhouses boasting suburban-scaled interiors; candy-colored strip centers complete with synthetic stucco pediments and plenty of paving are placed along every busy street. Even when new typologies for housing are introduced or rediscovered — townhouses, lofts, or apartments over retail — they are clothed in the neo-traditional garb of their suburban cousins and often exhibit the same negligent behavior in regard to the public realm. Adjoining townhouses huddle in gated, insular enclaves or line block after block with a continuous wall of garage doors facing the street. As development seeks new shelf space in the Inner Loop, the complex mixture of buildings and programs that defines a vibrant urban setting is replaced with the bland homogeneity of the newest exurban subdivisions and strips.

Writing about Houston in 1978, British architecture and design critic Reyner Banham noted that the city "has no native-grown culture with which to explain itself to the world. It has no history to explain itself to itself even."[11] An enthusiastic observer of American building culture and cities, Banham, in a one-day tour of the city, astutely observed the "open game" of land values, combined with the lack of any geographic impediments or zoning, that then, as now, drives the speculative production in this city. But he missed the game's importance: It *is* the culture with which we explain ourselves to ourselves. Ever since the Allen brothers gambled on the marketability of a bend in Buffalo Bayou, Houston's "native-grown culture" has been real-estate speculation. And marketing.

Big-Box Urbanism

Marketing-as-planning structures Houston as a vast retail environment — not just a city of big boxes, but the city as a big box. Wal-Mart, not only the world's largest retailer but also the world's largest company, constantly manipulates its floor stock in response to real-time demographic profiling. As customers check out, their purchases are correlated item by item with other purchases made in every other store in the system. Armed with that information, Wal-Mart adjusts the distribution of its products both globally and locally. In a similar manner, but without benefit of management, real-estate product in Houston is constantly repositioned for better market performance. The city's streets — its shelves — are constantly restocked. New product replaces old, as suburban settings are displayed for sale throughout the city.

The real estate products in Houston and other major cities are increasingly similar. That sameness has its uses. Mortgage banking and real estate development protocols demand a certain level of design uniformity to best guarantee the maximum market share available. Mortgages are traded as commodities, and a uniform product makes mortgage transfer easier. If each house were deeply different, then something other than a spreadsheet would be required to assess and communicate its market value as covered by the mortgage.

Design distinctions offer no competitive advantage in the housing market. A unique product, however innovative or intelligent, introduces an unacceptable level of financial risk for developers and banks alike. Success sells, and difference is dangerous. With design reduced to replicating previous successes, the question becomes how to distinguish an undistinguished housing product.

As all real estate products — houses, townhouses, subdivisions, retail centers — become more generic, it becomes harder for a builder to gain a competitive edge. Better product placement (exclusivity) or discount pricing (economy) offer advantages, but both tend to reduce the potential size of the market. It is possible, however, to offer an essentially generic product under the guise of exclusivity, and to offer the appearance of distinction with the assurance of affordability.

That, of course, is the magic of David Weekley's big box.

SuperModel Homes

Behind the New Home Center™ on David Weekley Court sit three "Idea Homes" that demonstrate "just how David Weekley's designs become buyers' dreams."[12] Each home is styled — or, more precisely, life-styled — to show the advantages of purchasing a Weekley Home. The smallest, the Wilkins, is relatively modest by current Houston standards: one story, two baths, three bedrooms plus FlexSpace™ — a Weekley term for space-we-don't-know-what-to-do-with-yet. The Wilkins' not-so-subtle French theme in blue and yellow carries through to the color-coordinated socks and shirts hanging to dry in the laundry room. In the kitchen, prints of Parisian street scenes line the walls, and a cookbook titled *Backroad Bistros, Farmhouse Fare* lies open near a wicker breadbasket overflowing with baguettes.

The Wilkins is not the smallest plan in David Weekley's arsenal. In fact, at approximately 2,200 square feet, it's almost 600 square feet larger than something called the Eastdale. But the Wilkins is clearly the starter house in the Idea Homes trio.

The furnishings and household belongings indicate that the home's fictional family is a young couple with an infant and a toddler. The smallest bedroom is furnished as a nursery. Stuffed animals fill the crib, and a changing table is stocked with Huggies. The second bedroom, a little girl's, houses "Patsy's Puppet Playhouse," with the puppet actors hung from the theater's ceiling and an audience of dolls on the bed. The FlexSpace™ is certainly the young father's domain — at least until another child comes along. The room is outfitted with fishing poles, nets, aquatic taxidermy, and fishing-related prints. On the desk sits a flat-screen computer by Props™, an electronics company that apparently reduces overhead by dispensing with circuitry.

The master bedroom (or "owner's retreat," as it is known in most contemporary residential developers' plans) is least distinguished by any character traits except, of course, a taste for the good life. A food tray with a plastic fruit-and-croissant breakfast sits on the king-size bed. Clearly, this is just the beginning for the Wilkins family. Available for between $152,000 and $212,000, depending on location, the house is the first step in a three-tiered rise to the top of the home market.

The second model on the David Weekley Court, the Collingsworth, measures almost 2,900 square feet. It costs anywhere from a modest $194,000 for the Urban model from the Build on Your Lot program to $485,000 for a Custom Classic version located at Cole's Crossing, described as "an exit from the fast lane … where the milkman still delivers."[13] (In fact, buyers receive six months of free milk delivery.) A step up from the Wilkins, the Collingsworth introduces the increasingly popular "children's retreat" between bedrooms two and three. It's described as "a special place just for the kids, where they can do their homework, play games, or watch TV while mom and dad enjoy some quiet time with a movie or reading by the family room fire."[14] The room holds an easel and several

board games, along with a colorful array of kid-friendly furniture.

The display model corresponds perfectly with the idealized life of Weekley's literature. The kids in this house, rung two on the ladder to domestic bliss, are slightly older than those at the Wilkins and are starting to display personality traits with their bedroom furnishings. The young girl in bedroom three is still obsessed with dolls (an antique baby carriage sits in her room), while the young boy in bedroom two is in the midst of a politically correct cowboys-and-Indians phase. (His wallpaper shows an integrated Southwestern camp with teepees and a chuck wagon). Apparently the boy also dreams of growing up to be David Weekley™. On his desk, beside a tomahawk and beneath a Buffalo Bill poster, sits a Props™ computer with a sales report displayed on its frozen screen. According to the report, Props™ products provide a critical sales advantage to the home seller; for the past four quarters, sales of model homes with Props™ electronics have outperformed those without.

The Collingsworth's FlexSpace™ is an optional attic room complete with dormers. Perhaps the cowboy-loving son chose its saloon furnishings: swinging doors, saddle barstools, cowboy boots, a full-sized John Wayne cardboard placard, and cartoon cowboy wall covering. Several resin-filled, foam-topped beer mugs and a few bowls of stale popcorn sit next to unplayed hands at the poker table. It's as if a neutron bomb has erased all the occupants without disturbing their domestic dreams.

By now, you feel as though you're spying on strangely perfect Stepford families. In several rooms, embroidered pillows sport clever sayings: "If you want the best seat in the house, move the dog"; "My favorite thing to make for dinner is reservations"; and "I may have my faults, but being wrong is not one of them." The unseen Weekley set decorator seems to be asking, "How could anyone who lives this well be wrong?"

The Collingsworths may not be wrong, but they're not as right as their neighbors. The Winchester measures 3,400 square feet and is priced as low as $227,000 on your own "Urban" lot. The biggest of the three Idea Homes, the Winchester still ranks a significant notch below the biggest, most expensive David Weekley Homes™. (The Kramer, for instance, measures 4,500 square feet, and is available at Cole's Crossing for about $500,000.) But among the three Idea Homes, the Winchester represents the top of the ladder, the ultimate in the three-steps-to-success, David Weekley New Home Center™ supermodel series.

As you enter the Winchester, you're greeted by the butler — a flat, stiff butler cut out of wood and painted to resemble a servant from Masterpiece Theatre. He stands in the foyer, holding a serving tray with four crystal brandy snifters. With this aristocratic flourish, the scene is set.

A dinner party is about to take place. To the left of the foyer, the table is set, and delicious-looking (albeit artificial) desserts are lined up on the sideboard. To the right, dark-stained wood wainscoting and built-in bookcases line the walls of the library, which features an antique drop-front writing desk and a crystal decanter filled with faux Scotch. Curiously, Leon Uris's *Armageddon* claims a prominent place on the bookshelf. Has David Weekley™ imagined the neutron-bomb scenario as well?

As in the other homes, the kitchen is the picture of good, healthy living. Plastic artichokes waiting to be prepared on the cutting board, fresh herbs dry on a rack, and a can of Ghirardelli coffee sits on the counter. A cornucopia overflows with wheat on the island next to the range.

On the other side of the spacious family room, the owner's retreat is finished in French neo-classical style. The wallpaper shows a classical frieze, and framed Beaux Arts prints hang on the walls. A breakfast tray rests on the ottoman, complete with a fresh bowl of plastic strawberries, a plastic croissant — from the Wilkins bakery, perhaps? — and an empty coffee cup. A photo on the dresser shows smiling grandparents with three teenaged children. Through a corner window, a person relaxing in the sitting area could look out onto … an overflowing dumpster in the parking lot next door. The trash is conspicuously out of place in this perfect world. For a moment, the illusion is broken.

The three upstairs bedrooms surround the requisite children's retreat. This retreat is clearly the domain of teenagers. The board game Clue (it was the butler in the foyer with the brandy snifter!) is hidden in the closet. Commanding far more attention, a bookshelf/desk unit along the wall displays what must be the complete Props™ product line — a computer, stereo, and television.

The kids' bedrooms in the Winchester are the most fully developed spaces in the Idea Homes. These children are ambitious and hard working, with clearly defined dreams and ambitions. Bedroom four is the romantic traveler's room, with model biplanes, sailing ships, and hot-air balloons accompanied by Victorian-era painted wooden figures. In the closet, two leather suitcases await duty.

Bedroom number two (if only the occupants had names!) is home to the future archeologist. Prehistoric-looking models of insects, a book on fossils, a globe, and an African drum sit among rattan furniture. Mosquito netting drapes the canopy bed, and a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* poster hangs next to the door.

The last room, bedroom number three at the front of the house, belongs to a young woman obsessed with architecture. She appears little interested in the teenaged trappings that annoy adults; only a few desultory clippings of heartthrobs and a homecoming ribbon are displayed on a small tack board. This young woman focuses on her goals. A wire model of the Eiffel Tower stands next to the bed. Framed photographs of classical details hang on the walls, along with a surrealist montage of the interior of a Gothic cathedral overlaid on an Atget-like urban street scene. A slipcover on the chair at the drafting table matches a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired bedspread. The shelves are stocked with books on architecture (along with, oddly, a copy of *Mommy Dearest*). Assorted Frank Lloyd Wright volumes keep company with a book of late 20th-century skyscrapers, a technical drafting book, and Diana Agrest's *Architecture from Without*. A drawing tube sits on the shelf in the closet, and nosy shoppers who open the drawer next to the desk find a collection of drafting supplies.

More than any other room in the Idea Homes at David Weekley's New Home Center™, this last one — filled with architectural ambition — is the most strongly themed. Moving through the homes on David Weekley Court, it is obvious how carefully the domestic environment is crafted to articulate a progression through three stages in the life of a successful family. But this last room — the end of all the family's striving? — is confusing. Why is this fictional young woman obsessed with architecture, when architecture is so clearly not the issue in Weekley's world? Why not medicine? Or law?

Because, as British artist Richard Hamilton once observed, "Design is a sales weapon."[15] The designer is a marketing aid, Hamilton argued; the fact that someone thought about the design of a product is more valuable to sales than the product itself. David Weekley wields his sales weapon well, capitalizing on architecture's cultural cachet more than architects do.

Weekley distinguishes his product from other speculative residential construction with a marketing campaign that emphasizes his company's design intelligence and sensitivity at every turn. With typical immodesty, the website states, "LifeDesign™ blends the fundamentals of design, architecture, engineering, physics, psychology, and sociology to create a home that looks better — and lives better — than all the rest."[16] And at the New Home Center™, architecture, a symbol of success and one of market capitalism's ultimate luxury goods, is made available in a retail format — the big box superstore — familiar to every American shopper.

If Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture Without Architects* were on the shelf next to *Architecture from Without* in the aspiring architect's room, then the mechanism and message would be more transparent. David Weekley™ is selling choice without risk, exclusivity without expense, "architecture" without the hassles associated with an architect. But all the real decisions have already been made — by the market. ■

1. New Home Marketing Company, www.newhomeswichita.com
2. Additional New Home Centers opened outside Dallas in January 2001 and in Austin in January 2002.
3. www.davidweekleyhomes.com/nhc.asp
4. Ibid.
5. www.davidweekleyhomes.com/newroom_facts.asp
6. www.davidweekleyhomes.com/search.asp. Searching the online database, one finds houses ranging from a 1,700-square-foot $122,000 house to a 4,500-square-foot $525,000 house.
7. www.davidweekleyhomes.com/davidlesson.asp
8. Ibid.
9. www.davidweekleyhomes/aboutus.asp
10. Ibid.
11. Banham, Reyner. "Collect $2,000,000," *New Society*, June 15, 1978, p. 608.
12. www.davidweekleyhomes.com/nhc.asp
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14. www.davidweekleyhomes.com/privacytogether.asp
15. Hamilton, Richard. "Persuading Image," 1959, *Collected Words: 1953-1982*, p. 133.
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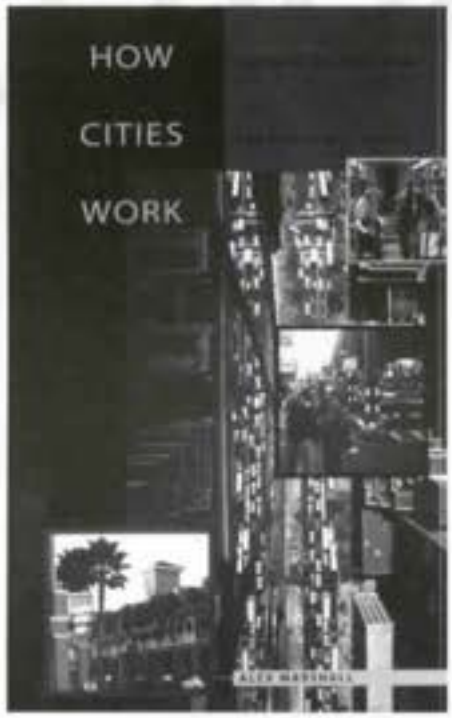
Planning, Politics, and People



How Cities Work: Suburbs, Sprawl, and The Roads Not Taken *by Alex Marshall. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. 243 pp. $50 hardcover, $24.95 paperback.*

The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism *by Dana Cuff. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. 380 pp. $40.*

Reviewed by Terrence Doody

Ask a cabbie how to get to Carnegie Hall and he'll answer, "Practice, practice, practice." Ask a retailer the three secrets of success and she'll say, "Location, location, location." Ask Alex Marshall and Dana Cuff the essence of urban planning and they are likely to answer, "Politics, politics, politics." Otherwise, Marshall's *How Cities Work* and Cuff's *The Provisional City* have little in common. Marshall is a journalist whose book reads like a long series of feature articles. Cuff is a professor of architecture and urban design at UCLA; her book is built of a long, theory-formed introduction to the detailed histories of five large-scale housing developments in Los Angeles from the 1930s to the present. Both in the end are mildly hopeful that we can learn from their analysis of our mistakes, but I am not sure their hopes can bear the weight of the evidence they present.

In *How Cities Work*, Marshall argues that they do work when they set the right relation between a place's basic economy, its internal and external transportation systems, and the governmental decisions that affect especially the means of transportation. Marshall calls cities creators of wealth. What a city can make depends on the transportation systems that control materials and products and that get the workers to and from the job; and transportation depends ultimately on government, the only entity large enough to lay the streets and freeways and operate the ports. The core of older cities was of course pedestrian, then expanded with trains, cars, and highways, which moved business and industry out of the core and into the suburbs, where the people had moved already. And though it is the automobile that made suburban life possible, it is not cars, he points out, that cause sprawl; it is freeways that cause it. So urban planning has to begin with a vision of the whole and the power to organize on a large scale.

To illustrate his points, Marshall examines four "cities": Celebration, Florida, a New Urbanist development outside Orlando that is owned and operated by Disney; the Silicon Valley; the Jackson Heights neighborhood of Queens, New York; and Portland, Oregon. Only Portland, obviously, is a city by any classical definition, and that is one of Marshall's points. Things have changed. And Celebration is not a city by any definition but that of Andrés Duany, New Urbanism's chief ideologue, and that is one of Marshall's points too. New Urbanism is most successful as a rhetorical construct, Marshall thinks, and Celebration is nothing more than another car-bound suburban subdivision. Its main street is a highway; it does not have a real commercial center or its own economy; it doesn't even have its own government. Disney rules. And the homeowners' association and other forms of Common Interest Development that it exemplifies Marshall considers

New and Notable

The City in Mind: Meditations on the Urban Condition *by James Howard Kunstler. The Free Press, 320 pp., $25.* The author of *The Geography of Nowhere*, in which he declared suburbia "a tragic landscape of cartoon architecture, junked cities, and ravaged countryside," now trains his mordant eye on the urban condition. Through stories as compelling and diverse as Louis-Napoleon's renovation of Paris, the bloody fall of Tenochtitlan, the grandiose schemes of Albert Speer, and the "gigantic hairball" of contemporary Atlanta, Kunstler discovers what is constant and enduring in cities, and explores the terrible perversities of history that have brought cities to grief.

The Nature of Order: Book One, The Phenomenon of Life *by Christopher Alexander. Oxford, 480 pp., $75.* In a new four-volume essay, the author of *A Pattern Language* identifies a common set of well-defined structures that are present in all order, from micro-organisms and mountain ranges to the creation of good houses and vibrant communities. *The Phenomenon of Life*, the first volume in this masterwork, ponders the nature of order as a basis for a new architecture and argues that living structure is at once personal and structural, related not only to the geometry of space and how things work, but to human beings whose lives are ultimately based on feeling.

Case Study Houses *by Elizabeth A. T. Smith. Taschen, 464 pp., $150.* A unique event in American architecture, the Case Study House program, which oversaw the design of 36 prototype homes in Los Angeles between 1945 and 1966, sought to develop plans for modern residences that could be easily and cheaply constructed. Some of modernism's greatest talents — Richard Neutra, Charles and Ray Eames, Eero Saarinen, and others — generated highly experimental homes whose influence extends to the present. Here is a monumental retrospective of the program, with comprehensive documentation, brilliant photographs from the period, and, for houses still in existence, contemporary photos.

Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping *by the Harvard Design School Project on the City & Rem Koolhaas. Taschen, 1,000 pages, $50.* In 1997 and '98, Koolhaas and his graduate students studied shopping as a defining element of the modern city, and, in many cases, the reason for its existence. Targeting the U.S., Europe, and Asia, the students explored retail technologies, marketing strategies, and the hybridization of retail and cultural/recreational environments. The result is a selection of essays ranging from "Disney Space: Urban Template" to "Three-Ring Circus: The Double Life of the Shopping Architect," as well as hundreds of diagrams, floor plans, and photographs that illustrate the ways in which shopping has refashioned the contemporary city.

— Michael Kimmins

"corporate fascism." He doesn't like New Urbanism, but distinguishes Eastern versions of it such as Celebration from Western versions such as Portland that have grown out of the environmentalist movement. His arguments against Duany's pretense are very satisfying.

The Silicon Valley, which used to be the Santa Clara Valley, is a city in function but not in form. It has generated enormous wealth, but its shape is the unintended byproduct of California's highway system. Marshall uses the Valley to discuss several issues: the ways the city and suburbs have exchanged roles; the differences between European sprawl and American; Lewis Mumford's prescience about the effect of cars on urban organization; and the fate of the carless poor in Palo Alto and San Jose. One of his most telling anecdotes comes from a woman who has worked for 30 years in Menlo Park, where the old town center has been revived by restaurants and boutiques. On the two-block-long downtown, arugula is available in 37 different restaurants. "I just wish there was someplace to buy a bra or some underwear," she says.

Marshall is very good with vignettes like this; he is less so, I think, in trying to discuss what he calls the Death of Place, because he doesn't quite have a definition of place to begin with. It exists in nostalgia, but he strongly implies place must also be a densely centered area that is easy to visualize. The Silicon Valley has many lovely visual aspects, but it is more a concept than a field of appropriate images and, therefore, a lesser place than Jackson Heights.

Which isn't a city either, but a neighborhood in a great urban complex. Jackson Heights is important to Marshall's argument because it is an "anachronism" that still works as a portal for immigrants to enter the city's economy and the middle class. Unlike the poor in East Palo Alto, the newly arrived in Jackson Heights have a pedestrian center that gives them access to stores, services, and the public transportation that makes cars for everyone unnecessary. It has not become a slum, nor has it been turned into "a giant fern bar" like so many of the townettes across Northern California. Jackson Heights is the historical and moral opposite of Celebration and a clear example of the role government plays. Real estate developers do not do El-trains and subways, and their developments are not initially hospitable to Koreans, Haitians, and Columbians. Marshall points out that a lot of older suburban sections have become ethnic enclaves as their original populations have moved even farther out, but this again is proof of Jackson Heights' rarity and the changing roles of city and suburb.

And Jackson Heights wasn't planned to be what it has become. It has evolved with its populations and without the large-scale convulsion Dana Cuff examines in *The Provisional City*. Portland, Oregon, wasn't exactly planned, either, Marshall wants to say, because its "urbanism" is the successful offshoot of environmentalists' concern to save the surrounding Willamette Valley. To do this, urban growth boundaries were established by Oregon's regional and state governments: exactly Marshall's essential point about the place of politics. Portland was turned in upon itself, density was fostered, and affordable housing and public transportation were assured. They even wiped out parking lots to build buildings. Yet one of the reasons Portland has worked so well is that there are very few minority citizens there. It is not the sham Celebration is, but it is not Jackson Heights, either.

Marshall's argument — about the economy, transportation, and government — is so clear that it eventually seems self-evident, until you realize his four prime examples are not entirely representative of American urbanism and its problems. Boulder, Colorado, tried to do what Portland did and failed. Marshall is also very repetitious. I would have liked, in place of his redundancies, more passages like this:

To survive, retail needs an astonishingly large potential customer base. ... A Wal-Mart Supercenter can require a customer base of a half million households within a 20-minute drive. But even a small restaurant or pharmacy requires high traffic volume ... by foot or by car. Traffic volumes depend on transportation systems. Wal-Marts are located around key freeway interchanges because it allows them to access a regional population base. Small stores can succeed in an urban neighborhood, but it requires at least 10,000 families within walking distance, which means a gross density of at least ten homes in an acre. . . . Manhattan can support retail in almost every block because it can pack 10,000 people into one block.

The Provisional City is suffused with such details. Cuff's argument is denser and the question of politics not so simple. Her stories of architecture and urbanism in Los Angeles are stories of the long conflict between the progressive ideals of public housing and the practical victories of private developers. Here is how she describes her project:

The present exploration of architecture and urbanism emphasizes the disruptive over the continuous, the spontaneous over the planned, short-term instability over long-term stability, the circumstantial over the referential.... Eruptive building in cities dominates our phenomenal observations, while the historian's long view digests such episodes with narra-

tions of constancy and progress. I will make the case for postwar urban change as multiple convulsions, weakly linked in the Los Angeles context by ideology, regulation, and infrastructure.

The convulsion occurs to a part of the urban body which then becomes a discrete zone, operating with greater independence from its surroundings.

But it is an extreme version … a violent upheaval in geographic, social, and individual [histories] that concerns me. I argue that these convulsions result from the political economy of property, urban policy and its federal appropriations, and contemporary design ideology.

There is a great sense of loss throughout this book, and the politics are complicated by several forces these quotations only hint at. In her theoretical prelude, Cuff explains the deep conflict between America's investment in the theory of individual property rights that derives from John Locke and the conflicting right of the government's eminent domain. This, moreover, is not simply the opposition between private and public, because the government has often ceded eminent domain to private developers, who claim public land for themselves in the name of progress and the single-family dwelling. To do this, it is very often necessary to "create" slums. These, like Duany's theme parks, are also rhetorical constructs: not merely older buildings in poorer neighborhoods, but moral zones defined by their inhabitants' turpitude, uncleanliness, ethnicity, and race. Slum clearing she calls "racial cleansing." Slums, she says, are "conceptualized epidemiologically." And public housing is also offensive to American property values because it makes the private public (which is the reverse of ceding eminent domain to developers), favors the renter over the owner, sponsors multifamily developments instead of single-family units, and looks "European," which means socialist.

The historical background of these issues has many roots: in World War I, the Depression, the New Deal, World War II, women in the workplace, housing built for defense workers, returning veterans, the baby boom, internal migration after the war, McCarthyism, tenant loyalty oaths, and the growing power of the real estate lobby. The progressivism embodied in low-cost public housing is ultimately deemed un-American so Los Angeles can build its own Levittowns.

In telling the stories of those towns — of Aliso Village, Rodger Young Village, Westchester, Chavez Ravine (where a Mexican "mountain village" was razed to make the city safe for the Brooklyn Dodgers), and Playa Vista — Cuff is able to deliver in great detail all the internal contradictions that give her argument such specificity and weight. Nothing in her accounting is typical; there is no neat teleology; everything is really complicated. Rodger Young Village, for instance, was a development of Quonset huts for defense workers and never intended to be permanent. Moreover, it was entirely integrated, and the integration worked. When the city tried to tear the place down for a newer development, the citizens of Rodger Young organized and resisted. They weren't all crazy about the architecture, but they did realize their real social coherence, their community, was maybe unique and certainly invaluable. They lost, of course. In one of her chapter titles, "Rodger Young Village: 'Quonset Hut Community,'" Cuff registers an oxymoron too violent for history to bear.

The other story of hers I like pits an idealistic housing advocate named Frank Wilkinson against his archenemy, Fritz Burns, a real estate developer who in another kind of book would have been called a visionary. Burns was a Catholic and a big donor to the Los Angeles diocese. Both he and Wilkinson were also friends of Monsignor Thomas J. O'Dwyer. Wilkinson and O'Dwyer were in contact with each other every day for ten years until Wilkinson was investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee and sent to jail. O'Dwyer received a mysterious sabbatical and never spoke to Wilkinson again. This episode does not explain everything in Cuff's long, rich, complex book, but it does tell us why, when money is talking, the poor are unheard.

In the end, Cuff says she believes that large, disruptive building projects need not be all bad, but the record of failure she presents is pretty conclusive. Marshall's scheme seems a bit too simple at this point, and Cuff's history too complex, to be easily translated into any plan of action. Their books confirm each other's points, it seems, and cancel each other's hopes. The good things that happen in these books are never the result of urban planning, but accidents as different as Jackson Heights, Rodger Young Village, and Marshall's own home neighborhood; and in these places alone do we sense anything at all like community, the ideal that developers trumpet and slum clearance denies.

After I decided not to go to Carnegie Hall, the cabbie got to talking, and you know what he told me the secret to community is? "People, people, people." ■

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