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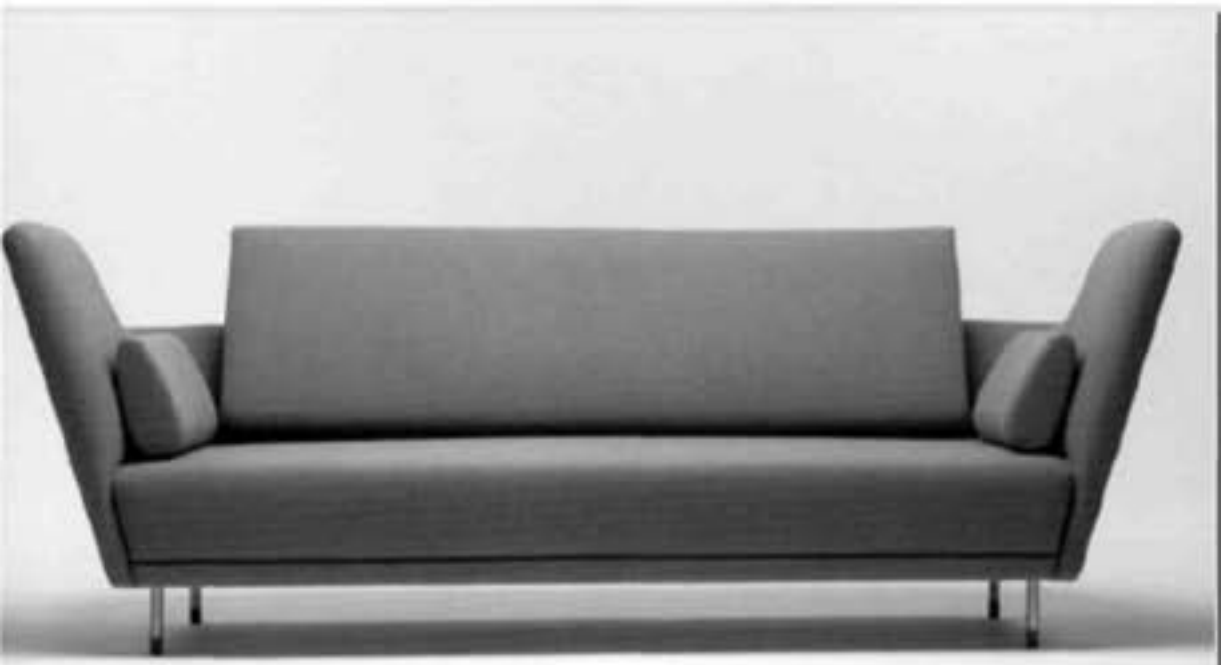

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Joel Warren Barna is author of *The See-Through Years*. He lives in Austin.

Thomas Colbert is a Houston architect and Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture.

Terrence Doody is a professor in the English Department at Rice University.

Lisa Gray is managing editor of *Cite*.

W. Mark Gunderson is an architect in Fort Worth. He is immediate past-president of the Dallas Architectural Foundation and is a contributing editor to *Buildings of Texas*, to be published later this year by Oxford University Press.

Paul Hester is a principal of the photography firm Hester+Hardaway.

Allison Hunter is a writer, web designer, and artist living in Houston. She is also editor of *SPOT* magazine, published by the Houston Center for Photography.

Lauren Kern is a freelance writer living in New Haven, Connecticut. She was previously associate editor of the *Houston Press*.

Barry Moore is an architect at Gensler. He is also an adjunct professor in the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, and directs its Workshop for Historic Architecture.

Christof Spieler, P.E. is a senior associate at Matrix Structural Engineers and a lecturer in the Rice University Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

William F. Stern is an architect and a principal in the firm of Stern and Bucek Architects. He is also an adjunct associate professor in the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture.

Bruce C. Webb is a professor in the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture.

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance

60: Spring 2004

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Cover: Garage Four at BMC Software, by Daniel, Mann, Johnson & Mendenhall, 2000. Photo by Hester+Hardaway.

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AS THE CITY TURNS...


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The 17th annual Rice Design Alliance Gala – Revolve|Evolve: As the City Turns – celebrated the continuing transformation of downtown Houston. The party was held November 8, 2003, in one of the city's newest skyscrapers, 1500 Louisiana, designed for Enron by Cesar Pelli & Associates. Gala chairs Jane and Ken Page greeted guests as they arrived via escalators to the sky bridge level that connects the first Enron building to the new 40-story tower. Underwriters were seated in the circular sky ring over Smith Street and enjoyed a delicious dinner provided by Jackson and Company.

The evening included a fabulous silent auction, chaired by Judith McClain, that raised a record $62,500. Houston artists donated pieces that raised more than $24,000 in the auction. Julie Kinzelman curated the works.

The RDA Award for Design Excellence, a Steuben Glass bowl donated by Neiman Marcus, was awarded to Central Houston Inc., which has been the steward of Houston's vision for the redevelopment and revitalization of downtown since 1983. Central Houston's president, Bob Eury, and its chairman, Richard Everett, accepted the award.

Environment co-chairs Lauren Rottet and Erick Ragni worked with the fd2s graphic design team to create a sophisticated ambience. A warm orange glow filled the sky ring, and party guests in the Revolve Lounge danced under blue and silver lights to the music of El Orbits.

Intell Management and Investment Company's Henry Terech Jr. was beaming to see so many people – more than 900 – in the building his company then owned, a building that was designed for entertaining large groups. Underwriting chairs Kimberly and Tim Debner were also all smiles as their committee raised $355,000 for RDA programs and *Cite*.


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1. Bob and Gayle Eury and Judith McClain
2. Tom and Laura Bellows
3. Tim and Kimberly Debner
4. Richard and Jenny Everett
5. Jo and Jim Furr
6. Larry and Joyce Lander
7. Ken and Jane Page with Jackson Hicks
8. Patrick Peters and Elizabeth Gregory
9. Craig Minor and Suzy Robertson
10. Norma and David George
11. Erick Ragni and Lauren Rottet
12. Sarah Balinskas and Jeff DeBevec
13. Carrie Rushing and Dennis Carpenter
14. Susan and Bob Boykin
15. Barbara Amelio
16. Yummy dessert buffet by Jackson & Company
17. Rice student volunteers
18. Rice and UH student volunteers
19. Francesca and Filo Castorre
20. Sylvia and Randall Walker
21. Lynn Herbert

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RDA NEWS

Party Hearty at the Park

To mark the completion of the reflecting pool that connects Hermann Park's Sam Houston Monument to the Molly Ann Smith Plaza, RDA and the Friends of Hermann Park are throwing a party.

On Wednesday, April 28, the Rice Design Alliance will join the Friends of Hermann Park to celebrate the final completion of Hermann Park's large-scale renovation.

The project began in 1992 with "Heart of the Park," a competition sponsored by RDA, the Friends of Hermann Park, and the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department to come up with a plan for the raw stretch of water, grass, and trees that connected the base of the Sam Houston Monument to what was then called the Grand Basin (now known after a major renovation as McGovern Lake). The winning entry by Melton Henry/Maurice Robison Architects Inc.; Peter Brown Architects/Planners; and Scott Slaney and Steve Harding of Houston called for a reflecting pool bordered by allées of live oaks, and included a garden in memory of the late O. Jack Mitchell, dean of the Rice School of Architecture from 1978 to 1990 and a passionate advocate of the park, to whom the competition was dedicated.

The Friends of Hermann Park raised the funds for the improvements, and hired noted landscape architect Laurie Olin to create a new master plan for the entire park.

The April 28 event — titled "Party Hearty!" — will include a brief dedication ceremony for the O. Jack Mitchell Garden as well as a cocktail reception, dancing, and music by El Orbits.

Tickets to the event are $50, and can only be purchased by members of the Rice Design Alliance or Friends of Hermann Park. Dual memberships in the organizations will be offered at this time only at a discount.

The party will run from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Hermann Park's Molly Ann Smith Plaza. For more information, call 713.348.4876.

Chairs of the event are Katy and John Miner, Francy and Mark Mitchell, and Vallette and Russell Windham.

A Snapshot Worth Looking At

From April 8 to May 1, RDA, in collaboration with the Lawndale Art Center, will present *Snapshot: Houston Design On View 2004*. This open-call exhibition, which will be presented at the Lawndale gallery at 4912 Main Street, is designed to introduce Houston viewers to the wide variety of realized and unrealized projects being designed in the city.

The fourth architecture exhibition co-sponsored by RDA and Lawndale, *Snapshot* is intended to make Houston design the focus of critical inquiry, public discussion, and debate. With the exception of entry size, no restrictions was imposed on the registered entries. One of the ideas behind *Snapshot* is that in an open forum such as this, the city of Houston can be appreciated as a working architectural and metropolitan organism.

On the evening of April 7 an opening reception was held at Lawndale. All the *Snapshot* entries will be documented in a soft-cover catalogue that will accompany the exhibit. The catalogue will be available for $15 at Lawndale during the exhibition.

Admission to the exhibition is free and open to the public. It can be viewed Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. The gallery is closed on Sunday. For more information, please visit www.rda.rice.edu.

Snapshot: Houston Design On View 2004 is supported in part by Crescent Real Estate Equities, Ltd.; Intell Management and Investment Company; KUHF 88.7 FM; I.A. Naman + Associates; Turner Construction Company; Hill Swift Architects; the Corporate Members of the Rice Design Alliance; and the City of Houston and the Texas Commission on the Arts through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.

New Managing Editor at *Cite*

Lisa Simon, most recently the Night & Day editor at the *Houston Press*, has been hired as the new managing editor of *Cite*, effective March 24. She replaces Lisa Gray, who is leaving the magazine after three years to work on a book.

A Houston native, Simon has worked for the Massachusetts Medical Society as managing editor of their online communications and as a senior medical writer. Simon is a graduate of Rutgers University and did postgraduate work at Harvard University in neuroscience and at Boston University in project management. She can be reached at citemail@rice.edu.

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The Rice Design Alliance
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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CALENDAR

April is Architecture Month in Houston
For more events, go to www.aiahoutx.org.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

Initiatives for Houston Grant
Applications due June 15
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

The Initiatives for Houston grants program focuses on Houston's built environment, its history, present condition, and future development. The program is open to students and faculty of the Rice School of Architecture, the University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, and the College of Architecture at Prairie View A&M University.

This year RDA will make separate awards of up to $5,000 each to a student winner or winners and a faculty winner or winners.

RDA 2004 ARCHITECTURE TOUR

Saturday and Sunday,
March 27–28, 1–5 p.m.
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

This year's tour, "Six Houses, One Neighborhood," highlighted the distinctive David Crockett Addition. Developed in the post-World War II years, the neighborhood, bordered to the north by West Alabama, to the south by Richmond, to the east by Kirby, and to the west by Eastside, is home to both ranch houses and exceptional new homes designed by architects for the people who live in them. These houses demonstrate how new residential construction can complement an established neighborhood rather than overwhelm and destroy it. The tour also featured one of the neighborhood's original ranch houses, sensitively remodeled in recent years.

3314 Lake, Val Glitsch, 1998.

3319 Ferndale, Dillon Kyle Architecture and Diane Harkins Modesett, 2002.

3018 Ferndale, Carlos Jiménez Studio, 1995.

Houses on the tour included: 3314 Lake Street (1998, Val Glitsch); 3202 Virginia (c. 1950, alterations/additions: Kirby Keahey); 3319 Ferndale (2002, Dillon Kyle Architecture and Diane Harkins Modesett) 3114 Ferndale (2001, Stern and Bucek Architects); 3110 Ferndale (1997, Stern and Bucek Architects); and 3018 Ferndale (1995, Carlos Jiménez Studio).

RDA/LAWNDALE EXHIBITION: SNAPSHOT

April 8–May 1
Lawndale Art Center
4912 Main Street
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

RDA, in collaboration with Lawndale Art Center, will host *Snapshot: Houston Design on View 2004*. This open-call exhibition provides an opportunity for the public to view the wide variety of realized and unrealized projects being designed in Houston.

An opening reception was held at Lawndale on the evening of April 7. Tickets are $25 per person, and reservations will be accepted through April 5. For reservations, please call RDA at 713.348.4876. All Snapshot submissions will be exhibited and published in an accompanying catalogue.

SALLY WALSH LECTURE

Monday, April 19, 7:30 p.m.
Brown Auditorium
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Co-sponsored by RDA and the Houston Architecture Foundation
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

Toshiko Mori is the Robert P. Hubbard Professor in Practice of Architecture and chair of the Department of Architecture at Harvard University Graduate School of Design. Mori is also the principal of Toshiko Mori Architect, which was established in 1981 in New York. Her firm's

work has been widely published and has received awards and prizes internationally. Current work includes houses in Maine, Florida, and New York; the Visitors Center for Darwin Martin House in Buffalo, New York; and several projects in New York City.

RDA HOMETOWN TOURS
Boston: June 17–20
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

This summer's Rice Design Alliance tour will feature Boston, a city that mixes urban sophistication and colonial charm. Included in the tour will be walking tours of Beacon Hill, Victorian Back Bay, North End, and Waterfront, as well as buildings by Charles Bulfinch, H.H. Richardson, Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier.

PARTY HEARTY!
April 28, 6:00–9:00 p.m.
Hermann Park
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

"Party Hearty!" brings together members of the Rice Design Alliance and the Friends of Hermann Park to celebrate the completion of the Heart of the Park Design for Hermann Park and to dedicate the O. Jack Mitchell Garden, made possible by a grant from Sara H. and John H. Lindsey. The evening will include a brief dedication ceremony, a cocktail reception, and dancing to music by El Orbits. Tickets for members are $50 each; discounted memberships to each organization are available.

RDA FALL 2004 LECTURE SERIES: BERLIN — ARCHITEKTUR, POLITIK, UND KULTUR.
Wednesdays, October 6-27, 7:30 p.m.
Brown Auditorium
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

RICE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE SPRING LECTURE SERIES
Farish Gallery, Anderson Hall
For information and event updates go to www.arch.rice.edu

Monday, April 5, 7 p.m.
Mark Cousins, Director of General Studies at the Architectural Association, London, will speak on "Functionalism and Guilt."

Thursday, April 22, 7 p.m.
Kivi Sotamaa, partner at Ocean North in London and Helsinki, and an assistant professor at Ohio State University, will speak on "Adventures in Form."

RICE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE STIMS (INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS)
Room 117, Anderson Hall

Friday, April 2, noon
Matt Seltzer and Blair Satterfield, associates with Bricker+Cannady Architects, will be available for discussion.

Friday, April 9, noon
Christopher Hight, an assistant professor in the Rice School of Architecture, will be available for discussion.

RICE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE FILM SERIES
Outside in the front courtyard of Anderson Hall, weather permitting, or in Farish Gallery.

Monday, April 12, 8 p.m.
Independent Exposure 2003 is a selection of short films from Microcinema International's vast collection of original works. The film series is curated by Patrick Kwiatkowski, partner of Microcinema International, and Brian Wesley Heiss.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE
Architecture Theater, Room 150 of the Architecture Building
713.743.2400 or www.arch.uh.edu/news

Tuesday, April 6, 3:00 p.m.
Thomas R. Diehl, a professor in the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, will speak on "TeachingMeaningPraxis."

Monday, April 19, 3:00 p.m.
Peter Stutchbury of New South Wales, Australia, will speak on "The Work of Stutchbury & Pape."

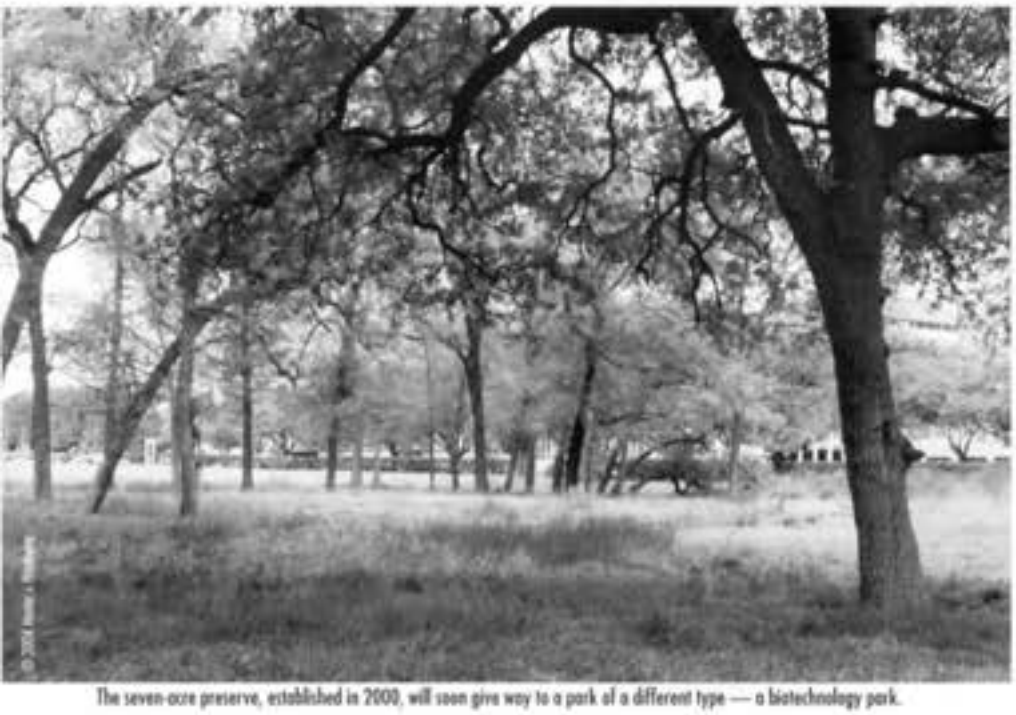
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITIONS
College of Architecture Gallery
713.743.2400 or www.arch.uh.edu/news

April 1-24
French Architecture, "Work of Dominique Perrault."

Ecologists have been seeking to return part of the land around the University of Texas Health Science Center (above) to the way it might have been before Europeans arrived in Texas.

THE GREENING OF HOUSTON — ONE INCH AT A TIME

Just how small can a nature preserve be?



The seven-acre preserve, established in 2000, will soon give way to a park of a different type — a biotechnology park.

HOUSTON MAY BE KNOWN more for paving than for planting, but a handful of landscape architects, ecologists, and even private citizens are hoping to change that by bringing little bits of real nature into the urban jungle. These micropreserves of native plants might cover only a few acres, but they could be a big step toward mitigating some of the negative effects of development.

"What we really wanted was to have a piece of land, the job of which was to provide nature's services that we had removed by putting in parking lots and buildings and streets," says University of Texas School of Public Health ecologist Carl Hacker, who created a seven-acre ecology research park for the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. The park, located south of Old Spanish Trail and east of Fannin, just north of the UT-Houston Apartments and Recreation Center, was designed not only to increase bird and insect biodiversity, but also to improve air and water quality, slow drainage, and lessen the urban heat island effect. "And we won't even get into the emotional things of how good it feels to go walking through a grassland," Hacker says.

Nature doesn't happen naturally in a city. To create the Urban Ecology Research Park, Hacker and his team first faced the difficult task of extracting invasive, non-native species such as King Ranch bluestem and Chinese tallow — without the use of chemical pesticides, which can harm native plants. "We did this mostly by brute force," he says.

Then there was the issue of determining what to plant in their place. "What we want," says Hacker, "are plants that really are adapted to the area, that we believe would have been a part of the landscape when the combination of Conquistadors and Anglos showed up. We have to go back to the first groups that started naming things and writing them down."

Going native is important: Because native plants are adapted to the area, they require less pollutive maintenance such as mowing and fertilizing. They also retain more water and carbon than their non-native counterparts and can clarify storm drainage as it passes through the swales on the site.

Hacker transplanted grasses and shrubs from the Navasota River bottom and added 400 to 500 new native trees such as maples and oaks — clustered as if they had sprouted naturally from seeds and acorns. Since January 2000, when mowing was stopped and planting began,

the park has attracted birds that are not usually seen in the city, among them kingfishers and western tanagers.

But it turns out that hanging on to a micropreserve can be even more difficult than creating one. The land on which the Urban Ecology Research Park sits was recently given to the MD Anderson Cancer Center for the development of a biotechnology park; as a result, Hacker will not be able to study the long term ecological impact of his project. Instead, he's taking micropreserves to an even smaller extreme, landscaping buildings on the UT School of Public Health campus with ecological research gardens. Even at the smaller size, Hacker says, micropreserves can help scientists understand how urban ecosystems work.

Other universities are pursuing similar small-scale greening strategies. At the University of Houston, architect Charles Tapley has led two classes to develop a one-acre "Green Zone" of native plants and trees next to the College of Architecture.

"There's a gap typically in architecture students having any kind of background that has to do with nature," says Tapley, "and yet the building has to relate to nature in some way." And nature has a way of relating back to buildings. "The use of trees and plants can reduce the heat island and can moderate the amount of energy that has to be consumed in a building to keep it cooled and heated," Tapley says.

Tapley is also working with Rice ecology professor Paul Harcombe to restore the four-acre Harris Gully Natural Area, part of the Lowrey Arboretum at Rice University. In 1999, when Rice deepened a detention basin at the gully, Tapley and Harcombe saw an opportunity to plant native grasses and wildflowers in the low-lying area. Harcombe, who had previously created the two-acre Rice Prairie on the north side of the campus for bioscience teaching labs, says the Harris Gully project has been much more successful than his first endeavor because the digging out of the detention basin removed invasive weeds.

"I think the idea of coupling micropreserves with micro-detention ponds could allow Houston to create one of the nicer systems of natural areas around," Harcombe says.

Homeowner Mark Goloby saw potential in his neighborhood detention basin as well. Goloby spearheaded an effort by the homeowners of the Hearthstone development in northwest Houston to turn their unsightly hole in the ground into a two-and-a-half-acre "naturescape." When the community stopped mowing the area in 1999, native plants such as Indian blanket and false-foxglove began showing up on their own. Hearthstone also added native trees such as river birch and bald cypress to replace some of the canopy that had been removed in development.

Goloby hopes his micropreserve will become a haven for migratory birds, but families looking for a little nature close to home are already flocking to the site. "We're trying to strike that balance that says a facility can be nice and usable and not necessarily have to look like a golf course," says Goloby.

According to Houston Parks and Recreation director Roksan Okan-Vick, more and more Houstonians are coming around to Goloby's way of thinking. A recent survey conducted by the parks department found that more residents are interested in trails and picnic areas than in manicured spaces such as ball fields. "I was very happy to see that because that is the national trend, and I'm not sure that Houston has always been there," says Okan-Vick. "But I think we're definitely there now."

Because native plants are adapted to the area, they require less pollutive maintenance such as mowing and fertilizing.

The parks system currently has about a dozen natural areas totaling approximately 600 acres, and Okan-Vick is hoping to develop more as resources allow. In the meantime, she, too, is working on the small scale, replanting medians and esplanades with native plants and encouraging private citizens to create micropreserves in their own yards.

Thanks to a recent change in the municipal code, would-be naturalists can now get a permit from the parks department exempting their high natural grasses and shrubs from the so-called "weed ordinance" that prohibits uncultivated vegetation over nine inches tall.

"Even the little postage stamp-size plots, if we do enough of them," says Okan-Vick, "add up to a huge benefit for the city." — *Lauren Kern*

In a pasture in Waller County, houses rescued from destruction in Houston are being stored until they can find a new owner.

PRESERVATION
Piece by Piece

Historic Houston, Inc. has been quietly going about the business of saving as many historic houses as it can, and salvaging materials from the ones it can't.

The small preservation non-profit has as its primary goal moving endangered houses into the hands of individual property owners or builders who are committed to restoration and reuse. The endangered houses are donated to the organization, which then locates a new owner, coordinates all moving and permitting, and is finally reimbursed by the buyer. If a house cannot be saved, then Historic Houston's secondary goal takes over: to salvage materials from doomed houses. Demolition is done by volunteers (there are currently 88 active ones) and the salvaged materials are sold from a temporary location at 1702 Houston Avenue two Saturdays a month.

The success of Historic Houston's primary goal has been spectacular. Since 2002, 63 houses have come to the organization; in January alone, 23 houses were donated to Historic Houston. Fifteen houses are now in the hands of new owners, while others are mothballed in a pasture in Waller County awaiting "adoption." Community development corporations such as Avenue CDC have helped put houses in the hands of new owners. When that happens, everyone wins: the developer who gets a tax deduction when he gives the house away, and the home owners who get an affordable house.

Most of the donated houses, however, cannot be placed. As a result, they have to be salvaged. According to Historic Houston founder and director Lynn Edmunson, the salvage operation "kind of developed," when she couldn't find takers for a house or didn't have enough time to move one to a new location.

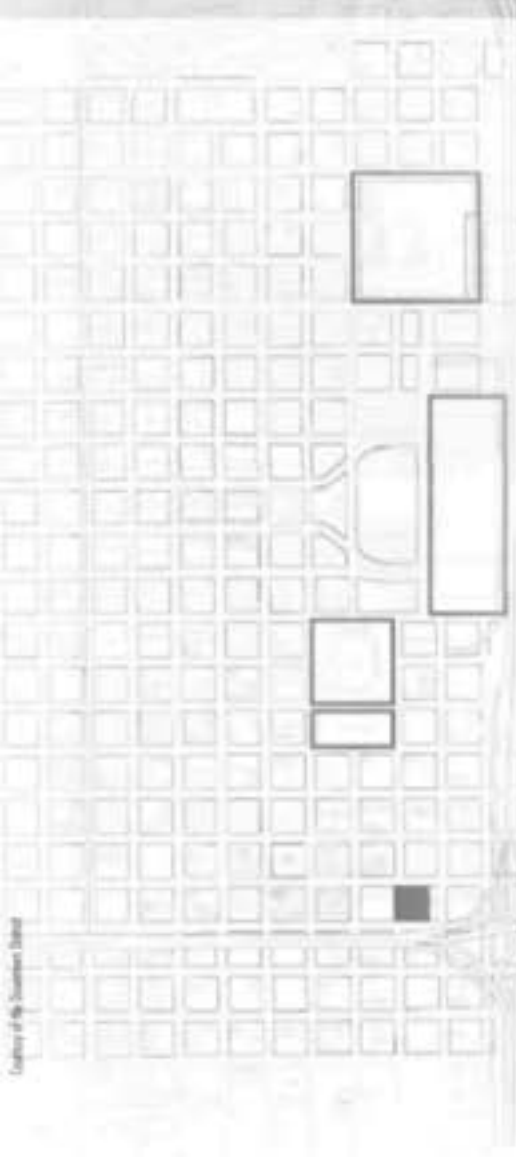
Historic Houston salvages everything, including the bathroom sink.

When Historic Houston salvages a house it takes everything, unlike architectural specialty businesses that tend to cherry-pick. As a result, the Historic Houston warehouse is jammed with doors, windows, shutters, cabinets, columns, balustrades, trim, flooring, siding, structural lumber — you name it.

Developers are happy to have Historic Houston salvage their unwanted houses because it reduces their cost of clearing a site. Homeowners and contractors are equally happy to obtain low-cost, quality materials for their residential projects, lowering the costs of restoration. The salvage operation has generated enough income to provide the organization with power tools, a generator, and a much-needed pickup truck. What is the next big need? A permanent home for the salvage warehouse.

What most amazes Historic Houston members is that there are so many houses donated to the organization that they can't keep up with the inventory. The next most amazing thing is that there is a huge demand for what they have to offer. Historic Houston has indeed discovered an important niche in the Houston housing market. — *Barry Moore*

Looking northeast from the Toyota Center: Super blocks and an abundance of surface parking lots dominate the east side landscape.



Big-Ticket Urbanism

Can money bring life to the east end of downtown?

BY JOEL WARREN BARNA

What marks "success" when spending public money to revitalize an urban area? Is it achieved when regular activity involving sizable numbers of people starts up in a part of town that was previously empty? Or must taxpayer funding be matched and exceeded by increased property and sales taxes?

The east end of downtown Houston is a laboratory for working out an answer to these questions. Over the course of nearly 20 years, more than $1.5 billion in public funding has been poured into the area in an effort to attract new commercial construction.

Before 2003, some $400 million (adjusted for inflation to 2003 dollars) was spent on convention and sports facilities in the East End. And the winter of 2003 saw the culmination of the latest and biggest round of public improvements, with the opening of a new basketball arena and a new convention-center hotel, along with an expanded convention center and two new parking garages (to be followed in late 2004 by a reworked public space, Root Park). The combined price for these most recent projects comes to $1.1 billion.

Downtown maps point the way to the new sports venues on the east side.

A rare pedestrian walks the street beside the George R. Brown Convention Center. More frequently used is the bridge to the parking garage.

Elevated highways break the connection between the east side of downtown and the residential neighborhoods of the East End.

In addition, the Cotswold Project, managed by the Houston Downtown District and comprising $62 million in streetscape improvements in an area that covers the northern section of the East End, was completed in 2003.

As with the Metro light rail line between downtown and the Texas Medical Center and with numerous other transportation improvements, this paroxysm of sprucing up was timed with the Super Bowl in mind — an event that seems destined to be remembered worldwide not for all Houston's efforts and the hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars spent, but for a seconds-long glimpse of Janet Jackson's breast.

Looking past the Super Bowl, downtown promoters predict that the new East End facilities will bring millions of new visitors to downtown each year. Their hope is that the increased traffic will transform the area from its long-term emptiness and make it an attractive site for new office, retail, and residential development.

Success under the "more people downtown" standard is all but assured. But success under the "return on investment" standard depends on a number of external factors.

The first factor determining the success of these recent initiatives will be the reactions of two companies, Crescent Real Estate Equities Limited Partnership and a Taiwan-based firm called Golconda. Crescent and Golconda both have considerable investment in the East End, each owning more than a dozen undeveloped blocks in the area. (Representatives of Golconda did not return repeated telephone calls requesting information for this story).

Other, more remote factors will also play a role. These include the national economy, the financial (and legal) health of Houston-based companies, and the continuation of the recent willingness to move offices and housing to the central city. As Houston's history has shown again and again, however, these factors contain a lot of risk.

Clearly, however, city and county officials have made significant moves to set the stage for future commercial investment that will both increase the central-city tax base and reinforce the urban core's viability. The projects completed in 2003 are a mixed bag architecturally, but they are important steps in redefining — in fact, in saving — Houston's center.

DOWNTOWN'S EAST END

The east end of downtown (henceforth referred to as EED) — that part of downtown Houston lying east of Fannin and west of the US Highway 59 elevated — was, as Stephen Fox writes in the *Houston Architectural Guide*, "Houston's most respectable Victorian neighborhood." It was laid out as part of downtown's 250-foot-square-block street grid, and at the same time more or less contiguous with the Harrisburg/Navigation neighborhood stretching farther east toward the Port of Houston.

The EED's residential quality gave way to small businesses and warehouses in the 1920s, as Houston embraced the automobile. The transformation accelerated in the 1950s, as housing shifted dramatically outward to the suburbs. (A few of the 19th-century houses remain in the area.) By the 1960s, this part of downtown had become home to Houston's first Chinatown, with a heavy concentration of businesses owned by Asian immigrants.

Pedestrian bridges were prominent in this visionary plan of Houston Center, William L. Pereira Associates, 1971.

Toyota Center, Morris Architects, HOK Sports Facilities Group, and John Chase Architects, 2003.

COMING OF THE SUPERBLOCKS

Construction of the US 59 elevated lopped off the EED's eastward neighborhood connections. Then Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation, seeing the diminutive scale and underdevelopment of the EED as an opportunity for a grand gesture, acquired 33 square blocks along McKinney and Lamar Street and scraped them clear.

William L. Pereira Associates of Los Angeles, working for Texas Eastern, planned an office complex built atop a gigantic four-level parking garage that would seal nearly the entire 75-acre area off from the sky. Luckily, the recession of the mid-1970s killed most of the plan, leaving only the glowering black-glass hulk of Two Houston Center, with its sky bridge links to One Houston Center (built in 1978). Four Houston Center, a 16-story, two-block spanning box of dark glass and brown brick, was added in 1983. Two Houston Center includes the enclosed "Park in Houston Center," a complex of shops and restaurants that has eked out an existence from the daytime sky-bridge and tunnel traffic. Its street amenities and entries, in keeping with the original Houston Center Plan, are little more than afterthoughts.

By the early 1980s, even with several celebrated high-rise office buildings going up downtown, city officials were starting to worry seriously about the condition of the city center outside the Louisiana Street corridor. More and more, areas beyond the corridor were being dominated by vacant lots. After a city-wide bond election, a site on the east side of the city was chosen for a new convention center to replace the Albert Thomas Convention Center, now Bayou Place, which marked one of downtown's western boundaries.

Intended to spur development in the EED and built for $109 million ($171 million in 2003, adjusted for inflation), the George R. Brown Convention Center is an architectural theme-and-variations exercise playing off the pipes and sheet metal of the oil fields, refineries, and chemical plants that underpin Houston's economy. As in the industrial facilities it echoes, the Brown Convention Center's architectural gestures are all about functionality, but somehow they come across as playful.

In siting and planning, however, the building was anything but playful. It's a huge white lump plopped into the street grid, sprawling over an area equivalent to six square blocks, cutting off two east-west and two north-south streets. Literally feeding off the US 59 elevated, it was at such a different scale from its setting that it required its own freeway service ramps. As Peter Papademetriou wrote in his forward to the 1990 edition of the *Houston Architectural Guide*: "The Brown Convention Center represents the 'big bang' theory of redefining a district."

Papademetriou, while no fan of the Brown Convention Center's design, wrote that he hoped it would succeed in revitalizing the EED. That was not to be, however: The building of the convention center did almost nothing to bring new development downtown. Real estate values in Houston had started plunging even before the convention center opened, the first ripple in a wave that would become a seven-year long national real estate recession.

Recession or no, the Brown Convention Center had some of the same problems as the Houston Center plan that preceded it. It was a superblock freeway object with a hostile relationship to the surrounding streets, too far away from the Main Street corridor — and even from the Park Shops — for any meaningful pedestrian interaction. It also took a bite out of mobility through the area and further divided the EED from its eastward connections.

THE BALLPARK

The next chapter in public intervention in the EED came with construction of the 42,000-seat downtown baseball field, originally called The Ballpark at Union Station, to replace the Astrodome as the home of the Houston Astros. The new ballpark, opened in 2000 for a construction cost of $248 million, or $265 million in today's dollars, was part of a welcome trend of centripetal forces bringing activity to the city core, a trend taking shape throughout the country. Beginning in the late 1990s, thousands of new housing units were built in Houston's Midtown area, starting a dozen blocks south and west of the convention center, making central Houston a residential zone for the first time in nearly a century.

From a distance, the ballpark is dominated by its retractable roof. But up close, it's a remarkably successful part of the EED streetscape. The architects, a consortium headed by HOK Sports Facilities Group, incorporated and played off the elements of the old downtown Houston train station. The result is a building that spans four blocks, but that has a manageable, even

Houston Center Gardens, the largest east side park, spans three blocks between the convention center and the central business district.

Recent revisions have brightened the once dour walls of The Park, a downtown shopping mall, with graphics and street side openings.

Over the course of nearly 20 years, more than $1.5 billion in public funding has been poured into the east side of downtown in an effort to attract new commercial construction.

welcoming street-level scale.

As everyone knows, the naming rights for the ballpark were sold to Enron, the golden child of the new economy and Houston's claim, yet again, to be the world city of the next century. When Enron was exposed as a garden-variety fraud and collapsed into civic humiliation, the naming rights for the ballpark were sold to Minute Maid, a division of Coca-Cola that synthesizes "juice" from a startling variety of ingredients — a real business, to be sure, but not one with the sort of sparkle that can support a whole city's psyche.

Herewith an aside on the confluence of architectural sparkle and sports, and their costs to a city: Two generations ago, the Astrodome was the "Eighth Wonder of the World," and only a decade ago it underwent a multi-million dollar renovation designed to keep it attractive for the Astros and Oilers. No sooner was that work finished than the owners of the two sports franchies threatened to move if local taxpayers didn't again invest hundreds of millions of public dollars in order to increase the franchises' private profit margins, primarily by creating more VIP skyboxes.

At the time, people across the country were rebelling, at least in print, against the rapacity of sports franchise owners, who everywhere were demanding new stadiums at taxpayer expense. Houston showed that the owners had the whip hand: In the midst of the Enron meltdown the Oilers relocated to Tennessee, then won the Super Bowl that Houston fans had been waiting for since the 1960s.

The Astrodome has always been a vexing problem. On the one hand, it has been one of Houston's best recognized international landmarks, supplying much of the sparkle in an otherwise bland multi-nodal landscape. On the other hand, it was an urbanistic disaster, the number one example of the antagonism of Houston's civic leaders toward a dense, multiuse urban core. And finally, it was a working building that was enormously expensive to replace. The Harris County Sports Authority spent $449 million on a 72,000-seat stadium for the new NFL franchise the Houston Texans, who played their first game in 2002. Take that together with Minute Maid Field, and Houston and Harris County taxpayers have spent some $750 million in less than five years to replace a building that had lost none of its functionality and only some of its sparkle.

End of aside and back to the Ballpark at Union Station/Enron Field/Minute Maid Field. By whatever name, the ballpark attracted lots of people downtown. According to figures published by the City of Houston, the 275 yearly events hosted at the ballpark bring an estimated 2.8 million people downtown annually.

Nevertheless, the ballpark has had only a minimal impact in bringing new development downtown. Since Minute Maid Field was completed, only one new project has gone up in the EED — Five Houston Center, a graceful 27-story, 577,000-square-foot office tower designed by HKS and built for $115 million by a division of the multi-divisioned Crescent Real Estate.

While the influx of a couple of million baseball fans to the EED certainly didn't hurt, it was actually the Enron-era surge in downtown office rents that led to Five Houston Center's creation. But since Enron's collapse there has been lots of vacant space in downtown office buildings, and thus little demand for more new office towers in the EED. Leaving office construction aside, however, the point is that no other significant retail, restaurant, or residential development was spurred by the ballpark.

But city officials, developers, and others say that last year's crop of projects marks a turning point, one at which the number of visitors to the EED can change the equation and actually begin having a real effect on building there.

A BILLION DOLLARS' WORTH OF BOXES?

The current surge in construction spending comes in response to pressure for a bigger convention center and, of course, for a more profitable home for a sports franchise, in this case the Houston Rockets and its WNBA offshoot, the Houston Comets.

Why expand the convention center? "So we can compete for the biggest and most profitable conventions," says Dawn Ullrich, head of the City of Houston's Convention and Entertainment Facilities Department, which owns and operates the Brown Convention Center.

In a $165-million project, wings have been added at the convention center's north and south ends. This will expand the center's overall size from 1.15 million to 1.85 million square feet; exhibition space is being increased from 451,500 to 853,000 square feet.

According to projections from the Convention and Entertainment Facilities Department, the expanded convention center will host 300 events, up from an average of about 260 per year (in 2002, with the center under construction, there

Much of the east side is still a transitional jumble. Here a vintage Society Hill house is squeezed between a parking lot and the looming heights of Minute Maid Park.

were only 209 events) and bring 1.5 million visitors to downtown Houston each year. According to Ullrich, Houston was kept out of the market for the biggest conventions not only by the size of the Brown Convention Center, but also by the lack of available hotel rooms in the downtown area.

For this reason, the Hilton Americas Houston, a new 1,200-room hotel, was built and connected by a multilevel sky bridge to the convention center. The hotel was financed and is owned by the Houston Convention Center Hotel Corporation, a non-profit entity created — reluctantly — in 2000 by the Houston City Council, which had seen two of its erstwhile members indicted for kickbacks related to earlier attempts to get a convention-center hotel financed. A new 1,600-car garage, one block south, is attached to the hotel. The price tag for both the hotel and garage is $285 million.

Gensler & Associates is the hotel's architect of record, with Arquitectonica as the design architects; Hines is the developer, and Hilton Hotels will operate the facility. With its asymmetrical massing and its banding in muted blues and greens, the hotel's exterior is reminiscent of the work of the early "out of phase" modernists of Houston, Joseph Finger and Kenneth Franzheim.

According to the city's projections, the hotel will have 350,000 guest nights per year. Hotel taxes and rental car fees are projected to be the key elements in retiring the construction bonds for the convention center and the hotel itself. According to Ullrich, some 1,100 other hotel rooms have been added downtown since 2000.

In terms of visits to downtown, the biggest impact is likely to be created by the new 18,500-seat basketball arena built to host the NBA Houston Rockets and the WNBA Houston Comets, as well as a minor league hockey team. Completed with funding from the Harris County Sports Authority, the arena will, according to city projections, host 200 events per year and attract two million annual visitors. The Rockets will pay $8.5 million annually to the sports authority, $5.8 million of which will go to retiring the construction bonds.

(By the way, the Rocket's old home, Compaq Center, once called the Summit, has become the new home of Lakewood Church, led by Pastor Joel Osteen and claiming the slogan: "Discover the Champion in You." According to the church's website, "the Lakewood International Center will become the 'village square' of Houston. With more than 2 million people currently attending [Compaq Center] events each year, there is hardly a more visible or familiar landmark in the city. Its location alone will allow us to present a message of hope to more people than any outreach in the history of Houston." Blocks for offices and meeting rooms will be added to the building's east and west ends, with the existing arena squatting between them.)

Naming rights for the new downtown arena were sold to the car manufacturer Toyota. It's an interesting change; instead of a home-grown company, such as Enron, getting its name out to the world, Toyota's interest is in marketing to Chinese NBA fans who will follow the fortunes of Rockets center Yao Ming in television broadcasts.

Inside Toyota Center, the majority of seats are closer to the playing floor than those at the Compaq Center were, so that fans can be more in touch with the game. Crucially, the Toyota Center has 92 luxury suites, where Compaq Center had fewer than 30.

The new basketball arena was designed by a consortium of architects including Morris Architects, HOK Sports Facilities Group, and John Chase Architects. Unfortunately, their design for the exterior includes none of the graceful detailing or contextualization that make Minute Maid Park a welcome addition to the EED. The building, which covers four blocks, is roofed with a shallow, mushroom-cap dome, and is lined on its perimeter with a bland concrete arcade, not all that different from the new 2,500-car parking garage being constructed on an adjacent block.

Inside, the ceiling over the arena is suspended from four architectonically pleasing corner columns. But the corridors are narrow and bland, finished in low-cost materials that may be durable but that lack architectural interest. The best part of the arena is the entry plaza on the southwest corner, turned toward Houston Center and the downtown skyline.

In an interesting development, the Rockets are collaborating with the Convention and Entertainment Facilities Department to take over and rework Root Memorial Square, a block-square park of grass and old oaks that was previously reworked in the 1990s by the late Burdette Keeland. The new plan for Root Square calls for construction of an outdoor basketball court as its centerpiece. The idea is that Rockets players will play with the cream of the city's street players there, as they have done for years at the Fonde Recreation Center, and as players have done at New York's famed Rucker Park. Most of the users of the park in recent years have been homeless people, who will be displaced by the construction and new intensity of park use.

Another open-air block has been reconfigured as part of the reworking of the EED. This is the so-called "power

block" at LaBranch and Dallas, owned by Centerpoint (once Reliant, once HL&P), the main transmission point for practically all the electricity used downtown, an unmovable chunk of visual disorder overlooked by the new convention center hotel, the arena, and the convention center, not to mention the buildings of Houston Center. The Sports Authority, the City of Houston, the Rockets, and Crescent have put in more than $1.5 million to clean up the block, giving it new paving and painting the transformers, power poles, and other fixtures all a uniform beige. Higher exterior walls and fences have been added, along with new plantings and a series of "light-stick" sculptures.

Says Jane Page of Crescent Real Estate Equities Limited Partnership, which owns 13 blocks in the area, "The plan we came up with was to minimize the visual impact, clean it up with new paving and higher walls, and then actually celebrate it as a place that reflects Houston — the power and energy and light."

Page is one of the people who will rebuild the EED when market forces are right. And she says she sees signs that the public investment is paying off. Crescent last summer sold two partial blocks near the arena to a private developer who plans, she says, to build residential projects, the first in the area in nearly a century.

Adds Page, "This type of activity on the east side of downtown creates a vibrancy and excitement that draws people to events and functions during the day, evenings, and weekends. Houstonians want to live and work where there is excitement and activities. The east side is transforming to a true urban experience. We have had several Houston Center customers locate in our complex for the very reason of being in the middle of the ballpark and arena."

Crescent has signed two restaurants, both aimed at an upscale evening crowd, for the Houston Center's Park Shops, and will reconfigure the relationship of the two-block section to more strongly interact with the street. Entrances will be moved from corners to mid-block, and retail will be opened to the street.

Eventually, says Page, Crescent would like to see office towers in several of the blocks it owns near the convention center.

Whether this will be enough to begin the transformation of the EED from an ocean of surface parking to a living part of the city's fabric remains to be seen. The area still faces the isolation that has kept it relatively empty for decades — the EED is so far from the new light rail line along Main, from the theater district, even from the new housing developments between downtown and the medical center, that it can't draw from their energy. But if public money for convention facilities and sports facilities can do the trick, Houston has certainly paid the price. ■

Root Memorial Square, now a haven for the homeless, will soon sport basketball courts where NBA players can face off against amateurs.

BIG MONEY. BIG BUILDINGS.

CAN HUMAN LIFE EXIST IN THE SUPER-SIZED BUILDING DISTRICT?

BY TOM COLBERT

Houston's newest sports arena, the Toyota Center, sits in the middle of what the newly installed street signs call the Toyota Center District. It lies on the eastern edge of downtown, adjoining the recently enlarged convention center and the new Hilton Americas Houston hotel. It is not far from the new Five Houston Center high-rise, and the recently expanded South Texas College of Law. One goes to the Toyota Center hoping to find some exciting architecture and maybe even a lively pedestrian-centered street scene. This is, after all, an entirely new district, paid for by taxpayer dollars. It is public architecture on an Hausmannian scale. Here especially, one does hope that a recent headline seen in the *AIA Journal of Architecture* would ring true: "Public Architecture Sets the Bar for Social Responsibility."[1]

On a weekday morning, however, it is not the architecture or the vitality of the district that arrests one's attention, but rather the emptiness of the streets and parks surrounding the Toyota Center. Root Memorial Square does have people in it, but they are street people who have been driven from their homes under the bridges on the north side of downtown by loudspeakers that the city placed there. These speakers blare industrial noise throughout the day, in order to drive the homeless away, and they succeeded brilliantly. Homeless people are not tolerated in the parks closer to the center of downtown or in front of the convention center, so they congregate here, near the Toyota Center, where the only other human presence is that of the custodial workers, private guards, and police whose job it is to service and protect the enormous public investment that has been made in new construction in this part of downtown. The homeless will probably soon be driven even from their haven in Root Memorial Square, though. New projects are being planned for the park. Well-lighted basketball courts, where NBA stars will face off against selected high school athletes, are promised, a stage for pre-game musical performances is soon to be installed, and large beds of seasonal flowers are to be planted.

The designers of the Toyota Center District don't seem to have been very interested in actual people, homeless or not, and where they might walk or hang out between performances. But they are very interested in cars and where they will be parked. There are quite a few parking garages, the blank walls of which crash abruptly into the sidewalks, presenting a forbidding façade to pedestrian passersby. None of the garages appears to have been designed to allow future use of the ground floor for retail or commercial purposes, or to give the eye or the hand a place to rest. There are plenty of surface parking lots, too. Most of these are surrounded by iron fences, and some even have elevated guard towers. The Toyota Center web site clearly describes the building's interest in its context. It says nothing about the neighborhood, but instead lists abundant parking as a prime reason for attending events there. It boasts of "ten thousand parking spaces within just a few blocks," with "a private sky bridge entrance for premium guests."[2]

Parking garages are not the only pedestrian-unfriendly structures in the Toyota Center District. An entire block at the entrance to the Toyota Center and in front of the Hilton hotel is filled with electrical transformers feeding power to downtown. The transformers are screened from the street by 15-foot high walls that abut the sidewalk. Nearby, another city block is filled by the huge cooling plant for all these buildings, the District Energy Center. If you asked a city planner to draw up a list of land uses that would keep people away from the Toyota Center District, you could not have come up with a more perfect anti-pedestrian program. The irony is that so many of these un-civic structures are owned or financed by the City of Houston.

One would expect that the Toyota Center building itself would fit into its context about as well as its flying-saucer-shaped roof suggests. In fact, it is more accommodating to the street than the other new buildings in the area. It, too, presents bland walls to the sidewalk, but they are less opaque, and they seem less impenetrable than most of the neighboring buildings. The Toyota Center also creates a credible public space at its entrance. Waiting in line for your tickets or to go into a Rockets game is an exciting and sociable experience, especially at night. Crowds line up along lights set in the pavement, and strangers feel free to talk to one another under the spectacle of glittering skyscrapers. For the crowd's entertainment, a monumental television screen hovers in the air overhead. The building opens up enough at its entrance to create an inviting sense of anticipation. Its brightly lit foyer is completely revealed behind a multi-floor wall of glass. Office spaces, shops, and exercise rooms are all visible inside. Standing in the plaza, waiting to go inside, one feels engaged with the city and its inhabitants.

From a distance, the Hilton hotel also seems like a place where one might find some urban conviviality. But sadly, at the street level it is like a fortified bunker. Its back and sides create a canyon-like streetscape of barren concrete walls. Its heavily recessed, north-facing entry is concealed behind a broad moat of bus and taxi drop-off lanes. Seen from the freeway, the nearby Five Houston Center and the South Texas College of Law buildings also suggest a greater level of vitality and responsiveness to human scale than is actually the case. They, too, have blank walls on all sides, albeit not as blank as those that grace the Hilton hotel and its attendant parking garages.

One might console oneself with the thought that these sorts of forbidding streetscape conditions — conditions that are also found around Houston's new convention hotel, around the Toyota Center, and in fact around the entire super-sized building district on the eastern edge of downtown — are the inevitable result of the peculiar nature of these facilities and the crowds they generate.

Sadly, this is not the case. The Enron buildings on the other side of downtown have no particular need to accommodate huge crowds, and yet despite their more sophisticated skin and their stronger claim to the space of the street, they too are semi-fortified buildings that wall in unoccupied, heavily patrolled streets. In fact, much of the commercial core of downtown is built this way. What a pity that the City of Houston is following the same path that our corporate titans have blazed for so many years.

As we come to the end of downtown Houston's greatest period of publicly-financed building construction, it is worth taking stock of what we've got. We have two major new sports facilities, a large convention hotel, tens of thousands of structured parking spaces, a doubling in size of the convention center, miles of newly defined streets, dozens of acres of newly landscaped parkland, and significant new commercial construction. But it is unclear what the civic agenda of all this monumental building really is, beyond attracting capital to the downtown area.

In a January *New York Times* article, Edward Rothstein summed up the problems we face as we attempt to grow our downtown: "The city's greatest achievement, it often seems, is the protection of the private realm and competing private interests; about the public realm there is no understanding."[3] ■

1. *AIA Journal of Architecture*, December 2003, pg. 12.
2. This can be found at www.houstontoyotacenter.com/parking.aspx.
3. Edward Rothstein, "What Should a City Be? Redesigning an Ideal," *New York Times*, January 24, 2004, pg. B7.

A Super Bowl map of Houston.

Spectacle City

Was it Houston our Super Bowl guests loved?

Or was it the city Houston impersonated?

BY BRUCE C. WEBB


Main Event weekends downtown normally cordon off six blocks for pedestrians; on Super Bowl weekend that was expanded to 16 blocks.


Temporary street sign, top, to a temporary city, bottom.

Playing the role of fun city during Super Bowl weekend, Houston had all the markings of the cities of spectacle that were so reviled by social critic Guy Debord and the Situationist internationals. For them the modern city had become little more than a giant parking garage, zoned into special interest belts of mass consumption and spectacle — a place of manufactured wonderment and glamour that were products of commodity fetishism. "The spectacle," Debord wrote, "is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life." And it's a determined capitalistic ethic to displace the authentic public life and intricate layers of subtleties of the city as it has grown up in real time.

Leading up to Super Bowl XXXVIII on February 1, Houston faced a perennial problem: How do you whip up a city out of the urban bits and pieces tumbling around in a perpetual state of unfinishedness, to put on a good show for a nation that is Houston-skeptical? For while most Houstonians think their city is a pretty good place to live, it troubles more than a few of them that almost no one else agrees. This deficit of self-confidence is abetted by things such as an article in the *Economist* calling Houston just flat-out ugly. Then there was a story making the rounds about a conversation between a city official and a member of the International Olympic site selection committee that was reported to have gone something like this: Houston official: "Well, what are our chances that Houston will make the cut?" Olympic official: "Not a chance. Look, you've got great venues, a good financial plan, and all that stuff's great. But you don't have a chance because Houston's so ugly. The freeways are ugly, the major streets are ugly, and we can't bring the world to all that ugliness." So in a way, the Super Bowl was a chance to even things up.

Houston hasn't yet become the kind of city that absorbs an event of this magnitude with the insouciance of San Francisco or New Orleans, or the studied indifference of New York City. The small-town nature of this huge metropolis shows through as the city becomes singularly focused, and for a few days Super Bowl seems to be its sole *raison d'etre*. "Join our team of thousands of dedicated volunteers," the Houston Super Bowl Host Committee exhorted on its web site, calling for loyal locals to serve as airport greeters, hospitality volunteers, and event logisticians. As many as 7,000 volunteers were needed to assist at the NFL Experience alone. And Mayor Bill White invited the entire city to join him in his "Put on your smile, there's company coming" campaign, which was engineered by an Austin (not Houston) advertising firm.

Building a Super Bowl city involved a collaboration between the city itself, the National Football League and its camp following corporations, and entertainers. In addition to a sufficiency of empty downtown space, Houston was also able to enlarge on its Main Event weekends, which since October 31 of last year have cordoned off a six-block pedestrian zone along Main Street. For Super Bowl weekend this precinct was enlarged to 16 traffic-free blocks in an area that includes many downtown nightspots and restaurants. Houston also had two relatively new downtown sports venues on the east side to show off, Minute Maid Park to the north and the Toyota Center to the south, connected by the five-block-long George R. Brown Convention Center, which held the vast NFL Experience

The upscale temporary toilet known as Charmin's Ultra Potty Palooza featured 27 hardwood-floored rooms with never-ending two-ply.

Roger S. Welch

In the buildup to the Super Bowl, music — made available courtesy of corporate supporters — was heard across much of downtown.

Roger S. Welch

Beer companies sponsored everything from concerts to the Bud Bowl in Minute Maid Park.

Roger S. Welch

sports carnival. There was also a new, 1,200-room Hilton hotel, connected by bridge to the convention center. Behind the convention center the grim field of support columns for US Highway 59 had been painted bright red as an accommodation for the little Chinatown strip that faces it.

But more than anything else, it was the new METRORail line, the building of which had fractured the city for the past two years, that fostered a sense of coherence and urbanity that would have been difficult to imagine in Houston a year earlier. METRORail created a linear city that joined patches of concentrated activity and interest that for Super Bowl tourists included: downtown, party central; the museum district with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's exhibition "First Down Houston: Birth of a NFL Franchise" (and other things); and, finally, Reliant Park. Also along the way were Rice University, Hermann Park, and the Texas Medical Center, as well as blocks of newly constructed condos and apartment blocks of various stylistic description. And, of course, a few dark buildings where business had closed, casualties of the prolonged disruptions during rail construction.

The response was overwhelming. Forty-one thousand METRORail boardings were recorded the Friday preceding the Super Bowl; 55,000 Saturday; and 61,000 Super Bowl Sunday. The only hitch was a product of downtown's success in attracting crowds. On Saturday, Metro decided to terminate rail service near the jam-packed Walker Street for safety reasons.

Houston provided space, infrastructure, and volunteers, but corporate America placed its brand on everything else. Those familiar with Houston's public life know that it's mainly sponsored by beer companies and radio stations. Looking for the public life, follow the twin inflatable campaniles: the Budweiser beer can and the KUHF portable radio. The Super Bowl was simply on a much larger scale. Something called the Bud Bowl was installed at Minute Maid Park; sponsored by Anheuser Busch, it featured a pair of concerts (rock on Friday, country on Saturday) that were free to those with tickets given out by local radio stations. Outside the stadium there was a cluster of food and activity booths (most popular was the mechanical bull) and the Budweiser Clydesdales. Rival suds giant Coors set up a few blocks away with the Coors Light Superbash, with its own featured lineup, including Sammy Haggar, Trick Pony, and Better Than Ezra. Closer to Main Street, Coors had a smaller "Tailgate Stage" and Motorola/AT&T weighed in with another stage on Travis and Preston. Even the most basic human need was satisfied in upscale style by corporate sponsorship: Charmin's Ultra Potty Palooza. This 53-foot-long 18-wheeler contained 27 private rooms with hardwood floors, sinks, wallpaper, floral scents, and an inexhaustible supply of two-ply toilet tissue — luxury accommodations that made the row of little blue porta-potties that are abundant at most outdoor gatherings seem Third World.

Building a Super Bowl city involved a collaboration between the city itself, the National Football League and its camp following corporations, and entertainers.

The real star attractions were more shadowy chimeras, imaginative excesses of soft-core partying. *Playboy* magazine situated its iconic playmates in a party called "Heaven and Hell" held at the Corinthian. *Maxim*, another men's magazine, created Circus Maximus at Regal Ranch, and *Sports Illustrated* threw "The Best Damn Swimsuit Party" on the plaza right out in front of City Hall.

Nothing attracts a crowd like the promise of seeing a real celebrity, and tickets to parties that promise to deliver one or more of them in the flesh can bring big money. These interactive rituals in which different echelons of society are brought into proximity demonstrates stratification of even a temporary city's circuits. To make the Galleria into a double-circuited city, the parking garage under Foley's was closed to all but stars, who moved through the mall on their way to chic shops like Louis Vuitton-clad NFL running backs. They were surrounded by a bevy of beefy uniformed blockers, while adoring throngs pressed against the windows for a peek.

Around town people paid for a vantage point from which they might have the chance of seeing *someone*. At the Mercury Room on Prairie Street, a bleacher seat for $97.90 allowed one to watch a crowd of revelers who paid $500 to get a little closer to stars such as Gerald Lavertt, George Clinton, and Vanessa Lynn. At Champs Americana, $20–$80 bought a stroll along the red carpet and a chance to see invited guests that included Beyoncé.

This leering spectacle seemed like foreplay after the denouement that occurred on Sunday during the half time extravaganza: the ultimate media spectacle of Janet Jackson's breast being bared by her singing partner Justin Timberlake on national television.

The Super Bowl has become an amalgamation of some of the most prominent themes of modern America: power, patriotism, sex, commodification, and profit. Houston was more than up to the challenge as host. It did so well, in fact, that it was compared to New Orleans' Bourbon Street and Austin's Sixth Street. But for visitors carousing on Main Street, it would be difficult to say whether they were really in Houston or simply on the set of an enactment of urbanity brought to life by the NFL. In other words, was it the city they came to love, or was it the party? By Monday it was all gone.

This summer Houston will again play host to a national event. This time it will be Major League Baseball's All Star Game. And like the enchanted village of Brigadoon that materializes from the mist for one day every 100 years, we will have out instant city one more time. ■

MOVING ON

AN INTERVIEW WITH MAYOR BILL WHITE

George Hixson Photography

ZONING | LIGHT RAIL | NEIGHBORHOODS | PRESERVATION

In mid-December, shortly after his runoff victory over Orlando Sanchez, *Cite* sat down Houston's then-mayor-elect Bill White. Editorial board members Barry Moore and William F. Stern, along with managing editor Lisa Gray, asked questions on a variety of subjects covering quality of life issues, public transit and traffic management, historic preservation, and delivery of city services. White's responses to these questions revealed a pragmatic approach to problem solving and an itch to begin work. The interview began and ended promptly on time. As White said in closing, "I've got to move on!"

Cite: *In 1993 a zoning referendum to establish a more comprehensive set of planning guidelines for Houston was narrowly defeated. During the intervening ten years groups such as Blueprint Houston have come forward to suggest alternative ways to implement planning guidelines. Do you have any intention of seeking ways to address the need for comprehensive planning guidelines as a replacement for the current system of ad hoc ordinances?*

Bill White: First, deed restrictions need to be enforced. We need to revitalize deed restrictions in neighborhoods where there have been claims of waivers. This is happening all over the city.

And we need to enforce the ordinances we have. We don't enforce ordinances against trucks cutting through neighborhoods, against parking. If we can't do the things that we're set up to do already, things on which we've already achieved consensus, it'll be hard to attempt something new.

I like the idea of something driven from the stakeholders up, like the Main Street Corridor, which involved citizens and businesses. We need to do a better job on historic preservation. We need to do a better job of respecting neighborhoods that are trying to redevelop. Some of those blighted neighborhoods only receive notification after the fact that there are very high-density, low-income apartments being placed right in the middle of those neighborhoods in transition. Those things we need to do better.

So rather than talking about somebody at City Hall coming up with a vision of a city that other people live in, I'd like to do something that is based on the feedback and priorities of the neighborhoods.

Cite: *What about groups looking at planning guidelines for the city? Would you call upon those groups to help reformulate ordinances to plan Houston?*

White: The idea of Blueprint Houston is good. I was on the board before they came up with a name, when it was all competing nonprofit organizations. I supported the effort that eventually became Blueprint Houston, and attended meetings, including the organizational meeting of Blueprint Houston. At that meeting there was a person who'd led the effort in Phoenix to create urban villages. We went through Phoenix's experience with building consensus for new planning. She said — and I agree — that it's important to find some things that are not abstract, that are early deliverables, so that citizens don't feel their time is wasted.

Blueprint Houston put together a list of priorities that certainly are priorities of mine: New mass transit, better air quality. We have problems right now with inside-the-Loop neighborhoods with safety. You can have the prettiest neighborhood in the world, but if it's not safe, people won't live there.

But to tell you the truth, I've seen some list of priorities from Blueprint Houston that emphasized the types of things that people have talked about a long time. But I have not seen specific recommendations concerning, say, how the planning department ought to work with neighborhoods, etc.

Cite: *The zoning referendum might better have been called "neighborhood preservation." Zoning is anathema in this city. Is there any way you can envision implementing what that zoning referendum was trying to establish — basic guidelines, setbacks, etc.? The reason inner-city neighborhoods are in such chaos is that there's no way to control what's going on next to you.*

White: First, I need to push back on that premise. I visited every neighborhood. In the neighborhoods that are in worst shape in our city, which encompass an enormous amount of land — the people there say, and I observed, that it's because of abandoned properties and crime. And I would say also a lack of business. It's hard for people to have affordable housing close to where they work, where they shop, where their kids go to school. Those things are eating the guts out of the neighborhoods in our city.

Those will be my highest priorities: transportation, neighborhood safety, cleaning up the neighborhoods, enforcing the ordinances that we have, improving air quality, improving drainage — that has become a nightmare. If I make progress on those things, on which right now we have a consensus, I will have made a lot of progress.

Redoing some battle on neighborhood planning or zoning is not as high on the radar screen. Talking to the civic clubs, I hear there are things already on the books about public nuisances that are not enforced. They say, how is it that a building gets permitted in violation of deed restrictions? Those things are what people are interested in.

Cite: *Given the scope of public works projects currently underway, and the criticism the prior administration received specific to this department, what initiatives will you take immediately to improve the department of public works? This question also goes to another perceived problem: Buildings in the city are generally mediocre, without architectural distinction. The selection process considers lots of criteria, none of which get at design excellence.*

White: When we speak about the public works department, most of what that does is roads and streets and drainage. So maybe I'll say something that refers to Public Works, but especially with emphasis on what is now Building Services. The essential elements of reform have been identified. I have already received a confidential report. First, we need to depoliticize the process of selecting vendors and the like. Second, we need to have leadership which can build a public works department which is considered the most professional in the nation. I think it can be done within a period of years. Third, we need to make sure we have the right skill mix. We need to have the right type of people. For example, it takes somebody who's designed something to be a knowledgeable consumer of design. This is true whether it be a water tank, freeway, or a building. As to the specific issue you raise, I agree that there is a very, very high return on designing buildings with excellence, and I think that ought to be a commitment.

Cite: *In the days before term limits, many councilmembers became experts on (and champions of) certain areas, such as*

Eleanor Tinsley on parks. Is it possible with term limits for this kind of leadership to evolve again?

White: I think it is. Part of it is that if you elect people to council who are civic leaders before they get there, they're more likely to be civic leaders after they get there. It's like picking stocks. People tend to remember the ones they make money on and forget the ones they lose [money on]. When I first moved to Houston, some people were doing you a favor to meet with you. It didn't matter what you thought, they were going to be in there forever. Some sorts of term limits are good, but what the limits should be — there's a lot of discussion about that.

Cite: *Some people have said that the term of office for a mayor — two years — is too brief. The first year you're getting used to it, the second year you're running for mayor again. Is that anything you're thinking about?*

White: It would be crazy for the city council or me to start extending their own terms. On a personal note, six years sounds like a long time. I love this city and want to make a contribution, but …

I think that is something that a lot of knowledgeable people are discussing, whether it should be extended from two to four. You could do it in a way that didn't apply to anybody currently holding office. I think there would need to be some consensus about that. There's going to be enough controversial issues: transportation, air quality, reforming the way we do business, drainage, public safety. I'm going to have my hands full with those things.

Here's a quality of life issue. Libraries and parks have typically been at the bottom of every city budget in terms of priorities. Since they're intimately involved in quality of life, how would you give them priority?

I want to make sure that money we spend right now is well spent. We have 900 people working in the city parks department. We have lots of people working in the county parks. At the county parks less money is spent, and the county parks are better maintained. I don't know why 900 people can't maintain our parks, to tell you the truth – and do even more. But the widespread perception is that even if we were to add more park green space, which I want to do, we can't maintain what we currently have. You remember when McGregor Park was going to be taken back because the city couldn't maintain it. We can't maintain what we have. The neighborhood parks are not well maintained. Contrast McGregor Park to Memorial Park. We need to do something to McGregor Park in terms of maintenance, upkeep, physical appearance, etc. My first priority is to try to get more bang for the buck out of the substantial amount of money we spend. We spend $50 million on parks, and I want to be sure we get $50 million in results.

Cite: *Houston is the only major city in America without an effective ordinance for the preservation of historic structures and neighborhoods. Though a preservation ordinance does exist, the law is currently written only to delay the demolition of designated historic structures for a period of 90 days. There is nothing to prevent an historic building's destruction. How will you deal with the ineffectiveness of Houston's preservation ordinance?*

White: I think it's very important that we do so. I want to get clear direction about the type of balance that I want to see, and then see if a number of citizens representing different interests can come up with a consensus. If there's any group — I don't care who it is — who says my way or no way, I don't consider that to be constructive. The direction which we had is based on, from what I've heard, on what other cities did right and wrong. Let's identify what we consider to be the first 50, 70, or 80 historically significant structures and come up with something that provides for those structures. In some cases it may be a neighborhood or a group of structures in a neighborhood that operates together. But if we can't do that, we won't make progress anyway.

I consider it to be a bit of a crisis in the sense that there are historical neighborhoods — Third Ward, to give an example — which are under attack, losing their distinctive historical structures and losing the character of those neighborhoods.

I don't think [saving neighborhoods is] done through historic preservation. Part of it, but only part of it, is through historic preservation. Parts of the Third Ward would be suitable for development guidelines that are community-based and stakeholder-driven. The Third Ward, which is at-risk as far as the character of the neighborhood, will be changed by what we do with abandoned properties or properties that are bought by speculators. How do we encourage revitalization of the area, but do so in a way that does not drive out people who live there because of higher property values?

Cite: *There's a great development opportunity associated with METRO light rail.*

White: Probably it's a great opportunity. I consider that one of the tougher issues. I support rail. The natural tendency is to bring in high-density, often upscale development and businesses right along those rail lines. That's one of the advertised benefits of rail. But it does destroy neighborhoods. So let's be plain and blunt about what happens when that occurs. And so deal with those neighborhoods. Some people say, "It doesn't destroy neighborhoods, it improves them." But it depends on whether you've lived there 40 or 50 years, and what you like. It's a tough issue. But it's an issue we're going to confront.

Cite: *Do you have plans to promote a true commuter rail system to the far suburban communities?*

White: I'd like it to be done. That's one reason it's important that we got the METRORail referendum passed, because if you have commuter rail dumping people going to multiple employment centers, you need something to get them to those places of employment. This can be done in parallel with, or as a next stage to, a rail system, along the lines of the one proposed by METRO as the next phase. It can't be done before that. Otherwise you have circulation problems.

The real problem with congestion in Houston isn't the inner city. It's the congestion coming in. The light rail system doesn't address that. But as the population grows rapidly, shouldn't we be planning now? This is one of the easiest cities in the world to implement rail because the geography is so forgiving and we have existing right of ways.

[White points out the conference-room window.] Eureka Junction is about a mile and a half that way. You know what that is? It's where the rails in the middle of the United States came together at a big rail head. There were rail junctions in the St. Louis area, the Chicago area, and the Houston area "where 14 rails met the sea."

One of the rail lines came down the Katy Freeway. One of them came down from Navasota and to the north. Another one — the one that comes up from Sugar Land, I don't know where it originates — goes through Memorial Park, through the Amtrak station, and out to Florida. Right there. That junction.

I've talked to owners of the rail line up 290. It needs to be renovated, but that's a place you could put commuter rail.

Cite: *What are your thoughts about expansion of the Katy Freeway? The strategy of adding more lanes seems increasingly controversial. You can never build enough lanes….*

White: I think the highest value of the mayor — this is going to require discipline and understanding — is to talk about where we can have a significant impact on what happens in the future. There's a lot of things where a billion dollars in contracts are already negotiated, where port battles have been fought, where things in the planning phase for ten years have been constructed. I don't try to redo everything that's already initiated. It may be that Katy is in that situation.

I have taken a look in general. We need to submerge these freeways. We ought to put the freeways below grade. That should be a standard design feature of the freeway redesign.

But what I'm focused on right now, with Katy and Kirby under construction, is what do we do to mitigate what will begin on US 59? How do we avoid some of this happening in the future, where lack of coordination of projects has [construction projects] starting at the same time, with citizens getting involved in the process late in the game both because of the TXDOT culture and because citizens have day jobs and focus on these things.

I've got to move on. Thank you. ■

Interior of one of the five parallel bays that comprise the ground floor of the Nasher Sculpture Center, Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Genoa, Italy, with Interloop A/D and the Beck Group, 2003.

Urban Garden

Nasher Sculpture Center

BY W. MARK GUNDERSON

Top: Exterior gardens, Peter Walker and Partners, with Mark di Suvero sculpture *Exiva Amore*, 2001, in foreground. Bottom: Garden façade and terraces.

The recently completed Nasher Sculpture Center, by Renzo Piano and the Renzo Piano Building Workshop (RPBW) with contiguous and integral garden designed by Peter Walker, landscape architect, fills a missing tooth in the Dallas Arts District Master Plan. Noted philanthropist and collector Raymond Nasher's gift to Dallas, the center houses significant works of 20th-century sculpture collected by Nasher and his late wife Patsy. The collection is regarded as one of the finest in the world, and arts organizations worldwide made overtures to acquire it before Nasher decided to create his own repository in his home city. The new center also houses a study center, the Nasher Institute for Modern Sculpture.

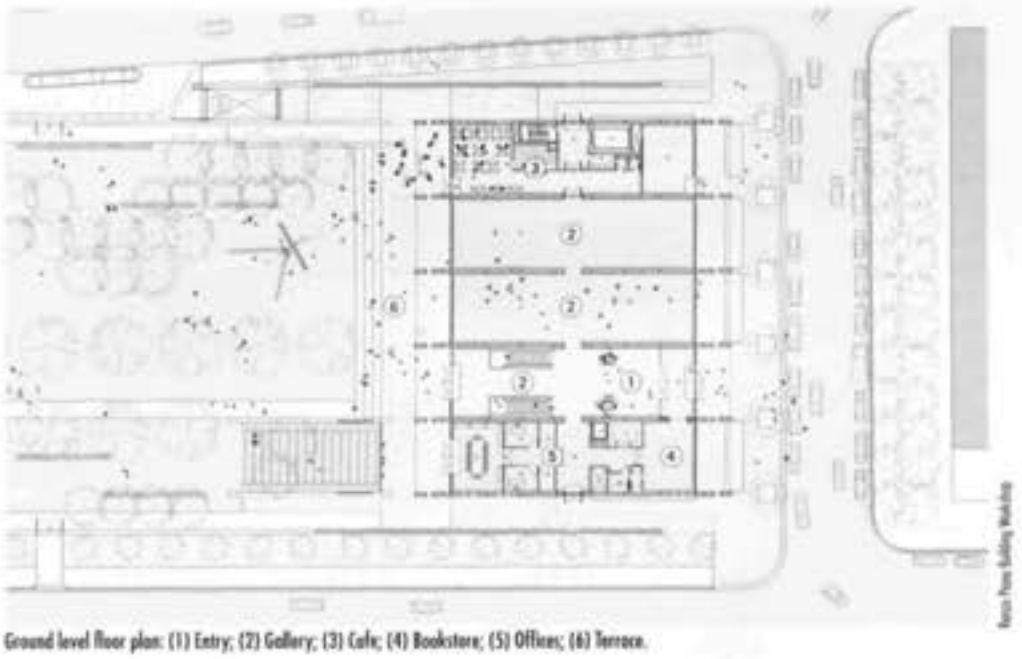
The Nasher Center is the first art-related component to be completed along the east-west axis of Flora Street, the intended primary pedestrian armature for Dallas's museum district, since the Crow Center for Asian Arts opened in 1998. Rem Koolhaas, Norman Foster, and Brad Cloepfil/Allied Works are currently designing other performing arts and educational facilities along this spine. The Nasher's 2.4-acre site, a former parking lot immediately east of the Dallas Museum of Art (Edward Larrabee Barnes, 1984, with additions in 1985 and 1993), has a north-south orientation that is terminated at its north edge by the Woodall-Rogers Freeway and on the south by Flora Street.

Nasher hired Renzo Piano after a visit to the Museum Beyeler convinced him that Piano could produce a building of the exquisite quality he desired. Piano's design studies and analysis began in August 1999. He proposed "a building and garden as one" that would provide an urban oasis in Dallas' sometimes hostile downtown.

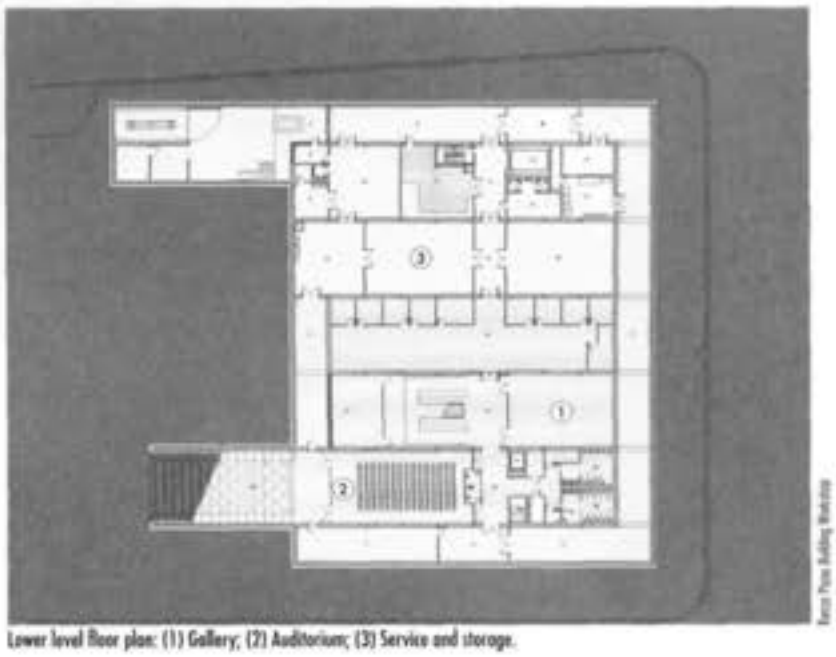
In an early scheme, Piano placed the museum building against the west edge of the site to minimize the walk from the art museum's parking garage. Later, the parti became a row of six parallel, 24-foot-high masonry walls defining five bays that were open-ended on the north and south and roofed with a subtle, arbor-like glass assembly. The disposition of these repetitive walls has the calm demeanor and stability of an Agnes Martin painting.

Three middle bays at ground level form the primary galleries, and the two side bays contain administrative offices, meeting rooms, and a café. Below grade, a gallery for displaying light-sensitive materials is bracketed on the west by a large auditorium that opens outdoors to a stepped grass-and-granite amphitheater. On the east are art-handling areas, a conservation lab, research spaces, and a library. A vehicular elevator accommodates large trucks and deliveries.

Longitudinal site section of the Nasher Sculpture Center.



Ground level floor plan: (1) Entry; (2) Gallery; (3) Cafe; (4) Bookstore; (5) Offices; (6) Terrace.



Lower level floor plan: (1) Gallery; (2) Auditorium; (3) Service and storage.

The site's subtle slope is an integral part of the building and sculpture garden. A broad terrace on the north side of the building engages the landscaped garden with continuous, subtle stone steps of dark green South African granite, providing a dramatic panorama of the outdoor sculpture collection. Peter Walker's landscape plan creates a series of informal arboreal "rooms" by calling for lines of trees that act as a direct formal extension of the gallery walls. Trees (some quite mature) were imported to the site. They form incomplete allees and give structure and settings for the placement of sculpture. A continuous masonry wall delineates the perimeter of the 1.42-acre garden space, and along with the berms on the north side it buffers the garden from traffic noise, creating a sanctum.

James Turrell's skyspace "Tending, (Blue)," a 26-foot black granite cube, is located in the center of the garden's north edge, abutting the freeway. Inside, a ten-foot-by-ten-foot roof aperture frames a piece of the sky, making it into a tangible object overhead. The cube is entered from the west by a small, radiused entry vestibule whose wall is washed with changing artificial light from the sub-floor. The effect is somewhat less successful than Turrell's "The Light Inside," the installation in the access tunnel between the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Beck and Law buildings, if only because the scale is so small that the effect is somewhat anemic, and tempered glass doors can admit considerable lateral daylight.

The primary skyspace, however, is refined and very impressive. Air-conditioned during warm weather and with heated granite benches around the perimeter for colder months, it creates an accommodating and engaging outdoor room. The emphasis on the vertical ground to sky axis serves as a pivot, both conceptually and physically, to the open and horizontal emphasis of the garden and museum.

Piano's design is based on a complementary pairing of the ephemeral and the eternal. Two-foot-thick seriate walls are intended to be of an archeological quality, almost found in nature, while the glass and steel roof might be replaced over time. The Piano Building Workshop referenced images of archeological sites showing eroded remains of walls. Two-inch-thick travertine panels are employed as sheathing. The two-foot-by-four-foot panels were water-blasted on the structure's outer face to give them a sense of advanced age and honed and filled on the inside.

Piano calls the scheme a "roofless museum," but he has again fabricated a stunning roof assembly using pre-strengthened cast stainless steel and dual layers of low-iron extra clear laminated glazing. The minimal roof membrane, slightly arched to form a canopy, is supported on curved steel beams. Most glazing elements were fabricated in Florence.

Direct sunlight is screened by a perforated plane of aluminum tiles, each three inches thick, four feet by six inches across, and resembling egg-crates. The tiles were computer designed to select only direct north light. Unlike the strategy in Piano's Menil Collection and Museum Beyeler buildings, where the sun screening elements were hung below the roof, in the Nasher they are placed above the glazing. The curved beams and glazing are assisted and stiffened by stainless "yacht"-cable supports from above. Ove Arup and Partners, London, provided their unique sensibilities to the design of this assembly, minimizing all redundancy.

The resulting daylight suffuses the ground-level galleries and is colored by the travertine, understated monochromatic curatorial supports and white oak-plank flooring. The window-wall that ends the five gallery bars allows only rich horizontal light, with an urban view to the south and garden view to the north. A higher level of daylight than the usual curatorial allowance was considered desirable for the resolution of detail in viewing predominantly three-dimensional works.

The internal proportions of the galleries are a double-square — 32 feet between walls and 16 feet vertically to the point at which the vault springs from the wall — and each gallery is 112 feet long. Each façade then includes an additional 16-foot-deep extension of the glazed canopy for sunshading and overhang. Transverse circulation is through aligned and unadorned eight foot wide by ten foot tall apertures centered axially in the east-west direction.

The building exudes a quiet competence with superbly executed finishes, a tribute to both the architects and engineers, as well as to the contractor. Detailing is a crisp and masterful exhibition of a sophisticated minimalist construction in which assemblies of differing natures exist in perfect counterpoint. "[Nasher's] only concern was quality. He never raised issues of cost," said Vel Hawes, an architect and the owner's representative on the project.

On October 17, 2003, the architect and the owner addressed 1,800 or more people in a public conversation at Dallas' Meyerson Symphony Center. Renzo Piano's first reaction at the podium to the unexpected size of the crowd and to its extreme gratitude for the new building and gardens was "Mama mia!" The joy was mutual. ■

Public life is still possible on private property: Magic Carpet Golf on Seawall Boulevard in Galveston.

Immanent Domains

We are where we think we are

BY TERRENCE DOODY

Celebration Station is an entertainment complex at 6767 Southwest Freeway, on the inside feeder road between Bellaire Boulevard and Westpark. It consists of a dark arcade filled with electronic games, children at parties, and unbearable noise. There is also a go-cart track, a pool for bumper boats, and three eighteen-hole miniature golf courses laid up and down a fake "mountain" that rises to about 40 feet in height. The mountain has concrete appliqués painted the color of sandstone, a waterfall and slow stream, an open-ended cave that you play through, and a number of holes that step several levels down the terraced layout. It is a very neat place and, by far, our family's favorite venue for miniature golf.

One very hot Sunday afternoon last summer, I noticed a Latino family — husband and wife, three very small children, and a grandmother, all in black — not playing miniature golf, but strolling the courses. They were, I realized, "tourists" taking in the scenic vistas and dramatic overview of US Highway 59. It was a moment of some pathos.

However, I have wondered since then whether pathos was the right response. We were there for essentially the same reason they were, but we were disguised as golfers and it cost us $30. At no cost at all, they were improvising their pleasure in a city with few sidewalks, fewer parks, and elevat-

ed prospects available only from freeway overpasses. They were taking a walk, and redefining the city for themselves in the ambiguity of the commercial space that can so nicely facilitate this kind of appropriation. They started me thinking about the nature of place, about public places like entertainment facilities and malls, about our definitions of privacy in public, and, of course, about cell phones.

We usually experience places from the outside in. They are there already before we arrive and are defined in some way by their function; places usually have names, and they contain things. We put ourselves in places and behave appropriately. But we can also experience places from the inside out as we appropriate them by acts of the imagination and redefine their purpose. This appropriation can be both simple and complex. It starts in gestures such as using a sewer top for home plate as we play in the street. It can be the designation of a romantic corner in a restaurant that then becomes "ours," in the way a song becomes "our song." Neutral landscapes, with private associations or evocative qualities, suffused with possibilities or memories, are available both on the way to school and in cultural monuments such as Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey. And think about what's going on when Christo wraps a large public building or a bridge. Gestures like these, from creating home plate to the installation of controversial sculpture, I like to think of as establishing immanent domains. They are private acts in public, and they can play with our civic senses of "zoning."

II

Immaculate Nikes, a purposeful stride, and eyes as cloistered as a monk's all mark the seniors who walk the malls. She never carries a purse. He is not dressed to be seen. They are not shopping. They are exercising. And they are obvious.

If they were walking like this through the sidewalkless streets of my neighborhood, you would hardly notice, and there are people in other cities who walk to work down Michigan Avenue, Madison Avenue, Commonwealth Avenue, with a purposeful stride and fixed gaze, who are not shopping either. (Does anyone walk through Highland Village on the way to work? Can you walk through Highland Village in the first place?)

But public streets are always both means and ends, theaters as well as bazaars, but thoroughfares first, and the place where strangers are least legible and most interesting. The avenues of a mall, however, don't go anywhere else, aren't routes, have no other rationale, and mark strangers as shoppers. These avenues are as focused in function as an escalator. It is almost reasonable, therefore, that one mall manager argued that the mall-walkers ought to be banished during the Christmas shopping season because they take parking spaces from orthodox consumers and they crowd things. Imagine! Crowds at Christmas! He lost the argument. History and custom were not on his side.

In 19th-century American cities commercial spaces, like modern malls, were developed not to exclude the foreigner and the unorthodox, but to offer another opening into the new world. Department stores were intended not simply to sell things but also to be the agent and stage of a changing order, "a form of real emancipation" from "the boredom of familial confinement or the drudgery of domestic routine."

"A millionaire [such as Marshall Field] who greeted his customers and responded to the grievances of a shopper on the crowded floor of his store elevated an obsequious act to the level of a public service."

"A poor woman's self-esteem was elevated by her ability to share a display counter with a rich woman, who in turn achieved her satisfaction from the admiration of clerks and customers."

The preceding phrases and passages are taken from Gunther Barth's *City People* (1980), but his points were anticipated and dramatized in Emile Zola's novel about a Parisian department store, *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883), and in Theodore Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie* (1900). Novels, among the many other things they have always done, have always explored, or even exploited, the zone between the private and the public, between immanence and the common social order.

In any daily urban life, it seems, we live in that zone all the time. What the poor woman at the counter thinks about herself and her place, in every sense, is what establishes in her mind the meaning of her life. What the rich woman thinks does the same thing. The invisible zones of their consciousness, as a novel can give them to us, as we can imagine them watching people in the mall, enrich the place they're standing in a way the place can never fully contain.

The cafes-concerts in the Paris of Haussmann and the Impressionists' paintings of them did some of this kind of social work, but American cities had a much more heterogeneous populace to work with, and the class issues Barth identifies are still obvious in the differences between the Galleria and the Alameda Mall, where there is no Tiffany's, and in the reputation certain cities have for blue-collar football teams — Oakland but not San Francisco, Pittsburgh but not Miami. But deeper than class is commerce. Money makes the world go round and helps us all identify and disguise ourselves. In places like malls we are neither private individuals nor exactly public citizens; we are free to be many other things at once, visibly and invisibly at the same time.

III

Sidewalk visionaries, talking to their unseen gods, used to be schizophrenics and the homeless. Now it's the guy whose little cell phone is plugged in on the other side of his face. Because phone technology is still so imperfect, he is speaking very loudly. He is violating your privacy as he forces you to overhear him, and we don't yet have a word for this inversion of eavesdropping — which is a truly spectacular word itself. The boundaries of public and private are contested in this relationship between a cell phoner and his unwilling audience, and I think of this relationship as a commercial space too, created not out of any deep human need to be talking to someone miles away as you stroll the city or fight the freeway traffic, but out of the communications industry's Darwinian aggression. Nature, one of my students told me, is what is possible. And we can now select to be two places at once, talking to someone who is not here but there in another domain.

One sign the Apocalypse is nigh was the woman I saw walking down the white line in the middle of University Boulevard, at about 8:20 a.m., morning traffic streaming past her on both sides, her eyes on the high horizon, her ear on her cell phone. Where, in what world, was she? "Up there in air-space," Salman Rushdie writes in *The Satanic Verses*:

"Up there in air-space, in that soft imperceptible field which had been made possible by the century and which, thereafter, had made the century possible, becoming one of its defining locations, the place of movement and of war, the planet-shrinker and power-vacuum, most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic...."

This air-space is also the domain of the electronic media that are now essential to the other defining location of our experience in postmodernity, the city — which in Rushdie's novel is equally Bombay and London. The world is incompatible, one of his characters says, and "the locus classic of incompatible realities" is the city, because there is nothing like the city in all its messy splendor that resists clear-cut binary orders of public and private, social and individual, functional and free, or legible and opaque.

Maybe one simple reason It's All At The Mall, or at Celebration Station, is that any place that takes our money gives us some freedom in return. Or it may also be that some places with high-intensity definitions encourage our resistance: They push against us so hard, we have to push back to make room for ourselves.

The poet Wallace Stevens defines the imagination as the pressure inside us that resists the pressure of the reality outside; and he is perfectly comfortable with the implication of this position that all of us are necessarily poets, that the gestures by which we establish our immanent domains in the world are acts of art. Stevens is as democratic in this belief as Walt Whitman is, but more radically anarchic because he writes without Whitman's hope in community. And because he is neither a novelist, nor an architect, nor a city planner, but a poet of exquisite abstractions, he says of himself, "Life is an affair of people not of places. But for me life is an affair of places and that is the trouble."

The Borders bookstore I know best has books and magazines, CDs and VCRs for sale, a snack shop and coffee bar, and a massage station. Upstairs there are many soft reading chairs, and one Saturday I saw a couple, their laps piled with books and magazines they hadn't bought, their empty latte cups at their feet, sound asleep.

Sleeping in libraries is perfectly natural. Sleeping in stores, however, is the projection of a kind of privacy hard to gauge. An immanent domain, for sure, and all they had to buy was the caffeine that didn't keep them awake. ■

Medical Towers Garage, 1709 Dryden Street, Golemon & Rolfe and Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill, 1956.

The Surprising Beauty of the Parking Garage

BY WILLIAM F. STERN

Photography by Paul Hester

Usually we experience parking garages while driving up or down a continuous ramp searching for the nearest unoccupied parking space. These utilitarian structures, formulaic in plan and a modern convenience for our mobile society, can be frustrating as they force us upwards, story after story, in our quest to park. Though the interior spaces of parking garages tend to be banal and confusing, their exteriors have from time to time been treated with a surprising degree of clarity and ingenuity. In fact, a number of Houston parking garages qualify as worthy works of architecture. In those exceptional instances the architects and owners have recognized the impact of these structures not only on adjacent buildings, but also on the streets with which they align.

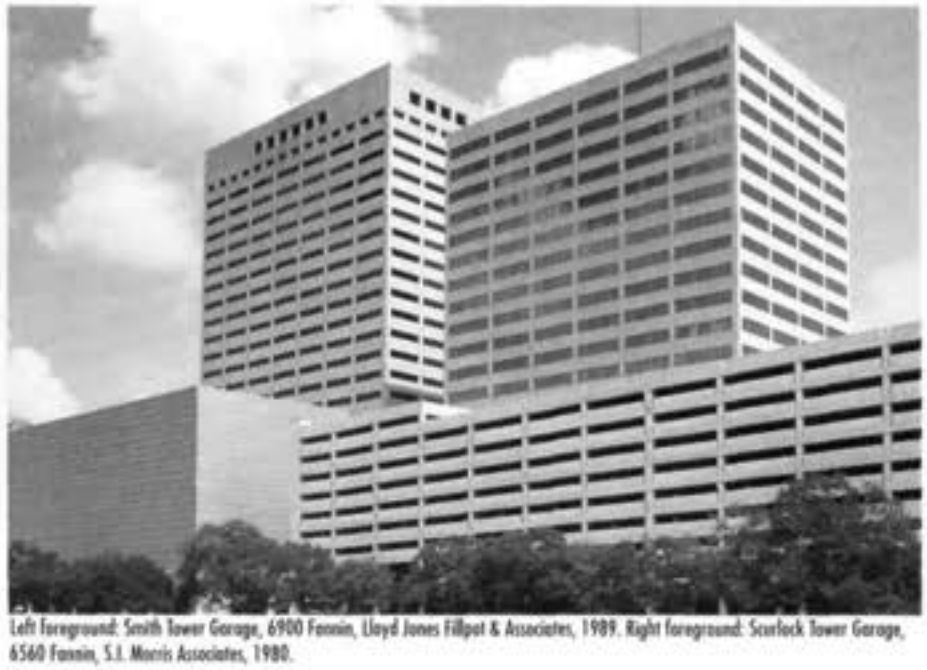
Some of Houston's better-designed garage structures have been fully integrated with the buildings or developments they serve, in a way that purposely hides their function. Such is the case with the St. Luke's Tower parking garage, an integral part of the building masked from the street by the same curtain wall system that clads the towers. The Chase Tower garage downtown has been designed as a compatible free-standing addition to the tower across the street, expressed in the same gray granite cladding and dark glass. Without signage to indicate its entrance, one might assume that the Chase garage is another handsomely designed office building.

Other downtown garage buildings do not so intentionally mask their intended use. Along the east side of Milam Street between McKinney and Polk the street façade is composed of a series of independently designed parking structures that include the garage for Foley's department store, an early rendition of a parking structure built as an exposed concrete frame with brick spandrels separating the levels. And at 700 Leeland

Fannin Holcombe Building Garage, 6900 Fannin.

Hyatt Regency Garage, 1200 Louisiana Street, JV III Architects, 1972.

St. Luke's Medical Tower Garage, 6624 Fannin Street, Cesar Pelli & Associates and Kendall/Heaton Associates, 1991.



Left foreground: Smith Tower Garage, 6900 Fannin, Lloyd Jones Fillpot & Associates, 1989. Right foreground: Scurlock Tower Garage, 6560 Fannin, S.I. Morris Associates, 1980.

stands a full-block parking garage with an elegant filigree of lightweight perforated metal panels subtly screening the cars within.

The downtown Hyatt Regency's attached parking garage, a massive brick block with rows of narrow slits for ventilation, succeeds because it has been designed to complete the overall composition of the hotel complex. This is also the case with the 1957 Medical Towers building in the Texas Medical Center, where the garage structure, horizontally composed, forms a base for the tower slab, not unlike the compositional arrangement of Lever House in New York. At ground level, with its façade recessed from the garage above, the function is given over to shops and restaurants, which lessen the weightiness of the multi-level garage structure above.

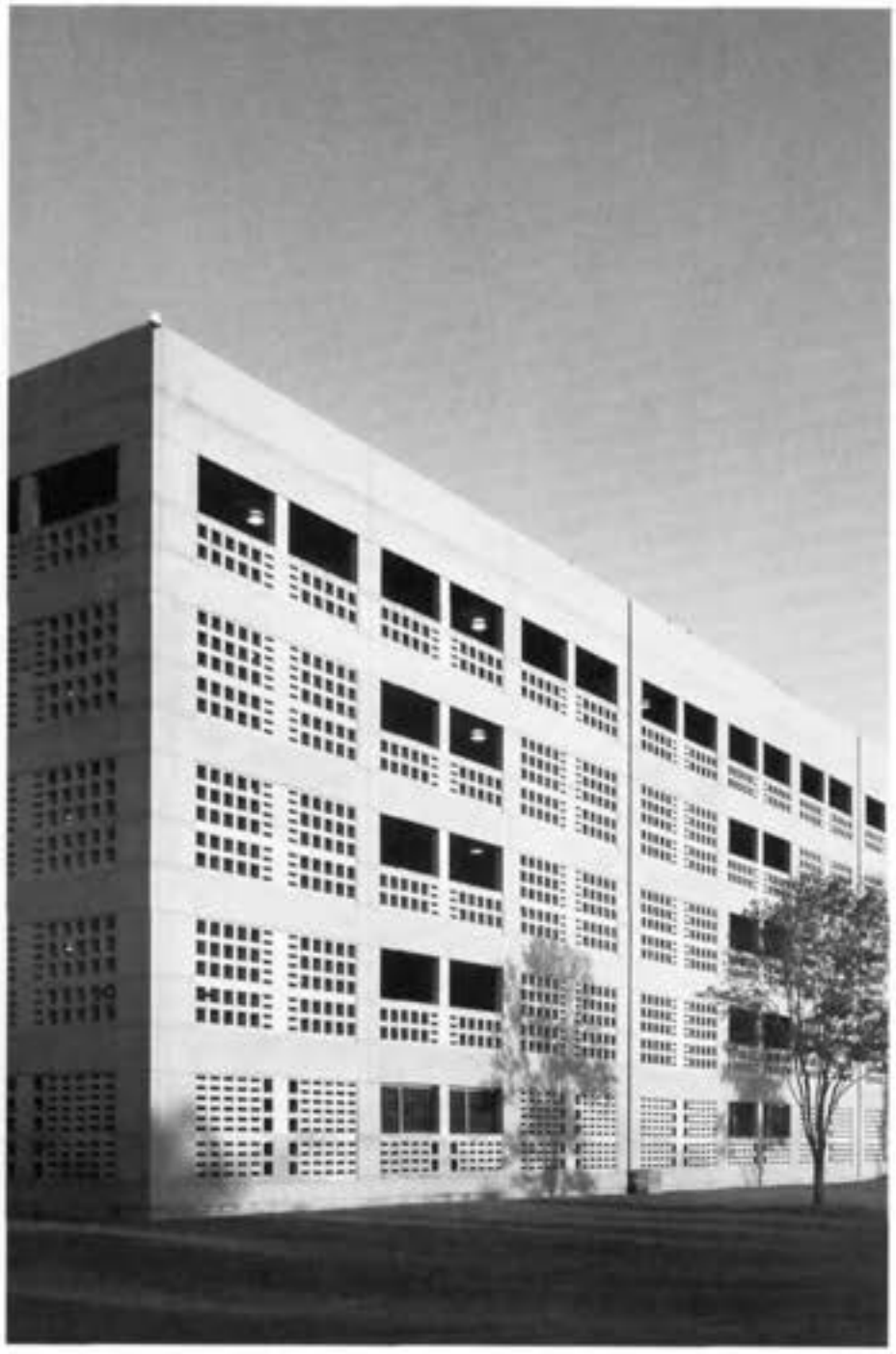
Retail space as a component of a garage structure is best represented at the Post Oak Central complex north of the Galleria. Built as a phased development of retail space and office towers, garage buildings surround the towers on three sides as a continuous shopping arcade with parking above. The extruded linear quality of the parking structures balances the verticality of the office towers, giving form and containment to the space at street level. The cladding on phase two and three garages mimics the curtain wall system of the towers with black aluminum panels separated by silvery horizontal screens as a complement to the black spandrel panels and silver mirrored glass of the adjacent towers.

Where the garage structures at Post Oak Central are expressed as architecture on a par with the office towers, the parking garages for Galleria 1 and 2 make no such pretension. Clearly conceived as part of an overall urban design for this mega-development, the long expanse of garage faces the service road of West Alabama and is partially screened from view by a dense line of live oaks. A simple system of concrete columns painted white supports parking trays contained by inexpensive pre-cast concrete panels separated by dark voids for ventilation.

In other instances, parking structures stand out as distinct works of architecture. Such is the case with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's garage east of Fannin. In both its composition and scale, this garage presents a more compelling relationship to the surrounding streets than the adjacent limestone-clad Beck Building. Particularly when viewed from the corner of Binz and Fannin, the mass of the parking garage breaks down into an abstract arrangement of blocks clad with a combination of tightly detailed bronze panels at street level and precast concrete panels above. The designers have also imaginatively joined the spacious parking trays with one of the museum's primary entrance lobbies.

For the high-rise campus headquarters of BMC Software on Beltway 8, north of Westheimer, the parking is contained within a series of five-story free-standing structures. These box-like concrete garages contrast with the glass- and metal-clad towers and are arranged to reinforce the site and landscape design. But the beauty of these parking structures is derived from an imaginative patterning of hollowed-out concrete blocks, set between the frames of the concrete structure. The arrangement of voids and solids produces an elegant façade that expresses the garage's structural and ventilation requirements.

A city evolves as an aggregate of its buildings. Though a building can be admired as an individual work of architecture, its ultimate success also depends on its relationship to adjacent buildings and streets. The garage structures featured on these pages distinguish themselves not only as resolved works of architecture, but also as buildings that elevate the very form of city and place. ■



Top left: Galleria 1 Garage, 5015 Westheimer Road, Neuhas & Taylor, 1970.

Top right: BMC Software Garage Two, 2101 City West Boulevard, Keeting, Mann, Jernigan, Rottet, 1993.

Bottom left: Foley's Garage, 1100 Main Street, Kenneth Franzheim, 1947.

Bottom right: Four Oaks Place Garage, 1300-1400 Post Oak Boulevard, Cesar Pelli & Associates and Melton Henry Architects, 1983.

Top left: Humble (ExxonMobil) Garage, 700 Leland, Welton Becket & Associates with Golleman & Rolfe and George & Abel Pierce, 1963.

Top right: Chase Center Garage, 601 Travis Street, I.M. Pei & Partners and 3D/International, 1982.

Bottom left: Post Oak Central Garage,1980-2000 Post Oak Boulevard, Johnson/Burgee with Richard Fitzgerald & Partners, 1978.

Bottom right: Americana Building Garage, 811 Dallas, Lloyd & Morgan, 1960. Refacing by Kirk & Associates, 2000.

Top left: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Garage, 1100 Binz, Rafael Moneo and Kendall/Heaton Associates, 2000.

Center left: Dresser Tower Garage, 601 Jefferson, Neuhaus & Taylor, 1973.

Center right: 1500 Louisiana Garage, Cesar Pelli & Associates and Kendall/Heaton Associates, 2002.

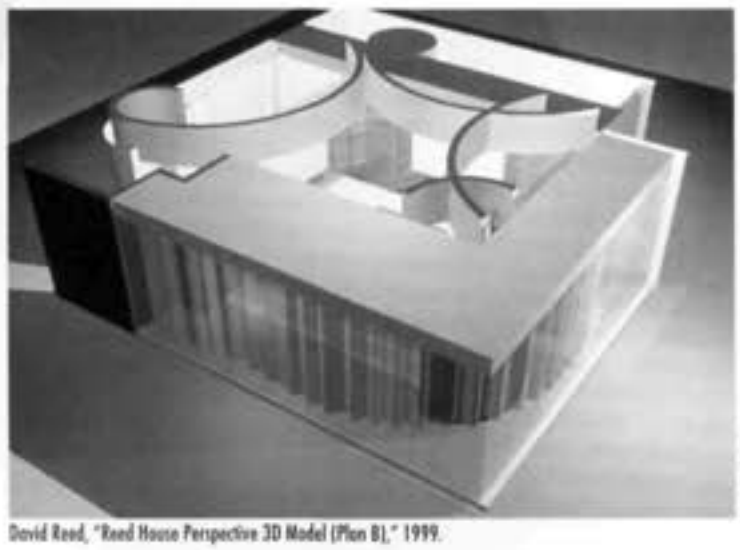
Bottom left: Park Towers Garage, 1233-1333 West Loop, Haff Blackstone Strode, 1974.

Bottom right: Highland Village Garage, 4080 Westheimer, Morris Architects, Inc., 2002.

The House as Art

TRESPASSING: Houses x Artists,
Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston
January 17–March 14, 2004

Reviewed by Allison Hunter



David Reed, "Reed House Perspective 3D Model (Plan B)," 1999.

TRESPASSING: Houses x Artists (read "houses by artists") which was recently on view at the Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, is the brainchild of Alan Koch and Linda Taalman, two up-and-coming architects with a penchant for interdisciplinary design. In 1997, they founded OpenOffice Arts + Architecture Collaborative to foster this project and others. In 2003, Koch and Taalman left New York (and Open Office) for Los Angeles, where they established a new firm, TK Architecture. The design duo is swiftly gaining prominence with this exhibition (organized jointly by Cara Mullio, the Bellevue Art Museum, and the MAK Center for the Art & Architecture, Los Angeles, and shown widely throughout the U.S.) and with recent projects such as the highly publicized *DIA: Beacon Museum*, converted from a 1929 factory, in Beacon, New York.

In the initial phase of *Houses x Artists*, artists worked with Koch and Taalman to generate more radical approaches to architecture, beyond the "things that you would [consider] if you're working in a strictly logical system about rainwater or other dilemmas of shelter," says Koch in the exhibition catalogue. The next step in the three-year process was to formalize their discussions as an exhibition. TK Architecture hand-picked nine artists — Kevin Appel, Barbara Bloom, Chris Burden, Jim Isermann, T. Kelly Mason, Julian Opie, Renée Petropoulos, David Reed, and Jessica Stockholder — whose work reflects "unresolved architectural ideas." Each artist was asked to propose a "house concept" using whatever means was most relevant to their artistic practice. TK Architecture stressed to the artists that they should approach the program under ideal conditions, without the distractions of real-world constraints such as materials, budget, neighborhood, or site. In the final phase, it was hoped that collaboration with TK Architecture would produce a viable architectural proposal.

Koch and Taalman soon discovered that artists' optimal working conditions can mean "defying natural properties of time and space" (which Barbara Bloom proposes) — not exactly ideal conditions for building a house. The final results are an eclectic mix of house designs ranging from a sculptural take on the pre-fabricated house (Opie, Isermann, Mason), to the artists' dream home (Reed, Stockholder), to the house as conceptual art (Burden, Appel, Petropoulos, Blooen).

Opie, Isermann, and Mason approach the house as a flexible system of ready-made components. Their simplistic cast forms (Opie and Isermann) and appropriated industrial components (Mason) leave the viewer wanting more architecturally and pictorially. Opie's "Concrete U-blocks" is made of 23 blocks cast in concrete, each block roughly eleven inches square (at 1:10 scale). The work was displayed in a cluster on one of the gallery room floors, near two computer-generated vinyl prints illustrating more elaborate configurations. On a pedestal nearby, a more intriguing model in wood and Plexiglas better illustrated Opie's interlocking U-shape design. Beyond this work, one found Isermann's "Scale Roof and Structure Prototype" mounted at chest-level. A series of identical yellow cast-polyurethane foam panels rest over a simple steel structure, like a geometric car port. In the same room, one discovered T. Kelly Mason's "Catalogue Layout," made of laminated pages bound by plastic rings, on a bench. "Layout" is meant to look like a proof version of a catalogue for Mason's house components. It is printed with Post-it notes (an office-supply take on the trompe l'oeil effect) that include comments over illustrations. "Catalogue Layout," reproduced as a final product in the exhibition catalogue, includes a typed letter to the "Investor" signed, "T. Kelly Mason, VP of Sales." Mason's project seems tongue-in-cheek, yet the deadpan exhibition catalogue claims his house model is "...a working machine designed, ultimately, to make its owner take responsibility for a series of aesthetic decisions." Next to the bench were Mason's two bare-bones house models on pillars; inside each was a large stone. Along a dividing wall were two large-scale color photographs: one of fruit, the other of shed-like metal buildings (which do not look like his scale models).

David Reed's "Interactive Model, 2002" (with TK Architecture) is a half-finished model for an art collector's "bedroom/pavilion." Viewers are encouraged to rearrange the collection of two-dimensional artwork (tiny magnets with color reproductions of paintings) and roof designs (on acetate sheets). Two miniature versions of queen-size beds slide in and out of the central area on tracks. Future display designs are made possible by an underground storage area that holds art, a library, and a scale model of the house. Reed's model is intentionally rough, with exposed foam-core walls and the like evoking a construction site and a ruin — and a gesture to Robert Smithson, an outdoor installation artist of the 1960s.

In a corner near the entrance of the Blaffer gallery, Chris Burden's "Small-small Skyscraper Model" grabbed viewers' attention as the mini-elevator transported a paper cut-out of a human figure up and down the narrow structure of glass, wood, and steel. Burden's "quasi legal" outbuilding ironically meets Los Angeles code since it is "under 400 square feet and under 35 feet high," it can be constructed without a permit. Burden's skyscraper-built-for-one, with its glass elevator, perfectly frames the paranoid exhibitionism often associated with L.A.'s movie industry. Early concept drawings such as "Mini-Skyscraper on Little Mesa," a black-and-white photograph (taken by Burden) of a mesa in a desert area, are found in the exhibition catalogue. Burden uses his location shots as backgrounds for humorous illustrations in thick black marker, ballpoint pen, and White-Out liquid, where his outbuilding is seen "floating as a house boat" on the side of a cliff and on a little mesa. On the facing pages, TK Architecture's technical drawings translate the artist's imagined spaces into working plans.

Petropoulos's "GSMM models, 2002," so-named for "Gas Station MiniMart," is accompanied by a heavy-handed "film collage," titled "2 or 3 Things I Know About Her," which was displayed on a television monitor in a small room next to her installation. The viewer was wise to skip this endless stream of hand-held shots of a gas station minimart, intercut with short interviews, highway scenes, and full-screen text spelling words like "SAFETY." The barely audible soundtrack combines a whispered narrative between a man and woman with unedited audio from inside the minimart, and war factoids. Petropoulos' GSMM models, displayed in the adjacent room, are replicas of minimart structures converted into livable spaces through interior decorating strategies such as gutting banks of refrigerators for bookshelves. In front of the models were several banquettes with headsets playing "Gas Station/Minimarts," a compelling soundtrack of conversations between minimart employees and customers which, when isolated from the film, manages to be poignant.

Bloom's "MOOD RING HOME" installation took over the corner of a large room, where she had staged a "template" of a house that includes chunky candy-colored wood and fabric furniture, resembling a half-hearted IKEA showroom. On one table, there was a homemade pentagonal-shaped board game with an accompanying manual the size of a CD case. The board is dotted with generic game pieces and small cardboard squares. The square game pieces depict furniture, a door, bed, lamp, and so on, in stylish hand-painted illustrations, copied from Chinese language flashcards. Bloom's CD-Rom computer game (designed by Douglas Reppetto), installed on an Apple notebook computer placed conspicuously on a coffee table near a couch, could not be accessed during my visit. The lime-green computer was closed, with a hand-written "out of order; do not touch" warning. The low production values of the furniture and game board beguile anyone familiar with this established artist's body of work such as "The Reign of Narcissism," a polished mixed-media installation roughly a decade older. Bloom's contribution is best represented in the exhibition catalogue with high-quality reproductions of early designs (including a high-rise building and an elevated spinning building with moving sidewalks).

In the end, the disconnect in the program that led the artists to approach their house concepts with varying degrees of liberty creates a crack in the exhibition's foundation. Given the illegal connotations in the title *TRESPASSING*, we expect subversive, "anti-architectural" concepts, not working models, blueprints, or, worst of all, slick 3-D renderings. For the most part, the truly experimental moments in *TRESPASSING* occur in the conversations between artist and architect within the pages of the exhibition catalogue. As Bloom comments in her conversation with Koch and Taalman, "Maybe the key is not to concentrate on the solutions, but to stay with the questions." ■

A Freeway Runs Through It

Houston Freeways *by Erik Slotboom. Published by Oscar F. "Erik" Slotboom, 2003. 416 pp., $34.95.*

Reviewed by Christof Spieler, P.E.

"Is Houston the world's most freeway-influenced city?" ask ads for *Houston Freeways*. The answer is not as obvious as it seems. The freeway has so thoroughly worked its way into the fabric of American life that every city is freeway-dependent. San Francisco — a city that cancelled more freeways than many cities built — relies on commuters flowing into the city on I-80, I-580, and US-101. Even New York, which tallies half the daily transit rides in the United States, would be a very different place without the LIE, the New Jersey Turnpike, and the Cross-Bronx Expressway.

But freeways don't come to mind when one thinks of New York, San Francisco, or even car-oriented sunbelt metropolises such as Phoenix. In Houston, they are a central part of the city's image.

In some ways, Houston was fated to become a freeway city. Its late blooming meant that land was available to easily translate thick red lines on a planning map into concrete (the 610 loop was built largely through open land). The flat plain the city spread across left it with a dearth of natural landmarks, so the freeway took that role. But our freeway city is also the result of deliberate and accidental decisions on the part of planners, engineers, and politicians.

Among the most important of those decisions was the feeder road. No state other than Texas has built feeder roads so universally, and even other Texas cities — Austin is a good example — have considerable lengths of freeway without them. In those places, freeways slip through the city, connected only at on- and off-ramps. In between, they pass back yards, side lots, and the backs of buildings: places that are only incidentally next to a freeway. In Houston, the freeway is the city, a continuous strip of commercial property, all easily and obviously accessible. Elsewhere, one takes the freeway to a shopping strip; in Houston, the freeway is the shopping strip. The feeder roads are a transitional zone, half freeway and half city street, tying the freeway and the city together.

The feeder road originated as an expedient way to address the concerns of property owners whose street access was cut off by the freeway. On I-45, the Gulf Freeway, Houston's first freeway, intermittent stretches of these roads were built where required, as they had been elsewhere. But it was immediately apparent to property owners that property on a feeder was worth more than property that didn't have a feeder. Thus local politicians — who until 1956 were responsible for right-of-way acquisition — supported building feeders. But so did the local office of the Texas Department of Transportation. By the 1980s, TXDOT engineers were implementing the modern frontage road, continuous even through interchanges, with U-turn lanes at all cross streets.

Houston Freeways reveals 50 years of decisions like that. It makes it clear that Houston's freeways were not inevitable. They were the work of people such as DeWitt Grier, head of TXDOT from 1940 to 1968, "the father of Texas freeways" and a passionate frontage road advocate; of mayor Oscar Holcombe, who brokered the deal to replace streetcars with freeways; and even of Richard Holgin, who fought against building the Harrisburg Freeway through his neighborhood.

It's incredible that this book wasn't written sooner. It took the dot-com bust, which left TexasFreeway.com webmaster Erik Slotboom with free time. Freeways are clearly his passion: Slotboom wrote, photographed, designed and published the book himself.

It's always a joy to read the work of an enthusiast. Slotboom gets excited about high-mast lighting, crash attenuation barriers, and five-level stacks. He discusses the technical virtues of each freeway and ponders, for example, why 290 is a second-generation freeway and 288 is a third-generation freeway, even though they were built at the same time. He provides exhaustive diagrams, illustrating when each freeway segment was built and when it was rebuilt.

Among the technology, a history of Houston emerges. The text covers some of the more obvious changes the freeways brought — the creation of Sharpstown, the rise of Post Oak, the conversion of a suburban subdivision into Greenway Plaza. But the enormity of these changes really comes across in the stunning historic photographs Slotboom pulled out of TXDOT archives. We see the intersection of I-610 and US Highway 59 as construction started, with only a single shopping center visible. We see Little White Oak Bayou before it was covered by I-45. We see downtown just as the first section of I-45 opened, when the houses of the Fourth Ward still reached to Smith Street. (More such photos are online at Slotboom's Texasfreeways.com).

Aerial view of Interstate 45 under construction, circa 1961.

These photos incidentally show how freeways tore the city apart. We still see ghosts, here and there, of connections that were lost: the Antioch Baptist Church in odd off-kilter downtown blocks, the orphan segments of Louisiana, Travis, and Milam just south of Highway 59, and the disappearance of Post Oak Boulevard and its reappearance south of the Loop. But photos that show the swaths of demolition freeways cut through old neighborhoods make it obvious what we lost in return for mobility.

Every construction project is a trade-off, but freeways offer both greater gains and losses than most. The freeways let us travel through the city with astounding ease. They allowed Houston to grow from a regional city to a center of international business. Freeways have been a boon to the central business district and the suburbs. But the inner city paid the price. Neighborhoods were divided. Residential areas became tawdry commercial strips. The old commercial streets, separated from the neighborhoods that sustained them, declined.

To Slotboom, though, there is no bad freeway, and the wider the better. The only freeway in Houston to have been permanently cancelled was the Harrisburg Freeway — the extension of the Pasadena Freeway to downtown, eliminating a short detour on the 610 Loop. It would have been built within three miles of the Gulf Freeway to serve no obvious transportation purpose, and the ramps connecting it to US 59 near today's Minute Maid Field would have made a congested downtown bottleneck worse. Its 400-foot-wide right-of-way would have wiped out 1,244 residential units, 40 commercial buildings, and two churches. But Slotboom asserts the neighborhood would have benefited: "While other neighborhoods close to downtown experienced a renaissance during the 1990s, particularly the Heights area near the Katy Freeway, the Harrisburg corridor was left behind." In fact, the center of the Heights is no closer to I-10 than Harrisburg Road is to I-45. But the real fallacy here is that no neighborhood on the east side — regardless of how close it is to a freeway — has revitalized. Freeways are not the only factor in urban growth.

As Slotboom laments environmental legislation, asserts the need for more and wider freeways through the inner city (we all know that what Midtown really needs is a freeway down Louisiana to the Pierce Elevated), and celebrates the big-and-cheap philosophy that has long dominated TXDOT, it becomes obvious that there is another side to the story, one that has not been written. Perhaps someday someone will write a companion volume.

Nevertheless, *Houston Freeways* is a remarkable achievement. It has become increasingly obvious that the single most important factor in urban growth is infrastructure, and freeways are the most important infrastructure of modern Houston. This book explores and explains them. Along with Steven Baron's *Houston Electric: The Street Railways of Houston*, which explores the pre-eminent infrastructure of pre-modern Houston, Slotboom's book belongs on the bookshelf of anybody interested in Houston. ■

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