59 : Winter 2004 $5.00

cite

The **Architecture**
and **Design Review**
of **Houston**

How light rail will reshape Houston

Doug Michels, dolphins, and the House of the Century

Austin's marvelous, minimalist Hotel San José

The last days of Flamingo Isles

59>
0 74470 93169 0

A comfortable
work environment
promotes creativity.

Metro Bix

Steelcase Groove

McCoy Workplace Solutions

Steelcase Leap Lounge

From floor to ceiling
and everything in between.

Visit our website @ www.mccoyinc.com or
call 713.862.4600, for more information.

Let us inspire
your space.

Steelcase Unison, Leap chair

McCOY
Workplace Solutions
AUTHORIZED STEELCASE DEALER

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

Stephen Fox is a fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas.

Lisa Gray is managing editor of *Cite*.

Nonya Grenader, an architect, teaches at the Rice University School of Architecture.

David Hay, a freelance writer, lives in Los Angeles.

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

Alex Lichtenstein is an assistant professor of history at Rice University.

Jennifer Mathieu, a freelance writer, lives in Houston.

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

Janet H. Moore, a freelance writer and lawyer, lives in Houston.

Chula Ross Sanchez is an artist and designer living in Houston.

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

Rives Taylor is the campus architect and planner for the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. He is also the Kirksey Faculty Fellow at the University of Houston Gerald D. Hines School 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

59: Winter 2004

Cite (ISSN: 8755-0415) is published quarterly by the Rice Design Alliance, Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005-1892. Individual subscriptions: U.S. and its possessions: $15 for one year, $25 for two years. Foreign: $30 for one year, $50 for two years.

Cite is indexed in the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals.

 Publication of this issue is supported in part by grants from the Susan Vaughan Foundation, the City of Houston, and the Texas Commission for the Arts through the Cultural Arts Council.

WebCite: www.rda.rice.edu

Cover: Light-rail vehicle at the Fannin South station.

Photo by Hester+Hardaway.

Cite

RDA NEWS

Christof Spieler

HOUSETOWN

Christof Spieler

TWO YEARS AGO, participants in an RDA design charrette proposed ways to reuse the Astrodome. RDA held another design charrette on August 9, but the subject could hardly have been more different: modest, earth-friendly houses rather than a huge, climate-controlled bubble.

Eighty participants, working in 23 teams, were asked to design a house for an elderly couple on a small site perched on the edge of Highway 59 in the Third Ward. Each team had a few tables in a University of Houston School of Architecture studio. They worked on the problem from 8:15 a.m. until 4 p.m., after which a six-member jury convened behind closed doors to choose the winners.

The team of Chula Ross Sanchez, Brad Schubert, and Yoonchul You won the first-place trophy (an odd but endearing fan-equipped eccentric wheel mounted on a corrugated base, donated by Mr. Navid Ghedani & ARTEFERO). Their "project NEST," a stack of irregularly oriented rooms and exterior terraces, stood on piloti to preserve green space below and nestled beneath a curved metal form that collected water, caught wind, and shaded the building. The jurors praised the project for "green" features that were also architecturally striking.

Like the first-place winners, many teams oriented their buildings to Houston's climate, mitigating the sun with shading and opening up to prevailing winds. Teams explored alternate materials, alternate power, and urban farming. Many also considered sustainable design in a broader context, providing community spaces and trying to enhance the surrounding neighborhood.

More information and photos from the charrette can be found at http://www.rice.edu/projects/RDA/programs/HOUSeTOwN-home.htm.

—Christof Spieler

Phyllis Wood

Ephemeral City editors Bruce Webb, Barrie Scardino, and Bill Stern, with Brazos Bookstore owner Karl Kilian (standing).

EPHEMERAL CITY RELEASED

THE LONG-ANTICIPATED RDA publication, *Ephemeral City: Cite Looks at Houston*, was celebrated at a book signing at the Brazos Bookstore on November 19, with all three editors in attendance — Bruce Webb, Barrie Scardino, and Bill Stern.

Ephemeral City was funded in part by a $30,000 grant from Houston Endowment Inc. and with support from the Anchorage Foundation of Texas, Barbara J. Amelio, Alfred Glassell III and Marli Andrade, Lynn and Bill Herbert, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and Mrs. And Mrs. Wallace S. Wilson.

The book received a rave review by Michael Ennis in the December 2003 issue of *Texas Monthly*. Ennis describes *Ephemeral City* as "a sweeping historical overview, civic memoir, and municipal self-help guide. It adds up to a witty, unfailingly perceptive portrait of a Houston we haven't seen before, a metropolis as culturally complex as it is commercially crass, as brilliantly innovative as it is heedlessly self-destructive, as enigmatic and hidden as it is aggressively in-your-face."

Published by the University of Texas Press, *Ephemeral City* brings together 25 exceptional articles from *Cite*'s first 20 years, along with 224 black-and-white maps, drawings, and photographs (most by *Cite*'s long-time architectural photographer, Paul Hester). The book sells for $35 and is available at bookstores and at the Rice Design Alliance.

Phyllis Wood

Patrick Peters, Jane Page, Bob Eury, and Richard Everett.

AS THE GALA TURNS

RDA GALA CHAIR JANE PAGE presented Central Houston's president, Bob Eury, and chairman, Richard Everett, with the 2003 RDA Award for Design Excellence at the annual gala on November 8. Nine hundred guests attended the black-tie affair, themed "Evolve. Revolve. As the City Turns." The event raised more than $400,000 for RDA programs and the publication of *Cite*. Look for more party pix in *Cite* 60.

CALENDAR

RDA SPRING 2004 LECTURE SERIES: CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE NOW

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

Wednesday, January 21, 7:30 p.m.
Blair Kamin, the Pulitzer Prize–winning architecture critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, offers an overview of Chicago architecture.

Wednesday, January 28, 7:30 p.m.
Doug Garofalo, of Garofalo Architects, is known for innovative design. "Digital media is changing aesthetics," he told *Architectural Record*. "We're trying to tap into that."

Wednesday, February 4, 7:30 p.m.
Brad Lynch is a principal of Brininstool + Lynch Architects, which designed the new Racine Art Museum — a low-budget renovated bank building that Architecture Magazine said "should become a stop on the architectural pilgrimage to Frank Lloyd Wright's Wingspread House and Johnson Wax Complex."

Wednesday, February 11, 7:30 p.m.
Ralph Johnson, of Perkins & Will, has designed many of Chicago's best-known recent buildings, including the O'Hare International Terminal and the Boeing World Headquarters.

Wednesday, February 18, 7:30 p.m.
Jeanne Gang, of Studio Gang Architects, is a protégée of Rem Koolhaas. Of her first public building, the renovated Starlight Theater in Rockford, Illinois, critic Blair Kamin wrote, "The result is impressive: a theater in which the drama starts long before the transparent stage doors slide open."

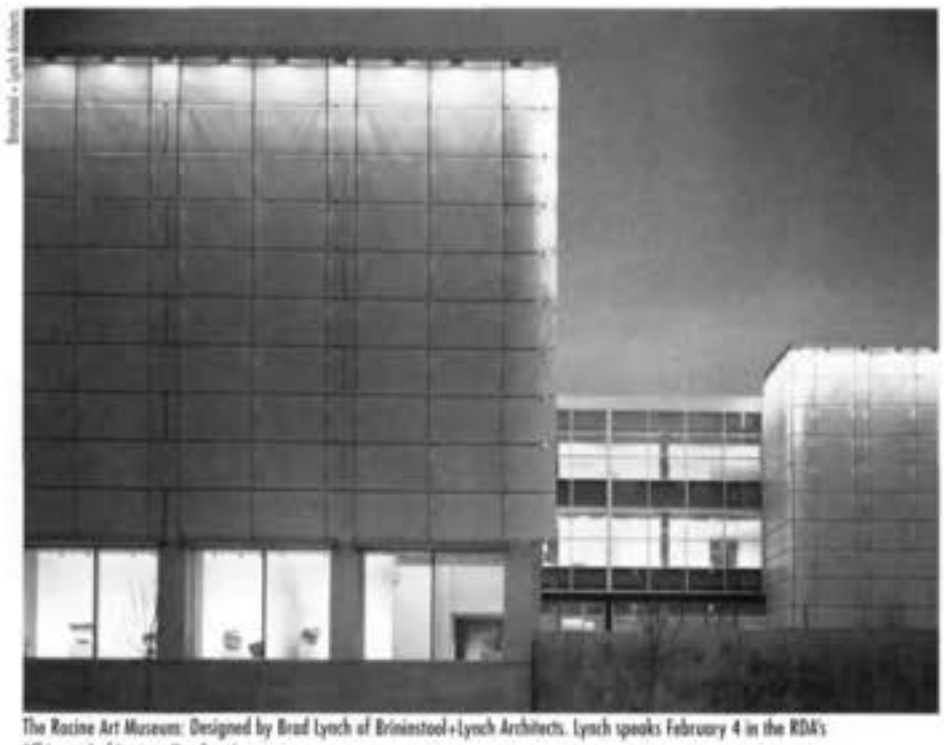
RDA 2004 ARCHITECTURE TOUR

Saturday and Sunday, March 27–28
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu

This year's walking tour features new houses and one remodeled house in the Ferndale Addition and David Crockett Addition, just west of Kirby Drive.

RDA EXHIBITION

April 9–May 1
Lawndale Art Center
4912 Main Street
713.348.4876 or www.rda.rice.edu



Brininstool + Lynch Architects

The Racine Art Museum: Designed by Brad Lynch of Brininstool+Lynch Architects. Lynch speaks February 4 in the RDA's "Chicago Architecture Now" series.

Snapshot 04: Current Houston Design on View offers a quick overview of work in progress at Houston architecture firms.

BLAFFER GALLERY EXHIBITION

January 17–March 14
University of Houston Fine Arts Building
713.743.9530 or www.blaffergallery.org

Trespassing: Houses x Artists (pronounced "houses by artists") features houses designed by nine artists in conjunction with OpenOffice, the firm that recently designed the new DIA:Beacon space in New York. Freed from program, scale, site and finances, the artists were asked to rethink the house, both spatially and socially.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE SPRING LECTURE SERIES: "THE DESIGN PROCESS: A PERSONAL APPROACH"

Architecture Theater, Room 150 of the Architecture Building
All dates are tentative. Confirm at 713.743.2400 or www.arch.uh.edu/news

Tuesday, February 3, 6 p.m.
Chung Nguyen of MC2 Architects (Houston, Texas)

Tuesday, February 10, 6 p.m.
Marc Tsurumaki of Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis (New York)

Tuesday, February 17, 6 p.m.
Max Levy (Dallas, Texas)

Tuesday, February 24, 6 p.m.
Galia Solomonoff of OpenOffice (New York)

Tuesday, March 2, 6 p.m.
Lauren Crahan of FreeCell (New York)

Tuesday, March 9, 6 p.m.
Thomas R. Diehl (Houston, Texas)

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITIONS

College of Architecture Gallery
and Archives
713.743.2400 or www.arch.uh.edu/news

February 8–March 6
"Inner Scene Vienna"

March 23–April 15
Dominique Perrault

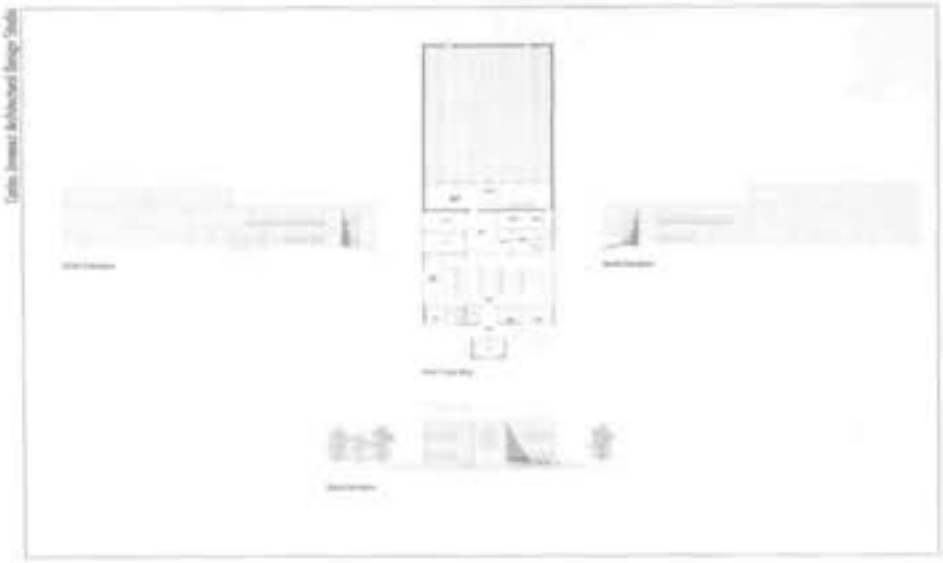
FOTOFEST 2004 GLOBAL FORUM ON WATER: BRINGING TOGETHER SCIENCE AND ART

April 1–4 at the Menil Collection, Rice University, and Rothko Chapel
713.223.5522 or www.fotofest.org

Thursday, April 1
William McDonough, FAIA, the proponent of sustainable design who *Time Magazine* named a "Hero for the Planet," lectures.

Courtesy Rice University

Above: One possible plan for the Rice campus. Below: Elevations and a first-floor plan for Carlos Jimenez's Library Service Center.



Carlos Jimenez Architectural Design Studio

RETHINKING RICE

Michael Graves helps the university plan its future

Dean Currie, vice president of finance and administration at Rice University, likens this era of Rice's development to the closing of the American frontier. Alumni — especially older alumni — have viewed the Rice campus as having infinite possibilities for westward expansion.

But the west is no longer limitless, says Currie, and coming to grips with the limits to expansion has fundamentally changed the way that the Board of Trustees plans for the school's future. With Rice's prime land already put to use, the campus' western frontier has closed.

To address this issue, the administration and trustees have embarked on a new plan for future expansion — a new chapter in Rice's history of master planning. For almost one hundred years the campus has grown under the celebrated master plan developed by Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Goodhue. ("Willy," the statue of Rice's founder at the center of Rice's academic quad, holds a copy of the Cram Goodhue plan.) More recently, the plan was updated by noted architect Cesar Pelli.

Now, with the help of Michael Graves, FAIA — an architect whose name is synonymous with 1990s post-modernism, and whose products crowd the shelves of Target — the university is once again mapping its future expansion. According to Currie, the Board chose Graves not only because "he was so thoughtful about the institution," but also because he represented "master planning in the best sense: He began by listening to the client." Rice had previously hired Graves to design Martel College and the expansions of Brown and Jones Colleges.

In late February, a spinal infection left Graves, 68, paralyzed from the waist down. Despite related travel restrictions, he and his design team remain heavily involved in Rice's architectural plans.

The new plan, says Currie, might include such radical changes as reorienting the campus to take advantage of Rice's growing interaction with the nearby Texas Medical Center. William Barnett, chairman of the Rice board of governors, notes that Rice has more than 75 major joint ventures in the Medical Center right now, including 50 with Baylor College of Medicine alone.

Rice might refashion the three-acre Tidelands Motel property as a gateway to the Medical Center. According to Barnett, the property eventually could host a major research facility surrounded by a large university bookstore, shops, cafes and places for people to gather and discuss ideas.

Students and faculty would also use this gateway at the intersection of Main Street and University Boulevard to board the new light rail system being installed along Main Street. Light rail will give students and faculty easy access to relatively inexpensive housing along the rail line. Rice Owl fans could also use light rail to attend sporting events, significantly alleviating campus parking problems.

The master plan also takes into account Rice's new satellite campus — a 30-acre tract of land just outside the 610 Loop donated by Rice trustee Raymond Brochstein. The tract will be used chiefly to provide desperately needed storeage.

For that land, Carlos Jimenez, an associate professor of architecture at Rice, designed the 26,400-square-foot Library Service Center currently under construction. The library annex, capable of holding 1.75 million volumes, will significantly increase Fondren Library's capacity. Students and faculty will be able to review materials in an on-site reading room, or request that books be transferred to Fondren Library. The university will also use the Brochstein tract to store commencement stands and other bulky items.

To address campus flooding, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is paying for the university to expand Alumni Drive, converting it into an "overland flow channel." This project will direct campus floodwater toward a detention pond and Harris Gully. Although this project will eliminate the current tennis courts, eight new courts will be built between the swimming pool behind Autry Court and the track/soccer stadium.

Currie also notes that the master plan will allow for updated exercise facilities, which he says are desperately needed. One idea under consideration is razing the existing gymnasium. Eventually the university would build a larger, new gymnasium with up-to-date exercise facilities on the spot.

To preserve Rice's green space, much of the contemplated parking on campus would be built underground.

Under the master plan the administration plans to remodel the president's house, the O'Connor Building. According to Barnett, "It will be a kind of window into Rice for a lot of people: visitors, alumni and prospective students." The refurbished building will also house the admissions office.

Rice's new president, who will replace outgoing Malcolm Gillis in the summer of 2004, will occupy the Wiess House at the corner of Main Street and Sunset Boulevard. Harry Wiess, one of the Humble Oil founders, commissioned William Ward Watkin, the first chair of Rice's architecture department, to design the pink-ish Mediterranean-style house. Weiss' widow donated the Shadyside neighborhood home to Rice in 1974.

Architect Bill Neuhaus, of W.O. Neuhaus Associates, is handling the $3.3 million remodeling job, which will provide large entertaining spaces, private gardens, and a small parking court. The remodeling project will also mend the house's façade and repair damage caused by Tropical Storm Allison.

— Janet H. Moore

Above: The courtyard of Avance's school at Browning Elementary. Below: The building plan.

Pre-Fab(ulous)

AVANCE HEAD START PROVES THAT SCHOOL TEMPORARY BUILDINGS DON'T HAVE TO BE AWFUL

DESIGNER DOUG OLIVER likes to tell an old teachers' joke: "Nothing is as permanent as a temporary building." The humor hides misery. Teachers hate temporary buildings: The sightlines are awful, and the students approach their education with the respect and dignity you'd expect in a trailer-park ambiance.

Such a dismal outcome was perhaps to be expected when Avance Head Start, a private nonprofit group, erected a new building on the grounds of the Heights-area Robert Browning Elementary School. The usual strictures applied: Avance (pronounced "a-*von*-say") relies on federal funding, which requires that the Head Start building be "movable"; and the budget for the project — approximately $435,000 — was modest for a 6,300-square-foot building.

But for the school's three- and four-year-old at-risk students, Avance operations officer Feliciano Gallegos wanted something more inspiring than the usual temporary building. He approached Oliver, who'd worked on a previous plan for another Avance campus, and Oliver teamed up with architect of record Michael Morton of m Architects.

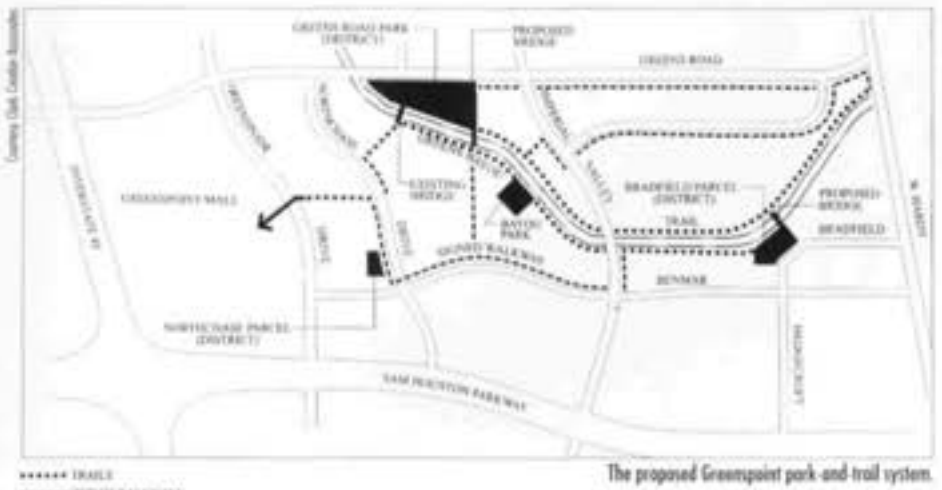
Their design looks and feels very different from the campus's other temporary buildings. To preserve the three tall pine trees on the triangular site, Oliver designed his building in a boomerang shape around them. Two wood-frame pre-fab modules form the parent-services wing, with a meeting room and an office for Avance's family-development worker. Four more modules form the spacious classroom wing. From the hallway, administrators can quickly glance over low walls into the four classrooms, each with direct access to a bathroom (so important for pre-schoolers). The two wings are linked by a built-on-site administration area, whose large windows look onto Browning's playground. Outside, porch-like "outdoor classrooms" allow messy lessons.

On the external walls, siding is arranged in the Mondrian-like compositions. Oliver originally proposed several vibrant color schemes, but Browning's principal wanted something that would blend better with the 1920s brick school and its existing light-yellow temporary buildings. Gallegos suggested a compromise: dark red and forest green, colors gleaned from the school's playground equipment. "I didn't know they made such drab playground equipment," Oliver laments, "but it was the brightest palette available on the campus."

After its first school year, the building has received both critical acclaim (an AIA Honor Award) and praise from parents and teachers. Gallegos, delighted by the results, has engaged Oliver and Morton to design Avance's next project, a similar low-cost building in Pasadena.

In June, at the Browning site, Gallegos proudly surveyed the brand-new landscape plants in the boomerang's central area — the latest improvement to a building he clearly loves. "Children spend so much of their time in buildings," he said. "So often people design buildings that aren't sensitive to that. It's a missed learning opportunity." — *Lisa Gray*

The Greening of Greenspoint



The proposed Greenspoint park-and-trail system.

Many architects dream of replacing urban blight with attractive green space. Clark Condon Associates realized this dream several years ago in the Greenspoint area, transforming acres of dilapidated apartments into two attractive parks linked by trails along Greens Bayou. Better still, the project continues to add green space with more parks and trails under development.

Greenspoint's decline began in 1976 after the City of Houston annexed the area near Intercontinental Airport — which before annexation had been located 15 miles north of Houston. With the nearest city police station almost ten miles away, crime surged — and grew even worse in the 1980s, when the oil market's crash further wounded the area's oil-industry and airport-dependent economy.

Community leaders hoping to reverse Greenspoint's decline focused on an 11-acre tract of urban blight. Vagrants occupied some of the decayed, partially burned and flooded houses. The Greater Greenspoint Management District worked with the City of Houston to have the buildings declared dangerous and destroyed. After they were razed, the tract was safe and clean — but it was only an empty field, not a full-fledged park.

In the early 1990s, the district retained Sheila Condon, principal with landscape architects Clark Condon Associates, to create a master plan for two parks: Thomas R. Wussow Park, on those 11 acres, and CityView Park (2.5 acres). Both patches of former blight, the two parks lay just a half mile apart and could be connected by paths.

According to Condon, the plan needed to include "a place for people of all ages, from little toddlers to senior citizens." She proposed picnic areas, jogging and bike paths, play areas for children, ball fields, meeting areas, and quiet spaces.

For years, the management district searched for money to implement the plan. In 1998, the District created a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone to provide financial incentives to qualified developers for including public amenities, such as parks, in their projects. The Archon Group, a developer rehabilitating approximately 5,000 apartments in the area, was keenly interested in improving the neighborhood and, with the incentives, launched the project.

When the parks officially opened on May 2, 2002, they mirrored the master plan developed years before. "It's nice that the design stood the test of time," notes Condon.

The parks quickly proved popular with Greenspoint's 75,000 residents. Wussow Park offers a water-spray area and playground for children. At the larger park, residents frequently rent the multi-purpose ball field (designed for soccer or baseball), volleyball courts, or one of the many pavilions dotting the two parks. CityView Park, which sports an attractive trellis, has even been leased for wedding receptions.

Pleased, the Greater Greenspoint Management District hired Clark Condon Associates to design two more parks: one on nine acres along Greens Bayou at Ella Boulevard and Greens Road, and another on four acres near the Sam Houston Parkway and Hardy Toll Road. The two parks remain in the design phase. The management district has arranged funding for the new parks, and recently it obtained a $2.4 million grant from the Texas Department of Transportation to develop a trail system linking all four parks.

Whenever Condon drives by the CityView and Wussow parks, she revels in the sight of people actively enjoying the green space. Jack Drake, president of the Greater Greenspoint Management District, is proud of the park project. "It has changed the lives of those who work and live in the Greenspoint area," he says. "It has enhanced their quality of life. What greater reward could you have as a board or staff member of the district than creating that?" — *Janet H. Moore*

Preservation Gets Hip

HOUSTON MOD AIMS TO SAVE HOUSTON'S RECENT HISTORY

"When people think preservation, they think stuffy Victorians," says Karen Lantz, a founding member of Houston Mod. "We want them to think hip and cool."

Lantz, like the other architects, designers, and enthusiasts who started the group this summer, is passionate about the simplicity and experimentation of modern design. While Mod members value preserving buildings from all eras, they say post-war architecture is especially important to a city as modern as Houston — not that the city itself always recognizes this.

"Houston's heyday was the Astrodome," says Lantz. "We were Space City, an international city, cutting-edge. Then we make a baseball stadium that's all nostalgic, of an era that never even happened in Houston."

The group hosted its first event, a talk by William F. Stern, FAIA of Stern and Bucek Architects, on August 21 at the Lawndale Art Center. A reception before the event was sponsored by Ray + Hollington Architects. In his lecture, Stern addressed the value of modern architecture in Houston and described the challenges associated with preserving these buildings, including asbestos abatement and working with materials such as glass, steel, and concrete.

Stern laments the era's lost buildings, from Allen Parkway Village to the Great Southern Life building on Buffalo Speedway. Others remain in peril: the Astrodome, the Prudential Building on Holcombe, and numerous residential homes, which are often the most difficult to save. But he is hopeful Houston Mod can stop the carnage: "If you have a group of people beating the drum, you'll have people look differently at these buildings."

While Houston Mod wants to attract a diverse group, founding member and architecture enthusiast Michael Brichford, 32, says the organization hopes the cause will especially appeal to younger people, who may be more open to the experimental approaches of the time. Brichford says he recently showed his own parents a Memorial Bend home from the 1950s with a butterfly roof. "They absolutely hated it," he laughs.

Still, Brichford and other Mod members hope that Baby Boomers and older people will care about these buildings — perhaps out of nostalgia, or because they have personal memories associated with the buildings.

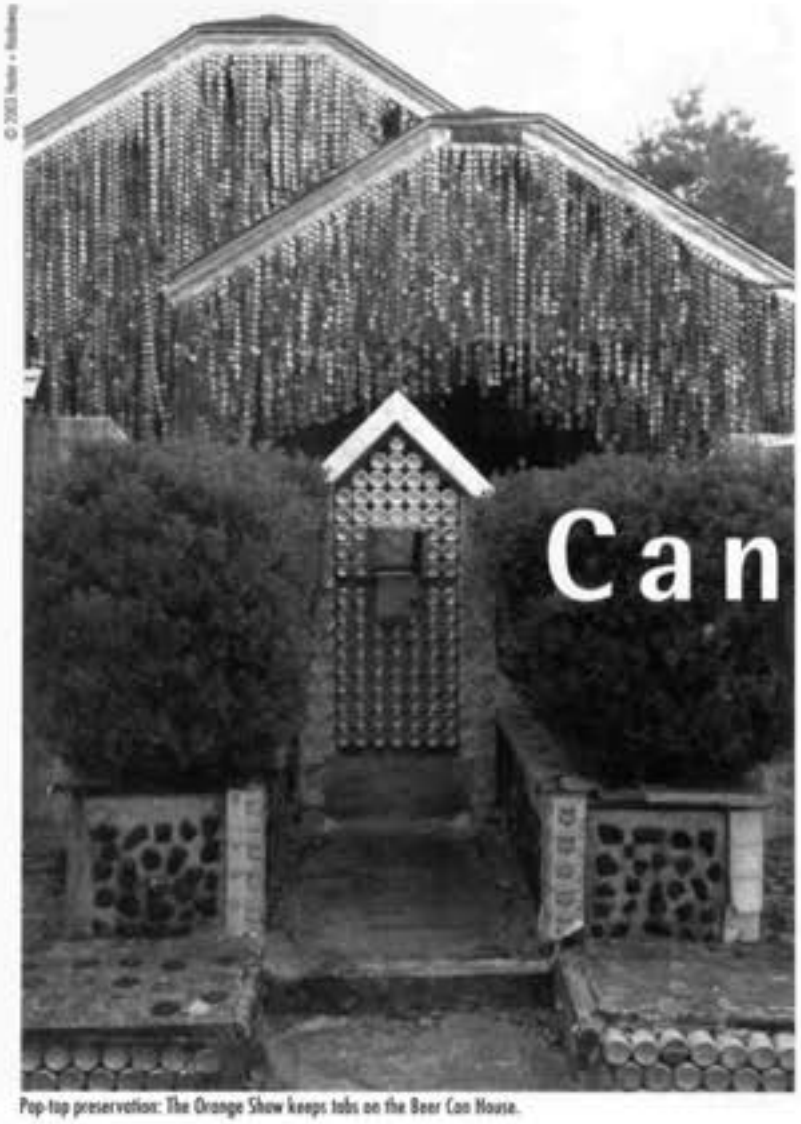
The group's web site, www.houstonmod.org, provides an interactive tour of examples of modern architecture in Houston. Highlights include Phillis Wheatley Senior High School, designed in 1950 by MacKie & Kamrath, and the Bank of Houston building by Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, which was erected in 1967.

The web site also offers visitors an opportunity to donate money to the organization online through PayPal, and all givers are designated as something groovier than just a "supporter." Supporters who donate $10 will be able to pronounce themselves "minimalists," while those who shell out $65 will be deemed "hipsters."

It seems that by not taking themselves too seriously, HoustonMod hopes to get its city serious about historic preservation.

"We like to refer to ourselves as the Mod Squad," says Lantz.

— *Jennifer Mathieu*



Pop-top preservation: The Orange Show keeps tabs on the Beer Can House.

CanDo

BY BARRY MOORE

John Martin Milkovisch did not consider the transformation of his modest bungalow into the Beer Can House to be art. He thought of it as a pastime, and enjoyed watching reactions to his creation. "It tickles me to watch people screech to a halt," he said. "They get embarrassed. Sometimes they drive around the block a couple of times. I know my place changed the conversation in those cars."

Milkovisch, a Southern Pacific upholsterer by trade, started his epic project in 1968. He began by covering the entire lot at 222 Malone Street with concrete, inlaying it with bits of rock, marbles, metal, and wood. "I got sick of mowing grass," he often claimed, adding, "I hate to throw anything away." After the yard was finished, he shifted attention to his stockpile of aluminum beer cans. He used their tops, bottoms, sides, and tabs to make curtains, mobiles, fences, sculptures, windmills, and wind chimes. He wired them into long chains and hung them from the eaves, and used the flattened sides for shingles all over the exterior.

To explain the origin of his muse, Milkovisch once said, "When I wake up and can't go back to sleep, that is when I think of all this crap. All those crazy things come to me during sleepless nights, which I should be sleeping but I don't." During those sleepless nights, he found creative ways to use the 40,000 empty beer cans he'd saved over 17 years.

It seems natural that after Milkovisch's death, the Beer Can House should become a property of the Orange Show Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving, promoting, and documenting visionary-art environments. Last summer the foundation's Beer Can House Steering Committee began documenting the property, conceiving a conservation plan, and assessing the house's restoration and maintenance needs. It also began evaluating the merits of historical certification and of acquiring the vacant lot next door.

The architectural documentation has been completed under the direction of instructor Jim Arnold and fifth-year architectural student Kimberley Radich, both of the University of Houston's Workshop for Historic Architecture. The measured drawings and archival photographs were done to Historic American Buildings Survey standards, and will be placed in the Library of Congress. A conservation plan is also part of the package.

John Milkovisch inadvertently created a nationally celebrated gem of folk creativity with his Beer Can House. With the stewardship of the Orange Show Foundation, visitors should soon be able to appreciate the site with all the senses — including a sense of humor. ■

DOWN THE LINE

How will light rail change Houston?

BY CHRISTOF SPIELER, P.E.

In 1994 readers of *Houston Life* magazine saw an overhead view of Main Street lined with stores and apartments, shaded by trees, and punctuated by public squares and gateway arches. It was architect Peter Brown's vision of urban revitalization, and it looked awfully good in colored pencil.

That article led to an organization (Making Main Street Happen, founded n 1994) that held a competition (won by Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects in 1999) that created a master plan (first issued in August 2000). By then, the goals of high-density pedestrian-oriented development had been boosted by the Metropolitan Transit Authority's decision to build a light-rail line in the Main Street corridor.

Redevelopment was part of the light-rail plan from the start. Main Street offered existing sources of ridership, but it also offered potential for dense, pedestrian-friendly development that would create new ridership. In a city that lacks planning tools such as zoning and growth boundaries, light rail was a way to encourage growth in the urban core. METRO forecast that rail would bring $500 million to $1 billion in new development.

That's the plan; now comes reality. Houston, like many cities, has a long history of plans that went nowhere. There are few concrete signs of the Main Street Master Plan: There is no world's tallest tower on Buffalo Bayou, no HSPVA campus in Midtown, and no public square at the south end of downtown. But master plans don't make a city; developers, retailers, and ultimately residents do. If they don't follow, light rail's potential will be wasted.

But the groups that supported the master plan — a mix of private, public, and semi-public organizations — are still working, often behind the scenes. Few of their projects are grand in scale, but they do not need to be. A city is the sum of many little things. The hope is that the right little interventions will cause big change. If the groups create the right environment and set appropriate examples, private capital will follow. That approach has worked before: Downtown's revival in the 1990s was kick-started by public funding for Bayou Place and the Rice Hotel. Main Street is a much bigger and more ambitious project.

FANNIN SOUTH

Any idea that light rail automatically brings development evaporates at Fannin South. METRO bought land behind Sam's Club because it was cheap, and it will probably remain that way. Development here is bringing only more industrial parks.

Rail doesn't change things because there's nothing here to start with. New communities have been built around rail stations, but they're rare. One such project is Orenco Station, built in a "greenfield" site on the MAX line between Portland, Oregon, and suburban Hillsboro. It includes 1,800 homes on 209 acres. Hillsboro rezoned the area as mixed use to maximize the potential of the rail line. The city then tweaked zoning regulations to allow narrower streets, smaller lots, and less parking. Ground-floor street-front retail lines the street that leads to the light rail station. The project is hailed as a success, with the retail space occupied and homes sold at a premium. But the development wouldn't have happened without government prodding and a developer willing to take a risk.

Parking is the biggest hindrance to Fannin South's development — the presence of parking, not its absence. Planners consider the quarter-mile radius around the station to be prime walkable territory. At Fannin South, more than a quarter of that area is covered in concrete to accommodate the 1,436 park-and-ride spaces — spaces that will encourage car commuters to ride rail, but that will also discourage pedestrians. Ultimately, a transit system that relies on cars won't change the shape of the city. Light rail's potential for changing how people live lies not in existing suburbs but in new places like Orenco or in old places that aren't hard-wired for automobiles.

MEMORIAL HERMANN HOSPITAL | HOUSTON ZOO

HERMANN PARK | RICE UNIVERSITY

MUSEUM DISTRICT

After curving through Hermann Park, the light rail line emerges into the downtown street grid. Houston's foundets, the Allen brothers, laid out very small blocks — 250 by 250 feet — and as the city expanded, that pattern was continued south into what is now Midtown and the Museum District. This grid, built for a horse-and-buggy city of 40,000, has aged well, showing its flexibility by keeping downtown relatively uncongested (except when the streets are torn up). More modern street patterns in areas like Post Oak have not aged nearly as well.

The grid poses technical problems for light rail. Many of the people behind the Master Plan pushed for the so-called "Strasbourg Model," in which railcars would mix freely with pedestrians and automobiles. But METRO wanted the Main Street line to be the core of a future regional rail system; mixing trains and other traffic would not provide enough capacity or speed. So the system was designed to limit pedestrian crossings and allow cars to cross the tracks only at signalized intersections. Thus, two-thirds of the cross streets in the Museum District have been turned into cul-de-sacs where they meet the tracks; continuous medians up to six blocks long restrict cross traffic on Main through Midtown; and left turns have been prohibited all along Main. Even so, the system's trains are limited to two cars because a three-car train would block downtown intersections.

In more important ways, though, the grid suits rail perfectly. Transit planners believe most people will walk up to a quarter mile to get to a rail station; the grid lets pedestrians move freely in any direction and creates a full circle of tributary area around each station. From the Museum District station to the northern end of the line, stations are located every half mile, creating a theoretically continuous strip of transit-accessible areas. These neighborhoods were built around transit; transit-friendliness remains in their makeup. A study in Dallas found that households in old streetcar neighborhoods drove 40 percent as far every day as households in newer suburban neighborhoods.

But turning theory into passengers requires more than streets; it requires a pedestrian-friendly environment. The keys — adequate sidewalks, trees, buildings at the sidewalk with appropriately scaled ground floors — are well-known but often disregarded.

The Museum District is about as good as it gets for pedestrians in Houston: a dense tree canopy, continuous sidewalks, buildings built up to the street with windows to the sidewalk, visible landmarks, and parks in which to to pause. But even here there are pedestrian-unfriendly places such as the windowless Fannin wall of the Museum of Fine Arts and the full-block parking lot of St. Paul's United Methodist Church. And other than museums there isn't much to do here — no shops other than gift shops, no food that isn't in a museum.

The groups behind the Main Street Plan are working through the Urban Land Institute's Houston chapter to encourage pedestrian-friendly development through city planning regulations. They propose letting areas along Main Street petition city council for an Area Plan that would adjust existing city regulations in that area — for example, to reduce parking requirements near rail stations and replace required street setbacks with requirements to build right up to the sidewalk. The planning department is now drafting such regulations for city council approval. The Main Street groups also want to allow additional non-binding guidelines; good behavior would be encouraged by reducing fees, waiving other requirements, or providing tax credits for developments that comply.

But a pedestrian-friendly environment can't be legislated; it takes design on the part of public agencies, non-profit institutions, and private landowners. METRO is placing maps at each station showing the surrounding blocks. The Museum District has hired Minor Design (which also designs this magazine) to create pedestrian-friendly signage. The Warwick Hotel built a terrace café on Main Street. Perhaps one day the church parking lot will be replaced by a café or a newsstand. Where the environment is right, even Houstonians will walk: go downtown on a Friday night even in August for proof. But they need places worth walking in.

around the stations where businesses like coffee shops, and a fabric canopy over the intersection of Main and other groups are trying to make the case.

BELL

Harrisburg and Southeast lines.

Inner Kirby line.

MAIN STREET SQUARE

The center of the downtown business district falls somewhere near the corner of Main and Lamar. But for years the spot was marked by an empty lot while skyscrapers were built to the east and west. The last major highrise built on Main Street was the First City National Bank Building in 1960; the 1947 Foley's, diagonally across the street, was downtown's last major retail building.

Until light-rail construction began, Main was the core of the Houston bus system. Before the freeways, this was a boon for the stores and theaters that lined the street. But as the bus system declined, it took Main with it. The local bus system now serves mainly those who can't afford a car (commuter buses generally avoid Main Street, using Smith, Louisiana, and the streets around Houston Center), and the high-end retail district was replaced by liquor stores and grungy cafeterias. The growth of the downtown tunnel system drove other retail — and street life — underground.

Light rail gives a renewed importance to Main Street, and a complex mix of downtown organizations is trying to capitalize on the opportunity. The new streetscape here is testimony to their efforts.

METRO paid for the light-rail track, but not for the brick pavers around them and on the traffic lanes and sidewalk. Nor did METRO pay for the fountain — the centerpiece of a three-block pedestrian area known as Main Street Square — that the trains will pass through in the 1000 block of Main. And METRO didn't pay for the fancy finishes on the adjacent station platforms. Downtown interests, concerned that the concrete paving standard on the rest of the line wasn't good enough for downtown, persuaded city council to expand the Market Square Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone — created to fund the Rice Hotel renovation — to cover all of Main Downtown and fund the street improvements. The new Reliant Resources Plaza highrise, which fronts Main Street Square, is also a public-private partnership. The TIRZ paid $2.5 million for two of the three tunnels that enter the building, creating a tunnel hub. METRO pre-paid a $5 million 25-year lease on a Ride Store (which offers transit information, tickets, and public restrooms) and use of a lobby with tunnel access at the corner of McKinney and Travis. The Downtown District, a sort of public utility district funded by assessments on downtown landowners, paid for design studies and building-exterior enhancements and serves as METRO's landlord.

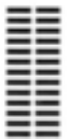
Downtown interests have high hopes for these improvements. 1000 Main capitalizes on a 1992 "Superstop" study that proposed a central transit hub with tunnel access. METRO's John Sedlak points out that the air-conditioned tunnel system, despite its negative effect on street life, can help transit by increasing the distance that people are willing to walk. There are bus stops with protective canopies on three sides of the building and the rail station on the fourth. Glassed-in lobbies at two corners of the building offer unimpeded escalator access to the tunnels as well as a visual link between the aboveground and underground worlds.

Main Street Square is an attempt to lure pedestrians out of the tunnels. Sidewalks are extended to the light-rail tracks on the west side of the 900 block, both sides of the 1000 block, and on the east side of the 1100 block. That closes Main to all car traffic for one block and leaves it one-way for two blocks. The widened sidewalks are paved with decorative brick and lined with planters. The central fountain surrounds the rail tracks and extends to the sidewalks on both sides. Computer-controlled jets of water will arch over the light-rail trains.

Pedestrian areas have a mixed record; most pedestrian malls of the 1970s have had traffic restored. Even Portland, Oregon, with a thriving downtown retail district, is considering restoring traffic lanes to its downtown transit mall. Early in the light-rail project, Central Houston argued the importance of keeping traffic on Main to METRO. But Central Houston's Guy Hagstette says they were looking for a "big idea" to make the light rail station a focal point. The Downtown District hired EEK to create schemes for the station; none convinced everyone until EEK proposed filling the street with water. Hagstette admits it's a risk but argues that something dramatic is required to change people's perceptions of Main.

The hope is that Foley's and the Square will act as the anchors for a new ground-level retail district. Central Houston and the Downtown District have worked on this, too. They encouraged the developers of McKinney garage in the 900 block to include ground-level retail, are working with McCord Development to find a way to retrofit ground-floor retail into the garage that replaced the late, lamented First City banking hall in the 1000 block, publicized the historic renovation possibilities of the building that now houses Main Food & $ Store in the 1100 block, and convinced the developer who converted the Sakowitz Brothers Building next door to configure the parking ramps to allow the future insertion of ground-level retail along Main,.

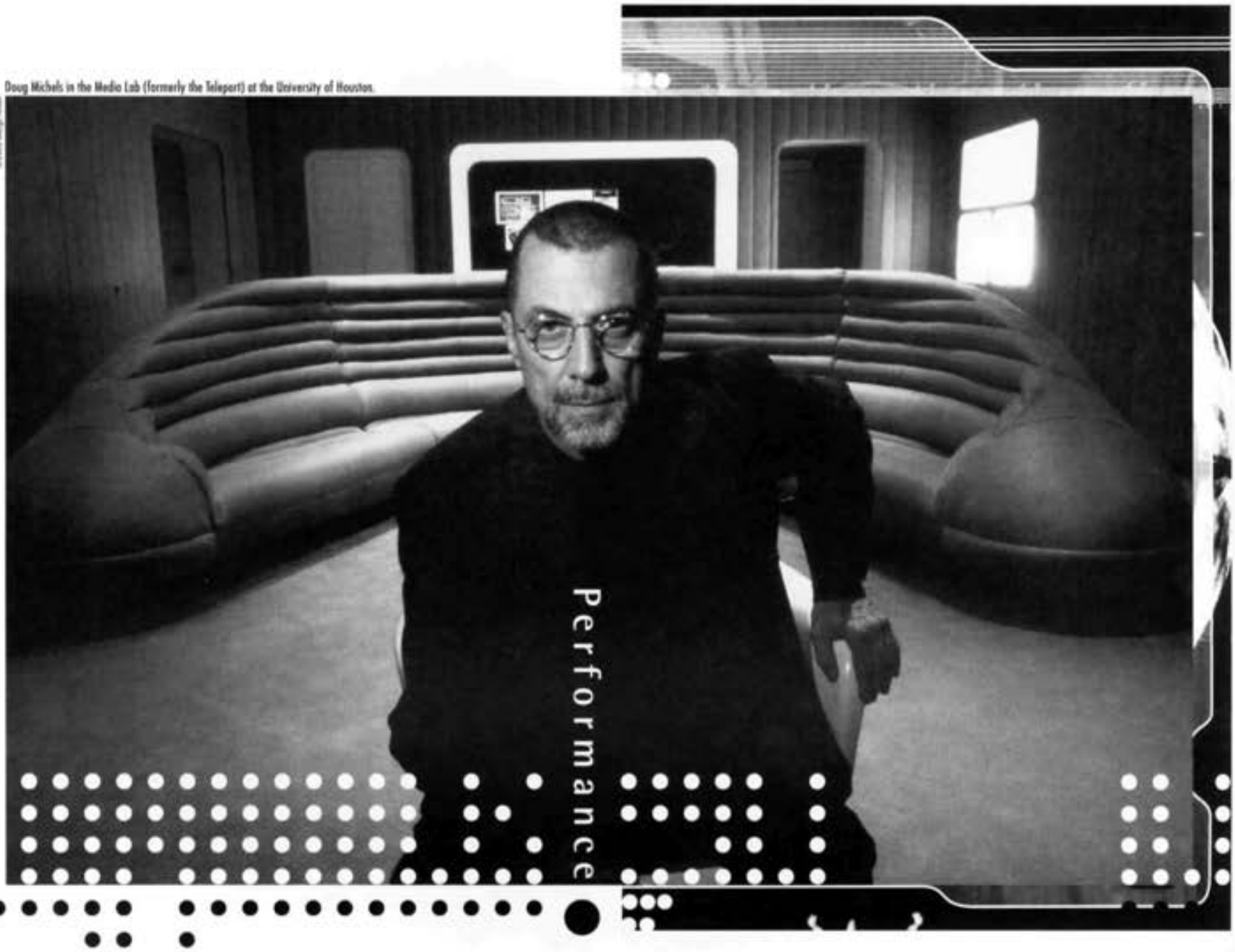
But providing space for retail is one thing; convincing a retailer to fill it is another. The first tenants of the 1000 Main retail space — a bank and a reprographics firm — are hardly the anchors of high-end retail. Real estate broker Nick Hernandez of Boyd Page says that there is a progression to retail; local restaurants come first, followed by national chains, followed by dry goods retail. If street construction hadn't stopped the progression, he says, there would be more national chain restaurants by now. Within a few years, downtown might have a Gap or Old Navy. Entertainment-oriented retail may come sooner. The key is having people on the sidewalks after office hours.



only part of downtown that can truly claim a 24-hour street life.

this link, the center would link light rail, Amtrak, and Greyhound. This transit hub could become the anchor

made of master plans and good intentions, they are built over years, one decision at a time. ■



Doug Michels in the Media Lab (formerly the Telepart) at the University of Houston.

Performance Architect

For Doug Michels, Buildings were a Byproduct

BY LISA GRAY

Doug Michels would have loved his obituaries. He loved seeing his name in print, and in the weeks and months after his June 14 death, articles appeared in the *New York Times, The Washington Post, Time*, and *Architectural Record*. They discussed his work with Ant Farm, the art collective that made the Cadillac Ranch; some mentioned the Ant Farm retrospective set to open at the Berkeley Art Museum in January 2004. Most of the obituaries attempted to cover Doug's complicated life after Ant Farm — his obsession with dolphins; his stints in the straight world, working at established firms such as HOK and Johnson/Burgee. The obituaries identified Doug variously as an architect, an artist, a visionary, a provocateur, and even a fashion designer. Those labels all seemed feeble.

I understood the problem: Doug resisted short descriptions. I'd written about him a few years before, for the *Houston Press*, and hadn't done any better. He stayed in touch with me anyway. He sent strange, wild e-mails showing his latest strange, wild projects; we had the occasional lunch. He made me laugh.

I wasn't sure that laughter was the response Doug hoped for, but he didn't seem to mind. When he proposed some wild scheme — to build a 500-foot chrome woman bestriding a Houston freeway, to construct a dolphin embassy in space, to build a humongous National Sofa in front of the White House — he waited for your response. If you took his proposal seriously, then he took it seriously, and enlisted your help to make it real. If you treated it as a joke — a brilliant piece of paper architecture, a commentary on modern existence, but nothing that could actually be executed — then he laughed right along with you. He could go either way: Big-Idea Guy or Joker. Your choice.

The obituaries missed that ambiguity. I saw flashes of it, here and there, in Doug's on-line wake, dozens of e-mail tributes that circulated to the people he'd invited to his 60th birthday party. The most satisfying summary came from Doug's Houston memorial service. "We're here to celebrate Doug's life and the way Doug lived it," said Chip Lord, Doug's old friend and collaborator. "And the way he lived it, I think, was as LIFE/ART — a life performed."

• • • • •

On the phone, Peter Papademetriou remembered a scene in that performance. In the mid-'60s, Peter was a class behind Doug at the Yale School of Architecture. Yale was hosting an exhibition on Frederick Kiesler, the surrealist architect and designer of The Endless House. Doug asked Peter who the hell Kiesler was. Peter replied that Kiesler had built practically nothing, but because the Museum of Modern Art was convinced he was a genius, he was set for life.

Doug thought that was really cool. Peter thought the moment was a turning point.

Doug set out to convince people that *he* was a genius, or at least someone who grokked the spirit of the times. While still a student at Yale, he was published twice in *Progressive Architect*, and also in *Archigram*, the hippest of the architecture journals. After seeing another young architect's apartment published in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, he called the reporter and convinced her to visit his groovy pad. She said she'd come in four days — and only then did Doug begin a frantic decorating binge. The result appeared in the magazine: zoomy geometric Supergraphics painted on the walls, sleek borrowed furniture, and a bed headboard made from a VW Beetle ad. The last-minute hodgepodge captured the zeitgeist; a decade later, a photograph of the place showed up in C. Ray Smith's book *Supermannerism*.

Doug set out to convince people that *he* was a genius, or at least someone who grokked the spirit of the times.

But Doug was remembered as much for his antics as for his architecture. Hired to teach architecture at stuffy Catholic University in Washington, D.C. — not the best match for his style — he marched his students out to a parking lot and arrayed them in orderly rows. Then, to teach the concept of freedom within the grid, he ran zigzags among them, whispering "Mies van der Rohe, Mies van der Rohe."

After the university fired Doug — it didn't take long — he styled himself as a far-out, tuned-in lecturer and traveled the country, seeking his next adventure. At Tulane, he hit it off with Chip Lord, then an architecture student. They met again in San Francisco in '68, the place and time of underground newspapers, underground music, and political undergrounds.

Doug and Chip declared themselves a collective dedicated to underground architecture. "Like an ant farm?" asked a friend.

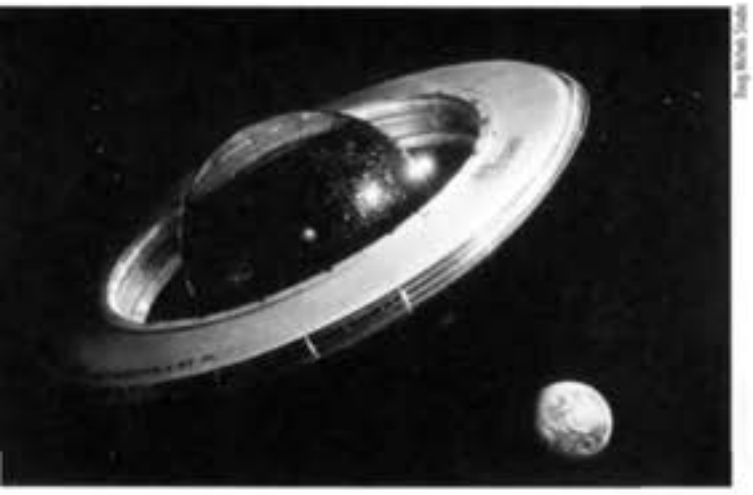
Thus Ant Farm was born: a group with a lot of ideas, only a little money, and absolutely no clients. The idea was to be an architecture firm like a rock band: fluid, hip, with players who come and go. Fluidity and hipness, though, didn't generate income. Doug, with a wife to support, took a job at a garage. Chip moved back in with his parents.

At the University of Houston, Burdette Keeland and Howard Barnstone, under student pressure, offered Doug a paying gig as a lecturer at the school of architecture, and Doug wangled a part-time job for Chip, too. Houston was far less groovy than San Francisco, but it gave Ant Farm a financial base. And UH students — who'd already formed a rowdy, Merry Pranksters-ish bunch called South Coast — gave Doug and Chip a peer group. When South Coast met Doug at the airport with a coffin, Doug happily climbed in.

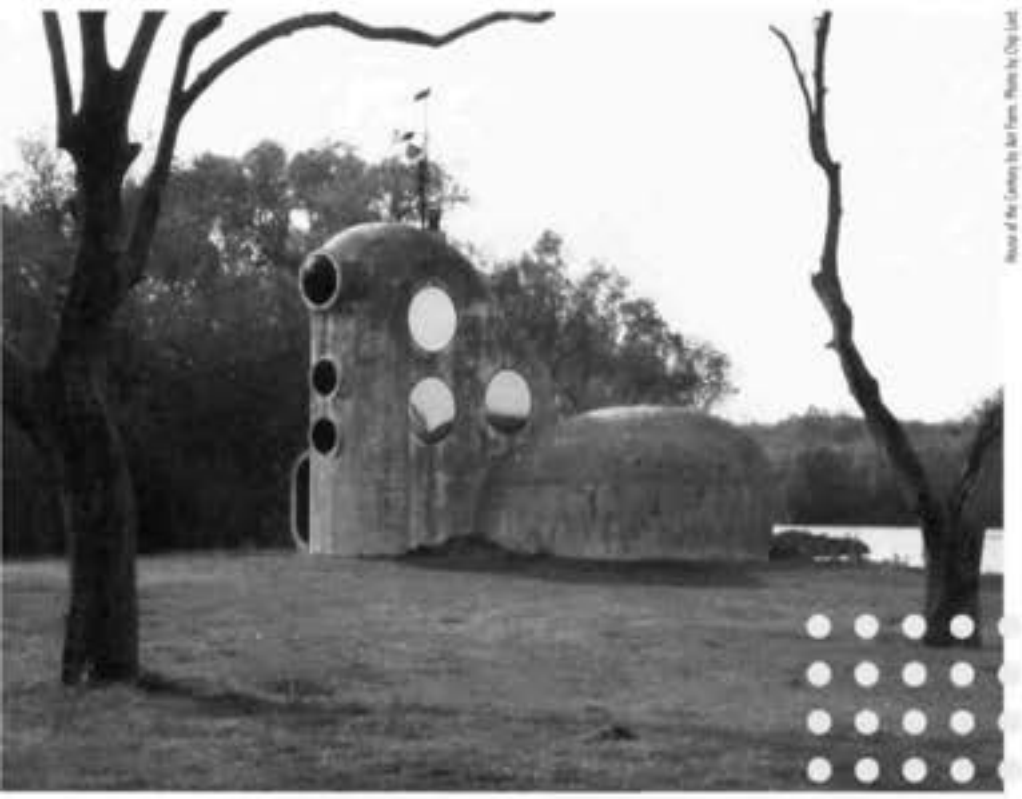
Doug and Chip taught architecture as a total-immersion lifestyle. At a crash pad in Montrose, they and their students plotted happenings such as a sleepover in the Astrodome. It would, of course, be a groovy, psychedelic sleepover, with parachutes suspended from helium balloons and sex in center field.

The amazing thing was that Doug somehow pulled it off. On that project, as on every project, he served as Ant Farm's interface with the straight world, the guy who talked to authorities. While other Ant Farmers wore long hair and Day-Glo tribal markings, Doug kept his hair clipped short, wore suits, and carried a briefcase. Says Chip, "It looked like we had an FBI agent with us."

After Doug and Chip's contracts at UH were up, Doug wandered Europe,



Doug Michels' Bluester



House of the Century by Ant Farm. Photo by Chip Lord.

Cadillac Ranch by Ant Farm: Lord, Michels, Marquez. Photo by Chip Lord.

From the top: *Bluester*, Doug Michels' space station for dolphins; the House of the Century; and *Cadillac Ranch*.

searching for the wife who'd left him, then drifted to Israel and India. Chip headed back to San Francisco, accompanied by a handful of new Ant Farmers. The colony waxed and waned, depending on the project at hand. The Ants toyed with way-out ideas that now seem ahead of their time: inflatables, solar power, telecommunications, nomadism. They lived on food stamps.

• • • • •

To build real buildings required real money, and Doug, Ant Farm's front man, set about finding it. Without the other Ant Farmers realizing what he was up to, he courted Marilyn Lubetkin, an art collector who once mentioned to Doug that she and her husband wanted to build a vacation house on the shore of Lake Mo-Jo, in Angleton, near Houston. For a year, Doug barraged her with mail, sending wildly decorated envelopes that contained drawings of strange dwellings rising from the swamp. Lubetkin yielded in the fall of '71.

Lord and several other Ants traveled to Houston, and soon, surprisingly, the house moved from design to production. When it became clear that the Ants and their Houston friends would build the house themselves, its design became more modular, easier to execute, a wee bit practical — which is to say that it looked less like a giant lizard and more like a spaceship. The aesthetic was a cross between the Jetsons and Kiesler's Endless House, a Yellow Submarine painted refrigerator-white. It was hard on the outside, with a long Plexiglas passageway leading to a stucco shell. And it was soft on the womb-like inside, with upholstered walls and curvaceous wood never betraying a right angle. Lubetkin's husband called the place, skeptically, the House of the Century. The Ants loved the name.

The House of the Century was one of Doug's favorite projects, and one of his most obviously architectural works — not to mention a scheme that was actually executed. Its techniques were innovative; students at UH still study it. But when you talk to the Ants and their friends, they only lightly describe the house itself — its construction techniques, its form, its materials and site. Mainly they tell the stories of its building: what car Doug was driving when he visited the site; how the Ant-generated construction arm, tiny Nationwide Builders, acquired its grand name; how the construction site felt like a party. The House of the Century was, like most of Ant Farm's work, less an object than a process. The idea of the house and the story of the house mattered more than the house itself.

When completed, the house was frequently photographed and much discussed. It won a *Progressive Architecture* award, but Doug was just as proud of its appearance in *Playboy*.

• • • • •

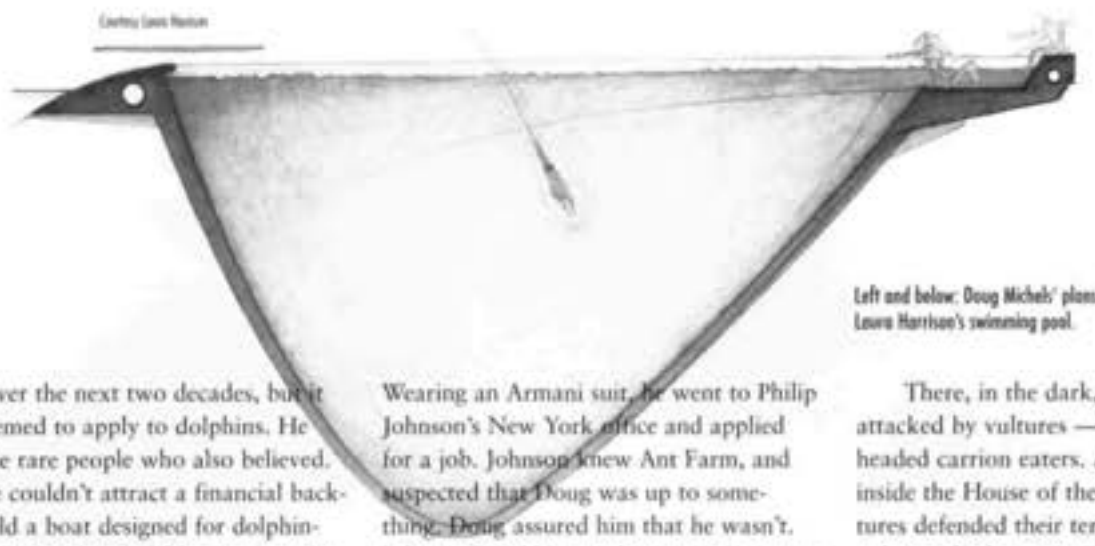
While working on the House of the Century, the Ants met Stanley Marsh 3, a hippie millionaire from Amarillo. Marsh says that sometimes the Ants visited his ranch, where they stayed up all night discussing art and revolution. Marsh believed that it was immoral to display an art object because then the art accrued value. Art, he believed, should be hidden, so that it didn't become a filthy investment vehicle. He commissioned the Ants to create a hidden piece of art.

The Ants called Marsh an elitist. They liked the idea of making something that didn't appreciate in value, but they said they wanted to create art for the people, visible for free. They suggested placing a sculpture by the freeway on Marsh's ranch. Marsh agreed, and they began *Cadillac Ranch*.

Doug and Ant Farmer Hudson Marquez had been playing with darts whose tails looked like Cadillac fins. Everyone liked the idea of planting ten real Cadillacs nose-down in the ground. Marsh saw Cadillacs as the ultimate symbol of capitalism, their ever-evolving tail fins and this-year-only colors the emblems of conspicuous consumption and planned obsolescence. He liked his Cadillacs out of commission.

When the Ants proposed to scatter the cars randomly in a field, Marsh's wife objected. They would look messy, she said, and would be hard to plow around. The Ants then proposed to line them up, all in a row, all at the same angle. Marsh promised his wife that if she hated the sculpture, he'd tear it down after six months.

Instead, of course, *Cadillac Ranch* became famous. The tail fins starred on postcards and T-shirts. Warren Zevon wrote a song called "Cadillac Ranch," and Bruce Springsteen made it a hit. The Ranch became a mandatory stop



Left and below: Doug Michels' plans for Laura Harrison's swimming pool.

on Route 66 pilgrimages. Amarillo touted itself as a tourist destination.

Years later, Doug felt odd about *Cadillac Ranch*, about the way that it became an icon with a life of its own, a story outside Ant Farm's control. He didn't think it was Ant Farm's best work — that would have been the *House of the Century*, maybe, or *The Eternal Frame* (in which the Ants relentlessly re-enacted the Kennedy assassination), or *Media Burn* (in which Doug drove a Cadillac-cum-spaceship into a pyramid of burning televisions). Yet somehow *Cadillac Ranch* hit a pop-culture nerve. "Our hit single," Doug called it.

Still, he defended it fiercely. Whenever a commercial concern ripped off the *Cadillac Ranch* concept, Doug was once again the guy in the suit, the Ant who dealt with the lawyers. Stanley Marsh 3 owned the physical sculpture, but Ant Farm — Doug, Chip and Hudson — owned the concept, and their permission was needed to use it in ads. Over the years, as companies "borrowed" that concept, the Ants won settlements from Volvo, General Electric, Absolut Vodka, and Hard Rock Cafe. "It was like getting a grant you didn't have to apply for," says Chip.

• • • • •

In 1978, Ant Farm's warehouse in San Francisco burned. It seemed a signal: Ant Farm was officially over.

Doug went to Australia, where dolphins changed his life. Architect and critic Michael Sorkin, an old friend of Doug's, writes that his obsession was "made magic by an early encounter with one during an acid trip." Back in the States, Doug alarmed his old friends with fervent plans to cultivate dolphin-human relations. "It was like seeing a friend converted to a cult," says Chip. "He'd say things like, 'We'll open the Dolphin Embassy on Embassy Row in Washington, D.C.' " Doug for once remained serious, even when hardly anyone played along.

His old irony was gone. It came back slowly over the next two decades, but it never seemed to apply to dolphins. He found the rare people who also believed. When he couldn't attract a financial backer to build a boat designed for dolphin-human contact, he pitched a movie script that included such a boat; if the movie were made, he reasoned, the boat would have to be built. When the movie wasn't made, the script evolved into a graphic novel. The boat evolved into a spaceship shaped like Saturn, a giant glass orb where dolphins in helmets could somehow communicate with humans in the ring.

Pepper Mouser, an old friend, joked about making a documentary: *The Doug Michels Story: How Dolphins Ruined My Life*. By then Doug's enthusiasm had been tempered; he could laugh. Still, his friends wondered: What was it about dolphins?

"Somehow, for him, dolphins embodied a contemporary version of the state of nature, a paradise lost but perhaps recoverable," writes Michael Sorkin in *Architectural Record*. "His appreciation for these creatures was further deepened by the fact that they had another, darker side. Flipper could be murderous, filled with rage. And dolphins could be deeply sexual, orgiastic."

Laura Harrison knew Doug in many different ways: as a beer-drinking friend; as an architect (he designed her pool, one of his few projects still extant in Houston); and as a subject for the documentary films she makes. Laura thought a lot about Doug's relationship to dolphins, and why he maintained it even when it made him a laughingstock. Dolphins, she notes, are intelligent loners, but they also function well in groups, where they show a warm camaraderie.

Doug, says Laura, was an intelligent loner. And after Ant Farm broke up, he longed for a group.

• • • • •

While still in the first flush of his dolphin mania — when his friends thought he was craziest — Doug simultaneously presented the straightest side of himself to the world. Wearing an Armani suit, he went to Philip Johnson's New York office and applied for a job. Johnson knew Ant Farm, and suspected that Doug was up to something. Doug assured him that he wasn't. Johnson hired him, and Doug spent a year designing parking garages and bathrooms. Finally, Johnson promoted him to senior designer on Transco Tower.

Doug left the job after his old Ant Farm friends invaded Johnson's office but had a hard time getting past Doug's secretary. They were shocked. They said, "Doug, come home."

Doug left. But he remained proud of Transco. And later, he worked at HOK — another giant firm, another place where his artist friends wondered if his costume was wearing him. Doug played it both ways.

Besides his dolphin obsession, Doug fashioned himself as a futurist — and sometimes he even envisioned a future without dolphins in evidence. In 1978, he and Richard Jost designed Teleport, a futuristic media room for Houstonians Rudge and Nancy Allen. *Newsweek* called it a center for "compunications." Years later, after Rudge Allen died in the Teleport's chair, Doug updated the retro-future room for the University of Houston.

In '99, he moved back to Houston to teach at UH. Once again, his teaching gig was only temporary. But he was at UH long enough, that second time around, to escort a group of students to the House of the Century, the site of Ant Farm's glory.

Doug wasn't sure what they'd find. He knew that a flood had wrecked the place in the late '80s. He knew that the long Plexiglas entryway had collapsed, and that water water had destroyed the upholstery. He expected a ruin. He wondered how a futuristic ruin would look.

As Doug's group approached, the house looked beautiful: pristine white capsules were covered in vines. The Plexiglas entryway was gone, but the exploratory party made its way into the stucco main building.

There, in the dark, they were attacked by vultures — real, live, bald-headed carrion eaters. A flock had nested inside the House of the Century. The vultures defended their territory the way that vultures do: by projectile vomiting.

There, in the dark, they were attacked by vultures – real, live, bald-headed carrion eaters. A flock had nested inside the House of the Century. The vultures defended their territory the way that vultures do: by projectile vomiting.

SHORE THING

JOHN MECOM'S FLAMINGO ISLES WAS ONE OF THOSE GRAND PROJECTS THAT COULDN'T FAIL. BUT IT DID.

BY BRUCE C. WEBB | PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHULA ROSS SANCHEZ

Land use plan, Flamingo Isles, circa 1962.

Imagination and an extravagance of scale often seem to pump up the dreams of developers working the Gulf Coast. In a state so vast, hot and mostly dry, the Texas coast seems like the gold coast, especially when it's only an hour's drive away from the state's largest city.

Big dreams die hard, but every abandoned project isn't simply a case of a failed business deal. Sometimes a plan is so audacious that by itself it should qualify as a work of conceptual art.

The biggest, most grandiose and in many ways strangest development scheme for the Texas Gulf coast was Flamingo Isles, a project that Houston oilman John Mecom came up with in the 1960s. Mecom personified the zeitgeist of those prosperous years: He assembled a 3,446-acre site in Hitchcock, just across West Bay from Galveston, and began to plan a city that he hoped would eventually accommodate 30,000 to 100,000 people. Details are sketchy and difficult to locate, but the original plans called for something like 20 miles of slips designed to accommodate some 5,000 boats. There were to be yacht clubs, a country club with an 18-hole golf course, and an executive-jet airport with a 7,000-foot runway — along with several major hotels, motels and an assortment of apartments, townhouses and family cottages. But this was only for starters. On October 9, 1966, the *Galveston News* reported on plans for high-rise business towers, apartments, retirement homes, schools, churches, and (of course) extensive recreation facilities.

More novel features included an amusement park called The Landing, described on the site plan as an amalgamation of New Orleans' French Quarter, Six Flags and Disneyland. Mecom had purchased the monorail from the 1964 New York World's Fair, and rumors floated that he planned to install it as a bay crossing between Flamingo Isle and Galveston's West End. When that proved unworkable he promised instead cable cars that would also link to a chain of air-conditioned off-shore fishing platforms. Several of the futuristic cars from the monorail lay idly rusting along Highway 6 near Hitchcock for many years.

Construction on the huge project began in earnest in 1966 with an army of "Mecom blue" bulldozers digging, dredging, and building roads. But by 1969, with expenses mounting and the investment turn-around point nowhere in sight, Mecom walked away from the project, leaving behind a modern archeological site that included as its centerpiece a landscape of alternating concentric circular bands of built-up land and canals — land that was to have hosted the first residential development. From the air the maze-like figure resembles a vast Robert Smithson earth work or one of those enigmatic earth markings that New Age gonzos interpret as evidence of ancient aliens. Five houses were constructed for the five utility directors, and an octagonal house was built for the harbormaster. A huge pink-and-blue Flamingo Isles sign located along Highway 6 remained long after Mecom had given up. Over the years, it lost several of its letters, and recently was torn down.

After lying fallow more than 30 years, the Flamingo Isles property is currently being developed by Watkins Properties of League City as a considerably more modest 700-lot master-planned community called Harborwalk. But before the new developers had razed the few extant buildings and toppled the Flamingo Isles sign, University of Houston graduate architecture student Chula Ross Sanchez and her husband, Ramon, began visiting the site by boat. Their photographs depict the uncanny atmosphere of a big dream in ruins, recording a moment in extremis before the new developers began to chase the ghosts away. ■

House with bicycle: Flamingo Isles, 2002.

Utility-district directors' houses, Flamingo Isles, 2002.

Aerial view, Flamingo Isles, 2002.

Clockwise from top left: Flamingo Isles pilot's house; spartica marsh; shoreline; canal.

Hotel SAN JOSÉ

DO YOU KNOW THE WAY?

THE ZEN OF MOTOR-COURT RENOVATION

BY NONYA GRENADER

It wasn't easy to reinvent Austin's San José, a 1930s-era motor court on South Congress Avenue. In its heyday, the San José was a picturesque tourist spot, but by the time Odessa-born Liz Lambert bought it in 1995, the place was dilapidated — many would say beyond repair. Lambert, a lawyer, left a position in the Texas Attorney General's office to keep the motel running, hoping to re-create it room by room.

In retrospect, says Lambert, "it was a blessing not to have the money to do it all at once." She kept the doors open while observing every possibility — the bones and layout of the existing buildings, the quality of light and shadow, and the unique site in the midst of burgeoning development on South Congress. The venerable Continental Club, a nightspot that had been attracting well-known musicians since 1957, was directly across the street. Antique shops, thrift stores, and restaurants added to the mix.

In 1998, after assembling a team of architects and craftspeople who shared her design sensibilities, Lambert closed the motel for renovation. David Lake and Ted Flato (Lake Flato Architects), with their project architect Bob Harris, examined the typical U-shaped motor-court layout with its two-story front office and room wings flanking center parking. Lake immediately envisioned a new back building that would form a fourth edge. In a practical sense, the addition doubled the rental possibilities from 20 to 40 rooms. And as a design move, the new structure completed a frame for the courtyard that today is continuously filled with guests and locals alike.

The exterior is as compelling as the interior. Bamboo and cactus punctuate walkway and pool edges. Rainwater is channeled into sculpted concrete catch ponds, and vines have overtaken metal pergolas. And just when the gray-green palette seems almost too restrained, pink antique roses invade the color scheme. The same contrasts infuse the spare interiors. A woven Ikea lounge mixes with a classic red Eames chair. Vibrant Indian prints cover beds that float on slabs of East Texas pine. Rooms are equipped with compact disc players, and the extensive CD library ranges from Leonard Cohen to Louis Armstrong.

It is not surprising to learn that Lambert has made a film to document the transformation of the San José — as she calls it, "an homage to its previous life." For Lambert, the "before" is as important as the "after" — just another juxtaposition. It is the easy cadence between differences in style and materials that make the San José so intriguing and so difficult to categorize. When Hank Williams III visited, he observed that, at the San José, "Japan meets Mexico." He was just about right. ■

Real Cool

BY STEPHEN FOX

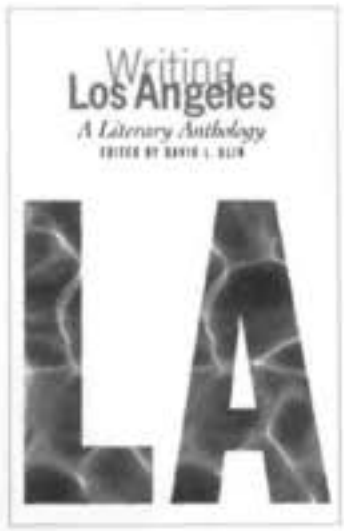
The Hotel San José is cool. It is also real. This is less of a paradox than it seems. Coolness pertains to style, which involves performance, appearances, attitudes. Reality is (or is supposed to be) about how things are, irrespective of how they act, look, or what people's opinions about them may be. That the San José is simultaneously real and cool is a critique of all the places that are not cool because they try to evade the reality of their circumstances. The San José makes the real cool by engaging its setting, but selectively. Economy of means leads to spatial clarity and ambient tranquility.

Green and gray: you would never guess there are so many variations of these two colors. At the San José, green and gray are the tones of the stucco walls and painted trim of its buildings. They are the predominant tones of its copious but restrained vegetation. If you look at the walls, you begin to notice that they are tonally continuous with the plant species alongside or on them. At the San José you notice that you notice such things, even if you don't usually notice such things. That's the kind of place it is.

It's fun to be outdoors at the San José. There are spaces to explore. Linear open-air corridors fringed with bamboo and punctuated by trees that shoot up through decomposed granite paths, pergola-sheltered passageways between buildings, views into distant courts and through horizontal wood lattices into sheltered patios, inset porches furnished with upholstered day beds: it's not about something (or someplace) else. It's here.

The rooms are spare, animated by reflected light that makes you remember that *lux* ("light") is the Latin root of "luxury." A polished concrete floor, a bed consisting of a mattress on a pine platform with arms that serve as bedside tables, a pine counter-table-desk hung from the wall on black-painted steel struts, a molded red chair, and a bright-colored sliding panel that is the bathroom door. And a page torn from a book of poems, thumb-tacked to the bathroom wall.

At the San José you feel happy. You're glad you're here. You wish you could stay longer. ■



Reassessing Rudolph

Paul Rudolph: The Late Work by *Roberto de Alba. Princeton Architectural Press, 2003. 224 pp. $40.*

Reviewed by David Hay

The late Paul Rudolph, as famous and as prodigious an architect as there was in the 1960s, lived long enough, unfortunately, to see his works fall from favor and his reputation decline. This view of Rudolph still prevails — as someone who did his best works in the 1960s, first as a strict Modernist designing houses in Florida, then as more of an Expressionist building large-scale works in the Northeast.

But a closer examination of what Rudolph attempted in the last 20 years of his life (he died in 1997) throws this assessment into question. By the '80s and '90s, though Rudolph had not become a Postmodernist, he had long cast off the shackles of strict Modernism. In fact, he expanded his concept of expressive architecture in ways so imaginative and complex they defied easy and immediate comprehension. That many of these groundbreaking works were built in Southeast Asia made it even harder for Rudolph to receive the recognition he deserved.

Fortuitously, the new book *Paul Rudolph: The Late Work* examines Rudolph's later accomplishments. If anything, the book is too modest. At 8"x10" many illustrations and drawings, the format in which Rudolph was an acclaimed master, are best read with a magnifying glass. For a handsomely illustrated introduction, I recommend Tony Monk's *The Art and Architecture of Paul Rudolph*, published in 1999. But that book unfortunately is out of print, and de Alba's volume offers consolations for its small size: Architectural historian Robert Bruegmann makes a carefully argued introduction to de Alba's descriptive writing, and the publication is of particular interest to Texans since several of Rudolph's later, more complex works are in the state.

The architect was a favorite of Sid Bass, who at Yale took architecture classes from one of Rudolph's former associates, Vincent Scully. In 1970, when Bass and his then wife, Anne, built their home in Fort Worth, they chose Rudolph. In the late 1970's Bass again selected Rudolph to design the City Center complex in downtown Fort Worth. The Bass House, one of the most magnificent if underappreciated homes in the country, shows how Rudolph came to excel during this period: He was able to more successfully and elegantly link his forms together, creating exceptionally open spaces on the inside while eschewing the formal rigidity of traditional Modernism on the outside.

Inside the Bass House, according to de Alba's text, "twelve levels of living spaces of various dimensions are organized into four main stories." There are actually 14 different ceiling heights. Thanks to the shifts in level and scale all about them, the rooms feel more expansive and airy than their measured volumes.

Its exterior is monochromatic. White enameled steel beams frame floor-to-ceiling windows and additional white porcelain-enameled aluminum panels provide privacy. Like many of Rudolph's works from this period, its overall form is highly detailed, busily so. As a result, it is not easy to read. The forms expressively move above and about themselves: Balconies stretch out way beyond walls, overhanging roofs have open rectangles carved out to allow light to filter to the level below, and so on.

Rudolph went even further with his own Manhattan triplex in the late 1970s. Shown as it was then in de Alba's book, it remains even today, in its stripped-down form, a good introduction to life inside a late Rudolph structure. During a visit over a year ago, I found that moving between levels — or the individual rooms on each floor — required concentration. Rudolph never seemed concerned with the connecting spaces. Yet in each major social space, I was thrilled by the extraordinary sense of expansiveness, due in large part to the elimination of visual or structural barriers between each level. To enhance this effect, he installed translucent plastic panels, and even Plexiglas floors between the floors.

Paul Rudolph: The Late Work details this ability to create shifts of space and form in larger structures, showing seven skyscrapers Rudolph designed between 1969 and 1994, four of which were built. Also featured are two homes in Southeast Asia, including a luxury triplex in Hong Kong. Never constructed but shown here in drawing and model form, it is a spectacular aggregation of small volumes, attached to tall columns with such visual looseness that the structure, concrete sheathed in reflective aluminum, resembles a box kite. Not only are individual living spaces cantilevered out to the hilltop air, but so are two of the swimming pools.

Rudolph's high-rises have none of the decorative touches associated with Postmodernist towers of the period, but they refuse to be monolithic boxes. To achieve a sense of human scale relative to nearby buildings, cars, and people, his skyscrapers are elevated off the ground at their bases. The towers above exhibit his trademark plays with volumes — often to the point that the tower appears to twist. These structural moves occur from floor to floor, as floor plans on one floor shift from those of a floor below.

Although such moves are in evidence in Rudolph's City Center complex in Fort Worth, they're masked by the all-glass exterior, unusual for the architect. The shifting is more exaggerated in his Bond Center Office Towers in Hong Kong and the Dharmala Headquarters in Djakarta. His finest achievement, outdoing many similar precepts used by Le Corbusier in Indian high-rises, is the Colonnade Condominium complex built in Singapore in 1980. The building is an aggregation of two-story apartments placed in a shifting pattern throughout the tower. Each has a balcony or room cantilevered out from the tower and shielded from the sun by an exterior wall. Although not constructed as pre-fab units as Rudolph wanted, the building remains a thrillingly executed example of a high-rise whose building forms still could be well repeated, thus lowering its cost. Its treatment of environmental factors such as the sun is similarly pioneering. But details apart, it stands out, like many of Rudolph's designs from the period, as a compelling and daring achievement — not bad for an architect generally assumed to have been in decline.

City of Angles

Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology. *Edited by David L. Ulin. Library of America, 2002. 880 pp. $40.*

Reviewed by Alex Lichtenstein

Sprawling, kaleidoscopic, exotic, dark, thrilling, offbeat, edgy, campy, glittering, glamorous, gay (in both senses) — these adjectives might in equal measure be applied to the city of Los Angeles and to the writing it has spawned, now collected in the marvelous anthology, *Writing Los Angeles*, a justifiable addition to the Library of America's literary classics series. Editor David Ulin effectively captures the spirit of a very particular place in his wide selection of journalism, essays, fiction, poetry, memoirs, and diaries, spanning more than a century of Southern California letters.

To attach writing to geography or region implies both writing from a location and writing about a place. These two criteria mark the irreducible core of Ulin's choices. The best seamlessly meld these approaches, serving simultaneously as dispatches from an unfamiliar land and markers of a distinctive literary style, written in their own patois even as they manufacture it. No reader will come away from this collection of writings unconvinced that L.A., perhaps more than any other American city, can lay claim to its own literary sensibility, one deeply rooted in the region's unique urban geography.

Part of this effect derives from the ceaseless "newness" of L.A., not just because of the city's constant self-reinvention, but also because Southern California was new and strange to many of the people who came there and wrote about it, whether from somewhere "back East" or from Europe. Certainly some of the most interesting writing in this book comes from the latter "fraternity of refugees," in Jan Morris's phrase: Christopher Isherwood, Simone de Beauvoir, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, Bertolt Brecht, Gavin Lambert, Salka Viertel, David Hockney. But on the domestic side as well, some truly great writers, posing as exiles, seem to have found inspiration in L.A.'s ambience: William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, and F. Scott Fitzgerald are represented here, and their contributions do stand out for their high literary quality.

Nevertheless, as in all anthologies, some editorial choices inevitably appear idiosyncratic. The excerpt from Nathanael West's dark novel of Hollywood life, *The Day of the Locust* (1939), consists of a short description of a film studio lot

and the shooting of *Waterloo,* but none of West's sensibility of foreboding dissolution. John Fante, justly described by Ulin as the poet laureate of "Southern California's nameless, faceless citizens," is represented by a rather solipsistic account of a writer's struggle to make it. Work by Mike Davis, catastrophist of L.A. as eco-social nightmare, is limited to the prologue to *City of Quartz* (1990), a book with many more interesting sections; Davis's *Ecology of Fear* (1998) is nowhere to be found. Of the 77 authors represented in the anthology, barely a dozen are women, which strikes even someone averse to this sort of counting as underrepresentation (though Ulin grants Joan Didion a generous 26 pages). Chester Himes, Walter Mosley, Charles Mingus, and Art Pepper (a white interloper) evoke the sights and sounds and smells of Central Avenue, the warm-beating cultural heart of black L.A. in the 1940s and 1950s. But only a handful of selections reflect the importance of L.A.'s Hispanic and Asian-American populations or the explosion of a veritable U.N. of ethnic literary cultures in southern California over the past three decades.

The anthology unfolds chronologically, the selections metastasizing like the expanding conurbation itself. This permits the reader to chart the expansion of L.A.'s distinctive culture, especially its mass youth culture that blossomed in the postwar period — hot rodders, surfers, movies, music, drugs. It also allows one to recognize the accretion of a sedimentary literary tradition in and of a place that staked its claim to modern urbanity largely by denying it had one. Not only do themes recur, but so do people (star of screen Greta Garbo, star of altar Sister Aimee Semple McPherson), places (Hollywood, Venice, Topanga Canyon), landmarks (architectural, like the Watts tower; natural, like Zuma Beach; and supernatural, like Forest Lawn Memorial Park), gay cruising spots (Pershing Square, immortalized by John Rechy in *City of Night* [1963]), weather (the Santa Ana winds), and literary culture itself.

Marc Norman quotes Louis Adamic on suburban anomie; Joan Didion invokes the apocalyptic vision of *Day of the Locust;* her husband, John Gregory Dunne, recalls Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon;* Cees Nooteboom cites Reyner Banham on the glee of "Autopia." Helen Hunt Jackson's 1883 nostalgic evocation of the glorious past of the Spanish mission era opens the book; but later Carey McWilliams reminds us just how false to history this invented tradition really was. "The sacred aspects of the romantic past have been completely divorced from their secular connotations," McWilliams wrote in *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (1946), so that romanticization of the region's Spanish heritage went hand-in-hand with blatant discrimination and violence directed against its impoverished Chicano descendants. If McWilliams retraced Helen Jackson's steps, only to puncture her pretensions in the name of social justice, Robert Towne, screenwriter for Roman Polanski's film *Chinatown* (1974), claims inspiration from McWilliams' telling of the tale of the Southland's "water wars," written 30 years before.

Other bits of the anthology remind us that in the history of L.A. is written the history of twentieth-century American culture. At the dawn of the cinema age, poet Vachel Lindsey remarked of the "moving picture" that "it is thrillingly possible for [California] and the art to acquire spiritual tradition and depth together." Many L.A. writers were subsequently fascinated by the eruption of mass culture and the cult of celebrity on the nation's western edge — movies, yes, but also evangelical religion, advertising, suburbia, cars and freeways and drive-ins, art, music, homosexuality. L.A. always exuded the quest for spiritual satisfaction — either through religious or erotic ecstasy, through a hunger for images and manufactured entertainment, through the promise of hedonistic ease, or through communion with the natural environment that remains an inescapable presence in the region.

But the inverse of Lindsey's proposition served as fodder for writers as well. Just take H.L. Mencken's explanation for the wild popularity of a "commonplace and transparent mountebank" such as evangelist Sister Aimee. He reckoned that there were "more morons collected in Los Angeles than in any other place on earth." Edmund Wilson joined the chorus lambasting the titillating moralizers, who preached the gospel to transplanted Midwesterners eager to "get an intimate peek into the debauched goings-on of their neighbors, and at the same time be made to feel their own superior righteousness." To many literary observers, L.A. seemed a deep well of artificiality, a "huckster's paradise" in Ulin's words, a city of scams — medical, religious, real estate, oil — indeed, a scam itself. Were movie stars its quintessential figures, or were dirty cops, thugs and *pachucos*? — all rendered with that ineffable noir taint that clings to the hardboiled genre of Raymond Chandler, James Cain, Ross Macdonald, and James Ellroy, their modern inheritor.

So for all its glorifiers, in equal measure L.A. has generated "critics and debunkers" — Upton Sinclair, Adamic, McWilliams, West, Didion, and Davis stand out. What is striking about the literature of the dystopians is that they take up the same themes as the region's celebrators — the past (a myth rather than an idyll), the environment (unforgiving rather than gentle), the image-makers and boosters (hucksters rather than avatars of the future), and the exploitation of land and people (rather than fecundity and freedom and the blossoming of dreams).

Another tasty genre served up on this menu of disillusion is the "Hollywood novel," the exposé of the seamier sides of the movie business, dating back to Carrol and Garrett Graham's *Queer People* (1930), and finding its apotheosis in John Gregory Dunne's *Monster* (1997) (not excerpted here) with a stopover at West's classic *Day of the Locust* (1939). More touching still are the short stories derived from this genre: the stinging cynicism of Budd Schulberg's "A Table at Ciro's"(1941) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's sad, tremulous, beautiful "The Last Kiss" published only posthumously and perhaps the best piece of writing in the entire book. Most striking in this pre-feminist fiction is the clear-eyed bitter recognition of how easily Hollywood exploited and destroyed young women.

Los Angeles: described in its cheap artificiality by Christopher Isherwood as "perhaps the ugliest city on earth"; by Jack Kerouac as "the loneliest and most brutal of American cities" and "a huge desert encampment"; by Gavin Lambert as "a series of suburban approaches to a city that never materializes"; by Norman Mailer as "a kingdom of stucco, the playground for mass men." But as editor Ulin points out, L.A. is also probably still "the wildest, most natural of America's major cities." Simone de Beauvoir observed on her 1947 visit that "one feels that the most sophisticated city in the world is surrounded by indomitable nature." She concluded that she felt "if human pressure were relaxed for even a moment, the wild animals and giant grasses would soon reclaim possession of their domain" — a possibility taken up four decades later by nature writer John McPhee, in a terrifying excerpt from *The Control of Nature* (1989), describing the "chunky muck" of "debris flows" down the L.A. basin's mountainsides sweeping away everything in their path.

Natural disasters aside, as noirist James M. Cain remarks in his surprisingly fond evocation of the southern California landscape, "bringing water in by pipeline is still the outstanding accomplishment of man in this region." No greater symbol of this accomplishment exists than the diversion — theft, really — of the Owens River from its valley 250 miles north of the city to "make Los Angeles fertile, flush-friendly and be-pooled," in the words of film writer David Thomson. This is the ecological "crime" memorialized at the heart of the film *Chinatown,* and a recurring theme treated by several writers; indeed in many ways it emerges as something of the central literary trope for L.A.'s history and its relationship with the land, what one might call the region's "political ecology." Cedric Belfrage in his 1938 novel, *Promised Land;* Carey McWilliams, of course; Reyner Banham in his testament to the Water and Power Building as "the only public building in the whole city that genuinely graces the scene and lifts the spirit"; and the closing tribute to the curves of Mulholland Drive by film writer David Thomson, all take this deeply compromised feat of social and ecological engineering as the template on which to sketch L.A.'s history and social character. "The road, the drive, the highway," Thomson concludes in words that might apply to the entire project of L.A., "all thrill to the way man has commanded natural power and beauty here and turned them into property or a story." And so might we thrill; this collection is a wonderful place to start. Strange as it may seem, after reading it through I think: Oh, how I want to live there!

Listening to Nature

Human Ecology: Following Nature's Lead by Frederick Steiner. Island Press, 2002. 256 pp. $25.

Review by Rives Taylor

Only recently have American designers begun to address the complex relationship of nature and one of its components, humankind. In the last several years a small but influential cadre of thinkers has also embraced the idea that sustainable human design must be based on that larger whole, the natural ecology.

Such a book is *Human Ecology* by Frederick Steiner, the new dean of architecture at the University of Texas, Austin. His subtitle, "Following Nature's Lead," concisely states his thesis: Nature's physical systems should serve as models for the design of diverse human landscapes.

"Landscape offers a scale where social and physical processes and patterns can become evident," Steiner writes. Landscape, as he describes it, is not simply shaped land; coming to terms with the landscape is the "essential first step toward sustainability." Steiner takes a firm stand that urban settlements can be sustainable — that is, that cities can minimize their adverse impact on the environment, doing damage only as fast as the earth can regenerate itself.

In the influential book *Biomimicry,* Janine Benyus, with a background in agricultural and forestry sciences, saw nature as a source of inspiration. Steiner goes further still, arguing that successful urban intervention is impossible without an intense appreciation of place and of nature's hidden order. At a minimum the designer must study what existed on a site before humans settled on it, and must clearly understand how nature continues to shape the city.

And how, exactly, does one understand such things? Steiner says you must

put them into context — a suitably complex context. He offers a notion of "hierarchy as a framework, a system of nested networks" that can serve as a tool to understand both natural systems and human culture (which is, after all, a natural system). Steiner's version of hierarchy is at odds with the usual reductionism of academia — that is, the art of making simplifying generalities about complex systems. Instead, Steiner fights the uphill battle of constructing an academic thesis that does not run counter to the complex systems he describes. (Even the book's own dust jacket emphasizes nature's "hierarchy" as a simple organizing tool or lesson to be learned, as if this volume were the easy-to-digest, step-by-step instruction booklet that many design practitioners crave.)

Steiner repeatedly explains that nature's hierarchy is anything but simple, static, and predictable. Nature's hierarchies are not the stable pyramids of military command charts; instead, they're cycles, like a rolling wheel that repeats itself, never returning to precisely the same point but moving evolutionarily forward. Recognizing that human activity is part and parcel of nature, Steiner uses the natural loop cycle to describe all human technology, scientific study, and design endeavors.

He particularly focuses on historic divisions within the studies of economics, ecology, and urban morphology/planning — disciplines artifically separated by the differing vocabularies of their practitioners, and by the focus of the disciplines' investigations. That separation works against a holistic understanding. Steiner instead urges the study of "new ecology," which instills "deeper understanding of interactions at various scales [and] holds the prospect for better, although more complex, approaches to resource management, nature conservation, and environmental protection as well as the arts of environmental design and planning."

A proscriptive approach parleyed by an academic — the dean of a school of architecture, no less — might be dismissed as idealistic, or at a minimum, unattainable. Steiner attempts to limit such criticism with case study–like examples of student work as well as his own vivid personal experiences of dynamic but balanced human and natural ecologies. In examples ranging from Italy to Japan, he shows that effective, long-lasting human intervention was organized with regard to the natural order.

In an era when we rarely take the time to plan the consequence of our actions, *Human Ecology* renews the call for learning the big lesson from natural systems. Additionally, Steiner's work adds another sorely needed and complete examination of the underpinnings of a sustainable design process. ■

You Can't Go Home Again?

BY TERRENCE DOODY

Photo courtesy of HOK (Conn & Ferguson, Inc.)

One of Chicago's favorite buildings: Fourth Presbyterian Church

In early June, I went on the Rice Design Alliance tour to Chicago with three things in mind. I wanted to see the city through the eyes of our professional guides. I wanted to gauge my affection and understanding of it against their expertise. And I wanted to learn about those things I didn't know. Great architecture is not simply self-evident. Its meaning and value are couched in history, in the tradition of forms, in theories and arguments. They are also couched in our personal experience and expectations, as well as in neighborhoods we don't even know about. All these different contexts came to bear on my big moment as we stood in front of H.H. Richardson's Glessner House.

Our guide, Rolf Achilles, said we could see the corner of the old R. R. Donnelly printing plant down Prairie Avenue. In high school I had a summer job as a messenger that took me to that plant many times. I had no idea then that Prairie Avenue was a historic district; I knew it only as a neighborhood where I felt uncomfortable. And I am not sure that if I had seen the Glessner House by accident, I would have noticed it or known what I was looking at. For in fact I wasn't even aware of its existence until 1997, when I read about it. Because my in-laws live in Pittsburgh, I had encountered by then his overpowering Allegheny County Court House and, subsequently, had sought out Trinity Church in Boston. The Glessner House was not as big as I thought it would be from the pictures I'd seen. Its proportions contained and even refined the massiveness of the stonework, and I began to understand how proportion is much more important than any pure value we assign to size. A basic lesson, to be sure, but not one you can learn from reading. This intuition about proportion had affected me when we were in Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House and Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple, but it was only here I became really conscious of it.

I had a completely different kind of big experience on our first afternoon. After lunch at the Arts Club, another place I'd never heard of when I lived in Chicago, we took the Chicago Architecture Foundation's cruise on the Chicago River through much more familiar territory. The cruise starts at the Michigan Avenue bridge, where the Wrigley Building and Tribune Tower stand as a gateway. I had always liked the Wrigley Building, with its white facades and the gap in it that now brings to mind Pennzoil Place; and I seem to have always known that the Tribune is a second-best building, an idea of architecture commensurate with Col. McCormick's idea of his own grandeur.

But from the river, in the slow tracking shot the boat provided, we could see in a long single glance about a hundred years of very distinguished building: from the neo-classical London Guarantee and Accident Building (Alfred S. Alschuler, 1923) on the river's south side; then north and just to the west, Mies's last skyscraper, the beautiful IBM Building (Office of Mies van der Rohe with C. F. Murphy Associates, 1971), which stands across the street from the towers of Marina City, by Mies's student Bertrand Goldberg, the coolest address on the planet when it opened in 1967. Then back on the river's south side, the spectacular curved tower of 333 Wacker Drive (Kohn Pedersen Fox, 1983), whose wall of green glass holds the river and sky in constant equipoise.

333 Wacker was exactly the kind of newer building I wanted to hear about. The kind of older building I wanted to discover was then the cruise's best surprise: the Montgomery Ward & Co. warehouse (Schmidt, Garden & Martin, 1908), which also follows the river's curve and is as elegant as an Iowa barn. Back at the other end of the river and of our trip, east of Michigan, I recognized this warehouse's perfect counterpart: the NBC Tower (SOM, 1989), with its useless, orthogonal, perfectly Po-Mo flying buttresses that pay homage to, of all things, the Tribune Tower. Does this kind of ironization, I asked, now make the Tribune itself Postmodernist? And make its nostalgia prophetic?

My more serious question of Rolf Achilles was: Is there another American city that has a comparable concentration of fine buildings across so many historical styles? I know that if you stand in the center of Boston Commons, you can see, starting with Bulfinch's statehouse, about two hundred years of architecture, but I am not sure all of it is as distinguished as Bulfinch's. (In the old town square of Prague, you can see in a long glance examples of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Neo-classical, Baroque, Beaux Arts, and modernist building standing hip to hip, but that's another neighborhood altogether.) Rolf couldn't think off-hand of another place, and there's a lot of classical Chicago School architecture you can't see from the river. I was pumped with pride.

After the river tour, we were taken into two of Mies's apartments at 860-880 North Lake Shore Drive. The first one had a northeast corner view, looking up the Drive and out onto the water. Its window-walls made the outside-inside distinction seem trivial because the view was — delicately put — not unsublime. All my adult life I had wanted to see these apartments from the inside, and it was worth the wait. They were, in every way, perfect. Consequently two days later, the Farnsworth House, which I hadn't learned about until much later, didn't have the impact on me it had on one of the other pilgrims, an architect who said she had studied pictures of it forever. I felt that, for its full effect to take hold, the Farnsworth House had to be lived in rather than merely visited. It is deeply peaceful because its artlessness makes it seem inevitable; and like all great art, it fulfills at once the need it creates.

Ninety minutes later that Saturday morning, we were at Lake and Kenilworth in Oak Park at Wright's Unity Temple. I grew up in Oak Park, on Kenilworth, have friends who bought a Prairie-style house, have been in Wright's home-studio and in Fallingwater. I had not been in Unity Temple, however, and it blew my little mind. To enter it, you are turned away from the world and into the building, perhaps into yourself as well, to the sanctuary, which is a cube filled with light. Its flat ceiling makes no gesture toward transcendence, so as you look into the sanctuary's center, you look across it as well to the other congregants: you see yourself in them as they see themselves in you, and in this relationship Wright defines the sacred.

(Later that evening, I said to my brother Dan, who lives in Oak Park, that Unity Temple was the most moving church I had ever been in. He asked if I had even been in the Duomo in Florence. Very good question. I had been. And I am prepared to do further research on this matter when the RDA mounts its Oak Park–Firenze trip.)

The moral of my story, therefore, is yes, you can go home again. It's great. And it is even more fun if you try to look at it as though it were someplace else. From my window in the Hotel Burnham, looking north, I could see on my right Burnham's Marshall Field building, where I went as a child to see the *real* Santa Claus; on my left, the great Picasso in Daley Plaza, which I was lucky enough to see unveiled at its dedication in 1967; and straight ahead, my favorite of all, the John Hancock Center. This view is nothing like the one from my bedroom window on Kenilworth. And I had just learned something too cool about the Fourth Presbyterian Church, which stands across the street from the Hancock. This is one of everybody's favorite buildings and probably the first one I ever responded to, in my messenger days, as architecture. What I learned is, it was designed by Ralph Adams Cram, who also did Rice. Made me feel right at home. ■

stelton

Stelton's unique design attitude was formulated in 1963 in close collaboration with the Danish architect and designer Arne Jacobsen. Their idea: to create a complete line of tableware where the close correlation in the design of all of Stelton's items would ensure harmonious table settings. The result was the *Cylinda Line* launched in 1967. It immediately attracted considerable attention for its serene and functionalist approach.

Since then Stelton, with designer Eric Magnussen, has developed an extensive range of 175 modern classics in stainless steel. The entire line of Stelton salad bowls, teapots, barware, kitchen utensils, and cutlery is available now at Sunset Settings.

SUNSET SETTINGS

2610 Sunset Boulevard Houston, Texas 77005 713 522 7661 www.sunsetsettings.com Monday–Saturday, 10am to 5pm

Debner+Company

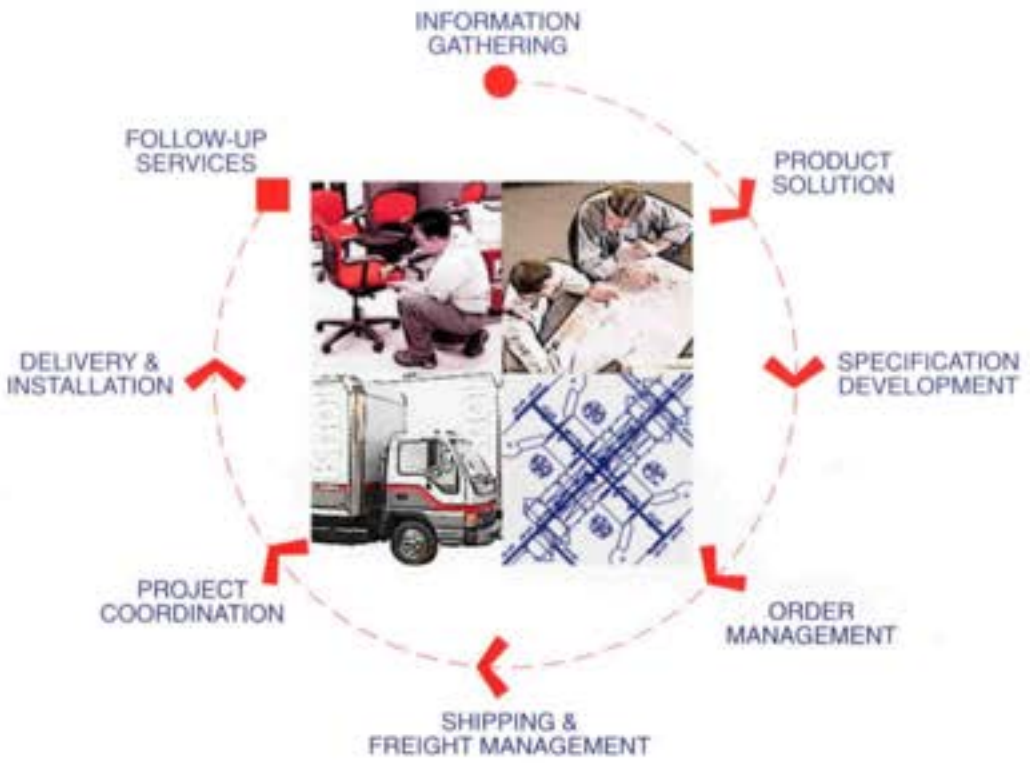
2000 Bering Dr. Suite 100
Houston TX 77057

T 713.782.1300
F 713.782.1332

www.debner.com
mailcenter@debner.com

Houston's Premier Knoll Dealer™

IT'S WHAT WE DO.



BERNHARDT
CABOT WRENN
CARTWRIGHT
COUNCILL
DAVID EDWARD
EGAN VISUAL
EVOLVE
FALCON
GUNLOCKE
HARTER
HICKORY BUSINESS FURNITURE
ICF
JOFCO
KEILHAUER
NIENKAMPER
NUCRAFT
TUOHY
VITRA

Knoll
Knoll & Other Fine Office Furniture

CORPORATE WORKSPACE SOLUTIONS

Debner+Company

Rice University
Rice Design Alliance - MS 51
P.O. Box 1892
Houston, Texas 77251-1892

T15-11**********ECRLOT**C-000
MR. LONNIE HODGEBOOM
DR. BETSY STRAUCH
2207 MIMOSA DR APT E
HOUSTON TX 77019-5631

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Houston, Texas
Permit No. 7549