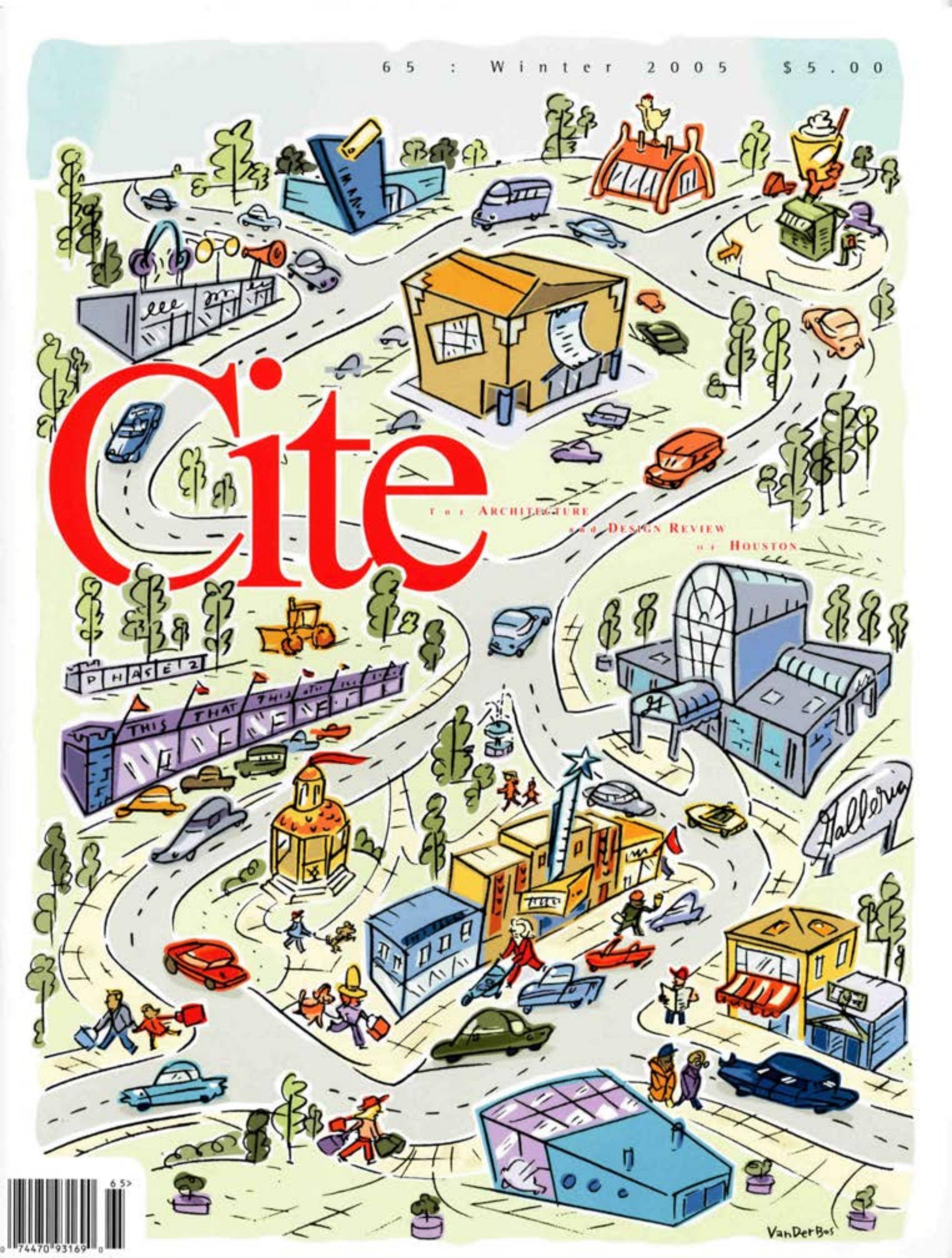
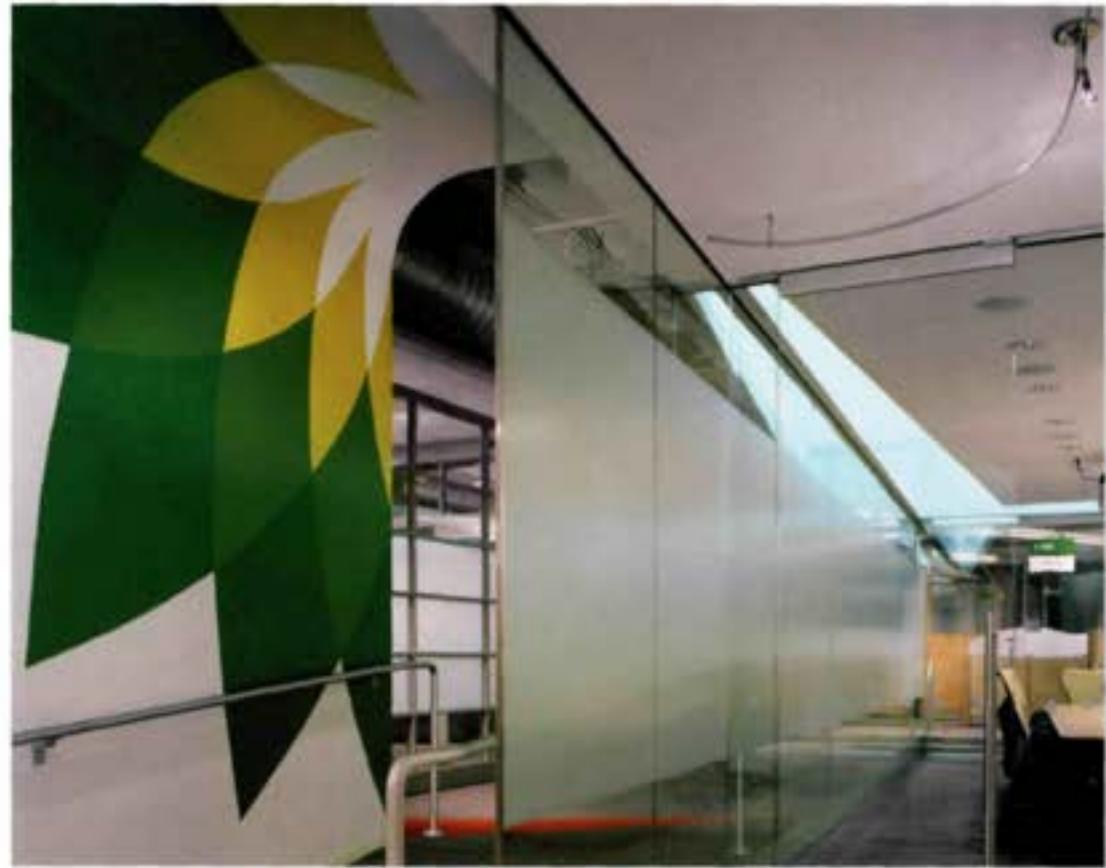


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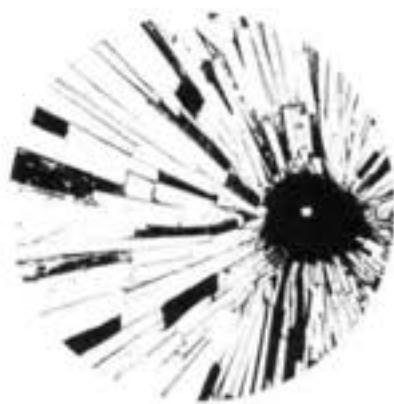
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THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

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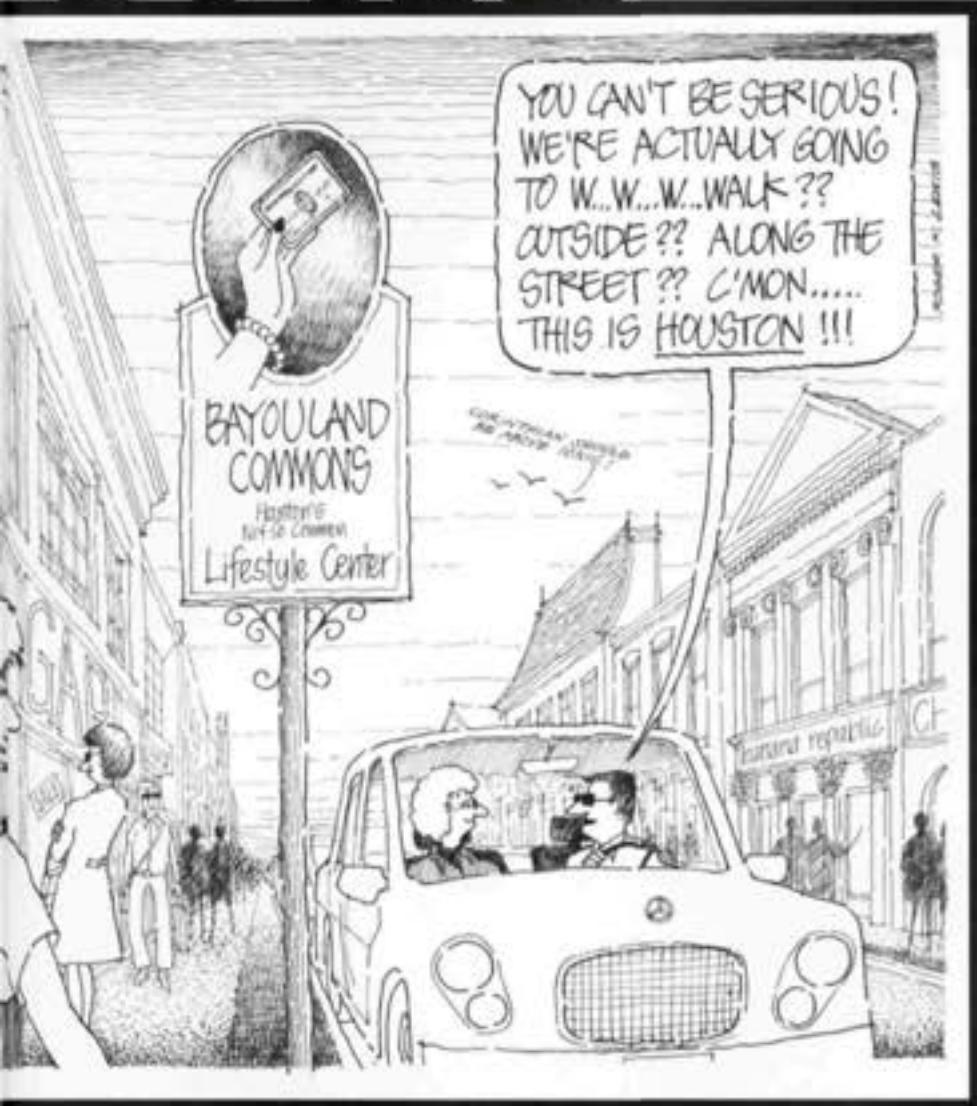
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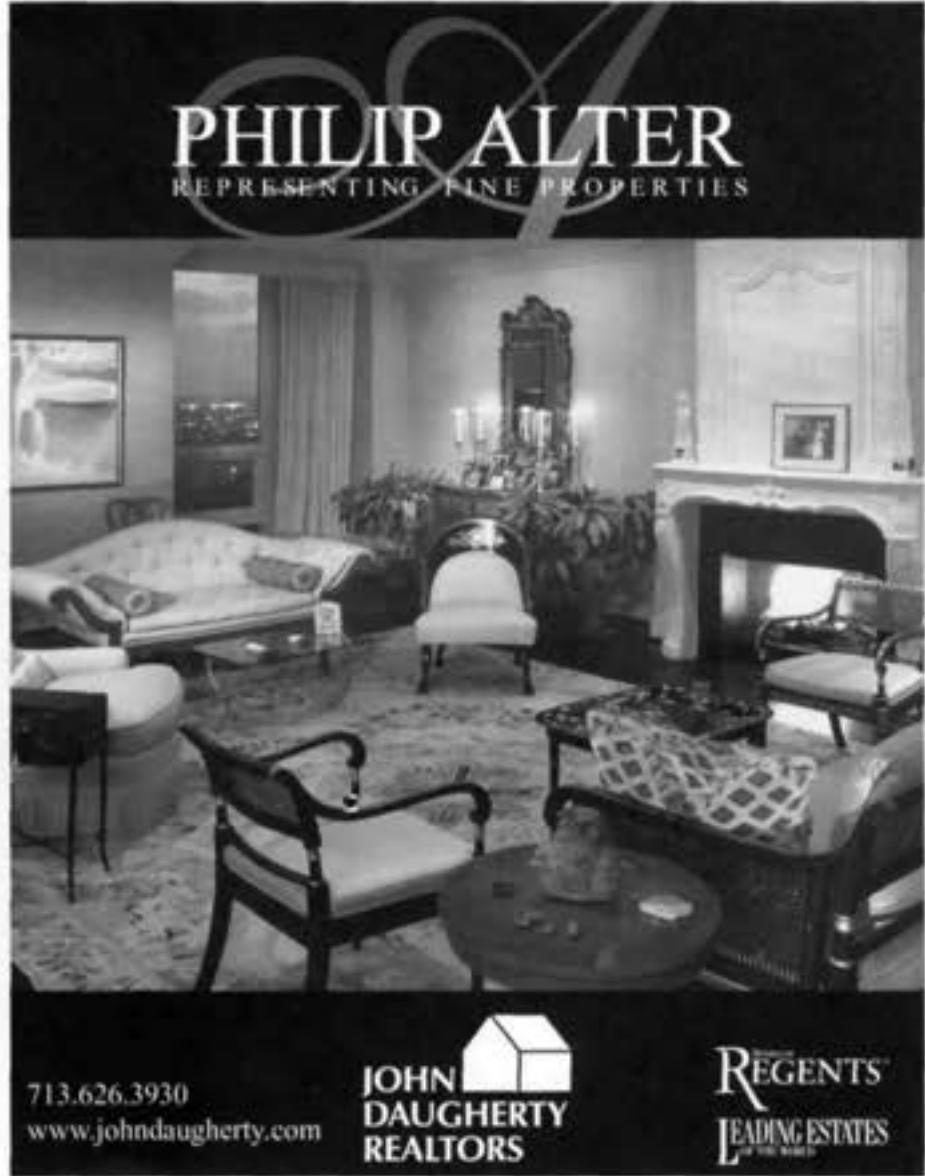
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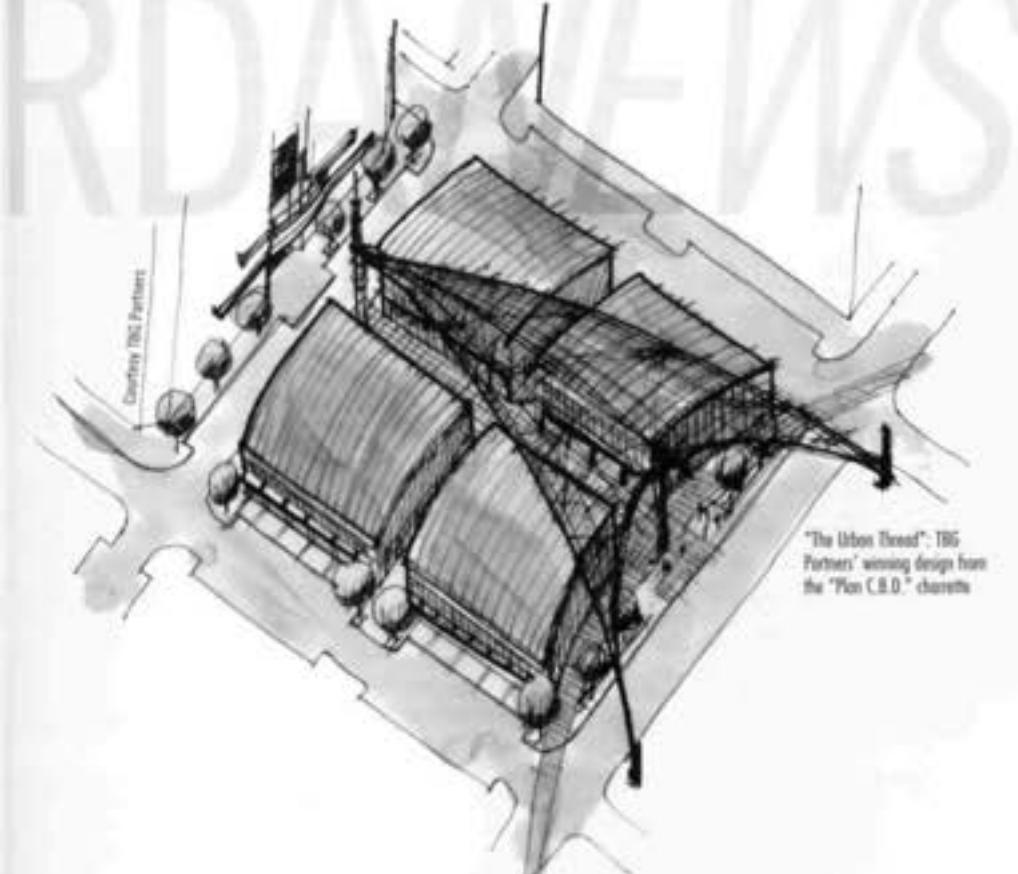


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## Plan C.B.D.: The RDA Partners 2005 Design Charrette

TBG Partners, a landscape architecture and land-planning firm, was recently presented with the Honor Award for Most Sustainable Design at the RDA Partners 2005 Design Charrette. "Plan C.B.D." focused on urban design within the Central Business District of Houston. As always, the Design Charrette was open to architects and non-architects, individuals, and teams of up to five people. Participants arrived at the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture at the University of Houston and worked energetically from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Designs were hung in the atrium and judged by Clark Martinson, General Manager of the Energy Corridor District; Amar Mohite, Planner for the City of Houston, and Cyndi Robinson, Senior Transit Planner with the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

The winning design, "The Urban Thread," is intended to promote more convenient residential living in central Houston around the future downtown park and along La Branch Street. Residential brownstones front the proposed downtown park with mixed-use retail anchoring the corners of La Branch and Dallas as well as La Branch and Walker. An urban marker is designed for a site just west of the proposed downtown park directly across La Branch. TBG Partners' team consisted of Bill Odle, Drew Mengwasser, Meade Mitchell, Matt Manda, and Paul Homeyer from Gensler.

A merit award was given to the team of Clark Condon Associates, including David Daughtry, Brian Roth, and Paul Weathers, for their scheme, "A River Runs Through It." Participants from SHW Group, including David Baldacchino, Luis Fernandez, Bob Liu, Reyna Masters, and Dan Whalen, were given a merit award for their design, "Trail Mix."

## 2005 Initiatives for Houston Grants Announced

The Rice Design Alliance continues to support the study of Houston's built environment with its sixth annual Initiatives for Houston grants program. Three winning proposals will be funded of the seven submitted by students and faculty at the Rice University School of Architecture and the University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture.

In "Deploying Exurbia," UH masters degree candidate Heath West will outline the possibilities available for architects and urban planners in the chain-builder communities growing up outside of Houston's Loops. West was awarded \$2,000 to expand his study of current residential community development practices in Houston.

Architects Charles Tapley and Chula Ross Sanchez, both adjunct faculty at UH, were awarded \$4,500 toward the purchase of data-collection equipment and plants for their proposal, "Green Roof." Tapley and Sanchez will create green roof mock-ups for use by students and Houston's community at large, ultimately using the data they collect to plan a 2,000 square-foot green roof for the Bairdette Keeland Design Exploration Center at UH.

In "Houston Hope: Strategies for Change," Rafael Longoria, UH professor of architecture, and Susan Rogers, visiting assistant professor of architecture and interim director of the Community Design Resource Center, have reported on the success of a major initiative to improve the quality of life in six of Houston's most blighted neighborhoods. Longoria and Rogers were awarded \$3,500 to publish the results of their study on the working partnership between the University of Houston, the

City of Houston Planning Department, and the citizens of these six neighborhoods to make housing affordable and the communities healthy using design as a strategy for change.

Initiatives for Houston proposals are evaluated in terms of their potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the city.

## RDA Travelers Head to Phoenix, Charleston, Paris

The RDA has planned something for everyone in its 2006 Hometown Tours. Each destination—the Arizona desert in February, Charleston in June, Paris in the fall—will offer travelers exceptional architectural experiences. Knowledgeable guides and expert speakers will lead private tours of homes and public buildings in these three beautiful, and very different, settings.

First up is Phoenix, February 23 through 26, 2006. With a population of 1.4 million, Phoenix is the sixth largest city in the U.S. and the capital of Arizona. Along with adjoining cities Tempe and Scottsdale, Phoenix spreads across a basin in the Salt River valley rimmed by mountain ranges. This spectacular landscape inspired Frank Lloyd Wright to establish a winter camp in the Sonoran desert in 1929, which was the forerunner to his winter home, Taliesin West (1938), where he shaped his architecture for the desert. Wright came to Phoenix to collaborate with his former draftsman Albert Chase MacArthur, Jr., on the design of the Arizona Biltmore resort hotel (1929), marking Phoenix's emergence as a regional city in the 1920s. Since the 1980s, Phoenix has seen an outburst of bold, imaginative, regionally-inflected architecture by Will Bruder, Wendell Burnette, Jones Studio, and Marwan Al-Sayed. With significant new buildings by Tod Williams-Billie Tsien & Associates, Richard Meier & Partners, Antoine Predock, and Mack Scogin-Merrill Elam, Phoenix has emerged as one of the most architecturally exuberant cities in the U.S.

Next, RDA will be traveling to Charleston, June 8 through 11. Charleston was the Houston of its day: In 1770 it was the fourth-larg-

est city in Great Britain's Atlantic seaboard colonies. Laid out on the Grand Modell (a city plan of 1680) on a peninsula between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers—which flow together to create the Atlantic Ocean, as Charlestonians like to insist—Charleston is one of the most architecturally distinctive cities in the U.S. Built with 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century landmarks of Anglo-American architecture by Gabriel Manigault, William Jay, Robert Mills, Russell Warren, Thomas U. Walter, Charles Reichardt, E.B. White, and Edward C. Jones, it is where the "single house"—an American house type adapted to the local landscape and climate—took form. Afro-Charleston culture developed in the courts and "rows" hollowed out of the interstices of the Grand Modell, behind the merchants' and planters' houses, the tall-spired churches, and the imposing Palladian public buildings that still impress with their stateliness.

Great cities place importance on quality design at all scales. When RDA crosses the Atlantic for the first time in October 2006, it will be to one of the greatest of them all, Paris. The urban fabric there has been woven over centuries to include the significant monuments, famous public spaces, and architectural jewels, as well as the creative institutions devoted to the design of furniture, architecture, landscape, and fashion. Light and glass have been principle elements in Paris architecture, as can be seen in the Sainte-Chapelle's gothic elegance, Pierre Charreau's inimitable *Maison de Verre*, and Jean Nouvel's refined Institute of the Arab World and Cartier Foundation. Henri Labrouste's use of iron in the Ste-Geneviève Library exemplifies the tradition of harnessing the potential of innovative construction techniques, as do Auguste Perret's exploration of reinforced concrete as a structural and expressive material in numerous homes and public buildings, and Piano and Rogers's industrial tech Pompidou Center. A day trip to Chartres Cathedral confirms the integration of light and building technology as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

There is a waiting list for the Paris trip. For information, pricing, or to sign up for any of these RDA Hometown Tours, visit the RDA website at [rda.rice.edu](http://rda.rice.edu), or contact RDA tour director Lynn Kelly at 713-256-3244 or [lynn\\_kelly\\_tx@yahoo.com](mailto:lynn_kelly_tx@yahoo.com).

## rda gala 2005

### a modern classic

The 19th annual Rice Design Alliance gala this year honored a modern classic, interior designer Herbert Wells. Accompanied by his companion Anne Farish and his business partner Jerry Jeannard, Wells held court in his "living room," which was literally moved from his home to the party site at The Pavilion to illustrate his eclectic design sensibilities. RDA President Barbara Amello greeted the over 1,000 guests who gathered to honor Wells and to feast on a scrumptious dinner provided by Jackson and Company. Bidding was active on the nearly 200 designer auction items, many of which were donated by longtime vendors of Wells and reflected his high-quality aesthetic.

Herbert Wells's style is eclectic but his sensibility is modern. Since beginning practice in Houston in 1949, Wells has transformed the interiors of numerous Houston dwellings. He is especially known for his subtle color combinations, toned to enhance the visual and textural sensations produced by pieces of furniture, fabrics, and especially works of art.

Gala environment co-chairs Lauren Rottet and Kellie Mayfield of DMJM Rottet designed a welcoming space that took advantage of The Pavilion's soaring palm trees and reflected Wells's style. Patterns from his favorite fabrics were reflected on walls and printed on banners, designed by Alan Krathaus and Fiona McGgettigan of Core Design. Colors for the evening were Wells's signature blue and brown.

Gala Chair Judith McClain was all smiles as she greeted the guests. After having served previously as RDA gala Auction Chair and Underwriting CoChair and now as Gala Chair, Judith also bid farewell to friends as she leaves Houston to become the Alumni Director of the Medical School at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock.

Gala Underwriting Chair David Spaw with his new bride Joanie was aglow not only because of his recent marriage but also because this year's event broke all previous records, raising over \$458,000 for RDA programs. Add that to the auction proceeds, and gala proceeds topped a half-million dollars this year, heavily supported by friends of Herbert Wells. Auction chair Katherine King and a setup team led by Sydney Lencir used their design talent to display items that many could not resist.

Seen in the crowd were Y. Ping Sun and David Leebron, president of Rice University, who marveled at the support of the Houston design community; Raymond and Susan Brochstein; Jim and Jo Furr; Margaret and Louis Skidmore; Paul Johnston; Sara Dodd Spickelmier with husband Keith and father Jim Paschell; Herbert Wells's daughter Cathy Carter Malone and her daughter Meg; and Stephen Farish; as well as numerous Wells friends and supporters.

At a special event honoring Gala 2005 underwriters at the home of Nancy and George Peterkin, Herbert Wells received the RDA award, a Mossi vase designed by René Lalique in 1933 and generously donated by Lalique in The Galleria. The Peterkin home was designed by Houston architect Howard Barnstone and interiors were specified by Herbert Wells. Guests were treated to an environment created by the master.



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Left Architects: John Casbarian, Danny Samuels, and Bob Timme at RDA's first "Fireplace Chat," January 1985.

*Robert H. Timme, dean of the University of Southern California School of Architecture, former dean of the UH College of Architecture, and founding partner of Taft Architects, died on October 20, 2005, of complications of lung cancer. He was 60. His partners in Taft Architects wrote the following remembrance of him.*

## ROBERT H. TIMME (1945-2005)

Our association with Bob was much more than a professional partnership. It was a real-life adventure for kindred souls with common aspirations and interests: a joyful collaboration in a magical enterprise that included work and play, exploration and discovery. Bob Timme was our partner, friend, indeed our brother.

The three of us first met on a hot and steamy August Monday in 1965, as we began our studies at the Rice School of Architecture. Bob had been majoring in biology for two years when he transferred to architecture, legend has it, after seeing a suite mate in architecture using fancy, multi-colored magic markers to render his project. An upperclassman in the freshman studio, Bob exuded not only confidence, but also an effusive geniality to us bewildered newcomers. The three of us gravitated toward each other, perhaps initially out of curiosity, but also out of an intuitive sense of common interests and beliefs.

Our friendship grew over those years, but we were also rivals, constantly looking over our shoulders at each others' work. It was fun and exciting, and Bob, with never-ending energy and drive, pushed us to the limits. Together we taunted bad teachers, challenged good ones, and generally wreaked havoc. When Paul Kennon dictated that all studios were to be painted white and tables aligned in orderly rows, the three of us (at Bob's suggestion) built a colorful, round gazebo over our desks.

We expected an angry reaction, but Kennon encouraged our creativity instead, and became our first mentor.

Our first collaboration during our freshman year was a project to design a structure using only wood dowels, string and glue that could carry heavy loads. We started out working alone, but it quickly became clear in the preliminary load testing that Danny knew the secret: you could increase strength by pre-tensioning the structural members. Seeing this, Bob quickly suggested that the three of us form a team and make our solution together.

Later we worked together on several competitions, forging an academic collaboration. When one visiting faculty member realized we were moonlighting together, he remarked that we were "in cahoots." We submitted the project under the collective name Architects Incahoots & Associates (AIA), tongues firmly in cheek.

After graduation, we all ended up working in Houston, and hanging out together in the evenings to discuss our work. We rented a storefront space on Taft and Fairview; it became our clubhouse, and later, our office. The "AIA" name stuck until with the same tongue-in-cheekiness we changed it to the seemingly more conservative Taft Architects.

Bob was the original multi-tasker. When he went home at night nothing stopped. Everything from his desk was dumped into shopping bags to take home. There, he would watch videos, cook a gourmet dinner, and at the same time build the most beautifully detailed wood models of our projects, prepare work for his students, read books on color and gardens, all while drinking glasses of fine wine topped off with cognac. The next day he would appear with the finished models to show us, and also discuss some item he had read or a detail of a movie he had watched.

Bob relished challenges of mak-

ing things. When the contractor of the Estes House, one of our first projects, went bankrupt, Bob took over the construction and finished the job. One of Bob's students, who had been a ceramic artist before turning to architecture, came to work for us, and soon after we were not only using ceramics in our work, but had purchased a kiln at Bob's insistence, and were firing away at will. When his daughter Elizabeth was almost two years old and we went on a trip to Utah to give a lecture and then ski, he made beautiful tiny skis for her by hand.

Architecture for us was a means of living life to its fullest. We accepted guest lectureships, but only in places where we could go skiing afterward, or lie in the sun, or discover a great restaurant, or have good wine. We scandalized the American Academy in Rome when we applied together for a single Advanced Fellowship, but received the award at the admonition of a jury familiar with our triumvirate. On our first day in Rome, we ate pasta al checca at a small family restaurant, a pasta dish made with fresh raw tomatoes. Bob liked it so much and had so many helpings that the restaurant ran out of it. Bob insisted: more pasta. The owner offered everything else, but Bob was adamant. Twenty minutes later, a new platter of pasta al checca appeared.

Yes, we had our differences, and we did not always agree, and sometimes we could really be angry with one another. Yet, by the end of each day, our common spirit won out and we toasted our good fortune to be together. Bob always said our work was the result of consensus rather than majority rule. If one of us had a different point of view, the other two felt obliged to listen and understand rather than dismiss.

When Bob left Houston for Los Angeles ten years ago, it seemed temporary. Our phone conversations continued, and we relished the times we found ourselves together at some conference or gathering. This past January, John and Bob spent a few days at our house in Saint Sauvant to work on a small hotel with our architect friends in the village. Nothing had changed. Bob started sketching immediately, looking for scraps to make a model, watching the news in French on TV, and doing something else on his computer. We drank wine, ate oysters and confit de canard, and of course drank lots of cognac.

This is how we cherish the memory and legacy of our Bob. — *John Casbarian and Danny Samuels*

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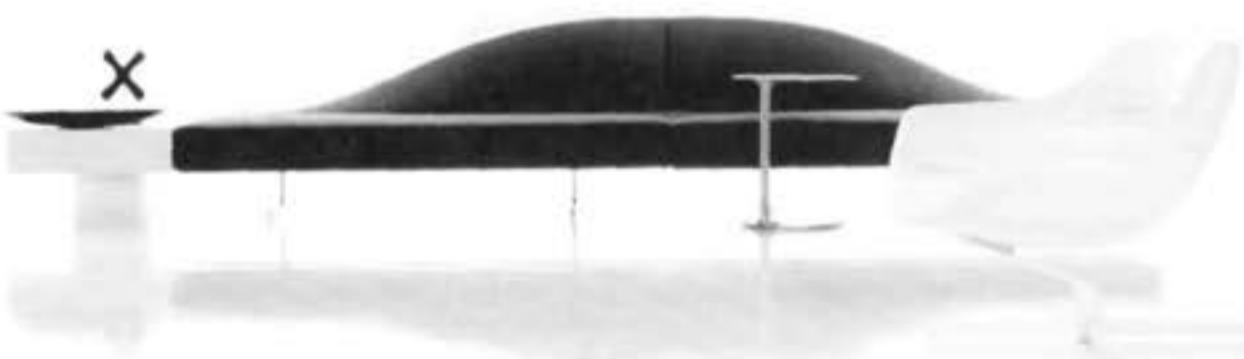
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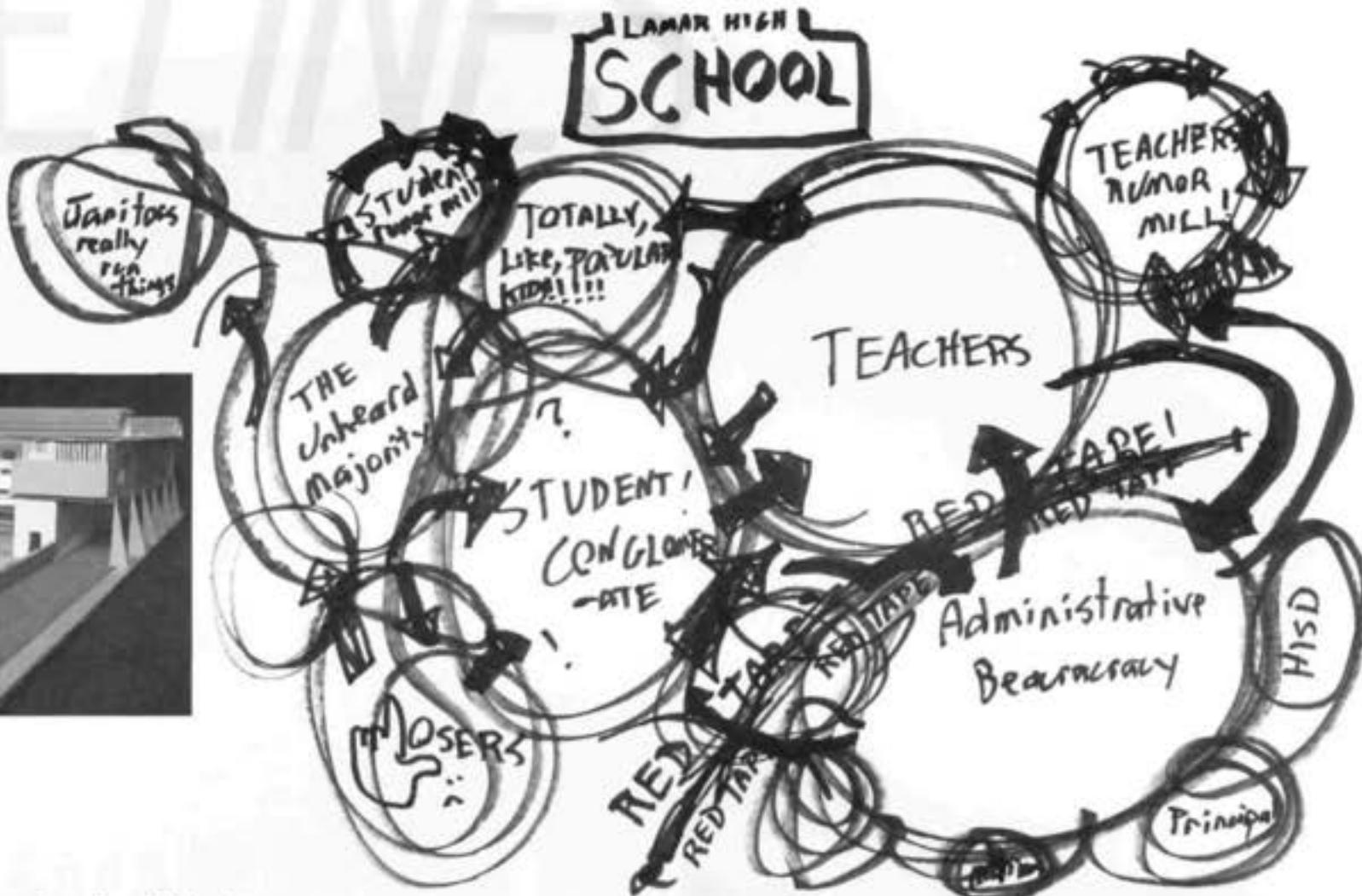
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Above: High school student Alberto Ortiz's model for a museum district school.  
Right: Zackary Van Brunt's conceptual map of the spheres of influence at work in his high school.



## Mapping a Future in Architecture

The distinctive and inquisitive voice of radio personality Ira Glass competes with the nervous energy in the second floor studio at the University of Houston College of Architecture. It's the first day of the annual Summer Discovery program and nearly 60 would-be architects are busy at their desks, mapping their worlds at three different scales. Working along with an episode of *NPR's This American Life* streaming from a laptop on the topic of mapping, these students do not yet comprehend the sophistication of the things they are revealing. Armed with only black sharpie markers and tabloid sized office paper, the students struggle to represent (from memory) maps of their bedrooms, their high schools, and the route they took that morning from home to the UH campus.

An unlikely first project for an introduction to architecture course, this exercise asks the students to consider their most familiar and intimate surroundings, and the personal relationships they establish with the built environment. Unlike the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) featured in Rafael Longoria's "Mapping Houston" (Cite 64, Summer 2005), this approach values the students' own experiences and memories over precise recording of "the facts." The work produced is surprisingly original, and offers more insight into how they perceive their own position in the home, institution, and the city than carefully drafted floor plans or accurately rendered perspective drawing ever could.

Students in Summer Discovery are selected from high schools across Houston and occasionally beyond for the five-week intensive summer program designed to give them a taste of architecture school, and to prepare them for applying to college architecture programs. Now in its tenth year under the direction of Drexel Turner, the Program began as an outreach initiative of the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture at the University of Houston. The teaching team headed this year by Kari Smith is an ensemble of recent graduates and current students from Rice and UH.

As Ira Glass says at the start of the radio program on mapmaking, maps ask us to look at the world and consider just one thing, to the exclusion of everything else. This kind of looking allows the student's individual vision and voice to come forward. They are challenged to choose what will be represented, and what will be absent; in essence, to decide what matters. For beginning students this kind of critical thinking and decision making takes them much further toward what it means to be an architect than learning basic drafting skills and CAD software would.

These first lessons in selectivity, subjectivity, representation, and contextualization are difficult concepts to grasp. At first glance, Zackary Van Brunt's map of his high school is unrecognizable as cartography. Lacking exposure to conventions of contemporary mapmaking allowed him to create a more fluidic

representation of relationships and information that resembles the bubble diagrams architects often employ for programming. Closer inspection reveals the complexity of the unique language he has created in order to portray the relationships and power dynamics of a public high school. The size of the circles pertains not to numbers of people, or even to space within the building, but rather to spheres of influence within the system. Arrows, tangencies, and adjacencies mark relationships between groups as well as chains of command. For instance, in Van Brunt's view, the janitors "really run things": His diagram illustrates their connection with the "unheard majority" and their distance from the principal and administration. Overall, the most intriguing maps reveal the mapmakers own hidden agendas, personal fears, desires, life experiences, and cultural positioning.

The complicated analysis developed in this early assignment readily translates into the final project for the studio—designing a small school in the museum district. Students worked in small groups to craft the program for the school. Having already considered their perceptions of relationships to their own high schools through the mapping exercise, they were able to engage in thoughtful discussions during the program development phase. Participating in the design of their own programs creates a greater level of engagement with the project and a deeper investment.

Without pre-defined program or square footage requirements, the students came up with five distinct school programs, among them a culinary arts institute (complete with in-house, student-run restaurant) and a television and radio learning center. Furthermore, the students were challenged to determine, on their own, square footage needs based on the site restrictions and opportunities; the number of students, faculty, and staff; and the kinds of learning environments and activities they wished to accommodate. Often a student would start with the furniture required for a single work station, for instance, and then calculate the spatial needs from there, an approach that led to very carefully considered rooms and a more comprehensive and memorable understanding of space planning.

The studio is dedicated to guiding each student in the understanding of the practice of architecture and the clarification of his or her personal direction. Activities aim to establish and foster a process-oriented working environment, where knowledge is gained from experimentation and iteration. Even students who decide that architecture is not for them have learned through experience to expand their initial assumptions in solving problems. With this experience they are better positioned to know what to expect from an education and career in architecture, and, more importantly, to know a little bit more about themselves and their relationship with the built environment.

— Kayte Young and Kari Smith

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"The real possibility of a community": Boulevard Place, Wulfe & Co.'s mixed-use urban oasis, will include the site of the underperforming Saks Pavilion.

## Retail Resurrection: The Death and Rebirth of Saks Pavilion

With the recent residential land rush within the city center, Houston's Inner Loop retail markets are also accelerating, or more accurately up-scaling and densifying in a surprising diversity of places. At least two major retail and entertainment venues are being brought on line in the downtown area—the next phase of Bayou Place, and a new site three blocks south of Houston Center and west of the nascent central park/George R. Brown Convention precinct. In addition, there are at least four projects on the west end near or at Loop 610 that rival if not surpass the scale of these downtown ventures. Catering to the River Oaks, West University, Tanglewood, and Memorial neighborhoods, these "lifestyle centers" (see "Lifestyle Centers Coming (Back) to Houston," page 26) will witness the beginning of a new Houston urban environment.

Not only have prosperous demographics pushed shopping to a new level of success and demand, but the proximity of a number of under-utilized but land-valuable sites also offers the right locations. The momentum comes as well from the desire of an increasing number of consumers to live, work, play, and generally be inside the Loop. (The cost of gas does not hurt either.)

Post Oak Boulevard is, to many retail cognoscenti, ground zero of Houston commercial potential, anchored

on one end by the regional behemoth of the Galleria (see "City Under Glass," page 20), itself growing, and the numerous condo towers and offices on the other. As the Uptown District's website touts,

*With more than 2.3 million square feet of commercial office space, Uptown Houston represents approximately 14 percent of Houston's total office space, making it only second in terms of size to Downtown Houston. Uptown Houston is the 14th largest business center in the U.S., with five million square feet of gross leasable retail space, more than any other retail destination in Houston. The Galleria is ranked the fifth largest retail complex in the country.*

On this golden mile it was only a matter of time before the bedeviled Saks Pavilion site would be the focus of redevelopment. While there are other less-developed sites along the Boulevard, a unique geographic and economic opportunity will drive this site to a new level of mixed-use density we have not seen before in Houston.

As stated five years ago in the *Houston Business Journal* report on "tenant defections," the 286,000-square-foot Pavilion retail center was then only 20 percent occupied. Its history was troubled: It was built shortly before the first "energy bust" in 1972 by Saks Fifth Avenue, which wanted a separate presence from the Neiman Marcus-branded Galleria, and dubbed the Saks Fifth Avenue Fashion Center. Since then, "The complex has changed hands at least four times in its 28 years [before 2000]."<sup>1</sup> In 1988, a major expansion was completed by then-owner BT Pavilion Corp., an affiliate of New York-based Bankers Trust, again just before a slow economic period. That

round of construction added the entire front portion of retail space, underground parking, and high-end touches such as palm trees and the glass atrium-like ceiling in the two-story center.<sup>2</sup> Yet less than 10 years later Saks re-strategized and tried to relocate to the old Marshall Field's space in the Galleria to go head-to-head with Neiman Marcus. The Pavilion had been purchased in 1995 by Radler Pavilion LP who:

*slapped the specialty retailer with a \$130 million breach-of-contract lawsuit to stop Saks from leaving. At the time, the Pavilion's lawyer said Saks' lease dictated the department store keep its Pavilion post until 2008. In the meantime, Saks had sunk \$50 million into dazzling new digs a few blocks away at The Galleria. The lawsuit claimed Saks' vacating of the property would devastate the high-fashion mall at 1800 Post Oak. Radler also sued Saks for defamation, claiming the company damaged the Pavilion's reputation by making unflattering remarks about the location.<sup>3</sup>*

And so Saks has stayed until the entire Pavilion's demise.

In the last several years Wulfe & Co., which owned the eight-acre strip center on the southwest corner of Post Oak Boulevard and San Felipe (anchored on either end by Eatzies and Café Annie's), had been studying a way to redevelop that site into a dense mix of commercial retail and office. The growing Inner Loop apartment and condo market also allowed for potential residential towers in the blend. As Ed Wulfe notes, this development sits on an intersection unrivaled anywhere in the state and perhaps the country; it is the crossing of the commercial powerhouse of Post Oak Boulevard and the golden arte-

rial of San Felipe. The former anchors the Uptown District and hosts approximately 200,000 office workers and shoppers daily and more than 18 million visitors from all over the world each year. The latter is the straight-shot drive connecting Houston's most affluent cluster of neighborhoods, including River Oaks, Tanglewood, and Memorial. This was a site on which to do great things. But Wulfe's development team, including Hermes Architects as planners, was challenged to balance an attractive retail destination and the needed density on this fairly tight site. The value of land meant parking would be either below grade or in structures. In addition, the planning scenarios emphasized that a large retail magnet (with its commensurate large-scale ground floor footprint) was vital in order to readily draw the targeted customer to an inviting Lifestyle Center environment, that itself was predicated on a costly pedestrian-friendly urban oasis. The eight-acre strip center site could not, in numerous scenarios, work as well as the savvy developer knew it would need to.

So Wulfe & Co. turned its attention to the south, to the underperforming Saks Pavilion. The then-owner was at first not interested in selling a strip of its contiguous land to augment the smaller Wulfe site's limitations. But, in a Houston-sized big deal, Ed Wulfe moved to secure the option to purchase the entire Pavilion site and amass 21 acres for the development of an even larger high-density mixed-use project, now named Boulevard Place.

As delineated on the Wulfe & Co. website, the evolving concept anticipates the construction of two new streets: an extension of Post Oak Lane south from San Felipe to Ambassador Way, and a new east-west street, Boulevard Place Drive, which will connect Post Oak Boulevard to Post Oak Lane. The new project will include approximately 375,000 square feet of upscale retail shops and restaurants, 800 mid- and high-rise residential units, and a 225-room upscale hotel.

While the Wulfe & Co. team will develop the master plan to coordinate the entire development, Ed Wulfe is looking to focus single-mindedly on a lively pedestrian environment and ground floor commercial enterprises. After all, retail strategies are his expertise. Thus Wulfe is looking to sell air rights or ground rights to other developers whose expertise lies in office and residential offerings. "I listen to the consumers—I gauge their desires and I respect their perspectives," says Wulfe. "This development can leverage on future mass transit and the real possibility of a community that we have not seen before anywhere." —Rives T. Taylor

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Tenant defections started Pavilion problems," *Houston Business Journal*, January 7, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid



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## A Place to Come To



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Top: Westin hotel scheme for a civic park to be located on a site in front of the George R. Brown Convention Center, pictured above. Architects: Kippner Associates.

Could a 12-acre park succeed in doing what a pair of sports arenas and a convention hotel have so far failed to accomplish—bring the spark of residential life to the east side of downtown?

That's the promise, or more properly the hope, being offered up by the planners behind the still-unnamed park that will sit in front of the George R. Brown Convention Center. As plans for the space, bounded by Avenida de las Americas to the east, La Branch to the west, Lamar to the south, and McKinney to the north, were being unveiled in October and November, one point became clear: if it were to achieve all the goals set for it, then it would require a large number of nearby neighbors, not just visitors traveling in from the suburbs.

Not surprisingly then, preliminary renderings of the park and its environs include a number of flanking residential towers rather than the sea of car-covered asphalt that currently fills much of the real estate. These drawings are not just a designer's fancy, insists Mary Margaret Jones, president of Hargreaves Associates,

the San Francisco-based landscape architecture, planning, and urban design firm selected to be project lead for the park. While admitting that "the biggest problem the site has is that it surrounded by surface parking lots," she adds that her experience with similar undertakings in Louisville, Kentucky, and San Jose, California, have convinced her that a park, more than most other urban developments, spurs residential construction. "What we have found in our other projects is that often the park comes first," she says. "It is the park that helps be a catalyst, because suddenly there's an address for residential development. And then you have the perfect mix—people working, living, playing around the park."

It was in part the success of Hargreaves's work in Louisville and San Jose that led to the firm being selected to oversee the Houston project. Hargreaves, along with team partners PageSoutherlandPage and Lauren Griffith Associates, was one of four finalists interviewed, the others being the Office of James Burnett with SOM, West 8 with Clark Condon, and Gustafson Guthrie Nichol Ltd. with McDugald-Steele and Rey de la Reza. According to Guy Hagstette, a special advisor to the mayor for downtown urban development who will, in January, become full-time director of the new park, what helped set Hargreaves apart from the rest was not simply its history with other urban parks, but also its analysis of the climate and micro-climates of Houston's park site and of the environment around the park, both as it is today and how it will change as development occurs. That last, Hagstette notes, is of particular importance to the Houston Park Conservancy, the private non-profit that will manage the park for the city.

A schematic design of the new park is scheduled for completion by the end of 2005, with final design to be done by mid-summer 2006, and construction started in late summer. The park's opening is set for October 2007. Meanwhile, the Park Conservancy has been gathering suggestions from the public about what should be included in the park, suggestions that have led to a preliminary map of the space that Hagstette describes as a "starting point" for the design process. Included on the map are such neighborhood amenities as a dog run and jogging paths along with an area for a farmers market, a white-table restaurant and a snack bar, a pond for sailing model boats, gardens, a "great lawn," and an avenue for kiosks that can be adapted for use by ethnic, art, and other temporary festivals.

How much of that will remain in the final design, and what will give way to other amenities, is uncertain at this point, but according to Hagstette what will not change is the desire to create a mix of ele-

ments that will make the park appealing both to people living next door to it, and to those who will have to travel to reach it. To keep the park active, he says, will require more than simply good design, as important as that might be. It will also require active management. "The missing ingredient in Houston is that public spaces like this park need to be programmed and managed just like a cultural venue would be, and we haven't had that," says Hagstette. "Our desired list of activities for this park is quite long. It may even be unrealistic. But the whole idea is to have a rich layering of different activities, so much so that when you go there you see something you could experience everywhere you turn."

Hargreaves's Mary Margaret Jones agrees. One point her firm emphasizes in its downtown projects, she says, is the need for a full time manager. A park that has only occasional events, and is left fallow the rest of the time, is unlikely to be a success, she says. Louisville is just one city where the active management model has proven its worth, Jones notes. The park Hargreaves developed there was built next to parking lots and post-industrial land on the edge of downtown. From the moment it opened it was programmed almost daily with festivals, fireworks, and other events, Jones says, and as a result it quickly filled with people. In the beginning they had to come to the park by car, she says, but they came. And now the park is surrounded by high-rise residential, offices, and even a minor league baseball stadium. "Phase one of the park was built about eight years ago," she says, "and now a second phase is under construction because it was so successful."

Whether that success can be replicated in Houston, where downtown parks have tended to be empty of people more often than not, remains to be seen. But Hagstette is convinced that the park fronting the George R. Brown will be different, and perhaps even set a pattern that other downtown parks can learn from. Already, he notes, some downtown developers have shown faith in the park's prospects. One nearby block has been purchased for use as high-rise residential, and two other nearby blocks are under option for residential use. In each case, the park was cited as a reason for the development.

Of course, there's no guarantee that the towers will be built. Five years ago, similar residential high-rises were announced in the wake of Minute Maid Park's completion. Those complexes never got off the ground, and the same thing could happen again. Still, Hagstette, Jones, and the others involved with the development of downtown's new park think they've got the right lure this time, something that will bring people into central Houston not just to visit, but to stay.

— *Mitchell J. Shields*



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The El Dorado Ballroom will again become the cultural center of the Third Ward, thanks to owner Row House Community Development Corporation.

## Howling on Dowling

A revamping is in the works for one of Houston's most important cultural landmarks. The El Dorado Ballroom, on Dowling at Elgin in the center of the historic Third Ward, may soon be restored to its former elegance. From its very beginning "the 'Rado" was a symbol of the community's pride as well as its most prestigious focal point, especially for musicians.

The El Dorado Ballroom was built in 1939 by philanthropist Anna Dupree and her jazz impresario husband Clarence to establish a "class" venue for black social clubs and general entertainment. They hired architect Lenard Gabert, a graduate of Rice's first architecture class in 1916, who produced a streamlined modernistic building with a rounded corner facing the intersection. Large plate glass windows in the second floor ballroom (later shrunk to a horizontal band of glass after a fire in 1952) looked out on Emancipation Park. The first floor was filled with commercial leases, originally featuring a restaurant, clothing store, appliance shop, and a photographer. Later tenants included a diner, barbershop, beauty shop, insurance agency, and a tailor—just what the neighborhood would have needed at its main commercial crossroads.

When it opened, black musicians had plenty of honky tonks and low class joints to play in; the El Dorado was one of the few high class, jacket-and-tie, white table-cloth establishments available to blacks this side of New Orleans. Patrons could expect to enjoy the big band sounds of big stars as well as the work of local talent. The establishment served beer and set-ups, and patrons brought harder stuff in paper sacks, just like at all the white clubs.

El Dorado, the "Home of Happy Feet," was the first showcase in Texas for black music. In the late 1930s and '40s it was the venue of choice for blues, jazz, talent shows, and dances. The club was

closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, but on Wednesday nights ladies got in free. In the 1950s the 'Rado lineup featured Pluma Davis's Eight Piece Band, T. Bone Walker, Jimmy Reed, Guitar Slim, Charles Brown, Bill Doggett, Etta James, and the superstar Ray Charles.

Roger Wood's *Down in Houston*, a great book about Houston's jazz and blues legacy, quotes trumpet player Calvin Owens: "Playing the El Dorado—I mean that's like saying, OK, I've made it." And impresario John Green adds, "The El Dorado Ballroom was top of the line. Oh yeah, back in those days, people would really get dressed to hear a band there!" The site was celebrated in Conrad Johnson's 1947 single, "Howling on Dowling," recorded in Houston's Gold Star Record Studio.

The late 1960s and early '70s marked the steady decline of the El Dorado as a live music venue. The enterprise was crippled, like so many other black-owned businesses, by the negative economic impact of desegregation—a phenomenon repeated all over the South.

Sometimes it takes a while for good things to happen to historic places. In 1999 Row House Community Development Corporation bought the El Dorado building and the vacant lot next door on Dowling. According to Executive Director Antoine Bryant, the El Dorado will function once again as the cultural center of the Third Ward. Long-range plans include a mix of neighborhood-friendly retail on the first floor, including a restaurant with outdoor dining. In the short term, the organization is raising funds to install an elevator and a new fire stair; the air conditioning and roof are in great shape. Meanwhile the ballroom is open and available for rentals and special events.

Before long we'll all again be hearing the howling on Dowling. —Barry Moore

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## Follow the Money : Houston's Third Federal Reserve Building

BY GEORGE DODDS



Top: The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Houston Branch (Michael Graves and Associates with PGAL, 2005) welcomes visitors with open but secure arms; above: The parking structure is defended by gnarly and metal posts that lower to allow cars through.



Left: The front facade is perched behind a pile of ADA ramps and a steel defensive gate. Above: Robots move boxes of cash from vault to processing floor and back.

*Money, get away.  
Get a good job with good pay and you're okay.  
Money, it's a gas.  
Grab that cash with both hands and make a stash.  
New car, caviar, four star daydream.  
Think I'll buy me a football team.*

*Money, it's a crime.  
Share it fairly but don't take a slice of my pie.  
Money, so they say  
Is the root of all evil today.  
But if you ask for a raise it's no surprise that they're giving none away.*

*Money, get back.  
I'm all right Jack keep your hands off of my stash.  
Money, it's a hit.  
Don't give me that do goody good bullshit.  
I'm in the high-fidelity first class traveling set  
And I think I need a Lear jet.*

*Pink Floyd, "Money"  
© 1973 Pink Floyd Music Ltd.*

**THE KITCHEN OF A FAVORITE RESTAURANT,** the basement of a hospital, the working end of a meat packing plant: all are places better left unseen. Yet, to appreciate fully the architecture of the new Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Houston Branch (FRB Houston), you really need to stick your head into vast back room on the ground floor and follow the money. While they do not make it here (that's what the U.S. Treasury Department is for), they do process the hell out of it.

Periodic changes to the Prime Interest Rate notwithstanding, most Americans neither know nor care what the Fed does on a day-to-day basis, let alone that currency requires occasional "processing" and "flow control." This facility's public relations program, however, is engineered to change this, at least for those in Houston. Chairman Alan Greenspan, two parts Sphinx, one part Delphic Oracle, is

perhaps the most visible face of the Fed's historic spectral opacity. Through his periodic testimonies at Finance Committee hearings on Capitol Hill, delivered in a syntax that would make George Orwell weep, Greenspan regularly keeps Congress and Wall Street informed while reminding the hoi polloi that what we don't know is probably better left that way. Yet, the program for the Fed's Houston Branch (developed jointly by the local firm PGAL and Michael Graves and Associates [MGA] of Princeton) includes an ambitious educational agenda, to make more transparent the inner workings of an inherently covert, high-security institution.

The architecture of this machine-for-your-money is relentless in its logic, precise in its movements, and calculated to within a stupefyingly narrow range of tolerances. And that is just the 24-hour security force. Largely mechanical and digital, the manner in which currency is handled here is singularly extraordinary to watch close-up. Much like trapeze artists and tightrope walkers at the circus, the cash flow within the building's bowels will be a highlight of every carefully crafted group tour. On the ground floor robotic forklifts carry stainless steel-framed sarcophagi clad in bullet-proof glass from point to point. The ultimate destination of these boxes of cash—lots of boxes of lots of cash—is a fully automated, computer-controlled three-dimensional galvanized steel matrix (the vault) that moves and stores a virtual infinity of glass prisms of cash cargo vertically and horizontally at warp speed. To conjure a vague idea of this technological pageant, imagine the awe-inspiring vast warehouse from the final scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* combined with the claustrophobic rectilinear order of a "Borg" ship from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and that still doesn't do it justice. The process is nothing short of extraordinary, leaving

the slack-jawed visitor constantly looking over his/her shoulder, attempting to steer clear of the next robot on its way to some pre-determined undisclosed location.

#### Novus Ordo Seculorum

So who couldn't use a Lear jet, a Ferrari, or one's own professional sports team? Unlike the trappings of financial excess, money is fast becoming non-material in our material world. Whether or not it "is the root of all evil today," it is certainly far more fluid than it was a generation or two ago. Credit and debit cards, direct deposit, internet-based banking, and online bill payments have made cash, coin, and even checks seem quaint and almost obsolete. These recent changes in what was once a cash and carry culture left the Fed with tens of thousands of square feet of vacant office space on the second floor—space originally allotted for check processing, once a preoccupation of the Federal Reserve Dallas Bank. It is not unusual for Federal Reserve Banks to lease excess space to commercial tenants if it is not immediately needed, though it's difficult to imagine many tenants who would easily fit in this high-security enclave. FRB's are constructed for 50 year life spans and additional space can accommodate expanded operations as they evolve. Because of the uncertainty of the check operation during the planning stages of the building, officials said that a separate entry off of the garage was provided into the second floor to accommodate an outside tenant.

It took far more than a sizable stash of cash and "a four star daydream" to create this "new secular order" on Allen Parkway. This building complex is programmed in myriad ways, many of which will never be seen save for by a select few. This is not always a matter of security, as some are buried 40 feet below grade and

others are embedded within the building's walls and intestines. Among these is a digitally controlled "horizontal well system" to all-but-instantaneously detoxify and geologically stabilize what was a brown-field site; and a continuous-pour, horizontal concrete structural slab system that was necessary in order to construct this two-football-field-length building sans nettlesome expansion joints. Apparently the robots that transport all the currency into the vault find expansion joints unnerving.

Via the honorific entrance facing Allen Parkway, visitors pass beneath a bronze eagle perched atop a bronze pyramid through a bronze "revolver" (a.k.a., revolving door). Called "The Guardian," this is not just any old bronze eagle; it is a very large eagle. Its situation and wingspan make it seem far bigger than the great eagle (August Gaul, sculptor) in Philadelphia's old John Wanamaker Department Store (D. H. Burnham, architect). The Wanamaker eagle, relocated from the site of the 1904 St. Louis Exposition, ornamented one of the department store's grand interior "public squares." The Fed's eagle is more icon than ornament. The sculpture by Kent Ullberg, who was awarded the commission in a competition, is adapted from The Great Seal of the United States, found, among other places, on the back-side of the one dollar bill. Unfortunately, the talons of the Fed's eagle obscure one of the most important parts of America's financial iconography—the pyramid's severed top, filled with the Masonic "eye of reason." Despite its large scale, the eagle is partially obscured by the relatively young live oaks that confront the building along Allen Parkway. The architects originally had a curb cut, drop-off lane in mind along the Allen Parkway feeder, where school buses and other vehicles could drop passengers along the formal



entrance. This would have necessitated removing several of the trees, a proposal that the city nixed. Without the vehicular accommodation, the formal entrance is more a ceremonial gesture than a functional front door.

Entering under the eagle and beneath a two-story porch with Piacentini-esque columns, the combined effect seems better suited to Rome's Piazza Venezia circa 1930 than Houston's somewhat forlorn Allen Parkway circa 2005. Once inside the icy, air-conditioned interior, visitors first navigate a formidable phalanx of human and electronic protective measures. The Visitors Center, as yet unfinished during our tour in early August, is located just beyond this Checkpoint Charlie. In addition to elegant and well-detailed didactic displays by Houston-based The Douglas Group, the Visitors Center includes a window and a plasma screen affording visitors a glimpse of what is the most fascinating part of the building's operations—the ground floor sorting rooms and the vault. The FRBHouston is protected by a gaggle of highly-trained armed guards, a kettle of video cameras, and an exaltation of constantly monitored video monitors. Nonetheless, the Fed's public relations agenda will permit guided

group tours access to several floors of its operation relatively deep inside the perimeter. Organizations that are in line with the Economic Education and Financial Literacy mission of the Fed, and not in competition with other local venues may, for a fee, use the elegantly appointed conference facility equipped with state-of-the-art communications hardware for combined analog and digital meetings.

However, the Visitors Center may not be the best place to begin assessing the architecture of this amalgam of complicated programmatic restraints and site conditions. After spending the better part of a day touring the length and breadth of this building and its adjacent storage facilities (one for cars, the other for currency), it is difficult to know precisely where to begin. There are several entrances, depending on which category of visitor/user you fall into, and numerous ways of inhabiting this enclave, depending on what it is that brings you here. Visitors, employees, and Brinks truck drivers all experience a very different Houston Federal Reserve. For most Houstonians driving along Allen Parkway, it will remain an outside with no inside; its front facade conspicuously and curiously perched behind an unfortunate pile of ADA ramps and a less-than-

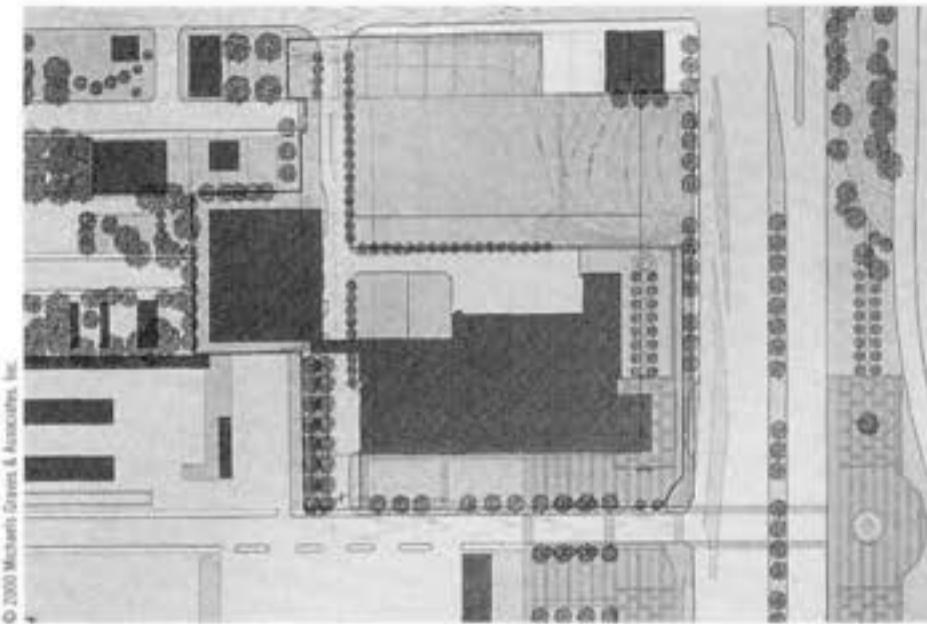
inviting steel defensive gate. Perhaps the best place to begin, therefore, is to summarize the project's beginning.

FRBHouston awarded MGA/PGAL the commission to design a replacement for its longstanding downtown Houston operation in 1999. Significant planning and programmatic studies were undertaken to justify requirements with approvals being required at several levels from Houston to Washington, D.C. Needing a facility more than three times the size of their most recent venue at 1701 San Jacinto by Goleman and Rolff architects (1958), the FRBHouston chose a large tract of land on Allen Parkway, bracketed by Taft and Gillette streets. The San Jacinto building, described by one local architectural wag as "pathologically anonymous," replaced Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick & Gottlieb's neoclassical Branch Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas (1922). Located at 1301 Texas Avenue, it is now home to the Houston Area Urban League. Their limitations notwithstanding, the first two FRBHouston buildings were located "downtown"—a term that until recently seemed misapplied to Houston. But now that the city sports a reviving CBD as well as theater and museum districts, it is unfortunate that the Feds

couldn't find another chunk of downtown on which to build.

The third Houston Branch is where it is, in large measure, owing to currency processing and security operational requirements. Indeed, it was not that long ago that you could drive up to the steps of the U.S. Capitol building without encountering a single security person, let your car idle, and march up the monumental stairs, your out-of-town visitor in tow, to briefly take in the architectural majesty of an open society. But the present-day implications seem to require no further elaboration. Things change.

Much has been published elsewhere about the urbanistic and cultural implications of the Allen Parkway site choice. Conveniently located near the nexus of two Interstate highways, the most visible marker of this site choice was the demolition of the WPA-era Jefferson Davis Hospital (1931-37), designed by architects A.C. Finn and Joseph Finger, by the previous owner, Finger Cos., an apartment development firm, who had planned to use the site for garden apartments. The architect's response to its environs was one of mediation and amelioration. It is challenging to register this in the completed complex, however, for several



reasons. Perhaps the most egregious of these is the choice and palette of materials that clad this 300,000 square foot polychromatic pile of brick and tile. The building's typology and coloration were ostensibly chosen to reflect the hues of local Southernity. Yet, the exterior bears a remarkable likeness to MGA's un-built Museums of Discovery Freedom Square, designed at the same time (2000) for Erie, Pennsylvania. I have been to Erie and to Houston. While both cities are located near large bodies of water, the similarities end there.

Perhaps one of the project's most tangible losses, architecturally and urbanistically, was its intended open relation to the surrounds, ameliorated by a straightforward albeit elegant landscape. The colored site plan published in *Michael Graves: Buildings & Projects 1995-2003*, and developed in conjunction with the local landscape architects at Clark Condon, Associates, shows the FRB Houston surrounded by bosques of trees, lawns, and promenades that engaged and re-invigorated the green space of Allen Parkway. Typical of Graves's drawings, any offending surroundings are masked out of the idyllic picture, including the City of Houston Vehicle Maintenance Facility that currently frames a view of the Federal Reserve from the east. Also missing are the dilapidated shotgun houses contiguous with the complex's parking garage. The idealized nature of the drawing notwithstanding, it demonstrates the architect's vision for the future site. This assemblage of building and landscape would have given back to the city the gift of a substantial public park, intended to seamlessly merge the parkway and Memorial Drive on the other side of Buffalo Bayou, bracketing the occasional festivals that encamp across from the FRB Houston. But no. In its place are a much-redacted landscape, and an extraordinarily long steel fence ornamented with more security cameras and monitoring devices than a Vegas

casino. The landscape architecture program was yet another victim of post 9/11 hyper-security trauma.

Elsewhere in the project, the architects adroitly responded to stronger facility security requirements adopted by the Federal Reserve System after 9/11 including security upgrades to the facility's materials and methods of construction. An inspection building where trucks are searched and scanned before moving to the secure loading zone was expanded from one lane to four. While the building's fully redundant structural system is subtly registered in the facade, most of the other redundancies are hidden: Virtually all utility services (telecommunications, water, gas, and electrical) are doubled. The entire compound is on the city electrical grid, however it also has its own backup power generation capabilities. This is one complex that could take a licking and keep on ticking. Moreover, the complex is fully outfitted as a small village with all the necessities, so that the staff needs to enter and leave the complex only once a day.

No amount of money or well-intentioned colored drawings will buy the love of many Houstonians still carping about the demolition of the Jefferson Davis Hospital. Yet, there are things money can buy. The quality of the interior finishes and attention to the smallest detail, a top flight security force, other highly trained staff, and well appointed, volumetrically generous facilities are first class. With a charming dining room adjacent to a large rooftop pergola-ed dining area for the general staff, an elegant yet simple private dining room for special events, a well equipped wellness center, a lovely Research Library with a cozy exedral-shaped memorial reading room, and an interior shooting range for the security staff (all firearms stay within the compound), the new Houston Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas must be a pretty nice place to hang your hat for eight to ten hours a day, many longer.



**Opposite page**  
 Top, left: Conference room.  
 Top, center: Third Floor corridor with furniture and light fixtures by Michael Graves.  
 Top, right: East elevation shows segmentation of the building.  
 Below, left: View east from second-floor corridor shows downtown skyline with City Maintenance Center just outside FRB's vehicle entrance gates.  
 Below, right: Generous outdoor and decks offer opportunities to look at the sprawling building.

Far left: Graves's original site plan would have made a more accommodating relationship to traffic on the north entrance. At left, top: Screen mesh shapes the parking garage interior. At left, below: Walk-up visitors are greeted by a grand station and more steel gates.

### Annuit Cœptis

The Great Seal of the United States of America consists of three Latin mottoes. The most often quoted is the easiest and least controversial: *"E pluribus unum,"* or "Out of many, one." The second, *"Nōstris Ordo Seculorū,"* is variously translated as "A new secular order" and "A new order of the ages." The most enigmatic of the trio may be the most apropos in assessing the Houston Branch, as it underscores not what this collection of buildings achieve, but rather how far the architecture falls short. The source of *"Annuit Cœptis"* is ostensibly *"Da facilem cursum, atque audacibus annue cœptis"* from Virgil's *Georgics*. Among its possible translations are: "Give me an easy course, and favor my daring undertakings," and "Smooth my path, condone this enterprise of bold experiment." But banks are inherently risk averse, and so too is the architecture of this complex. Neither "daring" nor a "bold experiment," this complex, in the context of Graves's recent architectural production, follows a familiarly "easy course." This concatenation of tapioca-colored colonnades, pseudo-architraves, over-scaled pergolas, faux-vaulted roofs, and inscribed brick patterns imitating large blocks of stone tattooed in an aggressive polychromatic program (inside and out) are, in the aggregate, little more than cartoons writ large. The Fed's Houston Branch demonstrates that, for better or worse, Mr. Graves and his associates still believe in the possibility of constructing an architecture parlante. Yet, even as Alan Colquhoun, in his essay in Andreas Papadakis's first A.D. on Graves in 1979 lamented, it remains an open question as to whom Mr. Graves is speaking and in what language.

Michael Graves and his associates have long had the tendency to build drawings rather than draw buildings. The most egregious consequence of this practice is producing buildings that look more simplistic than simple—elephantine rather

than elegant. If this is an architecture parlante, it is mono-syllabic, and its metaphors have worn thin to the point of one-liners (such as a bank vault topped with a faux-vaulted roof). The parking garage is the unlikely exception. Its elegantly thin and exposed concrete decks (with unusually high floor-to-floor heights to match those of the main building's), and a diaphanous screen of steel cladding that mimics the main building's implied stone motif create an unexpected, playful, and highly effective foil to the remainder of the project.

Many recent high-profile civic or institutional buildings tend to be mute icons of high-tech materialist fetishes, gargantuan abstract expressionist sculptures with an HVAC system, or crudely inert wrappers of programmatic exigencies. The Federal Reserve wanted none of this in their new building in Houston. Their Request for Proposals, developed by the Fed's own architectural advisory committee and sent to a select group of architects, included a "Vision Statement" clearly articulating a desire for a building character aligned with, for want of a better term, the classical tradition. In their search for (an architect and) the image of an architecture that represented the Reserve's national role as "the bank for all the other banks," they used such terms as "solid," "stable," "dignified," and "classical." When the Federal Reserve twitches, the financial community feels a tsunami. Yet, while all of our fortunes and futures depend on the Reserve's policies and forecasts, it sought in the design of this branch of its Dallas-based operation a vague and somewhat conflicted image of a past that never was. Things could be worse. As this is the third Federal Reserve Building in Houston in the last 80 years, chances are there will be a fourth in a generation or so. Until then, between Taft and Gillette on Allen Parkway, Houstonians can visit the most recent building, take a tour, and follow their money. ■



Courtesy The Houston Metropolitan Research Center

The Galleria, Westheimer Boulevard, circa 1971, Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum, architects, with Neuhous and Taylor. Below: The four stages: Galleria I (1971), Galleria II (1977), Galleria III (1986), and Galleria IV (2002).



## CITY UNDER GLASS

The Galleria offers consumers a look at nearly everything, including its own version of sprawl

BY BRUCE C. WEBB

**IN MANY WAYS, MODERN HOUSTON** and the Galleria grew up together. It was in 1969 that then-tyro developer Gerald D. Hines began to reinvent the shopping center as a street under glass (with apologies to the magnificent 19<sup>th</sup> century Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan). Paired with the Harris County Domed Stadium built in 1965, another exemplar of the architecture of technical defiance, the Galleria helped make Houston the air conditioning capital of the world, a city with self-satisfied buildings, closed systems of the well-tempered environment that were suitable for anywhere and perfect for inhospitable climates, be they along the Inner Loop or in the vacuum of outer space. It was the age of the astronauts—Houston was transformed overnight into Space City with the arrival of the manned space program—but it was the builders and developers and their projects who were becoming local legends.

Out of this zeitgeist, developer Kenneth Schnitzer began to build Greenway Plaza, a 127-acre master planned business and residential development that resembled Greater London Council developments of the same period. And George R. Brown announced plans for the infamous Texas Eastern Transmission Company Houston Center project, an urban design proposal to turn 33 blocks downtown east of Main Street into a vast, elevated mall that would have hovered over the layer of carbon monoxide issuing from vehicles trapped beneath on the city's street grid.

Times change and yesterday's attractions are merely targets for today's competitors. In his entry on the Galleria in the *Houston Architectural Guide*, historian Stephen Fox credits its influence as "a typological development of national, even international, consequence," but concludes by wondering "whether it will outlive the set of circumstances that brought it into being and survive to attain the historic distinction that will eventually accrue to it." Houston's attitudes are ruthlessly Darwinian and easily distracted, and survival often depends upon renewal—not just maintenance and restoration, but a real magnification of the spectacle.

And spectacle has come to mean super malls like the Mall of America in Minneapolis (configured like a Parchesi board, with a Camp Snoopy amusement park at the center) or the truly colossal West Edmonton Mall in Edmonton, Canada, with its giant water park and indoor beach and wave machine—the subarctic equivalent to putting an ice-skating rink under glass canopy in Houston. As a point of comparison, Edmonton's mall contains 800 stores and 110 eating establishments, along with eight theme park attractions, roller coaster, gambling casino, ice rink (where the NHL Edmonton Oilers often practice), aquarium, a gun shop, museum, and live ammo shooting range. As might be expected, West Edmonton Mall also holds the Guinness record for having the world's largest parking lot. Compared to such festival excesses, the understated architecture and high-style products on display at the Galleria make it seem like the Uffizi.

#### Everything Under One Roof

What does it mean when a city's genius loci revolves around artificial biotopes? Just as the Astrodome wasn't like any other stadium, the Galleria, as Gerald Hines said, wasn't just another mall. In the first place, under a transparent glass canopy in the blistering Texas sun, it featured as its central spine a skating rink. Unusual for a mall at that time, it was three stories tall. And rather than being a line of shops only, it opened with a mix of tenants that included hotels, offices,

bars, restaurants, even a bowling alley (long gone) and four movie theaters. In a private club there were exercise rooms, a swimming pool, and rooftop tennis courts. There was also a jogging track on the roof that circumnavigated the barrel skylight, which allowed runners to look down on the skating rink while shoppers watched them from below. In a city lacking in dramatic natural features or extensive, splendid, intact historic districts to show off to visitors, the Galleria and the Dome served as proxies.

Architect Victor Gruen, who designed Southgate Center near Minneapolis in 1956 for the Dayton Hudson Company, is generally credited with inventing the first totally enclosed and temperature controlled modern mall. The way Gruen

different precincts with different characteristics, much like the properties on a Monopoly board. You can get a feel for how this zoning works by looking at the stratified interior elevation of Galleria I. The ground floor, a kind of proletarian food court collection, reads like a fast food hall of fame: Sharro Italian Buffet, McDonalds, Taco Bell, Roman Delight, Ninfa's, Sonic. Riding above on the piano noble are places with more élan, such as Tourneau and Versace. Finally, in the third floor "attic": Eddie Bauer and the Original Levi Stores.

The socio-economic milieu of the Galleria has little in common with the more middle-brow malls that have proliferated in America's suburbs. It's not exactly a slice of Houston's demograph-

### *Mall space is controlled space, compressed so there are almost no gaps where the mind can wander off.*

saw it, the mall was the modern successor to traditional social spaces. It was a place, he wrote, "for participation in modern community life that the Greek Agora, the medieval market place and our own town squares provided in the past." Along the way, Walt Disney, with his California theme park, had shown how you could chop and channel many of the more compelling features of towns and cities while leaving out the bad stuff, and create America's number one tourist attraction in the process. The mall picked up where Disney left off, with the idea that what people wanted was a neater, tidier, and more convenient downtown, a purified commercial precinct of super abundance that matched the suburbs, a place where shopping and fun would become metaphors for one another. Part of making this happen is how the mall promotes a feeling of security with its enforced behavioral limits, a kind of *in loco parentis* even for adults, symbolized by the mall cops who for a year or more have been ostentatiously patrolling on Segways and looking like bionic troopers from the future.

Mall space is controlled space, compressed so there are almost no gaps where the mind can wander off. A successful mall like the Galleria exercises nearly absolute control over the stores that are its tenants. The stores pay rent and overage charges (a percentage of profits) for the benefit of being in the mall. Except, that is, for the magnet department stores, which usually enjoy a sweeter deal. What the mall is looking for is a certain coherence, a sense that the mix of stores belong together, that they have similar characteristics and act in harmony. In a large mall like the Galleria, there may be

ices; it's more Rodeo Drive than Main Street. The original 600,000 square foot Galleria, designed by Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum with local architects Neuhaus and Taylor and opened in 1971, was anchored by Neiman Marcus at one end and open at the other. Over the intervening 35 years the Galleria has grown in four distinct segments.

#### Growing Pains

Galleria I is classically modern and centered by the ice rink; the interior architecture is almost invisible, deflecting attention to the sky, the ice rink, the shops, the promenade, anything but itself. In 1977 HOK with SI Morris Associates added Galleria II, a 650,000 square foot wing that is aligned cross axially to the original and anchored at the intersection by a 12-story sky-lit space surrounded by balconied office towers that look down on the promenade. With six glass elevator shafts rising through the 180-foot high space, it is a vertical counterpoint to the emphatic horizontality of the mall. Galleria II also included a second hotel, the Westin Galleria. Galleria III (Fitzgerald and Partners), completed in 1986, somewhat awkwardly spliced on another 300,000 square feet with Macy's as the anchor.

Using Saks Fifth Avenue department store as a giant en-suite connection gave Galleria III a back lot feeling. (It is also possible to reach Macy's from Galleria II by a shortcut outdoor promenade along the edge of the parking garage, a mood-breaking breath of non-commercial reality that has become a smokers' haven.) Galleria III is low key, without the spectacle quality of its predecessors.

Stretched as it was, the Galleria quickly lost some of the simple elegance that was present in the original diagram. In particular, the way the mall and parking garage in the original paralleled one another, connected by bridges that spanned across the delivery service circuit located in the slot between, was admirably neat. It was a marvelous cross section, with a near perfect systems design. But as the Galleria grew, parking became more problematic; garages had to be folded in willy-nilly. Today there are some 13,900 parking spaces in seven different garages, and getting lost, or rather losing one's car in the vast parking bowels, is a common experience.

Galleria IV, the latest addition designed by Atlanta architects Cooper Carry, opened in 2002, adds to the architectural rambling. Projecting south from Galleria II, this addition spans West Alabama with a 125-foot-long by 200-foot-wide second level span. Lined with shops, it is more mall than bridge-like. To assemble the land necessary for the project, the plan shifted Hildago Street 275 feet to the south. Another real estate problem was internal: Since the Westin Galleria Hotel was in the way of expansion plans, one floor of the hotel was dismantled and its functions redistributed, with the lobby and the ballroom located on opposite sides of the public concourse. Houston's first Nordstrom's department store and local standby, Foley's, anchor the addition, the latter located on a spur. Because West Alabama passes through, it splits the mall into two segments on the ground level, with the bridge providing circumstance for a large, commodious porte cochere for the hotel above.

The main axis of Galleria IV is formed into a gentle interior bow that affords a shallow panorama view of all the shops in a single glance and relieves some of the tedium of the shotgun arrangement found in most malls. The concourse is brightly day-lit by a ribbon of clerestory windows and there is a neatly articulated suspended soffit. A water feature designed by Wet Design, whose oeuvre includes the fountains for the Bellagio Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, marks the intersection of the Foley's wing with the primary concourse. Described as a computer controlled water column falling 50 feet in choreographed patterns from a water chandelier, it nonetheless looks for all the world like a mechanical udder.

In 1999/2000, \$25 million was poured into a remodeling project to give the Houston Galleria a fresh look. Certain things that once connoted elegance, like the carpeted mall floors, had become passé. The floors were repaved with imported marble tiles. The original picket railings that partially obscured visual connections between levels were replaced by glass panels, creating a more open feeling.



Photo © 2005 Eric Reeder, used with permission



Top, left: The classically modern Galleria I offers ice skating under the blistering Texas sun. Top, right: Galleria I's elevator shafts are a vertical counterpoint to the mall's emphatic horizontality. Above: Between Galleria I and its parking garage, tracks deliver the elements of high style. Left: Galleria I's rooftop jogging track circumnavigates the bowed skylight, allowing joggers to watch shoppers (and vice versa).



A large glass elevator was added near the east end of the skating rink. New, more comfortable furniture was also installed.

#### The Art of the Deal

The recent history of the Galleria is a mind-boggling litany of mega-million-dollar deals. Hines sold off the Houston Galleria in 1999 to Urban Shopping Centers and partner Walton Street Capital for around \$525 million. (The Dallas Galleria sibling developed by Hines in 1982 was sold at the same time to UBS Realty Investors, a part of the Swiss Bank.) From there Houston Galleria became part of a package acquired by Rodamco, a Netherlands-based company that paid more than \$3 billion for the acquisition in 2000. Following the breakup of Rodamco in 2002, Simon Property Group, a giant in the shopping mall business with nearly one third of the largest malls in America (those with more than \$250 million in annual retail sales), purchased the Galleria along with nine other Rodamco commercial properties. Despite all this, the Galleria today is more than healthy; with its 700,000-square-

foot expansion, it tops out at 2.4 million square feet, the fifth largest mall in the United States. But the retail business is fickle, and department stores have had a difficult time in recent years.

Competition of the sort that killed Town and Country Shopping Center to feed the revival and enlarging of Memorial City Mall is the wind that shakes the stability of real estate investments. Dying malls have become a category of urban phenomena with a dedicated web site ([deadmall.com](http://deadmall.com)) containing obits on malls that are empty or on the verge of becoming so. In 2003 Lord and Taylor, one of the anchors of Galleria II, announced that it would close all three of its Houston stores, creating a big-box vacancy. And cutting closer to home, Macy's this year acquired Foley's in a merger with the Federated-May Company. Macy's now plans to put its name on the new Foley's store in Galleria IV, abandoning its present location and leaving it empty. Replacing these two anchors is unlikely, giving the Simon Company the problem of how to find new, compatible uses for these spaces. Some of the ideas being discussed include



clusters of upscale restaurants, children's play spaces, more shops, and even apartments or condominiums.

#### Second City

As the Galleria grows and changes, it reveals its kinship with the megastuctures that fascinated architects like Constant Nieuwenhuys and the Situationists in the 1960s. During that decade architects such as Yana Friedman explored megastuctures as strategies for building efficient modern urban developments. But for the Situationists the allure was the potential the megastucture had for labyrinthine constructions, places for wandering. In Constant's New Babylon plan for the Hague, city structure was imagined as a continuous constructed network spreading across the urban and country landscape like an internet diagram. It's as though the Galleria were to launch spokes in every direction; grafted onto the city it might zig-zag to Katy or to Galveston. For Constant, New Babylon was a post-capitalist critique of the city; the corridors of New Babylon were to be free-zones of artistic and

social activity, the aimless territory of the "drift." But the model was equally well suited to the consumer city.

Mega-malls and modern regional airports and other buildings of their ilk are of such size and complexity that they constitute a special category of places where the canons of architectural judgment no longer apply. (Curiously the Galleria still has a single street address, 5015 Westheimer, even though it stretches over more than a half-mile and has multiple entrances.) At some point they pass the tipping point of architecture and become mega-construction, no longer understood in terms of a single conceptual organization but rather many different ones crashing together like dropped jackstraws.

Buildings like this are not quite urban design either. They are more likely to become problems for urban design since they defy the scale and pattern of urban order. Indeed the mall didn't grow out of the city but rather out of a desire to supplant it with a new order that was geared to the realities of the automobile. It's hard to predict if Uptown and the Galleria that dominates it is the last of something once new or merely a stage in a process that

will eventually evolve into a place that is more gracious and more traditionally urban. Plans for expanding METRORail include an east-west line tying the Galleria to the north-south downtown-to-Reliant Park line. Since METRO riders arrive as walkers, there is a possibility that Uptown will need to become more pedestrian-accommodating than it is today.

But for today the Galleria remains a great luxury ship that never leaves port. It is possible to come aboard and wander like a flaneur, gazing, analyzing, and getting aesthetic enjoyment in this opulent sensorium. You can shop; ice skate; eat at any number of restaurants; sneak into someone's wedding reception, prom, or bar mitzvah; swim and play tennis; watch people; treat the place like a hands-on museum of desires; and retire to your own state room in one of two hotels. Marx was not quite right when he called religion the opiate of the masses. In modern America, it's shopping. Places such as the Galleria, with a whiff of opulence hovering over everything, where what you want is more important than what you need, have become the markers of a city's aspirations and prominence. ■



Top, left: Lowry Galleria III looks the spectacle quality of its predecessors. Top, right: Galleria IV forms a gentle interior curve and greets shoppers with a "water chandelier" by Wet Design, Inc. Above: Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, Milan, Giuseppe Mengoni, architect, 1877, was reportedly an inspiration for Houston's version.



Westbury Square (William F. Wortham, Jr., architect, 1960) in livelier days.

## Remembering Westbury Square : Houston's First Lifestyle Center



Westbury Square today.

BY BARRY MOORE

### TO A PERSON WHO KNEW WESTBURY SQUARE

when it was new in 1960, returning in 2005 is as if continental drift had pushed Brigadoon into an uninhabited corner of the third world. To walk through what is left of the development is to encounter cracked plaster on exterior walls, empty awning frames facing Bellfort, crooked blinds inside empty second floor apartments, dying plants in the one remaining patio, and a handful of empty shops with rusty ironwork and moldy damp corners,

Like Havana on a bad day, Westbury Square is too dispiriting to feel unsafe. But of course, a lot can happen in 45 years. To a commercial development, a half-century can be like a geological age.

By the end of the 1950s, developer Ira Berne's Westbury subdivision was a hot residential area. Southwest of where the West Loop curves into the South Loop, and just south of Meyerland, it was very quickly successful. That whole area of Houston was one of the fastest growing

areas in the two decades following the Second World War, fueled by construction of Loop 610, Sharpstown Mall and its eponymous subdivision, and white flight from Riverside Terrace. Although Weingarten Realty briefly flirted with the idea of a 340,000-square-foot shopping center on the 33-acre corner of West Belfort and Chimney Rock, the firm dropped the plan, designed by Wilson, Morris and Crain, probably because what they hoped to build was too much like the nearby Meyerland Shopping Center.

Happily, the Weingarten departure was Berne's big opportunity. The asthmatic New Yorker had moved to Houston in 1946, ready to bet on his adopted city. Needing a retail "town center" for his Westbury neighborhood, he picked up the 24 acres immediately behind the intersection of Chimney Rock and Belfort in 1960. The nine acres that made up

the pointed corner had been retained by Weingarten Realty, which in 1961 opened a "French Market"-themed grocery store; its location on the site allowed a clear view of Westbury Square and its entrance to westbound travelers on Belfort.

Berne was wild, crazy, and rich enough to try something that the more traditional competition hadn't the vision—or nerve—to try. He loved Italy, and determined to establish "old world" charm on the suburban prairie. Working with Houston architect William Wortham, whose practice was dominated by commissions from home builders, Berne succeeded, in a way—if antique street-lights, brick walks, benches, fountains, and down-scaled themed façades count for old world charm. At a time when Houstonians were accustomed to big department or grocery stores attached to a string of neighborhood convenience shops, Berne succeeded in translating Disneyland's Main Street into Italian vernacular, and importing it into Texas. Who could argue with his success? Westbury Square was immediately popular and profitable with a modern Houston that had never seen anything like it.

But the genius of Westbury Square wasn't really its design; it was in the kinds of leases collected there, and their novel hours of operation. Berne assembled 60 shops, galleries, and restaurants, mostly small. None would be considered a "magnet" in the typical shopping center parlance.

No one can pinpoint exactly the date the Square opened, but its incredible popularity was instantaneous, carried almost entirely by word of mouth. By the mid-



"Ahead of its time by about 50 years": Mindful and walkable, Westbury Square was "out of phase" with Houston for much of its existence.



Courtesy the Houston Metropolitan Research Center

sixties visitors were overwhelmed by original and attractive stores offering gifts (6), art (3), imported crafts (5), antiques (5), jewelry (4), children's clothes (2), eating establishments (5), women's clothes (2), and one each for candles, scents and oils, men's wear, flowers, wines and liquors, wilderness equipment, books, lamps, party supplies, monograms, a dance studio, and The Little Red Schoolhouse day care. Oh, and a few professional offices and many second floor apartments—something truly unique at a time when the trend was to separate living and shopping. A few of the stores were excellent and attracted their own clientele: The Candle Shop; Cargo Houston, an original amalgam of Pier One and Ikea; Cromwell's, an English style men's store; Galaxie Jewelers, long happily removed to a location near the Rice Village; and Rumbleheimer's, an old-fashioned ice cream parlor complete with little round marble tables and a coin operated player piano. Berne named that one—"Kind of a cross between Katzenjammer and Rumpelstiltsken," he told the *Houston Post*.

All of the stores stayed open until 10 p.m., at a time when only the largest department stores stayed open at night, and then only during the Christmas season. Westbury Square was a true sensation, not only for shoppers, but also for people just looking for something fun to do. After an early movie, young and old and lots of families headed for Westbury Square because it was the place to go, to see and be seen. Being there was different from being at any other shopping center; for the first time, the exterior spaces between shops were just as important as the shops themselves, and the fountains and benches drew people together in a make-believe community. Many remember Westbury Square at Christmas as a complete and novel experience, with outdoor choirs, bell ringers, trees full of candles,

and novel "bee" lights everywhere. It was as if Disneyland's Main Street USA had been translated into a real place where a person could buy real stuff, and then go home to an apartment on the second floor. Ira Berne had created a "lifestyle center" without knowing it.

Westbury Square was the rousing success as the linchpin to his housing development that Berne had hoped. It was so successful that within a year he announced construction of 250 townhouses surrounding Westbury Square. Still there on the north side of Bellfort, some have been converted to small professional offices. Westbury Square flourished throughout the 1960s. A clock tower was soon added to punctuate the entrance. The central piazza with its large fountain, imported from Italy, transformed itself into weekend art festivals. Craftspeople for the first time in Houston publicly blew glass, threw pots, and dipped candles as visitors watched. Early on, merchants invented the annual "Lemon Sale." As Addison McElroy, owner of The Candle Shop, Cargo Houston, and The Chemist Shop, remembers, "All the merchants would rent booths in the back alley and stock them with seasonal merchandise at a discount. Crowds would gather well in advance and be held at bay by the local sheriff and barricades. At 9 a.m. the sheriff would fire the starter's pistol and mobs of bargain-hunting women would come charging through the square."

(No one else in Houston tried to emulate Berne, though the Dallas near north side retail and office development on Routh Street, sparked by Foster Poole's Sample Shop (similar to Cargo Houston and the Candle Shop combined) and the subsequent Quadrangle project, provided Dallasites their first destination shopping experience.)

Everything changed in 1970 when the Galleria opened.

In an abstract way the two retail destinations were similar: they appealed to people as the place to be, they offered an impressive variety of shopping opportunities, the public spaces were more important than the stores themselves, and they offered ancillary space for offices and residents. But the scale of the new development was an overwhelming draw. Instead of little boutiques there was Neiman Marcus. Instead of a player piano there was an ice rink. It was as if the Radio City Rockettes had opened down the street from Bojangles.

Westbury Square soldiered on into the decade, but the fun was over. Westbury Square could not compete, nor could it attract the crowds anymore. And as the crowds withered away, so did the tenants. In 1979 Ira Berne sold the property to Canadian investors, who apparently didn't know any better, and reportedly closed the stores he owned. Two years later, when the northerners split, Tuesday Morning, the successful remainders store now in the Greenbriar Shopping Center, opened its first store in the old Cargo Houston space, probably inspired by the once popular Lemon Sales. By the early 1980s Westbury Square had had four leasing managers in three years. In 1983, a new owners syndicate made a third attempt to make it a go, but without much heart or money. The business editor of the *Houston Post* surmised that the shopping village may have been about 50 years ahead of its time, because the Houston area hadn't matured yet.

By the end of that decade, Home Depot, sensing a big market in Westbury homeowners in need of fixing up their 30-year-old houses, built a store where Weingarten's used to be. The big box store, dropped on the site like a boxcar in a sandbox, destroyed the original piazza where Cargo Houston and Rumbleheimer's used to be, removing

the moribund heart of Westbury Square. Currently, Al Antonini, Trustee, absentee Los Angeles owner since March 1990, holds the sad remainder. From the evidence of his stewardship, nothing is going to change until what's left falls down and is scraped away.

Westbury Square's brilliant early years make it strange to revisit the place where the retail Brigadoon used to be. How, exactly, did it shine so brilliantly and then slide so quickly downhill? Ira Berne's development was what late Houston architect Howard Barnstone would have characterized as "out of phase." Berne built with a traditional palette, utilizing historic references, traditional architectural details, and a lot of roof tiles and decorative ironwork three decades before it was acceptable to developers and designers alike. He put retail and residential together at a time when it was understood that a person was supposed to drive, not walk, from point A to point B. And he made the piazza, not the first floor of the magnet department store, the gathering place. It was unique and definitely ahead of its time. By about 50 years.

Currently, the Trammell Crow Company is developing the 24-acre Richmond Avenue site occupied by the Houston Independent School District's administration building and the adjacent Will Rogers Elementary School. The company anticipates replacing these educational facilities with 600 residential units and 400,000 square feet of retail space in what they are calling a "walkable, urban environment." The company states, "This concept of combining residential units with retail is probably going to be the first of a genre that's coming down the pike." It will be a real Lifestyle Center. If Ira Berne were alive today, he would understand what Out of Phase means. Who remembers Westbury Square? ■



Sugar Land Town Square at First Colony (Planned Community Developers, Ltd., with master planners Ambrose McEvany & Hinesz Architects and landscape designers SIA, 2003). Sugar Land City Hall (PG&L, 2004) is in the background.

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## Lifestyle Centers Coming (Back) to Houston

Retailers are giving affluent shoppers what they want—invited Main Streets

BY RIVES T. TAYLOR

**LIKE SO MANY CUSTOMER-DRIVEN SERVICES IN MODERN AMERICA**, the shopping district goes through great upheavals every five to seven years, just to keep drawing the affluent customer. Taking keen interest in the upheaval are the creators of the "retail sense of place": the national high-end retailers, their powerful leasing agents, retail developers, and architects. Their associations, the Urban Land Institute and the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), continually monitor these shopping trends. As the Urban Land Institute noted in its 2002 "Place Making" report:

"America's changing demographics show a change from mass market standards to niche markets of lifestyle, from unplanned suburbs to master planned communities, from suburban anonymity to yearning for community, from contemporary to neo-traditional styling, from strip commercial suburban sprawl to compact, highly defined town centers."<sup>1</sup>

The targeted customer is increasingly in the suburbs, where in the recent past the "shopping-necessity" was provided by the strip center, the big box, or the regional mall—often at some distance. The shopping pilgrimage was a way of life. Concurrent with the 21<sup>st</sup> century growth of demand for the single-family house (driven by low interest rates), 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban sprawl has evolved into the suburban estate or planned community. Seeking competitive advantage, these developments now plan retail that is close by the residential enclave and extremely attractive to the suburban lifestyle. The new suburban family does not desire a strip center out on the highway but a "lifestyle center" for its estate lifestyle.



The number of these new shopping venues is set to double over the next few years, according to the ICSC. This shift in demand to "upper end" shopping has also been the subject of an increasing number of national popular press exposés. These have documented the demand, and in turn created more demand; a 2004 *USA Today* article quotes—almost advertises—the key big chain retailers that dictate the character of the new shopping experience [emphasis mine]:

"It's a very gracious shopping atmosphere, convenient if I'm in a rush, but laid-back enough if I'm not," says Margery Myers of Talbots, a specialty chain in several lifestyle centers.

"It's a *quality of life* issue," says Yaromir Steiner, CEO of Steiner & Associates, which develops lifestyle centers. "People want places to sit out and eat lunch, and offices in walking distance and residences nearby. The *mixed-use approach* leans toward this *lifestyle*."

Bookseller Barnes & Noble sets up shop in lifestyle centers because the mix of tenants tends to draw professional workers. "The main demographic for the book business is education. We're looking for *people who are college graduates*," says Mitchell Klipper, chief operating officer of Barnes & Noble, which does business in about 20 lifestyle centers.

Tricia Sellers of Williams-Sonoma says: "We are in lifestyle centers because they cater to our customer demographic and their lifestyle. It's a fairly *affluent customer* who loves cooking and entertaining at home."<sup>12</sup>

*Note the highlighted phrases—these are the buzzwords of the Lifestyle Center.*

Ed Wulfe, one of Houston's pre-eminent developers and retail brokers, sees this new Lifestyle Center shopping experience as being driven by the demands of today's informed, quality- and time-conscious customer. These demands force retailers to change the designs of their stores, and in turn to demand changes to the larger milieu in which the stores sit, in order to continue attracting desirable consumers. Wulfe emphasizes this domino effect with specific and escalating trends:

- A widespread slowdown of regional mall construction and the increasingly uncertain viability of the big department stores.
- The competition from big-box retailers like Target and Wal-Mart whose convenient one-stop approach offers competitive prices and extensive selection.
- The rise of stores that demand a street front, out-of doors, Lifestyle Center environment, such as Williams-Sonoma, Barnes & Noble, and Crate and Barrel.
- The success of restaurants and entertainment venues of all types clustered among the Lifestyle Center stores and their customers.
- The availability of the market to support 200,000 to 450,000 square feet of high-end retail in a Main Street environment.

The success of the complicated partnership of demand and supply involved in this continual retail evolution rests with the leasing agents' ability to first draw the national retail giants like Whole Foods Market, Container Store, and Pottery Barn into the deal. The national retail groups work with the local retail broker to investigate the "trade area" for the right demographics of household income and education. An average income of at least \$100,000 per household within a fairly tight geographical radius is needed for a Lifestyle Center to even be considered, according to Nick Hernandez of local retail real estate advisors Page Partners.

The partnering of big name tenants and local retailers who want to get in the game is part of a choreography that rivals the much more visible details of the pedestrian environment design. The developer and his design team mediate between the design standards of the larger planned community and the retail broker's demands of store size, placement/orientation, and co-tenancy. While the local architects do create the street level ambience and the (frankly) minimal stage set fronts of the public outdoor

The "place making" in the design of Sugar Land Town Square's pedestrian features and store fronts (three photos above) is aimed to draw the shopper into the stores.



Vista Properties commissioned Hermes Architects to design LaCenterra at Cisco Ranch: (top) town center model, (above) suburban sprawl aerial view, and right plan.

rooms, national marketing and design teams dictate the store presence for the bulk of the space.

#### The Revival And Reinvention Of Main Street

While malls can be updated with this Lifestyle Center approach, either by modifying their tenant mix or (like Woodlands Mall) rejuvenating a part of the introverted shed to create an out-of-doors retail and dining festival area, the market prefers more a series of free standing buildings arranged along the lines of old urban forms. One seemingly obvious answer is to return to Main Street as the prototype. This New Urbanist model has a big appeal to the developer. The arrangement brings greater sales and rental rates per square foot, parking is conveniently close, and the stores are more visible and thus identifiable from a distance.

The U.S. has had Main Street as its shopping and civic focus as long as it has had urban environments. Clever developers in the past 75 years have simulated this prototypical American experience in newer developments (with the messy

parts culled out) to create a focused shopping world. These early examples, like Houston's River Oaks Shopping Center (Stayton Nunn-Milton McGinty with Oliver C. Winston, 1937) or the grandfather of them all, Country Club Plaza in Kansas City (Edward Buehler Delk, 1922), have a discrete mixed-use presence on the second floor above a highly choreographed or "playful" pedestrian environment below. The current Lifestyle Center is differentiated from the earlier shopping venues by its larger scale; its upscale mix of retail, entertainment, and restaurants (but few utilitarian services like dry cleaners); and the increased presence of more and larger cars.

As the Urban Land Institute notes, the old and new approaches both exhibit "the art, science, and business of place making." These are made-up worlds that nevertheless want to impart some history of place. "The open-air design is normally dotted with fountains and benches. There are usually table-service restaurants and adult-friendly bookstores. The parking spaces are often right by the stores and the atmosphere seems as much about



ambience as it is about retail."<sup>3</sup>

These "invented places" want to create a sense of history that will link the civic and shopping experience to the larger region. The shoppers' experiences are shaped by where they park, how they walk, and what they see in order to get into the stores. This is, in essence, the role of the developer and design team, although there are limits to their creativity in this partnership with national retailers (with their formulas for success) and the lease agents (who know how big to build the boxes and where to place them for maximum "punch").

To create a civic center appearing to have multiple decades of development, where each and every building has a different presence, the designers draw on a panoply of stage set styles framing the wide sidewalks that access the stores. The architects' designs focus on copious planting, street furniture, site lighting, water features, piped-in music, outdoor eating precincts, and comfortable places to sit and watch people.

Along these "Main Streets" the retailer, lease agent, and developer want lots

of convenience parking. This allows for impulse buying or quick in-and-out trips. The width of the streets should allow for light and views but must not be too wide to preclude a shopper emerging from one store from seeing something of interest in the store window across the street.

Recent exercises that are held up as models in the shopping business are Miami Lakes (Dover, Kohl & Partners, 1995); The Grove in L.A. (Elkus/Manfredi Architects, Ltd., with Langdon Wilson Architecture Planning, 2002); The Market Common, Clarendon in Arlington, Virginia (Antu Novich + Associates, with McCaffery Interests, 1998); City Place in West Palm Beach (Elkus/Manfredi Architects, Ltd., with Palladium Company, 2000); and Kentlands Market Square in Gaithersburg, Maryland (Beatty Companies, 2001). These either include parts of older civic centers or try to recreate in a few months of construction the mass of building types that evolved over generations in the past. What these districts actually look and feel like—their unique "sense of place"—is all part of the competitive advantage that each development seeks.

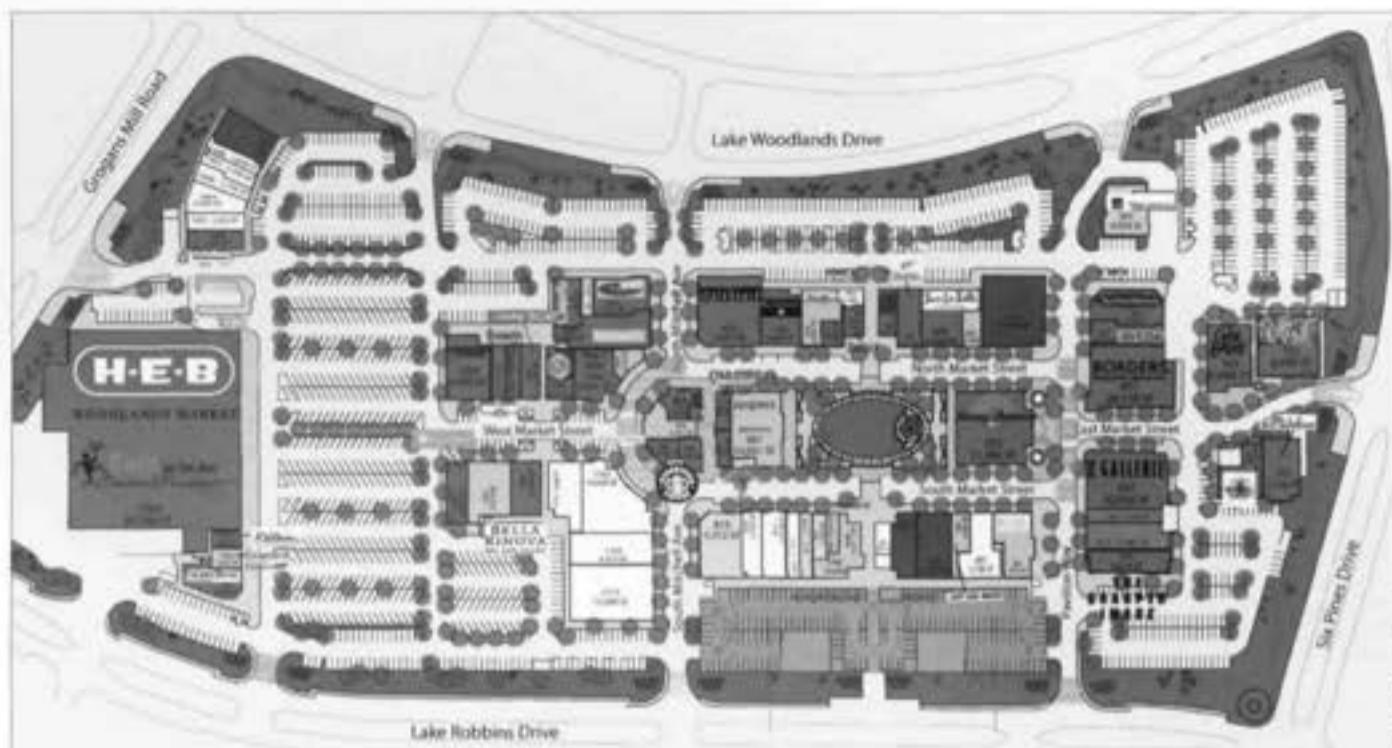
Left: Plot for Market Street, The Woodlands, showing a Main Street as an island surrounded by parking and anchored by a supermarket. Bottom Left: Corners are prime retail locations with the widest sidewalks full of amenities.

### Houston Is Late To The Game

As Ed Wulfe points out, the Lifestyle Center and, in particular, its newer town center/Main Street armature, first evolved in places where density of the suburbs—like Washington, D.C.'s, in Virginia—demanded it. Our region is late, as Nick Hernandez notes, not only because of the suburban consumer's negative perception of year-round use of open air environments in Houston, but also (of greater importance) because the national retailers did not think this region was sophisticated enough for the Lifestyle Center. The local leasing agents in the past were not able to make the case that the region's customers would support the needed scale of high-end retail to make the expensive street facades and pedestrian environment pay for themselves. That has now changed.

The affluent demographic explosion of west Harris and Fort Bend counties is the catalyst for these centers' introduction. The still evolving 32-acre Sugar Land Town Center at First Colony and the soon-to-commence LaCenterra at Cinco Ranch are clearly branded as Lifestyle Centers. Large ground floor retail blocks and second floor offices line streets with wide sidewalks and festive and populated urban spaces. Street parking is immediately in front of all the stores (45-degree angled to get the fastest turnover), with many more parking spaces in garages hidden behind.

The scale of the projects is considerable; in Sugar Land the mix of 390,000 square feet of office space and 249,000 square feet of upscale retail and restaurants sits in a 1.4-acre walkable downtown setting, and is augmented by a 300-room full-service Marriott Hotel and Conference Center, separate mid-rise residences (167 units), and Sugar Land's new City Hall. The PGAL-designed city hall adds gravity to the reinvented civic center of this rapidly growing municipality in Fort Bend County. Developing this district is Planned Community Developers, Ltd. (PCD) in partnership with the city of Sugar Land. They brought together a design team, including Ambrose McEnany & House Architects as master planners and SLA as landscape designers, to grow this mixed-use district in phases, to be fully developed by 2008. Sugar Land's web site sales pitch is typical: "Sugar Land Town Square is Sugar Land's pre-



Courtesy Tradition Properties

mier retail, dining, and entertainment destination. Whether it's a stroll along a cobblestone walkway, or a prime spot near the cascading landmark fountain, Sugar Land Town Square offers a shopping experience like no other. Enjoy outside dining, shopping, and entertaining in an atmosphere of a bustling Main Street. *Enjoy all that life has to offer... indulge in the uniqueness of Sugar Land Town Square* [emphasis mine]."

LaCenterra at Cinco Ranch is another green-field, multi-phased development, designed by Hermes Architects in partnership with developer Vista Equities, property manager Vista Management Company, and leasing agent Page Partners. The advertisements bill the new development as "an attractive lifestyle center catering to the burgeoning population growth occurring in far west Houston... where home prices range from \$200,000 to over \$1,000,000... LaCenterra at Cinco Ranch will be a place where lakes take center stage to three distinctive restaurants nestled among offices and retail shops designed to produce a pedestrian-friendly shopping experience in a town-center environment." However, the design limitations and challenges are typical of starting a town center from scratch. Notes Peter Merwin, formerly of Hermes Architects and now at Gensler, the developer sought precedents for this kind of shopping experience, such as Kierland Commons in Tempe, Arizona (Woodbine Southwest Corporation with Herberger Interests, 1990). "The best approach is to let the market work unfettered," says Merwin. "The design emphasizes a 'shed' with a strong identity on the outside but flexibility within, allowing the retailers complete freedom inside—and the creation of copious amenities and strong design attitudes at the street level of the pedes-



Courtesy Tradition Properties

rian." By intent this stage set balances the "trade dress" within the ground floor (the right-sized retail space), with the differentiated building blocks that allow for visual interest and external branding of diverse tenants. Often the signage and wayfinding itself, while of high quality, is mandated by the local community standards to be low-key. LaCenterra has to fit in the comprehensive design and planning standards of the larger Cinco Ranch community. To add an additional civic component, the Hermes Architects team worked with the developer to include a second floor ballroom and clock tower visible across the plains.

It should not be surprising that another new Lifestyle Center is in The Woodlands, itself a planned series of communities with affluent and mobile demographics. The planned development has a diverse 1,000-acre downtown Town Center, a concept managed by a designated Improvement District within The Woodlands Development Company (TWDC), with more than six million

square feet of commercial and retail businesses, and more than 2,000 hotel rooms. Through the Town Center runs the Waterway, a 1.25-mile long linear park and transportation corridor that links the businesses, shopping, dining, urban living, and entertainment venues. Within the Town Center Improvement District (less than a mile away from each other actually) are both a successful and growing Woodlands Mall and the new Lifestyle Center called Market Street, The Woodlands.

Noted as one of the country's most recent and potentially most successful (by retail sales) shopping models, Market Street's mantra is "America's Hometown now has a Downtown." Developed by Tradition Properties, with retail leasing managed by Page Partners and office lease management by CBRE, the 34-acre, pedestrian-friendly site contains over 496,000 square feet of new development. An H-E-B anchors one end with high-end eateries at the other. These are the two utilitarian "draws" to bring people to Market Street every day.



Top: Gensler's Main Street facade on the south reflects a "generation of styles," with stores below and other uses above. Center: Individualized building facades imply history and unique identity. Above: Neighborhood-scale theater marquis for Main Street.

The development started over four years ago with tours of other regions' successful Lifestyle Centers, and an initial charrette by TWDC and its Town Center Improvement District, the developer, the lease agents, and the design team of Development Design Group (DDG) of Baltimore. The developers chose this out-of-town talent no doubt for their considerable national experience. The Woodlands teams also came in with a \$10 million tax abatement that they hoped would push the project forward. The utility and roadway infrastructures as well as the luxuriant and suitably endowed urban spaces (following the required Woodlands model) had to be in place before most tenants were signed on. The scale of these upfront costs often stops this kind of development early in the process. But the abatement made the difference here, and laid the groundwork for what some in the business say is the best design quality yet seen in a Lifestyle Center.

The project was initially master planned by DDG, with Gensler's Dallas and Houston offices as production architect. Known for his historically attuned and sensitive designs with Barry Moore, Paul Homeyer of the Houston Gensler office was later tapped to create these Main Street facades. As Homeyer notes, two architectural aspects were carried forward from the initial charrette by developer mandate: First, for the most part the buildings are two stories tall, with most retail at ground level and offices and professional services above; second, since The Woodlands is a new planned community, the architectural street presence would refer to a historic, perhaps generic, Main Street.

Within the confines of these governing principles, the facade architecture has some interplay of massing supporting the typical plan of large, deep retail spaces below and smaller tenant suites above. The buildings that line the central square are done in varied architectural

styles, drawing an analogy to the old Main Street reality of different buildings of different vintages having different architectural styles. Homeyer's design of the south row's massing and facades, which house the multi-screen second floor theater complex, in fact tried to be specifically true to historic Houston details, proportions, and materials, ranging from Victoria to Art Deco. "In dealing with a windowless theater facade the downtown Foley's was the conceptual model," Homeyer says.

Having seen a number of these developments, Nick Hernandez of Page Partners notes Market Street's one-of-a-kind focus on street amenities, the fountain and landscape program, street art, the green central square, and street and sidewalk paving. At the center of the project is the civic gesture. It is a fairly small green space, ringed by the shops and facades of the new Main Street, which regularly hosts outdoor jazz concerts as a smaller counterpart to the Cynthia Woods Pavilion down the road.

Almost taking a page from the New Urbanist manifesto, the brochure for Market Street says it all: "Market Street is a place where shopping, dining, entertainment, programmed community events, and celebrations come together to create a one-of-a-kind urban environment." Interesting too is the Market Street logo. It is the miniature image of Paul Homeyer's varied facades on the south side of the square: The actual architecture of an invented Main Street has become the symbol of America's new and invented hometown, symbolically floating on letterhead. ■

#### Notes

- Bohl, Charles. *Place Making—Developing Town Centers, Main Streets, and Urban Villages*. The Urban Land Institute, 2002, p. 15.
- "Shopping in the great outdoors," USA Today, August 3, 2004.
- Ibid*



### Definitions of Shopping Environments with Houston Examples

Center	Concept	Square feet*	Shopping center definitions	Houston Examples
Neighborhood	Convenience	30,000-150,000	1 or more supermarkets	
Community	General merchandise, convenience	100,000-350,000	2 or more discount department stores, drug, home improvement, large specialty/ discount apparel stores	
Regional	General merchandise, fashion (mall, typically enclosed)	400,000-800,000	2 or more full-line department stores, junior department stores, mass merchants, discount department stores, fashion apparel	Meyerland, Northgate, Gulfgate, Woodlands
Super-regional	Similar to regional center but has more variety and assortment	800,000+	3 or more full-line department stores, junior department stores, mass merchants, fashion apparel	Galleria
Fashion/specialty	Higher-end, fashion-oriented	80,000-250,000	Fashion	Saks Pavilion
Lifestyle	Upscale specialty stores; dining and entertainment in outdoor setting	150,000-500,000	Not usually anchored, but may include large-format bookstore, multiplex cinema, small department stores	Woodlands Market Street
Power	Category-dominant anchors, few small tenants	250,000-600,000	3 or more home-improvement stores, discount department stores, warehouse clubs, off-price stores	Best Buy, Walmart, Sam's, Target anywhere
Theme/festival	Leisure, tourist-oriented, retail and service	80,000-250,000	Restaurants, entertainment	Kemah
Outlet	Manufacturers' outlet stores	50,000-400,000	Outlets	Conroe, Sealy
		*SF Including anchors		

### Next Steps Inside the Loop

Will we finally see a cosmopolitan mixed-use district?

Most of Houston's new Lifestyle Centers have been suburban raw land projects. But what about the dense urban core? Can Houston copy the many examples from across the country where density of wealth already exists in an urban area of mass transit and higher land costs? Houston is about to find out. Five urban Lifestyle Center projects close to or within Loop 610 are on the drafting boards waiting for the right tenant mix, the full land acquisition or options, and investment in the needed infrastructure. All are scrambling for the retail anchor tenants. Every one is a mixed-use project, denser than most Houston precincts, with a minimum of two stories of offices stacked on top of ground floor retail. Hotels and residential towers, condos, or apartments are key to making the development pay the steep ground and infrastructure costs. Parking strategies use both below grade

and stacked approaches, the latter in multi-story but hidden structures. At least two may have distinct mass transit possibilities.

West of the 610 Loop but within Beltway 8 is the former Town and Country Mall. To be called The City Center, the project is under development by Midway Development working with Gensler, with lease agents Page Partners. The second, at the corner of Post Oak and San Felipe stretching south to Ambassador Way, is the 23-acre site for Boulevard Place, developed by Wulff & Co. (see "Retail Resurrection," page 13). The third is six acres on Westheimer just inside the Loop 610. This will be Trademark Properties' second Houston Lifestyle Center, after the successful Market Street, The Woodlands. The current HISD Headquarters and Will Rogers Elementary School site will hold the fourth effort, a Trammel Crow urban Lifestyle Center project in design

by Gensler, which will have retail, theater, and residential components. Finally, the Upper Kirby District has a developer looking to infill retail and residential towers stretching south from the corner of Westheimer and Kirby.

All of these multi-million dollar centers will target Houston's affluent shoppers. This SUV culture, which travels farther to work/school and has less time to engage in discretionary shopping and perhaps civic engagement, is a challenge for retailers. The economic segregation of our population, first apparent in the character of our residential communities, might become all the more apparent in these new shopping habits and environments. After all, the focus is on consumption, not civic life, as the center of the American universe. What we buy and, now, where we buy it, defines us. — Rives T. Taylor



Wal-Mart designed to reflect local taste: Belmont, North Carolina.



## Wal-Mart meets Architect

### A Powerful Owner Drives Design Process Change

**MOST ARCHITECTS LOOK AT A WAL-MART AND SEE ONLY THE "BIG BOX"** of "low-cost retail," an industry segment that long ago abandoned the use of design-oriented architects. However, when "construction owners" look at the same building they see the value inherent in this aesthetically simple but almost functionally perfect structure, a structure that is being continually improved and replicated throughout the world.

*Mary E. Kell, Client Services Manager for BSW International, received the email notifying the A/E firm of another project. The Owner has assigned a regional civil engineer and environmental consultant to work with BSW. The site has been selected; the Owner has listed specific requirements. The clock starts. Construction documents will be complete in less than 5 weeks. If necessary, they can be ready in hours.*

Wal-Mart has become the leading retail company in the world largely because it understands processes. The retail giant uses these processes to serve almost 140 million people weekly in more than 4500 Wal-Mart Stores and Supercenters, nationally and internationally. Long the subject of business school case studies, the chain has carefully designed and continually improves upon its supply chain management, distribution, and pricing. Wal-Mart knows how to serve its customers by developing processes and facilities that place products in front of the customer at the right place, the right time, and the right price. The Wal-Mart stores—the sites, the buildings, the fixtures—are detailed responses to company needs. Wal-Mart is a sophisticated construction owner, applying its same genius for delivering products to the development of the Wal-Mart store, a critical component of its business plan.



Woodland Park, Colorado.



Avon, Colorado (front elevation below).

BY BARBARA WHITE BRYSON

Twenty years ago, Wal-Mart knew what it wanted from architects but just couldn't get it. The retailer wanted quality, utilitarian stores delivered quickly for a price that matched its business plan. A common response from architects and contractors was that this was not possible. If it wanted quality buildings quickly, Wal-Mart would have to give up price. If it wanted a low price, it would have to give up schedule or quality. Wal-Mart refused to accept that outdated industry premise so they sought out an architect that was ready for change. They found Bob Workman of BSW International.

*Tracy Bruffett, Prototype and Change Team Manager for BSW International, examines the project information spreadsheet, looking for requirements that will require a change to the prototype and those that would be required due to site conditions. This "change triage" process helps him immediately identify those changes that will be completed based on a pre-determined lump sum fee and what changes will be charged by the hour. This cost information is forwarded to the client for final decisions almost instantly on a web-based system. Changes are accepted or rejected electronically and then forwarded quickly.*

Workman saw the possibilities: "There are thousands of good projects out there, he says, not just projects published in *Architectural Record*. I looked at the retail world, which was rampant with inefficiencies, architect community inefficiencies, and lots of opportunities. What if, in that environment, we focused on what we did in the design process...that little bitty part? It could have a vast effect and it would impact clients' ability to improve their business models and compete more effectively."

"Years ago," he continued, "I wondered what would happen if architect's egos weren't getting in the way of having more of an effect on the world...So [BSW] focused on the programs nobody else was interested in—Wal-Marts, gas stations, Montgomery Wards—where more variables could be controlled." These simple "low-design" projects, driven by clearly defined owner expectations, provided an opportunity to redesign the project delivery process.

Bob Workman had studied Deming, the famous process engineer who brought Japanese principles to the United States. Workman strove to understand how these principles could be applied to the architectural design industry, a service industry that commonly accepts imperfection as a standard rather than the Deming goal of a "Zero Defect Process."

*Tony Sabello, Graphics Illustrator for BSW International, reviewed the 15-page questionnaire that had been taken to the local building official. It covered every aspect of the project, clarifying every potential grey area including graphics/signage restrictions and requirements.*

Deming placed a high value on information that is accurate, timely, complete, and relevant. "We started by forcing the worry curve forward in time," says Workman. "Instead of letting ill-timed information come in whenever it surfaced, we proactively determined what was pertinent information. We collected all that information, put it in front of the decision maker, made sure he made a decision, then made him live with it." Workman's team asked Wal-Mart general contractors what they needed. Then the A/E



Beautiful only in their effectiveness (left to right): Prototype Wal-Mart Supercenter, stores in Lathem, Arizona, and Grand Blanc, Michigan.

## In many ways, the Wal-Mart Supercenter resembles the Model T of Henry Ford: simple, effective, and built by a process still in its infancy.

asked the same question of the building officials and other key members of the process. "Boy, did we learn a lot!" says Workman. This knowledge enabled BSW to focus on and measure things that mattered; things that could change what the architect did. They documented items like bid questions and RFIs. If they had two pointing to the same problem, they made a change.

The production of Construction Documents starts with the "Automation Process," AutoCAD 2005, using Xdata to manipulate the characteristics of the building. Basic information is fed into the system, including code requirements, dock location, and utility access points. The drawings, then 95 percent correct, are produced entirely by the system, ready for final review and adjustment.

Workman observed that less than 20 percent of every traditional project is really spent on design. More than 80 percent of the effort goes to develop "an error filled set of customized working drawings." He wanted to flip that condition so that 80 percent of the time is dedicated to design. He did that by rotating as much of the process as he could out of the single project into an overall program. He fixed and controlled everything possible from cash registers to contracts. Ninety-five percent of every project became automated or standardized. Seventy-five percent of the project drawings were reused, coming straight from the prototype.

*Mary pulls the detailed sequential checklist for project production to determine next steps. Since it is Thursday, she also checks for prototype changes that may have been approved during the weekly meeting between the project team and the owner. Mary has no problem determining how to proceed. The process has been well defined.*

It was an experiment that paid off. Workman helped make Wal-Mart successful by providing designs at comparatively high speed, giving Wal-Mart an even more cost effective place to conduct their business. While perfecting the prototype, the architect was able to deliver stores that are safe, well lit, attractive, clean, and flexible. Surprisingly, Wal-Mart doesn't want to stop there. More recently, the giant retailer has taken advantage of the extended time available to focus on design. At the behest of its neighbors, Wal-Mart has developed an increased understanding of the impact that its stores have on communities, and so the retailer is challenging BSW and a select group of other architects to develop designs that reflect local architectural needs and tastes. Specifically responsive designs have been generated for unique communities like Avon, Colorado; Woodland Park, Colorado; and Belmont, North Carolina. "Wal-Mart continues to be a great client," Workman says, "They are willing to learn, to press the envelope, and to improve."

Recent media attention focused on Wal-Mart indicates the super retailer may be using the 80 percent design time to address market and environmental changes as well. When you have a nearly perfect retail delivery prototype, you can tweak it as needed. A September 17, 2005, article in the *Wall Street Journal* says, "In early June, Wal-Mart opened a prototype supercenter in Rogers, Arkansas, that targets the new [more well-rounded income level] demographic. Among the changes: wider aisles, mock hardwood floors, and skylights." Wal-Mart is also pressing the envelope in the area of sustainable design. The September/October 2005 *Texas Architect* features the "Eco-Friendly Design" of the new supercenter in McKinney, Texas, a prototype store enhanced by more than "29 environmentally focused experiments."

*The final merchandizing plan arrives 60 days prior to the owner taking possession of the project from the contractor. This is "show time" or, rather, "stress time," evaluating the impacts, determining required changes and getting the changes to*

*the contractor. Tracy Bruffett knows that Wal-Mart values this part of the process highly. They have to be able to shape the interior of the store to meet current retail trends. This is the heart of their mass customization process.*

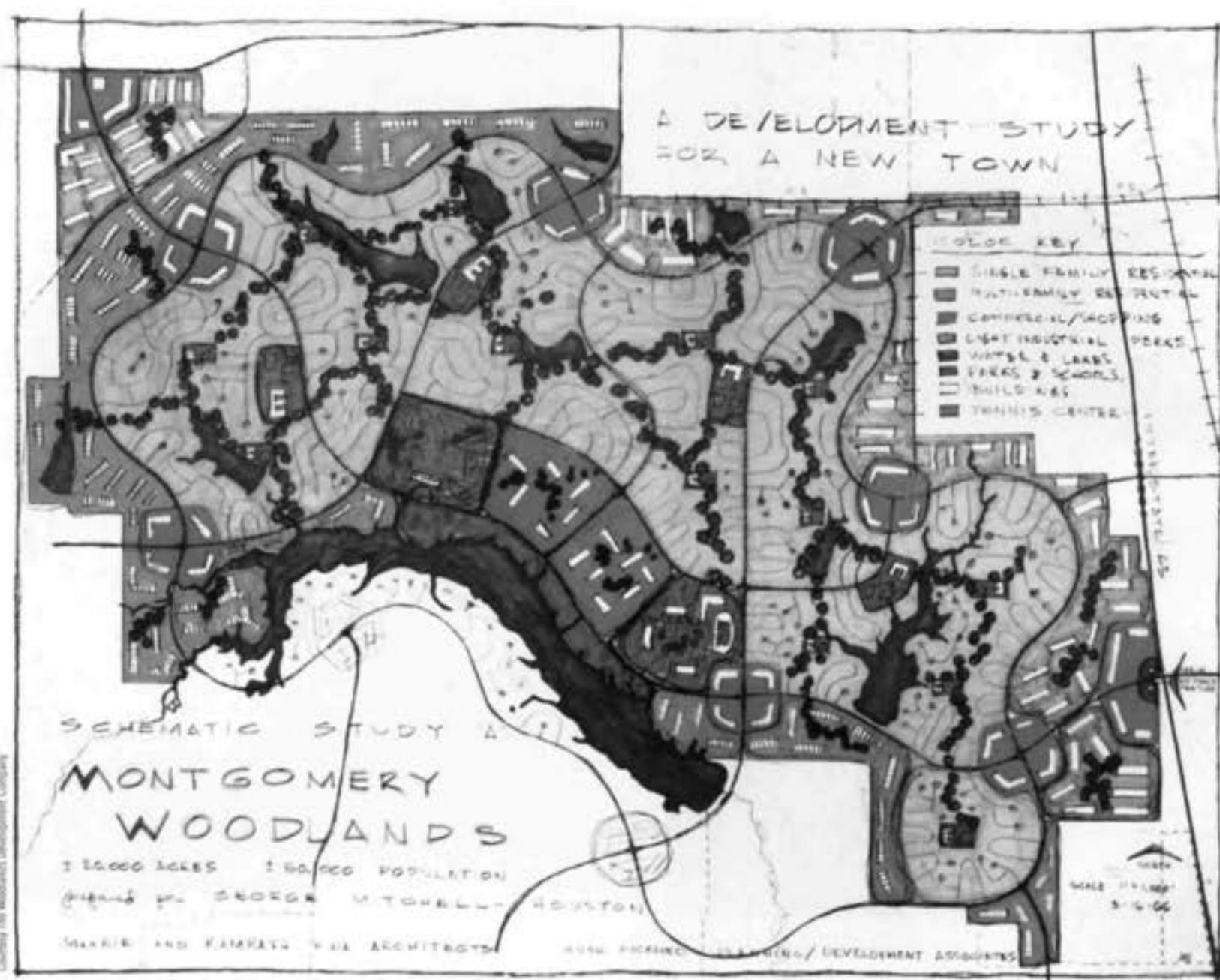
According to Bob Workman, this is only the beginning of experimentation for BSW International. He believes strongly that these same processes can enhance design aesthetics as well as function. As he sees it, the Wal-Mart store projects are in the "first arc" of experimentation. After mastering these processes and refining these tools in the low-cost retail environment, BSW was ready to move up to the next arc, to projects requiring more sensitive and creative design. In fact, the architect has already incorporated these processes into the next arc, taking on hotels (Marriott), restaurants (Applebee's) and a wide variety of other clients. He believes it is only a matter of time (and research) until he can apply many of these "mass customization" processes to unique projects at the most demanding levels of design.

So much about creating buildings can be examined, perfected, and duplicated, over and over again. Most owners are serial builders, having programs of more than one building. Most projects have vast similarities in foundation, structure, and systems. Processes, people, and design can all be rotated out of the individual project environment to be focused on and improved. Each rotation and subsequent improvement is an opportunity to change, to improve, to be inspired.

*Tracy closely examines the data from the completed project. He scans the subject line of each of the twenty-two RFIs from the project. It's getting harder and harder these days to find prototype problems to be addressed. Customization problems are only a little easier to track down. But Tracy still looks at all the data on every job, like a detective, searching out the villain. Eureka! That new connection detail needs some work... You get what you look for.*

By choosing to deal with process opportunities and defining a simple palette of materials, details, and ideas, an architect could become a masterful service provider as well as a craftsman, an artist, and, most importantly, a 21st century professional. As Workman states, "Just look at the level of design that can be found in the car industry. That comes from confidence in the process. Not until the industry understood the process could they address style. It is the same in architecture. [By addressing and improving the process] architects will be freed. They will be more creative. They will be better designers. They will be more valuable to the world and they will [have the opportunity to] take on more responsibility [in the project delivery process]." Bob Workman focuses on projects that don't excite most architects. But his efforts have gleaned important information, systems, and tools that can inform the entire architectural community. He responded to the needs of a focused construction owner and, for that, he has been successful. This is not, however, a classic case of "selling out". It is instead one of the most interesting areas of industry exploration we have seen in decades.

The automobile analogy can be extended here. In many ways, the Wal-Mart Supercenter resembles the Model T of Henry Ford: simple, effective, and built by a process still in its infancy. There is little about these structures that we would ordinarily call beautiful except, possibly, in their effectiveness. But one can't help wondering what incredible new forms and variations might someday grow from this new set of processes. It is just possible that the most significant change coming to the design industry, in function and form, will be from projects that, by the nature of their simplicity, permit experimentation...projects like Wal-Mart. ■



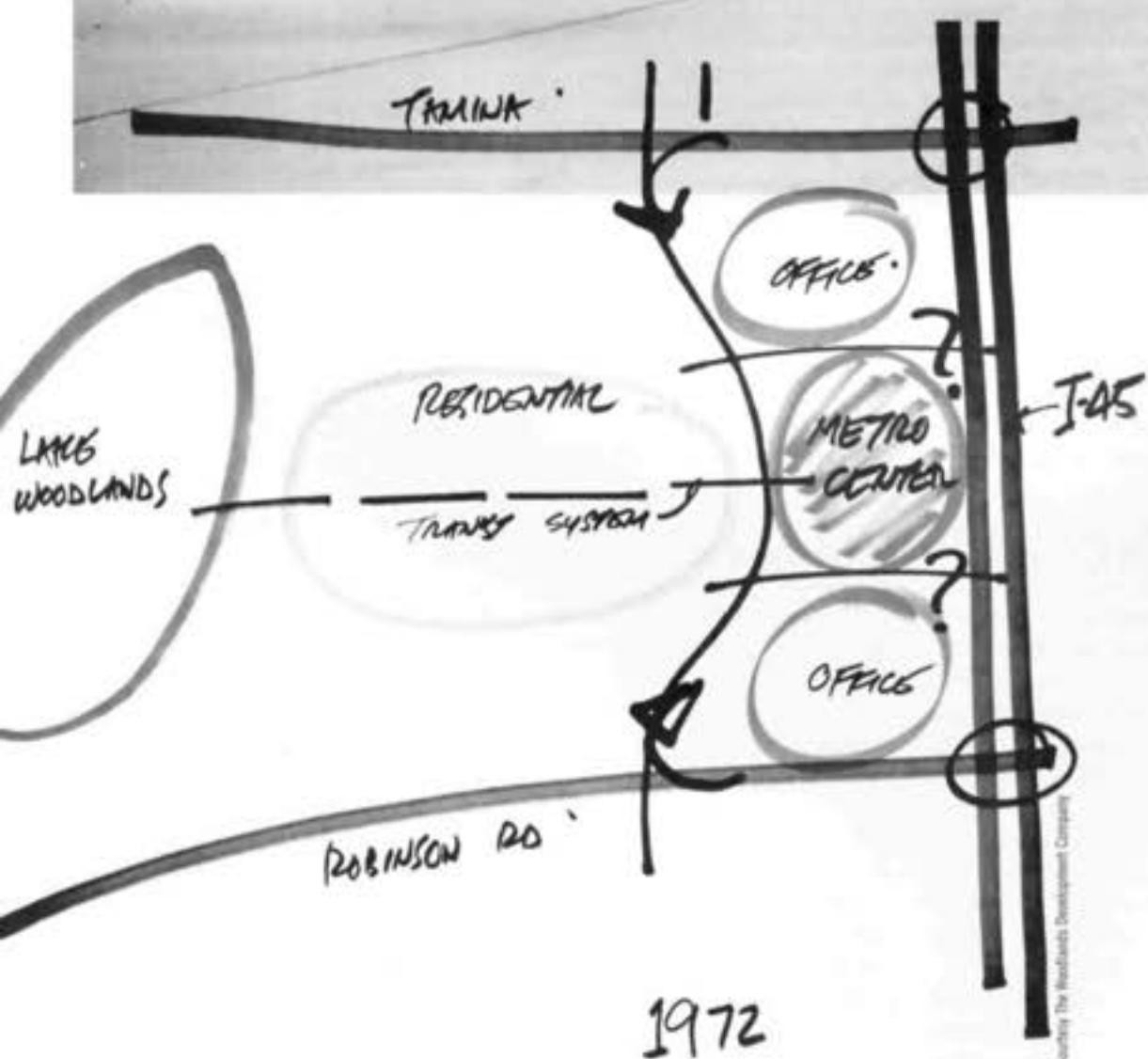
## The Woodlands : Retrospect and Prospect

BY FREDERICK STEINER

AFTER WATCHING POST-WAR SUBURBS sprawl across the landscape during the 1960s, a handful of developers, architects, and planners argued that Americans could do better. New communities, they claimed, could be built in harmony with nature and be open to people of all races and religions. Jobs would be close to homes and all buildings would be well designed. Idealism was these planners' driving force, even if some of the things they planned fell short of their aspirations or now seem odd. Their enthusiasm was fueled in particular by two new communities that had been developed during the 1960s—Reston, Virginia, and Columbia, Maryland. Even federal policy makers became interested, and in 1970 Congress passed the HUD Title VII Urban Growth and New Community Development Act, which guaranteed up to \$50 million in support if a developer met specific social and environmental goals.



Historic Driver



Courtesy The Woodlands Development Company



Courtesy The Woodlands Development Company

Top: Part of The Woodlands design concept was to subordinate the visual commercial signage to the larger natural environment. Left: Ian McHarg's team started with the relationships between community pockets of timber to a larger Woodlands center that itself was attached to the regional arterial of I-45. Above: The Woodlands had been a source of raw materials, from lumber to oil, for decades before George Mitchell saw its potential as a sustainable garden city.

Eventually, 13 new communities were approved for loan guarantees by the federal government under the Title VII program, plus an additional three funded by a related New York State program. Ten states were represented in all, most of them east of the Mississippi River. Texas, however, had three federally-funded new communities—Flower Mound near Dallas, the San Antonio Ranch, and The Woodlands. All of the communities had ambitious social and environmental goals, but the individual focuses varied, such as Soul City, North Carolina's emphasis on African-Americans and new-town-in-town initiatives in New York City (Roosevelt Island), New Orleans (Ponchartrain), and Minneapolis (Cedar-Riverside). Like The Woodlands, most of the other projects were in green-field sites.

Twelve of the HUD Title VII new towns defaulted on their loans and went bankrupt. The one exception was The Woodlands, sitting only a short distance away from the unplanned sprawl of Houston. Now, three decades later, one might ask the question: Why was The Woodlands different?

I have a personal interest in the answer to that question. Title VII changed my life. In 1971, I began working for an idealistic Dayton, Ohio, homebuilder named Don Huber. Huber's family was famous for building Levittown-like suburbs. Huber himself experimented with modular building techniques and initiated partnerships with church groups to build homes in African-American communities. I went to work for him designing brochures for his housing projects and taking pictures of 5,000 acres of rolling Ohio farmland northwest of Dayton. It was on this land that Huber dreamed of building a new community.

He decided to pursue a Title VII grant and hired a crusty Harvard MLA named Gerwin Rohrbach to lead the effort. Since I knew the 5,000 acres well, Rohrbach appointed me his administrative assistant. One of my jobs was to give the prospective master planners we interviewed a tour of the property. A bunch of old codgers from the Architects Collaborative came from Cambridge; Hideo Sasaki and Stu Dawson also flew in from Massachusetts. The Simonds brothers, John and Philip, traveled from Pittsburgh. Gyo Obata and Neil Porterfield arrived from St. Louis. And then there was O. Jack Mitchell and

his Omniplan colleagues from Houston. One afternoon, while I was driving Harry and Ben Weese around in my VW bug, we interrupted a pair of naked hippies in a cornfield.

"Don't see that in Chicago," Harry Weese observed.

What made The Woodlands different? The short answer is George P. Mitchell, Ian L. McHarg, and Houston.

Huber was a Dayton homebuilder, George Mitchell a Texas oilman. The difference in the level of capital they could apply was substantial. Huber's goals were lofty, but his experience grounded in local homebuilding. Mitchell wasn't constrained by prior development experience and followed the lead of his consultants, most notably that of Ian McHarg, best known for his book *Design with Nature* and his advocacy of the use of ecology in design and planning. And, of course, Houston was growing in the 1970s, while Dayton was not.

In the mid-1970s I entered the University of Pennsylvania to study with McHarg. By this time, planning for The Woodlands was well underway, and it was already being recognized as the most successful of the Title VII new communities. The Woodlands is often touted as one of the most complete and comprehensive examples of McHarg's ecological planning method.<sup>1</sup> In fact, McHarg himself repeatedly made this claim in his books *A Quest for Life* and *To Heal the Earth: Selected Writings of Ian McHarg*. (Having McHarg on board, however, was not itself a guarantee of success. With his Wallace, McHarg, Roberts, and Todd colleagues, he helped propose two Title VII new communities. The Ponchartrain new-town-in-town in New Orleans never even received HUD approval. Only The Woodlands prevailed.) Still, one wonders how much of the positive commentary was hype, and just how successful The Woodlands is from today's perspective.

#### Design with Nature and Money

Ann Forsyth, director of the Metropolitan Design Center at the University of Minnesota, who has conducted the most thorough critical assessments of The Woodlands to date, dubbed it an "ecoburb."<sup>2</sup> By that she meant that The Woodlands is greener than other American suburban communities. Forsyth

divides the planning of The Woodlands into five phases: early ideas from the mid-1960s to 1970; ecological design and the Columbia contingent, 1970 to 1974; Title VII in operation, 1975 to 1983; community building, 1983 to 1997; and post-Mitchell growth since 1997.<sup>3</sup> Former CEO of The Woodlands Operating Company Roger Galatas' less critical "inside story" presents a similar time line.<sup>4</sup>

George Mitchell was born in Galveston in 1919 to Greek immigrant parents. He majored in petroleum engineering with an emphasis in geology at Texas A&M, and after graduation went to work for the Stanolind Oil and Gas Company (now Amoco) before spending World War II in the Army Corps of Engineers. Following the war he went into the oil drilling business with his brother. Their successful venture eventually became Mitchell Energy & Development Corp. Then in the early 1960s George Mitchell began to experiment in land development as a way to diversify the energy business.

In 1964 Mitchell purchased 50,000 acres of land north of Houston owned by the Grogan-Cochran Lumber Company; 2,800 acres of this purchase became the seed of what became a 27,000-acre new community.

Most Title VII new communities were in the 5,000 to 8,000 acre range, but the expansive acreage put together by Mitchell signaled the scope of his ambition. Mitchell consulted several Houston area architects and planners, hiring Roberr Hartsfield away from one of those firms—CRS. A Penn graduate, Hartsfield introduced Mitchell to McHarg's *Design with Nature*. Mitchell also sought out the advice of James Rouse, who had developed Columbia, Maryland, and later hired several people who had worked for Rouse on that pivotal new town. In her writing, Ann Forsyth has illustrated the similarities between Mitchell and Rouse, such as their business acumen and their commitment to interfaith cooperation and understanding, as well as the similarities between their resulting new towns. She also makes an important distinction, noting in her book *Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands* (see review, page 43) that "Rouse's response [to community planning] had been to explore the potential for social science to solve the problems of

city building; Mitchell, eventually, looked to the natural sciences and, in particular, ecology as it was being translated into environmental planning and landscape architecture in the late 1960s and early 1970s."<sup>5</sup> Given Mitchell's background in geology, this is not surprising.

The first meeting between Mitchell and McHarg was transformative for both men. "I suggested to Mitchell that the most critical factor was cash," McHarg reflected in *A Quest for Life*, adding, "God smiles on ecological planners."<sup>6</sup> Or, as Mitchell restated it in a recent interview, "God smiles on ecological planners when you make a profit."<sup>7</sup>

McHarg suggested using the natural drainage system of The Woodlands site to structure development. This would, he noted, help reduce the prospects for flood damage. Ever the geologist, Mitchell asked, "All right, natural drainage works, but what does it mean to me?"

"First, George, it means you'll get \$50 million from HUD and, second, it will save you even more money," McHarg responded. "For instance, you won't have to build a storm drainage system. This will save you \$14 million for the first phase alone." And so McHarg converted the oilman into an ecologist.<sup>8</sup>

Wallace, McHarg, Roberts, and Todd proceeded to produce a series of four extraordinary reports to guide the planning and design of The Woodlands. One of these reports, an ecological inventory, resulted in an ecological plan, guidelines for site planning, and land planning and design principles for the first phase of development.

With money and ecology forming the bedrock, Mitchell's staff and team of consultants, which included economic and marketing specialists Gladstone Associates, master planner and architects William Pereira Associates, and engineers Richard Browne Associates, prepared plans and obtained approvals. After The Woodlands received its commitment from HUD in April 1972, "infrastructure construction assumed a feverish pace" for the 1,750-acre first "village," called Grogan's Mill.<sup>9</sup> The new community officially opened on October 19, 1974.

Through the rest of the 1970s development continued as one-by-one the other Title VII new communities failed. During this same period the relationship between HUD and The Woodlands became an



Both natural and enhanced water features become focal points for the planned village communities, allowing The Woodlands to maintain a natural and dynamic presence.

uneasy one. For example, disagreements occurred over financial management, project organization, affirmative action, and low- and moderate-income housing. Beyond the difficulties with HUD, Mitchell faced the other economic challenges of the decade, chief among them the Arab oil embargo and the resulting sag in Houston's real estate market. Still, despite the setbacks, Mitchell's Woodlands Development Corporation soldiered on with staff reorganization and financial readjustments.

In 1983, the Title VII status of The Woodlands ended, directly affecting the amount of affordable housing in the new community. (As Forsyth notes, most of the federally subsidized housing was built before 1983.) The change came during a period of slow national economic growth. As the price of oil dropped, the Houston economy especially suffered. Regardless, development in The Woodlands continued. Several key employers, among them Hughes Tool and Anadarko Petroleum, moved to The Woodlands. Schools, places of wor-

ship, and other key institutions such as the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion and the Houston Advanced Research Center opened. As a result of The Woodlands Country Club, with its three golf courses, the new community became associated with golf.

In 1997, the population of The Woodlands exceeded 50,000. That same year, Mitchell sold The Woodlands Corporation and all of its assets to a partnership of Morgan Stanley and Crescent Real Estate Equities for \$543 million.<sup>10</sup> The 2000 Census recorded a population of 55,649. As growth continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Rouse Company, developers of Columbia, purchased a 52.7 percent interest in The Woodlands.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Piney Woods

Given these changes, one might well ask what are the prospects for the future of The Woodlands, and what will be its lasting legacies. Driving into The Woodlands from the ugly suburban sprawl that has grown up on its borders, the first thing

one notices is, well, the woodlands. Every year the residents of The Woodlands are asked what they like the most and, according to George Mitchell, every year they respond "the woods."<sup>12</sup> As recommended by McHarg and his colleagues, large stands of loblolly pines and associated oaks, sweet gum, hickories, tupelo, magnolia, and sycamore have been preserved. In the Title VII plan, 3,909 acres were to be set aside as open space. Eventually, 8,000 acres of the total 27,000-acre community will become open space. This land includes public park and preserve land as well as five private and two public golf courses.

As anyone who has lived in the area very long knows, heavy rains and flooding are a frequent occurrence in and around Houston. To reduce the negative impacts of this excess of water, McHarg's strategy called for, first, the use of natural drainage systems to control storm water; second, the minimum clearing of native vegetation; and third, limited use of impervious surfaces. This strategy has proven successful, and as a result residents

of The Woodlands have not been negatively affected by floods.

Wildlife habitat is an auxiliary benefit of large areas of native plants and connected natural corridors. Waterfowl, turtles, and small mammals are plentiful in the riparian areas along streams and around The Woodland's lakes. Residents also report seeing coyotes, a species particularly adaptive to changing habitat conditions.

In 1994, MIT planning student Russell Clive Claus wrote "a retrospective critique" on the use of ecology in The Woodlands planning for his master's thesis.<sup>13</sup> He used principles from landscape ecology to assess The Woodlands and found it lacking. He argued that several of the ecological principles "that underscored the planning phase are flawed by today's standards and would have been counterproductive to the achievement of contemporary conservation goals." Furthermore, he noted that The Woodlands Corporation "failed to pursue the ecological vision encapsulated in the early planning phase." In defense of The



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A series of waterways link venues such as the regional Woodlands Mall and offer water taxi transportation options.

Woodlands plan, the landscape ecology principles did not exist in 1974, when the plan was prepared. It was McHarg, in fact, who helped provide the interdisciplinary collaboration that contributed to the development of landscape ecology. However, his criticism about the failure of the developers to pursue the early ecological planning vision seems fair. Anyone who has ever been involved in a long-term, large-scale planning project can attest to the challenge of sustaining idealism and vision. Claus' thesis reminds us that ecological science and ecological design continue to evolve. Some mechanism to incorporate new ecological knowledge into The Woodlands' ongoing planning and design would have been a really significant innovation. Still, no development as expansive as The Woodlands has incorporated this newer science or design in its planning.

#### New Minorities

People who the U.S. Census classify as "white" are now a minority in Texas. Conversely, according to the 2000 Census,

87.5 percent of The Woodlands population is "white non-Hispanic." So one might well ask if the idea of racial diversity, which was a dream for new towns during the 1960s and a goal HUD established for Title VII communities, was ever really likely in The Woodlands. Pre-Title VII Columbia has achieved a good level of diversity, but then Columbia is located in the Washington, D.C., region while The Woodlands is in Texas, where integration of housing was an explosive issue even in the 1970s.

One remarkable aspect of The Woodlands in this regard is that George Mitchell appeared to be sincerely committed to diversity. There were efforts not to discriminate in housing sales based on race or religion. In the early years, the range of housing prices was more inclusive than in the later years of development. In addition, HUD supported a better mix of housing before withdrawing its support for low income housing in 1983, a move Mitchell calls "very disappointing."<sup>14</sup> It is the prices of the homes in The Woodlands, rather than overt discrimination that appears to have limited the racial diversity. Although it is possible to purchase condominium units in the lower \$100,000s, single-family builder homes starting above \$200,000 and custom homes into the millions dominate The Woodlands real estate market. Galatas reports that The Woodlands Corporation currently does not address the lower 40 percent of Houston's housing market.

Mitchell was more successful in encouraging religious diversity. According to Forsyth, "Mitchell was attracted by Rouse's experiment with interfaith."<sup>15</sup> Mitchell consulted with Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant leaders and formed The Woodlands Religious Community Incorporated, now called Interfaith.<sup>16</sup> This organization assumed many social planning and social services responsibilities in the new community and has overall been a positive force. For example, when a group of evangelical Christians organized a commemoration for the first anniversary of 9/11 that excluded Muslims and Jews, Interfaith held a more inclusionary event.

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#### Keeping Up Appearances

George Mitchell exhibited considerable devotion to The Woodlands for more than 30 years. His was not a get-rich-quick scheme. Galatas reports that Mitchell said, "I didn't want to sell The Woodlands, ... [it] is a great project and I was very proud of it."<sup>17</sup> At the time of the sale, Mitchell was 78 years old. He told Galatas "if he had been 50 years old in 1997, he would not have sold The Woodlands Corporation."<sup>18</sup>

The Woodlands is more than a bedroom suburb as a result of Mitchell's leadership. The Woodlands has indeed become a community, albeit a rather "upscale" one. Homes continue to sell well, including those in the million dollar range.<sup>19</sup> The retail establishments and golf courses indicate an affluent citizenry. The community's proximity to Houston's main airport and Interstate 45 have made it attractive to business and industry. In fact, Mitchell sited The Woodlands with the location of the airport and interstate in mind.<sup>20</sup> In the beginning, he set a goal of providing



The natural habitat is laced with bike and jogging trails that link village pockets.

Frederick Steiner

employment opportunities for at least one third of residents within the community.<sup>21</sup> This goal continues, and as of 2004, there were 30,000 jobs in The Woodlands, which represents a good jobs-housing balance.<sup>22</sup> Employment near homes has reduced the numbers of commuters somewhat in the Houston metropolitan region. Mitchell originally expected Houston to annex The Woodlands and has been "disappointed" that The Woodlands residents have resisted annexation. However, he is "hopeful" that some day soon this will come to pass.<sup>23</sup>

The New Urbanists have renewed public and developer interest in new communities. However, they tend to ignore the American new communities of the 1960s and '70s and use earlier eras of town planning as their precedental touchstones. Real differences exist between the visions of the New Urbanists and the earlier generation of American new community planners. There are few front porches and many winding roads in The Woodlands. Except for an early bibliogra-

phy put together by noted New Urbanist Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, the New Urbanists have paid scant attention to The Woodlands or any other American new community of the 1960s and 1970s. The New Urbanists focus on a specific design aesthetic first and place a strong emphasis on circulation and connectivity second. A few leading New Urbanists even express open hostility to environmentalism. The New Urbanist developments that have been built thus far are more New Suburbanist than urban. They are affluent neighborhoods that have been developed for economic and aesthetic goals rather than for environmental protection or social equity.

The new communities of the 1960s and '70s emphasized environmental and social concerns. Landscape design prevailed over architectural design. In The Woodlands, transportation systems may have catered to the automobile, but roadways were designed to fit the terrain. Pedestrian and bike trails weave through the piney woods, connecting residential

neighborhoods to shopping and office areas. Design standards effectively control signage and utilities are buried and hidden from sight.

The building architecture in The Woodlands is, well, suburban in appearance. Perhaps this is why its design has not attracted much interest from the New Urbanists or the broader architectural community. In this regard, The Woodlands can be compared to two other Wallace, McHarg, Roberts, and Todd projects from the early 1970s, Amelia Island in north Florida and the Austin, Texas neighborhood where I live. Amelia Island presents similarities to The Woodlands in both landscape and building design, although new developments during the past decade display a noticeable New Urbanist influence. My neighborhood, which is inside Austin's city limits, developed following the Wallace, McHarg, Roberts, and Todd Lake Austin Growth Management Plan of 1976.<sup>24</sup> Although in my neighborhood oaks are preserved rather than pines, the residen-

tial and retail structures as well as the street patterns display similarities to their Woodlands cousins.

### Prospects

So how exactly does one judge The Woodlands 30 years on? In the environmental and economic realms, The Woodlands can point to many successful achievements. Its social record, however, is more disappointing, with modest racial diversity. Over time, The Woodlands has become a more affluent, more exclusive community. Its landscape design is accomplished and pleasant, but its building architecture lacks innovation and excitement.

But then there is the dream. The Woodlands began as a dream, and one can imagine another dream that builds from it. One can imagine a new community in the future that sets aside even more land as open space, transcends competence in landscape design, and advances an architecture that is both

livable and inventive. This new community would draw on the most up-to-date knowledge in ecological science and ideas from ecological planning. The developer would possess the business acumen and stamina of George Mitchell. The new community would be linked to the world by rail and internally through bike and pedestrian trails. All new buildings would be built to platinum LEED standards and schools would have windows. The community would also be dedicated to achieving social equity and racial diversity.

George Mitchell helped change planning, design, and development practice in Texas. As he reflects, "When we started planning The Woodlands, there wasn't the architecture or land planning talent to design and build a new town in Houston. That's why I hired ten people from Columbia, plus some of their consultants and talent from all over the nation, like McHarg. Now there's the talent in Houston, but it would be impossible to assemble the land for a new community like The Woodlands."<sup>21</sup>

Mitchell and his wife Cynthia continue to live in The Woodlands. He has used much of the wealth generated from the sale of The Woodlands and his energy interests to advance sustainable development, historic preservation, and environmental research. Mitchell's ten children inherited his idealism and have pursued studies and careers as environ-

mentalists and architects, as developers and scientists.

We can also be inspired by George Mitchell's idealism. A success in the oil and gas business, he did not need to venture into the risky business of building a new community. But he did, largely because of his belief that we can do a better job designing our built environment. Now that we have entered the first urban century, with more than half the world's population living in city-regions for the first time in history, we need to pursue this ideal with a renewed commitment. As we have become a more urban planner, many more people have joined us with more on the way. As our numbers have increased, we face a future with finite or declining land, water, and energy resources. The Woodlands is not perfect, but George Mitchell's vision illustrates the practical reality of dreaming big. ■

#### Notes

1. See, for example, George T. Morgan, Jr., and John O. King, *The Woodlands: New Community Development, 1964-1983* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1987); Cynthia L. Galatas and Kenneth L. Helphand, *Yard Street Park* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994); and Roger Galatas with Jim Barlow, *The Woodlands: The Inside Story of Creating a Better Home town* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Land Institute, 2004). As well over a decade ago in this journal, see Richard Ingersoll, "Utopia Limited: Houston's Ring Around the Beltway," *Cite* 31 (Winter-Spring, 1994):10-16 and Peter Wood, "37,000 Woodlanders Can't Be Wrong," *Cite* 31 (Winter-Spring, 1994):17.
2. Ann Forsyth, "Evolution of an Ecoburb," *Landscape Architecture* 95 (7, July 2005): 60, 62, 64, 65, 66-67. See also Ann Forsyth, "Ian McHarg's Woodlands: A Second Look," *Planning* (August, 2003):10-13 and Ann Forsyth, "Planning Lessons from Three U.S. New Towns of the 1960s and 1970s: Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 68(4, 2002):387-417.
3. Ann Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 161-163.
4. Galatas, *The Woodlands*.
5. Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, p. 164.
6. McHarg, *A Quest for Life*, pp. 256 and 260.
7. Interview with George Mitchell, August 24, 2005.
8. McHarg, *A Quest for Life*, p. 264.
9. Morgan and King, *The Woodlands*, p. 32.
10. Galatas, *The Woodlands*, p. xiv.
11. Ibid., p. xvi.
12. Mitchell interview.
13. Russell Clive Claus, "The Woodlands, Texas: A Retrospective Critique of the Principles and Implementation of An Ecological Planned Development" (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Master of City Planning thesis, 1994).
14. Mitchell interview.
15. Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, p. 182.
16. Galatas, *The Woodlands*.
17. Ibid., p. 155.
18. Galatas, *The Woodlands*, p. 156. Galatas reports that Mitchell would have preferred to sell his energy interests but they were entangled in litigation. He sold the energy company about three years after liquidating The Woodlands.
19. Mitchell interview.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Galatas, *The Woodlands*, p. 179.
23. Mitchell interview.
24. Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd, *Amelia Island, Florida, A Report on the Master Planning Process for a Recreational New Community* (Hilton Head Island, South Carolina: The Sea Pines Company, 1971) and Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd, *Lake Austin Growth Management Plan* (Austin, Texas: City of Austin, Department of Planning, 1976).
25. Mitchell interview.

#### Being There: Living in The Woodlands

Long before The Woodlands welcomed its first homeowners, George P. Mitchell had gathered a team of environmentalists, hydrologists, land planners, and engineers to help him plan an environmentally sustainable community. The Woodlands goes beyond such typical environmental measures as shared parking for parks, churches, and schools, limiting impervious surfaces and planning for storm water management. As an example of the proactive environmental ethos that has been a part of The Woodlands plan from the beginning, protected areas have been allocated for endangered species like the bald eagle and the red cockaded woodpecker. The planned development has grown to include 27,000 acres, but it still maintains its commitment to sustainability.

Over its 30-year history The Woodlands has been recognized with 38 environmental awards, including a 2003 gold award in the prestigious Nations in Bloom competition, the world's only competition that rewards local communities for achievements in environmental management and the creation of livable communities. Endorsed by the United Nations, Nations in Bloom encourages best practices, innovation, and leadership in providing a vibrant, environmentally sustainable community that improves quality of life.

The Woodland's environmental office

conducts educational outreach programs including the annual Arbor Day Tree Giveaway each January, when 30,000 tree seedlings are distributed to residents. Earth Day in April provides opportunities to learn about composting, xeriscaping, and other earth-friendly programs. Each fall, the Wildflower Festival brings together local businesses to sponsor a wildflower seed giveaway—thousands of wildflowers bloom in the spring in neighborhoods and along roadways as a result.

As an unincorporated area outside of any city jurisdiction, The Woodlands had to create its own governance structure, and the one it came up with fosters a sense of community and commitment to the environment. The community is divided into villages, with each village composed of several neighborhoods. Each village has its own elected, unpaid association officers including a Residential Design Review Committee (RDR). The RDR reviews all exterior changes requested by homeowners to ensure that standards are enforced. Regular public meetings give village residents an opportunity to express their views about issues within the community and to learn about new initiatives.

As the community grows, environmental quality continues to be important. A high performance, green building team at the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) is called upon for advice on commercial, public, and residential

projects and to offer outreach programs. HARC also maintains a vigorous research agenda designed to explore advanced concepts for building within a sustainable frontier. The successful Cultivate Green initiative is an example of the team's work. With funding provided by the Texas State Energy Conservation Office, this program educates the public in using sustainable materials and practices for residential construction and remodeling.

Over the next ten years the community is expected to grow to a population of 125,000. It will have 22 public schools; eight private schools; 60 religious congregations; 1,000 miles of roadway; 300 miles of pathways; 150 parks; 2,750 employers; 72,700 employees; 32,000 homes; 7,000 apartments and assisted living facilities; and 4,000 town homes and condominiums. Even as it grows, 8,000 of the community's 27,000 acres will remain green space in the form of parks, golf courses, bike paths, and forest preserves.

One of the areas of The Woodlands that will experience the greatest and most concentrated growth is the Town Center, a mixed-use urban core of homes, offices, shops, restaurants, entertainment, and specialty stores. The Center is a catalyst in building a richer social environment and facilitating economic growth. The Center's newest addition, the mile long Woodlands Waterway, links Town Center establishments by

water taxis, trolleys, and pedestrian walkways.

My wife and I truly enjoy living in The Woodlands. Being empty nesters, three years ago we selected a small, two-street neighborhood where approximately 75 percent of the 47 households are in a similar stage of life. Our neighbors have become our extended family; we can walk the streets and name the people who live in every single house. Rarely do we travel outside of The Woodlands as we find all of the amenities we need right here. We enjoy free concerts in the parks, the entertainment offered at the pavilion, and a wide variety of restaurants and shopping opportunities. A particular favorite is the new Market Street area where we can walk and explore the many small boutiques. Environmentally focused events are also a must on our calendar, especially "Landscaping Solutions," where we learn about native plants and how we can personally protect the environment.

The emphasis on living in harmony with nature is a true blessing for us, providing a very full and rewarding quality of life experience. In The Woodlands we have found a satisfying lifestyle: a vibrant local economy, high standards for the maintenance and protection of the natural and built environment, opportunities for continuing education, and rich social interaction. — *Richard C. Haut, Ph.D.*

*"There is only the fight to recover  
what has been lost and found and lost  
again and again."*

T.S. Eliot

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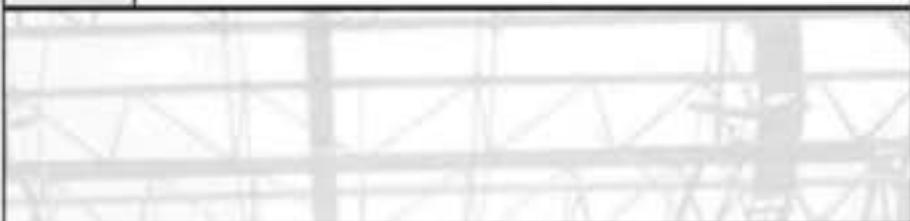
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## According to Plan

*Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands* by Ann Forsyth. Published by University of California Press, 2005. 396 pp., \$29.95

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

Ann Forsyth, professor of urban studies at the University of Minnesota, has written a valuable comparative study of three of the best-known examples of the "new community" movement of the 1960s and '70s: Irvine, California, between Los Angeles and San Diego; Columbia, Maryland, between Baltimore and Washington, D. C.; and The Woodlands north of Houston. These are functionally defined as "satellite cities" (meaning they were planned to be big, mixed-use, and part of existing metropolitan areas), constructed according to master planning processes meant to be carried out profitably over decades. Forsyth examines these three communities within the broad context of 20th-century American suburbanization to evaluate how different and effective they have been as reformist models. She also evaluates their performance over 30 to 40 years to see how they compare to the principles of Smart Growth and the New Urbanism. One of the most commendable features of the book is its critical assessment of suburban planning models that, from the perspective of current suburban critiques and models of reform, may now seem dated. Forsyth forcibly makes the point that many of the attributes of both Smart Growth and the New Urbanism (if not the latter's design imagery) also pertain to the New Communities movement.

Forsyth first outlines the general issues that New Communities responded to in the 1960s: urban crises, socioeconomic inequity, racial discrimination, the decline of American center cities, the problematic record of federally-subsidized Urban Renewal programs, and a pervasive cultural critique of postwar suburban development encoded in the term "sprawl." The critique of sprawl is a recurring theme in this book. It is both the image and the practice against which all three communities were constructed. Yet the extent to which each community is implicated in the processes of sprawl

gives Forsyth's generally positive assessment a note of ambivalence.

Each community had a different origin. Irvine was a 93,000-acre ranch in private ownership that lay within the path of metropolitan Los Angeles' southward growth. Because state and federal government agencies had begun to use their condemnation power to install infrastructure within the ranch domain, the Irvine Company commenced planning in 1959 for an expansive new town linked to a new campus of the University of California. The first sector was opened in 1964, and in 1971 much of the ranch was incorporated as the City of Irvine. As Forsyth notes, what sets Irvine apart from the other two communities was that the developer did not have to buy the real estate, but did have to contend with community residents, who acquired the political power to alter its plans through agencies of city government.

James Rouse developed Columbia outside his home city, Baltimore. Rouse founded the Rouse Company, a major mid-century real estate development corporation; as Forsyth notes, he invented the concept of the festival marketplace. The initial 15,500-acre site was assembled between 1961 and 1963 and the first of Columbia's "villages" opened in 1967. What was unusual about Columbia was Rouse's personal commitment to providing for income and racial diversity, setting Columbia apart from the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area and its prevailing real estate practices. Columbia is also territorially fragmented, unlike the other two examples.

The Woodlands also embodied the personal commitment of its founder, Houston independent oilman George Mitchell, to exploring alternatives to suburban sprawl. Mitchell began buying what would eventually be 27,000 acres of timberland in Montgomery County from lumber companies in 1964. Planning for a new town began in 1966. A second town plan was prepared in 1969 in order to secure a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Title IV grant, and a third plan was prepared beginning in 1971 by Wallace, McHarg, Robert & Todd of Philadelphia and other consultants to obtain a Title VII grant. (Of the three, The Woodlands is the only community to have made use of public funding.) What Forsyth describes as the



## ReFormInG SubUrbiA

THE PLANNED COMMUNITIES OF IRVINE, COLUMBIA, AND THE WOODLANDS



ANN FORSYTH



on use of the automobile as the primary mode of transportation, even within the community. This qualification touches on the issue of sprawl. As different from surrounding suburban developments as The Woodlands is, it seems to contribute to metropolitan sprawl rather than serving as an antidote to it. Forsyth connects the economics and politics of sprawl to the presence of small-time operators and their incremental processes—precisely the factors that loom so large in the economic and political landscape of Houston. Each community profiled represents an exceptional commitment to integrated master planning that requires access to large reservoirs of capital and the ability to measure out profitable returns over decades. She acknowledges that the scale of operations involved in the three communities is an important reason that they remain exceptional. Forsyth also observes that one of the constituencies most consistently critical of the three communities is "high style professionals in architecture."

Forsyth is very effective in describing the development of each community. She extensively interviewed participants in the process (as well as consulting corporate archives, public documents, publicity material, and news stories) and she notes differences in recollections stemming from who was where, at what time, and what their stake in the process was. Because she recognizes and constantly reminds readers of the crucial role of the market in determining the success or failure of all three communities, she is attuned to the tensions between ideals and pragmatism—and rivalries between competing interests—that figured in the history of each community. She also explores the relationships between the development corporations and agencies of local government, which often had the power to thwart the developer's proposals by refusing to grant waivers or pass new legislation. Forsyth captures the sense of elation and optimistic enthusiasm that prevailed in the planning of Columbia and The Woodlands, as well as the consequences of the cyclical economic downturns that affected both communities at vulnerable moments.

Forsyth's analysis is so carefully constructed that her favorable assessments are not easily disputed. Yet they don't seem entirely satisfactory either. Forsyth notes at the outset that none of the communities is environmentally sustainable, in part because planning for each was premised

The carefully wrought conclusions Forsyth comes to give authority to her comparisons between New Communities and Smart Growth/New Urbanism. What she questions is the efficacy of reformist models "to achieve real progress in areas such as housing affordability and energy use reduction;...and influencing others to adopt even the level of change that has occurred" in a political and economic climate "dominated by products that externalize the costs of growth." *Reforming Suburbia* is constructed and written with clarity. This enables Ann Forsyth to make a compelling case about the importance of the New Communities movement historically and the continuing relevance of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands to current debates on American urban and suburban practices and policies. ■

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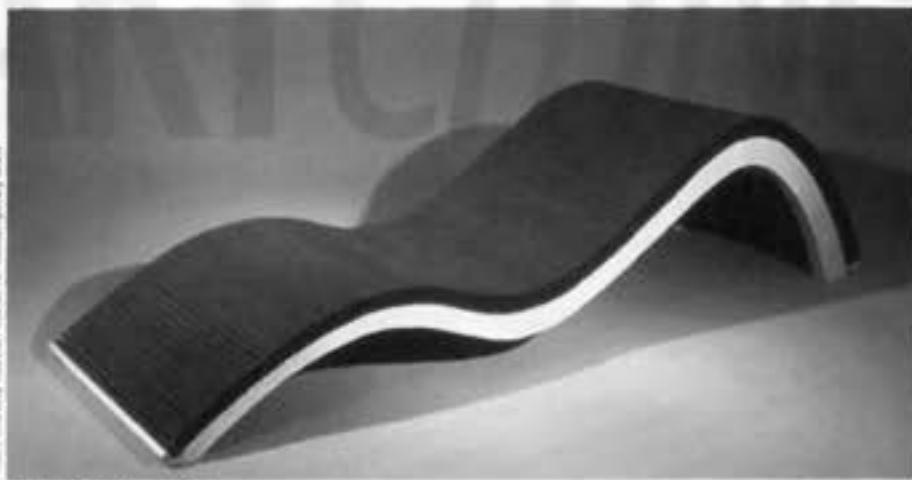
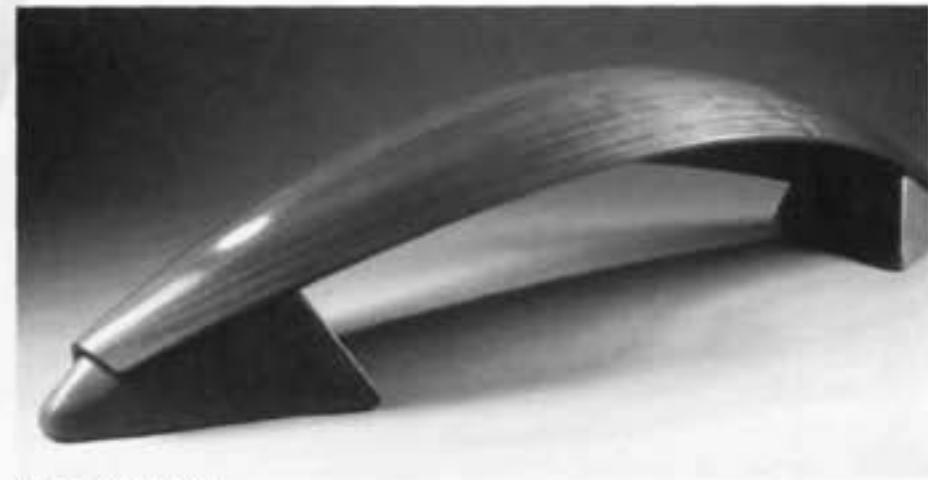
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## When Opposites Attract: The Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

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Reviewed by Thomas Riesnak

The Houston Center for Contemporary Craft poses a challenge to anyone who would want to argue that "contemporary" and "craft" exist as two different and mutually exclusive worlds. The label "contemporary" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is more often than not related to mass consumption or mass customization, or a self-conscious style built around product lust—anything other than "craft." With few exceptions in our Manchurian consumer culture, new knowledge equals 24-hour news, hunger equals fast food, depression equals Prozac. But craft takes time and expresses the singularity of the individual.

*Contemporary* carries with it much modernist baggage, engendering visions of the inorganic and the machine-made, while *craft* still evokes themes of honesty, authenticity, grace, and resonance—the human elements of design. The Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) has adopted this interdenominational frolicking between life and art as its mission, manifesting the hybrid zone where art, execution, and process go together and are displayed in a qualitative unity. I would suspect that fellow travelers from Ruskin to Rauschenberg would appreciate and endorse the unorthodoxy that makes the HCCC, in my view, one of the most important educational and exhibition spaces in Houston.

In the HCCC any and all preconceived concerns about a split between life and art are made inconsequential. One is invited

to simply embrace the humanity of form through a combination of imaginative design, technical proficiency, and the unlikely juxtaposition of materials. The HCCC refers to itself as a "contemporary living museum...where loom and laser, anvil and lathe, computer and kiln ignite the imagination and bring new vision to life." Given this kind of mission, contemporary craft has the potential to transcend the mere translation of our culture and to actually transform our cultural values. The attraction here is the demonstration of the pleasurable journey from raw material and idea to refined art and resonance, the creation of a cultural non-fiction.

A case in point, "Curv-iture," on view at the center from June 17 to September 4, 2005, features a stunning collection of furniture that "celebrates the curve." Sponsored by the Furniture Society, the exhibit features 35 original pieces selected from a field of 476 that were submitted from eight countries. "Curv-iture" was the theme exhibit for the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Furniture Society Conference held at Savannah College of Art in 2004.

Pleasingly out of phase, the passion in the exhibited work resides far from the preconceived or mass-produced. There are two distinct qualitative divisions of work in the show: the beautiful, representing classically crafted objects that demonstrate a mastery of the hand (and that might be better suited for the Bayou Bend Collection); and the sublime, spiritually rich examples that challenge the imagination and cultivate the soul. Industrial felt, glass, forged steel, waxed twine, neoprene, concrete, digital imagery, milk paint, and cottonwood branches seem an unlikely list of building materials for the creation of fine art furniture.

yet this odd lot combines courageously in essays on the curve that achieve exactly that end.

Matthias Pliessnig's *Shell* is an extraordinary piece made from concrete, mahogany, and a phenomenal curve; the fusion of these three ingredients creates a sense that one is not simply an observer, but a participant who is viscerally, tactiley, and emotionally engaged. For me it was like the first time I heard music over a set of headphones: A chill ran down my back, and I felt the hair stand up on my arms and the back of my neck. That was what happened when I walked into the Asher Gallery and saw Pliessnig's work. The elegance with which these discordant materials work together is extraordinarily subtle for such a large work, which is united in a sublime curve that unifies and balances the entire composition.

Several other pieces in this exhibit affected me in a similar way. Jennifer Anderson's magnificently simple *Chaise* made of industrial felt, Baltic birch plywood, and steel cables—a comfortable great-great grandchild of Le Corbusier's classic from the 1920s—was crafted with awe-inspiring elegance. Equally interesting but more whimsical is Jake Antonelli's *Daydreamer*, a wildly organic lounge constructed of ash and yellow-heart, tied together with waxed twine using a surgeon's care. The piece had me thinking of what might happen if Frank Gehry's bent wood furniture were to meet up with Charles Eames's leg splint in one of those synergies where  $1+1=3$ . Any of these pieces could serve as a poster child for this exhibit, with their resonant curves melding disparate and unlikely materials to create furniture fusion.

Most of us, from designers with

academic credentials to designers of the everyday, have been mistakenly taught that creative ideas equate to risks rather than advancements. The artists in the "Curv-iture" exhibition were fortuitously absent for that lesson. The work in this exhibit does not represent problem-solving in the traditional sense, as an essentially conservative undertaking that accepts given parameters and proceeds in a linear fashion until a solution is reached or time has run out. PROBLEM: Who is God...God is love...love is blind...therefore God is blind...time's up! The work presented in "Curv-iture" by contrast is affirmed by a non-linear process in which familiar definitions—chair = four legged thing we sit on, or chair = place of repose—are deliberately de-familiarized; opportunities are exposed, transformed, translated, and reified, resulting in a change of heart about what was previously considered a fixed text. The entire "Curv-iture" exhibition communicates, and we should feel fortunate the work lets us participate in the conversation.

The Houston Center for Contemporary Craft provides a forum for the exhibition, education, and communication about the how and the why: How in the world did the artist/craftsperson do that and why in the world do I feel so compelled to embrace it? Just as craft eventually found its place in response to the industrial revolution, contemporary craft is finding its place in our rapidly changing, information-driven consumer culture. Houston has a "living museum" to promote the cultural legacy of craft, while at the same time providing a forum for the equal exchange of ideas between the public and the artist, between life and art. ■

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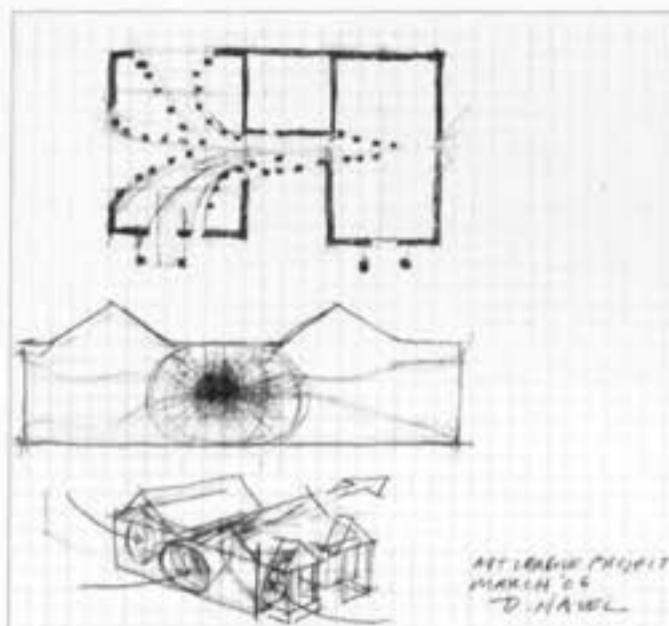


Photo by Alena Lant

Top: Sculptor Dan Havel's original drawing for *Inversion*.

Photo series, top: The west exterior wall facing Montrose Boulevard seemed to be constantly in the process of exploding. Center: The vortex continued through the center of its modest host dwellings. Bottom: *Inversion's* tail and spilled out onto the ground.

## Aesthetic of Demolition

### *Inversion*

May 21–September 27, 2005  
1006–1008 Willard Street

Reviewed by Patrick Peters

The quick ink sketch above clarifies the idea behind *Inversion*, but it can't capture the arresting nature of the artwork itself. The frozen explosion of wood siding that resulted from these modest drawings slowed traffic on Montrose Boulevard for weeks.

The two dilapidated wood-cottages-cum-art-classrooms that became *Inversion* had outlived their usefulness to the Art League of Houston when Executive Director Debbie McNulty invited Dan Havel and Dean Ruck, two Houston sculptors with a history of architectural revision, to create a final use for them. As conceived and executed, the work partially consumed the two conjoined buildings in the process of its making. Havel and Ruck harvested siding from the buildings' exterior and recombined this detritus into a vortex reminiscent of a tornado funnel, cut east-to-west through the buildings' cores. (The artists normally work independently, but collaborated nine years previously on "O House" with Kate Petley [Cite 36, Spring 1996], boarding up and then hollowing out a dilapidated bungalow in Houston's West End to create a room-scale camera obscura.)

Over a period of three intense weekends of work in early May, Havel and Ruck produced their installation via simultaneous actions of unbuilding and building, performed surreptitiously if audibly behind the houses' walls, up until the critical moment of unveiling. The pair advanced the vortex's construction to the west exterior wall and then broke through it, revealing the project's existence to the passing traffic on Montrose Boulevard.

Local enthusiasm for *Inversion* generated discussions of relocating it to a permanent setting. Its image circulated

across this country and abroad. The fact that the final demolition of *Inversion* was postponed due to the expected near-Houston landfall of Hurricane Rita, the second of two closely occurring natural disasters to devastate the upper Gulf Coast, is ironic. The devastation wrought by the recent hurricanes exposed us to images more terrifyingly sublime than this modest assemblage, but somehow linked to it by its reference to nature's raw power.

But in contrast to this reading of art-as-symbol, the real power of this work stems from the particularity of the stick-by-stick procedure employed to ground viewers in the empirical fact of the thing, its American wood-frame construction. In an essay on the conceptual ambiguity of the American timber frame, architectural educator Tom Peters writes that the advantage of the American timber frame is that it is a-systematic. Its process resembles Dada, involving a "creative misunderstanding" of the formal logic of building. In illustration, the disquiet observed in *Inversion* is the product of the juxtaposition of an over-scaled orifice inhabiting such a modest host dwelling. Large holes in buildings this small should cause failure, but did not, even under Houston's share of Rita's high force winds.

At the moment of final dismantling, the artists were asked about their emotional response to the loss of their artwork. Havel explained that the process of its demolition had begun at the outset. Far from being a fixed object, *Inversion* was an arrested moment in the continuous process of destruction of the building—and an echo of more natural processes. As the concluding phase of *Inversion*'s aesthetic of demolition, the actual dismantling was efficient and uncelebrated. According to Havel, the backhoe operator charged with the task noted with pride that he had completed his assignment five minutes ahead of an estimated 45. He added, "This is my art." ■



Rowing down Highway 59 after Tropical Storm Allison. How much water will the new trench hold when the next big storm hits?

## Storm Warning

While the rest of the nation watches on big screen plasma televisions, in the Gulf States those affected by Hurricane Katrina are participating in a live-action drama seen too many times by their forefathers. They face a future already challenged, and now they must keep the President's promise to rebuild "better and stronger" than ever and to do so "out of harm's way." Soon the earnest planning and design will begin. The question of how best to prevent future damage to citizens and businesses on the Gulf Coast will be posed and quickly answered. The goal will be to repair damaged structures and rebuild those destroyed as quickly as possible in order to get "back to normal." Like their Gulf forefathers, those who have been affected by Katrina will most likely not take the time to consider their options.

Two months ago Houston dodged a similar threat from Hurricane Rita, which aimed its destructive might directly at the city before shifting off to the east. But only four years ago thousands suffered severe flood damage from Allison, another fickle tropical storm.

In the weeks and months that the Katrina recovery will require, the focus of most recovery teams will probably shift, as it did in Houston, from a mindset of inquiry and planning to a mindset of immediate problem solving. Pressures on officials will be immense, and the ability to maintain a long view will diminish day by day. Soon enough, the entire focus will become a near frenzy to recover and return to the normal rhythms of the city. In the process, the affected population,

just like that in Houston, will lose the ability to ask the question, "How did this happen?" And more importantly the need to answer the more essential question—"What must we do regionally to prevent this from happening again?"—will be lost in the rush.

The problem-solving, get-it-done-fast, and get-a-bigger-hammer mindset will settle in, and soon enough New Orleans, Gulfport, and Biloxi will be rebuilding in the below sea level bowl, 60 feet from the Gulf of Mexico—as did the Texas Medical Center institutions which built back at the end of the narrowest point of the Brays Bayou watershed (the "rain water surface flow funnel") after Allison. The recovery effort will seize upon getting the harmed back to doing what they, and we, have always done.

In fact the "recovery" process is designed to end up with this status quo rebuilding as the desired result. The governing law for all natural disasters is the Stafford Act. The section of the law that governs what can happen is the public assistance section. The cardinal rule of the program is to return what was damaged to its pre-disaster condition. The federal taxpayer will not be expected to improve or enhance anything beyond what existed before. These chilling words and the strident manner in which they are applied by FEMA will drive all recovery, planning, and design teams to quickly move to the conventional and comfortable paradigms (for example, witness the rush to put the displaced into scattered mobile home parks across

BY BRIAN YEOMAN

Louisiana, regardless of proximity to work or schools).

Two other components of the recovery program will fundamentally shape how cities, counties, parishes, and state government respond. The first is the unpleasant knowledge that it is myth that the Federal government, in the personage of the President, is going to pay for the recovery; actually it will only pay 75 percent of the eligible costs. The second programmatic limitation is cash flow. The entire FEMA program is a reimbursement program—yes, a reimbursement program. The applicants have to have the cash to do the work. Afterwards, they can get 75 percent of their money back, but only if the projects were eligible in the first place.

Preparing for the next surprise weather attack brought on by erratic global climate changes, New Orleans, Gulfport, and Biloxi, like Houston, will begin a process of fortifying their buildings against major flooding, believing that human engineering is smarter and more powerful than nature. The cities will rebuild the levees, install more pumps, power the pumps with solar panels, and allow residences to again share the easement with the levees. The mantra will become, "We are looking to not just rebuild what was lost, but to rebuild it better where possible."

Meanwhile, those who know that the big picture includes enlisting Mother Nature in the defense of the damaged areas will not be heard. The power of the engineered response will drive the

affected to obsess on the detailed concerns related to storm damage. Like the war on cancer, it will become a process that will fixate on the symptoms and fail to consider the cause.

Vital functions that failed will slowly be pieced back together and begin to function in flood-prone areas. Soon enough they will be permanently rebuilt on the same ground. While this will take place with the expenditure of billions of dollars worth of flood protection construction and relocation money, it also will be designed to fail in the face of natural's onslaught. The absolute need to take a detailed look at the natural systems in the region, like wetlands and dunes that were compromised in the catastrophic event, will be lost in the rush to rebuild as they were in post-Allison Houston.

The plan for areas damaged by Katrina should propose natural systems as the primary mitigation strategy. Recovery should give the community an opportunity to allow natural systems to do what manmade systems have failed to do over and over again. Unfortunately, this option won't be given any serious consideration: FEMA mitigation funds require complex engineering analysis; the rebuilding focuses on the ever-problematic recovery to pre-existing condition. Our historical rush to pave over and build on top of wetlands means that the FEMA-mandated "return to existing conditions" can never include enhanced natural systems.

The lessons Houston should have learned from Allison have been ignored. Do we remember how much water I-10 held between the Loop 610 and downtown Houston? How much water does anyone believe the new Highway 59 moat will hold when the next major storm hits town? Can we think that if we continue to build at the end of the funnel as we have, that the addition of any mega-million dollar drainage project can begin to address the storm water shed by the massive structures that now cover what precious open land once existed on Houston's flat prairies? Will a world-class Emergency Situation Response Plan lessen the blow to Houston? Can we really accept the notion that planning and practicing for disaster is the best defense against it?

The Katrina recovery can choose to build on past lessons, using the knowledge Houston has painfully gained. Designing with natural systems, understanding the Gulf Coast ecosystems, and respecting and honoring the simple, macro-level, first-order scientific laws of thermodynamics should not have to be so difficult. We cannot control all natural systems—every human faces this truth as he faces the inevitability of his own death. Decay comes, matter tends to spread spontaneously, and water always wins. I fear that this realization is going to come far too late to affect this storm recovery. ■

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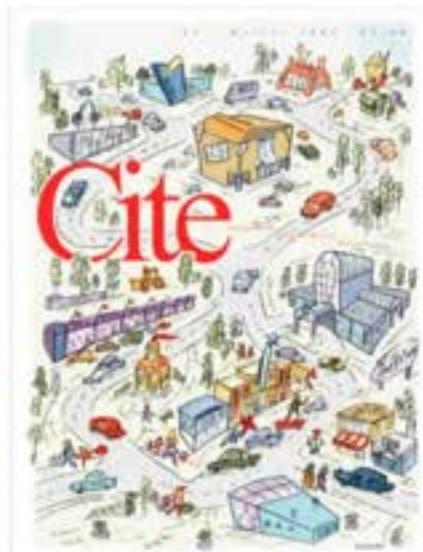
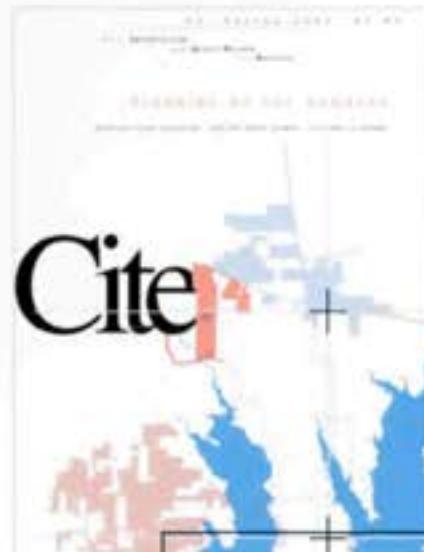
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