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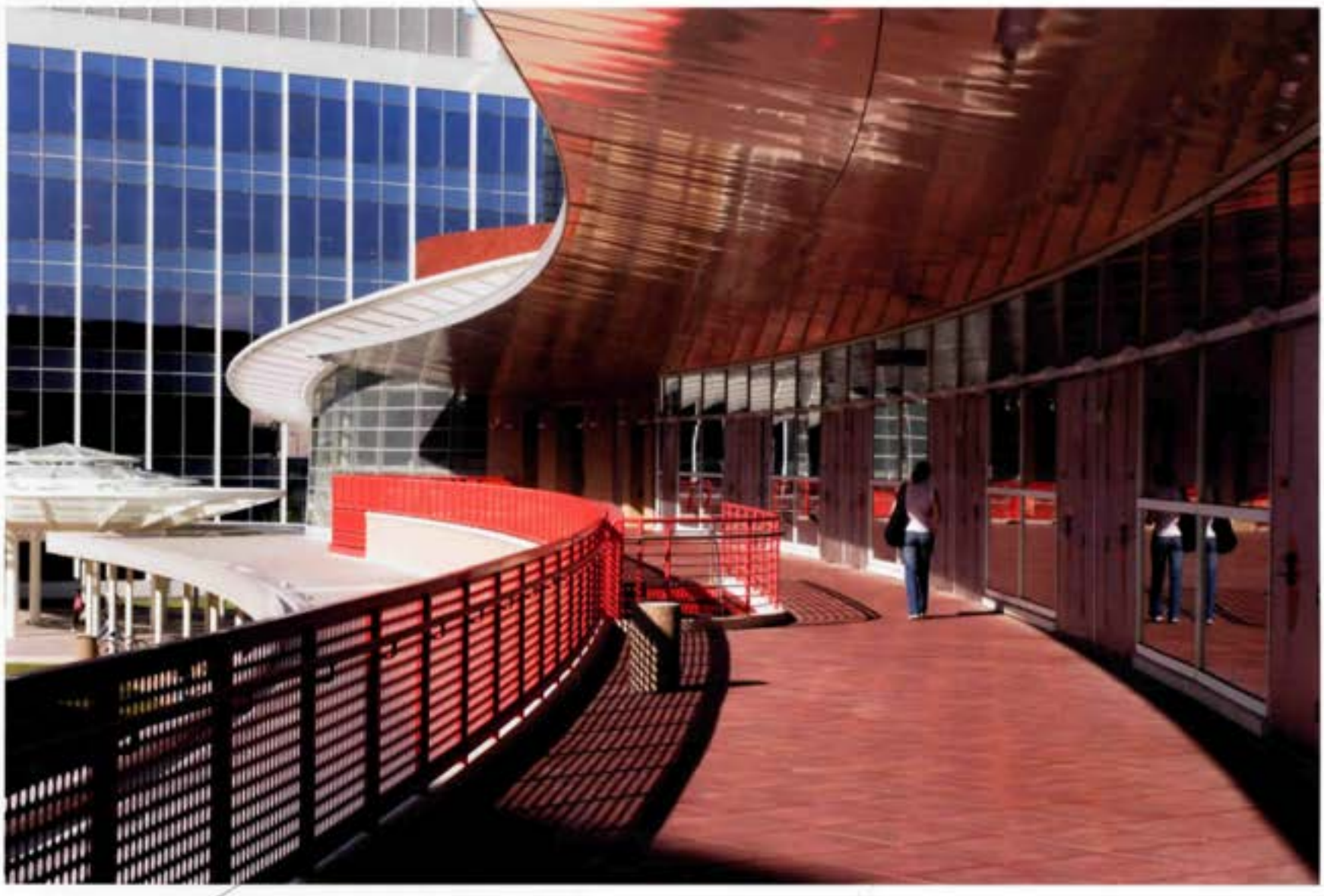
Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE
and DESIGN REVIEW
of HOUSTON



CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON UNVEILS A PLAN TO TIE TOWN AND GOWN TOGETHER

\+ INSIDE THE WALLS, ELDER STREET LOFTS, AND S.I. MORRIS REMEMBERED

68>
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Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN REVIEW OF HOUSTON

A PUBLICATION OF THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

68: FALL 2006

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WebCite: www.rda.rice.edu

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contents

Above Left: *Growth* by Todd Campbell. Photo courtesy Houston Center for Contemporary Craft.

Cover: Covered walkway at the University of Houston's Science Engineering Research and Classroom complex (Pelli Clark Pelli Architects with Kendall/Heaton Associates, 2005). Photo by Frank White.

Rendering courtesy Zeigler Cooper Architects

Rendering of the proposed interior of the new Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

LETTERS

SACRED HEART CONCERNS

It was with some interest that I read the article about the new Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral [Citelines, "The Light Inside," *Cite* 67]. In your journal, which can be appropriately critical of architectural and design developments in Houston, you surprised me in that the new building came off so lightly.

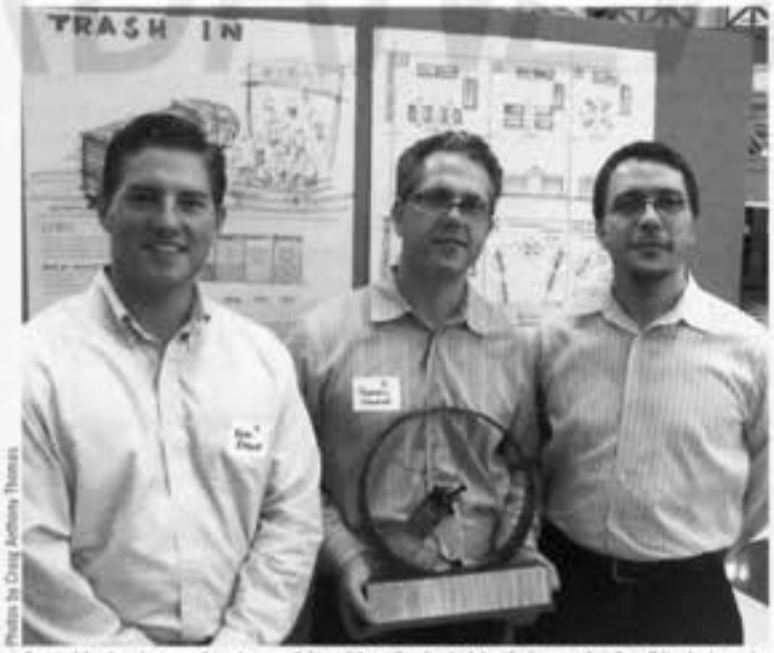
The local Catholic Church hierarchy had an opportunity to build an edifice for the ages, to exercise the skills of the finest architects in the world, to trigger the spirit of the godly and the godless by designs which elevate the spirit, to put Houston on a par with Chartres, Barcelona, Cologne, or even Los Angeles. Instead, the self-proclaimed simplicity of the edifice is not the simplicity of Matisse's Chapelle du Rosaire in Venice.

As a practicing Catholic, in particular, I was sorely disappointed that the local see did not have the forethought to consult much of the fine talent in the community or elsewhere in developing plans or ideas for this building. Contrast their approach to that of Los Angeles (where the Queen of Angels Cathedral designed by Rafael Moneo is a monument receiving numerous accolades), San Francisco (where Pietro Belluschi's building remains a distinct icon for the city), or Oakland (where Santiago Calatrava was at least given serious consideration as the designer for the new Cathedral of Light).

In a church whose centuries-old membership includes master artisans, we seem to be relegated in the present to the prosaic and the tedious. It is unfortunate that the catholicity of Catholicism is being challenged in Houston, a city with strong ecumenical roots. The Church should ecumenize also through its employment of talented and visionary architects.

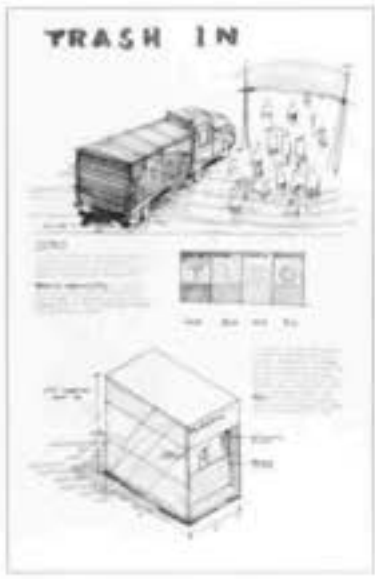
Wayne Xavier Shandera, MD
Baylor College of Medicine
Houston

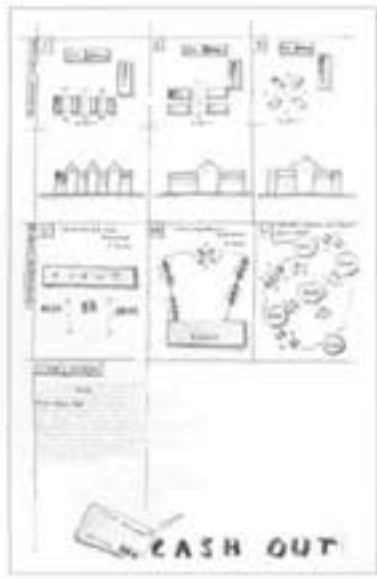
Have a criticism, comment, or response to something you've seen in Cite? If so, the editors would like to hear from you. You can mail your comments to Letters to the Editor, Cite, *Rice University, Rice Design Alliance–MS 51, PO Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251-1892, or e-mail them to citemail@rice.edu.*



Photos by Craig Anthony Thomas

Sustainability Award winners Brian Attaway (left) and Aaron Beasley (right) with charrette chair Russell Hruska (center).





Talking Trash: RDA Partners 2006 Design Charrette

This August, five teams participated in the sixth annual RDA Partners Design Charrette. The title of this year's charrette was "Talking Trash," and it focused on the problem of recycling at large public events.

The program called for participants to design a transportable collection facility for the recycling of event trash. The facility was required to physically collect and store trash. Participants were also asked to focus on ways to incorporate educational and interactive aspects into their designs. The winning team, "Trash In Cash Out" or "TICO," responded to the challenge by creating an immediate incentive for taking an item to the recycling station at an event. In the TICO system, each person attending an event would have a value card that would be given credit when a recycled item was scanned.

As always, the charrette was open to both architects and non-architects, and people could participate as individuals or in teams of up to five. On the morning of Saturday, August 5, participants arrived at the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture and began to work energetically. They started at 8 a.m. and kept at it until the competition drew to a close at 6 p.m. Designs were hung in the college atrium, where they were judged by Jeff Boyd, Regional Materials Marketing Manager, Allied Waste; Lynn Edmundson, Director, Historic Houston; Julie Hendricks, AIA LEED, Kirksey; and Jeff Taebel, Director of C&E Planning, Houston/Galveston Area Council.

Saman Ahmadi and Aaron Beasley, intern architects with Kendall/Heaton Associates; Brian Attaway, with D.E. Harvey Builders; and Jyh-Chan Lin, with EDI Architecture, made up the "TICO" team, and they took home the Sustainability Award for their efforts.

Photo by Gerald Moorhead

The Astrodome (Hermon Lloyd & W.R. Morgan and Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, 1965) is among the buildings to be celebrated at the RDA Gala.

2006 RDA Gala: Space City Style

Plan to join RDA as it celebrates Houston's modern architecture of the 1960s and the Houston architects who defined it as bold, sleek, and cool! The 2006 RDA Gala will take place on Saturday, November 11, at 7 p.m. at the Hilton Americas-Houston downtown. Gala chairs Joan and David Spaw have planned a thrilling evening, including dinner, dancing to the music of the Fab Five, and a silent auction of unique designer items. Guests are invited to dress in classic Sixties attire or black tie.

The Rice Design Alliance's 2006 gala benefit will honor the large architecture firms whose work some 40 years ago began to give Houston its unique modern look. These firms—Caudill Rowlett Scott; Golemon & Rolfe; Irving R. Klein & Associates; Lloyd, Morgan & Jones; Neuhaus & Taylor; George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce; and Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson—were responsible for iconic buildings such as Jesse H. Jones Hall, Houston Intercontinental Airport, the Astrodome, and the Houston Independent School District Administration Building. It was they who helped give Houston's architectural landscape its distinctive character in the 1960s.

At this year's gala, RDA invites Houston architects to reunite to trace their institutional heritage, showcasing the broad impact of these seven large firms and how they became a training ground for many of Houston's successful architectural practices today.

If you worked for one of the firms mentioned above, RDA asks that you let us know by e-mailing your name and the names and dates of the firms at which you worked to rda@rice.edu. By doing so, your name can be recorded on our reunion register. And please join us for a really fun time amongst friends at our Sixties reunion!

Gala proceeds will support the 2007 educational programs of the Rice Design Alliance, including the publication of *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston*. For table and ticket information, please go to the RDA website at www.rda.rice.edu or call Mary Swift at 713.348.5670.

Snapshot 007: Houston Design on View

Next spring, the Rice Design Alliance, in collaboration with Lawndale Art Center, will host its fifth triennial exhibition of Houston design featuring architecture, interior architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, historic preservation, industrial design, furniture design, and graphic design. Previous exhibitions have showcased the designs of more than 150 Houston individuals and firms from a broad range of disciplines.

A call for entries and registration information will be available in January on the RDA website, www.rda.rice.edu.

The work of Houston's design professionals will be on view from May 18 to June 16, which comes on the heels of citywide events recognizing next April as "Architecture Month." In an open forum such as this, Houston can be appreciated as a working architectural and metropolitan organism.

CALENDAR

LECTURES

::

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE
Margaret Orth
Founder and Director of Research, International Fashion Machines, Seattle
■ Monday, October 2, 5 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

RDA FALL LECTURE SERIES: RESURFACING THE CITY
Charles Waldheim
■ Wednesday, October 4, 7 p.m.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Brown Auditorium
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

PREFAB LECTURE: ESPACE MOBILE
Ralf Becker, Salzburg, Austria
■ Tuesday, October 10, 3 p.m.
College of Architecture Theater,
University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture

RDA FALL LECTURE SERIES: RESURFACING THE CITY
Mary Margaret Jones
■ Wednesday, October 11, 7 p.m.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Brown Auditorium
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

RDA FALL LECTURE SERIES: RESURFACING THE CITY
Julie Bargmann and Chris Fannin
■ Wednesday, October 18, 7 p.m.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Brown Auditorium
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

PREFAB LECTURE: FLATPAK HOUSE
Charlie Lazor, Minneapolis
■ Tuesday, October 24, 3 p.m.
College of Architecture Theater,
University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture

RDA FALL LECTURE SERIES: RESURFACING THE CITY
James Corner
■ Wednesday, October 25, 7 p.m.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Brown Auditorium
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE
Jean Lelay and Karen Cook
RFR Engineering and Kohn Pedersen Fox, Paris and London
■ Monday, October 2, 5 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

MENIL/RICE LECTURE SERIES: ON MODERN ART, MODERN ARCHITECTURE, AND MODERN MUSEUMS
Terence Riley
■ Monday, November 6, 7 p.m.
Herring Hall, Room 100,
Rice University
713.348.4276

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE
Francisco Mangado
Architect, Pamplona, Spain
■ Monday, November 6, 5 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

PREFAB LECTURE: FRAMEWORK HOUSE
Wyatt Frantom, Adam Janusz, Joe Meppelink, Onezieme Mouton
■ Tuesday, November 7, 6 p.m.
College of Architecture Theater,
University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE
Thomas Wiscombe
Principal, Emergent, Los Angeles
■ Monday, November 13, 5 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

RDA/MENIL COLLABORATION: KLEE AND BAUHAUS
Marcel Franciscono
■ Wednesday, November 29, 7 p.m.
The Menil Collection
713.348.5583 or rda.rice.edu

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE
Michelle Addington
Associate Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Design
■ Thursday, December 7, 6 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

All photos courtesy AIA Houston, except where noted

Houses featured on AIA Houston's 2006 home tour include: **Top:** 4029 Chatham Lane, Val Glitsch, FAIA, architect; **Center right:** 302 Eastwood, MCT Architects; **Center left:** 1815 Southmoor Boulevard, Interform Architects; **Above:** 505 West Alabama, Collaborative Designworks, architect.

EXHIBITIONS

::

DESIGNING DOMESTICITY: INDUSTRIAL DESIGN FOR MODERN LIVING, 1930-1960
■ Through October 28
Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Gallery
713.743.2400 or
www.arch.uh.edu/news

PREFAB EXHIBITION: FRAMEWORK HOUSE
■ November 7-30
University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Gallery
713.743.2400 or
www.arch.uh.edu/news

TEXAS TOWNS AND THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE
An exhibition of photographs from Richard Payne's *Texas Towns and the Art of Architecture*. This will be the first exhibition in AIA Houston's new home, the Architecture Center of Houston, 315 Capitol, Suite 120
■ Exhibit opening and book signing, November 16, 4-6 p.m.
■ Exhibition November 16-December 31. Monday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m., Friday 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

EVENTS

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AIA HOUSTON HOME TOUR
Tour features ten houses designed by AIA members
■ October 20-21
713.520.0155 or aiahouston.org

GULF COAST INSTITUTE: LIVABLE HOUSTON MEETING
■ Wednesday, October 25, 12 p.m.
Houston-Galveston Area Council, 3555 Timmons, Second Floor
713.523.5757 or gulfcoastinstitute.org

2006 RDA GALA
The 20th annual RDA Gala, held to support the 2006-2007 RDA programs and publications, will celebrate Houston's modern architecture of the 1960s and the Houston architects who defined it.
■ Saturday, November 11, 7 p.m.
Hilton Americas-Houston
1600 Lamar
713.348.5670 or rda.rice.edu

GULF COAST INSTITUTE: LIVABLE HOUSTON MEETING
■ Wednesday, November 15, 12 p.m.
Houston-Galveston Area Council, 3555 Timmons, Second Floor
713.523.5757 or gulfcoastinstitute.org

Photo by Richard Payne

Photo by Richard Payne

The photos top and above are from Richard Payne's new book, *Texas Towns and the Art of Architecture*.

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

The Rice Design Alliance

The Rice Design Alliance, established in 1972, is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of architecture, urban design, and the built environment in the Houston region through educational programs; the publication of *Cite*, a quarterly review of architecture and design; and active programs to initiate physical improvements. Membership in the RDA is open to the general public.

Individual Membership $45
Ticket discounts for all RDA programs
Free subscription to *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston*
Invitations to "members only" events
Participation in the annual membership meeting and event
Participation in the annual architecture tour

RDA Partners Membership $45
All of the benefits accorded to Individual members
Opportunities for participation in RDA Partners programs and events

Student Membership $15
All of the benefits accorded to Individual Members.
Student ID required.

Household Membership $75
All of the above benefits for your household

Sponsor Membership $150
All of the benefits accorded to Household Members
Courtesy tickets to two selected RDA programs

Patron Membership $250
All of the benefits accorded to Sponsor Members
Courtesy tickets to three selected RDA programs

Sustaining Membership $500
All of the benefits accorded to Patron Members
Courtesy tickets to all RDA programs

Contributing Firm $500
All of the benefits accorded to Sustaining Members for one year
Two individual memberships to give to employees, clients, or friends
Recognition at all RDA Partners events

Corporate Membership $1000
All of the benefits accorded to Sustaining Members for one calendar year
Five individual memberships to give to employees, clients, or friends
Recognition at all RDA programs held at the MFAH and in *Cite*
Recognition on RDA's website with link to your website

Corporate Sponsorship $1500
All of the benefits accorded to Corporate Members PLUS sponsorship of a selected RDA program
Recognition on sponsored program print materials and at the program

Gala Benefactor Membership $5000
All of the benefits accorded of Corporate Sponsorship for one calendar year
Reserved priority table for 10 at RDA's annual gala
Four tickets to the Gala Underwriter party
Recognition in the gala invitation, program, and *Cite*

Subscription

❍ One year: $15 ❍ Two years: $25

Membership Application

NAME

ADDRESS

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TELEPHONE

E-MAIL

OCCUPATION

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

AMOUNT ENCLOSED $

Checks made out to the Rice Design Alliance should be sent to:
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Rice Design Alliance – MS 51
PO Box 1892
Houston, Texas 77251-1892
Telephone: 713.348.4876 www.rda.rice.edu

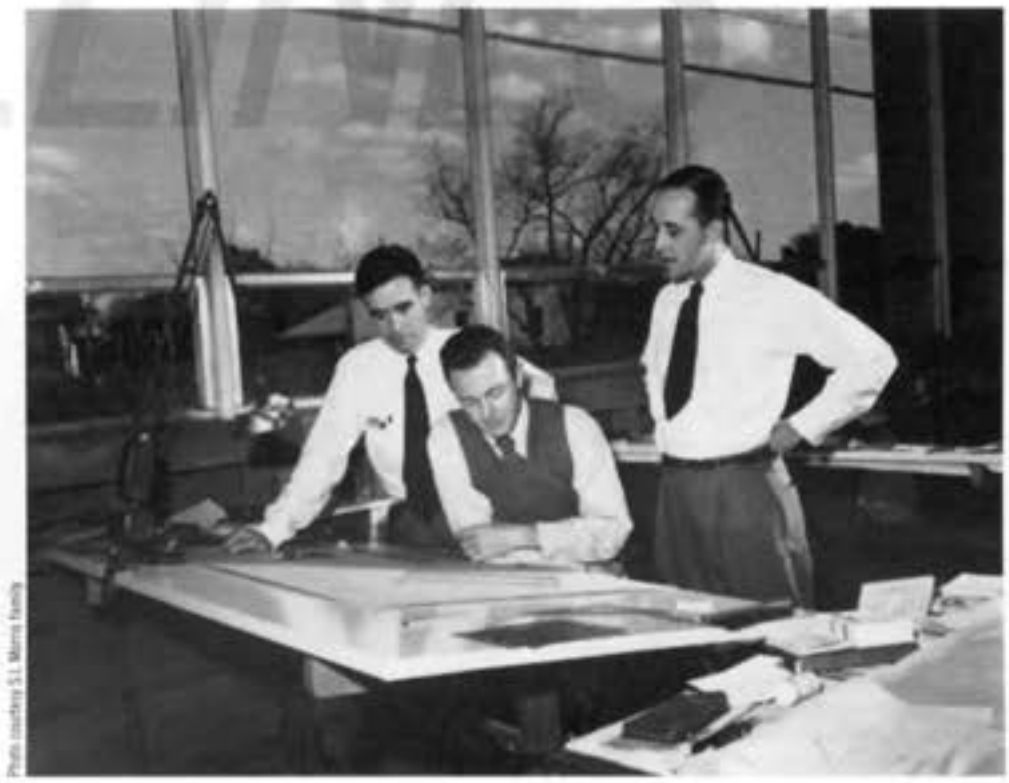


Photo courtesy S.I. Morris family

Photo by Hickey & Robertson, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, archives

Photo courtesy S.I. Morris family

Seth Irwin Morris, seen below in his later years, had a career many would envy. The top right photo shows him (left) with his first partners, F. Talbott Wilson (center) and B.W. Crain. The bottom right photo shows him (third from right) in 1971 viewing a model of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Brown Pavilion. Morris' firm provided local architectural services on this museum addition; Mies van der Rohe was the design architect.

The Morris Effect S.I Morris, 1914-2006, didn't design modern Houston, but he helped call it into being

Many words have been written in *Cite* about the life, career, and work of Seth Irwin Morris, who died August 1, 2006, at the age of 91. Morris, founding partner of one of the most successful and profitable architectural firms in the nation, was among the most civic-minded architects Houston has ever produced. Since his modest beginnings in 1938, when the firm of F. Talbott Wilson and Irwin Morris was founded, Morris and his partners have over the years designed many landmark buildings. A list of them is a roll call of a booming city: the Astrodome, Houston Country Club, the United States Post Office, the Electric Tower, the Houston Post, One Allen Center, KPRC Television, Houston Central Library, the Texaco Building, First Baptist Church, the Glassell School of The Museum of Fine Arts, One and Three Riverway, Brown & Root Headquarters, First City Tower, Inn on the Park, Bookstop at the Alabama Theater, and the Wortham Theatre, among others. In association with SOM, Morris and partners produced First City Bank Building, One Shell Plaza, and Two Shell Plaza; with Philip Johnson, they created the Pennzoil Building, the University of Houston College of Architecture Building, and Transco Tower; with CRS, they made Houston Center One. In addition to this outstanding legacy of built work, the firm of Wilson and Morris over the years cultivated the careers of more than 21 architects who went on to start their own firms.

But these lists don't tell much about the way S.I. Morris practiced architecture, or the way he ran his firm. A Texas native, born in Madisonville on September 1, 1914, Morris was an "accidental" architect. He chose Rice University before he chose a major. Originally intending to study engineering, he applied to the architecture school when he learned there were no more places for freshmen in engineering. He didn't set out, in other words, with ambitions as a designer, nor aside from his work on his own house did he ever claim to be one.

From the beginning, Morris understood instinctively that there were two sides to an architectural practice—the designer/talent side, and, equally important, the business/marketing side. This realization was demonstrated in his penchant for selecting extremely talented designers to be his partners and associates—from Talbott Wilson, to Ralph Anderson, to Sally Walsh, to Eugene Aubry.

There was no personal ego at work here. Morris famously (and modestly) drove innocuous cars, never had a reserved parking place, and lived in the same house for more than 50 years. The energy that other architects place in service to ego, S.I. Morris channeled into his firm. He quickly came to understand his unusual ability to get work, build personal relationships, and spot talent. As his family has often remarked, "Dad was always in a hurry"—to get to the next presentation, to visit a potential client, to be at the office. More than anyone I know in the profession of architecture, S.I. Morris and his wife Susie developed lifelong friendships with clients. Those clients all came to know and appreciate him

as a straight shooter whose firm consistently produced excellent design, executed to the highest technical standards, for the maximum value. Who wouldn't appreciate that?

S.I. Morris the Rainmaker was a formidable, almost larger than life competitor, as every other architect in his line of sight quickly came to appreciate.

Nobody knew more people in the boardroom or on the development committee; no one else could say by 1970, "Our firm has won design awards every year of our existence"; and no firm could expect better competitive pricing on projects, because of the firm's reputation for the quality of its documents.

To those lucky young people who were successful in his firm, S.I. Morris imparted by example three important principles for a rewarding professional life: (1) The needs of the client are paramount, best served by the highest quality work; (2) Architecture must be approached as a real business that should make money; (3) Architects must give back to their community.

Morris' commitment to Houston was legendary and diverse. He served on the boards and development committees of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Rice University, the Houston Parks Board, the American Red Cross, the Boy Scouts of America, and the Center for the Retarded.

It is common among successful architectural practices that the firm is known by the name of the design partner—think Hermon Lloyd of Lloyd Morgan Jones, George Pierce of Pierce Goodwin Alexander, Bill Caudill of Caudill Rowlett Scott. In a rare tribute to the importance of a non-design partner, S.I. Morris's firm was always referred to as "Morris," as is its successor to this day. Morris Architects is named for the go-getter, the businessman, the modest architect who did not design.

It was mostly the family and closest friends who got to know the personal side of S.I. Morris: the zinger one-liners, the timing, the best wine cellar, the generosity of spirit, the passion for baseball—especially if it was played in the Astrodome. After his retirement in 1984, those close to him were able to see and appreciate a lot more of S.I., but he was still in a hurry. Ten years later, when his sister-in-law asked why he had apparently switched from wine to scotch, he replied, "Not fast enough!"

Besides the large family, extended and otherwise, the large circle of friends, the scores of former colleagues, S.I. Morris will be missed by his profession and his city. All of us are the "Senior Partners" now, and we have to do it without S.I. Morris in the corner office, plotting the next "win," negotiating the fee, planning the growth of the firm.

He will be missed. But if we seek a monument, to paraphrase the epitaph of Sir Christopher Wren, all we have to do is look around. — *Barry Moore*

(Cite editorial board member Barry Moore's late wife Barbara Dillingham was Mrs. Morris' sister.)

A Houston Legacy

The buildings that S.I. Morris helped bring into existence are well known, but almost as important to his legacy are the architectural firms that he helped spawn. In the Winter 1999 issue of *Cite*, to accompany a look back at Morris' career, a list of some of those firms was printed. At his passing, it's worth giving them another look. Among them are:

Photo courtesy S.I. Morris family

S.I. Morris famously claimed he only designed one building in his life. This is it, a modernist house designed in 1952 for him and his family.

Adams Architects, Inc.
Browne Penland McGregor Architects, Inc.
Pleas Doyle Associates
Leslie K. Elkins Architects
Philip Ewald Architecture, Inc.
Gabriel Architects
Griffin Architects, Inc.
Hall/Barnum Architects
Dennis R. Hancock
Jackson & Ryan Architects
R.C. Johnson Architects
Kendall/Heaton Associates, Inc.
Jim McReynolds Architects, Inc.
Morris Architects
Alsey Newton Architect
Stern and Bucek Architects
Urban Architectural Group
Watkins Hamilton Ross Architects
Willis Bricker & Cannady, Architects
Wilson Architectural Group, Inc.
The Wingfield – Sears Group, Inc.

Photos by © Hall Wiley

Above: The John Goldberg Senior Housing Complex, built on what was once known as the East End Dump. **Above Right:** Washington Courtyards, where once car lots stood.

Filling in the Gaps

Brownfields Program helps determine if possibly toxic sites are ready to reclaim

Earlier this year, Ron Sandberg, the Brownfields Program manager for the City of Houston, faced a problem unusual for most government officials: He had money to hand out, and not enough people asking for it.

The money had come in the form of two grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; their purpose was to help pay for environmental assessments of brownfield sites around the city. This was not something that most major developers needed; they tended to have their own environmental assessment teams and funds. But it was something that nonprofits and community development corporations might find useful.

Unfortunately, too few of these groups knew the money was available, or even that the city had a Brownfields Program designed to give them a hand. So Sandberg began spreading the word. One group he met with was the Houston Parks Board, which had some nine sites it was hoping could be made into parkland. Before that could happen, though, they needed to be sure that the sites were environmentally fit. That, Sandberg said, was something he could help with. "What we could offer is free environmental site assessments," Sandberg notes. "It's the type of thing that can make a difference in whether a project is workable versus undoable."

That Houston is awash in brownfields—defined as any property where redevelopment is complicated by the presence or potential presence of environmental contamination—is nothing unusual. Most major cities are dotted with plots of land that were once home to businesses or industries that can leave toxic substances behind in the soil, substances that can cause health problems for workers or residents if a site is redeveloped before it's cleaned.

The importance of these sites has increased in recent years as Houston has become more interested in building on existing abandoned land rather than expanding into undeveloped territory. These sites can often be a gap in the city fabric, land builders avoid out of fear that they'll end up entangled in environmental problems. It was to encourage the reuse of such properties that the city's Brownfields Redevelopment Program was established a decade ago. The program's primary purpose was to administer money provided by the EPA: the city would apply for EPA grants, then distribute that money to those who applied for it to the Brownfields Program.

The Brownfields Program wasn't set up to restore damaged properties itself, though it could help people find funds for that purpose. Rather, the program was designed to help determine just what sort of remediation, if any, a plot of land might require. Until such an assessment could be made, nothing else could be done. And since not everyone was interested in spending the money, or had the money, to roll the dice and see if a property could be rehabilitated, land laid fallow. It was in part to get people looking at such properties again that the Brownfields Program was started.

The program began in 1996 with $200,00 to hand out. In 1998 it was awarded another $200,000, and got the same amount again in 2001. In 2005, though, the city won two grants totaling $400,000, something that came as a bit of a surprise given the intensity of the rivalry from other cities around the country for the funds. Since the program still had $100,000 it had not yet disbursed, that meant it had fully half the money it had received over 10 years ready to give away. Only there were not enough people asking for it.

"There are groups out there who could use the funds, but don't know our program is available," says Sandberg, who took over as manager of the Brownfields Program last September. "We clearly have to do more to get the word out. Our plan is not to do business as usual, but to grow the program. We want to market it, to bring in more sites. We're looking at spending what we have, and then asking for more."

What the program offers is free environmental site assessments to determine the nature and extent of contamination on a site; help in participating in a State Voluntary Cleanup Program; coordination among local, state, and federal agencies; and placement of each site or project on the city's brownfields website (www.houstonbrownfields.org). "What we do," says Sandberg, "is help a property move as fast as possible through the cleanup to a letter of completion from the EPA, and then the development and reuse of the property."

The program has already scored some notable successes, among them the reuse of 550 acres of brownfields. Some 30 properties are currently in the program, and about half that number have already been assessed and remediated. Sandberg likes to cite the Washington Courtyards at 2505 Washington Avenue as an example of what the program can do. The site was one that had been used for car lots and car repair. Avenue CDC thought the property would be a good place for affordable apartments, but didn't know if the ground had been contaminated by petroleum products. So they turned to the Brownfields Program to help with a site assessment. As it happened, the property was clean and didn't need remediation. Such a result is unusual, but until the assessment was done questions remained about whether the site was useable. Once the site was approved, though, the Washington Courtyards followed. Similar stories occurred with the Pleasant Hill Senior Retirement Village at 3814 Lyons Avenue, built on the site of a former dry cleaners and commercial laundry, and the John Goldberg Senior Housing Complex, located on an area of land once known as the East End dump.

Among its other projects, the Brownfields Program is hoping to develop a brownfields inventory or map so that if a developer calls asking about a potential site, they'll have information at hand on it. But for now, the priority is finding more people to give money to, and get more sites assessed and ready for construction. "We would be very happy to have more applications for money than we have money to give," says Sandberg. "It's better than having what's here go unused." — *Mitchell J. Shields*

Photos © 2006 Eric Hester

Top: The River Oaks Theatre opened in 1939, and is today the only intown neighborhood theater of its era still showing movies. **Above:** The Alabama Theater, also built in 1939, was renovated to become a bookstore in the late 1980s.

History in the Making?

"A tough city to love" is how I describe Houston to newcomers—an image I work hard to overcome by proudly showing the sites that make our city great. We Houstonians are frequently relegated to mourning the demise of yet another historic building, thanks in part to a weak preservation ordinance overmatched by the entrepreneurial, developer-driven urge deeply imbedded in our city's soul and lifeblood. In other cities it's recognized that successful preservation balances the protection and continued use of historic buildings, and satisfies the bottom-line needs of developers. In Houston we are too often told that this is not possible.

If recent events are any indication, this long-held mindset may be changing. Local and national press and unyielding community outcry surrounding the River Oaks Theatre, the River Oaks shopping center, and the former Alabama Theater (now the Alabama Bookstop) suggest a change in the historic preservation zeitgeist of our city.

Houstonians frequently learned of a threat to a historic building only after it became a pile of rubble waiting to be scooped away. When news of a threat has preceded demolition, the outcry often centered on the misinformation that either the city or non-profit groups are at fault, and can actually do something to prevent the demolition. A common misperception is if a building is listed on city, state, or national historic registers (and has a plaque!), there is some protection provided by a non-profit, or by the city, or by… someone. But historic designations are largely honorific, and the greatest protection is at the local level, typically through zoning and a strong historic preservation ordinance. Unless a building is national register listed or eligible and the project involves federal funding, there is no review or negotiation, and no federal agency or historic preservation police telling anyone what and how to redevelop a building. Or that it must be saved. Slow to arrive and welcomed was Houston's now year-old owner-initiated "protected landmark" designation that will prevent the demolition of a local landmark in perpetuity.

The tools of Houston's preservationists have been and continue to be persuasion and creative, early planning. As David Bush, programs and information director of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance (GHPA), notes, "The persuasion will only work if both sides are willing to communicate."

One way to get both sides to talk is through public pressure, successfully leveraged recently in favor of the River Oaks Theatre, the River Oaks shopping center, and the Alabama Theater.

On Saturday, July 22, an article appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* announcing that the theaters and shopping center had been added to GHPA's list of endangered buildings. The story was basically that Weingarten Realty, owner of the River Oaks Shopping Center (where the River Oaks Theatre is located) as well as the Alabama shopping center (the home of the Alabama Bookstop), was planning some changes. At the River Oaks Shopping Center, the curve of buildings on the north side of West Gray at the West Gray and Shepherd intersection would come down, to be replaced by a new "state-of-the-art" Barnes & Noble. Next to fall would be the mirror image buildings on the south side of West Gray to make room for new residential development. The theater would be the last to go, most likely in two to three years.

Due to its proximity to the Alabama Bookstop, also owned by Barnes & Noble, the new mega-store would require closing the Alabama. The chain reaction had the potential to result in the loss of four buildings that are an important part of the urban fabric that makes our city unique.

The same day this story appeared in the *Chronicle*, *Houstonist*, a blog led by a group of people who love Houston, started an online petition. By Monday morning there were 50 signatures, a number that made *Houstonist* member and preservationist Jim Parsons feel the posting had been a great success. By Wednesday, though, the petition had gathered 7,872 signatures. By Friday—less than one week after the story had broken—there were 14,494. By Wednesday August 2, the petition had gown to 20,288 signatures,

and more were coming in at a rate of 100 a day. The signature page and comments are available online (at www.ipetitions.com/petition/riveroaks) and include the names of thousands of concerned citizens, among them socialites, a heart surgeon, city council members, a Weingarten heiress, and a granddaughter of attorney Hugh Potter, who developed the River Oaks neighborhood in the 1920s along with partners Will and Michael Hogg. Comments range from eloquent—"The center is one of the first of its kind. It needs to be saved intact with the unique theater. Houston is so backwards when it comes to historic preservation! It should make economic sense for Weingarten to be a leader in this process."— to brief and straight to the point—"Are you crazy??"

The *Houstonist* wasn't the only part of the online world raising a hue and cry. By July 28 more than 4,000 people had registered at Historic Houston's website to receive e-mail updates about the River Oaks Shopping Center and the River Oaks Theatre. At the same time that an online community was coming together, the print media was fanning the flames. The *New York Times* picked up the story on August 12, and the following Wednesday an article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*. Meanwhile, the *Houston Chronicle* wouldn't let the story go: In the two months following the initial article, ten more followed, each bringing home the notion that losing the theaters and the shopping center would be a disgrace.

In 1937 the first stores of the River Oaks Shopping Center opened. Richard Longstreth, professor of American Civilization and director of the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at George Washington University, wrote in a 1996 *Cite* article of the development. At the time the shopping center was built, Longstreth noted, it was considered "one of the most ambitious of its kind" and was held to high esteem by real estate developers, architects, and planners as the cutting edge method to bring real estate development to the outskirts of a city.

The commercial center was conceived to provide homeowners with basic shopping and services. There was a service station on each of the two corners at the Shepherd intersection, each one designed for unobstructed views of the shopping that beckoned beyond. The River Oaks Theatre was added two years later. It was operated by the Dallas-based Interstate chain, which capitalized on providing neighborhood theaters as opposed to the downtown venues popular in the preceding decades. Other Houston neighborhood theaters operated by Interstate included the Almeda (1939, demolished), Alabama (1939, now Bookstop), Yale (demolished), Delman (1935, demolished), Tower (1936, now Hollywood Video), North Main (1935, now a church) and the Village (1941, demolished). The River Oaks is the only remaining intown neighborhood theater still operating as it was originally built.

As talk of the threat to the theaters and shopping center continued, others got into the act. A group of citizens went to city council to protest, and actually received a sympathetic hearing. At-large council member Peter Brown, an architect, was quoted as saying, "This is about more than the River Oaks Theatre. This is about more than historic preservation. People are seeing that because Houston has been so reluctant to enact basic standards, the city is losing its character. We're losing the soul of the city."

Then at the end of August Carolyn Farb, a power in Houston society and a woman who commands attention, organized a protest some 100 strong in front of the River Oaks Theatre. The protesters held up glowing popcorn bags and were dressed in basic black.

It's unlikely that Weingarten Realty expected any of this, especially in Houston. At first they were tight-lipped, yet as the clamor grew, they began to talk, and even suggest that should the circumstances be made right, they would do something to help save the theaters and shopping center. Weingarten has already demonstrated that they understand the value of reutilizing old buildings. They, along with then-partner Kaldis Realty, converted the Alabama Theater into the Bookstop in the late 1980s and later added an appropriate new addition and entrance on the back of the structure that is both contemporary in design and compatible with the scale and style of the original building.

The hope now is for Weingarten to be smart, creative, and savvy enough to reutilize the existing buildings at the Rivers Oaks and Alabama shopping centers in a manner that satisfies their bottom line and protects the two centers' architectural fabric. Houston deserves no less.

The larger question is whether the public uproar that has given the theaters and shopping center a fighting chance is a one-time phenomenon, or the start of a new way of thinking about preservation in Houston. Changing Houston's historic preservation ethic and encouraging the strengthening of our historic preservation ordinance are not tasks that can be easily accomplished. Unless the city's citizens demand a stronger ordinance, we share the blame for any history that crumbles under the wrecking ball. Maybe we've come to understand that. And maybe, given a little time, my city won't be as tough to love. — *Anna Mod*

All photos by Shannon Sharp, except where noted

The northeast corner of Huntsville Unit, a.k.a. The Walls. Unlike most modern prisons, The Walls is next door to a residential neighborhood.

Breaching The Walls

To solve the mystery of Texas' most famous prison,

For most Texans the state's system of prisons is a remote and invisible world. Celebrity trials and capital punishment may keep the existence of prisons implanted in the public consciousness, but where prisons are located and what conditions inside them are like is often a mystery. Given the vast scale of the system, this mystery seems carefully constructed. That sense of mystery is heightened around older prisons, which are separated from the world not by wire fences but by massive walls that obscure every aspect of what goes on inside.

There are county and municipal jails, boot camps, halfway houses, federal prisons, and other sorts of detention facilities in Texas, but the largest population of prisoners is housed in state prisons. The state prison system is operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, which has an annual budget of $2.5 billion and operates 106 prisons. The TDCJ employs 42,000 people and maintains 3,200 buildings. More than 157,000 people are incarcerated in its buildings, a number that does not include those who are in jail awaiting trial or those who are on parole or under community supervision. Altogether there are around 500,000 people in some form of restraint or detention in the Texas state prison system.

Huntsville is the state prison system's historic home. Most of the TDCJ's administrative offices are there, as is the Texas Prison Museum. There are five prisons in the immediate vicinity of the city and eight others in the surrounding area. Combined, they're known as Region One of the TDCJ system. The prisons in Region One occupy more than 40,000 acres of land and have a total offender population of approximately 25,000, including more than 400 on death row. If you don't count the students at Sam Houston State University, the offender population in District One exceeds Huntsville's total population.

The world of the TDCJ is one dominated by statistical data and newspaper headlines. But as compelling as the numbers and stories can be, they are simply the background against which the physical fact of the prisons must be understood. To comprehend the architecture of these places one has to visit them, and the logical place to begin is in the heart of Huntsville at the historic Huntsville Unit, better known as The Walls. The Huntsville Unit was the first prison in the state, and it is by far the best known.

Opened in 1849, only a few years after the battle of the Alamo, this is a prison with an unusual history. During the Civil War it housed court-martialed Confederates, Union soldiers, and slaves who were brought in to manufacture Confederate uniforms. Innumerable celebrities have been incarcerated there, among them the infamous outlaw John Wesley Hardin, Native American Chief Santana, and blues legend Leadbelly. Dozens of famous entertainers, including Gene Autry, Willie Nelson, and George Strait, performed at the now-defunct Prison Rodeo that was once attached to the prison. Numerous films have been shot within its walls. And every male prisoner incarcerated by the state of Texas is processed through this unit before being released back into society. It is inside this unit that all Texas executions take place.

Entering The Walls is a memorable experience. Deep feelings emerge, fed by the knowledge that, as Jim Willett and Ron Rozell wrote in *Warden: Texas Prison Life and Death From the Inside Out*, "More people die in there at the

Aerial view of The Walls unit, looking southeast. The stadium that was once the site of the now-defunct Prison Rodeo can be seen next to the prison complex.

you need to step inside

BY THOMAS COLBERT

hands of the state than in any other place in the civilized world." At first the place is hard to find, even though it is only a short distance from downtown Huntsville. It's located a block off the main road, placed incongruously in the middle of a quiet neighborhood of gingerbread houses, shaded lawns, and children riding bicycles. Rising out of this tranquil domestic scene are the imposing brick perimeter walls that give the place its nickname and its fame. Light, steel-framed guardhouses known as pickets cling to the top of these walls. It is a viscerally present fact of life here that the guards in these small glass houses are armed with high-powered rifles.

Approaching the entrance to the prison, one passes through a small army of white-suited prison trustees maintaining flowerbeds, polishing handrails, and picking up litter. Every surface in the vicinity of the prison is pristinely clean and polished to a mirror-like finish. Guards watch from the pickets above. They wave their hands in a salute that politely informs you that you are being watched.

Barely protected by a small projecting roof, simple aluminum entrance doors open into a small foyer, which leads to brass barred steel doors straight ahead. To the left is a guard behind a reception desk. She sits behind a panel of steel bars topped by a thick, Lexan screen. The wall behind her is covered with a numbered grid, each square of which is occupied by huge brass and iron keys. After the seated guard has checked with the warden's office and another guard has searched your clothing, the steel doors buzz open and one is admitted into a second foyer, this one with oak pews on one side and historic photographs of the prison lining the walls. Several more layers of highly polished brass bars lie ahead. The warden's suite is to the right.

This inner foyer is supervised by a guard looking down from an overhead bridge, and by another guard at a picket inside a barred enclosure known as the Bull Ring. The Bull Ring is where family visits are sometimes allowed, and where prisoners are assembled before being moved. Fluorescent fixtures illuminate the area only dimly, but on a clear day sunlight pours in through windows and doors that open onto a courtyard ahead. White walls and glittering veils of 15 foot high brass bars combine with the soft babble of the voices of men in white jumpsuits to create an otherworldly threshold as more locks click and gates buzz open to the prison's interior.

Behind the forbidding barrier and pickets that encircle its perimeter, the rectangular campus of The Walls is divided into two discreet zones—the Upper Yard and the Lower Yard. The Upper Yard is separated from the Lower Yard by long, thin cellblocks that stretch from one side of the campus to the other. To pass between the yards, prisoners must pass through a concrete tunnel that runs under the cellblocks. The tunnel is about 15 feet wide and 100 feet long. It has a steel gate at each end. Like all of the doors and gates in The Walls, these gates are kept locked. When a group of prisoners is brought through the tunnel they are strip-searched so that no weapons or contraband pass from one side of the prison to the other.

The Upper Yard, which has a courtyard at its center, is primarily residential and administrative in use. Arranged around the courtyard are the Administration Building, which has a clock overlooking its entrance; a chapel with its steeple

The prison's southwest corner, with a picket where a guard can watch the interior yard. Seen from this angle, it's easy to understand how The Walls got its name.

beside the clock; a hospital; a dining and classroom building; two cellblocks; and a small office for the guards. The central courtyard contains a few basketball hoops, a wall on which movies can be projected, and a covered area with weight-lifting machines. When in the courtyard, prisoners stand or walk in neat lines or exercise at the weight machines. Occasionally a guard calls out a person's name, but the place is otherwise surprisingly quiet. A few trees beside the chapel provide shade and soften the courtyard's northern edge. Before meals the smell of food fills the air, reinforcing the curious feeling of a Puritan town square or the quad in a strict boy's high school.

The Lower Yard is where the prisoners work. A variety of industrial buildings are located there, including a large, one-floor, steel-framed building with north facing skylights and three smaller, two-floor factories. Originally license plates, mattresses, and shoes were made here. Today the buildings are primarily used for auto repair and body work. A textile mill, print shop, and boiler plant are also located in the Lower Yard, helping make it strongly reminiscent of the type of early 20th century industrial area that might be found near an aging urban waterfront or railroad yard. Asphalt runs from building to building, and cars and trucks line the edges of the streets and alleys. All of the buildings are clad in brick and have early 20th century detailing. Clanging noises, the sound of machinery, and the smell of solvents fill the air.

Among the most notable structures inside The Walls is the East Block, built in the 1850s. Originally a cellblock, the East Block has not been used for that purpose in more than 25 years. Since being taken out of use as a cellblock it has been preserved primarily as an historic artifact, although a few cells are used as storage.

Entering the East Block, one passes into an extremely quiet place in which beams of sunlight penetrate a dim, Piranesian interior. The single great space of the building is dominated by two rows of cells placed back-to-back and rising up in a single, three-floor block that never touches the exterior masonry walls. The cells are made of vaulted brickwork on three sides, with a wall of bars facing the run, or walkway. Each cell has a single light bulb, a double bunk bed frame, a small lavatory, and a commode. Each is about seven feet wide by nine feet deep. The doors, part of the barred wall, are smaller than one would expect. At about five feet nine inches in height, their size reflects the smaller stature of the average person when the facility was built. The large locks on each cell door match the oversized keys behind the prison receptionist's desk.

Cellblocks in Texas are not air-conditioned, but the thick masonry walls of the East Block hold in the heat of the day and the cool of night. Perhaps as a result, the East Block was a popular cellblock until the day it was closed. These cells also had more privacy than was available in other cellblocks, and most East Block cells had a view of a window on an exterior wall, something that can be a rare commodity in a prison.

The East Block's design is practically identical to the design of the main cellblock of the Ohio State Prison of the early 19th century, which became a model for other facilities of the time. Inspired by a prison reform movement, the East Block was considered a state of the art facility when it was built. Texas followed the Auburn school of penology at the time, which called for silent labor during the day and isolation at night, an approach that was believed to cure anti-social behavior and to be more humane than other forms of punishment.

A little over a hundred yards south of East Block, on the south side of the courtyard in the upper yard, is The Walls' newest and largest cellblock, Cellblock 5. First occupied in the 1940s and originally known as the Shamrock Unit, Cellblock 5 was built as an entirely separate, ultra-high-security prison with its own warden and staff. Cellblock 5 is an elongated Panopticon form. In an inversion of the plan of the East Block, which placed all cells in the center and open space around the outside, Cellblock 5 contains four floors of cells built around a narrow courtyard with a picket at the center. The cells are divided into four pods surrounding the courtyard, which was recently roofed over. Each pod contains two tanks—two floors of cells facing the picket through an operable glass curtain wall and a narrow double height activity space—one on top of the other. There is only one way in and out of Cellblock 5,

Photo courtesy the Texas State Library and Archives Commission

Below: The prison's Administration Building as it looked from 1895 to 1942. Its Victorian frills made it appear almost festive.
Left: The Administration Building as it is today. In 1942 the structure was covered in prison-manufactured brick to give it a more somber mien.
Bottom: Map of the Huntsville Unit.

and that is through a single, very heavy steel door leading to an industrial stair. The steps and landings of the stair are made of metal grating so that nothing can be concealed from the view of a guard at the top or bottom of the stairs. Steel doors seal off the stairs at the exterior and at each floor. The cell doors on each floor of a tank are closed or opened all at one time by means of a large hand crank operated by the guard on duty.

Out of sight from most areas of the prison, but never far from mind, is the small building that The Walls is best known for. Attached to the northeast corner of the perimeter wall is the Death House, where executions are carried out. The Death House is a surprisingly unimposing one-floor building with a corrugated tin roof. Except for the absence of windows and the abundance of razor wire overhead, it could be a small suburban bungalow from the early 1950s. Pressed metal canopies protect the two entrance doors from rain. One door is for the use of the condemned, guards, and chaplains, and the other door is for the use of members of the victim's family, the family of the condemned prisoner, and members of the press. The door used by the condemned man or woman opens into a row of eight windowless cells that face a broad, windowless corridor. At the center of the corridor is a table covered by a white tablecloth with a small vase of flowers and two Bibles on it. The only other furniture in this Spartan facility is a podium for ministers and a chair for a guard.

At about eight feet high, the ceiling is unusually low and residential in scale compared to other buildings in the prison. Floors are covered in vinyl composition tile rather than concrete, and the walls are painted a matching light color. Illumination is kept low in order to create what's considered a "calming" atmosphere. At one end of the Death House corridor is a single, featureless door. That door opens into the brilliantly lit death chamber, which has a heavy gurney bolted securely to the floor. On one side of the chamber is a one-way mirror that allows the executioner to watch in anonymity for the warden's signal to proceed. On the other side of the room are two windows looking on from separate viewing rooms, one for the family of the victim and one for the family of the condemned. The

Plan courtesy the Texas State Library and Archives Commission

THE HUNTSVILLE UNIT, HUNTSVILLE TEXAS

LEGEND

1. ADMINISTRATION
2. EAST BLOCK
3. VISITATION
4. DEATH HOUSE
5. SOUTH BLOCK
6. HOSPITAL
7. CHAPEL
8. GUARD OFFICES
9. CLASSROOMS AND CAFETERIA
10. WEST BLOCK
11. LAUNDRY
12. 5 BUILDING
13. 6 BUILDING
14. TWO FLOOR INDUSTRIAL
15. ONE FLOOR INDUSTRIAL
16. TEXTILE MILL
17. BOILER PLANT
18. RODEO STADIUM
19. CONTACT VISITATION
20. OFFICES
21. FAMILY VISITATION CENTER
22. TDCJ SYSTEM ADMIN
23. DIRECTOR'S HOUSE/ CONFERENCE
24. OLD GUARD'S DORM
25. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE
26. WAREHOUSE
27. SUPPORT BUILDINGS

Right: The East Block, built in the 1850s, is one of the prison's most notable structures.
Opposite Page, Left: View of Cellblock 5, looking east. Cellblock 5 is The Wall's newest cellblock.
Opposite Page, Right: The Death Chamber

executioner's window is sloped so that the different families will not see each other reflected in the mirrored glass behind the gurney. The only other object in the room is a microphone hanging down over the gurney to capture the condemned man's or woman's last words.

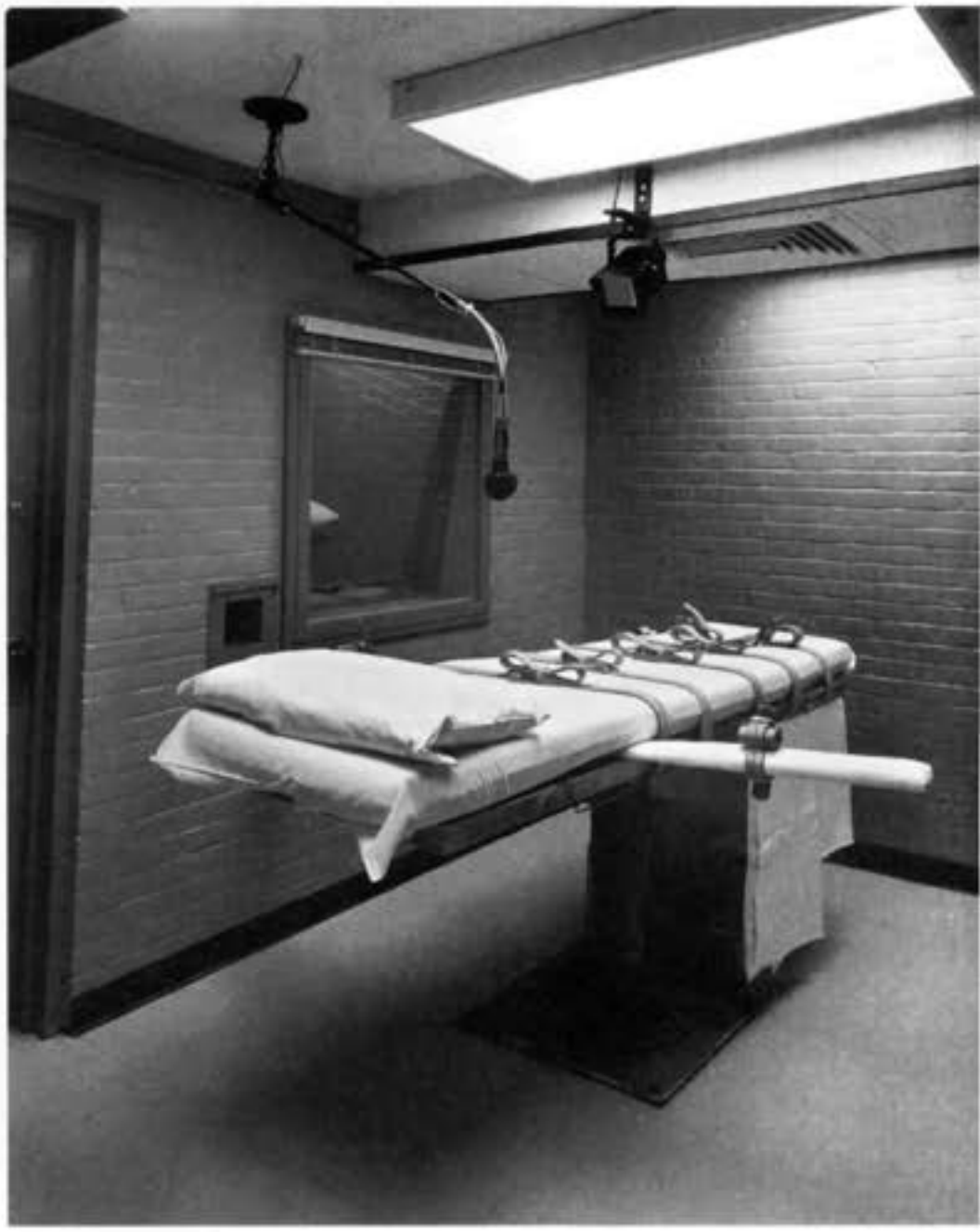
The public path to the Death House is through a long, narrow courtyard with a pristine rose garden and a lush lawn. Aside from the trees on one edge of the Upper Yard, these are the only plants inside the prison. The condemned prisoner does not arrive by this route, though. He or she arrives in a van that pulls up to a chain link fence near the building's entrance.

Death Row, where condemned offenders wait for their trip to the Death House, is not in The Walls but rather in the Polunsky Unit some miles away. Death Row was moved from The Walls to relieve overcrowding, and also so that the guards who officiate at executions will not have developed a personal relationship with the condemned.

The original Death Row, which contained both the cells of the waiting condemned and an execution chamber, still exists in a wing of the East Block called the South Block. Built in the 1860s, the South Block is very similar to the rest of the East Block, with a major distinction: one row of cells on the ground floor was sealed off from the rest of the building to house those sentenced to die. The layout of the old Death Row is very like the layout of the current Death House, including separate exterior entrances into the cell area and the execution chamber. In order to get to this row of cells today one has to enter the hospital next door, go up to the second floor, and then back down into what appears to be a cellar with two small, barred windows opening onto the back of the chapel. (This entrance to the hospital was created, and doors leading to the courtyard filled in, when the original Death Row was put to use as a tuberculosis ward.) Windows provide very little light. The few bare bulbs cast shadows of cell bars and locks on the concrete floor and the ancient, canary-yellow masonry walls. Although abandoned for many years, the cells here are still covered with poignant graffiti and elaborate illustrations.

One of the most extraordinary things about The Walls is the way it coexists benignly with its context. Outside the perimeter wall a variety of satellite structures are woven into the neighborhood. To the east are the concrete and brick ruins of the old Prison Rodeo and a few Victorian homes owned by the TDCJ. To the north is a family visitation center, where relatives can wait for their loved ones to be released or for a scheduled visitation. North of that is the old TDCJ Administration Building. To the west are the old Director's Home, now used as a conference center, and a series of multi-floor brick warehouses, one of which used to serve as a dormitory for guards. To the south are a few small service structures. Surrounding the prison on all sides, these buildings establish a transition zone that seems to protect the scale and character of the larger neighborhood.

The perimeter wall is interrupted only in a few locations. Public entry is through the Administration Building, which is attached to the north wall much as similar entry buildings were located on the exterior walls of other early 19th century prisons. In 1895 the Administration Building was torn down and rebuilt in an exuberant Victorian style, with a deep front porch facing the street and numerous decorative elements, including an ornate clock tower over the entrance. In 1942 the festive decoration was stripped off and a layer of prison-manufactured brick was added to cover eroding sandstone walls and give the prison a somber, forbidding appearance more in keeping with other prisons in the region. At this time the wall surrounding the prison was also covered with brick to protect its sandstone construction. The clock above the main building was retained in the renovation, but now with one face looking at the street and the other much closer to the courtyard within. Backlit at night, these clock faces were preserved as a reminder of the passage of time for inmates and for the crowds of people who occasionally gather outside.



The Walls has a number of unusual qualities for a major facility in this part of Texas. In the first place, it is deeply imbued with a sense of history and tradition. This is perhaps the only place in the region where historic structures such as the East and South blocks would be valued and preserved when they have apparently outlived their usefulness. It is also one of the few facilities in the region where the foyer, office walls, and computer screen savers are all decorated with historic and contemporary photographs of the architecture, and where the employees have an obvious sense of pride in being familiar with its history. In more modern prisons, and in nearby Houston, there is little sense of history or tradition. But inside The Walls the sense of history is palpable. In the Upper Yard and the Lower Yard and in the older cellblocks, one feels the ghostly presence of the hundreds of thousands of men whose lives have played out in the rituals of passage and containment that have defined life at the prison since the days of Sam Houston. Guards even say that some places are haunted.

Another striking aspect of the place is the strength of its architectural character. It might be said that any place that has been around as long as The Walls and has been modified as many times would have a similar richness of architectural expression and powerful affect. But it would seem that the prison's strength of character was intended by its designers. The Piranesian qualities of the older cellblocks came long after Piranesi's "Carceri d'Invenzione" etchings were published, and the renovation of the Administration Building to give it a more somber and intimidating image was obviously no accident. The intensity of the sense of history and strength of character that are to be found at The Walls stand side by side with a more surprising aspect of the place—its ordinariness.

After the first few minutes inside, one is impressed by the fact that everything at The Walls seems ordinary, and at one level even comfortable. One expects something horrifying, but instead finds a place where some people are employed and some are incarcerated, and as is the case everywhere else, everyone hopes that nothing will "go down." One is also impressed by the strong resemblances of different aspects of the prison to other sorts of places.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault argued that the school, the factory, the modern military, and the prison all share common roots in the European monastic tradition. One can see echoes of the truth of that proposition in The Walls. The appearance of the Administration Building shares characteristics of a schoolhouse and a factory in equal parts. The warden's office could be exchanged for any high-school principal's office, or for that matter the office of the dean of most colleges of architecture, and no one would be the wiser. The Upper Yard is like a prep-school campus, and the Lower Yard is like a walled-in factory. The perimeter wall gives the campus the character and appearance of a fortified military base or a monastery. Prisoners line up and walk in neat rows and columns like soldiers, uniformed school children, or monks in procession. What most distinguishes the place as a prison are the ever-present oversized locks, the giant keys, and the elaborate rituals of oversight, which are observed whenever a door is opened or closed.

The Walls is completely unlike more modern prisons, which are surrounded by chain link and razor wire rather than by brick walls. Modern prisons are located beside freeways rather than in neighborhoods. Their buildings are made of pre-engineered building systems with metal siding inside and out rather than brick and reinforced concrete. In modern prisons, the architectural richness of The Walls is replaced by a total objectification of the environment, an objectification in which no design considerations are admissible except utility and cost. Modern prison designers apparently have no interest in the affective, formal, or didactic qualities of building.

From an architectural point of view, the mystery of our prison system turns out to be not what lies behind the enshrouding walls, but what explains the transformation of design intentions and architectural sensibilities expressed within them. ■

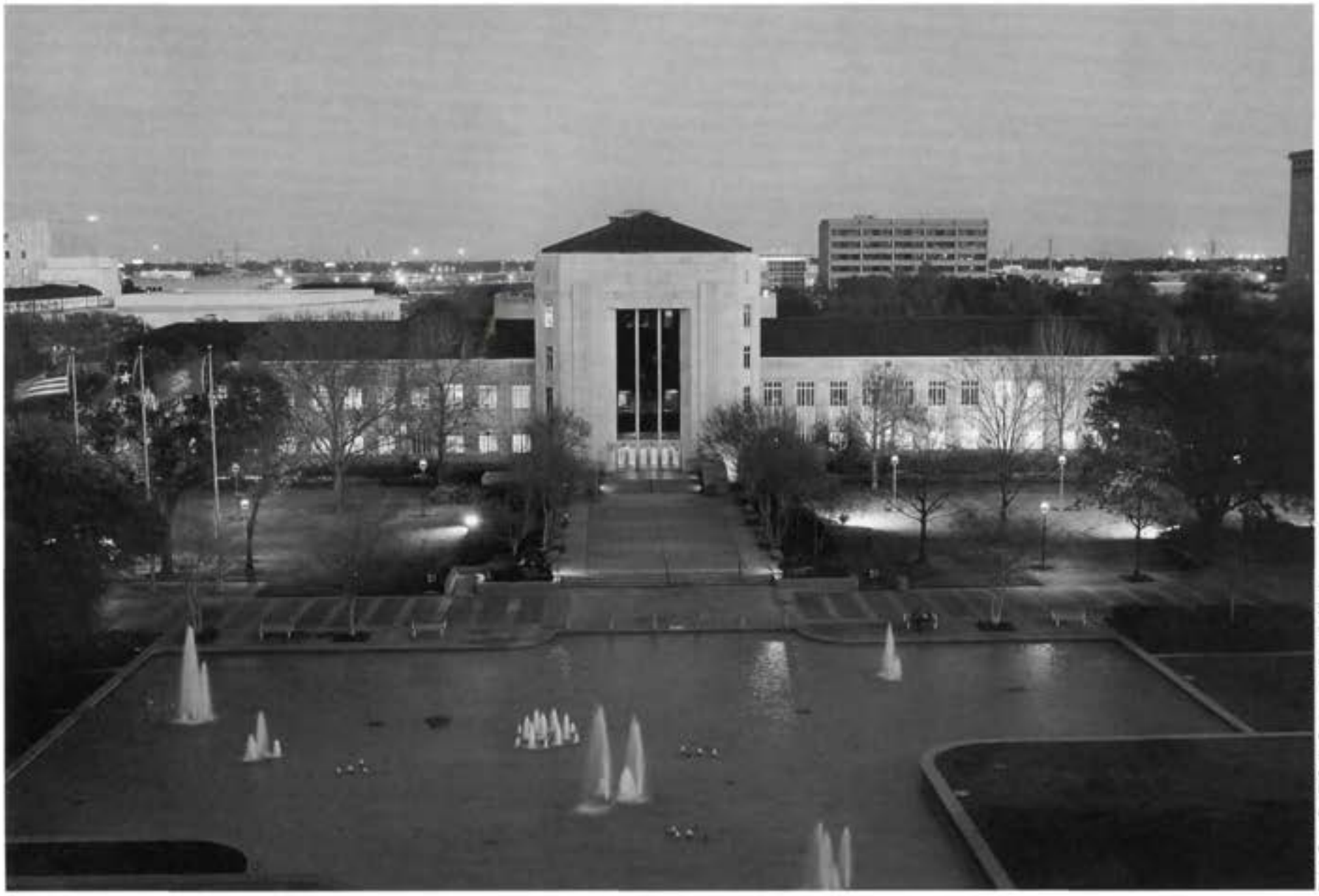


Photo by Thomas Shea/UH Creative Services, courtesy University of Houston

Framing the Issues

The University of Houston's Framework plan envisions a campus bustling with life, not cars

BY DAVID THEIS

UNTIL RECENTLY, if you wanted a God's-eye-view of the University of Houston's central campus, all you had to do was go up to the studios on the third floor of the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Building and look at the wall-sized photograph that was there. That photo captured the campus from overhead, showing the university as a reasonably green space surrounded by barrier islands of parking, which created a no-man's land between the school and its Third Ward neighbors.

Then, for a sense of how the university could look in five, ten, or twenty years, all you had to do was turn away from the wall and ponder the enormous, computer-generated plywood model that was also then located in the College of Architecture's third floor studios. The model, computer-routed in a series of curving grooves, showed large new swatches of green space, including a corner where the campus reached to Brays Bayou. It also showed a Cullen Boulevard that was closed to traffic and lined with trees. Above all, it showed the University of Houston's vast expanse of perimeter parking lots transformed into a series of quasi-villages, each one open to its surrounding neighborhood. In short, the model presented a place that someone viewing it might wish already existed, so it would be possible to take a walk down one of the shaded boulevards, get a bite to eat, pop into an art gallery, and maybe check out the bird life down on the bayou—not to mention take in a class on modern sculpture or state-of-the-art physics.

The model represents a radical change for the University of Houston, one that would alter both its sense of itself and its sense of connection to the city beyond its borders. Phillip Lopate, writing in the fall 1996 issue of *Cite*, accused the university of "refus[ing] ... contact with a surrounding urban world ... [which] explains the bodiless, abstract, unmemorable—or, should I say, willfully antimemorable—quality of the campus itself." In the *Houston Architectural Guide*, Stephen Fox described the university's isolation from its neighbors in even stronger language: "Through purchase and exercise of ... eminent domain, it has surrounded itself with a swath of territory that buffers the campus.... Displaced neighbor-

Opposite Page: The Ezekiel W. Cullen Building (Alfred C. Finn, 1950). Its quadrangle is a product of Hare and Hare's 1937 master plan for the university.
Below Left: Illustrative site plan of the proposed campus. White areas represent both new and existing structures.
Below: Illustrative site plan of the existing campus. Darker grey areas represent existing structures.

All maps and renderings courtesy Cooper, Robertson & Partners

hoods and apartment complexes have been replaced with suburban, institutional landscaping, a noncommittal approach to urban design."

The rather enormous difference between the campus described by Lopate and Fox and the hoped-for campus reflected in the computer-generated model reflects a new vision, one embodied in the university's latest master plan, officially known as the Framework. Like all visions, the Framework will no doubt be tempered by reality, but its level of ambition is clear. In an effort to raise the University of Houston to Tier 1 status, and to imbue the campus with a much-desired sense of place, university regents turned to the New York urban planning team of Cooper Robertson & Partners, which has developed campus plans for Harvard, Yale, and Trinity College, among others. Working with University of Houston planners and a fifth-year design class at the College of Architecture, Cooper Robertson created a scheme for a reinvented campus.

At a number of points, the Framework opens the campus up to its neighbors and welcomes them in. The "unpresent scrim" that Lopate described would be pierced, and "town and gown" would finally meet. As Joe Mashburn, dean of the College of Architecture, notes, the Framework "is uniquely UH. Cooper Robertson was aware of how [the university] was created in order to educate the children of the working class. Their plan invites the community in."

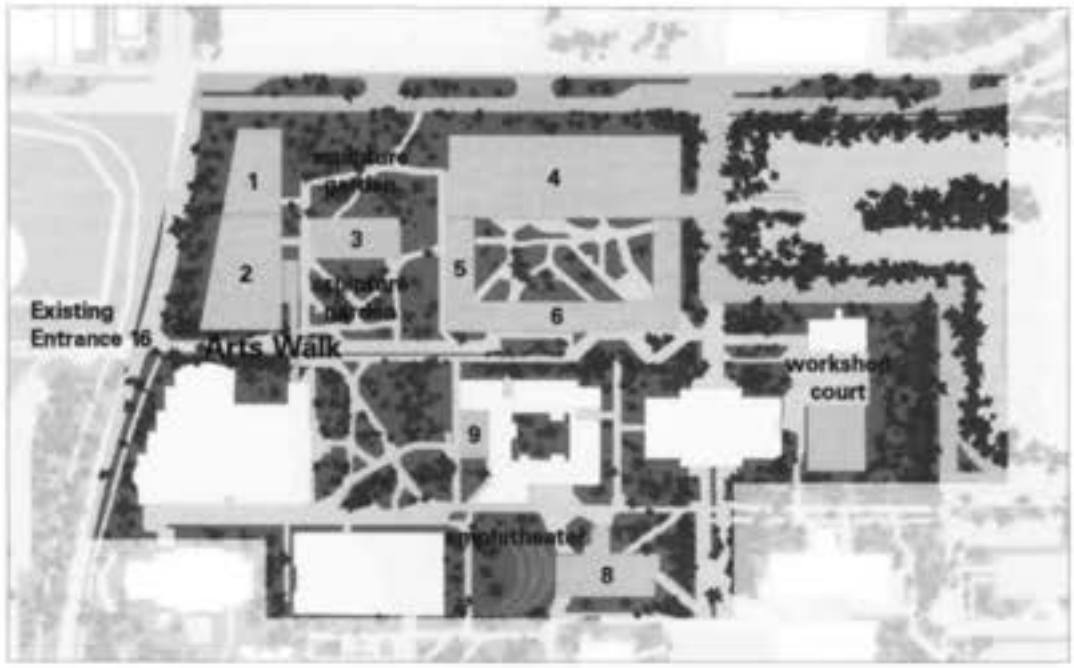
The Framework also plays a prominent part in the University of Houston's efforts to raise its profile, both locally and beyond. The UH Board of Regents' ultimate goal is to have the university recognized as a Tier 1 research institution, one funded by the state at the same levels as the University of Texas and Texas A&M. But in academia as in business you have to spend money to get money, so the regents are embarking on an ambitious capital campaign, one whose goal is expected to be in the $600 million range, in order to drastically upgrade facilities and attract higher profile professors and students.

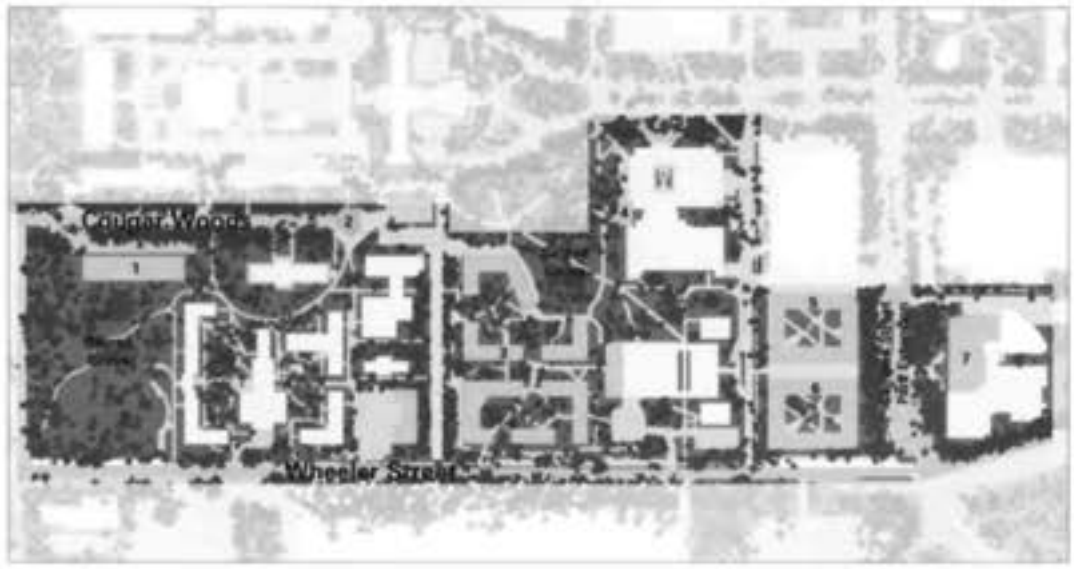
Regardless of whether the university reaches Tier 1 status, in the next ten years the student population is expected to grow from the current 35,000 to around 42,000, which would put a massive strain on the university's resources. It already faces a shortage of 800,000-square-feet of classroom and office space. And since planners also expect the number of students living on campus to rise from the current 5,000 to 12,000 by 2016, a shortage of housing is another concern.

To deal with this influx of students, the campus' built environment is expected to almost double in size, from eight million square feet to around 15 million square feet. According to Phillip Anketell, the university's director of campus planning and real estate, the regents have stated that they want to expand facilities without losing the university's "park-like feel." He adds, "They've said, 'We don't want to be another UT.'"

The need for these new buildings is what led to the decision to put the Framework together. One of the first initiatives of University President Jay Gogue, who took office in September 2003, was to commission a strategic plan. When that was completed in the fall of 2004, the university administration realized that to implement their strategy a number of new facilities would be required. To help make sure the facilities were put in the right places, a new master plan was needed. That became the Framework. Work on the Framework began in December 2005.

Cooper Robertson told the regents that they could achieve the kind of growth they wanted, and maintain both green space and open space, without expanding the campus' geographic limits, which total about 550 acres. By taking one essential step—transforming parking on campus—they could have their cake and eat it too. In the vision of the Framework, nearly all of the campus' sprawling surface parking lots would be changed into something else. Cars would wind up in parking garages, most of which would have retail and other amenities on the ground floor, or satellite lots on the outer periphery of the campus. (For details on the first of the parking garages, see sidebar page 25.) The leftover space, which would be substantial, would be transformed into a series of "villages,"





Below: Map of the four proposed campus precincts as well as development parcels.
Top Right: Map of proposed Arts Precinct.
Bottom Right: Map of proposed Wheeler Street Precinct.
Opposite Page, Top Left: Map of proposed Stadium Precinct.
Opposite Page, Top Right: Map of proposed Professional Precinct.
Opposite Page, Bottom: Artists' renderings of what the proposed new precincts might look like. Left to right: Arts Precinct, Wheeler Street Precinct, Professional Precinct, and Stadium Precinct.

each with its own identity.

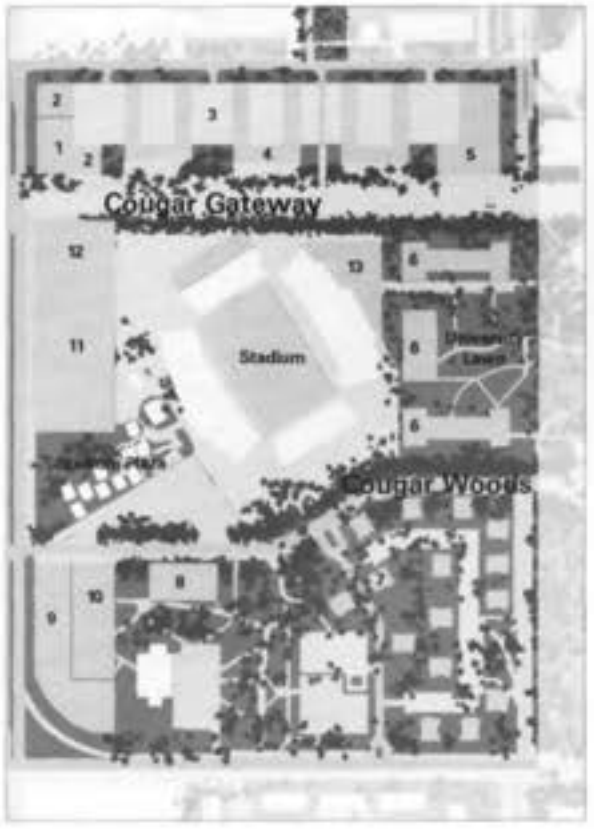
In a somewhat oversimplified nutshell, the plan leaves the interior of the campus almost untouched, but radically transforms the school's edges by creating four precincts, each with a distinct character, but each combining academics with housing and retail, often in the same building.

One precinct that could bring visitors from across town to the campus includes a 550,000-square-foot Art Village, proposed to be built in the parking lots between the College of Architecture Building and the Gulf Freeway. Along with the attractive green space already in place between the Moores School of Music and the Fine Arts Building, the Art Village is projected to include a sculpture courtyard, outdoor art studios, an outdoor amphitheater, and a student plaza. Loft apartment buildings with student housing and retail would be included, along with a parking garage with ground-floor retail.

Dave Irvin, the university's assistant vice president for facilities and plant operations, and perhaps the leading spokesman for the Framework, foresees a mix of private art galleries and cafes in the lofts and garage.

Graduate students and married students are expected to be attracted to Calhoun Village, at the north end of Calhoun in what is called the Professional Precinct. Calhoun Village, one of three suggested areas of commercial development, would contain some 100,000 square feet of first floor, continuous retail space on both sides of the street filled with tenants such as bookstores, outdoor cafes, and specialty shops. The Professional Precinct would add around 1,600,000 square feet to the campus itself—768,000 academic and 665,000 residential. Besides creating courtyards and quadrangles for the engineering, law, and business schools, the plan calls for mixed-use student housing, which would include academic and commercial space along with the residences.

In one example among many of campus greening, a re-routed Calhoun Street would enter an expanded park zone



along Brays Bayou, in effect absorbing the bayou's jogging trails and wooded spaces into the university. This parkland could be one place where Third Ward residents would feel welcome strolling in to explore the campus' new shops and walkways. Calhoun, says Irvin, would become "a destination."

The Wheeler Street Precinct would be built with undergraduates in mind. Its development would include student housing designed to look like low rise residential, in part to respect the nearby University Oaks neighborhood, which consists in large part of single family homes. There would also be academic space and retail designed to appeal to younger students. This area would extend into the Third Ward, and welcome the university's neighbors to shop and otherwise be a part of the community.

The Stadium Precinct contains what might be the Framework's most intriguing features. Cullen Boulevard would be closed to vehicular traffic between Elgin and Wheeler, creating a pedestrian zone that would one day include a tree-lined stretch dubbed the Cougar Woods. Elgin between Cullen and Scott would be named the Cougar Way, and would be the chief pedestrian entry point into campus. Elgin would be open to cars, but would be expected to see a great deal of foot traffic as well after the street is lined with mixed-use buildings, including outdoor cafes.

The university's holdings on Scott Street would also be transformed by mixed-use buildings, and by an intermodal transit station where the new Metro University light rail line is anticipated to reach the campus' outer edge. Shuttle buses would be used to ferry students from the light rail stop into the university's interior. On Scott Street the university hopes to work with private developers, who, according to Irvin, are attracted by the coming rail line.

The Stadium Precinct would add almost 1,900,000 square feet to the university, including 730,000 square feet of housing and retail, and 1,158,000 of academic. A large plaza would be constructed on the Scott Street side of Robertson Stadium.

While major changes would take place on the university's outer edges, the interior of the campus would remain recognizable to current students. Some building would take place, but mostly to create plaza-like "quads" around existing buildings. While such quads are not new to the university, the Framework plan would add to those already in place. One of the first examples of this Framework-inspired quad-building—the Cesar Pelli-designed Science Engineering Research and Classroom complex, which is built around a green square and a fountain—opened last fall. (For more on the complex, see story page 26.)

University representatives are uniformly excited by the Framework's promise of giving the "anti-memorable" campus an identity and sense of place. Irvin says the developments would "make the campus interesting and exciting, and will differentiate UH from Lubbock and Stillwater."

Phillip Anketell sounds mildly amused when he thinks about how the University of Houston, "only three miles from downtown Houston, has tried to pass itself off as Penn State." Why, he asks, "should we create a suburban setting" that goes dead during long stretches of the day and night? By mixing uses, he notes, large parts of the campus would remain urban and lively even when classes are out.

Anketell also says that though the university is not a pioneer in developing a mixed-use campus—Atlanta's Georgia Institute of Technology and several West Coast universities have added such components—he doesn't know of any campus that has done so to the extent outlined by the Framework.

While the University of Houston's excitement over its Framework is understandable, so is the skepticism that a Houstonian might feel upon hearing about it. Anyone who has been waiting to see what kind of development the light

Photo by Frank White

Above: Students from the university's college of architecture work on the computer-generated model of the Framework master plan.
Above Right: Maps showing the growth of the University of Houston campus by decades.

rail line would create along Main Street, or longing to see a backhoe gouging up asphalt around Minute Maid Park, might ho-hum the news from the University of Houston as mere drawings on paper, or, at best, carvings in plywood.

And the Framework is not, of course, the first master plan for the university. (Actually, in the publication that outlines the Framework it is not even described as a master plan, which is defined as "prescriptive and detailed," but rather as a plan that instead "provides a vision and the necessary ingredients to realize it." For most, though, the Framework is seen as a master plan, even if a general rather than a specific one.) The first campus master plan was conceived in 1937 by the St. Louis landscape architecture office of Hare and Hare. Like many campus designs of the period it was based on the concept of the academic quadrangle, with an overall organization essentially beaux-arts in character with open and closed spaces arranged along axes and cross-axes with formal focal points. The Cullen quadrangle is the best example of this era of campus building.

In the 1960s the university experienced dramatic growth both in physical size and population. The 1966 campus master plan, influenced by the Victor Gruen plan for Fort Worth, provided for a ring of parking lots around the traditional, pedestrian-oriented campus. While the Hare and Hare plan of 1937 stressed defined architectural spaces, the pattern that followed was much more diagrammatic, with free-standing buildings sited along pedestrian and vehicular circuits in an ever-expanding field of parking lots, resulting in the University of Houston as it is today.

Subsequent campus plans have tried to synthesize aspects of the traditional Hare and Hare plan with the commuter plan of 1966. The Framework, though, is less interested in a synthesis than in something new. As to skepticism about whether the ambition will be achieved, Dave Irvin acknowledges that "after a campus master plan is introduced and unveiled, it's usually placed on a shelf." But where the Framework is concerned, he says, "we are already implementing some of its key parts." The first of the new parking garages has opened, and the transformation of Calhoun Street is underway, with landscaping, ornamental pavers, benches, and other elements being added to the roadside, and two of Calhoun's six lanes being eliminated between University Drive and the Law Center. And the first stage of a new student plaza in front of M.D. Anderson Library is scheduled to be completed soon. (The library itself was recently renovated.)

Irvin describes a basic difference between the university's Framework and other, more chimerical plans. "Most plans fail because of a lack of funding and political will," he says. But according to Irvin, the University of Houston has both. "The plan has been developed by our regents and advancement people with an eye to what is economically and politically possible," he says. Irvin doesn't name names, but he says that the university has approached possible donors with the Framework in hand, and that the donors "made commitments that they'll want to announce in their own time."

The Framework has also been created with the surrounding neighborhood in mind. According to Anketell, State Representative Garnet Coleman—who by some accounts has been instrumental in slowing the pace of Midtown development in an effort to prevent Third Ward gentrification—is on board with the University of Houston's plan, and other community leaders have been consulted as well. "They want to see the neighborhood develop," says Anketell.

Irvin says that in the next year to year and a half, more components of the Framework will be completed. Cullen will be closed. A 1,000-bed mixed-use development on Calhoun will be open. Half a dozen buildings, he says, are in design and should soon break ground. It appears that the Framework is well on its way from vision to reality, though the breadth of the Framework plan will clearly take more than a few buildings to implement. Nonetheless, the idea of the Framework has already resulted in some surprises. As College of Architecture Dean Mashburn points out, the regents are relying heavily on architecture to sell the new idea of the university to the city and donors.

"Architecture and planning will be emblems for the capital campaign," he says, sounding a little dazzled. And who can blame him? After all, how many massive Houston projects have been sold on the basis of architecture and planning? ■

Top Right: View of the plazas at the new University Parking Garage (STOA/Goleman/Bolullo Architects, 2006).
Bottom Right: The five-story garage incorporates retail on the first floor, and in its four parking floors has 1,000 more spaces than the surface lot it replaced.

Photos by Frank Ahlin

Park and Stay

A new garage at UH tightens the bond between commuters and campus

The University of Houston has long been known as a commuter school. And for good reason: only 12 percent of its students live on campus, and of the remaining 88 percent, very few live within walking distance. So the vast majority of the student body commutes, and is fated to suffer the burden of parking on campus. Historically, the university has dealt with parking demands through surface lots. But as the university has grown, the land those lots sprawl across has become increasingly precious. With the university now redefining itself as a destination place, one where students stay rather than simply attend class and then go home, the need to come up with a long-term solution to the problem of parking has increased. At the same time, the university is having to address a major deficit in facility space.

One approach to dealing with both of these issues can be found in a new garage located on Calhoun Road near the university's main entrance and on the edge of the campus' most prominent square. Close to the iconic Cullen Building, the new addition to the M.D. Anderson Library, and the University Student Center, a main hub for student interaction, the garage, known as the University Parking Garage, replaces a surface parking lot between the Hilton Hotel and the Campus Recreation Center. Since the site neighbors key infrastructure for campus services, a number of programmatic functions were proposed for it. Addressing the need for both parking and facility space, the University Parking Garage takes an integrated approach to solve multiple problems. Rather than being committed solely to parking, the structure also incorporates space for a welcome center, retail, offices, and student services. The result is a mixed-use parking garage that confronts a number of planning issues and signals a new direction for parking and place-making on campus.

The building is bounded on three sides by streets, two of which, Calhoun and University, are major arteries. STOA/Golemon/Bolullo Architects designed the garage to be set back from these streets to create plazas on three sides. Retail and student services open onto these plazas, which form a buffer between the mass of the structure and the roadways, allowing for open-air circulation around the base of the building. Steel canopies offer shade at the pedestrian level while creating a transition space from the plazas to interior spaces. Behind the offices and storefronts, a core of parking serves employees and visitors to the university.

Stacked above the ground level are four floors dedicated to student parking. Approached by car, there is a sense of grandeur to the building's vehicular circulation. Unlike many garages, where the rise is circular through the plan, at the University Parking Garage the circulation flows along two ramps stacked one atop the other. These ramps form a two-way street that crosses every level, creating a very intuitive path. On their ascent each ramp connects several floors, resulting in dynamic volumes of space that allow drivers to sense the multiple stories of parking.

In keeping with the predominantly horizontal forms of the campus, the overall scale of the building, though large, is made understated by a low profile. The concrete and brick facades of the garage's upper floors fit it into the language of campus materials, while its steel-and-glass stair towers and ground floor storefronts provide a contrast to that language. Void patterns in the brick veneer expose the structure's nature while serving to ventilate the building and admit generous natural light.

The immediate impact of the 543,000 square-foot structure has been seen in a several ways. With a net gain of 1,000 spaces over the previous surface lot, it has alleviated some parking woes. The building also establishes a formal visitor's entrance, providing an easy way to enter the campus and find information about it. Visitors previously entered the university a number of different ways, each one as confusing as the next. Now a Welcome Center provides a first stop. Students, meanwhile, are provided convenient access to offices helping with financial aid, admissions, counseling, and other crucial services. The design further provides 12,000 square-feet of lease space for retail and restaurants, which have added social elements for improved university life. Most important, these elements create a center of activity that the university can build upon towards its vision of a vibrant student campus.

The University of Houston has never been a self-contained city like many other universities or a residential enclave like Rice. As a typical commuter campus, it has not been a destination place either. What the university can claim is a diverse student body drawn from the metropolitan community. However, it takes social elements, such as the University Parking Garage's restaurants and retail stores, to lay a foundation for the active student life that will keep that community on campus.

The University Parking Garage is one element of the broader Framework master plan that hopes to transform the University of Houston. (See story page 20.) The section of Calhoun where it sits would, under the Framework, become a "student village," and the garage, with its first floor amenities, is seen as an integral part of that. The garage is also a model for others to follow. A second mixed-use garage is being studied for the intersection of Scott and Holman. The goal of that garage would not be limited to beginning a retail corridor along Holman, but would also provide a way to engage the Third Ward community and serve as a transit center for existing bus lines and the proposed Metro Light Rail.

With the University Parking Garage, the University of Houston has initiated an approach of addressing both social issues of student life and urban issues of commuting. The university's ability to imagine a structure of such a mixed nature displays a self-assurance about a new agenda for building on campus. It's clear that the university no longer has a problem being perceived as a commuter school. Rather, it has embraced its eccentricities with a building as dynamic as its student body. — *Reynold Scott Magnuson*

Courtyard of the Science Engineering Research and Classroom complex (Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects with Kendall/Heaton Associates, 2005).

All photos by Frank Wilde, except where noted

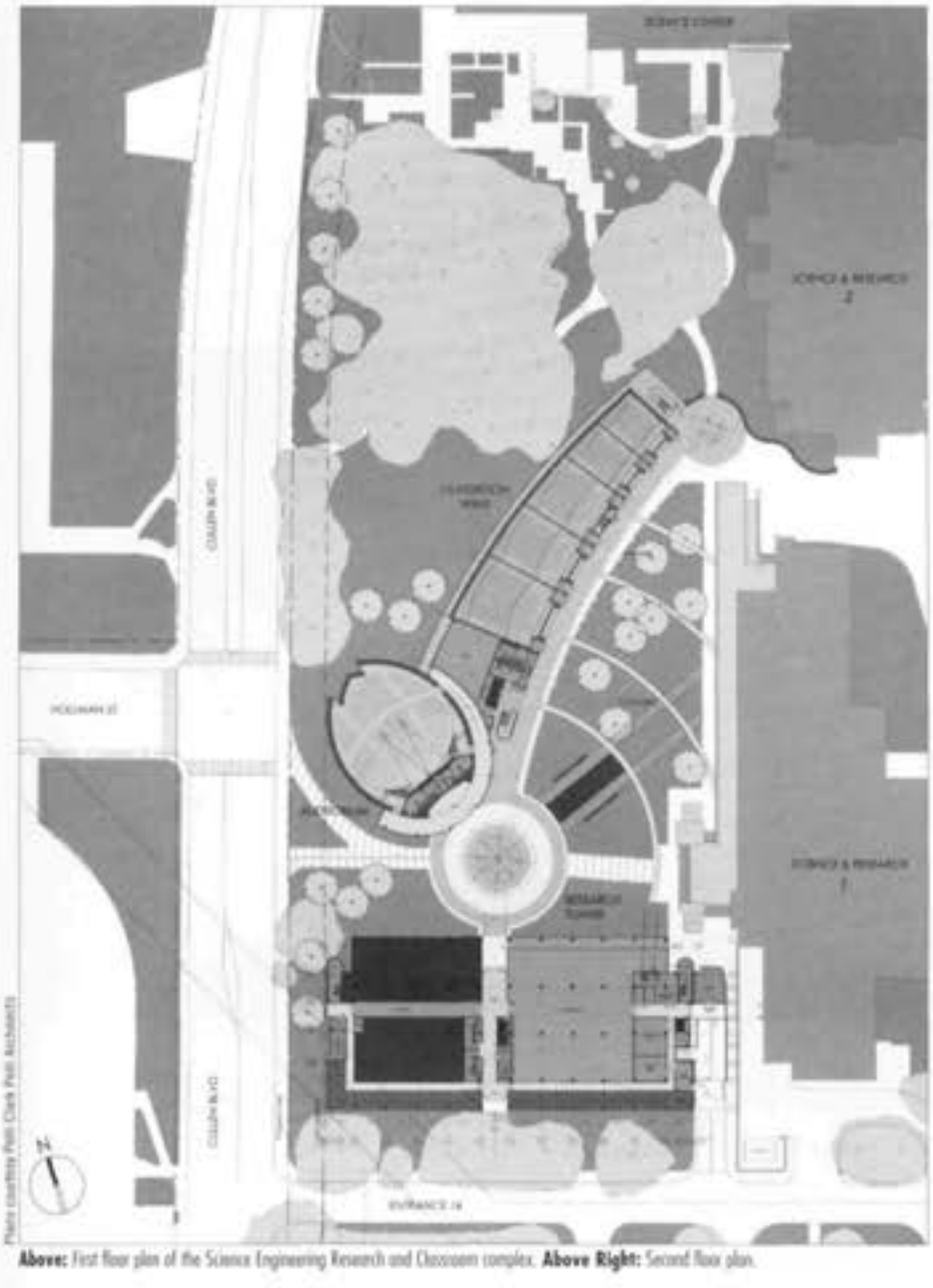
Plans courtesy Pelli Clark Pelli Architects

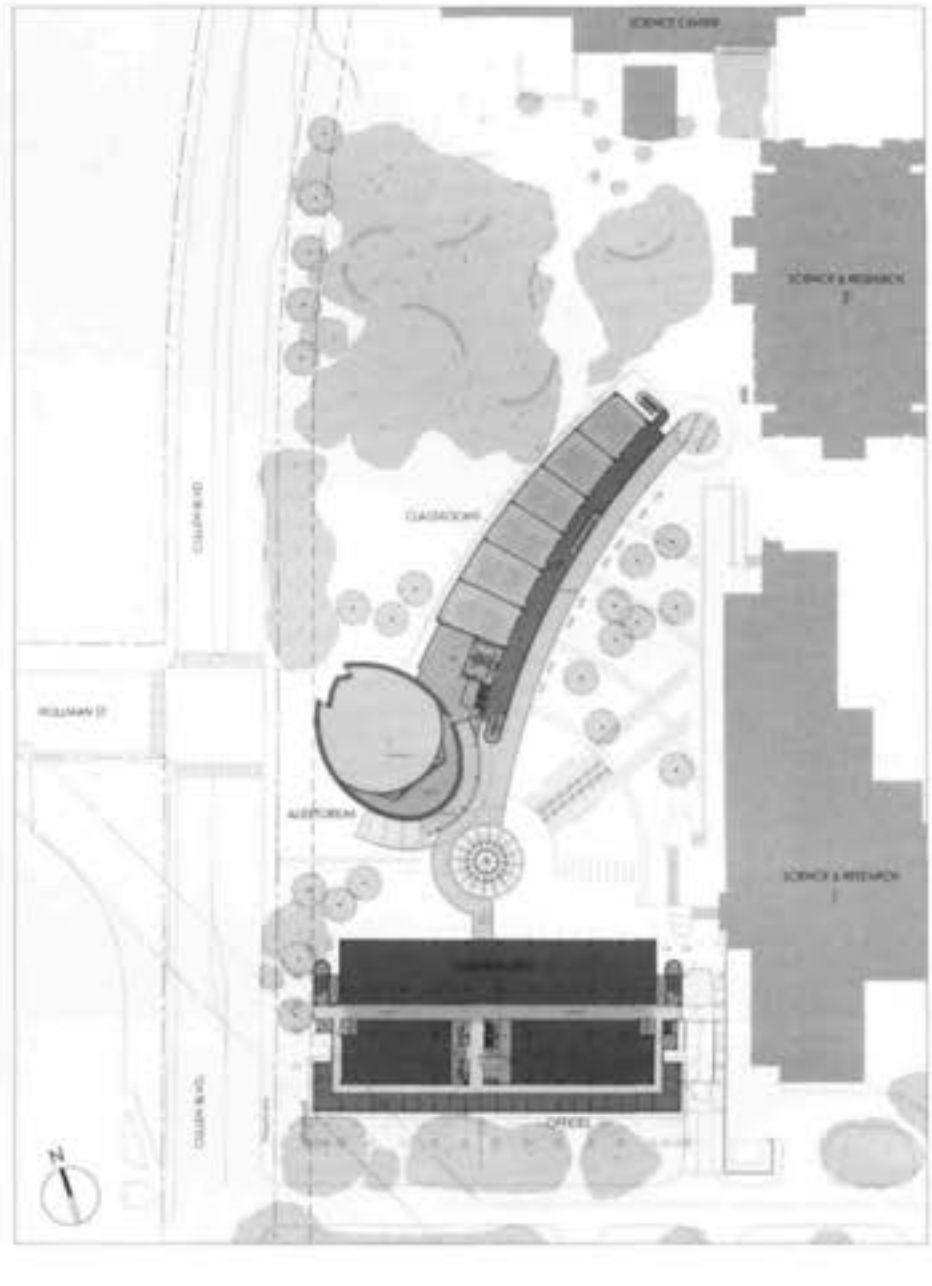
Raising the Bar

Cesar Pelli's Science Engineering Research and Classroom complex sets a new standard at the University of Houston

BY WILLIAM F. STERN

The University of Houston's main campus has never been particularly well known for distinguished architecture. The campus is represented, however, by more than a few outstanding examples of well-designed academic buildings, if few that attract attention. Among these are the trio of limestone buildings that formed the original campus core, especially the 1950 proto-modern Ezekiel W. Cullen Building, designed by prominent Houston architect Alfred C. Finn. The most recent building to claim broad appeal, deservedly or not, was Philip Johnson's 1986 Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, a post-modern homage to the 18th century French architect Claude Ledoux. Now, 20 years later, the new Science Engineering Research and Classroom complex (SERC), designed by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects of New Haven in collaboration with Kendall/Heaton Associates of Houston, is also claiming broad appeal, this time deservedly so. The complex, which opened last fall, establishes a new benchmark of design for future buildings on the university's central campus. Moreover, its architects have succeeded in creating a dynamic arrangement of imaginative





Above: First floor plan of the Science Engineering Research and Classroom complex. **Above Right:** Second floor plan.

structures that have well-considered spatial relationships to several existing science buildings on the western side of the university's campus.

The work of Cesar Pelli, Pelli Clark Pelli's principal designer, is well represented in Houston. Indeed, the city claims the greatest concentration of Pelli designed buildings anywhere in the United States outside of New York City. These include the Four Leaf Towers condominium and Four Oaks office complex north of the Galleria; the Main Street addition to St. Luke's Hospital; the former Enron building now occupied by Chevron on Louisiana Street; and two buildings on the Rice University campus—Herring Hall and an addition to Rice Memorial Center.

Pelli Clarke Pelli and Kendall Heaton were selected from a field of 27 local and national architectural firms considered for the SERC project. While the University of Houston did not limit its search to so-called "signature" architects, according to Dave Irvin, associate vice chancellor for plant operations, the university did want an architect who would bring design distinction to the project, an architect who would design a building attractive to the kind of research scientists the university is seeking to recruit. One component of the SERC project, a new research facility, was planned to anticipate the hiring of at least 30 new scientists over the next five years for the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and the College of Engineering. As Irvin explains, the administration's goal is to establish the university as a top ranked research center, one on par with the best universities in the country. They therefore wanted a building that would be of the same high caliber as the scientists who will occupy it.

Pelli's response to the mixed program of classrooms, an auditorium, offices, and research laboratories was to split that program into separate buildings, in part as a way of responding to a complex set of site conditions. The site is located on the east side of Cullen Boulevard, a major north-south seam in the campus, and adjacent to two older science buildings to the east (Science and Research 1 and Science and Research 2) and the Houston Science Center to the north. An existing grove of trees and a depressed parking lot, which unobtrusively fronted Science and Research 1, were considered attractive features of the site, and the university initially asked the architects to retain both. But the architects quickly realized that to do so would necessitate a stacked building proportionately too tall for the location.

Preservation of the trees took precedent over saving the parking lot, which was sacrificed, allowing the building to encompass more of the site. Of the three buildings abutting the site, Science and Research 1 is the most architecturally significant. Designed by the Houston firm of MacKie & Kamrath and completed in 1969, the tall, visually prominent science building exhibits a Wrightian influence characteristic of the firm's other work, and is one of the noteworthy buildings on the University of Houston campus. The SERC architects chose to reinforce that building's presence and stature by forming a new courtyard along its edge. Loosely triangular in shape, the courtyard is defined on its two other sides by the dynamic curve of SERC's classroom/auditorium building and the new research tower. The auditorium acts as a fulcrum, from which the classroom wing spins out like a celestial comet's tail, even narrowing at the end.

This informal courtyard is in keeping with some of the best aspects of the university's planning. The original Hare and Hare master plan of 1937 anticipated a formal arrangement of buildings, not unlike the beaux-arts planning of the nearby Rice University campus. While a portion of that plan was realized, the majority of the campus has developed in a less structured fashion, becoming more like a large park interspersed with buildings set indifferently into the landscape. The revised master plan of 1966 pushed vehicular traffic and parking to the periphery, making the inner campus a pedestrian precinct, with pathways crossing landscaped grounds. The SERC complex not only adds a new courtyard in the larger garden of the university, but by preserving the grove of trees also provides a pocket park on the site's western edge, adjacent to the Houston Science Center.

The three major divisions of the complex—classrooms, auditorium, and laboratory—function independently. Only the research tower, with its emphasis on science, relates programmatically to its section of the campus. The classroom wing is not assigned to a particular department, but instead fills a general need for more classrooms on the western

Top Left: Classroom wing and auditorium as seen from the Cullen Boulevard side.
Middle Left: The research tower.
Bottom Left: Glass wrapped egress stair at the research tower.
Below: Covered walkway at classroom wing.

side of the campus. The auditorium is also unassigned and can be scheduled by any university department or organization. Together, however, the buildings, each with its own architectural definition, form a unified composition assembled around the courtyard.

The dominant feature of the two-story, brick classroom wing is its double-level, covered outdoor circulation. At the ground floor an open arcade supported by a row of circular columns skirts the courtyard, protected by the second-story walkway above. A wing-like, cantilevered canopy projects over the second story walkway. Besides providing an efficient, cost-effective way to enter and exit the classrooms, the open circulation more directly integrates the classroom wing with the courtyard, promoting interaction as the students come and go from their classes.

The classroom wing's program has been divided into five small lecture halls with fixed seating on the first level and six classrooms with movable seating on the second. The spaces are strikingly differentiated—on the first floor are windowless, almost claustrophobic rooms, and on the second level are spacious rooms with floor to ceiling windows that face the courtyard on one side and the grove of trees on the other. Apparently, this contrasting treatment satisfied the desires of some faculty members who prefer to teach in environments visually sealed off from the outside.

The auditorium, a 550-seat ellipsoidal structure, strategically terminates the Holman Street axis and presents a striking form at the intersection of Holman and Cullen Boulevard. A circular, glass-covered pavilion serves as a link between the classroom/auditorium building and the research tower, providing a generous, protected gathering place, as well as the major threshold to the building complex and garden courtyard. At the opposite end of the classroom wing, a smaller version of the glass pavilion terminates the covered walkway and the courtyard. The circular and curved forms of buildings, pavilions, arcades, and roofs are gracefully joined together into an energetic architectural whole.

Completing this composition is the research tower, a much larger structure that stands apart and is more directly related in scale and massing to Science and Research 1, which runs perpendicular to it. In fact, the two buildings are joined at the third level by a sky bridge. The program for the research tower dictated a more universal space, resulting in a rectilinear form that contrasts with the swooping curves of the adjacent classroom/auditorium building. And its much larger size—157,000 square feet versus 47,000 square feet for the classroom/auditorium building—resulted in a more consolidated multi-story structure. Each level of the five-story tower is zoned with laboratory space facing north into the

Right: Glass pavilion at the entrance to the courtyard, on axis with Mackie and Kenneth's Science and Research 1 building (1969).
Below: Auditorium lobby with Jackie Ferrara installation at inset wall.

courtyard, back-up space for the laboratories on the other side of the corridor spine, and a narrower band of faculty offices facing south.

According to the architects, the ideal module for laboratory and service areas determined the research tower's width. The office row is expressed on the exterior by bands of ribbon windows set into a limestone facade. Windows are protected from the southern sun by curved, perforated sunscreens at each level. Pelli exhibits his modernist predilections most emphatically with stair towers that are clearly expressed at both ends of the building, most dramatically where the taught glass skin curves around the stairs and landings. Taking advantage of its northern orientation, the floor to ceiling windows of the laboratories offer views not just into the courtyard, but to the city beyond.

While the classrooms and auditorium were completed and ready for the 2005 fall semester, the research tower remains an unfinished shell, awaiting funding of approximately $5 million per floor to be completed. The research tower has a floor plate that provides maximum flexibility, so that each laboratory space can be customized according to the specifications of the research. A utility core running the length of the building provides the infrastructure that each laboratory will tap into. As in a commercial office tower, when a particular research project is completed, the area can easily be remodeled for the next project. Moreover, the building is not assigned to any one department, but will serve the disciplines of bio-engineering, nano-technology, strength of materials, and medical engineering, among others. With 30 new research scientists anticipated to arrive over the next half decade adding to the existing pool of university scientists applying for research grants, the building will not be lacking for tenants. Faculty offices are scheduled to be ready for occupancy by late fall 2006, while the laboratories will be built out over the next two years.

Although not directed to use specific materials or colors, the architects chose compatibility with nearby buildings, particularly through the use of buff colored brick for the classroom wing and limestone cladding on the east, west, and south façades of the research tower. Bolder coloration both accents and distinguishes the building forms of the auditorium and the classroom wing. The sculptural shape of the auditorium, which projects above the classroom wing, is clad with an eight-inch by eight-inch crimson colored brick block turned on the diagonal. As seen from the research tower, even the auditorium's bright red metallic roof contrasts with the beige standing seam metal roof of the classroom wing.

Pelli reserved the strongest statement of color for the outdoor stairwells and second story handrails of the classroom wing—perforated metal painted a saturated reddish orange color. This color, a version of University of Houston Cougar red, stands on its own as a foil to the yellowish brick and creamy color of the cantilevered canopy above the second level walkway and the arcaded ground floor walkway. The bluish tint of the research tower's courtyard-facing glass curtain wall adds another element of color to the ensemble.

At the University of Houston, all new buildings are allotted one percent of the cost of construction to purchase commissioned works of art. Over the years this program, which is responsible for the Frank Stella murals at the Moores School of Music and the Scott Burton benches at the entrance to the College of Architecture, has enhanced the campus environment by making the university into something of an art park. For the SERC complex, a committee composed of faculty, artists, and curators selected the nationally prominent American sculptor Jackie Ferrara. Ferrara often works with recognizable architectural shapes such as stairs, walls, towers, and rooms, which she transforms into a language of sculpture.

Ferrara designed two purposefully subtle pieces that blend into the complex's overall architectural assemblage. The first of these, a long courtyard installation, is in fact a fountain rendered in two contrasting colors of granite. Water washes the sides of the extruded triangular form, and a seat edge runs the length of both sides. For the lobby to the auditorium Ferrara created a second work consisting of wood strips stained in multiple colors and laid up horizontally in a staggered pattern, with figural shapes running vertically along the length of an inset wall. In both cases the work blends with the architecture in a satisfying way that is less about the object and more about enhancing the architectural design.

Cesar Pelli and his design team have taken the challenges of a many faceted program and produced a complex of buildings that is visually arresting and functionally expressive. As good as the architecture of this complex is, it is the common area of the courtyard that distinguishes this site. What had formerly been a parking lot next to a grove of trees has been made into a gathering place. And by compositionally incorporating the new complex with the surrounding science buildings to form an abstracted quadrangle, Pelli and his team have brought an invigorated sense of place that had not been there before.

The success of the university's ambitious new master plan will depend heavily on its being fulfilled by distinguished architecture. If the Science Engineering Research and Classroom complex augurs the direction for new buildings at the University of Houston, there is reason to anticipate a bright future for the campus on Cullen Boulevard. ■

Photo by G. Lynn Photography

Spirits of Place

Jefferson Davis Hospital rises from the grave as an artists' haven

Architect Bill Neuhaus is modest when he talks about how his firm turned the former Jefferson Davis Hospital, located just north of downtown in the First Ward, into what is now the Elder Street Lofts, a residential project of Houston's Avenue CDC and their development partner, Artspace Projects Inc. of Minneapolis. "It's not architecture the way you thought you would be doing it," Neuhaus says. "It's more like solving a mystery; putting a puzzle together."

While everything about the project was very real—the lofts are currently home for 34 tenants, most of them artists—planning and designing the renovation of Jefferson Davis Hospital also became a de facto exercise in revealing history.

Every site has a story to tell, but places that are haunted are especially saturated with significance. And haunted is what Jefferson Davis Hospital has long been rumored to be. It was built in 1924 on a poorly kept parcel of land that had been Houston's second oldest cemetery. That cemetery, established in 1840 to handle an overflow of corpses from a yellow fever epidemic, also became the burial ground for victims of subsequent cholera and yellow fever epidemics in 1866 and 1867, as well as Confederate soldiers returned from the war, rich and poor, black and white.

According to descriptions from the era, Houston's zoning phobia didn't affect the cemetery's organization. It was divided into four sections, the first of these designated a potter's field "to receive the remains of all criminals and persons of infamous character such as committed suicide or come to their death from a wound received in a duel." The second section was reserved for blacks and the third for burial of persons not otherwise provided for. The fourth was divided into small lots that were sold to the highest bidders.

This order didn't hold for long, and according to a *Houston Chronicle* article, by the end of the 1870s the cemetery was filled with several thousand corpses and closed by the city. Some people continued to bury additional family members in their plots, stacking coffins atop each other to make a single grave site into a double, even though a city ordinance forbade that practice.

Eventually the cemetery receded from the city's consciousness, becoming neglected land and then a poorly maintained park. Not everyone forgot, however, so when the city decided to erect Houston's first permanent charity hospital on the site, it honored the dead veterans buried there by naming the building for the president of the Confederacy (an honor that was later transferred to a newer Jefferson Davis hospital built on Allen Parkway in 1937, and razed in 1999 to clear the way for the Federal Reserve Building that opened last year). An inscription on the cornerstone of the original Jefferson Davis Hospital read, in part, "in loving memory of our Confederate soldiers, whose sacred dust lies buried in the shadow of this building."

Despite this memorial, little respect was paid to the actual graves when the hospital was built, as recent mappings of the gravesites show. Prior to 1969, when the Texas Antiquities Code came into effect, no special attention was required to be given to gravesites. Even in 1986, when the Houston Fire Department began to remodel some facilities that had been built near the hospital, they began as though it were still the old days, digging anywhere they wanted to and gathering up bones in buckets. But this time the casual treatment of the one-time cemetery came to the attention of local

Photo courtesy W.O. Neuhaus and Associates

Opposite Page: The one-time Jefferson Davis Hospital (Wilkes Alfred Dowdy, 1924), now known as the Elder Street Lofts (renovation by W.O. Neuhaus and Associates, 2005) and a home to artists and musicians, among others.
Left: A graffiti-marked column in the interior of the Jefferson Davis Hospital prior to renovation beginning.
Below: In the years prior to its restoration, the historic hospital had fallen into a sad state of disrepair.
Bottom: To help maintain the hospital's traditional appearance, damaged brick on the exterior was matched and replaced.

Photo courtesy W.O. Neuhaus and Associates

Photo courtesy W.O. Neuhaus and Associates

BY BRUCE C. WEBB

media, and Dr. Kenneth Brown from the University of Houston's Department of Anthropology was called in to examine the site and the unearthed remains. Brown, according to newspaper reports, determined some of the remains were of Confederate soldiers and accused workers of taking "ghoulie souvenirs." Brown also held out the tantalizing possibility that some of the graves might date back to a 1600s English settlement, but that hypothesis was never fully investigated or supported.

The rough treatment of the cemetery over the years led to rumors that the area was haunted. In fact, it had the reputation of being the most haunted site in Texas, and even today a number of websites make the case with stories of paranormal adventures, frights, initiations, and Halloween parties, as well as photographs of mysterious, translucent orbs floating inside the building. Until recently, the old Jefferson Davis Hospital was a featured stop on the High Spirit Ghost Tour of Houston. Haunted or not, for Houston architects W.O. Neuhaus and Associates, the hospital site's charnel history became a factor in the renovation plan they were called upon to produce.

A few years back, Avenue CDC, a Houston non-profit organization dedicated to revitalizing Washington Avenue and the Near Northside community, fixed its sights on the old Jefferson Davis Hospital. By that time it bore little resemblance to the building that, when it opened, was praised as one of America's most modern hospitals. Over the years the original Jefferson Davis Hospital building had been used as a clinic, as a residential addiction treatment facility, and for records storage. Then for nearly two decades it went empty, left to slide into disrepair.

Photo courtesy W.O. Neuhaus and Associates

Photo by G. Lynn Photography

Photo by G. Lynn Photography

Top Right: One of the few new additions to the former hospital was this rear stairway.
Top: A corridor in the Jefferson Davis before renovations.
Above: The first floor corridor following renovation. This corridor has become an ad hoc art gallery, featuring works created by residents.

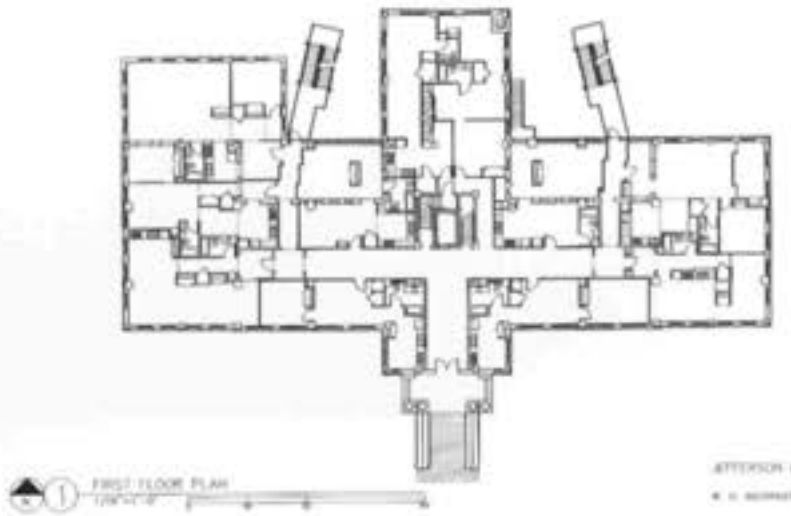
What Avenue CDC saw when they looked at the old hospital was not particularly pretty, though it retained an elegant façade and entryway, as well as a structure that seemed solid despite its years. It had been designed by architect Wilkes Alfred Dowdy in the Georgian style, and elements of that style still poked through. But in general Jefferson Davis Hospital presented a gloomy aspect, one reminiscent of the description Edgar Allen Poe devised for the House of Usher: "bleak walls, vacant eye-like windows, a few rank sedges." Twenty years vacant it was rotting around the edges, with disintegrating brick and a crumbling interior softened and melted away by Houston's insidious climate. The only signs of life were the spirited graffiti that was nearly everywhere and the gang members and homeless people who used the building.

To help with Jefferson Davis' revitalization, Avenue CDC got in touch with Artspace Projects of Minneapolis, which has found a niche in the development game by helping create affordable living space for artists and arts organizations. Artspace is drawn to older, abandoned buildings such as the original Jefferson Davis Hospital. By being preserved and revitalized rather than demolished, by being put to new uses, such buildings can, Artspace believes, contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the surrounding community.

Artists can be great agents for urban recovery and building urban character. They are natural pioneers, often willing to move into unwanted parts of cities such as warehouse districts, industrial buildings, and other places that haven't yet found a spot in the real estate market. Using sweat equity and an iconoclastic sensibility, artists carve out places to live and studios in which to work, and attract little restaurants, coffee shops, and bars—sometimes all of them in one. Best of all, they do this without creating gentrified, historical "plasticvilles." Few places in modern cities seem as colorful or have as much homemade appeal as artists' neighborhoods.

Photo courtesy W.O. Neuhaus and Associates

Below: Residents inside one of the apartments at the renovated hospital.
Right: Floor plans of the former Jefferson Davis Hospital, showing the layout of the new apartments on the ground floor (top), first floor (middle), and second floor (bottom).



Plans courtesy W.O. Neuhaus and Associates

Artspace, as its name implies, helps artists get the space to start this ball rolling. To do its work, Artspace relies on the assistance of various federal and state agencies as well as private donations and local support and incentive programs. They have a long list of success stories, among them the 2001 development of the National Hotel Lofts on Market Street in Galveston, created from a building that had a glorious beginning as an opera house.

It takes vision to see the possibilities in an old building that has been wrecked by years of neglect and deterioration. Preservation specialist Anna Mod, who researched the Jefferson Davis Hospital and ensured that the architect and developer followed established historic preservation standards in its redevelopment, notes that when it was built it was quite up to date and incorporated many architectural elements then popular in hospital design, including an emphasis on sunlight and ventilation. Its location on a slight rise, away from other structures and pollution, was advantageous and enhanced the effect of the prevailing breezes.

Original architect Dowdy included two screened, fresh-air balconies on the west façade of the second and third floors. Other then-modern provisions included a pair of operating rooms with overhead skylights, a clinic, a radiographic and fluoroscopic room, and two large spaces that are listed on the plan as the men's and women's "insane wards." The facility was also fully segregated: on the ground floor a partition divided the corridor into separate wards and clinics for blacks and whites, an historical fact that the present-day architects noted by replacing the partition with a stripe on the floor.

W.O. Neuhaus' task was to create 34 modern apartments from this medical maze, while at the same time following the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings. Contrary to popular belief, a building's being listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as

Below: This boiler room is scheduled to be remade into a communal space, perhaps a gallery or a studio open to all the residents of Elder Street Lofts.
Right: The green roof installation seen here is a first for an Artspace project. Though small, it suggests more to come.
Next Page: The view of downtown from the former hospital is one of the renovated building's best features.

Photo courtesy W.O. Neuhaus and Associates

Photo by G. Lynn Photography

the Jefferson Davis Hospital is, does not mean the state or federal government can dictate what's done to it. If a private person owns a listed building and uses no federal funds on it, there are no mandates for him to follow. In this case, however, since Artspace, which acted as the developer, wanted to take advantage of a 20 percent rehabilitation tax credit for historic buildings, the project was reviewed by both the Texas Historical Commission and the National Park Service. If you want the carrot, you have to follow the rules.

As it happens, what an architect or his client might want to do with an old building doesn't always correspond to what the agencies charged with protecting our heritage insist on. Participation in the investment tax credit program obligates architect and developer to follow guidelines that require historic buildings be rehabilitated for continued use and to preserve character defining features. Preservation of such things as an interior floor plan, the arrangement and sequence of spaces and built in features, and applied finishes are all-important to a building's historic character and are reviewed. The U.S. Department of the Interior, which supervises the historic buildings program in conjunction with the Texas Historical Commission, insists on a three-step process of identifying, retaining, and preserving whenever possible. The regulations are as much about restoring and preserving an historic setting as they are about protecting notable architecture.

Since Jefferson Davis was originally built as a hospital for indigents, its interior was Spartan; with the exception of terrazzo floors there wasn't much of architectural note inside. Early plans proposed by W.O. Neuhaus and Associates would have simplified the building's interior organization by running a corridor down one side and dividing the other into side-by-side apartments. Reviewers at the federal level nixed the idea because it would have obliterated the hospital's original corridor plan, and with it the building's etymological roots. Similarly, many architects have a penchant for exposing the brick in these older buildings, a penchant at odds with preservationists' desire to restore plaster walls where there was plaster in the original. This usually means sheet rock. In the Jefferson Davis Hospital there were also details that needed to be restored or replicated, notably the curved-cornered interior window frames and the modillion blocks at the eves. Many of the exterior bricks were replaced and the wall repointed. The roof, originally tile, was replaced with asphalt of a similar color.

In addition to the rehabilitation requirements there were the issues of the cemetary to contend with. In 1995 the site had been listed as a State Archeological Landmark, which meant an archeological survey of the property was required before any new construction took place. Prewitt and Associates, a cultural resources firm from Austin, investigated all areas where subsurface disturbances would occur, such as proposed locations of sewer lines, sidewalks, parking areas, stairways and water tanks, both inside and outside the building. In other words, the architect would make proposals and then the investigation team would dig around to see if those proposals would disturb anything.

Fifteen areas on the grounds outside the hospital building were investigated using mechanical trenching, and the findings helped determine the location of new stair towers as well as the surface treatment of paved areas. Inside the building the investigators cut and removed portions of the concrete slab and dug into the floor with a small track hoe to guide the location of new sewer and utility lines.

All in all the archeological investigation resulted in the discovery of 64 previously unknown graves beneath and around the building. A Texas Historical Commission official visited the site periodically to check on the work; excavations were aborted when unmarked graves were found, and some construction plans were changed to avoid disturbing the burial sites. New construction had to work around the existing graves. This required some ingenuity: the architects located new underground utility lines inside an old utility trench rather than snake them through the labyrinth of gravesites. According to the archeology consultants, careful planning allowed the rehabilitation work

Photo by G. Lynn Photography

to proceed with no graves having to be exhumed and moved.

What Avenue CDC and Artspace got for the $6.4 million dollars they spent on the project is an accommodating, no frills residential facility—a place with a genuine proletarian spirit to it. Restored, the exterior is a handsome example of a period style, while inside the building retains most of its institutional hospital feel. The best features of the building are all circumstantial, and it is to the credit of the renovation architects that they didn't try to impose a new will on the building, but instead allowed new readings to emerge from what was there.

The eccentricities of the building plan resulted in nearly every apartment being different, with dozens of individual, purpose-built kitchen and bathroom installations. The exposed concrete ceilings are crisscrossed with an intricate weaving of utility conduits, the surest sign of loft modern updates. Unexpected room arrangements and shapes, and occasional isolated architectural characters, add up to a building that is a bit of a *wunderkammer*. The tenants are predominantly artists, and not surprisingly, as a result the apartments come alive with quirky decoration and plenty of iconoclastic collections. Despite the thickness of the plans, most of the apartments are surprisingly bright. By contrast the corridors and stairwells are austere. The exception is the first floor hallway, which has been turned into an ad hoc gallery that hosts work by residents.

One of the site's best amenities is a splendid view of downtown Houston, a vista perhaps best seen from the roof, although some of the choicest locations from which to take in the panorama are occupied by neat rows of humming air conditioning units. Nonetheless, this would be a great vantage point from which to watch the fourth of July fireworks.

Elder Street Lofts features the first green roof installation on an Artspace project, as well as the first on an historic tax credit project in Texas. The green roof covers an area about the size of a three-car garage. Though small, it suggests more to come. Sustainability is a new interest of ArtSpace, which recently drafted a protocol statement and formed an advisory committee to better address the interest in sustainability of many of the communities it serves. The Brown Foundation, reflecting its own interest in sustainability, funded the green roof construction.

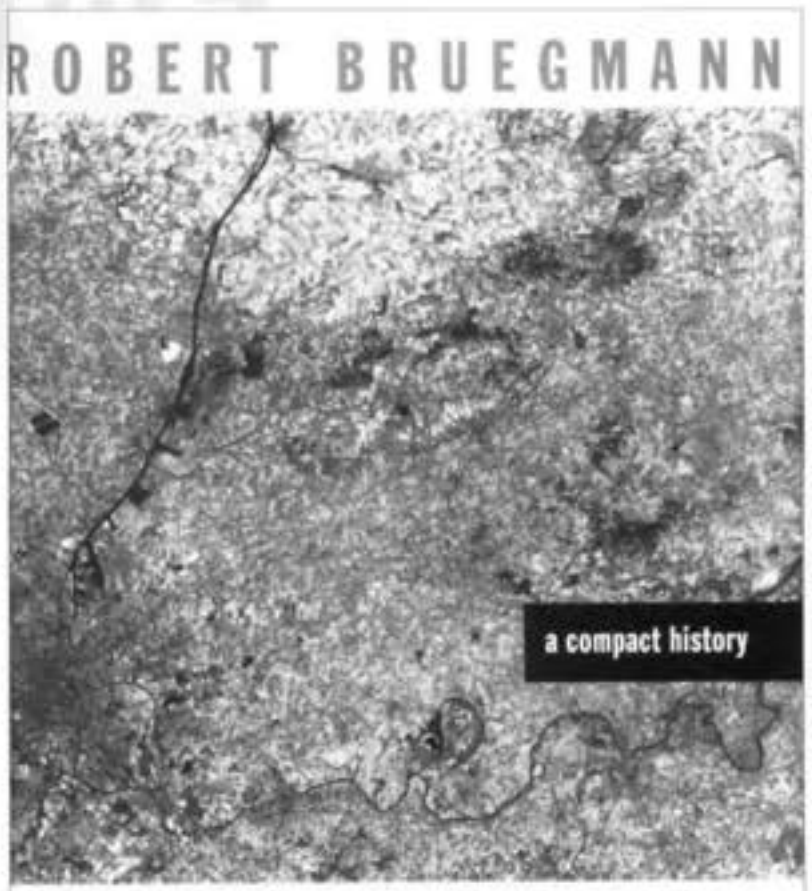
The Elder Street Lofts building is currently hemmed in by a Fire Department maintenance facility, the same one that caused an uproar over disturbing gravesites during its 1986 renovation. The site is flanked on two sides by trees, but the maintenance facility gives it a back-lot feeling. There are other buildings on the property that remain to be renovated: a boiler building that's slated to become a community space (perhaps a gallery or communal studio) and a nurses quarters, now a Harris County Probation Office, that is envisioned as being transformed into elderly housing. A community vegetable garden has been started, and according to Marty Lawler, executive director of Avenue CDC, there are plans for a memorial garden.

The building is full and lively. It opened in October 2005 and got an unexpected boost through an influx of artists and musicians from New Orleans who had been driven from their city by Katrina. Though the lofts were originally intended exclusively for artists, certain contributors to the project (including the City of Houston) insisted they be open to the community at large.

Cemetery-hospital-artists lofts make for a juicy mixed metaphor. Jefferson Davis Hospital was a badly wounded facility, and what W.O. Neuhaus and Associates and the Artspace/Avenue CDC team have done is heal some of those wounds and return the place to the city more whole, and more useful, than it has been since the early part of the last century.

David Crowell of Artspace said as much in an open letter he wrote on September 9, 2004: "People ask, 'How can you build housing on a cemetery?' Well you can't, except JDH was already built and we are only renovating it and bringing it back to life. I can't speak for the dearly departed, but if I were interred at JDH I'd prefer to have Life, Hope, Creativity, and Love above me as opposed to crackheads, haters, and bangers." ■

Liberte, Egalite, and Sprawl



Sprawl: A Compact History by Robert Bruegmann. Published by the University of Chicago Press, 2005. 280 pp., $27.50.

Reviewed by Terrence Doody

Here are some facts from *Sprawl* author Robert Bruegmann:

"Los Angeles ... often taken to be the epitome of sprawl, has become so much denser over the past 50 years that it is now America's most densely populated urbanized area, as measured by the census bureau. It is considerably denser than the New York or Chicago urbanized areas.... Although this might seem preposterous since Los Angeles has no neighborhoods with densities anything like parts of Manhattan, Los Angeles has a relatively high density spread over an extremely large area. Los Angeles also has none of the very low-density exurban peripheral growth seen in the New York region. In fact, quite unlike Eastern cities, Los Angeles has almost no exurban sprawl at all because the high cost of supplying water makes relatively compact development almost inevitable."

This is the epitome of the argument Bruegmann makes in his well-organized book about the messy definitions and policies that have caused, confused, and tried to control urban sprawl. And here are some of the numbers behind this argument: At the time of the 2000 census, Manhattan contained 70,000 people per square mile, but New York City as a whole held only 26,000 per square mile. Chicago held fewer than 13,000 people per square mile.

And these were the only two cities in the country with a density of more than 10,000 people per square mile. Phoenix, for contrast's sake, distributed 1.3 million people over an area of 475 square miles. This is ten times the size of Paris, which like most other major European cities has been thinning out for a long time too. Cities naturally expand with economic maturity, and they always have. Rome sprawled away from the tenements into the suburban latifundiae; London sprawled westward out of The City into the West End, which now feels like London's center.

It is through statistics such as those above, and the theories they permit, that Bruegmann's thesis will be developed or contested by the policy-intellectuals and academics he addresses, who'll agree with him, or not, about what sprawl actually is. According to Bruegmann, sprawl is definitely not a simply fixed demographic category or easily verifiable. Sprawl is a construct made of assumptions and values that over time have come to contradict each other. And it is a blunt rhetorical instrument, like its counterpart urban blight, that arms reform. Too often, he contends, it is a category of taste that means "others" do not live the way "we" do. They are too crowded and too poor and, therefore, alienated. Or they are too far from each other and too selfish and, therefore, alienated.

Cities are ecological rather than mechanical systems, and the cause of outward urban growth cannot be as simple as more cars and freeways, or racism, or zoning, or technology, or greed. Cities spread because, as their economies mature, populations prosper and want to exercise powers of choice, their new capacity for mobility, and their desire for privacy.

This is not all bad. The neighborhoods left behind are then open for the less prosperous to move up to. And when gentry move back into the center of a city, they can revitalize it without crowding it all over again. Gentrified neighborhoods are almost always more thinly populated than they were originally. Bruegmann himself lives in one such neighborhood just north and west of Chicago's downtown, where expensive renovations are inspired by both nostalgia for the area's original look and the need for two-car garages.

Bruegmann is chair of the Department of Art History at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and brings to his scrutiny of urban policies both a historian's focus on the contexts in which assumptions are formed and an art historian's sensibility about progress. He doesn't wholly believe in it. Art and architecture haven't necessarily gotten "better," he argues. Cities haven't either, exactly. And then there's us, the human race—with more of us than ever before on the planet to foul things up.

Bruegmann has strong libertarian sympathies. He says that "many people [concluded] that congestion in fast-growing places proved the failure of highway building. It would probably have been more useful to consider congestion ... a testimony to an economy so vibrant and quality of life so high that people continued to move in and to drive despite the obvious problems." He also says: "At base, none of these objections to their arguments really mattered to the most passionate anti-road crusaders. Theirs was merely an update of the hoary tradition of wanting to reform the lives of other people who couldn't be trusted to make the right decisions on their own."

American downtowns now account for only about ten percent of a city's jobs, and many of them have become theme parks of traditional urbanity. Intellectuals in particular love the old ideas and local textures of a pedestrian core. I love them as much as anyone. My daughter sent an e-mail from Antwerp recently to report, "We have had another wonderful European city afternoon." I was so proud of her, so heartbroken.

On the other hand, Bruegmann has this to say: "A higher percentage of newcomers to Houston than to Portland have been poor and members of minority groups. The fact that Houston has somehow managed to accommodate all of these new citizens and provide for them a median family income only slightly below that of Portland is an extraordinary achievement. In part it has been able to do this because of a permissive attitude about growth and land use that has resulted in land and house prices in Houston below the American urban average. For many families, the economic and social mobility seen in Houston are more important than the benefits of smart growth, as seen in Portland."

And this: "Many people, especially academics, have resisted the notion that ordinary citizens have played a major role in the creation of the great cities of the world."

See you at Starbucks. ■

COMING IN CITE 69

Cite

- NOVELIST OLIVE HERSHEY EXAMINES THE LIFE AND ART OF GERTRUDE BARNSTONE
- RICK BRETELL REVIEWS AUSTIN'S BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART
- BEN KOUSH DISCUSSES THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EAST END NEIGHBORHOOD
- NONYA GRENADER WALKS THE BLUE BAYOU
- PLUS, AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR JONES, THE AIA'S NEW ARCHITECTURE CENTER, AND MORE

Arts and Crafts

Todd Campbell's *Hairline* (2005), created using the craft techniques common to the blacksmith, has a fascinating, centipede-like quality.

CraftHouston 2006: Texas
Houston Center for Contemporary Craft
July 15—October 1, 2006

Reviewed by Kelly Klaasmeyer

What's the difference between art and craft? That's a question that easily sparks debate in the art world. But while curators, critics, and historians may still care about distinguishing between the two, fewer and fewer artists bother with such traditional boundaries. Pluralism is the hallmark of today's art scene, and in that scene the "art or craft" question is increasingly irrelevant.

Which brings us to the *CraftHouston 2006: Texas* show at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. This juried exhibition was designed to offer a survey of the current state of craft in Texas. Art historian and *Metalsmith Magazine* editor Suzanne Ramljak curated the show, and she has included an admirably wide range of objects under the craft tent. But unfortunately the objects have an equally wide range of success and failure.

Some of the show's objects fit naturally into a fine art context, even though they were made using craft techniques. Todd Campbell, for instance, uses the "craft" of metal forging to fabricate floor sculptures. One doesn't really care what camp the sculptures are supposed to fall into. All that matters is that how well they work.

His *Growth* (2005) uses forged and welded metal segments arranged so that they grow organically across the floor like mushrooms or giant mold spores. *Hairline* (2005) is a snaking line delineated on both sides by short, curved pieces of metal. Although somewhat distractingly presented on a wide white plinth, the piece has a weirdly fascinating, centipede-like quality. In his sculptures, Campbell skillfully used the centuries-old craft of the blacksmith to create highly contemporary works.

Likewise, *Love Handles* (2004), a witty, body-referential work by Erin Cunningham, is art with surrealist overtones. It consists of two pieces of metal that look like they were cast from the fat over someone's hips. Adorned with "punny," actual handles, they're presented as a removable accessory. Cunningham has given the metal a fleshy patina, and the material imparts a weight and tactility that evokes hefty slabs of flesh.

Heavy on the sexual with a dash of the surreal, William Luft and Edward McCartney make decadently conceptual cast silver … um … implements in their series *The Seven Deadly Sins*. There's *Anger*, an ice pick-like tool, and *Gluttony*, a four-way utensil with a mutant knife, spoon, fork, and corkscrew. But *Lust* (2005), is the most surreal and explicit of the pieces. Luft and McCartney crafted an object that has a heavily veined sterling silver phallus on one end, a mouth in the center, and a silicone tongue that holds a tiny pearl at the end. *Lust* is as well crafted as it is attention getting.

The show also features some objects made using craft techniques that function well as craft in the traditional sense. Deborah Harrison's weaving *Deutsche Werkstätten Rug* (2005) is one of the best. It's crisply and beautifully executed, blending the artist's skill with a striking geometric design tightly woven in black and a range of red-toned fibers. It's an incredibly well made object that's easy to covet.

Two small, footed, cast-glass bowls by Ellen Abbott and Mark Leva aren't quite as effortless in feeling, but they do have a lovely frostiness. The most successful is *Kiddish Cup* (2006), which is edged with a bas-relief green grapevine against a bluish tinged glass. In the center of the bowl lies a raised cluster of deep purple grapes. It's certainly an arty religious accessory.

Also creating decorative tableware, Deborah Berry crafted a tea set modeled on the shape of a vintage oil can and accessorized with automotive hose clamps. It's nicely executed as well as amusing.

But there is a no man's land between successful art and successful craft, and unfortunately that is where a large number of this show's objects fall. They are made with craft techniques, but they are frightfully unsuccessful either as art or craft.

Daryl McCracken's teapot-ish *Oil Can Relic* (2005) is, strangely, another oil can reference. But McCracken takes things from the whimsical to the hideous. There are some George Ohr, the mad potter of Biloxi, overtones to his piece, but while Ohr's work was engagingly odd, this is just plain bad. Weird organic additions are smashed onto a fairly conventional teapot shape, but it's just not icky enough to be interesting. Purposefully ugly can work, but you have to make a concerted effort. Incidentally ugly doesn't cut it.

Sharbani Das Gupta also embraces the ugly—albeit unintentionally—in *Hurricane Season* (2006), a conceptually heavy-handed work. It's a wall-mounted piece with a hurricane-shaped swirl of shredded clay meant to look like torn newspapers. Unfortunately, it just looks like a pretentious mess.

There are pieces in the show that seem to involve great technical challenges, and yet they are visually bereft. Anyone who blows glass probably knows how difficult it is to create a vase like Richard Moiel's and Kathy Poeppel's, with its basket-weave effect using cane glass. But the problem is, the vase still looks like banal home décor circa 1983. It the end it doesn't matter how hard it was to make. Craft, like art, is not ice skating; you don't get separate points for technical and artistic merit. What works, works. What doesn't, doesn't.

Becoming enamored with technique is a hazard for those who inhabit the craft world, though the problem is by no means exclusive to them. Painters, photographers, and printmakers, among others, can also become so caught up in technical effects that they forget the final product has to be successful as a work of art—not just as a display of technical expertise.

Ultimately "art" and "craft" are defined not by what media you use, but by what you do with it. *CraftHouston 2006: Texas* offers an effective overview of what, and what not, to do. ■

Over the past two decades, the College of Architecture Building's atrium has hosted a number of art events and speakers, among them a full-scale model of the Tempietto di San Pietro (left), *Open . . . The Ritual* (above, first from left), Philip Johnson (speaking at the building's dedication, above, second from left), *Towers Tower* (above, third from left), *Organ Grinder* (above, fourth from left), and *Towers Studio Cardboard House* (above, fifth from left).

The House of Memory

BY CELESTE WILLIAMS

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard wrote a now-famous psychoanalytic paean to the house, which he thanked for serving to shelter and encourage memories. What Bachelard found to be true of the house can also be true of other buildings, and when the University of Houston's College of Architecture Building celebrated its 20th anniversary this past spring it brought to mind just how two decades of occupancy has made that curious building into a true house of memory, one firmly planted in the psyches of the thousands of architecture students who have passed through its electric doors.

Designed by Philip Johnson as a thin reworking of visionary French architect Claude-Nicholas Ledoux's House of Education of 1773-1779 for the salt-works city of Chaux, the College of Architecture Building was immediately controversial. When Johnson came to Houston with a crude cardboard model of his creation to show the board of regents, architecture students—wearing cardboard versions of Johnson's signature black "Corbu" glasses—admonished him for a perceived lack of originality. Signs appeared with "Ledoux" crossed out and "Ledon't" inserted underneath.

At the time, unabashed borrowing of historical styles, with which Johnson had become enamored, was not yet fully understood, or at least not fully appreciated, by the College of Architecture's usually edgy students. But what the building lacked in originality it made up for in audacity and uniqueness. Following the building's 1986 dedication, people began finding things about it that they liked, though such admiration was often admitted only grudgingly. The university administration may have loved the building, but visiting architects still suppressed a chuckle when they entered, while others feigned a kind of critical apoplexy.

Johnson placed the Architecture Building across a former vehicular entrance to the campus, where it was prominently visible from the Gulf Freeway, envisioning it as a kind of Propylaia, the building that marked the entrance to the Acropolis in Greece. For its part the Architecture Building ceremonially marked a new pedestrian gateway into the University of Houston's inner campus. Within the background context of the sedate, late-modern buildings that are ubiquitous on the campus, Johnson's recitation of Ledoux's masterpiece is powerful. Just like the Transco (now Williams) Tower with its rotating beacon, another of Johnson's great Houston landmarks, the Architecture Building, with its rooftop lantern, marks a place in the city's night sky.

The most impressive feature of the Architecture Building, however, is inside, where Johnson created a building within a building, a house of architecture fully articulated in stark surrounding columns and tracing an axis mundi from the bottom floor to the framed, pyramid-shaped glass canopy. The active section of the atrium, with its myriad internal perspectives and vistas, is the feature that most people find breathtaking. It even surprised Johnson himself, who marveled at its height while on the construction site. On the ground level Johnson placed the 60,000-volume Jenkins Library, a lecture theater, two galleries, a model shop, and the College of Architecture's administrative offices. Studio spaces occupy the loft-like spaces on the upper floors, with faculty offices, seminar rooms, and support facilities tucked into the background poche. To students and faculty the building became a big house, a place you belong to.

Once significant design development was well under way by Johnson/Burgee in conjunction with local architects Morris-Aubry, respected business designer Sally Walsh began to bring its interiors to life. By emphasizing focused discrete spaces she infused an air of elegance into the building's interiors. The library, with its rare book collection elevated above the central checkout station, was given an array of seating groups featuring designers Mies van der Robe, Breuer, and Bertoia. The dean's office was outfitted with an extraordinary Herman Miller desk designed by Bruce Burdick, who called it a "workbench for an executive." The student lounge featured Robert Venturi's molded plywood Queen Anne, Sheraton, and Regency chairs, paired with Cabriole Leg tables laminated in the whimsical "Grandmother's Apron" pattern.

Equally amazing were the Kito "Wink" and "Joe" leather baseball glove chairs provided for lounging. Perhaps most impressive was the open faculty conference area, with its quietly luxurious Mario Bellini black marble table and russet leather Cab chairs. To complete the vision, an exemplary collection of works by architects was mounted throughout the floors. The building went beyond comfortable, becoming a stage set for the design aspirations of future architects.

But it was the atrium that gave the college a space around which to center its activities. Part piazza and part theater, it has been the scene of a number of significant events, among them the *Idea of City* exhibit of oversized models organized by Charles Moore and Peter Zweig, which was the inaugural exhibition of the College of Architecture Gallery. Ben Nicholson's and Mark Schneider's 1986 full-scale model of Bramante's Tempietto di San Pietro, erected within the atrium, was an appropriate first major atrium installation. Ever more avant-garde responses to the atrium have followed. In 1990 students and faculty presented *Slice of Houston*, a three-dimensional scale model of a section of the city composed of edible parts. Faisal Butt's *Ritual of 1993* created a processional ritualizing established paths that circumnavigated the atrium. In 1994, Gabriella Gutierrez directed *Tension Builds*, an installation featuring musician Ellen Fullerman playing the world's largest stringed instrument, which spanned the atrium. In 1998, to honor the arrival of Coop Himmelblau architect Wolf Prix, Dietmar Froehlich and his students created an ad hoc reprise to Prix's 1984 *Blazing Wing* with a frozen wing entitled *Diabolix*, deconstructed like fractal geometry and suspended with tensile mooring. Perhaps the most dynamic and unconventional use of the atrium, however, came in 2000, with Dwayne Bohuslav's interactive installation *Organ Grinder*, a series of gargantuan fiberglass and steel human organs, sensor activated and equipped with motors, bellows, liquidity, and LED lighting to simulate natural functions. The steel ribs semi-permanently installed to distribute *Organ Grinder*'s weight have since served a multiplicity of purposes. In 2005, Andrew Vrana's and Joe Meppelink's student team incorporated them into their *Litebeam* installation, the first exhibition piece produced by CNC digital technology.

The atrium has also been home to many distinguished guest speakers, among them Pritzker Prize winners Philip Johnson, Glenn Murcutt, and Zaha Hadid, and prominent architects Wolf Prix, Cesar Pelli, and Aldo Rossi. Similarly, the atrium has housed weddings, graduations, fundraising galas, and memorials testifying to the legacies of Philip Johnson, Burdette Keeland, and Robert Timme, a former College of Architecture dean who significantly contributed to the development of the school.

In 1997, then-Dean Bruce Webb obtained the Hines Endowment for the College of Architecture, providing a secure future for its students and resulting in it being officially named the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture. It was a naming that brought Hines, Houston's most prominent developer, together again with Philip Johnson, the architect he most favored.

It has taken some years to realize that Johnson may have been more right than wrong with his design of the University of Houston's College of Architecture. By allowing a freedom of determination in its vast open spaces, Johnson created a building that can appeal to our consciousness of centrality, as Ledoux's de-sanctified Temple of Education. Two decades on the building may be much the same, but the feelings it engenders are not. What was once derided is now embraced. ■

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