66 : Spring 2006 $5.00

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

Inside Stories

Architecture from a different perspective, with novelist Kathleen Cambor, poet Mark Doty, and the Art Guys.

Plus: Prairie View A&M's new Art and Architecture Building and walking in Houston.

Access Flooring

Ultimate flexibility made simple.

• Sustainable Design • Improved User Control • Better Air Quality

BP America's AIA award winning space, designed by Gensler, with 8" Underfloor Air Plenum and Plug & Play power.

Enhancing the experience of office workers throughout Houston by improving air quality, reducing hot & cold complaints and providing easy system and service flexibility.

To learn more about access flooring & underfloor air, visit our website @ www.mccoyinc.com or call Andy Bergman at 713.802.7119, for more information.

Houston's Leader in Advancing Underfloor Technology®

ICE moves DIRTT to create agile, sustainable interiors.

DIRTT—'Doing It Right This Time'

refers to creating sustainable office space with *Agile Architectural Solutions*.

Agile Architectural Solutions are built on the philosophy of combining simplicity, self-expression and sustainability now and in the future.

ICE ™ is DIRTT's revolutionary and graphical software for modular workspace design.

DIRTT

Now available at

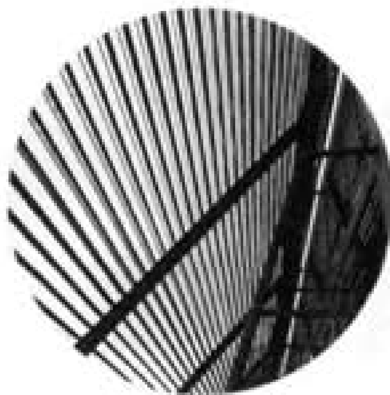
The offis

Office Furniture Interior Solutions

Bernhardt • Cabot Wrenn • Dunbar • Hightower • Fixtures Furniture • Global
izzy • Keilhauer • Knoll • Martin Brattrud • Nienkamper • Nucraft • OFS • Tuohy • Versteel • Watson

7110 Old Katy Road • Suite 200 Houston Texas 77024 • 713.629.5599

Highest Quality Delivered Consistently



Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN REVIEW OF HOUSTON

A PUBLICATION OF THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

66: SPRING 2006

Cite (ISSN: 8755-0415) is published quarterly by the Rice Design Alliance, Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005-1892.

Individual subscriptions: U.S. and its possessions: $15 for one year, $25 for two years. Foreign: $30 for one year, $50 for two years.

Cite is indexed in the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals.

Copyright 2006 by the Rice Design Alliance. Reproduction of all or part of editorial content without permission is strictly prohibited.

The opinions expressed in Cite do not necessarily represent the views of the board of directors of the Rice Design Alliance. Publication of this issue is supported in part by grants from the Susan Vaughan Foundation, the City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County, and the Texas Commission for the Arts.

The Rice Design Alliance, established in 1972, is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to the advancement of architecture and design.

WebCite: www.rda.rice.edu

Contributing Writers

Kathleen Cambor is a novelist who lives in Houston. A recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, she is author of *The Book of Mercy, In Sunlight, in a Beautiful Garden*, and the forthcoming *Drawn by Desire*.

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

Mark Doty is a poet who teaches at the University of Houston every fall, and divides his time between Houston and New York City. His latest book is *School of the Arts*.

Laura Furman is the author of two novels, three collections of stories, and a memoir. She is series editor of the O. Henry Prize Stories and a professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin.

Kelly Klaasmeyer is an artist and art critic living in Houston.

Daisy Kone is the author of *Land Development* (10th edition) and was formerly a professor in the University of Florida's College of Architecture.

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

Ronnie Self is an architect and an associate professor in the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture.

Mitchell J. Shields is a freelance writer living in Houston.

Ann Walton Sieber was managing editor of Cite from 1995 to 1996. A Houston native, she has worked as a writer and editor in the city for more than two decades. Her guidebook to local vegetarian restaurants, *VegOut Houston*, will be published by Gibbs-Smith Publishers this fall.

Guest Editors
Terrence Doody
Karl Kilian

Editorial Committee
Chairman
Barry Moore

Larry Albert
Thomas Colbert
Terrence Doody
Stephen Fox
Nonya Grenader
Lynn M. Herbert
Karl Kilian
Ben Koush
Rafael Longoria
Danny Marc Samuels
Barrie Scardino
Christof Spieler
William F. Stern
Rives T. Taylor
Bruce C. Webb

Acting Managing Editor
Mitchell J. Shields

Graphic Design
Minor Design Group

Photography
Paul Hester

Advertising
Sara O. Tovar

Rice Design Alliance
Board of Directors

President
Barbara J. Amelio

President-Elect
David T. George

Vice President
Nonya Grenader

Treasurer
Stewart O. Robinson

Secretary
Chuck Gremillion

Jory Alexander
Marilyn G. Archer
Fernando L. Brave
Carolyn S. Brewer
Barbara White Bryson
John J. Casbarian
Andrea Crawmer
Steve Dishman
Jessica C. Farrar
Robert R. Fretz, Jr.
Lynn M. Herbert
Lonnie Hoogeboom
Andrew F. Icken
Donna Kacmar
D. Jean Krchnak
Lawrence F. Lander
Kay Lentz
Lars Lerup
Rafael Longoria
Judith K. McClain
Joan B. Miller
John D. Miner
Barry Moore
Michael Morton
Jane B. Page
Patrick Peters
Cindy Reid
Andrew Robertson
William C. Ross
Lauren Rottet
Jeffrey D. Ryan
Barrie Scardino
Carrie Glassman Shoemake
Louis H. Skidmore, Jr.
Anita Webber Smith
David Spaw
William F. Stern
Cindi Strauss
Rives T. Taylor
Tom Vaughn
Randall Walker
Bruce C. Webb
Joe Douglas Webb
Larry E. Whaley
Celeste Williams
Flora Yon Yeh

Executive Director
Linda L. Sylvan

Program Administrator
Kathryn Fosdick

Membership Coordinator
Mary Swift

Marketing Coordinator
Sara O. Tovar

Accounting Assistant
Cathy Bauer

Office Assistant
Raquel Puccio

RDA Corporate Sponsors

A & E – The Graphics Complex
Joan & Stanford Alexander
Allsteel Inc.
Anchorage Foundation of Texas
Applied Finish Systems Ltd.
Aries Restaurant
BNIM Architects
Baker Botts L.L.P.
Baker Concrete Construction, Inc.
Sarah Balinskas Fine Framing
W. S. Bellows Construction Corp.
Binswanger/Conine & Robinson
Brochsteins Inc.
Brookstone, L.P.
Builders West Inc.
CB Richard Ellis
Cadence McShane Corporation
Camden
Cameron Management
Carter & Burgess, Inc.
CenterPoint Energy, Inc.
Clark Condon Associates
Constructors & Associates, Inc.
Conti Jumper Gardner & Associates
Continental Airlines, Inc.
Creative Flooring Resources
Crescent Real Estate Equities, Ltd.
DBR Engineering Consultants, Inc.
DMJM Rottet
Debner + Company
El Paso Corporation
Anne Francis Farish
FKP Architects
Fretz Construction Company
Gensler
Gilbane
Greater Houston Community Foundation
The Greentree Fund
Grover Printing
Bobby & Fred Haemisegger
D. E. Harvey Builders, Inc.
Haynes Whaley Associates, Inc.
Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum
Jackson and Company
Jackson & Ryan Architects
KUHF 88.7 FM
Kendall/Heaton Associates
Kirksey
LALIQUE
Manhattan Construction Company
The Marek Companies
McCoy Workplace Solutions
McKinnon Associates
Metzger Construction Company
The Miner-Dederick Companies
Mission Constructors, Inc.
Morris Architects, Inc.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
I. A. Naman + Associates
Nancy B. Negley
O'Donnell/Snider Construction Inc.
The OFIS
Anne Owen
PGAL
Parra Design Group, Ltd.
Perkins & Will
Planning Design Research Corporation
Powers Brown Architecture
Ridgway's
Karen Rose Engineering & Surveying
Louisa Stude Sarofim
Robert Shaw Woodworking
SpawGlass Construction Corp.
SpawMaxwell Company
Sara Dodd-Spickelmier & Keith Spickelmier
TAS Commercial Concrete Const. LP
Tellepsen Builders, L.P.
Trammell Crow Company
Turner Construction Company
Vanguard Environments
Vaughn Construction
Walter P Moore
Watkins Hamilton Ross Architects, Inc.
Way Engineering Ltd.
Webb Architects
Weingarten Realty Management
Wells Design/Jerry Jeanmard, Inc.
The Woodlands Development Co.
WYLIE

RDA Corporate Members

American Construction Investigation, Ltd.
S.L. Anderson Company Ltd., Consulting Urban Foresters
Associated General Contractors, Houston Chapter
Berger Iron Works, Inc.
Browne Penland McGregor Stephens Architects, Inc.
The Office of James Burnett
Karol Kreymer/Robert J. Card M.D.
Cokinos, Bosien & Young
Coordinated Moving Systems, Inc.
Leo A Daly Houston
L. Barry Davidson Architects AIA, Inc.
Francois de Menil, Architect, P.C.
J.E. Dunn Construction
Elegant Additions
Glassman Shoemake Maldonado Architects Inc.
Greenwood King Properties
John Hansen Investment Builder
Herman Miller Inc.
Hines
Howell Mims Associates, L.L.C.
Jaster-Quintanilla Houston, LLP
Knudson & Associates
The Lentz Group Inc.
Lesley & Associates, Inc.
Lighting Unlimited
m ARCHITECTS
McDugald-Steele
MGC Inc.
Matrix/Structural Engineers, Inc.
Milam & Co. Painting, Inc.
Montalbano Lumber Co., Inc.
Office Pavilion
O'Neill Hill
PSI
Raven Mechanical, LP
Redding Linden Burr, LLC
SWA Group
Satterfield & Pontikes Construction, Inc.
Schenck and Company
Stern and Bucek Architects
TDIndustries, Inc.
3D/I
Todd Land Company
Windham Builders

Cite

contents

5 **RDA News: Design/Build Symposium and Tour | Exploring Phoenix**

6 **Calendar**

9 **CiteLines: Buffalo Bayou Promenade | Good Brick Awards | 2006 Architecture Tour**

13 **Endangered City: Goodbye to the Wonderful World of Fun**

14 **Prairie Style**
Prairie View A&M's new Art and Architecture Building.
RONNIE SELF

inside stories

17 **Inside Stories**
Viewing architecture from a different perspective.
INTRODUCTION BY TERRENCE DOODY

18 **Our House**
Sometimes a house is more than just a home.
KATHLEEN CAMBOR

20 **Corbusier's Scupper**
From Chandigarh to Colquitt Court, with a little imagination.
INTERVIEW BY TERRENCE DOODY

24 **Dew Drop In**
A plantation house is saved, and with it memories of the past.
BARRY MOORE

26 **The Art Guys Make a Home**
Mixing work and life calls for a few large rooms and lots of light.
MITCHELL J. SHIELDS

30 **It Fakes a Village**
Finding a place worth walking in Houston isn't easy.
DAISY KONE

35 **CiteReading: *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration; The House in Good Taste; Eileen Gray; Eileen Gray: Architect/Designer***
REVIEW BY LAURA FURMAN

39 **ArtCiting: *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space***
REVIEW BY KELLY KLAASMEYER

40 **HindCite: Urban Poems**
MARK DOTY

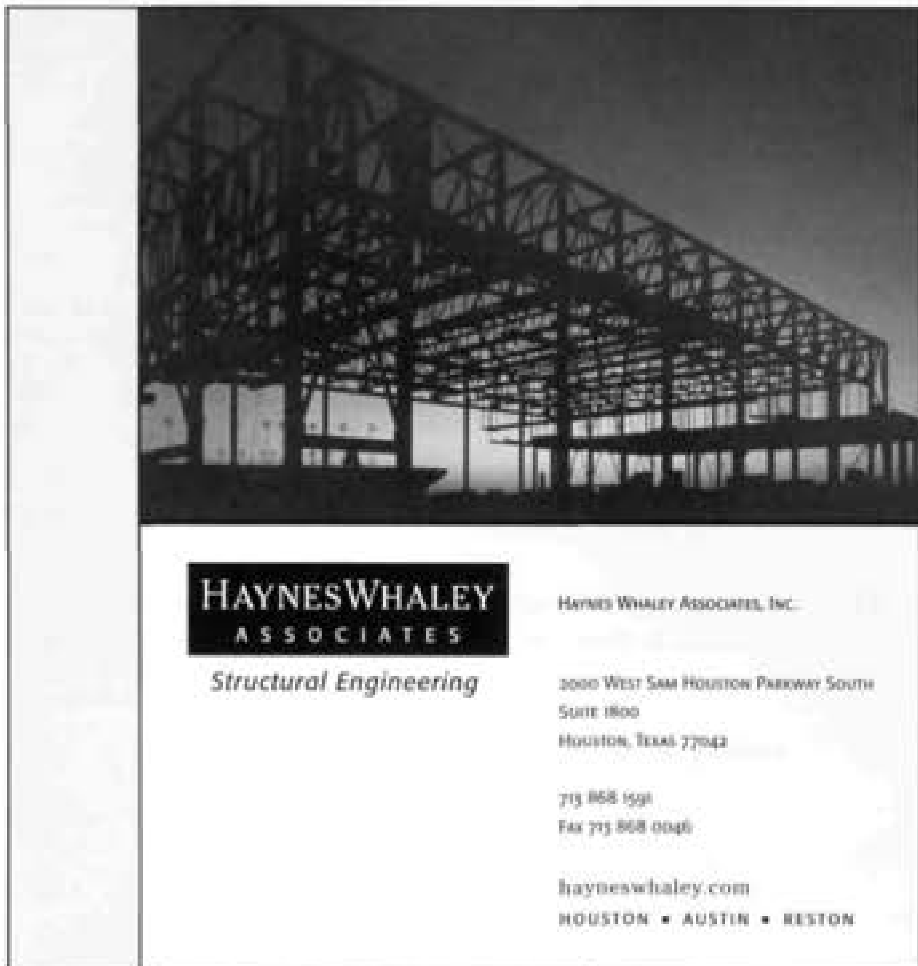
Above: The "I-story" in Judy Chapman's house (Scott Ballard Architect, 2000), looking down from the second story landing.
Cover: The "I-story" looking up from the first floor. Both photos ©2006 Eric Hester.

SARAH BALINSKAS

Maintaining the quality, value and integrity of art work and collections with appropriate frame designs, specialized display solutions and conservation conscious art care.

Fine Framing | Display Alternatives | Art Services

1114 Taft Houston Texas 77019
713.630.0030 713.630.0035 fax
www.sarahbalinskas.com



Design/Build Symposium attendees at the UH Outdoor Performing Arts Stage, Roberts Elementary School.

RDA Design/Build Symposium and Tour: Practicum and Praxis

On Saturday, January 28, 20 participants and 45 attendees gathered at the University of Houston for the RDA Design/Build Symposium and Tour, co-sponsored by the AIA/Houston.

The morning started with presentations by faculty and students from both the Rice University School of Architecture and the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture. Both schools offer upper level design/build classes, at Rice under the rubric of the Rice Building Workshop and at UH under that of the Graduate Design/Build Studio. The general intention of both programs is to offer architecture students broader exposure to the construction process and the construction industry. By focusing on smaller-scale projects or prototype assemblages, students and their faculty advisors are given the opportunity to work from schematic design through construction documents to cost estimating, and ultimately to fabrication and construction of a built structure.

Following the presentations by current faculty and students, former students Joe Meppelink, Onezieme Mouton, and Andrew Vrana presented work they had done while in school, as well as more recent work in digital pre-fabrication done with current students at the University of Houston.

Later that morning, young designers, architects, and developers presented how they integrate construction and design. Anne Eamon and Mark Schatz of m + a architecture studio showed their award-winning 700 square-foot house and garden. Rodney Collins of Collins Architects & Construction Co. presented his work, including his bed and breakfast establishment as well as new developments. Chung Nguyen of MC2 Architects showed a multi-generational house and a medical office building designed and built by his firm. Camilo Parra of Parra Design Group presented his award-winning townhouse designs and reminded the audience that design/build has been a strategy for production of dwellings for a long time.

Whereas the typical design/build delivery involves a venture between an architect and a builder, the architects presented in RDA's symposium are architect-developers who also act as builders. In the same way the Rice and UH design/build students have constructed their projects, these architects have built theirs.

The attendees then departed on two buses for lunch and a tour of projects completed by the two schools of architecture. The tour included the UH Charter School Outdoor Science Classroom at Holman and Cullen, the UH Charter School Ecological Classroom at Wheeler and Cullen, the Rice Canopies and the UH Outdoor Performing Arts Stage at Roberts Elementary School, the Rice Canopies and the UH Mechanical Shade Tree at Poe Elementary School, the UH Structure for Storing and Scoring at Ervan Chew Park, and the Rice Six Square House, XS House, and Duplexes at Project Row Houses.

While the rain held off most of the day at a slight drizzle, towards the end attendees were ushered into the Project Row House Community Development Corporation, where a reception and exhibition of other design/build projects around Houston were awaiting them.

RDA members enjoy the grounds of the Arizona Biltmore. From left to right: Lynn Kelly, Barbara Amelio, Ed and Carrie Shoemake, Warren Martin, Ty Kelly, Sally Johnson, Karen Schenck, Catherine and Cornell DeWitt, Barbara and Louis Sklar, and Stephen Fox.

RDA Tour Members Explore Phoenix

In February, 18 RDA members visited the desert Southwest and America's sixth largest city, Phoenix. Over the last quarter century, Phoenix has experienced not just an explosion of population, sprawling its way across south central Arizona, but also an explosion of inventive architecture.

Over four days, from February 23 to February 26, RDA's tour group saw much of what the city has to offer. Will Bruder, Wendell Burnett, DeBartolo Architects, Jones Studio, and Marwan Al-Sayed are just a few of the architects whose work has brought national attention to Phoenix. Add to their work significant new public buildings by Tod Williams-Billie Tsien & Associates, Richard Meier & Partners, Antoine Predock, and Mac Scogin-Merrill Elam, and it's no surprise that Arizona's capital has emerged as one of America's most architecturally energetic communities.

Upon arrival, the RDA group met Will Bruder, godfather of the current Arizona School, at Bruder's Central Library, which transformed local understanding of how a public building could poetically interpret the natural landscape, even on a strict budget. (Bruder presented the library at a lecture that he gave to the Rice Design Alliance in 1997.) Later that afternoon, Bruder joined the group for a tour of another one of his projects, the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, and together they watched the light change at sunset in the museum's skyspace installation by James Turrell, *Knight Rider*. Following that experience, Louise and Will Bruder hosted the group in their award-winning townhouse, Loloma 5.

RDA members spent the following day viewing a number of private homes, including several designed by Bruder, as well as the Freeman-Silverman House by Tod Williams-Billie Tsien & Associates, the House of Earth + Light by Marwan Al-Sayed, and the house and studio of architect Wendell Jack Burnette. DeBartolo Jr., who worked with Caudill Rowlett Scott in Houston but now practices architecture with his son Jack 3, arranged a visit to the Mariposa Residence, a compound for the Jesuit Community. Jack and his wife Pat also hosted the group at a tour and reception in their home in Scottsdale, overlooking the mountains.

Led by architectural historian Stephen Fox, the group toured Taliesen West, Frank Lloyd Wright's winter home, a highlight of the tour. Wright's influence can be seen at the Arizona Biltmore, where the group toured and had brunch before seeing new buildings at Arizona State University in Tempe on the way back to the airport and home to Houston.

The Phoenix tour was the first of RDA's Hometown Tours for 2006. In June, RDA members will be heading east to Charleston, South Carolina. And then in October RDA will cross the Atlantic for the first time to explore the City of Light, Paris. (This tour is sold out.)

Anyone interested in information or signing up for the Charleston tour can go to rda.rice.edu, and click on the RDA Hometown Tours link. You can also contact RDA tour director Lynn Kelly at 713-256-3244 or lynn_kelly_tx@yahoo.com.

CALENDAR

LECTURES

::

THE CABBAGE PATCH & THE STORK: CLASSIFYING CONTEMPORARY URBANISM
Francoise Fromonot
Ecole d'Architecture de Paris-LaVillette
■ Monday, April 10, 5 p.m.
Rice University, Anderson Hall
Farish Gallery
713.348.4864 or www.arch.rice.edu

EARTHSCAPERS
Ron Rael, Assistant Professor of Architecture
Clemson School of Architecture
■ Tuesday, April 18, 3 p.m.
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Theater, Room 150
713.743.2400 or
www.arch.uh.edu/news

SALLY WALSH LECTURE
Annabelle Selldorf,
Architect, New York, New York
■ Tuesday, April 18, 7 p.m.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Brown Auditorium
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

THE GREAT BEYOND
Pierre David
Ecole d'Architecture de Marseille
■ Thursday, April 27, 6:30 p.m.
Rice University, Anderson Hall
Farish Gallery
713.348.4864 or www.arch.rice.edu

EXHIBITIONS

::

FRESH FORUM 3
■ Wednesday, May 10, 7 p.m.–10 p.m.
Kirksey | Architecture,
6909 Portwest Drive
713.850.9600 or www.kirksey.com

EVENTS

::

11TH ANNUAL 20TH CENTURY MODERN MARKET
May 5–May 7
Lawndale Art Center
4912 Main Street
713.528.5858 or lawndaleartcenter.org

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARCHITECTURE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BLUEPRINT BALL
■ Saturday, May 20, 7 p.m.–11 p.m.
Gerald D. Hines
College of Architecture
Entrance 18 off Elgin or Entrance 16 off Cullen. Valet parking provided.

RDA ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
■ Thursday, June 1, 6 p.m.–8 p.m.
Centerpoint Energy Tower
111 Louisiana Street
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

AIA SANDCASTLE COMPETITION
■ June 3
Galveston
713.520.0155 or aiahouston.org
(For more AIA events, see ad on inside back cover.)

RDA HOMETOWN TOUR: CHARLESTON
■ June 8–June 11
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

Subscription
One year: $15 Two years: $25

Name

Address

City/State Zip

❑ Check for $ ________ enclosed.
❑ Gift subscription

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 $35
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

Student Membership $15
All of the above benefits

Family Membership $50
All of the above benefits for your family

Sponsor Membership $125
All of the benefits accorded to Family 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

Corporate Membership $1000
All of the benefits accorded to Sustaining Members
Recognition in the RDA journal Cite and at all RDA programs
Link to your website from RDA's website

Corporate Sponsorship $1500
All of the benefits accorded to Corporate Members
Sponsorship of a selected RDA program
Special recognition on 5,000 announcements, at the program, and in Cite

Membership Application

Name

Address

City/State Zip

Telephone

E-mail

Occupation

Membership Category

Amount enclosed $

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

GROWTH THROUGH DIVERSIFICATION

CHILTON CAPITAL MANAGEMENT, LP
INVESTMENT COUNSELORS
Established 1996

Christopher L. Knapp, Chief Executive Officer
Thomas M. Motter, CFA, CPA, Chief Investment Officer
David M. Underwood, Jr., Senior Fixed Income Portfolio Manager

1300 Post Oak Boulevard, Suite 1220
Houston, Texas 77056
713.650.1995
www.chiltoncapital.com

For information contact Kim Fontenot, Director of Marketing
kfontenot@chiltoncapital.com 713.650.1995

THE ART OF WAR

MARCH 17- APRIL 23

WWW.GREMILLION.COM
GREMILLION & CO.
FINE ART, INC.
2501 SUNSET BLVD. • HOUSTON 77005
FINEART@GREMILLION.COM (713)-522-2701

A NON-COMMERCIAL EXHIBITION OF INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED ARTISTS CURATED BY FERNANDO CASTRO AND FERNANDO CASAS

IN CELEBRATION OF OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Herman Miller
Knoll
Dunbar
Eames
Saarinen
Zographos
Heywood Wakefield
George Nelson
Verner Panton
Harvey Probber

Mid-Century
Modern Furniture

1665 B Westheimer Houston, TX 77006
713.521.3030
vintage designs & architectural furniture
Large Quantities
New & Used
Home
Office

Metro Retro
405 Preston Ave
Pasadena, Tx 77503
713.473.0000
www.metroretrofurniture.com

visit our eBay store:
http://www.stores.ebay.com/Metro-Retro-Furniture

The goods and/or services described above are those of an eBay Stores seller, not eBay Inc. eBay and the eBay Stores logo are trademarks of eBay Inc.

41 E. Stillforest

COLLEEN SHERLOCK
GREENWOOD KING PROPERTIES • 713.524.0888

325 W. Friar Tuck

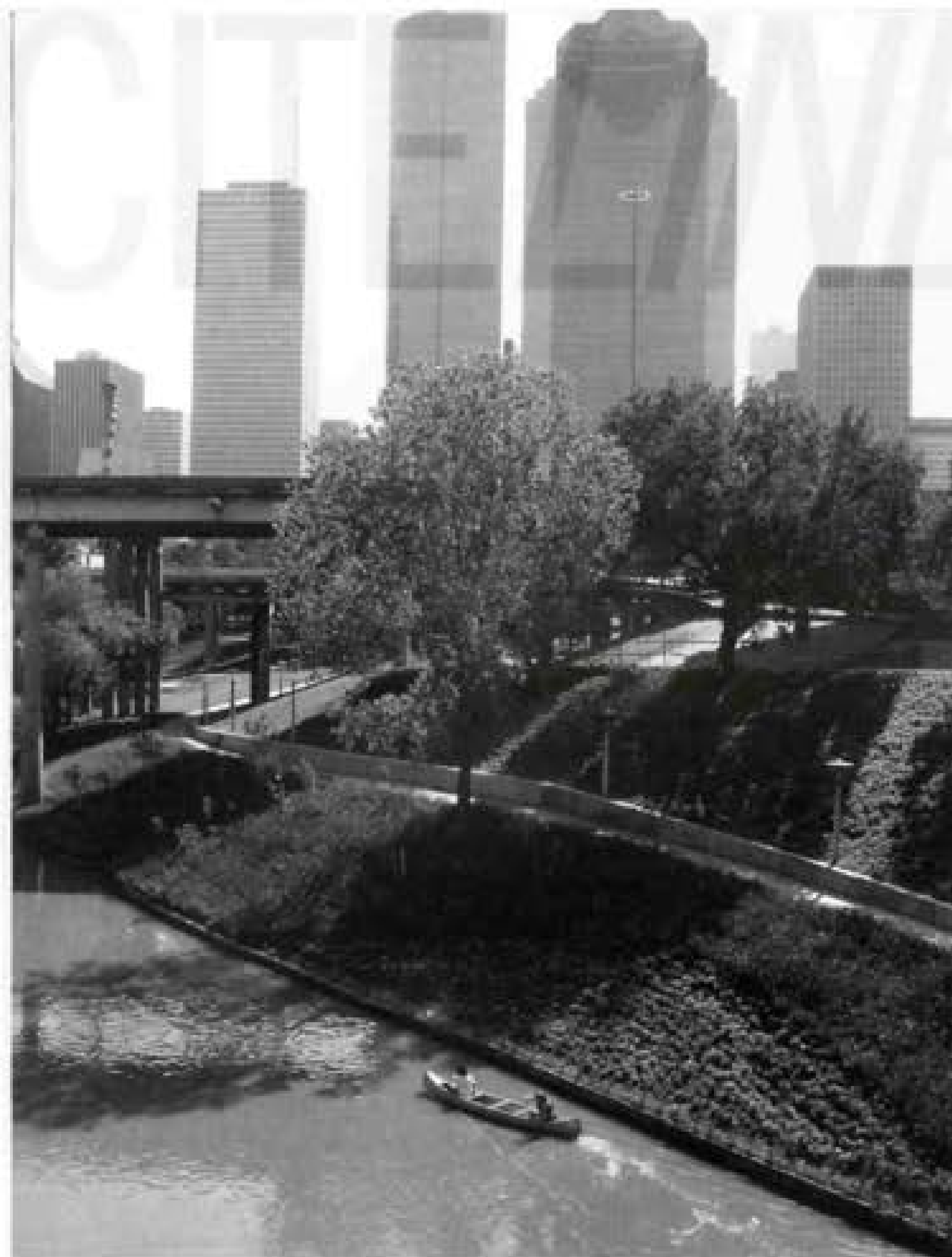
CATHY BLUM
GREENWOOD KING PROPERTIES • 713.524.0888

Aspen & Auckland Collections by **Cassina**

HermanMiller for the Home Cassina Knoll

Carolyn Brewer's Sunset Settings is a retail store providing classic modern furniture and accessories to Houston. Open since 1995, Sunset Settings provides the public, as well as architects and designers, a source for classic modernist pieces while introducing innovative contemporary designs. In addition to furniture from Knoll Space, Cassina, Herman Miller for the Home, Kartell, ICF, Vitra and many others, Sunset Settings also provides modern lighting, glassware, flatware and china, including the Rosenthal Collection and Alessi.

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



A Pleasant Promenade

A new pathway along the banks of Buffalo Bayou hopes to remind the city of its liquid assets

All photos courtesy the Buffalo Bayou Partnership

Top: Canoeists pass by a walkway and landscaping that is part of the recently completed Sabine-to-Bagby Promenade (SWA Group, 2006).
Above: A pedestrian takes in a section of the half-mile long promenade.
Top right: Stairways provide a new connection between surface streets and the banks of Buffalo Bayou.
Right: The lighting along the promenade was designed to be bright enough for security, but soft enough to provide a romantic touch.

Over the last half-century, while other Texas cities learned to treasure their waterways, Houston's bayous have been dumped in, trashed out, lined with concrete, and generally relegated to weed-lot status. Now, though, an important step has been made toward redressing that neglect. Under the guidance of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, a landscaped walking path has been developed along the banks of Buffalo Bayou downtown. Known as the Sabine-to-Bagby Promenade, its intent is to draw Houstonians down to the water's edge, and remind them of one of the city's too long ignored treasures.

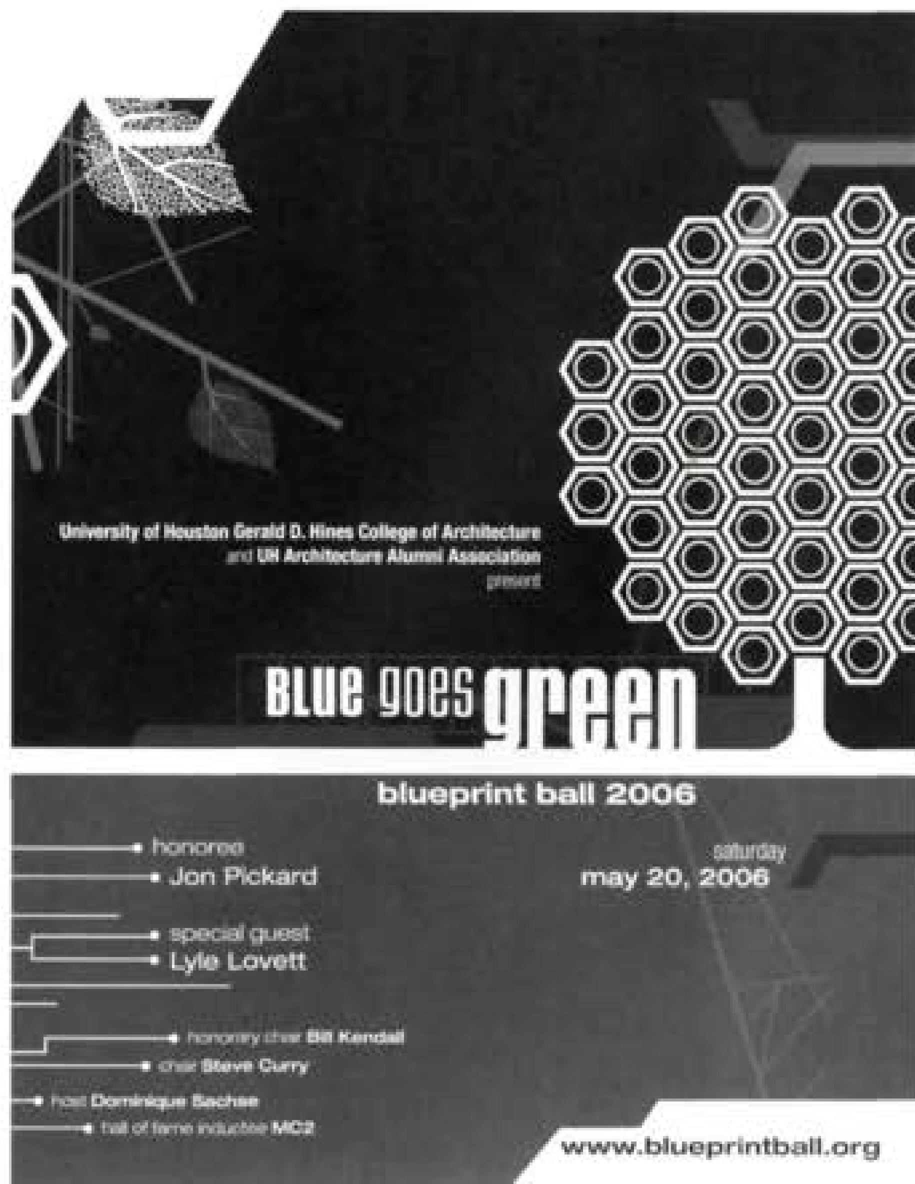
Grand opening ceremonies for the new promenade will be held May 20, when the public will be invited to see just what the $15 million project has to offer. Designed by the SWA Group, the promenade is part of the Partnership's Buffalo Bayou Master Plan, which envisions "a new urban core focused on Buffalo Bayou ... transform[ing] Houston's neglected waterfront into an active and vibrant center."

Begun in 2004, the Sabine-to-Bagby Promenade is more than a simple pathway. The Partnership has overseen a total makeover of the part of the bayou that winds northeast from the Sabine Street Bridge to just shy of the Wortham Center—widening it, sloping and reinforcing its banks, providing extensive native landscaping, and adding 12 access points, two of them handicapped (and bike and stroller) accessible. Twenty-three acres of parkland have also been created, and ideas abound for programming the new amenity, from welcoming street performers to offering a wireless access arena.

Although barely more than half a mile in length, the promenade covers a crucial section of Buffalo Bayou, connecting a stretch along Memorial Drive/Allen Parkway known for hiking and biking and Sesquicentennial Park. Perhaps most important, the Partnership has not only worked to make the banks of the bayou an appealing place to spend time, they've also made them much easier to get to it.

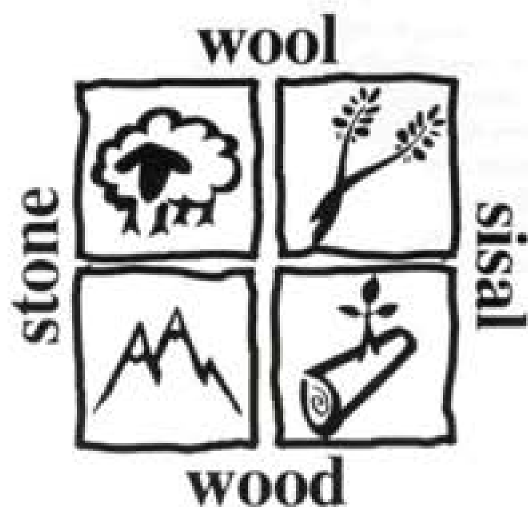
"The element I'm most excited about is the stairways, because it gives this connection to the street that we hadn't had before," says Anne Olson, the Partnership's executive director. "This is going to allow people to access the bayou a lot easier, and help make downtown more pedestrian friendly."

The stairways that excite Olson descend from street level to the Promenade with streamlined, Art Deco-esque handrails. Four of the portals from street to water are marked by inverted stainless steel canoe "trellises" by Houston sculptor John Runnels, with quotes about water carved into their sides. Runnels' canoe sculptures interact with other nearby public art: Mel Chin's *Seven Wonders* flanking the Wortham Center, and Paul Kittelson's *Bayou Beacons*, the



THE NATURAL SOURCE

carpet, rugs & flooring



CREATIVE FLOORING
RESOURCES
2410 Bissonnet • Houston, Texas 77005 • 713-522-1181

stainless steel, fluted pillars attached to I-45 above. Runnels is a longtime bayou devotee, co-founder (along with Charlie Sartwelle) of the Buffalo Bayou Artpark, and a man whose public art has popped up bayou-side in the vicinity of the Sabine Street Bridge for more than 15 years.

Runnels calls Buffalo Bayou "Houston's mystery," and hidden as it is in plain sight, it does have a mysterious quality. In tracing the bayou's path, the Sabine-to-Bagby Promenade makes a study of this secreted atmosphere, winding along the rear of buildings and abutting feeder roads. The promenade plays with this urban aesthetic; in several places it passes abandoned waterworks or concrete armatures, now aged into sculptures by the patina of time.

Starting at the Sabine Street Bridge, the promenade ascends the gentle slope next to the Allen Parkway feeder road; passes the backside of the fenced-off Sam Houston Park; goes behind the City Hall Annex under a spaghetti bowl of freeways and causeways; and levels off behind the Hobby Center garage. The promenade project has added a pedestrian bridge to cross the bayou at this point—the first ever pedestrian bridge along the Buffalo Bayou Walk—allowing people to loop around back to the starting point past the Sabine Street Lofts.

The wooden plank bridge is 10-feet wide, its design a gentle curve of rust-textured corten steel trusses. Crossing behind the Hobby Center, the bridge provides a pedestrian and bike connection from downtown to the neighborhoods of Montrose, the Heights, and Midtown.

Past the bridge, the promenade parallels the backside of the vacant Bayou Place 2 complex. Just as it approaches the Wortham Center, the Promenade segues into the red brick and grassy expanses of Sesquicentennial Park.

The work that went into the promenade not only made Buffalo Bayou easier to access, it also made it possible driving past to see the water. The newly sloped banks reveal what before was hidden at the bottom of steep edges, drainage-ditch fashion. As the bayou's water flows towards downtown, the vividness of its olive-green color is surprising. "Everybody that sees this project can't believe it's Buffalo Bayou," says Olson. "I took somebody out there and they said, it's so much more like a river than it looked like before."

Probably the most attention-getting element in the promenade is its lighting. The promenade pathways are lined with light posts that provide an illumination strong enough for security purposes, yet have a softened glow, creating an atmosphere that's "a little romantic, like strolling in Europe," says project manager Ian Rosenberg. Designed by New York lighting designer Herves Descotes L'Observatoire (with collaboration from artist Stephen Korns in Amherst), the lamps have flying-saucer-like caps. On top of these saucers are orbs that glow either white or deep blue, varying with the 29-day lunar cycle. When the moon is full, all the orbs strung along the path are white; as the moon starts to wane, the lights near the Sabine Street Bridge change to blue, and this blueness creeps farther up the bayou every night.

As a result, people passing overhead on the Pierce Elevated will see a string of lights dangling along the blackness of the bayou, part white, part deep blue, depending on the time of the month. In time, the Partnership hopes to extend the moon-tied lamppost line all the way from Shepherd Street to the Ship Channel Turning Basin, creating what they call an illuminated "spine of the city."

A light show can also be found on the undersides of the freeways, which are washed in the same rich blue, as though the water of the nighttime bayou was exhaling on the cars and trucks passing overhead.

But for all the creativity exhibited in the lighting, the creation of the pedestrian bridge, or the new access points, the most ambitious structural component of the promenade project is barely visible. This is a system of 5,500 gabions—wire baskets of concrete rubble—that has transformed Buffalo Bayou's steep, sludgy banks. Weighing two to three tons, the gabions are placed in a three-tiered stair-step just below the water's edge, creating a more stable bank, a flood control buffer, and a gradual grade that allows for easier canoe access. In widening and grading the bayou, the project excavated more than 100,000 cubic feet of dirt, at places moving the bank back as much as 50 feet.

A City of Houston project, the Sabine-to-Bagby Promenade was managed by the Partnership and was a collaboration between the city, the Texas Department of Transportation, and the Harris County Flood Control District. Private partners included Houston Endowment, Inc., the Brown Foundation, and the Wortham Foundation.

As for the future, the Partnership recently hired New York art consultant Diane Shamash, director of the Minetta Brook non-profit, which has garnered admiration for its public art projects on the Hudson River, projects that emphasize the relationship between contemporary artists and communities.

Shamash is working with the Partnership to establish a similar public art program along a 10-mile stretch of Buffalo Bayou. In a pilot project for the initiative, they've begun exploring ideas for a "floating cinema" along the promenade, in which large projections of film and video would travel down the bayou by barge. — *Ann Walton Sieber*

All photos courtesy the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance

White, Finger, RDA Win Notice at 2006 Good Brick Awards

He may have passed away more than a half century ago, but on January 27 Houston architect Joseph Finger was a big winner in the annual Good Brick Awards handed out by the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance (GHPA) to recognize excellence in historic preservation projects, programs, and leadership. Finger, who enjoyed a prolific career from the 1910s to the 1940s, is now often overshadowed by Alfred C. Finn, a favored architect of businessman Jesse Jones. This year, however, in an unusual coincidence, independent renovations of three of Finger's buildings received Good Brick Awards.

Houston Mayor Bill White, Rice University, and the Rice Design Alliance also shared the Good Brick spotlight. White accepted the 2006 GHPA President's Award for preservation leadership, while renovation of the historic Wiess House at 2 Sunset Boulevard (designed by William Ward Watkin in 1920, with W.O. Neuhaus Associates, Architects, designing the recent renovation) earned Rice its third Good Brick Award. RDA and Houston Mod were recognized for their cooperative program "Modern Mode: Houston Architecture at Mid-Century." The April 2005 event featured a tour of eight significant houses built from the 1940s to the 1960s.

RDA also played a critical role in the conception of another award-winning project. Hermann Park Conservancy received the 2006 Stewart Title Award for its Heart of the Park capital improvement project, a project that grew out of a 1992 national design competition co-sponsored by RDA.

In giving Mayor White his award, GHPA Executive Director Ramona Davis noted that the Mayor "recognizes preservation's economic and aesthetic value to the city, and that has translated into good public policy."

But the man of the hour was the late Joseph Finger. Club Quarters in Houston restored Finger's Texas State Hotel (1926), 720 Fannin, a 16-story skyscraper with ornate Spanish Plateresque detailing. PageSoutherlandPage designed the restoration. Lawndale Art Center received a Good Brick for renovating the former Barker Brothers Studio (1931), 4912 Main, an example of Finger's mastery of Art Deco design. Richard Fitzgerald was the project architect. And Fretz 420 Main, Ltd. was honored for redeveloping Finger's modernistic Byrd's Department Store (1934), 420 Main, as a mixed use commercial/residential property. Ray + Hollington Architects designed the renovation.

Other recipients of the 2006 Good Brick Awards are:

Ken and Peggy Lindow for 3317 Morrison Street. A 12-year, hands-on project resulted in the rescue and meticulous rehabilitation of this 1910 house in Woodland Heights.

Avenue CDC and Artspace Projects, Inc. for Elder Street Artists Lofts. The rehabilitation of the former Jefferson Davis Hospital into 34 affordable loft-style apartments is a very visible preservation success. The local landmark at 1101 Elder was built in 1924 and had stood vacant for 20 years. W.O. Neuhaus Associates, Architects designed the project.

Major and Beverly Stevenson for E.R. and Ann Taylor Park. A 17-year effort led to the successful creation of a nature park on 26 acres of the historic Stevenson family homestead. The park at 1850 Reed Road includes the antebellum home site and family cemetery.

Kaldis Development Interests for 807 Taft. The original home of Antone's Food Import for more than half a century has found new life as Gravitas Restaurant. Architectural design was by Ference Dreef of The Kollectiv and Rudy Colby of Colby Design.

St. Thomas High School. The parochial school at 4500 Memorial Drive restored the rotunda in its 1940 Main Building. Ray Bailey Architects, Inc. designed the project.

Harris County, Jerry Patchen and Avi Ron for 1417 Congress. A partnership between local government and private enterprise preserved an important downtown landmark: the 1903 Palace Hotel. Bruce Fehr was project architect.

Carol Eckels Adams was recognized for her dedication in revitalizing the Katy Heritage Society and advancing preservation in an area of Harris County that is not usually thought of as historic.

Story Sloane III received GHPA's Preservation Partner in Print Award for his commitment to preserving the photographic record of Houston's historic architecture as well as his generous support of GHPA.

During the Good Brick Awards ceremony, American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter, also presented two awards recognizing distinguished architecture of lasting value. The AIA Houston 25 Year Award went to S.I. Morris Associates, Architects, for the former Prudential Insurance Company Building (1977), now the SBC Building, at 6500 West Loop South in Bellaire. The 50 Year Award honored Rice Stadium (1950) and its architects Hermon Lloyd & W.B. Morgan and Milton McGinty.

Top row, left to right: Texas State Hotel, Joseph Finger, 1926; Barker Brothers Studio (now the Lawndale Art Center), Joseph Finger, 1931; St. Thomas High School Main Building Rotunda, 1940; Jefferson Davis Hospital (now Elder Street Artists Lofts), 1924.
Second row, left to right: Byrd's Department Store, Joseph Finger, 1931; Palace Hotel, 1903.
Third row, left to right: 3317 Morrison Street, Woodland Heights, 1910; Wiess House, William Ward Watkin, 1920.
Fourth row: 807 Taft, original home of Antone's Food Import.

All photos © 2006 Hester + Hardaway

Left to right: 403 Westminster, Neuhaus and Taylor, 1960; 11110 Wickwood, Frank Welch & Associates, 1996; 5715 Logan Lane, Taft Architects, 1995; 407 Thamer Circle, William T. Cannady, Anderson Todd, and Raymond Brochstein, 1974.

House and Water

RDA's 2006 architecture tour explored how architects have responded to Houston's bayous

From its inception, Houston's most distinctive topographical feature has been its bayous. In residential areas, their ravines and embankments add physical variety, and provide natural habitat for plants and animals that thrive in riparian settings. At the same time, their eroding banks and occasional dramatic flooding can make living next to them perilous.

The Rice Design Alliance's 2006 architecture tour, held March 25 and 26, investigated the varied approaches that architects and landscape architects have taken when designing houses and landscapes on Buffalo Bayou and its tributaries. The tour looked at how architects choose to embrace the bayou or distance their buildings from it, and how landscape architects have extrapolated from existing site conditions or preserved them with minimal intervention.

The tour began with a well-known mid-20th century Houston country house built on the bayou—Rienzi, 1406 Kirby Drive (Staub, Rather & Howze, architects, 1953; Ralph Ellis Gunn, landscape architect). Rienzi, which since 1999 has contained the European decorative arts collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, takes advantage of the topographic variations of its setting on Buffalo Bayou's south bank. Architect John F. Staub and landscape architect Gunn adjusted the one-story, split-level house, its terraces, and its gardens to the idiosyncrasies of the terrain by adhering to the classical architectural practices of symmetry, centrality, and figuration. The pavilion-type house and its descending terraces carefully compose the bayou woodland landscape and play off its natural variations.

The second stop on the tour, 5715 Logan Lane (Taft Architects, architects, 1995), is a tower house designed to maximize its inhabitants' exposure to the dense tree canopy of a woodland setting across Buffalo Bayou from where Rienzi is located. Taft Architects' John J. Casbarian, Danny Samuels, and Bob Timme minimized the house's impact on its site by going up rather than spreading out. The exterior of the stucco-surfaced, wood-framed house is self-effacing, especially from the street. Inside, though, it opens up to the landscape through an aluminum window wall system set between thick lateral fins that structurally brace the house's volume.

The next stop was 266 Pine Hollow Circle (P. M. Bolton Associates, 1972). This flat-roofed modern house, faced with Mexican brick and walls of glass and built on a site that backs onto a tributary of Buffalo Bayou, was designed by architect Preston M. Bolton to facilitate entertaining and family life. The site's natural character has been largely preserved. From the inside this sets up a dialogue between interior composure and the unpredictability of nature. Lofty ceilings, a floor plane of cement tile, and exposed brick interior walls give the reception rooms, which run through the center of the house, an expansive sense. This is enhanced by a skylight that transforms the middle of the house into an interior patio.

House number four was 250 Pine Hollow Circle (Wilson, Morris & Crain, architects, 1953; Robbin B. Sotir & Associates, soil bioengineering consultants; McKinnon Associates, landscape management). This is a compact modern house set within eyesight of the bayou channel. Interior spaces are organized in a rectangular floor plate. An unusual L-shaped reception hall-living room-dining room dominates the west half of the house. The east half of the house is filled with bedrooms overlooking the bayou and a long space that is a cross between a passageway and a family room. The ingenuity with which Wilson, Morris & Crain arranged family living spaces in a defined container and set them in relation to the bayou makes this house feel spacious and varied.

Next up was 403 Westminster (Neuhaus & Taylor, architects, 1960; Stern and Bucek Architects, consultants for the restoration). Houston architects Harwood Taylor and J. Victor Neuhaus III designed this unusual modern house to respond to a site on the north bank of Buffalo Bayou. One-story at street level, the flat-roofed, pavilion-type house steps down the south-facing slope so that, its right-angled geometry notwithstanding, it seems to respond to the contours of the topography with amazing suppleness. Taylor and Neuhaus provided raised, screened terraces, courtyards of varying degrees of enclosure, and a stepped swimming pool terrace to complement the spatial surprises of the house. The present owner has meticulously restored this mid-20th-century modern.

The sixth stop was 840 Kuhlman (Thompson+Hanson, landscape architects, 2000). This expansive one- and two-story house is tucked onto its site on Briar Branch of Hunters Creek so unobtrusively that it is invisible from the street. Organized in a linear sequence of spaces beneath a gabled roof, the house is modest on the outside and expansive inside. The major living space is framed by a linear hall elevated on a raised platform that doubles as a book room. Bedrooms open to the landscape, yet still feel private.

House number seven was 407 Thamer Circle (Raymond Brochstein, Anderson Todd, and William T. Cannady, architects, 1974). Bounded by a ravine, this two-story, flat-roofed house stands out on its heavily wooded site because of its rectilinear wall planes of white stucco. These scored surfaces provide a backdrop against which the slender trunks of pine trees and the native undergrowth are silhouetted. Inside, the house seems very open. Almost the entire rear half is filled out with a 75-foot long, two-story high space containing seating areas and a dining table. Sliding glass doors open the lower half of the long rear wall to a deck skirting the ravine. The upper half of the space is serenely white, broken only by a high-set window that receives morning light and reveals a view of the sky.

The tour ended at 11110 Wickwood Drive (Frank Welch & Associates, architects, 1996; Herbert Pickworth, landscape architect). Dallas architect Frank D. Welch slid this large but subtle house beneath the pine trees on a lot that backs up to a ravine that frames the property on two sides. A gabled, raised-seam metal roof, redwood clapboard siding, and aluminum-framed windows accent the understatement. Inside, white-painted wall planes and floors of polished oak strips or Leuders limestone emphasize the house's organization as a linear sequence of volumes looking out to a rear redwood deck. Elevating the house above the ground gives the interiors a suspended feeling, which is enhanced by liberal use of skylighting.

Photos by Joe Schwartz

The Texas Cyclone, above, and the Texas Tornado, above right, are just two of the memorable rides lost when AstroWorld was reduced to a pile of rubble.

Goodbye to the Wonderful World of Fun

Incredible! Within 12 hours of the end of Final Fright Night at AstroWorld, when the venerable theme park closed for good, crews were on the ground dismantling the rides that generations of Houston kids grew up and threw up in. By the following Friday, big red tube sections lay on the ground, unrecognizable as thrill rides, and dump trucks and flat beds were everywhere, ready to cart the old attractions off to theme park limbo.

As one of 23,456 people, I was there on opening day. On that sunny June first, 1968, Judge Roy Hofheinz, the "AstroWizard," impatiently unlocked the gates 15 minutes early; the Hofheinz grandchildren unleashed 2,000 balloons; and 500 VIPs marched in behind the AstroWorld Band. The rest of us followed in a high holiday mood, ready to experience a "Wonderful World of Fun."

The Judge had announced the project in September 1967. As detailed in *The Grand Huckster*, a 1980 biography of Hofheinz, it took $25 million to tie down the 56 acres he promised would become "an elaborate, high quality, multimillion-dollar family amusement and entertainment center." As the biography notes, Hofheinz went on to boast, "This is destined to become the world's greatest tourist attraction."

Indeed, it was a huge project: 600,000 cubic yards of earth fill; 10,000 trees; and 2,000 tons of air conditioning to cool patrons. There was to be a staff of 1,200. The nearby Harris County Domed Stadium parking lot could hold 30,000 cars, and brightly colored trams would pick up customers there and deliver them over Loop 610 bridge to AstroWorld's front gate. Hofheinz hired Harper Goff, then working on EPCOT, and Frank Arnold to design AstroWorld's interiors, and Sam Daidone to travel the world to buy "stuff" to fill them.

Hofheinz predicted the park could entertain 20,000 people per hour at peak times, and host 1.6 million in a year. In the early years his projections were very close. The second year alone attendance increased 25 percent.

AstroWorld was just plain fun, and a bargain. You parked for 50 cents, and adults got in for $4.50, children for $3.50. Once inside, all the rides were free. The timid and very young could enjoy the steam train that circled the park, or drive the little cars along their guide rails in the AstroWay. There was a beautifully restored Denzel Carousel with an automatic Wurlitzer band organ, and there was the Six Shooter that swung you around in a swing seat, high above the landscaped grounds. Adventure was offered by the Lost World Ride, and a lift up the 340-foot AstroNeedle. Thrill-seekers lined up to ride the Black Dragon, or scoot through "Der Hofheinzberg" on a sled, almost colliding with the Abominable Snowman. Everyone could get in the act at the Crystal Palace, the root beer saloon that employed the best and brightest from Houston high school drama departments. All this, and it was gorgeous, too, full of themed landscaping, with flowers everywhere. The *Houston Chronicle* reported shortly after the opening, "AstroWorld, like the Domed Stadium, defies description."

The demise of AstroWorld probably started with the Judge's financial troubles. By the end of the 1960s he had leased the park to Six Flags Corporation, and by June 1975 the corporation owned it.

Seeing the park come down last October reminded me of the closing and demolition of the older Playland Park, built in the late 1930s on South Main near Murworth. That park was just a bunch of rides, nothing fancy, but it did have a Woody—an old fashioned wood roller coaster—on which I lost my glasses when I was in the sixth grade. Playland Park already looked pretty tired when work on the AstroDome began in 1961, and in no time at all the land became more valuable than the attraction.

Six Flags blamed rising land values for the closing of AstroWorld. I'm not buying it. Six Flags in Arlington, on the freeway linking Dallas and Fort Worth, has to be on much more valuable property. It's hard to tell, but the decision is more likely due to poor business judgment and a lack of interest in the Houston market.

Toward the end of Judge Hofheinz's life, longtime family friend Reuben Askenase commented, "The Judge was one of the most imaginative men I'd ever met in my life." The late and lamented AstroWorld was one of the best manifestations of that limitless imagination. What will be the next to go, the Astrodome? — *Barry Moore*

All photos © 2006 Hester + Hardaway

Prairie Style

Michael Rotondi has given Prairie View A&M's school of architecture an impressive new home

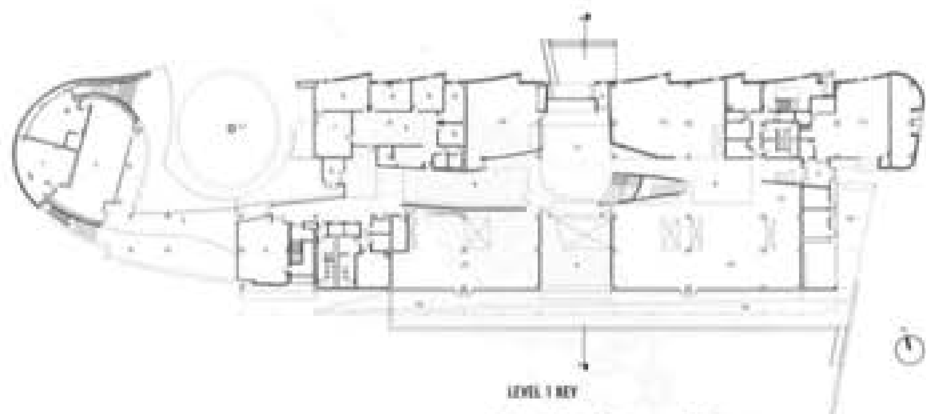
BY RONNIE SELF

Top: The south façade of Prairie View A&M's Art and Architecture Building (RoTo Architects with HKS, 2005) is now the first thing visitors to the university see when they drive onto campus.
Above: The north façade contains the entrance that faces the rest of the Prairie View campus, and the one most used by students.

AT PRAIRIE VIEW A&M, Michael Rotondi and RoTo Architects haven't simply created a new building, they have effectively provided a distinctive new entry for the whole university. This was not by accident; originally offered a location at the rear of the campus, Rotondi talked the university into letting him site his new structure where it would be the first thing seen by someone approaching Prairie View A&M by car.

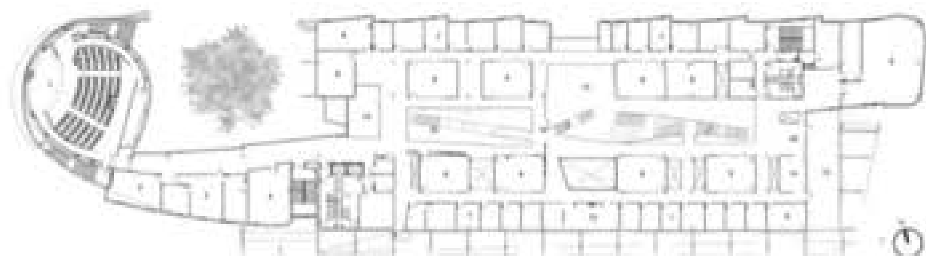
What that visitor now encounters is a building that may appear to some a bit detached from its architectural context, or simply bizarre. But in fact, thanks to its relatively modest size and scale, its horizontality, its broken massing, and its materials and color, it sits rather comfortably in the landscape. Rotondi has cited as a major influence the form and flux of his native Los Angeles, but with Prairie View A&M's new Architecture and Art Building that influence appears to yield to the simple force of the surrounding prairie.

The result of this meeting of L.A. iconoclastic architecture and the Texas landscape is something more akin to the work of Bruce Goff, the Oklahoma architect who built almost exclusively in prairie settings, than that of Morphosis, the Los Angeles firm founded by Rotondi and Thom Mayne in the early 1970s. There are certain similarities in Goff's approach to building (mainly houses) in a Midwestern prairie context and RoTo's



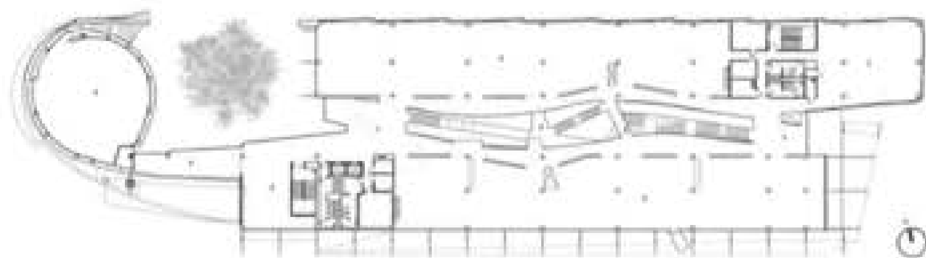
LEVEL 1 KEY

1 Cultural Center Archive
2 Cultural Center Gallery
3 Breezeway
4 Architecture Gallery
5 Entry
6 Administration
7 Conference Room
8 Office
9 Canyon
10 Lecture Hall
11 Main Space
12 Art Studio
13 Wood and Metal Shop
14 Lounge
15 Architecture Studio
16 Porch
17 Century Oak



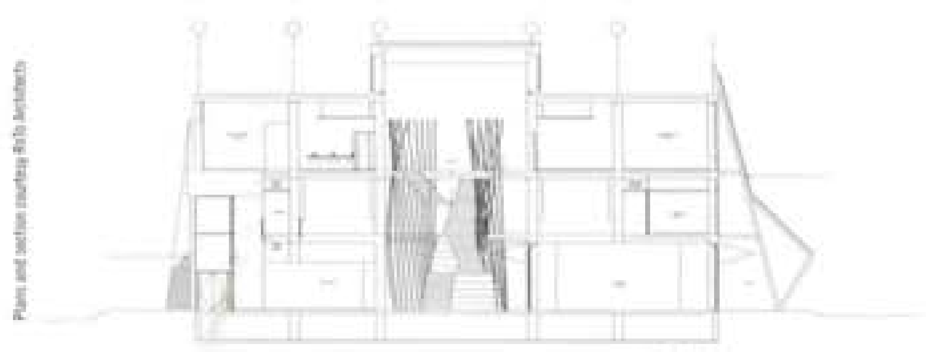
LEVEL 2 KEY

1 Presentation Theatre
2 Cultural Center Meeting Room
3 Cultural Center Offices
4 Reference Library
5 Conference Room
6 Work Room
7 Offices
8 Classroom/Seminar
9 Computer Lab
10 Lounge
11 Cafe
12 Roof Deck
13 Faculty Lounge
14 Canyon
15 Open to Below



LEVEL 3 KEY

1 Lounge/pin-up
2 Studios
3 Canyon
4 Open To Below



Plans and section courtesy RoTo Architects

Top left: The building's exterior is clad primarily in red brick, with matching mortar to create a more homogeneous surface.
Above: Plans of the Art and Architecture Building's three levels show how the auditorium was pulled away from the main building to allow for a mature live oak tree, while a cross section shows how the "canyon" running down the center links studios, classrooms, and offices on either side.

response to the setting at Prairie View: the already mentioned horizontality and broken massing as well as an appreciation of the decorative; a love of rounded, especially spiral, forms; a preference for angled walls and sloped floors; use of multiple materials and a certain ad-hoc approach in their handling; and a silhouette punctuated by feeler-like forms, such as a structure projecting from behind the brise-soleil on the south facade of the building.

In both Goff's work and Rotondi's Architecture and Art Building at Prairie View there is a seemingly opposing desire for an impression of unconventional shapes on the one hand and planning based on strict geometry, symmetry, and centrality on the other. Simple forms are obscured by more exuberant added elements and willfully manipulated façades. In both approaches the relation to a prairie site alternates between detachment from, and connection with, the exterior.

Rotondi has previously worked within the context of the South Dakota prairie, and has said that a prairie landscape offers a rarely seen level of openness. His Architecture and Art Building at Prairie View A&M creates a protected, inwardly focused world markedly different from the preoccupations of an earlier, still emblematic Los Angeles architecture—the Case Study houses, as an example—which opened itself freely to a more hospitable climate.

For obvious reasons, architecture schools are concerned with the architecture of the buildings that house them. Prairie View A&M is just one of several U.S. institutions to have recently commissioned a well-known architect for a new architecture or design facility. Thom Mayne, Rotondi's ex-partner at Morphosis, should soon start construction on a building for New York's Cooper Union; Steven Holl recently completed a project for Pratt Institute; and Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects also recently completed the Knowlton School of Architecture at Ohio State University.

One apparent goal of all of these projects is to transmit design consciousness through ambitious schemes that bear the clear stamp of a prominent architect. The results have been strong, personalized, statements rather than the more neutral response that sometimes results when a designer, even a renowned one, assumes the role of a somewhat anonymous author. Ironically, SCI-Arc, the Los Angeles school of architecture Rotondi and Mayne helped found, is housed today in an architecturally neutral, yet impressive, quarter-mile-long former freight depot that is devoid of an omnipresent architectural stance.

Recent architecture school buildings have also been designed as learning tools in themselves. Structure and mechanical systems, for example, have sometimes been left exposed for didactic purposes. Promoting a sense of community and enhancing student exchange has likewise been a major objective. As a result, a central public space, usually an atrium, has been a common architectural feature.

When visiting the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, Rotondi admired Philip Johnson's vast atrium, a space that overflows with life, especially during events such as graduation. Rotondi has cited that space as a reference for his own building at Prairie View A&M, which is most definitely an "atrium scheme," even if in this case the central area has been christened "the canyon."

Rotondi's 105,000 square-foot building is defined by four major components. Two of those components are a pair of

Top: The Art and Architecture Building's primary social space is the canyon, an atrium that runs the length of the structure, with entrances at each end. **Above:** An entrance to the auditorium reveals Michael Rotondi's affection for rounded forms.

parallel-bar buildings, three stories high, which house studios, classrooms, and offices. These are linked by the third component, a central, full height atrium—the canyon—that is lit by continuous clerestory windows on its long sides. The fourth component, a rounded volume that houses exhibition space at ground level and an auditorium above, has been pulled away from the main body of the building in order to create a courtyard to contain an existing, mature live oak tree. The auditorium punctuates a corner where two major campus drives intersect.

The main social space is the canyon, which forms a primary, east/west axis with entries at each end. It is intersected by a cross-axis that begins with the main entrance on the north side—the entrance that faces the rest of the A&M campus—traverses the building, extends out into the landscape to the south, and terminates in a grove of trees planted in a circular pattern. This north/south axis is clearly implied, but it's only practicable on the special occasions when two large garage-type doors—one between the canyon and a gallery space and the other between the gallery and the outside—are opened.

Unlike Johnson's atrium, Rotondi's canyon is not a simple void. It is enlivened by angled stairs and sloped bridges that connect the various spaces and levels, which are symmetrically arranged on both sides. The stairs, bridges, and spaces adjacent to the canyon provide places for impromptu meetings, for formal or informal reviews, or simply for sitting.

Because of the comfortable width of the space and the reasonable floor-to-floor heights, the canyon avoids monumentality. It is most definitely a space that unifies, yet it can rarely be grasped in its entirety. It is a dynamic and cheerful space, and the white frit glass in the clerestory windows makes the canyon's light seem even a bit clearer. Exposed concrete columns are on a regular grid (as throughout the building) and support the concrete ceiling/roof. The floor is yellow terrazzo. The canyon is rigorously planned, yet softened by a few twists. Without a doubt, however, the most debatable element of the entire building is the wire mesh screen structure that runs on each side of the canyon's central staircase. It is superfluous, and unnecessarily breaks up the atrium space.

Angled stairs and sloped bridges enliven Rotondi's "canyon."

The two bar buildings house loft-like studio spaces that are subdivided as necessary by movable furniture, and which open directly onto the canyon. Perforated metal ceiling panels mask the main runs of mechanical services that are otherwise exposed. All spaces have windows or open onto the light-filled canyon. Classrooms and faculty offices have glass walls that reinforce the impression and possibility of communication and community.

A large terrace to the east and two small balconies to the south offer more options for places to "hang out." In talking about cities such as Los Angeles, Rotondi has lamented the lack of true public spaces. In the Architecture and Art Building he has attempted to create a certain public and urban quality by using a central atrium. Architectural historian Kenneth Frampton, however, has commented that the atrium has become a surrogate public form, one created as a compensation for the erosion of the true public realm. Atriums create "cities-in-miniature," with primary public façades found on the inside rather than the outside. Rotondi's canyon has indeed achieved a certain urban quality as a space of "public appearance," to quote Frampton. The numerous surveillance cameras in and around the Architecture and Art Building, however, clearly indicate that making a truly public space is considerably more difficult.

On the exterior the primary cladding is red brick, with matching mortar that renders the surface more homogenous. On the south façade, perforated metal decking, also brick-red, shades a glass wall and is supported by a straightforward, welded tubular steel frame; at ground level there is a porch-like space that opens onto the prairie. On the north façade, the brick cladding peels away from the structure and resembles a series of billowing curtains. Though it is a highly personal gesture, this basically decorative motif does indicate the structural grid within the building, while allowing east light to enter through the resulting triangular slits.

The difference in conception between this façade treatment and the wire mesh screen in the canyon may be similar to the distinction made in the past between "décor," which is derived from the basic organization and structure of a building, and "ornament," which is simply added. A preoccupation with the graphics of the north façade has, however, made it overly opaque and somewhat unfriendly to the truly "public" street that fronts this side of the building, as well as to the campus beyond. Likewise, the graphics interfere with interior spaces benefiting from north lighting, and as a result studio spaces on the north side of the building are not as pleasant as those behind the perforated screen on the south side.

The rounded form of the auditorium/exhibition space is clad in the same red brick as the rest of the building, though in this case the brick is corbelled and shows Rotondi's fondness for the spiral forms found in the cosmos, and in the DNA molecule. From certain angles the auditorium's volume alludes to the Great Mosque of Samarra in Iraq, which Rotondi has refered to as an example in built form of the spiral he so appreciates.

At the heart of Rotondi's scheme at Prairie View A&M is a rational and functional design. Certain quirky aspects, even if somewhat debatable, make the Architecture and Art Building appealing and endearing. Students and faculty appear genuinely proud and enchanted with the new structure.

Bruce Goff once said that "it is an architect's obligation to his client not only to solve his problems and to satisfy him, but to do more than this, so the client will have an environment which has not only meaning to him today, but in which he can continue to grow."

Like Goff, Rotondi is an architect and an educator. His real clients are the successive generations of students who will pass through his building. We can anticipate that they will collectively continue to grow in his Architecture and Art Building. ■

Inside Stories

The architect's claim that the house he has designed lets the outside in used to puzzle me. I thought we built houses to keep the outside out—shelter against the elements, the enemy, and the night. Then I realized that the architect who says this is speaking not functionally, but formally. His design says, "Look! My shelter shelters, even while it looks like it's doing something else." This is not the art that hides art, but high design that displays itself as artlessness.

This wee epiphany has something to do with my moment in Harrod's, on my first trip to London. I oohed and aahed with great grace and asked a friendly salesman what the place was really like. He said, "It's like a city in itself." Really. I am not persuaded by highbrow metaphors that praise Mozart for being "pure poetry" or defend pro basketball because of its affinity with ballet. What the speaker is actually doing is not clarifying anything about Mozart or basketball, but boasting about his level of culture. The salesman could have called Harrod's the real flagship of the British Empire. He could have called it the House of Di. But in this instance he wasn't boasting about himself. He was describing the store's complexity, and suggesting it was a principle of narrative—a container of many stories, which he could tell me.

Buildings are more than their material components. They are made of ideas and values and remade by their inhabitants into another kind of fit, another meaning and explanation. Cities summon strangers together and place them in many kinds of containers, and the containers that we have invented to be buildings and the ones we have invented to be novels have more in common than the pun they share on "story." Buildings and novels also ground the tradition of thinking about architecture and narrative together. Figures of gods and goddesses, women and men, have traditionally adorned temples, churches, and governmental buildings, and their stories are intrinsic to the buildings' significance and function. In traditional narratives, it is the inn on the road that sets the stage for pilgrims and travelers to tell their stories to each other. And this tradition enters the history of the novel in Henry James's famous preface to The Portrait of a Lady, where James writes: "The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million ... every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will." Throughout the 19th century, in fact, there was a whole tradition of novels set in boarding houses and apartment buildings, which contained not only the stories of the novel's characters, but also embodied the culture's ideas about privacy, the street's temptations, and the doctrine of the sexes' separate spheres.

"A sense of place," or "the spirit of place," always suggest to my mind the ethos of Romantic nature poetry. William Blake wanted to see all the world in a grain of sand. Walter Benjamin wanted to see his world in an item for sale in the Paris arcades. Which implies a much different kind of story—more enclosed, more material, more novelistic. The architect who wants to tell us the story of his house that lets the outside in is also telling us a version of his own story: his autobiography, embodied in terms of his intentions and the decisions he has made. And the person who wants to tell us about the house he grew up in, or the one that marked a new chapter in her life, or the one that provides a final place to settle, is also offering a life tale. This is the autobiographical story in every work of art, told in the choice of the word, the stroke of the brush, the exact slant of the roof, and there is no telling of this story from the outside. The good stories are always inside jobs. — *Terrence Doody*

© 2005 Hester + Hardaway

Converted from a garage apartment, the office in Kathleen Cambor's new house gave her writing life a different dimension.

BY KATHLEEN CAMBOR

OUR HOUSE

Sometimes a house can become not just a home, but family

After I married, my husband and I searched for a long time in order to find a house that suited us. I must admit to being less discriminating than he was during this process. As a young wife, and relatively new bride, I saw every house we were shown through the scrim of my flushed happiness. Squat bungalows, pillared colonials, undistinguished red brick boxes—they all shimmered with possibility for me. But my husband was older, a bit more seasoned, and from the start he objected to what we came to think of as the "Houston floor plan"—two stories with the stairway rising from the entry hall, the living room and a little sun room on the right, the dining room on the left, the kitchen predictably behind it. He wanted something different, something uniquely itself.

So on a rain-soaked afternoon in February of 1973, when I phoned my husband with the news that our realtor had found a pink California mission-style house for sale, I heard excitement in his voice for the first time since we'd begun our search. Pink, stucco, on a quiet cul-de-sac, I said. He cleared his schedule to come with me later that same day to take a look.

It was as if the word charming had been coined to describe it. The house was like something from a 1930s movie set, completely different than anything we'd seen in our long months of looking. Inside, the walls were a textured plaster, and they met the ceiling at a graceful curve rather than a sharp right angle. Rounded archways led from one room to the next and gave the house a kind of Spanish flair. Old built-in glass cupboards, relics of another era, caught the sun's rays in the dining room and kitchen. Although the rooms were spacious and the ceilings tall, the space had a rather cozy, compact feel.

Three bedrooms surrounded a small square hallway on the second floor. The fringed edges of a striped awning on a tiny balcony just off the master bedroom slapped sharply in the wind. Shelved recesses, which had been built in random places in the plastered walls, gave rise to speculation about their function. Had there been religious icons, statues of saints, placed there? Other things about the house also seemed odd and unexpected. At some point in its lifetime a 40-foot-long room, one side of which was walled with glass, had been added, and the size of it—you could have large parties, you could have had a dance in there—suggested that someone had once wanted this home to be larger and grander than it was, that someone had been ambitious for it.

Our realtor, a friend, confided that a church had owned the property years earlier, and that under its auspices the house had been used as a commune, a refuge for young runaways. It was said that the vagrant teens lived there unattended by adults, that there were strange comings and goings in the night, that the yard had been let go to seed, that the awning was tattered and the stucco crumbled. Refurbished and for sale, the house was now well tended. But the story lent the place a certain aura, gave it a shady past—a quirky, checkered history that appealed to me. My husband had three children from a first marriage, and they and I were still feeling our way in our new family. And although I was young, I was not foolish. I knew that with stepchildren I was bound to make mistakes. There would be missteps, failures, and hard times ahead. For that kind of life, it seemed to me that we were going to need a home that wasn't picture-perfect, just as we were not the picture-perfect family. This house looked like one could allow for that, a flawed house that would not hold our flaws against us.

And it didn't. It took us in, and adapted to us in ways that another, more formal place might not have. It was not quite big enough for all of us, especially after I had one, and then another baby. But this home was somehow endlessly

accommodating. It grew as the family did. The lot was big enough for us to add an atrium, a bath, and two bedrooms at the end of what we always called "the long room"—and that addition became a kind of wing for the older children. Rooms intended for specific use lent themselves gracefully to a variety of functions. We lined the walls of the so-called living room with bookshelves, and it became a library. The tiny sitting room off the master bedroom was easily converted to a nursery. One summer, not long after we moved in, my younger stepson and a friend built a go-cart from a kit and a lawn-mower engine, and for lack of a better place to work they commandeered one end of "the long room" for their project. It was an unlikely setting for such a construction, but with a drop cloth spread beneath them, tools heaped everywhere in adolescent disarray, day after day they labored, and the sounds of their tinkering and laughter became the background music of that summer.

Throughout my childhood I had longed to be a writer. So seriously did I take myself and my ambition, that when I was eight years old I wrote a novel—derivative to be sure; I was much influenced by the Nancy Drew books I couldn't get enough of at that time—but it was a novel nonetheless, four fat notebooks written out in the Palmer penmanship in which I had been so well trained by Benedictine nuns. I'd always been a reader, but the completion of the book was evidence to me that I possessed the patience and fortitude to be a writer too, that I had "the stuff." Convinced I had found my true vocation, I devoted myself to it. When I was 12 I won a statewide essay contest, then five years later a national writing competition for high school seniors. But neither my ardency nor my modest successes impressed my practical parents. For them writing was a form of make-believe, an unseemly self-indulgence, and certainly no way to make a living. So they began the girls-should-become-nurses argument that they meant to win at any cost. The harder I tried to convince them how much I loved literature and writing, the more vociferous their objections grew, and by the middle of my second year in college they'd worn me down. I put aside my own desires and gave up all thoughts of writing. For years after that, as if not to taste of the forbidden fruit, I found it difficult to even read for pleasure.

But now, in my adult life, the wish to write came alive in me again. And as it did, I began to dream of houses, each dream a variation of the one that came before. I enter an unfamiliar house through a door that has been left ajar, and walk through the living and dining rooms and kitchen, each room furnished simply, all ordered and contained. This is all there is, I think, there is nothing unexpected here. Then I turn a corner, and am amazed to find another room, and then another, and then another still—a space for reading, one for writing, all the rooms that I could ever need.

Not long after the dreams began, when my second child was not quite two, I took a writing workshop at the University of Houston. Once again the sitting room adjacent to the master bedroom underwent a conversion. I claimed it as my study. I began to rise at 4 a.m., before the children, and wrote in the pre-dawn silence in a circle of light cast by a single lamp. In the years that followed I had two stories published in literary magazines. After reading one, an agent who admired it contacted me. I began a novel, and chose as its setting my grandparents' house, a place I'd lived for long periods of time in my childhood, and that had meant a great deal to me. A fireman, like my grandfather, was a figure in my story.

I wrote and wrote, and my writing life expanded as the house and children grew. After attending college in the east, my two oldest stepchildren came home to Houston for medical school. We decked and bricked in the small back yard. My husband brought home an electric pasta machine (before they became ubiquitous) whose directions were printed only in Italian, a language that none of us could read, but as a family we gathered in the kitchen and, by trial and error, figured out together how to work the thing, so that we could triumphantly make fresh pasta the new hallmark of our meals. My stepdaughter moved to Oregon for her medical residency and then, on a quick visit home, in that same kitchen, she met the man who would become her husband. By the time my first novel was published, the two youngest children—those born to me—were preparing to go away to school.

Rooms once full stood empty now. Rooms and more rooms, just as it had been in my recurring dream. My publisher was eager for a second book and I was eager to write one. An idea for an historical novel took hold of me, a big project. With the children gone, I moved my work into my son's bedroom—a larger study that could accommodate the books and maps and timelines I would need to guide me through the writing of the book. For a year I labored in that blue-walled room, cool northern light slipping through the shutters.

For a while after the children left my husband and I luxuriated in the extra space, but gradually we realized that we now had too much room. Besides children, we'd always filled the house with friends. We loved to cook for them, and had had countless small dinners and large parties. But with my writing taking so much of my time, we didn't entertain as much as we once had. Even so, whenever the possibility of moving to some place smaller came up in conversation, my husband and I quickly skirted past it. How could we abandon the house we loved? In it we had done the work required to become the family we so much wanted to be. We had had a Suzuki violin recital for 40 six-year-olds, an eight-course Chinese dinner for 20 middle-schoolers, a wedding reception for a beloved daughter. So much had been endured and celebrated there. One or more of the children began to cry each time we mentioned the possibility of leaving.

And then, in the fall of 1997, there was a terrible explosion that set the house ablaze like so much tinder. The young man who lived in the garage apartment on the property behind ours extinguished his stove pilot light, turned his oven on, filled his rooms with gas, and waited for deep, drugged sleep and a painless death. An ill-considered but carefully constructed plan, except that a tiny spark ignited all that accumulated gas, and by some law of physics that I have never understood, the great heaving force of the explosion hurled itself at us. It was a Saturday night, I had just gone to bed, and the sound and impact were such that I thought, "a plane has crashed, a bomb has detonated, it is the end now, soon we will be dead." The explosion unleashed a force that rocked the entire neighborhood so powerfully that it not only shattered all our windows, but those in houses many blocks away as well. It ejected nails from sheetrock, separated walls from baseboards, flung pictures to the floor. It sent brick and board projectiles hurtling like missiles down the length of "the long room." As quickly as the firemen got there, by the time their sirens sounded on the street high flames had licked through the rear of the house and the rooms that we had built for the older children.

No one was hurt. That's always the first thing we say to ourselves after a trauma, a brush with death. At least no one was injured. But there was no ignoring the fact that we had had come so close to it. If one of the children had been home, if my husband had not left his study in the back of the house in order to fetch a glass of water from the kitchen. If the windows over the bed into which I'd just slipped had not exploded but had imploded instead, pelting me with little knives of glass. So we were lucky, and we knew it. The first thing I did in the pre-dawn light after the firemen left was to crunch my way across the broken glass that covered my study floor to turn on my computer. Lucky again. It, too, was unscathed; the precious (to me) pages of the new novel I had begun had not been destroyed or damaged.

Yet in the weeks that followed, as the slow work of reconstruction began, we came to realize that the sense of shelter and safety, real or illusory, that we had felt in our home had disappeared, and would not be returned to us. By the time a year had passed and the repairs were finished, we had come to understand that it was time for us to leave. What had once felt impossible seemed obvious now. The family that had been sheltered in these walls was grown and gone. Time I had spent "keeping the house" could now be spent writing. Nonetheless, after the movers left with the last of the furniture, after we'd walked through the empty rooms one final time, I could hardly bear to close the door and drive away.

Live in a house for a long time, and it becomes so known, so familiar, you almost stop seeing it.

What I hadn't anticipated about the move was that in a new space, everything looked new. The light shone differently at different times of day in unfamiliar rooms. The sounds of traffic on a busier street made me feel more like the city dweller that I was. Our new house had a garage apartment, and my writing life acquired another dimension when I turned it into my office, my own little building, to which I could retreat each day, a separate space a little distant from the domestic distractions that so often beckoned. My work had slowed during the upheaval and reconstruction after the fire, and now, in new surroundings, the pace quickened again. And my novel, about the Johnstown Flood of 1889—a great disaster—grew deeper because I'd experienced the terror of a small disaster of my own.

The raising of a family is intrinsically a drama. In our case it was a drama that unfolded in a California mission-style house on a quiet cul-de-sac.

In our new house we live a drama of a different sort, one comprised of uninterrupted, work-filled days. Much of the loving patience that was required of me while I was raising children is now focused on the characters I invent. The life of a writer is by its very nature rather dreamy, and so it is for me. It's both wonderful and at times frightening to spend so much time in my own head. When the work goes well, I find myself submerged in a kind of fugue state, where all manner of strange thoughts and feelings rise up suddenly, unbidden.

Sometimes when I'm submerged that way, in my mind's eye I see the pink house, and more than once it has occurred to me that perhaps it sacrificed itself, that it burned and shattered as a way of freeing us. Maybe, like a tender parent, it had known that it was time to let us go. And when those thoughts come to me (and only a writer of fiction could imagine so far-fetched a thing) I let myself believe for an instant that it's true, that our pink house had loved us as much as we'd loved it. ■

Architect Scott Ballard (left) and client Judy Chapman (right) exchanged ideas constantly when her house was being planned.

Photo © 2006 Eric Hester

CORBUSIER'S SCUPPER

From Chandigarh to Colquitt Court, with a little imagination

INTERVIEW BY TERRENCE DOODY

A few years back, native Houstonian Judy Chapman was living a traditional River Oaks life in a traditional River Oaks house on Stanmore. Then she decided she needed a change. She wanted a house that better reflected who she was, that fit with the woman she had become, not the woman she had been. Working with architect Scott Ballard, Chapman set out to build "rooms of her own." The result was like nothing she had ever lived in: a U-shaped building enclosing a side court, with metal siding, polished concrete floors, and windows that Chapman opens to seasonal breezes. It was definitely not a River Oaks traditional. Last summer, Terry Doody, who has known Chapman for 25 years, sat down with her and Ballard to ask just how somebody matches a house to a personality.

CITE: Judy, why a house like this, at this time in your life?

CHAPMAN: I had always wanted to build a house. And one day I realized that I was approaching 60 and wasn't getting any younger or richer. Sixty is the only birthday that has ever given me pause. My River Oaks friends thought I was nuts.

CITE: What were your first ideas, your specifications?

CHAPMAN: When we started I didn't want to tell Scott too much. I looked at it as designing a functional piece of art, and I didn't have too many practical considerations, because it was just me living here. There was a real sense of freedom doing it at this stage of my life.

BALLARD: When we first met, you brought with you a picture of a house you liked. Northeastern style. It was striking, although restrained. Then everything you said after that was a clue to me you wanted something different. What we ended up with was not restrained at all.

CHAPMAN: I had no idea what the house would look like, but it had to feel right, and I wanted to see the outdoors. At our second meeting, which was actually a

All photos by Michael Ortega, except where noted

couple of years later, after interruptions and trying to find property to build on, Scott started asking me all these questions that I didn't have answers to.

I did tell him I wanted a contemporary house with windows, bookshelves, fireplaces. I wanted a "live-in" kitchen with a table and a sitting area, where I now have the television. I wanted my laundry room downstairs and a bar. An aging friend of mine told me that I had to have a powder room at the back of the house, off the kitchen, in addition to the one at the front, "because when you get old, you have to use the bathroom every time you turn on the water."

I also wanted the master bedroom on the front and upstairs, so I could sleep with the windows open. I realized I could do here what I have done at the summer house I rented in Maine, but just at a different time of year.

BALLARD: We started with three completely different floor plans for discussion purposes and evolved into a totally different plan—a U-shaped house, with an interior atrium as the focal point, with maximum exterior wall space for the greatest amount of natural light, and places on the inside to hang Judy's art. We started in a fairly conventional way, but when you mentioned the metal siding, I knew we could widen our explorations. I thought the small study models really turned you on to the excitement of doing something different, more sculptural.

CHAPMAN: I'm very visual. The house had to look right.

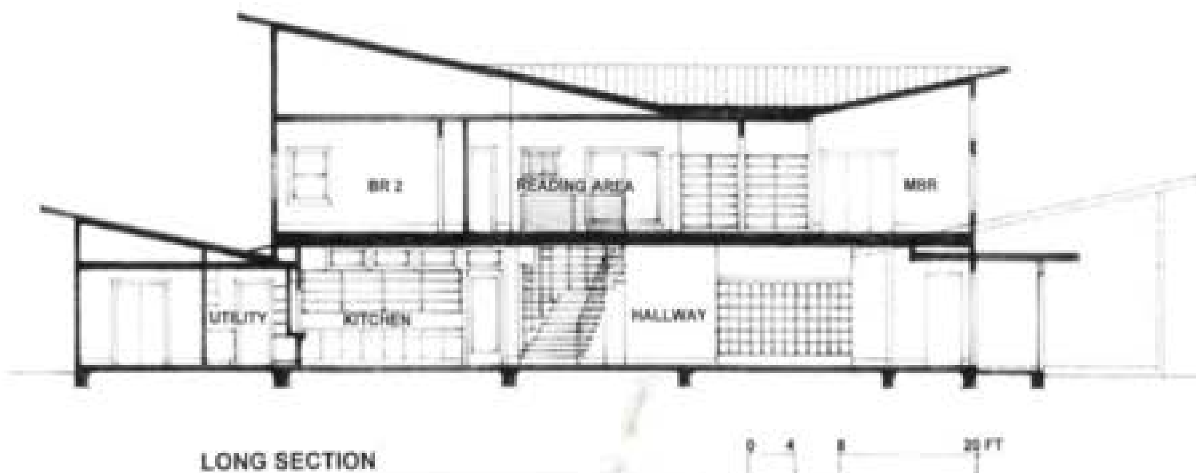
CITE: First it had to feel right and then look right? Is this place more tactile or visual?

CHAPMAN: Both—it's the emotion of the place, my emotion, that's what I feel.

CITE: Did you two have any conflicts? Any dead ends?

CHAPMAN: We didn't really have any! I never felt Scott had any desires of his own except to please me...

Top: In Judy Chapman's house (Scott Ballard Architect, 2000), a U-shaped interior and an abundance of glass make it possible to look from the living room across an atrium into the kitchen. **Above:** When a third-story library proved too costly, a stairwell library, or "li-story," was designed as an alternative.



Plans and section courtesy Scott Ballard

inside

CITE: Does the AIA know about this, Scott? Does your wife?

CHAPMAN: I did suggest as we went along that a third-story library would be cool. Scott said we couldn't afford it and went on to design a stairwell library, which is a real surprise, my favorite feature of the house.

BALLARD: I went to the University of Texas and was educated as an engineer and an architect both. I actually enjoyed the engineering part more—the way things work. The client's assignment and the limits of the budget are for me the artistic challenge. Not any "signature" look. After we decided on the "li-stairy" and I suggested we put your office under the stairs, you were on board immediately.

CHAPMAN: I wanted a desk in a space that could be completely closed off. I'm neat about everything but my desk. The office was going to go upstairs, but we changed that during the framing.

CITE: During the framing? Are decisions and new directions like this, at this stage, normal?

BALLARD: Normally you try to make all the decisions before construction, because changes during construction usually come with a high price tag. I try to take advantages of opportunities to make "free" changes, however, which can be done if the owner and architect are actively involved during framing and can catch things early enough.

CHAPMAN: I was there every day and I could say anything to Scott. Also, the builder, Allan Edwards, was very cooperative. I even added two windows in the master bedroom after the framing was done. I just walked into the room and wanted to see through the wood to the outside.

BALLARD: My feeling is that the whole process is always all collaboration. Judy might not be able to tell me what she wants in architectural terms, but she will know it when you show it to her. She gives me her program in terms of rooms and budget, but throughout the whole process I am learning what she wants exactly and what she's open to consider. She is learning of the possibilities of self-expression, and I am thinking dimly of how the evolving plan will mass out as a structure.

CHAPMAN: The empty shape of this house is finally Scott's idea.

BALLARD: But it is very important to me that I am never in the position of trying to force an idea on a client. I try to give

them choices, between what they might think they wanted and something that might be more architecturally interesting.

CITE: Judy, when I first saw this house in its finished state, I didn't think it "looked like" you at all. This house is cool, hard-edged, monochromatic. You are warm, plush, and colorful.

CHAPMAN: Not cool and monochromatic. I say calm and peaceful, which are things I never had in my life until my late fifties. I would say the house reflects my inner self at this time in life. I also feel it's warm and inviting. My friends have said so too; they feel that my things make it warm. The clay artist who designed the tile and sink in the guest bath, Le Beth Lammers, and Gertrude Barnstone, who did the screens on the front door and fireplaces, they added a lot. And so did Steve Dvorak, who went to Rice, who did the fireplace surrounds.

CITE: And the house number is in violet neon. But you have told me you that you painted the inside of the garage periwinkle for the days you might feel in sensory deprivation.

CHAPMAN: Yes, I did! But this house feels energizing to me, a real deliberate transition into what Scott called earlier the "unforeseen." I felt I finally had the courage to build the house I wanted and to hell with what others thought.

CITE: What do others think now?

CHAPMAN: Well, my family really likes it a lot. My severest critic now says she could live here, but another old friend calls it a "tin shack."

CITE: Do you think of the light in this house as a color? As I sit here and get used to looking at the whole place, the tones of this room come out, emerge, like the blacks and whites in an Ansel Adams photo. Is that fair?

BALLARD: I think so too.

CHAPMAN: As you can see on the walls, I love black and white photography.

CITE: The textures of the wood, the fabrics, the stone surfaces are still a muted palette, just richer than I first thought. Cool and peaceful but not monotonous. Maybe that's what is calm and energizing both. Has living here changed you?

CHAPMAN: I have become a gardener. But this house is a sign of changes already started in me, not their cause. I love looking out these windows. The fact that I can see through the house, from the kitchen in the back, across the atrium, and out through the living room windows to the house across the street, is really cool. And my bedroom window lets me watch the sky turn, the light change, as I'm in bed. The blinds pull up from the bottom, not down.

CITE: What's the neighborhood beyond the windows like?

CHAPMAN: It's better than anywhere else I have ever lived! Its name is Colquitt Court, and it was built as a small, blue-collar subdivision in the 1930s. The little houses on Richmond that are now all shops were part of the original development. The neighbors are fabulous, and I've become the head of our civic association.

CITE: And it is all because you have these windows! This story even has a moral: Civic responsibility grows from your eyes on the street. One final thing—tell me more about the atrium. It's a jungle out there.

BALLARD: The atrium sits right across from the sliding-glass door/window on the stairs' landing, so the air really moves through here. It creates the house's chimney.

CITE: Does water run in? Those plants have loved the rain.

BALLARD: The roofs are tilted to conduct the water through the scupper into the pool and keep it running away from the house.

CHAPMAN: I wanted a round pool; I'd seen a picture of one. But the house shifted a little and a round pool would have been too big.

CITE: What's a scupper?

BALLARD: The extension of the gutter. I showed Judy a picture I took of the scupper Corbusier designed for his State House in Chandigarh, and she loved it. She always chose, as I said, the most adventurous and exciting option. You couldn't ask for a better client.

CITE: So Corbusier's scupper has come to Colquitt Court. And Judy's smiling. I think we can stop here. ■

Opposite page: Plans and section of Chapman's house, showing how it wraps around three sides of a central atrium.
Top: The scupper Ballard took from one designed by Corbusier for his house in Chandigarh.
Above: Front view from the street.

All photos © 2006 Eric Hester, except where noted.

Dew Drop In

A plantation house is saved,

BY BARRY MOORE

Photo courtesy Historic Houston.

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE that Houston was once an agricultural community—a small town surrounded by huge cattle ranches and plantations growing cotton, corn, and sugar. From an economic point of view, though, it was a great place to grow things: Farmers and ranchers were able to get their products to market with relative ease thanks to Buffalo Bayou and the developing railroad network.

Sadly, almost no early plantation structures remain in the region to remind us of that history. The Kellum-Noble House—built in 1848 on the banks of Buffalo Bayou and today the gem of the Heritage Society's collection of historic buildings in Sam Houston Park—has long been the rare exception. Soon, however, it will be less of a rarity. Thanks to the efforts of a local family, as well as students from the University of Houston, Houston preservationists, and Fort Bend County, one of the area's last remaining sugar plantation houses will be restored and opened as a museum, offering yet another glimpse into our agricultural heritage.

The house, known as the Dew Plantation House, has been home to the Dew family for more than a century. Over that time it has moved from being the center of a thriving agricultural enterprise to an aging remnant of an era past. Karl Kilian, owner of the Brazos Bookstore (and a guest editor of this issue of *Cite*), has fond memories of the Dew Plantation, being himself a part of the large extended Dew family. During his childhood there were trips to the house at least once a month, and on every major holiday. Kilian especially remembers the largest dining table he had ever seen—literally a groaning board.

To be welcomed at the Dew Plantation was a city kid's dream: It offered 1,000 acres of Brazos River bottom to explore and picnic in, dewberries and pecans to gather, deer and armadillos to chase, and horses to ride. Fifty years ago it seemed like a remote wilderness, reached through a forest of oil derricks and pump jacks, though it was only 30 minutes from Houston. It was "the quintessential Coastal Plain experience," as Kilian describes it.

The history of the area bears Kilian out. The land between Oyster Creek and the Brazos River—rich bottomland with warm humid weather, mild winters, and ample rain—was both ideal for growing sugar cane and conveniently located for cargo steamboats. In the mid-1800s, this "Sugar Land" became known as the "sugar bowl of Texas." The Imperial Sugar Company completed a mill here in 1896, with the capacity to refine 100,000 pounds of sugar a day, effectively increasing the demand for rich, sugar-growing land. Anticipating this sugar boom, in 1895 three brothers—Dr. Hugh Saunders Dew, Henry Wise Dew, and George Louis Dew—purchased the 1,000-acre Belvidere Plantation, near the DeWalt Settlement between Sugar Land and Missouri City, from their childless uncle.

The plantation house that came with the purchase ended up being destroyed by fire. That house had been close to the Brazos, but for their new plantation house the three brothers chose a different site, one near the railroad tracks and what was later to become State Highway 6. Family history holds that the brothers built the present Dew Plantation House late in 1900, following the devastating Galveston Hurricane. The new house was sited facing the road and the town of DeWalt across the tracks, with an allee of oak trees lining the drive. The original building was a two-story, "ell-shaped" frame farmhouse in late Southern Plantation style, with Greek Revival and Victorian detailing. Three ionic columns supported the original porch and balcony, with chimneys on the north and south sides. Front doors on the first and second floors featured wood paneled doors with glass transoms and sidelights. The parlor and dining rooms boasted Greek Revival mantle pieces.

and with it memories of a Houston past

The Dew brothers prospered here, raising sugar, corn, cotton, and cattle. In 1912 they organized the Dew Brothers Syrup Company. In 1931 Henry Wise Dew was one of the eight founders of the Houston Fat Stock Show and Rodeo.

Following the deaths of the brothers, the property passed to their two sisters and one sister-in-law. Upon the death of the sister-in-law in 1958, the sisters split the property: Ruth Dew Lalley got most of the land (which is now incorporated into the Quail Valley subdivision), while Jessie Dew Agnew got the house and the land facing Highway 6. The property then passed to Agnew's niece, and ultimately to two great-nieces, sisters Muffie and June Moroney.

Last year, the Moroneys placed the Dew Plantation House and the 37 acres that remained of the plantation's land on the market. The Johnson Development Corporation, developers of master-planned communities such as Sienna Plantation, Riverstone, Fall Creek, and Tuscan Lakes, bought the property with the idea of building a retail commercial project there. Despite the sale, Muffie Moroney had hopes that the plantation house that had been home to her family for generations could be saved, perhaps by being adapted into a centerpiece of the new development.

Unfortunately, Moroney's persuasive talents were insufficient to convince the new owners to incorporate a restored historic house as a centerpiece of the development. And there the story might have ended. But Moroney was unwilling to give up. She was insistent on finding a new life for the house she had loved all her life.

With Moroney's sponsorship and encouragement, the Workshop for Historic Architecture at the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture was engaged to help provide a first step in saving the house. Under the direction of instructor Jim Arnold, students researched the Dew Plantation, completing their effort in the summer of 2005. As is typical when architecture students undertake a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), the group of six and Arnold spent a host of Saturdays photographing, measuring, documenting, and researching the plantation house, as well as interviewing surviving Dew family members. The resulting field notes were transformed into computerized plans, elevations, sections, and details, and the photographs and research were incorporated into a historic report, all of which will be deposited in the HABS Archive in the Library of Congress, and ultimately displayed on HABS' website.

Concurrent with the student effort, Moroney began to hunt for organizations willing to restore the house and open it as a museum. Fort Bend County became interested, especially due to the vision of County Commissioner Grady Prestage, and the a non-profit preservation organization Historic Houston came on board as well. Johnson Development Corp. also agreed to participate, donating 7.5 acres adjacent to Kitty Hollow Park—just a short distance away down Highway 6—as a new site for the plantation house.

Finally, late last year the roadmap and cast of characters was finalized for saving the Dew Plantation House. Moroney donated the house to Historic Houston, which then demolished various parts of the structure that had been added since 1900, paring it down to its original size and shape. Next, Historic Houston moved the house to Kitty Hollow Park, where it will be deeded to Fort Bend County. Then the county, or a designated organization, will seek funds to restore the Dew Plantation House as a museum.

No one believes that restoration is easy. In fact, in the case of the Dew Plantation House, it would have been impossible without the vision and determination of a very few people. But this is an endangered building story with a happy ending, one that gives Houstonians another entry into the agricultural past of the city. ■

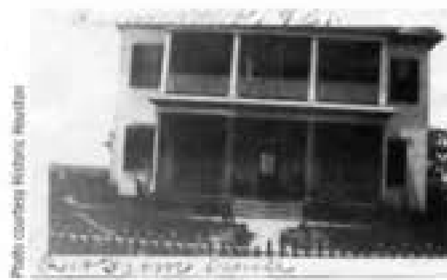


Photo courtesy Historic Houston

Opposite page, top: To get to the original plantation house (right), outbuildings had to be stripped away (left). **Opposite page, bottom:** Two generations of the Dew family in front of their homestead, circa early 20th century. **Top:** Dew Plantation House, 1901. **Bottom:** Interior fire place, 2006.

insideSTORIES

All photos © 2006 Eric Hester

THE ART GUYS MAKE A HOME

Mixing work and life calls for a few large rooms and lots of light

BY MITCHELL J. SHIELDS

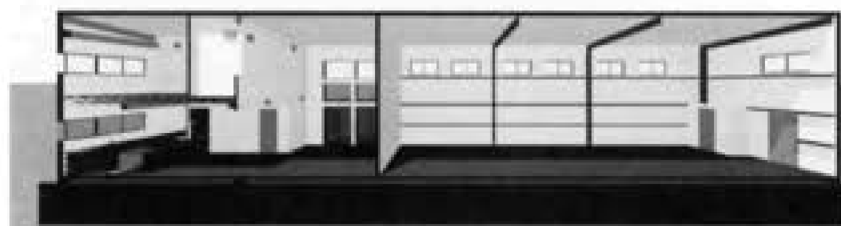
Opposite page: The Art Guys' studio. On the other side of the wall at the far end is Michael Galbreth's living quarters. **Left:** Dining room and living room, with kitchen to the right. Upstairs to the right are the bedrooms and bathrooms. **Below:** Longitudinal and horizontal cross sections of the house/studio, also known as the Art Guys New World Headquarters (Cameron Armstrong Architects, 2005).

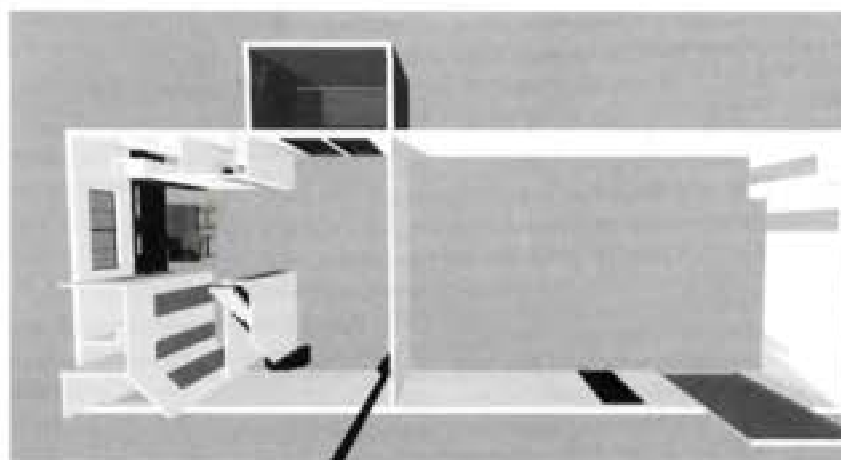
IT WOULDN'T BE suprising if some people, upon their first view of the Art Guys New World Headquarters, were a bit surprised, or even disappointed. After all, the Art Guys—as Houston artists Jack Massing and Michael Galbreth term their creative partnership—are hardly known as reticent. If anything, they're known as the exact opposite. These are the men who, for one art project, walked through downtown Houston with buckets of water attached to their feet, in another (titled "A Ton of Beautiful Women") asked different women to weigh themselves until a total of a ton of female flesh had been reached, and in yet another wore suits covered with corporate logos for a year, effectively making themselves into human billboards, or human NASCAR cars. The *New York Times* described them as a "cross between Dada and David Letterman, John Cage and the Smothers Brothers." Modestly reserved, they are not.

Their New World Headquarters, though, could easily be described as reserved, even modest. Tucked away on one side of a double-sized lot in Acres Homes, it seems less nondescript than invisible, almost hidden in the trees. As architect Cameron Armstrong, who worked with the Art Guys to design and build the combination home/studio, remarks, the Headquarters almost appears to be an abandoned industrial building, something stumbled upon and refurbished slightly for artistic purposes. That it was in fact built from scratch, in part to create just such an impression, is evidence that appearances can be deceiving. And in that way it fits into the Art Guys aesthetic better than it at first seems to.

"There's a difference between our work and our lives," admits Michael Galbreth, "a big difference. I don't know that a lot of people recognize that. But then again, we've purposefully muddied the waters a little bit." The story of their New World Headquarters doesn't exactly make the waters less muddy, but it does reveal something of how life affects art, art affects life, and how the meeting of the two can sometimes create something quite unexpected.

Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing met more than two decades ago at the University of Houston, beginning in 1983 the partnership that would end up making them arguably their home city's most visible artists. Six years later, in 1989, they'd become successful enough that they decided they needed a home base from which to work, and where they could invite people by to see and participate in their art. "Before that," says Galbreth,





Sections courtesy Cameron Armstrong

Top: Front façade. The entrance to the living quarters is through a door placed at an angle into the inset, left. The studio entrance is underneath the porch cover. **Above:** The view through the kitchen into the dining room. The ceilings here were left unfinished, revealing the ductwork. **Opposite page:** Looking down from the top of the stairs toward the dining room and back yard.

"our work was more conceptual or performance oriented. But by then we had started doing more actual 'works,' physical pieces that required a studio. We'd changed in what we did, so we needed to change where we were."

What Galbreth and Massing found for what they came to call their World Headquarters was an abandoned mattress factory on 22nd Street near Shepherd. By the time they located and decided to rent it, the 19th-century structure had been empty for ten years. It was little more than an empty shell. For Galbreth and Massing that was perfect. They could build out the interior (thanks in no small part to art-friendly landlords) to meet their needs, which was in essence one big room in which to create art, and smaller rooms for Massing's bedroom and Galbreth's bedroom. The line between life and work was limited at best, nonexistent at worst. The living quarters connected directly to the studio, and when friends gathered for openings or parties the distinction between home and office tended to disappear.

For young artists, for people to whom life was work and little else, this was fine. "Crazy as the Art Guys are, we were a stabilizing influence on the neighborhood," recalls Galbreth. "We had regular activities, we were always around. We were a fixture." But just as their work had matured to make a studio a necessity, over the next decade their lives matured to make living at that studio less attractive. By 1999, Jack Massing had gotten married and moved out, commuting to the World Headquarters for work, but leaving Galbreth as the building's single occupant. Then Galbreth met his wife to be, and by 2003 he was married and ready for something different as well.

"The old studio, I loved it so much. Jack and I were both very close to that building because so much of the Art Guys' history is there," Galbreth says. "For us, it was an extraordinarily important building. But our personal lives changed, and we both required other things." Other factors came into play as well. Massing and Galbreth had been thinking for a while about the advantages of owning their own space rather than renting. And the real estate market was such that mortgage money was cheap. It made the decision to move easier than it might otherwise have been. "That situation, when you decide to move, is based on so many variables," Galbreth says. "It was a painful yet wonderful thing to think about. And if we were going to build a place, this was the time."

One thing Massing and Galbreth agreed upon was that anything new they came up with reflect the things they liked about their original World Headquarters. One of the characteristics they most wanted to retain was the quality of the light, which filtered in from windows set high in the walls. They also liked the adaptability of the open space, the freedom it provided. Any new World Headquarters, they decided, would have to be based in large part upon their old World Headquarters.

"When we were talking about what they wanted," says Cameron Armstrong, "the process became that we'd assume they were going to renovate and adapt an existing building to suit their needs. And then the question was, what sort of building would you like to adapt? Once we decided that, we'd go ahead and create a new building to fit those requirements. So it's like we were designing the perfect abandoned warehouse."

Armstrong was brought in by Massing and Galbreth in part because they knew they'd need an architect to give physical form to their ideas; in part because they knew they wanted a metal building, and Armstrong is recognized for his metal structures; and in part because he and the Art Guys had been friends for years, and they very much wanted to hear what he had to say about their plans for a new home. Armstrong for his part was happy to comply; over the years he's had a number of artists for clients, and says he likes the give and take that working with an artist entails. Some clients, he notes, have no idea what they want and depend completely on the architect for ideas. Other clients know exactly what they're after, and get an architect simply to carry out their existing vision. But artists, says Armstrong, while they often have distinct desires are still working on the best way to satisfy them. Collaboration is key to his work method, Armstrong says, and artists are often the best collaborators, engaging in a give and take that provides him a chance to surprise himself, and be surprised by others.

One of the surprises in this instance was the degree to which the lot the Art Guys had found to build on influenced

the design. Located in a semi-rural section of Acres Homes in northwest Houston, the lot was in fact two adjoining lots, neither of which had anything on it other than a tangle of overgrown briars and a small forest of trees. The land was purchased not just for a studio, but also for living quarters for Michael Galbreth and his wife, Rainey Knudson, who operates the arts website Glasstire.com. Initially, the idea was to have two structures, one a home for Galbreth and Knudson, the other a studio for the Art Guys, connected by a sky bridge. But that proved impractical in part because it would require crossing the line that connected the two lots. Even though both lots had the same owner, as far as the city of Houston was concerned they were separate properties that would require separate permitting.

The resulting bureaucratic entanglement helped scuttle the two structure approach, so the Art Guys and Armstrong settled on the adapted warehouse idea, where one part would be a studio and another part a home. To avoid the lot lines issue, the studio/home would be placed on just one of the lots, with the other left as yard. And since everyone wanted to retain as many trees as possible, it was decided that the least forested space would become the construction site.

That space was close to the right edge of the property, and hardly dominated it. For the Art Guys that worked fine. "The studio was to be a workspace, not an expression of their artistic ideas," notes Armstrong. "One thing about a warehouse design is that it provides a sense of anonymity, it lets you fade into the background. That's something artists tend to like, since they get so much attention elsewhere. The placement of the building only added to that."

As for the building itself, says Armstrong, the major issue was its size. "In the end, their studio is a production facility," he notes, "and they need a lot of freedom in there. So in terms of design, as long as we got the perfect volume, we were good. Whatever was done inside was a secondary issue." The result was a simple 110 foot by 40 foot rectangle created from five distinct bays, the ones at each end being 25-feet wide and the center three being 20 feet. The two bays at the left end would house the living quarters; the remaining three bays would constitute the studio. The roof would be sloped from front to back like an oversized shed. In many ways the design was simplicity itself. "This is an industrially fabricated building," Galbreth admits. "There is nothing at all to distinguish it from a commercial building."

But for all that, the details mattered. It was the details that would capture the spirit of the original World Headquarters. "We went round and round in our discussions," Armstrong says. "It's like a spiral. You start out and you can move everything three or four feet in any direction, and at the end of the day you can't even move it 3/8ths of an inch, because it's all right where it's supposed to be." Armstrong recalls there were constant trips back to the old mattress factory to check proportions and light. "We constantly used it as a reference for the New World Headquarters," he says. "But the curious thing is, in the end, the new studio was actually quite different. It had different materials and different proportions. Somehow, though, it still had the same feel."

On a warm fall afternoon, Michael Galbreth sits on the large porch fronting his and Jack Massing's New World Headquarters. The porch, though sizeable, is little more than a sealed concrete slab open on three sides and covered by a metal roof. Still, it's cozy in the afternoon sun. It will be perfect, Galbreth notes, for parties, when revelers can empty out of the studio just behind him to enjoy the fresh air. It will also be a good place to work on art not suited for the indoors. At the original World Headquarters, he notes, they used the driveway for that purpose.

The Art Guys have not been here long. The land was purchased in 2002, and construction began in the fall of 2003, with the slab being poured around Thanksgiving. But it wasn't until spring 2005 that the building was ready to move into, and even today there's work that remains to be done. One reason for the delay is that while laying the slab and raising the exterior walls and ceiling were done by contractors, much of the interior work has been done by the Art Guys themselves, particularly Galbreth.

The studio, the 2,600-square-foot expanse of which can be seen through a door not far from where Galbreth sits, is still little more than a shell. A temporary office has been set up inside, but the building-out that Galbreth and Massing have in mind has had to wait while a large art project for the Phoenix airport is finished. A walkway from the looped drive that curves in front of the building remains to be laid, and a wood floor is still to be placed in Galbreth's living quarters.

As to those living quarters, the only way to get to them is through a door on the outside. There's no direct inside connection to the studio itself, a product, Galbreth says, of getting to an age where he appreciates the separation between home and work, even if that separation is just a short walk. "In the old Headquarters the house and the studio eventually became just one big space," Galbreth says. "I was never really away from work, and when we had parties or openings there was no way to close the apartment off. After a while it's just not pleasant to wake up to the smell of stale beer in the morning. And besides, Rainey just wouldn't have it."

It was his wife Rainey that worked with Armstrong most directly to shape the living area, Galbreth says. "I told Rainey to do what she wanted, it was her house," he notes. "I could live anywhere." He and Massing focused most of their attention on the studio. One of the easy decisions was to keep all the windows high on the wall, to replicate the light that had fallen in the original World Headquarters. The windows, running in a row just under the roofline, appear small, but do a surprising job of keeping the interior illuminated. And because all the support beams are on the edge, the studio is supremely open, little more than a space waiting for something to happen. A similar sense of light and airiness are found in the living space, although in this instance a wall of glass that opens to the back yard helps.

"One of the most beautiful things about this building is the metal joists, which we left exposed," Galbreth says. "They're attached to the perimeter of the building, and that's what supports the second floor in the living quarters. All the walls are non-load-bearing. So if we wanted to move a wall, we moved it. It gave us a lot of freedom. I love it. I think it's almost Shaker in its simplicity. It's very much a minimalist style and approach. There's an elegance to it I really like."

"What ultimately made this work is that there were a lot of conflicting desires and needs that had to be accommodated," Galbreth adds. "Everyone was in agreement about certain things, such as having an unfinished concrete floor or leaving a lot of the construction elements exposed so the materials could speak for themselves. But everyone also had their distinct ideas. if Jack had done it alone, the building would have been different. If I had done it alone, it would have been different. If Rainey had done it alone, or Cameron, it wouldn't have been the same. But we did it together, merging our needs, and that's the only way we could have ended up with what we have. And I think it really works. I just wish we'd done it a long time ago." ■

All photos © 2006 Eric Hester

It Fakes a Village

BY DAISY KONE

"The 20th century was about getting around. The 21st century will be about staying in a place worth staying in."
— James Kuntsler

ASIDE FROM THE splendid gift of Hermann Park, with its perpetual endowment of communal grace, the public realm of Houston is, for the most part, the street. Like many cities whose development occurred primarily after World War II, Houston lacks the urbanity that makes Charleston or San Francisco so beguiling. For the last 50 years, almost without fail, we have built Houston's urban places primarily for the convenience of cars and trucks. In doing so, we have unwittingly nurtured a quality that fosters a dull ambivalence to our own culture, a culture that evolved in part from our communal experiences within a human-scaled public domain.

City forms evolved from the pattern of shelters grouped around an open, communal area. The vital functions of food preparation, policy making, childcare, and weapons manufacturing were performed in the open area, making it more important than the surrounding shelters. Later, this open space evolved into the agora, town plaza, or square.

While Houston lacks an abundance of plazas and squares, this doesn't mean we can't have a vibrant public realm defined by the street. Street patterns are the framework for some of the most desirable urban places ever built, such as those found in Savannah, New York City, Mt. Carmel, or Princeton. But Houston's urban places are formed by streets and public frontages designed to the standards of the suburb, a place whose very existence depends on the car. These standards make the street's primary purpose the delivery of a car to a parking lot, whose overpowering prominence makes many of our favorite Houston places simply conduits to destinations, not destinations on their own. The only important experiences occur inside the buildings.

The Measure of Urbanism

Places in Houston do exist where experiences include not just the destination, but also what might happen along the way to it. One of these is the narrow street grid around Lanier Middle School. A mixture of homes and shopping is found within a quarter mile radius of the school's location at Westheimer and Woodhead. Sidewalks are included within the public frontage of the streets, while the grounds of the school provide a type of park or open space. Westheimer Road to the north is lined with restaurants, bars, and shops. Westheimer's widening over time to four lanes has compromised the original pedestrian environment, but this is mitigated by parallel parking on the street, which provides both a traffic calming effect and a buffer that makes those who choose to walk rather than drive feel safer. The older buildings that were once grocery stores, gas stations, and shops remain commercial, and are open to the street with porches or storefronts. Many neighborhood residents choose to walk from their homes to shop or eat, a choice rarely made in the Galleria area, a place with no lack of shopping and dining destinations and one also replete with condominiums full of potential pedestrians.

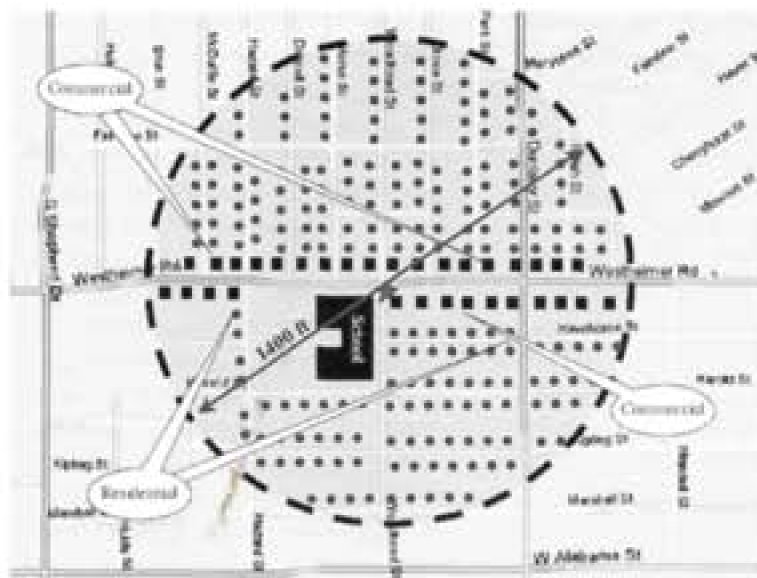
The difference between the two neighborhoods is that in the one around Lanier Middle School, the one with walkers, the phenomenon of the Pedestrian Shed is still working. The Pedestrian Shed, codified

Finding a place worth walking in Houston isn't impossible, but it isn't easy

as a design tool of the New Urbanism, is equivalent to a five-minute walk or a distance of 1,400 feet (a quarter mile). In general, this is the distance people are willing to walk to reach a destination. For anything exceeding this, we tend to go back to our cars. This phenomenon can be observed in many existing situations. Anchor stores in shopping malls are placed accordingly. In many European cities, pubs are situated at points separated by this distance. This is also the basic standard for the placement of Starbucks cafes along Madison Avenue. From historic American neighborhoods to European villages, this measure is a constant both rational and empirical.

The Pedestrian Shed is a simple measure, like the two finger width between eyebrow and brim that determines the correct placement of a cowboy hat. Think of it as the urban equivalent of Vitruvian Man. This famous drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, depicting a male figure in two superimposed positions with his arms apart, circumscribed in a circle within a square, is also referred to as the Canon of Proportions. Da Vinci made the drawing to study the male body measurements as determined by Vitruvius. The measure of each part is a function of its relationship to the whole. From this we know a palm is the width of four fingers, the length of a man's outspread arms equals his height, the length of the hand is one-tenth the height, and so on. The symmetry and harmonic relationships so clearly illuminated in the drawing were incorporated over and over again into Renaissance architectural proportions.

The Pedestrian Shed, like the Golden Mean or Golden Section (proportioning ratio of 1:1.618), is universally found. It is as observable in the traditional urban environment as the Fibonnacci Series is in nature. The square mile containing Lanier Middle School as its center is a good example, and is abutted by several other such square mile areas that more or less adhere to this principle. Thus, when employed as a canon for planning, the 1,400 foot maximum distance that should be between destinations sets the "neighborhood" boundaries. As in the Lanier example, each "neighborhood" is planned with an accessible center (a park, shops, a school). Walking from home to the post office, the library, the school, or the shops



Opposite page, top: Four-way stops, single-depth parking, and short blocks slow down traffic in Rice Village, allowing pedestrians a sense of safety.
Top: The single crosswalk that connects the two sides of Highland Village can be daunting to pedestrians, who have to confront cars moving quickly along an arterial street.
Above: A diagram of the Pedestrian Shed surrounding Lanier Middle School, indicating the distance people are willing to walk to reach a destination, and the different destinations available within that distance.

In Rice Village, a closely connected mix of retail and service businesses, along with a good supply of restaurants, gives shoppers a reason to stay out of their cars and on their feet.

provides social contact. Such social contact within the Shed is further supported by the human scale of buildings, whose frontages accommodate not just sidewalks wide enough for two people to walk abreast in both directions, but also conveniently located benches, lighting, and landscaping, all of which help to make walking desirable and secure. Buildings should be permeable, with large windows allowing views into their interior, where food, goods, and activity entice people to come inside. Most important, the assembly of the street, public frontage, and buildings is conceived as a unified whole, with the geometry of the cross section (building height to street/public-frontage width) having ideal proportions that address human scale and prevent the street from becoming a quasi-freeway.

A Good Tool is Hard to Find

The Montrose District, Midtown, and West University Place contain remnants of this intuitive discipline. The remnants peek through layers of subsequent development, only to disappear again under the crushing footprint of a shopping center or arterial roadway.

Some might wonder why all neighborhoods can't have the positive aspects delivered by the Pedestrian Shed, but it's not that easy. When it comes to cities, Houston in particular, the complexity of competing goals can be overwhelming. Historically, when cities began to be planned instead of growing naturally like yeast colonies, heroic attempts emerged to codify their nature. Professions developed to focus solely on particular issues. As a result, urban place making today is embedded in a tangle of public policy, codes, regulations, and requirements of financial institutions. It all forms overwhelming barriers to innovative design. In many instances, city planning has succeeded in nothing more than the laying over of a calligraphic shroud that encodes uses and limitations. The codes are hieroglyphs, powerful as symbols but dispossessed when translated into real actions. I tend to agree with Andres Duany's comment on the failure of planning as process: When the job seems too difficult, the tool is probably wrong.

Buckminster Fuller once said that when he was working on a problem he never thought about beauty, he only thought about solving the problem. He also said that when he arrived at a solution, if it was not beautiful he knew it was wrong. Charles Bohl, director of the Knight Center for Urban Studies at the University of Miami, says that one of the most destructive forces working against the construction of urban places is the grafting of suburban types—building-lot configurations, street types, landscaping, public works, open spaces—onto urban settings. This is the unsettling reality of the Galleria-Post Oak area, which expresses a high urban density using a suburban strip-mall form. The problem of the suburban model is that it results in places that are too dense to be country, too sparse to be urban, and too auto-dependent to be a viable public realm. This condition relegates Galleria power-shoppers to commingling within the confines of the mall, the modern substitute for the public square. It's not that this is a false experience, just that it is the *only* experience. And the story is the same for many other favorite destinations, such as Highland Village—it's a one-liner.

Village Life

In spite of how far away we move from the original village idea of community, we still feel it necessary to evoke it, if only by name. Having had our pedestrian rights and public gathering places slowly eroded by the supremacy of the car, we substitute facsimiles. Hence we append certain nomenclature—village, plaza, courtyard, square, meadow, woods, plantation, colony—to contemporary built forms. Meyerland Plaza, Highland Village, and First Colony are actually nothing of the sort. Yet bizarrely, we accept these appellations despite the discrepancy. Does this reveal some crack in the psychology of individual and collective identity? Or is it merely nostalgia?

To extend the question, consider the purpose of a shopping center name: that of improving customer capture ratio and brand recognition. Nostalgia is frequently called upon for the job. Using words such as village, plaza, or square handles this function while tapping into the desire to belong. The names bring to mind images of people strolling, picnicking, sitting on benches, smiling as they greet one another, and discussing the news of the day. In a simpler time, these activities were a byproduct of obtaining necessary provisions. Now we take care of business as efficiently as possible, obliterating the most basic opportunities for communal experience.

In Highland Village, a "lifestyle center," there's not much to do except get inside the shops as fast as possible, in spite of a prodigious effort towards decorative fuss. The Village boasts an allee of resolute palm trees lining the street, a Houston signifier for up-market shopping first utilized at the River Oaks Shopping Center. In Highland Village the trees are festooned with playful oversized flowers, which are changed periodically to reflect the seasons. A curved glass-block wall provides a backdrop to a bronze sculpture composed of five abstracted female shapes, presumably representing various incarnations of happy Village shoppers—young, old, single, in groups. These abstracted forms turn their back on the shops and gaze across Westheimer to the Pottery Barn, perhaps wondering how they might possibly get over there.

A small plaza sits in front of the grouping, completing an assembly whose entirety is, for the most part, viewed by people in cars speeding along Westheimer. As if this were not enough visual stimulation for the cars, an enormous berm is currently being constructed on either side of the sculpture plaza with the words "Highland" on one side and "Village" on the other. The letters are set at an angle, once again for the viewpoint of passing motorists, although a better vantage point might be from the air. Thus the Village's only example of public art and public plaza, albeit a small one, is directed at the car. Located where it is, very few people walk in front of it. Fittingly, not one of the symbolic female shoppers has any feet.

The stylization of Village life into a series of parking lots creates a condition in which walking is not forbidden, just made empty of promise. All the necessary ingredients for a pleasant pedestrian experience are present: sidewalks, public art, permeable buildings with windows showing goods, interesting shopping, street trees, parking in front of stores, etc. But they are all in the wrong proportions or wrong places. They are devoted to making Highland Village a single gigantic billboard.

Navigating the convoluted leftover spaces by foot is tricky. Leaving Crate and Barrel by the east doorway, the pedestrian is confused. The tendency is to turn north towards the other shops. But once this decision is made, accessing the Westheimer sidewalk to get to the other side of Drexel is inconvenient and awkward. Therefore the pedestrian's preferred method for getting to the shops on Drexel's west side is the mid-block run. Even mothers pushing baby strollers run this gauntlet, dashing between cars, some of which, thank goodness, might actually be slowing down for a red light.

Pedestrians who turn south or exit Crate and Barrel's Westheimer doors are greeted by a blank space containing a line of white bollards that guard the Crate and Barrel storefront. The configuration of this ambiguous space makes it unsuitable as a sidewalk, parking lot, or plaza, although it does contain four parallel parking spaces that only the cognoscenti have discovered. This is a wasted opportunity to pull pedestrians in front of the invitingly open Crate and Barrel building, which boasts ample fenestration, as well as beautiful lines and massing. Merchandise is attractively displayed, but once again, more cars move by this façade than people. Just beyond the blank space, the peek-a-boo sidewalk along Westheimer doesn't look very friendly, given that only four inches of curb separate walkers from heavy traffic.

Thus walking around Highland Village is surprisingly discomfiting. An engorged Westheimer Road reams out the Village, breaking it into two pieces. Here, the street comes into its full glory as a six-lane arterial feeding cars to Loop 610 or the Galleria and back. To confound the problem for pedestrians, anxious shoppers, keen to initiate the hunt, frequently jump the lights at the Village's only pedestrian crossing, located at Drexel and Westheimer. Two fading white stripes painted on the street are merely lip service to minimum code standards; the crossing is almost imperceptible. No other signage, change of paving materials, or geometry alert drivers to the importance of this intersection to pedestrians. Contrast this with the beribboned archways soaring over the north and south parking lot entrances. Pedestrians may have been left on their own, but a great deal of effort is invested in showing cars where to turn.

The original Highland Village was built before people began to miss historic public spaces such as the courthouse square or the farmers' market, places we long took for granted. Even as Westheimer grew from two lanes to six, it wasn't seen to matter that it gutted Highland Village; movement between the shopping center's two halves was expected to be by car. Central Market did not exist then, but now that it does, how disappointing it is to be unable to eat breakfast or lunch there and then walk directly over to the Village shops on a Saturday. Now nothing short of a pedestrian bridge could improve the ugly, circuitous route to the pedestrian crossing at Drexel. If half as much attention was given to the pedestrian as is given to the car, Highland Village could be a great place to be, not just a great place to shop.

Connectivity

Conversely, in Rice Village, pedestrians share the street with drivers. Cars from the Texas Medical Center to Rice University to West University Place and beyond are filtered through Rice Village's strong street grid. Instead of slicing right through the middle of Rice Village, the traffic-laden arterial of Kirby Drive is an edge, and nobody walks it, just as no one does any arterial. Rice and University Boulevards carry a lot of traffic, but the benefit of the grid—connectivity—provides many different ways of moving cars through. The people who live in the Montrose area experienced the connectivity phenomenon first-hand when, after efforts to block the destruction of Spur 527 failed, their worst fears did not materialize. The existing street grid was actually able to deliver the cars that once spewed off U.S. 59 in a single stream to their various downtown destinations without severely compromising their neighborhood.

Sidewalks in Rice Village, whose minimum width—2.5 to 3 feet—is usually considered inadequate for pedestrian-friendly environments, are completely walkable. The short blocks, abundant four-way stops, and single-depth parking on every street slow auto speed and put barriers between cars and people, making walking completely non-threatening.

The additional parking load is deposited in a centrally located, free parking garage that sits in the middle of a block, not directly on the street. Other, smaller parking structures are placed on the north side, also off the street. Throughout the Village, the two-story building height and narrow travel-lane widths of the streets keep the scale appropriate to humans. Two mid-block passages through the buildings cut journeys in half for destinations on University, Rice, or Times Boulevards. This destination-driven urban plan has a rich mix of retail and service businesses, ample supply of restaurants, and shared streets, all parts of a robust formula encouraging people to spend time there and celebrating the extravagant variety of the commonplace.

The number of new apartment and other residential buildings around Rice Village is an acknowledgement of the growing awareness of a walkable neighborhood's value. The ability to live near work or shop without a car serves more than a social leveling or functional purpose. It invites immersion into the human drama, whether we are spectators or primary players. The public stage that is the street or square is also the clearinghouse of the community, giving inhabitants the chance to compare and contrast themselves with others, all types of others. This body-to-body type of social exchange—speaking, walking, mannerisms, dress—is not possible via cell phone car-to-car.

Recovery of Standards

Just as the full spectrum of developers, lenders, design and transportation engineers, and all the associated professions have contributed to the decline of public space, they are capable of aiding its recovery. The mission of the planning and landscape professions, as well as the engineering professions, is the recovery of the historical standards that exist and function in such places as Charleston, Princeton, Savannah, and Miami's South Beach. As proven by market value, increased health benefits, and public approval, these standards work in many situations and should be available for use again.

This need not and should not be a comprehensive application. Many urban building forms that are necessary for modern convenience (the parking lot, the drive-thru) inherently create undesirable street frontage. And conventional suburban development has a right to exist in the built environment. We just need to let go of the idiosyncratic idea that it must be the only form. Every city contains areas of existing or potential mixed use, and we should think twice before we dispose of them. The tendency to blanket our communities with the suburban forms responsible for traffic congestion and sprawl is strong in terms of the planning establishment's resistance to change. Nevertheless, Houston's pockets of potentially walkable urbanity are poised to become bright spots among the blanks of strip-mall parking lots. Reinforcing design elements of good public space would have the forceful effect of bringing more pedestrians, commerce, and safety to the neighborhoods, making the habitat of the urban environment more viable for its predominate species: humans.

"Tradition is the tending of the fire, not the worship of the ashes." — *Johan Wolfgang von Goethe* ■

All the advantages
& none of the risks

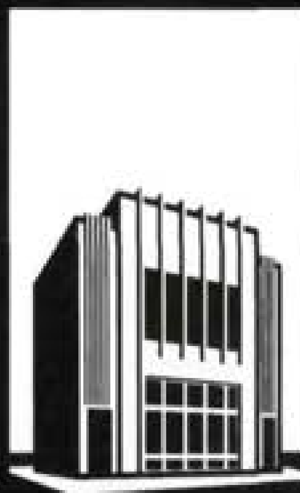
Choosing the right products for your home is a very important and personal decision. Getting the best in sound and vision doesn't need to be a personal risk when you choose Bang & Olufsen. Not only do we offer a unique range of audio and video solutions, we stand behind them as well with our three-year product warranty and in home service.

As a certified Bang & Olufsen dealer, we have extensive experience in custom design and expert installation. Choose Bang & Olufsen, a professional and reliable partner with over 30 years of industry experience.

Challenge your senses at:

Bang & Olufsen Houston Galleria
5015 Westheimer, Suite 3160
Houston, Texas 77056
713.960.6066

BANG & OLUFSEN B&O



MARKET HOURS
Saturday May 6 10–5
Sunday May 7 10–5
$5 Admission

LAWNDALE ART CENTER
4912 Main Street
713.528.5858
lawndaleartcenter.org

BENEFIT PREVIEW PARTY
FRIDAY MAY 5, 6-9 PM
$35 per person, $25 for Lawndale Members

FREE LECTURE
WEDNESDAY MAY 3, 7 PM

Decorative Arts dealers from Houston and beyond offering Furniture, Glass, Ceramics, Metalworks, and Fashion

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Lawndale's 20th Century Modern Market is the original antiques show of its kind held in the Southwest, exclusively featuring design of the twentieth century. This year's Market will feature specialist dealers from around the country, offering a variety of media including furniture, glass, ceramics, metalwork, textiles, objects d'art and fashion. Each year in conjunction with the Market, Lawndale sponsors a free public lecture on Modern design.

LIVE BEAUTIFULLY.

ligne roset

SNOWDONIA Bed. Design: Eric Jourdan.
Find inspiration at Ligne Roset: 5600 Kirby Drive Houston, TX 713.629.7722
www.ligne-roset-usa.com

Rooms to Live By

Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration by Penny Sparke, edited by Mitchell Owens. Acanthus Press, 2005. 372 pp., $85.

The House in Good Taste by Elsie de Wolfe, preface and endnotes by Hutton Wilkinson, introduction by Albert Hadley. Rizzoli, 2004. 368 pp., $26.

Eileen Gray by Penelope Rowlands. Compact Design Portfolio series, editors Marisa Bartolucci and Raul Cabra. Chronicle Books, 2002. 96 pp., $12.95.

Eileen Gray by Caroline Constant. Phaidon, 2000. 256 pp., $59.95.

Eileen Gray: Architect/Designer, revised edition, by Peter Adam. Abrams, 2000. 408 pp., $39.95.

Reviewed by Laura Furman

"The walls are covered with an Oriental paper patterned with marvelous blue-and-green birds, birds of paradise and parakeets perched on flowering branches," wrote Elsie de Wolfe of the bird room in the original Colony Club, which was built in 1902 and was one of her first big projects as a decorator. "The black lacquer furniture was especially designed for the room. The rug and hangings are of jade green. I wonder how this seems to read of—can only say it is a very gay and happy room to live in!"

We have to take de Wolfe's word for it. The bird room is no more. The Colony Club occupies another building. When we look at black-and-white photographs of de Wolfe's interiors, images often fuzzy and badly lit, their gaiety and happiness escapes us.

We remember rooms in a number of ways: the light as it settled on certain objects, the colors and textures, where we sat, and, as a culmination of all this, how we felt in that moment. But what of rooms that we've never been in, what of rooms that no longer exist? How can they be remembered and appreciated? How can the designers of rooms that no longer exist be understood and remembered as something more than names?

Interior spaces—different from the furniture that fills them, the parameters that define them—are a step away from the material, closer to the ephemeral. Nothing built lasts forever, but for the decorators, interior designers, and architects who concern themselves intimately with interior spaces, forever can be an awfully short time. If interiors have a chance at an afterlife, it is in the recorded memory of individuals who experienced them, in writing, and in images. A look at recent books dedicated to Elsie de Wolfe and Eileen Gray, two of the preeminent interior designers of the last century, gives some sense of what remains and what can still be both enjoyed and learned from work that is inaccessible—either much altered or lost altogether.

Elsie de Wolfe was born in New York City in 1865; her father's family was French Huguenot and had moved to Connecticut from Nova Scotia. Her mother was born in Scotland, and her cousin, chaplain at Balmoral Castle, arranged to have de Wolfe presented to Queen Victoria at court. De Wolfe grew up then with manners and with no fear of the rich and titled, though she herself had neither wealth nor social standing. She was unusually sensitive to the visual. In her memoir *After All* she recalls her reaction to new wallpaper in the family drawing room, when she "threw herself on the floor, kicking with stiffened legs." When her physician father died in 1890, de Wolfe became a professional actress, a slippery position in the early part of the 20th century, to help support her family. Though neither beautiful nor particularly talented, de Wolfe was striking looking, moved well, and wore clothes wonderfully. She was also lucky in love. Performing in an amateur production at Tuxedo Park in 1887, de Wolfe met Elisabeth Marbury, an influential theatrical producer and literary agent whose client list included Oscar Wilde. The women were together for 30 years, and their homes became de Wolfe's design laboratories, places where she could practice her ideas for interiors.

It was after having met a range of rich and powerful people through Marbury that de Wolfe decided to give up acting and take up interior decoration, a role likely more satisfying than any she'd played on stage. In 1905, de Wolfe wrote in *Vanity Fair*: "I am going in now for interior decoration. By that I mean supplying objets d'art and giving advice regarding the decoration of their houses to wealthy persons who do not have the time, inclination, nor culture to do such work for themselves. It is nothing new. Women have done the same thing before."

Two designers of contrasting styles: Top, Elsie de Wolfe at her Avenue d'Iena apartment; above, Eileen Gray in her Paris apartment.

De Wolfe's self-confidence, intelligence, and sense of humor served her well. Over a long career she decorated the Frick Mansion in New York; the Magnolia and George Sealy Residence in Galveston; Brooks Hall, a 97-room dormitory for Barnard College; the original Colony Club; Condé Nast's apartment at 1040 Park Avenue; and, for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, projects in London, Paris, Cap d'Antibes, and Nassau.

De Wolfe believed in mirrors, light, air, and color, in balance and suitability. She used chintz so extensively and consistently that she became known as the Chintz Lady, and she often created a scheme around an object—rug, lamp, ceramic vase. She painted furniture white and hated brass beds, preferring metal beds painted white. ("I think the three

The boudoir in Villa Trianon, the house in Versailles in which Elsie de Wolfe lived, and which she decorated and redecorated for decades.

most glaring errors we Americans make are rocking chairs, lace curtains, and brass beds," she noted.) De Wolfe loved fireplaces, treillage, and a room with a daybed (lit de repos). She preached about the value of the authentic versus the newly reproduced: "A pewter platter that has been used for generations is dulled and softened to a glow that a new platter cannot rival. What charm is to a person, the vague thing called quality is to an object of art." She crusaded against the "ugliness" and "bad taste" of the Victorian era and worshipped the French decorative arts, wishing for a return to the style of Louis XIV and Louis XV. She and Marbury bought a house in Versailles called "Villa Trianon," which de Wolfe decorated and redecorated for decades.

In 1926, at age 60, de Wolfe married Sir Charles Mendl, a minor English diplomat, and became Lady Mendl, international hostess, continuing as a prominent decorator and social arbiter until her death in 1950. In addition to her other accomplishments, de Wolfe published best-selling books on decoration that reached beyond matters of design into self-help: "You will know without being told that your wall colors must be neutral; that your woodwork must be stained and waxed, or painted some soft tone of your wall color. Then, let the rugs and curtains and things go until you decide you have to have them. The room will gradually find itself, though it may take years and heartache and a certain self-confession of inadequacy. It will express your life, if you use it, so be careful of the life you live in it."

In the recently re-published *The House in Good Taste* (originally ghostwritten by Ruby Ross Wood, herself a decorator), de Wolfe's philosophy of living and design comes across clearly. De Wolfe dismissed the idea that all furniture in a well-planned room must be of the same kind (a lesson shelter magazines still emphasize from time to time). Her precise dicta—such as the discussion of the mechanical piano versus the real thing— are in some cases outdated. But though her book and its illustrations are of a period, the contemporary reader can still be charmed, and perhaps emboldened to take on her or his own living room not in de Wolfe's style, but in her spirit.

De Wolfe's rooms as we see them in *The House in Good Taste*, and even in the elaborately produced *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration* by Penny Sparke, seem like a collection of still lifes rather than a united, exciting space. They even appear crowded and a bit jumbled. Though she created grand entryways, over and over again we see flowers (and plenty of them), her fireplaces, Louis XVI chairs, small tables ready for a teacup or a book, chintz upholstery, the desk she believed each bedroom should have, the canopied beds. Throughout her evolution over the decades, de Wolfe maintained a continuity of taste.

Sparke's lively and detailed prose gives the reader a solid sense of de Wolfe's intelligence and energy, something she accomplishes through an excellent presentation not only of de Wolfe's individual history, but also of the social and historical context of her achievements. Sparke tells us that because of de Wolfe's business success, by the 1920s and 1930s "the female interior decorator had become a significant phenomenon, especially in America." Following World War II, male-dominated modernism ascended as the dominant aesthetic ideology, eclipsing and undermining the achievements of de Wolfe and her disciples. As part of this new movement, the more professional-sounding term "interior designer"—used perhaps because it was less sexually suspect and implied a level of higher education and training—began to displace the more old-fashioned "interior decorator."

Though *The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration* is generously illustrated, we often get a stronger sense of a de Wolfe interior from Sparke's words than we do from the visual evidence of de Wolfe's designs. Words can preserve even the fleeting experience of an interior. For example, in a memoir of her years as editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, Edna Woolman Chase wrote that when you were in a de Wolfe room "you were at ease. The lights were well placed for reading and the chairs were comfortable. In her guest-rooms the beds were first-rate, there was a place where you could conveniently remove your shoes and stockings, there was always a full-length mirror, and the lights of the dressing table were intelligently arranged.... She might sometimes be fancy. She was never foolish."

In 1923, when de Wolfe was still going strong, Eileen Gray designed the Boudoir de Monte Carlo for the Salon des Artiste Décorateurs, and Dutch architect Sybold van Ravesteyn wrote, "It heralds the arrival of a Louis-free tendency, even in France."

Gray was in many ways the opposite of de Wolfe. So separate were their social and professional circles that though they both lived primarily in France for much of their lives they seem never to have met. Gray's career was not built on pleasing clients or the public. Her light fixtures, furniture, and textiles are remarkably fresh, and have the beauty of an object touched by a human hand. She moved from handmade and individually designed objects to an architecture that was an extension of her ideas about the kind of interior space human beings need. Though she was well versed in the ideas of her contemporaries, Gray was not polemical. She foresaw the dehumanizing danger of the mass-built even as she worked to perfect building techniques. Many of her architectural designs remained hypothetical; disappointing as that might have been for Gray, it removed her from the arena of career and business. Her integrity remained intact, and she had the toughness of an artist. Over the years Gray's reputation has waxed and waned, and her fate might be to be rediscovered by each new generation and claimed as its own.

Gray was a native of Ireland, the daughter of a baroness and an artist. Born in 1878, by 1907 she had established herself in Paris, where she would occupy the same apartment for the rest of her long life. Gray was independently wealthy and so never had to contend with architectural clients. That was probably a good thing; she was too shy for the compromises and negotiations necessary for architectural and design practices.

Gray began by designing and creating furniture, rugs, and extraordinary lacquered screens. Some of her designs of furnishings were site-specific, and Gray had from the beginning her own ideas of the importance of physical surroundings to the human spirit. With her lover and colleague Jean Badovici, a Rumanian-born architect and architectural theorist, she designed Jean Désert, a shop in Paris where she sold her beautiful objects. A report in an American newspaper about Jean Désert noted that: "Turning the handle of the entrance door is a sensation, because it is the first door handle of its kind ever beheld. It does not look like a door handle."

With Badovici, Gray designed a remarkable house in the south of France they called E.1027, a numerical play on their initials. Gray worked for harmony in her interiors. She wanted neither body without soul nor soul without body, but instead a harmony among the objects and with the architecture itself. She also wanted flexibility in her rooms, multiple uses that would provide privacy and communality to the occupants, and she wished to create her harmony not just by congenial arrangements of beautiful objects but also

by the design of the space itself. Though never formally trained as an architect, she succeeded in building radical spaces and influencing her contemporaries.

Even today Gray's rooms look remarkable, fresh and alive. Though the photography of her spaces is no better than that of de Wolfe's, we can get some idea of exactly how imbued was each space with Gray's intelligence and vision. The Boudoir de Monte Carlo is opulent, inventive, and even looks comfortable. It also looks like the work of an individual for an individual; this is not sleek, perfected modernism. Caroline Constant, whose excellent book on Gray's work is thorough and accessible, writes of the 1923 Monte Carlo boudoir that: "Seeking to both engage the senses and entice the imagination, she included a rich profusion of carpets and wall-hangings, inventive light fixtures, a pair of freestanding screens of interlocking panels, which she painted white, and numerous lacquer elements, including a daybed, writing desk, bookcase, and side table.... She subordinated the object qualities of her furnishings to the ambience of the whole, using texture and color to enhance its experiential qualities as lived and felt rather than conceptualized. To draw the observer into the experience of her boudoir, Gray explored various means to imply extension beyond the volume's immediate spatial confines."

As part of the Modernist movement, Gray engaged with the problems of her day. In response to a French law mandating vacations, she created designs for a vacation and leisure center for workers. And her drawings and models for pre-fabricated, quickly assembled minimal housing, inspired by homelessness during the Depression, seem particularly exciting and relevant today.

The objects Gray designed are more famous than she is: the Transat chair, her tubular steel and glass bedside table, the Bibendum chair. Her work is now reproduced, and in a small way keeps her design presence alive. (The Bibendum chair, designed by Gray around 1925, was seen in the TV series *Firefly*, set at an indeterminate date far in the future.)

Gray has often been seen as an artist neglected and forgotten, but one comes away from Constant's unstintingly detailed and rigorous work not feeling at all sorry for Gray but filled with admiration for her work. She protested only rarely when her name didn't appear on work on which she'd collaborated, and the years without recognition or encouragement from the world didn't diminish her dedication. Her involvement with the process of design, whether an object remained on paper or was built, and her fascination with the category of problems that will never be solved once and for all, made for a good life, all in all. Unlike de Wolfe, who lived and died with a steady stream of devoted friends and admirers, Gray was solitary and quiet, continuing to work and build as she could.

In the late 1960s there were stirrings of recognition for Gray, then in her eighties. Her work—chairs, designs for E.1027 and another house—was seen in London, Graz, and Vienna. In 1972, four years before Gray's death, *Le Destin*, a lacquered screen completed in 1914, was sold for a record $36,000. Honors came from the British Royal Society of Arts and the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland. An exhibition of Gray's architecture traveled to Princeton, Columbia University, and Boston City Hall. Gray died in Paris at the age of 98. Constant writes that Gray's "last creation consisted of a pair of cork screens, but she was proudest of her architecture."

Though Peter Adam's biography remains the sine qua non for our knowledge of Gray, Constant's book is a necessity for those who truly wish to know her. Constant's immaculate scholarly work is as close as we can come to being inside one of Gray's houses. Compared to the substantial work of Adam and Constant, *Eileen Gray* by Penelope Rowlands can seem a greeting card of a book, more pictures than text. But it succeeds as a lively introduction to Gray, and is a good place to start.

The question of remembering rooms can be answered only by an acceptance of temporality. Even if de Wolfe's and Gray's interiors were preserved exactly in an ideal museum, they would serve as nothing more than a reminder of the real thing. Both designers believed in living spaces, and preservation is antithetical to living. Perhaps the place where the two women designers, so different from one another, meet is in the example that their remembered lives—and rooms—set for those of us still wondering how to live in our own rooms. ■

MKG ART MANAGEMENT
INTEGRATING ART AND BUSINESS
ART CONSULTING
ACCREDITED ART APPRAISALS
INVENTORY MANAGEMENT AND INSTALLATION
ART LEASING
AIA/ASID ACCREDITED CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES
2825 COLQUITT HOUSTON TEXAS 77098
P. 713.526.4146 F. 713.526.4158
WWW.MKGART.COM

COMING IN CITE 67

Cite

_Artist Collectives at Jeff Davis Hospital and Baldwin Park
_Spending Time in Huntsville's Prison Complex
_Examining the Recent Renovations at Bush Intercontinental
_The Mangling of Montrose Boulevard

Anderson
LANDSCAPE & NURSERY, INC.
Since 1982
Specializing in:
Residential Garden Design & Planting
Stonework
Drainage
Traditional & Native Gardens
2222 PECH RD / HOUSTON, TX 77055
713.984.1342

Effective communication through experience-based design.

Vanderbilt Children's Hospital
Nashville, Tennessee

Terminus
Atlanta, Georgia

International Waterfront
Port of Spain, Trinidad

Riverside Regional Medical Center
Newport News, Virginia

Moody Gardens
Galveston, Texas

Centura Health System
Rocky Mountain Region

Uptown Park
Houston, Texas

Market Street
The Woodlands, Texas

Firelands Health System
Sandusky, Ohio

Arkansas Children's Hospital
Little Rock, Arkansas

Kimball International Showroom
Jasper, Indiana

Davis Park
Durham, North Carolina

Vanderbilt Medical Center
Nashville, Tennessee

Tower of the Americas
San Antonio, Texas

Sentara Health System
Hampton Roads, Virginia

Baptist Health System
San Antonio, Texas

Ernest N. Morial Convention Center
New Orleans, Louisiana

Brookview Town Center
Knoxville, Tennessee

Bal Harbour
Largo, Florida

Eastern Virginia Medical Center
Norfolk, Virginia

NorthPointe Village
Tampa, Florida

Amegy Bank
Houston, Texas

Sam Houston Race Park
Houston, Texas

Grandluxe
Houston, Texas

Pointe West
Galveston, Texas

The Georgia Aquarium
Atlanta, Georgia

Technology Square at Georgia Tech
Atlanta, Georgia

First Citizens Bank
Columbia, South Carolina

Time Warner
Charlotte, North Carolina

City Gate Centre
Chicago, Illinois

McAllen Convention Center
McAllen, Texas

Corridors Phoenix
Phoenix, Arizona

Royal Palm
Plantation, Florida

Floyd Medical Center
Rome, Georgia

Sterling Ridge/Carlton Woods
The Woodlands, Texas

CNL Center
Orlando, Florida

Middletown Health System
Middletown, Ohio

Gordon Hospital
Calhoun, Georgia

North Hills Town Center
Raleigh, North Carolina

St. Vincent's Health System
Birmingham, Alabama

FMG DESIGN

ENVIRONMENTAL GRAPHIC DESIGN + VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS + BRANDING

Photo courtesy Contemporary Arts Museum

Andrea Zittel's A-Z Homestead Unit (2001-2005) was designed small enough that it could be erected without a permit.

Home Improvement

Andrea Zittel: Critical Space
Contemporary Arts Museum
October 6, 2005—January 1, 2006

Reviewed by Kelly Klaasmeyer

You can transform your life by changing your wardrobe, rearranging your living room, clearing out clutter, and organizing all the detritus in your spare room. At least that's the premise of a bevy of reality TV shows. It is also the inspiration behind Andrea Zittel's work. Zittel's art stems from her own never-ending quest for improvement. She is not critiquing these impulses; like many of us, she believes in and enthusiastically embraces them.

Zittel remakes her wardrobe, her living spaces, her schedule, her diet, and even her sense of time; the results become her artwork. This art is rooted in practicalities to a certain point, and then the playfully conceptual kicks in. "Andrea Zittel: Critical Space," her recent show at the Contemporary Arts Museum co-curated by CAM's Paola Morsiani and Trevor Smith of New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art, presented a survey of Zittel's works from 1991 to 2005.

The problem of what to wear to work provided the impetus for Zittel's longest running artwork. In 1990, Zittel moved to New York, fresh from graduate school at the Rhode Island School of Design. She landed a job at a hip gallery where she was supposed to dress well—on a measly $17,000 a year. Zittel's solution: Rather than buy multiple cheap things, she would design *one* perfect outfit that would serve as her daily uniform.

Beginning in 1991, Zittel debuted a new "uniform" seasonally. A phalanx of them was on display in the CAM show. Zittel has created constructivist-influenced designs and set parameters for herself, such as only making things from rectangles or creating "single strand" crocheted dresses. Creativity resulting from self-imposed limitations is a recurring theme in Zittel's work. And because they have to function as clothing, the uniforms create their own parameters for experimentation.

That low-paying gallery job led to artwork beyond Zittel's clothing. Her works exploring living space had their genesis in the 200-square-foot Brooklyn storefront that was her home and studio in the early 1990s. Faced with existing in such cramped quarters, she started designing units that could incorporate the functions of dining, sleeping, and eating. An early example is *A-Z Living Unit* (1993), which when closed is about the size of an average bookcase. Opened and set up, the amenities include a collapsible cot, closet, folding campstool, file cabinet, desk/dining table, hot plate, toaster oven, and shelves of dishes. It's really Spartan, but there's something appealing about it. You could set up housekeeping under a bridge with the *A-Z Living Unit*. (Zittel uses her initials, A-Z, as a generic company name along the lines of ACME, Wile E. Coyote's supplier.)

From her dinky storefront Zittel moved to a giant warehouse space, which offered its own set of problems—no heat or air-conditioning. To offer instant climate relief, Zittel designed telephone-booth-sized hot and cold chambers. These units were made from angle iron and plywood, materials she still uses in her work. The esthetics are a little Soviet, with construction matter-of-fact and heavy on the birch plywood, but über-sleek design isn't Zittel's goal. Rather, the focus is on exploring solutions to problems.

For another space investigation, *A-Z Cellular Compartment Units* (2001), Zittel sliced a conventionally sized room in half, creating two four-foot-high living spaces. Shades of *Being John Malkovich*! On her website, www.zittel.org, Zittel pitches the unit's advantages in a mock advertising tone: "*Living inside of an A-Z Cellular Compartment Unit is like living in a luxury home that fits inside of your studio apartment*. Have you ever wondered what it would be like if you could transform your one room into ten? You could have a reading room, a laundry room, an exercise room ... every need or desire could be given its own space and its own time."

All this, of course, would be contingent upon not engaging in activities that require you to stand erect. Zittel acknowledges the Habitrail overtones of the piece. But who, as a kid, didn't want a human-sized hamster maze?

Inside the diminutive units you can relax in the bed nook or sit cross-legged at a built-in desk or a kitchen counter. Zittel hasn't included water access or a bathroom. (This is probably a good thing. Her earlier works with toilet facilities ran to chamber pots and galvanized buckets.)

Zittel's freestanding outdoor structure, *A-Z Homestead Unit* (2001-2005), was designed to have less than 120 square feet so it could be erected without a permit. The artist fabricated and tested them at her desert outpost in California, A-Z West. With no power, plumbing, or insulation, the homestead units have the habitability level of a garden shed. Zittel purposely avoids "architecture," separating herself from the practical responsibilities associated with the field.

The survey of Zittel's work at CAM illustrated her thought processes. To streamline meals she developed *A-Z Food Group*, a convenient and nutritious mixture of dehydrated vegetables, fruits, legumes, and grains. It can be "eaten dry, cooked as stew, formed into patties, or baked as a loaf." Yikes! To simplify cooking, Zittel created a table with a griddle embedded in it. To simplify cleanup, she built tables with carved indentations instead of plates. To furnish her home, she hacked couches and chairs out of giant blocks of high-density grey foam—comfy, and they don't show dirt. Expect one of these ideas to be co-opted by a Home and Garden Television program soon.

Other Zittel works leave the domestic sphere and address the idea of escape. *A-Z Deserted Island* (1997), an island-shaped white fiberglass raft, comes with a seat—for one. More epic is *Prototype for A-Z Pocket Property* (2000), a 10- by 30- by 60-foot island Zittel fabricated and lived in/on off the coast of Denmark. Made from concrete, it looked like a rocky hill covered with foliage—but sporting windows and a door. Building your own island is a fantasy even better than a giant Habitrail.

If a deserted island is inconvenient, you can also get away from it all in one of Zittel's *A-Z Escape Vehicles* (1996), which look like mini-Airstream trailers. At about five feet high and seven feet long, they're just big enough for two people to sit inside. Three were included in the CAM show, customized by their owners. One features a stereo and plush—albeit casket-like—interior upholstered in powder-blue velvet. Another has been transformed into a saltwater flotation tank. For her own vehicle, Zittel fabricated a "rock" grotto with water and colored lights. This is one project Zittel ought to mass-market. An "escape vehicle" towed behind the car might make holiday visits to the relatives a lot more bearable.

Some people have described Zittel's work—the living units in particular—as fascist, but I think that's inaccurate. Her work is not about a grim future in which we are forced into living in her compact, minimal spaces. Zittel's work is an enthusiastic exploration of ideas, and she's systematic enough to make art from them.

At the entrance to "Critical Space" was a wall text by Zittel with 14 points and the heading, "Things I know for sure." The last point states, "People are most happy when they are moving forwards towards something not quite yet attained." Zittel, continually moving forward to the next improvement, must be a very happy woman. ■

HINDCITE

URBAN POEMS

BY MARK DOTY

Grackles On Montrose

Eight o'clock, warm Houston night, and in the parking lot
the grackles hold forth royally, in thick trees on the lip of traffic,

And either they're oblivious to the street-rush
and come-and-go at the Kroger or else they actually like it,

our hurry a useful counter to their tintinnabulation.
Now one's doing the Really Creaky Hinge, making it last a long time;

now Drop the Tin Can, glissando, then Limping Siren,
then it's back to the Hinge done with a caesura

midstream, so it becomes a Recalcitrant Double Entry.
What are they up to, these late, randy singers,

who seem to shiver the whole tree in pleasure
when somebody gets off a really fierce line,

aerial gang of pirate deejays remixing their sonics
above the median strip all up and down the block

from here to the Taco Cabana? They sample Bad Brakes,
they do Tea Kettle in Hell, Slidewhistle into Car Alarm,

Firecracker with a Bright Report, and every feathered body—
how many of them *are* there, obscured by dense green?—

seems to cackle over that one, incendiary rippling, pure
delight, imperious and impure singing; the city's traffic in tongues,

polyglot cantata, awry, expansive, new.

Heaven

Tonight there's a mirror on the sidewalk
leaning on the steps of the cathedral.
I want to think it's a work of art,
or at least an intentional gesture

anyone passing can see, reversed here,
the rooftop Virgin's golden face
ringed by lightbulbs, look up toward *us*.
A few blocks down the searchlights revolve

atop some office tower's steely sheen.
Where would they lead us, these beacons
that sweep the dark and cut the steam
billowing from the stacks, so the sudden sections

of cloud stumble in stunning and troubled currents?
I have a friend who sometimes sells
everything, scrapes together enough money
to get to the city, and lives on the streets here,

in the parks. She says she likes waking
knowing she can be anyone she wants, keep any name
as long as it wears well. She stayed with one man
a few days; calling themselves whatever they liked

or nothing, they slept in the park
beneath a silver cloth, a "space blanket,"
that mirrored the city lights, and the heat
of his dog coiled between them would warm them.

I knew, she says, *I was in heaven.*
Isn't that where those beams washing
and disguising the stars have always called us:
the anonymous paradise, where there isn't any telling

how many of these futures
will be ours? It was enough to be warmed
by steam blurring the café windows, to study
how grocers stacked the wet jewels

of produces and seem fed—though the wine-flush
would brighten everything, and dull the morning
of working a thankless block. She held out her hand
enough times to catch a torrent,

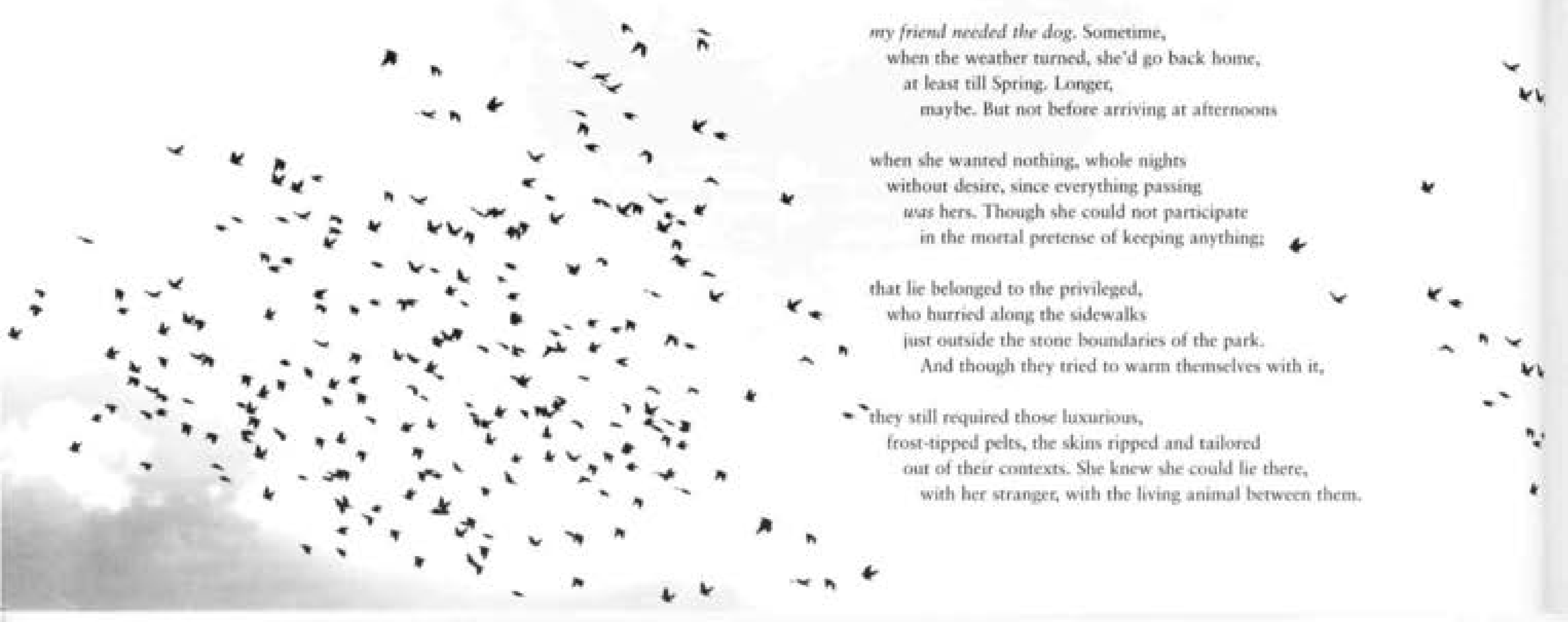
though little was offered by the sharpening chill
of street lacquered by rain, perfected
and unyielding. *It's a little easier
for a woman to panhandle; that's why*

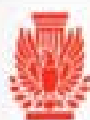
my friend needed the dog. Sometime,
when the weather turned, she'd go back home,
at least till Spring. Longer,
maybe. But not before arriving at afternoons

when she wanted nothing, whole nights
without desire, since everything passing
was hers. Though she could not participate
in the mortal pretense of keeping anything;

that lie belonged to the privileged,
who hurried along the sidewalks
just outside the stone boundaries of the park.
And though they tried to warm themselves with it,

they still required those luxurious,
frost-tipped pelts, the skins ripped and tailored
out of their contexts. She knew she could lie there,
with her stranger, with the living animal between them.





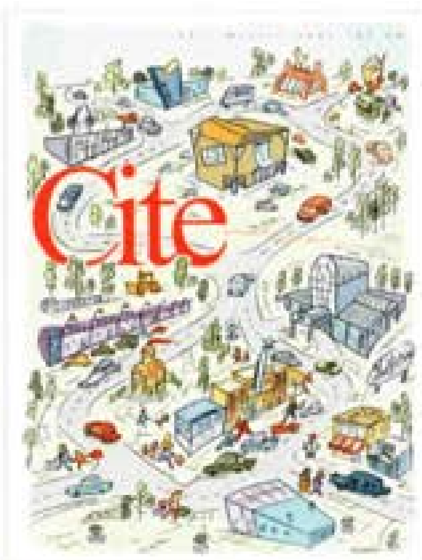
AIA Houston

A Chapter of The American Institute of Architects

Architecture Month April 2006

Events Calendar

Date	Event	Description and Location	Information
April 1 M-F 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	**Through the Architect's Eye** Young Architects Forum, AIA Houston FotoFest	Photographic Exhibition mARCHITECTS Gallery, 1206 Nance, Reception 3/24 6:00 – 9:00 p.m	www.aiahouston.org 713-520-0155
April 1 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	**Architecture Along the Red Line** Historic Resources Committee, AIA Houston	Metro Rail Architecture Tour Meet UH Downtown stop, $2.00 round trip	www.aiahouston.org 713-520-0155
April 4 - April 27 M-F 9:00a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	**Art by Architects** Small Firm Roundtable, AIA Houston	Two Houston Center, 909 Fannin, 2nd floor Opening Reception 4/4 5:30-7:30 p.m.	www.aiahouston.org 713-520-0155
April 6 6:30 p.m.	**Design Awards Dinner** AIA Houston	Presentation of 2006 winners of the AIA Houston Design Awards Competition. $25, Erie City Ironworks, 1302 Nance	www.aiahouston.org 713-520-0155
April 8 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.	**Student Design Charrette** AIA Houston	Architecture student teams from Rice, UH, Prairie View A & M, and Texas A & M. will compete. Prairie View A & M	www.aiahouston.org 713-520-0155
April 9 2:00 p.m.	**Main Street Market Square** Walking Tour, Greater Houston Preservation Alliance	90-minute Architectural Tour $10 Meet at Market Square Park, Travis at Congress	www.ghpa.org 713-216-5000
April 18 7:00 p.m.	**Sally Walsh Lecture** Annabelle Selldorf, Houston Architecture Foundation, Rice Design Alliance	Brown Auditorium Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Main Street entrance	www.rda.rice.edu 713-348-4876
April 18 3:00 p.m.	**Earth Scrapers** Lecture by Ron Rael, UH College of Architecture	Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Building, UH	www.rda.rice.edu 713-348-4876
April 21 9:00 a.m.	**Student Day in the Office** AIA Houston	Architecture students spend the day in a Houston architectural firm	www.aiahouston.org 713-520-0155
April 25 6:00 p.m.	**Lecture by Peter Zweig and** Bill Price, AIA Houston	2005 Faculty Grant Award Lecture Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Auditorium, UH	www.agchouston.org 713-843-3700
April 27 6:30 p.m.	**The Great Beyond** Lecture by Pierre David, Rice School of Architecture	Rice University Lecture Anderson Hall, Farish Gallery	www.arch.rice.edu 713-348-4864
April 28 7:00 p.m.	**Michael G. Meyers Award Presentation** AIA Houston, Houston Architecture Foundation	Announcement of winners of High School student competition, Ensemble Theater, 3535 Main Street	www.aiahouston.org 713-520-0155
April 29 7:00 p.m.	**Celebrate Architecture 2006** Making it Happen, Houston Architecture Foundation, AIA Houston	Honoring Jim Kollaer, FAIA Bayou Place II, Capitol at Bagby	www.aiahouston.org 713-520-0155

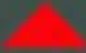


a proud supporter of the Rice Design Alliance

contact Mike Wall at 713.780.4141 x107
mwall@groverprinting.com
www.groverprinting.com

BERNHARDT • CABOT-WRENN • CARTWRIGHT • DAVID EDWARD • DECCA • EGAN VISUAL • FALCON • GUNLOCKE • HARTER • HICKORY BUSINESS FURNITURE
ICF • IZZY DESIGN • JOFCO • KEILHAUER • **KNOLL** • LOEWENSTEIN • MAYLINE GROUP • NIENKAMPER • NUCRAFT • OFS • SOURCE • STYLEX • TUOHY

W O R K S P A C E **S** O L U T I O N S



Knoll AutoStrada

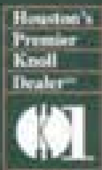
"It's in the details."
— G

TEL 713.782.1300
FAX 713.782.1332

Debner+Company

8020 KATY FREEWAY
HOUSTON TX 77024

www.Debner.com
mailcenter@debner.com



Since 1991

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

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