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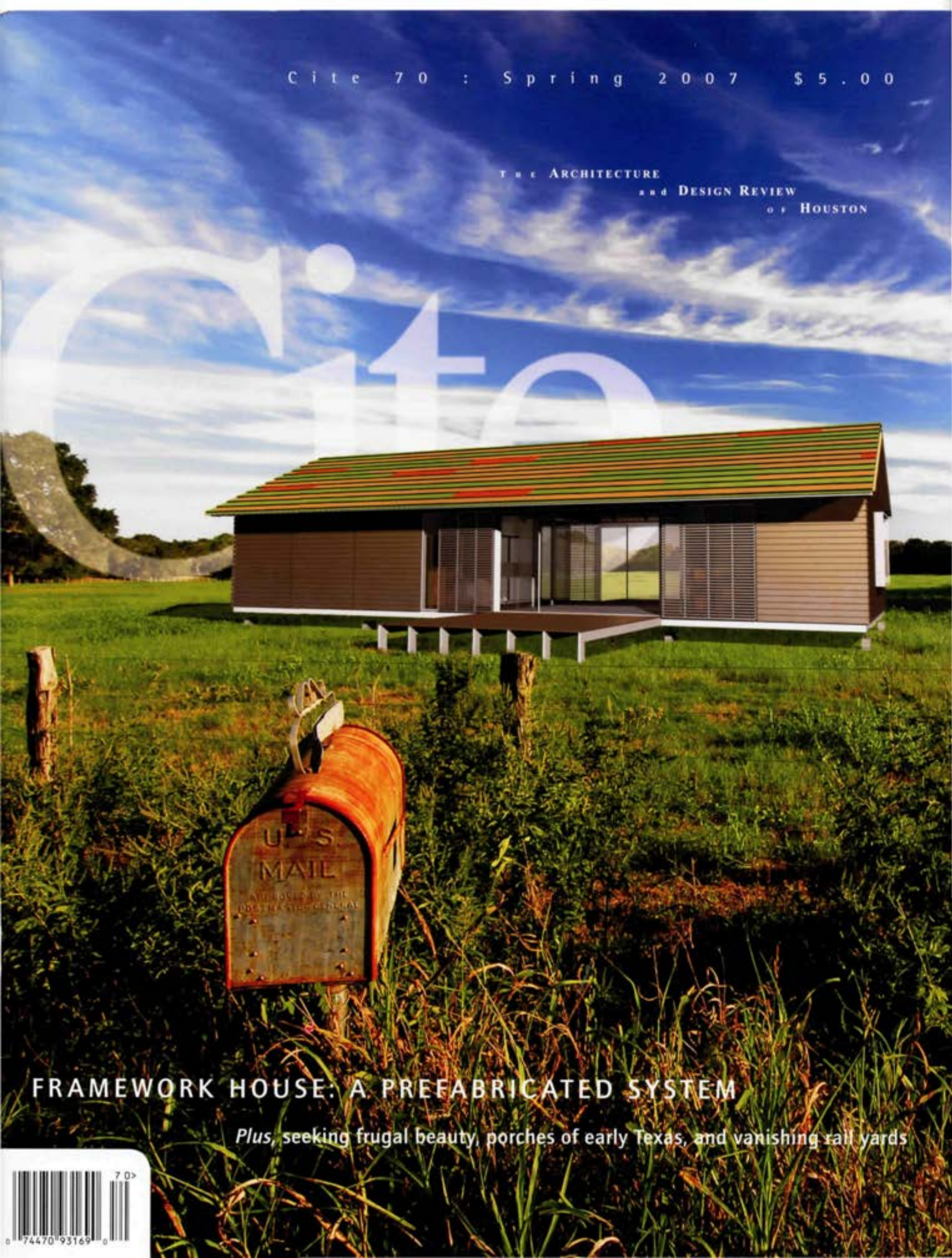

FRAMEWORK HOUSE: A PREFABRICATED SYSTEM

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OF HOUSTON

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Cite

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Above: Illustration of workers carrying an anodized aluminum tube for a Framework House. Courtesy Joe Meppelink.
Cover: Illustration of a dogtrot-style Framework House in a rural setting. Courtesy Joe Meppelink.

RDA tour group on the top floor of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye.

RDA Hometown Tour: Paris 2006

Last October, John Casbarian, associate dean and director of the Rice University School of Architecture, and Kent Fitzsimmons, resident director of the Rice University School of Architecture, Paris, designed an extraordinary tour of the City of Light and surrounding sites for the Rice Design Alliance. It was quite a challenge to compress a city of heroic architectural proportions into something that could be seen in five days, but in the end they found the perfect balance of old and new architecture.

To put the city into historic context, the walking tours were interspersed with a sampling of Paris' great monuments—Sainte-Chapelle, Charles Garnier's Opera House, and Henri Labrouste's Bibliothèque Nationale, to name only a few.

A day trip outside Paris began with an in-depth tour of Chartres Cathedral and its crypt in the morning, followed by an afternoon tour of Domaine de Marie-Antoinette and Petit Trianon in Versailles. The tour was perfectly timed, as the Petit Trianon was closed a month later for extensive renovations that are expected to take two years.

Rice Architecture alumnae Mary and Roberto Roca hosted a lovely four-course dinner in their home, which is located just outside the northeast wall of Versailles and the Potager du Roi. Their house was originally part of Jean-Baptiste Colbert's palace, built in the 17th century.

The focus then shifted to the early 20th-century architecture of Le Corbusier. With the assistance of Tim Benton, the leading historian on Le Corbusier, the group was able to visit all the floors of both Villa Jeanneret and Villa La Roche before taking an afternoon visit to Villa Savoye.

During another walking tour, Alain Salomon, an architect who teaches at the Columbia University School of Architecture's Paris program and has had projects published in numerous French and international magazines, pointed out examples of the rich historic urban fabric in Paris, including Place des Vosges, Hotel Sully, Rue des Rosiers, and the Maries.

Afterwards, the RDA tour group adjourned to Restaurant Georges atop the Pompidou Center, where architect Brendon MacFarlane joined them for lunch to discuss his latest projects. The grand finale included a look at the recently completed Musée du Quai Branly by Jean Nouvel.

How do you follow up such a great trip? Why, with a visit Buenos Aires, "the Paris of the western hemisphere," bien sur! For more information about the upcoming RDA adventure, please visit www.rda.rice.edu.

Executive Editor hired for *Cite*

At the end of January, Julie Sinclair Eakin joined RDA to take over a newly established position at *Cite*, that of executive editor. Eakin arrives from New York City, where she was a senior editor at *Architecture*.

Eakin has a masters of architecture degree from the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), and a masters in the history of architecture from the University of California at Berkeley. Her freelance writing has appeared in the *New York Times* and *I.D.* She anticipates that *Cite* will offer her the opportunity and challenge of integrating two of her interests—storytelling and the design of cities—in a meaningful way, and looks forward to assisting in its ongoing evolution. Eakin welcomes your comments, and may be reached at Julie.Eakin@rice.edu.

CALENDAR

Photo by Adrian Aguirre

Above and right: *Untitled*, from photographer Adrian Aguirre's series *La Muerte de Narcos*, 2007.

Photo courtesy Cristian O'Connor

House outside of Buenos Aires by Cristián O'Connor.

LECTURES

::

UH ARCHITECTURE LECTURE: INTERPRETING ANTHROPOGEOMORPHOLOGY: PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS OF THE CENTER FOR LAND USE INTERPRETATION
Matthew Coolidge
Founder, CLUI, Culver City
■ Tuesday, March 20, 3 p.m.
College of Architecture Theater
University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE: PITCH-BLACK
Hernan Diaz Alonso
Principal, Xefirotarch, Los Angeles / Design Faculty, Southern California Institute of Architecture
■ Monday, March 26, 5 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE: ENVIRONMENTAL REFRACTIONS
James Carpenter
Principal, James Carpenter Design Associates, New York
■ Monday, April 2, 5 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

HOUSTON MOD LECTURE: PRESERVING THE MENIL HOUSE
William F. Stern
Principal, Stern and Bucek Architects
■ Thursday, April 5, 7:30 p.m.
Cullen Hall
University of St. Thomas
www.houstonmod.org

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE: GREETINGS FROM SILVER LAKE
Kevin Daly and Christopher Genik
Principals, Daly Genik Architects, Santa Monica
■ Monday, April 9, 5 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LECTURE: STRUCTURE OR REVOLUTION
Guy Nordenson
Partner, Guy Nordenson and Associates Structural Engineers, New York, and Professor, Princeton University School of Architecture
■ Wednesday, April 25, 6:30 p.m.
Farish Gallery
Anderson Hall, Rice University

UH ARCHITECTURE LECTURE: A VIEW FROM THE MARGIN
Cristián O'Connor
Architect, Buenos Aires
■ Monday, April 30, 6 p.m.
College of Architecture Theater
University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture

EXHIBITIONS

::

THE CARCERAL CITY: THE ARCHITECTURE OF PRISONS IN TEXAS
■ Through March 24
University of Houston
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Gallery
713.348.5583 or rda.rice.edu

6-PACK: SIX EMERGING PHOTOGRAPHERS FROM MEXICO CITY
This exhibition explores censorship in documentary photography and the boundaries of photographic truth. Featuring the work of Adrian Aguirre, Benjamin Alcantara, Dante Busquets, Enrique Greenwell, Omar Gamez, and Victor Mendiola.
■ Through April 15
Houston Center for Photography
1441 West Alabama
713.529.4755 or www.hcponline.org

JANE BLAFFER OWEN AND THE LEGACY OF NEW HARMONY
■ April 1-27
University of Houston
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Gallery
713.743.2400 or
www.arch.uh.edu/news

SNAPSHOT 2007: HOUSTON DESIGN ON VIEW
■ May 18–June 16
Lawndale Art Center
4912 Main Street
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

EVENTS

::

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE URBANISM
■ Sunday-Tuesday, April 1-3
Texas A&M University,
Memorial Student Center
sustainableurbanism.tamu.edu

Photo by Adrian Aguirre

DIGIFAB FORUM:
DIGITAL STRATEGIES/FABRICATIONS TACTICS
With Scott Marble, Columbia University; David Erdman, University of California at Los Angeles; Brad Bell, University of Texas-Arlington; Sean Lally, Rice University; Andrew Vrana, University of Houston; Joe Meppelink, University of Houston; and Santiago Perez, University of Houston.
College of Architecture Theater
■ Tuesday, April 3, 3-6 p.m.
Discussion, 6:30-7:30 p.m.
University of Houston, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture

RDA ARCHITECTURE TOUR
SOUTHAMPTON: A NEIGHBORHOOD TOUR
RDA's 2007 Architecture tour will feature houses old and new in Southampton, one of Houston's most memorable 20th-century planned neighborhoods. The tour will show how new houses, when thoughtfully designed, can add to the character of historic neighborhoods rather than detract from it.
■ Saturday and Sunday, April 14-15, 1 p.m.-6 p.m.
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

RDA PARTNERS: FRESHFORUM4
■ Wednesday, May 28, 7-9 p.m.
Debner + Company
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The houses at 1809 Dunstan (top, Scott Ballard, 1993) and 1901 Bolsover (above, 1926) in Southampton are two of the nine featured on RDA's 2007 architecture tour.

Cite

The Architecture and Design Review of Houston

The Rice Design Alliance

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

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Participation in the annual architecture tour

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Courtesy tickets to three selected RDA programs

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Courtesy tickets to all RDA programs

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Local Competition

Students and professionals collaborate to find the best plan for Mandell Park

Photo by Michael J. Sweets

Above: Mandell Park in its current incarnation, looking west toward Lucky Burger.
Top Background: Keiji Asakura began planning for a new Mandell Park by having his student collaborators draw loose schematics to get a feel for the different aspects of the space.
Opposite Page, Top: Asakura Robinson's winning plan for Mandell Park.
Opposite Page, Bottom: A view of the proposed park from the southwest corner.

It's not that unusual for a large public project to take advantage of charrettes or competitions to pit ideas against each other in search of the one that works best. But for small projects—say, a 1.22-acre pocket park tucked away in the Museum District—such things are rare. The complexity of setting up a competition, not to mention the cost, tend to be considered too much work for a relatively tiny enterprise.

Thanks, however, to a group of interested residents, a half dozen Houston architectural firms, and architecture students from the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, Mandell Park, a modest swath of green space at the corner of Richmond and Mandell, received a level of attention that similar spaces can only dream about. A one-day charrette, weeks of collaboration between professional and aspiring architects, a competitive exhibition at a neighborhood art gallery, and a final vote to select the preferred plan resulted in a proposal that, if built, could give the city a memorable new gathering spot. More important, though, it could provide similar spaces across Houston with a model to follow, one that could potentially result in more interesting approaches to urban design.

Actually, to call the current Mandell Park a "park" might be to stretch the term a bit. It's closer to a blank slate waiting for something to be written. The space was originally purchased in the late 1980s as a potential site for a branch public library. When, instead, the branch ended up in a renovated church on Montrose near Richmond, the land at Richmond and Mandell was allowed to lie fallow, devolving into a place for weeds to grow and trash to be dumped.

It wasn't until 1992, when a group of concerned neighborhood residents took on the daunting task of clearing the property and keeping it clean, that the potential of the area started to become apparent. On the southern part of the property an organic community garden known as Meredith Gardens was established; and then, in 2003, the northern part was cleared of concrete and debris by the city when the Library Department transferred ownership over to the Parks and Recreation Department.

That transfer was marked by the land officially being designated Mandell Park, and over the next couple of years the neighbors who had unofficially been keeping the place presentable morphed into an official non-profit known as Friends of Mandell Park and began thinking about its future.

A vision statement was drafted that called for the park becoming a place of "respite where people can come to relax and enjoy the quite solitude of nature and art." In order to figure out how to make that happen, some of the Friends started talking to the Parks Department and architects who lived or worked in the neighborhood, among others. The suggestion they got was to hold a charrette.

"To be honest, we had no idea what a charrette was," says Skip Almony, president of Friends of Mandell Park. But then he was put in touch with Rafael Longoria, whose architecture firm, Longoria/Peters, has its office not far from the park. Longoria, an architecture professor at the University of Houston, proposed having a modified competition that would include a charrette. To help bring local architects on board, he suggested pairing the professionals with his fourth year students.

The idea was intriguing enough to get six firms—five landscape architecture firms and one architecture firm—to sign onto the project. Included were Clark Condon & Associates, White Oak Studio, Environments & Company, The Office of James Burnett, Brave/Architecture, and eventual winners Asakura Robinson. In a one day gathering at the University of Houston last fall, professionals and students met with member of Friends of Mandell Park and others to get a sense of what area residents wanted, then broke off into groups to come up with preliminary plans, which were later displayed for more comments. What followed was

some two months of work to develop more finished proposals, models of which were then exhibited at the Anya Tish Gallery in October. Residents were given ballots to vote for the design they liked best, and then the final choice of a plan was made by members of the Friends of Mandell Park board following one last presentation at the University of Houston.

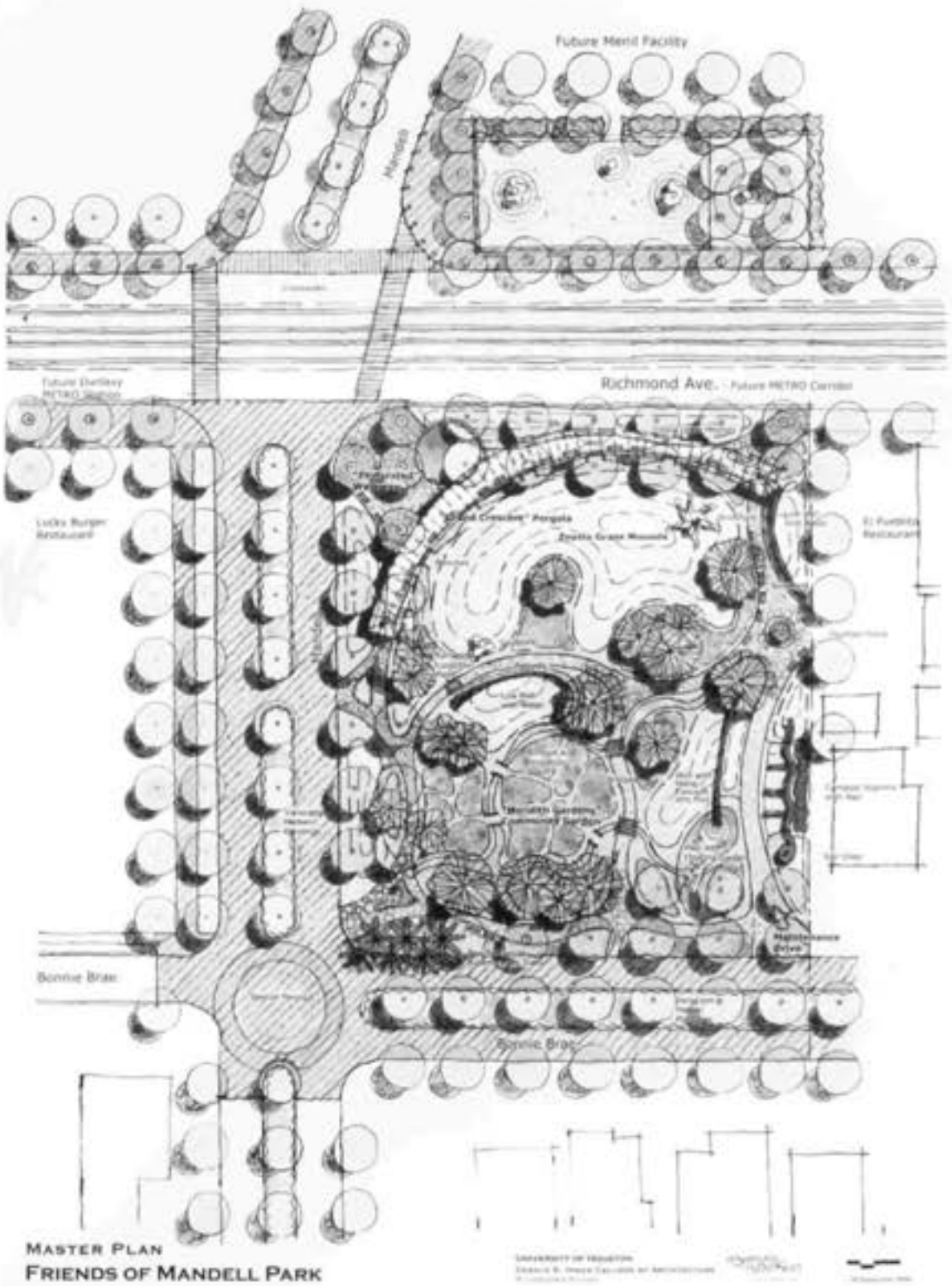
According to Almony, the choice was a close one between the design created by Clark Condon & Associates and the Asakura Robinson proposal. Both were admired for their "sinuous" approach, which tied the various elements of the park together in an organic manner that reflected the influence of Meredith Gardens, which would remain the centerpiece of the park. But ultimately Asakura Robinson's idea of a curved, see-through pergola facing Richmond and a grassed mound for visitors to recline on, along with an enhanced Meredith Gardens and a winding walkway, won the day.

Bringing the ideas of firm principals Keiji Asakura and Margaret Robinson, and students Keith Chan and Marianne Do, to life will still require fundraising and a considerable amount of work. But since the project was designed to be built in segments, if necessary, Friends of Mandell Park board members feel confident they can ultimately bring it into being.

A bigger question might be whether what they accomplished at Mandell Park can be realized at other parks across Houston. Keiji Asakura notes that his firm's work on the park project turned out to be more time consuming than he anticipated, and that it's not something he could do that often.

Still, Asakura thinks that the model of a charrette tied to a competition could be a good one for other park groups to strive toward, especially if architecture students could be involved to lessen the load on the professionals. To that end, Friends of Mandell Park is thinking about putting together a booklet detailing their experience, going through the mistakes they made and the successes they had, for others to learn from.

It's not an easy path to follow, admits Friends of Mandell Park's Almony, and at times it can seem more than a little daunting. But once the results come in, he says, you realize it's worth the work. — *Mitchell J. Shields*



MASTER PLAN
FRIENDS OF MANDELL PARK

PERSPECTIVE FROM INTERSECTION OF MANDELL AND BONNIE BRAE
FRIENDS OF MANDELL PARK

Photo by Gerald Moorhead

Photo by Fernando Brave

Photo by Michael J. Shields

The BEST Products building at three stages of its life. **Top:** With original façade intact. **Center:** After façade's removal. **Bottom:** As it is today.

No Longer BEST

A short while back, finding myself in the proximity of Almeda and I-45, I decided I wanted to show the old BEST Products Company Showroom to some of my colleagues.

I knew that BEST Products had fallen out of business in the late 1990s, but remembered getting a quick glance of the abandoned or re-utilized store from the freeway on my way to the beach every so often. After driving in circles for a while, I was able to locate the building. My fears became founded when I discovered it had been modified, and had lost its original character.

It's not that I had ever considered the BEST Products Company Showroom a great piece of architecture. However, I remembered how moved I had been as a young architecture student to see this, and other buildings designed by James Wines' SITE (Sculpture In The Environment) architecture firm, published. It was not so much the architecture of their buildings that I found intriguing as it was their expressive character. It was through SITE's work that I accepted the notion that a certain type of building did not have to follow prescribed typologies. The options could be multiple. To me, this was the first clear built expression that the box could be "broken or exploded."

BEST Products contracted with SITE to design nine unusual retail facilities, but the one in Houston was arguably the most striking. (All were out of the ordinary, however, which you can see for yourself at www.siteenvirodesign.com/proj.best.php.) Wines titled his Houston building The Indeterminate Façade, and it was, as Stephen Fox described it in his *Houston Architectural Guide*, "an attempt to subvert the banality of the American suburban landscape." Built in 1975, the showroom soon became one of the most familiar images in American architecture. According to writer Diebold Essen, one survey found that photos of the showroom had appeared in more books on 20th-century architecture than photos of any other modern building.

After BEST Products went bankrupt, the Houston showroom became home to an electronics retailer and a furniture store when it wasn't empty, which it often was. Then in July 2003 the building's owner took down Wines' distinctive crumbling façade, and what had been memorable became ordinary.

The building is still there, but the spirit of it has gone. Its departure is consistent with local attitudes toward architecture in general, and the disregard for the collective memory of the built environment in particular. We are left with the notion of the high volatility of the built project in comparison to the power of the dictates of the real estate market.

All that remains of the building's original image is the box that once supported that magnificent "cascade of bricks." After the façade was removed, and before the new tenants took over, the ghost of a banner advertising its availability as a real estate commodity could dimly be seen. That same shadow screamed of an opportunity lost, an opportunity that is no longer available. — *Fernando L. Brave*

COMING IN CITE 71

THE HURRICANE ISSUE

- James Blackburn presents an alarming tale of what could happen here
- Andrei Codrescu reflects on Katrina's aftermath
- Tom Colbert investigates disaster preparedness plans

Plus, architectural responses to Katrina, a dissection of building codes, and more

Both photos this page by Clay Harmon

Abandoned In Place

The former Southern Pacific rail yards are a ghost of Houston's industrial past

PHOTOS BY CLAY HARMON, MARTHA THOMAS, AND ARCHIE PIZZINI/TEXT BY BRUCE C. WEBB

JUST NORTH OF DOWNTOWN, close to Buffalo Bayou, is the nearest industrial site to Houston's city center. There, for more than 100 years, a busy railroad yard operated. It has been some time, however, since rail cars pulled into the former Southern Pacific yard to be examined, worked on, and returned to the nation's rail system. The site was retired from active use close to a decade ago, and with Houston's central business district now expanding on the strength of a new appetite for inner city living, the property has begun to change its stripes.

Investors purchased the site in 2001, formed a TIRZ, and began showing around a proposal for a large "dense, mixed-use, pedestrian friendly, and transit-oriented development" called Hardy Place. With similar sites in Houston in recent years, the first act of possession has been to subject the land to the tabla raza treatment, reducing it to a blank slate onto which a new urban reality can be written. This was the case with the former Astroworld, where the manufactured hills and mounds and planted trees and shrubbery that had created a setting for the amusement park were scraped away and leveled, despite being located in a topographically-starved coastal plain. The mantra is Darwinian: grow-evolve-adapt.

And this is apparently the planned future of the one-time rail yard. Other cities may try to rehabilitate industrial sites, taking advantage of the buildings that exist to create something new with a link to something old, but that's all too uncommon in Houston. Before the earth scrapers moved in, though, a trio of photographers—Clay Harmon, Martha Thomas, and Archie Pizzini—roamed through the rail yard's empty buildings and grounds, documenting the environs in extremis. What they found was a place abandoned, but not necessarily dead, at least not yet. Theirs are pictures of an expedition into the belly of a singularly disquieting place after the machine stops, a place where the skin and bones and mechanical organs held in check by purpose and motion are not simply abandoned but heaped up, flooded, contaminated, and collapsing.

Just outside the thin allure and digital tidiness of the modern city, it's a dirge for the industrial style and the culture of a hundred years ago, for the railroad has changed very little in that time.

Houston is more new than old, and it is perhaps this more than anything else that makes it different from most of the world's big cities. Like most sunbelt

All photos this and facing page by Martha Thomas

boom towns, Houston owes much of its form and substance to late 20th century technology. Most of all, it learned how to grow away from its industrial sites. And it's for that reason that you have to go searching if you want to find signs of the city's industrial past.

By contrast, Pittsburgh, where I grew up, was one of the most industrially committed cities in the country. As was common among cities that came of age in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Pittsburgh depended on rivers and railroads to feed raw materials to the kindred factories that were the core of its economy. Those factories lined the banks of the rivers that flowed through the narrow valleys; the neighborhoods where the workers lived in densely packed houses flocked with soot were nearby. It was impossible not to be aware of the mills, their fiery machines, the mechanical muscle, the shrill, metallic noises. It was a setting H.L. Mencken described in an essay, "The Libido for the Ugly," as "hideous without a break."

Everything industrial from those days has now gone away, leaving Pittsburgh's industrial valleys so thoroughly pockmarked with abandoned industrial sites, empty downtowns, and run-down neighborhoods that in some places the scene looks like pictures of the devastation in the Ruhr Valley after Allied bombings in World War II. Pittsburgh, too, has learned to grow away from its industrial past, but doing so there is much harder than it is in Houston. So it capitalizes on its past with a vigorous nostalgia industry.

It is of course not the case that Houston has no heavy industry or notable industrial sites. This is, after all, the world's petrochemical center, and petrochemicals is an industry that takes a back seat to none in its spectacular architecture. The refinery corridor along Highway 225 between Pasadena and the dramatic Baytown bridge is perhaps the city's most compelling vista, especially at night, and I never fail to take visitors out there after they've seen all the usual city attractions, usually after dark, when the dots of white lights outline the silhouetted forms of this spectral city.

Houston is also the busiest port city in the United States in terms of foreign tonnage, and its 25-mile-long ship channel is the other place in town with an exaggerated industrial landscape, this one with giant, Star Wars-like cargo cranes striding the railroad tracks, flexing mechanical muscles while lifting loads on and off docked container ships that have arrived from around the world. But this landscape is far off the beaten path for most; the city shrivels away from it.

And so for many Houstonians the industrial present is as invisible as the industrial past, creating a disconnect from the muscle that once kept, and still keeps, much of the city moving. As older sites get bulldozed flat rather than reinvented, that disconnect grows.

As they empty, all ruins become receptacles for the imagination, perhaps none more so than industrial sites that, when they were in use, were off limits to the general public. Now that they are coming apart, their noisy bustle and purpose silenced, they are vulnerable, open, revealing, suspended in time. As architecture critic Robert Harbison wrote, "Perhaps one's residual incomprehension of such places fuels one's present interest."

Maybe we only need museums because we don't trust the real. But each relic and artifact can be a portal into the city's memory. Julie Bargmann of D.I.R.T. Studio, who gave an RDA-sponsored lecture in Houston last fall, showed an approach that allowed these old sites to be active parts of determining their own future. Instead of erasing every trace of a site's history, D.I.R.T.'s solutions incorporate the legacy of an industrial past into new regenerative spaces, often by recycling much of the detritus rather than carting it away. In this way, the city, with time, builds upon itself. But it builds in such a way that there are clues enough for one to be able to say, "I remember." ■

All photos this and facing page by Archie Pizzo

Framework House

A prefabricated system, in three acts

To demonstrate the flexibility of the Framework system, the designers digitally placed an early version of the Framework House in different contexts, such as urban settings (above and opposite, right) and rural settings (opposite, left).

BY RAFAEL LONGORIA

THOSE WHO ATTENDED the University of Houston's fall architecture lectures last year received the equivalent of a graduate education in prefabricated architecture. The lecture series began with Margaret Culbertson's introduction to the history of catalogue houses, then followed with Rocio Romero, Ralf Becker, and Charlie Lazor discussing their work, and culminated with the unveiling of Houston's own entry into the prefabricated sweepstakes—the Framework House.

As fans of Sears-Roebuck catalogue houses know, prefabricated and mail-order buildings are far from new. In her talk, Culbertson, director of the Hirsch Library at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the author of two books on catalogue houses, traced the rise and fall of prefabrication in the U.S.[1] Her answer to the question of why mail-order houses lost popularity can be summarized in one word: Levittown. That legendary New York suburb epitomized the on-site, assembly-line-style production of single-family houses. The end of World War II brought with it enormous demand for suburban houses, as well as new and widely-available types of financing that favored the purchase of ready-to-occupy houses over the more cumbersome process of buying a plot of land and then arranging to build a house on it.

Over the years, some of the best minds in architecture, among them Buckminster Fuller, R.M. Schindler, Walter Gropius, and Konrad Wachsmann, developed prefabricated designs that received varying degrees of critical acclaim, but no financial success. In the end, the most commercially successful examples of mass-produced, prefabricated dwellings in America have been mobile homes and "double-wide" manufactured houses, both of which bear the burden of being associated with marginal living conditions and an absence of aesthetic concerns.

Since the late 1990s, though, prefabrication has been stirring a great deal of interest among the design cognoscenti, with *Dwell* magazine taking a leading role in promoting the idea. The recent prefabrication movement has been about new models for practicing architecture as much as it has been about more efficient construction techniques. Before

In another attempt to illustrate the Framework system's adaptability, the designers created a series of floor plans, top, that they felt could reflect the different needs of potential residents.

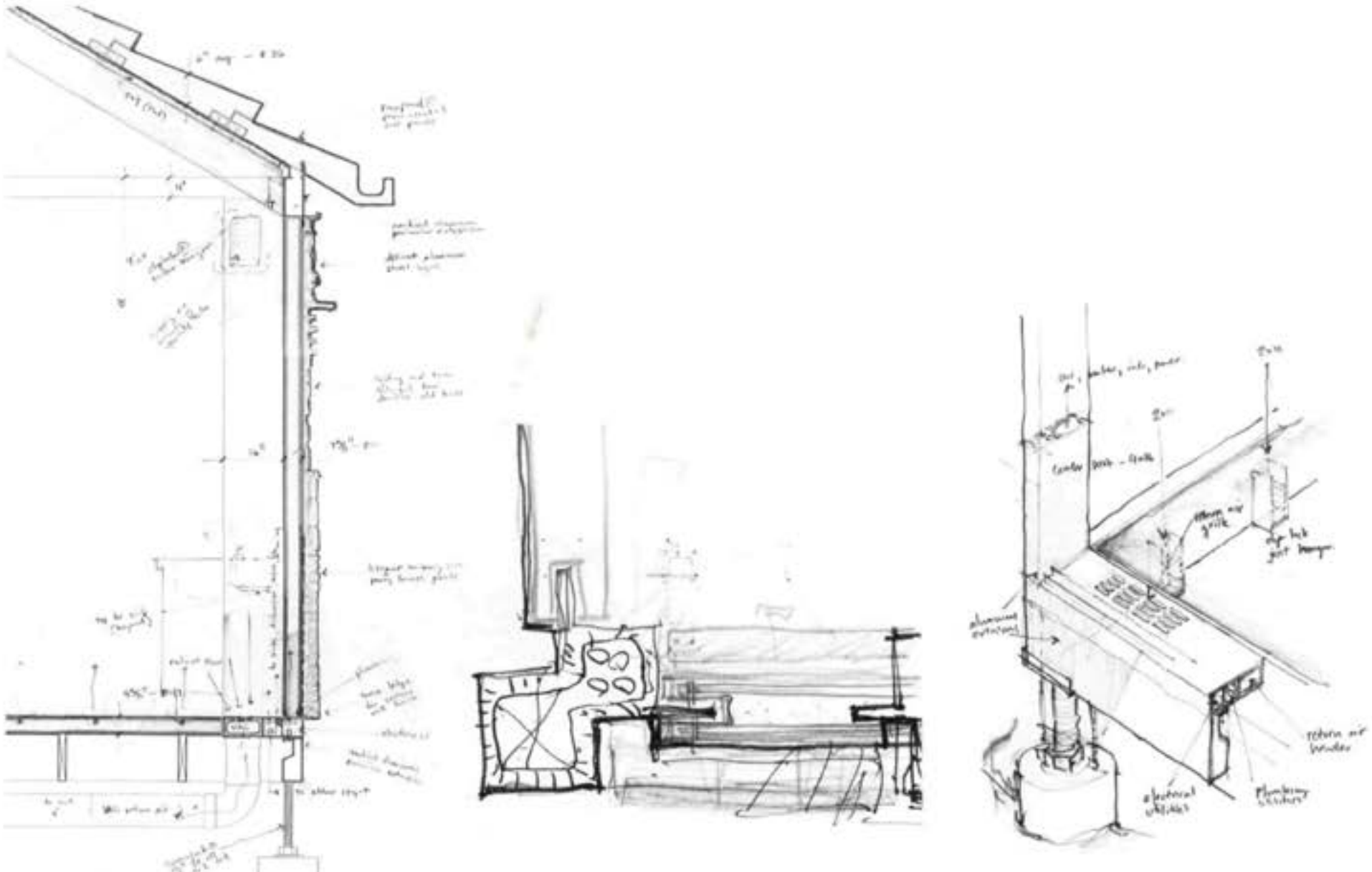
creating FlatPak for the Lazor Office, a Minneapolis architecture firm whose prefabricated work has been widely published, Charlie Lazor was already a successful design entrepreneur. BluDot, the internet-based design business he co-founded, has a large following for the thoughtful furniture and objects it produces and sells. The BluDot business model greatly influenced the FlatPak prefabricated system, providing lessons about devising designs that flow from available manufacturing technologies and emphasize shipping efficiency. Lazor has also developed a clever graphic system for clients to communicate their programmatic and spatial desires. The handful of FlatPak houses produced so far are a testament to the adaptability of the system. While providing a wide range of solutions to different sites and living arrangements, all share an elegant tautness reminiscent of Bauhaus projects.

Rocio Romero is another major player in the prefabrication movement, and her fall lecture at the University of Houston, "Making Modern Architecture Affordable," made her priorities clear. The various house models she produces from her base in Perryville, Missouri, are put together with carefully detailed interlocking panels clad in corrugated metal. She pays particular attention to hiding gutters and downspouts, resulting in a house with a strikingly clean and refined exterior for a relatively moderate price. Ralf Becker of Salzburg, Austria, on the other hand, is working within the much different economic context of the European Union. His painstakingly crafted Espace Mobile house is delivered complete on-site by a truck, and can be relocated with relative ease. It is as pricey as it is beautiful. The financial logic Becker presents is based on high land prices, as well as tax policies that make it more feasible for young professionals in the European Union to rent land rather than own it.

A prominent local architect recently told me that he opposes the concept of prefabricated architecture because it lacks the all-important response to specific sites and programmatic conditions. But unlike Becker's Espace Mobile example, the current prefabricated movement in the U.S. is not really about ready-made architecture. Instead, it is about mass customization. With their homes, Lazor and Romero play a significant role in site positioning, space planning, and elevation design. But they work with a pre-determined palette of details and building components, which significantly lowers design and production time and, therefore, cost. Houston's own entry into the prefabrication sweepstakes, the Framework House—which was the subject of an exhibition at the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture Gallery at the University of Houston last November—is a good example of this approach.

Act 1: Metalab

Upon arriving in Houston in 1997 as a graduate student at the Rice School of Architecture, Joe Meppelink started a



Illustrations this and facing page courtesy Joe Meppelink

Photos courtesy Joe Meppelink

Onezieme Mouton's prefabricated pavilion installed (above) and stacked on top of his car in the Anderson Hall courtyard at Rice University (top).

metal fabrication company to help cover the costs of college. He named his business Metalab, and taking advantage of the wide availability of inexpensive warehouses near downtown he set up a well-equipped workshop that became a celebrated hangout for Rice architecture students. Kindred spirits were allowed to use the shop's equipment and to experiment freely with materials and techniques.

This remarkable act of entrepreneurship and hands-on romanticism perfectly captured—or maybe even anticipated—the prevailing spirit in American architecture schools. All over the country, interest in design/build, digital fabrication, entrepreneurship, prefabrication, mass production, affordable housing, and sustainable materials and methods has been in full ferment for the past decade among architecture students and faculty.

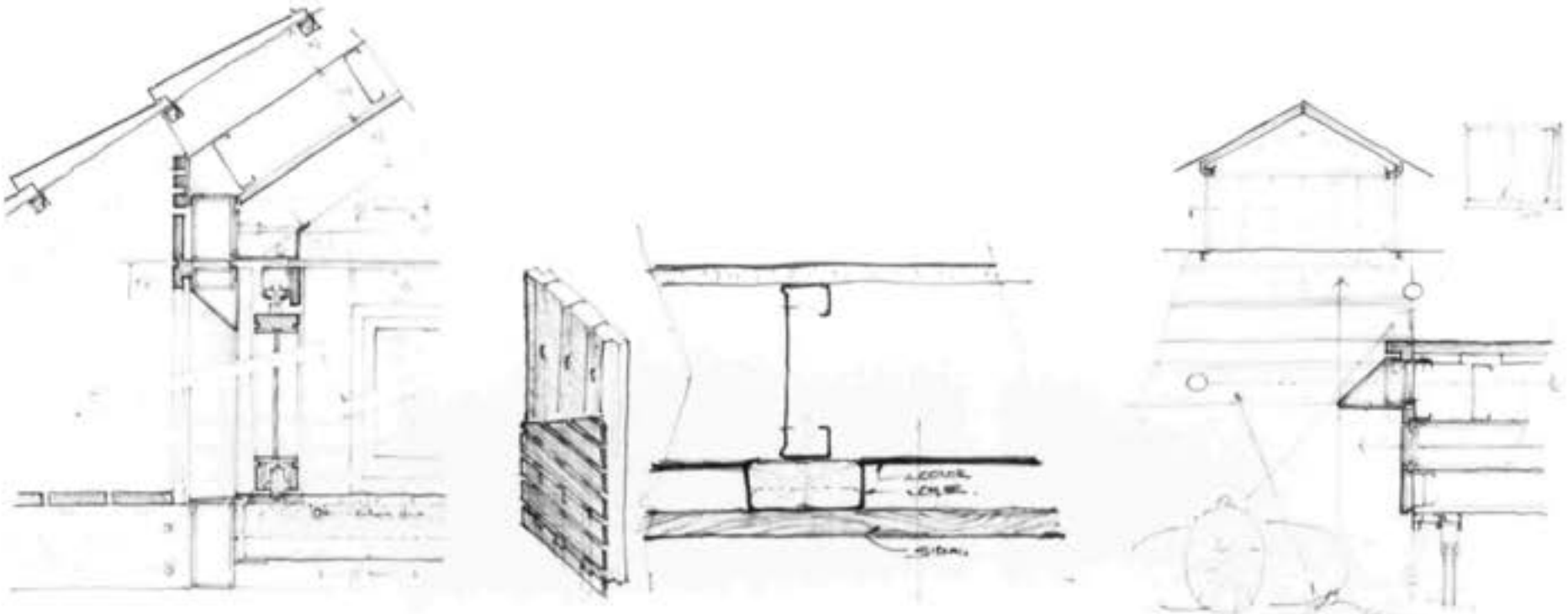
The national leadership of the American Institute of Architecture Students has repeatedly cited the reluctance to become a "CAD monkey"—i.e., an architecture graduate as a glorified computer draftsman—as a prime motivator in the movement to seek alternate ways of practicing architecture. Academics even have a couple of terms for the broader phenomenon: projective architecture and post-critical thought.[2]

One Rice student who took advantage of Metalab's generosity to carry out design work was Onezieme Mouton. His thesis project, a full-scale, portable metal-frame pavilion with translucent panels, was built at the workshop and carried on the roof of his Volkswagen to Rice's Anderson Hall for his final jury. This pavilion—which made it to the cover of *Sallyport*, the Rice alumni magazine—formed the conceptual basis for what became the Framework House.

Act 2: Competition Triumphs

Metalab closed its doors in 2001 when Meppelink finished school and began developing a professional practice. But in the spirit of Metalab, Meppelink's practice was organized around a shifting set of collaborations under the name of FRAMEwork. Mouton, Wyatt Frantom, and Adam Janusz joined Meppelink to work on a prefabricated house prototype. Working at night and around their other obligations, the four developed the

Opposite Page: Detail sketches from a competition winning Framework design, showing a wall section with salvaged facing and integrated gutters (left), a corner detail (middle), and the Smartframe system with adjustable piers (right).
Below: Details from the latest version of the Framework House, showing the revised wall section (left), the rain screen wall assembly (center), and the James Turrell-inspired corner detail (right).



Framework House concept to submit to some of the affordable house competitions being organized at that time around the country.

In 2003 their design was selected as a winner of both the Florida-based ET Foundation design competition and the HOME House Project competition organized by North Carolina's Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. Excerpts from the text prepared by the team for the Southeastern Center competition entry underline their project's emphasis on ease of construction, flexibility, and consumer choice:

"FRAMEWORK provides a clean minimal structural system of anodized aluminum framing and painted SIPs (structural insulated panels), with a customized flair of colored automotive-finished roof forms, and anodized aluminum finish on the frame. The house could be quickly assembled by trained technicians, and could also be built using unskilled volunteer labor due to its simple components and minimal need of power tool use. Flanges are also provided on the exterior perimeter extrusions that allow for addition of finish materials, which further customize and project the will of the owners and their abilities and aesthetic choices, and also create a beneficial rain-screen system which will even further improve R-values in the walls and extend the life of the exterior envelope."[3]

"An uncle who is a mason, a desire to recycle aluminum cans, a derelict house nearby, leftover paint and building materials from other projects—all can be appropriated into the super flexible context of each FRAMEWORK house."[4]

Their design was artfully presented in a variety of urban and rural contexts, and in an array of plan configurations cleverly titled by the potential inhabitants' occupations. More than prototype, the Framework House was conceived as a multi-layered system of choices. It is a kit-of-parts for grownups, from which, with the coaching of an insightful group of designers, they can design their own houses using a well worked-out set of details and elements. The proprietary details developed for the competition version of the Framework House include an eye-catching SIP roofing system with integrated gutters, clever money-saving foundations to deal with difficult Gulf Coast soil conditions, and the refined Smartframe, "a multi-cellular aluminum extrusion which carries cold air, hot and cold water, electrical, and data utilities within its profiles."[5]

Act 3: Back to the Dogtrot

In 2006, real estate investor Jason Dunn joined the Framework team to help move the project from idea to reality. This new collaboration resulted in a regional marketing strategy that targeted turnkey delivery of weekend country houses. This strategy takes advantage of the Framework system's ease of assemblage by as few as two people without the need of heavy machinery or specialized equipment (a particularly appealing feature when building far away from cities), while at the same time implying a clientele prosperous enough to own a second house.

From the very beginning the design team drew inspiration from vernacular house types when demonstrating the flexibility of the Framework system. Steven Holl's pamphlet, *Urban and Rural House Types*, was an important reference in the design process.[6] The dogtrot house, where two cabins are joined by a continuous pitched roof forming a breezeway in between, was a natural choice for a country house prototype in the vicinity of Houston. Dogtrot houses are one of the earliest Anglo-American building types in Texas; they are perfectly suited to climates with hot and humid summers and moderate winters. The iconic breezeway of the dogtrot house is a flexible space that, when the weather is nice, can double the living area of the house. The dogtrot works best with generous amounts of land around it, where the breezeway can be more easily calibrated to the prevailing winds. When viewed perpendicular to the ridge of the roof, the dogtrot is a powerful device to frame the landscape, transforming the simplest of buildings into an architectural act. Of course, siting a dogtrot to take advantage of such a view is easier to achieve in the countryside than on a crowded urban lot.

In the latest version of the Framework House, the construction system has evolved with a pragmatic redesign that favors cost efficiency and marketability over daring design. The clever foundation that does away with the need for drilling equipment is unchanged, but the metal

Illustrations courtesy Joe Mazzeira

Part of a step-by-step construction sequence illustrating the Framework system.

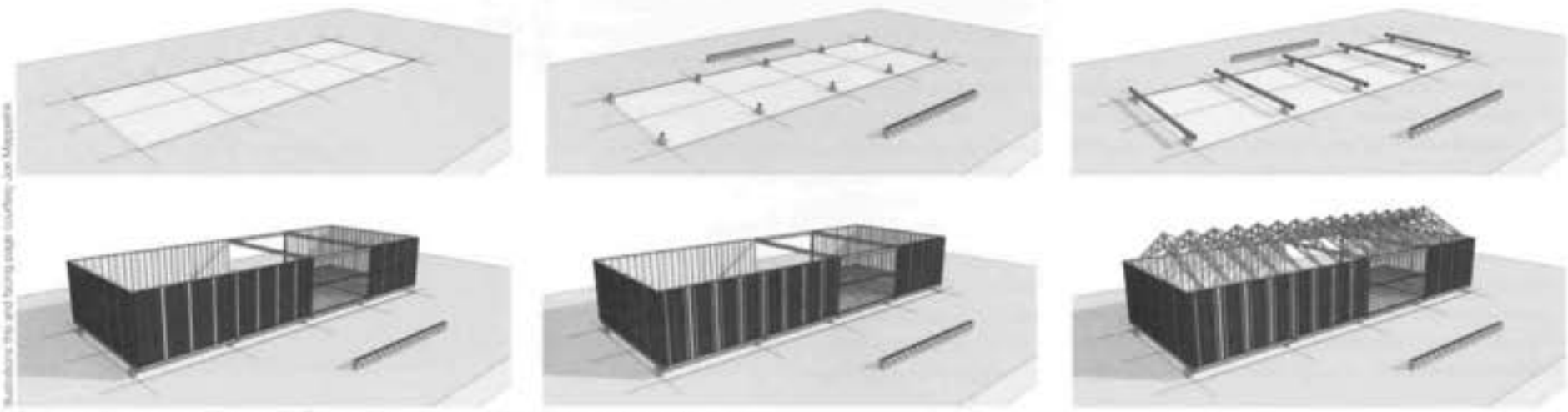
Photos © 2007 Eric Hester

Above and right: Full-scale mockups of the Framework system, as seen in an exhibit last fall at the University of Houston's College of Architecture Gallery.

frame no longer uses extruded aluminum profiles with integrated utility chases. Instead, clients are now offered a range of tubular frames. The anodized aluminum tubes used in the prototype sections that were displayed last fall at the UH College of Architecture Gallery are strikingly beautiful, and light enough to be carried by two people, even in 24-foot lengths. A super lightweight structural insulated panel already being produced in Austin has been adopted for the wall system. But it has been weatherproofed and modified with a clever wooden handle that allows it to be used in a rain-screen assembly, while at the same time making it easier to carry during construction. Folding wooden trusses (again, easy to transport and handle) now support a double layer, vented roof whose outside layer is built with surfboard technology.

While the lively colored roof that helped distinguish the earlier renderings is gone in this version, there is nothing in the chosen technology that rules out its reintroduction. The most seductive new feature shown in the prototypes displayed at the Architecture Gallery is a breeze-way corner detailing inspired by James Turrell's installations. Like the roof hole of Houston's Live Oak Friends Meeting House, the sharp edges of the dogtrot opening have a surreal flattening effect.

Construction on the first of the Framework Houses is expected to begin this spring. Since this is not an off-the-shelf product, but a flexible system for users to assemble their ideal house, the price varies considerably depending on the clients' choices. The projected cost for a basic dogtrot model of approximately 1,620 square feet (including breezeway) is



Illustrations this and facing page courtesy Joe Mazzeira

As shown in this sequence of drawings, the Framework House grows quickly in simple, easy-to-assemble sections.

$139,000. A "shell-only" version, where the client would be responsible for interior finishes and fixtures could go for as little as $89,000.

Cost has been the Achilles' heel of the contemporary prefabrication movement, particularly when dealing with prototypes, or a handful of orders rather than mass production. At its current prices, the Framework system is quite competitive with conventional construction. But it is clearly not yet meant for affordable housing, as defined by the federal government. Rather, it is an example of mass customization, taking advantage of available manufacturing, communication, and marketing technologies to make quality architect-designed homes affordable to a wider audience. ■

For more information on the Framework House, go to www.framework-ad.com.

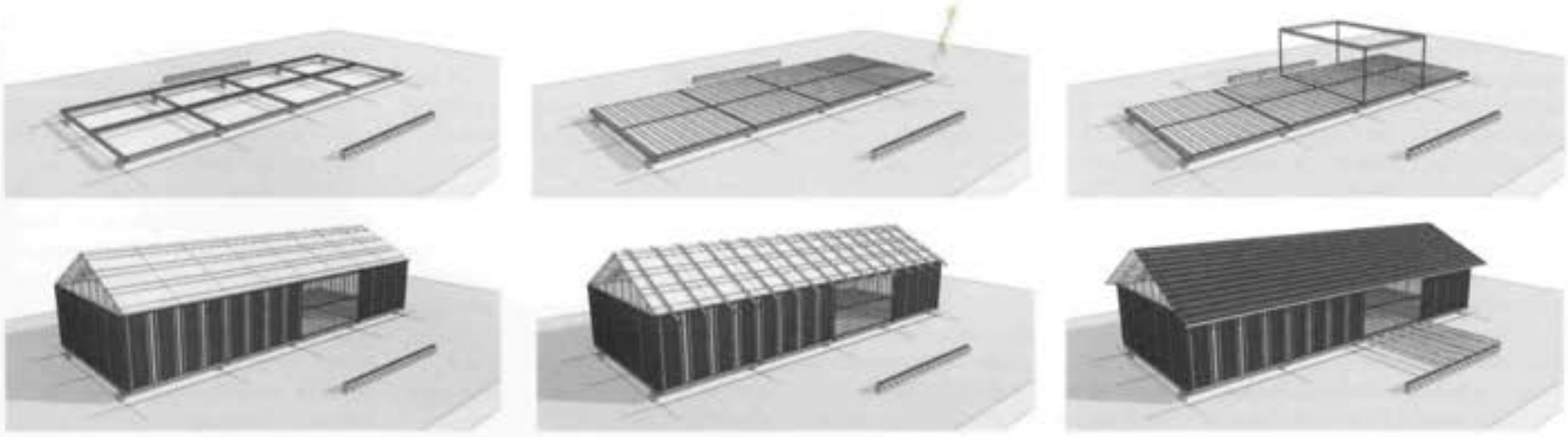
Plan and section courtesy Joe Meppelink

NOTES

1. See Margaret Culbertson's *Texas Homes Built by the Book: The Use of Published Designs, 1850-1925*, Texas A&M University Press, 1999, and her *American House Designs: An Index to Popular and Trade Periodicals, 1850-1915*, Greenwood Press, 1994.
2. Karyn Varnelis, "History & Theory: Looking Beyond Post-Criticality," *Architecture*, September 2006, p. 78.
3. David J. Brown, editor, *The HOME House Project: The Future of Affordable Housing*, MIT Press/Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 2004, p. 64.
4. Ibid, p. 65.
5. Ibid, p. 64.
6. Steven Holl, *Pamphlet Architecture #9: Urban and Rural House Types*, Pamphlet Architecture/ William Stout Architectural Books, 1982.

Photo illustration courtesy Joe Meppelink

View of breezeway in Dogtrot version of the Framework House.



Small Houses for a Big City

Searching Houston for examples of "frugal beauty"

BY MICHELANGELO SABATINO

"It is better to want less than to have more." — St. Augustine[1]

IT IS CLEAR THAT the ethos John de Menil once described as "frugal beauty"—
—embodied in Renzo Piano's Menil Collection building as well as Philip Johnson's design of the Menil House—has been overwhelmed by the effects of conspicuous consumption.[2] One might well ask whether Houston's architects, developers, and citizens have honored John and Dominique's de Menil's legacy by reacting responsibly to a global energy crisis that refuses to go away, or whether they have fueled the trend toward a "progress" that values super-sized McMansions or bombastic townhouses over more frugal, yet sophisticated, dwellings. Can we imagine the government and people of Houston collectively defying the "bigger is better" strategy and adopting a moratorium against oversize houses on small lots, such as the one adopted last year in Austin?

To be sure, signs of resistance to this diffuse and shortsighted approach to the built environment have surfaced among some Houston architects, who have rallied to the ethical imperative of "less is more." Architectural designers of different backgrounds and generations have in recent years realized houses in the 2,000-square foot range—a range that falls well below the national average of single-family homes—that, while speaking their own distinct architectural language, all reflect the quality of frugal beauty. This is a beauty that can be found in designs that limit the footprint of a building while keeping an eye on overall environmental impact and using a limited palette of basic "green" materials that resonate and enhance the quality and identity of their neighborhoods. Frugality is also reflected in the lifestyle that these homes encourage: Modest-sized spaces inevitably limit the materialistic impulse toward purchasing, displaying, and storing commodities.

To be sure, the restraint that these designers (and clients) have exercised doesn't always come with a small price tag; simple does not necessarily mean simplistic, and frugal doesn't always mean cheap. That said, what is significant is that these critical regionalist (or post-modern, in the spirit of John Hudnut's definition of 1945) houses speak of a desire for continuity with an aesthetic and ethic of modesty embodied by some of the lasting examples of domestic architecture of the 20th century. These homes build upon the foundations of a number of precedents, ranging from Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonians and Alvar Aalto's vacation cottages to the Case Study Houses.

Seven homes I found in Houston, hidden amongst much vulgarity, are commendable examples of how contemporary domestic architecture can explore local or regional vernacular precedents in order to bring a commonsensical building approach to the needs of a society that relies heavily on the automobile and digital technologies. Still, homes such as the ones I explore in these pages are a mere drop in the proverbial bucket when compared to the vast amount of speculative single-family housing that makes up a city that refuses to stop sprawling. Whereas the commercial architecture and infrastructure of the last decades has assumed a generic global quality—despite exceptions and some concessions to the symbolic such as the kitsch Texas Lone Stars emblazoned on the concrete piers of elevated highways —domestic architecture in Houston has challenged the status quo and entered more forcefully into dialogue with the genius loci of the city and region. In the process, architects have discovered that this genius loci owes much to the city's identity as a Southern frontier town turned metropolis with an "anything goes" mentality. In a city where the Now and the Future count infinitely more than the Has Been, domesticity is likely to be a refuge for the value of permanence.

Thanks to the role played by the vernacular forms and indigenous construction materials, as well as an understanding of the ways heat, wind, and light can be harnessed poetically rather than viewed as an enemy, an interesting version of Kenneth Frampton's "critical regionalism" appears to be thriving in Houston. The houses I discuss are all located inside the 610 Loop, and are inserted into established neighborhoods, away from the rows of identical houses found in sprawling, developer-built "planned" communities that are not that different in concept from those of Scottsdale or Las Vegas. In such communities, considerations of architectural language and environmental correctness inevitably lose out to more pressing concerns over how big the media room must be in order to make the house attractive and resalable. In most cases, the plans of these homes really don't change significantly from state to state even though one would expect that different socio-cultural, climatic, and geographical conditions would influence architectural language.

Architect: John Zemanek, FAIA **Associate Architect:** Longoria /Peters
Structural Engineer: Structural Consulting Co. Inc.

ZEMANEK HOUSE (2000)

Houstonians tend to prefer expansiveness over frugal footprints that do less with more by making use of flexible spaces rather than depending on single-purpose rooms. As evidence of this, a *Houston Chronicle* article last June announced the arrival to Katy of Martha Stewart Homes "branded with her name and tweaked to suit local tastes." Here, that "taste" means, at least in part, being bigger. According to the *Chronicle* story, the largest Stewart Home offered in Katy will be 1,000 square feet larger than the biggest one in the first Martha Stewart development in Cary, North Carolina, and 500 square feet larger than the biggest in the second development near Atlanta.

But the houses of Houston architects such as the ones below make the case that architects and enlightened developers can embody the concept of "frugal beauty" to help promote more sustainable, conscientious uses of resources in home building and maintenance. Instead of resorting to bombastic "dream homes," builders and architects would do better to adopt types of domesticity that exercise restraint, even while not depriving homeowners of their desire for dreamy comfort. The domestic architecture I examine also makes the case that architects can dialogue with tradition with creative optimism toward the future, and without the nostalgia-driven restrictions that weigh heavily upon the work of neo-traditionalists.

Photo by Jack Thompson

Photo by G. Lyon Photography

Photo by Jack Thompson

Photo by Jack Thompson

Zemanek House (2000)

John Zemanek, FAIA

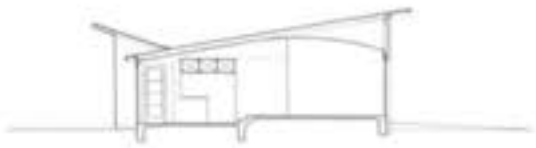
The house of architect and teacher John Zemanek is a moody presence in the mixed crowd of early 20th-century arts-and-crafts bungalows that once defined Montrose and the overbearing new townhouses that are transforming the low-density, eclectic atmosphere of the neighborhood. Zemanek's design combines references to the materials, "primitive" primary volumes, and generous pitch of roof of Texas barns and sheds with romantic allusions to Asian architecture, art, and gardens. The architecture reminds us of the existential tension between Zemanek's upbringing on a farm in Texas and his love of an Asia he discovered while in the U.S. army during World War II: A tractor seat is installed next to the front entrance door, while screens painted with a Chinese landscape function as moveable partition walls inside.

With its central corridor as a spatial and visual spine, this design builds

Plan and isometric courtesy John Zemanek

KOELSCH HOUSE (2000)

Architect: Dillon Kyle, Dillon Kyle Architecture **Structural Engineer:** James Austin Engineers, Inc. **Contractor:** Hahnfeld Witmer Davis



FLOOR PLAN

1. ENTRY
2. KITCHEN
3. DINING
4. LIVING ROOM
5. BEDROOM
6. BATH
7. OFFICE
8. SITTING ROOM
9. CARPORT
10. POOL

Plan and section courtesy Dillon Kyle Architecture

on that of Zemanek's 1968 house on Colquitt Street. The new house, however, makes a more forceful urban gesture by fully occupying a corner lot and by using perimeter walls to define open-air spaces and garden-like appendages. The materials palette reflects Zemanek's desire to combine pier-and-beam wooden construction, economical concrete masonry blocks and plywood, and the pale "Asian" luminosity of industrial steel cladding for the roof. Nowhere is sheetrock to be found. The limited range of materials confers on the Zemanek House its "primitive," frugal quality: Traditional vernacular buildings don't normally combine more than one or two materials between cladding. Despite Zemanek's commitment to a postmodernism in the tradition of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel, the principal elevation of his house is pierced by the beam ends to reveal, in a functionalist manner, the structure of the building.

During the 1960s and 1970s, books such as Clovis Heimsath's *Pioneer Texas Buildings* and Eric Arthur's *The Barn–A Vanishing Landmark in North America* brought attention to a tradition of anonymous vernacular builders who offered the bold shapes typical of modern architecture without the machine-age materials. Heimsath drew attention to the "mood quotient" of a Texas pioneer vernacular building that sat amidst a "pensively rugged countryside." Arthur compared the sacred power of the anonymous farmer's barn to a cathedral. It is hard not to see some of these qualities in the shadowy, cavernous interior of Zemanek's home.

These re-readings of traditional buildings introduce the poetic possibilities of a "dialogue with history" (while avoiding historicism) that had been precluded in orthodox interpretations of modernity. Insofar as it celebrated the poetics of preindustrial beauty at a time when the Platonic rationalism of the West began to be questioned, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows* can be used as an owners' manual for Zemanek's houses on Colquitt and Peden, both of which seek protection from the Texas light with shady recesses. As Tanizaki wrote, "The quality that we call beauty, however, must always grow from the realities of life, and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows, ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty's ends."

Zemanek's poetic realism is close to an autobiography in building. With its strong exterior expression and its calming shadowy interior, his frugal house reflects his struggle between a Nietzschian sense of willfulness and a more intimate and detached Zen-like repose and surrender to the world.

Architect: Nonya Grenader Architects **Design Team:** Nonya Grenader, FAIA, and Christopher Mechaley **Structural Engineer:** Structural Consulting Co., Inc. **Contractor:** Builder's West, Inc.

LOVE-WEBB HOUSE (2004)

All photos this page © 2004 Hester + Hardaway

Koelsch House (2000)
Dillon Kyle Architecture
Compared to Zemanek's moody and introspective house, architect Dillon Kyle's house for art dealer Franny Koelsch is a playful and whimsical cottage. At first glance, the subtly urban presence of the house is unobtrusive and welcoming, despite the absence of the front porch typical of bungalows in the Woodson Place neighborhood in which it is located. Rather than retreat from the street, this single-story house clad with multi-toned brick, colorful trim, and clapboard respects the scale of the neighborhood, which is characterized by sober monochromatic single-family bungalows and occasional two-story houses.

When comparing the Koelsch house to other Kyle designs, such as the Branard Avenue home designed for Christopher Knapp, what is obvious is Kyle's willingness to accommodate and encourage the contribution of the client. At a time when many architects think of themselves as celebrities and resort to self-promotional strategies, Kyle's humility is a rare expression of frugality of spirit.

In its plan and interior elevations, the Koelsch House demonstrates Kyle's skill in creating a spacious, mid-20th-century modern informality that combines an arts-and-crafts material palette with polished concrete floors. The architect fuses a Corbusier-inspired open plan with more disciplined, discreet rooms influenced by Adolf Loos. A partially covered outdoor patio with a swimming pool extends the interior to provide a welcoming overall living space. By carefully fitting the program onto the site and avoiding a double-story solution, Kyle demonstrates how an architect and client can harmonize the scale of a house with that of its neighborhood without giving up on architectural expression or personality. This transformation of restraints into design opportunities opens yet another possibility in the pursuit of frugal beauty.

Love-Webb House (2004)
Nonya Grenader Architects
The Love-Webb House reflects the personality of both client Jim Love, a Houston artist who died a year after moving into his house, and its architect, Nonya Grenader. On close scrutiny, one can see how Love's suggestions were synthesized and enhanced by the steady hand of an architect who knew how to put aside ego in the service of architecture. From the mechanical "cushions" that mediate between the foundation's reinforced concrete piers to the steel pipe threaded into the roof overhang on the west façade, Love's interest in the process and aesthetics of assemblage and mechanics confers

Plan and section courtesy Nonya Grenader Architects

KAPLAN HOUSE (2004)

Designer: Brett Zamore, Brett Zamore Design **Engineer:** N. Lee Walden, P.E.

Photo by G. Lynn Photography

Plan and section courtesy Brett Zamore Design

on the exquisite house the qualities of a modern and ancient machine.

The abstract, taut white walls and pine floors of the interior are a striking contrast to the undulating façades of corrugated steel, which are typical of the neighborhood, and ward off any temptation to consider the house as just picturesquely "rustic." The design responds to the spirit and nature of the site and the neighborhood.

The two-story house was built close to the road because of the presence of Love's studio (now demolished) on the east side. The existence of the studio explains the decision to have a virtually windowless east façade.

Love's desire to clad the simple volume with corrugated galvanized steel (Galvalum) responds to an aesthetic of modesty represented in Houston by such irreverent public buildings as Eugene Aubry's Rice Museum and Media Center and Gunnar Birkerts & Associates' Contemporary Arts Museum.

Grenader's Love-Webb house is just around the corner from Aubry's double houses—the original Tin Houses—designed for Fredericka Hunter and Simone W. Swan in 1974. In recent years, architect Cameron Armstrong has also worked to enrich the West End neighborhood with sophisticated additions clad in galvalum.

Grenader enhances the "primitive" and modest spirit of the cladding by treating it more like load-bearing armor than a mere skin. The Love-Webb house is an act of resistance against the encroaching townhouses that gesture to the humble spirit of corrugated steel, but share none of the subversive qualities its use represents.

Kaplan House (2004)
Brett Zamore Design
With his design of an East End house for journalist David Kaplan, young designer Brett Zamore has achieved a modern synthesis of two "timeless" vernacular domestic buildings typical of Texas and the South: the wooden dogtrot, with its open-air living room, and the shotgun cottage, with its narrow façade and shallow porch. Zamore provided Kaplan a narrow yet spacious plan that doesn't feel like it wants to be bigger than it is. With his thrifty, cost-efficient house for Kaplan, Zamore confers renewed dignity to both affordability and living frugally within ones means.

Taking his cue from the modest East End neighborhood, Zamore is not embarrassed by small. The architect accentuates the primary shapes of the square, rectangle, and triangle throughout the front and lateral façades, achieving poetry with

Designer: Carlos Jiménez Studio, Carlos Jiménez, Project Designer
Associate Architect: Brett Zamore **Engineers:** Matrix Structural Engineers, Chip Hurley, P.E. **Landscape:** A Thousand Flowers, Lois Rappaport
General Contractor: INSITE Design Build Studio, Charles Bosch

HANNEMAN HOUSE (2005)

humble means not unlike that achieved by Carlos Jiménez, for whom he has worked.

The white clapboard siding, the louvered wood sliding screens that enclose an indoor dogtrot space, and the placement of the house against one side of the lot to keep the other half free and allow for a more private garden all reflect how ingenuity, attention to scale, and budget restraints can go a long way toward achieving meaningful architecture in a city.

Hanneman House (2005)
Carlos Jiménez Studio
While the colors of historic American cities such as Boston and Philadelphia are dominated by the red of brick or the white of clapboard, Houston cannot boast (or is not burdened) by such homogeneity. Thus, it is not surprising that for a house Carlos Jiménez designed on a street in Southampton near Rice University—a street where Georgians and Tudor Revivals stand alongside each other recalling a New England town that has little to do with the semitropical Houston climate—he subversively introduced a green, two-story façade interrupted only by an iconic chimney in the best of the Aldo Rossi tradition. Rather than search within the comforting earth tone of brick, Jiménez captures and enhances "his" Houston through two dominant colors, one found in the broad, lofty sky (blue), and the other (green) in the abundant live oaks and various other trees that make Houston a very verdant city.

The articulation of the Hanneman House's interior space is straightforward, yet offers a number of subtle visual and spatial surprises. With the help of an ingenuous and dramatic single-pitched roof that mediates a change in height with a bold, unifying move, the home shifts from two stories in the front to become a single story in the back. The house wraps around a small garden and swimming pool area onto which the master bedroom and bathroom opens. This house is at its best against the backdrop of a luminous sky or reflected in the clear blue of the swimming pool.

The Hanneman home is one of Jiménez's many contributions to enriching the fabric of Houston, which is perpetually *in fieri*—in becoming. His color-as-camouflage approach is his way of inserting dreamlike, mysterious islands of silent contemplation amid the aggressive mediocrity of much of the developer-built domestic architecture.

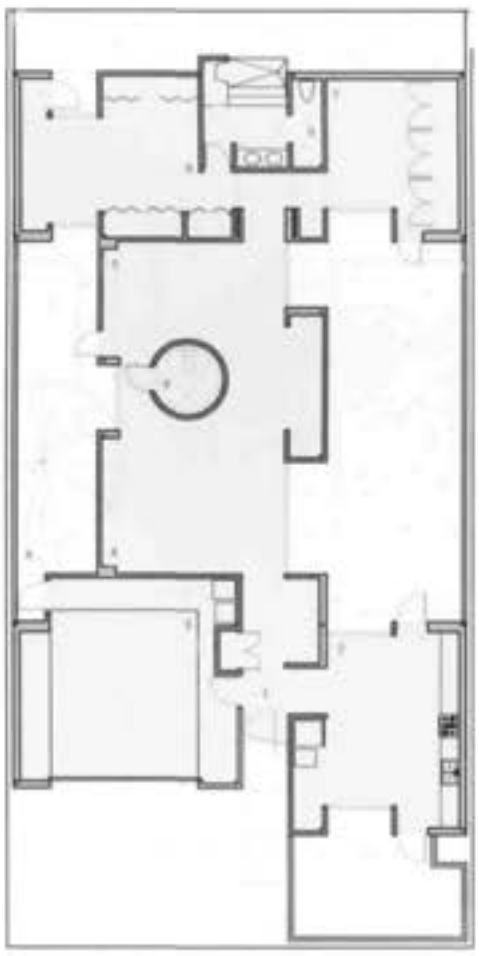
Somewhere in between the poetry of spontaneity and the willfulness of conscientious design, Jiménez finds ways of conferring renewed meaning on the notion that good design need not be expensive,

Plans and section courtesy Carlos Jiménez Studio

COURTYARD HOUSE (2005)

Architect: Peter Jay Zweig, FAIA **Design Consultant:** Philip Johnson, FAIA **Architecture Team:** Linda Zweig, Jorge Castillo, and Shadi Qashoa **Structural Engineer:** Gerald Prickette, P.E. **Contractor:** Engineered Constructors, Inc. **M/E/P:** H.M. McLeod, P.E.

Photo by F2FA/Jorge Castillo



Plan and exploded drawing courtesy Peter Jay Zweig

FLOOR PLAN

1. ENTRY
2. KITCHEN / BREAKFAST
3. GARAGE
4. LIVING ROOM
5. DINING
6. MASTER BEDROOM
7. BEDROOM
8. COURTYARD
9. BATHROOM

and that frugal beauty is about restraint in spirit as well as the purse strings.

Courtyard House (2005)
Peter Jay Zweig, FAIA
Despite the introverted and hermetic exterior of architect Peter Jay Zweig's Courtyard House, the atmosphere of the interior spaces and the internal courtyards shares much with the joyful solemnity of Luis Barragán's work. In keeping with the introspective quality of courtyard buildings, the street façade is understated. While the courtyard house is not foreign to Houston's modern architecture, not enough architects use it to explore the possibilities of living in shaded outdoor spaces that don't rely on the "well-tempered environment" made possible by air-conditioning. Zweig's contribution should be added to such notable examples as the raised multilevel courtyard of the Spanish-style Isabella Court (1929) and the open-air courtyard of Johnson's Menil House.

By making a few well-conceived decisions in the plan and by stopping the walls short of the ceiling, Zweig creates a sophisticated sequence of interior spaces and visual effects that give the house the impression of an "exploded box." (This is how Zweig himself describes the space.) Throughout this house, Zweig combines high-end technology, in the form of a patented load-bearing foam panel wall system, with low-tech approaches to harnessing the poetics of Houston's abundant natural light by using a tactile and sensuous stucco-like surface.

The tension between the artisanal and the high-tech recalls the archaic futurism of Zweig's early mentor Paolo Soleri and make this home a unique contribution to its West End neighborhood, which is filling up with oversized, ill-considered townhouses.

Salazar House (2006)
Stern and Bucek Architects
Despite Stern and Bucek's contributions to the architecture of Houston over the past decade, it is not since the completion of William F. Stern's house in the Museum District (1992) that the firm (then known as William Stern & Associates) has shown the adventurousness of embracing a new type—such as the courtyard house—as a source for domestic design.

While the Salazar House, in Hampshire Oaks near the Orange Show, reflects Stern and Bucek's commitment to a critical regionalism somewhere between Edward Larrabee Barnes' Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and William Wurster's Gregory Farm, its Mediterranean courtyard opens a new chapter in the firm's work. This home reflects the quality of "a kind of scaled-

Architect: Stern and Bucek Architects **Design Team:** David Bucek, Daniel Hall, and William F. Stern **Structural Engineer:** Higgins, Inc. **Contractor:** Mainland Construction **Planting Design:** Gregory Henry

SALAZAR HOUSE (2006)

down urbanity" that Lewis Mumford attributed to the South in his *The South in Architecture*, a quality also visible in the interwar work of such Spanish-revival architects as George Washington Smith and in the work of the more radical, post-war modernist Sarasota School.

Despite the anomaly of the courtyard plan and the inverted roof pitch for a neighborhood of single-story bungalows and ranch houses, the modest scale—one story in the front and two in the back—as well as the materials palette enable the house to fit seamlessly into its setting. The architecture of the home embodies the laid-back personality of a gracious, but unobtrusive, neighbor.

The desire of the Salazars to invest in their neighborhood rather than look elsewhere—the couple's existing house was demolished and the new one built on the same lot—made it possible for the architect to work with them to invigorate a neighborhood that would likely have been passed over by developers hoping to make a fast buck.

While Stern and Bucek's design does not parallel the affordability of Zamore's Kaplan House, it does offer an elegant though modest-sized living space that avoids over-design. Materials such as marine-grade plywood panels, raised seam metal (for the roof), and brick create a modest yet sophisticated atmosphere.

In a city such as Houston, which occupies 600 square miles, and where drive-in banking pavilions habitually cover areas that are the equivalent of entire blocks in European cities, scale is paramount. Bigness and excess are everywhere. A disregard for environmental responsibility is self-evident as the ubiquitous air-conditioning roars incessantly.

Yet the examples of architecture I have discussed should leave no doubt that Houston has its share of conscientious architects, and is not quite a wasteland. The question that begs answering is whether they are doing enough, and whether it is possible to extend their know-how to create alternative forms of domesticity that also have market appeal.

We need to work together to educate the powers that be and convince them that modest but thoughtful homes can be good business. To avoid marginalization and obsolescence, architects must continue to promote frugal beauty as an antidote for conspicuous consumption. ■

FLOOR PLAN

1. LIVING ROOM
2. KITCHEN
3. UTILITY
4. PASSAGE
5. SITTING ROOM
6. MASTER BEDROOM

Plan and section courtesy Stern and Bucek Architects

NOTES

1. See M.A. Couturier, "The Magnificence of Poverty" in *M.A. Couturier, Sacred Art*, University of Texas Press, 1989, pp. 40-45.
2. John de Menil uses the term "frugal beauty" in a letter to Reuben Askanase dated November 27, 1972. Menil Collection archives.

M photos © 2007 Eric Hester

The Michel B. Menard House (1838) in Galveston is a superior Texas example of the Greek Revival approach, with colossal columns and a porch that extends across the façade.

Porches of Galveston-Houston

BY JOSEPH MANCA

The columns of the Menard House are of the Ionic order.

THE CITIZENS OF THE new Republic of Texas wasted little time in erecting fine domestic structures, and a number of outstanding houses from this period exist in Galveston and Houston. During the 1830s and 1840s, the Greek Revival dominated American architecture, and the style flourished in Texas, reflecting the shared tastes of the recent settlers. Compared to the previous Federal period, the Greek Revival manner was characterized by broader proportions, a more emphatic horizontality, and an increased archeological awareness. Sometimes ancient Greek forms served as models for design, but the aptness of the term is also based on more general similarities with classical Greek architecture, including calmness and a simplicity of detail. In the American context, builders often suggested antiquity by painting their (usually wooden) houses white, evoking, at a distance, the appearance of stone.

There was a particular and striking connection between classical revival architecture and the domestic porch. From the time of the Italian Renaissance, architects had adapted the porticoes of Greek and Roman public architecture to the design of domestic structures. The porch was widely diffused in America by the 18th century, from humble cabins to mansions, and was adapted to the new classical style. A wide range of middle-income and wealthy Americans built Greek Revival homes, their spread abetted by design books prepared for carpenters, and these houses were often graced with porches that were at once impressive and functional, accommodating leisure activities and providing an escape from the stifling heat of the interiors during the summer months. Many of the earliest houses in Galveston and Houston had such porches. A German-American visitor named Ferdinand Roemer noted in 1846: "A porch of this kind [resting on wooden pillars about two feet above the ground], at least on one side of the house, is a necessity in every Texas home ... as it affords protection against the direct rays of the sun and at the same time permits the air to circulate freely."

The oldest of these classical porches in Galveston is found on the Michel B. Menard house, which dates to 1838. Menard had moved from Quebec in 1829 and carried on the Indian trade, specu-

Galveston's Samuel May Williams House (1839) may lack the monumentality of the Menard House, but nonetheless remains a fine example of a classical, Gulf Coast cottage.

Post-Independence, Greek Revival was the Gulf Coast's porch of choice

lated in land, and opened a sawmill. He was a signer of the Texan Declaration of Independence in 1836, and served as the principal leader of the Galveston City Company, which was chartered by the young republic to sell land to new settlers. The property surrounding Menard's house originally comprised about ten acres; although now diminished in size, enough space remains to suggest its original verdant setting. The main block of the house, from 1838, is two rooms deep and first consisted of a parlor and dining room downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs, the pairs of rooms accessible by halls on the right side. Menard made additions in about 1845, including new wings on either side of the original structure and an El in the back.

The Menard House is a superb Texan example of the Greek Revival manner, with freestanding, colossal columns in the Ionic order and a porch that extends across the façade. The window and door surrounds are of a characteristic Greek Revival type, with ears on the upper corner and low-pitched pediments. The house plan, with a side hall and two rooms on each floor, is compatible with an established national type, yet the second-story balcony and the hipped roof were more widespread during the Greek Revival in the South than in the North, and other details, such as the tall windows that rise from the floor level, made special sense in the Gulf Coast location.

The house has three porches, one before each block, including a sturdy little porch fronting the office on the left. The Ionic capitals on the main block, which served as models for the capitals on later additions, are particularly striking. These capitals were based on the Ionic versions at the Athenian temple of Artemis Agrotera, on the Ilissos River, of which only traces now survive. Architect Minard Lafever of New York published the form in his influential *Modern Builder's Guide*, of 1833, and this was the likely source for the Texan craftsmen. The Menard capitals have a similar arrangement of egg-and-dart elements, graced with delicate tendrils on either side. The scrolls in the Greek fashion run parallel to the façade, although the ancient Greeks usually angled the volutes of the capitals on the very ends of the facade. Like the ancient model, the columns of the Menard House are fluted, and as with the original Greek temple itself, the first section of the Menard House was tetrastyle, with the four columns projecting out to form a spacious porch.

The whole structure must have appeared in 1838 to be a miraculous flowering of classical ideals, a temple-like, gleaming white home that rose up overnight in this windy, sand barrier island. Menard's porch, both in detail and in overall form, attained the level of a classical portico, which might have increased the illusion that the house was an ancient tempietto. The Menard House brought the new, but timeless, ideal of Greek classicism to this frontier of Anglo-American civilization.

The Samuel May Williams House, although lacking the monumentality and archeologically inspired detail of the Menard House, is a noteworthy survivor from Galveston's earliest years and a fine example of a classical, Gulf Coast cottage. Williams was, along with Menard, a director of the Galveston City Company, having arrived in Texas in 1822. He became wealthy by the mid-1830s through financial deals, and by the

A side view of the Williams House's front porch.

The Nichols-Rice-Cherry House (from around 1850), now located in Sam Houston Park and here seen decorated for last Christmas, originally had a two-story porch that wrapped the entire house. Today, only the front porch survives.

time of the construction of his house in Galveston was serving in the House of Representatives in Austin, the Republic's then capital. Williams later operated the Commercial and Agricultural Bank of Texas, which he led until his death in 1858.

Williams built his house in the same area as Menard did, a suburban lot 20 blocks away from the town's main business center that offered quiet and distance from the docks. New Orleans was struck by yellow fever in 1837, and Galveston was devastated by the disease in 1839. It was thought that refuse in the water and unsanitary streets caused yellow fever, so Menard, Williams, and other investors in the Galveston City Company built far enough from the commercial center of Galveston to enjoy the clean, healthful air of a suburban neighborhood. Like Menard's, Williams' house faced east, toward the main part of town, allowing the prevailing breezes to waft through the dining room and adjoining central hall. Their porches were important components of this quest for fresh, cooling air and the desire for impressive architectural styling.

The Williams House is decidedly more regional than the Menard House. The wood-framed structure once stood a full story above grade on brick piers. That ground floor was reduced in height during 1903-1911 when, in a massive feat of engineering, the city's grade elevation was raised, requiring that houses be lifted up on new foundations or, like the Williams House, have their piers filled in. The structure—with its full-length porch on the front, overhanging roofline, dormer windows, hipped roof, and utilitarian ground floor that could be bypassed via a staircase to the main floor above—is a raised cottage typical of the Gulf Coast. The French doors leading out from the two front rooms onto the porch link the house to Louisiana traditions.

The vernacular, local quality of the design is apparent in the moldings and in details such as the doorway surround of the main entrance, which is based on craftsmen's inventiveness and not on pattern books and broadly established types. Williams lived in Louisiana before coming to Texas, and the style of his home was in keeping with the architecture of his former state. The Williams House is graced with Tuscan Doric columns on the porch, and the solid simplicity of the overall effect is consonant with the broader Greek Revival style. The porch's south side, early but of uncertain date, extends the portico around the house and would have allowed a good view of the Gulf into the early decades of the 20th century, before further development of the area.

The city of Galveston, despite damage from hurricanes, preserves many of the kinds of structures that graced early Houston, the architecture of which most often fell victim to economic progress. Houston was founded two years before Galveston, although the earliest extant domestic structures postdate the time of the Republic. As in Galveston, antebellum porches were commonplace.

Two such examples from the 1840s and 1850s survive in Houston. The Nichols-Rice-Cherry House, from around 1850, was built for Ebenezer B. Nichols, a business partner of William Marsh Rice, and originally stood downtown facing Courthouse Square. Later lived in by businessman and philanthropist Rice, the house was moved more than once, and was finally brought to Sam Houston Park in 1959.

Its architecture is by any measure finer than that found in other extant examples in early 19th-century Galveston or Houston. The interior has spectacular woodwork, with the repeated use of the Grecian anthemion (stylized honeysuckle) motif, which is seen in the double parlors and elsewhere in the formal lower rooms. Margaret Culbertson, author of *Texas Houses Built by the Book*, has shown that the main doorway surround derives from a plate in Lafever's *Modern Builder's Guide*.

The capitals of the porch are, roughly, of the type of Ionic order from the aforementioned Athenian temple, although these are distant variants on the original classical model; here the tendrils are less delicate, an added bead-and-reel motif runs near the banding of the neck of the capital, and the volutes are wider compared to the width of the fluted columns. No attempt is made to harmonize these capitals with the design elements of the doorway surround.

The two-story porch originally wrapped around the entire house, although only the porch on the façade survived the various relocations. The porch's presence on three sides is shown in a watercolor view of 1852, where the six columns of the façade appear clearly. As for demonstration that the exterior element went around the whole structure, paneled lower sections and windows above all open to allow passage.

These floor-length openings make no sense unless there was a porch on each level from which to exit. Moreover, the schematic view of the house in a lithograph map of Houston in 1873 shows the house with a double-level porch on all four sides.

A final porch to consider is more vernacular, and more local: The Kellum-Noble House, which is on its original site, was built by brick manufacturer Nathaniel K. Kellum, who also operated a saw mill and tannery on the property.

Fittingly, bricks are used extensively in the construction, and are utilized to form ornamented details of the vernacular "Doric" capitals of the lower story. The house, having served a number of functions, fell victim to fire in the 1950s

The porch of the Kellum-Noble House (1847), also in Sam Houston Park, is more vernacular, and more local, in its design.

and is heavily restored. The stocky brick piers of the ground level and the wooden columns of the upper level surround the entire house, creating an extensive two-level porch that wraps around the L-shaped structure. The brick piers are delightfully naive, and two stepped bricks form the echinus of the capital.

The piers are not evenly spaced around the house, as there are several intercolumniations used. The brick material would have constituted a prestigious material for Houston in the 1840s, and the house, because of the grandiose porch, has a more imposing appearance than the surprisingly limited square footage of the interior spaces would have achieved on its own.

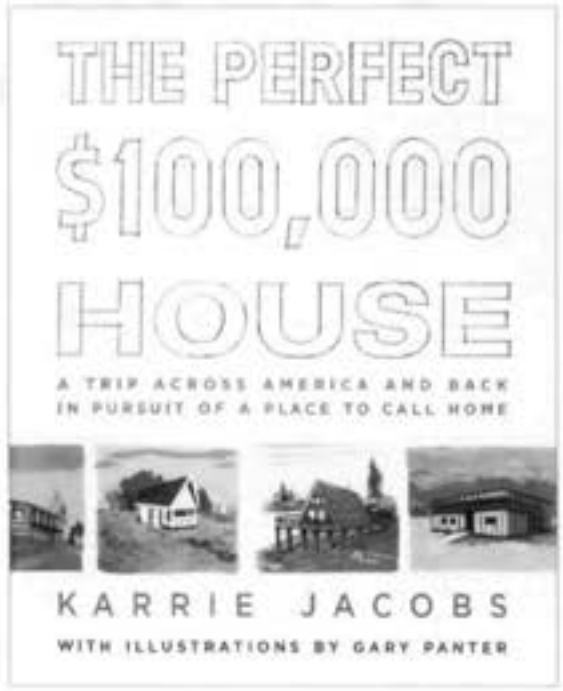
Along with the wide doors and the short central hall passageway that forms a dogtrot-like breezeway through the ground floor, the extensive porch helps break down the barrier between indoors and out. An exterior staircase on the right side offers the sole access to the porch of the upper floor, and doors offer direct entrance into several of the rooms on both the lower and the upper stories.

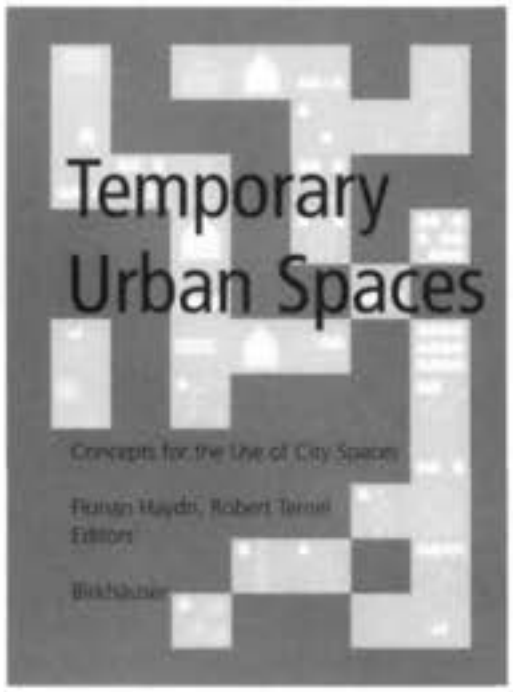
The access to rooms via doors from a porch on various levels is derived from the galleries of the French Mississippi Valley, which became diffused among a broader Anglo population. Despite the vernacular elements and local expression of the Kellum-Noble House, the thick proportions and simple ornament mark it as sharing in the broader American Greek Revival.

A basic conservatism, characteristic of the South in general during this time, continued to pervade domestic as well as commercial architecture in Galveston and Houston, and the Greek Revival, with porches usually sporting simplified Doric columns and capitals, continued to be built to the end of the 19th century and beyond. The growing impatience in the Northeast with the established Greek Revival style is indicated by the remarks of a 21-year-old Bostonian visiting Galveston in 1859; Horace Scudder complained of the port city that "even the aristocratic houses were nothing but ugly Grecian boxes with pillars."

Tastes were changing elsewhere more rapidly, but Galveston and Houston stayed longer with traditional classical forms and what architect Andrew Jackson Downing had denounced already in 1846 as the "Greek temple disease." At any rate, the veranda had come to be regarded as a necessity, and styles of domestic architecture that dominated after 1850 or so, beginning with the Gothic Revival and Italianate styles, incorporated porches in new and picturesque ways. The American porch continued to flourish with a great number of revival styles, and its progress was not slowed until the advent of air conditioning and of 20th-century social changes that made sitting outside less desirable or necessary. ■

This doorway surround at the Nichols-Rice-Cherry House was copied from a book illustration.





No Place Like Home

The Perfect $100,000 House: A Trip Across America and Back in Pursuit of a Place to Call Home by Karrie Jacobs. Published by Viking Adult, 2006. 304 pp., $25.95.

Reviewed by Lisa Pope Westerman

When looking at the cover of this book, one has to wonder what Karrie Jacobs means by the phrase, "The perfect $100,000 house." Early on, she states that the $100,000 is for the house only, and is exclusive of the land cost. She also acknowledges that her perfect house—1,000 square feet for $100 per square foot—"would cost the same per square foot as a typical American house." Based on her notion that typical American homes are fairly ordinary, Jacobs searches for an atypical dwelling, for only $100,000, where she can feel at home.

You've probably seen Karrie Jacobs' name before. For more than 15 years she has served as an architecture and design critic for various national and international magazines and newspapers, most recently *Metropolis, Travel & Leisure,* and the *New York Times*. One of her most notable achievements was being founding editor of *Dwell*, a must-read magazine for architects, closet-architects, and those urbanites who dream of designing their own homes. Intelligent as well as witty, Jacobs writes her book from a New Yorker's perspective, dropping in a comment here and there à la *Sex in the City*.

Starting from a "720-square-foot co-op apartment at the corner of Third Avenue and 14th Street in Manhattan," Jacobs begins her adventure to find not just a house she would enjoy living in, but one located in a place she'd be willing to move to. This is a big deal for Jacobs. Part of her quest was to "find a town where it feels comfortable for a woman to go into a bar by herself." Her book is as much about place making as it is about houses.

One of Jacobs' biggest challenges was that, in a sense, she knew too much. Jacobs recalls her first encounter with Modernism as a young girl at her parents' friends' house, noting how much she enjoyed being in that space. This experience likely set the tone for the career she was to have, a career that gave her the opportunity to explore plenty of well-designed modern homes. But even with this amount of exposure, while she knew which houses felt right, she couldn't define the factors or aspects of a home that contributed to the feeling.

To come up with a definition, Jacobs traveled to Yestermorrow, Vermont (an old hippie town), continued cross-country to the Northwest, then returned to the East via the South, encountering along the way an array of off-beat personalities, among them serious architects, quirky entrepreneurs, and middle-aged bikers. One interviewee was Brett Zamore, a graduate of the Rice School of Architecture, with whom she spoke while in Houston about his "shot trot" house. Jacobs was fascinated with Zamore's determination to create a home made of a kit of parts.

Jacobs relates her experiences place by place in the context of her travels, searching out examples of architectural innovation in American home design. After three months and 14,000 miles of listening and observing, Jacobs shares several truisms and epiphanies. She notes how hard it is to build a typical stick frame home, and ends up questioning the idea that "modernism is good, traditionalism is bad." After spending some time at the original Habitat for Humanity community near Americus, Georgia, she becomes sympathetic to its main mission—and gets over the bad rap it tends to have in haughtier design communities. She learns what she calls "architectural math: The smaller a building is, the more it costs per square foot." Other observations: Build in Texas where labor is affordable; the best towns are college towns; clean design is expensive (you can't cover up stuff); tires and dirt make a decent home (but don't have bathrooms); solar collectors can be zapped by lightning; and the A-frame has not perhaps been explored to its fullest.

The Perfect $100,000 House is inspiring. Jacobs' visits are the ones you wish you had the time to make yourself. Some of the places you may have seen already, and some you may not have known were there. What begins as the author's personal quest transforms into a journey that may change your perception of today's housing market. Although this book is a good read for non-architects, Jacobs' findings, which include a great body of architectural research, could inspire architects and innovative developers to make well-designed housing available to everyone at an affordable price.

Momentary Urbanity

Temporary Urban Spaces: Concepts for the Use of City Spaces, edited by Florian Haydn and Robert Temel. Published by Birkhauser, 2006. 272 pp., $40.

Reviewed by Reynold Scott Magnuson

Imagine stepping onto a Metro light-rail car and, as the doors close, the front carriage is suddenly flowing with alcohol and Samba music, while the rear carriage sports a DJ and costumed commuters. At first you're taken aback, but then you join in the revelry, connecting with fellow passengers. Then, at the next stop, the scene quickly disperses.

Such an event seems far-fetched. But something just like it happened on the Circle Line of London's Underground. The project, dubbed the Circle Line Party, and other experiments like it represent an avant-garde approach to urban design, one resulting from a European Union research project called Urban Catalyst whose results have been compiled in *Temporary Urban Spaces: Concepts for the Use of City Spaces*.

Composed of ten essays divided among the themes of Politics, Practice, and Desire, as well as details of 35 projects that illustrate an array of urban experiments, *Temporary Urban Spaces* addresses a specific movement in urban planning. The philosophy behind the movement represents the desire to move away from traditional planning tools towards a process-oriented methodology. In his essay "From Regulation to Moderation," Klaus Ronneberger states the hypothesis this way: "...our model for urban development is no longer the master plan conceived on a drawing board, but temporary uses that are already available at a specific place and programmes that have evolved within a specific context—'organically' as it were—with the participation of the local population."

Temporary Urban Spaces starts with four politically themed essays exploring the economic, historic, and bureaucratic factors surrounding short-term urban planning. Each author interprets the umbrella term "temporary" in his or her own way, showing it to cover a broad spectrum of ideas, meanings, and practices. The result is an urban manifesto with a distinctly playful character, a manifesto strongly supported by the fundamental premise that public spaces need to reflect the cultural context and social activities of the society they serve. The contributors are not focused on condemning traditional models. They are more interested in trying new ideas than denouncing old ones.

Florian Haydn's essay, "A Material That Never Comes to Rest," opens the

Practice section with certainty. He conveys the power of socially determined public space when he says, "Temporality contains the essence of democracy. There are states that are constantly renewed, seeking decisions and creating moments of agreement." The other essays, however, fail to connect in the same way. Their ideas and projects are less engaging, and create a weak transition into the Desire section.

The essays of Desire focus on capturing the feelings and emotions evoked in public spaces through different events and experiences. Ursula Hofbauer's "Horror Vacui" uses a project called Permanent Breakfast to illustrate her interest in challenging the use of space in the pseudo-public sphere. The project begins when one or more people set up a breakfast table in a public space and offer, perhaps, coffee and rolls, inviting passers-by to join them for breakfast.

The reactions have generally been positive. People readily sit down, drink coffee, and chat. The idea is spread like a chain letter, and has taken root in most European metropolises as well as in New York and Taiwan. According to Hofbauer, "Permanent Breakfast is a game, an art project, art in a public space and public art, but also … a tool to test the quality of public spaces or, to put it another way, to ensure the public character of a certain space." In her essay, Hofbauer elevates this whimsical game to a political act, describing it as a "handy litmus test to ensure oneself that a space is public." It is a simple point: That small interventions can change drastically how we perceive and use public space.

The 35 projects, which are presented in the last section of the book, vary greatly in theme and ambition. Each one was a creative intervention of urban space, and represented the spirit of temporary planning. The Circle Line Party was initiated as a pure expression of freedom, and has not been duplicated. Permanent Breakfast, now in its 11th year, is ongoing. One of the most interesting and inspiring projects is one initiated by Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoe. In 2001, as a public relations-event for the city's traffic policies, a beach and a large swimming pool replaced the Georges Pompidou motorway for four weeks. The project has been repeated every year since. It now attracts more than 4 million visitors annually, and the idea has been copied in several other major European cities.

The variety of temporary uses is broad. It stretches from art projects to purely commercial events to cultural and entertainment offerings. *Temporary Urban Spaces* makes an entertaining, if not strong, case that the inclusion of process-oriented planning can create user-centric city spaces that, compared to rigidly planned spaces, bring big advantages. If nothing else, it should at least challenge you to discover that there is nothing quite like a well-placed public breakfast table.

T for Texas, C for Courthouses

Historic Texas Courthouses by Michael Andrews. Photography by Paul Hester and Lisa Hardaway. Published by Bright Sky Press, 2006. 276 pp., $49.95

Reviewed by Daniel G. Carey

Hailing from a state—Kentucky—where what county you're from means a lot more than it probably should, I found myself right at home when I moved to Texas in 2000. Right at home, because I began witnessing the swell of county pride as many of the state's historic courthouses were, one-by-one, rehabilitated and restored. For the last seven years I have, thanks in part to my involvement with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Smart Start" courthouse preservation grant program, enjoyed a front-row seat as Texans stood up and took pride in protecting and preserving dozens of their historic and revered centers of law and politics.

Courthouses are much more than local seats of jurisprudence. They also function as mini-hubs of the universe. For many of us, going to the courthouse is the closest we will come to experiencing local rule. It is fitting, then, that these bastions of participatory democracy should be honored by this handsome, well-written account by Michael Andrews, a former U.S. Congressman from Houston.

Another in a line of coffee-table books about the county courthouses of Texas—a line that includes 1971's *The Texas Courthouse* by June Welch and J. Larry Nance; 1983's *The People's Architecture* by Willard B. Robinson; 1984's *The Texas Courthouse Revisited* by June Welch; and 1999's *Old Friends: Great Texas Courthouses* by Bill Morgan—this contemporary version does most of what the others do and a little bit more. It serves as an articulate testament to the value of preserving our historic public architecture.

Andrews selected 100 of the state's 200-plus historic courthouses to focus on, and each is honored with beautiful photographs by Paul Hester and Lisa Hardaway coupled with basic historical and architectural information. He arranged the book in three logical sections: the Golden Age (mid 1870s-1900), a New Century (1900-1920s), and Texas Moderne (1930s). In each section, Andrews highlights the dominant architects and dominant architectural styles du jour, from Victorian, Beaux Arts, and Classical Revival to Art Deco and Art Moderne. Readers learn about the genius of Alfred Giles, James Riely Gordon, Henry Truman Phelps, and others who literally and figuratively architected Texas' downtowns. At the beginning of each section, Andrews provides historical background that creates a context for more deeply understanding the period and its representative courthouses. In these overtures the reader receives a palatable dose of American and Texan history—just enough to whet the appetite, but not so much as to make you skip over it and "just look at the pretty pictures."

But the "pretty pictures" are, indeed, something to behold. Paul Hester and Lisa Hardaway prove their skill and merit page after page. Their astonishingly good photographs capture both the scale and detail of each building against a backdrop of miles of those famous Texas skies. A few standouts are the Irion County Courthouse, the Bexar County Courthouse, the Shackelford County Courthouse, and the Maverick County Courthouse. Readers can follow the text and get a nice lesson in architectural history while gazing at photos that complement Andrews' research and observations.

Of equal interest are the historical footnotes and anecdotes, from George Lott's murderous rampage in the Tarrant County Courthouse to "Old Rip," the horned toad who resided in the cornerstone of the old Eastland County Courthouse from 1897 to 1928. Andrews turns brick and steel into flesh and blood with his stories of mob violence in McLennan County and midnight fires in Milam County, fires set by competing town fathers who coveted being the county seat.

As good as this book is, a few small improvements would have made it even better. Bolder page numbers and captioned photos would aid the reader in more fully appreciating the views and the lessons. While I can appreciate the unadulterated artistry of the photos, a well-placed note would have eased the burden of flipping back and forth between photos and a list of illustrations. Including 16 entries in the Texas Moderne section may honor a significant period in Texas' growth, but fewer of these more homogenous, low profile substitutes would have conveyed the same message. If nothing else, they show us how much more we should appreciate the Golden Age and New Century representatives. Also, I wish Andrews had shared more information about the square or land on which the courthouses sit, e.g., landscaping information and the rise and fall of the town center. In many cases, as courthouses go, so goes the county seat … and the preservation of one begets the revitalization of the other. That is the positive message this book affords. ■

All photos courtesy Rice Gallery

Rip Curl Canyon was meant to be a virtual landscape, which for some meant a virtual playground.

Landscape in the Digital Field

Rip Curl Canyon
Rice Gallery

Reviewed by Andrew Vrana

The emergence of landscape as a theme of discussion and production in art and design last fall in Houston was a local manifestation of a recent global interest in the subject. Landscape as either metaphor or artifice has become a means to model or realize various aesthetic visions and systemic organizations, from the painter's canvas to large urban conglomerations.

The Rice Design Alliance's *Resurfacing the City* lecture series featured an array of designers who operate between the disciplines of shaping landscape and planning infrastructure. In the recent past, the role of each design field was isolated by a separation between an urban and pastoral dichotomy. Landscape designers groomed nature into picturesque idealizations, and planners plowed through everything without concern for aesthetics. The new complex of multidisciplinary practice realizes that at some point everything became essentially urbanized, and that one has to absorb an understanding of ecology and materiality in order to organize complex systems of the landscape and urban fields. With this, a new vitality between the city and nature becomes possible.

Parallel to this discussion, Rice Gallery last fall curated a site-specific installation titled *Rip Curl Canyon* by Los Angeles' Ball-Nogues Studio. Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues, along with a team of students and faculty from the University of Houston College of Architecture and the Rice University School of Architecture, inhabited the gallery for several days in order to build an artificial landscape, one conceived in a virtual space far from the physical reality of Houston. This simultaneous separation from and connection to place, on view last September 21 to October 29, was an important theme that contextualized the work.

Ball and Nogues are part of a trend in which young designers use the flexible space of the gallery or the temporary installation to experiment with architectural constructions that incorporate digital tools, material innovation, and non-standard modularity. Former collaborators with Frank Gehry's office who trained at SCI-Arc, Ball and Nogues are fostering a new instrumentality between a loose programmatic condition and a formal and material response.

Rip Curl Canyon was the temporary manifestation of a virtual landscape. The designers used a constellation of digital media to create a topography that was not modeled on an actual place, but which evoked a natural geological formation. Using the non-standard, curvilinear geometry that 3D software makes possible, Ball and Nogues produced a surface that took on the freedom to cascade and fold like an indoor ski-slope, or a surfer's "killer wave" frozen for posterity. The Gehry aesthetic was most apparent in the use of vertically oriented cardboard sections that formed a surface through repetition and displacement. Nogues worked in Gehry's model studio, and was instrumental in the development of some of his cardboard furniture. In that furniture, a standard series of profiles are adhered together to form the shape of a chair. With *Rip Curl Canyon*, this technique was applied on a massive scale.

One stroke of clever ingenuity was the creation of a differentiated surface with a series of standard profiles repeated and supported by a shifting substrate made out of a reticulated plywood frame. This was an economical response to how the sections of cardboard were cut by a standard die at a box company in Dallas. To change the shape of the die would have been cost prohibitive, and also unnecessary, if Ball and Nogues could constrain the shape of a section while pushing the formal moves of the overall surface. This was achieved with parametric software that allows for the control of finite components of an assembly while the overall system of pieces changes shape.

Designers of jets, cell phones, and shoes have already used these tools, and now digitally plugged-in architects are

The plywood substrate that supported *Rip Curl Canyon* was a compelling sight on its own.

Though meant to be experienced up close, from a distance *Rip Curl Canyon* looked less like landscape and more like sculpture.

incorporating their potential. The plywood substrate was a compelling construction on its own. It was produced by Brochstein's, a local millwork fabrication company, using Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) routing equipment set to specific dimensions derived from the digital model. The substrate arrived as a series of pieces that went together with minimal site work and within exacting tolerances.

Maximilian's Schell, an earlier installation by Ball-Nogues Studio at Los Angeles' Materials & Applications Gallery, was an elegant experiment in material lightness and minimal surface composed of a series of CNC cut pieces arranged in a spiraling vortex array. Using translucent, gold-tinted Mylar, the construction was installed in an outdoor gallery space that allowed it to play off natural light as the day progressed, creating a shifting mirror image that projected onto the ground and passing visitors. This element of play was carried forward in *Rip Curl Canyon*'s undulating surface, which was designed to be climbed and navigated by the younger visitors to the gallery.

The use of an art gallery to launch an architectural project is nothing new. A number of designers who were once considered purely experimental, but who are now getting large commissions, started their careers in the controlled environment of the gallery. The recent retrospective of Zaha Hadid's work at New York's Guggenheim Museum traced this trajectory from her early paintings to her current urban and built work. Others have watched this trend and are realizing the power of working outside the typical understanding of practice while producing projects that experiment with ideas of material production and space making—all without having to keep the rain out.

One project that preceded *Rip Curl Canyon* with regard to this trend, as well as in theme, was 1996's *Skin of the Earth* by Raoul Bunschoten. Bunschoten ran a studio unit at the Architectural Association in London that used the gallery as the site of experimentation for partial architectures. *Skin of the Earth* consisted of a series of lead plates that were individually folded and collectively sutured together to create supple, pre-digital undulating surfaces that were a metaphor for the tectonic plates and metropolitan layers that form the epidermal surface of the global landscape. I mention these references to contextualize the gallery based architectural project as being initiated by designers such as Bunschoten and Hadid, and to show how such work has evolved.

The Rice Gallery should be applauded for opening their curatorial agenda to include this kind of speculative architectural project. Along with the Blaffer Gallery, which a short while back hosted the work of the Ant Farm Collective, it is fostering a dialogue between art and architectural culture in Houston that is raising awareness on local and national scales. ■

Home Sweet Home

Preparing for growth will mean thinking differently about where we live

BY RIVES T. TAYLOR

We Americans spend a lot of our time and money making our houses "castles"—both in terms of size and advanced (and energy-consuming) technology to fill that space. The annual Houston Home and Garden Show more than demonstrates the focus we have on where we live: Over the past 40 years, for example, we have added about 50 percent more space per family member to our homes.

The American love affair with the home has evolved from colonial pattern books and Andrew Jackson Downing's mid-18th century designs exploring the "American" house. Those pattern books, predicated on the plan, section, and elevation of the model house, were based on creating functional housing prototypes that, although imported from the Old World, were to be climatically and materially fit into a New World context. It was an unwritten understanding that while, say, the aesthetic of Georgian England was to be used in the design of the American house, dealing with such practical issues as water collection, cross ventilation, day lighting, and the use of durable local materials suitable for the vicissitudes of the climate would also be part of Anglican pragmatism.

Over the last 60 years we have ignored that pragmatism in our desire for the single-family house freestanding on a quarter-acre suburban lot. A great deal of modern North American homebuilding geography has ignored the reality of place. Vast housing estates, with their attendant population and traffic, have appeared in regions not particularly supportive of our notion of the home as an indestructible castle. This sense of longevity of "Home" has been shaken recently with three particular, and in some cases quite literal, storm clouds. We are finding that the limits of electricity and potable water are detrimentally impacting at least 75 percent of America's suburban areas. An even more uncertain challenge to our house and home promises to be the increasing forces of hurricanes and other climate-related destruction, especially for those within 100 miles of the coast or in the deserts of the Southwest.

While houses may be increasingly energy efficient, our demand for more and more technology along with the sheer scale of residential construction is overtaxing the distribution grid and power system. (This is happening not just in America, but elsewhere in the world—China alone will need over 400 million new houses in the next 20 years.) The distribution grid is increasingly seen as particularly susceptible to failure. Hidden from view is the fact that the primary source of power to the average house is a coal-burning power plant, with its problematic pollution footprint. By some estimates, Texas is looking to increase its electric power consumption by 50 percent in the next 30 years, and there is concern that getting the system the energy it demands will result in more power plants that could accelerate air quality and global warming problems.

Similarly, the modern houses in huge estates demand city-purified or potable water in huge quantities, water that is often distributed by aging and leaky systems. The fastest development in North America is occurring in areas where there is barely enough water available for growth. Think Arizona, southern California, San Antonio, and even, though a bit farther away from its water challenges, Houston. Yet less than 25 percent of the water in homes really has to be potable.

Perhaps like our forebears in Houston, we could learn to collect some of the 48 inches of annual rainfall for the remaining 75 percent of this water use.

There are, of course, steps being taken to address energy and water use of older homes through conservation. Houston Mayor Bill White has started a weatherproofing and energy optimization strategy for multiple older neighborhoods; several hundred post-World War II houses in the Pleasantville neighborhood are getting these improvements.

Affordable housing organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, are also taking a closer look at the long-term costs of ownership for their houses, and seeking ways to reduce water and electricity use. In other parts of the country, where limits on resources are more clearly recognized, developers of large-scale housing are being prodded to provide a product with real water and energy efficiency, using such tools as the DOE Energy Star protocol to substantiate their results. Such market demands are now starting to affect even Houston builders.

In the past two years the third storm cloud for the extended life of the house has emerged even more forcefully. Not only are more active weather patterns such as hurricanes and heavy rains impacting the longevity of the house, but the uncertainty of the power grid and the potential for long power outages create a stark sense of uncertainty among homeowners. In the case of Hurrican Rita, it was reportedly not the strong winds that destroyed the most houses, but rather the extended power outages, which led to the destruction from within of even slightly waterlogged residences. Unmitigated humidity can lead to the degradation of the entirety of a house's interior. The drywall, particle-board cabinets, and carpets of Gulf Coast houses are unlikely to withstand a bout with this natural force. Recall that earlier houses not only didn't have these new but fragile finishes, they also didn't rely on central air conditioning for dehumidification.

The recovery of most of the Gulf's housing stock has been slow not only because of the well-reported problem with capital flow, but also because of the debate entailed in recovery. Do we rebuild the same old way—as in fact is encouraged by FEMA—or do homebuilders need to think both about disaster reliance (durability and ease of recovery) and decentralized water and power distribution (local generation including solar photovoltaic panels) to avoid large grid failures? A small but growing industry has sprung up for specialized house construction in which a broadened and strengthened sheltering roof and strengthened façades—the rigid shell of the home—enclose a far more energy- and water-efficient core, one fitted with far more durable materials suited for the climate. Especially when raised above the level of surge tides, these homes are noted to be disaster resilient.

Dealing with these issues are questions we face in the Houston and Galveston area as we plan to double in size. A large part of our region's growth will come at the expense of the open, natural spaces that help handle floods, lessen heat waves and the impact of hurricanes, and also provide everyday sources of natural delight.

This growth, if south of Houston proper, also will require a rethinking of what we'll do before and after a natural disaster. Many consider sheltering in place the only answer. One thing is certain: Our southeast Texas homes need to learn the recent lessons on the limits and stewardship of resources in the face of a clearly changing world. ■

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