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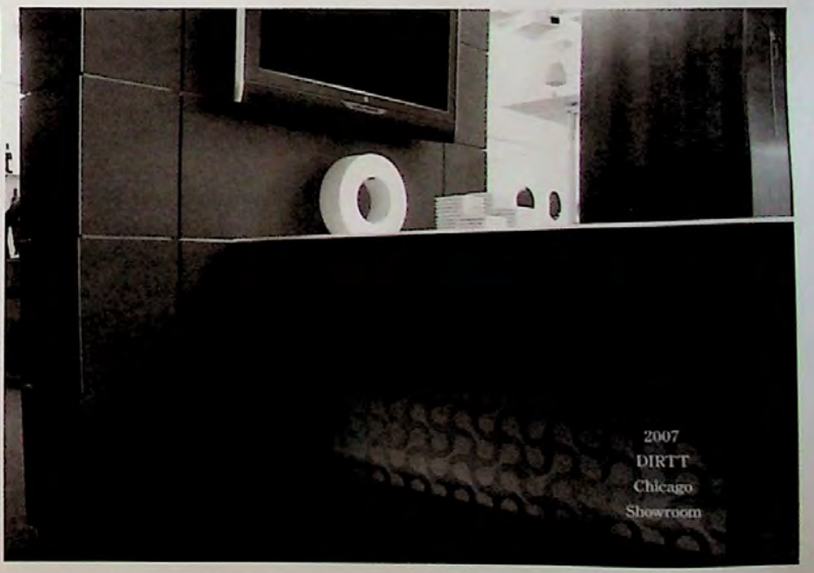

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THE ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN REVIEW OF HOUSTON

A PUBLICATION OF THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

75 SUMMER 2008

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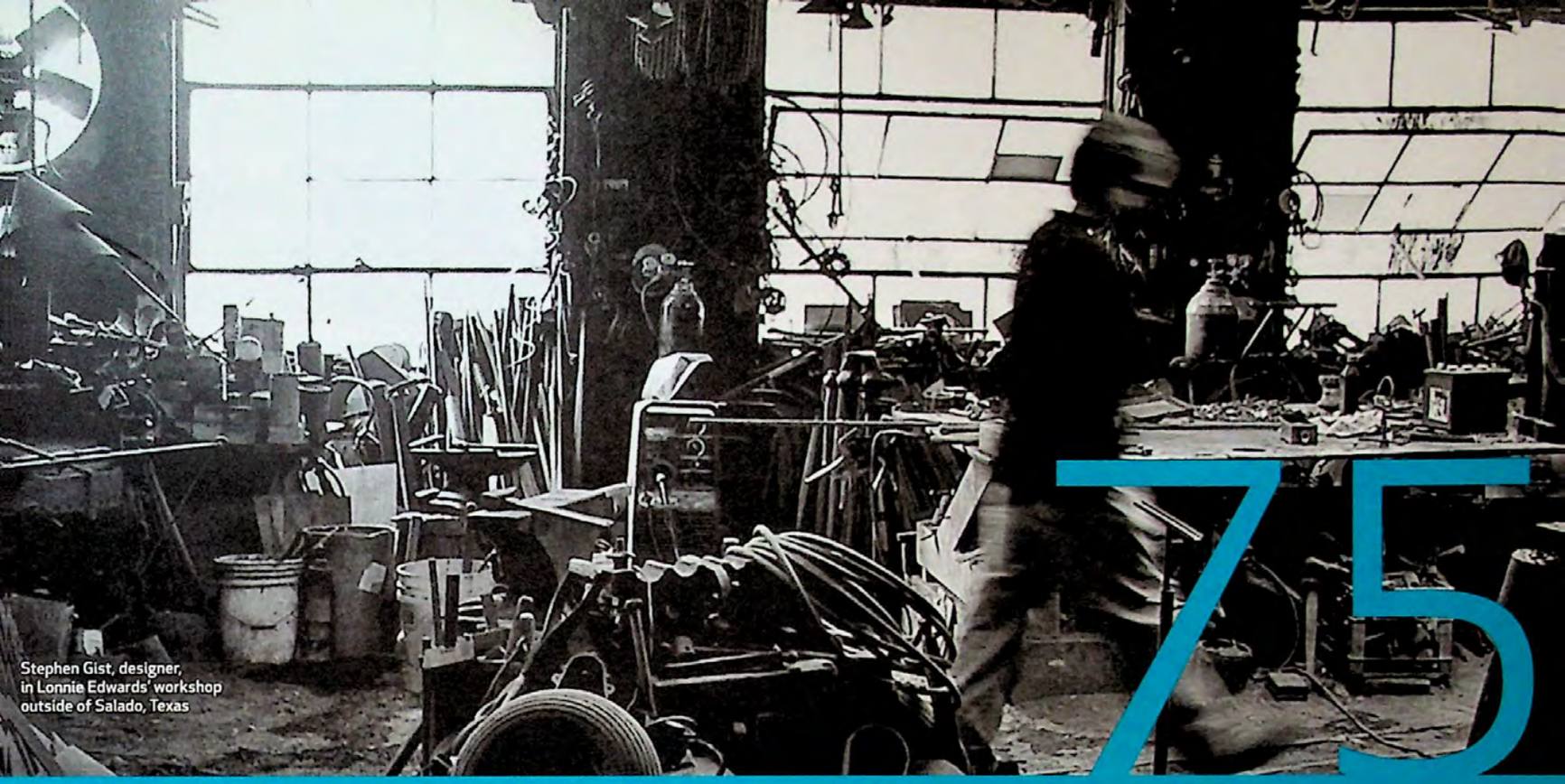
The Rice Design Alliance, established in 1972, is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to the advancement of architecture and design.
website: rda.rice.edu

COVER: Dinosaur reaching for the heavens atop a strip mall in Alief. Photographed by Paul Hester.



Stephen Gist, designer, in Lonnie Edwards' workshop outside of Salado, Texas

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TANIGUCHI'S PLAN

Asia House comes to the Museum District.

TOP: **Asia House, north elevation drawing.**
ABOVE: **View from gallery to sculpture garden.**
RIGHT: **On-site full-scale mockup of Asia House.**

Architect Yoshio Taniguchi

"IT IS POSSIBLE TO MAKE PLACES ON THE EARTH THAT give a sense of grace to life," says Nancy Allen, a board member of Asia Society Texas Center who ceremonially broke ground on the newest cultural addition to Houston's Museum District: Asia House. True to her conviction, Allen and her fellow board members hired Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi to design his first freestanding building in the United States.

Just north of the Holocaust Museum, on Southmore between Caroline and Austin, the 38,000-square-foot Asia House will serve as the permanent home of the center, offering public spaces, offices, flexible meeting rooms, a garden café, a theater, and an art gallery. Kendall/Heaton Associates is the architect of record, with contractor W. S. Bellows Construction Corp. and Geoffrey Brune, AIA, as design liaison. Scheduled to open in 2010, programming will include dance, film, art, and public discussions with government officials with the mission to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders, and institutions of Asia and the United States.

Taniguchi, known in the United States for his expansion of The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in Manhattan, has a high-profile career in Japan designing museums, including the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures at the Tokyo National Museum, the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, and the Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as other public buildings. Asia House in Houston is his second U.S. project after MOMA.

As the rain held back (for the most part) behind a gray cloudy sky, the groundbreaking on May 15, 2008, was attended by dignitaries from Houston's Asian community, including Houston Rockets center Yao Ming. Dramatically poised behind the speaker's podium was a wooden mockup of the northeast corner of the building where the primary entrance will sit at the juncture of the structure's two dominant planes. Taniguchi requested the full-scale mockup, uncommon in U.S. design practice, so he could study, refine, and change elements as needed prior to construction. Minor on-site alterations to the mockup conveyed the sense of lines erased from a piece of paper. They included a change in the depth of the front wall and the relocation of a canopy from the roof to above the paired doors on the east façade.

"I am interested in creating spaces that human beings can experience. I am not interested in architecture as a container—I find it too confining," Taniguchi explained, in a perfect fit with Allen's vision. After the ceremony, a rainy walkthrough of the mockup demonstrated the marriage of Allen's passion and Taniguchi's talent. The front doors are hidden behind a wall that forces the visitor to experience the building as a place of exploration and unfolding. Just past the doors, a space that reaches the full height of the interior, soaring and uplifting, dramatically appears inside the entry foyer.

The interior areas are arranged so that there is access—physical and visual—to adjacent spaces, gardens, and water features. Visual access requires restraint, an attribute not widely associated with Americans, and is reminiscent of walking through the MOMA addition. Asia House is a place to engage notions of both Asian and Western cultures, and it accordingly provides spaces for contemplation, exchange, and reflection. The culture, skill, and vision of the architect are integral to the building's sublime spaces and rich materials, which capture a sense of grace, harmony, and beauty.

-Anna Mod

PORTRAIT: PAUL HESTER; RENDERINGS COURTESY ASIA HOUSE; MOCKUP: GEOFFREY BRUNE

GREEN INVADERS

From nuts and bolts to Soap Nuts at Wagner Hardware.

WHEN NEW LIVING: HEALTHY HOME ESSENTIALS OPENED for business at the beginning of this year, the store's entire inventory fit on three shelving units poised just inside the front door of a 70-year-old hardware store in Rice Village.

"It started off as an experiment," says Jeff Kaplan, one of New Living's founders. Less than six months later, his experiment in green retailing may not be ready to emerge from its hardware-store laboratory—but it is beginning to take over the lab.

Those three initial shelving units, welded from angle brackets of recycled steel and attached to reused casters so they could be rolled into position, took the place of what had been a single aisle inside Wagner Hardware. "It was an entire aisle of nuts and screws," says Tiffan C. Wong, New Living's manager. Once the hardware items had been moved to the back of the store—and Wagner employee Arthur Buchanan had carted the fixed metal shelving upstairs into storage—Wong wheeled New Living's mobile displays into place. On top of the plywood shelves ("the best we could find at Home Depot," Wong says) went New Living's newer, greener products: three-packs of biodegradable European sponge cloths called Twist (each of which, both Wong and the package claim, will last as long as 17 rolls of paper towels); Soap Nuts ("it's like laundry detergent that grows on trees," she explains); and Yolo Colorhouse interior house paint with zero VOCs (volatile organic compounds, solvents that pollute indoor air).

Gene Wagner founded Wagner Hardware in 1938 and built the current store on Kirby Drive seven years later. Today his daughter, Nancy Abernathy, owns and manages the store. She perches behind the register at the front, ringing up customer purchases of both Wagner and New Living items. From the moment last year when Kaplan first described to her his concept of a "green general store" planted inside Wagner, Abernathy knew it would be a good match. "I thought it would give the tired hardware store a new outlook," she says. "Update it."

Kaplan and founding partner Adam Brackman met Wong—now a partner and New Living's only full-time employee—through an ad they posted on craigslist.org last fall, seeking a "social entrepreneur passionate about green living." Wong, who has a background in environmental research and forestry, also had retail experience.

Starting small has allowed New Living time to figure out what it wants to be when it grows up. "We're truly learning from the market," says Kaplan. "It's given us an opportunity to talk to people and find out what their needs are and how to evolve the store. There was no way to predict what direction we should go in." Wong has a more blunt assessment of the store's character: "It's like a virus."

By April 22, Earth Day, that virus was ready to spread further into Wagner's recesses. Out went a second aisle: plumbing supplies. In rolled more mobile shelving units, which Wong over the course of several weeks slowly populated with still more eco-friendly home products: wool and sisal samples from Nature's Carpet; IceStone, a Cradle-to-Cradle-Certified countertop material made of recycled glass and cement; and American Clay plaster. Outside the store, a new window graphic covering the storefront proclaimed, "It's easy being green," but still made no mention of the new store growing steadily inside of it.

And so the willful blending of the two stores' identities began. Early on, Wong could easily figure, as they came through the door, which customers had come for hardware and which had come for New Living's products. But those separate groups have slowly grown less distinct.

"They have Kilz primer. We have no-VOC paint," she continues. "They have seriously toxic pesticides; we have organic fertilizers and organic bug killer. You could say we're moving from nuts and bolts . . . to Soap Nuts." New Living's steady expansion through the aisles of Wagner Hardware mirrors the growing popularity of ecologically friendly products among its customers. And one enables the other.

One early New Living customer was Beaver's, Monica Pope's new ice house and barbecue joint in the Sixth Ward. The restaurant's tables have surfaces of Kirei—a Japanese panel made from sorghum stalks that New Living sells for more than $300 a sheet. When Beaver's ended up with an extra table with uneven legs, Wong brought it in, placed it by the front door, and stacked it with copies of William McDonough's *Cradle to Cradle*, a book that encourages designers to use "the intelligence of natural systems" to create products that work for both commerce and the environment. "We're recycling an old space," Kaplan says. "We want to be scrappy. You don't have to start over; you should be resourceful and work with what you have."

The steady progress of New Living's products—on mobile and fixed shelving units—continues. Among the latest items to find their way onto the advancing shelves: spray bottles of Lucky Earth Waterless Car Wash and a solar-powered backpack.

Kaplan now says New Living is ready to take over the whole store. He is in the process of signing a new lease agreement with Abernathy, who plans to stay on to help with the transition. But even after New Living has overwhelmed its host, the Wagner Hardware sign will stay on top of the building— as a marquee, Kaplan says. Inside will be a venture that's grown strong enough to repopulate the store, filling it with products intended for people who want a more environmentally conscious focus to their lives. Kaplan and Wong imagine it will serve as a resource center, too, for people interested in learning about green product choices.

Kaplan does not know what the store will look like next year, once it subsumes Wagner Hardware entirely. That build-out has not been designed yet. He imagines the registers will be in a counter built into the center of the space. But he likes the idea of keeping everything else in the store on wheels.

-Larry Albert

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Adam Brackman, Anat Kaufman (commercial rep), Jeff Kaplan, Tiffan C. Wong.

TOP: PH DESIGN SHOP; BOTTOM: ERIC HESTER

LECTURES

RDA FALL LECTURE SERIES
ENGINEERING ARCHITECTURE

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston,
Brown Auditorium
7 p.m.
713.348.4876 or rda.rice.edu

GREGG PASQUARELLI, PRINCIPAL, SHOP
New York
Wednesday, September 10

MICHELLE ADDINGTON, PROFESSOR, YALE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
New Haven
Wednesday, September 17

ARAN CHADWICK AND NEIL THOMAS, PRINCIPALS, ATELIER ONE
London
Wednesday, September 24

HANIF KARA, PRINCIPAL, ADAMS KARA TAYLOR
London
Wednesday, October 1

UH COA FALL LECTURE SERIES

University of Houston
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture
3 p.m.
713.743.2400 or arch.uh.edu

EUNSOOK KWON, PROFESSOR, UH INDUSTRIAL DESIGN DEPARTMENT
Design Pedagogies
Tuesday, September 2

JEFFERY SCHNAPP, PROFESSOR, STANFORD UNIVERSITY
Palo Alto
The Face of the Modern Architect
Wednesday, September 16

MARTIN MELOSI, PROFESSOR, UH HISTORY DEPARTMENT
Energy Metropolis: Excerpts of An Environmental History of Houston and the Gulf Coast
Tuesday, September 30

MARK MUECKENHEIM, PROFESSOR UH HISTORY DEPARTMENT
Recent Work
Tuesday, October 7

BRETT SCHNIDER, GUY NORDENSON AND ASSOCIATES, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS LLP
Translations: Structural Design of the Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion and the New Museum of Contemporary Art
Tuesday, October 14

STUDIO DROR
New York City
Recent Work
Tuesday, November 10

RSA FALL LECTURE SERIES

Rice University
Anderson Hall
arch.rice.edu for schedule and times

EXHIBITIONS

DESIGN COUNCIL 10TH ANNIVERSARY

August 23 - January 4
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

99K HOUSE COMPETITION

September 3 - October 30
Architecture Center of Houston, 315 Capitol

NEWS

BERLIN STUDY TOUR : 99K COMPETITION WINNERS : CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS : NEW EDITOR

RDA BERLIN STUDY TOUR

Sunny skies greeted RDA members each day during their May visit to Berlin, Germany. Architectural critic Ulf Meyer, author of *Bauhaus: 1919-1933*, and art historian Rolf Achilles of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago guided the group, which was also accompanied by tour director Lynn Kelly and RDA executive director Linda Sylvan.

Architectural highlights included tours of Potsdamer Platz and Sony Center by Renzo Piano and Helmut Jahn, Hans Scharoun's Berlin Philharmonic, the Dutch Embassy by OMA/Rem Koolhaas, the Berlin Jewish Museum by Daniel Libeskind, and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe by Peter Eisenman. In Dessau the group visited the Bauhaus and the Bauhaus Master's Houses by Walter Gropius. A trip to Potsdam included a visit to Charlottenhof Palace by Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Erich Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower. Special events included lunch at Foster+Partners rooftop cafe at the Reichstag and a concert in Schinkel's Schauspielhaus.

LEFT: **99K competition winner Hybrid / ORA, Seattle, WA.**
RIGHT: **RDA Berlin travelers.**

SEATTLE FIRM WINS 99K HOUSE

The winner of the 99K House Competition, sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance, in collaboration with the American Institute of Architects Houston, is the team of Hybrid/ORA from Seattle. The group includes Robert Humble, Joel Egan, Ben Spencer, Owen Richards, Tom Mulica, and Kate Cudney.

"This design addresses both affordability and the environment through energy savings, and offers attractive opportunities for home ownership in the Fifth Ward," said Bryan Bell, Founder and Executive Director of Design Corps. Bell was one of five jurors for the competition.

"The design not only met the 99K budget, a critical criteria, but it allows for a range of specific users to personalize the space," he added.

Announced in October of 2007, the competition called for a single-family house with up to 1,400 square feet, including three bedrooms and one-and-a-half to two bathrooms, to be built for $99,000 or less. The competition challenged designers and architects to design a sustainable, affordable house, with special consideration given to affordability, longevity, energy savings benefits, and appropriateness for the hot, humid climate of Houston. The competition drew 182 entrants from 29 U.S. states and 16 countries around the world.

The City of Houston, through the Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority (LARA) initiative, has donated a site for the house located at 4015 Jewel Street in Houston's historic Fifth Ward, a residential area east of downtown. D. E. Harvey Builders has offered their services as general contractor of the project, and Haynes Whaley has donated its engineering expertise.

Groundbreaking is to take place this summer. Once constructed, the winning house will be sold or auctioned to a low-income family through the Tejano Community Center.

As part of the mission to broaden the public's awareness of the built environment and the positive roles that architecture and design can have in the community, RDA and AIA, Houston will be holding an exhibition of 66 designs selected by the jury. It will be held at the Architecture Center of Houston, 315 Capitol, from September 3 to October 30. Various opportunities will be available for local builders and Community Development Corporations to meet the architects and designers who participated.

The competition was supported, in part, by generous grants from Houston Endowment Inc., the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Houston Arts Alliance. For more information, please go to the competition website, the99khouse.com.

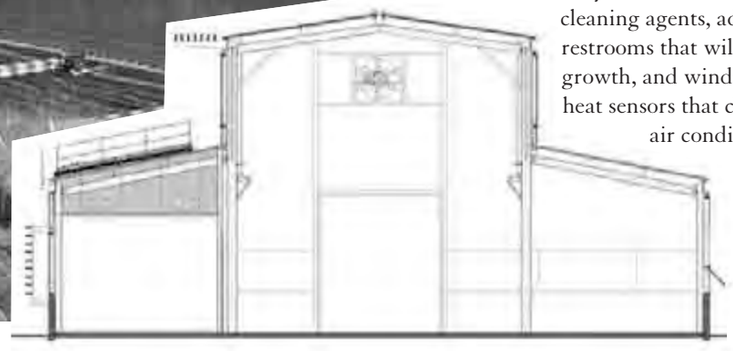
CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Cite welcomes the submission of article ideas, detailed pitches, and written articles. Authors of published pieces are paid for their work. Send submissions and questions to citemail@rice.edu.

CITE HAS A NEW EDITOR

In June, the RDA welcomed Raj Mankad as the new Editor of *Cite*. After earning a bachelors from Northwestern University, he soon began working in publishing, including time with Penguin. Mankad grew up in Mobile, Alabama and returned to the Gulf Coast to attend the University of Houston Creative Writing Program. As a teacher at UH, he worked with undergraduates to launch a website profiling sites in Greater Houston they knew intimately. After completing his MFA, he served for four years as Managing Editor of *Feminist Economics*, an academic journal based at Rice University. His priorities for *Cite* include improving local and national exposure by helping build a dynamic online presence. Mankad welcomes your comments, and may be reached at mankad@rice.edu.

LEFT: COURTESY HYBRID/ORA; RIGHT: ROLF ACHILLES



LEFT: Burdette Keeland, Jr. Design Exploration Center, University of Houston, Geoffrey Brune, architect, 2008. The green roof was funded in part by an Initiatives for Houston grant from the Rice Design Alliance.
BELOW: Keeland Center, section drawing.

GOING LEED

SUSTAINABLE CAMPUSES

The Greening of Rice and the University of Houston

"A BUILDING IS NO LONGER FOUR WALLS AND A ROOF," says Rives Taylor, who teaches sustainability courses for architecture students at both the University of Houston and Rice University. "Everything today is judged by performance." His students learn to compute their own ecological footprints and to use their immediate surroundings as a laboratory, observing, for instance, the effects of Houston's asphalt-covered landscapes on the local ecology. Phrases like "stewardship, cause, and consequence" are mantras in Taylor's instruction.

UH and Rice have been implementing a number of progressive practices Taylor and others have promoted in recent campus retrofits and expansions. Rice will add nearly 1 million square feet to its 3.7 million by the end of 2009, and all new buildings will be LEED certified at a minimum, a decision the school's director of sustainability, Richard Johnson, proudly credits three of his students with hastening. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. It is a third-party certification program administered by the USGBC (United States Green Building Council). The campus-wide policy was formally adopted following the students' impressive presentation for an environmental studies class in which the mundane problem of a dorm room sink renovation was met with an ambitious green product solution. Administrators were impressed with the ease and economy of their selection and understood it to be an appropriate catalyst for the bigger picture.

A grander example of firsthand learning is Rice's prospective LEED Gold building designed by noted British architect Sir Michael Hopkins: The new Charles and May Duncan Residential College is due to open its doors in summer 2009. The building is named for President Jimmy Carter's Secretary of Energy and his wife, who donated $30 million toward its construction. The building will feature natural lighting and efficient water fixtures, cork or hardwood in place of conventional carpeted floors (which can harbor germ buildup), VOC (volatile organic compounds)-free and formaldehyde-free finishes and cleaning agents, additional vents in restrooms that will inhibit mold growth, and window sashes with heat sensors that close off the air conditioning when the windows are opened. Intended as a pedagogical demonstration, Duncan Hall will also contain an off-the-grid teaching classroom, where roof-mounted photovoltaics will track the sun and a section of the wall will be left open to display its innards; a showcase of sustainable materials will be arrayed there as well. The building is designed to provide continuous data about its own performance, allowing Rice to assess it over time.

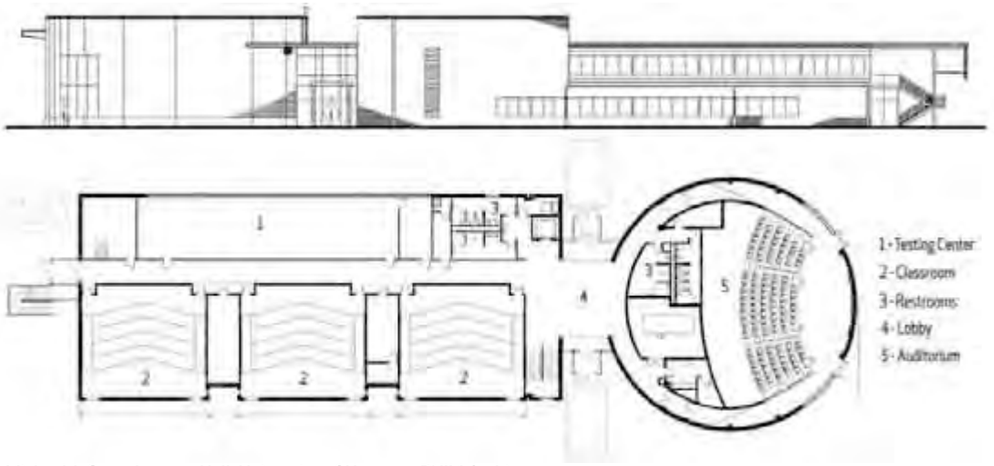
Charles and May Duncan Residential College, Rice University, Hopkins Architecture, 2009.

"Living in this type of building will make better citizens," predicts Johnson. "The fact is, we've passed on to this generation a global systems crisis. We shouldn't require that addressing that crisis diminish their quality of life." As an undergraduate student in civil engineering at Rice in 1992, Johnson laments that he never saw any real-life examples of engineering processes and believes that these sorts of learning opportunities are critical.

Across town at UH, executive director of facilities, planning, and construction Dilip Anketell reports a $2 million annual savings from replacing old high-wattage fluorescent lights and magnetic ballasts with energy-efficient fluorescents and electronic ballasts. Part of the Campus Energy Conservation and Cost Reduction Program designed to reduce the energy consumption of 115 older buildings on campus by 20–30 percent, the plan also includes raising all air-conditioning settings from 70 to 72 degrees (gaining an estimated annual 3–4 percent energy savings for each degree increase). In addition, every new building will feature occupancy sensors to reduce lighting and corollary electricity consumption.

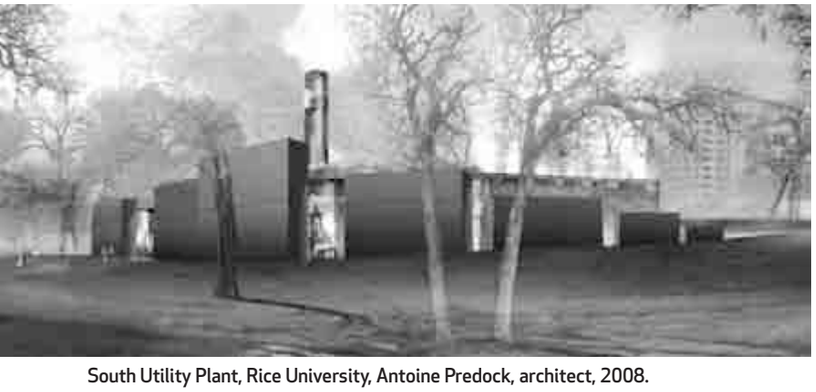
The UH Board of Regents has informally directed that all current and future building projects should aim for a minimum LEED Silver standard. The University's planners are approaching LEED certification cautiously, directing their consultants to prioritize those LEED criteria that provide the greatest overall energy use reductions and that recognize regional differences rather than using LEED criteria as project criteria. Despite this, the Michael J. Cemo Lecture Hall adjacent to the Bauer College of Business Building now being designed and slated for

TOP: PAUL HESTER; PLAN: COURTESY GEOFFREY BRUNE; RIGHT: COURTESY RENDERING, RICE UNIVERSITY



Michael J. Cemo Lecture Hall, University of Houston, BNIM Architects, 2009.
TOP: **North elevation;** ABOVE: **First floor plan.**

completion in July 2009, is going for Gold. The two-story, 31,000-square-foot building is to house a testing center, a career services center, and serve as a home for the Global Business Minor program. In addition to rainwater collection, north-facing glass, and other energy-efficient strategies now common in buildings by BNIM Architects, its extensive use of LEDs as a light source will lead to significant savings in electricity consumption without compromising quality.



South Utility Plant, Rice University, Antoine Predock, architect, 2008.

The campus will continue using its gas-fired turbine systems as part of the central plant, but with a twist: "If you're going to use a nonrenewable energy source, you need to exploit it," Anketell explains. An improved procedure both reduces and captures CO_2 emissions, while using "waste" steam to create electricity and cooling. Graduate and undergraduate students with paid project management internships are working with the school's faculty on these and other innovative solutions. The chemical engineering department has developed a resin durable enough to construct 100-meter-long wind turbine blades. UH is a leading partner with Lone Star Wind Alliance; together they are designing a facility for testing the 70-100 blades in Ingleside, Texas.

While many of both institutions' sustainable commitments are not visible, others are immediately present. UH recently reopened one of its underutilized buildings, a 1940s shop building that architect and UH faculty member Geoffrey Brune extensively remodeled into The Burdette Keeland, Jr. Design Exploration Center. It won a Texas Society of Architects design award this year. Located in front of the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, the building houses a fabricating, welding, and wood shop. Its sloping "green" roof is the only one of its kind in the city. "We're proud of our landscape, above and on the ground," says Anketell. As another example of recycling, the university recently spent $60,000 to move 22 mature live oak trees that were in the way of new construction projects to better locations.

Ambitious landscape preservation is also under way at Rice just south of its new South Plant, which will begin operating chillers and boilers for the 480,000-square-foot Collaborative Research Center at Main and University later this summer. Near the plant site is the Harris Gully Natural Area, a stretch of open grassland with scattered trees where the Harris Bayou once ran open across campus until it was routed into a culvert after Rice stadium was built. Johnson calls this site, used by ecology and evolutionary biology students as an outdoor classroom for gathering plant specimens, a "unique biodiversity eco hotspot."

The campus will continue using its gas-fired turbine systems as part of the central plant, but with a twist: *"If you're going to use a nonrenewable energy source, you need to exploit it,"* Anketell explains.

Although LEED standards typically require a 1-2 percent increase in overall project costs, Johnson thinks it's key to view the university's sustainable investments in terms of quality of life. "We should be asking, 'What's your baseline?' instead of inquiring, 'How much does it cost to implement LEED?'" In other words, how long do you expect a building or environment to function? The quality you're seeking, he says, would likely be different for a prestigious university campus as opposed to, say, a mini-mall.

-Julie Sinclair Eakin

DISCOVERING GREEN

Build it and they will come?

PARKS HAVE SOMETHING OF A TALISMAN STATUS among politicians. There are few American cities that have not tried to revitalize their downtowns with a riverfront walk, a historic plaza, or a dancing fountain. Civic leaders imagine office workers eating *al fresco*, couples picnicking at sunset, and kids playing in fountains. But for every San Antonio Riverwalk, there are dozens of parks with empty benches, unappreciated historical murals, and outdoor amphitheaters used maybe once a month.

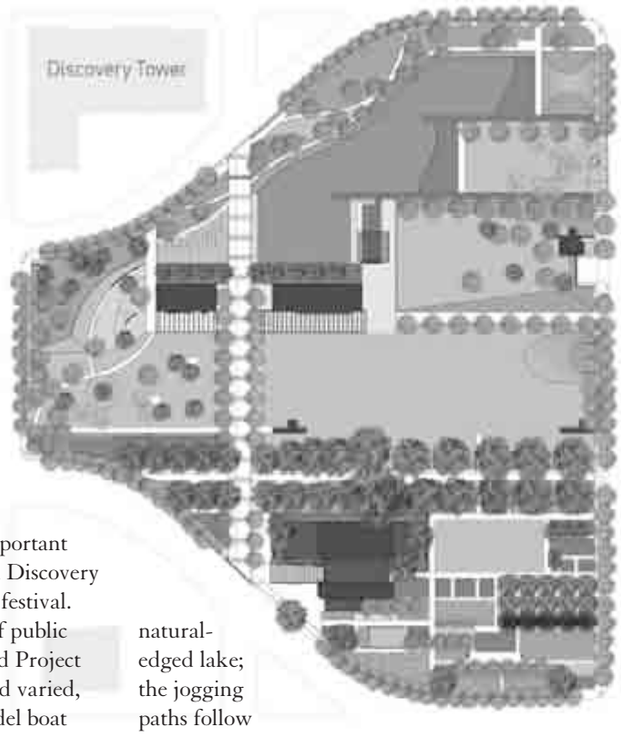
Downtown Houston offers numerous examples. Hermann Square (1939, Hare & Hare) is simple, classical, and grassy. Tranquility Park next door (1979, Charles Tapley Associates) is jagged steel and concrete. Jones Plaza (1966, CRS Architects; rebuilt 2001, Bricker & Cannady Architects) is centered on a terraced event space, and Root Memorial Square (2005, Kirksey) on an outdoor basketball court. And the second phase of Sesquicentennial Park (1998, Ray + Hollington Architects) has a sloping lawn. But none of these spaces attract people. Crowds are small even on a beautiful spring weekend. And on weekdays at lunchtime, most of the parks remain strangely empty. That's not because Houstonians won't go outside: the smaller office building plazas see much more use, and deserted downtown parks can be found all over the United States in many different climates.

So, when Mayor Bill White announced in 2004 that Houston would assemble four blocks to build another Downtown park, the obvious question was "How will this one be different?"

The answer was to learn from the exceptions to the rule: when a festival is going on, the parks are absolutely packed. If there is food, trinkets for sale, activities, and music, people will drive from

The Grove, PageSoutherlandPage Architects, 2008.

FAR LEFT: COURTESY RENDERING, RICE UNIVERSITY; LEFT: COURTESY PAGESOUTHERLANDPAGE; TOP: BNIM ARCHITECTS



Discovery Green plan, Hargreaves Associates, PageSoutherlandPage, and Lauren Griffith Associates, designers.

distant suburbs and brave unfamiliar parking just to go to a park.

With this in mind, the first and most important design decision made for what's now called Discovery Green was to build the park as an ongoing festival. The program, which came out of a series of public meetings organized by the New York-based Project for Public Spaces, was ambitiously large and varied, calling for two restaurants, a lake with model boat rentals, fountains, a playground, a dog run, stages for events, gardens, lawns, a small library branch, and space for public markets. To keep things lively, the park's management organization plans between 10 and 15 events for a typical week. No other Downtown park has as much going on.

There are two iconic models for the American urban park. The first is New York's Central Park, designed to create a naturalistic world altogether removed from the city, with a series of structured activities to attract people. The second prototype is the courthouse square, designed as a foreground to monumental buildings, where formal plantings frame the city rather than screening it out.

One might think, given the intense program, that Discovery Green would resemble Central Park. But the site won't allow it. Central Park is 843 acres; Hermann Park, Houston's own version, is 445 acres. Discovery Green is only 12. The neighboring highrises are taller than the park is wide; the adjacent convention center actually occupies more space.

The park's designers, Hargreaves Associates, did not try to overcome the nature of the site; they capitalized on it. The park's very bones are urban, so its plan is based on the street grid. It is divided into a series of outdoor spaces defined by trees, paths, and simple, open modern buildings designed by PageSoutherland-Page. These spaces unfold as a series of rectilinear east-west slices. At the southern edge are small-scale gardens, a putting green, and bocce ball courts. The next slice contains the Grove (a formal restaurant) and the Tree House bar, plus an event lawn with a bandstand. In the next slice, a tree-shaded promenade follows a path where Lamar Street once ran.

The biggest slice encompasses a large, open lawn, a smaller lawn dotted with trees, and a dog run nestled next to a row of live oaks. Adjacent to the lawn the site slopes down to the performance stage, which lines up with the informal Lake House café, a dining terrace overlooking a hard-edged model boat basin, the administration building, a playground, and a play fountain.

In the final two slices, the boat basin expands into a natural-edged lake; the jogging paths follow McKinney as it curves alongside. The east-west grid then reasserts itself as two wooden piers that become paths that bound another meadow and a slab-sided hill. This, like the rest of the park, is green, but it does not pretend to be natural.

These east-west slices are bisected and connected by a north-south promenade that follows the former path of Crawford Street, which is now closed to cars through the park. Crawford today is a disjointed street. It connects pockets of activity: Toyota Center, the Hilton, Annunciation Church, Minute Maid Park, and a future light rail station. But in between are blocks of vacant lots. The park is focusing its urbanism on Crawford, rather than toward the existing highrise district, in the hope that Crawford will become a site of urban activity as well.

Encouraging development was an explicit goal of the park. In that sense, one could already declare the park a success. A residential tower, One Park Place (Jackson & Ryan Architects), and an office building, Discovery Tower (Gensler), are under construction on its edges, and two hotels are planned.

The park is the latest stage in a 30-year project to rebuild the east side of Downtown, a project that so far has produced a series of huge buildings—a convention center, a ballpark, a sports arena, and a hotel—having little relationship to each other. The park's job is to link them. That's not easy: the hotel entrance facing the park is a car drop-off point, and the George R. Brown Convention Center is all closed doors and empty concrete unless an event is going on. But the two new developments are better. Discovery Tower, at the end of the Crawford axis, will have a plaza facing the park and two levels of retail. One Park Place is more opaque, but it, too, will have a park-side retail space.

Building a park to encourage development is inherently risky. Jane Jacobs once noted that parks usually do not add life to the city but instead tend to drain it. A neighborhood park depends on the bustle of activity around it for its life; without that it feels empty and dangerous, and soon becomes a haven for the homeless. Even if the presence of the park itself engenders development, the off-limits reputation remains, and the park ends up depressing rather than enhancing its surroundings.

Thus, in order to succeed, Discovery Green must be a destination as well as a neighborhood park. That means convincing people to come Downtown to visit. On a series of beautiful spring weekends in April and May, the park was packed with hundreds of people—lying on the grass, picnicking, eating at the restaurants, playing in the playground, flying kites, sailing boats, and walking dogs. Even on a Tuesday night at 6:30, there were 30 women doing yoga, a dozen strollers parked at the playground, and perhaps a hundred other people scattered across the park. So far, the park seems to be working. But will they still be coming when the novelty wears off?

-Christof Spieler

View of Discovery Green from the George R. Brown Convention Center showing the underground garage in foreground, the Grove restaurant, and the Houston Skyline with One Park Place under construction.

TOP: COURTESY DISCOVERY GREEN CONSERVANCY; RIGHT: JIM OLIVE

LEFT: The Beacon at the John S. Dunn Outreach Center, Christ Church Cathedral, 2007, Leo A Daly/LAN and PageSoutherlandPage. View of arcade facing Prairie Avenue.
ABOVE: View from reception area of The Diocese of Texas out to Nancy Powell Moore Garden.

Building for Community: John S. Dunn Outreach Center, Christ Church Cathedral

by **Stephen Fox**

At the beginning of 2007, Christ Church, the cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, dedicated a four-story, 350-car parking garage on Prairie Avenue, a block east of the church's downtown parish complex. What makes Christ Church's parking garage architecturally notable is that the cathedral parish and its architects, a joint venture of Leo A Daly/LAN and PageSoutherland-Page, combined parked cars in one complex with a variety of unlike activities as follows: the diocesan chancery at the corner of Texas Avenue and Caroline Street, where the bishop of Texas and his staff have their offices; the Nancy Powell Moore Garden, a publicly accessible green space at Texas Avenue and San Jacinto Street designed by Clark Condon Associates landscape architects; and the John S. Dunn Outreach Center on the ground floor of the garage, which provides space for nonprofit organizations offering services to low-income people, including the Beacon, a day center for homeless people. Design architect Lawrence W. Speck of PageSoutherlandPage and his associates let the various components speak for themselves, generating an urban architecture of contrasting toughness and fragility.

Christ Church Cathedral has occupied the corner at Texas Avenue and Fannin Street since 1839. The present church and its adjoining guild hall were built in 1892–93. After the parish was elevated to the rank of cathedral of the Diocese of Texas in 1949, the complex was expanded with the addition of Latham Hall (1950, Maurice J. Sullivan–Charles F. Sullivan). The church and Latham Hall bracket the Bishop's Garden at the center of the Texas Avenue block front. Designed by the landscape architect Ralph Ellis Gunn, it is one of the most serene outdoor spaces in Downtown Houston.

Christ Church found itself vulnerable to the up-and-down cycle of most American religious institutions in downtown locations. In the early 1980s, a new bishop moved the diocesan chancery to the suburbs. Under the leadership of the Very Rev. J. Pittman McGehee, who became dean of the cathedral (the cathedral's chief pastor) in 1980, Christ Church began to rebound. During McGehee's tenure, Christ Church built the two-story Jones Education Building (1989, Bailey Architects) and initiated a series of ministries to the city. In 1981, COMPASS, a nonprofit organization providing services to homeless people, was formed. Treebeard's Restaurant began serving weekday lunches at the Cloisters in the guild hall, and the Cathedral House Montessori School was opened. During the tenure of McGehee's successor, the Very Rev. Walter H. Taylor, Christ Church's historic buildings were restored (1995, Volz & Associates and Heimsath Architects), and the parish was instrumental in starting New Hope Housing, Inc., which completed its first single-resident-occupancy apartment complex in 1995 (Jackson & Ryan Architects). By 2000, when the present dean, the Very Rev. Joe D. Reynolds, arrived, growth in parish membership and programs had made further expansion impera-

TIMOTHY HURSLEY

This noble effort challenges the fearfulness, mistrust, and preemeptive defensiveness that so erode public space in many U.S. cities.

tive. Christ Church bought all the lots it did not own in the 1200 block of Texas, one block east of the church, where its surface parking lot lay. In 2003, a new bishop of Texas, the Rt. Rev. Don A. Wimberly, indicated his eagerness to move the diocesan chancery back downtown.

An issue addressed in the parish's selection of an architect was whether the parking garage complex should match the Victorian Gothic design of the cathedral and guild hall. Latham Hall and the Jones Education Building had deferred to the 1890s buildings. PageSoutherlandPage and Leo A Daly/LAN treated the one component they added to the west block—the three-story McGehee Hall—as a pared-down version of Latham Hall, but the garage-chancery complex on the east block got its own identity. The garage displays its concrete structural frame. Structural columns on the ground floor and solid panels facing some of the interstitial bays are veneered with orange-red brick. Open garage bays are rimmed with translucent glass spandrels attached to thin vertical aluminum mullions. Iron fencing, set in a low brick wall studded with piers, separates the public sidewalk from the cathedral property. The diocesan chancery is a two-story building faced with vertically aligned transparent, translucent, or opaque glass panels set in a thin aluminum armature. The chancery is ringed with a two-story, steel-framed shade structure. Its linearity and the shadows it casts create implied volumes of space that amplify the size of the building with sensations of layered transparency. A one-story version of this pergola frames the Moore Garden. Between the inner run of the pergola and the south face of the garage is a shallow slot containing a stone-faced fountain trough. The garage bays adjacent to the fountain are surfaced with a screen of horizontal wood slats; planter boxes are suspended in an offset pattern from the aluminum mullions framing the slats. The stairway and elevators serving the garage occupy a tower surfaced with translucent glass panels attached to aluminum mullions.

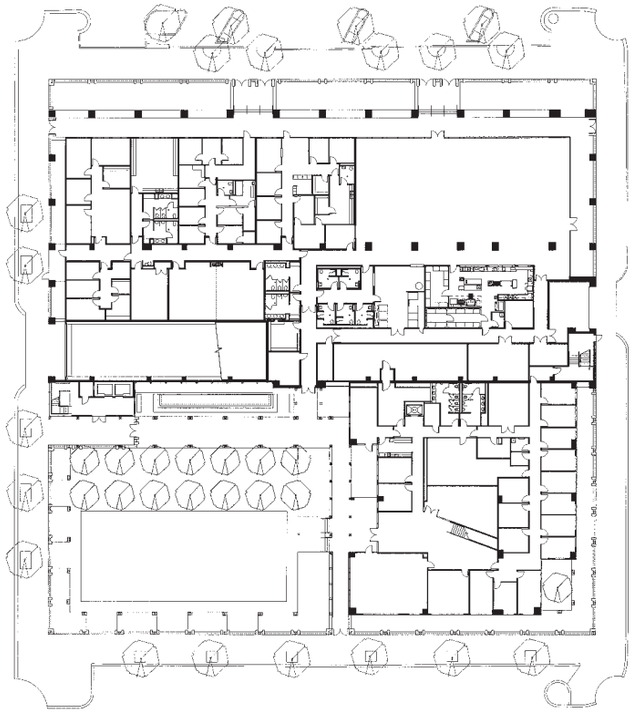


PHOTO ABOVE: Shade structure framing Diocese of Texas offices, Caroline Street and Texas Avenue.
RIGHT: First floor site plan. The John S. Dunn Outreach Center occupies the upper half of the site. The Diocese of Texas occupies the lower right quandrant. The Nancy Moore Powell Garden occupies the lower left quandrant.

PLAN: PAGESOUTHERLANDPAGE; PHOTO: TIMOTHY HURSLEY

These fragile glass scrims reveal the tough gray concrete block walls of the elevator core and the intermediate landings and diagonal runs of the stairs.

The Christ Church garage and chancery complex is appealing in its candor. The garage is masked, but not denied. The shade structures respond architecturally to Houston's hot, humid climate. The glass scrims cladding the garage, the elevator-stair tower, and a skylight box atop the chancery glow at night with a cool radiance. Yet despite all that is praiseworthy in the complex, something is missing, and it involves the architecture. The brick is problematic. It appears to have been used to moderate the toughness of the exposed concrete, yet it fails to materially engage the existing buildings of Christ Church or neighboring structures such as the Alden Hotel and the Houston Cotton Exchange Building, evoking suburban ranch houses of the 1950s instead. The design of the brick wall and iron fencing is prosaic when compared to the much more meticulous design of the shade structures. The Moore Garden's ground plane seems overly composed and lacks the intimacy of the Bishop's Garden. In an architectural design that emphasizes subtle tectonic distinctions rather than stylistic narratives, these lapses undermine the consistency that supports perceptions of rigor and simplicity. Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum's 2007 downtown garage at Main and Walker demonstrates that a multi-story parking garage can be reduced to its concrete structural frame and, because of good proportions and conscientious detailing, still be a work of architecture. And at Rice University, the Office of James Burnett's landscape design for the Raymond and Susan Brochstein Pavilion (2008, Thomas Phifer and Partners) demonstrates that a formal, geometrical landscape design does not have to seem diagrammatic and user-averse.

The client and the architects seized the opportunity that this mixed-use program presented to shape a city building that invites the public in. Like Christ Church's dedication to providing social services for the homeless and troubled, this noble effort challenges the fearfulness, mistrust, and preemptive defensiveness that so erode public space in many U.S. cities. That a parking garage was the catalyst for this complex indicates how the weak identity and low prestige of a garage make it susceptible to colonization by other, potentially more urban, uses. The architects' dialectic of toughness and fragility gives the complex its architectural strength and virtue. What matters is not their lapses, but that they and their clients had the faith to move beyond conventional expectations.

new life in

Visitors to Alief's commercial strips find themselves in a multicultural sensorium. THIS PAGE FROM TOP: The Parisian Bakery at Beechnut and Wilcrest, a staple of the Vietnamese community. Posters on the wall advertise a music variety show. Nearby at the Hong Kong City Mall, men gather on weekends to play *Xiangqi*, a Chinese form of chess, and shoppers gaze at wigs displayed on mannequin heads. At Preach the Word Evangelical Church, worshippers are dressed in African and Western garb. OPPOSITE PAGE FROM TOP: Inside the Parisian Bakery, customers can choose from a wide assortment of breads , pastries, and the ubiquitous Vietnamese sandwich. Next door at the same strip mall, Tacos La Balita serves up Mexican food.

alief

A global mash-up in the suburbs.

By **Aaron Howard**

Photography by **Paul Hester**

At first look, the southwest Houston neighborhood of Alief appears to be another case of suburban design horror. Strip malls and parking lots cater to the worst of car culture. Little boxes made of ticky-tacky thrown up for quick profits. Buildings complicit in the atomization of life. "An American suburb," environmental journalist Bill McKibben once wrote, "is a device for turning money into a kind of armor against experience, the experience of other kinds of people."

Alief, though, deserves a closer examination. Yesterday's suburbs have evolved and matured, becoming culturally richer and more diverse than the purified communities they once were. They differ from what people think of as "traditional suburbs."

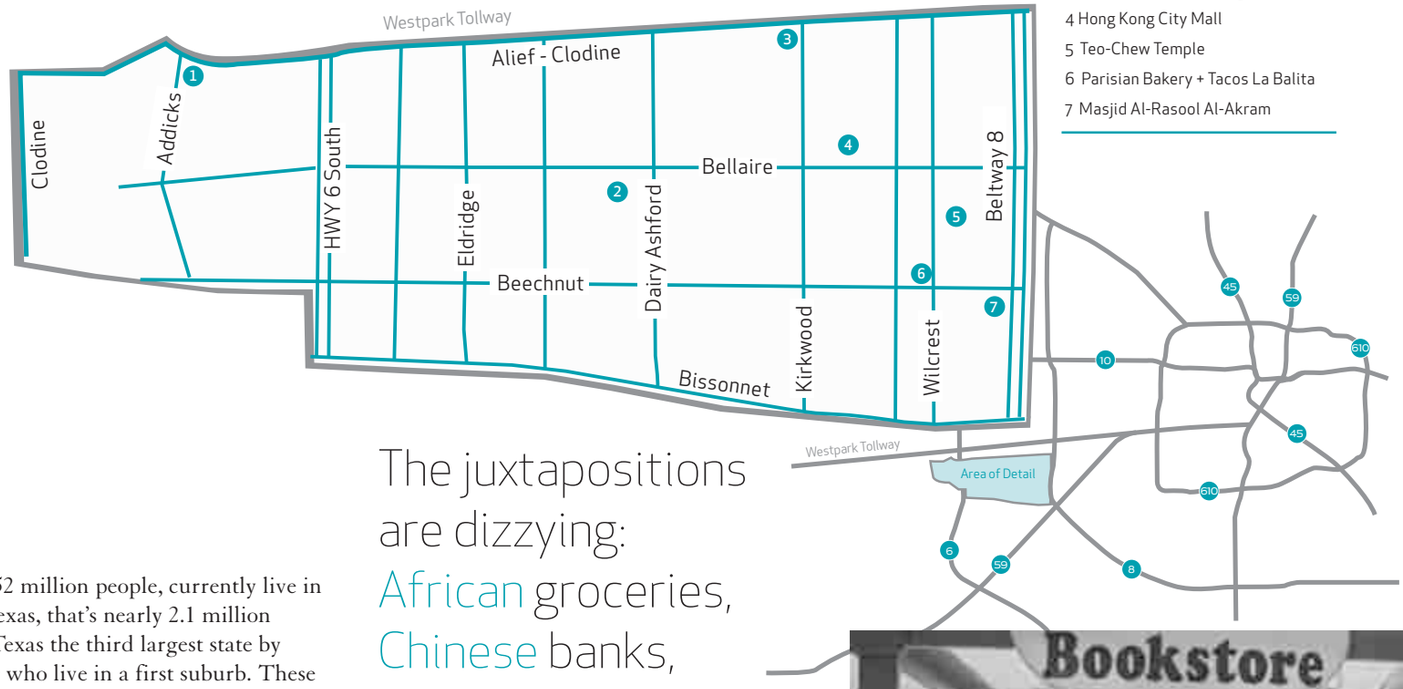
Once a tiny stop on the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway line, Alief was annexed by Houston in the 1970s. Originally all white and far less diverse than the nation as a whole, Alief is now among the most diverse places in Houston. The census figures for foreign-born residents in the Houston area rose from 37,000 to 516,000 between 1970 and 2000 with much of that growth in suburbs. The Alief Independent School District (AISD), which serves some 46,000 students, is the most ethnically diverse school district of its size in Texas.

The demographic changes in Alief reflect a nation-wide trend of immigrants bypassing central cities and moving directly to "mature" or "first suburbs." According to Robert Puentes, a Brookings Institute fellow, "Almost 29 percent of America's foreign born live in first suburbs. In sharp contrast, the percentage of the nation's immigrants living in primary cities declined sharply from about 38 percent in 1970 to 28 percent in 2000. As a result, first suburbs now have more foreign-born residents (9 million) than primary cities do (8.6 million). And over 30 percent of the 21.5 million immigrants that came to this country from 1970 to 2000 settled in first suburbs."

The importance of the changing first suburb has largely been overlooked. Nearly one-fifth of all

ABOVE: **Discriminating Vietnamese and Chinese diners believe any seafood dish must start with the freshest ingredients and that means dramatic displays of live fish in the market.**

1 New Life Baptist Church
2 Jade Buddha Temple
3 Preach the Word Evangelical Church
4 Hong Kong City Mall
5 Teo-Chew Temple
6 Parisian Bakery + Tacos La Balita
7 Masjid Al-Rasool Al-Akram



The juxtapositions are dizzying: African groceries, Chinese banks, halal pizza, karaoke bars, Vietnamese *bidas* pool halls, and remittance centers to the Philippines.

Americans, some 52 million people, currently live in first suburbs. In Texas, that's nearly 2.1 million people—making Texas the third largest state by numbers of people who live in a first suburb. These statistics, however, do not reveal the deep cultural transformations that have taken place. Drive the Alief streets, look inside the shops, talk to the patrons, enter the temples and churches—there you see how first suburbanites strive to create meaningful lives.

Pho shops outnumber fast food hamburger chains in the strip malls gone global. The juxtapositions are dizzying: African groceries, Chinese banks, halal pizza, karaoke bars, Vietnamese *bidas* pool halls, and remittance centers to the Philippines. Attorneys who specialize in immigration law abound. Zabihah.com lists 92 Houston-area *halal* restaurants, where the meat has been prepared according to Muslim laws, and twenty-four of them are located in Alief.

During the real estate market crash of the 1980s, land prices fell sharply in Alief. Whites began leaving. Commercial affordability increased and business rentals became a huge attraction to immigrant entrepreneurs. "The older population left," explains Audrey Singer of the Brookings Institute, "and the older commercial areas, especially strip centers changed hands. The strip centers were often perfectly sized for family businesses. Affordable land prices also meant we began seeing formerly vacant land filled in with commercial enterprises. It's a form of recycling and rebirth, convenience and concentration for immigrant entrepreneurs. The new Alief is definitely a different place today because of its commercial activity."

Danny Nguyen's story illustrates the transformation of Alief. He was 13 years old in 1975 when his

ABOVE: Scenes from a bookstore and the food court in Hong Kong City Mall.

The minarets and dome of the Masjid Al-Rasool Al-Akram rise from South Course drive, a quiet backstreet off of Kirkwood.

ABOVE: **Behind the pastor and choir, lyrics are projected in English and Korean at New Life Baptist.**
ABOVE RIGHT: **Roadside signage welcomes you to worship.**

father and he escaped Vietnam at night by boat. "My story is pretty typical in terms of the risk it took to escape, having at least one relative in America before we arrived, and coming to America in search of freedom of speech, human rights, and enterprise," says Nguyen. After earning a degree from Texas A&M, he began representing commercial tenants in a real estate business and now serves as President of the Vietnamese-American Chamber of Commerce. Nguyen remembers when, in the late 1990s, land on Bellaire Boulevard in Alief sold for $1-1.50 per square foot. Today Bellaire Boulevard is the area's major commercial corridor.

"But please don't call this a Chinatown," he says, "This is an international district. It reflects Chinese, Vietnamese, Koreans, Thais, Indians, Pakistanis, and other peoples."

The sacred architecture of Alief is often dramatic though hidden on backstreets. The minaret of a masjid, the dome of a Siva temple, a giant Buddhist statue, and an Apostolic church share a single sky along a street on the border of Alief and Sugarland in a stunning compression of religions that few streets in the world can rival. Speaking of these buildings as simply diverse misses the complexity of the situation and the reimagining of cultural practices that have accompanied Alief's demographic shifts and economic growth.

University of Houston sociologist Helen Rose Ebaugh has studied immigrant religious communities in Houston over the last decade. She describes two models of immigrant churches. The first is called a host church, where a major denomination either hosts or rents space to an immigrant church. The second model, which Ebaugh calls *de facto* congregationalism, describes groups that start in a home and then build their church, temple, or mosque with financing drawn from the congregants. "Often the congregants choose a pastor, minister, or monk," says Ebaugh. "And there's usually the development of a religious education component equivalent to Sunday schools." The Sunday schools help compensate for the isolation immigrants often face raising children after leaving extended families in their home countries.

The New Life Baptist Church represents a varia-

The minaret of a masjid, the dome of a Siva temple, a giant Buddhist statue, and an Apostolic church share a single sky along a street on the border of Alief and Sugarland in a stunning compression of religions that few streets in the world can rival.

tion on the host church model. Pastor Robert Park started the church in a warehouse in Spring Branch to minister to the Korean community. In 1999, the congregation moved to Alief into a church that once served a local Anglo congregation that had dwindled to 40 members. The story, though, is not that simple. Park purchased the Alief property at the time his congregation merged with Pastor Jose Pablo Monroy's Hispanic group, which had been renting the space from the West Oaks Baptist Church. When New Life moved in on the day that West Oaks closed, some of the Anglos stayed. New Life now holds four services on Sunday—two in English, one in Korean, and one in Spanish—with the entire church taking lunch together.

Monroy moved to Houston from Guatemala City in 1984. "Even though the political situation in Guatemala was in turmoil, that wasn't the reason why we came here," he says. "I had been invited to come to the US as a Christian missionary working with the Hispanic community." He says his family is typical of what he calls the maturing Hispanic community. "My children were born here. They finished university and are professionals. The new generation is interested in education. Education is the priority and the parents are working hard to keep their sons and daughters in school." Monroy's own story and the mixed New Life congregation show that the diversity of Alief is not entirely as compartmentalized as the boxlike architecture afloat in a vast sea of parking lots might suggest.

Lunch at New Life Baptist Church.

In contrast to New Life, the Jade Buddha Temple is an example of the congregational model. Tracy Chiang moved to Houston with her family in 1986 from Taiwan via Vancouver. Her family ran an import/export business and she came here to assist. Casually raised within the Buddhist tradition back home, Chiang says she turned to Buddhism "just like a majority of American people would turn to Christianity" when her mother was diagnosed with colon cancer one year after her father had suffered a serious stroke.

> Both New Life Baptist Church and Jade Buddha Temple appear well positioned for the ethnic and economic flux that is likely to continue in Alief.

"I went to Jade Buddha Temple and talked to the Venerable Hung I. He spoke to me about life and death. He also taught me how to handle the final stage of my mother's life. He agreed to conduct the ceremony, flying with us to Vancouver Island to do it." After taking classes at the temple for two years, Chiang became an active volunteer, then a member of the temple board and assistant to the abbot. Of the temple's 1,500 members, the majority are from Taiwan, says Chiang, but an increasing number of new members are from Hong Kong and Mainland China.

"Right now in our temple we have an American monk," says Chiang. "He's a Texan. We don't try to convert people's belief. We let the community understand what Buddha taught. Now the temple is tied to the Chinese or Vietnamese communities, but you can also see the long-term effect of the Dalai Lama who spread the message of Buddhism to Americans. There's a market in America for Buddhist thought. America is a friendly country where people respect different beliefs. Jade Buddha Temple sees itself as an American temple especially since the Texas Buddhist Association was founded here. Houston is my home town and definitely we are American."

Both New Life Baptist Church and Jade Buddha Temple appear well positioned for the ethnic and economic flux that is likely to continue in Alief. Shopping malls, major banks, and multi-story commercial buildings are replacing strip malls. The price for land on Bellaire Boulevard now goes for $30 per square foot. Nguyen predicts future development will include upscale commercial buildings and high-rise condos. Plans are already in the works for a mixed-use center off Beltway 8. New generations of immigrants, adult children of immigrants, Anglos, and others may transform this first suburb once again.

The Teo Chew Temple, located at 10600 Turtlewood Court, is densely appointed with flowers, candles, incense, fruits, two Fu Dogs, and golden icons of Taoist deities.

by **Kevin Alter**

FROM A CULTURE OF making

An architect as builder.

A familiar conversation is often heard in the studios of most schools of architecture. It begins with the observation that unlike the practitioners of other arts (great and small), architects do not actually make the buildings they design. When painters apply paint to canvas, musicians make music by playing instruments, and sculptors fashion artifacts, they marry their conceptual and ideological aspirations with the crafting of an end result that is manifestly theirs, existing in a particular place and time. Their conceptual and physical efforts are combined, and each directly informs the other. The architect's efforts, on the other hand, remain primarily in the realm of representation, a description of what will be others' work to project into the actual conditions of place. The architect's designs are necessarily removed from both physical building and circumstance, both of which appear in their designs as abstractions of the reality they project. So, if architects are not actually making the things they design, the conversation continues, how then do the material facts of building and circumstance inform their conceptual aspirations, and vice versa? How indeed can an architect design a building without firsthand knowledge of its physical making and place?

Architectural schools of thought disentangle this *crisis of making* primarily through a focus on one of two different responses. The first response embraces the field's inherent abstraction from the realities of making and place, and revels in the possibilities this abstraction poses. In contrast, the second focuses on the physical artifact and particularities of context. Unfortunately, the former path all too often leads to a tautological design agenda divorced from the realities of building and place, while the latter leads to an overly fetishized artifact above and beyond concerns larger than itself. Successfully resolving this divide between representation and material fact is difficult and requires a visceral understanding of place, circumstance, material, and construction.

Schools of architecture begin at a deficit, particularly undergraduate professional programs that admit students largely based on their academic performance as measured in grades and standardized tests. (Portfolios play a larger role in professional graduate programs.) Unfortunately, these measures tend to exclude from admission those individuals who can understand the difficult spatial and mechanical arrangements of something as complicated as a tractor, for example, and are able to take it apart and put it back together again. More than simply a valuable background for study in the field of architecture, such skills support an approach that values buildings as carefully phrased material artifacts in sync with the many conditions of their circumstance.

In 1998, Stephen Gist was just this type of candidate applying to architecture school. To hear him tell it, his acceptance into the University of Houston's School of Architecture was in no way based on his prior academic performance, but rather on the associate dean's review of his accomplishment in making all sorts of things. Gist comes from a culture of making, where the realms of art and building easily intertwine, and from an ethos that values material, craft, and labor alongside aesthetics, composition, and nuance. A visit with Gist to artist Lonnie Edwards' studio is particularly informative (a mandatory, if unexplained stop while touring the milieu in which Gist works) and is introduced as the site of much of the young architect's childhood. There one finds a cornucopia of objects of all kinds, piled high and seemingly organized by type or size or character or material, the sum total of which is fantastic.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **Gist House, Stephen Gist, designer, view from the southwest; Limestone rubble wall in gabion cage ties the building to the site; Main entrance, view from east of the wall; Lonnie Edwards' workshop outside of Salado, Texas, 2005.**

KEVIN ALTER

RIGHT: Entrance shows the combination of material constructions.
BELOW: Gist House plan.

Material is everywhere, and its visceral presence defines an extraordinary collection of rooms. Like the practitioners whom he counts as his mentors (most notably Glenn Murcutt, with whom he participated in a 21-day master class at the University of Newcastle), Gist has begun an architectural career solidly relying on this rich background as the basis for his work—the best of which draws its insights from places like Edwards' studio. Featured here is Gist's first building, his own home, and in it one finds the foundation for a promising future in the field.

Turning off I-35 onto East Amity Road, three miles north of Salado, the visitor encounters rolling hills, fertile farmland, and stunning trees just moments off the interstate. More familiar, unfortunately, is the encroaching development of suburban houses. Discovered amid this unpleasant reminder of the lack of architectural value in much of the American landscape, Gist's home is a delightful respite. Set back significantly, the house first appears across a field, glimpsed between houses closer to the road. Simultaneously unfamiliar and intuitively appropriate to its place, the house presents itself broadside, with a 300-foot-long masonry wall that traverses the landscape, serving as a measure to its subtle changes and defining a private realm beyond. A 40- x 132-foot roof, slightly inclined to the south and structurally independent, hovers above the wall, sliding across it to define a carport and suggest the location of the home's entry. The visitor loses sight of the house prior to turning into the driveway: it reappears as one skims alongside the enclosing wall.

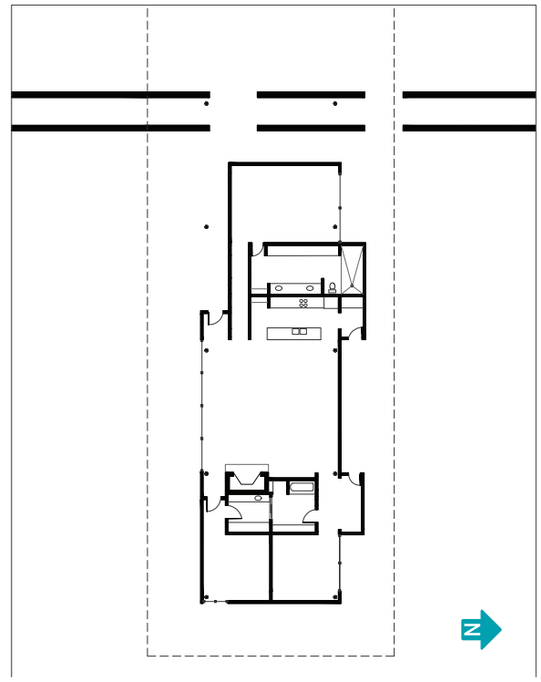
This defining feature of the house is composed of limestone rubble salvaged from a neighboring field and collected into gabions, which are in turn stacked against a straightforward welded-steel frame. While a formally unfamiliar element for a house, this gabion wall seems to fit into the landscape, appearing as an industrial artifact or the defining edge to a tract of land. It operates at the scale of the landscape and, as such, has the authority to define a precinct rather than exist as an object in a field. Albeit grand in scale, a quality of casualness nevertheless pervades the place. Three unassuming portals, scaled accordingly to people and equipment, invite the visitor through to the private realm, where the house unfolds easily into its protected setting. Led through the darkness of the wall, the visitor turns twice before encountering the interior landscape with fresh eyes.

Seemingly effortless in its placement, the building is very well sited, its primary act of settlement being the definition of public and private realms. Here the private realm extends far beyond the house's 1,920 square feet and perimeters of air-conditioned space. It is bound by the gabion wall to the west, by a grove of live oaks to the south, by the house proper to the north, and by a vine-covered steel scaffold to the east (recently added to screen off the further intrusions of suburban development). This generous space provides an idealized range for the life of the house and acts as an enormous exterior living room (perpetually carpeted in green grass as it also serves as the home's septic field). Like a walled garden, what lies behind the barrier is a mystery until one enters, when the distinct place within is revealed.

> Like a walled garden, what lies behind is a **mystery** until entering, when the distinct place within is introduced anew.

The house proper resides under a hovering roof that is supported on an independent 24- x 23-foot, cross-braced grid of steel columns, separated by a continuous clerestory of butt-glazed, monolithic glass panes. Two "boxes" collect all the service aspects of the building (bathrooms, storage, mechanical, etc.) and allow the served spaces to be free from a usual building's necessity for thickness. A master bedroom defines the west end, two children's bedrooms, the east, and a single living space lies in between. Disarmingly straightforward in plan, the home's spatial experience is rich, refusing an easy understanding or singular reading. Primary views are defined, but alternates are also offered. Light and air are embraced from multiple sources, and activity is invited rather than prescribed.

There is a sense of immediacy to the physical character of the building, and a quality of straightforwardness is evident throughout. Challenged with the quandery of passing through his relentless gabion walls, for example, Gist simply cut openings crossed with steel lintels. Cast-in-place concrete walls were not tortured to perfection, but rather gain their character from their embrace of typical fabrication methods and tolerances. Responsible for the literal fabrication of much of the building himself, Gist consistently turned to the obvious, albeit elegant, solution. Details were considered, but not turned into an excuse for unnecessary elaboration. The best parts also convey a sense of their own making in the final product. Innovation is present, but as a means to solve omnipresent concerns—here mostly with regard to water. The roof ends, for example, in a gutter fabricated from a continuous sheet of steel, bent in place to elegantly define the roof's edge and capture the flow of water off its surface. From here the water traverses the length of the gabion wall, which acts as an aqueduct, carrying the water to the three cisterns that flank the grove of trees and greeting the visitor upon entry.



Clearly influenced by luminaries of current architectural practice (Murcutt, Louis Kahn, Jacques Herzog, et al.), this first building for the young architect has been a work in progress since he began construction in 2003 and moved his family into their home in 2005. As it evolves, quotations from these influences have been transformed into elements of his own authorship, and one is left confident that, with time, finesse in making will be added to Gist's powerful spatial and material intuition for building.

In the end, Gist's home gives the cynic (all too often numbed by the lauding of the easily consumable image preferred by mainstream architectural publishing) faith—faith in the inherent generosity of orthogonal geometry that privileges circumstance and material over architectural artifact; faith that architecture is possible in the midst of banal development; faith in the power of material presence; and faith that architecture can ennoble a life lived within it.

PHOTO: KEVIN ALTER; PLAN: COURTESY STEPHEN GIST

BEACHTOWN

AND THE ABUSES OF *DISORDER*

by Roger Connah

Beachtown is a new seaside development emerging out of the sand on Galveston's east end. Designed by the Miami architecture firm, Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company, who were planners for the much acclaimed Seaside beach town in the Florida panhandle that gained much exposure as the setting for Peter Weir's satirical film *The Truman Show*, Beachtown Galveston is a mixed-use development patterned on new urbanism principles. Beachtown seeks to create a traditional, protected vision of life from a bygone era. The architecture draws from the Classical, Vernacular, and Victorian styles typical of historic districts in Galveston, Charleston, and New Orleans. Beachtown was founded by developer Tofigh Shiraz in 1980, and will eventually cover 125 acres of Galveston Beach property, most of it in the front line for a hurricane event and below Galveston's seawall. Builders are required to meet strict construction standards to protect against damage from natural forces. For example, many of the buildings are framed using BluWood®, a treated lumber resistant to uncontrolled moisture absorption, mold, fungus, and termites. Roger Connah, a writer on art and architecture and teacher based in Ruthin, North Wales, visited Beachtown with Bruce Webb this spring shortly after completing a six-month writing assignment in Karachi, Pakistan.

ROGER CONNAH

older man—faded, wrinkled wash, blue t-shirted in Sunday shorts, graying hair, furrowed skin—leans on the white railings of the dune walk already erected in Beachtown Galveston. The site, at present ghostly and adventurous, could just be as exciting at this moment as it will ever be. When the Renderers move in and the prescribed density is achieved, chained to a pattern-book of order and dimension, the void will not be the open plots currently on show, but the milk-float and Brighton environment up ahead in the distance. "We thought about buying one," the man's younger curly-haired friend says, "but you know, guys, I mean look at it, guys, you'd be living in shanty-land, and," he pauses to make an effect he doesn't need, "when the wind blows…poof it's gone…driftwood city…"

"No thank you," his partner agrees, "we thought about it, really we thought about it. There's even another development like this up in Hitchcock, called Harbor Walk, but guys, guys, who wants a Hitchcock Texas postal address?"

Postal address architecture isn't a new idea, nor is designing a community to look instantly freeze-dried. But the sound of Hitchcock or Keaton, Texas appeals more to this observer than Beachtown Galveston. Nearby an all turquoise house is rising off the sand, poised on 20-foot-high concrete columns, its cladding half covering the wooden frame.

Stilt house under construction, Beachtown, 2008.

A small golf buggy approaches the building, pausing to show a prospective buyer named Tracy the "turquoise house." He stops upon noticing another visitor looking up and photographing the rather Gordon Matta-Clarkish effect of deconstructed wood and building board.

"Are you interested?" he asks.

"Well, yes," the visitor replies, "I kind of like the turquoise. Great color...great gashes in the building, super contradiction, superimposition!"

"What?" the salesman says, "Oh, you can't have that color; that's the under-cladding. You can only have certain colors. But sure, come by the Control Office this afternoon and I'll show you our pattern book."

"Look Mummy, an albatross!" Tracy's daughter squeals, and the golf buggy shoots off to show mother and daughter the other beginnings of Beachtown.

HOMELAND INSECURITY

The drama of our existence today is cyclical, from the dream of nature to the fear of nature. The idea of resisting terrifying futures on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico is a gamble most home-owners would choose to ignore. Insurance companies will not, and in a country that cannot sneeze for fear of litigation by the victim, the stakes for this sort of dream are high. When the art of happiness is narrowed to philosophers, soundbytes, Feng Shui, high definition television, and anti-cholesterol medicine, architecture shifts to offer the type of society and the imagined community missing in other parts of life.

A beach town can be more visions in one; not only the fortified structures to avoid nature's advance, it can as well become the theater for organized life. Six for one, this is also the locked condition for open minds, the narrative for adventure within the willed community of candy-floss charms. The patterns for this nostalgia are provided by the forms of Classical Dementia, where the façade consultant is Buster Keaton rather than Brad Pitt or George Clooney.

We can accept the Beachtown rhetoric of course. It's as useful as speaking highly of someone speaking highly of you; it's a spiral of the willed kneeling in front of the willing and praying for life to be

LEFT: **The author on Clifton Beach, Karachi, Pakistan, 2007.**
BELOW: **Beachtown rendering, East Seaside Drive.**

safer, calmer, and less bothersome elsewhere. The fingers too fat for the Blackberry and PDA's to txt back to ground control wear T-shirts instead: *"I love Beachtown, it's so contrary!"* And the contrarians always spot the funkiness and they use it to reverse some of the agony of high architecture. And to legitimate postmodern confections of timeless symbols and of displaced ornamentation. But high architecture too often does the same and lets ornament through the back door.

NOT FOR PUBLIC USE

The last time I found myself on a beach was in Karachi, Pakistan. Clifton Beach is on the Arabian Sea, and by day, a touch festive, a touch fearsome. To the right, a long promenade, a riding school, and the hold-your-noise stretch where pollution reaches its own heights. Clifton Beach to the left is a touch unbalanced, lodged as it is in the history of its imperial name, its position in the politics and fear of that city. An unfortified space, it suspends its British history and enters the personal history of its strollers. At night, fear is stranded. Anxiety closes off and moves to other parts of the fortified city of Karachi as floodlights illuminate the beach. There, glistening, the rippled sand catches the retreating water a hundred and fifty meters from the promenade. The ordinary architecture of the city meets—if you wish to use the word —the *soul.* Hawkers, strollers, scavengers, Afghani refugees, and all sorts of other beach-drifters pass. Their sounds blend with other joyous activity and ingenious small worlds become larger than life. A curious psycho-acoustics at work at the edge of the sea makes this space democratic in a welcoming way. You can observe the beach activity by camel or from horseback, to the immense delight of the young boys who lead them. Young girls cruise in the semidarkness, out of sight of parents. Elderly ladies walk the littoral and children thread in and out with sweets and rock candy. You cannot help but appreciate the energetic public life within the immense constraints in a difficult part of the world where the surprise attack or bomb might go off just about anywhere. Whether by design or not, this beach is for life.

When trying to find an image of this Karachi beach on the internet, the most obvious picture of the fading light on the rippling water comes up, but the crowds are outside the frame and a censoring script slashed across the image renders it unusable and uncopyable. That slash is Beachtown, where the dune walks are locked, only homeowners get keys, and the beach is not for public use.

ENTER THE RENDERERS

Quite possibly, even the kandy-kolored, tangerine dream-flake Beachtown existence cannot be controlled in the way the New Urban Guild requires. The patterns may be stretched out as far as the eye can see in the wallpaper book back in the white cabin sales office, but the user's manual is not actually brought out. Under the claims of a branded, registered, fortified program, what we do learn about is the guarantee of high standards for Beachtown homes:

> *Beachtown is the first community in Galveston to apply the Fortified...for safer living® program to home construction. This national inspection-based initiative has been developed by the Institute for Business and Home Safety and sets exacting standards to make homes better able to resist natural hazards such as wind and water. Fortified homes are rated to withstand 130-mile-per-hour winds as well as water penetration. The program has been adapted to the Galveston environment for use at Beachtown, where certified, fortified East Village beachfront homes in the base zone have robust concrete framing and massive foundations. They are also built at least two feet above FEMA's flood elevation standard.*

Fortified is such a safe, convincing word, and yet it's hard to read this literature and not wonder why these standards are not, literally, even higher. Beachtown Galveston is sited on a flood plain, one of those unnatural zones in the Gulf of Mexico where nature may eventually take its revenge on the land. We have seen this recently throughout the world as whole regions are overwhelmed by forces beyond us.

Two feet above flood elevation is small potatoes frankly when the unpredictable hits; two feet is knee high to the grasshopper that becomes a hurricane. Our regulations can ensure standards, but the conditions are changing. Our desire to meet requirements might promise a controlled community but there is no authority that can announce that global warming will not send waves bigger than those imagined in 100 year or 200 year strategies. A Category 4 hurricane alone could raise the tide to 22.4 feet topped by three to five-foot waves and winds of 150 miles per hour. The houses will not only tumble, nature's image will shatter them into the slow-motion cinema of blue-stained skies.

FEAR-MONGERING

Is this fear-mongering dampening the dreams of those who wish to live in a beach town on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico? Maybe. But fear mongering goes two ways; it bounces back from the mirror of optimism of a designed life and secure existence. It is quite possible that Beachtown Galveston is the ultimate route to one of those well-known funkifications of architecture today. The New Urbanists are

TOP: COURTESY ROGER CONNAH; BOTTOM: COURTESY IUI PROPERTIES

convinced that a double-breasted suit and Wallace and Gromit cuff links make up for the ever-changing architecture of the magazines and the pattern-language world. The result is a more ordinary and everyday sort of alchemy.

Beachtown is also social therapy, where makeover strategies meet reality television, and become the weakest link architecture. It's a seductive trend and readily plausible. A fortified existence is flood-proof, critic-proof, ethnic proof; it is multi-vitamin tablets and ginseng. But where do you go when the clock on the wall suddenly shifts and the barometer warns of impending disaster? Pack the car and head out on the highway to Austin? Take the lift to the top of the lookout tower? And the picket fence? "It cannot be any picket fence," the salesman in the white Control Center informs the prospective buyer, "It must be one of the picket fences from the pattern book, look, here see."

Such a weight to turn the pages. "I can only let you have one of these books if you buy a house." The gift of such architecture is the gift of the displaced; revered by worried individuals who wish for the same fortified privilege, pay for it, run from it, laugh at it, and die from it. In the meantime each owner will be given that special key to access each of the dune walks that lead to the open beach. The new urbanist principles presented in the glossy brochures and Flash-driven Beachtown website are belied by the physical realities: the closed access to the beach, the absurd fortification of the design, and the placement of the development in a zone that hurricanes will one day reclaim. The nostalgic reproduction of architecture from a bygone era does not connect us to history when the façades cover up the erosion of public space and genuine community. Rather than encouraging us to face up to our fears in a meaningful way, Beachtown creates an isolated private space that gives the illusion of a safe bubble in which you can live life outside of history.

The advertising literature goes so far as to suggest that Beachtown is a "green" extension of the historic Strand district, though they are separated by about two miles. Even if we realize that advertising language cannot really convince us, then the media circus may. "The Coastal Living Magazine 2008 Idea House, under construction at Beachtown, is being built using BluWood. In addition to the almost 4,000-square-foot Idea House, BluWood is being used for beachfront and lagoon-front homes and townhomes." And if the media circus does not quite convince us then the celebrity might: "Recently, Brad Pitt and his team of architects chose BluWood for his green housing project in New Orleans, and ABC's Extreme Makeover Home Edition used BluWood for a new home constructed in South Carolina. Now Beachtown is introducing BluWood to Texas." I like Brad Pitt—the work he is doing with community groups to rebuild in New Orleans seems substantial—but how much weight this holds for Beachtown living and future architecture is entirely unmeasured. Perhaps that is just its point—an extreme makeover achieves its result but at the same time erases more history however slightly we attempt to hold onto it. Our howl, our kandy-kolored, tangerine stream-flaked architecture will continue to attract the game-show world of private lives and public fear.

ABOVE LEFT: **East Beach, Galveston.**
ABOVE RIGHT: **Beachtown, Town Center rendering.**

The empty spaces that appear now, glimpsed through the skeleton legs of half constructions and columns hitting nothingness, have more spunk and fullness than anything that will be achieved when the site is silver-topped and skimmed full of designed houses. Then the void of this sort of planning will be more complete than any of the structures the architects ever imagined. If Stewart Brand tells us brilliantly how to learn from buildings, we might also recommend this learning from those not quite yet built.

IF WE TOLERATE THIS, OUR CHILDREN WILL BE NEXT

Architects, it is true, often want to speak of the big issues, as if the discipline validates greater anxiety and expert opinion, but it is unlikely we will turn to the pattern-book makers of Beachtown for future inspiration. Simpson or Southpark cuff links may carnivalize our dress, but this slight flair, this one item of snazz in the otherwise closed world, can make few claims to be serious architecture. The greening of Galveston's "Strand" designs a way of life already defined by life under the headphones; the route is internal, the disorder necessary to shake the future cannot be reflected in the pattern book. To live the Beachtown dream, a user's manual might start with the following:

1. Insert headphones, listen to the soundtrack of a world elsewhere, and close eyes when passing through the liminal zones and the sea wall that leads to the edge of Galveston.
2. Ignore the gunfire and open eyes to friendly images of nature.
3. Set up the picnic table in front of the huge virtual wall inside the house.
4. Celebrate life as designed for others.
5. Ignore the GPS for GB Int'l Airport and find your own way.
6. Watch Beachtown blaze on red letter days, have the blazers ready, and the piping in Saltwater Taffy colors.

LEFT: ROGER CONNAH; RIGHT: COURTESY IUI PROPERTIES

BEACHTOWN IS ALSO SOCIAL THERAPY, WHERE MAKEOVER STRATEGIES MEET REALITY TELEVISION, AND BECOME THE WEAKEST LINK ARCHITECTURE.

Hanging columns in a house under construction, Beachtown, 2008.

ROGER CONNAH

SO AFRAID OF DYING

Galveston, oh Galveston, I am so afraid of dying/ Before I dry the tears she's crying/ Before I watch your sea birds flying in the sun/ At Galveston, at Galveston.…

The very assemblage of tailored buildings can, in all seriousness, hijack vision elsewhere; it's the rat in the maze in Karachi influencing the rat in the maze in Houston. This architecture preempts headlines and has no real need to become a TV reality show. We have had the makeovers, the hijacked and the weakest link, which now condition hostility and untidiness in daily behavior. The result of such shows is like this architecture: the last one to remain speaking is not always the last one with something to say and it might be the one wearing the Funky Beachtown T-shirt.

Galveston, oh Galveston, I still hear your sea waves crashing/ While I watch the cannons flashing/ I clean my gun and dream of Galveston….And to anticipate the weather balloon that is always out of sight, but never out of mind, we check the near coastal forecasts for the day after the day before:

MATAGORDA BAY-GALVESTON BAY- 500 AM CDT FRI APR 4 2008 ...SMALL CRAFT SHOULD EXERCISE CAUTION THROUGH FRIDAY AFTERNOON... TODAY... SOUTHERLY WINDS AROUND 15 TO 20 KNOTS BECOMING WEST IN THE AFTERNOON. BAY WATERS SLIGHTLY CHOPPY TO CHOPPY. A CHANCE OF SHOWERS AND THUNDERSTORMS. TONIGHT...

I still see her standing by the water/ Standing there lookin' out to sea/ And is she waiting there for me? On the beach where we used to run…

ARCHITECTURE is About Life

A conversation with John Zemanek

by **Carlos Jimenez**

ABOVE: **Carlos Jimenez and John Zemanek discuss architecture, teaching, and life.**
TOP RIGHT: **First Zemanek House, Colquitt Street, living area, John Zemanek, architect, 1968.**

John Zemanek , who at 86 remains as *curious* and *vigilant* as ever, has for more than 40 years taught design and history to countless students at the University of Houston's College of Architecture. I was one of those students in the late seventies. During my years at the university I spent many mornings and afternoons in one of the architect's earliest designs: the Student Life Plaza (1971), a work of rooted subtlety where water, trees, and paving patterns composed a tranquil space amid UH's disparate gathering spaces.

LEFT: ERIC HESTER; ABOVE: JOHN ZEMANEK

Here I found Zemanek's consummate care toward the making of place: a sensibility intent in releasing multiple delights for the senses. Similar qualities emanate from the two houses the architect has designed for himself. His first house on Colquitt Street (1965) remains a work of luxurious modesty, a lesson on materiality, and a place where layers of space dissolve into intertwined pauses of nature. Some years ago I wrote about this house and I titled the text "The Light Between Gardens" in reference to the design's distinct narrative of two gardens mediated by a delicate and observant architecture.

On a recent spring afternoon I visited Zemanek at his current house on Peden Street. We engaged in an animated conversation about many things, among them a third house that he is presently designing for himself, or as he put it: his need for "downsizing." We discussed the long history of his involvement in architecture.

Carlos Jimenez: You are an architect whose life is marked by a deep passion for design, landscape, and construction. What led you to teach history courses and seminars?

John Zemanek: Your question has a complicated answer. In early 1962 Donald Barthelme was appointed Director of the School of Architecture at Rice. He initiated a series of decisions, which were not much welcomed by his faculty. In the aftermath of the controversy Barthelme resigned. Richard Lilliott, head of the architecture department at the University of Houston, immediately hired him as a full-time professor. In protest, Howard Barnstone, William Jenkins, and Burdette Keeland, who were at the time teaching at the college, walked out on the job saying that they would not teach if Barthelme was going to teach there. This was the first week of classes so you can just imagine the difficulty that created. Lilliott, who had met me through a mutual friend, called me up and invited me to teach a visiting design studio. I remember replying: "When?" and he responded, "Well, right now." I was hired to teach design. I had never taught history in my life. I had not even been a history major. As a student I took the standard Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, and Modern architectural history courses. That was my whole background in the history of architecture. But Lilliott, who was from the English department, didn't have architectural history in his background either, so he just said to me, "I've learned it from scratch, why don't you try it?" So here I am still teaching history.

C.J.: When I was a student in the late 1970s you also taught a seminar on Postmodern Architecture. I remember that in one of them an incensed Michael Graves walked out of your seminar after you probed him with a particular question. I also remember an enthusiastic Alberto Pérez-Gómez enthralling us with inspired musings on Octavio Paz and architecture.

J.Z.: Regardless of how I came to teach history, my constant desire has been to make it relevant to my students' future practice of architecture. Since you mentioned Michael Graves and Pérez-Gómez, I should explain that my goal at that time was to show how Graves saw architecture as self-referential, not as an instrument of change, while Pérez-Gómez saw architecture as part of cultural evolution.

C.J.: How do you see the role of architectural history in the education of younger generations of architects today?

J.Z.: History was very important for me as a student. The study of history reinforced my view of architecture and its possibilities in a cultural sense, and therefore it has had a great deal of influence on my deeper search for significance. All significant architects have had an enormous knowledge of history. It is very much evident in their work. With the coming of Postmodernism, architecture was released to deal with history through decorative, spectacular, and dramatic gestures. Mainstream postmodernism declared that architecture is about architecture, not about making statements or expressing opinions. My view has always been that architecture is about life, that architecture is not self-referential. Nor is art. Architecture and art are instruments of social change, of cultural evolution.

Students today think, why should I even study history? I will be lucky if I can get a job and be an average middle class person. And to get a job and to hold it I have to be good at the technology of architectural production. I don't know if today's students ever think about moral, ethical, or philosophical reasons for doing their designs.

C.J. Have you seen much of a change in students over the years?

Second Zemanek House, Peden Street, John Zemanek, Architect, 2001.

J.Z.: Students today are quite different, let's say, from students in the early 1980s or in the 1970s. There was an enormous change in world history after the Vietnam War. Education in America took a major shift with the Kent State student massacre. At that point, those of us who were resisting the war in Vietnam, or were supporting the Civil Rights movement and many ideas about democracy and freedom, were taken aback. We thought that we had won, we thought the worst was over and from here on all we had to do was implement what we believed was theoretically right. When it went from theory to practice we thought things would still prevail, but we fell asleep on the job. As we took our victory for granted we began to lose ground. There is a great saying that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance." We were not vigilant, and so gradually civil rights began to erode, the poor became poorer, the rich became richer, the middle class diminished in significance until today we are at a point where reversal is almost a *fait accompli*. We are not a democracy. Why has the attitude changed? Look for instance at this war in Iraq, everybody knows that it is wrong, even the President knows it, but there is no one willing to do anything about it, not that they don't think that something should be done about it, they just don't know how to proceed to stop it. They think that since the war is so unanimously rejected that it will automatically go away. Students say, what the heck am I supposed to do about this; no one else seems to think about it.

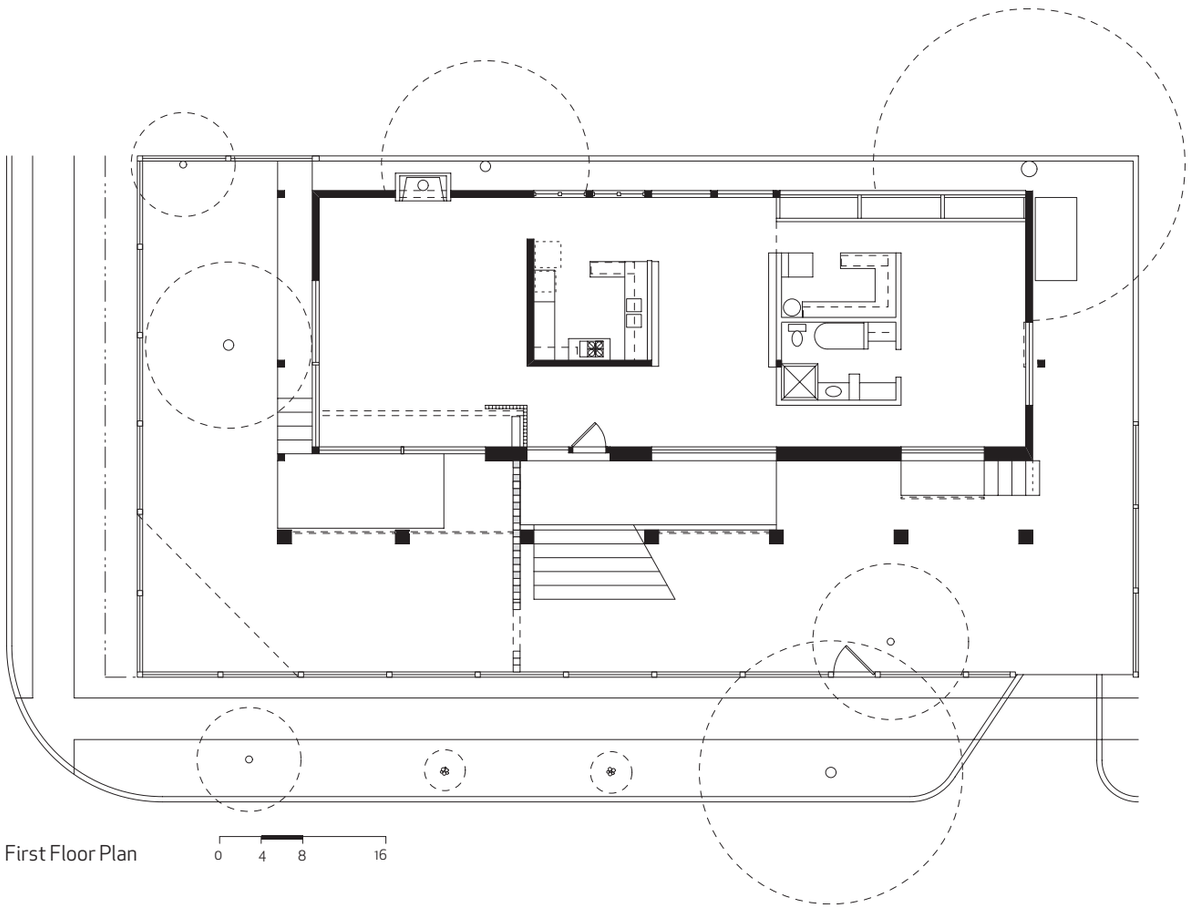
C.J.: Where do you think this troubling apathy comes from?

J.Z.: Students today are very disturbed about their future. At the beginning of each semester I ask my students to write a short text on "how do you see yourself as an architect practicing, and how do you relate that to your education?" The answers I get are very alarming, you see. Students know that things are messed up, and they know that they are going to end up doing something that is not necessarily architecture but the best they can do. And therefore studying anything else is somehow suspect; it is an illusion to think that it is going to be to your benefit to know history. It is not that they don't want to learn it, but they don't want to feel that they have been taken, that after all of that time spent studying history they are not going to need it or that it will not mean anything. So they think, why should I be taken in not once but twice? like the one-two punch. Is this a kind of cynicism, apathy, paralysis, amnesia? I don't know. I do know that an understanding of the relevance of history is no longer regarded as a part of the equation or formula in design of buildings.

C.J.: One of the most abiding characteristics of your work is its incorporation of nature and landscape. Can you talk about this?

J.Z.: I grew up in a farm and I clearly recall my childhood interest in buildings. I remember for instance that when one of my sisters got married they built her a small house on the farm, so I remember all of the materials scattered around. I had never seen lumber before so I was fascinated with its different sizes and with the structural

JACK THOMPSON



Plan for the architect's third Montrose house, a work in progress.

framing. Later I became even more fascinated with how the structural members in one of the barns were not concealed and the singular feeling that their exposed framework gave to the space. I found all farm buildings quite compelling, whether they were located in our own property or in our neighbor's land. The farm buildings were arranged around a courtyard. We worried about indoor and outdoor space, orientation, drainage, trees, shade, each and all very calibrated for their purpose. There was a clarity in the way the farm worked as a machine of sorts, needing this type of building for this, this structure for that, and so on. The whole thing was also a community. Then there was the larger surrounding landscape; lots of trees, creeks, and rivers, the farms mingled with the prairie and manicured fields to create the gardens that stretched to the horizon. There was never any intention to dominate the landscape; we understood and followed its natural course. The farm buildings were devoid of any ornament or embellishment, their materials were exposed. That is why it wasn't such a peculiar leap for me to go from the architecture of the farm to modern architecture when I began my studies in 1939. Such buildings as Falling Water and the Barcelona Pavilion, for instance, felt right to me. I instinctively understood them as sophisticated interpretations of the buildings I knew on the farm. I suppose I have never outgrown the indelible experiences of my origin. Of course, with globalization and agri-business that garden landscape in which the family farm evolved has devolved into a rural slum.

C.J.: This appreciation of place is something that springs from these indelible experiences. It clearly influences the way you think of architecture today.

J.Z.: For instance, from where we are sitting right now I see four old trees. I can sit here and do nothing just in awe of them. These trees tell me where I come from. I have also planted more trees. They are part of a new reading of the site. Existing and new trees converge. When I come home at night I immediately open the patio doors to let the air through. There is not a lot of traffic noise, it is a quiet neighborhood. I love the sounds that come in, the street, the murmuring voices from the street and nearby houses. If the house were closed off none of these conditions would happen. The transitions or thresholds between interior and exterior spaces are always full of possibilities for spatial drama, even if there might not be any trees or vegetation there. Such spaces are contacts with nature and they must not be eliminated, we should always incorporate them in the architecture.

C.J.: After having lived in two houses of your own design, you are now in the process of designing a third house. What prompted this new venture?

J.Z.: The new house is also sited on a corner lot and it will be a much smaller house, more compact and simpler to maintain. In fact it is only 1,600 square feet. My present house is too big for me. I am downsizing you might say. But then again these motives might just be excuses. The real reason is that I got to build. The design is a simple rectangular volume enclosed by a surrounding exterior wall right on the property line and lifted two feet off the ground. The house is a single space with two islands for kitchen and bathroom. Even though it is overall a much smaller house I feel that it will be visually more spacious than my current house. From the inside it will all read as one continuous level, gently sloping toward the streetscape.

C.J.: What are your thoughts on the state of architecture today, in particular what do you think of global culture and consumerism as they affect architecture?

J.Z.: Consumerism is not so much about consuming or enjoying as it is about controlling. Consumerism is an instrument of social and political control. You know, our constitution says nothing about capitalism; we have been conditioned to believe that capitalism and democracy are inseparable, but this is not true at all. Advanced capitalism, which is where we are today, is simply another name for consumer culture. There is no cumulative gain in consuming for the sake of consuming—it is an escape from reality, just as it is an escape for architecture to turn to applied ornament or other spectacular devices to justify its existence. Mainstream Americans are addicted to consumerism in order to escape the boredom of reality—reality is that "eternal vigilance" vital to liberty. It is "writ large" in architecture, computer games, iPods, NASCAR….To cope with the 9/11 tragedy the President advised Americans to go shopping, and they did. To democracy, advanced capitalism is the tail that wags the dog. Optimistically, architecture will return to meeting people's real needs; it will be self-ornamenting.

C.J.: But isn't this rampant consumerism taking place at a global pace today?

J.Z.: China and India are trying to catch up to where we were 50 years ago. The world is not becoming Americanized though, it is becoming modernized. To say that China is becoming Americanized you would have to superimpose American thoughts, values, and patterns on a culture that extends 5,000

COURTESY JOHN ZEMANEK, ARCHITECT

TOP RIGHT: **Peden Street House, front street elevation.**
ABOVE: **Colquitt Street House, front street elevation.**

years and is so transparent in its determination. Now most Chinese or Indian students are quite determined, positive, confident, and optimistic, they know that their foundation is solid, ancient, and proven. I think the only thing that is going to save this country and put it back on track is going to be a major economic crisis. People are going to have to wake up. You know, during the Great Depression, the western world was separate from the east, but today we cannot do anything without considering the whole world population. In spite of all recent events I am optimistic in the sense that it is possible for someone to rise, an individual, or a group of individuals and say, "Wake up!" Look at what happened four years ago when Barack Obama electrified Americans with his keynote address. You know that this is a mind and spirit that is not going to go away. Now we are in fertile territory for people to realize it is time to wake up.

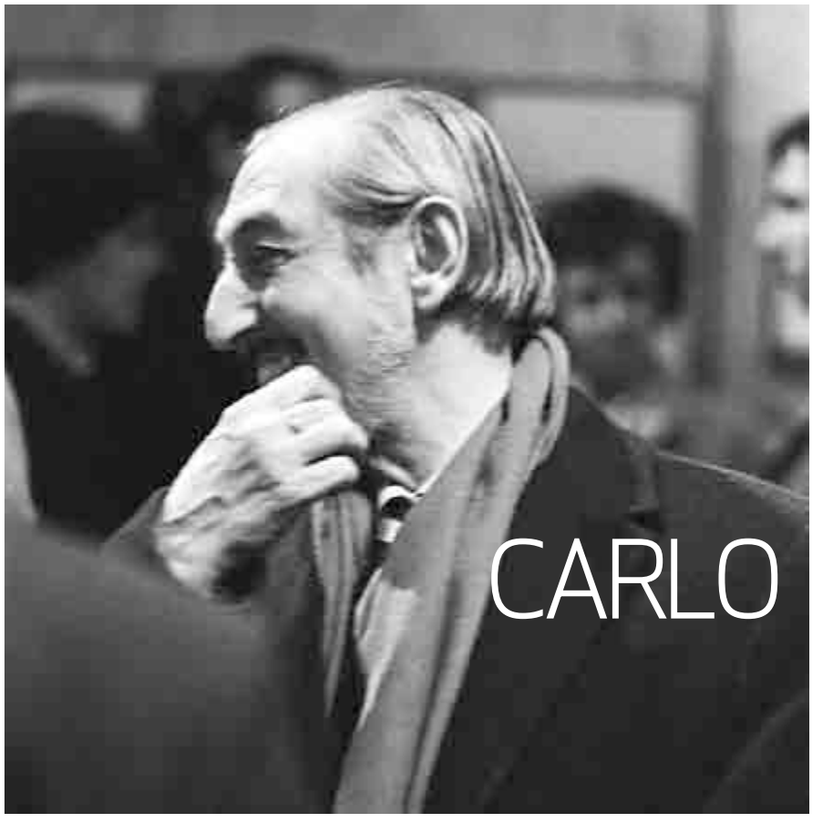
C.J.: How can architecture operate in a cultural and effective way amid overbearing market forces?

J.Z.: Where architecture has joined consumerism in becoming a marketable commodity, it has abandoned the challenge to make the world a better place. Once the "content" of architecture determined the "form" of architecture. Now architecture's "content" is the "form"—this is what consumer culture is about. We were not vigilant, we lost momentum. Mies put it quite well when he was interviewed about what his thoughts on Postmodernism were and he replied: "We showed them the way, what the hell went wrong?" Again we were not alert. And for architecture to be effective, it must reflect vigilance and not be driven by market imperatives.

C.J.: What do you think are the most critical instruments or attitudes that students of architecture should nurture or possess?

J.Z.: In my view for students to learn they should cultivate an attitude of curiosity, a willingness to truly learn. And to do that they must know how to read, speak, and write better. They must accept a common or shared vocabulary of understanding. A student should learn to think in terms of long-term events, long-term experiences, rather than instant gratifications. Students should think in terms of cumulative experience in a cumulative range. We can't substitute fragments or bits of information for knowledge. This attitude of curiosity leads to a richer appreciation and understanding of knowledge, life, nature… everything, especially architecture.

JOHN ZEMANEK



Carlos Scarpa, Berkeley, California, 1969.

CARLO SCARPA

{ IN PERSON }

By **Max Levy**

In September and October 2007, the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture at the University of Houston hosted the exhibition *Erich Mendelsohn: German-American Architect, 1887–1953*, organized by Mendelsohn's biographer Regina Stephan for the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen Stuttgart. Dallas architect Max Levy reflects on an earlier exhibition of Mendelsohn's drawings in an installation designed by Carlo Scarpa, and the impact it still has on him.

When I turn the page of an architecture magazine and the work of Carlo Scarpa appears unexpectedly, I feel a quiet inner thrill. Since Scarpa's death in 1978, his caress of materials, his strange but faultless sense of placement and proportion, the contemplative nature of his details seem increasingly moving. My appreciation is heightened by my awareness that his output was relatively limited. Confined mostly to the floating world of Venice and a few other Italian sites, Scarpa's work tantalizes because of its rarity and distance from us. It may come as a revelation, therefore, to learn that Scarpa executed a project in the United States. Seen by very few people, it remained in place for only one month, and only a few mediocre photos survive.

In March 1969 the University Art Museum at the University of California, Berkeley, mounted an exhibition of 146 tiny but epic architectural sketches by Erich Mendelsohn, the great German modernist. The drawings were presented in an installation of architectural stagecraft created by Scarpa. I was an architecture student at Berkeley at the time and wandered into this confluence of masters.

Though I knew a bit about Mendelsohn from my architecture history courses, my introduction to Scarpa was up close and personal. He came to Berkeley to refine the exhibition design on-site and to supervise its installation. A few days before the show opened, I came across a small poster announcing that Professor Scarpa would lecture on his work that evening. Though the eminent historian Vincent Scully would eventually place Scarpa "somewhere between Wright and Kahn," I found no one at the architecture school that day who had heard of him. I went to the lecture anyway. In a room that would have seated 300 people, only five showed up. This prompted much animated discussion between Scarpa and his interpreter, and soon we heard from the lectern: "Professor Scarpa feels this room is too large for such a small group. We must move to a space better tailored to the scale of the gathering."

Scarpa waited with genial forbearance, chain-smoking and smiling over at us occasionally, while the search went on for another venue. We sat there silently, too self-conscious to bail out of the awkward situation. At last a smaller room was found all the way across campus, and away the whole group marched. It was like a scene from a Fellini movie: nightfall, the Pacific fog rolling in, the AV guy in the lead pushing his slide projector on a noisy metal cart, then Scarpa in his gorgeous sport coat and long woolen scarf, followed by his interpreter, and finally the ragtag audience of five.

In the new room, Scarpa began projecting images of his work. We saw a travertine door, a plaster ceiling polished to an almost mirror finish, fittings that combined cast iron, bronze, and rosewood, rooms loosely defined by planes of luscious materials dissolving into shadow, windows like glass boxes of light, and a birdbath so poetic it was heart-stopping. We saw the Museo Correr, the Canova Plaster Cast Gallery, the Olivetti showroom, the Querini

Mendelsohn was a contemporary of **Albert Einstein**, **Sigmund Freud**, and **Arnold Schönberg**. Until the 1960s, when his reputation began to fade, he was often grouped with the founding masters of modernism.

Stampalia Library, the Museo Castelvecchio. And we saw schematic drawings for a work in progress, the Brion-Vega Cemetery. Each drawing teemed, margin to margin, with ideas in embryo, some precisely delineated, others a mist of color and spirit. As the jewel-like images were projected, Scarpa kept up a vivacious commentary in Italian. He stood next to the slide projector in the middle of the room, facing the screen along with the audience, his face grotesquely uplit, cigarette smoke swirling luminously as he spoke. Despite the language barrier he conveyed an unforgettable sensitivity to materials, details, and space.

Mendelsohn was a contemporary of Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and Arnold Schönberg. Until the 1960s, when his reputation began to fade, he was often grouped with the founding masters of modernism. His career was launched by the remarkable conceptual sketches presented in the Berkeley exhibition, most of them about the size of a notecard, some no larger than a postage stamp. Many had been drawn on scraps of paper in the trenches during World War I, where he served with the German forces on the Russian front. A few bold but miniature strokes of black ink or pencil revealed structures of unprecedented dynamism, seemingly rushing forward into a hopeful future. The drawings were also unusual for the way they depicted buildings spatially, seen from an angle instead of flattened and static in the plan/section/elevation tradition.

The setting for the exhibition was a space about the size of a basketball court inside a windowless, brown brick Romanesque building, roofed by a single gable with a large ridge skylight of steel and wire-glass. Built in 1905, this building had served as the university's powerhouse until the 1930s, when it was picked clean and given over to gallery space. The building sat among oaks and old-growth redwoods next to Strawberry Creek, a dark, cathedral-like sliver of nature that tumbles through the hilly campus. This bucolic scene contrasted with the university's politically and emotionally charged atmosphere, fueled by the ungovernable mass protests over the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, sexual liberation, pacifism, feminism, and free speech. Just fifty yards away from the brown brick building was Sproul Plaza, ground zero for leafleteers, demonstrations, and moments of anarchy.

Designing the exhibition presented Scarpa with two immediate hurdles. First there was the budget. Accustomed to working with lavish materials, the virtuoso was limited in Berkeley to little more than plywood. Second, the powerhouse space was too big for the display of such small drawings. As with the lecture, Scarpa looked to refashion the place so that it would be "tailored to the scale of the gathering." Using eight-foot-tall panels of fir plywood, he tightly defined a space in the center of the room that in plan was jaggedly configured, something like a stroke of lightning. (The remainder of the powerhouse was treated much as the poché in an architectural drawing). The panels, stained either red-orange or loden green, were detailed so that the plywood's edge laminations were revealed. Mendelsohn's drawings, with their concentrated black strokes, oversized creamy white mats, and wooden frames stained nearly black, looked exquisite against the strangely colored gallery walls. Smaller drawings were hung somewhat higher than normal, meeting one's gaze at eye level. By contrast, the larger drawings required a bow of the head: they were mounted on low plywood lean-tos that created spatial eddies in the gallery. A further tiny detail: the inside corners of the mat cutouts were radiused, showing care for the drawings' frailty and organic lines. The towering scale of the space overhead was reduced by suspended swaths of white silk. There was no artificial light: soft northern California sunshine poured through the big skylight, was filtered by the silk, and finally filled the place with a chiaroscuro of liquid calm.

Erich Mendelsohn Exhibition, Carlos Scarpa designer, University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, 1969.

I visited the exhibition three times during its short run, and on each occasion I was the only one there. The show had been swept to the quiet margins by the competing campus upheaval. Arts reporters made no mention of it in the cultural press. The show's only appearance in the print media was a superb little seven-inch-square exhibition catalogue, which surprisingly is still available for sale online after all these years (see Susan King, *The Drawings of Erich Mendelsohn*, 1969).

Neither Mendelsohn nor Scarpa was a stranger to turmoil like that gripping the Berkeley campus in 1969. Mendelsohn's career, in effect launched by World War I and mortally wounded by World War II, was one of the great reversals of fortune of the modern movement. In the interwar period, his was one of the largest architectural practices in Germany, marked by prestigious projects and artistic advances. His success was begrudged by the Bauhaus circle and snuffed out altogether by the Nazis. The Jewish architect closed his thriving office in 1933 and immigrated first to London, then to Jerusalem, and finally to San Francisco. Though he produced some remarkable buildings at each stop, his promise as an international form-giver seemed to fade away in northern California. Similarly, Scarpa's career was marked by roiling politics, this time in Italy, bringing him in conflict first with the communist partisans, then with the fascists, and all along with the Italian architectural community, which never admitted him to the profession. Just before coming to Berkeley, he had a run-in with his own architecture students at the University of Venice. At some peril to his own safety, he tore down their banner of protest, not because he disagreed with them politically, but because he thought their lettering was disgraceful.

When Louise Mendelsohn, Erich's widow, invited Scarpa to design the show, he was so pleased that he waived his fee, asking only that his expenses be reimbursed. Despite the meager budget, he must have been buoyed to learn that much of the funding was made possible by John Entenza, legendary editor of *Arts & Architecture* magazine, founder of the Case Study House program, and at that time director of the Graham Foundation. Scarpa seemed to take the very American project schedule in stride; he accepted Louise's invitation in January, arrived in February, and the show opened in March. It is recorded that he referred to the carpenter assigned to the installation as his "lumberjack," though it is unclear whether this was an affectionate term for the big fellow in flannel shirt and jeans, or an expression of frustration over the carpenter's coarse workmanship.

After the exhibition closed, it was offered as a traveling show to several museums around the country. Interestingly, two of them were the Dallas Museum of Art and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, both of which turned it down. The Museum of Modern Art in New York took the show, but only the framed Mendelsohn drawings made the trip. The plywood panels wound up in a university storeroom, no doubt scavenged over the years for other purposes.

In retrospect, I have to admit that though I was intrigued by the lecture and exhibition, I didn't fully appreciate what I had wandered into. That appreciation has taken years to mature, deepened by my exposure to Scarpa's broader works and measured against my own attempts at wresting some degree of artistry from an obstinate world. The farther away I recede in time from that lecture, the more it seems to revisit me at odd moments. As for the exhibition, I know that it was a dimmed version of Scarpa's full powers. And yet, though denied his typical formula of rich materials, master artisans, and long gestation, he still managed somehow to engage the eye, the mind, and the heart. In that gallery he created a wood-grained environment of uncommon warmth, tinged with the color scheme of the Third Reich and laid out in a wrenched geometry unlike any other floor plan of the time. And all of it, down to the cut of the mat board, was meticulously directed to amplifying the distant thunder of Mendelsohn's brilliant little drawings.

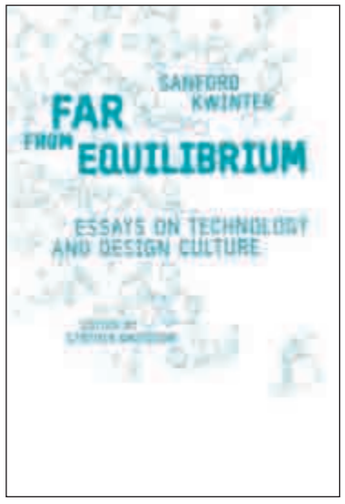
See "Erich Mendelsohn's Cosmopolitan Vision: A recent U.S. exhibition gave this German icon his due" by Laura B. McGuire in *Cite* 73.

NOT THE LAST WORD: SANFORD KWINTER

Far From Equilibrium: Essays on Technology and Design Culture
(Edited by Cynthia Davidson, Barcelona and
New York: Actar, 2008, 196 pages; $33.00, paper)

by Kazys Varnelis

FOR A NEW YORK WRITER TO REVIEW A BOOK BY ONE OF Houston's great architectural thinkers in *Cite* is unquestionably risky. But given Sanford Kwinter's own dual allegiance to these two cities and his fascination with the potential lying in the concentrated and dissipated forms of urbanism that these cities respectively epitomize, perhaps it is not impossible. And where better to talk about Kwinter? After all, it is in Houston—both city and intellectual milieu—that Kwinter rethought urbanism, redirecting it away from an image-based notion of the city (Garnier and Corbusier to Lynch and Rowe) in favor of an understanding of cities as products of dynamic forces.



Far From Equilibrium is a collection of essays that surveys the evolution of these theories in Kwinter's thought. Most books of collected essays come up short, reflecting less a coherent body of work than a wandering mind. But this is not the case here. Selected from his writings in the nineties, these essays form a new document, as relevant to us today as they were in their first iteration—perhaps more so.

Most, but not all, of these essays are from editor Cynthia Davidson's *ANY* magazine, for which Kwinter regularly contributed a column called "FFE" (originally titled "Not the Last Word," but renamed at Kwinter's request). Intended to accompany the conferences and the books that Anyone Corporation produced, *ANY* began publication in the wake of Jacques Derrida's influence on architecture, giving life to the suggestion that writing and theory were the highest forms of (architectural) intellectual work. Initially designed by Massimo Vignelli as a graphically flamboyant tabloid, *ANY* visually announced that the writing in its pages would be radical, not merely observing but rather agitating for and inventing a new architecture.

Kwinter's role in *ANY* was crucial. After his brief response to a query from Robert Somol on the status of form in architecture was printed in Issue 8 as "Form Work: Colin Rowe," Kwinter arrived in full force in Issue 9 with "Urbanism vs Architecture: The Bigness of Rem Koolhaas." This was a pivotal issue for *ANY*, marking a change in editorial staff as well as a shift away from deconstruction toward a broader interest in culture, technology, and diagramming. The graphic language of the magazine was redone, the formalist Vignelli design replaced with a more gridded approach by Michael Rock, Susan Sellers, and Georgianna Stout. Davidson suggested that this new look reflected the influence of Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, both already associated with Kwinter.

But *ANY* was formulated as a ten-year project, and when that point was reached in 2000, it was shut down. Davidson and Kwinter then reunited as editor and writer, shaping the "FFE" columns—together with other essays that they felt applicable—into this new product. The result is hardly a complete selection of Kwinter's thought, nor does it comprise every text he wrote for *ANY*. On the contrary, this book picks out a particularly vital thread in Kwinter's intellectual narrative, reframing key texts from the *ANY* period that emphasize Kwinter's current commitment to resistance. Thus, the book bypasses the aspects of Kwinter's work in the 1990s, such as his "new pastoralism," that could be misinterpreted as supporting less critical motifs in contemporary thought.

But this is not revisionism. On the contrary, the key to the book is his 1996 essay "Radical Anamnesis (Mourning the Future)." Here Kwinter concludes, "Through (selective) memory the future becomes possible, a future that the past could not think and that the present—alone—dares not." In this spirit, working with Davidson as his editor, Kwinter has discovered a radically new book among these decade-old essays, unabashedly facing up to the dangers of technology and challenging architecture to justify itself today.

During the publication process, *Far From Equilibrium* passed to Actar Publishers, where editor Michael Kubo and designer Reinhard Steger punctuated the book graphically. The design moves the book forward to the present day, expounding on the work of Bruce Mau, who designed Kwinter's Zone Books starting in the 1980s. A series of gatefold pages reveal projects by architects such as Diller Scofidio+Renfro, Ábalos & Herreros, and Toyo Ito, work forged in the same milieu as Kwinter's writing. Just as these gatefolds disrupt the flow of reading, they also mark a transition in typefaces. These disturbances are registered at the threshold of the reader's consciousness, affirming, as Kwinter does, a faith in the powers of design itself to reconfigure our thought.

But this is a mere overview. Throughout, Kwinter's critical, incisive voice questions what design can do for society today and calls for us to make a stance—to take the road not taken by criticism, which has moved to a vacuous endorsement of the lowest common denominator, either embracing post-criticism or banal journalism. If *Far From Equilibrium* was once "Not the Last Word," we can be sure that this magnificent work is, if nothing else, not the last word that we will hear from this brilliant thinker.

THOROUGHLY MODERN

Hugo V. Neuhaus Jr., Residential Architect/1948-1966
(Ben Koush, Houston Mod, 2007, 95 pages; $20.00, paper)

by Nora Laos

AS RAYMOND BABBITT, DUSTIN HOFFMAN'S CHARACTER in *Rain Man* (1988), might have said, "Mid-century modern is in…definitely in…definitely." Nearly every house for sale in the Houston subdivision of Glenbrook Valley is identified as such. Architecture, furniture, fixtures, utensils, and jewelry designed in the 1950s and '60s are being rediscovered and revalued today, albeit by a limited segment of the population. But what exactly *is* "mid-century modern?" Ben Koush here offers us a glimpse of one side of this multifaceted "style" that dominated much of American architectural design in the two decades after World War II.

In 2007, the residential production of Hugo V. Neuhaus Jr. (in collaboration with C. Herbert Cowell and David Haid) was the subject of Houston Mod's third exhibition about modern houses in the city. In this exhibition catalogue, Koush meticulously describes 15 houses designed by Neuhaus over the course of 18 years, between 1948 and 1966. Most of the architect's work from this period is starkly "modern," one story, flat-roofed, large expanses of glass and brick, and exposed structural members. In terms of composition, the smaller vacation homes are single pavilions, while the primary residences either are "courtyard houses" (square plans with a hollowed-out central atrium open to the sky) or are formed by boxes segregated by function and connected by hallways and outdoor patios or courtyards. Many are conspicuously large, even by today's standards. Neuhaus's own house from 1949–50, built for himself, his wife, and his stepson, measures 6,000 square feet and includes five bedrooms and seven baths.

This book documents with nearly archaeological precision each house's original design, structural skeleton, materials, furnishings, landscaping, and owners in as much detail as is available in archival and published materials, as well as from current owners and descendants of the original clients. Each project description is accompanied by a dimensioned and labeled original plan, site plans, elevations, and perspectives (when available), and black and white photographs of the houses in context, many dating to the periods of initial occupancy. The houses that have been well preserved and maintained are illustrated with new images taken by the author to consciously emulate the tone, cone of vision, and general character of those from the 1950s and '60s.

The catalogue includes a foreword by Stephen Fox and a series of essays that address the architectural origins and theoretical underpinnings of modernism in the United States and particularly in Houston. Koush divides modern architectural trends in postwar Houston into three categories: Usonian, Contemporary, and Miesian. Neuhaus's *oeuvre* belongs to the Miesian trend, inspired by the German modern master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, whose approach Koush characterizes by "sobriety of form, strict separation of materials according to structural function, lack of ornamentation, and tectonic economy." Neuhaus's homes reflect the stark minimalism and integration of interior and exterior spaces introduced by Mies in his house projects from the 1920s and in his famous Barcelona Pavilion from 1929. (A formative experience early in Neuhaus's career was serving as the local architect supervising construction of Philip Johnson's house for Dominique and John de Menil, which in large part introduced Houston to Mies's modernism.) However, the Houston architect inflected Mies's purity by introducing vernacular components such as wood lath sunscreens and, occasionally, exposed wood structural members and stucco wall finishes.

In the most general theoretical terms, modernism in architecture was a revolutionary movement, a rejection of the historically eclectic styles that had dominated 19th- and early 20th-century architecture. It was also linked to a democratic ideal that espoused "good" design for all economic strata. In Houston, however, Miesian modernism came to be linked with privilege. Neuhaus's clients (and he himself) came from what is described by both Fox and Koush as the city's "patrician" class, the moneyed elites who had the ability to influence the architectural direction of the cityscape. Those in this group, like the de Menils, who were conscious of, and engaged in, contemporary culture, philanthropy, and social justice, often turned to a handful of architects committed to modern design. Neuhaus was one of those architects. Though Houston became known for its mid-century modern design, many wealthy families nonetheless opted for more traditional architectural solutions. Fox acknowledges this when he concludes that the "paradox, and poignancy, of Hugo Neuhaus's architecture is that it embodied a nobler standard of excellence and beauty than the Houston social class to which he belonged was prepared to invest in, appreciate, and conserve."

We see the dignity of Neuhaus's residential designs in the attention to industrial materials, exposed structural members, strict structural grids, and open plans. A number of Neuhaus's symmetrical designs reflect his interest in the Palladian nine-square plan, interpreted through the Miesian structural grid. Koush concludes that the Houston architect must have understood that his work might some day be compared to classical architecture. However, according to clients' wishes, the architect also at times employed indigenous materials such as brick and pine, concealed the structure with brick facing or wood panels, made adjustments in the structural grid for the sake of space planning, and compartmentalized his plans. His work was, as Koush asserts, "consistently varied." In other words, "modern" in terms of Neuhaus's work doesn't mean any one thing except perhaps the conscious rejection of historicist forms like Corinthian columns, classical crown moldings, or pediments over windows. As Gwendolyn Wright puts it, modern architecture is as "lively and mutable as quicksilver." "Mid-century modern," then, is an overarching sobriquet that describes the variety and richness of postwar American design production.

Koush has produced a thoroughly researched and finely written piece of cogent scholarship that is a relevant and much needed contribution to the documentation of Houston's mid-century architectural heritage. Though the author is not a trained architectural historian, he is an accomplished architectural critic. But my praise begs the question: for whom is this catalogue written? Those who use a loupe to read the drawings that reciprocate the text will probably already be advocates of the architectural legacy that is Houston Mod's calling. However, the mission of the organization states that it seeks the support of the general public in its mission and, therefore, it might also consider introductory publications for those outside the hermetic architectural community.

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Maybe Freeways Aren't *Forever*

by Thomas M. Colbert and Bruce C. Webb

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPENING of Houston's first freeway, an 8.5 mile segment of what became known as the Gulf Freeway running from downtown to Telephone Road. The *Houston Chronicle* recorded that a crowd of some 500 gathered on the Calhoun Road overpass for a 7 p.m. ceremony on September 30, 1948. And the rest as they say is history. Like a high speed version of Baron Haussmann's roadway gigantisms in 19th-century Paris (but without the Beaux Arts), the Interurban as it was originally called since it was laid out largely in the alignment of the former Galveston-Houston interurban railway muscled through the existing urban and suburban fabric, shaving off parts of the city, bisecting roads and streets and creating determined divisions between what had formerly been intact neighborhoods. This was still eight years before the Federal Interstate Highway Act, but as Erik Slotboom wrote in his study, *Houston Freeways: A Historical and Visual Journey*, the 8.5 mile segment of the Gulf Freeway was a prototype, a first not only for Houston but all of Texas. And it contained all of the most important features that would characterize the city's vast and continually expanding freeway system. Perhaps most distinct among these, the feeder lanes that pumped up the value of the relatively worthless land on the freeway's flanks for a burgeoning commercial strip.

Today Houston arguably has more miles of freeway than any other city in the country, including L.A. Freeways are a ubiquitous presence and the most dominant feature of the cityscape. Manifolding their relentless logic and engineered economies, they have redefined the form and experience of the city. Architecture attached to the freeways struggles desperately to be noticed against the super-monumentality of the highway and the clutter of freeway billboards and lollipop signs. Awkward spaces between the access roads and the buildings lining its edges fail to satisfy even the most basic requirements of place making.

The success of freeways was a self-fulfilling prophesy as Jane Jacobs observed in her 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Quite simply they encourage more automobile traffic, more traffic jams, and more suburban sprawl. Widening the system to solve traffic congestion is like loosening your belt to cure obesity, observed traffic engineer Walter Kulash.

Lewis Mumford who had a curmudgeon's dislike for freeways, particularly in the city, wrote that building a highway has about the same result on vegetation and human structures as the passage of a tornado or the blast of an atomic bomb. Like most American cities, Houston is in the process of healing. In deference to residents of the Museum District, Houston did a remarkable thing a few years ago, depressing and channelizing Highway 59 to make it far quieter and all but invisible to adjacent neighborhoods, then outfitting it with overhead bridges specific to their place instead of copied from a highway planner's handbook. In the process they also enhanced the city drainage system since this stretch of depressed freeway periodically becomes a grand canal and massive detention pond after a sustained rain storm. Elsewhere in Houston, mile after mile of freeways are now being lined by sound walls that would have been the envy of medieval military engineers, usually leaving a lonely and never used sidewalk floating in band of St. Augustine grass and litter between the roadway and the great walls of Houston. In some locations landscape buffers and even the occasional public art installation show a new found interest in brushing up the edges.

But even as attempts are made to make the freeway a better neighbor, gas prices dancing between 3 and 5 dollars a gallon call into question the advisability of a city designed to be filled up and emptied out on a daily basis. The long daily commute, like Hummers and Chevy Tahoes, already seems out of fashion. As though in anticipation of even higher fuel prices the city is becoming denser by the day. Multi-story townhouses and large-scale apartment complexes, high-rise residential towers, and big new mixed-use facilities are filling up the area inside the 610 Loop, pressing ever more tightly against feeder roads and overpasses. Looking down the road, it's not at all unlikely that within the next 60 years the freeway that itself supplanted a rail line may be made to share its right of way or even itself be supplanted by a new rail system.

Already cities like San Francisco, Milwaukee, New York, Portland, and Seattle have set in motion plans to deconstruct portions of their inner-city freeways as an act of urban restoration. Taking apart the freeways may have an even bigger impact on cities than their construction did. The inner-city land that the freeway occupies is a valuable resource for the city. It's not unthinkable that someday the 610 Loop may become our own Ringstrasse combining boulevards with a continuous public park—a place rather than a no place. And urban freeways that have divided the landscape and created the city's economic and social partitioning may be reconstituted as unifying seams. Could the Katy freeway be be the ultimate realization of Soria y Mata's Ciudad Lineal or carbon sequestering forest land, or perhaps super-high-density housing and commercial development? Or, in an act of pure restoration, will the city simply reconnect streets divided 60 years ago and sell the land to real estate developers?

The question is whether the next iteration of our freeway system will see Houston emerge as the city of the future once again, or as a city burdened by a history that it cannot deconstruct.

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RIGHT: **Freeway Circus, a collage by Rame Hruska, graduate studio project at the UH Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, 2001.**
BELOW: **Design for an apartment complex constructed on abandoned freeway, Rame Hruska and Polly Ledvina, while graduate students at the University of Houston.**

TOP: COURTESY RAME HRUSKA; BOTTOM: RAME HRUSKA AND POLLY LEDVINA

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