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THE ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN REVIEW OF HOUSTON

A PUBLICATION OF THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

77 WINTER 2009

Cite (ISSN: 8755-0415) is published quarterly by the Rice Design Alliance, Rice University, Anderson Hall, Room 149, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005-1892.

Individual Subscriptions:
U.S. and its possessions: $25 for one year, $40 for two years.
Foreign: $50 for one year, $80 for two years.

Publication of this issue is supported in part by grants from the Susan Vaughan Foundation, the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance, and the Texas Commission for the Arts.

Write for Cite

Cite is the greater Houston's forum for architectural, design, and planning issues. Articles should address a broad audience and include reviews, essays, analysis, and commentaries. Article ideas and proposals are reviewed by the editorial committee and are welcome in one of three forms:

TIPS: Tell us your ideas, even if you aren't an architect.

DETAILED ARTICLE PROPOSALS: Include context about the subject, an explanation of why the article would be of interest to the *Cite* audience, and a writing sample.

FULL MANUSCRIPTS: Send manuscripts for consideration by peer-review.

OffCite.org is an additional venue for timely coverage and short pieces as well as an opportunity for writers to start establishing themselves as part of the pool from which the magazine draws. Send all submissions and questions to citemail@rice.edu or to the *Cite* mailing address:

CITE MAGAZINE - MS 51
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Cite has always mixed an appreciation of high design with a shot of down and dirty civic engagement. The cover of the first issue, published 27 years ago, was graced by the image of a sewer manhole. "Trading Toilets: The Subterranean Zoning of Houston" shared the feature well with a review of the Renzo Piano-designed Menil Collection and an interview with Cesar Pelli.

Few cities have their own architecture and design magazine. When *Cite* was launched in 1982, Houston was the landing pad of the world's star architects, the Dubai of its day. Houston had bucked the trends of the national economy and anything seemed possible, until the banks failed and the price of oil collapsed. *Cite* persisted. It catalogued the lost opportunities, lamented speculation unaccompanied by considered urban planning, and pointed to the troubling patterns underlying a rapidly changing environment. It was there for each new loop road; there for struggles over light rail, condo towers, and changing neighborhoods; there to bear witness to the oddities and unexpected joys of the city.

This issue focuses on memory, on key parts of the built environment that are lost or threatened, and, in the remarkable case of Kraigher House, rehabilitated. To remember is radical. It is an elemental step towards imagining a more humane and livable environment. Indeed, the current local headlines are reminiscent of 1986. We are faced again with making sense of a boom gone bust. The times call for a recommitment to *Cite's* role as a forum for thoughtful debate and, through that debate, an instigator of collaborative action.

To accomplish our goals, we need your participation and support. The options are varied: sending us tips and feedback, contributing to our newly launched website, OffCite.org, writing magazine articles, or volunteering to help distribute the magazine. We welcome input from anyone interested in the built environment—architects and designers, city planners and developers, real estate agents, community activists, artists, and civic-minded individuals.

RAJ MANKAD

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FSC

COVER: Jack Tar Motor Hotel Pool Terrace. Courtesy of Guy W. Carwile.

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RDA, established in 1972, is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of architecture, urban design, and the built environment. Through its lecture programs , civic forums, tours, and *Cite*, RDA creates a public forum to stimulate discussion, involvement, and cooperation among the many groups of citizens who are able to improve the quality of life within Houston and its environs. Membership is open to the public.

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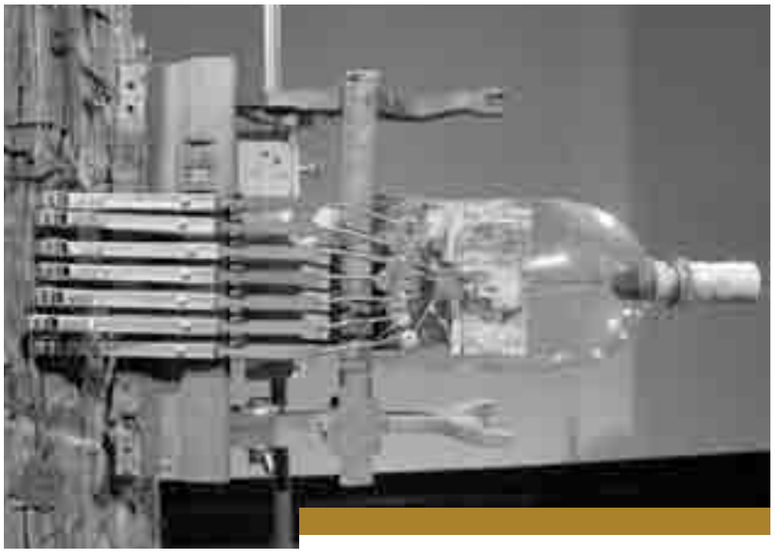
Patrick Renner's device converts patterns made by staples and nails into sound.



OPENING

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Singing the Freeways

"I live practically in the shadow of Highway 71 and can hear the constant hum of traffic from my backyard if the sound of condo construction doesn't drown it out," writes Barry Stone, a photographer featured in the Lawndale Art Center's exhibition from January 23rd until February 28. One image features a mother and child beneath the monumental structure of the highway. The others employ dreamscapes. A fractured diamond. Plastic animals grazing.

On the second floor, Patrick Renner's contraptions wrap around utility poles salvaged from Hurricane Ike. Visitors push a rod to set the machine into motion. It reads the patterns of the nails and staples in the wood and transmits the information to a music box comb housed in a plastic coke bottle that amplifies the sound for a wireless microphone. Speakers in the room play the high-pitched, syncopated song scored by the anonymous people who posted signs on the poles.

–Raj Mankad

Images from Barry Stone's "Highway 71 Revisited".

CITÉ BEAT

After the Firestorm: The Future of Civic Art

In November 2008, the Houston Arts Alliance was the target of an ABC13 Wayne Dolcefino report on the civic art program. The segment—titled "Where's the Art?"—questions the purpose of Nancy Retz's "Synchronicity of Color" installations at Discovery Green. The structures, which cover stairwells, are repeatedly referred to as "waste" by an interviewee. The report goes on to question the rate at which projects have been completed.

The civic art team at the Houston Arts Alliance has responded with an exhibit at the Space125gallery about upcoming plans for Houston municipal artwork. It includes sketches, design elements, information about the process, and examples of civic artwork.

A bit of history: ten years ago, the city adopted an ordinance that sets aside 1.75 percent of municipal construction costs (not including price of land or road projects for example) to go to the development of civic art. During the past ten years, the city's collection has grown to include upwards of 400 pieces. The vast majority of these pieces are found in local parks and libraries, while a significant portion are paintings held by various city departments.

The nine projects currently in the pipeline for Houston include several exciting works by locally prominent and nationally known artists: mosaics produced through community collaboration by Reginald Adams, a huge mural at the Looscan neighborhood library by Bert Long, a row of 38 carousel horses by Sharon Englestein, and the proposed pedestrian bridge collaboratively designed by Elmgreen + Dragset and the SWA Group, set to cross Buffalo Bayou at Montrose.

The Space125gallery exhibition at 3201 Allen Parkway will be on view until March 6.

–John Pluecker

CALENDAR WINTER09

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TOP TWO: RAJ MANKAD; ALL OTHERS: BARRY STONE

AMIR KASEM: ILLUSTRATION BASED ON REPORTING AT HTTP://SWAMPLOT.COM/TAG/ROYCE-BUILDERS

ECONOMY

TIPPING POINT

National Economy Woes Catch Up with Houston

HOUSTON'S ARCHITECTURE, ENGINEERING, AND CONSTRUCTION industry remained cautiously optimistic long after the national economy slowed. The explanations for Houston's continued strength were many. "Buoyed by the price of oil" and "never had a bubble won't have a bust" were popular. The change in course came earlier for some sectors. The end of the homebuilding boom was expected. By September, when Lehman Brothers collapsed before the last winds of Hurricane Ike dissipated, Houstonians learned the distinction between a financial crisis and a plain-old recession. Though the local economy remained fairly healthy with low unemployment and a diversified business sector, national lenders stopped financing arguably sound investments.

Locally, several hundred floors of towers and hundreds of thousands of square feet will go unbuilt. The Sonoma, the Titan, the High Street, Turnberry Tower, the Hanover Apartment Tower and Ritz Carlton Hotel at Boulevard Place, and Regent Tower—all have been delayed or redesigned at a smaller scale. Though the Ashby Highrise developers continue to file for permits and "Tower of Traffic" signs linger in Boulevard Oaks and Southampton, the grand confrontations between high-rise developers and neighborhoods—and the political momentum needed to plan for a projected population growth of 3.5 million people in the Houston area by 2035—appear to be on hold. High Street is a steel skeleton, Sonoma now a fenced-in mud pit of undetermined fate. The sheer decadence of the Titan with its units named after Coco Chanel, Pablo Picasso, and Frank Sinatra shimmers only on the website, a testimony to what seemed development business as usual a few months ago, but now defines the excess that led us into this mess.

The retail closings—Starbucks, Circuit City, CompUSAs—have compounded the problem leaving empty retail space. The new Circuit City on the Katy Freeway is closing before it even had a chance to open.

Some firms in niche markets, doing institutional projects, or working overseas have retained the same number of employees or have grown, yet the number of layoffs reported in *Architectural Record* are dizzying. Royce Builders has closed and nearly every local architecture firm has had at least one round of layoffs. 2008 may have been the end of an era in Houston architecture. What will the era be called? Sadly, many an architect will have the spare time to mull it over.

-Raj Mankad

URBAN UPDATE

Metrorail's Future Plans

Five years ago, Houston opened its first light rail line. It has been a success by any measure, carrying more people per mile than any other U.S. light rail line outside of Boston. Forty percent of them were not riding METRO before the rail opened.

It has also been five years since Houstonians voted to expand the system, and the results there are less obvious. The plan includes five new lines by 2012: the North Line, extending the current line northwards; the East End Line down Harrisburg; the Southeast Line, from Downtown past UH to Palm Center; the University Line, connecting UH, Midtown, Neartown, Greenway, and Gulfton; and the Uptown Line, extending the University line to the Galleria and the Katy Freeway.

So far, there has not been a single foot of new track in the ground, the construction contract remains in negotiations between METRO and Parsons Transportation Group, and METRO still has not figured out how the get the Uptown tracks past Memorial Park.

But this year has shown signs of progress. Utility construction has started on Harrisburg, a preview of the thousands of orange barrels to come. The North and Southeast Lines have completed the environmental process and are now eligible for federal funding (and there will be more of that to go around soon: the federal stimulus bill included additional transit funding). The lawsuit that was threatening to stop the University Line has been dismissed.

Meanwhile, the city is working on new rules to make sure that passengers will be able to walk safely to the 48 new stations. An Urban Corridors Planning study, conducted by The Planning Partnership of Toronto, recommended wider sidewalks, the elimination of mandatory setbacks, reduced parking requirements, protection for established neighborhoods, and financial incentives for denser, more pedestrian-friendly development in the corridors around the new lines. These recommendations are now being considered by a Planning Commission subcommittee that will propose new ordinances to City Council sometime this year.

METRO intends to start construction on the Southeast, North, and Uptown lines this year, and the University Line in 2010. All five lines are scheduled to open by 2012, as promised in the 2003 referendum. Projections call for 250,000 daily riders on 38 miles of line, which would be more than three times as many as Dallas carries on 45 miles today.

–Christof Spieler

NEWS

SMALL HOUSES TOUR

At a recent RDA Civic Forum, Rice University sociologist Stephen Klineberg said, "Our children will not have bigger houses, or faster cars, but they will live richer lives."

In this economic climate, the nation's attitude towards wealth and need is changing. Energy prices, housing prices, and gasoline prices affect consumers

Kit House designed by Brett Zamore (2003).

choices. Many are choosing to live smaller and smarter, using the benefits of great design to do so.

In Houston, where McMansions reign and Hummers patrol, living small is not yet the norm, but it is a growing trend. The 2009 RDA Architecture Tour will highlight innovative examples of houses under 2,000 square feet.

The houses are small but the range of styles is broad, from an intricately designed, energy-efficient, entirely repeatable row house to a creatively retrofitted, unique shipping container. Included in the lineup is the 99k House and the Rice School of Architecture Solar Decathlon House, both under 1,500 square feet.

The Small House Tour will be held on Saturday and Sunday, March 28-29, from 1-6 pm each day. Please visit rda.rice.edu for more information.

DE LANGE CONFERENCE

For the first time in history, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. At this defining moment in the history of cities, the seventh annual De Lange Conference, March 2-4, will ask many of the world's leading thinkers and practitioners of innovative urban solutions to engage in a dialogue on the concept of sustainable and humane cities. Speakers will include Mustafa Syed Kamal, the Mayor of Karachi, Pakistan; Antanas Mockus, a Colombian mathematician, philosopher, and politician who served as Mayor of Bogotá; and Saskia Sassen, Columbia Professor and author of *The Global City*. The conference will pose the following questions: What does our urban future promise? How can urbanization provide answers to ecological, social, and economic issues of the 21st century?

Marfa tour group.

RDA ON THE TRANS PECOS TRAIL

In February, thirty-five RDA members landed in Midland to begin an epic tour.

First stop Fort Davis: lunch in the Davis Mountains State Park, a driving tour of the historic downtown, and a walking tour of the Fort.

Thirty miles later, Marfa: Houston friends graciously opened their houses by Carlos Jiménez, Cameron Armstrong, and Taft Architects. Marlys Tokerud hosted a reception in her rehabilitated adobe house and compound.

The group visited the Chinati Foundation and went on a walking tour of downtown that included Donald Judd's house, The Block.

Archeologist Robert Mallouf of Alpine, Texas led a driving tour that included the mining ghost town of Shaftner, border town Presidio, Fort Leaton, ancient Indian burial grounds, and Big Bend National Park. The group ended the day with a reception at the Gage Hotel in Marathon.

Last stop, Fort Stockton: RDA member Gaye McCullough led a tour of her house on the National Historic Registry and the group visited the Annie Riggs Museum, Grey Mule Saloon, and of course the Fort.

Eight hundred miles, two parks, three forts, ten private homes, one saloon, art, architecture, archeology, all in four days.

LETTERS

I was excited to read "Building the American Dream: The Politics of Housing." But it left me wondering: once I'm holding onto my boot-straps, what then?

Maybe the answer is in apartments. There are 160,000 class C and D apartments in 1,000 complexes in metropolitan Houston. Many of these were built in Houston's booming 1970s. They were nice when they were new, but they're showing their age. In some apartments, rent is less than $400 a month. And the problems at Houston's worst apartments are very much in the collective consciousness. Crime. Collapsing stairs. Fires. Murky pools. Raw sewage.

As the economy gets worse, more people will have to move to these apartments. We can either redouble our efforts to fix the problems, or we can ignore them. I pray we make the right choice.

Adam J. Weiss, AIA
Houston, TX

Whenever I read about the potential reuse of the Astrodome, I am always intrigued that there never seems to be any discussion about a public/private partnership (such as with the Hermann Park Conservancy) which would convert it to the world's first air-conditioned park. Take out the field seats, convert the skylights back to clear plexiglass, grow

OffCite.org: The *Cite* Magazine Blog

In early December 2008, *Cite* and the Rice Design Alliance launched OffCite.org, a new blog with news, commentary, and links about architecture and design in Houston and around the world. It attracted numerous visitors from the Houston area and as far away as Perth, Australia. Posts included a review of the Brochstein Pavilion by Stephen Fox, a report on public housing in Galveston after Ike, and a critique of the latest plan to revitalize Market Square. Check OffCite.org for these posts and others:

Graphic Design Badass

More from the interview with *New York Times* senior art director Steven Heller.

Exposing Graphic Design

Video of the sold-out, standing-room-only talks given by Steven Heller, Andy Altman, Ellen Lupton, and Michael Rock for the Rice Design Alliance lecture series on graphic design.

Move Over Car Culture

Coverage of regional and local efforts to improve transit infrastructure, including light rail, high-speed and commuter rail, bicycle paths, and highways.

Out of Cite

Posts about projects and wares of local designers like Hometta, Mark and Jennifer Johnson's modern home-planning company.

≫ LOOK FOR THE NEW RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE WEBSITE COMING SOON!

LEFT: PAUL HESTER; TOP: TOM DUNGAN

some grass (on man-made hills, of course), and allow the citizens of Harris County to have a huge climate-controlled space to relax and play in (especially for our hottest and wettest days).

Financially, the Sports Authority would have to operate it to produce revenue-generating events much of the time (Central Park-type concerts, Xtreme sporting events, etc.) and then the public could use it for free all the other times (pay to park). It would be a moneymaker for Harris County, a real amenity for the Texans/Rodeo, a major tourist attraction for Houston, and one giant leap for preservationists-kind.

James Rowland
Houston, TX

I read and thoroughly enjoyed "Boom Times for Texas School Design" in the Fall 2008 issue of *Cite* (76). Among my several positive thoughts was, "Yes! Finally some scholarly, learned truth about design, specifically school design." Let the chips fall where they may. The article is well composed and presented; to the point, important, and an easy read. It should be required reading of every superintendent of schools, every school board, and each member of our Texas legislature (particularly).

I hope that somehow either *Cite* or the Texas Society of Architects or local architects across the State, or all of the above will see that such distribution is made before this upcoming legislative session begins in earnest. Special bound copies should be ready and distributed for such mass and personalized mailings.

John O. Greer, FAIA
Wallie E. Scott Professor of
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College of Architecture,
Texas A&M University

Cite: Thank you for your letter. We have made a pdf version of the article available at OffCite.org and encourage readers to distribute it widely.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU
Cite welcomes and encourages readers to send letters, including critical ones, to citemail@rice.edu.

SELF-ICONIZATION BY STEVEN HELLER

An Interview with Steven Heller

Since serving as Screw*'s first art director as a seventeen year old, Steven Heller has pushed the boundaries of graphic design. He has been an art director and writer at the New York Times for over thirty years, and founded the M.F.A. "Designer as Author" program at the School of Visual Arts. He has also written or edited more than 100 books, including Iron Fists: Branding the 20th-Century Totalitarian State and The Design Entrepeneur.*

On January 21st, Heller kicked off the RDA Exposing Graphic Design speaker series to a packed audience. The next morning Raj Mankad and Heller sat white knuckled in the backseat of Amanda Hayes-Valentine's car as she raced down the Hardy Toll Road to the airport.

RAJ MANKAD (RM): Your book *Iron Fists* begins with a line from a Walter Benjamin essay, "Fascism is the aestheticizing of politics." How do you reconcile that with Obama's highly aestheticized campaign?

STEVEN HELLER (SH): Walter Benjamin wrote at a time when the world was faced with the incredible horror of fascism in such a profound way because they did do such a great job at identifying their party and their ideology through graphic and architectural means. He might not have said the exact same words in the 21st century because aestheticization is part of the marketing plan of almost any corporation. So, given that politics is a public corporation, politicians are going to brand themselves to identify with anyone they want to have brought into their base. I think Obama's campaign can't be equated with the aesthetification of politics as fascism because it is consistent with what is going on in contemporary marketing.

The McCain campaign was doing the exact same thing. They just weren't doing it as nicely. The Obama people just had a more soothing aesthetic. They got a better designer. They brand just about everything. The washington.gov website is much cleaner and has the Obama blue. But really, I don't see it as propagating an idea or an ideology in the same way as the Nazis did. It's not saying "You should be liberal" or "We are right." It's just saying "This is who we are" and the subtext is "Change is coming" because we redesign.

RM: The actual symbols matter, right?

[Heller clutches the seat as a pick-up cuts across three lanes.]

SH: Well, W did have his W, and if you were a W lover you wore the W. I have a Mussolini M that if you turn it upside down is a W. Hitler didn't use an initial, but JFK used an initial and FDR was given initials. The techniques that are in play now are venerable techniques. It's logical that for Obama you'd use an O. You could use a B, but the B doesn't do that much for you. Obama is the mnemonic. And it's logical that you put in red, white, and blue somewhere because he's running for president of the United States. If Obama came out with a sign as stark and uncharacteristic as the Swastika was when the Nazis were just a political party, then I would say there is some ideological message behind the symbol. What Hitler did when he took that symbol was compete with the hammer and sickle for one. He showed his defiance to the Weimar Republic by changing colors all together. What Obama is doing is conforming to the American scheme.

AMANDA HAYES-VALENTINE (AHV): What about the iconization? Che Guevarra comes to mind when you think about the Shepard Fairey posters of Obama's face.

SH: The Obama face is a wonderful face. All politicians use their faces.

AHV: But that specific treatment?

SH: That was Shepard Fairey on his own. It wasn't official until it took off and then the Obama campaign realized that they couldn't ignore it and they might as well embrace it. They even asked Shepard to give him a smile. I was told by Scott Thomas, who was responsible for the campaign graphics and website, that the only thing that Obama had to say, that he heard about, was that the poster looks a little too social realist.

Different artists from Andy Warhol to Rauschenberg to Peter Max did posters for their particular candidates. They were always more iconic because they were more artful than the official campaign gear, which is always pretty…

AHV: Newsy.

SH: Yeah it's newsy. It's a silhouette photograph. It's red, white, and blue. They never want to rock the boat for a good reason.

AHV: What can rock the boat now? You blogged once on Russian Constructivist themes appearing in advertising campaigns and how it's even possible to purchase a ready-to-go Constructivist poster on istockphoto.com.

SH: It's funny. People who lived through the communist regime will say people died for that style and now it's just a commercial trope. You know, so's the crucifix.

[Amanda pulls up to the terminal.]

RM: I want to thank you for doing this interview.

SH: Thank you for getting me here in one piece.

ExxonMobil Baytown plant and the Houston Ship Channel.

ART

WE THE PETROLEUM PEOPLE

The unscripted beauty of our dominant industry

THE EXHIBIT "TEXAS OIL: LANDSCAPE OF AN INDUSTRY," at the University of Houston's Blaffer Gallery until March 29, is the centerpiece of a wide-ranging project brought to town by the Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) from its base in Los Angeles. The innocuous title is unlikely to trigger breathless excitement; we live here, after all. Why would we want to make a deliberate effort to see pictures of the very things we try our best to ignore on a daily basis: the gargantuan refineries and chemical plants, the pipelines and pumps and nameless apparatus coated in industrial paint and rust? "Texas Oil" urges us to rethink our assumptions of what merits our attention by examining a world that most of us barely know despite how intricately it is entwined with our everyday experience.

The exhibit begins in a dark room with a high-definition aerial video scan, eerily reminiscent of *Blade Runner*'s opening sweep over a dystopian Los Angeles, following the winding industrial corridor from the 610 Loop to the Baytown bridge. In the background throbs an ominous industrial soundtrack taken from the film *Alien*. From this hypnotic and unsettling environment we emerge into a stark white "portrait gallery" of the Houston corporate headquarters inside which the unbelievably complex operations we have just seen are planned and supervised. These façades are sleek and blank, the names of the corporate entities utterly generic. Not a single human being appears—except us, the observers and, of course, consumers for whose benefit this industry exists. Moving downstream, a corridor of maps detailing the North American petrochemical pipeline infrastructure leads to the heart of the exhibit: a gallery of oblique aerial shots of the area's most significant refining and processing sites, storage facilities, and drilling fields. The photographs surround, as if in worship, a single plexiglass barrel of oil, the concrete representation of that now-abstract concept around which so much of our lives revolves, and for the extraction and reconfiguration of which all that we have seen and more exists. One is struck by the resources of skill, thought, time, and effort our society expends to obtain this black cylinder of ancient solar energy as well as the damage we are willing to accept, to ourselves and our environment, in order to benefit from its properties.

The photographs present their subjects as plainly and (barring the sci-fi soundtrack) with as little commentary as possible. CLUI and its guiding force, Matthew Coolidge, have created neither a breathless, big-shouldered celebration of the Great American Boomtown nor a predictable vilification of "oilmen" and the ecological destruction "they" have wrought. The Center's purpose here, says Coolidge, is "not to abstract . . . but to make more coherent" the world of petrochemicals of which Houston is a nerve center. Essential to this drive toward coherence is the insistence that we—Americans and Houstonians in particular—actually train our attentive gaze on the size, complexity, and significance of the industry in the midst of which we live. The oblique aerial views place the huge facilities in their context of land and water, making them both more and less overwhelming; the offhand, sidelong quality reminds us continually that these are not diagrams—there is a person snapping the picture, who went there and looked.

Some years ago the environmental critic William Cronon wrote of industrial civilization, "We work in its institutions, we eat its food, we drive its cars, we benefit from the intricate and all too invisible networks with which it shelters us, all the while pretending that these things are not an essential part of who we are." Similarly, says Coolidge, "Texas Oil" seeks to remind us that "we have to comprehend and understand this massive industry in order to make any sense of what we're doing collectively" as a nation; in other words, we cannot decide where we wish to go, and understand how to get there, until we face, clearly and without prejudice, where we are.

"Texas Oil" reminds us that *we* are the "oil people" and this world is not distant from our experience, but fundamental to it. Petroleum, says Coolidge, is "the primary vehicle of our transformation" as a nation. Washington, D.C., is the nerve center for political power; New York is the nerve center of commerce. The exhibit prods us, gently and without irony, to stop pushing out of our field of vision the very industrial landscape that makes us the nerve center of an American industry that has become the de facto foundation underlying that commercial and political power, involved to some degree in everything we touch.

-Steven Wolfe

CENTER FOR LAND USE INTERPRETATION PHOTO ARCHIVE

FROM PRETTY POTS TO FUNCTIONAL GARBAGE

Studio Glass Comes Full Circle

OVER THE LAST FIFTY YEARS, THE STUDIO GLASS MOVEMENT has revolutionized glassmaking, turning a factory-line process into an artist-directed, personal one—hand-blowing, firing, and manipulating glass to create beautiful, one-of-a-kind objects. Artists like Dale Chihuly, Lino Tagliapietra, and Harvey Littleton have become some of the most well-known and bestselling artists worldwide. The current exhibit at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, "Hot Glass, Cool Collections," wows viewers with pieces from all of these founding members of the Movement; however, perhaps the most thought-provoking work is happening in the small gallery in front.

In this first room, a small exhibit entitled "Environments = Form + Space" brings together three younger glass artists, including one, Matthew Eskuche, whose work remits us to the very definition of craft and the origins of glasswork. Eskuche creates flameworked glass pieces that resemble the most quotidian and disposable items in our contemporary society—plastic water bottles, coke bottles, paper cups, Styrofoam cups, and beer bottles. Of the two Eskuche pieces, the first features these glass objects, oil-painted white, on an Ikea shelf (#0834C632!) with a canvas behind it with swaths of color resembling bold, retro patterns on paper cups. In the other, more recent, piece, "Art Criticism in Layman's Terms," Eskuche has scattered what appears to be common garbage on the ground in front of a white canvas hung on the wall. On first glance, the casual observer, accustomed to seeing craft as a pretty pot or an intricate glass sculpture, might not even notice the piece. The Center was forced to place a safety barrier between the art and the public because visitors were touching or stepping on the "trash." On closer look, one notices the delicate clear plastic cups are actually made of glass with non-melting glass ice cubes inside. The viewer is left with an important question: what makes this craft?

The other glass objects go even further. What appears to be two green glass Sierra Nevada Pale Ale bottles are also handmade with screen-printed labels. The Colt 45 40oz, a scrunched "plastic" coke bottle, and another "plastic" coke bottle in what would appear to be a little paper boat used for hot dogs—all handmade. As it turns out, all the glass is hand-blown and most (but not all) of the other "garbage" is handmade: cigarette butts, a Big Mac container, Chinese food take-out boxes, and a Marlboro pack.

Eskuche's work takes the Studio Glass Movement back to its origins: factory-produced objects. He uses the artistic tools and methods of Studio Glass to produce work that looks like mass-produced, very functional consumer items—throwaway plastic and glass bottles. In this sense, his work deals with function by subverting expectations of what functional really means. In his work, the revolution of Studio Glass comes full circle.

Both exhibits, "Environments = Form + Space" and "Hot Glass, Cool Collections" are open at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft until March 15th. As part of the exhibit's closing, Eskuche will do a hot glass demonstration on Saturday, March 14, at 11 a.m.

-John Pluecker.

Matthew Eskuche's hand-blown glass pieces at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft.

ERIC HESTER

downtown's downtown

Houston Pavilions and an urban dilemma

by Max Page

IN 1958, an up and coming architecture critic wrote some biting words about typical downtown developments of the day:

> This year is going to be a critical one for the future of the city. All over the country civic leaders and planners are preparing a series of redevelopment projects that will set the character of the center of our cities for generations to come. Great tracts, many blocks wide, are being razed; only a few cities have their new downtown projects already under construction; but almost every big city is getting ready to build, and the plans will soon be set.
>
> What will the projects look like? They will be spacious, park like, and uncrowded. They will feature long green vistas. They will be stable and symmetrical and orderly. They will be clean, impressive, and monumental. They will have all the attributes of a well-kept, dignified cemetery.
>
> These projects will not revitalize downtown; they will deaden it. For they work at cross-purposes to the city. They banish the street. They banish its function. They banish its variety.[1]

Well before the rest of the country came to recognize the rot at the core of urban renewal ideals, Jane Jacobs, author of the classic 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, was applying her unrelenting, razor-sharp wit to eviscerating it from her perch on Hudson Street in Greenwich Village. She argued for valuing everything planners hated: mixing of uses, people walking on the streets, 24-hour activity, small blocks, new and old buildings. She argued that these qualities of traditional neighborhoods make a safer and more enjoyable urban environment, and equally important, that this kind of urban fabric produces economically vibrant cities.

Whether or not its developers and architects ever uttered her name in meetings, Houston Pavilions is descended from Jane Jacobs's ethos, designed to undo the damage of mid-century modernist planning theory. In the words of Roger Soto of HOK, one of the architects, the project is a new effort to "sew up a hole in the urban fabric."

The massive investment that went into Houston Pavilions has evoked hope that a downtown defined by office towers, parking lots, and underpopulated streets can be enlivened with human activity. Developer William Denton and his Houston partner Geoffrey Jones have taken three empty blocks directly adjacent to the core of downtown Houston and remade them into a potentially lively mix of 300,000 square feet of retail and 200,000 square feet of office space. They have looked in the eye of the Houston sun without blinking: they have created a shopping center that requires visitors to, yes, walk from store to store. Indeed, the whole project is off the grid—that is, off the underground tunnel grid that links most of the city's downtown towers. And they have capitalized on Houston's remarkably successful investment in light rail with more passengers on less than five miles of light rail than any other system—this is not your father's Houston, I told people after a recent visit—and thereby supported the city's continued investment in the system.

Houston Pavilions, said Soto, was a "bold endeavor." The developers were "working against fifty years of development in order to create a real downtown shopping experience." Denton was a bit more cautious. "We don't pioneer retail downtown," he told me. "We won't pioneer the reverse commute back to downtown." Indeed, Houston Pavilions has surfed if not a wave, then a gentle current back to downtown. With the convention center, Bayou Place, and Discovery Green, there is the beginning

photography by Paul Hester

The ground floor of the central spine lacks crossings at Fannin and San Jacinto.

The entrances on the east and west sides of the Houston Pavilions feature lively and inviting façades.

of a real countermovement back downtown and investment in a walking city. "You used to be able to shoot a cannon off and not hit anyone," said Denton. But that has started to change. Still, it is small, and reversible, so Denton's gamble was–and is–real. As he himself put it: "If you had said to me 'You'll be investing $107 million in downtown Houston, I'd say you were nuts." This is not to say the developers didn't have a lot of helpful public and private backing: Buchanan Street Partners of Newport Beach, California, provided $47 million in equity for the project; and the city and county together chipped in $14.3 million, out of a total project cost of approximately $170 million. With the experience of his successful Denver Pavilions, which is the template for Houston Pavilions down to the "boutique" bowling alley and the major music venue (House of Blues in the place of the Denver project's Hard Rock Cafe), Denton brought a popular national idea to Houston—the downtown destination shopping district.

Though the Pavilions is presented as an urban place, the developers' backgrounds are in traditional covered malls, and it shows in two missed opportunities at Houston Pavilions.

First, the project is missing the crucial ingredient of mixed-use projects—housing. This was not for lack of trying. The developers and project architects Soto and Pablo Laguarda (of Laguarda Low) worked for a year and a half on the project with residence towers, one a condo and the other apartments, at either end of the three-block project. When these were announced, the developer's phone lines "were lit up" with inquiries. But Denton was firm in his view that to lure upper-class professional customers, he would have to have subterranean parking: "people want to hop out [of the parking lot] and into an elevator." Despite the best efforts of the architects, the cost of integrating parking into the site became prohibitive. Late in the game, they removed the residential towers and left this as a retail and office project. The tyranny of the car, and the fear of unsafe streets, doomed a better project.

Looking south down San Jacinto Street, the circular walkways above elevate the foot traffic and activity off of the public street.

Looking east down Polk Street, the Houston Pavilions on the left, the South Texas College of Law on the right, and the Hilton in the distance.

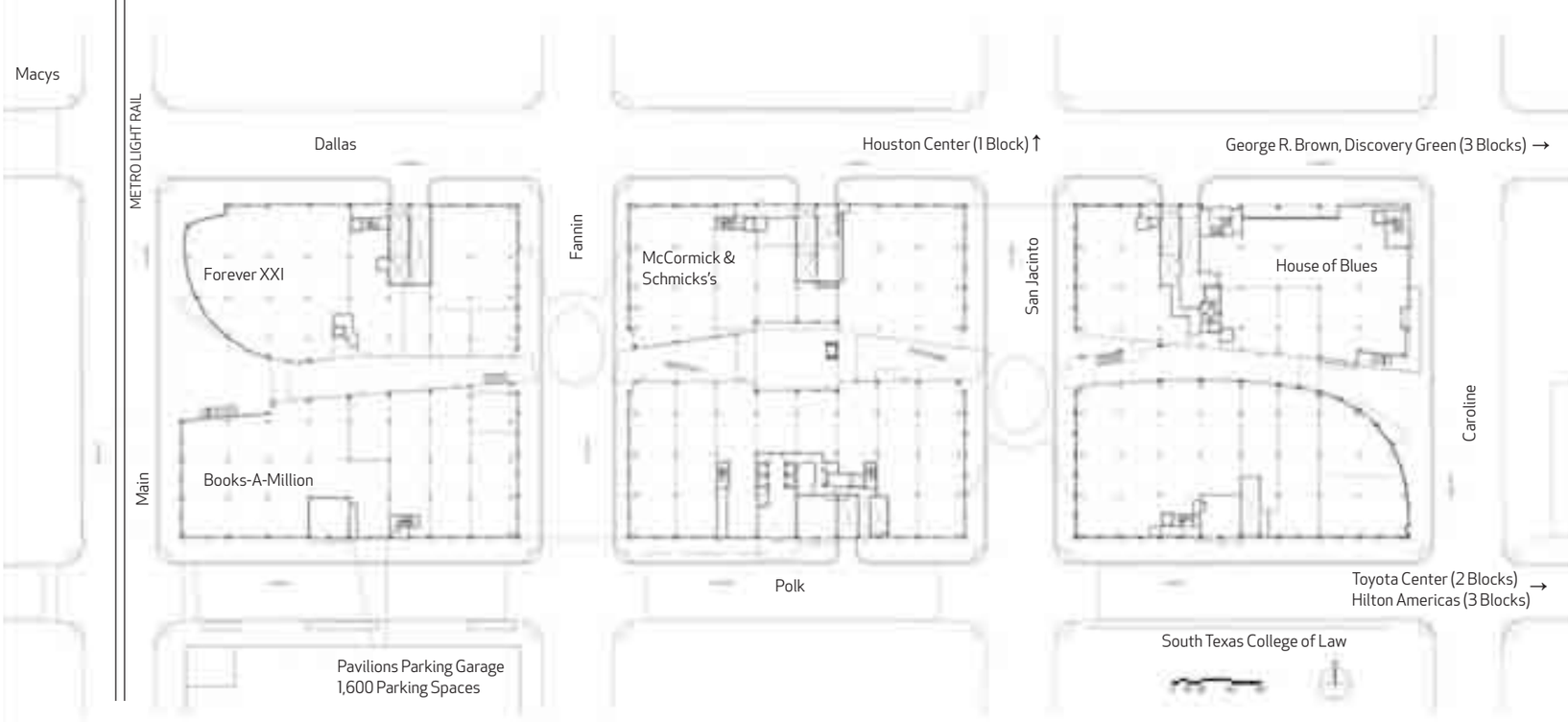
Second, the project turns away from the street. Like the residential component, the decision about whether to orient the project to the existing street grid, or turn away, was made in the wrong direction. Soto laments the choice. "We had some compelling ideas about activating the street," he told me. "But in the end, the developer chose to attach retail stores to a 'central spine,'" perhaps because that approach created a scheme that more closely resembled the traditional covered malls Denton had spent years developing.

There is a long tradition of creating interior shopping streets. Indeed, some of the finest public shopping places in the world, the Milan Galeria, or even the main building of Quincy Market in Boston, are interior streets. But those shopping centers are in cities with a rich pedestrian life already; the interior shopping district does not undermine the public life of the city, but reinforces it. What Houston needs more than anything is to animate street life downtown. Houston Pavilions does less to contribute to that goal than it could have.

The architects have done their best to make the street façades lively, with varying materials and textures, and opening up the ends of the project with extensively glazed curved facades, such as with the Books-A-Million store and restaurants with outdoor dining calling the passersby into the project's interior street. But it is hard to overcome the sense that this is a mega-project, with a mall-like walkway down the middle. With a project at the very heart of the city—"we are downtown's downtown," says Denton—the opportunity to enliven street life appears to have been missed. The street front facing the Texas School of Law, which seemed a natural place for foot traffic, is a blank series of service entrances.

The flaw in this approach is most powerfully seen as you walk down this central spine and come to one of the major avenues the project crosses. One

The target audience is, according to the developers, the young professionals in town, cor



Level one plan.

Client:
Houston Pavilions, L.P.
(William Denton and Geoffrey Jones)

Project Manager:
The Wells Partnership

Architects:
Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum (HOK) and
Laguarda.Low

Landscape Architects:
SWA Group

Engineers
Wylie Associates (MEP), Haynes Whaley
Associates, Inc. (Structural)

Construction Contractor
D.E. Harvey Builders

could either climb up the crude metal staircases to the second floor (incidentally creating an inelegant, useless underside in the middle of the passageway), and then back down; walk to the real street corner and cross at the light; or make a dash for it and hope for the best. True, the circular walkways from one block to the next above the street are the most exciting architectural features of the project, but it undermines the goal of creating a lively street-level walkway.

For all its urban attributes such as light rail access, an outdoor pedestrian walkway, a live music venue, and the downtown location, Houston Pavilions is oddly retrograde. This is, in many ways, a typical mall: three levels with balconies overlook stores and shoppers below. The efforts to shield visitors from the noonday sun make it feel almost covered. The target audience is, according to the developers, the young professionals in town, conventioneers, and youth within the 610 Loop looking for a place to hear music and hang out. Critic Thomas Hines refers to such developments, which have been cut and pasted all over the country, as "lifestyle centers" designed not to create community but to please consumers in a setting that bears a resemblance to an urban place.

My disappointment with Houston Pavilions may be due to visiting it too early in its evolution. Only sixty percent of the retail spaces had been leased, and many had not yet opened (Denton promises 70 percent by the spring, and more by summer 2009). Though I was there at night and during the day, the development was eerily quiet. I had an odd feeling of déjà vu as I walked past the empty façades and through the lifeless walkways of this new project, as if I had taken this same sad, lonely walk in city after city—in Vorhees, New Jersey, in Columbus, Ohio, and in the new urbanist downtown developments at Kentlands and Seaside. Each beckoned with a vaguely nostalgic vision of downtown. But none had what those places of memory had—people.

The mantras of mixed-used, walking cities, and "people places" show up in planning documents, architectural writing, and developer's brochures—all of it bears the DNA of Jane Jacob, but are used to pitch whatever the wares might be. I fear that the widespread adoption of her language has done little to prevent what she predicted: "They will have all the attributes of a well-kept, dignified cemetery."

But who knows? Perhaps the Houston Pavilions will succeed as its antecedent in Denver did, with success being defined as drawing enough wealthy professionals that the stores thrive, filling the city coffers with tax dollars.

nventioneers, and youth within the 610 Loop looking for a place to hear music and hang out.

1. Jane Jacobs, "Downtown Is for People," *Fortune* magazine, April 1958.

PLAN COURTESY OF HOK

RAJ MANKAD

PHOTOGRAPHS OF LOST HOUSTON BUILDINGS SPARKED THIS ARTICLE, AN AUTOMOBILE PROPELLED IT INTO EXISTENCE. I WAS SITTING ONE AFTERNOON AT A SIDEWALK CAFÉ IN MONTROSE, OBLIVIOUS TO THE ROUTINE NOISY TRAFFIC PASSING A FEW FEET FROM THE TABLE UNTIL A VINTAGE 1950S AUTOMOBILE APPEARED. CONVERSATION CEASED AS THAT REMNANT FROM AN EARLIER CULTURE, LOVINGLY RESTORED, FLOATED SERENELY DOWN THE STREET. DWARFING THE SURROUNDING CARS, IT EMBODIED THE 1950S IN ITS SCALE, PROPORTIONS, MATERIALS, AND TEXTURES. NO PHOTOGRAPH COULD EQUAL THE SUBSTANTIAL PRESENCE OF THAT AUTOMOBILE CRUISING THROUGH OUR BUSY 21ST-CENTURY URBAN ENVIRONMENT. IT STRUCK ME THAT SURVIVING BUILDINGS ARE EVEN MORE POWERFUL REPRESENTATIVES OF THEIR TIME. SINCE THEY LACK MOBILITY, WE HAVE TO SEARCH THEM OUT.

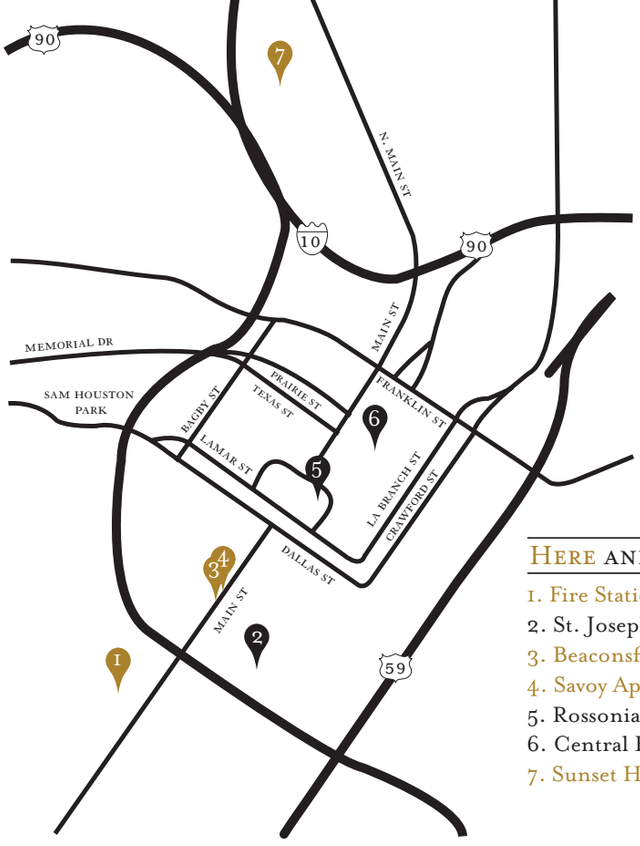
HERE GO

LEFT: CENTRAL FIRE STATION IMAGE FROM ANNUAL MAYOR'S MESSAGE AND DEPARTMENT REPORTS HOUSTON, 1903; RIGHT: COURTESY RANDY PACE

& ONE

REMNANTS *and* REMINDERS *of* HOUSTON'S *past*

BY MARGARET CULBERSTON



Here and Gone

1. Fire Station No. 7
2. St. Joseph's Infirmary
3. Beaconsfield Apartments
4. Savoy Apartments
5. Rossonian Apartments
6. Central Fire Station
7. Sunset Hospital

Fire Station No. 7, built in 1898, is now the Houston Fire Museum.

As I mourn our Houston losses to the wrecking ball, I treasure the survivors. Like that 1950s automobile, they can bring us closer to buildings and structures that are gone. Along with documentary photographs, they enable us to understand and pay homage to absent buildings and the world that created them. In the process, perhaps, we can forestall further significant destruction. Join me in visiting a fire station, a hospital, and an apartment house, all of which illuminate the black and white images of vanished buildings through the process of revealing their own history.

Fire Stations

Houston's oldest surviving fire station, built in 1898-99, sits in the 2400 block of Milam, completely surrounded by the dense new apartment developments of Midtown. The building operated as Fire Station No. 7 until 1969 and now houses the Houston Fire Museum. In spite of changes to the interior, an addition to the rear, and 1930s era stucco covering the original brick walls, the late 19th-century character of the building persists. Architect Olle J. Lorehn, originally from Sweden, came to Houston from St. Louis and designed the building in a Romanesque Revival style. He also designed several other notable Houston buildings, including the Binz Building (demolished) and the Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral (threatened).

Fire posed a serious and constant threat during Houston's early years, and volunteer fire companies provided only limited protection. When the 1894 St. Joseph's Infirmary building burned to the ground the same year it was built, along with most of the other buildings on its block, public outrage helped to finally convince the city to support a full-time, paid fire department.

To keep financial expenditures manageable, the city bought the equipment and horses from the volunteer companies, but rented the station buildings. Station No. 7 on Milam was one of the first to be built by the growing city. It served the prestigious South End, an 1890s residential neighborhood south of Downtown. The *Houston Daily Post*, on January 1, 1899, declared the almost completed building "a perfectly equipped fire station, probably the finest south of St. Louis…" The first floor housed a steam engine, a hose wagon, and four horses, while the second floor served as a dormitory for the firemen. Two sliding poles in the front corners of the building provided the traditional means for speedy descents.

A few other old fire station buildings remain in Houston at 1702 Washington Avenue (1903), 1919 Houston Avenue (1905), and 319 Sampson Street (1910), but the grandest of Houston's fire stations, the Central Fire Station of 1904, survives only in photographs. Its history, though, is well

WHEN VISITING THE SITE
one can easily
SUPPESS THE FREEWAY NOISE
and enjoy this
SECLUDED CORNER
from another era

John S. Dunn Outreach Center, Christ Church Cathedral, on the site of the Central Fire Station.

PAUL HESTER

Clockwise: Detail of the Sunset Hospital, current St. Joseph's Hospital, and the old St. Joseph's.

documented. Three years after Station No. 7 was completed, the city aldermen voted to build a new central station at the corner of San Jacinto and Texas, just east of Christ Church Cathedral. Henry C. Cooke & Co. prepared the plans. Cooke, who was born and trained in England, had practiced architecture in Galveston for several years in the 1890s before moving to Houston after the 1900 storm.

Construction on the new central station was well under way when disaster struck the old station. Just after midnight on February 8, 1904, a fire started in the neighboring livery stables and soon spread to the station. The reporter wrote that "fire brands soared through the air like birds of evil and for blocks away the rain of fire and ashes resembled a driving storm or blinding blizzard." Many horses died in the burning stables and those that escaped ran wildly through the streets. Masonry building walls collapsed. The fire was so intense that it burned a fire hose lying on the street and melted the paint off the steam wagon's wheels. The firemen managed to confine the worst damage to a half-block area and saved most of the fire-fighting equipment, yet despite their efforts, property worth over $100,000 was destroyed.

With the old station gone, workers rushed to complete the new one while the firemen set up temporary quarters in the city's market sheds. The public opening of the Central Fire Station on March 21, 1904, was a grand evening affair, with music, champagne punch, and bouquets of flowers adorning the equipment. The *Houston Daily Post* report referred to the "dainty" arrangement of the upstairs rooms, where the dormitory's iron beds were tinted in shades of blue, pink, and white, leaving us to wonder who was responsible for a color scheme more typical of a nursery than a fire station.

Designed in a Renaissance Revival style and faced with gray brick, the new 20,000-square-foot station cost $30,000. Its curved corner wall topped with a small dome emphasized the building's corner site, and three large exit doors faced each street. (Since horse-drawn vehicles could not back up easily, they entered by a rear door and pulled into the appropriate bays.) The horses were stabled next to the wagons for quick harnessing. Bricks paved the first floor as well as the facing streets, although many of Houston's other streets at the time remained unpaved and were hazardous in rainy weather. The second floor contained offices, a dormitory, and a gymnasium for the men. There were six sliding poles.

Built to house six horse-drawn vehicles and 21 men, the station was considered out-of-date and inadequate by 1921, when all of Houston's fire vehicles were motorized. Neighborhood stations like Station No. 7 could be adapted for the new engines, but the Central Fire Station was replaced in 1924.

Although the 1904 station was demolished years ago, the 1899 Station No. 7 survives. Visitors can walk through the space that once housed horse-drawn wagons as well as the men ready to face the excitement and danger still to be found in fighting fires.

Hospitals

An intriguing yellow and red brick building stands on a rise above White Oak Bayou just north of Downtown. Built in 1910–11 as a hospital for Southern Pacific Railroad employees, and now operating as the Thomas Street Clinic, it is one of Houston's oldest hospital buildings to have survived into the 21st century. Also known as the Sunset Hospital, it was part of a well-established tradition of providing health benefits for railroad employees. Southern Pacific's hospital program began in 1868, and its network of hospitals and emergency facilities continued to operate until the 1960s. Deductions from each worker's paycheck and company contributions supported the program. As part of this network, the Sunset Hospital, with room for about 75 patients, served employees from the entire region. The *Houston Daily Post*, on January 1, 1911, declared that it was the "largest institution in the state devoted exclusively to the care of railroad patients."

ABOVE: PAUL HESTER; BELOW: FROM *ART WORK OF HOUSTON*, 1894, PUBLISHED IN *HOUSTON REVIEW*, V. 9, NO. 1, 1987

The sounds of the nearby Southern Pacific machine shops and roundhouse probably served as frequent reminders to patients and staff of the source of their livelihood. The shops are now gone, but many of the frame cottages and bungalows where workers lived remain, although new townhouses are beginning to replace them. Hedged gardens flank the old hospital, and the land behind descends to the banks of White Oak Bayou. Few cars pass on the narrow neighborhood streets, but the nearby hum of freeway traffic is a reminder of the contemporary world, as is the building's current use as a county clinic for AIDS patients.

When visiting the site, one can easily suppress the freeway noise and enjoy this secluded corner from another era. A huge live oak tree fills the garden at one side of the hospital, with a serpentine branch that reaches down to touch the ground before curving back up toward its rightful territory. The yellow brick walls glow on sunny days, framed by the contrasting red tile roof and the red brick trim that forms the arches and corner quoins. The unknown Southern Pacific architect even carried the decorative alternation of red and yellow through to the mortar used between the bricks: red mortar for the yellow bricks and yellow mortar for the red bricks. An original mosaic of the Southern Pacific logo (train tracks heading into the sunset) graces the entrance stair landing. The entrance arbor, featuring the same yellow and red bricks and mortar as the main building, dates to the original construction, but no longer supports the yellow morning glories brought from California by the wife of the chief surgeon.

The site of the Rossonian Flats shown above is now occupied by 2 Houston Center, shown right.

The Sunset Hospital appeared at a time when hospitals were just beginning to improve their effectiveness and, consequently, to increase in number and public acceptance. The Houston city directory for 1911–12 listed 13 "Hospitals and Sanitoriums" in addition to the Sunset Hospital, in contrast to the 1894–95 city directory, which listed only two, the Houston Infirmary on Washington Street and St. Joseph's Infirmary.

The 1895 St. Joseph's Infirmary, like the Sunset Hospital, was originally located in a quiet residential area. Preserved only in photographs, this impressive building emerged after its immediate predecessor's tragic destruction. The Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word founded the original St. Joseph's Infirmary in 1887, taking over an old frame building at the corner of Franklin and Caroline. The hospital soon expanded its operations into adjacent frame buildings. After their heroic service during the 1891 Houston smallpox epidemic, which earned them strong local support, the Sisters began planning a substantial brick building for a site across the street. Unfortunately on October 16, 1894, only a few months after they had moved into that newly-constructed building, a fire in a neighboring boardinghouse spread to the hospital. The nuns managed to save all of the patients, but the new brick building was destroyed, and two of the nuns died in the flames. The citizens of Houston responded to the catastrophe with financial contributions, and the Sisters purchased a new site at Crawford and Pierce, described in the *Houston Daily Post* on March 21, 1896, as "far from the noise and dust of the city." A loan of $10,000 aided in the construction of the new brick hospital building, which opened only a year after the destruction of the former, short-lived structure.

Galveston architect Nicholas Clayton designed the handsome Renaissance Revival building. Its prominent two-story arcaded loggia and numerous tall windows reflected the 19th-century emphasis on fresh air and ventilation in the treatment and prevention of disease. The patient rooms were on the first and second floors, while the basement, with its more limited light and ventilation, housed the chapel, the Sisters' dining room, the kitchen, storeroom, and laundry. The Sisters' dormitory and the surgery were on the third floor, an arrangement typical in 19th-century hospitals, since skylights provided the best lighting for surgery.

St Joseph's continued to grow, with substantial additions in 1904, 1919, 1930, 1936, and 1947. During its later years, the central portion of the 1895 building remained in use for administrative purposes, until it was demolished in the 1960s to make room for yet another expansion. The site is now occupied by the George Strake Building, one of several massive buildings in the St. Joseph Hospital complex. Busy streets surround it, and the Pierce-elevated section of Interstate 45 rumbles nearby. Standing on the Crawford Street sidewalk, it is hard to imagine a time when the 1895 brick building stood alone in a neighborhood of small, scattered houses. A visit to the grounds of the Thomas Street Clinic, however, can provide a hint.

Apartment Buildings

The 1911 Beaconsfield apartment building rises eight stories at the southwest corner of Main Street and Pease Avenue. It and the much altered building a block away, the former Savoy Apartments, are the only remnants of a once vibrant residential neighborhood. Back then, the stylish new apartment buildings towered above the surrounding boardinghouses and single-family residences that they were

ABOVE: POSTCARD C. 1914; BELOW: PAUL HESTER

gradually replacing.

Today the Beaconsfield remains miraculously intact, well maintained, and functioning in its original role, although the apartments are now cooperative rather than rental units. It has escaped the disfigurement of the nearby Savoy and the total destruction of so many other downtown apartment buildings, including the grand Rossonian Apartments, once at the corner of Fannin and McKinney Streets.

Construction began on the Beaconsfield in December 1910, just as the Rossonian was nearing completion. The Beaconsfield's height would surpass the seven-story Rossonian and Savoy, but its footprint was smaller, and it emphasized luxury over size. Built by the Lamb-Field Company and designed by local architect Alonzo C. Pigg, the Beaconsfield features floor plans that have been credited to Elbert C. Lamb, one of the major investors and first occupants of the building. Prominent white lintels emphasize the exterior's many windows, which were integral to the builders' intent to design for comfort in Houston's hot summers. Each of the 16 apartments is arranged so that every room has an exterior exposure. Open-air loggias, today enclosed but still visible, enabled cross-ventilation in the rooms. But even cross-ventilation brought little comfort in August, leading the developers to advertise iceboxes that could hold 600 pounds of ice. True to their luxury status, the rooms were extra large, and the interior finishes included mahogany wainscoting and beams, birch paneling, and oak flooring.

The Beaconsfield, left, remains intact and continues to function as an apartment building whereas the Savoy, right, is altered and abandoned.

If the Rossonian's rooms were not quite as large as the Beaconsfield's, the building still succeeded in exuding elegance and style at a scale far greater than the Beaconsfield. Filling a full quarter of a city block, the building contained 74 apartments. The Fort Worth architectural firm Sanguinet and Staats, one of the largest and most influential in Texas, brought high-style apartment design to Houston in the Rossonian. With Renaissance Revival elements detailing the elevation's three-part organization, the building presented an image of solidity crowned by the lacy, fanciful trelliswork defining the roof garden. "Extensively patronized by the smart set of Texas during the warmer months," according to B. H. Carroll, writing in 1912, the roof garden was one of many amenities provided by the Rossonian, along with "handsomely appointed reception rooms and hallways."

In mid-19th-century America, the term *apartment* still referred to an individual room in a dwelling. By the 1880s *apartment houses* had become identified with the new high-rise, multifamily residential buildings being constructed for the wealthy, quite distinct from the *tenement houses* for the poor. Apartment houses, however, came to Houston a bit later than the 1880s. When the Rossonian was under construction in 1910, the *Houston Daily Post* noted that the city had "nineteen fine apartment houses, six of them erected during this year."

Both the Rossonian and the Beaconsfield housed Houston's elite, as well as others who had the means to enjoy the buildings' modern conveniences and luxurious design. Sharing a single apartment enabled three young men with office jobs at the Texas Company to live at the Rossonian in 1912. Higher-profile Rossonian residents included Niels and Mellie Esperson, who had moved to the Beaconsfield by 1920, joining Henry Stude, Cleveland Sewall, and William Vinson. Will and Ima Hogg also enjoyed Houston apartment living, though they selected another 1910 building, the Oxford, at the corner of Fannin and Clay.

THE DORMITORY'S IRON BEDS
were tinted in shades of
BLUE, PINK, AND WHITE
leaving us to wonder who was
RESPONSIBLE FOR A COLOR SCHEME
more typical of a nursery
THAN A FIRE STATION

Garden apartments and suburban developments eventually drew away residents of the early 20th-century downtown apartment houses, leaving them vulnerable to replacement by office buildings and parking lots. The Beaconsfield remains, although today it is surrounded by asphalt and missing the old trees that once reached its fourth-floor windows. Sleek Metrorail trains following the path of the old streetcars link it to parts of Downtown and the Museum District that would still look familiar to the original residents.

Houston's past survives in words, images, and structures. Each informs our understanding of the others, but never overlooks the potency of the real thing. Seek out the survivors. Stand beside them. Revel in their physical presence, the feel of brick and stucco, the details that elude the photograph. Savor them. Protect them.

PAUL HESTER

Statler Hilton exterior during its heydey.

A hotel brochure from 1972 touts the Stetson's "great drinks and tray-carrying dolls in hotpants."

Modern Revival or Wre

By **David Theis**

Downtown Dallas is a bustling place these days. Main Street has been recently (and very attractively) redeveloped. The Deep Ellum entertainment district had fallen on hard times in recent years, but is now in the process of being redeveloped by a single developer. Numerous buildings are being converted into lofts and condos in a variety of styles and price ranges. The list goes on. As does redevelopment, until you reach downtown's east end, where the old Statler Hilton hotel, shuttered since 2003, looms over a perplexing cityscape.

The casual visitor might not see the question mark. Instead, a very promising development appears to be unfolding. Main Street Garden, a 1.75-acre urban park, is under development. Surrounded as it is by vintage buildings (most of them in search of new tenants), the park looks like the ideal urban green space, capable of knitting together the surrounding buildings into a lively and harmonious whole. The Mercantile National Bank Building, a substantial modernistic edifice, is being converted into housing with ground floor retail. The University of North Texas wants to convert the old Dallas City Hall (now the Municipal Building) and its adjacent annex into its law school.

"You can just picture the students out reading on the grass," sighs Katherine Seale, executive director of Preservation Dallas.

Seale sounds wistful, as well as frustrated, because she sees the area's hidden flaw, which involves the Statler Hilton. Because of the building's historic significance for Dallas, and because it could be converted into hundreds of apartments, the former hotel could become the centerpiece for the east end of downtown.

But instead, the building faces the distinct possibility of demolition. In fact, the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed the Statler Hilton on its 2008 list of the most endangered historic places in the country.

All this because there's no place to park.

The Statler Hilton made its splashy debut in 1956. It was the first hotel the Hilton chain opened after it bought out the rival Statler Hotels in the mid-50s. That move made Hilton the world's largest hotelier,

LEFT: JOHN ROGERS PHOTOGRAPHY; RIGHT: JASON GRANT

Statler Hilton and the East End of Downtown Dallas

cking Ball

and it wanted to celebrate by erecting a distinctive building. Prominent hotel architect William Tabler of New York designed a Y-shaped building with a flat-slab structural system, which limited the number of columns the building required, allowing for grand, uninterrupted interiors. The Statler Hilton was the first U.S. hotel to be faced with glass, porcelain enamel, and aluminum curtain wall.

Not unlike the unlucky Shamrock Hotel in Houston, the Statler Hilton was a social center for Dallas. Celebrities such as Gene Autry and Hedda Hopper attended its week-long opening festivities. Seale says that the hotel is iconic for Dallas, as it is both part of the skyline, and a marker from the post-war era, when "Dallas came of age."

Finally, the hotel is one of most important Modernist buildings in Dallas. But that designation may be more curse than blessing. Twentieth-century Modernism is a period that is struggling to be recognized as architecturally significant in Dallas, Houston, and almost everywhere else. More and more people recognize the period of the mid-20th-century as beautiful and worth saving, but the consensus is tentative.

It is not stretching the matter to say that organizations such as Preservation Dallas began in an attempt to defend older styles against Modernism.

Eventually, the Statler Hilton, along with the rest of downtown Dallas, suffered the effects of suburbanization. The hotel struggled to make it to the new century as a functioning hotel. It closed in 2001, briefly reopened and then closed for good—as a hotel—in 2003. In the meantime, the Hilton chain sold its former icon to the Far East Consortium, an international real estate development corporation that, as its name indicates, is mostly active in Asian development.

Former Dallas mayor Laura Miller wanted to demolish the hotel, which she termed "ugly," in 2003, when she began advocating for the urban park, which is now Main Street Gardens. Miller wanted the park to include the hotel grounds.

But at this point, Preservation Dallas showed its clout using Dallas zoning and design ordinances, which Houston's preservation groups can only envy. The group's lobbying shrank the park and spared the hotel—for the time being.

Seale looks back on this outcome with satisfaction. Because of its historic associations for the city, and its contribution to the skyline, the Statler Hilton is the "number one priority" of Preservation Dallas. But the group cannot dictate what happens with a building after they have preserved it. And because the land the Statler Hilton stands on is rising in value (or at least was before the current economic downturn), the city is under pressure.

Mayor Tom Leppert held a press conference to discuss the status of a number of vacant downtown buildings. Leppert took the aggressive step of sending out "Chapter 54" letters to several owners, essentially telling them they needed to either sell or redevelop their buildings, or begin paying stiff fines for code violations.

He was specifically pessimistic about the Statler Hilton. "He told me it may not be savable," says Seale. "He says there are pigeons roosting inside the building."

Seale does not assign much weight to this observation. "It's not unusual to find pigeons inside abandoned buildings," she says. "It doesn't mean it can't be saved."

She acknowledges that the Statler Hilton has challenges beyond shooing away the birds. The hotel has environmental issues, chiefly concerning asbestos abatement. The rooms are small, and the ceilings low, by current standards. And Far East Consortium is asking for a lot of money—$20 million. That is a challenging number because of the single biggest challenge facing the building's survival—a potentially fatal lack of parking.

The hotel's parking garage was demolished to make way for Main Street Gardens. The building's advocates hoped that the new park would include underground parking, as does Houston's Discovery Green. But the city's contract with Forest City, the developers of the adjacent Mercantile Building, forced them to begin park construction in October, before a plan for putting in underground parking could be finalized. The contract does call for the park to be designed so that its western end could later be converted to underground parking. But, as Seale says, it is not likely that the city will ante up for a multi-million dollar park, and then shortly thereafter demolish that same park to put in parking.

The Statler Hilton looks to be behind the eight ball, but Seale does not despair. The city can offer "very strong" tax incentives that make redevelopment feasible, and indeed a number of prospective buyers have considered making an offer. (Seale recently told *Cite* that "a contract may be in play.")

In any event, Preservation Dallas will not wring its hands while the old hotel is demolished. Seale says that, depending on the details of any possible redevelopment plan, the organization is prepared to push to designate the Statler Hilton as a landmark, and therefore protected building, even over owner objections. That protection would save the former hotel from demolition for two years, at which point the designation could be renewed. This protection, in combination with tax incentives, is obviously a very powerful city-building tool—one that Houston preservationists simply do not have in their meager toolbox.

Rooftop hot tub.

JASON GRANT

Resurrection or Demolition?

Downtown Hotels in Houston and San Antonio

Finding new life for shuttered hotels built in the 1950s and later is not easy, according to Bob Eury, President of Central Houston. "If the hotel is old enough, then the funky parts are part of the charm," he says. But for Modernist buildings such as downtown Houston's Holiday Inn and Sheraton-Lincoln, the low ceilings and small rooms (by today's standards) are seen as merely unacceptable. And their floor plans do not lend themselves to conversion. "It's not economical to join two rooms. Maybe you can make three rooms into two."

But the need for more downtown hotel rooms is so pressing that last fall, the Houston City Council and Mayor White passed an ordinance offering "very meaningful" (in Eury's words) tax rebates to hoteliers who either put up new construction or bring an old hotel back to life.

Eury says that developers are currently trying to redevelop the Sheraton-Lincoln as "100 percent hotel," while it is unclear what the new owners of the Holiday Inn plan for their structure.

Among major Texas cities, San Antonio probably has the easiest time of keeping old hotels functioning as hotels. The recent (and ongoing) redevelopment of El Tropicano Hotel Riverwalk serves as an example.

Unlike in Houston and Dallas, tourism is so strong in downtown San Antonio that "There's no problem attracting hoteliers," according to Bruce MacDougal, executive director of the San Antonio Conservation Society. The Tropicano's developers took a novel and financially prudent approach to their work. According to MacDougal, instead of closing and gutting the hotel, which had been "limping along" under its previous management, they redeveloped it incrementally without ever completely closing it. They have also been clever about publicizing each phase of the re-do, as when they debuted the restoration of the hotel's trademark 60-foot-tall mural.

Aesthetically and commercially, El Tropicano stands as an example of intelligent redevelopment.

COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT BROWNSVILLE AND TEXAS SOUTHMOST COLLEGE (UTB/TSC)

a Daring Rescue:

Neutra's Kraigher House Returns to Life

The flat roofs, projecting eaves, ribbon windows, and white-washed walls of the George Kraigher House in Brownsville are newly restored after a nearly two-decade preservation effort. The result of the work of community activists, city officials, and the University of Texas, Brownsville/Texas Southmost College, this significant example of early modern architecture—and the city's role in aviation history—is a unique contribution to the larger panorama of the city's built heritage.

by Catherine Gavin

Near collapse after years of neglect, squatting, and water damage, Preservation Texas and the National Trust named the Kraigher House to their "most endangered" list in 2004.

BUILT in 1937 to the designs of renown architect Richard Neutra (1892-1970) for a Pan American Airlines pilot, the George Kraigher house was Neutra's first residential design erected outside of California. Neutra, a Viennese immigrant, who moved across the Atlantic with hopes of exploring the possibilities of modern design, settled in Los Angeles in 1925. A prolific writer and one of Southern California's most celebrated residential architects, Neutra designed the Kraigher House during a period when his practice was flourishing. It is the only example of his single-family homes in Texas, and the first International Style house built in the state.

The project was completed for the sum of $5,000 under the supervision and management of local Brownsville contractor A. W. Neck and architect Frank L. Godwin. Neutra himself did not actually visit the Brownsville site until 1951. "Architecture by remote control" was how he described his limited site supervision of the Miller House construction in Palm Springs in 1937, which also aptly describes his relationship to the Kraigher House job.

Neutra's client, George Kraigher (1891-1984), was a highly successful pilot and Pan American Airways executive who happened to see a Neutra home as he was flying into southern California. He contacted the architect to design a modern house for his new Lower Rio Grande Valley residence. Brownsville, just under an hour's flight from Mexico City and 2,301 air miles from the Panama Canal, opened an aviation gateway to Latin America during the late 1920s. Pan Am leased the airport, changing the name to Brownsville-Pan American Airport in 1929, and established its Western Division headquarters there three years later. Kraigher, the chief pilot and operations manager of the division, perfected instrument flight techniques and land approach patterns on the mountainous air routes south of the border before returning to the northeast in 1946. (He would later commission Neutra again for another home.) Pan Am remained a strong presence in the city until the early 1960s, when it relocated its Western Division headquarters to Miami.

The house, however, deteriorated more quickly than Brownville's place in aviation history. There were two subsequent owners following Kraigher's departure. On his only visit to the house, fourteen years after it was completed, Neutra was upset by cracks in the stucco and unsympathetic changes to the original interior design. The subsequent use of the house as a rental property beginning in the 1970s and encroaching development further advanced its increasing disrepair. Strip malls, restaurants, and apartments transformed the country landscape, and by the early 1990s, the building was in dire condition and only six acres remained of the once expansive site.

Although the National Trust for Historic Preservation called attention to the plight of the Kraigher House as early as 1992 (as did *Cite* in 1993), it was Ambrosio Villarreal, Jr., the ardent founder of Preservation Brownsville, who took up the cause of saving the Kraigher House in the mid 1990s. Historic preservation efforts focused on the conservation of nineteenth-century buildings had enjoyed popular support in the border city since the 1970s. Villarreal set out to educate the public and municipal officials about the value of the Kriagher House. Due to his persistent lobbying and persuasion, the City of Brownsville purchased the house and a third of its six-acre site in 1999 in order to avoid its demolition. A fence was erected to protect the property from

Interior restoration included replication of Masonite built-in furniture.

vagrants, yet the house remained untouched. The city's inability to begin rehabilitation led both Preservation Texas and the National Trust to name the Kraigher House to their "most endangered" lists in 2004, again as a result of Villarreal's efforts. In late 2005, the city signed a 99-year lease agreement for the amount of one dollar with the University of Texas, Brownsville/Texas Southmost College, enabling the university to begin restoration. Dr. Juliet V. García, president of UTB/TSC, and Dr. José G. Martín, the university's provost, were instrumental in supporting the rescue of the Kraigher House.

Enter Lawrence V. Lof. Though he is assistant professor of biology at the UTB/TSC, Lof has reinvented himself as a historic building conservator and the university's historic rehabilitation manager. Since 1998, he has restored four historic properties in Brownsville for use by the university. Students were integral to the success and completion of these projects; a Historic Rehabilitation Practicum evolved from this work and now provides students in the Industrial Technology Department hands-on experience with historic restoration construction. Lof recognized that conserving the severely deteriorated house and maintaining the integrity of Neutra's design were no small tasks.

"Every window pane was broken; all of the built-in furniture was stripped; the brass finishes on the windows and the copper pipes were taken and sold by trespassers," says Lof. Prior to the city's acquisition of the property it was used as a shelter by vagrants, numerous fires throughout the 1990s had caused severe damage to the roof. In 2006, when work began, it had been exposed to the elements for seven years, exacerbating the already deteriorated condition.

Because moisture damage to the base of the wood frame was acute, the house's structural shell was being held together largely by the stucco exterior finish. Work began with an emergency structural stabilization and replacement of the partially burned roofs. Lof emphasizes that throughout the process his goal was to follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and save as much of the original fabric as possible.

"We had to rebuild the roof and all of the interior elements. The structure, steel casement frames, and exterior stucco however are largely the original materials," explains Lof.

Unlike many of Neutra's projects, photographic documentation of the Kraigher House was scarce; the team had one historic image. They were unable to locate the questionnaire Neutra sent to all of his clients, but the letters between Neutra and Kraigher, preserved in the Neutra archives at the University of California, Los Angeles, proved to be invaluable.

"Their correspondence detailed the construction process: from Kraigher's requests for modifications to the original one-story design and his desire to close in the screened porch to the colors and textiles of the interior finishes," says Lof. The documentation answered many of the questions for the team, but did not reveal distinctions between the drawings and the as-built conditions. "We noticed that often Neck made adjustments to maintain the lines, especially in the interior spaces. The windows for example were

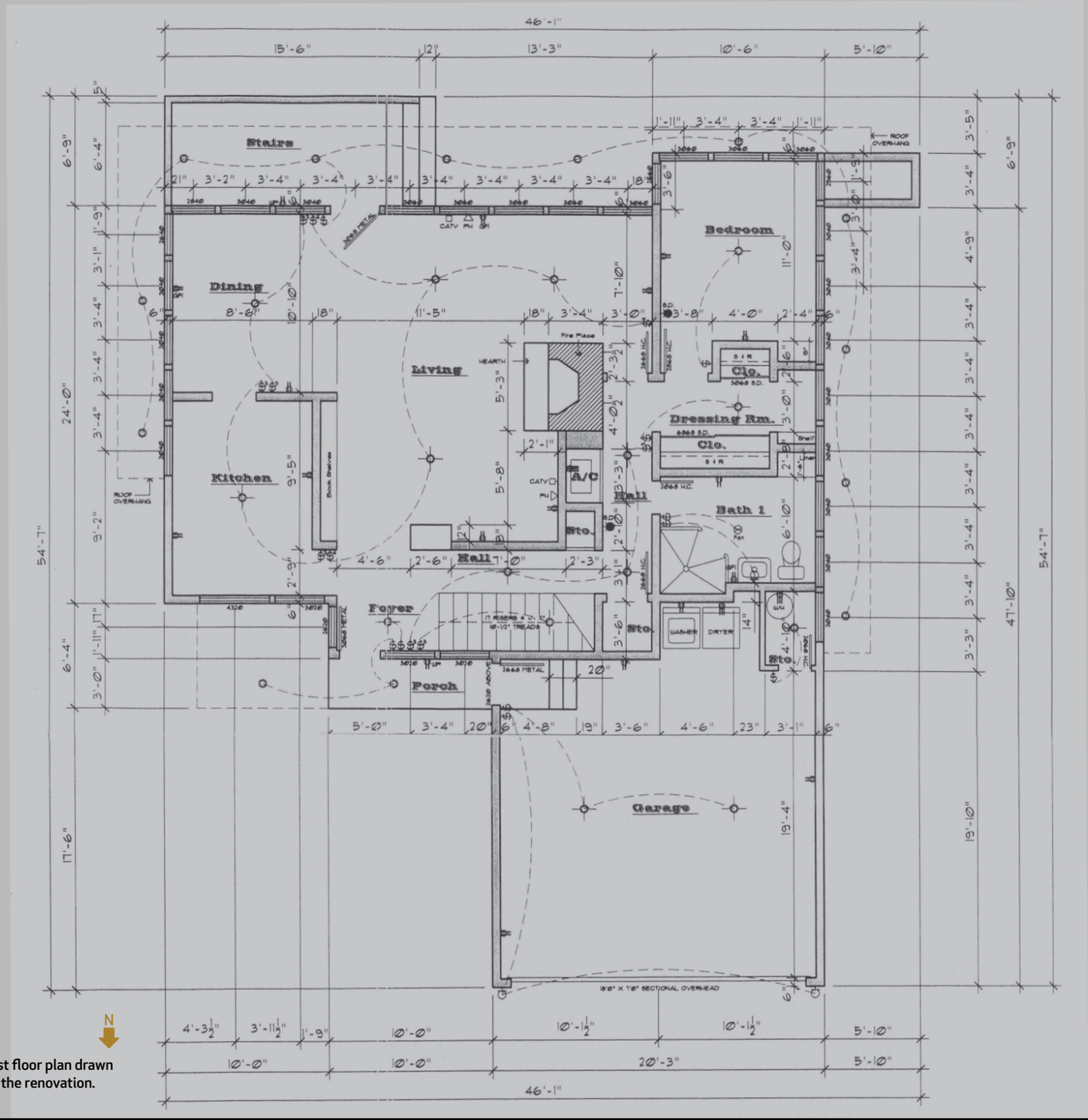
Valley Pearl

SITED ON A SIX-ACRE LOT along a resaca, an ox-bow lake, on the northern outskirts of Brownsville, the Kraigher House is a two-story wood frame structure faced with cement stucco. A raised foundation lifts the first floor approximately five feet above the sloping site. The compact L-shaped plan opens to the south and was finished on the interior with Masonite built-in furniture.

Typical of Neutra's work, the house is positioned to take advantage of the climate and views of the landscape, blurring the boundaries between the interior and exterior while maximizing comfort. The ribbons of casement windows on the first and second floors open the interior spaces to the Gulf breeze. Passive solar design involves blocking the sun with wide eaves, into which rising heat is pulled through vents. Exterior lighting, recessed in the eaves, creates privacy screens by obscuring evening and nighttime views of the interior of the house while eliminating reflections on the interior.

The house, however, deteriorated more quickly than Brownsville's place in aviation history.

THIS SPREAD: COURTESY UTB/TSC



First floor plan drawn for the renovation.

larger than all notes stated. We remained true to any of the as-built modifications. With this house, and Neutra in general, it was all about the lines."

As is the case with many early and mid-century modern structures, missing materials and hardware are no longer produced. Reconstruction and replacement were required for the roof and ventilation systems, as well as the interior finishes. A manufacturer in Monterrey, Mexico supplied the rolled steel for the replication of the original crimped gutters and a local company formed the breaks to replicate the soffit. Small fragments of the wood louvers for ventilation and the textured glass diffusers of exterior recessed lighting provided enough information for Lof's team to rebuild these features. The wood strips in the soffit allow heat to rise up the face of exterior walls approximately two feet to a horizontal screen where the air escapes. This detail, along with the numerous transoms and windows, responded to the humid heat of Brownsville by allowing air to circulate throughout the house, although the rehabilitation added a central air-conditioning system.

"On the interior we were able to replicate the original polished Masonite panels for the built-in furniture and sliding doors where Neutra had originally specified them," said Lof. "The hardware for the casement windows, however, is no longer produced. We left fixed panes in the casements until a later date when more resources are available to reproduce the hardware."

In the bathrooms, the original cast-iron tubs remained, as did some of the white subway tiles. The red paint of the downstairs bathroom and the green finish of the upstairs bathroom walls were both noted in the correspondence. The red interiors of cabinets were also discussed in Neutra's letters and confirmed by the paint samples taken on site. On the exterior, numerous areas of the stucco were repaired as needed; the entire surface was then painted white, as it had been originally. The steel casement windows were also painted an aluminum color as specified in 1937.

"Lof's team went to great lengths to find

PLAN: DAVID HINOJOSA

Lawrence Lof, left, with students from the University of Texas Brownsville, standing under the eaves of the Kraigher House after completion of the renovation in 2008.

Reclad in brick in the 1950s, the original terrazzo-faced fireplace was restored.

manufacturers to reproduce necessary elements," says Daniel Carey, director of the Fort Worth-based southwest regional office of the National Trust. "They also introduced new materials, and in my opinion, successfully walked a very fine line: on one hand conserving as much as they could of the original, while also updating the building to meet code."

New York architect Theo Prudon, president of the modernist preservation organization, DoCoMoMo-US, notes that upgrading residences to contemporary standards of comfort and size are primary challenges when preserving early- and mid-twentieth-century houses. Prudon emphasizes that the visual integrity of a design is also key to the conservation of modern buildings.

Lof notes that appreciation for the design and modern materials was an acquired taste for both him and his students. "They were in shock when I explained that we were going to lay linoleum over the beautifully reconstructed oak staircase." He seems to have brought his training as a scientist to the work, using a forensic approach to preservation, carefully investigating clues and piecing together an understanding of the original design. "As we were working with the interior spaces, we realized that the original terrazzo-faced fireplace had been reclad in brick at some point in the 1950s," he adds. "It was amazing to see how the lines of the room came together when we removed the non-original material."

The Kraigher House now has a shiny fresh appearance; the essence of modernism was, after all, its newness. Lof and the university's restoration is an important contribution to the conservation of Neutra's work.

"The Kraigher House is an example of the growing importance of modernism in preservation circles here in Texas," says Carey. "There are numerous good buildings across the state; many of them are worth saving and people are talking about it." Carey also notes the importance of public access to the Kraigher House, "It is significant that the building will be adaptively reused and programmed with general access; we want it to be relevant."

Peter Goodman, director of the city of Brownsville's Historic Downtown, says, "We had numerous calls from individuals at the beginning of the process hoping to renovate the property for private use. It was not our desire for this significant design to be in private hands."

The university has not determined how it will use the Kraigher House. Neutra's own house and studio, the VDL Research House II in Los Angeles, is now owned by California Polytechnic State University, Pomona, which has struggled to raise operating costs for maintaining the house for tours and functions. UTB may use the Kraigher House as part of a new architecture program. Behind the chain link fence the city erected before the restoration to block vagrants, the house now stands shiny and bright. It will soon be open to the public.

LEFT THREE IMAGES: COURTESY UTB/TSC; RIGHT: FROM COLLECTION OF DIANA CLARK

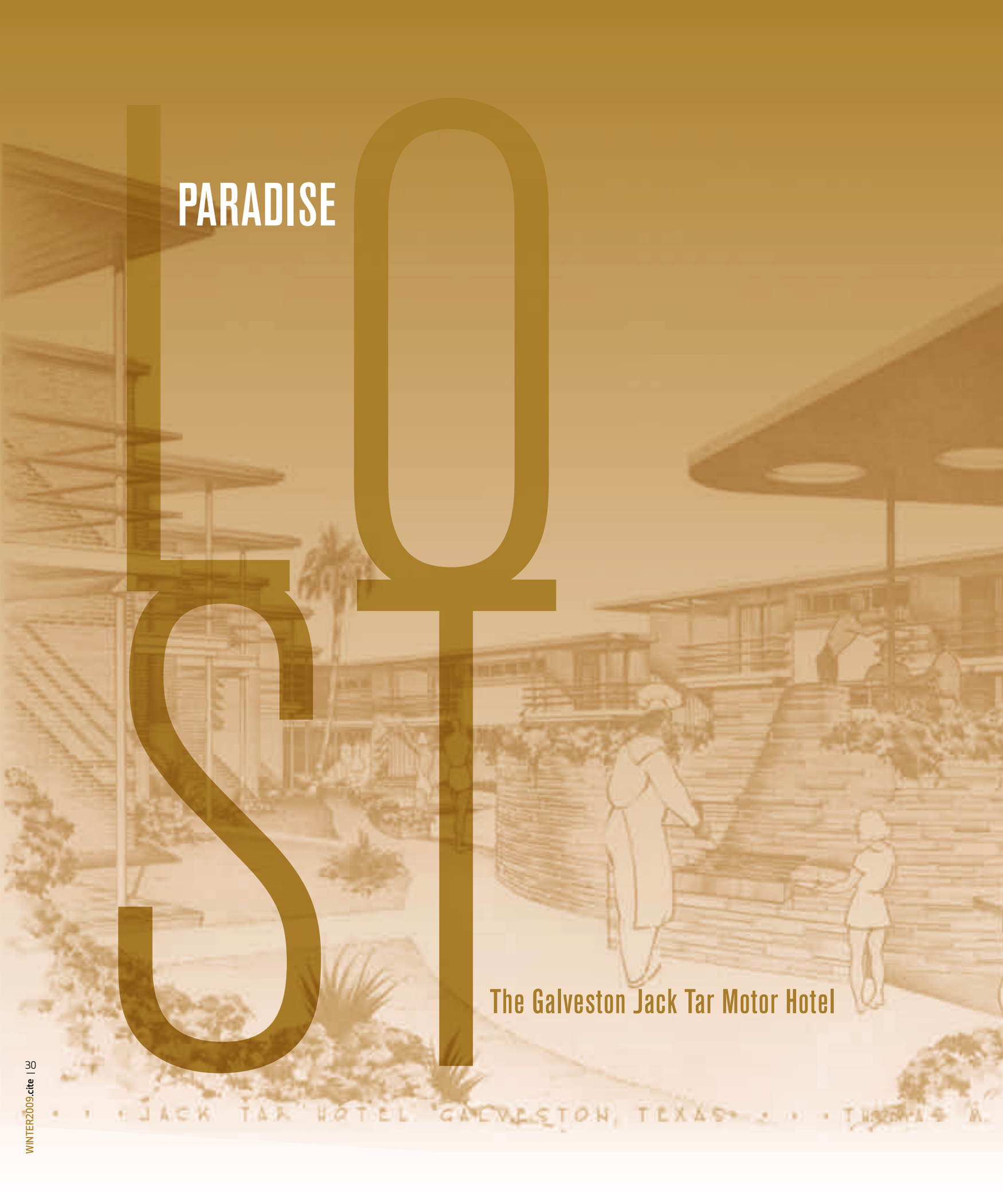
George Kraigher, left, "Arriving from Los Angeles in our first Douglas".

A Dashing Man

by Stephen Fox

RICHARD NEUTRA'S DESIGN COMPLEMENTED George Kraigher's sense of adventure. Both men were born in the Austro-Hungarian empire. Kraigher (1891-1984) was from Slovenia and trained as a pilot in the Austro-Hungarian military. In 1915, he defected to Italy and, for the rest of World War I, flew for the Serbian air corps. Immigrating to the US in 1921, he performed aerial survey and mapping work before joining Pan American Airways in 1929. When the company routed all its overland flights between the US and Latin America through Brownsville, the southernmost city in the continental US, Kraigher helped pioneer the routes. In 1937, he set what was then a speed record for commercial flights in a journey that began in Brownsville and, over the course of six days, extended as far south as Santiago, Chile, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, before ending in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Kraigher was gregarious and convivial. An accomplished horseman, he entertained in Brownsville, often arranging for friends to fly in from other Texas and Mexican cities served by Pan Am. When the US entered World War II, Kraigher left Brownsville. During the war, working first for Pan Am, then as a military officer (eventually attaining the rank of colonel) under the Office of Special Services, Kraigher used his flying skills and geographic knowledge in support of critical military missions. He charted air routes across Africa, serving supply lines from the US to the Middle East and India in the early 1940s. In the latter part of the war, he was active in the Balkans, organizing and carrying out aerial rescues of downed Allied aviators. Kraigher did not return to Brownsville after the war. He organized air services for Aramco in Saudi Arabia and in the 1950s built a second house designed by Richard Neutra in Litchfield, Connecticut, where he lived until his death.

PARADISE



The Galveston Jack Tar Motor Hotel

RENDERING OF OUTDOOR GRILLE COURTESY OF LAURA PRICE

Galveston Island has a rich architectural history, but visitors to its well-preserved Victorian district may know little of its more recent modernist achievements. One of these was the Jack Tar Motor Hotel on the Galveston seawall, which in the mid 1950s opened an addition–with a vast, kidney-shaped pool and Edenic landscaping–that lured vacationers and brought mid-century modernism to the island. This is the story of the Jack Tar, from its beginnings as a tourist court, to its star turn as an exemplar of postwar design, and finally to the all-too-familiar status as vanished landmark.

By **Guy W. Carwile**

Grand opening, 1953. From left, Ed Leach, Charles Sammons, and Thomas Price in front of Earl Wilson's helicopter.

Jack Tar Court from 1941 brochure.

Hotel and cafeteria from the seawall.

View from Lanai Suite, 1953.

Matchbook, 1940.

Jack Tar pool terrace, 1961.

Postcard of Jack Tar Court, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 1942.


Sara Curry on honeymoon with Gene Curry, Jack Tar, 1956.


Charcoal Galley restaurant, 1956.

THE

story begins in 1939, when W. L. Moody III, chairman of Affiliated National Hotels, acquired two parcels of land overlooking the Gulf of Mexico for the purpose of building a motor court. The property was dramatically sited near the point where Sixth Street (now University) and old U.S. Highway 75 (now Broadway, a main Galveston artery) intersect with the boulevard that adjoins the island's seawall. At the time, Affiliated owned 32 properties nationally, most of them traditional hotels. But change was coming.[1] From 1937 to 1939, the market share enjoyed by motor courts had doubled, while the share taken up by hotels had declined 25 percent. Despite the lingering effects of the Depression, a motor court must have seemed a good investment.[2] Moody, a member of a prominent Galveston family, convinced the city to sell him the right-of-way that separated his two parcels, giving him a larger, contiguous property.[3] This development approach is commonplace today, but was novel in the late 1930s. That Moody could proceed with it testifies both to his business acumen and to the power of his family name.

Before World War II, few motor courts were designed by architects, who saw the building type as somewhat beneath the profession, but Moody's project was again novel in that architects planned it: John J. Croft, Jr., architect of record, and H. S. Shannon.[4] Anchoring the project, which was built in 1940 by the contractor, E. C. Northen, were a main office, gas station, and drive-in restaurant, all facing the intersection of Seawall, 6th, and Broadway.[5] The 83 rental units were housed in three long, jagged bars overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, and in an extruded building that formed a boundary along the north and east property lines. Guests could park off-street in spaces next to the rooms, an arrangement that typified motor courts and boosted their popularity.

The first name for the facility, the "East End Courts," garnered so little enthusiasm that a naming contest was held. The winner, a ten-year-old girl from nearby League City, earned a hundred dollars for her submission of "Jack Tar." (Ironically, the judges learned this term was slang for a sailor only after they had chosen it.) More important to the court's success was Moody's decision, five weeks after the grand opening, to hire a jovial young manager named Ed Leach.

At 27, Leach combined years of hotel experience with an outsized personality. His ever present smile and larger than life stature at over 6 feet tall and 295 pounds made him difficult to forget. On Leach's watch the Jack Tar Motor Court flourished, especially after World War II, when the baby boom and a flourishing economy put Americans back on the road. Moody responded to the demand by purchasing an existing tourist court followed by an existing apartment building on the west side of 6th street. The two acquisitions, all with multiple discrete rooms for privacy, were geared toward families wishing to prolong their stay at the beach without sacrificing the comforts of home.

Before World War II, tourist courts typically lacked air conditioning and amenities beyond recreational lawns with sporadic playground equipment. After the war, to meet families' desire for plusher lodgings, these older courts were razed in favor of new construction or significantly remodeled.

In 1942, Affiliated built a Jack Tar Court in Hot Springs, Arkansas, as part of an apparent plan to open a regional chain of motor courts. The new court was overtly streamline moderne with white cement-plaster cladding, in stark contrast to the subdued masonry employed at the Galveston facility, but like its sibling it boasted the "sign of ship shape service"—a neon-illuminated pylon sign that dominated the horizon. Although this sign—an early example of "heroic" motel signage—predated the Holiday Inn "Great Sign" by 12 years, the creation of a chain of Jack Tar Hotels was still a decade away.

In 1949, the Jack Tar was given a hundred-thousand-dollar makeover that put air-conditioning in all rooms, renovated the grill, and added the 24-hour "Coffee Cove." The project was designed by the architect Thomas Price, an East Coast native who moved to Galveston after the war as a naval reservist, and it forged a professional relationship—later, a life-long friendship—between Price and Leach.

Before World War II, few motor courts were designed by **architects**, who saw the building type as somewhat **beneath** the profession...

In 1952, Charles Sammons, a Dallas insurance magnate and frequent visitor to the Galveston court, bought the property along with the rights

HELICOPTER PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSENBERG LIBRARY, GALVESTON, TEXAS; EPHEMERA COURTESY OF GUY CARWILE

Aerial photograph of the Jack Tar Motor Hotel addition, 1953.

to the name "Jack Tar." Sammons decided to build a state-of-the art expansion, tapping Ed Leach to oversee the million-dollar project; Leach would also serve as president of Jack Tar Hotels, a subsidiary of Sammons Enterprises that eventually grew to include 14 properties, which were either company-owned or lease-managed.[6]

In order to convince Sammons that Price should design the expansion, Leach cited his successful collaboration with the architect in 1949. The new concept was highly ambitious: an ultramodern resort hotel, not only the first of its kind in Texas, but, in Leach's phrase, a "Millionaires' Paradise." The slogans were "Prepare to be Pampered" and "The Ultimate in Fine Living." By 1952, plans for the project, to be built on land Sammons had bought to the east of the original court, were complete, and after two years of construction, on July 31, 1954, paradise opened with great fanfare.[7] According to the Galveston Daily News, the grand-opening drew such notables as Allen Shivers, then-governor of Texas, baseball great Dizzy Dean, Glen McCarthy, the oil wildcatter and owner of Houston's grand Shamrock Hotel, and New York gossip columnist Earl Wilson, who flew to Galveston in his own helicopter.

Thomas Price had an exotic architectural **pedigree** for the small town of Galveston, including degrees from **Virginia Polytechnic Institute** and **Harvard**...

Thomas Price had an exotic architectural pedigree for the small town of Galveston, including degrees from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Harvard and experience with Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Hugh Stubbins. His design took full advantage of his site's raised topography and irregular contours. An access lane, cruised by motorized luggage carts called "Jimmy Js," divided the property into a small triangular parcel, which housed 12 rental units facing the Gulf, and a larger one, in the shape of a truncated trapezoidal, which contained 35 units oriented toward a lush courtyard and pool. These served as the expansion's defining elements and arguably as the Jack Tar's signature attractions. They enabled the resort to earn added revenue by operating the private Quarterdeck Club, which catered to members by offering, among other services, a "Mascot Deck" for pets. By now, pools had become a must-have amenity at motels, but the pool at the Jack Tar would have exceeded travelers' expectations. Its curvilinear shape was still uncommon and at 4,000 square feet, it was extraordinarily large. Guests could peer down on the pool from a bridge, from elevated terraces surrounding it or from the perimeter band of motel rooms. These rooms were actually Lanai-type suites with floor-to-ceiling glazing (the opposite walls had high windows for privacy); they opened onto either decks or terraces. Here, Price showed his affinities with his former teachers and employers. Like Gropius, Price could take a complex plan configuration and unify it under a more simply shaped roof plane. Like Breuer, he exploited the dynamic between opaque and transparent elements of the architecture. And Price blurred the line of demarcation between inside and out by taking materials used on the interior and extending them outside, reinforcing the idea that terraces and decks were extensions of the interior spaces.

The terraces also offered prime pool-watching, a theatrical experience enhanced by multicolored landscape lighting. Leach in particular was intrigued by the idea of the pool as a stage set—a notion advanced by Busby Berkeley spectaculars and musicals starring swimmer Esther Williams—and he proposed that the Jack Tar pool host water ballets and style shows like those at the Shamrock in Houston.[8] Price himself viewed the Jack Tar pool as an idyllic Eden, emulating a South Seas lagoon. But Price's lagoon differed from the jungle swimming holes of 1930s Hollywood movies: it was manicured and polished and comprised of many layers. There were lawns, planters sprouting dense tropical foliage, flagstone-paved terraces, a waterfall, steps cascading down to the water's edge, a sinuous bridge, and, most important, the free-form surface of the water. The interplay between the water and surrounding hardscape was defined by a humble though important feature—the scum gutter. Price obviously understood the formal implications of this component, opting to use it instead of newer technologies.[9] This narrow gutter separated the surface of the water from its context both vertically and horizontally, allowing the flagstone terrace to engage or disengage the water's edge or to delaminate vertically to form the bridge. At the deep end of the pool Price set planters high above the surface of the water, simulating a gorge, with the diving board carved into the planter wall. Normally, a sheer masonry wall surrounding the deep end of a pool would seem unsafe, but the gutter offered a graspable continuous rung at the water's edge.

For guests, the manicured Eden at the Jack Tar courtyard was an appealing alternative to the rough-hewn Galveston coastline, according to long-term Price employee and Houston architect Louis Frey, and compelling enough to compete with the natural beachscape in a similar way that Morris Lapidus' Hotel Fontainebleau in Miami Beach does. So important was the pool to the overall architectural composition that was featured on most postcards that advertised the facility. A high-contrast, conceptual pictorial view of the pool/terrace

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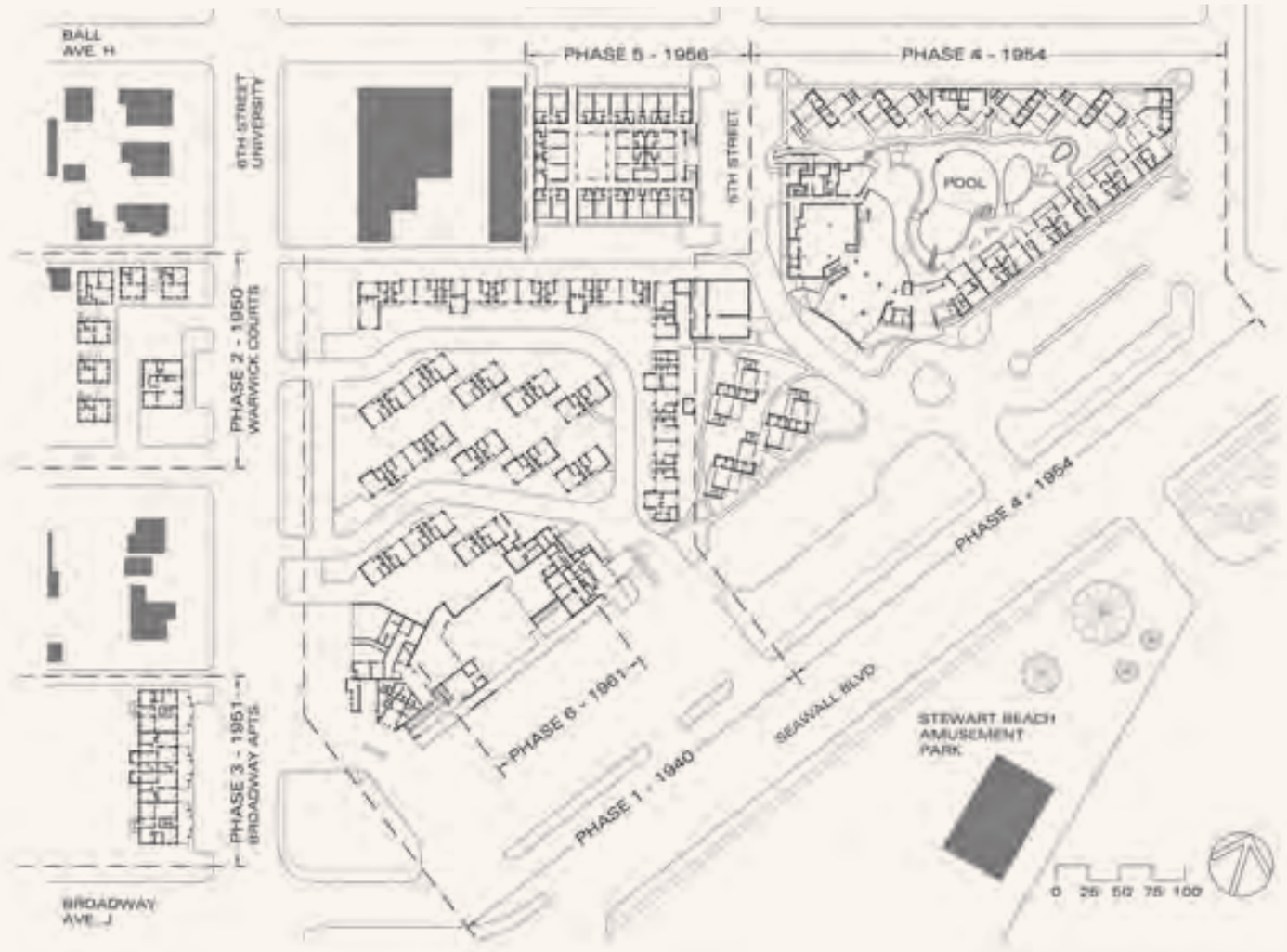


Each phase in Jack Tar development.

was imprinted on motel stationery and other marketing materials. The pool and terraces became so popular that visitors flocked to the Jack Tar even if their rooms did not face the pool, as long as they had access. Sammons noted this and soon bought land north of the original 1940 section and east of the 1954 addition for another expansion. Instead of continuing with the low-density, maximum-amenity formula initiated by Price and Leach, however, Sammons directed that the new building should maximize the number of rooms per acre. The result more closely resembled an office building than a component of a mid-century resort.[10] In 1960, continuing this approach of adding amenities without the benefit of adjacency to the pool and terrace, Sammons and Leach returned to the office of Thomas Price for an infill project in the original 1940 section of the complex. The project established an urban edge along Seawall Boulevard, but it marginalized the original portion of the property by blocking views of the Gulf of Mexico from many units. Architecturally, the Jack Tar fell victim to its own successes.

In 1968, Ed Leach retired, triggering events that would shutter the Jack Tar in Galveston.

After many shifts in ownership, the hotel was sold in 1973 to First South Dakota, Inc., and the name changed to the Islander Beach.[11] By 1981, fire and building code violations had caused a large section to be condemned; in April of 1983, then-owner Roberto Lee hired criminals to set the hotel ablaze so he could collect insurance proceeds. (Lee would later be convicted of arson, conspiracy, and mail fraud.) After final blows from Hurricane Alicia (which struck Galveston in August 1983) and two more fires, the hotel was demolished in 1988. On its site stands the just-opened Emerald Condominiums, a 15-story, mixed-use project.

From original project through multiple alterations, the Galveston Jack Tar illustrates that in no case are substantial financial backing, superb management, or sensitive environmental design enough to assure success. This occurs when the three components converge, as they did on the 1954 Jack Tar addition which, by any measure, was one of the great midcentury motels in the United States.

1. Data taken from the inside cover of a 1940 matchbook advertising Affiliated National Hotels

2.Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), 180.

3.Maury Darst, "What is now an eyesore was once an island showplace," *Galveston Daily News*, 21 Dec. 1987: 1A & 9A.

4."Auto Court is Planned for Privacy," *Architectural Record*, July 1940: 98-99.

5. Ellen Beasley and Stephen Fox, *Galveston Architecture Guidebook* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1996), 235.

6. Pauline Leach, telephone interview with author, 11 July 2007. Pauline Leach is the widow of Ed C. Leach.

7. "Jack Tar Addition is Ultra Modern," *Galveston Daily News*, 31 July 1954:

8. "Swimming Pool to be Year 'Round Attraction," *Galveston Daily News*, 31 July 1954: 7.

9. Van Leewan, *The Springboard in the Pond: An Intimate History of the Swimming Pool*, 185, 186.

10. "Jack Tar Hotels-First Four Years of a Chain," *Hotel Management*, June 1957; 56

11. Darst, 1A & 9A.

PLANS DRAWN BY GUY CARWILE FROM PREVIOUS PUBLISHED PLANS IN ARCHITECTURAL RECORD, JULY 1940 AND JULY 1953, AND HOTEL MANAGEMENT, JUNE 1957

the suburb of tomorrow

Frank Sharp and the legacy of **Oak Forest**

by *Randal L. Hall*

In the mid-1920s, at the age of 19, Frank W. Sharp left the family farm in Crockett, Texas, for big-city Houston. By day he worked as a carpenter's helper and attended business college at night. His co-workers and fellow students must have detected a glint in his eye, some early sign of his ambition even then. Sharp would ultimately reshape the city several times over and ride the housing boom so high that when he fell he would take the governor of Texas down with him.

Sharp got started with a $150 loan building homes during Houston's oil-driven growth in the 1930s. During World War II, Sharp built housing in Jacinto City and Texas City. As the war drew to a close, Sharp foresaw Houston's extension to the northwest beyond Garden Oaks, which was begun by E. L. Crain just outside the city limits in 1937, and bought 1,132 well-located acres of adjacent land.

Oak Forest came into being in 1946 and Sharp laid out 4,780 lots by mid-1947. He drew on his wartime experience building large numbers of units, and on the ideas and people behind Garden Oaks. He hired the architectural firm Wilson, Morris, and Crain (later famous for creating the Astrodome) to design all the houses. As with Crain's work in Garden Oaks, the building of Oak Forest was "speeded by the precutting of framing members and the preassembly of wall framing sections, cabinets, windows and doors."[1] The design of kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, and trim were also standardized, but the variations in plans allowed the company to have the advertising slogan, "No two houses are alike."

Sharp initially planned to carry out every aspect of developing Oak Forest. He owned Frank W. Sharp Enterprises, an umbrella company that ran four smaller entities: a firm doing concrete and street work; the Douglas Fir Lumber Company, whose two mills in the Northwest kept Sharp immune from widespread shortages of lumber; the Oak Forest Corporation to handle development and merchandising; and the Frank W. Sharp Construction Company to handle the building. A closely connected company did the millwork. His production schedule called for peak output of an extraordinary twenty houses each day. A three-bedroom home with 852 square feet sold for $9,050, while a two-bedroom model with 737 square feet sold for $8,000.

In July 1948, Oak Forest got a dose of national publicity when *Better Homes and Gardens* featured several of its homes. At that point nearly a thousand had been completed. The magazine reported that the projected investment of $32 million with a planned population of 25,000 people meant that Oak Forest was "one of the largest privately financed, single-family home developments in United States or world history." It lauded the attributes of the houses: "attractive outside and inside color schemes, big windows, lots of closets, planned kitchens, screened porches, and individuality for each house." The distinctiveness of each building held particular significance at a time when suburban developments often took fire for their lack of individuality. According to the article, "Of the first 400 houses built in Oak Forest, only two were alike in planning and only two were white in color."

Frank Sharp

In September 1948, Sharp shifted gears. Rising material prices and the cost of overhead had cut his profits. Small builders often beat his total production costs. He reinvented his role, allowing other builders (such as Charles R. Brace, who previously had a large role in developing Garden Oaks) to take over construction in Oak Forest while Sharp provided lumber at a good price, accounting support, and so on. Skilled laborers were paid at a piece rate. It was "an extraordinary free-enterprise system of piecework and subcontracting," according to Architectural Forum.[2]

As the community grew, Sharp saw new avenues for profit. In 1953, he proposed to start the Peoples State Bank in Oak Forest and commissioned two economists to analyze the area's potential. Their report projected that 1,301 new houses would be built "in the immediate Oak Forest area" during 1953. One new shopping center with 12,000 square feet on Ella Boulevard on the border between Oak Forest and Garden Oaks was to open on May 1, 1953. It would house "two doctors, one dentist, one lawyer, one jewelry store, one liquor store, one ladies-ready-to-wear store, one general merchandise store and one bakery."[3] In addition, Sharp had two larger centers under construction.

In 1955, Oak Forest neared completion. At age forty-eight, Sharp began development of Sharpstown, a projected ten-square-mile community on Houston's west side that would earn him national fame. At its dedication, Norman Mason, the Federal Housing Admin-

New construction next to an original Oak Forest house.

...Oak Forest was "one of the LARGEST PRIVATELY FINANCED, SINGLE-FAMILY HOME DEVELOPMENTS in United States or world history."

PROPOSED BANK WILL SERVE NORTHWEST HOUSTON

Promotional rendering of what would be the Oak Forest State Bank.

istration's commissioner, called the subdivision "a new experiment in our way of life."

The scale of Sharp's ambition for Sharpstown was the biggest change from Oak Forest. *Popular Science* breathlessly reported, "On the gusty plains at the edge of Houston, Texans are building—on Texas scale—the Suburb of Tomorrow. It's billed, natch, as the biggest real-estate subdivision in the world: 25,000 homes, 100,000 people." In the exciting new world, Oak Forest was left in the dust as simply Sharp's "first biggest-in-the-world development." Sharpstown did not quite reach the size initially estimated, totaling about 15,000 homes on 4,000 acres, but it rightly was Sharp's crowning real estate achievement.

Sharp expanded his business enterprise into banking and insurance, but in early 1971 his reputation crashed in a massive financial and political scandal. Sharp schemed to manipulate the stock price of an insurance company he controlled, with the hope of gaining passage of a favorable bank bill in the Texas legislature. He made unsecured bank loans to various political figures, including Governor Preston Smith, and they used the money to buy stock in Sharp's insurance company. Through friendships with the Jesuit Fathers of Houston, Sharp persuaded the group to borrow money from the bank and then loan it to his realty company. He later convinced the fathers to buy, at artificially high prices, the insurance company stock owned by the politicians. But the Securities and Exchange Commission did its job and uncovered Sharp's maneuvers. The Sharpstown State Bank collapsed. Nationally Sharp became just another example of that "well-established stock figure in the folklore of American villainy:" the "Texas flimflam man."[4] In 1971, he pleaded guilty to securities and banking violations. Though he received only a $5,000 fine and three years of probation, his reputation and influence never revived.

While the property values and demographics of the Sharpstown area changed dramatically when many whites fled to more-distant suburbs, Oak Forest remained more stable. Given that the banking scandal has all but faded from memory, Oak Forest may well be Frank Sharp's enduring legacy. But in typical Houston fashion, the location and attractiveness of the neighborhood's plan appear to be the undoing of its original character. Older ranches and cottages are being scrapped and replaced, though the current economic downtown may slow the bulldozers down. Some builders respect the restrained size of the original construction, but many have plopped down mega-houses. On the other hand, the new homes—though jarring—could be said to match the brash expansiveness of the one-time farm-boy who built the neighborhood.

1. "Texas Subdivision Has 4780 Different Houses," Architectural Forum 87 (July 1947): 86–87.
2. "A New Method of Merchant Building," Architectural Forum 91 (September 1949): 75–77.
3. John P. Owen and Alan D. Carey, A Survey of the Oak Forest Area to Determine the Economic Validity of the Charter Application of the Proposed Peoples State Bank ([Houston], no publisher, March 1953), 27–29.
4. A. James Reichley, "The Texas Banker Who Bought Politicians," Fortune, December 1971, p. 95.

OAK FOREST STREET PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL HESTER

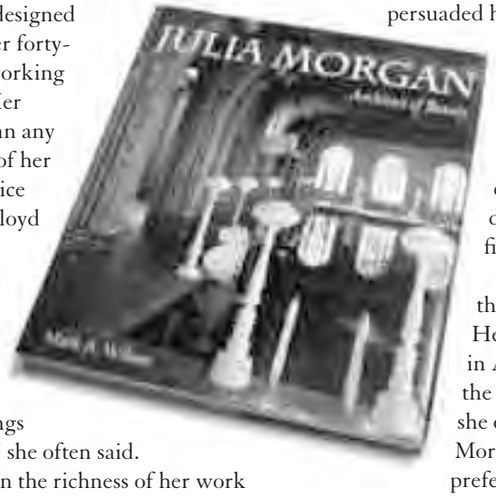
A WOMAN'S WORK

Julia Morgan: Architect of Beauty
(Mark A. Wilson, Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2007, 232 pages, $60, hardcover)

by Barry Moore

THOSE REARED OR EDUCATED IN THE BAY AREA MIGHT dimly remember Julia Morgan as the architect who assisted William Randolph Hearst in designing San Simeon, his great monument to his ego, and for very little else.

But the record of her achievements is stunningly rich and varied. Living from 1872 to 1957, Morgan, as a sole practitioner, designed over 750 buildings over forty-two years, famously working eighteen-hour days. Her output was greater than any other major architect of her generation—about twice the output of Frank Lloyd Wright, in fact. That she almost slipped from memory is more due to her dislike of publicity rather than the quality of her work. "Let my buildings speak for themselves," she often said.



Now we can revel in the richness of her work in *Julia Morgan: Architect of Beauty* by Mark A. Wilson. The first major publication on Morgan, this is one of the most handsome and most beautifully illustrated volumes on my architectural shelf. Wilson has combined readable research with exceptional color photographs of Monica Lee and Joel Puliatti, and collected historic drawings and photos. The result is a visual feast.

Julia Morgan was a true feminist pioneer. Interested early in architecture at the University of California, she enrolled in Bernard Maybeck's descriptive geometry class. After working in his office for two years after graduation, he persuaded her to attend the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he had studied. The obstacles were formidable: a woman had never been admitted before. After three attempts at the admission exams, she was admitted, and distinguished herself by claiming first prize for her final design thesis.

While in France, she attracted the attention of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, one of the wealthiest women in America, and a great promoter of the University of California. When she offered financial assistance to Morgan, the young student declined, preferring to live on her limited funds. From that time, Mrs. Hearst became a lifelong mentor and friend.

Back in Berkeley in 1902, Morgan accepted a position with John Galen Howard to work on a new Hearst-inspired campus plan. She might have stayed there indefinitely had she not overheard her pompous boss say, "The best thing about this person is I pay her almost nothing, as it is a woman." Deciding immediately to move on, she passed her licensing examination in February 1904 and opened her own office the following month. She was the first woman with a full-time independent practice to become a registered architect.

The ensuing work of Morgan placed her firmly in the First Bay Tradition, which was characterized by the following:

1. Use of local, natural materials
2. Combination of historic motifs with modern materials and methods
3. Careful integration with surroundings, bringing the outdoors indoors
4. Each building a unique design, fulfilling the needs of client and community

Julia Morgan's first large commissions came from her champion, Mrs. Hearst, for five buildings for the Mills College campus in Piedmont, California, over the years 1903 to 1909. "El Campanil," the iconic bell tower, was the first reinforced concrete building west of the Mississippi. Her reputation as the best structural engineer on the West Coast earned her the task of redesigning the Fairmont Hotel after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Shortly after these very public projects, Morgan's reputation soared. She undertook the Oakland YWCA in 1915, and its success led directly to eighteen more assignments for the "Y," including Hollywood, Salt Lake City, Phoenix, Honolulu, and Tokyo. The Berkeley Women's City Club, 1928-29, her second largest building, in many ways best demonstrates the skill and finesse of the architect. This book is especially generous with photographs of the Conference Grounds at Asilomar, adjacent to Pacific Grove on Monterrey Bay.

Phoebe Hearst died in the Influenza Epidemic of 1918, and Morgan was asked to design the Hearst Memorial Gymnasium for Women at UC Berkeley in 1924—still one of the most elegant classical structures on campus.

Morgan's client relationship with William Randolph Hearst began when he asked her to design a new headquarters and printing plant for the Los Angeles Examiner in 1915; he thought it would be a good idea to work with his mother's favorite architect. Four years later he began to redevelop his father's ranch, San Simeon, into a personal Shangri-La, with Julia Morgan collaborating every step of the way—one of the great client-architect partnerships in US history. The site was an enormous 250,000 acres, with fourteen miles of Pacific coastline. She began working on the site when she was forty-eight years old, and continued until her seventy-fifth year designing 165 rooms, 127 acres of gardens, and a Neptune pool holding 245,000 gallons of water.

Julia Morgan: Architect of Beauty is a long-deserved tribute to one of America's most talented and prolific architects. In the words of Kit Ratcliff, an architect in Emeryville, "She created structures in which people continually experience a sense of well-being—even a century after they are built."

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A NOD TO DECORATION

Houston Deco: Modernistic Architecture of the Texas Coast (Jim Parsons and David Bush, Bright Sky Press, 2008, 192 pages, $24.95, hardback)

by Anna Mod

Then, as today, Houston has forged its own style —not Southern, not Midwestern, not Western. Totally Texan, totally independent, playing by its own rules. At times that independence has lead to the loss of some of the early 20th-century structures that told the story of Houston's "coming out" years when the foundation was being laid for the dynamic international city of today.
-Madeleine McDermott Hamm, Foreword.

Houston Deco: Modernistic Architecture of the Texas Coast is a welcome companion to regional art deco publications *Cowtown Moderne*, *Pueblo Deco*, and *Tulsa Art Deco* and rightfully puts our region on the deco architectural tour map. Written by historic preservationist David Bush, currently the director of information and programs for the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, and Jim Parsons, a freelance writer, editor, and GHPA volunteer, Houston Deco includes both modest and high-style masterpieces from the metropolitan area and surrounding Gulf Coast counties. The book is long overdue and serves as a reminder that our city, despite its renown for demolishing everything in site in the name of economic growth and progress, has stunning and important architectural treasures so obviously worthy of the uphill battle to include preservation as part of our civic culture and consciousness.

The book is organized according to the building's original use: commercial, theaters, institutional, residential, and industrial, with a final chapter titled "Hidden History" that includes side-by-side historic and current photos of some of Houston's more recognizable slip-covered buildings—the gems waiting to be rediscovered. The foreword, written by former *Houston Chronicle* Home Design Editor Madeleine McDermott Hamm, boldly states what we Texans like to hear: "If Art Deco had not emerged in 1925 in Paris at the "Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes," the then-new style probably would have been born in Houston." She goes on to say, "Houston and Ar Deco belonged together . . . Fresh and bold, bot looked to the future, not toward the past. . . Ho ton was (and is) a forward-looking city, ready t embrace and advance the newest, freshest ideas Yes! Hamm draws the parallels between the sty and the city's rejection of traditional decorative forms and elements during the 1920s when Hou ton was experiencing unprecedented growth an purposefully strove to distinguish itself as a gro ing American city. The book backs her up show iconic works, such as the San Jacinto monumen La Porte and the Gulf Building downtown, bot designed by Alfred Finn, that serve as institutio beacons and set the new design standard for sub quent theaters, studios, apartment houses and o small commercial buildings. Art Moderne exam are also included and visually demonstrate the stripping down of the decorative elements of th deco style and modernism crept into the buildin vocabulary. The introduction provides the read with enough background to distinguish betwee deco and moderne and highlights the careers of deco masters Alfred Finn and Joseph Finger in Houston as well as Fred Stone and Augustin Ba in Beaumont. The accompanying web site, www.HoustonDeco.org, includes more informa tion on local advocacy efforts as well as a helpfu timeline of the buildings.

Despite our jaded belief that we tear everyth down, this book reminds us to get out and take look. The authors provide commentary on som of the threatened buildings, such as the Alabam and River Oaks Theaters and lament the loss of one wing of the River Oaks Community Center Since publication, the Hawthorne & McGee Ser Station in Beaumont has been sadly demolished Publications such as this do not pretend they ca will save these buildings—their goal is to educa about the architectural treasures scattered arou the region where, like most places, they are app ated, neglected, threatened, revered, and loving restored.

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the *afterlives* of buildings

by Polly Morrice

NOT LONG AGO I TOOK MY TEENAGED SON TO THE TAILOR'S SHOP. The plain storefront, tucked in near the end of a strip mall, is run by two Vietnamese women—they look to be mother and daughter—who work seven days a week, though both seem to have passed the age when many would put up their thimbles. The space is crammed: with clothes in various stages of creation or alteration, racks of Simplicity and Butterick patterns in 1980s styles, boxes of old magazines, multiple volumes of the Time-Life series on the Vietnam War, outdated Chinese restaurant calendars, and small shrines–one to the Virgin Mary, one to Buddha, one to a deity I cannot identify. A heady incense smell competes with garlicky cooking.

My son was overwhelmed. He has autism, and while his form of the disorder is fairly mild, the sensory impact of the shop was hard for him to handle. Outside, I tried to explain: the country the women had immigrated from, their work, and finally, why they burned incense at the shrines. His face cleared; he understood.

"Oh," he said. "They're Shriners."

I didn't correct him. For my son the world's data enters in a rush—of noise, of images—and he sorts things out via an acute visual memory, a love of patterns, and deeply associative thinking. Linking "shrines" to "Shriners" reassured him because we live near a former Shrine Temple. The building was sold last year—it's on a prime parcel at the corner of North Braeswood and Brompton—but, perhaps because of the economic downturn, it still stands. When we drive home from errands, my son asks what's going to happen to it.

Because he knows that buildings go missing. In our neighborhood, sturdy mid-to-late 1950s ranch houses and mundane commercial strips alike have been scraped away for new construction. As we head south on Buffalo Speedway, he wants to know if I recall the old auto repair place. Or the blue carport across the street from it, full of broken-down vehicles. I don't. Townhouses replaced those forgettable structures nearly a decade ago, and for me, it is as if the three-story, neo-Mediterraneans behind gated drives have always been there. For my son, the upscale development is superimposed on an earlier, exact blueprint. In Hollywood thrillers, children see dead people; my son sees vanished buildings.

The way those with autism think is sometimes labeled alien. I would argue that my son's apprehension of his surroundings is a more heightened version of most people's need to invest places with meaning. We develop rituals around where we live and work. Our preference for the known may explain why some drivers find one route to work and doggedly stick to it, even when road construction makes the going awful. Just as the sewing patterns in the tailor's shop create garments—bridesmaid dresses, three-button blazers—that help create identities, the urban fabric invests and is invested with our changing selves. We order our lives by it. We tack memories of bad dates and sick children to it. We're wired to honor its social and historical boundaries, even when these abruptly change.

One lost establishment my son repeatedly invokes is The Ranch, a nightclub that once occupied a shambling strip center on Buffalo Speedway and is now the subject of many an internet blog post. As one nostalgic contributor notes, until the owner sold out to a developer in the 1990s, The Ranch was "the world's largest lesbian nightclub." In the 1960s the space housed Dome Shadows, a popular rock venue that featured Steppenwolf and the 13th Floor Elevators. On the fan site that commemorates this club, webpages of newspaper clippings vie with the testimonies of a photographer, a booking agent, a woman who claims she won a "hot pants" contest. An amateur historian chimes in that Judge Roy Hofheinz, father of the nearby Astrodome, took Dome Shadows' proprietor to court for infringing on the name of his creation. In my son's view, The Ranch is most memorable for its last daytime tenants—artist friends who specialize in conservation framing, which prolongs the life of fragile works. They lost their lease when the club was sold.

In Houston, of course, no place is sacred—not the largest lesbian club in the world, nor its so-called Eighth Wonder. If, as seems possible, the Astrodome goes the way of Dome Shadows and The Ranch–whose volleyball net, horseshoe pits, and country-and-western dance floor were replaced by townhouses—it will no doubt spawn its own memorial websites. Someday, too, the Shrine Temple will engender a cybershrine, ornamented with white, quasi-Moorish arches along its banner and sidebars. There its image will persist, a permanent if bodiless monument.

Some buildings do have an afterlife. In cyberspace, in our best or sorest memories.

And in my son's mind.

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