

Cite

THE
ARCHITECTURE
+ DESIGN
REVIEW OF HOUSTON

GAME ON

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after the
Americans
with Disabilities
Act have
we passed go?



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ABOUT THE COVER: Illustration by Brian Holderman, a Pittsburgh-based graphic artist and painter known for work that blends his illustration and hand-drawn typography with traditional graphic design.

Write for Cite

Cite is greater Houston's forum for architectural, design, and planning issues. Articles should address a broad audience and include reviews, essays, analyses, 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.

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.

CONTRIBUTORS

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KELLY MOORE, a PhD candidate in Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Houston, writes nonfiction and poetry.

JULIA MANDELL is a designer, planner, writer and editor. An architect-trained landscape designer at SWA Group in Houston, she

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
RICE UNIVERSITY
P.O. BOX 1892
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77251-1892

focuses on the intersections of architecture and landscape and urban natural systems planning.

JOHN MIXON is Law Alumni Professor at the University of Houston Law Center, where he taught for more than 50 years. His reference book *Texas Municipal Zoning Law* was first published in 1985.

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JOE SELF is an architect and founding principal of FIRM817. As a graduate of Rice University he was happy to review a Houston project.

LAURA SPANJIAN is Sustainability Director for the City of Houston.

JACK THOMPSON is a photographer based in Houston.



LEFT: Julia Mandell
RIGHT: Susan Rogers

LETTER FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

This issue of *Cite* features articles on a broad range of topics. In all the pieces, the unpredictable development patterns of Houston play a role. The lack of planning and zoning here, or the "ad hoc" form of zoning as John Mixon describes it in his contribution, leads to innumerable challenges for individuals, communities, and designers. The vagaries of Houston's growth at times feels like a game, fun and entertaining, grueling and shameless, rewarding some and relegating others to deprivation. We sought to highlight proactive responses and efforts to take a stand.

Kelly Moore navigates Houston in a wheelchair. She explores gaps and back alleys on her wheels that are "large, curvy hips that sometimes shimmy and sometimes coast, always whirring beneath [her] circling arms." Her beautifully written essay goes well beyond documenting the obstacles she faces, such as steps and broken sidewalks. She does more than consider the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) twenty years after its passage. Moore's insider-outsider perspective gives all of us a chance to see our culture, our bodies, and our city anew.

The anchor article in the issue is a survey of new downtown buildings. The vast stretches of surface parking lots seem to be filling in, though the process is halting—a two steps forward one step back dance that can be hard to keep faith in. Is the center of the city beginning to come back to life? *Cite* has a special role, as the only consistent forum on architecture in Houston, to provide an independent look. Writer and artist Kelly Klaasmeyer takes on that challenge.

A house designed by Ronnie Self for himself and his partner is a pleasure to consider. Though the house is perched on the edge of the canyon-like interchange of Highways 59 and 288 and offers sweeping views of the city, reviewer Joe Self (of no relation to Ronnie) does not allow himself to be consumed by the context. He keeps his sights on the rigorous plan.

Susan Rogers and Maria Oran present a data-rich analysis of the distribution of grocery stores in Houston, revealing food deserts and gluts. The information juxtaposes protests against new stores in affluent areas with the complete lack of access to fresh foods in other neighborhoods. The question of food, community, and justice returns in the final piece, an excerpt of a rousing speech given by Houston's Sustainability Director Laura Spanjian.

The aim of *Cite* is to raise the level of debate and standards of architecture and design in Houston by bringing sustained attention to the challenges we face. We do not imagine all readers will agree with the positions taken by these writers. Rather, we hope this issue will serve as a starting point for discussion and action.

JULIA MANDELL

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Taking Houston to the Cutting Edge of the Local Food Movement



Cleveland Turner, the "Flower Man,"
weighs in on the Saint Emanuel House
on page 29.

RDA GALA

PROGRESSIVE ART

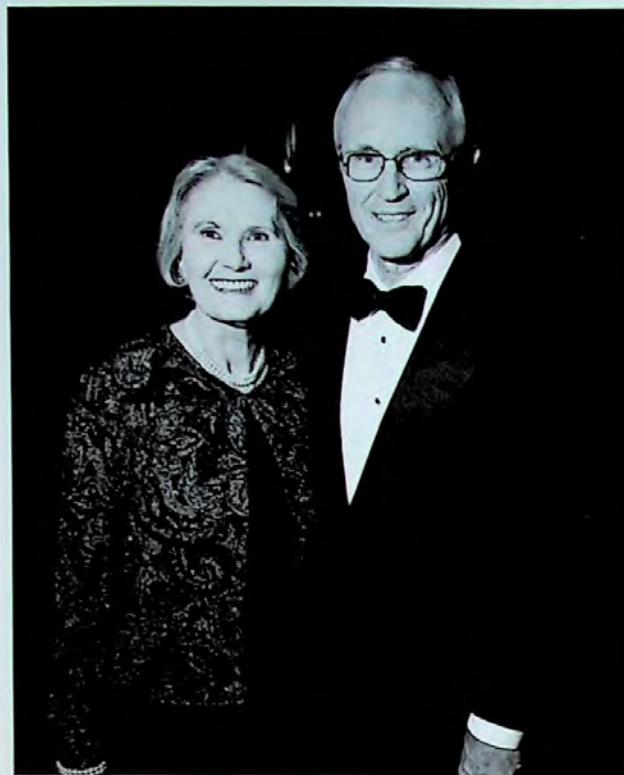
Infrastructure, Greenspaces, and Waterways

PROGRESSIVE ART: INFRASTRUCTURE, GREENSPACES, AND WATERWAYS was the theme of the Rice Design Alliance gala where over one thousand members of Houston's architecture, engineering, and construction industries gathered at the Hilton Americas hotel on November 13 to honor Art Storey, Executive Director of the Harris County Public Infrastructure Department. Storey is credited with making Houston's bayous more efficient and beautiful community spaces. Under his leadership, LEED principles and historic values have been respected in the design and construction of new Harris County buildings and the reconstruction and renovation of the historic 1910 courthouse.

Fundraising chair Doug Combes was in great spirits as almost \$500,000 was raised to fund RDA programs. PGAL's David Andrews, along with Las Vegas associate Ron Singer, designed the ballroom environment which featured entry gates hung with blue and green fabric, suggesting greenspaces and waterways. Designer Rebekah Johnson provided floral arrangements of blue hydrangeas and natural grasses to complement the blue, green, and brown tablecloths (the infrastructure) sweeping through the ballroom.

Guests pored over the silent auction, known to be one of the city's best, and Auction Chair Mary Beth Woicak was delighted to see guests bid furiously over the curated display of designer items, including work donated by Houston artists and galleries.

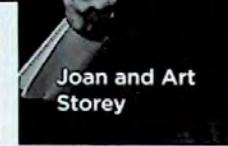
KHOU-TV Channel 11 reporter Katherine Whaley quickly got the crowd's attention during dinner when she introduced RDA President Kimberly Hickson who with Gala Chairs David and Norma George presented honoree Art Storey, who humbly accepted accolades from the crowd that included Rice President David Leebron and Y. Ping Sun, Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, and Rice School of Architecture Dean Sarah Whiting.



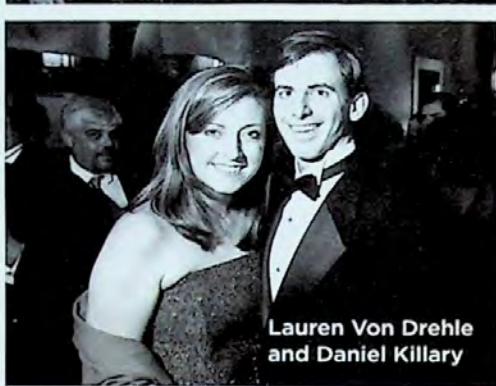
Y. Ping Sun and David Leebron



Kristin Skarbovig and Mary Beth Woicak



Joan and Art Storey



Lauren Von Drehle and Daniel Killary



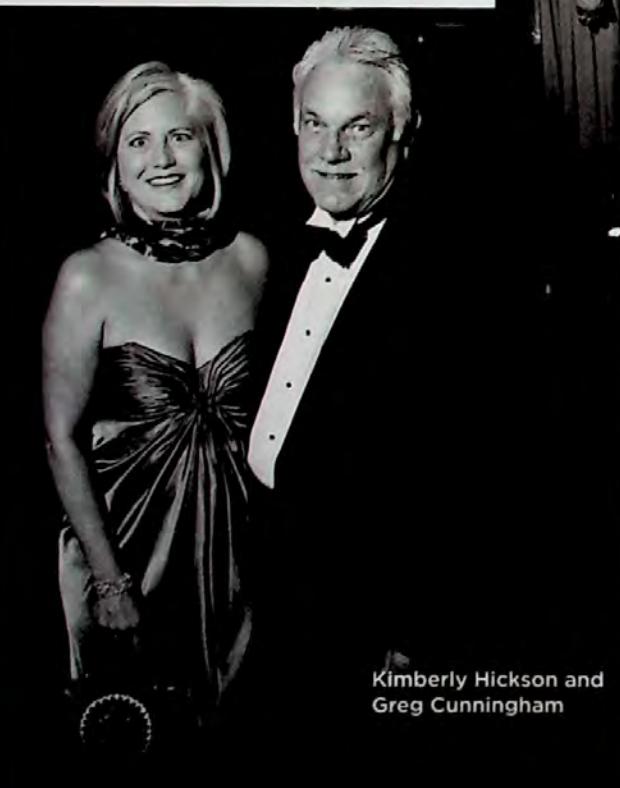
Celania Ramirez, Liz Fischer, and Derek Smith



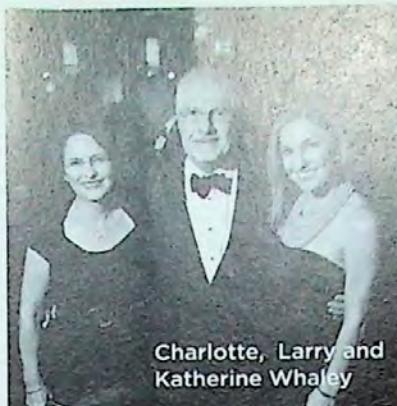
Joseph and Michelle Hatton-Rodriguez



Fares El-Dahdah, David and Rachel Dewane



Kimberly Hickson and Greg Cunningham



Charlotte, Larry and Katherine Whaley



Norma and David George



Will Ross and Delrae Weerts



Gwen and Ed Emmett



Mélanie Herz-Promecene and Chris Promecene



Ron Witte and Sarah Whiting

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PLAT, A NEW STUDENT PUBLICATION FROM RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, RELEASED ITS SECOND ISSUE, WHICH "TRACES THE IMPOSTOR THROUGH ITS MANIFESTATIONS FROM CHARACTER TO PRACTICE."
PLATJOURNAL.COM



THE NEW NATURAL

Following the industrial revolution, our environment has been so fundamentally altered that it has resulted in an ambiguity between the natural and artificial. Once considered invasive, the industrial object has become so entrenched in the landscape that it appears as a native element. Within contemporary cities it is now the natural that reveals itself as an impostor resulting with the manufactured environment as the new natural. – Justin Brammer and Tracy Bremer

CITINGS

>> NEWS FROM RICEDESIGNALLIANCE.ORG

WEB SITE THRIVES

LThe RDA website features commentary and podcasts from its civic forums and lectures, a calendar of RDA events and events sponsored by other area organizations, travel journals from RDA city tours, and several resources including links to OffCite.org, the *Cite* blog, and CiteMag.org, a new website featuring free access to the magazine archives.



FROM LEFT: Petra Blaisse, founder of Inside Outside; A house and a bus shelter designed by LA DALLMAN.

> ANYTHING THAT FLOATS

Hosted by rdAGENTS, a young professional group within RDA, Anything That Floats challenges participants to build a device to float a short distance along Buffalo Bayou with discarded building materials provided that day by RDA. The April 9 event will be followed by Bayou Buddies' Bayou Bash, where participants can enjoy live music, pontoon boat rides, crawfish, and libations. Visit ricedesignalliance.org for more information.

> SALLY WALSH LECTURE FEATURES PETRA BLAISSE

Petra Blaisse started her career at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in the Department of Applied Arts. From 1987, she worked as a freelance designer and won distinction for her installations of architectural work. Gradually her focus shifted to the use of textiles, light, and finishes in interior space and, at the same time, to the design of gardens and landscapes. In 1991, she founded Inside Outside, a studio working in a multitude of creative areas, including textile, landscape, and exhibition design.

Since 1999 Blaisse has invited specialists of various disciplines to work with her, and currently the team consists of about ten people of different nationalities.

Inside Outside works globally on projects of increasing technical sophistication, ambition, and scale. Throughout the years, Inside Outside has collaborated with various architects and designers, including Rem Koolhous OMA on the Seattle Public Library. Blaisse has lectured and taught extensively in Europe, Asia, and the United States. Her work has been included in numerous design and architecture exhibits internationally. In 2000 a solo exhibition on Inside Outside's work was organized at the Storefront for Art and Architecture in Soho, New York, for which Dutch graphic designer Irma Boom created Blaisse's first publication, the catalogue *Movements, 25%*. The first monograph on the work of Petra Blaisse / Inside Outside was published February 2007 by NAI Publishers and was reprinted by The Monacelli Press (October 2009).

The lecture, sponsored by RDA, Rice School of Architecture, The Architecture Center of Houston, and AIA Houston, will be held Wednesday, April 13 at 7:00 p.m. in The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Brown Auditorium.

> SPOTLIGHT WINNER ANNOUNCED

This year's third annual Spotlight Award is being given to partners Grace La and James Dallman of the firm LA DALLMAN. The award, which recognizes exceptionally gifted architects in the early phase of their professional careers, carries a cash prize.

Based in Minneapolis, LA DALLMAN is responsible for such innovative projects as Pittsburgh's Allegheny Square; the Chazen Art Museum in Madison, Wisconsin; UWM Hillel Student Center; and Great Lakes Future permanent exhibits at Milwaukee's Discovery World, among countless others.

According to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "Grace La and James Dallman ... are considered rising stars They understand the hidden

connections among landscape, history and design." The RDA's Spotlight Committee found their talent palpable during their evaluation period. Committee member and architecture professor at the University of Houston, Rafael Longoria says, "La and Dallman are great examples for architects in Houston. They have advanced a form of sustainability that goes beyond following a checklist of best practices. Their project revitalizing 1960s high-rise residential buildings is a leading example of urban recycling. It is inspirational to see the quality of work being produced by a small firm from Milwaukee."

Dallman and La will speak September 7 at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, when they accept their award.

> GALA SAVE THE DATE

Rice Design Alliance's 2011 Gala will be held November 12. Please plan to join us.

LETTERS

CITE ENCOURAGES READERS TO SEND LETTERS, INCLUDING CRITICAL ONES, TO MANKAD@RICE.EDU.

CITE 84

Looks like the last issue's a keeper.
Burke Evans

Absolutely my favorite issue of *Cite*. I poured over every word. And the cover was really cool. Tradition and making stuff together as family, it just doesn't get better than that.

Chula Ross Sanchez

Kudos to all. One of the very best issues ever,
Gerald Moorhead, FAIA LEED AP

That was the best *Cite* magazine to date. Houston was captured well. Beautiful photos, excellent subjects. Great city. I miss it.

Stephanie Eugster



84 is one of the all-time great *Cite* issues: great theme, witty and incisive writing, stunning photography, and beautifully realized design.

Christof Spieler

The issues of *Cite* don't often elicit motivation for me to offer a con-

gratulations, but this past issue was superb in so many ways. It provided interesting information that will last longer than the hour it took me to read the issue and did so with good writing and photographs. I loved it and hoped that others will as well. If this issue signals a change in direction, I applaud the efforts and approach taken in its assembly. The local business spotlights were so informative. Thanks again for the work.

David Himel

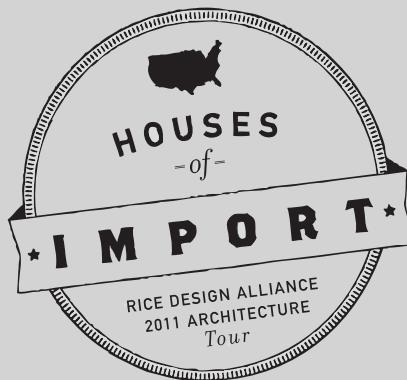
MARK YOUR CALENDAR!



RDA ANNUAL ARCHITECTURE TOUR: HOUSES OF IMPORT

SATURDAY & SUNDAY / APRIL 2-3, 2011 / 1:00 P.M. - 6:00 P.M.

HOUSES OF IMPORT presents a unique side of Houston through the designs of non-Houstonians. RDA's tour showcases how visiting architects provide fresh insight and inspiration, adding to Houston's architectural vitality. Additionally, this tour reveals how unique characteristics of Houston – climate, history, transportation, landscape, and lack of zoning – are interpreted from an “outsider's” perspective. Ultimately, Houses of Import will demonstrate how an emerging global design practice is beginning to have a substantive impact on our local residential design market.



CALENDAR

TOURS

RDA ANNUAL ARCHITECTURE TOUR

Houses of Import
Saturday and Sunday, April 2-3, 2011
1 p.m. - 6 p.m.
713.348.4876

RDAGENTS COMPETITION

ANYTHING THAT FLOATS

Saturday, April 9, 2011
7:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Sesquicentennial Park along Buffalo Bayou

LECTURES

SALLY WALSH LECTURE

Petra Blaisse
Wednesday, April 13, 2011
7 p.m.
The MFAH, Brown Auditorium

SPOTLIGHT

Grace La And James Dallman
Wednesday, September 7, 2011
7 p.m.
The MFAH, Brown Auditorium

GALA

RDA ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

Saturday, November 12, 2011

UNEXPECTED CITY



PUTTING YOUR HOUSTON ON THE MAP

HOUSTON'S UNEXPECTED PLACES—FROM THE WAREHOUSES SURROUNDING DOWNTOWN TO OLD-SCHOOL BARBERSHOPS TO OPEN FIELDS—GIVE THE CITY ITS SPARK. HOUSTONIANS ARE OFTEN WALKING LIBRARIES OF SUCH PLACES.

Rice Design Alliance has launched a campaign entitled **Unexpected City** that is asking for submissions for publication on Offcite. Send ideas to Katie.Plocheck@rice.edu. Places off the beaten path or a personal experience that provides fresh perspective on a familiar icon are welcome.

Visit Offcite.org to view the latest entries!

WHAT LESSONS LEARNED FROM IKE?

Houston Remains Vulnerable to Major Catastrophe

NEWS REPORTS FROM JAPAN SHOWING TOWNS

swept away by the recent tsunami and survivors fleeing from toxic leaks could be a preview of what lies ahead for the Houston area.

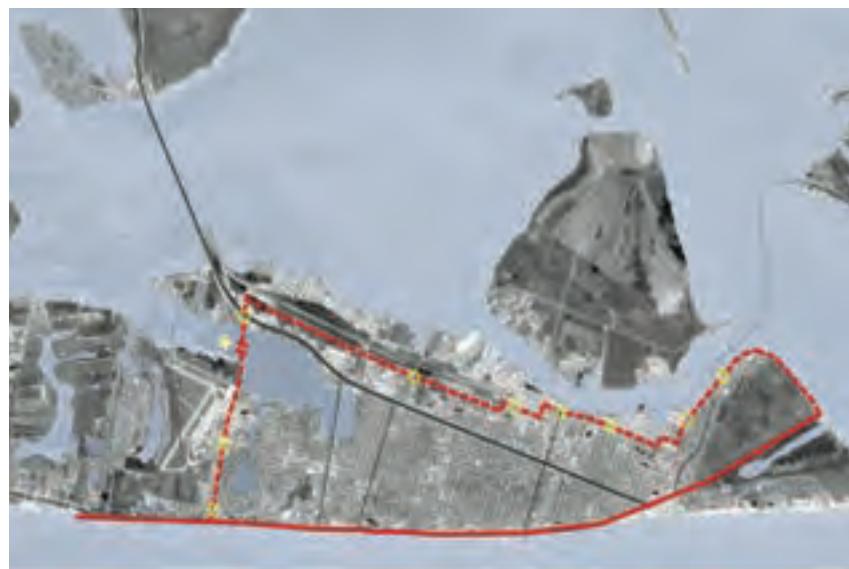
Had Hurricane Ike made landfall a mere 30 to 50 miles to the south, Houston's main water treatment plant would have been completely submerged, according to Dr. Phil Bedient, a professor of environmental engineering at Rice University, leading to a loss of safe drinking water for days if not many weeks. Moreover, refineries and processing plants along the ship channel would have contaminated the floodwaters, swamping the city in a toxic soup. He made these warnings as a panelist in an RDA civic forum focusing on hurricane planning and preparedness in the Houston/Galveston region on Wednesday, March 9.

In addition to Dr. Bedient, the forum featured County Judge Ed Emmett and Galveston Mayor Joe Jaworski. Lonnie Hoogeboom, Director of Planning and Design at Houston Downtown Management District and Rafael Longoria, ACSA Distinguished Professor at the University of Houston, both moderated the discussion.

Although no plans were discussed to prevent the flooding of the water treatment facility, Dr. Bedient did present several options for levees and dikes. One such option was to create a channel gate across the opening to the bay between Boliver Peninsula and Galveston Island. The strategies were more targeted than the grand "Ike Dike" proposal by Dr. Bill Merrell.

Attendees asked about possible land buy-outs to create no-build zones. Judge Emmett responded "of course it's possible, but to do it on a scale necessary—I don't see how you do that." He talked about the size of the population of Harris County. "Did you know that the unincorporated areas of Harris County, when taken together would be the seventh largest city in the US?" he asked.

Notably, Mayor Jaworski responded to the question of land buy-outs with some passion. "We gotta remember how we got here. Europeans came over



TOP: Proposed gate and levees across Houston Ship Channel.
ABOVE: Proposed levee around key sections of Galveston.

in boats and built where they landed. How do you forget that? We have to find a way to let people live there [Galveston Island] in order to service the port, the hospitality industries, the historical areas, and educational institutions. We need to build new homes to withstand the storms, build well and smart on Galveston Island," he said.

The hour-long forum seemed to raise more questions than answers. Solutions are only beginning to gain traction. Five years after Rita and two years after Ike, we must heed the final words of the evening from Lonnie Hoogeboom and just "pray that there isn't another big storm this year."

- Allison Parrott

TALKING FASHION DESIGN

Workshop Houston's Style Shop

THIS ARTICLE FOLLOWS UP ON AN INTERVIEW IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE OF C/ITE (84) WITH A STUDENT WHO DESIGNED AND BUILT HIS OWN BICYCLE AT WORKSHOP HOUSTON'S CHOPPER SHOP.

Under a haze that settles over the skyline, the houses-turned-workshops sit unassuming and quiet. Inside, though, there is a bustling of adolescent energy. Up a flight of steep stairs is the Style Shop where Arbay Muya spends her afternoons spinning ideas into clothes.

Before coming to the Style Shop, the 13 year old knew nothing about fashion. "I wore whatever clothes my mom got me." But since her participation in the program starting in September, Arbay has developed a sharp sense of personal style, rattling off her likes and dislikes as definitively as any designer in the industry. The Style Shop is Arbay's haven for fashionable self-expression, where she is free to use computers, sewing machines, screen prints, and presses to design and produce her own clothes and accessories.

She learns about different clothing lines and fabrics, and how to sew and make something out of nothing. What was once an old t-shirt becomes a book bag for Arbay's schoolbooks. Since she is required to wear a uniform, this book bag is the only piece from her self-made collection that makes it onto school grounds.

I ask her if she's received requests to make these bags for her friends. Arbay nods. "But I told my friend to come here instead and make her own t-shirt bag. What if I make it a certain style, and she doesn't like it?" For a young girl, Arbay possesses a keen sensibility towards those around her, freely acknowledging the vast possibilities of creative pursuits, willing to leave others to their own devices. And in the midst of this growing awareness, she observes, ingests, and manufactures her own designs.

All this, of course, is not without mistakes. "When I first used the sewing machine, I would push too hard on the foot pedal, and this made the fabric move too fast." I tell her she'd better watch that leadened foot when she learns to drive. She laughs and quickly adds that she is much better at the foot pedal now.

"I like it when I make mistakes," she says.
I raise my eyebrows.

"Then a new thing pops up. I get to make it a different way. It becomes a different style."

To Arbay, graphics and fashion designs are an ongoing building process. She uses Photoshop to create the design, makes the image into a screen print, and presses her own shirts and bags. And if the butterfly applique is in the wrong place or the print's not the right color, Arbay simply shrugs and reinvents the design.

I ask her which item she is most proud of making at the Style Shop.

"I made this shirt that has a cool logo on it. It has the letters 'BMG' on it, and it stands for 'Best Muslim Girl.'"

It is not until the next day after talking to Seth Capron, one of the founders of Workshop Houston, that I learned BMG is the name of the clothing line Arbay plans to start.

"Is this what you want to do when you grow up?" I ask.

"No, fashion's just a hobby." She tells me about taking care of her nephew when he's sick, how his chubby cheeks puff up when he laughs, how this makes her laugh. "I want to be a pediatrician. I want to help kids." I am marveling at her ambition when she cuts in. "I would be a kindergarten teacher but I don't want that headache."

So in the meantime, in the years before she'll have to leave the sewing machine for the stethoscope, Arbay can be found in an upstairs room of that converted four-plex on Sauer Street putting her thoughts onto cotton. Maybe by the time she is driving, having mastered lightness of foot, Arbay will be the proud face behind a local fashion label. Her nephew, who by then would be walking and talking, would don one of her T-shirts,

the tag on his inseam bearing the recognizable letters: "BMG. Product of Workshop Houston."

- Christine Ha



Arbay Muya

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RDA, established in 1972, is a nonprofit 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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SIDEWALKS STEPS AND LABYRINTHS

*The **trials** and **stimulations** of getting
around Houston's inner loop
neighborhoods in a wheelchair*



CARRIER
HELP
- PICK -
A CARD

CARRIER
HELP
- PICK -
A CARD

BY KELLY MOORE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIAN HOLDERMAN

"The body disturbs the purity of the architectural order. It is equivalent to a dangerous prohibition . . . Architecture, then, is only an organism engaged in constant intercourse with users, whose bodies rush against the carefully established rules of architectural thought."

—Bernard Tschumi



have a fantasy of a performance I'd like to give. I'd like to go into a restaurant in which all of the tables are crowded together, where the host would most likely seat me in my wheelchair at the first table, right next to the door, because that is the most accessible spot, right where the cold wind or hot air will come rushing through with every person entering. From there, I'll very calmly and sweetly take a labyrinthine path through all of the small aisles, bulldozing through chairs and brazenly pushing tables back, never stopping, metal legs of tables and chairs scraping noisily against the floor as I go. With every inevitable worried offer of help, I will kindly and calmly say, "No thank you, I've got it," until I've snaked my way through the whole restaurant. The movement of noises and the path of overturned chairs will fill the restaurant with a map of my own mind, at one point seeming as though it had no destination at all, and ultimately coming to a stopping point at the back of the restaurant, at the bathroom. To be able to enter a building, to look out at the markers of my destination, and to stroll easily toward that goal with no tricks of flights of steps or narrow pathways. To trust my own path not to betray me or thwart me.

I was born with a form of Muscular Dystrophy that keeps me at a relatively low level of muscle mass. So pushing myself long distance in a manual wheelchair is difficult, though the exercise helps me maintain my strength. About a year-and-a-half ago I acquired a Tailwind wheelchair. This is not your grandmother's recliner-on-wheels or that hunk-of-metal-on-shopping-cart-wheels you might be rolled around in at the hospital. It's a sleek manual wheelchair with a lightweight lithium ion battery that adds power when I'm pushing myself over grass, up hills, or over a difficult hump, and it's drastically changed my experience of moving through Houston. Switching from a manual wheelchair to a power-assist wheelchair has meant switching from total dependence on my car to plant me as close to my destination as possible and then struggling to lug myself the rest of the way to my destination, to suddenly, for the first time, being able to stroll out of my house on a Sunday afternoon and

amble down the street, by myself, to the park. Or to the museum, or to a coffee shop—whatever I feel like doing. It's meant finally knowing the satisfaction of really getting something out of all that effort I put into moving. It's shifted my mental map of Houston from a maze set up by some abstract power to confuse and thwart my attempts to be a part of various cultural spaces where I'd otherwise belong, to a sprawling labyrinth with no clear end or beginning, but plenty of unpredictable pockets full of the wild, the weird, and the beautiful—the Orange Show, the Menil Collection, and hidden trails along the bayou to name a few.

Imagine that my spine extends down below my hips, connecting itself to the axis of the wheels on my wheelchair. Sitting up and reaching my arms back, gripping the rims of the wheels, I push the weight of my upper body and wheelchair forward—a constant bowing, a kind of frontwards rowing in which rather than looking down at the water I've disturbed, I lift my eyes up at what lies ahead—at puddles of black water, sidewalk squares pulled up or smashed, curb ramps that end in the jaws of a gutter, street corners with no curb ramps at all, cars parked in driveways that block the sidewalk, telephone poles planted in the middle of small walkways, steps. The wheels themselves are large, curvy hips that sometimes shimmy, sometimes coast, always whirring beneath my circling arms. The vibration of the sidewalk against my wheels lets me know that I'm making friction against the ground, carving out a path. The little jogs onto the grass or street to avoid obstacles are an exciting push into dangerous territories, where my ears and my eyes are alert for hidden holes and whooshing cars, as I weave my way around parked cars and deep gutters. I meet the eyes of passersby; then I give them the top of my head.

Despite the fanciness of my new wheelchair, and despite the fact that Houston was voted the most disability-friendly city in the US in 2008 by the National Organization on Disability, I encounter impassable sidewalks and building entrances throughout the city. Although Houston is known predominantly as a driving city, underfunded in the areas of pedestrian- and biker-friendly paths, the city does run a "Safe Sidewalk Program," providing repairs to sidewalks that serve pedestrian access to schools or along major thoroughfares or wheelchair-user access to public transportation, employment, and various necessary commercial venues. But this program is complaint-driven, and

The ion battery powered Tailwind wheelchair.



according to *Governing Magazine*, “the small percentage of residents who qualify under the program can expect to wait up to two years for sidewalk repairs once approved.” Simply pushing myself through the street appears to be the more convenient option.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), now twenty years old and still changing, has dramatically increased the access that persons with disabilities have to employment, housing, and public and commercial spaces. It’s a civil rights law calling for “reasonable accommodations” for wheelchair users, among other persons with disabilities, to access public and commercial spaces through modifications such as ramps and wide doorways. So why do I still lack access to so many bars, coffee shops, and other businesses? Complicating matters, Texas follows the Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS), certified as an equivalent to the ADA guidelines. Commercial and public buildings are inspected for compliance with TAS when they are built or are undergoing renovations of \$50,000 or more, but commercial venues built before January 1, 1992, and not undergoing large renovations (which includes many of the buildings I frequent) are not required to comply with these accessibility standards. Furthermore, beyond the initial inspection, TAS and ADA are only policed, like the Safe Sidewalks Program, when an individual files a complaint with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation or the Department of Justice. I have never done this. So far, I feel more empowered in negotiating with business owners themselves to make “reasonable accommodations,” making it clear that I won’t patronize them (and spread the word) if they don’t, than in waiting indefinitely for governmental processes to come through. I can say that it’s thanks to ADA that I can simply say “no” and go to a different venue. Wheelchair accessibility is now a more universal part of commercial building design in the US, a standard against which we can hold noncompliant businesses. This is another way in which I’ve learned to push back against the spaces I move through.

A

coffee shop recently opened in Montrose called Bungalow Coffee. Marketing themselves on the draw of a bungalow you might find in the Heights, complete with front porch and yard, they are in fact housed in a bungalow. And yes, a bungalow typically does have a couple of steps leading up to the porch, a kind of divider between the public street and the comfortable space of the porch. But the coffee shop didn’t consider adapting this design for someone in a wheelchair. What I was given instead of a ramp was a pained look of apology and an offer to carry me up the steps.

In the case of stairs, it is usually necessary to be carried. To reach my arm up around someone’s neck as he or she reaches one hand under my thighs and one hand under my back, breathes, and lifts. Sometimes my carrier is a complete stranger, sometimes a boyfriend or a close friend. For many years, it was my father. To be carried is to know what it’s like to carry that person’s body. “Don’t worry, I’ve got you,” I like to say. In some arms, I’m heavy and unbalanced. In others, I hang neatly against them, buoyant, as though lying in a hammock. I note the rare one who puts his hand on the back of my skirt before lifting me so as not to show my ass to the world, and this subtle attentiveness sends me. I’ve known others, excited or confused about their newfound power, who swing me around haphazardly like a life-size



To be carried is to know what it's like to carry that person's body. "Don't worry, I've got you," I like to say.

ragdoll. Some are cautious, some are laboring, some are effortless, some are nervous, and some are careless as airport baggage handlers. I know the distance of my face from theirs, their breathing and the tightness in their shoulders and neck, learn the rhythm and weight of their steps. I'm sure they know a few things about me, too. Sometimes the only way to push against architectural barriers is to give up on physical barriers, to take on another's body as an extension of my own, and in return to offer up mine as an extension of his or hers. But this is a lot to offer up for a cup of coffee, and I pick my carriers carefully.

As a person with a disability, it's often difficult to find access into a countercultural space. The bars and coffee shops frequented by people of my community—writers, artists, musicians, academics, hipsters—tend to be housed in either buildings built before ADA or TSA came into being or are simply set up to look as though they are old, hole-in-the-wall spots, disguising their faces from the busy streets. And because of this, I know that all of the signs that are simply meant as visual boundaries to mark off a cultural space are often physical boundaries blocking me out of that cultural space. Chances (now, sadly, closed), Big Star, and Poison Girl, to name a few, are all places that I can only access with help over a step or two. I entered each of these places for the first time with the help of a friend or a stranger, and I don't hesitate to do so again. But that first encounter of a boundary around the building, blocking me out of that space, always smacks hard. It seems to question whether I really belong. I've been fortunate enough to find a way into unconventional cultural spaces over the years, and as I do so, I make myself more visible as a disabled person in that community. I ask questions about wheelchair access and handicap parking, get to know the owners and workers, and little by little, my act of resistance to open up those spaces is to make my experience visible from the inside out.

The eight-plex in which I now live didn't originally have a ramp, and the Federal Fair Housing Act doesn't require owners of housing built before March 13, 1991, to build me a ramp—only to allow me to add one myself. So I bribed an architect friend to design a ramp for me. I ordered all of the materials for delivery, and I then further bribed my friend and her coworkers to build the ramp. Menil Properties came along afterward to paint the ramp in their matching colors, and that's the DIY manner in which I carved myself a path into a neighborhood and a living space I'd wanted to access for a long time. I've learned through processes such as this one that independence doesn't mean self-sufficiency. Rather, independence requires a constant negotiation with my community, trading of favors, voicing my needs clearly, and a bit of patience.

I often wonder what it would be like to live in a city that was built for me, in which I could float easily, alone, in straight lines from one safe bubble of space to another. In "Figures, Doors and Passages," Robin Evans describes how domestic architecture has shifted since the Renaissance from an open matrix of interconnected rooms that all served as thoroughfares for one another to a place of solitude and "independent access" for private rooms through hallways. With this comes a shift from a way of life in which accidental encounters and contact were a daily norm to a way of life in which "purposeful or necessary communication was facilitated while incidental communication was reduced, and contact . . . was at best incidental and distracting."

If we look at the design of the larger city, we can see that Houston itself, in its sprawling form, its focus on convenient car passageways, and its well-known lack of zoning laws, focuses its design on a compartmentalized way of life, on "independent access." Galleries, restaurants, and shops, because they don't necessarily exist in an integrated space with the businesses around them, build their own environments for themselves. And as the majority of us travel alone to work by car, we spend our travel time in solitude, avoiding the random encounters with strangers that New Yorkers might have in their travel on subways, trains, and in taxi cabs.

But because many of these spaces designed for independent access don't allow me the same kind of access, I experience Houston in a more matrix-like manner than most. I find myself going three quarters of the way around a building before I find an entrance with a ramp. And often that entrance leads to a back room or a kitchen that no one else typi-

cally sees. My entrance is not the one at the end of the promenade with the steps that broaden out onto the walkway and the giant columns that stand like sentries on either side of large glass doors. Mine is the hidden one, the one off to the side, the ramp that follows a snaky form and leads to a smaller door with its own push button.

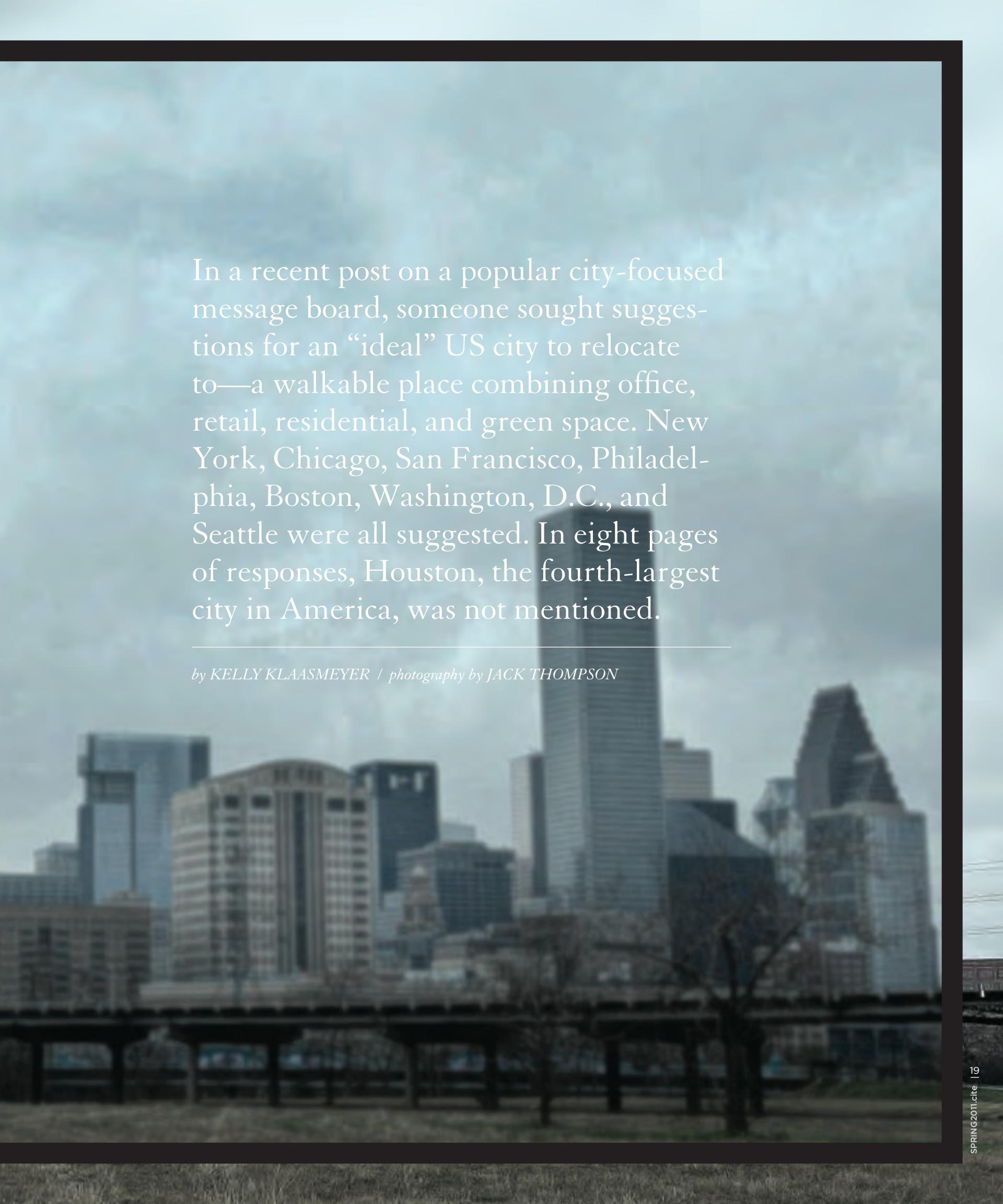
My neighbor Jules and I went for a walk on a Sunday afternoon. Next to my laboring, whirring form, she is tall and sleepily floats on her long legs. She followed my zigzagging path around potholes, cars, and gutters, taking the grass or the street or whatever space was left for her by my side. Our separate Saturday nights out had left us quiet and thoughtful. I told her of my thwarted attempts to find a sidewalk path from our house to a party at Richmont Square, and my desire to bulldoze a path through every inaccessible space. She told me of her tango dancing, how difficult it still is for her to hold her body at its full height and let her partner move her through space. We walked toward St. Thomas and wandered toward the labyrinth. She stepped onto the path first, and I followed. I lost track of her quickly, focusing on following the line in front of me and holding on tight to it as it doubled back and forth upon itself. With no walls, only a pattern formed in the ground, the labyrinth becomes a psychological exercise in trusting your own line as it carves its way through space. And so the labyrinth led us in a dance we couldn't predict. In the corner of my eye, I saw her moving in large, sweeping patterns that I knew were soon to be mine, though I couldn't see how. She followed a long path that looked as though it would careen straight into mine, then at the last minute, it would curve away. Sometimes my path seemed to move in circles and then suddenly I found myself elsewhere. Jules reached the center first, and I wondered if I'd lost track of my line, if I was going in the right direction at all. But with a few turns and curves, I reached the center, too. We dipped our feet in the water fountains and wandered home.

I sometimes think that I should put up more of a protest, stage some great demonstration of resistance. How many times should I ask the owner of a favorite coffee shop to mark off a handicap space before I complain to the Department of Justice? On one hand, these are my friends, my community, with whom I can always negotiate a compromise. But how much does that compromise really help the next person who arrives in a wheelchair, who isn't yet a part of this community? My manner of resistance continues to shift as I try to answer these questions for myself. For now, I do my best to be aware of the ways in which the design of spaces affects my sense of belonging, and the ways in which my own movements also have the power to push back against the space around me. Perhaps if I took a rubbing of that curb I struggle over to cross the street every day, we might see this invisible boundary between my figure and the ground. As the street's asphalt rises up to thwart my path, the dark stroke of my graphite stick will mark that spot, putting pressure down and smoothing itself out across it in a streak, a tread. If only in the most infinitesimal way, I'm wearing down the hard edges of that surface into the shape of my path. **c**

An
HONEST
LOOK
at
DOWNTOWN

*The Center of Houston Has Come
a Long Way and Has a Long Way
Yet to Go.*





In a recent post on a popular city-focused message board, someone sought suggestions for an “ideal” US city to relocate to—a walkable place combining office, retail, residential, and green space. New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, D.C., and Seattle were all suggested. In eight pages of responses, Houston, the fourth-largest city in America, was not mentioned.

by KELLY KLAASMEYER / photography by JACK THOMPSON



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Earlier in its history, Houston's downtown might have made the cut, back in the days when Market Square really had a market on it. But we're all familiar with downtown's lingering Jekyll and Hyde reputation: thriving business center by day and largely deserted landscape by night. Save for performing arts events and festivals, downtown in its off hours was the domain of skateboarders and homeless people. In the early '90s when I lived in a warehouse downtown, my largely abandoned neighborhood looked like the set of a post-apocalyptic movie. Practically the only sign of life after five was a yellow El Camino we had dubbed the "Crack Wagon." It would stop in the middle of the street and people would crawl out from underneath loading docks to make purchases.

But the drive to bring people downtown is increasing and increasingly successful. Bob Eury, executive director of the Downtown District, says he believes Houston is becoming more balanced in its "24/7 or 18/7 activity," pointing out that "places like Discovery Green and [the newly revamped] Market Square are proving to be remarkably potent in terms of creating places where people feel very comfortable gathering."

And while Houston's downtown—with its elaborate heat avoidance systems of tunnels and sky bridges, and walled off by a ring of highways—will never be a conventional sort of core, there are a number of new buildings that acknowledge green space and the street (and some that don't). There are also new projects filling in those surface-level parking lots, increasing density, and expanding a sense of connectedness. And in what may be a startling development for some, an iconic mid-century building is being remodeled rather than razed. Additionally, LEED certification, a novelty only a few years ago, seems to be de rigueur for many new buildings.

In spite of the less-than-ideal economic climate, Houston's downtown has a number of new, recently or nearly completed building projects. One of them, the Harris County Jury Assembly Room and Transportation Plaza, designed by PageSoutherlandPage, has been in the works for almost ten years—and, in an act of genius or hubris, it is located underground. That's right, underground. In the Bayou City. The bulk of the building is subterranean. Like Discovery Green, also designed by PageSoutherlandPage, the site, a former parking lot, will become much needed green space.

A glass pavilion in the center will house a security checkpoint and provide the entrance to the offices and assembly rooms below. Although it is underground, it won't feel like it is—light is the focus of the space as it will pour down from the surface-level pavilion as well as enter through sections of frosted glass-block skylights in the roof. The elevator shafts and walls facing the lobby will be glass back-painted white. In renderings it reads as a clean-lined, luminous, and open space—transparency and openness being the county's conceptual goals for the space.

The current jury hall is a massive, stockyard-like space designed to corral up to fifteen hundred head of

jurors (the largest in the country, apparently), although nowhere near that many are called at any one time. The new building divides the assembly area into four, more human-scaled, 250-seat auditoriums that radiate off the underground lobby. The space is also connected to the courts complex via the tunnel system. (This means that jurors will have to go through security only once, and the phenomenon of jurors disappearing on their way to their courts will be ameliorated.) The open plaza not only provides park space for people in the courts complex, as well as downtown, but it also gives jurors a drop-off and central orientation point.

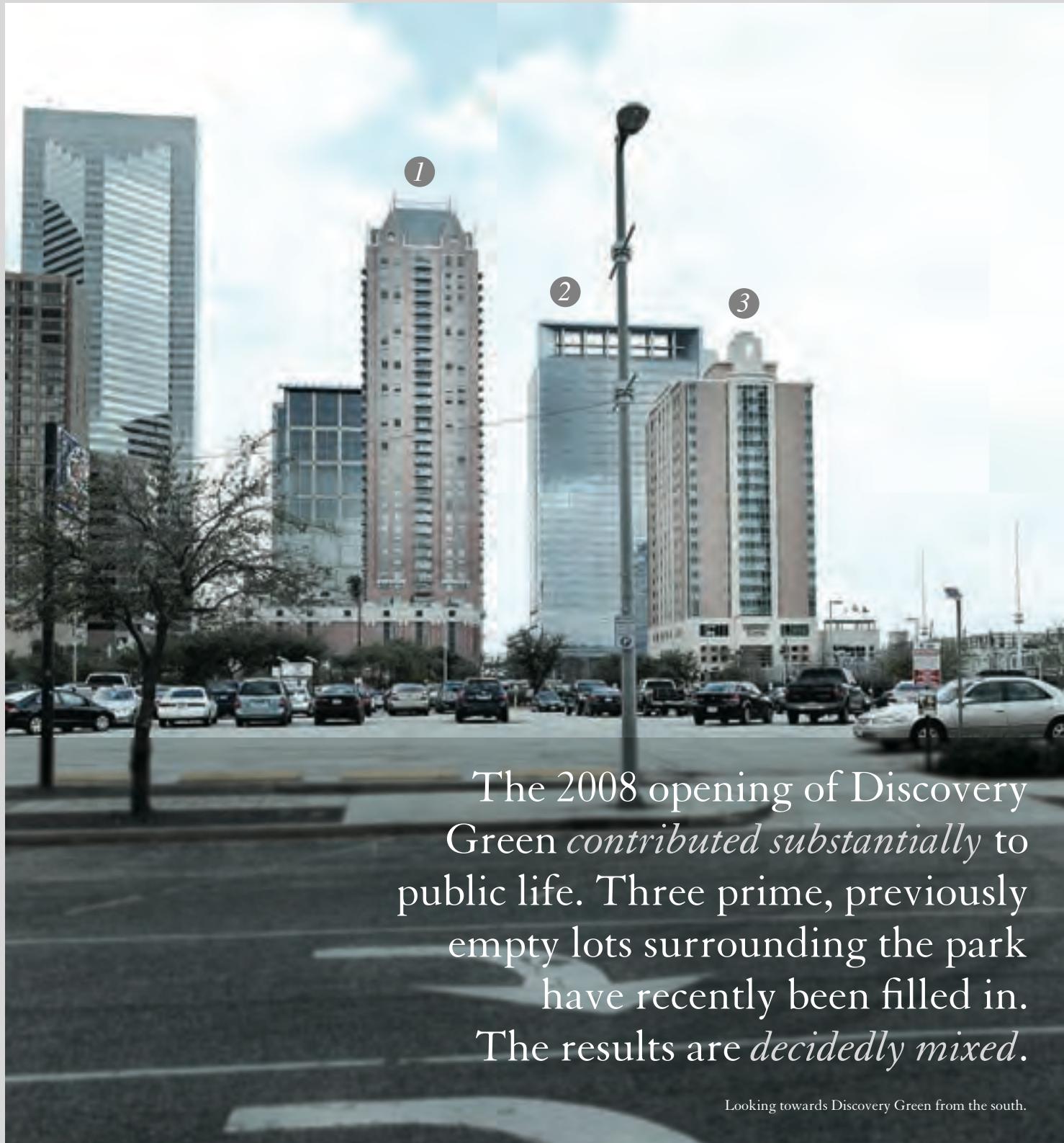
Anyone still traumatized by Tropical Storm Allison's downtown flooding will be reassured by the massive, gasketed flood doors blocking the complex off from the rest of the tunnel system. Although the building was planned before the prevalence of LEED certification, its location underground and the several feet of earth over its roof make for a highly energy-efficient space.

In 2008, the opening of Discovery Green made a substantial contribution to public life. Now, three prime, previously empty lots surrounding the park have recently been filled in. The results are decidedly mixed.

Designed by Gensler Architects, Hess Tower (formerly Discovery Tower) is the success story here. A 30-story LEED Gold pre-certified building, which is targeting Platinum certification, it is set back from the edge of the site facing the park in front. The primary lobby is on the second floor, but a ground floor entry pavilion extends out from the main building to allow a tie-in to Five Houston Center through a sky bridge. The result is not a sheer façade smacking into the edge of the park but a somewhat stepped approach. The lobby extends into a pôrté cochère writ large. The effect is a pleasant, more human-scaled transition into the building from the park space. Additionally, the pavilion will boast a green roof with native grasses and plants.

The Hess Tower parking garage originally was to be located in the base of the building, but the acquisition of an adjoining lot made it possible for the garage structure to be tucked behind the north side. At present the parking garage fronts Discovery Green, but Gensler convinced the developer, Trammell Crow, that a 75-foot-wide strip facing the park should be left empty to allow for the possibility of a residential development facing the park.

The architecture of the building's roof incorporates spaces for a series of turbines to generate wind energy. The innovation was made possible by the open park space, which allows for unobstructed Gulf winds from the south and east. The turbines would have generated a small portion of the building's power, possibly enough to light the building at night. It was a forward-thinking addition, but as with a lot of great new



The 2008 opening of Discovery Green *contributed substantially* to public life. Three prime, previously empty lots surrounding the park have recently been filled in. The results are *decidedly mixed*.

Looking towards Discovery Green from the south.

1 ONE PARK PLACE

DEVELOPER
Finger Companies

ARCHITECTS
Jackson & Ryan Architects

ENGINEERS
Walter P Moore (civil), Haynes Whaley Associates (structural), Wylie Consulting Engineers (MEP)

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR
D.E. Harvey Builders

2 HESS TOWER

DEVELOPER
Trammell Crow Company

ARCHITECTS
Gensler

ENGINEERS
Walter P Moore (civil), Haynes Whaley Associates (structural), Wylie Consulting Engineers (MEP)

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR
Gilbane

3 EMBASSY SUITES

DEVELOPER
American Liberty Hospitality, Inc.

ARCHITECTS
Mitchell Carlson Stone, Inc.

PROJECT CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT
The Mathis Group, Inc.

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR
Linbeck

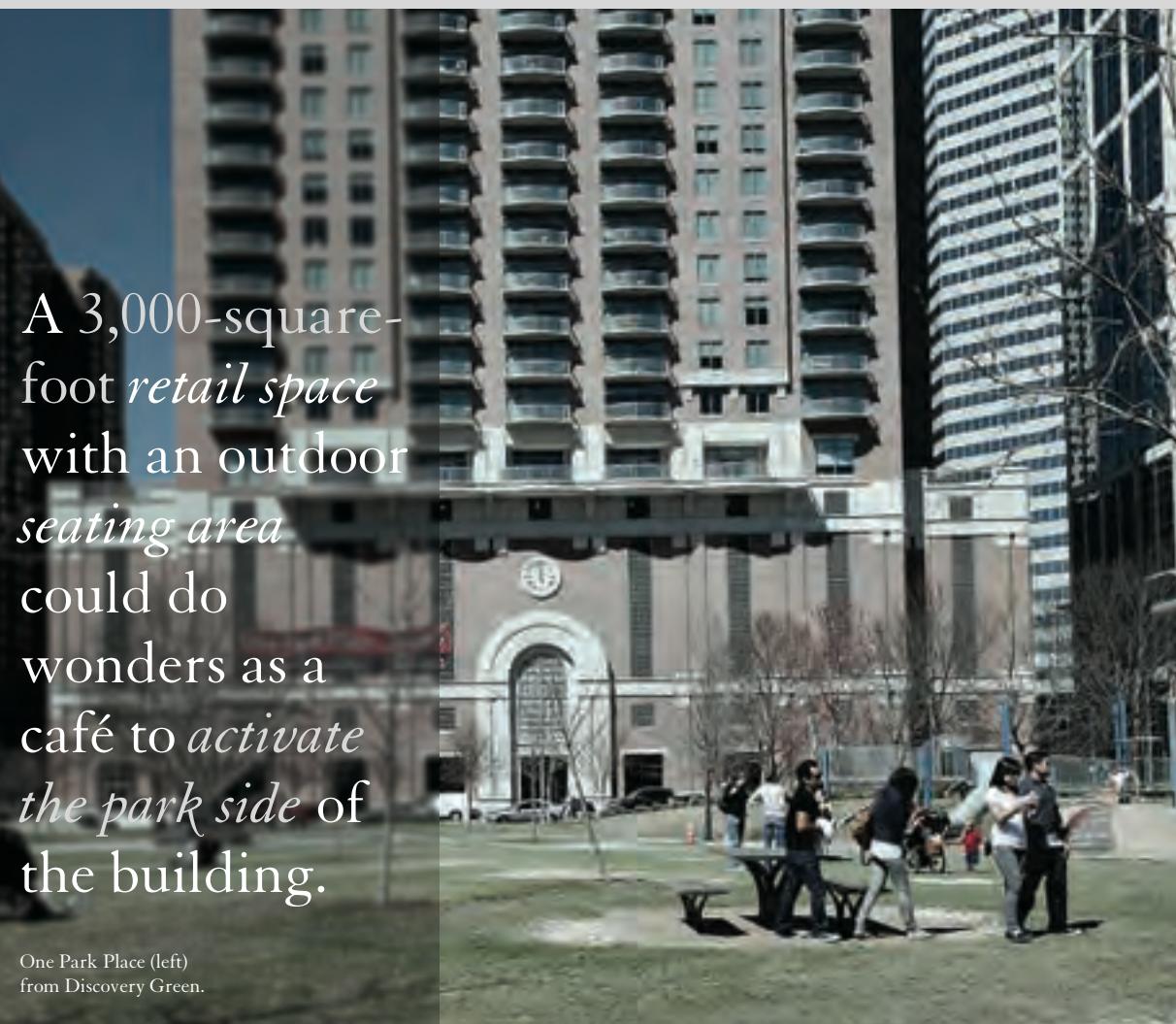
ideas, there were kinks—like the fact that the turbines are now gone. Regarding the turbines, Gensler issued a comment that a malfunction occurred and “all aspects of the installation are being carefully examined by the project team to determine the specific cause of the malfunction and the appropriate corrective action.” The spinning blades would certainly signal a progressive and innovative spirit, and the city’s will to lead in alternative energy.

The glass in Hess Tower is beautifully transparent and highly efficient, performing better than the darkly tinted glazing on older buildings. It allows daylight into the building, reducing energy consumption for lighting and avoiding the ominous and impersonal look of a wall of dark or mirrored glass. The lobby has a large glass curtain wall expanse that offers a clear view of the leafy treetops edging Discovery Green across the street. The second-floor lobby interior was originally to be faced with an especially intense red marble, creating a striking wall of color (you can still see this in the video rendering at www.discoverytowerhouston.com), but when Hess leased the entire building, they requested the marble be changed to a shade in their signature green—the result is the kind of marble you see in bank lobbies.

Next door is the Finger Companies’ One Park Place, the first residential tower built downtown in over 40 years. Designed by Jackson & Ryan Architects, the high-end rental property was styled to look like a French chateau, albeit an exceptionally tall one. A mansard roof with a railing and gables tops the 37-floor building. The “chateau” styling is not postmodern irony; the goal instead is to reference iconic luxury buildings like New York’s Plaza Hotel. The tower’s swimming pool is definitely channeling a hotel. The leasing agent who walked me through the property told me the developer wanted it based on the pool of the Ritz-Carlton in Maui. Walking outside a high-rise chateau to a tropical pool area seems more than a little incongruous, but it’s a pleasant space for residents, and the agent said they congregate there for potluck barbecues on the weekends.

At the ground level, there isn’t much to relate the building to the park. The largely symbolic “main entrance” on La Branch Street faces the park and has the parking garage above it, but residents seem to primarily come and go in their cars from the McKinney Street entrance. On the plus side, a 3,000-square-foot retail space (available for rent at press time) with an outdoor seating area facing La Branch could do wonders as a café to activate the park side of the building. The coming ground-floor Phoenicia market will face Austin Street, not the park, but is perhaps the biggest recent win in the push for a lively multiuse downtown.

The building, which opened in 2009, is 88



One Park Place (left)
from Discovery Green.

percent occupied, according to the leasing agent, so it certainly appeals to a significant demographic. Those kinds of numbers should be encouraging to other residential projects. The apartments are comfortable, each with its own balcony, and the site is full of amenities—residents don’t even have to change their own light bulbs. Discovery Green is essentially the building’s back yard. Residents seem to be sports fans (Toyota Center and Minute Maid Park are nearby), young professionals, empty nesters, international transfers, and New Yorkers who think it’s a bargain.

I’ll wager, however, that most Houstonians just don’t feel that downtown, especially the eastern edge, is rocking enough yet to justify paying a premium for it as a residential location. (With refreshing candor, developer Marvy Finger has touted the refineries and petrochemical plants visible in the distance, saying to Bloomberg.com, “You’re really viewing a Christmas tree at night.”)

One Park Place shines in contrast to the “McArchitecture” of the nearby Mitchell Carlson Stone-designed Embassy Suites. That building, with what appears to be synthetic stucco “Deco” styling, is a down-market entry from the school of historical pastiche. The hotel has an almost entirely blank wall facing the park. To paraphrase one observer, it looks like they just pulled some plans out of a drawer and tried to fit them on the site. As far as I can tell, the structure’s sole redeeming quality is that it is Downtown’s first LEED-certified hotel.

The Embassy Suites is a prime example of what Eury is talking about when he says, “We have building codes, but we don’t go very far beyond that. We are not highly prescriptive as to some of the more detailed ways that buildings relate to the public realm.” The space around Discovery Green should be a prime location, and it’s a sadly missed opportunity when mediocre architecture hogs the room. There is, however, still another surface-level parking lot up for grabs, so we’ll see what tomorrow brings.

Hess Tower is not the only building leaving room for residential development; so is the Houston Ballet Center for Dance. The Ballet is finally moving from their aging and inconveniently located studios on West Gray Street to a new building with perfect proximity to the Wortham Theater Center. Houston Ballet’s managing director C. C. Connor decided the center’s footprint should take up only half the purchased lot, and the other half should be sold to help fund the project. They sold the lot (just in time before the real estate crunch) to buyers who planned to build condominiums. It’s a sign of the times that the bank now owns the empty lot (read: free parking!).

The Gensler-designed building is highly visible as you drive east into Downtown from I-10. The building’s west side has large expanses of glass that offer views into the practice studios, within a skin comprising a random pattern of honed and polished granite. Opaque patterned bands run along the glass to create



HOUSTON BALLET CENTER FOR DANCE

ARCHITECTS

Gensler

ENGINEERS

Walter P Moore (civil and structural), Jacobs Carter & Burgess (MEP)

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR

W. S. Bellows Construction Corporation

modesty panels.

The building houses nine studios in all, with a black box theater for presentations and rehearsal. There is space for the academy, company, and administration, as well as dormitories for the students. That it is the largest facility of its kind in the US will undoubtedly expand the capabilities, as well as increase the profile, of the Houston Ballet.

A sky bridge for the dancers runs between the building and the Wortham, a significant improvement over the drive from the old West Gray location. The open-air bridge is sheathed with aluminum panels bent and perforated to create a curving pattern, conveying a sense of movement. Marks along the bottom of the bridge are related to choreography notation. Barely visible images of ballet dancers that look like clip art have been sandblasted onto the metal of the bridge. The bridge itself is attractive enough, but built with \$1.5 million in TIRZ funding, which is ultimately city tax money, it could have and should have been pushed farther to make a real visual contribution to the city. It's a missed opportunity for a dramatic statement like that of Wilkinson Eyre's "Bridge of Aspiration" between the Royal Ballet School and the Royal Opera House in London. Involving visual artists in the design would have been another good idea.

YMCA has also dumped its old downtown location for a new five-story, LEED Gold-certified building. Walls of glass offer natural light and views of downtown to the northeast. The building's lobby entry is recessed, creating a large, covered porch area with tables and chairs, acknowledging that people might like to congregate outside in the shade. The Kirksey-designed building also refreshingly embraces color. Backlit orange check-in counters greet visitors, and an orange central staircase provides a reference point that was sadly missing in the labyrinthine layout of the old 1941 building.

While many were thrilled to shed the apparently decrepit old location, the move was not without controversy. The new building does not offer any housing for residents displaced from the 132 "short-term" residential units at the old facility. It does, however, offer a food pantry. Renovation of the old building appears to be out of the picture. (The Y had estimated it would cost \$25 million.) "It seems a shame to demolish it," says architectural historian Stephen Fox. "It is just frustrating that there is so little incentive in Houston to reuse worthy buildings instead of wiping them out for parking lots." The *Houston Chronicle* reported that the YMCA is razing its old building and selling the (parking) lot to Chevron.

Hines Interests—the developer of many of Houston's iconic buildings, including Pennzoil Place, Republic

Bank Center, and Chase Tower—chose a historic block at the center of downtown to invest in a new 46-story office tower. BG Group Place (formerly MainPlace) took out three buildings in what the National Register of Historic Places described as "one of Houston's last historic blocks." Fox seems less disturbed than one might expect. "They were all part of the historic streetscape of Main Street," he says, "but in terms of their individual architectural distinction, they were kind of marginal, and they had all been extensively altered." The demolition of the Bond Clothes store building, however, according to a statement by David Bush, Director of Programs and Information at the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, resulted in "the loss of one of Houston's most significant surviving Art Deco interiors." The renovated 1913 Stowers Building, on the corner of the block, was saved.

Pickard Chilton, a firm based in New Haven, were brought in as design architects for BG Group Place, and Houston's Kendall/Heaton Associates, Inc. served as associate architects. The Hines building is slated for LEED Gold pre-certification with a goal for Platinum. The company retains ownership of its buildings and leases out space over several decades so it is in their interest to invest in energy-efficiency. BG Group Place's detailing clearly benefited from the developer's extensive experience.

The Hines office building is clad in a glass curtain wall, while horizontal glass and aluminum sunscreens extend over the windows of the north and south faces. The wall and screens were fabricated as a unitized system in San Antonio by Arrowall allowing for a rapid assembly on site. Vertical sunshades run down the west façade and the grid pattern continues with precision into the lobby, which features granite floors, walls of white polished marble and backlit glass, and custom wood paneling from Brochsteins.

The iconic characteristic of the building is a 39th-floor sky garden with a five-story atrium notched into the building's façade. This feature inspired various online comparisons including to a giant wrench, which puts the building in good company. Pennzoil Place was compared to milk cartons. Blair Kamin, the *Chicago Tribune* architecture critic, has noted that one of the defining features of Houston's downtown is the procession of such towers easily seen from a car on the highway.

Although the sky garden is hyperbolically described in a Hines video as a "beacon of sustainability," introducing open air and foliage that high up in an office tower is thrilling if you've ever worked in a hermetically sealed highrise. There is a garden on the roof of the parking garage as well for the private use of the 11th-floor client.

The basement includes a retail space and a connecting tunnel that was dug initially by hand

trowel in order to avoid any disruption to the thicket of utilities and light rail on Main Street. In a nod to what was imploded, one of the subterranean walls is adorned with a salvaged portion of the Montagu Hotel, which was on that site and in its heyday boasted the only air-conditioned rooms downtown. In its recent past, though, the hotel pushed the “seedy” envelope, before degenerating beyond use.

BG Group Place's interaction with the street is similar to that of Houston's mid-century highrises: it's a monumental object on the block, although it lacks the trophy modern sculpture that marked those iconic buildings. (Interestingly, art seems to be absent from all the new buildings downtown.)

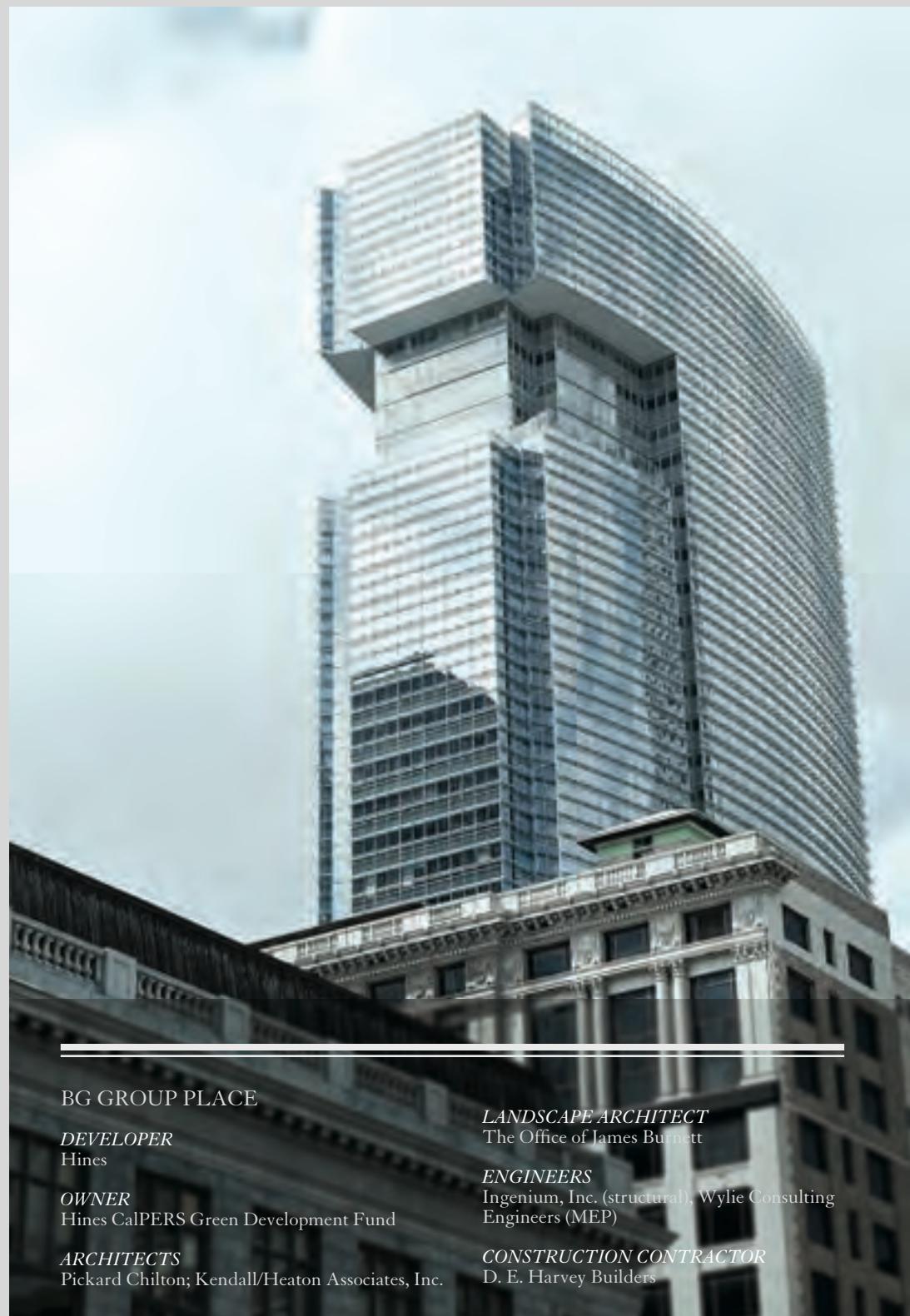
Responses to the building from designers and laypeople I spoke with were positive. The building has, after all, replaced a block of boarded-up buildings at the heart of downtown with a gleaming tower, constructed at high standards. But, given that Hines built cutting-edge towers in Houston during the 1970s and early '80s that drew international attention, will this new tower have the same effect? Though the building is a commendable contribution to the city, it is not likely to reestablish Houston as a leading force in innovative architecture. For example, though the building has achieved a high level of LEED certification, and with its sky garden is acknowledging that tenants might desire access to fresh air, there is nothing in BG Group Place like the kind of systematic building-wide natural ventilation that a firm

like starchitects Foster and Partners has incorporated into their towers. More to the point, the bold and controversial Jean Nouvel design proposed by Hines for 53W53rd in Manhattan raises the question why the developer chose a more conservative tack for Houston. Why do other cities get the A+ architecture? Is the Houston client base less invested in contributing to the urban fabric and raising their international profile through cutting-edge architecture than thirty years ago?

TIn a move inspired by the economy as well as El Paso Corporation President and CEO Douglas L. Foshee's appreciation for mid-century architecture, the former Tenneco building, now El Paso Energy building, is being renovated and is seeking LEED Gold certification. Although the architects for the renovation were not allowed to disclose details about the project, and access wasn't available inside to look at the 1963 Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill building, what you can see of the street-level transformation is pretty dramatic, perhaps more dramatic than some might want for one of Houston's classic modern buildings. Originally the colonnaded base surrounded a rectilinear lobby with darkly tinted windows that seemed to drop down from the building's center. The lobby is now a giant cylinder of clear glass. The reconfigured space likely functions better for the occupants, but Fox says he "would have hoped for a more delicate and subtle intervention than was achieved. But the more important point is to maintain the building as a class A office building rather than to make no interventions at all."

There are thus encouraging bright spots among downtown's new development, all the more remarkable for taking place during a terrible recession. But ultimately, as the fourth-largest city in America, we should be doing better. In some areas we have come a long way. We are getting "greener" and thinking about downtown as a "city" rather than an office park. But we are losing ground in terms of producing nationally and internationally acclaimed architecture.

Perhaps most disturbing is the fact that Dallas is doing much better. Its carefully planned arts district, which includes landmark projects involving the likes of Sir Norman Foster and Rem Koolhaus, is impressive. And while going for big-name starchitects can seem like a very "Dallas" thing to do, what really distinguishes that city from Houston is the level of architectural ambition that it has for itself. Great architecture doesn't just come from writing a check to a big name, it's creating a climate where everyone involved is willing to take risks, push the envelope, and expect more. Well-known architects can turn out banal work and lesser-known architects can turn out amazing work, depending upon the expectations and freedom given them. Good enough isn't enough. Houston, these days, is too easily satisfied with a B+. c



BG GROUP PLACE

DEVELOPER
Hines

OWNER
Hines CalPERS Green Development Fund

ARCHITECTS
Pickard Chilton; Kendall/Heaton Associates, Inc.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
The Office of James Burnett

ENGINEERS
Ingenium, Inc. (structural), Wylie Consulting Engineers (MEP)

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR
D. E. Harvey Builders

EL PASO ENERGY BUILDING

CLIENT

El Paso Corporation

ARCHITECTS

Gensler

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Clark Condon Associates

ENGINEERS

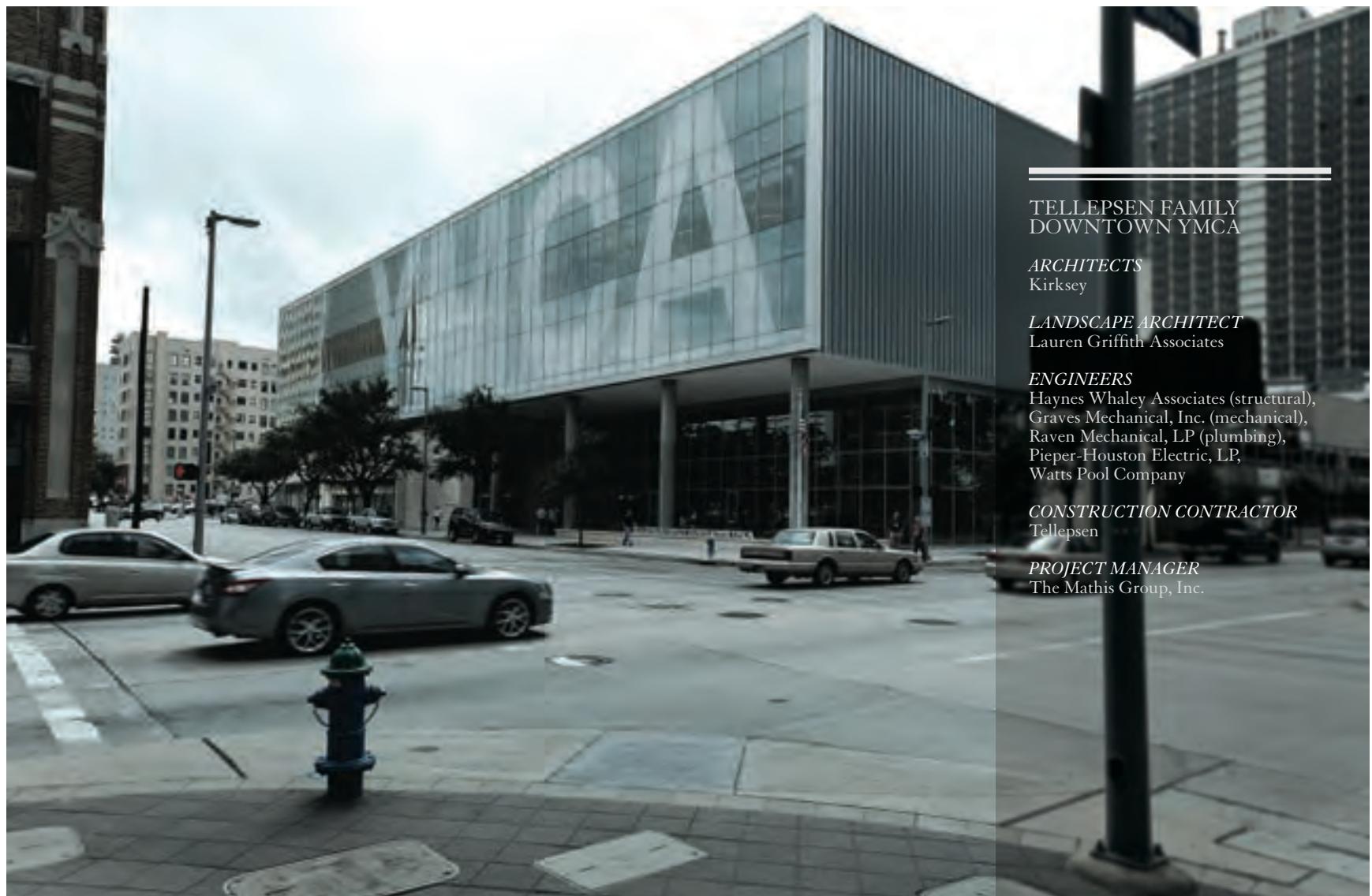
Ingenium, Inc. (structural),
I. A. Naman + Associates, Inc. (MEP)

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR

Gilbane, Inc.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Hines



TELLEPSEN FAMILY DOWNTOWN YMCA

ARCHITECTS

Kirksey

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Lauren Griffith Associates

ENGINEERS

Haynes Whaley Associates (structural),
Graves Mechanical, Inc. (mechanical),
Raven Mechanical, LP (plumbing),
Pieper-Houston Electric, LP,
Watts Pool Company

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR

Tellepsen

PROJECT MANAGER

The Mathis Group, Inc.



GLASS **HOUSE** ON A CONCRETE CANYON

HIGHWAY 288 SERVES AS AN UNLIKELY YARD TO RONNIE SELF'S ARCHITECTURAL VIEW-BOX

BY JOE SELF* PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL HESTER

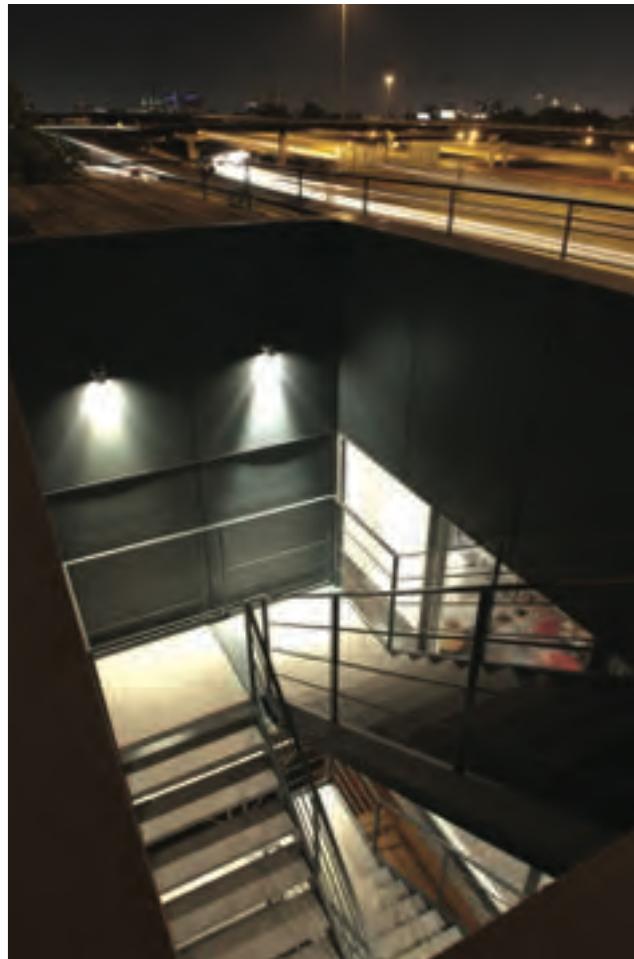
avilion architecture, when it works, is the result of a disciplined process of reduction in form and program. The position of Melville's Bartleby must be assumed when faced with options such as foyers, coat closets, pantries, breakfast rooms, fireplaces, dens, music rooms, media rooms and every other sort of programmatic. At the Saint Emanuel House, preferring not to creates a stage for a procession from car, through the low space underneath the concrete slab, to the living room view of downtown's silhouette at dusk.

The site of the Saint Emanuel House is perched above the Highway 59 and 288 interchange. This section of the freeway, completed in the 1980s, divided the neighborhood, and now serves as a boundary for "Midtown" to the west and a truncated Third Ward to the east. The house is located on the Third Ward side. Architect and professor Ronnie Self refers to the neighborhood and the freeway often when describing his house. "I wasn't interested in a postage-stamp lot that isolates you." The house is situated beyond the front building-setback line. In fact, a variance was sought, baffling city authorities, to place the building farther back and close to the freeway. The architect's work here is inflected more to the freeway as if to underscore the effort to mediate between the neighborhood and the freeway.

The entire site is treated as a garden composed of plants and materials chosen for low maintenance. The composition, reasonable and efficient, introduces almost no architectural extensions of the house to the ground plane. Tall galvanized gates set into chain-link fence are the threshold between the garden and the rest of the world. The fence is planted with climbing jasmine—intended to obscure the fence. As is often the case, the house will benefit greatly once the garden matures.

The stair-court, the most dynamic element of the design, pierces the middle of the slab. The treads and rails are revealed from top to bottom. The stair and its enclosure are painted a deep gray color to display natural light while obscuring shadows. The play of light across the stair is remarkable. The stair is approached straight on by the occupants and from the side by visitors. It is a clear indication of entry that invites rather than affronts. Ascending the stair, one is treated to a change in acoustics and an upward view of the sky. At the entry-level landing broad sheets of glass reveal the study on one side and the kitchen on the other side.

Upon entering one is presented with a northerly view of downtown Houston through the single floor-to-ceiling glass corner window. This is stunning at night and during the day with an ever-dynamic foreground of cars merging from 288 onto 59. The real work of the design is about controlling views and the sun—the reduction of glass and the extension of the roof plane beyond the walls, the shape of the



OPPOSITE: St. Emmanuel House, 2010, seen from interchange of Highways 59 and 288. ABOVE: Roof deck and stairwell.

house made to echo the shape of the lot, the placement on stilts to provide distant, not near, views. The views to the neighborhood are given in the opposite direction. When seated or reclining the views towards the neighborhood are of sky and treetops. A view down the hall is framed through floor-to-ceiling glass. Delightful views from kitchen to study and back again pass through the vitrine-like stair-court. The house acts as a view-box to the city, to the neighborhood, and within itself.

Kitchen, bath, and storage are tucked away. Details and finishes are of the minimal, agonized-over sort. Books are accommodated in carefully composed shelves—the titles are refreshingly more important than the shelving. The generous ceiling height is

a function of the exterior panel module. All is white (except for dark wood floors and an orange wall at the vanity sinks). No wall base, no protruding trim and no doors to the bedrooms. "I would prefer not to."

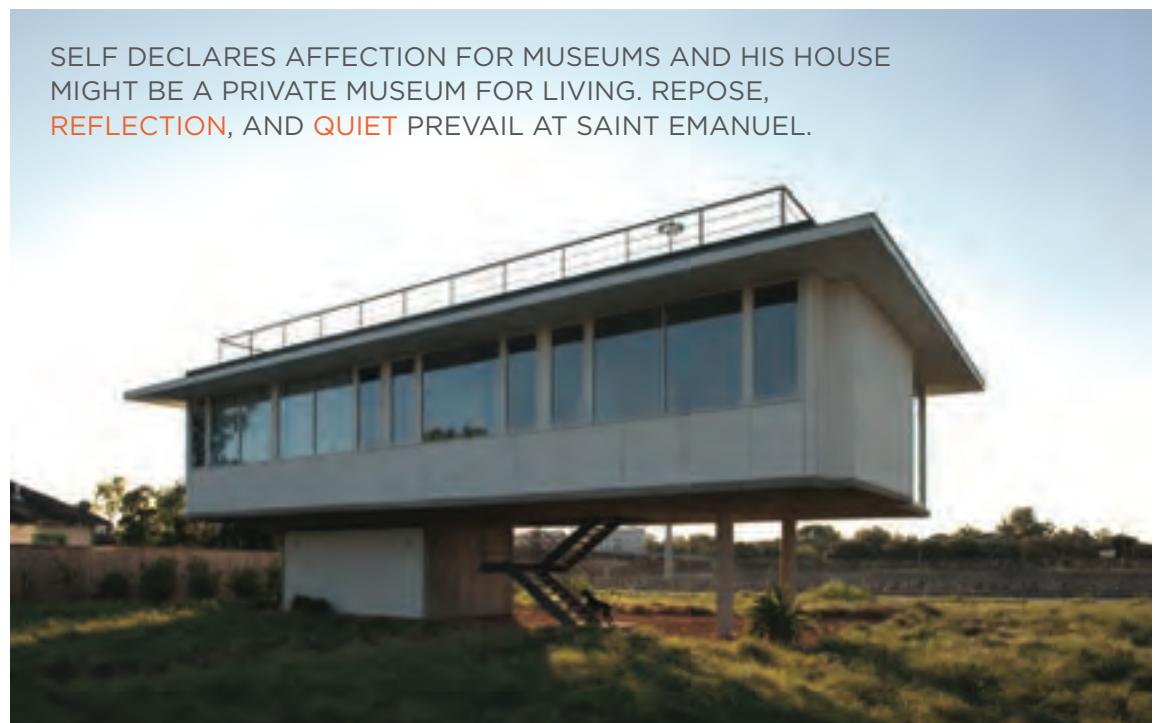
Climbing to the roof and emerging there into the panoramic view is exhilarating. The thrum of the freeway barely intrudes. The roof deck is interrupted by the low stair enclosure and a seat-height raised platform that accommodates clerestory windows to the bathroom below. The sky is the ceiling.

The Saint Emanuel House may be viewed any number of ways. If designed by an amateur it could be taken on its own merits and not seen in relation to much of anything else. But since the designer is an architect and one that teaches architecture it is tempting to tease out the question —where does this originate?

The Japanese teahouse, pre-dating Laugier, may be the fullest precedent for pavilion architecture—a single function for a limited time. The modernist interpretation of the teahouse—even when encumbered with sleeping, dining and study functions—often draws upon the tradition of glass architecture. This influence is purely a circumstance of history—the result of ambitious German theorists coupled with technical advances in steel, concrete, and glass. Tatami mats are replaced with production modules.

Standardization in architecture hinges on garden architecture of the nineteenth century. The pavilion, in English hands, became an open showcase. Many architects still wonder, "If such products and theories are available, why don't we all live in glass houses?" (The answer has something to do with the abundance of stones.)

Paxton, Taut, Mies, and Johnson give the glass pavilion good lineage. But these minds worked in cold climates with a desire for maximum sunlight. What happens to the glass pavilion when it is settled into a tropical climate? One answer is the Saint Emanuel House by architect/professor Ronnie Self. (A note on names: The house is named for



the street where it is located and not for the Christian martyr.)

Self indicates, when pressed, that Renzo Piano (his employer for 10 years) and the work of Mies van der Rohe are influential. My first impression was that the Maison Tropicale by Jean Prouve must be an influence. Others, drawing upon less august references, might see a dry-docked house-boat or a control tower. These last two interpretations can be forgiven in a flood-prone city given over to transportation systems. Self declares no allegiance to Le Corbusier. It's true that the horizontal glass does not read as a ribbon window. There is no Corbusian free façade and no free plan. That being said, there is a roof deck if not a roof garden. *Pilotis* and a partial *Dom-ino* armature are also in place.

TOP LEFT: House seen from east at night evokes the famed Julius Shulman photograph of Case Study House 22, **TOP RIGHT:** A wall of windows overlooks the Third Ward; **ABOVE LEFT:** Stairwell pierces through the center of the house; **ABOVE:** Southeast elevation.

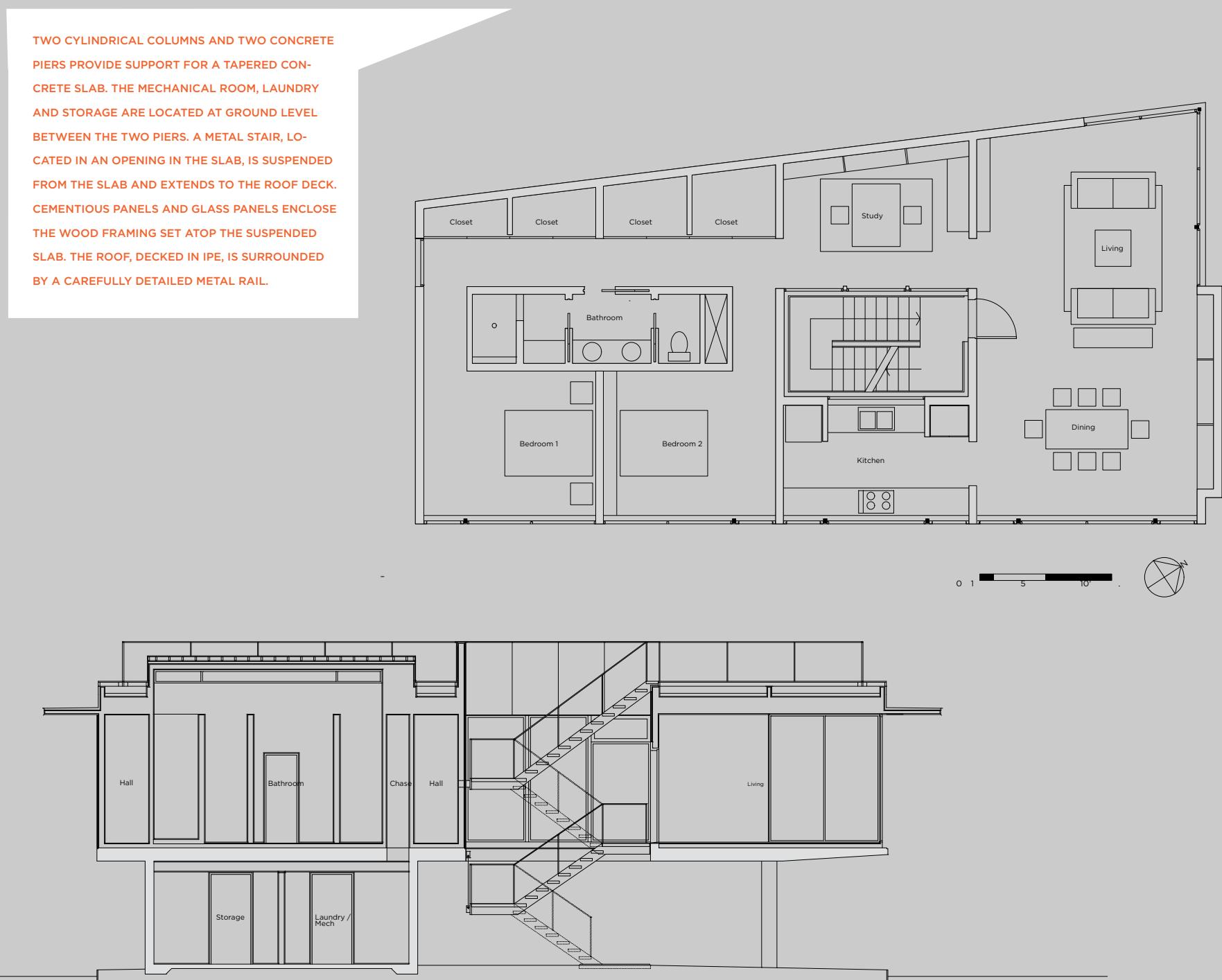
Self wants to distance himself from all traditions of Houston architecture. The typical Mies-on-the-Bayou is half brick and half glass and sits on the ground. Pilotis were sometimes deployed but usually for automobile shade. Self raises his pavilion for a view but shuns the car and does not allow it below the house. Brick is out of the question.

At Saint Emanuel it is as if a giant hand has plucked a high-rise apartment from its frame and placed it on a suspended slab at the edge of the freeway. The disconnection from the ground, if not the surroundings, and the relegation of laundry and

the automobile to the ground level echo penthouse living. The exterior appearance is highly repeatable and less significant than the unfolding of space at the interior. The views have been carefully orchestrated to sky, street, and city. Interior views are calculated across the stair-court and down the hall towards the sleeping areas.

The Saint Emanuel House does not seem to be intended as the universal answer to the problem of housing. Market forces are not at play. Adaptability and additions do not suggest themselves. Self does not seem to worry that his house will suffer modifications at the hands of later generations. The matter-of-fact design is very much a response to the individual living pattern of the occupants, their professional and

private histories, their budget and the location. Even if exuberant expression is held in check the Saint Emanuel House is a bold assertion that this house, along with other examples of modern architecture, can be widely comprehended. Self reports broad interest from all kinds of passersby: Cleveland "The Flower Man" Turner, who transformed a nearby Third Ward house into a colorful folk installation, said, "Like your house," as he rode by on his bicycle giving a thumbs-up sign, to which Self replied, "Like your house too." It may seem a bit old-fashioned to maintain trust in the modern, but if the ideals can be made real then the work of modern architects must also include, as Ronnie Self has provided, an open hand. **c**



BY JOHN MIXON ILLUSTRATIONS BY AMIR KASEM

ZONING AROUND

OUR CITY'S AD HOC SYSTEM OF ZONING IS NO GAME. OFTEN APPLIED ARBITRARILY AND UNFAIRLY, IT'S INEFFICIENT AND BORDERLINE ILLEGAL. YET IT REMAINS THE HOUSTON WAY.

Houston touts itself as a model of enlightened differentness: a public-private combination better at managing growth than traditional zoning. But beneath that chamber-of-commerce gloss, Houston's land use is a far cry from free enterprise in action.

"The Houston Way" combines an adamant refusal to use government power to guide growth and protect existing investment, with a willingness to conduct ad hoc mediation of constant developer-citizen conflicts through the city planning commission. Rejection of traditional land use solutions often places the city at the borderline between legal and not-so-legal regulation.

From the day a couple of 1830s hucksters named their promotional development after the hero of Texas independence, Houston has catered to real estate promoters who assumed that their own financial interests unerringly reflected the public good. Mid-range land developers and entrepreneurs convinced the public to defeat zoning in three referenda. However, the margin of defeat has diminished with each referendum, indicating The Houston Way might be at risk in the twenty-first century.

Actually Houston's disdain for zoning is more façade than fact as the city institutes a variety of complex *de facto* zoning-type regulations. How



does Houston's cozy public-private system play out in reality? The following vignettes illustrate how Houston handles land use warfare while maintaining the fiction that impersonal, efficient private markets determine land use in a city of happy homeowners.

THE ASHBY HIGHRISE

The Ashby Highrise controversy has received substantial coverage in local papers and was the subject of an opinion piece in *Cite* (73). The reports, however, never fully explain the legal history behind the debate.

Along with many other inner-city residential neighborhoods, the Southampton subdivision was platted with traditional residential deed restrictions set to expire after a specific time. Several nearby subdivisions faced expiration of their restrictions after the 1962 zoning referendum failed, and nervous residents looked for a way to preserve their neighborhoods' single-family residential character. Ordinary property law would make restrictions renewal difficult, if not impossible, by requiring near unanimous approval by lot owners.

Accordingly, in 1965 a responsive legislature empowered Houston residents to renew residential restrictions by a majority vote of lot owners. The renewal would apply to all lots whose owners failed to "opt out" within one year after the effective date. While Southampton was not involved in this statutory renewal because its original restrictions allowed a onetime 50-year renewal, which happened in 1973, efforts are

already under way to invoke the statutory renewal procedures in 2023. Other residential areas near the Ashby-Bissonnet intersection remain largely protected by original or renewed restrictions.

To add punch to private deed restrictions, the city attorney can sue to enjoin violations, and the city requires applicants for building permits to certify that proposed construction will not violate residential restrictions. The resulting system looks and works a great deal like zoning by a different name. With intact and enforceable restrictions, affluent residents near the intersection of Bissonnet and Ashby could feel reasonably safe from unwelcome commercialism, but they knew the unrestricted land along the busy street of Bissonnet itself posed an obvious and constant development threat.

The threat became imminent when Buckhead Investment Partners bought a 67-unit garden apartment project at the intersection of Ashby and Bissonnet to develop a mixed-use project featuring a 23-story condominium. While not especially welcome, the aging garden apartments had not been a bad neighbor. A highrise tower was something else. Condominium owners would undoubtedly have been as affluent as many of the single-family residential owners, but that wasn't the point. An often-heard complaint is that condominium owners could look into homeowners' backyards, and God knows what they might see. Furthermore, the tower's shadow would rob residents of light and air (which might be a blessing, considering Houston's heat and pollution). Even more irritating, the developers themselves had been raised in the elite neighborhood. More than one fuming resident asked why Buckhead (or a vulgarization of the name) didn't build the tacky highrise in somebody else's backyard.

When yellow signs opposing the "Tower of Traffic" sprouted on virtually every yard within a mile of the Ashby site, it was clear that Houston's city government had to respond—but how? The city used various strategies to delay the permit for two years, but the developers' persistence finally reduced the city to its last shot—a 1940 ordinance giving the public works director power to regulate driveways that intersect with city streets.

The Ashby project would require driveway access to Bissonnet and/or Ashby. Without public works' approval, there would be no permit and no driveway. If the director decided the proposed development would generate more traffic than Bissonnet's two lanes could handle, the department could refuse the permit. The developers provided traffic studies. Alas for the protestors, traffic flowing from a condominium, even a highrise condominium, is not substantial.

Inasmuch as 67 units would be demolished to make way for the new housing, traffic enhancement would not start from zero. The



director, however, determined that the proposed commercial uses would cause a traffic jam. Under protest, the developers applied for a permit for a reduced project, one without the spa, retail space, and executive offices, and with residential units reduced from 226 to 210. The director approved the driveway for this reduced permit.

The developers appealed the denial of a permit for the full project to the general appeals board, a city panel composed mostly of city employees, which affirmed denial of the permit. The developers have now sued for \$42 million, alleging violation of constitutional rights. The drama will continue well after this article is published.

What is abundantly clear from the Ashby dispute is that the city, operating without clear standards, used its formal power to withhold driveway permits as leverage to impose zoning-type limits on development. The application of the driveway ordinance to control use may be unprecedented in local practice.

Despite the Ashby controversy, no mayoral candidate in the 2010 election mentioned that conventional land use zoning would have protected the neighborhood and disabused the developers of the notion that Houston is a free enterprise city.

PARTY-WALL DUPLEXES BLOCKED BY NEIGHBORS

The Southampton Extension is a south-of-Bissonnet subdivision about a mile west of the Ashby highrise site. Like adjacent Southampton, the Extension was developed as a restricted, low-density residential community. Unlike their across-the-street Southampton neighbors, the less restrictive Extension allowed duplexes. Expectations in the 1930s were that an owner might build a duplex, live in one unit, and rent out the other. Over time, the Extension became trendy, and some duplexes were converted to single-family structures or replaced by large new houses. But the exception for duplexes remained and opened the door for a more profitable type of dwelling—two separately owned residences joined by a party wall with separate fee ownership of a split lot. Splitting a platted lot into two separately owned parcels produces a "re-plat" that requires city planning commission approval.

Although the split-lot dwellings were expensive and architectural, a number of Extension residents

did not welcome half-sized houses joined at the hip on half-sized lots, and they looked for a way to stop the infill development. If their city were zoned, the entire subdivision might have been originally classified for single-family residential use with existing duplexes continuing as nonconforming uses. Even if initially zoned to allow duplexes, a district-wide zoning amendment could accommodate the residents' desire to exclude them. But in unzoned Houston, the offended residents lacked access to traditional remedies. What to do?

The city's response to this unwanted lot splitting is typical of The Houston Way. An existing city ordinance allows a majority of lot owners to initiate minimum lot size regulations block by block. Any lot owner can petition the city planning director for a minimum lot size to apply within that owner's block face (or to opposing block faces in the same block). The director must approve and send the application directly to the city council for legislative approval if owner(s) of 51 percent of the lots in the block agree and no lot owner objects. If an objection is filed, the entire planning commission conducts a hearing and, if it so decides, sends to the city council a minimum lot size ordinance applying just to that block. Planning commission approval appears to be automatically keyed to the same 51 percent vote. The minimum lot size is awkwardly, but precisely, calculated as "the largest existing size that lots in 70 percent of the area . . . in the special minimum lot size area are equal to or greater than." The average split lot in the Extension could not come close to meeting this requirement.

The minimum lot size ordinance effectively empowers 51 percent of private lot owners in a block to initiate a process that arbitrarily destroys their neighbors' traditional property rights.

EMINENT DOMAIN IS AVAILABLE ON DEMAND (FOR THE RIGHT PEOPLE)

The Supreme Court's decision in *Kelo v. City of New London* generated party-line Republican and Libertarian outrage against local governments using eminent domain to acquire land for economic development. The plurality decision found the Fifth Amendment's "public purpose" satisfied by economic improvement in the city. Justice O'Connor's dissent, by contrast, would have limited eminent domain to two circumstances: (1) where true public use obtains (as with streets and parks); and (2) where transfer of title to private entities alleviates a public harm, as opposed to providing an economic benefit.

Justice Kennedy's concurring opinion was more pointed. Although he agreed that economic development satisfied the public purpose test, he would



prohibit all takings that "favor a particular private party, with only incidental or pretextual public benefits"

The 2005 Texas legislature picked up on Kennedy's warning against pretextual takings and enacted a "Limitation on Eminent Domain for Private Parties or Economic Development" statute, commanding that:

(b) A governmental or private entity may not take private property through the use of eminent domain if the taking: (1) confers a private benefit on a particular private party through the use of the property; (2) is for a public use that is merely a pretext to confer a private benefit on a particular private party

Kelo would ordinarily be a non-issue in Houston, where eminent domain is rarely used except for right-of-way acquisition and where the supposed free market in land use would superficially translate into a hands-off role for the city. But neither ideology nor statute stood in the way of aggressive condemnation when one politically powerful real estate developer wanted to dress up the front yard of his proposed project.

The problem was a very visible palm reader who rented a poorly maintained home from two brothers who owned a 0.16-acre lot. The brothers refused to sell at the developer's price. No doubt, the splashy advertisement of "fortunes for a fee" would detract from the multimillion-dollar, mixed-use, upscale development next door. Even worse, the offensive lot

THE EFFORT TO ENACT THE NEIGHBORHOOD ZONING BILL FAILED WHEN THE REAL ESTATE LOBBY DISCOVERED IT AND KILLED IT.

threatened to nix the sale of a residential tower site that was expressly conditioned on dressing up the ugly tract. When the developer's private negotiations stalled, the city graciously stepped forward and condemned a portion of the lot to widen the public street (an admittedly legitimate use) and the rest of the tiny tract to create a public park (not so legitimate).

The postage stamp park violates Houston's expressed policy against park dedications smaller than one acre. Moreover, the speck of green at issue here was purely surplus because a 4.7-acre park stands just two blocks away. The park director opposed condemnation and testified in a deposition that he was simply handed an approving memo to sign—the first time in his four-and-a-half-year tenure that the city had acquired park land by eminent domain. The city's tender of \$433,800 is far less than the developer's last offer of \$1.4 million, which the lot owners refused. There could not be a better bargain for the developer, who did not even have to use his own money for the "park."

The taking is probably constitutional under the liberal "public purpose" test of *Kelo*'s majority opinion, and the tiny tract's ultimate use by the public satisfies Justice O'Connor's public use requirement. But it runs head-on into Justice Kennedy's warning that eminent domain should not be used for strictly private purposes—a prohibition that is restated in the Texas statute.

Only true believers in The Houston Way would defend using city funds to dress up a developer's front door. But this developer serves on the board of the public management district that orchestrated the acquisition, he contributed substantial sums to campaign funds of various elected officials, and specific council members have questionable financial connections with the development entity.



City officials are undoubtedly proud of the successful "public-private partnership" park that may indeed eventually benefit the city. Whether the action disregarded statutory and constitutional limits clearly does not count. It's The Houston Way.

THE THWARTED NEIGHBORHOOD ZONING BILL

Some 20 years ago, a proposal was made to empower a governing body to identify districts within the city and employ traditional zoning regulations within those districts (but not city-wide). The entire proceeding would be carried out "in accordance with a comprehensive plan" both as to the entire city and within the land use districts themselves. The neighborhood zoning proposal was

shelved in favor of citywide zoning, which seemed a cinch to pass in 1993 but nevertheless failed at referendum.

The concept of neighborhood zoning was revived in 2009, partly—but not entirely—as a result of the Ashby highrise controversy. House Bill 4648 would have authorized less-than-citywide zoning in complying neighborhoods, euphemistically titled "management districts." The proposal had some local precedent. Houston now hosts several "tax increment reinvestment zones," with traditional land use zoning power granted by specific enabling statutes, though most do not exercise the power. The special zoning bill was introduced on the last day for new legislation in hopes it would slip through without the anti-zoning lobby noticing it.

This legislative effort was different from previous zoning attempts in that Garnet Coleman, a legislator from a predominantly African-American and Hispanic district, sponsored it. Zoning referenda in

HOUSTON'S LAND USE PROBLEMS RUN DEEPER THAN ITS LACK OF ZONING. THEY POINT TO THE FUNDAMENTAL ETHICAL ISSUE WHETHER LAND USE LAWS AND CITY GOVERNMENT SHOULD OPERATE FOR THE ENTIRE CITIZENRY OR JUST FOR THE ELITE.

Houston traditionally receive an overwhelmingly negative vote from low-income voters in minority districts. In traditionally zoned cities before the civil rights movement, minority neighborhoods were often placed adjacent to the least desirable industries, dumps, and treatments plants. It is rumored that money to defeat the 1993 referendum was passed by owners of sexually oriented businesses, which apparently feared even tighter control through zoning, to minority ministers who preached against "white man's zoning." What has happened since 1993 to make zoning a more attractive option to minorities?

Houston has some very upscale minority neighborhoods. They have the same problems, and perhaps the same political power, as wealthy white neighborhoods. As documented in Jon Schwartz's film *This Is Our Home, It is Not for Sale*, once the neighborhood of Riverside became the home of upwardly mobile African Americans, the status quo was threatened by expanding universities, freeway construction, and the placement of a psychiatric hospital.

Moreover, though zoning has a legacy of working against minorities, in this day and age it is low-income residents of every ethnicity who are most adversely affected by the city's squeaky-wheel attitude toward land use control with its actions against "hot sheet" motels, liquor stores, cantinas, and trashy front yard businesses, and most recently in favor of block-busting developers who destroy traditional African-American neighborhoods by gentrifying any land standing in the path of white residential expansion.

The effort to enact the neighborhood zoning bill failed when the real estate lobby discovered it and killed it, according to a Southampton advocate following the progress of the "submarine proposal." Candidates in the recent mayoral race disowned the proposal, along with zoning of all kinds, and their campaigns offered only platitudinous commitment to "smart" codes, "neighborhood preservation," and more police. The successful candidate, current mayor Annise Parker, has said she does "not believe that zoning is workable for Houston."

Though the neighborhood zoning bill failed, the collaboration across neighborhoods and communities could mean a shift in the political climate.

TIME FOR A NEW VOTE ON ZONING?

What do these vignettes indicate? First, Houston may be unique but not in a way its boosters would like to trumpet. Free enterprise drives land use only when it is politically palatable. Government power is available for affluent homeowners and developers alike who have access to city hall.

Second, enacting a formal and traditional zoning ordinance might not make much difference in the city. The same real estate interests and affluent neighborhoods that influence city government

today would undoubtedly hold power over citywide municipal zoning.

Third, low-income areas are ignored or at best viewed as gentrification opportunities. The biggest land use problem is that low-income residents must suffer whatever next-door uses the market provides while waiting for the poodle-owners to arrive. Zoning could eliminate the worst offenders from low-income residential areas.

Houston lives in its own dreamworld of free enterprise, where real estate interests cynically control city government (though less directly than in the past) and where slogans prevail over substance. Houston's land use problems run deeper than its lack of zoning. They point to the fundamental ethical issue whether land use laws and city government should operate for the entire citizenry or just for the elite.

Houston is so sprawling and discontinuous that neighborhoods are hard to identify and identify with. The political process is so dominated by real estate and business interests that there is no legitimate procedure whereby homeowners can protect their greatest investment. Though it is easy to overestimate zoning as a tool for creating a planned urban environment, anything that identifies, protects, and reinforces community—that essential quality of human existence—is useful in a sprawling urban amoeba such as Houston.

Maybe it is time for another vote on zoning. **c**

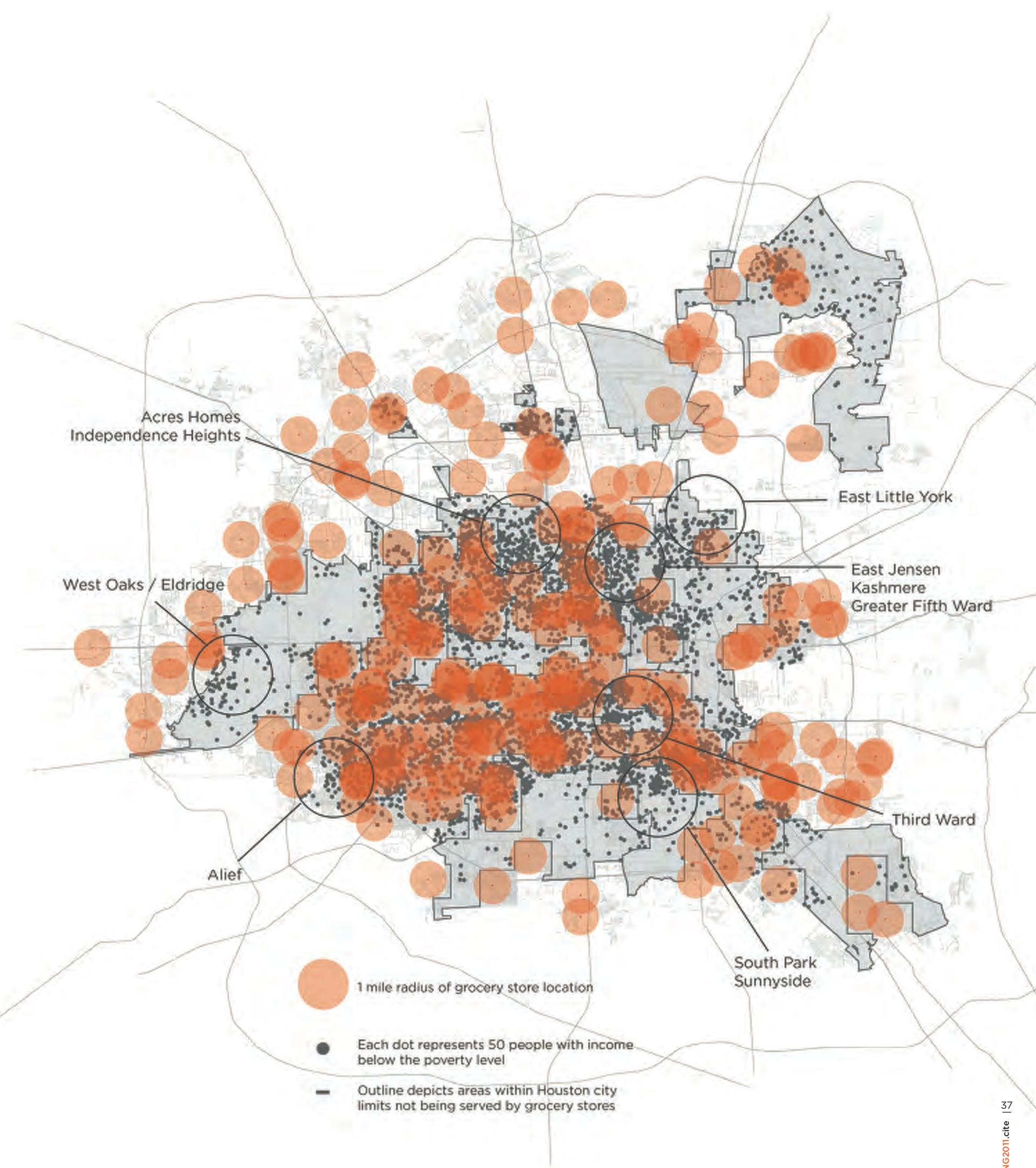


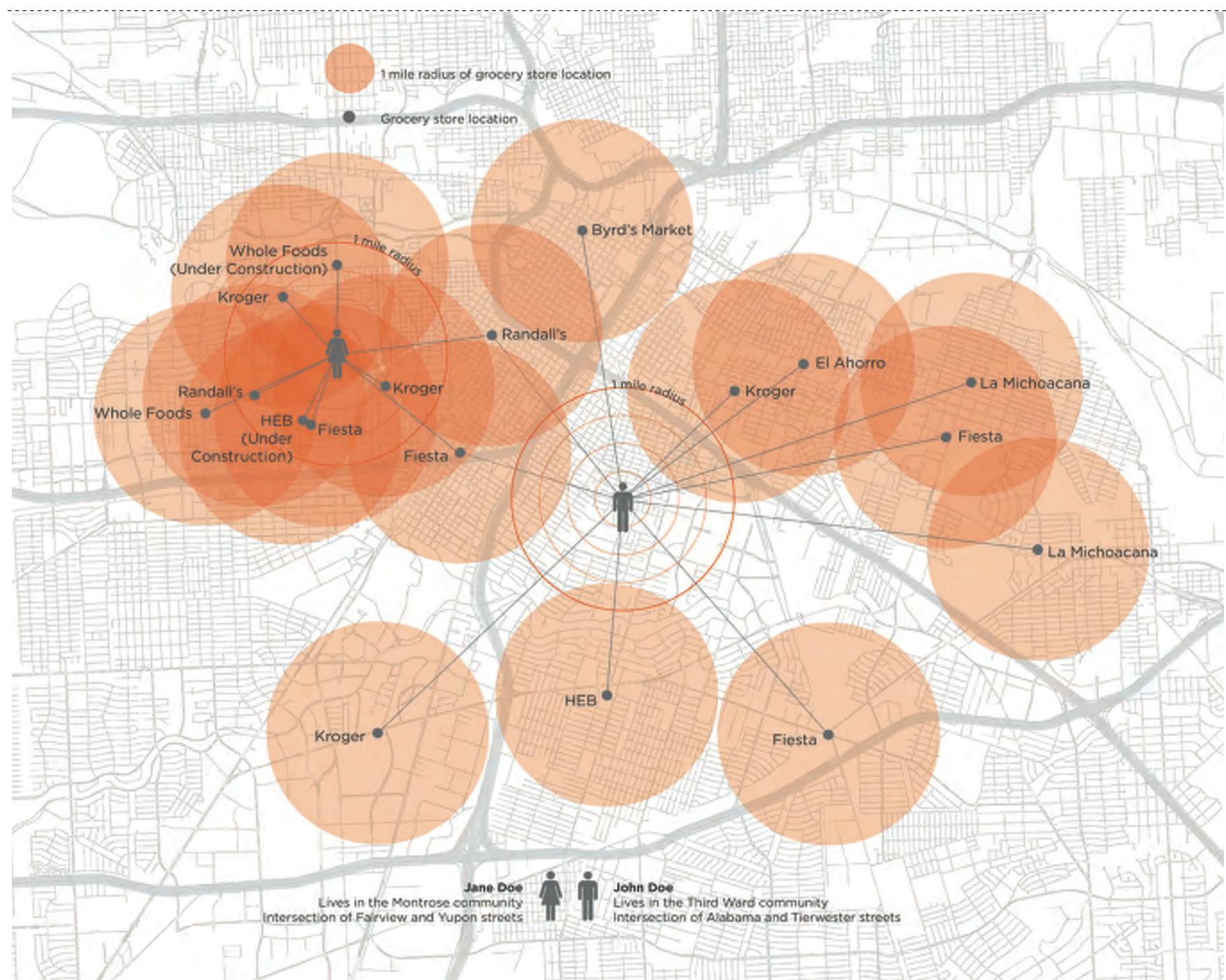
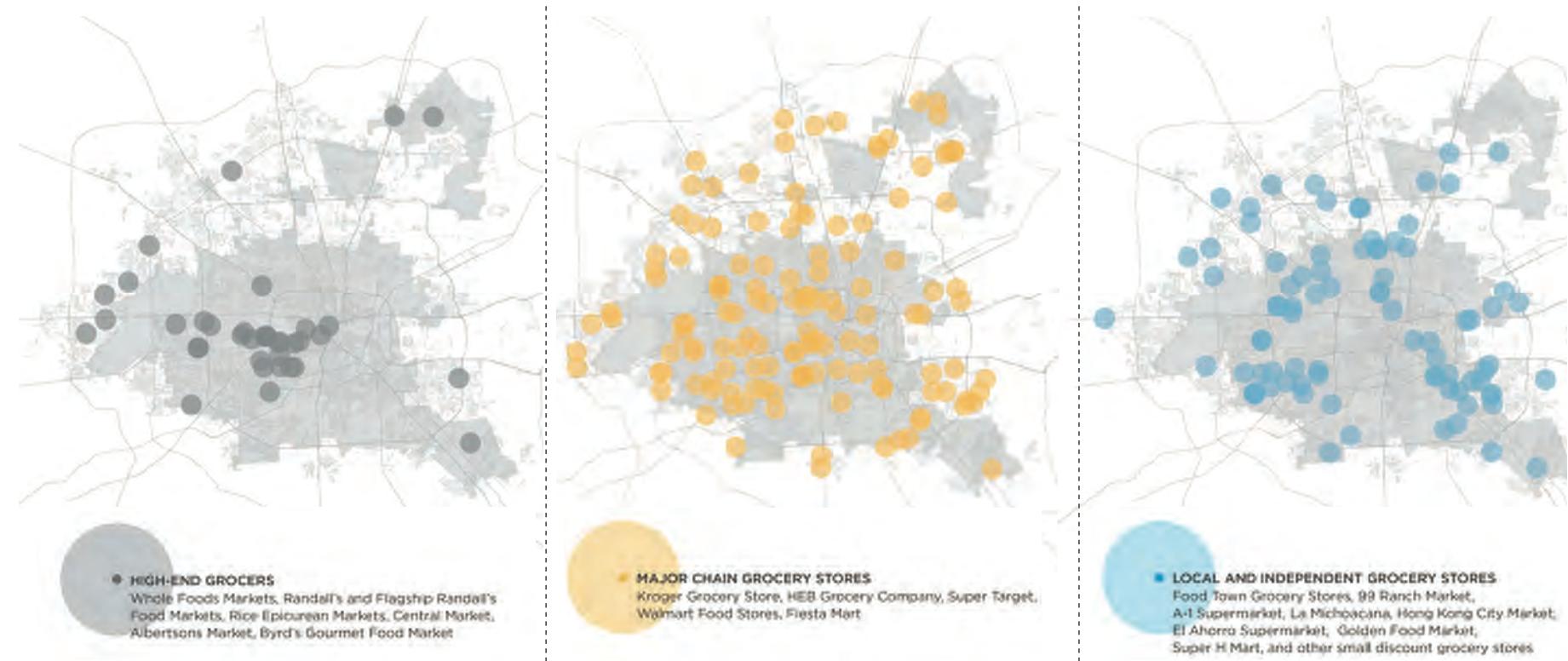
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Mapping Houston neighborhoods reveals a great divide in access to grocery stores and suggests possibilities for bridging the gap.

BY SUSAN ROGERS AND MARIA ORAN

In 2010 neighborhood quality of life and the unzoned “Free Enterprise City” again came to blows. Residents protested, but not against highways, toxic factories, landfills, or highrise towers; instead the targets were a proposed big-box store and grocery store. In the Heights, yard signs screamed, “Super Neighborhoods, Not Super Centers,” in response to the proposed Walmart. And as this article goes to print, another Inner Loop Walmart fight appears to be on the horizon, this time for Idylwood in the East End. Meanwhile in Montrose, a heated debate erupted over the proposed HEB at Dunlavy and Alabama Streets, directly across the street from a Fiesta Mart. HEB placated residents by offering a choice of three designs by famed San Antonio-based architecture firm Lake|Flato.





Food is among the most basic of our needs. In Houston, access to healthy food and a good grocery store is not an unreasonable desire, but it is one that goes unfulfilled for tens of thousands of people, many of them poor. For this reason the recent protests in areas glutted with grocery stores leave a bit of a bad taste in the mouth, even while illustrating the potential of community organizing in the face of corporate power. The irony is that as grocery stores and big-box chain stores converge on neighborhoods with means, often cannibalizing the customer base of other local stores, the neighborhoods ignored in this quest for the highest-end customers continue to yearn for easily accessible, fresh, and healthy food.

In other words, in contrast to the “grocery glut” in places like Montrose, where from the intersection of Fairview and Yupon Streets, you can choose from four grocery stores less than a mile away (and in the future, when the new HEB and Whole Foods stores are complete, you will be able to choose from six), there are neighborhoods across the city of Houston that lack any grocery store, of any design. These neighborhoods can be designated “food deserts.” A food desert, according to the Food Conservation and Energy Act passed by Congress in 2008, is an “area



Dominique Latin, 23, of Houston
heads to the Fiesta Mart on Main Street near Wheeler after bussing from Bissonnet and Beechnut with her children.

with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly located in lower income neighborhoods.”

A map of grocers within the city of Houston carrying a wide selection of fresh produce was created from information available on Google and major grocery store websites. Where are these food deserts in Houston? In places those who know the city would expect, including parts of the Third Ward, Alief, Sunnyside, South Park, Acres Homes, Independence Heights, East Jensen, Kashmere, the Fifth Ward, East Little York, Willowbrook, and West Oaks/Eldridge. In these areas and others, more than a quarter of a million low-income residents live more than a mile from a grocery store, and more than 25 percent of these residents do not have access to a car.

Proximity to a grocery store, however, is only one part of the equation. Cost and quality are the others. Dominique Latin, 23, heads to the Fiesta Mart on Main Street near Wheeler Avenue after bussing from Bissonnet and Beechnut Streets with her children. Even though she lives next to a Walmart, she says that canned goods at Fiesta are cheaper. “Walmart, HEB, and Kroger don’t want to build in poor neighborhoods because they don’t want to lower their prices as much as stores like Fiesta. They don’t want to compete,” says Latin. Maps of no-name-brand, mainstream, and high-end grocery stores show that even in areas that do not appear to be food deserts, there is marked stratification. In effect, a low-income resident living next door to a store out of her price range is in a food desert.

On a brisk January morning in the Third Ward, Diana Worthy, 61, buys food from a Family Dollar Store at Griggs Road and Milart Street in the Third Ward and carries her groceries home. She pins her hopes for

a grocery store stocked with nutritious food on the METRO light rail expansion and the demographic change she expects will accompany the investment. “I think they’re not planning it,” she says, “but the neighborhood is changing because of the train. The neighborhood will demand it.”

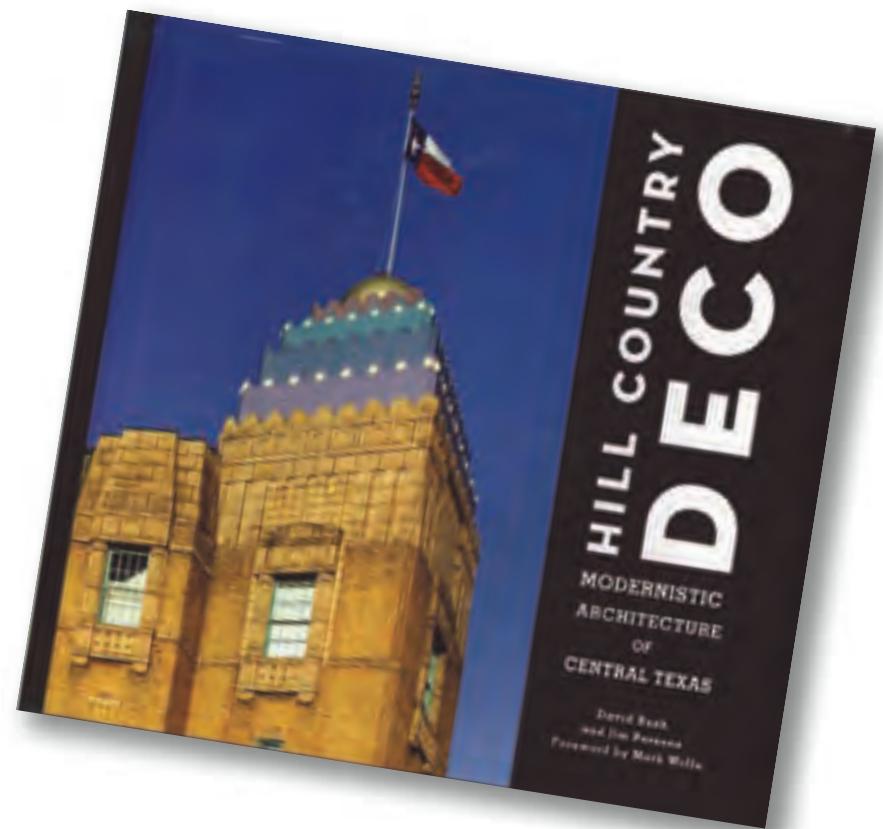
Food deserts have a disproportionate effect on vulnerable women and children. Single mothers are substantially more likely to live in poverty, and a recent multistate study found that low-income zip codes were half as likely to have a grocery store as higher income areas. Furthermore, convenience stores and fast food are often abundant in low-income neighborhoods, encouraging the consumption of high-fat, high-sugar, processed foods. There is clear evidence that lack of access to fresh and healthy food contributes to diet related health problems such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.

Currently, a new federal program is being proposed to address the inequities in access to healthy food. The Healthy Food Financing Initiative would provide \$400 million in grants and loans to assist retailers in locating in neighborhoods without access to fresh food. The program is modeled after Pennsylvania’s successful Fresh Food Financing Initiative, which offers block grants or low-interest loans to grocers who agree to open stores in low-income or rural areas. The program, according to Policy Link, has generated 83 new or improved grocery stores, provided 400,000 people with access to healthy food, created five thousand jobs, and sparked \$190 million in economic development, all with a public investment of \$30 million.

While the protests against HEB and Walmart attract media attention, the debate needs to be widened to include addressing the more insidious problem—lack of access to healthy food—that undermines the very health of our families and our economy. **c**

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative would provide \$400 million in grants and loans to assist retailers in locating in neighborhoods without access to fresh food.





STYLE FOR AN URBAN TEXAS

Hill County Deco: Modernistic Architecture of Central Texas (David Bush and Jim Parsons, TCU Press, 2010, 206 pages, \$35.00, hardback)

by Anna Mod

It must have seemed very unusual to people accustomed to exuberant Victorian styles. In comparison, Art Deco buildings were smooth, more symmetrical, far simpler in shape and plan, and maybe just a bit too modern for some. More like that new refrigerator in the kitchen than a building should be. But soon it was "out with the old and in with the new," and within a decade excellent examples of Art Deco architecture could be found throughout the state.
—Mark Wolfe, Foreword

MOVING INLAND FROM HOUSTON DECO (2008), the authors rolled out the second of what is hoped to be an ongoing Texas Art Deco series. Their first book, *Houston Deco*, reviewed in *Cite 77* (Winter 2009), was an overview of period buildings in Houston and Gulf Coast towns. This new book is similarly organized by building type: commercial, theaters, residential, institutional. Additionally, it includes a chapter on commemorative pieces, biographies of the represented architects and artists, and carefully chosen architectural drawings that are juxtaposed with photographs to show the skill of hand drafting. Researchers and those wanting additional information will delight in the architect and artist biographies, and the detailed illustration credits could spark a stand-alone tour of Texas architectural archives. While the authors cut their teeth on the Gulf Coast, *Hill County Deco* has upped the ante: it is both a colorful guidebook and a credible reference on the subject.

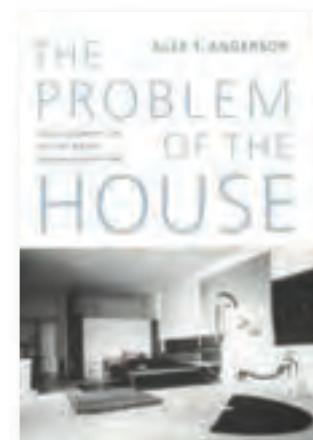
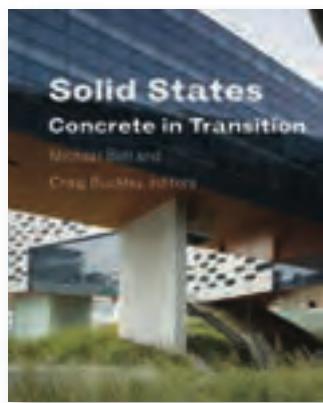
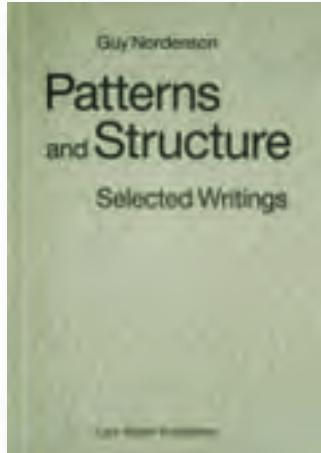
The foreword by Mark Wolfe, executive director of the Texas Historical Commission, sets the stage, not-

ing the shift in tastes from pre-World War I Victorian-era styles to new European imports. Central Texas is a window onto what occurred across the state as Texas transitioned from an agricultural economy to one based on oil exploration, and as the population began the shift from predominately rural to urban. Art Deco was the perfect style to carry the state through this change, and murals that clearly portray the cowboy, ranching, and agricultural past, no matter how romanticized, also boldly depict the future of urbanism, rural electrification, and industry. Wolfe also mentions that the Hill County was especially well poised for Art Deco style development with the influx of new oil money and the strong Texas ties to Washington, D.C., through Vice President John Nance Gardner, an East Texas native who facilitated the state's securing of numerous WPA, CCC, and PWA projects. The height of Art Deco also coincided with the Texas Centennial, influencing the commemorative buildings, sculptures, and artwork that celebrated this important milestone. Art Deco was a favorite of court

houses, post offices, public buildings, banks, and movie theaters, and the organization of the book's chapters allows for a quick comparison of these buildings within the region.

The building styles vary from exuberantly detailed Art Deco to the pared down Moderne style, while the mural painting examples clearly bridge the transition. Specifically, San Antonio's central post office mural, titled "San Antonio's Importance in Texas History," shows the obvious influence of the Mexican muralists, namely Diego Rivera and David Siqueros, evidence that architects and artists were looking outside of the state for stylistic execution while searching deep into Texas history for their subjects.

Facing the introduction page is an image of the mural from the 1933 State Highway Building in Austin, showing the 254 counties of Texas, the six flags, and vignettes of our agricultural past, all overlaid with images of rural electrification and modern industrialization. The introduction includes a lament from William Orr Ludlow, FAIA, taken from a 1930 article in the *San Antonio Express*, where he asks if modernistic architecture is destined to replace the prevailing styles. The authors do an excellent job placing Art Deco in its historic context, including its origin in, and evolution from, Beaux Arts classicism: though the style was called modernistic at the time, it is in fact a stylization of classical elements and forms. *Hill County Deco* is a colorful coffee table book that is fun to flip through, while more serious readers will enjoy the comprehensive overview of the subject matter and the carefully researched and cited buildings, murals, commemorative pieces, and architectural drawings.



PATTERNS AND STRUCTURE: SELECTED WRITINGS 1973-2008

BY GUY NORDENSON

"It is rare to see engineers engaging in a sustained effort to write about their work and its significance," says Harvard Professor Antoine Picon. This compilation is a wonderful reflection on Nordenson's career thus far and the changing pace and stature of structural engineering.

\$60 / \$48 FOR RDA MEMBERS

SOLID STATES: CONCRETE IN TRANSITION

EDITED BY MICHAEL BELL & CRAIG BUCKLEY

An interdisciplinary group of architects, historians, theorists, engineers, fabricators, and materials scientists collectively explore the past, present, and future possibilities of this highly calibrated, fluid material.

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BY MARK KRISTAL

Now more than ever, architects and designers are crossing aesthetic borders, and redefining craft to suit their own creative needs, philosophies, and expectations. This volume features 25 residential, commercial, and institutional projects.

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WHAT ARCHITECTS DESIRE

EDITED BY "DIE WALVERWANDTSCHAFTEN MÜNCHEN - ZÜRICH - BOSTON," A COLLECTIVE CONSISTING OF CORDULA RAU, EBERHARD TRÖGER, AND OLE W. FISCHER

The leitmotif of the German contribution to the 12th Architecture Biennial in Venice, "desire," is at the same time the topic of a survey among architects; answers are given through drawings.

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THE PROBLEM OF THE HOUSE: FRENCH DOMESTIC LIFE AND THE RISE OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

BY ALEX T. ANDERSON

"The problem of the house is a problem of the epoch," stated Swiss architect Le Corbusier; architecture, he felt, should focus on everyday life and produce housing that is "made for living in."

\$60 / \$48 FOR RDA MEMBERS

MY GREEN CITY: BACK TO NATURE WITH ATTITUDE AND STYLE

BY R. KLANTEN, S. EHMANN, AND K. BOLHÖFER

This book presents inspiring work from around the world that is bringing nature back into our cities: from urban farming initiatives, guerilla gardening, and architectural visions, to furniture, products, and other everyday objects that use plants in a functional or aesthetic way.

\$60 / \$48 FOR RDA MEMBERS

NEW ANTHOLOGY RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT HOUSTON'S IDENTITY

Literary Houston (David Theis, editor, 2010, 544 pages, TCU Press, hardback \$32.50, paperback \$24.95)

by Hank Hancock

IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO THE BROADLY APPEALING collection *Literary Houston*, editor David Theis can't help but recite the timeworn conventions about Houston's literary heritage, starting with the bugaboo (just nine words in) of New York City and our comparative lack of esteem. His collection does a great deal to dispel this hand-wringing about proving the city's cultural worth by assembling a set of laudable themes and perspectives we can securely identify as Houston's own. At the same time, as useful as this collection will be for many readers—it is both a sort of textbook that college instructors might adopt, as well as a casual survey for occasional sampling—it raises pertinent questions about what we should expect of Houston's literary heritage.

The 64 contributions chosen and arranged by Theis are alone evidence of a distinctive literary tradition. The book—like Houston—is a sprawling, untidy volume, whose planning is not always clear, with choices that seem puzzling at first but are more sensible in thoughtful retrospect. Nevertheless, it provides a clear introduction to writers the city regularly celebrates, as well as honoring those whose legacies have faded somewhat. Theis readily acknowledges

that with his choices he entered contested territory, one with fiercely defended interests and established ideas about what constitutes "literary" and "Houston." No surprise if certain readers are dissatisfied with one or more of his selections or disappointed not to find their pet Houston tract included in the table of contents. Luckily for us, Theis has included an excellent appendix of titles "That Got Away" (sometimes owing

to rights restrictions). Also, plenty of the contributions themselves cite additional titles and the names of authors significant to Houston.

Theis divides the book into sections, some of which cannot secure their borders. The first three are Biography and Memoir, Visitors, and The City Itself, each of them containing some works that could fit elsewhere or should. The next, Events, adds to the historical selections in the previous sections—works of interpretation as well as original documentation—with essays about the Battle of San Jacinto (fought mere months

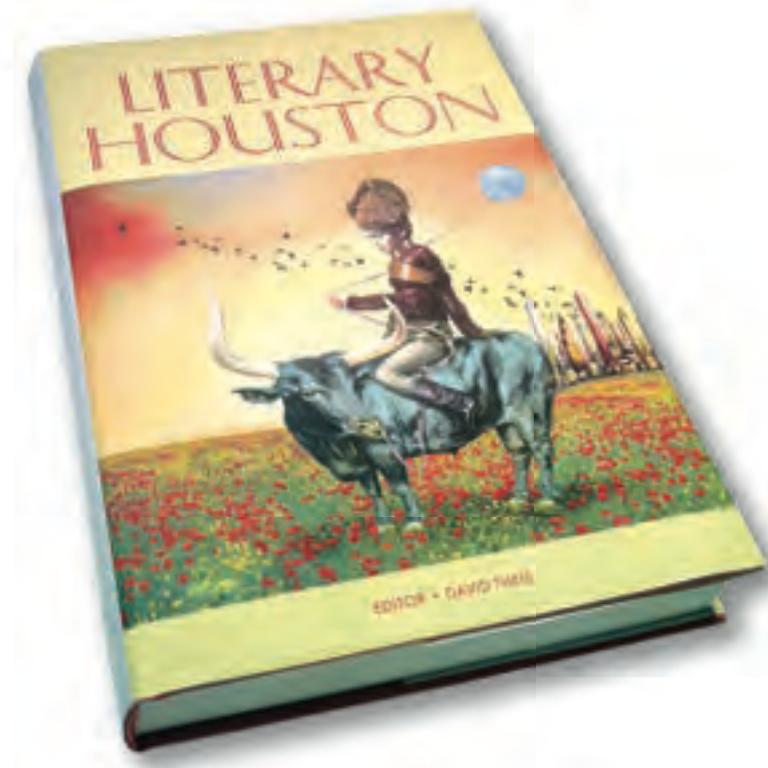
before the Allen brothers landed), the turbulent founding of the Houston Symphony, the Astrodome (not exactly an event, but all right), the defection of Chinese ballet sensation Li Cunxin, the Enron debacle, the disintegration of the space shuttle Columbia, and the influx of evacuees from Katrina. The final two

sections—less than a third of the book—comprise creative writing by mainly contemporary poets and fiction writers, often drawing from the tremendous store of talent at the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program. *Literary Houston* relies so much on journalism and history, however, it might lead us to conclude that nonfiction is Houston's sturdiest literary genre.

Newspaper columnists and journalists dominate much of the nonfiction, a fact that shouldn't be surprising, given that we have for several decades now benefited from award-winning coverage in the *Houston Press* and *Texas Monthly*, and that the local dailies have at various times employed such luminaries as O. Henry, Walter Cronkite, Donald Barthelme, and Sig Byrd—all included here.

Indeed, very little in this book surpasses Sig Byrd's electrifying beatnik street patois: "Evenings, Gafftop still slaves as an eccentric dancer at the Club de Lisa, in the Bloody Fifth Ward, where the cats say he is very lagoon in the shake-dance number."

A significant share of the essays concern themselves with Houston's architecture, planning, neighborhoods, and development, recognizing that Houston's story has always been about unchecked speculation and its effects on the lives of its citizens. Historian Stephen L. Hardin describes the "ills of desultory development" when Houston was the capital of the Republic. In the rush to build, the Republic's founders failed to erect enough chimneys and installed too few stoves, so statesmen huddled in dirt-floor shacks where they withstood not only withering summer heat and freezing, damp cold (the open prairies 170 years ago must have made Houston winters a quite different experi-



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RETROSPECT.

ence from today), but also pestilence, disease, and streets full of mud, tree stumps, and animal carcasses. (Philip Lopate, on the other hand, later contends that Houston “has one of the mildest and pleasantest climates of any North American metropolis.” I’m sure neither is lying.)

Albert J. Guerard, born in Houston in 1914, left the city ten years later (by train!) only to return in 1972 to test his memories against the evidence on the ground. The result is a record of the wastes made of the neighborhoods of Downtown, what we now call Midtown, and “the Binz” where museums now congregate. In his essay, he describes experiencing vertigo—not only because of his own changed perspective (and occasional false memory), but also at the sight of the many paved-over lots and new freeways, and the utterly changed social texture of street corners and sidewalks near his old home, now split up into a fourplex and inhabited by black families. It is tempting to try to trace some of the place names he employs (Google maps can help somewhat), but 1972 is already eons ago, and the places have already changed again.

Guerard’s father, Albert L. Guerard, came to Houston in 1913 to teach at the new Rice Institute (whose buildings he endearingly characterizes in his own essay in terms of their pastiche of nonlocal traditions), and already he describes the city as “sprawled indefinitely over the prairie.” (He is one of several over the following century to mention the immensity of the Houston sky.) Guerard senior then describes Houston’s transformational decade just prior to World War I, including the completion of the Ship Channel, the development of the newly discovered oil fields, the rise of industrialists Jesse Jones and Will Clayton, and the convergence of 17 railroads. (Several later writers will deem their own decades to be transformational, and because we’re talking about Houston, they were mostly right.)

Ada Louise Huxtable’s nearly canonical “Deep in the Heart of Nowhere” provides a take on Houston from a “car’s-eye view” in 1975, midway through another transformational decade. Her criticism is eloquent and precise: “Houston is all process and no plan. Gertrude Stein said of Oakland that there was no there, there. One might say of Houston that one is always on the way, always arriving.”

However, we probably learn more about “the real Houston each resident seeks out individually for want of a discernible mass focus” in Philip Lopate’s “Houston Hide-and-Seek” from 1989. Lopate got out of the car and over several years sought out the city in its zydeco joints and art spaces, constructing “an interior city from the handful of locations that are charged with personal meaning.” Lopate inveighs against 60-mile-an-hour architecture, the triumph of the car over walkable spaces, the evacuation of Downtown, and Houston’s foolish anti-urban sensibility, but he has the advantage of an interior perspective. Terrence Doody elaborates on this interior perspective further in “Immanent Domains,” explaining what is perhaps a signal strategy in Houston’s cultural geography: that

we make meaning from the inside out “as we appropriate [places] by acts of the imagination and refine their purpose.”

Since Houston takes so much effort to find a way into, we can better appreciate the contributions of our literary visitors—H. L. Menken and Simone de Beauvoir are caustic examples, with Jan Morris and Stanley Crouch rather more friendly—who were necessarily at a disadvantage, but still managed to shine some light on Houston’s fraught cultural relationship with the rest of the country and the world.

Much of the nonfiction in *Literary Houston* concerns itself with a century-long effort to consolidate Houston’s cultural prestige, summoning up the central role oil money has played here. Theis weighs the usefulness of extravagant oil wealth in side-by-side profiles of two very different women. First, Joanne Herring (played by Julia Roberts in *Charlie Wilson’s War*) was instrumental in motivating support through her social circles for US intervention into Russian-occupied Afghanistan. Her contemporary and opposite number was Dominique (Schlumberger) de Menil, to whom more than a few of Houston’s cultural institutions owe their founding or survival. She and her husband were able to bring together Houston oil barons, ecumenical religious leaders, and black radicals, as described in Norman Mailer’s rather nauseating (and still somehow fascinating—that’s Mailer for you) report of his baiting of a militant Negro professor on the occasion of the 1969 moon landing of Apollo 11.

The de Menils fought against Houston’s provinciality in the 1950s by advocating modern art and bringing in artist friends and curators from New York and Europe to class up the joint. Two decades later, curator Jim Harithas (according to a piece by Lisa

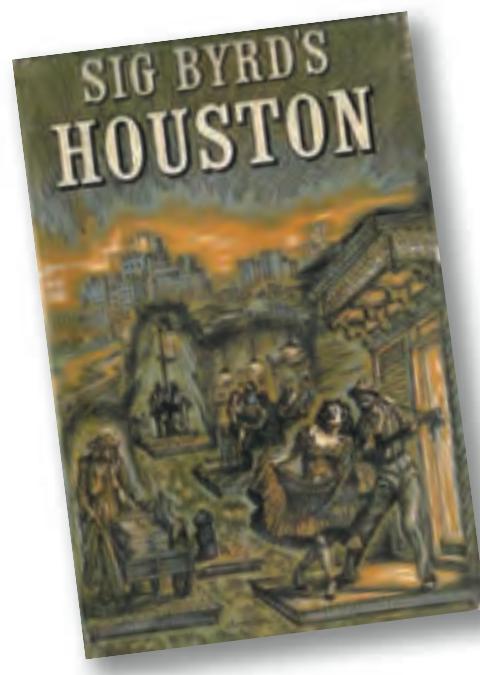
Gray) took the opposite tack toward the very same goal, demanding that the city support its own artists and prove itself equal to the most productive art centers of the world. What matters here is that Houston’s supposed provinciality has remained a constant, a fixed idea, a problematic motif in our self-conception (among others revealed in the collection).

Houston’s patrons of the arts have long aimed to make art and architecture into the basis for Houston’s “salable” national and international repute. For this very reason, the book casts a critical eye on its own project: to tout against claims to the contrary that there is such a thing as a literary tradition in Houston.

As regards the creative works, what makes a work of fiction a “Houston story” or a “Great Houston Novel,” of which Theis claims there is none so far? Is it a simple matter of setting? If so, Mary Gaitskill, in an otherwise fascinating story featuring her trademark elliptical observations, wraps the place up with the ready-made and not entirely satisfactory observation, “Houston in the summer was terribly hot and humid.” Other works point out our car culture and our funky bayous. Poets Rich Levy and Robert Phillips lay claim to an authentic Houston by way of portraits of the city’s drunks and bus riders. Or does the writer need to make Houston the subject *per se*? Lorenzo Thomas’ excellent and intimate poem “Liquid City” meditates on sorrows and ambitions that are especially recognizable here. Theis might easily have included dozens more “Houston poems,” which nearly every faculty member and student at the UH writing program sits down to write at some point in his or her tenure, temporary though it may be.

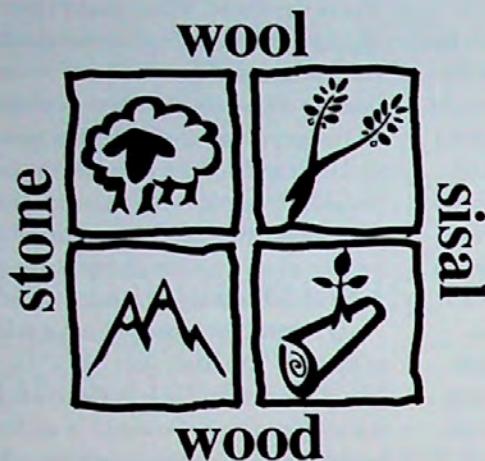
According to this collection, *Literary Houston* can point to a set of long-standing and still vibrant themes unique to our city, and we can continue looking for and publishing those works without anyone insisting that “this is a Houston story.” Antonya Nelson’s “Eminent Domain,” one of the best examples, makes Houston recognizable in a picture of patronage and poverty hidden and exposed, of self-infatuation and charity and survival.

The considerable charm of *Literary Houston* lies in the dozens of unexpected convergences between writers in different eras or about different subjects and in different literary modes. Besides the subjects already mentioned, we regularly encounter these great Houston themes: space and outer space, the information age, the tremendous sky, oil power and state power, artists flourishing amid benign neglect, the fecundity of the natural environment, the shameful history of white supremacy and the corollary racial prejudice and mistrust, music made cheap and on the fly, Totally Nude Live Girls, casual violence, self-deception, and deceptive self-presentation. These multiple perspectives—from a century ago, three decades ago, or last year; from the native, the visitor, or the transplant—together produce a rich, complete, contradictory, and thus truer portrait of Houston than any one story or received idea, including the one that says that Houston lacks or is still in search of its own literary traditions.



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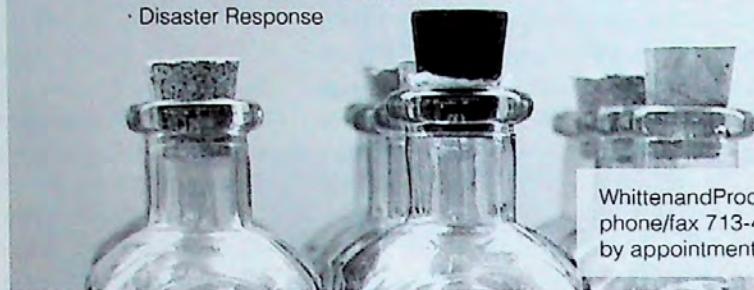
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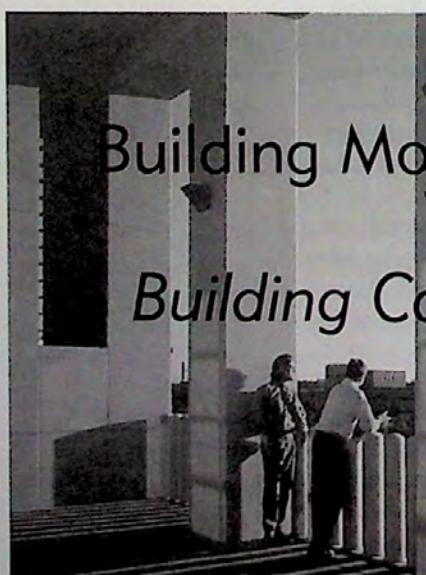
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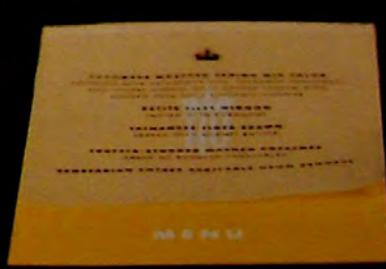
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A Call to Revolution

Taking Houston to the Cutting Edge of the Local Food Movement

AT ITS MARCH 9, 2011 GALA, THE NON-PROFIT URBAN HARVEST HONORED LAURA SPANJIAN. MAYOR ANNISE PARKER RECRUITED HER FROM SAN FRANCISCO ONE YEAR AGO TO SERVE AS THE SUSTAINABILITY DIRECTOR FOR THE CITY OF HOUSTON. SPANJIAN MOBILIZED HOUSTONIANS AROUND NUMEROUS INITIATIVES. BELOW IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE ROUSING SPEECH SHE DELIVERED ON RECEIVING THE HONOR.

On first glance, what we did in the past year does not necessarily seem difficult to accomplish: build some vegetable gardens downtown, open a new mid-week farmers market, help out some food trucks ... What's hard about that?

What made our efforts hard is that most people thought we were crazy, that it wouldn't work, that the gardens wouldn't grow, that they would be graffitied, that plants would be stolen and vandalized, or even that people would start growing "pot" in our "pots."

They thought the farmers market could never work downtown because of the parking, the culture, and the tunnels. My favorite question about the site was, "City Hall? Where is that?"

And they thought Houston wasn't ready for a burgeoning food truck and food cart movement.

But of course, we have been successful building vegetable gardens, starting new farmers markets, and supporting food trucks. Most importantly, we created community and inspired people of diverse backgrounds to grow food in the city.

Urban Harvest does not give up. They have a vision. They not only want to build more vegetable gardens and open more farmers markets, they want to start a revolution ... a local food revolution, a livable city revolution, a community revolution. Their work is not just about vegetables or gardening or urban farms. It's about bringing people together, creating community, sparking economic development, working together, partnering to make Houston not just a green city or a city that is on the cutting edge of the local food movement, but a great city.

This is just the beginning. We don't just want vegetable gardens downtown, we want them everywhere. We don't just want a few farmers markets around town, we want big, vibrant, successful farmers markets in beautiful locations. We want to partner with Recipe for Success to put vegetable gardens in every school, community gardens on big lots accessible to many neighborhoods and chefs, and mobile trucks that sell fresh

We need you to be **ambassadors**, opinion leaders, community leaders, and **spread the word**.

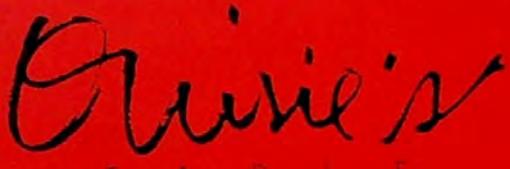
produce to areas of the city that need it. We want to partner with Neighborhood Centers to create kitchen incubators to encourage more microbusinesses to succeed. We want to work with the Food Trust and major supermarkets to minimize the food deserts in Houston. We want to work with the Health Department on policies to decrease childhood obesity. We want to work with the Mayor's Council on Health and the Environment to create a sustainable food policy for Houston. We want to partner with food trucks and carts to support their success. We want to work with chefs and restaurants to encourage them to buy and sell local food. And, of course, we want to partner with all of you to promote, buy, grow, and eat local and organic food.

We need you to be ambassadors, opinion leaders, community leaders, and spread the word. Make a commitment tonight to bring one downtown employee to the City Hall farmers market next week. Bring one new family member to one of the markets over the weekend at Eastside, Discovery Green, or Highland Village. Talk to public officials about how important local food is. Support your local microbusinesses, food trucks, and carts. Talk to your children about healthy eating. Write letters, show up, be seen, talk to people. That is how our city will become great. You can all make a difference with some action and activism.

LAURA SPANJIAN



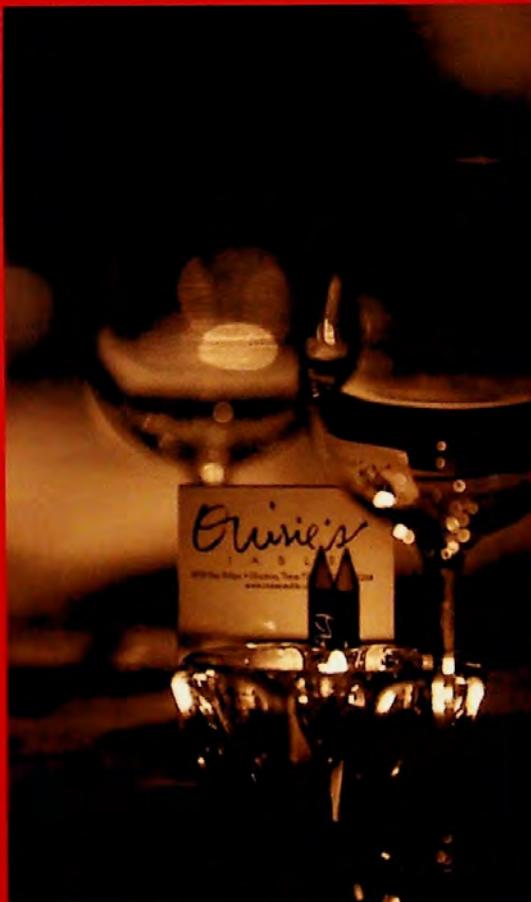
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