

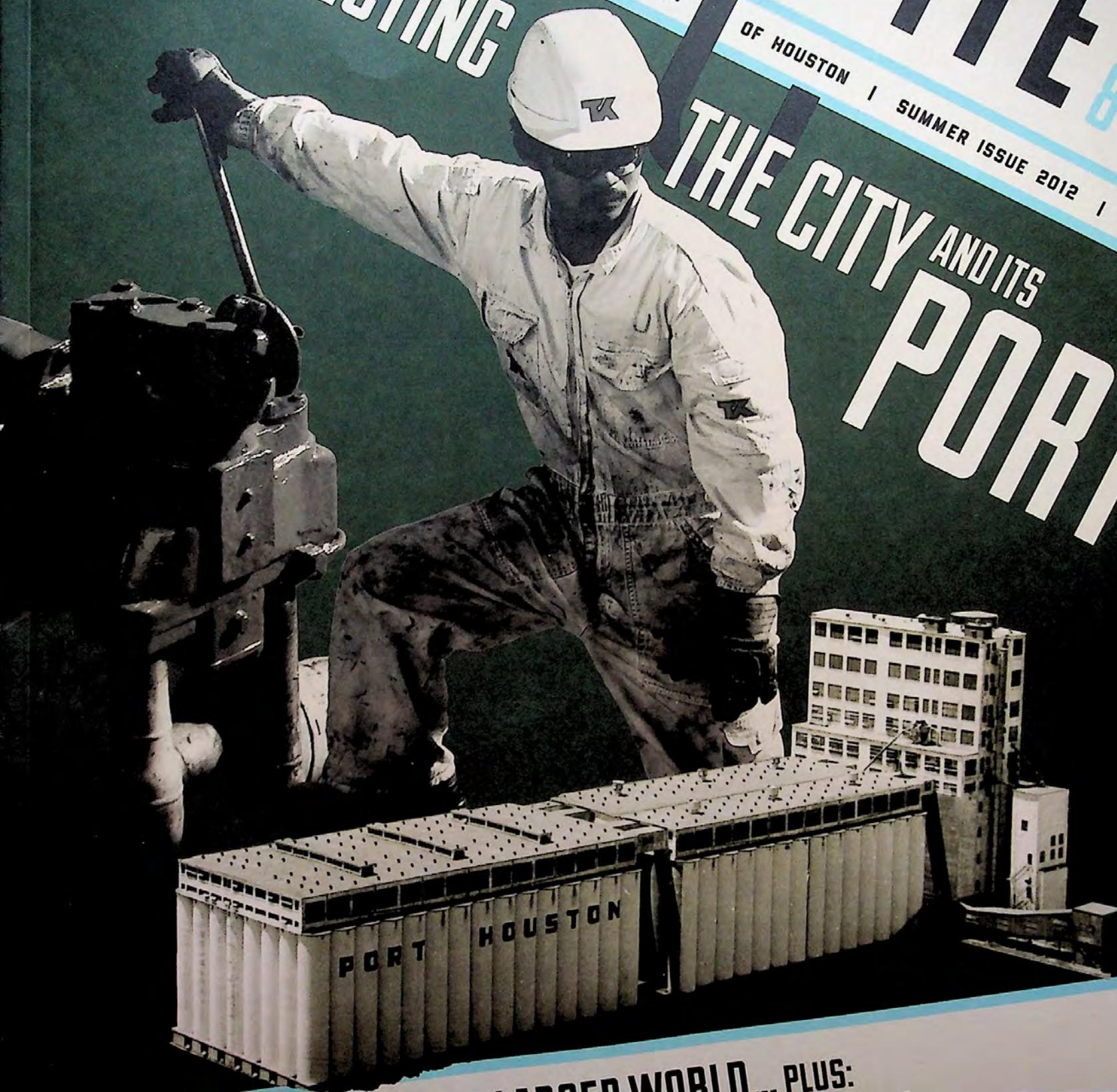
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THE ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN REVIEW

CITE 89

OF HOUSTON | SUMMER ISSUE 2012 | \$7.00

THE CITY AND ITS PORT



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YOSHIO MEETS NORM

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LECTURES

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Michael Speaks

Dean of College of Design,

University of Kentucky

Wednesday, September 5, 7 p.m.

Alfredo Brillembourg

Caracas Urban Think Tank

Wednesday, September 19, 7 p.m.

Jeffrey Schnapp

Director, metaLAB, Harvard University

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Marc Angélil

Professor of Architecture, ETH Zurich

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SPOTLIGHT AWARD

Pezo Von Ellrichshausen

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Architecture Center Houston



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CHARRETTE

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND PROMENADES:
UNIFYING MUSEUM PARK SUPER NEIGHBORHOOD

Rice School of Architecture

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CAN A FLOOD OF TOURISTS PROTECT THE WETLANDS, AND THE REGION, FROM STORM SURGES?

Four days after Hurricane Ike hurtled across Galveston and charged up Interstate 45 to Houston on September 13, 2008, a team from the Army Corps of Engineers noticed something remarkable as they assessed damage by boat: water was still streaming off the Chambers County wetlands into the east arm of Galveston Bay. The flow was so substantial that it looked like a long waterfall. With the center of Ike's 46-mile-wide eye tracking over Galveston at 73rd Street, then up the interstate, the Bolivar Peninsula and the marshy pastureland to the north across the bay had been on the "dirty side" of the storm—the northeast quadrant. With sustained winds of 110 miles per hour, Ike ranked only as a high Category 2 on the Saffir-Simpson Scale; but in terms of size (120 miles across) and kinetic energy, the storm was one of the most powerful on record. It lifted the Gulf of Mexico into Galveston Bay and Galveston Bay into San Leon, Bacliff, Kemah and, from the harbor side, the city of Galveston. Combined with the uprooted trees, downed power lines, ripped roofs, and other windstorm mayhem across Houston, this near-biblical level of flooding brought the cost of damage to \$27 billion, making Ike the third most expensive hurricane to make landfall in the U.S.

The wetlands had acted like a sponge. First, they absorbed the 14-foot storm surge that had flattened up to 90 per cent of the structures in towns and subdivisions on the Bolivar Peninsula, then they released it gradually back into the bay.

"That caught our attention," says Houston environmental attorney James Blackburn, Professor of the Practice in Environmental Law at Rice University. "The key word is 'resiliency.' The area can absorb a storm and recover."

Blackburn is also a co-director of the SSPEED Center—for "Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disasters"—a consortium of seven universities. Based at Rice, it includes experts from the University of Houston, Texas Southern, Texas A&M, UT Austin, UT Brownsville, and LSU, plus several architecture and engineering firms. Established in 2007, SSPEED initially focused on lessons from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; but within a year, they had Ike to learn from.

With the primary goal of protecting lives and minimizing property damage, the group studied a variety of ideas, including one developed by

William J. Merrill before the SSPEED Center started its work. Inspired by the massive structures that keep the North Sea out of Holland, Merrill's so-called Ike Dike would be a massive floodgate that could close off Bolivar Roads, the entrance from Galveston Bay to the gulf. A multibillion-dollar price tag made that approach unfeasible, at least in the present economic climate. And there were also environmental objections.

"My main concern about the Ike Dike would be the impact it would have on the environment," cautions Alice Anne O'Donnell, M.D., chairperson of the Galveston group of the Houston Audubon Society. "It would prevent the normal, natural barriers to high waters from working."

And periodic flooding renews the wetlands, helping maintain them as nurseries for fish, crabs, shrimp, and oysters and as lifelong habitat for birds.

"Wetlands function in two ways," SSPEED's co-founder and director Phil Bedient, Rice professor of Environmental Engineering, explains. "They're definitely an area of storage, and they can help knock down the peaks of these surges."

Aided by a \$1.25 million two-year grant from the Houston Endowment, later renewed for an additional three years for \$3.2 million, the SSPEED Center assembled its diverse coalition of experts and began exploring alternatives that would work with the natural process, rather than reining it in. They are carefully coordinating with the Port of Houston to explore constructing a gate structure at the mouth of the Houston Ship Channel.

The preservation of wetlands is the most innovative idea to come out of the center. They considered turning the storm-trampled Bolivar Peninsula into a national seashore, similar to Padre Island, then rejected the idea. It was unlikely to fly under current economic conditions, and it ran contrary to Texans' attitudes about property rights.

Like other forms of national parks, national seashores involve the federal government's buying up historically or scenically important real estate,

often using the concept of eminent domain to leverage property from reluctant buyers. Beginning with Yellowstone in 1872 and proliferating after the National Parks Service Act of 1916, national parks have entailed the U.S. Department of the Interior owning and managing scenically or historically important real estate, creating and managing tourism infrastructure, and strictly regulating concessions for lodging, food service, canoe rentals, and the like. To keep the parks within the vacation budgets of average Americans, entrance fees are maintained at a level that doesn't begin to cover costs. Most of the expense is borne by taxpayers whose enjoyment of the natural wonders will be limited to calendar photos and Discovery Channel documentaries, because these unspoiled natural areas often are far from major cities. (For example, Big Bend National Park is 12 hours from Houston, eight from San Antonio and even four from El Paso.)

Extending its scope to all the precious marshes in and near Galveston Bay (the country's second-largest bay after Chesapeake) and to the barrier island and peninsulas protecting them from the open Gulf, SSPEED brought together state and federal agencies, nonprofit conservation groups, local governments and representatives of the tourist industry to explore an alternative: create a national recreation area extending from Winnie and High Island, along the Bolivar Peninsula and southwest to Matagorda Bay. Save the wetlands and let them protect the built environment on the mainland by offering an economic incentive to local residents:



ABOVE: Map showing existing protected areas of the coast.

greatly increased revenue from tourists—tourists drawn by the natural assets themselves, not by elaborate, expensive resorts and golf courses. And let's call it something that would stir Texas pride—the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area (LSCNRA).

As proposed in the LSCNRA, the National Park Service contributes expertise and coordination, giving nonprofit organizations, state and government entities, private property-owners, and entrepreneurs incentives to work together and



defray overall costs.

Those cooperating entities also reap tremendous economic benefits from recreation and tourism activities. "It's a recreation area, but it's also a way for conservation to abound along the coast," says Bedient.

Although a national recreation area is a congressionally-created unit of the National Park Service, as proposed, the recreation area's assets will be primarily owned by private individuals and businesses, or by other government entities or nonprofits. Participation by landowners is voluntary; but if they want their fishing marina, for example, to be promoted as part of this government-sanctioned tourist destination, they must sign an agreement stipulating that certain mutually acceptable conditions will be met.

The SSPEED team recognized that political and business expertise would be essential to the project's success. They persuaded distinguished statesman Secretary James A. Baker III to become honorary chair of the steering committee. As chair, they enlisted Houston businessman John Nau III, who with his wife, Bobbie, owns Silver Eagle Distributorship, the second-largest beer distributorship in the U.S.

Believing that business leaders have an obligation to do public service, Nau had previously focused his volunteer efforts on historic preservation, creating a business-based model for taking preserved assets, from battlefields to old forts, and translating that into "preservation for a purpose"—in other words, tourism and economic development. At the request of President George W. Bush, Nau came to the Alabama and Mississippi coast right after Katrina and witnessed the role the marshlands, estuaries, and barrier islands played in protecting areas of development.

Those experiences combined to fire his enthusiasm about the Lone Star National Coastal Recreation Area. "It combines the economic benefits of tourism and the ecological benefits of marshland," Nau explains, "and it focuses the attention of local residents on these assets. On top of that it's 100 per cent voluntary, which is how Texans view their land. That's absolutely the sweet spot."



LEFT: Point Bolivar Lighthouse, built 1872.
ABOVE: Kayak group on Galveston Island.

are undisturbed. They're more considerate of their surroundings. And they certainly have the money to spend."

Visitors would access the LSNCRA through three highways leading off Interstate 10—US 288, I-45 and SH 124—utilizing accommodations, restaurants and similar services in Freeport, Galveston, High Island, and along the Bolivar Peninsula. A lot of the infrastructure is in place, at least for the start. Raised walkways, docks for kayak rentals and guide services, and rustic eco-lodges would be constructed with future hurricanes in mind. "The buildings and other structures would be elevated," Bedient says. "If they were taken out by a storm hit, it wouldn't be taking out entire subdivisions."

In February the task force released a report predicting that by its tenth year of operation the Lone Star National Coastal Recreation Area would add 5,260 new jobs to the region, including 11 per cent more in tourism, and would infuse \$192 million into the local economy. That money will come from the pockets of an additional 1.5 million visitors. Wouldn't that many people threaten the wetlands ecosystem the program intends to save?

"Alaska has already seen changes due to increased tourism," concedes Gina Donovan, executive director of the Houston Audubon Society. "But I'd rather have the opportunity to connect people with nature. Due to urban sprawl, the area is going to be affected. If it's going to be impacted negatively, I'd rather have it be by people enjoying it."

The project is being pursued in collaboration with the National Parks Conservation Association and Houston Wilderness. Along the coast, response to the proposed Lone Star National Coastal Recreation Area has ranged from cautiously positive to exuberant. Bob Stokes, president of the Galveston Bay Foundation, calls it "a promising opportunity," but adds "a lot of pieces have to come together to make it work from a conservation perspective."

Some of those pieces were discussed at the SSPEED Center's conference "Gulf Coast Hurricanes: Mitigation and Response" on the Rice University campus on April 10-11. A highlight of the meeting was the release of Philip Bedient's new book, *Lessons from Hurricane Ike* (Texas A&M Press). Ultimately, the U.S. Congress must approve Lone Star National Coastal Recreation Area. The conference was one step in the SSPEED Center's development of the background documentation for review by the National Park Service.

- Sandy Sheehy

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



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RiceDesignAlliance
ENGAGING PEOPLE SHAPING PLACE

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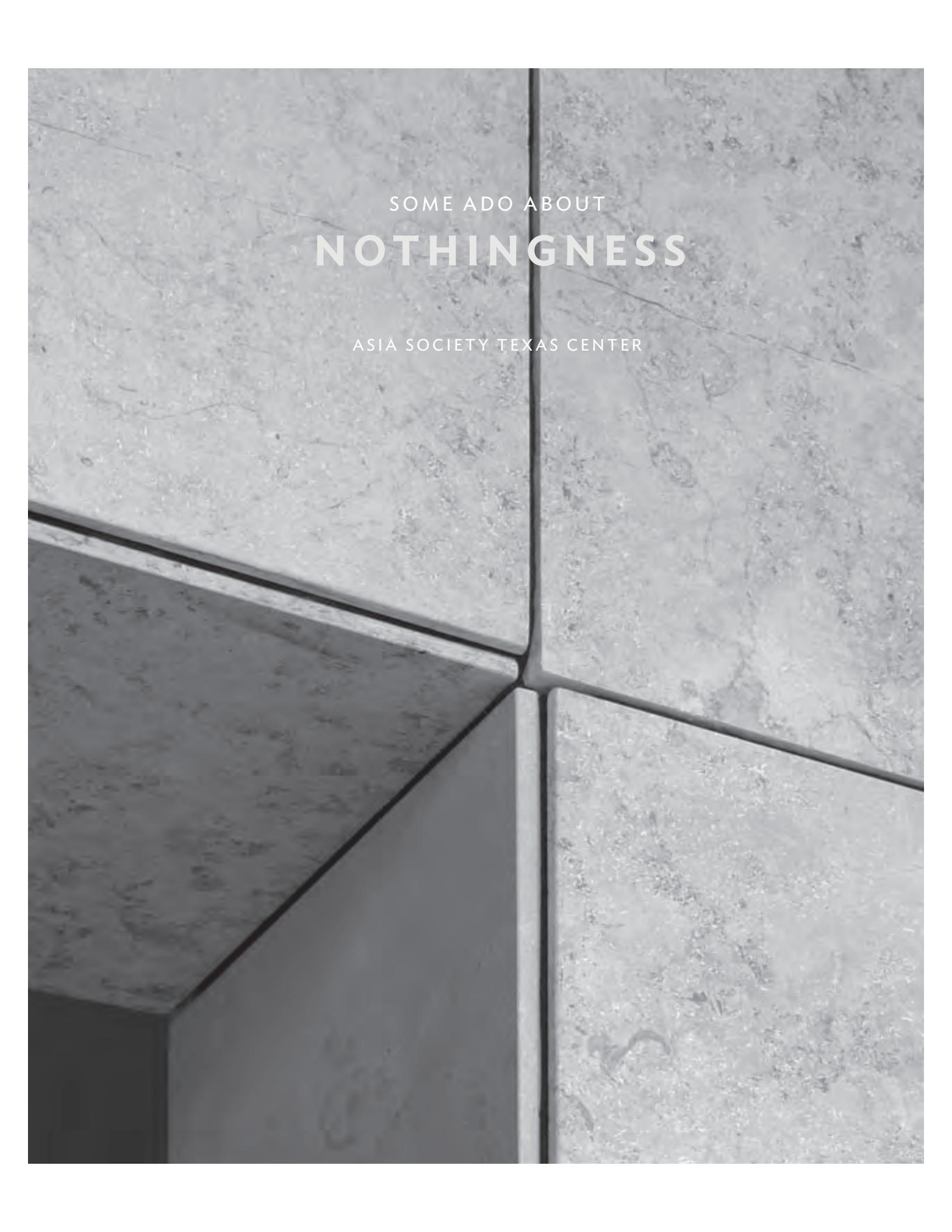


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WALTER P MOORE



SOME ADO ABOUT
NOTHINGNESS

ASIA SOCIETY TEXAS CENTER

THE MUCH-ANTICIPATED HOUSTON MUSEUM DISTRICT opening this April of Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi's exquisitely constructed Asia Society Texas Center (ASTC) follows the unveiling in February of a similar center in Hong Kong designed by the American architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien. Though the Asia Society has facilities in ten cities in the U.S. and Asia, these commissions are only its second and third substantial new constructions, after the 1981 New York City headquarters building designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes. Both new centers are cross-cultural emissaries, resolving complex demands. Still, Taniguchi may have been faced with the more difficult task: giving poetic dimension to a Houston lobby.

If, on the surface, the Asia Society's hiring of a Japanese architect to design in Texas, and American architects to design in China, seems crass and diagrammatic—like *Wife Swap*, except with extraordinary construction budgets—the decision is actually subtle and complicated. The work of both firms is already invested in complex East/West cross-cultural influences. Understanding that influence is useful, particularly in Taniguchi's case. The ASTC has been called overly formal and rude to the city in its relationship to the street (as has Taniguchi's only other building in the United States, his addition to the Museum of Modern Art in New York). Arguably, the ATSC embodies a different idea of respect, one in which a Modern syntax carries historical memory across cultural lines.

THE NON-PROFIT ASIA SOCIETY, FOUNDED IN 1956 BY JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER III—he grew up surrounded by his parents' extraordinary collection of Asian artifacts—promotes mutual understanding among the peoples of Asia (defined as Japan to Iran and Russia to New Zealand) and the United States. The Society's press materials state that the centers seek to "increase and enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas across the fields of arts and culture, policy and business, and education." To this end the public space of the new ASTC is a two-level array of elegant set-piece gathering spaces: theater, gallery, flexible meeting room (a small, sub-dividable conference hall), sculpture garden, café, and gift shop (initially serving as a small gallery). Each component is perfectly, richly neutral, fraught with potential. All are linked by a serene entry-level common hall. An open lounge, central to the upper level, overlooks and extends this hall.

Both new centers serve as concrete manifestations of cross-cultural dialogue. The Rockefellers have long been influential supporters of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the 2004 expansion of which was designed by Taniguchi, chosen from a list that included Williams and Tsien. I think one can safely say the Asia Society shares a core belief often central to the curatorial agenda of the Modern. Flatly stated: there may well be differences between cultures, but these differences are entirely meaningless—in the over-arching sense of the pan-cultural ecumenical humanism long embraced by the Modern—and also

deeply meaningful, the means by which you understand relatives rather than define enemies.

An eager embrace of Asian aesthetic sensibilities was pivotal for many great Modernists in the West, from Van Gogh to Wright to Taut to Gropius to Cage to Rauschenberg, and so on. Western influence has also powerfully affected Asian cultural production, particularly after World War II. Yet, if much has been made of the dialogue's possibility, actually defining the distinction between "Western" and "Eastern" sensibilities poses intractable dilemmas. Broadly speaking, one consequence of increasingly fine-grain curation and objective historical research of recent years has been a growing difficulty to speak of any culture as absolutely isolated from others.

For example, we conventionally think of Japanese aesthetic tradition developing in isolation. Still, it's hard to separate out entirely the cyclical influence of Chinese Imperial life, of craft and construction techniques imported from the Korean peninsula, and of the arrival from mainland Asia of various forms of Buddhism, as the Japanese islands and the continent beyond continued connecting and disconnecting like a faulty wire. The consequence of the later arrival of Americans, Dutch, and Portuguese would seem easier to parse, but it is not, or not exactly. After the forced opening of their markets in the 1850s, Japanese artisans rapidly developed aesthetic objects for Western consumption—Japonica—based in part on Japanese interpretations of Western desires. Successes in this market rebounded on Japonica's stylistic development. Thus, for example, the Japanese woodcuts that early Modernists treasured were frequently already cross-cultural interpretations, as complex in layered influence as the folded steel at the edge of a samurai sword.

It's likely a Western impulse to want to take these folds apart, making a diagram of difference. But doing so is not really the point with either of these firms. At stake is not clarity of hindsight, but continuity of potential. The architecture of Williams and Tsien has long been admired for difficult simplicity, abstraction arising from close attention to material possibility, use of asymmetrical circulation vested in narrative and landscape, and a preference for exception at the scale of the body. Though these architectural means are solutions to pressing issues in Western architectural discourse—how to enrich Modern abstraction as an alternative to Post-Modern representation—they are also associated with iconic Asian architectures, like those of Heian-era Japan.

With Taniguchi, it suffices that his own foundation myth as architect starts with three and a half formative years of study at Harvard, under a Bauhaus-inspired curriculum run by International Style architects whose borderless agenda was partly informed by close study of certain Japanese buildings, notably the Katsura Imperial Villa.¹ Taniguchi's early professional work was marked by a brittle enslavement to squares, a trend, probably arising from publication of early works of Eisenman, Meier, etc., that spread virulently through Japanese architecture in the early 1980s. But Taniguchi also worked for Kenzo Tange, and



of the Japanese architects whose design has come to the fore recently, Taniguchi alone remains committed to the simplistic geometry of mute, monumental mass associated with Tange, and with similar late High-Modern corporate architectures—Roche and Dinkeloo, I. M. Pei—of the West.

As with Pei, Taniguchi's work is frequently described as both controlled and restrained. It is obsessive though not, as with Richard Meier, oppressive. Consider the soft rigor present in an internal corner at the ASTC. Meier would have angle-mitered the limestone edges to impossibly brittle thinness to avoid violating the geometric purity of the intersection. Taniguchi accommodates the necessary material dimension, then exacts his revenge in the installation's excruciating precision. The result is orderly without seeming retentive (as shown in the opening photograph). Having escaped Meier's nervous self-referential squares, Taniguchi arranges his rectangular fields of exquisite materials (tending to the same limited palette) to settle experience. The resulting quiet spatial stability is not only a result of this understated un-insistent insistent rigor. As is immediately apparent in the ASTC interiors, Taniguchi is also a master of stable proportion and scale, and of rendering those in natural light (he is also good, within an otherwise hard-surfaced acoustical nightmare, of obtaining actual, acoustical quiet).

There is one bizarre aspect to Taniguchi's success. The largely corporate, mostly Western-developed architectural language he uses was moribund—dead, actually—when he adopted it. Likely for this reason, Taniguchi's work was, prior to the MOMA commission, frequently ignored in surveys of Japanese architecture (in a June 27, 1999, *New York Times* review of a book on

Taniguchi, Martin Filler describes the confusion that followed Taniguchi's being named to design the MOMA addition: it was almost impossible to find images of his buildings). But ruthless control of mass by Cartesian geometry is not what makes Taniguchi's buildings consequential. Instead, he is able to enliven their ponderous architectural language with vibrancy and uncertainty. This Taniguchi accomplishes by deeply idiosyncratic means. Into a neutral International syntax—the architecture of corporations everywhere!—he quietly imports a series of architectural strategies associated with archaic patterns of form and use in historic Japanese architectures. The startling consequence of this importation is both familiar and foreign, and so resonates with the Asia Society's purpose.

Before I describe how those strategies work at the ASTC, I'd like to summarize the cross-cultural influences at work. We're talking about a forum in Houston, designed by a Harvard-trained Japanese architect, serving to enable discourses between and about Asia and America, in which a ponderous Western Modern architectural syntax, influenced in its formative years by exposure to Asian models of formal thought, is reactivated by the use of historical Japanese architectural constructs, that evolved, perhaps influenced by Korean construction techniques, from earlier Chinese spatial patterns, which in part arose to accommodate a new religion arriving from the Indian sub-continent ...

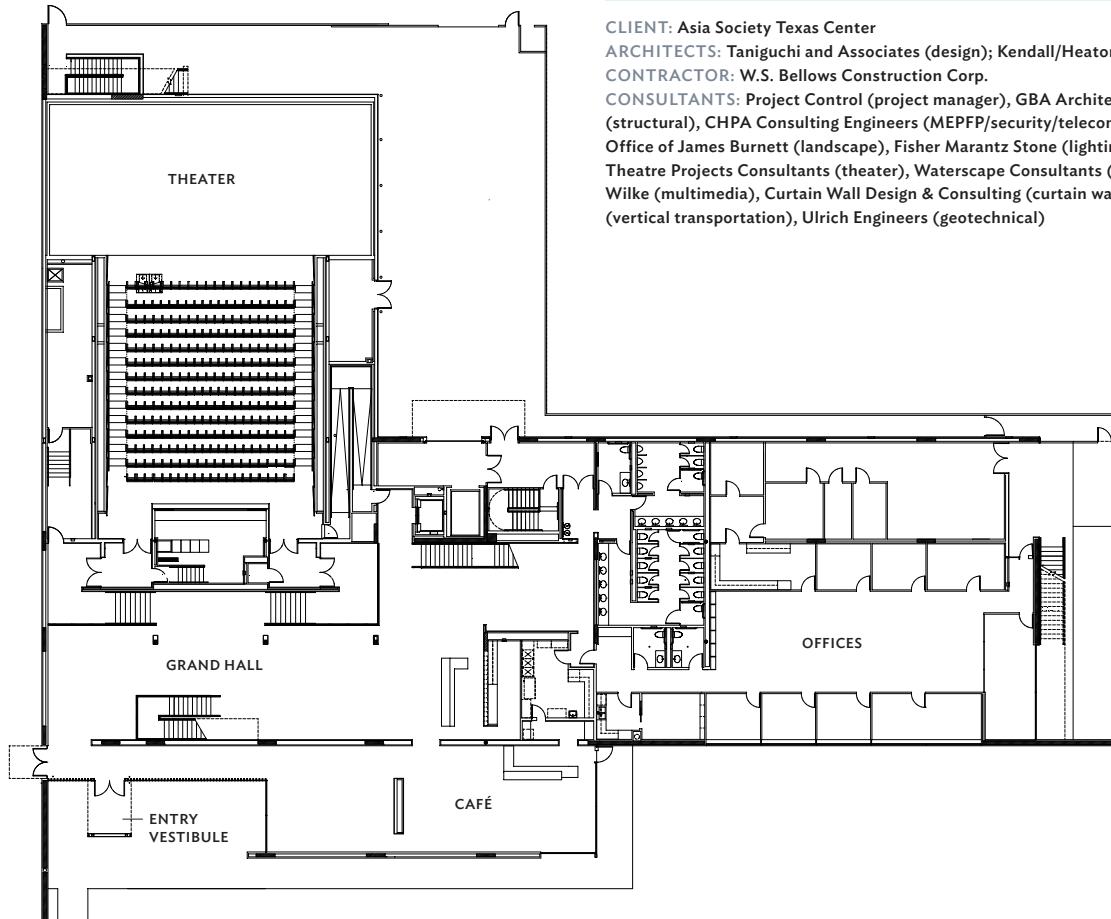
Re-reading that last sentence, I suddenly realized Houston might well be the perfect place for such a venture.

WHEN DESIGNING CULTURAL BUILDINGS, TANIGUCHI
regularly starts with an opaque sanctified box, a closed trea-

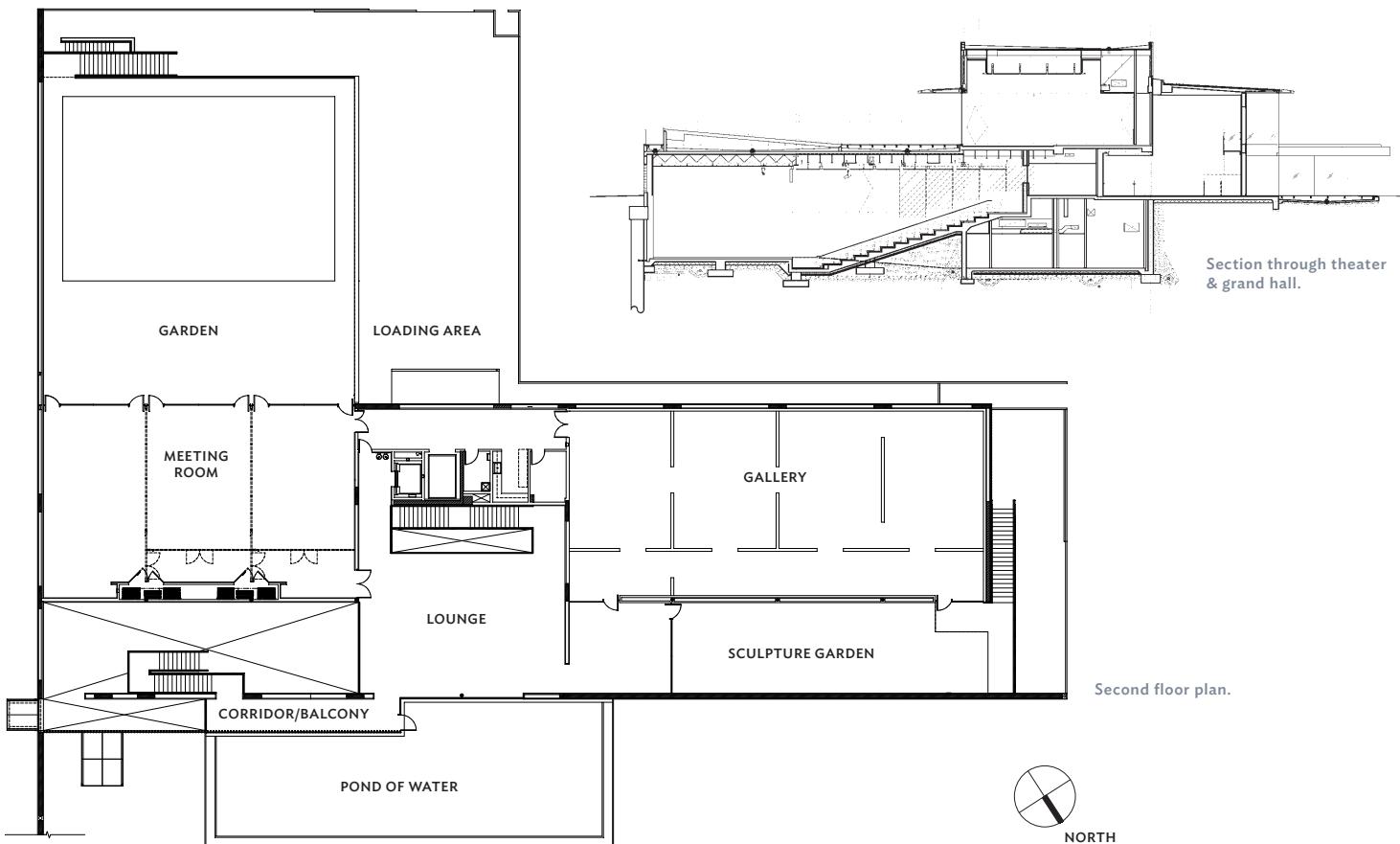
ABOVE: Gallery of the Horyuji Treasures, Tokyo, 1999.

Taniguchi accommodates the necessary material dimension, then exacts his revenge in the installation's excruciating precision. The result is orderly without seeming retentive.

NOTES 1. Fumihiko Maki, in "Stillness and Plenitude," the excellent introductory essay to *The Architecture of Yoshio Taniguchi* (Abrams, 1999), retells the story of Taniguchi—having studied engineering—being (so the story goes) tricked into architecture by a glowing description of the education at Harvard's Graduate School of Design given by a friend of Taniguchi's father (who secretly wanted his son to follow in his footsteps as an architect). Taniguchi's arrival at the GSD in the early 1960s coincided with Sert's deanship, but the curriculum was still largely a continuation of that left by Gropius. In 1960, Gropius, with Tange, Ishimoto, and Bayer, published the seminal *Tradition and Creation in*



First floor plan.



sury, sometimes lifted on posts (the "ur-model" of the type is the eighth-century Shosoin in Nara). Taniguchi uses this box to establish dark, actual interior space. This isn't particularly odd, though it flies in the face of an essential Modern trope, the necessity of continuity between inside and out. This powerful mechanism is clearly apparent in Taniguchi's masterpiece, the freestanding Gallery of the Horyuji Treasures, at the National Museum of Japan in Tokyo. There, dark protected interiority, a literal treasury, renders more remarkable the objects—including gilt bronze Buddhist Kannon statues reflecting infinitely in a Taniguchi-designed grid of glass vitrines—protected within.

At the ASTC, Taniguchi's signature treasure box sits behind the building's most identifiable elements: the two Jura limestone-clad walls extending along the north and east sides. The box is clearest from the west, but it's intentionally if subtly evident from all sides. Outside, its exterior is clad mostly in grey metal. Inside—isolated by a continuous linear skylight—its outer wrapping changes to dark panels of impossibly consistent Cherry veneer. In the hierarchy of public spaces at the ASTC, the box houses programmatic treasures: the large gallery, the meeting room, and the public seating of the theater. But the mysterious box also contains a large, central service core, a Western definition of dark program, so you understand it as organizational or diagrammatic more than sanctifying.

Perhaps for this reason, Taniguchi occasionally relinquishes the box's didactic logic. For example, the meeting room is entirely contained within the treasure box, and you perceive it as such—it sits on columns over the theater. But when you enter the room, you discover its entire south wall (what should be the far side of the box) is cut away, opening to a garden that, sloping up to a bamboo hedgerow at its far edge, re-establishes containment. It's a beautiful room, better for upending expectation. Taniguchi makes similar exceptions in the sculpture garden, where the grey metal changes to white stucco to better reflect light and define sculpture garden, and in the lounge, on which more in a moment.

The two limestone-clad bounding walls previously mentioned serve a second historical stratagem. Taniguchi invariably obscures his treasure boxes behind layered screens and walls, or within walled compounds. In historic Japanese (and other Asian) architectures, a precinct so defined was already a crucial interior, as such sets of walls defined hierarchies of access. At the Ise Shrine, for example, only Imperial family and ranking priests could pass the innermost walls, into a bounded space lacking any mechanism to specify behavior aside from the mute presence of the treasure house, and the forbidden central axis.

At the ASTC, you do not really enter the building satisfactorily (though you're already inside the air-conditioned envelope) until you've passed through the tight gap left where those two bounding walls are held back from intersecting, a lovely moment. The building's public entry sequence, beginning in the parking lot, and abetted by Taniguchi's placement of heritage live oaks, perversely requires everyone to squeeze through this narrow slot at the building's northeast corner. The grand hall—really, an audience hall—opens to one's right immediately upon so doing. The darkness, scale, proportion, and rectangular ordering (set by the column lines) of the hall recall similar spaces in Imperial architectures in Japan, for example, the Shishinden (throne room) in the Kyoto Imperial Palace or the various audience rooms of the Ninomaru in the Nijo Castle. The hall's monumental interiority is pleasingly aloof, unconcerned with the outside world, or with you (you correctly enter off axis).

Though two levels, it is both a room and interstitial space between treasure house and bounding walls. Taniguchi brings his full attention to bear on its design.

For most of its length the hall is lobby, the arcane rituals of which Houstonians should now, after generations of practice, be tenth-level masters. Taniguchi's vision of a Houston lobby accommodates and distinguishes between the collective and the individual. On your left as you move west into the hall's three-square bay length is the theater entry: from the central bay, two mirrored stairs drop a half level to the left and right through the screen of columns supporting the treasure box above. This large-scale symmetrical and centralizing public gesture is carefully offset on the opposite side of the hall by a lovely free stair that, folding back on itself, offers a smaller-scale path moving up, and then back out through the bounding wall, escaping outside of the precinct so carefully established.

This escape stair introduces an asymmetrical path binding the stable public hall at its edges. Turning on the stair's mid-landing you see, diagonally across and beyond the far limit of the hall, behind the lounge and improbably cut into the treasure house, a similarly dimensioned stair lit from above. It's like children becoming aware of each other across an adult party. To reach that far stair Taniguchi takes the wanderer outside the bounding wall, along a narrow corridor—a balcony really—flush with a plane of water outside (covering the café and shop below). This balcony is enclosed by the vertically mullioned glass curtain wall veiling the building upon approach, itself a Taniguchi signature, the vertical glazing so narrow—the pieces have the rough proportion of the cut strips of noren, the cloth screens hanging over public entryways in Japan—you are surprised your eye and mind can conspire to make the window wall transparent at all.

Then back through the bounding wall to the lounge, the calm center of a calm building. From this sitting room Taniguchi cuts a series of surprising garden views: through the open doors of the treasure box meeting room and out its great south-facing window to that sloping garden; past the edge of a cherry-clad wall (folded out from the box to screen the gallery) out to a west-facing sculpture garden; through a startlingly large north-facing window cut in the bounding wall out across that pond of water to an Oz-like downtown Houston (the view framed between the planted oaks).

In the downtown view Taniguchi utilizes shakkei, or borrowed landscape—one of the oldest techniques associated with Japanese and Chinese garden design—in which the middle ground is screened from view with foreground form specifically configured to engage circumstances of the distance in dialogue. The pond, lined in black granite to more perfectly reflect the skyline, hides the lawn, the street, the parking beyond. The easy mysticism of the intermittent fog spewing from its edges will at least serve as an excuse to leave a slow-moving conversation in the hall below.

To activate these views, Taniguchi shades their ultra-clear glass openings with deep, shallow-sloped awnings. These are curious elements, appended to the building. They are neither abstract nor abstractly representational—unlike every other element in the building—but are pragmatic and normative constructions, derived from movement of the sun and drainage of rain. The interplay between abstract logic and normative form is historically a source of deeply satisfying invention in Japanese architectures. Unlike most architects working in an abstract geometric syntax, Taniguchi does not always repress the

Japanese Architecture, with its famously edited photos (making it appear a Bauhaus masterwork) of the Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto (likely brought to Gropius' attention by Bruno Taut's 1936 study). In the early 1960s a number of popular and influential studies linking Modern and Japanese aesthetic concerns were readily available, of which Arthur Drexler's *The Architecture of Japan* (Museum of Modern Art, 1955), Heinrich Engel, *The Japanese House: A Tradition for Contemporary Architecture* (Tuttle, Rutland, 1964), and Werner Blaser, *Structure and Form in Japan* (Artemis, 1963), were widely known (I was shown all three by various professors at Rice 15 years later).



ABOVE: The hall is entered from the corner.

normative, and frequently obtains startling success with its introduction, most powerfully in similar awnings at the Nagano Prefectural Art Museum. At the ASTC the dialogue seems underdeveloped, particularly in the east elevation, where the two pragmatic diagonals, sitting atop that immense gridded limestone wall, feel entirely overwhelmed.

Of Taniguchi's archaic strategies, the last I'll describe is at work in the powerful honorific approach axis of the ASTC's public entry. This discrete walkway aligns with that monumental entry gap between the bounding walls, through which you can darkly make out the wooden treasure box. But to enter you first have to pass through the noren-configured glass screen wall. To do so you must leave the axis: the entry doors are in an offset, body-sized, cowl-like vestibule (a Taniguchi signature). There is a larger path, but you cannot traverse its full length.

The entry path so conceptualized makes clear the strengths and limits of Taniguchi's method. Entry is handled similarly at the Gallery of the Horyuji Treasures in Tokyo. There, Taniguchi interrupts the axis of approach from the east with a large shallow pool, in which, aligned with your approach, is an intermittent vertical jet. Beyond the pool, the axis is completed within the building by a crucial stair (you're meant to go up this stair first), veiled in glass. As at the ATSC you enter the building on an offset path through a boxed vestibule.

But at the Horyuji Gallery—unlike at the ASTC—something deeper is embedded in the organization. In the morning, the Jura limestone of the Horyuji treasury house burns golden in the sunrise. Reflected in the pool, it appears desirable but unavailable to those wishing to see the treasures. This is the traditional scenographic format for temple siting associated with the

Pure Land form of Buddhism. A mark of Taniguchi's genius, the construct also works at the end of the day, when the inside stair shines in the late afternoon sun.

The carry forward of that old and deeply acculturated pattern, stated in the most abstract Modern syntax, is brilliant: you don't suspect the pattern's presence, since such backward-gazing was unwelcome in the Modern. But it's also crucial to the architecture's success that, in the program of the Horyuji Gallery, Taniguchi was given the content to challenge the capacity of abstraction to carry narrative and cultural content. Is the same true at the ATSC, both in the small matter of the approach, and the larger matter of the general program? That is less clear to me. See it when it's full of people. I saw this subtle building empty, when its nothingness held out mostly promises.

But for now: congratulations, Asia Society, continued success to Houston. I'm writing this in Austin. We can't even build an art museum, and struggle to construct exceptionally. That said, we do some things well, and now would be the right time to red-flag the building's obstinate proudness about carbon footprint—they have to stop bragging about how much limestone was cut in Germany to get pieces Taniguchi would accept! The building uses geothermal wells for heating and cooling, but my sneaking suspicion is Taniguchi likes geothermal because it's quiet. But, enough: here's a non-profit offering proofs beyond promises in its desire to promote complex cross-cultural understanding through an architecture that does not pander to the least common denominator, but begins with difficult ambitions supported by a healthy budget and a commitment to see the work through to the highest level of detail and finish. ☺

Turning on the
stair's mid-
landing you
see, diagonally
across and
beyond the
far limit of
the hall,
behind the
lounge and
improbably
cut into the
treasure
house, a
similarly
dimensioned
stair lit from
above.

WESTHEIMER ON FOOT

HOME OF THE HIP. WALK OF THE BRAVE.

A FEW YEARS AGO, MY WIFE, SUSANNE, AND I MADE OUR first excursion to Anvil, the Westheimer curve's cocktail bar with high standards, to see what the young people were up to. The bar was already celebrated, even in the national media, for its pre-Prohibition-era concoctions. We were also intrigued by owners Bobby Heugel, Kevin Floyd, and Steve Flippo's conversion of an old commercial building into a contemporary space. They were continuing the welcome trend set at Café Brasil, Hugo's, and Empire Café of renovating old buildings rather than demolishing them.

We went and we enjoyed. Watching the bartenders (they happily eschew the trendy term "mixologists") strain mightily as they shook their cocktails was surprisingly entertaining, and we compared notes on our drinks with the thrill-seekers beside us at the bar. It's quite possible that between us we had The Brave (tequila and sotol, for starters), the Kentucky Cane (rum, rye, and more), the Americano (campari, vermouth, and soda), and a Waxing Poetic (cinnamon-infused bourbon, absinthe, and more). I may have also thrown down a craft beer. All this as we admired the handcrafted-ness of the space itself: the reclaimed meat locker doors that led to the bathrooms and the tongue-and-groove flooring used as tabletops.

To make a long story short, Anvil left us feeling rather expansive and wanting to continue our urban experience. Perhaps because of the alcohol, we forgot we were still in Houston, where walking from one place to another is not really encouraged, so we decided to stroll up Westheimer, then cross over to Poscol.

We'd only taken a few steps when sobering reality hit: Westheimer is no place for pedestrians. The sidewalks were broken and uninviting. The street was badly lit. Nobody else was walking. Cars, trucks, and buses were roaring by; we had to run across Westheimer to the restaurant. Poscol was softly lit, and the Italian small plates were delicious, but my pleasure was dimmed by the memory of that unpleasant walk. Not so much by its specific details as by the thought that something wasn't right here. Walking a bar- and restaurant-rich street like Westheimer shouldn't be so nerve-wracking, so ankle-threatening, not even in Houston.

Not long afterward, when the American Planning Association placed Montrose in its Top 10 "Great Places in America," based in part on its "walkability," we had to scoff. They must not have walked along Westheimer.

Since that time, the street seems to have grown even worse,

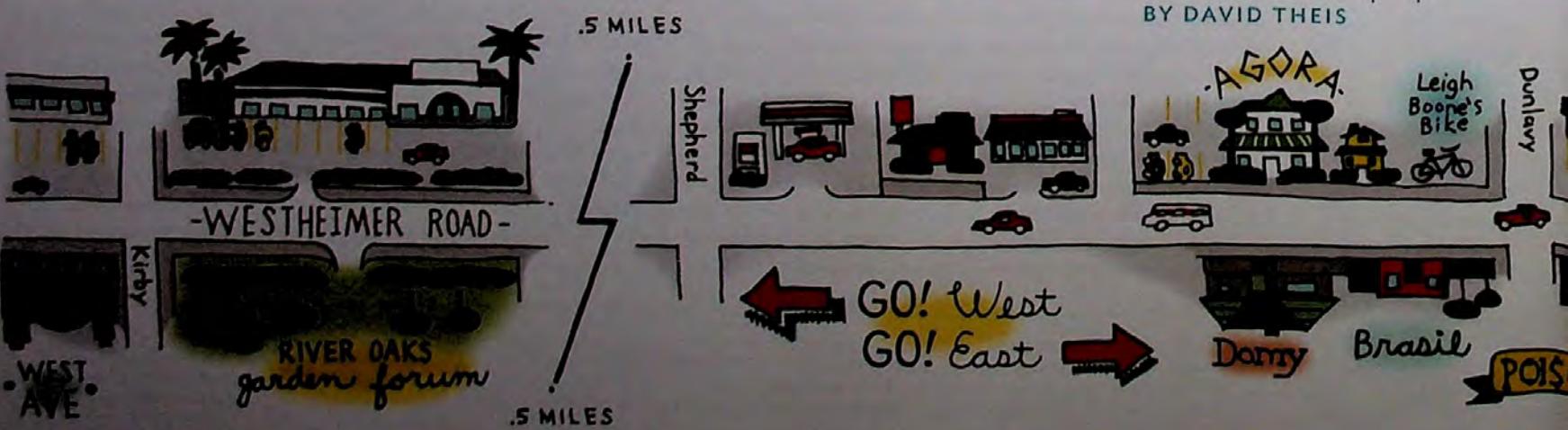
largely because its culture has become better. Restaurants and bars worthy of national attention continue to open, but each business owner has to fend for himself when it comes to providing parking and repairing ruined stretches of sidewalk. While some old buildings have happily been converted into temples of gastronomy, others have been leveled to create surface lots to meet mandated parking requirements.

In short, the stretch of Westheimer between Bagby and, say, Woodhead has become probably the best restaurant row in Texas—and the bars, boutiques, and antique stores are not far behind. In short, Westheimer should be a great urban promenade. But it isn't even an acceptable one, in large part because the City classifies the street as a "major thoroughfare," that is, as a street or road designated for the highest possible volume of traffic.

Only in Houston would we attempt to build a sophisticated urban scene along a traffic sewer. As urban planner and Citizens' Transportation Coalition (CTC) board member Zakcq Lockrem told me as we surveyed the street, "The culture is great. The public realm leaves a lot to be desired." (It's worth noting that other potentially urban and inviting inner-loop streets, such as Washington Avenue and Navigation Boulevard, face similar limitations due to the City's major thoroughfare designation.)

Frankly, I've let the wretched state of Westheimer's public realm gnaw at me, and I've threatened to walk the Bagby-Woodhead stretch in a sort of death-defying (or at least comfort-defying) stunt, just to document how bad it really is. I kept putting it off—my masochistic impulses are not generally overpowering—but recently gave in. It was probably the back-to-back-to-back openings of Uchi, Underbelly, and the Hay Merchant that prompted me to action. That and the rather heroic efforts of area barkeeps and restaurateurs to fight off the city's proposed parking requirement increases.

Led by Anvil's Bobby Heugel, these small business owners have formed the nonprofit group OKRA (Organized Kooperative on Restaurant Affairs) to resist these increases and promote the city's independent bar and restaurant culture. I could say more, but OKRA is a story for another time. Let's just say that these 20-somethings show a level of civic-mindedness, and pride in Houston, that frankly would've seemed perverse 20 years ago, when the goal of a bar or restaurant owner was to make customers feel as if they weren't in Houston.



Chef/owner Chris Shepherd at Underbelly wants to tell the "story of Houston food," while Heugel and Kevin Floyd of Hay Merchant named their incredibly successful new beer bar after Louis Westheimer himself, an early Houston "hay merchant." Someone at Uchi got a Texas State Historical marker put up honoring Felix Tijerina, who built the iconic Felix's, a space (if not exactly spirit) that Uchi now inhabits. These folks deserve more from the city than blighted sidewalks.

At the end of a weekend of heavy rain, I set off on my walk. I decided to make the grim promenade in two loops. Starting from Montrose, I first headed west, passing Hay Merchant, where the earnest young beer drinkers standing on the patio looked uncannily like younger versions of Hank Hill and his friends drinking Alamos in their alleyway. Hay Merchant and Underbelly share the old Chances lesbian bar building, which comes almost all the way out to the sidewalk (which the bar owners had to rebuild at their own expense). I walked past a strip center with its parking lot in front, then came to the Cherryhurst Center, home to Catbird's bar and Silverlust jewelry. Curiously, this short stretch has diagonal parking on the street. If only the rest of the street had the same.

I next came to the Middle Eastern restaurant La Fendee and was reminded of its *Houston Press* review, which spelled out the hazards of Westheimer traffic. "At one point," former *Press* critic Robb Walsh wrote, "a piece of metal debris lying in the road got pinched by a passing car tire, which propelled it into La Fendee's parking lot with such force that it made a loud metallic ring when it hit the fender of a pickup truck." This is presumably not a concern for a Parisian sidewalk-sitter.

I saw my first fellow pedestrians as I approached Anvil at the west end of the curve. They were three youngish black men, talking and laughing in high-pitched voices. They suddenly looked toward me, their eyes widening as they gasped and jumped away from the street. Did I look that threatening? I got my answer when water splashed all over my left side. I gasped and jumped as the culprit, a speeding tow truck, continued to splash water as it rushed toward some unseen but towable car. Wondering now why I was doing this, I reached Da Marco, among the first of the fine dining restaurants to open on Westheimer. It presents

itself to the street as an outpost, even a fortress, with its very big, in-front parking lot and high metal fence.

Some buildings present a more pleasing face to the street, like Hugo's, with its row of flowers and general air of Mexican grace, but standing in front of the lovingly restored old commercial building, designed by Joseph Finger, I was reminded that the owners had to demolish a house to create their in-back parking lot. By this point, I was almost to Kuester Street. Here the south side of Westheimer actually does become somewhat urban-walker friendly. The center, which houses vintage clothing stores and the Poison Girl bar, comes out to the sidewalk, which had a few pedestrians. Somebody even crossed the street.

If I kept walking all the way to Kirby, I would reach the West Ave development with its simulacrum of a street. Not even the prospect of a meal at Pondicheri made that effort appealing, so I crossed Westheimer and started making my way back.

When I reached Café Brasil and Domy Books, at the corner of Hazard, I was on one of the most urban-pedestrian corners in Houston. A few people were walking, and a young bicyclist smiled at me as she went by. I couldn't help but note the "ghost bicycle" on the other side of the street. That is the white-painted bicycle that marks the spot where Leigh Boone, a bicyclist, was killed by a speeding fire truck in April 2009.

Even though it's home to some wonderful bars and restaurants, many of them in beautiful old houses, Westheimer loses any semblance of pedestrian life as you cross Montrose heading east; a series of strip centers sees to this. For a street in an old section of Houston, Westheimer here is strangely denuded of trees, and in the summer it offers no protection from the sun whatsoever. Parking lots, driveways, and the sidewalk blend together into a field of concrete, as if the goal had been to make the street as ugly and uncomfortable as possible.

I paused for a moment across from Indika and Dolce Vita, summoning up the old house that once stood between them and that had been torn down to make room for parking. There are now two lots between the two restaurants, and a tall metal fence fronts the street. The valet parkers have set traffic cones in the entrance to each lot, so that you can't

just drive in. Instead of looking like good neighbors, and making the street a welcoming environment, these two excellent restaurants look like the two Koreas with a bristling DMZ in between.

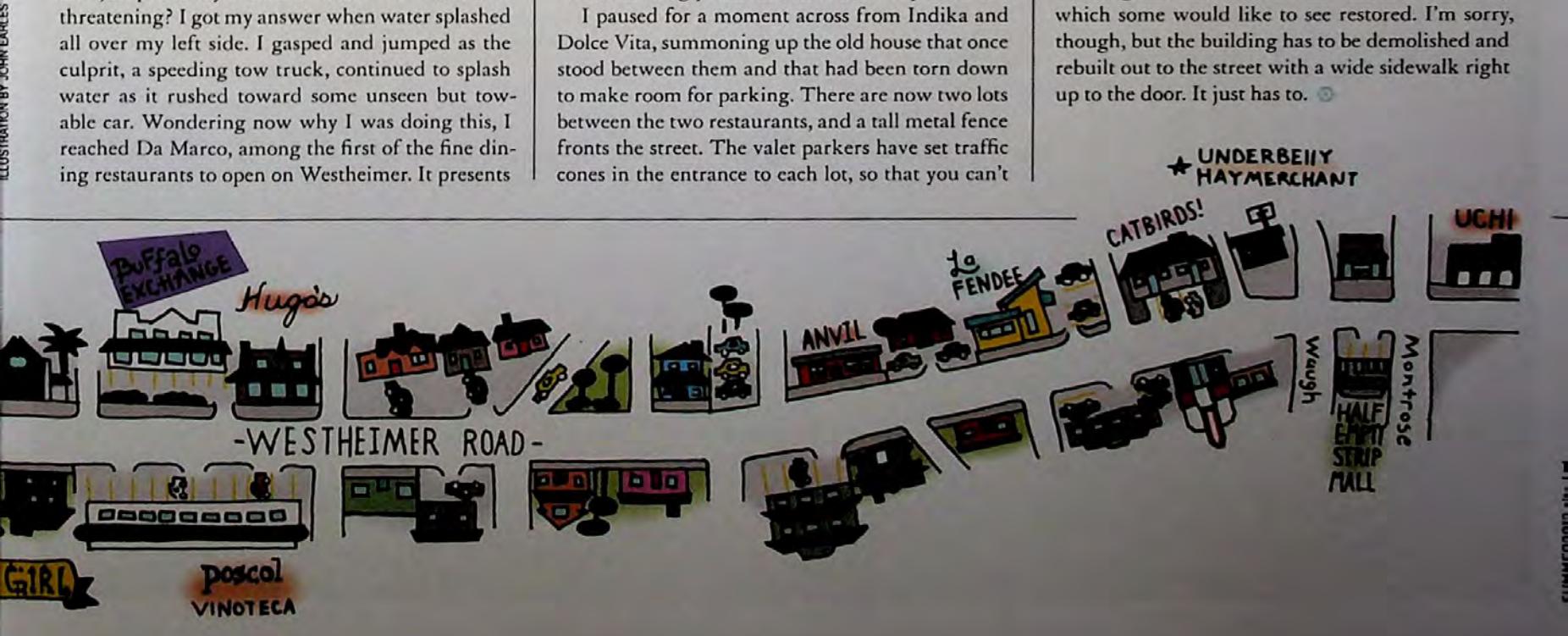
By the time I reached Jeannine's Bistro, the friendly little Belgian café in a strip center at Bagby, I had been splashed a second time and just wanted to get off the street. So I walked a block north and returned to my car along Avondale, which in contrast seemed like the most beautiful street in the world. It was quiet and lined with mature oaks and old homes. No concrete lots lay between the houses and the street; brick townhouses were built all the way out to the sidewalk. Birds chirped. It felt as if I'd gone from a barbaric space to civilization.

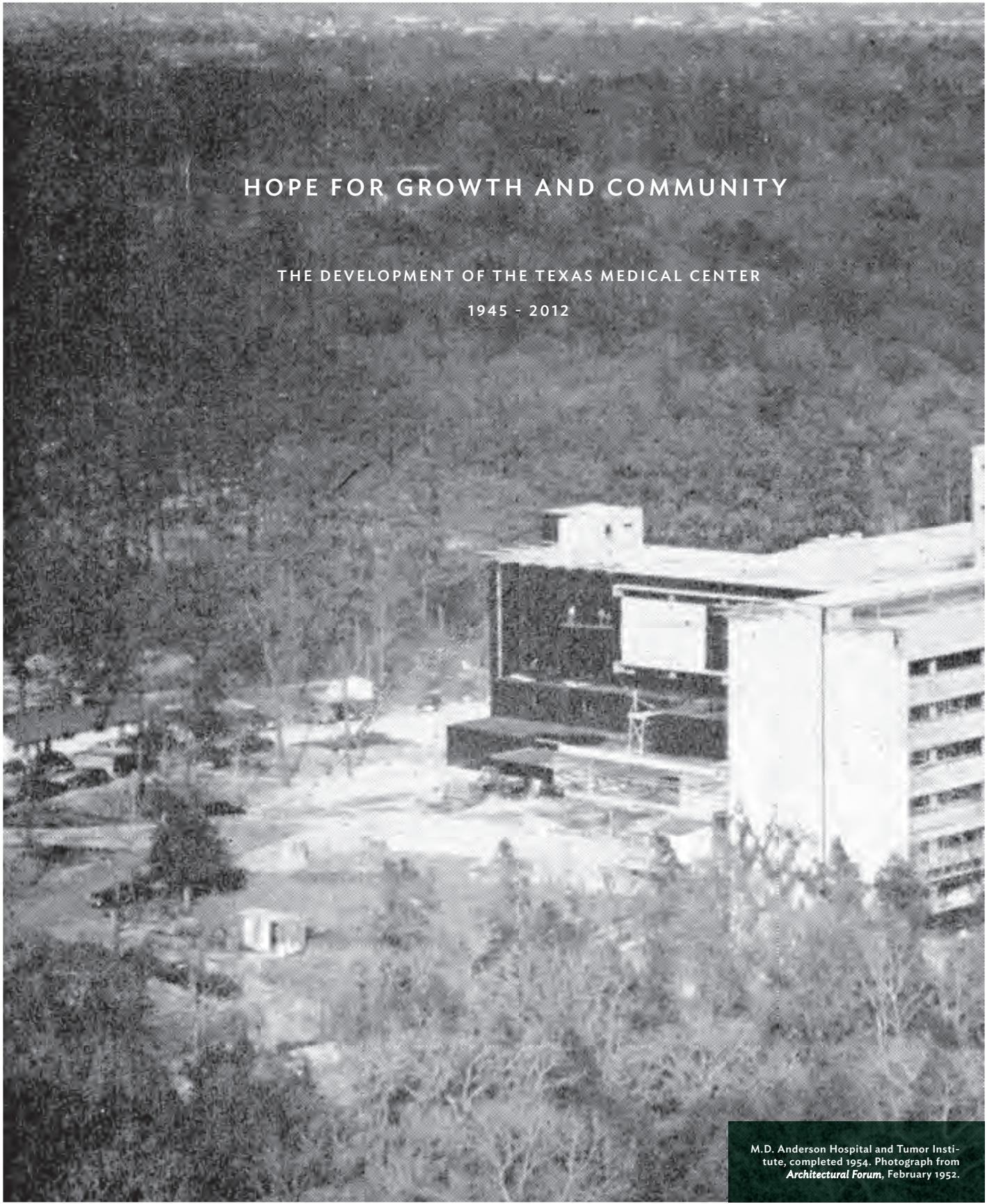
How could Westheimer's public realm be made worthy of its culture? The first answer is easy and cheap. If the city changed the street's designation, along this stretch at least, and reduced it to three lanes (east, west, and turning), the improvement would be dramatic. (Someone at the city's Transportation Planning Office told me that, contrary to speculation, the city has "no current plans for reconstructing [i.e., widening] this section on Westheimer.") If the City, the Management District, or any entity other than the put-upon business owners then paid to expand the sidewalks into that reclaimed lane, the results would be more dramatic still. If they built a parking garage and allowed some of the surface lots to be transformed into plazas and pocket parks, you'd have a showcase.

Finally, if the gruesome-looking, half-empty strip center at the southwest corner of Montrose and Westheimer were demolished, allowing a mixed-use five- or six-story structure to be built all the way out to the sidewalk, the area would truly be transformed.

Actually, this last proposal might actually happen. While I was still recovering from my walk, I read that the strip center was up for sale. Apparently there's a Joseph Finger-designed Art Deco building hidden beneath the hideous cladding, which some would like to see restored. I'm sorry, though, but the building has to be demolished and rebuilt out to the street with a wide sidewalk right up to the door. It just has to. ☺

★ UNDERBELLY HAYMERCHANT





HOPE FOR GROWTH AND COMMUNITY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER

1945 - 2012

18
SUMMER2012.ctte
M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute, completed 1954. Photograph from *Architectural Forum*, February 1952.



BY BEN KOUSH

THE TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER, PERHAPS HOUSTON'S GREATEST institutional campus of the postwar era, is intriguing if for no other reason than that it has grown so large. According to its own statistics, by the end of 2011 it was expected to surpass downtown Houston in square footage and become the equivalent of the seventh largest central business district in the country. Since the Texas Medical Center includes both a large number of buildings and the impressive infrastructure to support them, the growth of this "city of medicine" can be seen as a representation of modern Houston in a condensed form.

The development history of the Texas Medical Center consists of a series of cycles where an often thoughtful master plan and architectural controls are proposed, then systematically ignored due to the exigencies of the separate expansion projects of the various member institutions. It is a history driven by Houston's excruciatingly pragmatic pro-growth, pro-private civic ethos, which puts new commercial development in any shape or form—"growth"—as a priority over public or communal (the wicked word that sounded so close to "communist" to postwar ears) concerns. As Suzy and Clyde Burleson observed in their book-length *A Guide to the Texas Medical Center* (1987): "A most unusual fact about the Texas Medical Center is that it was not originally conceived by doctors. Businessmen generated the idea, sold it to the community and guided the early planning.... Any outcome other than growth was inconceivable." The good news, however, is that this one-sided approach seems to be tapering off and assuming, ever so slightly, a more balanced vision of growth and community.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER WAS ALMOST ACCIDENTAL. In 1936, Monroe Dunaway Anderson (1873–1939), the wealthy founding partner of Anderson, Clayton & Co., then the world's largest cotton merchandiser, established the M. D. Anderson Foundation, a charitable trust. When Anderson died three years later, he bestowed his entire \$19 million fortune on the foundation. As documented in *Monroe Dunaway Anderson* (1994) by N. Don Macon, the trustees of the foundation, whose somewhat vague goal was "the improvement of working conditions among workers generally, as well as among particular classes of unskilled, skilled, and agricultural workers," were at first unsure how to proceed in their charitable endeavors. An early donation, for example, was \$1,000 to the Junior League Eye Fund for eyeglasses. However, in 1941, once they learned that the Texas Legislature had appropriated a sum of \$500,000 to establish a cancer research hospital somewhere in the state under the auspices of the University of Texas, they acted. They offered to match the entire appropriation with funds from the M. D. Anderson Foundation if the regents of the university would agree to locate the facility in Houston. The regents accepted, and the trustees quickly bought the six-acre former house and grounds of Captain James A. Baker, known as "The Oaks," for \$68,000 for temporary use until wartime building restrictions were lifted. Meanwhile the trustees sought a larger property for a permanent facility.

They soon fixated upon a 134-acre tract of land that had origi-

nally been purchased by philanthropist, civic leader, and real estate developer Will Hogg (1875–1930) in 1923 as an addition to Hermann Park. (This was the same year that Will and his brother Mike Hogg, in a fit of philanthropy, purchased the 1,503 acres that would become Memorial Park). By 1930, the roughly triangle-shaped Hogg tract, bounded on its south by Bellaire Boulevard, on its northwest by Main Street, and on its northeast by the remainder of Hermann Park, had been incorporated into the master plan for the park by the landscape architects Hare & Hare, who designated it for playing fields and a running track. However, the prevailing attitude of the entrepreneurial elite was that public land was not an amenity to be conserved for future generations, but was really more like a natural resource to be exploited immediately, preferably for a money-generating enterprise. This thinking is evident in the description of the Hogg tract by Colonel W. B. Bates (1889–1974), a lawyer at Fulbright & Crooker and one of the trustees of the M. D. Anderson Foundation: "I guess everybody thought that the City would one day make that land a part of Hermann Park. But they weren't using it for much of anything at the time. They had a few baseball diamonds there, but most of it was unused. It was heavily wooded with dense undergrowth, a little like a swamp in some places." Ralph Ellifrit (1909–1999), then the beleaguered director of the city's planning department, strenuously objected to the appropriation of the land for a medical center:

The whole thing was planned on the quiet with Mayor Pickett, and of course this meant millions of dollars for Houston. When it finally broke open, we opposed the use of park land. We were brushed aside by the mayor, and we were practically told it was none of our business. There was a great deal of open land just beyond Holcombe drive to the west—hundreds of acres. They could have gotten twice the land that they got. The Medical Center site was a beautiful wooded area.... And, of course, at that time there weren't these great amounts of money to build hospitals.... It was just like beat-

ing your wife for someone to oppose it, and we were just whipped down completely. ("Planning the City: An Interview with Ralph Ellifrit." *Houston Review*. Winter 1981.)

In December 1943, after a referendum on selling the land in which only 951 votes were cast, the city proceeded to sell the Hogg tract to the M. D. Anderson Foundation for \$400,000. As publicity mounted around the plans for the cancer research hospital, the trustees were able to persuade the medical school of Baylor University, then located in Dallas, to relocate to Houston with the promise of \$1 million for a new building adjacent to the new facility, another \$1 million to be paid over ten years to fund medical research, and a 20-acre parcel on the newly acquired property.

The trustees hired the engineer Herbert A. Kipp (1883–1968) to plan the site. Kipp, who had laid out the street plans for the initial sections of River Oaks in 1924, created what Stephen Fox referred to in *Cite 35* in 1996 as "a new Houston hybrid." It is a model that combines the visual imagery of the college campus, as exemplified by the Rice Institute across the street, with the street layout and legal covenants of the private, restricted subdivision, with which Kipp was intimately familiar. (Kipp was also vice president of the River Oaks Corporation until its dissolution in 1954.) Architectural "recommendations" were even developed by a committee headed by James Chillman, Jr. (1891–1972), longtime director of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and an architecture professor at Rice since 1916. The suggestions included height restrictions (eight stories) and recommended stone or brick exteriors with a "limited amount of stucco," light colors, sparing use of architectural decoration, and low, sloped roofs covered with terra-cotta tiles. In essence, the medical center buildings were to be much simplified versions of the original Byzantino-Spanish-inspired buildings of the Rice Institute as well as other public buildings of the 1920s like the original Hermann Hospital (1925) and the Houston Public Library (1926). These buildings were then considered to be some

LEFT: Herbert A. Kipp master plan, 1946
BELOW: Master plan, 1947.



HOUSTON POST, FEB 1946



JOHN P. MCGOVERN HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS AND RESEARCH CENTER

THE BUILDINGS OF THE
TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER
THROUGH THE YEARS
(Thumbnails on bottom of pages)
by Ben Koush

1940s
WELL-BEHAVED
"FORBEARS"

(1) An addition to **Hermann Hospital** and the 15-story **Hermann Professional Building** were both designed by Kenneth Franzheim and Wyatt C. Hedrick, and completed in 1949.

1950s TO MID-1960s
GOLDEN AGE OF
POSTWAR
MODERNISM

(2) **Texas Children's Hospital** (1953, extensively altered), designed by Milton Foy Martin, was three stories tall with a four-story section above the main entry. The long north-south elevations were distinguished by the consistent use of overhanging, flared aluminum fins that served as solar shades for the patient rooms. The short end elevations were solid brick. In 1955, the building won a design award from the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), as well as a national design award from the AIA.

(3)(4) **MacKie & Kamrath**, Houston's best-known proponents of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian architecture, designed the **University of Texas M. D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute** (1954, extensively altered) and the **University of Texas Dental Branch Building** (1954, currently scheduled to be demolished). Both were distinguished by their use of Georgia Etowah pink marble. The celebrated furniture designer Florence Knoll designed the interiors of the M. D. Anderson Hospital. Only one exterior wall of the original hospital remains visible. In 1954, *Time* magazine dubbed the hospital the "Pink Palace of Healing" in a feature article on its architectural innovations, and in 1955 the building won a medal of honor from the Houston AIA.

(5) As the **Dental Branch Building** appears more or less in

(1)



Hermann Hospital additions

(2)



Texas Children's Hospital

(3)



M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute then

(4)



M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute now

its original state, it allows one to still see the wonderful detailing that MacKie & Kamrath devised for it. In 1951, the editors of *Progressive Architecture* declared it one of the most innovative new medical buildings in the nation, in an annual survey that a few years later would become formalized as the P/A Awards program.

(6)(7) Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) is the New York-based architectural firm that single-handedly defined classy corporate architecture in the United States for the first two decades after World War II. They designed their first building in Houston, the **Medical Towers Building** (1956), as design consultants to the Houston firm Golemon & Rolfe. The building takes the tower and podium part of SOM's recently completed Lever House (1952), but where Lever House has office space in the podium, the Medical Towers has parking space, and where the ground level of the Lever House is open and raised on columns to allow for public access, the Medical Towers has shops. In a concession to Houston's hot, sunny climate, the long elevations of the rectangular tower are clad with a curtain wall of turquoise, enameled steel panels that alternate with narrow strips of dark gray, tinted solar glass. The narrow end walls, roughly facing east and west, are solid brick. In 1954, the building won a design award in the first annual P/A Awards program. The Medical Towers Building went on to win a national design award from the AIA and a statewide design award from the Texas Society of Architects, both in 1957. It also won a design award from the Houston AIA in 1960.

(8) George Pierce—Abel B. Pierce designed the **Houston State Psychiatric Institute** for Research and Training Building (1962, demolished). They made extensive use of pierced concrete blocks to create patterned screen walls. The building won a design award from the Houston AIA in 1962.

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of the most prestigious examples of public and institutional architecture in Houston. According to the author of an article about the planning of the Texas Medical Center that appeared in the Chamber of Commerce magazine *Houston* in August 1946, "Unity rather than uniformity is the goal sought by the board, this to be accomplished through harmony of material and attention to the related mass of each building in relation to the group of buildings."

A plan of the Texas Medical Center published in the *Houston Post* in February 1946 suggests how the trustees of the M. D. Anderson Foundation at first hoped to integrate the new development into the urban fabric of the city. In it the Texas Medical Center is shown as formally addressing not only the Rice Institute and the United States Naval Hospital, but also wildcatter Glen McCarty's Shamrock Hotel and community center (1949, demolished), which had been designed by Wyatt C. Hedrick and was then being planned and built, and the Southgate and Shadyside subdivisions. Even the Parklane Apartments (1940, demolished) that were designed by F. Talbott Wilson and S. I. Morris, Houston's grandest Federal Housing Authority-sponsored garden apartment complex of the New Deal era, is depicted in the plan along the northern edge of Hermann Park. It also shows in dashed lines the future route that Fannin Street would take through the western side of the park to provide better access from Downtown, about three miles north.

Kipp's initial street plan for the Texas Medical Center consisted of straight, angled, and curved streets that created a number of roughly equal-sized, trapezoidal-shaped plots for each of the existing member institutions as well as additional plots for future use. Perhaps because the trustees of the M. D. Anderson Foundation wanted all institutions to feel equally important, there was no consistent use of axial alignments—as at the Rice Institute, for example—which would have created a hierarchy

IN THIS RESPECT, THEY REVEAL THE CONUNDRUM OF MODERN HOUSTON, WHEREBY GOOD ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN ON THE SCALE OF INDIVIDUAL BUILDINGS IS UNABLE TO TRANSLATE ON THE LARGER SCALE INTO A COHERENT URBAN FORM.

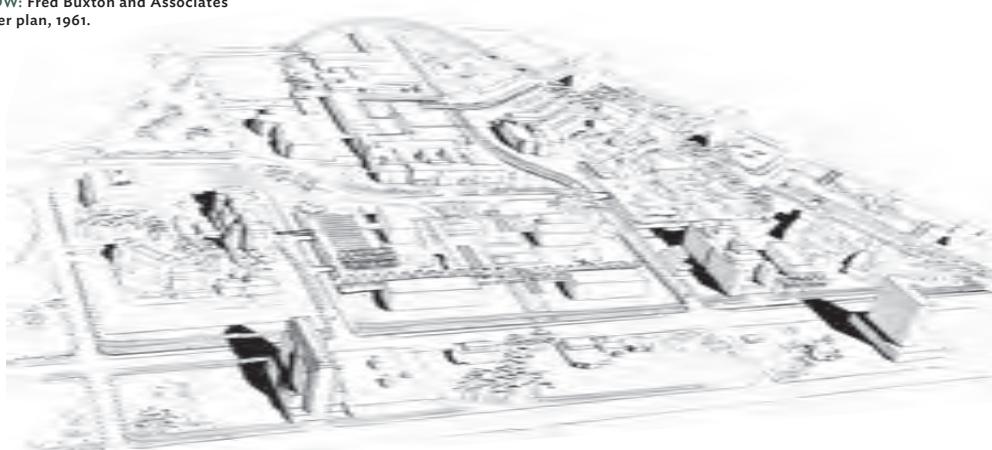
of streets and subsequently of the plots adjacent them. As Ellifrit later recalled, the immediate model for Kipp's scheme was that of the 1920s garden subdivision, with traffic limited to homeowners and their servants and gardeners: "[H]is idea was to discourage automobiles.... Mr. Kipp designed it as if he were designing a setting for a group of estates." Early renderings of the Texas Medical Center indeed show a carpet of greenery over which the low, symmetrical buildings were to be systematically arrayed.

Chillman's architectural suggestions were followed for the first buildings of the Texas Medical Center. They include the Baylor College of Medicine (Hedrick & Lindsley, 1947), the new wing of the Hermann Hospital (Kenneth Franzheim and Hedrick & Lindsley, 1949), and the Hermann Professional Building (Kenneth Franzheim and Wyatt C. Hedrick, 1949). However, the guidelines were ignored by the architects of the next set of buildings, which opened from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. (The only guideline that seems to have remained was the height restriction, which was finally abolished in 1964.) These buildings, the most architecturally distinguished in

history of the center, were strictly modern, flat roofed, asymmetrical, and clad in a variety of multicolored surfaces. Unfortunately, they were sometimes placed at what seems to be random on their properties and in no way responded formally to their neighbors, as did the earlier buildings. In this respect, they reveal the conundrum of modern Houston, whereby good architectural design on the scale of individual buildings is unable to translate on the larger scale into a coherent urban form. A comparison of aerial photographs of the Texas Medical Center in the 1940s and in 1950s shows that the formerly green and forested grounds suddenly disappeared, to be almost entirely replaced by crowded parking lots. By 1979, only 360 of the estimated 4,700 original native trees remained standing.

Growth quickly spilled outside the center's official bound-

BELOW: Fred Buxton and Associates master plan, 1961.



COURTESY KNUDSON & ASSOCIATES



(5)



(6)



(7)



(8)

Houston State Psychiatric Institute

aries. The Medical Towers Building (1956), like the Hermann Professional Building, was built on the strip of land between Fannin and Main that was not technically included in the Texas Medical Center site. Buildings in this area were not required to be nonprofit, as they were in the Texas Medical Center, and so tended to be office towers for doctors and bank buildings.

By 1955, progress on the Texas Medical Center was considered sufficiently impressive that the editors of *Fortune* magazine chose to include it in an article entitled "Since 1930," which featured color photographs by Ezra Stoller of new developments throughout the United States since the Depression. Shortly thereafter, the parking situation, which had so quickly become the Texas Medical Center's Achilles heel, prompted Susan Clayton McAshan, the daughter of Will Clayton (1880-1966), M. D. Anderson's longtime business partner, to press the officers of the M. D. Anderson Foundation to seek a new plan for development. In addition to a lack of parking capacity, the disheartening appearance of so many asphalt-covered acres of surface parking lots was becoming intolerable. The officers hired Fred Buxton & Associates, then Houston's most prominent landscape architectural firm, to devise a new plan. The proposal that Buxton and his associate Charles Tapley presented in 1961 was to establish seven large, communal underground parking garages that would be administered by the Texas Medical Center independently of the member institutions. On their roofs were to be fanciful landscaped gardens with curvilinear paths and planting beds, in the manner of the Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx. Sadly, this charming scheme was not implemented. Had it been, the convivial, garden-like atmosphere envisioned by the founders of the Texas Medical Center might have actually taken shape, if only for a short time before growth again overwhelmed it. The major legacy of the Buxton plan was that the Texas Medical Center did eventually take over parking and began to charge fees that would cover its day-to-day operating expenses. In 1965, discussions began to plan for a multilevel parking garage, the first of several throughout the center, which would serve Methodist Hospital and St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital.

From the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s, many new buildings appeared in the Texas Medical Center, but only a handful came close to the architectural distinction of the second-generation buildings. It was as if the breakneck growth of the member institutions left no time for thoughtful design. Or perhaps architecture took a backseat to the thrilling, daredevil heart operations then being developed by the surgeons Dr. Michael E. DeBakey (1908-2008) and Dr. Denton A. Cooley (b. 1920).

By the mid-1980s, the Texas Medical Center was again choking on its own growth. In aerial photos, it now appears as a tight knot of buildings nearly touching each other, as many of the parking lots of the 1950s had been built over. As Richard Ingersoll wrote in his caustic analysis of the Texas Medical Center that appeared in *Cite* 22 in 1989:

In general the buildings of the Medical Center are being transformed by an accretive process that adds new features in response to the need for operational efficiency and programmatic demands, resulting in labyrinthine circulation in the inside and a confused jumble of volumes on the outside. An inchoate snarl of parking structures, unclear points of egress, and difficult connections between structures make the Medical Center an experientially unpleasant place that seems to promote the feeling of illness rather than relieve it.

In contrast, the low-density areas—The Shamrock Hilton Hotel, Rice University, Southgate, Hermann Park, Shadyside, the VA Hospital, and the Parkwood Apartments—surrounding the lumpen mass remained almost as they were in the immediate postwar years. But the opportunity for harmony had been lost. The logic of Herbert Kipp's master plan first published in 1946, where the original low, pavilion-like buildings of the medical center, designed in the spirit of a college campus, could engage in a meaningful and sympathetic way with those of its nearby neighbors, had clearly been abandoned.

The administrators of the Texas Medical Center were worried enough to commission not one, but two new planning studies. The first was jointly authored by 3D/International and CRS Sirrine in 1986, and the second was presented in 1987 by a team lead by David Scoular, then the director of planning at Baylor. Of the first proposal, no record now seems to exist, despite queries to the helpful Texas Medical Center archivists. Ingersoll's discussion of the Scoular plan notes that its major design element was "a detached second-level walkway that shelters an exposed portico below," which would connect to each of the various institutions in the complex. This seems to have been the first official recognition of the embryonic system of tunnels and sky bridges that was beginning to take form, linking the disparate buildings in the Texas Medical Center. However, just as with the original plans by Kipp and those by Buxton, these schemes were discarded almost as soon as they

were prepared.

In the aftermath of a spate of internecine bickering in 1996, including a lawsuit between institutions (see Michael Berryhill's contribution in *Cite* 47 in 2000), the administrators of the Texas Medical Center began efforts to promote more cordial relations among the member institutions. This was no easy task. By the late 1990s, the center had some 42 member institutions, up from the original half dozen—each with its own parcel of land and separate administrative apparatus. In effect, the Texas Medical Center had become an enclave of enclaves, each fiefdom zealously protecting its turf as continual growth made the boundaries between seem ever narrower. The Texas Medical Center itself had also grown: in 1966 it began acquiring land south of Holcombe, and in the ensuing 30 years it had increased its holdings from the original 134 acres to about 700 acres.

The administrators' efforts were parlayed into yet another

MID-1960S TO MID-1990S HALTING AND VAULTING
From the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s, many new buildings appeared in the Texas Medical Center, but only a handful came close to the architectural distinction of the second-generation buildings.

(9) One such building is the 25-story **St. Luke's Medical Tower (1991), designed by Cesar Pelli & Associates and Kendall/Heaton Associates. In what was becoming a recognizable trend, this building was located in the commercial strip adjacent to the Texas Medical Center between Main and Fannin Streets. Pelli, master of the slick curtain wall, used it to great effect here. The office tower, which rises above a nine-story parking garage, is shaped into twin octagonal towers surmounted by tall, spiky needles. Resembling twin syringes ready to shoot their serum into the heavens, the silvery, mirror-glass-clad St. Luke's Medical Tower provided a much needed landmark for the center's otherwise drab skyline.**

2000S AND 10s CITY OF MEDICINE
From 2000 onwards, new buildings have moved the Texas Medical Center towards somewhat more urban goals.

(10) Methodist Hospital Research Institute (2010), designed by the New York firm Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates and the Houston firm WHR Architects, may look corporate, but it has the virtue of at least being very tasteful. What's more, the yin-yang relationship it establishes with the convex, curving façade of the neighboring **St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital Denton A. Cooley Building for The Texas Heart Institute** (2002), designed by Morris Architects, is really quite compelling.

(11) In distinct contrast to the new Methodist building, the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center's Lowry and Peggy Mays Clinic (2005), designed by KMD Architects, is a delirious pile of turquoise-tinted mirror glass and pink precast concrete, complete with a neo-Babylonian hanging garden of healing.

(9)



St. Luke's Medical Tower

(10)



Methodist Hospital Research Institute and St. Luke's Denton A. Cooley Building for The Texas Heart Institute

(11)



M.D. Anderson Cancer Center's Lowry and Peggy Mays Clinic

(12) In 1996, the administrators of the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston hosted an invited architectural competition to design a new building for the **University of Texas School of Nursing**. The ambitious competition's roster of prominent architects who participated included Rodolfo Machado/Jorge Silvetti, Taller de Enrique Norton y Asociados, Lake|Flato Architects, Tod Williams Billie Tsien & Associates, Steven Holl Architects, and the winner, Patkau Architects of Vancouver. The husband and wife team of Patkau, which has a reputation for green architecture, proposed an elegantly louvered, elongated slab for the building. Due to mixed messages from the client (asking the designers to lower the cost to \$40 million, but keep the features that required a \$60 million budget), Patkau eventually resigned from the project in 2000 after having worked on the design for four years. BNIM, a Kansas City-based firm noted for sustainability, and Lake|Flato were subsequently hired. Completed in 2002, the building is marked by an awkward combination of materials and forms. The final cost was \$58 million. Though this author prefers the Patkau proposal, it should be noted the building won a design award, as well as an award for its sustainability, from the Houston AIA in 2005, and a design award from the Texas Society of Architects in 2006.

(13) The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston's **Fayez S. Sarofim Research Building**, designed by BNIM and Pennsylvania-based Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann Associates, was completed in 2006. The building's engagement with Brays Bayou heralds the linear green spaces envisioned by the latest medical center master plan.

(14) A new addition to the medical center, completed in 2012, the **Texas Children's Hospital Women's Pavilion**, designed by FKP Architects, is distinguished by an enormous, two-story pedestrian bridge separating hospital workers from civilians. Large bridges such as this may be the new norm, as the latest medical center master plan calls for all buildings to reserve space on the second and third floors for pedestrian and utility connections.

non-binding master plan, this one devised by the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM). Grandly entitled "Vision for Growth: A 50 Year Master Plan," it was published in 1999. It seems to be the first plan to incorporate the lightly developed land south of Holcombe, dubbed the South Campus. The new master plan marked the end of the hybrid model, meshing garden subdivision with university campus, that had informed development of the Texas Medical Center for its first 50-plus years. The Texas Medical Center's problems, the SOM plan stated, were now on the scale of those of the central business district of a large city. Architecturally, this meant that new buildings would no longer be of the pavilion type, but would extend to the property lines and spatially begin to define street corridors, as buildings do in traditional urban settings. The biggest problem was still parking, and the SOM plan proposed that all new buildings be equipped with underground parking garages, and that existing contract parking be moved to peripheral lots linked by a shuttle service. Use of public transportation was suggested as something of an afterthought. However, the plan did suggest that denser development appear at the future light rail stops to be built on Fannin.

The SOM plan was liked well enough for the Texas Medical Center to have it updated in 2006. By this time, some new developments, like the inclusion of Rice University as an official member institution, had prompted specific changes, like the effort to improve the Main corridor, which gave Rice the cold shoulder with a wall largely comprising the backs of the medical center's parking garages. Also some of the suggestions of the 1999 plan had been implemented: parking was being rearranged and moved off-site, and a "commons" building had been erected in the center of the original campus. Severe flooding during

Tropical Storm Allison in 2001 had prompted some additional updates. These included moving power and electrical controls to the second or third floor of new buildings, and making plans for an extensive skywalk system in lieu of tunnels (or ground level sidewalks for that matter)—somewhat in the spirit of Alison and Peter Smithson's famous proposal for the *Hauptstadt* in Berlin (1957) with its separate system of elevated pedestrian walkways above the city streets. In fact, new buildings are now required to incorporate areas on their second and third floors for future skywalk connections.

Today it seems as if it is not budget that determines the size and character of buildings in the Texas Medical Center, but rather how much parking can be fit in the program. While it seems as if the member institutions of the Texas Medical Center no longer have it in them to commission truly excellent works of architecture, one hopes they at least continue to commission more competent ones than bad ones. The best of the recent buildings, like the Methodist Hospital Research Institute, are so valuable because they start to contribute in a meaningful way to creating a better urban environment. Despite its density of building stock, the Texas Medical Center clearly shows the difficulty of creating a persuasive sense of place. The most recent series of master plans seem to point in a good direction, if only the member institutions agree to adhere to their recommendations. Some of their recommendations, however, do raise troubling questions. In particular is what appears to be an increasing preference for enclosed skywalks for pedestrian circulation in lieu of outdoor sidewalks. According to the Pedestrian Circulation Master Plan of 2002 the proposed new generation of skywalks are described as "streets" and the internal lobbies where they connect are "plazas." If we recall that the Texas Medical Center sits on land

that was intended to be public park space, the further privatization of its already limited public space is indeed troubling. We can only hope that some sort of balance can be struck. In other suggestions, the plans show a lot of promise. The transformation from "campus" to "city," for example, is intriguing and seems full of possibility. Just maybe, if things go well, the Texas Medical Center will someday become a cherished Texas place. ☺



FROM TEXASMEDICALCENTER.ORG/VISION-FOR-GROWTH

SOM masterplan, 1999, revised 2006.



(12)

University of Texas School of Nursing



(13)

Fayez S. Sarofim Research Building



(14)

Texas Children's Hospital Women's Pavilion

PORT OF HOUSTON

SPECIAL SECTION

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CITY OF IMPORT



THE BIGGER THE PORT OF HOUSTON BECOMES THE more it disappears. At the turn of the last century, when the port was a fraction of its current size, the city had an intimate relationship with its docks. Now, when the ships themselves rival buildings in scale, many Houstonians never see them.

Consider this: the Port of Houston is, according to its 2011 report, the nation's number one port in terms of foreign waterborne tonnage. It is home to the world's second largest petrochemical complex just behind the South Louisiana Port, a collection of facilities along the Mississippi River's banks upstream of New Orleans. The two ports alternate over recent years between positions one and two in import, export, and foreign trade cargo volume and tonnage, while Houston-Galveston ranks in the top three U.S. ports along with Los Angeles and New York City in import, export, and foreign trade cargo value.

How is it possible so many of us can live in ignorance of what is arguably the defining engine of our economy and our culture? This special section is an initial exploration, a brief foray, into the paradox of Houston and its port.

- *Raj Mankad*





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THE FOURTH CHOICE

PAPER CITIES ON THE BAYOU

by Monica Savino

THE ALLEN BROTHERS." That's how the story always starts.

It has often been written that the Allen brothers arrived in 1836 on the banks of what would become Houston's Main Street dock, landing here as discoverers in a virgin land. John Vanderlyn's 1847 work *The Landing of Columbus* comes to mind. That's the conventional history of Houston's start that we learned as youngsters or newcomers. Not much more was taught, as that might distract us from the tasks of progress. Fast-forward 176 years and, well, here we are, working away with heavy machinery, building a great city, and moving forward to a bigger and better modern world. The Allen Brothers. Was it really that simple?

Resources made available by universities and digital public archives now give us all the ability to delve into Houston's rich

past, and when we dig deeper, more reveals itself. Recently, a critical mass of projects on Buffalo Bayou, including Buffalo Bayou Partnership boat tours, public improvements in the Greater East End Management district, the Navigation Street and Harrisburg projects, and efforts by Houston Arts + Media, are bringing long-overdue attention to this truncated history of Houston's start. These and many more resources introduce us to some of the hundreds of community builders active in the area previous to the Allens' arrival.

Counter to our assumptions, the site for a major port of entry for Texas on the Gulf Coast was not by default Galveston Bay and Buffalo Bayou. Eighteenth-century Spanish explorers spent decades exploring the fluvial openings along the Gulf, considering the Sabine, Neches, Colorado, and Red Rivers, but they never established a primary port capable of handling seagoing vessels due to the inconsistent water elevations and shifting sandbars on those Texas rivers.

Also, we know that Jean Lafitte established an enterprising career as a smuggler and privateer in Galveston and the bay leading to Buffalo Bayou between 1817 and 1820. In violation of Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. importation bans, Lafitte supplied Texas and Louisiana with slaves and other goods by smuggling them through vague ports of entry avoiding

the taxation that came with more traditional lines of distribution. Lafitte also worked as a mercenary or subcontractor for governments, monarchs, and private investors, securing the weapons, durable merchandise, and currencies of sailing ships against the will of their owners or chartered transporters. One could argue that Lafitte was one of our region's first and better-known independent contractors.

The settlers of Austin's Colony found the fluvial plains of the Brazos River valley excellent for farming, and by the 1830s the area was thick with cotton



Houston was among several attempts to build a port city on Buffalo Bayou.



FROM LEFT: Workers handle cotton at the port; "Houston Ship Canal: Loading Oil," a 1941 painting by Jerry Bywaters; barge loaded with pipe.

and sugar plantations worked by thousands of slaves. The 1850 U.S. census shows that the areas along the Brazos, including present-day Austin, Brazoria, Colorado, Fayette, Fort Bend, Washington, and Wharton Counties, held only 8 percent of Texas' white population at the time but 21 percent of the state's slave population.

As early as 1825, the colony had grown profitable and required quick transport for its agricultural goods to markets beyond the Gulf Coast. To their disappointment, efforts to move cotton, corn, livestock, sugar, and molasses downstream on small steamboats, sailing on the Brazos River from San Felipe de Austin to Valesco, were just as poorly realized as the efforts to move imports upstream for inland trading. The river route had severe limitations. The Brazos bent tightly for 840 miles, and was deep in some places, but braided and shallow in many other places. Shifting sandbars were a constant unknown, log and debris jams from vegetation were thick, and seasonal rain patterns made water levels inconsistent from month to month, which was typical of all Texas rivers at that time.

One of the first settlers to explore an alternative port of entry was Tennessee transplant and investor Nicholas Clopper. Clopper established a competitive route in 1826 that would take goods from local plantations by land, hauled in oxen carts along what was known as the San Felipe Road, and load them onto barges on Buffalo Bayou at Harrisburg. Clopper's ultimate plan was to run cattle by land from the Brazos to his holdings at Clopper's Point (later Morgan's Point), slaughter them there, and then load the beef on outbound ships.

Between 1822 and 1840, numerous settlements grew up along the banks of Buffalo Bayou and along the San Felipe Road, progressing further and further inland and toward the west in an attempt to reduce the transit time between Galveston Bay and the Brazos River Valley. In the midst of this aggressive expansion of settlements, the 1835-36 Texas Revolution and its war for independence against Mexico flared, though it appears that the war was a critical but fleeting inconvenience for most of the ambitious capitalists. They simply evacuated their towns and settlements until a battle had moved through the area, returning when they could to pick up the pieces.

Hardly operating in a lonely, desolate setting, the Allens were one of the many, many land speculators and business operators who established towns along Buffalo Bayou in the hopes of creating the preeminent port that would expedite the movement of goods between the Gulf of Mexico and the Brazos River valley. The fact that Buffalo Bayou has a measurable tide, rising and falling 6 to 12 inches as far upstream as Shepherd Drive, meant that their belief that the bayou could provide a river-like passage was not unfounded; the bayou's value as a trade route was acknowledged by many of the skilled boat pilots of the time.

Each municipal development corporation along the water touted its own appeal to attract settlers, investors, and businesses. The Harrisburg of John Harris was one of the oldest establishments, dating from before 1825. Burned to the ground by Santa Ana during the Texas Revolution in 1836, it attempted to rebuild and promote its traditional and reliable connection between Clopper's Point to the east and the San Felipe Road leading to the Brazos River valley to the west. It also offered credit to customers on its exceptional selection of goods brought from the East Coast. Later, James Morgan's city of New Washington (on Morgan's Point) boasted a store and warehouses in the hopes of creating a commercial hub. We can only imagine what was offered in Pokersville.

ENTER THE ALLENS: the two brothers, Augustus and John, and Charlotte, Augustus' wife, facilitated the primary deal that netted the city of Houston in 1836. Originally from New York, the Allens had worked for a number of years in Texas land offices, selling land certificates throughout the eastern part of the state, so it is reasonable to assume that they had a fair amount of knowledge of tract statuses along the Gulf Coast. Charlotte joined her husband in Texas in 1834, and it was her financial contribution from an inheritance, Augustus' business acumen, and John's salesmanship and zeal that synergistically sealed the deal when they purchased 6,600 acres for \$5,000 from Elizabeth Parrot, John Austin's widow, in August 1836. Our local legend has suddenly grown from two founders to three forward-thinking investors. By early 1837, "Team Allen" had grown to ten with the addition of parents and

siblings. The Allens.

Before 1836, Augustus, Charlotte, and John Allen had considered no fewer than three sites for their new town. The Austin parcel was their fourth choice. They actively pursued Galveston, Morgan's Point, and Harrisburg, but deals failed to materialize due to legal issues with the parcels or the Allens' low-offering price. When one offer was unsuccessful, they simply looked upstream for the next property owner willing to sell at their price.

The Allens played the marketing equivalent of a royal flush by promoting their new city in the region's newspapers only five days after the land purchase, naming it in honor of the then very popular San Jacinto war hero Sam Houston. Today, that ubiquitous advertisement can now be viewed in print and digital resources. It mentions that the land was surveyed, platted, and ready for development; that it provided a reliable waterway connection with the Gulf and a land connection with points inland; and that by the end of September 1836, it could publicly claim to be the Capital of the Republic, albeit temporarily, remaining so until 1840. The Allens ran advertisements for months starting in the August 30, 1836, issue of the *Telegraph and Texas Register*, a weekly that had commenced publication after a four-month hiatus during the Revolution. The Allens used the media skillfully, and by continuously advertising their product, they made it distinct from the offerings of other land speculators. The Houston tradition continues as we expect nothing less than a constant flow of real estate advertisements with dreams of our new lives appearing in the form of wide-angle, photoshopped views with promises that the commodity is "ready for . . . " —you name it.

The definitive milestone to the Allens' success was that by 1839, Houston was a city of 2,500 to 3,000 inhabitants and a port located at the narrowest point between the Brazos River and the Gulf. Today, it's difficult to imagine the multi-day travails of moving cash crops in the 1800s when the distance between the Houston city limits at Grand Corner Drive and the banks of the Brazos River at River Cliff in Richmond now is a mere nine miles. On the other hand, it's not so difficult to see that we live in the spirit of the early entrepreneurs, whether it is Lafitte's aggressive trafficking or the Allens' bold claims. ☀



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WORKING THE PORT

THE PORT OF HOUSTON is the great hidden engine of the city's prosperity. More than one million jobs belong to people who work the Port and its related industries, and everyone in the region is affected at least indirectly. The Port itself is a massive geographic complex: a constellation of docks, warehouses, railheads, refineries, and heavy machinery stretching some 50 miles along the Ship Channel. These structures exist for the sake of the water traffic: numberless vessels, at dock or in motion, ranging from tiny pilot boats, to sturdy tugs, to the massive cargo ships, more than one thousand feet in length.

It is hard to imagine an economic landmark of such size and importance, and yet so well concealed, as the Port of Houston. The massive Port of New York, in contrast, is plainly visible in almost any panoramic view of Manhattan; its docks may be seen from the Henry Hudson freeway or any of the tallest buildings in Manhattan; one of the nation's most visited tourist attractions, the Statue of Liberty, offers a commanding view. The Port of Houston sees far more cargo yet a Houston resident can drive the entire web of the city's major roads and find only wisps of evidence that the Port of Houston exists. If you look down from the one quarter-mile stretch of Interstate 610 East that rises far into the air to span the Ship Channel, you may see one of the massive cargo ships in motion; driving Beltway 8 East two miles south of I-10 will take you over another stretch of the port. Most Houstonians have to drive far out of their normal commuter routes to reach these impressive but still very partial hints of the Port of Houston.

Already concealed by the geographic accidents of Houston's expansion, the Port was further concealed, strategically, in the wake of 9/11, as the Department of Homeland Security re-

quired Houston to deter potential terrorist acts by closing previously accessible parts of the port to the public. Workers can no longer bring family members down to the docks. Job seekers hoping to secure employment for a day or a lifetime have a far more complicated task ahead of them.

Working the Port, as its first principle, gives pride of place to the expressions of the people who are the greatest ground-level experts on the Port of Houston and the Houston Ship Channel—the workers themselves. The following two articles are part of an effort to make the Port of Houston better seen, better heard, and better known. The words by Father Rivers Patout and spoken and pictorial images by Lou Vest address central parts of the story of the Port, but the story is as big and diverse as the Channel is long.

Working the Port takes its name from a project conceived and designed by Pat Jasper, Director of Folklife and Traditional Arts Program of the Houston Arts Alliance. Jasper has been joined on the project by colleague Carl Lindahl (Professor of English and Folklore, University of Houston) as well as other contributors, and supported by a wide range of partner organizations. Funded initially by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, *Working the Port* focuses specifically on collecting the stories of, and thereby giving voice to, the men and women who make up the diverse workforce of the Port and the Ship Channel. The project has collected over 50 narratives thus far, and the pieces included here are fragments from much longer interviews, forming a brief prologue to the far more extensive examination and celebration of the Port of Houston and the Houston Ship Channel that will occur when their centennial is observed in 2014. —*Pat Jasper and Carl Lindahl*



AN INSIDER'S CHRONICLE

FATHER RIVERS PATOUT ON THE CHANGING NEEDS OF SEAFARERS

Interview conducted, introduced, and edited by Pat Jasper

Photos by Jack Thompson

THESE EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW with Father Rivers Patout tell the inside story of an institution central to the heart of the Port of Houston and the Houston Ship Channel. Father Patout is a chaplain at The Houston International Seafarers Center, a building perched on the channel at the turning basin, close by the headquarters of the Port of Houston Authority. The Seafarers Center was built to serve the men and women who work on the docks and in the industries that line the channel, or who arrive on the ships that transport the remarkable amount of cargo that moves in and out of Houston annually. It is by no means a prepossessing building, but like the human heart, the muscularity of its mission is undeniable.

A native Texan, Father Patout was there at the center's inception—a young priest full of the vigor and social vision that infused the Catholic Church in the late 1960s. And through his long tenure at the

center, marked by his continued dedication to serving seafarers, he has witnessed many changes in the conditions and character of the work that is conducted at the Port of Houston. Most of all, he has come to know the seafarer community itself—its challenges and trials, its assets and strengths. Whether they agree with him or not, few would deny that he is one of that community's greatest and most vocal advocates.

I was ordained in 1967—over the time when Vatican II was happening. My very first assignment was down near the Port at a place called Blessed Sacrament; that's where we got to find out about seafarers. [Serving seafarers] was a very big social concern. [In] 1968, we came to this Port to start ministering to seafarers, and we borrowed a building from the St. Vincent de Paul on Harrisburg, a number of miles to the south—upstairs, hot. But the very first days

we opened, people came in droves, walking up to these areas, and we said, "We must have something right here."

Our first presumption was, "Why would seafarers ever want a priest or minister telling them they couldn't read Playboy or drink beer?" What a stereotype! That was a common stereotype, still today, that they are alcoholic womanizers. On the contrary, it was very evident soon that ... they were family people, great people, and, in fact, they taught us. They were probably some of the more tolerant people in the world because they had seen every culture and didn't hold it against you to be of a particular religion or race—that there were good and bad of all kinds.

Father Patout worked hand in hand with some of the city's most noted leaders to make the work of serving seafarers more than a ministry. Establishing a site and organizing a building campaign called for a broad



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consortium of interests and a pragmatic sense of mutuality between social concerns and business interests.

In those early years, we were very, very fortunate to have people who really took an interest. We had a number of socialites and our churches, but I would say Howard Tellepsen—who was at that time head of the Port Commission—was probably more important than anyone else, because he made a commitment to build a building with his company and raised the funds we didn't have through his foundation—what an offer!

The first president was Albert Leidis. He was a Belgian captain, and he was a hard-drinking, fussing, and cussing person and he had seen the deprivations of the seafarers on the ships in his early days, when they were fed terrible food and [worked] under terrible conditions. And he really believed that seafarers needed a better life. I really credit him with being the founder of the center's idea here. He'd gotten permission to get Port land for where we built the building, but he didn't have any money. So when the churches came in with money, it was a great marriage.

And even the different philosophies—there was always a little tension between the business people and the social helpers [that were part of our board], because [the business leaders] didn't want the business slowed down. But again, it was a wonderful tension that helped us to look at both sides of the situation. How can we have a beautiful center to help people? How can we help the Port to have better efficiency?

Rather than accept the received model of how such an institution might work, the founders decided to take an internationalist, ecumenical approach to developing the center. It was a simple but revolutionary step, and it led to a center that was the first of its kind in the world.

I'd taken my vacation that summer to go out to the West Coast to visit a couple of seafarer centers and asked them what was right. So, we built a seafarer's center here in Houston, the very first in the world—none had ever been done before that shared all the interests of each of the denominations, shared the business, shared the poor. Every other center up until that time had to be either sponsored by a particular church or particular national government.

So we were the pioneers on that, and, thank you, Lord, it was a great thing. Now this is the model for the world. [And nowadays] seafarers are diverse on every ship, and [our idea] just makes more sense than ever—that they can come here without being asked, "What do you believe? Where are you from?" Our model spread throughout the world.

But in addition to furthering the work of chaplains like Father Patout and his associates, the center's fa-

cilities were key to bettering the physical and mental well-being of the seafarers who utilized it. Sports facilities provided respite from the confines of a ship and an opportunity for sailors and workers of all nationalities to connect with each other.

We first opened in a building some miles away. [It was] borrowed, but under construction was a swimming pool, the soccer field, and the track. We started using those in about two years. Meanwhile, the building was under construction, and, finally, when it opened in 1973, we knew a lot more about how to be chaplains to seafarers.

The athletic program was very important in the early days. We had sports week, and the winning ship got these big trophies and prizes, and there was a dance and a big hoopla. So, it was very active in the early days. We had one or two soccer games every night. We had uniforms we'd give them. We even had shoes that were donated. Sometimes, we had rivalry between two ships; sometimes we brought a local team out to play. [It was] very active in the early days because the seafarers had time, and they had larger crews, and they had young people!

I never will forget we had a tournament once at our festival, and some girls were playing on one of the teams and beat the ones with the Greeks. And they were just furious, throwing chairs, "How could you let women do this?" But it was a very active participation in the early days and very fun.

I remember one of the interesting events [involved some] Chinese sailors who wanted to go swimming. And we had one of those little shacks for a change room before our new building was constructed. But they didn't speak English, and so our volunteers would kind of point to the basket, and would point to their clothes, and then point to the shack. Well, these Chinese sailors bowed solemnly, took off all their clothes right in front of the volunteers, bowed again, and put the swimming suits on.

Like the balancing of business and social concerns, developing a single Houston International Seafarers Center avoided duplication but maximized interaction among the diverse religious and national communities. This approach contributed to heightened understanding and tolerance, but it often called for forbearance and diplomacy.

We try to be open and helpful. We don't proselytize. That's why the chapel is separated here, so that when there is a chapel service, those go that choose to go. The bar doesn't close down; the music doesn't stop. And it's worked out wonderful over the years.

I want to tell you one ecumenical story. When we were in our early years, we said, "We want this chapel to welcome people of different faiths." And for Islam, they face Mecca to the east, they use a prayer rug, and they pray their prayers on the prayer rug. So

we had a prayer rug donated, and I said, "Isn't that wonderful? Let's go put it in the chapel. And find out where east is." I deliberately went out when I was going to start the mass and asked some of these Islamic people to please come. Well, they're sitting in there dutifully, and I'm standing in front of them, saying, "Now, in respect to your religion, we have this prayer rug, and here is east. We want you to come and use this for your prayers whenever you feel." They weren't smiling; they were kind of frowning. One of them started to get up, and, later on, I found out what an offense it was to stay with your shoes on the prayer rug. You learn a lot about those things. So, these are things they taught us over the years.

I have a favorite story. This was the Cold War, and the Russians definitely did not want their seafarers to be influenced by capitalism and Western things. So they always had a commissar aboard who is in charge of political thought. So we had to be very careful—one was the bibles: it would be against the rules for them to take bibles. Therefore, we put plain brown covers on them. And when the commissar wasn't looking, they knew when to take them. We wouldn't take them aboard ship.

But one of my favorite stories is about Christmas. I went aboard one [Russian] ship and I said to the commissar, "I have brought New Year's gifts." They weren't Christmas gifts then, because Christmas is a Christian holiday. But they celebrate New Year's, and I said, "I want to bring them aboard for you. They're made by the people of this community, and they want to share it with you."

"Nyet," [said the commissar], who looked like a World War II veteran with his pockmarks, and his big moustache, and his Russian cigarettes. And so, the captain was sitting here. He wanted the presents. But the commissar wasn't sure. And they finally said, "Well, can we see one?" I said [whispers], "Please let there be no bible in it."

So we opened up one: combs, socks, writing paper. And they said, "Well, we can't accept because we don't have a gift to you." And I said, "Well, I'll take a drink of vodka, you know." And the captain, smiling, said, "Well, we don't have vodka, but we just came back from Cuba, and we've got some great Cuban rum." And I said, "Okay." So we go upstairs now to the captain's office, and the commissar [is] warily looking, he doesn't like what's developing.

So I said, "Toast to the American seafarers, toast to the Russian seafarers, toast to the friendship of all that gather." And each one toasted, and after [a] few toasts they said, "Okay, we'll take the gift." I said, "Nyet, not the gift, a gift for everybody."

"Toast to the American seafarers, toast to the Russian seafarers." By this time it has been toasted enough. So they've agreed, finally. The commissar's defeated philosophically, so I got the presents and put them on board. And I'm having [a] little trouble navigating down the gangway. As I was about to



"We try to be open and helpful. We don't proselytize. That's why the chapel is separated here."

ABOVE: Meeting hall and reception window at The Seafarers Center.

leave, I said, "Happy New Year!"

And the captain looks around [and says], "Merry Christmas!"

It was a political game, you know, but that was very significant in the early days.

From the day The Seafarers Center was finished—despite how well received and lauded it was, and despite the many local workers or international seafarers who enjoyed its extras and its amenities—it faced obsolescence. The character of the work that seafarers performed was changing, and the number of workers needed aboard was shrinking.

In the early days, it would be ordinary to have 200 people a night up [here]. I didn't have 11 people last night. Now, we do a lot of work. We provide the Wi-Fi so they could use their computers on the ship. We provide cell phones. We provide other aids to help them, but the number of people coming in to the center—I think the biggest night we [had recently] was 58, because the church was putting on a party, and they came to that. So, that's a great night today.

In the early days, that would have been a terrible night. A big center like this? We don't need the space. We need more mobile transportation. We need more aboard-the-ship presence. The ministry is alive and well, and The Seafarers Center is alive and well, and helping people, but in terms of the type of help, it's different from when we started.

We would not have the large numbers of people and the swimming pool—which is fantastic—and those who come really love it. But again, the swimming pool would be full every night too. We had to hire a lifeguard. We don't do that anymore but we would probably get the most use out of the basketball court, the ping-pong table, the pool tables, but even those things are not utilized in the way they had been before.

The biggest change, of course, is the time in port and the number of people on a ship. When I started, 40 was an average aboard a ship. Now, 20 if you're lucky is an average aboard a ship. They'd be here a week—they would have time to socialize, time to work, time to get their shopping done. Today, two days is a long time in port, and many ships leave on the same day they come in.

Containerization and technology continue to alter the workplace and the kind and quality of workers that find their way to the Port and Ship Channel. Today, the work and the worker hardly resemble the place and the people The Seafarers Center was built to serve.

So, everything is speeded up. [Now] we would never build this center with all these beautiful things. We haven't played soccer in the soccer field in years. It is difficult for 11 people to get off at any one time, that would be over half the crew, and they're older because there's seniority. And there's less women because they were brought in when [the ships] had need of more seafarers. They were excluded when [the ships] didn't, because they were the last ones in.

Technology, technology. In the beginning, seafaring jobs involved a lot of backbreaking jobs: you had to pull this pulley and lift that bale and upload aboard. [Now] it's all done automatically. You don't need to have a radio operator aboard. You couldn't even sail the ship when I came unless you had a radio operator that could do all the communications. No such thing exists anymore. You just turn your computer on, and you use satellite guiding, and you

push a button, and it does the things that you used to have to do by hand. And the economics of it all: "We need to reduce crews to reduce costs." "We're going to be competitive." Containers came into being. [Before that,] everything came in bulk and had to be unloaded individually.

Now, you just have to lift the box out, and no human is doing it. It's a big crane lifting them out. You can clear a container ship in a day, and you can roll off 5,000 automobiles in a day on a Ro-Ro ramp. Most of the things are so automated that you don't need the personnel and you don't need the time to do that. It's part of the speed of the moving in and out of the Port, because the ship is working all the time in port. That's their hardest work. When they're at sea, they can actually rest a little bit, but here in port, they have to take on supplies; they have to load and unload; they have to repair anything that needs repairing. And so, they are busy aboard ship.

And now Homeland Security provisions, resulting from the 9/11 attacks, have completely rearranged the landscape of the Port of Houston and the Houston Ship Channel.

Homeland Security is the worst possible thing that could have happened to seafarers. The restrictions are so horrible. Seafarers have to get visas in their own country before they're even allowed to consider getting off [the ship], and for some they're very expensive visas. The restrictions when they get here—they're inspected 96 hours out to sea for any possible connection to terrorism. Then they're boarded by the Coast Guard before landing, and looked at and examined again. And when they're docked, Immigration goes again and checks each one of them. If they don't have the documentation, they cannot leave their ship. But even if they have the documentation, it's often the facility [that] makes it very difficult. We have people having to pay a couple hundred dollars to go a couple hundred yards from the ship to the gate, each way. You know, that's just horrible and an ordinary seafarer cannot afford that. I'm on a dock access committee for the Coast Guard, and our job is to guarantee that any seafarers that have permission to leave should be able to leave without cost and come back without cost to board the ship.

If you were a worker coming in, you have to have a TWIC [Transportation Worker Identification Credential] card. If you're a seafarer—American—you have to [have one]; now, foreigners can't own one. But even an American stationed right below our center can look up there and see the center, he can't walk up to the center anymore unless somebody like myself with a TWIC card and an escort card picks him up, brings him up, and takes him back. So freedom of movement is horribly restricted. These are some of the real changes that have happened since 9/11. ☀

Excerpts from an interview of Rivers Patout by Pat Jasper, July 26, 2010; archived as HAA-WTP-PJ-SR001 with the Houston Arts Alliance; also on deposit at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and the Houston Folklore Archive.



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THE EYES OF THE PORT

THE WORDS AND PHOTOS OF LOU VEST

*Interview conducted, introduced,
and edited by Carl Lindahl*

LOU VEST'S IMAGES OF THE PORT OF HOUSTON are a singular blend of talent, experience, and access. His photographs capture both the surface beauty and inner workings of what he sees, for he is both a visual artist and an insider who has piloted the port's waters for more than a quarter of a century. Viewing Galveston Bay and the Ship Channel from the commanding heights of a ship's bridge, he focuses on the men and women who work the ships and docks, as well as on the almost unearthly "beauty of the industrial landscapes" that take shape along the water's edge. He sees the port as the living product of a relationship among terminal operators, tugboats, stevedores, agents, pilots, and a host of other organizations, all performing their specialized tasks in an organic way.

Louis Carl Vest is known as "One-Eighteen" by his fellow pilots. As the 118th member of the Houston Pilots Association, he works among the very few to be entrusted with one of the most difficult and honored jobs on the port: piloting giant cargo ships up and down a 52-mile-long sliver of water known as the Houston Ship Channel. On the open seas, it is the captain who controls the vessel, but once the ship approaches the entrance to Houston's Ship Channel in the Gulf of Mexico, Lou or one of his fellow pilots climbs aboard to navigate it up the narrow, shallow waterway to a port dock for unloading. The giant ships, which may exceed 1,000 feet in length, regularly pass each other coming and going along the channel. The channel is only 500 feet wide, and the combined width of two giant cargo ships approaches 300 feet. That leaves the pilots with only an average of 70 feet to separate each ship from the channel bank and 70 feet to separate the two ships from each other.

Pilots, therefore, must know every quirk and bend of the Ship Channel. No more than 45 pilots are available at any given time to guide cargo ships like these into America's busiest port.

Lou Vest has been a Port of Houston pilot since 1986. He has powerful memories of the day he became a pilot.

I put in an application, and as I got to know some of the pilots, I got some support. I got voted in in 1986. They asked me to join the Pilots Association. And I was a very happy camper. In the maritime industry, being a pilot is like being invited to be in the major leagues. If you're a minor league player and you get to be a pilot, that's the big leagues, and it's like being invited to play for the St. Louis Cardinals or something like that. And I was very pleased. For several

reasons. Houston is a very good Pilot Association. And I was always impressed by the professionalism of the pilots there. And it's a very busy port. And I frankly liked the pilots I knew from Houston.

So, I was very pleased. I found out that I'd gotten in. I'd taken a barge down to Antofagasta, Chile. A big barge of grain. We'd traveled all the way down to Chile, and we off-loaded the grain, and I was about ready to leave, and I called my wife. They had a big telephone exchange downtown. You had to walk downtown. And so I called my wife, and she said, "Well, are you sitting down?"

And I said, "Well, yeah, I am."

She said, "Well, I found out yesterday, you got in the Pilots Association."

And I was so happy. I thought, you know, I'd just won the lottery. And all the way back to the boat—I had to walk, you know, a couple miles back to the boat—I thought, "My God, I'm going to get run over by a dump truck or something. I've used up all the luck I've had in the world. And one of these damn dump trucks is going to run me over here." I was really careful walking back to the boat.

And it really has been a good career. I've enjoyed it. I've been here since '86. It's 2011 now, and I've never regretted it. It's been a good association. And I like the Pilots Association very much.

Since about 2000, Lou has been photographing the Port of Houston. He recalls one of the incidents that spurred him to take his camera on board with him.

I had a job where I finished up about three in the morning, and I had to walk about a mile to get to my car down in the docks. And it was three in the morning. It was absolutely calm. There was a light rain falling. And the reflections of light in the water, the raindrops hitting the water, with the concentric splashes. And I'm walking down there, and there's all these ships, just ship after ship, and they're registered in Bombay and Bahamas and Cypress and Vanuatu, and they all have exotic names of one kind or another. And I thought, "Wow, you know, I could write a poem about this. I could use the exotic names of the ships." I even thought about writing down the names of the ships that day, but then I thought, "Ah, you could pick any day." It was really kind of a moving experience. There I am with the romance of going to sea; it was like Conrad, Kipling, you know, and I really enjoyed the moment. And that was before I started taking photos. I had been a photographer before. Amateur, when I was real young. I started



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thinking then about starting to carry a camera with me again. To capture that moment.

AMERICA'S PORT

When Vest teaches outsiders about the port, he starts with the same photograph (*opposite*).

It's a photo of the American flag in sort of an arch over a container ship in the background. And I took it when I was getting off a ship one night. I saw that and I said, "Yeah, that might be a nice photo." I didn't really plan on it. I took about ten photos but this particular one with the arch over the top [stood out]. And then a couple weeks later, they had some show on television called "America's Port," and it was all about Los Angeles. And I thought, what a bunch of bull. They don't do even a third as many ships as Houston does. And Los Angeles is a Hollywood city. I mean, Houston is a nice working-class city; the port is central to our economy. Houston's America's port.

Houston is the biggest port in the country. I was talking to a captain at a function for the Maritime Museum. We got to talking about Houston, how much traffic they do, and he said, "Well, I was at a meeting last month, and we had a consultant come in to talk to us about different ports and how we manage traffic and some of the problems we're having. And the consultant had this big dry-erase board, and

he starts writing up there, puts up a big circle, and he says, 'Okay, this is Houston, we're going to put this off here by itself for awhile, and then we're going to talk about all these other ports.' And he writes down New York, New Orleans, Los Angeles. And the guy from Los Angeles, he goes, 'Well, how come Houston's separate?'

"And [the consultant] said, 'Well, it's just a different case altogether.'

"No, really. What's so special about Houston?"

"And he said, 'Well, how many ships do you do a day over there in Los Angeles?'

"He said, 'Well, 15, 20.'

"They're doing 70 ships a day over here. A different case altogether."

THE BEAUTY OF INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPES

Vest sees the port both as a work of nature and a work of culture. He views the social bonds and interdependence of its workers as an organic phenomenon, and the industrial landscape as almost magical.

It's an industrial area, but it's not necessarily ugly, I don't think. You know, I always thought I was kind of crazy, because when I was a kid, I remember outside the small town where my grandfather had a ranch, they built a power station, and you could see

that power station for miles across the plains in South Texas, and it always looked like a fairy castle to me, with all the lights and the catwalks and the towers. And I thought, "That's kind of cool." And when I grew up, I still had that in my mind.

And, of course, the Houston Ship Channel, that's all it is: towers and lights. I had two nephews from Colombia; they were from a small town in Colombia. They came up, and we picked them up at the airport. And they were like eight or ten years old, and we're driving over the Beltway 8 bridge, and they're standing up in the car, going, "Wow, look at all the Christmas lights!" you know, and it wasn't: it was just the Port of Houston. The petrochemical complex. But

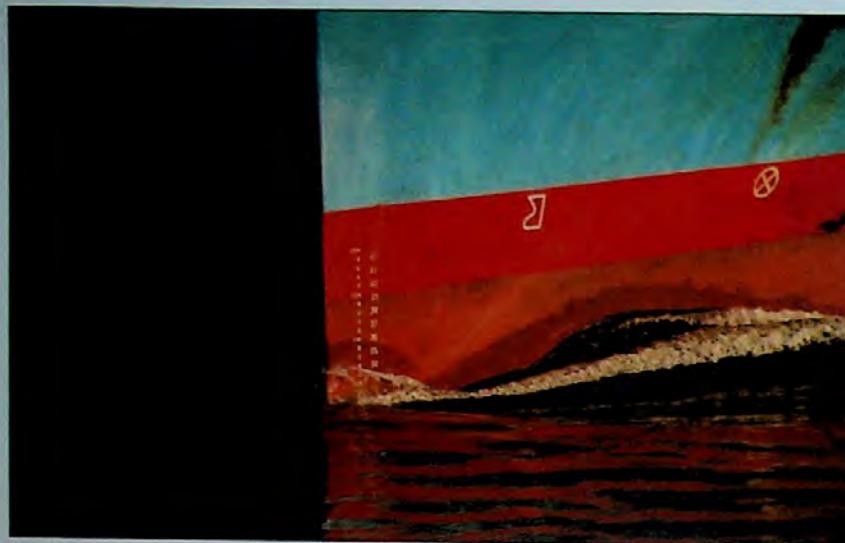
"It always looked like a fairy castle to me, with all the lights and the catwalks and the towers. And I thought, 'That's kind of cool.'"



ABOVE: Industrial landscape as crystal palace.



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LEFT: In a highly efficient and functional world, bright colors highlight the stunning forms of the ships. ABOVE: The mood is positive when the port runs smoothly.

they thought it was beautiful. They thought it was like a crystal palace.

So, to look at it with those eyes is different. So, I'm not going to be all Pollyannaish about it. I mean there's some serious things they do they should probably correct, but they try.

And my experience has been that nobody pollutes deliberately on the Ship Channel that I know of. People make a real effort to keep things clean. When I first started working as a young man, I think the first port I went to was Norfolk—in the Navy as a midshipman. And it was horrible. I mean, the banks of it were like black Crisco, with embedded eggshells and tires, and everything else.

And you don't see that at the Port of Houston. I mean, there's definitely a high tide line and a low tide line, but I think that's as much algae as anything else. You don't see stuff in the water. Now, you will see stuff after a heavy rain. But that's stuff that washes down from Houston. We see islands of trash wash down the channel from Houston, and it's plastic water bottles and tennis balls and abandoned tennis shoes and tires. And disposable lighters and acres and acres of Styrofoam cups. All that stuff washes down, but that's not thrown overboard by sailors. I'm sure that sailors are not 100 percent innocent of this, but for the most part, they put their trash away. This is my industrial landscape.

PILOTS AND PILOT BOATS

There's a guy jumping onto the pilot boat off the gangway (*opposite*). I have to say, pilot boat drivers are some of the best boat drivers in the world. You won't find better ship handlers, better boat handlers anywhere than the pilot boat operators. They're very, very good. [Often] there's rough sea. They have to bring the pilot boat in next to this ladder and hold it there safely while the guy gets on and off. We do 17,000, 18,000, jobs a year, and these guys are out there bringing these little boats out alongside these ships 17,000, 18,000, times a year, and I've seen them

"There must be 200 different docks, a couple hundred steamship agents, the Coast Guard, the pilots, the linemen, and the tugboats. Somehow it all comes together to make a big, organic entity."

just come up, just as smooth as you could imagine, and put the ladder right within six inches of that gangway there, and you just step across, and they treat it like, "This is what I do every day." And they're good. They're very good. And they should get a lot more credit than they do.

In spite of the highly interdependent work along the Ship Channel, there are moments when a pilot is alone. Lou reflects on such moments while describing one of his photos not featured here.

This picture is a metaphor for being a pilot. It's in the middle of the night, and this guy's probably just been woken up about ten minutes before, and he climbs up the ladder, and you can see this stairway going way up there towards the ship, and it's dark at the top. You don't know what's up there. And here's this guy. He probably got up there, and they said, "Okay, you've got your ship coming up." And he goes up there, you know. He doesn't know what kind of crew is up there. He doesn't know if the ship is all in one piece or not. If the engine works right. Is it going to steer well or not? You know, he just goes up there

into the darkness, and that's a very good metaphor for a pilot's life.

AT THE END OF HIS INTERVIEW, Lou returned to the notion of the port as an "organic entity." He portrays port life as the product of an interdependent relationship that binds the ocean to the Ship Channel, and the seamen to the natural forces that give them their daily work and daily challenges.

I think Port of Houston's a great place. It's been a very exciting place to work—in the best sense, you know. Not that "somebody-screwed-up" sort of exciting. It has been very good to me. And I think what's interesting is I've been impressed by the organic nature of it. How it all works together. All these independent people and agencies: the steamship agents and the terminals. There must be 200 different docks, a couple hundred steamship agents, the Coast Guard, the pilots, the linemen, and the tugboats. Somehow it all comes together to make a big, organic entity. And—like that [photo I took of a captain and crew that were smiling (*above right*)—basically, Houston is like that. I mean, there are days when it doesn't function so well, and people get kind of crabby, but thus far it's a well-run, well-organized, happy thing that's trying to do the right, the right thing, for the city and the port. And I think they deserve recognition: the people who go out to these meetings, and talk about safety, and how to do things better, and how to clean up, and how to prevent accidents. You know, they really seriously try—and the thing organically works very well.

Excerpts from an interview of Lou Vest by Carl Lindahl, November 8, 2011; archived as HAA-WTP-CL-SR001 with the Houston Arts Alliance; also on deposit at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and the Houston Folklore Archive.



ABOVE: A pilot boat holds steady as a man minds the gap.



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RUIN OR RESOURCE

RECONNECTING THE CITY AND THE SHIP CHANNEL

by *Monica Savino*

Photos by Jack Thompson

LESS SENSATIONAL AND LESS GLAMOROUS than some of Houston's other public faces, such as the Texas Medical Center, energy corridor, and arts institutions, the Ship Channel is an exceptional series of places due to its history and for its potential. Despite a rich and wild history along its banks during the 19th century that transformed low-lying grasslands, thickets, and swamps into perpetual boomtowns, very little to virtually nothing remains of the built environment of that time. This reality echoes a frequent tragic chorus in Houston: where's the history?

This quarter-mile-wide corridor through the Ship Channel to the San Jacinto Battleground State Park is truly responsible for the region's earlier undisputable success, giving rise between 1820 and 1840 to a collection of paper cities, sawmills, warehouses, docks, and cotton compresses. The artifacts that remain in this corridor are either ruins or resources. First- and second-generation structures are long gone and even third-generation structures are ruins, replaced by tall weeds, scrappy trees, metal buildings, or liquid storage tanks. Included in this group of

structures are bridge footings that step at the edge of the bayou, factory floor slabs half covered in debris, and incinerator chimneys. The resources are those structures that are recognizable, remain intact, or have only recently been vacated. With a directed collaboration, they can effectively be rehabilitated or reused.

Reconsideration of ruins and resources along the Ship Channel corridor goes well beyond the ephemeral nostalgia of simple preservation and should continue the conversation about Houston's industries and technologies and about the city's wealth and workers, while viewing the aquatic route as a timeless symbol of opportunity. The ruins, suggesting fragments of stories, can serve as functional inspiration for other uses: a warehouse slab as a basketball court or sculpture installation; concrete footings as the beginning of an observation deck. Something should remain to ignite the historic memory of the corridor before redevelopment marches into the area, removing all remaining traces of the industries that built the region. Meanwhile, the following resources, still intact and quite functional, are chock-full of historic relevance.



EXAMPLE No 1: GRAIN ELEVATOR, 1926

The export grain elevator designed by the John S. Metcalf Company of Chicago is one of the few remaining structures that confirm the success of the Ship Channel in the early 20th century. Built in 1926 to satisfy export needs, the elevator was a public project resulting from the state-sanctified merger of the City Harbor Board and the Navigation District Commission that combined the two into a modern Port Commission and gave the port relative autonomy in operations, fundraising, and capital projects. The 1922 referendum approved by Houston voters that essentially separated the city from any port obligations was the impetus for many capital improvements along the bayou's edge. The 1926 grain elevator with its 1 million bushel storage capacity was soon enlarged in 1930 to store 3.5 million bushels. While the elevator remains one of the single most prominent landmarks on the Ship Channel and can still be seen from many points in the city, according to former Port of Houston Authority (PHA) executive director Thomas Kornegay, it is no longer functional for export grain due the port's adoption of the ISO 14001:2004 environmental management standard. Currently, a portion of the warehouse is utilized by an importer of highly specialized, packaged whole-grain animal feed, but not much more is stored there.

In *Towards a New Architecture*, Le Corbusier presents mass as it relates to the empirical form and light using eight dramatic photographs of contemporary American and Canadian grain stores and elevators as examples. "Thus we have the American grain elevators and factories," he writes, "the magnificent first-fruits of the new age. The American engineers overwhelm with their calculations our expiring architecture." Composed of straightforward geometric cylinders and stacked cubes, the High Level Road facility at the port is just as formal and monumental as Corbusier's examples.

Years ago, concrete grain elevators were a common sight along the channel and symbolized the power of grain agriculture in Harris and surrounding counties. The question of what to do with this struc-

ture is surely in play or will soon be considered by the PHA. The January 2012 PHA meeting report included this agenda item statement: "The Port Commission approved the demolition and redevelopment plan for certain obsolete properties, many of which are nearly 70 years old, on the Houston Ship Channel or near the Turning Basin Terminal." Although the 1926 grain elevator is not included, a number of sheds, warehouses, and wharves in various states of functionality in the immediate area are specified in the demolition plan. The PHA anticipates a higher and better use for all of their properties in the vicinity of the Turning Basin, which have been cycling in and out of functionality over the past two decades. How will the 1926 export elevator fare during the inevitable redevelopment? Probably no better than so many of the other grain elevators that once punctuated shipping and trucking routes in the Houston area. PHA's 6.2 million bushel Public Elevator #2 and the Cargill Elevator in Channelview are still heavily used, while two extant facilities at Westview and Lumpkin and at Highway 290 and Long Point Road are no longer used for their original purpose. Actual projects that adaptively reuse concrete grain elevators and similar structures are gaining attention in the northern U.S., Canada, and other countries, but have by no means captured Houston's attention.

The Turning Basin is a powerful and historically meaningful location along the Ship Channel, and the 1926 grain elevator and stores could potentially survive as both rehabilitated program space and a monument dedicated to the Gulf Coast's immense agricultural and industrial heritage. What better way to bring immediacy to the Ship Channel's early years than with an observation deck on the 180- to 200-foot tall silos. In addition to taking the *M/V Sam Houston* boat tour, one could visit one of the oldest remaining facilities for handling agricultural products and learn about a time when moving goods to the East Coast markets from the Brazos River valley fueled the 1820-1830s race to explore Buffalo Bayou as a deep water route.



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EXAMPLE No 2: UNITED STATES APPRAISERS STORES, 1939

With a commanding view of the Turning Basin atop a hill, the building at 7300 Wingate Street was built for use as the United States Appraisers Stores. Originally serving under the Department of the Treasury, the federal appraiser was responsible for documenting the values and quantities of imports and exports passing through the Ship Channel and for setting tariffs on various goods. The cornerstone reveals that the building was a project of the Federal Works Agency, to which the Works Progress Administration was assigned, under supervising architect Louis A. Simon and supervising engineer Neal A. Melick. During their career in the Federal Works Agency, both Melick and Simon were responsible for hundreds of highly functional buildings, most of which are still in use and on the National Register of Historic Places. They include Fort Knox's Bullion Depository, U.S. Border Inspection stations in Arizona—the first of a new typology—and the Santa Monica Post Office, among many others. After the appraisers building sat vacant for many years, the federal government finally sold it in the late 1990s to a local private entity.

The Neoclassical structure is very similar to other works by Melick. Veneered in tan brick, the classically organized elevations are minimally detailed. The front elevation is very flat and includes horizontal

and vertical accent banding in limestone, while the east and west elevations have faintly detectable vertical window recesses in the brick veneer. Both elevation treatments are expressively moderne. Limestone crown molding, the pared-down baroque-styled entry stair on the exterior front, and a modified hip roof with classic red clay tiles create an eclectic mix. Its siting on a natural hill as well as on an eight-foot-high concrete basement level, in part to mitigate the uneven grade, completes the elements for a classical institutional landmark.

The building is a resource for both the Ship Channel and the community of Harrisburg. Located only about 400 yards from Hidalgo Park and the Harrisburg and Sunset Rail Trails, the building has vehicular access via 75th Street, and pedestrians and bicyclists can access the property through an extension of Avenue Q to Harbor Drive. The property could conceivably serve the community. Private reuse of the building with its proximity to the channel could pose security issues for the PHA, whereas a repurposing with PHA or other maritime partners would not. For instance, the building could serve as a community outreach center or a job training center for those wishing to enter maritime or port-related jobs.



EXAMPLE No 3: OFFICE BUILDING, 1914

Little is known about this small, simple building that has a prominent location on the south bank of a channel barge slip near Brady's Island. Owned by the port, the building is constructed of reinforced concrete with a basement level, one main floor, and a penthouse with an outdoor roof deck. An example of early classic modernism, similar in expression to designs by Irving Gill, the exterior looks to be in its original condition. Sited at the rear of the hilltop property, the building gives its occupants a worthwhile view past the barge slip to the larger channel operations beyond.

Most recently occupied in 1999 by Gantt Marine Service, Inc., a mooring operation, the building was previously occupied for some time by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps' presence on the Ship Channel is plausible when one realizes that this segment of the channel underwent dramatic improvements in the early 20th century. The Corps' involvement with the Ship Channel, however, goes back to Reconstruction, when it was finally settled that the "national government should invest in internal improvements," as noted by Marilyn Sibley in her history of the port, and the first U.S. survey of the channel was made. Longtime Houston boosters lobbied for a port of entry for Houston in direct competition with landowners further downstream toward Galveston Bay. In the end, the engineers deemed the economic

and environmental costs, such as constant and heavy erosion, were too great and risky to cut a deep-water access from Harrisburg to downtown Houston. Instead the huge amount of cutting and dredging approved in 1870 extended from Constitution Bend (the present day Turning Basin) to Galveston Bay. In 1903, the first million-dollar appropriation was made to dredge, straighten, and widen the bayou, and by 1912 capital improvements were in full force from the Turning Basin to Bolivar Point, uniformly widening and deepening the channel to 25 feet deep. In addition to the monumental scope of work of dredging the channel, the 52-mile project was a collaboration led by Jesse H. Jones between the Federal government and the local community represented by the City of Houston Harbor Board, the Harris County Houston Ship Channel Navigation District, and local private businesses in what would be the first-ever public-private partnership. Completed in September 1914, the same year the Panama Canal was finished, Houston's "modern" Ship Channel started at the Turning Basin, cut Morgan's Point, and cleared Red Fish Bar in Galveston Bay.

Of many buildings that popped up along the channel corridor at this catalytic time, the gem at 8200 Cypress still stands. By the way, the PHA is looking for a tenant for the office building.



EXAMPLE No 4: WORLD TRADE BUILDING, 1962

The PHA's World Trade Building is a curious example of what unique directions an adaptive reuse can take. In the 1960s the PHA had a presence in downtown, and in 1962 it commissioned Wilson Morris Crain + Anderson (WMCA) to design the World Trade Building at 1520 Texas Avenue. In the formal tradition of Kenneth Franzheim's Bank of the Southwest Building (1956), Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's First City National Bank Building (1960), both in Houston and completed before Emery Roth + Sons Pan Am Building (1963) in New York City, WMCA designed a modest, two-volume complex: an office tower and an engaged pavilion-style platform. Owned and operated by the port, the complex served as the first World Trade Building (Center) in the U.S. In an attempt to promote the Ship Channel, international trade, and worldwide cultural exchange, the offices of the Houston World Trade Association were located there, as were offices for shipping companies, freight forwarders, and foreign consulates. This was a time when Humble, Shell, Sinclair, Gulf, and other petroleum companies were consolidating their

administrative operations to Houston, creating one of the largest concentrations of petroleum business in the U.S. Amenities for trade members included offices, interpreters, administrative services, and a trade-reference library. In the platform volume was the main lobby, an auditorium, and meeting rooms, while the plinth top floor housed the private World Trade Club, with a restaurant where shipping and business executives and agents often lunched.

The port's executive offices were located in a small, separate three-story building on Capitol Avenue behind the World Trade Building. According to Kornegay, the PHA personnel were scattered: "The port director's office and the boardroom were on the third floor of the building. Purchasing, Trade Development, General Counsel, and Engineering were also in the building. Operations, Security, and Accounting were located at the Turning Basin Terminal in a small one-story building. Addi-

tionally, the Engineering department had grown and was moved to the World Trade Building in 1987." It was obvious that the two sites were impeding efficiency within the PHA, and a new administrative building was commissioned at High Ridge Road at the port in 1992. This was a critical act of separation between the port and the central business district.

Afterwards, the Houston Ship Channel's daily presence disappeared from the public's eyes. What happened to the International Style modern building that strived to bring a vibrant international energy to downtown Houston? After a couple of sales transactions, the renovated building, with a pseudo-classical makeover, is now a hotel near Minute Maid Park, while the World Trade Association operates under the auspices of the Greater Houston Partnership in their Smith Street offices. ☀



A WILD AND PEACEFUL PLACE

Buffalo Bayou: An Echo of Houston's Wilderness Beginnings
(by Louis F. Aulbach, CreateSpace, December 2011, 752 pages, \$24.95)

by Ann Walton Sieber

I GREW UP IN HOUSTON NEXT TO A CREEK called—on the rare occasions it was called anything—Poor Farm Ditch. Although this may sound like some boggy and backwards outskirt of Harris County, Poor Farm Ditch crept right through manicured and, at that time, middle-class West University. And to call it a creek was rather ludicrous, since “creek” implies some natural desirability, an allure that had long since been channelized out of poor Poor Farm. One reads in storybooks that children play in creeks, but it never occurred to us children to play in or by Poor Farm—lined with concrete, as it was, and guarded by a chain link fence.

My childhood experience of Poor Farm Ditch is pretty typical for our city. Houston is called the Bayou City, but for a considerable time we have relegated the bayous to the realm of the functional—used, not for scenery nor sport nor succor from hectic city life, but simply for drainage. I love the River Walk in San Antonio and Town Lake in Austin, and I remember idly wishing Houston also had a river going through our downtown, when I realized with a start ... we do. Buffalo Bayou. Why, I wondered, wasn't Buffalo Bayou and its sister streams more a part of our daily city lives and consciousness?

It was not always thus. Historically, Houstonians have had a rich engagement with our bayous for both everyday use and enjoyment. And today an energized cadre of bayou backers has been working to bring Houston's waterways back into the public eye.

In *Buffalo Bayou: An Echo of Houston's Wilderness Beginnings*, river buff and historian Louis F. Aulbach has produced a prodigious work of research about Houston's “mother bayou.” He first conceived of it as a 100-page guidebook for canoeing, the next in a series of guidebooks he'd written through the years on various Texas rivers, but he found Buffalo Bayou so rich in history that his work stretched out for 12 years—and the book stretched into a 740-page tome.

Aulbach starts at Buffalo Bayou's headwaters and, chapter by chapter, progresses downstream, stopping his narrative just shy of the Ship Channel (leaving that to another book). As he passes through each neighborhood at the leisurely rate of about ten pages per mile, he presents a hodgepodge of history, people, industry, current development, botany, canoe warnings, and arcana.

We hear about the people who gave their

names to our streets and neighborhoods: Eldridge (William T. Eldridge, first manager of the Imperial Sugar Company in, yes, Sugar Land), Tomball (Tom Ball, a Huntsville politician who had a hand in the development of both River Oaks and the Ship Channel), and Bering (the Bering brothers owned 2,000 acres of farmland out by Bering Street). Mitchell Westheimer immigrated from Germany in the 1850s, prospered in Houston, and donated land for a road from Sealy to Columbus; Westheimer Road today is the longest major street in Texas. The town of Katy was named for the MKT (Missouri, Kansas, Texas) railroad. And Waugh Drive was named by Houston bridge and street commissioner T. L. Waugh for his son Private Tom T. Waugh, killed in World War I.

Contrasts abound: the Cenacle Retreat House is described on one page and on the facing page, sewage disposal. Sometimes the data is wryly amusing, such as the upscale hotel that shut down a nearby archery range in Memorial Park when arrows were discovered

in the hotel parking lot. Sometimes the going is a tad tedious, such as the recitation of house prices in various Memorial Village subdivisions and even the cost to golf at various courses near the bayou (greens fees at Meadowbrook Farms Golf Club are among the highest in the state at \$90). And sometimes the book is illuminating: the first legislative action of then-greenhorn U.S. Congressman George H. W. Bush was to stop the Army Corps of Engineers from giving Buffalo Bayou concrete sides, like so many of its sister bayous in Houston—even if, ironically, the George H. W. Bush statue in downtown Houston presides over the only section of Buffalo Bayou with a concrete lining.

Aulbach's sensibility and pacing is that of a canoeist paddling in slow-moving waters. One story leads to another, and detours are rampant.

A typical meander starts in 1944, when an airplane crashed into a tuberculosis hospital that once abutted Buffalo Bayou; because the airplane flew from Ellington Field, several paragraphs of Ellington Field history are related, including the fact that George W. Bush flew there during his on-and-off period as a reserve pilot; then, because the hospital site became the Center for the Retarded, the section closes with the average cost of a caning job done by Cullen Caners, currently operating out of the center.

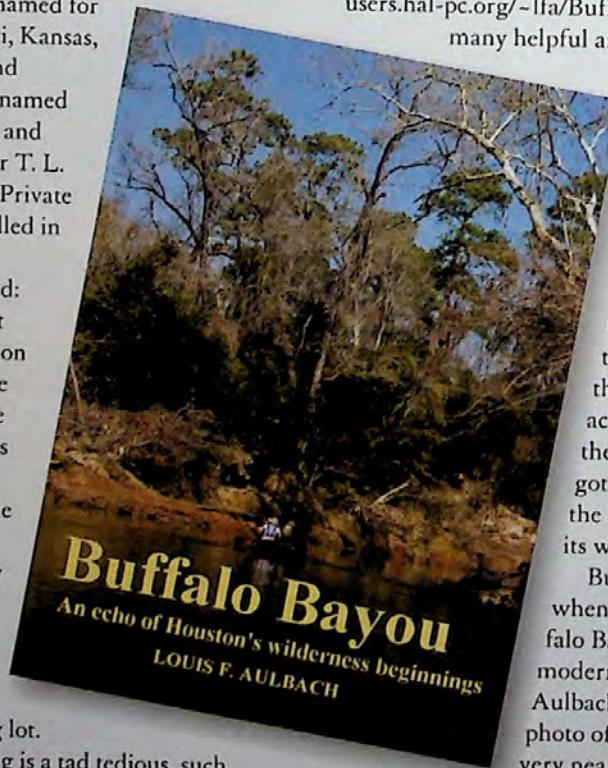
Aulbach says his guiding vision was that “history can best be understood when one stands at the place where the events took place.”

Buffalo Bayou is a charming compendium of data, although the level of detail is a bit of a slog, and may be more interesting to those who have specific interests in a particular neighborhood or topic. Like many a reference work, *Buffalo Bayou* is likely more valuable in the having than the reading. Aulbach's website provides a more digestible source for Buffalo Bayou info: users.hal-pc.org/~lfa/Buffalo.html. Plus, it has many helpful and interesting photos and visuals, which are almost entirely missing from the book.

I recently kayaked down Buffalo Bayou from Loop 610 bridge into downtown, my first time to do such a thing. I was struck by the almost total dearth of activity or attention given the bayou. Only when I got to Allen Parkway did the city seem to engage its waterway.

But, by the same token, when paddling down Buffalo Bayou, the reach of modern Houston feels distant. Aulbach told me, “The cover photo of the book was taken very near to the geographic center of the fourth largest city in the United States, yet a canoe trip in this section of Buffalo Bayou allows you to imagine what the area was like when the Allen brothers began to stake out the town of Houston on the banks of the bayou in 1836. You have a sense of a wild and peaceful place. Even after 176 years, there are traces, or echoes, of the historical past along the bayou.”

The course of a river is akin to the stages of life, from babyhood as a spring to full bloom, gushing maturity, yet all laid out to view simultaneously. Aulbach's book chronicles what is past or passing with our venerable bayou. As for what is to come, that is writ in water by us all. **c**





READING ARCHITECTURE: A VISUAL LEXICON

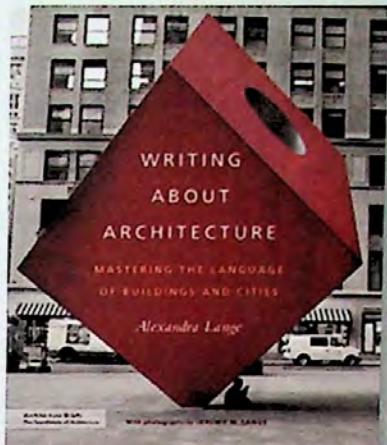
BY OWENS HOPKINS

This innovative and unique book is a visual guide to the buildings that surround us, naming all the visible architectural features so that, unlike other architectural dictionaries, the reader doesn't have to know the name before looking it up.

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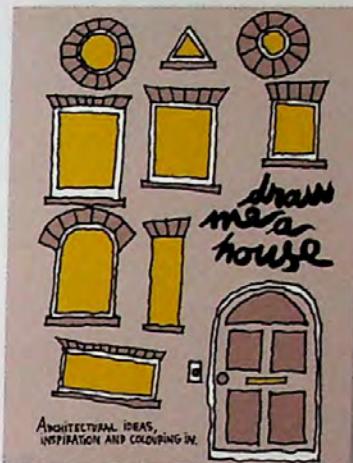


WRITING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE: MASTERING THE LANGUAGE OF BUILDINGS

BY ALEXANDRA LANGE

Writing About Architecture is a handbook on writing effectively and critically about buildings and cities. Each chapter opens with a reprint of a significant essay written by a renowned architecture critic, followed by a close reading and discussion of the writer's strategies. This book is based on the author's design writing courses at New York University and the School of Visual Arts.

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BY THIBAUD HEREM

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EDITED BY BETH MILLER AND TODD WOODWARD

In 2011 the Community Design Collaborative celebrated two decades of providing pro bono design services to nonprofit organizations in Philadelphia and the region. *Leverage* showcases the approach and success of this groundbreaking community design center. Profiles of 20 key projects highlight how the Collaborative transforms its values into three dimensions, on projects large and small, and the successes of its volunteer architects, planners, engineers, and community leaders in revitalizing Philadelphia's underserved neighborhoods.

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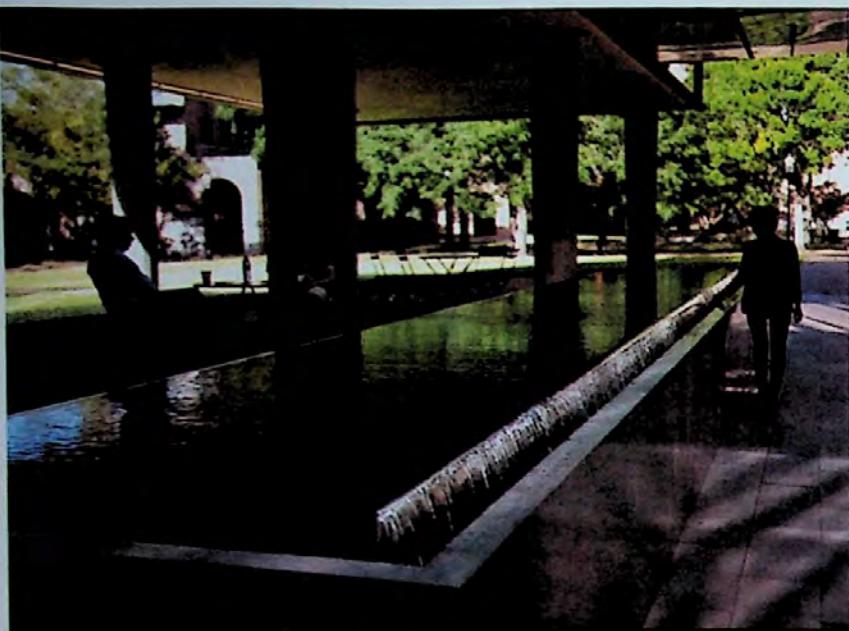
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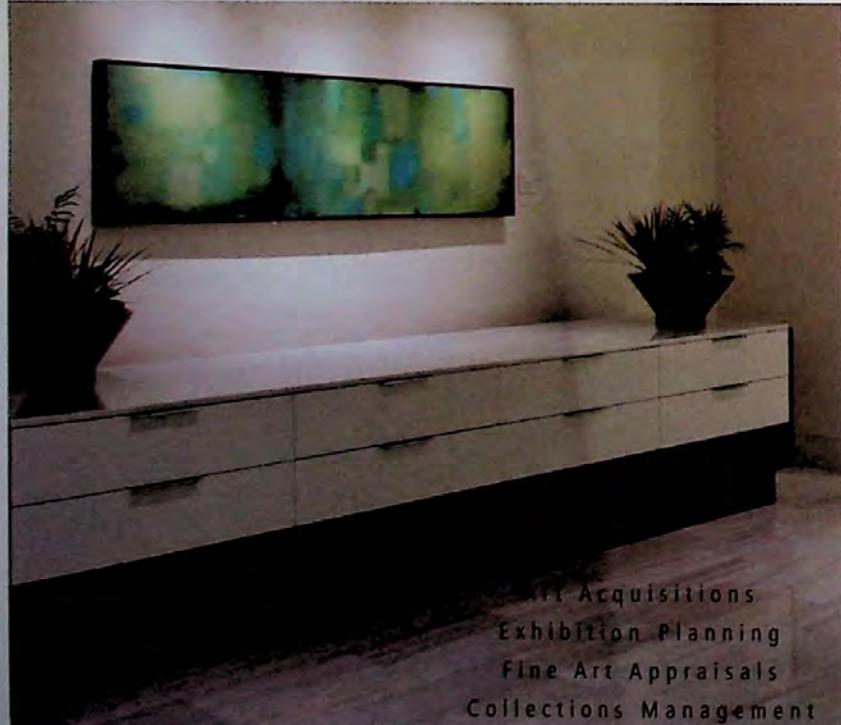


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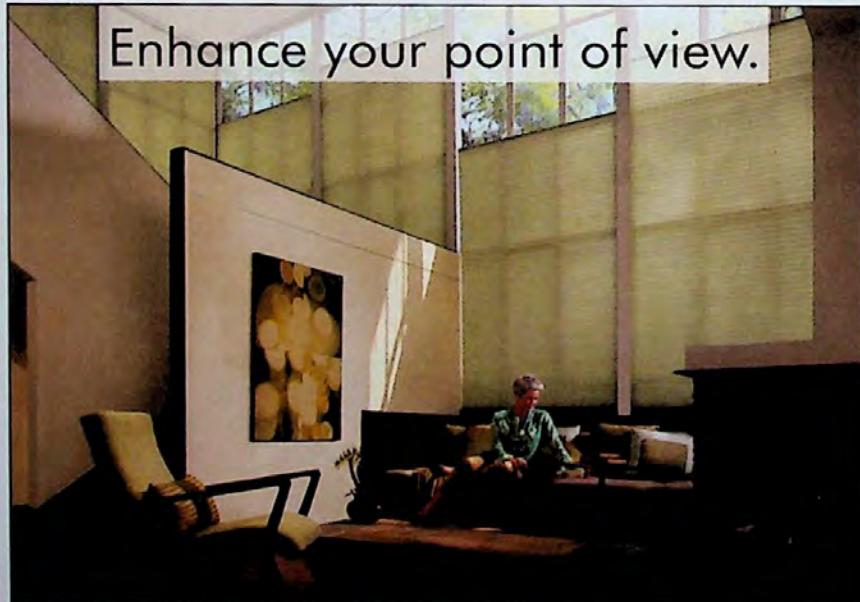


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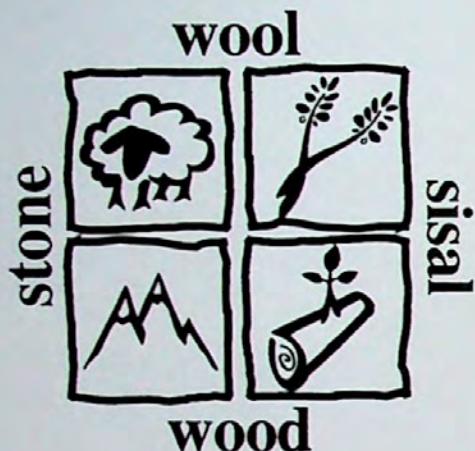
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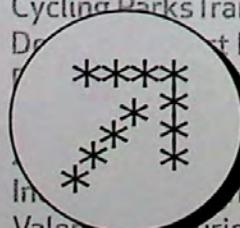
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The Nelson-Atkins Museum of art in Kansas city was designed by Steven Holl, the architect chosen by the MFA,H, for its expansion.

COUNTERPOINTS

Big Wisdom and Small Wit May Put Houston Back on the World Stage for Architecture

by Ronnie Self

“...SILENCE IS AS FULL OF POTENTIAL WISDOM AND WIT AS THE UNHEWN MARBLE OF GREAT SCULPTURE,” writes Aldous Huxley in *Point Counter Point*. And architectural competitions multiply the potential by three, or four, or more.

Houston’s psyche is that of a city with the promise of a yet hewn stone—or at least a mass of clay. In the last few months Houston has invited twelve architectural teams to propose designs for three significant projects. It is an exciting time.

Morphosis, Snøhetta, and Steven Holl competed for a new building for The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, to be built in the current parking lot just across the street from the Law Building. Holl was chosen, but the project has not yet been made public. Together, the architect and client are now examining program, planning, and phasing.

Interloop, Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis, Neil M. Denari, SHoP, and Snøhetta competed for the Metro Central Station-Main, a downtown transfer station. Reportedly, an architect has been selected, but the name will not be announced before a phase of budget verifications and design modifications has been successfully completed.

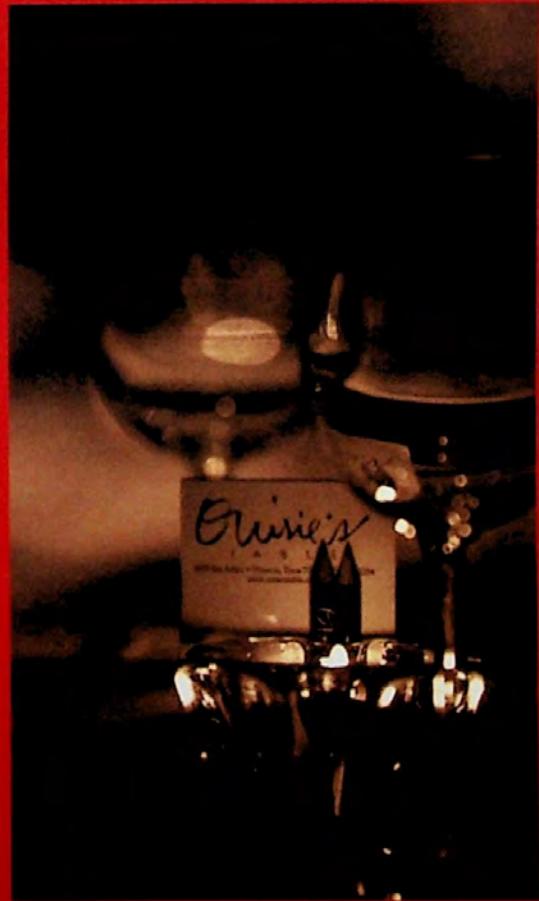
David Chipperfield, Johnston Marklee, SANAA, and Tatiana Bilbao recently presented designs for the Menil Drawing Institute on the Menil campus. Johnston Marklee were selected for the project.

While the extreme juxtapositions (no zoning, etc.) that characterize Houston can sometimes be exhilarating, much of our everyday architecture inspires less enthusiasm. Occasionally, these more important projects come along to break the silence of the humdrum. More exciting generally hasn’t meant flamboyant, however. Even with our rough-and-tumble reputation, Houston hasn’t taken the path of a more brash architecture and may even be seeking the harmonious. The three MFA,H finalists provided a fairly wide formal variety for consideration for a new addition. In many ways the existing buildings of Mies and Moneo couldn’t be more different: Mies’ transparency versus Moneo’s opacity, Mies’ universal space versus Moneo’s contained rooms. Judging from his previous work, Holl’s project could be the offspring of the two with translucent walls rather than opaque or transparent, and gallery spaces that are not as contained as rooms but more defined than lofts.

The Menil choices seem more focused. The competitors, even with very different backgrounds, are of a similar ilk with a preference for simple forms and a tendency for minimalism. The relatively unknown architects on the list, Johnston Marklee and Tatiana Bilbao, have less of a track record which makes for more risk, but also increased potential. The success of Johnston Marklee’s project will likely depend on a perceptive and compelling interpretation of the context—a fairly unique situation and challenge in Houston and a good example to set.

If both museum projects have a certain gravitas calling for “wisdom,” there seems to be a place for “wit” in the Central Station design. Though there are many constraints and the project has to function well, there isn’t a lot of program. The proposals are more lighthearted. They generally extract a concept from an aspect of context or function, run with it, and translate it into form without agonizing over the architectural gesture. If what results—having navigated through a complex decision making process and a tight budget—is a success, it should be an even more pertinent example for Houston’s more everyday architecture. If museums commonly hold competitions for even the smallest additions, there was no unwritten rule that obliged the Central Station to do the same. In that way our hopes for it are even higher.

Competitions are quickly forgotten, though, and the building itself becomes the seed for the future. I have been told that the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck was contacted as a possible candidate for the Menil Collection. If chosen, Houston would have been a slightly different place. Every competition—and building—opens some doors and closes others. c



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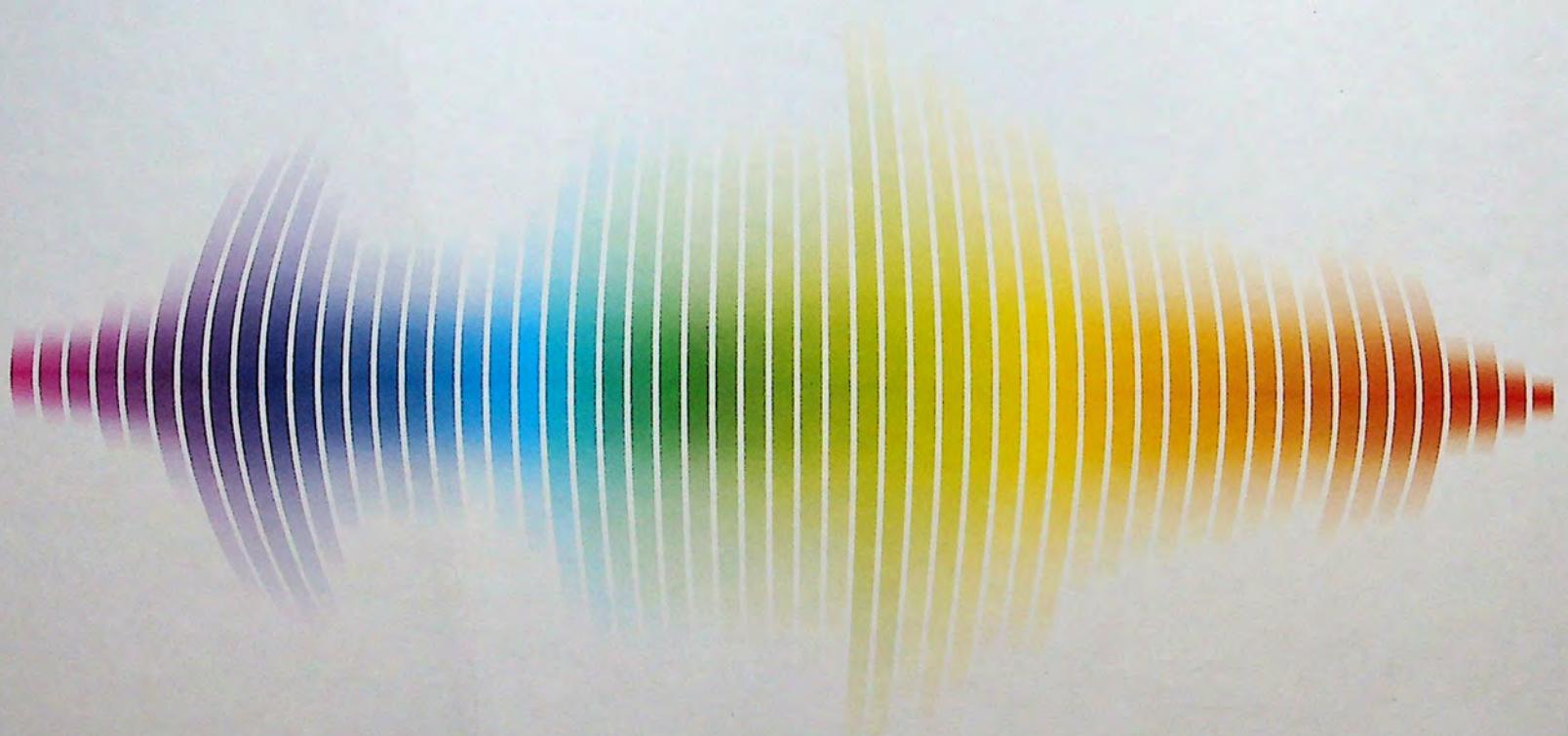
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