Horizon Lines

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX MACLEAN

When Alex Maclean approaches his shot, he takes his hands off the yoke and leans his head out the airplane window. He circles, refines his approach, studies the site, photographs, and circles again, returning to the same sites for several days when shadows are long, when the ozone clears. This obsessiveness would produce extraordinary images, to be sure, but there is more. Even as his hands leave the yoke, his feet work the rudder pedals so the plane rotates sharply on the yaw axis until his lens points at the perfect angle. The entire plane behaves like a well-trained horse as he pulls from the rushing 90-degree-plus air a moment of total stillness. A silent abstraction is plucked from a deafening roar.

When I rode alongside Maclean in a Cessna 172 last June, I thought I would be in that moment with him, but I did not see the art in the photography as it was happening. Rather, my consciousness was entangled by my gastrointestinal system. The experience was cathartic if not revelatory.

We take off from the West Houston Airport outside Beltway 8. The runway is flanked by new houses, industry, and a Buddhist temple. Look how from the air this humdrum Houston mash-up turns into a giant game board. Look how the Energy Corridor is a true corridor sandwiched between two vast reservoirs, water spilling through the gates of the earthen bulwarks. Look at the rippling form of I-10 and the proximity of the nodes in our dearly beloved conurbation.

"Viewed from the air, scenes that from the ground appear mundane often revealed an intelligence of form that transcends their content, making things as ordinary as a striped parking lot or a routine apartment complex appear as stunning essays of pure geometry," writes the late William F. Stern in his essay on the photographs by Maclean published in the Summer 2000 issue of *Cite* (48). Stern and Maclean attended the Harvard Graduate School of Design together, and their collaboration for *Cite* is a high point in the publication's history and resulted in an exhibition at the Menil.

Think of all that has changed in our relationship to aerial photography since 2000. You can tour Houston from the sky whenever and wherever you want with a smartphone. For a few hundred dollars, you can build your own drone and shoot your own aerials. Yet the art of Maclean's photography, honed over more than 30 years and 11 books, is as relevant as ever.

What exactly do the photographs say? Regarding the images published in 2000, Stern writes that they are "not manifestly critical views, though they do prompt critical thinking about how the city grows and settles into a relationship with its natural site." The same could be said now. Maclean shot more than 1,500 photographs using a Canon 5D Mark III, a digital SLR. He shared 800 with *Cite* via a folder in the cloud. (Stern received a box of 1,500 slides.) In culling from this digital set, we privileged images that are, at first, confounding. Images in which the power of the abstraction temporarily overwhelms. The site is defamiliarized. Just as you make sense of the image, caught somewhere between awe and analysis, there is a little opening. A chance to see anew.

Whereas the first photo essay lingered on open spaces, vast vacant lots, and the "ubiquitous cul-de-sacs, resembling biomorphic organs," the images taken 14 years later show a city in the middle of upheaval. Construction. Expansion. Density. The same dizzying patterns emerge across commercial, residential, and industrial landscapes.

It was Maclean's interest in documenting oil extraction from tar sands that brought him from Alberta back to Houston. He has published some of the photographs on Huffington Post. Seen in that context, Houston is "nature's metropolis," to borrow from the title of William Cronon's book. We are creators and consequences of a continent-sized machine.

By the end of the trip I made with Maclean, I had sweat through my clothes. The immediate euphoria of the takeoff had long given way. Let me tell you, not everything about Houston looks great from the air. ***Even as the mundane becomes deceptively beautiful, the uncanny charm of Houston is lost from the air.*** **You are confronted with the raw power of the economy.**

BY RAJ MANKAD

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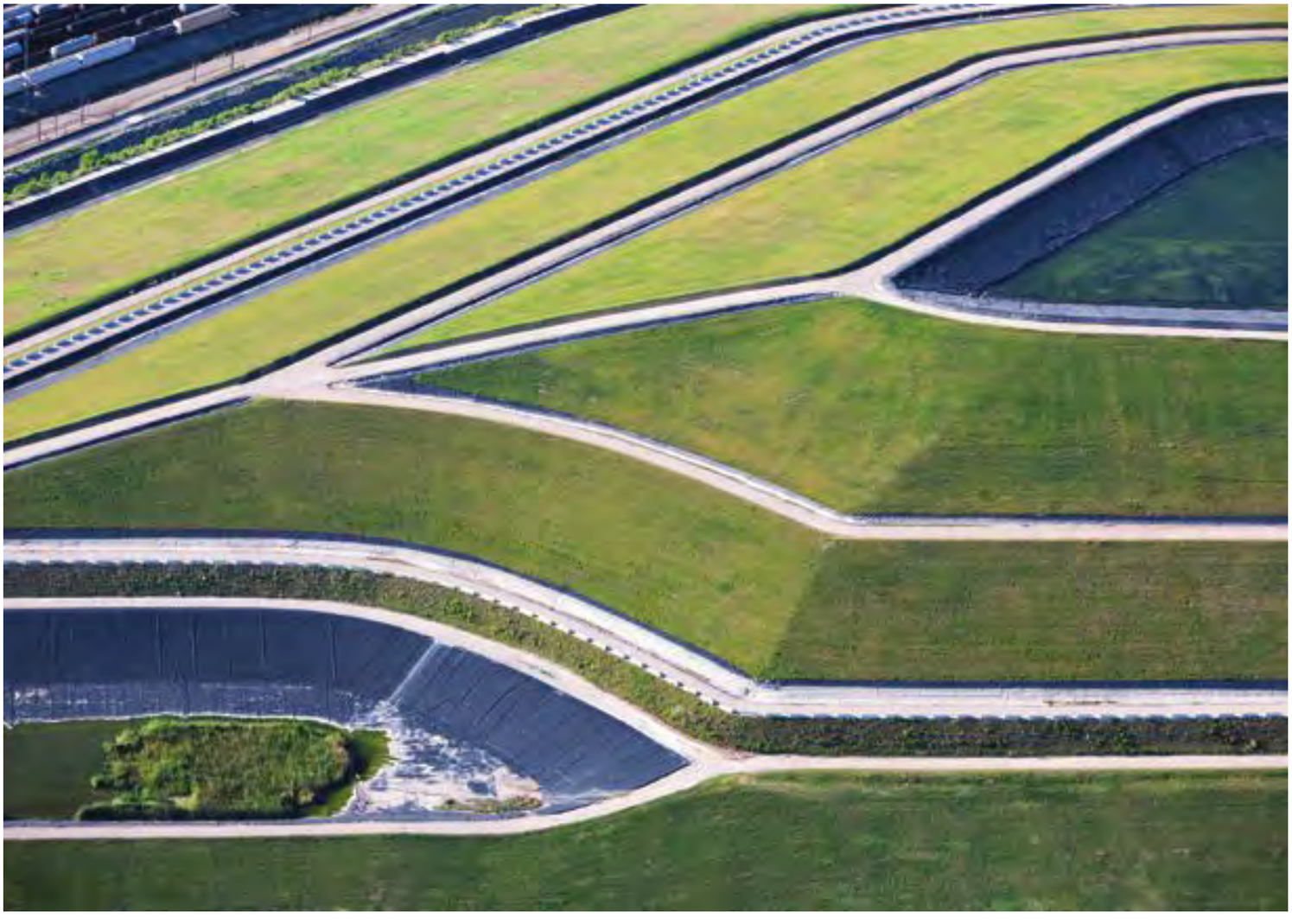

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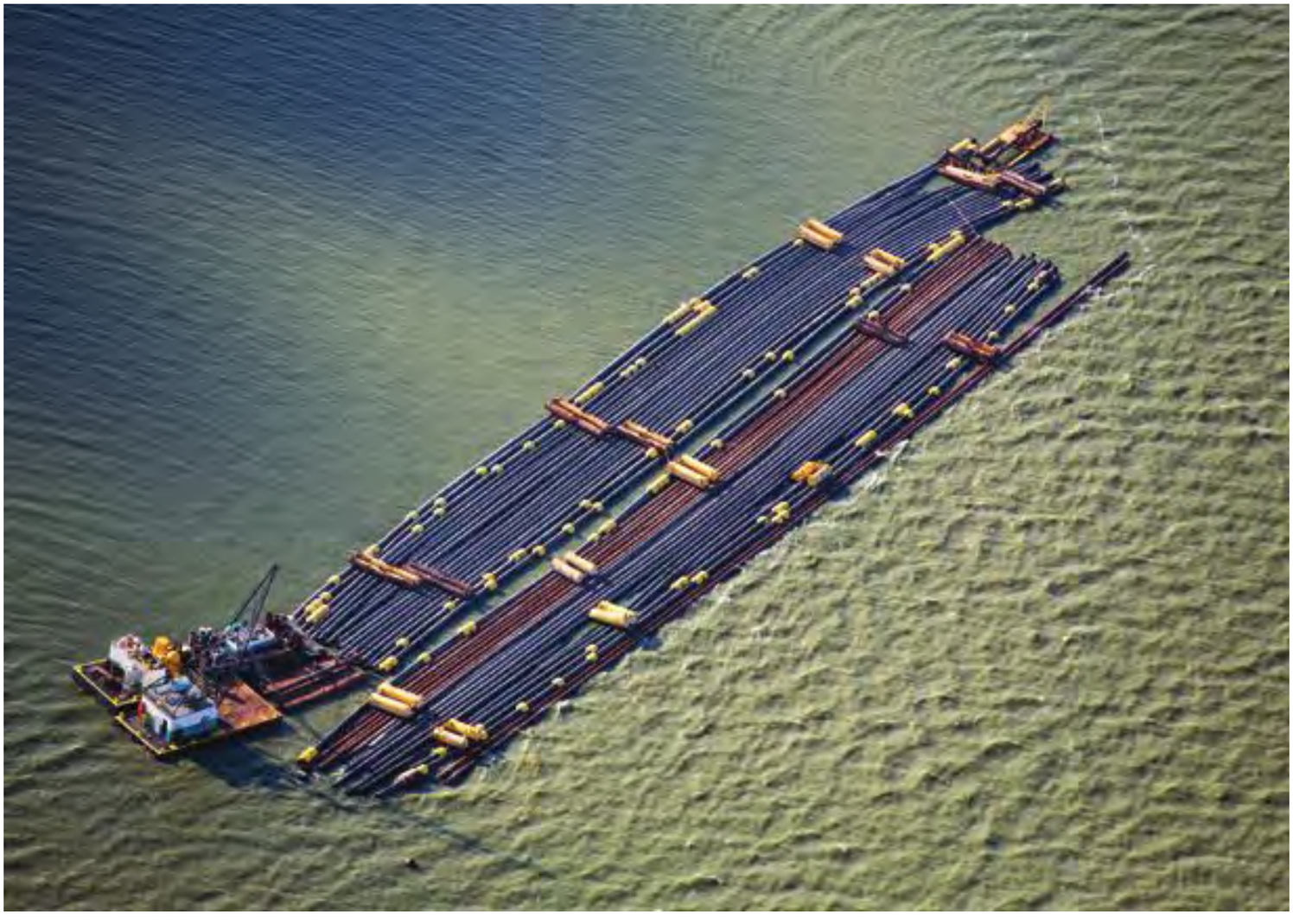

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"The settlement of the countryside, the growth of the city, and the expansion of the market that linked them, all rested on the basic premise that people could and should exploit the wealth of nature to the utmost."

WILLIAM CRONON, *NATURE'S METROPOLIS*


MAERSK
HORIZON LINES

INSIDE MODERN HOUSTON

The Life and Design of Sally Walsh

BY JUDY KUGLE

PHOTOS FROM MFA.H SALLY WALSH ARCHIVE

LEFT AND BELOW University of Houston Student Union, 1968.
ABOVE Sally Walsh in the Houston Public Library, 1976.

At the end of her last resumé, Sally Walsh wrote, "When I walk through Houston buildings today and find good contemporary design, whether or not I had a hand in it, I find myself taking credit … because on this specific turf it flourished with my help." This statement is not narcissistic; it is a statement of fact. Gary McKay quoted these words and called them "justifiably proud" in his Spring 1992 obituary for *Cite*. To begin the story of Walsh, one must first acknowledge her mark on every aspect of how commercial interiors and furniture specification are still practiced in Houston.

"When posed with the interior design for the University of Houston's new hub of student campus life, the University Center Building, Sally Walsh approached the project with the concept of a simple, handsome, well-coordinated interior involving classic pieces to form the best possible contemporary environment."

Apprenticeship with Knoll

Walsh was born in Inspiration, Arizona, on April 1, 1928. Her father worked for Anaconda Mining Camps. She lived and attended the camp schools in Sonora, Mexico, from 6 to 10. At the age of 19, Sally dropped out for what she called "rebellious boredom." She went through many jobs before landing a life-altering opportunity with Hans Knoll, co-founder of the furniture manufacturer and interior design firm that redefined the corporate office.

She said that for her interview with Knoll she wore a white straw cloche, or bell-shaped hat, that her mother sent her off with when she left Sioux Falls. As she waited in the reception area seeing all the other interviewees carrying large cases and looking very sure, she became frightened and decided to leave. The receptionist asked her where she was going and told her to sit down.

Walsh cited her mother's Knoll catalog as a reason she was hired. Hans Knoll told her she was hired for two reasons: she had a perfectly blank mind, and he had never seen a more enchanting hat. He asked her to take off her hat and, when she did, never to wear it again. *Knoll women do not wear hats!*

Beginning in 1949, Walsh spent six years as Knoll's assistant. She "typed, walked the sheep dog, waited on customers in the showroom, watched Hans present one incredible Planning Unit project after another, called on architectural firms in five states, cut thousands of perfect rectangles out of fabrics and pasted them on plans, flew to Manila to find out why Knoll furniture was arriving in Japan with spool legs, designed spaces, found showroom sites in San Francisco, kept a sharp eye out for imaginative furniture/textiles,

Wilson Stationary & Printing Company, 1972, Houston.

decorated the Christmas tree with cookies flown in from Germany, and cried when [she] displeased the fifth God—Hans."

Walsh began calling on architects in Chicago and gradually picked up more territory as the orders began rolling in until she was the manager of the department. Walsh credited her curiosity and belief in the perfection of the product for her success. In August 1954, after becoming engaged to be married, Walsh resigned.

Her presence inspired the women who worked there to dress and act like she did. She dressed smartly and avant-garde, and did not hold back her individuality.

Transco offices, 1972, Houston.

Wilson

In 1955, Walsh moved to Houston with her new husband. She planned to open a Houston Knoll showroom, but Hans Knoll died before the plan materialized. Her first Houston job was at Suniland Commercial, where she met architect Jack Evans. After 18 months, they started Evans Walsh, a pioneer "good design" shop. As she put it, "The architects were kind to us and so we survived—not prospered but survived." It was at Evans Walsh that Preston Moore first encountered Walsh. He made her an offer: leave her business and join Wilson Stationary & Printing, an old Houston firm that, among other services, sold office equipment and furniture. At the time, Wilson did not have the design presence that would bring in business from architectural firms beginning to control the design of corporate interiors. With the approval of E. C. "Charles" Wilson, Moore offered a salary of $25,000, close to doubling her salary at Evans Walsh.

According to Moore, she changed the business in every way. Walsh promptly bought Wilson a Knoll dealership. Her presence inspired the women who worked there to dress and act like she did. She dressed smartly and avant-garde, and did not hold back her individuality. She not only changed the way the women at Wilson dressed, she changed the attitude of the men. She was not afraid to speak up — and she was usually right.

The interior design Walsh completed while at Wilson was mostly corporate, including offices for Schlumberger. In 1968, while Walsh was with Wilson, she designed the installation of a Rodin exhibition at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFA,H). Another notable project while at Wilson was The University Center Building at the University of Houston with Pierce and Pierce. The October 1968 *Interior Design* observed that: "When posed with the interior design for the University of Houston's new hub of student campus life, the University Center Building, Sally Walsh approached the project with the concept of a simple, handsome, well-coordinated interior involving classic pieces to form the best possible contemporary environment."

The April 1974 *Interior Magazine* published an article on the offices of Transco, Houston's first "open office" building, completed in 1972 with 3DI. "The planning idea was to place work units 45 degree angles to outside walls in V's that leave clear views to the windows while the angled 5' 5" high files and unit shields preserve intimacy and privacy."

Walsh had a huge influence on those she mentored at Wilson, many of whom started their own businesses. Henry McCoy met Walsh while she was at Wilson. Before he founded McCoy, he sat down with Walsh to solicit her advice and her exact words, as related by him, were: "God damn it, 'Hinny,' you go do that!" He credits a big part of his success to her. She helped him by lining up a bank loan and introducing McCoy to manufacturers.

S.I. Morris Associates

In 1971, Walsh left Wilson and started Sally Walsh Inc., working as a consultant for six months. She then joined S.I. Morris Associates as Partner in Charge of Interior Design, where she remained until 1978. Those years at Morris were a high-water mark for Houston architecture. One has only to look at the list of principals in the 1960s through the '80s to see the influence of the firm. In 1973, partners were Eugene Aubry, Sally Walsh, William Kendall, Alsey Newton, Rob Roy, George

PHOTOS FROM MFA.H SALLY WALSH ARCHIVE

Knoll International Showroom, 1980, Houston.

Spence, John Weigman, Nolen Willis, Charles Hubbard, John Bertini, Jim Heaton, Magruder Wingfield, and Tom Daly.

In 1972, Walsh completed the new space for Wilson Stationary & Printing Company, which moved from downtown to the Southwest Freeway. (The building is now wrapped in the decaying Sphinx and columns of a magic show gone bust). Her brochure for the project states: "Having worked with the owner for a number of years, the interior designer was able to provide a straightforward program to the architects—'[a] single white box with a black concrete floor, [a]ll space divisions to be freestanding allowing for future changes.'"

Practically all the furniture in the Wilson showroom was displayed in settings, which allowed people to imagine themselves in a rooms similar to their own offices. The large space was divided to prevent a customer from being overwhelmed by hundreds of choices at once. One exception to the concept was the 120-foot space running along the freeway frontage where new designs and systems were dramatically displayed.

Harding Lawrence of Braniff Airlines saw an article in the November 1975 *Texas Monthly* in which S.I. Morris was quoted as saying Walsh was the "toughest son of a bitch in the partnership." Lawrence asked her to design his apartment interiors. (She forced him to reframe all his family photos.) They developed a great working relationship, and Walsh went on to design Braniff's corporate headquarters in Dallas. Her notes dated April 2, 1980, read: "So, imagine if you please a white world (walls, ceiling) anchored by an oh so practical dark navy blue clad floor—clad with a 2" black base and punctured with rows of doors in tan crisply outlined in black. And then—the bank of color runs—a connecting, meandering, beckoning thread." She used such furnishings as an armless lounge chair and bench that she and Don Palmer designed, made

PHOTOS FROM MFA.H SALLY WALSH ARCHIVE

by Brochsteins, Inc.; a Mies coffee table by Knoll; and an Atlas sofa by Stendig. Later in her career, Walsh and Raymond Brochstein sought to start a furniture line based on the products that Walsh had designed, including the Braniff desk, which she patented. The prototype for the Braniff chair is now part of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston permanent collection.

Walsh worked with Gene Aubry on Morris's new Central Library for the city of Houston. It is now impossible to appreciate how sensational the original design was. Stephen Fox writes in the *AIA Houston Architectural Guide*: "Remodeling in 2008 radically reconfigured the library's interior spaces and led to the destruction of Sally Walsh's subtle, stylish, and eminently usable interiors."

At the time of its opening, the library got rave reviews in publications. From a June 1976 *Interiors* article, "Pavilion on the Piazza," the description reads: "A library where no one need feel cooped up. The ruddy quarry tile of the vestibule gives way to [a] continuous surface of flame-colored carpet in the reading areas."

James Ross of S.I. Morris Associates writes, "Where once you saw only a disjointed wasteland of parking lots, aged small buildings shivering in loneliness, and hermetically sealed alien giants, now if you look out of the library or towards it, you see a real city, possibly even a Renaissance city. People respond instinctively."

When she designed offices for Lehman Brothers, no chair made the traders happy. According to John Weigman, Walsh rode in Aubry's Citroen car and decided that its seat was the most comfortable she had ever sat in and that Gene should take it out of his car so they could put it on rollers to test it as a piece of moveable furniture. The traders loved it, in particular the pocket in the back, where they could place their calls. She called France to order the bucket seats, and the factory representative said, "Just what kind of accident did you have?"

Legacy

Walsh's boldness with the Citroen seats was just one of her many audacious experiments with materials and space. She persuaded clients to embrace modern design as a total concept, thereby influencing interiors, buildings, and entire landscapes.

Though Gerald Hines is rightly credited with bringing Houston to the forefront of architectural excellence in the 1970s, Walsh also deserves credit for convincing Houston's corporations and institutions to embrace modernity through the sheer force of her personality and the power of her design.

Walsh was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia while still with Morris. From 1980, she worked independently when her health permitted. In 1986, she was inducted into the *Interior Design* Design Hall of Fame. She died January 12, 1992 at the age of 65. Her name is recognized by many because of the lecture named in her honor, but the younger generations of Houston's design community have little knowledge of her impact on design and Houston's built environment. I hope that this documentation motivates others to carry out the critical and historical analysis her work deserves.

Above: Lehman Brothers, Houston, 1974.
Left: Braniff International, Braniff Place, 1979, Dallas, DFW Airport.

Will the Urban Highway Reclamation Movement Come to Houston?

by Torie Ludwin

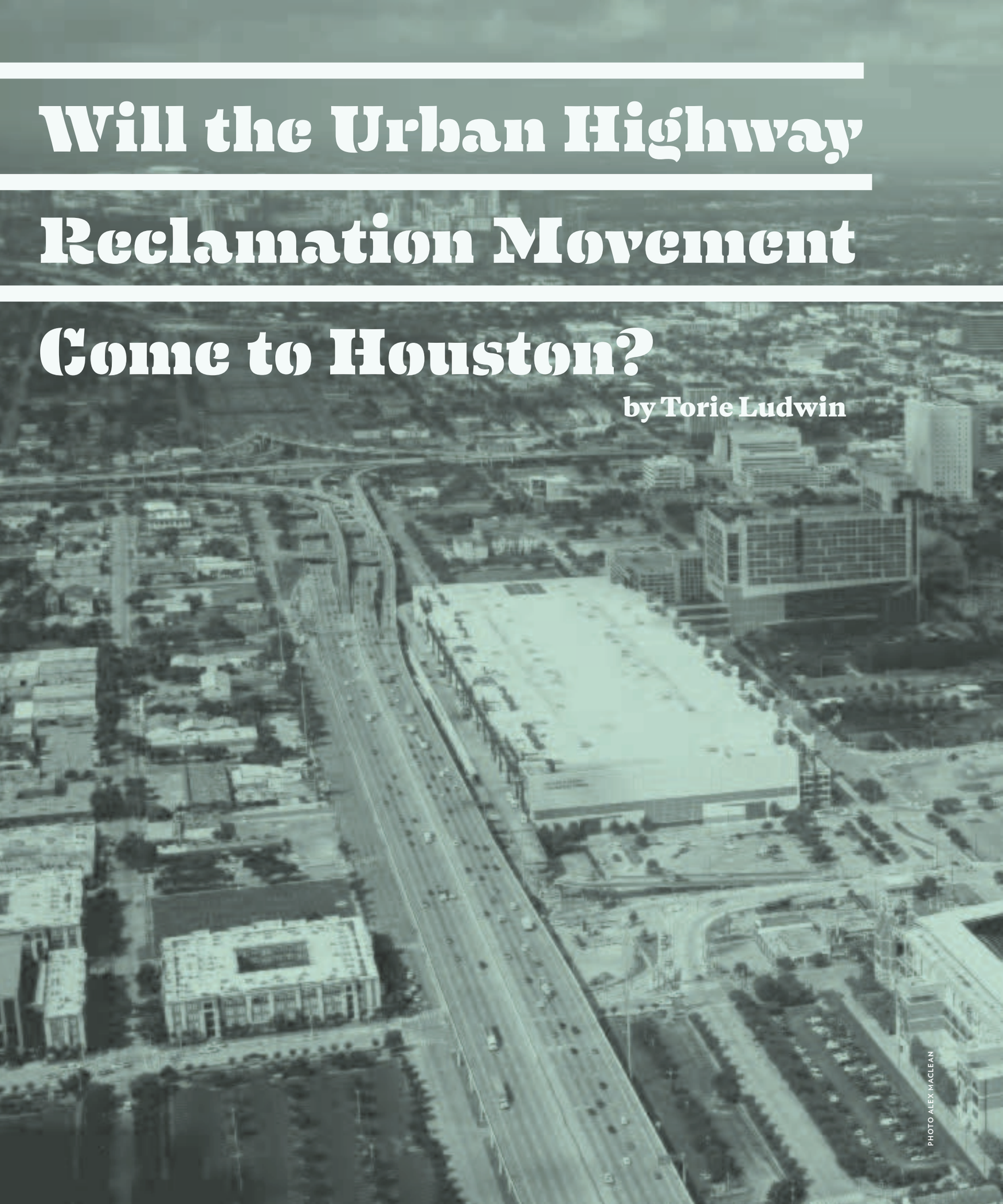
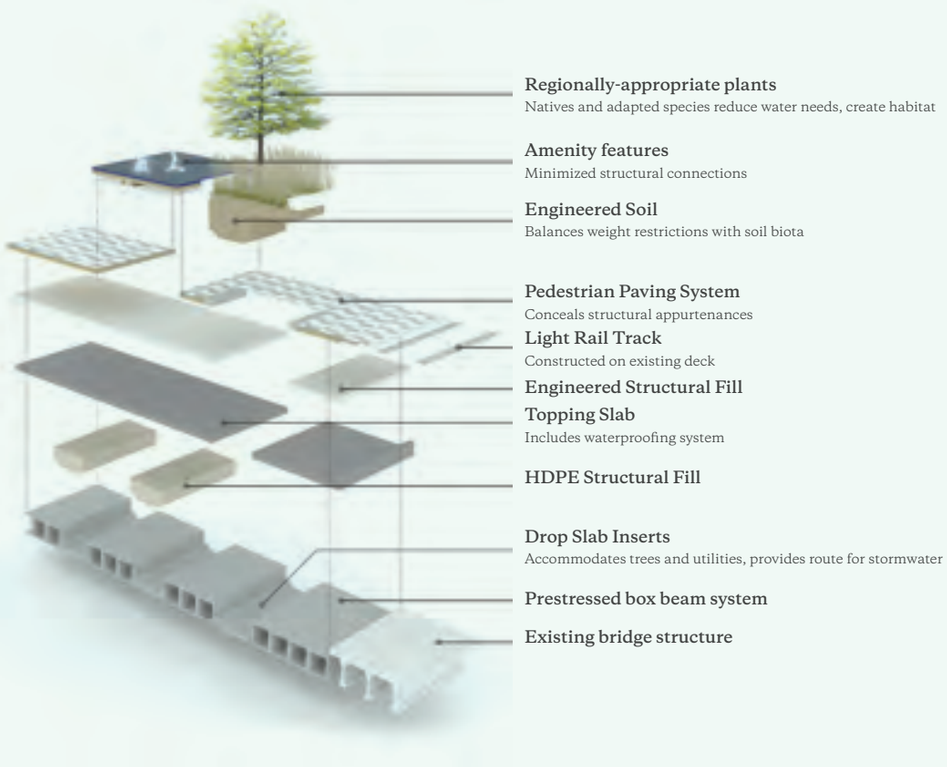


PHOTO ALEX MACLEAN

It's not just San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Milwaukee, Saint Louis, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, New York, and Providence anymore. Even Dallas is doing it. Dallas! Cities nationwide are demolishing, rerouting, moving underground, or capping urban highways—reversing the devastating effects of the golden age of the automobile. The results have been outstanding: cleaner air, less noise, better traffic flow, more greenspace, increased walkability, greater property values, and significant economic development.

Diagram of Klyde Warren Park deck structure over the Woodall Rodgers Freeway
Courtesy Office of James Burnett.



In Dallas, urban planner Patrick Kennedy has mounted a campaign to tear down a section of I-345 currently bifurcating the city and repurpose the space for development and parks. Kennedy's website, anewdallas.com, makes a compelling case from economic, traffic, urban planning, public safety, and quality-of-life points of view, using several other successful highway demolitions as potent examples. When the new *Dallas Morning News* architecture critic, Mark Lamster, lauded the proposal, the online version of the article received hundreds of comments and galvanized the effort.

This isn't Dallas' first effort in turning urban thoroughfares into greenspace. The highly successful Klyde Warren Park, completed in 2012, caps 5.2 acres of Woodall Rogers Freeway and acts as a walkable "bridge" between Downtown and Uptown. Funded through a private-public partnership, it provides a wealth of programming as well as a restaurant, performance stage, jogging trails, a dog park, a playground, fountains and more.

Via capping or rerouting, could Houston reclaim sections of I-45, 59, or 288? Minus a little highway, Houston could have 12 percent less air pollution citywide (as happened in Boston), increased property values (San Francisco), a drop by several degrees in average temperatures (Seoul, Korea), better traffic flow (Portland), more greenspace (everywhere), and greater economic development in the area. Can you imagine it? Dallas can.

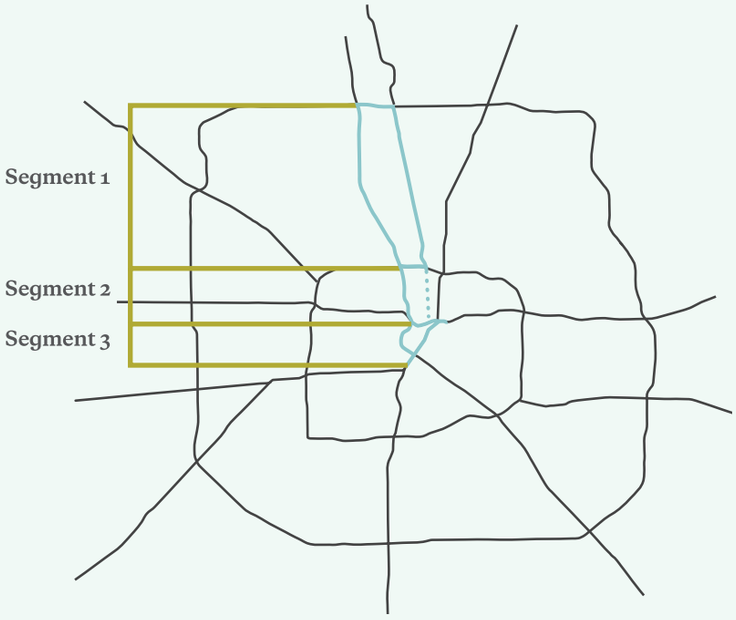
As it turns out, so can the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), along with many Houston residents. According to proposals on the state agency's table, the highway system around Downtown Houston may be subject to a significant transformation. How the highways are changed is of great debate, and it well might be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the city to make a radical positive change downtown.

The goal of the North Houston Highway Improvement Project, in the works for more than 10 years, is to reduce traffic along I-45 between Beltway 8 North and its intersections with Highways 59 and 288 in Downtown Houston. It divides I-45 into three segments: Beltway 8 to 610, 610 to I-10, and I-10 to I-45's intersection with 59 and 288, including the Pierce Elevated.

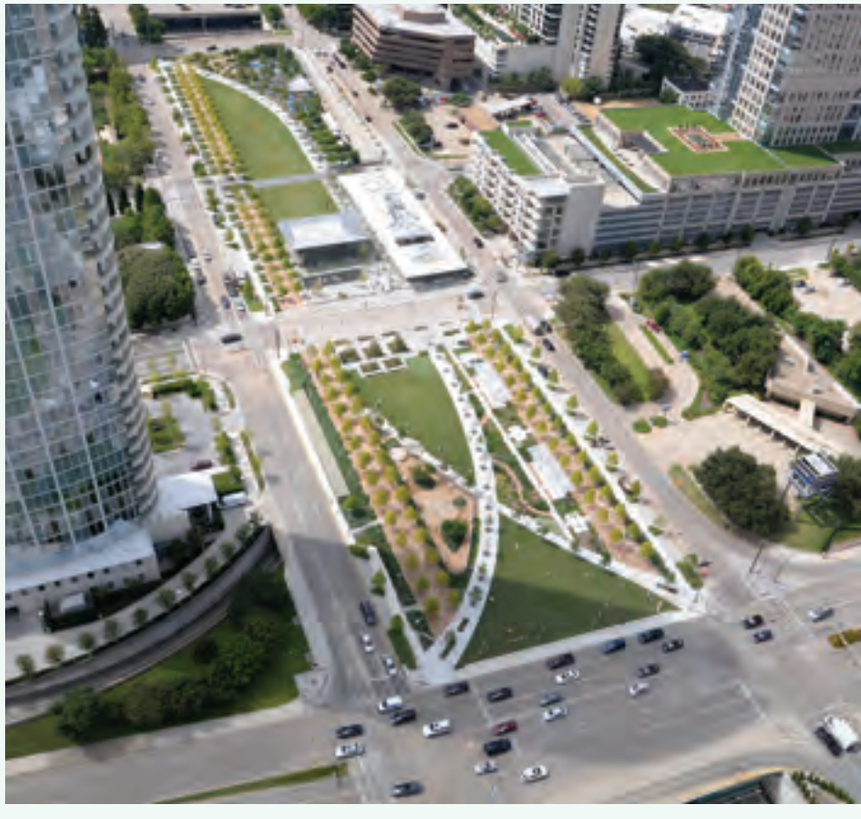
The expansion of I-45 has been a concern for state, federal, and local agencies for several years not only because of current traffic congestion and high rate of accidents, but also expected area population growth, aging infrastructure, and unmet safety standards.

TxDOT and 20 federal, state, and local agencies, including the City of Houston Public Works and Engineering Department, the Houston Downtown Management District, and the East Downtown Management District have been assembled to weigh in on the transformation of I-45 to accommodate Houston's incredible growth and the traffic that comes with it.

On November 14 and 19, 2013, TxDOT held its third set of annual, public meetings about the North Houston Highway Improvement Project, where it presented three possible alternatives for each segment of I-45. As federally mandated, TxDOT chose the alternatives from the several it presented in its public meetings one year earlier.



TOP Segments in North Houston Highway Improvement Project
RIGHT Woodall Rodgers Freeway in Dallas before Klyde Warren Park
LEFT Freeway after Klyde Warren Park



The alternatives for segments one and two involve different ways to widen I-45 or stack new lanes, raising concerns about noise and air pollution. Two of the three alternatives for segment three through Downtown involve removing, partially or fully, the Pierce Elevated, which generally has slow speeds and divides Downtown from Fourth Ward and Midtown. Its removal could signal a fluid re-integration between Downtown and its immediate neighbors.

However, the alternatives also propose widening 59 to the width of a football field along its north-south stretch behind the George R. Brown Convention Center to accommodate the realignment of I-45. With new public transit, the BBVA Compass stadium, more commercial enterprise, and its prime location near Downtown, the area of East Downtown is experiencing a renaissance. A massive elevated highway could negatively impact East Downtown's growth as well as serve as an ever-widening barrier between the two parts of Houston.

After the 2013 public meetings, area residents voiced their deep concern about the impact of a greatly expanded elevated highway merging 59 and I-45 on the surrounding neighborhoods. Because TxDOT is early in its planning and no budget has been set for this project, the agency can be especially responsive to community involvement and public comment. Receiving and responding to community feedback is part of the federally mandated NEPA process; now is the time when involvement from both residents and business can influence the direction of how Houston's downtown highways are transformed.

As the Department of Transportation follows through on its federally required processes to propose and examine alternatives to the expansion of I-45, it's winnowing the options quickly and public comments can have an impact. It holds meetings about once a year to take comments from the city's residents and businesses. At Public Meeting #4 TxDOT will present the preferred alternative chosen from the three alternatives for each segment, as presented at the 2013 Public Meeting #3 .

To voice your concerns about or support for the reshaping and redevelopment of Houston's highway system, with the attendant impacts and benefits for our city's neighborhoods, please visit *ih45northandmore.com*.

Memorial Park Master Plan

A new master plan for Memorial Park by Thomas Woltz of Nelson Byrd Woltz proposes a grass- and tree-covered land bridge, 800 feet long, that would rise across Memorial Drive, over a tunnel, to reconnect the park's north and south sides. Are such land bridges a new trend as Houston attempts to maintain or expand its car-oriented infrastructure while also aspiring to a more pedestrian-friendly urbanism?

DISCRETE DUPLEXES

HOUSTON'S SUNSET BOULEVARD DOUBLE HOUSES

by Margaret Culbertson

Eighteen secretive houses line the 2300 block of Houston's Sunset Boulevard. Built in the 1930s, they appear to continue the sequence of two-story single-family dwellings that stretch five blocks to the east. Similar in size, form, and their eclectic revival styles, the houses on this block vary in only one significant aspect. They were built to house two families rather than one.

Deceptive or *duplicitous* could apply to such structures, but I prefer *discrete*. Their designers may have intended deception, but they fooled only those who never crossed either threshold. An alert eye can often detect subtle exterior clues to their double identity from the street. Even if these houses fail in their deceit, they totally succeed in seamlessly merging with their surroundings, while still providing for alternate lifestyles and incomes. What could be more discrete?

Double houses date at least to Roman times, but they re-emerged as a popular form in 18th-century England. The British called them semi-detached houses to distinguish them from free-standing "detached" houses and row, or terrace, houses "attached" on both sides. Similar examples appeared in American cities in the 19th century, but Americans preferred the more straightforward adjective "double" and "twin" in their terminology. Published examples included New York architect Calvert Vaux's designs for a "small rural double cottage" and a "double suburban house" in his 1857 book, *Villas and Cottages*, and Philadelphia architect Isaac Hobbs's "twin dwelling" in his 1876 book, *Hobbs's Architecture*.

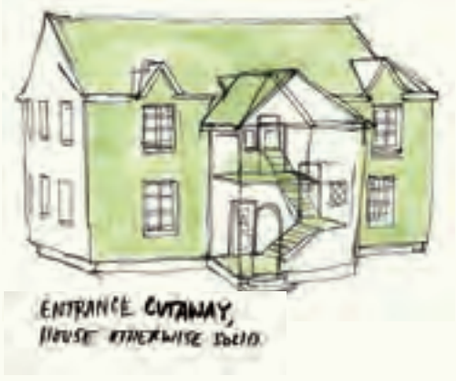
In the early 20th century the adjective "duplex" gained popularity in many contexts, sounding more up-to-date and modern than the prosaic "double." Duplex houses and apartments joined duplex razors, phonographs, and brakes in the popular vocabulary. (Duplex apartments have rooms on two floors connected by an internal stairway and are found in urban areas, particularly New York City.) With the American tendency to abbreviate, duplex houses eventually became known simply as duplexes. (Duplex apartments became similarly abbreviated, leading to occasional confusion when urban and suburban worlds intersect.)

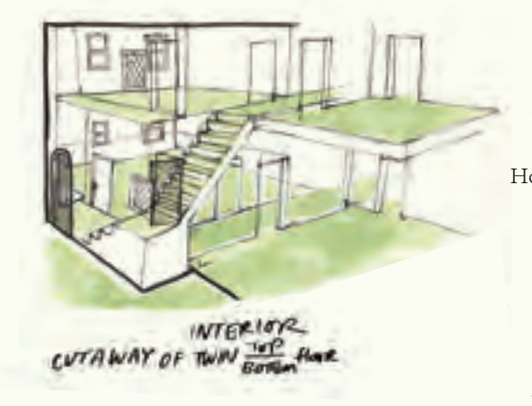
Duplex designs often emphasize the dual nature of the residence, usually with bilateral symmetry and prominent separate entrance doors. The opposite approach of disguise gained interest in the 1920s and flourished in the 1930s. In the purest examples, only one entrance door is visible from the street. That door leads to an interior hall with two apartment entries. Slightly less discrete examples provide a prominent entrance in the façade for one apartment, with the second entrance placed in a subsidiary location, less visible from the street, as in the two-story duplex built at 1848–50 Marshall Street in Houston, designed by architect Joseph B. Hutchison for Peter M. Deden in the fall of 1935. The second entrance there lurks in the shadows of an arcaded corner porch. An asymmetrical cross gable also enhances the deception. As the *Houston Post* described it, "The place has no resemblance to the four square walls of the average duplex, but has all of the lines of a large, one-family residence."

Discrete duplexes can be found scattered among single-family houses of the 1920s and 1930s or concentrated on specific blocks or streets

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SARAH WELCH

VIEW OF 2ND ENTRY ENTRANCE





if there were zoning or deed restrictions. The larger, more ambitious examples often were located adjacent to more prestigious neighborhoods. By echoing the scale, styles, and materials of those substantial houses, the duplexes could increase their own desirability while providing housing for individuals whose aspirations exceeded their pocketbooks. This pattern can be found in Los Angeles near Hancock Park; in Dallas's Highland Park; and, closer to home, in Southampton Extension, the nine-block subdivision west of Houston's Southampton Place. Platted by Southampton's developer, E. H. Fleming, in 1925, Southampton Extension duplicated the earlier subdivision's deed restrictions regarding lot sizes, setbacks, and dwelling costs, with one exception. Duplexes were allowed. The legal language emphatically, if circuitously, declares two-family residences were as far as the developers were willing to go down the slippery slope of multi-family housing: "No apartment house or duplex designed to be occupied by more than two families will be permitted in the said addition, the object of this provision being to prohibit multiple housing throughout the entire addition."

In both subdivisions, Fleming laid out the largest lots on Rice Boulevard, which faced the Rice University campus, and on Sunset, which served as the central east-west thoroughfare. Deed restrictions specified greater setbacks and higher minimum construction costs on those boulevards than for the rest of the subdivisions. To heighten their desirability, Fleming planted live oak trees on the two boulevards. During the boom years of the 1920s, two-story homes in eclectic revival styles began to populate the boulevard. But by the time those houses might have continued across Greenbriar and onto the Southampton Extension block of Sunset, the Great Depression had descended. The larger lots and higher building cost requirements on the block proved a special challenge at a time when funds were scarce. The duplex loophole of the deed restrictions eventually provided the solution.

By echoing the scale, styles, and materials of those substantial houses, the duplexes could increase their own desirability while providing housing for individuals whose aspirations exceeded their pocketbooks.

Fleming began selling lots on the 2300 block of Sunset in 1926. Early purchasers evidently bought the land as an investment, for nothing was built in the 1920s. With the stock market crash of 1929 and ensuing economic depression, it is not surprising that the block remained barren through the early 1930s. Finally, in August 1935 Howard G. Cleveland began construction of a two-story single-family residence at 2316 Sunset. A continuation of the Sunset single-family sequence appeared to be underway. But three months later the second structure, a duplex, introduced the form that would dominate the remaining construction on the block.

Houston builder William E. White had been building substantial single-family dwellings in River Oaks, Edgemont, and Cherokee Place for several years, but he expanded his building vocabulary, as well as his territory, after purchasing four lots on the 2300 block of Sunset in October 1935. On January 5, 1936, the *Houston Post* noted that White had started work on a "large two-story brick veneer duplex at 2345-47 Sunset boulevard, at a cost of approximately $9,000." A *Houston Chronicle* article a month later recorded that White had completed that duplex and begun work on another next door at 2349–51 Sunset. It described the structures as having seven rooms and two baths in each apartment, with the living rooms "paneled in fir" and the other rooms "done in sheetrock." White claimed in the article that each building cost $16,000, but he might have been inflating his costs as he prepared to set his sales price. If

his claim regarding costs was accurate, White appeared to have lost money on these projects. The duplex at 2349–51 sold in March 1936 for a recorded price of $9,600, and 2345–47 sold in July for the same amount. White carried on with his business even if these were losses, but he did sell his remaining lots on the 2300 block without buildings and concentrated his activities on single-family and commercial projects.

No documents survive to tell us why White decided to build duplexes on his Sunset property, but he evidently responded to local building trends. In 1934 only 11 duplexes were noted in the *Texas General Contractors' Association (TGAC) Monthly Bulletin*'s lists of Houston building projects, but the situation changed significantly in 1935. Between February and June, the *Bulletin* noted construction of 37 duplexes, and the numbers kept going up. Local newspapers ignored the duplex trend until September 1935, when the Sunday editions of the *Chronicle* and the *Post* together published 12 articles featuring construction or purchase of duplexes in Houston. White's decision appears almost inevitable given the surge in duplex construction and the $8,000 minimum construction requirement of his Sunset Boulevard deed restrictions. He could build either a duplex or a single-family dwelling for $8,000, and a duplex might appeal to a new market.

William White's decision to spend a few thousand more than the minimum and utilize discrete designs for his duplexes reflected the quality of his previous projects as well as his responsiveness to current building trends. Family connections also introduced him to duplex construction. His father and brother, James L. and John L. White, were active in speculative building projects along with William, and all three were involved in the White Construction Company. In September 1935, the newspapers noted that

2326-28 Sunset

2345-47 Sunset

2302-04 Sunset

2330-32 Sunset

2301-03 Sunset

2344-46 Sunset Blvd.

J. L. White had been hired by Paul A. Frotz to build two duplexes on Caroline Street. (Neither the *Chronicle* nor the *Post* specified whether it was James or John.) Those duplexes have not survived, but their reported construction cost and size were similar to the duplexes William would build on Sunset (seven rooms for each apartment and cost of $10,000 for each structure on Caroline.) Whether his motivation was aesthetic or monetary, William's two Sunset duplexes embodied compatible neighborhood design by utilizing different styles—Tudor for 2345–47 and French for 2349–51. The Tudor design completely conceals its duplex identity with a single entrance door. At 2349–51 a central entrance door provides access only to the downstairs apartment. The upstairs apartment is served by a less prominent entrance on the side.

Others soon followed White's example. On January 27, 1936, Tom S. Dies, a claims adjustor with Humble Oil and Refining Company, signed a mechanic's lien with contractor D. B. Rochelle to build the duplex at 2326–28 Sunset for $7,500. Each apartment contained only five rooms, plus bath, but a three-car frame garage with two servant's rooms above was included. The February 2, 1936, *Houston Post* noted that plans were being prepared for a duplex for Lindsey Blayney Jr. at 2302–04 Sunset. A week later the *Chronicle* carried an advertisement for duplex sites on Sunset offered by Houston Land and Trust Company. Duplexes gradually filled in the block over the next four years, leaving only one lot vacant. That lot remained empty until 1948, when Sam Houston Presley built the final duplex.

All of the subsequent builders on the 2300 block followed White's example of building discrete duplexes in a variety of styles. The two largest, on the northeast (2301–03) and northwest (2302–04) corner lots, allow their residents separate exterior entrances, but clever design subterfuge preserves a single-family illusion. At 2302–04, built in 1936 for Lindsey Blayney Jr., local architects Campbell and Keller took advantage of the large lot to design a long façade broken by projecting and recessed sections. The most deeply recessed section includes a modest porch with two entrance doors. One of the doors faces the street, but the other, on the wall perpendicular to the street, remains virtually hidden within the shadows of the porch. Across the street at 2301–03, built in 1937, physician James Agnew opted for an asymmetrical English design with a projecting front-gable wing. With multiple window shapes and sizes and a steeply sloped, catslide roof on one side, the small side porch on the other side appears more like a sympathetic rustic appendage than the entrance to a second apartment. Similar stratagems for disguising the second entrance were

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARGARET CULBERTSON

used in approximately half the duplexes on this block, while the remaining examples present a single entrance visible to the street.

One of those with a single entrance was built for Mrs. Adele L. Dorsey by William G. Farrington, who would later become a major Houston developer, with Tanglewood to his credit. In the 1936 and 1937 city directories, he listed himself solely as an architect, but the *TGAC Bulletin* shows that he worked regularly as a contractor. He knew Southampton and Southampton Extension well, for both his home and office were located on Sunset Boulevard. Although his work focused on single-family residences at the time, the *Houston Post* credited his firm with a duplex at 2601 Arbor in April 1936, about a year before Mrs. Dorsey hired him. Farrington or his recently hired architect Robroy C. Carroll could have designed her duplex at 2315–17 Sunset. (Mr. Carroll joined Farrington's firm in time to be listed as its architect in the 1937–38 city directory.) Mrs. Dorsey's duplex features the bold geometry of a front-gable form with a recessed side-gable extension on the east side. An arched entrance, brick "quoins" at the corners, and a round vent centered in the triangular gable provide the only decorative elements of the façade. At a cost of $13,345, it was among the most expensive structures on the block. Mrs. Dorsey, a divorcee, evidently built the duplex as an investment and for rental income, for she continued to live with her parents on Missouri Street. One of her first tenants was Meek C. Chiles, an attorney with Fulbright, Crooker & Freeman.

The architectural and construction firm Russell Brown & Company built three of the duplexes on the block, beginning in November 1936 on a lot purchased from William White. The firm had plenty of duplex experience, having built 10 during the previous year on the 1700 block of Bolsover, east of Southampton. They repeated three of those designs on Sunset, where they appear to better advantage on the larger lots. Even so, their first Sunset venture, the Colonial Revival example at 2341–43, took nine months to sell. That might have led the company to proceed with more caution regarding their lot at 2323–25 Sunset. Construction started only after they sold the property to Nan Hooks in October 1937. Jess Atchison, a Shell Petroleum Company clerk who rented one of the Bolsover duplexes (1740), liked it well enough to contract with Russell Brown in November 1937 to build a duplicate on a lot he purchased at 2330–32 Sunset. He subsequently moved to the new location with his wife, Dorothy, and remained there through the 1940s.

The single repeated design on the block was not the work of the larger-scale developers Russell Brown or William White, as one might expect. F. W. and Myrtle Lumsden signed a mechanic's lien with H. G. McDaniel in September 1936 to build a two-story brick-veneer 10-room duplex at 2305–07 with a three-car garage and apartment above for $8,200. Since McDaniel was listed as an architect in the city directory, he probably supplied the design, but the contract does not specify the design source. After moving into their duplex, the Lumsdens might have been less than thrilled when McDaniel purchased the lot next door and started building a near duplicate of their house in March 1937. A different entrance porch and side extension help to diminish the repetitive effect, and the current vine-covered façade at 2309–11 provides additional camouflage.

With multiple window shapes and sizes and a steeply-sloped, catslide roof on one side, the small side porch on the other side appears more like a sympathetic rustic appendage than the entrance to a second apartment.

The duplex at 2344–46 Sunset stands out as the only building on the block in a Modernistic style. Glass bricks fill a narrow two-story window, and the curve of corner porches remains in the later siding that closed them in. The appearance of a flat roof is given by extending the brick wall high enough to hide the actual low-pitched hipped roof from the street view. In April 1940 Edwin T. Kelley, of the Kelley Lumber Company, contracted to pay J. C. Bush $11,500 to build the "two-story, 10-room, two bath, brick-veneer duplex" along with a "two-story, three-car frame garage with three-room apartment above."

The success of the 2300 block of Sunset Boulevard as a picturesque duplex neighborhood derives from Fleming's original plat design and deed restrictions, as well as the architectural variety. Generous lot sizes, deep setback requirements, and a divided boulevard with plantings in the central esplanade provide breathing space and a green setting for the residences. The mandated minimum construction costs encouraged substantial, well-built structures. Other blocks of duplexes in Houston are often characterized by smaller lot sizes, narrower streets and more shallow setbacks, as well as the seemingly inevitable tendency of developers to repeat designs in close proximity for economic rather than aesthetic gain. Stylistic variety gives each of the Sunset duplexes a unique identity, while their similar proportions still allow for neighborly compatibility.

Current development trends in the area now threaten the block, as nearby houses are razed and replaced by large-scale structures that consume their lots and tower over their neighbors. But the 2300 block of Sunset has managed, so far, to escape any demolitions. Though an effort to approve stronger deed requirements a few years ago failed, owners on the block successfully supported new setback restrictions, which have provided some protection. All the original structures remain, though a few display significant exterior alterations. Several have been converted to single-family dwellings, but since they originally were designed to disguise their duplex identity, it is difficult to determine which have been converted when strolling down the sidewalks. Discretion remains triumphant on this block of secrets. C

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Draw
The 2014 Rice Design Alliance Gala

Saturday, November 8, 2014, 7 p.m.
Houston Hilton-Americas Hotel

The 2014 Rice Design Alliance Gala, Draw, celebrates a man who made an indelible mark on Houston: William D. Kendall, FAIA, founder of the firm that would become Kendall/Heaton Associates. The gala will begin on Saturday, November 8, 2014, at 7 p.m. in the ballroom at the Houston Hilton-Americas hotel.

The French Connection
RDA Hometown Tours

The Big Easy and Beyond
April 16–19, 2015
$2,100 pp/dbl (does not include airfare)

After Paris: A Tale of Three Cities
May 30–June 8, 2015
$5,200 pp/dbl (does not include airfare)

In 2015, the RDA Hometown Tours will take a French twist with trips to New Orleans and the Louisiana Bayou Country, and to Lyon, Marseille, and Bordeaux, France.

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Help support *Cite* and other programs by becoming a member of the RDA, dedicated to advancing architecture, urban design, and the built environment in the Houston region, and enhancing the quality of life within our community. Individual memberships begin at $45. Corporate memberships are also available. Benefits include a subscription to Cite and invitations to two exclusive annual membership events.

Learn more at ricedesignalliance.org/membership.

Filip DUJARDIN, Untitled from series Fictions, 2009

Near Future

The RSA/RDA lecture series *Near Future* brought to Houston five visionaries from a mix of professions whose creative work attempts to forecast the future. The future is typically represented in literature, film, and art as a distant fantasy—flying cars, robot servants, laser beams. But these speakers—an architectural historian, photographer, production designer, architect and curator, and artist—examine the actual present conditions of our cities and combine both what is familiar and what is unexpected to speculate about the look of things in the next generation. Belgian photographer Filip Dujardin and Oscar-nominated production designer K.K. Barrett (best known for his work with director Spike Jonze on such films as *Her* and *Being John Malkovich*) packed the Brown Auditorium at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Complete Streets are coming to your neighborhood soon. *We hope.*

by Jay Crossley

On November 1, 2013, Houston Mayor Annise Parker signed her Complete Streets Executive Order calling on city employees to do all they can to make all streets safe for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transport. Though a single proclamation cannot change a city overnight, a rapid transformation is possible because of ReBuild Houston, the multi-billion dollar road building and drainage initiative created by the 2010 Proposition 1 vote.

PHOTO BY CLAUDIA CASBARIAN

Every street in Houston is used by humans worthy of safe and comfortable infrastructure.

THE DESIGN What would Houston Complete Streets look like? One pilot project to consider is in Midtown—Bagby Street between I-45 and the Spur. The Midtown Redevelopment Authority asked Design Workshop out of Austin to redesign the street to take better consideration of pedestrians while using various environmentally sound principles to reduce the negative impact of street construction and actually improve water quality. You really should walk down Bagby. Notice the bulb-outs—curb extensions that allow for a shorter pedestrian crossing. Notice simple design elements that respect the pedestrian, such as benches. Notice how good street investments can also serve water quality purposes.

Though a good start, this street is not a full example of what the city can accomplish if appropriate departments actually pursue Complete Streets. It remains an unsafe place for people on bicycles with unnecessarily wide lanes and no treatment for bicyclists. The northern part remains an unsafe place for pedestrians, due to the same excessive lane width and high design speeds for cars, lack of safe crossings, and nothing to signal drivers to adjust from exiting a freeway to integrating into a walkable urban environment.

Some of the missing elements were in the original Design Workshop proposal—most importantly a safe, separated bike lane and additional bulb-outs for safe pedestrian crossings and traffic calming—but were dropped because they conflicted with the current Infrastructure Design Manual (IDM), Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan, and Bicycle Master Plan. As we put projects on the ground, city departments and commissions will need to change the IDM and other city rules and procedures to allow for safer streets.

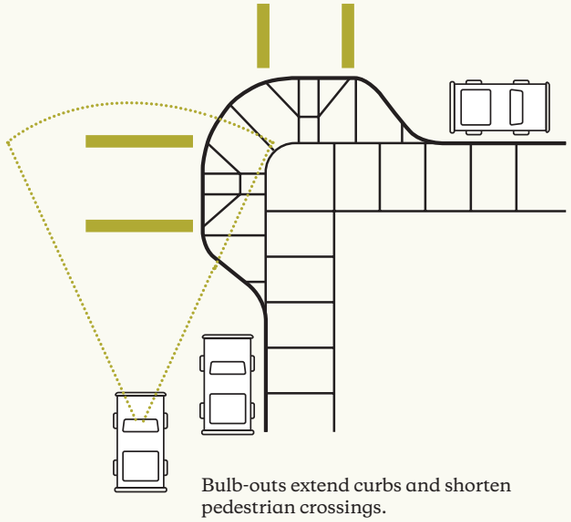
THE PROCESS Perhaps more important than a new vocabulary of street design are changes in community processes. Every ReBuild Houston project follows a process. The Planning Commission decides every year how many lanes we hope to provide for cars on our streets. Every Capital Improvement Project (CIP) project has public meetings. These should become more relevant as we adopt a Complete Streets approach, because the context, needs, and dreams of the neighborhood hold more weight in this world than in our previous potential speed-focused road design paradigm.

The Mayor's executive order requires a Complete Streets and Transportation Plan that incorporates the existing bundle of plans we already have: the Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan, the Bikeway/Pedestrian Plan, the Transit Plan, the Rail Plan, the Multimodal Classification Plan, Context Report, and the Master Parking Plan. The coordination of all these plans is a daunting task in a city that vaunts its lack of traditional planning. However, with Mayor Parker's recent appointment of Pat Walsh as the new Planning and Development Director and Dale Rudick as the new Director of the Public Works and Engineering Department, it's possible Houston is poised to truly implement a Complete Streets approach.

THE SCOPE This is not a story about a handful of little projects in affluent areas. Complete Streets fits the diversity of Houston with appropriate, efficient infrastructure and optimization of our limited transportation funds for all Houstonians. For example, Houston Tomorrow is currently working with the diverse areas of OST/South Union, Near Northside, Neartown, and Washington Avenue/Super Neighborhood 22 on pilot proposals for Neighborhood Greenways, which can quickly spread the benefits of Complete Streets.

Over the long run, we will begin to see every single project in every neighborhood use the principles of Complete Streets. If truly implemented, Complete Streets will come to River Oaks and Sunnyside, Kingwood and Montrose, Downtown and the Energy Corridor, Gulfton and Sharpstown. Every street in Houston is used by humans worthy of safe and comfortable infrastructure.

The children of Houston should enjoy the freedom of riding their bikes around town. The elderly and disabled of Houston should enjoy the freedom of continued access to the good life without a car. All of us should expect our elected officials and public servants to make real progress on reducing the unnecessarily high rates of traffic deaths we currently suffer—in our cars, on foot, or on a bike. C



Bulb-outs extend curbs and shorten pedestrian crossings.