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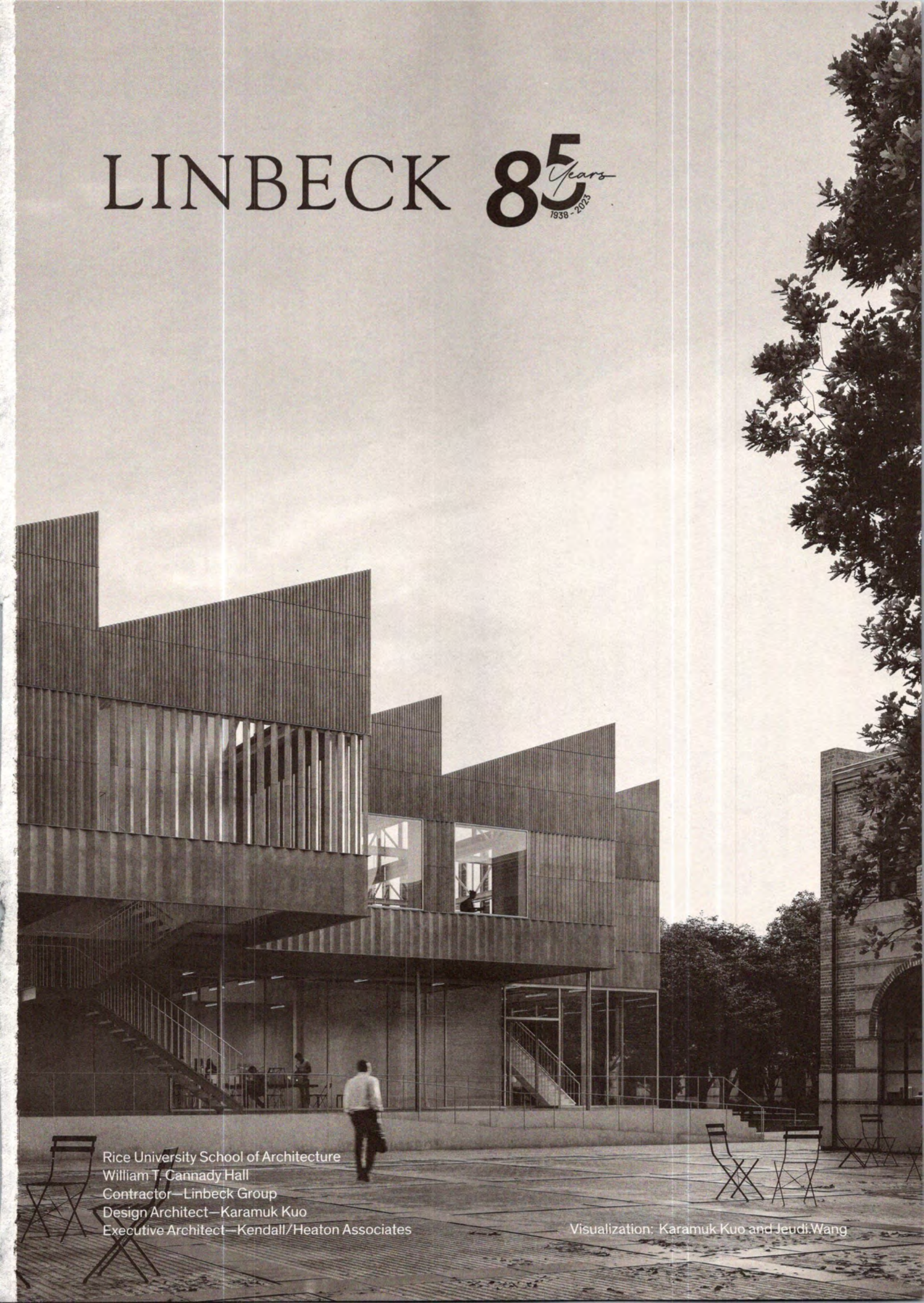

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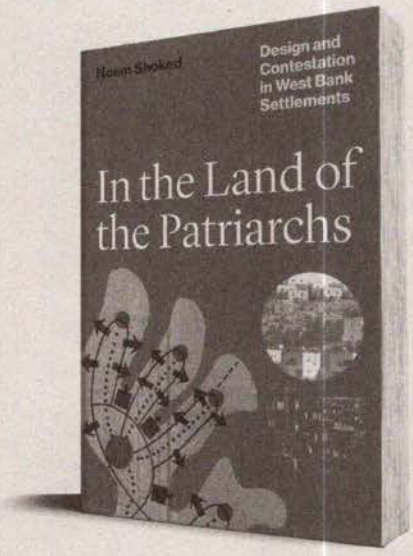

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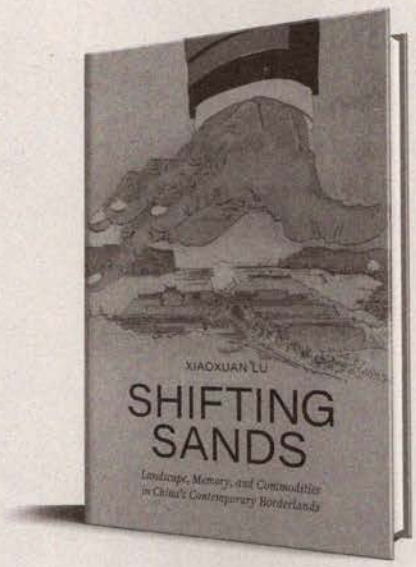

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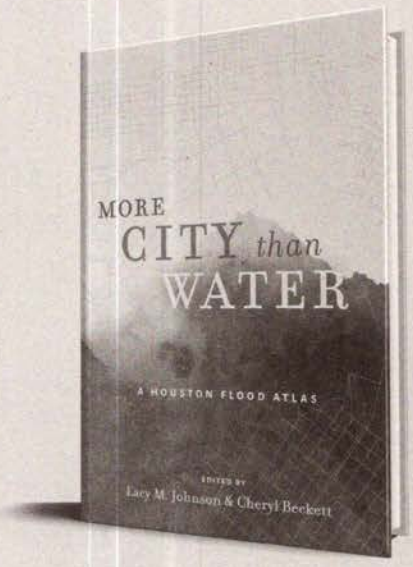

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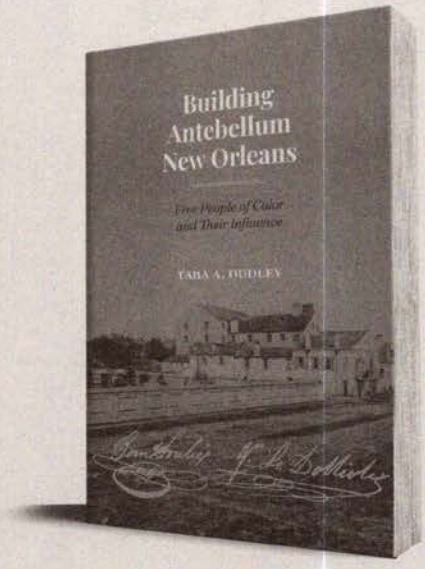

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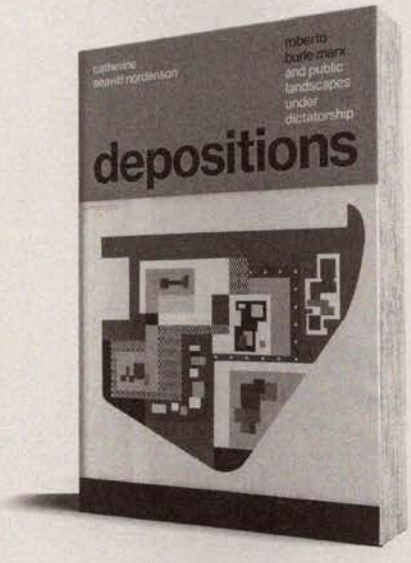

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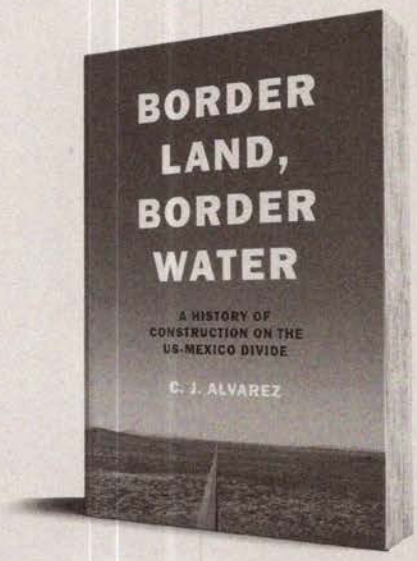

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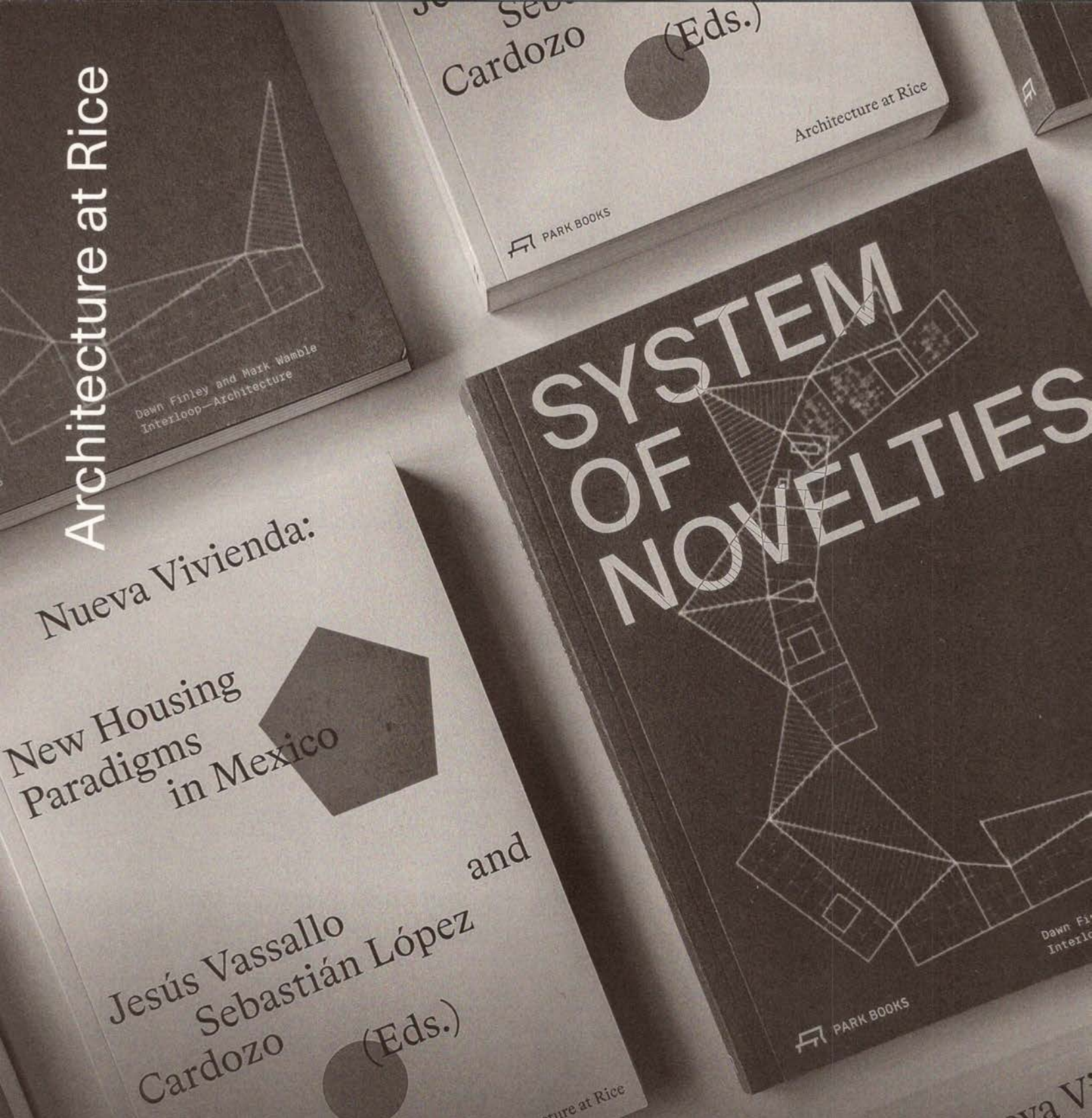

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Pictured: *System of Novelties* by Dawn Finley and Mark Wamble, *Nueva Vivienda: New Housing Paradigms in Mexico* edited by Jesús Vassallo and Sebastian López Cardozo.

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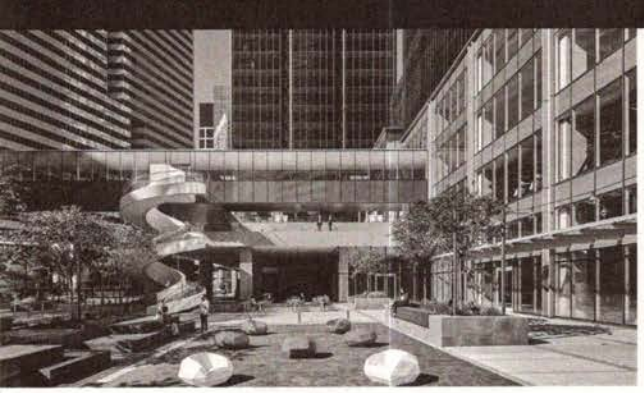

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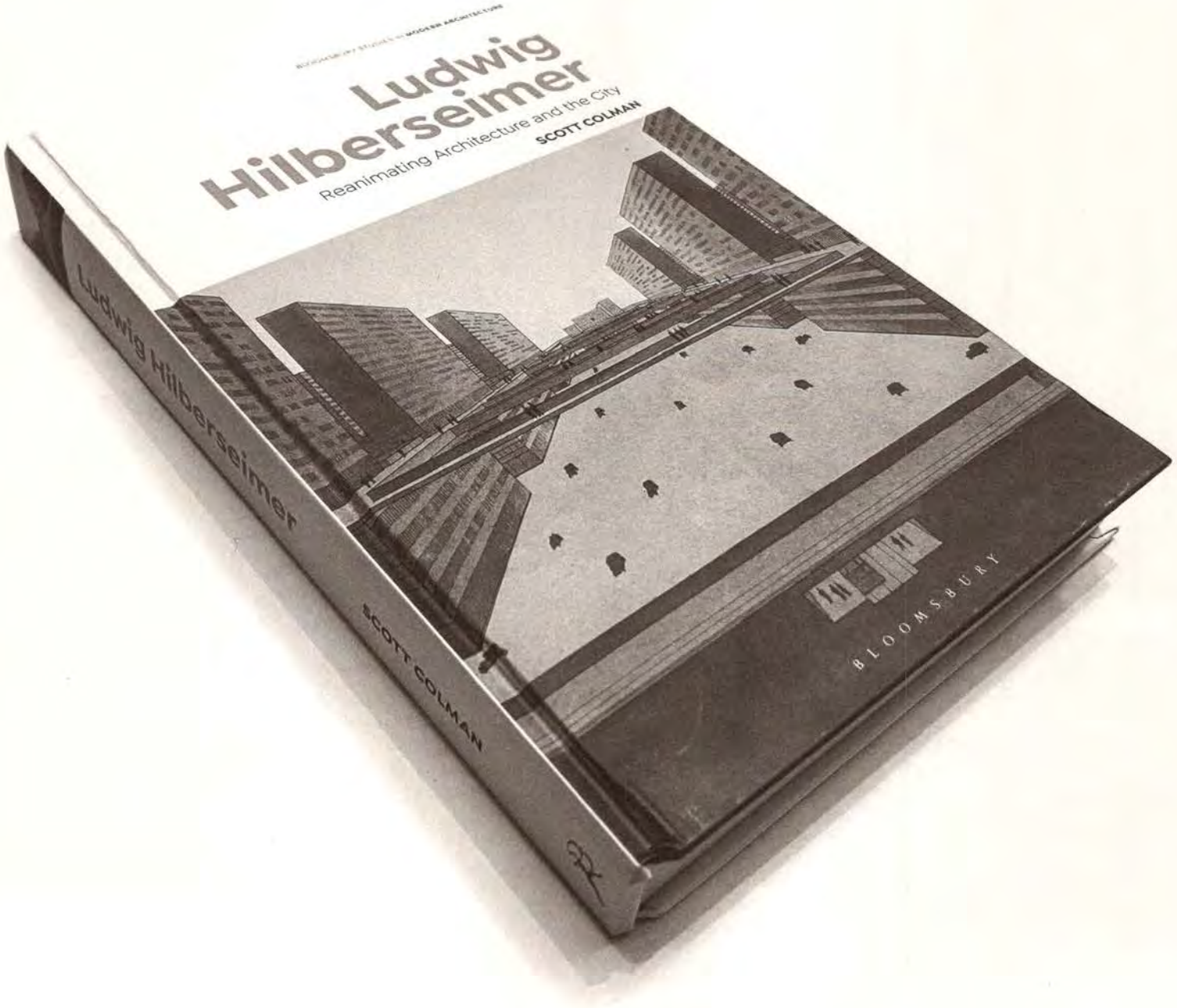

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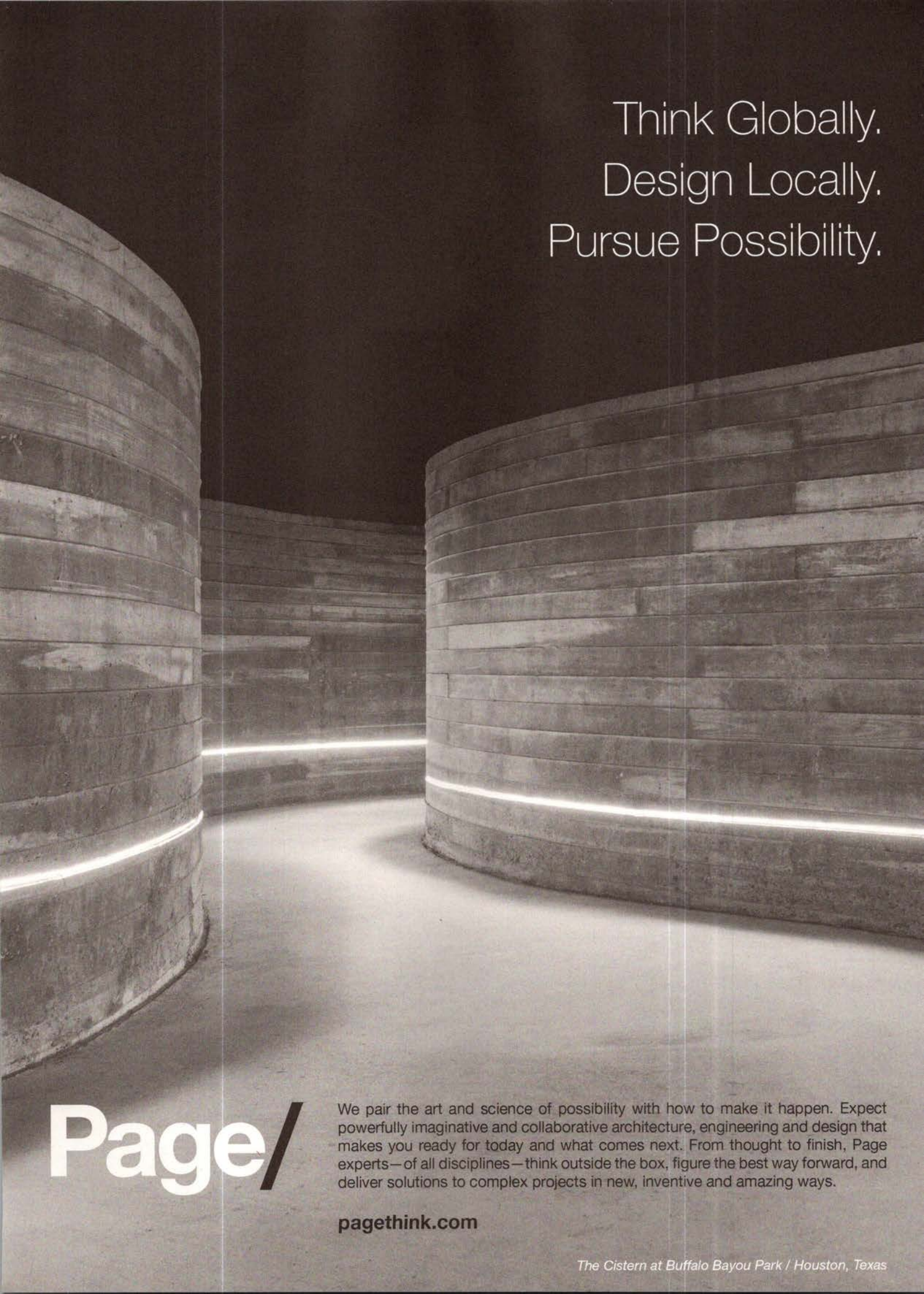
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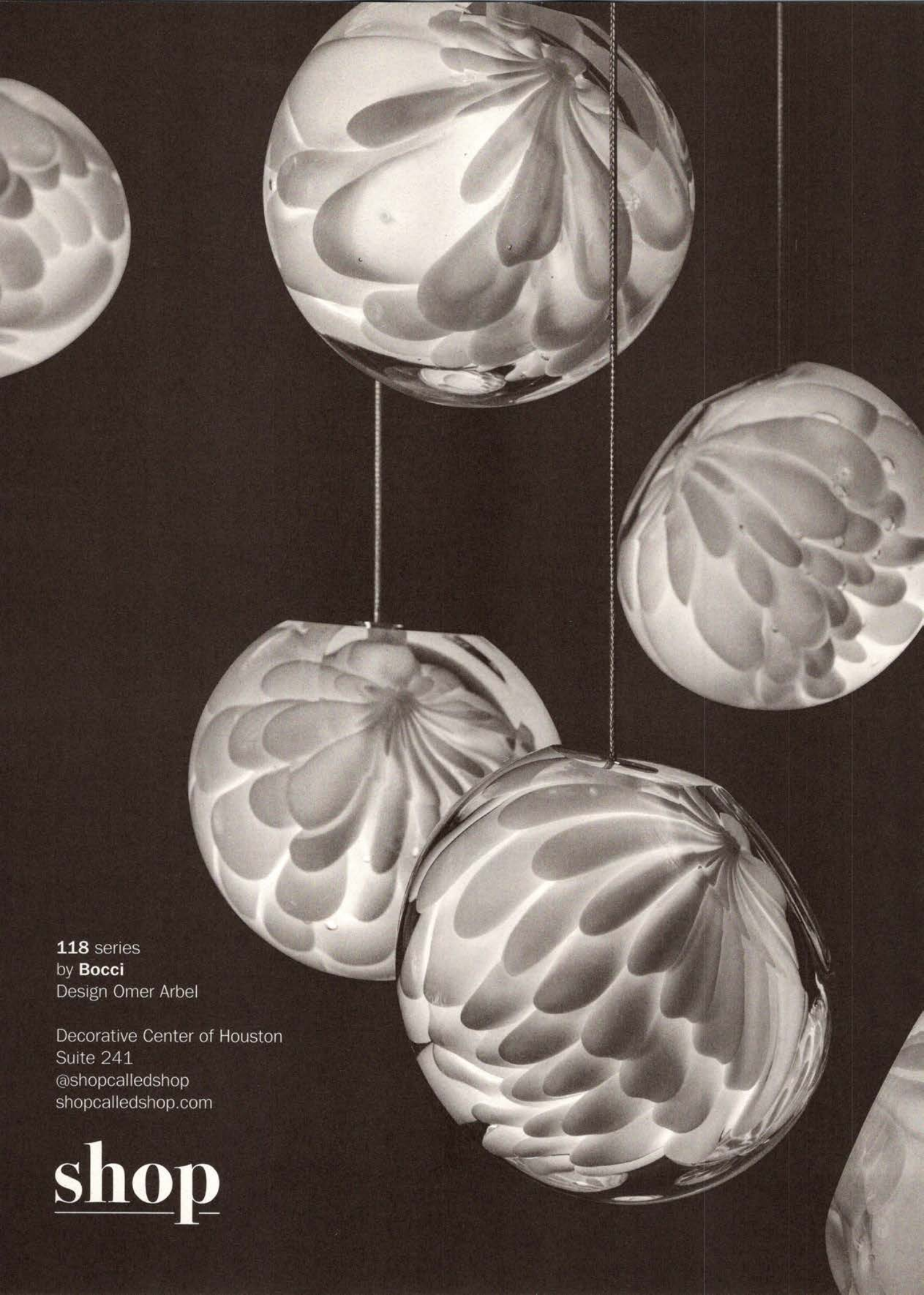
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Rice Design Alliance

Rice Design Alliance is the public programs and outreach arm of Rice Architecture. We are based at and work from the Rice School of Architecture as an advocacy group that believes that multidisciplinary and research-based design can improve our cities and the way we live in them.

RDA was established within Rice Architecture in 1972 by the school's first dean, David Crane, together with alumni and other civic-minded community members who believed that quality design thinking should be available to all in our community and that Houston's citizens—experts and non-experts alike—should feel empowered to act and transform our city through design.

Mock newsstand in downtown Houston, built to stage the cover photo for the fifth-anniversary issue, *Cite* 18, in 1987. Photograph: Paul Hester.

Letter from the Dean

Igor Marjanović

It is with great pride that I introduce this issue of *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston*, published through Rice Design Alliance (RDA). For fifty years, RDA has been the cornerstone of public programs and the outreach arm of the Rice University School of Architecture. In a constantly evolving city such as Houston, there are very few things that last that long, and Rice Architecture is truly proud to have been *Cite*'s home since its founding in 1982.

Cities are never completely finished. The nature of an urban project is its perpetual evolution and layering. With its rapid urbanization and demographic growth, Houston is a particularly dynamic city. As the pages in this issue attest, *Cite* has captured the ebbs and flows of Houston's financial and urban developments, as well as the ensuing tensions between the capitalistic and the aesthetic, between the natural and the urban. Accelerated by the planetary climate change, the city and the landscape constantly push against each other in Houston: the overgrown trees, the omnipresent water, and the ever-increasing effects of weather have left their marks on buildings, lots, and infrastructure. The opening and closing images in this issue are a testament to that ecological and urban friction.

As the school's dean, I am deeply honored to be the first to thank the many people who have contributed to *Cite*'s founding, perseverance, and many transformations. *Cite* has always captured the dynamism and diversity of Houston—a federation of varied ecologies, aesthetics, and narratives. This pluralism is visible in the magazine's own evolution—large at times, small at others. Sometimes printed in black and white, it also appeared in vibrant color. Today, we are gazing at this varied history with pride and insight, collectively reflecting on aspirations that are pertinent to our own generation of Houstonians. *Cite* 104 takes stock of that history while projecting into the future, as one cannot look forward without also looking back.

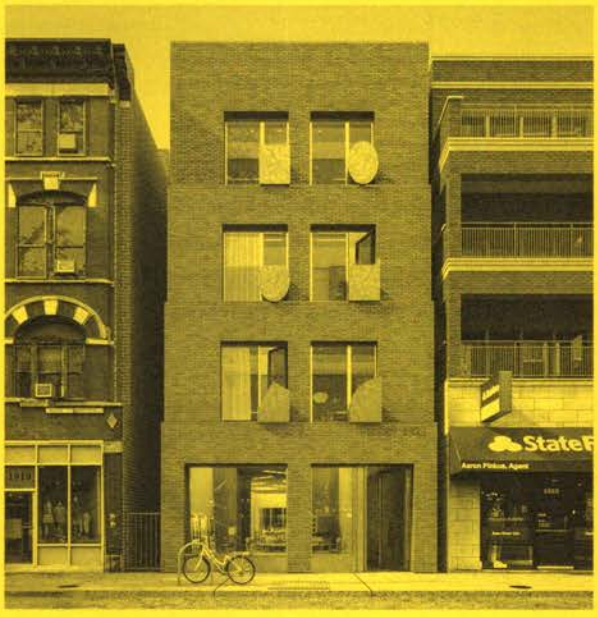
Building on that spirit of self-reflection—and on the internal and external assessment processes that started as early as 2014—there were many collective conversations over the past year about the future of RDA, which included officers and volunteers, faculty and staff. Ultimately, there was a prevailing conclusion that RDA will realign itself with the School of Architecture as its community outreach program rather than separating into an independent organization. RDA has drawn its strengths from passionate enthusiasts and devoted citizens, as well as from Rice's immense talent of students and faculty. The school itself is RDA's best home, where all programs and activities are free and open to the public. This decision to evolve RDA is a continuation of its original mission—laid out in 1972 by our first dean, David Crane—to advance quality design and urban life for all Houstonians. We will carry this aspiration into the future as we advance Rice University's values of community access and diversity.

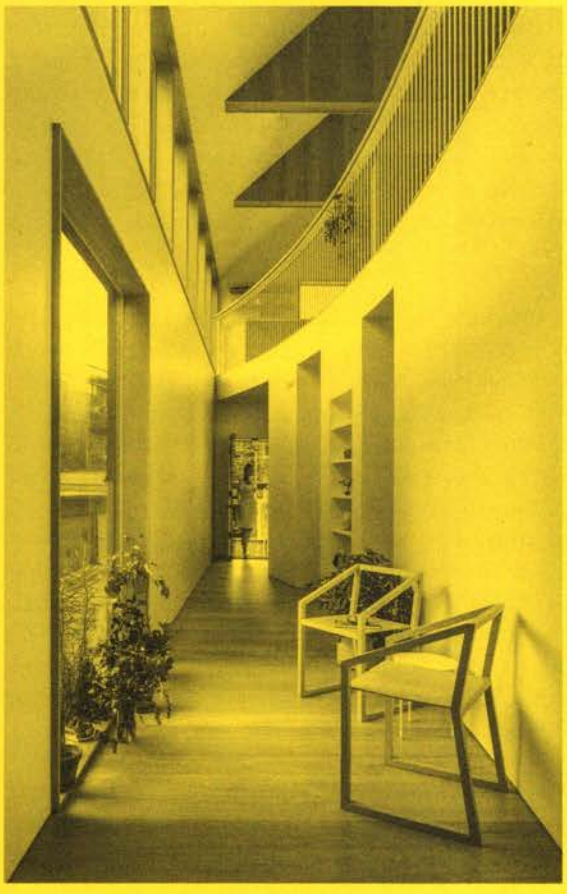
On behalf of the school community, I am indebted to all the volunteers, patrons, and enthusiasts who have been supporting our community programs so generously. I am also grateful to Rice Architecture faculty and staff, who have always championed RDA's urban-minded mission, enabling its events, programs, and publications to shine locally and globally. Their ambitions for excellence in design-related research and community outreach are evident in this issue of *Cite*, too, where guest editor and associate professor Reto Geiser cannily framed the history of a journal, a school, and a city in the context of global architectural, cultural, and political currents. His insights have shaped this issue not only as an editor and a designer—together with Noëmi Mollet—but as a teacher, too. Much of the content stems from his course entitled Houston Talks, testifying to the unique contributions that Rice students and faculty bring to the larger Houston community. Our managing editor, Nancy O'Connor, shepherded this publication steadily and astutely, and I am thankful for her guidance.

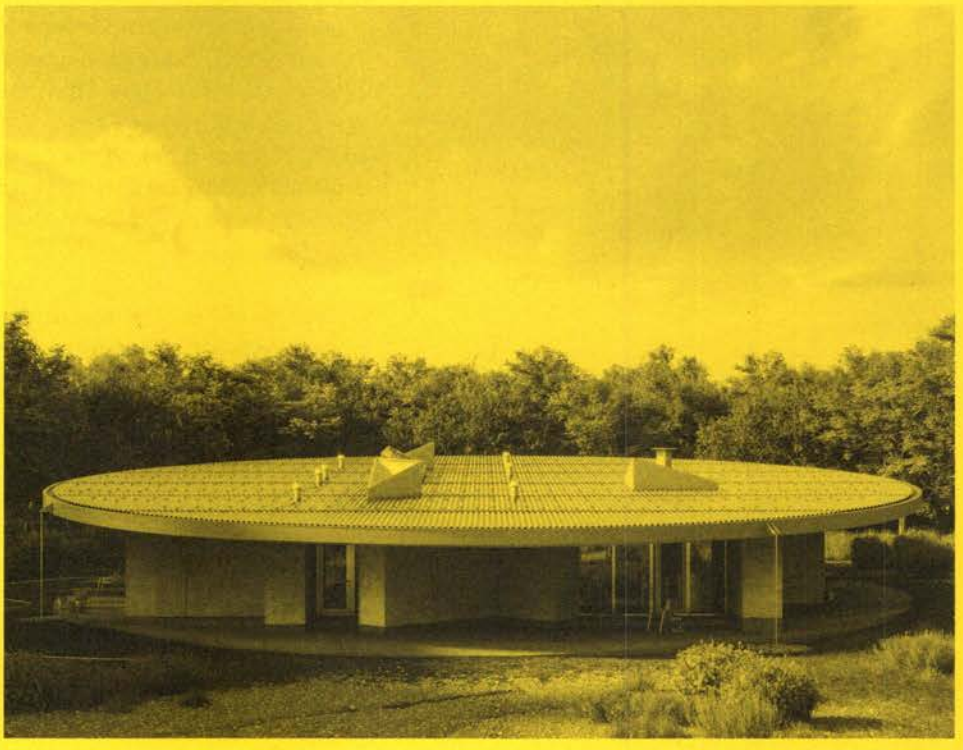
Finally, I want to take this opportunity to thank all former board members, officers, and volunteers for their long-standing support and participation—and, in particular, Andrew Albers and Daimian Hines for their leadership and advice. As we open a new chapter—and a new building for the School of Architecture very soon—I cannot help but wonder whether, despite such long and shared history, our work together has only just begun.

2022 Spotlight Award

Kwong Von Glinow







Clockwise:
Chicago, Chicago, concept design, 2022.
Alison Von Glinow and Lap Chi Kwong, Photograph: Haas + Haas.
House, Some of This, Some of That, concept design, 2022.
ArdmoreHouse, completed, 2020, Photograph: James Florio.

The Chicago-based practice of Kwon Von Glinow (KVG) is the recipient of this year's Rice Design Alliance Spotlight Award. Chaired by associate professor Troy Schaum, a committee of faculty from the schools of architecture at Rice and the University of Houston selected KVG for this year's award. The committee noted that "Their work offered an optimistic take on the future of the design in our cities at this stage in their careers." Lap Chi Kwong and Alison Von Glinow founded their practice in 2017 after spending formative years working at such prominent offices as Herzog & de Meuron, SOM, and Toshiko Mori Architect.

What clearly distinguishes KVG is a genuine delight in creating living environments that take advantage of each work's inherent simplicity. Take the Ardmore House (2020), a three-level structure that is confidently placed at the intersection of a residential street and an alleyway. The design surprises with its sophisticated banding of materials, hinting at interior complexities that will be revealed once inside. A double-height, curved space spans the full length of the house, giving the often-ignored alleyway an unexpected presence across the entire composition. The elegant enfilade of wooden trusses that shapes the top floor's vaulted ceiling offers a counterpoint to the simple gable roof.

Other notable designs include an inventive variation on Chicago's historic typology the Three-Flat—so named Chicago, Chicago—and a retreat in the woods designed for a young family—Some of This, Some of That. The latter design has a playfulness that underscores and subverts the geometric rigor of its layout. A circular slab, matched by a gently sloping roof structure, contains all interior and exterior spaces within its circumference. This unexpected object appears to both rest and soar amid its forested clearing, an effect that provides a bounty of surprises, which can also be said about the work of this distinct and admirable practice.

— Carlos Jiménez

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2022 Houston Design Research Grant

Rice Design Alliance has provided research grants for architecture and design students and faculty since 1999. With the generous support of The Mitsui U.S.A. Foundation, RDA relaunched the renamed Houston Design Research Grant in 2020 (formerly known as the Initiatives for Houston Grant) to more actively support research that can make a significant contribution to the Houston community through quality design-thinking.

Starting in 2020, applications were expanded nationally to students and faculty looking to work on research projects of relevance to Houston's urban environment. The grant now awards $6,000 each to a student and faculty winner who are invited to present their project at a public lecture at Rice Architecture and to publish their research in *Cite*. Every year the grant addresses a different topic.

The 2022 submission guidelines required a critical focus on Houston's built environment—its history, present condition, and future development—and a connection specifically to architecture, design, and spatial thinking.

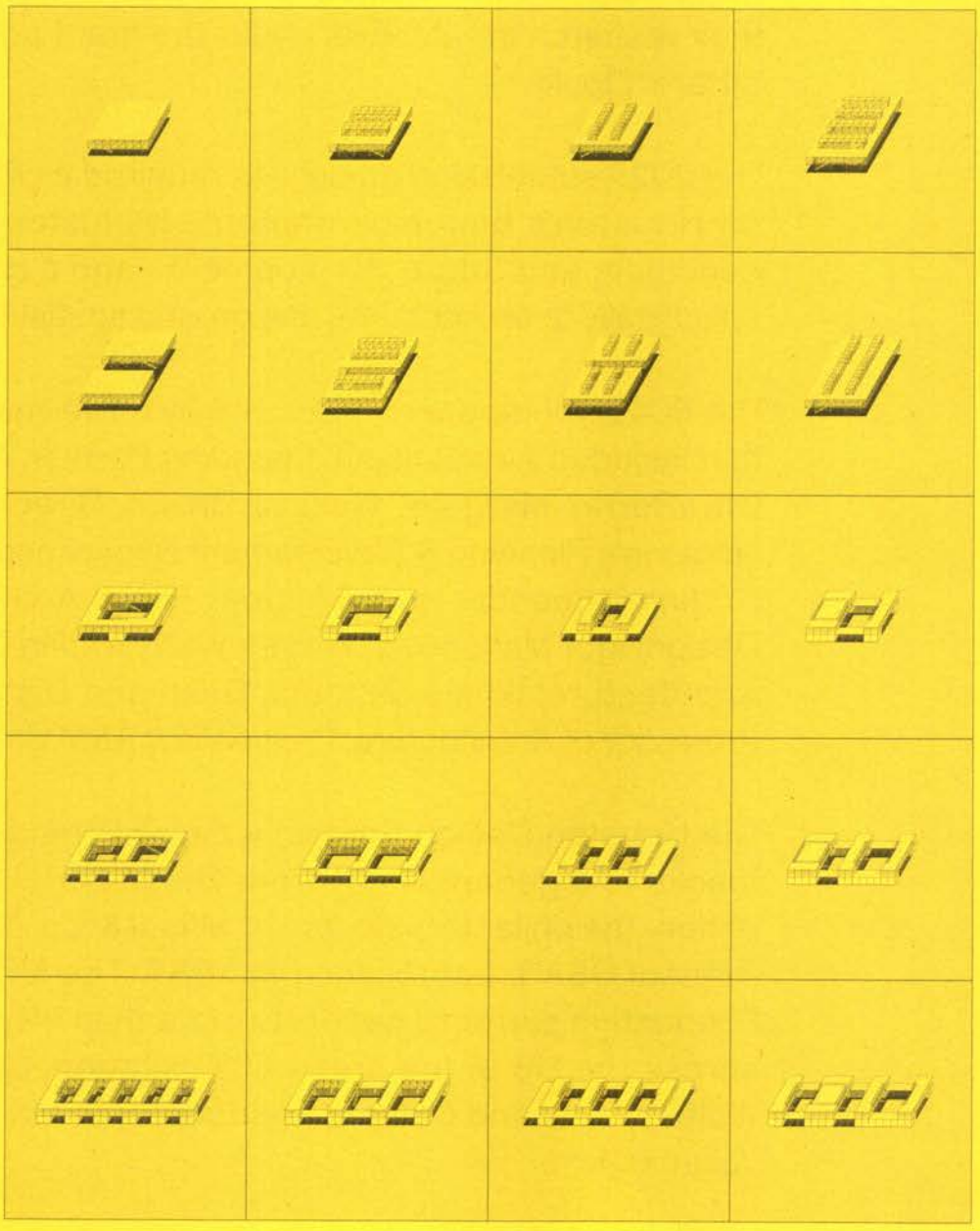
The 2022 winners were selected by a five-member jury that included Amna Ansari, Founding Partner, Associates UltraBarrio; Margaret Wallace Brown, Director, City of Houston's Planning & Development Department; Daimian S. Hines, Founder and Principal, Hines Architecture + Design; Igor Marjanović, William Ward Watkin Dean, Rice Architecture; Ikhlas Sabouni, Dean and Distinguished Professor of Architecture, Prairie View A&M University.

The Houston Design Research Grant is made possible thanks to a generous gift from The Mitsui U.S.A. Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Mitsui & Co. (U.S.A.), Inc. ("Mitsui USA"). Established in 1987, The Mitsui U.S.A. Foundation currently supports more than fifty initiatives across the US in the areas of Education, Community Welfare, Arts and Culture, and Employee Matching and Volunteerism.

2022 Houston Design Research Grant Faculty Award

HOME-OFFICE

Variations of a Houston Type



HOME-OFFICE, *HOUSTON-VARIATIONS*, 2022.

While Houston is notorious for its sprawling highways and lack of zoning, distinctive spatial types have emerged in response to the city's regulatory environments. Everyday buildings such as the raised single-story office building—what we call the "office mat type"—and the low-rise drive-in courtyard apartment produce precise typological responses to Houston's underlying economic and climatic conditions. Through this lens, does Houston offer a way to reframe typology as an open-ended process of social, technical, and environmental adaptation? Rather than producing an endless series of market-ready spatial products, can the inexhaustibility of type create a counter-project in the speculative city?

In the mid-twentieth century, the office mat type in Houston evolved to meet the growing demand for affordable office space outside of downtown. This type consists of a two-story column structure with an elevated single-story space. Some of the most notable examples are along the Richmond Avenue business corridor, designed by the Houston-based firm Neuhaus and Taylor for the developer client Gerald D. Hines in the early 1960s. Although the aesthetics flicker between the generic and the remarkable, the office mat and its organizational principles were driven by an intense attention to economy of construction. The tenants were typically small commercial companies, so costs had to be minimized and layouts made as efficient as possible. Parking and entrance lobbies were located below the buildings, as it was cheaper to park underneath the building than to buy more land to accommodate car-commuting suburban workers.[1] Adjusting to nonideal lot dimensions to achieve the most efficient and flexible office plans, the envelopes of the buildings were often stepped back from the edge of the property.[2] Furthermore, these cantilevered roofs and perimeter balconies were primarily used to reduce energy costs, making them rent-competitive to meet the market's bottom line.[3] Everything from their space planning to their construction methods was driven by the "unforgiving economics of serially-reproduced speculative buildings."[4]

In the late 1960s, a new housing type emerged that could be read as a variation of the office mat. Reclad in wood siding, stucco, decorative stonework, or faux mansard roofs, the "drive-in" apartment retained the economic efficiency of the office mat's two-story scale with parking underneath.[5] The primary transformation of the type was the addition of a central courtyard that functioned as the primary circulation space; from it both ground floor and second floor units were accessed through an open-air balcony and stairs. The structural bay accommodated a row of parking spaces around the perimeter of the building beneath the second-floor units. Despite the courtyard, access to light in the units was often limited to small openings on the exterior facade, and the apartments relied on air conditioning window units with virtually no access to cross ventilation.

The drive-in courtyard apartment is a hybrid of what Reyner Banham describes as the Los Angeles "dingbat" and the early twentieth-century garden apartment.[6] Yet even with the addition of the central courtyard, its bare economic formula of lot size to parking space dimension limited the spatial possibilities of the apartment units, creating dark interiors with little relationship to the courtyard. Although the low-rise courtyard apartment is a critical source of affordable housing for renters in the city today, these current permutations reveal an exhaustion of the type. Describing Houston's loss of the garden apartment and its relationship to the landscape, Nonya Grenader and Stephen Fox note, "Today, apartments tend to turn inward rather than outward. ... In the midst of this, what is to become of Houston's gentle machines in the garden?"[7]

As the mechanisms of speculative development in Houston are replacing these small-scale residential buildings with luxury towers and townhouse developments, are there alternative ways to increase density without displacing people to the periphery? How can we use the typological impulse to imagine variations not as economic products but instead as new forms of life? HOUSTON-VARIATIONS reimagines twenty new typological permutations for the low-rise office mat and the drive-in courtyard apartment, testing to what degree the constraints of the type allow a recalibration of the relationship between environmental enclosure and form. For the office mat, breaking up the deep office slab, deepening the environmental envelope, and adding layers to the materiality of the facade yield a climatically responsive and adjustable type. The complexity of the drive-in courtyard apartment offered even more potential for variation. Rather than limiting the building to a single courtyard, the type's expansion into multiple courtyards interconnected by shared balconies potentially offer new sequences and relationships between the units and the landscape. Parking spaces can become breezeways and covered passages that animate the interior collective spaces.

This project further adapts the envelope system of the drive-in to create a more open relationship to the building's exterior. The second-floor facade transforms with an operable panel system that maximizes flexibility and access to light and air. The units' sliding glass doors are set back from the layered panel system, allowing the tenant to adjust the climate of the room. Within the courtyard, the open-air balcony expands into a shared screened-in porch, creating a semiprivate threshold for each unit.

If the office mat and the drive-in are responses to the reciprocal relationship between property, the financial constraints of the market, and the costs of environmental enclosure, we argue that these types can also offer a counter project to speculative development in the neoliberal city. By adjusting the relationship between typological form and environmental envelope, the project imagines new ways to restructure the relationships between climate, social life, and current forms of urbanization. As "gentle machines" in the city, these variations combine the pragmatism of the type's economy to imagine new forms of climatic delight.

Notes

1 "Offices Over Parking," *Architectural Forum* (January 1962): 89.

2 Ibid.

3 Barry Moore and Anna Mod, "The Richmond Corridor: Where Gerald Hines Went to Graduate School," *Cite* 57 (Spring 2003): 15.

4 Ben Koush, "Light Touch: The Work of Harwood Taylor," *Cite* 64 (Summer 2005): 14.

5 We are borrowing this name from Keith Neu and Drexel Turner's essay "Houston's Drive-in Apartments," *Cite* 38 (Summer 1997): 28–31.

6 Banham credits the term "dingbat" to the urban planner Francis Ventre. Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973): 175.

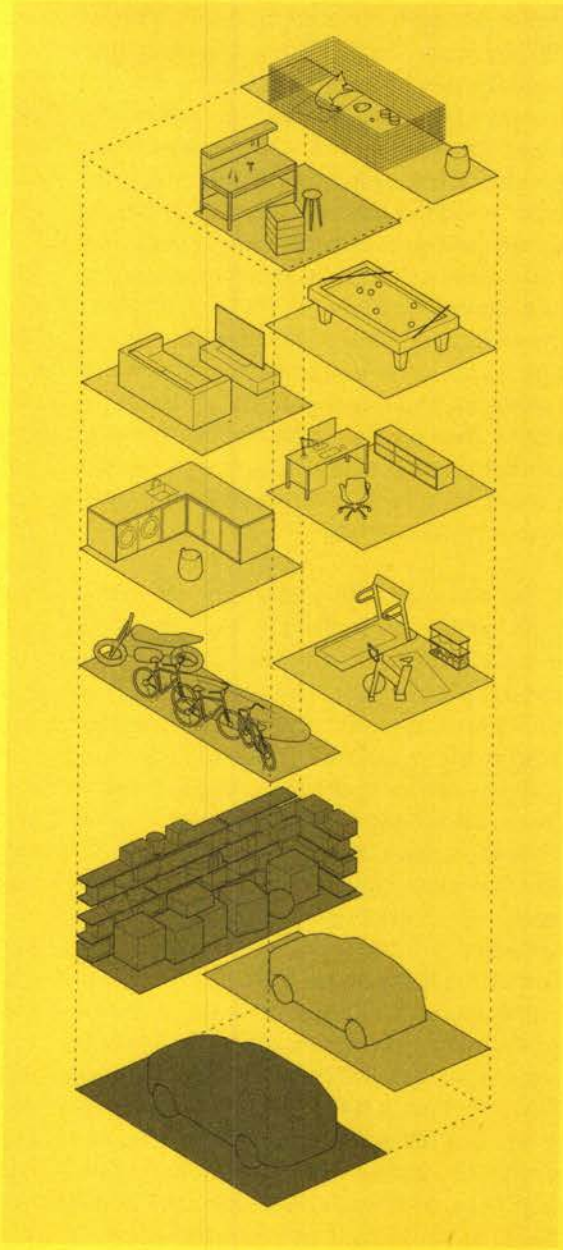
7 Nonya Grenader and Stephen Fox, "Rooms with a View: In Praise of the Vanishing Garden Apartment," *Cite* 45 (Summer 1999): 23.

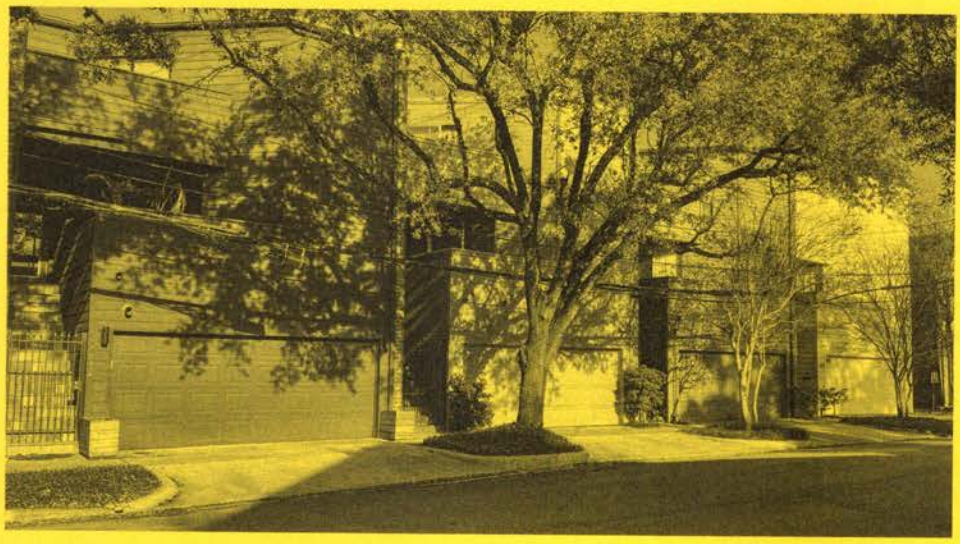
Founded in 2017 by Brittany Utting and Daniel Jacobs, HOME-OFFICE is a Houston-based research and design collaborative that experiments with the reciprocity among architectural types, their technical assemblies, and the environment.

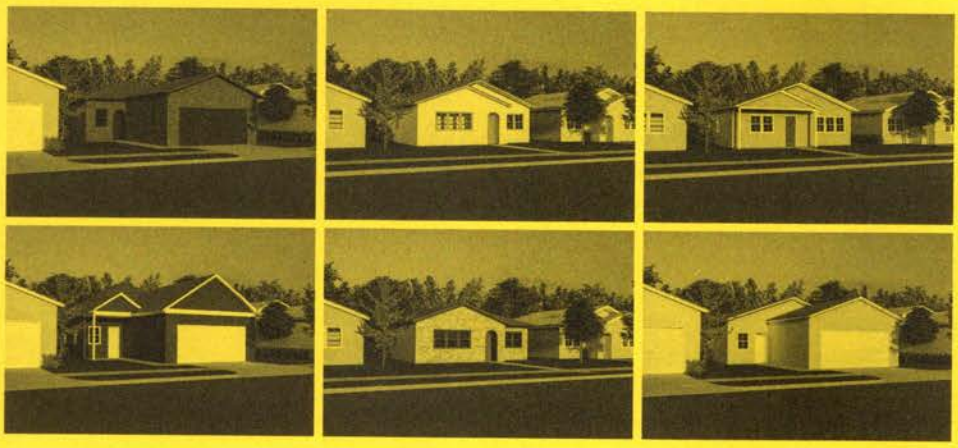
2022 Houston Design Research Grant Student Award

Rae Atkinson

Carless Garages, Careless Spaces, and Everything in Between







Clockwise:
Garage-fronted townhomes on Hazard Street in Houston, typical of recent development inside the loop.
Illustration of space and time use for private garages based on survey results.
Six renderings used to determine aesthetic preferences regarding visible garages.

The garage is a curious element of the built environment; it is utterly ubiquitous, prominently situated, and yet chronically overlooked. Nearly all new houses and townhomes built in the United States feature a private garage.[1] Blank mechanical doors often constitute the largest element of a home's front facade, defining the streetscape of countless neighborhoods. In Houston, the garage's omnipresence goes beyond the new residential subdivisions in the suburbs; blocks upon blocks of garage-fronted townhomes increasingly define many inner-loop neighborhoods. With many garages projecting in front of the home, driveways are often truncated, nudging parked cars onto the sidewalk. Having become the de facto parking solution, the garage-fronted home diminishes the visual interest of the street and damages the pedestrian experience.

Despite their prevalence, garages receive little thought. Even the simple question "what is a garage?" yields fascinating responses. While the most obvious answer is that a garage is a storage container for cars, a voyeuristic peak beyond a neighbor's open garage doors is likely to tell another story: the garage is the most multifunctional room in the house. Pop culture tells us the garage is a creative space, churning out garage bands and technology start-ups. Our friends' garages are aspirational spaces for the pursuit of health and fitness goals. Nostalgia reminds us that garages are social spaces, hosting high school parties and game nights. My research interrogates the role of the single-family residential garage to enable its future reimagination. I created two separate online surveys that each reached audiences of over 400 individuals (demographically balanced to represent the US Census) to understand how people use their garages and how they feel about the aesthetics of garages.

The results of the first survey affirm the garage as a highly multifunctional space, validating the anecdotal observations described above. Users negotiate a wide range of activities at various times. Participants responded to a series of questions about the size of their garage, the frequency of different activities that take place there, and the amount of space those activities utilize. The majority (68%) of households with garages are what I call "Frequent Parkers," which are those that park a car in the garage at least once per week. Frequent Parkers also use garages for a range of other activities at least once per week: about 30% use the garage as workshop or creative space; about one in five use the garage as a workout space or a social space; and at least one in ten use their garages as a play or study space.

Interestingly, it is the households on the other end of the spectrum—those who almost never park in their garages—that have the least multifunctional garages. For these "Never Parkers" (22% of households with garages), the garage is essentially a storage unit, too full to accommodate a car. Never Parkers are more likely to be middle-aged and older, corresponding to the accumulation of possessions over longer lifetimes.

The smallest group of garage-users is the "Occasional Parker." Representing 9% of households with garages, these respondents park a car in their garage less than once per week but more than once per year. These Occasional Parkers use their garages for the same range of non-parking activities as Frequent Parkers, but with greater frequency. Occasional Parkers are much less likely to use their garage for miscellaneous storage, leaving the garage as a highly flexible space that can accommodate a range of uses, including parking the occasional car.

A second survey indicated that Americans are highly divided between those who prefer the appearance of homes with visible garages and those without visible garages. The survey presented images of single-family homes, with and without front-loaded garages. To control for extraneous variables (lighting, landscaping, home size, etc.), these images were digitally designed and rendered, rather than sourced from the real world. When asked which home was most attractive, a slight majority (54%) of respondents preferred garage-dominant facades. However, when I rephrased the question to ask which of the homes the respondent would most like to live in, the preference for the garage-dominant facade increased to 61%. In some cases, the functional promise of a garage appears to outweigh aesthetic objections, even based on a single image of a hypothetical home.

The survey results may be unexpected to some; those who find garages unattractive may be alarmed at how many respondents disagree. Others may not have expected such a high percentage of households to frequently park in their garages. I certainly was surprised, and I believe that this element of surprise is a benefit of empirical research. Designers so often make decisions based on personal preference and gut instincts; however, results like these are a helpful reminder that the designer's opinion may not match that of the people they are designing for.

Surprises aside, this research still demonstrates opportunities to improve upon the production homebuilder's one-size-fits-all approach to garages. Since most garages accommodate two cars, while most households park only one car inside, there is an opportunity to redesign garages to better reflect their multifunctional nature, diminishing their emphasis on the car. At the same time, two in ten households with garages never park their cars inside and would seemingly be well served by a storage shed behind the home or another similar solution. Meanwhile, although most Americans do like the look of garages, that majority is much smaller than the share of new homes built with prominent garages, revealing a clear opportunity to rethink the look of the garage and its typical relationship with the street. Upon first glance, the garage may seem too mundane or too obvious to warrant serious design consideration, but these findings suggest that the garage is not only worthy of greater consideration, but also ripe for design innovation.

Notes

1 US Census Bureau, "Characteristics of New Housing," accessed November 2, 2020, https://www.census.gov/construction/chars/.

Rae Atkinson is a Master of Architecture candidate at Rice University. Her undergraduate coursework at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill focused on urban planning and sustainable development. Prior to beginning her graduate studies, Rae was a senior associate at RCLCO Real Estate Advisors, conducting market research for landowners, government organizations, and developers.

Houston

Talks

Reto Geiser

Guest Editor

Cite has been the voice of Houston's architecture and design community for four decades. During this time, Houston has witnessed significant change—oscillating between busts and booms—and *Cite* has been a trusted observer and commentator of this transformation. Sometime between the founding of the Rice Design Alliance in 1972 and the launch of *Cite* magazine a decade later, architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable described Houston as "the city of the second half of the twentieth century," a place "without the rationales of geography and evolutionary social growth that have traditionally created urban centers and urban culture. [...] Houston today is the American present and future. It is an exciting and disturbing place."[1]

This observation is as relevant today as it was back in the 1970s—but under radically different conditions. Houston has changed. The lack of natural boundaries, for example, initially the precondition for the city's unstoppable expansion, has turned into a major challenge with storm surges and other repercussions of climate change. The Houston metro area's continued growth is now fueled by immigration, which has enabled it to become one of the most diverse cities in the United States. A related challenge is that it has turned into one of the nation's cities most segregated by income.[2] According to sociologist Stephen Klineberg, the founding director of Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research, who established the Houston Area Survey in the year of *Cite*'s launch, "all of the region's ethnic groups are now minorities, all of them called upon to build something that has never existed before in human history—a truly successful, inclusive, equitable, and united multiethnic society that will be Houston, and Texas, and America as the twenty-first century unfolds."[3]

Cite has been a witness to this urban evolution. It has created a permanent record of this city in which the states of decay and ascent are blurred. In the very first issue, the editors of the magazine—then printed on tabloid-sized newsprint—announced the intention for it to be "a forum for the presentation and criticism of issues unique to the developing city." William F. Stern noted on the occasion of *Cite*'s fifth anniversary

that "the city that was springing up everywhere might actually have to address the extent of its growth and begin to plan for the future. Houston, the sprawling city that had captured America's imagination in a love-hate relationship, was perhaps reaching the point where the question was no longer 'how big?' but what kind of city this was to be."[4]

With this question in mind, the goal of this anniversary issue is two-fold: first, we want to honor the Rice Design Alliance, whose fiftieth birthday we celebrated in 2022 along with the forty-year run of *Cite* magazine. We reflect on the organization's history, while also projecting forward—or as Marshall McLuhan aptly described, "[w]e look at the present through a rearview mirror. We march backwards into the future."[5] Second, as in many of the previous issues of *Cite*, we are taking stock of Houston. For this, we invited fifty voices, insiders and outsiders, to join this conversation and to reflect openly on our ever-changing conurbation in words and images.

Initiated as the Rice University School of Architecture's community outreach organization, the RDA provided a forum for discussion to bring together "a wide variety of concerned citizens and friends of Rice."[6] Despite half a century of outstanding programs, including lectures, public forums, tours, publications, grant programs, and exhibitions, there are—other than personal recollections and memories—surprisingly only very few archival traces of the organization's contributions to Houston's architecture culture. When we began to work on this issue, fifty years of a lively organization were gathered at the Woodson Research Center Special Collections & Archives at Rice University in barely two boxes consisting of scattered program and membership leaflets, news clippings, and the nonprofit's charter. Considering this lack of an archive and given that many of RDA's main protagonists who have shaped the organization from its founding to the present day are still active, this issue of *Cite* offers the perfect opportunity to start collecting documents and recording the vivid recollections of the organization's early days.

As part of an advanced seminar on oral history at Rice in the fall of 2022, a group of twelve students set out to conceive and conduct conversations with selected interlocutors who have shaped RDA and especially *Cite* magazine.[7] The transcribed and edited interviews, along with photographic glimpses including a selection from Paul Hester's *The Elusive City* series that offers us a sense of Houston during the formative years of *Cite*, form the first section of this publication. If we consider architectural criticism not to be limited to building descriptions or the analysis of functional and aesthetic qualities, but to include how the built environment engages a broader cultural context, this inevitably incomplete oral history project is not only a relevant historical document—the full recordings will be available to the public in the RDA papers—but reverberates with *Cite*'s initial ambition as a publication of architectural criticism.

The second part of the magazine is dedicated to another look at the city that surrounds us. Joel Warren Barna observed in 1993, that, in the first decade of the magazine's existence, *Cite* set out to "tell the city's true story [...] to look beneath and behind the reified facticities that constituted the public understanding of architecture" in Houston.[8] Broken into three subsections, this part covers areas that have shaped the city in the past and continue to do so as we move forward. Inspired by Hester's attempts to capture the elusive Houston, we invited Swiss photographer Marianne Mueller to look closer and introduce her outside view, collecting observations of everyday environments, recontextualized into pairings and sequences, presenting a selective, yet unembellished

portrait of Houston. Through essays, criticism, field notes, historical case studies of unrealized projects, visual essays, artists' contributions, and conversations, we let Houston talk. The section titled "Houston in Real Life" focuses on some of Houston's long-term challenges, including economic inequalities, homelessness, and, at its core, the city's struggle to adequately house its growing population while at the same time addressing significant urbanistic, environmental, and infrastructural issues. Next, "Houston in Between" sheds light on the omnipresence of infrastructural systems—past, present, and future—and how they continue to shape the city's morphology. And finally, "Houston in Excess" highlights a convergence between an exuberant culture of manifested exuberance from the past with the gradual incorporation of its built manifestations into promising alternatives for the future.

At the peak of technological development and the oil boom, Huxtable declared Houston to be a city that points to the future. While we might conclude that Houston isn't the city of the twenty-first century, it is, according to Klineberg, a preview of what the rest of the US will look like in a few decades. Houston keeps changing, and we must remain adaptable, and it is therefore critical to develop an image for what this city can be. We need to develop ideas for increasing density, which is imperative to house affordably Houston's growing population, to make more efficient and sustainable mass-transit feasible, and to become more resilient to natural disasters that began to hit the area with an uncanny frequency.

"When we first started," Jack McGinty recollected on RDA's beginnings, "these ideas were kind of radical and revolutionary and outside the mainstream." Barry Moore, one of the organization's founding members, later commented on the RDA's development, suggesting that "it's still amazing [...] to look at RDA now and to see how not controversial and highly respected it has become."[9] Have we become too comfortable? Are we in need of "young voices who will pick up from here and ask all the hard questions, while making good trouble," as Herman Dyal expressed in our conversation? Critical reflection, dialogue, and debate, some of the key values that led to the launch of this publication, form the core of such change. This requires broad public engagement, for any conversation is only as good as its active participants.

Notes

1 Ada Louise Huxtable, "Space City Odyssey," *Texas Monthly* (May 1976): 34.

2 Stephen Klineberg, *Prophetic City: Houston on the Cusp of a Changing America* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020): 53.

3 Heather Leighton, "Not only is Houston getting more diverse, but residents' households are, too," Urban Edge, May 14, 2019, accessed June 15, 2023, https://kinder.rice.edu/urbanedge/not-only-houston-getting-more-diverse-residents-households-are-too.

4 William F. Stern, "*Cite* at Five," in: *Cite* 18, (Fall 1987): 28.

5 Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantham Books): 74–75.

6 Rice Design Alliance Bylaws, January 1973, Woodson Research Center Special Collections and Archives, Rice University.

7 Special thanks to Salomon Frausto, Katherine Keltner, Nancy O'Connor, Rebecca Russell, and Allan R. Turner for their invaluable contributions to the seminar. I am grateful to all the individuals who generously agreed to take the time to share their stories and their insights into the history of the Rice Design Alliance.

8 Joel Warren Barna, "*Cite* at 10," in: *Cite* 30, (Spring/Summer 1993): 48.

9 As quoted in: Raj Mankad, "Mainstreaming the Militants: On the Founding of Rice Design Alliance," *Cite* 90 (Fall 2012): 23.

Paul Hester *The Elusive City*

A display of photographs by Paul Hester, who had regularly contributed to *Cite* since its first issue in 1982, *The Elusive City* opened at the Menil Collection in Houston in October 1998. The show was staged at a moment of close collaboration between Menil director Paul Winkler and Rice University. As the following conversation with Hester underscores, his photographs have been essential to the visual language of *Cite*. The pictures published here were originally included in the exhibition catalog co-published by the Rice Design Alliance and the Menil Collection in conjunction with the show. Douglas Milburn's description of Houston in his accompanying essay seems still fitting twenty-five years later: it is a city that is unpredictable, difficult to pin down, and hard to perceive, an elusive environment that Hester has so beautifully captured in its many stages of urban transformation.

— RG

31 → Memorial Baptist Hospital Demolition, 1980.

32 → Night Billboard, 1978, from *Signs in the Houston Landscape* by Peter C. Papademetriou, published by the Houston Public Library.

33 → Galleria Pool, 1978.

34/35 → Astrodome, 1990, for *Cite*.

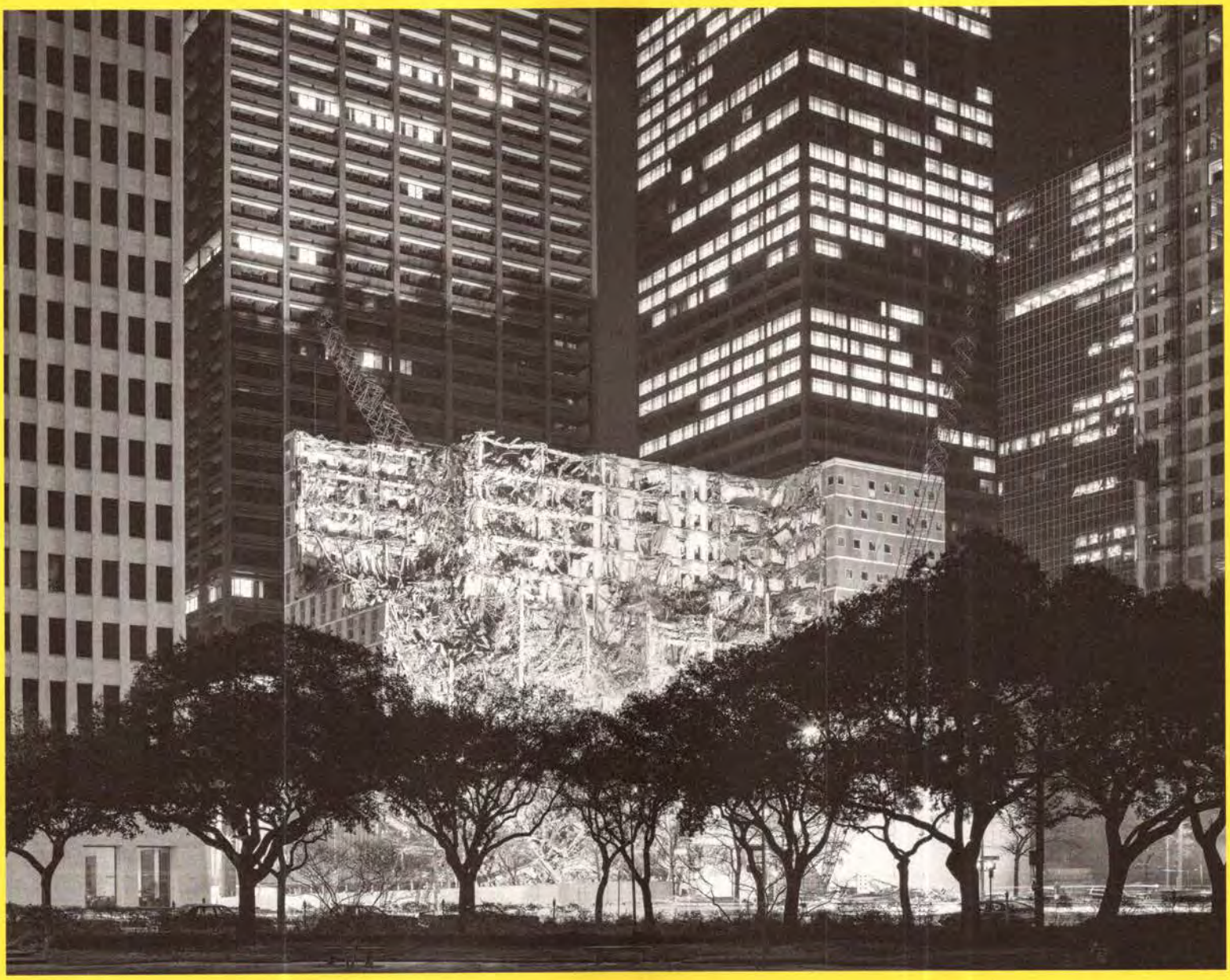
36 → 1209 Andrews Street, 1985, for an exhibition about the Fourth Ward at DiverseWorks.

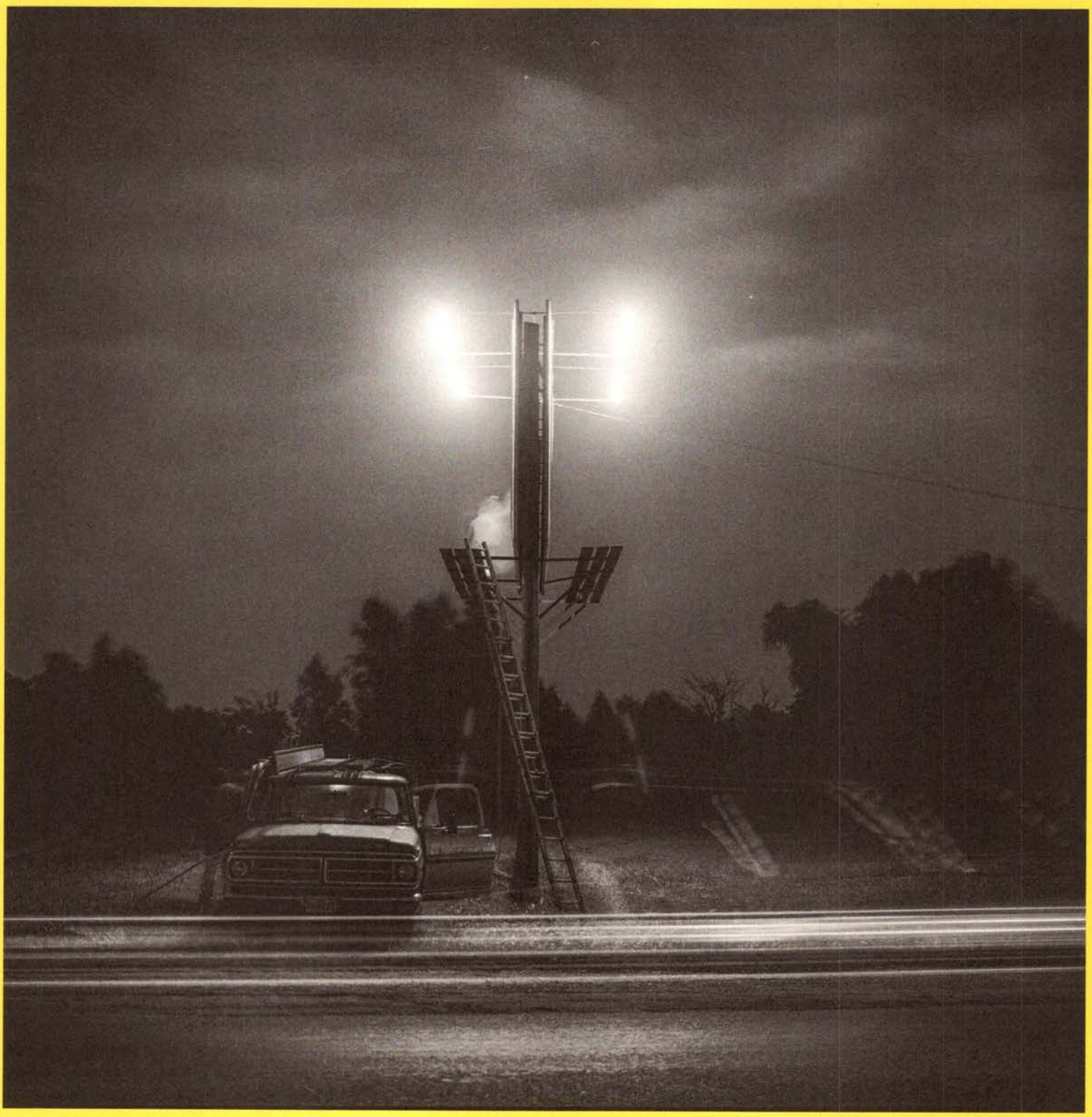
37 → 2508 Pelham Drive, from *Houston Architectural Survey* (1980).

38 → Galleria, 1978.

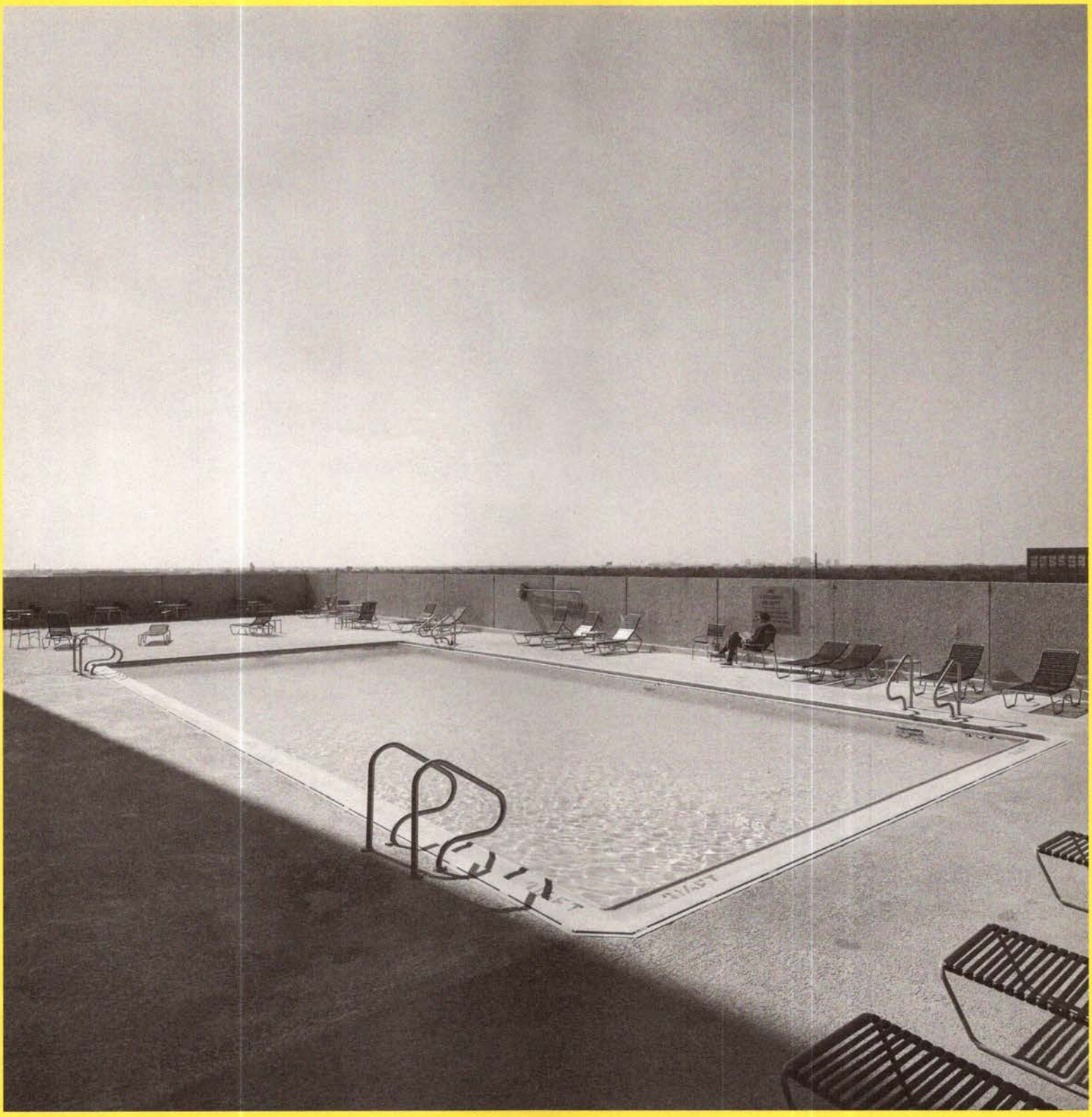
39 → Texas Commerce Tower, 1984, for *Contemporary Texas: A Photographic Portrait*, Martha A. Sandweiss, editor, published by the Texas Historical Foundation and Texas Monthly Press 1986.

40/41 → Magic Island, Highway 59, 1984, for *Cite*.

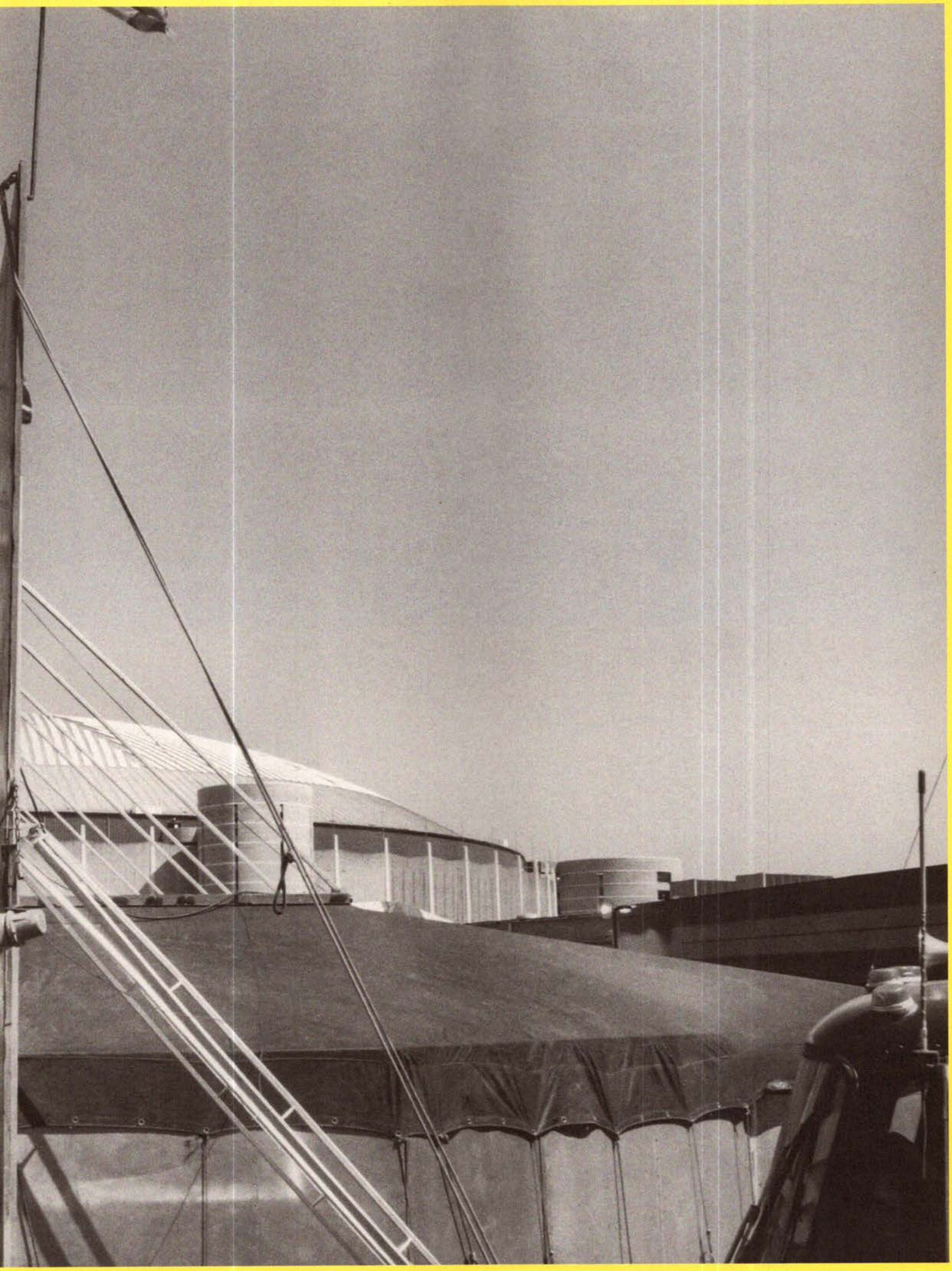


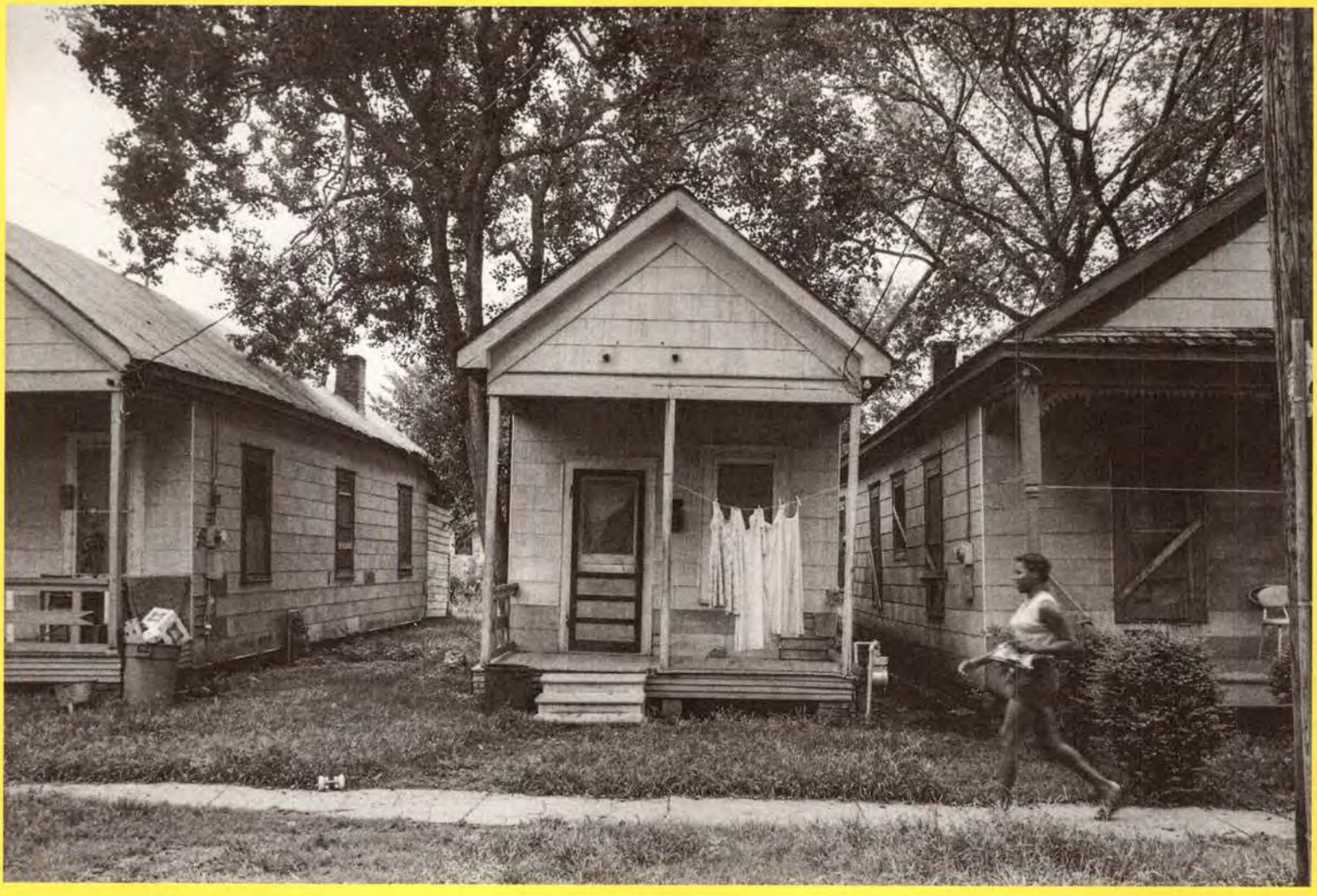


Paul Hester

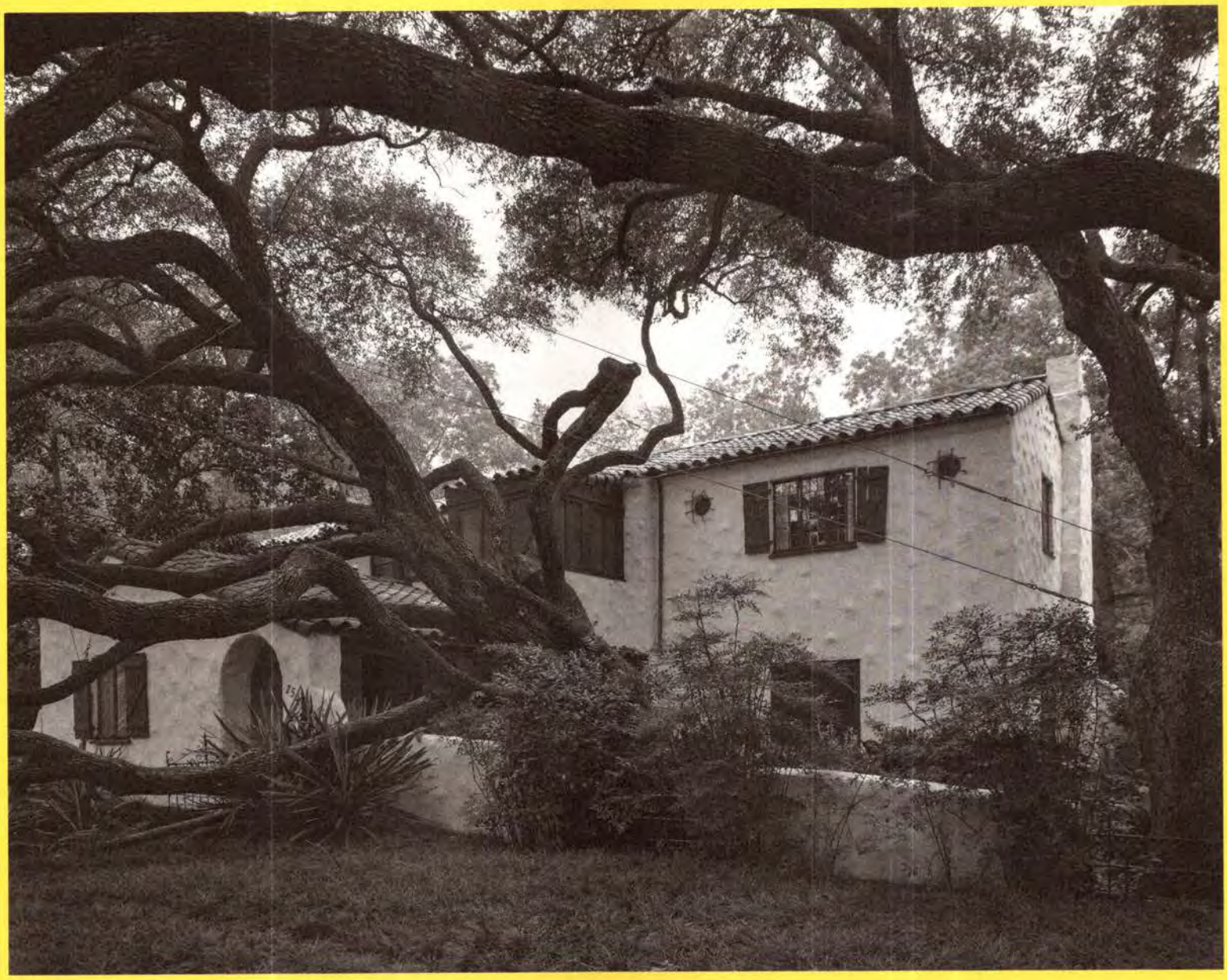


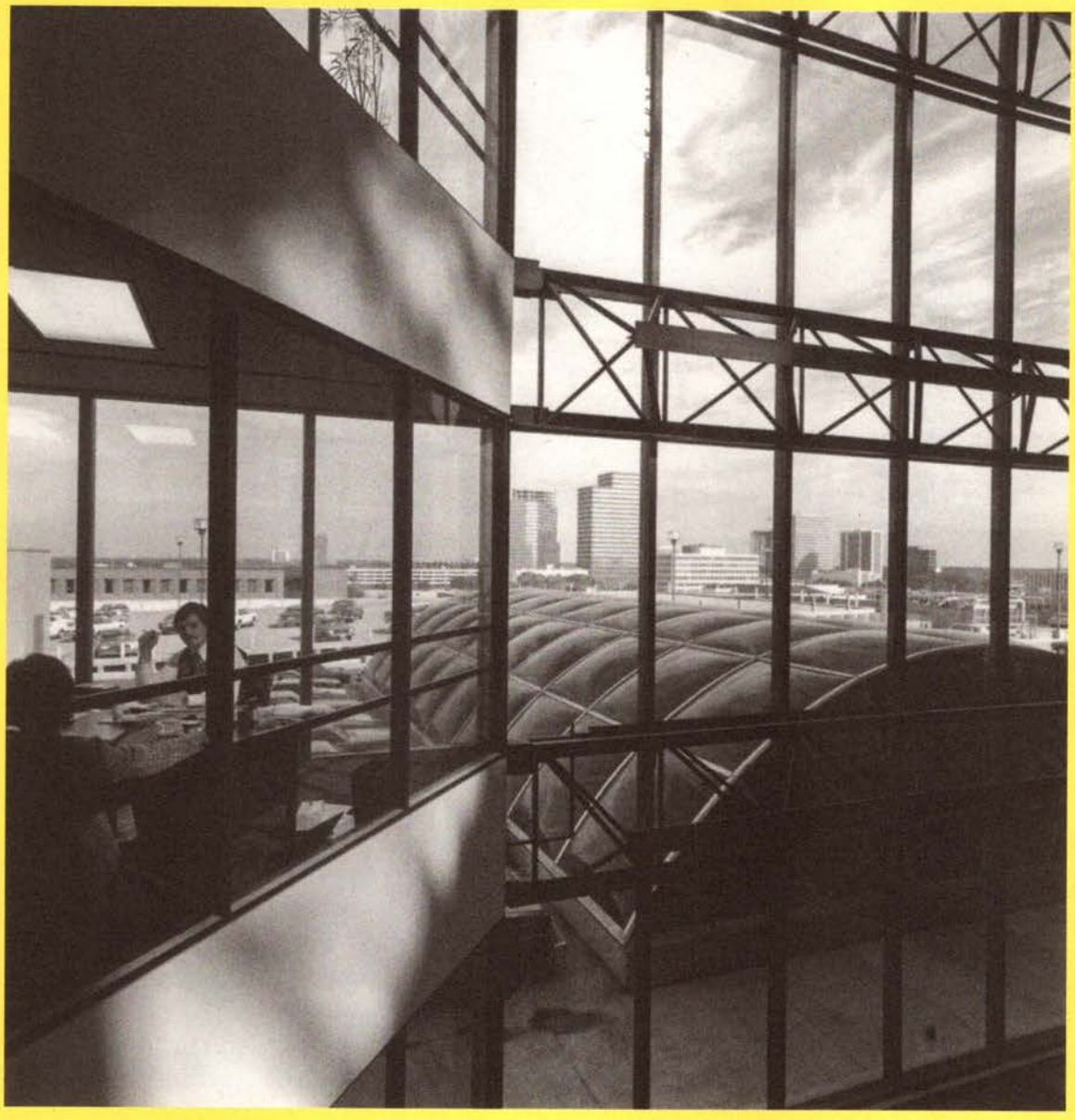
Paul Hester





Paul Hester





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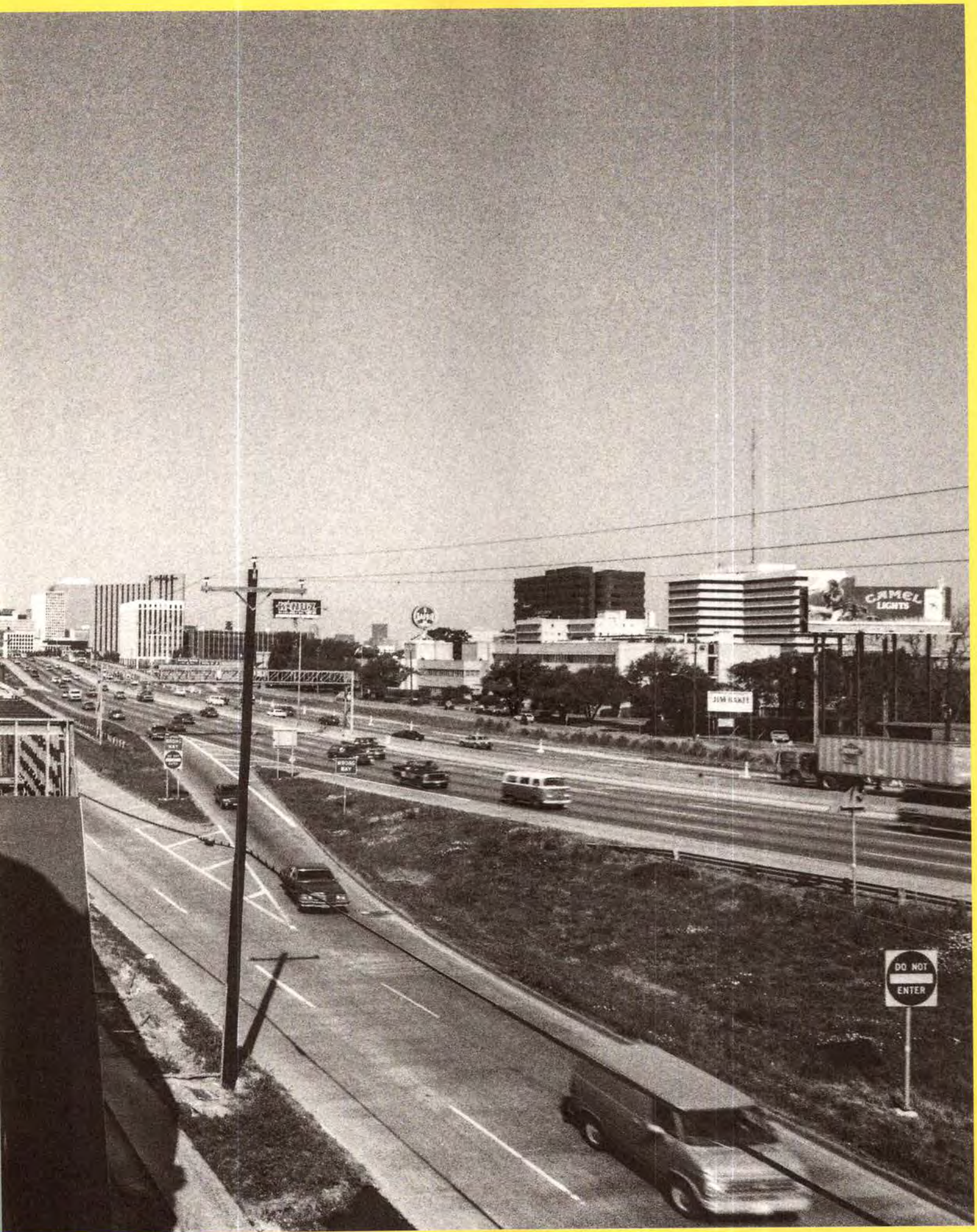
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Paul Hester

in Conversation with Paul DeFazio and Zee Zeng

ZZ You started as an architecture student at Rice in the late 1960s and later changed your major to photography. What was the Rice School of Architecture like at the time, and what drew you to photography?

Paul Hester installing panels in Market Square Park, 1992. Photograph: Lisa Hardaway.

PH I really wanted to come to Rice because they had unusual, well-designed yearbooks. The entire first year in architecture was taught by Elinor Evans, who had studied with Josef Albers at Yale. She was very sensitive and spoke in poetic terms. It was as frustrating as hell because I wanted to be an architect. I wanted to deal with concrete and steel. But I learned a lot from her, especially about design and colors and shapes, and it was a really terrific, life-changing course. Later, in my junior year, Peter Papademitriou invited Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, who had already done their study of the Las Vegas Strip, which was later published as *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972). With them, we began to study Westheimer Road. Papademetriou had previously edited *Perspecta* at Yale. He asked my good friend William C. Lukes and me to take pictures for *Houston: An Architectural Guide,* which he edited on the occasion of a national convention here in Houston for the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Look at the cover! It's a fabulous map of the city, composed of the words "Moving on Out to New Orleans from the East Texas Freeway." Peter's idea for the book originally ran into some conflict with the local chapter because, of course, they were most interested in pages that featured photographs of their projects. But Peter was interested in showing the actual city beyond individual buildings. Within the publication, the city was divided into fifteen parts. We explored together, photographing, and had such a great time! We have photos of so many things that are not here anymore. This was my introduction to photographing Houston.

ZZ Later you also became a faculty member at the University of Houston, is that correct?

PH First year out of graduate school at RISD I taught high school in Massachusetts. Then I came back to Houston and worked at the Rice Media Center as the Photography Coordinator, and I taught one summer at the University of Houston. That was when things really began to take off. I had been away four years, and Houston had changed. Pennzoil Place and other significant buildings were being constructed. Ada Louise Huxtable, the architecture critic for the *New York Times,* came to Houston and declared it the city of the second half of the twentieth century.

The next project was the *Houston Architectural Survey* (1980). Stephen Fox and Drexel Turner and others conducted the research. They wrote narrative descriptions for 251 buildings in Houston built before 1950. I photographed. This is where I learned about the city and also honed my skills in using a four-by-five camera because the editors wanted negatives in that format. The prints and research document are archived in the Houston History Research Center at the Houston Public Library. These two projects really set the pattern. There were writers, historians, and researchers collaborating on a project, and they would tell me where I would find a building. Then I would figure out the best time of the day for the sunlight.

ZZ The project you mention were all completed before the founding of *Cite*. Did they prepare the ground for your involvement in *Cite* and the Rice Design Alliance?

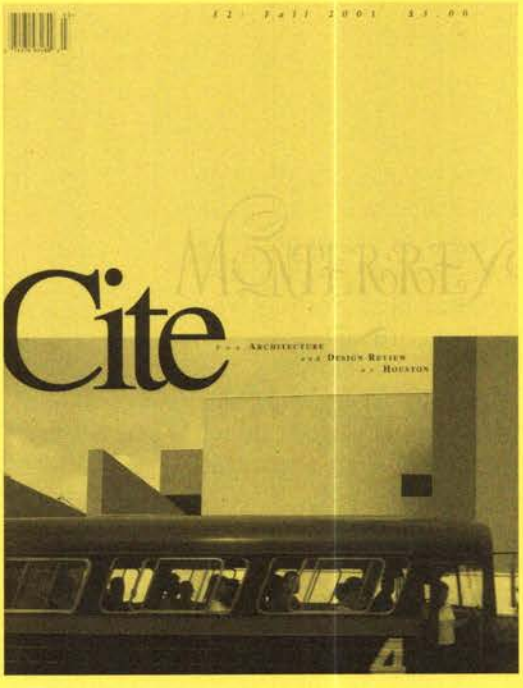
PH If you open the pages of *Houston: An Architectural Guide* and look at the staff, you will see two names there: Stephen Fox and Drexel Turner, both being interviewed for this project. I had been working on a few projects with Drexel as early as my undergraduate years. When the Rice Design Alliance started in 1972, I was

not aware of it. One day they called and asked me if I wanted to take some pictures. I had plenty of control over what I chose to take photographs of and how I could contribute to *Cite*. It was a quarterly back then, so it kept me busy and put a lot of miles on my car. Sometimes I would be working directly with an editor or writer. Other times they would commission me for particular articles. I would explore areas of the city that no one would ever go to, leaving the bubble of Rice and West University. This helped me to expand my idea of what this city truly is.

In those days, there was collaboration between Rice and the University of Houston, which has a different kind of student body—a lot of the kids still lived at home, working part-time. I think the mix was important; it led to an emphasis on the city. As *Cite* evolved, different editors would shift the direction in different ways. Lisa Simon, for example, almost turned *Cite* into a city magazine. At the time, there had been various attempts at a local magazine wanting to fill in that role, but they never really lasted very long. There just wasn't advertising support for such magazines, and as a result, *Cite* began to fill that void. It was much more about the popular culture of the city, not about architecture in the pure sense of the word. It was so much fun to photograph for *Cite* because it was very people- and city-oriented.

PD *Cite* was changing over your long run as a contributor. It started off as a black-and-white newsprint publication, then transformed into a glossier, full-color version, and now in its latest editions, it changed once more. How did you experience these changes and how did the role of photography in the magazine transition over time?

PH All of the early issues in the large newspaper format were shot with 35 millimeters, black-and-white film. I had a dark room where I developed my own film. I would give the designers contact sheets and they would mark them up. For an issue in 2001, they flew me to Monterrey, Mexico, and I took some color film just for a change, among them a color photograph of a bus that's passing Legorreta's MARCO museum. The changes in format coincided with the shift from quarterly to monthly. Even when you publish quarterly, it's hard to keep up with time—buildings are torn down, and there are always new developments. And for a yearly publication it's just not the same. When it was a newsprint, it might have appeared as a throwaway, but it wasn't. The articles were amazing. I continue to pick them up, look back and learn things that I had either not completely grasped the first time or forgotten. If you look through all the editions, the graphic artists were doing interesting things, and it got to the point where more and more they were not using photography on the cover. The documentary style of photography seemed to be less interesting. That same shift was happening in the general photography world.

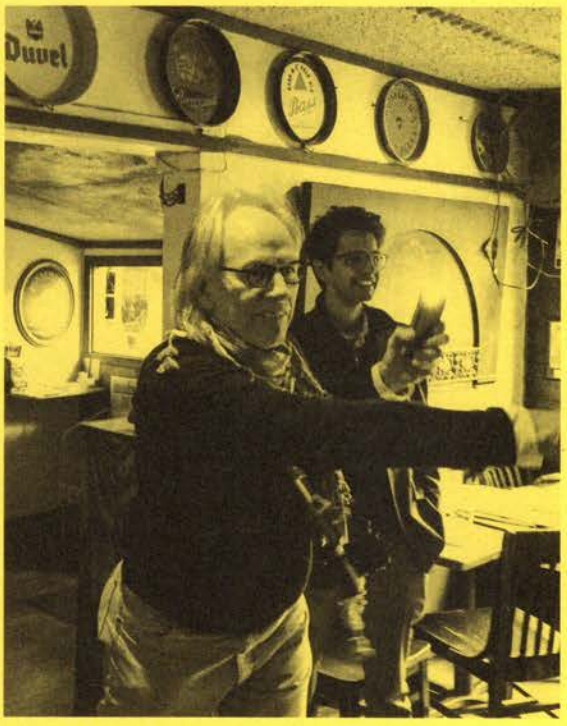


Cite 52, Fall 2001. Guest Editor: Rafael Longoria.

PD Do you perceive the changes of *Cite* to coincide with the evolution of the RDA?

PH I think so. The deanship of Sarah Whiting brought many changes to the RDA. I don't know what her thoughts were, but I do know that she severed the ties between the RDA and the University of Houston. In the beginning it was very collaborative between people from the University of Houston and Rice. The RDA had an office off campus in the River Road Shopping Center. That's where they would have editorial meetings. I think that physical distance was important. It was neutral territory between the two schools. Before the office changed to Anderson Hall it was nice: loose and free. And I think at that point the emphasis shifted toward having an academic focus instead of pop culture. For me, there wasn't as much to photograph.

ZZ Your photography marks urban transformation and creates a record of the city, and you have an interest in documenting how Houston has changed. Where does that interest come from?



Herman Dyal, guest editor and designer for *Cite* 100, and Raj Mankad, *Cite* editor, throwing darts at the Ginger Man, Houston, December 8, 2016. Photograph: Paul Hester.

PH Without photography we would forget. That's easy for me. One of my teachers at Rice, Geoff Winningham, taught us about Eugène Atget, who photographed Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He carried his eight-by-ten camera with glass plates out into the city to describe how it was changing. That really is the model for me. I've stayed in the same city long enough to see so many changes. When they tear buildings down, I like to say I remember protesting the demolition of the building before that one. There's a rapidity with which Houston reinvents itself, often without valuing what was before.

For one of the assignments in my class, I put a map of Houston on the wall, and the students had to throw a dart, and then they would have to go to that place. This was before Google street view, so they had no idea what was going to be there. When *Cite* 100 was coming up, Raj Mankad, the editor, called me and asked if we could do a version of that project, and I insisted on throwing a hundred darts. We got an eight-foot square map of Houston and went to the Ginger Man, a former pub on Morningside Drive, and spent an afternoon throwing darts. I then spent about six months driving all around Houston. It was eye-opening.

ZZ You suggested ties between the Department of Visual and Dramatic Arts at Rice and the de Menil family. Your first show staging work for the RDA, *The Elusive City* in 1998, was held at the Menil Collection. Can you tell us more?

PH Drexel Turner was working with Paul Winkler, the director of the Menil Collection. At one point they began to stage exhibitions of architectural significance. In 1993, for example, they showed, *Renzo Piano Building Workshop: Selected Projects*, which had amazing drawings that were all laid out on tables. Nothing was on the wall.

In 1972 Drexel was working on his master's degree at the University of Texas in Austin, and he would drive back and forth to Houston. He was a great fan of Robert Venturi. He commissioned Venturi to design a Habitat for Humanity house that was built. There were a couple of issues of *Cite* for which Drexel used the approach to photography Venturi employed in his book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), a book, in which the photographs are just too damn small, from my point of view. But Drexel loved vernacular architecture, and he would ask me to photograph it.

When we worked on the AIA guidebook, William Lukes and I formed a company, Vernacular Photo Works. We would go photograph grain elevators, oil pipelines, pumping stations, and other anonymous structures that were designed without architects. In 1986 Drexel commissioned me to photograph the monuments that Texas had put up in 1936. So I was driving all over the state of Texas, photographing these little statues, including the San Jacinto Monument.

Drexel also introduced me to Carlos Jiménez, and asked me to photograph his house, and thirty years later I'm still documenting that same project. Just two weeks ago he asked me to come by and photograph some changes in his studio. I like to believe we've influenced each other. He never wanted people in his photographs, and one of my pet projects was always to get people in photographs. One day we were by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston administration building he designed along

Montrose Boulevard. A woman in a red dress walked by, and I took the picture. This is now his preferred photograph.

I worked with Stephen Fox for thirteen years on a book on Birdsall Briscoe, a local Houston architect who has since passed away. We visited thirty to forty houses. Stephen has his own digital camera, he takes pictures, and some will be included in his book—but he would never take credit for them, he doesn't want to call attention to the fact that he did it. We would be on house tours, and he would very politely ask if I could take a photograph of one particular element or feature of a building. I've always learned from architects about ways to photograph, and working with Stephen teaches me to see a building in ways that are different from the way I see it.

But I also stayed in contact with people through teaching. One of the best things that happened to me was when I was invited to teach at Rice, because I had always wanted to. I enjoy teaching a lot. I miss it, and I still have dreams about it.

PD What role do you play in *Cite* now?

PH Since I retired from teaching, I haven't been doing as much architectural photography as I used to do. Consequently, I'm also not doing very much for *Cite*. About two and a half years ago Maria Nicanor, then executive director, asked me to photograph four sites—the POST, the Houston Endowment, the Ion, and the Ismaili Center—that were about to undergo significant change. And then they were going to run an article that would show what had happened to those sites a year later. This was great fun because it was exactly like what I used to do for *Cite* before. But then it didn't happen. I went on an RDA house tour because I hadn't been asked to photograph for the house tour that time. And there were a couple of houses that I wanted to see, and I realized it was more fun to go when people were there. It was kind of a party. Of course, I wasn't also trying to photograph, so I guess I'm changing too. But I'm a dues-paying member of the RDA now. I went to the annual meeting and that was terrific because I got to see Igor lead the meeting. I hope that Igor is very successful in his vision, that the school will be putting people first in all respects in terms of students and in terms of design principles, and I hope that an optimistic (and hopeful) attitude will be present in whatever the magazine does.

Paul Hester photographing for *Houston Architectural Guildebook*, 1971. Photograph: William C. Lukes.

Editorial, *Cite*, Special Issue, published in opposition to the construction of a Main Street elevated rail system proposed by MTA, November 19, 1982.

what talking

Joel Warren Barna

we still wouldn't come any- says one transit engineer.

iled by General Manager Houston this year after 10 ccessful transit authority in res of more than $1! billion

"This system will do what rapid transit does best, which is to connect residential neighborhoods with major employment centers," says Metro's Chief System Planner, John Breeding.

The train will be on two guideways, elevated over some 70 percent of its path except at its western end. In the downtown area it either will go underground down Main

EDITORIAL

On October 28 the Rice Design Alliance wrote the Mayor and City Council expressing its opinion that "neither the City Council nor the public have enough information to make an informed and binding decision on the proposed heavy rail transit system along Main Street." That letter further stated that "until such time as other alternatives are presented and studied by the Council and public, it would not be prudent to commit to any plan that will so radically affect the future of Houston." Since that time very little new information has been released by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). Therefore, on November 9 the Board of the Rice Design Alliance adopted the following motion:

The Board of the Rice Design Alliance is opposed to the construction of the 2.3-mile downtown Main Street elevated rail system proposed by MTA. It is the opinion of the Board that future proposals by MTA must address the broader issues related to a transit system of this type.

MTA has by its own description proposed the most economical and expedient method for constructing the first phase of a rapid rail system to ameliorate our transportation problems. The system responds to transportation needs, but there are other basic urban and social issues this development must also address.

cheaper to tunnel the whole thing out from below the surface, including the stations." Glass says that tunneled subway lines in Lille and Lyons demonstrate the cost and appropriateness of the technology he proposes.

How does Glass respond to charges that he is trying to drum up business for Spaw-Glass and Borie-SAE by opposing the elevated and pushing for a tunneled subway?

"That's silly. MTA will have to go out for bids on any work they do, and that takes care of any advantage for us. Of course we'll bid for a subway job, just as we will on the elevated if that's what they decide on. But we want a subway because it's the best thing for Main Street."

Architect William O. Neuhaus wonders whether MTA's figures on the difference between elevated and subway don't conceal an apples-to-oranges comparison. "On the one hand, the MTA people talk about a 2.3 mile elevated line from Buffalo Bayou to the Southwest Freeway. And to hear them talk at first, it sounds like that would be the length of the subway. But Bill Alexander says that the subway would emerge from the ground at about McGowen, which makes the actual subway line mea-

Toll Road, which Lindsay favors. More recently, however, Lindsay said he doesn't expect any conflict between the two transit schemes.

"MTA needs to finish the spine corridor, then their next priority is to add lines that will add new ridership to the system, and extending the line along Hardy to the airport is pretty much serving the same people, not adding new ones," Lindsay said. "I predict they'll take longer than they plan on the spine corridor, then they'll try and get a cross town line, so it will be 15 years or more before they get to extending the line to the airport."

Veteran transit engineering consultant, J. K. "Dixie" Howell, who has some 16 years experience in the evaluation of rapid rail transit systems, directly contradicts MTA's claim to have chosen the least expensive alternative for the downtown portion of the railway. MTA is planning to use trains that are too big and expensive, Howell asserts, with stations that are much larger than necessary, and a configuration that adds almost 50 percent to the cost of the downtown 2.3 stretch of aerial trainway.

"For my money, the best alternative is definitely elevated, not subway," Howell says. "But the most cost-

EDITORIAL

Criteria for evaluating the feasibility of any proposed system must, at a minimum, demonstrate its impact upon existing and anticipated:

1. **pedestrian circulation—sidewalks, tunnel systems**
2. **vehicular circulation—automobiles and trucking**
3. **public transit interfaces—routes and connections**
4. **offices, stores, homes and public institutions along the proposed routes**
5. **growth and development patterns in Houston.**

In presenting the physical, financial and aesthetic ramifications of their transit system proposals, MTA should clearly explain the alternatives they have considered, demonstrate their comparative advantages and disadvantages and justify their recommendations.

Our freeway system, considered capable of meeting Houston's anticipated growth and development needs when it was proposed in 1951, has become the transportation noose around Houston's neck. Given this compelling example, it is not the time for poverty of thinking. The cheapest transit system that can be built today may not be the most economical system for its anticipated 100 year life span. The most expedient construction schedule today may not serve the long term interests of Houston.

Denver

Over the past decade the Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD) has flirted with various technologies and alignments, but not until 1979 did it begin to focus on a 77 mile rail system. This would be a light rail system however, rather than heavy rail (as in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Baltimore, Miami and as proposed for Los Angeles and Houston) and would operate at grade. A network of overhead wires provides the power source to operate light rail vehicles. That is, they are updated versions of the electrified street cars that began to be introduced in American urban transit systems around 1890. A 15 mile line, the Southeast Corridor, has been designated by RTD as the initial portion of the system to be implemented. Its alignment and configuration in downtown Denver have yet to be determined. DeLeuw, Cather and Company of Chicago, the principal engineering consultant in the design of the Washington Metro, is RTD's chief consultant. In 1980 the total cost of the 77 mile system was estimated at $500 million.

Denver's most publicized transportation project has been the Transitway/Mall, a 14 block concourse on Sixteenth Street. Vehicular traffic along the Mall will be restricted to shuttle buses running in two narrow lanes

Denver: Typical section (above) and plan (below) of Sixteenth Street Mall. (Architectural Record, July 197

Barry Moore and Rafael Longoria at a *Cite* publications committee meeting, July 9, 2003. Photograph: Paul Hester.

Stephen Fox

in Conversation with Andy Entis and Tasiana Paolisso

TP You were initially trained as an architect at Rice. What motivated you to shift away from practice toward architectural history?

Home Front

HOLLY MOORE

SHOPS, SERVICES AND INFORMATION FOR THE PERSPICACIOUS HOUSTONIAN

Local Color

Rice Capades

HOUSTON HOME GARDEN

DESIGNS ON LIVING

Stephen Fox, featured in *Home and Garden* magazine, June 1981. The issue highlights his publication *The General Plan of the William M. Rice Institute*, resleased the year before.

SF There was never any difference for me between architecture and its history. As a student, I spent as much time in the library as possible, looking at bound volumes of architecture magazines to learn about the recent history of architecture. Between the second and third year of my education, Peter Papademetriou asked me to join a team he assembled to work on the American Institute of Architects' guidebook, *Houston: An Architectural Guide* (1972). Over the years, I worked with Drexel Turner and Paul Hester, both of whom came to play very big roles in the Rice Design Alliance and *Cite*. From 1977 to 1979, I worked as a research assistant for the Houston architect Howard Barnstone, who was writing a book about another Houston architect, John F. Staub, who had practiced from the mid-1920s until the mid-1960s and was still living. It was an opportunity not only to do research, but also to talk directly to the person whose work I was studying. That was a great advantage in curbing some of my more imaginative enthusiasms as a historian.

After the Barnstone book was published, I rejoined Drexel Turner, who had hatched another research project: conducting a survey of historical buildings in Houston for the Texas Historical Commission. At the end of that project in 1981, Drexel fixed me up with a Houston architect who had endowed a foundation to sponsor work in architecture—the Anchorage Foundation of Texas. So, in 1982, I became a fellow of that foundation. For forty years that has been my primary occupation. In 1987, I was asked by Tom Colbert and Jean Krchnak to teach a course on the architectural history of Houston at the University of Houston's College of Architecture. Three years later, Richard Ingersoll, who was then a professor in Rice's School of Architecture, asked me to teach the same course at Rice. My work during my career has been focused on Texas, especially Houston's architecture of the past two centuries, but also includes research on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture of the Texas-Mexico border.

AE How have you assembled such an elaborate catalog of buildings and references, in a city that doesn't keep particularly good records?

SF I began by going through newspapers, which meant perusing rolls of microfilms of the Houston newspapers to find out about buildings that had escaped people's memories. It turned out that the newspapers are a very rich source of information about buildings in Houston.

TP I wonder if you could talk about your involvement in *Cite* during its early days, as guest editor and also contributing numerous articles? How has your involvement evolved over time?

SF I first became involved with RDA when I worked for Drexel Turner between 1975 and 1977. In my experience, Drexel is the key person in defining what the Rice Design Alliance became: the lecture programs, the tours, and then eventually *Cite*. *Cite* was more of a collaborative venture, but Drexel was the force behind conceptualizing the building blocks that would define the Rice Design Alliance. Because I had knowledge of Houston architecture that other people didn't, they would ask me for information if they wanted to look at a certain theme, deciding which buildings they were going to plug in to exemplify that focus. That's how my involvement with RDA's program committee began, and that was how I was always most involved with the RDA. In 1980–81, the program committee evolved into the editorial committee for *Cite*.

Contact sheet of Stephen Fox photographed in the academic quadrangle on Rice University campus, undated.

AE You teach at both Rice and the University of Houston. How would you characterize the relationship between the two schools, and what is it like to bridge that gap?

SF Whereas UH was acutely aware of Rice's presence, students at Rice, at least when I was a student, were not so aware of UH. There have been crossovers over the years, but not always very happily.

Donald Barthelme, who was one of the first modern architects in Houston, became the first professor of architecture at the University of Houston in 1946. In 1959, Barthelme was appointed as professor of architecture at Rice. He seemed to be under the impression that he was being installed to reconfigure Rice's architecture curriculum, which Rice's architecture faculty did not appreciate. Everything ended badly. Barthelme returned to UH, where he was not welcomed with open arms either. That was an early episode of a sometimes-tense relationship between the two schools.

TP How would you describe RDA's role, negotiating between the two institutions? Has this relationship changed over time?

SF Because Drexel Turner taught at UH before he came to Rice in 1975, he had good working relationships with his UH peers. On account of their interest and participation in RDA's programs, such UH faculty as Bruce Webb and Bill Stern became involved with RDA as committee and board members. RDA felt like neutral ground. It was not necessary to declare allegiance to one institution or the other. Board and committee members from UH had as much responsibility as those from Rice, which they shared with board and committee members who were neither academics nor connected to either institution.

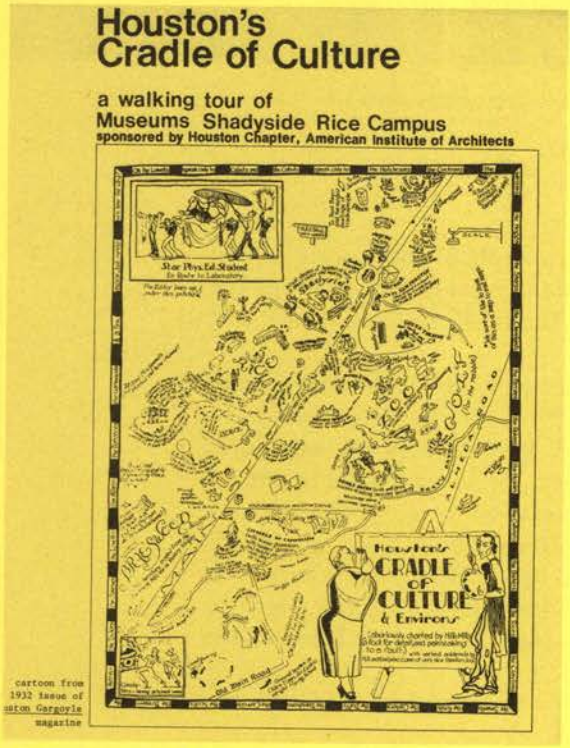
In spring 2008, RDA instituted a policy of term limits for membership on the editorial committee. After serving a certain number of terms, you had to rotate off for a period, although you could later be reelected. This did not go over well with some long-term committee members, who took it extremely personally.

That moment reignited a sense of rivalry. In 2009, Sarah Whiting became dean of architecture at Rice. She had a clear agenda for the Rice School of Architecture and questioned why Rice Design Alliance was not more closely aligned with, and under the direction of, the dean of architecture. Her authority to direct RDA was never in question. It's just that her predecessors as dean had chosen not to do so and had left the leadership of RDA to its board of directors and executive director. Because I was one of the members who rotated off the editorial committee in 2008, I was an outside observer by this point. Dean Whiting asserted control of the program committee, getting young Rice faculty to organize RDA's lecture series. In 2011, board members affiliated with UH began to resign.

TP You indicated how changing leadership around *Cite* brought unique and diverging foci to the publication, such as an interest in counter-architecture. Did you personally intend to incorporate some of those topics when you initiated *Cite*?

SF What I was interested in doing was investing *Cite* with a sense of history. That was something missing from the coverage of Houston architecture. In addition to looking at the actual landscapes of Houston and their counter-architecture, one could also make the case that architecture, landscape architecture, urbanism, and design in Houston had a history. And so, most of the initiatives with which I was involved were focused on exploring that history and its relationship to current design initiatives.

AE Can you talk about the urban context of Houston at the time of *Cite*'s creation?



Houston's Cradle of Culture, 1976.
Editors: Stephen Fox and Peter Papademetriou.

SF Forty years ago, Houston was on an upward trajectory and architecture seemed to be a field where energy, enthusiasm, and vision were highly concentrated. Buildings such as Philip Johnson's Pennzoil Place, for instance, had a tremendous impact on the awareness of architects and architectural critics. Pennzoil changed the course of high-rise building design globally. Houston was a privileged place for architecture in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the oil economy was on a steep upward incline that began with the Arab oil embargo of the mid-1970s and continued until that market collapsed in 1982.

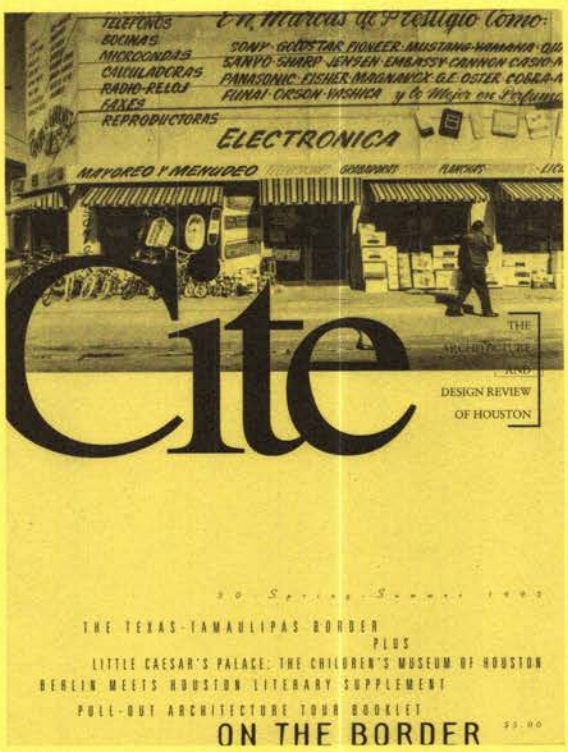
Corporations and developers engaged in adventurous architectural patronage. This extended to younger practitioners who weren't working in the corporate sector because young developers looked to Gerald D. Hines as a model for how to make their marks in the world with architecture. Such architects as Bill Stern and the partners at Taft Architects benefited from having clients who wanted something that was different and distinctive. It seemed like this was an opportune time for RDA to launch a publication.

TP Is there one issue of *Cite* that is particularly memorable for you?

SF There are many. One was *Houston in the '50s* (1984). As guest editor, it gave me an opportunity to recruit such contributors as Peter Papademetriou, John Kaliski, and Mark Alan Hewitt to look at what had been accomplished in Houston twenty-five to thirty years earlier. Many of the architects who contributed to that period were still in practice in the 1980s. It was a way of reminding readers that Houston had a significant architectural heritage that remained relevant and was continuing to be built upon. I was guest editor for *Viva San Antonio* (1986), published to

correspond with the American Institute of Architects' national conference in San Antonio. This was the first time that *Cite* did an entire issue not focused on Houston. In the early 1990s, I collaborated with Rafael Longoria on an issue titled *On the Border* (1993) that looked at the Texas-Mexico border. Another issue coedited with Rafael Longoria examined architecture and urbanism in Monterrey (2001), for which we recruited contributors living in Monterrey. We were taking *Cite* outside Houston, to other places in Texas, to the edge of the state, and beyond. At the same time, we emphasized relationships back to Houston to underscore the point that the architectural profession in Houston was not limited to what happened here, but was operating on a national, even global, scale.

TP Could you talk a bit about your involvement with the Houston tours?



Cite 30, Spring/Summer, 1993.
Guest Editors: Stephen Fox and Rafel Longoria.

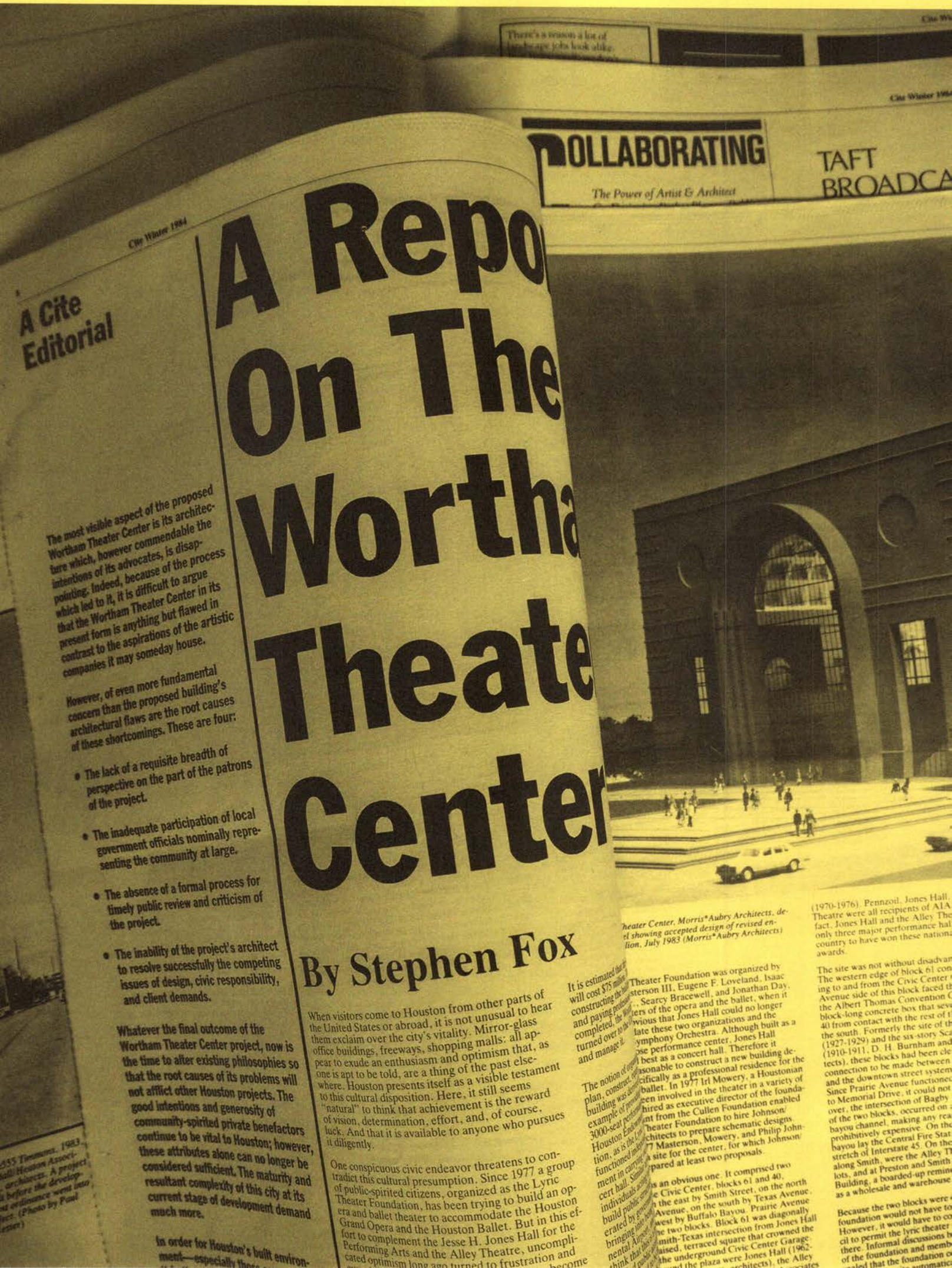
SF Again, it was Drexel Turner who, in 1977, came up with the idea of having annual architecture tours. In Houston, the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) had begun in the mid-1950s to do an annual modern house tour. It was their way of promoting modern residential architecture. By the late 1970s, AIA Houston also organized tours, which had different emphases; they were not always just of houses. By the mid-1970s the CAMH had ceased doing tours. This gave RDA the opportunity to take up that particular cultural trajectory. But rather than focus only on recent architecture, which is what the Contemporary Arts Museum had done, Drexel proposed pursuing different themes. Sometimes RDA did look at new architect-designed houses in Houston. At other times the focus was on houses in a specific neighborhood. RDA discovered that people were much more interested in visiting houses than nonresidential buildings. The tours were very important as a membership tool. They became RDA's biggest recruitment and membership renewal event.

Part of RDA's mission was to expose a broad public to different parts of Houston, to the history of architecture in Houston, and to new work by young architects. In 1978 for the second architecture tour, Jacqueline André Schmeal and Danny Samuels organized a tour called "Hidden Places," focused on obscure sites. It was so popular that RDA organized a successor tour in 1980. Tours were an enjoyable way for people to explore and experience architecture. Since I've spent much of my life in schools of architecture, I'm used to being around architecture all the time. But for people who have an interest in architecture but are not affiliated with a university, there are not necessarily many opportunities to look at architecture in a focused way. Because of the tour themes, participants were exposed to the cultural layers that exist in Houston. They could begin to see buildings in the various contexts in which architects are used to thinking about them. For the general public, this was revelation: to experience various ways to consider and think about architecture.

TP How about the international tours? Have those tours made you reflect upon Houston differently?

SF Yes. For instance, it was a revelation to go to Toronto in summer 2022 with Carlos Jiménez and RDA tour coordinator Carolyn Landen and discover that in so many ways Toronto is like Houston and then discover that in so many ways Toronto is not like Houston at all. Or to look at Austin, which is now the model city in Texas. Austin was always such a small place; it really didn't count as one of Texas' major cities even though people were very sentimental about it. Yet going on recent tours outside the state, I realized that when people look to Texas for any kind of urban initiative today, they look to Austin. From a Houston perspective, this seems weird. But it is an indication to me that Houston's leadership—including leadership in architecture—has not kept up. It is painful to see that Houston is not the city of the future that it confidently imagined itself as being when *Cite* began publication.

Architectural Criticism: *Cite*, Winter 1984, Stephen Fox on the challenges of realizing the Wortham Theater Center and Houston's lack of responsible city government and public participation.



Cite Winter 1984

A Cite Editorial

The most visible aspect of the proposed Wortham Theater Center is its architecture which, however commendable the intentions of its advocates, is disappointing. Indeed, because of the process which led to it, it is difficult to argue that the Wortham Theater Center in its present form is anything but flawed in contrast to the aspirations of the artistic companies it may someday house.

However, of even more fundamental concern than the proposed building's architectural flaws are the root causes of these shortcomings. These are four:

- The lack of a requisite breadth of perspective on the part of the patrons of the project.
- The inadequate participation of local government officials nominally representing the community at large.
- The absence of a formal process for timely public review and criticism of the project.
- The inability of the project's architect to resolve successfully the competing issues of design, civic responsibility, and client demands.

Whatever the final outcome of the Wortham Theater Center project, now is the time to after existing philosophies so that the root causes of its problems will not afflict other Houston projects. The good intentions and generosity of community-spirited private benefactors continue to be vital to Houston; however, these attributes alone can no longer be considered sufficient. The maturity and resultant complexity of this city at its current stage of development demand much more.

In order for Houston's built environment—especially these

555 Timmons, 1983. ...Houston Associates, Architects. A project ... before the development ordinance went into ... (Photo by Paul ...ester)

A Repo
On The
Wortha
Theate
Center

By Stephen Fox

When visitors come to Houston from other parts of the United States or abroad, it is not unusual to hear them exclaim over the city's vitality. Mirror-glass office buildings, freeways, shopping malls: all appear to exude an enthusiasm and optimism that, as one is apt to be told, are a thing of the past elsewhere. Houston presents itself as a visible testament to this cultural disposition. Here, it still seems "natural" to think that achievement is the reward of vision, determination, effort, and, of course, luck. And that it is available to anyone who pursues it diligently.

One conspicuous civic endeavor threatens to contradict this cultural presumption. Since 1977 a group of public-spirited citizens, organized as the Lyric Theater Foundation, has been trying to build an opera and ballet theater to accommodate the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet. But in this effort to complement the Jesse H. Jones Hall for the Performing Arts and the Alley Theatre, uncomplicated optimism long ago turned to frustration and become

...heater Center, Morris*Aubry Architects, de... showing accepted design of revised en... tion, July 1983 (Morris*Aubry Architects)

It is estimated that ... will cost $75 mill... constructing the ... and paying profess... completed, the ... turned over to the ... and manage it.

Theater Foundation was organized by ... sterson III, Eugene F. Loveland, Isaac ..., Searcy Bracewell, and Jonathan Day. ...ters of the opera and the ballet, when it ...vious that Jones Hall could no longer ...late these two organizations and the ...ymphony Orchestra. Although built as a ...se performance center, Jones Hall ... best as a concert hall. Therefore it ...asonable to construct a new building de... ...cifically as a professional residence for the ... ballet. In 1977 Irl Mowery, a Houstonian ...een involved in the theater in a variety of ... hired as executive director of the founda... ...nt from the Cullen Foundation enabled ...heater Foundation to hire Johnson/ ...chitects to prepare schematic designs. ...7 Masterson, Mowery, and Philip John... ... a site for the center, for which Johnson/ ...pared at least two proposals.

The notion of ... plan, construct, ... building was ... example of ... 3000-seat ... Houston ... tion, as is the ... functioned ... ment in ... cert hall. ... individuals ... build public ... erated by ... bringing ... nental ... think that ... ...t Public ...

...is an obvious one. It comprised two ...e Civic Center, blocks 61 and 40, ...Avenue, on the east by Smith Street, on the north ...west by Buffalo Bayou. Prairie Avenue ...he two blocks. Block 61 was diagonally ...mith-Texas intersection from Jones Hall ...aised, terraced square that crowned the ...the underground Civic Center Garage. ...d the plaza were Jones Hall (1962- ...architects), the Alley ...ociates

(1970-1976). Pennzoil, Jones Hall ... Theatre were all recipients of AIA ... fact, Jones Hall and the Alley The... only three major performance hal... country to have won these nationa... awards.

The site was not without disadvan... The western edge of block 61 con... ing to and from the Civic Center ... Avenue side of this block faced th... the Albert Thomas Convention C... block-long concrete box that sev... 40 from contact with the rest of t... the south. Formerly the site of th... (1927-1929) and the six-story Sc... (1910-1911; D. H. Burnham and ... tects), these blocks had been cle... connection to be made between ... and the downtown street system... Since Prairie Avenue functioned ... to Memorial Drive, it could not ... over, the intersection of Bagby ... of the two blocks, occurred on ... bayou channel, making any rea... prohibitively expensive. On the ... bayou lay the Central Fire Stat... stretch of Interstate 45. On the ... along Smith, were the Alley T... lots, and at Preston and Smith ... Building, a boarded-up remin... as a wholesale and warehouse ...

Because the two blocks were ... foundation would not have to ... However, it would have to co... cil to permit the lyric theater ... there. Informal discussions b... of the foundation and memb... ...ealed that the foundation ... automatic

1.) Increase individual dues to $35.00.

" Family category for $50.00.

-- "Spouses are included in all

page 2.

THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

The Rice Design Alliance was formed under the supervis
David A. Crane shortly after he came to Rice in the fa
of 1972 as the new Dean of the School of Architecture.
the same time, David also formed the Rice Center for C
Design and Research. While both organizations are par
of the University, the Rice Center is a non-profit cor
formed as an independent educational and research inst
RDA was formed within the School of Architecture to pr
a community forum for issues concerning the built and
environment. It is under the control of its Board of
which consists of elected members plus representative
the School of Architecture, Rice University and from th
College of Architecture, University of Houston.

RDA was started with a small nucleus of faculty and arc
alums, and by April of 1973, they had not only formed t
Board, started a membership, but had sponsored their fi
program on land use. From the beginning, architecture
have been active in RDA, and they still represent a ver
strong core. In the past years, membership has expande
to include a broader base of Houstonians who are not in
way connected to the University.

At the time RDA was being formed, there was a Rice Arch
Alumni Association which was semi-active. Their main r
at that thime was to collect funds for several student
especially the William Ward Watkins travelling fellowshi
This $2,000 fellowship, named in honor of the first chai
of Architecture, is given annually to a student to be us
for travel and study in Europe. As RDA gained momentum,
although not necessarily because of it, interest and mem
in RUAA declined. In 1975 the two groups merged. The R
President became an RDA Board member at which time we de
to put the alumni organization in a state of limbo until
time as an interest justifies the rebirth.

The orginal goal of RDA was to become large enough in mem
and wealthy enough from admission of public events that
would make a real impact on Houston. An amount is budget
each year to help defray the costs of the Sophomore Field
Trip and the Farish Gallery.

by a Board of Directors
the membership, upon no
or upon nomination from

2. Directors and

The Board
of at least twenty-one
detemined annually by t
the School of Architect
graduate of the School
shall be a member of th
University, one of whom
Architecture of Rice Un
shall be an undergradua
majoring in architectur

The Rice Design Alliance is an educational organization whose purpose is to stimulate greater public awareness of the man-made and nautral environments. By sponsoring lectures, seminars, symposia, exhibits and tours RDA seeks to involve the general public in issues related to the design of public spaces, parks, offices, shopping centers, residential areas and private homes. The organization attempts to create a public forum that stimulates discussion involvement and cooperation between the many groups of citizens who are able to improve the quality of life within Houston and Harris County.

RDA was founded by the faculty and alumni of the Rice Shcool of Architecture, and the School remains its major supporter. At the present time, RDA has a Board of Directors composed of more than thirty community leaders from various fields of endeavor as well as the Dean and two students from the Rice School of Architecture and two students from the University of Houston College of Architecture. The organization continually seeks to strengthen the ties between the business community and those trained in the various fields of architecture. This is accomplished through the Board of Directors, through programs, through the publication of Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston, and through the cooperation with other institutions such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

General funding comes from memberships purchased by individuals, firms and foundations. RDA also asks corporations and public funding agencies to support some of its seminars, lecture series and publications.

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE PROGRAMS

LECTURES
Modern Architecture: An Introduction, Spring, 1975
Exterior Spaces: Some Issues, Spring, 1976
American Architectural Heritage, Fall, 1976
A New Wave of European Architecture, Spring, 1977
Great American Neighborhoods, Spring, 1978
Urban Design/A New Civic Art, Winter, 1979
The Interior Landscape, Spring, 1979
The House in America, Fall, 1979
The Architecture of Sixteenth Century Italy, Winter
Our Envrionment in the Eighties, Spring, 1980
Inside/Outside: The Architecture of Interiors, Spri
British Architecture Since 1600, Fall, 1980
Building for Best Products, Winter, 1980
Philip Johnson: A Three Decade Retrospective, Sprin
Currents: Interiors for the Eighties, Spring, 1981
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Herman Ellis Dyal

in Conversation with Reto Geiser

RG You have been elected a Fellow of both the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), which is notable, if not unprecedented. Can you tell me more about your journey between architecture and graphic design?

On April 9, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson joined 47,878 fans for the opening of Harris County Domed Stadium—the Astrodome.

HED I was coming of age in the Houston suburb Spring Branch in the 1960s, and, like many kids of my generation, I was drawn to the graphic design of album covers and magazines. My only real exposure to architecture as a kid was the newly opened Astrodome, where I witnessed Mickey Mantle hit the first home run in the stadium in April, 1965, during an exhibition game between the Astros and the Yankees. Several years later, I was exposed to an architectural model of the Philip Johnson-designed University of St. Thomas in the home of my high school girlfriend, whose father was on the UST board of trustees. I couldn't have imagined then that a decade or so later I'd have the opportunity to work for Mr. Johnson. When I went off to college in 1968 at the University of Texas at Austin, I entered the architecture program and immediately felt at home. Architecture gave me the academic focus I had lacked, and through the work of Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, collectives like Archigram and Ant Farm, and artists like Ed Ruscha, I was introduced to graphic expressions in architecture.

My first job out of school was with Caudill Rowlett Scott (CRS), which was one of the first architecture firms that included a serious graphic design group, which I would join. After receiving my graduate degree in architecture from Tulane, I spent four years at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) back when they had a Houston office and were designing high-rises. The work was conventional architecture, but when the occasional graphic design opportunity would come through the office, I would usually raise my hand and get involved. Graphic design continued to be an interest, although I wasn't formally educated in it. I eventually had the opportunity to go to New York and work for Johnson/Burgee, and I spent a short period of time there before coming back to Houston. The Rice Design Alliance (RDA) was very active at that point and friends Stephen Fox, Drexel Turner, and Bill Stern pulled me in as *Cite* was established. Along the way, I was developing graphic design interests and capabilities, and I reached a point where I had to decide if this is what I really wanted to do. At first, after coming from the world of serious architecture, it felt a little like slumming, but I came to accept that it's where my true passion lies.

RG What was Houston like when you came back after your studies? How would you describe the graphic design and architecture culture at the time?

HED Houston was booming. And I think it was soon after Ada Louise Huxtable had written a well-known column in the *New York Times*, in which she suggested that the future looks like Houston. I was living in New York at the time and thought... hell... I'm *from* Houston, what am I doing up here? Johnson/Burgee and SOM, the firms I worked for, were doing so much work in Houston. The city was on the map. Interesting things were going on; it was the place to be.

RG You suggest that the architecture scene was bustling at the time. How would you characterize the graphic design community at that moment?

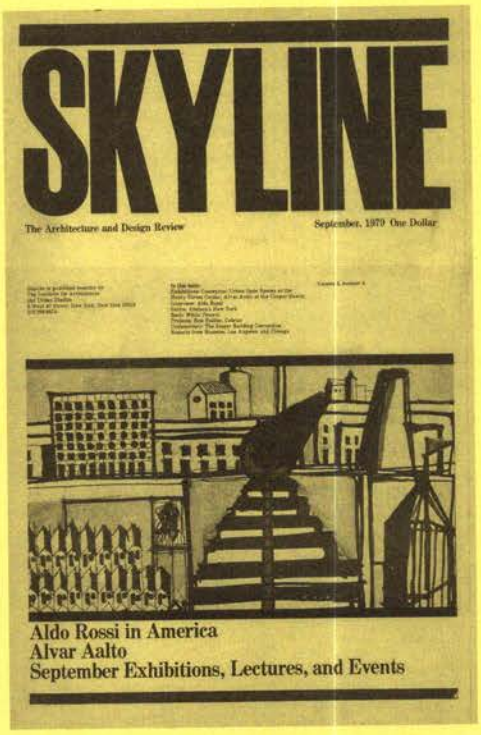
HED Even though I was doing a lot of graphic design work, I wasn't really part of the graphic design community and still self-identified with the architecture crowd. There were some exceptional photographers and designers in Houston at the

time. Jerry Herring comes to mind. Also Lowell Williams, who later established the Pentagram Austin office, and Woody Pirtle, a Dallas designer, who had great influence in the Houston market and who also ended up at Pentagram. While good work was being done in Houston in that realm, graphic design tended to be stronger in Dallas at the time, which had to do with the presence of the Richards Group—a very influential advertising agency—along with retailers such as Neiman Marcus that were driving a lot of high-end work.

RG You designed the first issue of *Cite* in 1982. Could you elaborate how that commission came about?

HED At the time, RDA and particularly *Cite* were a bit of a guerrilla operation. I certainly didn't know what I was getting into and couldn't have even imagined that it would become such a venerable and respected institution. We were just doing interesting stuff and work we thought was important. I was already designing posters for the RDA lecture series when *Cite* started to take shape. When we began to consider what form it would take and who would do what, I stated that I knew how to set type and that I could handle design and production and that I would love to do it. That's how I remember it anyway; it felt very casual.

RG The original design of *Cite*, in its newsprint format, but also typographically, has a strong reminiscence of Massimo Vignelli's design of *Skyline* for the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS).



Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, *Skyline: The Architecture and Design Review*, September 1979.

HED I'm self-educated in graphic design, and as I found my way, Vignelli became a big and important figure to me. I was well aware of his work, including *Skyline*, as well as other relevant publications, such as *Metropolis*. The tabloid format seemed appropriate for the editorial content we were thinking about for *Cite*. I tried to keep it simple, but not as rigid as a prototypical Vignelli design. It was much more casual. I particularly liked the name *Cite* graphically. Four letters, including that giant "C," all set in Times Roman, probably one of the few typefaces I knew at the time.

There were several other name possibilities considered before we settled on *Cite*. I can't remember who exactly came up with all this, but someone suggested *Sprawl*, which seemed perfect for Houston, but that was judged as a little bit too snarky and cynical. Someone else suggested *Radar*. RDA, put a few letters in there and you've got *Radar*. I just detested it. But given its support, I realized that if we couldn't come up with something else, it would be *Radar*. Again, I really hated it, and I was highly motivated to come up with something better. I eventually came up with *Cite* and the different readings of it as *Cité* or *Site*. But I was not the one who then came up with all the witty and wonderful variations and headings, like *ForeCite*, *HindCite*, *Cite Seeing*, *OverCite*, *Citelines*, *Citespecific*, etc., that continued to be used long after my involvement. That was probably Drexel Turner or maybe Stephen Fox. I'm not sure. So we settled on *Cite* and looking back on it, I think it was a good decision.

RG Did you overlap with the Institute's activities during your time at Johnson/Burgee? Do you think the IAUS was a reference or potential influence on the RDA as an organization, beyond *Cite*?

HED Yes, I went to some lectures. And I was interested in their publications, *Oppositions*, for example, which, like *Cite*, also has multiple readings of its title. I'm sure the Institute had an influence on a number of people. I don't know that I thought about it consciously at the time, but I'm sure that was in our minds.

RG From today's perspective it seems like the RDA back in the 1970s was a loose band of young architects and designers who really wanted to learn more about Houston and to overcome the prevalent lack of critical engagement with this different type of urban conglomerate in the making or also the major lack of architectural criticism. Can you elaborate?

HED There was a recognition that the AIA Houston was not in a position to be critical of its own. Those of us who were involved in *Cite* at the time could criticize a development or a building that the AIA likely couldn't for institutional/political reasons. I previously referred to RDA as kind of a guerrilla operation, and I think that was part of it. Early on, when there was no gala honoring someone, it was possible to say what you really thought. We were independent, in a corner of the building and did whatever we wanted to do. There was no heavy hand coming over from Rice University or the School of Architecture. At least I never felt it or had to deal with it. Perhaps others did. Once those layers were introduced, the organization became more institutional, part of the establishment.

RG *Cite* was critical, timely, and direct at the time, which manifests itself particularly in the first few issues you designed.

HED Yes, there was an editorial and design freedom that was declared in that first issue, on which we prominently placed a manhole cover. In the same issue there was an interview with Cesar Pelli, who was working on numerous large commissions in Houston at the time. The general expectation was that this exclusive interview would be the cover story. But then there was also Bill Neuhaus' very timely story on development issues in the city. It was an important piece, and I glommed onto it. While I was intrigued with the story's graphic potential—it seemed to declare that *Cite* was going to be different, unafraid to speak up on things that truly mattered. Of course, we could have put a Pelli project on the cover. That would have been the more obvious thing to do, given his fame. But we took it in a different direction. We were claiming to be this serious architecture and design review of Houston, as anchored in the subtitle, and I think editorial and graphic treatment of the first issue signaled that.

RG This cheekiness, humor, and at times irony seem to have been an integral part of early *Cite*, editorially, but it's also reflected graphically.

HED This is maybe best illustrated by the introduction of a gossip column in an otherwise serious architecture publication. Maxine Messenger was a celebrity gossip columnist for the *Houston Chronicle*, covering the lives of the wealthy and social class in Houston. And someone proposed that we play on that in *Cite*. Messenger's column was called *Big City Beat,* and so we just riffed on that and adapted it to *Big Cité Beat*. We had our own gossip column and could talk about how hotshot architect so-and-so was driving around town in his new Porsche 911. I am not sure how long that lasted, but I love the spirit and ridiculousness of it. This was a serious publication, and yet there was room to be cheeky.

RG What audience did *Cite* target?

HED There was an editorial committee with serious people on it. We asked exactly this question: what are we going to be? The answer was clear: the architecture and design review of Houston. Whoever is interested in architecture and design was our audience. We were not particularly strategic. I don't remember how it was distributed back then, but it was available at newsstands, back when newsstands still existed.

RG Can you describe the reception of the first issue of *Cite*?

HED I think people responded well to *Cite*. At least I hope they did. Also, back then there were the home tours and the lecture series, which took place at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Most of the speakers were amazing, which is a testament to the people who were really driving the RDA back then: Drexel Turner, Stephen Fox, Bill Neuhaus, Bill Stern, Bruce Webb, and many others. I think all these activities went hand-in-hand with *Cite*. I think it's also important to mention issue number two, which was published almost immediately after the first one. There was an immediacy to *Cite* at the time, and it was packed with fearless criticism. The second issue was solely dedicated to transit because there was an MTA plan that had been promoted for the

Cite 1, August, 1982; *Cite* 5, Winter, 1984; *Cite* 6, Spring-Summer, 1984; *Cite* 100, Summer, 2017. All issues designed by Herman Dyal. For the anniversary issue in 2017 he also served as guest editor.

city. We realized that this was about to happen, and alarm bells went off amongst the editorial committee. We felt energized to do something about it and decided to quickly put together a special issue. Because it was conceived, written, and published so quickly, it varies a bit in format. It's a little smaller and printed on very cheap newsprint.

RG The first five issues of *Cite* reflect your graphic approach, and then, around 1984, the design and along with it your credit changed. Can you tell me more about this shift from graphic designer to design director?

HED As you know, designing and producing *Cite* is time consuming, and I was trying to establish my own practice at the time. Lorraine Wild, who was the designer after me, was a collaborator in my little firm for a while, and she was way more talented than me. She took over and I think designed more issues than me.

RG Photography is a thread that consistently runs through *Cite*. As a visual form of argumentation, it was often treated equal to the word. As a gifted photographer yourself, can you tell me more about this and your collaborations with Paul Hester early on and also more recently?

HED Paul was there from the very beginning. I would, from time to time, exchange ideas with him and review things. And then we closely collaborated much later, for *Cite* 100, which is centered primarily on Paul's photography. It was great fun working with Raj Mankad, the editor of *Cite*, Paul, and others. Paul's photographs were taken just before Hurricane Harvey. In fact, as we were going to press, I added a little blurb next to my guest column to put the photos into this context.

RG How would you describe the development of the publication over the forty years of its existence—not just as its designer, but also as an observer of the period in between your first issues and the guest edited anniversary issue in 2017?

HED It's important to point out that I moved to Austin in 1986. So while I kept an eye on *Cite* to some extent, I didn't see it continually, but to the extent that I have, *Cite* seems to have remained true to its stated mission. With regard to its art direction, as with any publication, I think it's gone up and down some, but there have been periods when it was certainly better than anything I was able to produce at the time. It's remarkable that it has lasted this long, but that's a testament to the strength and clarity of its mission, and the people who have honored that over the years. I don't think any of us at the time could have imagined its longevity. I'm proud of what we were able to do and what it has become, and I hope there will be some young voices who will pick up from here and ask all the hard questions, while making good trouble.

Cite, covers designed by Herman Ellis Dyal, 1982–1984.

Miscellaneous photographs, prints and slides, ca. 1990 to 2005, collected in an envelope stamped by Minor Design Group, graphic designers for *Cite* over many years.

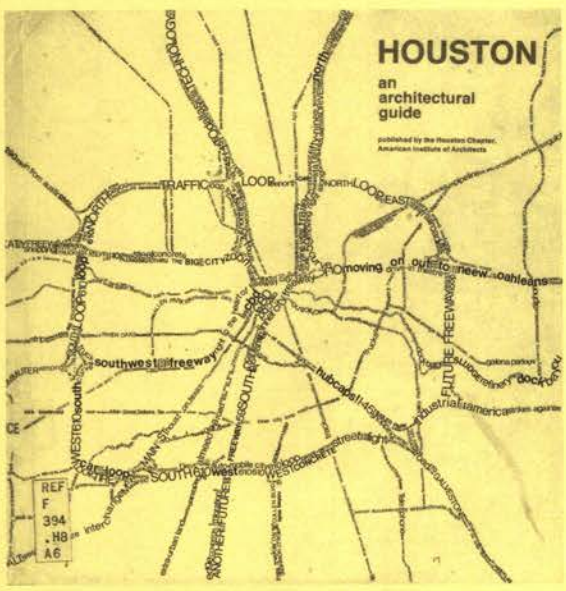
Drexel Turner

in Conversation with Christian Ayala-Lopez and Marlena Fleck

MF What drew you to Houston's architectural scene after graduating from University of Texas at Austin with a master's degree in urban and regional planning?

DT At the time, Alan Taniguchi, the former dean of architecture at UT, had come to Rice when David Crane was named dean. (Before, while I was at UT, Alan had helped me get a scholarship to go on a Society of Architectural Historians study tour in the Northeast. That tour, led by historian William Jordy at Brown University, was extraordinarily well-produced and eye-opening.) I had also previously been in touch with Barry Moore, a Houston architect and Rice alumnus, and at one point he suggested I talk to Peter Papademetriou, who was doing a guidebook about Houston architecture. I talked with Peter, and he invited me to join the crew alongside Stephen Fox, Paul Hester, Deborah Poodry, and Bill Lukes. It was a very enjoyable experience as I had always been interested in architecture as well as city planning, so there were many things for me to learn. I never took a course from Peter, but I consider myself his pupil.

MF Can you expand on Peter Papademetriou's goals and influences for the *Houston: An Architectural Guide*?



Peter C. Papademetriou, *Houston: An Architectural Guide* (1972).

DT Peter wanted to replicate the format of the *Guidebook to Boston Architecture*. That was a very straitlaced kind of thing that had been realized in 1970 on the occasion of another AIA convention. Peter tried to sneak in as much content as he could that was essentially cultural and topographical, showing the city just as it was. He had a perspective on things that was more inclusive, a lot more focused on things as they are and not as people perhaps wish they were. He had gone to Princeton as an undergraduate and to Yale as a graduate student where he was the editor of *Perspecta*. Peter was connected with an amazing array of people, including Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. I remember seeing the titles he listed in his syllabus at the time, including books like *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750–1950* by Peter Collins. He first turned me on to "The Missing Motel: Unrecognized American Architecture," an essay by Reyner Banham that had been reprinted in *Landscape* by J. B. Jackson. All of this is to say that Peter took a very broad view of things. He had a sense of humor. In 1970, he cowrote an article in *Architectural Design* with Peter G. Rowe called "The Pope and the Judge," in which they compared the Astrodome and all its trappings to the Vatican. I think the Vatican was smaller to begin with, but that was the kind of sensibility he had.

The guidebook project was over in time for the AIA convention, and Peter walked a very tight rope in doing that. The AIA was looking for something that would validate the profession and show the city through rose-colored glasses, and Peter was looking at it in a much broader way. The guidebook included lots of vernacular stuff, and Paul Hester did a great job capturing that visually along with Bill Lukes. Paul has been in Houston forever and if there's anyone who has served as the Eugène Atget of Houston over fifty years in photographs, architecturally and otherwise, it would be Paul. He's an incredible resource.

MF Did similar conversations with this broader perspective on the profession happen at Rice at the time?

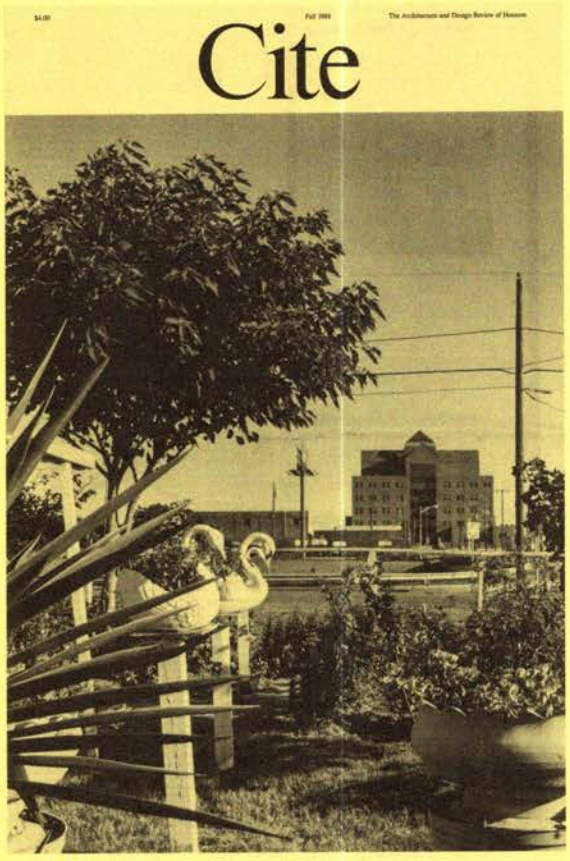
DT The closest thing would be the Cullinan Professorship at Rice, which was a visiting position. The school brought in Colin Rowe, Robert Irwin, J. B. Jackson, Spiro Kostof, and Kenneth Frampton, among others. At the time, these invitations were extended under the auspices of Jack Mitchell, who was dean of the School of Architecture while I worked at Rice and who envisioned the Cullinan Professorship as having a public lecture

component that would emulate the Norton lectures at Harvard to some extent, including a publication. They were not always fixated on capital "A" architecture—a virtue I associate with Papademetriou, Jackson, and Mitchell.

CA What influenced you all to form a group that led to the beginning of the Rice Design Alliance?

DT I stayed in touch with Peter Papademetriou and started looking at the possibility of establishing a civic advocacy group focused on planning and architecture. It would combine aspects of the Architectural League of New York and the Municipal Art Society of New York. Once upon a time in Houston, there was something called the Forum of Civics that the lawyer and businessman Will Hogg had established in the 1920s (he died in 1940), although the organization had waned during the Depression. Our project was to engender a similar organization; we were able to get some initial funding from Nina Cullinan, who was a benefactor of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. This allowed us to explore the feasibility of our own version, following in Hogg's footsteps more or less.

CA Can you speak to the vision of David Crane, who was the dean of the School of Architecture at Rice when the RDA was founded?



Cite 21, Fall 1988.
Chair of the Editorial Committee: Drexel Turner.

DT David Crane is someone whom Denise Scott Brown repeatedly acknowledges as her mentor when she was a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. If Denise Scott Brown thinks there's something to you, then there's probably something to you. Crane came and he had real ambitions for the school. He was the first person to be dean of the School of Architecture instead of a director.

Crane, the son of missionaries in the Belgian Congo, was a very serious, earnest person and had a bigger vision of things. The School of Architecture was essentially a department as opposed to a school. I don't even know if there was a graduate program at that point or not, but, if so, it was teeny tiny. Well, it's still relatively small-scale. David was inspired by community forums that took place at Boston College. At the same time, he established a sort of clinical practice arm of the school, focused on urban design and planning, which was the Rice Center (a forerunner, separated by several decades, of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research), the Rice Design Alliance, and two community development advocacy organizations, one for downtown (Central Houston, Inc.) and another for the Galleria area (Uptown Houston Association). They are effectively sort of mini chambers of commerce that may end up having been the most consequential thing that David Crane did. There was also a South Main Center Association that eventually died because of the Texas Medical Center, an overpowering player in that particular area.

CA What was your role in the RDA in those early years?

DT I worked on a lot of the program development for the RDA; we also shared speakers with the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York. Together with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, we held joint lectures at the Brown Auditorium designed by Mies van der Rohe. Sometimes we hosted smaller events, but even those resonated across the city. The level of discourse was elevated but also accessible at the same time.

CA Is there a significant figure in *Cite* that has made an impact on Houston's architectural discourse?

DT Stephen Fox wrote about the Menil Collection project in *Cite*, and Reyner Banham later quoted that text in his review of the building. The community was concerned the building would be too unmonumental, and Stephen concluded the Menil

both was and wasn't. None of these conversations could have been sustainable without Stephen Fox, who is God's gift to architectural culture in Houston. I first met Stephen when we were working on the AIA guidebook, and I've been in constant communication with him ever since. I've learned a lot from Stephen. Much of what the RDA did, in its best moments, was an inspired collaboration of committed people. Dallas now has an architectural forum, modeled after the Rice Design Alliance. I don't know if that's a good thing or not, but imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

MF Did you think at the time that *Cite* was a platform for criticism?

DT *Cite* is a horrible place for criticism because you can't tell it like it is because there are built-in conflicts with the professional community and supporters of Rice and so on. When Peter Papademetriou left, *Cite* got more and more watered down intellectually—he had to fight tooth and nail to get *Cite* to print an interview he did with Tom Wolfe, which offended the sensibilities of someone on the editorial board. At the end of the day, criticism is not really going to change things. People are going to do what they want to do regardless. After all, taste is taste. I would like it to be possible for nice things to happen at a level beyond just basic common sense or enlightened planning. In practice, that only gets you so far.

CA But you did write, in praise and criticism, covering the Rice Media Center and Fondren Library in *Cite*, correct?

Barnstone & Aubry, Rice Art Museum (also known as the Art Barn), Rice University, 1972. Photograph: Paul Hester.

DT The best buildings on Rice campus since the Second World War were the Rice Museum (also known as the Art Barn) and the Rice Media Center built with Menil patronage and designed by Howard Barnstone and Eugene Aubry. It was an ingenious, wonderful complex. They were meant to be temporary, but stayed quite a while and had more spirit, more snap than anything since.

And then there is the story of Fondren Library. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown proposed a scheme for it, but it was too hard to understand for Rice. Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott, who had designed and built numerous libraries and library additions elsewhere—including the new front and south wing of the M. D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston—proposed a generic mini-dome on top of Fondren. Venturi instead suggested a screen and a considerable addition to the rear modeled after the firm's addition for the Frist Campus Center at Princeton. Unsurprisingly, neither came to pass though the firm had done similar library projects at Dartmouth and Bard. While one of the assistants to the president insisted that Venturi's proposal was ugly, I thought it was sophisticated. You can't win for losing. The whole history of architectural patronage is just a series of occasionally happy convergences, and we were trying to cultivate something of the kind. (Rice, by the way, had rejected a Menil-sponsored art and architecture complex by Louis I. Kahn in the late 1960s.) Architecture, Venturi said, is a very fragile medium, and it just will break your heart in lots and lots of ways. But he also believed in being pragmatic, and one of Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates' most admired buildings, the original Children's Museum of Houston (1989–92, realized in association with Jeffrey Ryan, a former colleague from the firm's early days), is just that and brilliantly, playfully so.

CA What was the relationship between the Menil Collection and the Rice Design Alliance at that time you were involved?

DT There was no real connection per se. When I was overseeing the Farish Gallery at Rice, we would occasionally borrow objects from the Menil. I had also been involved with the Menils when they ran the Rice Museum. We installed an Alvar Aalto show that came from the Cooper Hewitt Museum. We presented a Marcel Breuer show in Farish Gallery with some furniture that came from the Museum of Modern Art, and I asked Dominique de Menil if we could borrow a work by Wassily Kandinsky to

complete a Bauhaus mise-en-scène. She agreed, which I did not expect. So we had a Kandinsky, a real easel painting, in the gallery for a couple of months. We were hoping that the alarm system would actually work in case it needed to. The Menil has extraordinary resources and continued sharing them with Rice—the Alice Pratt Brown Art and Architecture Library in Fondren has since also benefited from Menil loans.

CA Was the RDA trying to engender the kind of civic engagement in the 1970s and 1980s that the Architectural League of New York had pioneered earlier?

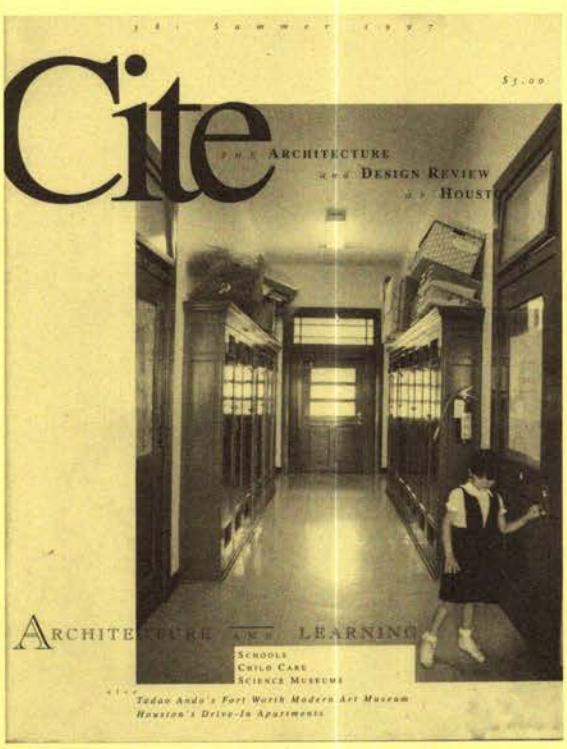
DT I think we definitely were. One of the first programs we organized through RDA, with the help of Juanita McGinty and Terry Hershey, was to engage the US Army Corps of Engineers, the city, and the county, in an effort to extend the work that was just beginning to show results on the stretch of Buffalo Bayou west of downtown, which Terry and others had saved from becoming a concrete ditch just in the nick of time. It was an uphill battle to scale it up and, in fact, it took decades. But today, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership functions, with timely and sustained backing from the Kinder family, as a long, narrow equivalent—extending both west and east of downtown—of the community development organizations David Crane helped seed. Somewhere, he must be smiling.

CA Was hosting the competition for Hermann Park a way to potentially generate interest and fresh ideas into public spaces?

DT The competition for Hermann Park was problematic, as most competitions are. I think it produced a very unimaginative plan and the results seem banal and underperforming in effect. It's not a destination, it's timid compared to the Gerald D. Hines Waterwall Park near the Galleria or the Fort Worth Water Gardens. The Japanese Garden, which predates the competition, happens to be in exactly the wrong place. It cuts off an allée into the park that should have been kept open.

MF Why do you think these competitions were unsuccessful?

DT RDA could never undertake active advocacy or engagement from a position of real strength, regardless of the consequences, with the amazing exception of the campaign that ensued as the result of a *Cite* editorial I wrote. It challenged the double decking of the Southwest Freeway through Montrose, which led to the formation of a community group, SWAP (Southwest Freeway Alternative Project), a RDA-sponsored teach-in at the University of St. Thomas, and persistent and well-targeted process of engagement with TXDoT, which resulted in actually depressing the new roadway. But that was the exception that proves the rule. My hope all along had been for the RDA to eventually become the Houston Design Alliance and not be inhibited by its connection to Rice, so it could engage more forthrightly rather than obliquely. Bruce Webb, who was teaching at the University of Houston and a frequent contributor to *Cite*, was always advocating for broadening it, making it a Houston-wide entity rather than a Rice organization. That never went anywhere, and I had made the same point myself. It was delicate because I worked for Rice for much of the time. Part of the dynamic was people on the board liked the Rice identity, the cachet. They liked being able to go to the faculty club and feel they were part of the organization. I'll also say that even if the RDA were independent, it would still face long odds to promote change. Consciousness-raising can only get you so far—just as there's no substitute for enlightened patronage, you also need the resources, expertise, and influence to challenge the status quo.



Cite 38, Summer 1997.
Guest Editor: Drexel Turner.

Publications addressing issues of Houston's water and park infrastructure.

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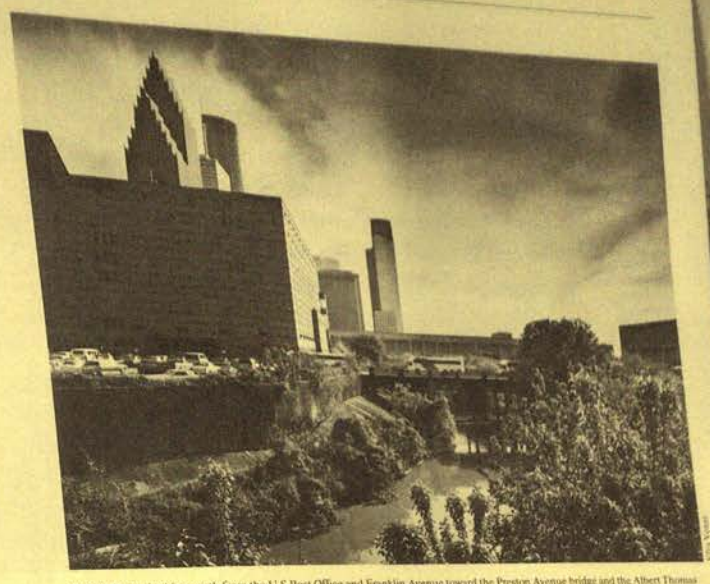
Views From Nowhere



Buffalo Bayou looking south from the U.S Post Office and Franklin Avenue toward the Preston Avenue bridge and the Albert Thomas Convention Center. On the left is the Wortham Theater Center; on the far right, the Central Fire Station. The elevated section of I-45 lies out of view just beyond the fire station.

A Bend In the Bayou

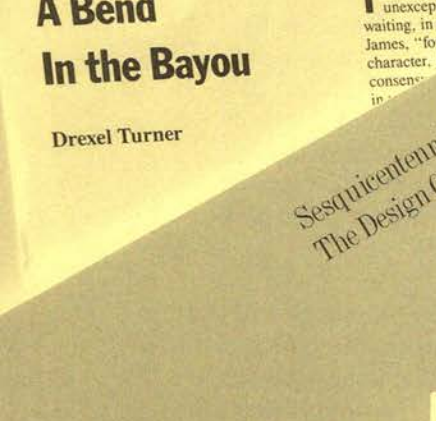
Drexel Turner

The prospects of American cities are unexceptional by and large; they seem waiting, in the formulatic lenry James, "for life, for erest, for character, for select consens uch in me by

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston to Rice and Hermann Park, a product of Houston's brief, more conventional encounter with the City Beautiful movement. But in Rowe's estimation, "while from high up, with towers seen above trees, Houston may occasionally look like a romantic fragment of the *ville radieuse*, as one descends to earth, apart from the Rice campus and certain adjacencies, there is little but visual misery to be experienced."[3]

Philip Johnson, whose acquaintance with Houston goes back to the late 1940s, has marked the city's lack of "urban space" d proposed looking for even 15 acres ntown with which to make some.[4] on's proposition may seem quaint, ental, even disjointed, but it also curiously pragmatic for a city conformance with the paradigm, "people ride to want to walk," assuming such be found at all.[5] Indeed, one ohnson's own vest-pocket

The problem of gaining enough space in the right place would involve urban reparations on a scale the city has yet to attempt or even contemplate, although Richard Keating suggested something like it in the context of the Sesquicentennial observance. The land is actually there for the taking if one could only peel back the elevated portion of I-45 that overbears the west edge of downtown and the bayou and which chiefly serves, at that margin, to pass traffic by, rather than into and out of, downtown. This removal ideally also might encompass the causeway-like approaches to Memorial Drive, the Coliseum annex, the west end of the Albert Thomas Convention Center, Bagby Street north of Capitol Avenue, and Franklin Avenue in front of the U.S. Post Office. It might incorporate certain adjoining tracts as well, especially that of the sprawling, faceless central post office which squanders the northwest corner of the bend in the bayou. So cleared and assembled, the resulting acreage would provide an ample, largely unimpaired corridor from which to begin to foster the ablance of a more agreeable city on

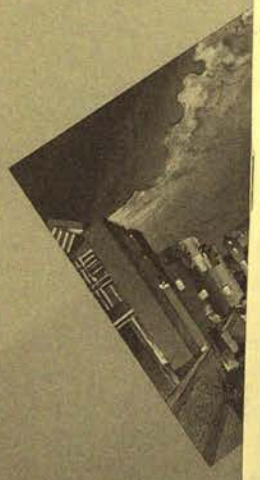


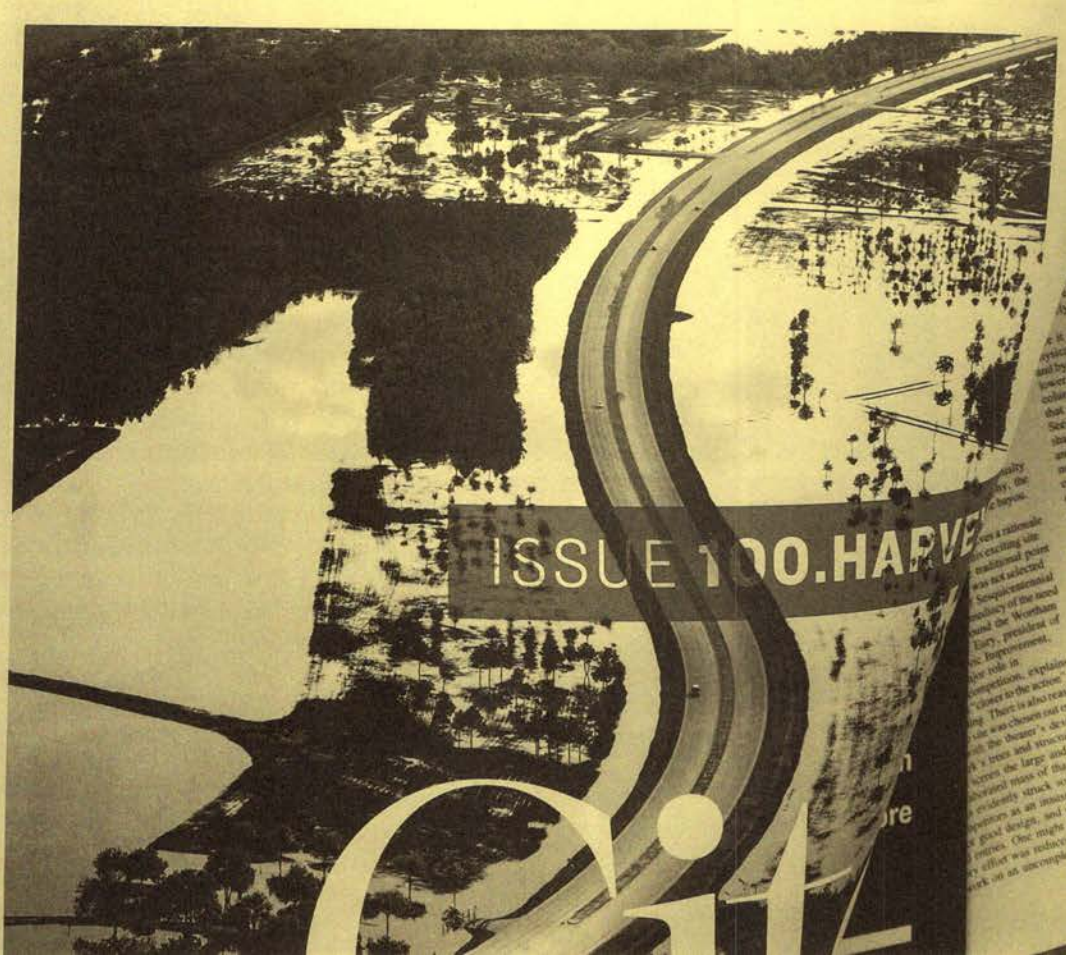
Bicentennial Plinth

View looking southeast toward island

The Houston Sesq
Park Design Com

John Pastier





PRESIDENTS OF RDA

1973-74	O. E. Peck Drennan
1974-75	Juanita Jones McGinty
1975-76	J. Kurth Brown
1976-77	Drexel Turner
1977-78	Mary K. Lynch
1978-79	Peter C. Papademetriou
1979-80	Frank C. Smith, Jr.
1980-81	Karl Laurence Kilian
1981-82	Anne S. Bohnn
1982-83	W. O. Neuhaus, III
1983-84	William F. Stern
1984-85	W. James Murdaugh
1985-86	Raymond Brochstein
86-87	Andy Rudnick / Frank Douglas
87-88	Elizabeth Blossom
88-89	Doug Harbour
89-90	Eric Anderson
90-91	Bill Bostwick
91-92	Jay Baker
92-93	Leslie Davidson
93-94	Barrie Scardino
94-95	Charles Maynard
95-96	James Anderson
96-97	Karen Boyer
97-98	

Ted Richardson

HISTORY, PURPOSE, PREV. DESIGN PRES.

Gordon Wittenberg *in Conversation with Gabriel Gomes Raymundo and Peter Lin*

PL You were the editor of the very first issue of *Cite* in 1982. Could you tell us about your first involvement with Rice Design Alliance?

GW The RDA was always looking for board members. As a new faculty member, I was asked by the dean if I wanted to be on the RDA board. Peter Rowe was a good friend of mine—he later went on to Harvard—and he was part of the organization from the beginning, so I thought it would be an interesting thing to do. I knew it had started as an urban design think tank, complete with corporate offices in a Greenway Plaza high rise, but by the time I was involved, it had moved back into the school and seemed to have become more of a social arm of the School of Architecture with the purpose of raising funds and increasing public awareness of design issues in the city. There were no publications.

GG Could you describe how *Cite* came to be from your perspective? What was Houston like at the time?

Cite

It is traditional to introduce a new publication with a statement of purpose. *Cite* is the first ongoing publication of The Rice Design Alliance. Its goals are very much those behind the establishment of the organization itself. The RDA was formed in 1972 as a community outreach organization of the School of Architecture at Rice. The purpose of the organization was and is to provide a public forum for the presentation and discussion of design ideas at both the architectural and urban scale. The RDA has over 500 members including architects, designers, planners, and other representatives of the building industry. The largest single group of members is, however, individuals not associated with the design professions. This group has been active in informing themselves and other members of the general public about urban design and architectural issues, especially those inherent in the development of the Houston area. The real hallmark of the RDA has been this unique alliance between individuals of different background, interested in understanding and improving the social and visual aspects of the environment.

Throughout the past ten years the RDA has sponsored a number of lecturers, forums, tours, and exhibits. Many well-known historians, architects and designers have participated in these series including Robert Venturi, Michael Graves, Ian McHarg, William Jordy, Colin Rowe, Robert Stern, Paul Goldberger and others. The lecture series have been especially successful at providing images of current and historical trends in urban design, architecture, and landscape design that may be appropriate to the Houston environment. Few of these, however, have focused specifically on the problems and possibilities inherent in Houston's own growth. Consequently, in addition to providing a vehicle for the presentation of design ideas, it is our hope that *Cite* can become a forum for the presentation and criticism of issues unique to the developing city.

Cite will be published on a regular basis. Though the focus will be the Houston area or design issues that can be related directly to the Houston area, we hope to encourage participation of regional contributors as well. The publication will ultimately be structured around central features or topics, with criticism from both the national and local points of view.

Finally, we are very much aware of the contribution made by regional publications to the awareness of design issues on the part of the general public. It is our hope to continue and expand this tradition by providing critical commentary as well as awareness of issues pertinent to a growing metropolitan area. In this way we feel the issues addressed in *Cite* may be relevant to a much larger audience.

Gordon G. Wittenberg

Editorial *Cite* 1, August 1982.
Editor: Gordon Wittenberg.

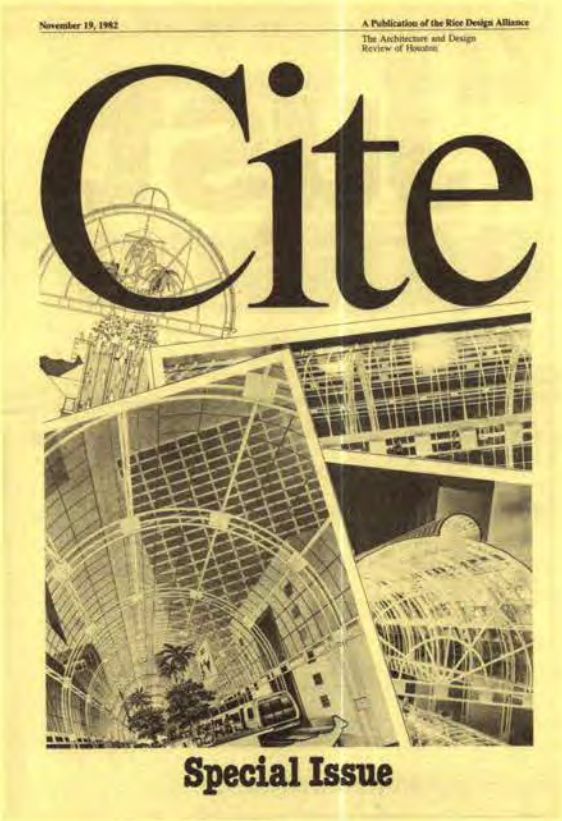
GW *Cite* was started very quickly after I got on the board. I think the reason was that there were a few of us who were contemporaries in terms of age. I'm not sure exactly how this happened, but we started talking after a board meeting: sitting around after everyone else had left. The group included William Neuhaus and the late Bill Stern, who taught at the University of Houston in the architecture school. We started kicking around the idea of making a publication. The reason was that at that point in time, in the late '70s and the early '80s, Houston was kind of a big deal. It was a phenomenon that people from other parts of the country, especially architects and urban designers, were looking at. There was no zoning. The city was experiencing rampant growth. The Environmental Protection Agency had declared a sewer moratorium in Houston because it didn't have the capacity to support more development. The city was anticipating a vote on a transit system. There were a lot of things going on. In the architectural community, there was much discussion about Houston as the new form of the American city, along with Los Angeles and maybe Atlanta.

We all felt like it would be great if the design community in Houston had a voice in this conversation. After several meetings, Linda Sylvan, who would later serve as RDA's executive director, and I became aware that there were significant funds available from the National Endowment for the Arts. With that opportunity and RDA actually creating a surplus of money through their fundraisers at the time, we decided to start what would become *Cite*. We set up a small committee, composed of the three of us that began the conversation, and Herman Dyal, a graphic designer, who was initially trained as an architect and also a member of the RDA.

PL What kind of discourse did you want to disseminate through *Cite*?

GW There were two ideas that we were talking about. One was to create a kind of forum for the discussion of urban design issues and a kind of resistance to the development community. The city was at a point of substantial growth; things were happening, and these issues were very consequential. The other idea was to provide criticism of local architectural projects, a goal especially important to Bill Stern. However, to many of us, this concern was secondary to the big urban design issues the city faced.

The "headliner" of the first issue was the sewer moratorium and the trading of sewer rights. To get a building permit, you had to acquire sewer rights commensurate with the scale of the project. But the way it was set up, a developer could offset that requirement by buying the rights from other entities. There was



Cite, Special Issue, November 19, 1982. Editor: Gordon Wittenberg.

even some evidence that big institutions were selling the sewer rights of their parking lots to large developers who would build multiple high-rise buildings that would obviously put an increased load on the sewer system. We felt strongly that it was our duty to uncover that as an issue.

Next, we did an emergency issue to address the Metro proposal that was coming up. The Metro authority had proposed an elevated rail system running approximately in the same location as the current street system, and we were really opposed to that. We thought the technology was not going to be long-lasting, and it was quite expensive. As I remember, Howard Barnstone had sent a somewhat tongue and cheek letter to the editor of the *Houston Chronicle* stating that it would be cheaper to buy a bunch of Mercedes limousines that people could just call and get a free ride to wherever they wanted than to build this system. So we worked on the issue to highlight the challenges and possible criticisms to this proposal. It died a quiet death anyway, but it was exciting to be more involved in the city than we perceived the school had previously been.

Eventually *Cite* transformed into something similar to its present form, covering a number of different issues, urban design being just one of them. Eventually I had become too busy with research and establishing a practice to actively contribute and others took over. I think the amount of work required to keep producing issues "burned out" a number of Rice faculty and eventually, the University of Houston faculty took over some components of RDA.

PL In your view, did *Cite* transform from an eclectic publication, focusing on contemporary architectural news and practice, to one that is more theoretical and academic?

GW I think that was an aspiration. I thought eventually, if we gained a credible presence in the city and in the national community, we would be able to do more of that sort of thing. However, I retained a healthy bit of skepticism about that. Before we started the magazine, I called friends at other universities and conducted a very informal survey of other publications that might be comparable. I concluded that they all only lasted a couple of years. For those with a more purely academic focus, it was important to clearly define a mission. If you wanted to be a publication with a broader audience, you had to focus on that challenge. I think we just constantly went back and forth between those two things. But, as an academic, I really thought it would be great if we could develop a publication with more intellectual credibility than generalist commentary on the local context. I hope somebody will figure out how these two directions can coexist and maybe this is the direction *Cite* is going now.

GG I agree that this form of tension can be productive for a platform like *Cite*. We know that colleagues like Stephen Fox, John Kaliski, and Bruce Webb were also involved with the editorship and authorship of the first few issues of *Cite*. Could you tell us about your experience collaborating with them?

GW Bruce was always a part of this discussion, in a very positive way as was John and, of course, Stephan was always such a generous resource. Bruce wasn't trying to steer things one way or another, but he shared the ambition that *Cite* could be a voice from Houston and could gain some credibility among the design community in general. There was really no competition between us. I would say that Bill Stern stuck to his guns and was very forceful about wanting to develop a critical aspect of the magazine. But knowing Bill as we all did, this was no surprise. We knew what our interests were, and Stern's practice was growing at the time, so he didn't have the time to develop the more critical model. It was a great time in Houston. You could get funding for

things, and we could get support from Rice. Our advantage was that people were debating whether Houston was going to be the model for the new American city. Accordingly, there was a lot of outside interest. Obviously that interest has waned, and people see the model in a negative way.

PL Were there any comparable or inspirational publications around at the time *Cite* launched?

GW Not that I remember. There was *Texas Architect*, which was going through a period of building more credibility. They eventually developed a running report on new architecture. Many of us in academia—from Rice, UH, UT Austin, and Texas Tech—wrote evaluations of new buildings, highlighting interesting new work in Texas. That was the only other Texas publication that I can think of; the scene in terms of publications was pretty limited.

PL Many of your essays in *Cite* were concerned with your research focus, the environmental impact of new forms of construction and architectural technologies. In *Cite* 26, you wrote an essay on the Ziegler House by Rice alumnus Scott Ziegler as an alternative housing design in response to the suburban movement in Houston. What prompted you to write about this specific project?

GW To some degree in this case, I let my distaste for postmodernism affect my analysis. I went to Washington University in St. Louis in the 1970s. We were exposed to a lot of postwar European architects including Hans Hollein and Aldo van Eyck. Le Corbusier was always in the background, and we were excited about buildings like the Free University of Berlin by Candilis-Josic-Woods. But then, just as I was leaving architecture school, they were beginning to publish the work of Michael Graves and Peter Eisenman's early houses. We were completely blindsided. When the full-blown impact of postmodernism hit, I was definitely uncomfortable with it. I must have let that influence my appraisal of the Ziegler House.

Scott was an admirer of English architects like Edwin Lutyens. If I could rewrite the article, I think he saw that as a way to get out of the postmodern dilemma. In other words, there was a style in domestic architecture that was neither purely historical nor ahistorical that you could follow. I was pretty negative about it as a prototype because I was a modernist. I personally wanted to see buildings that were experimental with regard to technology and houses that really took a stand on the urban condition in Houston and didn't lend themselves to being replicated like a typical subdivision house. I was a little afraid that any style that was adopted would yield more postmodern architecture, which could be so easily subverted by developers with no architectural interests at all.

GG You worked with other publications during the very initial stage of *Cite* including *Skyline* and *Texas Architect*. How was the experience working with them different from the RDA?

GW I think they were pretty noncritical. They would get in touch with you and see if you were interested in writing an article. They would say to just send the article when ready and they would publish it. I don't think I ever got any editorial revision of anything. There were so few publications, and they needed material. They wanted to encourage as much as possible.

PL Do you keep up with the most recent activities of the RDA and the latest issues of *Cite*?

GW I haven't in a while, since I retired and we moved away from Houston. From my perspective, there are so many huge social and environmental issues, I find myself less focused on traditional architectural and urban problems.

I think it's important to recognize that *Cite* still exists and has outlived any other publication that's anything like it—inclusive of the community, as well as the architectural profession and the academic side of it. What hasn't been fully resolved yet is how that academic component can grow and develop. And I think

Gordon Wittenberg

The Environmental Impact of Tall Building

(Photo by Paul Hester)

After an absence of some years, anyone who returns to an American city is inevitably surprised by the radical change that has occurred in its skyline. Indeed, the skyline of every major American city, with the exception of Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, has been completely changed over the last 20 years by the construction of large numbers of high-rise office buildings. In addition, a number of very tall buildings (50 floors and up) have appeared in many of these cities. In Houston, several buildings of more than 70 stories have been built and an 82-story building with a projection approaching 100 stories in height is in the site-preparation stage. Wind-tunnel tests have been completed on a 160-plus-story building for Chicago. Other very tall structures are being proposed for Denver and New York. As it appears that the American city of the future is going to be characterized by large concentrations of tall buildings, it might be prudent to consider just what the long-term impact of these structures will be and what the consequences for the future of the city might be.

Long-Term Urban Impact

In 1978 the Chrysler Building was declared a National Historic Landmark. This is significant because it suggests that tall buildings have existed as a building type long enough to draw conclusions about their long-term life and their impact on the urban environment.

New York has the greatest concentration of high-rise buildings in the world. This concentration has existed for some time. It also has three of the tallest buildings in the world — the Empire State and the twin World Trade Center towers. Though Houston is a very different sort of urban environment, we might expect some of the general long-term effects of tall building observed in the New York example.

There is very little information available about the long-term economic life of tall buildings. From the relatively recent interest in rehabilitating commercial structures, it appears that buildings can have lives significantly longer than their first economic life. In New York, significant renovation in both commercial and residential structures has been taking place for some time. The bulk of the buildings being renovated predate the 1920s and are relatively small in size, which is related to the economics of renovation. Newer buildings have not generally been renovated but demolished. Most recently, preservation advocates have achieved landmark status for Lever House (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, architects, 1952) to prevent demolition. Not only is this building only 32 years old, it has received world-wide recognition as one of the earliest and best examples of the modern slab-office building. A similar fate awaited the Chrysler Building. After 1960 the owners of the Chrysler Building, Goldman-Diloronzo Interests, could only service the huge mortgage on the building by effectively eliminating any maintenance on the property. This led to, among other things, the accumulation of 1,200 cubic yards of trash in the basement, numerous leaks, and other serious problems which drove tenants away and doomed the structure to certain demolition. It was saved from this fate only by a takeover by the principal mortgage holder, the Massachusetts Mutual Insurance Company, and the investment tax credit that landmark status made possible.[1]

There are many reasons that a relatively new structure of unquestioned architectural historic value such as Lever House might be demolished, not the least of which is the continued extremely high value of land in Manhattan. However, it is ironic that Lever House could not be renovated at less overall cost than constructing a completely new structure. Indeed, this is true for most high-rise buildings and if this condition is exacerbated by the height of the building, a serious future problem is created wherever there are concentrations of these buildings. In the case of the Chrysler Building the maintenance service was reduced and as a result many tenants decided to move. While the area around the building did not seriously decline in value, the building enjoyed a very negative reputation.[2] Would anyone have imagined this possible when the building was completed in 1927?

Another serious question regarding the impact of tall buildings is related to their effect on the surrounding urban environment. We all have observed the phenomena of lobbies crowded early in the morning and late in the afternoon but devoid of life at other times. The concentration of population in very tall buildings means that the street level must be allocated almost completely to circulation space. The little commercial space that remains is too expensive for small-scale retail operations that used to inhabit the street level. As tall buildings are constructed in larger and larger numbers, the surrounding streets become less populated and therefore less able to support small-scale commercial activity. In other words, a vicious circle is initiated in which fewer and fewer people have any direct interest in the public space. The street becomes an unused, and potentially dangerous, area.

Beginning in the 1950s a number of critics of urban planning — perhaps the best known of which was Jane Jacobs, author of *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* — warned of this disturbing development in the "modern city." They argued that the seemingly chaotic network of small businesses and mixed use that characterized the streets of the traditional city was an important social mechanism. Besides providing a stimulating environment, rich in random associations, the businesses had a vested interest in the safety of the street and supervised it as such. More recently, such observers of urban crime patterns as John Q. Wilson of Harvard University, have recognized a relationship between intermittent use, lack of supervision, and random violence.

The purpose of this argument is not to suggest that high-rise building is responsible for street crime. However, it does appear that this type of building contributes to a pattern having negative consequences. In recognition of this, New York zoning laws were changed in 1979 to mandate retail space on the street level of commercial structures[3]. Other cities have adopted "bonus" programs to stimulate redevelopment of the downtown street area.

Planning and Development Patterns

The tall building has become a component of the planning of American cities, especially those developing like Houston. In such localities as Dallas or Denver, this phenomenon happened under the watchful eyes of a planning agency, while in such others as Houston, the same phenomenon occurred exclusive of public controls.

In the 1930s and '40s planners began to realize that the flight to the suburbs would exert serious consequences on existing downtown areas. Urban design theory strongly supported the redevelopment of downtown areas in conformance with modernist planning ideals on the model of many European cities rebuilt after World War II. In the 1950s the United States government supported this goal by instituting the Urban Renewal Program that made possible the public condemnation and clearing of large tracts of downtown property. This laid the groundwork for the eventual commercial revitalization that has taken place in many American cities. However, this process lent a distinctive flavor to the character of redevelopment. It was narrowly effective and favored large-scale projects of the type we have been discussing. Consequently, the single-minded and segregated planning of modernist urbanism and modern economics has produced downtowns that suffer from the same general problems: the lack of activity during the day and the threat of danger at night. As downtown redevelopment was accomplished, the reason for subsidizing downtown development ceased to exist. However, this planning trend has not been altered and the ideas of centralizing commercial functions and constructing larger and larger buildings to house them continues to be stimulated today by such programs as the Urban Design Action Grant Program (UDAG).

Houston is a good case in point of how strong the momentum for centralization has become. In 1974 the Environmental Protection Agency issued an ultimatum to the City of Houston to improve sewage treatment or stop new development.[4] The city's response was to declare a "sewer moratorium" on all new construction. In what often has been described as a "brilliant" stratagem, the city managed to trade plant capacity so that construction was limited to existing capacity in all areas but the central business district. In a small area, which included the CBD, no restrictions were imposed; the sewer moratorium did not exist. With similar logic, a metro system has been proposed that fixes, once and for all, the focus of development on the downtown area. Whether or not the system is economically justifiable, it represents so large a public investment that the city would be obliged to support growth along it.

Obviously, economically active downtown areas are important to a city's image and tax base. However, increased centralization supports a building type with questionable future consequences. Although concentration of commercial growth in center-city areas was important at one time, it may be that other strategies that support a variety of forms of development are preferable today.

Operating and Maintenance Costs

Prior to the 1973 Arab oil embargo, the management of the twin World Trade Center towers in New York boasted that the buildings (population 50,000) consumed more electrical energy than the city of Schenectady.

Theodore H. Dunne Building, view of courtyard (Lost America. From the Mississippi to the Pacific. *Princeton, Pyne Press, 1972*) *A block square building configured around an internal court.*

There are many reasons why tall buildings consume so much energy. The elevators and pumps required to service the upper floors attach an energy-use premium to building height of about 10 percent. Another source of energy consumption is related to the sheer size and bulk of the buildings. While it is true that large-scale mechanical systems have some inherent efficiencies, they have difficulty handling variable-sized loads. That is to say the machinery is efficient when operating at 100-percent capacity but cannot operate efficiently when only a few floors or single offices require air-conditioning. During a typical year, the majority of operating time is in such a partial demand mode.

The largest environmental premium paid for very tall buildings, however, is a product of the scale and inflexibility of the floor plan. The greatest single consumer of electricity, and the greatest single source of heat that the air-conditioning system must overcome, is the lighting system. Almost half (about 40 percent) of the air-conditioning tonnage in high-rise buildings is provided to offset the heat generated by lighting systems. Consequently, air-conditioning may be required 12 months of the year, even in Chicago and New York. Many very tall buildings become larger at the base; other, slab-type buildings may maintain the same shape for their entire length. In either case, the sheer size of floor and depth of core space virtually eliminates any possibility of using increased exposure to natural light to offset artificial-lighting requirements. Consequently the building form tends to "lock-in" the inefficiency of large buildings and prohibit increased efficiency at a future date.

In view of serious consequences in the future, why are these buildings still built? Many people assume that they are the inevitable product of the balance sheet and the real estate development process. There appears to be, however, a considerable body of evidence that suggests that high-rise buildings, especially very tall ones, are surprisingly subjective products, built as much for symbolic as financial opportunity.

Building Costs

There is no question that tall buildings are inherently more expensive than equivalent space in other height configurations. It is difficult to say exactly how much more expensive, because developers and clients are generally secretive about the ultimate cost of these projects. Preliminary cost information was available on the following Houston projects. It is generally accepted that the actual cost exceeded this amount by, in some cases, a considerable percentage.

Available information would place the cost of a structure roughly comparable in quality and below ten floors at approximately $30/sf.[5] Therefore the very tall building represents an approximate 20 percent premium building cost over lower-building configurations.

The major component of this increment is the cost of the structural system. There have been a number of significant changes in the engineering of tall buildings that have led to a dramatic reduction in the amount of steel in very tall structures. The Empire State Building (1929-1931) used an average of 50 pounds of steel/sf of building area, while the Sears Tower in Chicago (1972-1974) used less than 15 pounds of steel/sf of building area. Much of this reduction was due to the pioneering work of engineers like the late Fazlur Khan of the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.[6] Khan observed that the primary forces in tall buildings were induced by wind loading rather than gravity, and he developed the framed-tube system of wind bracing that is now utilized almost universally in high-rise buildings above 40 floors. Even at the theoretical optimum, however, Khan observed that the amount of structure must increase dramatically in response to building height. For example, a 50-story structure must utilize about 30 percent more steel/sf than a 20-story structure of comparable floor area.

Vertical circulation systems are another major cost generated by increased building height. Many buildings in excess of 40 floors use a dual elevator system incorporating low-rise and high-rise elevator banks. The low-rise elevators are conventional in design and serve the lower half of the building. Faster and more sophisticated elevators serve only the top floors of the building. Very tall buildings may utilize three sets of elevators through a sky lobby. Conventional elevators serve the building's lower floors and serve the highest ones from the sky

New York (population 100,000).[7] This raises another disturbing issue of tall building: future users are compelled to perpetuate a high future energy-use pattern.

Research done by the Building Owners and Managers Association suggests that, on a national average, office buildings consume about 75,000 BTUs of end-use energy or 112,500 BTUs of source energy per square foot of office space.[8] At present, the construction costs of an average office building are exceeded by its utility costs in approximately 11 years. This has changed on the order of 300 percent, from a 30-year recapture as recently as in 1960.

All available information indicates that very tall buildings exceed these consumption figures by about 15,000 BTUs/sf of end-use energy, or 20 percent.[9] This implies an even more rapid capture of capital by operating costs in this building type.

Recent Houston Tall Building Projects

Project	Developer	Date Project Announced	Floors, Heighth	Gross Area (in square feet)	Budget (in millions)	Cost per Square Foot
Texas Commerce Tower in United Energy Plaza	Gerald Hines Interests	14 April 1978	75 (1,002 ft.)	2 million	$145	$85
Allied Bank Plaza	Century Development Corp.	3 June 1980	71 (970 ft.)	2 million	$200	$100 plus
RepublicBank Center	Gerald Hines Interests	19 June 1981	56 (777 ft.)	1.5 million	$180	$120
Transco Tower	Gerald Hines Interests	8 July 1981	64 (901 ft.)	1.6 million	$200	$125
Southwest Center	Century Development Corp.	11 October 1981	82 (1,400 ft.)	2 million	$350-$400	$175-$200

Gordon Wittenberg, "The Environmental Impact of Tall Building," in: *Cite* 6, Spring–Summer 1984.

somehow having both community engagement and that academic aspect is important. Maybe the RDA could handle community outreach completely through lectures and competitions. And *Cite* can be more of a research journal. The outreach aspect of the RDA is really important, but it's a very difficult thing to do in order not to become just a social institution that throws fancy parties and that sort of thing.

GG Do you feel that *Cite* has reached the goal that you had initially envisioned for the magazine?

GW Critical urban design issues were in the public forum in the city's development when *Cite* was launched. I have no idea how it might have affected things that were happening on the ground, but I do know that architects started talking to each other about these issues. When you went to an AIA meeting, people had read *Cite* and had something to say about the transit system or the sewer moratorium or other issues discussed. Rather than gossip about which firms had gone out of business, or who was moving where, there was a healthy amount of discourse and also discussion among schools about the importance of the topics covered in *Cite*. There was an impact, although there's no way to really document it, but it did address issues that were going on at the time, which I don't see nowadays. There are many issues in Houston still, some very obvious, including flooding, income disparity, or homelessness. I still feel that those questions about Houston can be part of the recipe for what this publication can be. But I know there are other people that see that very differently.

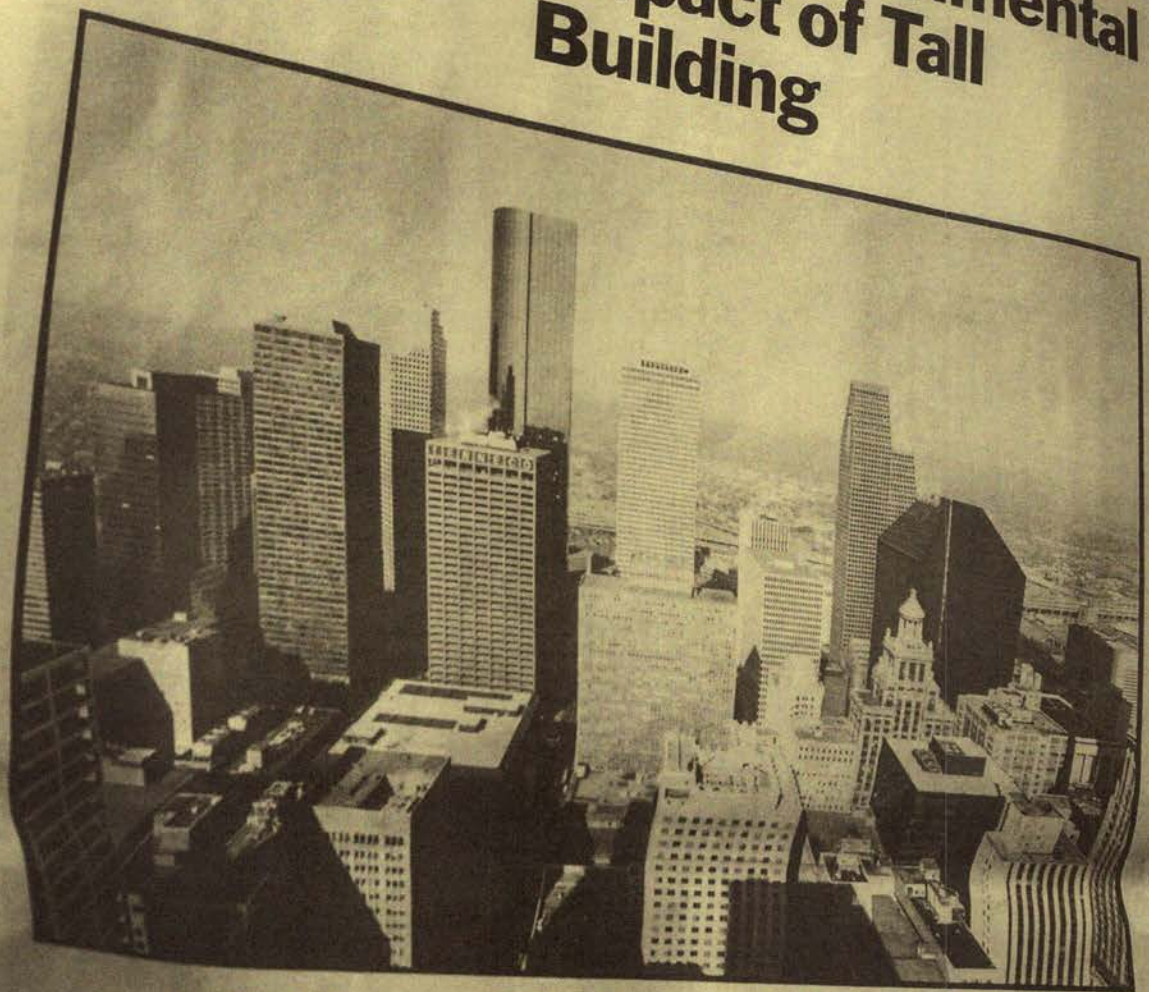
Cite 6, Spring/Summer 1984, guest edited by John Kaliski with a focus on the construction of the Houston skyline.

Scraping the Houston Sky: 1894-1976

Stephen Fox

Gordon Wittenberg

The Environmental Impact of Tall Building



(Photo by Paul Hester)

After an absence of some years, anyone who returns to an American city is inevitably surprised by the radical change that has occurred in its skyline. Indeed, the skyline of every major American city, with the exception of Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, has been completely changed over the last 20 years by the construction of large numbers of high-rise office buildings. In addition, a number of very tall buildings (50 floors and up) have appeared in many of these cities. In Houston, [illegible] buildings of more than 20 stories have been built [illegible] building with a projection approaching [illegible] a height in the site-preparation stage. [illegible] have been completed on a 160-plus-acre [illegible] Other very tall structures are [illegible] Chicago and New York. As it appears [illegible] firms brought to Houst[illegible] rency and quality not exp[illegible] the century. Moreover, the [illegible] architects associate with the in[illegible]

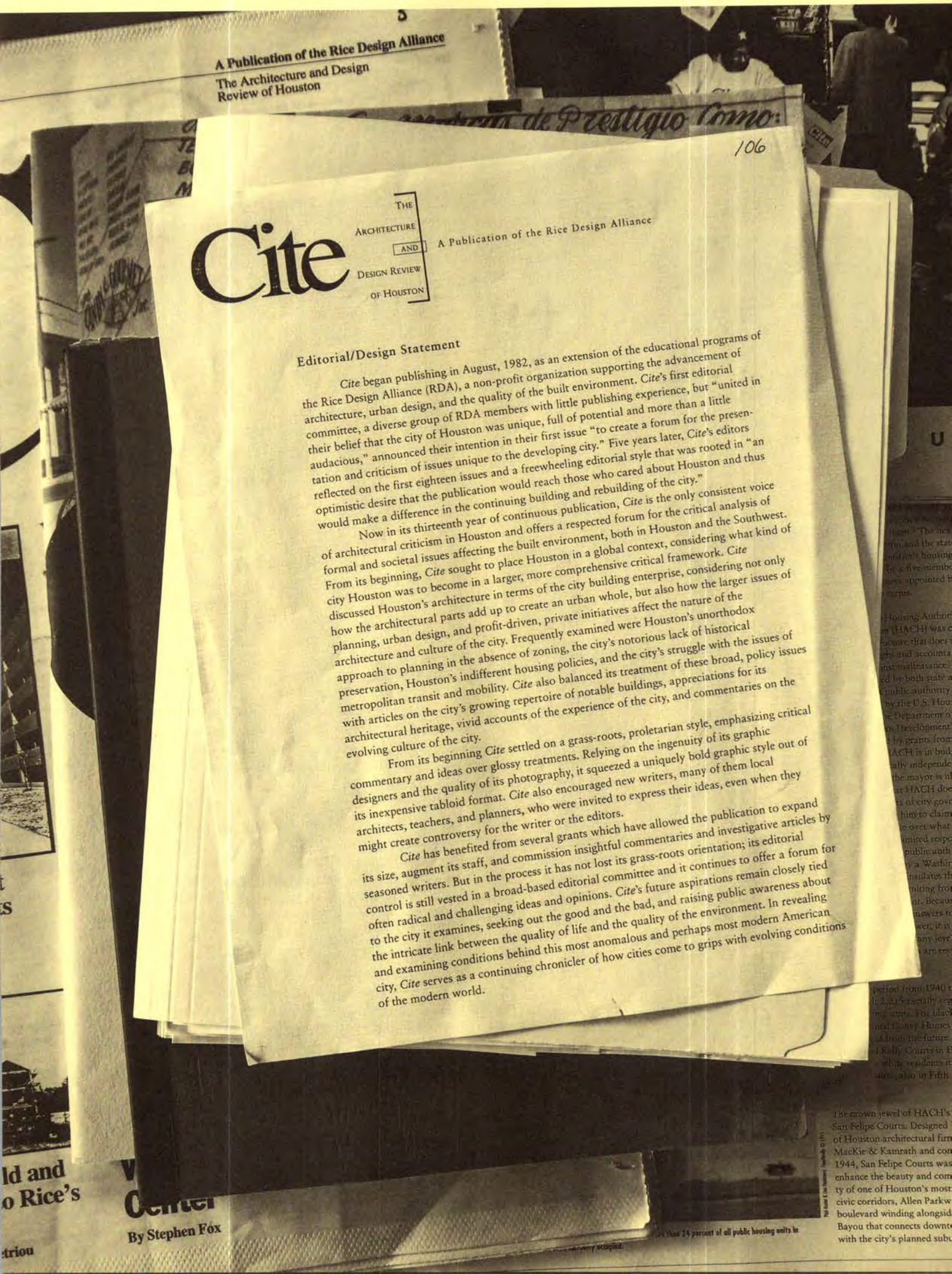
House (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, architects, 1952) to prevent demolition. Not only is this building only 32 years old, it has received world-wide recognition as one of the earliest and best examples of the modern slab office building. A similar fate awaited the Chrysler Building. After 1960 the owners of the Chrysler Building, Goldman-Dilorenzo Interests, could only service the huge mortgage on the building by effectively eliminating any maintenance on the property. This led to, among other things, the accumulation of 1,200 cubic yards of trash in the basement, numerous leaks, and other serious problems which drove tenants away and doomed the structure to certain demolition. It was saved from this fate only by a takeover by the principal mortgage holder, the Massachusetts Mutual Insurance Company, and the investment tax credit that landmark status made possible.[1]

There are many reasons that a relatively new structure of [illegible] architectural historic value such as Lever [illegible] not the least of which is the fewer people have any direct interest in the public space. The street becomes an unused, and potentially dangerous, area.

Beginning in the 1950s a number of critics of urban planning — perhaps the best known of which was Jane Jacobs, author of *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* — warned of this disturbing development in the "modern city." They argued that the seemingly chaotic network of small businesses and mixed use that characterized the streets of the traditional city was an important social mechanism. Besides providing a stimulating environment, rich in random associations, the businesses had a vested interest in the safety of the street and supervised it as such. More recently, such observers of urban crime patterns as John Q. Wilson of Harvard University, have recognized a relationship between intermittent use, lack of supervision, and random violence.

The purpose of this argument is not to suggest that high-rise building is responsible for street crime. However, it does appear that this type of building contributes to a

Editorial/Design Statement, *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston*, 1995.



A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance
The Architecture and Design
Review of Houston

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Cite
THE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN REVIEW OF HOUSTON
A Publication of the Rice Design Alliance

Editorial/Design Statement

Cite began publishing in August, 1982, as an extension of the educational programs of the Rice Design Alliance (RDA), a non-profit organization supporting the advancement of architecture, urban design, and the quality of the built environment. *Cite*'s first editorial committee, a diverse group of RDA members with little publishing experience, but "united in their belief that the city of Houston was unique, full of potential and more than a little audacious," announced their intention in their first issue "to create a forum for the presentation and criticism of issues unique to the developing city." Five years later, *Cite*'s editors reflected on the first eighteen issues and a freewheeling editorial style that was rooted in "an optimistic desire that the publication would reach those who cared about Houston and thus would make a difference in the continuing building and rebuilding of the city."

Now in its thirteenth year of continuous publication, *Cite* is the only consistent voice of architectural criticism in Houston and offers a respected forum for the critical analysis of formal and societal issues affecting the built environment, both in Houston and the Southwest. From its beginning, *Cite* sought to place Houston in a global context, considering what kind of city Houston was to become in a larger, more comprehensive critical framework. *Cite* discussed Houston's architecture in terms of the city building enterprise, considering not only how the architectural parts add up to create an urban whole, but also how the larger issues of planning, urban design, and profit-driven, private initiatives affect the nature of the architecture and culture of the city. Frequently examined were Houston's unorthodox approach to planning in the absence of zoning, the city's notorious lack of historical preservation, Houston's indifferent housing policies, and the city's struggle with the issues of metropolitan transit and mobility. *Cite* also balanced its treatment of these broad, policy issues with articles on the city's growing repertoire of notable buildings, appreciations for its architectural heritage, vivid accounts of the experience of the city, and commentaries on the evolving culture of the city.

From its beginning *Cite* settled on a grass-roots, proletarian style, emphasizing critical commentary and ideas over glossy treatments. Relying on the ingenuity of its graphic designers and the quality of its photography, it squeezed a uniquely bold graphic style out of its inexpensive tabloid format. *Cite* also encouraged new writers, many of them local architects, teachers, and planners, who were invited to express their ideas, even when they might create controversy for the writer or the editors.

Cite has benefited from several grants which have allowed the publication to expand its size, augment its staff, and commission insightful commentaries and investigative articles by seasoned writers. But in the process it has not lost its grass-roots orientation; its editorial control is still vested in a broad-based editorial committee and it continues to offer a forum for often radical and challenging ideas and opinions. *Cite*'s future aspirations remain closely tied to the city it examines, seeking out the good and the bad, and raising public awareness about the intricate link between the quality of life and the quality of the environment. In revealing and examining conditions behind this most anomalous and perhaps most modern American city, *Cite* serves as a continuing chronicler of how cities come to grips with evolving conditions of the modern world.

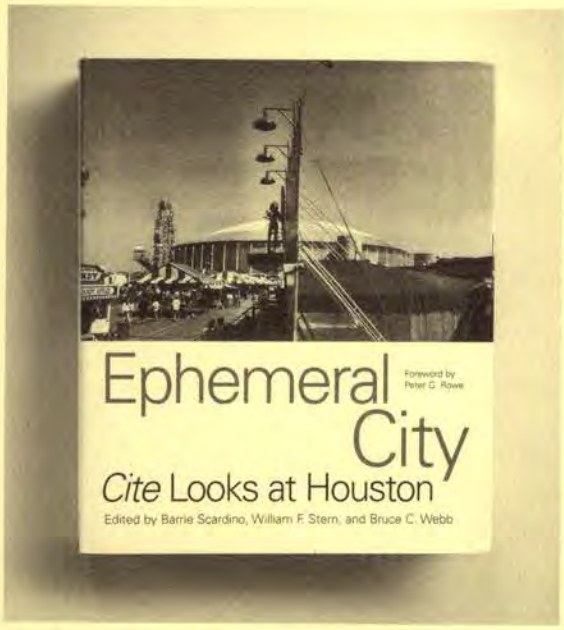
ld and
o Rice's
Center
By Stephen Fox

The crown jewel of HACH's
San Felipe Courts. Designed
of Houston architectural firm
MacKie & Kamrath and com
1944, San Felipe Courts was
enhance the beauty and com
ty of one of Houston's most
civic corridors, Allen Parkw
boulevard winding alongsid
Bayou that connects downt
with the city's planned subu

Bruce C. Webb

in Conversation with Maximilien Chong Lee Shin and Robin Hueppe

RH You are fascinated by the short-lived nature of things in Houston. You have previously described it as a "simulacrum of many different temporal places that doesn't give you a pure or complete dose of anything." In 2004, you coedited the *Ephemeral City* with Barrie Scardino Bradley and William Stern, in which a collection of *Cite* essays addressed the temporality and ambiguity of the city.



Barrie Scardino, William F. Stern, and Bruce C. Webb, *Ephemeral City* (2003).

BW I called my first public lecture in Houston "The City of Short-Lived Phenomena," which became the "Ephemeral City" in an essay I later published. My point was to conceptualize Houston in a temporal manner as characteristic of postmodern cities. Things here didn't last very long—neither ideas nor buildings—and there was a notable speed to life in the city. When Ada Louise Huxtable came to Houston to look at Philip Johnson's Pennzoil Place, she was affected as much by Houston's dynamics as the buildings. You know, the future was about speed, movement, dynamics. And that was exciting for young faculty and students. Ant Farm, impresarios of environmental futurism, found the Texas Gulf Coast and the University of Houston good nesting places for their work. Houston was kind of an urban anomaly, prospering and growing while other urban centers were declining. And still testing out what kind of city it would be. People were beginning to talk about the possibility that Houston's own sense of place might be worth thinking about. But how to shape this new identity?

MC One of these ideas was a design alliance between Rice University and the University of Houston. What were the initial activities that inspired this idea?

BW Yes, and it became the most successful and long-lived idea. It was meant to be a program that reached out rather than turning inwards. It wanted to offer a kind of small, open university to a larger community, to create an organization shaped around a number of programs and a lecture series. It was a Rice invention, Drexel Turner was involved, but programs usually came from a cooperative participation of differently affiliated people, rather than members of a single institution—Rice faculty, UH faculty, and practitioners were involved, sometimes other universities, including Texas Southern University and Prairie View A&M. It helped to build bridges. We also began to collaborate in focus groups, hosted planning sessions, and organized other programs that took on issues in the city. One group, for example, looked at Houston's lack of zoning from a different angle, considering it an alternative to zoning practice elsewhere. And when we looked at the bayous as amenities, we stepped up to organize some competitions such as the "Heart of the Park" for Hermann Park or the one at Buffalo Bayou. Once you started looking around, there was lots to do.

RH And *Cite* became a platform for the eclectic range of concepts and activities that brought the RDA to life.

BW Yes, after a few years of activity, we agreed one night during a meeting at Bill Stern's house that we would need a publication. The RDA was and still is accepting of new ideas. We had people who wanted to write and spread ideas and critical perspective, and the RDA had funds and an organizational structure. And could turn something from loose conversation into an actual

discourse. *Cite* grew from a small magazine with limited means to one with an impressive format that began to pay its writers. The whole thing was so terrific! You start a publication that gives opportunities to discuss and work out your ideas with thoughtful people giving you their feedback. This allowed us to grow as writers in a small community. We started to share influences. I can remember the first time Stephen Fox edited a text I was writing. He gave me back my manuscript full of red ink and packed with good comments. He knew so much about Houston. *Ephemeral City*, the edited collection of *Cite* essays, would later become an informal anthology for classes looking at Houston, a city that was still a bit of a mystery. People talked about Houston without knowing much about it, mainly criticizing it. But it wasn't "Houston Love" for us either. It was maybe "Houston Like," which opened a lot of possibilities.

MC Can you reflect on how *Cite* grew and became a unique publication that resisted the adoption of a singular style?

Cite 82 launch party, July 22, 2011. Editors Michelangelo Sabatino (left) and Bruce C. Webb. Photograph: Eric Hester.

BW Beginning as a newsprint tabloid *Cite* grew up over the years. People noticed that, although *Cite* kept looking and sounding more substantial, it never became a "professional" magazine. Somebody had the idea to try a format with glossy covers and newsprint on the inside so we tried that for a while. The cover became a place for a great photograph or graphic. There always was a question of a style sheet for the magazine so somebody who's more of a fledgling writer would know how to do things and the publication would have a sort of consistency running through it. But if you have too much consistency, you end up with something less interesting, I think. There are a lot of magazines that have that homogeneous quality that resemble airline magazines. *Cite* managed to resist that most often. It maintained a kind of postmodern feel reflecting many contributors. Not just in the writing but in illustrations and layout ideas to challenge our agile graphic designers. You could read the collection of headlines, and they were all like little stories, reflecting the attitudes of different writers in the publication. Some of them were more scholarly. Stephen tended to write no-nonsense titles. Drexel Turner was a master of turning a word into a pun and getting a collection of sparkling headlines. Bill was between everybody else. When you picked it up it was like reading Houston itself, a collection of pieces and parts, of consciousnesses.

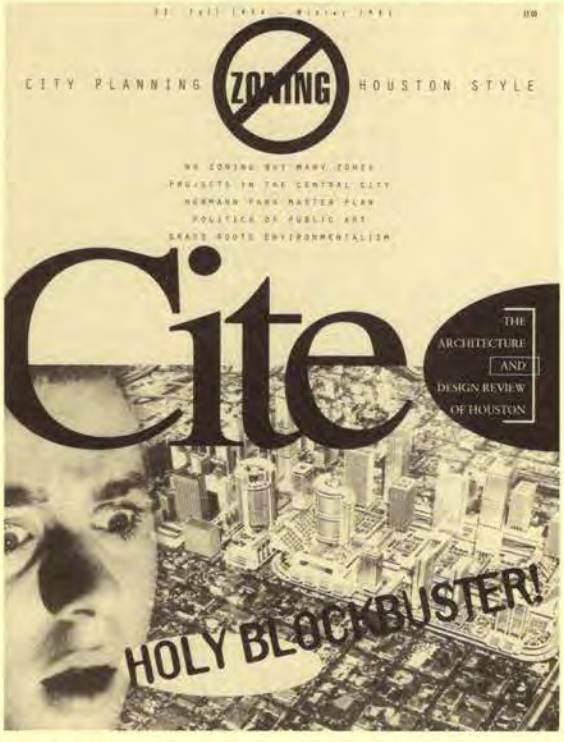
RH You previously indicated that there were some institutional tensions over the course of the development of *Cite*, which you described as a nonaligned publication in between the Rice School of Architecture, the College of Architecture at UH, the American Institute of Architects, and independent practitioners. Lars Lerup and you simultaneously acted as deans of the two respective schools. Can you elaborate on that relationship?

BW We would have discussions in which Lars would argue that since RDA was at Rice, from his perspective, his school invested money without getting much out of it. I used to tell him that he had the best possible outreach program without much of an effort or investment since RDA paid their own bills. Of course, I would have to admit that we got a good deal out of it too. Most of the time, through the life of RDA and *Cite*, it was UH and AIA people investing their time in the committee. But he didn't like that fact very much either. And because most of the writing was done by UH faculty, our new dean at UH asked me why we would give all that credit to Rice. But we didn't have the money for a publication like this. And I think the faculty of Rice and UH who were involved thought it was a great thing anyway. What I thought was the essential quality of the whole was being an in-between organization: to stand in for a change in this context of academic selfishness. "Our team, our research, our *Cite*." I think you have to get beyond that.

RH That is probably a downside of the inward-oriented identities formed in American colleges. How did this conflict unfold?

BW The organization and publication changed with the appointment of a dedicated editor. Instead of belonging to the publication committee, it became a different, centralized operating system under the editor. Formerly the editor was on an ad hoc, issue-by-issue basis working with the editorial committee. I liked this; it promoted a lot of variety. Rice went through a series of deans who had their own ideas for the publication. Under Sarah Whiting's deanship, Rice became interested in changing the publication into a more scholarly magazine, but the real spice of the magazine got lost. The people that made these changes are probably ecumenical and progressive. But it got caught under the wheels somehow. I liked that Rice and UH were sharing this project with a more inclusive critical perspective. It has enormous potential to carry on forever. The need is there, but it's harder to sell people on something that has so much freedom to it. It's easier to provide them something professional with a seal of approval.

RH You outlined a similarity between Houston and *Cite* as both being eclectic collections of different parts. And there are more links between the two beyond this comparison. The RDA organized a number of notable competitions that shaped Houston in significant ways. Members sometimes participated with their own practices and built projects that emerged from this involvement.



Cite 32, Fall 1994–Winter 1995.
Editors: William F. Stern and Bruce C. Webb

BW It was ambitious. We had not seen a competition here for a long time. When the Buffalo Bayou was being redeveloped, downtown was moving north. The bayou and downtown suddenly ran into one another when they built the Wortham Theater Center. That was like an outpost of downtown sitting along this other sinewy piece of what could become the city. It looked like a really good opportunity to do something special, another empty, forgotten space. Later competitions, like the "Heart of the Park," came about this way. The RDA is a great purveyor of such initiatives because they know how to turn ideas into a real project. It's a hard thing to get a competition started and developed. But it can give you opportunities and momentum. While some take shape in the format of competitions, other changes are driven by people doing some significant work. Like the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston building by Steven Holl, for example. By defining a corner, it creates an inside-outside public space. It's dynamite in terms of building cities and has such an impact. When you look around, there are all kinds of uncanny projects—the Rice Hotel, too. I was sure it's going to be torn down, but Randall Davis has been a developer with imagination, itch, and ego. And these are the same juices that built Houston in the beginning. So I think the evolution of the notoriously unfinished city will be the prime architectural project of the future, and *Cite* and the RDA are the places in which such projects can thrashed out.

MC As you suggested, Houston is a developer-oriented city, and I was wondering how the RDA functioned as a platform for faculty at Rice and UH to engage with developers and other agents from the community, providing them with ideas and input.

BW I think the RDA puts some talk into the community: people read things and then show them to someone and maybe they end up with someone who has some influence. The RDA had many developers as members. The hope was that they would attend our lectures, see a higher level of work discussed from other places and become involved in committees. And that has happened. But some people were affronted about certain critiques that appeared in *Cite*. People are sensitive. We got into trouble with a lot of articles, but nobody's ever killed me.

RH You came to architecture with an English degree, and you stress the relevance of narration beyond just the argument in your writing. What role do you think narration assumes in architecture and urban design discourse today?

Bruce C. Webb and Malcom Quantrill (eds.), *Urban Forms, Suburban Dreams* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993).

BW Publications that believe in narrative as opposed to simply laying out arguments are valuable since they help to envision change and the city as animated stories. Every incident in the city is a little piece of history involving people and settings. John Hejduk used to talk about cities this way, and he had all these beautiful allegories for cities. Instead of just talking about how a Texas town square developed as different buildings in a formal arrangement—which is the way we might have talked about it not too long ago—he would consider it as a kind of theater, with dramas, personas, populating the square. It started to set up the potential for you to imagine how this becomes a stage of activity as opposed to just formal ideas. I always liked that because I was storyteller. But when I got into architecture school, nobody wanted to talk about the poetry of architecture. Only when I graduated from architecture school it started to enter the discourse on the city. You have to conserve the sense of the narrative as much as you can.

The task is to go home, sit down in the loneliness of your desk, and write. The second part of it is finding friends who share your interests and are willing to sit down and read your work in a way that gives you perks, not just critical reading. That was the impetus for *Cite*, too. To stop complaining about being down here and spend some time together trying to understand and figure out, and maybe enjoy this place. I wrote "A Houston Childhood in 1991" in *Cite* 26. It described what it was like for the children of Houston to go to school with an almost Heideggerian view of all the details becoming present on the way. Richard Saul Wurman was a big purveyor of the idea of the open city in the 1960s. How does the city open itself up to you? His argument was that we would learn so much outside of school by becoming aware of real things doing the work of the city. Wurman called it "The Invisible City."

RH Houston is still incredibly full of unexpected things. It might not be full of the public life that some urbanist-architects hope for, but you never get used to the city because it is so different from many other places.

BW That's it! So, where are the best places where a kid could to grow up and hang around safely? Where is the urban vitality that shows us the real city rather than its commercial glamour? Then you have to wonder where are places of its creative messiness.

RH "A Walk Down Montrose Reveals" was the name of your article in *Cite* 49 (2000)—an ode to the uncanny yet compelling spatial composition of Montrose Boulevard. You sound wishful about Houston's future.

BW I still have a faith in ad-hoc-ism in the city, in environments with an authentic sense of place that we can enjoy, appreciate, and build upon. The people coming together and talking about the city are always changing, so the publication itself becomes a subject of inquiry. I would like *Cite* to save a lot of encouragement for people to do something they may not think they can do, which is to participate in a city dialogue, and, when they have ideas, share them. Those ideas are probably interesting, and you should feel the need to try to explain them. Even if your audience is small. Bill Stern always thought that the next step in *Cite's* evolution was to become a television show. One hour a week. And Bill thought he would be Mr. Architecture or something like that.

Cite at 5, Fall 1987, Peter C. Papademetriou on new public buildings and their relevance for place making; in the background, report on the first RDA Gala Fight for Cite.

The Rice Design Alliance held its first gala benefit, Fight for Cite, on Saturday, 27 June, at the Houston Boxing Association, 5470 Newcastle at Glenmont. Josephine Abercrombie, HBA owner and vice-chairman of Rice University's Board of Governors, was the honorary chairman. John P. Stainback, development director of Barker Interests and Decoma Venture, and Babette Fraser Warren were co-chairmen. The event was a tremendous success, raising over $22,000 for RDA and *Cite* magazine.

The black-tie evening began with cocktails and tours of the state-of-the-art training facility. Ouisie's Table, with Jim Jamail and Sons Food Market, provided a superb dinner for the 300 guests. Several three-round demonstration boxing matches were put on by HBA boxers. A three-round "white-coll…

Josephine Abercrombie, Fight for Cite honorary chairman, with Victorian boxing squirrels presented by the RDA

Cite Fall 1987 9

Houston in the '80s

In Search of Public Places

Peter C. Papademetriou

Aerial view of downtown Houston shows the relationship between the central business district and the Brown Convention Center (upper right) and the Wortham Theater Center (upper left).

Houston approaches the last decade of the century with a diminished rate of economic growth. For a city that has seen a consistent pattern of cyclical boom and expansion in the century-and-a-half of its emergence, the sober reality of this sesquicentennial is that we face the immediate future with a new set of rules. Alleviating this novel uncertainty about a future that has not proved as reliable as we once complacently imagined it to be are several buildings that recently have been added to the urban landscape, and have, in our present crisis, given reassuring credence to the idea that though Houston may be down, it is not out. Yet, elation in the face of adversity is only part of what needs to be addressed, as we make the transition from the more recent days of "Houston Proud" to a broader vision for the future.

The central issue is how our buildings contribute to something beyond themselves, how they make places special. The projects in question suggest that they belong to citizens-at-large, "the public." But in so doing, they assume a responsibility to provide settings for public life, to enrich the places they occupy within the urban landscape, to be extra-ordinary.

These new public buildings are the George R. Brown Convention Center, El Mercado del Sol, the Gus S. Wortham Theater Center, and The Menil Collection. They represent different attitudes about commerce and culture, and, for purposes of this discussion, are less important as works of architecture than for the extent to which they contribute to a larger sense of place.

They are significant as parts of existing areas of the city. Each had the potential to enrich its context, which might mean altering it in very different ways. Any final evaluation must center on enhancement of their micro-landscape, and, conceptually, each project also contained within it the possibility of forging a long-term relationship to Houston at large. The conception is in part programmatic, having to do with the uses served by each building; in part contextual, having to do with its location and the ways in which it addresses the place it occupies; and in part representational, in terms of how it expresses values in a perceptible way.

There could be no greater contrast among these projects than between the Brown Convention Center and El Mercado. Brown clearly embodies the "Big Bang" approach, while El Mercado has in part been hailed for its ostensibly preservationist approach (see "El Mercado del Sol," *Cite*, Fall 1985).

George R. Brown Convention Center

The business of conventions is a major industry for many metropolitan areas. The 19-year-old Albert Thomas Convention Center, across from Jones Hall downtown, has become increasingly obsolete and uncompetitive; Houston's East End has been a neglected area in terms of development over the past three decades, with most new growth downtown occurring west of Main Street. Its principal identity, city-wide, came from the small complex of Asian restaurants and shops immediately east of the Eastex Freeway, in what was once Houston's Chinatown, but which has in more recent years become home to a surge of Vietnamese and is now being billed as "Vinatown."

The optimistic period of the early 1970s was marked by the most dramatic corporate "land grab" in downtown's real estate history, the famous day in 1970 when representatives of Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation simultaneously (as the story goes) acquired over 30 city blocks of real estate and set in motion what was initially conceived as a great "mega-structure," Houston Center. This master plan of development, by William Pereira and Associates, was to result in a single building platform that would span existing streets, and was given …

A pergola and planter partitions the … playground for the children sheltered … Houston Area Women's Center. … Parsons, architect

Off the deck, children have … explore. On a ground covered … bark stands a gridded cube … various levels and rails, a slide, … firefighter's pole. …

Selecting materials and forms belonging to the lexicon of gardens – pine bark, wood decking, different patterns of wooden trellises, a pergola, trees, flowering ivy, wooden benches, and potted plants – the architect chose three elements as the focus of different sections: a swing in the decked area, a climbing tower in the section for older children, and an arbor to separate them.

Perimeter walls were raised to the 8-foot maximum height allowed by city code. At one end of the fence, a grid image of a building, with turrets at either end and a half-moon and star for the sky, is a substitute for the niche or wall sculpture in enclosed, formal gardens of the past. Here, L-shaped corner benches offer "sociable" seating for adults. The deck-covered half of the playground contains a swing, a seesaw, and a sandbox, but in a telescoped area. The swing, suspended from a simple pipe frame, is in the center, its space demarcated by a large circular cutout in the deck. The sandbox, …

Linda Popkin

According to Barry M. Goodman Associates, consultants coordinating the transit project, the total estimated capital cost of the trolley is $10.7 million. Grants to cover costs of constructing the system and acquiring equipment have been received from federal and state sources. Local utility companies have made donations for utility relocations. Supporting grants covering operating costs for the first three years were committed by the Moody Foundation and George P. Mitchell. Annual operating …

Cite 17, Spring 1987, edited by Peter D. Waldman, with a spotlight on Frank O. Gehry, Mario Botta, Charles Moore.

Nonya Grenader
Danny Samuels

in Conversation with
Siobhan Finlay and Melvalean McLemore-Catina

MM Can you tell us what brought you to Rice and give us a sense of your early years as students, professors, and practicing architects with your own firms?

DS I came to Rice as a freshman in 1965, went through the B.Arch. program, and did my preceptorship with Guillermo Jullian de la Fuente, who was finishing Le Corbusier's works in Paris and Venice. After I graduated, I started hanging out with classmates Bob Timme and John Casbarian after work, and we talked about doing competitions. That was the beginning of Taft Architects. About five years after graduating, I taught a design studio at the University of Houston, and later Peter C. Papademetriou invited me to teach a structures seminar at Rice.

NG As an undergraduate at the University of Texas in Austin, I knew that architecture would be something that I would enjoy for the rest of my life. When I was working for Morris Aubry Architects in Houston, I started a program that exposed high school students to architecture at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA). I taught there for fourteen years while I was working and raising my family. Teaching was so invigorating and motivated me to eventually do it at the university level, which is why I came to Rice as a graduate student, where I then had the wonderful experience of meeting and later teaching with Danny. For me, the combination of teaching and having a small practice has been so productive and meaningful.

Cite publications committee meeting, July 9, 2003. Rafael Longoria, Karl Killian, Nonya Grenader, Danny Samuels, Stephen Fox (back toward camera). Photograph: Paul Hester.

DS We started teaching together in 1994 and taught first-year design studios for twenty years. Nonya and I had the opportunity to take two semesters with the freshmen and figure out ways to present a series of basic design problems that we knew would lead somewhere the following semester.

SF How did you get involved with the Rice Design Alliance and *Cite*, and what are some of your favorite contributions?

NG At the time, the RDA was a very exciting organization in Houston. Nobody was gathering people to discuss design in the larger community beyond the Rice hedges, and not a lot was being written about Houston architecture in the press. The RDA offered a unique way for people to come together, and, as a young architect, I was attracted to this. My first engagement with the RDA was in the 1980s when RDA held their gala celebration under the arched walkways near Lovett Hall at Rice University. They asked architects to design and make toys as table decorations that would be auctioned off. I joined many Houston architects in contributing to the event and enjoying the festive evening. From then on, I went to every lecture. I went to what was known then as

the Fireside Chats, which turned into larger public forums. And soon after I began to contribute to *Cite*.

DS One of my first interactions with the RDA was in 1978, when I helped organize the "Hidden Places" home tour. In 1985, Taft Architects gave a Fireside Chat in the jury space at Anderson Hall. We set up a fireplace with a video of a fire burning and served ourselves from a decanter of cognac. In 1987, the RDA sponsored an emergency fundraiser called "Fight for *Cite*" at Josephine Abercrombie's boxing facility. This was the first RDA gala—it is documented by a series of press photos with all of us in boxing garb. I served several terms on the board and later on, I was a member of the program committee and helped organize the lecture series. At a certain point, I had reached my term limit and Bill Stern asked me to work on *Cite*. That was around the same time that Nonya was editing some issues of *Cite*. It was great working not just with other Rice colleagues, but also with people from the University of Houston, and the greater Houston community.

Cite 39, Fall, 1997.
Guest Editors: Nonya Grenader and Bruce C. Webb.

NG We both had the chance to work on *Cite* and the program committee for several years. It involved a lot of collaboration between Rice and UH faculty, as well as people who would come to the lectures. Not just architects, but engineers, craftspeople, makers, and artists. A great example of this interdisciplinary work was a lecture Danny and I worked on together on architectural photography called, "Changing Focus: Photographers View Place." It came up in a discussion that often the way many people view and understand buildings is through photography. We asked several curators and photographers, including Eugenia Parry, John Szarkowski, Alex MacLean, Tim Hursley, and Julius Shulman, to talk about how they approach buildings through photography and how they work with architects.

Editing the "Texas Places" issue for *Cite* 39 with Bruce Webb in 1997 was incredibly special. We wanted to expand the conversation beyond just architects and brought in writers like Larry McMurtry and other voices who could look at a place differently. We've all read a novel or an essay that captures a place in a way that you couldn't draw, make a model of, or couldn't render. Yet the words are so vivid that it's just another way of thinking about space or describing a place.

MM How did you bring together this collection of voices to contribute to *Cite*?

DS Writers at Rice like Terry Doody in the English department naturally gravitated toward *Cite*. Christof Spieler was a civil engineering student writing for the *Rice Thresher*, and when we realized that he was interested in architecture we roped him into writing for *Cite*.

NG *Cite* would never have been the same without the extraordinary photos of Paul Hester. And Stephen Fox wrote eloquently for so many issues. Graphic designers like Craig Minor also contributed tremendously to *Cite*. There was a real effort to get local graphic designers for different issues, and it became a showcase for young talent. All those people brought so much to it.

MM In David Crane's original vision for the RDA, there was a goal to connect architects with the Houston community. How successful has the RDA been in fulfilling this aspiration?

DS There has always been tension around the question whether the RDA should be an outreach arm of the School of Architecture exclusively. It became much more than that, and at certain points, it became a citywide design forum. No one anticipated how large an organization it would become and what kind of community support it would have. It took a long time to build up this community. In the early days, the audience for a lecture would be a few dozen people and then a hundred people. Over the years, we were able to build up an audience with events at full capacity in the Mies auditorium at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and there was an equal audience for *Cite*.

Back in the day, the organization was a political hotbed. There were such strong personalities and such strong beliefs. And it was constant. It wore people down just because it was such an intense situation. After seventy issues or so, we hired an editor who had experience with architectural journals. She wanted to revamp the graphics, and consequently there were changes to the format and it became one of the biggest arguments I've ever seen. People were screaming and walking out because the new format was smaller. Then there was a debate about transitioning from black and white to color. Any organization has these kinds of tensions, but we tend to forget about them. *Cite* was most successful when Houston was ground for new buildings being constructed and architects coming through. Today, Houston is more of a middle-aged city, but in those days, we were preadolescent with an anything goes mentality, and young architects could come and start a career here.

SF The RDA has sponsored several design competitions, including the 99K House Competition, which called for submissions that would provide an affordable housing prototype for Houston's Fifth Ward. Can you talk about the process of organizing the competition and how the project engaged with the local community?

NG We had the opportunity to put together a competition that we proposed as a collaboration between the RDA, AIA, and the City of Houston, which donated the land. In 2008, we asked architects from around the world to design a house that could be built for $99,000. The 186 submissions (from 29 states and 16 countries) were first narrowed down to sixty-six, which are part of the publication. Then the jury, including Bryan Bell from Design Corps and David Lake from Lake Flato, chose the winner. David Harvey from Harvey Builders helped realize the project. It was a memorable experience because it was based on the successful collaboration of so many people.

Rice Building Workshop, ZeRow Solar Decathlon House, 2009, on Rice campus, ready to be transported to Washington, D.C.

DS When Nonya became the RDA President, she made that her cause and worked so hard on this project to make it happen. The design competitions were an opportunity for the RDA to catalyze design solutions in Houston.

NG At its best, the RDA highlighted certain conditions in Houston and more broadly in Texas and the Southwest. The 99K House Competition was a chance to bring ideas from all over to Houston

and allow them to inform the city. For me, the biggest joy during the time I was most active with the RDA was bringing people together to have conversations about relevant issues. The house that the jury selected ended up being a very sustainable house. At the time sustainability was on the cusp of being talked about. Organizations like the RDA continue to talk about ideas that are important and that becomes an opportunity to initiate change.

MM Together, you both founded Rice Building Workshop (RBW) in 1996 to give students the opportunity to design and build projects in a local context. Your first built contribution was a collaboration with Project Row Houses (PRH). Why did you choose to work in the Third Ward initially, and why did that community continue to be such a focal point for RBW?

Rice Building Workshop at Project Row Houses,
Danny Samuels, Rick Lowe, Nonya Grenader (from left to right).

NG Danny and I had been teaching together for several years, and we identified a lot that was in the Third Ward not far from PRH. At the same time, my son's class was looking for a volunteer project. I had recently visited PRH and was so impressed with it and asked if they needed anything. They asked for help with landscaping and my son's class did the planting. I told Danny about this experience and how I admired that PRH was part of the community. They knew their neighbors, the churches, and the schools. They did something that was unique, that no one else was doing because they revitalized a community through the arts. Of course, they had many other ambitions too, but this was such a great way to go about doing it. I suggested that we talk to Rick Lowe, who founded PRH together with other artists, and see if we could understand anything about his process that we might use on our lot. Rick told us about an available lot and the desire to build a house and grow the Young Mothers Residential Program. He explained that many of the families wanted to stay after the year that had been designated and the next house could be a place for those families. It was the beginning of a beautiful relationship with PRH.

DS The Building Workshop started when then-dean Lars Lerup sent me a note saying to go out and start to get the students off campus and working on experimental projects. The next semester, I offered a course that looked at construction. There were three projects going on nearby: two on Rice campus, Thomas Beebe's Baker Institute and Antoine Predock's Center for Nanoscale Science and Technology, and the Chapel of St. Basil by Philip Johnson at the University of St. Thomas. I arranged with each of the superintendents to let students join weekly site meetings. Nonya was on board after that, and we started talking about how we would fulfill the charge from Lars. Nonya was very interested in affordable housing, and suggested that we should look at a low-cost house. At the time, nobody was talking about making houses affordable by making them smaller. But when we looked at Project Row Houses, we saw these very small houses, and they inspired us.

Rice Building Workshop, Designs for Menil Café, Rice University School of Architecture, Fall 2011.

NG When you look closely at them, the 496 square-foot shotgun houses seem almost identical. They are enhanced by the fact that there's a front porch, a common backyard for everyone, and connectivity to the street. If you look at John Biggers' row house paintings, it's evident that he wanted to celebrate people coming out of the house, a kind of collective possibility. The houses could have and should have been larger in many cases, no doubt, and residents had very limited means, but the lot prices were low. What happens when you don't have enough land or resources? How can you work with a small footprint and try to engage the house in a way that elevates its opportunities? The row house is one unit, but when placed together with others along the street, it forms a very powerful ensemble that artists have celebrated because of its collective impact. So, we took this on and considered what you can do with smaller square footage.

DS The Six Square House was nine hundred square feet, two stories, and it took three years to build. We had to learn that having two stories multiplied the constructional complexity. For the next project, we decided, if this size was good, then maybe five hundred square feet would be even better. We came up with the XS house, which is now the Kindred Stories space. It was the same size as the shotgun houses, very much inspired by them, and much faster to construct.

MM How did RBW work with the RDA?

NG We were fortunate to receive RDA grants in addition to other grants from AIA Houston, the Susan Vaughan Foundation, and numerous companies and individuals. Many people made it happen, and RDA consistently gave support.

DS The RDA and RBW were two separate efforts. For us they were allied because we participated in both of them. We would be in the RDA board meetings, and somebody would ask what

Rice Building Workshop at ModPod House, Houston, Spring 2013.

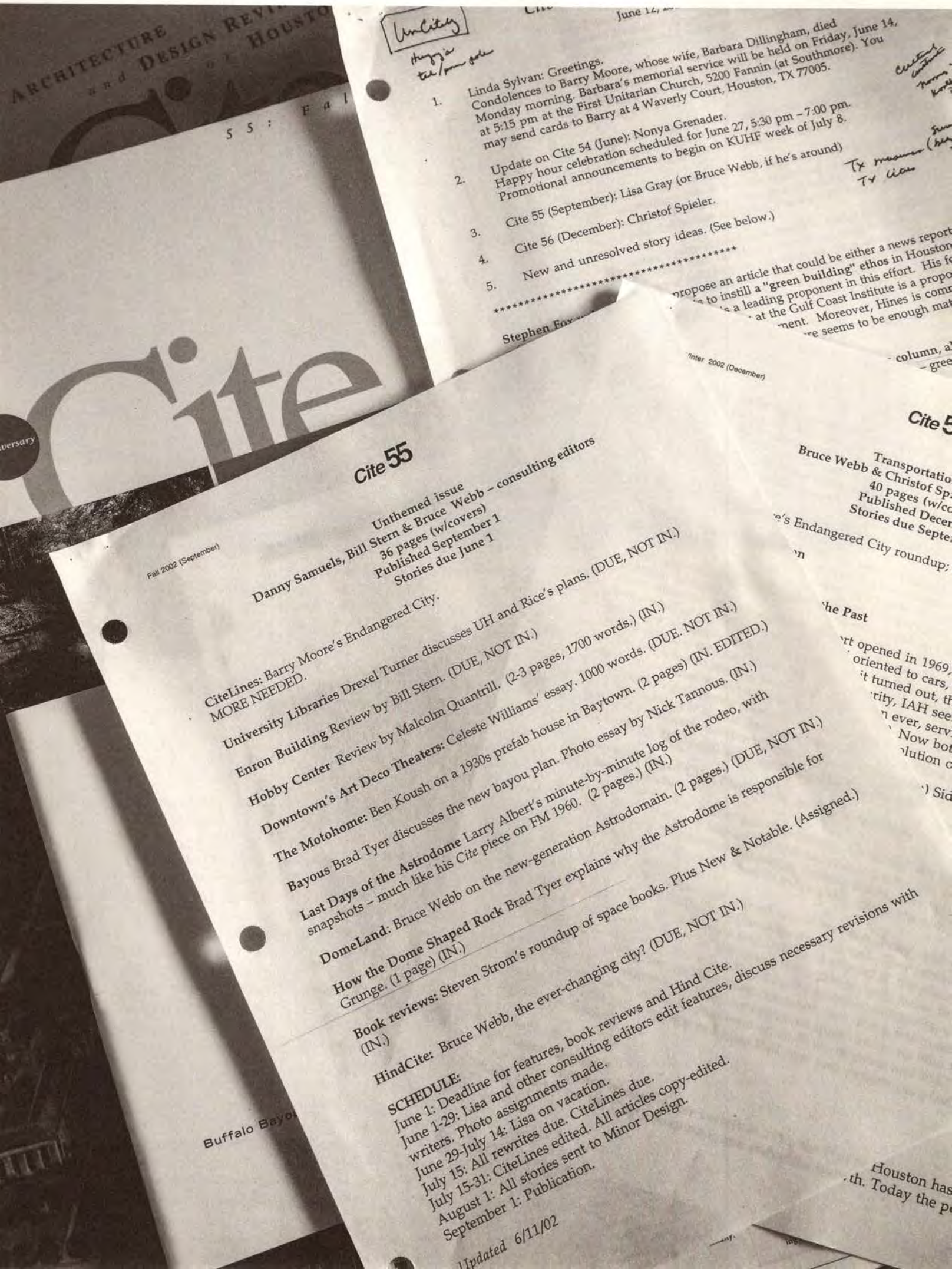
RBW was working on, and they would help us raise money for our projects. Larry Whaley, an engineer on the board, helped raise money for the Solar Decathlon. Stan Marek helped with every project and still does. When you have an organization that has a lot of people in the construction industry, they see it as a way for students to become familiar with what they do.

MM You alluded to the uniqueness of the RDA as an organization, that it was something you wouldn't find anywhere else in Houston. What are your thoughts regarding the future of RDA?

DS Everyone who is involved in an organization at a certain point thinks that this is the greatest time of that organization and it will never be like that again. For me, regarding all the nonprofits I've ever worked with, all I want to see is that the kind of overall structure of it remains so that new people can come in and introduce their voice. I would hope that there would be enough organizational structure so that other young people can join and find ways to do the next *Cite* or do the next lecture series.

NG The RDA has always asked how we can think about conditions of design in the public realm. Those conditions are constantly changing, so it is always valid to examine and comment through *Cite* magazine and various other formats. What I found most meaningful about the RDA was its capacity to bring so many people together. It is important for each group to structure the conversation in ways that reflect their passions and investigations and curiosities. One thing that I see as an overlap between Rice and the RDA, is the importance of students. We wouldn't have had the Rice Building Workshop without the incredible creativity, resilience, adaptability, and sheer talent of our students. And the Rice Design Alliance lectures were filled with students who were active in many ways. For me, students are at the forefront of this conversation, and I hope that level of engagement will continue.

Cite editorial meeting minutes, June 12, 2002, content updates on *Cite* 55 (editors Samuels, Stern, and Webb), and *Cite* 56 (editors Spieler and Webb).



UrbCity

June 12, 2002

1. Linda Sylvan: Greetings.
   Condolences to Barry Moore, whose wife, Barbara Dillingham, died Monday morning. Barbara's memorial service will be held on Friday, June 14, at 5:15 pm at the First Unitarian Church, 5200 Fannin (at Southmore). You may send cards to Barry at 4 Waverly Court, Houston, TX 77005.
2. Update on Cite 54 (June): Nonya Grenader.
   Happy hour celebration scheduled for June 27, 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm.
   Promotional announcements to begin on KUHF week of July 8.
3. Cite 55 (September): Lisa Gray (or Bruce Webb, if he's around)
4. Cite 56 (December): Christof Spieler.
5. New and unresolved story ideas. (See below.)

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propose an article that could be either a news report
to instill a "**green building**" ethos in Houston
a leading proponent in this effort. His fo
at the Gulf Coast Institute is a propo
ment. Moreover, Hines is comm
re seems to be enough mat

Stephen Fox

Winter 2002 (December)

- column, a
- gree

Architecture and Design Review of Houston

55: Fall

Cite

Fall 2002 (September)

Buffalo Bayou

Cite 55

Unthemed issue
Danny Samuels, Bill Stern & Bruce Webb – consulting editors
36 pages (w/covers)
Published September 1
Stories due June 1

CiteLines: Barry Moore's Endangered City.
MORE NEEDED.

University Libraries Drexel Turner discusses UH and Rice's plans. (DUE, NOT IN.)

Enron Building Review by Bill Stern. (DUE, NOT IN.)

Hobby Center Review by Malcolm Quantrill. (2-3 pages, 1700 words.) (IN.)

Downtown's Art Deco Theaters: Celeste Williams' essay. 1000 words. (DUE. NOT IN.)

The Motohome: Ben Koush on a 1930s prefab house in Baytown. (2 pages) (IN. EDITED.)

Bayous Brad Tyer discusses the new bayou plan. Photo essay by Nick Tannous. (IN.)

Last Days of the Astrodome Larry Albert's minute-by-minute log of the rodeo, with snapshots – much like his *Cite* piece on FM 1960. (2 pages.) (DUE, NOT IN.)

DomeLand: Bruce Webb on the new-generation Astrodomain. (2 pages.) (IN.)

How the Dome Shaped Rock Brad Tyer explains why the Astrodome is responsible for Grunge. (1 page) (IN.)

Book reviews: Steven Strom's roundup of space books. Plus New & Notable. (Assigned.) (IN.)

HindCite: Bruce Webb, the ever-changing city? (DUE, NOT IN.)

SCHEDULE:
June 1: Deadline for features, book reviews and Hind Cite.
June 1-29: Lisa and other consulting editors edit features, discuss necessary revisions with writers. Photo assignments made.
June 29-July 14: Lisa on vacation.
July 15: All rewrites due. CiteLines due.
July 15-31: CiteLines edited. All articles copy-edited.
August 1: All stories sent to Minor Design.
September 1: Publication.

Updated 6/11/02

Cite 5

Transportatio
Bruce Webb & Christof Sp
40 pages (w/co
Published Decer
Stories due Septe

's Endangered City roundup;

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Houston has
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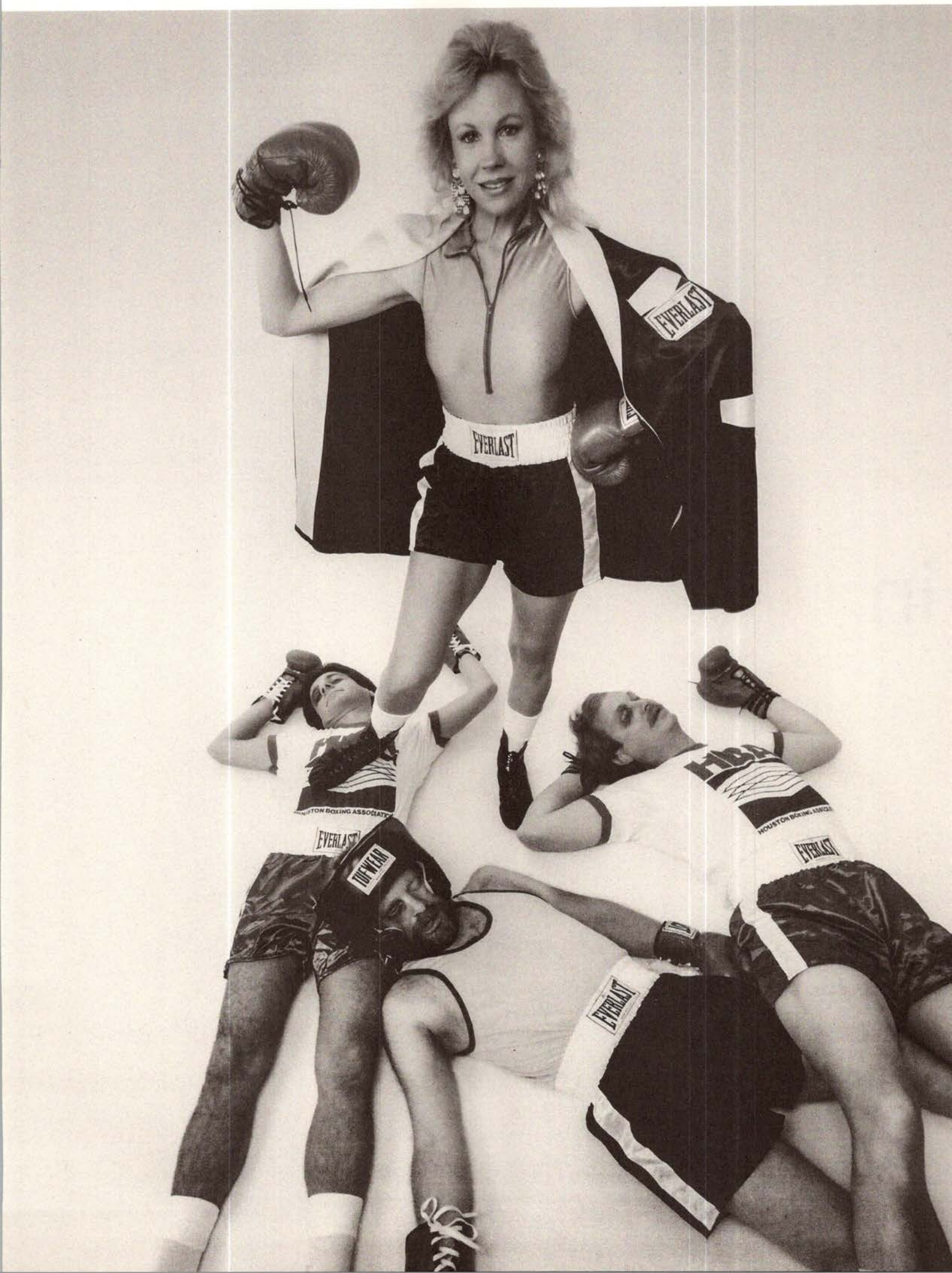
Rice Design Alliance Gala, Fight for *Cite*, Houston Boxing Association, June 27, 1987, Carolyn Farb with John Casbarian, Bob Timme, and Danny Samuels, Partners of Taft Architects.



Houston

in

Real Life

Houston is no longer the affordable city it was after the oil bust of the 1980s when prices were remarkably low. The myth of Houston's affordability is fueled by a high percentage of substandard housing. Housing costs have skyrocketed since the pandemic, a situation accelerated by tax policies, a massive housing shortage, and a commodification of housing in a free, global market.

Over the past decade, a dangerous rise in housing prices relative to income surged in many large cities across the United States. Low-income residents, many of them minorities and families with children, are being pushed out of urban centers, and for the most vulnerable, this can easily end in homelessness. Houston is no exception. Homelessness is woven into the urban landscape underneath its highway underpasses, and even though the city made significant progress in reducing homelessness over the course of the past decade, there are still too many individuals who are forced to sleep without shelter.

Adequate housing is a human right. While Accessory Dwelling Units have been the center of attention as a nimble response—also seen here in Houston—to the crisis, affordable, larger-scale multiunit housing is an unavoidable step to reach an adequate housing supply. In demand are revised models of inhabitation that foster a densification of the existing urban fabric and offer desirable housing opportunities for all social strata, in proximity to workplaces and public infrastructures, and consequently, a reduced dependency on the private vehicle as a mode of transportation.

Considering that the occupation of the land has been largely configured by self-imposed frameworks that restrict the use and activities that may take place on property in a subdivision, change is in our hands, both as designers and inhabitants.

Tibor Bielicky
Ellena Ehrl

Recording America

Highlighting the relationships among architecture, society, subculture, and media between the postwar era and today, *Recording America* connects the history of building in the US with issues of relevance for today's society. It is a contemporary chronicle engaging with people, projects, and places in a subjective and Gonzo-esque approach. Although it has its roots in academic and historical research, this project utilizes stylistic devices borrowed from everyday photography via media art concepts and New Journalism writing. In 2022, after a two-year pandemic-era hiatus, we continued the investigation we started in 2014 that, so far, includes New England, the Midwest, South Florida, and the Western US, with a chapter dedicated to the Lone Star State. The time spent in the greater Houston metropolitan area turned out to be among the most formative with regards to material and knowledge gathering. We were accompanied by Stephen Fox—aka Mr. Houston and architectural historian—who generously shared his deep reservoir of knowledge in a drive-around show-and-tell. We also roamed around in our typical unscripted way to discover the subtropical ecosystem of this place. Houston and its particular approach of laissez-faire regulations, its historically challenging and rich urbanism, its geography as shaped by the most pressing topic of the environmental change, and its demographic diversity, with uncountable subcultures emerging from the area: these all have contributed to an immense account for our unorthodox and ongoing investigation.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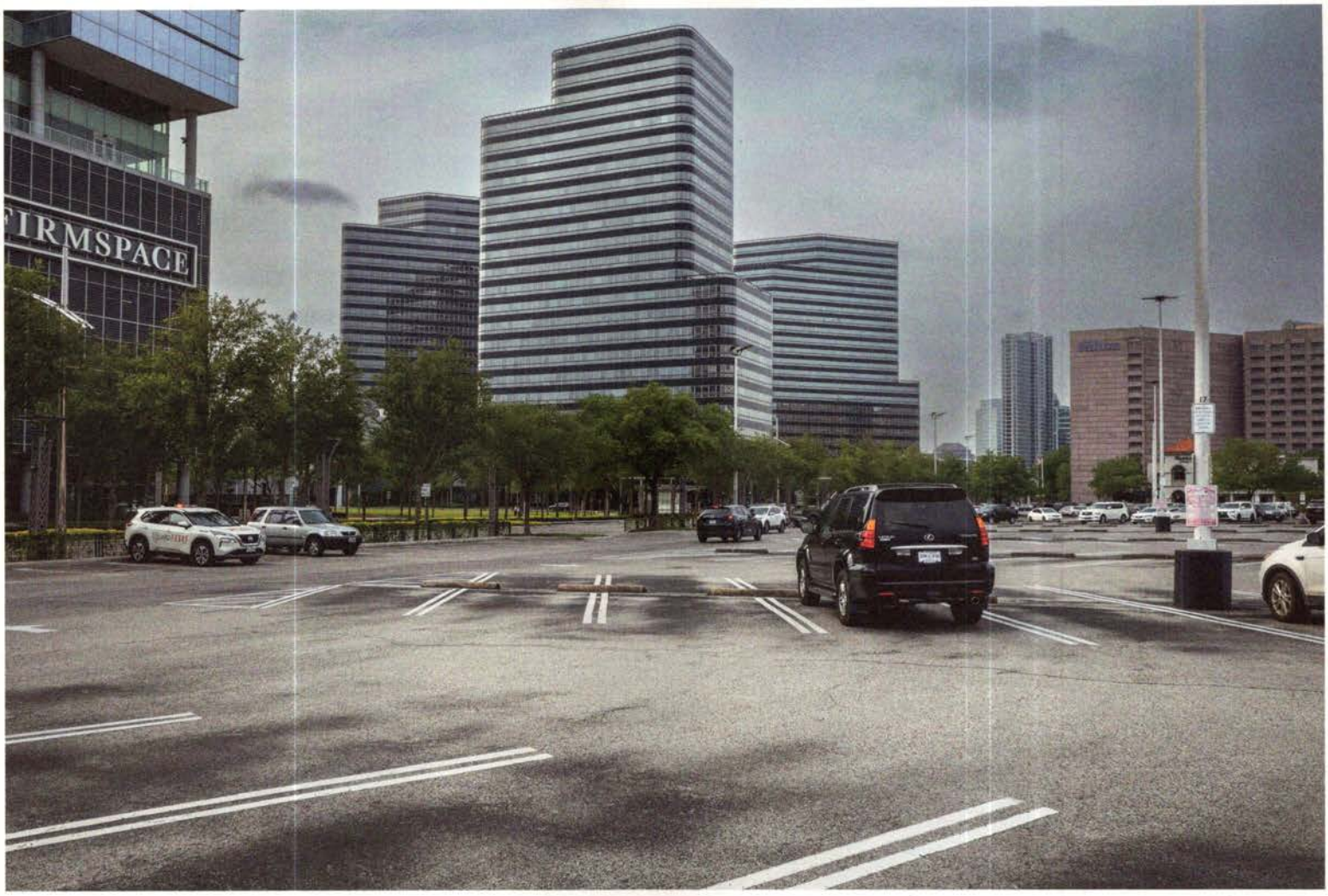
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Right to Housing

Joy Horak-Brown, Michael C. Nichols, and Eva Thibaudeau-Graczyk in Conversation with Reto Geiser

Why is Houston considered a success story in addressing the homelessness crisis in America? Reto Geiser spoke with three key figures who are on the front lines of this challenge in the Houston area. Michael C. Nichols, president and CEO of the Coalition for the Homeless, speaks about coordinated access as a hallmark of Houston's response. Eva Thibaudeau-Graczyk, CEO of Temenos Community Development Corporation, and Joy Horak-Brown, president and CEO of New Hope Housing, explain why they support a housing-first approach for their respective organizations. All three concur that funding, cooperation, and compassionate care are the cornerstones to Houston's success.

RG In December 2022, a state of emergency was issued by the newly elected mayor of Los Angeles, where 40,000 people were forced to sleep in the streets. Why is Houston doing better?

Skid Row neighborhood, Los Angeles, March 2022.

MN Houston began looking at ways to make homelessness as rare, brief, and nonrecurring as possible about a decade ago. At that time, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) declared Houston had a homelessness problem. HUD provided the city with technical assistance, and Mayor Annise Parker decided this was an issue she wanted to get personally involved in. And the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009 was passed too, which ensured that instead of HUD giving money to individual agencies, the agency would distribute it by community. A Continuum of Care steering committee was set up, and two other commitments were made during that time. The first was the community would try to focus on housing the most vulnerable people first. I define vulnerability as those most likely to die. The second big decision was to set up coordinated access that everybody who is getting housing would come through.

ET It was a really unique time in which these brand-new regulations were written that radically changed the playing field for homeless response. The funding before this time was not set up to reward people using interventions that cost the least and had the biggest impact. The HEARTH Act ushered in these new regulations; it laid out a blueprint that could greatly reduce homelessness. Houston was incredibly, incredibly well positioned at that time. We had two new leaders in place at both of our major housing authorities. Prior to these two folks who came in, no one at the housing authorities had seen themselves as a change agent or a contributor to ending homelessness.

With the infusion of rental assistance in the form of vouchers from our housing authorities as a community, we were able to look at the money and were able to be very, very prudent about redirecting dollars and replacing rental assistance with these vouchers. This freed up a ton of money to create new

The Ion District, Houston, homeless encampment located under the US 59 Freeway, between Caroline Street and Almeda Road, January 2022.

opportunities for people to exit homelessness and to move into permanent housing. And so those key leaderships, including that of Mayor Annise Parker, and then the directives at both the city of Houston and Harris County—with their top leadership at the economic and housing development departments getting on board to be part of this—made a phenomenal difference. Where a lot of communities have really gotten stuck is that there's a turf war and competition for dollars among providers. And the Houston community partners, by contrast, had a willingness to come together and say, okay, I don't have to do everything. My agency is really good at supportive services. I don't have to also have an emergency shelter. I don't also have to have street outreach.

Instead of taking limited dollars and diluting them across the entire geography, we were able to really concentrate in people's specialties and be much wiser with the use of our money. Providers and leadership were willing to step aside from their own organizational best interests and put the person experiencing the crisis of homelessness at the center of every conversation and doing the best thing for them.

RG Can you briefly explain the "Housing First" approach?

ET Housing First means you don't have to jump through hoops to deserve housing. It's the idea that no matter where you are in your journey in wellness—for example, in experiencing serious mental illness, struggling with addiction, experiencing trauma, or facing complex chronic trauma—no matter where you are in that space, you can be housed, you can sign a lease, and you can keep permanent housing. This model embraces the idea of harm reduction so that you don't have to take an

analysis or breathalyzer in order to keep your apartment. And the idea of Permanent Supportive Housing as an intervention is a powerful thing. Housing is the intervention that gets people off the streets and then the services wrapped around them are what keep people housed.

Houston Metro, Wheeler Station, US 59 underpass, May 2023.

MN First, it is housing, a real unit with a lock and a key and a roof and air conditioning, heating, generator, plumbing. Second, it is funding for that place. The third component is services, but paid services, not volunteers coming in, but rather experts. It is a very robust system. The evidence is that by tackling the most vulnerable first, you still have more than 85% people not returning to homelessness for two years or more. That's remarkable.

JHB New Hope Housing has 1,500 studio efficiency apartments that are dedicated to people who have been chronically homeless or who have experienced homelessness. The average length of stay in our apartment homes is 33 months, which approximates the length of stay in any quality, multifamily apartment property in the city of Houston. You might wonder why people don't stay forever in beautiful, affordable housing with expert services? People get married, they get a job across town, they move in with a roommate, they move back with their family, they are elderly and move to a nursing setting, or they die. These are the same reasons people leave any apartment setting.

RG Based on the impressive track record that you outlined and your different initiatives, do you think Houston can become the first major American city to effectively end homelessness?

ET Homelessness does not exist in a vacuum. Homelessness is a result of the failing of all sorts of other systems and institutions, and unfortunately, those issues are not being fixed. We are working as efficiently and as effectively and as quickly as we can. Unless we can close those doors that feed into homelessness, we won't be able to end it.

JHB Homelessness is a complex and multilayered challenge. It is a symptom of other societal ills. A significant percentage of Americans are medicated for anxiety or depression or mental illness. If those problems are undiagnosed and untreated, as is typical for the homeless or those at risk, then they spiral. An untreated mental health problem can lead to people self-medicating, and now you may be talking about drug addiction or alcohol abuse. Of course, it is difficult to address mental and behavioral health or addiction if a person is not stably housed. Affordable Housing + Services is a health intervention.

MN Let me tell you what my goal would be. The aspiration is that when someone becomes homeless, we would find them housing within thirty days. Is that a realistic goal? It depends on funding.

ET You also have to have property management and housing that are willing to accept what our folks bring to the table. That means: evictions; lack of rental history; insufficient funds; and previous drug charges or assaults often from when people are living in shelters or on the streets. We know that the people we serve go through hard times, and they're on extremely limited incomes. However, they do pay 30% of their income toward their rents at Temenos. If they have a crisis and for some reason they aren't able to pay that, they're now behind on rent. We will make a payment plan, but many typical landlords will instead proceed to eviction.

JHB New Hope Housing's core purpose is to help people stabilize and advance their lives through Housing + Services so that homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring. Current funding is allocated to chronic homelessness, which has been an important and successful initiative. Now we must begin to help citizens without them living on the street for a year in order to qualify for assistance. That length of homelessness imbeds whatever challenges the individual is facing, making it extraordinarily difficult for a person to recover and move forward as productively as they might were the trauma of homelessness shortened. An apartment home offered within 30 days would have a strong, measurable, and positive impact.

ET I also want to highlight the fact that New Hope and Temenos accept vouchers and work with the housing authority. There are so many mainstream places where people could live, but they can discriminate on source of income. It's a huge problem. People are out there with vouchers, and they can't find anywhere to use them.

RG Let us shift our focus briefly to policy and leadership questions. As far as I understand, the success here in Houston in terms of reducing homelessness is very much linked to what's described as systems-level thinking and to a successful collaboration of you all and many others in leadership and the community.

MN Entities that have to be around the table were present in 2012—and they're still working with us. That's the amazing part. It's not just the city of Houston. It's the city and their housing department. Harris County and their housing department. It is philanthropists like the Houston Endowment; they are systems thinkers and want to solve system-wide problems.

ET I say that the people who are making the policies and directing the money cannot be the providers. Rather, they need to be the people with the resources. That was the fundamental shift that we did. We went from a system in which policies were dictated by providers to one where those who control the resources made the priorities, which is really where the decision making hopefully is.

JHB But those who control the resources need their priorities and decisions informed by the professional experience of those who offer the solutions, the practitioners who are providing affordable, permanent housing with services.

RG What are some concerns that impact the ability to successfully realize affordable housing?

ET One of our key partners is the faith-based community. When they own land and they're supportive of affordable housing, number one, you have site control and land. Number two, the whole congregation backs the project, saying, yes, we want this. And that's where you can start to build your proof point, where for future projects, you can say, "we're a good neighbor." It can be tough with a "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) mentality.

US 59 underpass at Main Street, Houston, May 2023.

JHB The typical arguments in opposition to affordable housing are concerns about traffic, overcrowded schools, lack of transportation options, lack of grocery stores, bad sidewalks, and a general thought that the neighborhood would not be a good place for the residents to live. There's the idea that you are doing a disservice to the people you are proposing to offer a lovely, affordable apartment home. Of course, the people making those arguments are living themselves in the purported undesirable neighborhood. You hear these arguments again and again. And one of the things that the NIMBY neighbors can do very effectively if you're using Housing Tax Credits, as most affordable housing developers do, is lobby against you with the state representatives who can then speak up in opposition. This can push you from 9% tax credits to using 4% tax credits, which is far less financing for construction. This can cost a developer millions of dollars. Or worse, this lobbying can completely cancel the direly needed affordable housing development.

Located in Houston's historic East End, on the Metro light rail, New Hope Housing Harrisburg is an award-winning community that helps relocate homeless individuals into permanent supportive housing. Houston, May 2023.

RG Can you tell us a bit more about the role of transit-oriented housing, and what role this plays in your work?

JHB All of New Hope's properties are transit-oriented, which is a key need for residents in affordable housing. In fact, in our studio efficiency apartments for the formerly homeless and those at risk, very few residents own an automobile. One of our properties is right on the light rail, another has a bus stop across a private drive, and all of our developments are located on robust bus lines. It is also important to note that there is not a particularly strong transit system the farther away you are from Houston's core. When you build in the city core, you're usually doing infill housing. And that land is in smaller parcels and the costs are simply higher. Transit oriented is vital for affordable housing, and it comes at a price.

RG Can you elaborate how nonprofits like Temenos and New Hope invest with a long-term mentality that exceeds the typical investment timeline of fifteen years as advanced by commercial developers and lenders?

JHB The use of Housing Tax Credits, which are a central financing mechanism for affordable housing, carries with it a forty-year land use restriction agreement for affordability. Our business model is not about selling our property. It's about our commitment to designing our properties for durability, holding them in perpetuity, and maintaining them to the highest standards.

ET And part of that goes into the design of the buildings and really thinking long-term and designing not for immediate upfront cost, but really looking at durability and longevity.

JHB Homelessness is a housing problem, and so the greatest concentration of homelessness will be found where there is the least amount of affordable housing available. It's challenging to build affordable housing and to provide the appropriate services to meet resident needs, but New Hope has worked for three decades to learn our business and to be able to execute with excellence.

RG Who sets the vision for affordable housing?

JHB We are still operating off of the vision and strategy put in place when Mayor Annise Parker, Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, and the Houston Housing Authority came together. I am still waiting, as I said earlier, for that vision to adjust to accommodate all our homeless neighbors, not just the chronic homeless who have lived on the street for a year or more. That adjustment must be driven by federal dollars.

ET There is a newer collaborative group that's come together that we're both part of—the Houston Housing Collaborative—and I think they're having some success in figuring out the space. They have brought together many affordable housing providers, and it is certainly part of their hope that they can set that vision.

RG In what ways is Houston different from other major cities that are facing homelessness?

MN We have a great partnership between faith-based institutions, faith-based nonprofits, and government and secular nonprofits and philanthropy. It is unique. And although there's not a perfect agreement, everybody is willing to work together to team up, to try different things and talk about different things.

ET Yes, the way that our jurisdictions have worked together with elected leadership is not typical. In other places you see a lot of finger pointing and that has not happened here and it's made for great progress.

JHB We are dealing with a very complex problem, and it's a messy one because we humans can be messy to work with. We all are. But it isn't a hopeless problem. And we've made a tremendous amount of progress that we can point to and feel really good about. We've come together to make a very real impact on the lives of real people. We think a lot at New Hope Housing about the souls who go to sleep in our buildings every night. They are our core purpose.

MN Or the souls that are unhoused on the street tonight. Homelessness is a complex problem, but there's a solution.

New Hope Housing's Brays Crossing provides studio-efficiency apartment homes for single individuals living on zero to low incomes. Houston, May 2023.

Jamal Cyrus *Astro Blue*

it is because we are
a vital part of this machinery
SOUL but sometime victual
it (blue debris) lingers here
like a scented oil stain in concrete
at times aromatic, sweet
at times repugnant
and able to conjure the most tenebrous ancestral hours

binded or bound to space and place
you cannot escape its rhythm
have embodied its pace
it is insidious yet humble
and feels no need to be known
Imperceptibly it replicates
like shadows in the landscape
like dust on a broom

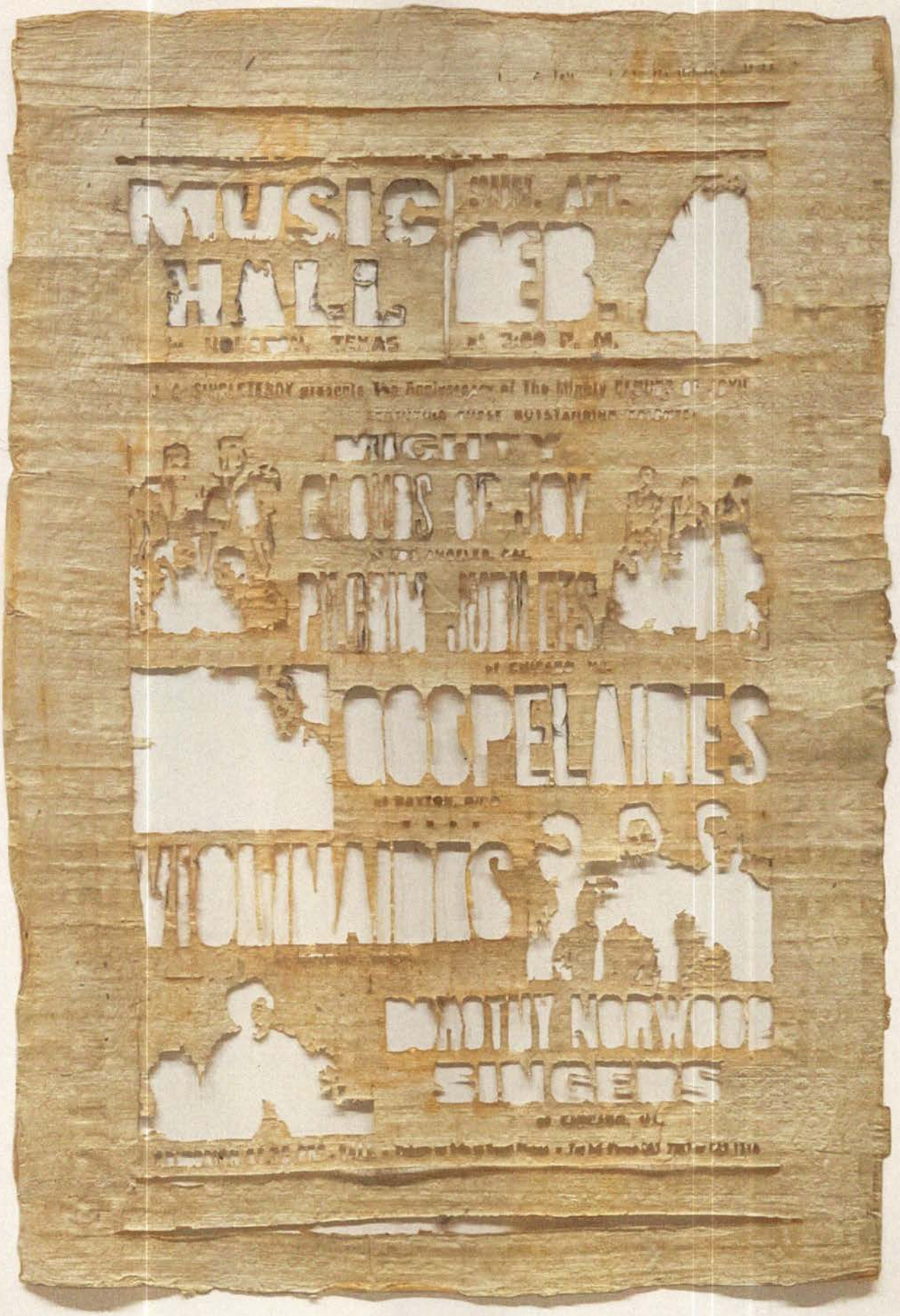
107 → *Sonic Heritage*, 2018
laser-cut papyrus
30 1/8 × 22 5/8 × 1 5/8 in.

108 → *Bobby Bland in all Blues*, 2017
acrylic paint, pigment, grits, and gel medium on dyed canvas mounted on Styrene
54 × 72 in.

109 → *Blues in Spring (3)*, 2019
Pigment, grits, and acrylic on laser cut canvas
60 × 44 × 2 in.

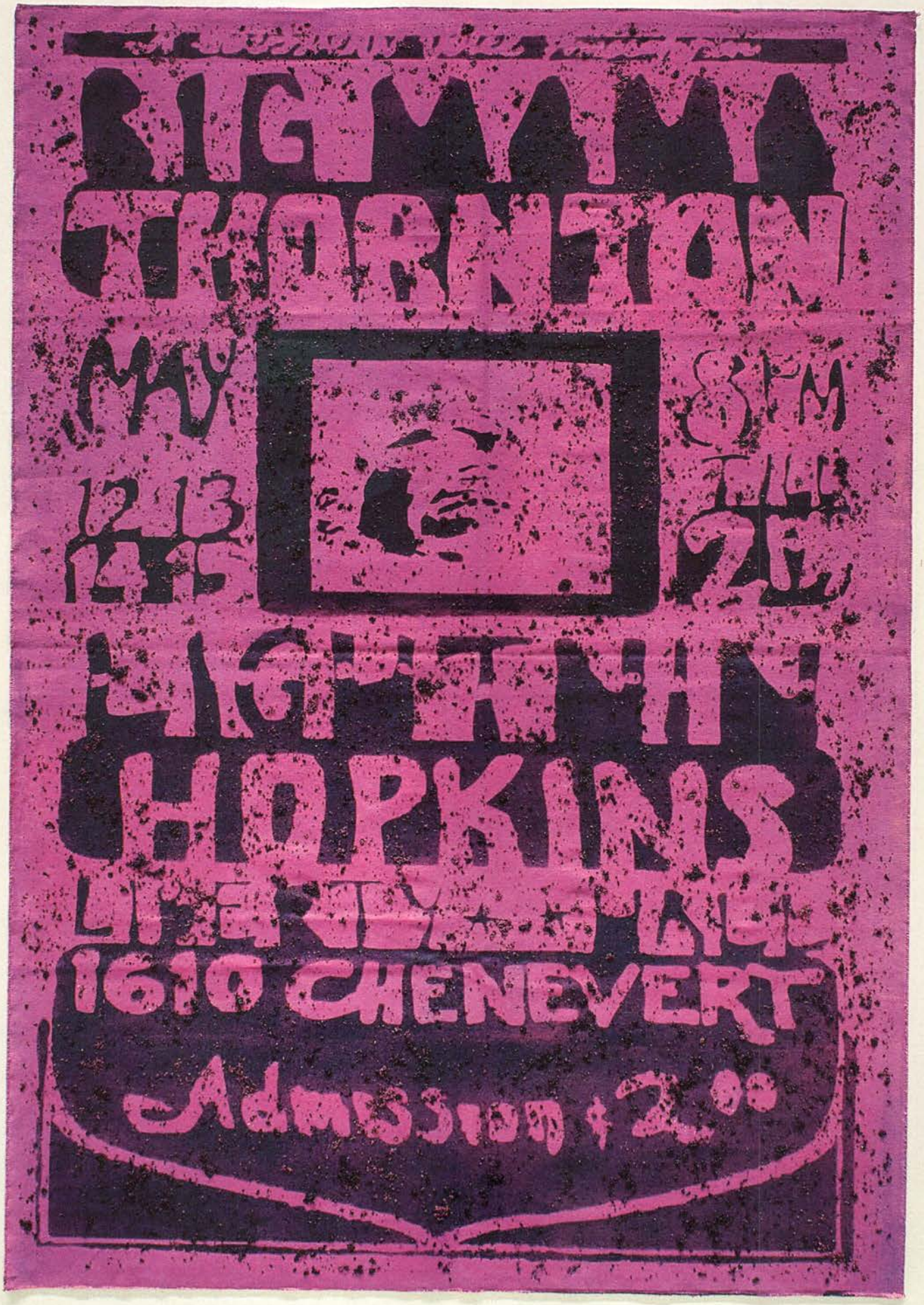
110 → *Blues in Spring (2)*, 2019
Pigment, grits, and acrylic on laser cut canvas
60 × 44 × 2 in.

111 → *Blues in Spring (1)*, 2019
Pigment, grits, and acrylic on laser cut canvas
60 × 44 × 2 in.


MUSIC
HALL
FEB. 4
MIGHTY
CLOUDS OF JOY
GOSPELAIRES
DOROTHY NORWOOD
SINGERS

Jamal Cyrus


ST. FRANCIS of ASSISI
PARISH HALL
5102 DARNEY
PRE-SALE $1.50
FRIDAY
APRIL
11
BUILDING FUND COMMITTEE
IN PERSON
The EXCITING
CLIFTON
EVERYTHING IS ALL RIGHT
CHENIER
AND HIS
RED HOT LOUISIANA BAND


SIGMA
TAURION
MAY
12 13
8PM
7th
LIGHTNIN
HOPKINS
LIBERTY HALL
1610 CHENEVERT
Admission $2.00

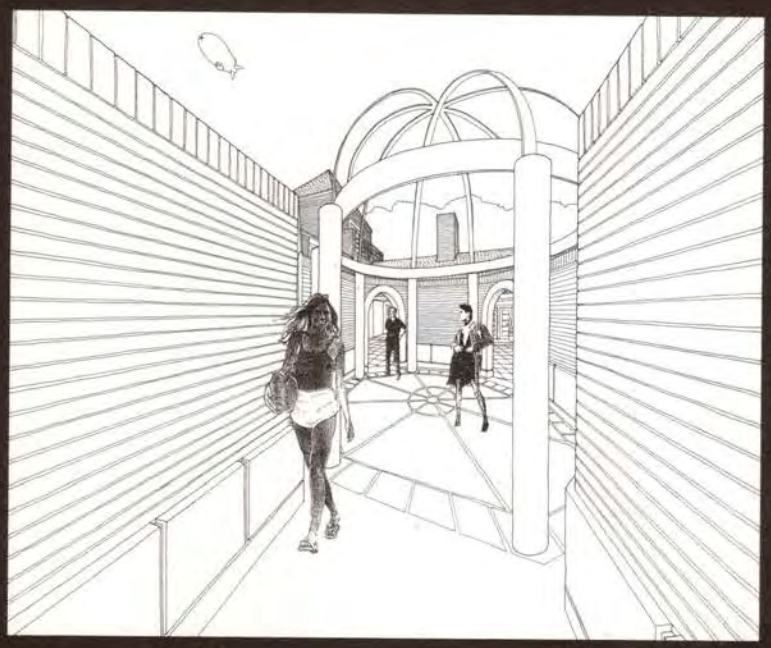
Jamal Cyrus

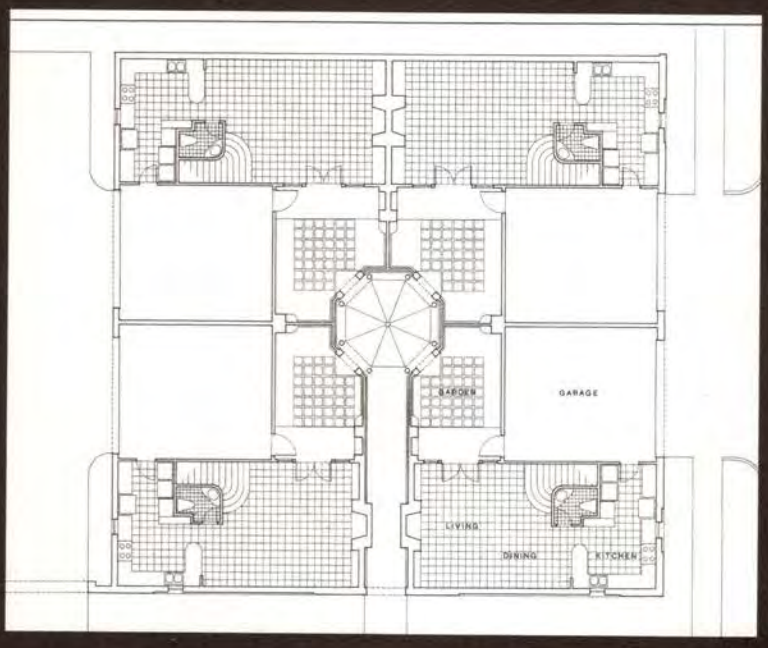

COLISEUM
MONDAY
MARCH
The BIG SHOW OF THE YEAR
DYNAMITE
The Fabulous
JAMES BROWN
ELSIE MAE
CRAWFORD
JEWELS
PIECE BAND
LOU CHRISTIE
THOMAS

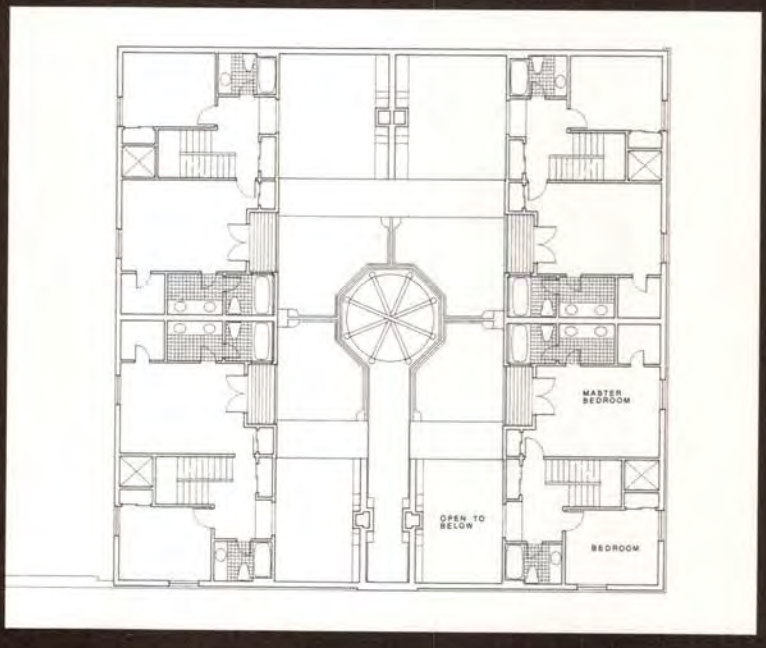
Houston Unbuilt

Kathryn E. O'Rourke

Commonwealth Townhouses, Taft Architects







Commonwealth Townhouses, Houston, 1982.
Collages, Plans (first floor, left; second floor, right).
Images courtesy of John J. Casbarian/Taft Architects.

Houston is rich in thoughtfully designed townhouses, the residential type most suited to the city's comingling of urbanity and sprawl. The Commonwealth Townhouses, designed by Taft Architects in 1982, would undoubtedly be highly sought-after in the Montrose-area real estate market today had they been built. The firm planned the project to occupy a corner site at Commonwealth and Maryland Streets, and it would have consisted of four three-story, L-shaped houses organized around a central court. Each house was designed with two bedrooms, two and half baths, a study, a small garden, and a two-car garage. The project combined signature elements of the firm's early-1980s style, including a tautly composed plan and highly disciplined facade composition. In its contextualism, formalism, and clever allusions to historical precedents, the Commonwealth Townhouses project is a case study in architectural postmodernism.

The designers at Taft Architects prided themselves on their attention to site, something they emphasized in Commonwealth presentation documents when they described the design as a response to the "old neighborhood of stately mansions," as well as to "somewhat harsh edge conditions."[1] These neighborhood edge conditions apparently dictated the inward orientation of the townhouse group and the nearly windowless ground floor walls. Taft Architects studied context at multiple scales and translated it into the project in both the massing and the plan. Pyramidal roofs atop the towers at the four corners of the project along with sloped roofs below them and pronounced chimneys together acknowledged prominent forms on neighboring houses. Small, upper-level terraces, placed perpendicularly to the street and visible from Commonwealth Street, echoed nearby porches. To organize the site, the architects may have looked one block south for inspiration. The first image in their presentation materials was a detailed map of the area. Most striking in it were the four blocks of the Hyde Park neighborhood bounded by Fairview, Waugh, Missouri, and Yupon Streets, with Lamar Park running, axis-like, from Waugh, across Commonwealth, and deep into the next block. In plan and at a much smaller scale, the Commonwealth Townhouses group somewhat resembles the arrangement of the park and its adjacent streets.

Visitors to the Commonwealth Townhouses would have passed under an arch and walked down a tall, narrow, open-air walkway between two houses to a small octagonal court articulated by the domical ribs of a gazebo-like structure. Four arches opened from it onto the gardens in front of each house. In section—and because of its proximity to the gardens—this structure almost recalls the follies popular in eighteenth-century English landscape gardens, many of which were the settings of important neoclassical country houses. Whether or not the site plan was meant as a response to the grid and greenery of Houston's Hyde Park, with the bold, clear geometries elsewhere in the scheme, it also reads as an echo of the hierarchical planning of neo-Palladian classicism seen in the plan of Chiswick House (Richard Boyle and William Kent, 1729) in London, a city with a much larger and more famous Hyde Park.

Of course, neo-neoclassicism was all the range in the 1980s, and it is not difficult to imagine that the highly intellectual bunch of architects at Taft, who circulated with some of the most theoretically engaged and formally daring architects of the period (including Peter Eisenman, César Pelli, and Kenneth Frampton), would have played such formal and rhetorical games. This is the same firm, after all, that first called itself Architects Incahoots & Associates, as if to show the American Institute of Architects just how much the members of the office didn't care. The small firm, which was nationally recognized by the time it created the Commonwealth project, later took the name of the street on which its office stood.

At Commonwealth, Taft maximized lot space and packed a double-height living/dining, area into the three-story buildings. The architects had designed similarly open and volumetric spaces at their Grove Court Townhouses (1979), which were also densely arranged and oriented inward on a hierarchical plan. In the unrealized Commonwealth project, in an echo of Le Corbusier's *promenade architecturale*, they conceived of the section as "a progression of single and double volume spaces."[2] Such configurations, which began to appear in Houston townhouses in the 1970s and would later become a mainstay of the type there, served to bring light into the dwellings and increase the sense of spaciousness. Taft acknowledged other architectural histories on the facade, which was to be clad in brick and had a pronounced stucco base that rose to articulate the buildings' corners, garages, and the arch of the pedestrian entrance, thus using forms evocative of the mission-revival style. A model of the project implies that the color palette was to consist of pink-orange planes, mint green roofs, and a sand-colored stucco base. The multiplicity of architectural historical allusions in the design was characteristic of the eclecticist strand of postmodernism and, along with the colors, made the design read as cleverly up-to-date.

Curiously, the building that Taft did realize that was most like the Commonwealth Townhouses project was a large, private house on the tiny Caribbean island of Nevis, a place presumably quite different from Montrose and more than 2,000 miles from Houston. The Talbot House (1980–81) also has four corner towers, boldly scaled geometries, and bright colors. Given the priority the firm placed on contextualism, one is tempted to search for parallels between the sites, but, other than the shared condition of high humidity, one comes up with those of the loosest sort, ventured winkingly, and only because of the architects' obvious delight in wordplay. When Taft worked on Nevis, the island was in the process of further loosening its ties to the former colonial power, Great Britain, and on the way from being a protectorate to merely part of the Commonwealth.

Notes

1 Taft Architects, *Commonwealth Townhouses, Houston, Texas* (Project files of Taft Architects), n.p.

2 Ibid.

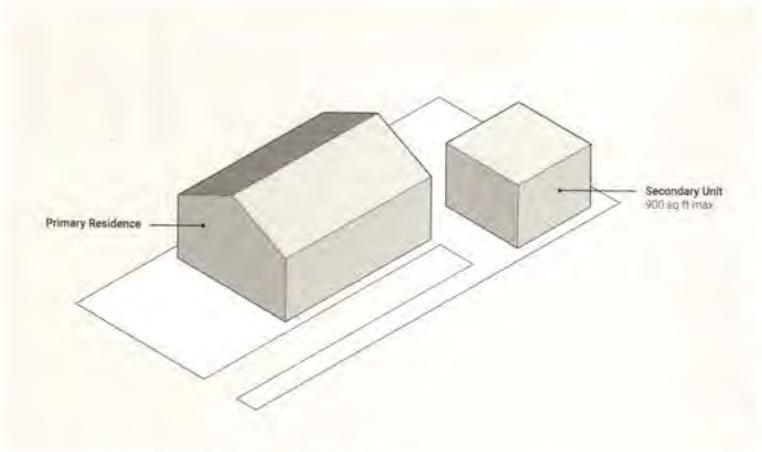
Construct, Auxiliary, a net-positive Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), 2019–22. Photograph: Paul Hester.

Net Positive

Andrew Colopy

Dwelling

Auxiliary is a net-positive Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) in Houston's First Ward and the latest project to be realized by Construct, a long-standing design-build program within the Rice School of Architecture. An ADU is simply a second residence built on the same property as a single-family house, a type of housing outlawed in many US cities in parallel with the advent of single-family zoning. By contrast, Houston has regularly allowed such "secondary dwellings" that are commonplace in older neighborhoods. When Construct took up the research topic, ADUs were just starting to attract attention. Despite a national image of affordability, much of central Houston is rapidly becoming less so. And widespread interest in ADUs is undoubtedly a response to the dual crises of housing affordability and environmental sustainability. An ADU may provide lower-cost rental housing and increase the density of existing neighborhoods while maintaining their character.



Houston Municipal Code, Single Family Residence.

Houston Metro Single Family Lot Map.

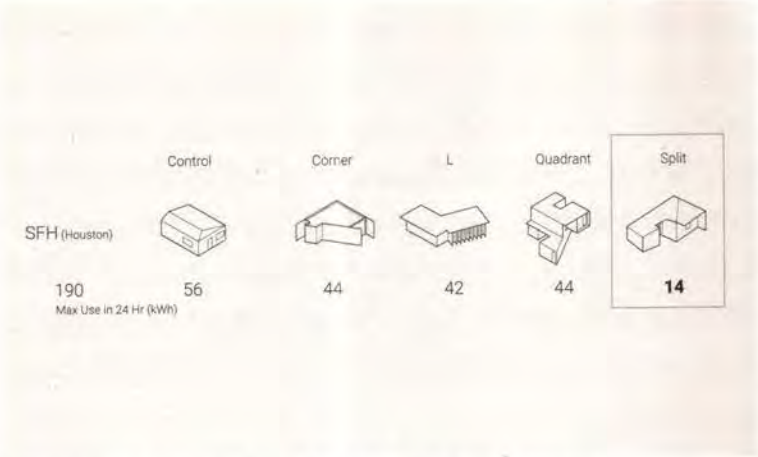
Framing.

They also make sense given the rise in smaller households, more intergenerational families, single parents, and cohabiting individuals. They do pose specific challenges however. Smaller spaces and tighter quarters test our cultural norms of comfort and privacy. Hidden away, they also struggle to participate in the public sphere. Rentals cannot provide the economic benefits of home ownership, and they can be more expensive to build than mass-produced, conventionally developed homes.

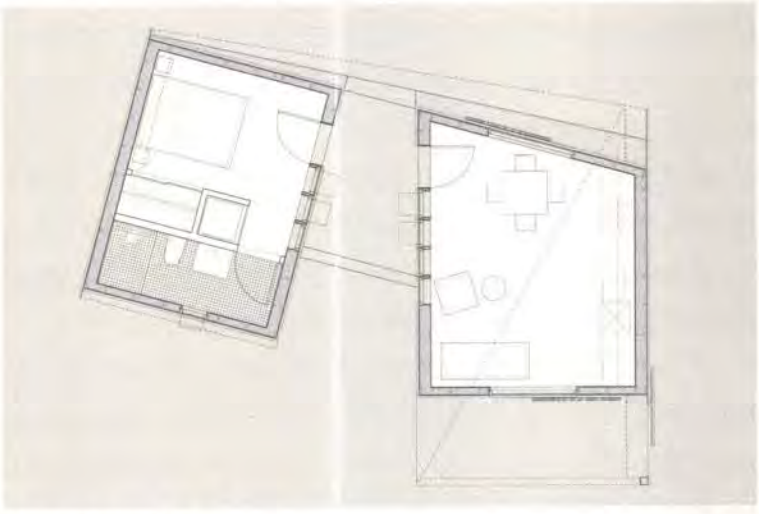
Consider the ADU's potential through a simple thought exercise: the Houston metro area is comprised of over 1.5 million single-family homes, of which, just over 5,000 are thought to have an accessory dwelling.[2] Adding an ADU alongside each existing home could easily house over two million people and accommodate metro population growth beyond 2040.[3] Of course, doing so may double down on longstanding ecological and social problems, and so Construct aims to demonstrate a more thoughtful approach through speculative research and realized projects.

Though many factors contribute to the persistent rise in housing costs, Construct's work has emphasized one important reality: that construction efficiency peaked sixty years ago.[4] This is a fact that is both shocking and unsurprising, given that the model of US housing production hasn't substantially changed either, continuing to rely on the serial production of low-density, repetitive, single-family homes built upon undeveloped land—industrially organized production, yet still constructed by hand. In this respect, the ADU is inherently more sustainable, providing infill housing within the existing urban fabric, though must contend with the reality of highly variable and constrained site conditions. These are very real limits that frustrate any ability to scale through serialized production, whether in product or process.

In response to these interrelated concerns, student projects began by designing an adaptive



Energy Analysis: Comparative Energy Projection of Prototypes and Control.



Prototype Concept Plan.

Portal Frame Mockup.

prototype that is tested and refined computationally at an urban scale across a large array of prospective sites. Similarly, they developed computer-controlled fabrication and speculative assembly processes to increase the efficiency of nonstandard production.

We initiated the Auxiliary project in 2019 with support from Rice University's Energy and Environment Initiative, specifically charged with the development of a net-positive ADU. The basic idea was straightforward: to realize an ADU prototype that minimized energy use and that paired solar generation with battery storage in order to produce more energy than it consumed. In principle, any extra power generated could then subsidize the primary dwelling.

Students evaluated 19,298 single family lots that comprise four central Houston neighborhoods. Analyzing specific sites in aggregate, existing conditions guided design, generating a proposition for each site rather than a single, idealized standard.

Working in groups, students then developed prototypes, testing and refining their designs for the full range of prospective sites. In parallel, they developed novel building envelope assemblies, building full-scale mockups to improve fabrication and construction processes while simulating their thermal performance. Comparing projected energy use, all projects outperformed a control. One, however, was predicted to use 75 percent less energy than the comparative control and was selected to advance.

The chosen project, designed by Katie Gullick and Madeleine Pelzel, made use of a form similar to that of a well-known historical type, the dogtrot. This form has separate interior spaces with an exterior porch running through its depth to maximize passive ventilation. While the internalized porch functions similarly in the students' project, more importantly, it separates day and night functions into separately conditioned volumes: living, kitchen,

Sheathing.

Cladding.

Solar Installation.

and dining in one half, bed and bath in the other. This approach allows the conditioning of the two volumes to be tailored to occupant use. While the inhabitant is asleep, for instance, the kitchen volume can be conditioned for optimal overall energy use rather than human comfort. This logic extended to variations of the type, a live/work separation for instance, rather than day/night.

Alongside the project's unique spatial configuration, the students developed a portal-frame system that integrated standard lumber with CNC-cut plywood plates. The approach creates a double-stud and rafter system, more materially efficient in structure and more insulative, while aiming to shorten on-site framing and ease construction of more complex and variable, solar-optimized roof angles.

Construct engaged Avenue CDC, a local nonprofit that provides affordable housing, with an offer to partner and realize a prototype. Avenue's proposed site included two bungalows and an existing ADU from the 1930s, all historically protected buildings and affordable rentals in Houston's First Ward.

In all, 63 students worked to design and build the project over the course of 30 months. Today, Auxiliary provides an affordable home rented at 80 percent Area Median Income, and through a partnership with PearlX, will track energy usage to evaluate real-word performance for future research.

Notes

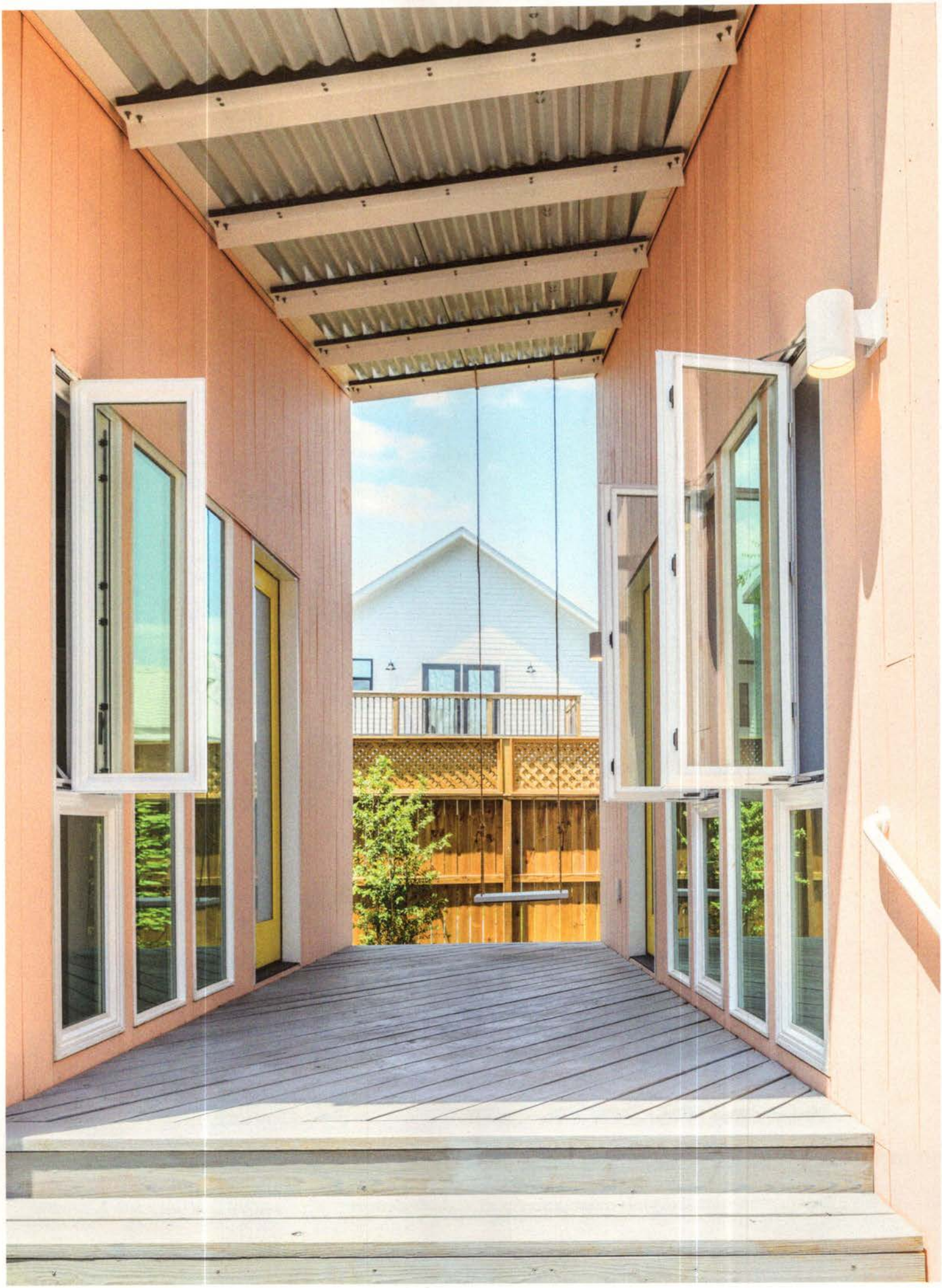
The project was led by Construct codirectors Andrew Colopy and Danny Samuels and supported by grants from Rice University's Energy & Environment Initiative and the Susan Vaughan Foundation.

1 Established in 1996 as Rice Building Workshop (RBW) by Professors in the Practice Danny Samuels and Nonya Grenade, the program was recast as Construct in 2017 when joined by Codirector and Associate Professor Andrew Colopy.

2 The Kinder Institute for Urban Research has identified an estimated 5,300 ADUs within the city of Houston based upon 2020 Harris County Appraisal District data.

3 The Greater Houston Partnership's report, *Metro Houston Population Forecast*, projects approximately two million additional residents between 2022 and 2041.

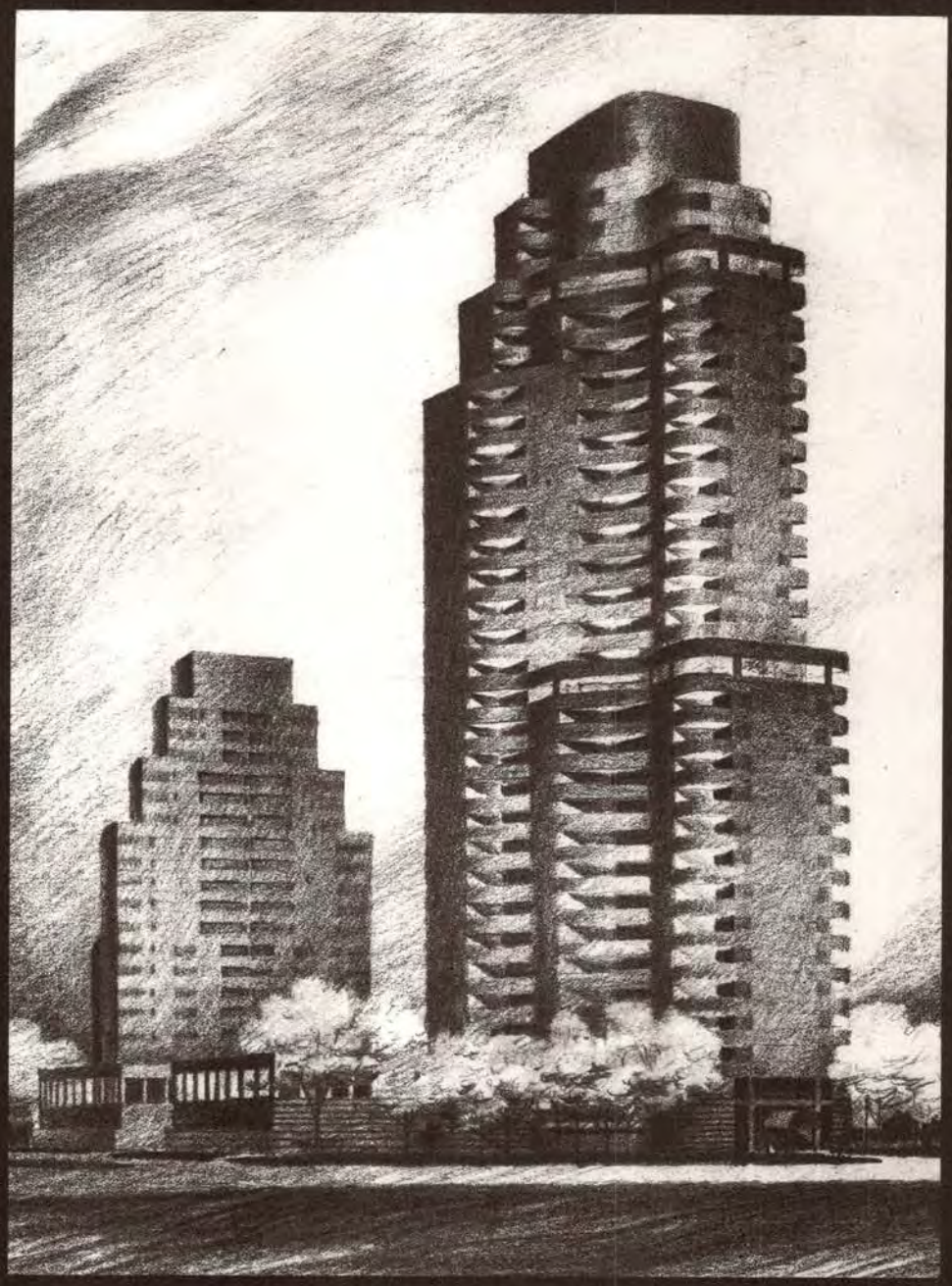
4 Research by McKinsey from *The Economist*, "Efficiency Eludes the Construction Industry," August 19, 2017.

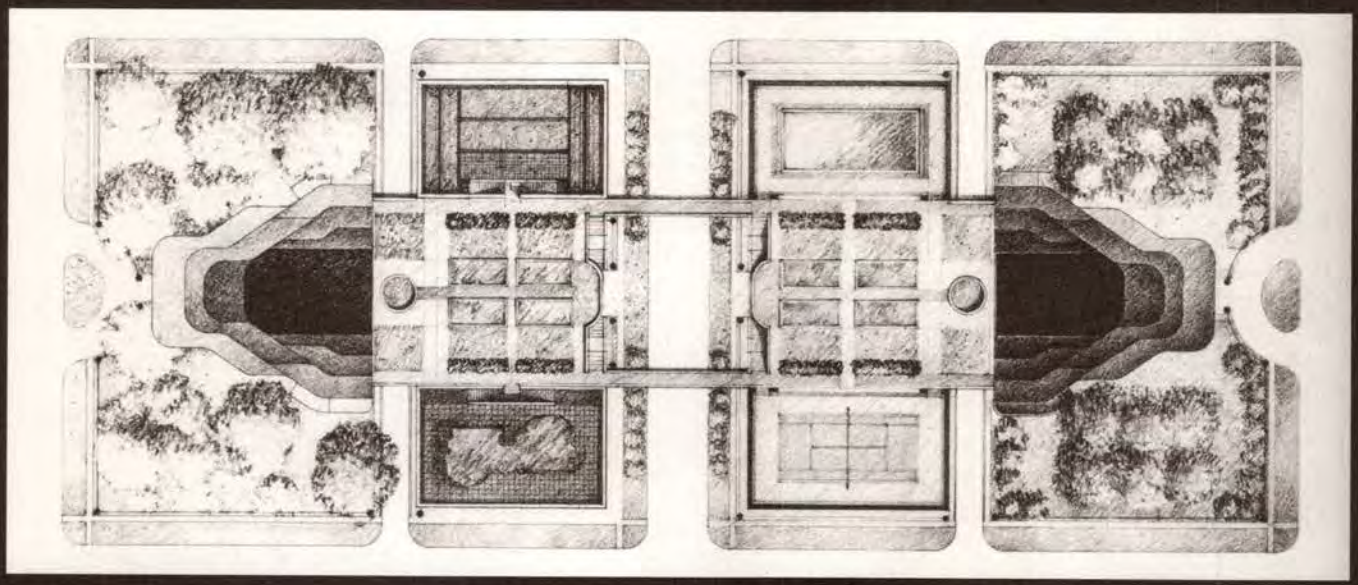


Houston Unbuilt

Deepa Ramaswamy

Tower and Park Reconsidered





César Pelli, Competition Entry, Hermann Park Towers, Houston, 1979. Rendering and Site Plan. Images: Cesar Pelli & Associates; Renderings by Jon Pickard AIA.

In the essay "Skyscrapers," featured in *Perspecta* in 1982, Argentinian-American architect César Pelli surveys the changing intentions and theories in the design of tall buildings, from the high-rise buildings of the nineteenth century to the skyscrapers of the 1980s. He considers his own designs for tall buildings as more pragmatic than ideological, as deeply concerned with fulfilling the architecture's "civic responsibilities" towards the city, the street, and the user rather than fitting into the image of the skyscraper as "an ideal prism"—a reference to the Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building in New York City from 1958.[1] Pelli's legacy has since been associated with the skyscraper form. Despite his pragmatic analyses of his projects, Pelli gave his works sculptural and painterly qualities that emerge from his specific engagements with structure, street, material, and context. Among the many Pelli-designed buildings in Houston are commercial skyscrapers such as the St. Luke's Medical Tower (1991) and 1500 Louisiana Street (formerly Enron Center South, 2002); the residential Four-Leaf Towers (1982); and more scale-sensitive institutional buildings such as Herring Hall (1984) on the Rice University campus and the Science and Engineering Research and Classroom Complex (2006) at the University of Houston.

Before these very prominent buildings, Pelli won a design competition for the Hermann Park Towers in Houston's Museum District launched by Achille Arcidiacono in 1979. This unbuilt residential high-rise project was markedly different from some of Pelli's aforementioned buildings in the city, both in its materiality and form. The Hermann Park Towers would have been located on 2021 Hermann Drive, a 3.4-acre site on the southern edge of Houston's Museum District that faces Hermann Park on one side and the city on the other. The site is bifurcated by a road that essentially creates two blocks with different views. Pelli's proposal sensitively responds to the dual nature of the site. Two towers of differing heights on two blocks face each other on a raised podium. The facing sides of the towers are flat and chamfered. All other sides of the towers are wavy, narrower on the top, and comprised of balconies. The two buildings can be read as one curved object that has been cut purposefully and sharply in half and separated to respond to the conditions of the site. This duality also heightens the public and private aspects of high-rise residential living with an internal, quiet, and reserved facade facing private landscape areas and an external, more exuberant presence. The typical floor plans for the Hermann Park towers have seven condominiums per floor, with 246 units between the two buildings. The balcony size changes in each unit and across floors, which makes the undulating pattern possible.

Three years after the Hermann Park Towers proposal, Pelli built the boxy, curtain-walled, forty-story residential Four-Leaf Towers in Houston's Galleria area. There are two hundred condominiums placed within two buildings that, at first glance, look like several other office buildings in Houston in the early 1980s. There are no overt design suggestions that reveal these towers as residential buildings, except for the colored glass facades. When comparing the Hermann Park Towers proposal from 1979 to the Four-Leaf Towers from 1982, the sculptural contours of the former stand out. They are reminiscent of the formal qualities of some of Eero Saarinen's works. Pelli had spent a decade working for Saarinen before he started his practice César Pelli & Associates in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1977 along with his wife, landscape architect Diana Balmori. The Hermann Park Towers competition was one of the earliest projects that Pelli's new practice would participate in.

While most of Pelli's high-rise projects from the 1980s onwards, including the Four-Leaf Towers, are steel or concrete structures with lightweight curtain wall enclosures, Hermann Park Towers was proposed as a painted brick structure in relation to Houston's Rice University campus and the nearby Shadyside neighborhood. In an interview for the first issue of *Cite* magazine in 1982, Pelli characterized high-rise residential buildings as distinct from commercial office towers, for residential spaces are the function of multiple private ownership patterns, twenty-four-hour occupation cycles, and public space needs that are more complex than the series of horizontal production spaces that constitute commercial skyscrapers.[2] This distinction is most clearly decipherable in Pelli's design for Hermann Park Towers with its multiple floor plans, changing balcony shapes, and landscape spaces that are intensely private and hidden from the road.

As an unbuilt project from the late 1970s, the Hermann Park Towers marks a transitional moment for both Pelli and Houston. This competition entry came just before Pelli claimed international fame for projects like the Museum of Modern Art Residential Tower in New York (1984) and the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur (1998). Pelli was named dean of the Yale School of Architecture in 1977 and started his own practice after a formative decade at Eero Saarinen's office, and later at Daniel, Mann, Johnson & Mendenhall in Los Angeles. Houston in the 1970s was at a point of inflection as well. The city was driven by unabashed growth in a deregulated environment that abhorred any sort of coherent planning in its urban form. The decade saw a surge of building activity and a constantly changing skyline boosted by oil revenues with skyscrapers designed by big-name architects, including the Johnson Burgee-designed Pennzoil Place and the I. M. Pei-designed JPMorgan Chase tower (formerly Texas Commerce Tower), earning the city the moniker "skyscraper laboratory" from the *New York Times* critic Paul Goldberger in an article from 1981.[3] If the Hermann Park Towers had been built, the project would have been a curious and welcome oddity, rooted in its locality within a dissonant urban environment. By the mid-1980s, Houston witnessed its own boom and bust cycle, with falling oil prices leading to a slowdown in the city's pace of growth. The unbuilt Hermann Park Towers project was a singular contextual response to the density and verticality of high-rise residential architecture taking shape in an otherwise horizontal and sprawling Houston.

Notes

1 César Pelli, "Skyscrapers," *Perspecta*, vol. 18, 1982, pp. 134–51.

2 Rice Design Alliance, "An Interview with Cesar," *Cite* 1, August 1982.

3 Paul Goldberger, "Houston Architecture Typifies Changing Attitude," *New York Times*, October 10, 1981.

On Affordable Housing

Curtis Davis and Mayra Guevara Bontemps in Conversation with Jesús Vassallo

Houston was once championed as an affordable place to live, but that narrative has recently changed. Not only have housing prices surged, but there are also ingrained inequities in the system that persist. Jesús Vassallo had a conversation about this new reality with Mayra Guevara Bontemps from the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation and Curtis Davis, an architect and urban planner who focuses on strategic community planning. They grapple with the aging housing stock in Houston, the price we pay for the current tax structure in the state, and the inability to reach a civic consensus about how to tackle these complex, systemic problems.

JV I was recently looking at the Kinder Institute's 2022 *State of Housing in Harris County and Houston* and found the takeaways for the Houston region to be quite clear. The main finding, as you know, is that the housing prices have skyrocketed in Houston in the last three years, shattering all records. Another key point is that single-family homes continue to dominate in sales volume with 84% of the total, a figure that is reflective of the housing inventory as a whole. The report also mentions the big disruption in supply that we have experienced in the last few years with construction companies and the development industry at large being disrupted by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and other global events. The report then describes all the ways in which inequities are systematically ingrained in the housing stock and the built environment, from disparities in mortgage applications all the way to minorities historically occupying disaster-prone areas.

I would add a point that was left out, namely that we are losing the small reservoir of affordable multifamily housing we had in Houston. All of the low-rise garden-style projects that were built in the 1960s and 1970s are coming to the end of their useful life and for which we have no replacement.

Taken as a whole, a picture emerges in which the legend of Houston as an affordable city no longer holds, no matter how you try to spin it. We have somehow created a perfect storm with both supply and demand disfunctions crashing into an aging and inadequate housing stock. On the other hand, we are in perhaps the most aggressively free market economy in the world, with Texas and Houston being famous—even within the US—as pro-business, small government environments. The market is supposed to be this magical thing that regulates itself if left to its own devices, yet what we see on the ground as practitioners working on housing is the opposite.

We are already deep into a housing crisis, and yet there seems to be little appetite for radical change or even for a managed correction. So, my broad question to you today is, what do you think of the bleak picture I just painted? How would you qualify it or challenge it, and what do you think should happen in

Jesús Vassallo/Affordable Housing Lab, Seven affordable units on Chew Street, Houston, 2021.

the next years to improve the situation? What can be done at the federal, state, and local levels? What should nonprofits and for-profit developers do differently?

MGP The interesting thing about affordability is that what is unaffordable to native Houstonians or Houstonians who have been living here a long time is extremely affordable to others who are moving here from out of state. And that, I think, is part of what you're talking about in terms of where all of these elements are crashing into one another. We have had a large influx of people moving from states where someone would pay $2,600 for a studio apartment and be happy about it. And so, there is a difference in perspective. Those folks on the other hand might get a shock when they start looking at the typical salaries in our region. Salaries must reflect the housing market and they currently don't. And that is part of what we talk about when we discuss the challenges of creating affordability. We are now in an environment where the cost of construction is very high and land is becoming expensive, yet the salaries have been stagnant for ages.

In our specific case as a nonprofit, what we can do is to try to make sure that we are helping residents to elevate their position to improve their income sources, so that they can rise to meet where construction and housing costs currently stand. This is the main strategy for us: to foster economic development opportunities. There really is nothing that we can do about the price of land, and there is little we can do about the cost of construction, even if we are looking at creative alternatives.

JV What you say is interesting, because one could argue that the market is working in the sense that it is leveling the price of places in cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York with places like those in Houston. The problem is that this not only negatively impacts our region, but also that it is a fallacy, because Houston is still a very low-service city and wages do not match those other regions either.

CD One can get somewhat philosophical when talking about the fallacy of efficient markets. From an economics point of view, and in the case of housing, to the extent that housing is a commodity that has market value, that value is driven in part by who the players are in the market and their ability to find effective demand. So, for example, in the single-family housing market in Houston, when it became profitable for investors to build houses for rental rather than for sale, they created some quick market distortions. The minute it became valuable to investors to buy capacity, that is land, the production capacity of builders became strained as they entered in competition with the single-family homeowner. That created a market distortion that still impacts Houston in a profound way.

On the other hand, the fallacy of affordability in Houston can be defined in part through the fact that Houston has a high percentage of substandard housing. In reality, a lot of the low income, affordable housing that existed in the market existed primarily because of the tolerance for substandard accommodation. And that is another part of the equation that often gets overlooked when one thinks about Houston over the past two decades as being an affordable place. It was affordable because a large percentage of the properties were substandard.

I think to look at the question of affordability more properly is to ask if you can create conditions in a market that decommodify or limit the commodification of housing. And I'm not talking about an Eastern European socialization of housing. I am not even talking about US public housing from the 1930s or 1940s, but I am talking about some semblance of socialized housing.

There need to be market interventions that manage affordability and target a certain production to specific market segments in a way that begins to produce a balance. Right now, what happens is the opposite: housing is a commodity in a free market, and because capital is so fluid right now, the market is global, and

Jesús Vassallo/Affordable Housing Lab, Twenty-eight affordable units in an exurban setting, Harris County, Texas, 2019.

anyone can become a player in the housing market in Houston. Housing must be decommodified in a significant segment of the housing market for a true affordability to be established.

Imagine the city decided that all our city-owned land, or at least a significant portion of it, would be designated for community land trusts; then that tax policy was structured such that the local decision makers around real estate tax policy could provide those trusts advantages to be competitive in the market; and finally that the philanthropic dollars that result from the excess capital people accumulate could also be put into housing trust funds. Under such circumstances, there may be a local formula to construct a strategy that begins to address affordability. In essence, what I am saying, is that to try to address the problem of housing affordability within the current framework is a fool's errand.

Jesús Vassallo/Affordable Housing Lab, Seven affordable units on Chew Street, Houston, 2021.

JV I also believe that because housing is not just a commodity, but also a basic human need, there is urgent pressure to decommodify it. While I agree with your perspective that there may be some solutions at the local level, I also believe that the only way to fence off part of the market and lower the degree of commodification is for the public good to assert itself through the different levels of government. What could be done in that regard? What do lawmakers in Washington have to impose? What could be accomplished at the state level? And what needs to be done at the level of the county and the city?

CD Starting locally, from the side of housing production and housing stability, I would start with tax policy and real estate tax measures. Because, in the case of neighborhoods that are undergoing forces of gentrification, those economic pressures can be defined and countered accordingly. For example, in Atlanta, in the neighborhoods just east of the new football stadium, a policy was put in place to collect philanthropic dollars from those who are benefiting from this public investment and create a fund to support the neighborhoods who were impacted by the new venue. The fund will cover the marginal increase in property taxes due to inflationary values caused by gentrification. This is an example of a neighborhood stabilization strategy at a local level.

JV This is a great way to allow residents of a disadvantaged area to benefit from the good outcomes of gentrification, the increase of property values, while shielding them from its downsides, the increase in property taxes. It allows residents to stay in their neighborhoods and avoid displacement. Gentrification is a problem that also deeply affects your work with the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation. Can you elaborate?

MGB Indeed, we are seeing real estate valuations double, triple. That's not sustainable. Nobody's income is doubling. And so, just as Curtis said, a critical component of affordability is real estate taxes. There are mechanisms already in place that could allow us to request exemptions, but Harris County keeps denying them. It does not matter that we are providing a service and that we meet the needs of vulnerable individuals who need housing. As a society we are willing to give tax exemptions and tax benefits to Amazon to move a giant warehouse into a community, but we are not willing to give a tax exemption to a nonprofit who is providing affordable housing. It is interesting when you start comparing it that way. But we have very few options, beyond many times taking a loss ourselves as an organization. It is not sustainable to pay $150,000 of taxes on a property we are offering below market rent. So, yes, we are struggling with that right now.

JV Is our tax structure is wrong? Removing the state tax put so much pressure on property taxes that it inevitably creates a lot of inequities. It puts people whose incomes are really strained and who own no other assets than their homestead at the mercy of forces beyond their control. Taxing the land so heavily is a way of structuring taxes that doesn't necessarily make your contribution proportional to your income, or even your wealth at large.

CD I won't call tax policy a third rail of politics, but it almost is. Restructuring tax policy could help to better advantage the disadvantaged. However, in this country, there is a debate as to whether you should invest top down or bottom up. And there's an overall inclination to invest top down because there is more confidence in that approach. I would argue that in this current political environment of distrust, poor cooperation, and a lack of communication, to have a rational conversation around something that is legitimately debatable, as you suggest, is going to be very tough.

The question for me is where the leverage with the local taxing authority is, what the local assessment policies are, and how one can affect this problem at the local level. Unfortunately, the state legislature has decided in many jurisdictions that it wants to limit their power. They take those decisions because of an authoritarian trend that they believe serves them at the moment.

If we could reclaim a democratic mindset, and if the American tradition of local control of local real estate tax policy could be reestablished, then I believe starting with local tax policy would be key. We already have all the tools enabled in the state legislature to potentially put a major dent in the affordable housing problem.

JV What you are saying is that you really believe in working at the local level, maximizing work at the local level, and that the role of the intermediate level of the state would be not to interfere.

CD That is it, to really put a lean into the state about this question of local control and what it means, and really engage that debate in a legitimate way. It is difficult now because of the culture wars and a certain tribalism in our politics, but in the context of liberal versus conservative policy in the traditional sense, there is a legitimate debate that could be had and common ground that could be found around tax policy.

JV Your work, Mayra, has been directly affected by this. Large, federally funded programs that could help Houston residents are being kept at bay through this sort of intervention.

Jesús Vassallo/Affordable Housing Lab, Six affordable units on Rawley Street, Houston, 2020.

MGB Yes, unfortunately, with a heavily Democratic city in a heavily Republican state, there will always be political clashes between the powers that run the city or the state and their different departments. In this case, the state's General Land Office is in a process of taking over affordable housing programs from the City of Houston. It is unfortunate that low- and mid-income residents are the ones that end up getting hurt because of the political discord, because, in the end, we should all have the same goal in mind: to serve residents in a way that makes sense. The state talks a lot about local control, except

when it comes to the actual local control exerted by the town halls. That is always a challenging topic. It is painful when the city develops programming that residents contributed input towards, that met specific local needs tailored to specific problems, only to turn around after years working towards that goal, and see it swept up and lumped into the state's overall goals. In a way, the paternalistic instincts towards control of health care, reproductive health, and other arenas of public life, are also being rolled into housing policy.

JV Maybe just to shift the conversation slightly, could we talk a bit more explicitly about what we see when we look out the window? That is, instead of talking about housing in terms of policy, we could discuss the buildings and types of spaces that form the physical shape of the city. Houston is a place that changes rapidly. We are now seeing an aggressive gentrification in many neighborhoods in the center of the city, and new forms of development taking root, like podium towers sprouting along former commercial corridors as well as planned communities in the outskirts that are much denser than previously imagined. How would you describe those changes of city, and where do you see it headed?

Jesús Vassallo/Affordable Housing Lab, Six affordable units on Rawley Street, Houston, 2020.

MGB One word, townhouses. I think that initially the phenomenon was a result of developers' desires to increase profits. Subdividing lots and building on smaller lots. But now even nonprofits are having to do it just to compensate for the increased value of land and construction. So, where we used to condemn the total transformation of neighborhoods, we feel like we are now a contributor because we just cannot afford to pay $80,000 for a lot and build a single-family home on it in an affordable way. The density is significantly increasing, and the typology of housing is inevitably different. I have lived here for eighteen years, and I have seen the city change drastically, from levels of affordability and types of housing, to complete neighborhoods just razed and replaced.

CD The changes are monumental. If I was to write an essay about this question that you have raised, Mayra, I would entitle it the "Etch-A-Sketch City." Houston seems to maintain the belief that the built environment can be infinitely wiped and redrawn, as with the magnetic drawing toy. To me what matters is that the best civic space is built on civic consensus. There has been development in Houston that has improved the quality of the city in terms of large-scale civic space. The Buffalo Bayou intervention is an example of that, and there are others even around the Katy Prairie. However, the smaller scale incremental development, which is market driven—that is, where the density is driven by market forces—does not have a good civic consensus. There is a market consensus about what is the most efficient housing to build given the development regulatory framework, but a civic consensus doesn't exist. And this is one of the challenges in American cities, particularly Houston, which is that the rate of growth and change far outstrips the capacity to build consensus. What does that look like and what does it mean? People do not grow up in the same neighborhood over multiple generations anymore. Civic associations and membership outside of the homeowner association do not exist anymore. To build a civic consensus around density, is what you need to establish a high-quality community. You need dialogue, and to have a dialogue you need time.

Marianne
Mueller

Houston I, 2023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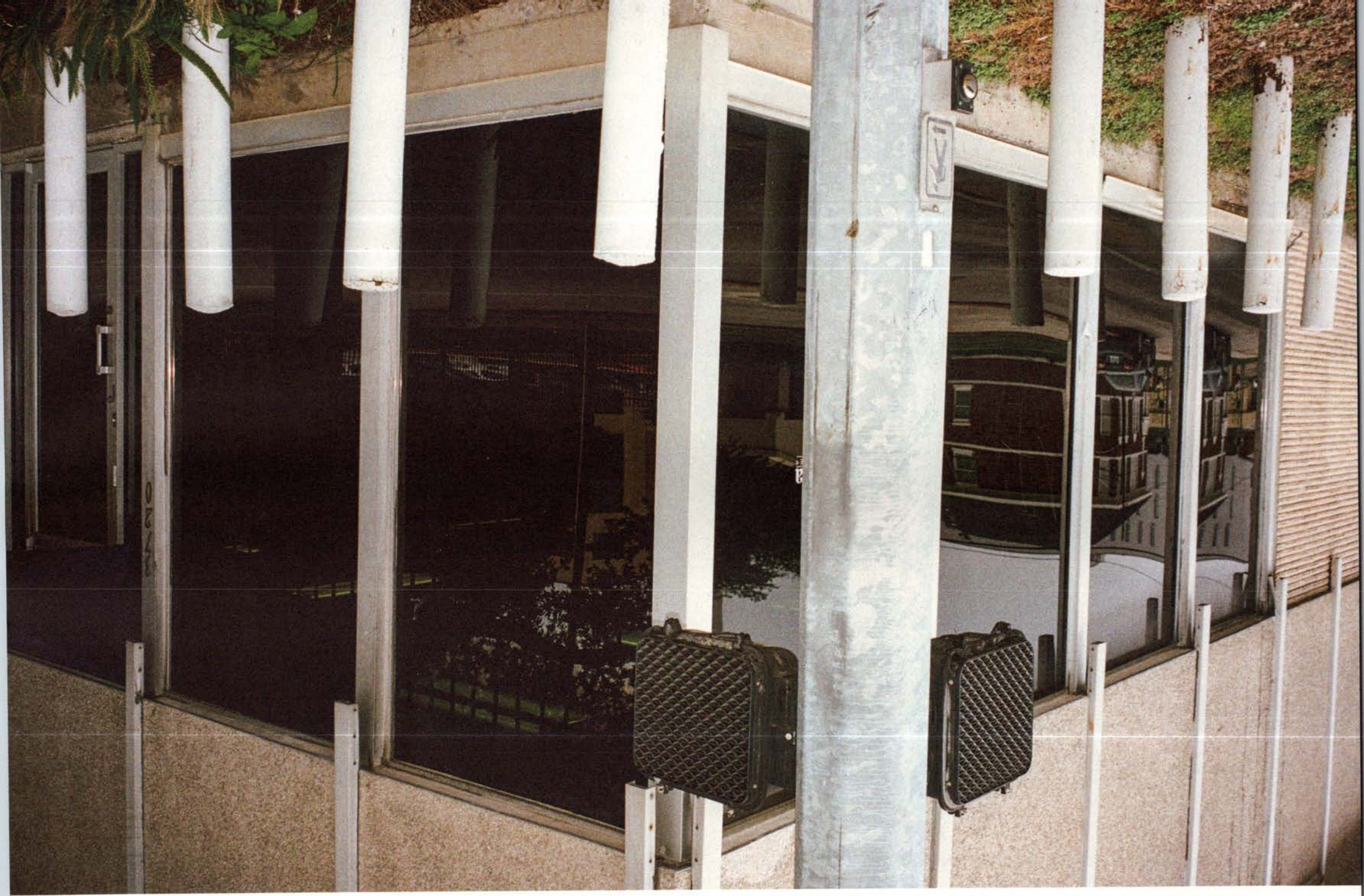


INSPECTION HOURS
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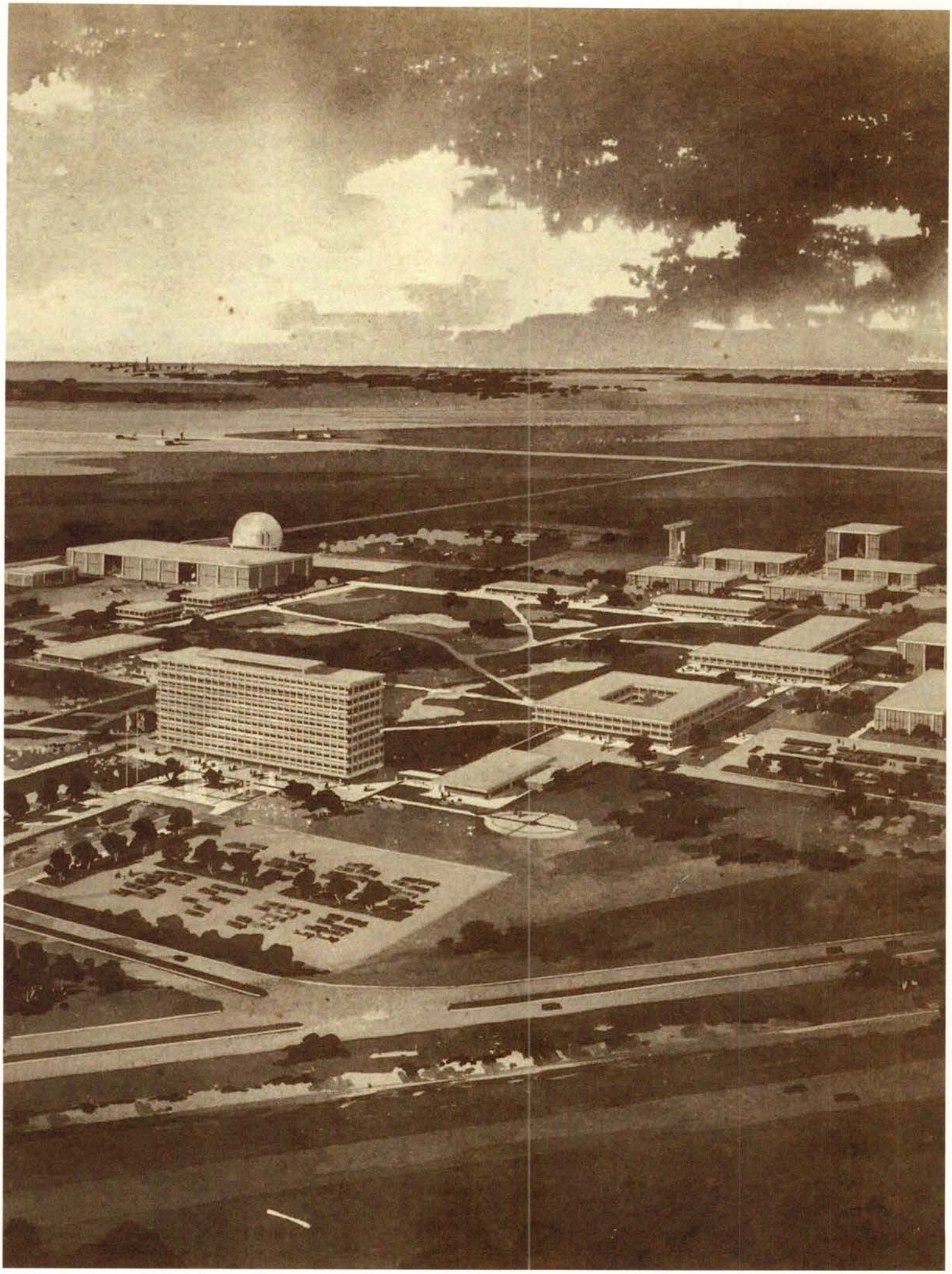
Houston is a palimpsest of infrastructures. One of the least dense of all major US cities, Houston is shaped by expansive layers of freeways, railroads, waterways, electrical grids, and other infrastructural systems we have constructed to occupy the vast floodplain stretching all the way to the Galveston Bay. These systems have shaped the way Houstonians dwell. Defined by discontinuous, spine-based cul-de-sac subdivisions, the city is dependent on an expansive network of transportation infrastructures.

As the following contributions affirm, the urbanization processes driven by petrochemical interests, the infrastructural planning and construction of NASA's space complex, the expansion of the Houston Ship Channel and port, and the numerous straightened and channelized bayous controlled by the US Army Corps of Engineers have turned the Gulf Coast prairie into a synthetic landscape. Recurring natural disasters have undeniably uncovered that we cannot conceive of such infrastructures on a local or even regional scale. Rather they, as part of the technosphere, as Peter Haff and Albert Pope discuss, converge at a global scale.

The fallout of such human constructs and aspirations can be sorely traced in the surroundings of these infrastructural projects (not only in Houston, but around the globe). Highways split previously intact wards, minority neighborhoods are exposed to severe pollutants as industries occupy infrastructural corridors, and repeated flooding occurs where the most vulnerable communities live.

The contributions in this section demonstrate that although infrastructure is a political consideration, particular interests should not be the sole force shaping it. Instead, it must be driven by collective conversation and an awakening that starts with the challenge of our foundational assumptions and preconceptions of the (built) environment.



Manned Spacecraft Center, NASA (1961). Detail of bird's-eye rendering looking toward Galveston Bay, Clear Lake, Texas.
Source: NASA Johnson Space Center Archives.

Apollo's

Jeffrey S. Nesbit

Infrastructural
Urbanization of
NASA's Manned
Spacecraft Center

Houston

Houston has been called "Space City" ever since the National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) selected this area of Texas for the space center construction in 1961. Yet is it a space "city"? Houston does not share the history and designations of the traditional city. Perhaps "city" as defined as a form of classical urban growth never existed due to the lack of zoning and formal urban planning. Instead, Houston can be better understood as a form of infrastructural urbanization—planning processes guided by technical, engineering, and utility means rather than traditional urban design principles.

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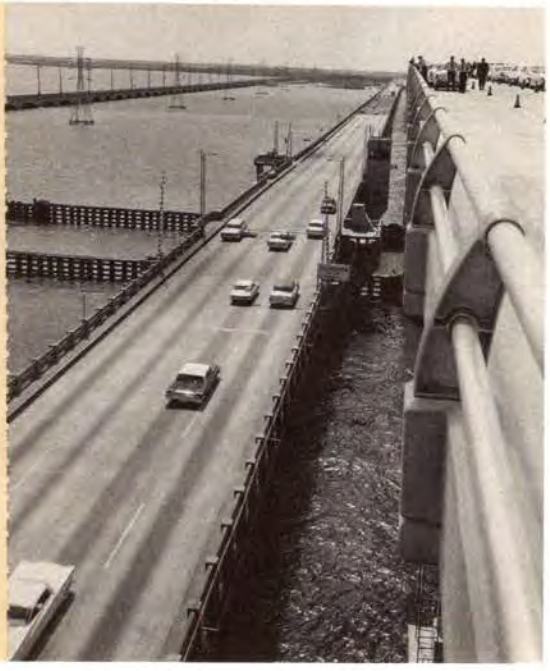

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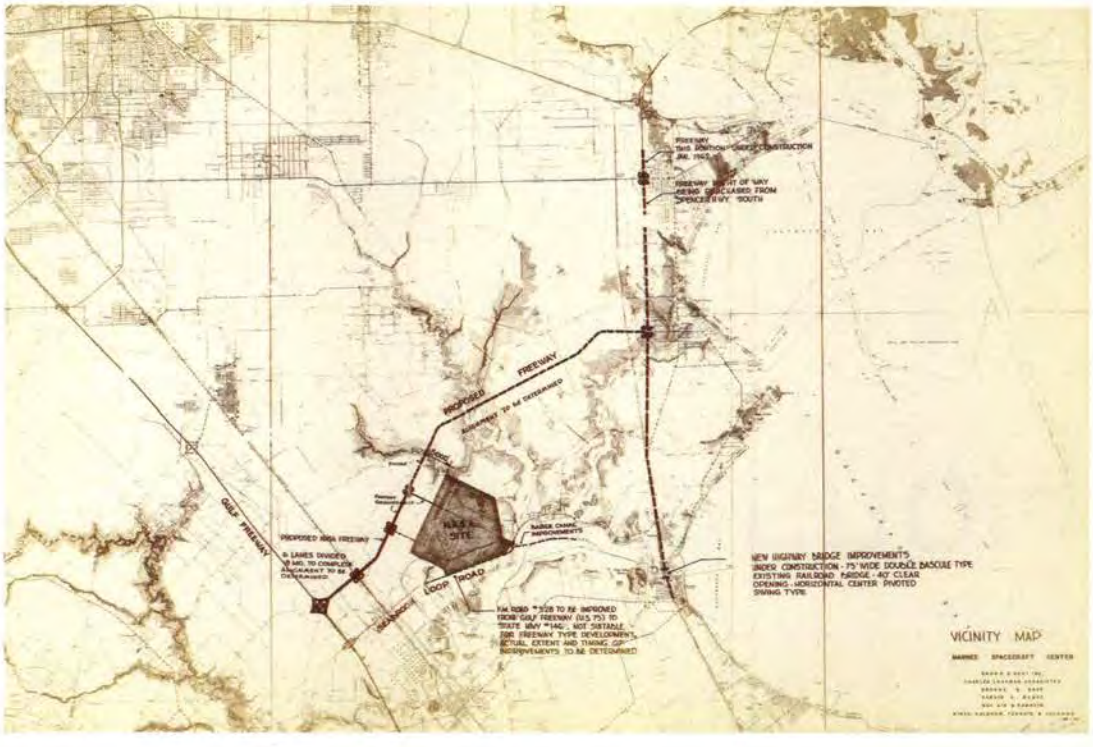

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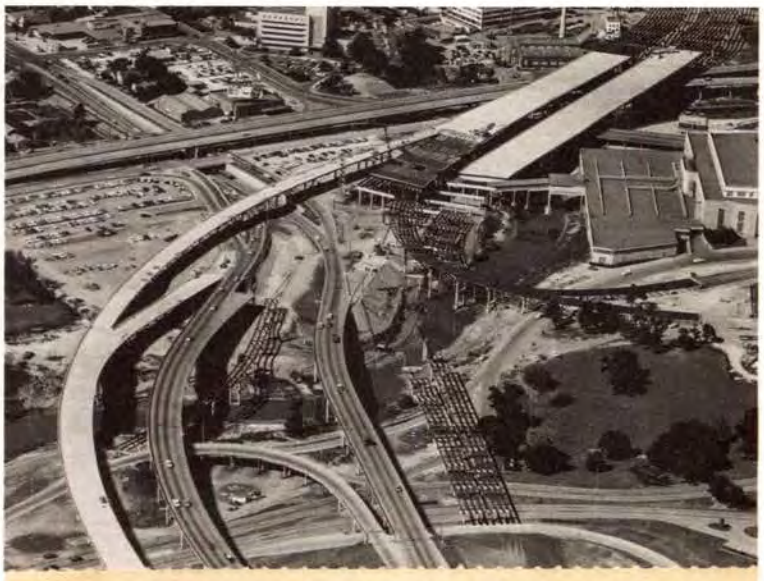


030 Houston: Construction of IH 45 elevated section

A Causeway New/Old (c. 1961). This photo was labelled as the "new" causeway high clearance bridge. The original drawbridge facility, which can be seen in this photo, was later demolished.
Source: TxDOT Archive Library.

The term infrastructural urbanization was first used to describe the way military-industrial technologies gave way to a reflective history of modernism in the United States.[2] It was architectural practices that failed to keep up with processes of urbanization. During the Cold War, the United States increased the spread of postwar housing development, leading to the explosion of car-dependent infrastructure projects across the nation. Simultaneously, the famous "space race" under President Dwight D. Eisenhower's administration beginning in the late 1950s had much of the public's attention. And Houston strangely becomes the culmination of both—infrastructure for cars and administration for space. When considering the connection of both the highway network and the management of space travel, Houston is a landscape of continuous future imaginaries embedded in regional and extraterrestrial infrastructure. This essay offers a brief history of NASA's space complex in Houston. As the title suggests, the greater Gulf Coast environment is entangled with the formation of NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center, which, I argue, is illustrative of modern urbanization practices in the United States.

B Manned Spacecraft Center, NASA (1961). Vicinity map and master plan, Clear Lake, Texas.
Source: NASA Johnson Space Center Archives.

Incorporating Harbor and Hurricane

Houston might be one of the clearest examples of American urbanization tied to national interests of car-dependent infrastructure in parallel with aerospace aspirations during the Cold War. Reaching extraterrestrial space required a vast landscape in support of bureaucratic planning. Before landing on the moon, NASA had already become an agency steeped in bureaucratic processes. With weighty political pressure for quickly assembling a moon-bound space program, the agency required extensive areas of design and planning, not only for mission control and astronaut simulations, but also for spaces for administration, infrastructural utility, shipping, and connections with local institutional, medical, and scientific communities. The architecture and infrastructure of NASA mirrors Houston as an aesthetic image of bureaucratic governance and its association with Houston's industrial landscape. But to understand NASA's arrival, it's important to remember the earliest formations of greater Houston.

C Construction of IH 45 at Sam Houston Coliseum (1961). Downtown Houston, Texas
Source: TxDOT Archive Library.

The growth of modern urbanization practices across this Gulf Coast prairie has produced an entirely synthetic landscape. Nearly all of greater Houston's native ecosystem has disappeared. Conservationists still struggle to retain the last remains of a dying native and "natural" environment in the region.[3] From the operationalized arrangement of warehouses and manufacturing sites to the vast proliferations of single-family housing, a scattering of urban forms signals what Fredric Jameson would refer to as the "archaeologies of the future" in our neoliberal climate—a space between imaginations and the artifacts that render the environment visible.[4] Oddly, Houston's story as a non-city begins with an unusual beginning—a harbor and a hurricane.

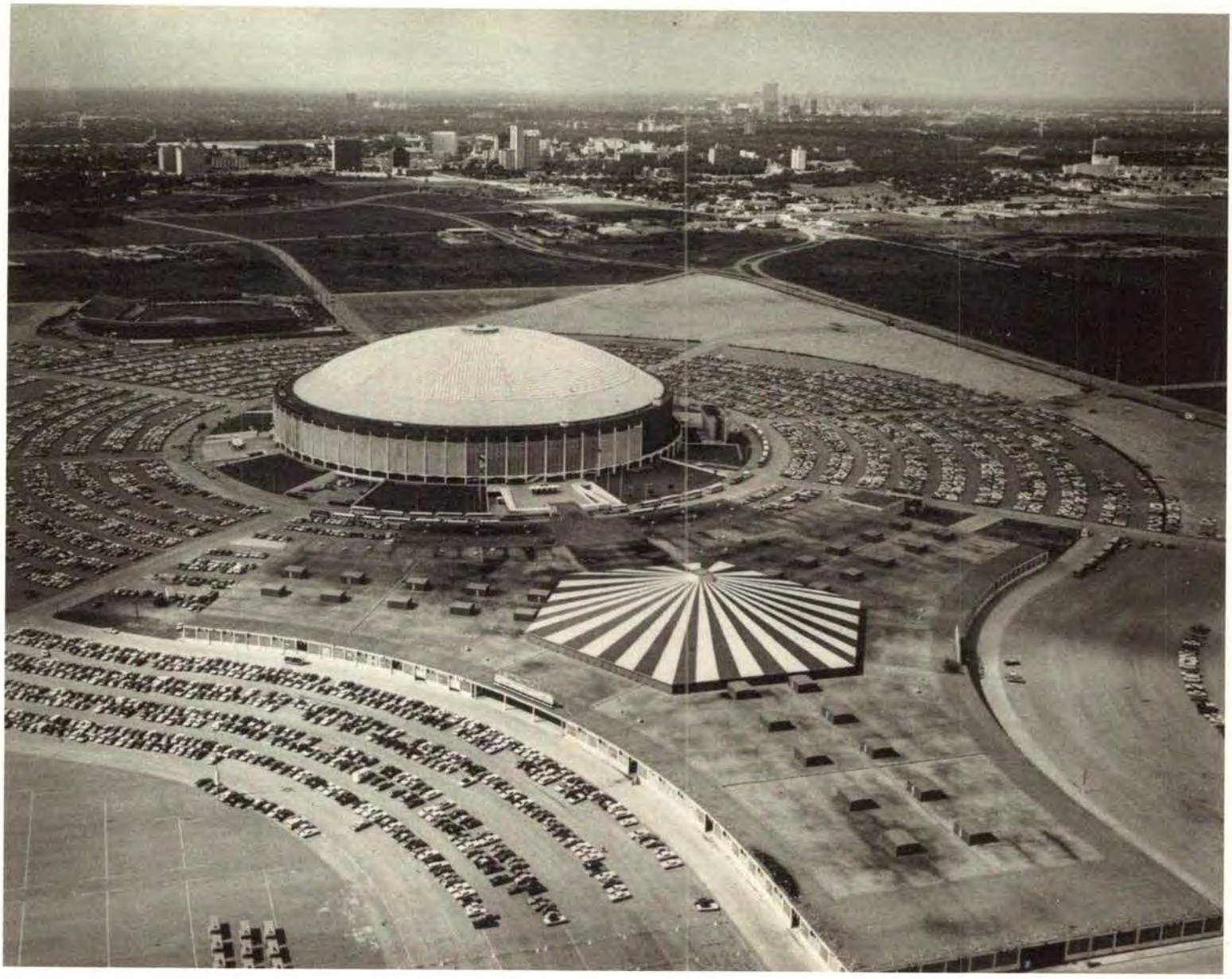
Galveston Island, a natural barrier just off the Texas coast, is less than three miles wide and up to 30 miles long. It sits only five feet above sea level. Made from a humid mixture of soils, sand deposits, and brackish water, the harbor created in Galveston was seen by Texas settlers in the nineteenth century to be *the* place for future growth. Quickly upon its incorporation in 1838, Galveston County became a thriving place of commerce, a bustling international port, and a region with expansive agricultural production. At the end of the nineteenth century, Galveston was the largest and most prosperous city in the State of Texas. But nature had its response.

On Saturday, September 8, 1900, a massive hurricane slammed into the region, flooding practically everything in its path. The infamous Great Storm of 1900 marks the highest number of fatalities by a natural disaster in United States history, taking over 8,000 lives. Notable due to its high and consistent threatening wind speeds, the category-four hurricane violently ripped apart Galveston, leaving little behind. Instead of focusing on major rebuilding efforts in the area, businesses turned their attention elsewhere. Through the early 1900s development interests and construction of rising energy markets moved upstream—literally moving supply, shipping, and trade routes. And an immense forty-foot-deep dredging project forming the Galveston Harbor Channel would ultimately enable the Port of Houston to become the first international waterborne commerce hub in the modern world.[5] And by 1960, Houston's population has expanded to just under one million residents.

Entangling Infrastructure and Imagination

By the late 1950s, with the rise of the oil and gas industry in Houston, major infrastructural projects also increased, including dredging channels, bridge construction, and vast highway networks. In 1960, according to the Texas Department of Transportation archives, the state built the new Galveston Causeway, an important connection for vehicular traffic between Galveston and Houston that helped complete the longer corridor of Interstate 45 (I-45). Less than a year later, NASA decided the Houston area would be the location of its next major space site, the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center (MSC), most likely due to President Lyndon B. Johnson's interests in bringing future industries and attention to his home state. And perhaps not coincidentally, a site located along I-45 halfway between historic Galveston and Downtown Houston was identified for construction. The large site is in fact not in Houston proper at all, but instead it is in Clear Lake, a small town situated neatly between Houston and Galveston.

The NASA MSC sits on the marshy Texas wetland, a landscape that leads to Galveston Bay. This link between the MSC and the bay is a vital infrastructural network that NASA needed to combine an ever-expanding highway network and use of water channels for moving large-scale



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D Houston Astrodome and Astrohall (1969). Aerial photograph, Houston, Texas. Source: Houston Public Library.

scientific equipment, including capsules and rockets. Moreover, we find two airports just north of the MSC site. The closest military airfield is Ellington Field, used by the US Air Force and Air National Guard, and the closest commercial airport is Houston International Airport (known today as William P. Hobby Airport). Access to Ellington Field supported NASA's astronaut training and basic flight transportation needs throughout the Apollo program. Now named Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base, the site was selected as the future Houston Spaceport for research and development.[6] NASA strategically chose the site in Houston for its potential access to airfields, water channels, and highway infrastructure, but also contributed greatly to the shaping of infrastructural urbanization and proposed highway and channel improvement projects in the adjacent region.

As illustrated in the original planning documents from 1961, it is clear that the designers of the MSC were perfectly conscious of the importance of connecting their new site to infrastructure in the region. Indicated on the NASA Vicinity Map, all notes relate to current and proposed infrastructure improvement projects. These include notes such as a "new highway bridge improvement" at Galveston Bay, "freeway under construction" and "right of way being purchased" near La Porte (access point for the Port of Houston), and a proposed "NASA freeway" connecting I-45 and Bayport.[7] In a Texas journal shortly after completion of the Space Center, "over 2,000 workmen and scores of roaring machines moved like large ants over a tract of land that only a few months before had been an open prairie along the shores of Clear Lake." The article continues by suggesting that the region selected was adjacent to "an insignificant body of water that in the distance opened into Galveston Bay," signaling a kind of remote rhetoric as if nothing in this landscape existed previously.[8]

We often associate infrastructure with urban development, and the correlated civil engineering disciplines are utilized to manage and organize urban design in dense areas. But what can be said for infrastructure entangled with supporting rocket missions into outer space? Did the infrastructural planning and the construction of NASA's Space Center actually—as opposed to superfluous nickname—contribute to urbanization directly? Described in a NASA Manned Spacecraft Center documentary, "the center also has the advantage of adjacent industrial plants and personnel, one of the nation's three largest ports, and waterborne transportation facilities," which suggests a distinct link between NASA's interests and the need to connect with economic and infrastructure routes across the world.[9]

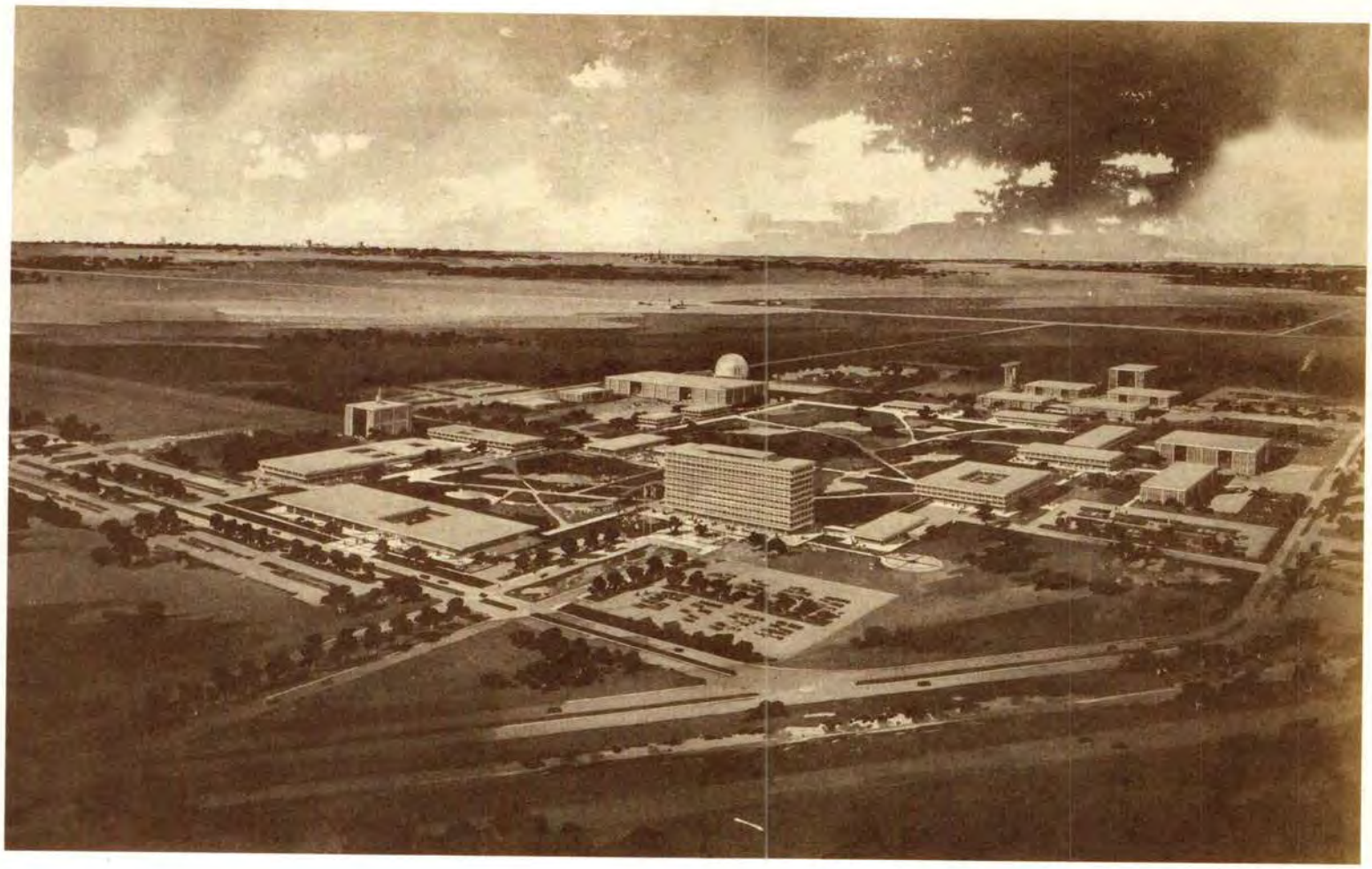
The Independence Day parade of 1962 rolled slowly through Houston's downtown district and on to the Sam Houston Coliseum. The motorcade included astronauts, politicians, engineers, scientists, and office administrators, alongside an actual Mercury capsule as a triumphal artifact. All on display to solidify Houston as a place of economic, industrial, and intellectual prowess for a nation's centralized hub of future space flight operations. Just one year before, in 1961, the construction of the I-45 freeway cut immediately adjacent to the Coliseum site. In fact, it is this very highway—built out of US defense interests—that joins the newly formed Manned Spacecraft Center with the downtown oil and gas market just over twenty miles away.

Designing Administration and Aesthetics

By the time NASA began planning for the famous Apollo program in the early 1960s, it had already become a large bureaucracy. In the previous decade, the space programs were distributed across various sites and government agencies in terms of funding, personnel, and military services and was the cause of much inter-federal and military rivalry. Therefore, this newly formed bureaucratic agency was heavily rooted in an obsession with efficiency—thereby producing a built environment that mirrors an aesthetic of presumed rationality and economies of scale.[10] Physical planning with the goal to consolidate the agency was of utmost concern. The design plans were submitted in 1962 and MSC officially opened in 1964, the same year Houston's Astrodome was inaugurated.[11]

James Webb, director of NASA from 1961 to 1968, spearheaded the administrative leadership that commissioned a collection of engineers and architects for the planning and design of MSC. The team included the local, Houston-based architecture and construction firm of Brown and Root, Inc., which teamed up with Charles Luckman, a well-established architect with a long list of previous military and government design contracts under President Eisenhower's administration.[12] Luckman's architectural modern ethos was neatly linked with national interests in efficiency and repeatability. In fact, *Time* magazine praised Luckman for supposedly planning and designing the forty-nine MSC buildings in forty-eight days—a feat so outrageous that it could only be achieved by using repeatable forms in the planning process.[13] The architects prioritized "simple-shaped" panels and bays to build quickly and continue to grow efficiently. And certainly, anxious to meet hard-pressed deadlines from NASA's leadership in Washington, Luckman made architectural decisions following his philosophy of architectural modernity at the intersection of business and economic responsiveness.

NASA's intentions were to use the new MSC center as a unified place for office personnel, laboratory equipment, computer complexes, and testing facilities, as well as a dispensary, an auditorium, and a cafeteria—an all-inclusive campus with centralized amenities, a model that would later become the basis for tech campuses found around the world today. With 5,000 personnel at the center and thirty-three main buildings in the original plan (eventually NASA would construct over one hundred buildings), the architecture and planning had to be swift to accommodate for the variety of programs simultaneously in



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Jeffrey S. Nesbitt

E Manned Spacecraft Center, NASA (1961). Bird's-eye rendering looking toward Galveston Bay, Clear Lake, Texas. Source: NASA Johnson Space Center Archives.

progress. The spatial recommendations for the arrangement of facilities on site included building orientations according to sun angles and modules of interior dimensions. Based on typical office interior measurements, "office planning modules" became the primary architectural feature for maximizing planning flexibility. The interior defined the exterior enclosure, thereby extending the interior dimension across the entire master planning grid—an architecture without a traditional urban design scheme yet tied to a large spread of infrastructural urbanization. General modules were set to four feet, eight inches, as the "desirable minimum" office dimension with greatest flexibility. Precast panels were then deployed across all facilities with varying degrees of orientation for buildings and design systems, such as the Haller furniture systems and factories designed by Fritz Haller. The administration facilities are generally one to two stories, with long horizontal facades covered by overhanging roofs and supported with thin *pilotis*. In contrast, the various testing and laboratory facilities are large volumes to minimize obstructions for overhead cranes.

The management of the design, engineering, and testing for the Apollo program, included bureaucratic organizational structures including five assistant directors for administration, engineering, and development, along with flight crew operations, flight operations, and the White Sands Test Facility in New Mexico, but directed from Houston—an example of administrative activity occurring from distant geographies. The entire complex, occupies over 1,700 acres and is owned, maintained, and monitored by NASA, including all on-site utilities and services. The federally owned land is required to service its own energy, water, and waste management. However, the infrastructural and architectural emplacements are not fully contained inside the perimeter. They spill out into the greater infrastructural implications and regional connections. Even the desire to form a modern, modular, and "efficient" complex meant it could be expanded over into other industries outside the site boundaries, including port infrastructure and the modern industrial-aesthetic facades. Examples such as the proliferation of tilt-wall constructed warehouses can be found across Houston.

F Manned Spacecraft Center, NASA (1961). Aerial photograph, Clear Lake, Texas. Source: NASA Johnson Space Center Archives.

Access to NASA's MSC is restricted and yet the complex is highly connected as in literally through highway infrastructure, port loading, and through the bureaucratic administration of a national agency including the monitoring and managing of extraterrestrial spacecraft operations from one of the first control rooms constructed in the world. The Manned Spacecraft Center is an example of infrastructural urbanization. As such, the design and planning for the space center aligns with the broader trends in the United States including methods of urban decentralization, administrative ubiquity, and the increase of technical land-use planning. The culture of architectural modernization in American cities like Houston became implicitly connected to the production of the space complex. Examining Houston's Apollo program allows us to consider the deeper entanglements between civil infrastructural imprints and national aspirations for reaching extraterrestrial space made out from a sprawling urban landscape—both of which uniquely required reshaping a landscape, connecting transit networks, and were consumed with architectural aesthetics meant to appear just as efficient and rationalized as civil engineering efforts. Houston continues to be an imaginative place, an urbanized wetland evoked more for its expansive infrastructure and repeatable modern industrial forms rather than its urban design practices.

G Johnson Space Center "Mission Control" Interior, NASA (1964). Formerly known as Manned Spacecraft Center, Clear Lake, Texas. Photographs: Jeffrey S. Nesbit, 2019.

Notes

1 See also, Rem Koolhaas, "Whatever Happened to Urbanism", in *S, M, L, XL: Office for Metropolitan Architecture* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994).

2 Stan Allen, "Infrastructural Urbanism," in *Points + Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999) 49-52.

3 Diane Cowen, "Gulf Coast prairie, Houston's native ecosystem, nears extinction," *Houston Chronicle*, July 12, 2022 (Houston: 2022).

4 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005).

5 Bureau of Economic Geology, "Galveston Island," (Austin: University of Texas at Austin / Bureau of Economic Geology, 2021), accessed December 26, 2022, https://www.beg.utexas.edu/geowonders/coastal.

6 Houston Airport Systems, "Welcome to the world's first truly urban commercial spaceport: Ellington Airport," Houston Airport Systems, accessed February 21, 2023, https://www.fly2houston.com/spaceport.

7 Brown & Root, Inc. and Charles Luckman, "Vicinity Map and Master Plan," in *Master Plan and Architectural Concept: Manned Spacecraft Center* (Houston: Brown & Root, INC./Charles Luckman, 1962), 4.

8 Stephen B. Oates, "NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center at Houston, Texas," in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol 67 (3) (Houston: Texas State Historical Association, January 1964).

9 The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, "NASA Manned Spacecraft Center: A National Resource," (Houston: NASA/MSC, 1966).

10 See: Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

11 The Astrodome, constructed in 1965 with the largest dome in the world at the time and the first artificial grass (known as "AstroTurf"), followed both the image of NASA's concurrent space program and its innovation in engineering technology.

12 See: Stuart Leslie, "Spaces for the Space Age: William Pereira's Aerospace Modernism," in Peter Westwick, ed. *Blue Sky Metropolis: The Aerospace Century in Southern California* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2012). According to Leslie, "aerospace modernism appealed as much to the military as to its defense contractors" and it was the "Air Force officers, like their corporate counterparts" who actively embraced the modernist forward-thinking.

13 As noted in Charles Luckman, *Twice in a Lifetime: From Soap to Skyscrapers* (New York: W. W. Norton: 1988).

Thomas Struth *Neutral Buoyancy Lab, JSC, Houston*

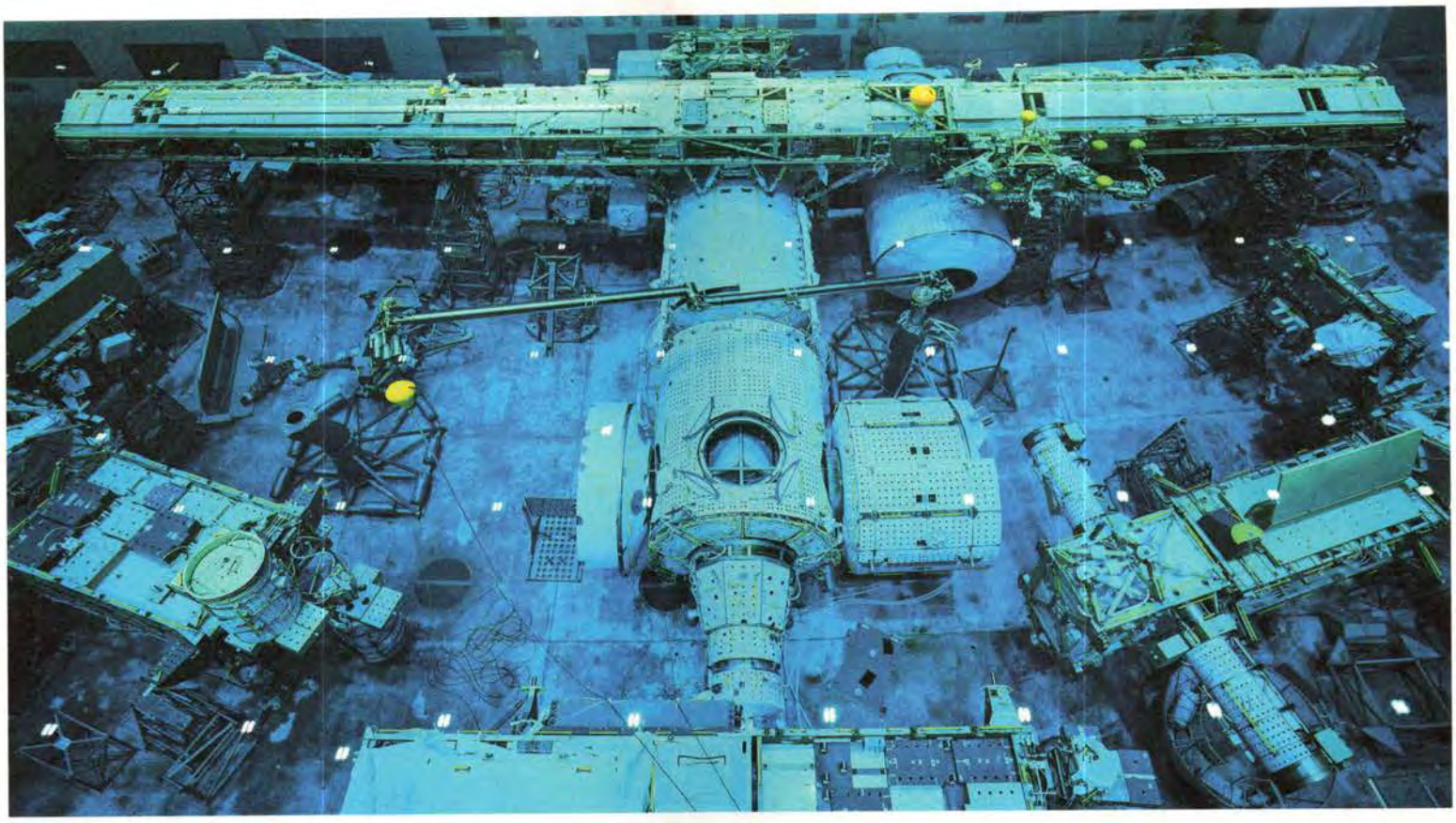
The Johnson Space Center is home to the largest indoor pool in the world. Submerged in 6.2 million gallons of water, the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory (NBL) contains a partial replica of the International Space Station, allowing astronauts from around the world to train in conditions that simulate the microgravity of space flight. When the German photographer Thomas Struth arrived in Houston in the spring of 2017 to install the inaugural exhibition at the Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University, he requested access to this extraordinary facility. As part of his ongoing series of images exploring the intersection of advanced technology and human ambition, Struth captured images of the NBL, working from a cantilevered platform above the enormous pool. The resulting views of the submerged space vessel, although devoid of people, highlight the heights of human ingenuity and creative intelligence. At the same time, they invite viewers to consider the implications of science and technology and how these forces shape our world in both positive and negative ways. On the evening following his visit to NBL, Struth shared some of the photographs he had taken with a digital camera. When I asked how he selects a specific frame from the hundreds of options the artist replied, "when it transcends documentation."

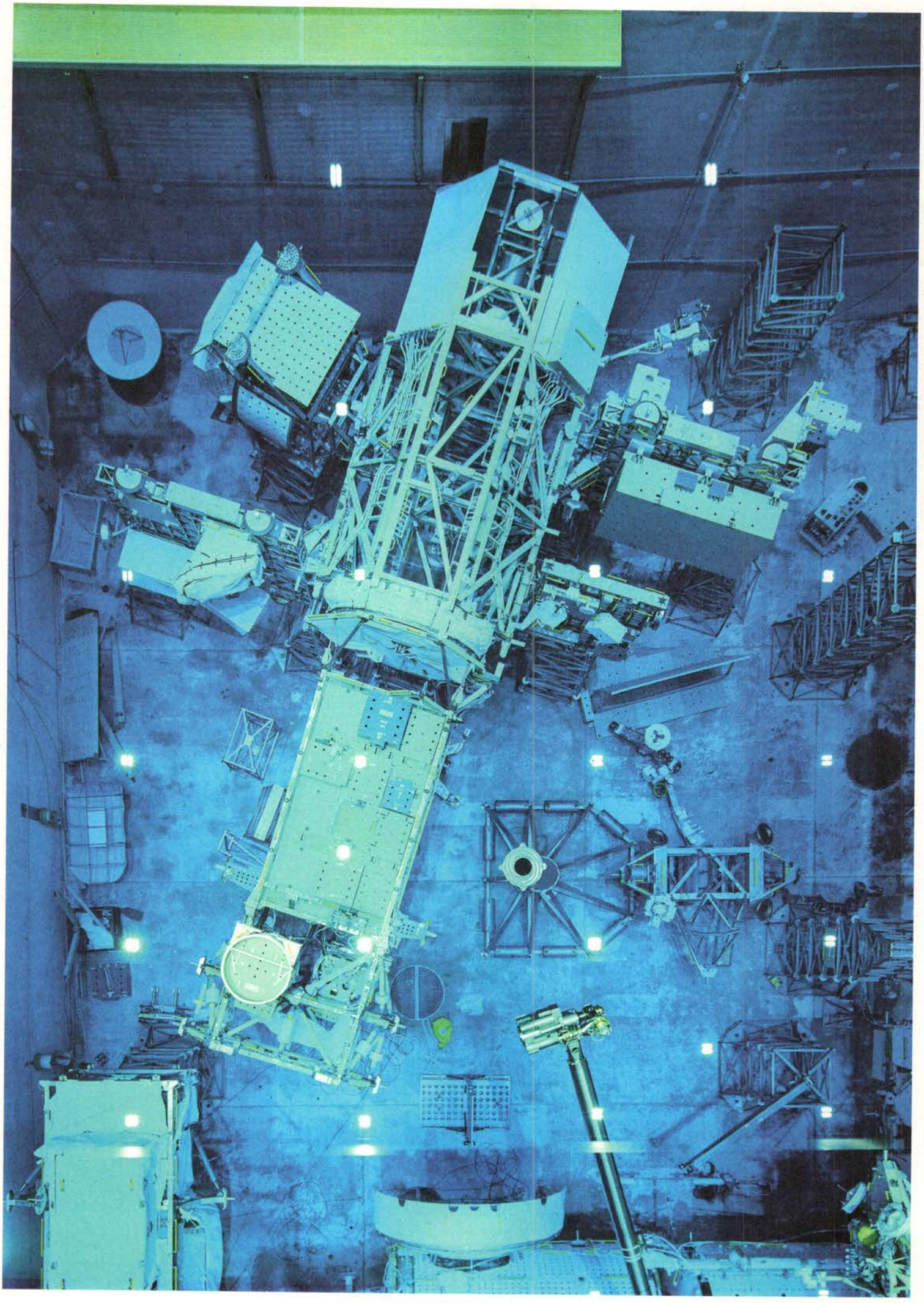
—Alison Weaver

163 → *Full-scale Mock-up 1, JSC, Houston 2017.* © Thomas Struth.

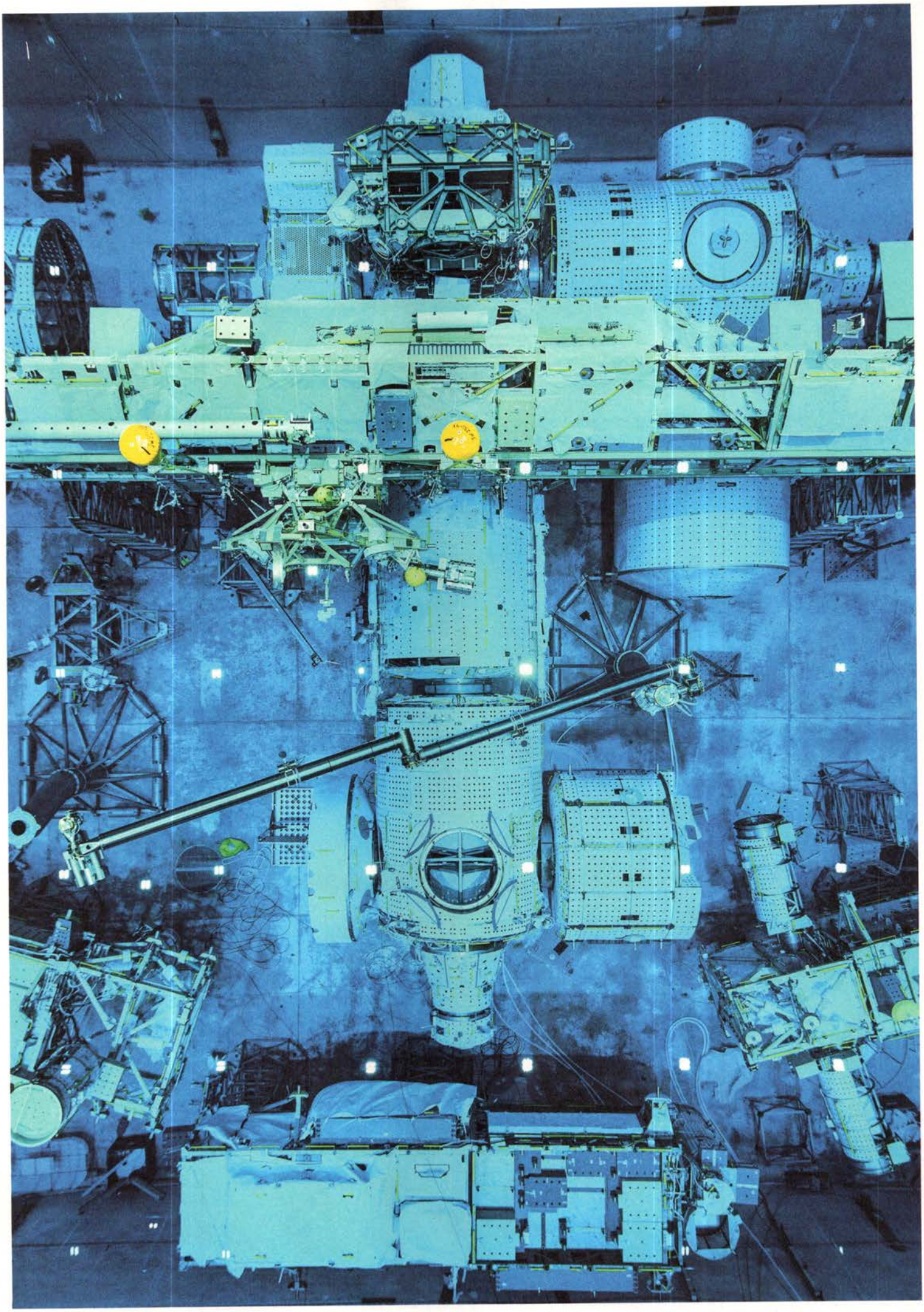
164→ *Full-scale Mock-up 2, JSC, Houston 2017.* © Thomas Struth.

165 → *Full-scale Mock-up 3, JSC, Houston 2017.* © Thomas Struth.





Thomas Struth



Neutral Buoyancy Lab, JSC, Houston

Nearly 100,000 Texans commute between Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth more than once a week. The proposed 240-mile high-speed rail line would shorten the total travel time between the two Texas megalopolises to less than ninety minutes.

Texas

Christof Spieler

is

Anti-Urban

The website for Texas Central—a private company proposing to build high-speed rail from Houston to Dallas—features a rendering of a train on a concrete viaduct above a field of bluebonnets. It's a great depiction of the small footprint of electric high-speed rail—but it's also a depiction of what has proven to be the most difficult obstacle this project faces in Texas. The demand for high-speed rail is clearly there: thousands of people travel daily between those cities, and a ninety-minute bullet train trip would be faster than either driving or going through TSA, boarding, and flying. Unlike the mythical hyperloop, the technology is proven: high-speed rail is operating in many countries around the world. The flat land between the cities poses no particular engineering or construction challenges.

The people in that flat country, however, are another story. Ranchers filed lawsuits challenging Texas Central's right to eminent domain, rural state legislators proposed laws prohibiting state agencies from cooperating with the projects, and most of the counties the rail line would pass through officially opposed it. All of this delayed the project, which was originally supposed to start construction in 2019, and now, likely because of COVID and difficulty attracting private funding, it seems to be on hold, with work paused and the staff of Texas Central disbanded.

This should have been the kind of brash, ambitious project Texas loves. It's cutting-edge technology. It's attracting out of state investors. It's putting lots of money into infrastructure. It's privately funded, a showcase of capitalism, unlike the socialist taxpayer-funded freeway that connects the same cities. And this is a state that doesn't let environmental laws hold up private projects or even public ones.

But what Texas Central ran into was Texas's own self-image.

High-speed rail is fundamentally urban; it excels at connecting cities to cities. Texas Central trains would have gone from the center of Houston to the center of Dallas with only one stop in between, accelerating to 180 mph and leaving the ranches, farms, and small towns along the way as scenery but not destinations. That is entirely appropriate; the metropolitan areas at both ends are two of the ten largest in the United States, each with a gross domestic product larger than that of Arizona or Indiana according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Together, they represent half of the state's people and half of its economy. Connecting them better would clearly strengthen Texas.

Texas, though, has never thought of itself as urban. The state's mythology is comprised of cowboys, ranchers, and oilmen, always with a background of big open spaces. Politicians make ads of themselves driving pickup trucks down dirt roads. The biggest annual event in Houston, the largest city in Texas, is a rodeo. Our license plates have shown cowboys and cacti and mountains but not urban skylines. The state music is Western swing, not the blues. Our subdivisions are named for ranches. And when the Texas Department of Transportation proposed a few years ago that the "Farm to Market Road" designation might not be appropriate for Westheimer next to the Galleria, people were upset.

This kind of rural self-identity is not unique to Texas, of course. There's been a persistent strain of American thought that rural life is pure and authentic while cities are corrupted, unhealthy, and unsafe. Our only architect president, Thomas Jefferson, wrote "I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man." When people talk about "the real America," they mean farms in Kansas or a small town in Vermont, not the Bronx. And anti-urban politics resonate with some people everywhere. But the other populous states have made their big cities a part of their brand. We haven't.

An anti-urban bias is built into Texas's institutions. Every county has the same government structure: in Loving County, population 57, each of the four elected commissioners represents 15 people, in Harris County, with over 4.7 million people according to the 2020 Census data, each represents more people than the governor of South Dakota. In the Houston-Galveston Area Council's Transportation Policy Council, the body responsible for allocating federal transportation dollars in the region, Harris County has 60% of the population but only 40% of the votes. The Republicans in Austin have long drawn district lines to intentionally disenfranchise cities.

The reality is, though, that Texas *is* urban. In 1900 the ten biggest counties in Texas made up 20% of the population. Today, the

ten biggest counties represent 60% per the Texas Almanac. We have more Vietnamese immigrants than we do cattle ranchers, more people living in urban apartments than in small towns. Texas Department of Transportation and METRO data shows more people ride the light rail in Houston every day than take I-10 through West Texas. The Gulfton neighborhood is as Texan as Luckenbach. It's big city economies that are driving the state and encouraging people to move here.

If Texas recognized its urbanity, it would have high-speed rail, even if it required public funding. But it would also be different in many other practical ways. Because cities naturally require a higher level of regulation than the sparsely populated countryside, we'd have laws that enabled cities to do things like block cement plants from being built in residential neighborhoods and give counties more powers in unincorporated areas. If we recognized that cities require different kinds of transportation solutions, we'd build infrastructure to make it easier to walk and bike. In a proudly urban Texas, cities would carry more political weight. We would not have laws intended to make it hard for urban residents to vote, and we'd ensure those residents received their fair share of the state budget. Restrooms in city parks might be as nice as those in highway rest stops.

If Texas would also celebrate its urbanity, it would tell different stories, craft a different version of its history, celebrate a more inclusive culture, and broaden what it means to be Texan. This is where we need writers, poets, painters, planners, and architects. That should be our mission: not just to build infrastructure but fundamentally to reimagine what Texas is.

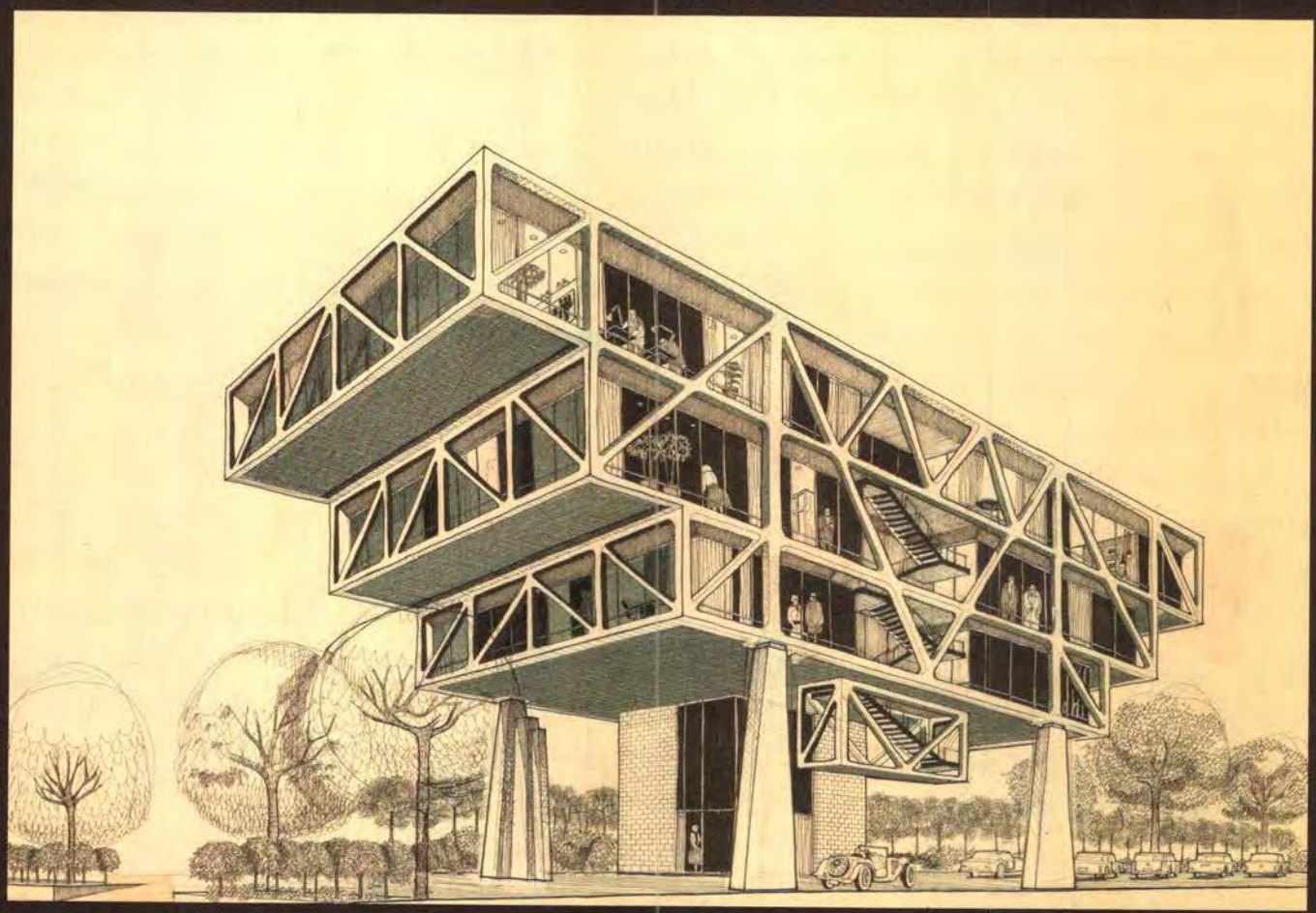
But we can't borrow Texas urbanism from elsewhere. Although it makes sense to import trains from Japan given that they figured out the technology decades ago, we can't import a vision. For all its faults, our rural mythology is distinctive. If it's going to inspire people, our urban vision must be, too. We've spent far too long modeling our cities on others. The designers who envisioned Houston's first light rail line showed photos from Strasbourg. The planners who advocated for a bike plan talked about Portland. The developers building on Buffalo Bayou call their project "East River," as if it were in Brooklyn. The pages of *Cite* have often been used to lament that we should be like other places: that Houston should have zoning like every other city, that we need downtown revitalization like Baltimore, that we need better historic preservation like Savannah, that we need more world class architecture like New York. It's easy to figure out what's wrong with our cities. But that's not enough to make them better. Seeing what's right—celebrating that Houston is one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the world—helps. But that's still a statistic, not a vision.

Yes, we are missing high-speed rail. But we are lacking the broader vision of what Texas is. If Texas Central could not redefine this state's identity, and what this state can be, maybe we all need to do so. A train, no matter how fast, no matter how shiny, is not the point. It's where that train takes us.

Houston Unbuilt

Barrie Scardino Bradley

Imagined: A Mid-Century Architectural Office



Top to bottom:
Burdette Keeland Jr. in an automobile. Burdette Keeland Architectural Drawings and Photographs, University of Houston Libraries, Special Collections.
Sketch of Office Building for Howard Barnstone and Burdette Keeland, 1962. Howard Barnstone Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.
Howard Barnstone & Partners and Burdette Keeland Office Building, 1914 West Capitol (now 1914 North Memorial way), 1964. Photo: Frank Lotz Miller. Howard Barnstone Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

In 1962 two noted architects proposed an office building unlike anything Houston had ever seen—nor would it see. Howard Barnstone, FAIA (1923–1987) and Burdette Watts Keeland Jr. (1926–2000) designed a building to house their architectural offices plus two floors of rental space overlooking Buffalo Bayou in the historic Sixth Ward. Barnstone and Keeland taught together in the College of Architecture at the University of Houston (UH), at times shared professional office space and were best friends. Barnstone moved from his native Maine to Houston in 1948 after graduating from Yale. When he accepted a job to teach at UH, he expected to remain only a couple of years, but he never left. Keeland, a Houstonian, received his architecture degree from UH, where he met and studied under Barnstone.[1]

After designing a few houses on his own, Barnstone partnered with Preston Bolton from 1952 to 1961 (Bolton & Barnstone), primarily producing clever but derivative Miesian houses that received accolades and awards. From 1962 to 1965 he worked with young associates under the name Howard Barnstone & Partners. After the Bolton & Barnstone practice dissolved, Barnstone and Keeland leased space together on the sixth floor of the Niels Esperson Building (1962) in downtown Houston.[2] Although they shared office space from 1962 to 1969, Barnstone and Keeland were never partners. A key person who began working for Barnstone in 1959 was Eugene Edwards Aubry, FAIA (b. 1935), who did become Barnstone's partner for four years beginning in 1966.[3]

Both Barnstone and Keeland were busy during the 1960s, and each managed to get plenty of publicity in both national architectural magazines and local newspapers. By late 1962 they had acquired two small back-to-back lots (50 by 100 feet) just west of downtown and finalized for publication a drawing for an exceptional office building there.[4] In February 1963 the *Houston Chronicle* published this drawing and a short notice entitled, "Construction to Start on Odd Building."[5] And in May both *Architectural Forum* and *Progressive Architecture* published information on the building, noting that the two architects would occupy only the first level, leaving the upper two floors as an income-producing space.[6]

The tall building was indeed odd, particularly in a residential neighborhood comprised of Victorian cottages. Its overt structure contained three increasingly large, steel-framed boxes stacked like an inverted pyramid with the three levels encased in larger V-shaped trusses that held the whole together structurally and visually. This cantilevered structure rested on thick concrete piers with an entrance at ground level. They designed it to be the height of a five-story building with the lowest floor raised twenty feet above grade to afford views of the Houston skyline and Buffalo Bayou. Robert Barnstone and Deborah Ascher Barnstone—in their essay on Robert's uncle's work—suggested that the building harkened back to work of the Soviet Constructivists such as El Lissitzky's 1924 *Wolkenbügel* (cloud-pressers) project that was also never built.[7]

The Barnstone-Keeland office building illustration itself has a few curious features. For one, the staircase in the section appended to the bottom of the lowest floor goes nowhere. The entry cube presumably contained an elevator, so why this extra little box? The building imagined without it seems cleaner. Secondly, only one of the three piers shown seems to be buttressed, another awkward inclusion. Also the office building and the Cloud Presser drawings both include cars, the former to provide interest and the latter to provide scale. In the 1950s and 1960s, the automobile became a huge force that architects and planners had to consider. The little car in the Barnstone-Keeland office illustration is, in fact, Keeland's own car, a 1952 MG TD sports car convertible. The inclusion of this particular car suggests that Keeland might have been the illustrator.

But which architect came up with the Barnstone-Keeland office design is unknown. At the time Keeland and Barnstone seemed primarily interested in New Brutalism, designing buildings such as the Essex-Houck Building (1962, Burdette Keeland Jr.) and Piney Point Elementary School (1962, Howard Barnstone & Partners, since demolished). Barnstone likely had the idea of raising a glass-skinned building high enough over the trees for the views, and Aubry, who was an especially intuitive designer and adept illustrator, may have contributed not only suggestions but also produced the attention-grabbing drawing.

Estimated to cost $380,000 (over $3.7 million today)[8] had this building been constructed, it might have changed the nature of West Capitol Street (now North Memorial Way) from residential to upscale office and perhaps commercial buildings. The imagined Barnstone-Keeland office could have prompted more Futuristic buildings in that sector. Today, the area is a mix of old cottages and commonplace office buildings. The one-story glass-framed pavilion that Barnstone and Keeland built on the property instead of the "odd building" is partially obscured with residential landscaping. It has a nondescript two-story addition at the back, and the contiguous lot on State Street behind the building is a parking lot—a sad ending to what might have been.

Notes

1 For biographical information on Howard Barnstone see Stephen Fox, "Howard Barnstone 1923-1987," *Cite 18* (Fall 1987): 18–21. For biographical information on Burdette Keeland see "Burdette Keeland Architectural Papers," University of Houston Libraries https://findingaids.lib.uh.edu/repositories/2/resources/4#.

2 Project no. 6239, Barnstone-Keeland Offices, 630 Niels Esperson Building, 808 Travis in Catalogue Raisonné, *Making Houston Modern* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 331. The following year they moved to the 14th floor (project no. 6303) before occupying the office building that was actually constructed in 1964.

3 Barnstone & Aubry 1966-1969, *Making Houston Modern*, 335–40.

4 Sixth Ward Historic District Nomination Form, National Register of Historic Places. Completed and submitted March 23,1977; approved January 23, 1978. "Current Property Owner's List," np, W.R. Baker addition, NSBB, Block 430, lots 3 and 10 (1914 West Capitol Street) were owned by Eugene Aubry et ux. https://drive.google.com/file/d/11O-j5ZXSPts5G5kh2ml0wtQFztr7SiZKh/view.

5 "Construction to Start on Odd Building," *Houston Chronicle*, February 24, 1963, section 7, 2. See also "Takes Inverted Shape," *Houston Post*, February 24, 1963, 49.

6 "Houston Offices," *Architectural Forum* 118 (May 1963): 59; and "Exposed-Frame Building," *Progressive Architecture* (May 1963): 78.

7 Robert Barnstone and Deborah Ascher Barnstone, "An Architectural Family Portrait," *Making Houston Modern*, 194. Lissitzky's "horizontal skyscrapers" of the Cloud Presser project were intended for eight different sites in Moscow.

8 US Bureau of Labor Statistics website https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm puts the amount from February 1963 at $3,709,962.50 in December 2022 dollars This pricey estimate may be the reason the project was scaled down to essentially the smallest "box" with sliding glass doors for walls instead of glass filled steel trusses—a far less expensive building with no rental space.

Agency and Scale in the Technosphere

Peter K. Haff in Conversation with Albert Pope

The research of Peter K. Haff, emeritus professor of Geology and Civil and Environmental Engineering at Duke University, focuses on the role of technology in the Anthropocene, the new geologic epoch. In this conversation with Albert Pope, he elaborates on an understanding of large-scale technology as a geological phenomenon—the technosphere—a quasi-autonomous force that shapes the modern human condition.

AP Before the introduction of the concept of the technosphere, infrastructure was conceived and constructed as isolated regional services that were developed in pockets across the country. Since the onset of the Great Acceleration, however, these infrastructures have been converging at a rapid pace interconnecting at a global scale. With the global networking of infrastructure, system-wide emergent effects are now being recognized. These emergent effects are what establishes the technosphere as a global entity. How does that strike you as a definition?

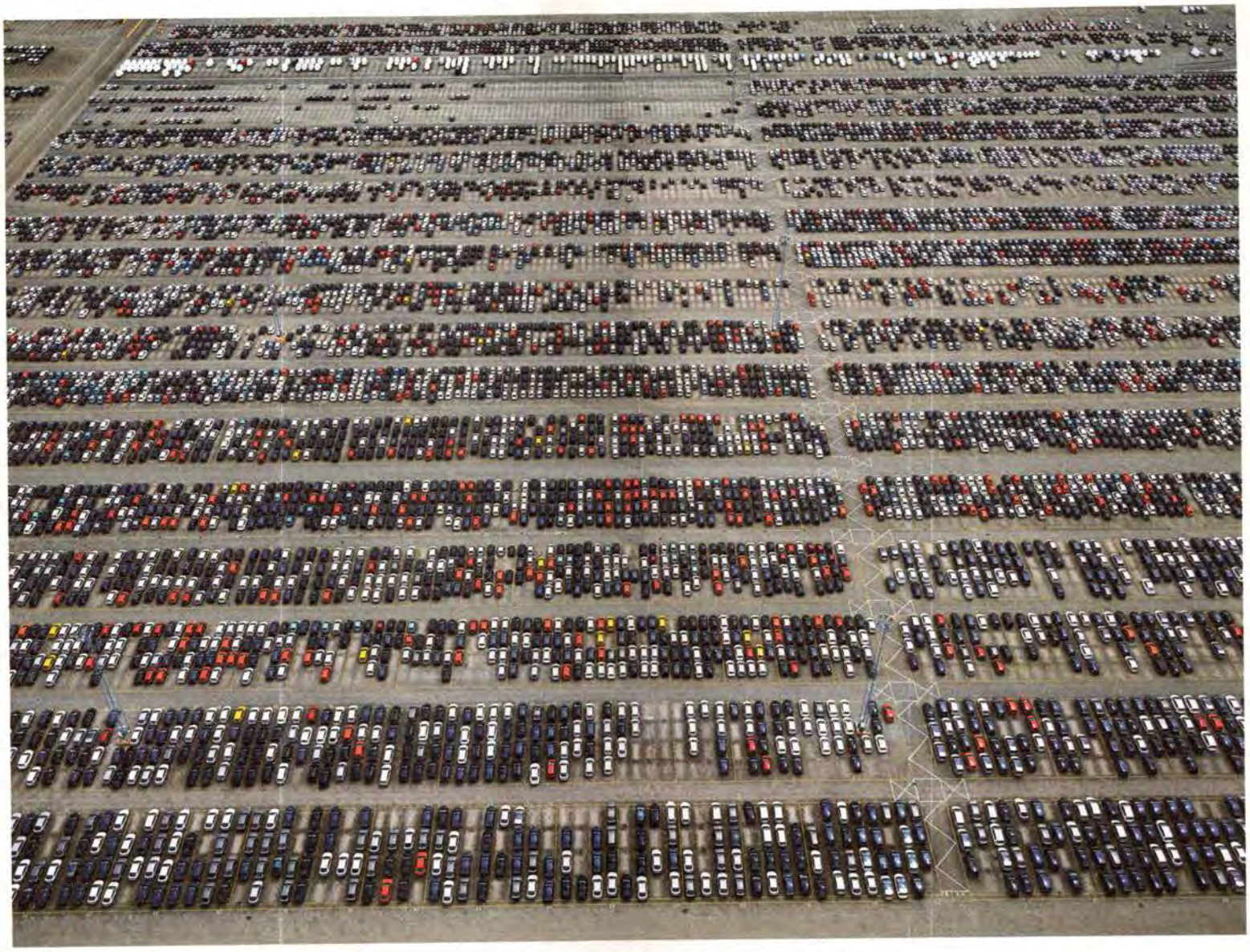
PH I think it captures the scale and some important elements of the technosphere. In my definition, the technosphere includes all kinds of technological artifacts and the links between them, but it also contains almost all the world's humans. Without humans, who are an integral part of the system, you wouldn't have the technosphere. Humans are essential components of the technosphere.

AP Yes, that is a significant omission right off the bat.

PH Around 2012, I became involved in an international project to try to assess the Anthropocene as a possible new epoch in the geological time scale. I am still part of that community, but at some stage, when you're talking about technology and the Internet and humans who are active today, it just doesn't seem very geological. So I thought, well, let's see, what would it take to render the Anthropocene as kind of a genuine geological event?

First, it would be an objective thing in the world rather than just a concept. It would perhaps be something like a sphere because we're used to dealing with the hydrosphere, the biosphere, the lithosphere, and so on. I tried to lay out a kind of a prospective case that humans plus technology are not a mature sphere, but at least an emerging sphere. I began to think along more abstract lines of what the minimum requirements are that such a global system, or really any physical system, would have to have. I didn't aim to describe the actual manifest presence of the technosphere but tried to imagine what one would expect to be the general properties and relationships between parts, systems, environments, and so on.

When I talk about the technosphere, I always have this abstract model in the back of my mind, although in real life it would certainly have both technological parts and human parts. I keep trying to think of a way to get into the nitty gritty—the cataloging of all the different parts and components of it—but that's not really where I function best. My expertise is in geomorphology or the science of land surface processes. I've given several talks and interviews and written papers on the technosphere, but it hasn't yet taken off, perhaps because the explanations and examples



Edward Burtynsky, *Car Terminal*, Ritthem, Zeeland, The Netherlands, 2011.

all have an abstract cast to them, which makes them difficult to articulate in a way that would engage a larger audience.

AP I think you might have to give us more time. The abstract model you wrote about in 2014 is difficult, and it takes time for people to think it through, especially with respect to the human component. The physical system you describe includes humans as just one more component of the system. This parity between people and objects is a barrier for many people.

PH It's a huge conceptual barrier, and it's also a huge political barrier because it subtracts the agency of humans including all the things that we consider distinctively human, like their desires, emotional expressions, or irrationalities. Where are friendship and love? I think those are useful questions, because whatever definition one comes up with, it must allow for the human side of the equation. The idea, however, is to consider humans just as physical parts of the technosphere without attaching any special properties to them or denying them any properties except those in conflict with physical law. Obviously, humans have characteristic properties, but at the abstract level, a human is just another part, like a gear in a wheel.

AP It's not like we have not been here before. I am thinking back to the 1980s, and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT). ANT was an early attempt get beyond the anthropocentric blinders that accompany the majority of network analysis. New insights come when human beings are regarded as "actants" that are equal to all other working parts of a functional network. There is just so much more at stake now that networks have run amok.

PH Latour had the right idea with ANT, but I'm not sure he carried it forward to its logical conclusion. My goal was to see how far one could get with allowing for human participation in the life of this recently emerged physical system, but without imposing any preconceptions of human nature. Most of the interest came from people who are not in the natural sciences, like yourself, and in the humanities there was a lot of interest. Some of it was critical, but still, there was a lot of engagement with the idea.

AP The inclusion of humans as a component is certainly one of the more striking formulations of a technosphere. But what drives it home is the way you limit the agency of human components. In your 2014 paper, "Humans and Technology in the Anthropocene: Six Rules," you divided up the technosphere by scale. You put sensible limits to those scales and then limited any effective interaction between these scales. While we are active participants in the physical system, we have very little effect on it at a systematic level. It has a dramatic effect on us, but we have a very limited impact on it. In addition to thinking of humans as a component, pushback also comes from the fact that we have almost no ability to control the technosphere. Even if our fate was wholly determined by the technosphere, few would concede it.

PH Much criticism comes precisely from there. In the paper you mention, I outline three strata. For a system composed of a given size, say a human, stratum one is the much smaller stuff. Stratum two is stuff that's about our size. Stratum three consists of things that are substantially bigger than us. The rule is that a component can only interact directly with another component of comparable size. For example, in a dispute over taxes, you can't go to the Internal Revenue Service, seize it with your hands, shake its shoulders and make it more reasonable. You must deal with a tax agent, a component in your stratum, with connections inside the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy makes a decision. This means it reacts, and it comes back down to your stratum, say in the form of a letter. So it moves up to the larger system and then focuses back down again to you. These are feedback loops. Every physical system is built on feedback loops that provide a mechanism for crossing between strata. Feedback loops embedded in the larger system are what define agency, both in the tax bureaucracy and in the technosphere.

AP These analogies demonstrate that physical networks—such as the IRS—are stratified by scale: a microscope scale, a human scale, and a superhuman, macroscopic scale. Your analogies further suggest that there is very limited action (feedback loops) that exist between these strata. A question that arises from this setup is how effective such analogies might be once we apply them to the technosphere. What would constitute an intervention between the strata of the technosphere?

I believe there's a real value in the fact that we recognize that there are different scales, and there are limits to them. It immediately displaces an anthropocentric point of view when we acknowledge that we exist within different scales of organization and that these different scales may operate under very different rules. The fact that we become aware of these strata, and understand that they are all different, is crucial. What works on one stratum may not work the same on greater or lesser strata. In short, we must get outside of our own frame of reference to see the limits of our own knowledge. It brings us to a full awareness that the things that we make and operate are not always imaginable, let alone controllable.

An entirely new question that arises from this research is how our awareness of the technosphere changes our response to it. Many will simply reject outright the notion that humans are components of an organizational logic that we may never understand and ultimately cannot control. On the other side of that awareness, however, it is possible to imagine, if not calculate, the integrated behavior of individual entities as well as complex aggregations such that feedback loops can be imagined, constructed, and observed.

The fact is that the part of the technosphere that exists at a larger, "stratum three" scale is destroying our future and that there is a limited amount of what actants on our scale (stratum two) can do to affect that destruction. The organizational logic of our routine existence is so deeply embedded in our worldview, I am not sure that human societies can even grasp the existence of an unknown logic at an unknown scale.

PH The question is why, if humans are in the driver's seat, we just keep doing all these things that are making the world worse for us and for our children, for every other species on the planet, if not for the environment as a whole? The answer is that "humans" are not human. Instead, "humans" are simply part of an emergent system, the technosphere, which exerts its own agency, as it must do, like any system, in order to survive. As with the IRS, individual humans are not in the control as far as the technosphere is concerned.

Still, capitalism does not seem to be just a technospheric mechanism deployed to keep its human components content with their lot as they work to support the technosphere. Something more fundamental seems to be going on. What is so fundamental that it would lead a physical system like the technosphere to lay waste to its environment, threatening its own survival?

Well, consider a fire in a forest. Say a camper drops a match, or a lightning bolt strikes a tree and starts a small fire. The fire is a system. A forest fire consumes energy, like any dynamic system. And you can see it metabolizing. It evolves just like a little organism growing into a bigger one. And what are the limits to the size of a forest fire? Well, the fire is in its own stratum two, and a stratum three force like a rainstorm can come along and put the fire out. The fire's size could also be limited by its running out of fuel to burn. So why does the forest fire have a predilection to grow indefinitely whereas a biological organism, for example, grows for a while, but doesn't just keep getting bigger and bigger? A little deer grows until it becomes a mature deer, but a little forest fire grows until it runs out of fuel or runs into some other external impediment to growth. What's the difference, considered an abstract system, between a forest fire and a deer?

Edward Burtynsky, *Oxford Tire Pile #1*, Westley, California, USA, 1999.
© Edward Burtynsky, courtesy Weinstein Hammons Gallery, Minneapolis/Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto.

AP May I interrupt for a clarification? What you're saying is that we think of the technosphere as a kind of organism, like ourselves, when really, it's much more like a fire, right?

PH Yes, exactly.

AP We expect the larger scale to have what you're calling a design system, a series of brakes or stops that are built in by natural selection, and that it's these stops that will perpetuate the species into the future. As opposed to a fire, which you referred to as an emergent system that has no brakes or stops associated with it. And that is one of the fallacies. We assume that the behavior of the parts or substrate is identical to the behavior of the whole or upper strata. And that unity, so sensible at the human scale, is what we project into the entirety of the technosphere. What we want to do is to reproduce our own, second-level organization onto the larger whole because that is the perspective from which we understand a unified world, like an organism. But it's not.

PH Yes, you have a completely different kind of system.

AP That in itself is an amazing parallel. You called it an emergent system, the fire versus the design system, which is the organism. If we go back to the definition of the technosphere as an emergent system, it means it hasn't been designed by natural selection to have any of the qualities of its parts. The parts do not anticipate the logic of the whole in the way that an organism's parts—such as brakes or stops—are integrated into its metabolism in order for it to survive. That seems like an adequate definition. Yet the technosphere is an emergent system, not an organism. It may be wrong, but just the idea that an organizational system unlike our own is in control of our fate explodes our perspective on so many, seemingly intractable, environmental problems.

PH I think that the idea of the technosphere as a "superorganism" is flawed. It implies a level of internal stability or homeostasis for which there is no evidence. Biological organisms with homeostatic structures, i.e. internal controls, were "designed" by natural selection, but the technosphere is an emergent system that lacks self-governing mechanisms, the brakes and stops at a higher level. But if the technosphere is analogous to an undesigned system like a forest fire, then you say, well, maybe it's going to just burn itself out, or encounter other external impediments to growth. I think "undesigned" might be the key. There are after all biological systems that are undesigned and continue to expand until they reach external limitations, biological populations for example, or cancer. Rabbit populations explode until all the grass is gone, and cancer burns like a fire through the body until it reaches its resource limit and dies, as does the patient. For the rabbit population, cancer, and the technosphere, there is no awareness but these systems have agency or purpose. What is the purpose? These systems seek more energy to survive and reproduce, but, lacking a homeostatic mechanism, they don't know when to stop.

AP Many firefighters remark that the fire they are fighting often seems to have a mind of its own. You seem to be saying that certain properties cross the boundaries between non-living and living systems.

PH Yes, but let's go beyond the analogy just a little bit. Why didn't the biosphere just keep making the organism bigger and bigger (hypertrophy), rather than making multiple copies (hyperplasia)? Why not just make the same organism twice as big? One reason is that an organism is the product of design, and successful design gets harder and harder as system size and complexity increase. But part of the design of biological organisms is reproduction, and the *product of reproduction is a population of offspring, an undesigned system.* Undesigned systems can be very good at growing, and growing large, by following one simple rule: at least some of your parts should be able to copy themselves. In a designed system adventitious copying of parts can wreak havoc

(cancer), but in some undesigned systems, like biological populations, or a forest fire, where one ember begets many embers, the path is open to exponential growth.

The technosphere is also an undesigned system. Parts of it are obviously designed, but those parts are slapped together without much regard for the survivability of the overall system. Overall, the technosphere is undesigned. This means it needs to figure out its own energy budget. The result is excess. It errs on the side of extracting more energy and creating more technospheric mass than it would need for simple maintenance. How much more? Being undesigned and so non-homeostatic, the technosphere doesn't know. So it consumes as much energy and mass as it can, given its current capabilities, and so grows as long as enough energy is available. It's basically a technological form of reproduction.

AP Emergent systems and cell populations are lower-level organisms. A single-cell population is not a leopard. The elementary products of natural selection do not have regulating mechanisms. An organism may be incredibly sophisticated in itself, but when a number of sophisticated organisms become a population, they collectively revert to the behaviors of a much more primitive system.

The problem you describe is one where we are limited to the functional knowledge of our own scale strata. We are locked into that scale expecting that all other strata will have the same organizational logic as our own. The assumption that our own strata is comprehensive is so deeply seated that we don't even know it's an assumption. One of the bedrocks of design culture, Ray and Charles Eames's celebrated film, "The Powers of Ten" (1977), is a beloved testimony to the profession's latent holism, an unexamined belief in an integrated universe where all of its parts add up to a greater whole. The film starts at a lakeside picnic in Chicago (two humans on a blanket) and visually transports us to the outer edges of the universe in ten second steps until our own galaxy is a just speck of light among many others. From deep space the camera snaps back to the picnic and immediately moves inward into the hand of a sleeping picnicker, again with ten times magnification every ten seconds. Our journey ends inside a proton of a carbon atom within a DNA molecule within a white blood cell. In this celebration of scales from macrocosm to microcosm, there are no discontinuities and non sequiturs, only a perfectly graded tenfold zoom.

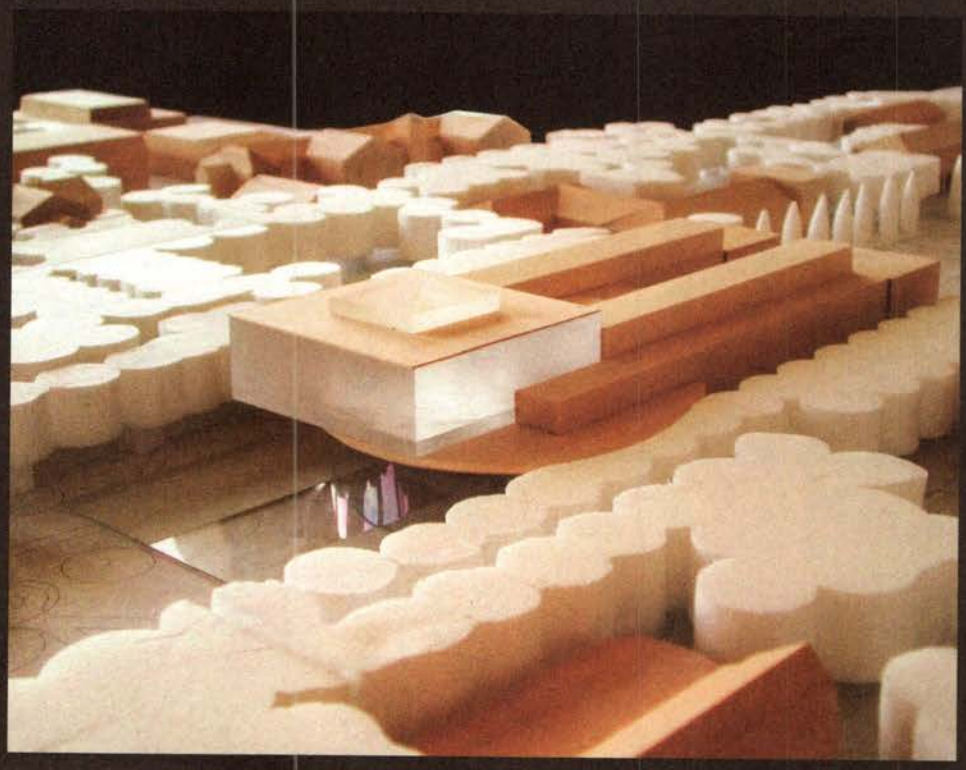
This film is perhaps the most blatant demonstration of why we are unable to effectively intervene in the behavior of the technosphere. We lack the conceptual framework that allows us to see and understand the strata of scales that you are describing and the discontinuities that would break Eames's steady sequence into a series of violent jump-cuts. It means that solutions to climate change must follow a path that leads down to our foundational assumptions. Anything less will be like responding to a raging inferno by turning up our personal air conditioner.

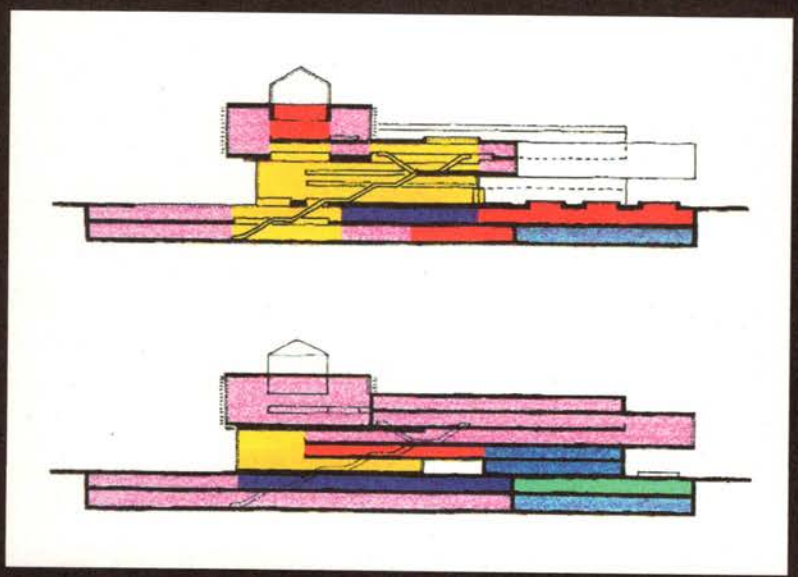
Edward Burtynsky, *Ferrous Bushling #17*, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, 1997.

Houston Unbuilt

Stephen Fox

Reconstructing Fondren Library





Michael Wilford and Partners' concept massing model in context (top), functional section organization (left) for Fondren Library at Rice University (2001/2002).

Michael Wilford and Partners' 2001 scheme, produced in collaboration with Boston architects Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott, to replace Rice University's Fondren Library (originally completed in 1949 and expanded in 1968 with the addition of the Graduate Research Wing) fell victim to the bursting of the dot-com bubble in 2000 and flooding triggered by Tropical Storm Allison in June 2001. Looking back two decades later, with the 1949/1968 Fondren Library still in operation, the question posed by the Wilford-Shepley scheme is: would it have been any more relevant to the ways libraries have evolved in the twenty-first century than its still functioning predecessor?

The project to transform Rice's library grew out of a university study prepared in the mid-1990s to examine the future of knowledge collection, storage, and diffusion as libraries faced the accelerating impact of digitization. The Library Planning Committee's 1997 report envisioned major changes in the ways space would be used in the existing 225,000-square-foot Fondren Library and an anticipated 55,000 square-foot addition. In 1988 the library had begun to manage its collection by moving publications out of the library to an on-campus depository.[1] Between 1999 and 2000 the Philadelphia architects Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates worked with the Shepley firm on a plan to demolish the 99,000-square-foot Graduate Research Wing and replace it with a 169,000-square-foot addition. Responding to trustees' architectural objections to the asymmetrical front elevation of Staub & Rather's 1949 Fondren Library, the Venturi firm proposed masking it with a layered and patterned screen that horizontalized perceptions of the library.[2] Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates' proposal did not satisfy. As of early fall 2000, they were gone.

By October 2000, Michael Wilford & Partners of London replaced Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates as design architect. Wilford had been a visiting critic at Rice's architecture school in the late 1970s and was the architect, along with his (by 2000) deceased partner James Stirling, of alterations and additions to Staub & Rather's Anderson Hall (Rice's architecture building), adjoining the Fondren Library (1979–81). Wilford, working with Shepley's Geoffrey Freeman, proposed a completely new, 295,000-square-foot building to be constructed in place of the Fondren Library.[3] Wilford's design clearly responded to criticisms of the Fondren Library's architecture. The east front, facing the Academic Court, consisted of the narrow ends of a symmetrical pair of wings. These parallel wings were staggered in height, rising from three to four to five stories above ground. An axial concourse between the wings penetrated deeply into the library from the Academic Court. Toward the west (what would have been the back of the Fondren Library), the library stepped up above an elliptical, glazed, ground-level pavilion; its skewed geometry colliding with the orthogonal geometry of the parallel wings. This pavilion overlapped a cross-axial campus sidewalk behind the library. Exterior doors afforded entry to the pavilion from the sidewalk as well as the axial concourse. Stacked atop the west end of the building were additional layers, culminating in a glazed lantern. Wilford referred to the elliptical pavilion as an "immersion concourse."[4] A computer-generated perspective implied that the interior was to be an ecstatic layering of terraced platforms linked by escalators. What the model did not reveal is that most books would be collected in immense stacks occupying basement and subbasement levels. These underground floors comprised a block in plan that protruded invisibly beneath the Academic Court on the east and the (so-called) Great Court on the west.

It was not aesthetic objections but rather bad timing that led to the abrupt demise of Wilford's proposal. During the second week of June 2001, Tropical Storm Allison stalled over Houston, producing catastrophic flooding particularly notable in the Texas Medical Center, just east of Rice's campus. The Fondren Library was largely spared. Less than an inch of water collected on the library's basement floor, not high enough to reach the lowest bookshelf level. But because of the extraordinary damage suffered by hospitals and research facilities in the Medical Center, where basements exposed for construction excavation permitted flood water to inundate underground levels, the two layers of basements that were to house most of Fondren's bookstacks suddenly looked very problematic. On July 16, Rice University president Malcolm Gillis suspended planning for the new library.[5] The university's provost, Eugene Levy, explained that in light of the economic contraction caused by the dot-com bubble crash of 2000, the prospect of being able to raise $130 million for a building where most books would be housed underground was no longer tenable.[6]

President Gillis had repeatedly described Rice's new library as a model for the future of university research libraries. Ironically, this may have been the case. Because university librarian Charles Henry and his successor, Sara Lowman, were already committed to transferring book storage out of the library, construction of Rice's Library Service Center five miles south of the campus in 2003–04, a concrete tilt-wall warehouse for books designed by Carlos Jiménez and Kendall/Heaton Associates, diffused the crisis of congestion plaguing the library. By also providing space in new buildings for a number of departments and institutes formerly housed in the library, wide swaths of space were liberated inside Fondren.[7] During 2005–06, Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott and partner Geoffrey Freeman reconfigured ground-floor public spaces in the library to construct a new west-side entrance connecting through to the library's historic east entrance.[8] One component of the downsizing of the library expansion involved construction of a coffeehouse, initially envisioned as being inside the library but by 2004 conceived as a freestanding building: the Brochstein Pavilion and its adjoining landscape (2008) by Thomas Phifer and Partners and the Office of James Burnett.

No one loves the Fondren Library in 2023 any more than they did in 2001. Yet the terms "sustainability" and "resiliency" come to mind when contemplating how rethinking interior spatial allocations, intensively and imaginatively developing adjacent terrain, and relying on electronic accessibility and off-site storage and retrieval have made it feasible to live with the Fondren Library despite its architectural shortcomings. And just think: if Michael Wilford's building had been built, it would now seem "old."

Notes

1 Susan Egeland, "Fondren Plans Reorganization of Library Holdings: $21.4 Million Donation from Hobby Foundation Funds Initial Stages of Strategic Plan," *Rice Thresher*, January 30, 1998, 1, 7.

2 David B. Brownlee, David G. DeLong, and Kathryn B. Hiesinger, *Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates: Architecture, Urbanism, Design* (Philadelphia and New Haven: Philadelphia Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2001), 116–17.

3 Michael Wilford, *Michael Wilford with Michael Wilford and Partners, Wilford Schupp Architekten, and Others: Selected Buildings and Projects, 1992–2012* (London: Artifice Books, 2014), 208–209.

4 Mark Lai, "Fondren Library Renovations Postponed; Board Rejects Original Blueprints; New Architect to Submit Plans Soon," *Rice Thresher*, October 27, 2000, 12; Ron Nissimov, "Rice's Construction Boom Gets Underway; New Facilities and Building Restoration Part of $500 Million Improvement Program," *Houston Chronicle*, December 31, 2000, 31; Leslie Liu, "Board Approves New $130 Million Library," *Rice Thresher*, March 23, 2001, 1, 11.

5 Leslie Liu, "Library Project Delayed Indefinitely," *Rice Thresher*, August 24, 2001, 1, 4.

6 Ibid.

7 Elizabeth Decker, "Library Improvements Considered," *Rice Thresher*, November 9, 2001, 1, 8.

8 Monica Huang, "Library Renovation Project To Begin as Early as December," *Rice Thresher*, November 5, 2004, 1, 6.

Every Shelter, Emergency Floor, Informal Refugee Settlement, Beqaa Valley, Lebanon, 2020.

Scott Key

Redesigning the Refugee Aid System

Photography by
Silvia Mazzochin and
Salomé Mosher

A person displaced today will be displaced for over two decades according to global averages. This fact shocks many who believe displacement to be merely a months-long circumstance, assuming that displaced people must simply get resettled elsewhere in the developed world. Unfortunately, this brings up a second critical statistic: less than 0.1% of all refugees will ever be resettled. This lack of awareness has led architects and designers to seek out silver-bullet solutions to emergency housing and shelter instead of pursuing longer-term, durable, systemic solutions. Clever folding, flat-packing, or inflatable "solutions" frequently pop-up in common design blogs or originate out of design studios at universities. While these solutions are often alluring, they tend to be lacking substance. We all would like easy solutions, but, sadly, they do not exist—at least not in the refugee-aid sector.

As designers, we need to pioneer long-term, sustainable strategies to address the needs of over 100 million displaced people around the world. For decades, these millions have been living in vulnerable conditions in fields and urban slums of developing countries. Proper solutions to their situation must address stable housing; we also need to find ways to improve refugee agency and create economic and employment opportunities. Displacement rates are growing at an alarming pace, and according to the World Bank, this population is expected to grow to over 241 million people by 2050. In response, at Every Shelter we are trying to shift the strategy across our sector to pioneer new, dignifying, sustainable solutions in the face of generational displacement. This is why we are launching "Shelter Depot," a hardware store in a refugee camp in northwestern Uganda, that provides refugees the agency to actively shape and define their own environment.

But that's not how we started. We started out as students chasing our own solutions. Designers tend to be optimistic and idealistic. We all believe in design's ability to solve problems and to "change the world." When Sam Bridendine, my cofounder, and I started as architecture students in the graduate program at Rice University, we were aware that millions of refugees around the world lived in precarious conditions. And we believed we could design a scalable product that would keep millions of people warmer, dryer, cleaner, and healthier. The floor system we developed, Emergency Floor, helps tens of thousands of Syrian refugees live more dignified lives on a stable

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and clean floor. Currently we are responding to the millions displaced by the recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria by sending thousands of our floors. They are modular, insulated systems that retrofit existing shelters of all shapes and sizes and are self-installed by the refugees. While our floors have been installed all over the world, we are now focused on internally displaced families in the Atmeh camp of northwest Syria, a group that is in particular need. The floor system is manufactured in Kütahya, Turkey, and transported, in cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent, to Syria by truck.

By some measures we have been successful in our endeavors. But in the process of developing that first product, we were faced with the hard reality that the existing systems of aid are flawed and ill-equipped to support displaced populations for years, much less decades. We thought we could revolutionize aid with a product, but we learned that the fundamental issue is first the underlying aid system. The current system creates generational aid dependency, instead of investing in refugees and displaced people's independent futures. We must consider refugees not just as victims in need of aid, but also as the fully capable, and talented individuals they are, ready to rebuild their lives wherever they may be. We need to implement design strategies that enable them to fulfill their own needs, preferences, and aspirations.

Every Shelter's current focus is to build a replicable model, an ecosystem, that values refugees as the central characters in their own recovery—refugees designing and building desirable goods for other refugees. This ecosystem has three primary components: needs are met with high-quality Shelter Goods (our brand), made at a Shelter

Scott Key

Workshop, sold at Shelter Depot, an alternative to the current system of mass aid distributions. We want to foster a flourishing, localized, refugee-led ecosystem. Our newest Shelter Good product, *Bashe Bora* (Swahili for Better Tarp), is made from locally harvested billboard material. As opposed to typical mass-manufactured tarps, imported from afar, that last a family only three to six months before leaking and resulting in nonrecyclable trash, the tarps made by refugee employees at our Shelter Workshop in Kampala provide shelter roofs with a lifespan of five to ten years.

Mass distributions are largely ineffective, demeaning, and unsustainable in the long run, for there is no consideration of what refugees need or want. Bidi Bidi, where we are opening the first Shelter Depot, is the second largest refugee camp in the world, and it is currently experiencing the same funding contractions we've seen up close within the Syrian refugee context. Shelter Depot will bring needed innovative goods and services to this very remote setting. It will offer goods, not for free, but highly subsidized as a manner of both stretching limited aid dollars and providing refugees the dignity of self-reliance. Where capital is lacking, work-for-credit opportunities (such as reforesting the local context or creating eco-brick alternatives to local burnt-bricks) will be available. It will be a responsive platform to support refugees in their own long-term recovery. Every Shelter wants to reconfigure the aid system from the inside out, with good, thoughtful design at its very center.

This journey began back in the classrooms and hallways of the Rice School of Architecture. It has been almost a decade since I graduated as a wide-eyed architecture student ready to save the world through the power of design. I never for once thought that my architecture degree would lead me to launch a hardware store in a refugee camp. But I've also never been more optimistic that good design, at both a product and a systems level, can indeed change the world. And that's Every Shelter's mission, until every refugee can create a home.

Scott Key

Marianne
Mueller

Houston II, 2023


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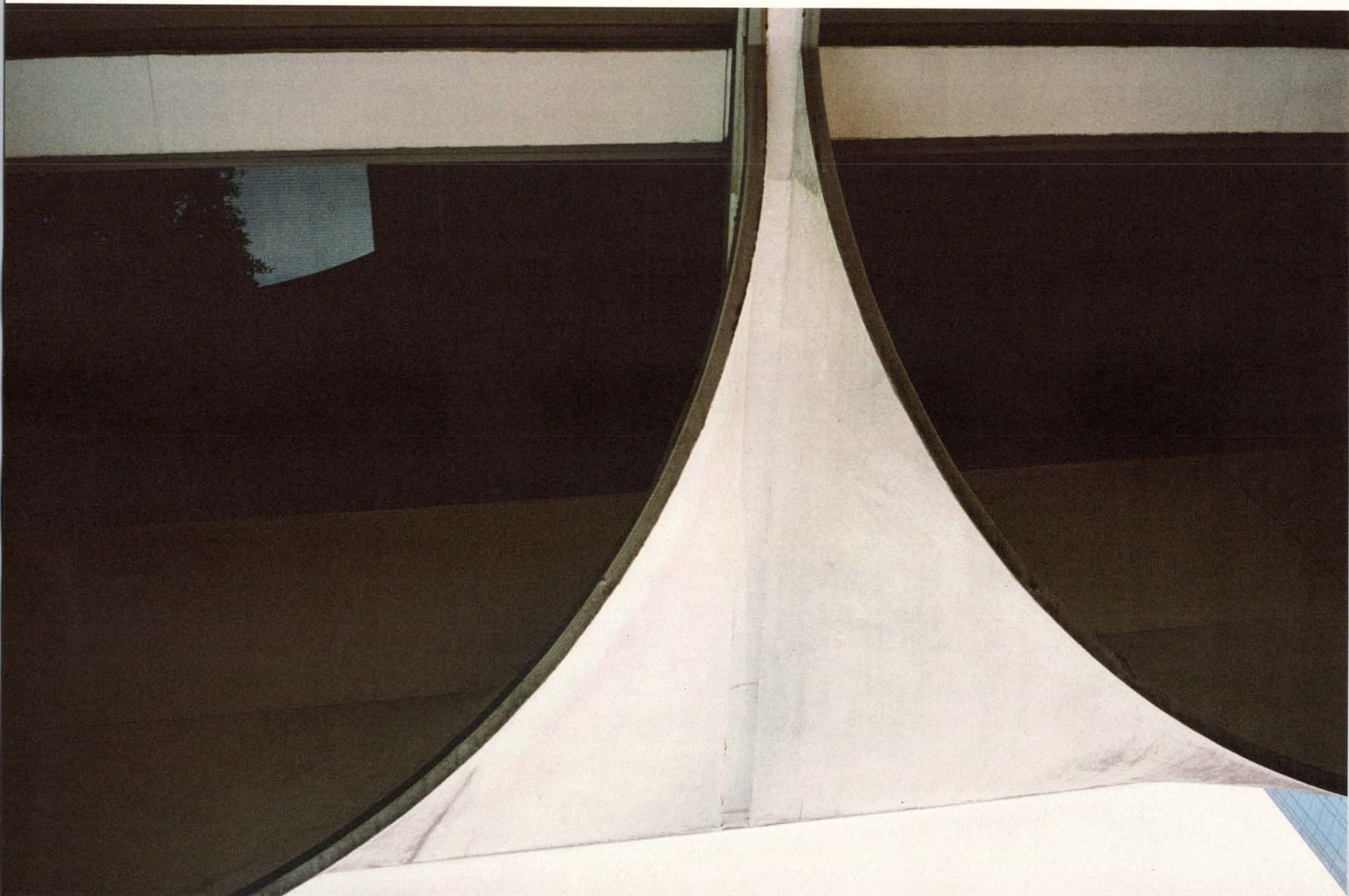


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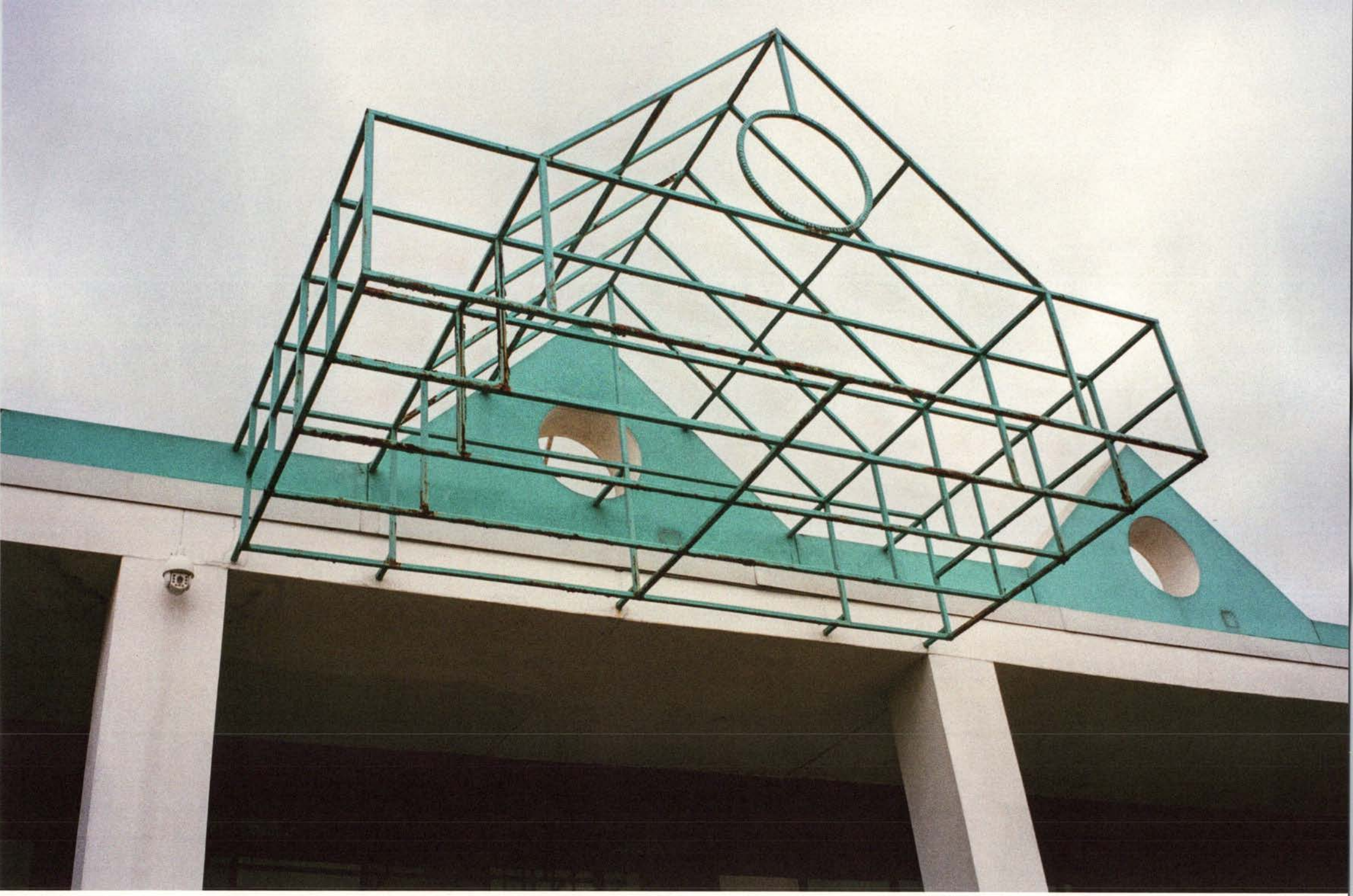


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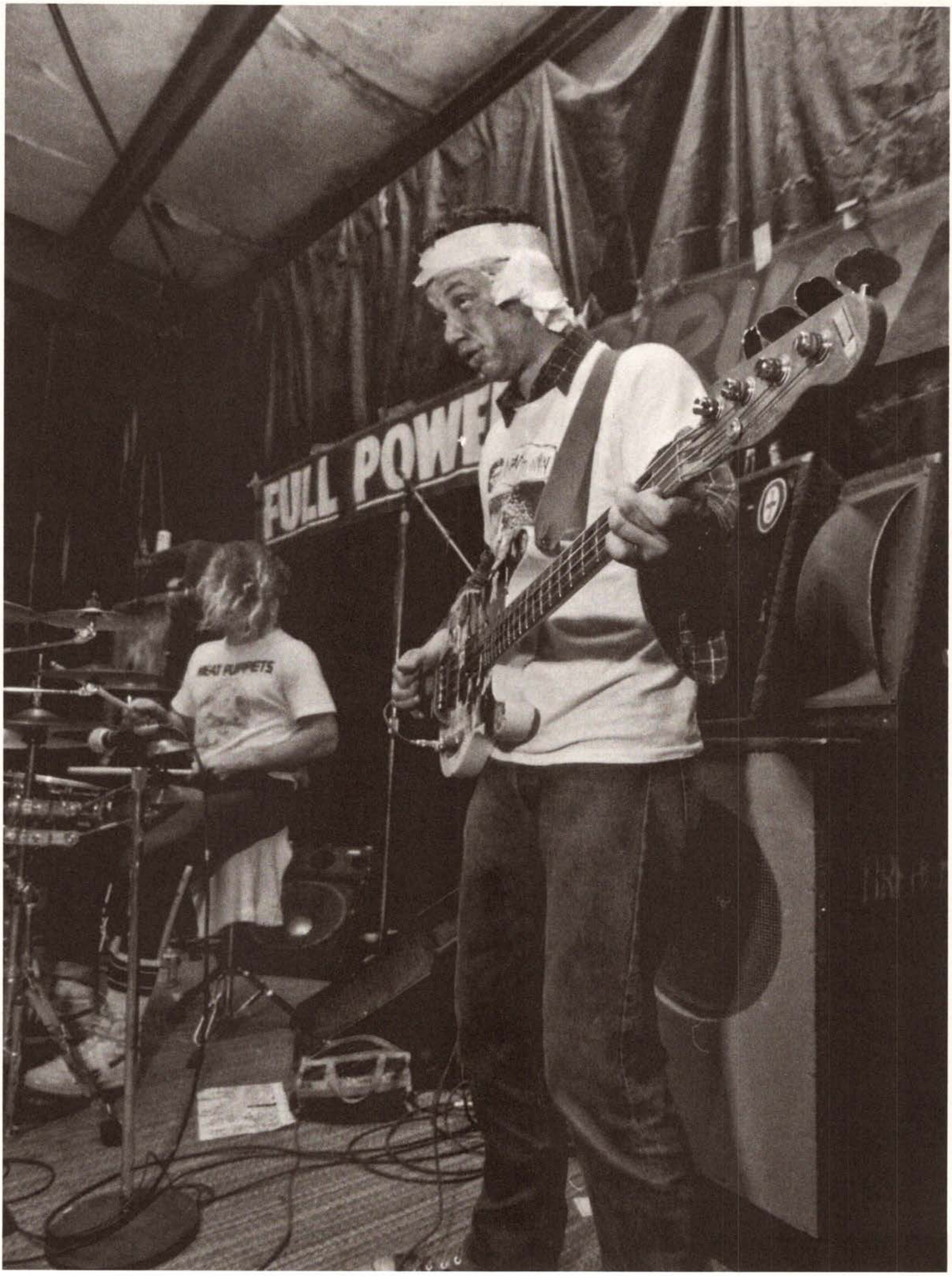
Excess

Houston is a city of extremes. With twenty-six lanes, the Katy Freeway is one of the world's widest motorways. Lakewood Church, with 16,800 seats, competes with St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. And even though shopping malls have proliferated globally in the past decades, the Galleria is still one of the largest in the country.

More importantly, this exuberant culture of manifested excess and even failed aspirations leaves traces on everyday life and the built environment of this conurbation to this day. The unrealized Houston Center, for example, was a manifestation of the belief in the oil capital's unlimited resources. Today, the unbuilt thirty-three city block megastructure to be constructed on a swamp and set to offer twenty-three million square feet of air-conditioned space must be understood as the culmination of a period out of balance with the environment. On the other hand, the Galleria, a palace of commerce, was from its conception in the late 1960s an atypically dense version of its type. While in its initial stages the interstitial space between developments was hardly ever designed, continuously expanding residential developments that complement the commercial programs, as well as Metro's recently completed Silver Line Bus Rapid Transit, point to a future of higher density that enables a shared street life and a more urban public realm.

Houston is changing. The majority-white context Enrique Ramirez grew up in transformed into an environment, in which, according to sociologist Stephen Klineberg, "all of the region's ethnic groups are now minorities." But lasting change takes time. Just as teenagers explored the city from the back seat of the car in the 1980s, there is still no way to consume Houston's excessive expanse and its vast cultural terrain other than by the automobile. And yet, despite fierce public resistance, an effective system of public transportation would be key to an urban experience that is accessible to all.



fIREHOSE at the Apocalypse Monster Club in Houston in 1987. Photograph: Ben DeSoto.

Space City

Enrique Ramirez

Punk City

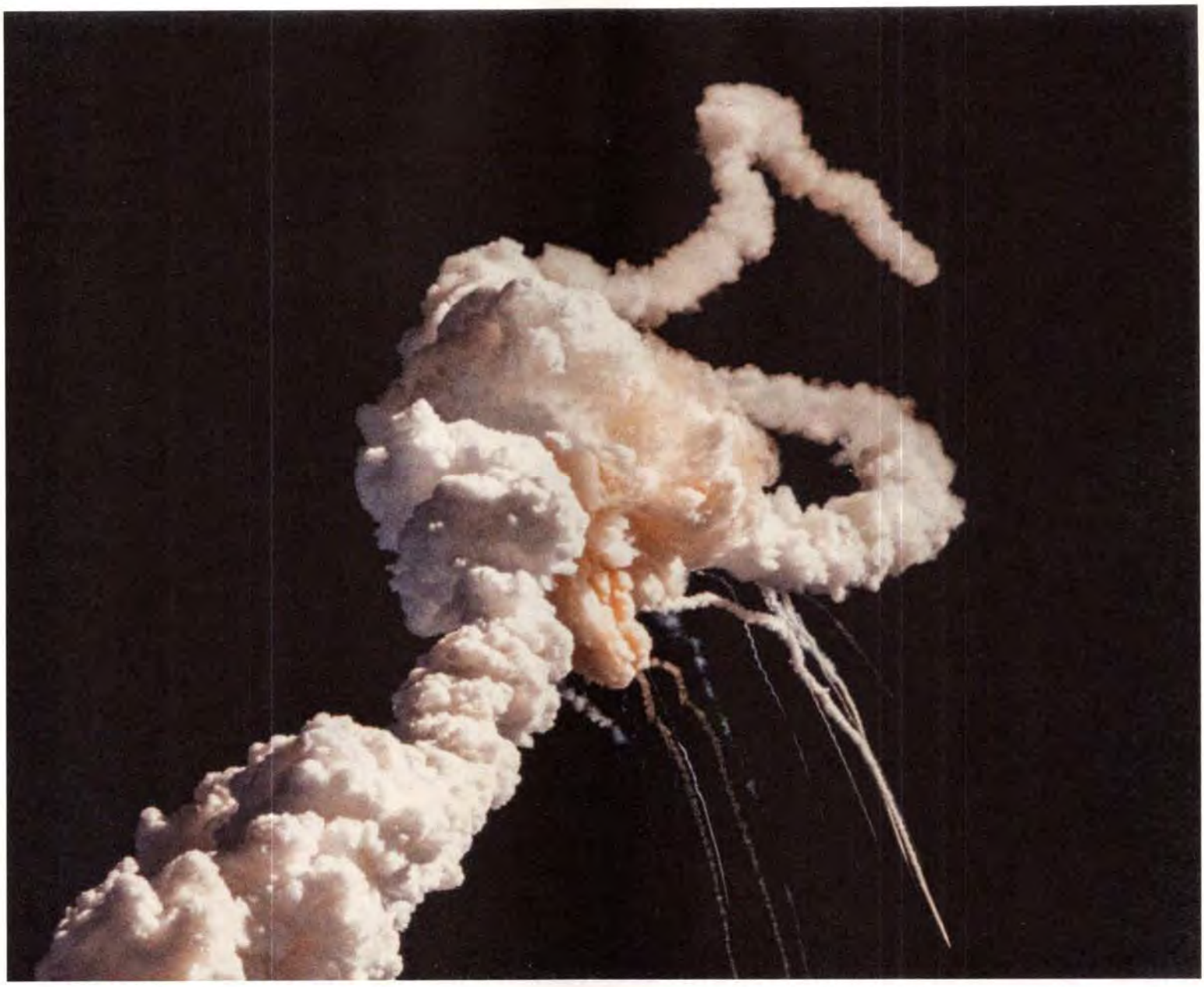
In 1986, I was a freshman at Clear Lake High School, a sports-and-academic behemoth known for its formidable marching band, debate squad, basketball team, and drama classes. The school was not far from the Johnson Space Center, and many of the students had parents who worked for NASA or any other number of defense contractors associated with the aerospace industry. The school was also overwhelmingly white, and this meant that for those of us who were not popular; who did not play sports; who were Black, South Asian, Mexican American, and otherwise out of step with the rest of youth culture in this Houston suburban enclave; who would spend time in mall bookstores or convenience store magazine displays poring over issues of *Thrasher*, *Transworld Skateboarding*, or *Spin*: our shared passion was punk rock. It was our lingua franca.

And as punk rock aficionados, we were all too eager to buy beer at a Stop-N-Go or Circle K and to party at friends' houses or concert venues. Those who were a bit older were still smarting from the fact that the drinking age in Texas had been raised from 19 to 21 in 1986. This meant that it was harder than ever to see shows. Some learned the dark art of shoplifting alcohol from gas stations. Others asked older siblings for help. But for most of us, we took advantage of the fact that the bands we wanted to see played in all-ages venues or clubs that advertised special concerts for all-ages crowds. Venues such as Fitzgerald's, Cabaret Voltaire, International Club, or even the Lawndale Art Annex—all were part of a larger constellation of spaces where we felt wanted, welcome, and included.

I had already missed some shows that year. I still regret missing an opportunity to see the Minutemen play with Billy Bragg at the Lawndale Art Annex in October of 1985. Not only were the Minutemen touring with another favorite band of mine, R.E.M., but this would be the last time anyone would be able to see them—lead singer and guitarist D. Boon would die tragically in a car accident on December 22, 1985. That was just before Christmas, and at the time I was stumbling, struggling in my classes, teaching myself how to play songs on a nylon-string guitar that belonged to my grandmother, and, of course, listening to Funhouse, the punk rock show on KPFT hosted by Chuck Roast, an important figure in the burgeoning punk rock scene in Houston. I would stay up late at night dialing in the radio to catch the final moments as Chuck played tracks by Black Flag, Big Boys, as well as local bands, including the woefully overlooked Really Red, whose songs were gems of agitprop, caustic tirades against incidents of racism that were so prevalent in Houston in the day. To listen to Funhouse was to participate in some other kind of culture, and you could do it clandestinely, from the comfort of your own bedroom.

Along with radios, mixtapes were an important medium for sharing music, an informal economy of taste, if you will. And if you were lucky, you would have a friend with a turntable who would record the latest albums by bands on SST Records or Alternative Tentacles Records. But by far the most important medium—if by medium we mean a form of transport, a way to dislocate ourselves in time and space to arrive at another moment and place—then there was no medium like a car. I suppose that in retrospect, holding an object that is as inextricably linked to cultures of consumption and extraction as a car seems misguided and maybe even tragic, but having a car meant freedom. Freedom from school. Freedom from parents. And it was not just freedom from those things that we believed were holding us in check, but a car was a mobile space, fugitive and elusive, in which we spent time in thrall to our passions.

Having a car also gave us the means to insulate ourselves from the tragedies that were constantly being replayed in newscasts. And in 1986 alone—the winter and spring of my high school freshman year—the inventory of the things that made you want to close off from the rest of their world was daunting indeed. For instance, there was the Challenger explosion in January, an event that reverberated in our community and high school (some of the astronauts who died had children who were my classmates at Clear Lake High School). April alone saw two global events that made the atmosphere seethe and flutter with tension. In addition to the Chernobyl disaster—which, to my vivid imagination, conjured images of radioactive plumes crossing the Atlantic and descending down on American cities—there were the massive airstrikes led by large formations of US Air Force bombers against Libyan targets.

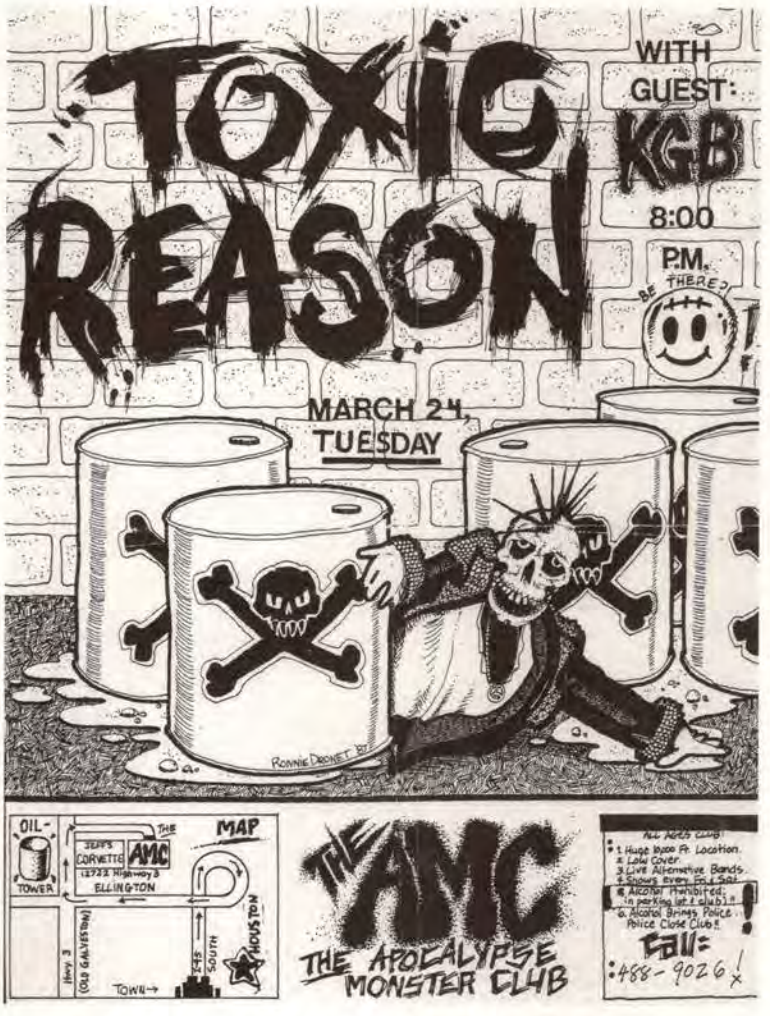


On January 28, 1986, the Challenger space shuttle and her seven-member crew were lost when a ruptured O-ring in the right solid rocket booster caused an explosion soon after launch.
Image © NASA (86-HC-220)

It might have been a response to a series of devastating terrorist attacks, and yet it was not too hard to imagine how such events could lead to more global calamities. And as much as we tried to shield ourselves from the world, punk rock—and art in general—became the chief means for engaging with it. Having a car made it easier. Having a city made it a reality. Being in a band made it urgent.

For a teenager like me, underage and eager for new sounds and seeing more bands, Houston was a vast cultural terrain to be consumed by automobile. Mixtapes provided the soundtrack. I was not driving yet, which made the experience all the more pleasurable because it meant that I could glimpse the city as if it were a succession of images viewed from the comfort of the rear seat of my friend's beat-up Cadillac Coupe DeVille. In May, we all jumped into the car to go catch Hüsker Dü at Phideaux's on the corner of Westheimer and McKinney. We took the long way, which in suburban Houston autospeak meant foregoing the Gulf Freeway and looping northwards, flinging ourselves at high speeds along the Pasadena Freeway and watching the panorama of smokestacks, gasometers, and other structures brisling with barium lamps and aerials emerge from water vapor clouds along from the Houston

Seven Seconds and Verbal Assault at Apocalypse Monster Club, 1986.



Toxic Reason at the Apocalypse Monster Club by Ronnie Dronet 1987.

Ship Channel. Right before the all-important merging with Loop 610, I recall a blue light disintegrating in the fog. We passed it very quickly, but not too much, for I caught the words "Zero Inn" flashing in the periphery through the foul-smelling haze. It was ominous, and yet somehow beautiful.

When we arrived at Phideaux's, what we found was not a club in any conventional sense. It was a warehouse next to an IHOP. To enter, you paid a doorman a couple of bucks, and in exchange you got a plastic cup that you took to a keg to fetch yourself some beer. It was a humid night, and the warehouse reeked of smoke and stale beer. Fortunately, we arrived there just as Hüsker Dü was performing their soundcheck. And it was incredible. I stood there in front of the PA speakers and let myself be drenched in a sea of cresting and pulsing air emanating from Bob Mould's Marshall stack. I stood there in awe and watched Mould play some of my favorite songs on his low-slung Gibson Flying V. I had listened to songs like "If I Told You," "I Apologize," "Celebrated Summer," and "Divide and Conquer" many times on my Walkman and bedroom tape player. And yet hearing these songs live, a blissful, earsplitting cascade of beautiful noise, I felt as if I was levitating. Bob Mould was also wearing an R.E.M. shirt, which made the experience that much better.

Later in the evening, as the first opening band began to take the stage, I went to one of the kegs and saw Greg Norton, Hüsker Dü's bass player. He was such an unlikely figure. Immediately recognizable for a handlebar mustache with curled, waxy ends, he was wearing a safari hat and a black Club 688 T-shirt tucked into cargo shorts. Norton was

not the only punk musician I would meet. In fact, every time I would go to a show, I met members from the bands I wanted to see. It became a ritual. This is how I met Cris and Curt Kirkwood of Meat Puppets, for example.

But that summer in Houston delivered more than I could ever imagine. One weekend, we rode up to the Houston International Festival to see Spalding Gray perform one of his famous monologues—and this was only months after I had seen *Swimming to Cambodia* at the River Oaks Theater. In June, I saw Laurie Anderson perform at the Houston Music Hall. This was during her *Home of the Brave* tour. And seeing Anderson play violin in a white jumpsuit along with a couple of keyboard players and dancers, whirling about in front of screened images of rotating antennae and words conjured from pixelated typefaces, I felt as if I were in another world, if not another time and space.

Houston's punk clubs were part of a vast urban archipelago, a clustering of locales floating in an endless plane that constituted what could more or less be called a "scene." It was, in many ways, my school. And as a fifteen-year-old bassist in a fledgling band, it was the best education that I could have received. Many punk rock kids or aficionados will speak about the DIY aesthetic as being integral to punk culture. But I think this is a poor way of characterizing this moment of my life. The reason why this is, is that no one tells you how to be in a punk rock band. You do it, and you stumble along, groping, hoping what you do is fun to play and sounds good. This was the case with my first band, Devil Donkey. By the time that 1987 came around, we had played a couple of shows in Houston. (One of these had to be shut down because someone had broken the venue's bathroom toilet with a sledgehammer.) We were fastidious, dedicated, as much as a group of young punk rockers can be. We recorded our songs on a Fostex 4-Track recorder. We listened to ourselves and tried and tried to get better.

That spring, fIREHOSE, the band that rose from the ashes of the Minutemen, was going to play at the Apocalypse Monster Club, a warehouse in a sea of warehouses filled with auto repair hoists, machine tool storage, and an occasional gas station. It was on Highway 3, across from Ellington Field. In preparation for the show, we made a recording on the Fostex and made a quick drawing that we mounted next to a picture of my friend's dog. This would be the cassette cover. We also used this drawing for a design that we made into a silk screen and transferred to a T-shirt in our guitarist's bedroom. The night of the show, we drove to the Apocalypse Monster Club and presented Mike Watt with our tape and T-shirt, which he immediately put on over his flannel.

In a photo taken by Ben DeSoto, you can see fIREHOSE playing at the Apocalypse Monster Club in Houston in 1987. It was their first tour. George Hurley is wearing a Meat Puppets T-shirt while Mike Watt wears a bandage around his head. Watt hurt himself earlier in the day while fixing the radiator on the band's tour bus. This is what he told us when we hung out with him before the show.

And if you look closely, you will notice that Watt is wearing our band T-shirt.

Our band was called Devil Donkey. Gary Heidt fronted. Erik Amlee played guitar. Susie Ibarra played the drums. I was the bassist. We opened up for bands like JFA, U.K. Subs, and Glass Eye at various clubs in Houston.

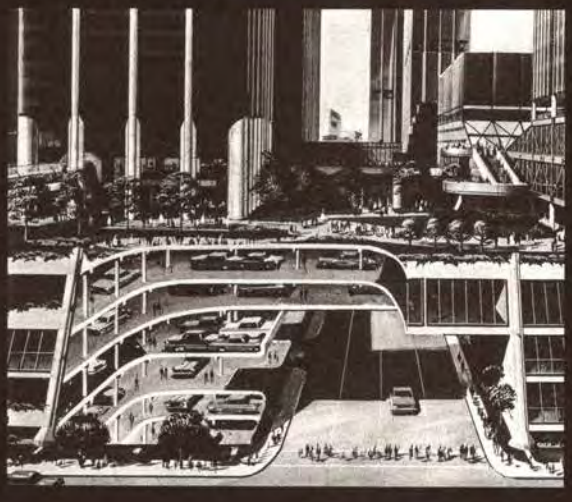
I was 15 at the time of this show.

And when I see this picture, I still gasp with excitement.

Houston Unbuilt

Michael Kubo

Specters of Petro-Urbanism: Houston Center



Houston Center in downtown Houston, Texas, was a massive urban renewal scheme of thirty-three city blocks designed by William Pereira in the late 1960s and early 1970s for the Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation.

At the southeast corner of Fannin and Walker Streets in Downtown Houston stands a monolithic column, sheathed in glossy black aluminum. It forms the corner of a stepped-back four-story parking garage, above which rises a six-story slab and forty-story tower of offices. Despite the scale of this complex, which spans a full city block to San Jacinto and McKinney Streets, the building conveys little sense of the immense, fantastical scheme of which it was intended to form only the first fragment. Never realized in its originally projected form, Houston Center would have extended over thirty-three contiguous city blocks, essentially doubling the footprint of Houston's existing central business district within a single megastructure containing some twenty-three million square feet of air-conditioned space.

The grandiose scale of Houston Center was the brainchild of George R. Brown, cofounder of Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation—a major owner of cross-country oil and gas pipelines linking southwestern energy fields with the eastern US—and president of Brown & Root, one of the world's largest construction and engineering companies by the late 1950s. Already known for undertaking bold, large-scale ventures to expand the company's transmission business, Texas Eastern's decision to develop Houston Center coincided with the broader diversification of major US corporations into for-profit real estate development after the late 1960s.[1] The company had little prior experience in real estate, but sought to leverage the firm's oil capital, ready access to bank loans, and in-house expertise in large-scale construction projects via its close ties with Brown & Root. Texas Eastern's leadership decided that real estate ventures were only worth pursuing at an extreme scale, one big enough to "make a difference on the bottom line."[2] Its response to this imperative would be, it claimed, "the biggest privately owned real estate development project ever," dwarfing among others Rockefeller Center in New York City, which by 1970 was comprised of roughly 10.8 million, of an eventual 17 million, square feet.[3]

The ambitions for Houston Center were rivaled only by those for the Woodlands, which together formed the alpha and omega of Houston's oil-fed development in the 1970s. Each projected a competing direction for the expanding metropolis: one a pastoral suburban utopia in which petro-capital was transmuted into a paradigm of ecological planning, the other a multilevel city within a city that would recenter Houston's growth within a vast, interiorized downtown complex. Both developments were planned by the Los Angeles-based office of William L. Pereira & Associates, well known for visionary designs including the Transamerica Tower in San Francisco (1969–72) and large-scale master plans including the new town of Irvine, California.[4] Pereira's Houston Center scheme reimagined the largely undeveloped eastern portion of the city's central business district as a self-contained "platform city" of office towers, hotels, entertainment venues, and apartment blocks for a population of nearly 100,000 office workers and 16,000 inhabitants, built atop a gargantuan parking podium spanning over the existing street grid and ringed by a high-capacity loop road. The rooftop of this mega-plinth would serve as the "promenade level" for the complex, a new ground surface of landscaped plazas and air conditioned pedestrian malls connected by a three-dimensional network of moving sidewalks and people movers.[5] The project was announced on the front page of the *Houston Chronicle* in October 1970 as a "City of Tomorrow"; real estate ads for Houston Center later touted it as "the most exciting concept yet developed for the American city," one that would create "a new city for people on a platform above the city of the automobile."[6] Enabled by a massive program of private, oil-funded land acquisition unfettered by significant public oversight, Houston Center offered a spectacular image of corporate interior urbanism at a scale that seemed barely conceivable even in a city without zoning.[7] Yet "as bold as the development plan may seem," the *Chronicle* noted in its announcement, "Texas Eastern officials left no doubt that it would be carried out."[8]

Despite the company's confidence, the eventual development of the Houston Center site bore little resemblance to these grand pronouncements. The extravagant original scheme quickly proved infeasible amid the competitive realities of a crowded Houston real estate market, failing to attract major tenants away from the traditional Downtown center, and stretching the financial capacities of a transmission company unfamiliar with the economics of development. Texas Eastern sold off two prime blocks of the site to First City Bancorp in 1978 and the following year formed an "unhappy marriage" with Cadillac Fairview, a major Toronto-based development company, which assumed a fifty-percent stake in Houston Center until the collapse of their relationship in 1986.[9] While Texas Eastern's efforts did gradually spur the expansion of Houston's central business district to the east, it did so as an unexceptional collection of largely conventional commercial buildings. The company eventually donated the easternmost portion of the thirty-three-block site for the construction of George R. Brown Convention Center, named for the man whose outsize vision for Houston Center had failed to become reality.

Only a single city block of the original mega-parcel, Two Houston Center (1972–74), was built in accordance with Pereira's futuristic master plan. Clad in dark anodized aluminum panels and bronze-tinted solar glass, the building is Houston's lone example of the "oil-slick" aesthetics associated with the Los Angeles-based group known as the "Silvers," which included Frank Dimster, lead architect for the project for Pereira & Associates.[10] Two Houston Center's multilevel organization reveals archaeological traces of the "platform city" that never was, as seen in the landscaped rooftop plazas that sit above its tiered parking base; the heavy X-bracing where the building spans over San Jacinto Street; and the double-height sky lobby, five stories above street level, where office workers would have boarded people movers that were never built. A remodeling of the plinth by Gensler in 2020 removed the flying escalator volumes that originally carried pedestrians up to the fifth floor promenade level, reskinning a portion of the complex with glass volumes that render it indistinguishable from other contemporary office buildings. Yet what is left remains haunted by the specter of Houston Center, among the last megastructural fantasies of the late twentieth century.

Notes

1 Christopher J. Castaneda and Joseph A. Pratt, *From Texas to the East: A Strategic History of Texas Eastern Corporation* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 175.

2 Ibid., 179.

3 Ibid.

4 In contrast to the Woodlands, Texas Eastern's choice was apparently based on more pragmatic concerns: the oil company sought to avoid an "equity type" planning firm that would demand an ownership stake in order to participate in the project. Castaneda and Pratt, *From Texas to the East*, 182.

5 Carla C. Sobala, *Houston Today* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1974), 17.

6 Charlie Evans, "'City of Tomorrow' Planned Here," *Houston Chronicle*, October 11, 1970, 16; Houston Center advertisement, *Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 1974, 4.

7 To span city streets across the thirty-three-block site, Texas Eastern leveraged the state's oil law to argue that it held air rights not only above but across each of its adjacent blocks, quickly gaining these rights under a city ordinance passed at the company's request. Castaneda and Pratt, *From Texas to the East*, 186.

8 Evans, "'City of Tomorrow' Planned Here," 16.

9 Castaneda and Pratt, *From Texas to the East*, 235.

10 Charles Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 66.

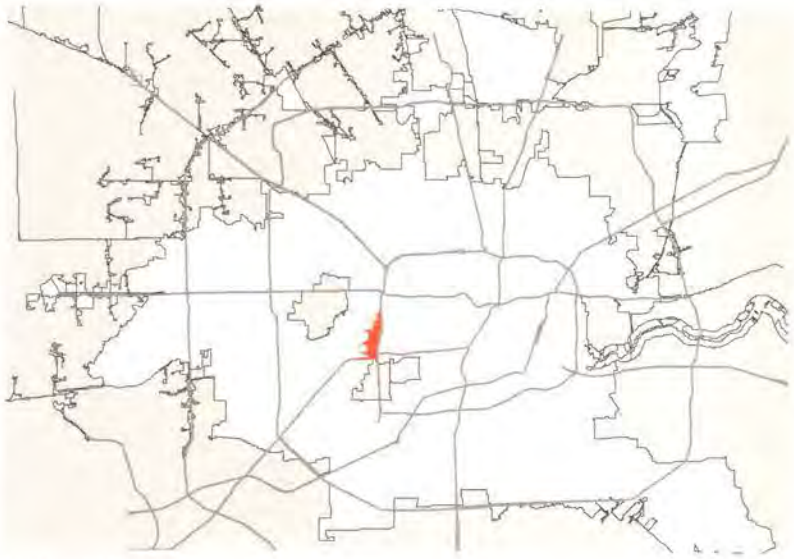
Houston MetroRapid Silver Line (Bus Rapid Transit), Westheimer/Galleria station.

Revisiting Uptown

Judith K. De Jong

Four Observations on Density

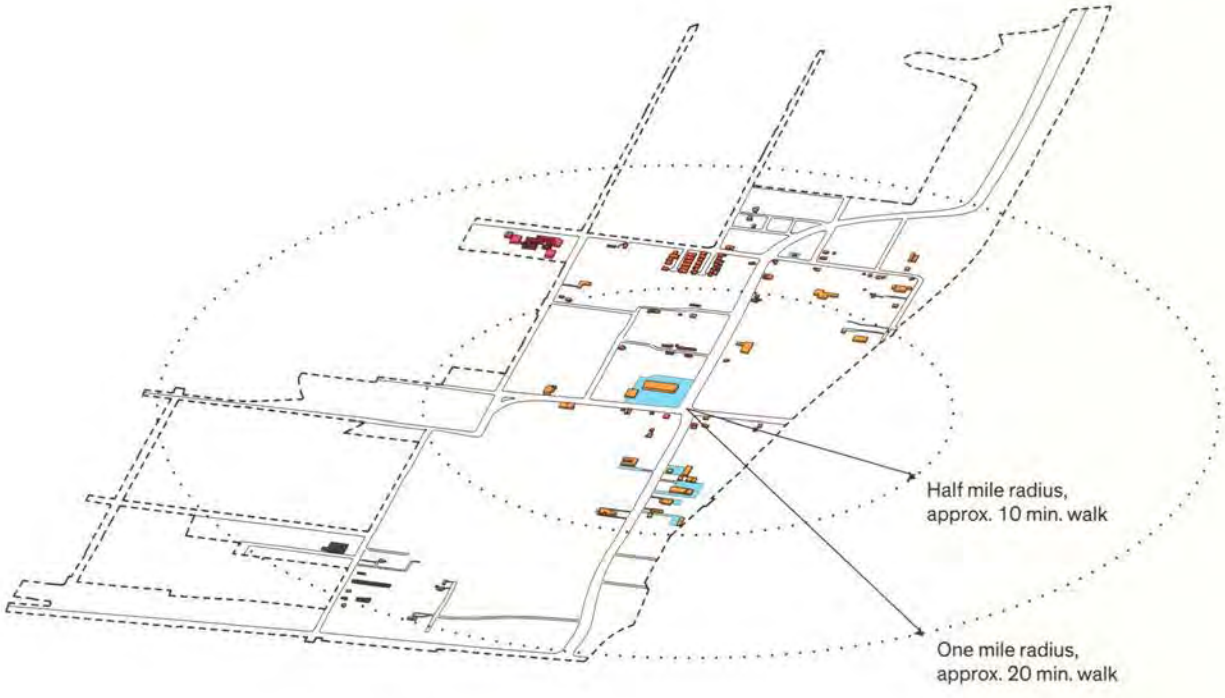
I step off the number 82 Westheimer bus just past the northwest corner of Westheimer Road and Post Oak Boulevard, the figurative center of Uptown. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) infrastructure is new, of course, but otherwise the intersection and the buildings immediately around it look and feel basically the same as they have since the late 1990s, when I worked in then-Transco Tower; there are wide roads full of traffic, large parking lots on three corners, and a drive-through coffee shop in yet another large parking lot on the fourth, all fronting big retail buildings. My long walk throughout the area, however, reinforces on the ground what the accompanying drawings of Uptown's evolution make evident: the seeming stasis of the immediate intersection belies the area's unexpected history—and possible futures—of density within the context of an urbanizing "suburb."[1]



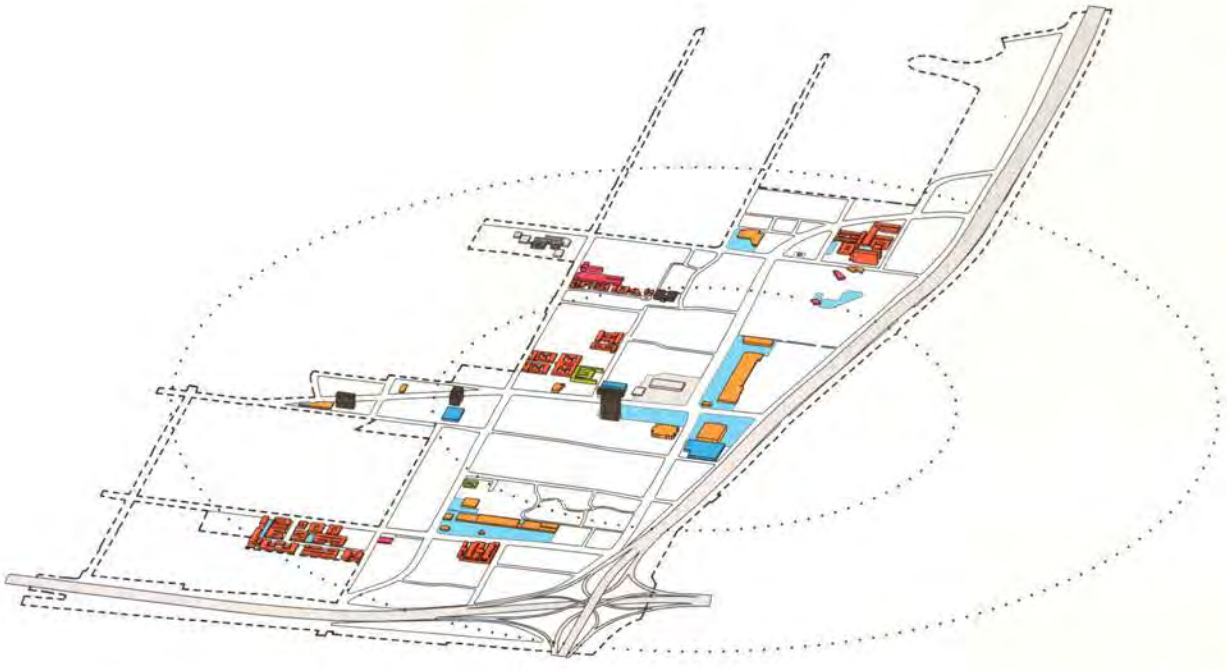
Residential
Hotel
Office
Retail
Parking Garage
Parking Lot
Cultual/Civic
TIRZ Boundary

Uptown Houston

1950–59



1960–69



Density of Work

In the 1950s, the area now known as Uptown was the largely vacant hole in a misshapen donut of rapidly expanding single family subdivisions.[2] Yet certain kinds and degrees of density were characteristic of the area very early on, the highest profile example of which was the Galleria Mall. In contrast to the typical, low, sprawling, retail-only suburban shopping mall surrounded by massive surface parking lots, in the late 1960s/early 1970s, developer Gerald Hines built a vertically formed mall that was intensely programmed with retail, amenities, hotels, and officing. Even its parking was concentrated; it had extensive structured parking that provided adjacent access to multiple floors of the mall. Although most commonly known for its shopping and entertainment, the Galleria also provided density of work in the office towers, hotels, and stores, complemented by smaller office and retail buildings that popped up nearby. Buildings dedicated to work proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s, especially on or near Post Oak, solidifying Uptown's reputation as an employment center, which continues today. With the exception of a Galleria extension, the new retail of that era was low-rise with surface parking, while the new office and hotel projects were primarily high-rise towers with large amounts of adjacent structured parking. Few projects had intentional spatial relationships to the others, however, and parking reinforced separation. The result was individual, largely internalized, and isolated instances of dense programming, activity, and/or form scattered across a disconnected field. Since 1990, few additional office projects have been built, while hotels and retail have continued to proliferate.

Density of Residence

Simultaneously but under the radar of Uptown's expansion of work, multifamily housing was also being built throughout the immediate area, including directly across the street from the Galleria. In the 1970s, multifamily momentum continued in the vicinity, as well as in the area just east of Interstate 610 and north of Westheimer Road; while not part of what became the Uptown TIRZ (Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone), it is clearly oriented towards it.[3] Thus as early as the late 1960s and most certainly by the late 1970s, one could live in walkable proximity to work, shopping, and other services in Uptown.

Early on, this residential density was enabled by low-rise infill typologies such as townhouses and courtyard complexes, of which multiple versions exist. Given Houston's long-standing willingness to raze instead of renovate, it is surprising that some of these still exist within Uptown, but they are comparatively affordable for the area and fill an important need. Multifamily housing continued to develop somewhat under the radar in the 1980s, when three high-rises were introduced in the southern area of Uptown, as well as a decade later, when the courtyard complex was turned inside-out; parking moved from the perimeter surface to a structured parking garage at the center, and four to five stories of wood-framed, street-facing units laminated its perimeter, producing the mid-rise typology often called the Texas Donut.

Since 2000, increasingly high-density housing has exploded in the area with 1,989 new units between 2017 and 2021 alone.[4] The Texas Donut has continued to evolve; versions on particularly large sites maintain structured parking at the center but introduce a series of smaller courtyards along the perimeter, such as at the Margo on Sage from the 2000s. More recent versions move the parking garage to the periphery so as to have a shared interior courtyard, but still laminate residences on several sides of the garage, such as at the Caroline Post Oak built in the 2010s. And if earlier multifamily housing developments infilled their sites, more recent sites also infill the larger area, most palpable in the Lakes on Post Oak/Waterwall area, where mid-rise infill is the norm, and near the San Felipe Road/Post Oak Boulevard intersection, where infill consists primarily of high-rise towers sitting atop structured parking podiums on smaller, more irregular sites. This ongoing concentration of housing has significant implications for street life beyond work hours.

Density of Street Life

I continue my walk north on Post Oak on sidewalks that were reworked as part of the Metro Silverline BRT construction completed in 2020. When I last wrote about Post Oak's streetscape a little more than a decade ago, I observed that its deep suburban setbacks provided space for the emergence of a more purposeful, more urban public realm, the highlight of which was the polished stainless steel identity elements such as the arches and street signage; however, the concrete sidewalks remained unfortunately narrow.[5] Redesigned by a team led by Terrain Studio, the new sidewalks are now about twelve feet wide, composed of light gray pavers, and lined with a staggered allée of live oak trees of a healthy caliper, which in Houston's climate should grow fairly quickly into a capacious canopy. It feels more accessible and enjoyable, and perhaps also because it is a Thursday with temperatures in the low 70s, I encounter other pedestrians along its length, including at midday when people are exiting office towers to walk to lunch nearby. That pedestrian traffic is reflective of the increasing intensification of working, living, and recreation along Post Oak.

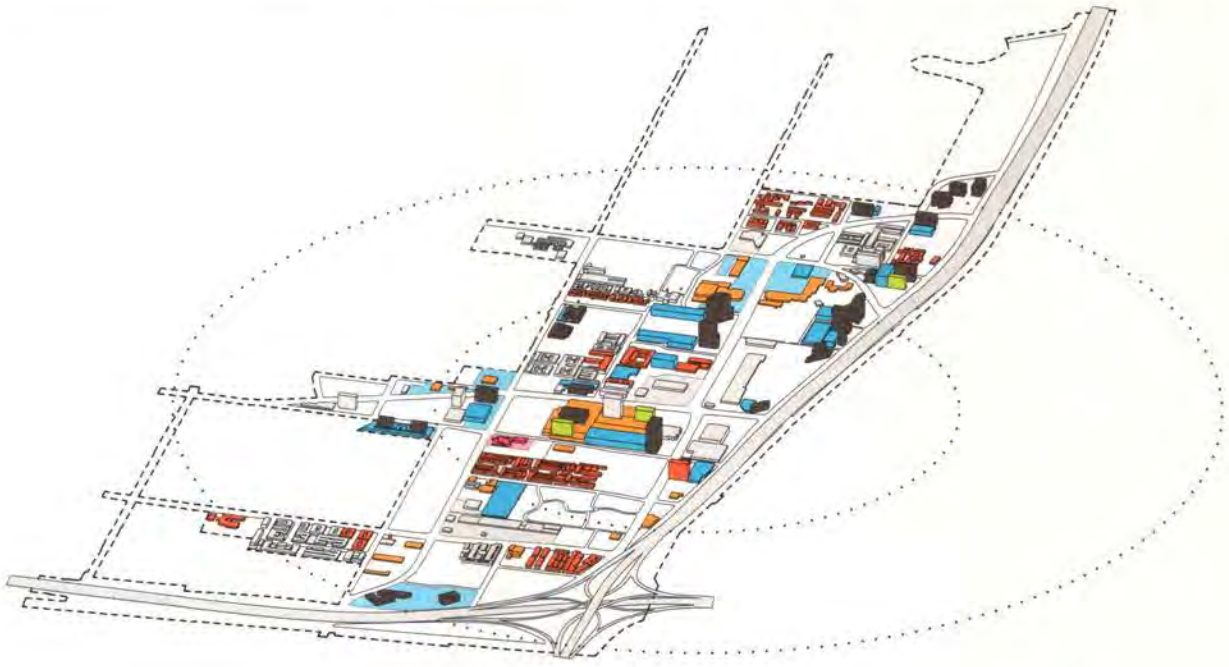
The new urban street edge that is emerging is not only striking, but also a significant change. In some places, this occurs as a result of the widening of Post Oak for the BRT, which shifted the west sidewalk towards existing buildings, for example at the BBVA Compass Plaza building (2013), where the front facade and covered side entry arcade now almost reach the relocated sidewalk. Post Oak Central's fountain now feels less removed and more accessible as well. In other places, it is because new projects are purposefully orienting towards Post Oak in a more urban way, such as Zadok Jewelers' 1801 Post Oak building (2023) that effectively reaches the sidewalk. The building that contains the restaurant Moxie is a result of both; a 2017 addition to the Center at Post Oak strip mall extended a big roof and terrace for covered outdoor seating towards the sidewalk, which itself was shifted towards the building in the road reconstruction. These three examples encourage important active, visual, and physical connections to the street, especially for pedestrians, and serve as models for future projects on Post Oak and throughout the area.

I encounter pedestrians throughout my long and meandering walk, but a memorable hotspot was in the 2300 to 2500 blocks of McCue Road, a tree-lined stretch of low-, mid-, and high-rise multifamily buildings from across the decades that collectively create a mostly urban street edge. The road is narrower and calmer here, and there are pedestrians walking dogs, coming from nearby grocery stores, and talking to each other on the street. I also encounter groups of pedestrians at the Gerald D. Hines Waterwall Park and in multiple locations adjacent to the Galleria. But sidewalks are still missing in some places, especially within the Lakes on Post Oak site where I must walk on the roads, and crossing most major streets remains challenging due to their width combined with too-short crosswalk countdowns. I cross Westheimer at McCue towards the Galleria alongside two women with young children, who just barely make it across within the timeframe—likewise with a less-mobile couple at Westheimer and Sage.

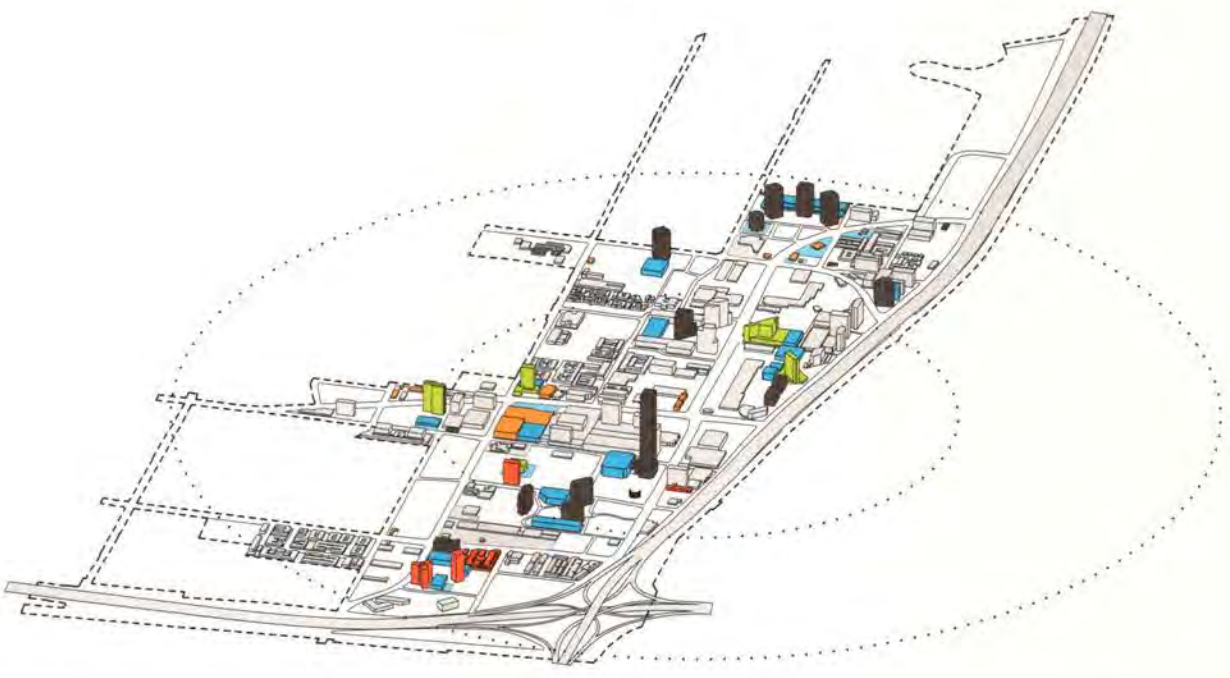
Density of Parking

Another impediment to active street life is what has aggregated over time into an extraordinary density of parking, especially structured parking. Several places in Uptown exemplify this impact. At

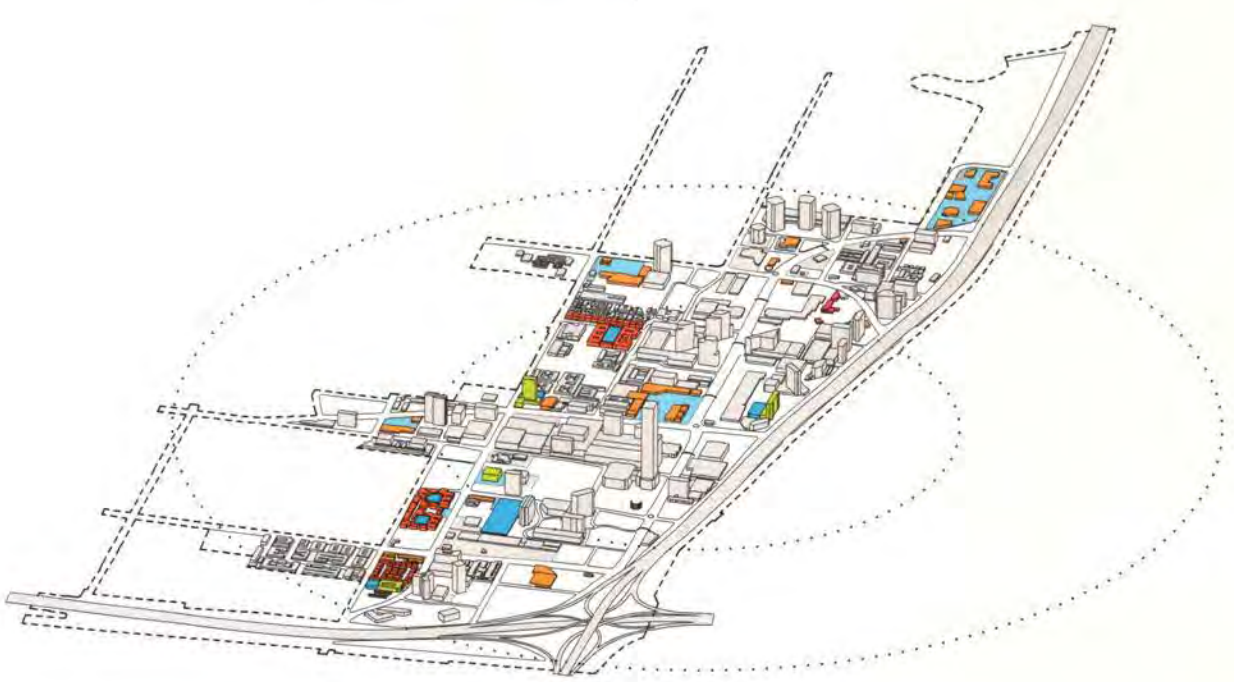
1970–79



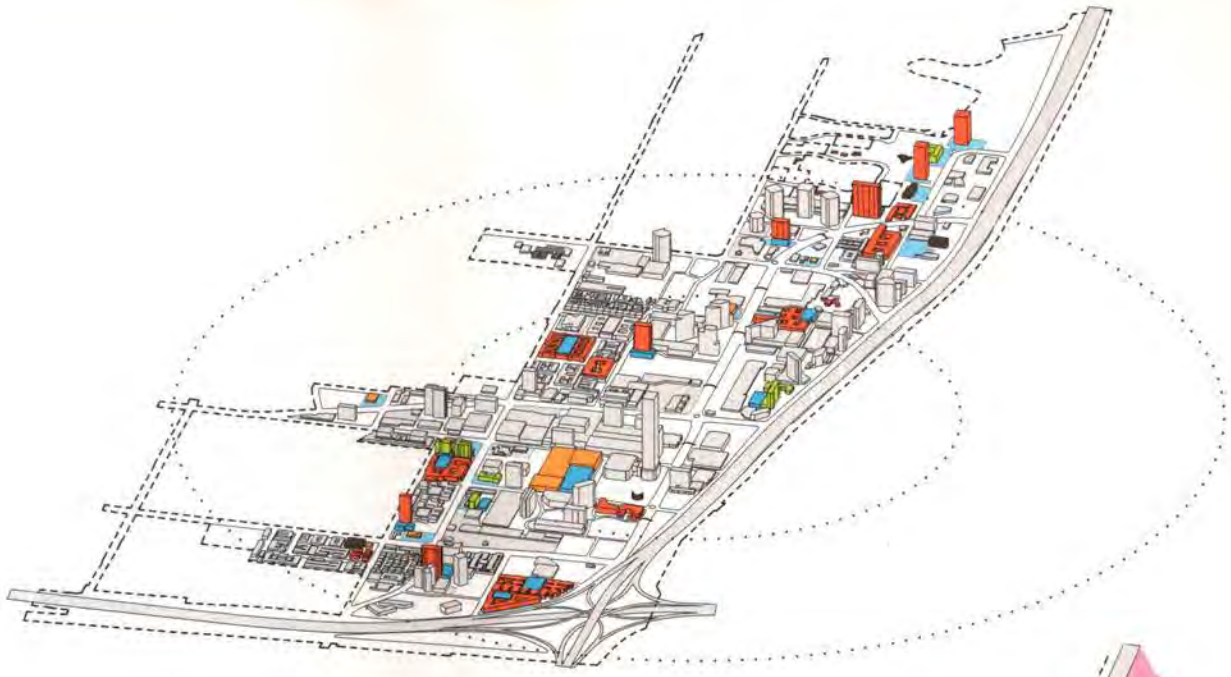
1980–89



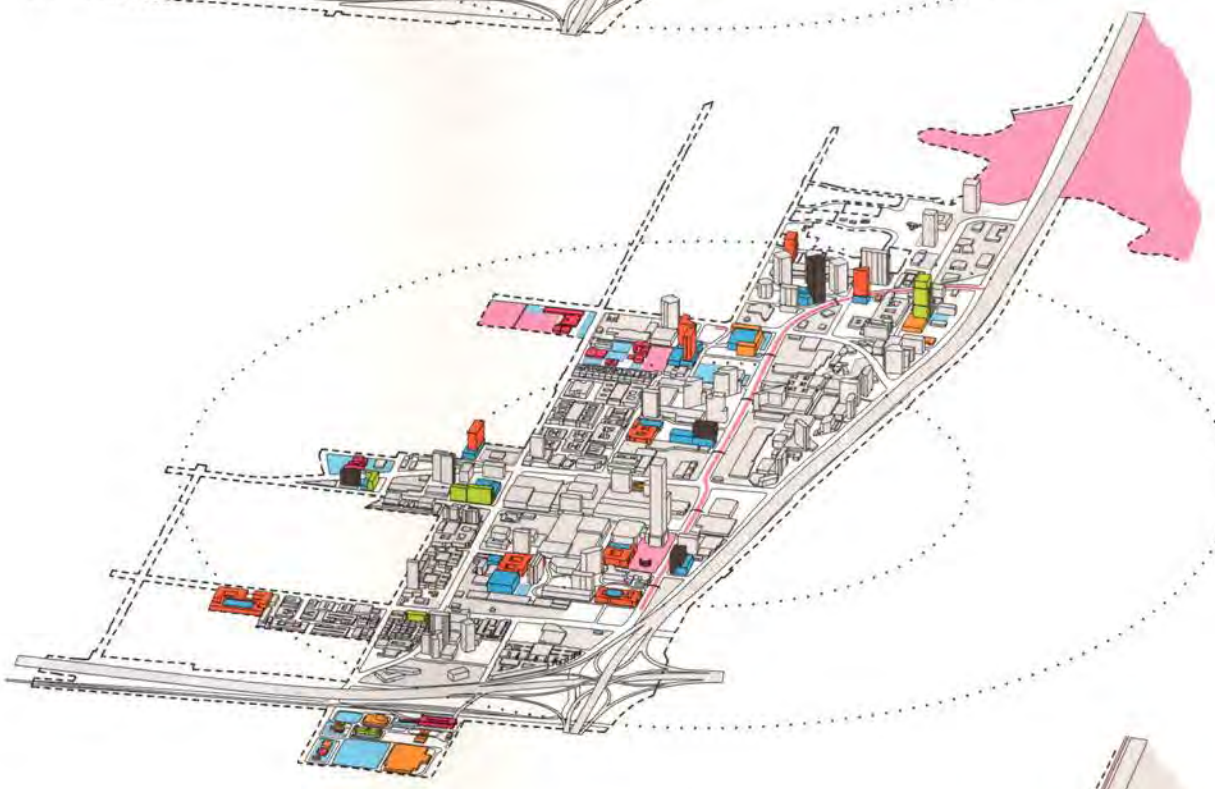
1990–99
TIRZ implemented in 1999



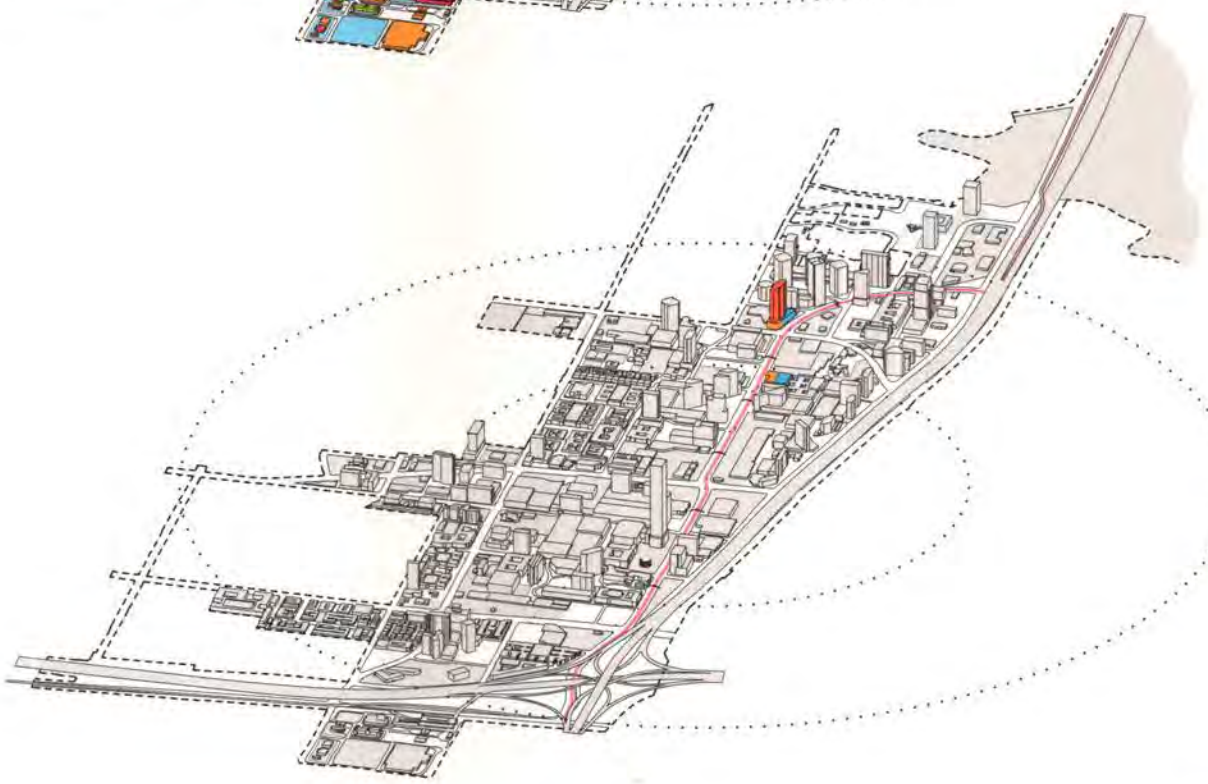
2000–09
TIRZ expanded in 2008

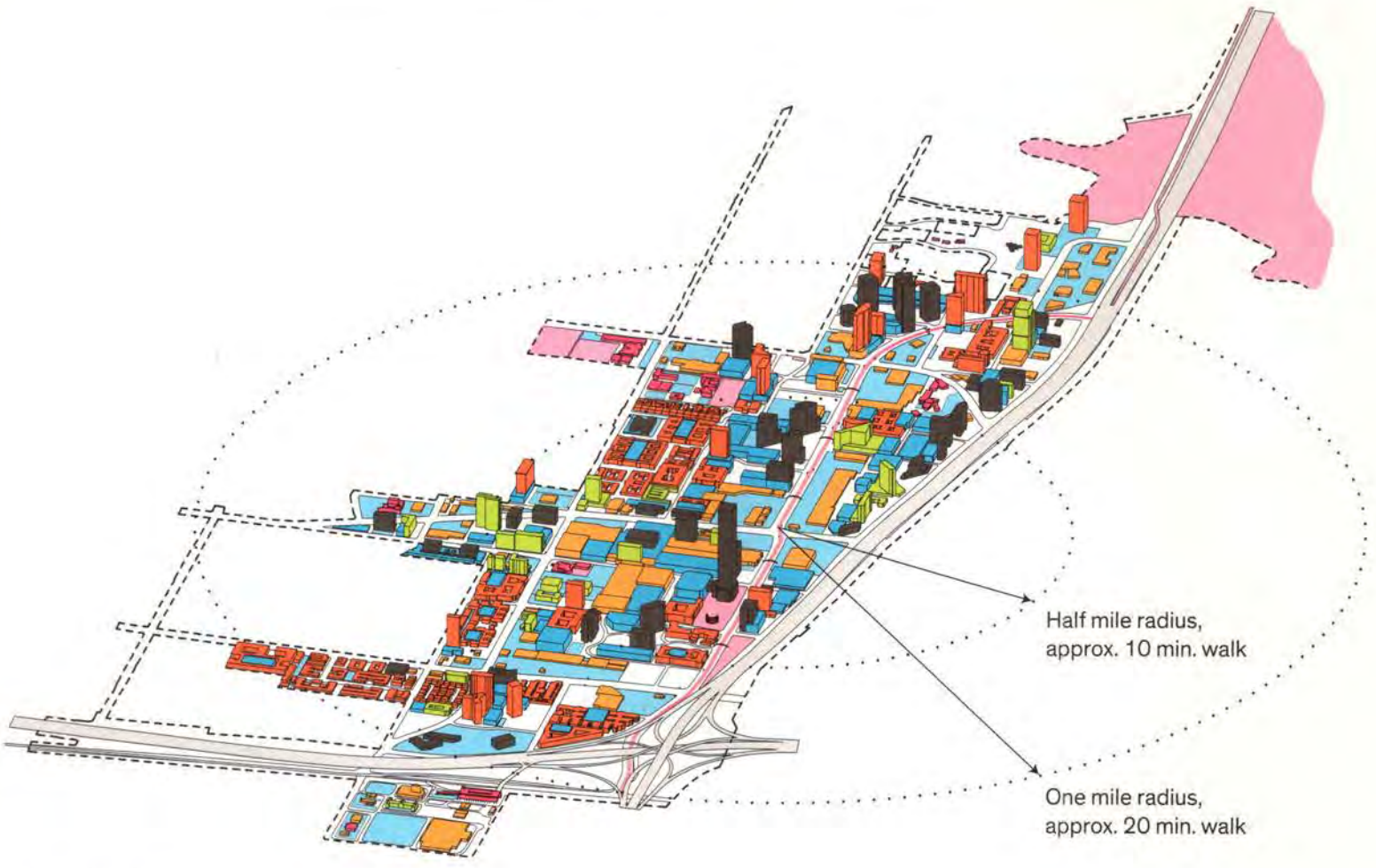


2010–19
TIRZ expanded in 2013



2020–Present





1950–Present

Residential
Hotel
Office
Retail
Parking Garage
Parking Lot
Cultual/Civic
TIRZ Boundary

Post Oak Central, giant parking garages along the north, west, and south edges effectively wall off the site from the streets and neighbors. Except for the blank backside of Macy's—which is, frankly, just as bad—and a block of residential units, the street edge of the 2800 block of McCue is comprised of five- to ten-story parking garages—and dead-ends into yet another giant seven-story parking garage to the north. The Astoria (2015), a high-rise condominium building on Post Oak just north of San Felipe, abuts the beautiful new streetscape with a towering parking podium. Despite a street-level pedestrian entry flanked by some glass windows, the podium is otherwise opaque and lifeless, and the verticality of its ornamentation reinforces its overwhelming presence at the street. These are significant problems of architecture and urban design; however, the fundamental issue is parking policy.[5]

Uptown's Futures

My walk culminates at the intersection of Richmond Avenue and Post Oak Boulevard, where I cross to the BRT station in the middle of the street. As I wait for the number 433 Silver Line bus to the Northwest Transit Center, I imagine how I might write about Uptown in another ten years. The area's evolution since 1950 clearly shows the history of its various densities and the resulting overall mix and proximity across sites. The increasing density of residence is particularly notable, as it indicates Uptown is a desirable place to live, and as such, all densities are likely to advance as remaining empty sites are developed and some existing lower-density sites are redeveloped.

But Uptown's possible futures continue to lie less in individual projects and more in infrastructures that leverage its density, mix, and proximity to enable shared street life, which the most recent remaking of Post Oak shows Uptown continues to have the vision, will, and wherewithal to achieve. Ideally, Westheimer would be remade with the same care, and because Uptown is more than its TIRZ boundaries, a new Westheimer streetscape should extend to adjacent areas east of 610 and west of Sage, reinforcing Westheimer's importance as an east/west connector across a large portion of Houston. Moreover, work to strengthen shared life throughout Uptown must continue with more and better sidewalks, and equally importantly, with a more general attitude of connection across sites. A focus on infrastructures of shared street life within the context of increasing density also points to a moment of inflection on parking, the massive volume of which remains the single most suburban aspect of Uptown. A parking census and utilization study *for the area* would be an important first step towards the development of future-focused parking strategies for Uptown, easier versions of which include designing active, pedestrian-focused street edges, especially at ground level; providing shared parking; uncoupling the purchase of parking spaces from the purchase of condominiums; and designing parking that can be converted to other uses in the future. More radical versions include parking moratoriums and/or the elimination of parking minimums. In short, more density of work, residence, and street life should beget less density of parking as Uptown continues to urbanize.

Many contemporary discussions about increasing density, mix, and walkable proximity remain focused on models derived from traditionally formed and compact places such as historic Paris or Boston. These, however, developed from very different contexts than spatially loose and sprawling places like much of Houston, and their lessons, while important, are not automatically and/or fully relevant.[7] That is what makes the evolution of Uptown so vital now and in the future: it is an ongoing experiment in new forms of urbanization, and its successes—and failures—can influence other such places.

Notes

1 For more on Uptown Houston's history as an urbanizing suburb, see Judith K. De Jong, *New SubUrbanisms* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 151–53, 156–62.

2 Previous versions of the accompanying drawings were published in De Jong, *New SubUrbanisms*, 154–55. New and revised drawings by De Jong and Ceema Sheikha, with support from a grant from the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs at the University of Illinois Chicago. Original drawings by De Jong and Felipe Oropeza. All drawings developed primarily from aerial images from Google Earth Pro and TIRZ maps from https://www.houstontx.gov/ecodev/tirz/16.html.

3 The Uptown TIRZ was established in 1999 and expanded in 2008 and 2013. Since Uptown does not have commonly agreed-upon boundaries, the TIRZ serves as a comparative baseline across the decades.

4 This number reflects a larger Uptown area, some of which is within the TIRZ. Jeff Jeffrey, "Popular Houston neighborhood among top 20 areas for apartment growth nationwide," *Houston Business Journal*. November 4, 2021. https://www.bizjournals.com/houston/news/2021/11/04/washington-avenue-memorial-park-multifamily-develo.html

5 De Jong, *New SubUrbanisms*, 157–59.

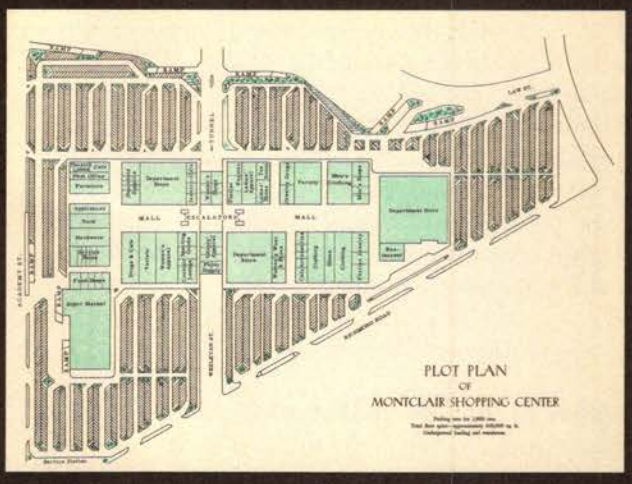
6 For the most comprehensive discussion of American parking policy and its impacts, see Donald Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking* (Chicago: APA Press, 2005). For more on spatial impacts and design opportunities of parking, see De Jong, *New SubUrbanisms*, 43–63.

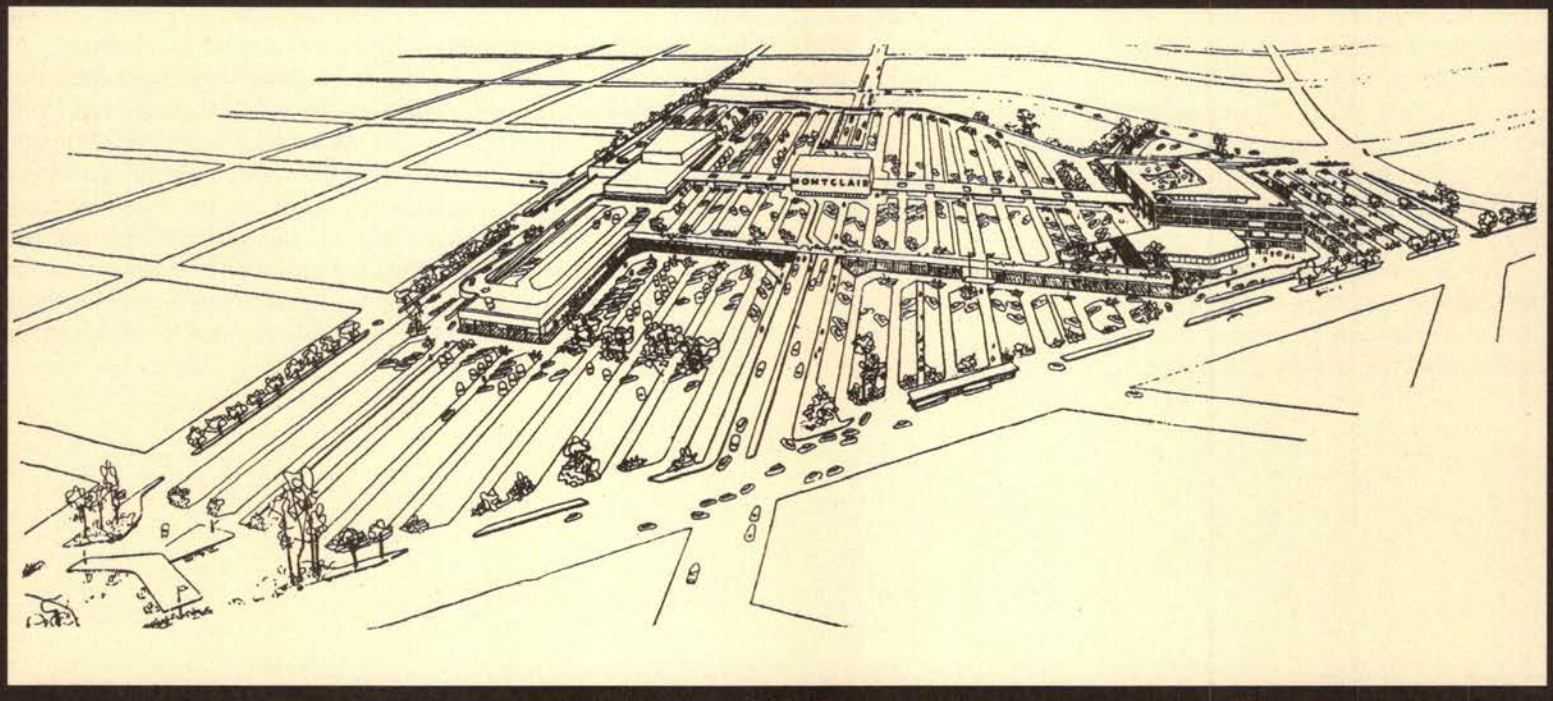
7 Lewis Mumford uses the term "spatial looseness" in *The City in History* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc., 1961), 4.

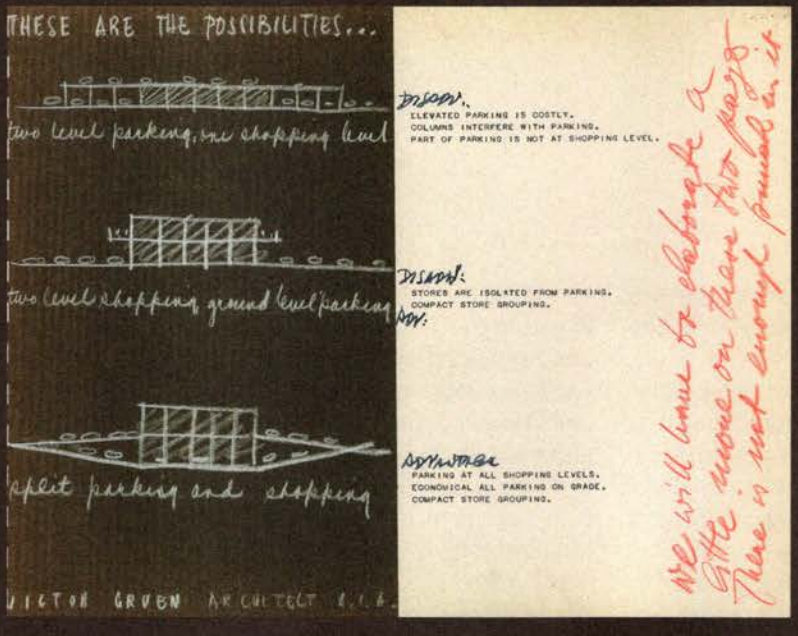
Houston Unbuilt

Alex Wall

Fabulous Montclair: A Visionary Retail Complex







Plan and visualization of completed site studies, and parking diagrams for the Montclair Center in Houston. Images courtesy: Victor Gruen Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

In 1951–52, the Houston developer Russell Nix invited the Austrian-American architect Victor Gruen to design the Montclair Shopping Center for a site six miles southwest of downtown. The real estate economist Larry Smith acted as financial advisor and Irving R. Klein and Associates acted as the local architects. The Montclair project intersects two significant trajectories: first it is a key project in the experimental period in the development of the regional shopping center, a new building type; second, it marked a turning point in the career of Victor Gruen, who would create numerous pioneering shopping center projects before moving on to the design of pedestrian malls, downtown plans, and new towns. Unexecuted, the project is known from a single birds-eye view drawing showing bold elements and qualities that would only be realized in the best regional shopping centers years later.

Even before the end of World War II, it was clear that the postwar settlement pattern of American cities would be transformed to adapt to new conditions. In the May 1943 issue of *Architectural Forum*, titled "194X," the editors invited a number of well-known architects to propose building types for the new era. Victor Gruen and his then-wife and partner Elsie Krummeck wanted to publish sketches for a large shopping complex on a major automotive route with an expanded program to illustrate their concept of the suburban shopping center as a center of cultural activities and recreation.[1] Instead, the *Forum* showed a modest neighborhood center that recalled the shopping villages of the 1930s, such as Houston's River Oaks. Gruen and Krummeck continued to produce a succession of projects experimenting with different layouts and forms of the store blocks, department store, parking lots, and pedestrian areas. By 1950, Gruen was advising the J.B. Hudson Company on both the form and location of three or more regional shopping centers around Detroit, yet in their first project, Eastland, Gruen and Krummeck struggled with issues of parking, pedestrian access, and layout. The project was shelved due to the restrictions on building materials during the Korean War.

In 1951, while Gruen was designing Eastland, *Women's Wear Daily* published the Montclair project—a $10 million, 600,000 square-foot center situated on 27 acres, which had three unusual features that were nevertheless rational responses to site and climatic conditions.[2] First, because Nix had acquired two parcels on either side of Wesleyan Avenue at its junction with Bissonnet, the architects proposed that the street be run beneath the shopping center as an underpass. Second, in addition to ground parking for 2,000 vehicles, there was parking for an additional 1,800 cars on the roof in what would have been one of the largest installations of its kind in the United States. The idea of rooftop parking was well known to Gruen who had used dramatic access ramps to the rooftop parking area at his 1949 Milliron's Department Store in Los Angeles. Third, Houston's heat and humidity were stifling—how was a customer to shop in comfort? Montclair would be air-conditioned, which would have made it the first shopping center of this type. Air-conditioning had been used in department stores since 1919 and was not unusual in Houston at the time, but no one had ever air-conditioned such a large and multiple-tenanted complex.

The aerial perspective drawing published in the architectural and trade press shows that Gruen made a substantial conceptual leap beyond his current work on Eastland. The large scale of the shopping center ensemble spanned across the middle of the irregular triangular site. The eastern edge of the buildings abutted Bissonnet where the large five-story department store and an elevated restaurant pavilion formed an urban plaza. Academy Street formed the western edge of the development, and it featured a smaller department store and the supermarket. The remaining space to the north and south of the complex was given over to parking. A 900-by-70-foot indoor shopping street, flanked by rows of shops and stores, connected the department stores. Near the middle, a large, double-height atrium space would have served as the "community's living room," a staging area for events and exhibitions.

Gruen recalled that Korean War restrictions on building materials put the project on hold, yet significant elements of the design and development process were unworkable.[3] In the case of the design, the enormous scale, including a five-story department store, and the three novel features of the underpass, roof parking, and air conditioning substantially raised the cost of the project. While the design was developing, Russell Nix was neither able to secure the commitment of a department store nor obtain signed leases from tenants of the store blocks, both necessary to secure investment. Despite Gruen's considerable background in retail merchandising, he had not grasped the complexity and expense of his project. The failure of Montclair led him to subsequently collaborate closely with Larry Smith to create a synthesis between design and economics for the new building type. Their collaborative writing in both the retail trade and architectural press culminated in *Shopping Towns USA* (1960), which for a time was considered to be the bible of shopping center development.[4] Ultimately however, the financialization of shopping centers shifted the authority from the architect to the developer and his financial advisors. The gardens, sculpture, public rooms, and social services such as community rooms, day care, and post office were stripped from the program.

After Montclair, Gruen produced Northland in the Detroit suburbs in 1954, and two years later he opened Southdale, the nation's first indoor shopping center, near Minneapolis, which refined some of the qualities explored in the Montclair project including an air-conditioned interior court and two department store anchors. He conceived Southdale to be the center of a planned community including offices, hotel, medical facilities, and different forms of housing, all built much later in different form. By 1957, Gruen had returned to Texas where he produced his landmark plan for Fort Worth, which featured a pedestrian downtown served by several large parking garages. Midtown Plaza, which opened in 1962 in Rochester, New York, successfully transformed the elements of Southdale into a compact downtown site. The expanded program at Southdale and the urban density of Midtown Plaza pointed towards the potential of a new generation of shopping centers that would be the basis for regional subcenters or "edge cities," notably Houston's Galleria.

Notes

1 "109 Store Houston Shopping Center of 1952 to Feature Pedestrian Mall," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 3, 1951.

2 Alex Wall, *Victor Gruen: From Urban Shop to New City* (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2005), 69–70.

3 Jeffrey M. Hardwick, *Mall Maker* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 111–15.

4 In 1952, Gruen and Smith published "Shopping Centers – The New Building Type," in *Progressive Architecture*, 33, June 6, 1952 and "The Ten Steps Preceding Shopping Center Construction" in *Women's Wear Daily*, July 2, 1952. Victor Gruen and Larry Smith, *Shopping Towns USA: The planning of shopping centers* (New York: Reinhold), 1960.

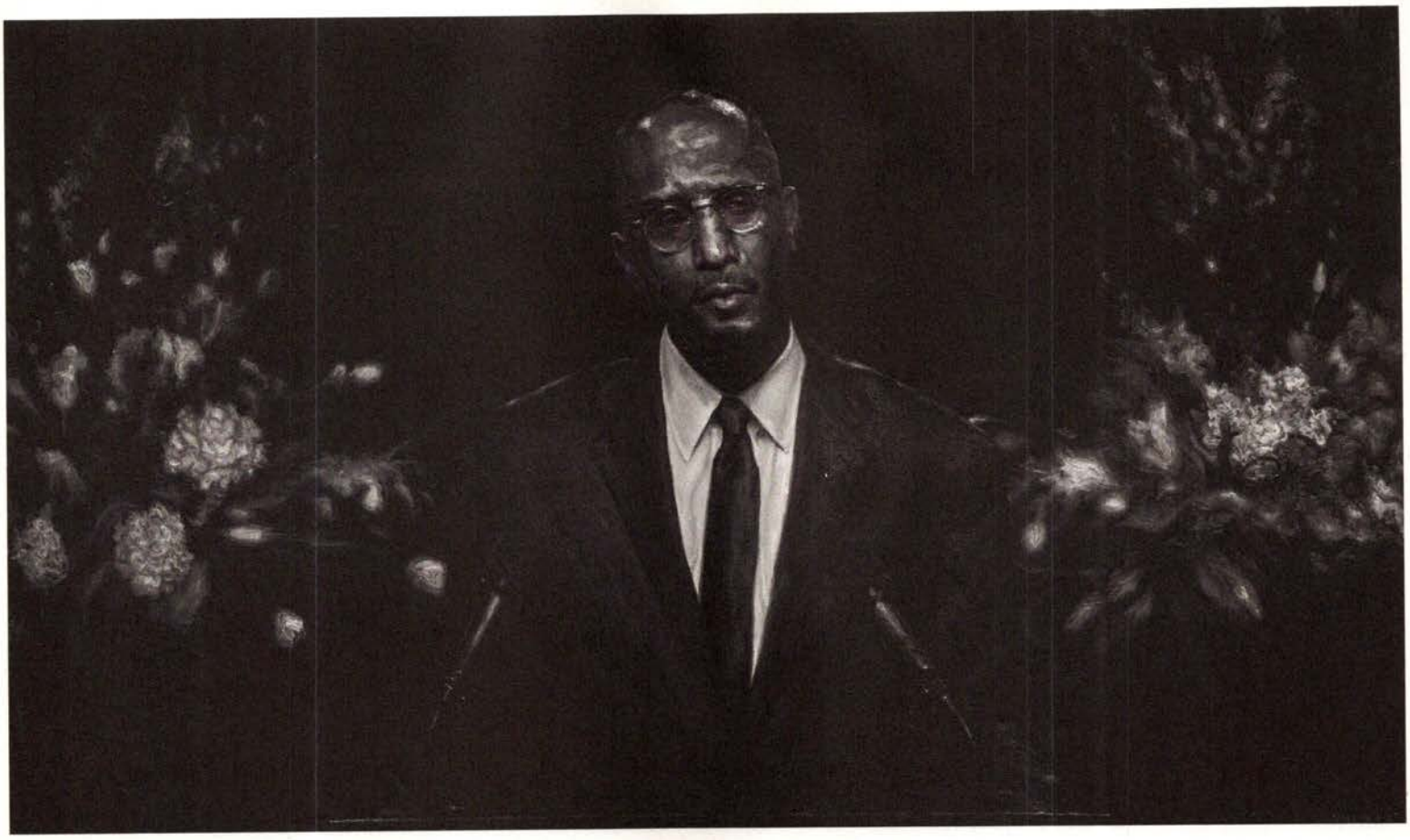
Vincent Valdez *Dream Baby Dream*

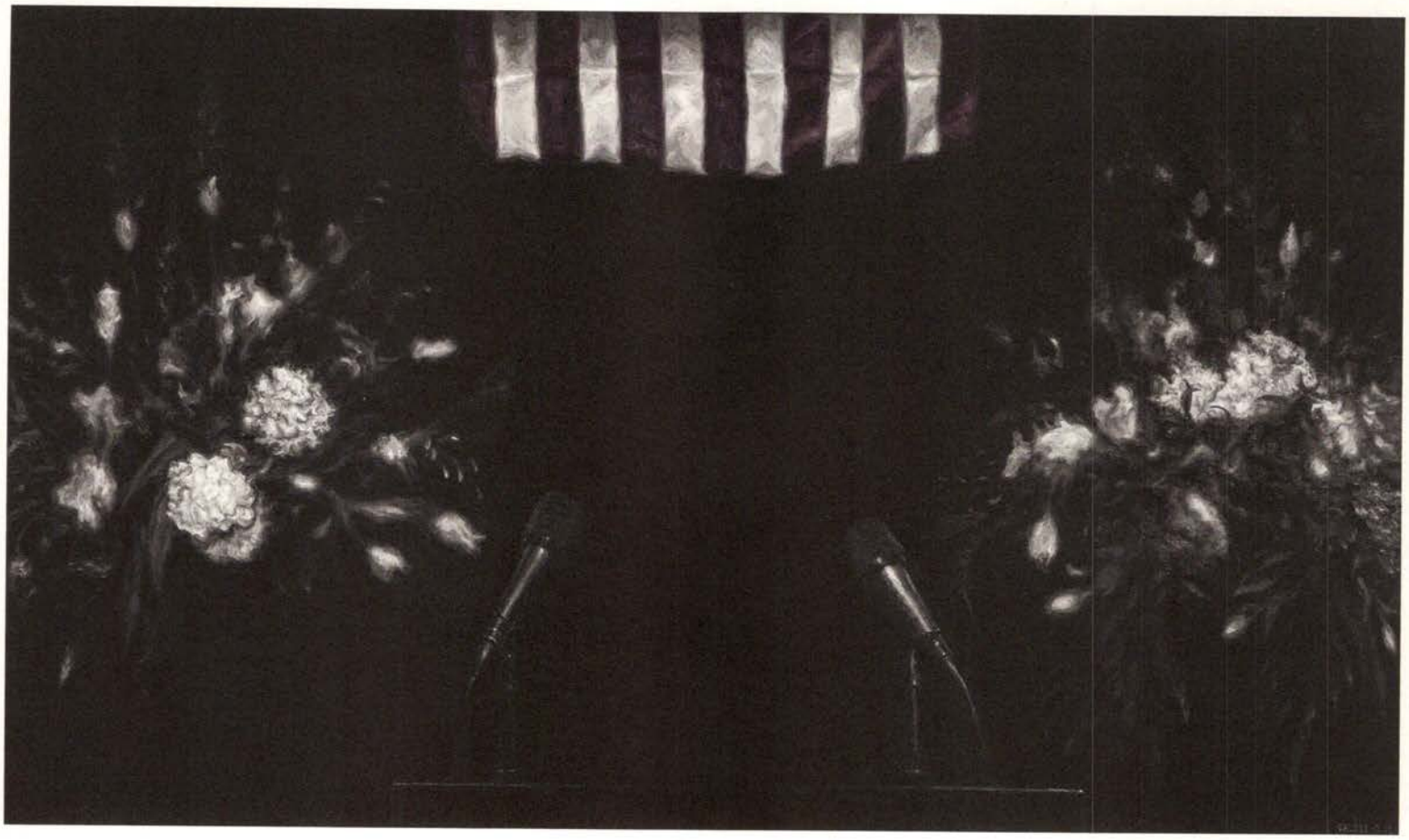
This series from 2017/18 is comprised of twelve paintings that focus on the podium, wreaths of flowers, and eulogists at Muhammad Ali's funeral. They appear silent, hesitant, and even uncertain about their willingness to speak. Valdez purposely does not reveal the identities of his selected portraits; instead he chooses them for their symbolic representation of a wide range of Americans. Age, ethnicity, dress, posture, and expression were factors in his choices. The figures' potential muteness serves as an apt metaphor for our troubled times. Rendered in black, white, and grey, these works have only touches of red around the eyes, noses, and hands of the mourners, reminding us of our resistance to remaining numb even after all we have lost and continue to lose. The ten portraits are accompanied by two panels, one of the empty podium—the reconciliatory speeches yet to be given—and the other, a vertical panel, displaying a funeral wreath. The cascading ribbon is emblazoned with the lyrics from punk band Suicide's "Dream Baby Dream," the song so effectively used in Adam Curtis's 2016 film *HyperNormalisation*, reminding us to "keep those dreams burnin'."

—Denise Markonish

235–245 → *The Beginning Is Near/ An American Trilogy, Ch II: Dream Baby Dream,* 2018
Oil/mounted paper
42 × 72 in.

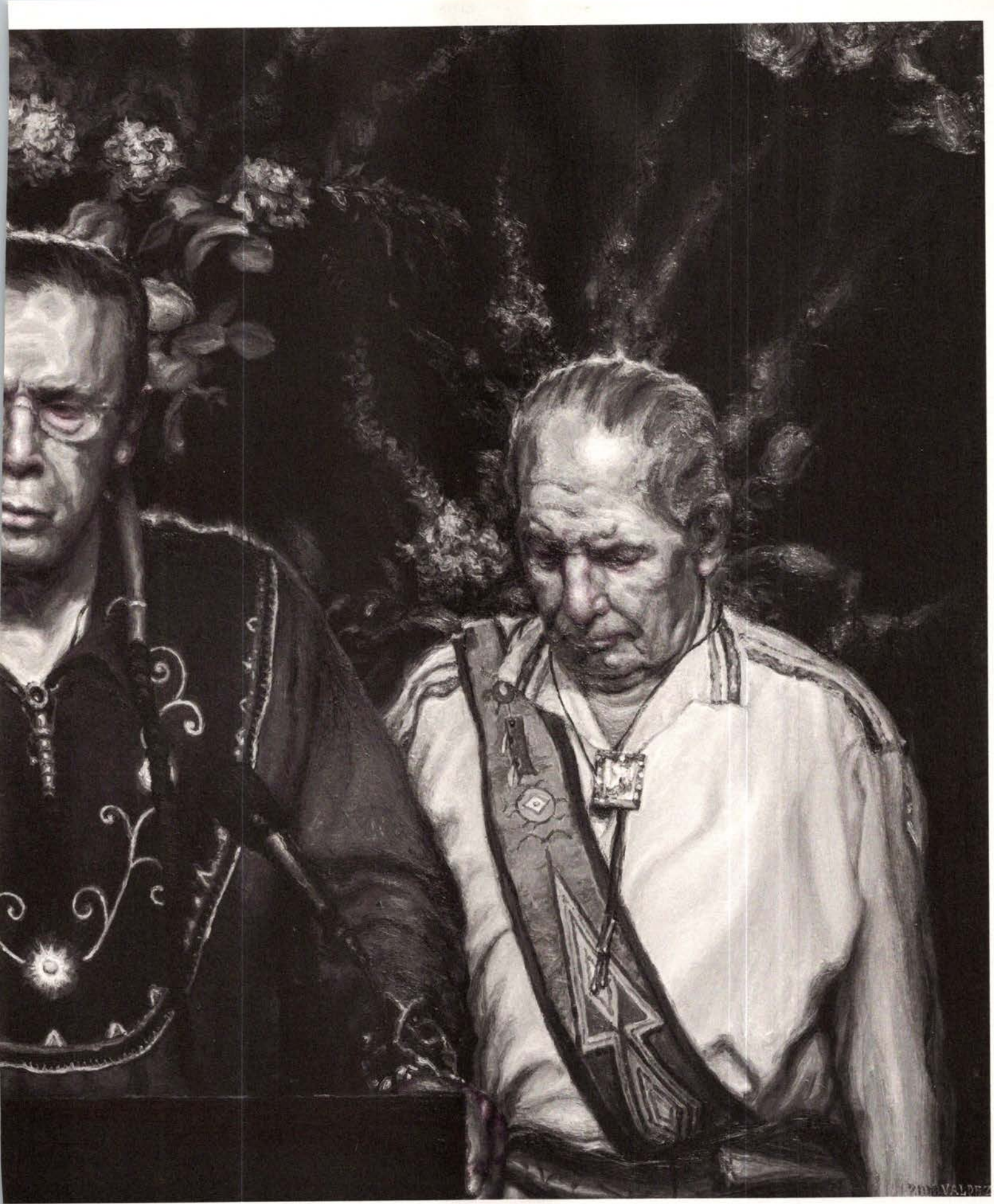
Vincent Valdez





Vincent Valdez

Vincent Valdez



Vincent Valdez

Vincent Valdez

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MICHAEL C. NICHOLS has participated in business and civic activities in Houston following a long career in law and as an elected state representative in Georgia. He is the current president and CEO of the Coalition for the Homeless.

KATHRYN O'ROURKE is a historian of modern architecture whose interests include many subjects in Latin America, the United States, and Europe. She teaches courses on the art and architecture of Latin America and on modern architecture at Trinity University in San Antonio.

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BARRIE SCARDINO BRADLEY has been writing and lecturing about Houston history and Texas architecture for more than thirty-five years. She was previously managing editor of *Cite*.

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Next

Rice Design Alliance (RDA) was established within the Rice University School of Architecture in 1972 to facilitate the school's outreach and public engagement. RDA is now returning to this original mission of design advocacy and the advancement of urban life for all Houstonians. It is evolving to play a more accessible role within the school's community engagement efforts, in which all programs and activities are free and open to the public. This process of integrating more fully into Rice Architecture comes after a comprehensive evaluation initiated in 2014. Many stakeholders were involved and many options considered—including the creation of an independent, nonprofit organization—and, ultimately, the prevailing opinion was to align RDA more closely and decisively with Rice Architecture as a community and public engagement program of the school. While we have maintained the core mission-centric activities, including the civic forums, research grants, and *Cite* magazine, we are also considering new beginnings that will fundamentally transform how we engage each other and the larger Houston public. We look forward to imagining these new futures together and staying connected in new and exciting ways.

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Andrew Albers
President, RDA Board of Directors, 2022—23

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