

## NEWS

### SMALL HOUSES TOUR

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

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



Kit House designed by Brett Zamore (2003).

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

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

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

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

### DE LANGE CONFERENCE

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



Marfa tour group.

### RDA ON THE TRANS PECOS TRAIL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## LETTERS



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

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

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

Adam J. Weiss, AIA  
Houston, TX

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

## OffCite.org: The Cite Magazine Blog



In early December 2008, *Cite* and the Rice Design Alliance launched OffCite.org, a new blog with news, commentary, and links about architecture and design in Houston and around the world.

It attracted numerous visitors from the Houston area and as far away as Perth, Australia. Posts included a review of the Brochstein Pavilion by Stephen Fox, a report on public housing in Galveston after Ike, and a critique of the latest plan to revitalize Market Square. Check OffCite.org for these posts and others:

### Graphic Design Badass

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

### Exposing Graphic Design

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

### Move Over Car Culture

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

### Out of Cite

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

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

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

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

**James Rowland**  
Houston, TX



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

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

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

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

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

## An Interview with Steven Heller

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

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

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

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

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

**RM**: The actual symbols matter, right?

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

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

sickle for one. He showed his defiance to the Weimar Republic by changing colors all together. What Obama is doing is conforming to the American scheme.

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

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

**AHV**: But that specific treatment?

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

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

**AHV**: Newsy.

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

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

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

[Amanda pulls up to the terminal.]

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

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

