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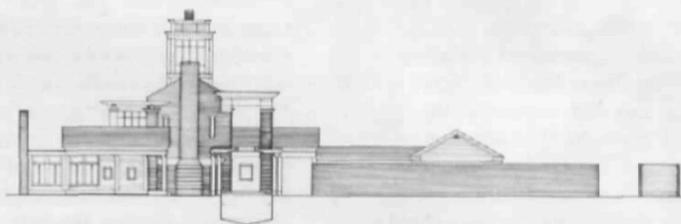
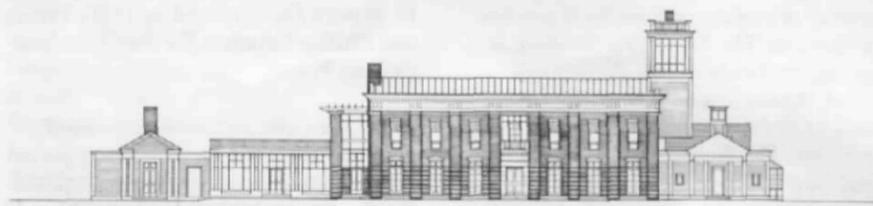
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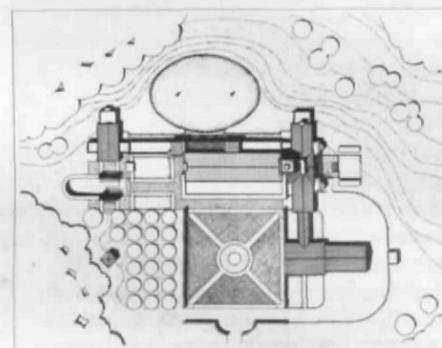
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Citelines

Machado in Texas



Top: Bedell-McFarlane House, 1985, Rodolfo Machado, architect, south elevation. **Above:** West elevation, Bedell-McFarlane House. **Right:** Site plan, Bedell-McFarlane House



Rodolfo Machado's arrival at Rice University this year as the first Harry K. and Albert K. Smith Visiting Professor of Architecture had been preceded by three unbuilt designs by Machado and his associate Jorge Silvetti for projects in Texas. Architectural and urban design schemes by the Boston-based firm of Machado and Silvetti Associates have been honored with numerous awards, exhibitions, and publications and their work has figured prominently in the postmodern preoccupation with the semantic dimension of architecture and the debate over historicism versus invention.

The work of Machado-Silvetti deals most often with ethnocentric themes and urban typologies where an assured sense of the classical mechanics of architectural form-making is used to pursue metaphorical intentions. Even at the residential scale there is an intense interest in urban issues of publicness, privateness, and gathering, and their architectural representation through courts, gates, gardens, and towers. The designs are rigorously conceived in plan, usually employing strong, geometric partis, evocative both of classical architecture as well as an almost primordial sense of place-making.

Two of their Texas projects are urban design schemes. Machado's individual entry to the Houston Sesquicentennial Park Competition (1985) organized the irregular site along Buffalo Bayou into five public squares by extending the axes of the surrounding city grid. Each of the squares seized upon opportunities in the site and context to create a series of thematic parks. A major figurative element of the scheme was a 150-foot-high "constructivist tower" in "Houston Plaza" on the corner of Bagby and Franklin, serving as a Houston symbol and a platform from which to view the downtown skyline.

A second project, in Dallas, done with an urban design consortium, undertook the redevelopment of Deep Ellum, an older section of that city adjacent to the central business district. This project, which is extensively described in *Lotus 50*, attempted to unify the district by proposing a master plan in which a set of coordinated typological buildings (townhouse, tower, loft, courtyard, and market buildings) were used to establish a distinct identity for the mixed-use district - one which restored the potential for urban street life by providing a contrasting scale and architectural character from the isolated, self-contained towers in the downtown.

The third project, a large house near Palestine, Texas, takes off on the grand style of a southern plantation house with its long, narrow plan for ventilation and a high, shading veranda porch. Machado calls this project "a house in the country" rather than "a country house" to avoid inappropriate associations with now-mythical 19th-century country manor living (the clients are *daily commuters*). The house nonetheless evokes a manor-esque scale and presence. The apparent size, however, is neatly broken down into a set of smaller and distinct parts, setting up a kind of dialectical relationship between manor house and cottage ("We all have our cottage moments and our palace moments") such as Gaston Bachelard writes about in *The Poetics of Space*.

The plan employs an L-shaped parti which forms around a central motor court and organizes the activities of the house into three distinct parts. The largest and most prominent of these, the formal house, faces onto the axis from entry gate of the motor court and contains the public rooms on the first level and the family sleeping quarters above. A "domestic house" forms the east leg of the plan with a den, kitchen, service entrance, and caretaker's quarters. The crossing of these two legs is marked by a lantern over the kitchen service island and a taller observation tower over the stairs, giving a vertical punctuation to the horizontal, gabled profile of the building.

The rooms of the formal house are linked by a two-story loggia on the north side which extends out to the west, abutting with the third domain of the house, a summer pavillion with a ping-pong room, sauna, swimming pool, and outdoor kitchen. A small ceramics studio is detached from the house and positioned on the irregular edge of a formal orchard that occupies the fourth corner of the rectangular site plan.

The site concept uses geometries figuratively to create symbolic conditions of order in the wooded site. The motor court and elliptical lawn are idealized figures; the third element, the grid-planted orchard is disrupted and eroded on the west side allowing the rectangular plan to soften and unwind on the fourth corner. The service entrance through the domestic house along the side is

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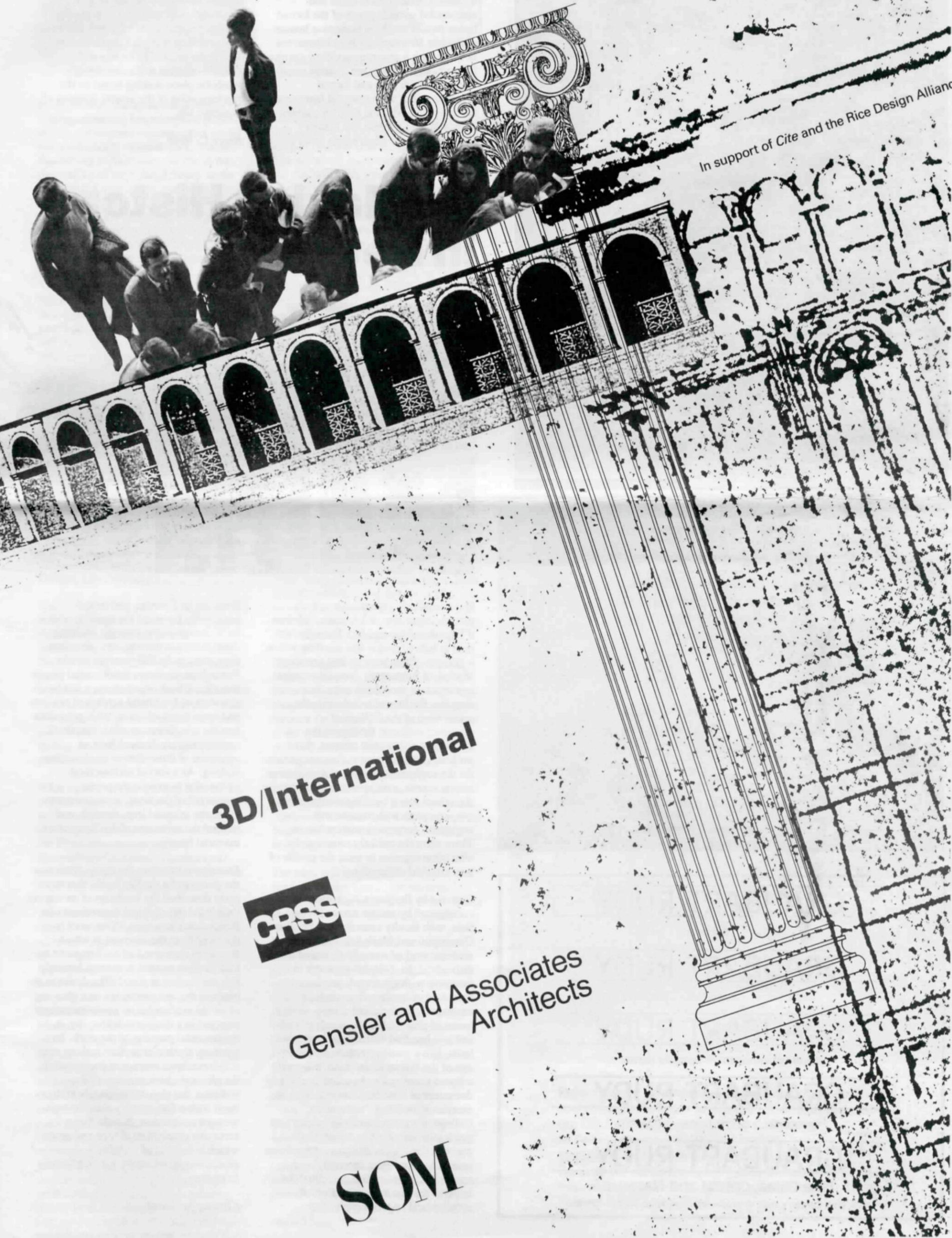
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segregated from the formal entrance which occurs along an axis from the gate, across the motor court to the entrance hall, and a view out to one of the two obelisks marking the generating centers of the elliptical lawn.

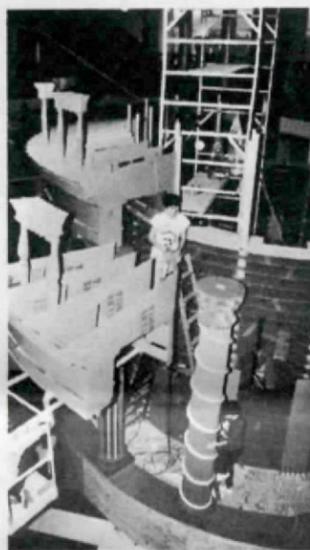
The house is a veritable catalogue of historical allusions and attributions. The entry hall is a direct quotation from *Boscobel*, an early 19th-century Federalist house in Putnam County, New York, known to the clients and the architects. The general shape and colonnaded veranda porch of the formal house recalls southern plantation houses of the late 18th century, here interpreted in brick with a generous masonry cornice (the subsidiary wings are painted wood). The overall site plan and formal arrangement of the house and landscape are sympatric with the English country houses of Philip Webb and Edwin Lutyens. And the observation tower is

reminiscent of the widow's-walk towers found in captain's houses in seaside locations.

With all of its architectural mnemonics and *double entendres*, the Palestine house seems to lack some of the metaphorical intensity of earlier Machado-Silvetti houses. Instead, this house exhibits a real concern for livability and domestic order. In an essay for the 1980 Biennale, Machado-Silvetti described an interest in their work as "a searching for an architecture which effects its own clarification by resorting to principles that are beyond style." Though this house seems to deal in a kind of calculus of styles, the principle lies in a well-thought-out plan and a concept of symbolic place-making based on the representation of the several domains of domestic life.

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If it is at all possible to entertain a ghostly apparition of Ledoux's "Maison d'Education" alongside a Texas freeway, then to behold within this startling vision a glimpse of the growing and groaning shadow of Bramante's Tempietto under construction should not come as a surprise. Fashioned to celebrate the completion of the College of Architecture's new facility on the University of Houston campus, this project, undertaken as a class assignment for the sophomore history of architecture survey course, managed to metamorphose the school into a bustling construction site, complete with masons and engineers, carpenters and craftsmen. These were the unlikely missionaries who came together to trace the profile of new classical dimensions.

Directed by Benjamin Nicholson, and coordinated by master mason Silvano Sole, with faculty consultants Christine Cinciripini and Mark Schneider, 120 students worked some 30 thousand hours throughout the 1986 fall semester to assemble with clockwork precision a truckload of lumber, five van-loads of cardboard, six thousand screws, several boxes of glue sticks, 20 pounds of nails, and one hundred dollars worth of 3-inch bolts, into a modern transformation of one of the Italian Renaissance's gravest tributes to antiquity. As much a scholarly document of historical conjecture as an exercise in building "restoration," the College of Architecture's Tempietto was quick to assert itself as a polemical construction. A combination of hands-on research, home-spun ingenuity, and team-work coordination described the impetus for this authentic effort of architectural *re-production*.

Treatises by Filarete, Serlio, and Letarouilly provided the students with a basic interpretative strategy, enabling them in turn to unravel, one piece at a time, the nearly 500-year-old puzzle. From drum to dome, the dissected pieces were laced back together into a sandwich structure of horizontal cardboard cut-outs and open layers of space. This procedure was the manifestation of an "implicit" spatial program derived from an operation of three-dimensional section-making. As a sort of architectural vivisection to expose the poetic "innards" of the work, it was meant to guide the initiated into, through, and beyond the mysteries of the Tempietto's essential beauty.

During construction the rising drum was the genesis of a fin-like world that more aptly described the workings of an engine than it did the classical dimensions of a Renaissance structure. "Our work is divorced from the moment in which Bramante conceived of his Tempietto so that we have wanted to express honestly this dislocation in time." The desire to reproduce the Tempietto, not as a ghosting of an old artifact but as a new messenger engaged in a discourse with today, is the fundamental premise of the work. Its procedural ethic of section-making not only reveals an attempt at documenting the physical characteristics of the building, but also optimistically realigns itself with a five-century slice through western civilization. It embodies a recursive conception of time and space which is capable of yielding extraordinary wealth by viewing history in reverse.

Christopher Genik

The New Market Square



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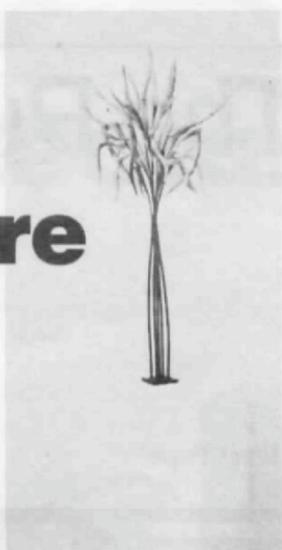
DiverseWorks, the artist-run downtown arts organization, has initiated a project to turn a downtown eyesore into a useful and aesthetically relevant park. Market Square was to have been the site of the first capitol of the State of Texas. In the bicentennial year it was transformed into a landscaped park – a transformation that proved less than successful. The park is neither well-used by citizens, nor a focal point for the surrounding 11-block area designated by the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

Since 1982, the Downtown Houston Association (DHA) has been studying proposals for the transformation of the site into a more appropriate park. In 1985, DHA and the Parks Department endorsed a proposal from DiverseWorks that called for site-specific art works to be chosen and incorporated into a new scheme. Following procedures recommended by the National Endowment for the Arts in selecting artists to execute works of art in public places, a consultant was retained and a panel chosen. Walter Hopps, director of the Menil Collection, was named consultant and, in addition to the author, the panel consisted of William A. Camfield, professor of art history at Rice University, and Al Nodel, director of the Gallery of Otis/Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles.

The DiverseWorks panel chose five artists to submit proposals for art: Malou Flato, Paul Hester, James Surls, and collaborators Doug Hollis and Richard Turner. Both DiverseWorks staff and the panel were committed to choosing experienced artists who would respect the historic importance of the site and would encourage and promote increased public use of Market Square for casual strolling, resting, and informal music and dance performances.

What came to be the guiding idea for the project – that the park would be a work of art in itself rather than a space to install art – came about as the DHA deferred to the DiverseWorks concept and DiverseWorks assumed organizational and financial supervision. The DHA has remained an enthusiastic partner.

The artists were charged with working together to develop an overall scheme. In early meetings it was decided that Hollis and Turner (California artists who individually and as collaborators have been responsible for a number of public-art projects) would develop the site plan. In their concept, a simple, almost routine, plan, consisting of diagonal walks sloping slightly down to a central square, would be elaborated by grafting the works of art directly onto the architectural elements of the plan rather than treating them as separate objects in the park. Turner and Hollis would turn surfaces of the walks and central square into an *objet trouvé* mosaic: in recognition of the historic focus of the park and perhaps the wholesale demolition of historic buildings in the surrounding blocks, they will collect debris from demolished buildings – floor tile, marble, sections of brick – and set them in the concrete as the sidewalk is poured.



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Top: Model, 1986, James Surls, sculptor.
Left: Aerial view of Market Square

Malou Flato, an Austin artist who also has completed other public-art projects, will construct eight quarter-circle wedge-shaped benches covered in ceramic tile. The artist will paint ceramic glazes over the tile, and each separate bench will portray some aspect of the markets that formerly surrounded the square: flowers, trinkets, vegetables, and hats. The benches will be placed on the four sides of the park, close to the surrounding sidewalk, as convenient resting places to eat lunch, watch pedestrians, or enjoy an outdoor performance. Their tile surfaces, cool and colorful, are reminiscent of town squares or plazas in Mexico.

Houston-based sculptor James Surls will fabricate a 20-foot-high work for the center of the square. As illustrated by his model, the work will have a steel stem topped by a cluster of organically shaped slim wooden petals. The sculpture – one of Surls's largest to date – is reminiscent of a flower. Its height will direct the viewer's eye up to the city's skyline, moving from the street level of the historic square to Houston's contemporary buildings.

Paul Hester, a Houston photographer, will contribute both historic and contemporary images to the park. Turner's and Hollis's sidewalks will be lined by rough-finished concrete walls of a height which varies from 8 to 24 inches. The photographic images baked onto industrial tile will be installed on the sides and tops of these walls.

Some images will be culled by Hester from his research in the files of the Houston Public Library and will picture shops that existed around Market Square through the years. Contemporary images of the area, taken by Hester, will be included as well. Each tile will be a contact print, as both old and new photographs have been taken by an 8-by-10-inch view camera. The historical photographs chosen by Hester are small "moments in time" and will reinforce the fragments in the sidewalk and lively images glazed on the tile benches.

The park will be planted with grass and shaded by trees which, for security reasons, are placed so that a clear view of the park from the sidewalk is possible.

In early December, 1986, the artists presented their plan to the panel of jurors, the Parks Department of the City of Houston, and the Municipal Arts Council, the body charged with approving all public art within the city. The concept was endorsed and site preparation began. Project costs are approximately \$500,000 – a modest sum for a work of art the size of a city block. DiverseWorks has begun fund-raising efforts.

The new Market Square Park is scheduled for completion in August 1988. Its quiet presence will do much to transform the downtown historic district into a more focused and people-oriented part of our city.

Marti Mayo

THE BLACK

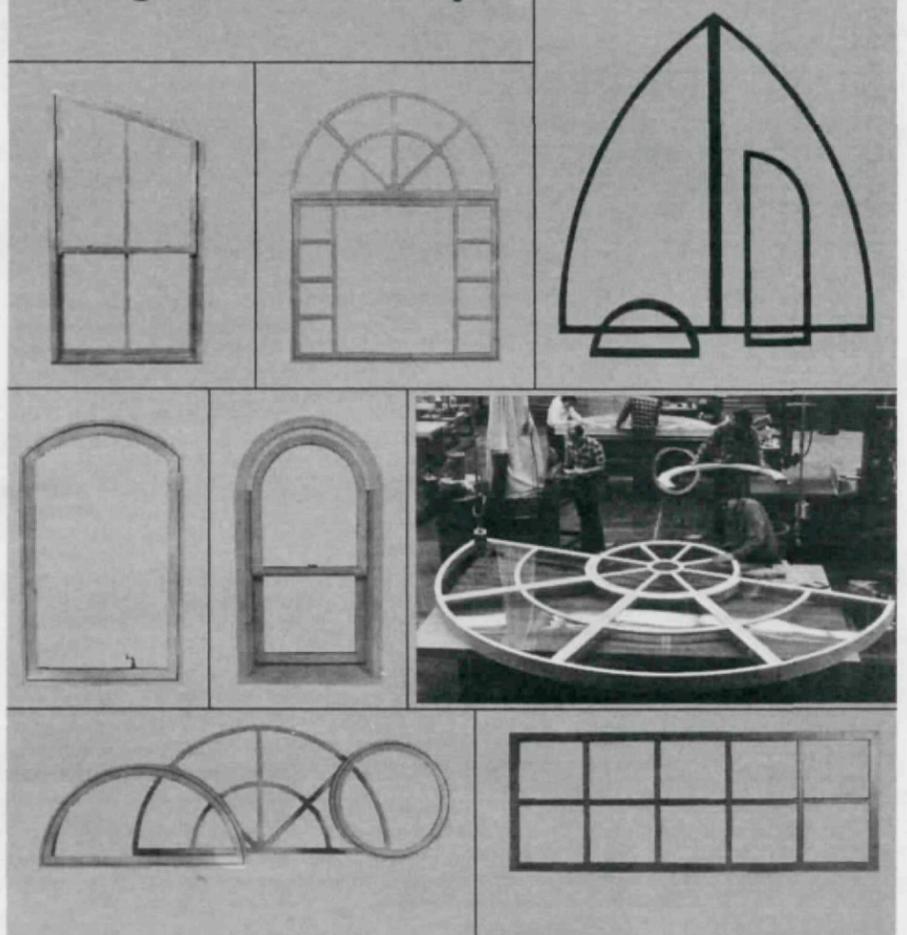


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