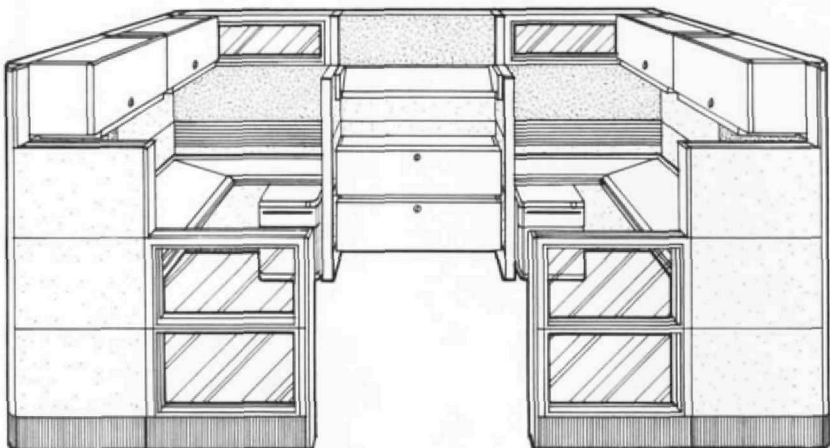
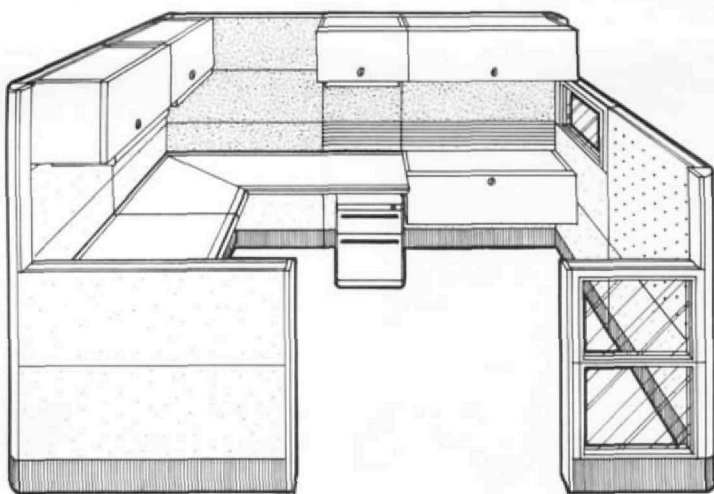
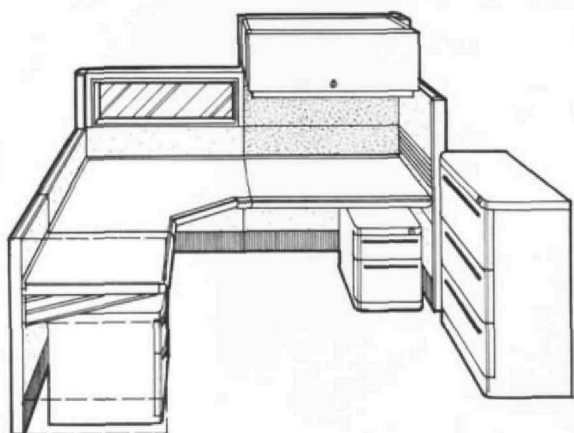
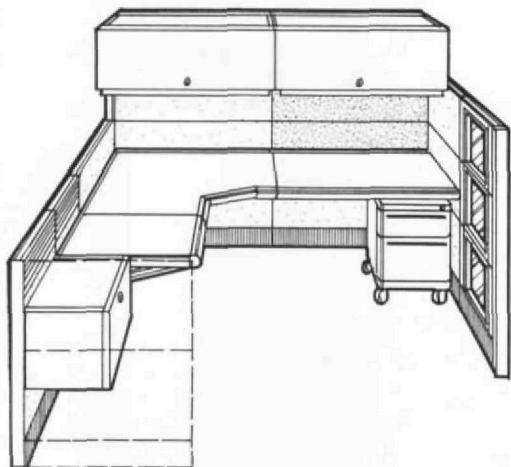


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Citelines

Cite Awarded \$25,750 Grant From the NEA

The Rice Design Alliance's biannual journal, *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston*, has been awarded a grant of \$25,750 by the National Endowment for the Arts. The grant will provide 37 percent of *Cite's* budget over the next 18 months and will allow the magazine to pay writers for feature articles and to be distributed more widely in Texas and the Southwest.

Now in its ninth year of publication, *Cite* offers a forum for critical analysis of architecture, urban planning, and design in and around Houston and of issues affecting the city's growth and quality of life.

In recent years, *Cite* has published articles on transportation plans for Houston, the city's public and low-income housing, and the architecture of significant Houston neighborhoods, as well as commentary on buildings of special interest in Houston and Texas, including the George Brown Convention Center, the Alice Pratt Brown Building for the Shepherd School of Music at Rice, the Conoco Building in Houston's Energy Corridor, the Halsell Conservatory and RiverCenter in San Antonio, the Corpus Christi City Hall, and the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, as well as articles by Phillip Lopate, Max Apple, J. B. Jackson, and Joseph Rykwert and interviews with Charles Moore, Aldo Rossi, and Tom Wolfe.

Michael E. Wilson

1949–1990

Michael E. Wilson, architectural archivist of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, died 2 December 1990. He was 40 years old. Wilson had been architectural archivist at the Metropolitan Research Center since 1982. Prior to coming to Houston, he was assistant archivist at the Rosenberg Library in Galveston.

During his tenure in Houston, Michael Wilson presided over the expansion of the library's architectural collections, accessioning the collections of Howard Barnstone, John F. Staub, C. C. "Pat" Fleming, and MacKie & Kamrath among others. He also compiled and edited catalogues of the Alfred C. Finn and Harvin C. Moore collections. Wilson served at various times on the boards of directors of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, the Texas Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and the Society of Southwest Archivists. He was a member of the Historic Resources Committee of the American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter and a contributor to *Cite*.

Contributions in his memory may be made to the Michael E. Wilson Memorial Fund of the Houston Public Library. These will benefit the research center's architectural collections.

Stephen Fox

Tiel Way Architectural Tour

The Rice Design Alliance's 14th annual architectural tour, held from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, 18 and 19 May, featured six houses on Tiel Way in River Oaks. These houses constitute one of the most consistent and superlative expressions of mid-20th-century modern design in Houston. The houses open for the tour included:

2 Tiel Way – Gardens only
1961, MacKie & Kamrath

8 Tiel Way
1953, MacKie & Kamrath

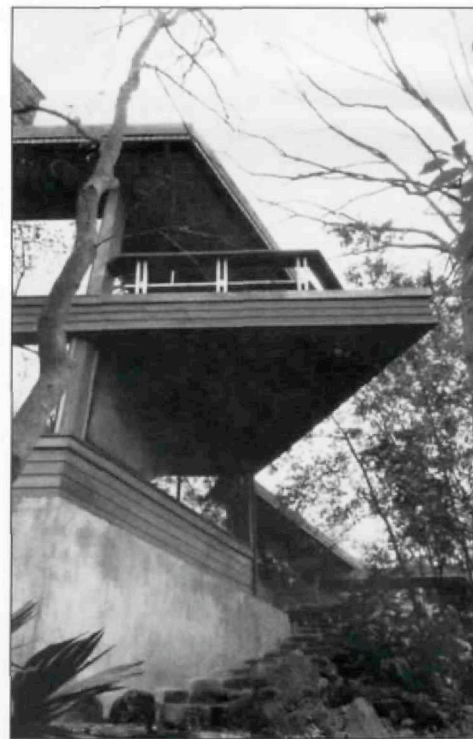
20 Tiel Way
1956, Northrop & Northrop

48 Tiel Way
1958, MacKie & Kamrath

59 Tiel Way
1949, MacKie & Kamrath

67 Tiel Way
1950, MacKie & Kamrath

Karl Kamrath (1911–1988) and Frederick J. MacKie, Jr. (1905–1984), established their practice in 1937. Profoundly influenced by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, they were among the foremost modernist architects in Houston from the late 1940s until the early 1980s. Their works include the City of Houston Fire Alarm Building (1939), San Felipe Courts (1942–44), the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute (1948–54),



48 Tiel Way, MacKie & Kamrath, 1958.

Temple Emanu El (1949), St. John the Divine Church (1951–54), the headquarters for Schlumberger Well Surveying Corp. (1953), and seven houses on Tiel Way.

Stephen Fox, architectural historian and Fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas, presented a lecture on the works of MacKie & Kamrath on 8 May in the Brown Auditorium at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

The lecture was funded by the Bromley Smith Freeman Charity Fund. The tour was funded in part by Gilbert King Construction; Mitchell Energy & Development Corp.; Renaissance Builders, Inc.; Structural Consulting Co., Inc.; Truffles and Flourishes Catering, Inc.; Windham Builders; and the city of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston.

UH Students Win Architecture Competition

Antarctica has emerged as a vision of the 21st century. The ozone hole, environmental protection, possible future uses of natural resources, and international cooperation have joined scientific research as major issues at Earth's last frontier. In June 1990 the American Institute of Architects/Student Chapter, in cooperation with the American Institute of Architects and the National Science Foundation, issued a call for entries for a national student competition titled "Environment 1, a South Pole Research Facility." The charge was to design a research center that would exert a minimal environmental impact upon the polar region, meet the research requirements of the scientific community and maximize their comfort, and use state-of-the-art architectural technologies.

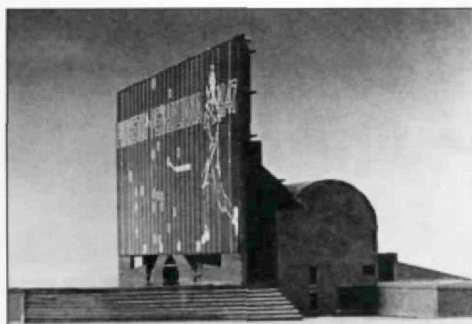
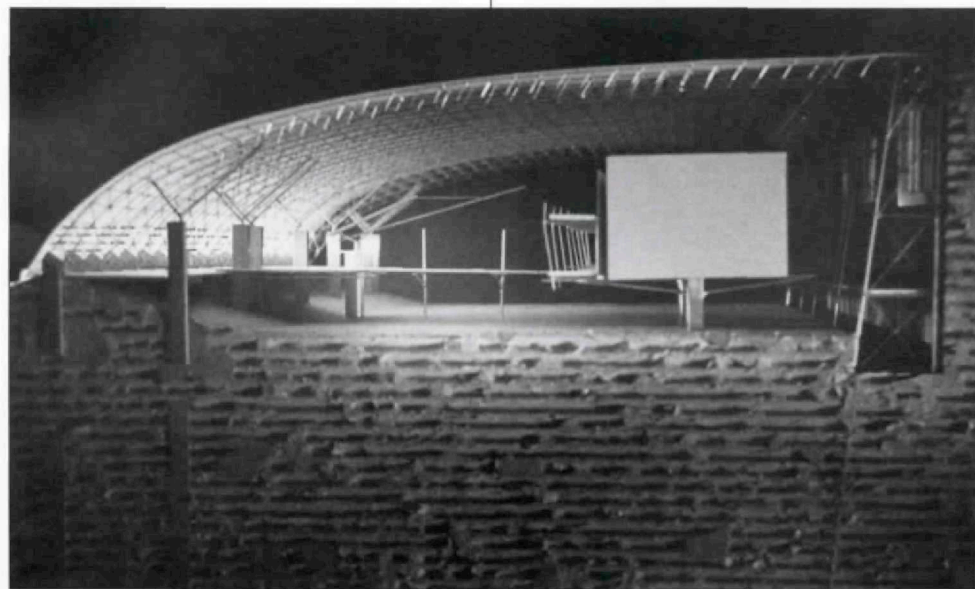
In preparing our entry, the first step was to conduct research on the unique climate and topographic conditions of Antarctica. The research center at the South Pole sits on a 9,000-foot-deep bed of ice that accounts for 70 percent of the world's fresh water. But the South Pole is a desert: water is a valuable commodity, because all of it is frozen. Another problem of building in Antarctica is snow drifting. The wind blows constantly at five to ten knots, creating an unstoppable ice buildup of 6 to 12 inches per year. The existing station is almost completely buried. The inhabitants struggle year-round, through a six-month day and a six-month night, against these conditions. They gather ice for melting and dig to keep ice off the structure.

Our design was developed by attempting to work with the environment rather than against it. The focus is on using the inevitable ice buildup on the leeward side of any object. In our design, the prevailing wind blows the snow over the aerodynamic shell of the building; the ice accumulation that naturally occurs is melted for fresh water. The building components are modular and respond to the size of the cargo bay of an LC 130 airplane, the only current means of delivering building materials. The linear wing allows for the future expansion of the center. The linear design also provides a zone for utilities at the rear of the structure. Buildings underneath the wing-shaped windbreak are elevated to dissipate the heat generated inside. Otherwise the ice below the structure would melt and cause the foundation to settle unevenly.

The aesthetics of the design resulted from the problems the site presents. The competition was unique because we did not have to search for formal inspiration. We tried to develop an architecture of purity that would make the effect of human presence at the South Pole pristine and elegant.

Peter Dorsey
John Major

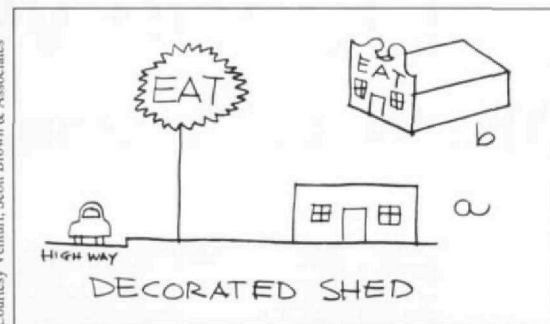
Environment 1, a South Pole Research Facility, 1990, model of premiated design, Peter Dorsey and John Major.



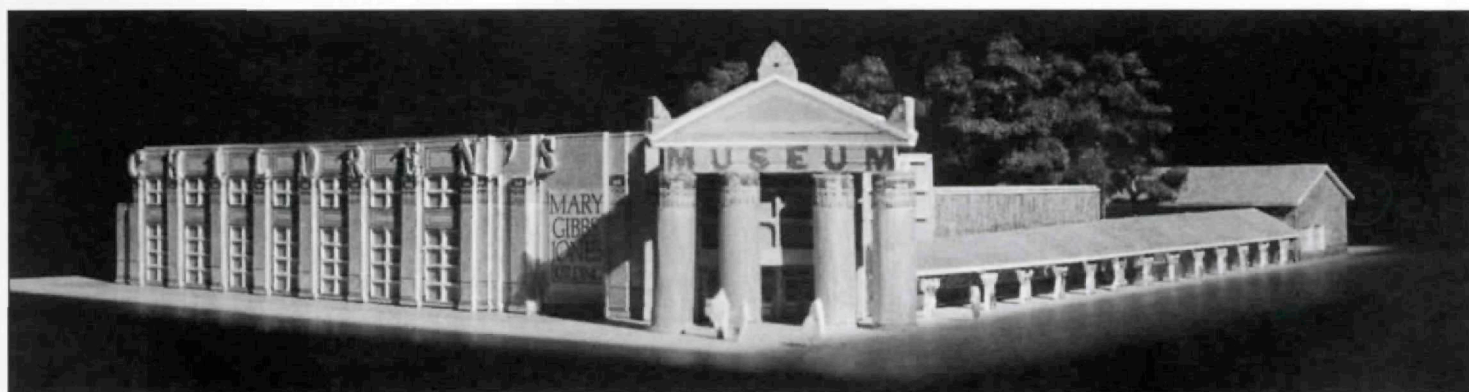
National Football Hall of Fame, 1967, model, Venturi & Rauch.



Satiric proposal for Boston City Hall, 1972, Robert Venturi, delineator.



Decorated shed diagram, 1972, Robert Venturi.



The Children's Museum of Houston, model, Cannady, Jackson & Ryan and Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates.

A T E M P L E F O R T O T S

Suspending adult disbelief and competitiveness in order to create an island of mystery appropriate to a child's imagination was the charge given the designers of the proposed building for the Children's Museum of Houston. While examples of this building type range from day care to science fair, they have the potential to mediate between the pressures and responsibilities of adulthood and the fertile minds of our nation's young.

Toward realizing this potential, the Children's Museum of Houston in September 1990 purchased two adjacent blocks bordered by Binz and Ewing avenues and Austin and Crawford streets. The tree-shaded site, split by LaBranch Street, provides room for the new building on the east block and visitor parking next to Park Plaza Hospital on the west block. This site lies one block north of Hermann Park in the city's nascent museum district.

The complex planned for the east block consists of two buildings, the Mary Gibbs Jones Building facing Binz and the Exhibit Design Studio along Ewing. These have been designed by Cannady, Jackson & Ryan of Houston in association with Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates of Philadelphia. The two buildings will frame a planted courtyard, the Children's Discovery Garden, a space shaded by the remainder of the stand of 70-foot-tall pine trees that presently grows on the site. SWA Group is the landscape architect.

Rather than present static artifacts, the exhibitions produced in the Exhibit Design Studio will invite hands-on experience, reflecting the progressive developments in children's exhibition design that began with Michael Spock's ground-breaking exhibition *What's Inside* at the Children's Museum of Boston in 1963. In anticipation of this, the architects opted to provide a neutral

enclosure for the gallery spaces, one that will serve as a "toybox" to hold memorable treasures and accommodate changing exhibitions. As counterpoint, they aligned the permanent institutional spaces along the Jones Building's public face toward Binz Avenue and joined these to the galleries with the Kids' Hall grand arcade.

From first sighting, the complex reveals the paradox of its architects' conflicting agendas. It is ambiguous rather than clearly dialectic, presenting itself as a "difficult whole."¹ Because the architects chose not to distinguish clearly and completely between the heroic and permanent nature of the gallery building and the utilitarian and flexible nature of the exhibition design studio, one is reminded of Robert Venturi's aphorisms advocating an architecture of "both/and" rather than "either/or."² Reflecting this condition, Jeffrey D. Ryan, Venturi's Houston collaborator and one-time employee, described the new museum as incorporating "both traditional Classical and Modern architecture" in a way that "addresses the dual need for flexible space that will accommodate interdisciplinary hands-on exhibitions, as well as a permanent and imageful appearance that creates the Children's Museum identity."³

Given this clear statement of dual purpose, one might expect the Children's Museum to represent the next evolutionary stage in Venturi's brash building-sign hybrid strategy, which was demonstrated in his visionary scheme for the National Football Hall of Fame of 1967 and his satiric counter-proposal for the Boston City Hall of 1972. Yet, although its programmatically responsive interactive agenda reigns paramount inside, outside the museum's visual agenda yields both flat and subtly modeled civic expression. The Jones Building presents inexpensive metal-clad walls on three faces of the complex. On the fourth, toward Binz, a thin scrim is hung, a temple colonnade to be realized in cast stone and synthetic stucco. Toward the corner of Binz and LaBranch, where the entrance is located at the pedestrian crosswalk, a curved, billboardlike propylaeum is "inflected." Child-size cutouts form a protective "caryakid" loggia next to the LaBranch Street schoolbus loading area. These classical motifs in low relief constitute a visual simulacrum, neither merely graphic nor fully architectonic. The façade of this cultural institution is thereby equated to mere advertising, fueling the debate surrounding Venturi's controversial exploration of the "decorated shed" and his challenge to distinctions between high and pop culture.⁴ In contrast to more literal "decorated sheds," the Jones Building's monumental decoration wraps the edges of its north façade and, while tempting one to find associations with the banality of tract

houses and strip shopping centers, does not fully surrender to its signlike role. It hazards being mistaken for significant construction. If its irony is missed and it dupes the public into accepting such immodest economy as a new paradigm, it demonstrates the persuasiveness of mirage as a surrogate for haptic experience. Given that advances in communication technology and the operations of the mass media have made the experience of architecture increasingly subordinate to the play of images, Venturi and Scott Brown's design calls to mind Jean Baudrillard's assertion that the logical development of advanced technology may ultimately lead to a world of "simulations" alone.

This is the paradox of Venturi's surface-oriented techniques. If consumed at face value, they encourage complacency toward the construction of important cultural monuments and an acceptance of the bourgeois view of urban life they present. One can hardly take solace in the fact that Adolf Loos faced this same condition in Vienna nearly one hundred years ago. It is ironic, however, that in his public warning he invoked the sham façades constructed by Field Marshal Potemkin to quiet the conscience of Catherine the Great. In his analogy, Loos prophesied our time:

*Who does not know of Potemkin's villages, the ones that Catherine's cunning favorite built in the Ukraine? They were villages of canvas and pasteboard, villages intended to transform a visual desert into a flowering landscape for the eyes of Her Imperial Majesty. But was it a whole city which that cunning minister was supposed to have produced?*⁵

Patrick Peters

Notes

- 1 "The difficult whole in an architecture of complexity and contradiction includes multiplicity and diversity of elements in relationships that are inconsistent or among the weaker kinds perceptually." Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 2d ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), p. 88.
- 2 Ibid., p. 23.
- 3 Children's Museum press release, 9 October 1990, p. 2.
- 4 Venturi argues for the "particular significance of the decorated shed with the rhetorical front and conventional behind: for architecture as shelter with symbols on it." Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1977), p. 90.
- 5 Adolph Loos, "Potemkin City," in *Adolph Loos: Spoken Into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897-1900* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1982), p. 95.