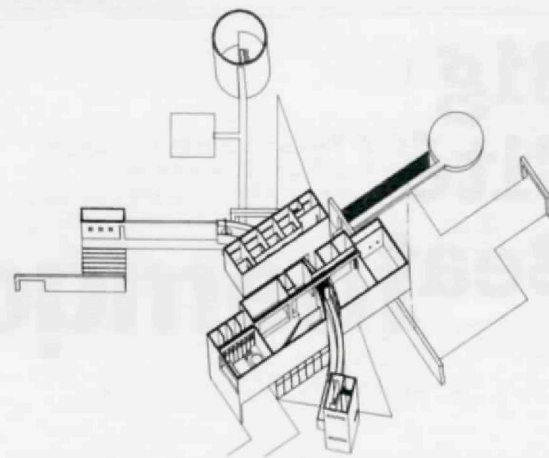


Citelines

House for a Russian Film Director based on "Proun 12E" by El Lissitzky, project by Josephina de Léon (*Explorations*, 1983)



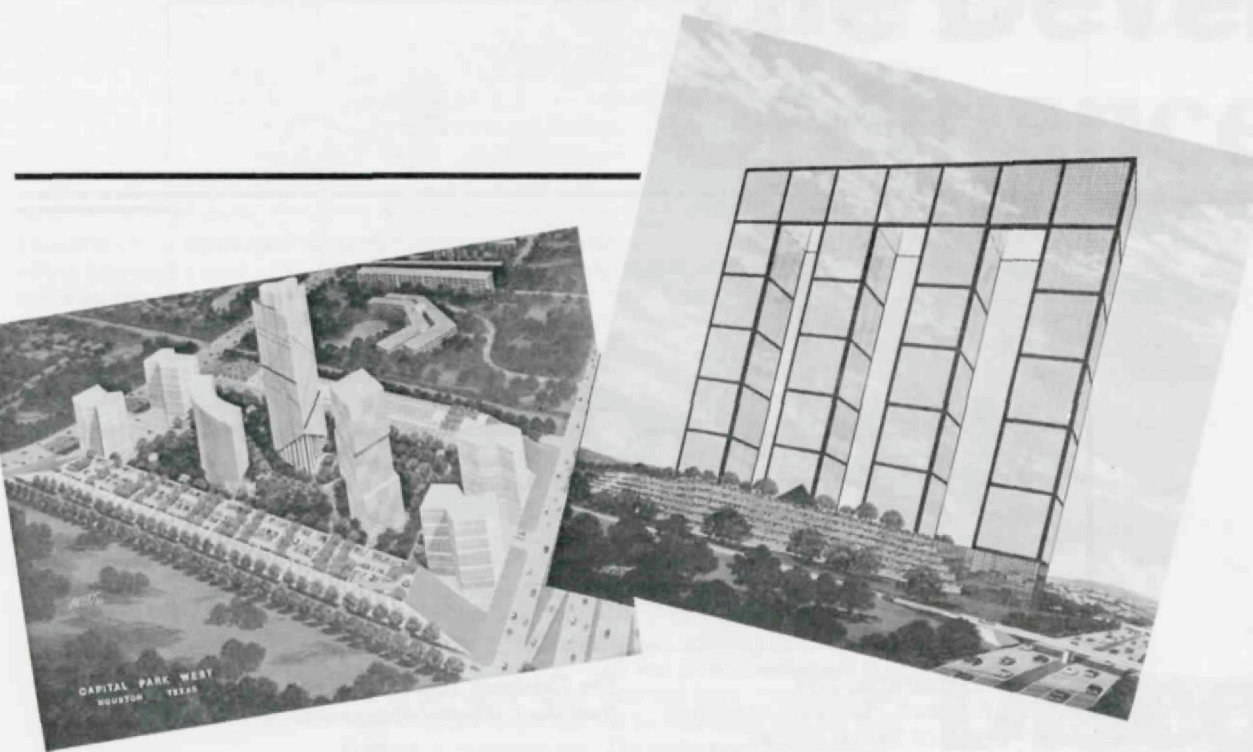
From Coast to Côte: Houston Architects On Display

Two recent exhibitions in New York and Los Angeles have featured the work of students from the University of Houston College of Architecture. During October and November 1983 projects from fourth-year studios were exhibited in a show called "Explorations," held at Avery Hall on the campus of Columbia University. The work consisted of a series of transformational exercises produced by students of Bahram Shirdel and designs for a country retreat for a hypothetical Russian film director derived formally from an El Lissitzky painting, a problem assigned by visiting critic Kenneth Frampton. The College of Architecture has published a catalogue of the exhibition, also called *Explorations*, designed by Lorraine Wild.

As part of a series of exhibitions called "Home Sweet Home, American Domestic Vernacular Architecture" held in 12 Los Angeles area museums and galleries, students from the UH's Texas Studio contributed to Charles Moore, Sally B. Woodbridge, Peter Zweig, and Bruce Webb's installation "Cabin, Temple, Trailer" at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Arts, which ran from November through December. The three aspects of American domestic architectural culture described by the title were the focus of the exhibition. Interpretive models built by students elaborated upon these themes. Ellen Singer presented a Texas-German Sunday house, Frank Vargas a replica of the Old Faithful Inn, and Lynn Wang a prefabricated house that could be ordered from a Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogue of the 1910s. Mark Hoistad's models described the symbolic role of the tower in traditional building types, and Tom Heatwole's the symbolic role of the porch. Akai Yang's reconstruction of Houston's now demolished Majestic Theater (1923) by John Ebersohn, Ebersohn's first "atmospheric," stole the show. A catalogue of the combined exhibitions called *Home Sweet Home* has been published by Rizzoli International Publications. It contains essays by Moore and by Zweig and Webb.

In London Dennis Sharp is organizing a show to open in April at The Building Centre that will document the career of Alfred C. Bossom (1881-1965), an English architect who practiced in New York between 1903 and 1926. Bossom specialized in the design of tall buildings. Toward the end of his American career, Bossom designed a series of tall buildings in Texas that included the Magnolia Petroleum Company Building in Dallas (1921), the United States National Bank Building in Galveston (1925), and the Petroleum Building in Houston (1927). Following his return to England, Bossom entered politics as a Conservative MP from Maidstone. He was knighted in 1953 and created Baron Bossom of Maidstone in 1960. Bossom also was a president of the Anglo-Texan Society. Efforts are currently underway to bring the Bossom exhibition to Texas in 1985.

In Paris, at the end of spring, an exhibition of Houston architecture and city form called "Why Houston, Why?" will be shown at The American Center. To open on 28 May with a symposium featuring architects, developers, and public officials from the U.S. and France, it is being organized by Burdette Keeland and François Ceria under the sponsorship of the University of Houston College of Architecture. The exhibition will contain introductory data on Houston's culture, geography, and economy, models and photographs specially taken by Richard Payne of Houston's tall buildings, a video "ride" down Westheimer Road, and a selection of work by Houston's "Young Turk" architects. "Why Houston, Why?" will travel to Houston to open the new office of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in the Houston Design Center.



Capital Park West, Houston (Arquitectónica)

Horizon Hill Center, San Antonio (Arquitectónica)

Arquitectónica Texas

Arquitectónica's brash sense of style is slated for some major exposure in Texas. Since opening a Houston office in 1982, Arquitectónica has produced a number of low-rise, infill, residential projects locally. Now the firm has two designs in progress for high-rise complexes in the suburbs of Houston and San Antonio.

The San Antonio project, commissioned by Efraim Abramoff's Orah Wall Investments, is Horizon Hill Center, located on a former estate at the northwest corner of Interstate 10 and Callahan, near the San Antonio airport. It comprises a 45-story "arcade:" four, square shafts joined horizontally at their bottoms and tops. Three of the shafts contain 800,000 square feet of office space, the fourth will be a 366-room hotel and apartment building, and the base structure contains a 200,000 square-foot retail mall and a six-level, 2,750-car parking structure disguised as a terraced garden and split by a street of shops. Incorporated into the design is an existing country house. Construction will begin after Abramoff concludes negotiations with the Federal Aviation Administration, inasmuch as the arcade, as designed, rises several floors above the FAA's height ceiling. Horizon Hill Center will be the tallest building in San Antonio.

For the Kelly Capital Corporation, Arquitectónica, in association with Kendall/Heaton Associates, has designed Capital Park West, a complex of seven office buildings and two mega-garages on a 32 1/2-acre site between Interstate 10 and Memorial Drive in Houston's Energy Corridor now occupied by the former Ashland Chemical Company Building (1962, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, architect). Completed or under construction nearby are three Skidmore, Owings and Merrill towers in West Lake Park; Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates' Conoco Woodcreek complex; Caudill

Rowlett Scott's Shell Woodcreek building; and the first two buildings in Westbranch Energy Plaza by Gunnar Birkerts and Associates and Morris*Aubry Architects.

At the north and south entrances to Capital Park West's rectangular site pairs of 15-story, Z-plan office buildings flanking entrance boulevards are set in moats that double as retention basins. Two 4,500-car garages wall in the east and west boundaries; both are heavily landscaped and one will feature an athletic club along its summit. Within this enclosure is a garden traversed by an S-shaped road, lined with crepe myrtle trees, that curves around three towers: a 22-story, 440,000 square-foot curved slab; a 42-story, 825,000 square-foot triangle; and a 34-story, 725,000 square-foot stack of cubical blocks. A construction date for the first phase of development has not yet been announced.

In both projects Arquitectónica explores the surreal dimension latent in the gridded aluminum-and-glass curtain-wall, the very emblem of cheap, banal modern architecture. Abrupt shifts of scale in the enclosing armature of Horizon Hill Center endow its urbanistic role as a neo-Suprematist gateway to San Antonio with an undertone of menace. The hidden scandal lurking beneath the cliché of the grid-as-neutral-container is blown wide open at Capital Park West. Houston's infatuation with the "shaped" skyscraper and its corporate paranoia fantasies are indulged in this clutch of unbelievably formed buildings dispersed in a lush garden of perpetual security. As at Horizon Hill Center, the metaphorical aridity of Cartesian rationalism is juxtaposed ironically with an artificial, paradisaical landscape.

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Big Cité Beat

☛ Houston's **Tidelands Motor Inn**, an iridescent survivor of the Fabulous Fifties, was sold to Rice University in October 1983, 25 years after its opening (which was studded by stars Robert Culp and Marie McDonald) in 1958. The 200-room Tidelands, designed by Austin motel architect Winfred O. Gustafson, displayed a Modern Oasis theme: banana trees, flamboyant colors, and barrel-vaulted roof forms à la Le Corbusier. The motel's now dismantled sign said it all: a neon palm tree, incorporating the word *Tidelands*, shading a giant, orange *T* (in which *Motor* was arrayed horizontally and *Inn* vertically), all perched on the edge of an amoeboid shape filled with blue neon waves, where the word *Pool* floated lazily. Aficionados can console themselves at the Tides II, a '70s spin-off just two blocks away (although **John Margolies** reports that it just isn't the same). Meanwhile, Rice plans to use the former motel, which is adjacent to its campus, for graduate-student housing.

☛ In the midst of wars, recession, and the threat of global nuclear holocaust comes **Debrett's Texas Peerage** (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1983, 385 pp., \$25), a gabby, not scrupulously accurate, and often inconsistent gazetteer of Texas's indigenous "aristocracy" by Hugh Best. In scope and execution *Debrett's Texas* comes in well below the undisputed masterpiece of the genre, John Bainbridge's *The Super-Americans* of 1961. Of some interest nonetheless is Chapter 14, "The Clients of John Staub — 'The Court Architect.'" This consists of an introductory paragraph, followed by a 14-page list of Staub's buildings cribbed from

Howard Barnstone's monograph, *The Architecture of John F. Staub, Houston and the South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), without even the merest acknowledgement. Several other passages in the book betray a close reading of Barnstone. But not close enough it would seem. For above a caption that purports to depict the central hall of Bayou Bend (1928), Staub's house for Ima Hogg, is a photograph of the long gallery of the Steves House (1965, O'Neil Ford and Associates, architects) in San Antonio. In forthcoming volumes of its promised series on American peers of other regions, Debrett clearly needs to do better than best.

☛ **Taft Architects** have scored again. In October they won the commission to design the new Corpus Christi City Hall in association with Kipp, Richter and Associates of Corpus Christi.

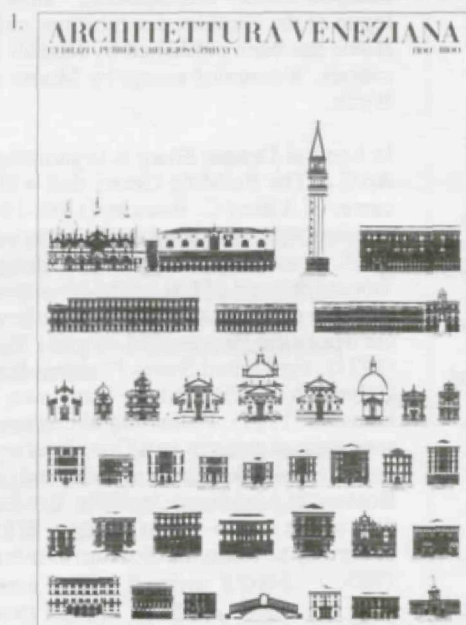


The Tidelands Sign (Drawing by Alan E. Hirschfield from the Collected Monuments Series, 1978)

The site is three blocks at Leopard and North Staples, near the garish Nueces County Courthouse. The building will contain 135,000 square feet and cost \$12 million. Construction is scheduled to begin in January 1985.

☛ **Charles Moore** will be named O'Neil Ford Professor of Architecture at The University of Texas at Austin. Funding for the chair was completed early in 1982, six months before the death of the celebrated San Antonio architect in whose honor it was endowed. Since then, several well-known candidates have been rumored to be on the verge of getting it, among them Donlyn Lyndon and Robert A. M. Stern. Moore emerged as the spontaneous consensus choice following a lecture stop at UT last fall.

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