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On 13 September 1986, the University of Houston Center for Public Policy and Houston Proud hold a half-day conference: "Neighborhoods at Risk: Strategies for Community Action." It takes place in a ballroom of the Marriott Brookhollow. Water is served.

Tables surround the room, staffed by various private and government groups. At one table is Darryl Keller, owner of Lifestyle Management. For the right price, his company will manage a neighborhood, overseeing security, trash, landscaping, and mosquito control. "Houston's a little unique, no local controls," Keller says. "We take the place of the local government."

The purpose of the conference is to stress the importance of the homeowner's association as a vehicle for improving a community's quality of life, and as a voice for reaching developers, local government, banks, and residents. Conference organizers also hope to cultivate future neighborhood leaders. Barton Smith speaks frankly to the audience of concerned homeowners, saying that Houston is experiencing the greatest home market decline since the Great Depression.

During a break, a member of the conference steering committee tells me that Houston could lose out as a whole because of its distressed neighborhoods. He hears that New York banks are getting nervous about insuring loans here. He also tells of neighborhood civic groups going to mortgage banks, trying to renegotiate, make trade-offs. "We'll mow lawns of foreclosed properties if you'll lower mortgage rates." This has never been done before, but banks are open to the idea," he says.

Time sure flies. It seems only yesterday that Houston stood for power, but now we approach mortgage banks in the role of yardmen. Difficult years lie ahead for suburban dreams. Some literally may be plowed under, according to Smith. Others may revert to what he calls "mixed land use."

But when all is said and done, Houston may grow wiser. Perhaps in the future, we'll build suburbs with more care, and perhaps in this current struggle, we can add greater meaning to our existing neighborhoods. Says David Montgomery of Forestwood, "These are tough times, but the world's not coming to an end. At least in Forestwood, we're now talking to one another." ■

## Citations

### Star Wars In the Labyrinth

*"Buildings and Reality: A Symposium on Architecture in the Age of Information"*

Sponsored by the Center for the Study of American Architecture  
The University of Texas at Austin  
23-24 October 1986

Reviewed by Malcolm Quantrill

The line-up for this, the third symposium to be organized by the Center for the Study of American Architecture, promised more than the conventional swings and roundabouts between regionalists and fashion-artists purveying the very latest *thing*. Having spearheaded the first two events, the center's director, Lawrence W. Speck, gave the ball to Michael Benedikt, whose game plan also gave Charles Moore a more modest part in the action. All this seemed most appropriate as the longhorns settled to battle out of the labyrinth of linguistics, seeking a cosmic spiral that would deliver us from the beastly myth of the machine, upwards into the cool, fresh air of *reality*, no less.

Benedikt set the battle lines by saying that if architecture responds to cultural change, it is only doing what it has always done; but that now the "information explosion of video, VCR, Walkman, T-shirts, et cetera are imperceptibly changing our perceptions." He then played the already mythical Bo Gehring, arch-priest of video's new compact simulations of alternative configurations in space. Gehring spoke of this new *essence* in terms of an exclusive perfume: "Five seconds of film took 125 people five months to make, but half the world's population saw its initial relay." His most convincing tape, however, was an unedited shooting by Claude Lelouche of a high-spewed motorcycle run from Versailles, down the Champs Elysées, through Paris, to Montmartre. He told us: "When we read the 'viewer' controls the speed of information flow, while in TV everything is in real time, with no variant." According to Baudrillard, he said, "Architecture has two options:

either to become more ephemeral (like the media) or more traditional: it is vestigial — it does not go away."

Horace Newcomb, professor of film and television at The University of Texas, saw "the environment as the medium. Through orientation and siting, the form of villages and towns express the environment. A cathedral expresses cultural values; a shopping mall does not. Postmodernism, its constant interrogation of forms, becomes *not only* the 'dissolver' of values *but also* a 'tutor.' TV, its endless being, becomes what Robert Eco has termed celebration of the victory of life over art; dissolving the High Victorian illusion that stories have an ending into a mythic, religious, serialized, narrative of experience. But buildings are not serial," he said, "they do not embody narrative meaning — except in the *spiral* and the *labyrinth*. And it is difficult to get people to invest in metaphors!"

Douglas Davis, architecture critic of *Newsweek* and a video artist in his own right, reminded us that the labyrinth passes through the Augean stables, out of which he made a determined effort to clear the bullshit. His tapes portray his own vivid efforts to break out of the labyrinth of television — one resulted in middle-aged women smashing their tubes in order to *touch* the beast within — supporting his contention that "there is no mass," because "the medium is *only* transmission, but there is also reception." He recalled the interview with a Texas woman in 1958, who, when asked what she thought of television, said: "It's great! If you close your eyes, it sounds just like the radio." "The medium is not the message," Davis concluded: "the message is the medium."

Peter Eisenman proved that, while architecture may no longer have a narrative role — "Modernism failed," he told us, "because it is impossible to deal with the fictive in abstraction" — he is a great raconteur. On this occasion his theme was "The Art of Dislocation." "Whereas the caveman did not have in



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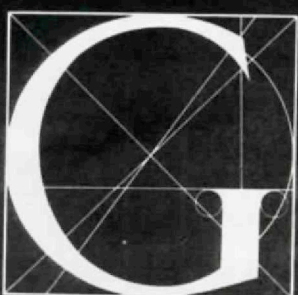
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mind a two-bedroom ranch house with a cathedral roof and a two-car garage, a series of dislocations have brought us to it," he argued, proposing "an architectural narrative that is self-narrating." It seemed pure irony to hear Eisenman arguing for an Aaltoan "autonomous architecture;" but he related how Jacqueline Robertson had told him: "I always knew you'd get into the wavey-wavies."

Karsten Harries attacked the whole idea of a linguistic basis for architecture, saying that "the idea of text, and of presence is taken far too seriously. Architecture speaks to us of space, not signs, while the architecture of Las Vegas is *anti-spacial* precisely because as Robert Venturi says, it is a landscape for displaced persons." Harries was reminded of Nietzsche's observation that metaphors which are worn out, without sensuous powers, are like coins that have lost their pictures – now no longer as coins only metal! Yet he found hope in postmodernism's creative, imaginative response to this devaluation, "dislocating and translating devalued symbols into an unexpected medium, making what was long taken for granted again conspicuous." He found Frank Lloyd Wright's "image of Liberty" in

Addison's "spacious horizon, where the Eye has Room to range abroad, to expatiate at large the Immensity of its Views, and to lose itself amidst the Variety of Objects that offer themselves to its Observations." Yet he sided, too, with Schopenhauer, who said of architecture: "its sole and constant theme is support and load."

For Eisenman, an architect had to have written a theoretical treatise to prove himself. He said (of the Dietzenhofers): "I cannot take account of every peasant who comes in from the fields and puts together a few bricks," but later admitted that he had gone too far! And he offered an important key to the proceedings with this comment: "The difference between a Robert Stern house and my Ohio Armory is that, when people go into a Stern house they believe it's 80-years-old. When they look at my Armory they know it's not real. Stern is practicing simulation; I'm doing dislocation!"

In his introduction to *The Architecture of the City*, Eisenman confuses the function of the spiral with that of the labyrinth. At Austin, thanks to Michael Benedikt, the essential distinction between them was re-established. ■

## Landmarks of Texas Architecture



Church, Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, San Antonio, 1768-c.1780; reconstructed 1928-37, Harvey P. Smith, architect; restored 1984, Ford, Powell and Carson, architects

Text by Lawrence W. Speck, photographs by Richard Payne, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, 119 pp., illus., \$29.95

Reviewed by John C. Ferguson

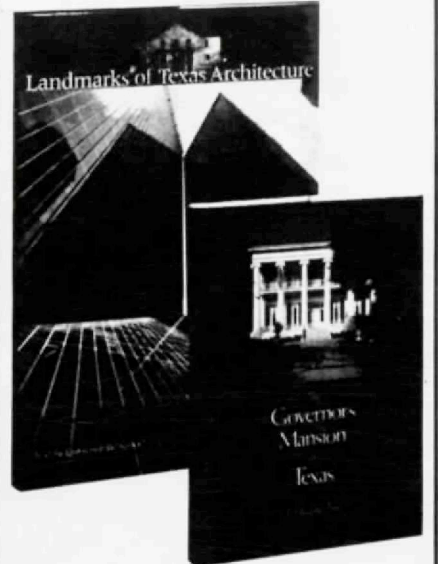
This is the final product of a Texas Society of Architects project that first appeared in 1983 as an exhibition entitled "Creating Tomorrow's Heritage." The poll conducted by the Texas Society of Architects (TSA) to determine the 20 outstanding examples of Texas architecture, the subsequent voiding of that poll, and the selection made by a panel appointed by TSA have already drawn the attention of architecture critics, and, in any case, are outside the scope of a book review.<sup>1</sup>

The first sentence of the book is a caveat: "This is primarily a picture book." Given that the photographs which Richard Payne took for the exhibition in 1983 were a major precondition for the book, the narrative provided by Lawrence W. Speck nonetheless is more extensive than is to be found in most coffee-table books. The author notes that the text is not intended to be definitive. Yet even so, it

must be judged on its ability to convey the architectural history of the buildings selected for inclusion in the book. Similarly, the photographs of the buildings must present a complete visual record of their significant features.

Most of the photographs are of very high quality, but there are serious problems with the text. These range from simple mistakes in dating to misinterpretations of architectural history. In the text devoted to the San Antonio missions, the author claims that the ornament and decoration of the missions is Moorish. While it might be possible to accept this claim, with some serious reservations, for the entry arch at the Mission Espada chapel, it is quite inaccurate when applied to the exterior ornament at the Alamo, Concepción, and San José. The work on the Alamo and Concepción is of Spanish Renaissance derivation, and that at San José is of baroque derivation, although all are rather *retardataire* efforts. In noting the various construction periods at the missions, the author curiously avoids referring to the restoration work at Espada and the major reconstruction work at San José in the 1930s by the San Antonio architect Harvey P. Smith. Since most of what the visitor sees at

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Photographs by Richard Payne

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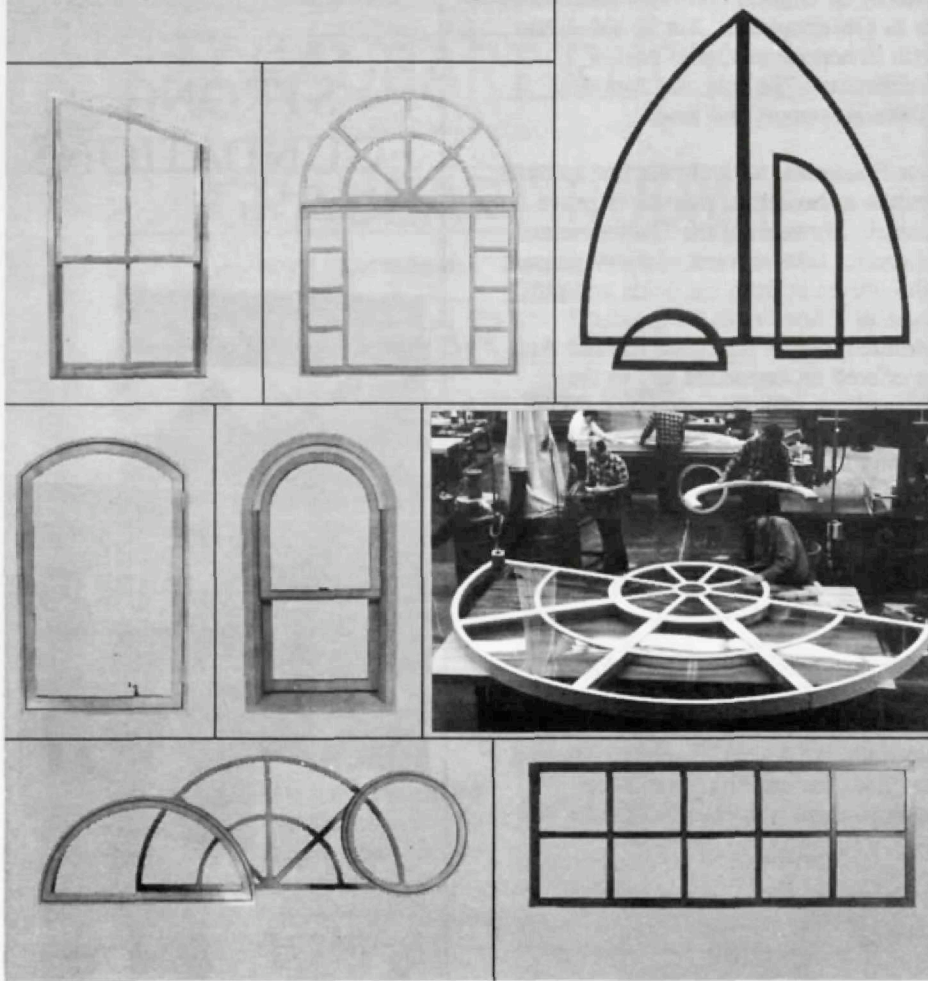
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San José is from the 1930s, and not the 1760s, this should be made clear to the reader.

By claiming that the Governor's Mansion in Austin has undergone little structural alteration since its completion in 1856, Speck chooses to ignore the major addition made to the house in 1914, greatly expanding the living space and resulting in the loss of the original rear wing. One of the major products of this addition, the conservatory on the first floor, is illustrated, but is not identified.

Speck's evaluation of Old Red and the Bishop's Palace in Galveston, the two N.J. Clayton works in the book, is somewhat confused by his excessive use of stylistic labels to describe the structures. The text for Old Red fails to mention that the entire roofscape of the building was redesigned after the 1900 hurricane, resulting in a significant alteration to the original appearance of the building. Speck's claim that the arched exterior elevations of Old Red owe a debt to the Cheney Building by H.H. Richardson ignores the fact that this work is in Hartford, Connecticut, not Boston, and that Clayton's use of such a design feature is more indicative of Richardson's broad influence upon countless other American architects between 1875 and 1890. Sadly, the Bishop's Palace, which contains Clayton's greatest interior, is not represented by color photographs of that interior, only two small black-and-white views. Speck's claim that the front parlor fireplace was exhibited at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, and was a prize winner at that event, cannot be substantiated with primary documentation, nor can the statement that the music-room fireplace cost ten thousand dollars. The suggestion that the use of floor-to-ceiling windows in the house is somehow an invention of Clayton's is to ignore the fact that such window types had been in common use in Galveston since the 1840s.

Battle Hall at The University of Texas was not completed in 1910, but in 1911. It contains the finest interior of any building on the campus, yet only black-and-white images represent the splendid reading room on the second floor. The statement that the use of polychromed terra-cotta on the building does not derive from Spanish and Italian precedents is to ignore the fact that it was to precisely such sources that Cass Gilbert and the major American terra-cotta makers were looking at the time of the design and construction of Battle Hall.

Perhaps most puzzling are the narratives for the Elbert Williams House and Fair Park, both in Dallas, in the sense that more is left out than is included. For

example, it would have been of great benefit to the reader to show one of the vernacular houses that David Williams used as his inspiration for the Williams House, even if such a comparison demonstrated that Williams was not above taking liberties with his revered sources. Moreover, since the interior of the house has been scrubbed of all of its original painted decoration and Williams's specially designed furniture is no longer in place, why bother to include color photographs of rooms that have lost their integrity and can tell us little about what Williams's interiors were meant to represent?

Fair Park is described without reference to any of the artists whose works make the complex the success that it is: Pierre Bourdelle, Julian Garnsey, Raoul Jossett, Eugene Savage, Lawrence Tenny Stevens, Allie Tennant, and James Buchanan Winn, Jr. The source for the night lighting of the park can easily be traced back beyond the 1925 Paris Exposition to the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and the combination of formal and informal landscape planning found at Fair Park is yet another example of the long-running impact of the Chicago exposition.

These and other errors tend to suggest that the manuscript was never carefully proofed by anyone versed in the architectural history of Texas, or of the United States. The general reader of this book will come away with no help in furthering his or her knowledge of the subject, as there is no bibliography to serve as a guide. Considering the ease with which such an addition could have been made, its omission suggests that the book was rushed to completion for the benefit of sales during the Sesquicentennial year, or at least the American Institute of Architects' 1986 convention in San Antonio. While the layout of the book allows for large-format color prints, there are some images — the State Capitol and Old Red — which are ruined by having their centers lost in the gutter of the book. A lack of captions for the photographs becomes a problem, especially when more than one building is mentioned in the text, as in the case of Trinity University and Fair Park.

In spite of its stated intentions, this volume is not the general introduction to Texas architecture that *should* have appeared in this Sesquicentennial year. One hopes that its publication will not preclude the preparation of a more comprehensive book on this important subject. ■

**Notes**

John Pastier, "Texas Architecture: Mythmakers and Realists," *Texas Journal*, vol. 8 (Fall-Winter 1985-1986), pp.16-17.

**Austin: Its Architects And Architecture  
1836 — 1986**

*Hank Todd Smith, editor; Michael McCullar, Kenneth Hafertepe, Lila Stillson, Edgar P. Van de Vort, and Bruce D. Jensen, writers, Austin: Austin Chapter, American Institute of Architects, 1986, 115 pp., illus., \$16*

*Reviewed by Stephen Fox*

*Austin: Its Architects and Architecture (1836-1986)*, a handsome catalogue designed by Herman Dyal, Jr. and edited by Hank Todd Smith, is the result of an effort by the Austin Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to commemorate the Sesquicentennial by establishing an architectural archive to document local architectural history

at the Austin Public Library's Austin History Center. The chapter's principal goal is to collect drawings and other records relating to local buildings and local architectural practices. The chapter additionally committed itself to the production of this volume to acquaint the public with the history of architecture in the state's capital city.

The catalogue comprises three essays, followed by profiles of 43 architectural practices that span from the 1850s to the present, a bibliography of published and unpublished sources on Austin architecture, and an "index" of about 350 buildings, listed by name (sometimes historic, sometimes current), with



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Atrium, James H. Robertson Building, Austin, 1893, rehabilitation by Robert Jackson Architects, architects (1985)

address, date of construction (and demolition), and architectural attribution. Most, but not all, of the buildings in the index are mentioned in the essays or the profiles.

Surprisingly, there is no catalogue of the architectural collections now extant at the Austin History Center, The University of Texas's Architectural Drawings Collection and Barker Texas History Center, or the State of Texas's Archives, although reference to material collected by the chapter for deposition at the Austin History Center is made in the briefest of the three essays – on The Collection and Conservation of Architectural Documents – by Lila Stillson, Edgar P. Van de Vort, and Bruce D. Jensen.

The other two essays, "Building Austin" by Michael McCullar, architectural columnist for the *Austin American-Statesman*, and "Austin Buildings" by historian Kenneth Hafertepe, might well have been consolidated, since the former consists chiefly of data that is, or ought to be, in the profiles of the architectural practices. Hafertepe's essay is a concise, well-organized account of successive architectural developments in the capital from the time of its laying-out in 1839. Twentieth-century buildings are given attention equal to that accorded more frequently published 19th-century landmarks, although more attention might have been paid to the 1940s and '50s, when national awareness first began to be focused on Austin architects. Hafertepe sharply criticizes the mediocrity of the buildings erected during the past 30 years at The University of Texas, criticism that might justifiably be extended to the adjacent preserve of the State of Texas. There are small disappointments. Some important buildings go unnoticed or are insufficiently noticed. One also misses recognition of two house types characteristic of Austin: the five-bay, symmetrical-front Victorian cottage and the bungalow.

The profiles of architectural practice vary greatly in the amount and quality

of information conveyed. Some are very unsatisfactory (for instance, Conrad C. Stremme: Is it known whether he designed more than one building?), or omit mention of important building projects that were executed outside Austin (George L. Walling designed far more significant buildings than those listed and illustrated in the profile on him). Once firms began to dominate, the profiles fill up with biographic data on the various principals, crowding out consideration of the architecture, mercifully in some cases, it must be conceded. Cass Gilbert and Paul Philippe Cret rather disingenuously are accorded honorary citizenship (who wouldn't want to claim them?), yet there are no entries for Renfro and Steinbomer and J. H. Eccleston Johnston, Jr. Perhaps their practices were not established by 1976, but does ability count for nothing?

Although not without shortcomings, *Austin: Its Architects and Architecture* provides the most comprehensive account of architecture in Austin yet published. The Austin Chapter of the American Institute of Architects deserves commendation for undertaking this venture. May it be the first step in a concerted program of collection, exhibition, research, and publication to detail the city's architectural history. ■

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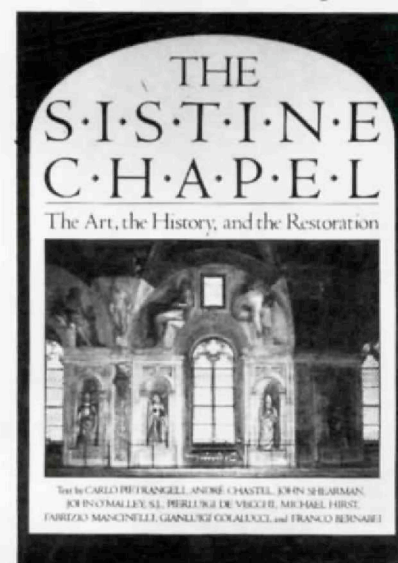
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