

# Citations



## The Complete HHR, or Richardson Redux

### *H. H. Richardson: Complete Architectural Works*

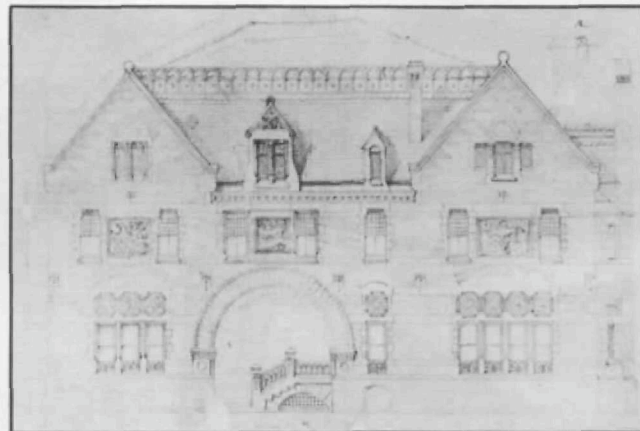
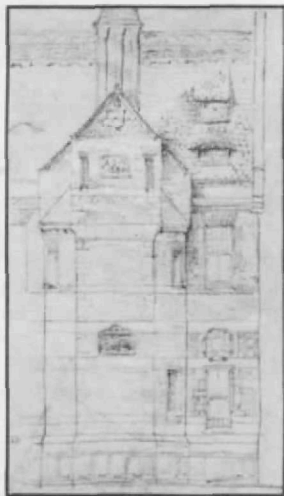
In his classic book, *The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and his Times*, Henry-Russell Hitchcock called Richardson "not the first modern architect" but "the last great traditional architect." In light of more recent studies, it seems that Richardson was both the heroic, forward-looking artist presented by Hitchcock and Scully, and a solid, professional, commercially successful late Victorian architect whose best works merited the enormous acclaim accorded them by critics, and whose lesser works were no better or worse than those of his contemporaries in the 1870's and 80's. Hitchcock's comment notwithstanding, his vivid portrayal of Richardson as a tragic hero crying out in the wilderness of late 19th-century American architecture has colored our understanding of the period in a way which suggests that Richardson's predilections were those of a later generation of functionalists. "Had Richardson lived to build things comparable to the second Leiter Building and the Boston Public Library," he wrote in 1936, "the effect of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago need not have been so catastrophic." From the vantage point of 1983, and the fuller appreciation of 19th-century architecture which recent history has given us, Richardson may appear to stand in a different relationship to the architecture of his times. Though he will no doubt always be considered one of America's greatest architects—and deservedly so—the achievements of his predecessors and successors can now be seen in a more positive light, proving that he was not the last great traditional architect after all.

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner's handsome and exhaustively researched new book, *H. H. Richardson: Complete Architectural Works*, allows us for the first time to view the complete spectrum of Richardson's *oeuvre*. In it we can see in clear plans and photographs the buildings and projects of Gambrell and Richardson's early years prior to the "breakthrough" buildings of 1872, Trinity Church and the F. W. Andrews House. Major early buildings such as the Brattle Square Church (1869-73), Buffalo State Hospital (1869-80) and Hampden County Courthouse (1871-74) are given relatively full presentation for the first time. Richardson's masterpieces and better known mature works, such as the Watts Sherman House (1874-76), Ames Gate Lodge (1880-81), Trinity Church and Rectory, New York State Capitol (1875-1886), Allegheny County Courthouse (1883-88), Marshall Field Wholesale Store (1885-87), and his magnificent series of libraries can be seen in accurate plans, archival photographs, drawings, rare interior views, and contemporary photographs. Extraordinary unexecuted designs, such as the quaint Cottage Project of 1867, the Connecticut State Capitol Competition entry of 1871-72 (reminiscent of Ecole des Beaux-Arts student projects of the 1850's in plan) and the Young Men's Association Library of 1884 are given a description in text and drawings. And for students and Richardson buffs who may wish to travel from Wyoming to Boston in search of the master's work, Ochsner has even provided a gazetteer of addresses (by Zip Code!) and a series of maps locating both extant and demolished buildings in the U. S. Here is the complete H. H. Richardson—85 built structures and 65 unexecuted projects—chronicling the 20 years of his prolific career from 1866 to 1886.

The book is organized as a chronological catalogue, with each entry containing a text section, reference listing, archival resource listing, and photographs. Information is provided on clients, collaborators, history of the design, and, perhaps most interestingly, how the

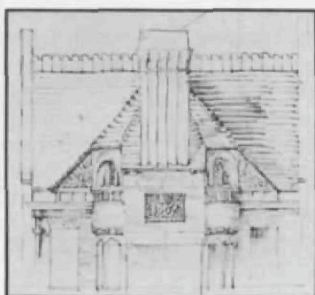
commission was received. The author has unearthed many illuminating details about Richardson's practice, his clients, and the liaisons which brought him his important buildings. The history of the architectural profession has only recently become a topic of study by architectural historians. This book, along with monographs on such major 19th-century figures as Richard Norman Shaw and Richardson's major rival, Richard Morris Hunt, and James O'Gorman's study on Richardson's drawings of 1974, will help to fill out our rather hazy picture of the practices of the first organized professional architects in England and the U. S.

Richardson's major clients, many of whom were Harvard graduates, are fascinating figures with their own success stories. William Dorsheimer, the Buffalo attorney and influential New York politician who helped the architect win several commissions in Buffalo and Albany, including the controversial New York State Capitol in 1875, was introduced to the firm by Frederick Law Olmsted. Richardson did a rather conservative house for him in Buffalo in 1868, thereby winning his patronage for many years to come. James A. Rumrill, son of a wealthy jewelry manufacturer, was a close friend of the architect at Harvard, and helped him to garner his first large commission, Unity Church, Springfield, in 1866, among others. Perhaps the most interesting of Richardson's patrons was the Ames family of North Easton, Massachusetts—already a wealthy dynasty of tool manufacturers and railroad financiers in 1877, when Gambrell and Richardson did the private Oliver Ames Free Library. F. L. Ames, son of Oliver Ames II and a member of Gambrell's class at Harvard, was responsible for the firm's involvement with several family memorials, while also retaining the architect to design the unique Gate Lodge to his estate (1880-81), three stores including the Boston Wholesale Store of 1882-83, and the Old Colony Railroad Station in North Easton. Ames was a man of wide-ranging business and personal interests—a director of the Union Pacific Rail-

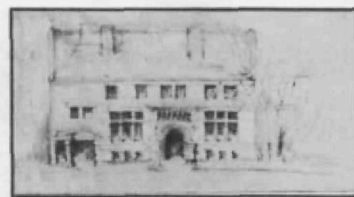


Left: Rectory for Trinity Church, Boston, Massachusetts, 1879-1880, H. H. Richardson, architect, Preliminary elevation study. (Houghton Library, Harvard University)

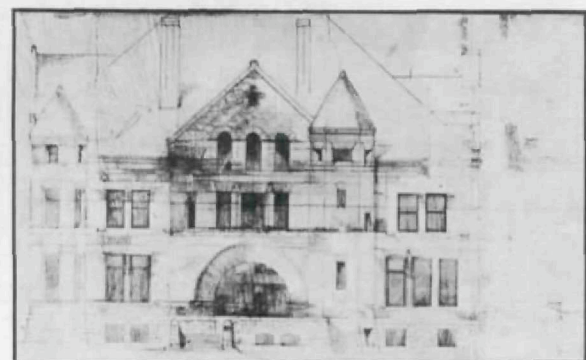
Below: Hay House, Washington, D.C., 1884-1886 (Demolished), H. H. Richardson, architect, Preliminary elevation study. (Houghton Library, Harvard University)



Left and above: Rectory for Trinity Church, Four studies of Newberry Street elevation. (Houghton Library, Harvard University)



Above: Glessner House, Chicago, Illinois, 1885-1887, H. H. Richardson, architect, Preliminary elevation study. (Houghton Library, Harvard University)



## Beautiful Sketches but Sketchy Descriptions

### *H. H. Richardson: Late Houses*

The Rice University School of Architecture's Farish Gallery staged an exhibition of H. H. Richardson drawings in October and November of 1982. The exhibition, entitled "H. H. Richardson: Late Houses," consisted of drawings of 19 Richardson houses executed between 1872 and 1889. The guest curator was Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, who also delivered a lecture on Richardson's houses at The Museum of Fine Arts on 27 October. Drexel Turner, Farish Gallery Director, assisted in as-

sembling and hanging the show.

As an exhibition of architectural drawings, "Late Houses" offered much to delight the eye and educate viewers in the types and styles produced by the finest of America's 19th-century architectural offices. Study sketches, finished plans and elevations, office presentation perspectives, and some detail sketches were presented, along with a small photo of each house and a brief description.

The most interesting portions of "Late Houses" were the various groups of study sketches—notably of the Glessner House, Hay and Adams Houses, and Bigelow House—which treated a particular problem of massing, elevation or detail. In the Glessner House, several studies of an engaged tower or turret, quite complex and grandiose, resulted in the understated treatment of that element in the final building. An extraordinary series of tiny detail studies for the Hay and Adams Houses (which

received the most extensive coverage of any building in the exhibition) showed the intensity of refinement which Richardson and his draftsmen were capable of, putting to rest any charge that Richardson was an architect obsessed only with massing. Although, as James O'Gorman observed in *Selected Drawings of H. H. Richardson and His Office: A Centennial of His Move To Boston, 1874* (Harvard College Library, 1974), Richardson's infirmity in his later years prevented him from making more than a few basic sketches for each design, he must certainly have taken an active interest in certain formal problems which could be studied and restudied by draftsmen under his supervision. Various exterior perspective sketches presented in the exhibition also revealed a process of picturesque refinement in silhouette and massing, a more characteristic Richardsonian concern.

Many of the drawings, some done in soft pencil, some in ink, and some in pen and wash, were quite beautiful

road which his father had helped to form, with investments in manufacturing and real estate. He was the kind of confident, almost princely patron well suited to Richardson's artistic temperament, who typified the sort of philanthropic *noblesse oblige* found in men like Andrew Carnegie later in the century. Significantly, Richardson's most abstractly expressive Ames family commissions were memorials—the Free Library, Oakes Ames Town Hall, and the powerful Ames Monument in Wyoming. Hitchcock considered the latter to be the finest memorial in America, an extraordinary vindication for the scandal which followed the Ames brothers' financial dealings over the Union Pacific Railroad.

Ochsner's catalogue entries, while providing client descriptions and building histories of interest to historians, also contain building descriptions and data on the current condition of the structure. While this makes rather dull reading (and, to be fair, this is not a book for light amusement but a reference) it serves an important preservation purpose. Here the author deserves commendation for the tremendous effort put forth in visiting and surveying all of the Richardson buildings still standing in the U. S. during an eight-year period. This book and the recent Frank Lloyd Wright catalogue by Storer are the only complete historic surveys made of the work of major American architects, and more will be needed if valuable examples of American architecture are not to be lost through ignorance. Like most historic surveys, this document also gives an assessment of the "significance" of each structure. Because the author is able to bring his considerable knowledge of the opinions of Richardson scholars to bear on this problem, what results is a more authoritative statement of value than can be found in most local surveys.

The book is thus something of a hybrid: part art historical catalogue, part reference, part survey, part gazeteer and part picture book. Luckily for architects of a less historical bent who like Richardson's work, the author

and book designers have contrived to give the illustrations some prominence and to throw in as many as possible. Most of the photos are of excellent quality, and a substantial number of drawings have been included, though not always enough to fully describe a project. One wonders why plans were omitted for some major buildings, such as the New York State Capitol and Albany City Hall, and why buildings like Sever Hall and the Stoughton House deserved relatively few photographs (none of which showed views of the rear).

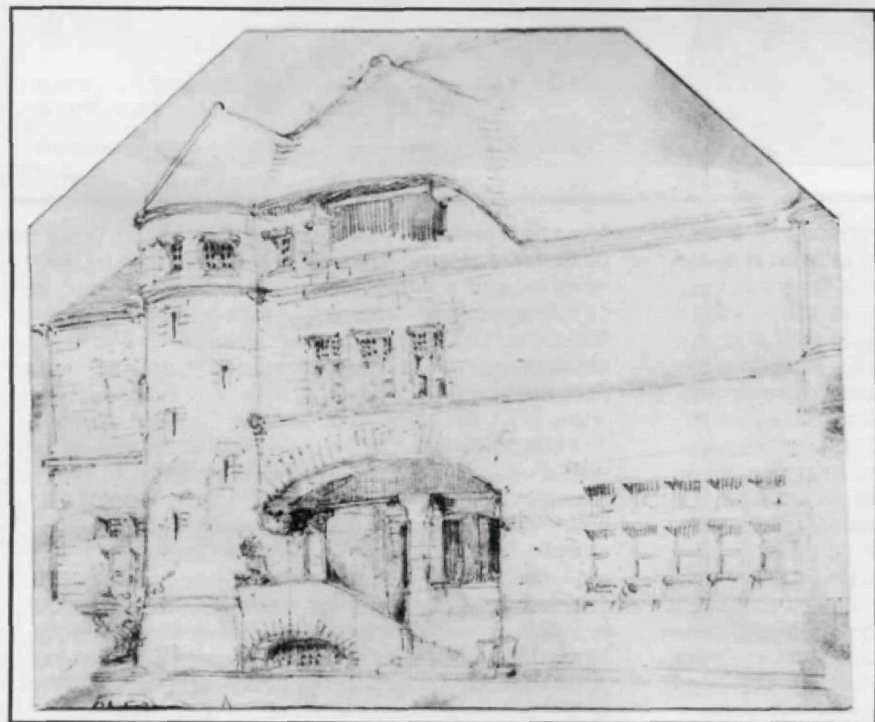
Still, these omissions do not take away from the value of the book as a visual document, and most of those who will spend the \$50 required to own a copy will do so because of the richness and relative completeness of the visual information. What emerges from a careful perusal of the 386 illustrations is, I believe, a different Henry Hobson Richardson from the one most of us came to know through the standard histories of 19th and 20th-century architecture. Just as we began to see a less protean Frank Lloyd Wright as more of his early career was unveiled, Richardson too can be seen as an architect who absorbed and transformed the influences of his epoch gradually. And we can now more readily compare his work to the standard commercial, religious, and domestic architecture of the period. Richard Morris Hunt, Richardson's less talented but equally successful contemporary, produced a body of work not dissimilar in profile and type to that of his Boston rival—buildings thought at the time to be distinguished in relation to the milieu, but even then judged to be far inferior to Richardson's. Both architects struggled with the exigencies of new building technologies, programs, and a changing clientele—some clients with vision, others with rather unsophisticated tastes. Hunt had fewer artistic successes than Richardson, but achieved some innovative and viable solutions to the architectural problems of his time. In Richardson's lesser works and those in which his individual *maniera* is not prominent, one can see the same hesitancy and conservatism found in most

buildings of this period of rapid economic growth and cultural uncertainty.

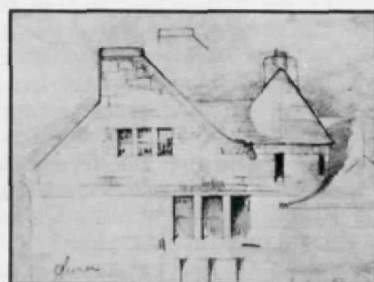
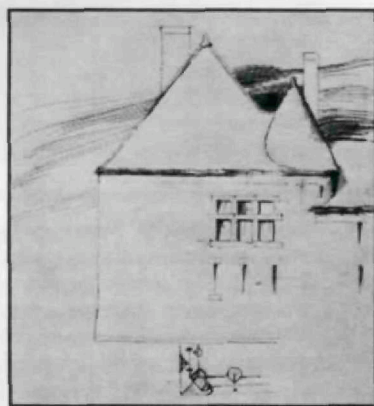
The reasons for Richardson's greatness will no doubt also be reinforced by the documentation of his total output. Many of his less prominent buildings—the houses of his middle and late period in particular—show aspects of his compositional genius more readily appreciated in his public works, a fact noted by Ochsner and by Richardson's first biographer, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer. Rare views of well-known buildings will allow us to study massing and detailing more fully by giving a more complete picture. In short, Ochsner's book provides the visual basis for a genuinely balanced assessment of the architect's career, one more nearly approximating that which his contemporaries could provide. Montgomery Schuyler, who saw many of Richardson's buildings shortly after completion, gave what is still the best characterization of Richardson's particular compositional genius when he wrote:

*Now the great and merited success of Richardson was as personal and incommunicable as any artistic success can be. It was due to his faculty of reducing a complicated problem to its simplest and most forcible expression. More specifically, it was due to his faculty for seizing some feature of his building, developing it into predominance and skillfully subordinating the rest of his composition to it, until this feature became the building. It was his power of disposing masses, his insistence upon largeness and simplicity, his impatience of niggling, his straightforward and virile handling of his tasks, that made his successes brilliant, and even his failures interesting. Very much of all this is a matter of temperament, and Richardson's best buildings were the express images of that impetuous and exuberant personality that all who knew him remember.*

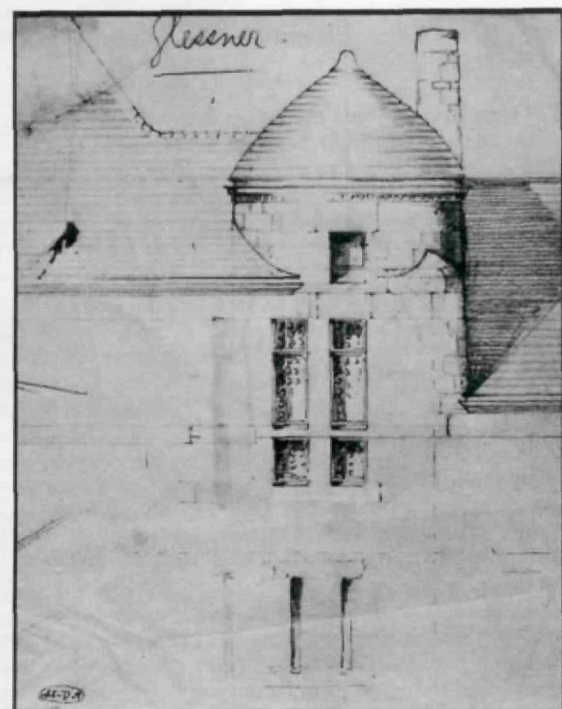
Mark Hewitt



Above: Project: Ames House, Boston, Massachusetts, 1880, H. H. Richardson, architect, Perspective of front elevation. (Houghton Library, Harvard University)



Above and right: Glessner House, Three studies of 18th Street elevation. (Houghton Library, Harvard University)



in themselves. Of the drawing techniques used by Richardson and the draftsmen, the less formal soft-pencil and wash studies allowed a richer and more vital presentation of the robust modeling of wall surfaces and masses which are Richardsonian trademarks. But the exhibition showed that more conventional formal presentation drawings were also made in colored inks on heavy paper. Richardson was known to dislike gaudy color-wash renderings of the academic *Beaux-Arts* type he had known in Paris as a student. O'Gorman, in his 1974 catalogue, asserts that Richardson's preferred presentation drawing was a brown-ink line drawing done on heavy paper. The Farish Gallery show makes it clear, however, that a number of styles were employed for different purposes, perhaps owing to what a client expected and what a particular draftsman could execute.

Although the problems of attribution for Richardson's office drawings are considerable, as O'Gorman's catalogue shows, one wished that, along with the title of

individual drawings, the Farish Gallery exhibition had included some explanation of who made each drawing (especially if there was reason to suspect that a sketch was from Richardson's own hand), at what point in the design process it was made, why it was made, and more precisely what it showed.

There were other problems arising from the arrangement of the exhibition. Since a complete photographic and drawing description was not provided for any of the houses, it was not only difficult to correlate some of the drawings with the finished buildings, it was also impossible to glean a complete impression of the houses' interiors and exteriors. Was the exhibition meant to show Richardson's late domestic architecture, much of it unfamiliar to most of us, in its best light as building? If so, one must question the method and thoroughness of its presentation. Was the exhibition intended as a record of Richardson design process and a presentation of architectural drawings as artifacts? "Late Houses"

left one wanting more information in a slightly more coherent format.

The show did, however, bring to the general public a fascinating series of drawings from an exciting period in American architecture. A few of the Richardson houses, like the Sard House, were not well represented. But far and away most of Jeffrey Ochsner's choices were excellent—many drawings from the Houghton Library (not shown in the O'Gorman catalogue) were on view at Farish Gallery, and the series of drawings of the F. W. Andrews House were shown for the first time as a result of Ochsner's research and the courtesy of the Andrews family. A catalogue with more supplemental information and more extensive analysis would take care of the questions raised by this stimulating exhibition.

Mark Hewitt

## Malinda Beeman's Cairo on the Bayou: Ancient Evenings in Space City

There are those who come to Houston to create, capture, feel its energy. Some witness it from afar, like Ada Louise Huxtable, the architectural critic from New York, who declared Houston "an anchor to time and place where neither is defined. All those values that accrue throughout centuries of civilization—identity, intimacy, scale, complexity, style—are simply created out of whole cloth, or whole prairie" substituting fantasy for history. To Huxtable Houston has the "kind of vitality that is the distinguishing mark of a great city in any age."

Artist Malinda Beeman sees the same vitality in the built environment in Houston, and for eight years she has been capturing it in a series of sometimes gentle, sometimes startling images.

"What got me interested in the architecture of Houston was that I came from southern California," says Beeman. "Some of the first things that excited me were the older Art Déco buildings—the gas station-restaurant-theater facades I had never paid attention to in L. A.—like the Alabama Theater, the Tower Theater and Captain John's Restaurant. They are such unique, beautiful buildings. There is a magnificent theatrical quality to them. They have character."



1. Sirens of Cities, lithograph, Malinda Beeman. (Harris Gallery)

2. Great Sphinx from the series Cairo on the Bayou, oil on canvas, Malinda Beeman. (Harris Gallery)

Houston's vitality becomes an integral part of Beeman's art. She says that the creative energy the Art Déco buildings made her feel unleashed in her a new vision of function and form, mythology and meaning, and Houston's place in time.

"Moving to Houston and watching the buildings going up has been like watching Oz being built," says Beeman.

Her first drawings of Houston buildings were intended as a way of "documenting the architecture because I knew the buildings might not exist much longer," she explains. But the work led her to realize that the architecture "was harkening back to shapes—shapes that give a sense of immortality."

The rapid evolution of the Houston landscape made her feel time as "collapsed," she says, and that led her to think about ways in which the shapes used in recent buildings connected with those used in ancient eras.

"Architecture, rather than being any specific building, is more a symbol of society, as the pyramids are symbols of Egyptian society. You don't think of the Egyptian people, but Egyptian civilization. The Interfirst Bank, Greenspoint Plaza, Allied Chemical and Pennzoil Place are equivalent symbols of our time, our place in the universe," Beeman explains.

Beeman made a series of lithographs of these buildings, then a second series that showed the same buildings with bars of brilliant color (energy, she says) hovering near them, and the waters of the local bayous splashing high around them. A third series added allusions to Greek mythology—"things like the Sirens, who sang and brought men to the rocks, where the buildings are like vessels on a great ocean and the sirens of the city are luring us to the rocks or whatever danger confronts us."



But these weren't enough.

"What felt right was Egyptian," she says.

The Nile. The Bayou. The Pyramids. Pennzoil Place. Ocean waves splashing up became flood waters inundating a city. Houston is a society based on water and pools of oil—a whole civilization living by it, being fed by it, dying with it. Much like the Nile with its ebb and flow, the pipelines and waterways of Houston "still encroach upon and threaten our civilization."

She did a painting juxtaposing an Egyptian Sphinx with Pennzoil Place and found "that it made the contemporary building look like it should be in Egypt. I found that the geometry had a quality of extreme modernity and yet a quality of ancientness and timelessness."

The new civilization in an Old Kingdom context.

Philip Johnson is Beeman's hero. "In his fantasy, he steps beyond safety," she says. In a way, her recent paintings are a homage to the architect, but they are also visions of "what I've learned from the geometry and forms of buildings and what they do to their space. Cloud shapes (in the new paintings) give the buildings a quality of space—they provide movement and color, and they are a link into the concept of past and present being one, everchanging but always the same."

Adds Beeman, "Looking at the buildings from Loop 610 and realizing inadvertently that I was moving into the fast lane in reality, I had a singular feeling about the way the buildings and I were interacting."

Beeman's recent work, entitled "Cairo on The Bayou," was exhibited from 11 March to 2 April at the Harris Gallery.

Carol J. Everingham

## Transportation and Urban Development in Houston

### Transportation and Urban Development in Houston, 1830-1980

Peter C. Papademetriou, Houston: Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, 1982, 108 pp., 139 illus.

The scholarly study of the interrelationship between transportation and urban form has been long neglected. Planning professionals have largely concentrated on the analysis of transportation technology optimization while architects and urban designers have focused on the physical form of the city. In recent years, the growth of transportation problems in Houston and the obvious impact of the freeway system on development patterns have generated increased interest in this interrelationship but until the publication of Peter C. Papademetriou's *Transportation and Urban Development in Houston*, its history had never been written.

The pioneering quality of Professor Papademetriou's work cannot be overestimated. When he began, the archives of transportation-related materials for Houston were mostly uncatalogued and no comprehensive bibliography of such materials existed. Thus, this book must be regarded as particularly significant because it has established a framework for the study of transportation and urban geography for the southeast Texas region. It is the work to which future researchers will refer.

The field may have been neglected because the story is so difficult to trace. Multiple issues—technological, financial, political and social—are involved and myriad personalities on local, state and national levels have important roles.

Although Professor Papademetriou begins his narrative in 1830, the major threads of development appear in the

1880's and 1890's. Two separate developments are significant—mass transportation and individual transportation. The rise of the electric street railways following Frank Sprague's construction of the first trolley system in Richmond, Virginia in 1887, was an expression of the first development. By 1890, 51 cities had operating trolley systems. In Houston, the electric street cars began operation in 1891. By 1910, near the height of the proliferation of electric street railways across the United States, Houston had more than 50 miles of trolley line. The development of individual transportation technology was initiated about the same time. The automotive experiments of the 1890's succeeded in producing only a few vehicles regarded as toys for the rich, but the application of mass production and the appearance of the Model T in 1908 signaled the spectacular rise of individual automotive transportation in this country. In concert with this technological advance was the rise of the "Good Roads" Movement, initially a product of the bicycle craze of the 1890's, but given its ultimate direction by the appearance of the automobile, automobile clubs, and a need for streets, roads and highways for auto travel.

The extension of the first trolley lines in cities led to the first major burst of suburban growth in the United States. Today the shape of such cities as Boston, New York and Philadelphia reflects the form of the street railroads even though many of these have disappeared. Houston, in contrast, remained a small city through the first decades of the 20th-century, with a population which did not reach 400,000 until the 1940's. By the time the significant growth of Houston began, mass transit was in decline and the decentralized form of the city resulted from a total automobile orientation. As Professor Papademetriou demonstrates, in the 1950's and 1960's decentralized auto orientation was regarded as the wave of the future. The construction of freeways, pushed through parks and stable communities, was heralded as the height of progress. The dependence of the Houston economy on the consumption of motor fuels reinforced the belief in freeway development, automobile transportation and the decentralized city. In the 1960's and 1970's, the freeways generated their own city form producing Houston's unique combination of linear and multi-nodal development.

Mass transportation in the form of diesel buses (after the phaseout of electric street railways in Houston in 1940) never became a significant influence on the form of the city. Instead, buses followed in the wake of the decentralized sprawl with route extensions resulting in increasing mileage but often decreasing patronage. As the peak of Houston freeway construction was reached about 1970, the bus system, nearing financial collapse, was beginning to suffer from physical deterioration as well. Public ownership, viewed as the option of last resort, came in 1973, but physical deterioration of the bus system accelerated until the system was in near ruins by 1978.

The decade of the 1970s was marked by changing attitudes toward mass transportation in Houston due to the failure of the freeways to handle Houston's tremendous growth and the recognition of limits on the availability of fossil fuels necessary to serve the decentralized city. This change was clearly shown by the August 1978 vote creating Metro.

This complex story is somewhat difficult to follow in the text, if only because it has so many interwoven threads to which this review cannot do justice. The story is aided considerably by the 139 illustrations provided by Professor Papademetriou, including maps, charts, photographs, advertisements and magazine covers, which combine to demonstrate how people of each period viewed their environment and what they perceived as issues in city planning and transportation systems development. Unfortunately, some of the maps have not reproduced well and can be difficult to read, but this is a minor flaw. In addition, Professor Papademetriou assumes his readers will have at least a cursory familiarity with Houston. Without this, it might be difficult to follow the references to various locations, although the central themes and major points will still be clear.

This book is a significant addition to any collection of Houston history and must be regarded as essential reading for those who wish to understand the historical background of Houston's transportation network and its unique urban form.

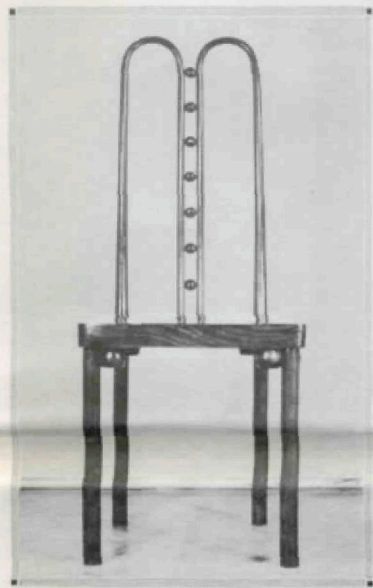
Jeffrey Karl Ochsner

## From Werkstätte to Our State: Josef Hoffmann Design Classics in Fort Worth

Like so many turn of the century designers, Josef Hoffmann, until recently, has been the victim of a type of criticism that tended to promote one particular aesthetic by demeaning or, even worse, ignoring an essential body of work. Now nearly 80 years after the founding of his Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshop), Hoffmann's name has been resurrected. Hoffmann's designs for buildings, furniture and domestic items of all sorts are once again the subject of intense interest not only on the part of critics, historians and connoisseurs, but perhaps more importantly by the present generation of designers.

Far away from *fin de siècle* Vienna, the work of Josef Hoffman was recently the subject of an exhibition called "Josef Hoffmann, Design Classics" held at The Fort Worth Art Museum between 17 November 1982 and 9 January 1983. The show was organized by the museum's director, David Ryan, with the assistance of David Gebhard, who wrote the excellent catalogue which accompanied the show.

It is still difficult to attempt an evaluation of Hoffmann independent of the complexly intertwined histories of



Chair, 1906, Josef Hoffmann, designer. (The Fort Worth Art Museum)

the Vienna Secession (of which he was a leading figure), the English Arts and Crafts movement and the American Craftsman movement. Yet walking into The Fort Worth Art Museum and turning to the exhibition, one was impressed by the objects themselves apart from questions of their historical significance. The Hoffmann designs—which included dozens of wood chairs, upholstered settees, lamps, cigarette cases and silverware—were displayed in a naturally illuminated gallery as pristine objects crafted with intelligence and skill. Even after so many years, the air of experimentation was still fresh.

Hoffmann's sturdy, straight-backed chairs were contrasted with more delicate furniture ensembles, some appearing too fragile for sitting. And yet these pieces had in common the essential Hoffmann traits: invention, material integrity and craftsmanship.

Hoffmann transformed his simple chairs by cutting, bending or laminating the wood framing elements, making the joining of pieces integral to the design. The wood, often beech, was rarely left unfinished but painted, enameled or lacquered. While painting and lacquering may seem at odds with expressing the nature of the material, they protected the furniture. Other pieces appeared to have been stained black or brown. On one stained desk, the wood grain was subtly drawn out with white paint. Upholstered furniture was crafted with equal precision. On the underside of one upholstered armchair, copper springs were revealed. Though the springs were not intended to be viewed, they were Hoffmann's way of insuring durability, suggesting that no matter how experimental the piece or how often produced, it was meant to stand up to time and use.

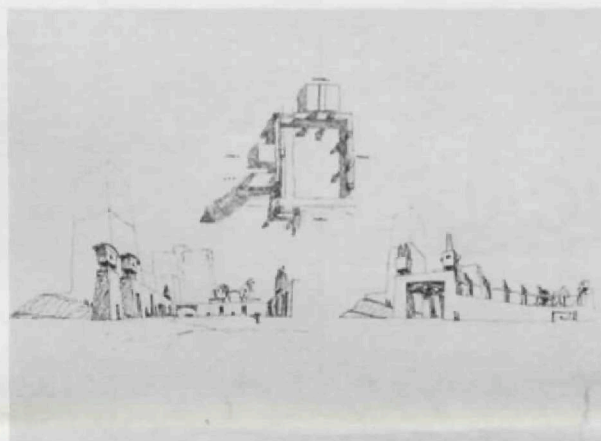
Other furniture pieces included armoires, writing tables, stools and tables, all treated with the same degree of elegance and restraint as the chairs and the upholstered

seating. The exhibition concluded with the smaller items of furnishing. These were silver tureens, silver place settings, a cigarette box of ebony and inlaid mother-of-pearl, gridded metal wastebaskets, lamps and pocketbooks. Like the chairs, settees and tables, these furnishings revealed Hoffmann's deep love and respect for the materials.

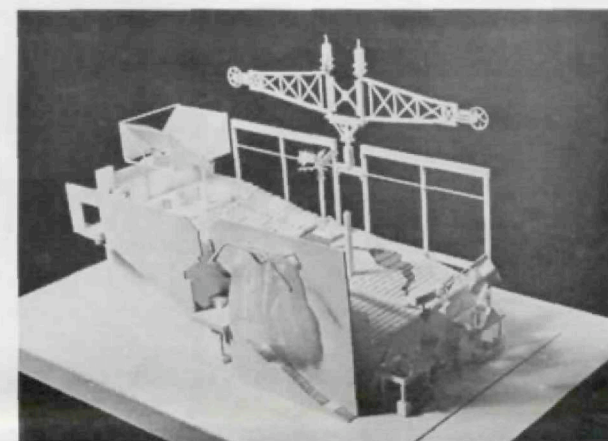
The Fort Worth exhibition concerned itself mostly with Hoffmann's work of the period between 1900 and 1910, although he produced work until his death in 1956. Many of these items have not been seen for decades and one wonders just how much was lost during Hoffmann's period of critical rejection. This is true not only of Hoffmann, but of Otto Wagner, Otto Prutscher, in fact all the designers of the Vienna Secession. Oddly missing from the exhibition were several of Hoffmann's designs that have remained in production all these years, in particular the bentwood "Prague" chair, made today in the original mold and distributed in this country by Stendig. However, the exhibition showed Hoffmann to have been an extraordinarily thoughtful designer, an experimenter, an inventor. Dismissing him as an eccentric decorator is clearly wrong.

Obviously much of the interest in his work today has arisen because architects are once again turning to furniture design and the design of objects. This raises an intriguing question. Were Hoffmann's works genuinely vital to the development of art and architecture? Or does their revival merely reflect the current interest in any body of artifacts that did not originate in a moral and aesthetic sphere that would have conformed to the purist strictures of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*? As Gebhard demonstrates in his catalogue essay, designers often are judged not on the basis of their actual products, but accepted or rejected on the basis of how well a particular piece fits into current philosophies and styles.

William F. Stern



Art Precinct, Alan E. Hirschfield, architect with Chris Petrash. (Photo by Rick Gardner, Contemporary Arts Museum)



Model, Of Gardens, Galleries and Grottos, Lonnecker + Papademetriou and Peter D. Waldman, architects. (Photo by Peter C. Papademetriou, Contemporary Arts Museum)

## Dreams and Schemes: Architectural Permutations of the Contemporary Arts Museum

Throughout most of last fall Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum featured a major architectural exhibition based on the theme of its existing building and what hypothetically might become of it and its immediate surroundings. Twenty Houston architects were invited by CAM director Linda Cathcart and curator Marti Mayo to submit proposals "both possible and visionary... for the expansion, renovation, rebuilding or conversion of the existing museum structure on the present site." Eighteen widely disparate entries in the form of architectural drawings and/or, models were received and exhibited under the title "Dreams and Schemes, Visions and Revisions for the Contemporary Arts Museum."

Firms and individuals participating ostensibly represented a broad spectrum of Houston's design professionals, ranging from large commercial firms through smaller practices of old and new repute to groups of young designers and academics of a more theoretical and conceptual bent. Approaches or arguments frequently issued from surprising quarters, however. The exhibitors were Arquitectónica Texas; Howard Barnstone; Anthony E. Frederick; Ian Glennie; Robert E. Griffin in association with Randy Gay, John Perry and Bruce C. Webb; Alan E. Hirschfield; William R. Jenkins; Thomas M. Lonnecker, Peter C. Papademetriou and Peter D. Waldman; Morris\* Aubry Architects (Ed Brudnicki and Jim Postell); Richard Keating of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Houston; William F. Stern, Herman Dyal, Jr., Drexel Turner and Gregory Warwick; Taft Architects; Charles Tapley Associates; 3D/International; Anderson Todd; Urban Architecture (Hossein Oskouie, Rick del Monte and Lucho Gonzales); Marvin Watson, Jr.; and Ziegler Cooper in association with Stephen M.

Starensier.

Given the CAM's existing building, a bi-level, shiny metal parallelogram by Gunnar Birkerts and Associates (1972), two-thirds of the entrants responded predictably with a building set within the bounds of the CAM's property lines. Three of the six non-conforming schemes exceeded the site limits or broadened the interpretation of the context under consideration. Charles Tapley Associates took an urban design approach and reworked the entire museum area, with special attention to rerouting existing transportation systems and connecting to future ones. Alan Hirschfield formed an art precinct by linking all of the existing cultural institutions with a thick wall full of art and artists surrounding a major public plaza.

The other three extra-territorial responses were not so much built solutions as polemical or conceptual statements. The Stern/Dyal/Turner/Warwick submission ignored the existing museum altogether and offered economic justification for relating the CAM to a new, downtown, high-rise development only generically adumbrated. Taft chose to make a didactic and critical point with their cautionary "Allegorical Cartoon about Houston," showing existing buildings growing progressively upward as mindless extrusions which eventually self-destruct. The third non-building submission, Robert Griffin's "Fond Metaphors," seemed to be solely about the rejection of abstraction, for it consisted of eight toy-like models of museum-shaped parallelograms dressed-up as unbuilding-like objects, e.g.: an iron or a piece of Swiss cheese.

Though degrees of realism varied from highly practical to conceptual, if not visionary, almost all of the built solutions transformed or obscured the existing building so as to radically alter, or contrast with, its appearance. Only Marvin Watson showed such deference to the existing volume as to leave it untouched and dominant. Ian Glennie retained Birkerts's abstract block, but multiplied and telescoped it upward into a metallic zigurat, a symbolic diagram of his program for building up the museum's collection.

Apparently the abstract scalelessness, blank, inarticulate elevations and obscure entry of the existing building are no longer acceptable, for the remaining 10 buildable

solutions sought to remedy some or all of these faults. Sometimes though, as in Arquitectónica's proposal, the Birkerts building was surrounded and displayed within the new development as if the old were a period piece of abstract sculpture.

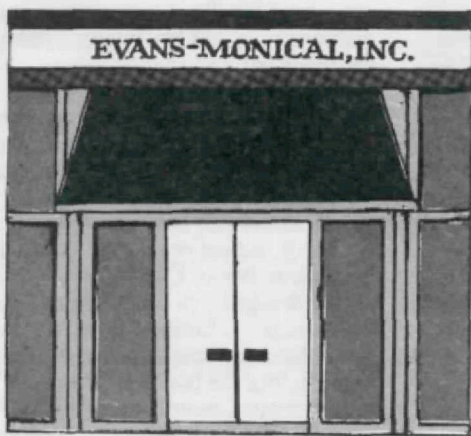
All of the buildings proposed were at least somewhat more recognizable as buildings than the original, objects of use and habitation as well as geometry. Many celebrated and made unequivocal the act of entry, while adding exhibition or activity spaces that were either external or exposed through transparency. Some exhibitors used familiar elements in such unexpected and intriguing ways as to impel the viewer into the museum by sheer force of curiosity. "Of Gardens, Galleries and Grottos" by Lonnecker + Papademetriou and Peter Waldman engulfed the existing building in an extraordinary new envelope which both concealed and revealed its contents with glimpses of promised experiential delights inside and out.

High-rise forms were posited by three exhibitors, foretelling an increasingly dense and "urban" development of the museum area. Howard Barnstone's "Muse" apartment tower piled atop the expanded existing museum 22 floors of drive-up duplexes for those auto-crazed, wealthy Houstonians who cannot bear to be parted from their cars.

Only three entrants displayed what might be called realism as their primary determinant. Among them, Anderson Todd's solution was notable for its unity. Though Rick Keating of SOM used a similar structural idea of spanning the existing volume with great trusses, the result was not a whole, but two built objects co-existing interestingly, but uncomfortably, on the site.

An overview of "Dreams and Schemes" demonstrates the extreme difficulty of adding to so totally self-contained and geometrically pure an object as Birkerts's CAM. Even the combined architectural efforts of these many talented individuals yielded few truly desirable prospects. A more foresighted, less compulsively abstract and exclusionary approach to the design of future architecture would better serve Houston's long range interests.

Lynn Bensel-Hewitt



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