

# A New School of San Antonio Architecture Emerges

**¡VIVA!**

## San Antonio

Melanie Young

Founded in 1718 as a Spanish mission station, San Antonio is one of the oldest American cities west of the Mississippi. Among large Texas and southwestern cities it is unusual not only for its antiquity, but because it has long been perceived as possessing a special character - exotic, romantic, eccentric, picturesque.

From the late 19th century onwards San Antonio has prized this character, celebrating it in guidebooks and with its spring Fiesta, an elaborate civic festival commemorating the heroism of the Alamo and of Texas's independence with a theatrical, colorful display of the city's cultural heritage - its German, Anglo, French, and above all, Spanish and Mexican roots. San Antonio has always been a city where extravagant gestures and colorful personalities translate into legend - from Davy Crockett to Teddy Roosevelt to the outspoken, charismatic O'Neil Ford, probably the only person in the United States to be declared an official National Landmark.

Yet oddly enough, the earliest attempts to express San Antonio's special character through architecture were made by outsiders: Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz of New York responded to the city's "exotic" Hispanic past with his San Antonio National Bank Building of 1886, decorated with Moorish detail; Otto Kramer of St. Louis used vestigial Spanish Baroque ornament on the upper reaches of the City Hall (1890) on Military Plaza; and the Alamo was the stated source for the splendid Southern Pacific Company Passenger Station of 1902, a Mission style complex of buildings designed by two San Francisco architects. Only after the turn of the century did San Antonio architects begin to acknowledge the possibility of local tradition with Mission and Spanish Colonial style buildings, such as the International and Great Northern Railroad Passenger Station of 1907 by Harvey L. Page (modeled on the Southern Pacific); the Municipal Auditorium of 1926, with its brightly tiled domes and twin mission towers; or the 1926 Aztec Theater by the Kelwood Company, with its colorful exotic interior. These in turn became part of a larger tradition of ornate, colorful, highly decorated buildings by local architects: James Riely Gordon, Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres, and Ralph H. Cameron, to name only the most prominent.

This larger tradition influenced the design



San Antonio National Bank Building, Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz, 1886 (Photo by Paul Hester)



Southern Pacific Railroad Station, D. J. Patterson and John D. Isaacs, 1902 (Photo by Paul Hester)

of the Paseo del Rio, conceived in 1929 by the architect Robert H. H. Hugman, but not built until 1939-1941. Its romantic Mediterranean (Spanish and classical) detailing, picturesqueness, and lush landscaping expressed, like the jazzily ornate skyscrapers going up alongside the river during this period, the city's delight in elaboration, intricacy, and theatricality. For in its heart of hearts San Antonio has always been a "baroque" city, not only in its Spanish Baroque heritage (exemplified by the sculptural decoration on Mission San José) but in its love of elaborate, exuberant, excessive detail, and all things ornate, colorful, odd, and complicated. This quality is evident not only in much of its downtown architecture, but in the meandering maze of downtown streets, in the lavishly jeweled gowns of the Fiesta "Royal Court" as it parades by on floats, and in city politics that outsiders no longer try to understand. The "baroque" tradition in San Antonio's architecture is in part an expression of the city's complex accumulation of different cultures throughout its history. From the missions to the '20s skyscrapers to the Paseo del Río, the baroque can be associated with "high" style and metropolitan prototypes in San Antonio's architectural history. Opposed to this, however, is the vernacular or "low" style that provided the foundation for a very different tradition, introduced to San Antonio by

O'Neil Ford when he moved there in 1939 to restore La Villita, a group of small mid-19th-century houses once inhabited by German and Anglo immigrants.

### The Modernist Regional School of O'Neil Ford

The simple, vernacular, "pioneer" houses of La Villita, along with the examples of mid-19th-century domestic and rural architecture that Ford admired in Castroville and its vicinity, inspired the Modernist Regionalist tradition he helped create. Ford's approach to architecture a combination of abstracted vernacular building shapes accented with sturdy handcrafted detail, regionally available materials used "honestly" (to demonstrate their natural structural properties), modern functional planning, economy, and siting that respected the land and the climate - became enshrined in the 1950s as the correct way of building in Texas and San Antonio, overshadowing for some time the baroque tradition represented by the River Walk.

By virtue of his energetic personal charm (as much as by the merits of his buildings), O'Neil Ford fathered a school of architecture of which San Antonio, because of his presence there, was the center. Ford's charisma attracted numerous disciples: according to one local

architect, "half the architects practicing in San Antonio today spent some time working for O'Neil, and those who didn't still didn't escape his influence." The Modernist Regional school that this influence created not only shaped the practice of architecture in San Antonio during the past 30 years or so, it shaped the city's view of its own architectural history, enshrining Texas pioneer architecture as the true tradition. Ford's careful restoration of La Villita's houses to their elemental vernacular appearance can be seen as a rebuke to the picturesque, Mediterranean style of Hugman's River Walk (the two projects, constructed at the same time, intersect at the Arneson River Theater) as unauthentic and theatrical.

Ford and his disciples have produced some of San Antonio's finest buildings. In numerous, uncomplicated houses where the marriage of soft-colored masonry and weathered cedar makes them look as if they sprung from the site itself; in the way the red brick and reinforced concrete buildings of Trinity University cohere and complement the steep rocky slope where they are set; in St. Mary's Hall, a graceful school of chalky-beige brick and exposed cedar organized around a tree-filled courtyard that is framed by segmental arches - in these Ford produced the tough, low-key architecture that seems so right in its suburban settings.

But the problem with laid-back, unassertive buildings based on domestic and rural vernacular prototypes is that they don't always translate well into urban settings. They sometimes appear bland in places where a more striking public presence is called for. Nor has the Modernist Regional tradition provided an adequate vocabulary for dealing with some of the building types demanded in an urban setting - for buildings that need to be massive or tall, highly visible (especially in freeway locations), or symbolic (expressive of their public role, particular subcultures, or the client's product, for example). Put another way, the school's disapproval of overt historical and cultural allusion, its distrust of monumentality, its suspicion of the public façade as deceptive and pretentious, and its insistence on abstract formal simplicity

the courtyards, mission walls, and other semi-enclosed outdoor spaces (like the River Walk or the Alamo Enclosure) that are recurring elements in San Antonio's architecture. Besides using buildings to shape space, the new school sometimes treats buildings as oversized sculpture; there is an interest in giving buildings bold, sculptural forms drawn from Modernism, or its funkier incarnations of the 1950s. To summarize, this new school of San Antonio architecture draws on an eclectic vocabulary in creating buildings that are decorative, colorful, evocative, and formally complex.

#### The New School:

##### A Step Beyond O'Neil Ford

Along with Chris Carson of Ford, Powell and Carson (the firm Ford founded), three other firms - O'Neill and Pérez; Lance,

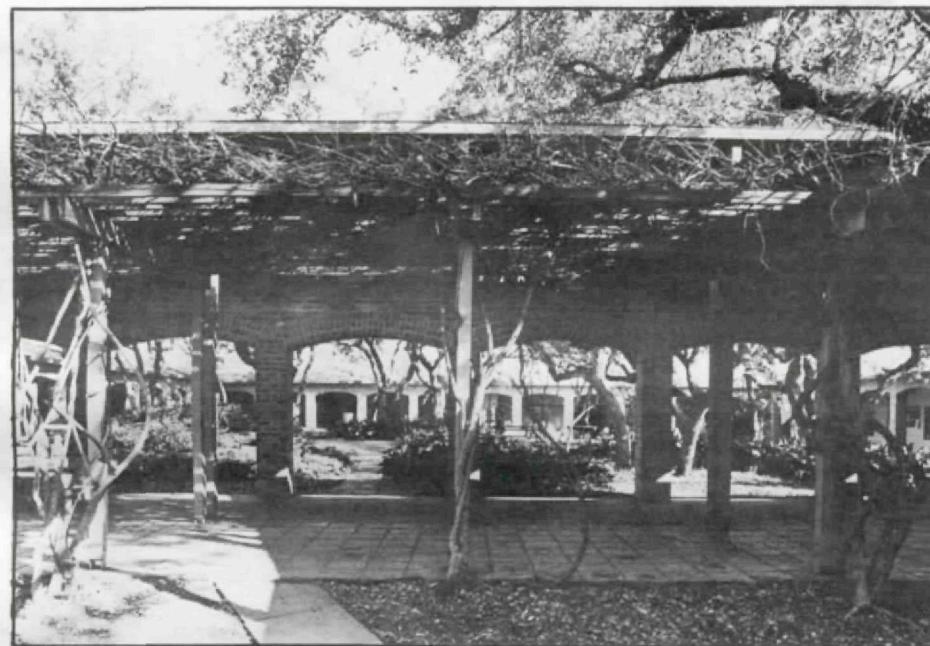
to communicate the client's technical products and image. It reads like an oversized sculpture: a planar, gridded screen punctuated with glass-block apertures provides the backdrop for a chunky pylon and a stepped mass, connected by a steel space frame that spans above the entry. Adding wit to the building's attention-grabbing image is the company's name, "MUZAK," spelled out in giant letters applied to the face of the pylon, which is crowned by a tilted satellite dish. Though clad in rough, brown tile, the Muzak Systems Building transmits a lively architectural signal to passing drivers, an appropriate sign of itself that goes beyond the Modernist Regional aesthetic without resorting to commercial flashiness.

assemble their materials to create bolder, more evocative forms in order to address the particular context.

Lance, Larcade and Bechtol use regional materials as one element in a vocabulary that is more eclectic and expansive than that of Modernist Regionalism. Like O'Neill and Pérez they often use these materials to create more complex, sculptural forms. Their work gains much of its impact from vivid contrasts of materials, textures, and colors. They are particularly adept at combining the low-key natural materials of the Ford aesthetic with brightly colored constructive elements, as in the chapel of the Convent of St. Scholastica in Boerne.

Here, in a simple rectangular structure focused internally on a floor-to-ceiling glass wall behind the altar which frames a view of a grove of trees, color-coded structural and servicing elements contrast with natural ones. The red- and yellow-painted steel roof trusses and lighting system, for instance, create an airy, three-dimensional grid that contrasts with the limestone side walls of the chapel. In the dialogue between natural and man-made elements that ensues, like answers like from opposed planes: the stone wall of one side echoes the stone wall opposite; the woods outside the altar window correspond to the wood wall at the back of the chapel; and the royal-blue carpet answers the red-and-yellow ceiling grid by completing the triad of primary colors. In the dynamic tension that results from the interaction of the unassertive natural elements and the bright man-made ones, the architecture becomes a metaphor for the spiritual dialogue that takes place within it.

Like Larry O'Neill, Andrew Pérez, Mike Lance, and John Larcade, Ken Bentley (of Ken Bentley and Associates) worked for Ford, Powell and Carson before starting his own firm. Bentley appears to be moving towards more sculptural, abstract



St. Mary's Hall, Ford, Powell and Carson and Bartlett Cocke and Associates, 1968 (Photo by Paul Hester)

prevented it from developing a vocabulary that could address the plurality of San Antonio's architectural history, culture, and urban milieu.

#### The New School

It is the recognition of this pluralism, rather than of any one tradition, that appears to be shaping a new school of San Antonio architecture today. Although a majority of its pupils have emerged from the Ford tradition and identify it as a starting point - if not the foundation - of their work, what is noticeable about the group as a whole is that its members choose eclectically among the formal elements of Regionalism, Modernism, Postmodernism, and what they interpret as San Antonio's traditions and unique character. Postmodernism's effect has been to liberate rather than dictate: it has provided the freedom to explore and respond to the city's architectural pluralism (especially its baroque tradition as well as an expanded vocabulary for articulating it).

Some of the characteristics of this school, which has emerged during the past six years, are sharp contrasts in color, materials, and textures; a penchant for gridded, skewed, and stepped configurations; and the use of layering as a compositional device (horizontal as well as planar layering). Common, inexpensive, or unconventional materials are used with zest and imagination, as are constructive elements (often brightly colored) in decorative or structurally exaggerated ways. It is an architecture that delights in allusion and symbolism, openly referring to local traditions, cultures, or the particular program. The references it makes are intended to draw the observer into a dialectic of meaning that contains a large element of "play" of humor, wit, irony, reversals, and patterns that cleverly interact. Such play makes for lively buildings, giving them an intense, active quality. Members of the new school also exhibit a concern for context and a commitment to careful urban design; many show a special interest in addressing the street (and the freeway) and like to emphasize the rituals of progression and arrival with carefully delineated outdoor spaces. Configuring buildings, walls, and the contours of the land itself to shape space and create a special sense of place is another widely shared practice, which in part alludes to

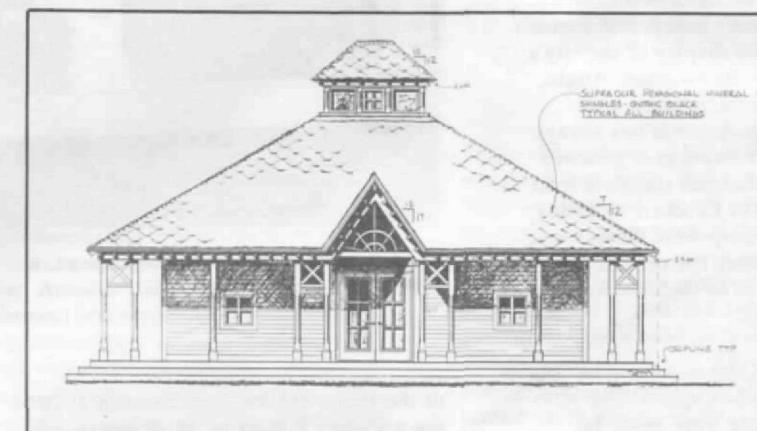
Larcade and Bechtol; and Ken Bentley and Associates - work in the spirit of Ford's Modernist Regional tradition while distancing themselves from its ideological insistence on formal simplicity, sobriety, and unassertiveness. Chris Carson's Steves House of 1965 marked the first dramatic break with tradition in its open reference to Mexican historical antecedents (including the use of actual 18th-century Mexican architectural fragments). Ford initially disapproved of the design, commenting, according to Carson, that it was "so decorative it could ruin us."

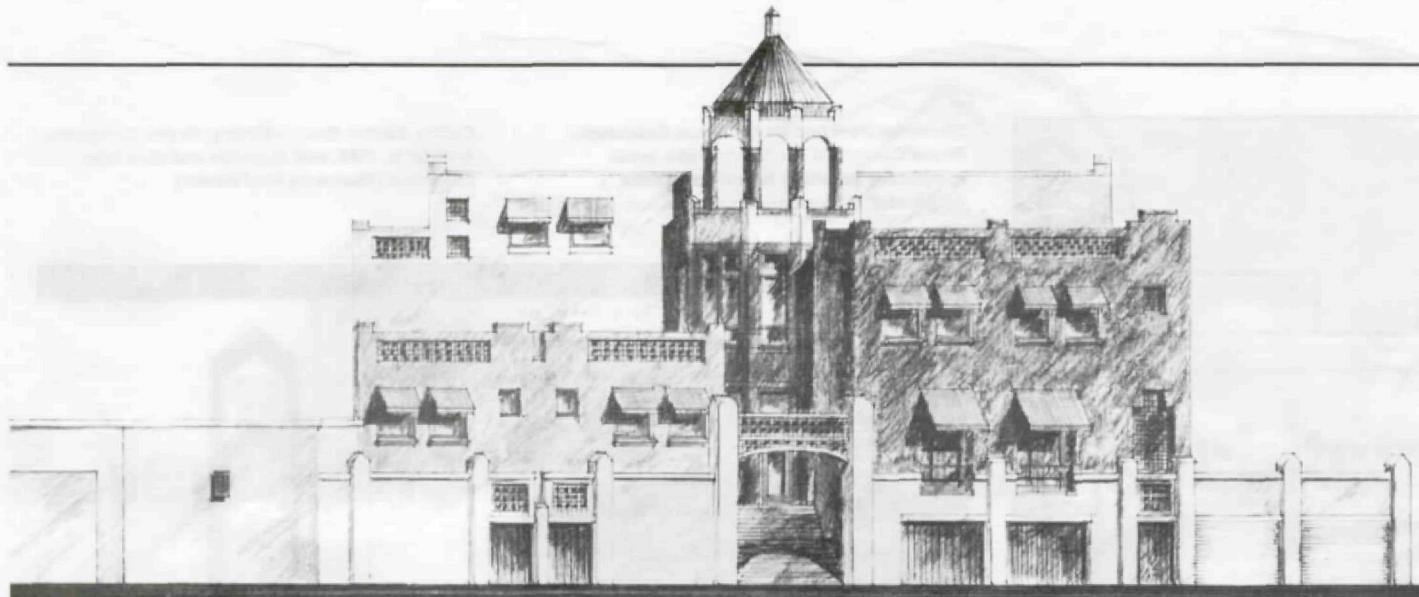
Carson's divergence from the formal precepts of Modernist Regionalism is evident in the 1983 Pace Foods plant, an industrial building (manufacturing plant, warehouse, and administrative offices) that responds to its freeway location with a strong, sleek image. Rusty orange-red awnings, window trim, and gates stand out crisply against the building's tan, stucco-finished, concrete tilt wall panels. The piquant color combination and stepped massing of the long two-story building not only add to its freeway visibility but evoke the Mexican origins of the plant's product: an orange-red Mexican hot sauce. In the Pace Foods plant Carson remained true to Ford's principles of formal and constructional economy and unpretentiousness while pursuing a vocabulary appropriate for a large industrial building along a freeway. A current project marks a further departure for Carson into color and allusion: the Fulton Beach Hotel in Rockport, which will recall a Victorian seaside hotel with its long row of narrow gables and wood siding painted in broad bands of color.

Since the early 1970s, Larry O'Neill and Andrew Pérez III, both of whom worked for Ford in the 1960s, have proceeded cautiously toward more and more formally assertive architecture. A fascination with the street, both as a site determinant and a conceptual strategy, has informed this progress. As Andrew Pérez III explains, they wanted to "put the street into buildings and create rooms outdoors" as a strategy for knitting a building into its urban surroundings.

O'Neill and Pérez's Muzak Systems Building (1983) uses the "street" as a compositional cue by addressing its freeway location with a boldness intended

Clockwise from upper left, below: Pavilion, Fulton Beach Hotel, Rockport, Ford, Powell and Carson, in design (courtesy Ford, Powell and Carson); Chapel, St. Scholastica Convent, Boerne, Lance, Larcade and Bechtol, 1980 (courtesy Lance, Andrew Pérez III, 1983 (Photos by Paul Hester)





Elevation drawing, 419 South St. Mary's Street, Alamo Architects, in design (courtesy Alamo Architects)

compositions of shapes drawn from a Modernism unalloyed by Regionalism. His compositions consist of elegant arrangements of intersecting cubes and rectangles (Oak Court Condominiums, 1980) or lean, horizontal layerings of rectilinear forms edged with slender horizontal bands to emphasize their linearity (Bentley House, Terrell Hills, 1981).

Bentley also uses his cubist geometry to manipulate light and achieve an effect he calls "transparency" - the feeling of minimal separation between inside and outside. In the Bentley House, for example, the view upon entering penetrates the long house from front to back through an enfilade of openings which frame works of sculpture in a central courtyard and in the garden at the back of the house: it is like looking through a series of transparent boxes within boxes.

Although Bentley's work is formally more complex than that of the Modernist Regional school, it maintains a connection to it through regional materials, hand-

crafted details (such as brick corbeling), and an emphasis on formal clarity and unpretentiousness.

#### The New School: A Return to Baroque Traditions

Four firms, Arrow Associates, Alamo Architects, Chumney/Urrutia, and Reyna Caragonne Architects, have found in San Antonio's baroque traditions and other influences (contextualism and Post-modernism) a clear alternative to the Modernist Regional school. They do not identify its ideology as central to their work. What concerns Arrow Associates and Alamo Architects above all is context: if they use regional materials, the rationale stems from the project's surroundings rather than allegiance to the Ford aesthetic. And in responding to the context of downtown San Antonio for two planned projects, The Riverton and a residential-office development at 419 South St. Mary's Street (both unbuilt so far), each has recovered a part of San Antonio's baroque tradition: the urbane, highly decorated skyscrapers of the 1920s, such as Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres's

neo-Gothic Smith-Young Tower and the colorful Art Deco J.M. Nix Professional Building by Henry T. Phelps, both completed in 1929.

The Riverton, by Arrow Associates (Cyrus Wagner, Sherry Kafka Wagner, and Gregory Warwick), a high-rise apartment tower planned on the River Walk, carries on the tradition of San Antonio's 1920s tall buildings with its mixed-use program and its irregular setback form, brick cladding, limestone trim, and stylized "Mayan-Deco" crown topped by a mansard roof.

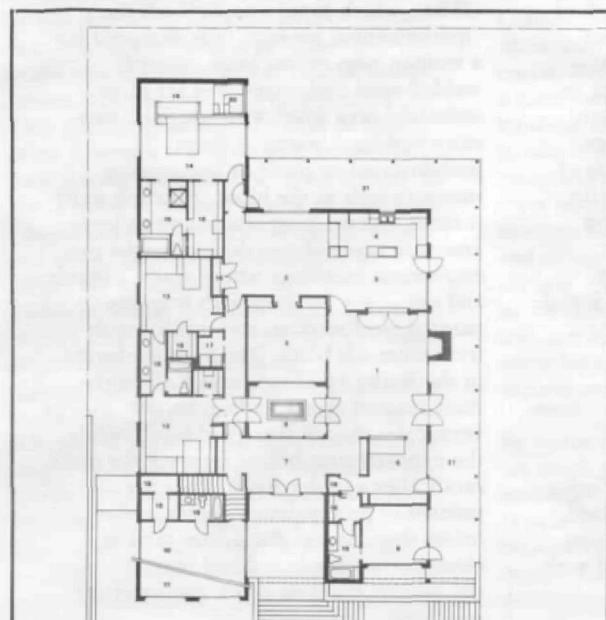
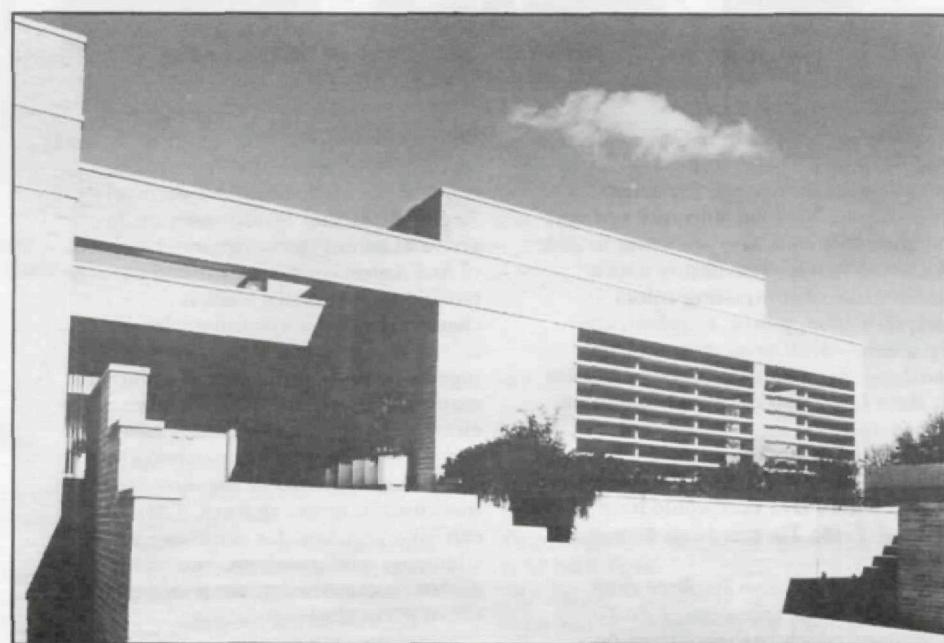
Alamo Architects (Irby Hightower, Michael Lanford, Billy Lawrence, Michael McGlone) will remodel and add another floor to a long, three-story building with narrow frontage at 419 South St. Mary's Street. Like The Riverton, this is a mixed-use residential project and it takes its contextual cues from the nearby Smith-Young Tower and the adjacent Plaza Hotel, also by Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres. The wide bands of yellow, orange, and green that will be painted on the long

side visible from the street, and the colored tile that will decorate its street façade (a wall and gateway framing an entry court) echo the green tile of the Smith-Young Tower and the Mexican tile trimming the Plaza Hotel. The project will also allude to the Smith-Young Tower's detailing with neo-Gothic style piers, an arched gateway, and an octagonal green-roofed pavilion that crowns its façade and serves as its organizing element. With its color and decorative detail the project will take its place in San Antonio's baroque tradition of colorful buildings.

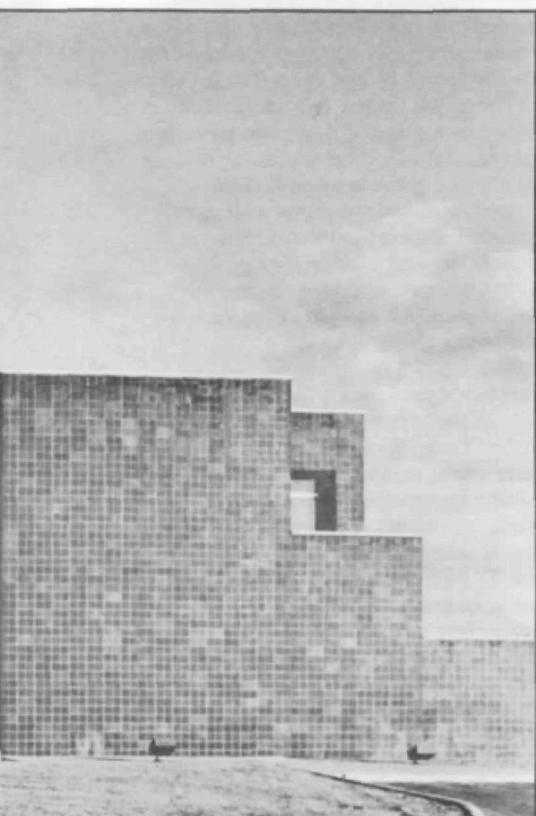
Chumney/Urrutia and Reyna Caragonne have adopted color as a key element and revel in it like merrymakers at Fiesta - Chumney/Urrutia using it in interior architectural work and Reyna Caragonne for buildings to assert a special sense of place. Walking through their projects is like entering another world, where fantasy and an atmosphere of celebration prevail.

The interiors designed by Chumney/Urrutia exhibit many of the characteristics of the new San Antonio school: brash oppositions in materials, textures, and colors; a delight in "play;" a penchant for grids, skewed elements, and planar and spatial layering; and work that is highly allusive and symbolic. Patrick Chumney and Judith Urrutia seek to create interiors with "content" - referring to the client, his product, or some key element of the program - and use inexpensive and unconventional materials with zest and ingenuity.

The opposition of vivid and muted colors prevails in the offices of the Negley Paint Company (1985), the color dialectic organized around division into reception and office areas (bright colors) and research (neutral colors). The lobby entrance, flanked by two Lucchi First chairs, greets the visitor with a dazzling array of Memphis-intense colors: black, red, blue, yellow. But what rivets attention is the undulating "river" of orange corrugated metal that seems to emerge from the blue back wall to slice through a corner of the lobby and pass through another wall. This "river of paint" sets the scene in motion: following it as it crosses over a hallway to the right, one is led in a visual dance from color to color and plane to plane, most of the surfaces punctured by niches or openings painted in contrasting colors. On the floor a checkerboard of vinyl asbestos tile, its grid slightly skewed from the right angles of the walls, shifts in color combinations as it spills across the floor. The exuberant space is the company's best advertisement.

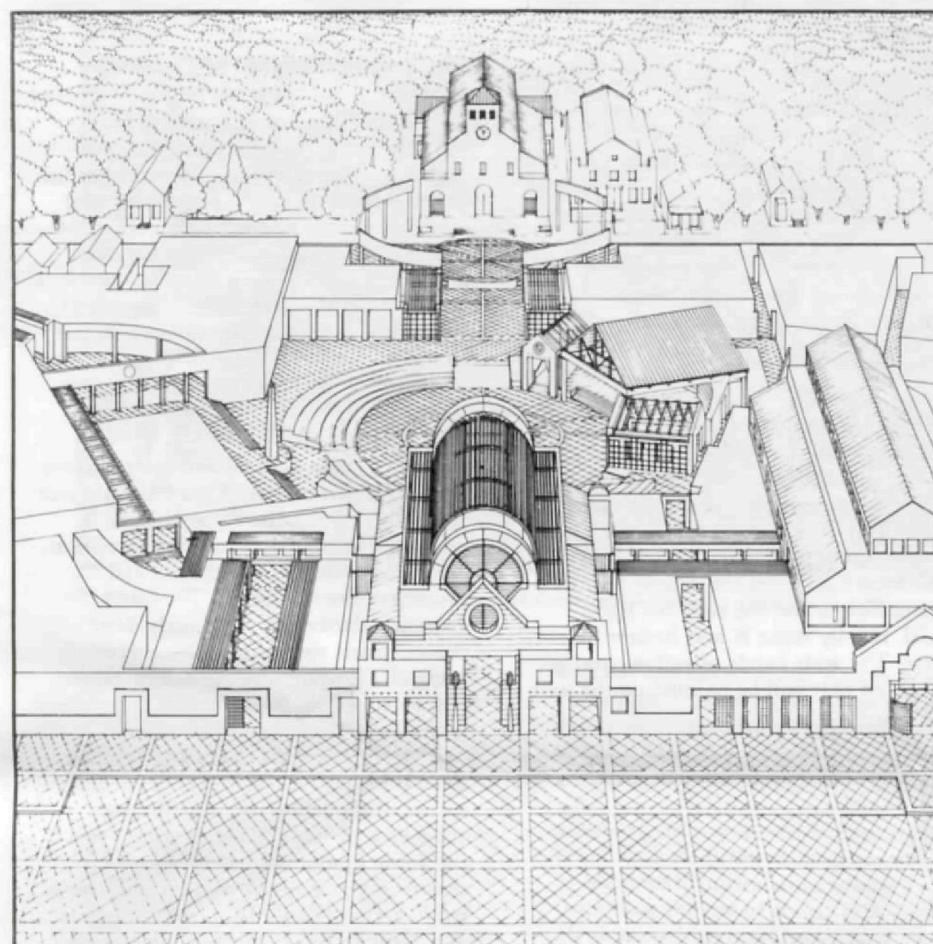


Negley Paint Company, Chumney/Urrutia, 1985  
(Photo by Paul Hester)





Clockwise from bottom left: Plaza Guadalupe, Reyna Caragonne Architects, 1984, aerial perspective (courtesy Reyna Caragonne Architects); Guadalupe Street elevation; portales;



Collins Garden Branch Library, Reyna Caragonne Architects, 1985, east elevation and view from southwest (Photos by Paul Hester)



Already an integral part of San Antonio's baroque tradition, Elías Reyna and Alexander Caragonne's Plaza Guadalupe (1985) is a colorful arrangement of shaded plazas, an open-air theater, and covered concession booths. Its brightly painted and tiled surfaces combine the festivity of a Mexican market with the ritual feeling of Hispanic courtyards and public plazas. Designed as a ceremonial plaza for outdoor festivals and events in the middle of an Hispanic neighborhood west of downtown, Plaza Guadalupe combines classical, European, and Mexican elements with a folk art-like array of colors that evoke the neighborhood and culture without resorting to kitsch. The tiled faade of the gateway structure, facing Guadalupe Street, acknowledges the use of tile on the fronts of commercial storefronts along that street, as well as on the colorful Art Deco Theater Guadalupe nearby, which Reyna Caragonne remodeled as part of the Avenida Guadalupe project. The plaza's main axis cuts through the center of the block between Leo M. J. Dielmann's Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on the north and the plain commercial structures on the south side of Guadalupe Street, symbolically spanning the project's synthesis of vernacular neighborhood elements and the baroque. Additional structures will be added to the project (a clinic by Lance, Larcade and Bechtol is scheduled for completion this year), as part of a master plan to revitalize the economically depressed neighborhood. Reyna and Caragonne were instrumental in helping the community get funding for revitalization efforts, demonstrating their commitment to addressing urban problems in San Antonio.

Reyna Caragonne's Collins Garden Branch Library (1984) displays iconic and deconstructive motifs: the masklike house-shapes above the entrance and rear elevations look as if they are about to slide upwards and away. The library uses a brilliant array of contrasting colors - violet, slate blue, yellow, eggplant, and deep green - similar to those at Plaza Guadalupe. Reyna and Caragonne explain that their foray into color and figuration was prompted by their collaboration in 1982 with Michael Graves on the San Antonio Conservation Society's plan for RepublicBank Plaza that would have saved the Texas Theater from demolition.

Chumney/Urrutia also attribute their use of color to the influence of Postmodernism, which has stimulated not only color exploration but a sense of play and exuberant celebration in the work of these firms. San Antonio has not been spared the overdose of tiresome Postmodern clichés visible in recent work in so many American cities: the northern freeway rim affords copious examples. What separates the work of this wing of the San Antonio school from such trite, superficial styling is that they use pop historical forms and allusions intelligently, purposefully, and effectively. Their architecture is experienced as joyful and as connected to its places and purposes, not merely as glib and forgettable.

**The New School:  
Bringing It All Together**  
Joneskell, a large firm headed by J. Carlos Jones and John H. Kell, Jr. that evolved, as did Chumney/Urrutia, out of Bartlett Cocke and Associates (which worked with Ford on the buildings of Trinity

University and The University of Texas at San Antonio) selects freely from the elements of Modernism, Modernist Regionalism, and Postmodernism to arrive at an energetic, original synthesis of San Antonio's vernacular and baroque traditions. Joneskell's work is characterized by a vivid interplay of colors, textures, and materials, the ingenious use of inexpensive, industrial materials, as well as colorful constructive elements, a concern for contextualism, and playfulness and wit, particularly in combining elements of the different traditions in arresting ways. They also exhibit a penchant for serrated walls, triangular configurations, and stepped and gridded compositions, often infilled with tile or glass block.

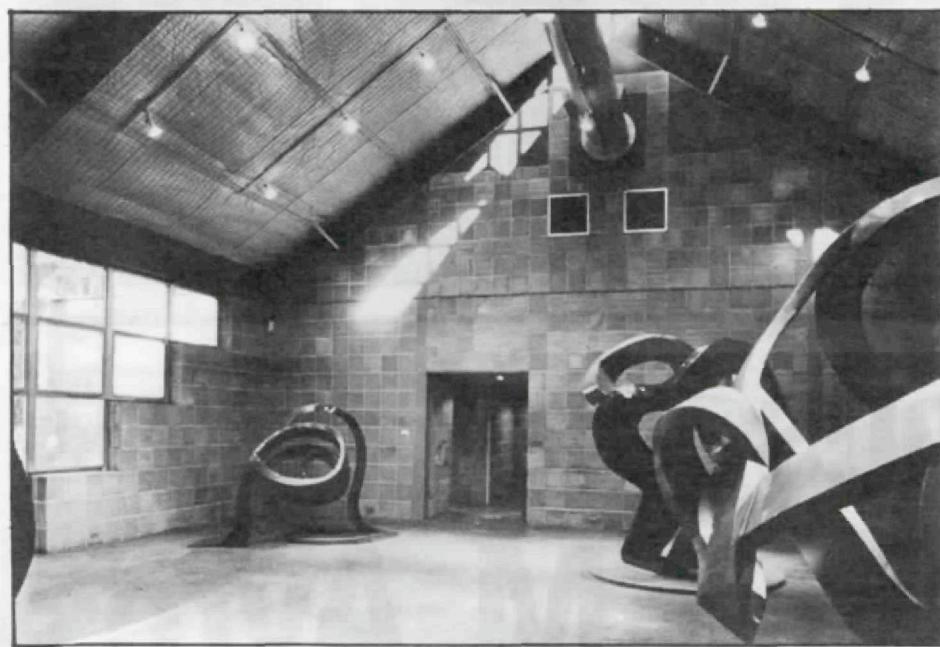
The firm's Harvey Sculpture Studio (1983), which Jones and Kell call their "quintessential project," was designed for a woman who makes huge, colored, welded-steel sculptures. It is set in an industrial area filled with one- and two-story buildings, many of them prefabricated or made of inexpensive masonry such as tile block. Alluding to its context, the working studio and gallery areas are made of two double-height pre-engineered buildings whose walls - inside and out - are outlined with brightly painted steel sections and infilled with terra-cotta tile block. The barnlike forms of the Butler buildings, says Kell, with their seamed metal roofs, echo the vernacular shapes that Ford loved, while the exposed steel beams framing the walls recall Mies van der Rohe. They are painted in pure primary and secondary colors that suggest the paints used in elementary schools, a detail that adds to the playful, building-block quality of the structure.

Aztec-like stepped patterns (made by stuccoing over some of the wall tile and painting the resulting triangular areas) decorate the gable ends of the buildings below the roof line (inside and out), while square windows in a stepped configuration around the side-facing entrance cleverly reverse the pattern by turning it upside down. Through its energetic combination of colored metal constructive elements, the building expresses its role as a studio for a sculptor who works with similar materials.

Joneskell's remodeling of, and addition to, an older, one-story brick school building, now the James K. and Mary Ruble Activities Center of Trinity Baptist Church (1984), uses some of these elements, but more sedately. For the addition, the firm again took a pre-engineered metal building, outlined the outer wall panels with steel sections painted green horizontally and coral vertically, and infilled the wall not with tile but with glass block to let in light yet diffuse the view of the parking lot.

Glass block puts on a still more lively show in the serrated outer wall of the Bartlett Cocke Jr. Construction Company, where the firm was asked to design an addition compatible with the company's offices, an old wood-framed farmhouse in what is now an industrial and warehouse area. The addition was conceived as a double ribbon of glass adjoining the house and angling around a huge oak tree to create a courtyard. Its serrated glass-block walls screen out views of the adjacent industrial tract while clear mullionless glass sheets face the courtyard. Orange-red brick, the same as that used in the farmhouse's chimney, forms other

From top to bottom: Bartlett Cocke, Jr. Construction Company Building, rear view, Chumney, Jones and Kell, 1982; Harvey Sculpture Studio, Joneskell, 1983, interior and street elevation (Photos by Paul Hester)



connecting walls, tying the two structures together, as does the standing-seam metal pitched roof, echoing the shape of the farmhouse roof and the vernacular structures Ford admired. Exposed steel beams painted a deep slate blue outline and divide the brick and glass-block walls into panels. The color combination of the brick and steel, although more intense, recalls the red brick and blue-gray metal trim of Ford's buildings at Trinity University. "A lot of our masonry and steel vocabulary we owe to O'Neil - we just put it together differently," notes Kell.

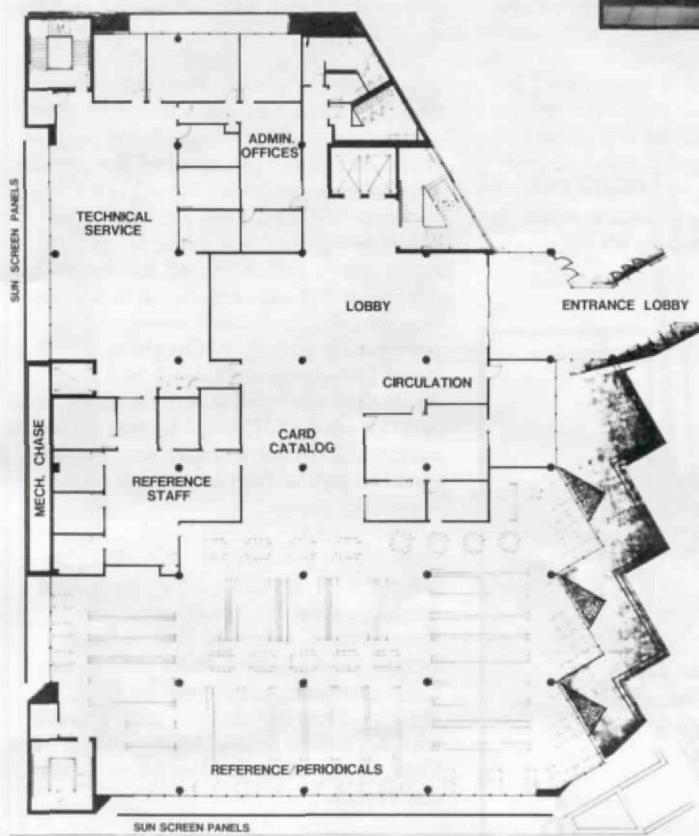
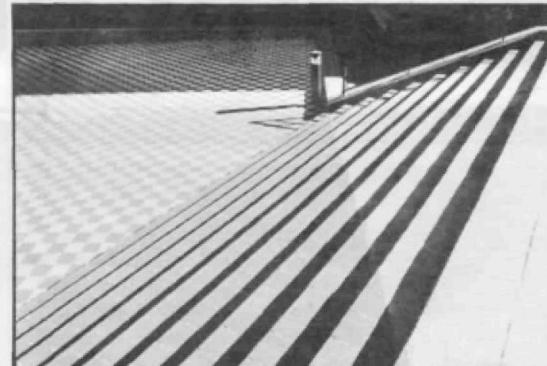
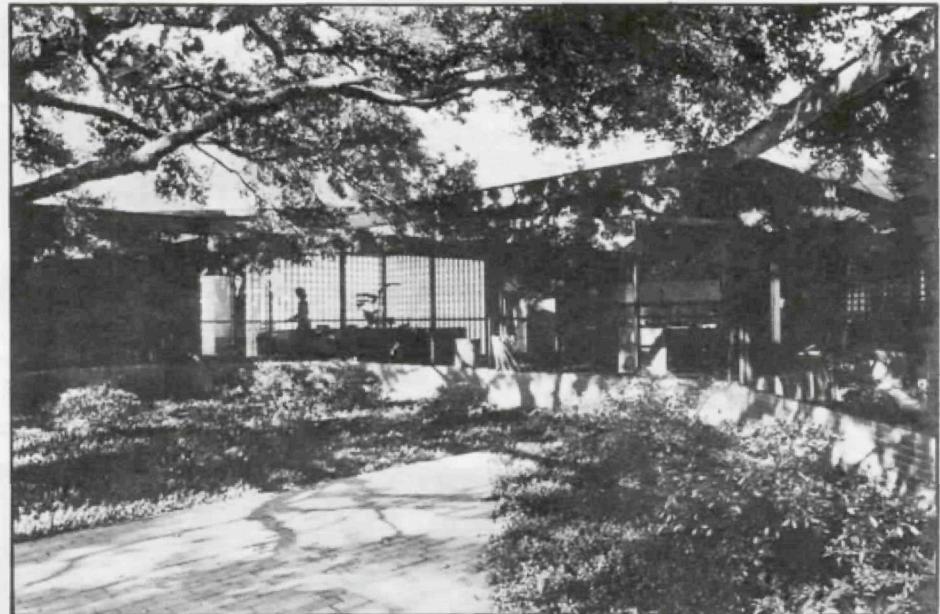
Serrated walls, tile, and glass block reappear at the Dolph Briscoe Library of The University of Texas Health Science Center (1984), a massive three-story building in the Southwest Texas Medical Center. Bands of glass block and rusty-red tile infill the large, flat, gridded east screen wall of the building, while an aggressively serrated wall of dark-tinted glass bays cantilever out from the entrance side. These three layers of dark triangular bays, alternating the angle in which they point from floor to floor, appear to be only barely restrained from shooting off into the blue by the thin layers of white concrete that support them. These jet-dark triangles suggest not only flight but the boomerang and wedge shapes of the 1950s, turned up several warps here to a new level of intensity and sophistication.

The library's entry court takes the triangle motif and combines it with the grid for a witty play of patterns using white tiles and the same dark-red tile found in the gridded screen walls: a large triangle made of the white tile leads to a checkerboard of white and red tile, which leads to a large triangle of red tile, and so on in a ritual dance that mounts the steps to the library and the adjoining lecture building.

The play with angles and triangles versus rectangles, squares, and grids stems from the building's response to its context: its entrance elevation faces the angular lecture building, while the rectilinear north elevation echoes the shape of the nearby medical school building. The massiveness of this side of the building is tempered by the flat, gridded screen east wall that projects out from the building several feet, as if floating in front of it. In the grid the thin vertical strips of reinforced concrete (the structural material of the building) appear light and almost insubstantial as they vertically intersect the broad bands of dark-red tile and glass block. The slender wedges of concrete sandwiching the rows of cantilevered bay windows have the same paradoxical appearance of lightness, making the obsidian glass they hold seem the stronger material.

But if the library wittily reverses the apparent densities of concrete and glass, it performs a virtuoso dance with tile, using it as wall, entry courtyard, and lobby floor surface, where it is laid in geometrically patterned rectangles resembling Navajo rugs: a large one in the middle of the lobby, a smaller one in front of the elevator, and a narrow one down a hallway. These *faux* rugs also bring to mind the tile in the gridded screen walls that seem to hover in front of the building, an association that sparks a cognitive dilemma: materials are not quite what they seem.

Joneskell produces another playful dialectic with materials at the Sarita (Continued on page 23)



From top to bottom: Bartlett Cocke, Jr. Construction Company Building, courtyard view; Dolph Briscoe Library, The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Chumney, Jones and Kell and Phelps and Simmons and Garza, 1982, entry court elevation; (left) detail of entry court paving; (right) detail of lobby paving (Photos by Paul Hester); below: main floor plan (courtesy Joneskell)

# ¡VIVA!

## San Antonio

(Continued from page 17)

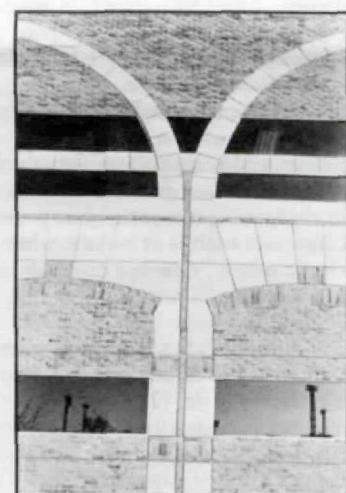
Kenedy East Law Library at St. Mary's University (1984). Here the play, acted out by a series of arches and horizontal bands that dance decorously around the two-story building, focuses on the conventional use of brick, glass, and cast stone. The basic pattern of two segmental arches within a larger round arch, all three intersected by two horizontal strips, varies from elevation to elevation. For example, the west wall displays white stone arches set into the solid red-orange brick wall and filled almost entirely with brick except for the two bands of glass that intersect them. At this point it is not clear whether the arches are structural or merely decorative. Their repetition and sharp delineation against the darker brick gives them the crispness and playfulness of unfolded paper cutouts. The teasing riddle of their function is compounded by a real segmental arch, of the same scale as those in the wall, standing like a ceremonial gateway over the sidewalk leading to the library. This *real* arch supports nothing beyond itself, whereas what look like *faux* arches may turn out to be structural elements. Pressing on to the north elevation and the entrance, one finds that the spaces between the arches are filled with glass instead of brick, while strips of brick rather than glass sail through the glass in an exaggeratedly non-structural way, as if it were paint or the kind of stone veneer that Ford liked to dismiss as "peanut brittle." By using brick in this "heretical" way the architects play with the Modernist Regional tenet that brick, to be used honestly, must arch over openings, not speed straight across them or whiz through glass. Continuing on to the far east wall, one finds that the arches have disappeared, leaving only the solid glass bands. The now-you-see-it, now-you-don't quality of the walls' witty striptease, where brick becomes weightless and glass almost solid, also has a symbolic role: the glass strips alone mark the side of the library housing the administrative offices, whereas the arches denote the reading rooms and stacks.

The two types of arches also have a contextual function: through them the building alludes to and knits together two different periods of campus architecture: the round arches from the oldest, the segmental ones referring to more recent structures in the style of the Modernist Regional school, which widely used the flat arch during the 1960s. The arch motif also suggests the firm's synthesis of San Antonio's baroque and vernacular traditions: the round arch a baroque element, the segmental one part of the vernacular tradition.

Sarita Kenedy East Law Library, St. Mary's University, Joneskell, 1984. From top to bottom: Detail of curtainwall; west elevation and portal; view from southwest (Photos by Paul Hester)

Together the three images (two types of arches and horizontal strips) also demonstrate the ease with which the firm moves among the different vocabularies of the Ford aesthetic (segmental arches), Modernism (the rectilinear strips), and Postmodernism (the round arches) to arrive at a new synthesis. Indeed, the outstanding quality of this library is the way it gracefully knits such elements together. The building's achievement is not only the fluidity of its synthesis, but being both contextual and dramatic in its own right. The arches are at the heart of the building's paradoxical fusion of seemingly opposed attributes: they confer a dignity befitting a place for the study of law, while their playful variations provide that other important and elusive quality: delight.

O'Neil Ford's legacy still stands and probably will weather as gracefully as his buildings. Rather than repudiating it, most members of the new school treat its elements as part of a larger vocabulary. For what unifies this school more than anything else is its eclecticism. Rather than being guided by any particular ideology, they take a pragmatic, flexible, job-specific approach to each project. Uninhibited by rigid formal or ideological criteria, they have freed themselves to explore different directions and respond to context, program, and San Antonio's urban milieu with zest and ingenuity. Through the use of color, formal complexity, and play the architects of this school have created dramatic, lively buildings that address their surroundings with assertive presence and pizzazz. By retrieving San Antonio's baroque tradition as part of their vocabulary, they have found a larger, more flexible language for expressing San Antonio's cultural and architectural pluralism, urban complexity, and special sense of place. ■



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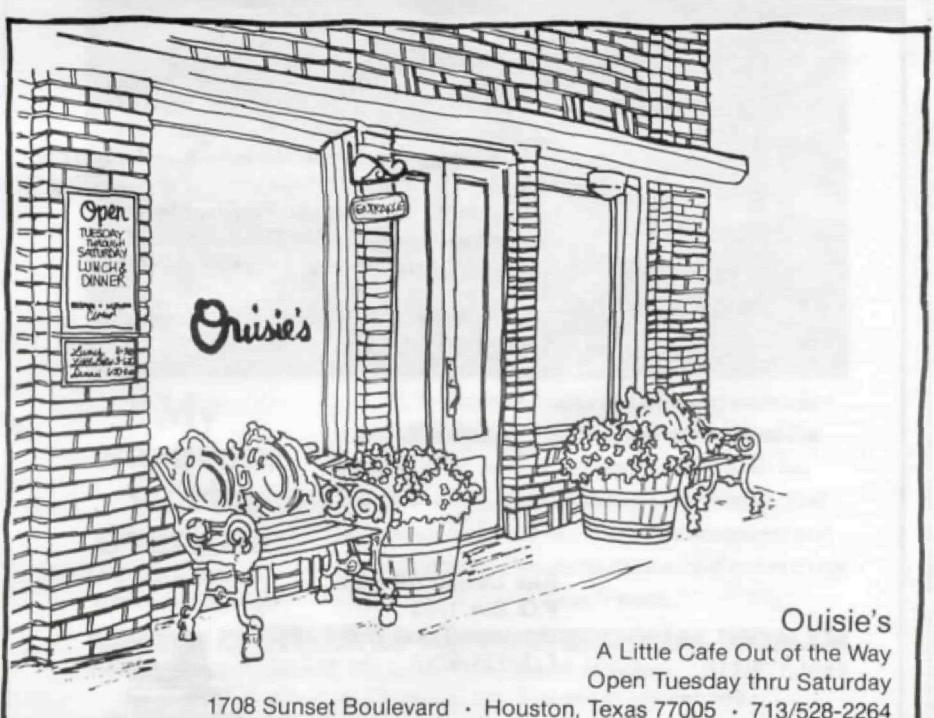
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