

HindCite

Cite at Five

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Five years may not seem like a very long time in the grand scheme of things, but when measured in Houston time, it seems like an entire generation. And in terms of a publication, five years can seem like an eternity. Considering that the life span of volunteer publications is shorter than the average new television sit-com, it is with some satisfaction that we look back over 18 issues of *Cite*, which have brought us from the modest proposal of a few interested people back in 1982 to this present fifth anniversary issue.

Much has happened over these five years. From the present vantage point, it is worth remembering that among the pressing issues facing us in 1982 was the fact that Houston's growth was not yet so much affected by the limitations of an economic downturn as by the limitation of the city's sewage capacity. This meant that the city that was springing up everywhere might actually have to address the extent of its growth and begin to plan for the future. Houston, the sprawling city that had captured America's imagination in a love-hate relationship, was perhaps reaching the point where the question was no longer "how big?" but what kind of city this was to be.

Such were the concerns of a planning committee from the board of directors of the Rice Design Alliance which gathered in late spring of 1982 to lay the groundwork for a new publication that would become the architecture and design review of Houston. This group, comprising *Cite's* first editorial committee, had varying ideas and approaches, but it was united in the belief that the City of Houston was unique, full of potential, and more than a little audacious, and a critical review might help to make its growth all more understandable. The discussions were marked by an optimistic desire that the publication would reach those who cared about Houston and thus would make a difference in the continued building and re-building of the city.

A strategy for funding what was envisioned to be a modest undertaking was planned through the solicitation of advertising, the raising of subscriptions, and the setting aside of a percentage of RDA membership dues for the publication. The first hurdle was giving the new publication a name. The "Architecture and Design Review of Houston" seemed a bit dry by itself, though that would ultimately become *Cite's* surname. "Sprawl" was suggested, enjoying some popularity before being rejected as at least as applicable to Los Angeles as Houston. "Radar," an acronym for "Rice Design Alliance Architecture Review," also was turned down. Finally the group settled on *Cite*, a name which reverberated with homonyms: "site" or "sight" or, if you prefer, "cité." The fun was only beginning. Soon there would be departments and columns appearing whose headings played on the new journal's name: *Citelines*, *Citeations*, *CiteSeeing*, *Big Cité Beat*, *Citesurvey*, *HindCite*, *ForeCite*, *UnCitely*, *Re:Cite*, *Out of Cite* and even *OverCite* to cover additions and corrections.

The first issue in August 1982 presented the unlikely image of a City of Houston manhole cover on the front page and the lead article was entitled "Trading Toilets: The Subterranean Zoning of Houston." The article described how the limitation of sewage capacity inside Loop 610, but not including the central business district, was stifling development. But the virtually unlimited capacity outside the loop and within downtown was allowing relentless and uncontrolled development. That issue also included an interview with Cesar Pelli, the architect of Four Leaf Towers, Four Oaks Place, and Herring Hall at Rice University; a review of the recently announced designs by Renzo Piano for The Menil Collection; a planning prescription for downtown; an article entitled "Drafting for Dollars;" and a photo essay on Bay Ridge near La Porte, Texas. That mix of articles - planning, architecture, the urban environment, the city's past, and preservation - established a pattern that *Cite's* editors have followed for the last five years.

The momentum picked up quickly with the publication of a special issue on the Metropolitan Transit Authority's 1982 plan to build a rail line from southwest Houston to downtown. Referred to by the editorial committee as the "emergency issue," it was produced in two weeks. Of concern to the editors was the impact of an elevated rail over Main Street downtown. While far from being opposed to rail or mass transportation per se, the board of the Rice Design Alliance took issue with Metro over what was viewed as a hastily conceived plan. An editorial recommended tabling the plan largely because of its impact on a historic section of Main Street. The special issue was timed to coincide with an upcoming vote in Houston's City Council, a vote that would defeat the overhead rail proposal. Thus began *Cite's* ongoing concern with Houston's transportation problems. The Spring 1983 issue contained "Congestive Failure," a report on the Houston Chamber of Commerce's Regional Mobility Plan, and this was followed two years later in the Fall 1985 issue with an article entitled "The METRO Regional Plan 1985," reporting on Metro's plan for major transportation corridors and transit facilities. An article in this Fifth Anniversary Issue describes how far Metro has come from its plans of 1982, with a feature article on the agency's current proposals - a light rail system to supplement what has become one of the nation's best-run bus systems.

By Fall 1983, *Cite* had become a regularly scheduled quarterly publication, with guest editors taking charge of each issue. That issue featured material relating to historic preservation in downtown Houston. In subsequent issues, articles related to a selected theme would be tied together in the "feature well," the center section of *Cite*. Advocacy-oriented topics, such as the sad state of housing in Allen Parkway Village and in the Fourth Ward, were balanced with more descriptive or historically related subject matter as in the Fall 1984 issue, which devoted its feature section to Houston in the 1950s.

The themes have been diverse and not necessarily connected, expressing the interests of the editors and writers at a particular moment. Thus, the phenomenon of the "tall building" in Houston (Spring-Summer 1984) would be followed by an issue featuring architecture and growth

outside Loop 610 (Summer 1985), and architectural theory and ideas (Winter 1985). The Spring 1986 *Cite* featured material on San Antonio's architecture in an issue planned to coincide with the American Institute of Architects' annual convention meeting in that city. Topics from planning in Houston (Fall 1985) to housing in Houston (Spring 1985) to neighborhoods in Houston (Winter 1986) have also provided feature material for *Cite*. The Summer 1986 issue presented a cache of literary articles on Houston by local writers together with a collection of photographs. In addition, there have been reviews of current events on the architectural and city scene as well as reviews of books and gallery exhibitions devoted to architecture, planning, or design. *Cite* has sought out photography exhibitions for review, particularly when they have had a strong architectural or urban-related theme. Articles have always been accompanied by professional photography.

Including the current anniversary issue, *Cite* has been published 18 times over the past five years at a cost of approximately \$14,000 per issue with a press run of 11,000 copies. Most issues have run 24 pages; the length of an issue is determined not so much by available subject matter or articles, but by funds from advertising revenues. *Cite* is not self-sustaining but is strongly dependent upon the RDA membership as well as grants from the Cultural Arts Council and the Brown Foundation. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of a group of RDA supporters who put on the Fight for *Cite* gala in June, the publication is back in the black after missing the Summer 1987 issue due to financial problems.

What is missing from this summary of the last five years is a mention of all the writers, editors, photographers, designers, and staff without whose contributions there would be no *Cite*. It is noteworthy that the majority of the magazine's writing, production, and editing are done on a voluntary basis, with the able assistance of a part-time managing editor, graphic designer, and photographer. On occasion a writer has been given a modest honorarium when *Cite* editors think an invited professional writer or journalist is needed to cover an important story. But perhaps the most revealing observation to be made about *Cite* contributors is their relative youth. Indeed, their average age is probably 35, and in the first years their average age was probably closer to 30. That is where this HindCite will end, with the hope that *Cite* will always be a place of youthful idealism and that its vitality will never stagnate. For that to happen, though, a new generation of contributors must come along. And from the viewpoint of this generation, I hope the next five years are as provocative as the last. ■

