

RE: CITE 30

Stephen Fox's article in the recent issue of *Cite* (Spring-Summer 1993) on the Kraigher House, designed by Richard Neutra in 1937, was of particular interest to me. He states, "Neutra never traveled to Brownsville." That is correct if one considers only the time during construction. Neutra did visit the house in 1951, 14 years later.

While serving as an associate architect in the Austin firm of Fehr and Granger, I became aware of a proposed addition to the McAllen Municipal Hospital and that architects were to be interviewed for selection. Charles Granger, FAIA, knew Neutra and solicited his participation as an associated architect. Neutra assented, and after appearing before the selection committee (the job went to Ford and Colley even though Neutra handed the three-member committee copies of *Time* magazine with his picture on the cover) asked if we could drive him to Brownsville to see a house he had designed but had never seen. Charles Granger and I agreed, and we drove to the address he gave. As we pulled into the driveway, Neutra was visibly shaken by what he saw. The white stucco was badly discolored, with massive cracking. Charlie and I were shocked, Neutra was appalled.

But Neutra was the master of the moment. As he stood looking over his woefully dilapidated creation, he said: "It is aging beautifully! It is wonderful!" I learned much from his marvelous sense of bravado, and that there was no time for humility. It was aging beautifully like some past lover.

Neutra then walked to the door, pushed the doorbell, and, when the lady of the house appeared, proudly introduced himself in his elegant Continental manner: "I am Richard Neutra, the architect who designed this house many years ago. May we come in?" We did go in, had a pleasant tour, and left for McAllen after about 30 minutes. The Kraighers had gone and the name of the lady of the house I cannot recall. Neutra never mentioned the house again during his stay in Texas. I did see him several times over the years, and as late as 1967 we talked about our trip to Brownsville.

So in 1951, as now in 1993, the Kraigher House was in bad condition. I hope that this fine example of modern architecture can be restored and maintained. It is an outstanding monument of its time.

This is a footnote to Stephen Fox's excellent article. I have told this same story to Dr. Jay Henry, the architectural historian whose new book on *Texas Architecture* (University of Texas Press, 1993) includes photographs of the house.

George S. Wright FAIA
Arlington, Texas

DOWN WITH THE SOUTHWEST FREEWAY

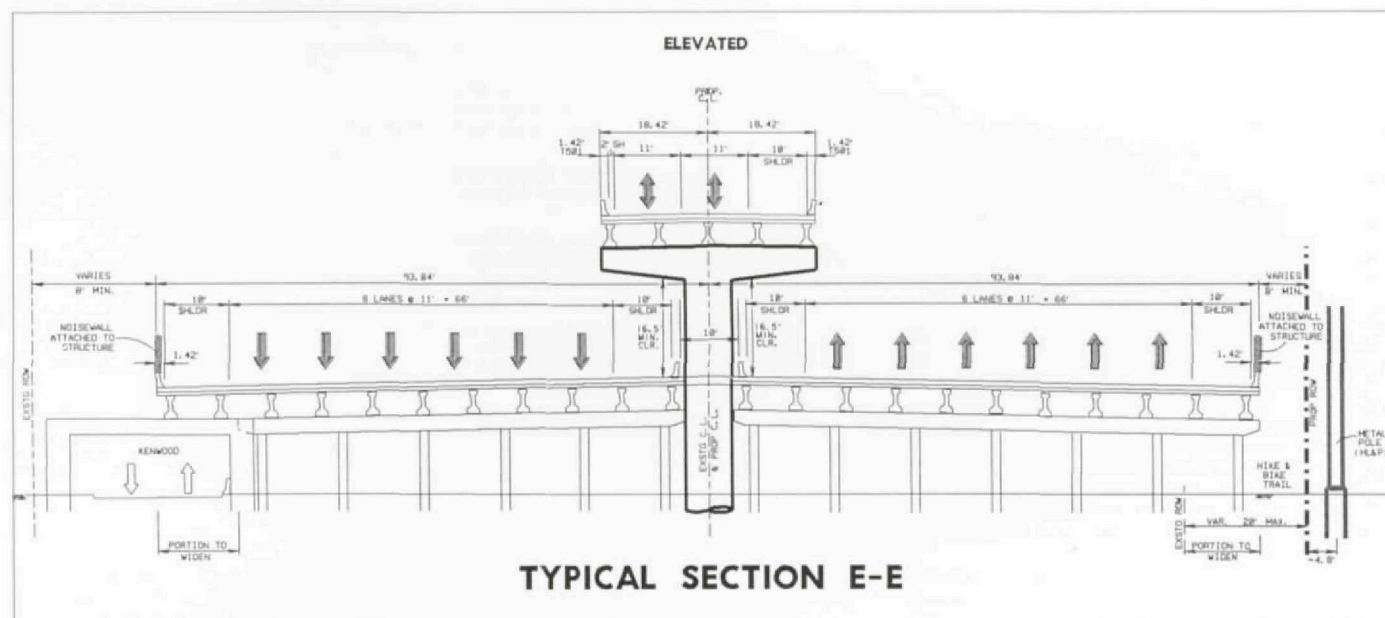
Deyan Sudjic, the London architectural critic and editor, in his recent assessment of Houston and other cities of the late 20th century suggests that the best hope for achieving a measure of quasi-urban grace here lies in the nurturing of our tree-lined boulevards. These, he argues, can provide a setting for the kind of public life the city now experiences only in bits and pieces. Montrose is the only boulevard Sudjic mentions by name in this connection, citing its tentative sprinkling of cafes and the long-running Museum of Fine Arts, with its Mies van der Rohe pavilion and gardens fore and aft. Montrose and Renzo Piano's Menil Collection, located in a "leafy suburb" nearby, he suggests, provide "coordinates" around which Houston may "one day begin to solidify," although vision is still needed to make that happen.

Unfortunately, since the opening of the Southwest Freeway in the early 1960s, Montrose Boulevard and its environs have been assaulted in the most obnoxious manner by ten lanes of elevated expressway that ascend from a comparatively benign open-cut configuration to form a viaduct just east of Mandell that overbears Montrose, Main Street, and much of the old South End with noise and fumes before dipping below grade once more to intercept State Highway 288. Equally offensive is the underside of this viaduct – a dank, hypostyle no-man's-land that few care to use even for parking (although the homeless are out in force at Fannin and San Jacinto). At a time when other cities are dismantling elevated expressways (Boston, San Francisco) and covering over depressed ones with parks (Seattle, Phoenix, Duluth, San Diego, Hartford), the Texas Department of Transportation seeks to compound rather than rectify its longstanding abuse of Montrose and Main Street by adding additional elevated lanes on either side of the offending viaduct and by superimposing a third-level high-occupancy-vehicle lane down its middle. The cost of adding insult to injury is projected at \$30.7 million – approximately a

tenth of what the Department of Transportation plans to spend on Houston highways in 1994. (Metro is contributing the \$9.6 million cost of the HOV lane; the rest of the project is funded by TDOT.) Construction will take 18 to 24 months, if work commences as planned late in 1995.

The cost of demolishing the elevated section of the Southwest Freeway and replacing it with below-grade traffic lanes covered over by a grassy, tree-lined mall is perhaps four times greater than the Department of Transportation's Rube Goldberg approach. But it would be money well spent in consideration of what Montrose Boulevard and its environs already represent to the city (even from a stranger's perspective), no less than what they might someday become if given the chance. In rethinking the project, careful consideration should also be given to improving the on- and off-ramp-access characteristics of Montrose and Main Street, something the current plans also neglect to remedy. Federal ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) funds might be used to help defray some of the added expense, as would increased tax revenues from properties whose valuation continues to be depressed by the effect of the freeway in its current form. In no case should public expense of any sort be incurred in making the Southwest Freeway even more offensive than it already is to this particularly promising slice of Houston, even if the project must be deferred until sufficient appropriations are available to allow it to be done right the second time.

One of the mottoes inscribed in the foyer of City Hall comes from another distinguished English critic, John Ruskin, who wrote in the mid-19th century, before the streets of Houston had even begun to be paved, "When we build, let us think that we build for ever." Perhaps it needs to be added to the lobby of the Texas Department of Transportation too.



Texas Department of Transportation, proposed section, Southwest Freeway expansion, 1992.

Spring Architecture Events

Rice Design Alliance
P.O. Box 1892
Houston, Tx 77251-1892
(713) 524-6297

Spring Lecture Series:

Virtual City. A five-part lecture series that will explore the effects of the new technologies of communication and information exchange on urban life. The series will include the following speakers:

23 February – Deyan Sudjic, editor and critic. His latest book, *The 100 Mile City*, reviewed in this issue, chronicles the new shape of the world's great cities in the postindustrial age.

2 March – Bruce Sterling, science fiction writer. His most recent book, *The Hacker Crackdown*, describes the law enforcement and computer-crime activities that led to the creation of the Electronic Frontier Foundation in 1990.

9 March – Howard Rheingold, editor of the *Whole Earth Review*, a consultant to the U.S. Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, and the author of numerous books, including *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, reviewed in this issue.

23 March – Bruce Tomb and John Randolph, principals in the firm of Interim Office of Architecture (IOOA) in San Francisco. Their recent work explores architectural space constructed through the electronic feedback of urban phenomena.

30 March – Sanford Kwinter, 1993–94 Cullinan Professor of Architecture at Rice University, cofounder and editor of *ZONE*, a serial publication of philosophy and contemporary culture, and editor of *Zone Books*, a collection of 20th-century documents in philosophy, ethnology, and history.

All lectures will be given at the Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 8 p.m. This series is made possible by generous grants from Compaq Computer Corporation, Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, and the Texas Committee for the Humanities, and by support from the Corporate Members of the Rice Design Alliance and the City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council.

6 March – 3 April

Cinemarchitecture V: Virtual City, a film series in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The following films will be featured:

6 March – *Entr'acte* and *Blade Runner*
13 March – *Prospero's Books*
20 March – *Strictly Propaganda: The Rise and Fall of a Totalitarian State* and *The Architecture of Doom*
27 March – *Videodrome*
3 April – *Kisbo Kurokawa* and *The Icicle Thief (Il Ladro di Saponetti)*

All films on Sunday evenings at 7 p.m., Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. For weekly film information, call (713) 639-7515.

23–24 April

Tin Houses: An Architecture Tour and Fireside Chat. Sheet metal usually has been associated with farm or industrial buildings, but recently it has been used successfully in domestic architecture (see "Powers of Tin," p. 40).

The Rice Design Alliance will hold its 17th annual architecture tour on **Saturday and Sunday, 23 and 24 April, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. each day.** This year's tour will highlight six sheet-metal houses in Houston's West End, a series of late-19th- and early-20th-century Houston neighborhoods located on the north bank of Buffalo Bayou. At its center is the oldest of these neighborhoods, the A. Brunner Addition, platted in 1888. Brunner, as the subdivision was commonly known, set the pattern for future development in the West End: a right-angled grid of streets, blocks bounded by open drainage ditches, and white-painted wood cottages with front porches that housed families of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, but all of modest means. This historic landscape persists in Brunner and its successors, Magnolia Grove to the east and the Rice Military Addition to the west, even though Houston has encircled them and transposed them from beyond the outskirts of town to the heart of the city over the course of the 20th century.

During the past 20 years, the West End has acquired a new identity as Houston artists, in search of attractive, affordable, well-located working and living places, have moved in. Signaling their arrival has been the development of a distinct West End architectural style, evident in the pre-engineered metal-shed structures that dot the neighborhood. This unpretentious neighborhood is where some of the most exciting and unconventional experiments in Houston domestic architecture occur.

The tour is open only to RDA members and guests. Memberships are available on the tour and include a complimentary tour ticket. The following houses will be included:

5003 Blossom, Urban Architecture, architect, with Ian Glennie, 1984
5421 Dickson, Natalye Appel, architect, 1992
5420 Floyd, Frank Zeni, architect, 1990
5423 Gibson, Cameron Armstrong, architect, 1993
802 Knox, Val Glitsch, architect, 1992
507A Roy Street, S. I. Morris Associates (Eugene Aubry), architects, with Ian Glennie, 1974

19 April

Tin Houses: A Fireside Chat. Tin house architects and homeowners will participate in a moderated discussion about the phenomenon of house design using galvanized sheet iron as an architectural material.

Rice Media Center,
Rice University,
entrance #8 off
University Boulevard,
7:30 p.m.

20 May – July 1
Best-Laid Plans: Buildings and Projects by Houston Architects and Designers. RDA, in association with Lawndale Art and Performance Center, presents an exhibition of built and unbuilt work by Houston architects and designers. A catalogue will accompany the exhibition.

For more information about these programs, please call the Rice Design Alliance, (713) 524-6297.

Rice University School of Architecture
P.O. Box 1892
Houston, Texas 77251-1892
(713) 527-4864

The Rice School of Architecture introduces **Friday @ Five**, a series of lectures for spring 1994. The participants are Lars Lerup, dean, Rice School of Architecture (January 21); Scott Strasser, architect (February 11); Bruce Mau, graphic designer (February 11); Christian Hubert, architect, Los Angeles (February 18); Aaron Betsky, architectural critic, Los Angeles (February 25); John Biln (March 11); Rodolphe El Khoury, historian, Princeton University (March 18); Spencer Parsons, professor, Rice School of Architecture (March 25); and Karen Bermann, professor, Iowa State University (April 8).

18 March – 30 April

The Architecture of Light and Color. An exhibition open to the public, in the Farish Gallery of the School of Architecture.

University of Houston
College of Architecture
Houston, Texas 77204-4431
(713) 743-2400

28 March – 3 April

Tension Builds. A multidimensional sound collage, structural installation, and performance (1 April at 8 p.m.) dedicated to the music and memory of John Cage. In the Atrium, UH College of Architecture. Please call the college for times.

10–14 April

Jefferson Week Lectures. In the Theater, College of Architecture. Call for speakers and times.

Sally Walsh Lectures in Interior Design: The Realm of the Interior.

31 March – James Coote, Cass Gilbert Professor of Architecture, University of Texas at Austin, will speak on "The Technique of Illusion: Robert Adam at Osterley Park."

7 April – Charles Kifer, director of design for the Houston office of Gensler & Associates, Architects.

21 April – Frances Halsband, partner, R. M. Kliment & Frances Halsband, Architects, New York, and Dean of Architecture, Pratt University, New York, will hold "A Conversation About Collaboration."

All lectures will be held at the College of Architecture, University of Houston, at 7:30 p.m. The Sally Walsh Lectures are sponsored annually by the Houston Architecture Foundation.

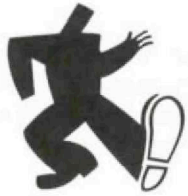
9 and 10 April

Woodland Heights House and Garden Tour. The Woodland Heights Civic Association will introduce its spring tour of houses with a lecture by Stephen Fox, "Origins of the Woodland Heights and Its Place in Houston Development," at 12 noon, 9 April, at Travis Elementary School, 3311 Beauchamp. The tour follows and will take place from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, 9 and 10 April.

Woodland Heights, begun in 1907, incorporated comprehensive deed restrictions and extensive planning, including a neighborhood landscaping plan that remains evident in the majestic canopy of live oaks lining Bayland Avenue. Its architectural legacy still stands in rows of Craftsman bungalows and houses of other styles, which are being renovated at a furious clip.



Bennett House and Studio, 802 Knox, Val Glitsch, architect, 1992.



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RDA Honors Constantine S. Nicandros at the Ball of Energy

The Rice Design Alliance held its most successful fundraising event ever on Friday, 12 November 1993, when more than 550 RDA supporters gathered at the Doubletree Post Oak Hotel for the Ball of Energy, chaired by Yvonne and Scott Ziegler. Net proceeds from the ball totaled \$120,000, which will help fund RDA programs and *Cite* magazine.

The evening's theme was a salute to the energy industry, which has shaped Houston's magnificent skyline, endowed public art, enhanced city parks, and provided the city with green spaces. RDA recognized the industry's contributions in a video prepared especially for the evening by writer and director Barrie Scardino. The Rice Design Alliance hopes this recognition will encourage more environmental awareness, promote design excellence, and stimulate greater participation by the energy industry to enhance the quality of life for future generations.

The 1993 RDA Award for Design Excellence was given to Constantine S. Nicandros, president and CEO of Conoco and vice-chairman of DuPont, for his commitment to urban design, the built environment, and the arts. RDA president Leslie Davidson presented the award, a Steuben bowl donated by Neiman Marcus.

Constantine Nicandros and his company have demonstrated leadership in adopting environmentally responsible measures for the industry and setting high corporate standards of quality by creating an exemplary working environment for Conoco employees. It was through Nicandros' influence that Conoco commissioned architect Kevin Roche of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo & Associates, the 1982 Pritzker Prize winner and American Institute of Architects 1993 Gold Medalist, to design its headquarters building, completed in Houston's energy corridor in 1985.

The Rice Design Alliance would like to thank gala chairs Scott and Yvonne Ziegler, auction chair Valerie Vaughn, underwriting chair David Watkins, environment chair Scott Strasser, video chairs Barrie Scardino and Peter Rockrise, student chair Angelo Directo, and all the many volunteers who helped make the Ball of Energy a success.

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Left to right: Gala chairs Scott and Yvonne Ziegler, Tassie and Constantine Nicandros, and RDA president Leslie Barry Davidson.