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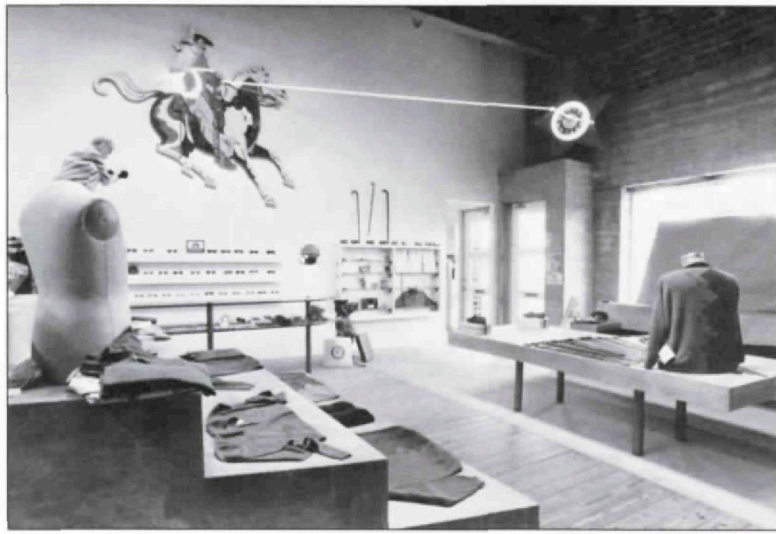
Shop Lifting

A Pair of Shoe Boxes in the River Oaks Shopping Center

Lucy H. Holmes

The "shoe box interior" is the basic unit of most upscale and would-be upscale retail establishments in Houston, whether found in malls or in strip centers – those quintessentially American drive-up bazaars. The exterior of the retail strip stands as a regimented façade, with repetitive elements of material, texture, and color; individuality is expressed in the sign band, window treatment, and attitude toward display in the store window. Location within the strip is critical, for the retail shop depends on exposure for much of its business. The interior of the shoe box, a finite volume of fixed dimensions, challenges the designer to create the illusion of greater width, height, and depth. Space is divided into three main areas: the entry (waiting and check-out), front of the house (display), and back of the house (service). This typology can be observed in two retail establishments, coincidentally next door to one another, in the River Oaks Shopping Center that have treated their shoe box spaces in an innovative way.

Allrecords, 1960 West Gray, by architect Bill McDugald (1986), is a remembrance of things not too long past, executed with wit and charm that jive, as it were, with the store's inventory of jazz and rock classics. The entry, with a vinyl tile grid of random colors on the floor and a dropped soffit supported by a single decorated column (pins, beads, dolls' arms), brings back the colors and images of the fifties with a surreal overlay. Curtains of painted brick, like David Byrne's suit, divide display areas. The first set of curtains is freestanding although somewhat obscured by shelving;



Cotton Club. Clothes horse with rider.

the second set is mounted on a partition of narrow, horizontal wood pieces suggestive of grooved siding. This "siding" is also used for the store's long side walls, with display racks slotted in the grooves. An ivy and flower-light frieze (the irregularly bent conduit connecting the wall sconces reminded Fred Allred, the proprietor, of ivy) runs around the interior of the store.

A new alcove at the rear, formerly an office, was recently incorporated into the retail space. The ceiling of the addition is glass, set into a grid that exposes the mechanical system. An installation-in-progress by artist Jack Massing promises to transform the ductwork-crossed plenum above into a glass-bottomed boat of kinetic curiosities – climbing gorillas, flashing lights, spinning pinwheels, a tiny putting green, a toy caboose blown back and forth by oscillating fans.

The Cotton Club for Men, 1956-A West Gray, by Swan & Swan Design with Deborah Laurel (1985), reflects a somewhat minimalist approach to store design such as seen at Issey Miyake in London and New York, to which owner Terrell Swan has added a distinctive regional overlay. He calls the overall effect "Japanese western," although



Allrecords. Alcove ceiling installation by Jack Massing.



Allrecords. Cherubic column, ivy conduit, and "curtain" wall.

"country eastern" might apply with equal precision.

The sense of height, openness, and light, coming both from skylights and the front window, makes this shoe box seem much larger than it actually is. The window on the street is left without display most of the time. The shop interior, which becomes the display, uses the materials that are part of the minimalist trend – concrete, warm wood, pipe shelving and racks. The floor is concrete and unfinished pine planks. One wall is exposed brick. The built objects are a concrete sofa, two bunkerlike display areas along the central axis (accented by industrial wireglass skylights above the double-height space), and a glass checkout counter, with carefully broken edges, near the entry. Pipe shelving and racks are used for display around the periphery. Regional touches include a neon cowboy lassoing a star-shaped clock placed above the entry door, cowhide cushions on the concrete sofa, and (two-ply) screen doors on the dressing rooms. ■

Pinstripe Paradigms

Architecture and the Corporation: The Creative Intersection, by Thomas Walton. *Studies of the Modern Corporation, Graduate School of Business, Columbia University.* New York: Macmillan, 1988, 218 pp., \$29.95

Reviewed by Jeffrey L. Meikle

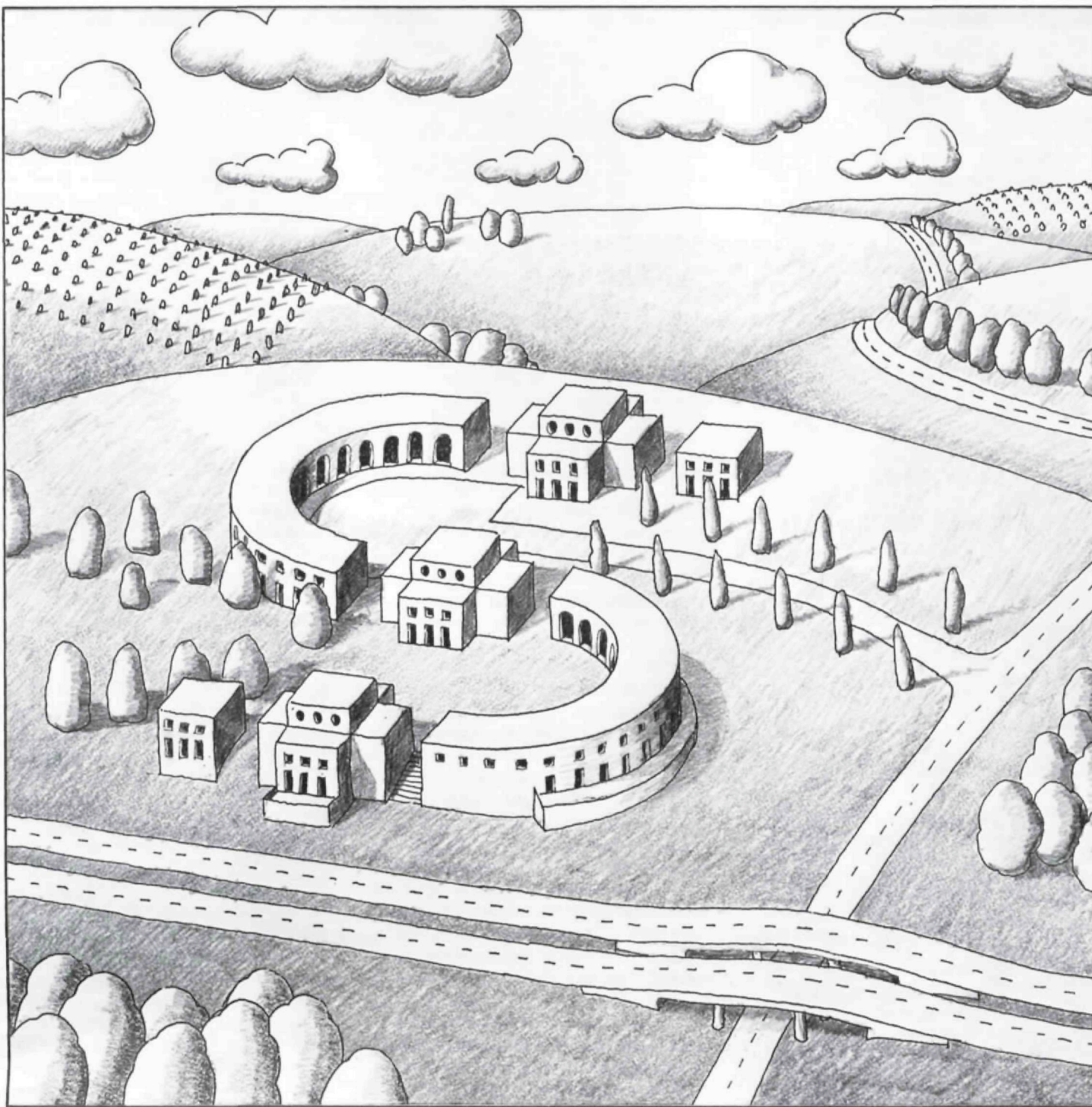
Recent observers of American business have emphasized "quality" and "excellence" when confronting the problem of aggressive foreign corporations. The drive to rejuvenate American capitalism initially focused on emulating the success of the competition. Quality experts advised imitating the Japanese by developing "just-in-time" manufacturing systems or by increasing worker loyalty; they encouraged imitating the Europeans by adopting long-term product-oriented management strategies in place of a typically American obsession with abstract short-term profit-and-loss statements. More recently, however, business advisers have focused on the product itself, on the attractiveness and function of its design, rather than on the process by which it is manufactured. Thomas J. Peters, one of the first promoters of quality (*In Search of Excellence*, 1982), devoted considerable attention to product design in his followup bestseller, *Thriving on Chaos* (1987). The message that design sells products, a maxim widely accepted during another era of intense business competition, the Great Depression, has been brought home in the past couple of years by major articles in *Forbes* and *Business Week*, a design column in the *Wall Street Journal*, books by Christopher Lorenz (*The Design Dimension*, 1986) and Peter Gorb (*Design Talks!*, 1988), and reports from several design organizations funded partially by the National Endowment for the Arts' Design Arts Program and partially by corporate grants. As a result, business executives and managers have become more aware of product design as a force that not only motivates consumers at point-of-purchase but also shapes the general image of a company, builds employees' perceptions of corporate culture, and contributes to the overall potential of everyday life. Although contemporary accounts of design and business often describe a continuum running from graphics to products, from exhibitions to interiors, from individual buildings to the built environment in general, most actually focus on product design to the exclusion of everything else. Addressing this imbalance, Thomas Walton, a professor of architecture and planning at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., has produced an extensively documented study devoted to the use of architecture as a tool for business success.

Architecture and the Corporation is directed at executives and managers responsible for initiating and supervising design and construction of corporate facilities. The sloganeering subtitle – *The Creative Intersection* – links the book to the current genre of promotional works aimed at boosting American competitiveness and productivity. Walton flatters executives by referring to them as "archons" (from the Greek word for the chief magistrate of ancient Athens) and by comparing them to such patrons as the Gonzaga of Mantua or the Medici of Florence. He implies that the corporation bears primary responsibility for the welfare of contemporary society and suggests that an enlightened age of aesthetic harmony, based on the collaboration of archon and architect, is at hand. Some readers, especially architects but also businessmen who have grown weary of the "excellence" genre, will be put off by this appeal to executive vanity. That would be a shame. *Architecture and the Corporation* presents a series of detailed case studies whose



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lucid explication reveals pragmatic techniques for the successful application of architecture in the business sector. Avoiding undocumented random anecdotes organized by theme (the stock-in-trade of self-help books since Dale Carnegie), Walton offers primary research and scholarly analysis. Businessmen may have more to learn from Walton than do architects, most of whom are willing to compromise and collaborate. But for the executive whose knowledge of architecture is limited to an admiration of Frank Lloyd Wright (or to an avant-garde appreciation of Peter Eisenman or Frank Gehry), Walton's case studies should prove indispensable when contemplating a new headquarters or the expansion of an old plant.

Before introducing the volume's five case studies, Walton devotes two chapters to a preliminary statement of his major findings. The first, "The Rationale for Rational Design," explores the benefits to be derived from good architecture. In his opinion, even an executive with little experience in construction should expect the design of a headquarters building, factory, or research center to yield two benefits: an increase in corporate prestige among business contacts and the general public, and a good return on investment. But Walton maintains that architecture can do far more for a company. An appealing work environment increases productivity, especially among educated white-collar workers trained to be sensitive to their surroundings. By its spatial arrangements a building can reinforce or reshape the patterns of human interaction that make up corporate culture. A building may also respect lifestyle preferences or employee values at no additional cost and thus contribute to the satisfaction of workers on the job. Awareness of such technical factors as appropriate materials selection, passive and active energy conservation, and efficient project management leads to effective cost control. Architects and

executives with a sense of planning flexibility can ensure that a structure remain usable long after its original function has disappeared. Finally, corporate architecture can fulfill a sense of social responsibility by maintaining a sensitive relationship to the environmental, urban, and human contexts in which it is placed. As developed by Walton, this last point rarely goes beyond the sentiment that what's good for business is good for America; the unit of concern here is the individual corporation competing with others for the business and goodwill of the public.

While Walton's first chapter describes the benefits to be gained from adopting architecture as a business tool, his second summarizes methods for doing so. The four "Maxims to Maximize Results" suggest how to approach the following crucial processes: 1) integrating the diverse perspectives of all the people with a stake in the design process — managers, employees, and architects; 2) orchestrating the roles of the various active participants in the design process, both in house and outside; 3) identifying from among the welter of opposing claims and viewpoints those points whose resolutions are crucial to the success of a project; and 4) rationally managing the plurality of sometimes conflicting opinions to create consensus decisions acceptable to all participants.

After stating his rationale and maxims with logical clarity, Walton demonstrates their relevance with five case studies — the heart of the book. He has carefully chosen the corporations and their architectural projects to portray a diversity of companies and building types. The projects encompass two corporate headquarters of vastly different scale, a chemical company's urban office tower (Hercules) and a loan company's villagelike campus in a rural setting (Beneficial). Industrial facilities include a manufacturing plant for a small

company with a longstanding interest in "good design" (Herman Miller), an engineering center for a major aircraft company whose successful excursion into "good architecture" subsequently frightened it back into aesthetic invisibility (Lockheed), and two projects for a conglomerate whose major concern is cost effectiveness (United Technologies). Although Walton writes with his paradigm and maxims occasionally too much in view, his narratives accurately portray the frequent clashes and compromises that occur in any large building project. Based on in-house documents and interviews with a host of participants, supplemented by articles in trade journals and business magazines, the case studies are utterly convincing. While not as dramatically realized as the interaction among client, architect, and contractor portrayed by Tracy Kidder in *House* (1985), Walton's narratives of more complex situations name names, assign praise and blame, and probe

beneath the promotional surfaces over which a lesser analyst might have skimmed. The overall impact, however, is not quite what the author intended. Dedicated to an honest presentation of the facts, he finds that solutions that seem successful after the fact often actually occurred fortuitously. Each project reveals numerous errors of judgment, many of which could not have been avoided. Chance and hindsight are more important than Walton would like to admit, and his book, as a result, cannot go beyond suggesting to corporate executives how to get started and what to do when things inevitably go wrong.

Architecture and the Corporation, despite its too fashionable, somewhat superficial adoption of "excellence" rhetoric, should prove an indispensable guide to executives and managers unfamiliar with the design and construction processes. Even those who have already successfully directed the evolution of corporate architecture will find it a helpful, rationally organized checklist of procedures and, through its case studies, a guide to flexible modification of that checklist. Architects, on the other hand, may find Walton's message sobering. J. Robert Hillier, whose firm drew up plans for the Beneficial headquarters, observed afterward: "I don't think of us as creators, but rather as translators of a client's ideas. When a project is completed, it stands as monument to the client, not to us" (p. 104). Few architects would disagree with this concept, at least as mildly stated by Hillier. In most of Walton's accounts, however, the architect nearly vanishes among a welter of in-house project managers, outside construction managers, design auditors, engineers, cost accountants, technical consultants, subsidiary contractors, and so on. Perhaps the wife of the company's president no longer settles design matters, but neither does the architect, and in fact Walton advises using an experienced construction manager rather than an architect on projects in which time and money are more important than "human and aesthetic concerns" (pp. 186-87). Ultimately, then, his title is misleading. His book is a guide to the process of effectively creating corporate architecture, but the architect's influence bears little comparison to that of the archon. ■

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A Brooding Peninsular Light

Erik Gunnar Asplund: Buildings and Projects, 1917-1940
Farish Gallery, Rice University
27 March - 23 April 1989

Reviewed by Carlos Jimenez

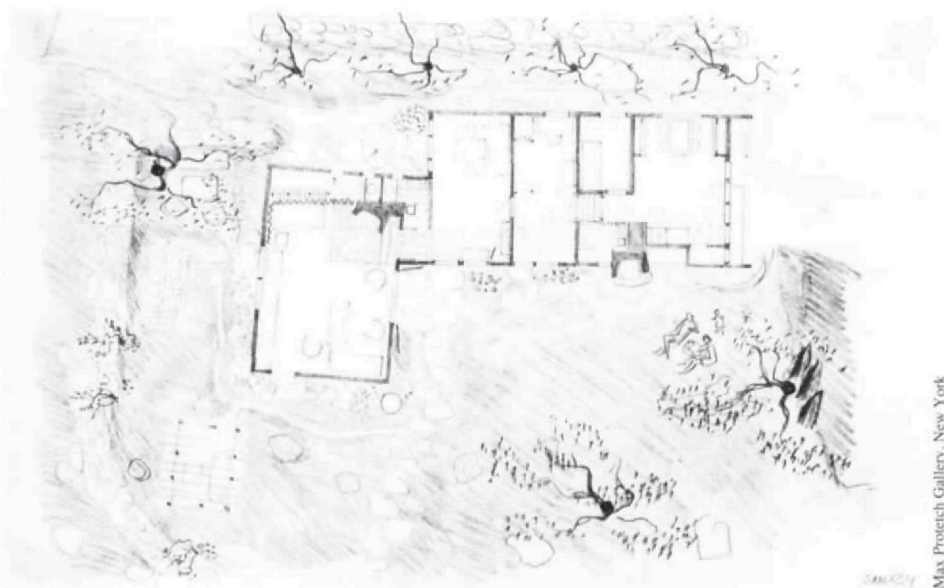
Erik Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940) possessed "a craving for the truth, clarity, absolute genuineness, and self-criticism," in the words of his friend, the architect and writer Hakon Ahlberg. These traits seem to exude from his drawings, 89 of which were exhibited this spring at the Farish Gallery, Rice University. Assembled from the Asplund estate by the Max Protech Gallery, New York, in 1984 and 1988, and lent to Rice by Protech and various collections, they reveal an artist of great lucidity engaged in ceaseless exploration and wonderment.

Working entirely in his native Sweden, Asplund's career extended from Scandinavian neoclassicism to the advent of Modernism. His work spanned a diversity of building types, from modest cottages to intricate villas, from schools to a library, law courts, a department store, and worker housing, from a solitary chapel in the forest to the consummate beauty of his last project at the Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm. He and Finland's Alvar Aalto, whose work he influenced, are the great Scandinavian architects of this century.

Asplund's singularity emanates from a refined sensibility toward the great and simple themes of human experience. Architecture for Asplund was the means by which to bridge these themes, capture their presence, and at times celebrate them. His work did not linger on the sentimentality of place but rather on the discovery of a place, aiming to reconcile and make apparent the particular emotional undercurrent of an idea and its effect on that place. Grand utopian fervors or the dicta of functionalism were not the impulses of his work. Instead he was guided by an understanding of the connection between nature and human emotions, the transitions between the old and the new, and the infusion of the tangible with the spiritual. As Ahlberg reminds us, "He had an ability to blow a fresh life and spirit into his work such as none of his contemporaries perhaps possessed." Yet this ability was the result not of virtuosity, but rather of painstaking dedication.

The Farish Gallery installation, rendered in patriotic blue and yellow, reminds one that Asplund could not have existed without Sweden and its brooding peninsular light. In his work he sought to craft this light into his buildings, as if he wanted to contain not only light itself but also the magnitude of an interior sky. The Stockholm Public Library and the Woodland Cemetery chapels and loggias attest to his depth of feeling in achieving this. At the same time, the Skandia Cinema drawings demonstrate that he could playfully turn this internal sky into a blue and red canopy hovering above enfiladed seats. The blue vault defines the cinema as a world within a world, and the building itself as a space where one awaits the screen's unwinding spell.

The Göteborg Law Courts Addition drawings recall this influential project's prolonged gestation. Confronted with the necessity of adding to a neoclassical building, Asplund sought the solution through struggle and endless revisions over a period of 25 years. The result is an ingenious integration of spatial relationships in which each element has found its exact placement. The existing and the new plans interlock while composing a complex and poetic sectional whole. The quiet repose of the courtyard and its view to the sky, the sensuality of a glass drink-



Summer house, Sononda. Site plan, 1937.

ing fountain adhering to the wall, an implacable clock overlooking the staircases, and light - perennial witness - brightening the wooden panels: all in unison make evident Asplund's patient refinement and pursuit of lyrical detail.

In contrast, the drawings for the Stockholm Exhibition buildings and grounds (several rendered by Rudolph Persson with confident, bright colors) display an ease and an immediate grasp of a concept and its realization. The temporary nature of that exhibition appears to have furnished Asplund with a tabula rasa on which to project a vibrant vision of the future. Sweeping canopies, bands of glass, and a profusion of multicolored flags herald an optimism about things to come. The constructivist assemblage of buildings, redolent of functionalism, does not suffer the fate of similar projects but rather establishes a strong relationship with the site, achieving an urban scale through the articulation of promenades, streets, and gathering spaces joined by continuous buildings.

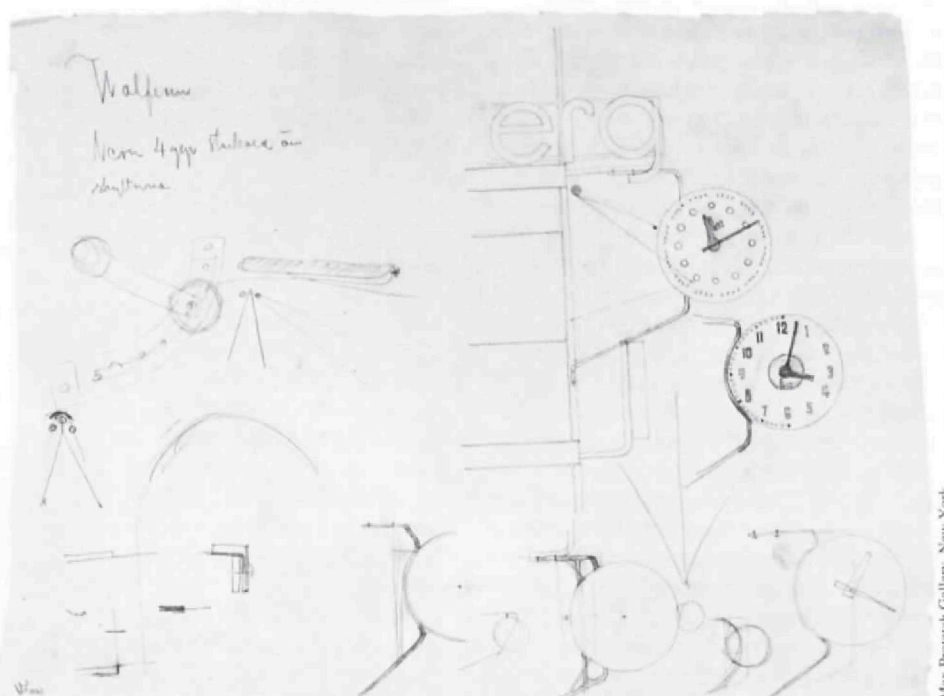
One of the most gratifying aspects of the Farish Gallery exhibition was the opportunity to see Asplund's hand tracing his thoughts, a process apparent in various sketches and drawings but fully manifest in four of them. Drawings reveal the temperament of the hand, the shadows of emotion, the physical gesture in space. In drawings, architecture is a history of hands. Whether through the piercing precision of a line by Mies, the ethereal shades of Kahn, or the jagged lyricism of Alvaro de Siza's scrawls, this lineage of hands brings us in direct contact with the architect's underlying faith. The four Asplund drawings are each imbued with his faith, at times suggested by a mere wave of graphite as it encompasses space and light, at times manifest in an ink line's intensity as it fuses building with site.

The drawings of the summer house on the island of Sononda (1937) situate the house in rhythmic counterpoint with the surrounding trees. Site and plan become

one as pencil textures and tonalities merge. The unexpected turn of the living room, pivoting from a hingelike fireplace toward the water, and the various changes in grade further emphasize the integration. Views and open courts create stations from which to glimpse the nearby sloping fields or the archipelago beyond. In the 1933 drawing "Houseboat for an Artist," the delicately drawn structure hovers almost weightless above the boat's main body. Transparency and minimal detailing of the construction combine with elements of ground, water, and air. Floating serenely on a plinth of water, the house casts its flag to the wind, while a railing sketch recalls the contouring bridge.

The courtroom chair sketch for the Göteborg Law Courts Addition (1935) is a window on itself. Through an enlarged armrest, the viewer enters the chair's world. Plan, structure, texture, and section render the chair complete. A study in scale and tactility results: the shadowed contours of the armrest invite one to feel its wood, gather its grain, encircle it in space. Similarly, the sketches of the exterior clock for the Bredenberg Department Store (1933) describe the duration and evolution of the clock's making and simultaneously delineate another world. A journey moves counterclockwise as one follows the gradual emergence of the clock and its bracketing to the wall. In a dance of structure and gravity, the clock is fixed beneath the building's signage; in its own time frame, Asplund's hand stops, erases, remembers, and begins again.

What Asplund's work ultimately affirms is that genuine architecture is achieved through clarifying the place and making palpable the spirit of that place. The forms and materials of the Sononda House, the luminous Stockholm Library, or the Woodland chapels and paths are not the sum of his architecture. They are only the means of establishing a realm of emotional amplitudes that the drawings in this exhibition delineate. They declare not only the self-awareness of the architect in his search, but also the unfolding of his silent faith. ■



Bredenberg Department Store, Stockholm. Studies for clock, 1933.

Houston From A to Z-Word

Free Enterprise City: Houston in Political and Economic Perspective, by Joe R. Feagin. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988, 313 pp., cloth \$36.00, paper \$12.95

Reviewed by John Mixon

Free Enterprise City is required reading for Houstonians who want to keep up with cocktail talk over the next year or learn why the city lacks zoning, denies that poor and homeless people live within its rotting core, and makes a religion out of unencumbered free enterprise. Reading the book requires advance preparation, though. First, the reader must forget about *Lonesome Dove*, because *Free Enterprise City's* less lovable characters are dryly and technically described, not developed as personalities. Second, skip pages 14-42, or even better 14-48, unless you are a sociology student or just love reading graduate theses that paraphrase prior publications to prove that they were read. Third, memorize the definition of *palimpsest* and make a game out of figuring out why the author uses it.

When it gets down to business, *Free Enterprise City* does a businesslike job of describing how Houston was begun by hucksters, handed over to businessmen, and run by a corporate clique out of the late Lamar Hotel's Suite 8F from the 1930s to the 1960s. The names are familiar: Jesse H. Jones, James A. Elkins, Sr., George and Herman Brown, Gus Wortham, and James Abercrombie. From Suite 8F, these power brokers made the decisions, formed the committees, picked the mayors, fired the mayors, and sometimes shared power with presidents as they played Monopoly with their community, scarcely perceiving any conflict between the public interest and their own. Hugh Roy Cullen and Glenn McCarthy were better known to outsiders, but they were far too flashy to participate in Suite talk. Make no mistake about it, Houston's early business elite were good at business. Whether they were equally good at running a city, and whether the city they created is worth living in, is less clear in Feagin's estimation.

Houston's entrepreneurs were never afraid of government. From the beginning, they manipulated governmental power to advance their own business interests. At a local level, they used tax money to bail out flooded subdivisions and to provide water and sewers for private developments. At the same time they pulled a steady flow of federal dollars to fund the ship channel, Ellington Field, and the Johnson Space Center. Government's more traditional role, that of regulating development and providing a public service infrastructure, was a different matter. These functions could be downright dangerous if placed in the hand of voters.

Following the business model, Houston's public planning (an oxymoron?) is privately produced, not publicly sponsored. As chief planner, the Houston Chamber of Commerce has spun out plans for air pollution (a 1945 report said not to worry), flood control, surface water supplies, traffic, airports, and home-rule annexation to ensure that Houston can spread infinitely outward. Privatized planning is shrewdly farmed out to those firms that are likely to provide the ultimate service. For example, Browning-Ferris was hired to plan the city's waste disposal, and an unnamed engineering firm described as "the other public works department" takes care of water and sewer planning.

Land-use planning is left to private developers who decide unilaterally where the next subdivision or office tower will spring up. Privatization now covers parkway planning as well, with private organizations busily assembling land for the next ones, all without significant public input.

Both the Suite 8F gang and the suite itself are gone now, but their influence lives on. Houston's current mayor, while not a good old boy, runs the city like a business and leaves the developers alone. In the public-private partnership the city is still junior partner, and its clear purpose is to serve business.

How has *Free Enterprise City* turned out? Real estate development has been Houston's hallmark from the beginning; so, predictably, Feagin chronicles the sprouting of high-rises and smelly industries from boom times to bad times, summing it up with the observation that "For what would seem to be sophisticated business, real estate is awfully unsophisticated. It's done by feel or by stomach." When the price of oil plummeted 32 percent, a billion-dollar bellyache was therefore inevitable.

Judged by the 1980s, Houston's oil-based businesses didn't do too well at business. They may have done even worse at running the city that the Suite 8F crowd willed to them. Putting business first meant that during 30 years of boom growth, the subservient city government delayed or ignored its enormous infrastructure needs until crisis time. The crisis is now, and Feagin sees impending disaster from toxic waste, water pollution, untreated sewage, subsidence, crumbling streets, and an immobile transportation system. He indicts the city for conspiring with its behind-the-scenes bosses to dump the social costs of unrestrained private development on the citizens by keeping taxes and services at the minimum survival level preferred by the barons of business. Even though some in the business community now acknowledge a problem, their most visible response is "Houston Proud" boosterism and no new taxes.

Feagin notes that Houston's public neglect has hit minority areas the hardest. In the early days, of course, minorities were excluded from both business and governmental power. Accordingly, the city took little account of them, except for an early zoning proposal to set aside three districts for black housing. Lack of political power also ensured that minority areas would be poorly served by utilities and other urban niceties. Highway planning, though, was easy from 8F: simply find a direct route through a black neighborhood and build a freeway.

Feagin's book holds little new for anyone who has read Houston newspapers for the past 40 years, but it should enlighten newcomers and youngsters. In closing, Feagin suggests that a new awakening among citizens may shift the balance of power. I disagree. I don't see how anyone in this century can pry *Free Enterprise City* away from the ghosts who continue to haunt us from Suite 8F. Just ask anyone who dares whisper the word *zoning* in public. ■

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