At least Houstonians out in the boonies have a clue about what the future demands. Rice University sociologist Stephen Klineberg's Houston Area Survey uses random phone sampling 6500 respondents to track public attitudes on civic issues. "Our findings indicate residents thinking the city's decentralized growth," Klineberg told the audience. His numbers show that more and more Houstonians favor boosting in the metropolitan region regardless of cost and enact governmental regulation of land use to protect neighbors. Klineberg is currently gathering data for the 1991 edition of the survey.

Mayor Kathy Whitmire felt the hot political climate in Klineberg's survey and quickly got behind the zoning issue. It could prove that the public's swung around to a position strongly supporting a governmental role in deciding how land is used in the city. Yet, oddly, moderator Barbara Concluded the fireside chat by summarizing. "Here we are in 1991, but there's not that much difference since 1980 in the attitudes ... and the conflicts represented here. (There's a) vision of a better city, but distrust of the public sector remains as strong as before."

It's hard to see how audience members would have left the chat with any clearer ideas of what approach would be the best means to a neutral planning issue of the early 1990s.

"If there are 600 less in a neighborhood and 400 are residental, are you going to affect the 200 that aren't ... and try to gentrify them or amoralize them?" Asked the questions to this and other quandaries are public decisions, Kristapson responds. "You bet they are. Absolutely political decisions."

This is the kind of down-to-earth realism I came to the chat hoping to hear, but the politics tend to grab in a cloud of generalizations.

As for the controversy over the desirability of commuter rail in Houston, both panel and audience, judging from the questions, seem to believe the project wouldn't fit. Whatever plan Houston finally decides to ride with. The only discussion revolved around whether Metro's failure to come to a conclusion was due to yet another failure of public leadership.

The tricky business of public-private joint ventures was similarly glossed over. The only mention of the private-public joint, city-supported Wortham Theater Center came in a lament by Keating that it had not been built in the center of the city. The Thomas Convention Center. Amazingly, none of the panelists mentioned Houston's failure to complete the George R. Brown Convention Center both downtown and under budget in the teeth of the mid-eighties recession and despite the city's failure to construct a downtown hotel to support it. Similarly undiscussed were the debates of the Mercado del Sol Hispanic-themed shopping center and the Holiday Inn that was to resurface as the Memorial Plaza. Former aide of the Elderly, bodies these "public-private partnerships" gobbled up million of community development dollars. Failed it? to become boarded-up eyesores on the outskirts of downtown Houston. They provide a powerful lesson from the epigones of what not to do in public finance but perhaps all this was too specific and outside the experience of the panels.

Still, the RDA's Fireside Chats serve a valuable educational function, and this one had a few high points. The standing-room-only crowd demonstrated that there is a desire in Houston for incisive commentary about urban issues. Next time the audience would benefit from a wider range of voices and colors on a panel with more specific local knowledge of the issues. Maybe that could generate some real warmth around the fireplace.

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Changing Platz
Berlin: The Politics of Order, 1737-1899
269 pp., illus., $39.95
Reviewed by Richard Ingersoll

I never dreamed I would feel nostalgic for the Berlin Wall. That crude and ugly prefab plane, capped with uncounting concrete cylinders designed to roll down on people, was a constant reminder that there was a barrier between the East and the West; it became the unwrapping symbol of the peace- breaking effect of overweening capitalism and police state communism. Within a year of the Wall's disappearance, this sentiment of unfulfilled, almost mystical display of unchurched militarily since World War II, accompanied with triumphant slogans about the creation of a "new world order" (a rhetorical term perhaps born uncountingly from Adolf Hitler, who was the founder of the German forces of rebuilding the Wall, one remedy to this depressing aftermath would be to read Alan Bair's Berlin: A Politics of Order, to gain a seasoned perspective on the problem as "as an over and once upright culture." Balfour gives us a thoroughly engaging lesson on the importance of architecture and urbanism in the cultural and psycho- logical order of the city. Berlin's new book, It's a.Delirious New York has there been such an original and stimulating investiga- tion of architectural history. Text and image are woven into a multifaceted pre- sentation of past and present, so that the reader can easily compare the very parity with the intimacy of observed drawings and photographs in the present.

In particular, Balfour focuses on the architectural consequences of the two Germanies, part moral reflection, the book relies on a single urban fragment of Berlin, the appeal of the city, thesuccessfully of the entire city — like the proverbial butter from which the rest of civilization is made. Balfour had found out on the city's western edge in 1837, became the stage for a succession of significant architectural experiments, not the least of which was its own rational delineation. The architects, political opportunists, and financial directors of the historical circumstances ebb and flow across the plaza: each new historical tide rearranges the plaza's elements. The book Rohe's (who has a 1967 photograph, uses the dust jacket, reveals Leipziger Platz as more than an exploration of social and political thought, history of the entire city-like the proverbial butter from which the rest of civilization is in a Plastic无聊, and I believe it is behind the Berlin Wall. While neither the misty of Berlin's history nor the best of Berlin's history, Leipziger Platz, the ideals of history, the various ideologies of social and political orders, constitutes a series of convincingly illustrated and documented presenta- tions of a possible order. The cast of buildings includes Friedrich Gilly's rebuilt monument to Frederick the Great and the octagon's center; Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Doric gate pavilions, placed discreetly at its western entry; Alfred Messel's Wertheim's Department Store, Berlin's first cathedral of commerce; the barricades of the October 1919 uprising and the House of the Fatherland on Potsdamer Platz, adjacent to the octagon; and Albert Speer's new Reich Chancellery, the kaleidoscope, in the public square and the octagon, in the garden of which Hitler would end his life. The balance of the whole is reached by the variously similar demeanor, while Hans Scharoun's Berlin Philharmonic Hall and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's National Gallery, placed in the nearby Kultur Forum in the 1960s, are finally fruitless attempt in the attempt to create an aura of stirrings, and strong beliefs. The nearby Postmodern designs of James Stirling, Peter Eisenman, and others are indeed indicatives of a subsequent willing suspension of belief.

One building, Eric Mendelsohn's Colum- bus Haus (1932), is pulled out of the diachronic sequence of artifacts to be treated in its own chapter. Mendelsohn's World War I trench sketches, depicting
forms free of structural or iconographic information, are juxtaposed with sketches by Hitler of a quadrillion dead and a great domed hall, grandiose ideas that became the ultimate justification for grandiose Nazi policies. In contrast to Hitler's imperial project for the city, Mendelsohn's work was meant to be free of historical allusion and architectural rhetoric, "a reality empty of meaning...free to carry any meaning..." Columbus Haus is catalogued in various uses of occupation and transformation. Mendelsohn believed it has been used by the SS as a prison after 1933 (although there is no documentation to the contrary). Partly ruined during the war, attacked in a riot after the war, the building is revealed as a sleek missionary of utopian Modernism that resist for a decade before being completely dismantled and run over by the Wall.

Seen at such close range, Leipiger Platz is a sphincter-like place that despite corrosive changes keeps posing an eternal question. Balloons eight different landscapes of desire, from the most authoritarian to the most liberal, represent vain attempts to reorder the world through the suggestive power of physical form. The wisdom embedded in this panoramic assembly is that no matter how charged or how stripped of association or language, architecture serves ideology poorly, as it can neither stop nor answer the eternal question.

Suburban Idylls

Genesis de un municipio de vanguardia, San Pedro Garza García by Juan Ignacio Barragán. Monterey: Libro Internacional S.A. de C.V., 1990. In Spanish. 168 pp., illus., $100

Tanglewood: The Story of William Giddings Farrington by Mary Catherine Farrington Miller. Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1989. 111 pp., illus., $29.95

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

San Pedro Garza García is the elite suburb of Monterrey, Nuevo León, the third largest city in Mexico and the country's industrial center. Since suburbanization began in the middle 1940s, San Pedro Garza García has grown from a rural township of 5,000 to a city in its own right, with a population perhaps as high as 200,000. Despite Mexico's economic crisis, Garza García emerged in the 1980s as a cultural and business center, with art galleries, international restaurants, corporate boardrooms and his own private paintings, filling in between the enclaves of the rich and more densely populated barrios. Land values in Monterrey and Garza García have increased, as the preference of wealthy Regionotamontanos, their awareness of U.S. models, and the evolution of the architectural profession in Monterrey. The emergence of the professional architect (as distinct fromengineers) and of professional specialization (the rise of the architect-decorator), the impact of the Monterrey Institute of Technology's cataloging of custom-designed and equipped houses on images of domestic luxury and currency, and the subdivision of the architectural profession into tendencies identifiable by style and professional attitude are all addressed. Such phenomena as the rise in popularity of the "McAllen-style" house during the 1980s will prove especially intriguing to Texan readers.

Whether San Pedro Garza García is in the vanguard of Mexican urban development or is simply an anomaly made possible by concentrated wealth and attentiveness to extra-Mexican models remains a crucial question. Growth and prosperity have brought to Garza García the familiar problems of environmental degradation, escalating real estate values, escalating volumes of traffic, and uncertainty about the desirability of unlimited expansion - the same Paradise Despoiled scenario that afflicts its North American counterparts. Barragán enumerates the problems confronting Garza García, although he does not examine the impact that its transformation into a supersuburban rival of Monterrey has had on the metropolitan city or the price extracted in resources to sustain a supersuburban scale of development.

San Pedro Garza García is an absorbing account of the development of a new departure in Mexican urbanism. The book's lack of maps, architectural drawings, and good photographs of the works of important architects is a problem for those unfamiliar with the city. Even so, San Pedro Garza García gives one the opportunity to look at contemporary Mexico outside the frame of modernizing non-nation-state assumptions and stereotypes.

The scope of Mary Catherine Farrington Miller's book about her father is more modest than Barragán's. Tanglewood: The Story of William Giddings Farrington documents the life of a Houston builder and developer and profiles his major real estate projects. Farrington was an exact contemporary of Alberto Santos. Trained as an engineer, he came to Houston in 1926, working first for the San Jacinto Trust Company on the development of Brazoswood, then entering the residential building industry. Farrington's Great Depression to become one of Houston's foremost suburban home builders of the 1930s and 1940s. After World War II he built the Lamar-River Oaks Community Center at Westheimer and River Oaks and the Post Oak Oak Village Shopping Center, opened in 1960.

Farrington's life could serve as a virtual case study of successful entrepreneurship in 20th-century Houston. Not only his building and development skills, but his involvement in civic, charitable, and cultural organizations, where his business acumen was valued, provide insight into the operations of the Houston establishment at mid-century. Mrs. Miller does not emphasize architecture, despite the high standards that Farrington's suburban houses and retail and apartment projects of the 1930s and 1940s exhibit. The River Oaks and Lamar-River Oaks community centers and the Parkwood Apartments remain outstanding demonstrations of intelligently planned, superlatively detailed building constructed for the wealthy by Farrington's staff architect at the time, Raymond H. Brogniez.

In River Oaks the Hogg brothers and Hugo Potter had demonstrated the competitive advantage that fine-rate architecture could give to speculative real estate development. Gerald D. Hines, at the end of the 1960s, rediscovered this connection between enlightened architec- tural patronage and market positioning. In light of his own prior achievements, Farrington's seeming lack of concern for architectural excellence after 1949 is puzzling. Unfortunately for him, this lapse cost his two most important undertakings, Tanglewood and the Post Oak Center, the historical distinction that might otherwise have accrued to them.

William G. Farrington and Alberto Santos responded to the desire of affluent city dwellers to drive or, even beyond, the edge of the city in search of a place to repose. West Houston and San Pedro Garza García are landscapes that, in less than 50 years, have been transformed from countryside into a kind of dispersed, low-density city. What is so compelling about the comparison of the careers of the two developers that these books make possible is the way in which two landscapes, 450 miles apart, reflect the same archetype in response to more profound patterns of domestic culture.