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FALL ARCHITECTURE EVENTS

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

Fall Lecture Series

The Public Landscape

Technology and economics have profoundly altered the landscape, and with it our relationship to nature. This series of lectures examines the role of landscape architecture in shaping our cities and public spaces.

20 September — Marc Treib, "Quest; Zest: Landscape Design 1980-1995+"

11 October — James van Sweden, "Natural Gardens: Gardens for the Twenty-First Century"

18 October — Catherine Brown, "Defining and Making the American Urban Landscape"

25 October — Robert Irwin, "Art in the Public Place"

1 November — Diana Balmori, "The New Park: American Agora"

All lectures will be given at the Brown Auditorium of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 8 p.m. For ticket information, please call (713) 524-6297.

Fireside Chat

Landscape Architecture in Houston

15 November

Houston landscape architects present their work. *Cullen Hall, University of St. Thomas, 7:30 p.m.*

RDA Ninth Annual Gala

High Style: A Salute to Stanley Marcus
Sunday, 5 November

Each year, the Rice Design Alliance acknowledges patrons of outstanding architecture and urban design with its Award for Design Excellence. The Board of Directors of the Rice Design Alliance will honor Stanley Marcus, chairman emeritus of the Neiman Marcus stores, with its 1995 award. As one of the most significant patrons of architecture and design in Texas during the 20th century, Stanley Marcus has elevated the perceptions, expectations, and judgments of several generations of Texans. Honorary chairmen are Mayor Bob Lanier and Mrs. Lanier and Mr. and Mrs. Gerald D. Hines; gala chairmen are Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Tudor III; and underwriting chairmen are Mrs. Nathan M. Avery, Mrs. Matthew R. Simmons, and Mrs. Wallace S. Wilson.

Neiman Marcus Galleria, 2600 Post Oak Boulevard. Cocktails at 7 p.m., dinner and dancing to the Mike Carney

Orchestra at 8 p.m. Gala tickets may be purchased by calling the Rice Design Alliance.

RICE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Fall Lecture Series

The Cullinan Professorship Lectures

Roberto Segre, professor of architectural history at the University of Rio de Janeiro and the Echeverria Polytechnic Institute, will lecture on Latin American architecture and urbanism.

18 September — "The Primitive Hut in a Tropical Paradise: The Search for an Appropriate House Type in the Caribbean"

25 September — "The First Modernity: European Influences and Utopian Thought During the 1930s"

2 October — "The Architectural Identity Crisis After 1945 in Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela"

9 October — "Caracas and the Survival of an Urban Tradition During the Age of Globalism"

Power of Two

How partners work in tandem for design and architecture.

19 October — Stanley Tigerman, Chicago

23 October — Gisue Hariri, New York

6 November — David Lake and Ted Flato, San Antonio

20 November — Donald Chadwick, Santa Monica

7 December — Ricardo Scofidio, New York
All lectures are held in the Farish Gallery, Rice University School of Architecture, at 7 p.m. For more information, please call (713) 527-4864.

Exhibition

"Citta Aperta/Open City": Photographs by Luciano Rigolini

15 September - 28 October

Contemporary cities are becoming increasingly similar. Luciano Rigolini, a Swiss filmmaker and photographer, captures this global phenomenon in ten large-scale photographs of nine cities, including Houston. *Farish Gallery, Rice School of Architecture.*

RICE UNIVERSITY

Symposium

"House, Home, Homeland," a Media Studies Symposium on Exile
27-29 October

The recent global changes in politics, technology, and social formations have raised fundamental questions about concepts of house, home, and homeland. This interdisciplinary symposium aims to explore some of these global and local shifts and the questions they raise about how we design and inhabit our homes. *Art and Art History Department, the Center for the Study of Cultures, and the Division of Humanities. Call (713) 527-4882 for information.*

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

College of Architecture Gala

Fifty Years of Excellence
in Architectural Education

29 October

A gala celebration of the 50th anniversary of the University of Houston's College of Architecture benefiting the college's Alumni Foundation. *Atrium, College of Architecture. For more information, call (713) 743-2400.*

BRAZOS BOOKSTORE

"Philip Johnson in Texas"

8 November

Dallas architect Frank Welch, author of the forthcoming book *Philip Johnson in Texas*, and photographer Paul Hester will deliver an illustrated lecture on Philip Johnson. *2421 Bissonnet, 7:30 p.m. For information, call (713) 523-0701.*

RDA: LOOKING AHEAD TO SPRING 1996

Public Art Discussion

January 1996

A program held in collaboration with the Contemporary Arts Museum and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County to broaden the dialogue about public art in Houston. *Date and location to be announced.*

Spring 1996 Lecture Series

Making It

6 March - 3 April 1996

Designers dream the dreams, but engineers and builders must make them realities. The lectures will focus on the process of transformation from idea to reality, including all its inevitable difficulties and convolutions. Speakers will include historians of technology, engineers, builders, and architects with particular engineering expertise.

CALL FOR ENTRIES

The Rice Design Alliance, in collaboration with the City of Houston Planning and Development Department, the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission, and the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, will sponsor an open design competition to create a design for a Houston Historic Landmark Medallion that would denote historical designations under the City of Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance. Registration opens 15 March 1996, and the winner will be announced 6 June. A registration fee of \$50 is required. Please call the RDA office, (713) 524-6297, for registration information.

NEW HOPE HOUSING

Alex Hecht

On 9 April 1995, New Hope Housing celebrated the grand opening of its single-room occupancy (SRO) apartment building — the first SRO in Houston. In contrast to the traditional but temporary options for the homeless — a night at the Salvation Army, the Star of Hope, or the Coalition for the Homeless — an SRO provides a more permanent residence. SROs are furnished apartments with rents ranging from \$250 to \$300 per month (utilities included), considerably less than the average one-bedroom rental rate.

"It's really nice to have your own home and not have to leave the YMCA by seven a.m.," says Earl Hatcher, manager of New Hope and the former director of SEARCH, a homeless shelter.

The New Hope complex, a three-story, 43-unit project at 320 Hamilton Street, lies on the eastern edge of downtown's derelict warehouse district, where the city's homeless are concentrated in the highest numbers. The building was designed by Guy Jackson of Jackson & Ryan Architects to blend into the blighted area of mostly abandoned 1920s and 1930s structures.

The New Hope apartments are comfortable (the 175-square-foot rooms have private bathrooms, desks, microwaves, and miniature refrigerators), affordable (\$280 a month with a six-month lease), and well furnished (beds and lamps have been donated by IKEA). Christ Church Cathedral, which provided the concept and initial planning for the project, contributed \$400,000. Furniture was also donated by Compass and Charter banks, and Episcopal High School's graduating class of 1994 raised more than \$10,000 for additional furnishings. Security features include a coded entrance gate, burglar bars on the first-floor windows, and nighttime video surveillance. This summer, residents planted a community garden in the building's interior courtyard.

Less than a month after the dedication, the \$1.25 million complex was full and had a waiting list of 200. To meet the demand, several more SRO projects are under way. New Hope Housing is seeking financing for phases two and three at its current site, for a total of 129 units, and has applied for a \$500,000 HUD grant toward future conversion projects: the King George Hotel at 1418 Preston (100 units), the William Penn Hotel at 1423 Texas Avenue (161 units), and the Savoy Hotel at 1616 Main (231 units). In addition, the Houston Area Community Development Corporation is remodeling the 1414 Congress Hotel to provide 57 SRO units. ■

SISTER MARY JO FIGHTS CITY HALL

Alex Hecht

When Sister Mary Jo May, one of Second Ward's most visible activists, shifted her focus to the cause of affordable housing, she believed her efforts were negated by a powerful force: City Hall.

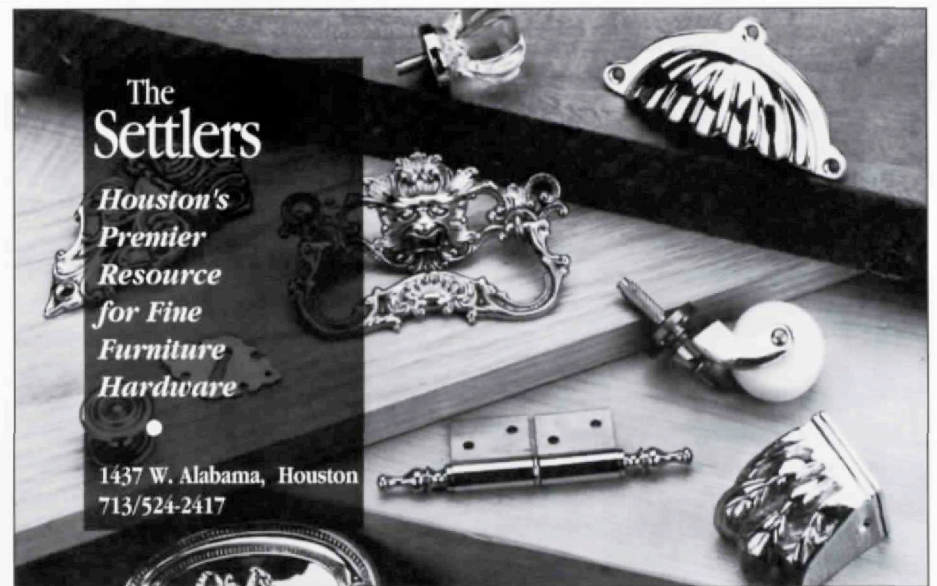
"The city tries to put those who are doing the housing in the same position as the poor," contends Sister Mary Jo, director of Guadalupe Social Services (GSS), a provider of transitional housing for women. "The city controls all the money and we are supposed to be grateful. Grateful beggars. It's just nonsense."

In 1991 May lobbied City Hall for funding to expand GSS. Operating out of a leaky, unsafe motel, GSS had provided more than 1,200 people a month with immunizations, clothing, food, and housing. City Hall initially pledged \$170,000 for a proposed expansion on two lots on South Jensen Drive, across from the site of El Mercado del Sol.

Expecting prompt fulfillment of the pledge, May and GSS instead suffered a host of delays. May dealt with four different community development directors over three years. Following established protocol, she constructed a model and a plot plan for the housing. But when a city official noticed that the two properties were two blocks apart and not adjacent, as the signed contract between the city and GSS stated, the city withdrew the \$60,000 earmarked for the second property from the project, claiming that May had not operated above board. "If I were trying to be devious," May exclaimed in October 1993, "why would I send a survey of that property with a map?" She added recently, "To tell you the truth, I think it was their way of getting out of giving the money."

In the fallout from her fight with the city and the subsequent coverage in the *Houston Chronicle*, May contends that many people involved in the local housing scene called to commend her for publicly challenging the city, which may well translate into political suicide as far as future contracts are concerned. "They all applauded the fact that I had spoken out on how hard it was to do business with the city," she says, "but nobody else was willing to step forward and say anything publicly."

Sister Mary Jo believes the second property will find funding, but probably not through the city. "I'd rather appeal to the generosity of the Houston community," she says, "than have to deal with the bureaucracy of the city. I wouldn't live long enough to see the money." ■



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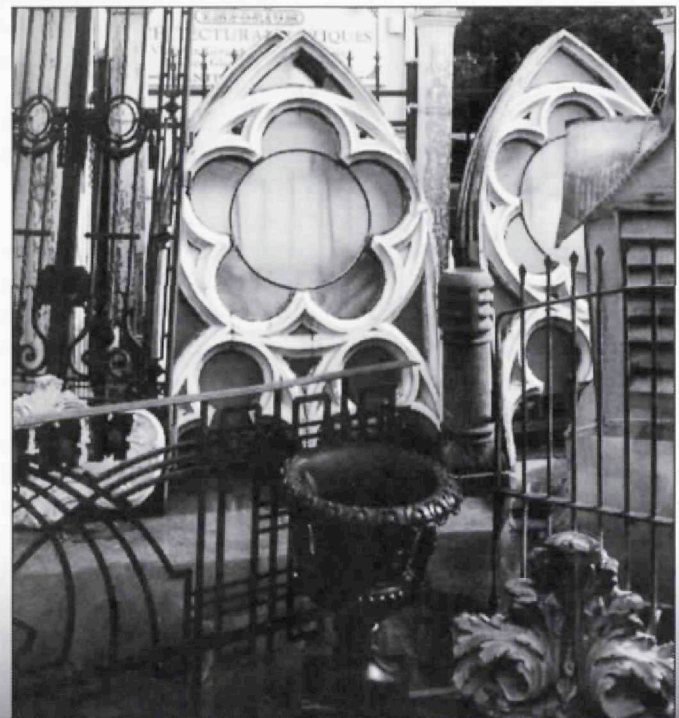
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Village Voice

What exactly are TIFs, PIDs, MMDs, and LGCs — and are they the way to create neighborhood-scaled governments in Houston?

John Mixon

If God didn't want Houston to spread from Galveston to Conroe, why did He provide it with such an abundant source of underground water? In other cities, new development could occur only at the connecting ends of existing water and sewer trunk lines. By contrast, in the last 30 years any Houston developer could drill a water well wherever a new freeway pointed and install a "package" plant to treat subdivision sewage. He could even avoid front-end investment costs by coaxing a friendly legislator to sponsor a local bill creating a kind of water district that was later called a municipal utility district, or MUD. After perfunctory legislative approval, the developer had only to house a few employees on the land and instruct them to vote to issue millions of dollars of general obligation bonds to pay for the water and sewer facilities. The "voters" also elected developer-friendly directors to run the district until the homeowners who bought into the subdivision took charge. Because the MUD's long-term debt was passed on to these homebuyers, the developer kept district size down to 200 to 300 acres so he could sell all his properties before the homeowners took control of the water district board. This practice produced a proliferation of small treatment facilities and precluded a regional approach to water treatment.

The MUD played a key role in Houston's unique development history and irrevocably determined the city's urban form. Now its progeny, special-service districts such as PIDs and MMDs (see sidebar), may play a similarly far-reaching role in our city's development.

In the sixties, seventies, and eighties, Houston enthusiastically endorsed MUD-financed growth and in its metro-dreams expected that systematic annexation of outlying subdivisions (when their bonded debt declined) would keep city tax coffers perpetually filled. Unfortunately, the combination of MUD sprawl and metro government didn't necessarily add up to a better city.

Houston in the 1950s was a compact city, but leapfrogging MUD subdivisions over the next 30 years generated urban sprawl that has no American peer. And sprawl wasn't all: ill-supervised MUDs dumped inadequately treated sewage into streams that flow directly into the city's surface drinking-water supply. Upstream MUD subdivisions dumped more flood-

waters than local bayous could handle. MUDs — along with industries and farmers — withdrew so much underground water that the surface started to sink, cracking streets and utility lines. The resulting subsidence saucers puddled the increased runoff around Houston instead of rushing it to the Gulf.

Houston's low population density stretched out streets and utility lines, with each mile serving fewer people and less taxable value than the urban standard. Year by year, Houston's aging infrastruc-

ture sank into greater disrepair, and an ever-outward momentum left inner-city land with little redevelopment value. Instead of being renovated or razed for renewal, decaying buildings spread their rot — first blocks of it, then neighborhoods, and finally entire quadrants of the city.

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With home-rule power over 600 square miles and 1,300 square miles of extraterritorial jurisdiction, Houston may be the best-equipped city in the nation to address metro-sized problems.

By the mid-1980s, age, cracking soils, expiring or unenforced deed restrictions, economic decline, and lack of zoning had left many pre-1970 residential neighborhoods in crisis. Equally disquieting were slow police response, ineffective mass transit, and a suspicion that no one listened or cared when trash stacked up and water-main geysers sprayed for weeks. The economic downturn of the 1980s also left shopping centers deserted, office buildings empty, and industrial and commercial sites abandoned.

During the 1960 to 1980 boom, state annexation laws that allowed Houston to reserve vast areas for potential annexation enabled the city (with Harris County's cooperation) to create a central government with remarkable geographical coverage. Today, with home-rule power over roughly 600 square miles inside its corporate limits and extensive regulatory power in 1,300 square miles of "extraterritorial jurisdiction," Houston may be the best-equipped city in the nation to address metro-sized problems. But the city's vast geographical range, from Clear Lake to Katy and from The Woodlands to Pearland, inevitably has distracted City Hall from neighbor-

hood-scale issues. For every advantage the city gained on a metropolitan level through large-scale government, individual Houstonians suffered a corresponding loss of local control.

Houston residents may not have associated the decline in local services with their city's obsession with metro-control, but residents of the few incorporated bedroom cities — West University Place, Southside Place, Bellaire, and the Memorial villages — clearly understood the value of responsive government that

is close to home. Speculative home-builders correctly predicted that affluent buyers would pay dearly for new houses in those cities, triggering a housing boom that far outstripped the sales pace in nearby Houston neighborhoods. Today, many inner-city Houston neighborhoods could match the bedroom communities' success if they were able to improve government services and bring them down to a local level. Without the reassurance of protective land-use regulation, better police protection, and infrastructure repair, private investors are unlikely to make the substantial capital investments required for renewal.

Mayor Bob Lanier's Imagine Houston project, begun in 1994, recommended conceiving of the metropolis as a network of "urban villages" in order to rejuvenate both the body and the soul of Houston neighborhoods. The idea contemplates a geographical focus and a local service component, and it requires a formal structure for channeling government services. Could special-service districts — the current incarnations of the MUD, such as TIF districts, PIDs, LGCs, and MMDs — provide a good structure for framing these urban villages?

The basic concept behind the various special-service designations is to create a district with special localized powers — of zoning, taxation, or management — to address some perceived local need. These public-private mini-governments can provide a variety of municipal services for specially defined areas and charge the

beneficiaries for the cost. Although these mini-governments were not designed with homeowners in mind, Houston's residential neighborhoods can tap TIF zoning power and PID assessment power to enhance local services. This potential has not been overlooked by Houston homeowners, who are eyeing the existing Lamar Terrace TIF/PID and other special-service districts already in place (see sidebar).

But the MUD lesson should be heeded: special-purpose districts can do both great good and great evil. TIFs and PIDs are not necessarily ideal mechanisms for empowering urban villages, because they were designed to do different, developer-friendly tasks that do not directly translate into neighborhood governance. As beneficial as current TIFs and PIDs may be for the community, their first priority is private profit. Public input is neither sought nor welcomed, and public benefit may be only an accidental by-product.

A multiplicity of localized special districts helped create the jurisdictional jumble that necessitated metro-government in aging urban corridors. Although the urban village concept is headed in the opposite direction, Houston could create a similar mess by employing special districts to excess.

Among the possible pitfalls, TIF districts may not perform as predicted. Unless immediate private investment occurs, as in Lamar Terrace, TIF projects may fail to spur private development and tax revenues. Moreover, TIF tax increments accumulate slowly, and a pledge of chancy future increments may not attract long-term lenders to finance capital improvements. Benefited areas must also beware lest a strapped city government cut services because of TIF or PID presence.

TIFs and PIDs might not serve lower-income areas well and may be unavailable for affluent homeowners. Legal procedures for creating special districts are complex and disabling. Southwest Houston homeowners have the cash and sophistication to start up a special district, but Fifth Ward would need substantial city help. Paradoxically, upscale neighborhoods may not qualify for TIF zoning because reinvestment zones are specifically designed to spur redevelopment in substandard areas.

The entire notion of capturing and plowing anticipated tax revenue back into a

SPECIAL-SERVICE DISTRICTS IN A NUTSHELL

TIFs, PIDs, MMDs, and LGCs are "mini-governments," authorized by state legislation, that provide limited services and/or improvements in defined areas. Other than PIDs, they are managed by directors appointed or approved by the governing body of the city or other designated entities.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts
Cities can designate substandard areas as reinvestment zones to encourage development or redevelopment, and taxing authorities can commit a zone's future increases in tax revenues to a tax increment fund that can be used or pledged to pay for approved projects in the zone. The board of directors has land-use zoning power. TIFs are aimed at promoting commercial development; residential areas qualify only if owners of more than 50 percent of appraised value in the zone petition for TIF designation. A residential TIF must devote one-third of its tax increment to low-income housing (not necessarily in the TIF zone). Cities cannot have more than 15 percent of total appraised land value in TIFs.

Public Improvement Districts (PIDs)
Cities can create PIDs to assess specially benefited landowners for district improvements and services if petitioned by owners in the proposed district, with a majority block determined by land valuation and property ownership. PIDs lack administrative structure, so a separate management entity must be created to administer continuing services. Future assessments may be pledged to pay revenue bonds issued for improvements. Homestead law may prevent foreclosure on personal residences, but homeowners are personally liable for unpaid assessments and accumulating interest.

Municipal Management Districts (MMDs)
The Texas Water Commission can create MMDs with power to levy ad valorem taxes and assess property owners for a variety of improvements and services such as security, planning and urban design, infrastructure, and parks. The commission acts on a petition from property owners in the proposed service area. MMDs are not authorized to serve traditional residential neighborhoods, and most homeowners are exempt from MMD taxes and assessments.

Local Government Corporations (LGCs)
City council may file articles of incorporation to create a local government corporation and then contract with the LGC to exercise powers on the city's behalf. The statute primarily relates to transportation, but LGCs can perform other functions.
J.M.

TIF district raises legitimate social concern. Increased tax revenue from a particular district does not intrinsically belong to that district alone. For example, when redevelopment increases River Oaks tax values, the increment belongs to the city at large.

Finally, only a limited number of residential neighborhoods can enjoy TIF benefits, including zoning, because the city cannot devote more than 15 percent of total appraised property value to TIFs. This is not immediately disabling, since Houston could accommodate \$9 billion in total TIF property value and has tapped only a minuscule portion of that figure thus far.

Considering their private orientation, awkwardness, and legal limitations, residential TIF/PIDs may best be used to showcase a significant urban village experiment. If the experiment shows promise for neighborhoods, the city can devise a more appropriate village-government mechanism. Uptown Houston's success in the Galleria area, for example, prompted the state legislature to pass general legislation authorizing MMDs. Houston can already bring many services — such as police substations and neighborhood planning assistance — down to a village scale, and could do even more if authorized by express legislation. If, for example, the primary value sought from a TIF is zoning power, the legislature could simply authorize less-than-citywide zoning.

Urban villages make sense in Houston, where city council serves metropolitan rather than local interests. Good sense, though, seldom translates into government action. The local real estate interests that defeated citywide zoning and successfully lobbied to prevent neighborhood zoning from being brought before the state legislature may be equally reluctant to share power through TIFs and PIDs. But many of the residents seeking special-service designation have power and influence as well, such as the homeowners in University Place who are currently investigating TIF or PID status for their neighborhoods. If pressed, they may test whether the developers' obsessive fear of land-use controls can be overcome by an equally strong desire to rescue a rich neighborhood at risk. ■

CURRENT MODELS OF TIFs, PIDs, MMDs, AND LGCs

Today, commercial landowners, not homeowners, use special-service districts to enhance value in their service areas and provide incidental benefits for the greater community.

• Lamar Terrace TIF/PID

The Lamar Terrace redevelopment project employs both a TIF and a PID in a reinvestment zone near the Galleria. Through the TIF, the developer plans to plough increased tax revenues back into the district as public improvements and apply land-use zoning to protect new investments. The PID will support enhanced services for district properties through assessments. Lamar Terrace should renew land long overdue for redevelopment, while contributing one-third of the tax increment to a low-income-housing fund.

• Midtown TIF

City council recently approved a 300-acre reinvestment zone that starts south of downtown at the Pierce Elevated and extends east and west of Main Street to the U.S. 59 connection with S.H. 288. The Midtown district is a paradigm of appropriate TIF designation, for it is aimed at revitalizing 175 blocks of this potentially valuable inner-city area, where property values have declined greatly over the past 20 years. Midtown wants to capture 25 years of future tax increment to improve local infrastructure and attract new residential investment, which the TIF will protect by deed restrictions and regulations.

• Downtown PID and LGC

At the request of downtown landowners, city council in 1991 authorized a PID to assess them for enhanced services. The city also created a nonprofit LGC to administer the program. Downtown landowners pay about \$2 million annually to upgrade public safety, improve street maintenance, support planning and economic promotion, and recruit tenants to a cleaner, safer, more vital downtown area.

• Uptown-Galleria Improvement District

A special 1987 state law created an improvement district to serve a downtown-size area near Galleria-Post Oak. The district's governing board applies its \$1.8 million annual tax revenue to enhance public safety, improve streets, and beautify this hotel, office, and retail center. Uptown's legal structure provided a model for later legislation authorizing MMDs.

• Greater Greenspoint MMD

The Greater Greenspoint Management District provides management, taxing,

and special assessment authority to support improvements and services for a 12-square-mile service area near Intercontinental Airport. Commercial property owners pay \$1.3 million in annual assessments to improve security and public safety, planning and urban design, infrastructure, and parks. Unlike TIF/PIDs, MMDs cannot tax or assess single-family, duplex, or fourplex properties.

• University Place

Some Southgate and Southampton residents have contemplated a TIF/PID for the Rice Village area bounded by Main Street, Kirby, the Southwest Freeway, and Brays Bayou, under the name University Place. TIF zoning could protect residential users from commercial intrusion and hush Village night spots while PID assessments elevate neighborhood services to the West University Place and South Side Place standard. Moreover, identification with a localized mini-government could invigorate citizen involvement, enhance property values, and increase University Place's power at City Hall.

• Other neighborhoods

A few Sharpstown sections and the Neartown Business Alliance (a Montrose property owners' association) have contemplated creating TIF/PIDs. The Heights, Meyerland, River Oaks, and Tanglewood could employ urban village concepts to good advantage. Homeowners in Third Ward and the Navigation area could control hot-sheet motels, liquor stores, and noisy bars, while capturing tax increments to improve their neighborhoods. The West Houston Association and Upper Kirby are also rumored to be seeking special legislation for their areas. *J.M.*

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David Todd

GREEN BUNGALOW REMODELING WITH CONSERVATION IN MIND

Houses are contradictory things. On the one hand, they are like nests and dens and La-Z-Boys — good and necessary props for comfort, security, and life itself. Not a very threatening picture.

On the other hand, the American Institute of Architects estimates that the building industry consumes 40 percent of the natural resources used by the U.S. economy. Wood makes up a large part of these resources. The appetite for lumber is gradually changing much of the East Texas Big Thicket into a clearcut, monoculture pine plantation. Once framed up and running, the typical all-electric house in Texas then annually consumes 19,000

kilowatt hours of electricity and causes the release of 10.5 tons of carbon dioxide, contributing to the risk of global warming. Some of our houses' effects are more local — witness the dune erosion on west Galveston Island, the wetland filling on the Katy Prairie, and the cedar destruction in the golden-cheeked warbler habitat of the Hill Country near Austin. Finally, after the contractors and subs and suppliers have all gone home, the construction and demolition debris they leave behind makes up 20 percent of the municipal waste stream.

Despite these dire statistics, my wife and I recently bought and remodeled a house



Wendy Price Todd

Green Building Sources

A short list of publications, publishers, agencies, nonprofits, and trade and professional groups that were useful to us in tracking down ways of building more sustainably.

- **Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings**
American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy
2140 Shattuck Avenue, No. 202
Berkeley, CA 94704
A handy guide that gives statistics and advice on saving money and energy in different home appliances and pieces of mechanical equipment.
- **The Environmental Resource Guide**
American Institute of Architects
AIA Orders
P.O. Box 60
Williston, VT 05495-0060
(800)365-ARCH
The *Environmental Resource Guide* is very expensive (\$98 for AIA members and \$165 for nonmembers), but it is thorough, current, and accessible (especially if you are privy to the "master format" used in Sweets building materials guides). It is particularly good for tracking the entire life cycle of impacts associated with a building product.
- **The Sourcebook for Sustainable Design**
Boston Society of Architects
52 Broad Street
Boston, MA 02109-4301
(617)951-0845 (fax)
The *Sourcebook* gives a narrative of the different issues and possible responses in

sustainable construction, as well as a listing of manufacturers and retailers for the new, more sustainable materials and technologies. As is typical with most listings in the field, this one gets rapidly out of date: many phones will have been disconnected and addresses abandoned without forwarding directions.

- **Guide to Resource-Efficient Building Elements**
Center for Resourceful Building Technology
P.O. Box 3413
Missoula, MT 59806
(406)549-7678
A list of sustainable building materials, particularly alternatives to traditional wood products.
- **Sustainable Building Sourcebook**
City of Austin Environmental and Conservation Services Department
206 East 9th Street, Suite 17.102
Austin, TX 78701
(512)499-3504
Like the Boston Society of Architects' sourcebook, Austin's *Sustainable Building Sourcebook* is a fine introduction to general sustainable building problems and solutions and provides a useful list of government agencies, trade groups, consultants, and vendors active in the field. This book is more current than the Boston version, and its information is more applicable to the issues of hot climates. The city of Austin employs a number of very helpful experts on sustainable building as well.

- **Environmental Building News**
R.R. 1, Box 161
Brattleboro, VT 05301
(802)257-7300
An informative bimonthly newsletter with timely short updates on a variety of sustainable building issues, as well as one or two well-researched, in-depth articles on single topics. An excellent bibliography of handbooks, source books, magazines, and newsletters is also available.
- **The Naturalist's Garden**
by Ruth Shaw Ernst
The Globe Pequot Press
P.O. Box 833
Old Saybrook, CT 06475
Although not focused on Texas and Southwestern habitats, this volume has a great deal of information on how to provide better cover, food, and water for wildlife in an urban or suburban garden.
- **Green Seal**
1730 Rhode Island Ave., #1050
Washington, D.C. 20036-3101
(202)331-7337
Green Seal certifies products that it finds to be environmentally sound. While relatively new, it has prepared ratings for lighting, plumbing fixtures, major household appliances, and windows so far. In a world of hype, you may find this organization's independence and objectivity reassuring.
- **National Small Flows Clearinghouse**
West Virginia University
P. O. Box 6064
Morgantown, WV 26505-6064
(800)624-8301
We found this group's staffers to be

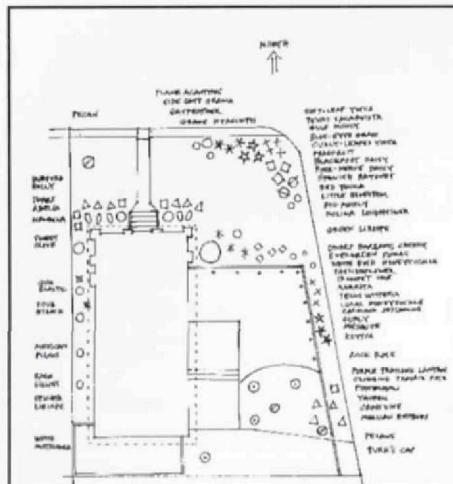
- extremely knowledgeable about on-site wastewater treatment. They are funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and have good access to the federal government's technical support. Also, they seem well connected with state and municipal officials who can give advice about technical and permitting issues.
- **Real Goods**
966 Mazzoni Street
Ukiah, CA 95482-3471
(707)468-9292
Real Goods sells a wide variety of sustainable building products, with a strong suit in energy conservation products, from fluorescent light bulbs to caulking string to alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power systems.
- **A Catalog for the Residential/Light Commercial Sector**
Rocky Mountain Institute
1739 Snowmass Creek Road
Snowmass, CO 81654
(303)927-4178
The catalogue identifies sources for efficient plumbing and irrigation products.
- **Native Texas Plants: Landscaping Region by Region**
by Sally and Andy Wasowski
Texas Monthly Press
P.O. Box 1569
Austin, TX 78767
(512)320-6900
We found *Native Texas Plants* to be the most complete, best illustrated, and most accurate landscaping book for Texas and the Southwest with regard to local range and growing conditions.

anyway. Steeped in guilt, we tried to do the project in the most sustainable, environmentally friendly way we could.

Located in the Austin neighborhood of Travis Heights, the house is a traditional 1915 two-bedroom, two-bath, one-office, 1,670-square-foot, one-story bungalow. It fits in with the context of its neighborhood, but it is not a head turner.

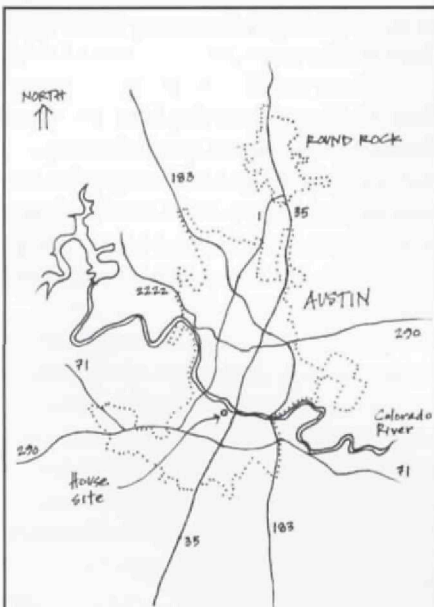
Together with our architect, Raymond Yin, we wrestled with questions of siting, energy efficiency, water conservation, and use of nontoxic and recycled materials. During our small project we found that there was no single best solution. Usually there were a number of good and competing answers with hard trade-offs among factors such as durability, cost, local availability, embodied energy, toxicity, and so forth.

We can't pretend that this is the complete and pure environmental house, nor that it is entirely novel. Still, it is a sign that we can create shelter that has a dramatically reduced environmental impact without having to huddle in a cave or build a house like a spaceship. ■



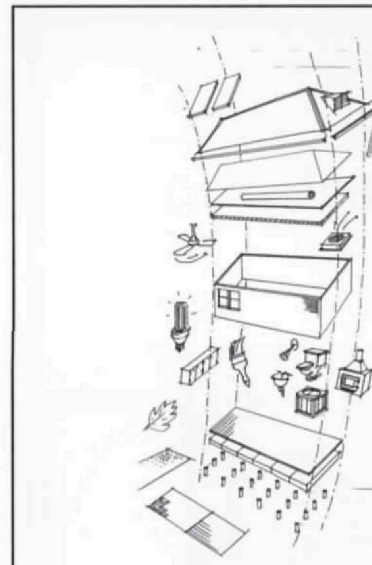
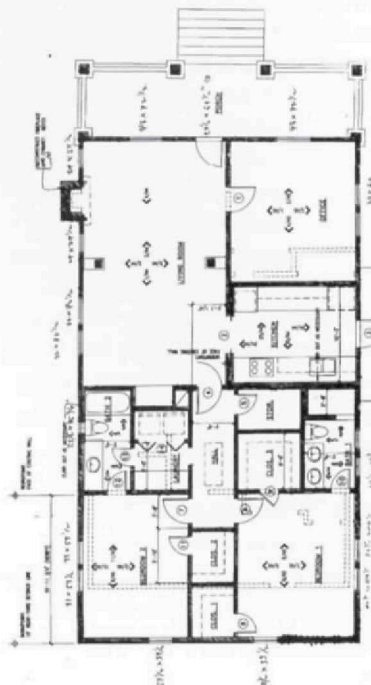
GARDEN

- Not removing trees for construction retains the advantage of natural, free cooling.
- Berms and mulching contain ground runoff.
- Surfaces are paved with locally available, water-permeable crushed granite.
- Roof gutters collect and distribute to the garden roughly 36,000 gallons of rainwater annually via a french drain and cistern, reducing runoff and lowering the need to irrigate with city water.
- The garden uses no pesticides or inorganic fertilizer and includes water, feeders, and houses for birds and bats.
- More than a dozen varieties of native, drought-tolerant plants provide berries for birds and flowering vines for bees and butterflies.



SITING

- Location within one mile of downtown cuts driving to work, shopping, and recreation, and avoids the habitat fragmentation and destruction linked to sprawl.
- Siting on a bus route permits easy use of mass transit.
- 1,680-square-foot footprint (20 percent less than average) minimizes material and energy use, while reducing impervious cover on the lot. The site has a relatively high overall permeability, with only 32 to 37 percent of its total surface being sealed. This reduces runoff and the attendant problems of flooding and pollution.

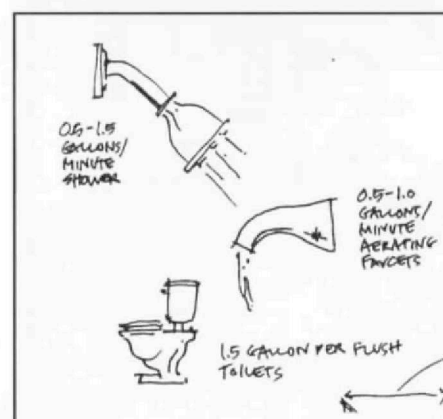


CONSTRUCTION

- The concrete slab is built on recycled broken concrete and stone taken from the site. The slab itself contains 20 percent coal fly ash, otherwise a waste product, and was set without volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, a whole family of carbon- and hydrogen-based chemicals that release a soup of fumes of varying toxicity at room temperature and pressure. These fumes are a concern on two accounts: toxicity to occupants (Americans spend 80 to 90 percent of their time indoors, where fumes from paints, adhesives, carpets, plywood, and other products can accumulate and create "sick building syndrome"); and threats to the atmosphere, such as ground-level ozone (of urban-ozone-alert fame, not the high-level, hole-over-the-Antarctic type).
- Wood and masonry are recycled in many cases. The patio and chimney are made from salvaged brick. The house also contains old doors, recycled framing studs, reused clapboard siding and beaded board, original concrete, and second-hand trim and paint.
- Exterior exposed lumber used on the fencing, garden, and deck is Colorado County juniper or ACQ-treated, sustainably grown yellow pine finished with low-toxicity boiled linseed oil. (Wood preserved with ammoniacal copper quaternary, or ACQ, is a less toxic alternative to

Wolmanized wood, which is preserved with the arsenic salt CCA, or chromated copper arsenate.) Small-dimension yellow-pine lumber and exterior-grade OSB and MDF were used for framing, subflooring and cabinetry. (Panels made from oriented strand board, or OSB, use chipped smaller trees, avoiding the need to cut older, larger trees. MDF, or medium density fiberboard, commonly known by the trade name Medex, is a more finely chipped wood panel, also made from younger, smaller trees than solid wood or plywood products would use.) Finish flooring used recycled longleaf pine. No rare wood species or formaldehyde-containing plywood were used.

- Fifty-year Galvalume channel-drain recycled steel-panel roof reduces the waste and new materials required for replacing typical 20- to 30-year fiberglass composite roofs.
- Borate-treated dry-blown cellulose insulation is made from recycled newspaper, keeps the interior well insulated, and avoids fiberglass. (Fiberglass is beginning to be suspected to be a carcinogen; Germany has listed it as a hazardous material in a similar ranking with asbestos.) The roof is lined with a mylar-backed, aluminum-coated radiant barrier that is estimated to lower attic temperatures by 10 degrees.
- Vinyl-framed, double-paned, low-E coated windows, coupled with 60 percent sunshade screens, were installed to protect against heat gain. Vinyl-framed windows are one-third the cost of traditional wood windows and are less likely to expand and contract, cutting down on drafts. As a result these windows have an infiltration rate of 0.03, less than a tenth of commonly accepted values.
- Low- and no-VOC adhesives, latex, castor oil, and milk-based paints, wall-texturing compounds, and water-based floor finishes were used to minimize offgassing and indoor air quality problems. Existing paint was left and covered because of lead content.



EQUIPMENT AND FIXTURES

- SEER 16.7 paired-compressor York air-conditioning unit with variable-speed blower is 50 to 70 percent more efficient than most units. Attic and ceiling fans help vent and circulate air.

- Blower-door testing helped find and seal all major duct leaks of cooled and heated air (20 to 60 percent duct losses are not unusual in houses).
- Ridge, hip, and louver vents allow convection to cool attic.
- 23,900-Btu, 70-percent-efficient wood fireplace insert can heat house without fossil fuels.
- Two 10' x 4' solar panels circulate warmed water through an exchanger to a gas-fired water heater.
- For lighting, daylight is used where possible, fluorescent and halogen lamps elsewhere, favoring task-lighting fixtures over ambient.
- Low-flow plumbing fixtures (faucets and showers at 0.5 to 1.0 gpm and toilets at 1.5 gpm) are estimated to use 41 percent less water than standard fixtures.

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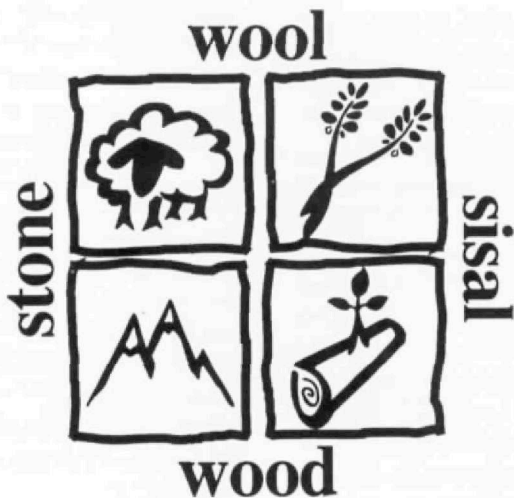


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THE NATURE OF CONTROL THE GREENING OF THE FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT

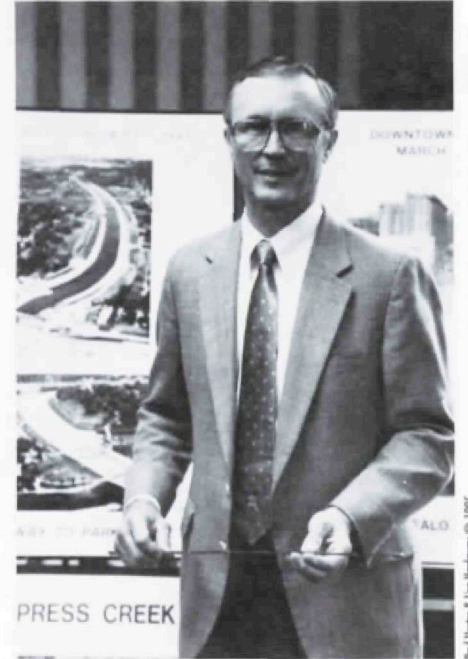
Barry Moore

In the past, the Harris County Flood Control District has often seemed more concerned with draining land for developers and lining every local stream with concrete than with Houston's larger environmental picture. But lately there has been a sea change at the agency: no longer does the flood control district turn a deaf ear to environmental issues. And, with \$500 million in approved projects with the Army Corps of Engineers, and another \$1.5 billion in the wings in the form of proposed projects, the flood control district could be the biggest environmental player in town.

The Harris County Flood Control District was created in 1937 after the devastating floods of 1929 and 1935. In partnership with the federal government and the Corps of Engineers, over the years the HCFCFD has completed major flood control projects at Addicks and Barker dams, Buffalo Bayou (wider and deeper than it used to be), White Oak Bayou, Brays Bayou, Sims Bayou, and Clear Creek. Most of these waterways were channelized in concrete, for years the agency's favored response to runoff problems. For its first half century the district was run as a typical good ol' boys' club, a style epitomized by the regime of Tom Langford, director from 1968 to 1976. "Public hearing" was simply not in Langford's vocabulary, and concrete seemed to be the only tool in his toolbox.

But since Art Storey took over as director in September 1989, the agency has begun to establish an excellent environmental record. Responding to organized citizen effort, it made the Corps stop construction on Sims Bayou (running across southern Harris County from Missouri City to the Port of Houston) and change the design to include more green and less concrete. It squelched the Corps's proposed aggressive channelization of 11 miles of Cypress Creek (which runs eastward from Cypress Station near U.S. 290 to its confluence with Spring Creek north of Humble) and pushed for a more sensitive treatment, which increased stream capacity by about 20 percent upon the project's completion in 1990-91.

Storey is excited about his Wetlands Mitigation Bank concept, which was approved on 15 August 1995 in a memorandum of agreement with the Corps. Under Section 404 of the Bush adminis-



Art Storey, director of the Harris County Flood Control District.

tration's Clean Water Act, land users are required to "mitigate" wetland acreage that is developed; in other words, if ten acres of wetlands are to be developed, ten acres of new wetlands must be created to replace them. Rather than have countless small and possibly inefficient wetland sites scattered around on different developments, Storey proposes a much larger mitigation wetland in the general area under consideration, built and funded by individual developers and based on a system of credits, appraisals, and fees. Both the private sector and municipalities



Flood control district workers mark trees that stand in the right-of-way on the Sims Bayou project, in order to relocate them.

like this concept, which could have huge environmental (and flood control) benefits. A site for the first of these mitigation banks has been identified in far northeast Harris County. Art Storey is eager to demonstrate the efficacy of the concept to other governing entities in the county.

"We are responsive to public concerns to do flood control with sensitivity," Storey says. "We take our expanded role with respect to the human and natural environment with enthusiasm; we will take the lead if we have the opportunity."

Under Storey, the district has changed in fundamental ways. There is a recognition that the district has many tools to use for flood control, not just one, and that it needs to discharge its mission with respect to the bigger environmental picture. There is a new commitment to bringing issues out in the open through public meetings, dialogues with city officials, and an energized task force. The flood control district has started encouraging park-type uses along HCFCD rights-of-way; already 50 miles of hike-and-bike trails have been put in place along county streams through this joint public/private program. Its new Environmental Services Department, the first in any local public agency, is charged with studying nonpoint pollution sources, with finding and developing the best grass for erosion control, and with moving and replanting trees otherwise doomed by flood control construction.

All these improvements cannot be credited solely to Storey. In large part they are the result of years of dogged citizen involvement, most notably that of environmental activist Terry Hershey and her group, the Bayou Preservation Association. "Now, when elected officials don't act, citizens get very involved," Hershey observes. Also, many people have moved to Houston from places with more progressive environmental attitudes, and they have begun to bring their expectations to bear on their adopted city.

Even with its new, improved attitude, the flood control district has its work cut out for it. Some of the sins of our past shortsightedness are soon to catch up with us; development cannot go on indefinitely on the flat and imperfectly drained Gulf Coast floodplain. For example, Brays Bayou is a flowing time bomb; designed in 1954 to handle "maximum development," it has been over capacity for ten years. Only 50 miles from the Gulf, only 50 feet above sea level, Harris County has an average slope for drainage purposes of only one inch *per mile*. Getting rid of heavy rainfall, never a simple matter here, gets more difficult and takes longer as new development adds impervious roads, parking lots, and roofs. This in

turn causes the 100-year floodplain (the land that would be flooded in the type of deluge that is expected every 100 years) to spread to include land that we never expected to flood. If Houston is to have any good environmental features — urban wildlife habitat, streamside recreation corridors, recharged water tables, clean surface water for recreation, cleaner air, or buildings relatively secure from flooding — development in the floodplain must stop.

But which of the 34 governing bodies in Harris County will regulate development in the floodplains of our 22 watersheds? The scale of such a task is intimidating. The Brays and Sims watershed alone, 246 square miles, is larger than the entire city of Chicago, and the 6,500 miles of bayous, streams, creeks, and ditches in Harris County, placed end to end, would stretch from Beaumont to El Paso eight times. If government agencies can work together to handle this monumental problem, their efforts could serve as a model for future regional planning.

In the coming years, community planning may well take place within the larger framework of the natural environment, rather than the more limited and as yet consensus-lacking frameworks of urban land use, traditional city planning, or design. Art Storey feels that sensitivity to the environment is an idea whose time has come: "Even Tom Langford would be doing more sensitive projects now." ■



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