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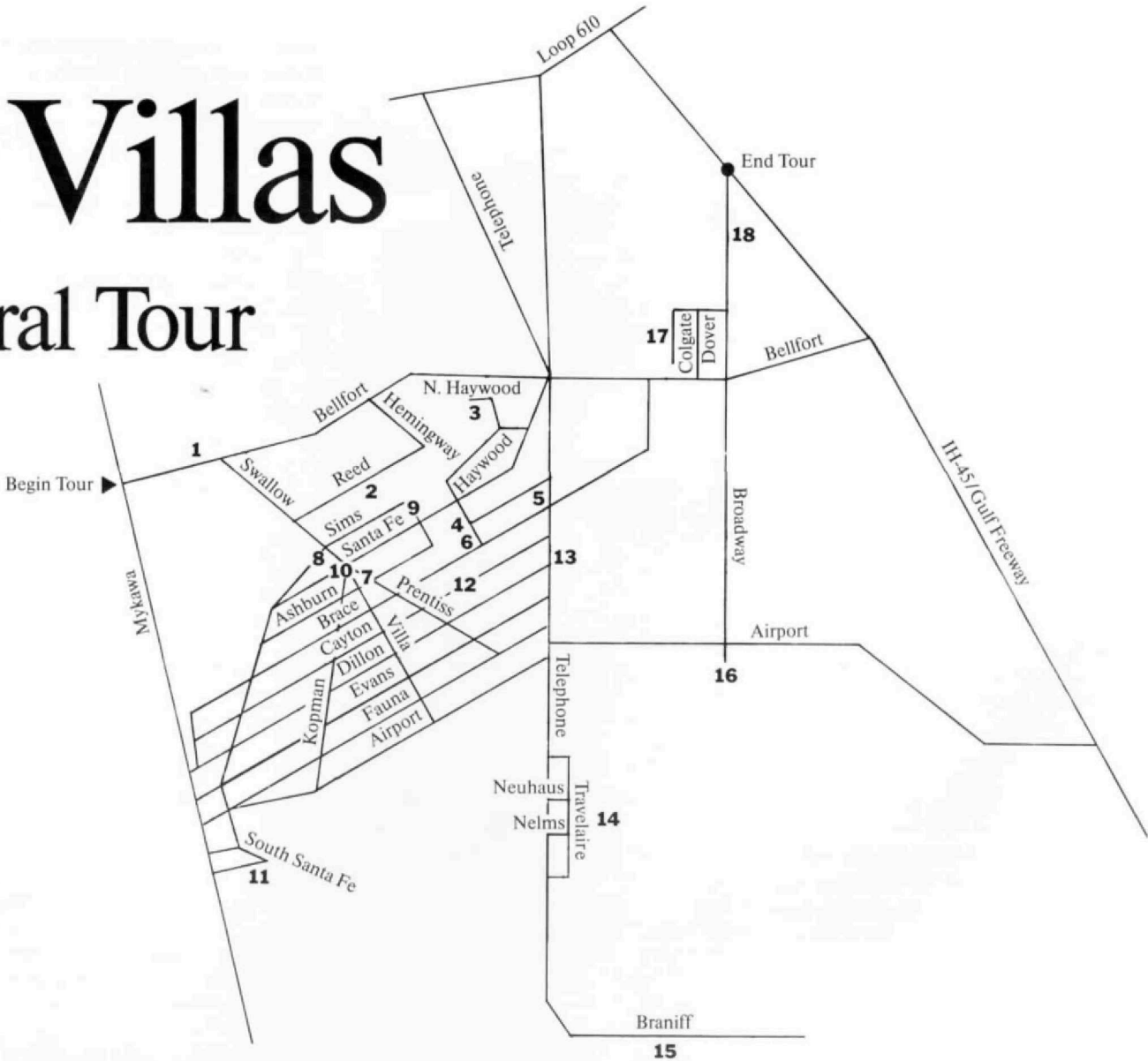
Garden Villas

An Architectural Tour

Stephen Fox

Garden Villas was one of Houston's more unusual suburban real estate ventures of the 1920s. Located on Telephone Road on the outskirts of town, it was planned and developed as a garden community, in which lots were large enough (7/10 acre) to sustain vegetable gardens, orchards, and chicken coops. The savings accrued from home-laid eggs and home-harvested produce "will be about enough to pay for the house," an early sales brochure asserted. Edward Wilkinson, a young Englishman who had studied at the Rice Institute, was staff architect for the developer, W.T. Carter, Jr. Wilkinson laid out the subdivision in 1926, with its curious mixture of countrified openness and Baroque formality – the radial cross-streets focused on the civic center at the apex of the plan, near Sims Bayou. The houses that the W.T. Carter Lumber & Building Co. built under Wilkinson's supervision are not architecturally sophisticated. But they are quite recognizable, especially a one-story type with an arched front porch lintel supported on columns. In 1926 Garden Villas advertised one of its one-story houses as a "ranch house type," the first known use of that term in Houston.

Garden Villas still seems very much on the edge of Houston, thanks to the presence nearby of the industrial and airports districts. The Carter family owned much of this property and it was from the Carter interests that the City of Houston in 1937 acquired the nine-year-old airfield that was to become Houston Municipal Airport (now William P. Hobby Airport). South of Hobby the countryside still waits. What Peter Papademetriou observed of Telephone Road in 1972 remains true today: "the road sweeps into town from the open country and, without turning aside, becomes the street. . . Telephone Road relives the American myth of the Open Road. . . [celebrating] images of homelessness, movement, and continuous flow."



1 6711 Belfort Street
Belfort Square Building
1966/Arthur D. Steinberg



Paul Hester, Houston

Without question, this four-story office building – a Douglas Milburn discovery – ranks as one of Houston's outstanding works of antic architecture. Green aggregate panels and gold anodized aluminum mullions provide architectural grounding for the zany penthouse.

2 7102 Reed Road
1964

In an otherwise nondescript neighborhood, this modern house makes all the right moves and displays all the right (or should one say Wright?) materials.

3 6410 North Haywood Drive
1950

Here in Garden Villas is a fine example of the 1950s contemporary look: low-slung, with low-pitched roofs, clerestory strips, and a dramatically glazed bay thrust against the obligatory chimney-pylon.

4 6720 South Haywood Drive
Garden Villas Park Recreation Center
1959/William R. Jenkins

This pair of steel-framed pavilions, with its articulated structural outrigging, isn't just Miesian, it's Miesian-Palladian. The nine-square grid of the rec building does get a little stretched in the middle to accommodate the program. But the lofty basketball pavilion provides the classical temenos-like space that Mies could always be counted on to deliver.

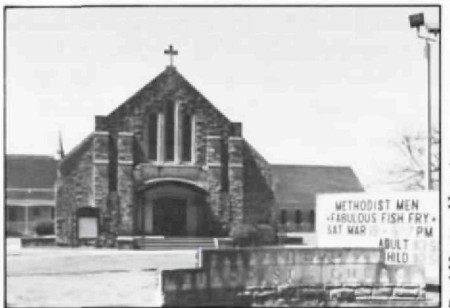
5 6702 Telephone Road
Airline Villas Apartments
1959

An homage to the Western Skies on Old Spanish Trail, the prototype Houston motel of the '50s. At Airline Villas, the model was updated with solar screens, played off against the big-scaled wooden slats of the second floor.

6 7393 Brace Avenue
c. 1931/Edward Wilkinson

This is one of several houses that Edward Wilkinson and his family live in on Brace Avenue between 1927 and 1939. It exudes the uncomplicated domesticity that was Garden Villas's chief attribute.

7 7155 Ashburn Avenue
Garden Villas Methodist Church
1941 and 1946/Edward A. Bodet



Paul Hester, Houston

The most impressive of the buildings gathered together in Garden Villas's perpetual prayer meeting is Bodet's Methodist church, faced with limestone and composed with the squat proportions associated with Bertram Goodhue's stream-lined Gothic of the 1920s.

8 7185 Santa Fe Drive
Garden Villas Elementary School
1932/Stayton Nunn and Edward Wilkinson

At the head of Wilkinson's town plan sits the elementary school, terminating the vista on Prentiss. The two-story entrance block is decorated with neo-Georgian detail. Behind it spreads out an addition by Harvin C. Moore and Stayton Nunn of 1950. Look quickly though. HISD is going to bulldoze Nunn and Wilkinson's original.

9 7370 Sims Drive
1937/Hiram A. Salisbury & T.G. McHale

Salisbury & McHale demonstrated their best River Oaks spit-and-polish in the composition and detailing of this trim country colonial. Note the guest house alongside. Sims Drive and Haywood Drive, bordering Sims Bayou, were intended as the elite streets in Garden Villas.

10 7190 Santa Fe Drive
Garden Villas Community Church
1939

The Garden Villas Community Church is a tentative modernistic rendition of neo-Gothic: parabolic arches and two strips of glass block, but nothing so far out as to shock the faithful.

11 7600 South Santa Fe Drive
Emsco Derrick & Equipment Co. Building
(now LTV Building)
1942/Fooshee & Cheek

LTV has respectfully preserved this very dignified modernistic building by the Dallas architects Fooshee & Cheek. Faced with cut limestone, it is simply composed with double-height recessed bays. Three plaques separate panels of glass block in each bay. Fooshee & Cheek, best known for Dallas's Highland Park Village, were responsible in Houston for the now-demolished River Oaks Gardens.

12 7200-7400 blocks of Cayton Avenue

This is the heart of Garden Villas: the uncurbed streets lined with pecan trees, the houses rambling with multiple additions, the open yards not kept up to West U standards. It's a very Texas place, just the sort of neighborhood for people whom one suspects probably prefer not to live in neighborhoods. Garden Villas still allows them to have it both ways.

13 6747 Telephone Road
Skylane Inn 1961/Bob Salter

Salter, the designer, builder, and owner of this complex of motel and apartment units, managed to incorporate every cliché of American modernism, circa 1960, into its main building.

14 8401 Travelaire Road
Houston Municipal Airport Terminal and Hangar
1940/Joseph Finger

Houston's first temple of flight is now in very shabby condition. The modernistically detailed hangar, to the south, is still in use; the terminal awaits rehabilitation, or at least the long-promised clean up.

15 8030 Braniff Street
City of Houston Firemen's Training Academy
1967/Jenkins Hoff Oberg Saxe

Startling to come upon unexpectedly, the Firemen's Training Academy is a tough-looking complex of widely scattered buildings, all made of exposed poured-in-place concrete. *Progressive Architecture* pronounced it "a landscape that may look straight out of the TV series *Star Trek*." The Drill Tower and the singed Fire Building decidedly stand out.

16 7800 Airport Boulevard
William P. Hobby Airport
1954/Wyatt C. Hedrick
Parking garage, 1985/Bernard Johnson, Inc.

Neither the terminal nor the garage that now visually obscures it is as compelling as Jim Love's *Ernie* (1985), poised in between.

17 8210 Colgate Avenue
1960/Paul Wahlberg



Paul Hester, Houston

Glenbrook Valley, laid out by the landscape architects Hare & Hare for the Detering interests, responds sympathetically to the gently undulating terrain along Sims Bayou. The houses, however, are prosaic suburban standards. With one exception: this precise, compact, flat-roofed house, set below street-level on a shallow downhill site. If only all Glenbrook Valley had risen to its level of architectural accomplishment.

18 4101 Broadway
Park Place Baptist Church
1952/R. Graham Jackson and Frank C. Dill
Dill's contemporary interpretation of the "pointed" style.