



The Corinthian: Grand new stairs in a grand old space.



Preservation at a profit: 2421 Brentwood.



Cafeteria style: 4916 Main, formerly the Weldon Cafeteria.

# Good Bricks

THE GREATER HOUSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE SALUTES THE YEAR'S MOST HEROIC RESCUE OPERATIONS



2337 Blue Bonnet: Back to International Style splendor.



The McCrory Building at Main and Prairie: One of Spire Realty's many projects.

**IN FEBRUARY**, more than 400 fans of historic architecture gathered for the Good Brick Awards, the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance's annual recognition ceremony. In the dark days of the 1980s, entire years passed without even one Good Brick being awarded. This year, seven juried awards recognized a whopping 12 buildings — including several sleek, Modern buildings, of the sort only now beginning to be considered historic.

This year's winners included:

**FRED GARVEY AND JACKSON HICKS FOR THE CORINTHIAN.** In 1905, the eight-story First National Bank, at 201 Main, was Houston's tallest skyscraper. The bank expanded the neoclassical building twice, and later converted the majestic 40,000-square-foot banking lobby — which extended a full city block — into office space. Drop ceilings interrupted the 35-foot-tall Corinthian columns, and cubicles cluttered what had once been a marble floor. In the early '90s, owner Harris County considered demolishing the building, but after the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance intervened, the county used it instead for storage. In 1999, developer Fred Garvey bought the building and began converting its upper stories to residential lofts. The lobby, though, was trickier: Who but a major department store could handle such a large, grand space? Jackson Hicks, Houston's best-known caterer, proposed to use it as a full-service "special events venue," a place for large-scale parties and weddings. Now known as The Corinthian, the huge, high-ceilinged room boasts restored columns, a replica of its original marble floor, and First National Bank's

original. An impressive new double staircase replaced the single stair First National Bank had used to limit access to the mezzanine.

The Good Brick Awards party was held, appropriately, at the Corinthian.

**COURTNEY AND FRED STEVES, AND GLASSMAN SHOEMAKE MALDONADO ARCHITECTS FOR 2337 BLUE BONNET.** In 1937, architect Howard Calhoun escorted his clients, Mr. and Mrs. L.D. Allen, to the Chicago World's Fair, where they admired a sleek, pared-down house designed by Walter Gropius. Besotted by the International Style, the Allens hired Calhoun to design them a similar house, and the result appeared in national magazines. But over the course of decades, the house suffered the indignities of age, such as leaky windows and worn cabinetry. In 2001, owners Courtney and Fred Steves hired Glassman Shoemake Maldonado to restore the home to its former glory — and to design an addition that detracted from neither the front facade or the main living areas.

**BILL CAUDELL AND RANDY POWERS FOR 2421 BRENTWOOD.** Between 1927 and 1930 Katherine Mott designed many Houston's most distinctive large houses — all in English styles, all with intricate brickwork, casement windows, and asymmetric plans. In the 1970s, the Mott house at 2421 Brentwood belonged to Houston power broker Bob Lanier; around that time, it suffered an awkward addition that doubled its square footage. By 2001, the house was considered a teardown.

Powers, an interior designer, and his partner, preservation enthusiast Caudell, bought the house, moved in, and threw themselves into its restoration. They hired preservationists, researched Mott's work, and took pains to make the addition look like a Mott original from the '20s, complete with her signature ironwork, intricately patterned brick, and fossilized limestone floors. Less than 18 months after buying the house, the couple sold it at a profit — possibly setting a record for the highest price per square foot ever paid in River Oaks — and proving that preservation can be profitable.

**RAY + HOLLINGTON ARCHITECTS FOR 4916 MAIN STREET.** McKie and Kamrath Architects designed the dramatic, cantilevered Weldon Cafeteria, which opened in 1949. Later tenants significantly altered the building, but Ray + Hollington, which



1602 Westheimer: Before (left) and after (right).



3843 N. Braeswood: After (above) and before (below).

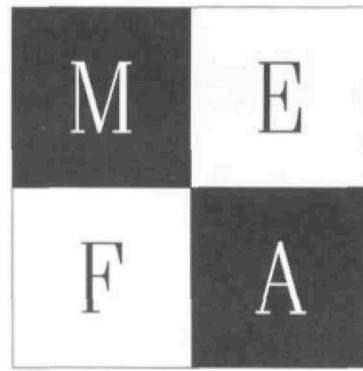
leased the space to serve as a studio, restored the original interior design.

**STEVEN COURTADE, SHERRY HILL, AND THE ALIDADE GROUP FOR 2010 KANE STREET.** Owner Courtade recognized the dilapidated 1890s shotgun house as a historic gem, but it measured only 800 square feet. He hired architect Sherry Tseng Hill to design an addition that would triple that square footage. To minimize the addition's effect, Tseng placed the new construction behind the house, where it appears to be an overgrown carriage house. The Alidade Group executed the design.

**SPIRE REALTY GROUP FOR SIX DOWNTOWN PROJECTS.** Spire, an early practitioner of downtown preservation, remains one of the most active. The award recognizes six projects: renovation of the Sam Houston Hotel, at 1117 Prairie Avenue; conversion of 915 Franklin Avenue, originally the office of Southern Pacific Railroad, into Bayou Lofts; preserving the facade of the 1907 Topek Building, at Travis and Commerce, while erecting an 88,000-square-foot parking garage behind it; rehabilitating the McCrory Building, at Main and Prairie; renovation of the two-story building at 509 Main Street, once home to Foley Bros. Dry Goods Company; and renovation of 708 Main Street, where powerbroker Jesse H. Jones once officed.

**COLBY DESIGN AND KALDIS DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS, FOR 1602 WESTHEIMER.** Andrew Kaldis, a developer with a long interest in preservation, knew that underneath its unimpressive modernized facade, the Imperial Plumbing Supply Building at the intersection of Westheimer and Mandell was the work of architect Joseph Finger. Stripping away layers of plaster revealed the original brickwork; removing the drop ceiling revealed the original tin ceiling; and Kaldis installed large, wood-framed windows where the original store windows had been. The elegant result is now home to Hugo's, Hugo Ortega and Tracy Vaught's much-praised Mexican restaurant.

**GINGRICH ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS FOR 3843 N. BRAESWOOD.** Most Houstonians don't consider 1960s buildings as historic treasures, but architect Kerry Gingrich saw that the best way to rescue this Modern office building, which had recently served as a hair-restoration clinic, was to restore it to its Bauhaus roots. Paul Homeyer, who chaired the Good Brick jury, notes that the judges were divided on this award. "It's different from our usual Craftsman-bungalow Good Brick," says Homeyer. "We decided that we wanted to encourage that kind of preservation, to get people thinking about what counts as history." — Lisa Gray



mixed emotions fine art

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