

## Pritzker in the (White) House

By Enid E. Jiménez

Throughout the evening of June 17, the White House had been filled with famous architects. They had been drawn to the nation's capital to watch one of their own receive the pinnacle of architectural awards. Now, as the exterior lights dimmed to a sultry yellow glow, those who had just attended the awarding of the 20th Anniversary Pritzker Prize to Italian architect Renzo Piano contemplated their return to normal life. Piano puffed on a congratulatory cigar and chatted with Rafael Moneo, the 1996 Pritzker winner, and a small clutch of dazzlingly dressed well-wishers. No one seemed to want to make the first move to leave.

The auspicious occasion was made even more auspicious by being hosted by President and Mrs. Clinton and being held in the White House, a first on both counts. Piano, whose only built American projects to date are Houston's The Menil Collection and the Twombly Gallery, had won the 1998 Pritzker Architecture Prize at the age of 60. Born and raised in Genoa, Italy, Piano could count himself among the 20 architects to receive this coveted award, which includes \$100,000 and a bronze medallion and was established by the Hyatt Foundation in 1979. He joins the seven other Pritzker laureates whose work can be found in Houston: Philip Johnson, James Stirling, Kevin Roche, I. M. Pei, Gordon Bunshaft, Robert Venturi, and Rafael Moneo.

That evening, the feeling of being enveloped by the White House was overwhelming. Designed by Irish immigrant James Hoban in 1792, this iconic dwelling is perhaps America's most renovated house. It's a place where Americans can sense the rich (if not particularly lengthy) history of their country, and it was an ideal setting for the prize ceremony.

For the mostly architectural guests, just getting to the White House from the nearby Hyatt Hotel was an event. They

were whisked the short distance in a motorcade of large buses that ended up stacked like so many beached whales in front of the White House's South Lawn. The buses sat there for about an hour. Dressed in their scrubbed up best, the attendees began to display a certain degree of chagrin and despair as yet another bomb dog approached to sniff the bus tires.

When finally welcomed inside, the guests were allowed to filter from one famous room to the next, soaking in music from military band trios and duos doling out Vivaldi, Mozart, and selections from *Porgy and Bess*. At dusk, everyone was ushered out onto the expansive lawn and then into a billowing, air-conditioned tent. When President Clinton appeared, there was a hush before the band broke into "Hail to the Chief."

The four-course meal was interspersed with a variety of short speeches, the first being Hillary Clinton's passionate comments on the need for a civic architecture. Following her introduction, architectural historian Vincent Scully delivered a perplexing diatribe on subjects unrelated to the evening's honoree. Despite this, Renzo Piano just seemed delighted to be there. After he was introduced, he humbly described his journey as an architect in a world that had supported his methodical work. As he talked about his life in architecture, the enthralled crowd of his peers hung on his every word.

President Clinton spoke last, succinctly addressing the many contributions made by architecture to the cultural foundation of the "American dream." And as he spoke, the crowd spooned up the evening's last course — an homage to architecture made of chocolate and passion fruit mousse with raspberries and kiwi sauces, all constructed to look like miniature buildings. ■



Renzo Piano's two American buildings: Houston's Twombly Gallery (left) and The Menil Collection.

## Cite to Remember

Few people have been more closely associated with *Cite* during its decade and a half of publication than photographer Paul Hester. From the second issue on, his pictures have provided an ongoing record of both Houston's past and its relentless drive into the future. Now, as part of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Rice Design Alliance, which publishes *Cite*, an exhibit of Hester's work will be on display from October 16 through January 3 at The Menil Collection, 1511 Branard. The show will contain some 40 black and white prints, among them the photo of shoppers at a lavishly stocked Fiesta, bottom, and the picture of the garishly decorated business, below, that was shot for a series of images illustrating the concept of signs as buildings, and buildings as signs.



Coming in  
**Cite**

**Cite 43: Spiritual Spaces**

Novelist Paula Webb quizzes priest and therapist J. Pittman McGehee on what makes a space spiritual.

CAM associate curator Lynn Herbert muses on the connections between art, architecture, and the sacred.

Barbara Koerble examines the church architecture of Gary Cunningham.

**Walter P. Moore, Jr.  
1937-1998**



**A**dmired engineer and educator Walter P. Moore, Jr. died June 21 from injuries suffered as the result of an April 4 automobile accident. He was 61. Moore, who had been chairman of the Houston-based consulting firm Walter P. Moore and Associates, Inc., was born and raised in Houston. He graduated from the Rice Institute with a B.A. and B.S. in civil engineering, then received his M.S. and Ph.D. in structural engineering from the University of Illinois. After serving as a captain in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, he joined the firm his father had founded in 1931.

Under Moore's direction, Walter P. Moore and Associates became nationally known for its design of high-rise buildings, sports facilities, and other large projects. In Houston, Moore was involved with the 49-story First City Tower, the Summit, and the Houston Center. He also had a guiding role in the design of the Miller Outdoor Theater in Hermann Park. Over the years, his firm had an impact on the built environments and the quality of

life in numerous cities.

Moore was not only an engineer, but an educator. In 1994, he joined the faculty of Texas A&M as an instructor in both engineering and architecture. He held the Thomas A. Bullock endowed chair and was director of the Center for Construction Education and the Center for Building Design and Construction. His honors included induction into the National Academy of Science, receiving the Distinguished Alumnus award from both Rice and the University of Illinois, and being named 1995 Master Builder by the Houston chapter of the Associated General Contractors.

Stan Kawaguchi, past president of the American Consulting Engineers Council, recalls Moore working hard to bridge the sometimes contentious gulf between architects and engineers. And Raymond F. Messer, the current chairman of Walter P. Moore and Associates, has noted that his predecessor was a man for whom "engineering was much more than calculations — what was more important was how engineering served society." ■

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# Future Shock

Probably no other city in America is undergoing change as explosive as that now taking place in Houston. Wherever you turn, you see the dust of development, the framing of new houses, the shadows of cranes lifting girders into place. In downtown and Midtown alone, a reported \$1.2 billion plus in new construction is underway. The city is flush with possibilities in a way it hasn't been for nearly two decades. And yet this torrent of growth throws off the eerie glow of lessons unlearned from Houston's past booms and busts.

The hallmark of Houston development — unfettered market forces embedded in the sacred tradition of laissez-faire property rights — has certainly allowed for rapid response to a phenomenal growth in personal wealth. Neighborhoods, especially those within the Loop, have changed character seemingly overnight. Fed in part by the welcome rediscovery of the downtown trilogy of work, residence, and play, inner-city property has again become dear, and there has been a rush to develop almost any available open space to its highest capacity, often using the same lot-busting scale as was used in the houses in West University during an earlier boom.

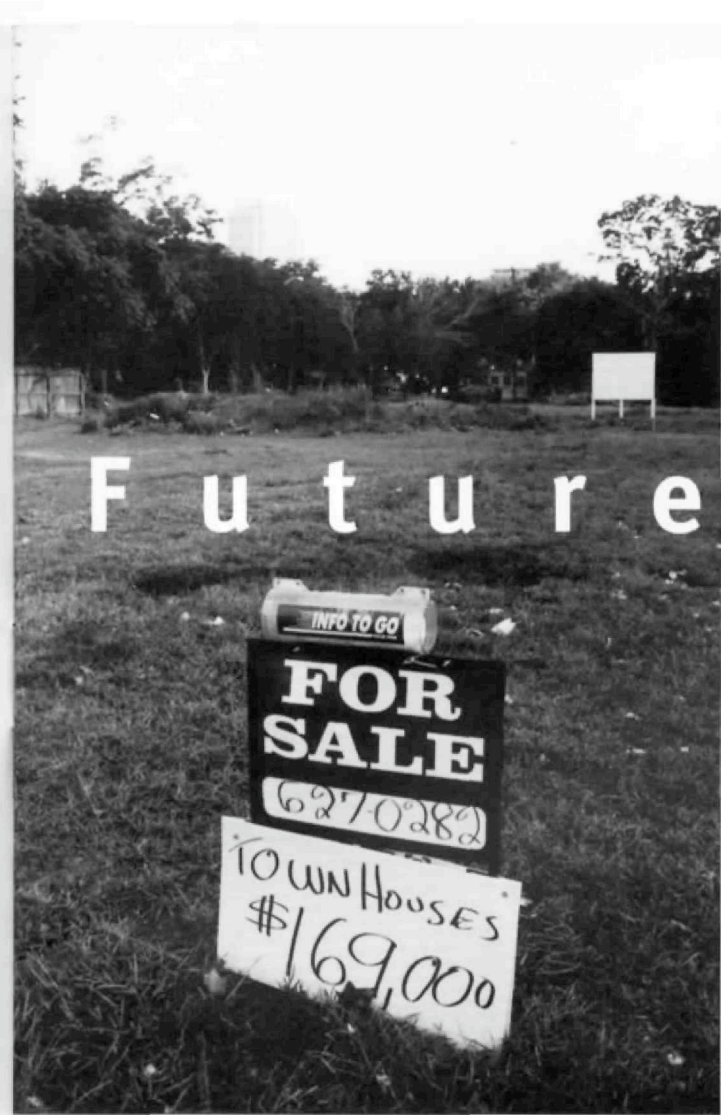
In the midst of this activity, planning seems to have been left behind. While discussion of the perils and pleasures inherent in the new construction takes place within the professional architectural and planning communities, this discussion has done little to spark a broader public discourse, and has had little impact on the actions of the developers whose work is changing the face of the city.

This is of more than just academic concern. Because what we build today we build for the next 30 years, for a generation that will be nothing short of revolutionary. Yet while we talk of the new millennium, of new technologies, and of the infrastructure of digital communication and commerce, Houston seems frozen in dated preconceptions and free-market inhibitions. For instance, we have only recently begun to move beyond the aging approach of buses and resurrect the idea of a rail system as an answer to our mass transit needs. Houston faces a staggering range of issues that a frozen mind-set cannot address: Beyond the promise of a 21st-century mass transit strategy and the urban impact of Metro's Downtown and Midtown Transit Streets Project, how will we move around the city? Can we have a historic preservation ordinance with teeth? When will there be public strategies for housing the families who have been stranded by the destruction of Allen Parkway Village and escalating inner-Loop property values? What is the place of city planning and design, much less zoning, in the public realm? How do we generate public discourse about the quality and character of civic space, including the place of public art in the city? And how do we deal with the crucial issue of the increasingly challenged, degraded environment that surrounds us in all the city's neighborhoods?

In this issue of *Cite* we try to come to grips with some of these issues — and, perhaps, spark public discourse along the way. In the hopes of Mayor Lee Brown and the concerns of former city controller George Greanias, in the dreams of those who see a downtown throbbing with around-the-clock activity and the dread of those who see the character of their streets being destroyed by careless construction, we can perhaps seek a holistic strategy, one that can tie together large city issues such as transportation, environmental stewardship, civic amenity, and modern communication technologies.

Houston's urban challenges won't be satisfied by quick fixes. We can't afford the short-term mind-set that too often marks the city's developers and, increasingly, corporate builders. In this era of fast growth the city's leaders have to move beyond mere caretaking, or minimal and reactive regulation. What Houston needs is a fully developed and long-lasting armature for growth and stability — something that's unlikely to arise out of unfettered market forces. Instead, such an armature will require political courage, thoughtful analysis, and careful reflection on the part of developers, planners, and government officials working together within the framework that defines this city.

*Rives T. Taylor, Guest Editor*



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