



For 50 years, the Menil House has been regarded as an architectural icon. Now an effort is underway to conserve it for future generations.

THREE YEARS AFTER ITS OWNER DIED, and five decades after it was built, the house on San Felipe that was home to long-time Houston art patrons Dominique and John de Menil is being prepared for a small facelift.

In February, the Menil Foundation hired Stern and Bucek Architects, along with preservation consultant Ellen Beasley, to work with Menil Collection curators in examining the Menil House,

cataloging its condition, and determining what should be done to guarantee that the residence remains in good shape. Once an assessment is made, any needed repairs will begin.

"One thing we're trying to make clear is that this is not a renovation, or remaking of the house," says Ned Rifkin, director of The Menil Collection. "We're characterizing this as a conservation

Preserving the MENIL

Taking stock of the house that pioneered

MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE in Houston

effort. There's going to be great sensitivity exercised in trying to not make the house look brand new. What we hope is that people who are familiar with the house will be able to visit once the project is completed and notice almost nothing different about it."

Still, as Rifkin notes, the house is a half century old, and anything that age in Houston's climate will begin to show wear. By uncovering that wear now and dealing with it, he says, more serious future problems can be avoided.

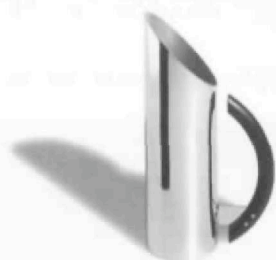
When Dominique de Menil died in December 1997, she left her house to the Menil Foundation, which runs The Menil Collection. In the time since, the Foundation has mulled over what use to make of the bequest. In the past year, says Rifkin, the house has been host to a series of lunches and to receptions following openings at The Menil Collection. But what its ultimate use will be is still uncertain. The only thing he's confi-

dent of, Rifkin says, is that the house "will not be an extension of The Menil Collection. It will certainly never be a public facility. We intend to maintain its residential status."

Designed by architect Philip Johnson in 1949, and completed in 1950, the Menil House is one of the most important residential structures in Houston, as much for its history and influence as for its actual appearance. It was not only the starting point for what eventually became The Menil Collection, it also introduced modernism as espoused by Mies van der Rohe, Johnson's mentor, to Houston. In the words of architectural historian Stephen Fox, the Menil House is "the modernist equivalent of Bayou Bend."

"It's an exciting project," Rifkin says of the Menil House work. "If we're going to enhance and augment our legacy, we need to take care of our history. And the Menil House is where, for us, it all began." — MJS

Modern Classics



Maria Batta for Alessi



Walter Gropius for Rosenthal



Arne Jacobsen for Stelton



Annaleena Hakatie for Iittala



Kati Tuominen-Niittylä for Arabia



Aldo Rossi for Alessi

Carolyn Brewer's

**SUNSET
SETTINGS**

1729 SUNSET BOULEVARD • HOUSTON, TEXAS 77005 • 713.522.7661

open tuesday through saturday from 10 am through 5 pm • www.sunsetsettings.com