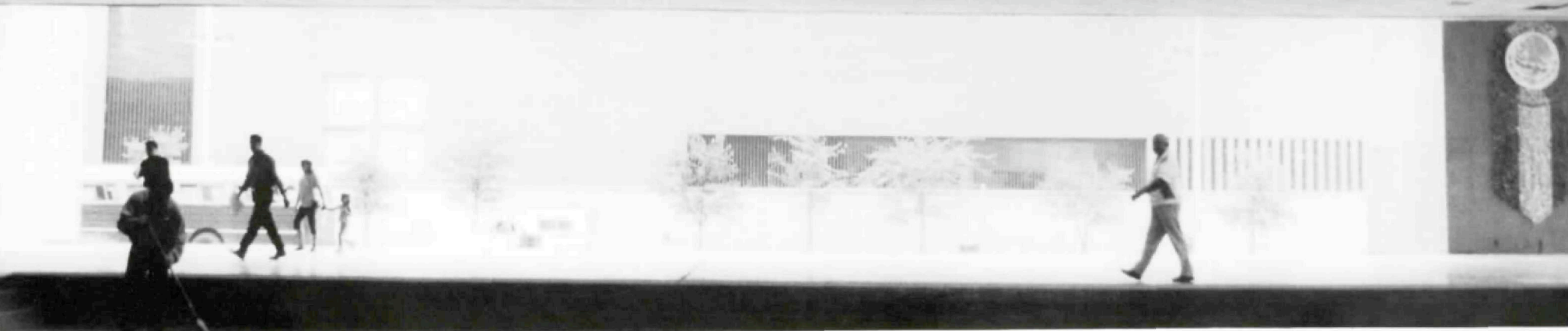


MONTERREY



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Monterrey & the Culture of the Northeast

RAFAEL LONGORIA



BEFORE TEXAS was identified with the Southwest, it was part of the Northeast. Saltillo was its capital, and the Bishop of Monterrey shepherded its souls. The creation of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Linares in 1777, which comprised Texas as well as what today are the Mexican states of Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas, marked the first official recognition of northeastern Mexico as an entity.

In 1792 the seat of the diocese moved to Monterrey, where the magnificent baroque façade of the bishop's summer palace still dominates the landscape from a hill west of downtown. From that point on, Monterrey emerged as the leading city of the Northeast, a role that has grown and evolved significantly over the last two centuries.

The identity of the Northeast and its part in the creation of cowboy mythology

are much better understood in Mexico than in the United States. The Northeast was the cradle of vaquero culture — the place where ranching and cowboys were invented. The region has its own cuisine (flour tortillas, machacado, cabrito al pastor, cortadillo, semitas, and goat milk candies) and its own music. It also has a libertarian tradition that remains strong.

In fact, Texas owes a great debt to the 19th-century liberal politicians from Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas who welcomed Anglo-American settlers to the region in the ill-founded belief that the immigrants would increase the number of liberals in the Mexican Congress.

In this issue, Armando Flores Salazar, through the analysis of three urban maps, succinctly traces Monterrey's transition from religious center to industrial powerhouse. The city map

of 1798 shows a colonial town defined by its plazas and churches. New military installations and civic administration buildings dominate the map of 1865. The 1894 plan shows a thriving city with consulates from Spain, Italy, Germany and the U.S., and with railroads linking Monterrey to Mexico City, the Gulf port of Tampico, and to the new border at Laredo. Also visible are the brewing company and steel foundry that changed the course of the city.

Naturally, the nascent industrial center just 130 miles from the border developed strong commercial ties with the industrial cities of the United States. Along with machinery and manufacturing technology, came architects from St. Louis and San Antonio — including Alfred Giles, whose delicately proportioned facades still survive in downtown Monterrey. And in

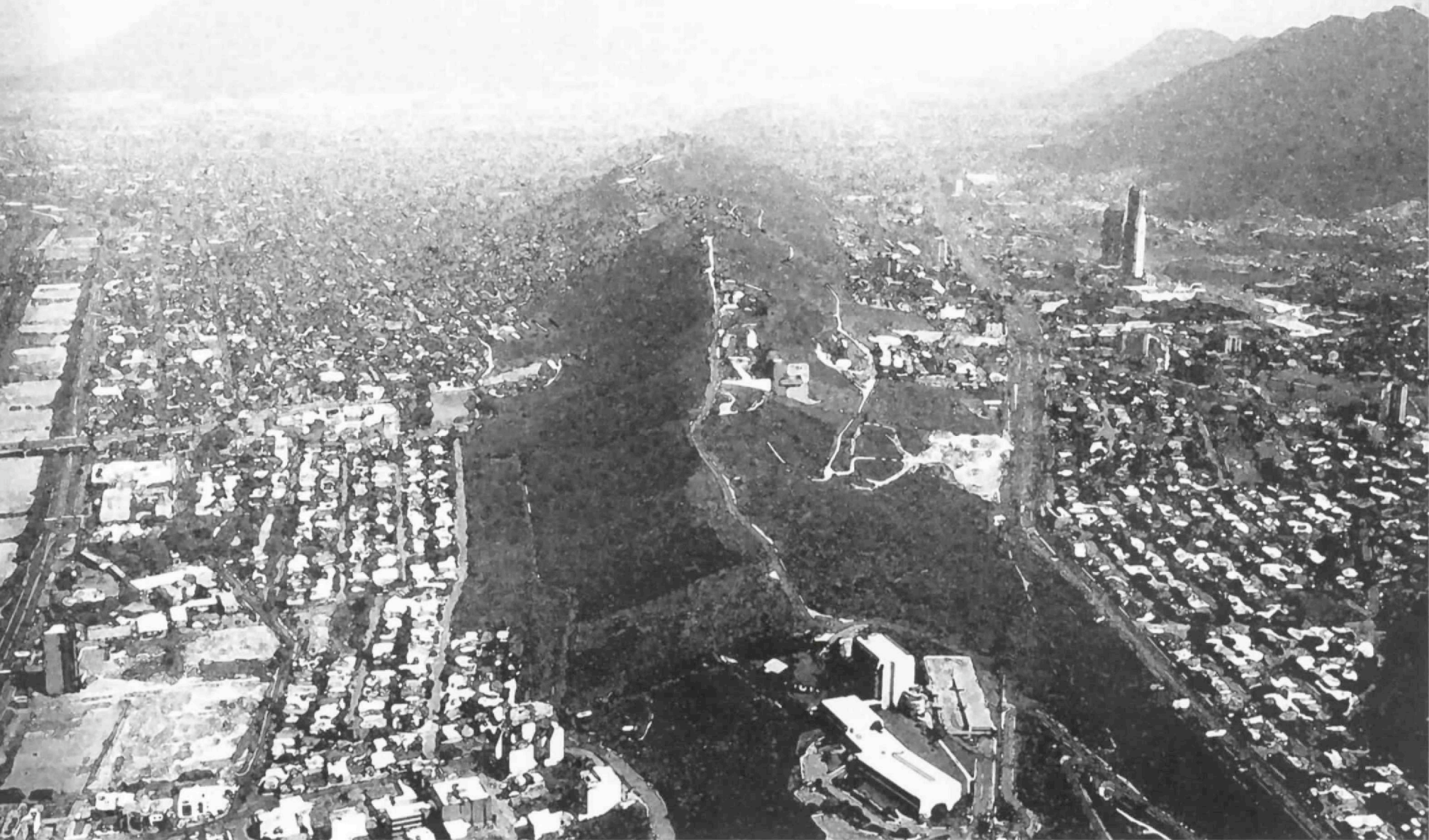
the absence of local architecture schools, many of the most prominent local architects of the pre-World War II era received their education in Texas universities.

After 1945, Monterrey emerged as an educational mecca. Its Instituto Tecnológico (ITESM) became Mexico's premier training ground for business leaders, attracting students from all over Latin America. The city also acquired a significant array of museums and other arts institutions that make it today the undisputed cultural center of a very large region. It is interesting to note that Monterrey's two greatest industrial icons, Cervecería Cuauhtémoc and Fundidora Monterrey, now house cultural facilities.

Particularly significant to the city's cultural aspirations is MARCO, the contemporary art museum that in 1991 opened its doors at a prominent

In the courtyard of the Monterrey City Hall, a wraparound mural shows the city's history — from its 1596 founding to its Little League triumphs four centuries later.





Aerial view of Loma Larga and San Pedro Garza García.



House in the Barrio Antiguo.

downtown site. MARCO embodies the flamboyant nationalist aesthetic that has become the signature of its architect, Ricardo Legorreta of Mexico City. The local popularity of this building brought Legorreta other important commissions, such as the enormous library for the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and ITESM's new graduate research campus.

Although Monterrey has always imported its high culture (including architecture) either from Mexico City or the United States, it has in the last 20 years begun to export popular culture in the form of norteño music. Just as Jalisco and the Bajío region of central Mexico provided many of the cultural artifacts that became national symbols in the first half of the 20th century, the images and sounds of the Northeast have captured the imagination of the entire country — and their appeal extends even beyond Mexico's borders.

The character of the Northeast can best be appreciated in the many small towns that surround Monterrey. The

city occupies an ecological border where desert plains meet forested mountains. And the vernacular architecture of the towns south of the city responds to radically different conditions from those of towns to the north. Villa de Santiago, just a half hour drive to the south of Monterrey, is a charming hill town with lush vegetation and crooked streets that dates back to the 1600s, while the hacienda of San Pedro in Zuazua, about 40 miles north of the city and also founded in the 17th century, vividly illustrates how buildings responded to an arid and hostile climate in the cattle-grazing plains. Nevertheless, the towns' similarities are stronger than their differences, and the same vernacular traditions can still be found in Monterrey.

Monterrey is a city of metropolitan suburbs, but its center, while predominantly modern, still has a provincial flavor. Sitting under the portales of the old Ayuntamiento facing the beautifully-scaled Plaza Hidalgo, all preconceived notions of Monterrey dissipate. Of course, it helps that the arches of the por-

tales crop out the atrocious mirrored-glass buildings across the square.

Nearby is the Barrio Antiguo, or what remains of it after the construction of the Macroplaza, a controversial urban renewal project at the heart of the city. The Barrio Antiguo is a great preserve of traditional urban fabric, with the sort of friendly scale and mix of uses that make so many Mexican towns work so well (especially when traffic is removed). In recent years, the Barrio Antiguo has become a lively entertainment district, with fashionable restaurants, cafes, and bars occupying some of the oldest buildings in the city. Unfortunately, many of the rehabilitations that have taken place try to make the buildings look like they belong in Guanajuato or Querétaro rather than capitalizing on their authentic regional character. Though a vigorous nucleus of architectural historians at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León is documenting the area's vernacular architecture, the city's decision makers do not yet seem to appreciate the richness of the local building and urbanistic traditions.



Portales of the old Ayuntamiento.



Aerial view of Fundidora Monterrey (now Parque Fundidora).

In the courtyard of the City Hall, at the southern end of the Macroplaza, a huge wraparound mural depicts the city's history — from its founding in 1596 to its Little League triumphs in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, four centuries later. In 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo partitioned the old Northeast, but the new realities of migration, communications technology, and the North American Free Trade Agreement have brought the region closer together than ever.

Reports about the vanishing border have become ubiquitous in the mainstream media. The cover of a recent special issue of *Time* proclaimed, "Welcome to Amexica." But the dramatic changes visible on both sides of the border are far from symmetrical. In Monterrey, the impact of NAFTA is most evident in the affluent suburbs on the south side of the Santa Catarina River, where HEB, Sam's, and Chili's thrive, while in cities such as Houston, the presence of Mexico is most palpable in middle- and low-income neighborhoods, where Spanish signs dominate the landscape.

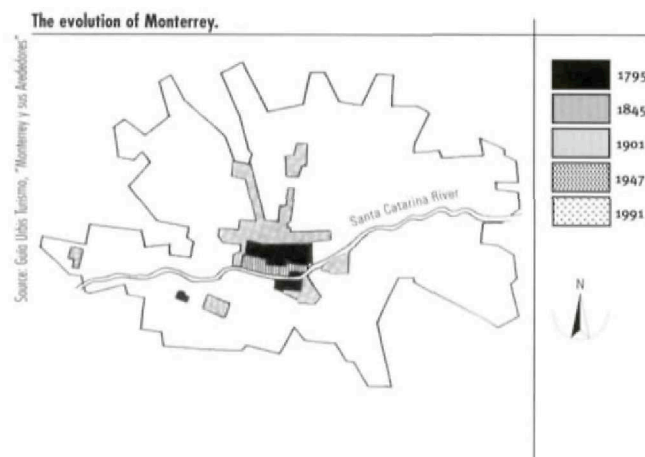
Globalization is a paradoxical phenomenon. It does not create a new homogeneous, hybrid culture; rather, it brings in close contact a multitude of cultures, providing opportunities to learn from one another. And as people travel and migrate, they better appreciate the uniqueness of their own places of origin.

Highway 59, the so-called NAFTA Highway, crosses all four of the northeastern states as it connects Houston with Monterrey and Saltillo. The road's upgrade is intended to facilitate commercial traffic. But history shows repeatedly that cultural exchanges are the most lasting effects of trade. ■

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POPULATION OF MEXICO'S LARGEST METROPOLITAN AREAS	
1. Mexico City	17,800,000
2. Guadalajara	3,545,801
3. Monterrey	3,110,457

Source: INEGI, 2000 Census (preliminary results)



Source: Gabo Uribe Lustosa, "Monterrey y sus Antecedentes"