

FARNSWORTH & CHAMBERS

City Parks Department Preserves the Wright Stuff

THE FARNSWORTH & CHAMBERS BUILDING, LOCATED at 2999 S. Wayside, reopened in December 2009 following an extensive rehabilitation by City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department for use as its headquarters.

The building is presently known as the Gragg Building, after the second owners who sold it and the surrounding acreage to the city in the late 1970s. Houston architects MacKie & Kamrath, local proponents of Frank Lloyd Wright, designed the building in a modernist style reminiscent of Wright's Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona and it includes steeply-slanted, rough-faced green quartzite walls and concrete vertical shapes that evoke the talud and tablero construction techniques of Mesoamerica.

Architects for the rehabilitation, Daniel Kornberg and Kris McGraw of HarrisonKornberg Architects, successfully adapted and improved the functionality of the building and introduced nine new hipped-roof clerestory skylights. Additional alterations include the introduction of egress doors,



Alan Shephard and other astronauts officed at the Farnsworth and Chambers building from 1962-64.

enlargement of the ribbon windows on the north and south (secondary facades), and replacement of floor-to-ceiling window systems where they were too corroded to be restored. Original elements including the interior mahogany paneling and light coves, wooden intake grills, steel-framed ribbon windows, and interior circulation were maintained and any damaged elements replicated in kind.

The building is significant nationally as the headquarters of the Manned Spacecraft Center (MSC) in Houston while the Clear Lake campus

was being designed and constructed from 1962-1964. Mercury astronauts, including Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, Wally Schirra, Alan Shepard, and Deke Slayton, as well as project director Robert Rowe Gilruth, maintained offices at the building.

-Anna Mod

Anna Mod served as the historic preservation consultant for the rehabilitation of the building. Read more about the building at OffCite.org.

PHOTOSCAPE

THESE IMAGES WERE NOT MANIPULATED

Photographs by David A. Brown, entitled "Trying to Find My Way," are on exhibition, as a part of FotoFest at Darke Gallery until May 1st. The series is a walk down Main Street. Brown turned his lens to storefront windows and photographed those strange spots where the outside views are reflected on top of interior ones. Are they more than optical curiosities?

The images show a buzzing, jangling range of data — historic buildings in the periphery, a policeman on patrol, a passing car, an empty store, a clear sky — that bring together a surreal but encompassing experience of street, architecture, and place.

-Raj Manḳad

