

CONSTRUCTION CHIC REIGNS AT RDA GALA,

"SHEETROCK AROUND THE CLOCK"

The Rice Design Alliance's eighth annual fundraising gala, "Sheetrock Around the Clock," was held on Friday, 11 November, at the First City National Bank Building. The gala, chaired by Jory Alexander and Carolyn Walne, drew more than 700 RDA supporters, who gathered to recognize Houston's construction industry for its contribution to the city's remarkable architecture.

The RDA Award for Design Excellence was presented to Warren S. Bellows, Jr., chairman of the board of W. S. Bellows Construction Corporation.

Bellows Construction, founded in 1914 by Warren S. Bellows, began building in Houston in 1924. Since that time, Bellows has built many of Houston's landmark buildings, including the San Jacinto Monument (Alfred C. Finn, 1936), the Houston Club (Alfred C. Finn, 1940), the Bank of the Southwest Building (Kenneth Franzheim, 1956), the First City National Bank Building (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1960), the Tenneco Building (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1963), One Shell Plaza (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill with Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, 1971), and the Wortham Theater Center (Morris Aubry, 1987), as well as the restoration of Bayou Bend (Graham B. Luhn and Kirksey-Meyers Architects, 1993). RDA president Barrie Scardino presented the award, a Steuben Illusion glass bowl donated by Neiman Marcus, to Warren S. Bellows, Jr.

Environment chairman Jay Baker specified a stage constructed of bright orange scaffolding and used orange construction fencing, yellow-and-black caution tape, blinking lights, barricades, and construction signage to carry out the theme. Baker & Botts donated 180 bright-yellow-and-white Mighty Tonka construction toys, including cranes, dump trucks, loaders, backhoes, and mixers, that decorations chairman Adele Howell Bentsen selected to place on the black-draped tables. (Following the party, Baker & Botts donated the toys to children at Scott Elementary School, the firm's Business/School Partner through the Houston Independent School District's Adopt-a-School Program.) Guests received yellow hard hats and carpenter's aprons at their places as favors, an effort chaired by

Sharon Tyler. Truffles & Flourishes prepared the stunning buffet and the fabulous Sheetrock Cake, garnished with sheets of white chocolate and silver Sheetrock nails made of dark chocolate. Music was provided by the Harry Sheppard Trio and Brave Combo. The crowd was entertained by a stylish silent auction organized by designers Cathie Johnson and Priscilla Blohm. During dinner, guests were treated to a slide presentation prepared by RDA



Left to right: Gala chair Carolyn Walne, RDA president Barrie Scardino, honoree, Warren S. Bellows, Jr., gala chair Jory Alexander, and Thomas F. Bellows.

president Barrie Scardino that documented some of the most significant Houston buildings constructed by the ten Houston construction firms that were recognized that evening: W. S. Bellows Construction Corporation; Tellepsen Corporation; Fretz Construction Company; Marshall Construction Company, Inc.; Meyerson Builders, Inc.; Schneider Construction Company, Inc.; Linbeck Corporation; The Miner-Dederick Companies; D. E. Harvey Builders; and The Lott Group, Inc.

The net gala proceeds of \$135,000 will help fund RDA educational programs and *Cite* magazine. The Rice Design Alliance would like to thank gala chairs Jory Alexander and Carolyn Walne, underwriting chair Paul Chapman, graphics chair Deborah Brochstein, student chairs Lonnie Hoogeboom and Christopher Hight, and all other committee chairs and volunteers who helped make the evening possible. RDA also thanks the following generous contributors.

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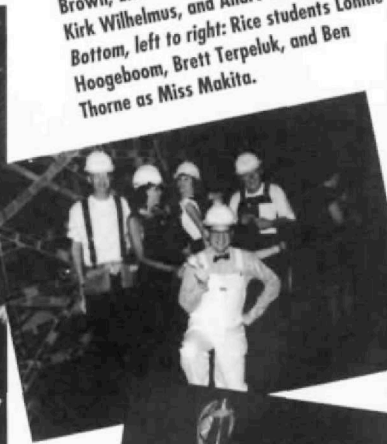
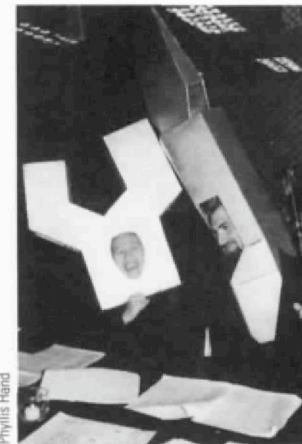
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Several guests opted for "tool belts" rather than tuxes. Left: Rice students Vi Tran (wrench) and Christopher Hight (screwdriver). Below, left to right: Chris Brown, Elaine Neyland, Sylvia Crispin, Kirk Wilhelmus, and Andre Crispin. Bottom, left to right: Rice students Lonnie Hoogeboom, Brett Terpeluk, and Ben Thorne as Miss Makita.



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RDA SPRING ARCHITECTURE EVENTS

The Rice Design Alliance has organized a series of events for spring 1995 to assess the impact of modernism on Houston, explore the controversial issue of preservation of modern landmarks, and study the work of practicing architects from around the world who continue to work in the modern idiom.

Symposium

25 January – *Modern Preservation: Back to the Future*

This symposium will focus attention on endangered modern landmarks, and panelists will discuss the imminent redirection of preservation efforts in this country from prewar to postwar buildings and sites. Participants include Diane Wray, founder and executive director of the Modern Architecture Preservation League in Denver, Colorado; Ellen Beasley, author and preservation consultant; and Richard Longstreth, an architectural historian and director of the graduate program in historical preservation at George Washington University. Rafael Longoria, assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston, will serve as moderator. 7:30 p.m., Jones Auditorium, University of St. Thomas.

Spring Lecture Series - *Still Modern*

This lecture series presents the work of four architects from different parts of the world who continue the search for modernity. The series will be introduced by Thomas Fisher, editorial director of *Progressive Architecture*, whose cover article, "Escape From Style" (September 1994), examines the current debate between style and philosophy in architecture.

22 February – Thomas Fisher, editorial director of *Progressive Architecture*.

1 March – Glenn Murcutt, Glenn Murcutt & Associates Pty Limited, Mosman, Australia.

8 March – Françoise-Hélène Jourda, Jourda & Perraudin Architectes, Lyon, France.

15 March – Mark Mack, Mack Architects, Los Angeles, California.

29 March – Markku Komonen, Heikkinen-Komonen, Helsinki, Finland.

All lectures will be given at the Brown Auditorium, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 8 p.m. This series is made possible by support from the Corporate Members of the Rice Design Alliance and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County.

RDA Architecture Tour and Lecture

18 April – *Texas Modernism*. A lecture by Stephen Fox, architectural historian and fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas. 8 p.m., Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

22–23 April – *Modern Landmarks*. The RDA's annual architecture tour will feature modern residential architecture in Houston.

For tickets and information about the symposium, lecture series, and tour, please call the Rice Design Alliance at (713)524-6297.



Howard Barnstone and Partners, architect, Maher House, 1964.



Heikkinen-Komonen, architects, Finnish Chancery, Washington, D.C., 1994.

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The Rice Design Alliance

The Rice Design Alliance, established in 1973, is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of architecture, urban design, and the built environment in the Houston region through educational programs; the publication of *Cite*, a biannual review of architecture and design; and active programs to initiate physical improvements. Membership in the RDA is open to the general public.

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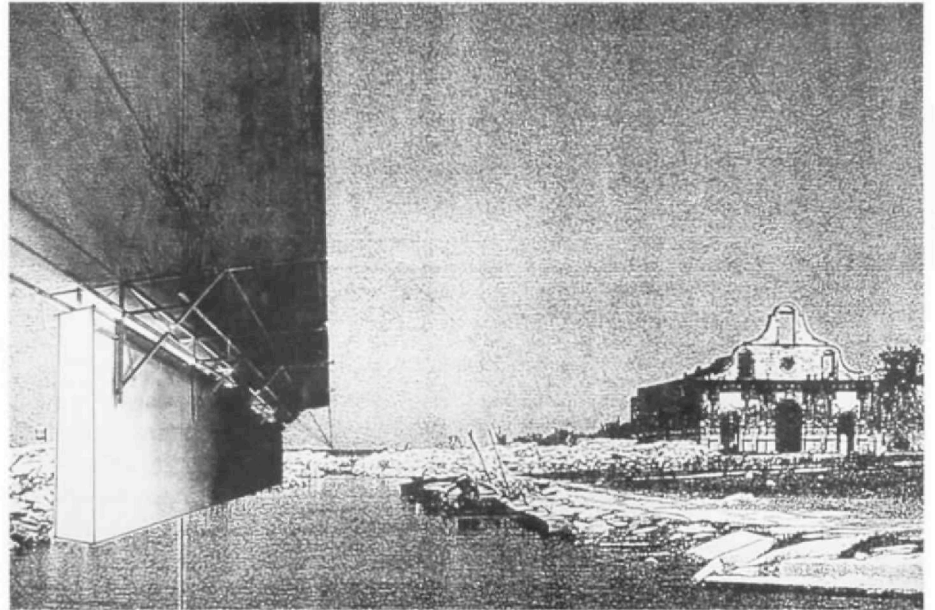
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Proposal for Guerrero Viejo by Olga Vazquez, University of Houston architecture student.



Templo de Nuestra Señora del Refugio, Guerrero Viejo, Tamaulipas.

Michael Tracy and the River Pierce Foundation are planning a colloquium, "Culture, Water, and Money: The Passion of the Frontier," for 14 and 15 April 1995. It will focus on preservation of the townsite of Guerrero Viejo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, an 18th-century town located on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, downstream from San Ygnacio, Texas, headquarters of the River Pierce Foundation. In 1953, the population of Guerrero was relocated to the new town of Nueva Ciudad Guerrero by the Mexican government so that the reservoir of Falcón Dam could expand into the historic townsite, which lies on the banks of the Río Salado. On the U.S. side of the border, residents of the small town of Zapata, Texas, county seat of Zapata

County, and surrounding ranches were expropriated and displaced (but not resettled) by the International Boundary and Water Commission. Old Zapata was destroyed prior to its immersion by Falcón Lake. Guerrero Viejo was not destroyed, however. Because it lies at one edge of the reservoir, it is only partially flooded, even when the water is highest.

In the flood-prone portion of the townsite only two structures survive, the early-20th-century church of Nuestra Señora del Refugio and a two-story bandstand, centered in the plaza in front of the church. The church is a sandstone shell, only partially roofed. The portion of the townsite that does not flood contains the shells of simple but very solidly construct-

ed one-story houses whose precise alignments mark off Guerrero's grid of unpaved streets. All of the surviving buildings in Guerrero Viejo are built of locally quarried sandstone. Only traces of the stucco with which they were surfaced remain. Most houses are roofless; some still retain double-leaf wood street doors, grilled window cages, and in one case a TV antenna. Fragments of two public buildings, the Hotel Flores and the *parián*, the public market building, also survive. Although the townsite is owned by the Mexican government, a number of houses are occupied informally by members of two extended families who earn their livings fishing in the Río Salado. There are no public utilities, services, or institutions in Guerrero Viejo.

Guerrero is threatened by deterioration and decay from exposure to Falcón Lake, which has bleached the dark sandstone that it inundates a chalky white. Exposure to the elements and unrestrained vegetation are eroding the building shells that do not flood. Theft of architectural artifacts and vandalism are also a problem. Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, which is responsible for the site, has posted signs asking visitors not to disturb its integrity. But the town's two cemeteries are vulnerable, especially the older one, whose walls have been breached and which has been invaded by vegetation.

In March 1993, a cleanup effort sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Mexico, with the city of Guerrero Nuevo and Los Caminos del Río, A.C. de México, as cosponsors, was organized to remove trash and cut back vegetation. This drew more than 300 Mexican and Texan volunteers from as far away as Monterrey, San Antonio, and Dallas. Some of the participants were returning to the town site for the first time since its initial flooding 40 years ago. Many families, not only in Guerrero Nuevo but in Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, have ancestral connections to Guerrero Viejo, which was the foremost urban center in the region until it was eclipsed by the two Laredos in the 1850s. José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara, one of the leaders of the Mexican independence movement in Texas, was from Guerrero, as was Antonio Zapata, the African-Mexican rancher for whom Zapata County, Texas, was named.

Representatives of the World Monuments Fund visited Guerrero Viejo with preservationists from Mexico and Texas in May 1993 to inspect the town site in order to develop a conservation plan that would preserve Guerrero Viejo as a heritage park. Work on the plan has not yet begun, however, as funds are still being raised to finance the venture. Meanwhile, the National Institute of Anthropology and History is evaluating a proposal to designate the site a *zona patrimonial*, which would extend federal preservation

protection to it. The University of Houston's Atrium Press is publishing a book of images of Guerrero Viejo. And the revised and expanded edition of the Texas Historical Commission's award-winning book *A Shared Experience: The Architecture, History, and Historic Designations of the Lower Río Grande Heritage Corridor*, published in November, contains a new chapter on Guerrero Viejo, according to Mario L. Sánchez, director of the Texas Historical Commission's Los Caminos del Río Heritage Project. Like *A Shared Experience*, the Atrium Press book will include historic maps, historic photographs, and contemporary photographs of the townsite.

On 14 May 1994, Michael Tracy hosted a presentation in San Ygnacio by architecture students from the University of Houston and the University of Texas at San Antonio. Students presented projects that dealt with practical issues of architectural conservation in Guerrero as well as the more elusive theme of preserving cultural memory. Joining Tracy in an animated discussion of what might (or should not) happen at Guerrero Viejo were UH architecture professor Rafael Longoria, who is from Nuevo Laredo and is a descendant of one of the Guerrero families; Laredo architect and UTSA architecture critic Frank Rotnofsky; Dwayne Bohuslav and Gevork Hartoonian, both on the architecture faculty at UTSA; Henry Estrada of San Ygnacio; and Betsy J. Gill, Sam Johnson, and Peter Glassford of Laredo.

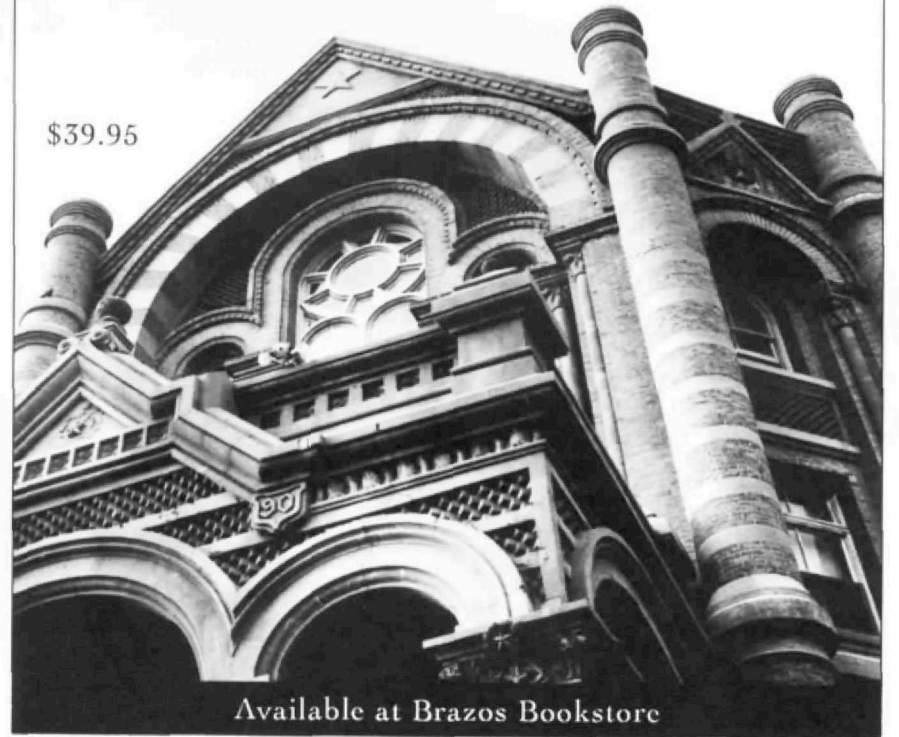
The exchange revealed cultural differences in the ways Mexicans and Americans reacted to Guerrero and, consequently, in what they identified as problematic about the site. The U.S. recommendation – decisive action to protect artifacts – contrasted with the Mexican view, which located issues of conservation in a broader cultural perspective that acknowledged the much more conservative (and, by default, conservationist) attitudes of Mexicans and the bonds of personal connection that joined so many families on both sides of the Río Grande to the region's history. The provocative and challenging nature of the discussion – the range of alternatives went from leaving the site untouched to reconstructing the town completely – prompted Tracy to issue what he called the San Ygnacio Resolve: to convene a meeting of Mexican and U.S. historians, preservationists, scholars, artists, and architects, who will be asked to define and debate alternative visions for Guerrero Viejo. The colloquium is intended to dramatize the cultural significance, and the vulnerability, of the 245-year-old Guerrero townsite.

Stephen Fox

The Galveston That Was

HOWARD BARNSTONE

\$39.95



Photographs by
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THE TEXAS RANGERS

Notes from
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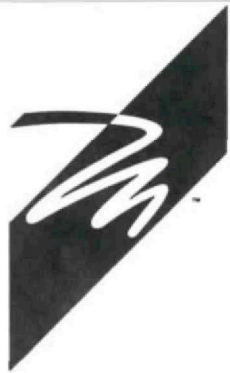
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"*The Texas Rangers* makes three important contributions simultaneously. It chronicles a well-known but poorly described episode in American architectural education; provides an interesting profile of several of America's most influential educators, both before and after their engagement at the University of Texas; and describes the ideological politics that flourished during the 1950s, an era largely unknown in any detail to the present academic community." – Peter G. Rowe, Dean of the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University

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WILLIAM E. BOSWELL, JR. 1950 — 1994



William E. Boswell, Jr., 1991-92 president of the Rice Design Alliance, died 15 June 1994. Until his death, Bill Boswell was

director of interior design at Irvine Associates Architects. Boswell received his degree in environmental design from the Pratt Institute. During a distinguished career that included positions at Hoover & Furr, Architects and Gensler & Associates/Architects, he received awards from the American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter; the Institute of Business Designers; and the American Society of Interior Designers. Boswell's projects included the Oasis Resort, Cancún, Mexico; the Putra World Trade Center, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Continental Airlines President's Clubs in Paris, Denver, and Honolulu; the Anadarko Petroleum Corporation Building, Houston; Browning-Ferris Industries, headquarters building, Houston; the AIA Library, Houston; and the restoration of the Niels and Mellie Esperson buildings in downtown Houston.

Jeff Bray, Boswell's friend and fellow choir member at St. John the Divine Episcopal Church, made the following remarks at Boswell's memorial service: *To those of us who knew him, it was apparent that the order and beauty he created . . . were merely an extension of the grace and quality he chiseled from the chaos of the world around him. . . . His was a philosophy of living. A cool, clean, white world where the only complexity was the shadow play of sunlight upon natural surfaces. . . . Bill lived his philosophy more completely than anyone I've ever known. Never once did he sway from his crisp, beautiful world. It was a world created purely from his own will. It was a world that promised a healthy and brilliant future for all.*

Bill Boswell died of AIDS at 44. Contributions in his memory may be made to the William E. Boswell, Jr., Memorial Fund, in care of the Rice Design Alliance, P.O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251. ■

QUASIMODO RETURNS JOHN OUTRAM'S COMPUTATIONAL ENGINEERING BUILDING AT RICE

One of the most beloved ironies of the romantic imagination is the condition of willful ugliness, an epithet that seems appropriate for the new Computational Engineering Building to be built on the Rice University campus by British architect John Outram. Quasimodo, the horribly disfigured and ill-proportioned hero of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, was a literary representation of the anticlassical theory that beauty is an arbitrary consensus of society, while all things in nature are pleasing to their creator. Outram's building, with its awkwardly proportioned six-foot-wide piers,



Mockup of partial wall section showing skin treatment and pseudo-Chinese bracketed rafters.

eccentric details elements such as Chinese-style brackets under the eaves, and hideous skin patterns of black and white ceramic tiles interspersed with conventional St. Joe brick (currently visible in a mockup of the wall section near the campus kitchens), will transmit a "Quasimodo effect" to the campus. Much like the grotesque works of 19th-century Philadelphia architect Frank Furness, the scheme for the Computational Engineering Building has a monstrous quality that will challenge most people's sense of beauty and will perhaps create pathos, or at least inspire pity.

At 112,000 square feet and with a budget of \$16 million, the Computational



Engineering Building will be one of the largest and most expensive buildings per square foot on campus. The footprint of Outram's design has been scrupulously worked out to complete the symmetry of the Engineering Quadrangle to the north while echoing the massing of the Physics Building to the south, and in this respect is safely, if not too conventionally, within the classical ordering system implied by the initial campus plan. The building design is then dictated by a bay system marked by abnormally thick piers, which turn out to be hollow, nonstructural service cores for pipes, mechanical paraphernalia, and electrical conduits. The piers alternate with square and round sections, but the pattern of their alternation is not regular; it seems that square piers are deployed at points of accent, such as the corners and major entries, and round piers at secondary or more passive points. That one of the piers is doubled only contributes to the illogic of their distribution. The same sort of discord governs the treatment of the two blocks that project in symmetry on the major southern façade: they have identical profiles, but one presents bays that are completely filled in, except for a double-height terrace in its center, while the other is voided, with open arcades hollowed from the first two floors and roof terraces above the entire third floor. The overall sense of disproportion in the southern façade is guaranteed by the treatment of the piers, which vary in height from a single story to two and three stories; yet unlike classically proportioned columns, all have the same width and terminate with the same scale of big, black, vase-shaped capitals. At a few points the capitals are left exposed and will be used as planters for some mitigating, quick-growing foliant.

The inside is as generous with space as it is cluttered with ornament. Running the length of the building is a 12-foot-wide interior street cut open to all three floors of offices and naturally lit by round clerestories. At the eastern end are a large auditorium and two lecture halls served by a 3,000-square-foot atrium, enclosed by an overbearing rind of 50-foot service shafts. Despite the openness of the corridor and the atrium, the orientation to the four different departments housed in the building will not be self-evident, nor will these static spaces breed a sense of flexibility. Meanwhile, the flashy banding on the interior columns, the diagonal grilles of the balconies, the vermiculated swirls on the blue rafters, and other such unrelated decorative flourishes will heighten the incoherence and magnificent ugliness and put to shame Ricardo Bofill's meager attempt at such for the Shepherd School of Music.

Outram has attempted to emulate the nested asymmetries of Ralph Adams Cram's medievalizing façades for Lovett Hall, but the awkward proportions, as well as the incompatibility of current materials (such as the thin mullions of the aluminum strip windows set in the thick frames of molded concrete), make his building a parody of late Victorian artifice. Much could have been learned by observing the discreet manner of another British architect, James Stirling, who with Michael Wilford designed the addition to Anderson Hall, which is far superior aesthetically and functionally, not to mention economically. The intersecting old and new wings of Anderson Hall meet in a bridged-over, double-height space that can be expanded or contracted at will, creating a fluid sense of space as well as a truly convivial social setting.

Furthermore, one of the great lessons of programming found in architectural history has unfortunately gone unheeded by Outram and the programmers of the new building: Louis I. Kahn's design for the Richards Building at the University of Pennsylvania also was organized around vertical service shafts, which proved to be much less flexible than horizontally arranged services. Thus the willful ugliness of the Computational Engineering Building is not even conceived of as serving some higher duty toward function, economy, or environmental efficiency. Quasimodo has returned as an ossified gargoyle, unable to prove his virtue.

Richard Ingersoll

John Outram & Associates, architects, proposed Computational Engineering Building, perspective elevation showing double-height arcades on south and upper terraces.

The site selected for the Computational Engineering Building was once occupied by the **Bonner Nuclear Laboratory** (George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce, architects, 1953, demolished 1994). One of the few "modern" buildings on the Rice campus, its distinctive tower housed a Van de Graaff accelerator, at the time one of the best installations of its type in the world. When the building no longer served its original function, it was successfully adapted as laboratories and music classrooms. Its recent demolition was a senseless and costly waste of a structure that could certainly have been adapted for further reuse.

