

MONTROSE

the mad mix

MONTROSE, THE HEART OF HOUSTON by Thorne Dreyer | Illustration by Kerry Fitzgerald

The Montrose was and is a uniquely Houston-kind of bohemia, a mad mix made possible by the city's no-holds-barred, laissez faire form of growth. And, ironically, it may fall victim to the very same zoning-phobic mentality, as so many of the area's old sites are being replaced by townhouses-from-Hell.

When Al Reinert and I wrote about the Montrose for the April 1973 *Texas Monthly* (they subtitled it "The Strangest Neighborhood East of the Pecos"), we sure didn't have to put in for mileage. We were already there—hanging at Prufrock's and Zorba's and Anderson Fair.

In many ways, Montrose was the heart of Houston back then. It had a social vitality and a sense of community and a tolerance for diversity that you didn't find elsewhere in this sprawling adolescent metropolis-on-the-make. It had lots of weirdness, and as we would discover, was steeped in history...

Like the legendary intersection of Montrose and Westheimer, where the underground newspaper *Space City!* was peddled to passing motorists, demonstrators protested the Vietnam War, and long-haired hitchhikers just in from the Haight caught a burger at Prince's...

The eclectic mix of cool old houses (from Victorian Epic to Ramshackle

Plywood) and vintage clothing shops and galleries and strip clubs and health food stores and junk shops and newsstands and radical collectives and artist studios...

And the rock emporiums. I first heard the 13th Floor Elevators at Jubilee Hall and Bruce Springsteen at Liberty Hall—and Townes Van Zandt at Anderson Fair (where we had block parties and crowned the "Mayor of Montrose")...

Houston's vibrant gay community, home to Montrose Gaze and the Gay Liberation Front, and more than three dozen gay bars, including Mary's Lounge, and Bayou Landing, thought to be the largest gay dance club between the coasts...

The Westheimer strip, called by some Houston's Left Bank, drawing hipster suburbanites and River Oaks slummers to five blocks of European-style restaurants and sidewalk cafes...

The Westheimer Art Festival that drew thousands of tourists, dogs, kids, and street performers into the neighborhood; the Greek Festival outside the historic Greek Orthodox Church; and the

massive Gay Pride Parades that rivaled New Orleans for flash and fashion...

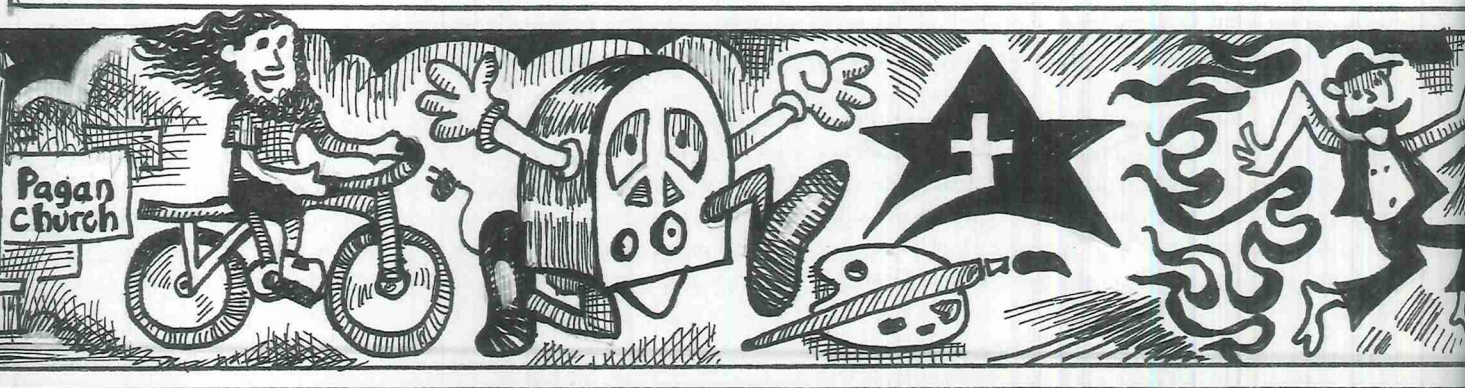
Radio Row on Lovett Boulevard where FM stations KLOL and KILT (Radio Montrose) were pioneers of "underground radio"—and KPFT, the infamous listener-supported Pacifica station, helped birth the "Cosmic Cowboy" movement, and was twice bombed off the air by the KKK...

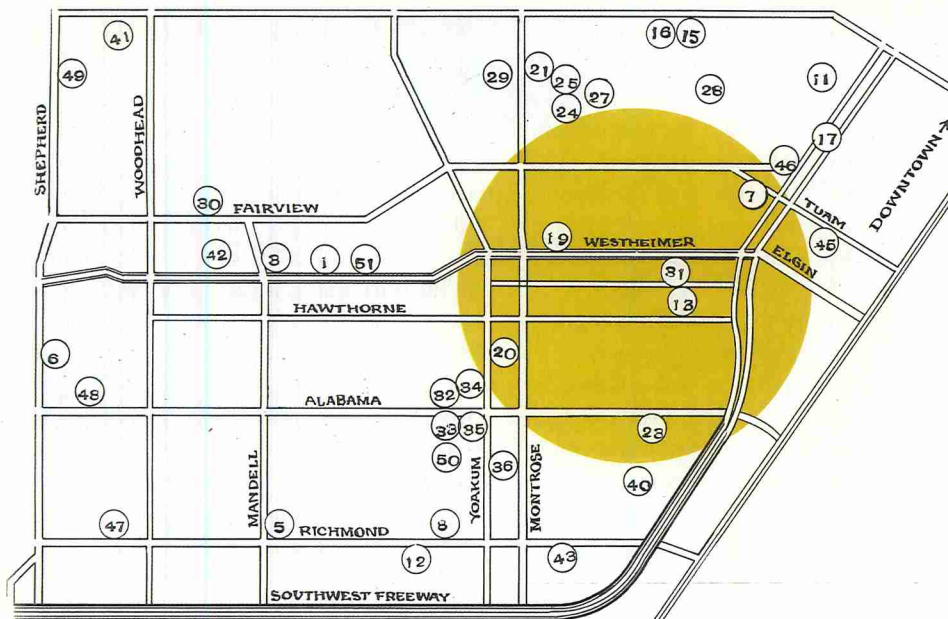
The old house with the odd turrets and built-in birdhouses where Clark Gable took acting lessons—and Howard Hughes' boyhood home that's now the Modern Language Building at St. Thomas University...

And of course the Pagan Church, with its papier mâché statues and hand-done signs advertising nude meditation and other esoterica. Above the door was written: "Our religion doesn't teach sin, shame or hypocrisy. So don't blame us for your dirty mind. With love all things are possible." 🚗

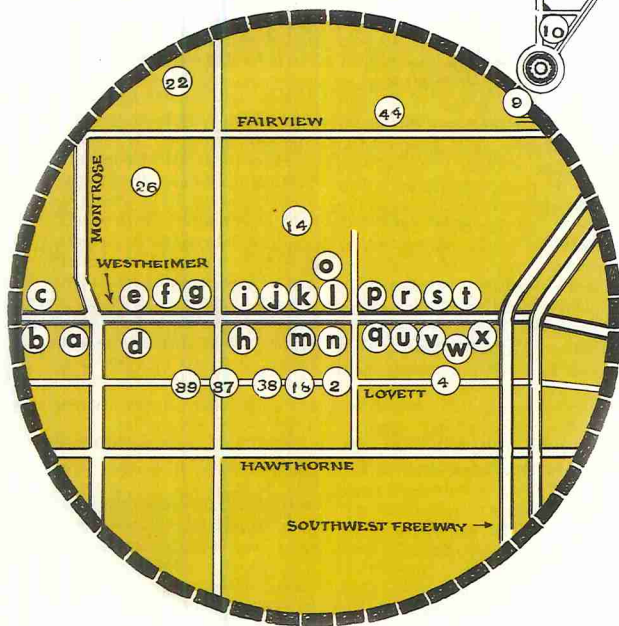
Montrose native Thorne Dreyer was a founder and editor of *Space City!* He now lives in Austin where he edits *The Rag* Blog (theragblog.blogspot.com).

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Montrose



- 1 Oak Tree Health Bar (healthy libations)
- 2 KILT AM & FM (Radio Montrose)
- 3 Ari's Grenouille (first sidewalk cafe)
- 4 Boccaccio 2000 (frenzied chic)
- 5 Van's Stampede Ballroom (cowboy hangout)
- 6 Bayou Landing (gay boogie)
- 7 Zorba's (the original article)
- 8 Lille Skool (free school)
- 9 Contemporary Arts Museum (modern cul-char)
- 10 Museum of Fine Arts (old timey cul-char)
- 11 Abraxas (underground paper)
- 12 Sand Mountain (folksaingin')
- 13 LBJ's house (historical site)
- 14 Dr. Webster's (where Clark Gable learned acting)
- 15 Lincoln High School
- 16 Zerk's (a delli)
- 17 The Family Hand Restaurant (historical site)
- 18 Hare Krishna Temple (Unconsciousness III)
- 19 Art Wren's (alias the Silver Dollar)
- 20 Greek Cathedral
- 21 Texas Art Supply
- 22 Carnaby's (was Natural Child)
- 23 Down Home
- 24 First Pagan Church
- 25 Anderson-Fair Restaurant
- 26 Inlet (community drug care)
- 27 Ebenezer's (hi-camp restaurant)
- 28 Food co-op (community-owned)
- 29 Paisley Co. (early head shop)
- 30 Cardet's Cafe (Cuban exiles)
- 31 Prufrock's (a hangout)
- 32 Grass Hut (head shop)
- 33 Mockingbird (underground newspaper)
- 34 Libran Books (like the name sez...)
- 35 Hamburgers by Gourmet (hangout for non-gourmets)
- 36 University of St. Thomas
- 37 School of Yoga
- 38 Esoteric Philosophy Center
- 39 Peyton Place Antiques (Sunday auctions)
- 40 Slug's (discotek)
- 41 Damian's (beer, pinball & hip-eyes)
- 42 National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML)
- 43 American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
- 44 Montrose Gaze (a USO for gays)
- 45 Community Garden (plant your seeds)
- 46 Jubilee Hall (old times)
- 47 Richwood Food Market (all-niter)
- 48 Staff of Life (health foods)
- 49 Hobbit Hole (meatless goodies)
- 50 Rothko Chapel (soul food)
- 51 Joseph's Wine Shop (libations)

- A Liberty Bank
- B Tower Theater
- C Mary's Lounge (gay bar)
- D Ruggles (eggs benedict)
- E Moveable Feast (health food)
- F Felix Mexican Restaurant
- G Art Wren's Silver Dollar Diner
- H Bacchanal Greek Restaurant (& belly dancing)
- I Phoenix Books
- J Mini-mall I
- K Happy Buddha Steakhouse
- L Honest Threads (recycled jeans)
- M Roundtable (gay bar)
- N Prufrock's (hangout)
- O Las Brisas Mexican Restaurant
- P Il Padrino restaurant
- Q Michelangelo's Italian restaurant
- R Club L'Amour (exotics)
- S Lillian's Maison d' Crepes
- T Alexander's restaurant
- U Cafe de la Paix restaurant
- V Sally Williams Antiques
- W Mini-Mall II
- X Just Ice Cream (Pizza too)

Map by Bill Narum

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