SPRING LECTURES

RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE:
NEW ORLEANS: FIVE YEARS LATER
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Brown Auditorium
Wednesdays, 7 p.m.
ricedesignalliance.org

The public and RDA members are invited to hear the following speakers during the series:

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY
January 19
Rice University
www.arch.uh.edu

INAKI ABALOS
March 17
Abalos + Sentkiewicz Arquitectos

SCOTT BERNHARD
January 26
Tulane University
www.architecture.tulane.edu/people/scott-d-bernhard

RAYMOND MANNING
February 2
Manning Architects
www.manningarchitects.com

ALEJANDRA LILLO
February 9
GRAFT
www.raftlab.org

TEX-FAB
February 10
University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture
Check tex-fab.net for fees and registration.

JORDI MARIO JAUREGUI
February 1
3 - 4 p.m.
Atelier Metropolitano

BRAD CLOEPFIL
February 22
5 - 7 p.m.
Allied Works

GARY CHANG
March 29
6 - 7:30 p.m.
Edge Design Institute, Ltd.

RICE UNIVERSITY:
Rice School of Architecture
Farish Gallery, 5:30 p.m.
arch.rice.edu

BEN VAN BERKEL
January 27
Principal Architect, UNStudio

MIGUEL ADRIA
February 3
Editor, Arquitectura

ANTOINE PICON
February 10
Harvard University

JUERGEN MAYER H.
February 23
J. Mayer H.

CATHERINE INGRAHAM
March 10
Pratt Institute

INAIA ABALOS
March 17
Abalos + Sentkiewicz Arquitectos

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON:
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture
Auditorium, Room 150
arch.uh.edu

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TOURING THE TOWNHOUSE BOOM
Back during the presidential campaign season of 2008, I canvassed for Barack Obama in a part of Houston where townhouses are numerous. I found the experience pretty alienating. Although hidden entrances may increase the owner’s sense of privacy, they frustrate anybody trying to find the owner, which may be the point. Some of the “entrances” were so hidden that I literally could never find them. Often all I could find was a big, wide garage door. Maybe that is the only entrance for some of these fortresses.

At other times I could only reach the entrance by going down a long, dark exterior hallway, which gave me a very queasy feeling. Sometimes at the end of this hallway, there would be a locked gate. Sometimes you could see the door to the house beyond the gate, but sometimes not. Sometimes there was a doorbell by the gate, but not always. I got the feeling that the people in these houses expected the worst. I began to feel like some sort of mugger or criminal, even though all I intended to do was tell them about early voting! How do they get packages from UPS or FedEx at these houses? What happens when they invite people to their house?

I should add that these townhouses were not in what I would call a bad part of town. They were right around the Kroger in River Oaks.

I was reminded of all this looking at the photographs in Raj Mankad’s and Ben Koush’s article about townhouses in Houston. They showed some even more alienating townhouses than the ones I saw in River Oaks. It may be true that these box-like structures will replace all the more human-scaled bungalows in our city, but their monolithic forms and blank elevations are not a virtue for all that. More openness to the street is what we should be looking for.

Pedestrians experience the alienation caused by these blank, forbidding boxes more acutely than car travelers do, I think. Perhaps that’s why we tolerate their ugliness: most of us just drive by them quickly, rather than walk slowly past them.

Shannon Stoney