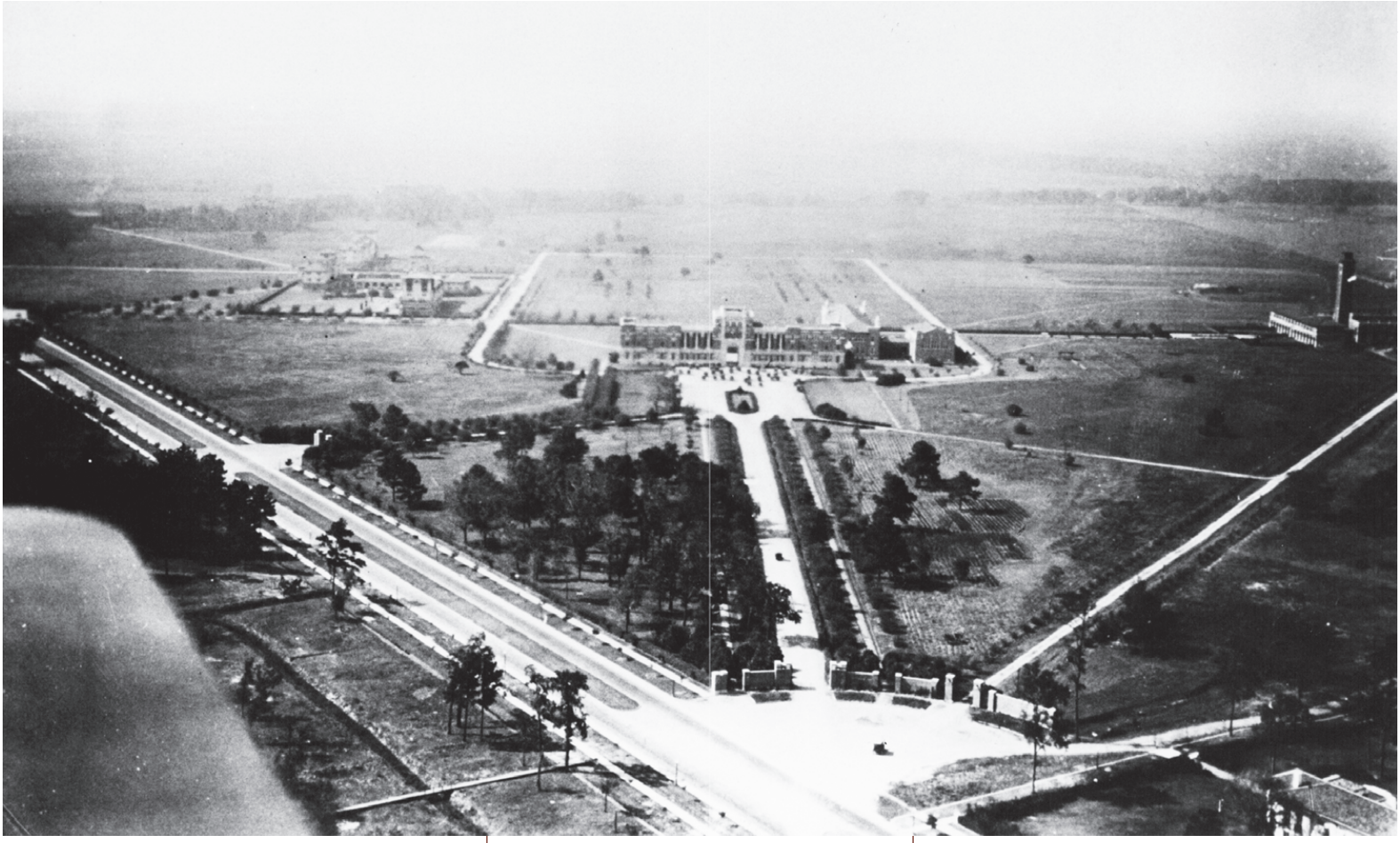
100 Years of Rice

CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES TO TRADITION

by Mark Cottle and Sabir Khan
photography by Paul Hester

THE RECENT SPATE OF CONSTRUCTION ON THE RICE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW HOW THE ENVIRONMENTS WE BUILD RELATE TO HOW WE LIVE. WE ARE ALL AWARE THAT **AESTHETICS** ARE CLOSELY TIED TO **ETHICS**; THE CHOICES WE MAKE AS WE SHAPE OUR CITIES, LANDSCAPES, AND BUILDINGS ARISE FROM, AND SPEAK TO, OUR **VALUES** AND ASPIRATIONS—IF NOT FOR ALL OF US, THEN CERTAINLY FOR THOSE WITH THE **MONEY** OR THE POWER TO CALL THE SHOTS.


GENERAL · PLAN
WILLIAM · M · RICE · INSTITVTE
HOVSTON · TEXAS
SCALE
CRAM · GOODHVE · AND · FERGVSON · ARCHITECTS
BOSTON AND NEW YORK



RICE MASTERPLAN AND AERIAL COURTESY WOODSON RESEARCH CENTER

Our need to understand the ideologies behind aesthetics and design is particularly urgent in the case of the university campus because the academy not only represents our vision of the ideal community but also seeks to enact it. Universities are, after all, where we send our best and brightest, and where we hope they may become better and brighter.

Frequently, however, ideology operates at the level of tacit knowledge—that which appears so self-evident, so "natural," that it seems pointless, even impolite, to mention it. Louis Althusser proposed that ideology is most effective when invisible. Who can contest what seems simply a fact of life? (The poor will always be with us; public transportation will never work.)

But we believe careful description can render some of these assumptions more explicit, drawing them up to the surface of visibility where they may be discussed, argued, and acted upon. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe has written, "Every act of seeing leads to consideration, consideration to reflection, reflection to combination, and thus it may be said that in every attentive look we already theorize."

THE BEST-LAID PLANS

The proposals of Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson—the General Plan and the first few buildings—have left to the Rice campus a rich but complicated legacy. In many respects, the evolution of the built campus is an ongoing exercise in hermeneutics, with each new project addressing a recurring question: How do we interpret the foundation story for new occasions and uses? Across the decades one can see a range of responses, playing in different registers from the first movement onto the Texas prairie, with varying degrees of success.

For Ralph Adams Cram, this "stupid and level site," as he described it in his memoirs, presented the consummate tabula rasa: a featureless plain upon which to deploy, with the confident optimism of the early twentieth-century American architect, a panoply of formal and tectonic ideas drawn from diverse cultures, places, and times.

In the late nineteenth-century American valorization of the continental university faced a resurgent challenge by collegiate values. According to Paul Venable Turner in his history of American campus planning, while many institutions of higher education in the United States sought to combine "a zeal for the Germanic emphasis on [the university's] research and graduate study with a reaffirmation of the Anglo-American collegiate tradition," the concomitant spatial forms and planning ideas of the university and the college were often at odds.

The university model was essentially urban, conceptualizing the institution as a "city of learning" in and of itself as well as a component of the larger metropolis. American university planning principles were closely aligned with those of the City Beautiful movement, which promoted Beaux-Arts techniques—major and minor axes, articulated hierarchies of scale—to develop the ground plan, the primary method of organizing space. For the purposes of the university, one of the most important strengths of the Beaux-Arts plan was its ability to accommodate difference, to accept and absorb a wide variety of programs and building types.

In contrast, the collegiate model preached a more conservative social gospel. This model sought authority in academia's monastic beginnings and proposed medieval-style quadrangles and cloisters for new school facilities, especially for student residences. A pietistic notion of the English college system, with its elitist emphasis on "fellowship" and seclusion, the idea of the college was by its very nature anti-urban.

Turner argues that Cram "was probably the most

fervent and vocal advocate of the revival of the medieval English quadrangle" and of the institution as "half college and half monastery," couching this preference in the moral terms of a devout Anglo-Catholic. This made him a surprising choice as principal architect for Rice, a brand new institution whose claims to tradition were not originally very strong, and whose charter demanded it remain secular.

Many schools reconciled these competing models by lodging a series of colleges, usually residential, within the larger university complex. Two disparate formal orders were thus deployed in quasi-independence, typically one at the scale of the individual building, the other at the scale of the compound. This allowed closed, picturesque Gothic-style buildings to be arranged according to an open, rational Beaux-Arts plan. In the intriguing hybrid proposed for the Rice campus by Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson, one can readily detect the tension between closed and open forms that marks an ambivalence toward the city. The encircling hedges today serve as one notable artifact of this struggle.

...Cram was probably the most fervent and vocal advocate of the revival of the medieval English quadrangle.

Many campus architects of the period looked to Thomas Jefferson's "academical village" at the University of Virginia. But the General Plan for Rice was perhaps the only scheme of the period to understand, and absorb, the most important aspect of Jefferson's ideal community: its intense but fraught relation to the landscape. The poignancy of the open-ended lawn at the University of Virginia derived largely from the sense that it represented an isolated fragment of classical civilization, brought over from the Old World and planted in the New, facing bravely into the wilderness.

Perhaps we owe to Bertram Goodhue the General Plan's procession from compressed entry spaces along Main Street to progressively larger ones, opening out by stages toward the western horizon. The face-off between imported orientalist structures and the immense, flat, brown prairie gives images of the early campus an uncanny power—a spell that would be rudely broken by Fondren Library in 1949. As the campus has developed over the years, the scale of its courts and quads has become increasingly homogeneous, and the campus risks losing the range of spatial densities, the varying degrees of containment and expansion, that energized it.

The General Plan and the stylistic strategies of the initial buildings at Rice were cobbled together from an unruly set of sources, representing contradictory values associated with both classical and Gothic modes of planning and construction. They were held together by the strong personalities of the two main players, President Edgar Odell Lovett and architect Cram; by Goodhue's orientalist imagery; and by an evocative mythology, the eccentric fiction of a Gothic rooted in the Mediterranean south.

So a strict interpretation of the early architecture cannot help but be seriously problematic. The distinctive and compelling Sallyport, for example, became a cloying parody when copied onto the George R. Brown Hall (1991, Cambridge Seven). A glib gesture toward contextualism, it revealed a failure to distinguish what is generalizable from what must remain singular. Over the past century, this dull, heavy-handed approach toward tradition has not been uncommon.

Conversely, an architect like James Stirling, a modernist masquerading as a postmodernist, could propose for the addition to Anderson Hall (1981) a witty and precise analysis of the mother ship, Lovett Hall. As a result, one not only enjoys the new work but also finds fresh appreciation for the old. When one enters the Anderson Hall concourse, perhaps the most exciting interior on campus, it is as though one is walking through a drawing. The planarity, which extends in an understated way to the exterior envelope, makes a virtue of the insubstantial building assembly, allowing us briefly to relinquish our nostalgic longing for the solid construction of earlier structures. Here the wallboard feels like paper. And it feels okay to feel like paper.

Stirling made it seem easy. Yet we need only look at César Pelli's work on campus soon after to see how hard it could be. At Herring Hall (1984), his massing strategy, like Stirling's, was "by the book": long, slender volumes slipped in among existing live oaks and offset from each other to form an intimate courtyard. Unfortunately, however, Pelli didn't recognize that buildings behind Fondren do not enjoy the same privileges of those on the main academic court. They need to be beefed up a notch to address the view outwards toward the western horizontal prairie, now populated with playing fields, the stadium, and a lot of parking.

Herring Hall is not without charm—it recalls municipal school buildings from the early twentieth

OPPOSITE: An aerial photograph of Rice University taken in 1920 showing Lovett Hall in the center. **TOP:** Fondren library interrupts the axis through the Lovett Hall Sallyport. **ABOVE:** James Stirling's addition to Anderson Hall wittily responds to Lovett Hall and the original master plan.

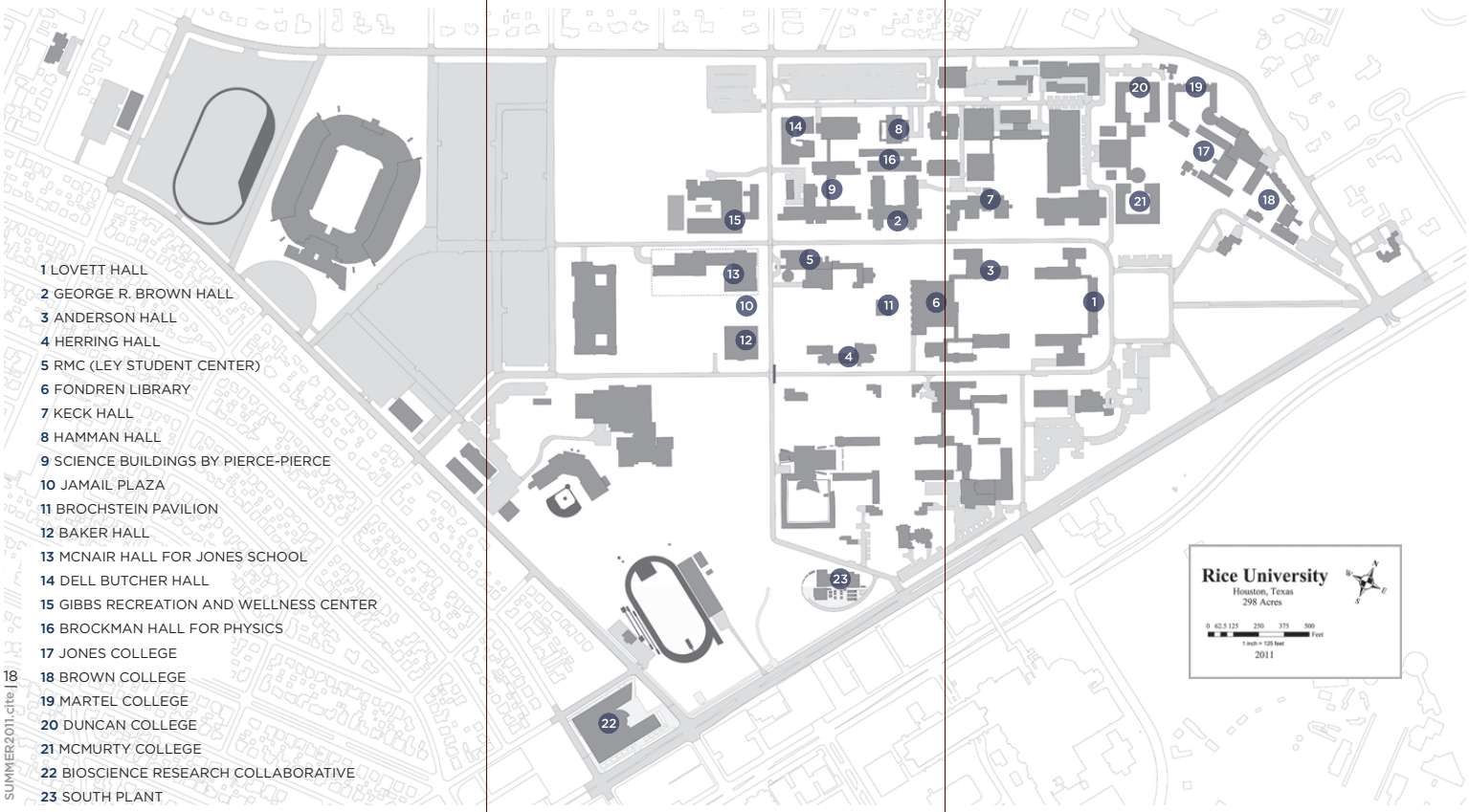
century—but it lacks Stirling's light hand. Here Stirling's planes give way to a dialogue between Pelli's extruded volumes and taut surfaces. The oscillations between thickness and thinness, elaboration and reduction, worked admirably with Pelli's early glass-clad projects, such as the San Bernardino City Hall (1972) and the Blue Whale in Los Angeles (1975). At Rice, however, where the surfaces are highly patterned with purposefully banal motifs, the dialogue becomes empty chatter. The intellectual provocation of the glass buildings is lost.

With the Ley Student Center (1986), Pelli's addition to the Rice Memorial Center (1958) on the other side of Fondren's backyard, the situation deteriorated further. The Memorial Center, situated as though it were a suburban mansion or country club, had ignored the General Plan completely. In Pelli's valiant effort to wrestle the complex back into harmony with the rest of the campus, he somehow lost the plot. With no clear way to reconcile the existing buildings with the traditional massing strategy, he defaulted to a "still-life" aggregation. When one approaches from the wide-open spaces to the west, Herring Hall and the Ley Center resemble an accumulation of toys.

John Staub's Fondren Library usually takes the heat as the first building on campus to break with the General Plan. Indeed, it does so with such brutality that Oedipal rebellion seems the only conceivable explanation. But the Chemistry Building (1925) by William Ward Watkin, now W.M. Keck Hall, built under the aegis of Cram and with his evident blessing, had already departed from both the Plan and the example of earlier Cram buildings. While one would have expected this building to follow the prescribed parti of layered, thin, linear volumes, as in Cram's Physics Building (1914), today's Herzstein Hall, the chemistry laboratories had to be much wider. The resulting thick-legged plan produced courtyards, yes, but spatially inert ones. Drifting from the creative eclecticism of Cram's work, Watkin employed a "correct" academic rendition of Lombard Gothic—an approach to history that was less about seeking inspiration and more about copying. Compared with the slap in the face presented by Fondren, the infidelities of the Chemistry Building were discreet, tolerable in part because the building was sited one row back from the main academic court, where the first dormitories had already shown the

Meeting the demands of ever-larger labs and other programming within the General Plan's original vision of pleasant spaces shaped by thin buildings is precisely the challenge...

Map of current Rice Campus with buildings numbered in the order discussed in this essay.



1 LOVETT HALL
2 GEORGE R. BROWN HALL
3 ANDERSON HALL
4 HERRING HALL
5 RMC (LEY STUDENT CENTER)
6 FONDREN LIBRARY
7 KECK HALL
8 HAMMAN HALL
9 SCIENCE BUILDINGS BY PIERCE-PIERCE
10 JAMAIL PLAZA
11 BROCHSTEIN PAVILION
12 BAKER HALL
13 MCNAIR HALL FOR JONES SCHOOL
14 DELL BUTCHER HALL
15 GIBBS RECREATION AND WELLNESS CENTER
16 BROCKMAN HALL FOR PHYSICS
17 JONES COLLEGE
18 BROWN COLLEGE
19 MARTEL COLLEGE
20 DUNCAN COLLEGE
21 MCMURTY COLLEGE
22 BIOSCIENCE RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE
23 SOUTH PLANT

rules to be more flexible. It was also apparent that the Cram buildings were far too idiosyncratic and heterogeneous to expect much in the way of strict orthodoxy.

In contrast, buildings designed by Pierce-Pierce in the late 1950s, including Hamman Hall and a series of science buildings, would draw on the optimism of the first Cram buildings. An array of long, low bars, the volumes' engagement of corresponding inside and outside spaces links them together in a way that hearkens back, in simplified form and at an expanded scale, to Rice's original cloisters, courts, and quadrangles. Without compromising the architectural language and construction methods of their own time, the handling of the buildings' materials has a directness and weight, together with an elegance of detail and proportion, strongly reminiscent of Cram's best work, which was not only spiritual in its intent, but also vividly corporeal in its effect. Alas, these buildings are sorely underappreciated, evidenced by their recent expedient retrofits with poorly proportioned, corporate glazing systems.

RIGHT: The Lee and Joe Jamail Plaza and Brochstein Pavilion appear as opposing black and white squares from above. The large footprint of Baker Hall contrasts with the thin bar-shape of Herring Hall. **BELOW LEFT:** Brochstein Pavilion, 2008. **BELOW RIGHT:** Lee and Joe Jamail Plaza and Baker Hall, 1998.

A TALE OF TWO SQUARES

A satellite view of the campus reveals two squares directly to the west of Fondren Library. The black Jamail Plaza (1998) and the white Brochstein Pavilion (2008) represent not just two decades, but also two very different formal approaches and value systems. Although a quick glance might suggest a Manichaean opposition between equal powers, or a Spy-vs-Spy struggle where differences are merely cosmetic, the view on the ground suggests otherwise.

The critical difference is not a matter of dark versus light, despite the metaphorical attraction of those two terms. Both squares, in fact, sport black materials, redolent of the "black gold" substrate that supports much of the wealth of the state, the city, and the university. The plaza, however, sulking beneath the basilisk stares of Baker Hall (Hammond Beeby and Babka, 1997) and McNair Hall, home of the Jones Graduate School of Management (Robert A. M. Stern Architects, 2002), takes the full brunt of the prairie sun. A place for ostentation, it more closely resembles a motor court than a pedestrian amenity. In contrast, the pavilion's filigreed canopy offers cooling shadows and a delightful, filtered light, reminding us that for at least some part of the year, the Houston climate is actually habitable.

The plaza's greatest difficulty lies with its neighbors, Baker Hall and McNair Hall. Like Fondren, this pair ignored the basic proposition of the General Plan: long, thin, wall-like volumes that weave together to form cloisters and courtyards. Instead, Baker Hall is just a disconnected box, its connection to the outside limited to a pompous entry. McNair Hall makes a show of breaking down its mass into linear volumes, but the floor plates are too wide, and the resulting wings too thick. It, too, zealously guards its conditioned air, admitting only grudging access to the surrounding lawns. Insular and self-absorbed, plonked down onto the site, the two buildings choke off the western vista once again, precisely where it should have been expanding out. Sadly, the updated master plan proposed by Michael Graves continues in this vein, proposing a parade of new buildings with unarticulated elephantine footprints. Meeting the ever-larger demands of labs and other programming within the General Plan's original vision of pleasant spaces shaped by thin buildings is precisely the challenge architects must take up with boldness, rather than slathering big boxes with superficial stylistic mimicry.

The pair represents an approach to building that sees it as mere stylistic packaging, a matter of taste or preference—what Kenneth Frampton has called "the technology of marketing masking the technology of production." The result is smug and complacent reiterations of unexamined platitudes. What does this kind of cynical lip service to tradition say to our students, and to ourselves, about how we understand the lessons of the past and the role of education for the future? And what do these two buildings indicate about the study and practice of international affairs and business management? The "iconography" over the entrance to the Jones School building is telling: The Enron office tower looms, simultaneously prominent and drained of historical significance.

This could not be further from the response the first president of the institute must have hoped for. As Lovett wrote, "We proposed to take architecture seriously in the preparation of all our plans, but we were unwilling to do this without taking the chance of making a distinct contribution to the architecture of the country while we were about the business."

Fortunately, Rice did take a chance with the Thomas Phifer-designed Brochstein Pavilion and in the process made a significant contribution to the campus. This project knew precisely what it had to do, and then did it. The ill-defined backyard created by Fondren's interruption of the central axis and its nearly blank back wall had lain fallow all these years. Amazingly, neither of Pelli's two projects nor his update on the campus plan resolved it. With the

AERIAL IMAGE FROM GOOGLE EARTH

Barbara and David Gibbs Recreation and Wellness Center

ARCHITECTS
Lake/Flato (design architect);
F&S Partners (executive architect)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
The Office of James Burnett

ENGINEERS
Shaw Smith & Associates (MEP)
Datum Engineering (structural)
Walter P. Moore (civil)
Boner Associates (AV/acoustical)
Counsilman/Hunsaker & Associates (aquatics)

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Project Control

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR
Tellepsen

Lobby and entry court, Barbara and David Gibbs Recreation Center.

benefit of hindsight, the solution is obvious: since Fondren had blocked the original grand axis, the university should press the restart button, establish a new starting point, and have another go at the western vista.

Given its unique role on the campus, the pavilion could be light, in contrast to the heavy brick all around it. But a glass "crystal" might easily have become another trap. Instead, in the spirit of Renzo Piano's Menil Collection, a pair of shimmering horizontal planes, canopy and pavement, play down the glass envelope and underscore the flat land, the rising mist, and the big sky. This allows the pavilion to read as an object in the landscape, as a porch framing the landscape, and as landscape itself—neatly summarizing in a fresh material the preoccupations of the original General Plan.

In addition, the project gives purpose and shape to the backyard, brings it into better proportion with adjacent buildings, and reduces the pinch at Jamail Plaza. Deploying a carefully selected range of materials and textures, the handsome landscaping by the Office of James Burnett reinforces the spatial ambitions of the pavilion and helps blur the distinction between inside and outside. Over the past several years, the reduced palette of plant and paving materials on campus has become increasingly suburban; the new landscape design proves to be a welcome change in direction.

GOOD NEWS / BAD NEWS

Long after most campuses, and most architects, had moved on, Rice University continued to put up so-called postmodern buildings. The Brochstein Pavilion took advantage of extenuating circumstances to break free, finally, from the stylistic death grip that even Antoine Predock's Butcher Hall (1997) could not entirely escape. But what have subsequent projects done with their newfound liberty?

First the bad news. We regret to report that though Lake | Flato's Gibbs Recreation and Wellness Center (2009) substantially improved exercise facilities on campus, its architecture misses the mark. Rather than work from the precepts of the General Plan, the project scarcely engages its surroundings and instead merely lines up along the adjacent streets—as though following setbacks comprises the full extent of its urban responsibilities. As a result, while the center claims three courtyards, movement from inside to outside remains awkward and abrupt, even at the swimming pool. True, many contemporary programs call for wider floor plates than those indicated in the General Plan's slender volumes, but that challenge should serve as a starting point to engage the Plan intelligently.

An athletic facility offers designers one of the most exciting programs around, particularly in the academic context. After all, the classical gymnasium combined exercise and instruction, and the rituals and protocols embedded in the activities themselves—practiced movements of bodies in space—suggest rich potential for formal expression. This building should have been smart and sexy. Instead we get a project that defaults to the calculated application of faux-urban imagery and materials drawn from nineteenth-century warehouses, the sort of thing that marketers use to lend a splash of excitement to essentially bland suburban spaces and endeavors—like a NikeTown or Spaghetti Factory.

And now for the good news: the recently completed Brockman Hall for Physics (2011), designed by KieranTimberlake, is exemplary in both senses of the word. Not only does it achieve excellence in almost every regard, but more importantly the project sets a high standard and a strong, inspired example for subsequent projects on campus. (See images on next page.)

At first, the siting strategy might seem counterintuitive: The building is located directly at the intersection of two axes, where one would normally expect a lawn, and stands closer to adjacent structures

than is customary for the campus. The traditional parti of slipped-in bars then goes in an unexpected direction: one bar on the ground, the other lifted on gracefully tapered pilotis. Surprise leads to delight because the moves make good sense. The scheme creates a series of smaller, interlocking courtyards in a more neighborly relation to adjacent buildings, which now begin to cohere. As one moves under and through the new building, engaging shifting views, a conversation emerges between columns and tree trunks, existing columns and new ones, round columns and rectangular piers. From there, one can more readily appreciate the spatial and tactile qualities of the Pierce-Pierce buildings (especially Hammon Hall, whose turquoise mosaic columns have never looked so glamorous). These denser, more picturesque spaces bring a measure of intimacy and mystery to the area, a contrast that helps underscore the sense of broad expanse on other parts of campus.

The plan owes much of its success to a creative and adroit allocation of space: laboratories that require large volumes have been placed underground, while offices have been floated up into the tree canopy. Without copying the form of Lovett Hall and its Sallyport, the building employs a very similar strategy to consolidate and distribute circulation in that much of it occurs on the exterior. Clean and well-lighted interiors are played down.

At the ground level, glass-block screens threaded with terra-cotta tiles replace the typical base of limestone and brick banding. It is an inventive take on Rice tradition—thick glass in the place of thin masonry—and it adds a luster and vibrancy to the surface that accords well with the marble slabs and mosaic tiles of neighboring buildings. The envelope material shifts subtly as one moves around the building, from a taut glazed plane on the northern façade to layers of masonry cladding and screens on the south. This elegant game of theme and variation allows the building to respond with unusual precision to local conditions.

The project's intelligence is of the sort that invites a close reading of how each part is conceptualized, together with how it is realized. In that light, the few minor glitches may be instructive; one could even argue that they constitute a strength. One difficulty with the project involves turning corners, a perennial conundrum. In this case, the problem presents itself on the raised bar, where the northern glazing wraps the corners at the end elevations. Because the façade projects beyond the ends of the bar with wall-like thickness, the glass cladding conflates a plane, which one expects to be solid, with volume, which one understands to be hollow.

First the Bad News.

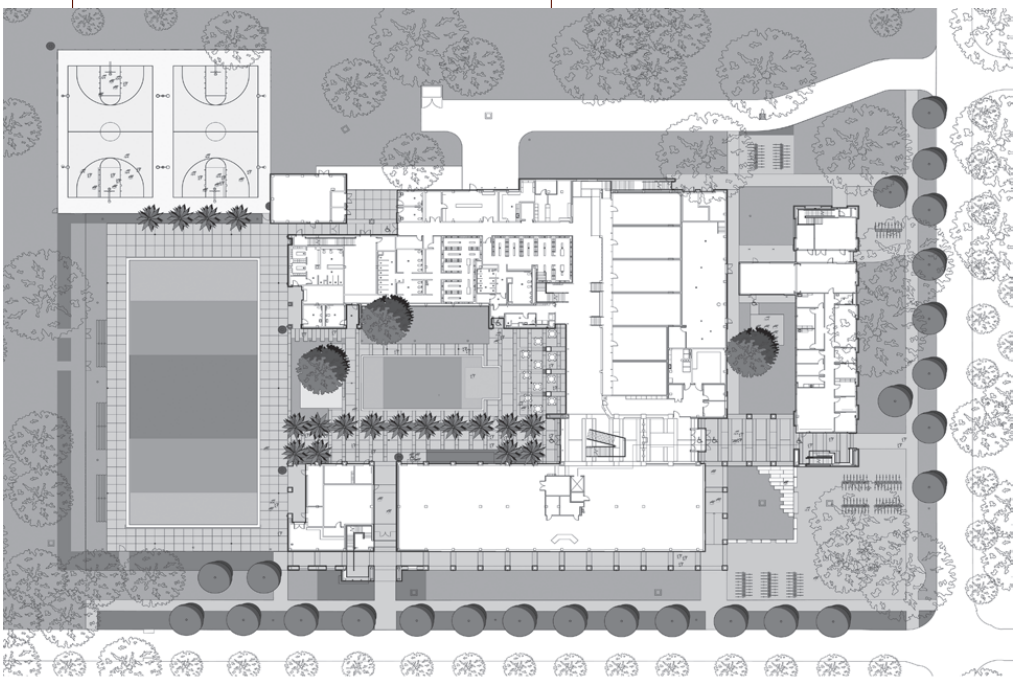
Perhaps using material drawn from the mullion systems, rather than glass, would have eased the confusion.

The large columns planted directly on the cross axis have already come in for their share of controversy. Although a bit shocking at first, they serve a number of important agendas: they reinforce the east-west grain of the area; they slow down passage into the complex from the Brown Hall's faux Sallyport (an interesting gesture of resistance from an otherwise incredibly tactful project); and by virtue of the offset, they frame views of Hamman Hall's delicate turquoise columns beyond.

ON THE UPPER EAST SIDE

The new residential colleges designed by Michael Hopkins and Michael Graves for the northeastern corner of campus bring much needed density to an area that has been ambiguous from the very beginning: the faubourg of Lovett Hall, within the hedges but outside the Sallyport. While quite logically designated for faculty housing in the General Plan, only the president's house was built there and not until the late 1940s. No surprise, then, that this area was given over to the first accommodations for women students—Jones College (1957), followed by Brown College (1965)—located half on and half off the campus, as far as possible from the male students, and under the nominal supervision of the president.

Given the delicacy of the midcentury buildings and his own predilection for heavy forms, Graves was an odd choice to design Martel College (2002)—all the more so since the move to shared food service meant the colleges would be physically linked. The layout for Jones College is similar to the Pierce-Pierce buildings from the 1950s: bar buildings that follow the grain of the General Plan and set up an oscillation between solids and voids. But the Graves additions ignore this approach in favor of the "still life" compositions popularized in the 1980s by architects such as Frank Gehry and Aldo Rossi. The scheme does have the advantage of absorbing the odd angles of the bounding streets. And the series of buildings



Plan for Barbara and David Gibbs Recreation Center.

Brockman Hall of Physics

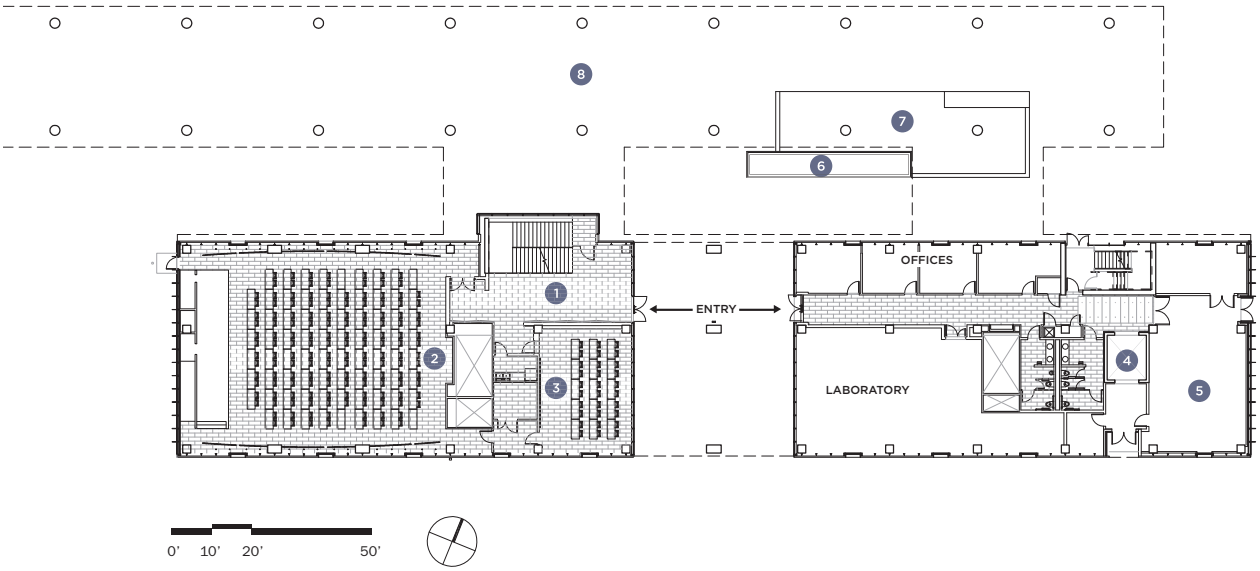
ARCHITECTS
KieranTimberlake Associates (design architect); Jackson & Ryan Architects, Houston (construction management); Perkins + Will (laboratory consultant)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
The Office of James Barnett

ENGINEERS
CCRD (MEP)
Haynes Whaley (structural)
Walter P. Moore (civil)
Ulrich Engineers (geotech consultant)
JE Acoustics; Arup Lighting

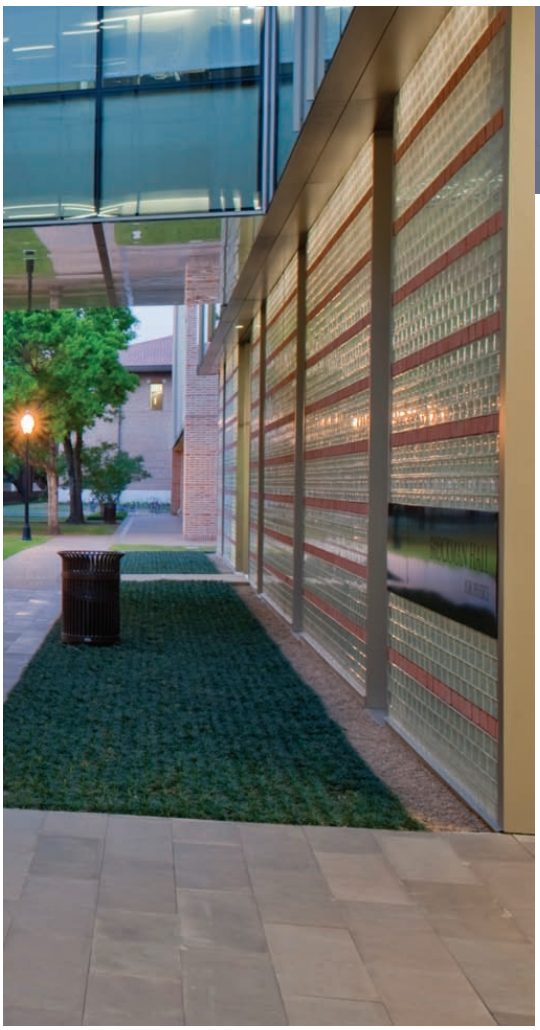
PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Linbeck

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR
Gilbane, Inc.



FIRST FLOOR

1 LOBBY
2 LECTURE HALL
3 CLASSROOM
4 ELEVATOR
5 ELECTRICAL SPACE, CLAD IN STAINLESS STEEL TO PREVENT ELECTROMAGNETIC INTERFERENCE
6 FOUNTAIN
7 RAISED WOOD DECK
8 LOGGIA/GREEN ROOF



TOP: Brockman Hall of Physics, north courtyard. TOP RIGHT: The turquoise columns of Hamman Hall are visible through the north-south axis of Brockman Hall. ABOVE: Glass brick on north elevation.

both connect and differentiate the three colleges. If not quite comprehensible, the resulting jumble of volumes and outdoor spaces provides picturesque incident, and while long past its sell-by date, the imagery still comes across as sincere. As it happens, the Martel servery is probably the most pleasant interior on the entire campus, presenting the relaxed scale, cheerful light, and easy curves of an early modern regional airport concourse.

The updated campus plan prepared by Graves called for more of the same for the two new colleges directly adjacent. Wisely, Michael Hopkins chose a calmer approach for Duncan and McMurtry Colleges (2009): two simple quadrangles face each other across their dining pavilions and a shared food servery. Overall, the scheme reads strong and clear, and the new buildings fit in comfortably with surrounding structures. A closer look, however, reveals some awkward moments.

The quadrangles hover between rotational symmetry (square with entries set at diagonals into the corners) and axial symmetry (open on the side facing the dining halls)—or between an incomplete "O" and a "C" with serifs. The semi-detached dining pavilions exhibit a similar ambivalence. Perhaps with greater care and attention to proportion, a scheme of balanced pairs could have been convincing—if, for example, the dining halls had been placed closer to or further away from the quads, and if the two pavilions shared the same geometry (instead one is round, while the other is rectangular). But the present configuration seems neither fish nor fowl.

Martel College, Michael Graves and Pierce Goodwin Alexander and Linville, 2002.

Duncan and McMurtry Colleges

ARCHITECTS
Hopkins Architects, USA (design architect)
Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas
(executive architect)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
The Office of James Burnett

ENGINEERS
CHP and Associates (mechanical); Haynes Whaley Associates (structural)

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Gilbane

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR
Linbeck Group L.P.

Where Graves gave emphasis to circulation, Hopkins downplayed that in favor of the primary occupied spaces: the dining pavilions. While this was an admirable sentiment, the downside is that it's hard to find the front door. Even the long allée of trees, the strongest landscape element in the area, peters out at the servery's rather prosaic emergency exit. Regardless of which door one uses, it feels as if one is entering the house from the garage and through the mudroom and the kitchen. This may be fine for daily use, but it is deeply unsatisfying for visitors. In fact, it is not entirely clear that a pavilion was the most appropriate form for the dining halls; they might have had a more robust connection to their respective colleges had they been incorporated directly into the wall-buildings that shape the quads.

This strangely muffled hierarchy of parts carries over to the wall section. Each element is handled elegantly on its own, but the relations among them seem out of focus. The rows of windows that punch the load-bearing brick walls of the upper levels, for example, appear out of proportion to the concrete colonnade immediately below. Highly articulated concrete abuts rather blunt brickwork. And the shift from post and beam to wall construction is blasé and noncommittal—in contrast to the intricately articulated transition from column to wall in the arcades of Cram's Lovett Hall or the razor-sharp edge between rough concrete and crisp glass in KieranTimberlake's Brockman Hall. Meanwhile, the penthouses look as though they had been added by someone else at a later date.

It is as if, at every register, refinement has been substituted for rigor.

These two new colleges have received a good deal of much deserved praise for their eco-friendly construction and mechanical systems. We are heartened by Rice University's growing commitment to a "green" campus, especially with the residential colleges. At some point, however, sustainable practice should be understood as a basic and essential part of any architect's professional responsibility, on the order of emergency egress and universal access. As we learn to live more lightly on the land, exciting developments in high-performance buildings may begin to intersect more directly with the genius loci of particular climates and building cultures. In his instructions to Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson, Lovett was explicit about the importance of breezes and shadows in Houston. The Brochstein Pavilion understood this and subordinated glazing to structure and canopy. The dining pavilions of Duncan and McMurtry Colleges do not, and the relationship between inside and out, which should be pliable, remains brittle.

AROUND THE HEDGES

As boundaries go, the hedges that gird the Rice campus are relatively gentle. Markers of persuasion rather than force, they signal private territory distinct from the surrounding city, a reading entirely consonant with the collegiate aspirations of the original Plan. It is not consistent, however, with the aims of a major university, and this is why the idea of the hedges warrants extended, considered discussion by the entire Rice community—including students, faculty, staff, and alumni—not just by trustees, administrators, and the designers they hire.

Duncan and McMurtry Colleges, and McMurtry dining hall.

While the hedges play a strong symbolic role, in practice the segregation they represent is more a function of land use, exacerbated by the expanding development of the campus toward the edges. In the early days, when the campus comprised a mere handful of buildings, the emphasis was quite rightly on the center: the main academic quad and the western axis. Over time, as the campus has thickened, even the outermost buildings continue to face inward, leaving their garbage dumpsters, service drives, and parking lots backed up against the hedges. The buildings at the edge have yet to realize the possibility of fronting the perimeter.

The turning away from the city is just a bit odd, since Lovett Hall, the first building, faces both

inward and outward simultaneously, and the Sallyport speaks directly to the task of issuing graduates, the school's first mission. In fact, the General Plan initially produced a dual boundary, building and hedge, together with a pair of apertures, the Sallyport and the front gate—a doubling that allows for the initial hybrid of college and university models. The resulting overlap between inside and outside—inclusion and exclusion—could continue to structure worthwhile debate.

To be sure, the three-quarter-mile stretch on Main Street doesn't give the campus much to work with. Along the portion that faces Hermann Park, Main and Fannin Streets combine to suggest a parkway. Here the sense of private gardens facing a public park seems correct, even gracious, enhanced by the jogging paths that border the hedges. The second half, with the Texas Medical Center on the other side of the street, is more problematic. Almost all of the Medical Center buildings face onto Fannin Street, leaving Main Street essentially an alley, servicing a wall of giant parking garages. Against this lineup of antisocial structures, a new urbanist proposal for the campus side of the street would be naïve. What, then, to do? As long as city and campus continue to be defined by privileged accommodations for the car—at the expense of walking, bicycling, and public transport—the problem will remain, to a large degree, intransigent.

Nonetheless, hopes were high for the BioScience Research Collaborative (2009) by Skidmore Owings & Merill, located on a block directly adjacent to campus at the corner of Main Street and University Boulevard. The program (research spaces shared with other institutions) seemed exactly what the doctor ordered. The building itself, though, hasn't much to do with sharing. The project reproduces yet again the corporate citadel illustrated in Rem Koolhaas's exhibit The City of the Captive Globe Project. Occupying a full block, the building has frontages on four different streets without managing a proper front to a single one. The BRC does blend in with the zombie Medical Center buildings across the street, but it doesn't register as a part of the campus. Instead it's stranded, outside the hedges and on the other side of a ball field.

While the BRC was off looking for street cred, the new South Plant (2008) by Predock shunned Main Street in favor of faux-rural pastimes, playing mad Ophelia with her

Turrell at Rice

THE THIRD SQUARE

BY RAFAEL LONGORIA

ONE OF THE MOST SURPRISING OBSERVATIONS IN THE PRECEDING ARTICLE BY MARK COTTLE AND Sabir Khan is their description of the matching black and white squares that punctuate the huge space between Fondren Library and the Shepherd School of Music when viewed from above (see page 19). The white square is the diaphanous roof of the Brochstein Pavilion, and the black square is the dark stone drop-off court between the Baker Institute and the Jones School of Business. Now a third square under construction by artist James Turrell is altering the pattern of squares on the site to white-black-white.

A May 17, 2011 ceremony marked the groundbreaking for a grass pyramid with a hovering white composite steel roof that will transform the lawn east of the Shepherd School building. In addition to framing the sky and enhancing appreciation of sunsets and sunrises, Turrell's installation will contain a digitally-equipped outdoor musical performance and laboratory space with capacity for 38 persons, and standing room for 50 more on the second level. Thomas Phifer, architect of the Brochstein Pavilion, collaborated on the structure.

Turrell has also delivered a skillfull feat of urban design.

Turrell has already created two of the most celebrated site-specific art environments with Houston: The Light Inside in the tunnel connecting The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston under Main Street and the roof aperture of the Live Oak Friends Meeting House, which has much in common with his proposal for Rice. Both the Rice and Live Oak Friends Meeting installations are part of a series of 28 Turrell skyspaces that include projects in Jerusalem, Norfolk, England, and Salta, Argentina.

A masterful exploration of light and space that magnifies the experience of natural phenomena has come to be expected of all of his projects; but at Rice, Turrell has also delivered a skillful feat of urban design. The pyramid and hovering roof of the skyspace will brilliantly terminate the western end of Rice's problematic back quadrangle echoing Thomas Phifer's elegant white trellis at the opposite end.

wildflowers. Worse, this sentimental reverie encroaches upon the area where the second cross axis slides through campus to meet Main Street. Occupied by a perfunctory service drive at present, the spot has the potential to become an important access point to the residential colleges on the south side, joining a similar gate at the end of the first cross axis. As more residential colleges are built in this area, concentrating building density on these two gates would link campus to city more precisely and robustly, and avoid the either/or approaches of the BRC and the South Plant.

Two of the most compelling buildings at Rice are to be found on the "satellite campus," a 30-acre tract approximately five miles further down South Main Street past the 610 Loop. The Library Service Center and an adjacent storage facility (2004), both by Carlos Jiménez, a local designer and Rice architecture professor with an international reputation, understand well their function and location. The simple articulation of green-tinted concrete slabs feels perfectly at home in the exurban interstices of freeway flyovers, train tracks, truck depots, and agricultural structures.

Now that the endgame of literal responses to tradition has been played out as far as it can go, why can't fresh, sophisticated, but unpretentious buildings such as these find a home on the main campus? **c**

South Plant

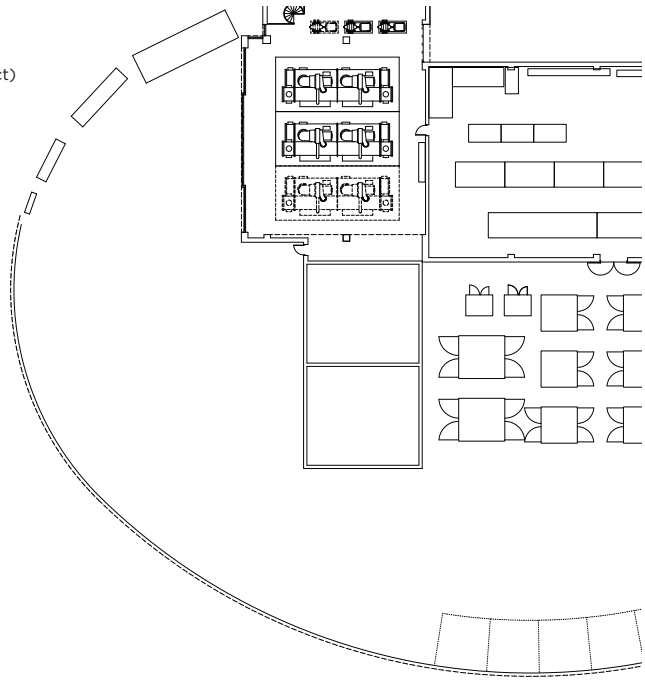
ARCHITECTS
Antoine Predock Associates (design architect)
Morris Architects (executive architect)
Michael Graves (master planning support)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
SWA Group in collaboration with Antoine Predock Associates.

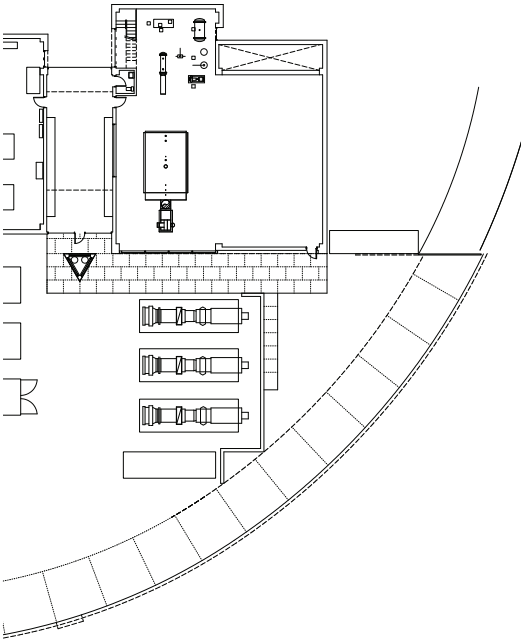
ENGINEERS
Bridges & Paxton Consulting Engineers Inc.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Project Control

CONSTRUCTION
Miner-Dederick Constructors Inc.
Project Control
Capp Electric
Cardinal Mechanical
Gowan Inc. (Mechanical Services)
Choate Plumbing



BELOW: South Plant interior. RIGHT: View of South Plant looking south toward Main Street from Weiss College.



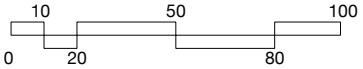
Biosciences Research Collaborative, SOM, 2011.

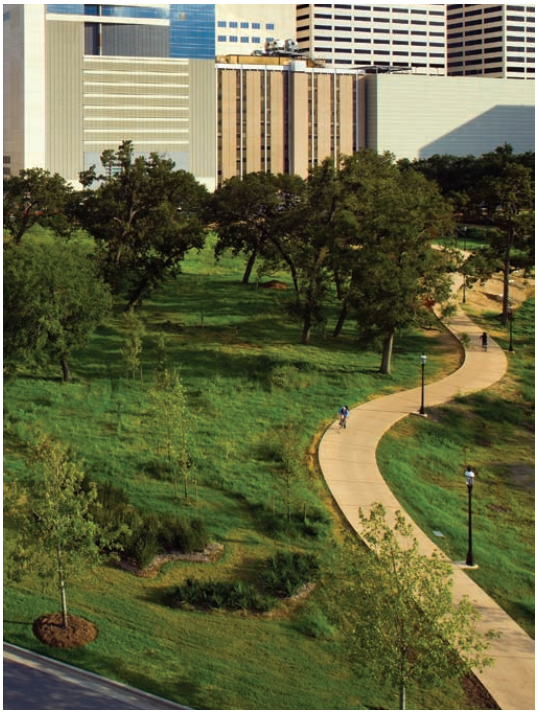
Biosciences Research Collaborative

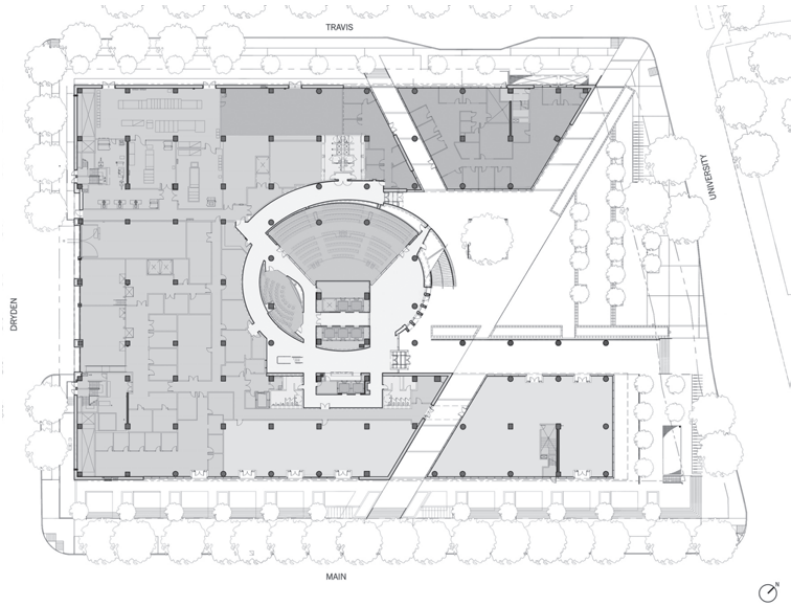
ARCHITECTS
Skidmore Owings & Merrill LLP
FKP Architects, Inc.

ENGINEERS
Bard, Rao + Athanas Consulting Engineers (MEP),
Haynes Whaley Assoicates (structural),
Perkins & Will (laboratory planner)

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR
Linbeck Group, L.P.







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