



The Harris County Civil Courts Building, circa 1910.

PRESERVATION

## COURTING CHANGE

### Resurrecting the Historic Harris County Courthouse

LIKE MANY OF THE OTHER 225 TEXAS COURTHOUSE buildings that are 50 years old or older, the Harris County Civil Courts Building, built on land set aside in the Allen Brother's 1836 town plat, has suffered from a malady afflicting historic structures statewide: deferred maintenance and unsympathetic alterations. Charles Erwin Barglebaugh, of Lang & Witchell in Dallas, designed the cruciform-plan, Beaux Arts-style building in 1910. A welcome latecomer to the Texas Historical Commission's Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, the building underwent selective demolition and hazardous material abatement this past spring and summer; restoration of the exterior and interior public spaces and the rehabilitation of additional interiors is imminent.

The acceptance of the courthouse into the Courthouse Preservation Program (established in 1999 by the Texas Legislature and Governor George W. Bush) three years ago occasioned the funding of \$500,000 for a preservation master plan, a document that details the building's historical and architectural development, provides an evaluation of existing conditions and rehabilitation recommendations, and includes an outline for the continued use of the building.

When the building opened, it was the fifth Harris County courthouse at this location. Remodeled to house the Civil Courts in the 1950s, when the (recently renovated) Moderne-style Harris County Courthouse was constructed nearby, the five-story

structure has a raised basement, four symmetrical pedimented façades with paired Corinthian columns, and grand staircases rising to an elevated first floor. Inappropriate changes made in response to technological shifts and office space needs over the years included filling in the central rotunda (in 1955), removing exterior and interior staircases, compromising load-bearing walls, and installing floor and ceiling coverings. The result was a severely altered historic structure.

The Houston architectural office of PGAL leads the current restoration team, with ArchiTexas as the historic preservation architect and Walter P Moore as structural engineer. In specific preservation zones of the building, a strict restoration philosophy will be implemented: If the missing feature existed in the building in 1910, it will be restored if extant, or reconstructed where missing; existing elements added after 1910 will be removed. Outside of the preservation zone, in secondary, tertiary, and non-public spaces, utilitarian office requirements will result in drop ceilings to facilitate HVAC and other cabling to all areas of the building.

Preparation for the selective demolition and hazardous material abatement necessitated study of the original architectural drawings combined with onsite inspection of visible elements and allowed for establishing preservation zones. As it became clear that not all elements shown on the original drawings had actually been constructed, the preservation architects looked to Cooke and Johnson counties, where Lang & Witchell had designed similar courthouses, to garner clues about the missing features and materials. While the 1915 hurricane destroyed the dome window on the Harris County courthouse, fortunately the sky-

light of Cooke County's courthouse is similar in scale, proportion, and appearance. Elements rediscovered when the drop ceilings and vinyl flooring were removed include significant portions of the original courtroom plasterwork on the fifth floor, door and window moldings, and the original mosaic floor tile.

Each pedimented façade originally had a grand staircase that took visitors from the street level to above the raised basement and into the rotunda. Over time, the staircases facing San Jacinto and Fannin streets were removed and the rotunda enclosed. These two important exterior staircases will be reconstructed and the rotunda restored using the original architectural drawings. Although the county jail original to the building will not be returned, window bars will remain as a physical memory.

Of six original courtrooms in the building, two large examples with viewing and seating mezzanines will be closely restored to their historic configurations and furnishings, with an allowance for new systems to accommodate the court's modern functions. An original bench from a public area will be replicated throughout the building, and elevators will be returned to their original locations.

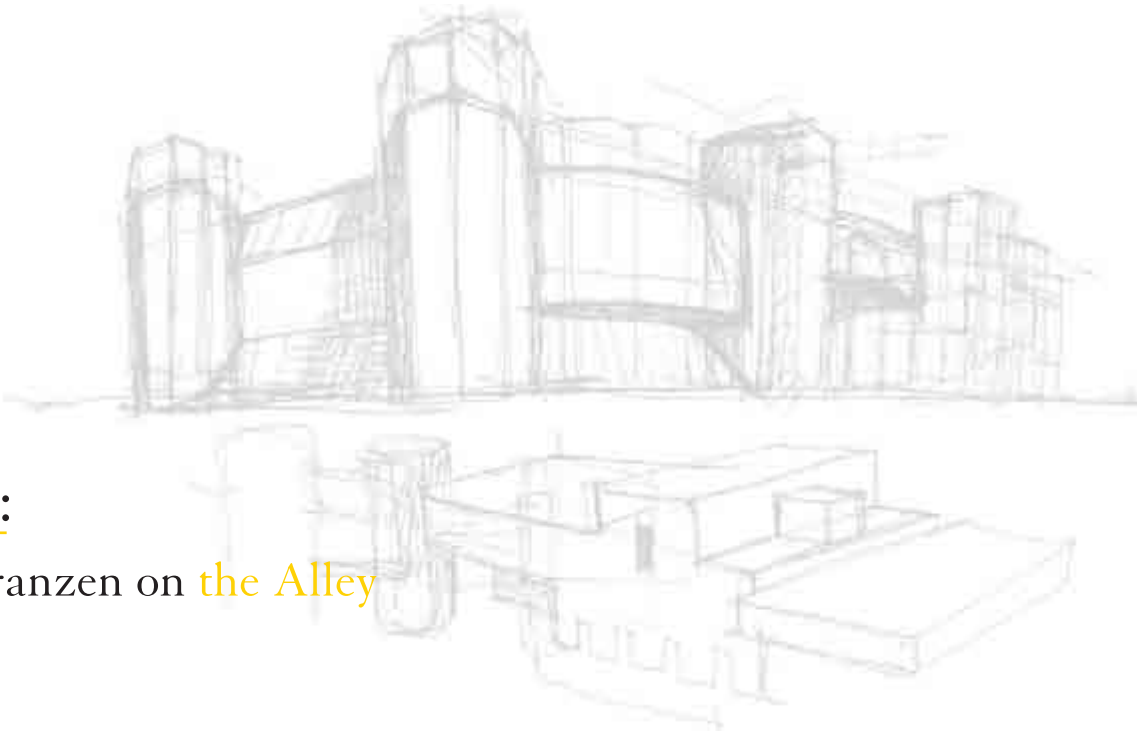
Missing elements on the exterior to be reconstructed include the terracotta balustrade and light posts and the terracotta tiled pediment roofs. The original windows, wood casement or sash with prismatic glass, will be replaced with an insulated wooden window of the proper historic proportion and appearance, but with metal cladding and insulated glass. The replacement windows will also be operable but will be fixed with a set screw, an easily reversible intervention needed to address current safety codes.

In the end, the building will be a credible and notable piece of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century civic architecture, well deserving of its place among Texas's historic courthouses and a source of pride for demolition-minded Houston.

— Anna Mod

**Q + A:**

**Ulrich Franzen on *the Alley***



**THE ALLEY THEATRE, BY ULRICH FRANZEN & ASSOCIATES, WILL SOON TURN 40.**

In 1968 the doors of Houston’s new downtown dramatic arts venue, the first large-scale cultural building designed by Franzen, opened under the charismatic leadership of founder and artistic director Nina Vance. The Alley’s kinetic qualities—seen in the ascending external steps that respond to grade changes on the site, and the monumental internal stair that spirals up to the second-floor lobby and theater—lend drama to the theater-going experience while recalling the Guggenheim Museum. The use of exposed cast-in-place concrete instead of travertine as the Alley’s finished surface gives the building a sense of irreverent permanence not unlike Boston’s City Hall, by Kallman McKinnell & Wood, also from 1968. Its free-form overhangs and terraces recall the sculptural qualities of such other contemporary New Brutalist buildings as Paul Rudolph’s Temple Street Parking Garage in New Haven. This bold yet humane building—a castle of sorts, replete with watchtowers—bears testimony to Franzen’s interest in robust Romanesque architecture as well as to the Alley’s reputation as an avant-garde repertory theater working against the grain to enrich Houston’s cultural life through intelligence and wit.

After decades of practice in New York City and teaching at Yale University’s School of Architecture, Ulrich Franzen retired to New Mexico, where he claims, like others before him, to have discovered the authentic America of the Southwest. I recently interviewed him there in the house he designed.

– *Michelangelo Sabatino*



TOP: Franzen’s sketches of the Alley Theatre.  
ABOVE: The Alley upon completion in 1968.

**WHO WERE THE PROTAGONISTS IN THE ALLEY’S BUILDING CAMPAIGN?**

The Ford Foundation was crucial; they selected the architects. Nina Vance became very friendly with Wilson McNeil Lowry, the man who really determined that the foundation would promote a repertory theatre movement in the United States. The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, designed by Ralph Rapson in 1963 and run from the late ‘60s by the actor/director Douglas Campbell, had set Lowry off to the importance of repertory theater in America.

**WHAT ROLE DID NINA VANCE PLAY?**

Nina Vance was the building’s heroine. She wanted an interpretation of the next step in her art and wanted to go beyond the theater-in-the-round as it was then understood. Nina wanted a setting in which it was possible for the action to surround the audience. That is why we designed the smaller open stage and an auditorium with ramps.

**WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR BASIC CONCERNS DURING THE DESIGN PROCESS?**

There is something special about Texas. I thought that Jones Hall being built before the Alley was importing a Lincoln Center attitude to a place with very special qualities, and it seemed like a terrible thing to do. My idea was to build something that represented not just Texas but the Southwest, with touches of Mexico. Jones Hall is exactly what I think you shouldn’t do in Houston if you want to have a building that is preoccupied with culture and life.

**WHY IS THERE A DRIVEWAY THROUGH THE BUILDING?**

Houston is not very pedestrian friendly. I wanted the building to be inviting for people coming in. I didn’t think the surrounding area was that welcoming. One of the requirements the theater group had was that they wanted people to be able to drive in and buy tickets. That is why we designed a driveway through the building.

**WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO CHOOSE CAST-IN-PLACE CONCRETE?**

I wanted something that was permanent and with a sense of history about it in terms of the material. I don’t think I would have used stone. Concrete was employed in a fairly sophisticated way. For the Alley, the concrete is very structural—it’s used for enormous spans and curves. It is a very complex building structurally.

**WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE THE FUTURE TO HOLD FOR THE ALLEY THEATRE YOU DESIGNED?**

I would be very unhappy if they tried to change the Alley. To me it’s like making a church glitzy. Who would think of that? I’m not religious, but a theater like the Alley tries to capture the spirit of that part of the world and celebrate it. To jazz it up would be a terrible thing. Just clean the outside surfaces up with some vinegar and water!

## LECTURES

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON,  
GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE  
FALL LECTURE SERIES  
3 p.m.  
arch.uh.edu; 713.743.2400

JAMES TIMBERLAKE, KIERAN TIMBERLAKE  
ASSOCIATES  
Philadelphia  
September 11

CHRIS REED, *stoss* LANDSCAPE URBANISM  
Boston  
September 25

ADA TOLLA + GUISEPPE LIGNANO, LOT-EK  
New York City  
October 2

JINHEE PARK, SINGLE SPEED DESIGN  
Boston  
October 23

EDWARD R. FORD, DETAILS OF MODERN  
ARCHITECTURE  
Richmond  
November 6

RDA FALL LECTURE SERIES:  
DESIGN ACTIVISM  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston,  
Brown Auditorium  
7 p.m.  
rda.rice.edu; 713.348.4876

ROBERTA FELDMAN, CITY DESIGN CENTER  
Chicago  
September 10

BRYAN BELL, DESIGN CORPS  
Raleigh  
September 19

JOHN PETERSON, PETERSON ARCHITECTS;  
FOUNDER, PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE  
San Francisco  
September 26

RANDY HESTER, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Berkeley  
October 3

CAMERON SINCLAIR, DESIGN FOR HUMANITY  
Sausalito  
October 10

## EXHIBITION

HOUSTON WILDERNESS: A COLLABORATION  
More than 50 photographs offering unique  
interpretations of the diverse eco-regions  
encompassing and surrounding Houston.  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
September 22, 2007 to January 6, 2008  
houstonwilderness.org; 713.524.7330

## TOURS

16TH ANNUAL OLD SIXTH WARD VICTORIAN  
HOME TOUR  
October 21. Tour Houston's oldest intact  
Victorian neighborhood, founded in 1877.  
old6ward.org; 713.446.5085

2007 AIA HOUSTON HOME TOUR  
October 27 and 28, noon - 6:00 p.m.  
Tickets for the nine architect-designed  
houses are \$25.00.  
Featured architects include: Allen Bianchi,  
Framework Design, Glassman Shoemake  
Maldonado Architects Inc., HarrisonKornberg  
Architects, Intexure Architects, m + a architecture  
studio, MC2 Architects, Metropolitan Design  
Group, Robertson Design Studio  
aiahouston.org; 713.520.0155



Single Speed's Sasaki Foundation exhibition design, Boston Architectural College.  
UH lecture October 23.

## LETTERS

### CITE 71

The [hurricane] issue gave *Cite* greater relevance and, I am sure, raised awareness, questions, and challenges for its diverse readership. This seems to be exactly what the mission of *Cite* and RDA should be in facing the future of the metropolis in general, and the Bayou City in particular. Moreover, the new format and design communicate this content coolly, clearly, and compellingly. Combined with the renewed editorial direction, the design brings *Cite* into the 21st century in style and raises the standard of the journal to the next level.

**Christopher Hight**  
Assistant Professor, Rice School of Architecture

The Hurricane issue just arrived and it looks great. Amazing cover!

**William Menking**  
Editor, *The Architect's Newspaper*

Last night was the first time since student days when I have read *Cite* cover to cover in a single sitting. #71 is wonderful, and alarming. Andrei Codrescu's reflections are a delight; "Data Central" is the sexiest centerfold I've seen in a long time; the student and churchgoer in me loves learning of the Katrina Furniture Project in NOLA; and the back-page Alexander Hamilton quote is almost as powerful as the embossed cover. *Cite* continues to deliver.

**Lonnie Hoogeboom**  
Natalie Appel + Associates Architects

I am enjoying this new look, and content, of our beloved *Cite*. It is the most visually sophisticated, coherent, and meaningful issue in a long, long time. More power to the press!!

**Paul Hester**  
Artist/Teacher, Department of Visual and Dramatic Arts,  
Rice University

Having grown up in Baytown, where my childhood home straddles the blue and gray zones of your map on page 31 of the latest *Cite*, I am very intrigued by this issue. This is the first time I feel compelled to read every article! Great job!!

**Ed Shoemake**  
Vice President, The Staubach Company

**LET US HEAR FROM YOU.** Please send your comments about *Cite* to julie.eakin@rice.edu.

### CORRECTIONS.

*Cite* 70: The photos on pages 38 and 39 were taken by Nash Baker.

*Cite* 71: In the table of contents, the *Texas City* article should have been credited to Bruce C. Webb.

American Embossing, of Houston, created the custom sculptural die for the cover of the Hurricane Issue.

# NEWS

FALL 07 DESIGN CHARRETTE \_ SUSTAINABLE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMPETITION \_ RDA GOES TO BUENOS AIRES \_ RDA 07 GALA

## BRIDGING THE PARK

Last month, 25 teams took part in the 7th annual RDA Partners all-day design charrette, Bridging the Park, with support from the Memorial Park Conservancy and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. Participants were challenged to propose a design to unite the north and south parts of Memorial Park, Houston's largest, via a pedestrian bridge. They were to design a link that will serve as a landmark for the city and also connect segments of an existing bike path along Memorial Drive.

The winning design, by a team from Clark Condon Associates (Rebecca Bailey, Chris Golden, Jamie Hendrixson, Brian D. Roth, Lindsay Landers, and Paul Weathers), thoughtfully considered the site both from a landscape perspective and in terms of usability and functionality within the larger park plan. Honorable mentions went to teams from architects DMJM Rottet and PGAL, and to a team of UH students (Fizza Hasan, Jasleen Sarai, Preetal Shah, and Laura Vargas).

Judges were Heidi Eagleton, architect with Roys/Eagleton; Rafael Longoria, board member of RDA and Memorial Park Conservancy, and architect with Longoria/Peters; Joe Turner, director of the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department; and Larry Whaley, president of Haynes Whaley Associates, Inc., structural engineers.

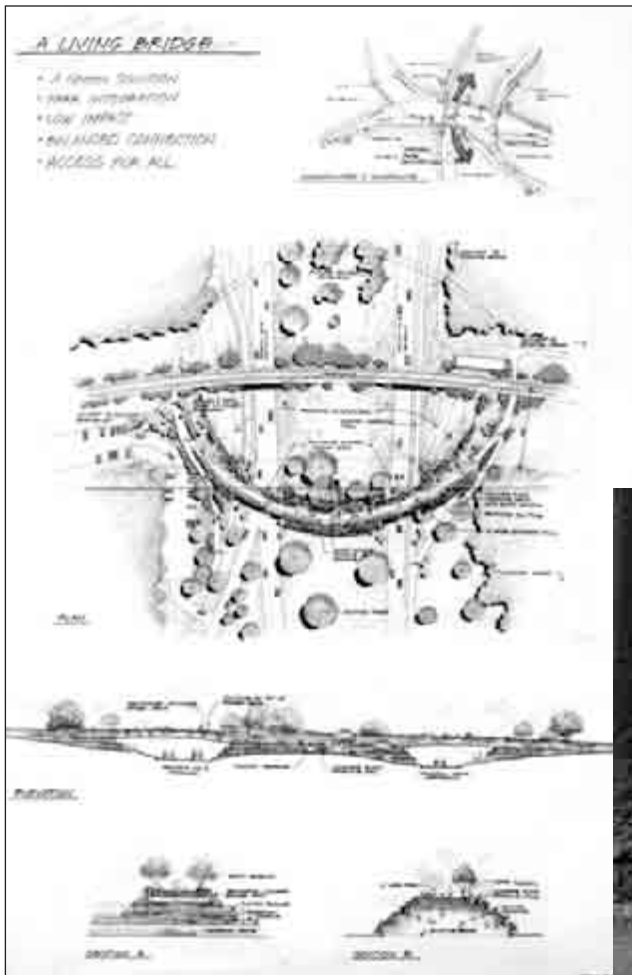
## THE 99K HOUSE COMPETITION

The Rice Design Alliance and AIA Houston announce a two-stage national competition to design a sustainable, affordable house that addresses the needs of the low-income family in the Gulf Coast region. The competition objectives are to broaden awareness of green building strategies applicable to affordable housing, to generate and publicize practical examples of these houses, and to construct an exemplary house prototype.

The competition committee challenges designers and architects to design a sustainable, affordable house for a specific Houston residential lot. Special consideration should be given to affordability, longevity, energy savings, and appropriateness for Houston's hot, humid climate. A site has been donated in the Fifth Ward, a residential area east of downtown, where the winning design will be built.

The competition is a two-stage project to be completed in 2008. Stage I will be an international design competition for a 1,200-1,400 SF single-family house with no more than three bedrooms and two bathrooms. The construction budget is \$99,000. Deadline for submissions is January 14, 2008. The Jury will select three finalists who will each receive a stipend of \$5,000 and will be expected to produce construction drawings.

For more information and to register, go to [the99khouse.com](http://the99khouse.com).



Bridging the Park charrette's winning design.

## RDA HOMETOWN TOUR

In June, RDA members gathered in front of the Casa Dr. Pedro Domingo Curutchet, designed by Le Corbusier, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Upcoming tours include San Francisco in February and Berlin in May. For information on both, visit [rda.rice.edu](http://rda.rice.edu).



## Green Matters, Green Works!

### THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE'S 2007 GALA

Saturday, November 3, 7:00 p.m. until midnight  
One and Two Allen Center, 1200 Smith at Dallas Streets, Houston

The Rice Design Alliance's 2007 Gala will honor longtime Houston environmental activist, Sadie Gwin Blackburn. A descendant of Harvey Allen (the younger brother of Houston's founders, for whom Allen Center was named), Mrs. Blackburn has a legacy of raising environmental awareness in Houston and leading efforts to preserve the city's parks, bayous, and gardens.

The evening will celebrate architecture that is environmentally friendly and sustainable. Guests will have the opportunity to learn about the importance of green building practices while dining, dancing, and viewing auction items.

<i>Gala Chairs</i>	Andrea and Bob Crawmer
<i>Underwriting Chair</i>	Kimberly Hickson
<i>Auction Chair</i>	Austin James
<i>Environment Chairs</i>	Eric Ragni and Scott Strasser

It is anticipated that 1,000 architects, design professionals, engineers, contractors, developers, and RDA members will attend this popular annual event. Funds raised will support the 2008 RDA programs and its journal, *Cite*.

For ticket information, please call Mary Swift at 713.348.5670.