



**Regionalism into Modernism:
David R. Williams, O'Neil Ford and an Elusive Sensibility**

Peter C. Papademetriou

© 1999 Peter C. Papademetriou

*Paper [resented 16 April 1990/Annual Meeting/Society of Architectural Historians/Houston, Texas
Session "Texas in the Twentieth Century"*

"Regionalism" as a concept has had a continuing theoretical interest, ever since Vitruvius concluded in his *Ten Books* that the ". . . arrangement of buildings should be guided by the kind of locality and changes of climate."¹ In the modern period it remains a constant theme, reappearing at intervals as a mediating force, or even a potential point of synthesis, although the historical evidence would seem to suggest that with each reappraisal, the definitions change slightly, and perhaps remain ever elusive. In 1948, the Museum of Modern Art symposium "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" evaluated the early effects of regionalism on the International Style, which had resulted in England as the "New Empiricism" and in America as the "Bay Region Style", suggesting a picturesqueness which was lamented by Alfred Barr as a ". . . kind of *neue Gemütlichkeit* with which to supersede the *neue Sachlichkeit* of the 1920s."²

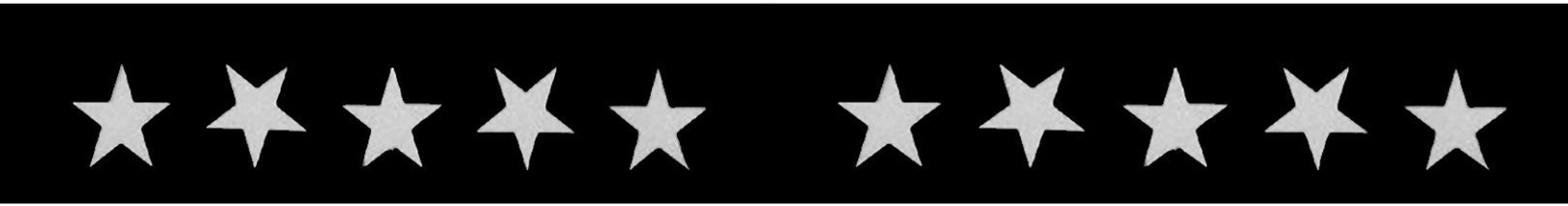
By the late 1950s, second-generation Modern architects had become quite open in their acknowledgment of Regionalism as an influence on architectural form. James Stirling wrote, "The more recent trend in many ways . . . could be considered . . . a reassessment of indigenous and usually anonymous building and a reevaluation of the experience embodied in the use of traditional methods and materials."³ Paul Rudolph also observed, "The great architectural movements of the past have been precisely formulated in a given area, been adapted and spread to other regions, suiting themselves more or less to the particular way of life of the new area. . . . *Regionalism is one way toward that richness in Architecture which other movements enjoyed and which is lacking today. . .*"⁴

¹ Quoted in Tzonis, Alexander and Liane Lefaivre, "Critical Regionalism" in Amourgis, Spyros (ed.), *Critical Regionalism*, College of Environmental Design, California State Polytechnic University, (Pomona) 1991, p.4

² Barr, Alfred, *et al* "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?", *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*, MoMA (New York) Spring 1948, p.8.

³ Stirling, James "Regionalism and Modern Architecture", *Architects' Yearbook 8*, Paul Elek (London) 1957, p.62

⁴ Rudolph, Paul "Regionalism in Architecture", *Perspecta 4*, Yale Architectural Journal, (New Haven) 1957, p.13, 19.



Henry-Russell Hitchcock, a participant in the MoMA symposium, could observe in the early 1960s, “Certainly it is time, however, that the extreme insistence on a sort of modernism in architecture that should be in its every aspect as different as possible from earlier architecture has diminished. Architects today are less afraid of continuity and partial identity in theory, in materials and in emotional content with buildings of the past. . .”⁵

Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, in the present decade, defining their concept of ‘critical regionalism’ have noted “. . .the beginnings of a ‘regionalist’ versus a ‘regional’ architecture [which] incorporates regional elements into design as a means not only of adapting to local conditions but also of criticizing an architectural order that claims universal application. . . regionalism has expressed aspirations of liberation from the brute force of an *a priori* typology imposed by a power perceived as foreign and illegitimate.”⁶

It should be noted that as one may speak of “mannerism” in architecture, the specific phenomenon of Mannerism is the period of the mid-1500s. Similarly, Regionalism was also an *actual* historical movement, from the mid-1920s to the early 1940s. In the Southwest, it was this sensibility which is particularly key to an understanding of the transition of architectural style into an altered modernism. Regionalism was a necessary historical bridge between late revivalist eclecticism and the modernist aesthetic represented initially by the International Style, which underwent its own transformation during the same period. Regionalism was at once a conservative formal tradition, in the true meaning of “conservation”, as well as a means by which the visual leap from a regionalist building to a modern one was ultimately not great.

This was necessary to a large extent because of the vagaries of architectural vanguardism in Texas. Issues of style generally exhibited a non-didactic tradition and were reflective of a recurring pragmatic tendency in Texas architecture, whereby the realities of a professional context removed from *avant-garde* cultural influences necessitated an approach best characterized as *non-ideological*. Regionalism, through its various forms, effectively continued this formal tradition and thereby became the means through which Texas architects came to terms with modernism.

⁵ Hitchcock, Henry-Russell “American Architecture in the Early Sixties”, *Zodiac 10*, (Milan) 19622, p.7

⁶ Tzonis and Lefaivre, *op cit*, p.5



IMAGE 1

David R. Williams
portrait by Jerry Bywaters



IMAGE 2

O'Neil Ford
photo in the 1930s

By the 1920s, perhaps as a result of, or at least in association with, isolationism following World War I, there emerged the concept of “. . .an ‘American art’, an art that was not based on imported European and that was accessible and understandable to *all* Americans.”⁷ In all discussions, this concept was generally gathered around Regionalism which nonetheless manifested the difficulty of not being a comprehensive or intellectualized body of theory. As William Jordy observed, “. . . regionalism is a changing concept, assuming different meanings in different contexts.”⁸ In all forms, however, “Regionalism is generally associated with the wide-spread return to *realism* that occurred in these years.”⁹ Significant social change was reflected in the arts, and the phenomenon of Regionalism may be viewed in part as the manifestation of the struggle to come to terms with a new cultural order. As Barbara Rose observed, “In many areas the past was giving way to the present, although not without a struggle”¹⁰ and “At exactly the same time, most of our early modernists [in painting] turned back in a more conservative direction”¹¹, or as Jordy characterizes it, “. . .by no influences much beyond the mid-nineteenth century.”¹²

Ultimately, it is not surprising to learn that those who identified the closest with the regionalist idea in the 1920s had, as Jordy notes, “. . .themselves grown up on farms or had some intimate boyhood contact with . . . the indigenous world.”¹³ Regionalist architecture in Texas centers around two such architects, David R. Williams and O’Neil Ford. Both embodied the virtues associated with Regionalism, as they came from a rural background and developed their unique design attitudes outside established patterns of architectural culture.

IMAGE 1

IMAGE 2

⁷ Heller, Nancy and Julia Williams *The Regionalists* Watson-Guptill (New York) 1976, p. 26
⁸ Jordy, William “Four Approaches to Regionalism in the 1930s” in Luedtke, Luther (ed.) *Study of American Culture - Contemporary Conflict*, Everett Edwards (Deland, Florida) 1978, p. 21
⁹ Barr, John I.H. (ed.), *et al*, *New Art in America* NYGS/Praeger (New York) 1957, p.95
¹⁰ Rose, Barabra *American Art Since 1900*, Praeger (New York) 1975, p. 43.
¹¹ Rose, *op cit*, p. 94.
¹² Jordy, *op cit*, p. 28.
¹³ *op cit*, p. 44



IMAGE 4

*DRW in Tampico, Mexico
Mexican Gulf Oil Co. 1916-20*



IMAGE 5

*'The Studio' Dallas, Texas
1928*

*O'Neil Ford
[2nd from Left]
David R. Williams
[3rd from Left]*

David Reichard Williams was born in a dug-out house near Childress, Texas in 1890, took an International Correspondence School Course in drafting during a period of time when he worked for the Fort Worth and Denver City Railroad, and in 1912 enrolled at the University of Texas in Austin. In 1916 he left a month before graduating; accounts ranged from anger over destruction of a watercolor by the Dean when Williams wouldn't 'follow orders', to the romance of American adventurism in Mexico as a civil engineer in Tampico. In 1922, he had married and went first to Fontainebleau and then the American Academy in Rome, returning to Dallas in 1924.¹⁴

IMAGE 4

It was in the decade after his return that Williams began to systematically visit and document the architecture of early Texas buildings, a process which led him to both written and design formulations of regionalist architecture.

Partially because of the personalities, the vicissitudes of careers, and personal indifference to documentation, it is difficult to separate the influences between Williams and Ford. There is no doubt, moreover, of their close collaboration, as well as the extent to which their intense interest in this Texas vernacular contributed to their association.

Otha Neil Ford was born in Pink Hill, Texas in 1905, the son of a railroad engineer, whose death left him head of his family at age 11. A bond of crafts held it together: his mother was a weaver, as was his sister, and his younger brother, Lynn, was a craftsman whose carvings have always been a part of O'Neil Ford's work. This use of ornamental work of great simplicity was, in fact, an essential ingredient to the sensibility which emerged in the regionalism of Ford and Williams. Ford had likewise taken an International Correspondence School course in drafting and briefly attended the Normal School (now North Texas State University) in Denton, but left after less than two years and sought out David Williams in Dallas in 1926.¹⁵

IMAGE 5

¹⁴ unpublished notes on David Williams from Jerry Bywaters of Dallas; also an account by Wellington Brink, "David Reichard Williams - advance guard architect" In *Holland's* April 1942 and George S. Kohl (ed) *American Architects' Dictionary* R.R. Bowker (New York) 1962, p. 764, as well as McCarthy, Muriel Quest, *David R. Williams: Pioneer Architect*, Southern Methodist University Press (Dallas), 1984.

¹⁵ Swank, Patsy "O'Neil Ford: Texas Architect" *Vision*, KERA/TV Dallas, June 1978, as well as unpublished notes on David Williams from Jerry Bywaters. See also George, Mary Carolyn Hollers *O'Neil Ford, Architect*, Texas A&M University Press (College Station) 1992, p. 17

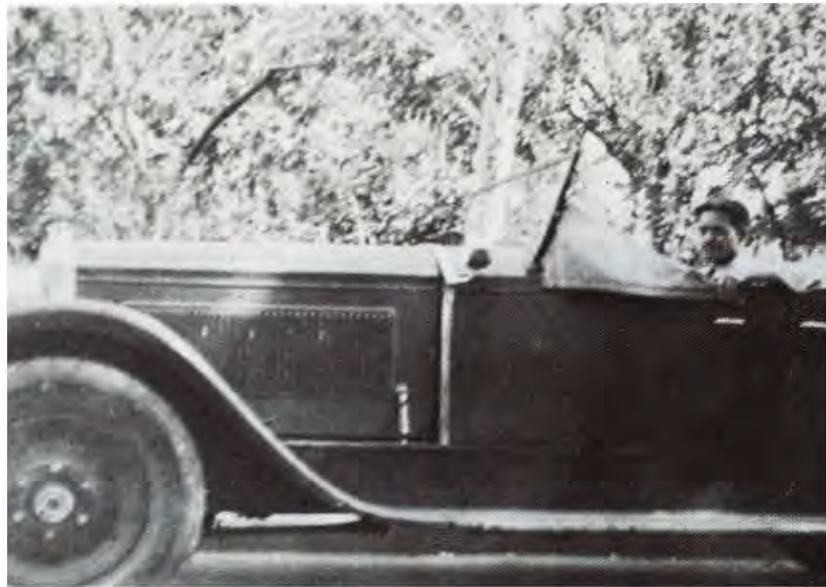


IMAGE 6

David Williams on the road



IMAGE 7

David Williams - Castroville, TX

'Old Church' 1923

[LEFT]

IMAGE 8

David Williams - Castroville

FRONT

[UPPER RIGHT]



IMAGE 9

O'Neal Ford - Castroville

REAR

[LOWER RIGHT]

IMAGE 10

COMPARATIVE IMAGES

Castroville, TX

David Williams - photo

O'Neil Ford - pen+ink sketch
[front & back]

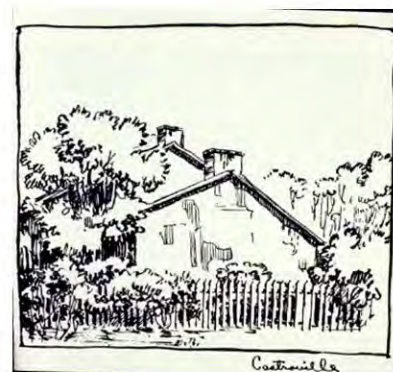


IMAGE 6

IMAGE 7

IMAGE 8

IMAGE 9

IMAGE 10

Both architects had as their fundamental reference, origins within the Texas regional context, and their architectural evolution exhibited the same dialectic as in other arts, such as when "... Thomas Hart Benton, who wished to turn back the clock to regain the virtues of simpler times came into direct conflict with others, such as Stuart Davis and Frank Lloyd Wright, who were ready to come to terms with the machine and its consequences."¹⁶ The architectural issue in Texas Regionalism was to respond directly to, as Stephen Fox proposed, "... contemporary functional requirements with a degree of regional cultural authenticity."¹⁷ Its key basis was that "The Regionalists... reasserted the importance of 'portrait of a place'... that art was shaped by its environment",¹⁸ accepting as Lewis Mumford suggested, "We recognize that difference does not imply inferiority".¹⁹

These became synthesized and given imagery through the surveys of Pioneer Texas buildings undertaken by Williams and Ford. Although both were talented draftsmen, Williams favored the camera and Ford the sketchpad; it appears as though simple economic realities were another reason for this division. The surveys occupied the years 1924-1928, and while they were never rigorously structured, they were clearly a focus of some intensity. David Williams has left several photograph collections, and the images contained in them indicate less of a pure academic historicism as much as a process of observation which could lead to more generalized borrowing²¹.

The photographs and negatives appear in different sizes and formats, prints are often worked over, with notes written directly on them. It is apparent that they have undergone some use, and even may have functioned as working sources in the studio. A selection from these surveys also shows certain recurring images, aspects looked at time and again. It is also relevant, in terms of the interaction

¹⁶ Rose, *op cit*, p. 93
¹⁷ Fox, Stephen "Texas 7", *Architectural Review*, Vol. CLXIV, No. 8, November 1978, P.279.
¹⁸ Heller and Williams, *op cit*, p.38.
¹⁹ *op cit*, p. 33.
²⁰ Williams, David R. "An Indigenous Architecture", *Southwest Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4, October 1928, p. 62.
²¹ Series F/Photographic Materials, David Reichard Williams (1890-1962) collection, Alexander Architectural Archive, University of Texas at Austin; included also are images from the National Youth Administration of Texas, circa 1940.



IMAGE 11

David Williams
photo of Lewis House
San Antonio, TX - FRONT
[LEFT]

O'Neil Ford
pencil sketch of Lewis House
San Antonio, TX - VERSO
[RIGHT]



IMAGE 12

David Williams
ink drawing of Lewis House
"Captn Robert E. Lee Drafting Room"
San Antonio, TX 1830



IMAGE 13

David Williams
photo Castroville, TX
"study with Greek Revival
influence" [LEFT]

O'Neil Ford
sketch Castroville, TX



IMAGE 14

eclectic Chateau
Armstrong Parkway
Dallas, TX

IMAGE 11

IMAGE 12

between Williams and Ford, to see instances where photographs by Williams have sketches by Ford directly on their back, and several examples where Williams photographs are converted into Ford sketches, and once again re-formed by Williams into pen and ink drawings.

An intermediate step involved the formulation of these observations into several articles during the 1920s for Southwest Review, whose editor John H. McGinnis was interested in the ideas of Regionalism. For Williams and Ford, the focus had been the early settlements of central Texas, particularly Fredericksburg and Castroville, but also others such as Salado and Quili. The attributes of these precedents embody values which reflect a modern sensibility toward visual simplicity, direct use of materials, and a certain degree of abstraction in form which may be seen as reductionist and generalized.

Williams wrote in "An Indigenous Architecture", "Our Texas people. . .have spent a considerable part of their money, much of their leisure, and some of their thinking in going all over the world to find . . .something. . .they may call. . .culture, and maybe they might call it art . . .but it has not yet been responsible for one square inch of indigenous Texas art. . .their forebears have left for them an architectural art as beautiful in its purpose as anything that has yet been built. . .beautiful because they were simple and natural. It is better to throw away our habit of supposing everything beautiful. . .had a foreign origin, and to admit that these little houses are not French or Spanish or even English at all, but are natural, native Texas art, suited to our climate and indigenous to our soil. There is not in any. . .a single observable instance of imitation, or sham, or dishonest use of materials, or any striving for effect, or use of unnatural ornament or of any material that is not structural and fit for its purpose,"²² a statement which, as Stephen Fox observed in his review of Muriel McCarthy's book David R. Williams: Pioneer Architect, was akin to Sinclair Lewis' 1929 Dodsworth, "Why shouldn't one help to create an authentic and unique American architecture? . . .Dismiss the imitation chateaux."²³

IMAGE 13

IMAGE 14

²² *Op cit*, p. 60, 62, 63, 67, 71.

²³ Fox, Stephen "O Pioneer", Design Book Review, No. 7, Summer 1985, p.12



IMAGE 14

David R. Williams
pen & ink drawings
"Stone House
The Fredericksburg Colony 1860"
[LEFT]
"An Old House built at Castroville"
[RIGHT]



IMAGE 15

O'Neil Ford
ink sketch
"Little Mexico - Dallas, TX"



IMAGE 16

O'Neil Ford
ink sketch
"Fredericksburg, TX"

IMAGE 14

This concept, that there was a discernible native art, had gained momentum through such writings as Charles and Mary Beard's book of 1927, *The Rise of American Civilization*. As the Beards were to later observe, "Beneath the imported academic art, most of which 'the people' either never saw or did not understand, in American regionalism the art of the people survived."²⁴ David Williams wrote, in "Toward a Southwestern Architecture", "...that our ancestors possessed a culture for which lately we have been searching so eagerly abroad," and lamented, "...it seems almost incredible that architectural practice could have declined from its early level in Texas to produce some of the monstrosities of the present." Williams declared "We are discovering our traditions, our legends, our folk-songs—our native architecture. We are beginning to see our old houses. These houses are functional, free from improper use of material, unnecessary ornament, imitated details, illogical imported ideas of plan or style, or inherited bad habit. Their style is modern, for it satisfies all the requirements of modern design and construction. It can be developed in perfect harmony with what is being done in modern architecture: none of our ornate styles has this quality."²⁵

IMAGE 15

IMAGE 16

In its first phase of realization, where a clear indication of intentions was expressed, the work of David Williams embodied what might be termed '*formal regionalism*'. That is, a heuristic connection was precisely established with those formal visual precedents from which he borrowed. This relationship was decidedly overt, as there was a presentation of his own projects intermingled with precedents in both of Williams' articles. Through a similarity of rendering technique, both in sketches by O'Neil Ford and his own pen and ink drawings, a heuristic connection was established by analogy. '*Formal regionalism*' in this respect, facilitated through the equation "this *looks* like that, so this *is* that", an instantaneous pedigree. Additionally, the use of direct borrowing may be seen in a sense as functional, free from improper use of material, unnecessary ornament, imitated details, illogical imported ideas of plan or style, or inherited bad habit. Their style is modern, for it satisfies all the requirements of modern design and construction. It can be developed in perfect harmony with what

²⁴ Beard, Charles and Mary *America in Midpassage*, McMillan (New York) 1939, p. 784.



IMAGE 17
Jerry Bywaters self Portrait
 1935
 [LEFT]



IMAGE 18
Jerry Bywaters oil painting
 "Houses in West Texas Big Bend" 1941
 [RIGHT]

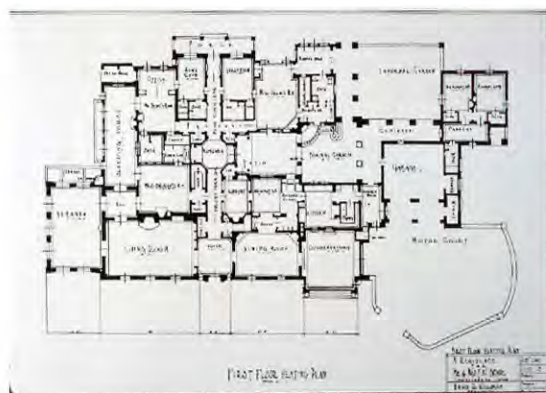


IMAGE 19
David R. Williams Drane Hse Plan
 Corsicana, TX 1926
 [LEFT]



IMAGE 20
Lynn Ford beam carving
 Drane Hse Corsicana, TX
 [RIGHT]

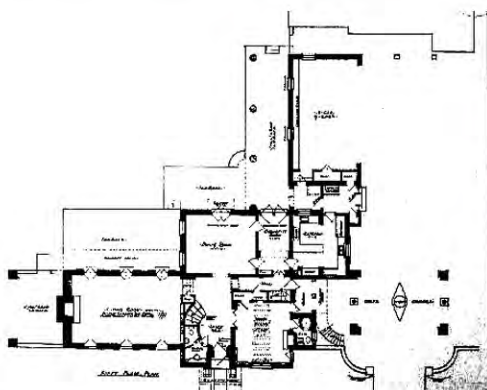


IMAGE 21
David R. Williams Stroube Hse Plan
 Corsicana, TX 1927
 [LEFT]



IMAGE 22
Stroube Hse rear view
 [RIGHT]



IMAGE 23
David R. Williams F.B. McKie Hse
 Corsicana, TX 1929
 exterior Terrac



IMAGE 24
David R. Williams pen & ink drawing
 F.B. McKie Hse

IMAGE 17

IMAGE 18

IMAGE 19
 IMAGE 20

IMAGE 21
 IMAGE 22

IMAGE 23
 IMAGE 24

is being done in modern architecture: none of our ornate styles has this quality."²⁵

In its first phase of realization, where a clear indication of intentions was expressed, the work of David Williams embodied what might be termed 'formal regionalism'. That is, a heuristic connection was precisely established with those formal visual precedents from which he borrowed. This relationship was decidedly overt, as there was a presentation of his own projects intermingled with precedents in both of Williams' articles. Through a similarity of rendering technique, both in sketches by O'Neil Ford and his own pen and ink drawings, a heuristic connection was established by analogy. 'Formal regionalism' in this respect, facilitated through the equation "this looks like that, so this is that", an instantaneous pedigree. Additionally, the use of direct borrowing may be seen in a sense as 'coming in the back door' and represented a reappraisal of form rather than its wholesale abandonment, a strategy eminently suitable to a conservative cultural context. Jerry Bywaters, regional painter and personal friend of Williams and Ford, observed, "...architecture, like language, is a continuous development, and that to advocate an architecture entirely cut off from the past is equivalent to advocate that we abandon English for Esperanto."²⁶

It is undoubtedly through the collaboration with O'Neil Ford that David Williams began his synthesis of 'formal regionalism'. In the Drane House in Corsicana of 1929, it emerges. The one-story building relates to site with its spreading shape and high walls of cut stone, and enclosed patios flanked by shady courts. Enrichment of the exterior is achieved by ironwork and other forms of discreet ornament; Lynn Ford also carved some of the interior woodwork. Bywaters characterizes the design that "...the architect at the very outset...denied the purely picturesque elements of colonial architecture...putting to use only the honest and workable features of the past and incorporating all the modern conveniences available..."²⁷ The Stroube House in Corsicana also continues the same themes, intended by Williams to be "...in the Texas manner, using the early Texas work as a source of inspiration..."²⁸ The McKie House of 1930 embodies a certain classic refinement with both modern and pioneer references: standing seam metal roof, exterior staircases, screened porches,

²⁵ Williams, David R. "Toward a Southwestern Architecture", *Southwest Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, April 1931, p. 311-12
²⁶ Bywaters, Jerry "More About Southwestern Architecture", Vol. 18, No. 3 Spring 1933, p. 245
²⁷ *op cit*, p. 249
²⁸ Williams, "Indigenous Architecture", *op cit*, p. 74



IMAGE 25

*David R. Williams
Warner Clark hse
Dallas, TX 1930
exterior*

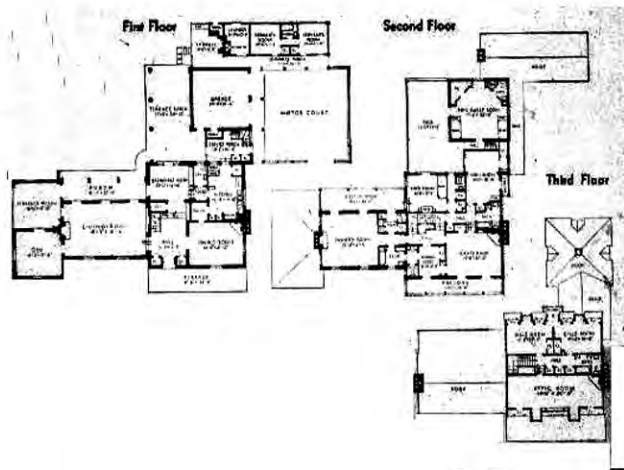


IMAGE 26

*David R. Williams
Elbert Williamms hse
Dallas, TX 1932
plans*

IMAGE 27

*Elbert Williams hse
exterior front view
[LEFT]*



IMAGE 28

*Elbert Williams hse
entry hall
[RIGHT]*

IMAGE 29

*Elbert Williams hse
exterior rear view*

IMAGE 25

shutters, Greek Revival brick dentil course, dormers and a modern emphasis of horizontal lines through projecting brick courses. The 1930 Warner Clark House in Dallas also combines old and new themes, particularly in its collection of details and handling of materials. Arcades serve to facilitate cross ventilation.

IMAGE 26

It is with the Elbert Williams House in Dallas of 1932 that he achieves the clearest level of *'formal regionalism'* and, perhaps in response to a fairly complex program for a family of seven, also begins to indicate elements of the later development, which I would designate *'regionalist functionalism'*. Its visual antecedents are many, but the basic reference is Castroville with the stone mass anchored by an opposing set of chimneys on the gable ends, as in specifically the Carle and Vance Houses. Yet, the borrowings are not simple quotation, but are skilled reinterpretations to fit the specifics of the client's needs. The massing of shapes, as reminiscent as they are of the vernacular sources, also programmatically evoke the areas of dominant use within the plan. As an example of *'regionalist functionalism'*, the dominant L-shape is oriented to catch the southeastern breezes and sited to pull these off the adjoining creek. Its interiors reflect the craft and handiwork by a variety of artists and craftsmen with a level of detailing which is both traditional and modern.

IMAGE 27 IMAGE 28 IMAGE 29

In 1932 Williams went to Washington, DC to join the Library of Congress Committee on the Historic American Building Survey. Over the next dozen years he served a variety of planning functions, including the Texas Relief Commission resettlement at Woodlake, the Matanuska Colony in Alaska, and in 1936 the National Youth Administration, becoming director of the Works Projects Division. He used his position to help O'Neil Ford, who after 1932 was in his own practice, as well as to systematically revisit the sites of central Texas and document his beloved buildings through the NYA. In 1941 the Federal Works Agency put him in charge of planning and architecture for the Mutual Ownership Defense Housing Division, through which he invited Richard Neutra to consult with Dallas architect Roscoe DeWitt on the development of prefabricated housing at Avion Village in Grand Prairie. He also spent time in Detroit with Eliel and Eero Saarinen on their Centerline Housing, architects whose non-rhetorical stance on modernism as well as adherence to the integration of craft



IMAGE 30
David R. Williams
Williams Hse
Lafayette, LA 1956
 [LEFT]

IMAGE 31
DRW age 55
 [RIGHT]

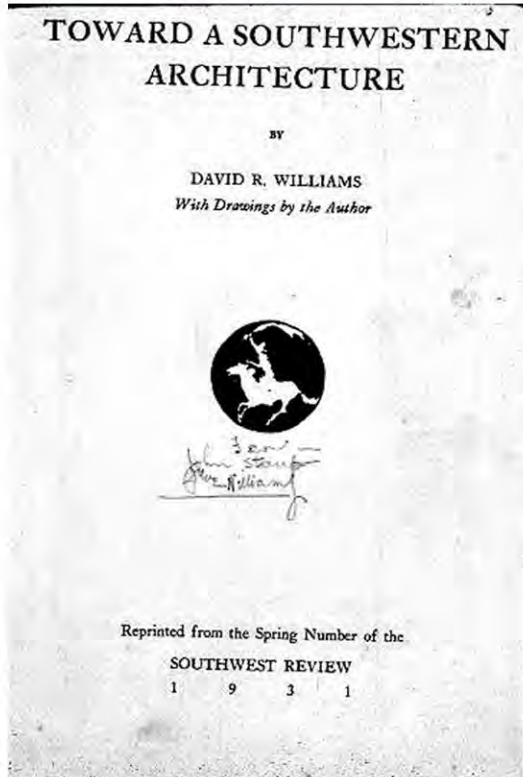
IMAGE 32
O'Neil Ford
Jerry Bywaters House & Studio
 [LEFT]

IMAGE 33
Klein-Naegelle Hse
New Braunfels, TX 1846
 [RIGHT]

IMAGE 34
O'Neil Ford
Stanley S. Kahn Hse
Dallas, TX
South [LEFT]

IMAGE 35
Stanley S. Kahn Hse
Dallas, TX
North [RIGHT]

IMAGE 36
reprint of DRW article
inscribed to Houston architect
John Staub



made them like-minded colleagues. A war injury resulting from a plane crash left Williams slightly crippled and he was over 55 years old when the war ended. However his interest in Regionalism remained and an unbuilt project for Lafayette, Louisiana of 1956 reflects both principles of

IMAGE 30

IMAGE 31

‘*regionalist functionalism*’ as it draws formal references from raised cottage precedents.

It is in the work of his younger colleague O’Neil Ford that both aspects of Regionalism are fully developed, and because, as Bywaters characterized him, Ford was “. . .a purist designer with modern inclinations,”²⁹ the eventual merging with modernism was made possible.

IMAGE 32

“*Formal regionalism*” is exhibited in the direct borrowing of the first Jerry Bywaters house and studio of 1930, whose separate buildings form a grouping in specific response to a

IMAGE 33

natural site, and which is a quotation of the Klein-Naegelin House in New Braunfels. The Stanley S. Kahn House in Dallas of 1932 manifests functional distinctions of orientation, with a squared-off massing to the north, but sheltering eaves over the open balcony on the south, also creating a more open relationship to the rear of the property. Its level of interior

IMAGE 34

detailing, with carvings by Lynn Ford, is evocative of the sensibilities exhibited in the Elbert Williams interiors.

IMAGE 35

It must be noted that Regionalism also affected the work of architects whose work was more ‘traditional’, such as Houston architect John Staub who had separately derived his own eclectic version of indigenous architecture for a more elite, and wealthy, conservative clientele. There was, in fact, a direct connection between David Williams and John Staub, and Staub was presented with a

IMAGE 36

fairly representative collection of Williams’ photographs of Texas architecture, in addition to a personally inscribed copy of his article “Towards a Southwestern Architecture”, which contains a Credo: “A logical regional architecture has for its origin the simple, early forms of building native to its own locale, and grows by purely functional methods into an indigenous form of art.”³⁰ Staub had himself developed a form which he characterized “Latin Colonial” in an earlier article of 1928, in which he wrote, “Is it not wiser for us to seek inspiration in the architecture developed in our own

²⁹ Bywaters, *op cit*, p. 247

³⁰ Williams, “Toward a Southwestern Architecture”, *op cit*, p. 301; inscribed copy in the collection of John Staub, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.



IMAGE 37
Jose Faurie Bldg [Brennan's Restaurant]
 New Orleans, LA
 1800

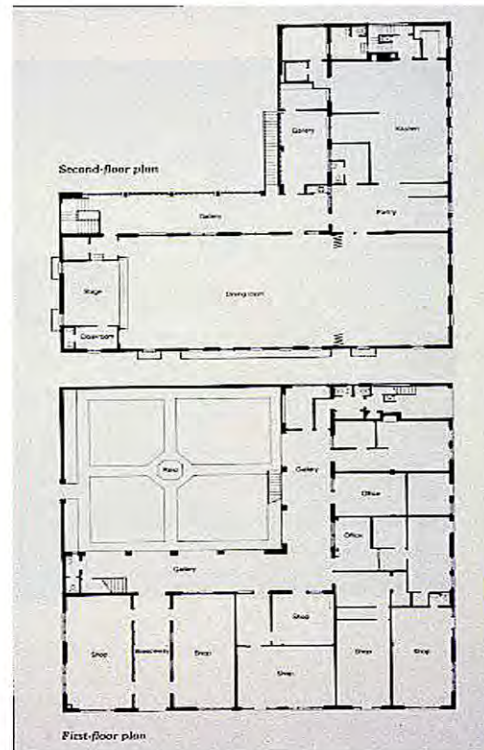


IMAGE 38
John Staub
Junior League Building
 Houston, TX
 1929
 PLANS

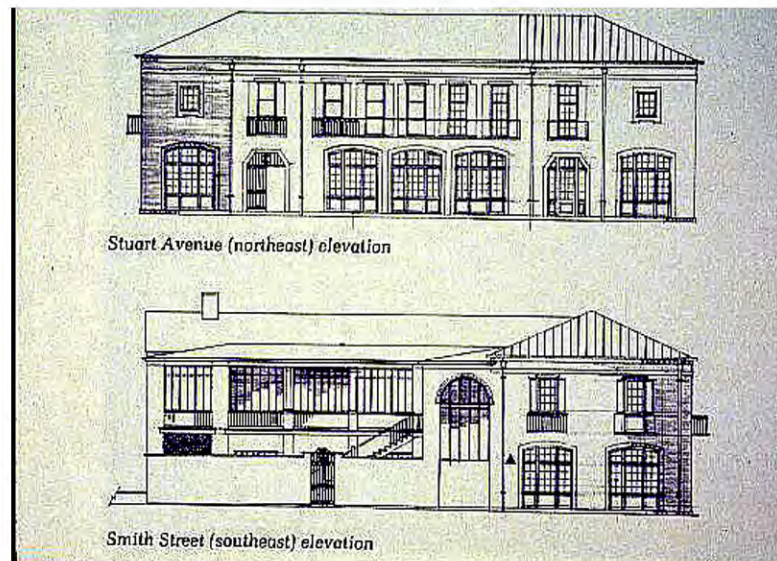


IMAGE 39
John Staub
Junior League Building
 Houston, TX
 1929
 ELEVATIONS

climate with materials at hand and adjust it to the tastes and requirements of our day, rather than force the adaptation of types derived in foreign environments. . . . Surely, study of this architecture shall bring rich rewards."³¹

Both history and historical style were shown as implicit in an analysis of the architectural problem, although Staub specifically sought to minimize the propriety of Spanish Colonial Revival, no doubt in part because it did not fully reflect the classical preferences of his conservative Houston clients.

Staub contended that the humid Gulf Coast was a specific regional context and that "Southeast Texas is climatically associated with Louisiana rather than Southwest Texas or New Mexico"³², which illustrates how flexible the notion of regionalism became.

His Houston Junior League Building of 1929 embodies both '*formal regionalism*' as well as '*regionalist functionalism*'. Its essential formal source was the José Faurie house in New Orleans of 1800, and its street façade evokes the same classical character. Its side elevation articulates the vertical layering of interior space, as the narrow central block was braced by a dependent lean-to structure separately roofed, containing the gallery. Brick piers surmounted by colonettes at the upper gallery recall a specific Creole arrangement, as do the louvered blinds inserted behind the gallery balustrade, as well as repeated on the arched aperture above the main stair landing. Moreover, its arrangement as an L-shaped block leaving a courtyard to the southwest was a familiar device to catch prevailing breezes.

Ironically, as the Faurie House became home to Brennan's Restaurant in New Orleans in 1955, so too the Junior League has become Houston's Brennan's, suggesting perhaps the inevitability of formal determinism.

To O'Neil Ford, the use of historical borrowing had changed by the 1930s, and when he was appointed project architect for the restoration of San Antonio's "La Villita" in 1939, one of the first

IMAGE 37

IMAGE 38

IMAGE 39

³¹ Staub, John "Latin Colonial Architecture in the Southwest", *Civics for Houston*, Vol.1, No. 2, February 1928, p.6.

³² Staub, *op. cit.*



Above: OLD VILLITA, now cleaned up. Below: CALICHE HOUSE.

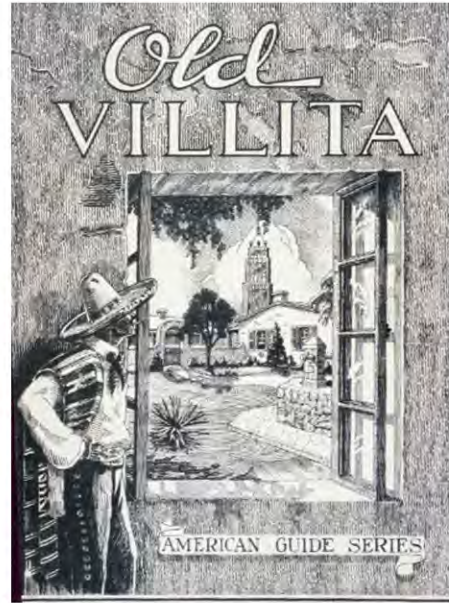


IMAGE 40
O'Neil Ford & Arthur Swank
scenes of existing La Villita
San Antonio, TX
SW Review 1939
 [LEFT]

IMAGE 41
"Old La Villita"
WPA Writers Project 1939
San Antonio, TX
 [RIGHT]

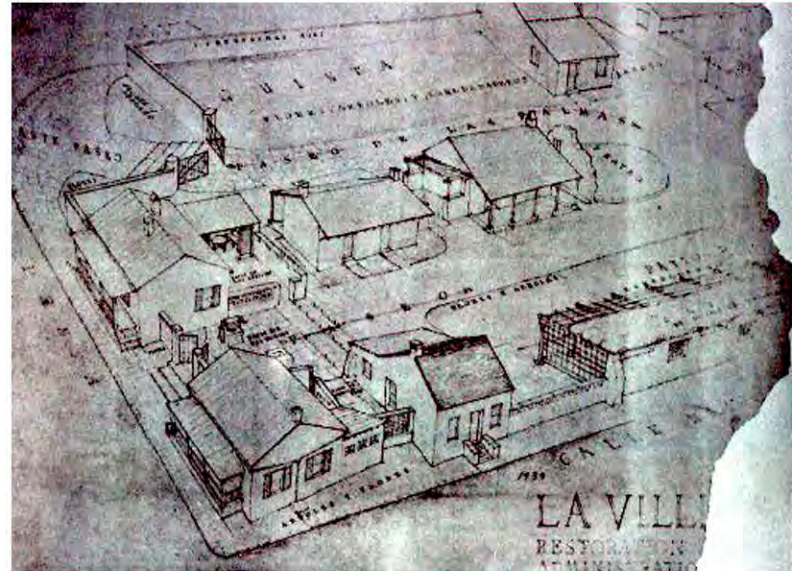


IMAGE 42
O'Neil Ford
La Villita Restoration
design proposal
San Antonio, TX
 1939

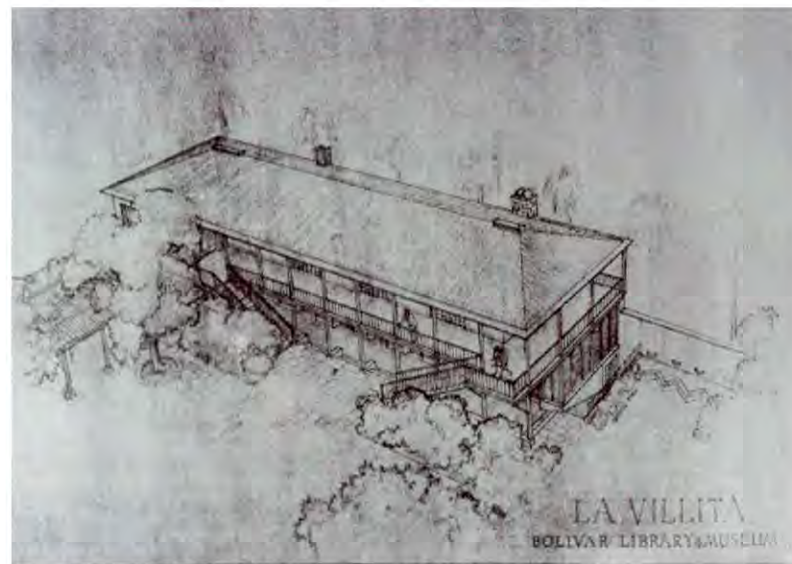


IMAGE 43
O'Neil Ford
Bolivar Library & Museum
La Villita
San Antonio, TX
design proposal

IMAGE 40

IMAGE 41

IMAGE 42

IMAGE 43

historic preservation projects in America, he stated, "At no time do we expect to affect picturesqueness or 'sweetness' at the expense of good sense or structural honesty, either in those things we build or in the parts we may restore."³³ Because of the extreme modification which La Villita's small group of buildings had undergone, Ford wanted to avoid a sterile reconstruction and, because of his Regionalist beliefs, essentially *failed to see* the problem as one of *historicism*, but rather as a demonstration of what we would now call '**contextualism**', and an affirmation of his own aesthetic.

Ford's work began to pull away from '*formal regionalism*', in recognition that continued use of traditional forms was in itself an aesthetic trap leading to the 'ranch house' of the late 1930s. Ford as well as others began to speak vaguely of a new indigenous architecture. Buford Pickens, Department Head of Architecture at Tulane, observed, "A rediscovery and reemphasis of the historical regionalism in our early architecture can be most helpful, but extreme caution must be taken to avoid superficiality on the one hand, or sentimental fascination with archaeological forms on the other. . . An understanding of the historical and cultural background is fundamental to the meaning of regionalism, but the core of the problem is essentially a contemporary and continuous one. . ."³⁴ Roscoe DeWitt of Dallas had written in 1931, "But it is possible that the very principles which made this native architecture sound and suitable now threaten its capacity to endure. New conditions have intervened . . . But . . . we are copying an older style cut to the measure of older conditions, and are not taking into account new types of buildings - - imagine an office-building in early Texas - - the age has brought new types of buildings, new materials with which to build, new conditions to be met; but with these it has brought an esthetic philosophy hardly sufficient developed to enable us to meet the crisis readily."³⁵ Dallas architect Thomas Broad suggested, "If

³³ Maverick, Maury *Old Villita* (American Guide Series), Works Projects Administration, 1939, p.3; see also

A.B. Swank, "The Villita Project", *Southwest Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4, July 1940

³⁴ Pickens, Buford L. "Regional Possibilities in Design and Construction", *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Winter 1949

³⁵ DeWitt, Roscoe "After Indigenous Architecture, What?", *Southwest Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, April 1931, p.315, 319

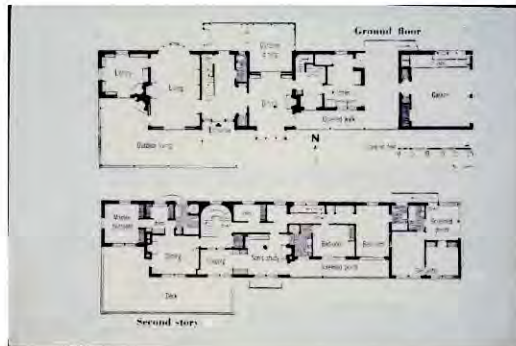


IMAGE 44
Ford & Swank
Arthur M. Bromberg Hse
Dallas, TX 1939
Plans



IMAGE 45
Arthur M. Bromberg Hse
exterior



IMAGE 46
O'Neil Ford
Frank Murchison Hse
San Antonio, TX 1937
Plans



IMAGE 47
Frank Murchison Hse
exterior

we attempt to throw away the architecture of the past, our architecture can not possibly express the present. . .progressive balance between a past that gives way to the present and a present developed out of the past. . .On the other hand, if period architecture is bad, certainly no improvement is offered by much is called 'modernism' . . .We must distinguish carefully between what is honestly and logically modern in the sense of being contemporary and functional, and what is merely affected."³⁶ Ford, in a companion piece, stated, "But perhaps it is necessary, as a sort of appendix to this exhibit of pernicious influences, to mention the 'modernistic' fad - really another manifestation of the impulse toward imitation. . .The functionalist ideal is building that serves basic human purposes permanently. . .that is free from ostentation and faddish 'isms' . . .that is what we wanted to show Texans - -that these houses were as modern when they were built as a skyscraper is today, as purposeful as a piston in a motor. . . These houses. . .are. . .straight-forward and honest, free from mannerisms and styles. . .Tomorrow's architects are not concerned with propaganda for a new style, but their stand shows conclusively how a new style will be formulated by meeting the needs of today with the scientific developments of today."³⁷ By the end of the 1930s, Ford had virtually abandoned '*formal regionalism*' and was exploring a synthesis of modern architecture through '*regionalist functionalism*'. The Alfred Bromberg House in Dallas of 1939 reflects this trend, and exhibits the classic *parti* of the single room-depth plan. Orientation, prevailing breezes, sun control are specific factors conditioning the plan form, along with a frank image association of 'house'. Such may also be seen in the Frank Murchison house in San Antonio of 1937, which contains these dominant aspects of '*regionalist functionalism*' as well as occasional details recalling the interest of '*formal regionalism*', such as the entry door done in the manner of a door in Fredericksburg of the mid-1850s.

IMAGE 44
IMAGE 45

IMAGE 46
IMAGE 47

³⁶ Broad, Thomas D. "What is Modernism?"(Part One of "Toward a New Architecture"), *Southwest Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, January 1932, p.190, 212-213

³⁷ Ford, O'Neil, "Organic Building" (Part Two of "Toward a New Architecture"), *Southwest Review*, Vol. 17, No.2, January 1932, p. 218, 221, 227-9.



IMAGE 48
O'Neil Ford
Murchison Hse
Entry

IMAGE 49
Johann Peter Tisch Hse
Fredericksburg, TX 1856
Entry



IMAGE 50
Chester Nagel Hse
Austin, TX 1943
exterior view from slope



IMAGE 51
Chester Nagel Hse
Plans
[LEFT]

IMAGE 52
Chester Nagel Hse
Site Plan
[RIGHT]

IMAGE 48

IMAGE 49

IMAGE 50

IMAGE 51

IMAGE 52

The transformations and transitions from Williams to Ford were instances which facilitated the assimilation of modernism into a regional sphere of practice. With the merging of 'formal regionalism' into 'regionalist functionalism', the path to a modified International Style was all but complete. As the International Style itself underwent changes in the era after 1930, it was characterized, as Jordy states, by an "...adaptation of the Style to normative human needs and desires rather than the forging of an *avant-garde* image. . ."38. Additionally, as Jordy continues, the transformed visual image of the International Style indicated "...the influence on it of vernacular and regional traditions. . .this tendency provided modern architecture with the deeper appeal and denser meanings possible from form called forth by concern for historical values" ultimately synthesized "...with the psychic values of regionalism, of natural materials, of the intimate relation of the building to its site, and increasingly aware of the complexity of the diverse requirements for psychological comfort."39

In order to fully assess the transitions between regionalism and modernism, the design by a student of Walter Gropius, Chester Nagel, for his own house in Austin of 1941 evidences not only the principles of his teacher, but also the degree to which they had been altered within the American context. The house is organized on its site and within its plan according to the best dictates of 'regionalist functionalism'. Overhangs dominate the southern orientation, while the north face is a clipped-off box. Its detail expression includes both the shapes of the International Style and references to the Texas vernacular. By 1941, however, this seemed not heresy but a logical synthesis, and Nagel exhibited this philosophical integration when he wrote, "Beauty was sought in its natural forms, not borrowed, not imposed. Natural laws were studied and made to act favorably."40

38 Jordy, William H. "The International Style in the 1930s", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 24, No. 1, March 1965, p.12.

39 Jordy, *op cit*, p. 13

40 "House in Austin, Texas", *New Pencil Points*, Vol.24, No. 1, January 1943, p. 20.

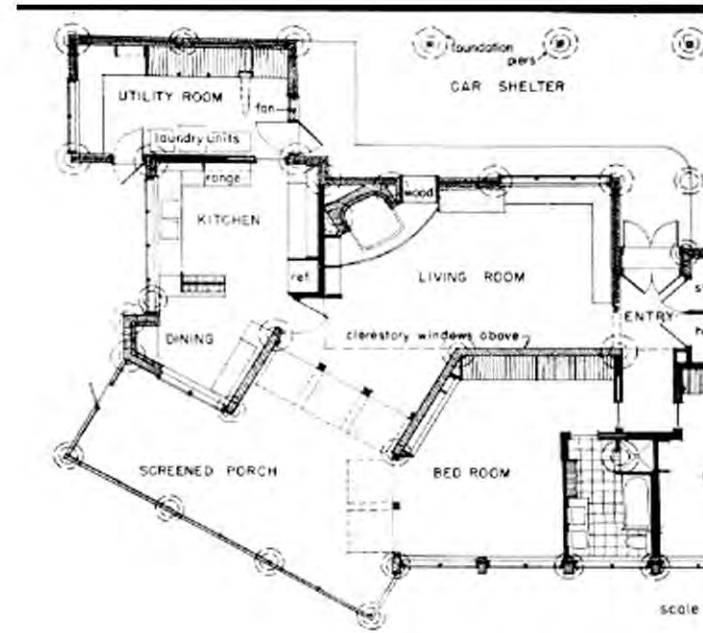


IMAGE 53
 Ford & Rogers
 William D. Mcneel Hse
 San Antonio, TX 1947
 Plan

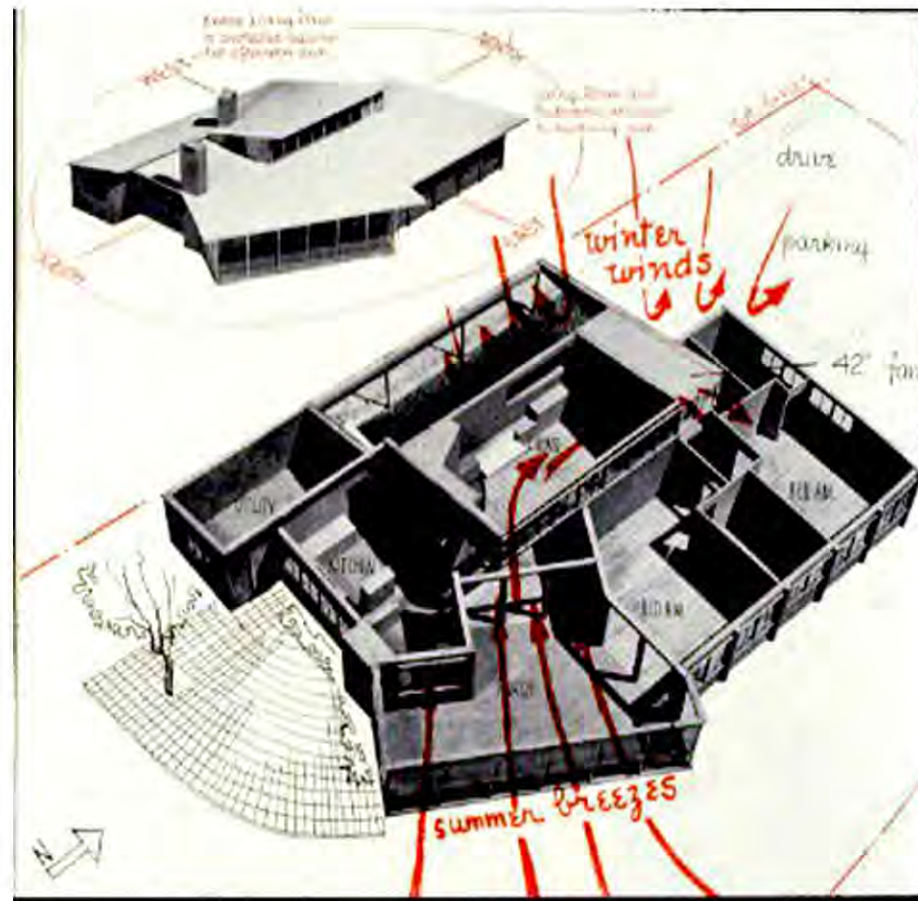


IMAGE 54
 William D. Mcneel Hse
 Concept Analysis

MAGE 53

Since O'Neil Ford spent World War II in the United States Air Force, it is not unreasonable to close out this discussion with a work of 1946, the William D. McNeel house in San Antonio by Ford and Rogers. Ford's presentation of the house emphasizes '*regionalist functionalism*', at the same time as he recalls "... the old German towns near San Antonio. [But] few architects have made any effort to move toward a comparably progressive architecture of and for today... Instead, there has arisen a new tradition that is generally characterized by 'peanut-brittle rock work'..."⁴¹ To this end a trivialization of regionalism may have been a contributing factor.

William Jordy cites the "enlarged vocabulary of the polemical austerity" of the International Style affected by considerations of comfort with "...the importance of traditional materials, of the role which outdoor living could play in enhancing human life, of the significance of regional traditions..." but warns of "...those who would 'humanize' modern architecture by redwood and barbecue pits..."⁴²

MAE 54

The strength of regionalist sensibilities had been their power to communicate through cultural resonance, and the aesthetic translation was to begin "...with a conception of the house so banally sentimental as to win the widest popular support-- what one has 'always wanted in a home'-- and then transcend the banality by his creative act."⁴³ Without a firm sense of what Jordy characterizes as 'Tough-Mindedness', the reversion to nostalgia was a trap which could "...denigrate a heroic tradition..."⁴⁴; the difficulty of dealing with borrowed references mandated a sensibility "...not edged with residual prettiness and sentimentality, but [which] derives from a tougher... vision."⁴⁵ This potential misinterpretation through trivialization, and the reduction to the *kitsch* object was an inherent problem with aspects of '*formal regionalism*', while the principles of '*regionalist functionalism*' were often more elusive to codification. However, as a sensibility paralleling the transformations occurring within the International Style, regionalism facilitated a necessary bridge.

⁴¹ "Seven Postwar Houses" *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 87, No. 8, September 1947, p.96.

⁴² Jordy, William H. "Humanism in Contemporary Architecture: Tough- and Tender-Minded", *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer 1960, p. 5.

⁴³ Jordy, "Four Approaches to Regionalism in the 1930s", *op cit*, p.29.

⁴⁴ Jordy, "Humanism in Contemporary Architecture", *op cit*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Jordy, "Four Approaches to Regionalism in the 1930s", *op. cit.*, p.43



IMAGE 55

O'Neil Ford
Ford Powell Carson Architects
San Antonio, TX

IMAGE 55

between eclecticism and modernism, and established a cultural pedigree in Texas which facilitated the adaptation of a revised modern architecture

In 1959, Eero Saarinen wrote on behalf of David Williams' nomination to Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, "His fresh, fearless pioneer spirit and his sensitivity to design, particularly in the regional and more primitive settings, is his great contribution to architecture."⁴⁶ It is not surprising that Saarinen, whose own career was one of a heterodox⁴⁷ architect, recognized Williams' 'search for form' and desire for an American modern architecture. And in turn, Williams himself wrote on behalf of O'Neil Ford, ". . . I consider O'Neil Ford far and away my greatest contribution to Architecture."⁴⁸

Both Williams and Ford were together elevated to recognition as Fellows of the AIA in 1960.

In the writings and synthesized work of Williams and then Ford, '*formal regionalism*' was essentially a return to 'first principles'. Since "Regionalism helped to establish a new and confident American self-image expressed in the arts in general. . .,"⁴⁹ it was inevitable that a parallel revision to modern architecture's visual imagery would occur. However, '*formal regionalism*' was unable to sustain itself and was largely only a transition into this adaptation. Perhaps it might be suggested of '*formal regionalism*' as in the sense of painting of the 1930s, that "one quality that the Regionalist movement consistently lacked was a sense of development. . .,"⁵⁰ Its antecedents were also inevitably backward-looking and somewhat revisionist, reflecting ". . . the confrontation between a dying rurality of the individual family farm and the small isolated village and emergent technological and institutional change. . .."⁵¹

In the best work, however, the historic borrowings of regionalism served as the decisive element providing ***the necessary cultural resonance and ideological traditionalism*** facilitating **modern** architecture's ultimate formal adaptation into a conservative cultural context.

⁴⁶ Quoted in McCarthy, Muriel Quest, *op cit*, p. 155.

⁴⁷ Papademetriou, Peter, "Eero Saarinen: Heterodox Architect"; *ptah 2002:2* (Journal of the Alvar Aalto Foundation); Vol.3, No.2, 2002.

⁴⁸ Quoted in George, Mary Carolyn Hollers, *op cit*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Heller and Williams, *op cit*, p.1

⁵⁰ *op cit*, p. 175

⁵¹ Jordy, "Four Approaches to Regionalism in the 1930s", *op cit*, p. 43.