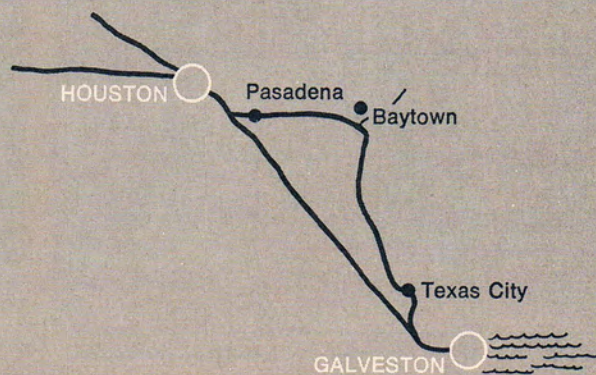


# ARCHITECTURE IN HOUSTON

A Heritage  
and a  
Challenge

The insights into the city of Houston here are by Peter C. Papademetriou, assistant professor, School of Architecture, Rice University. He is editor of *Houston: An Architectural Guide* (produced by the Houston Chapter AIA, text by Papademetriou, building research by Stephen Fox and Drexel Turner, photography by Paul Hester and William Lukes) which is the first comprehensive documentation of architecture in that vital city. There are also glimpses of nearby Galveston. The buildings illustrated here are from the guidebook, a copy of which will be presented to each registrant at the AIA convention in May.



## Historic

Houston as a place has only recently begun to infiltrate the professional consciousness. During a period of time that was characterized by a stalemate in building across America, Houston was unique in that a huge amount of construction continued unabated. This intensity of development and the rapidity of growth which has been a part of the Houston scene for the past two decades contributed to the myth of the "Space City": rising edifices in the image of the evolving corporate state.

Sprouting from the surface of the flat Texan plain, the towers of this image represent forces at work in the United States today. In this respect, as well as in the accompanying sociology of any such pattern of growth, Houston is in fact becoming less Texan and more a symbol of "generalized" America. As a case study, it offers a clear context representing the impact of urban forces which shape the face of our land.

The relevance of Houston, however, lies not only in seeing these forces at work, but also in presenting an opportunity to evaluate other aspects of the phenomenon which may be obscured by the spectacular images of corporate architecture. First, there is a past stock of building of valuable competency whose role in the future remains uncertain; second, there is a present of vivid vernacular which may provide ways of enlarging definitions of architecture.

Houston, bent upon emerging from a provincial second place to a position of prominence among US cities, is trying to catch up with those whose historic development dates from the same point, such as Chicago or San Francisco, but which already are a firm part of the American consciousness.

Houston at this moment is an evolving manifestation of many American attitudes. One of these, regarding buildings, is that if an old structure begins to outlive its "usefulness," it is torn down. Our economy and rapid growth begin to dictate this attitude; but if we create an environment which is all "new," a link to the past is broken.

Our built environment, its continuity and evolution, represent our faith in a place. A question posed for Houston is: Does the past have a future? And, if we have no past, how are we to have a sense of belonging to a place? One very real danger in our patterns of evolving urbanization is the loss of regional

ED. NOTE: Unless otherwise noted, all buildings are located in Houston.



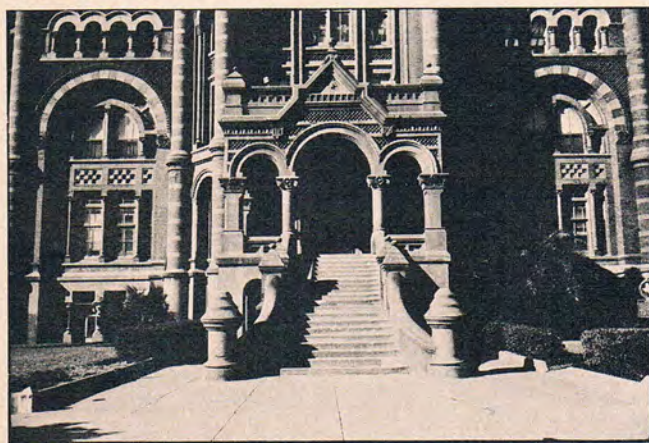
Walter Gresham House ("Bishop's Palace"), Galveston, 1888. Architect: Nicholas J. Clayton



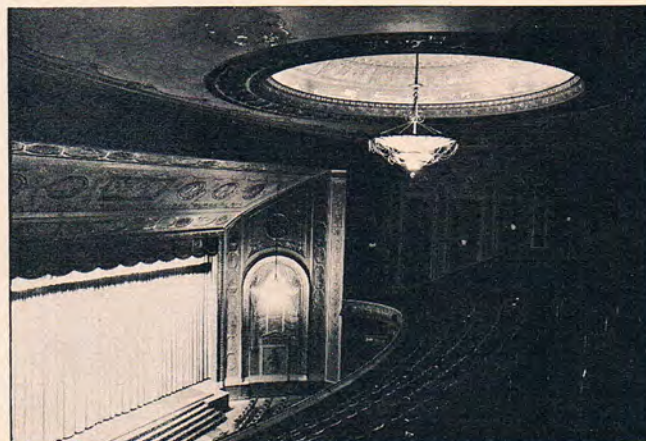
Allen Paul House, 1885



George Kelley's Restaurant, 1926



Ashbel Smith Hall ("Old Red"), University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, 1889. Architect: Nicholas J. Clayton

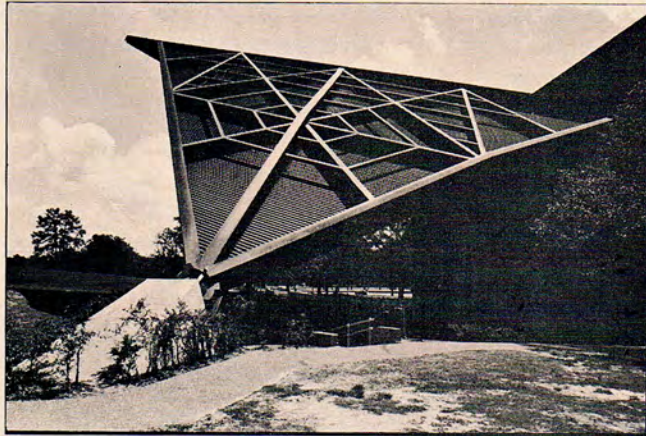


Metropolitan Theatre, 1926. Architect: Alfred C. Fain; associate architect: Jordan MacKenzie

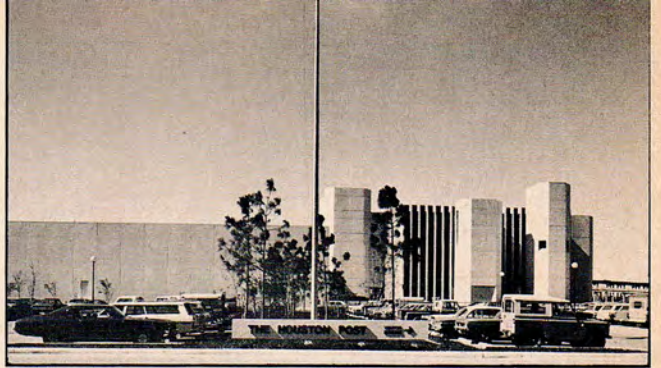
**Contemporary**



*The Galleria, 1969-71. Architects: Hellmuth Obata & Kassabaum; associate architects: Neuhaus & Taylor*



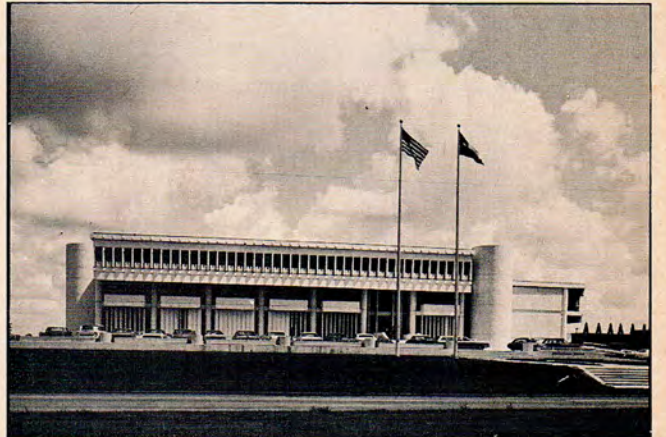
*Miller Outdoor Theater, 1968. Architects: Eugene Werlin & Associates*



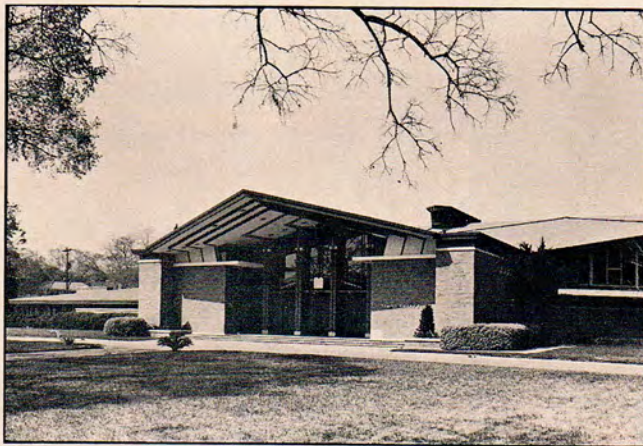
*Houston Post Building, 1969. Architects: Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson*



*The Astrodome, 1965. Architects: Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson; associate architects: Lloyd & Morgan*



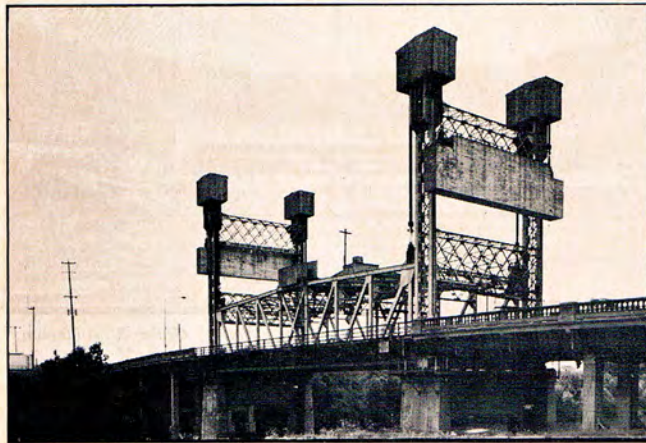
*Houston Independent School District Administration Building, 1969. Architects: Neuhaus & Taylor*



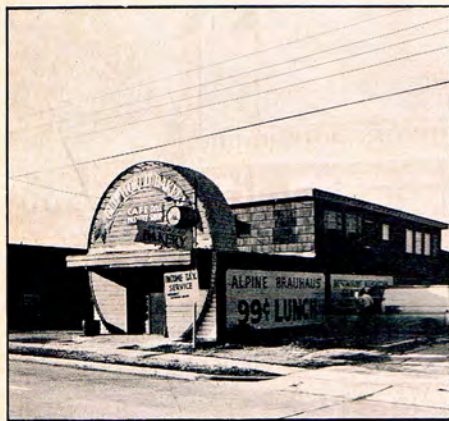
*Congregation Emanu-El Temple, 1949. Architects: MacKie & Kamrath; associate architect: Lanard Gabert, AIA*



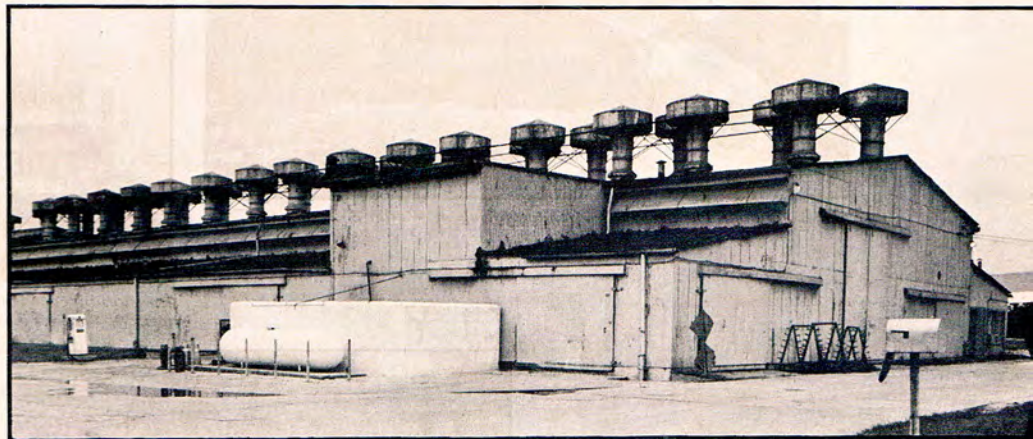
Alamo Plaza Motor Hotel, 1948



Lockwood Drive Bridge, 1928. Engineer: James Gordon McKenzie



Old World Bakery



Buffalo-Coffield Warehouse



Residences, circa 1930

## Vernacular/Industrial

character and of personal identity with a place. The corporate state and its expansionist economy develop along much the same lines across the country. In a situation where what was before is eclipsed by what is becoming, the need for maintaining a sense of continuity is even more urgent. We must have roots if our cities are to have meaning for the individual.

Forces unleashed since 1950 pose a threat to the fragile stock of old buildings in Houston, but they create situations which are a challenge to architects. The strip vernacular and jarring juxtapositions resulting from unresolved joints between the parts of our urban fabric should engage our abilities. Our vocabulary of building types should be enlarged beyond churches and cultural centers to include commonplace uses which are part of everyday life. Can architects, by choice, begin to broaden the base of what types of buildings constitute "architecture?"

Houston challenges us with the notion of environmental design. To truly deal with the environment, we must remember its psychological connections to people. Maintaining what has been handed to us by previous generations is one aspect. Another is to ponder the shocking energizers which are the forces of society to determine if the architect can deal with the commonplace as well as with the monumental and the "special." □