In December, Seattle-based landscape architecture firm Gustafson Guthrie Nichol (GGN) unveiled designs for a new civic park within San Antonio’s 1968 International Exposition grounds, otherwise known as Hemisfair. Inspired by natural vegetation, the park is designed to be a contemplative space that enhances the user experience. The park is expected to be completed in 2016.

On January 15, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), unveiled plans for the redevelopment of its 14-acre campus, which includes new buildings by Steven Holl Architects as well as Lake | Flato Architects of San Antonio.

Christian Pongratz is a professor of architecture at Texas Tech University, but hearing him speak about the project Urban Stage in downtown Lubbock revealed that he has a knack for storytelling as well. “Small West Texas town without a lot going on,” he said, setting a familiar stage—wide roads, empty parking lots, and winds unfettered by natural vegetation. “But then comes in the major players—the university, the biggest employer in town besides the hospital—and they ask, ‘Is there...”

Famed artist to bring color-filled chapel to UT Austin

Houston’s Rothko Chapel fuses art and architecture to create a contemplative space that some visitors experience as spiritual. Even the less spiritually inclined describe it as a highly intensified art viewing experience. Now a second artist’s chapel is coming to Texas, designed by another great abstract expressionist.
In September, Houston Mayor Annise Parker ordered the city’s planning department to create its first General Plan, an effort that represents more than a decade of advocacy, research, and community outreach on the part of non-profit Houston Blueprint ("Houston, We Have a Plan," pg. 14). If city council adopts the plan, which it will consider doing in late summer/early fall 2015, it will challenge Houston’s reputation among planning circles as a developer’s wild west where automobile enabled sprawl reigns supreme, and position the city to grow in closer accord with 21st century national trends. While the outcome of the plan may be guidelines for more transit options and more urban modes of development, it is not likely to result in zoning per se, though zoning it may be by a different name. Whatever it’s called, Houstonians will get their first comprehensive vision statement, a plan that will presumably represent the sum of their stated wants and needs. But without spirited leadership to see its provisions through, and a little watchdogging, it will just be a piece of paper, or web page rather, a declaration of aspirations.

On that note, Houston is set to get a new mayor in 2016. Parker is about to reach the three-term limit set on the office. Her successor will inherit the General Plan, should it be adopted. No clear frontrunners have yet emerged in the race. There are currently about a dozen men who have announced their desire to run. While, to my knowledge, none of them have detailed their position on the General Plan, it should be a key issue in the election. The Houston Mayor’s Office is one of the most powerful in the country—there is no city manager—and whichever the people elect to take the reigns of the city will have direct influence on how the plan is implemented.

Meanwhile, the price of oil has dropped below $50 per barrel, from a high in July 2014 of $120 per barrel. Houston, it has been said many times, is the only city in the U.S. where cheap gas at the pump is greeted with ambivalence. And no wonder. While falling oil prices haven’t turned the recent boom to a bust everywhere, yet ("A Tale of Two Cotullas," pg. 8), most of the big oil companies headquartered in Houston have been slashing thousands of jobs, shutting down domestic rigs, and delaying well completions until such a time as the price-per-barrel crawls back to where it needs to be for the boom to roll on. That could be as little as a year. Or it could be longer. Who’s to say? But the big companies, for the most part, have done what they needed to do to protect their shareholders. The oilfield workers will get by as they always have, on a wing and a prayer, feasting then tightening their belts. The Big Rich themselves, who, as well you might expect many of them are just getting richer. Forbes reported that Richard Kinder, CEO of pipeline conglomerate Kinder Morgan, increased his worth by about $2.5 billion to $12 billion since September. Great. Hopefully he’ll funnel more money to his philanthropic organization, the Kinder Foundation, which has made significant donations to many public projects in the greater Houston area, including Buffalo Bayou Park, Bayou Greenways 2020, Discovery Green, Hermann Park, the expansion of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston ("Texas Hold ’Em," pg. 1), and more. The Kinder Foundation is also involved in the General Plan effort.

Oil boom or oil bust, Houston is poised to leap ahead in its quest for world-class status. With the General Plan it will have a roadmap for smart growth. With good leadership in place and an engaged citizenry, its chances of following that roadmap to the end goal are good. Now if Houston would only put an end to its status as the largest city in America without an architecture critic at its paper of record, then we might really start to get somewhere.

The Houston Mayor’s Office is one of the most powerful in the country—there is no city manager—and whichever the people elect to take the reigns of the city will have direct influence on how the plan is implemented.
THE HEMISFAIR CONFLUENCE continued from front page by the city’s tradition of public gathering spaces and intimate relationship to its eponymous river, the 16-acre park includes plazas, plantings, and promenades, as well as a meandering water feature. Part of an ongoing redevelopment of the 90-acre Hemisfair site on the edge of downtown, the project integrates six new buildings, totaling over 600,000 square feet of mixed uses, and provides direct connections between San Antonio’s resurgent core, River Walk, and historic neighborhoods like Lavaca and King William.

“We did a lot of research into the history of San Antonio to find out the things that make this place special,” said Kathryn Gustafson, a founding principal of GGN. “What a great city. It’s such a party town. We did a lot of research into the history of San Antonio to find out the things that make this place special,” said Kathryn Gustafson, a founding principal of GGN. “What a great city. It’s such a party town.

In addition to GGN’s research, a program put together by the Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation (HPARC) from community input informed the park’s design. HPARC hired planning consultancy MIG, which conducted four months of public information gathering sessions in order to produce a programming document that was handed over to the landscape architects. “The way that the programming was developed was through public meetings and stakeholder charrettes and surveys,” said Andrés Andujar, CEO of HPARC. “MIG is very organized about how to get this information from the community. We ended up with eight programming sections that included our zocalo (plaza), a promenade, a lawn, an area where we had water shade, which we are calling The Shallows, and so on. When GGN arrived we were available to provide a consultant-led community development program for the civic park.”

“Andrés is one of the most professional clients I’ve ever had,” said Gustafson. “It’s a luxury to have a client that comes prepared with a well-thought-out scope and program.”

GGN’s design is multi-layered, with specified zones for the different uses San Antonians said they wanted from this public space, and a variety of typologies that respond to the city’s diverse cultural and natural history. The plazas and a gently curved event lawn combined can accommodate 12,000 people around a stage for music and other performances. This function can be activated day and night with both local and touring acts to create a consistent draw. For the less extroverted, there are placid gardens grouped near the few historic houses that remain at the fringes of the Hemisfair site, quiet areas where “you can read a book or take your elderly parent for a walk,” said Gustafson.

The water feature emerges from a source fountain in a plaza at the northwest corner of the site and then travels along a tree-shaded promenade in a channel that refers to San Antonio’s historic acequias—the irrigation channels dug for the original Spanish mission that later helped define the grid of the modern city. In the southern half of the site the water gathers in shallow pools inspired by the natural limestone formations that collect water throughout the surrounding Hill Country. The water will be a mix of reclaimed municipal water and processed stormwater gathered on site.

GGN is leading a design team that includes local and national firms. San Antonio–based Alamo Architects is providing architectural and urban design services. Seattle engineering firm Magnusson Klemencic Associates is the sustainability and water management consultant. Construction is expected to begin in 2016 once the west wing of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, which currently occupies part of the site, is demolished.

IT’S VERY EUROPEAN

Eavesdrop is scratching its head. First, in January, Gensler released new renderings for the Hotel Alessandra in downtown Houston. Where before the firm had proposed a sleek modern glass tower for the site with strong, swooping vertical lines that accentuated the building’s height, the new iteration shows a collection of rectilinear facade treatments of varying levels of transparency arranged to express a podium, tower, and crown with cornice. Jonathan Brinsden, CEO of the project’s developer, Midway, described the new look as a “modest interpretation of European style.” Then in February we learned from Nancy Sarneff of the Houston Chronicle that real estate company Hines is in the middle of constructing “a dense European village” (a.k.a. gated community) in the northwest 610 Loop full of townhouses in “Regency and Normandy” styles. The development also features a canal, so residents can pretend they live in Amsterdam, perhaps. A day later, news emerged that The Woodlands Development Co., a subsidiary of The Howard Hughes Corp., is building “luxury high-rise residences with a European sensibility” designed by Atlanta architecture firm The Preston Group. By the look of the rendering, however, the project’s sensibility seems to be closer to that of The Westin hotel that is rising next door. Eavesdrop is unsure what the marketing benefits might be of touting Europeanism in real estate development projects of this kind, nor if there is a hell waiting for those who would seek to undermine and cheapen 2,000 years of Western Civilization so that they can chisel a few extra bucks out of their customers, but we are damn sure not going to be duped into airing this meaningless drive!

SKI BUMMER

Meanwhile further north, Grand Prairie, Texas, has been spared what could have been the nation’s first indoor ski resort and Hard Rock Hotel. The project’s developer, The Grand Alps Group, pulled the $215 million proposal after a meeting with Grand Prairie’s mayor and city manager. They were not happy about losing the big fish. “We were a little surprised,” City Manager Tom Hart told The Dallas Morning News. “We thought we had a pretty good meeting.” In a press release, Sherman Thurston, Grand Alps’ CEO, cited a disagreement about “terms and conditions and costs” as his reason for pulling out of the deal. Apparently the $30 million in tax exemptions, offer to purchase half the land, and return of 75 percent of the hotel-motel taxes that Grand Prairie promised Thurston wasn’t enough to convince the developer, who claims to already have financing in place to build the project, including $100 million from foreign investors, mostly Chinese. Grand Alps is currently looking for other possible sites in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

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AN remains true to his vision,” Wicha told campus public space, while making sure it and make it a viable building for a university with Ellsworth to take the concept model not schematically. We have been working Overland Partners to refine and execute the cha paired Kelly with San Antonio-based for study.

The Blanton has raised over $7 million to build the project, with a total goal of $15 million including an endowment. Kelly’s chapel features a cruciform plan, each arm of which terminates with a colored glass installation that will bring multi-hued light into the stone interior. One installation features square windows, each of which is a single color, arranged in a grid. Another includes slit like openings arranged in a circular formation. A third has square colored windows positioned as diamonds arranged in a circle. Facing the entry, a niche will contain a totem sculpture.

Kelly, born in 1923, is known as one of the major American abstract artists working across painting, printmaking, and sculpture. His work spans Minimalism, Color Field painting, and pure abstraction without being bounded by any one movement. The chapel, however, evokes the six years Kelly spent in France in the late 1940s to the mid 50s, before he rose to international prominence. The artist was particularly taken with Romanesque architecture, which is clearly reflected in the chapel’s barrel vaults. In addition to being his first building, this will also be the first time Kelly, now 92, has worked in glass. The Franz Mayer studio of Munich, Germany, will fabricate the glass. Kelly and the design team will use a combination of two layers of glass to create the perfect color

Though the granite-clad chapel was conceived for a location in California, Kelly rechristened the project Austin in recognition of the particular qualities of Texas light, which will change the experience of the space. Though Austin is entirely Kelly’s design, Overland Partners is bringing essential expertise to the project. “In order to add insulation and create a cavity in the wall, the walls had to become thicker, so the building also became taller. We’ve worked closely with Ellsworth to translate his design intent,” said Rick Archer, a principal at Overland Partners. “One of the challenges of working with artists is learning to remove yourself completely from the design. This is Ellsworth’s piece.”

According to Wicha, the museum hopes to break ground on the project soon, and expects it to be completed in about a year.

ALAN G. BRAKE

04

THE ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER MARCH 11, 2015

OPEN> RESTAURANT

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4827 East Cesar Chavez St., Austin
Tel: 512-531-9033
Designers: Mickie Spencer, Clayton & Little Architects

Filling some big shoes, a New Orleans-style diner, serving up Texas comfort fare, has opened in the former and much beloved Arkie’s Grill in Austin. The new eatery has channeled its predecessor’s mid-century, roadside spirit, and aesthetic, with its own, more pronounced Googie-inspired renovation—even naming it after the original owner, Faye “Arkie” Sawyer. But first, the owners, Lauren and Stephen Shallcross and Mickie Spencer, gave the restaurant, built in 1948, a much-needed overhaul, from replacing the plumbing and electrical systems, to demolishing the back portion of the building, to taking down an unattractive drop ceiling that concealed handsome, dark wood rafters. Much of the retro interior was conceived by Spencer, a metalworker and designer, who also owns and has collaborated on several restaurants and bars in the area, such as the East Side Show Room and Hillside Farmacy. For the most part, the restaurant is configured like Arkie’s, with the counter-turned-bar on the right side, and red oak banquets with turquoise vinyl cushions to the left. “Even though we rebuilt it, we put it back in the same place because so many people grew up going there and really liked it,” said Spencer. Adding 1,000 square feet to the original plan made way for a new alcove in the back with more seating, an expanded kitchen, and bathrooms. A colorful mural by Spencer, featuring angular geometric shapes and lines, in the main room fits with the 1950s design scheme and contrasts well with the warmth of the red oak panels throughout the space. Spencer also designed and built the lighting, including the intricate starburst fixtures and the bowl lights suspended over the bar. A new patio, outfitted with strips of AstroTurf and vintage lawn furniture found at antique fairs in Texas, provides outdoor seating and a waiting area. With the help of local firm, Clayton & Little Architects, the exterior was revamped to accentuate the “mid-century modernist look” by replacing the flat facade with dramatic, slanted windows.

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Holl's master plan includes two new buildings, the Nancy and Rich Kinder Building for 20th and 21st century art, and a new Glassell School of Art. Lake | Flato is designing an art conservation center.

Texas Holl 'EM continued from front page

Holl is contributing a unifying master plan, a 164,000-square-foot gallery space for 20th and 21st century art, and a new 80,000-square-foot facility for the Glassell School of Art. Lake | Flato is designing an art conservation center.

Holl’s master plan includes two new buildings, the Nancy and Rich Kinder Building for 20th and 21st century art, and a new Glassell School of Art. Lake | Flato is designing an art conservation center. Holl is working with New York-based lighting design firm L’Observatoire International on the project. In addition to galleries, the building contains a 202-seat theater, restaurant and café, and meeting rooms.

The museum also announced that it will select a landscape architect to work with Holl on fleshing out the master plan. Construction will begin later this year and is slated for completion in 2019.
With the spring covered hose, the Planar 8 Flex Faucet from Franke is designed to let you feel free and have fun in the kitchen. Whether it’s washing up pans, filling up a pot for pasta, or just standing back and admiring, this faucet is the perfect balance of performance and design.

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lead the team to abort several of the installations halfway through execution, which White contextualized as “an important part of the learning process.”

Interactivity was a fundamental component of Urban Stage’s design, so most of the installations encouraged user engagement. The “Mushrooms,” for instance, used proximity sensors to emit sounds and lights when people walked by. “That was quite sophisticated,” said White. “They [the students] had to collaborate with electrical engineers on that one.”

A second installation, the “Forest,” demonstrated how to engage the winds in a public space with thin, human-height sticks planted upright so that the passing air currents created a dance of color and movement. The Forest’s interaction with nature deepened after a rainstorm melted the sticks into an intricate weave.

Local nurseries donated cacti and other desert flora in order to demonstrate how densification of vegetation could transform the harsh bareness of Lubbock’s downtown into an urban green space. Low-water plants and extreme heat, reduced the carbon footprint, and deepened the interactions between community and the environment.

Urban Stage went on for two weeks in early October, with varied and continous interactions throughout. The art installations engaged children and adults alike. Local bands performed while participants sampled food from different vendors. Students and professors were present at the event, encouraging the community to ask questions and give feedback. “Students don’t normally receive feedback,” noted White. “Next year the community will hopefully be more involved in the planning, and earlier on.”

Community involvement is necessary in White’s view. Despite the recent drop in oil prices, Lubbock anticipates an oil boom that could draw between 150,000-200,000 newcomers. If the town wants to thrive, he said, it will need to concentrate on directing growth inward by fortifying current structures rather than intensifying urban sprawl.

Lubbock’s climate also demands that urban growth incorporate the type of environmentally conservative measures demonstrated by Urban Stage. English lawns, for instance, are popular in the West Texas town, but are ultimately unsustainable due to water restrictions instigated by recent droughts—droughts that could become more frequent in the future. The project demonstrated that Buffo grass and cacti are more realistic options. “Lubbock is an arid climate,” said Pongratz. “You have to be aware of that. To react to that.”

The installations remained standing a month after Urban Stage officially ended, a tribute to the project’s success and a hopeful indicator that the changes it recommended may not be unwelcome in Lubbock.

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3. Vesuvius
   Ilfari
   In this elegant, unusual ceiling fixture, a polished spun-aluminium shade surrounds a hammered metal baffle. The inside of the baffle is brushed brass, which imparts a warm glow both upwards and downwards. Designed by Kevin Walz.

4. Palladium OIS Keypad
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   Backlit control buttons sit flush with the faceplate of this minimalist design, which is available in glass, metal, or plastic in more than twenty finishes. The button layout and labelling is customisable, making it suitable for commercial and hospitality use.

5. Verge Pure Lighting
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   Slim aluminum channels house a row of LEDs; when plastered into a wall or corner and illuminated, a floating-plane effect is achieved. Rums up to 40 feet and can feed off a single Class 2, 96-watt power supply.

6. Glass Drop
   Foscarini
   This transformative table lamp has a chromed aluminium, mirror-like exterior that seems to vanis when the bulb is switched on; as light filters through the hand-crafted glass, the finish changes to a luminous gold.

7. Wireflow
   Vibia
   The electrical wires of this updated, abstracted chandelier can be adjusted to trace geometries in two and three dimensions, allowing a great variety of sizes and forms to be created. Designed by Arik Levy.
Looking at the Tobin one is first struck by the marked contrasts of the building itself. On the one hand there is the historic Spanish Mission facade of the Municipal Auditorium. And then there is the angular, asymmetric glistening folded metal screen that veils the addition, which comes alive at night with a dynamic lighting display. The project houses three performance spaces, the largest of which accommodates 1,768 people with no seat further than 150 feet from the stage. Its construction tells a tale of the changing times in architecture, where technology and craft are once again at the forefront. That is the tie binding the historic facade to its contemporary partner. Designed by Seattle-based LMN Architects with local firm Marmon Mok Architecture as associate architect, the Tobin has many advanced elements that set the building apart. First and foremost is the dynamically lit metal skin that wraps the proscenium. It is a complex arrangement of folded and perforated panels, realized parametrically, that screens the building’s stepped, windowless masses with a modulating pattern of 18,000 panels, 1,300 of which are unique. Forming distinct yet-interrelated volumes around the building, the veil interlocks around a triangular support beam cantilevered from the panelized weather tight primary building skin. The panels form a continuous band woven both vertically and horizontally creating a seesaw effect that allows for light to reflect in different directions. Designed with eight different panel types sized to match the existing building’s limestone blocks. The result is a facade that has dimensional qualities and a richness of lighting effects both during the day and at night. Inside the main performance hall, a pneumatic flooring system allows for the complete transformation of the stepped auditorium seating into a flat floor within 23 minutes. The sheer mechanical acrobatics that this system undergoes is mesmerizing to watch. Banquets and symphonic concerts can be paired on a single day, which opens up the possibility of endless uses and unique experiences within the main hall.

One of the more noticeable and aesthetically prominent elements within the building is the integrated back-lit balcony fascias. Used to signal intermissions, augment a performance with ambient lighting, or create effects, the LED illumination system with a full spectrum of color was not possible just a few years ago. This may be the single most evidently aesthetic element within the hall, one that remains in the shadows until needed. Aside from being a backdrop to the lighting, they serve as a sophisticated dynamic sound baffle system. Perforated with a vegetal pattern that repeats, the fascias absorb sound and displace it throughout the large vertical volume. Together with adjustable panels located behind the seating, they can either be programmed to control reverberation for amplified music performances, or to increase reverberation for acoustical performances.

The Tobin Center showcases a development process that stems from a larger effort within the City of San Antonio. The client’s vision with clever financing made possible by the city is working to catalyze a metropolis that prides itself on its tradition of art and culture. The project successfully blends a historically important building into the present with its juxtaposition of old and new architectural elements, as well as functional and aesthetic building systems. This combination of pragmatism and aesthetic intent should serve the creative community as a model for future projects in the city. 

**RESOURCES**

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Lighting Design
Horton Lees Brogden Lighting Design
hlblighting.com

Metal Plate Wall Panels
Kovach
kovach.net

Seating Riser System
Gala Systems
galasystems.com

**IN DETAIL: TOBIN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS**

Strangely out of place, yet harmoniously so, the recently completed Tobin Center for the Performing Arts in San Antonio is the best work of architecture in the city in decades. Its closest rival, literally, would be the Central Library designed by Ricardo Legorreta in the 1990s a few city blocks away. It is a shame it has taken nearly 20 years for San Antonio to once again embolden itself with vision and purpose for its citizens. Looking at the Tobin one is first embolden itself with vision for San Antonio to once again at the forefront. That is the tie binding the historic facade to its contemporary partner.
Bluetooth® Wireless Adjustable Aiming & Dimming.
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Houston is famously, or notoriously, known as the largest city in America without zoning. It covers roughly 630 square miles. To put that in perspective, Houston could accommodate within its limits Washington, DC, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Boston, Baltimore, Cleveland, Denver, Miami, and San Francisco combined. As of the 2010 census, the city had a population of about 2.1 million with a metro area totaling 5.95 million. In the next 20 years, a million more residents are expected to call the Bayou City home.

In the past, Houston has managed such projected growth by expanding its hub-and-spoke freeway system and sprawling out across the vast coastal plain on which it sits. Now, however, a convergence of political forces, an urban planner from Harvard, a newly installed city planning director, the united voices of citizens, leaders, and groups across jurisdictional lines, and a tenacious campaign lasting more than a decade from one non-profit board is producing a road map for sustainable growth and development.

In September 2014, Mayor Annise Parker directed the planning commission to create Houston’s first General Plan. “Houston is constantly changing and growing. We have to have a better way to plan for that growth,” said Parker in a statement. “A general plan will allow us to better coordinate our resources, create opportunities for innovative partnerships, and provide a path to achieving our goals.”

BLUEPRINT HOUSTON AND THE GENERAL PLAN
Mayor Parker’s announcement marked a major milestone in the decade-long journey that Blueprint Houston, a non-profit organization formed in 2002, has spent advocating for a plan. “We have tried to be the squeaky wheel in the face of mayors,” said Joe Webb, an architect and chairman of Blueprint since 2010.

Among other efforts, Blueprint raised $120,000 to hire an experienced planner to advise the city in how to develop the plan, scopes, budgets, and timelines. “The city, having never done this before, had no concept of resources,” said Webb. The City of Houston pitched in $10,000 to hire the consultant. Blueprint hired Peter Park—the urban planner, professor, former Loeb Fellow, and visiting critic at Harvard’s GSD, former planning director of Milwaukee and Denver, and director of his own planning practice—to work as a consultant to the City of Houston’s Mayor’s Office and the Planning Department.

Park’s track record includes innovative planning in urban land use and regeneration, transit-oriented development, and zoning code reform. His research and work focuses on the link between leading innovation for quality design and practical implementation strategies for communities. Blueprint also held three citizens’ congresses over the years to collect visions of what citizens wanted their city to be. “We compiled all that and gave it to Peter Park,” said Martha Murphree, Blueprint’s executive director.

THE URBAN PLANNER
Park initiated the exploratory steps for the plan to spur the discussion about viable strategies critical to the growth of a major metropolitan area. He worked with city staff to define the scope of the plan and what it should accomplish.

“It’s a big change from what Houston has been in the past, and while Houston does not have zoning, there are a lot of regulations. They have regulations that cities with zoning are getting rid of,” said Park. “Houston has been going...
along without a plan, and people ask, ‘Why do you need a plan?’ but the past approaches of building highways and annexing is not a growth pattern and won’t serve the city in the long run.”

This historic approach of meeting challenges as they come has created a reactive state and Park believes it is not a viable approach. “How can you have a broader conversation of coordinating growth and policy and vision so that you can optimize the development of the city over time? There are a lot of project plans, and services, and MUDs, and mechanisms, but no overall vision about what’s the big idea,” continued Park.

Park explained that there are myriad reasons to have plans and, for Houston, the relationship between development and transportation needs to be addressed—not just cars and future traffic, but also the relationships between development and various types of transportation beyond the automobile.

“Too much development, too much traffic—that comes with growth and change,” said Park. “There are changing patterns of Americans moving back into the city and wanting a walkable urban city. It hasn’t been a priority. [Walkable areas are] not going to be everywhere, but it ought to be easier to do in Houston and the next generation of people who inherit the city are interested in these urban walkable places. Where people go and want to be there is a high priority on the human scale and activities for people. American cities prioritize the automobile at the expense of other things: freeways cut through underrepresented neighborhoods or high parking requirements result in objects in a big surface parking lot. High parking requirements and wider roads have not made it easy to create walkable urban areas but I think that is changing.”

Park cited Houston’s Complete Streets policy (a plan to make streets safer and more accessible, that Mayor Parker issued an executive order for in 2013) as one of the major initiatives that would fall under this broader umbrella vision for the city to grow, protect established neighborhoods, and find ways to direct growth and investment where it is most beneficial.

He also spoke about Houston’s light rail system, MetroRail. The system opened its first line in 2004 and has five new lines in different stages of planning and construction. “I have heard people criticize the light rail and it’s ridiculous,” said Park. “The corridors are going to become enormously successful and will be able to demonstrate to other cities what capitalized transit investment looks like.”

Park also addressed the city’s tradition of freewheeling, speculative development. With good planning in place, he said, the risks associated with this type of unrestrained urban growth can be mitigated. “More clarity can be broadcast from the city as a signal to the investment community,” he said.

“(Planning can) coordinate major tax breaks, job-creating jobs, and distribute density in a smart way to concentrate it on the transit corridors.” He added that smart planning is also about adding density, more affordability, and greater mobility without more and more cars on the road. “It’s the nature of success that brings people together,” said Park. “If you aspire to make great places, people will want to experience them.”

THE PLANNING DIRECTOR

In March 2014, Mayor Parker and City Council installed Pat Walsh as Houston’s top planning and development official. Walsh is a trained civil engineer from Carnegie Mellon and the University of Texas, Austin, and former director of transportation and long-range planning for the City of Sugar Land. “We have made great progress in developing the plan,” said Walsh. “We are preparing our vision and goal statement and then we will add more meat to the bone.” He also pointed to a planning and coordination tool, an interactive map available online, with layers of project information on it from various groups such as Buffalo Bayou Partnership, METRO, TxDOT, management districts, TIRZ (a Texas version of tax-increment financing), and the parks department.

The city has been asking for voluntary participation from these organizations. The map will be on the city website and powered by its geographic information system.

The plan, as Walsh described it, is being created in a compressed timeline of 10 months. It will be at a higher level as a planning document and is an opportunity to assess whether or not the city has the right tools and if it is using them in an efficient and right way. “We have to do a better job of coordinating with the amazing numbers of entities who do planning in the city, and we have got to work in a more strategic way to work with our development community to utilize...”
our land in the most effective way possible,” said Walsh. “We want our development community to be successful and we want to support them. And we know there are ways we can work together to mutually benefit. Houston is very successful in many ways without zoning. But we regulate development with subdivisions, landscape ordinances, dedication of right of way, drainage, and parking. We do have a lot of deed restriction-like zoning protections. We do not expect zoning to be an outcome of this. This is about making sure we are effective as possible at creating and enhancing the city.”

One of the ordinances to be examined relates to parking. Walsh said the city would revisit its parking policies to encourage vibrant walkable areas where people can visit their local restaurants and shops by foot, on a bike, or using transit. “Or it could be thinking more systematically about parking,” he said. “There are opposing interests with parking, there is a balance to be struck.”

One of Walsh’s goals is to gain a maximum degree of community support for the plan by being transparent and soliciting community input so that any future mayor will also have interest in supporting the needs of the people. “I am cautiously optimistic that this plan is going to offer valuable insight into how Houston can achieve good governance,” said Walsh.

That is a sentiment echoed by Park. “If a plan reflects what people wanted then it’s more likely to be adopted and taken,” he said.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

On January 8, Jennifer Ostlind, division manager of Houston’s planning commission, presented the draft vision statement for the General Plan. “Houston offers opportunity for all. We celebrate our diversity of people, ideas, economy, culture, and place. We promote healthy and resilient communities through smart civic investments, dynamic partnerships, education, and innovation. Houston is the place where anyone can prosper and feel at home.”

The plan is uniting major stake-holders from METRO, the Texas Medical Center, Greater Houston Partnership, Greater Houston Builders Association, Urban Land Institute, Houston Independent School District, The Kinder Foundation, TxDOT, and Harris County to churches, neighborhoods, management groups, and professional groups to coordinate, collaborate, and focus their efforts on strategies to deal with a host of future growth and investment issues: infrastructure maintenance, growing the tax base, efficient spending of tax dollars by City Council decisions, and streamlining the planning and permitting procedures.

“It’s a business plan,” said Webb. “A set of guiding principles and strategies based on what the citizens said about goals and priorities.”

The city will inform and engage the public in the coming months by conducting a series of outreach strategies before the framework plan is presented publicly to City Council for adoption in late summer/early fall 2015. If successful, the General Plan could transform Houston from a model of automobile-enabled urban sprawl into a paradigm for how post-war American cities might reinvent themselves in the 21st century.

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In 1909, just 30 years after Thomas Edison made electric light commercially viable, the Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti came up with an audacious idea: “let’s murder the moonlight!” he declared in a manifesto titled by that phrase. Just a little over a century later, his idea, once the stuff of early modernist fantasy, seems truer than he may have expected. The moon’s visibility persists (sorry, Marinetti), but stars are a different story. Unless you’re reading this on a camping trip in a remote part of Montana, go outside at night, look up, and, depending on cloud cover, you’ll very likely see a monochrome canopy of muted light grey to almost-but-not-quite-black, dotted, depending on the size of your city, with a dim handful of stars.

Moving architecture and design to keep the night sky darkened might come off as quaint—something for poets to contemplate—but, as researchers study the effects of nighttime lighting, their findings point to critical public health and safety consequences, along with a bevy of ecological concerns. “It’s a problem with many layers to it, including the aesthetic and poetic problem resulting from the loss of stars,” said Linnaea Tillet, the principal of Tillet Lighting Design, a New York City–based firm. “But it’s not just a matter of poetry. There are very real ecological consequences.” Those very real consequences also include some serious medical conditions—cancer, obesity, diabetes, and depression—linked to light exposure (by way of melatonin, the hormone that light modulates). That is just one layer. Astronomers can’t see stars through the haze of light, migratory patterns have changed, and the cost—environmental and economic—of keeping the night turned on continues to rise.

Over the last 15 years, as glass technologies have improved, the design community has done much to 

**DARKEr, SAFER**

The old canard that more night lighting means safer streets has led to the over-illumination of our cities, washing out the night sky and creating health, environmental, and aesthetic problems. John Gendall investigates new research that is leading many designers to raise the call for less light.
to tackle the issue of daytime light exposure. As skylines around the U.S. become ever more clad in glass, the architects and developers producing these curtain walls, and the critics who write about the buildings they enclose, tend to sing the same chorus: interior spaces bathed in natural light. When this sunny thought is not enough on its own, out come studies pointing to higher worker productivity, better achievements on test scores, and happier, more focused brain chemistry. While no one would dispute the merits of exposure to natural light, it seems a good time to ask: what about the natural dark?

“Sleeping in the dark is every bit as important as experiencing light during the day,” cautioned Travis Longcore, an associate professor of research at the University of Southern California, and the author of Ecological Consequences of Artificial Night Lighting. “We shouldn’t want the outside at night to look like the day.”

“We are constrained by our evolutionary history,” he explained. “We are used to bright days and dark nights, but now we get dim days and dim nights.” Drawing a parallel between the emerging research about night lighting and the path of medical science in confronting smoking and sun tanning, he said, “one will, in 30 years, look back and think the same thing.”

To avoid a tobacco industry-scale problem, designers are taking a new approach to night lighting. For many projects, this change begins with a basic question: Is light even needed? “Whenever you call for a light, ask if it’s truly needed,” said Longcore. At the Menil Collection, in Houston, where Tillett is overseeing the lighting for a campus designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA), she considered each light source. “Wherever we could, we limited light,” she said. “There are no light fixtures we haven’t justified.”

This does not mean that museum visitors spend their evenings fumbling around in the dark. Physiologists now understand that human sense perception is far more finely tuned to contrast between light and dark than to what had seemed to be the prevailing approach to light: more of it. The trick is to illuminate change—steps, doors, paths—rather than entire landscapes. So, at Menil, Tillett called for path lighting that would render the space easily navigable without blanketing it with light. “We preserved the campus atmosphere, using a play of light and shadow, to enhance wayfinding,” she explained.

To get to this level of specificity, designers are rethinking the fixtures themselves, equipping them to control the direction of light to eliminate trespass beyond property lines or municipal borders. Acorn lamps, for example, were perfectly suitable for a kerosene wick in a 19th century city, but using them with incandescent bulbs now is a stubborn grasp for historicism to the point of irresponsibility. “Oftentimes parks are lit by acorn lights, derived from gas lamps, so the result is a bunch of glary balls of light along a path, but everything else is pitch dark,” said Matthew Urbanski, a principal of MVVA. With its design for Brooklyn Bridge Park, MVVA carefully tailored the directionality of light to cut down on light pollution and to enhance the experience of the park.

Tucked beneath Brooklyn Heights, any uplighting in the new park would disturb the neighbors above. “By putting light in the right place—high, distributed, and pointed down—we were able to adequately light a place without causing light pollution,” said Urbanski. “When you’re on the promenade [in Brooklyn Heights, above], you can look down and be unwittingly staring at a light bulb.” For visitors to the park, the firm appreciated the value of looking out onto the water from...
the shore, so it avoided perimeter lighting that would have interrupted that view, opting, instead, to light from behind with shielded, side-baffled lighting.

One of the canards that has kept outdoor spaces overly illuminated has been the knee-jerk tendency to equate more light with less crime. For decades, cities and property owners held outdoor lights as tonic to illicit or criminal behavior. A 1921 editorial in Grand Rapids News said it plainly: “Good lighting of streets lessens, and almost eliminates crime.” Reasoning the city could cut its police budget by shifting public funds to outdoor lighting, it went on to say, “It is easy to prove that the best paying investment the city can make is one in electric lights.”

That argument, it turns out, is less easy to prove than the writer allowed. As Longcore asserted, “there is no universally applicable conclusion that comes out of criminology research that shows that more light means less crime.” Overlighting, in fact, can be worse than dimly lit spaces for several reasons, beginning with the risk of glare. As Longcore put it, “If you have bright lights, the shadows become much darker.”

So, in what might seem a counterintuitive twist, improving visibility at night seems to start with turning the lights down. Nancy Clanton, a Boulder, Colorado-based lighting designer and an author of the International Dark-Sky Association’s technical guidelines, has researched this effect in several American cities. “We have studied areas and have gone from full light levels down to 50 percent, then down to 25 percent, and we ask the public to tell the difference, and no one can perceive any change,” she said. “Vision is logarithmic, so in lighting, our linear metric is completely wrong,” she continued, backing up the fact that lighting can be cut to a quarter of current levels without anyone noticing.

In her lighting design for Union Station, in Denver, Clanton applied her research findings, keeping light levels low, emphasizing contrast, and downlighting facades (she has found, people feel safer when they can see a horizontal surface more than they would with a generally illuminated ground plane).

Research is also suggesting the light spectrum as something that needs to be carefully considered for nighttime lighting. On this, astronomers, physicians, and ecologists agree: blue light is bad. “The more we introduce blue light in the nighttime environment, the more we send out the signal that it’s daytime,” said Longcore. This applies not only to human physiology—melatonin is suppressed by blue light—but also to ecology and astronomy. “Blue light harms the environment and it’s the worst kind of light for sky glow,” said Clanton. She recommends lights at the low end of the spectrum. “The moon is 4,000 Kelvins, and we really shouldn’t need more than that.”

Try telling that to Marinetti. To the patriarch of Futurism, when the moon gave out its 4,000 Kelvins, he “ran to nearby waterfalls; gigantic wheels were hoisted, and turbines transformed the velocity of the waters into electromagnetic spasms that climbed up wires suspended on high poles, until they reached luminous, humming globes. So it was that three hundred electric moons, with rays of blinding chalky whiteness, canceled the old green queen of love affairs.”

There is much to be said for that old green queen. There is the melatonin, yes, and real public safety implications, true, but there is also the issue of getting a nightly reminder of our place in the universe. The night sky has long been the muse of architects and designers, evidenced by cities across the world and over the millennia that have been laid out in response to constellations. Rather than drawing from the past by screwing light bulbs into acorn lamps, it seems that celestial awareness would be a better lesson, designing spaces that don’t wash out the fact that we are, as Marinetti puts it, “all of us enwrapped in the immense madness of the Milky Way.”
Celebrating Architecture 2015

Shigeru Ban: An Architect

The Next Nexus: The Necessity for Another Design Revolution

Exhibition Closings

Exhibition Opening: Art of Architecture: What’s Wrong With Us?

Hiroyuki Hirai

rHE arCHitEC t's nEWSPaPEr MarCH 11, 2015

MARCH

WEDNESDAY 11
LECTURE
DBIA RMR Design-Build Best Practices Series
2:00 p.m.
PFA Event Center
2105 Decatur St., Denver, CO
aiacolorado.org

FRIDAY 13
EVENT
Celebrate Architecture 2015
9:00 a.m.
Shaw Center for the Arts
100 Lafayette St., Baton Rouge, LA
aia.coa.com

TUESDAY 17
LECTURE
Quantified Threads: Designing with Data
6:30 p.m.
Louisiana State University
102 Design Building
Baton Rouge, LA
design.lsu.edu

TUESDAY 18
LECTURE
Future Fashion in the Cloud
5:00 p.m.
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
School of Architecture and Design
421 East Lewis St., Lafayette, LA
soad.louisiana.edu

TUESDAY 24
LECTURE
Architectural Record on the Road: Multi-Unit Housing Symposium
8:30 p.m.
History Colorado Center
100 North Broadway
Denver, CO
aiacolorado.org

THURSDAY 19
EVENT
The Astrodome: Building an American Spectacle
5:30 p.m.
Architecture Center Houston
315 Capitol
Houston, TX
aiachouston.org

THURSDAY 20
EVENT
Slow Art at The Modern
6:30 p.m.
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
3200 Darnell St.
Fort Worth, TX
themodern.org

THURSDAY 26
EVENT
ICA New Orleans
2015 Design Awards
6:00 p.m.
U.S. Freedom Pavilion, The Boxing Center
945 Magazine St.
New Orleans, LA
aiacneworleans.org

LECTURE
Architecture for Humanity: Salon No. 7
6:00 p.m.
2532 15th St., Denver, CO
denver.architecturenforsustainability.org

LECTURE
Architecture for Humanity: Symposium
9:00 a.m.
History Colorado Center
1200 North Broadway
Denver, CO
humanity.org

EVENT
Celebrate Architecture 2015
8:30 p.m.
Shaw Center for the Arts
100 Lafayette St., Baton Rouge, LA
aia.coa.com

EVENT
Symposium
5:30 p.m.
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
3200 Darnell St.
Fort Worth, TX
themodern.org

EVENT
Gulf Coast Green 2015
7:15 a.m.
816 Town & Country Blvd.
Houston, TX
architecturenforsustainability.org

EVENT
Architects for Humanity: Big Little House: Small Houses Designed by Architects
7:00 p.m.
Museum of Fine Arts, Law Building
1001 Bissonnet St., Houston, TX
mfah.org

EVENT
Architecture Tour of The Modern
11:00 a.m.
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
3200 Darnell St.
Fort Worth, TX
themodern.org

EVENT
Tours of the Modern
8:30 a.m.
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
3200 Darnell St.
Fort Worth, TX
themodern.org

EVENT
Building the Museum of Art That Multitudes May Share: Building the Museum of Art Governor’s Gallery
107 West Palace Ave.
Santa Fe, NM
nmmartmuseum.org

EVENT
Tours of the Modern
11:00 a.m.
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
3200 Darnell St.
Fort Worth, TX
themodern.org

EVENT
Arts of Architecture: What’s Wrong With Us?
1:00 p.m.
Arkansas Arts Center
9th & Commerce, MacArthur Park, Little Rock, AR
arkansasartscenter.org

EVENT
Slow Art at The Modern
5:30 p.m.
The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
3200 Darnell St.
Fort Worth, TX
themodern.org

EVENT
Clinical tour of The Modern
5:30 p.m.
The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
3200 Darnell St.
Fort Worth, TX
themodern.org

EVENT
Building the Museum of Art That Multitudes May Share: Building the Museum of Art Governor’s Gallery
107 West Palace Ave.
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nmmartmuseum.org

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BAM Little House: Small Houses Designed by Architects
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Eroticizing Everyday Architecture

Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy’s Architecture and Biopolitics
Beatriz Preciado
City Lights Books
$29.95

Arch-porn, a contraction of architectural pornography, is bandied about for those publications and websites that feature lush photos of buildings and spaces—full frontals, 3/4 close ups, subtle details—accompanied by scant captions. I like those. They encourage fantasizing about projects and they expose a lot of projects quickly: form, landscape, lighting, materials, furniture—the things we think about when flipping pages. Occasionally there’s a good article too.

Eshewing images for words, Beatriz Preciado peaks in on Playboy and its impact on postwar American culture, particularly through its use of architecture. In the decidedly academic Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy’s Architecture and Biopolitics, Preciado follows the origins of Hugh Hefner’s empire and its focus on architecture and interior design as reinforcing his agenda for the cool, hip postwar generation. Though he published stories, articles, and interviews, Preciado contends that Hefner targeted white, middle class, heterosexual male lifestyle through a focused multimedia campaign featuring architecture and interior design.

Preciado noticed, in rereading three decades of Playboy from the first issue in 1953, that the magazine featured “more architecture plans, interior decoration pictures, and design objects than naked women.” The first image in her book is a sketch based on a 1962 photo of Hefner with a model of the Los Angeles Playboy Club, followed by a similarly posed photo of Le Corbusier holding a model. Photo-rich articles hyped the Playboy Penthouse and its amenities as “part of the architectural imaginary of the second half of the 20th century.” Nearly every issue included full color spreads promoting modern design and positively reviewing the work of modern architects, against the grain of contemporary architectural imaginary of the second half of the 20th century. Pornotopia’s allures of field and stream and mechanics. Playboy created the identity of a man as seen by the unostentatious, where misfits gather to get high, have sex, or of myth anyway; the spaced out place that there, among the scrub cedar and Yosemite Sam.

David Heymann’s first book of fiction begins with a nostalgic description of Austin, Texas, as remembered by the unnamed narrator and central character, who happens to be an architect. The heart of the memory centers on a visit to the hill country just west of town, along the Colorado River above Redbud Isle, that he made during a summer in his high school years, in the early-mid 1970s presumably. The narrator and a group of friends, who have just driven in from Houston, explore this rugged terrain in their car, feeling that they’ve stumbled into a land that time forgot, little changed from the Pleistocene Epoch. Then the car dips down to cross a dry creek bed and they discover that there, among the scrub cedar and beneath the arching branches of live oaks, are modest little houses, shaded from the blazing sun by the encircling vegetation, responding more to the contours of the limestone-studded topography than the presence of the road. A joint is smoked and the group of teenagers pushes on until they find a place to pullover and park among some other cars and a path down to the slow moving, dammed up river. They clamber down the path surrounded by flitting birds, crossing land that seems to have no designation whatsoever, neither public park nor private property. At the river, they jump in the cool, clear water and swim with other swimmers and people floating languidly in inner tubes. No one challenges their presence or pays them much mind at all, except to offer informal greetings. “hey man, hey,” as Heymann records it. Later, on the banks of the river, the narrator is dumbstruck when he sees a beautiful young woman strolling unselfconsciously past, wearing nothing but flip flops and a beach towel rolled around her waist emblazoned with the likeness of Yosemitte Sam.

And there you have it, the Austin of yore, or of myth anyway; the spaced out place where misfits gather to get high, have sex, and live close to nature; the unostentatious, come-as-you-are land of the Lotus-eaters; the final refuge from the “overstuffed burritness of America.” In Heymann’s words, it’s not a vision the reader gets to enjoy for long.

Before the opening section ends (the book is marketed as a collection of short stories, but reads more like an episodic novel that follows the trajectory of one main character on a consistent thematic arc throughout) the narrator visits this landscape again, years later, and finds it utterly destroyed, not by the ravages of fire or some other cataclysm, but by the built environment. Where before there had been a primordial setting, dotted or pays them much mind at all, except to offer informal greetings. “hey man, hey,” as Heymann records it. Later, on the banks of the river, the narrator is dumbstruck when he sees a beautiful young woman strolling unselfconsciously past, wearing nothing but flip flops and a beach towel rolled around her waist emblazoned with the likeness of Yosemitte Sam.

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EROTICIZING EVERYDAY ARCHITECTURE
continued from page 22. True to academia, Preciado includes a healthy dose of theory but it rarely overruns her thesis; Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze appear in small doses, as does contemporary architectural theorist Beatriz Colomina. Though academic work, the breadth of subject matter, topics, and anecdotes keep the discourse from becoming dry.

After exploring the socio-historical development of Playboy and the playmate, Preciado returns to the spatial with Playboy's move from the Chicago penthouse and clubhouse to the Los Angeles mansion, complete with an expansive exterior and landscaping. But Hefner and Preciado always return to the interior space. The mediatization of space as an electro-prosthetics is shown in Hefner's hyper-imagined rotating bed, which is simultaneously a sleeping and work surface, sexual playground, bar, stereo, television, telephone, and intercom, all complete with remote controls and secret doors.

Perciado even takes a dip into the era’s more radical explorations in the 1960s when Haus-Rucker-Co and Archigram and its constituents designed personal micro-environments and body suits. Each, like Hefner’s rotating bed, simultaneously shielded the user from the outside world and extended one’s senses and presence into it. Preciado sees these architectural mediatizations as precursors to today’s smart phones and apps—dates, cabs, food—all at a fingertip.

The conspicuous lack of photos, Preciado explains, results from not conceding to Playboy’s request to edit, or censor, content in return for image rights. Controlling the archive, she writes, controls the future history. Playboy doesn’t like its name appearing with the word “pornography.”

Preciado, a transgender and queer activist, does not focus on exploitation and chauvinism, but rather on social, medical, technological, and capitalism aspects of postwar society that enabled a change in consumption and lifestyle, what she calls the “pharmacopornographic” regime, including women’s liberation, the pill, and disposable income. Preciado navigates a fine line between gender politics, architectural and social history, and new technologies to bring a well rounded look at the phenomenon of sex and architecture as promoted by a 20th century business icon.

Pornotopia, though premised on Playboy, uses the magazine as an armature to explore sexual and gendered spaces and apparatuses in the second half of the twentieth century: bidets and brothels, strip tease and boudoirs, bikinis and Barbie dolls, glass facades and open plans, media and broadcasting, the latter as through the voyeuristic eye; Preciado touches on all of these. It just so happens that Hefner rode the crest of these technologies and modern architecture in the service of his idealized space, and consequently promoted them through magazines, television shows, mansions, and clubhouses into a multimillion-dollar empire in a move that was “to eroticize everyday architecture.”

James Way is a frequent contributor to AoK.

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As we wish a happy 50th to the First National Bank Tower in Dallas, we reflect upon a staple of the skyline and the future that is taking shape. At the halfway mark of the 20th century, Dallas was a city experiencing unprecedented growth. With it would come one of the defining building booms of the era. Fueled by a burgeoning oil industry, inland port, and continued success as a financial center for the region, the consolidation of banking operations would result in the largest construction boom of towers since the late 20s. The historic buildings along Main Street could no longer meet the spatial and functional requirements of this growing industry. In a city built upon the notion that everything bigger is better, modest solutions were a thing of the past. Towers would define the future.

Republic and First National banks were long-time neighbors and competitors. Both were located downtown away from each other along Main Street. Republic Bank made its first move toward a new headquarters. Designed by Harrison and Abramovitz the architecture firm responsible for the aluminum-clad Alcoa Building in Pittsburgh the 36-story Republic Bank opened at the corner of Ervay and Saint Paul streets in 1954. Topped by a vertically stretched crossed spire, an adaptation of the bank’s logo, the Republic Bank tower would stand as the tallest in the city until 1959 and would send a visual message to the world of Dallas’ rising modern prominence.

As the Republic Tower opened to the public, First National continued to face immense growth that led to challenging functional constraints. At its peak, the bank’s offices occupied eight buildings stemming out from its original home on Main Street. With the merger of Dallas National Bank in 1954, First National built its final addition on the corner of Field and Elm streets. The annex marked the first piece in the 13 parcels—one of the last remaining vestiges of the Elm Street Financial District—the bank would acquire to construct its new tower.

The tower’s design was the result of a partnership between two prominent Dallas architects: George Dahl and Thomas E. Stanley. George Dahl’s celebrated career covered nearly every function and style throughout the 20th century. From the early adaptations of the Chicago style in the design of the Neiman-Marcus and Tishman-Goetz department stores in Downtown Dallas to the art deco structures and planning of the Dallas Centennial Fairgrounds, Dahl’s work would shape the midcentury modern era with projects that embraced the evolving built landscape of the city.

Where Dahl was the seasoned architect of the team, Thomas E. Stanley, by comparison, was the up-and-coming. Stanley spent his formative years under noted Fort Worth architect W. E. Hedrick and later opened his own practice in the early 1960s. His office would ultimately be short-lived, but it amassed an impressive portfolio of corporate and retail architecture, including a series of tower projects in Austin, Chicago, and Indianapolis.

The First National Bank Tower closed and ceased banking operations, the key driver in the design changes, including the removal of sunken plaza to the massing of the ground floor and seating element that connects the corner of Akard and Elm with the double-height retail spaces. The design process, which ran from 1969 to 1974, was guided by the historic integrity of the building occur in the material selection. The unfolded palette addresses safety and comfort for the poor initial construction quality. For the architect, the challenge lay in converting the historic building into retail space as the primary occupant at the base and a conversion of the tower into 480 residential units. Meritman Associates/Architects (MAA), a perennial contributor to the historic landscape of Downtown Dallas, is responsible for the design of the tower.

By the mid-70s, First National no longer dominated the skyline. The title of tallest building west of the Mississippi River would be taken by the 555 California Street in San Francisco and the Renaissance Tower took the title of tallest Dallas building in 1974. First National’s prominence and the building’s identity inevitably came to an end with the savings and loan crisis in 1986. By 2010, suffering from a decline in occupancy rate and ceased banking operations, the First National Bank Tower closed to the public. After changes hands and going through multiple design iterations, Olympic Property Partners is now moving forward with a project to convert the building into a mixed-use development with retail as the primary occupant at the base and a conversion of the tower into 480 residential units. Meritman Associates/Architects (MAA), a perennial contributor to the historic landscape of Downtown Dallas, is responsible for the design of the tower.

The First National Bank Tower poses unique challenges with the historic tax credit program. With the tower having turned 50 in January the project could receive up to 20 percent in tax credits from the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program as well as an additional 25 percent from the Texas Historic Preservation Tax Credit, which was enacted in January 2015. For the project to be considered for the National Register it must comply with the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, exhibiting a high degree of importance and contribution to historical events. Significance in the development of architectural, landscape, and engineering fields is also of consideration.

The First National Bank Tower is all but a show-in for historic designation, however ownership has declined in recent years and at its current state, the redesign calls for the alteration of certain key elements of the architecture, from removing the marble to reconfiguring internal spaces. Though unfortunate at first glance, the process of designation has, understandably, been and continues to be a highly considered and contested portion of the redevelopment process. MAA’s design maintains the original intent behind the basic massing. The three-story volume housing levels 6, 7, and 8 is maintained as a parking garage with program below remaining independent of the perimeter column. The building’s framework from an exterior appearance, is left unchanged in form and character as well. Major additions and alterations to the formal nature of the architecture occur at the podium level. In response to changing market and cultural forces, pedestrian experience is the key driver in the design changes, including the removal of sunken plaza to the massing of the ground floor and seating element that connects the corner of Akard and Elm with the double-height retail spaces.

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