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HOUSTON LIVES THE LIFE; MODERN HOUSES IN THE SUBURBS, 1952-1962

by

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ABSTRACT

Houston Lives The Life; Modern Houses In The Suburbs, 1952-1962

By

Ben Koush

From 1952 to 1962 it seemed that modern houses might become the standard choice for middle class suburban housing in Houston. This is apparent from a survey of architectural articles in the local newspapers and the national press. Of these houses, twenty three were given special attention. From an examination of this group of modern houses, all built in the newer, outlying subdivisions, an understanding of the attitudes Houstonians had towards the postwar suburban city is apparent.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 Introduction

From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, there was a concerted attempt in Houston to promote modest yet high quality modern houses for middle class families as an alternative to mass produced houses. The preference for modern architecture that this effort represented is evident from the modern houses designed by Houston architects that were featured in the local and national press. The questions that this phenomenon raises include: Why was modern architecture seen as appropriate for Houston suburbs and how was it introduced? How did the suburban environment inform the design of these modern houses? What was the role of media in promoting these houses? What were the differences and similarities between the modern houses and more conventional Houston houses of this period? What linked these houses stylistically and ideologically? Why in the early 1960s did Houston architects, clients and the press abandon this project? Major sources of information include the Houston Chronicle, Houston Post, national architectural periodicals, and interviews with architects and clients. These houses constituted an extremely significant part of Houston’s twentieth-century cultural heritage that now exists primarily in the form of photographs and drawings, since many of the houses have been altered or demolished. The critical qualities these houses exhibited -- technical innovation, economy, belief in a progressive future, frankness, and lack of recourse to historical models -- are as pertinent today as they were nearly fifty years ago.
2 Modernism Becomes Conventional

That the first generation of Modern Movement architects opposed the forms of middle class domesticity common in residential architecture of the 1920s is well known. They criticized the collection of furniture and decorative objects in the conventional house, as well as the house itself, as outmoded and inappropriate to the age. An example: the poster for the 1927 Deutsche Werkbund Exhibition on the Home, where a large X covered a view of a typically furnished living room.¹ Concurrently, conservative architects and builders viewed modern design as barren and unlivable. During the 1930s, in the formerly conservative American architectural press, a reversal occurred in which the ideals of modern design, notably efficient planning, interior openness, transparency, privacy and outdoor living, were ascribed to traditional architects’ work as well as to the products of the house-building industry. These qualities were, of course, not unique to the Modern Movement. Such earlier reform-minded avant-garde groups as the Arts and Crafts movement advocated similar attributes. But it was under the aegis of modernism that they were finally accepted by the general middle class public. By the 1950s, when articles describing the virtues of modern and conventional builder houses were virtually identical in the American press, these attributes were seen as coming solely from the Modern Movement.

2.1 Regionalism

Houses in Houston followed this trajectory. Houston houses began to be published in the national architectural press in the latter half of the 1930s. These were traditional in style and
conventional in plan. The commentary usually focused on the historical style of the house, often invoking the concept of regionalism, which was used to justify a house’s style on the grounds of historical appropriateness and climatic adaptation, important in the days before air conditioning. In the 1930s Houston represented itself as part of the Deep South, so architectural elements derived from plantation houses, such as galleries with columns, wrought iron balconies, louvered shutters and low pitched hipped roofs, were frequently seen. An example was the Leverton House, one of a group of houses designed by the architect Cameron Fairchild and built in the River Oaks Courts on Stanmore Drive in 1936. It was featured in *Good Housekeeping* in 1937. The author of the article noted:

> ...*The architecture suggests the early 19th century, the white grill work being reminiscent of 1815. This and the white wood work against the brick walls are delightful in this Southern climate. The good proportions, sensible plan, and simple dignity of detail mark it as a charming house of today.*

The unusual site plan of five houses surrounding a communal open space, evidently inspired by modernist town planning in Radburn, New Jersey, was barely mentioned even though it was without precedent in Houston. The fact that the house was framed in steel was also not mentioned in *Good Housekeeping*. Another example of the use of Southerness to explain architectural design was the Hamm House of 1939 by Harvin Moore and Hermon Lloyd. Here the author wrote:
The problems of designing a house for the South go further than the comparatively straightforward minutiae of design such as materials, prevailing winds, etc. A good design will depend upon more that the literal interpretation of primary functions.

And yet every house designed for the South is likely to have at least a family resemblance to other houses erected in this region during the last 100 years or more.4

Regionalism remained an important topic in the discussion of traditional and modern Houston houses until the 1940s. The first modern house in Houston to be published in a national architectural magazine, the Kamrath House of 1939 by MacKie and Kamrath, was inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was seen as being a regional design, though it reflected a distinctly Texas origin rather than one of the Deep South. An interpretive shift was apparent in a 1939 article about the Monterey style Burke House by F. Talbott Wilson & S. I. Morris of 1938, which was described as, “Essentially a simple and workable relationship of rooms, the somewhat irregular plan is expressed on the outside by the variety of forms and materials.”5 Discussion of the historical style and regional origins of the Burke House, “an eclectic mixture of colonial and modern idioms with the native ranch house,”6 formerly of great importance was clearly secondary.

By the early 1940s the concept of regionalism as means of justification and distinction was on the wane. This coincided with the process by which Houston ceased to represent itself as a Southern city. Beginning as early as World War I, Houston began to imagine itself in terms of the national and global economy as civic leaders promoted construction of the
Houston Ship Channel in order to accommodate ocean going vessels capable of shipping cotton and oil to Europe. In 1942 George Sessions Perry wrote about the results of the growth of the Ship Channel and the burgeoning petrochemical complex lining its banks:

_Houston, however, like the man it was named for and the man who owns it [Jesse Jones], is not so much Texan as American. It has lost its Texas character by outgrowing Texas. It has taken on a great deal of the non-regional aspect of an adding machine, of big, but colonial finance._

At the end of World War II, Houston's economic elite no longer represented the city as part of the agrarian Deep South. Instead, they began to represent it as a city of the "Southwest," with implications of modern technological progress. In the _Look at America_ guidebook series published in 1947 by the editors of _Look_ magazine, Houston appeared in the volume on the Southwest, not the South. In 1946 the Houston journalist Sigman Byrd wrote in the _Houston Post_, "Industrial Houston is no mere post-war dream. It is alive and growing and fulfilling the predictions of those who have been saying that the East's industrial supremacy was on the wane." In 1949 the author of an article in _ Fortune_ wrote:

_Along the banks of the Houston Ship Channel is the world's greatest concentration of newly-built industry – over 100 plants valued at more than $1 billion. In one mile $100 million has been spent in postwar expansion, mostly chemical. In 1945, Houston led the U.S. in value of industrial construction and she has been among the five leading cities ever since. Industrial employment has trebled since 1939, the_
consumption of natural gas has increased 600 percent. When General Robert Woods of Sears Roebuck looked at the Gulf Coast two years ago, the value of Houston area industrial products was $2 billion; now it is $2.5 billion.10

In 1942, James Chillman, Jr., director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, wrote a lengthy article describing the qualities of the work of John F. Staub, Houston's foremost eclectic architect. He described the conflict between modernism and regionalism in Houston architecture that he saw in Staub’s work: "Superficial judgment might term his work traditional, but by so doing would confess a certain ignorance of modern building," because in Staub's projects, "Brick, glass and steel give the building form," and "wide windows, shaded porches, concessions to breeze and sun are thoughtfully arranged to extend interiors to the out-of-doors."11

2.2 Garden Oaks

Most of the interwar houses published in the national architectural press were built in Houston's elite neighborhoods, most often River Oaks. However, a number of small, moderate-cost houses were also published.

Architectural Forum, Architectural Record and Better Homes & Gardens followed the developments of the Houston builder, E. L. Crain. Crain's major subdivision, Garden Oaks, covering 750 acres with 1,150 house sites, was located in the far northwest section of Houston. It opened in March 1937.12 Crain retained the nationally known Kansas City
landscape architects and planners, Hare & Hare, to lay out the curving street pattern and incorporate the "latest thoughts in subdivision development." In an article written by Crain in the *Houston Post* in 1941, he described a highly structured, modernist planning process:

...Our first step after acquiring the land was to make a detailed study of the platting of the entire tract and to draw up a master plan to be followed through successive stages of development...

*In preparing the master plan we endeavored to integrate all the factors which would affect the community and particularly sought to make the most of the principal natural advantage of the site – the heavy growth of majestic oak and pine trees covering it...*A modified version of the so-called super block was used to cut down on the cost of side streets and those parts of the tract not easily adaptable to residential development were turned into public parks or playgrounds. *In short, the recently developed science of land planning was applied to the design of the project to exact the maximum of attractiveness with a minimum of cost to the purchaser, a goal which is reflected in the slogan, “Beautiful but not expensive.”*  

Although the plan of Garden Oaks was supposedly based on the most modern principals of urban design, it was still portrayed as the common man’s River Oaks, begun fourteen years earlier, whose planning was never discussed in such modernist terms. There were a number of similarities between the two: the street pattern of extremely long curved blocks, the use of a controlling organization, (the Garden Oaks Company) that could prevent a house from
being built if it did not meet its aesthetic requirements, such special landscaping features as esplanades and small parks maintained by the corporation, a private golf course, generous properties (usually 175' x 75'), and the provision of designated sites for schools and retail outlets. The intended audience for Garden Oaks was completely different though. A Garden Oaks lot cost about $800 and a house about $3,500.\textsuperscript{15} The minimum price for a house in River Oaks was $7,500.\textsuperscript{16}

The modernity ascribed to the design of Garden Oaks seemed to preclude its houses from being described in the traditional Southern regional manner, though there was not one modern style house in the project. \textit{Better Homes & Gardens} picked several Garden Oaks houses to be part of its "Bildcost" series of complete low-cost house plans that were made available to the public for $2.50. Special emphasis was made on the interrelation of the living area, dining area and kitchen, formerly completely separated, in the houses. In January 1940 an article in \textit{Better Homes & Gardens} noted:

\textit{See how the kitchen forms a hub for the dining and living-rooms and porch to turn on. And how the dining room, though a distinct unit in itself and not simply one end of the living room, is only slightly separated from the living room. When the family is alone, meals, reading, and living revolve in a time and step staving circle. When you're having a party the living and dining rooms and porch can be thrown together, with "party food" preparation only a step away.}\textsuperscript{17}

Commentary in \textit{Architectural Record} was similar:
The common device of combining living and dining areas is uncommonly successful in this Houston, Texas, house. An open screen of bamboo marks the division of the spaces, and facing this, in the dining portion, is a mirror-lined recess with glass shelves. The planting bay increases the apparent size of the dining room area appreciably. On the garden side of the house, the living porch extends the entire living-dining area to the outdoors.\textsuperscript{18}

*Architectural Forum* commented on the new esthetic presented: “A design for a completely level site, its horizontality accented by the effective use of low brick walls.”\textsuperscript{19} From the early 1940s onward, more and more houses would be praised for having a low horizontal profile until it was difficult to declare a house to be modern in Houston that was two stories tall.

### 2.3 Oak Forest

Frank W. Sharp was the developer of Houston’s major moderate-cost postwar housing development, Oak Forest, just west of Garden Oaks in 1946. Hare & Hare were retained to design the plan but apparently quit the job after completing only the schematic design.\textsuperscript{20} Oak Forest was remarkable because it was “the largest privately financed house project in U.S. history,” encompassing some 1,132 acres.\textsuperscript{21} Houston had an established tradition of extremely large subdivisions. The obvious comparison was with River Oaks. Opened in 1923 and containing 1,100 acres, it was only slightly smaller than Sharp’s Oak Forest.\textsuperscript{22} The main difference between the two was that River Oaks was for the elite and Oak Forest was
for middle middle-class, primarily World War II veterans and that River Oaks was developed in phases over twenty-five years and Oak Forest was developed much more rapidly over a ten-year period. The economic distinction between the two was reflected in the architecture. River Oaks contained a collection of about 1,500 mostly two-story houses in a variety of traditional styles by a variety of architects. Oak Forest had a much greater density, with 4,780 mostly one-story quasi-modern houses designed at first almost exclusively by Sharp’s favorite architectural firm, Wilson, Morris & Crain. An article in *Architectural Forum* of 1949 described the small houses as having many modernist qualities:

*Although no module is used in the design of these houses, construction is simplified by the repetition in most plans of standard 9 x 6 foot bathrooms and standard 9 x 10 foot kitchens and by fitting almost all the other rooms beneath standard 10, 12 and 14 foot roof framing members.*

*The design of all houses is characterized by these sense-making details: 1) A low over-all appearance is created by setting the house close to the ground on a concrete slab floor and by extending the low pitched (1 in 4) roof 3 feet beyond and 9 inches below the plate. 2) Windows are many and large and are protected from Texas’ burning sun and sudden summer showers by the generous overhang. 3) To conserve bedroom space, closets are projected outside of the main house perimeter beneath the roof overhangs. 4) Waste interior space is further reduced by holding hall areas to a minimum and by using sliding doors on all closets. 5) Garages are frequently replaced by open carports which may double as rainy day play areas. 6) Each*
garage or carport has its own "out door" closet for the handy storage of garden and play equipment. 7) Exterior color schemes include green, gray, pink, brown and white – a distinct break from Texas’ all white tradition. 8) Sharp’s design service includes careful orientation of the house not only from the street but, more important in hot Houston, to the prevailing southerly breeze.

In general, the design of Oak Forest’s houses is more modern than that in most local subdivisions. Sharp believes in paying for good design, as modern as the public will accept. Hence his selection of Wilson, Morris & Crain who have a progressive, modern reputation. Says Sharp, “One of the most important lessons the merchant builder can learn is that, when he adds good design to his houses, he is adding more dollars to his profits than he could add proportionally in any other way.” The fact that Oak Forest houses are selling faster than any other Houston development (and in a tough market which has prompted Sharp to say “Houses are hard as hell to sell here) gives weight to Sharp’s advice and credit to his architects.24

This commentary is intriguing because almost every point made here was previously made in articles describing Oak Forest’s one unambiguously modern house, the Revere House of 1948 by MacKie & Kamrath. The author of a 1948 article wrote of the Revere House:

...The architect and builder have merged their extensive small house experience in an attempt to produce the best possible house for the least possible money...
part, the architects have provided a pleasant design, with long lines and low wide overhangs and a color scheme based on redwood, copper and brick.

Placed so there is maximum privacy towards the street and protected from the north, the limited internal space of the Houston house is deployed to good effect. Living room, dining area and guest-recreation room may all be thrown together if desired. This horizontal spaciousness is emphasized by sloping ceilings which follow the roof line to give the rooms added height and interest. For a two bedroom house, the plan shows considerable ingenuity. The central bath makes for easier circulation and minimal plumbing bills...  

The most interesting element of the Revere House, a demonstration house built as part of a national program by Revere Copper & Brass Corporation, is the arrangement of rooms where the living area, dining area and spare bedroom formed one open space that could be separated by pleated leather dividers, a feature seen in at least a few of the Wilson, Morris & Crain houses. A plan by Wilson, Morris & Crain that appeared in Architectural Forum in 1949 was nearly identical to that of the Revere House; another plan that appeared in Better Homes & Gardens in 1948 was also very similar. Other qualities, such as a colorful appearance, provisions for storage and a low, horizontal appearance were common to both MacKie & Kamrath’s and Wilson, Morris & Crain’s designs.

Many of these traits were praised because they lowered the cost of the house as much as contributed to any sense of modernity. A one-story house built on a concrete slab with low
ceilings, low pitched roof, rooms without walls and an attached car port was undoubtedly cheaper to build than the interwar Houston houses built on piers with a basement for the furnace, high ceilings, tall roofs with attics and separate, enclosed garages.

The construction process at Oak Forest employed aspects of mass production to increase the speed with which a house could be built as well as to lower its cost. Photographs taken in 1947 eloquently demonstrated the sequence: clearing the land, paving streets and pouring foundations; framing; finished houses; and, most importantly, carloads of prospective homeowners viewing the finished product. *Architectural Forum* noted:

> Just as important as Oak Forest's 1,132 acres of land, Sharp has the organization, know-how, equipment and much of the materials with which to develop it. They are in the four subsidiaries of the so-called "Frank W. Sharp Enterprises": 1) Industrial Road Equipment Co., headed by Houston's ex-city manager, does all of Oak Forest's grading, street paving and other concrete work; 2) Douglas Fir Lumber Co., has two Pacific coast mills and more than 2 million board feet of fir – all of it, if necessary, for Sharp; 3) Oak Forest Corp., headed by a former FHA executive, handles project development and merchandising; 4) Frank W. Sharp Construction Co., as its name implies, does the actual building. Although independently owned, Houston's M and A Woodworks is closely knit into the group for the supply of millwork. (Most of its raw lumber comes from Sharp's mills; all of its output goes to Oak Forest.)
3 Suburban Urbanism

Every house in Houston published in the national architectural press was built in one of several planned subdivisions on the periphery of the city. This large-scale private investment in what was, ostensibly, public infrastructure (paved streets, sewers, electrical hook ups, etc.) was a defining characteristic of Houston from the late 1800s. Hugh Potter, president of the River Oaks Corporation, described the role of developers as urban planners in near-patriotic terms: “Since the time of George Washington, who subdivided extensively in northern Virginia, the subdivider has really been the planner of our cities.”28 It was not unique to Houston, but typical of most other American cities that saw their greatest growth prior to World War II. Reyner Banham, for instance, described a similar form of urbanism in Los Angeles:

Conventional standards of planning do not work in Los Angeles, and it feels more natural (I put it no stronger than that) to leave effective planning of the area to mechanisms that have already given the city its present character: the infrastructure to giant agencies like the Division of Highways and the Metropolitan Water District and their like; the intermediate levels of management to the subdivision and zoning ordinances; the detailed decisions to local and private initiatives; with ad hoc interventions by city, State and pressure-groups formed to agitate over matters of clear and present need.29
What was unusual in Houston, though, was the extreme degree of privatization in the public realm. Los Angeles may not have had a clear urban form but at least it had zoning. Houstonians, on the other hand, were proud of the fact that their city lacked even this rudimentary form of planning. What seems most striking about the urban pattern of Houston was the private development of increasingly large restricted subdivisions and the direct effect this had on architectural production. It will be useful to examine the evolution of Houston’s subdivisions to see how they informed the architecture built there.

3.1 Nostalgic Urbanism

Large-scale urban planning never played a significant role in the development of metropolitan Houston. Nevertheless such local modern architects as Herbert William Linnstaedter, Burdette Keeland, Howard Barnstone and the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects produced urban planning projects that were published in the local press from the late 1940s through the 1960s that completely ignored this reality.

The main force driving these schemes was nostalgia for the 19th century pedestrian city. Criticism was heaped on the formlessness of the postwar car-dominated city. Burdette Keeland complained in an interview, printed in the Houston Post in 1961, "You can sort of fly into Houston and fly out and not remember a single great moment." Focused invariably on downtown, these hypothetical projects were supposed to mitigate blight and obsolescence in the central business district by moving cars from the streets to underground parking garages. Buildings considered obsolete, usually smaller Victorian commercial buildings,
were to be demolished. Streets were to be converted into pedestrian malls lined with modern versions of the 19th century store-front retail shops that had been demolished. The result of this planning was to be the creation of architecturally defined, unrestricted public spaces.

Such backwards-looking critiques were not limited to modernists in Houston. In the suburbs, a similar nostalgically conceived project, Westbury Square, was built in developer Ira Berne's large Westbury subdivision in 1960. The only difference, aside from the suburban location, was that Westbury Square employed kitsch versions of historical architectural styles rather than modern design.

The un-built urban planning schemes proposed by the architects were completely at odds with their own built work in Houston’s outlying subdivisions, where a new urbanism reflecting the postwar condition based on privacy and exclusion was being created on a metropolitan scale through the joint efforts of Houston developers, builders, the house-buying public and a good deal of indirect aid from the federal government.

3.2 Ralph Ellifrit

The de facto spokesman for suburban urbanism was Ralph Ellifrit, director of the city of Houston's Department of Planning. Ellifrit's observations were recorded in a series of interviews appearing in the Houston Post and the Houston Chronicle from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. Houston's extremely low density resulting from its patchwork quilt of private subdivisions figured prominently in his schemes. Ellifrit noted that urban-renewal-
style planning preoccupied with old, dense slum areas near the central business district was inappropriate for Houston, which was not encumbered by a nineteenth century urban legacy. Ellifrit told the *Houston Post* in 1961:

*Age is a problem in any case in a city, but when you get age and overcrowding and dilapidation, you get acute problems. Like every city, Houston has a certain amount of that type of area although their problem isn’t as acute as the larger and older city.*

Ellifrit was perhaps subconsciously reflecting popular sentiment Houstonians expressed towards large-scale, federally funded urban renewal projects so popular in the 1960s. Houstonians had always had an ambivalent relationship with the idea of high-density housing. Even low-rise garden apartments were viewed with skepticism. In an advertisement put out by the Houston Home Builder’s Association during the 1952 Parade of Homes, the question, “Does Houston need more public housing?” was answered. “NO, public housing leads to socialism!”

Houston never qualified for federally funded urban renewal projects in the 1950s anyway because of its lack of zoning, the first requirement for federal funding.

In 1949 Ellifrit proposed a scheme for “Quiet Neighborhoods,” based on Ebenezer Howard’s 1898 garden city diagram, to create a city of low-density, independent super blocks and provide “open spaces, peace and quiet, and convenience.” Each was to be linked by a wheel and spoke system of arterial roads and freeways and was to contain a centrally located
school and park so children would not have to cross busy streets. Along the throughways were to be businesses and community centers. Ellifrit, as city planner, knew how the present-day freeway system was to be built and saw it as an integral part of his proposal. Ellifrit made the plan more palatable to Houstonians by excising the moral dimensions of Howard's plan when he replaced its key idea, the concentration of people into discrete garden cities containing all social classes, with an even spread of privately developed, restricted subdivisions.

Ellifrit acknowledged, as a civil servant in a city traditionally controlled by business interests, his role in the planning of Houston was limited. He relied on persuading such important developers as Ira Berne, E. L. Crain, William G. Farrington, Hugh Potter, and Frank W. Sharp to implement his ideas in their subdivisions and serve as models for other developers to follow. In 1949, for example, William G. Farrington, developer of Tanglewood was chairman of the Houston Independent School District's board of trustees and was influential in acquiring land in subdivisions for schools. Also, to a lesser extent, Ellifrit was able to use funds provided by the city to purchase strategic parcels of land for roads and parkways, thus influencing the location of future subdivisions.

3.3 Restriction

The goal of developers was to exclude non-residential components and undesirable types of people from their subdivisions in order to attract buyers and preserve land values. In
Houston, this was usually done in one of two ways. The first was legal (restrictive covenants) the second was architectural (restricted street plans).

3.4 Restrictive Covenants

Restrictive covenants were especially common in Houston because there was no other legal recourse, such as zoning, to prevent unwanted elements from invading a residential subdivision and lowering property values. They were extremely popular with both developers and inhabitants of subdivisions as evidenced by their near universal application in Houston. Hugh Potter emphasized the need for restrictive covenants in an article in *House & Garden* of 1937:

*No matter how carefully they have studied the floor plan, no matter how attractive a design the architect has created, no matter how soundly the contractor or builder may perform his work, the completed home cannot reach its highest value, either in dollars and cents or in utility and pleasure to the members of the family, unless it is located on a suitable site in a completely protected neighborhood, carefully maintained and restricted.*

River Oaks was known for having one of the most comprehensive set of restrictive covenants. They were described in 1929 as:
...the wise restrictions which are an integral part of the comprehensive and all-embracing River Oaks plan...this home neighborhood can never be invaded by commercial or apartment buildings...beautiful vistas can never be obstructed, and that the whole property is being developed under a system of permanent maintenance and architectural control...³⁶

They were further elaborated in *Architectural Forum* in 1935:

**RESTRICTIONS:**

*No house to cost less than $7,500. Minimum setbacks of from 30 to 60 feet.*

*No attached garages facing the street, and no garages closer to the front lot line than sixty feet.*

*Unkempt property is subject to care by the developing company, and the bill sent to the negligent owner.*

*Upkeep of property is paid for from a maintenance fund, contributed to by all property owner, including the company, of not more than two mills per square foot annually.*

*No sidewalks, no curbs.*
No trees or shrubs planted in the curb space on a theory that it improves vistas to confine such improvements to the properties themselves.

The enforcement of all restrictions and upkeep of property are controlled by the developing company, as distinguished from the more usual plan of forming housing associations among the property owners. The company supplements Houston policing with its own force, has its own refuse disposal system.\textsuperscript{37}

There were additional clauses prohibiting African-Americans from owning property and others prohibiting fences over four feet tall without written consent of the River Oaks Corporation.\textsuperscript{38} In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial clauses in restrictive covenants were not legally enforceable.\textsuperscript{39} (In comparison, the use of zoning for racial restriction was declared illegal in 1927.\textsuperscript{40}) However, this ruling seemed to have little actual effect as the high cost of property and a “gentleman’s agreement” meant that the wealthy, white, gentile inhabitants of River Oaks would continue to be its only inhabitants (the “gentlemen’s agreement” was the mechanism used to exclude Jews from River Oaks).\textsuperscript{41} River Oaks maintained its elite status because of the vigorous efforts of Hugh Potter, a Houston lawyer recruited by Will Hogg to head the River Oaks Corporation, which enforced the restrictions. Potter was extremely dedicated to the project and when the original covenant expired in 1955, he organized a successor organization to the River Oaks Corporation to continue the enforcement of the covenant. River Oaks’ continued popularity with Houston’s elite also had much to do with the fact that there were no large minority
neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity, as in the case of Riverside Terrace which bordered the historically Black Third Ward.

Riverside Terrace, which became the preferred subdivision of Houston’s Jewish elite, barred from living in River Oaks from the 1930s through the 1950s, had its own restrictive covenants. An early sales brochure referred to it:

\[
\text{Within this radius is the most select residential district of Houston today. It will be so tomorrow, and for all time...}
\]

\[
\ldots\text{Rigid building restrictions...so that each purchaser is assured beforehand of the exact character of the improvements with which he will be surrounded...}
\]

\[
\ldots\text{Building restrictions vary on each street according to the size of the building sites, insuring uniform improvements on the different streets.}^{42}
\]

Braeswood’s covenants, which were similar, were described by Stephen Fox:

\[
\text{The "Reservations, Covenants, and Restrictions in Braeswood, Houston, Texas" comprised 16 numbered clauses addressing land use (single family residences only, except for five lots on Maroneal where duplexes could be built); approval by the Braeswood Corporation of architectural plans, height, material, frontage, setback and open space requirements that applied to both houses and outbuildings; minimum}
\]
construction costs by lot and block (the range was from $10,000 to $50,000); racial restrictions, sign controls; and duration of the covenants (they were to run for a 25-year term and thereafter could be extended for 15-year increments).43

Garden Oaks then followed a well established Houston pattern with its covenants. There were required setbacks of fifteen feet from the sides of the property and fifty feet from the street. The minimum price for a house was $2,500.44 E.L. Crain elaborated on them in 1941:

*There are quite a number of unusual features incorporated in the restrictions covering all the Garden Oaks properties, and the developers are at all times ready and willing to give advice and make suggestions to the property owners in Garden Oaks with reference to the architecture of the homes to be built, regardless of whom the architect or builder might be. The Garden Oaks Company has been careful to retain control over the design of houses erected in the development. The Company requires that plans and specifications be submitted for written approval.*

*The developers have also established what is termed a "maintenance fund." This fund is to be for the maintenance of any streets, parks or parkways or for any other use for the general benefit of the community.*45

By the 1940s every large subdivision as well as many of the smaller ones in Houston regardless of the price range had restrictive covenants, in part because they were required for FHA approval. Oak Forest, Tanglewood, Sharpstown, Meyerland and Westbury all had
restrictive covenants closely following the local model initiated by elite subdivisions in the 1900s and moderate subdivisions in the 1910s. They invariably called for architectural supervision in house design, controlled the location of houses on properties by setbacks and had guidelines on such things as garages and landscaping. They typically provided for the creation of organizations to take care of subdivision-wide maintenance and landscaping of public areas by assessing an annual surtax on property owners. *House & Home* indicated in 1958 that privately enacted restrictive covenants on the local level took the place of zoning on a city-wide level and provided many of the same benefits:

*Houston is the only major city in the country with no zoning. Without large (and therefore self-zoning) subdivisions which the land developer system makes possible, there would be no protection of property or investment.*

*The home buyer benefits because he gets the protection of restrictive covenants and the advantages of good land planning and good community facilities. Equally important, the public gains because Houston's alert city planning commission has to deal only with a relatively few developers, instead of a great many builders and it can act as an effective coordinator of growth.*

*The commission makes sure that land plans tie in with Houston's overall road planning, and that space is provided for schools, churches, and recreational and shopping facilities. It also sees to it that Houston keeps some open, green areas. Since the war, the city has acquired 40 new parks, most of them in new subdivisions.*
Result of the Houston way: *more orderly growth than you'll find in many cities with zoning.*

Most modernist city planners seemed either to dismiss or ignore restrictive covenants in the formation of the urban environment, instead placing emphasis on zoning and architectural interventions. Zoning was seen by them as an advance over restrictive covenants because it was applied on a comprehensive scale. A restrictive covenant may prevent apartments, for example, from being located within the boundaries of the subdivision, but could do nothing to prevent one being located immediately adjacent to it. Zoning was also preferred because it was intended to promote the general welfare of the inhabitants of the city. According to Arthur B. Gallion, author of the classic urban planning textbook, *The Urban Pattern:*

*Most early [zoning] laws were concerned...with those uses considered a menace to life itself, and regulations against most of these uses were based on presentation of evidence in court that the uses were existing and had proven themselves dangerous.*

James Marston Fitch, author of the well-read text on American architecture and urbanism, *American Building,* first printed in 1947, concluded of zoning:

*More important in the long run was its tendency to establish certain minimum standards in terms of light, air, space. The effect of zoning upon houses, schools and office buildings was in general progressive.*
Houston's restrictive covenants, on the other hand, were the result of economic polices aimed at preserving the value of real estate. They intentionally protected the status quo of the privileged few who lived in the subdivision, rather than attempting to improve the residential environment on a citywide scale. They were problematic to modernists because they made explicit the fact that the city was, and continued to be, stratified by social and economic class.

3.5 Subdivision Morphology

The perfectly square grid of the central business district was transformed into the restricted street patterns in the subdivisions of the 1950s through four successive phases of deformation and reduction as Houston's street system expanded.

In 1836 the original town plan of Houston was platted as a grid of streets and blocks. Residential subdivisions occurred as "additions" to the existing street grid. The grid, especially as it existed in Houston where blocks were square and streets were the same width, was non-hierarchical, and traffic flowed relatively evenly across its entirety. There was no differentiation on the grid of streets as to function. A house or a business could, and did, occur anywhere.

In the 1890s, Houston saw the first changes to its basic grid. These appeared in the form of the stretched blocks of new "planned" communities, such as Houston Heights. Side streets were eliminated to form a longer, rectangular block lined with houses. By reducing the
amount of paving needed, an element of economy was introduced. Traffic also began to be channeled as certain streets were widened and designated as high capacity thoroughfares. “Avenue,” “boulevard,” and “drive” were the most popular terms to describe them in Houston. This was the first step in differentiating the grid according to function (long blocks, narrow streets = residential; short blocks, wide streets = commercial) and reducing traffic in subdivisions.

In the 1920s, the long blocks began to be curved. Although the first Houston subdivision with a curved street system, Forest Hill, was opened in 1910, it was an anomaly; no more were planned until the early 1920s. These 1920s subdivisions designed for cars (Forest Hill was a streetcar suburb), like River Oaks, Riverside Terrace and Braeswood, were built for Houston’s elite. Most low and moderately priced subdivisions continued to be built in the form of long orthogonal grids into the 1930s. By the late 1930s and through the 1940s, curved blocks appeared in middle class subdivisions like Garden Oaks and Oak Forest. Curving roadways slowed through-traffic and forced the motorist to use thoroughfares rather than passing through the subdivision. They also created a strong identity for the subdivision as it contrasted to the surrounding orthogonal street grid.

In the mid 1950s the fourth phase occurred. The curved grid was clipped. The first large scale examples were in such southwestern subdivisions as Meyerland, Sharpstown, and Westbury, all opened around 1955. By severing almost all links to the surrounding thoroughfares, traffic was discouraged from entering the subdivision. Intra-subdivision traffic was also discouraged as local street links were clipped. Clipping the grid reinforced
the separate identity of the subdivision by sequestering it from the rest of the city. But it became so pervasive that it made each subdivision seem more like its neighbors by the end of the 1950s.

The antithesis of the grid based subdivisions also appeared: the non-grid subdivision. It mostly took the form of a loop road. One of the first examples was West Oaks, a moderately priced subdivision opened in about 1940. Its street plan consisted of two irregularly shaped loop roadways beginning and ending at Post Oak Lane. Sherwood Forest was an important elite, non-grid subdivision opened in about 1950 with a street system consisting of a section of an irregularly shaped loop roadway bisected by Memorial Drive. In order to complete the circuit, one had to travel through the adjoining subdivision, Bayou Woods. The largest and best known example of this plan type was The Woodlands, opened in 1975. This type represented the ultimate in the elimination of traffic but it was only effective on a small scale; when a single loop or a few cul-de-sac streets were the extent of the subdivision. When it was used on a large scale, as in The Woodlands, the street system became so confusing that it was almost impossible, even for residents, to navigate. Today, it seems the non-grid subdivision is almost never used for large new subdivisions in Houston.

The grid never entirely disappeared. It continued to be the underlying organizational framework for the layout of the city. Despite its deformation and reduction on the scale of the individual residential subdivision, it continued to be used in a complete form on the primary and secondary system of freeways and thoroughfares. Through the efforts of city planner Ralph Ellifrit and the Texas Highway Department, the lack of mobility engendered
by clipping the residential street system was compensated on the large scale in the 1950s and 1960s by improvements to the primary and secondary street systems. The old traffic thoroughfares -- Main Street, Bissonnet Avenue, Bellaire Boulevard, Memorial Drive -- were further linked and extended to form a new larger secondary traffic grid. Onto this grid was grafted the large scale grid of the freeway system. The freeways were in turn, linked to each other, as the old thoroughfares had been before, to become the ultimate traffic grid, the nationwide Interstate highway system. The freeway was the antithesis and complement of the subdivision: a high capacity, high speed, fully linked traffic system. The relationship of the clipped grid of the subdivision and the giant grid system of freeways was symbiotic and both evolved simultaneously and complementarily.

3.6 Rationale

The restricted street plan then, a clipped grid, was the defining architectural feature of practically all postwar subdivisions in Houston regardless of economic class. Although the primary reason for its popularity was its ability to restrict access to the subdivision and thus protect the developers’ investment, other reasons were usually publicly stated. The three most common reasons were that it was more attractive, more economical and promoted traffic safety.
3.7 Aesthetics

Early proponents of closed street systems emphasized that curving roadways held an aesthetic appeal because they were reminiscent of natural settings, unlike grids which seemed manmade and artificial. One of the earliest, and most pervasive, examples for later planners was the Riverside community designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux which opened in 1869 on a site about nine miles west of Chicago. According to Olmsted:

*The misfortune of most existing suburbs is that in such parts of them as have built up little by little, without any general plan,...no intelligent design has been pursued to secure a distinctly rural attractiveness...*

*We should recommend the general adoption, in the design of your roads, of gracefully curved lines, generous spaces, and the absence of sharp corners. the idea being to suggest and imply leisure, contemplativeness and happy tranquility.*

Riverside’s street system, an extreme example of the curved grid, and its direct link to Chicago via a commuter railroad line and parkway (the latter was never built), was widely held to be a model of good planning, although only a few of its elements were borrowed by later Houston developers. Its dedicated parkway anticipated many Houston subdivisions. In the 1920s Buffalo Drive, now Allen Parkway, was built to provide access to River Oaks. In September 1957 Frank W. Sharp and his associates donated ten and a half miles of right-of-way running through his Sharpstown subdivision to the Texas Highway Department for the
future Southwest Freeway (with the stipulation that construction begin within a year). The small triangular parks between intersections were also a feature seen in Houston subdivisions designed prior to World War II.

Riverside’s extremely curvaceous and irregular interior streets were regularized in their Houston incarnations. Houston developers desired to create something resembling a park with implications of urbane leisure rather than the more rustic effect sought by Olmsted. A 1929 promotional book for River Oaks called the subdivision a “modern residential arcadia” and “Houston’s residential park” and referred to driving through its streets as “a cooling spin into the countryside.” In Garden Oaks, streets were “curved to afford pleasing vistas through the trees.” A promotional brochure for Garden Oaks printed around 1942 described the subdivision as a “residential park unsurpassed” and noted that, “Activity in gardening is both interesting and healthful.”

The other main feature of the interwar subdivisions was their elaborately landscaped parks and esplanades. A good example was Braeswood, opened in 1928. Advertisements for it described the park-like landscaping:

*Homes of dignity and charm – wide sweeping lawns that front gracefully, winding avenues – beautiful parkways, streams and bridle paths – cool breezes – alluring vistas.*
Other advertisements noted the relationship to "nature" that, in Houston, was represented by the bayous with winding paths and roadways along them:

_Brays Bayou in Braeswood is a small waterway of much beauty – and when landscaping the banks of this stream is completed, it will be pointed to as one of Houston's show places. Braeswood Boulevard along this stream, when lined with fine homes, will be a drive of beauty. It will be one link in Houston's 'along the water' drives, and will be admired by thousands yearly._

The novelty of this type of layout seems to have been strong. Photographs of these subdivisions often depicted the newly paved curving roads with their esplanades and landscaped parks before the houses lining them had been built. Photographs of subdivisions taken in later years, however, show only houses. Streets without houses and open parkland seemed to have lost their appeal by the 1950s, especially as subdivisions began to be laid out on the treeless coastal plains south of Buffalo Bayou.

Houston, unlike older industrial cities, never had a heavily urbanized sector to contrast with raw forest. There always seemed a danger, however faintly realized, that someday Houston might return to its unimproved state so clearly seen in the sub-tropical forests lining its bayous. Nature did not have to be nurtured, it had to be controlled. The idea of a domesticated garden setting clearly showing the human touch was therefore appealing.
This coincided with the manner in which Houston’s elite chose to represent the city visually. From the early 1930s to the end of the 1940s many photographs of the city appeared in the Chamber of Commerce’s monthly magazine, *Houston*. During this period, the city was represented by an image of one of its two principal features, the downtown skyline or the Houston Ship Channel. These views of the city were different from earlier published views (that also often depicted the downtown skyline) in the way that they juxtaposed the built environment with the natural environment in a manner to suggest that the entire city was situated in a park-like setting. A photo that appeared on the cover of *Houston* in July 1932 taken from Buffalo Drive facing west contrasted the tree-lined roadway as it curved through Sam Houston Park with the city’s two largest office towers, the Niels Esperson Building of 1927 and the Gulf Building of 1929. Another view appearing on the cover of the May 1945 issue juxtaposed the skyline with a jungle-like Buffalo Bayou meandering in the foreground.

Views of the Houston Ship Channel demonstrated a similar aesthetic. Photos were often taken from the San Jacinto Battlegrounds, several miles east of the turning basin and long reach because of the abundant greenery that made views of the waterway more attractive. A photo that appeared in the April 1930 issue showed a steamer framed by the branches of tree in the battlegrounds dripping with Spanish moss. The same year, the Port of Houston was ranked third in the nation, after New York and Los Angeles, in foreign exports.56
3.8 Economy

After the late 1920s, the natural aesthetic argument was no longer used to justify a curving street pattern. Economy became an overriding factor. E.L. Crain, for example, claimed a curved grid was less expensive for Garden Oaks because he did not have to build extra side streets. Oak Forest's curving streets were noted because they channeled traffic to the two shopping centers, presumably profiting the merchants located there. In Tanglewood, William G. Farrington wished to have a curving diagonal boulevard, Tanglewood Boulevard, bisect the subdivision because it would follow the path of a gas pipe line right-of-way that was otherwise unusable, causing his landscape architect, Seward H. Mott, to mockingly refer to it as "Pipe Line Boulevard."

The irony was that any efficiencies on the scale of a single subdivision were nullified on the metropolitan scale. This was because subdivisions with streets in the form of a clipped grid had much lower densities than older, gridded subdivisions. The result of the explosion of closed plan subdivisions was that, by 1952, Houston had more miles of paved streets per person than any other comparable American city and had almost as many actual miles of concrete roads as New York, a city with twelve times the population. That this was presented as a source of local pride rather than embarrassment speaks volumes about the attitudes of Houstonians who favored progress in any form in the 1950s.

The visual pleasure of the sight of curving ribbons of concrete was corroborated by a new trend in published views of Houston beginning in the late 1940s, when the skyline began to
be represented surrounded by the concrete wall of freeways rather than parks. Houston’s (and Texas’) first “super highway,” the Gulf Freeway was begun in 1946. Its cost was justified almost exclusively in terms of increased direct economic return for the city.\textsuperscript{61} In 1954 an article in \textit{Houston} noted that 840,000,000 minutes had been saved by using the freeway between 1948 and 1954 and that this time, valued at \$0.02 per minute for cars and \$0.05 per minute for trucks, amounted to a monetary savings of \$21,060,000. Since the cost of the freeway was estimated to be only \$15,600,000, the author of the article concluded optimistically, “Freeways don’t cost – they pay!”\textsuperscript{62} Traffic volume soon reached extraordinary levels as the freeways became an indispensable part of the local landscape. In March 1950 about 62,000 cars per day were using the partially completed Gulf Freeway.\textsuperscript{63} In comparison, in 1949, the heaviest traffic in the New York metropolitan area was on Route 25 through eastern New Jersey at Newark Airport where an average of 63,000 cars passed daily.\textsuperscript{64}

By 1949 when about six miles of roadway were complete, the Gulf Freeway instantly became the newest symbol of Houston. Aerial views of the skyline from the south, rather than land-based views from the west, showcased the new freeway to become the most published image of the city. Sometimes just the freeway was published as a substitute for the skyline, reaffirming the local fascination with highways and streets seen earlier in the numerous photos of streets in Houston subdivisions. An example was the view from downtown facing south that appeared in the November 1950 issue of \textit{Houston} that showed the bright new freeway trailing off into the distance.
3.9 Traffic Safety

As early as the 1920s, car traffic had become a fixation with American city planners. This interest seemed to stem from the astonishing number of car accidents that appeared to be the result of unregulated car use on an antiquated road system (which was synonymous with the grid). In Houston in 1928, for example, there were 5,000 car accidents, an average of 13 daily. Out of a total of 63,000 registered cars, this meant that one in twelve cars was involved in some sort of accident. In 1929, Los Angeles city planner, G. Gordon Whitnall was interviewed in the Houston Gargoyle. According to him:

*The very core of planning today is circulation. All other matters are incidental...*

*aesthetics, uses of property, zoning, recreation facilities, housing, civic centers.*

*Facility of traffic flow is the test. The mile as a unit of measure has become archaic; we substitute the minute.*

Statistics and photographs appearing in postwar city planning textbooks revealed an intense suspicion of cars and fear of heavy traffic among modernist city planners. According to a chart that appeared in the 1946 book, *New City Patterns*, 253,347 people were killed in all American wars from 1776 to 1937 while 454,333 were killed by cars from 1919 to 1937. A sensational photograph showing three crouching children directly in the path of a speeding car appeared in *The Urban Pattern*, with the caption “Wheels of Death.”
It seemed a hopeless proposition to control the paths of individual cars. A few planners, like Whitnall implied that decentralized traffic flow was natural and good. According to him:

...just as Los Angeles began to need rapid transit, the individual, to a large extent, provided his own transportation. Thus traffic became fluid, and reacted just as any other fluid. Just so much could be poured into the downtown business area, and no more. The rest overflowed. The answer was to disperse the business district...create compact outlying business centers...⁶⁹

Fitch wrote of the effect of cars on the urban environment in near-apocalyptic terms. His rhetoric displayed the ambivalent position that seemed to be common among America modernists of the immediate postwar years. It simultaneously accepted some elements of modernism, such as modern architecture, but rejected other elements, such as cars. Fitch apparently longed for the densely built, orderly urban environment of the nineteenth century that privileged the historic city center:

The motor car proved a disastrously flexible means for moving people, ideas, and things around the surface of the earth. It brought fantastic increases in vehicular traffic into the streets – traffic which had been hitherto tightly channelized into steel rails. In this way it profoundly altered the character and function of the street: on a city-wide scale, it made obsolete the entire street system.
A contradiction appeared. While the city as a whole continued to expand by centripetal attraction, the population within the city was flung, as though by centrifugal force, to a constantly expanding perimeter... The automobile was a factor in all this and left in its wake and urban turmoil of social, political, and economic problems. Land values, traditionally graded upward toward transportation and downward from the center out, had to be adjusted to a means of transportation which was everywhere. Values rose to preposterous levels at the center and along the expanding rim, while dooming the intervening "blighted" areas to decay... A given block in the path of urban expansion could easily be open farmland, stylish suburb, respectable boarding house, and unregenerate slum — all in the span of a decade or two.\(^70\)

The Chicago urban theorist, Ludwig Hilberseimer had a slightly different opinion, privileging safety over architecture: that traffic was spreading scourge, killing everything in its path. In 1949 Hilberseimer wrote:

*Today, those old regional routes have become highways, and motor vehicles speeding along them carry traffic danger into every village and town.*\(^71\)

His solution, like that implied by Fitch, was to force cars into clearly defined channels away from residential areas to protect the lives of the few hapless pedestrians who had not yet been run down by speeding cars.
Hilberseimer was particularly influenced by Henry Wright and Clarence Stein’s plan for the Radburn subdivision in New Jersey opened in 1929. When Radburn, “a town planned for safety,” was published in *American Architect* in 1930 the author of the article described the subdivision in terms that demonstrated a strongly anti-car attitude, anticipating later modernist urban planners:

*The only town in the world exclusively designed to meet the needs of this automobile age in a practical manner...And although the project is, as yet, but in the early stages of its development, in its safety street plan there seems at least to have been found a reasonable solution to one of the most serious of our present day problems – the successful handling of motor traffic. Experience long since has proven that automobile travel can never be properly and safely controlled by a multitude of rules and regulations.*

Radburn’s defining formal characteristic was the extensive use of cul-de-sac streets lined with houses facing shared green spaces that were perpendicular to a thoroughfare. The thoroughfares, “beltways,” were arranged in the form of a rough grid. The intention was that pedestrian traffic be limited to the greenbelts linking the cul-de-sac streets so that it would never conflict with auto traffic.

Radburn was also studied by modern architects from Houston. What seemed to impress them most was that way that cul-de-sacs could accommodate automobile traffic and integrate it directly into the houses. Stayton Nunn, who designed the first public-housing complex in
Houston, Cuney Homes in 1939, wrote an article about his opinions on architecture that appeared in the _Houston Post_ in 1935. In it he noted:

> There is one clearly defined trend which I want to take time to mention. It got its first real start in the English garden cities of Lechworth and Welwyn and was carried to an advanced stage of refinement in the American satellite town of Radburn, N.J. It is a simple trick of planning, yet it makes a vast difference in the character of a neighborhood where it is used. It is this: You forget that the site of a house must have a "front" and a "back;" you forget that streets must form a gridiron pattern and that there must be sidewalks and streets in "front" and alleys and detached garages in "back;" you remember that you always leave and approach your own home in an automobile and that the vast majority of other people who pass your house pass in automobiles; you remember that automobiles sometimes injure pedestrians, particularly children; you remember that it is convenient to drive into the garage by the shortest route and then to pass directly indoors to the living portion of the house; you think how desirable it would be if your small children could play with the others of adjoining families in an ample, well landscaped area where they could be safe from street hazards and be visible to each of their mothers from their own houses.

Then you layout your project like this:
The streets leading from belt drives and serving houses are motor roads only; the
houses all have integral garages with drives directly from the motor roads; the usual
more or less squalid individual back yards are converted into generous gardens and
recreation areas for the entire "super block." Pedestrian traffic to the houses
accommodated by walks in the park areas which the houses and motor roads
surround and enclose..."74

The Radburn concept was used most conspicuously in Houston in the River Oaks Courts,
begun in 1936. In the River Oaks Courts, the idea was inverted. The open spaces were made
discontinuous and private. Driveways were located where, in Radburn, the public greenbelt
was located, and they separated the groups of houses so that it was impossible for a
pedestrian to avoid crossing a roadway to get from one court to the next. River Oaks Courts
was not platted to provide public space, but rather make full use of a deep block backing up
to a busy thoroughfare, San Felipe Road.

Cul-de-sac streets in Houston subdivisions were not especially popular. They were usually
employed to segregate certain parts of a subdivision. In Garden Oaks, a series of duplexes
were built around five cul-de-sac streets in 1942. These cul-de-sacs served to keep transient
renters away from permanent homeowners. In Sharpstown, a series of cul-de-sac streets
were arranged around the Sharpstown Golf Course where the largest, most expensive houses
were to be built, well removed from the rest of the subdivision. In Meyerland, a series of
four cul-de-sac streets seemed to have been built for the same purpose. None of the
examples of cul-de-sac streets in Houston were intended to completely separate pedestrian traffic from car traffic as in Radburn.

In the 1920s, despite a severe traffic safety problem, Houstonians seemed to have a positive view of the virtues of speeding cars. An advertisement for River Oaks that appeared in the Houston Gargoyle depicted a car rushing through its gates with the caption:

_Fifty, sixty, more if you wish, and can afford the fine._

_The road is open, the curves are banked._

_The drive is wide, with only three crossings._

_Speed? Of course you can..._\(^{75}\)

However, this changed by the late 1940s. At this time, Houston newspapers listed the weekly highway deaths accompanied by a gruesome illustration of a grinning Grim Reaper every Sunday. In 1959 Houston Post columnist Emmet Collins observed with more than a touch of Cold War paranoia, "The new suburbanite lives in a tense jungle where eight-cylinder tigers, as well as the threat of intercontinental ballistic missiles and hydrogen bombs lurk."\(^{76}\)
As Houston's city planner, Ralph Ellifrit's greatest concern seems to have been devising ways to create smoothly flowing traffic channels. In the early 1940s he attempted to coordinate arterial roads by extending, straightening and linking existing thoroughfares so traffic would flow evenly across the city. By the end of the decade he was working with the Texas Highway Department to coordinate the path of coming freeways and the locations of interchanges.77

When he discussed the street plans of the Westbury subdivision in 1958, he spoke entirely in terms of traffic conditions:

Westbury has the major characteristics of a well planned subdivision. It has major streets, wide or double streets where needed and the street pattern discourages through traffic. Residential neighborhoods are quiet because streets are short and this discourages speed and through traffic. The big area is broken up into many small areas. Schools and parks are combined. Sites for schools, churches, shops are carefully planned, and schools are not put on heavily traveled roads.78

3.10 Federal Housing Administration

By the late 1920s, in such elite Houston subdivisions as River Oaks, Riverside Terrace and Braeswood, the physical characteristics of the modern Houston subdivision were firmly in place. The street plan consisted of a curved grid with many of its links to the surrounding thoroughfares clipped. There were provisions for communal landscaped parks. Spaces for
schools, churches and shopping centers were designated in advance. Direct routes existed for cars to get from the suburbs to the central city. Restrictive covenants were in place to prevent non-residential encroachment. It was striking to see how these traits were appropriated and then propagated by the federal government through the Federal Housing Administration to be used in low and moderate cost subdivisions.

In 1934 the FHA was founded as a New Deal “hypodermic” to indirectly “encourage credit for home financing and to revive a badly beaten house-building industry” through a policy of federal mortgage insurance. At first the FHA insured 90% of the mortgage for houses costing $6,000 or less and 80% of the mortgage for houses costing up to $16,000 (later reduced to $10,000).

In order to receive FHA insurance, it was necessary that the developer follow seven “requirements.” It was also strongly recommended that the developer uphold a series of “desirable standards” that were not required but, nonetheless, “if some of them were notably lacking, approval would be withheld until the condition was corrected.” If a subdivision scheme submitted to the FHA was particularly bad, “a member of the staff thoroughly familiar with good subdivision practice and rulings” would draw a rough sketch showing the preferred layout that the developer was then required to adapt as best as possible to his project. Seward H. Mott, chief of the Land Planning Technical Section of the FHA listed the requirements and desirable standards that his department had formulated in an article that appeared in *Architectural Record* in 1936:
Minimum Requirements

**First Requirement** – There must be convincing evidence of a healthy and active demand for homes of the type contemplated and at the prices asked...

**Second Requirement** is that the site must be suitable. It must be plainly appropriate for the type of development contemplated...

**Third Requirement** is that the subdivision must be easily accessible by means of public transportation and adequate highways to schools and employment and shopping centers...

**Fourth Requirement** covers installation of appropriate utilities and street improvements. The type and cost must be carefully related to the actual needs of the development...

**Fifth Requirement** is “Whenever the subdivision or any part of it falls within the jurisdiction of a city, county or regional plan or of subdivision regulations, the design and development shall comply with such plans and regulations...”

**Sixth Requirement** is that additional protection be provided by means of appropriate deed restrictions. Few zoning regulations are broad enough to provide the complete
protection necessary to assure the subdivision developing into a really homogenous neighborhood...

**Seventh and Last Requirement** is a sound financial set-up...

**Desirable Standards**

They include the careful adapting of the subdivision layout to the topography and other natural features; the adjustment of the street plan and street widths and grades to best meet traffic needs; the elimination of sharp corners and dangerous intersections; long blocks with the consequent elimination of unnecessary streets; a carefully studied lot plan with generous and well shaped house sites; parks and playgrounds; the establishment of community organizations of property owners and the incorporation of features that add to the privacy and attractiveness of the community.\(^{82}\)

The FHA was directly involved in almost all U.S. housing starts from 1934 to 1939. By the mid 1950s the proportion of FHA insured housing starts was down to between 17% to 36%. It is a commentary on the role of private developers to see how the quality of subdivision planning steadily diminished during these years, as the FHA oversaw less and less new subdivisions.
Such FHA subdivisions in Houston as Garden Oaks or Oak Forest shared many of the same urbane and pleasant qualities of the elite subdivisions of the 1920s. They had easily accessible, compact shopping areas, rather than sprawling strip centers. There were centrally located public schools, often designed by well known local architects. Planned open spaces, such as parks, were always included. Their street systems, designed by professional planners, were logical and easily navigable, in contrast to the chaotic street patterns of many 1950s subdivisions like Sharpstown, Meyerland or Westbury which were also planned by professionals, though they were working for money conscious developers rather than the federal government. The houses, mostly designed by well known Houston architects rather than builders or mediocre architects specializing in subdivision work, shared a consistent visual vocabulary and had innovative floor plans. (This was more apparent in Garden Oaks than in Oak Forest. Oak Forest’s first houses were largely the work of Wilson Morris & Crain and were well done. Sharp later decided that it was more economic to subcontract work out to local builders who did not use skilled architects for their houses, though they sometimes made use of plans provided by him. By 1949 there were thirteen separate builders working in Oak Forest.\textsuperscript{83} The houses in sections of the subdivision developed in the early 1950s clearly show that Wilson, Morris & Crain were no longer involved in the design of the houses.)

An irony is that Mott designed one well known Houston subdivision, Tanglewood. It was to be the postwar River Oaks and have many of the amenities suggested by the FHA in 1936, but as the design progressed, the developer William G. Farrington, who was not using FHA insurance, was more concerned with economics than creating a pleasant environment and
omitted almost all of them. Exceptions were the pathway on Tanglewood Boulevard that Farrington could not build on anyway and his subsidies of the Houston Transit Company to underwrite bus service that stopped outside the entrance of the subdivision because, as he put it, “All of you ladies want bus service to bring your maids here, but none of you wants the bus to go down your street.” The plan of the first part of the subdivision, a curved grid bisected by Tanglewood Boulevard, was unusual to the degree that it was hierarchical and easy to navigate, however, later additions strung along Woodway Drive apparently not planned by Mott were like any other 1950s subdivision in Houston. Tanglewood in all its banality perfectly demonstrated the near complete lack of interest on the part of postwar private developers, unless coerced, in creating an integrated community on par with the best local interwar subdivisions, a condition that exists in Houston up to today.
4 New Vernacular

By 1950, modernist rhetoric had attained sufficient currency that it was used to describe all houses in Houston regardless of style. Its existence is apparent from an examination of commentary appearing in the national and local press regarding houses built in Houston's subdivisions. This rhetoric continued to be used to describe modern houses built after 1950 and as the decade progressed, it began to be further elaborated.

Starting in the early 1950s, a group of local architects worked within the conceptual framework on which this rhetoric was founded to develop a new modern popular house type for the middle class Houston suburbs. These houses were remarkable for the unified image they presented, in contrast to the modern houses built earlier in Houston, a disparate group of designs based on a variety of unrelated sources. (The earliest influences were Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra who were influential in MacKie & Kamrath's and F. Talbott Wilson & S. I. Morris's designs from the late 1930s to the early 1940s. Alvar Aalto was the inspiration for Donald Barthelemy's house of 1941. Modernistic interpretations of the white International Style were seen in projects by Wirtz & Calhoun and Claude E. Hooton from the mid 1930s to the early 1940s. Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr. designed houses derived from his experience at the interwar Harvard Graduate School of Design of Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer in the late 1940s. Soon after, he became a committed disciple of Mies van der Rohe.)

The designs of this group of twenty-three modern houses built between 1952 and 1962 were overwhelmingly influenced by the work of Mies van der Rohe (and his offshoots, the Case
Study Houses and Philip Johnson, who had many direct ties to Houston) and to a lesser extent, the interwar Harvard GSD.

This group of houses was different from Houston’s better known modern houses, such as Johnson’s Menil House of 1951, in that they were designed for a middle class clientele. They were substantially smaller and less expensive than the Menil House and other luxurious modern houses. The average house was 2,100 square feet with three bedrooms and cost, on average, $32,200. The Menil House, in comparison was 5,600 square feet with six bedrooms (including one for a live-in servant) and cost about $105,000. Although these houses were relatively small and affordable, they were still larger and more expensive than most of their conventional counterparts. The average architect-designed house in Oak Forest in 1947 contained about 1,100 square feet with two bedrooms and cost about $10,000. By the mid 1950s the average house in Sharpstown contained 1,300 square feet with three bedrooms and cost about $14,500.

4.1 Publicity

During this period, the homogeneity of design among Houston modernists was noted by local architects and outside critics. Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson provided a statement on local trends in houses for a House & Home article in 1957 where they claimed that, “There is now a growing local school of almost classic elegance of style.” Henry-Russell Hitchcock wrote the introduction to a Contemporary Arts Museum architecture exhibition in 1959. In it he commented on local trends:
Not since the days of the Greek Revival, more than a century ago, has the individuality of the handling of a stringent and widely accepted mode of design counted for so much.\(^8^6\)

Howard Barnstone explained that the Miesian style was appropriated because it was easy to copy and, even in the hands of a poor designer, it looked good. During an interview with the California critic, Esther McCoy, published in 1963 he said:

*The average architect is usually not a great designer and, when he has a book to go by, whether it be colonial, Georgian, or Mies – the design had a certain built-in insurance – in that a vocabulary was being copied.*\(^8^7\)

For a time during the mid 1950s it seemed that modern houses might become the new standard for suburban housing. This is borne out by the fact that these houses were so prominently represented in the media. Not only did they appear in such limited circulation, avant-garde magazines as *Arts & Architecture*, they also appeared frequently in the building industry magazine *House & Home* and in high circulation magazines aimed at conventional house-bound wives, such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Homes & Gardens*. In May 1955, an article in *House & Home* featured twenty modern houses published from 1954 to 1955 in fourteen national consumer magazines (including the Bendit House published in *Good Housekeeping*) and declared:
Do you know that this month alone, 50 million Americans are pouring over glamorous pictures of houses with glass walls?

Do you know that this month, also, those same 50 million — all of them potential home buyers — are further being sold on the idea that storage should come in walls, that most furniture ought to be built in, that more than half their living space should be out-of-doors (and that the outdoors should be planned for that purpose), and that such modern devices as metal fireplaces, flat roofs, plastic skylights and family rooms are as natural a part of any good house as the front door?...

What does this mean to you as a builder, or an architect, or a mortgage banker? It means that you must get ready to satisfy a highly discriminating public... It means that you are going to be left by the wayside unless you give your customers what the magazines have taught them to want.

On the next six pages, House & Home has collected some typical — not exceptional, but typical — pictures from recent issues of leading consumer magazines... The audience you are dealing with is more than a third of the U.S. — the home-buying third. 88

This interest was not just the product of New York editors, it was also fostered locally. Many modern houses were featured in detailed articles appearing in Houston’s three daily newspapers, the Houston Chronicle, Houston Post, and Houston Press.
In the late 1940s Doris Woolf, writing in the *Houston Chronicle*’s “Woman’s Section,” began profiling modernistic and modern houses in addition to conventional houses in her weekly column on Houston houses. When she stopped writing in mid-1954 she was succeeded by Jean Vaschule and Marjorie Paxson. They stopped writing in late 1957, and were succeeded by Charlotte Millis. She married the Houston architect Charles Tapley in 1959 and started writing under his surname after that date. Charlotte Tapley stopped writing for the *Houston Chronicle* in 1961, but in the latter half of the same year, she wrote a number of articles for the *Houston Post* before she stopped writing all together. After 1961, a number of authors provided one or two articles each on modern houses in the *Houston Chronicle* at increasingly infrequent intervals.

The *Houston Post* did not begin featuring modern houses until 1952, when it inaugurated a new Sunday section called “Texas Living.” Several times a month from 1952 to late 1953, Mary Ellen Preusser (married to the Houston painter, Robert Preusser, a founding member of the Contemporary Arts Museum), wrote an article about a local modern house. After she stopped writing, Helene McNaughton (who commissioned Bolton & Barnstone to design her small modern house built in 1956) and Rosemary Weatherred succeeded her. Both wrote until early 1956. Next was Anna Beth Morris who wrote until the end of 1957. She was replaced by Virginia Trotter (née Lockett) who wrote until late 1960. Ann Minick Criswell wrote several articles in 1961. Afterwards, as at the *Houston Chronicle*, modern houses were featured with less and less regularity and no one author wrote about them.
The pattern of the Houston Press, the smallest daily Houston newspaper in the 1950s, which was bought out by the Houston Chronicle in 1964, was impossible to determine as no complete records of it seem to exist. From isolated clipping in architect’s scrapbooks, it seemed to be roughly similar to the larger newspapers. In 1956 Beverly Maurice and Ann Valentine wrote an article about the Gordon House. It is likely they wrote other articles on modern houses as well. Ann Valentine later wrote a few articles on modern apartments and interiors for the Houston Chronicle in the mid 1960s.

Many modern houses also appeared in the “Real Estate” section of all three newspapers, often with detailed commentary, photographs and drawings though the authors were only rarely named. Of the Real Estate section editors, Bill Rozzele from 1953 to about 1955 and Arnold Rosenfeld (who was also a part-time art critic) from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, both in the Houston Post, featured the largest number of modern projects.

Of the newspaper commentary, Mary Ellen Preusser’s articles were by far the most illuminating. She placed the local examples in national architectural context and displayed a wide-ranging familiarity with modern art and architecture. She often commented on the motives behind the design, hinting at conceptual positions. She was clearly interested in promoting modest modern houses and gave her articles provocative titles like, “Modern Is A Way Of Life.” She described how the homeowners, usually newlyweds, ingeniously stretched their meager finances using modern planning principles to provide surprisingly spacious and comfortable houses. In October 1953 she wrote, “The rapid acceptance of modern architecture in recent years may well predict a future in which good design is
available to everyone regardless of income.” Since economy was of prime importance to
her, it was not surprising that she declined to write the article about the luxurious Neuhaus
House, rather letting her more patrician-minded coworker, Marguerite Johnston write it.
(The only other article Johnston wrote on a modern house in the 1950s was one on her friend,
Mary Ellen Preusser’s house in 1952.) Other writers in the “Women’s Section” of the
newspapers usually commented mostly on interior furnishings, sometimes providing little
more than a detailed inventory of furniture, rather than describing the architectural character
of the house. Charlotte Tapley, though, writing at the end of the decade did come close to
Preusser’s earlier insightfulness.

Two other important local forums for modern architecture in Houston were the
Contemporary Arts Museum Modern House Tours and the Houston Parade of Homes, which
both began in 1952.

The Contemporary Arts Museum was founded in 1948 as the Contemporary Arts Association
by a small group of Houstonians in order to “…support any literary and scientific
undertaking, the maintenance of a library or promotion of painting, music, and other fine
arts.” The original building, designed by MacKie & Kamrath, opened in November 1949
with a party attended by a veritable Who’s Who of the Houston cultural elite, many of whom
“gave into the impulse to play with the modern toys, feel the unusual fabrics and try out all
the odd-shaped chairs and couches”. From its inception there were many innovative
exhibitions, often emphasizing the place of modern art and design in contemporary everyday
life. One example was “Interiors 1952: Beauty Within Reach of Hand and Budget,” held in
December 1951. Organized by Dominique de Menil and Mary J. Marshall (who commissioned Wilson, Morris & Crain to design a fine modern house built in 1955), the theme, according to Mrs. de Menil, was “the best at reasonable prices.” Its inaugural exhibition, “Contemporary Art in the Home,” held in November and December 1949, designed by the artists Frank Dolejska and Robert Preusser, was featured in books and national magazines for its inventive installation.

Based on the success of these exhibitions, it was decided to have a modern house tour to provide the public with the best examples of locally-built modern architecture. The first tour in 1952 featured nine recently built houses designed by a variety of local and nationally known modern architects and was held in conjunction with an exhibition at the museum, “New Directions: Domestic Architecture.” Mary Ellen Preusser commented on the ambitious motives of the tour:

_Houston has been made aware of her industry, her natural resources and beauty and, in some measures, her cultural efforts. Now she is ready to show the world that we have also developed an architecture that typically reflects our climate and the habit-patterns of our living._

Later tours would feature only local architects’ work and usually had only four or five houses. The first tour was seen by 4,000 people during its one day run. The tours were continued until the mid 1960s. Later tours, however, included remodelings of existing
houses or conventional houses with modern interiors. Almost all the modern houses in this essay were open to the public on one of the Modern House Tours.

The Houston Parade of Homes was sponsored by the Houston Homebuilders Association. The HHBA was begun in 1941 in response to the impending wartime cessation of private house building. Local builders "joined forces as a measure of self defense in a fight for their existence," and formed a lobby group that sent representatives to Washington D.C. to get permission to build war related housing developments.98 E. L. Crain was the first president of the association. In postwar years, its emphasis changed from self preservation to promotion:

The organization exercises a responsibility to the industry as well to encourage the development of new products and building techniques. To work toward better methods of home financing. To encourage development and use of new building equipment...Acting in the home builders and home buyers interests in the legislation of our state and nation...

The Houston Home Builders Association believes that home ownership can and should be within reach of every Houston family, that Houston homes should be built in a manner befitting the free enterprise system, that Houston home should be well-designed, well-constructed and well-located in attractive [subdivisions with] recreational, religious, and shopping facilities for all.99
(That they were not entirely successful in their lofty aims is apparent from the briefest survey of any Houston subdivision built today.)

The Parade of Homes was not a local invention, it was first devised by the National Association of Home Builders who copyrighted the idea along with the “Parade of Homes” name. Earlier Parades were held in Dallas, Dayton, Fort Worth, Little Rock, Memphis and Milwaukee. Houston’s Parades, though, averaging 30 houses each, were often the largest in the country, and were held earlier in the year than most, which assured that they were frequently published in national magazines through the 1950s. They were well attended. About 25,000 people saw the first Parade, by the mid 1950s attendance averaged 100,000 people, and by the end of the decade, attendance was nearly 200,000 people. The Houston Parades permitted the house-buying public to see the work of local builders, who each built one or two houses on several blocks of a specially designated street in one of the city’s new subdivisions. Parades mostly occurred in the southeastern and southwestern parts of Houston, although some were held in the northwestern and western sections. The Parades were a media spectacle; television and radio personalities were on hand for the openings. The newspapers usually devoted a lengthy special section profiling each house in the Parade on the opening weekend. Expensive prizes were given away. The most desirable was fully appointed Houston Home Builders Association House. Other prizes included cars, house sites and large appliances. There were also beauty pageants where a Ms. Parade of Homes was chosen.
Prior to 1952 there had been Home Shows in the Sam Houston Coliseum, starting in 1935 and continuing to 1942, produced under the auspices of the Houston Real Estate Board. Houses were also put on display by local builders or such specialized organizations as the Lumberman’s Committee or the Brick Manufacturers Association of Houston, through the 1930s, though it was usually just one or two houses, nowhere near the number shown at one time in the Parade of Homes.¹⁰²

As early as the second Parade of Homes, it was noted that many of the houses produced by local builders had features that allied them with modern architecture. Bill Rozelle toured the Parade of Homes in 1953 and declared:

This time the builders really did it. They went modern. The wooded parade area literally glitters with sparkling expanses of glass and the architectural design hits you hard, giving you the feeling that here’s something different – good...

The parade shows that the time when only the most expensive homes could be built truly good modern is past. It offers the young couple – liking modern but feeling that it is out of reach financially – proof that a good contemporary home can be built in the lower price field.¹⁰³

In an article in Cite magazine in 1984, Mark A. Hewitt examined several Miesian modern houses in Houston and declared they signaled a “small movement in domestic architecture in
a growing southwest city.” Hewitt also noted, but never made explicit the implications of the similarity to conventional houses when he wrote:

*Houston’s modern houses of the 1950s were as close to Tanglewood as they were to Barcelona. The car, privacy, more casual patterns of living and entertaining – the things that House & Garden noticed – were as important as the things that Arts & Architecture noticed.*

That, at one point in time, readers of shelter and interior decorating magazines would be seeing the same designs as the readers of the most vanguard architectural magazines and experiencing the same mostly positive presentation was unusual. To dismiss these modern houses as “superficial” applications of Miesian elements because they were built for the middle class is beside the point.

### 4.2 General Characteristics

In the early 1950s, nearly every house built in a Houston subdivision was labeled “modern.” Compared to the flat-roofed Miesian courtyard houses that one typically associates with “true” modern architecture today, this label may seem absurd. However, when compared to suburban houses built prior to World War II, the application makes perfect sense.

An entirely new aesthetic appeared in Houston at the end of the interwar period and was exemplified in Houston by houses built in Garden Oaks around 1940. It was based on the
exigencies of building large numbers of houses in planned subdivisions, on the desire of house builders for greater economy, and on an increasing predisposition to modernism.

Houston’s two universities, the Rice Institute (Rice University after 1960) and the University of Houston, also played a role. The architecture curriculum of Rice was in the Beaux-Arts tradition, but by the late 1940s, many of the professors who designed buildings had been converted to modernism. The University of Houston was a new institution; its Architecture Department was organized in 1945 and the first class was graduated in 1948. That the majority of the architects who designed this group of modern houses graduated from University of Houston or Rice attests to the strength of their architectural programs. After graduation, almost all of these architects maintained some sort of professional ties with each other. It is interesting to see how the Rice alumni stayed together or worked with graduates of prestigious, mostly eastern schools, such as Harvard, University of Pennsylvania or Yale, while graduates of the more “populist” University of Houston worked with former classmates and graduates of other Texas universities. Their clientele reflected these relative positions of status. Elite clients, like the Crameruses or the Studes, hired architects affiliated with the Rice group while middle class clients, like the Bendits or the Briers, hired architects from the University of Houston group. There was also a definite style associated with each school. The Rice group produced style similar to the interwar work of Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. Vertical wood cladding was typically used on the exterior of their houses to produce taut, buoyant volumes. The Cramerus House by Wilson, Morris & Crain was a good example. Architects in the University of Houston group produced a more advanced style derived from the Miesian courtyard house, especially as interpreted by Philip Johnson and, to
a lesser extent, the Case Study Houses. Defining characteristics were a preference for brick veneer which was used to create massive, solid forms and elegant, diagrammatic floor plans. The 1955 Parade of Homes House by Burdette Keeland and the McCartney House by Neuhaus & Taylor were examples.

This new aesthetic was typified externally by a low, horizontal profile, created in part by the switch from traditional pier and beam foundations to floating concrete slabs. In plan it was seen in the change from separate living rooms (living room, dining room, kitchen) to one room ("family room") with low dividers demarcating separate spaces; the migration of living areas to the rear of the house for privacy coupled with increasingly large areas of glass to let nature "inside;" the popularity of the term "outdoor living" to describe activity on paved patios, usually built adjacent the family room and accessible from early versions of sliding glass doors; the increasing prominence given of car storage and use of carports attached to the front of the house instead of rear-facing garages; and the use of built-in cabinetry and closets to take the place of such traditional storage areas as attics, basements, and garages that were no longer built.

Every one of these elements was incorporated into the classic modern houses of the 1950s. Some new elements were also added: flat roofs; interest in and use of such new technologies as structural steel framing and air-conditioning; extremely refined architectural detailing, coupled with the use of a palette of finish materials weighing heavily toward brick, vertical wood cladding, plywood paneling, terrazzo paving, and prefabricated sliding glass doors; and increasing interest in privacy, expressed in the appearance of courtyard type house plans.
4.3 Flat Roofs

The “flattop” was practically required for admittance to the modern club. Nearly every “true” modern house in Houston had a flat, gravel-covered built up roof (that, more often than not, leaked). If they did not, as in the Hardison House, the roof had a shallow pitch and efforts were made to disguise it. When the Hardison House was photographed, a view of the gable end was always omitted, for example.

Upon reflection, many modern architects could not understand why they would have ever built houses with flat roofs. Lars Bang, who designed the Bendit House of 1952, recalls that, “It was the style, that’s what they taught, that’s what everyone did.”

That the flat roof was taken up without much critical consideration was indicated by the almost complete lack of reference to its existence on modern houses in contemporary literature. When House & Home commented on the flat roof of Burdette Keeland’s 1955 Parade of Homes House, it was notable because it was so rare. Usually, it went without saying that a modern house would have a flat roof.

4.4 Technology

Exposed steel frame houses represented the apogee of 1950s structural technology. Today, steel is synonymous with our image of 1950s modern domestic architecture. No doubt the
extremely well publicized *Arts & Architecture* Case Study House program was largely responsible for this conception. This image was so captivating that, even though only six of the twenty-seven built Case Study Houses had steel frames, the entire program is remembered as being involved with the promotion of steel construction. The influential British critic, Reyner Banham, who was particularly attracted to the Case Study Houses, wrote about them many times, most notably in his book, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* of 1971, and in an essay written for the retrospective exhibition, "Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses," of 1989. In both cases he mentioned only steel-framed houses, concentrating on the Eames House, and never once mentioned any of the wood-framed houses. He also indicated that his colleagues were only interested in the steel-framed Case Study Houses.\(^{108}\)

The overwhelming interest in steel-framed modern houses was similar in Houston. Bolton & Barnstone’s (and Houston’s) best publicized house of the 1950s, the Gordon House, was steel-framed. It was featured in at least thirteen magazine articles, eight newspaper articles, and four books or catalogs. The Gordon House was an anomaly for Bolton & Barnstone. They only designed three other significant steel-framed houses, the Demoustier House of 1955 and two larger houses built in 1960, the Owsley House and the Winterbotham House. The remainder of their prodigious output consisted of wood-framed houses. By 1960 Bolton & Barnstone, along with every other local modern architect, realized that steel-frame construction was only viable for houses with large budgets. Out of the twenty-four designs in this group of Houston houses, only five had steel frames. Others had steel members in prominent positions to give the look of steel-frame construction without actually employing
it. The Bendit House, with its numerous lally columns, looked like the well known steel-framed 1950 Case Study House by Raphael Soriano, though its walls were actually framed with wood studs.

The exposed steel frame in Houston modern houses was used to achieve a certain look rather than for structural or economic purposes. The I-beams that looked so good in photographs were usually over-designed for the structural needs of a one-story house. The cost of steel framing in Houston was almost prohibitive. The 1955 Parade of Homes House was so expensive that Burdette Keeland refused to release its cost to the public, and he later quipped that it was almost the last house he ever designed because it took so long to sell that it almost bankrupted him. The steel-framed Gordon House cost $49,553 while the wood-framed McCartney House by Neuhaus & Taylor, which was the same size, cost $32,334. Its cost also reflected the very short period of time when smaller steel frame houses were built in Houston, from 1955 to 1957.

The use of exposed steel in modern Houston houses was contradictory. Heavy steel members with solid brick infill were used for courtyard type houses derived from Mies’s designs of the 1930s, which were not intended to be framed in steel. The use of solid, opaque materials within a steel frame negated its logical structural purpose, which was to permit large unencumbered openings that could be filled with lightweight, non-structural materials. Mies used steel framing in a logical way in the Farnsworth House to accommodate giant sheets of glass. Burdette Keeland came closest to achieving this ideal in the 1956 Arnold House addition. There, the master bedroom was raised above the ground
and framed in steel, with an infill of glass and sliding redwood lattice panels. He was able to do this because the Arnold House sat on a secluded four-acre tract and was invisible from the nearest street.

The most interesting steel-framed house was undoubtedly the Swenson House of 1957. A slender, three-story tower with large glassed-in openings, it was unique in the way that it exploited the nature of the steel frame to achieve something almost impossible with a conventional wood-stud structure. Its construction was so unusual that it was described in detail in an article in Texas Architect of 1959:

*The decision to build a "Tower" presented the problem of building a multi-story building at a reasonable cost. The structural solution was to make two 38-foot high steel bents, assembled on the ground and lifted into place. The horizontal steel members were threaded through and cantilevered four feet on each end. The decking is prefabricated concrete plank, cantilevered to make balconies. The structure is fireproofed with gunned lightweight concrete. The columns were gunned solid, with reinforcing at the flanges of the steel to make composite columns.*

There were many examples of less spectacular steel-framed houses in Houston. The first recorded instance was in a demonstration house at 3259 Reba Drive in River Oaks in 1928 built by the Hartwell Iron Works of Houston where the frame was made of steel studs with the same dimensions as wood 2x4s sheathed in plywood and finished with a brick veneer. A second steel-stud framed River Oaks house in the English Manor style, designed by
Charles W. Oliver in 1929 for Charles Hartwell of the Hartwell Iron Works, still stands at 2454 Pine Valley Drive.\textsuperscript{111} In 1934, Maurice J. Sullivan designed two very small steel-stud-framed houses for J S. Cullinan's (the founder of Texaco) limited dividend suburban resettlement subdivision, Nira Park on Market Street Road, that was never fully developed. These houses were covered with stucco and had Spanish tile roofs.\textsuperscript{112} In 1936 the Houston architect Cameron Fairchild designed a traditional styled house for himself at 3044 San Felipe Road framed in steel using Stran-Steel which was produced by the National Steel Corporation of Detroit. The Fairchild House was the first of a number of houses in Houston to be framed with Stran-Steel and its construction was a media spectacle. There were weekly photographs of its progress in the local newspapers and, when completed, the public was invited to tour the house. The Fairchild House was originally designed to be framed in wood but the architect decided to switch to steel after he was impressed by Stran-Steel, which he saw at the 1935 Houston Home Show\textsuperscript{113} In 1955, the architect, builder and developer Robert Clemens designed nine prefabricated steel-framed houses that were built by the J & B Manufacturing Company of Houston on Pine Creek Court in the Meadowcreek Village subdivision. He designed one other prefabricated steel-framed house in conjunction with Parents' magazine that was built in Meyerland for the 1955 Parade of Houses. These steel-framed houses looked like his other ranch houses designed for local builders. The frames of these houses were panels made of welded steel pipes that were bolted together on site.\textsuperscript{114}

None of these houses expressed their steel structure architecturally. Upon completion, they appeared exactly the same as their conventionally framed counterparts. Indeed, without construction photographs, it is hard to believe that they were steel framed at all. Steel was
used for utilitarian reasons in these houses. Greater strength, economy, and speed of construction were the rationale rather than aesthetics, as in the modernist examples. In the modern houses, where steel-frame construction was fetishized, architects were forced to rely on excessive amounts of labor and time to achieve a high quality finish, while the traditional, architects working with thin gauge steel studs that could be nailed or screwed together, required minimal amounts of additional specialized labor and were able to erect their houses much faster at a lower cost.

Just as the plan type (the courtyard house) of Houston's modern houses of the 1950s was derived from Mies, so was the architectural treatment of the steel members. Steel members had a massive appearance and joints were welded rather than bolted, as in the Farnsworth House. This was particularly apparent in the bathroom of the 1955 Parade of Homes House, where the single H-shaped column and I-beam dominated the tiny space. The column and beam were detailed so that the flanges of the column and beam intersected to give the impression that they were one piece of steel. In the joints of the Case Study Houses each member remained visually separate to emphasize a simpler, kit-of-parts approach to design. Even the two steel-framed houses by William R. Jenkins, the second Jenkins House of 1956 and the Brier House of 1957, which were closest in spirit to the steel-framed Case Study Houses had a massiveness to them that set them apart from their California counterparts.

The steel frame of the Houston houses was invariably painted white, like the Farnsworth House, while the steel of the Case Study Houses was almost always black. Mies' one
building in Houston, Cullinan Hall at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, originally had white painted steel members. Peter Papadimitriou wrote of this choice:

*The unusual decision to paint all the exposed steel white grew out of a building committee conviction that it would facilitate convincing the trustees that Mies' "classical" work was appropriate as an addition to the existing [classical] building.*

The design of Cullinan Hall was presented to the building committee (which included local modern architects Preston M. Bolton, Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr., and Anderson Todd) in 1954, the year before the first heavy steel framed houses appeared in Houston. Mies' design had an enormous impact on Houston modern architects. In 1965 Howard Barnstone, S. I. Morris, and Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr. declared Cullinan Hall to be Houston's greatest building, despite the fact that by then the dominance of Miesian architecture was on the wane. It is tempting to think on how their experience with Cullinan Hall may have affected their subsequent "classical" steel-framed projects.

Banham noted that the use of steel in the Case Study Houses represented the antithesis of classicism:

*...steel is used in a very unmonumental manner, as compared with Mies's and Johnson's work back East. The metal sections are inclined to be skinny and they are not treated as being of any great visual consequence in themselves...This kind of*
work reveals again the absence of that heroic-style creative angst of the European-based modern movement, and gives and improvisatory air to the whole fabric.\textsuperscript{118}

In contrast, commentary on the Houston houses often focused on their monumental, “classical” character. The Gordon House was perhaps the best example. \textit{Architectural Record} noted in 1956:

\begin{quote}
As a word, “elegance” is too often indiscriminately used – and currently somewhat out of favor – but it represents, as no other, a quality that many privately yearn for in their homes. And it is a quality sometimes bemoaned as singularly lacking these days.
\end{quote}

\textit{This Houston, Texas, home for Mr. and Mrs. Gerald S. Gordon is an excellent answer to that argument. It is very much in the “grand manner,” translated into a completely modern idiom.}\textsuperscript{119}

In \textit{House & Garden} the same qualities were described:

\begin{quote}
One of the most persistent forms in contemporary architecture is the classic rectangle. Its advantages are indeed compelling. Within its simple planes, the designer can achieve almost infinite aesthetic variety – and do it economically. Recently, the two part contemporary house has emerged as a significant trend in the U.S., and the fine rectilinear Houston home shown here offers strong arguments in its
favor. Recipient of a special mention in H&G’s 1957 Architectural Awards, it was cited by the jury for its “sparkling and sophisticated interior.” The jury felt it was the most notable of the “formal, disciplined” entries.¹²⁰

It was therefore ironic that Howard Barnstone later insisted he derived his “classical” Gordon House from the “whimsical” Eames House.¹²¹ This desire on the part of Houston architects and, perhaps, more importantly, their clients, for monumentality and classicism was indicative of modernism’s place in the upper echelons of Houston society despite what the critics might have said about it being “for the people.”

The wood version of heavy steel framing, post and beam, was even rarer in Houston houses. This might be because the architects who used post and beam construction most often, David Brooks & Edward Brooks, William N. Floyd and George Pierce – Abel B. Pierce, received relatively little publicity. Their houses were never fully featured in national magazines and only a few photographs and almost no drawings remain of them. Not one of the several post and beam houses designed by George Pierce – Abel B. Pierce appeared in a national magazine, even though their commercial and educational buildings received extensive coverage. There were a few isolated photographs of post and beam houses by David Brooks & Edward Brooks and William N. Floyd in national magazines, usually in House & Home articles about the Parade of Homes. The only other local modern architect to use post and beam framing was Howard Barnstone. He designed one project, the Mermel House of 1962, that was partly framed with heavy timbers and was the best published example of this structural genre in Houston.
Life as we know it in Houston would not be possible without another product of modern engineering: air-conditioning. The first recorded installation of an air conditioning system in Houston was in the Second National Bank Building in 1923. Surprisingly, it took a while for it to catch on. Between 1923 and 1933 there were only thirty units installed throughout the entire city. However, with the advent of more reliable compressors borrowed from the automotive industry and the introduction of a superior refrigerant, Freon, installations in 1934 alone totaled 33 units, more than in the entire previous ten years. The earliest residential uses of air-conditioning seem to have been in the J. Robert Neal House of 1933 and the remodeling of the Harry C. Wiess House of 1934 by John. F. Staub. By 1937 most of all new air-conditioning installations in Houston were for residential use, and Jack Fleming of Houston Lighting and Power observed, “air-conditioning was being bought for personal comfort applications at a price which was low enough to make it practical for such users.” Installations occurred at such a rapid pace that by 1949 Houston had more tons of air-conditioning per capita than any other U.S. city, a distinction it held through the 1950s and early 1960s. In 1953 approximately five percent of all Houston houses were air-conditioned; by 1963 the figure had risen to just under half and most new moderately priced houses came equipped with it.

At first the architectural effects of air-conditioning were minimal. They appeared principally in the form of larger ducts and mechanical rooms. Some modern houses had these duct in soffits below the line of the ceiling, as in the 1955 Parade of Homes House. The majority had ducts and mechanical rooms concealed from view. Occasionally smaller windows were
used, but this occurred primarily in commercial buildings. Until the late 1950s air conditioners needed large cooling towers and these slatted wooden structures soon started sprouting in suburban backyards. By the early 1960s though, cooling towers were a thing of the past. A few other changes occurred, such as adding insulation in wall construction to better trap cool air. On the whole the first air-conditioned modern houses looked very much like their un-air-conditioned neighbors. In fact, many early air-conditioned houses were designed for passive cooling in case the owners decided not to use it. The Baker House designed by C. Herbert Cowell & Hugo. V. Neuhaus, Jr. of 1949 was a good example. Mary Ellen Preusser, writing about the house in 1952, noted “Mr. Baker, a native Texan, was insistent that there be no window areas to catch the glare of the afternoon sun – an idea other builders might keep in mind.” The result is that there were numerous overhangs and projections, elements that would not appear in any of Neuhaus’s subsequent projects.

By the mid 1950s all timidity with regards to the efficacy or cost of air-conditioning was thrown to the wind. The effect of air-conditioning on the design of houses was profound. Everyone of the houses in this group was air-conditioned and most of the designs, relying on poorly ventilated courtyards and unshaded glass walls, would have been unlivable in Houston’s climate without it. In 1963 Howard Barnstone made one of the few published comments on the effect of air-conditioning on modern architecture in Houston:

_The regionalism or vernacular buildings in Texas were all designed to catch the breeze in the summer with wide open porches and for small, easy to heat interiors during the short winter months. Today with the climate-controlled interiors and our_
continued desire to wear suit jackets no matter what the weather, none of this makes much sense. I find nothing immoral in a complete change of architecture once you control the interior temperature efficiently.128

This sentiment was evidently shared by most of the other architects. Some, like George Pierce – Abel B. Pierce and David Brooks & Edward Brooks, tried to make peace with the climate on a regular basis. The Pierce House of 1955, the Carroll House of 1957 and the Solomon House of 1956 had nearly as much area devoted to screened porches as to enclosed living areas. A few others, such as Lars Bang, used extensive cantilevered overhangs to shade glass walls, even when it was no longer in vogue. Bang recalled that he never designed a modern house without including at least a four foot overhang.129 Solar screens, which were used regularly by Pierre Koenig, never seemed to interest modern Houston architects, who became increasingly unwilling to dilute the purity of their designs during the course of the 1950s.

4.5 Finish Materials

Although the houses in this group had different types of structure, they all shared a similar palette of finish materials. It was continually emphasized that these were natural materials requiring little maintenance (in contrast to steel which needed to be painted nearly every year in Houston’s humid climate).
For the exterior cladding, a mixed blend of salmon-colored brick was most popular. Ever since it was used for the first buildings of Rice University, brick of this particular color was used, especially by modernists, as the prestige cladding material of choice. The next most popular cladding was vertical redwood siding. Modernists seemed to like it because it did not have to be painted and could weather naturally to a silver gray color.

Inside, floors were usually of white polished terrazzo, if the owners could afford it. Otherwise they were covered with wall to wall carpeting. Occasionally other materials, such as slate, Mexican clay tiles or light colored linoleum was used. Interior walls tended to be covered plywood paneling; light brown mahogany was the most popular veneer. Exposed brick, sometimes painted white, was also common. This is not to say the old standby, gypsum board was not used. But one would hardly know it since it appeared in so few photographs.

Windows seemed to alternate between steel-framed sliding glass doors made by one of two companies, Arcadia or Steelbilt, or narrow high set clerestory-type windows. Regular sliding sash windows were almost never used.

Many of these materials were taken up by local builders by the late 1950s. When the 1959 Parade of Homes was featured in a *House & Home* article, seven trends were noted:

*Trend No. 1: More houses are wrapped around outdoor living...*
Trend No. 2: More grillwork is used on the outside...

Trend No. 3: More brick is used on the inside...

Trend No. 4: More indoor surfaces look hand worked...

Trend No. 5: More space dividers are used in more ways...

Trend No. 6: More built-in furniture is used everywhere...

Trend No. 7: More plywood is used to finish walls...

*House & Home* might have just as well have been talking about modern houses, these trends in conventional houses were so similar.

4.6 Privacy

The owners of modern houses in Houston seemed to have had an overwhelming desire for privacy. Provisions for privacy, unlike the existence of the ubiquitous flat roof, were often noted in contemporary literature, which would seem to indicate that it was seen as something of a novelty, unique to modern houses.
Notions of domestic privacy in Houston on a large scale first seemed to appear in the elite private street subdivisions that emulated the private places of St. Louis of the early 1900s. These subdivisions (Courtlandt Place of 1908 is the best example) had gates to close the street from the rest of the city. However, they were anomalous. Most of the other subdivisions platted before the 1920s were open grids. It was not until the 1920s that privacy became a defining characteristic of new Houston subdivisions. Privacy in these garden subdivisions was almost always linked with the idea of seclusion in a natural setting, away from the city. Advertisements for River Oaks, for example, compared the subdivision to a walled medieval town where the “wall” of restrictive covenants and a closed street plan kept the modern city at bay. Another advertisement for River Oaks made the link between the restrictive covenant and privacy more explicit:

_Today, in River Oaks, happy privacy... is yours at moderate cost. For in River Oaks you are forever protected against harassing encroachments. forever assured that your home environment will be what you want it to be._

These provisions implied a physical removal from the city, which was viewed as chaotic and noisy to a quiet, clean and green natural setting. Again, an advertisement for River Oaks makes this clear:

_The tumult and shouting dies when you pass into peaceful River Oaks. You leave the noise, rush and turmoil – and smoke – of the city behind. You are in the midst of calm and peace and natural beauty. Drives and boulevards are wider, houses further_
back, with more air and sunlight, all unsightly things seem to have disappeared, and
green lawns. friendly trees, colorful gardens and inviting homes are everywhere
around you.¹³³

The garden and park imagery and early photographs showing landscaped subdivision streets
without houses (the ultimate in privacy, no neighbors at all) further reinforced the idea.

It is therefore not surprising that modern houses built in River Oaks would reflect this built-in
desire for privacy by having some of the most extreme measures for ensuring it. The
finest modern houses in River Oaks were built along Buffalo Bayou, which forms its
northern boundary. They took advantage of the unusual dense woodland landscape to keep
prying eyes at bay. Since Houston had no other natural features, the bayous took on a special
significance. They were the only places in the city where such picturesque “natural” features
as topographic variety and watercourses existed in conjunction with dense vegetation.
Another appealing aspect of bayou sites was the decorative effects that could be achieved
when a backdrop of nature with its variety of colors and textures was seen through a glass
wall. That this effect could only be achieved on heavily wooded, and hence expensive sites,
no doubt enhanced its appeal to status-minded clients. The architectural strategy used again
and again in such settings was to have glass walls face the bayou side and solid walls face the
street side of the property. When windows were absolutely necessary on the street side, the
solid wall was pulled forward from the body of the house to create a courtyard.
In Mary Ellen Preusser’s article on the Stude House on Tiel Way, one of the most secluded streets in River Oaks, she stressed the way that house seemed removed from the urban environment and immersed in nature:

*It is this return to the forgotten emphasis on the beauty all about us that rivets our attention on this home. For all of its interesting features, the most outstanding is its obvious awareness of nature and her continued serenity in our modern, chaotic world.*

The Marshall House, built on another of River Oaks’ most removed sections, the northernmost stretch of Willowick Road, was described in a comparable manner:

*The exposed front side of the house is austere and has perhaps a certain townhouse quality, while the view from the house to the north leaves an impression of remoteness and suspension in nature.*

Howard Barnstone used similar language to describe the Hardison House built in the heavily wooded Memorial section of Houston:

*We believe that this home creates an image with its walled gardens, terraces, lighting and a plan that evokes a world of feeling that is, indeed, and escape from the machine world – but not an escape into the past.*
It is interesting to see how so many of the great modern houses in Houston of the first part of the 1950s were built on heavily wooded sites: the Arnold, Cramerus, Demoustier, Hardison, Marshall, Pierce, and Stude houses. By 1955 the idea that a modern house had to have some sort of view toward a backdrop of greenery was codified. This led to a crisis in the design of houses in such barren subdivisions as Tanglewood and Meyerland. The lack of proper natural setting required that the house close in on itself and provide its own views to green settings with courtyards on all sides, not just the front. This desire to shut off the house from its neighbors was also reflected in the way that subdivision planners during this period systematically removed links to external thoroughfares and, as the decade progressed, broke links between local streets as well, until the subdivision street plans were completely insulated. That owners of conventional houses, supposedly more neighborly because they had windows facing the street, were complicit in this was demonstrated by the near universal use of Venetian blinds to block views in and out of their picture windows.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that it was in the most banal of the 1950s subdivisions that the most extreme examples of modern residential design were built. It is impossible to imagine the 1955 Parade of Homes House or Neuhaus & Taylor's 1957 Electri-Living Home House in Tanglewilde being built in any other type of location. By the late 1950s this reaction to the suburban environment had become so strong that modern houses began to take on a fortified aspect. The Randolph House of 1960 by Larson & Wingfield was good example. Its thick brick piers with vertical board infill gave it the look of a fort on the frontier of the wild west.
By the early 1960s there was a sense of animosity on the part of the architects toward this environment. Ralph A. Anderson, Jr. covered the front wall of his courtyard house of 1960 with decorative wood battens, which gave it the distinctly unfriendly look of a miniature Renaissance castle. Even though he built his house in a 1920s subdivision, the convention of the courtyard house had become so ingrained that he was not prepared to design in any other way. He expressed irritation at what conventional builders were producing for subdivision residents (as well as at the fact that the inhabitants seemed happy without modern architecture):

*You never know what some boob is going to build across the street from you...*

*All that phony quaintness, That's right, the Olde English story and a half. The standard house had a front parlor no one goes in, filled with furniture no one uses. Then a playroom, where everyone watches television. It's a messy room that is barry looking. Have a living room and live in it.*

*The money people are perpetuating this kind of house – forcing people into a mold, like this is the best they can have.*

The complete rejection of the subdivision by modern Houston architects was perhaps best expressed in Preston M. Bolton’s scheme for a community of row houses at 5000 Longmont Drive built in Houston’s quintessential postwar subdivision, Tanglewood. This project was

*The stimulus for the project was an attempt to move away from the sort of stereotyped subdivision planning that bunched houses together on lots 10 feet apart – without using the space. It also was planned to give the city dweller privacy.*

*In Mr. Bolton’s development, you don’t even have to see your neighbors...*  

The nearby Waddill House built at 5528 Holly Springs Drive in 1956, when Bolton was still a partner with Howard Barnstone, was perhaps the prototype for Bolton’s later houses at 5000 Longmont Drive, which were also one-story brick courtyard houses. They were described by Bolton who said, “Basically the architecture of the houses is in the school of Mies van der Rohe...But we have softened it with soft colors and traditional accents.”

4.7 Rejection

The increasingly extreme designs of the later half of the 1950s marked the beginning of the end of modernism as a viable option for subdivision living. These designs made clear the attitude of modern architects in Houston who began to perceive the suburbs to be inhospitable to anything that was nonconformist. This retreat into a hermetic formalism was demonstrated by the growing refusal of some modern Houston architects to compromise the purity of their designs, much to the dismay of suburbanites who wanted something more
responsive. Later designs by Neuhaus & Taylor were especially diagrammatic in nature and it was almost impossible to imagine a typical middle class family living in them. The reaction to this in conventional circles was clear by the early 1960s. In 1961 the Houston Parade of Homes had no identifiably modern or contemporary houses for the first time in its history. One of the builders who participated, Leo McConnell, was interviewed and it was observed:

*Style might suffer a little. There's not a contemporary house in the 1961 Parade of Homes. But neither are their any houses with swimming pools in the middle of the dining rooms, or ones that resemble a one-story version of a 15th century castle.*

*Colonial styling leads the pack, and French town houses with mansard roofs are coming into a new wave of popularity. The typical Texas ranch house is still with us. but fading fast. And if the Parade can be used as a yardstick, Houstonians will be seeing many more houses with far-off influences such as Spanish, Tahitian, or Polynesian.*

*Why no contemporary? “The public is afraid of contemporary,” says McConnell. “they've seen too many bad contemporary houses with weird floor plans and equally weird exteriors. It just doesn't pay to build them. Loan companies are afraid of them. They do well in other parts of the country. but not in Houston.”*"
Most of the architects who designed modern houses in the 1950s ceased to do so in the early 1960s because it was not profitable and, in part, because there was also a sense of hopelessness that the modern architecture they preferred would ever really be accepted by the public. Some architects were also bored with Miesian architecture. In 1961 Burdette Keeland said, "I have practiced in the Miesian vein, and I’ve grown to fear it’s a bit strict."\textsuperscript{141}

Those who continued to do residential work in the 1960s did so for an increasingly elite clientele. The custom design and high quality detailing necessary for a good modern house became steadily more expensive until it was only possible for these architects to design with very large budgets, leaving the middle class to buy whatever the local builders were selling. In 1962, Howard Barnstone, who was by then designing fewer and fewer moderately priced houses, observed:

\begin{quote}
All the really great homes built today are contemporary in design.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Barnstone...feels on the other hand that it is very difficult to come up with a good design for a small contemporary house.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
It's tragic in a way...We architects, when we're fresh out of school, know that it can be done. But it rarely happens.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Why not? It involves a lot of hard work and time that brings a small commission. We have to make a living, too.
\end{quote}
If a low price contemporary home does turn out well, it has to be a labor of love for the architect. For that reason, I think it's best, if you're very limited on the amount you can pay for a house, to get a young architect just out of school.

He still knows he can do it.\textsuperscript{142}

Other modern architects, such as Preston M. Bolton, who continued to do residential work took a different course and began to remove the elements that made their houses modern. This was to accommodate clients demanding traditional architecture. Bolton's houses at 5000 Longmont Drive were originally to have no applied decorations according to early drawings by Howard Barnstone appearing in local newspapers. However, as they were built, the houses acquired strong references to vernacular Mexican architecture with their numerous iron grills over windows, brick arches and heavily carved wood doors.

Such a compromise between modernism and tradition was seen early on in the interiors of modern houses in Houston, the place where a client could easily make changes once the house was built. Clients who wanted to appear progressive, but not turn their back on tradition and their expensive antiques, seemed to have few ideological qualms about mixing modern architecture and traditional interior decorating. This conflicting, simultaneous acceptance and rejection of modernism existed from the time that Miesian architecture first appeared in Houston. In 1950, the finest Miesian house in the city, the Neuhaus House, was
furnished with an eclectic collection of traditional and modern furniture. The highly influential Menil House of 1951 was also eclectically furnished.

Some well known modest modern houses had modern furniture, such as the 1955 Parade of Homes House, the Gordon House and the second Jenkins House. But the majority had traditional furnishings. It is interesting to note that both the 1955 Parade of Homes House and the Gordon House were eventually equipped with traditional furniture several years after their initial publication in the national press. Houses by Wilson, Morris & Crain, such as the Cramerus House and the Marshall House, were the most extreme examples of the contrast between modern architecture and antique furniture. In fact, modern architecture was sometimes argued (negatively) because “Homes of contemporary design are one of the best backgrounds for antiques because the house itself generally lacks architectural interest and ornamentation.”143
5 Conclusion

The modern houses built in Houston's suburbs for middle class clients in the 1950s which seemed so suddenly to appear out of nowhere were, in fact, forecast in an ideological reversal visible in the American architectural press in the late 1930s. At this time modernist functionalist rhetoric was appropriated for the discussion of traditionally designed houses built in Houston. This reversal was first seen in the description of large houses in elite subdivisions, formerly interpreted in terms of regionalism. Shortly thereafter, functionalist rhetoric was also used to describe smaller houses built in moderate-income subdivisions. The use of this modernist rhetoric coincided with the way Houston chose to imagine and represent itself, no longer as part of the Deep South, but as a forward-looking "southwestern" city.

Houston's urban environment was drastically changing in the postwar period. An increasing number of extremely large, restricted subdivisions were built on the periphery of the city, a zone only recently made accessible through the widespread use of individually owned automobiles. The urbanism implicit in these subdivisions was based on notions of exclusion and privacy. These were achieved by the use of restrictive covenants and closed street plans. Restrictive covenants were first seen in Houston in elite subdivisions of the early 1900s; by the 1910s they were common in moderately priced subdivisions as well. Restrictive covenants were the only means of legally regulating the uses of property in Houston, a city without zoning. The street plans of large postwar subdivisions were increasingly insulated from the urban street grid by clipping links to external thoroughfares. This was justified in terms of aesthetics, economy and safety. In 1934 the Federal Housing Administration was
established to provide indirect federal aid to the house building industry through mortgage insurance. To receive FHA insurance, FHA requirements had to be met. Every one of these requirements was derived from practices already common in many Houston subdivisions. Thus the FHA served to codify the planning of the modern postwar subdivision on a grand scale.

By 1950, a modernist conceptual framework was firmly in place to discuss all houses built in Houston along with a new urban environment consisting of large, privately developed subdivisions. Both these elements informed a group of extremely stylish modern houses built for middle class clients. These modern houses were represented in the local and national press as a "natural," modern "vernacular" to challenge the supremacy of conventional builder houses as the preferred choice of Houston suburbanites. In many respects similar to their conventional counterparts, these modern houses differed in their use of flat roofs, the architectural expression of new technologies, finish materials and concern for privacy. The concern for privacy subsumed all other interests and led to a crisis in design whereby modern houses in Houston became increasingly extreme and diagrammatic by the end of the 1950s. Ultimately, the move towards an unresponsive formalism, desire on the part of the architects to make more money and boredom with the prevailing Miesian architectural style caused an end to this modern project of producing an architectural vernacular for the suburbs. One is tempted to add another explanation: during the course of the 1950s, suburbanites were increasingly reluctant to confront the problematic urban implications of their subdivisions so explicit in these modern houses.


4 “Mr. Dow Hamm, Owner.” *House & Garden*. 76 (November 1939). Section II, 17.


18 “Six Small Houses In Texas: Built For $4,400.” *Architectural Record*. 91 (June 1942). 53.


55 “Since The Day Of The Feudal Lord.” Houston Gargoyle. 2 (5 May 1929). Inside front cover.


60 Moore, John E. “Houston Tops All U.S. Cities With Paving.” Houston Post. Sunday, 4 January 1953. Section 4, pages 1, 2.


91 Johnston, Marguerite. "As Personal As A Toothbrush, This Young Couple Built Their Own Prepaid Castle." *Houston Post*. Sunday, 27 January 1952. Texas Living Section, pages 24, 25.


102 "Today's Castles." Houston. 10 (March 1939). 8, 22, 29.


111 “Steel-Frame Homes May Be Seen Sunday.” *Houston Post-Dispatch.* Sunday Morning, 13 January 1929. Real Estate – Building – Classified Section, page 2.


114 “Can This Simplified Steel Frame Compete With A Wood Frame?” *House & Home.* 7 (June 1955). 138-145.


135 "CAA Offers You A Look At Five Fascinating Houses." *River Oaks Times*. Friday, 11 April, 1958. 11.


A. Catalog of Houses

Note: Houses and published citations are arranged chronologically.

1952  Bendit House
      Stude House
1953  Arnold House
1954  Hardison House
      Cramerus House
1955  Demoustier House
      Gordon House
      1955 Parade Of Homes House
      Pierce House
      Watson House
      Marshall House
1956  Waddill House
      Solomon House
      Second Jenkins House
      Arnold House addition
      McCartney House
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>House Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Brier House</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electri-Living Home House</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Carroll House</td>
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<td>Swenson House</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Randolph House</td>
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<td>Anderson House</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>Mermel House</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Safford House</td>
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1952

Lars Bang

Bendit House

4111 Drummond Street, Ayrshire

2,700 square feet

$55,000

This house, built in newly developed Ayrshire in southwest Houston, was designed for Louis C. Bendit and his wife, Bernadene. Bendit was Bang’s partner in a construction business, B&B Enterprises, that lasted from late 1952 to 1954. Before and after he worked with Bang, he was sales manager for the Construction Machinery Company. The Bendits only lived in the house for about two years. In 1955 Mrs. Bendit, an enormously fat woman, died on the operating table during a back operation. and Mr. Bendit moved shortly after because he could not bear to live in a house that reminded him of such tragedy.

Sam and Marjorie Kamin next lived in the house, and it was under his name that the house was featured in the Contemporary Arts Museum Modern House Tour VI in 1957. Mr. Kamin worked for the Uptown Furniture Company. The Kamins had one son, Mervin (15)¹

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


1952

Cowell & Neuhaus

Stude House

56 Tiel Way, River Oaks

(extensively altered)

1,750 square feet

$24,424

Henry W. Stude and his wife, Jane Talbot commissioned this as a retirement home. Mr. Stude was a real estate developer and ran the family business, the Texas Baking
Company. In 1930 they moved to Chicago were Stude ran the Purity Baking Company leaving a traditional style house built for them in 1924 by Briscoe & Dixon. They returned to Houston in 1949 upon Stude’s retirement. Mr. Stude seemed to have died shortly after the house was built because he was not listed in the city directory after 1953 and in a *Houston Post* article of 1952 about the house he was not mentioned. Mrs. Stude moved away or died soon after as well.

When the house was featured in *House & Garden* in January 1954 it was owned by Louis and Louise Stevenson. Mr. Stevenson was a partner in the firm Houstoun, Stevenson & Cummings; by 1960 he was also chairman of the board of the Mortgage Investment Corporation.

**MAGAZINES**


**NEWSPAPERS**
“Contemporary Arts Museum To Sponsor Tour Of Nine Modern Houston Homes.”


1953

Burdette Keeland

Arnold House

5006 San Felipe Road, private property

(demolished)

1,300 square feet

$13,000

Gilbert and June Arnold commissioned this house. Mr. Arnold was an automobile underwriter for the American General Insurance Company. At the time, June Arnold was a homemaker. Later she divorced her husband, co-founded a feminist press in Vermont, Daughters, Inc., and gained fame as a critically acclaimed novelist. They had two small children, Kate and Berta.
From the beginning they planned to enlarge the house. Burdette Keeland designed the partially steel framed addition built in 1956. By 1958, neither the Arnolds, nor the address, 5006 San Felipe Road, was listed in the city directory. It was likely at this time that the house was demolished.

Photographs and drawings. Margie Keeland.

NEWSPAPERS


1954

Bolton & Barnstone

Hardison House

233 Merrie Way, Shadowood

(extensively altered)

2,100 square feet

cost unknown
Richard M. Hardison owned the Hardison Landscaping Company. His wife was named Anna. They had one son and one daughter.

Photographs and drawings. P. M. Bolton Associates.

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


1954

Wilson, Morris & Crain

Cramerus House

250 Pine Hollow Lane, Pine Hollow

3,400 square feet

cost unknown

Pieter A. Cramerus and his wife, Joanne, commissioned this house. Cramerus was vice president of Air Control Associates and the Dutch consul to the State of Texas. In 1955 they had three children, Pieter (8), Maryke (6) and Joanne (5).³

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


1955

Bolton & Barnstone

Demoustier House

608 Little John Lane, Sherwood Forest

(demolished)

3,600 square feet
Marc Demoustier and his wife, Germaling first lived in this house. Mr. Demoustier was bookkeeper for the Schlumberger Well Surveying Corporation. They had five children and a live-in servant. The Demoustiers only lived in the house for three years; in 1958 he was transferred to Venezuela.

Henry J. David, and his wife, Grace, next lived in the house. Mr. David, "engaged in the drilling and production business," was president of the Milwhite Mud Sales Company.

Slides. Margie Keeland.

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


1955

Bolton & Barnstone

Gordon House

2307 Bluebonnet Boulevard, Braeswood

(extensively altered)

2,700 square feet

$49,553

Gerald S. Gordon and his wife, Lillian were the original owners of the house. Mr. Gordon was a self employed attorney. In 1956 the Gordons had two daughters, Stephanie (13) and Leslie (10).\(^5\)
Photographs. P. M. Bolton Associates.

Photographs. Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


BOOKS AND CATALOGS


1955
Burdette Keeland
1955 Parade of Homes House, Meyerland
5146 Jackwood Street
1,400 square feet
cost unknown

Since the house was built on speculation there was no specific client, but it was intended for a family with two children. Gordon D. Watson, the first owner, was a bachelor. Watson was director of personnel relations for the Schlumberger Well Surveying Corporation. He lived in the house until 1962.
The next owner was a single woman, Agnes B. Danvers. She worked for a decorating store called the Gallery. In 1964 she was listed as working for the Maurice Pincoff Company. She may have been the owner when the house was published in 1962 in *Better Homes & Gardens* with traditional furnishings.

Photographs and drawings. Margie Keeland.

**MAGAZINES**


NEWSPAPERS


BOOKS AND CATALOGS


1955

George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce

Pierce House

5211 Greentree Road, Bayou Glen

(extensively altered)

1,800 square feet
cost unknown

George F. Pierce, Jr. and his wife, Betty, were the first owners of the house. Mr. Pierce was a founding partner in the architecture firm, George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce. In 1955 the Pierces had two children, Ann Louise (12) and George III (9)\(^6\)

Slides. Pierce, Goodwin, Alexander & Linville, Inc.

NEWSPAPERS


1955

Harwood Taylor

Watson House

6243 Olympia Drive, Briargrove

1,900 square feet

cost unknown
John T. and Nancy G. Watson commissioned this house. Mr. Watson was vice president of Watson Cushman Motors of Texas, Inc. By 1961 he was president of the Watson Distributing Company. The Watsons had two young children.

MAGAZINES


1955

Wilson. Morris & Crain

Marshall House

3700 Willowick Road, River Oaks

3,200 square feet

cost unknown
Whitfield H. and Mary J. Marshall commissioned this house. Mr. Marshall was an attorney at the prominent Houston firm, Fulbright, Crooker, Freeman, Bates & Jawarski. The Marshalls had one teenage daughter, Diane. 7

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


“CAA Offers You A Look At Five Fascinating Houses.” *River Oaks Times.* Friday, 11 April, 1958. 11.

1956

Bolton & Barnstone

Waddill House, Tanglewood

5528 Holly Springs Drive

3,600 square feet

cost unknown

Gregg C. Wadill, Jr. was an accountant in the firm Phillips, Sheffield, Hopson, Lewis & Luther. His wife, Jane, was a painter who specialized in portraits. They had one child.

Photographs and drawings. P. M. Bolton Associates.

NEPAPERS


Section I, page 3.


1956

David Brooks & Edward Brooks

Solomon House

3615 South Braeswood Boulevard, Braes Manor

2,200 square feet

$45,000 (including property)

Dr. Bernard M. Solomon and his wife, Sylvia commissioned this house. Dr. Solomon was a dentist. The Solomons had two children in 1957, Shari (7) and Mitchell (3 ½). 8

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS

Section J, page 5.

Morris, Anna Beth. “Family Living Theme Of Solomon House.” *Houston Post*.

Wednesday, 10 April 1957. Section 2, page 1.

1956

William R. Jenkins

Second Jenkins House

10911 Willowisp Drive, Willow Bend

1,900 square feet

cost unknown

William R Jenkins was head of his own architectural office. In 1957, William and his wife, Mary, had two daughters, Cassandra (5) and Melena (1 ½).⁹

The Jenkins only lived in the house for two years; in 1958 Irl R. and Jo A. Helms bought the house. Mr. Helms was an associate in the firm Butler, Binion, Rice & Cook. It was under the Helms’ name that the house appeared in the exhibition, *10 Years Of Houston Architecture* of 1959.

Photograph. Melena Jenkins.
MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


BOOKS AND CATALOGS

*10 Years Of Houston Architecture.* Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum. 1959. no pagination.

1956

Burdette Keeland

Arnold House addition
5006 San Felipe Road, private property
(demolished)
1,200 square feet (addition)
cost unknown

(See Arnold House for owners)

Photographs. Margie Keeland.

MAGAZINES


BOOKS AND CATALOGS


1956

Neuhaus & Taylor

McCartney House

275 Pine Hollow Lane, Pine Hollow
2,700 square feet

$32,334

James W. and Louise B. McCartney commissioned this house. Mr. McCartney was an attorney at the firm Vinson, Elkins, Weems & Searis. They had one small child.

MAGAZINES


1957

William R. Jenkins

Brier House

10211 Willowgrove Drive, Willow Meadows

(extensively altered)

2,300 square feet

$35,000

Morris I. Brier and his wife, Ann, commissioned this house. Mr. Brier was manager of the Gordon Jewelry Company. The Briers had three boys.

Drawings. Melena Jenkins.
MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


1957

Neuhaus & Taylor

Electri-Living Home House

9606 Meadowglen Lane, Tanglewilde

1,450 square feet

$18,000

Harwood Taylor, a founding partner in the architectural firm, Neuhaus & Taylor.

designed this house for his family in conjunction with the Electri-Living residential building program sponsored by *Living for Young Homemakers* magazine and the Houston Lighting and Power Company. Taylor’s wife, Cynthia Rowan, was from a prominent oil
family. Her father, Charles Rowan, was a founding member of the Fort Worth based Rowan Drilling Company.\textsuperscript{10} They had three young daughters.

The Taylors were known for being a glamorous couple and appeared regularly in the society sections of the Houston newspapers. Kate Gurwell, the \textit{Houston Post} society editor noted in 1964, for example:

\begin{quote}
Mr. and Mrs. Harwood Taylor jetted off to New York in early March, and after a week in the East, went directly to one of their favorite cities, Mexico, before taking a car out to Ixtapan Thursday afternoon. They landed minutes after de Gaulle's departure...Montezuma used to bring his battle weary warriors to Ixtapan over 500 years ago for recuperation in the hot springs, but Cynthia and Harwood Taylor doubted seriously if Montezuma's men enjoyed the baths as they did in the luxury of sunken pink granite tubs, set in suites of green Italian onyx.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

The Taylors lived in the house until 1961. The next owners were Carl S. and Peggy Burrows. Mr. Burrows was executive vice president of the Chimney Rock National Bank.

MAGAZINES

"Economy In Courthouse Design." \textit{Architectural Record.} 123 (Mid-May 1958). 159-163.
NEWSPAPERS


BOOKS AND CATALOGS

1957

George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce

Carroll House

2014 Persa Street, unnamed addition

(demolished)

1,300 square feet

cost unknown

Jack R. Carroll was a bachelor. He was an accountant at the H. A. Lott Construction Company.

Slides. Pierce, Goodwin, Alexander & Linville, Inc.

NEWSPAPERS


“CAA Offers You A Look At Five Fascinating Houses.” River Oaks Times. Friday, 11 April, 1958. 11.

1957

Swenson & Linnstaedter

Swenson House

3106 Brazos Street, Fairgrounds Addition

(extensively altered)

900 square feet

cost unknown

Bailey A. Swenson was a founding partner in the firm, Swenson & Linnstaedter. His wife, Kathryn, ran “Houston’s first professional New York connected gallery,” the New Arts Gallery, out an adjoining building that also served as his architectural office. The Swensons only lived in the house for two years. When their daughter, Germaine, was born in 1959 they moved to a nearby Victorian house at 105 Avondale Boulevard because they thought “…sunken marble bathtubs and spiraling cantilevered staircases are not for babies. And roof gardens are dangerous for beruffled little girls, even when they grow up to the tea party set.”

MAGAZINES

“Houston Residence Wins Chapter Award.” Texas Architect. 9-10 (September 1958).


NEWSPAPERS


"CAA Offers You A Look At Five Fascinating Houses." *River Oaks Times*. Friday, 11 April, 1958. 11.


BOOKS AND CATALOGS

1960

Larson & Wingfield
Randolph House
9214 McAvoy Drive, Braes Timbers
1,500 square feet
$18,500

C. Philip Randolph was a certified public accountant for the Quintana Petroleum
Company. His wife, Catherine, was a former history teacher. The Randolphs had two
children.

NEWSPAPERS

“Architect Designs $18,500 Home With 2 Sections. Enclosed Court.” Houston Post.

Criswell, Ann Minick. “How to Live In A Subdivision And Not Be A Goldfish In A

1960

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson
Anderson House
1638 Banks Street, North Edgemont

1,600 square feet

$20,000

Ralph A. Anderson, Jr. was a partner and one of the head designers in the architectural firm, Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson. He was a bachelor.

Photographs. Woodson Research Library, Rice University.

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS

Wednesday, 27 October 1965. Section 2. pages 1, 4.

1961

Howard Barnstone & Partners

Mermel House

5043 Glenmeadow Drive, Meyerland

(extensively altered)

2,200 square feet

$35,000

Irving Mermel and his wife, Ann, commissioned this house. Mr. Mermel was a self-employed accountant. They had one teenage son

Slides. Margie Keeland.

MAGAZINES

"House By Howard Barnstone And Partners, Architects." Arts & Architecture. 79


NEWSPAPERS


1962

P. M. Bolton Associates

Safford House

5000 Longmont Drive, #9, Tanglewood

2,300 square feet

$55,000

Winifred Safford, the well-to-do widow of Henry Gates Safford, commissioned this house. She had one live-in servant.
Slides. P. M. Bolton Associates.

MAGAZINES


NEWSPAPERS


1 Vaschule, Jean. “Homes Stress Convenience.” *Houston Chronicle.* Sunday 7 April 1957. Section I, pages 1, 2


9 Vaschule, Jean. “Homes Stress Convenience.” *Houston Chronicle.* Sunday 7 April 1957. Section I pages 1,2


B. Architects' Biographies

Lars Bang

Lars Bang, a Houston native, was a 1950 graduate of the University of Houston which he attended with the assistance of the GI Bill. While in school, he recalled that there was some tension between the older students such as himself who were financed by the GI Bill and younger students. This was apparent in attitudes towards teachers; older students seemed to prefer Donald Barthelme and younger students gravitated towards Howard Barnstone, who Bang thought was a "communist."¹

Bang worked for Phillip G. Willard full time while at University of Houston. Willard, originally from Fort Worth, worked there with architect Robert P. Woltz Jr. until 1939.² He came to Houston sometime prior to 1946 where he started his own firm which employed Auda Carroll Brodnax, David G. Brooks, Edward B. Brooks, Lucian T. Hood and Charles McKim and churned out hundreds of plans for suburban developers during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Bang worked briefly with David Brooks from late 1950 to early 1951. Bang then worked with Louis C. Bendit in a construction business, B&B Enterprises that lasted from 1952 to 1954. After his stint in B & B Enterprises he worked with Lucian T. Hood (University of Houston 1952) from 1954 to 1959; together they designed several notable projects such as the Times Center Building at 2444 Times Boulevard of 1955 and the Le Corbusier inspired Century Building at 2120 Travis of 1956. In 1960 he formed his own firm.
Bang designed a mixture of modern and traditional houses while he worked for Willard. He seemed to have designed only or mostly modern houses during the years 1951 to 1960. After 1960 he stopped designing houses and worked only on larger commercial projects.

Bolton & Barnstone

P. M. Bolton was educated at Texas A & M (where his father was president emeritus) and graduated in 1942. After graduation he served four years in the field artillery. He moved to Houston in 1946 and worked as an assistant engineer for Foley Brothers until 1947. In 1948 he worked for Kenneth Franzheim. In 1949 he worked for Irving R. Klein. From 1950 to 1952 he worked for MacKie & Kamrath. In the latter part of 1952 he formed a partnership with Howard Barnstone.

Barnstone, originally from Auburn, Maine, was educated at Yale and received a BA in 1944. He served two years in the Navy and returned to Yale where he received an architectural degree in 1948. The same year he was invited to teach at University of Houston. He decided to stay in Houston and worked independently out of an office at the rear of Bailey A. Swenson’s office at 3106 Brazos until 1952 when he formed the partnership with Bolton. He also continued to teach at the university until 1958.

Bolton & Barnstone was known for designing uncompromising Miesian modern houses. However, they also designed several notable commercial buildings such as the First State
Bank of Green’s Bayou at 1414 Federal Road of 1955 and the Carrier Corporation Building at 2727 Wesleyan of 1957. The firm was dissolved at the end of 1960. Upon dissolution each practiced independently. Bolton continued to design residential projects while Barnstone varied his output.

**David Brooks & Edward Brooks**

David G. Brooks and his brother, Edward B. Brooks, were both educated at University of Houston where they graduated in 1950. Both worked for Phillip G. Willard while students. Upon graduation, David worked with Lars Bang for part of 1950 and 1951. Edward continued to work for Willard until 1953 when he formed a partnership with David. In 1958 the name of the firm was changed to Brooks & Brooks.

David Brooks & Edward Brooks designed a mixture of small apartments, houses and commercial buildings. They were best known, however, for their modern apartments which were ingeniously planned and often built on thin lally columns to provide covered parking. A good example was the Hanna Apartments at 2419 Woodhead Street of 1954 designed to “fight the principle of devaluation of an apartment because it is situated in the rear of an existing building.”

**C. Herbert Cowell & Hugo V. Neuhaus**

(see Cowell & Neuhaus)
Cowell & Neuhaus

Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr., the firm’s designer, was a fifth generation Houstonian from an elite banking family. He received a BA from Yale in 1938 and an architectural degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1941. He served as a Major in the Air Force during World War II and returned to Houston in 1946. He worked for Kenneth Franzheim from 1946 until 1948 when he joined up with Cowell.

C. Herbert Cowell was educated at the University of Kansas where he graduated in 1936. He was living in Houston by 1941 when the city directory listed him as working for Harry D. Payne. In 1942 he worked for the Austin Company. From 1945 to 1946 he worked for Kenneth Franzheim which may have been where he first met Neuhaus. From 1946 to 1947 he was associated with George F. Pierce, Jr. In 1948 he began working with Neuhaus, who was listed as his associate. In late 1949 the name of the firm was officially changed to Cowell & Neuhaus.

The first projects Cowell & Neuhaus designed, such as the Turberville Motors Plant on the corner of Main Street and Berry Avenue and the Highland Village Center on Westheimer Road at Drexel Street resembled other late modernistic commercial buildings going up in Houston at the same time and gave little indication of the Miesian designs for which the firm was later known.
The firm was dissolved in 1963. Neuhaus then began working with B. Magruder Wingfield, Jr. Cowell joined the firm Koetter & Tharp which was then renamed Koetter, Tharp & Cowell.

William R. Jenkins

William R. Jenkins was born in Des Moines and moved to Houston in 1939. He attended Rice University for one year between 1941 and 1942 when he entered the Naval Air Corps. After the war he returned to Rice but soon transferred to University of Houston from which he graduated in 1952. He worked in the office of William N. Floyd, who designed large numbers of house plans for local developers, from 1951 to 1955. (Interestingly, several residential projects from these years were credited solely to Jenkins, such as the Lacey House at 11717 Longleaf Lane\(^6\) and the Kuldell House 6031 Beamer Street\(^7\).) From 1955 to late 1961 Jenkins worked independently. In 1961 he entered into a partnership with William B. Hoff.

Jenkins seemed not to have designed any traditionally styled projects in this period. He was known initially for his modern houses which he designed until the early 1960s, when he switched to apartments and commercial buildings.

Burdette Keeland
Burdette Keeland, Jr. graduated from the University of Houston in 1950 where he was Howard Barnstone’s star pupil and protégé. He worked independently for the rest of career though he frequently collaborated with other architects or had associates. In 1953 he worked with Harwood Taylor to design the Fred Winchell Studio at 1955 Richmond Avenue. During the mid 1950s Clyde W. Jackson (University of Houston 1950) was his associate. In 1960 he received a M-Arch from Yale University.

Although Keeland designed mostly modern buildings, some were quite conventional (but they were not publicized). During the 1950s he produced a range of projects including commercial buildings, apartment complexes and houses. He was also an extremely popular professor at the University of Houston, where he taught from the mid 1950s until his death in 2000.

**Larson & Wingfield**

John H. Larson was educated at Rice University and received his degree in 1950. He worked for Harvin C. Moore while a student, from 1946 to 1950 and possibly after. By 1954 he seemed to have been working independently. An article that appeared in the *Houston Post* noted that Larson worked independently for two years in McAllen where he was also a member of the city planning and parks and recreation commissions, probably between 1954 and 1955. He worked for Cowell & Neuhaus from 1956 to late 1958 when he formed a partnership with Wingfield.
B. Magruder Wingfield, Jr., a Washington D.C. native, moved to Houston when he was a teenager and was educated at Rice University where he graduated in 1952. He came from a prominent family; his father was Vice President and Director of the National bank of Commerce until his death in 1954. In 1954 Wingfield worked at the Benz School of Floral Design, the same year he received the Texas Swedish Cultural Foundation's architectural scholarship for travel and study and worked for Swedish architect David Hellden during part of 1955. He returned to Houston and worked for Hamilton Brown until 1956 when he began working for Cowell & Neuhaus which he left in 1958 to work with Larson.  

Larson & Wingfield designed several Miesian modern houses until it was dissolved in 1963. That year Wingfield began working with Hugo V. Neuhaus who listed him as his associate.

**Neuhaus & Taylor**

Harwood Taylor spent one year at the University of Houston then transferred to the University of Texas where he graduated in 1951. In 1952 he was back in Houston working for William N. Floyd, who at the time also employed William R. Jenkins. In 1953 he collaborated with Burdette Keeland on the Fred Winchell Studio. From 1954 to 1955 he worked independently and designed several modern brick houses and apartments. In late 1955 he formed a partnership with J. Victor Neuhaus III.

J. Victor Neuhaus III also graduated from University of Texas in 1951. He apparently interrupted his studies; in 1948 he was listed as working for Wyatt C. Hedrick in Houston.
Upon graduation he returned to Houston permanently and worked for Raymond H. Brogniez in 1952. From 1953 to 1955 he worked independently.

Neuhaus & Taylor was described as a “classic partnership” because design was done by Taylor and management by Neuhaus. However, Neuhaus continued to be given sole credit for projects up until late 1957. He also worked with Greacen & Brogniez on the Gibraltar Building at 2302 Fannin Street of 1959. The firm initially produced modern houses and small apartments similar to what both had been designing independently, but by the early 1960s they had switched to commercial projects, often in collaboration with mega-developers like Gerald Hines.

**George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce**

George F. Pierce, Jr., a Dallas native, was educated at Southern Methodist University and Rice University where he graduated in 1943. After graduation he served in the Naval Air Corps during World War II. In 1945 he returned to Houston and worked for Kenneth Franzheim. From 1946 to 1947 he worked with C. Herbert Cowell designing a number of Wright inspired modern and conventional houses. By 1948 he was teaching architectural courses at Rice and in the same year he formed a partnership with Abel B. Pierce (with whom he shared no relation).

Abel B. Pierce, Jr., was educated at Rice University where he graduated in 1930. He received a second degree from University of Pennsylvania in 1932. In either 1932 or 1933
he returned to Houston where he worked for Harry D. Payne until 1938. That year he started working for Stayton Nunn-Milton McGinty which he left in 1948 to work with George Pierce.

George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce was known nationally for the design of modern commercial, educational and religious buildings. While they also designed a number of significant modern houses in Houston, none were published nationally.

Swenson & Linnstaedter

Bailey A. Swenson graduated from Rice University in 1931. He worked for Charles W. Oliver from 1932-1933 and possibly until 1936 when he formed a partnership with Frederick W. Heidbreder, Swenson & Heidbreder. They added a partner, Victor Bush (Rice, 1932), in 1937 and changed the name of the firm to Swenson, Heidbreder & Bush. This firm lasted until 1940 when it was dissolved and Swenson began to work independently. He served in the Navy from 1943 to 1945. Upon his discharge he resumed his practice and in 1956 began working with Herbert William Linnstaedter. In July 1957 the name of the partnership was changed to Swenson & Linnstaedter.\textsuperscript{13}

Herbert William Linnstaedter attended University of Houston until at least 1948 when he was listed in a \textit{Houston Chronicle} article as a senior who won first mention in a contest to redesign downtown Houston.\textsuperscript{14} Linnstaedter was listed as being a fellow of the university in 1948 and in 1949, a critic. The same year he worked for Wilson, Morris & Crain. He was
said to have studied at Harvard University, perhaps between 1951 and 1953 when his name was absent from the city directory. In 1954 and 1955 he taught at University of Houston. In 1956 he began working with Swenson. In 1958 he was listed as being an assistant professor at the University of Houston. Although he was a prominent teacher, he was not universally liked by his students. Joel Brand (University of Houston, 1957) recalled that "our class was pissed at one of our professors, Herbert Linnstaedter... and we proceeded to put his very elegant MG-TC on the roof of the architecture building."16

Swenson's first employer, Charles W. Oliver, was staff architect for the River Oaks Corporation and worked in a strictly conventional mode. After 1936 projects credited to Swenson appeared regularly in the local newspapers which were mostly modernistic. After World War II, Swenson worked in a more modern mode. Almost all of his projects designed between 1936 and 1956 were houses and commercial buildings. Since he shared an office with Donald Barthelme from 1949 to 1957, it is tempting to think that Barthelme may have had an influence on some of his more avant-garde residential projects, such as the unbuilt De La Marre House of 195217 that resembled Barthelme's own house and the Swenson House at 3106 Brazos of 1957.

After 1957, Swenson & Linnstaedter primarily designed large projects, specializing in apartment complexes. Individual houses were the exception. The firm was successful and in 1960 they opened a branch office in Dallas.18

**Harwood Taylor**
(see Neuhaus & Taylor)

Wilson, Morris & Crain

(see Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson)

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson

F. Talbott Wilson and S.I. Morris both graduated from Rice University in 1935. From 1935 to 1938 they worked for fellow classmate M. Burns Roensch designing small FHA houses and apartments. In 1938 they left Roensch and formed a partnership. They left Houston to enter the service during World War II. They returned in 1946 and resumed their practice. In 1947 B. W. Crain, Jr. (University of Texas 1937, Harvard 1939) became a partner and the firm’s name was changed to Wilson, Morris & Crain. The same year Ralph A. Anderson, Jr. fresh out of Rice joined the firm. In 1953 he was made a partner and the name of the firm was changed to Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson. However, the change in name was not reflected in the local newspapers or the national architectural press until 1955-1956.

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson was one of the largest firms in Houston. They designed a wide variety of building types. Although they were known nationally for their modern design, they had no qualms about producing a conventional design should the client so desire and did so fairly regularly throughout the life of the partnership.


C. CAA/CAM Modern House Tour Listings

Tour I, 27 April 1952
Hamilton Brown, Hunt House, 526 West Friar Tuck Lane
Hamilton Brown, Selig House, 3715 Inverness
Cowell & Neuhaus, Baker House, 3665 Willowick Road
Cowell & Neuhaus, Stude (Stevenson) House, 56 Tiel Way
Philip Johnson, Menil House, 3363 San Felipe Road
MacKie & Kamrath, Adler House, 24 Tiel Way
Thompson McCleary, McCleary House, 6034 Memorial Drive
Edward Stone, Kempner House, 3688 Willowick Road
Wilson, Morris & Crain, Morris House, 2 Waverly Court

Tour II, 18-19 April 1953
Hamilton Brown, Hudgins House, 501 West Friar Tuck Lane
Hamilton Brown, Hohlt House, 223 Pine Shadows Drive
A. A. Liefeste, Jr., Lefieste House, 403 Blalock Road
Smart & Whitehead, Smart House, 318 Pine Shadows Drive
Wilson, Morris & Crain, Buie House, 310 Saddlewood Lane

Tour III, 10-11 April 1954
Joseph Krakower, Davidson House, 2418 Maroneal Boulevard
Paul Laszlo, Herzog House, 2523 Maroneal Boulevard
Lloyd & Morgan, Liese House, 328 Buckingham Drive
Wilson, Morris & Crain, Cramerus House, 250 Pine Hollow Lane
Wilson, Morris & Crain, Lazarus House, 57 Briar Hollow Lane

Tour IV, 2-3 April 1955
Bolton & Barnstone, Hardison House, 233 Merrie Way
Paul Elliott, Crow House, 325 West Friar Tuck Lane
William N. Floyd, Floyd House, 226 Pine Hollow Lane
Lloyd & Morgan, Shimek House, 3760 Willowick Road
George Pierce - Abel B. Pierce, Pierce House, 5211 Greentree Road

Tour V, 14-15 April 1956
Bolton & Barnstone, Gordon House, 2307 Bluebonnet Boulevard
Hamilton Brown, Selig House, 3715 Inverness Drive
Burdette Keeland, Pryor Apartment, Kipling Apartments II, 2719 Kipling Street
Robert Wilson, Wilson Apartment, Bettis Apartments, 4311 Bettis Drive

Tour VI, 13-14 April 1957
Lars Bang, Bendit (Kamin) House, 4111 Drummond Street
Bolton & Barnstone, Demoustier House, 608 Little John Lane
David Brooks & Edward Brooks, Solomon House, 3615 South Braeswood Boulevard
William R. Jenkins, second Jenkins House, 10911 Willowisp Drive
Lloyd & Morgan, Straus House, 53 Briar Hollow Lane
Tour VII, 12-13 April 1958

Edward Goodwin, Jr., Goodwin House, 3 Leisure Lane

George Pierce - Abel B. Pierce, Carroll House, 2014 Persa Street

Swenson & Linnstaedter, Swenson House, 3106 Brazos Street

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, Kelsey House, 2 Long Bow Lane

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, Marshall House, 3700 Willowick Road

Tour VIII, 11-12 April 1959

Engberg & White, Engberg House, 24 Still Forest Road

Robert Maurice, Maurice House & Office, 3222 Mercer Street

Neuhaus & Taylor, Erath House, 11206 Tynewood Lane

Neuhaus & Taylor, Genitempo House, 310 Carnarvon Drive

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, Thompson House, 4911 Tilbury Drive

Tour IX, 21-22 May 1960

Koetter & Tharp, Tharp House, 8218 Mallie Court

Lloyd & Morgan, Class House, Rice University

Lloyd & Morgan, Cooper House, 201 Kincaid Drive

Neuhaus & Taylor, Frame House, 403 Westminster Drive

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, Fulton House, Rice University
Tour X, 6-7 May 1961

Bolton & Barnstone, Lindsay House, 7623 River Point Drive
Travis Broesche, Walser House, 411 Fall River Road
Hamilton Brown, McClelland House, 11207 Tyne Court
William Hoff, Huvard House, 12526 Old Oaks Drive
George Pierce - Abel B. Pierce, Zwerneman (Lundgren) House, 16 Crestwood Drive

Tour XI, 28-29 April 1962

Bolton & Barnstone, Owsley House, 65 Briar Hollow Drive
MacKie & Kamrath, Ballantyne House, 2 Tiel Way
Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, Carter House, 62 Briar Hollow Lane
Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, Hines House, 146 Radney Stree

Tour XII, 1963

no information

Tour XIII, 5-6 December 1964

Howard Barnstone & Partners, Melcher House, 13 Tiel Way
H. F. P. Goeters & Associates, Salmon House, 506 Fall River Road
Jenkins & Hoff, Sheer House, 616 Hedwig Lane
Larson & Wingfield, Williams House, 31 Briar Hollow Lane
F. Carrington Weems, Weems House, 919 Kirby Drive
Tour XIV, 30-31 October 1965

Kenneth Bentsen, Bentsen House, 2933 Del Monte Drive

P. M. Bolton Associates, Bolton House, 5000 Longmont Drive

J. W. Evans, Evans House, 3118 Georgetown Street

Jenkins & Hoff, Hoff House, 772 Flintdale Road

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, Anderson House, 1638 Banks Street
D. Parade of Homes Listings

Parade I, 2-9 November 1952
Edgewood, 5800 block Willow Glen Drive (25 houses)

Parade II, 20-27 September 1953
Oak Forest, 4300 block Libbey Lane (30 houses)

Parade III, 5-12 September 1954
Airline Manor, Ayrshire, Braeburn Country Club Estates, Cedarwood, Creekside Manor.
Holly Hill, Long Point Woods, Pine Terrace, Ridgecrest, Robindell, Shepherd Forest,
Spring Branch Woods, Valley Forge, and Willow Bend (30 houses)

Parade IV, 11-26 June 1955
Meyerland, 5100 block Jackwood Street and 8700 block Prichett Drive (30 houses)

Parade V, 20-27 May 1956
Glenbrook Valley, 8200 block Cayton Street (30 houses)

Parade VI, 11-19 May 1957
Briarmeadow, 3300 block Longfield Circle (26 houses)
Parade VII, 13-20 April 1958
Sharpstown, 7100 block Langdon Lane (32 houses)

Parade VIII, 26 April - 3 May 1959
Westbury, 5800 block Warm Springs Road (35 houses)

Parade IX, 1-8 May 1960
Walnut Bend, 11000 block Olympia Drive (31 houses)

Parade X, 21-28 May 1961
Briargrove Park, 9900 block Burgoyne Drive (29 houses)

Parade XI, 4-15 July 1962
Sharpstown, 8900 block Rowan Lane, (33 houses)

Parade XII, 20-27 October 1963
Sharpstown, 8500 block Dashwood Drive (18 houses)

Parade XIII, 6-18 September 1964
Newport (League City), 1900 block Sunset Court North (20 houses)
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