

the stars are *big* and *bright*— deep in the heart of texas

by Stephen Fox

hincite

EVER SINCE GEORGE W. BRACKENRIDGE commissioned Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz of New York to design San Antonio's First National Bank Building (1886), and Magnolia Willis Sealy commissioned McKim, Mead & White to design her house, The Open Gates (1891) in Galveston, astute Texan clients have engaged the services of out-of-state star architects to produce buildings that set new design standards in Texas cities. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the University of Texas, in commissioning Cass Gilbert of New York to design a new university library, and the Rice Institute in Houston, by commissioning Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson of Boston to design an entire

university campus in Houston, demonstrated that Texan clients could contribute to a national discourse on building architecture of cultural significance.

The patronage of architectural stars in Texas has tracked general trends in American architecture. Blue chip eclectic architects figured strongly before the Depression. Modernists appeared on the scene in the mid-1930s. During the 1950s, the domino theory applied to star patronage in Texas: the Fort Worth Art Center (Herbert Bayer, 1954) was followed by Cullinan Hall at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

(Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1958), the Dallas Theater Center (Frank Lloyd Wright, 1958), and the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth (Philip Johnson, 1961). Corporate patronage followed cultural patronage, with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) carrying out major downtown skyscrapers in Fort Worth (1960), Houston (1961, 1963), and Dallas (1968). During the 1960s, Neiman-Marcus's Stanley Marcus and Houston developer Gerald D. Hines began to use stars to give their enterprises a higher profile. SOM's various offices, Edward Larrabee Barnes, I. M. Pei, Paul Rudolph, and—as Frank Welch has so engagingly described—Philip Johnson profited handsomely, as did the cities where their buildings were constructed.

Louis I. Kahn of Philadelphia delivered an architectural masterwork in 1972 with the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth; still the one Texan building regularly appearing on all lists of the greatest buildings of the twentieth century. Dominique de Menil advanced this architectural patronage to the global stage by hiring Italian Renzo Piano to design the Menil Collection (1987). British architects James Stirling & Michael Wilford, who had preceded Piano, created critically-acclaimed designs for Rice University in 1981. This gave other Texan clients the courage to hire internationally: Ricardo Legorreta, Solana Westlake/Southlake (1989–91) and the San Antonio Central Library (1995); Rafael Moneo,

Audrey Jones Beck Building, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2000); Tadao Ando, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (2002); Jean-Paul Viguier, Stieren Center for Exhibitions at the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio (2008); and most recently, Yoshio Taniguchi, Asia House Texas, Houston, and Adjaye Associates, Linda Pace Foundation, San Antonio.

In the Texan cultural firmament, Dallas now outshines Houston. Today, it's Deedie Rose who inspires Dallas clients and institutions to commission exciting architectural performances, doing for Big D what Dominique and John de Menil and Gerald Hines did for Houston from the 1950s through the early 1990s. Houston is now lagging badly because its clients have either lost their nerve or simply don't care; they have allowed major new building design in Houston to sink below second-rate status. This is what makes such small buildings as the Brochstein Pavilion at Rice (Thomas Phifer + Partners, 2008) and the Menil Collection master plan by David Chipperfield Architects so crucial.

The works of the masters can show local clients what immense emotional satisfaction great architecture can deliver, inspiring and encouraging them to commission architects (whether locally or globally) to make some more. ☆

Preliminary section of proposed addition to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Renzo Piano Building Workshop and Kendall/Heaton Associates.

