

Cite is Dead. Long Live Cite!

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100 IS A SCARY NUMBER with two big owly eyes staring back at you. The big question here would have to be: Why even go to the expense and trouble of making a print publication these days? I talked to several *Cite* founders for perspective.

They first met in 1982 around the dining table in William F. Stern's townhouse, designed by Howard Barnstone. We do not have a photo of the group, and with so many subsequent meetings, it's hard to know exactly who was there. But Stern, Anne Schlumberger, Barrie Scardino Bradley, Herman Dyal, Stephen Fox, Karl Killian, W. O. Neuhaus, Drexel Turner, Gordon Wittenberg, and Bruce Webb were among them. O. Jack Mitchel, the dean of the Rice School of Architecture, and Elizabeth Griffen, the executive director of Rice Design Alliance, supported *Cite* with funding and space. Griffen sold the first ads.

Barrie Bradley was the only one who had a computer, an Apple IIe. She and the first managing editor, Joel Warren Barna, used it to edit text, though the page layout under Herman Dyal's direction still involved glue and Exacto blades. They modeled *Cite* after *Skyline: The Architecture and Design Review*, a more accessible sibling to *Oppositions*, both of which were designed by Massimo Vignelli and published by Peter Eisenman's Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies out of New York. Bradley had a stack of *Skyline* back issues and had contacted the journal's editor, Suzanne Stephens. But the Houston crew, mostly in their 20s and 30s, were more playful in their editorial and graphic design approach.

"*Cite* often drew on a sense of irony, humor, amazement, and double takes," says Drexel Turner. Houston of the 1980s was rich substrate. The oil boom had given rise to not only masterful Gerald Hines buildings but also the absurd mass destruction of historic buildings. While Houston was eliciting national scorn among urban planners and occasional bemused delight from design critics, the local discussion of design was anemic.

"We thought this place needed a good scolding," says Bruce Webb. "After a while, we started not hating it as much. It was sort of cathartic."

For 40 years, Ann Holmes covered architecture, adding the field to her duties as the chief arts critic for the *Houston Chronicle*. Unlike other cities that have now lost full-time architecture critics at their newspapers, Houston never had one. "Newspapers [here] did not seem to be interested in having an architectural critic," says Stephen Fox. "*Cite* could function in that capacity and not be beholden to anyone."

The publication had an immediate impact on local and national discourse. The inaugural issue included a review of the Renzo Piano plans for the Menil by Fox, who wondered if the building risked being "overwhelmingly non-monumental." Soon after, in his own *Art in America* review of the Menil, Reynar Banham used that very quote as his jumping-off point to discuss the building. The second issue of *Cite*, arguing strongly against plans for elevated rail down Main Street, relied on information from a "Deep Throat" inside source. His identity kept secret all these years, Jeffrey Ochsner, who worked for METRO at the time, provided the leak.

With Linda Sylvan as the managing editor, from *Cite* 5 (1984) to *Cite* 32 (1995), and then as the

executive director/publisher, subsequent issues settled in to focus on the business of the built environment, preservation, education, land-use regulation, infrastructure, public space, lessons from other cities, reviews, urbanism, environmental challenges, and socioeconomics. To this day, *Cite* cycles through these same topics, often with the humor and amazement of those early writers, even as everything else about the publication constantly changes.

Cite has evolved by incubating and spinning off other platforms. Several books started as *Cite* articles, including *See-Through Years* by Joel Warren Barna; *Ephemeral City: Cite Looks at Houston*, edited by Barry Scardino, William Stern, and Bruce Webb; and *Houston Here and Gone* by Steven Strom. Houston Mod monographs by Ben Koush emerged from the publication as well. Christof Spieler's blog, Intermodality, grew out of his writing about transit for *Cite* and led directly to his appointment to the METRO board. After writing for *Cite* and serving on its editorial committee, Larry Albert launched Swamplot.com from his frustration with the journal's lack of a digital presence at the time. These blogs, especially Swamplot, fundamentally changed the pace of design discourse in Houston.

Then *Cite* went digital in 2008 when I began as editor. The digital publication now absorbs as much time and funding as our print format, and reaches more people. *Cite*'s impact on the city's principal newspaper followed a similar print-to-digital course. Former *Cite* managing editor Lisa Gray went to the *Houston Chronicle*, where she wrote a column from 2007 to 2014 that brought much of *Cite*'s approach, perspectives, and sources into the mainstream. Since then she has brought in Allyn West, once a writer for Swamplot and then *Cite*, to help her in producing the Gray Matters online section of the *Houston Chronicle*, which picks up digital content from *Cite* on a near weekly basis, including building reviews.

The next frontier is likely the gamification of *Cite* as more architectural discourse takes place on the enhanced/artificial reality devices. Imagine your phone pinging you as your self-driving vanpool passes a historic building. An avatar points out the entasis of the columns. You receive points for identifying the classical order of the façade and a bonus for clicking through to a *Cite* article by Stephen Fox. The Rice Design Alliance young professionals group rdAGENTS has already jumpstarted this gamification with their Instagram scavenger hunts. The boundary between party and publication, event and criticism, has dissolved. People sharing selfies in front of buildings has already changed how cities are planned, buildings preserved, and public spaces perceived.

Cite is dead because the context – the city, the people, the media landscape – in which it was born is gone. *Cite* today is in a perpetual state of rebirth. Rice Design Alliance has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to make our archives more accessible and interactive. Imagine finding content with a map interface. Imagine our years of articles organized by theme and presented in a way that anyone, from a high school student to a journalist, can navigate. Even now interns are geotagging and entering metadata into databases as we work with the Original Champions of Design on a whole new digital presence that's clearer, more accessible, and more powerful. This

will be a huge improvement over the long lists of past issues available only in downloadable pdfs.

Back in 1987, for the fifth anniversary issue of *Cite*, Drexel Turner and a crew built a mock newsstand kiosk in Downtown Houston and hung up all the past issues, then photographed it for the *Cite* 18 cover. I had always thought that image was collaged together by someone with terrific cutting and gluing skills. But no, they truly built a fake newsstand, a play at the hyperreal, plus a nose thumbing at "mainstream media" that is still relevant today. The situation in Houston, with its ongoing lack of a dedicated architecture critic at its newspaper, presaged the media collapse the rest of the country is facing now. And for that reason, Rice Design Alliance and *Cite* are national models for cities that no longer have those traditional journalistic venues for discourse on building design. Just before his untimely death in 2010, critic David Dillon wrote as much after losing his position at the *Dallas Morning News*. Nonprofit media groups, like the Texas Tribune and the Solutions Journalism Network, are starting to proliferate 35 years after the founding of *Cite*. Last year, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was donated to the nonprofit Philadelphia Foundation.

At the end of that fifth anniversary issue, William Stern expressed his astonishment that *Cite* had lasted so long, praising "all the writers, editors, photographers, designers, and staff without whose contributions there would be no *Cite*." He went on to declare that "the most revealing observation to be made about *Cite* contributors is their relative youth. Indeed, their average age is probably 35, and in the first years their average age was probably closer to 30." He added his hope that "*Cite* will always be a place of youthful idealism and that its vitality will never stagnate." Although it took a painful decision by the Rice Design Alliance board in 2008 to institute term limits, the editorial committee is once again quite young. Two or three editorial committee members are younger than *Cite* itself. And the vitality of the publication continues. For instance, the notable improvements we have seen to Houston's public realm and parks in recent years only make me ache for a far more thorough, equitable transformation. By embracing the larger media landscape, *Cite* is increasingly breaking out of its niche. As we are bombarded with information, much of it distorted, *Cite*'s committed, researched, thoughtful, optimistic voices stand apart, even on a screen.

Which brings us back to the question that 100 asks. Why are you holding this paper object and reading these print words? *Cite* will continue in print but only twice a year. Like LPs, print magazines like this one are in a quasi-golden age. They are deliberately inefficient. The object does not talk back. No email notification pops up at the top right corner of the page. No hyperlinks send readers in wild forays across the web. *Cite*'s deadness is its appeal. As graphic designer Herman Dyal, the issue's guest editor and the magazine's original designer, says, it's like you are hitting the pause button. There is a time for meditation. And what this issue asks is that you meditate on time itself.

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