



Gerald D. Hines and Pennzoil Place.
Photo by Annie Leibovitz. Courtesy Hines.

Remembering Gerald D. Hines (1925–2020)

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Gerald D. Hines, Houston’s best known real estate developer, died on August 23, 2020, at the age of ninety-five. Hines was especially known for his patronage of outstanding architects. Philip Johnson and John Burgee, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Pei Cobb Fried, Roche, Dinkeloo & Associates, César Pelli & Associates, Robert A. M. Stern, and Foster head the list. His firm, Gerald D. Hines Interests (now called Hines), developed such iconic buildings as the Gallerias in Houston (1969–71) and Dallas (1982), both designed by Hellmuth Obata Kassabaum; Pennzoil Place (1976), Transco Tower (1983), and Republic Bank Center (1983) by Johnson-Burgee; the 75-story Texas Commerce Tower (1981) by Pei; major downtown office buildings in twenty-three U.S. cities beyond Texas; and (according to Hines’s website) twenty countries outside the U.S.

Hines was a native of Gary, Indiana. He came to Houston as a mechanical engineering graduate of Purdue University but abandoned the air conditioning business to launch a career in real estate. By the early 1960s, Hines was attracting the attention of American architecture magazines with a series of suburban office buildings that architects Neuhaus & Taylor designed for him, featuring a single office floor elevated above ground-level parking to take advantage of small lots initially platted as house sites. Hines’s ability to profit by cleverly figuring out how to work around limitations was a hallmark of his long career. Engineering rationality and careful calculation disciplined his developer-driven enthusiasm.

In the second half of the 1960s, Hines jumped scales to undertake the simultaneous planning and construction of Houston’s Galleria, the 50-story One Shell Plaza office building in downtown Houston, and the 50-story One Shell Square office building in New Orleans, the last two designed by the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The Galleria, with its mixture of uses and concentration on up-market retail, was the harbinger of a new type of shopping center. SOM’s engineering partner, Fazlur Khan, made One Shell Plaza a prototype of Khan’s framed-tube construction system, a structural advance that enabled Hines to build it for substantially less than a conventionally framed tower of its height would have cost.

The meteoric expansion of Houston’s economy during its Golden Buckle on the Sunbelt era between 1973 and 1983 was when Hines emerged in the consciousness of the U.S. design media as not merely a client but a “patron” of architecture. His “protégé” was Philip Johnson. Together they came up with the twin-towered Pennzoil Place office building in downtown Houston, its sensational diagonal profiles undermining the strict engineering logic of One Shell Plaza but compensating by generating both profit and publicity. Pennzoil Place changed the way office buildings were designed because Hines trusted Johnson’s intuition that architectural singularity would be the project’s greatest marketing advantage.

With One Shell Square in New Orleans and the Trans World Airlines corporate headquarters in suburban Kansas City of 1971, Hines took his expertise beyond Texas. When the energy economy of Texas crashed in the early 1980s, Hines was able to stay afloat because his company no longer operated in a single market, even though such ambitious undertakings as First Colony, the suburban new town Hines and the Royal Dutch Shell Pension Fund developed in Sugar Land, southwest of Houston, suffered substantial economic losses. Funding a series of architecture exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art between 1985 and 1991 brought Hines’s name before New York’s cultural elite just as he was building Johnson/Burgee’s 53rd at Third office building, the curvaceous Lipstick Building, in Manhattan. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Hines was operating at Diagonal Mar, a spectacular site in Barcelona overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

Gerald Hines may have made his fortune in real estate development, but he made his reputation with architecture. The gift that his son and business partner Jeff Hines made to the University of Houston in 1997 led to the university’s college of architecture and design being named for Gerald Hines. In 1989, Hines was honored at the Rice Design Alliance’s second gala. He was elected to honorary membership in the American Institute of Architects in 1984 and the Texas Society of Architects in 1973.

Gerald Hines loved architecture. And it loved him in return.