

>> NEWS FROM RICEDESIGNALLIANCE.ORG

WEBSITE THRIVES

The Rice Design Alliance website features commentary and podcasts from RDA civic forums and lectures, a calendar of RDA events and events sponsored by other area organizations, travel journals from RDA city tours, and several resources, including links to OffCite.org, the *Cite* blog, and CiteMag.org, a website featuring free access to the archives.



FROM LEFT: Model of Initiatives for Houston winner “InHouse OutHouse”; Cien house, Concepcion, Chile, 2011, Pezo Von Ellrichshause; and participants in Anything That Floats; n.

> AIA COLLABORATIVE AWARD

The Rice Design Alliance was awarded a 2012 AIA Collaborative Achievement Award for excellence in the categories of Research, Dissemination, and Education. RDA is one of two organizations to win the national award, which is given by the American Institute of Architects.

> ANYTHING THAT FLOATS

The second annual Anything That Floats competition, which took place April 28 at Sesquicentennial Park, brought out eight enthusiastic teams ready to float the bayou with their innovative—and often amusing—designs.

Challenged to construct a float to cross Buffalo Bayou, teams received PVC piping with caps, a piece of insulation board, roofing membrane, and two 6-foot pieces of wood, all generously donated by Gowan, Inc., Chamberlin Roofing and Waterproofing, and JE Dunn Construction. Teams were rewarded with time deductions for building a Captain’s wheel and a functioning rudder. The team with the fastest time won the race.

The results were close, with a mere

one second standing between first and second places. The Grand Prize went to Mark Smith and Mark Danna, with second place going to Amy Hufnagel, Rachel Calafell, Mark Hoffman, and Eric Heumann with Walter P Moore. The “Best Sinker” prize was given to David Johnson, Alex Beck, Alex Noons, Ellen Vaughan, and Devan Mendez whose float, unfortunately, made it one way but not the other across the bayou. “Most Versatile” float was given the Gensler team of Meredith Epley, Jonathan LaRocca, Sean Thackston, and Adam Williams. Awards were distributed along with pizza and ice cream sandwiches. Each team received a “Certificate of Buoyancy” for participating.

> FALL LECTURES ON THE FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

The Fall 2012 RDA lecture series will address the future of architectural education and its potential impact on design practice and the built environment. Lectures will be held on consecutive Wednesdays in September and October at 7 p.m., with a pre-lecture reception starting at 6 p.m. at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Marc

Angèlil, Professor of Architecture, ETH Zurich, Switzerland will speak October 3.

> BRAZIL TOUR

Modern architecture in Brazil made a first timid appearance in the city of São Paulo, yet it was in the city of Rio de Janeiro that a particular, and internationally recognized, brand of architecture was forged. Rice University faculty Fares el-Dahdah, who grew up in Brasilia, and architecture historian Stephen Fox will be our guides. The tour dates are June 12-19, 2012.

> INITIATIVES FOR HOUSTON

RDA is pleased to announce the winners of the thirteenth annual “Initiatives for Houston” grant program, which funds research, study, and problem-solving around Houston’s built environment. Projects include “InHouse OutHouse,” submitted by Rice architecture students Andrew Daley, Jason Fleming and Peter Muesig; “Made in Houston” by University of Houston School of Architecture Associate Professor Donna Kacmar; and “Lobby Urbanism: Converging Downtown’s Interior and Exterior

Streets by Rice School of Architecture Wortham Fellow Bryony Roberts.

> SPOTLIGHT ON PEZO VON ELLRICHSHAUSEN

The annual RDA Spotlight Prize honors architects within their first 15 years of professional practice. Winners are selected by a jury for their design excellence and promise of a great design future. The 2012 Spotlight recipient, Pezo Von Ellrichshausen, will speak Monday, November 12, 7 p.m. at the Brown Auditorium at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The event is free and open to the public. A complimentary wine reception will take place before the lecture at 6 p.m.

> CHARRETTE

Rice Design Alliance’s 2012 design charrette will focus on creating a master plan for the Museum Park Super Neighborhood. The charrette will take place Saturday, August 4, 2012, 8 am-4 pm, at the Rice School of Architecture. A reception will be held Monday, August 6, 6-8 p.m. Learn more and register online at ricedesignalliance.org.



YOSHIO MEETS NORM

In 2009, Yoshio Taniguchi was standing in the intersection at Austin Street and Southmore Boulevard, taking in a full-size plywood mock-up of his drawing for the Asia Society Texas Center (ASTC).

"I was proud of it," says Norm Molen, superintendent at W.S. Bellows Construction. "We'd worked hard on it. It looked like a Hollywood movie set."

That morning, Molen went outside to meet the architect. Before they could even shake hands, Taniguchi was frowning at a 10-foot cantilever on the east wall. "Cut that off," he said.

"Right now?"

"Right now."

Molen says he knew then that he and "Yoshio," as he came to call him, would do well together. Taniguchi has been described as "demanding," a "perfectionist." "It's hard to live up to his expectations," says Nancy C. Allen, ASTC board member and chair of the committee that chose Taniguchi.

As it happens, these are the same words Molen's boss, Laura Bellows, uses to describe her superintendent. He's been with Bellows since 1994. Coming on as a carpenter foreman, the apprentice of his boyhood neighbor, he's now the lead on many of Bellows' most demanding builds—including the Byzantine Chapel.

Though the two men seem opposites — the Harvard-trained Japanese architect and the sunburned Texas builder—the ASTC became a site where their perfectionism each found its complement. "Whatever he decided he wanted, we'd do" Molen says, "I was like, 'Give me your best shot.' We were going to build a perfect building. The idea of 'It's close enough' just wasn't going to work."

All the ASTC's materials were shipped, en

masse, to Houston. Taniguchi traveled to Germany to select panels of limestone, ordered glass from Mexico, trucked in Appalachian wood. But these materials aren't perfect, Molen says. They're cut by humans. Sometimes, things are just—off. Even though Molen was working from a drawing that was, as he describes it, "a giant puzzle," the materials couldn't line up the way they were drawn to. Because he knew Taniguchi would object to imprecision, Molen laid out every line, inspected each seam, approved every installation. He implored his subcontractors: "Don't go forward unless I look at it." It took Molen and his team—which topped out at about 100—just 18 months to solve Taniguchi's puzzle.

Since Bellows handed over the keys in September 2010, the ASTC's been praised for its perfect stillness. But this is the product of a thousand smaller perfections that no layperson would notice. They still have the power to please Molen. The Z-shaped staircase inside the building's north entrance floats serenely a mere quarter inch from the wall. Molen had to line up the limestone, the steel, the glass—compensating for the weight and scale—with the intricacy required of furniture.

"It was so hard to build a building like this," Molen says. "It became do-able, I guess, because we did it."

Taniguchi arrived in Houston in April to celebrate the opening of the ASTC. At the end of the night, the architect approached the builder and asked to pose with him for a photo. The two men stood shoulder to shoulder. It wasn't a ceremonial gesture, by any means, nor a formal, public acknowledgment of Taniguchi's gratitude and admiration of Molen's work. But, Molen says, it was close enough.

— Allyn West

RDA CALENDAR

LECTURES AND CIVIC FORUM

NEXT: FOUR TAKES ON THE FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

Alfredo Brillembourg

Caracas Urban Think Tank

Wednesday, September 19, 7 p.m.

Jeffrey Schnapp

Director, metaLAB, Harvard University

Wednesday, September 26, 7 p.m.

Marc Angéil

Professor of Architecture, ETH Zurich

Tuesday, October 3, 7 p.m.

ON ARCHITECTURE FILMS

The discussion will focus on the ArCH's Annual Film festival August 16-18.

Wednesday August 22, 2012, 6:30 p.m.

SPOTLIGHT AWARD

Pezo Von Ellrichshausen

Tuesday, October 3, 7 p.m.

All lectures and the civic forum will be held at the Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

CHARRETTE

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND PROMENADES: UNIFYING MUSEUM PARK SUPER NEIGHBORHOOD

Rice School of Architecture

Saturday, August 4, 2012, 8-4 p.m.



RDA GALA TO HONOR STEPHEN KLINEBERG

Save the Date!

Sunday October 14, 2012, 6 pm

The Gala will take place on a Sunday evening in a temporary glass-walled building in front of Rice University's iconic Lovett Hall. Guests will be delighted by a secret spectacle. RDA will celebrate 40 years of providing architectural programs to the public and 30 years of *Cite* magazine, along with Rice University's and Rice School of Architecture's 100th anniversaries. And honoree Stephen Klineberg will be applauded for his 40 years of dedication to Rice and his commitment for over 30 years to Houston via the Houston Area Survey.

COMMUNITY

CAN A FLOOD OF TOURISTS PROTECT THE WETLANDS, AND THE REGION, FROM STORM SURGES?

Four days after Hurricane Ike hurtled across Galveston and charged up Interstate 45 to Houston on September 13, 2008, a team from the Army Corps of Engineers noticed something remarkable as they assessed damage by boat: water was still streaming off the Chambers County wetlands into the east arm of Galveston Bay. The flow was so substantial that it looked like a long waterfall. With the center of Ike's 46-mile-wide eye tracking over Galveston at 73rd Street, then up the interstate, the Bolivar Peninsula and the marshy pastureland to the north across the bay had been on the "dirty side" of the storm—the northeast quadrant. With sustained winds of 110 miles per hour, Ike ranked only as a high Category 2 on the Saffir-Simpson Scale; but in terms of size (120 miles across) and kinetic energy, the storm was one of the most powerful on record. It lifted the Gulf of Mexico into Galveston Bay and Galveston Bay into San Leon, Bacliff, Kemah and, from the harbor side, the city of Galveston. Combined with the uprooted trees, downed power lines, ripped roofs, and other windstorm mayhem across Houston, this near-biblical level of flooding brought the cost of damage to \$27 billion, making Ike the third most expensive hurricane to make landfall in the U.S.

The wetlands had acted like a sponge. First, they absorbed the 14-foot storm surge that had flattened up to 90 per cent of the structures in towns and subdivisions on the Bolivar Peninsula, then they released it gradually back into the bay.

"That caught our attention," says Houston environmental attorney James Blackburn, Professor of the Practice in Environmental Law at Rice University. "The key word is 'resiliency.' The area can absorb a storm and recover."

Blackburn is also a co-director of the SSPEED Center—for "Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disasters"—a consortium of seven universities. Based at Rice, it includes experts from the University of Houston, Texas Southern, Texas A&M, UT Austin, UT Brownsville, and LSU, plus several architecture and engineering firms. Established in 2007, SSPEED initially focused on lessons from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; but within a year, they had Ike to learn from.

With the primary goal of protecting lives and minimizing property damage, the group studied a variety of ideas, including one developed by

William J. Merrill before the SSPEED Center started its work. Inspired by the massive structures that keep the North Sea out of Holland, Merrill's so-called Ike Dike would be a massive floodgate that could close off Bolivar Roads, the entrance from Galveston Bay to the gulf. A multibillion-dollar price tag made that approach unfeasible, at least in the present economic climate. And there were also environmental objections.

"My main concern about the Ike Dike would be the impact it would have on the environment," cautions Alice Anne O'Donell, M.D., chairperson of the Galveston group of the Houston Audubon Society. "It would prevent the normal, natural barriers to high waters from working."

And periodic flooding renews the wetlands, helping maintain them as nurseries for fish, crabs, shrimp, and oysters and as lifelong habitat for birds.

"Wetlands function in two ways," SSPEED's co-founder and director Phil Bedient, Rice professor of Environmental Engineering, explains. "They're definitely an area of storage, and they can help knock down the peaks of these surges."

Aided by a \$1.25 million two-year grant from the Houston Endowment, later renewed for an additional three years for \$3.2 million, the SSPEED Center assembled its diverse coalition of experts and began exploring alternatives that would work with the natural process, rather than reining it in. They are carefully coordinating with the Port of Houston to explore constructing a gate structure at the mouth of the Houston Ship Channel.

The preservation of wetlands is the most innovative idea to come out of the center. They considered turning the storm-trampled Bolivar Peninsula into a national seashore, similar to Padre Island, then rejected the idea. It was unlikely to fly under current economic conditions, and it ran contrary to Texans' attitudes about property rights.

Like other forms of national parks, national seashores involve the federal government's buying up historically or scenically important real estate,

often using the concept of eminent domain to leverage property from reluctant buyers. Beginning with Yellowstone in 1872 and proliferating after the National Parks Service Act of 1916, national parks have entailed the U.S. Department of the Interior owning and managing scenically or historically important real estate, creating and managing tourism infrastructure, and strictly regulating concessions for lodging, food service, canoe rentals, and the like. To keep the parks within the vacation budgets of average Americans, entrance fees are maintained at a level that doesn't begin to cover costs. Most of the expense is borne by taxpayers whose enjoyment of the natural wonders will be limited to calendar photos and Discovery Channel documentaries, because these unspoiled natural areas often are far from major cities. (For example, Big Bend National Park is 12 hours from Houston, eight from San Antonio and even four from El Paso.)

Extending its scope to all the precious marshes in and near Galveston Bay (the country's second-largest bay after Chesapeake) and to the barrier island and peninsulas protecting them from the open Gulf, SSPEED brought together state and federal agencies, nonprofit conservation groups, local governments and representatives of the tourist industry to explore an alternative: create a national recreation area extending from Winnie and High Island, along the Bolivar Peninsula and southwest to Matagorda Bay. Save the wetlands and let *them* protect the built environment on the mainland by offering an economic incentive to local residents:



ABOVE: Map showing existing protected areas of the coast.

greatly increased revenue from tourists—tourists drawn by the natural assets themselves, not by elaborate, expensive resorts and golf courses. And let's call it something that would stir Texas pride—the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area (LSCNRA).

As proposed in the LSCNRA, the National Park Service contributes expertise and coordination, giving nonprofit organizations, state and government entities, private property-owners, and entrepreneurs incentives to work together and



LEFT: Point Bolivar Lighthouse, built 1872.
ABOVE: Kayak group on Galveston Island.

defray overall costs.

Those cooperating entities also reap tremendous economic benefits from recreation and tourism activities. “It’s a recreation area, but it’s also a way for conservation to abound along the coast,” says Bedient.

Although a national recreation area is a congressionally-created unit of the National Park Service, as proposed, the recreation area’s assets will be primarily owned by private individuals and businesses, or by other government entities or nonprofits. Participation by landowners is voluntary; but if they want their fishing marina, for example, to be promoted as part of this government-sanctioned tourist destination, they must sign an agreement stipulating that certain mutually acceptable conditions will be met.

The SSPEED team recognized that political and business expertise would be essential to the project’s success. They persuaded distinguished statesman Secretary James A. Baker III to become honorary chair of the steering committee. As chair, they enlisted Houston businessman John Nau III, who with his wife, Bobbie, owns Silver Eagle Distributorship, the second-largest beer distributorship in the U.S.

Believing that business leaders have an obligation to do public service, Nau had previously focused his volunteer efforts on historic preservation, creating a business-based model for taking preserved assets, from battlefields to old forts, and translating that into “preservation for a purpose”—in other words, tourism and economic development. At the request of President George W. Bush, Nau came to the Alabama and Mississippi coast right after Katrina and witnessed the role the marshlands, estuaries, and barrier islands played in protecting areas of development.

Those experiences combined to fire his enthusiasm about the Lone Star National Coastal Recreation Area. “It combines the economic benefits of tourism and the ecological benefits of marshland,” Nau explains, “and it focuses the attention of local residents on these assets. On top of that it’s 100 per cent voluntary, which is how Texans view their land. That’s absolutely the sweet spot.”

One advantage to the national recreation area approach is that for more than three decades it’s been shown to work. The U.S. now has 18, with the one of the oldest, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, abutting Los Angeles. LSNCR task force member Lynn Scarlett, who was Deputy Secretary of the Interior under President George W. Bush, considers Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area a good model for the Upper Texas Coast, partly because of its combination of natural and historical assets. Established in 1996, Boston Harbor Islands NRA incorporates 34 islands and peninsulas, lighthouses dating to the 18th century and a Civil War-era prison.

“The creation of a national recreation area provided some glue and coordination, along with some federal money and considerable technical expertise from the National Park Service, which knows so much about interpreting this nation’s history and natural environment,” Scarlett explains. For example, Outward Bound is a non-profit that owns land on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor. Their ability to provide outdoor experiences for youth is greatly enhanced by the gateway visitor’s center, maps, brochures, and the more regular ferry service brought about under the national recreation area. The non-profit, however, retains control over who has access to its land. Another island features a historic fort and others public beaches. As Scarlett says, “The recreation area takes disparate parts and provides the glue for a greater whole.”

The LSNCR is proposed to incorporate sizable portions of Chambers, Galveston, Brazoria and Matagorda counties, which have more than 350,000 acres of bays and estuaries. Partners might include the Anahuac and Brazoria National Wildlife Refuges and the 5,000-member Houston Audubon Society with its 2,400 acres of sanctuaries. Between March and May 2011 the sanctuaries at High Island and the Bolivar shore drew 12,000 visitors representing 47 states and 15 foreign countries.

These are the kind of tourists any region would want. As Diane Olsen, president of the Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council, puts it: “Nature tourists are a different breed. They prefer things that

are undisturbed. They’re more considerate of their surroundings. And they certainly have the money to spend.”

Visitors would access the LSNCR through three highways leading off Interstate 10—US 288, I-45 and SH 124—utilizing accommodations, restaurants and similar services in Freeport, Galveston, High Island, and along the Bolivar Peninsula. A lot of the infrastructure is in place, at least for the start. Raised walkways, docks for kayak rentals and guide services, and rustic eco-lodges would be constructed with future hurricanes in mind. “The buildings and other structures would be elevated,” Bedient says. “If they were taken out by a storm hit, it wouldn’t be taking out entire subdivisions.”

In February the task force released a report predicting that by its tenth year of operation the Lone Star National Coastal Recreation Area would add 5,260 new jobs to the region, including 11 per cent more in tourism, and would infuse \$192 million into the local economy. That money will come from the pockets of an additional 1.5 million visitors. Wouldn’t that many people threaten the wetlands ecosystem the program intends to save?

“Alaska has already seen changes due to increased tourism,” concedes Gina Donovan, executive director of the Houston Audubon Society. “But I’d rather have the opportunity to connect people with nature. Due to urban sprawl, the area is going to be affected. If it’s going to be impacted negatively, I’d rather have it be by people enjoying it.”

The project is being pursued in collaboration with the National Parks Conservation Association and Houston Wilderness. Along the coast, response to the proposed Lone Star National Coastal Recreation Area has ranged from cautiously positive to exuberant. Bob Stokes, president of the Galveston Bay Foundation, calls it “a promising opportunity,” but adds “a lot of pieces have to come together to make it work from a conservation perspective.”

Some of those pieces were discussed at the SSPEED Center’s conference “Gulf Coast Hurricanes: Mitigation and Response” on the Rice University campus on April 10-11. A highlight of the meeting was the release of Philip Bedient’s new book, *Lessons from Hurricane Ike* (Texas A&M Press). Ultimately, the U.S. Congress must approve Lone Star National Coastal Recreation Area. The conference was one step in the SSPEED Center’s development of the background documentation for review by the National Park Service.

- Sandy Sheehy