

Latin Influence

National Park Service Illuminates the Impact of Hispanic Heritage

The profound effect of Hispanic culture in American history began 500 years ago with Spanish colonial ambitions and continues today with an ever-increasing presence and influence. According to the 2000 census, Hispanic people are the largest minority group at 12.5 percent. This long association with America has produced a wealth of historic and cultural sites, some of them enjoying the highest status such places can earn for their association with our collective past. *Hispanic Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Hispanic Heritage*, a new publication from the National Park Service, takes a concise look at the Hispanic-American experience as seen through these sites.

The book addresses the history of individual groups—Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans—in the context of their cultural affiliation with the United States. Salvadorans fled civil war in the 1980s to establish enclaves in places like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC (where they are now the largest Hispanic group). Cuba’s long history with the United States and proximity to Florida have made for a strong influence, particularly in Miami.

Hispanic Reflections examines a wide range of property types—such as Spanish missions and military posts, farms, ranches, migrant labor camps, neighborhoods, theaters, and cultural centers—listing sites on the National Register of Historic Places, national historic

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The early Spanish settlers transformed the Southwest. Today, their missions and military outposts have become icons, some of the oldest relics of the early European presence on the continent. Colonial Spanish architectural forms have had an enduring influence on the built environment, and contact with native and African peoples brought unique variations.

American enterprise was an attractive draw for migrants from Latin countries. During the 19th century, railroads, agriculture, and mining attracted people from Mexico, with Mexican-Americans coming to figure prominently in the evolution of the American labor movement. Since the latter half of the 20th century, the classification “Hispanic” has come to include other groups. “While the influence of Mexico on Hispanic culture in the U.S. cannot be overstated,” write the authors, “Spain’s other holdings in the Western Hemisphere contribute to the expanding definition of Hispanic.”

landmarks, and places documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Engineering Record.

The Santa Fe Hotel, a National Register property in Fresno, California, was “a home away from home for Basque shepherds and their families,” as the book describes it, a link between the newcomers and the larger world outside. Many such places sprang up in the rural West of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Tampa’s Ybor City historic district grew up around the Cuban cigar industry of the 1880s. A company town, it was essentially self-contained, including factories, workers’ housing, and social institutions. Today it is a national historic landmark.

The Historic American Engineering Record documented the citrus landscape around Riverside, California, its irrigation canals, packing houses, and other apparatus directly connected to the presence of immigrant labor. Today the region retains a distinct Hispanic character, with 186 acres of groves preserved as California Citrus State Historic Park to commemorate the legacy.

While most Hispanic groups share language, religion, and “creolization”—mixing cultural influences from Africa, the Caribbean, and Native America—the book points out that the Hispanic identity is multifaceted, evolving even as its profile rises on the American scene.

Hispanic Reflections, informed by the latest scholarship, offers an extensive bibliography. The publication is the third in a series, the first two on African and Asian heritage.

RIGHT: Folk dancer at Chamizal National Memorial, El Paso, Texas.

contact point web *Hispanic Reflections on the American Landscape*
www.nps.gov/history/crdi/publications/NPS_HispanicReflections.English.pdf





Texas MODERN

A Mecca for Design in the Postwar Era

One goes by “Big D,” the other goes by “Cowntown.” One is known for its art scene, while the other directs tourists to its historic stockyards and rodeo. Only 40 miles apart, Dallas and Fort Worth may both have large populations, but they are two very different locales. One thing they do have in common is a wealth of modernist landscapes, as the Cultural Landscape Foundation recently high-

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lighted in its *Landscapes for Living: Post War Years in Texas* symposium, part of the foundation’s ongoing *Shaping the American Landscape* series. “Texas has always been very philanthropic towards its civil spaces,” says Charles Birnbaum, foundation founder and president, and that philanthropy is amply evident in both cities.

In the state where everything is big, there’s no shortage of interesting architecture. Fort Worth has an abundance of distinctive art deco-style buildings while Dallas is a hub of modernist skyscrapers. The entire oil-rich state has a history of turning to nationally known architects. Noted city planner George Kessler was commissioned for a number of projects throughout Texas in the early 20th century, as were landscape architects such as the Olmsted Brothers and prolific golf course designer A.W. Tillinghast. “The wealth of the state brought with it a desire for Texas to be recognized nationally, if not internationally, as a place of great culture and progressive thinking,” says Kurt Culbertson, a speaker at the symposium and chairman of the board at Design Workshop, a Denver-based urban planning group. “This brought an attitude of building big and building well.”

LEFT: *The Philip Johnson-designed Thanks-Giving Square Chapel.* **RIGHT ABOVE:** *Dan Kiley’s Fountain Place.*

contact points web Cultural Landscape Foundation <http://tclf.org/df>
Preservation Dallas www.preservationdallas.org/

Philip Johnson once called Texas his “favorite country,” and he left his imprint on the place. His Thanks-Giving Square—in the heart of downtown Dallas—is a genius work designed for the Thanks-Giving Foundation in 1976. The three-acre triangular site includes a sloped central plaza with roseate concrete walkways and grassy areas, the “symbol and centerpiece” being the 90-foot-tall white concrete chapel ascending upwards in a spiral. Inside, light pours down to the floor from the “Glory Window,” a spiraling ring of stained glass, and one of the largest horizontally-mounted stained-glass works in the



world. Water features at the site include a cascading waterfall underneath the bridge to the chapel entrance, water channels surrounding the plaza, and a triangular granite washboard at one side of the chapel. “It is a totally abstract space, confounding its function as a chapel for more than a few people,” writes Frank Welch in *Philip Johnson & Texas*.

The progressive thinking in Fort Worth can be clearly seen in two of the city’s landscape treasures, both created by renowned modernists, both water-themed, and both remarkable. Johnson’s Water Gardens, designed in 1974 as a gift to the city from the Amon G. Carter Foundation, is a jungle of concrete and water, composed of three pools: a quiet meditation pool featuring a still plane of water which cascades into a sunken waterway, a dancing pool with 40 aerating fountains, and the “piece de resistance,” the active pool where water cascades along 38 feet of tiered stone into a vortex, the best part being the free-standing steps which allow visitors to descend down

into it and watch the water rush around them. “An exhilarating, memorable sensory experience,” writes Welch. The park was featured in the 1976 sci-fi thriller *Logan’s Run*.

At the other end of the town is Lawrence Halprin’s Heritage Park, a concrete maze of rooms and pathways connected by flowing streams of water, built on a bluff that was once home to a 19th-century military fort. Water serenely makes its way down from the high points of the 112-acre site via waterfalls, pools, and channels. The site also includes oak trees, ornamental plantings, and a cantilevered overlook from which to view the bordering Trinity River. Though not one of Halprin’s better-known projects (he is better known for spaces that invite movement), it was recently listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is considered particularly significant as the predecessor to one of the architect’s most famous works of all—the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, DC. All the same design elements—outdoor rooms, narrative art, and the use of water—are present in both projects, says Birnbaum, who considers Heritage Park among Halprin’s best works. However, it has spent the last two years abandoned, after the city boarded it up in 2008 over concerns about its deteriorated condition, much to the dismay of Fort Worth preservationists who have had to fight to get it reopened, with design modifications to improve safety. “It’s just a brilliant modern plaza,” says Jerre Tracey, executive director of Historic Fort Worth. And with a few ruins of the fort still on the site, “it’s really the only place where you can touch the beginnings of the city.”

In cosmopolitan Big D, Dan Kiley’s Fountain Plaza surrounds the base of the city’s 60-story prism-shaped Fountain Place skyscraper, where 225 native Texas cypress trees shade a sea of waterfalls, 172 bubbler fountains, and a central fountain. Another noted Kiley work, the garden at the Dallas Museum of Art—a modernist group of rooms featuring pools, fountains, and sculptures—is just three blocks away. There is also a sizable collection of mid-century houses built in neighborhoods such as Midway Hills, Wynnwood North, and Jan Mar. “Dallas is a postwar city, by far,” says Katherine Seale, director of Preservation Dallas, a nonprofit group that inventoried 1500 modernist structures, built before 1965, as part of its city-wide Discover Dallas! Survey. “There was so much money in this city in the 1940s.”



THE PROGRESSIVE THINKING IN FORT WORTH CAN BE CLEARLY SEEN IN TWO OF THE CITY’S LANDSCAPE TREASURES, BOTH CREATED BY RENOWNED MODERNISTS, BOTH WATER-THEMED, AND BOTH REMARKABLE.

Among the residences her group has surveyed is Johnson’s Beck House, the largest he ever did, in the prestigious Preston Hollow subdivision. A design of slender arches, the museum-like structure is a livable version of the six-foot-tall open-air pavilion on the pond at Johnson’s famous Glass House estate in New Canaan, Connecticut. The 12,000-square-foot mansion was built in 1964 for millionaire couple Henry and Patty Beck. Described as “a trophy house that evoked de Chirico by way of Dallas high society,” by *New York Times* design editor Pilar Viladis, it features double winding Baroque stairways, an

umbrella-vaulted dining room, and gorgeous views of the six and a half acres surrounding it. Welch says there has always been a range of opinions about the house—Viladis calls it “almost campy”—but Welch also adds “within and without, it is a handsome structure and, though redolent of the 1960s, stands in proud modern splendor among the recently built faux chateaus of its neighborhood.” Johnson’s design has stood the test of time; a recent renovation by bodron+fruit design of Dallas adapted it to today’s living, successfully turning “what could have been monumental and chilly into something that is as comfortable as it is glamorous,” says Viladis.

Edward Durell Stone’s Oak Court saw another recent award-winning renovation. The house, a rectangular terrazzo-screened family-sized replica of the architect’s U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, India, was built in 1956 and had endured a number of insensitive alterations over the years. In 2004, new owners decided to return to Stone’s original design, with updates in that spirit. Today Oak Court still has its white marble, luxurious Italian walnut, and hand-carved mahogany screens, but gone are the crystal chandeliers, carved rococo fireplaces, and servant’s quarters. The second-story floor plan has also been reshuffled so that its living spaces are centered around the exterior terrace, now covered with a vaulted roof. And, a spiral stair tower—the only addition—now connects the terrace to the courtyard and swimming pool below. The most eye-catching element of the renovation is undoubtedly the return of a dining lagoon, part of Stone’s design later covered with marble and carpet. Located on the first floor, it features a circular marble slab and dining table centered in the middle of it. “This is architecture that surpasses

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ABOVE: Lawrence Halprin’s Heritage Park. RIGHT: The waterfall-like entrance of the Beck House, designed by Philip Johnson.







JAMES F. WILSON

the task of mere restoration by expanding the building beyond Stone's intentions," writes Michael Malone in *Texas Architect* of the work by the Dallas-based Buchanan Architecture firm, which received a National Trust Preservation Honor Award in 2008.

Architect O'Neil Ford was at the forefront of the state's forays into modernism, and the foundation's symposium also showcased the lesser known postwar impact of a husband and wife landscape duo who often worked at his side. Arthur and Marie Berger brought a style all their own—once described as Texas Chiaroscuro with their manipulations of light and shadow—recognizing how air-conditioning would ultimately change outdoor living and therefore the gardens of the region. They “enhanced the intimate and fluid connections between interior and exterior spaces by means of patios, terraces, and long galleries,” writes David Dillon in *The Architecture of O'Neil Ford: Celebrating Place*. Some of their 186 projects include the DeGolyer estate, now part of the Dallas Arboretum, the city's Temple Emanu-El, and Texas Instruments Dallas headquarters.

Many other modernist landscapes were created by the Lambert Landscape Company, a firm that arrived in Dallas during the 1930s, bringing with it a knack for attracting talent from across the country including prominent Texas landscape architects Richard Myrick and

TODAY OAK COURT STILL HAS ITS WHITE MARBLE, LUXURIOUS ITALIAN WALNUT, AND HAND-CARVED MAHOGANY SCREENS, BUT GONE ARE THE CRYSTAL CHANDELIERS, CARVED ROCOCO FIREPLACES, AND SERVANT'S QUARTERS.

Gene Schrickel, Jr. “In terms of modern landscape heritage, the region is really a who's who of landscape architecture,” Birnbaum says.

So what does the future hold for the post-war Texas landscape? The symposium's consensus was that while Texas will probably continue to thrive architecturally, some of its mid-century works, as they start showing their age, might go the way of Heritage Park. Culbertson says one reason they are threatened is that landscapes often don't get the attention awarded to other structures of historic merit. “Nationally, we have done a good job of recognizing the significance of works of architecture and engineering, but only a small fraction of the sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places are landscapes,” he points out.

Which is why the foundation is holding its Shaping the American Landscape series in the first place—to give such sites their due.

LEFT: Edward Durell Stone's recently restored Oak Court.