

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Arthur R. Holliday House
OWNERS: Maire Albiol & David Baldwin
APPLICANTS: Same
LOCATION: 3000 Del Monte Drive – River Oaks
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: 07-20-06

AGENDA ITEM: Ia
HPO FILE NO.: 06L127
DATE ACCEPTED: 07-15-06
HAHC HEARING DATE: 08-24-06
PC HEARING DATE: 08/31/06

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 14 and 15, Block 32, River Oaks Subdivision, Section One, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The buildings on the site include an historic two-story, concrete frame, stucco clad residence and a two-story, garage with quarters.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The residence at 3000 Del Monte was one of the earlier residences constructed in River Oaks, Section One, and is one of the few remaining Houston residential structures designed by noted Texas architect, Alfred Charles Finn. It was built as the residence for Mr. Arthur R. Holliday and his wife, Agnes, in 1927. The home was designed in the Italian Renaissance style, and is an important example of that type of architecture in Houston. Holliday was an innovative “pioneer” air conditioning contractor in Houston. He not only installed an air conditioning system in the Majestic Theatre, which holds the distinction of being Houston’s first air conditioned theatre, but he also installed an air conditioning system in his own home, at 3000 Del Monte Drive, which holds the distinction of being Houston’s first air conditioned residence.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The house at 3000 Del Monte was constructed in 1927 for Arthur R. Holliday, who was president and general manager of Dixie Heating and Ventilation Company, Inc. As early as 1913 an advertisement for the company appeared in the Houston City Directory. The ad reads: “Heating and Ventilating Engineers – Modern Heating and Ventilating Systems for Schools and Public Buildings – Cooling Systems for Theatres.” The company was located at 109-111 Fannin Street. The Dixie Heating and Ventilation Company was listed as one of the sub-contractors for the Anderson County Courthouse, for which they constructed the roofing and dome structure for ventilation. The Anderson County Courthouse (N.R.), located in Palestine, Texas was dedicated on December 30, 1914. It was designed by C. H. Page & Brothers, architects, at a cost of \$250,000.

Mr. Holliday, according to his step-daughter, was a pioneer in air-conditioning. Eventually, he would become associated in business with Karl Hoblitzelle as an air conditioning contractor. Karl St. John Hoblitzelle (1879-1967), was a self-proclaimed “pioneer” in vaudeville and motion picture entertainment. He originally founded the Interstate Amusement Company in 1905 with theatres in Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, Waco and San Antonio. He originally promoted vaudeville acts, but later expanded his ventures to include motion-picture theatres. Hoblitzelle provided his audiences with the “latest technical advances,” including sound equipment and air conditioning, which allowed theaters to

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screen films during the sultry summer months for the first time. Hoblitzelle commissioned the renowned, Chicago theater architect, John Eberson (1875-1964) to design his Majestic Theatre, located at 1925 Elm Street in Dallas, at a cost of \$2 million which opened April 11, 1921. Eberson was known for his unique design, called the “atmospheric style.” Eberson also designed the equally impressive, Majestic Theatre (demolished, 1971) in Houston, Texas. The theatre, Houston’s third Majestic, was located at 908 Rusk Avenue and opened on January 29, 1923. It was Houston’s first air conditioned theatre for which Arthur R. Holliday was the contractor. When Jesse H. Jones commissioned famed Houston architect, Alfred C. Finn, for his impressive Lamar Hotel (demolished) in Houston, it included the lavishly designed, Egyptian Revival themed theatre, the Metropolitan, which was built at a cost of \$2 million. It opened on December 25, 1926, and once again, Holliday was the air conditioning contractor. It was very likely that the professional association shared by Finn and Holliday during the Majestic Theatre project would have influenced Holliday in choosing Finn as the architect for his own home at 3000 Del Monte Drive.

From 1920 to 1927 Arthur R. Holliday had lived at 218 Hawthorne Avenue in the Westmoreland Addition in Houston. It was in 1927 that Holliday and his wife moved into their new, air conditioned home in River Oaks. According to Holliday’s step-daughter, who lived at 3000 Del Monte until she married in 1940, the house was the first air conditioned home in Houston. Arthur R. Holliday was a 32nd degree Mason and a Rotarian. He died in 1964 and was buried at Forest Lawn Lawndale Cemetery, located at 6900 Lawndale Street, Houston, Texas.

Mr. Holliday had sold the home at 3000 Del Monte to Mr. David A. Simmons in 1941. According to the Handbook of Texas Online, Mr. Simmons was responsible for founding both the Houston Bar Journal and the District Bar Journal. Mr. Simmons remained at 3000 Del Monte until 1950 when the house was acquired by Mrs. Solonphad Ross. Mrs. Ross sold the house the same year to G. L. and Rita Mims. Mrs. Mims lived in the house until 1968 when she sold it to Dr. and Mrs. Jean Jackson, who later sold the home to Mr. and Mrs. James Kempner in 1988. Maire and David Baldwin, the current owners, purchased the home from the Kempners in 2005, becoming the seventh owners of 3000 Del Monte.

According to the Handbook of Texas Online, Alfred C. Finn (1883-1964), a native of Bellville, Texas, received his professional training in the offices of Sanguinet and Staats of Fort Worth, the foremost commercial architectural firm in the state during the early decades of the 20th century. In 1912, he was sent to work in the Houston office of Sanguinet and Staats. Finn began independent practice in Houston in 1913. His first job was to supervise construction of the Rice Hotel for the Houston entrepreneur, Jesse H. Jones. This project began his life-long association with Jones, Houston's foremost real estate developer and builder.

During the early years of his practice, Finn designed many large houses in Houston, including homes for Sid Westheimer and Walter W. Fondren (the current Colombe D’Or restaurant) in Montrose, Earl K. Wharton in Shadyside, and Sarah Brashear Jones in Courtlandt Place. By the mid-1920s, Finn had become Houston's leading commercial architect, producing skyscraper office buildings, hotels, retail stores, and theaters in the downtown business district. For Jones, he designed a seventeen-story addition to the Rice Hotel, the Lamar Hotel, the Metropolitan and Loew's State Theaters, and the Gulf Building, the tallest building constructed in Texas in the 1920s. During this period, Finn's office also produced the Kirby Building, large houses for William L. Moody III in Galveston and Ross S. Sterling at Bay Ridge, and such institutional buildings as the Houston Light Guard Armory and St. Paul's Methodist Church.

Coinciding with Jesse Jones's move from business into government in the 1930s, Finn obtained some of the most prominent publicly-financed building commissions in Texas. His office designed the Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall (demolished), the Jefferson Davis Hospital on Allen Parkway (demolished), the San Jacinto Monument, and the Veterans Administration Hospital. After World War II, Finn was involved in the design of the City National Bank Building, the Ezekiel W. Cullen Building at the University of Houston, the Sakowitz Brothers store downtown, the Arabia Temple Crippled Children's Hospital, and Ben Taub Hospital.

The home Alfred Finn designed for Mr. Holliday was one of the first houses built in 1927 in River Oaks Section One, which was part of the "new" River Oaks development. The contractor for the house was L. W. Lindsay. According to the article about River Oaks in the Handbook of Texas Online, River Oaks was developed "by Buffalo Bayou and Memorial Park in west central Houston. The residential garden suburb, which comprises 1,100 acres, was developed in the 1920s by Michael Hogg and attorney, Hugh Potter, who in 1923 obtained an option to purchase 200 acres surrounding the River Oaks Country Club. In 1924 Hogg organized Country Club Estates to promote the development. The two developers retained Kansas City landscape architects, Hare and Hare, to provide a master plan that would protect the environmental integrity and natural beauty of the area. They also hired J. C. Nichols, who built one of the first major shopping centers in the United States, to serve as a design consultant. The master plan included homesites, a fifteen-acre campus for River Oaks Elementary School, two shopping centers, and esplanades planted with flowers. It called for underground utility lines, eliminated alleys, allowed only three intersecting streets, provided rigid building codes, and eventually banned all commercial traffic. Deed restrictions and centralized community control assured exclusivity; approval of house designs by a panel of architects and citizens and a purchase price of at least \$7,000 were required. The first home in the area, built by Will and Sue Clayton, is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Among the other notable houses is Ima Hogg's family home, Bayou Bend (N. R.; City of Houston Landmark), designed by John F. Staub and Birdsall P. Briscoe. In the late 1920s the development lost money, but by the late 1930s developers had invested \$3 million in the project, and the community had begun to influence development patterns downtown. In the 1930s River Oaks was at the geographic center of Houston. The community operated independently for three years, after which it was annexed by the city."

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Alfred Finn's architectural style is generally characterized as conservative. Heavy use of concrete, detailed stone work, an emphasis on symmetry, and a use of grand scale were all common in Mr. Finn's commercial and residential designs.

Current owners Maire Albion and David Baldwin possess the original Alfred Finn architectural renderings from 1927. The house is an Italianate Renaissance-style home with a vast lawn, handmade tile roof, stucco exterior, casement windows, and copper gutters. The house has been maintained in its original condition, with only minor, period-oriented changes to the electrical, HVAC, and kitchen configurations. Elaborate gardens and a fountain have been added to the east lawn to complement the Italianate architecture. The Baldwins plan to preserve the primary residence while further updating its electrical, HVAC, and security systems, and by modernizing the kitchen and master bedroom suites.

The house is listed in *Houston Architectural Survey*. A picture of the home was also found in a promotional book published circa 1929 titled *River Oaks: A Pictorial Presentation of Houston's Residential Park* accompanied by the following caption: "This Renaissance home, with its spacious

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lawn, its roof of handmade tile, and its triple arched entrance way, is regarded as one of the finest examples of its type in the country.”

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, and Diana DuCroz, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson County Courthouse (Palestine, Texas), <http://www.texascourthouses.com>

Beale, Sharie – Interview with Arthur R. Holliday’s stepdaughter – 1993 – (Sharie and David Beale owned the Arthur R. Holliday House at 218 Hawthorne, Houston, Texas at that time during her research for the application for National Register of Historic Places designation for the Westmoreland Historic District).

Beale, Sharie, National Register of Historic Places designation application, Westmoreland Historic District, Houston, Texas, 1994.

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Southwest Center for Urban Research, *Houston Architectural Survey*, Volume 3, pages 591-592.

River Oaks Corporation, *River Oaks: A Pictorial Presentation of Houston’s Residential Park*, 1929.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;		

- (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to Houston City Council the Landmark Designation of the Arthur R. Holliday House at 3000 Del Monte Drive.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
ARTHUR R. HOLLIDAY HOUSE
3000 DEL MONTE DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE

