

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: David Frame House
OWNER: Dana Roy Harper
APPLICANT: Anna Mod
LOCATION: 403 Westminster Drive
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: III.c
HPO FILE NO.: 08PL62
DATE ACCEPTED: May-01-08
HAHC HEARING: May-15-08
PC HEARING: May-22-08

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 33 and East 10 Feet of Lot 34, Block 2, Section 2, Huntleigh Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The structure is a one-story single-family residence sited on the north side of the Buffalo Bayou in Memorial.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The David Frame House at 403 Westminister, designed by Harwood Taylor in 1960, is both architecturally and historically significant. It is an exceptional example of the influence of modern architecture and the importance of the single-family residential structures during the post-war building boom in Houston. The design exemplifies the adaptation of Miesian principals to residential construction, an important characteristic of local architectural development, and was the product of one of the more prominent local modern architects of the period.

The David Frame House meets Criteria 1, 4, 5, 6, and 9 for Protected Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

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The post-war era construction boom in Houston was characterized by low-density development spread across vast areas of land. Beginning in 1948, the municipal government pursued a rigorous annexation policy of land, increasing the city limits from 74 square miles to 447 square miles by 1967.¹ Single-family houses filled suburban tracts linked by newly constructed roads and freeways and the population of the growing metropolis increased from 596,163 in 1950 to 938,219 in 1960.²

Single-family houses equipped with air conditioning flourished during this period as three dominant modern architectural trends - Miesian, Usonian, and Contemporary - developed. In *Booming Houston & the Modern House Residential Architecture of Neuhaus and Taylor, 1955-1960*, Ben Koush describes these styles as based on the styles of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) and Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959). Miesian aesthetics embrace austere practices of exposed steel members, while the more

¹ Koush, Ben. *Booming Houston & the Modern House Residential Architecture of Neuhaus and Taylor, 1955–1960* (Houston: Houston Mod, 2006), 5.

² Koush, 5.

organic style characteristic of Wright's later work inspired Usonian designs. The term "Contemporary" referred to a style inspired by popular culture and aspects of both Miesian and Usonian expressions.³ The discrete indication of structure, ordered relationships between individual parts, craftsmanship and tectonic austerity characteristic of Miesian design grew in prominence and overshadowed other influences by the mid-1950s. The architect and critic Philip Johnson, a student of Mies, adapted his professor's practices in numerous residential structures and it was Johnson's introduction and interpretation of Mies in Houston that had a direct influence on residential design in the city.

The Menil House designed by Philip Johnson was built in Houston in 1951. The house, an epicenter for cultural activity, immediately impacted the developing architectural design in the city. Brick walls contrasted full-height glass panels, and the flat roof, protected courtyards, and open interior plan became a model for post-war housing design in Houston.⁴ Harwood Taylor was among the younger architects such as Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr., Howard Barnstone, Burdette Keeland, William R. Jenkins, Kenneth Bentsen, and Anderson Todd practicing in Houston at the time.

Born in Dallas on May 25, 1927, Harwood Taylor grew up in Houston and graduated with a degree in architecture in 1951 from the University of Texas at Austin. As a student he frequently returned to Houston and worked in the office of William N. Floyd (1910–2004). Upon graduation, Taylor worked in Floyd's office until he established an independent practice in 1953. Taylor consistently designed well-planned Miesian-inspired houses that explored domestic privacy and maximized indoor and outdoor living. After two years of working successfully and independently, Taylor established a partnership, Neuhaus & Taylor, with J. Victor Neuhaus III in 1955. Their partnership allowed Taylor to focus on design and the firm's reputation grew as projects were published in architectural and home and garden magazines nationally and locally.

As the Neuhaus & Taylor practice expanded, they designed numerous apartment complexes and small- and medium-sized office buildings. Taylor designed the noteworthy Briardale Courts Apartments for his childhood friend David A. Frame, Jr., in 1958. Also of note was a series of small commercial structures completed in the early 1960s composed of a single floor of office space set above a parking garage elevated on pilotis.⁵ After 1960, the firm ceased publishing their residential commissions and focused on the pursuit of larger construction projects.⁶ Eventually Neuhaus & Taylor specialized in construction management, engineering services, and planning, rather than design. In 1972 the name changed to Diversified Design Disciplines and in 1975, as the bulk of the projects transferred abroad, the firm name changed again to 3D/I. Taylor died at the age of 61 in 1988.

Taylor is recognized for his series of brick-walled courtyard houses built in the growing suburbs of Houston. The houses are characterized by increasingly innovative programming, the integration of interior and exterior spaces, the juxtaposition of solid and transparent facing materials, and geometric abstraction in the plan and elevation. The works applied to strict tectonic principals typical of the Miesian-inspired designs. Taylor, however, integrates the precise architectural vocabulary in a dialog between design and domesticity.

The development of his residential design occurred over the course of the 1950s and arguably culminated with the construction of the David Frame House in 1960. Both early and later residences were recognized locally and nationally. The 1954 Fred Winchell Studio at 1953–1955 Richmond Avenue, completed in collaboration with Burdette Keeland, was published in *Architectural Forum* and

³ Koush, 13.

⁴ Koush, 18.

⁵ Koush notes the Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company Building (1960) at 2701 Fannin Street as the most elegant of these buildings.

⁶ Koush, 50.

received a merit award from the Texas Society of Architects the same year. Taylor continued to focus on integration of indoor and outdoor living in the design for the 1955 Living Parade House. As the model house for the Meyerland subdivision, it was part of the Fourth Houston Parade of Homes and was visited by over 75,000 Houstonians.⁷ The plan of the house is based on two continuous long volumes of living space protected by an enclosed courtyard. The rafters of the flat roofs extended over patios to provide shade and blur interior and exterior boundaries. Fred Buxton, the landscape architect, began to work with Taylor on this project.

The Kaim House, also completed in 1955, reveals numerous elements that Taylor repeatedly focused on and incorporated into the Frame House. It is the first of his houses that experiments with the influence of Mies' brick-walled courtyard structures of the 1930s.⁸ The front elevation is composed of two brick planes while the rear private facades are all glazed. The glass walls are protected by projecting eaves supported by thin lally columns. The Watson House, completed the same year, was also quickly recognized for its architectural merit. It published in *Arts & Architecture* and received an award of excellence from the Texas Society of Architects in 1955.⁹ Similar to the design of the Living Parade House, the plan is based on two long volumes.

Taylor continued to experiment with the placement of long horizontal pink Mexican brick and glass masses. The McCartney House (1956) and the Genitempo House (1957) demonstrate his emphasis on experimentation with long brick walls using his characteristic six-inch bricks. Both houses employ load-bearing brick walls in combination with standard glass modules set in aluminum frames. The goal was architectural precision that resulted in the elimination of additional framing elements and costs. The McCartney House plan is based on a series of rectangular blocks situated perpendicular to the street, while the Genitempo House has an H-shaped plan set perpendicular to the street. Taylor's next house, the Electri-Living House (1957), received local and national acclaim. Based on a four-foot module, the plan established long open living spaces around a central core in a completely enclosed envelope. Taylor's residential designs were particularly well received and the Electri-Living House garnered the most national attention. It was one of twelve houses sponsored nationally for *Living For Young Homemakers* magazine.¹⁰

THE FRAME HOUSE

The David Frame House was commissioned by David Frame and Gloria Klein approximately two years after the completion of the Electri-Living House. David Frame had established a working relationship with Taylor following the commission of the Briardale Courts Apartments in 1958. Construction was finished in May 1960 and the house was featured on the Contemporary Arts Association's Modern House Tour IX. A year later, it was part of the Museum of Natural History's Guild's Kitchen Tour. Published extensively locally and nationally, the house was featured in the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Houston Post*, and *House and Garden*. In 1961, the Texas Society of Architects recognized the David Frame House with a merit award for design.

The house reflects Taylor's continued emphasis on clear articulated architectural expression and the use of standard materials in an integrated open plan. The volumes of the house are low and horizontal, typical of all his courtyard houses. Unique in its natural setting and adaptation to the sloped lot, the multi-level plan reflects his dedication to blurring the boundaries of indoor and outdoor living. The

⁷ Koush, 33.

⁸ Koush, 34.

⁹ Koush, 38.

¹⁰ Koush, 46.

original landscape design by Fred Buxton facilitated the flow of the interior and exterior spaces along the glazed walls facing the courtyard. The architect's continued dialog concerning privacy is evident both in the articulation and materials of the facades and the interior design and finishes. As his final residential design, the Frame House is a significant example of the design ideals the architect pursued in all of his work. The house is historically significant as a product of the post war construction boom and a representation of the Miesian-inspired modern houses that were built along the streets of Houston's expanding suburbs.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The David Frame House is a one-story single-family residence located on the southwest corner of Westminster Drive and Farther Point in the tree-lined Huntleigh subdivision in the Memorial area of west Houston. The residence is situated on an irregular-shaped lot that measures 89.3 feet on Westminster Drive, 237.86 feet on Farther Point, and 297 feet along the adjoining lot to the west. The wooded site slopes steeply to the south down a ravine, which opens to Buffalo Bayou. The front, north portion of the lot is landscaped with densely planted pine trees, palms, spiraea, crepe myrtles and other mid-sized native plants. The numerous trees, lack of grass, and the winding crushed granite footpath leading to the main entrance create a natural and secluded setting.

The structure follows the grade of the site and is composed of three tiers of indoor and outdoor living spaces supported by an elegant, partially freestanding, concrete pier-and-beam foundation that steps down the ravine in the center of the lot. The flat roof and horizontal massing emphasize the long and low lines of the structure. The north and west elevations are visible from Westminster Drive and Farther Point respectively.

The overall L-plan of the building is composed of the main house and a guesthouse arranged around a sunken rectangular courtyard. A series of covered patios and sidewalks join these two elements and step down to the garden and swimming pool. The main three-story structure has an E-shaped plan and extends south in terraced sections to the bayou. The smaller guesthouse is located to the west on axis with the entrance to the main house and creates the L-plan of the entire building.

The main façade is composed of two intersecting low-slung volumes defined by elongated brick walls with a minimally detailed metal coping cap. The light pink Mexican brick is laid in a running stretcher bond. The two planes are punctured only by the off-center entry located at the terminus of the projecting eastern brick plane. The entry is recessed and is composed of a wooden gate with vertically staggered 1' x 6" and 2' x 4" boards. A canopy with a plaster ceiling and metal fascia supported by a thin lally column extends beyond the brick wall to the crushed granite footpath. The second brick plane is flush with the entry and extends to the west. Two skylights are partially visible on this elevation.

Upon entry, the multi-level plan that eases between interior and exterior spaces is revealed. Defined by the projecting wings of the E-shaped plan, the west elevation of the main house is arranged around two patios and is entirely glazed except for the brick facing of the facades of the first and third wings. The main entry to the house occupies the terminus of the central wing of the plan. The non-original glazed double wooden doors have a soldier course brick threshold. The recessed bays that flank the entrance are fully glazed and surround the two patios.

The first patio is enclosed with three walls of full-height glazed panes set in aluminum frames. The window wall of the central, recessed section, has operable sliding doors. A rectangular opening in the roof, finished with a wood fascia and metal coping, allows water and sunlight into the landscaped garden. The glazed panes of the second larger patio are taller, approximately twelve-feet in height. Like

the first patio, the central panes are operable sliding doors. The roof of this patio is punctuated by four openings divided with metal beams and finished with a wooden fascia and metal coping.

The large pink Mexican brick chimney defines the southern end of the west facade. It is the same pink brick employed on the north façade and is laid in a running stretcher bond; rectangular vents at the top of the chimney provide minimal decoration. The chimney is the only element that vertically penetrates the flat roofline of the house and the covered walkways.

The covered walkways extend from the west and south elevations to create a continuous roofline from the roof between the main house and the guesthouse. Supported by thin steel lally columns, it runs the entire length of the south façade of the guesthouse and wraps around the southeast corner of the main house to stretch across half of this elevation.

The south elevation of the main house is also predominately transparent. A double-height glazed wall that stretches six bays in length and reaches approximately eighteen feet in height defines the western half of the façade. The glazed panes are set in the same aluminum frames with centrally located operable sliding doors. A series of additional glazed panes above painted dark grey wood siding complete the eastern portion of the south façade. Balconies with thin steel railings are integrated with the lally columns and extend across both glazed sections of this façade. The concrete pier and beam foundation is visible below the floor height.

The east elevation has two levels. The upper portion is composed of painted, staggered wooden vertical boards similar to the main entry gate that terminate and screen the glass walls of the interior spaces behind. The garage door opening is framed in brick and has a metal rolling grate overhead door. The basement is visible below this southern section of the façade. The concrete structure frames two bays; a staircase and small garage/storage area finished in vertical wood siding occupy the first bay. A recessed entry flanked by three-light, full-height wood framed windows to each side defines the second bay. The entry has two side doors and is clad in the same dark grey wood siding. Cement stairs lead from this lower level to the pebble concrete driveway and garage that front Farther Point at the street grade.

The guesthouse is rectangular in plan and is faced with elongated pink Mexican brick on all elevations except for the south. The south façade of the guesthouse is composed of a total of six aluminum-framed openings that create a floor-to-ceiling glazed wall with operable sliding doors in the fourth and fifth bays.

The areaways and landscaping, notably on the west and south elevations, serve to create continuous transitions from interior to exterior spaces. The walkways and patios of these elevations are paved with regular squares of light pebble-concrete framed with wooden strips. Brick borders link the pavers to the brick stairs at the perimeter of the patios. A single wooden staircase leads from the guesthouse to the patio below. The patios lead to the green lawn landscaping and rectangular turquoise pool. A wooden deck wraps the southern end of the pool and connects to the covered walkway of the south elevation. On the east elevation, a similar design of pavers and bricks joins the basement level spaces to the stairs leading to the garage. A small brick retaining wall protects the pavers from the slope of the ravine to the east.

The roof is a four-ply coal tar built-up flat roof with copper flashing and metal coping. All of the roofs of the non-brick elevations have wood fascias. The system is continuous for the covered walkways and their multiple openings. The walkways are all supported by thin tubular steel square lally columns with rounded corners. The ceilings of the walkways are finished in white plaster. The foundation, which is partially exposed on the south and east facades, is composed of pre-cast concrete beams that rest on freestanding cast-in-place concrete piers and beams. The exposed foundation on the south and east

facades is visually reminiscent of freeway overpass construction, occurring contemporaneously in Houston.

The interior of the house optimizes the transparency of the west and south facades with a multi-level open-floor plan. The living spaces such as the kitchen and living rooms are laid out so that the interior and exterior spaces flow into one another. The house is approximately 5,067 square feet with five bedrooms and multiple shared living spaces. Unique interior finishes include the walnut paneling, a suspended staircase, recessed lighting coves in the ceilings, a large brick fireplace, and sunken baths.

An open-air studio/shed is located on the southeastern corner of the property. It is a recent all wood frame construction set on a concrete slab with a metal roof. Vertical wood siding partially encloses the studio to the south.

RESTORATION HISTORY & CURRENT CONDITION

The David Frame House remained unchanged for its first twenty years. Numerous unsympathetic alterations and renovations subsequently occurred after the original owners sold the property. The current owner acquired the house in 2004 and a sensitive restoration and rehabilitation campaign began under the direction of William F. Stern and David Bucek of Stern and Bucek Architects of Houston. Original photographs and drawings facilitated a full restoration of the exterior of the residence and a sensitive rehabilitation of the interior spaces.

When the current owner bought the house in 2004, the entire exterior was painted white and the terraced landscaping had been removed.¹¹ The roof was also in fair to poor condition due to the replacement of the original copper flashing with galvanized steel, which had quickly rusted allowing moisture penetration.¹² Alterations to the original design on the interior were more extensive and included a white paint finish on all of the walnut paneling and concrete infill in the former sunken baths. Finishes such as cast-plaster screens and the turquoise St. Charles steel kitchen cabinets were gone, and the recessed cove lighting had also been removed.

The restoration of the house returned the exterior to its original appearance using historic photographs and drawings as a guide. All of the white paint was gently removed from the original brick. The original wood louvers and steel columns and railings were painted to replicate the colors and tones of the photographs. In order to protect the longevity of the structure, a new four-ply coal tar built-up flat roof with copper flashing and copping was installed and the existing drainage system was upgraded.¹³ The landscape design with multi-level terraces framed by gardens was recreated in the spirit of the original design. The extensive rehabilitation of the interior spaces restored many of the unique character-defining elements and finishes to their original appearance including the walnut paneling, sunken baths, and recessed lighting coves in the ceilings.

The extensive restoration of the exterior and sensitive rehabilitation of the interior of the David Frame House is a tribute to Harwood Taylor's design. The owner was awarded a 2007 Good Brick Award by the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance for the project.¹⁴ Since completion of the restoration and rehabilitation, the Frame House has received renewed attention and has been featured in numerous local

¹¹ Telephone interview with William F. Stern of Stern & Bueck Architects on 4/16/2008 provided detailed information on the restoration and rehabilitation of the house as well as the condition of the fabric prior to commencement of the project.

¹² Ben Koush "The Frame/Harper House," *Texas Architect Magazine* (September 2007); Accessed on-line: Ben Koush "The Frame/Harper House," *Texas Society of Architects* <http://www.texasarchitect.org/ta200709-harper.php> (April 20, 2008).

¹³ <http://www.texasarchitect.org/ta200709-harper.php>

¹⁴ Maggie Galehouse, "Designers at home with modern lines / Midcentury architecture enjoys a popular resurgence," *Houston Chronicle*, December 1, 2006 (<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/gardening/features/4373445.html>).

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publications including *Texas Architect* (September 2007) and *Paper City* (May 2007). The resurgence of concern for the conservation of the Frame House and other significant mid-century residential designs is fundamental to the recognition of their contribution to the larger panorama of Houston's built fabric.

Listing the David Frame House as a Protected Houston Landmark will ensure the protection of this significant example of modern architecture.

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

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

S **NA** **S - satisfies** **NA - not applicable**

Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(1);
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event (Sec. 33-224(a)(2);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(3);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(4);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(5);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(6);
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present (Sec. 33-224(a)(7);
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride (Sec. 33-224(a)(8).

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- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b).

OR

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2);

OR

- The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3);

OR

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the David Frame House at 403 Westminster Street.

DAVID FRAME HOUSE
403 WESTMINSTER STREET



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SITE LOCATION MAP
DAVID FRAME HOUSE
403 WESTMINSTER STREET
NOT TO SCALE

