

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Hugo Victor Neuhaus Jr. House

OWNER: Robert Mosbacher

APPLICANT: Anna Mod, Preservation Consultant

LOCATION: 2910 Lazy Lane

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: May-17-2004

AGENDA ITEM: I

P.C.MEETING DATE: June-24-04

HPO FILE NO.: 04L114

DATE ACCEPTED: May-10-04

HAHC HEARING DATE: June-17-04

SITE INFORMATION

Tract Al-A, River Oaks Homewoods Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a one-story, brick veneer residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The 1950 Neuhaus house is perhaps Houston's best example of the contemporary modern architectural style that was favored by architects across the nation between 1950 -1970. Built in River Oaks, a residential garden suburb neighborhood developed in the 1920s by Michael Hogg and attorney Hugh Potter, the house was designed by Houston architect Hugo Victor Neuhaus, Jr. for himself and his family. The landscape plan is by Fleming and Sheppard whose other commissions include the Diana garden and north terrace at Bayou Bend (NR).¹ The Neuhaus house and gardens are nominated for listing as a City of Houston Landmark under Criteria 4.

Hugo Victor Neuhaus, Jr. was born in Houston in 1915, the son of Hugo Victor and Kate Padgett (Rice) Neuhaus.² Neuhaus, Sr. was an investment banker known as "The Baron" and in 1923 commissioned architect Harrie T. Lindberg to design a house for his family at 9 Remington Lane with John Staub as the supervising architect. When asked by John Staub later in life if his childhood house had any influence on his decision to become an architect, Neuhaus, Jr. responded that he "loved the feeling of the woodwork on hot summer days."³ The famous woodwork was the result of "15 coats of pumice rubbed lacquer that looked like glass."⁴

Hugo Victor Neuhaus, Jr. attended St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire (1934), Yale College (A.B. 1938), and the Graduate School of Design (GSD), Harvard University (B. Arch., 1941). Upon returning to Houston in 1946 after serving in the US Army Air Force for five years, Neuhaus worked briefly for the Houston architect Kenneth Franzheim, and then joined the office of C. Herbert Cowell and became a partner in 1949. After the dissolution of that firm in 1962, he practiced with Magruder Windfield, Jr. until 1967 when he established his own practice known as

¹ "BAYOU BEND." The Handbook of Texas Online. <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/BB/lbb1.html>.

² "NEUHAUS, HUGO VICTOR, JR." The Handbook of Texas Online.

<<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/NN/fne43.html>

³ Interview with William O. Neuhaus by Anna Mod, May 2004, Houston, Texas.

⁴ Ibid.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Neuhaus Associates where he remained until his retirement in 1980.⁵

In 1947 Neuhaus married Mary Wood Farish, the widow of his cousin William Stamps Farish, Jr., and became the stepfather of William Stamps Farish III. William Farish III grew up in the Neuhaus-designed house on Lazy Lane and in 2001 was appointed by President George W. Bush as the Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Following his first wife's death in 1979, Neuhaus married Olive McCollum in 1985.⁶

Architectural historian and Anchorage Foundation Fellow Stephen Fox describes the Neuhaus aesthetic as one of "refinement, precision and serene urbanity."⁷ The house in River Oaks, an example from the early period of his practice, is very Miesian and pure in its expression of the modern contemporary minimal design aesthetic. The success of the house is seen and felt in its warmth, elegance and serenity - the house does not have a sterile or cold feeling.

In addition to the house for his family, Neuhaus designed the Stude-Stevenson House (1951) and a house for Nina J. Cullinan (1953, demolished), both in Houston. Other houses of the 1950s outside of Houston include the Runnells-Pierce Ranch House (1956) in Bay City, and the Deterin Bay House in Bay Ridge, Morgan's Point (1959, demolished).⁸

"From 1960 to 1962, David Haid worked with Cowell and Neuhaus and the firm's commercial structures included: the Headlee District Office Building, Midland, Texas (1960), the Shell Development Company Auditorium and Research Building, South Side Place [Houston] (1961), the McAllen State Bank Building, McAllen, Texas (1961, defaced), and the Letzerich Ranch House, Friendswood, Texas (1962)."

Examples of Neuhaus' later work include: the Hudson Ranch House near Bay City, Texas (1965), the Wood House, Palestine, Texas (1965), the Rice Hotel Laundry, Houston (1966), the Letzerich House, Houston (1966), the Aline McAshan Botanical Hall for Children at the Houston Arboretum (1969), and the Sharp House (1978, with Graham B. Luhn)."⁹

History of the Neuhaus family in Texas

The first member of Houston's Neuhaus family, Ludwig Eduard Neuhaus, arrived in Galveston in 1846 and the following year founded a settlement he later named Hackberry, named after a grove of trees on the property.¹⁰ Located on Farm Road 532 eleven miles northeast of Hallettsville in northeastern Lavaca County, Hackberry "served as a stop over on the old Gonzales-San Felipe stagecoach route."¹¹ "Neuhaus farmed the property for several years and between 1850 and 1852, he constructed a two-story oak *fachwerk* [half timbered] structure for his residence and mercantile business and in 1853 opened a steam sawmill-gristmill and added a cotton

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "NEUHAUS, HUGO VICTOR, JR." The Handbook of Texas Online.

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/NN/fne43.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ " THE HISTORY OF HACKBERRY, TEXAS." <<http://www.neuarch.com/NewPages/history.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

gin several year later."¹² The settlement was granted a post office in 1862 and in 1865 Neuhaus built a general store. The extant two-story stone general store replaced the original store in 1880. "By 1884 the town had an estimated population of 300, seven steam gristmill-cotton gins, two churches, a school, a saloon, a blacksmith shop, and a tin shop."¹³ By 1900 the population was less than half that and members of the Neuhaus family began to move to Houston. Today the town is abandoned with only a handful of buildings standing - including the 19th century two-story stone general store. The land and remaining structures are still owned by the Neuhaus family.

Influence of Philip Johnson

Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr. studied at the Harvard GSD at the same time as Philip Johnson and when Johnson was commissioned to design a house in Houston for Dominique (Slumberger) and John de Menil, Neuhaus served as Johnson's local associate architect. As a result of this collaboration, Neuhaus came under the influence of Johnson's mentor, the Chicago architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.¹⁴

Neuhaus, Jr. was a board member of many local and state arts organizations and was chairman of the building committee of the Museum of Fine Arts when Mies van der Rohe was hired to design the first (1954) of two additions.¹⁵

C. C. Pat Fleming, Landscape Architect

C. C. Pat Fleming, who practiced in Houston and the South from the 1920s through the 1990s, was one of the founding members of the landscape architecture profession in early 20th century Houston and is regarded as one of Texas' leaders in the field. One of seven children, Cauthen Cook Fleming was born in Beaumont, Texas on February 13, 1909 to Joseph Vandever and Keziah Fleming. He studied architecture at the University of Texas in Austin until chemistry and welding accidents burned his eyes forcing him to abandon his studies. Under the guidance of retired UT architecture professor Dr. Tandy, Fleming visited Europe where he realized his desire to practice landscape architecture over architecture.¹⁶ He received no formal training as a landscape architect and gained experience as an employee of Mrs. C. B. Whitehead, an Austin landscape contractor who executed the planting for the University of Texas called for by the master plan designed by Hare and Hare of Kansas City."¹⁷ He later worked for the National Park Service and served as a "junior-grade landscape architect in the design of Palmetto State Park near Gonzales, Texas from 1934-1935."¹⁸

Subsequent Park Service jobs included the "supervising landscape architect for the planning and development of the San Jacinto Monument and Battlegrounds from 1935 to 1936. There he worked with Albert Sheppard, a friend of Fleming's from UT architecture school who would later become his

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "NEUHAUS, HUGO VICTOR, JR." the Handbook of Texas Online.

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/NN/fne43.html>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Phillips, Paige Allred. C. C. Pat Fleming: Houston, Texas, Landscape Architect. Master's Thesis, Louisiana State University, December 2003.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

business partner from 1937 to 1942.”¹⁹ Alfred Finn, architect of the monument, recommended Fleming to influential Houstonians and subsequent exposure lead to an appointment to the Houston Planning Commission in 1936 by Mayor R. H. Fonville. Two years later the same mayor appointed Fleming as assistant director of the Houston Housing Authority.²⁰

“On April 10, 1937, Fleming formed a professional landscape planning practice with Albert Sheppard. They received numerous major commissions in the Houston neighborhoods of River Oaks, Shadyside, and Broad Acres, many of which involved the work of prominent Houston architect John Staub. Most notable among these was the Diana garden for Ima Hogg at her residence, Bayou Bend.”²¹

Throughout Fleming’s 35-year practice, while focusing on residential landscape design, he also produced institutional, corporate and commercial projects including the 27-acre Prudential Life Insurance Company headquarters in 1952 (Kenneth Franzheim, architect) for which he received the 1955 Plant American Award from the American Association of Nurserymen.²²

Fleming’s civic involvement included the formation of the Harris County Heritage Society along with a dozen other citizens in 1954 and he was an advocate of the use of the city’s bayous as an urban amenity.

The length of Fleming’s practice spanned decades. Beginning with Beaus-Arts Classicism, a formal design style named after the Parisian Ecole Des Beaux-Arts where many American architects and landscape architects studied in the late 19th century, Fleming changed his design ideas with changing national trends. His career spanned subsequent trends of the Country Place Era, Colonial Revival and Southern Gardens and Modernism.

Modernism as a landscape design style included the rejection and reaction against the traditional styles. New technologies and attitudes were also inherent in the exploration of newness. While modernist architect sought to incorporate the beauty of the machine aesthetic and explore the possibilities of new and overlapping volumes and spaces, the modern landscape architect sought similar goals. Modern landscape design, according to the article *Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture* by architecture critic Marc Treib, adheres to six axioms: the denial of historical styles, the use and definition of space as opposed to the patterning of space, the use of landscapes by people and not merely for visual delight, the destruction of the axis, the use of plants as sculpture and the integration of the house and garden.²³

The Neuhaus residence on Lazy Lane is an example of Fleming’s modernist vocabulary. He designed the gardens in 1950, same year as the house. The entry court is more traditional with symmetrical organization of two cross-axes. The plantings of the entry court have been changed from the original and there is now an English-style flower garden. The rear patio is

¹⁹ Ibid., page 6.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., page 7.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., page 25.

distinctively modern in its design and is "divided into several subspaces for sunbathing, dining, dancing and lounging."²⁴

Architectural description

Located at the northwest corner of Lazy Lane and Kirby Drive in Houston's River Oaks neighborhood, the 1950 modern contemporary-style Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr. house was designed for the Houston architect and his family. The one-story, brick and glass house with flat roof faces east on over two wooded acres that slope down to a ravine beyond the rear patio and western lawn. The landscape architecture firm Fleming and Sheppard designed the garden.

The house is a grouping of pavilions clad in a "smudged faced" brick that ranges in color from salmon, to orange to buff and is laid up in stretcher bond coursing. A continuous fascia board and a metal roof cap emphasize the horizontality of the house. The main (east) façade is three bays wide. The first bay has a single circular window set in a brick wall. The second and central bay is divided into three subsequent bays comprised of an inset entry portico followed by a brick wall and then a window opening with a large central fixed pane glass flanked by 1/1 metal-framed windows. The windowed bay appears to have been truncated - the front doors and flanking windows are floor to ceiling as are the windows that look out to the rear patio. The third bay of this main façade is the three-car garage with the overhead doors divided by brick columns.

The north façade is five bays wide with the first bay a repetition of the single circular window as seen on the main façade. The second bay, a later infill addition, is a glass pavilion with glass transom clerestory windows at the roofline. The third bay repeats the window grouping as seen on the main façade. The fourth bay is a recessed brick garden wall with a heavy wooden door that appears to be original. The door is constructed of solid vertical wood blocks with horizontal wood bands at the top and bottom. The fifth bay is the pool bathhouse that has been renovated into an exercise and guest room.

The central void of the patio defines the west (rear) three bay façade of the house. The inset patio has light pink terrazzo flooring trimmed with brick. The terrazzo meets the corners of the house at right angles and opposite the pool the patio has a playful spiral shape. The rear walls of the house that surround the swimming pool are floor to ceiling fixed glass. The patio has three levels and ripples down to the western lawn via brick steps.

The house is organized as a series of pavilions grouped around a transparent central core made up of the entrance hall, dining and living rooms. Each of these three rooms has at least one wall made up entirely of floor to ceiling glass windows or doors. The living room has both its north and south walls made of glass that look out to the gardens and rear patio. Beyond the transparent central core, the house is separated into parent's bedrooms on the western wing, children's bedrooms in the eastern wing and kitchen and support utility rooms in the north wing beyond the dining room. The house reveals itself slowly from the entry hall. Moving either direction from the north or south, the visitor is then exposed to the

²⁴ Ibid., page 51.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

transparent core of the house where the walls disappear and the rear patio and gardens are visible.

There have been minimal alterations to the house since the 1950s and these alterations include the addition of a glass pavilion on the north façade, a small glass bay window in the master bedroom on the west façade and some alterations of the windows in the secondary spaces. Despite these minor changes, the house maintains its architectural integrity and remains an excellent example of the modern contemporary style in Houston.

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; | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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 accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends Landmark Designation to City Council of the Hugo Victor Neuhaus Jr. House at 2910 Lazy Lane.

SITE LOCATION MAP
HUGO VICTOR NEUHAUS JR. HOUSE
2910 LAZY LANE
NOT TO SCALE