

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: John A. and Audrey Jones Beck House

OWNER: John W. Sinderson, Jr. and Lisa Puckett Sinderson

APPLICANT: Same as Owner

LOCATION: 3223 Inwood Drive – River Oaks

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: II

HPO FILE NO: 06L170

DATE ACCEPTED: Dec-21-2006

HAHC HEARING DATE: Jan-24-2007

PC HEARING DATE: Feb-01-2007

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 5, Block 3, River Oaks Country Club Estates, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, brick and wood veneer residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The John A. and Audrey Jones Beck home was constructed in 1948-50 and was designed by the prolific Houston architects, Wilson, Morris & Crain. The body of work created by these architects is substantial and includes many of the iconic buildings in Houston: the Astrodome, the trapezoidal Pennzoil Place skyscraper, the Williams Tower, and many others. The home at 3223 Inwood was designed for John A. and Audrey Jones Beck. The Becks donated their world-renowned Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art collection to the Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH). In 2000, the MFAH opened the Audrey Jones Beck Building honoring Mrs. Beck's "profound contribution to the visual arts in Houston." The home qualifies for Landmark Designation under criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Notable Houston architects, Wilson, Morris & Crain, designed the house at 3223 Inwood in 1948 for John and Audrey Jones Beck. Audrey Jones Beck was born on March 27, 1922 in Houston to Audrey and Tilford Jones. According to the Houston Endowment, Jesse Jones was the only grandfather Audrey ever knew and her grandparents "treated her more like a daughter than a grandchild." She spent much of her youth at their Lamar Hotel penthouse on Main Street where she had her own room. Later, during Jesse Jones' fourteen years in Washington D. C., Audrey frequently represented her grandfather by "christening new, high-speed trains and launching ships he had financed through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). Along with Mrs. Jones's close friend, former first lady Edith Wilson, Audrey helped her grandmother sell war bonds in the RFC's Washington, D. C. lobby during World War II."

Audrey graduated from the Kinkaid School in 1939. She attended Mount Vernon College near Washington, D. C., and transferred to the University of Texas one year later. In 1941, she met Ensign John Beck while attending the opening of the Officer's Club at Corpus Christi's Naval Base. They were married eight months later at Christ Church Cathedral in Houston. For several years, they moved from assignment to assignment with the military.

After John Beck was released from the service, the couple made their home in Houston. John Beck developed a "booming business" selling and leasing heavy construction equipment. Mrs. Beck began a lifelong love and study of art. She said, "My romance with Impressionism began when I first visited Europe at the age of 16 as a student tourist, complete with camera to record my trip. I paid homage to the 'Mona Lisa' and the 'Venus de

Milo,' but the imaginative and colorful Impressionist paintings came as a total surprise. Works by these avant-garde artists, who had rebelled against the academic tradition of the day, were scarce in American museums at the time." John and Audrey Jones Beck began collecting the Modern Masters in the early 1960s. They acquired remarkable examples of Impressionism, Post-Impressionist styles, and early Modernism. Among the highlights were paintings by Gustave Caillebotte, André Derain, Edgar Manet, Camille Pissarro, Henri Matisse, Georges Seurat, and Pierre Bonnard. According to Art News, Mrs. Beck was "among the world's most important art collectors."

After Mr. Beck's death in 1974, Mrs. Beck lent her collection to the Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH). Over the years, she gradually gave these paintings to the museum, completing this "supremely generous gift" with the balance of the collection in 1998. According to the MFAH, "her gift to the museum remains one of the largest, most important, and most valuable in the museum's history." The MFAH's new building was named in honor of "Mrs. Beck's profound contribution to the visual arts in Houston." Audrey Jones Beck was a lifetime trustee for the MFAH, a founding trustee of the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet, and served as a Houston Symphony Society trustee. She served on the Houston Endowment's Board of Directors where she helped to guide her grandparents' legacy for 42 years.

Audrey Jones Beck died on August 22, 2003. After her death, the John and Audrey Jones Beck House was donated to the MFAH, who sold it to a buyer who held it for a few months and then sold it to Lisa and John Sinders.

According to Stephen Fox, architectural historian, Seth Irwin Morris, Jr. (1914-2006), one of the architects for the Beck Home, was born in Madisonville, Texas. Morris received a B.A. in Architecture from the Rice Institute, now Rice University, in 1935. From 1936-1938, he worked for Houston architect Burns Roensch. Fred Talbott Wilson (1912-1988) was born in Houston and graduated from the Rice Institute with a B.S. in Architecture in 1935. Following the receipt of his architectural degree, Wilson worked for Claude E. Hooten in Houston, and for Johnson & Porter in New York, New York. In 1938, Morris and Wilson established their own architectural firm in Houston. In the beginning, they were mostly commissioned for residential work. In 1941, they ceased practice, but resumed practice in 1946, with the addition of Buford Walter Crain. Crain was born in Longview. He had a B.S. in Architecture from University of Texas (1937) and a Masters in Architecture from Harvard (1939). In 1953, Ralph Alexander Anderson, Jr. became the fourth partner in Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson. The firm practiced until 1972.

On August 6, 2006, the Chronicle ran a front page article upon the death of Morris. The article, entitled "Houston Sky No Limit for Prolific Architect", stated that his architectural firm had left a "timeless imprint on the Houston skyline – from the first-of-its kind Astrodome to downtown's trapezoidal Pennzoil Place skyscraper to the Williams Tower that looms high over the Galleria." During his life, he received the Rice Design Alliance Award for Design Excellence, the Gold Medal Award from the Association of Rice University Alumni, and the Llewellyn Pitts Award from the Texas Society of Architects. He also was named a Rice distinguished alumnus. His civic work included serving as longtime board member and past president of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. An interesting quote on Morris' career comes from Drexel Turner, an architecture professor at the University of Houston, who said, "he was a master of trying to lend civic involvement with the practice of architecture. He truly was committed to the arts and civic potential of Houston. And certainly was one of the first generation of Houston architects who came of age professionally when modernism was also coming of age. He certainly was in tune with the times."

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Morris worked on many projects with his fellow architects, Wilson, Crain, and Anderson. Upon his death, the Chronicle listed their most notable projects. These projects include a wide range of commercial and community buildings.

- Houston Country Club (1957) with Hamilton Brown
- One Houston Center (1977) with Caudill Rowlett Scott and 3D International
- First City National Bank Building (1960) with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
- Texaco Office Building (1977)
- Astrodome (1965) (with Lloyd, Morgan & Jones)
- First Baptist Church of Houston (1976)
- U.S. Post Office (1962)
- One Riverway (1978)
- Electric Tower (1968)
- Brown & Root Southwest Houston Office Bldg (1980)
- Houston Post Building (1970)
- Three Riverway (1980)
- One Shell Plaza (1971) with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
- First City Tower (1981)
- Two Shell Plaza (1972) with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill
- Inn on the Park (1981)
- One Allen Center (1972)
- Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture building (1986) with Johnson/Burgee Architects
- KPRC Channel Two Studio (1972)
- Transco (now Williams) Tower (1983) in association with Johnson/Burgee Architects
- Tin Houses (1974)
- Wortham Theater Center (1987)

A further list of identified works of F. Talbott Wilson and S. I. Morris and others, which was researched and provided by Stephen Fox, includes: Paul Peters House, 1941 [demolished], Oak Forest Elementary School, Smith House, 1948, Mamie Sue Bastian Elementary School, Lazarus House, 1952 [Briar Hollow Lane--demolished], St. Philip's Presbyterian Church, 1953, 1960, Lucille Gregg Elementary School, 1954, Pieter Cramerus House, 1954, Whitfield Marshall House, 1955 [Pine Hill Lane, [demolished], Baker, Hanszen, and Will Rice Colleges, Rice University, 1956, Dr. Mavis P. Kelsey House, 1957, John B. Carter House, 1960, Ralph A. Anderson, Jr. House, 1960, F. Talbott Wilson House, World Trade Center Building, 1962 [refaced], Bayou Manor Apartments, 1962, Central Presbyterian Church, 1962, Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. Building, 1965 (with George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce), Heights State Bank, 1965, Western National Bank, 1967, Bank of Houston, 1967, Harris County Family Law Center, 1969, River Oaks Bank & Trust Co., 1970, Wilson's Stationery & Printing Co. Showroom, 1971 [refaced], Ernestine Matzke Elementary School, 1971, Great Southern Bank, 1971, Farish Hall, University of Houston, 1971.

The Beck home is an important “contributor to its block.” On one side is the “Redbird House” designed by Briscoe & Dixon in 1925 and named for the ornamental ironwork in the canopy above the entrance. The Redbird home is one of five speculative homes built in the original project for River Oaks (2 survive). On the other side of the Beck home is a Spanish Colonial Revival house designed by Charles Oliver in 1926.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The Audrey Jones Beck House is a variation of the Tudor style with Norman influence. Various interpretations of these two styles are found elsewhere in the neighborhood. The primary period of River Oaks development occurred during the 1920s-1940s, at a time when the nationwide “Period” style of architecture was in vogue. This style paid homage to the architectural antecedents of northern Europe and early American variations of this style. The Audrey Jones Beck House represents a relatively late example of the “Period” style that is well executed and harmonious with earlier architectural examples found within the neighborhood.

The Beck House utilizes stylistic elements prevalent in English Tudor as well as in French Norman architectural examples. The house is two stories in height and is constructed with a wooden upper story which sits atop a masonry first floor. The use of a masonry first floor with a wood second story was prevalent in the homes of Northern France and was adapted in the Louisiana Acadian architecture of the 18th and early 19th Centuries. The home’s English Tudor elements are apparent in its multi-light casement windows and gable end roof with dormers. The home features an unusual side main entry. A prominent gable ended bay projects northward from the primary façade and which is further extended towards the street by a one-story room with casement windows covered by a copper awning. Elsewhere, along the primary façade, is found a similar one story projecting bay beneath a copper awning. The main roof ridge is oriented parallel to the street and is multi level. The western portion of the house features a taller gable ended roof structure, which delineates it from the eastern portion.

The home is privately situated to the rear of the lot, behind a group of mature trees. According to the owners there are two possible origins for the home’s design. The first is said to be based on a home in Normandy. The second is said to be based on the design of a home that Audrey Jones Beck owned in California. The home was originally constructed in 1948-1950 and was subsequently remodeled with an addition in 1960. The addition included a two-story Great Hall, which was also designed by the architectural firm of Wilson, Morris and Crain.

The Sindersons purchased the Audrey Jones Beck home in January 2005 and have begun the process of a careful restoration which seeks to maintain historic materials while updating the home. The owners are in the process of restoring all of the historic fixtures acquired by Beck family from the Bricard firm in Paris. Recently completed work to the house, includes new gutters and roof which utilized similar materials to those originally used on the house. The houses mechanical systems, including electrical and plumbing, have been updated. The original detached garage, not visible from a public right of way, has been modified with the addition of additional bays and a second story bedroom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Fox, Stephen, personal notes and research about S.I. Morris and F. Talbot Wilson, August, 2006

Fox, Stephen, Houston Architectural Guide, American Institute of Architects, 1999

Houston Chronicle, Audrey Louise Jones Beck obituary, August 28, 2003.

Museum of Fine Arts Houston: <http://www.mfah.org/main.asp?target=collection&par1=9&par3=31>

Houston Endowment: <http://www.houstonendowment.org/aboutus/Audrey1.htm>

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented by Thomas McWhorter, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

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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	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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:

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the Landmark Designation of the John and Audrey Jones Beck House at 3223 Inwood Drive.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
JOHN AND AUDREY JONES BECK HOUSE
3223 INWOOD DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE

