

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: George V. Rotan Home
OWNER: Lynn and William A. Herbert
APPLICANT: Kelley Trammel for owner
LOCATION: 2300 Pine Valley Drive – River Oaks
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: III.b
HPO FILE NO: 07L173
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-08-07
HAHC HEARING: Mar-14-07
P.C. HEARING: Mar-29-07

SITE INFORMATION

Tract 1, Block 48, River Oaks Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes an historic two-story, brick residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The house at 2300 Pine Valley Drive was built for George V. Rotan and designed by John F. Staub, a noted Houston architect. Staub is best known as an architect of single-family houses and is closely identified with the River Oaks neighborhood. His client, George V. Rotan, was a prominent Houstonian known for both his business acumen and his athletic skill. The house qualifies for Landmark Designation under Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The house at 2300 Pine Valley Drive was built by John F. Staub for George V. Rotan. George Vanlandingham Rotan was born circa 1887 in Waco, Texas, to Edward and Kate Sturm McCall Rotan. His mother is listed in the *Handbook of Texas Online* for her work as an organizer and first president of the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs, a regent of the Henry Downs Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and a National Committeewoman of the Colonial Dames. She was also a leader in the establishment of Waco's first public library.

In his early career, Mr. Rotan moved to Houston and was an investment banker with the firm of Newhaus & Company. A 1925 article cites his attendance at the 14th annual convention of the Investment Bankers' Association of America in Winter Park, Florida. It describes a scene where "dry raiders confiscated 100 quarts of whisky from a room in the Soreno Hotel, headquarters of the convention." Luckily, no warrants were issued.

Mr. Rotan went on to organize an investment banking house, George V. Rotan Company. The firm was listed in the City Directory as Stock and Bond Brokers and Dealers in Investment Securities in the Niels Esperson Building. The firm later became known as Rotan Mosle, Inc. and was one of the largest Texas-based investment banks. In the 1980s, the firm was acquired by PaineWebber (now UBS). During his career, Mr. Rotan served as president of the Texas Investment Bankers Association and as a member of the board of directors of the national body. By 1943, the year of Mr. Rotan's death, he was acting as co-chairman of the second war bond drive.

The Chronicle states that "Mr. Rotan was a nationally known sportsman, having been many times the Texas amateur champion and won many trophies in national and international meetings." Research shows that George Rotan won the Texas State Championship at least four times (1912, 1913, 1914 and 1915), and it is possible that he won on other occasions as well. In 1993 he was posthumously inducted in the Texas Golf Hall of Fame in The Woodlands as one of seven "Pioneers of Golf". He also contributed to the founding of Hermann Park's golf

course. In a history of Hermann Park, Stephen Fox writes, "an 18-hole golf course was constructed on the site allotted by Kessler in 1922, following a design by the Houston stockbroker and golfing enthusiast, George V. Rotan, and the engineer David M. Duller." Upon Mr. Rotan's death in 1943, a front-page article appeared in the *Houston Chronicle*.

According to the *Handbook of Texas Online*, John Staub (1892-1981) began his architectural practice in New York in 1916. In 1921, he came to Houston to supervise a project in the Shadyside neighborhood, and went on to establish his own practice here in 1923. Staub is best known as an architect of single-family houses and is closely identified with the River Oaks neighborhood. His first independent commission in Houston was the River Oaks Country Club. He was then retained by the Hogg brothers to design two model homes for the developing River Oaks subdivision. As his career progressed, he was selected in 1928 as primary architect (with Birdsall Briscoe named associate architect) to design Bayou Bend, the home of Ima Hogg. Between 1924 and 1958, he designed thirty-one houses in River Oaks, in addition to making designs for homes that were never built, as well as designing renovations and extensions for existing homes. Outside of River Oaks, Staub homes from this period were built in Broadacres, Courtlandt Place, Riverside, and the Fort Worth neighborhood of River Crest. Additional Staub homes may be found in Beaumont, Dallas, and Memphis, Tennessee, some of which are open to the public as museums.

According to Howard Barnstone's book, some of the River Oaks homes designed by John F. Staub include:

- House for Country Club Estates, 3374 Chevy Chase, 1924.
- Joseph H. Chew House, 3335 Inwood, 1925.
- House for Country Club Estates, 3260 Chevy Chase, 1925.
- Kemerton Dean House, 1912 Bellmeade, 1925.
- John F. Staub House, 3511 Del Monte, 1925.
- Hubert B. Finch House, 3407 Inwood, 1926.
- Bayou Bend for Ima Hogg, 2940 Lazy Lane, 1926.
- Judge Frederick C. Proctor Home, 2950 Lazy Lane, 1926 (as associate to Birdsall Briscoe), demolished.
- Harry C. Hanszen House, 2955 Lazy Lane, 1930.
- John Sweeney Mellinger House, 3452 Del Monte, 1930.
- Wallace E. Pratt House, 2990 Lazy Lane, 1931, demolished.
- George A. Hill, Jr. House, 1604 Kirby Drive, 1931.
- Robert J. Neal House, 2960 Lazy Lane, 1931.
- Hugh Roy Cullen House, 1620 River Oaks Boulevard, 1933.
- David D. Bruton House, 2923 Inwood Drive, 1933.
- Clarence M. Frost House, 2110 River Oaks Boulevard, 1933.
- Ravenna for Stephen P. Farish, 2995 Lazy Lane, 1934.
- William J. Crabb House, 2416 Pine Valley Drive, 1935, demolished.
- Robert Bowles House, 3015 Inwood Drive, 1935.
- George S. Heyer Home, 2909 Inwood Drive, 1935.
- Oak Shadows for Ray L. Dudley, 3371 Chevy Chase, 1936.
- Tom Scurry House, 1912 Larchmont, 1936.
- James L. Britton House, 1824 Larchmont, 1936.
- Robert D. Strauss House, 1814 Larchmont, 1937.
- John M. Jennings House, 2212 Troon Road, 1937.
- Dan J. Harrison House, 2975 Lazy Lane, 1938.

- Claud B. Hamill House, 2124 River Oaks Boulevard, 1938.
- Edward H. Andrews House, 3637 Inwood Drive, 1939.
- Rienzi for Mr. and Mrs. Harris Masterson, III, 1406 Kirby Drive, 1952 (S,R&H).
- House for Mr. and Mrs. Ben M. Anderson, 3740 Willowick, 1956 (S,R&H).
- House for Mr. and Mrs. George A. Peterkin, Senior, 2005 Claremont, 1957 (S,R&H).

In addition to residential work, Staub designed the parish house of Palmer Memorial Church, the Junior League Building, and the Bayou Club in Houston. His firm designed buildings for the campuses of the University of Texas, Rice University, University of Houston, and the Texas Medical Center. He was the primary architect on the John Reagan High School project as well. Staub, Rather, and Howze also consulted with Jim Goodwin of Pierce and Pierce in the new building and planetarium for the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

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:

The Staub home located at 2300 Pine Valley Drive is designed in a very subdued Manorial style with elements of modified Georgian style. The home is essentially a three bay wide house with prominent forward projecting bay window and recessed entry on the ground floor. A two-story wing, also of brick veneer, is attached to the main portion of the house, but is stepped back from the front façade approximately five feet to the rear of the property. The home features large recessed paneled brick panels and a pronounced brick cornice as subtle decorative elements on the exterior of the home. Subtlety was often a trademark of John Staub designed homes. The minimal use of decorative cast iron used on the parapet above the projecting bay window and over the main entry way is another example of the subdued stylistic flourishes exhibited in this house.

The house at 2300 Pine Valley Drive has been featured in [The Architecture of John F. Staub](#) by Howard Barnstone and the American Institute of Architects Tour of River Oaks. The American Institute of Architects Houston Architectural Guide describes the use of "a favorite Staub trick on south-facing houses: the front door is in the backyard." According to the owner, Staub chose to ignore the River Oaks deed restrictions that called for the house to face either Chilton or Pine Valley Drive. The current owners characterized their home with the

following remark: "It's incredibly private and enhances the feeling that Staub sought for creating a kind of country house within a city."

One of the unique features of the home is in the floor plan. Most rooms have windows on three sides. John Staub designed many of his residential projects with particular emphasis placed on the window and door configuration. This was done in order to provide maximum air circulation even on hot Houston days. The current owner stated, "the house was always cool even pre-air conditioning simply because of how it was sited and where windows and doors were placed (maybe this is another reason why Staub ignored the deed restrictions)."

The interior of the home utilizes 9+ foot ceilings, which lend themselves to a more open and airy feel. About the house, a friend of the owners remarked, "How perfect - no wonder you like it - the Rotans were as tall as you all are!" There are two bedrooms on either end of the house that are slightly lower than the main floor. Two steps descend to enter them, which help to impart a feeling of intimacy to the rooms. Two steps must also be navigated to enter the den on the west side of the house. The home also features a John Staub trademark - the quintessential Staub powder room. As architectural historian Stephen Fox explained to the owner, Staub never wanted someone to walk right into the bathroom - you first enter an anteroom of sorts from which to access the bathroom. Finally, the home also has a huge basement with windows (lightwells) that was designed as an entertainment space with a bar and a dumbwaiter for easy access to the kitchen upstairs.

The home located at 2300 Pine Valley Drive is in very original condition with only minimal changes to the original footprint of the home. The few changes include:

- Two windows in the den and in the bedroom above it were removed and a fireplace and chimney was constructed in that location. It is possible that this occurred when air conditioning was installed in the house as the units are located right outside where the two den windows were.
- The original architectural plans depict a circular driveway with an entrance/exit on both Pine Valley and Chilton, of which there is no current evidence. It is possible that this element was never realized.
- The façade was slightly altered when two windows were added on the front/non-street facing elevation, when a butler's pantry was converted into a breakfast room. A bay window was copied from the living room (photo in the Staub book) and an upstairs window was adjusted above it so that it would be centered.

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

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/fst94.html>

Barnstone, Howard, The Architecture of John F. Staub: Houston and the South, University of Texas Press, 1979.

Fox, Stephen, Big Park, Little Plans: A History of Hermann Park.

Fox, Stephen, ed., "Houston Architectural Guide", 2nd edition, American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter, 1999.

Handbook of Texas Online, "Rotan, Kate Sturm McCall", s.v.

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/RR/froaf.html> (accessed February 8, 2007).

Handbook of Texas Online, "Staub, John Fanz."

Houston Chronicle, "George V. Rotan Funeral is Set for 5 p.m. Today," April 18, 1943.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Houston Chronicle, "Pioneers due Induction," October 8, 1983.

Time Magazine, "Convention", December 21, 1925.

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 |
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- (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;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- (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:

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the Landmark Designation of the George V. Rotan House at 2300 Pine Valley Drive.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP
GEORGE V. ROTAN HOUSE
2300 PINE VALLEY DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE

