

# Highlights of a Life: O'Neil Ford, FAIA, 1905–1982

**1905**—Born December 3 as Otha Neil Ford, the son of a railroad man in Pink Hill, Texas, a now-forgotten flag stop near Denton and across the Red River from Broken Bow, Oklahoma.

**1917**—Assumed part of the bread-winning role when his father was killed in an accident, leaving Mrs. Ford with three young children—O'Neil; a brother, Lynn; and a sister, Authella. A mutual interest in crafts formed a strong family bond, helped put food on the table, shaped O'Neil's seminal attitudes about building, and was the genesis for Lynn's lifelong career as an artisan.

**1924**—Traveled with his uncle in a Model "T" brass radiator Ford through dusty South Texas, examining—and falling in love with—the vernacular architecture of places like Fredericksburg, Castroville, San Ygnacio, and Roma.

**1925**—Dropped out of North Texas State in Denton after his second year of college and enrolled in a drafting course from International Correspondence School, which would be his only formal training in architecture.

**1926**—Secured a position with Dallas architect David R. Williams, who was acquiring a reputation for his Texas vernacular style and for his outspoken advocacy of indigenous art. During the next few years, Ford honed his design skills (as well as his party circuit prowess) and, with Williams, produced a number of exemplary regional houses.



*Dashing young gentleman, '29.*

**1933**—Remained in contact with Dave Williams, who had accepted a position with the Works Progress Administration in Washington. Ford subsequently worked in several capacities for the WPA and the Rural Industrial Resettlement Administration in Texas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana and Washington.

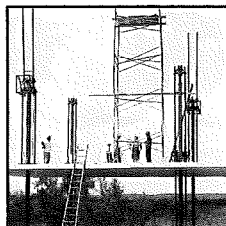
**1936**—Took Arch Swank as his partner in Dallas during a time of very few jobs, but soon began receiving some important commissions—Little Chapel in the Woods at Texas Women's University, the Frank Murchison House in San Antonio, and the Sid Richardson House (San Jose Ranch) on St. Joseph Island.

**1939**—Moved to San Antonio—at the behest of Williams and Mayor Maury Maverick—to direct the restoration of La Villita, a dilapidated 19th century residential quarter whose original character Ford was determined to maintain.

**1940**—Formed a lifelong partnership in marriage with the lovely Wanda Graham, who had been studying dance in London and who, as the daughter of the indomitable Elizabeth Orynski Graham, was descended from some of San Antonio's earliest families. Elizabeth Graham was an early activist in the San Antonio Conservation Society and had built Willow Way, a rambling



*Pilot, '42.*



*Lift-slab test, '49.*

ranch house near the San Jose Mission. The legendary Willow Way would become O'Neil's and Wanda's permanent home and the subject of colorful asides in articles about Ford, the eminent architect who lived in an unfashionable yet fanciful setting of books and clutter, fireplaces, porches, outbuildings, disabled classic cars and a veritable menagerie of dogs, cats, pigs, chickens, turkeys, guineas, parakeets and screaming peacocks.

**1941**—Appointed to Defense Housing Committee and, during the war years, served as a flight instructor.

**1945**—Resumed practice in San Antonio as a partner with Jerry Rogers designing primarily small industrial buildings and residences.

**1946**—Became a father with the birth of Wandita, followed by Michael in 1947, Linda in 1949, and John in 1950.

**1949**—Received the commission for the Trinity University Campus in San Antonio, along with Bartlett Cocke and Harvey P. Smith, where he first utilized the Youtze-Slick lift-slab construction process, which he had helped develop. The Trinity work, and a growing number of commercial and residential projects, occupied the firm during the late forties and early fifties.

**1953**—Founded O'Neil Ford & Associates and later moved to historic King William Street where, as recently as 1980, Ford's offices occupied adjacent residences in a somewhat makeshift fashion.

**1954**—Discussions began with some of the founders of Texas Instruments, which led to research with Felix Candela on the use of concrete shell construction

and its application in TI's first major installation, its Dallas Semi-Conductor Building, designed by Ford and Richard Colley. This collaboration, which initially included other associates such as Arch Swank and planner Sam Zisman, continued for years as TI spread worldwide. It was also during the fifties, in the wake of the lift-slab and TI successes, that Ford was first sought out as a lecturer. He would become a captivating speaker, averaging over ten major presentations per year to professional, student, artist and civic groups and accepting positions as a visiting lecturer at Harvard and other distinguished universities.

**1960**—Designated a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, one of more than a score of personal honors that he would receive, including several honorary doctorates, the Llewelyn W. Pitts Award of the Texas Society of Architects, the George Harrell Memorial Award of the Dallas Chapter of AIA, and citations from the Texas Historical Commission.

**1967**—Formed the partnership of Ford, Powell & Carson with associates Boone Powell and Chris Carson (which led to incorporation and additional principals in 1972). The firm produced the Tower of Americas for the 1968 Hemisfair and has continued its involvement in university, industrial and residential work, as well as the design of museums, churches, theaters and banks and a broad range of adaptive use/historic preservation projects. The work is known for its human scale, its appropriateness for its setting, and its use of local crafts and indigenous materials—all with due regard for technological innovation.



*Home with Zisman, '50s.*



*Pitts Award, '78.*

**1977**—Received a plaque from colleagues on the National Council on the Arts declaring him a National Historic Landmark, to which he responded, "Does this mean I can never be altered?"

**1981**—Honored by the announcement of a proposed O'Neil Ford chair in Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin, which has been endowed in the amount of \$500,000 plus matching funds from the University.

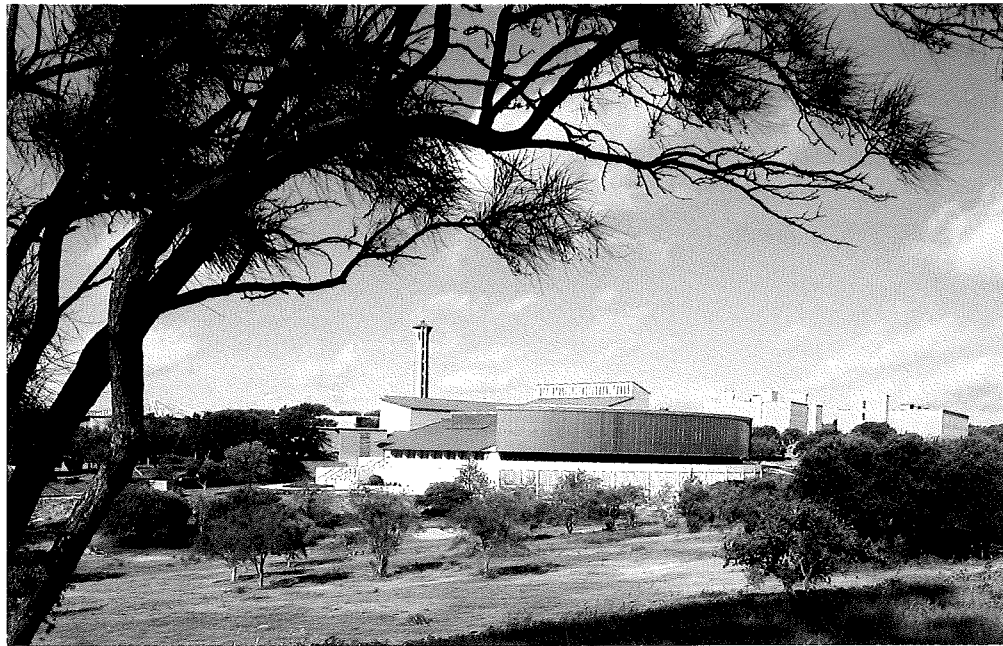
**1982**—Died July 20 after emergency heart surgery, leaving a large following of Texas architects without a hero.

# The Unforgettable Mr. Ford

## *An Appreciation*

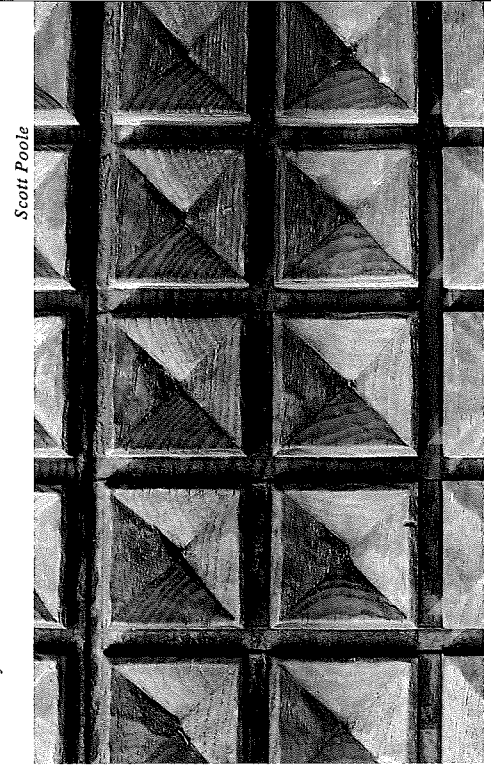


Those who knew and loved him—and there were many—used to “despair and get a little crazy” when faced with the certainty that, someday, O’Neil Ford would die. When, confounding all hopes, he *did* die, on July 20 at age 76, this preeminent-of-all-the-eminent among Texas architects left friends and followers reeling far and wide, facing a void that will not soon be filled. Ford left his indelible and finely crafted mark not only as architect, artist, preservationist, and technological innovator, but as teacher, philosopher, and articulate spokesman for continuity and a sense of place as wellsprings for the arts. He was a many-faceted, sparkling jewel of a man (with a few rough spots to make him real) whose true value and significance extend far beyond the capacity of one assessment to reveal. Consequently, in an effort to capture his elusive spirit, and to comprehend something of his legacy, we asked many of his colleagues and acquaintances to share their own insights into the O’Neil Ford that they knew. Their responses, pared down in many instances for the sake of the whole, appear on the following pages as a rich fabric of appreciation. From these tributes emerges not only a sense of Ford the accomplished professional but of Ford the warm and witty and irresistible human being. Full of energy, he milked each minute for all it was worth, and talked incessantly. He was saucy, irascible and irreverent. Yet he was sensitive and charming—captivating. He was the kind of person whose life touched others often and in profound ways. In a word, he was unforgettable.—LPF



Laurie Auditorium (1970) and Trinity campus, San Antonio, 1950—present (with Bartlett Cocke).

Richard Payne



Scott Poole

Wood detail by Lynn Ford.

**JAMES MARSTON FITCH,**  
**architecture historian and preservationist,**

**New York:** O'Neil Ford belonged to that always rare and now vanishing breed of American architects—the original, autochthonous native modernists who evolved their own special esthetic and technical responses to our country's building needs at mid-century. Far from diminishing Neil's unique contribution to this midpoint in the development of modern American architecture, it does him honor to link his name with the rest of that special breed: Gregory Ain, Harris Armstrong, Thomas Church, Alden Dow, Bruce Goff, George Fred Keck, Harwell Hamilton Harris, William Wurster. Distinctive as each one was, they shared a number of characteristics. They were either men who, on purely intuitive grounds, abjured a formal beaux arts education altogether; or who, having been exposed to such training, moved quickly away from its sterile protocol.

Each of them responded to the special needs and resources of his region but none of them ever slipped into the narrow parochial regionalism of painters like Thomas Hart Benton or the poets of the Southern Agrarian Movement.

They were almost magically immune to the lures of romantic eclecticism which was filling American suburbs in the twenties with beguiling facsimiles of Norman, Tudor, Georgian and Spanish houses. And—though as cultured and travelled men they were aware of contemporaneous European develop-

ments (the Bauhaus, Gropius, Corbusier, Mies, etc.)—they were none of them swept off their feet by the International Style after the thirties.

In a long and productive professional life, Neil did many buildings for which he will be long remembered. But for me, some of his most memorable works were among his more modest ones. I remember the house he designed for the landscape architects Arthur and Marie Berger which, on a rocky creek bank in Dallas, combined indigenous plant materials, straightforward functional design and a fine collection of vernacular furnishings and folk art in a ravishing synthesis of southwestern American culture, pre- and post-Columbian. I recall a summer evening in the formal sequence of cool and lofty rooms in the Steves's house in San Antonio, all in white plaster and candlelit Mexican antiquities. Most memorable of all were my visits to Willow Way, the old farm house compound in which he and Wanda led a life of relaxed and rather shabby elegance. Indoors, a mix of good books and fine food (and, on one occasion, a sick snake which Wanda was nursing back to health on the sunporch). Outdoors, a mix of his classic automobiles and her exotic birds: peacocks, white doves, grey guinea hens and black geese and some rare Japanese roosters with tail feathers so long and fragile that they had to be braided into coils to keep them out of the farmyard dust.

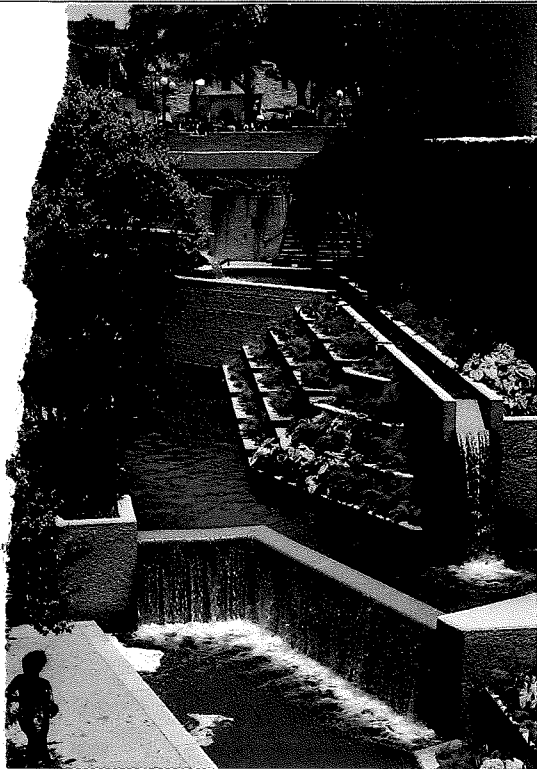
Willow Way was the domestic end of

Ford's spectrum of activities in defense of the historic patrimony of his home town. At the other end was the heroic battle which Wanda and he led to prevent the McCallister Freeway from destroying Brackenridge Park—a battle lost only when a special act of Congress was used to set aside an Advisory Council ruling against the Freeway. In between these two extremes—and co-existing with a steady stream of thoroughly contemporary building designs—was Ford's unswerving support of historic preservation in San Antonio.

In toto, O'Neil Ford's corpus of accomplished work constitutes an important chapter in America's recent architectural history. It was marked by his unfailing technical competence, his fundamental equilibrium between cosmopolitan taste and farm-boy common sense. And this work was fueled by a personality of inexhaustible optimism, generosity and simple good manners.

**HARRY S. RANSOM, friend and colleague, Houston:**

O'Neil Ford special and radical and familial and regional and textural and varietal and naturally outrageous and a wizard of an architect and man



*Paseo del Alamo, San Antonio, 1982 (with Thompson, Ventulett, Stainback—Atlanta).*

Texas Highways  
Lawrence Speck



*San Fernando Cathedral restoration, San Antonio, 1977.*

**DR. AMY FREEMAN LEE; speaker, painter, poet, critic and longtime personal friend; San Antonio:** How could one define architecture in Neil's terms? The immediate reply that comes to mind is that if I were to define architecture literally in his terms, you probably would not print the statement. His vocabulary and his modes of expression were as wide as his inner eye. Neil was never vulgar, only colorful, in his choice of words and the manner in which he strung them together. While the strands were always long and casual, they sparkled in both the sun and moonlight often to the point of being quite dazzling and hypnotic. Let me choose my words from the more elegant side of Neil's expression. To him, architecture had to be honest, simple, congruous and individual. If the resulting form made his category of we-made-a-few-mistakes-but-it's-not-bad, it had to be unobtrusive by proving itself an integral part of the place where it existed, and it had to serve its intended purpose in a style pertinent to the period and handsome enough to engage and enchant the beholder. "Hell, it's got to work, and it's got to be damn good looking." I can hear Neil saying these words right now.

**COLIN BOYNE, Consultant Editor, The Architectural Review, London:** You ask what is the significance of O'Neil Ford. To an Englishman he demonstrated to the full that favorite American story: the poor boy who

makes good. And he made good in the most exacting of all professions: architecture. We admired him for his research and technical innovation, which we expect from Americans, but we admired him too for his work on landscaping, which, sadly, we don't always expect. But we admired him most for avoiding fashion and stylistic cliché and for his struggle to create a humane, indigenous, contemporary Texan architecture.

**HAL BOX, FAIA, Dean, UT-Austin School of Architecture, and former protegee at Willow Way:** Of course there can never be another O'Neil Ford. He spanned a period of time and set of attitudes which reached near the roots of Texas. He spent his life articulating, extending, and enhancing ideas about how to live and build in Texas. He discovered part of Texas. He explored how people felt and how things are best built to fit this place. The clarity and consistency of his ideas were strong enough to carry them through the prevalent architectural thinking of the Beaux Arts, Art Deco, and International Style Modern movement. Who but an irascible self-educated genius could create consistent order of that chaos?

O'Neil Ford's significance to the mainstream of architecture is yet to be assessed. It is clear that his buildings have a positive even exhilarating effect on people and there is a certain reality of time and connectedness to place that will cause the history of architecture

to note his work among the well-crafted and sensitive architecture of the 20th Century. But his major effect was on the region. The architecture of Texas is different because of him, and the architects of Texas are different because of him.

O'Neil Ford was my mentor. I was one of many mentees. He was a phenomenal teacher which resulted, I think, from his caring for every person with whom he came in contact. He was very direct—caused people to think, to act thoughtfully, carefully, and sincerely.

O'Neil Ford showed us what materials to use and how to use them, how to make shade, how to make space, how to use craftsmen. He also showed us how we might be better individuals of purpose, how to serve our community and our profession. But he never showed us how we could be like O'Neil Ford.

**MRS. EUGENE McDERMOTT, patron of the arts and longtime personal friend, Dallas:** Neil liked architecture and people to be natural and unpretentious—he wanted "the real thing." To me, he is the most significant of Texas architects. He not only leaves a standard of excellence for buildings, but there are vivid memories of his wit and his capacity for friendship. I am proud that Mr. McDermott introduced Neil to Pat Haggerty, who hired and worked with him on the Semiconductor Building of Texas Instruments, which set an architectural style for that company.



Ford pencil sketch, 1926.



Kahn Hs., Dallas, 1932 (with Joe Linz).



Haggerty Hs., Dallas, 1958.

**JOHN PASTIER, architecture critic, Los Angeles/Austin:** Despite his ailments, I fully expected O'Neil Ford to live out the century, in part to enjoy two added decades of attention, but even more because his life was the medium he chose to practice his finest art.

His larger professional contributions were in spheres outside the design of buildings. Many architects easily beat him at that game, but few could match him as an influence on his colleagues, as a red-blooded embodiment of a profession that seems abstract and esoteric to most of its baffled public, and as an unflinching spokesman for much of the older architecture of Texas and the world.

As a mentor he offered livelihood, professional challenge, encouragement, diversion, and lasting friendship to a staggering number of architects over a span of two generations. As a witty and irascible public being, he mapped out the architectural world into distinct hemispheres of light and darkness, allowing both clients and general audiences to savor the advantages of standing with him in the brighter half. He sensed a need for myths and heroes, and volunteered to fill it.

His greatest contribution, dating back to the 1920s, was his championing of native Texan buildings. He understood and loved the vernacular structures of the 18th and 19th centuries with an intensity that matched his antipathy for the vernacular

environment of his own era, and for most high art and high technology approaches to contemporary architecture. While Texas urbanized and plunged into the future with abandon, he basically remained loyal to the small town past both as an artifact and as a model for his work. Through actual restorations, deft sketches, evocative photography, and a torrent of spoken words, he let Texans know that their architectural roots were sturdy and often beautiful.

**STANLEY MARCUS, Chairman Emeritus, Neiman-Marcus, Dallas:** O'Neil Ford and I were friends for over 50 years. Sometimes I wouldn't see him for two or even five years; but each time we met, it was as though we'd seen each other the day before. Perhaps the reason we stayed friends was that he never did any work for me; because, in his early days at least, O'Neil could be very exasperating with his strong opinions and his dilatory habits.

I can't comment on the significance of O'Neil Ford, architect. Much more important was the success of O'Neil Ford, human being. He was a warm and loyal friend. He was a perpetual enthusiast which inspired both client and student. He was a strong advocate and never backed down when he thought he was right. He was fastidious in detail.

Perhaps all of these qualities put together are what made him a successful man *and* a successful architect.

**JANE LANDRY, architect, former employee and protege, Dallas:** Neil's art was to make the ordinary into the extraordinary. Honest, simple materials became special because of the way he used them.

He was labeled a Regionalist. But I believe he was first a humanist. He built in response to human needs. Shade, shelter, green space and water provided ease and comfort. No bald, mean spaces with mirror glass glaring down from all sides.

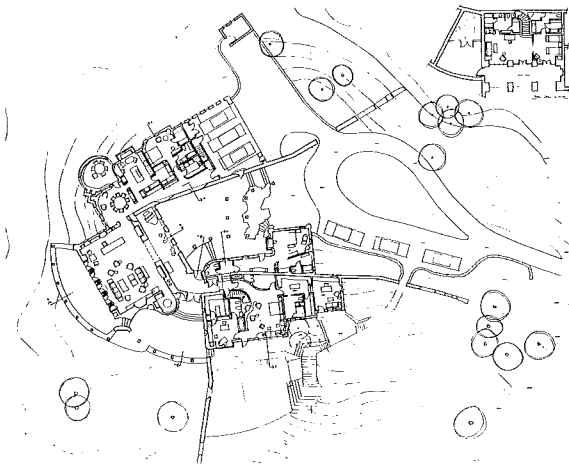
Neil learned from indigenous builders the world over. Nothing escaped his eye. He was always observer, adapter, transformer. But he applied the lessons of the past only when the past could answer a specific need of the present; there were no arbitrary applications of bits of history.

**ALAN TANIGUCHI, FAIA, Austin:** My admiration for Neil had not only to do with architecture, but the values and principles by which he lived, by which he designed buildings, by which he related to issues and public policies, by which he related to people. He always stuck by his principles, making him appear non-conforming in a profession that tends to play things safe.

On perhaps the last of his occasional visits to my office, he gave his version of the common bond between the Fords and the Taniguchis: "You know why we're such good friends? We 'hate' the same people."



Steves Hs., San Antonio, 1965.



Plan, Vickers Hs.



SECTION & LIVING ROOM

Ford's last project: Vickers Hs., Castle Pines, Colo., in progress.

**JOHN PALMER LEEPER, Director, McNay Art Institute, San Antonio:** The impact of O'Neil Ford's personality overshadowed everything else. He was trenchant and fearless, yet had a disarming country courtliness. He was simply larger than life, and in his orbit people and events and things acquired a new excitement.

I admired his quick comprehension of a project, sensing its totality immediately. His imagination was quickly fired, and a dozen possibilities had presented themselves before one had finished describing a project to him.

Despite his personal bravura, Neil was fundamentally a modest person, or at least his best architecture is modest. He built graceful buildings that are at home where they stand. As Dean Jack Mitchell of Rice remarked to me, "His architecture rarely makes a statement, and perhaps that is the best thing about it."

**FRANK WELCH, FAIA, Midland, former employee and protege:** Though he practiced architecture artfully, I don't think he considered what he was doing as art. I never heard him use the word applied to contemporary building. He believed strongly that there were "moral" choices made in creating a building. "Dishonest" or disingenuous use of structure, materials, or the way things go together were anathema to him as long as I knew him. Further, he railed against architecture as false expression. "Brick veneer,"

"later mod-drun," and "pew-eblo" were derisive terms he used for the artificial means and ends he saw in building.

His quest was simple but difficult: how to do the most for the least, how to achieve an economy of means. The results were subtle and elusive as graphic design and never self-centered or visually arrogant. I think he would agree that architecture was less a beauty contest than a torch race.

He was a hero to the young because he was young himself and was never condescending. In person he was the jolly iconoclast firing salvos at fashionable holy cows. While the students were designing in the current vogue, his cheeky attacks on the mode of the moment struck a warmly responsive nerve in them.

We mourn his death as deeply as we would youth, for that's what he had—unendingly. He never became old.

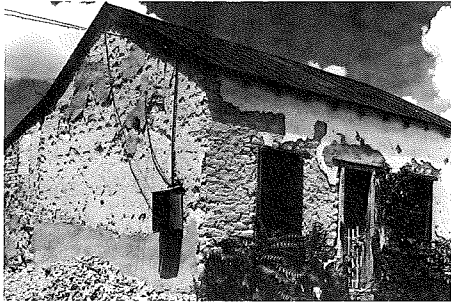
**CLOVIS HEIMSATH, FAIA, former employee and protege, Fayetteville:** I liked the world better when O'Neil Ford was living. Sitting for a moment after the funeral party in the garden beside the chapel, I saw him in the motion of the fountain, the pattern of the brickwork, in the severity, yet playfulness, of the building. I thought, "How will future generations know Ford when he's not there to thunder in their ears?" His involvement is written in his buildings and can be read by those who follow.

**DAVID DILLON, architecture critic, The Dallas Morning News:** In an era of bold geometry and resounding architectural statements, he designed buildings composed of small, quiet pleasures—Saltillo tiles, Mexican brick, edge-grain mesquite floors, handmade ceramic light fixtures. The first impulse on entering one of his buildings is not to stand back and look, but to touch, to read the architecture through the pores. Ford's death marks the end of an era in Texas architecture, as surely as his rediscovery of early Texas houses marked its beginning. That's the kind of grand statement that would have provoked him to an uproarious commentary on the inanities of critics. But it's true.

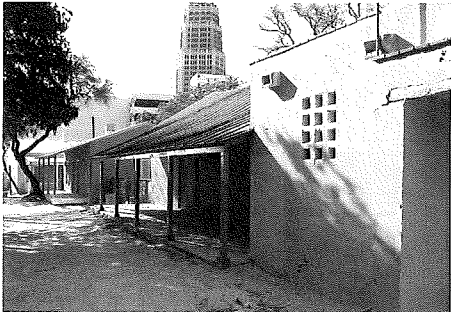
**EUGENE GEORGE, friend and colleague, Austin:** Perhaps O'Neil Ford as an individual is correctly classified as a cultural asset in that he has, so far as architecture is concerned, brought the potential of the culture into advanced accomplishments—has made selections and decisions which moved the cultural averages into higher levels.

He decided to be a hero by taking up self-assigned causes which attempted to improve the quality of life. And to a lot of us, he played that role very well. One accepted his hero role in the process of intellectual interchange during the sharing of thoughts and observations.

O'Neil Ford's curiosity about the nature of art and life was infectious, and I was one of those stricken.



La Villita, San Antonio, 1930s.



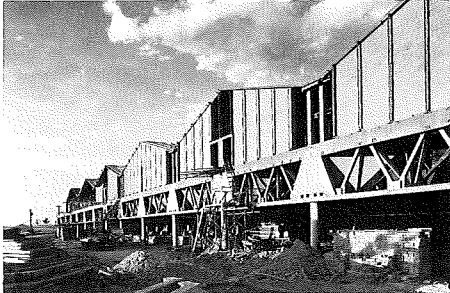
La Villita, San Antonio, 1980s.

N. Bleeker Green



T.I. Semiconductor Bldg., Richardson, 1958 (with Richard Colley).

N. Bleeker Green



Texas Instruments under construction.

Richard Payne



St. Mary's Hall, San Antonio, 1969.

**BOONE POWELL, FAIA, partner, San Antonio:** A champion of causes, O'Neil tilted at windmills and got away with it.

He motivated architects and others to transcend their limitations, primarily by asking them to adopt a relationship to values, to some extent his values, but values in any case.

He recognized early that he could accomplish far more through others than merely by himself. His life and relationships were consequently extraordinarily rich in complexity and he touched others, though sometimes only briefly, to a depth they remember long after with great emotion.

He was still youthful at 76 and possessed the rare ability to relate to people of all ages and backgrounds with great facility. He was especially able to relate to children and the student latent in every one of us.

His legacy is not easy to define, though it is certainly great. The large number of architects he encouraged and taught is a major part. So is the dedication to values and the guts to stand up for them even if commissions were lost. He recognized that another job was always waiting somewhere, but there was no making up for a loss of credibility.

His sense of his own roots as small-town product of the land never left him. It was connected, in a myriad of ways, to his belief in the rightness of a regional approach to design; that the roots of a place and its building

traditions ought to be reflected in its architecture. He would search out colors and patterns and textures from the vernacular and find refreshingly new ways to employ them in contemporary works. Though these techniques could be corny in less sensitive design hands, he was able to avoid such confusion in his work.

He revered the individual contributions and contributors to the whole building process. A building was therefore not something drawn as much as it was the product of masons and carpentry foremen and craftsmen and painters. Because he spoke their language, contractors, laborers and craftsmen alike could identify with him and his goals for a project.

**DOWNING THOMAS, FAIA, Dallas:** O'Neil Ford was an heroic Common Man. His buildings have that same quality; they seem to be simple structures of wood and brick that somehow transcend their function and lift our standards of excellence.

His gifted tongue charmed. But he was always prepared to exorcize evil, ready to play the Don Quixote giving verbal battle to the rapacious forces of mammon in the business community.

He spoke and acted for preservation of our historic buildings and of the elements of nature that give meaning to urban life. For six decades his buildings, like his words and his life-style, were an integrated expression of his land: Texas.

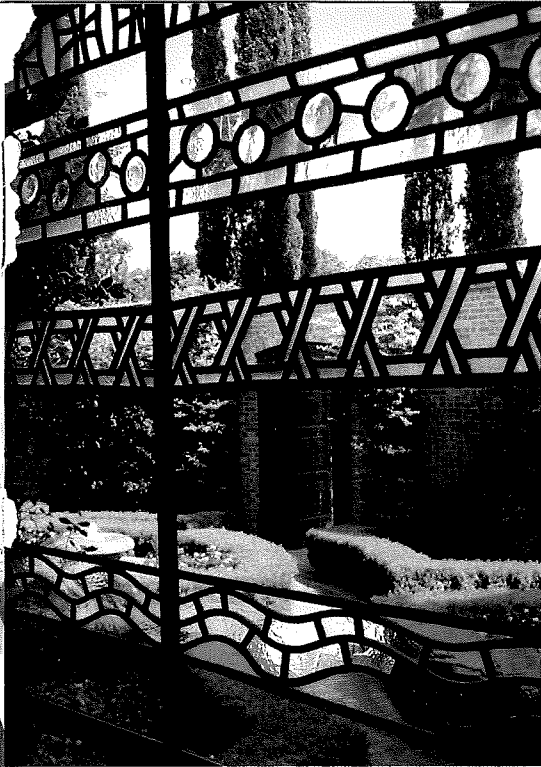
**WILLIAM SLAYTON, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Foreign Buildings, U.S. State Department, Washington, D.C.:**

I knew O'Neil best as a member of my panel of architect consultants at the Department of State and as a travelling companion when we visited several United States Embassies abroad. He was loved by his colleagues on the panel, by the architects who presented their designs to the panel (even though O'Neil at times could be quite critical), and by the Ambassadors and staff at the Embassies we visited. O'Neil could say the most outrageous things, but in a funny way so that one would accept his criticism. But, also, we all knew he was right. Of course, we had to tell him to shut up from time to time, but then that was part of the O'Neil we loved.

**MARY CAROLYN HOLLERS GEORGE, art historian and Ford biographer, San Antonio/Austin:**

O'Neil Ford was an artist. Architecture was his passion, his obsession. His extravagance of character and his legendary unconcern about promised delivery dates often exasperated clients and colleagues alike, but these are textbook symptoms of the artistic temperament. The design process, the nature of material and how to form it honestly, now these were things worth thinking about. The inquisitive child in him was ever young.

O'Neil Ford was an artist. Thank goodness.

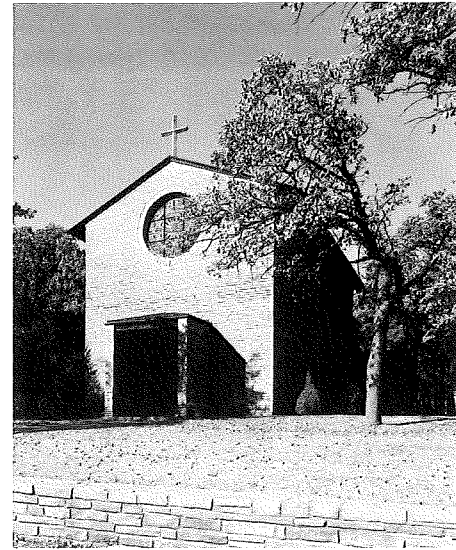


Detail, Parker Chapel.

Rick Gardner  
Lawrence Speck



Margarite B. Parker Chapel (at Trinity), 1965.



Chapel in the Woods, Denton, 1938 (with Arch Swank).

**ANDERSON TODD, FAIA, Wortham Professor of Architecture, Rice University:**

The theoreticians, the artists, the decorators of our fast-changing times bring wonderful new ideas and images to architecture. But they do not undertake to solve the main day-to-day problems facing architecture in our cities; nor do they try to make them understandable to the general public the way Neil did. It is not surprising that he is the only name in architecture known to the average person in Texas. He was the gentle, unrugged man who stood for rugged individualism. He stood for values beyond theory, fad or fashion. His values spoke out eloquently in plain-spoken architecture for fit, accommodation, unpretentiousness, permanency, good building and solid walls. Above all, O'Neil Ford stood forth and spoke out for integrity—and that is his great legacy and lesson for all of us in architecture.

**MARTIN PRICE, architect, Fort Worth:**

O'Neil Ford is alive and well with a legacy that lives, a legacy of humanism. It is a humanism founded on an architecture which considers the culture and landscape of an area, the importance of a continuity of tradition, the use of common sense, doing things in a natural way, high craftsmanship in building, and the nature of "design for man and not for cause." And O'Neil Ford is also alive and well with another legacy that lives, a legacy of outspoken condemnation of the

"pseudo-intellectual claptrap" of the Graves, Stern, Tigerman "Posties" and their followers whose hyped up promotion has infected our press, and whose principles are so contradictory to his own.

**ARCH SWANK, FAIA, former partner and longtime friend, Dallas:**

I was one of the many of his acquaintances who had to have the Ford fix more or less regularly. If he didn't call from the airport or drop into the office every few weeks, I would call him in an attempt to get my creative and rebellious juices flowing again—and it usually worked. If nothing more, listening to all his problems and adventures with cantankerous and demanding clients made my problems seem insignificant and solvable.

**SINCLAIR BLACK, architect and teacher, Austin:**

O'Neil Ford proves the axiom that I am about to make up (with apologies to Winston Churchill): "Cities shape people and they in turn re-shape the cities." Neil was clever to choose an interesting place like San Antonio, and San Antonio was lucky indeed to have him.

Most men are merely a product of their place, but that has been reversed in the relationship between San Antonio and O'Neil Ford. The sheer force of his beliefs, the clarity of his integrity and his irresistible charm have combined to shape the attitudes and sensibilities of San Antonio and its leaders in ways that any other city would envy.

**CHARLES TAPLEY, FAIA, Houston:**

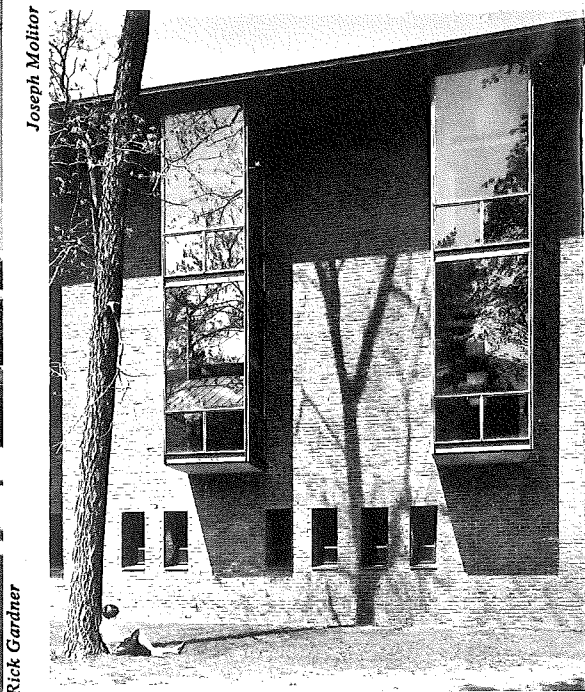
Mr. Ford had agreed to talk about architecture with Charles Moore at the November convention. On the telephone O'Neil had been a little cool about the subject—Architecture as a Communicative Force—probably because it was a little fancy. But he had agreed to participate. We got together for a meeting one Saturday morning in late June and he talked about architecture—about deserted Mexican villages he wanted us to see, beautiful places he had visited with his great friends Charles and Ray Eames and Marie Berger, back in the '50s. He raged about some of the "so-called Post-Modernists" and showed us an exquisite chapel he had done in the days of the WPA. The subjects came and changed like quick lights.

He had been videotaped by the Learning About Learning Educational Foundation exploring San Antonio with a group of youngsters, explaining how the city works, and what it really is. He seemed to feel a link between his sessions with the kids and the convention panel and was beginning to build an idea. I told him we wanted the tape for November, but I don't know that he even heard me. He was talking, plain and fast, reaching into complexities and quickly unravelling them. His understanding seemed total and he wanted to share it, seemed in a hurry to give it away. I wish everyone could have heard him. I wish that June had been November.





"Sombrilla," UT-San Antonio, 1976 (with Bartlett Cocke).



Bolton Hall, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, N.Y., 1967.

**LAWRENCE SPECK, architect and teacher, Austin:** O'Neil Ford was not a high-art, high-style architect of the sort that most commonly gets notice today. His work will be known, in the long run, I think, not for the number of new forms it invented, its novelty of shape or visual character, its uniqueness, its eyeball appeal or its ability to create instant Kodachrome memories. The strength of his work lies rather in its enhancement of everyday life. He made places to be—to eat, to sleep, to think, to chat, to drink, to laugh, to hang memories on. He used architecture to touch people's lives.

As a designer, Ford was a jogger, not a sprinter. He chugged along furiously shaping his world through a series of sidelong blows rather than driving single-mindedly toward a narrow goal. He demonstrated the fact that to commit oneself to a wide breadth of concerns is no less a commitment than to focus on a narrow band of issues. He was a pragmatist *and* a romantic, an idealist *and* an active doer, a flamboyant, Baroque personality *and* a gentle stone hut of a man.

Ford had an enviable grasp of the passage of time. He understood, in T. S. Eliot's words, "the pastness of the past as well as its presence." In an architectural world which was preoccupied with what was different about its own time, he dealt with issues which are always essentially the same—basic human and physical concerns which link all times together. He met himself

everywhere, in all places and ages—doing the same things but in a different way, feeling the same differently, reacting differently to the same. He lived in the whole world and at all times.

**CHRIS CARSON, partner, San Antonio:** Neil was the type who always preferred the back road to the main road. His own curiosity was intense, and he also had a rare ability to make other people see things they might tend to overlook. It was part of being a good teacher.

**PATSY SWANK, art critic and longtime personal friend, Dallas:** His significance as an architect is that that word is not big enough to hold what he meant to the profession, and architecture was such an organic part of him that I am not sure he himself could have defined it.

Structure and material were the means by which Ford fulfilled his urgent concern that people should have as useful and beautiful, as natural and comfortable a place to live and work and enjoy themselves as it was possible for him to give them. That concern embraced past and future, aesthetics and politics, society and mores, and often its force infuriated and frustrated him. But however certain he might feel that presentday foolishness threatened the future, he never failed to inspire those he taught—and that was everybody he touched—with his basic faith that tomorrow should be better, and that to make it better was the mandate of every architect who calls himself by that name.

**BILL BOOZIOTIS, FAIA, Dallas:** O'Neil Ford saw with the clarity of a child—but with the vision of a sage. He was a caricature of joy, sensitivity and other particularly human values. His architecture embodied them all with the same commitment, but with understatement.

**FRANCIS D. LETHBRIDGE, FAIA, Washington, D.C., former associate of Ford on the State Department's architecture review panel:** He was truly a remarkable person, half again more "alive" than anyone else I have ever known. He was never inclined to shield himself with the armor of personal reticence or that of professional mystique or incomprehensibility. Architecture—the practice of architecture—was for him simply the natural and inevitable extension of his own experience, sensibility and skill.

He was demanding of others, but gave far more of himself than was ever asked in return. He was impatient with, and openly critical of, the games that architects are inclined to play for each other, and of the overblown critical evaluation of fashionable but inconsequential architectural posturing.

His own architectural work is durable, much of it is poetic and beautiful, and all of it is relevant to its place and time. He had more to give, had he been spared longer, for he had the heart and the mind of a young man. But he will be sorely missed—and will, by God, be remembered.

## Reflections on a Funeral

**JAMES PRATT, FAIA, Dallas, colleague, admirer, and former student of Ford at Harvard:** Standing in front of the mirror at 5:55 a.m., I woke myself up with, "This is plain wrong—Ford, you would snort at my wearing a black tie." I rushed to put on a bright one and made it to the 6:45 San Antonio plane.

"Neil wanted cornbread and champagne at the funeral," Mary reported. Mary Bywaters, and her daughter and son, Jerry Cochran and Dick Bywaters joined us at the ticket counter. We were a cross section of mourners, this Dallas group: Mary a peer and lifetime friend of Ford, Jerry and Dick who had sat on his knees, the rest of us his clients, former students, employees or professional colleagues. And me in between. (*Damn you, Ford, why did you do this, putting me that much closer to the abyss?*) We all thought of ourselves as friends, I certainly not a close one; I had known him 29 years. But somehow, when you were with him, he made you consider yourself a good friend. He skated from person to person, lighting them up with his Gaelic wit.

The police ushers were in place to shepherd us to a shady Trinity University parking lot 45 minutes early. The summer morning was still cool. Undertakers were pulling a coffin out of a hearse in the chapel porte cochere. (*God, Neil, is what's left of you really in that thing—you irascible wonderful bastard?*) The reality of the event jumped into blurred vision above a throat lump. We pecked a few friends on the cheek or shook hands, avoided eyes and went in to sit down.

### Under His Roof

We were sitting under his roof, on his campus, in his town. It was a nice roof covering this high, rather early Christian-feeling box. It was a larger version of his and Arch Swank's Denton chapel; the main parabolic brick arches were held apart by low segmented ones over the side aisles. Outside its altar area the interior was all painted white. On the right, windows opened into a small walled garden, and the clear glass was banded horizontally at intervals with lovely let-in patterns: handsomely restrained with no color. (The critic in me carped, "*Neil, you should have used the same glass in the tiny windows on the left instead of that colored stuff. The ones on the right are so great.*") He wouldn't have been offended, though he might not have agreed. He was a critic of his own

work; once I was on a design awards jury in San Antonio where Ford took me aside: "You guys did right not to award that entry of ours; it didn't deserve a thing."

Maybe it wasn't a coffin. Functionaries rolled it in like a tea cart. A group of men in somber clothes who looked like they might be pall bearers sat up front, but with no duty to carry their friend's body. The box was wood as Mary said he had ordered, but from a distance it looked suspiciously like a factory-made mortician's model, and not the local carpenter's handiwork that Neil probably meant. Neil belonged to the generation of architects that still had a connection to handcraft. He never let the taste arbiters of the compound (Tom Wolfe's word) intimidate him to "purify" his designs by eliminating ornament or color, nor by making his walls exclusively curtains on an industrial box. He wasn't going down any purist blind alleys of a style conceived for climes unrelated to Texas. No ornament he used was superfluous; he knew intuitively how much was necessary to keep the eye from being bored. They might not know why, but his buildings will continue to delight laymen because of this stubborn personal rationalism tied to his artist's intuition.

There were faces at the funeral that surprised me, and might have Neil. He always had a slight wild streak about him, and he loved to pull dignity's tail. (*Seeing the establishment at your funeral would make you chortle, wouldn't it, Neil. You always were a guide dog nipping at the heels of the sheep. In fact, you were a downright snob about not being a member of the herd. And god, how you hated functionaries and bureaucrats!*) But his ego would have been satisfied to see them there, that hungry ego that had to be constantly fed.

### When the Saints . . .

"The Happy Jazz Band" started playing unhappy spirituals at a quarter to nine. Sax, brass, clarinet, piano, drums and bass. The mournful clarinet was excellent, but "Deep River" and "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" didn't seem for Neil; he didn't admit to trouble. When I called him in the hospital after a heart attack, he bluffed, "They're just trying to scare me." But the recessionary "When the Saints Go Marching In" certainly was right. Jim Cullum's blues snapped me back to a

spring night when we had found Wanda and Neil at a party overlooking the river near Jim Cullum's domain. Ford had already had his lung chopped on and was wearing a sign "Don't touch my back!"—on the back of this man who was used to being hugged so much. Any ordinary mortal his age would have obeyed his wife and gone home to bed at nine. Not Neil; with his usual generosity, he had swept us up for a dinner downstairs on the river. Like most successful people, he had that extra energy, even after his heart had sputtered several times and he had been slit and peeled like an orange half around his girth.

The priest began, "We are here to thank God for O'Neil Ford." That was right. Lots of us were. But the morticians hadn't realized that this wasn't much of a commercial wreath-sending crowd. It hadn't even occurred to most of us. They scrambled about taking down all the unused racks for holding wreaths.

Soon after, I looked back and realized that the side aisles were crowded with standees. Neil's story of sitting with a

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second generation of computer chieftains at a sidewalk cafe on the Côte d'Azur pricked my conscience. An elderly lady known to all had paused at their table. "Those wimps with me wouldn't get out of their chairs. The SOB's aren't gentlemen like those they took over from." Neil was an artful gentleman with women. (It was too late for me to be a gentleman this morning. The priest was praying.)

After the reverend had set the tone, Amy Freeman Lee climbed to a lectern and confirmed my view of Ford's dictum on sentimentality. "Make 'em

laugh," was her duty under his design of the event. (*God, Neil, it's your last design.*) One of her five stories (there was one for each of the decades she had known him) was a word picture of Neil in a checked jacket driving up to a party in an MG just after the second world war. "Jaunty," she thought. "That's class." He was from a town in North Texas miles from anywhere, and he deliberately exaggerated his lack of education, as part of the Texas style of his generation. Ed Stone, another outré architect that Tom Wolfe makes a bit too much of in his anger at the Bauhaus, played the same dirt-under-fingers game out of Arkansas, and migrated clean away from his roots to prominence. But not Ford. He stuck to Texas as a base, and worked at evolving forms satisfying to us here, though he occasionally designed buildings in other places. "Class" in his buildings was deliberately defined in Texas terms, and the buildings certainly mirror the man. Amy Lee carried through her charge eloquently, and yet somehow made us smile.

**Dobie, Webb, Bedichek, Ford**

More blues; not even long-haired jazz here; and then a second speaker. Maury Maverick Jr.'s role was to put a frame around Neil's contributions to San Antonio. After these two, John Henry Faulk's use of Shakespearean analogies seemed a bit heavy, which he admitted in his last sentence, looking down at the coffin, mimicking Neil, "Aw, Henry, you're laying it on a little thick," but I guess I got it about right." Missing was the visual artist's or architect's view of Ford's contributions. Neil had asked that Jerry Bywaters, Ford's salad days pal in creating an artistic identity for Texas, be one of the speakers, but he was ill. Faulk was perhaps to put a frame around Neil's contribution to Texas. I thanked him for a line about "Dobie, Webb, Bedichek and Ford." It was a nice image. Those three verbal craftsmen, and the materials craftsman. I can vouch for the Bedichek parallel. Eating a really ripe peach bought from a farmer at Dripping Springs while Bedichek pointed out the character of a wild flower or a bird in a madrona tree was the same as listening to Ford talk about simple early Texas building forms, and the same as experiencing one of his better buildings.

"Architecture's craft. It's hard work," he snorted perversely to a question whether architecture is poetry.

Ford had been sitting behind us, tapping us on the shoulders, muttering about the "high-flown" words of Norberg-Schulz who had lectured. And my mind snapped much further back to a 1952 image of him sitting in the Masters Class lab in Robinson Hall at Harvard, reading aloud his office mail from home, even letters from Wanda. The European and eastern students, chosen by Gropius and expecting to find him there teaching, did not quite know what to make of Ford. He was one of four visiting critics brought in to fill the void of Gropius' sudden departure. By the time Ford arrived, Ieoh Ming Pei had led them through one five-week exercise. Immediately following Pei's articulate, incisive style, derived from a blend of patrician Chinese and New England schooling, Ford's personal style was a shock. Did he have anything to teach them? He had to struggle against an intellectual snobbism from those 16 gentlemen, and his asking them to design an office building for an oil company in Texas, an improbable place, did not help. He hadn't designed any Harvard boxes, and as Tom Wolfe has shown, was outside the compound. Ford gradually won them over, all but Norberg-Schulz, who must have hurt Ford by exiting from the class at that particular moment. Perhaps this accounted for his outburst in Dallas against the theoretician; Norberg-Schulz turned it back on Ford with a

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complement about Ford's work, using rare grace and adroitness, a polished stiletto of words that skewered Ford's bluster. (*Neil, maybe you can take credit for making Norberg-Schulz a great critic by running him out of design class toward intellectual pursuits.* I

liked the irony.) At Harvard Ford's technical know-how shifted the orientation of the students to a practical base, and we were soon deep into how-to-do-it detail; however, we were applying the detail to flat-roofed Harvard boxes. Ford couldn't overcome fifteen years of German regime in his six weeks, though he worked on us every day.

**Frontier Suspicions**

The priest was dressed in a bright vestment that no cleric would have worn before the '60s. The meeting house services Ford must have known 70 years ago in Pink Hill, Texas, had to have been a sure contrast to this one. We had come a long way from agrarian frontier Texas, and Ford's life bridged the change. An Irishman full of stories, who talked endlessly, he nevertheless was suspicious of other people's words, perhaps out of his youth close in time to the frontier. After listening to a tape from a New Mexico professional meeting, he gruffed at me in a definitely ambiguous tone of voice, "I heard those words of yours about that upside down bank in Arizona." I never figured out if he was really disapproving, or begrudging, or both.

The service ended with "Amazing Grace," a camp meeting song which Ford probably did encounter in services at the Texas meeting houses of his childhood. He kept some of the style of a rural Texan, a part of his character admired. Older Texans loved him because he was still one of them, even though he worked in a subject they didn't know much about. His forms spoke to them, those sparse forms of brick. The intellectuals liked him because he was the first architect with any sizable body of work to give them their own identity in original physical terms. Ford knew his milieu and gradually distilled his designs from it. His color palette as well as his textures came to blend with a Latin character so long smothered or treated as a cliché in Texas.

We all got in cars and followed the hearse. It was only after we had gone by the Cathedral his firm had given new life to, and turned into King William Street by his old office, that I realized we were deliberately passing Neil's buildings and haunts. We took the river road by Concepcion. Out on the highway near the burial ground I could see neither the head nor tail of the file of headlighted cars. Police on motor-

cycles kept leapfrogging intersections. Did all San Antonio have to stop for that impressively long snake? The mayor had called out his police for an architect. Some things were changing in Texas; that would not have happened a generation ago.

Green gentle slope down to a dam on the river: large trees, for San Antonio. Instead of the grave my mind flipped to a story of Ford's bachelor days in Dallas: at Minnie Marcus's house a big lawn swept down to a small creek in a woods, where on a hot afternoon at a garden party, Neil and Eddie had snuck off for a swim. Their clothes stolen by some lady spies, Marcus and Ford marched out of the trees straight up the hill, deadpan, through the party, into the house and upstairs to find clothes.

"I don't know how to say there *must* not be any great ceremony—no weeping. I have gone away for pretty long trips before—and besides, does anyone have any choice about dying? Why fear the inevitable? Why scorn the natural ending?" Neil's words were printed under his picture in the program for the funeral. (*Neil, you were a better architect than a logician with words, but the gist was right.*) He really had played this ceremony straight, but with a Ford twist.

#### **Zinnias and Marigolds**

There were zinnias and marigolds through which four little crosses appeared on the coffin. Zinnias, yes, a nice Texas touch, but I wondered how he felt about the crosses. They were a familiar dining room table object from his house. Certainly he liked to design buildings for religious institutions, but was he a professed believer? He never said. I thought it more likely that he was content with the ubiquitous feather that someone said was in the lapel of his shroud. We went off and left the coffin standing there in the sun, in that terrible new practice of secret after-the-grave-service burial that undertakers have foisted off on us. None of his friends to help put him in the ground, or throw a flower down. The fantasies were all bad.

We drove down behind Mission San Jose, past the bull ring to park, and walked in the caliche dust bright under the hot noon light into Willow Way. I wanted a peacock to scream, and one finally did as we rounded the corner by the long outer bird cages. Under the arbor along one side of the front lawn

people were already eating. On the lawn two Latin ladies were patting out flour tortillas and another was buttering them with beans: wonderful burritos. Inside, on the porch, there really was cornbread and ham, while waiters passed champagne, as Neil had wanted. (*Neil, I'm glad you didn't have us drinking the wine out of gourds and pails.*) In Cambridge I remembered meals at the Henri IV, and other Harvard bistros, where Neil seemed to be spending his entire critic's stipend entertaining us students. There was a bar we came to frequent with Neil, principally because

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there was a barmaid whose body Gaston Lachaise must have used as a model for his sculpture. Most afternoons at six we marvelled at her. She was so decorative that she eventually captured, yea married, one of us, but not until long after Neil had set a pattern for us drinking beer there. He was in lab every afternoon, and in the mornings he was off looking at Richardson train stations or churches with a good brick or stone detail. This all ended when his turn with the Masters Class was finished, before a holiday. On a brisk wool suit morning after the leaves had all fallen, Neil and five of us took off for New York. There he introduced me to Luchow's, that great gastronomic institution, where he said goodbye. He was a Texan who knew his way around, for all that down home cornbread.

The lawn continued to fill with people. Except for the self-conscious ones in three-piece suits, the young had sensibly pared down their clothes to open shirts. The over 50s ones had pulled open their ties. There were some over 60 in formal daytime attire, including a few women in silk chiffon.

Like Bedichek, Ford wanted, demanded, connections to other generations than his own. Once we weren't sure why we were invited to a job interview because we knew it was Ford's turf. And this was confirmed when we got back to the office. The drafting studios were in disarray because Ford had wandered in, asking for people who were smokers, saying he wanted to show them what was going to happen to them. By the time he had left he had shown all the architects the entire extent of his big red new scar from the lung operation. There was a side comment relayed back to us absent partners: "Oh, I know where they are, but they won't get it." And we didn't.

There was a sizable number of architects standing on the lawn who had been influenced by him. Some like Harold Box had lived at Willow Way when Ford had had a studio of apprentices in the Wright tradition. Ones like Welch absorbed his wit and personal style. Others like the Petersons had carried out his early impetus to save and restore Texas' building heritage. The Landrys carry on his form style, as do O'Neill and Perez, from a still younger group of alumni. A few struggle to evolve the direction he set in more contemporary, machine-derived terms. On these people's doorsteps he appeared with erratic frequency, but he could be gotten for help, and was always solicitous when playing mentor. Once in the '60s when we were in trouble with a client over the design of our first four million dollar building, Papa Neil came to spend two hours with our questioner: "That building will come out fine if you leave 'em alone," was his summary aid.

#### **National Windows**

At the funeral I recognized none of his Texas Instruments clients who enlarged the scope of his work with homes, factories, and donated institutional buildings after the '50s. Lucy Nugent was there from the Johnson family, who gave him another kind of national window with an appointment to the National Endowment for the Arts. But none in our Texas adolescent culture were confident enough of their own taste to entrust him with the LBJ shrine, the major city halls, and art museums. Ford commented about himself and another architect, after losing the commission to design a museum, "We could have gotten that job together, if he hadn't thought he could

get it alone." I doubt that. Neil's forte was an American vernacular, earthy and out of the Texas past. For those self-conscious, capital "C" cultural projects, Texas donors played it safe with commissions resulting in approved national abstract designs, not regional ones, placeless though these designs may be. Texas is as yet no Italy with its own Michelangelos.

And Ford did tax some clients' patiences. One hired us on the rebound with a comment that Ford was always "out of sight, out of mind." But he had a capacity to maintain an enormous

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***Ford permitted himself to let a hint of sentiment show through his gruffness and to wax lyrical: Then the timbre of his voice rose and softened, became slightly airy in its caress about some beautiful soft stone or a brick vault.***

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network of friends, including some of those he exasperated. (*Ford, you were sometimes arrogant and jealous, but a lot of us forgave you because of your wit.*) He did have enemies. The adversary role he played in the profession during the '40s and '50s was partly due to ego, but also to his concern for saving early vernacular buildings before it was fashionable to do so. His seeming perverseness was also due to the style revolution then going on. Ford's work belonged neither to the beaux arts tradition, nor to the pure International Style. The moral fervor of the new style's evangelism did catch him to the extent that he eschewed classicism. This did not become clear in his work until the '40s, when his designs evolved in a new direction. By then his scorn of the beaux arts had the same moral tone as that adopted by all of us who were brain-washed in the training of the '40s; it was this moral tone that baffled and angered the traditionalists, and exaggerated Ford's separation from the then professional establishment. Time changed his evangelical architectural ideas, and softened Ford's ego; passing a campus

building being razed as we rode in the cortege, critic Dillon reported him recently saying, "I'm glad I lived long enough to see some of this '50s stuff of mine torn down."

Standing in the shade of Neil's house at this wake partly planned by the honoree on the back of a will, a different kind of party floated to mind: the one *Texas Homes* held for Neil when they did the issue on him last fall. Its ingenious pull-out invitation presaged good hors d'oeuvres and lots of people at the Mansion in Dallas. ("Don't touch my back, it's still sore as hell!") The issue showed his better side, his more personal buildings, and not the losers. Most of the latter were bigger institutions, or factories, where it is harder to control the subtleties of scale, or to introduce the materials and handcraft that he had become known for. Was that why he was reported to have evolved an office within the office, to keep control? Sometimes in the work of the grown-up firm, long weaned from him, there was no personal stamp. At the funeral one eulogy predicted that Neil would be installing those ceramic light fixtures in Heaven. I don't think so. Neil knew when not to use those fixtures, which now have lost spontaneity. They have the same mechanical character as Wesley Peters' imitations of Wright's detail. No one is varying their patterns, evolving them toward something new; Ford lived to see that detail of his work become a cliché.

#### **Waxing Lyrical**

At the end of the mowed lawn we saw the two little vaulted buildings that he had built on an excuse of needing *piéd-à-terres* for the young, but I suspect for the real reason of watching those Latin masons put up domes without centering. He was fascinated with the romantic handcraft technique wherein the mason started laying bricks or stone in a spiral out over space, working quickly with the mortar just stiff enough to hold the units, until he could plug the center with a keystone to make the dome secure from gravity. Talking about this was the special case when Ford permitted himself to let a hint of sentiment show through his assumed gruffness, and to wax lyrical: then the timbre of his voice rose and softened, became slightly airy in its caress about some beautiful soft stone or a brick vault.

To eat my burritos, I took a place at a

picnic table under the arbor. A shy 13-year-old, olive skinned and jet-haired, continued to eat next to me. I did not know how to get him to talk. Wanda and Neil had done more than most to bring Latin friends and culture out into the Texas sun, and mix them with the Anglo as they should be. History will say that Ford's real contribution was uniting the Anglo with a Latin tradition as the beginning of a style appropriate historically and in climate for that portion of Texas and Mexico west of the hardwood forest, north of Monterrey, and south of the caprock out to the Rockies.

#### **The Cobbler's Retreat**

The Happy Jazz Band was now playing New Orleans in the living room as I walked through the house. But this Texas house, Neil's own, was not of the gloss of *Texas Homes*. It was tangible, decaying, and like my mind, full of the detritus of several lives. An enlarged version of a Texas country house before air conditioning, dressed in fashionable garb of the '40s: a mass with flat eyebrows, wood awning windows, screened porches. How different from Eliel Saarinen's turn-of-the-century artists' compound outside Helsinki, or from Charles Eames' oceanside house, an homage to the machine. There was something of the friendly relaxed ramshackle of a large, old Texas farm, what with all of Wanda's long birdcages for exotic birds and laying hens, and numerous outbuildings. The house was the cobbler's retreat, no self-conscious stage set of Architecture. Piles of books stacked randomly. Rooms full of stuff. No pretense; none at all, and almost perversely so. He obviously didn't like to alight for long, by the evidence of this house. It seemed already that Wanda had properly taken it all back, though it was the same as a year ago, when we had the inevitable tour of the two tiny vaulted buildings. We had been sent to mass at Mission San Jose to hear the mariachis, and when we returned he was asleep. He was ordered to nap by the doctor. We hadn't waited for him to wake after Wanda gave us something to eat, and had packed green eggs for us to take to Dallas.