

Border Modern: Modern Architecture of the Texas-Mexican Border

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I dedicate this talk to the memory of Kenneth E. Bentsen, who died Tuesday. A native of Mission, Kenneth Bentsen studied architecture at the University of Texas and the University of Houston. Although he practiced in Houston, Kenneth Bentsen greatly influenced modern architecture in the Lower Rio Grande Valley through the buildings he designed in McAllen, Mission, and Edinburg in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Kenneth Bentsen loved his border homeland and he celebrated its distinctive culture in the buildings he designed here.

I also want to thank Carmen Pérez García for inviting me to propose this course and to acknowledge my profound indebtedness to Lower Río Grande Valley Chapter members and friends who have expanded my knowledge of the architecture of the Tamaulipas-Texas border: Manuel Hinojosa FAIA, Dr. Mario L. Sánchez, Rafael Longoria, Carlos Rugerio Cázares, Virginia Haynie and George R. Gause, Jr., Gerald Moorhead, FAIA, Ing. Clemente Rendón de la Garza, Michael Dailey, John Percy, AIA, Frank Briscoe, Jr., Lawrence V. Lof, Gregory Free, and Edward Burian.

Map

The Texan cities of the border region were sites where an extraordinary body of modern architecture was produced in the 1950s. This impulse also affected the Tamaulipas border cities: Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros. In addition to the inventiveness of the

buildings involved, what makes modern architecture in this zone so fascinating is the production of difference that occurred because these buildings were constructed to either side of an international border. The production of architectural difference in the twentieth century contrasts with the architecture of the lower Río Grande during the nineteenth century, when the border condition in architecture was registered in the similarity of buildings constructed on either side of the river rather than their differences.

Detail of Fairway Motor Hotel

What I deduce from this phenomenon is the importance of examining the local histories of such universal trends as modernism. Modern architecture, its disciplinary discourse of honesty, integrity, openness, and transparency notwithstanding, was implicated in the mid-century social economy of border towns. The historical layers embedded in this ostensibly simple, straightforward architecture are even denser because of the effect of the border condition.

View of Río Grande from Falcón International Dam

Before, as well as after, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which in 1848 established the Río Grande (called the río Bravo del Norte in Mexico) as the international border between Mexico and the United States, modernization—the historical processes with which modern architecture identified—had been assimilated to the established building typology of northeastern Mexico.

Map of Nuevo Santander, 1792; Northeastern Mexico in 1835

Modernization may be said to have begun along the Río Grande one hundred years earlier, in the middle of the 18th century. In the 1740s the Mexican viceregal government authorized don José de Escandón to explore, pacify, and populate the territory along the Gulf coast called “el seno Mexicano,” today the state of Tamaulipas and all of Texas south of the Nueces River.

Survey of Reynosa, 1767

In 1767, townsites were surveyed for all communities in Nuevo Santander, the Spanish colonial name for the province encompassing el seno Mexicano. This is the town plan of the Villa de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Reynosa. Although not all town plans in Nuevo Santander were identical, they reflected...

Townplans of Camargo, Reynosa, Guerrero, and Mier (1995)

...the directives encoded in the *Recompilación de Leyes de las Indias* of 1680 for organizing modern Spanish colonial urban space. These axonometric drawings by students of Professor Rafael Longoria at the University of Houston’s Hines College of Architecture of the central plazas of Camargo and Reynosa (on top) and Guerrero and Mier (bottom) show how in the 18th century modern colonial space was systematically inscribed in what would become, after 1848, four of the six Tamaulipecan border towns.

San Ygnacio, Texas:

In the village of San Ygnacio, Texas, the tightly configured spatial structure embedded in these town plans can still be experienced through the medium of San Ygnacio's architecture, even though the buildings of San Ygnacio were constructed in the 1850s.

Templo de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Mier, 1796

Architecture in Nuevo Santander also registered external influence. Manuel Hinojosa speculates that the parish church of Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción in Mier, Tamaulipas, inscribed with the date 1795, was the work of a guild of Talxcaltecan Indian builders, perhaps from one of the Tlaxcaltecan communities in Nuevo León, contracted especially to build the church.

Templo de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Mier, 1796; details

Manuel Hinojosa sees in the church's architectural articulation and decorative details traces of an indigenous, *tequitqui*, aesthetic, set within the architectural conventions of Franciscan church building. Mier's parish church suggests that geographical remoteness in the 18th century did not inhibit the penetration of external cultural influences.

Matamoros: Templo de Nuestra Señora del Refugio and Plaza Hidalgo

Modernization shaped the architecture of Matamoros. Founded in 1784, twenty-five miles from the mouth of the Río Grande, Matamoros was elevated to the status of a maritime port of entry in 1826 by the central government of Mexico, five years after Mexican independence from Spain. Matamoros was the first real city in the lower river region. New Orleans was Matamoros's chief trading partner, and its primary source of architectural influence. Matamoros's parish church, Nuestra Señora del Refugio, was

built between 1821 and 1833 by the French-born New Orleanian brickmason, Mateo Passement. After the church lost its towers in the hurricane of 1844, they were reconstructed, as seen here, as part of a neoclassical façade designed by Passement's nephew, the mason, architect, and engineer, Bártolo Passement, in the 1850s. Bártolo Passement was Afro-Creole, a free man of color who immigrated with his family to Matamoros in 1832 to escape the restrictions imposed on free people of color in New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase.

During the U.S. Army's occupation of Matamoros between 1846 and 1848, the years of the U.S.-Mexican War, Matamoros's central plaza, today the Plaza Hidalgo, was transformed from a dusty void into a landscaped urban garden under the direction of Major W. W. Chapman of the U.S. Army Quartermasters Corps. Trade, immigration, and war gave Matamoros a hybrid, transnational architectural identity by the middle of the 19th century. The strong forms of Mexican architectural and urban typology remained dominant. But this framework was filled in with details and materials that registered the impact of nineteenth-century modernization.

Casa Lojero, 1836, and Perrilliat House, New Orleans, 1825

Just how literal the translation of New Orleanian Creole architectural prototypes could be is apparent in comparing the Perrilliat House on Chartres Street in the French Quarter of 1825 (the pink house) with two views of the Casa Lojero in Matamoros of 1836. In Matamoros, as in New Orleans, brick was the medium of construction. This contrasted with the older upriver towns, where locally quarried sandstone was the primary material of construction.

Reyes-Ortiz-Puig House, Laredo, 1830s, 1866, 1871, 1872

In the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War, the type represented by the Casa Lojero—the Matamoros merchant’s house—was built all along the lower river corridor between Matamoros (and its Texan companion city after 1848, Brownsville) and, at the northern end of the corridor, Laredo, Texas, one of the original Escandón Nuevo Santander towns, and its post U.S.-Mexican War companion city, Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. In Laredo, the grandest example of a Matamoros merchant’s house type is the patio-centered Reyes Ortiz House, built in phases between 1866 and 1872, with its *patio-huerta* overlooking the Río Grande. The ground floor of the Reyes Ortiz House is plastered sandstone; the second floor is brick. This transition in material attests to the formation of a regional, and also transnational, building culture that would persist along the lower Río Grande into the second decade of the 20th century.

Casa Juan H. Fernández y Hermano, Brownsville, 1884

In Brownsville, the most imposing example of the Matamoros merchant’s house type was built in stages by an immigrant Spanish merchant, Juan H. Fernández, beginning in 1884. The emergence in the 1860s of this regional architectural vernacular, the Border Brick style, based on northeastern Mexican spatial practices but modified by New Orleanian Creole construction and decorative practices, was interrupted on occasion,...

Casa Melitón H. Cross, Matamoros, 1885, S. W. Brooks

...as at the Victorian villa of the U.S.-born Matamoros merchant, Middleton H. Cross, designed and built in 1885 by S. W. Brooks, an architect who came to Matamoros from

New Orleans during the U.S. Civil War, then relocated to Brownsville. The typological and decorative singularity of the Casa Cross, a modern dwelling house freestanding in its own garden, causes it to stand out in the Creole urban fabric of Matamoros, even today.

Templo de Santo Niño de Atocha, Nuevo Laredo, E. R. Laroche, 1888

During the 19th century certain building types, such as churches, tended to be designed in “modern” styles, one example being Nuevo Laredo’s oldest parish church, Santo Niño de Atocha, remodeled in a Roman classical style in the 1880s. Historian Eduardo Alarcón Cantú attributes the church’s design to another transplanted New Orleanian building professional, the engineer E. Roger Laroche.

Mexican National Railroad route map, 1891

In the early 1880s, the speed of modernization along the Tamaulipas-Texas border changed, accelerated by the construction of such cross-continental railroad lines as the U.S. owned-Mexican National Railroad, which linked Mexico City to the border at Laredo. This was an uneven process however. Railroad construction bypassed the lower corridor, relegating the towns downriver from Laredo and Nuevo Laredo to continued isolation...

St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway route map and Brownsville passenger station

...until 1904-05, when the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway was built to link Corpus Christi to Brownsville and Houston. Construction of the Brownsville-to-Houston railroad led to an ecological revolution in the delta of the Río Grande. Arid ranch land was transformed into highly productive cropland through the installation of irrigation

systems and the development of sixteen new towns along the rail line between 1904 and 1911. Real estate developers not only transformed the landscape, they also recruited migrants—farmers from the American Midwest—to move to the Lower Río Grande Valley, as the region came to be called, where the growing season lasted all year long and cheap labor was abundant.

San Benito Land & Water Co. Building, San Benito, 1911, Endress & Walsh; Louisiana-Río Grande Canal Co. Pumphouse, Hidalgo, 1912; Casa de Palmas, McAllen, 1918, M. L. Waller

The architecture of early 20th-century modernization in the Lower Río Grande Valley of Texas was initially identified with the California Mission style. Such key works of infrastructure as the San Benito Land & Water Co. Building of 1911 in the new town of San Benito (top left), the Louisiana-Río Grande Canal Co. Pumphouse of 1912 on the river at Hidalgo (top right), and the Casa de Palmas Hotel of 1918, built adjacent to the train tracks in the new town of McAllen, sought to manage the shock and alienation with which Midwestern immigrants confronted Mexican border culture by architecturally transposing “Mexican” into “Spanish.” Luxurious subtropical vegetation re-imaged the flat, hot, humid terrain of the borderland as an Exotic Tropical Paradise.

Colegio Modelo, Matamoros, 1922-23, M. L. Waller

The Mexican Revolution of 1913-17 disrupted the building economy of the Tamaulipecan border cities. In the post-revolutionary 1920s, new public buildings were few, but they signaled the modern aspirations of their builders by reproducing U.S. models. After the governor of Tamaulipas, General César López de Lara, toured

Brownsville High School in 1922 (bottom right)—following the remodeling of the school building, originally constructed in 1891 (bottom left)—he hired the architect of the remodeling, M. L. Waller of San Antonio (also architect of the Casa de Palmas), to reproduce the remodeled high school in the Colegio Modelo, completed in Matamoros in 1923 (top). Governor López then had Waller build two more versions, one in Nuevo Laredo, the other in the state capital, Ciudad Victoria.

Dr. Francisco R. Canseco House, Laredo, 1924, Enrique Canseco

An extremely rare example of the opposite phenomenon—reproducing a modern Mexican house type in a Texan border city—is represented by the cast-stone *palacete* that the Tampico, Tamaulipas, architect Enrique Canseco, designed for his brother, Dr. Francisco R. Canseco, on the Heights in Laredo in 1923-24. Although the Mexican Revolution caused many elite northern Mexican families to seek refuge in Texas, Dr. Canseco was highly unusual in maintaining a connection to contemporary Mexican architectural practices.

Edificio Longoria, Nuevo Laredo, 1929; Banco Longoria, Nuevo Laredo, 1929, John M. Marriott and J. Fred Buenz

The more common practice is represented by a pair of buildings constructed in 1929 by the Nuevo Laredo entrepreneur and banker, don Ottaviano L. Longoria. On Avenida Guerrero in Nuevo Laredo, Longoria built a block-long commercial building that mirrored contemporary U.S. Main Street building types. Longoria had the San Antonio architect John M. Marriott collaborate with J. Fred Buenz of Laredo on the American-

style Banco Longoria. For O. L. Longoria, as for Governor López de Lara, U.S. building practices and purpose-designed building types signified architectural modernity.

Hotel El Jardín and Missouri-Pacific Passenger Station, 1927, Kelwood Co.; Brownsville International Airport, 1929, 1930, Ben V. Proctor; U.S. Border Services Building, 1929, William D. Van Siclen; Southern Pacific Railway Passenger Station, 1929, R. W. Barnes, chief engineer, Brownsville

On the Texan side of the border during the second half of the 1920s, scenographic Spanish Mediterranean architecture identified buildings linked to transportation, communications, and trade technologies as modern. Both of Brownsville's railroad passenger stations, its tallest building, the eight-story Hotel El Jardín of 1927 (crowned with 60-foot-tall radio transmitting towers), the U.S. Border Services Building of 1929 at the Gateway International Bridge (lower right), and Brownsville International Airport terminal of 1929 (upper right), inaugurated by Charles Lindberg and Amelia Earhart, deployed winsome combinations of stucco, tile, and cast stone...

Brownsville in Texas on the Lower Río Grande: Where Mexico Meets Uncle Sam

...to assert the eclectic proposition that in an Exotic Tropical Paradise there was no contradiction between modernity and tradition. To progressive U.S. border entrepreneurs in the late 1920s, this romantic Spanish narrative was precisely what confirmed the modernity of their building projects.

Camille Sams and Larry F. Lightner House, Brownsville, 1936, Russell T. Pancoast

The Great Depression undermined the equation of scenography and modernization. One alternative that preserved use of historical models was Regionalism, which entailed modernizing and streamlining American historical models, exemplified by the Camille Sams and Larry F. Lightner House of 1936 in Brownsville. Designed by the Miami architect Russell T. Pancoast, the Monterey-style Lightner House discloses the continuing dependence of Texans on architecture in south Florida and southern California when it came to constructing architectural images of place in the borderlands.

John A. Knapp House, Weslaco, 1939, R. Newell Waters (Maynard L. Parker, 1940)

Southern California proffered a new suburban house type: the California ranch house. The Weslaco architect R. Newell Waters produced a California ranch type house for the Weslaco car dealer John A. Knapp in 1939 that was so faithful to the type that it was photographed for the Los Angeles-based *Architectural Digest* magazine in 1940 by Maynard L. Parker.

Salomé McAllen and William Scanlan House, Brownsville, 1940, Frank E. Torres

The house of Salomé McAllen and William Scanlan in Brownsville of 1940 was designed by Frank E. Torres, an architect born in Matamoros and trained at the University of Texas, who had worked in Mexico City from 1933 to 1938. The Scanlan House registers Torres's awareness of the 19th-century Border Brick style. It marks the first Regionalist evocation of the 19th-century vernacular architecture of the Tamaulipas-Texas border region.

An alternative to the Regionalist effort to rationalize the use of historical models, involved the rejection of all historical models in favor of an architecture shaped by the processes of modernization. Function, the materials and techniques of construction, and response to site conditions and climatic contingencies were the constituents of this alternative—modern architecture....

George Kraigher House, 525 Paredes Line Road, Brownsville, 1937, Richard Neutra

...Modern architecture was materialized in a small house designed on the outskirts of Brownsville in 1937 by the Los Angeles architect Richard Neutra for George Kraigher, a Slovenian immigrant and a pilot for Pan American Airlines, which maintained a hub in Brownsville. On the border, Neutra introduced to Texas the architecture of planar white walls, flat roofs, strip windows, terrace decks, and steel pipe rails: the attributes of modern functionalism delivered with the imprimatur of southern California.

Kraigher House

The interior of the Kraigher House was made to seem spacious by reflective surfaces, copious daylight, and wrap-around windows facing into the prevailing breeze.

“Open-planned, Window-walled House in Southwest,” *Architectural Record*, May 1939

The Kraigher House was the first house from the Texas-Tamaulipas border to be published in a nationally circulated architecture magazine, the May 1939 issue of

Architectural Record. Publication brought the region, fleetingly, into the realm of architectural discourse.

Two public buildings constructed in Nuevo Laredo ten years apart illustrate the impact modern architecture would have on the Tamaulipas border.

Palacio Municipal, Nuevo Laredo, 1937-40, Arq. Alfredo Hurtado Serrano

During the administration of Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas (from 1934 to 1940), the long-neglected Tamaulipas border became the focus of intensive state investment. One architectural result was the construction of a substantial new Palacio Municipal (now the Palacio Federal) in Nuevo Laredo in 1940. Eduardo Alarcón Cantú has identified the architect as Alfonso Hurtado Serrano of Mexico City. The neocolonial design of the Palacio Municipal reflected the nationalism of the Cárdenas administration, which rebuffed U.S. models of modernity by formulating a state cultural policy to frame models of Mexican modernity.

Palacio Municipal

Nuevo Laredo's Palacio Municipal preserves such Mexican spatial features as open-air *corredores* and a central *patio*. Before the Second World War, Spanish style architecture was used as an instrument of persuasion on both sides of the Texas-Tamaulipas border but in support of different ideological positions. On the Tamaulipecan side, neocolonial architecture was the consensus style of cultural nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s. On the Texan side, Spanish style architecture had masked Anglo-American assertions of cultural mastery in the 1920s.

Garita Miguel Alemán, Nuevo Laredo, 1950, Arq. Gonzalo Garita

After the Second World War, major state projects attest to the mid-century replacement of neocolonial architecture with modern functionalist architecture as the representative style of Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (the PRI). Between 1947 and '50 the Garita Miguel Alemán, the customs and immigration station at the international bridge in Nuevo Laredo, was built according to the plans of architect Gonzalo Garita. It is a modern portal through which motorists entered Mexico on the new Pan American Highway.

Basílica de la Purísima, Monterrey, 1941-46, Arq. Enrique de la Mora e Ing. Armando Ravizé Rodríguez

Although proponents of the Modern Movement in twentieth-century architecture mobilized the rationalist, instrumental discourse of modern engineering to justify functionalist architecture, they were not averse to Regionalism if treated as a method rather than a style. The Mexico City architect Enrique de la Mora demonstrated what form a modern Mexican regionalism might take when in 1941 he designed the first modern church built in Mexico, now the Basílica de la Purísima in Monterrey, completed in 1946. The parabolic profiles of the nave and transepts materialize the rationalism of modern concrete construction. But the rustic texture of the stone bell tower and the stone panels inset in the church's concrete frame imbue la Purísima with a powerful Regionalist emotional charge.

Templo de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Reynosa, 1950-54

The influence of la Purísima was visible in new parish churches constructed in border cities in the early 1950s. The population of Reynosa surged after the discovery of natural gas fields between 1944 and '49 and construction of a refinery there by Petroleos Mexicanos in 1951. Reynosa's good fortune was manifest in the construction of a new church for the city's oldest parish, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, dedicated in 1954. La Santísima Guadalupe reproduced the parabolic profile and stone-faced towers of la Purísima alongside the stone bell tower of the church's mid-nineteenth-century predecessor.

Templo del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, Matamoros, 1953

A new parish church, Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, was completed in Matamoros in 1953 facing Plaza Allende. It too paid homage to la Purísima.

Templo de Nuestra Señora del Refugio, Calle Eisenhower, Nueva Ciudad Guerrero, 1959

From as late as 1959, when the parish church of Nuestra Señora del Refugio was built in the new town of Nueva Ciudad Guerrero, traces of the Purísima model are evident. In the border cities of Tamaulipas in the postwar period, new construction was decisively reoriented away from Texan and U.S. models of modernity to Mexican models of modernity.

Falcón International Dam, 1950-54

Under the auspices of the International Water and Boundary Commission, the U.S. and Mexican governments sought through the 1960s to repeat the integrated development

strategy associated with the Tennessee Valley Authority. This included damming the Río Grande to construct Falcón International Dam and Reservoir, dedicated by presidents Adolfo Ruíz Cortines and Dwight D. Eisenhower in October 1953.

Aerial view of Nueva Ciudad Guerrero, 1948-54

On the shore of Falcón International Reservoir, the new town of Nueva Ciudad Guerrero was built in 1950-54 to replace Guerrero's 18th-century townsite, inundated by impoundment of river water in the reservoir. Nueva Ciudad Guerrero represented the PRI's mid-century vision of Mexico's future. It is a car-oriented, suburbanized city. Architect and historian Carlos Rugerio Cázares believes that the Mexico City architect Carlos Lazo, secretary of Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas during the Ruíz Cortines administration, was involved in Guerrero's planning.

Calle Benito Juárez, Nueva Ciudad Guerrero, 1954

Instead of a dense, compact urban fabric containing a mixture of uses, Guerrero is zoned, with residential neighborhoods of freestanding, single-family houses flanking a downtown commercial street.

Plaza Juárez and Palacio Municipal, Nueva Ciudad Guerrero

The central plaza is not in the center of town but isolated at one edge, on an acropolis near the lakeshore. The Palacio Municipal is a modern concrete building. Like Falcón Dam, it is an example of functionalist engineer's architecture. Nuevo Guerrero has few architecturally singular buildings. But, as Carlos Rugerio observes, it materializes a progressive vision of Mexican modernization and the PRI state that is quite significant in

a Mexican historical perspective.

Calle 6a y Calle Gen. Manuel González, Matamoros; Palacio Municipal, 1958, Arq. Jorge Elizalde

The Lázaro Cárdenas administration began construction in the 1930s of a network of flood protection levees, diversion dams, and irrigation canals that, as historian Casey Walsh demonstrates, converted the arid countryside of the *municipio* of Matamoros into one of Mexico's most productive cotton-growing regions. As a result of the spectacular cotton boom that erupted in the postwar 1940s, the west and south sides of Matamoros's Plaza Hidalgo were rebuilt with modern buildings in the 1940s and '50s. A new Palacio Municipal of 1958 by the architect Jorge Elizalde (center right) spoke the international language of modern Regionalism, liberated from historical models with its *brise-soleil* (the sunshade screen), also a feature of the adjoining Banco Industrial de Monterrey of the late 1940s (on the far right).

Casa Manuel Cavazos Gutiérrez and Casa en Calle 8a y Bustamante, Matamoros, c. 1950, Arq. Enrique León de la Barra

Architects moved to Matamoros for the first time since the 1860s. Enrique León de la Barra of Ciudad Victoria was one of the newcomers. He designed neo-colonial *chalets* for Matamoros's cotton elite in the late 1940s and early '50s.

Casa Amador Garza González, Colonial Jardín, Matamoros, 1950, Arq. Augustín Reyes Escobar

The most prolific of the newly arrived architects was Augustín Reyes Escobar, who was from Parral, Chihuahua. Reyes designed one of the largest houses in Matamoros for the cotton merchant Amador Garza González in 1950. It was built in the city's new elite neighborhood, Colonia Jardín, developed in 1945 along the road leading from the center of Matamoros to the Gateway International Bridge. In 1951 *Time* magazine reported that “Along the flowered streets of Matamoros’ El Jardín district, there are so many new and luxurious houses that one awed American mumbled: ‘This is just what the South must have looked like before the Civil War.’”

Casa Dr. Juvenal Rendón Sáenz, Colonial Jardín, 1956, Arq. Sergio Paredes Rangel

Another young architect, Sergio Paredes Rangel, a graduate of the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, was a Matamorensé (although he was born in Brownsville) and the nephew of the Brownsville journalist-turned-folklorist, Américo Paredes. Sergio Paredes’s house for Dr. Juvenal Rendón Sáenz of 1956 in Colonia Jardín displays Paredes’s mature understanding of the Usonian architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. As pronounced as Wright’s influence is, however, the Casa Rendón represents a distinctively Mexican interpretation. It occupies a lot much smaller than one in a comparable neighborhood in Brownsville, for instance, and is of reinforced concrete frame construction, the universal type of construction for buildings, including houses, in the formal economy sector of mid-century Mexico.

Casa López Padrón, Col. Zona Centro, Arq. Sergio Paredes Rangel

Sergio Paredes designed the Casa López Padrón not in Colonia Jardín but in Matamoros’s Zona Centro on Calle Sexta, the city’s principal north-south thoroughfare.

Matamoros architects were called on to insert modern houses into mixed-use, urban spatial settings where Texan clients would never have considered building new, single-family houses.

Casa Gastón Treviño García, Matamoros, Arq. Ignacio López Bancalari

The most spectacular house from Matamoros's cotton boom era was designed by a young Mexico City-based architect, Ignacio López Bancalari, on Avenida Alvaro Obregón in Colonia Jardín. López Bancalari was part of the team of architects who designed the Ciudad Universitaria of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, collaborating with Enrique Molinar and Félix Nuncio on the Olympic swimming pool and dressing rooms of 1952.

Casa Gastón Treviño García, Matamoros, Arq. López Bancalari

Douglas Grant House, Cedar Rapids IA, 1951, Frank Lloyd Wright

The oversailing fascias of López Bancalari's Casa Treviño García and its corner window bay evoke a specific house by Frank Lloyd Wright, the Grant House in Cedar Rapids, Iowa of 1950, which Wright designed for clients who, coincidentally, would spend their winters in McAllen in the 1970s and '80s.

Casa en Colonia del Prado, Reynosa

The popularity of Mexican interpretations of Frank Lloyd Wright can also be seen in this house in Colonial del Prado in Reynosa. The architectural historians Juan Ignacio Barragán Villarreal and Keith Eggener have noted the impact of Wright's architecture on mid-century houses in Monterrey and Mexico City while also observing the transformations resulting from what might be called cultural translation. Mexican

modern architecture was not isolated from broader cultural currents. But these currents were mediated by Mexican sources before they were widely transmitted within Mexico.

Aeropuerto Internacional General Servando Canales, Matamoros (1958) Arq. Luis MacGregor Krieger

Matamoros attracted a second young architect from Mexico City, Luis MacGregor Krieger, who was affiliated with the Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas. The SCOP built Matamoros's Aeropuerto Internacional, which MacGregor Krieger designed, between 1955 and '58. The center-periphery axis of architectural transmission visible in Matamoros reflected the centralization of Mexican political, economic, and artistic culture in Mexico City.

Arq. Mario Pani y Arq. Domingo García Ramos en el Palacio Municipal, Matamoros, 1958

An even more impressive demonstration of Mexican cultural centralization involved modern city plans—*planes reguladores*—that one of the leading Mexican architects of the mid-century period, Mario Pani—seen here in the new Palacio Municipal in Matamoros—prepared for the border cities of Matamoros, Piedras Negras, and Ciudad Juárez in 1958 under the auspices of another state ministry, the Secretaría de Patrimonio Nacional.

Plan regulador de Matamoros (1958)

Pani's *plan regulador* for Matamoros was consistent with the modernist planning logic of Nueva Ciudad Guerrero. It aimed to transform the edges of a 19th-century Creole city

into an exemplar of modernization reflecting the best practices of Mexico's leading architects and technocrats and, implicitly, the social vision of the PRI.

Grace Church, Weslaco, 1951, R. Newell Waters

Comparable to the streamlined neocolonial houses of Enrique León de la Barra in Matamoros were the conservative modern buildings produced by established architects on the Texan side of the border. R. Newell Waters's Grace Church in Weslaco of 1951 is a modern Regionalist design...

Grace Church

...emphasizing extreme material clarity and simplicity.

First Presbyterian Church, Weslaco, 1951, William C. Baxter, John F. Ring, Associate

William C. Baxter and John F. Ring's First Presbyterian Church in Weslaco, also of 1951, reflected Scandinavian influences in the low pitch of its gabled roof, the off-center glass entrance bay, and the low, thin tower. Regionalism enabled established Texan architects to assimilate to modern practices without totally abandoning historical models and an emphasis on masonry and wood craftwork.

"The Architect and His Community: Cocke, Bowman & York"

The assimilation of modern practices by established architects occurred in the changed cultural context of the postwar period: Modern architecture on the Texan side of the border attracted unprecedented recognition in the U.S. architectural press in the postwar period, such as this profile of the Harlingen architects Cocke, Bowman & York, published in *Progressive Architecture* magazine in 1955. Yet in contrast to Pani, López

Bancalari, and MacGregor Krieger, John G. York and his partners Walter C. Bowman and Bartlett Cocke were not connected to national centers of power or culture. Their prominence reflected the decentralized political and cultural networks of the United States, when compared to Mexico, as well as an emphasis on identifying “regional” talent especially characteristic of U.S. architectural publications in the late 1940s and early ‘50s.

Cornelius P. Thise House, Harlingen, 1950, Cocke, Bowman & York

It is intriguing to contrast the interpretation of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian architecture in Matamoros in the 1950s with its interpretation by Cocke, Bowman & York 25 miles to the north in Harlingen. Gale Cook, a draftsman for the York firm in the early 1950s, identified what he called the “cut-back eaves” of the Thise House of 1950 in Harlingen as Wrightian. The scale of the one-story Thise House is different from its two-story Matamoros counterparts, reflecting the suburban spatiality that constituted the field of U.S. postwar practice.

Cornelius P. Thise House, Harlingen, 1950, Cocke, Bowman & York

The composite construction of the house—compound wood beams are bolted to exceedingly skinny steel pipe columns—highlights the tectonic discipline of mid-century modern architecture and produces deliberately thin profiles that contrast with the much thicker profiles resulting from concrete construction in Matamoros.

First Presbyterian Church, Edinburg, 1948, Cocke & Bowman, J. York, Design Associate

The Wrightian overtones of Cocke, Bowman & York's perspective of the First Presbyterian Church complex in Edinburg...

First Presbyterian Church, Edinburg, 1949-, Cocke & Bowman & York

...gave way in execution to profiles and a brick-limestone material combination associated more with Eliel and Eero Saarinen's mid-century work than with Wright's.

Congregation Beth Israel Temple, Harlingen, 1949-51, Cocke, Bowman & York

A consistent difference between mid-century Texan and Tamaulipecan versions of modern architecture involved scale. As Cocke, Bowman & York's Temple Beth Israel of 1951 in Harlingen demonstrates, the Texan buildings were deliberately house-like in scale, advancing the implicit suburban agenda of U.S. modern architecture in the postwar period.

William T. Aldridge House, Brownsville, 1949, Cocke, Bowman & York

Cocke, Bowman & York's Aldridge House in Brownsville of 1949 shows how Richard Neutra's postwar work also affected York's design discipline. This is a plan diagram drawn from memory by the Corpus Christi art dealer Ben Holland—whose father, the Harlingen contractor Andrew Holland, built the house—and Ben's snapshot of the Aldridge House when new. In conversations I had with York's collaborators—Gale Cook, David Ashcroft, Edward Glass—no one ever mentioned the study of formal precedents. Instead, they described Cocke, Bowman & York's design process as guided by the overriding question of how to solve issues of programmatic compliance, site and climatic constraints, and budgetary limitations tectonically.

Clarke & Courts Building, Harlingen, 1951, Cocke, Bowman & York

An example of Cocke, Bowman & York's ingenious pragmatism is the Clarke & Courts Building in downtown Harlingen of 1951. Rather than conventional brick-framed display windows, the street front of the building became a single display window, shaded from the southern sun by an aluminum outrigger *brise-soleil* that also shaded the sidewalk in front of the building.

Casey Clinic, San Benito, 1950, Cocke, Bowman & York

The Casey Clinic in San Benito of 1950 represents Cocke, Bowman & York's responsiveness to the architectural problems of suburbanizing south Texan towns. House-like in scale, the clinic faces the regional highway that bypassed downtown San Benito. Internal views are oriented to the lagoon-like Resaca de los Fresnos...

Casey Clinic

...or to walled and planted interior courtyards. These courtyards evoke the *patios* of both vernacular border houses and their Spanish Mediterranean style successors of the 1920s, but rigorously suppress any stylistic echo.

Klee Square, 505 S. Water St., Corpus Christi, 1952, 1953, Cocke, Bowman & York

It is tempting to interpret Klee Square, a mixed-use retail and office building constructed in two phases on the outskirts of downtown Corpus Christi in 1952 and '53, as Cocke, Bowman & York's rejoinder to the stylistics of romantic regionalism. The steel-framed

complex, faced with modular insulated cement asbestos panels, is configured around a planted patio. Screened breezeways,...

Klee Square

...ceiled with exposed steel decking, are a modern analogue of Mexican *corredores*. In making architecture out of circumstances of use, construction, and climatic responsiveness, Cocke, Bowman & York appeared to assert that their buildings were truer to the architectural traditions of the Texas-Tamaulipas border than any stylistic revival.

Little Creek Magnolia Station, Harlingen, 1952, Cocke, Bowman & York

One of the many projects Cocke, Bowman & York designed for the Harlingen developer John Walker McKelvey was the Little Creek Magnolia Station of 1952 on the highway bypassing downtown Harlingen. The steel-supported, cable-stayed, wood-framed roof canopies of the Little Creek station were designed to maximize the provision of shade. The diagonal alignments visible in plan, keyed to the movement of cars, generated the dramatic sectional profiles that signaled the station's location to passing motorists. The Little Creek station bespeaks Cocke, Bowman & York's enthusiasm for the suburban frontier.

Aerial view of Laurel Park, c. 1950

Gale Cook gave me this aerial photo, taken in 1950, of the most ambitious of John McKelvey and John York's collaborations: Laurel Park, Harlingen's first garden suburban neighborhood. You can see from the proliferation of flat roofs, and of houses rotated in plan to orient them to the prevailing southeast breeze, the density of Cocke, Bowman & York houses along South Parkwood Drive, bordered by the Arroyo Colorado, which flows through the southern part of Harlingen.

House Designed for Living, Harlingen, 1949, Cocke, Bowman & York

Cocke, Bowman & York designed the House Designed for Living of 1949 as Laurel Park's demonstration house. Because the house lies on the north side of the street, its rooms need to open toward the street for access to the prevailing breeze. York threw inhibition to the wind by exposing the interior to the southeast, interposing a louvered screen fence to shield rooms from street views and expand the house's living space into the front yard (as you may be able to tell, there was also a roof deck). Although compact in plan, the House Designed for Living contained an unprogrammed space that appears in other Cocke, Bowman & York buildings. This was called a breezeway and it expanded indoor living and play space in the bedroom wing. Sliding louvered panels, instead of fixed walls, separated the bedrooms from the breezeway.

House Designed for Living

This rare color slide of the House Designed for Living, taken about the time of completion, shows an aspect of York's work not visible in the black-and-white photos that appeared in publications. Cocke, Bowman & York's buildings were exuberantly colored to articulate their composite construction. Doors typically were hinged to steel

pipe columns, eliminating wood door casings. Field fabrication of the components of these buildings made it possible to achieve the tolerances that rendered such constructional fundamentalism practicable.

Wilson R. Palmer House, Harlingen, 1950, Cocks, Bowman & York

Houses on the south side of South Parkwood, such as the steel-framed Wilson R. Palmer House of 1950, met the street with brick end panels and modular side walls whose west-facing strip of clerestory windows identifies the location of corridors and closets. As on the House Designed for Living, access to the front door is through the carport. Cocks, Bowman & York unabashedly foregrounded cars in their buildings.

Wilson R. Palmer House

Construction was exposed, as you can see in the corridor serving the bedrooms, which retain their louvered sliding panels. The custom-fabricated wood and glass doors were also hinged directly to the steel columns.

Wilson R. Palmer House

The south side of the Palmer House, looking out to the deep creek valley of the Arroyo Colorado, is a line of sliding glass panels, also field fabricated, that made it possible to open the living room to the terrace.

Frank G. Parker House, 2002 S. Parkwood Drive, 1949, Cocks, Bowman & York

At the Frank G. Parker House on South Parkwood of 1949, Cocks, Bowman & York registered the slight change in grade between the higher portion of the yard, closest to the

arroyo bank, and the lower portion, closest to the street. There is a two-foot, split-level change in interior floor elevations between the rear-facing bedrooms and the street-facing social rooms that is carried up to roof level in section, where high-set clerestory windows bring east light into the living room.

Frank G. Parker House

In the bathroom of the Parker House, and at the front entrance, one sees York's teasing play with exposure: opening both spaces to natural light with walls of obscured glass.

John G. York House, Harlingen, 1952, Coker, Bowman & York

The most radical of Coker, Bowman & York's houses was the house that York designed for his wife, Patsy Catsinas and their three children, Sandra, James, and Daniel. Built in Laurel Park in 1952, the York House was a South Texan version of Ray and Charles Eames's Case Study House No. 8 of 1949. This is a steel-framed house, faced with modular insulated cement asbestos panels, that turns a blank wall to Laurel Court except where the screened breezeway, marked by turnbuckled tension cables, is inserted. The slender, north-facing clerestory window on the street front highlights the steel bar joists supporting the roof.

York House

The plan of the York House isolates living spaces between the west-side interior corridor, lined with storage, and the east-facing screened breezeway. Because the site slopes down from the street to Arroyocito (or Little Creek), the house steps down in section from the bedrooms to the high-ceilinged living space. All construction is exposed.

York House

Behind the bamboo curtain was the galley kitchen, next to the front door. For all practical purposes, the kitchen was part of the living room.

York House

When the York House was illustrated in *Progressive Architecture* magazine in 1955, it was accorded a color photo. Here you see the layers of sliding screens, the red-painted bar joists and columns, and the Herman Miller and Knoll furniture. Ulric Meisel's photos of the York House capture the sense of joyous spontaneity the house exuded. It seemed to celebrate freedom from outdated social convention and tired formulas for what houses ought to look like (Sandra York said that she and her brothers loved to swing hand-over-hand on the bar joists). The furniture installed by Van Glass, the wife of York's draftsman Ed Glass and operator of Today's Living, Harlingen's good design shop—supported formation of identity and subject positions that affiliated the Yorks, and Cocke, Bowman & York's other clients, with the discourses of modern architecture and design, and the superior lifeways imputed to those who had the courage, the ethical conviction, and the clarity of judgment to break the chains of enslavement to the past. This is a mythical construct. But the compelling power it exerted was evident when, according to Gale Cook...

J. Lewis Boggus House, Harlingen, 1951, Cocke, Bowman & York

...draftsmen in the firm refused to work on production drawings for the Monterey type house Walter C. Bowman designed in 1951 for J. Lewis Boggus, Harlingen's Ford dealer.

Cocke, Bowman & York's clients were the business and civic leaders of Harlingen, Brownsville, San Benito, Edinburg, and McAllen. They were car dealers, bankers, developers, doctors, school board trustees, and church and temple building committee members. Reflecting the demographics of power and wealth in south Texas, they were also overwhelmingly Anglo-American.

Los Vecinos, Harlingen 1953, Cocke, Bowman & York

When Cocke, Bowman & York designed housing for a predominantly Mexican-American community in Harlingen, it was Los Vecinos of 1953, a 150-unit public housing complex built by the Harlingen Housing Authority. Period photos suggest how, after the Second World War, architecture transformed the ideological image of the Valley from an Exotic Tropical Paradise into a *Modern* Tropical Paradise. Yet design and its rhetoric of modern liberation failed to address the asymmetries of wealth, power, and opportunity that were so ingrained in daily life in the lower Río Grande Valley as to be invisible to the people who benefitted from it.

Tamalada/Making Tamales, 1987, Carmen Lomas Garza

The paintings that Carmen Lomas Garza produced in the 1980s, drawn from her memories of growing up in Kingsville in the early 1950s, expose the

mythological/ideological dimension of Cocke, Bowman & York's Modern Tropical Paradise.

Cumpleaños de Lala y Tudi (Lala and Tudi's Birthday Party) (1989) Carmen Lomas Garza

The homely interiors, uncoordinated furnishings, and the absence of luxuriant green lawns and subtropical vegetation,...

El Milagro (The Miracle) (1987) Carmen Lomas Garza

...highlight not just the spatial-material differences between working-class Mexican American households and those of the Valley's modern elite, but also Lomas Garza's emphasis on family, social ritual, and piety in the formation of social identity and subjectivity, rather than architecture, furniture, and publicity.

David Crockett Elementary School, Harlingen, 1951, Cocke, Bowman & York

In contrast to Mexico, where the Comité Administrador del Programa Federal de Construcción de Escuelas, a federal agency known by the acronym CAPFCE, controlled the design of public school buildings, local school districts exercised this responsibility in Texas. Public schools were, and remain, the economic mainstay for architectural practices in the Valley. Along with Caudill Rowlett Scott of Bryan, Donald Barthelme of Houston, and Fehr & Granger of Austin, Cocke, Bowman & York achieved statewide prominence with their school design. Public school districts in small towns embraced modern architecture during the Baby Boom era because it was cheap and could be built quickly. What Cocke, Bowman & York brought to this set of circumstances was spatial

imagination. Their design of David Crockett Elementary School of 1950 in west Harlingen bears out this point.

Crockett Elementary

The building displayed Cocke, Bowman & York's articulate color coding. An ingenious sectional design of the roof brought skylight into classrooms on both sides of the central corridor, balancing daylight, reducing glare, and, crucially, generating breeze flow.

Crockett Elementary

Progressive Architecture praised Crockett Elementary for Cocke, Bowman & York's ingenuity. As you can see from the drawing notes, the roof structure is of built-up wood beams carried on steel columns. This economy was observed by trustees of the Harlingen Independent School District in a new school for working class Mexican-American children on the west side of town...

James B. Bonham Elementary School, Harlingen, 1953, Cocke, Bowman & York

...while on the affluent, Anglo-American east side, James B. Bonham Elementary School of 1953 was built of non-combustible concrete frame construction and equipped with an auditorium-cafeteria, an administrative wing, and other facilities that school district officials judged Crockett could do without. As Ulric Meisel's photos show, Harlingen schools were not ethnically segregated. But the accommodations provided for working-class, westside students were not commensurate with those for middle-class, eastside students.

San Isidro School, San Isidro, 1950, Cocke, Bowman & York

My point is not that Cocke, Bowman & York were racists. They produced a state-of-the-art elementary-through-high school in 1950 in tiny San Isidro in Starr County, the poorest county in Texas, when tax revenue from the Rincón and La Gloria oil and gas fields made it possible for the rural Mexican-American community to expand its single existing school building (left center). But, like other postwar American modernists, Cocke, Bowman & York did not subject social and political relationships to the same strenuous critique with which they challenged architectural conventions.

St. Joseph Academy, Brownsville, 1960, Caudill Rowlett Scott

It's difficult to say with certainty that Cocke, Bowman & York created a constituency for modern design in the Lower Río Grande Valley of South Texas. But the buildings designed there by other architects in the 1950s certainly support such an assertion. In 1956, Caudill Rowlett Scott won a citation for St. Joseph Academy, the Catholic boys school in Brownsville, in *Progressive Architecture* magazine's annual design awards by pursuing the innovative passive environmental design techniques CRS pioneered in the 1940s.

St. Joseph Academy, Brownsville, 1960, Caudill Rowlett Scott

Completed in 1960, St. Joseph was more formally demonstrative than Cocke, Bowman & York's school buildings. Different roof shapes identified different uses and the spatial configurations they required.

St. Joseph Academy, Brownsville, 1960, Caudill Rowlett Scott

In September 1960, Frank Lotz Miller's photo of the St. Joe gym at sundown was published in an article in *Time* magazine highlighting America's "schools of tomorrow."

Hidalgo County Courthouse, Edinburg, 1954, R. Newell Waters

In 1949 R. Newell Waters had hired a young designer from Iowa, Merle A. Simpson, in order to maintain professional currency. Simpson designed the Hidalgo County Courthouse in Edinburg for Waters, one of the first modern county courthouses in Texas when completed in 1954.

J. Gilbert Philen House, Brownsville, 1951, Page, Southerland & PageShelby Longoria-Theriot House, Matamoros, 1950, Ellis F. Albaugh & Associates

For those for whom John York's designs were too far out, the Contemporary California ranch house offered an alternative. The Brownsville customs broker J. Gilbert Philen commissioned the Austin architects Page, Southerland & Page to design a sprawling one-story limestone and mahogany-faced house for his family in 1951 on a small estate in Río Viejo, the Brownsville counterpart of Laurel Park. The Matamoros banker, cotton merchant, and entrepreneur Shelby Longoria-Theriot had the Brownsville architect Ellis F. Albaugh design an equally sprawling American-type ranch house in Colonia Jardín in Matamoros in 1950.

Lloyd M. Bentsen House, McAllen, 1952, Kenneth Bentsen

The charisma of the California ranch house is visible in the expansive one-story house that the real estate developer, banker, rancher, and citrus grower Lloyd M. Bentsen and his wife Dolly commissioned their son, Kenneth, then an architecture student at the University of Houston, to design for them southwest of McAllen in 1952.

Bentsen House

Ben Hill's photographs—this is what the Bentsen House looks like today—capture the modern regionalist nuances and the tectonic rigor that Bentsen, who called on his design instructor at UH, Edmund Furley, for guidance, incorporated into the design of his parent's house.

Bentsen House

The curved, Thomas Church-like contours of the swimming pool, played off against the warm tones of Mexican adobe brick walls, the horizontal extension of the low-pitched, wood-shake roof, and the gestural profiles of the slender Washingtonia palm trees and branching mesquite trees construct in Ben Hill's photographs the compelling image of Modern Tropical Paradise that the photographers Ulric Meisel and Frank Lotz Miller had picked up on sixty years earlier.

John Stahl House, McAllen, 1951, Richard S. Colley

The appeal of mesquite-fired Mexican brick, with its subtle mixed blend of salmon and gold coloration, is visible in the house that Corpus Christi's foremost modern architect, Richard S. Colley, designed for John Stahl in McAllen in 1951.

Stahl House

Progressive Architecture saluted the Stahl House for its patio-centered configuration, which focused attention away from its setting in what had been a flat agricultural field on the east edge of McAllen.

Fort Brown Memorial Center competition, 1951

Contributing to the region's profile, was the most important architectural competition held in Texas in the 1950s: for the Fort Brown Memorial Center, a mixed-use civic complex built by the City of Brownsville on a broad field adjacent to the downtown business district, the Río Grande, and the Gateway International Bridge. Open to all architects registered in Texas, the competition produced an array of submissions (on the left are the three top-ranked entries; on the right Cocke, Bowman & York's unpremiated scheme) in response to Brownsville mayor Herbert L. Stokely's call to take account of the Border Brick style buildings of Brownsville and Matamoros.

Fort Brown Memorial Center, Brownsville, 1954, Wiltshire & Fisher

The winning design, by the Dallas architects Wiltshire & Fisher (now F&S Partners) and their young designer Donald Jarvis, was hailed by *Architectural Forum* magazine as a model community center for mid-sized towns. The civic center won a national design award from the American Institute of Architects in 1954, the year of its completion.

Suburban in its scale...

Fort Brown Memorial Center

...the Fort Brown Center complied with Mayor Stokely's call for regional awareness not stylistically but performatively, by incorporating *patio-huertas*, *corredores*, and *ramadas* to unify the complex spatially and experientially.

McAllen Civic Center, McAllen, 1958, Zeb Rike & Associates, J. B. Hancock; Caudill Rowlett Scott, consulting architects

The Fort Brown Memorial Center touched off an architectural competition among Valley cities. McAllen responded by commissioning architects Zeb Rike and J. B. Hancock to collaborate with Caudill Rowlett Scott on the design of the McAllen Civic Center, set behind a sweeping lawn that straddles the Mission ridge, imbuing the site with a rare bit of topographic variation.

McAllen Civic Center

Caudill Rowlett Scott used standard steel sections to construct the multi-building complex, so that it has a more robust scale than the Fort Brown Memorial Center. Like the Fort Brown Center, the component parts of the McAllen center are organized around landscaped interior patios screened by perforated brick *celosías*.

Casa del Sol, Harlingen, 1961, Taniguchi & Croft

Harlingen contended with the Casa del Sol of 1961, the work of the young Harlingen architects Alan Y. Taniguchi and Charles B. Croft. Its radial, thin shell concrete roof evoked a *sombrero*, justifiable inasmuch as the shape was generated by the material and process of construction.

Mercedes Civic Center, Mercedes, 1960, Gene P. Hobart

Another of the young generation of architects, Gene P. Hobart of Mercedes, like Taniguchi a native of California, suspended a folded plate concrete roof system from upstand beams for the City of Mercedes's civic center of 1960.

El Rancho Grande Motel, Brownsville, 1951, Frank W. Green

Another building type that became the subject of inter-city rivalry was the motel designed to represent itself as a tropical resort. Brownsville initiated this round with El Rancho Grande of 1951, designed by the Glendale, California, architect Frank W. Green in the California ranch style. The Lambert Landscape Company of Dallas turned the motel's ten-acre site into an exotic tropical paradise.

Sun Valley Motor Hotel, Harlingen, 1956, Howard J. Simpson and Leonard R. Simpson, builders

In Harlingen, the brothers Howard J. and Leonard R. Simpson bypassed local architects when they built the Sun Valley Motor Hotel of 1956, knocking-off the design of Niggli & Gustafson's Terrace Motor Hotel in Austin, despite the fact that the Terrace was built on a steeply sloping site while the Sun Valley's site is relentlessly flat.

Fairway Motor Hotel, McAllen, 1957, John G. York & Associates

The undisputed winner in the resort motel competition was the Fairway Motor Hotel in McAllen of 1957, designed by John York, who in 1954 dissolved his partnership with Bartlett Cocke and Walter Bowman. The Fairway had it all: the sculptural, neon-lit, high-rider highway sign, fabricated of cable-stayed steel pipe...

Fairway Motor Hotel

...a site of ten acres, its central green landscaped with over 1,100 trees according to the McAllen geologist William H. Wilson, managing partner for the investors who built the motel, and guestrooms clustered in the *casitas* with which York framed the fairway-like central lawn.

Fairway Motor Hotel

The administration and restaurant building was organized beneath thin, insulated, low-pitched roof decks that rose in profile to enclose volumes of refreshing shade.

Fairway Motor Hotel

From inside the restaurant, guests looked out at the central green, constructing the image of Modern Tropical Paradise with seductive persuasiveness.

Motel del Río, Nuevo Laredo, 1961

In Nuevo Laredo, Motel del Río on Bulevar Reforma of 1961 translated this image to the considerably more arid uplands of the lower river corridor.

Casa de Acero, Monterrey, 1960, Arq. Rodolfo Barragán Schwarz

One of the rare documented instances of direct architectural exchange between south Texas and northern Mexico involved York's work. David Ashcroft, who worked for York in the late 1950s, remembered that the Monterrey architect Rodolfo Barragán Schwarz paid a visit to Harlingen to inspect the York House before designing his most

famous house, the Casa de Acero (the House of Steel) of 1960 in Colonia Contry in Monterrey.

Guillermo Peña House, Brownsville, 1950, Caudill Rowlett Scott

During the 1950s, members of the Valley's emerging Mexican-American middle class asserted parity with their Anglo-American counterparts by becoming patrons of modern architecture. The Laredo-born cotton broker, Guillermo Peña, commissioned Caudill Rowlett Scott (in which his brother, architect William M. Peña, was a partner) to design a house for the Peña family in Brownsville in 1950. This was the childhood home of Peña's son, Federico Peña, mayor of Denver and successively secretary of transportation and secretary of energy in the Bill Clinton presidential administration.

Antonio Cisneros, Jr., House, Brownsville, 1955, and Dr. George Narro House, McAllen, 1957, John G. York & Associates

John York designed modern houses in Río Viejo in Brownsville for the gasoline wholesaler Antonio Cisneros, Jr., in 1955 (top; York also designed a series of gas stations for Cisneros), and in McAllen for Dr. George Narro in 1957 (bottom). The Narro House, and an adjoining York-designed house for Dr. Rafael Garza, were on the edge of, but not in, the elite Anglo neighborhoods just east of S. 2nd Street.

Narro-Sánchez Clinic, McAllen, 1958, John G. York & Associates

Dr. Narro also commissioned York to design the Narro-Sánchez Clinic in McAllen of 1958, which featured an abstract tile mural by the artist Shirley Voekrodt.

Dr. James C. Burkholder House, Harlingen, 1956, Alan Y. Taniguchi

Mexican-Americans were subject to overt discrimination in south Texas in the 1950s. Other minorities were subject to discrimination also, such as Japanese-Americans. Nonetheless, Alan Y. Taniguchi, the son of Japanese immigrants, followed his parents from California to south Texas in 1952, three years after graduating from architecture school at Berkeley. Taniguchi's house for Dr. James Burkholder of 1956, on the banks of the Arroyo Colorado in Harlingen, could have been transposed from the Berkeley Hills.

Dr. George Willeford House, Harlingen, 1957, Alan Y. Taniguchi

An expansive house with low-pitched roof and glazed gable for Dr. George Willeford of 1957 was one of several Taniguchi designed in Laurel Park. Unlike John York and Walter Bowman, Taniguchi and his family did not live in Laurel Park. The deed restrictions in Laurel Park specifically excluded "any person or any descendant of any person of the following nationalities or races, to wit: Negro, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese," even though the restrictions were filed in 1949, the year *after* the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed the use of deed restrictions for the purpose of racial exclusion. Such attitudes did not seem to harm Taniguchi's professional opportunities, however.

Anne Maddox Moore House, McAllen 1959, Merle A. Simpson

Merle Simpson, who had been Newell Waters's modern designer, went out on his own in 1956. In 1959 Simpson designed a modern house for the McAllen artist and art patron Ann Maddox Moore.

Moore House

With its profusely planted patio shaded by wood *ramadas*, Ann Moore's house, which she still occupies, is like a South Texan version of a Los Angeles Case Study house.

Wilson's Funeral Home, McAllen, 1960, Merle A. Simpson

Merle Simpson described the buildings he, York, Taniguchi, and other Valley architects designed--such as Simpson's Wilson's Funeral Chapel in McAllen of 1960—as examples of the modern “stick style” because of their thin, steel, pipe columns.

House in Raymondville, c. 1950, C. Gale Cook

Publication of Cocke, Bowman & York's buildings attracted talented young architectural graduates to their office. Gale Cook, who worked for the firm in the early 1950s, designed a small modern house on his own on the outskirts of Raymondville. The house's radiating compound beams make the roof look as though it is about to lift off.

West Kiwanis Club Demonstration House, Corpus Christi, 1954, Gale Cook; J. H.Alexander Homes, Orange, 1962, Gale Cook; Trinity Lutheran Church, Orange, 1962,Gale Cook

After leaving Cocke, Bowman & York, Gale Cook practiced first in Corpus Christi, where he designed the West Kiwanis Club Demonstration House of 1954 (on top), then

in Orange, Texas, where he settled in the late 1950s. Trinity Lutheran Church (left) and J. H. Alexander Homes (right), both from 1962 in Orange, display the impact that York's methodical commitment to constructional discipline and articulate detailing had on Cook's architecture.

Eugene Darby, Jr., House, Pharr, 1965, Max Edwin Burkhart, Jr.

After 1960, a new generation of architects began to emerge in Valley. Max Edwin Burkhart, Jr., a native of Iowa who grew up in Alamo and San Juan, produced such structurally articulate designs as the Darby House in Pharr of 1965.

Darling-Mouser Funeral Home, Brownsville, 1966, Robert E. Velten

In Brownsville, Robert E. Velten, son of the Brownsville builder W. A. Velten, began practice in 1959. Velten's Darling-Mouser Funeral Home of 1966 explored the use of folded plate construction.

Dr. Bruno R. Peraglie House, Brownsville, 1968, Robert E. Velten

His house for Dr. Bruno R. Peraglie of 1968 is also architecturally precise, constructing an alluring contrast with its resaca-side site and the Peraglie's exotic tropical paradise landscaping.

Treviño-Garza Clinic, McAllen, 1961, David P. Ashcroft

David P. Ashcroft, before commencing his own practice in McAllen, had worked for York, as is evident from Ashcroft's Treviño-Garza Clinic in McAllen of 1961.

Sanborn's Insurance Co. Building, McAllen; Bailey H. Dunlap Memorial Library, La Feria, 1963, David P. Ashcroft

Such Ashcroft designs as the circular Sanborn's Insurance Co. pavilion on S. 10th Street in McAllen, next to the Fairway, and the Bailey H. Dunlap Memorial Library in La Feria of 1963 demonstrate how he extrapolated a distinctive approach from York's methods that, in these buildings, generated architecture from sun screening and sun shading.

Harlingen National Bank Building, Harlingen, 1958, John G. York & Associates

The downtown building John York remodeled for the Harlingen National Bank in 1958 contains a tile mural by Shirley Voekrodt, whom York married in 1959. The national economic recession of 1958 was a setback for York, who had opened an additional office in Corpus Christi and took on partners to manage the two branches. The dissolution of his marriage to Patsy York in 1958 created tensions and alienated old friends in Harlingen. When, in 1960, York was offered a teaching position at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, he accepted and left Texas, where he never again lived.

McAllen State Bank Building, McAllen, 1961, Cowell & Neuhaus, David Haid Associates

By the late 1950s, modern architecture was changing as architects sought more monumental forms of expression. This is visible in the magisterial design that the

Houston architects Herbert Cowell, Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr., and David Haid produced for the McAllen State Bank Building in downtown McAllen of 1961.

McAllen State Bank Building

George Cserna's photo of the banking hall, published in *Fortune* magazine in 1961, with its exposed steel-frame structure, glass curtain walls, and flowering jacaranda tree, makes clear that the McAllen State Bank met the same criteria for modern design that York's buildings had.

McAllen State Bank Building

What changed was the substitution of gravitas, solemnity, and spatial grandeur for the spontaneity, exuberance, and intimacy characteristic of York's and Taniguchi's buildings. The dramatic transparency that the bank's east-facing curtainwall made possible was facilitated by central air-conditioning. Between 1950 and 1960, air-conditioning went from being an expensive option to an affordable necessity in architect-designed buildings.

Texas Architect "The Coastal Bend Revolution"

The generation of formally assertive shapes in thin, reinforced concrete shells, hailed in the early 1960s in this issue of *Texas Architect*, also challenged the practices associated with York's buildings of the 1950s.

Bacardí Bottling Plant, México DF, 1960, Arq. Félix Candela

The enthusiasm for concrete hyperbolic paraboloid vaults and folded plates among U.S. architects in the late 1950s and early '60s was spurred by awareness of the work of the Mexico City engineer and architect, Félix Candela, such as these examples at the Bacardí bottling plant outside Mexico City of 1960.

House of Mo-Rose Packing Shed, Rancho Viejo, 1961, Taniguchi & Croft

Alan Taniguchi and his partner Charles Croft were especially identified with the use of thin shell technology in the Valley. Their House of Mo-Rose citrus packing shed of 1961 was roofed by an economical system of cast-in-place concrete hyperbolic paraboloid vaults.

Ben Milam Elementary School, Harlingen, 1962, Taniguchi & Croft; Los Fresnos High School, Los Fresnos, 1963, Bowman Swanson Hiester, McAllen High School, McAllen, 1960, Zeb Rike

Folded plate concrete structures were applied to school design in Taniguchi & Croft's Bonham Elementary School in Harlingen of 1961 (upper left), Bowman Swanson Hiester's Los Fresnos High School in Los Fresnos of 1963 (upper right) and Zeb Rike's McAllen High School of 1960, the first school in the Valley to be built with central air-conditioning.

Cocke, Bowman & York Building, Harlingen, 1950, Cocke, Bowman & York

When Cocke, Bowman & York dissolved in 1954, Walter Bowman retained ownership of the Cocke, Bowman & York office building of 1950. In 1958 Bowman formed a new

partnership with his draftsmen, E. Lester Swanson and James W. Hiester. After Alan Taniguchi left Harlingen to become a professor of architecture at the University of Texas in 1961, Bowman Swanson Hiester acceded to Taniguchi's position as the foremost modern architects in the Valley.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish School, Brownsville, 1964, Bowman Swanson Hiester

Bowman Swanson Hiester were especially identified with the design of school buildings, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish School in Brownsville of 1964, for which Marvin Boland was designer.

Brownsville High School, Brownsville, 1967, Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland, Wilhite & Winans, and Robert E. Velten

In the mid 1960s Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland formulated a new prototype for centrally air-conditioned schools, first applied at Brownsville High School of 1967, designed in association with Wilhite & Winans and Robert E. Velten of Brownsville. The Swanson Hiester firm survives today as SHW Architects, which continues to specialize in school design but no longer maintains offices in the Valley.

PRONAF diagrams, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, September 1963

The most publicized modern architecture built along the lower Río Grande in the 1960s was produced in conjunction with a Mexican government initiative, the Programa Nacional Fronterizo (National Border Program), known by its acronym PRONAF. Conceived by a former mayor of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Antonio Jáquez Bermúdez,

who had also been director general of Petroleos Mexicanos, PRONAF was intended to reduce Mexico's balance of trade deficit with the U.S. by improving the image of Mexican border cities, attracting more U.S. tourists, providing modern retail trade centers so that residents of Mexican border cities would buy consumer products on the Mexican side of the border, and stimulating employment with what became the *maquiladora* system by attracting foreign manufacturers to open plants where Mexican workers could assemble goods for re-export.

Puerta de México, Matamoros, 1963, Arqs. Mario Pani con Hilario Galguera

The chief architect of PRONAF was Mario Pani. With Hilario Galguera, Pani designed the Puerta de México (Gateway to Mexico) customs and immigration stations in three border cities—Piedras Negras, Coahuila; Nogales, Sonora; and Matamoros—in 1962-63.

Puerta de México, Matamoros, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, September 1963

One significant way that Matamoros's *puerta* complex of 1963 differed from contemporaneous south Texan modern buildings was its implicit urbanity. Pani and Galguera spatially integrated the complex with the adjacent Colonia Jardín and planned for the ways that pedestrians, public and regional transit, and cars and trucks would intersect the *puerta*.

Aerial of Puerta de México

Contrasting national policies about the role that architecture and urban design might play in constructing national identity were evident in comparing Matamoros's *puerta* to...

Aerial of Puerta de México and U.S. Border Services Building, Brownsville, 1961, York, Boese & Associates

...the U.S. Border Services Building completed in Brownsville in 1961 and designed by John York and Olin Boese. York's initial designs had been as exuberant as Pani's. But by the time the General Accounting Office value engineered the project, all that survived was York's crisp detailing.

Puerta de México

Antonio Bermúdez, in the book he published about PRONAF in 1966, wrote that Mexicans took pride in the clear superiority of the modern, designed public spaces on the Mexican side of the border, when compared to those on the U.S. side.

Centro Comercial PRONAF, Matamoros, 1964, Arqs. Mario Pani y Hilario Galguera

Pani and Galguera designed a sequence of steel-framed, concrete-roofed retail shops between Colonial Jardín and Matamoros's *zona centro* in 1964 for Mexican businesses selling Mexican products to Mexican consumers.

"Mexique" *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Engineering News-Record*, and *New York Times*

U.S. publications and the Parisian architecture magazine, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, publicized the achievements of PRONAF.

Clínica-Hospital IMSS (Hospital General de Zona 15), Reynosa, 1966, Arqs. Guillermo Ortiz Flores con Julio Azuara y Felipe Quezal

Other federal agencies, such as the Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social, were responsible for major public buildings in border cities. This is the Clínica-Hospital IMSS in Reynosa of 1966 by the Mexico City architects Guillermo Ortiz Flores, Julio Azuara, and Felipe Quezal.

St. Joseph The Worker Catholic Church, McAllen 1967, Julio Rafael Guerra

During the 1960s, the architectural profession in the Valley began slowly to reflect the demographics of south Texas. In 1956, Julio Rafael Guerra of McAllen became the first Mexican American in the Valley since Frank Torres to be registered as an architect. Guerra spent most of his career as an associate of the Weslaco architect William C. Baxter. His major independent work is the Church of St. Joseph The Worker in McAllen of 1967.

J. Kendall Hert House, Brownsville, 1963, Ruth Young McGonigle

Ruth Young McGonigle, a Houstonian and a graduate of Rice who moved to the border in 1925 as the bride of George McGonigle, a Brownsville farmer, practiced for over fifty years. When the State of Texas instituted the licensing of architects in 1937, Ruth McGonigle did not seek to be registered and she never called herself an architect. In the 1960s, Ruth McGonigle designed the first of a series of houses in Brownsville, the J.

Kendall Hert House in Río Viejo of 1964, that drew explicitly on the Border Brick style of the 19th-century.

Betty Bentsen and R. Dan Winn House, McAllen, 1965, Kenneth Bentsen Associates

This regionalist resurgence was also evident in the house that Kenneth Bentsen designed for his sister and brother-in-law, Betty Bentsen and R. Dan Winn, in McAllen of 1965. Bentsen organized rooms in the house, built on a flat site in a new subdivision, around an interior patio. This enabled him to minimize windows on the street front of the house without sacrificing access to light and views.

Centro Artesanal, Matamoros, 1969

The Centro Artesanal in Matamoros, built in 1969 in the second phase of PRONAF development, after Mario Pani ceased to be affiliated with PRONAF, was as dramatic in its use of folded (almost draped) concrete plates as Pani's buildings had been in their use of steel.

Centro Artesanal, Matamoros, 1969

Although aspects of the Centro Artesanal's architecture reverberate with Mathias Goeritz's experimental space, El Eco, in Mexico City of 1953, it was nevertheless understood as a modern evocation of Mexican vernacular building practices, expressing Mexican cultural identity through the tectonic medium of modern concrete construction. Pani's architecture, like that of York and Taniguchi, treated regionalism functionally and performatively. After the middle 1960s, modern architects sought to externalize regionalism as an explicit architectural theme.

Pan American University, Edinburg, 1967-1982, Kenneth Bentsen Associates

This was evident in the most ambitious architectural project undertaken in the Valley in the 1960s: a new campus for Pan American University (now the University of Texas-Pan American), designed by Kenneth Bentsen Associates of Houston on the western edge of Edinburg. Bentsen organized classroom and studio buildings in the university's Fine Arts quadrangle of 1970 around a central patio, where the performance auditorium was located. Bentsen's use of buff brick facing and of arches (influenced by work then being done by the Philadelphia architect Louis I. Kahn in India and Bangladesh) coded these buildings as modern successors to the 19th-century Border Brick style without being explicitly historical.

Marti's, Nuevo Laredo, 1971, 1981, Howard Barnstone

The Houston architect Howard Barnstone pursued a Regionalist approach in the specialty store he designed for his stepmother, Marti Franco de Suneson, on Avenida Guerrero in Nuevo Laredo of 1971. Barnstone's original (the entrance screen with the Mission style *espadaña* is an addition of 1981), like the Centro Artesanal in Matamoros, is abstracted from vernacular Mexican prototypes in a way that is expressive and purposefully playful.

Santa Elena Catholic Chapel, Norias Division of the King Ranch, Kenedy County, 1973-74, Arq. Juan Sordo Madaleno

Indicative of the generational split between young Regionalists and their Functionalist elders, the Mexico City architect, Juan Sordo Madaleno, a contemporary of Pani's, employed broad wall planes of contrasting color, minus any folkloric associations, in the

tiny Chapel of Santa Elena, commissioned by Helen Kleberg Groves in 1973 for the Norias Division of the King Ranch. It is Sordo Madaleno's only building in the United States and, like Barnstone's Marti's, a rare example of direct cross-cultural exchange in the border region.

Puerta de México

Mario Pani's building projects for PRONAF in Matamoros, Piedras Negras, Ciudad Juárez, and Nogales vigorously affirmed his generation's faith that modern architecture could construct new spaces of social-democratic community, an optimistic ideology mirrored in practices on the Texan side of the border in the 1950s. Yet over time, as these spaces failed to produce, in and of themselves, new and more equitable social relationships, their newness and modernity...

Centro Comercial PRONAF, Matamoros

...seemed to lose relevance. In the 1990s and 2000s, even as the Puerta de México and the Centro Artesanal in Matamoros were restored, Pani and Galguera's PRONAF shops have endured "modernization" of their "dated" architecture.

Casino Matamorenses, Matamoros, 1957, Arq. Luis MacGregor Krieger e Ing.-Arq.

Augustín Reyes Escobar; 2003, Arq. Mario Ayarzagotia

Consciousness of the Border Brick style, stimulated by the bi-national preservation initiative, los Caminos del Río in the 1990s, led to the re-facing of mid-20th-century buildings around the Plaza Hidalgo in Matamoros, such as Mario Ayarzagotia's refacing

in 2003 of Luis MacGregor Krieger and Augustín Reyes Escobar's Banco Nacional de México of 1957.

Palacio Municipal, Matamoros, 1995 refacing

The pattern had been established with the refacing of Matamoros's Palacio Municipal in 1995.

Harry Katz House, Brownsville, 1960, Alan Y. Taniguchi and William H. Lambeth, Jr.

The process of misunderstood modernization is also visible in Brownsville, where the superbly sited Harry Katz House by Alan Taniguchi and William H. Lambeth in Río Viejo of 1960 was "updated" with a modern Spanish makeover in the early 1990s.

McAllen State Bank, McAllen (International Bank of Commerce)

After the McAllen State Bank built the tallest building in McAllen in 1978 (designed by Neuhaus & Taylor of Houston), it vacated the Hugo Neuhaus-David Haid building, which has undergone three substantial refacings since: here you see numbers two and three. Note that only the travertine plinth survives.

McAllen State Bank Building

Yet George Cserna's photos of the McAllen State Bank proved such compelling icons of modernity that in the 1980s the Los Angeles painter Roger Herman appropriated these

images for a series of big-scale paintings and woodcuts, which you see leaned against the wall in Herman's studio.

Sun Valley Motor Hotel, Harlingen (2011)

The construction of the US 77/83 Expressway in the 1960s diverted traffic away from the bypass roads of the 1950s, stranding resort motels, which lost their clientele—and eventually their buildings. The remains of the Sun Valley, photographed in 2011, are now gone.

Fairway Motor Hotel, McAllen (1998)

The Fairway in McAllen succumbed not to the loss of its clientele but to the rising value of the real estate it occupied, leading to the phased demolition of all of John York's buildings between 1996 and '98.

House of Mo-Rose packing shed, Rancho Viejo, 1960, Taniguchi & Croft

Today, Taniguchi & Croft's House of Mo-Rose packing shed is the maintenance warehouse of the Rancho Viejo golf course community. It still stands, although it is poorly maintained.

Laurel Park

It has fallen to architects, especially you in the Lower Río Grande Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and the architectural day tours you sponsor in

conjunction with the Building Communities Conference, to call attention to the existence of Laurel Park and the other modern landmark sites on both sides of the border.

Mike Dailey (left) and Carlos Rugerio Cázares and Clemente Rendón de la Garza (right)

On the left you see Mike Dailey, the chief advocate for promoting awareness of Harlingen's Mid-Century Modern heritage. On the right, emerging from Matamoros's Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, are preservation architect Carlos Rugerio Cázares (now archivist of the State of Tamaulipas) and Matamoros engineer and historian Clemente Rendón de la Garza, both of whom came to interact with their Texan counterparts through the bi-national Los Caminos del Río preservation initiative, which Dr. Mario L. Sánchez started.

Mad About Mid-Century Modern Homes, La Vida Valle

Mike Dailey has excited the owners of York and Taniguchi houses in Harlingen, such as Nydia Olympia Tapia-González, who now writes about Laurel Park on her blog, La Vida Valle.

Puerta de México, Matamoros

Modern architecture produced along the Tamaulipas-Texas border in the 1950s and '60s attracted critical recognition for the only time in the region's history. It's difficult to determine whether publication produced tangible benefits for architects in their own communities. Publication is a great gift to historians, however. One of the benefits of

professional discourse is that it leaves a record of achievements not preserved in the collective memory of the communities where these achievements occurred.

The history of modern architecture along the border involved exceptional architects—John York, Alan Taniguchi, Ignacio López Bancalari, Sergio Paredes, Kenneth Bentsen—who found in the methods and techniques of modern architecture the means to materialize what for them was distinctive about the institutions of daily life in the border cities of Texas and Tamaulipas at the mid-point of the 20th century. Differences between their buildings attest to the strong role that architectural discourse, codified and circulated in a national context, exercised on local production, visible in different interpretations of Frank Lloyd Wright, for instance, or whether Modern architecture's regionalist turn in the 1960s acknowledged local or national models of regional identity.

Mid-20th-century modern architecture registered the border condition spatially in disparate ways: differences in construction systems, patterns of architectural patronage, and predilections for the urban or suburban. The emancipatory rhetoric of modernism was tested in practice as even the most radical architects conformed to, rather than challenged, illiberal practices of discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation. Further blunting the optimism with which this historical episode began were the the collapse of the Matamoros cotton economy in 1961, the closing of Harlingen Air Force Base in 1962, and the flooding of Laurel Park in the aftermath of Hurricane Beulah in 1967, when the Arroyo Colorado rose to the eaves lines of houses on Parkwood Drive.

Patsy York at the Fairway and Fairway Motor Hotel postcard

Despite compromises, reversals, and disillusion, this body of modern architecture commands respect today. Its originality, tectonic rigor, and the poetic vision of modern life it projected demonstrate the potential for constructing cultural singularity, even in two nations' collective back yard, when imagination, ability, and courage coincide.