

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Menil House

AGENDA ITEM: A

OWNERS: Menil Foundation, Inc.

HPO FILE NO.: HP2024_0062

APPLICANTS: Ileana Del Toro, CFO; Stern and Bucek Architects

DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-23-2024

LOCATION: 3363 San Felipe, Houston, TX, 77019 – Briarwood

HAHC HEARING: March-14-2024

SITE INFORMATION: TR B, Briarwood, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a one-story brick, flat-roofed single-family dwelling.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The site known as Menil House is a linear one-story, brick-clad, flat-roofed, Miesian Modern Design single-family dwelling located at 3363 San Felipe Street in the Briarwood neighborhood in Houston, Texas. Menil House is a key monument in the history and understanding of 20th century modernist culture in the United States. The national significance of the property is derived from its association with John and Dominique de Menil, internationally recognized as two of the greatest American art collectors of the 20th century. Built in 1949-51, the house remained the de Menil's primary residence throughout their lifetimes. It was central to their modernist attitudes and practices in which art, politics, and spirituality were inseparable. The house is also nationally significant due to the de Menils' patronage in the careers of architect Philip Johnson and couturier Charles James, two figures of exceptional importance in 20th century American design. Menil House retains an extraordinary degree of historic integrity, making it a significant architectural landmark of the last half of the 20th century. The current property owner, The Menil Foundation, Inc., is seeking a City of Houston Landmark designation for the property. Menil House at 3363 San Felipe Street meets Criteria 1,3,4,5,6, and 8 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Dominique and John de Menil

John and Dominique de Menil are recognized internationally as two of the greatest American art collectors of the twentieth century. The bulk of their collection, much of which was displayed in their Houston residence during the late 1940s through the mid-1980s, is one of the world's most significant collections. Known primarily for its 20th century paintings, especially those of Surrealist artists Max Ernst, Rene Magritte, and Giorgio de Chirico, the collection also includes major holdings in antiquities, Byzantine art, and the arts of tribal cultures. From the outset, the de Menils' approach to collecting was distinguished from other collectors because it was so highly personal, idiosyncratic, and unsystematic. The qualities that unify and bring into focus the resulting disparate assemblage of nearly 15,000 works are its humanism, ecumenism, and spirituality, qualities that also define John and Dominique de Menil.

Born in 1908 into a strict Alsatian Protestant family, Dominique de Menil (née Schlumberger) was one of three sisters whose father and uncle founded what became the source of the family fortune, the oil-exploration equipment company Schlumberger Ltd. Dominique received degrees in physics and

mathematics at the Sorbonne. Baron Jean de Menil, born in 1904, was from a titled Catholic military family. After finishing his studies, he became a banker. The couple married in 1931 after Dominique converted to Catholicism. While still living in France in the 1930s, they showed a tentative interest in art, acquiring a portrait of Dominique de Menil by Max Ernst and African masks.

In 1938, John de Menil joined Schlumberger Ltd., and during World War II the couple moved to Houston. Houston was still “a small, friendly Southern town”ⁱ with a population of about 400,000. Oil and real estate, the latter unencumbered by zoning, were primary economic forces. Houston possessed a major deep-water port, the Houston Ship Channel, which was lined with oil refineries. The city had three universities: Rice Institute, the University of Houston, and Houston College for Negroes. Its primary institutions of high culture were the Museum of Fine Arts, opened in 1924, and the Houston Symphony Orchestra, formed in 1927. One journalist called Houston in 1946 “the nation’s unknown city,”ⁱⁱ a description that no longer applied by the 1970s when Houston, with a population of 1.2 million, had become a world energy capital and home of the American space program. The de Menils’ rise as art collectors on the national and international scene coincided with Houston’s rise as a city of national and world importance.

The de Menils felt in Houston that they could make a difference in Houston. Father Marie-Alain Couturier, a French Dominican priest who spent the war years in New York City, infused the de Menils with his passion for modern and sacred art. Alexander Iolas, a Greek-born gallery owner, not only introduced the de Menils to his passion, Surrealist paintings, but also to much younger artists such as Andy Warhol. A third major influence was Jermaine MacAgy who the de Menils brought to Houston to be the first director of the fledgling Contemporary Arts Association (CAA) and then the head of a new art history program that the de Menils began at the University of St. Thomas.

The de Menils were involved in the cultural lives of Houston, New York, and Paris, where they also had homes. Houston was always their primary residence and a major recipient and focus of their artistic interests and energies. In 1954, they established the Menil Foundation to fund their projects, and in 1962, they became American citizens.ⁱⁱⁱ

John de Menil became a trustee of the Contemporary Arts Association (CAA), founded in 1948, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in 1957. When the CAA asked him in 1951 to assist in staging a Van Gogh exhibition, he and Mrs. de Menil imported, much to everyone’s astonishment, 24 Van Gogh paintings. Many of the paintings were famed masterpieces, some never before shown in the United States. It was a typical de Menil gesture to promote Houston as an art center. Until this time, comprehensive showings of Van Gogh’s work had been limited to New York and Chicago. Other boards on which John de Menil served included the Museum of Primitive Arts, the Museum of Modern Art, and the American Federation of the Arts, all in New York, and the Amon Carter Museum of Art in Fort Worth.

Throughout their lifetimes, the de Menils integrated their passion for art with their equally passionate commitments to human rights, higher education, and religious ecumenism. The Menil House was central to fostering many of the projects that reflected their philosophy. It provided the setting for the exchange of ideas among an exceptional mix of people from Houston and around the world including artists, clerics, students, business and community leaders, civil rights activists, film makers, writers, art

historians, and scientists. The stream of house guests included people like Roberto Rossellini, Alexander Calder, Louis Kahn, Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning, and Henri Cartier Bresson.

The de Menils carried out important work in the area of social justice. They entertained members of Houston's African American community in their home and, importantly, supported Mickey Leland. Leland, who they met when he was a student at Texas State University, was a vocal leader of Houston's civil rights movement. Leland served three terms in the Texas House of Representatives before serving in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1979 until his death a decade later. The de Menils' scholarly response to segregation assumed national and international proportions with their creation and funding of a multi-volume research project, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*. The Menil Foundation published five volumes before donating the archive to Harvard University, which has published new editions of all the volumes and added several more (the final book is expected to be published in 2025).

In the area of higher education, the de Menils established the art history departments at the University of St. Thomas (1959) and Rice University (1968).^{iv} Both programs led to a series of extraordinary exhibitions that received national attention for their quality and imagination. Many of the exhibitions traveled and were designed around the teaching collection that the de Menils were establishing and traveled to venues across the United States and Europe. The de Menil collection, as displayed in their home, was published in national publications such as *Interiors* (November 1963) and *Vogue* (April 1, 1966). The de Menils were also extremely generous donors and lenders to other institutions in Houston and throughout the world.

After the untimely death of Jermayne MacAgy, the de Menils began working on a memorial chapel for which they commissioned artwork from a friend of MacAgy, Mark Rothko. The Rothko Chapel opened in Houston in 1971. This ambitious example of private patronage is indebted to the work of another of the de Menils' mentors, Father Couturier, who believed that contemporary artists, regardless of their religion, could help restore a sense of spirituality to churches and chapels. Mrs. de Menil ultimately established three humanitarian awards through the Rothko Chapel Foundation, including the Carter-Menil Human Rights Prize, in collaboration with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

After retiring from Schlumberger in 1969, John de Menil focused his energies on operating the Menil Foundation and cataloguing the collection and contents of the house. He died on June 1, 1973. His funeral details, which he planned, were characteristically singular. He lay in state wrapped in a sheet from his own bed. An undertaker provided the pine casket that was transported in a Volkswagen van that the de Menils had used to transport works of art. His requiem was performed by a Catholic priest, an African American Baptist minister, a rabbi, and a Buddhist priest. The international assemblage of more than 1,000 mourners included a local contingent of Black Panthers, whose breakfast program for children had been funded by the de Menils.

Following her husband's death, Mrs. de Menil continued as director of the Rice Institute for the Arts and also continued to collect, adding almost another 5,000 items before her death in 1997.^v The 1980s mark an especially important decade in the formation of the de Menil legacy. In April 1984, the Grand Palais in Paris exhibited some 600 items from the Menil collection. It was the largest and most comprehensive offering to date of "one of the last great American collections." Titled "The Rhyme and the Reason" by Mrs. de Menil and heralded in publications on both sides of the Atlantic, the show was "purposely

disorienting” in its juxtaposition of paintings and objects of different periods and cultures. As reviewed in the Manchester Guardian, “It is basically a collection of contemporary art and art of the past as seen through contemporary eyes, which is how [Mrs. de Menil] can rhyme a Nigerian sculpture with both a Byzantine reliquary and a sponge impregnated with Yves Klein blue.”^{vi}

In many ways, the display, curated by Dominique de Menil and Walter Hopps, was a trial run for the museum that was underway. The Menil House, which had been featured in American design journals in the 1960s, was again publicized in illustrated articles in *House and Garden* (July 1987), *Paris Match* (March 30, 1984), and the French edition of *Vogue* (May 1984).

Meanwhile, Dominique de Menil was devoting significant energy and resources to the creation of a museum. The core collection consisted of the couple’s personal artwork as well as their so-called teaching collection. Initially, John and Dominique de Menil worked with architect Louis Kahn to develop a design for their museum. After both John de Menil and Kahn passed away in the mid-1970s, Dominique de Menil paused before continuing with the project. In 1980, she commissioned Italian architect Renzo Piano, whom she felt could design the kind of building she envisioned. Notably, he derived great inspiration from the family’s residence on San Felipe Road.

In anticipation of the opening of the Menil Collection, the May 18, 1986 cover story of The New York Times Magazine featured the de Menil family, calling them “the Medici of Modern Art.” Art Editor Grace Glueck began her article with a photograph of Mrs. de Menil sitting in her dining room framed by Magritte and Wilfredo Lam paintings.^{vii} Even after the museum opened to the public on June 1, 1987, the Menil residence remained an important space for viewing paintings and objects from their collection.

The final decade of Mrs. de Menil’s life was marked by her administration of the Menil Collection and the Rothko Chapel, the creation of the Cy Twombly Gallery in 1995, planning for a light installation by Dan Flavin in a former supermarket on Richmond Avenue, and the construction and dedication in 1997 of the Byzantine Fresco Chapel, where two thirteenth century Cypriot frescoes were displayed. Throughout this period, Mrs. de Menil maintained an office at her residence.

Surrounded by her children, Mrs. de Menil died in her home of almost fifty years on New Year’s Eve 1997.

Significance of the Menil House

The house that Dominique and John de Menil built on San Felipe in Houston was central to the couples’ activities and interests. Conversations that took place within its walls have shaped Houston’s arts, politics, and social policies for many decades. The home was the backdrop for their collection and the seed for what became the Menil Collection. The house’s architecture has had a direct impact on the award-winning architecture of the Menil’s main museum building (Renzo Piano, 1987) and the Menil Drawing Institute (Johnston Marklee, 2018). The house continues to be a major piece in the collection, reflecting both the de Menils’ collecting philosophy and modernist point of view.

Upon first arriving in Houston in the mid-1940s, the de Menils lived in a suburban colonial revival house in Houston’s fashionable River Oaks area. According to their daughter Adelaide, her parents wanted to build a house “of their time,” as well as one that was functional, unpretentious, and easily

maintained for a family now with five children. The de Menils acquired three acres in Briarwood Court, a small subdivision surrounded by the larger neighborhood of River Oaks, an elite residential community.

When selecting an architect, the de Menils consulted New York-based sculptor Mary Callery^{viii} whose first suggestion was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who was working on a new wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. After the de Menils concluded that Mies would be expensive, Callery introduced the couple to Mies's disciple Philip Johnson, then director of the Department of Architecture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. At the time, Johnson's reputation was based on his co-authorship with Henry Russell Hitchcock of the seminal publication on the International Style in 1932 and as curator of a major Mies retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1947. Although Johnson had designed several residences, his fame as an architect was yet to be established. That would happen with the completion of his own Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut in 1949, the year when construction began on the Menil House.

While financial considerations may have influenced the de Menils' selection of an architect, their choice established a pattern seen throughout their lifetimes. The unusual, the unexpected appealed to their modernist sensibilities. They frequently acted as catalysts for emerging projects, ideas, and people. Johnson later observed that the de Menils "helped the right people at the right time."^{ix}

Johnson designed a courtyard house in the Miesian style characterized by the slab-sided composition, flat roof, elongated fascia flush with the roof line, glass walls, and no ornamentation. The open plan revolves around a glass-walled interior courtyard that spatially unifies the entrance and public areas. Large glass openings offer vistas throughout the house which, when combined with the 10'-6" ceilings, make it feel much larger than it is.

Johnson deviated from strict Miesian practice in several ways. He did not base the design on a modular planning grid, although he did apply a panelized division of wall surfaces, a typical Miesian detail. Steel framing spans only the largest spaces in the Menil House. Accommodating under one roof and on a single floor all the spaces needed by a family with five children proved difficult.

The Menil House succeeded in promoting Johnson as an architect. He later referred to it as "my first important house and in *Texas* to boot," saying also, "I owe my career to [Mrs. de Menil]."^x The de Menil association gave Johnson connections that led to major projects both within and beyond Texas borders, including the Schlumberger Administration Building in Ridgefield, Connecticut (1952), Boissonnas Houses I in New Canaan, Connecticut (1956) and II in Cap Benat, France (1964), the University of St. Thomas Master Plan in Houston (1956-59), the Roofless Church in New Hannyony, Indiana (1960), the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth (1961), and the Art Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi (1972).

The Menil House presented a Miesian modern design as an alternative to Houston's tradition-biased domestic architecture. No doubt, the interest created by Johnson's own Glass House (1949), piqued local interest and excitement. The house influenced a generation of young Houston architects, including Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr.; Howard Barnstone and his partner Preston Bolton; Burdette Keeland; Anderson Todd;

Harwood Taylor; and Kenneth Bentsen, who attracted national recognition in the American architectural press in the 1950s and early 1960s for their flat-roofed, glasswalled, and steel-framed modern buildings.

While they appreciated the Miesian principals in the design of their modernist residence, the de Menils felt that the severe minimalism of the interiors that Johnson preferred was insufficiently domestic. The de Menils asked Charles James, America's foremost fashion couturier, to serve as their interior designer.

James was already legendary both in America and Europe for the line, cut, and color of his dress designs, especially his elaborately "engineered" ball gowns for wealthy clients, among them Mrs. de Menil. Born in 1904, James began designing dresses after moving to New York City in 1928, and then spent much of the 1930s between London and Paris. His clients believed that to be dressed by James was to be marked "a woman of adventuresome taste."^{xi}

James was at the peak of his couturier career in 1949 and aspired to branch out into interior and furniture designer as well. Although he had decorated his own showrooms, the Menil House was his first and remains his only documented commissioned project. The de Menils, once again acting as catalysts, involved James in the project as early as spring 1950, when the house was under construction.

James's influence is seen in the surfaces, colors, and textures throughout the house. Many of the wall treatments – fabric-covered, grained, and painted – were James's choices, some of them actually applied by James. Some combinations replicated James's dress designs, the most exuberant example being the children's bedroom hall with its red velvet and fuchsia felt covered doors and transoms, painted cinnamon walls, and gold plush rug. The inspiration for the black cement tile floor used throughout the house is often ascribed to a similar floor the de Menils saw and liked when living in Venezuela for two years in the early 1940s. It is worth noting that photographs of James' showrooms, the earliest dated 1934, depict highly polished black square flooring.

Sparsely furnished when the family moved into the house in spring 1951, the bulk of the furniture was acquired specifically for the house over the next six years, as documented by family records and two sets of photographs taken circa 1952 and in 1956-57. The mixture of mostly 18th and 19th century European and American pieces was largely acquired by James or Mrs. de Menil, who enjoyed frequenting flea markets and antique shops. Additional pieces came from Schlumberger family homes in France. James designed three curvaceous upholstered pieces that remain in the house: a double "lip" sofa for the living room, a dining room banquette, and, the most intricate, a lounge chair resting on S-curved wrought-iron supports. Mrs. de Menil and her eldest daughter Christophe designed the seven-sided ottoman that has been the living room centerpiece since the early 1950s. It has inspired the upholstered octagonal ottoman in the foyer of the main museum building of the Menil collection, as well as a wood version in the Menil Drawing Institute.

For James, the Menil House was not the springboard that it proved to be for Philip Johnson, a fact more reflective of James' erratic personality and disastrous business procedures than of his talents. As a result, the Menil House is the only known Charles James interior, making it a unique and significant document in American decorative arts and interiors.

The juxtaposition of Johnson's building and James' interior was as unexpected as their art installations. The de Menils were comfortable living with a mixture of old and new, a trait more characteristic of European than American modernists. In both their house and their collection, the de Menils sought continuity with history.

The de Menils settled into their modernist house with ease. Throughout their lifetimes they made relatively few changes, none of a structural nature. There was always the addition of new of artworks and the moving of art and furniture to different locations within the house because "we were just enjoying art at home," as Mrs. de Menil stated.^{xii}

The insertions that the de Menils introduced to the property were made for practical reasons. As the collection grew, the de Menils enclosed two bays of the carport in 1955 to create what became known as the Collections Room. The alteration covered the carport opening with a glass wall and had minimal impact on the building.

The need for additional space also prompted the de Menils to build (1961) and enlarge (1969), a one-story flat-roof auxiliary structure clad with plywood siding with vertical grooves, on the southwest side of the property. Positioned and painted to be as invisible as possible from either the driveway or the house, the structure has been used as servants' quarters, a guesthouse, and since the 1990s, for storage. It has remained vacant for more than a decade. The auxiliary structure has greatly deteriorated due to a design flaw in the original design which exposed the lower wall framing to excessive moisture resulting in extensive wood rot. The auxiliary nature of the structure and severely deteriorated conditions render it unsafe and the auxiliary structure is planned to be removed in the near future. The structure does not possess the historic integrity necessary to be considered as a contributing structure to the Menil House.

In 1961, the interior courtyard was covered with a removable canvas cover supported by a vaulted pipe canopy structure. Oral interviews indicated that the canopy cover was necessary for several reasons. The intense Houston heat and lack of air circulation made it difficult to grow tropical plants in the courtyard space, which the de Menils desired, having experienced tropical plantings at their previous home in Venezuela. The canopy also protected against intermittent severe cold weather, such as the ice storm in 1958 that killed the trees around which the courtyard was designed. Prior to the installation of the 1961 vaulted canopy, an unsuccessful attempt was made to stretch sheets of canvas horizontally along the house's roof. After the canopy was installed, sun glare was no longer a problem, and the curtains and shades on courtyard windows were removed as shown in a set of photographs taken in 1964. The canopy has remained on the house since 1961.

Howard Barnstone, whose architectural firm Barnstone & Associates designed the canopy and the one-story auxiliary structure, was identified with the Menil House from the mid-1950s when he began carrying out commissions for the de Menils. After receiving his architecture degree from Yale in 1948, Barnstone (1923-1987) moved to Houston where he practiced and taught for the rest of his life. A follower of Mies van der Rohe, Barnstone and his partner at the time, Preston Bolton, received national attention for their Miesian style buildings during the 1950s.

Landscaping was never a priority at the de Menils' property. Both Philip Johnson and Howard Barnstone stated that Mrs. de Menil resisted a formal landscape; preferring instead a simple, park-like

setting. In 1958, Ralph Ellis Gunn (1909-1967), Harvard graduate and landscape architect employed by prominent Houston families, added the present walkway encircling the backyard. At the time, Gunn had just completed one of his most famous projects, the restoration of the gardens of Rosedown Plantation in St. Francisville, Louisiana, in 1957.

Over the years, protection of the trees and enclosure of the property became the most important landscape features.

The Menil House retains its historic integrity to a remarkable degree. Mrs. de Menil’s frugal, minimalist attitude toward change and repair meant that the property remained much the same in appearance at the time of her death in December 1997 as it was by the mid- 1950s. Most notably, security lights on tall poles were added in the backyard. She adopted the philosophy that if something had to be fixed or replaced, whether it was a chair cover or a door hinge, it should be duplicated. As observed by Philip Johnson at the time of Mrs. de Menil’s funeral, “She knew how to live in a house and what to put with those amazing Charles James sofas. She didn’t change a thing for fifty years...She knew she had something perfect.”^{xiii}

Walter Hopps, the first director of The Menil Collection, offered a succinct summation of the national significance of the Menil House, calling it “the DNA” of The Menil Collection. The de Menils believed that art should be an integral part of everyday life, to be enjoyed and contemplated on an intimate, one-to-one, everyday basis. It was an attitude that had a direct influence on all the de Menils’ architectural projects. The Rothko Chapel and the Menil Collection buildings were all designed and scaled to invite an intimate, personal connection between the viewer and the art. The Menil House deeply influenced the design of Renzo Piano’s museum building, which features an interior courtyard planted with subtropical vegetation, dark floors, proportions based on the living room of the house, and an oversized ottoman in the reception area. When planning the museum, Mrs. de Menil remarked that she “dreamed of preserving some of the intimacy I had enjoyed with the works of art.”^{xiv}

The Menil House is a unique cultural document, nationally significant for its association with John and Dominique de Menil, whose stature as 20th century art patrons and collectors is of national and international proportions. The astonishing number and variety of projects that the de Menils pursued and accomplished throughout their lifetimes emanated from their house, which in essence was the first museum of the collection. It is the primary site to understanding and interpreting the de Menils as patrons, collectors and modernists.

Since 1998, the present owner of the house, the Menil Foundation, has maintained the property. A multi-year effort to conserve the Menil House was completed in 2004; the project involved intensive research and oral interviews. The conservation, maintenance, and alteration efforts were designed by Stern and Bucek Architects, with the goal of returning the house to largely how it appeared in the April 1, 1966 *Vogue* article. During the 2004 work, some alterations were made, including new cabinetry and equipment for the laundry and an expansion and upgrades to the Collections Room and service spaces. Additionally, most of the original polished plate glass was replaced with tempered glass to meet safety requirements, as has also occurred at Johnson's Glass House. Furnishings original to the house as well as artworks from the de Menils' collection continue to grace the house.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Narrative Description

The Menil House is a one-story flat-roofed single-family dwelling, linear in plan and irregular in shape. Exterior walls of salmon-colored brick and plate glass are devoid of decoration. Located on an enclosed three-acre lot in Houston's Briarwood Court subdivision, embedded in the River Oaks neighborhood, the house presents a contrast to the surrounding multi-storied much larger houses of varying dates. The Menil property is entered from the north side, off San Felipe Road, a principal east-west street.

Set back at the middle of the lot, the full sweep of the low horizontal building (162') reveals itself as one enters the property. The brick facade is interrupted by the off-centered three-bay plate-glass entrance and two sets of horizontal windows to the west of the entrance. A narrow wood fascia painted white caps the brick façade and encircles the building.

In contrast to the solid brick front, the back of the building is dominated by glass surfaces and consists of three planes, each expressing a different section of the house. Large sliding glass doors in the living room and principal bedroom open onto a terrace. The children's wing extends into the yard, with casement windows running along the south wall. A paved parking area/courtyard in the southwest corner is delineated by a low brick wall.

The house is of brick cavity wall construction. Steel beams span major spaces. The joists, decking, and fascia are wood. The foundation is a concrete slab on grade with grade beams. The house plan is divided into three intersecting zones: the public and adult spaces are on the east; the children's bedroom wing is on the south; and the kitchen and service wing is on the west.

The house interior is animated by varying materials, textures, angles, and vistas. Floor to ceiling glass walls and an open-air internal courtyard on the east provide a feeling of spatial openness. Glass forms the long north and south walls of the living room; the south wall opens onto a terrace. The principal bedroom, located in the southeast corner of the house, opens into the living room. The study in the northeast corner of the house was originally designated as a guest bedroom. The ceilings throughout the house are 10'-6" high.

The children's wing in the south of the house consists of four bedrooms that open into a long hall with a bathroom at each end. Each bedroom has 7' high casement windows that frame a view of the backyard.

A narrow hall connects this wing to the living room. The room connecting the children's bedroom section to the kitchen is identified on the architectural drawings of the house as a playroom; however, it subsequently was used as a formal dining room. The west wall is comprised of glass and opens onto a narrow-recessed courtyard.

St. Charles metal cabinets enameled in a sea moss color were installed in the kitchen and adjoining pantry. The floor is covered with gray vinyl tile. Skylights, north-facing strip windows, and a south-facing glass wall opening onto the recessed west courtyard illuminate this space.

Originally, the carport accommodated three cars. A maid's bedroom and bathroom were located along the west wall of the service wing. The two westernmost carport spaces were enclosed by the de Menils in 1955, soon after the house was built, to create the Collections Room. At the same time, the bathroom was divided in half with the outside bathroom opening into the yard. The south wall of the Collections Room is floor-to-ceiling glass that looks onto the parking area.

The easternmost carport space remained an open covered area until it was partially enclosed in 2004 to expand the Collections Room. During the 2004 remodel, the 1955 wood framed raised floor with carpet was replaced with a concrete slab with cork flooring. Additional upgrades included new maple cabinetry, an enlarged reconfigured single restroom to provide accessible accommodation, a small office, and a storage room.

The dominant materials throughout the house are glass walls, black cement tile flooring made in Monterrey, Mexico (in the east and bedroom wings), and a plaster ceiling.

Wall treatments vary. Painted plaster is found in the principal bedroom and children's bedroom wing; exposed brick in the study and entry hall; wood paneling in the dining room and living room fireplace wall; painted wood cabinet and closet walls in all the bedrooms; faux graining in the study hall; and fabric-covered sections in the entrance alcove, study, and back hall.

The house has an exceptionally high degree of historic integrity. There have been no structural changes since it was built. Minimal alterations have occurred such as the enclosure of the carport and concealment of a window with brick that overlooked the parking area in the westernmost bedroom of the children's wing. Many wall surfaces exhibit their original finish, fabric, and in several instances, original paint.

Since 1961, the interior courtyard has been covered with a canvas canopy that is fitted on an interlocking arched metal frame that spans the space. The frame is attached to the corners of the courtyard fascia. Designed to protect courtyard plantings in extreme weather, both hot and cold, the canopy has arched side flaps that can completely enclose the space in the winter and can be removed during warmer months.

An additional structure is located on the southwest side of the property. This small flat-roofed one-story building is clad with plywood siding with vertical grooves. Built in 1961, the auxiliary structure was originally used as both servants' quarters and as a guest house. Due to its elephant gray color and surrounding plantings, the structure is barely visible from both the driveway and the main house. A

second bedroom and storage space were added to the structure's north side in 1969. In the 1990s, the building was utilized for storage; however, the structure significantly deteriorated due to a design flaw: the construction of the lower wall plate and plywood siding directly on top of the flat concrete foundation. Without a raised concrete offset or added sheet metal flashing, the wall framing experienced constant moisture exposure and has completely rotted.

The remnants of a small, covered storage shed for yard equipment was integrated into a brick wall at the southwest corner of the property.

The Menil property is isolated from neighboring properties on all sides. The front façade of the house is minimally visible from San Felipe Road because of a thick bamboo hedge that extends the width of the lot except for the driveway opening on the west side. At the northwest corner of the house, the driveway forks to the left into a surface parking area in front of the house and also continues behind the house to the small parking area. A tall bamboo hedge runs the full length of the east boundary line. A 6' high brick wall and miscellaneous plantings are located at the west and southwest boundary lines.

The generous arboretum-like yard with tall trees, both front and back, lacks formality. Oaks, elms, and pine trees appear to have characterized the property when it was bought by the de Menils. When the house was built, the interior courtyard was designed around four sizeable trees. By 1958, when a property survey map was prepared, the backyard contained a greater variety of trees than currently exists. The gravel walkway that encircles the backyard appears on the survey as a proposed walkway. A fan-shaped flower garden with brick walkways is located on the southeast point of the lot, adjacent to Briarwood Court, a River Oaks cul-de-sac.

Over the past decades, the greatest alteration to the landscaping has been the loss of trees. Some have been lost through natural attrition, as was the case with a large oak tree adjacent to the living room patio and another oak next to the front brick courtyard wall. Other trees have been felled by extreme weather, such as the courtyard trees that were lost in an ice storm in 1958.

The entire property maintains an extraordinary level of integrity due to minimal modifications made during the course of its occupation by Dominique and John de Menil and subsequent ownership by the Menil Foundation.

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- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
 - (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
 - (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
 - (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
 - (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
 - (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
 - (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.
- AND**
- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Menil House at 3363 San Felipe Street, Houston, Texas, 77019.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Menil House at 3363 San Felipe Street, Houston, Texas, 77019.

EXHIBIT A

PHOTOS

MENIL HOUSE

3363 SAN FELIPE STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77019

Photo 1: Primary north elevation of the Menil House. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 2: Oblique view of the north front elevation of the Menil House. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 3: Oblique view of the north front elevation of the Menil House, camera facing southeast. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 4: Detail view of the primary entrance centrally located on the north elevation of the Menil House. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 5: Oblique detail view of the north elevation and courtyard canopy roof structure of the Menil House, camera facing southwest. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 6: Interior view of the courtyard topped by the canopy roof structure of the Menil House, camera facing southeast. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 7: Rear entrance on the southeast corner of the Menil House, camera facing west. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 8: Southeast corner detail of the east side elevation of the Menil House, camera facing west. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 9: Northeast corner detail of the east side elevation of the Menil House, camera facing northwest. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 10: Rear south elevation of the Menil House, camera facing north. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 11: Rear entrance on the southeast corner of the Menil House, camera facing northwest. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 12: Detail view of the south elevation rear entrance on the southeast corner of the Menil House, camera facing north. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 13: South elevation rear driveway at the southwest corner of the Menil House, camera facing northeast. Photo by applicant, 2024.



Photo 14: Detail view of the south elevation rear entrance inset on the southwest corner from the rear driveway of the Menil House, camera facing north. Photo by applicant, 2024.

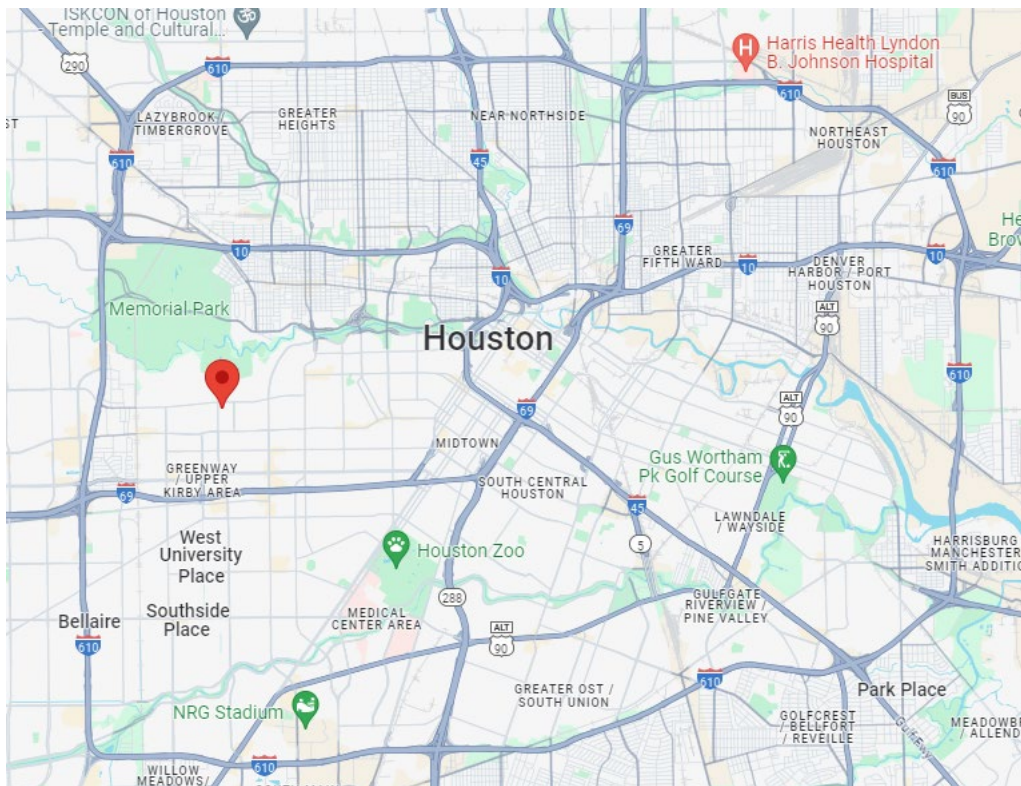


EXHIBIT B
MAPS
MENIL HOUSE
3363 SAN FELIPE STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77019

Map 1: Harris County, Texas. Accessed March 2024.



Map 2: Google Maps, Location of the Menil House. Accessed March 2024.



Map 3: Google Maps, aerial view of the Menil House. Accessed March 2024.

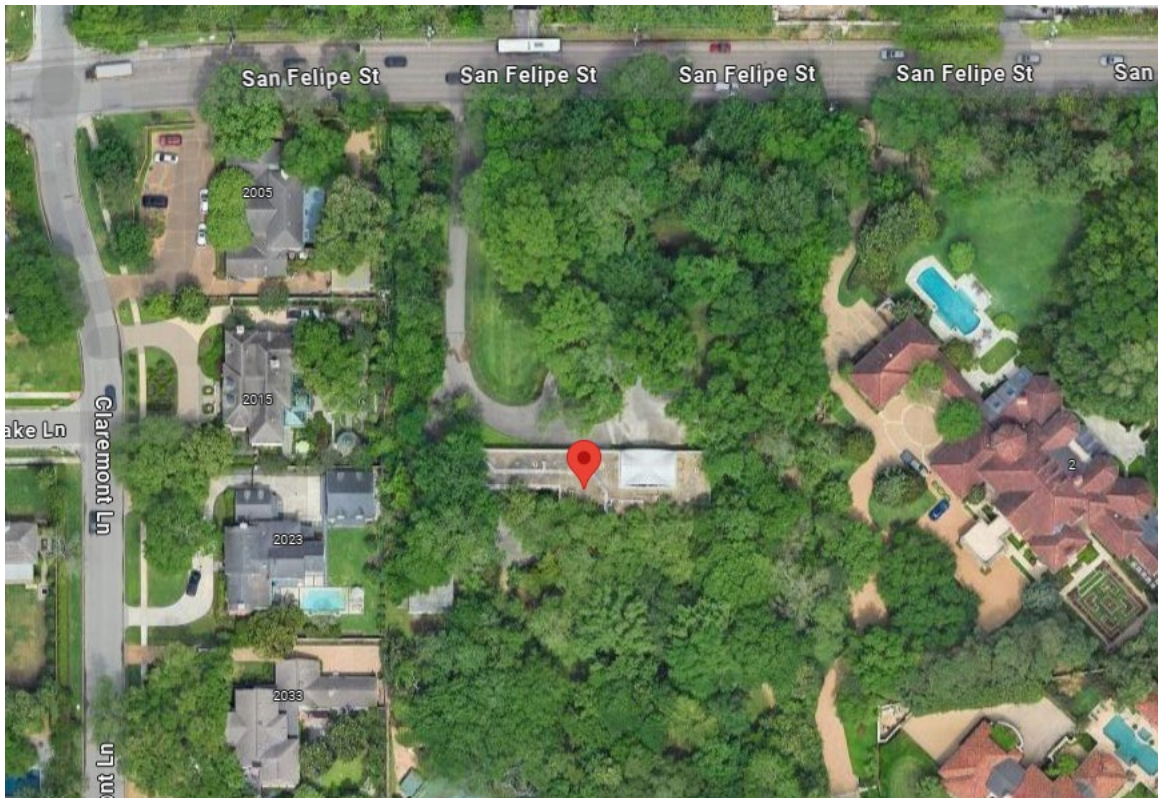


EXHIBIT C

FIGURES

MENIL HOUSE

3363 SAN FELIPE STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77019

Figure 1: The Menil House located at 3363 San Felipe on a map of Houston, date unknown. Source: Menil Foundation (applicant), 2024.

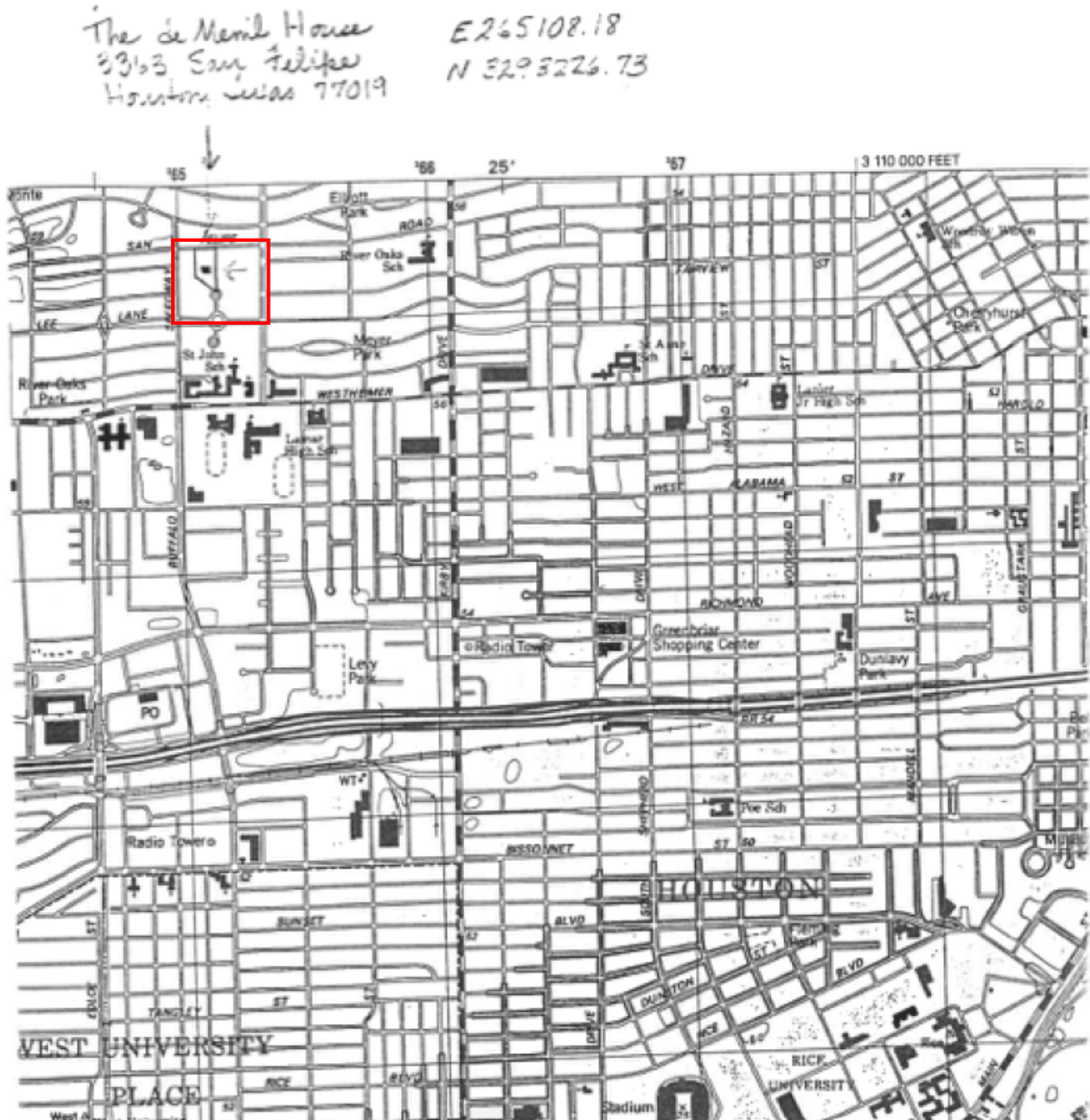
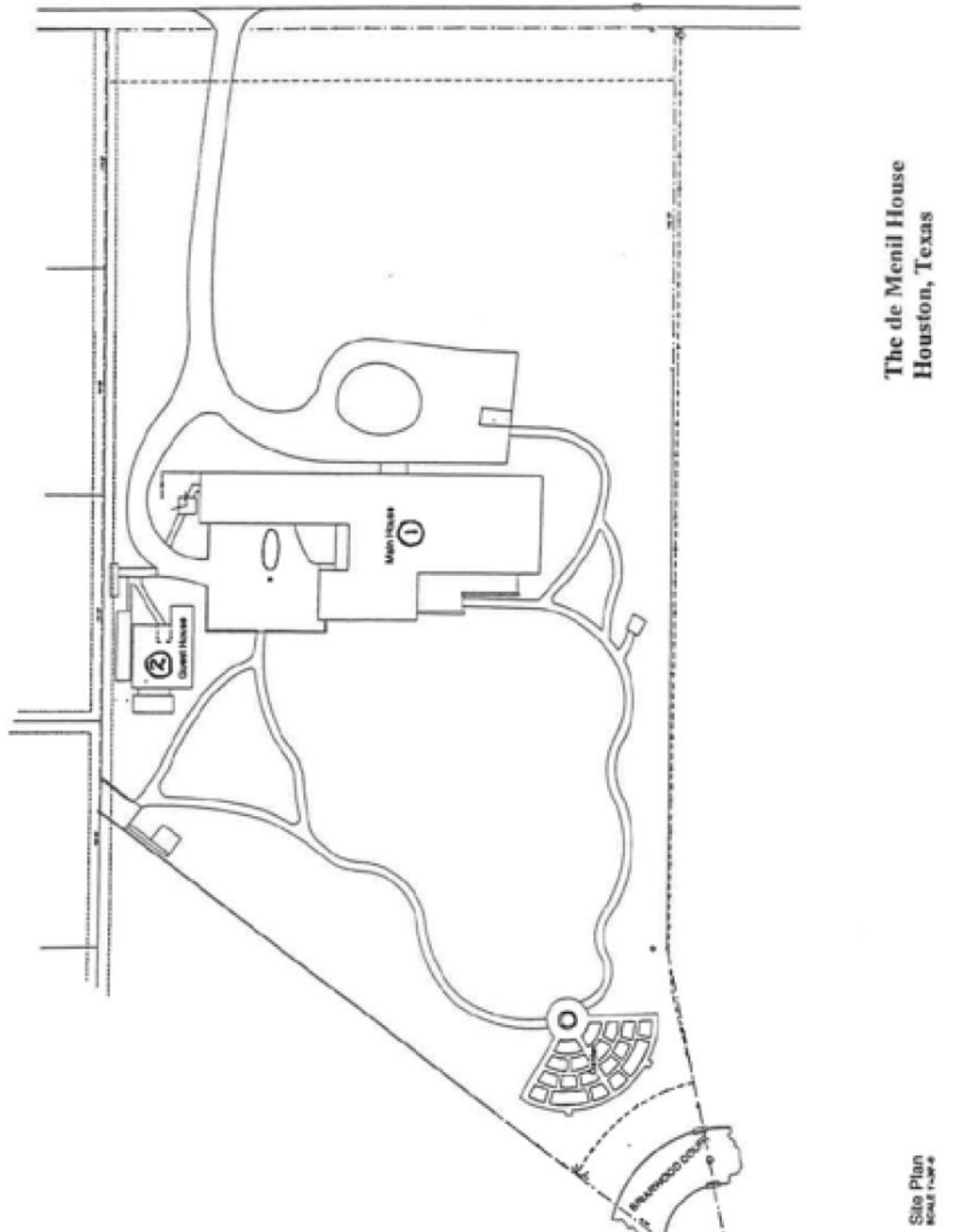


Figure 2: Site plan of the Menil House located at 3363 San Felipe. Source: Menil Foundation (applicant), 2024.

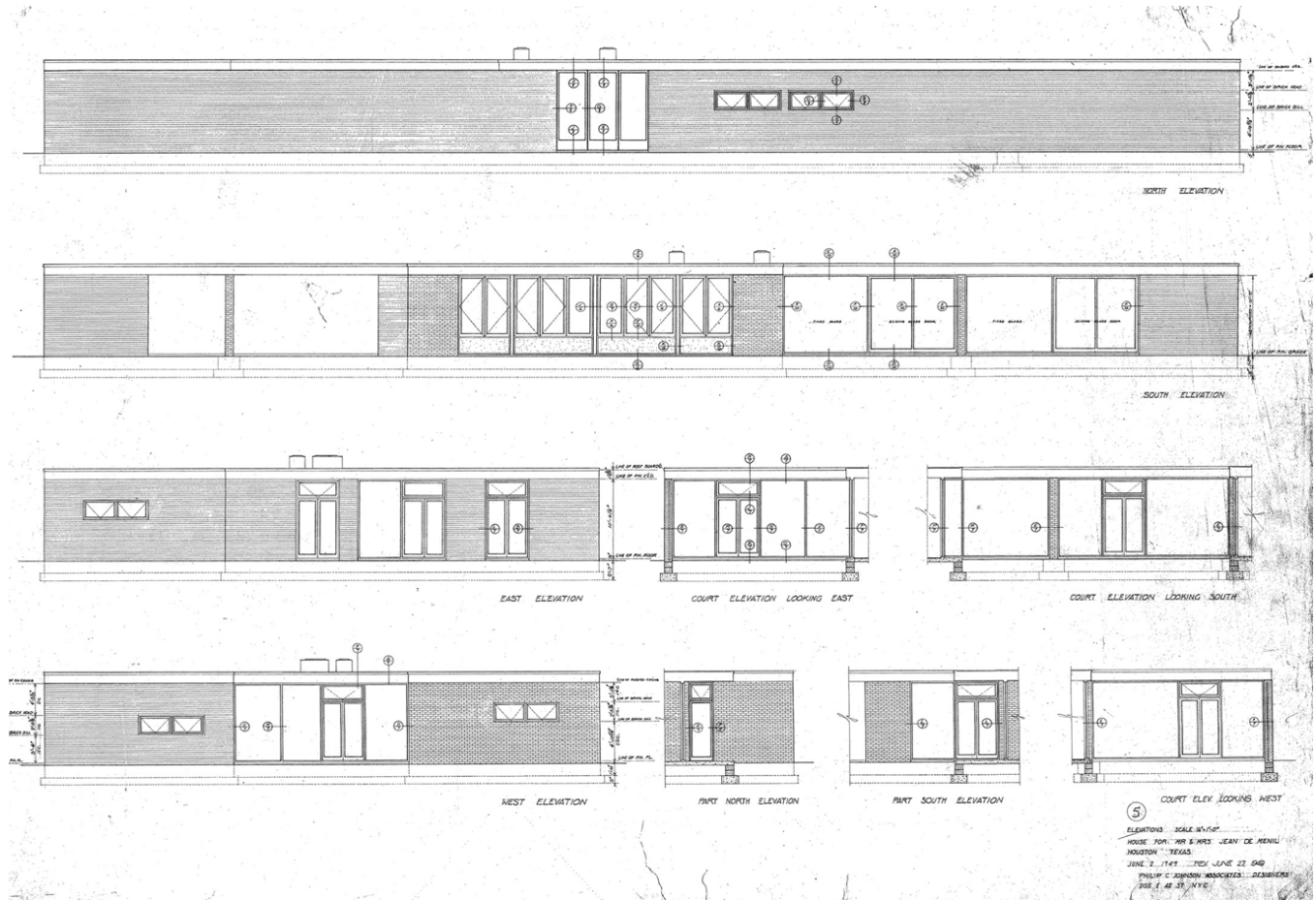


CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Figure 3: “House for Mr. & Mrs. Jean de Menil, Houston, Texas” architectural drawings by Philip C. Johnson. June 2, 1949 & revised June 27, 1949. Source: Menil Foundation (applicant), 2024.



END NOTES

ⁱ Marguerite Johnston, Houston: *The Unknown City, 1836-1946* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991), p. 391.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

ⁱⁱⁱ John de Menil legally changed the spelling of his first name to the Anglicized version when he became an American citizen.

^{iv} The Rice Institute was renamed Rice University in 1960.

^v The range of the collection includes photographs, rare books, paper works, and textiles.

^{vi} “Houston Comes to Paris,” in *Newsweek*, April 23, 1984, p. 60; *ibid.*, p. 61; and “Oil family jewels,” in *Manchester Guardian*, June 8, 1984, no page.

^{vii} Grace Glueck, “The de Menil Family: The Medici of Modern Art,” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 18, 1986, p. 33.

^{viii} Webb, B. C. (2008). Living Modern in Mid-Century Houston: Conserving the Menil House. *Journal of Architectural Education (1984-)*, 62(1), p.13.

^{ix} Frank D. Welch, *Philip Johnson & Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), pp. 35 and 259.

^x Dominique de Menil, video interview by Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Menil Collection Conservator, and Paul Winkler, Menil Collection Director, September 29, 1995, Menil Archives.

^{xi} Elizabeth Ann Coleman, *The Genius of Charles James* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1982), p. 11. Published for the exhibition of same title at The Brooklyn Museum, October 16, 1982-January 16, 1983.

^{xii} “Dominique de Menil,” interview in New York, December 1982, in *The First Show*, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, p. 35.

^{xiii} Welch, p. 259.

^{xiv} Patricia C. Johnson, “For the de Menils, a passion for acquiring art becomes a collection,” in *Houston Chronicle* Special pullout, Menil Collection, June 7, 1987, p. 7.