

Design Boom

IN HOUSTON, AMERICA'S ENERGY CAPITAL, THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE SCENE IS BIG—AND ONLY GETTING BIGGER.

BY CHRISTINA OHLY EVANS
PRODUCED BY CHARLES CURKIN

THEY SAY THAT EVERYTHING IS SUPERSIZED in Texas—not just the 10-gallon hats and Tex-Mex smorgasbords, but also its art and design worlds. In Houston, especially, cultural institutions are thriving, and introducing an international design mix has become a top priority. The city has long been an epicenter for oil, space exploration, and medicine, and with that has come a diversity that is being reflected in everything from art exhibitions to residential architecture, making Houston one of the most dynamic and eclectic urban centers anywhere.

“We’re knocking it out of the park,” says Gary Tinterow, director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, of the city’s flourishing arts institutions. “Our

museums, the opera, and the Houston Ballet are creating programming that is as good as anywhere else in the world.” There’s something for art enthusiasts in nearly every genre. The spate of culturally hefty programming includes a blockbuster exhibition, “Vincent van Gogh: His Life in Art” (through June 27) at the MFAH, and “Contemporary Focus: Trenton Doyle Hancock” (through May 19), a show of the sardonic illustrator’s work at the Menil Collection, which features a new Drawing Institute designed by Los Angeles-based ED A-List architects Johnston Marklee.

And it isn’t only the established names flexing their muscles this year: The Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University, a new cross-disciplinary, experimental space, is adding to the city’s intellectual

Inside the new Menil Drawing Institute, designed by Johnston Marklee.

frisson, as is the highly anticipated expansion of the Holocaust Museum by Mucasey & Associates, Architects. Beyond the arts, Houston’s sensorial explosion extends to the hospitality sphere too, with the launch of the five-diamond Post Oak Hotel at Uptown, an ultra-luxe 250-room property by Houston Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta that caters to the traveling aesthete. With a dramatic lobby decorated in Frank Stella paintings and a museum-quality collection containing pieces by Robert Motherwell, Alex Katz, and Howard Hodgkin, a stay there whets the appetite for art in all its vibrant forms.

An interest in design-led spaces has also infused Houston’s leafy neighborhoods, with the long-held preference for sprawling homes being displaced by luxury lifestyle condominiums among a certain set. One of the most exciting residential projects in the works is Giorgetti Houston, a collaboration between the venerable 120-year-old Italian furniture maker and local architecture and interiors firm Mirador. The horizontal seven-story mid-rise marks Giorgetti’s first foray into branded residential living, and it will have just 32 exquisitely appointed apartments, each with bespoke maple, marble, leather, and fabric finishes. “The building will be representative of the Giorgetti Italian lifestyle,” says Giovanni del Vecchio, managing director of Giorgetti. “Each of the flats will be a timeless work of art.”

There is something in Houston for **art enthusiasts** in nearly every genre.

Houston’s retail scene is equally robust, with a newly opened design shop, Paloma & Co., cofounded by ED A-List decorator Paloma Contreras, and showrooms including the highly curated CASA, which is bringing standout Italian furniture by Poltrona Frau and flooring by Listone Giordano, among others, to Texans with an appreciation for artisanal, high-quality craftsmanship. Classics endure, of course, and Houston is *the* place for a pair of perfectly made custom boots by sixth-generation maker Maida’s. While the French calf leather used by Maida’s is sourced from du Puy and d’Annonay—the same tanneries that supply Hermès—the silhouettes, embroidery, and embellishments are a cowboy’s delight.

This same authentic approach is being felt in foodie Houston, where chef Ford Fry is tweaking traditional Tex-Mex classics at Superica in the Heights and serving made-to-order fried chicken and Gulf seafood with killer cocktails at his retro-cool La Lucha. Nowhere is the transformation of the city felt more than at Central Market, a supermarket on steroids—cum—cooking school that features a 70-foot-long seafood case, more than 2,500 wines at any time, and a delicious rotating “passport series” that highlights the cuisines of countries around the globe.

With Houston still rebuilding after the devastation of Hurricane Harvey and soon to edge out Chicago as the third most populous city in America, it has a sizable responsibility to become one of the country’s most important cultural centers. Luckily, in Texas, size isn’t an issue. ■

RICHARD BARNES/COURTESY OF THE MENIL COLLECTION, HOUSTON. FOR DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES



1. Outside the Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, designed by Steven Holl Architects.
2. *Epidemic! Presents: Step and Screw!* (2014), by Trenton Doyle Hancock, on exhibit at the Menil Collection.
3. Inside the Post Oak Hotel at Uptown, designed by philanthropist and Houston Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta.
4. Custom leather boots and a belt from Maida’s.
5. A rendering of the Giorgetti Houston residential building, on track to be completed by 2020.