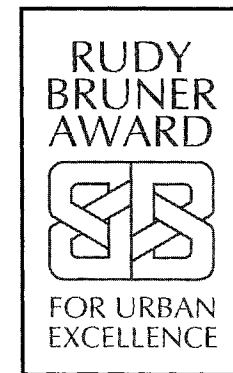

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MEDAL 1997



Project Row Houses
Houston, Texas



This is an excerpt from:

Visions of Urban Excellence

1997

Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

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Project Row Houses (PRH) at a Glance

What Is Project Row Houses?

- 22 historic “shotgun” style houses which were previously abandoned and have been transformed into a complex of art gallery/installation space, and social programs.
- An urban revitalization program which includes 8 houses for art installations; 7 houses for young, single mothers; a center for mixed media and performing arts, a day care and after-school program, a center for empowerment programs for African-American women, and a community garden.
- A national model which is being adapted to other inner-city locations. The hallmarks of the model are the combined use of local historic structures, art forms growing out of community cultural identity, and social programs responsive to local community needs.

Who Made the Submission?

- Project Row Houses, a nonprofit organization which owns and operates the project.

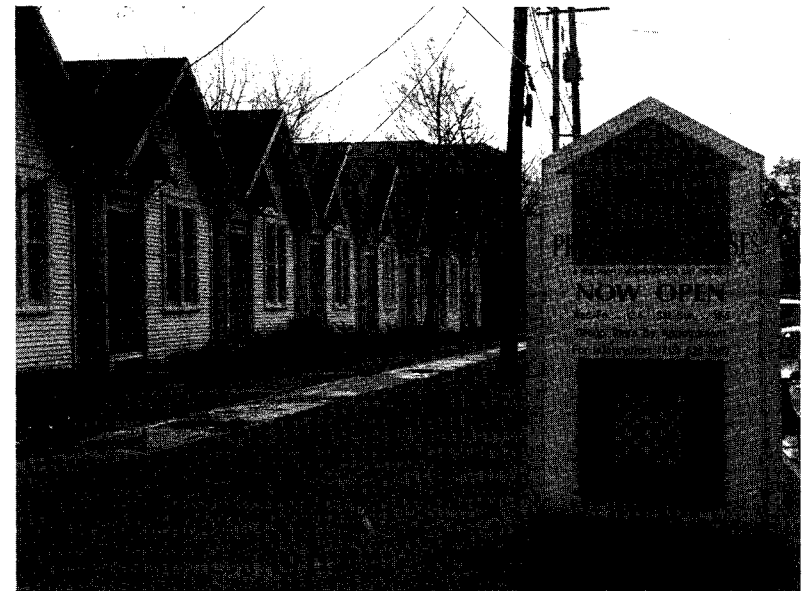
Major Goals of PRH

- To restore an historic site in Houston’s inner city;
- To create a center for visual, written, and performing art which showcases the work of African-American artists, while creating a strong connection between the community and its African-American heritage;
- To create opportunity in Houston’s Third Ward by modeling African-American artistic achievement in combination with social programs geared toward educational opportunity and self-reliance;

- To establish a model for reclamation of inner-city neighborhoods with art as catalyst to stimulate constructive dialogue addressing cultural, educational, economic, and social issues.

Major Accomplishments of PRH

- Rehabilitation of historic “shotgun” houses for art, housing, day care and after-school programs;
- Creation of an art program in 8 Gallery Houses, where prominent African-American artists utilize row houses for art installation and community workshops;
- Development of the Young Mothers Residential Program (YMRP) which provides transitional housing and life-skills training for young single mothers between the ages of 17 and 24;



Project Row Houses announces its opening.

- Acquisition of a contiguous 2 story building which PRH intends to rehabilitate for performing arts, offices, and community gatherings;
- Participation in projects in four other cities utilizing the PRH model for community revitalization.

Reasons for Including PRH as a finalist

- The focus on art as a tool to model cultural achievement and engage the community in interactive workshops;
- The potential for achieving multiple goals—providing transitional housing, stabilizing lives, combining art with social programs; offering a brighter future to community residents;
- Use of culturally significant historic houses for quality housing, gallery space, and social programs, in an art-based context.

Selection Committee Questions and Concerns for Site Visit

- Does PRH change the community/neighborhood vision of itself?
- Does the Third Ward now feel like a special place?
- Is PRH a real, active place, not just a group of historic structures?
- How has PRH affected the Houston business community?
- Who walks down the street? What is the feeling of the neighborhood?
- How real are they? Is this one person's vision, or is there an organization growing here?
- Is the project financially stable?
- Is the project connected to a network of support in the community? In city government? In the business community?
- What are the spin-offs and current and future plans? Where are they going next? What are they doing in Watts and East St. Louis?

Final Selection Committee Comments

- PRH was recognized as an innovative project, making an important statement about the place of art in community revitalization and its ability to make connections across traditional barriers.
- PRH is a grass-roots organization, operating outside the accepted channels of government, and demonstrating a degree of flexibility which enabled to respond to community needs. This suggests an innovative model which may well be outside of traditional funding patterns or boundaries.
- While PRH was commended for its originality, the Committee felt it was too early to judge its lasting impact.

Project Description

Chronology

1990–1992 A group of African-American artists, including Rick Lowe, begin to meet periodically to discuss ways of enriching their community through the development of temporary public art installations in African-American neighborhoods.

Summer, 1992 Rick Lowe discovers 22 abandoned identical “shotgun”-style houses in Houston’s Third Ward. The site seems ideal for the installation of art works due to the cultural significance of these houses, their significance in African-American history, and their location. Initial contact is made with owner.

Spring, 1993 PRH was awarded \$6,000 from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston, and \$25,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for preservation of the houses, and launching of the arts program. NEA shows PRH slides to the National Council and holds it up as a model community arts project. Houston’s Housing and Community Development

Department agrees that PRH will be considered for a 1994–95 Community Development Block Grant budget.

September, 1993 Five year lease/purchase of 22 row houses negotiated with owner, for \$100,000 at \$1,000/month. Artists lead community volunteers to clear site of trash and weeds.

October, 1993 Deborah Grotfeldt, formerly with DiverseWorks Art Space, joins PRH as Managing Director to develop and organize programs, develop budgets, implement fund-raising and write grant proposals.

March, 1994 Founding Board of Directors meeting and elect officers. Heimbinder Family Foundation loans PRH \$126,000 for outright purchase of property, and accepts burden of \$26,000 in back property taxes.

May–June 1994 Amoco/Home Depot and their employees contribute materials and volunteer labor to complete exterior renovation of 12 houses.

October, 1994 Inaugural installations open with works by eight prominent Texas African-American artists. Over 1,000 people attend.

April, 1995 The Meadows Foundation in Dallas grants \$100,000 to the Young Mothers Residential Program (YMRP).

June, 1995 YMRP mentor family moves in. Work begins on rehabilitation of YMRP houses with support from MASCO Corporation, Women’s Day Special Interest Publications, and U.S. Home Corp.

February, 1996 Five families headed by single mothers move into YMRP houses.

June, 1996 \$50,000 grant to support artists’ installations received from Rockefeller Foundation.

December, 1996 Funds to buy adjacent parcel loaned to PRH by Heimbinder Foundation; land cost is reduced by half by owner.

Key Participants *(persons interviewed are indicated by an asterisk*)*

Project Row Houses

Rick Lowe, *Founding Director**

Deborah Grotfeldt, *Executive Director**

James England, *President of the Board (*phone)*

Dr. Nelda Lewis, *Young Mother’s Residential Program (*phone)*

Heimbinder Family Foundation

Isaac Heimbinder, *Board (*phone)*

Sheila Heimbinder, *Board, YMRP Coordinator (*phone)*

University of Houston, Department of Architecture

Sheryl G. Tucker, *Architect**

Rice University School of Architecture

Nanya Grenada, *Architect**

Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County

Jessica Cussick, *Public Arts and Urban Design Director*

Houston City Council

Councilman Jew Don Boney*

Houston Department of Community Development

Ken Bolton, *Asst. Director**

Tom Doyle, *Community Planner**

S. Teffera, *Statistician**

Amoco Corporation

Cory S. Webster, *Executive Director, Amoco Torch Classic**

The Vision

Project Row Houses is the personal vision of founder Rick Lowe. As a young artist influenced by the work of his teacher, prominent African-American artist John Biggers, and by a growing feeling of alienation from the mainstream art world, Lowe began seeking ways to reconnect African-American art and artists with the

community. Based upon his work with Biggers, who had also researched “shotgun” houses and used them as an important element in his painting, Lowe developed the belief that art had the potential to transform the community in several important ways: by creating positive cultural images of African-American identity; by showcasing the artistic accomplishments of African-American artists; by bringing people from all economic and social levels into the community; and by engaging them in a meaningful dialogue about the issues raised by the art itself. This notion of the transformative power of art has been the driving force behind Project Row Houses (PRH), and while PRH has grown beyond this initial concept to include other programs, Lowe’s vision remains crucial to the identity of the project.

Project Row Houses and the Third Ward

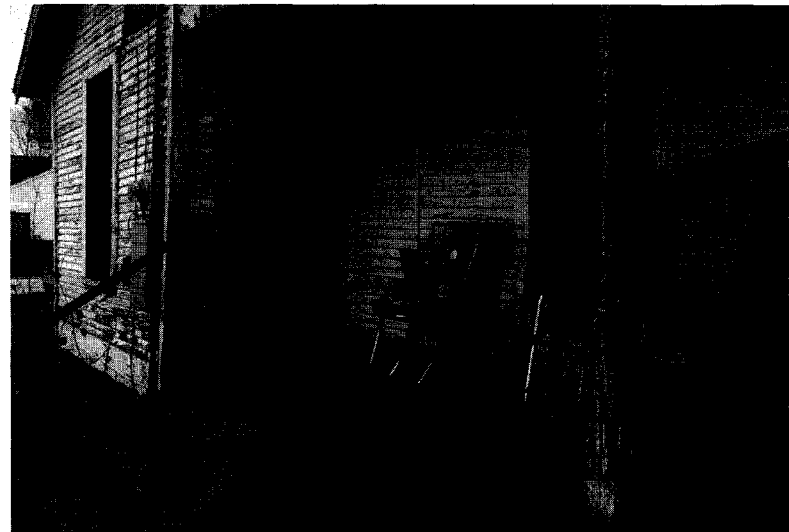
The selection of the PRH site was both deliberate and fortuitous. Although not a Houston native, Rick Lowe had developed connec-

tions in the Third Ward through his association with SHAPE Community Center. Lowe hoped to establish an African-American art installation there because of his connection with the community and because revitalization was desperately needed in that area. In the shadow of downtown Houston, the demographic profile of the Third Ward is typical of the nation’s inner city neighborhoods. The Third Ward is 98% African-American, and is characterized by extreme poverty, with 40% of household incomes under \$5,000. There is a large amount of vacant or abandoned property, with a 40% land use vacancy rate for the area. Education levels are low. 59% of those under the age of 25 never completed high school, and over half of the children in the Third Ward are born to single teen mothers and raised below the poverty level.

Despite its bleak demographic profile, however, the Third Ward has some important assets. It has not yet seen systematic demolition of dilapidated housing to make way for denser more costly development, as has occurred in other Houston neighborhoods.



Rick Lowe, Founder



A front porch in The Third Ward neighborhood

In addition, the Third Ward has some powerful neighbors including University of Houston, Texas Southern University, the Museum of Fine Arts and Texas Medical Center, located at the boundaries of the district. While the proximity of these major institutions raises the specter of future encroachment into the neighborhood, the Third Ward's MacGregor neighborhood, filled with large, landscaped, and attractive single family homes, has remained in good condition, and is now occupied by upper middle class African-Americans, who have contributed to stabilization of the community.

From Vision to Reality

When Rick Lowe stumbled upon the abandoned "shotgun" houses, he felt strongly that the Third Ward location, the importance of "shotgun" houses to African-American history, and the nature, quality and configuration of the buildings made it an ideal location for the art initiative he envisioned. Lowe worked for a



A Third Ward Street adjacent to Project Row Houses.

year to locate the owner in order to lease 10 "shotgun" houses for a temporary public art installation. The owner, however, insisted that all 22 houses be included in the transaction. By that time, Lowe, Grotfeldt, and others involved felt that the project could use the additional houses for programs which related to other community concerns and interests.

The negotiation of the lease/purchase agreement marked an important turning point for PRH. Soon after that Deborah Grotfeldt came to PRH from DiverseWorks Arts Space where she had served as Assistant Director. She helped to obtain critical nonprofit status, established the legal, financial and administrative systems which are in place today, and began major fund-raising efforts. Together, Lowe and Grotfeldt worked at project financing, developing relationships in the community, planning programs, and recruiting and managing volunteers and contractors who performed the initial site clearance, clean-up and rehabilitation.

Between the Fall of 1993 and the Spring of 1994, PRH established itself as a nonprofit entity, recruited an influential board of directors which included prominent professionals from the legal profession, major art institutions, and the housing industry. It enlisted the support of a significant volunteer base through Amoco Corporation and the art community. Although it was a productive period, it was not without its difficulties. Despite its ostensible support for PRH, in September of 1993 the City of Houston identified the houses as "dangerous buildings," and threatened to demolish them. Although this status was later revoked, trust between the City and the project was damaged.

This period of intense organization culminated in June 1994, with the restoration of the exterior of 12 houses through volunteer help and materials from Amoco and Home Depot. This was the first of many major volunteer efforts and was the beginning of a series of important milestone events. Later that summer the "House Challenge" resulted in the completion of eight Gallery

Houses, each of which was sponsored by established players in the Houston Arts community, including the Museum of fine Arts, the Menil Collection, the Museum of Contemporary Art, DiverseWorks, a neighborhood church, and an African-American sorority. Their names hang on the transom of each gallery.

While lease payments had been made on the site through a series of grants, it was not until March 1994, that PRH finally acquired all 22 houses through a loan from the Heimbinder Family Foundation. In April 1995 the Meadows Foundation gave \$100,000 to the Young Mothers Residential Program, ensuring that the program would move ahead. Near the same time, in June 1995, US Home, and its President, Isaac Heimbinder, entered into a collaboration with MASCO Corporation and Women's Day Special Interest Publications to design, renovate and furnish houses for residences and a day care center for the Young Mother's Program. This collaboration resulted in seven houses being decorated and furnished by different Houston interior designers. The results were published in a national magazine, showcasing the attractive and distinctly different furnished houses. The YMRP program was then launched, and five young, single teen mothers and their children, along with a mentor, moved into the houses.

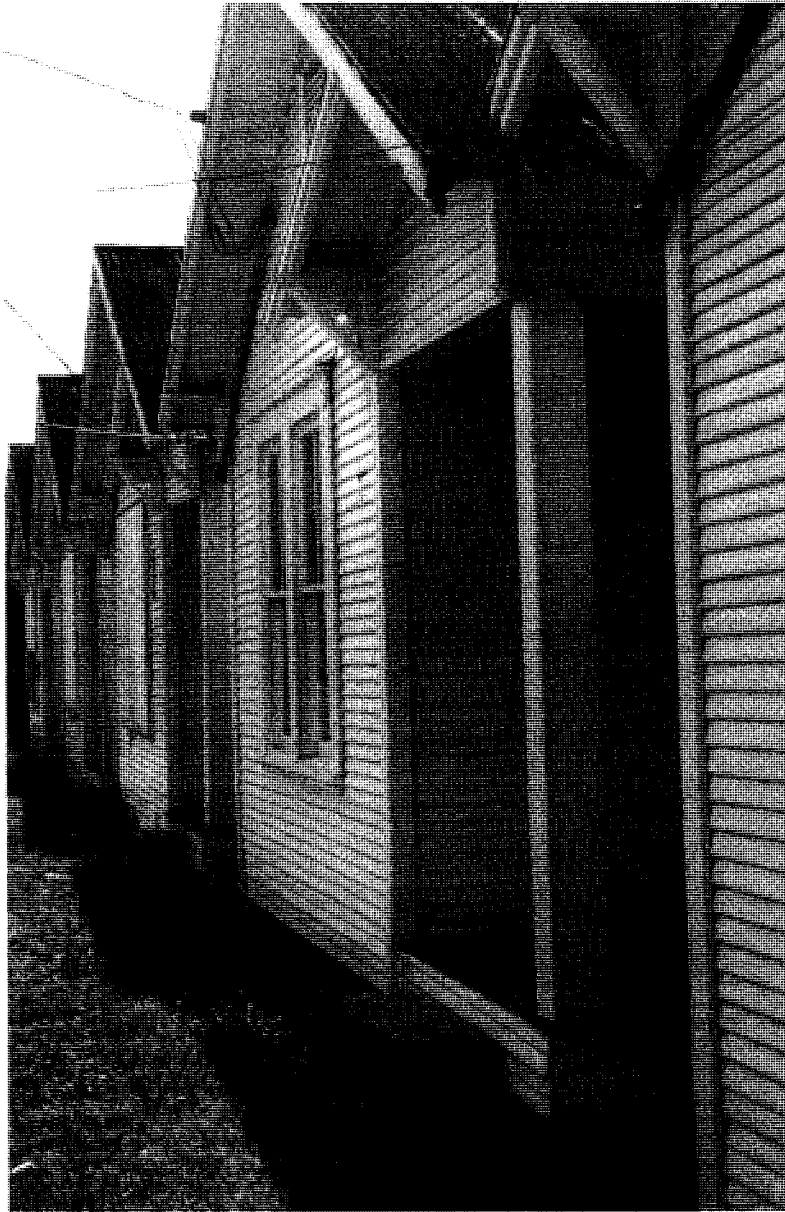
The momentum and energy which characterizes PRH has continued to grow. PRH now includes a variety of programs, housed in the 22 row houses. While the Gallery Houses, the daily after-school program, and the Young Mothers Residential Program are the cornerstones of the PRH social programs, PRH has remained flexible and demonstrated an ability to implement programs which are responsive to the needs of the Third Ward. Today PRH includes not only a day care program and an after-school program, but also Spoken Word House, a variety of empowerment programs run for African-American women, and a community garden.

The relationship between PRH and the Third Ward community appears strong. The community benefits directly from the PRH programs, and PRH has contributed to a sense of pride in community as increasing numbers of visitors come into the neighborhood. It is notable that PRH galleries and offices are open all day, yet there has not yet been a single incident of theft or vandalism. According to Rev. Robert McGee, the Pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church, the project is "like a blood transfusion; it has given life to the community."

The Architecture

The row houses are architecturally significant buildings, and their preservation and restoration has engendered support from the larger architectural community and two major universities, as well as from the neighborhood. The history of the row house, from West Africa to Haiti and the southern United States has been studied both by African-American artists such as John Biggers, and architectural historians. The historic "shotgun" house consists of two rooms of similar size, one in the front of the house and one in the back. The term "shotgun" is associated with the fact that the front and back doors are aligned, thus making it possible for a gun shot to pass through the house without hitting anything inside. In February 1994 the Texas Historical Commission determined that the PRH houses were eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. PRH received one of only 16 Honor Awards from the National Trust for Historic preservation in the fall of 1997.

The row houses are striking in their simplicity. Approaching PRH from Holman Street, one sees two blocks of identical one story row house facades, each painted white, with corrugated tin roofs overlaid with a brown patina of rust and age. There is a distinct visual rhythm inherent in the repetition of these simple forms. Many of the houses have modest plantings in front of them, but for the most part the appearance is plain, almost stark. Behind Holman



Project Row Houses facades after rehabilitation

Street, a second row of houses is located directly opposite, creating a small interior avenue of open space. This space, where back porches face each other, creates a communal area, where children play in the after-school and day-care programs, and where neighbors have a natural awareness of each others' comings and goings (see photos). In the future, the performing arts center planned at the terminus of the gallery houses will form a visual and functional edge to this communal "back yard."

African-American artist John Biggers, who has incorporated the row houses as a theme in his work makes the following statement about similar houses in the adjacent Fourth Ward: "I see them as I walk the Fourth Ward of Houston, the rhythm of their light and shadow, the triangle of their gables, the square of the porch, three over four, like the beat of a visual gospel."

PRH has been fortunate in its connection with architects who understand and are committed to the PRH vision. In November of 1993, in response to a grant request to HUD, PRH joined forces with Sheryl Tucker, an architect who developed a master plan for PRH as part of her design studio at the University of Houston School of Architecture. Ms. Tucker became actively interested in PRH and in the conservation of the "shotgun" houses, and applied for and received a grant of \$25,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts to develop a site master plan and architectural documents for the row houses. These drawings were displayed at the initial opening of PRH and formed the basis for the volunteer rehabilitation work.

In Sheryl Tucker's view, "the project has also helped many people understand that the "shotgun" house, the predominant housing type of the community, is not a symbol of shame associated with slavery, but a concrete visual link to African housing traditions as documented by architectural historians." Their restoration symbolizes a departure from the culture of neglect that has long characterized the area. Ms. Tucker remains architectural

consultant and Board member for PRH, and is currently involved in developing a design for the new two story building to be restored on the recently acquired corner property.

A second architectural resource for PRH is the Rice Building Workshop led by Nanya Grenada, professor of Architecture at Rice University. The workshop will focus on the design and construction of a new prototype row house, to occupy the vacant land recently purchased behind the Young Mothers houses.

The maintenance of the houses is supported by volunteer efforts of Chevron and Amoco, both of whom periodically volunteer at PRH. The houses are attractive and well-maintained, and during our visit the Amoco team toured the site to discuss the maintenance needs for an upcoming volunteer day.

Financing Project Row Houses

Project Row Houses has been financed by a series of grants from arts agencies, foundations and corporations. The acquisition of

the row houses through a loan from the Heimbinder Foundation, and a major grant from the Meadows Foundation for the Young Mothers Program, enabled PRH to establish direction and to secure a series of grants and loans from a variety of private and public entities. While these grants have met the financial needs of the project to date, the limitations of grant-based funding have also limited the scope of PRH's operations and expansion. PRH remains dependent upon the short term funding horizon associated with renewal of grants and the ongoing quest for additional funding sources.

While PRH is limited by its short funding horizon, it continues to secure the funds required to run the programs currently in place and to support new initiatives. While the Board has encouraged planning for additional programs and initiatives, they have also been careful to ensure that PRH runs existing programs successfully and within the means available to it. The Board is proud of the positive impact PRH has had on the community.



Interior courtyard at Project Row Houses before renovation.



Interior courtyard after renovation. Back doors face each other in a communal back yard.

Projected Budget:**September 1, 1996–August 31, 1997**

Revenues

Beginning Balance	\$99,159
Government Grants (<i>subtotal</i>)	\$68,086
NEA (pending)	\$10,000
TCA (committed)	\$13,042
CACHH (committed)	\$45,044
Corporations	\$45,000
Foundations	\$110,000
Fund Raising Events	\$55,000
Total Revenues	\$377,245

Expenses

Operations (<i>subtotal</i>)	\$213,145
Mortgage	\$8,540
Salaries	\$118,550
Payroll Taxes	\$11,855
Benefits	\$15,000
Contract	\$13,200
Utilities	\$5,400
Telephone	\$5,000
Office Supplies	\$4,000
Office Expense	\$4,000
Office Equipment	\$1,000
Postage	\$1,800
Liability Insurance	\$2,000
Auto Insurance	\$3,300
Auto Expense	\$5,000
Site Maintenance	\$3,000
Documentation	\$1,500
Miscellaneous	\$10,000
Art and Cultural Education (<i>subtotal</i>)	\$108,000
Artist Installations	\$68,000
After School/Summer	\$40,000
Young Mothers Residential Program	\$13,600
Planning	\$10,000
Total Expenses	\$344,745

Isaac Heimbinder was optimistic that as PRH becomes better known, and demonstrates its ability to run quality programs, it will become easier to attract funds.

Despite some conflicting messages from representatives of city government (see below), it seems possible that PRH will ultimately receive some additional funding from the City of Houston. The City Council is well aware of PRH, and the project is gaining sufficient visibility to improve its prospects of receiving additional public funds. Given PRH's plans for the future, City assistance in future property acquisition and expansion will be critical.

Project Row Houses and the City of Houston

The relationship between Project Row Houses and the City of Houston has been complicated. On the positive side, as early as the Spring of 1993, PRH was meeting with the Housing and Community Development Department to explore the possibilities for City funding. Initially the Department was supportive, indicating that PRH would be eligible for 1994–95 Community Development Block Grant funds. At about the same time, PRH was awarded \$6,000 from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston, one of the first grants awarded to the project.

By the Fall of 1993, both the City Council and the mayor were vocal supporters of PRH. In November Mayor Lanier's office and the Housing and Community Development department were instrumental in connecting PRH with the Amoco Corporation volunteer effort, an ongoing relationship that has been beneficial to PRH. Again in the Spring of 1994 the mayor assisted PRH in securing a \$5,000 grant from the Mayor's Cultural Arts Council, which continues to be a supporter of Project Row Houses.

In other ways, however, the relationship with the City has been problematic. Based in part upon the strength of the City commitment for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, in September 1993 PRH entered into a lease/purchase agreement

with the owner of the row houses. In the months following, however, instead of CDBG funds, PRH received notice that the row houses were on the City's "dangerous buildings" list and that the City was going to tear them down. Ultimately PRH was able to rescue the houses from this fate, but the relationship between PRH and the Department of Housing and Community Development had been seriously damaged. Much of the ensuing battle between the two was played out in the press, which led to a polarization between PRH and the City government. In the end, PRH did not receive CDBG funds, and the purchase of the property was arranged instead through a loan from the Heim binder Foundation, leaving PRH understandably distrustful of the City's intentions.

Representatives from the Department of Housing and Community Development indicated that the change in identity of PRH from an arts project to a young mothers residential project was problematic from a funding perspective, clouding the identity and direction of the project. Kenneth Bolton, Assistant Director of Housing and Community Development, indicated that the City is still "waiting" for PRH to stabilize. Bolton further suggested that since PRH had ultimately managed to get the funds to purchase the property elsewhere, City support at that level might no longer be needed. At the same time Bolton indicated that the City has recently received over \$20,000,000 to spend in areas such as the Third Ward, which is an Enhanced Enterprise Zone, and that they would be open to future proposals from PRH. He did acknowledge that the bureaucratic process can be slow and cumbersome, however, and sometimes difficult to mesh with agendas and schedules of nonprofit entities.

Jessica Cussick, Public Art and Urban Design Director of the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County, whose organization has provided support to PRH since its inception, was extravagant in her praise of PRH and what it is doing from an arts and cultural perspective. She felt that PRH is unique and enjoys an

almost "symbiotic" relationship with the Third Ward community and provides "art, child care and vegetables," in a fully integrated way. She told us about a local African-American bus driver, who passes PRH on his daily route, stopping his bus to inform his riders about the row houses, and the programs and art work which are available there.

City Councilman Jew Don Boney, an African-American Councilman representing the adjacent Fourth Ward, was also outspoken in his praise for PRH. He indicated that conventional development would never have preserved the row houses, and cited their importance and historical origins in West Africa. He felt strongly that the mix of uses on the site represented a true model of community building, and felt that PRH had become an integral part of the fabric of the Third Ward community. He cited the fact that



Houston Councilman Jew Don Boney

PRH, whose doors are open and unlocked, has never had an incident of vandalism because they have earned community trust.

Councilman Boney also cited the importance and quality of the artwork that has been displayed in the Gallery Houses. He felt that the Sacred Geometry exhibit had made a lasting impression on neighborhood residents, and had drawn a mix of people into the area. He noted that both Anglo and Hispanic artists had been included in PRH and felt this was good for the community. He emphasized the importance of introducing art that community residents would not otherwise see, especially art which offers African-Americans various interpretations of their culture. He felt PRH has revitalized the neighborhood, and he recognized the need for someone at the City level to “marry” the funding categories to the PRH approach in order to better support the project.

Organization and Leadership

From its beginning, when Rick Lowe was working in relative isolation toward a personal vision, PRH has grown into a thriving



Deborah Grotfeldt, Executive Director, and Rick Lowe, Founder

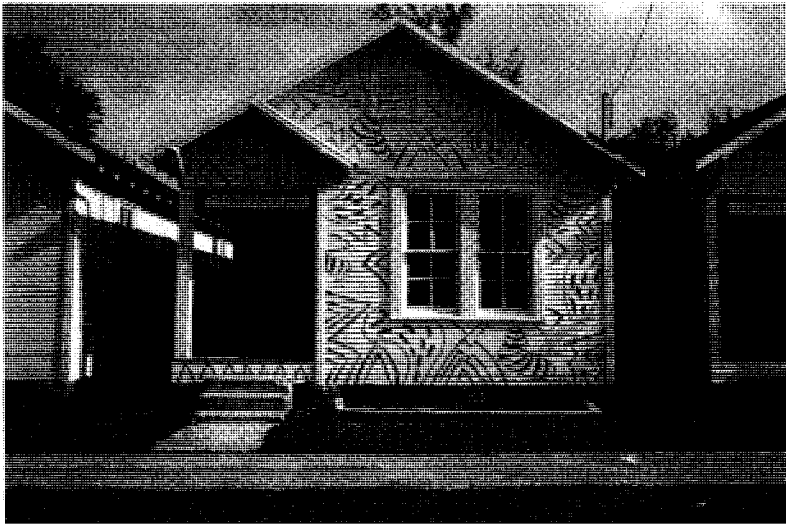
organization. As Founding Director, Rick Lowe continues to define and strengthen the vision of PRH, particularly with respect to the art program. Executive Director Deborah Grotfeldt also oversees activities pertaining to programs, funding, legal issues, administration and organization. Additional staff is now involved in managing the YMRP and other PRH programs. Major funders with whom we spoke mentioned that they were comfortable in contributing to PRH because they had confidence in Lowe and Grotfeldt.

Other significant leadership resides in the Board of Directors. The creation of the Board in 1994 was a critical step, as it has brought together leaders from the Houston business and art community in support of PRH. The board includes business leaders, attorneys, neighborhood leaders, and representatives of Houston’s major art institutions, all of whom have lent their professional expertise and/or financial support to the program. The Board is sufficiently diverse to include people with experience in both the arts and in social programming, giving it a valuable depth of expertise.

Project Row Houses Today: The Components of the Project

Eight Gallery Houses: The Art Program

The nature and quality of the art displayed in the Gallery Houses, and the relationship of the artists to the Third Ward community, are central to understanding Project Row Houses. PRH brings art to the community with the objective of engaging people where they are— and for many residents it is their first contact with art. Seven houses provide gallery spaces where regional and national artists are commissioned to work for a six month period to create some specific work, and make themselves available to the community for workshops and interactive discussions. The eighth house, the Project Gallery, provides short term exhibition space for community artists. The first show in Project Gallery House fea-

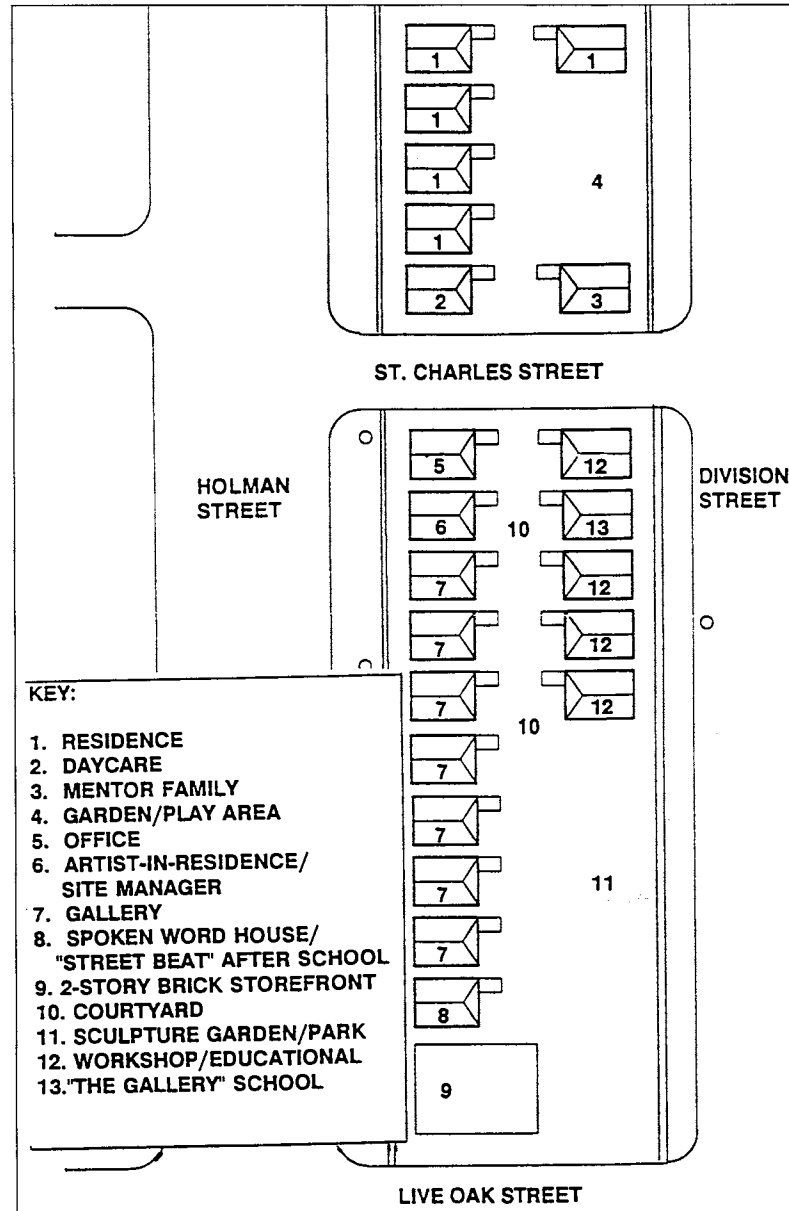


An early installation entitled "Tribal Markings" by Floyd Newsum included the exterior of the gallery house.

tured the work of 17 year old Angelbert Metoyer, who worked with PRH artists to develop a portfolio which resulted in scholarship offers to several major art schools.

Artists are selected on the merit of their work and their plans for interaction with the community. Each artist creates an art statement within the house—sometimes hanging a show, sometimes creating a total environment which may even include the exterior of the house. In addition, each artist schedules a series of workshops during which the artist interacts with local residents. PRH tries to have a range of artists in each round, including at least one nationally or internationally known artist, one or two from the broader region, and others from the local community. The artists develop installations and cultural activities for adults and youth, including neighborhood teenagers who are sometimes paid to serve as artist's assistants and tour docents. Each artist receives a stipend of \$2,000 plus \$500 for materials and travel.

Jessica Cussick at the Cultural Arts Council underscored the



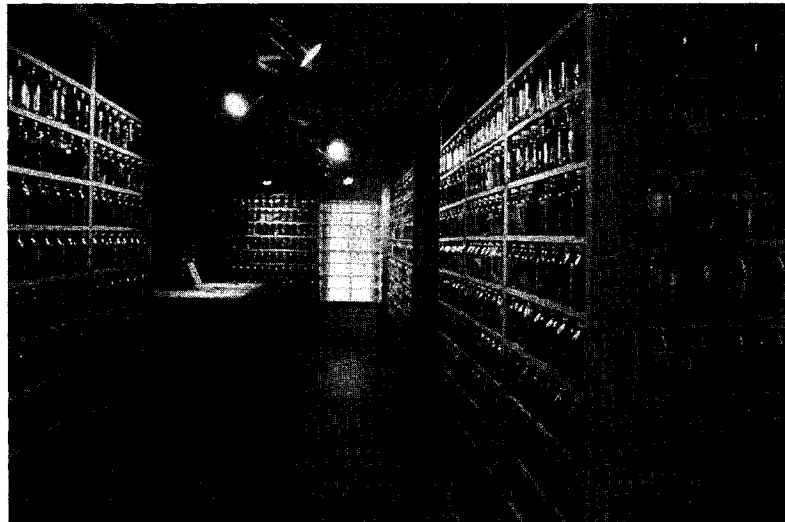
Project Row Houses site plan



Detail from Third Ward Archive

fact that people from the Houston arts community and others throughout the City regularly attend events and exhibitions at PRH. She also stated that PRH attracts “fabulous” artists and “has been consistently uncompromising about the quality of art they exhibit; that is a real strength of the project. People are seeing “tough art” which makes them think.”

It is integral to the concept of PRH that the art displayed and installed in the Gallery Houses be of high quality, thought provoking, and powerful



Tracey Hicks' installation, “Third Ward Archive,” is a photographic record of Third Ward personal histories.

enough to attract people with many kinds of interests and backgrounds. The installations showcase major contributions of African-American artists to the American art scene, and model African-American achievement. Two PRH artists were subsequently selected for the Whitney Biennial. It is an ambitious agenda that PRH has established, but one which appears to be working.

Young Mothers' Residential Program (YMRP)

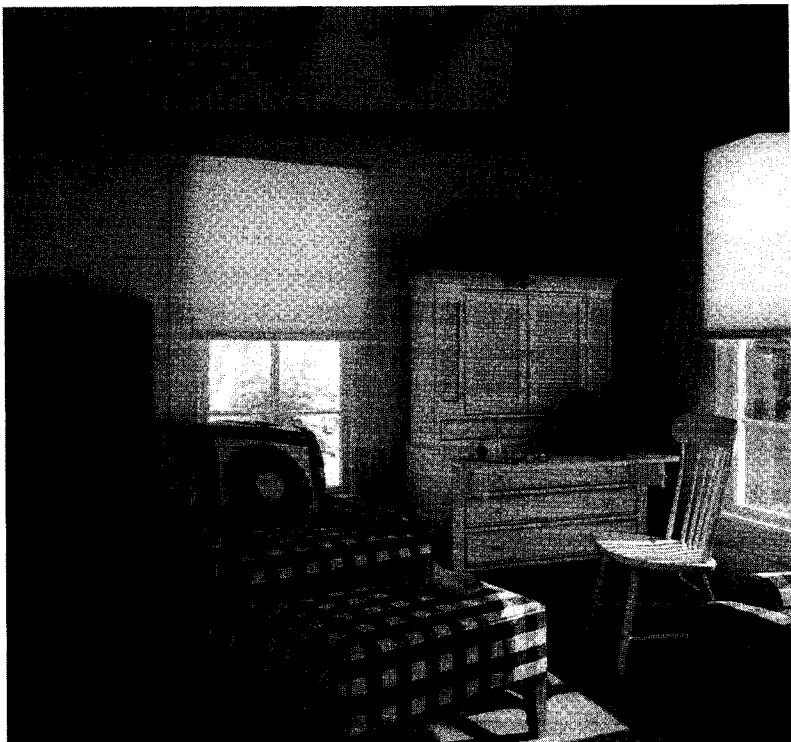
Located in seven houses down the street from the Gallery Houses, the YMRP provides residences for single mothers between the ages of 17 and 24 and their children for a one year period while they pursue educational goals, work, and learn parenting and life skills. The program includes one day care house, one mentor house, and five residences, each decorated and furnished by a local interior decorator. The residential program was initially conceived of by Deborah Grotfeldt, who saw the need for such a program for young African-American women in the community. Lowe and Grotfeldt brought in Dr. Nelda Lewis, a Third Ward native and PRH neighbor, who holds a MSW and a Ph.D. in child development and family living, to direct the program.

A team of people developed the YMRP concept which is based upon the precept that in order to provide quality care for their children, the young mothers must develop respect for themselves. To be selected for the YMRP, which gives each of the young mothers one of the furnished residences for a one year period, the young women must be enrolled in school and must have jobs, which may be outside PRH or in the office, the day care center or the after-school program.

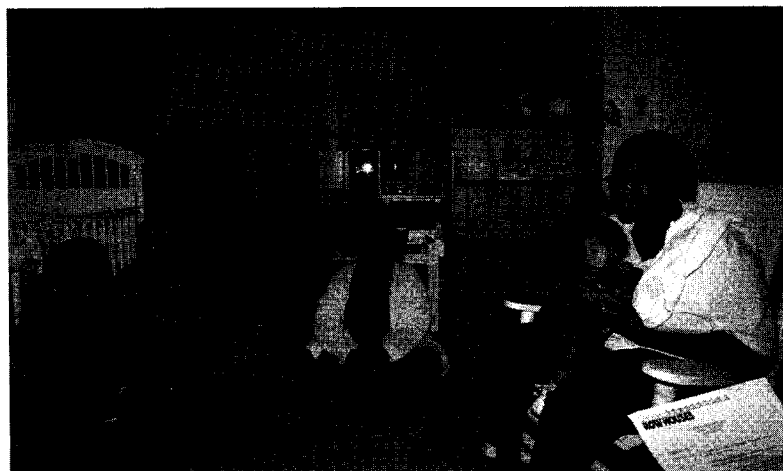
Sheila Heimbinder, of the Heimbinder Foundation and a PRH Board member, now works on the staff of the YMRP program, evaluating and strengthening the program, with a particular emphasis on expanding the relationship between the program and the Third Ward. She is working with SHAPE Community Center

to integrate PRH mothers into the ongoing SHAPE parenting program and, conversely, to invite and include more community mothers in the life skills training offered at PRH.

At the time of the site visit, two of the young mothers were completing their year long program, and three were about halfway through it. The site visit team spent an evening with the young women who spoke about the climate of mutual support in the program and how it allowed them to develop trust, and a sense of community. Each woman felt YMRP had made a major difference in her life; one had made the Dean's list in her pre-med college work at University of Houston and another was learning child care skills working in the YMRP daycare program.



One of the YMRP houses, decorated by a local Houston interior designer

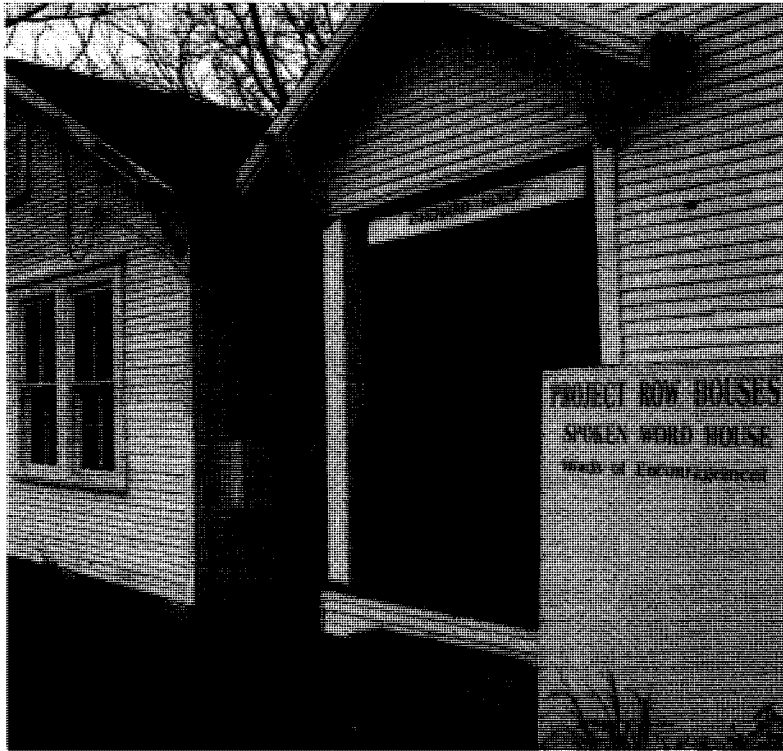


Some of the young mothers currently living at Project Row Houses

Spoken Word House (SWH)

The artist-in-residence at SWH at the time of the visit was African-American video artist Angela Williamston. The house is a media resource center designed to offer opportunity for at-risk youth and adults, and at the same time to provide a support base for multimedia artists who lack resources and facilities to realize their creative vision. SWH houses a music, CD-ROM, and video library as well as a computer, video, and drama production lab. The goal of SWH is to provide a platform for media literacy and community building through exposure to television production and interactive learning.

Angela reported that recently young Latinos who had never been in the Third Ward had been participating in some of the music productions. As she put it, "Music is a universal, colorless language that unites all kinds of people in a groove." Al, a young poet who spoke with us, said the visibility and focus of activity at Spoken Word House was "a pretty cool deal."



Front entry of The Spoken Word House

Sisters in Positive Progress House

This house supports a program designed to address self-esteem and entrepreneurship for African-American women. The House of Nefertiti Gift Shop provides an outlet for sale of crafts produced by neighborhood women, and the house is also a gathering spot for women to discuss cultural and gender issues. Sisters in Positive Progress also sponsors workshops addressing small business development, health, and education.

Day Care

Day care is provided on site for YMRP and for other neighborhood children. Some of the young mothers are employed in the

program, and an effort is made to hire Third Ward residents as day care providers.

Street Beat After School/Summer Program

The after-school program serves up to 20 neighborhood children age 6–12. The curriculum is interdisciplinary, and includes tutoring, improved speaking and creative/technical writing skills, African-American history and culture, photography, drum playing, and the like. The goal is to provide the children with individual attention, and to strengthen and reinforce critical thinking skills.

Ted Williams, a neighborhood resident whose children are in the program, spoke about how the children's work in school has improved as a result of the program and what a positive impact the program has had on his community

Community Garden

The community garden is located at the end of the gallery block, behind the houses facing Holman Street. It was launched in collaboration with Urban Harvest, who raised funds to establish the garden where five houses had been torn down. PRH hired a Third Ward resident to coordinate planting and maintenance. Produce is available to anyone in the community who wants to harvest it.

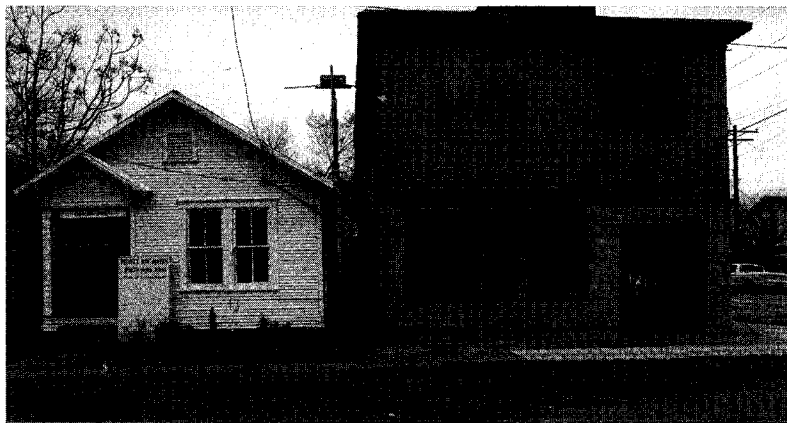
Current Projects and Future Plans

PRH has a number of new initiatives in progress and on the drawing board. Acquisition of the corner site is complete and plans to rehabilitate the building are underway. The building will house a coffee house/gathering space for visitors and community residents, additional performing arts space, and offices for the growing PRH staff.

In addition, the acquisition of vacant land behind the YMRP is now being completed, through the combination of a loan from the Heim binder Family Foundation, and a charitable contribution of a portion of land cost by the present owner. This site will ac-

commodate additional housing which is being designed on an updated row house model by Nonya Grenader's Rice University Workshop, whose students will also build one house. There has been preliminary discussion about tailoring this housing to the needs of the local elderly population, or alternatively to artist housing. However it is used, this housing is intended to provide an income stream for PRH.

The long-term goal of PRH is to continue to add property and programs as feasible, until the bulk of the adjacent vacant properties on the block have been acquired. Some of the program directions which are currently being considered for the future include larger facilities for day care, housing where visiting artists could live on-site and teach in the community for a period of time, housing for older residents who could assist in the day care program, and expanded performance facilities. An improved level of cooperation from the City of Houston will be important to PRH as they move forward, as the City can provide critical assistance in securing vacant tracts of land adjoining the site.



The dilapidated building adjacent to Project Row Houses was recently purchased.

The rapid development and success of PRH has inspired formation of a national organization which will be based at Project Row Houses and which will provide technical assistance to projects interested in utilizing the PRH model. In their own words, "PRH is establishing a national model for reclamation of inner-city neighborhoods with art as a catalyst to stimulate constructive dialogue addressing cultural, educational and social issues." This organization would be eligible for different funding sources than those available to PRH. Dialogue has already begun in four locations: Dallas, the Watts area of Los Angeles, East St. Louis, and Birmingham. The Dallas project involves development of community exhibit space at the Juanita Craft Museum. The Watts House Project is oriented to renovation of residential units surrounding Watts Towers for living and working space for artists. In East St. Louis African-American dancer-choreographer Katherine Dunham is seeking to establish an arts center involving local historic buildings, and in Birmingham the challenge is to develop a cultural arts complex with artist-in-residence programs in another area of row houses. PRH has recently approached the Rockefeller Foundation for funding for the national initiative.



Plans for a new performing arts and community meeting space that will replace the corner building.

Assessing Project Success

How Well Project Row Houses is Meeting its own Goals

The initial goal of PRH was to exhibit the work of African-American artists in order to reconnect their art with the African-American community, contributing to community revitalization. The art program has been established and is now in its fourth round of artist installations, having displayed the work of 32 artists in all, 30 of whom are African-American. The artwork, together with the community workshops, is serving an educational purpose and strengthening the community's identification with its African-American heritage. PRH has attracted artists with national reputations.

PRH has shown the ability to identify and respond to the Third Ward and has established programs which support the community. The evolution of PRH reflects an ability to remain flexible and to establish quality programs as the need arises. It will be important for PRH, however, to establish and maintain priorities, as there are many community issues and needs which must remain beyond the scope of the project.

Response to Selection Committee Questions and Concerns

- *Does PRH change the community vision of itself? Does the Third Ward now feel like a special place?*

PRH has clearly made an effort to become an integral part of the Third Ward. Relationships with SHAPE Community Center and the Trinity Baptist church are strong, and current residents attest to the good effect it has had on the neighborhood. Former Third Ward residents who have become community leaders are now board members and have become re-involved in the neighborhood through PRH. Dr. Lewis, and Board President James England, both of whom are Third Ward natives, speak with excitement about the positive effect of PRH on their old neighborhood. A new spirit of pride and excite-

ment in what has long been a neglected neighborhood is exemplified by the neighborhood resident and transit worker who stops his bus at PRH to call it to the attention of his passengers.

PRH alone, however, is not capable of solving the complex problems of the Third Ward. By continuing to strengthen the cultural identity and pride of place in the neighborhood, however, it could well become a catalyst for other revitalization. On its modest scale PRH is making an important contribution to the character and self-image of the Third Ward.

- *Is PRH a real place, not just a display?*

The architectural integrity of the row houses has been preserved, and they remain modest in scale and level of finish. While the art program attracts many visitors to the site, the residential, day care, and after-school programs make PRH a real, working place, and further integrate it into the community.

- *How has PRH affected the business community?*

PRH has interacted with the business community in two ways. It has secured the active participation and support of civic and business leaders who serve on the PRH board, contributing time and financial support. The board includes individuals from the corporate and financial sectors, the legal profession, and local government, as well as the arts community.

In addition, Amoco and Chevron have "adopted" PRH as part of their corporate giving programs, continuing to offer significant ongoing volunteer support, amounting to over one hundred thousand dollars in "in kind services" annually. PRH depends upon the efforts of these volunteers to accomplish much of its building and rehabilitation work and to provide ongoing maintenance. Through this effort, volunteers from many other communities have been introduced to the neighborhood.

- *Who is walking down the street? What is the feeling of the neighborhood?*

The Third Ward is a residential area with several important centers of activity, including PRH, SHAPE Community Center, Trinity United Methodist Church and several retail streets at its edges. Housing is run down, and other evidence of unemployment is visible. Nevertheless, the one story wood houses with mature trees and plantings add character and make the neighborhood feel welcoming.

The streets around PRH are peopled by a mix of adults, children, and older residents, as well as visitors to PRH. In a community that is 98% African-American, residents are becoming accustomed to the relatively new phenomenon of visitors from other communities arriving at PRH. People from all over Houston and beyond come to see the gallery installations and to meet well known artists, making PRH and the Third Ward a significant art destination in Houston.

- *How real are they? Is this one person's vision or is there an organization growing here?*

Initially, PRH was the vision of Rick Lowe who conceived and manages the art program. With the hiring of Deborah Grotfeldt, the appointment of the board of directors, and the addition of the Young Mothers' Program, PRH has evolved and is now "owned" by a diverse and committed group of professionals and supporters. Staff, board members, people in city government including the mayor, the corporate world, and the Third Ward community all take pride in their involvement with PRH.

- *Is the project financially stable?*

PRH operates on a relatively short funding horizon, and its board recognizes their vulnerability in this respect. On the other hand, PRH has been effective in procuring the funding it needs to sustain itself and to grow. Several hundred thousand dollars have been received in grants from various foundations,

and an additional \$130,000 in loans from the Heimbinder Foundation. Despite operating costs which are growing as programs expand, PRH has a secure funding base for the upcoming year.

Plans include development of housing which is intended to provide a modest but steady revenue stream to the project. As PRH grows and evolves, it will be critical to develop additional sources of long term funding and to begin to develop a source of stable investment capital in order to assure project security.

- *Is the project connected to a network of support in the community? In City government? In the business community?*

PRH depends for support upon a network of philanthropic and nonprofit funding entities, some providing renewable funding sources, others one-time grants. Among its major supporters are the Cultural Arts Council of Houston, the NEA, the Houston Endowment, and the Heimbinder Foundation. Corporations such as Amoco, Chevron, MASCO, and US Homes have provided significant volunteer and financial support. The relationship to City government is clearly more complex. The Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County has been a staunch supporter, providing grants over the course of several years. As of the date of the site visit, the Department of Housing and Community Development had not provided funds, despite early indication of their intention to do so.

The art community in Houston, including the major museums and the Menil collection, has been consistently supportive, and has sponsored restoration of several gallery houses.

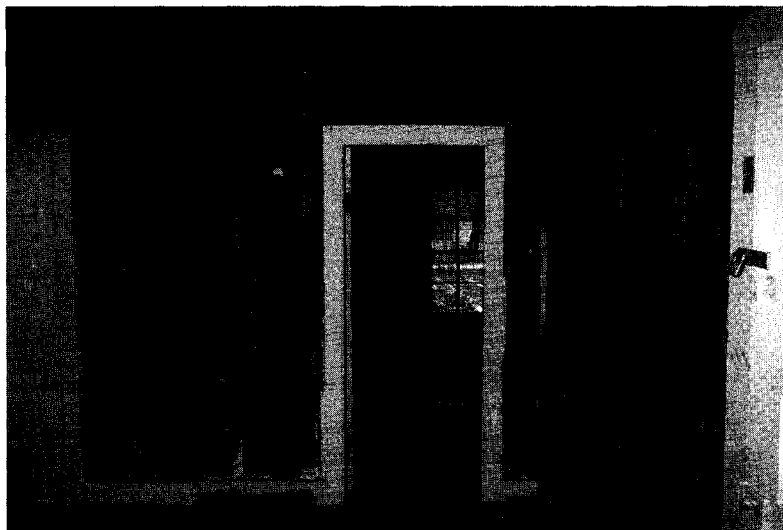
- *What are the spin-offs and current and future plans? Where are they going next? What are they doing in Watts and East St. Louis?*
- PRH has extensive plans for the future. Design and construction assistance has been procured for the new performing arts/ coffee bar building on the corner. Adjacent land next to the

YMRP is under agreement, and designs are proceeding for new housing for the elderly and visiting artists. Acquisition of additional land is being actively discussed, and city assistance is being sought. PRH is also lending expertise to other inner-city neighborhoods who wish to use art as catalyst to stimulate community revitalization. Initiatives in Birmingham, Alabama; Los Angeles; and East St. Louis are currently underway. (See Future Plans.)

Impact on Neighborhood and Community

PRH has a multi-layered relationship with the Third Ward. The diversity of programming, from the Gallery Houses to the Young Mothers program, has served to involve many different age groups. In addition, PRH has made an effort to hire Third Ward residents when possible.

Board member James England, Head of Litigation for the Metropolitan Transit Authority, is a Third Ward native who lends



"Echo" by Whitfield Lovell features charcoal drawings suggesting early row house residents.

his legal expertise to the project. As a former resident of the area, Mr. England feels PRH had been "tremendously important" for the neighborhood. He noted that it was remarkable that with computers, fax machines and other expensive equipment in the project, it had never been vandalized or burglarized.

Values Reflected in PRH and its Development Processes

PRH grew out of the desire on the part of African-American artists led by Rick Lowe to reconnect their art to the African-American community. That remains the underlying mission of the arts program at PRH. Other programs such as the Young Mothers' Residential Program have evolved in response to PRH's commitment to retain the flexibility to respond to community needs, and reflect an expanded sense of mission and values.

Leadership Effectiveness

Rick Lowe's vision and Deborah Grotfeldt's skill in administration and fund-raising have taken PRH from vision to reality, creating an arts center, a transitional housing program, and a center for day care, after-school care and entrepreneurial training and development. Together Lowe and Grotfeldt have overcome considerable obstacles and made PRH into an innovative center, true to its original goals. PRH is growing, however, and it is no longer feasible to have only two people run it. Third Ward residents are currently being trained to manage many of the day-to-day activities.

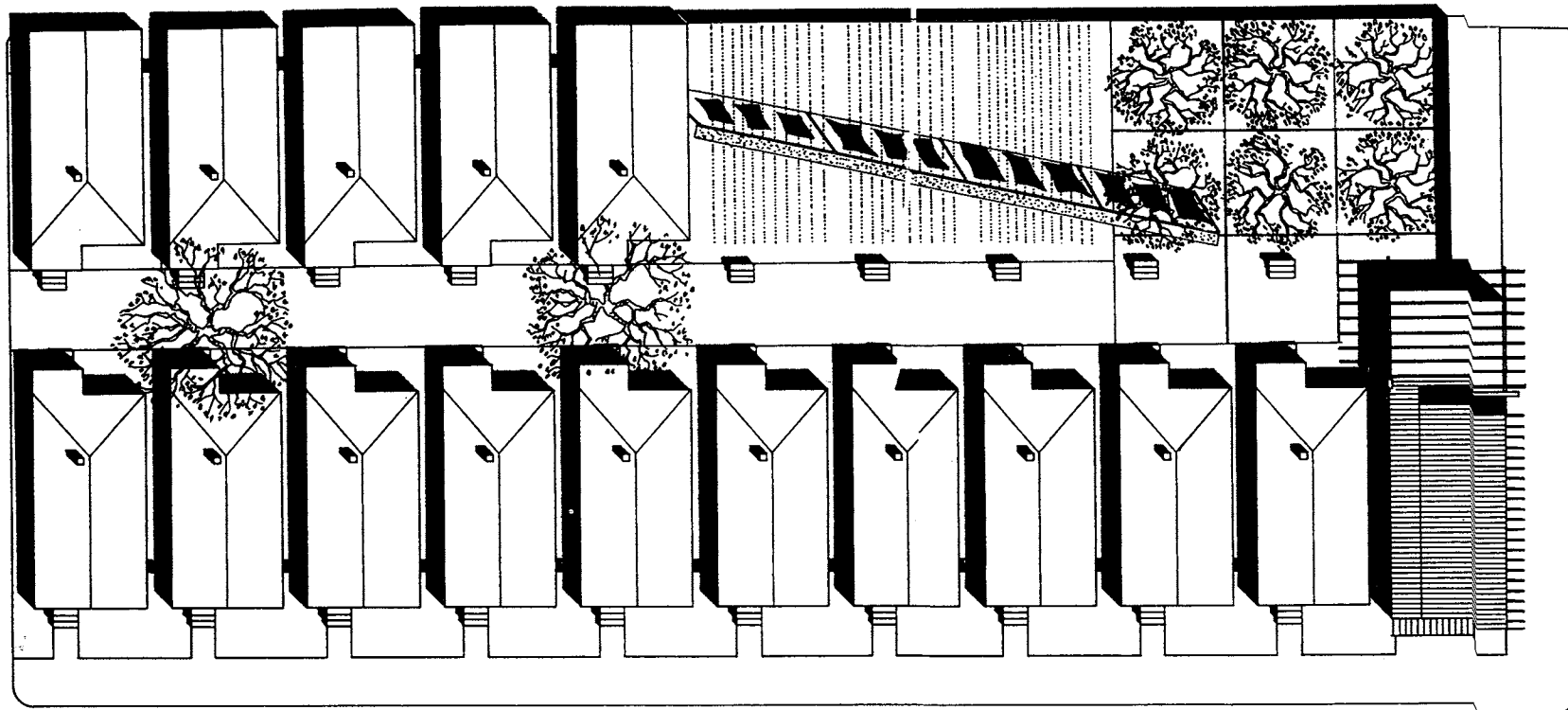
The Board of Directors for PRH is dedicated and extremely active. The Board has representation from the corporate, philanthropic, and political sectors, and is ready and willing to provide PRH with policy direction, fund-raising support, and financial oversight. The long-term viability of PRH is enhanced by the involvement and expertise at the Board level.

Prospects for Sustainability

While the project has grown and now seems relatively stable, it is by no means secure. Up to now, PRH has been successful in attracting funds to purchase the row house property and to operate an array of programs in a relatively small physical space. As PRH gains momentum and a demonstrated history, its ability to attract funding may improve. In addition, it appears likely that the City of Houston will work with PRH to help them access funds available for neighborhood revitalization. The increased visibility of the project in Houston has also set the stage for upcoming fund-raising programs, including extending sponsor-

ship to include all 22 houses and the staging of a gala evening event sponsored by the Board.

In order to reduce its dependence on annually renewed and one-time sources of “soft money,” PRH hopes that new housing will provide a modest income stream, as will future expansion schemes. The formation of a separate entity through which PRH will work in other locations throughout the country to help municipalities and start-up projects adapt the PRH model is another potential source of income in the long term, and has already attracted the attention of the Rockefeller Foundation. In the final analysis, however, as more short term goals continue to be realized, a long term goal of the project will be to develop an endow-



Gallery House block with future performing arts space and courtyard behind

ment or source of capital which will provide long-term financial security for Project Row Houses.

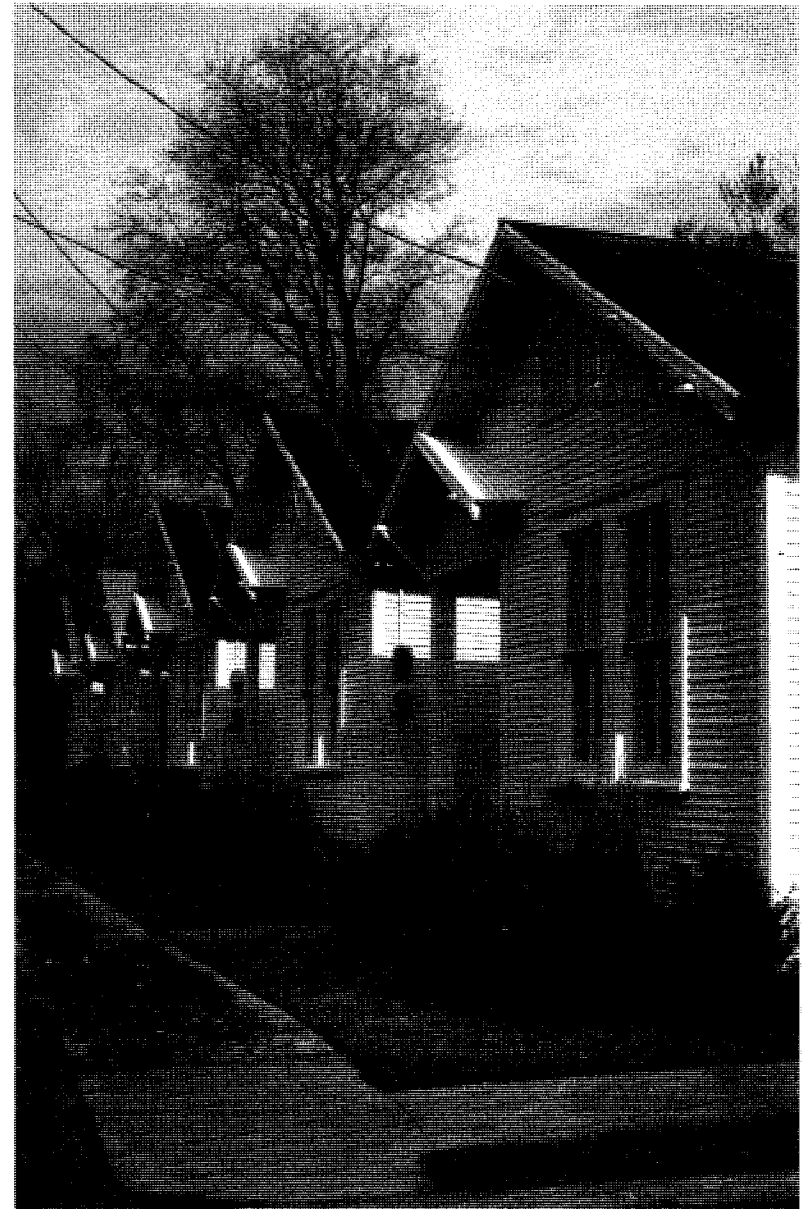
Selection Committee Comments

Project Row Houses was recognized by every member of the Selection Committee as an innovative and important project. There was a strong feeling that PRH raised important issues about the place of art in community revitalization, in building pride in African-American artistic accomplishment, and the potential of art in engaging different groups of people across traditional barriers.

The fact that PRH has made the city establishment “uncomfortable” was considered by the Selection Committee to be an asset for two reasons. On the one hand, it was felt that the discomfort arose in part from the fact that PRH was a true grass roots organization, operating outside the accepted channels of government process. This fact relates to its broad community support and the flexibility and responsiveness that the project has maintained, allowing it to change and respond to community needs.

The committee also felt that the tension with the city was due in part to PRH’s unique blend of art, art-based workshops, Young Mothers’ Residential Program, and other programs, which together did not conform to any pre-established funding slots and implicitly challenged traditional urban revitalization funding practices. This suggests an innovative model which may well be ahead of traditional funding patterns in its approach to urban problems.

The simple physical beauty of Project Row Houses was also commended by the committee. One member noted that she was happy to see that buildings that would not normally be preserved had been restored in a way that was respectful of their classical proportions and architectural integrity. She felt it would have been easy to diminish the aesthetic quality of the buildings



Holman Street elevation of Young Mothers Residential Program houses

because they are small, but instead a remarkable and beautiful place had been created.

Most of the questions about PRH related to its relative newness. While all of the project components, especially the art project, were commended for their originality and potential in community revitalization, the committee felt it was too early to judge the lasting impact of PRH and its programs. The image used by the committee is that it is still a bit fragile, a “butterfly,” and that the lasting effects of Project Row Houses will become clear in time.



Detail from “The Third Ward Archive”

For more information

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