

Houston Set to Expand Ideson Library Based on Cram's Original Intentions

H O U S T O N Eighty-four years after opening as Houston's Central Library, the Julia Ideson Building will finally be completed according to the plans of its original architect, Ralph Adams Cram. Dedicated in 1926 and named for the city librarian who pressured for a new facility to replace the Carnegie Library of 1904, the Ideson Building is about to undergo restoration by Gensler's Houston office.

Cram's use of the plateresque style of the early Spanish Renaissance for the library was, like his composite Eastern Mediterranean confection at Rice University, a personal choice of an appropriate style to reflect the area's traditions and climate. His design for the downtown library was originally intended as a picturesque composition of a main block oriented east-west with a projecting wing to the west and another wing to the south that defined several fenced gardens. However, the west wing was eventually shortened and the south wing was never built.

The library was planned as the cornerstone for a new civic center designed in a belated City Beautiful mode by Hare and Hare of Kansas City, Mo. The 1925 scheme arranged several court buildings and a city-county administrative building around a long reflecting pool. Today, the only remnants are the Ideson Building, the 1939 City Hall, and the reflecting pool.

With Cram's drawings at hand, Gensler's lead architect, Barry Moore, FAIA, has fashioned a strategy that will realize the south wing that was never built. While the exterior facades will duplicate the intended originals, the new inter-

ior spaces will house state-of-the-art archive storage and work areas for staff and the public. With much of the library materials moved to high-density shelving in the new wing, the grand lobbies and reading rooms of the historic building will be opened up for additional new uses like special events, receptions, and exhibits. The new south wing will also enclose one of Cram's gardens, an outdoor space that was never developed but now will be accessible from the reading rooms and used for events.

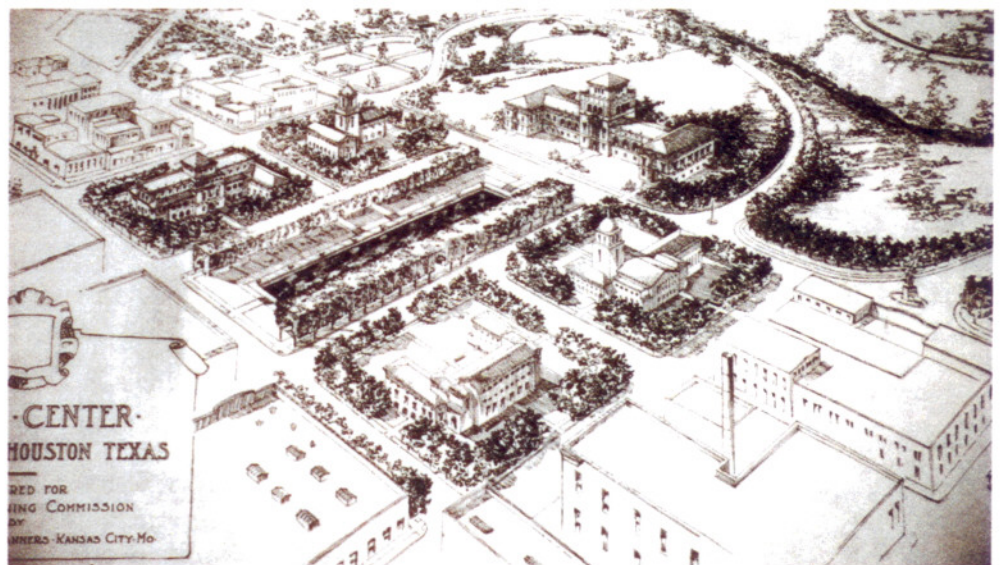
The library has had previous renovations, first in 1958 by Louis Glover that infilled arched loggias with windows, removed lobby arcades, and installed suspended ceilings to cover duct-

work. A renovation by S.I. Morris Associates in 1979 reversed many of these intrusions and restored original floors, woodwork, and plaster details. The new Central Library, designed by Morris and completed in 1975, on the block to the west took over the general library operations that year and the Ideson was then dedicated to the city's archives as the library system's Metropolitan Research Center. Gensler's new restoration will return the facades and all the public spaces to their 1926 appearance. In addition, the project will bring the building up to code, especially for handicapped accessibility.

Although the Texas Historical Commission has approved the project, the decision to reconstruct the never-built south wing technically runs counter to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Restoration. Known as the "Ten Commandments" of preservation, those federal standards state that "designs that were never executed historically will not be constructed."

The construction cost, estimated at \$25 million, will be funded by private donations and an \$8 million city contribution. Seeded with an initial contribution of \$2 million by Phoebe and Bobby Tudor, the non-profit Julia Ideson Library Preservation Partners was formed to raise funds. Construction is expected to start this summer, with the library's rededication planned for late 2010.

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(top left) The expansion will be at the back of the building. (above) Hare and Hare proposed this plan for the Houston Civic Center, with the Julia Ideson Building shown at far left.