

THE MENIL COLLECTION

Neighborhood Preservation & Development Strategy



A Neighborhood of Art

The Menil Collection has launched a comprehensive preservation and development program for its 30-acre neighborhood. The three-pronged strategy coordinates investment in the museum, landscape, and residential properties to strengthen the campus experience, adding value to the Menil's assets. The strategy will create new museum spaces, expand and rejuvenate the landscape, restore the historic bungalow properties, and create important new single and multifamily residential buildings. This initiative carries forward more than 25 years of stewardship and design leadership by the Menil. The Menil's goal is to affirm its campus's distinction as a contemporary neighborhood of art that contributes to the rich tapestry of urban life.





The Museum

Recognized as one of the world's major art museums, the Menil maintains an exceptional collection of modern and contemporary art; objects from the classical Mediterranean civilizations; Byzantine and medieval devotional works; and artworks by the indigenous peoples of Africa, the Pacific Islands, and the Pacific Northwest. The main museum building, by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and separate single-artist galleries testify to the Menil's standards for curatorial innovation and architectural design leadership. Following the lead of the founders, the Menil Collection will develop the new art buildings proposed in David Chipperfield's Master Site Plan while maintaining the intimate residential nature of this evolving neighborhood.

Urban Context: The Landscape

Appreciation of the Menil Collection is inextricable from the experience of its urban context. That environment is shaped by the surrounding landscape and buildings. Menil Park, with its Mark di Suvero sculpture, is one of Houston's most cherished open spaces. The landscape establishes the peaceful and contemplative nature of the campus. The Menil will restore and upgrade this defining feature of its neighborhood. The landscape must be reinforced as the connecting element that binds the Menil's distinct buildings into a unified neighborhood of art.





The Neighborhood

Bungalows from the 1920s and 1930s and small multifamily buildings compose the Menil neighborhood's serene setting, housing museum offices, private residences, and fellow arts organizations. Preservation of the bungalows has been central to the mission of the Menil since the museum's inception. Substantial reinvestment in the bungalows is required to secure their future. This multimillion dollar commitment, when combined with the replacement of significantly deteriorated non-historic properties, will uplift the neighborhood as a whole. Non-historic properties will be replaced by buildings of various sizes, each expressing the Menil's commitment to architecture of the highest design integrity while providing a range of opportunities for residential life.

The Plan

For a quarter of a century, people from Houston and around the world have honored the Menil Collection and its campus as the fusion of a great international art museum with a green and walkable urban neighborhood. Now the Menil is expanding its offerings for the next generation of visitors through a unified approach to investment in the museum, its landscape and its residential properties.

The Menil's Neighborhood Preservation and Development Strategy provides a framework for the institution to draw on Houston's dynamic growth as an economic and cultural hub. Maintaining the qualities for which it is admired while gradually transforming its campus into a more active, somewhat denser urban neighborhood, the Menil can become a model for new development in the city and contribute significantly to Houston's well-positioned creative economy. In turn, neighborhood investment can help sustain the Menil Collection itself by continuing to provide essential real estate income.

Campus Plan



- New or Improved Landscape
- Museum Exhibition and Administration
- Rental Properties
- New Development
- New Development II
- New Development III

Restoration Needs and Opportunity

The Opportunity

The Menil's artistic program is a major contributor to Houston's thriving creative culture. Non-profit arts tenants across the campus amplify this impact. Yet while the city's arts economy has boomed, that value has yet to accrue to the Menil's neighborhood properties, whose condition has deteriorated. Significant investment from multiple sources is required to stem further decline and restore the campus. That investment, including private capital, can also transform vacant lots and obsolete properties into new centers of residential life.

Houston's Dynamic Creativity

According to the September 2012 Houston Arts Survey released by the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University:

"The importance of the arts for Houston goes well beyond their entertainment value. The arts are also an economic powerhouse, a critical component along with energy, health, and trade in contributing to the prosperity of the Houston region....In addition, a flourishing arts community in Houston will play a vital role in helping the region build a successful, equitable, inclusive, and united multiethnic future."

The Menil as an institution already fuels this powerhouse for Houston. Investment in its campus can both expand this impact and leverage the value created by the arts.

Market Context

A strong multifamily residential market and increasing demand for inner-city living support this opportunity. The Montrose neighborhood, which is adjacent to the Menil campus, is already well known for its walkability, restaurants, and offbeat charm. The American Planning Association has designated it one of the nation's Great Places. Recent and planned investments in the larger Menil neighborhood – both City investments in public transit and significant private investments in the Rice University campus, the Museum District, and Hermann Park – also will drive interest in the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Investment

Expansion of the museum program and restoration of the Menil's surroundings under the Neighborhood Preservation and Development Strategy position the institution to leverage the strong Montrose residential market and the growing visibility of the arts city-wide. This program of investment will generate the gradual transformation of the campus into a more lively, arts-focused urban neighborhood that reflects the Menil's intellectual and artistic origins.



Examples of deteriorating properties needing revitalization



Museum

The Menil's Master Site Plan details a plan for a 40% increase in museum and operations space over time. Implementation is now underway. For the first phase, the Menil selected architects Johnston Marklee to design a groundbreaking new Drawing Institute housing and exhibiting the Menil's important collection of modern and contemporary drawings and serving as a center for the study of that medium. The Drawing Institute is the first in a group of new structures that will house art, provide visitor amenities such as a café, and support museum operations. These venues will increase the museum's offerings to the public.

"The design of the Drawing Institute evolved from the historic surroundings, mediating between the scales of the domestic neighborhood, the landscape, and the future expansion of the campus."

Mark Lee, Johnston Marklee, Architect of the Menil Drawing Institute



Existing and Planned Museum Buildings



● Museum Exhibition and Administration

Landscape

The Menil campus is fluid, elegantly synthesizing the intimate scale and eclectic character of the neighborhood, the subtlety of the architecture and a collection of irregular open spaces. The blend of an informal landscape with the highly refined architecture reflects the unique and inspired curatorial sensibility that lies at the heart of the Menil Collection. The planned intervention within this landscape will stay true to that spirit, respecting both the residential context as well as the qualities of the Menil to make the campus a richer and more vibrant version of itself.

The primary components of proposed landscape improvement and new construction are lighting, pavement, seating, planting, and outdoor sculpture. Revitalization of these elements will promote a sense of continuity across the site while also supporting variations unique to the needs of each area of the campus. Around the main museum building and Menil Park, site improvements will be subtle, enhancing their function without fundamentally altering their character. At the campus entrance at West Alabama Street, a more significant transformation is called for to create a threshold that is clear, welcoming, and on par with the rest of the campus.

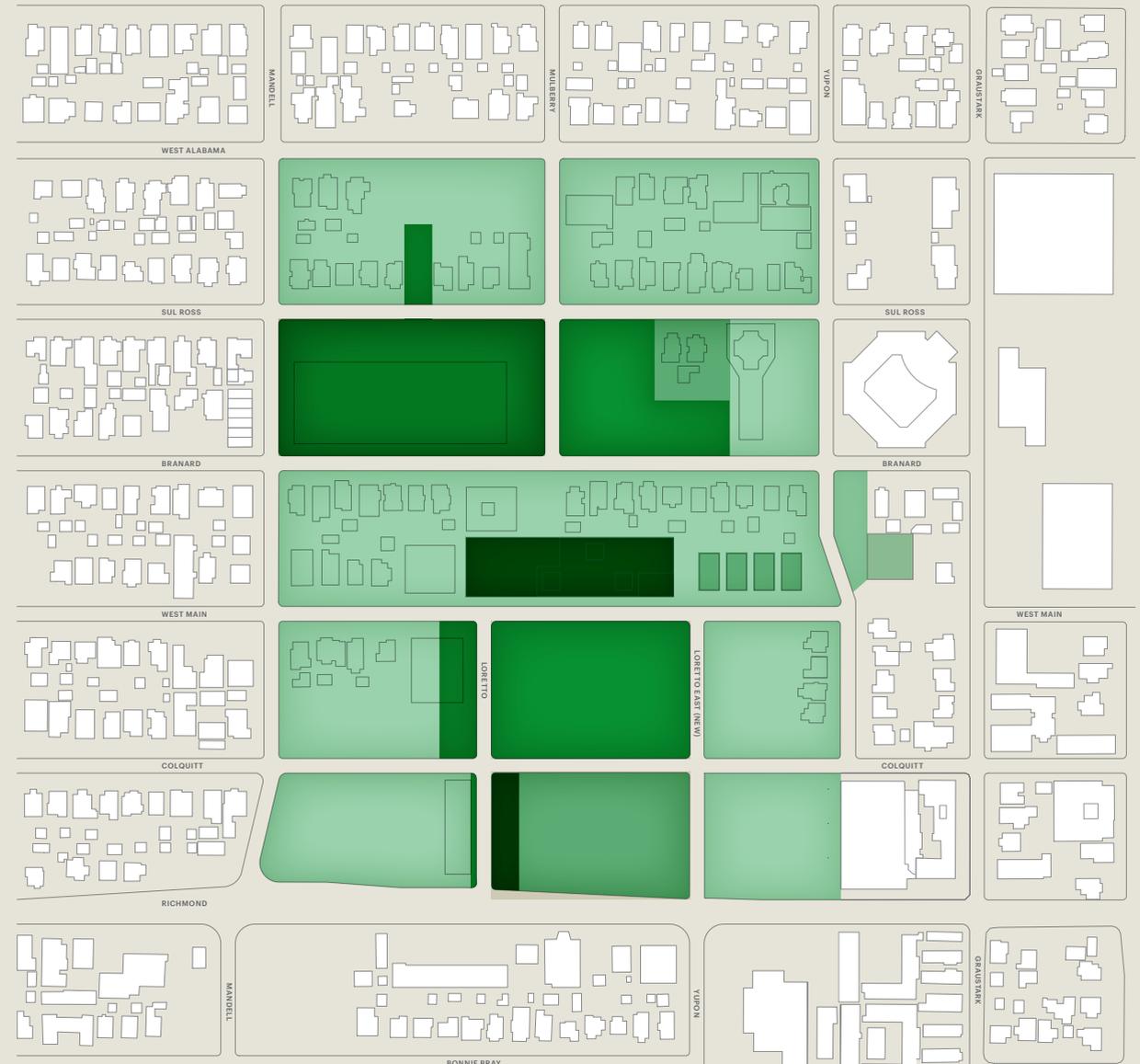
A major new park will connect the north half of the campus to future museum buildings and developments to the south. This new open space is an exciting opportunity to expand the Menil's mission, bringing the museum experience into the landscape and creating a versatile social space for the larger community.

“There is a wonderful openness in the idea of this place; it is manifest in the openness of the landscape. This is a campus that you move into and out of and through seamlessly, ultimately feeling very welcomed in the process.”

*Michael Van Valkenburgh,
Landscape Architect*



Existing and Planned Landscape



● New or Improved Landscape

Neighborhood Restoration & Redevelopment

Within Houston, the virtual absence of zoning has led to a scarcity of historically intact neighborhoods. The Menil's stewardship has provided for the continuity of the campus's modest bungalow tradition and intimate scale into the 21st century, defined by the integration of preservation with newer, innovative architecture.

The Menil owns two distinctly different types of rental properties: pre-war bungalows and post-war multifamily dwelling units. The classic bungalows – particularly those adjacent to or visible from the main museum building – are the primary focus of the preservation plan. The scale and proportion of the exterior porches, the oversized thresholds and window openings, and the light-gray palette will be treated as an architectural guide for the preservation and restoration of these buildings.

A few of the Menil's properties are not pre-war bungalows, lack distinguishing architectural features, and require significant capital investment. The Menil is undertaking a gradual process of redevelopment of these properties both in the bungalow vernacular and, in select sites, with more innovative design. To support the Menil's comprehensive vision for the campus, these buildings will achieve a high level of design excellence and significance within the character and intimate scale of the neighborhood.

"The award-winning architecture of the Menil Collection is recognized around the world for its elegance, clarity, and functional excellence. We have the master plan, the designers, the institutional spirit and determination needed to carry forward this tradition."

*Leslie Elkins Sasser,
Chair, Master Site Plan Committee*



Existing and Planned Neighborhood Residential Properties



● Rental Properties

Next Steps

The Menil is committed to a program of investment in its campus to accomplish the goals of the Neighborhood Preservation and Development Strategy. The Menil's commitment to neighborhood improvements, along with the assistance of others, will be substantial – likely tens of millions of dollars over the life of the project. Over the next five years, priority initiatives will include:

- *Construction of the Menil Drawing Institute and a new structure housing campus utilities, designed by Johnston Marklee*
- *A landscape plan, led by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates*
- *Revitalization of bungalows and redevelopment of neighborhood properties*
- *Mixed-use development along Richmond Avenue*

These initiatives, when taken together and implemented as integral parts of a single strategy, will continue the Menil's artistic, cultural and intellectual leadership into the 21st century. New buildings devoted to art, a larger and enhanced landscape, restoration of the historic bungalows, and new development that embodies design excellence will enhance its commitment to an ever evolving neighborhood for art. Brought to fruition by the Menil Collection, real estate developers, designers, government, and others, this Neighborhood Preservation and Development strategy will produce a more vibrant urban precinct that contributes to the dynamism of Houston.



"The Menil is a cultural urban oasis unlike anything else in America. As you go from building to building and gallery to gallery, in a tranquil landscape shaded by magnificent trees, you experience great art as a part of everyday life, in a neighborhood where people live, work, and play."

*Josef Helfenstein, Director,
The Menil Collection*

Advisory services for creation of the Menil Collection's Neighborhood Preservation and Development Strategy were provided by HR&A Advisors (real estate strategy), SHoP Architects (development massings and design guidelines), and Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (landscape concepts).

Cover: ©Michael Heizer
Photo: J. Griffis Smith/TxDOT
Page 1: Hester + Hardaway
Page 2–3: Paul Hester
Page 4–5: David A. Brown
Page 6–7: © Alexander Vertikoff
/ Vertikoff Archive
Page 13: CC Image courtesy of eflon on Flickr
Page 14: Paul Hester
Page 16: David A. Brown
Page 18: © Alexander Vertikoff
/ Vertikoff Archive
Page 22: David A. Brown

