



## Charles Tapley

September 21, 2015

Charles Reilly Tapley, Houston architect, landscape architect, teacher and mentor, and Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, died peacefully after a lengthy illness on Monday, September 21, 2015. Charles was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on August 18, 1931, to Julie Reilly Tapley and John Tapley, both of whom preceded him in death. He is survived by two sons, Robert Reilly Tapley and partner Olga, and Michael Blake Tapley; his brother, John Tapley and wife, Carolyn, nephews, David Tapley and wife, Peggy, Kyle Tapley and wife Ginger, and niece Julie Tapley Booth and husband Paul, as well as great nephews Will Tapley and John Tapley.

Charles's family moved to Houston when he was six years old. He studied architecture at Rice University, graduating in 1955 with both a Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts. While at Rice, he met his beloved wife, journalist Charlotte Louise Millis Tapley, who preceded him in death in 1988. Charles began his architecture career in the office of George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce, then transferred to Hamilton Brown's office, and finally to that of landscape architect Fred Buxton. He became a registered architect in Texas in 1960 and a registered landscape architect in 1970. In 1960, he founded Charles Tapley & Associates, with Charles H. Pagan as partner, and he practiced with different associates until his retirement in 2011. Charles quickly gained a reputation for designing light-filled spaces sensitive to their settings and environment. Charles's involvement with urban planning in the context of nature began with his firm's work on Buffalo Bayou in the early 1970s. He was

profoundly committed to sustainability and environmental preservation and spent much of his career advocating for the incorporation of conservation in design. Charles was the design visionary behind the revitalization of Buffalo Bayou. Everything that has been done in recent years to make the bayou a place that welcomes both people and occasional flooding was imagined in his master plan, the Buffalo Bayou Strategy (1977), developed on a forty-foot-long drawing unrolled on his studio floor.

Charles Tapley initially earned recognition for the design of houses for such clients as Grace David, art collector Joan Fleming, and photographer Gay Block. His sensational transformation of a nondescript house on San Felipe into a shop for rare books, The Bookman, provided the setting for a scene in Robert Altman's film "Brewster McCloud." During the early 1970s Charles worked on community green space plans, a pool, and a sales pavilion for Trailwood Village, the first community in Kingwood. In 1975 his firm designed some of the first cluster housing constructed in The Woodlands. His designs for the Oblate Retreat House in Dickinson, Texas, Camp Allen near Navasota, Texas for the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, and Live Oak Point in Fulton, Texas for the HEB Company involved rustic camp sites that made environmental consciousness seem fun and exciting.

Charles designed houses of worship for St. Cecilia Catholic Parish, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Parish, Northwoods Presbyterian Church, Christ the King Lutheran Church, and Covenant Presbyterian Church in Houston, St. Rita Catholic Church in Dallas, Notre Dame Catholic Church in Kerrville, and Bethany Lutheran Church in Englewood, Colorado. He was architect of the Seeley G. Mudd Computer Sciences Laboratory at Rice University and the Science Building at St. Mark's School of Texas in Dallas.

His historic preservation projects included rehabilitation of the Clock Tower Building on Allen Parkway for Mainland Savings, restoration of the Blanche Harding Sewall House in River Oaks for Sally and Nathan Avery, and consultation on restoration of Santuario de Guadalupe Cathedral in Dallas. Charles's own buildings and spaces are now subject to destruction. His

Garden Club of Houston Park in the Texas Medical Center was demolished last year to facilitate expansion of Methodist Hospital and his major downtown public space, Tranquillity Park, is facing the threat of demolition.

One of Charles's most remarkable traits was his professional generosity. He not only hired, but mentored, several generations of Houston's most talented architects, including Julia and Joseph L. Mashburn, W. O. Neuhaus III, Charles Keith, Jerry Lunow (who was his partner in the 1980s), John J. Casbarian, Gerald Moorhead, Jim McDonald, Leslie K. Elkins, Carl Brunsting, Chula Ross Sánchez, Tyler architect Steve Fitzpatrick and numerous other Houston and Texas architects. His long life was marked by a generous spirit, fairness to all and a kindness extended to his many friends, family and co-workers. He would lend a willing hand, a listening ear and a compassionate heart to friends and strangers alike, leaving behind a remarkable legacy of the built and unbuilt environment and hope in the hearts of those he encountered from all walks of life.

Charles Tapley taught as an adjunct faculty member at both the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture at the University of Houston, and the School of Architecture at Rice University. In 2003, AIA Houston organized an exhibition on Charles's career titled An Exhibition of a Life Merging Architecture and Nature, and awarded Charles the chapter's Thomas Jefferson Award. In 2011, Charles received the AIA Houston Lifetime Achievement Award, which entailed donation of a piece by the Milan architect and designer Andrea Branzi to the permanent collection of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in his honor. Charles's work won numerous design awards from the Texas Society of Architects. In 2012, he received the Texas Society of Architects' Lifetime Achievement Award and his designs were published in major US and international architectural magazines. His professional papers are deposited at the Woodson Research Center of Fondren Library at Rice University. Burial will be private. A celebration of Charles Tapley's life will be held at a future date to be announced. Condolences may be sent to Addison Funeral

Home at [addisonfuneralhomes.com](http://addisonfuneralhomes.com). In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Buffalo Bayou Partnership for further beautification of the Tapley Tributary on Buffalo Bayou, 1113 Vine St #215, Houston, TX 77002 and [buffalobayou.org](http://buffalobayou.org)

# Tribute Wall



“ *Charles Tapley*

July 20, 2022 at 05:14 PM



“ *Charles was such a wonderful man. Charming, intelligent and kind. He loved life and nature. I have to laugh when I think how Charles was constantly working on one project or another. He just could not leave things alone. Nothing made him happier tha*

**Mark Goranson** - August 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ *Mark Goranson lit a candle in memory of Charles Tapley*



**Mark Goranson** - August 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ *For years I have enjoyed the brief trot across the Tapley Tributary bridge along the Buffalo Bayou path and it's so nice to now know how it got its name. It invites you to stop and look down into the shaded water for whatever might be moving around. Wha*

**Greg Cain** - August 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM

CM

“ Carolyn Moss lit a candle in memory of Charles Tapley



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**Carolyn Moss** - August 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM

MR

“ Please-mail. He express my conndolences to the family of Charrles Tapley. I was part of his Houstonian family! I first met Charles swimming at The Bayou Park Club. He would bring me coffee inn the hot tub (with bathing suits, of course) after our earl

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**Margaret Rochs** - August 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM