

How to save Houston

Quick, while there's still something left

1. Join up

For a gentle introduction to preservation, check out the Web sites, walking tours and classes offered by Houston-area preservation groups:

■ **The Greater Houston Preservation Alliance:**

www.ghpa.org

■ **Historic Houston:**

www.historichouston.org

■ **Houston Mod:**

www.houstonmod.org

■ **Galveston Historical Foundation:**

www.galvestonhistory.org

And don't forget your own neighborhood organization.

2. Do your research

For an overview of Houston's historic buildings, start with Stephen Fox's *Houston Architectural Guide*. For a how-to on discovering your own house's previous life, see "Researching Your Historic Home," by city of Houston preservation officer Randy Pace (www.houstonheights.org/historicalresearch.htm).

If you're lucky, you'll find the kind of stories that new houses can't provide. Charles Stava found out that his Victorian in the Old Sixth Ward, owned by a real-estate mogul whose wife refused to move to a ritzier neighborhood, once boasted an early form of air-conditioning: Huge blocks of ice were placed under the floor vents, so that vapors cooled the floors below.

Michael Brichford grew so



STEVE UECKERT: CHRONICLE

FULL STEAM AHEAD: Charles Stava's "Steamboat House" will be featured this fall on HGTV.

besotted with his mid-century modern house that he extended his reach to include his whole neighborhood. He's erected a delightful Web site in Memorial Bend's honor. It's at users.ev1.net/~michaelb/bend/bend-

home.htm.

3. Buy old

Architect Ben Koush, one of the founding members of Houston Mod, loves to talk about his not-strictly-modern 1950s house in Simms Wood, on the east side. He bought the three-bedroom, two-bath house in April 2004 for \$112,000, then spent roughly \$60,000 on remodeling, landscaping, A/C and new furniture. The result was so stunning that the house was included on this year's Rice Design Alliance annual architecture tour.

Koush's outlay is astonishingly low for a showpiece home, but he says even so, he spent more than was necessary. He probably could have saved money by remodeling more slowly or using less deluxe materials.

"If someone on an architect's salary can do this, then anyone can," he says. "People who think it's too expensive aren't being clever enough."

4. Alter carefully

Life used to be simpler, so

it required less square footage. Luckily, it's possible to upsize an old house without destroying its character. Joe Mappelink is an Old Sixth Ward resident and architect who specializes in "sympathetic additions."

His own expanded house is a good example: From the back of the little 1885 Queen Anne cottage, you walk through a glass breezeway into a two-story new addition that doubles as Mappelink's living space and is hardly visible from the street.

"When they say they don't make them like they used to, it's true," Mappelink says. "Construction materials are of poor quality compared to the ones of 50 years ago. Back then, even the concrete was harder."

The 1885 part of his house, he says, is made almost entirely of heart cypress, which means that he doesn't have to worry about rot or termites.

"It could last forever," he says. "That house will probably be standing even after my addition falls down."

— LISA GRAY



HESTER + HADAWAY

'50S FIND: Architect Ben Koush bought his midcentury house for \$112,000.