

A. Hays Town

A(lbert) Hays Town (1903-2005) is likely the most recognized and beloved of the twentieth-century Louisiana architects. Town practiced for more than 70 years and was remarkably prolific, designing educational, office, commercial, and public buildings, and hundreds of private residences. *A. Hays Town and the Architectural Image of Louisiana* focuses on his residential architecture, on which he concentrated after the mid 1960s. The exhibition explores the historic sources and popular success of Town's residential designs, which created recognizable images of a shared homeland.

Town's Louisiana roots ran deep; born in Crowley, he grew up in Lafayette and studied at Southwestern Louisiana Institute (now University of Louisiana at Lafayette). In 1926, he took a degree in architecture from Tulane University, where he studied revered classical precedents, as well as emerging modernist aesthetics. While in New Orleans, he also developed an appreciation for Louisiana's historic architecture under his mentor, pioneer preservationist Richard Koch.

Leaving Tulane, Town joined the busy architectural office of Noah Webster Overstreet in Jackson, Mississippi. He stayed with Overstreet during the lean years of the Great Depression, but he also took a job that would eventually change the course of his career. Beginning in 1933, Town served as the Mississippi district officer of the Federal Historic American Building Survey (HABS), leading teams of draftsmen, photographers, and writers who documented the state's historic structures. At the same time, Richard Koch directed similar HABS teams in Louisiana. Through their parallel endeavors, Town gained a broader and more informed knowledge of the South's colonial and vernacular architecture, upon which he would draw beginning in the 1960s.

Town moved with his young family to Baton Rouge in 1939, opening a solo office there. Over the next two decades, his wide-ranging practice was successful and his building award-winning. However, at the age that many professionals consider retirement, Town refocused his work on residential projects, principally because he enjoyed the familial relationships that he formed with the clients. Designing houses that integrated historic motifs, sensuous materials, and views to the landscape, Town created an archetypal imagery of Creole Louisiana by drawing upon the state's French, Spanish, Caribbean, and other vernacular building traditions. Now treasured as historically significant in their own right, Town's houses are iconic and much imitated far beyond the region. Town's abiding legacy is as a regionalist who sought to create an indelible image of home in Louisiana and to implant his clear vision in its native soil that he so cherished.