

*World-renowned architect Philip Johnson died on January 26 at the age of 98. During his lengthy career he changed the face of Houston, and buildings on the UST campus are among the first and last of his creations. During the 1950s, he laid out a Master Plan for the Academic Mall, which was substantially completed in 2001 with the opening of Malloy Hall. While in his early nineties, he came out of retirement to add the Chapel of St. Basil, one of his crowing architectural achievements.*

## **Bookends of a Great Career Philip Johnson, 1908-2005**

During the 1940s, Houston arts patron, philanthropist and good friend of the University of St. Thomas Dominique de Menil hired a radical young architect out of New York named Philip Johnson to design her house. After his design for a new St. Michael's Church (back when an unpaved Sage Road cut through a pine forest) was rejected, the Menils became involved with the University of St. Thomas, then contained in the 1912 Link Lee Mansion, O'Rourke and Murphy Halls.

According to Frank D. Welch, writing in *Philip Johnson & Texas*, "Johnson's master plan was a straightforward, comprehensible scheme that could be completed incrementally by adding buildings and colonnade as funds allowed. It would have a monumentality, albeit horizontal, that was an essential element of Johnson's sensibility, a result of those years, from childhood, of looking at historic European buildings. The 'add-a-pearl' feature of expansion at St. Thomas would ensure the concept's integrity."

Johnson's design, which would cover three city blocks when completed, favored Thomas Jefferson's concept for the University of Virginia with two parallel rows of two-story buildings, separated by a lush lawn, with a library at one end and a chapel at the other. Even though the buildings serve radically different functions, they are stylistically and thematically linked as belonging to one university, with the anchors at each end representing the dialogue of faith and reason.

Johnson himself designed Welder, Jones and Strake Halls. "Like a sculptor, Philip Johnson was concerned with exterior shape and interior spaces," said the Rev. Janusz Ihnatowicz, professor emeritus of theology and who was involved in the planning of the Chapel of St. Basil. "With this preoccupation with shape and form, he often did not plan for storage space. In the design of Jones Hall, he neglected to add restrooms."

As the years passed, the University acquired additional parcels of land and the funds to expand the Academic Mall.