

## ZONING CHANGE REVIEW SHEET

#63  
11/16/06

CASE NUMBER: C14H-06-0021

HLC DATE:

August 28, 2006

ZAP DATE:

October 3, 2006

APPLICANT: Historic Landmark Commission

HISTORIC NAME: Herbert and Alice Bohn House

WATERSHED: Shoal Creek

ADDRESS OF PROPOSED ZONING CHANGE: 1301 W. 29<sup>th</sup> Street

ZONING FROM: SF-3

TO: SF-3-H

SUMMARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends the proposed zoning change from single family residence (SF-3) district to single family residence – Historic (SF-3-H) combining district zoning.

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION ACTION: Recommended the proposed zoning change from single-family residence (SF-3) district to single family residence – Historic (SF-3-H) combining district zoning. Vote: 7-0 (Leary and Arriaga absent).

ZONING AND PLATTING COMMISSION ACTION: Recommended the proposed zoning change from single family residence (SF-3) district to single family residence – Historic (SF-3-H) combining district zoning. Vote: 7-0 (Pinelli and Jackson absent).

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The Bohn House is outside the bounds of the Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey (1984). It is contributing to the Old West Austin National Register Historic District.

CITY COUNCIL DATE: November 16, 2006

ACTION:

ORDINANCE READINGS: 1<sup>ST</sup> 2<sup>ND</sup> 3<sup>RD</sup>

ORDINANCE NUMBER:

CASE MANAGER: Steve Sadowsky

PHONE: 974-6454

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION: Pemberton Heights Neighborhood Association

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

The ca. 1938 Herbert and Alice Bohn House is the city's premier example of Moderne residential architecture. Bohn was a prominent local businessman, the principal in Bohn Brothers (later Bohn's) Department Store on Congress Avenue. He designed the house and had Roy Thomas, one of the city's leading architects, draw up the plans.

**Architecture:**

The Herbert and Alice Bohn House is a masterpiece of Art Moderne residential design. Popular in the 1930s and 1940s, Art Moderne took its inspiration from the transportation age, with streamlined details, unconventional shapes such as porthole windows, glass bricks, and lines suggesting movement. The Bohn House has the massing of Art Moderne buildings, with square and rounded lines on the exterior, porthole windows at either side of the front door, a rounded glass brick solarium overlooking Shoal Creek, rounded corners at the sides of the front block and in the overhang at the front door. The movement celebrated by Art Moderne architecture is evident in the horizontal grooves in the retaining walls facing 29<sup>th</sup> Street and the curved metal railings enclosing the deck. The pool was added in 1945, and is fed from an artesian spring on the property. The house takes full advantage of its site, built on the sloping west bluff and overlooking Shoal Creek.

**Historical Associations:**

Herbert Bohn (1905-1967) was the son of Herman Bohn, one of three brothers who opened a clothing store on Congress Avenue in 1896. Bohn Brothers was one of the city's leading department stores, and a leader in new building technology. Bohn Brothers was the first store in Austin to have plate glass display windows (1905), and the first store to have air conditioning. Herbert Bohn was a principal in the store with several relatives until he bought out their interests and managed the store on his own. He changed the name from Bohn Brothers to Bohn's in 1955, and changed the focus of the store from a department store to a specialty fashion shop. Herbert Bohn closed the business in 1960 and devoted his time to Bohn's Travel Agency in the Driskill Hotel thereafter. After his death in 1967, his widow continued to live in the house until her death recently. The house is still owned by the three children of Herbert and Alice Bohn.

Herbert Bohn was a born designer, and came up with every detail of the house, from its round-arched interior doors to wall finishes. He asked family friend and prominent local architect Roy Thomas to draw up the plans for the house, which are archived at the Austin History Center.

**PARCEL NO.:** 02170004200000

**DEED RECORD:** 4-9-2005

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** Lot 3, Wooldridge Drive Addition

**ANNUAL TAX ABATEMENT:** \$11,765 (owner-occupied rate); city portion: \$2,000 (capped)  
\$5,918 (income-producing rate); city portion: \$1,430

**APPRAISED VALUE:** \$866,830

**PRESENT USE:** Vacant

**CONDITION:** Good

PRESENT OWNER

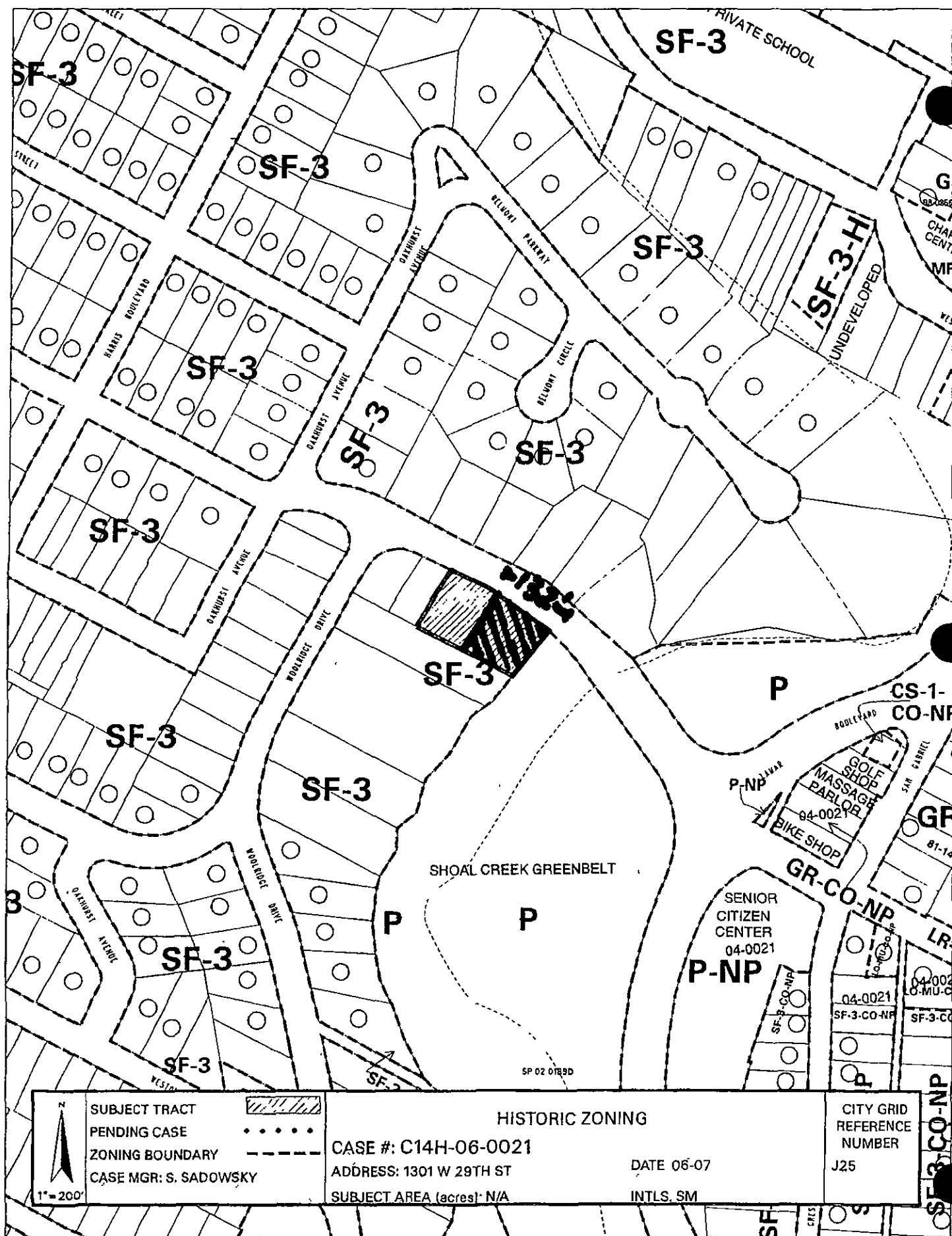
H.E. (Skip) Bohn  
5405 Tortuga Trail  
Austin, Texas 78731

DATE BUILT: ca. 1938

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS: None apparent

ORIGINAL OWNER(S): Herbert and Alice Bohn (1938).

OTHER HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS: None



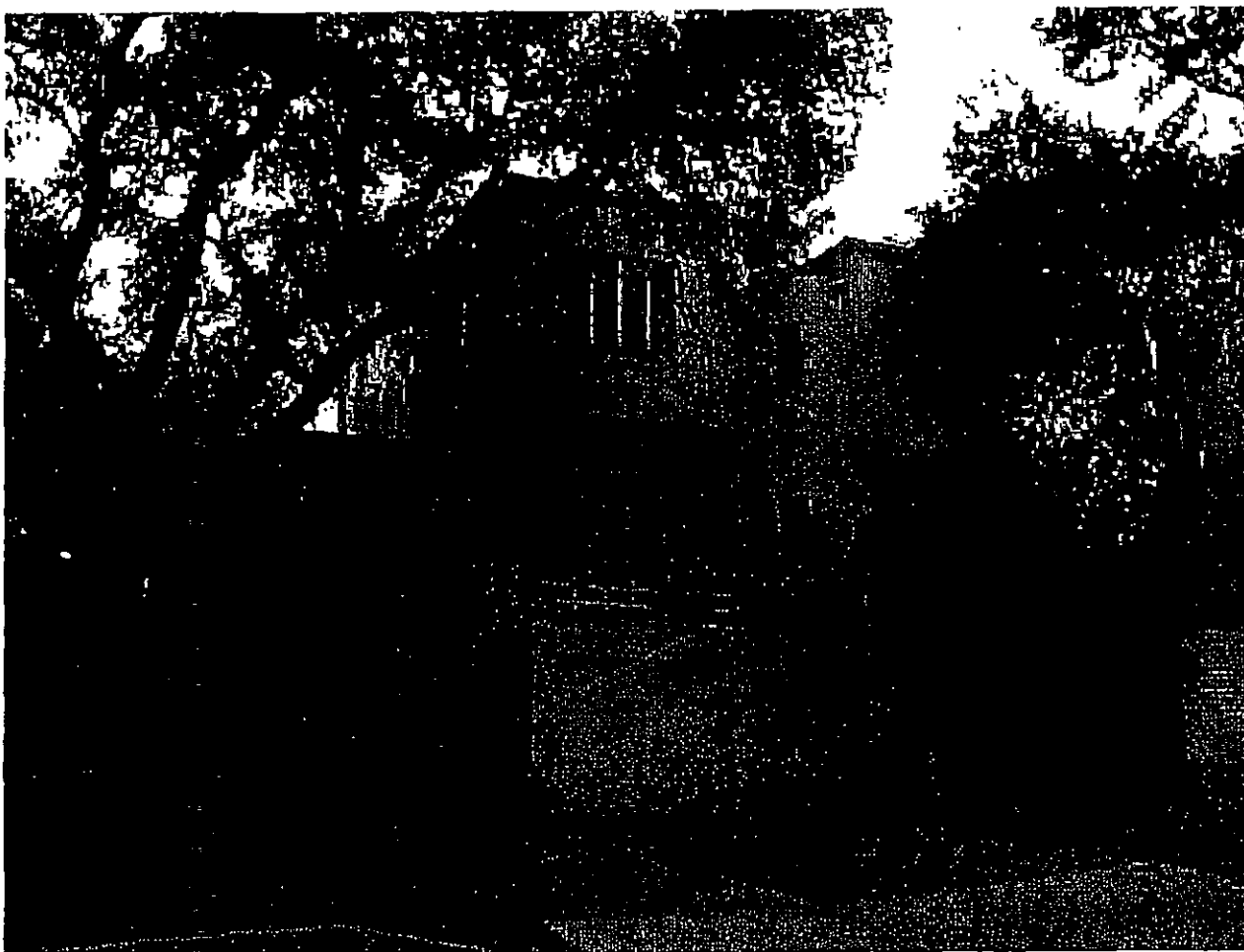


SF-3

SF-3



Herbert and Alice Bohn House  
1301 W. 29<sup>th</sup> Street  
ca. 1938



Herbert and Alice Bohn House  
1301 W. 29<sup>th</sup> Street  
ca. 1938

## OCCUPANCY HISTORY

### 1301 W. 29<sup>th</sup> Street

City Directory Research, Austin History Center  
By City Historic Preservation Office  
August, 2006

1976	William S. and Alice Brewer, owners Retired
1971	Mrs. Alice Bohn, owner Widow, Herbert P. Bohn No occupation listed
1967	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Retired
1963	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners No occupation listed
1959	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Bohn's Department Store, 517-19 Congress Avenue
1955	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Bohn Brothers Department Store, 517-19 Congress Avenue
1952	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Bohn Brothers Department Store, 517-19 Congress Avenue
1949	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Bohn Brothers Department Store, 517-19 Congress Avenue
1947	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Bohn Brothers Department Store, 517-19 Congress Avenue
1944-45	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Bohn Brothers Department Store, 517-19 Congress Avenue
1942	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Bohn Brothers Department Store, 517-19 Congress Avenue
1940	Herbert D. and Alice Bohn, owners Bohn Brothers Department Store, 517-19 Congress Avenue
1937	Address not listed. NOTE: Herbert and Alice Bohn lived at 122 Laurel Lane in Aldrich Place before building the house on Shoal Creek.



April 1982

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# AUSTIN HOMES & GARDENS®

Art Deco Rediscovered! A Special Issue

Deco Architecture in Austin A Decollector's Shopping Guide  
Fitness Clubs Landscaping with Color Swimming Fashions



Legendary Bohn House

Austin History Center ★ Austin Public Library

# A VISION OF STANGRI-LA

By Maria Hart Reese

Exterior photographs by Malcolm Cook  
Interior photographs by Dennis Fagan

The doorbell rings. Mrs. William S. Brewer rises from her chair in the solarium, walks up the terra-cotta tile steps to the living room, then across the aquatic marine carpet to the entry hall past the round port-hole window to the front door.

She opens it. Through the screen she faces a young stranger. He is smiling, polite, almost reverent in demeanor. "Another one of those architecture students," she thinks to herself. She is right.

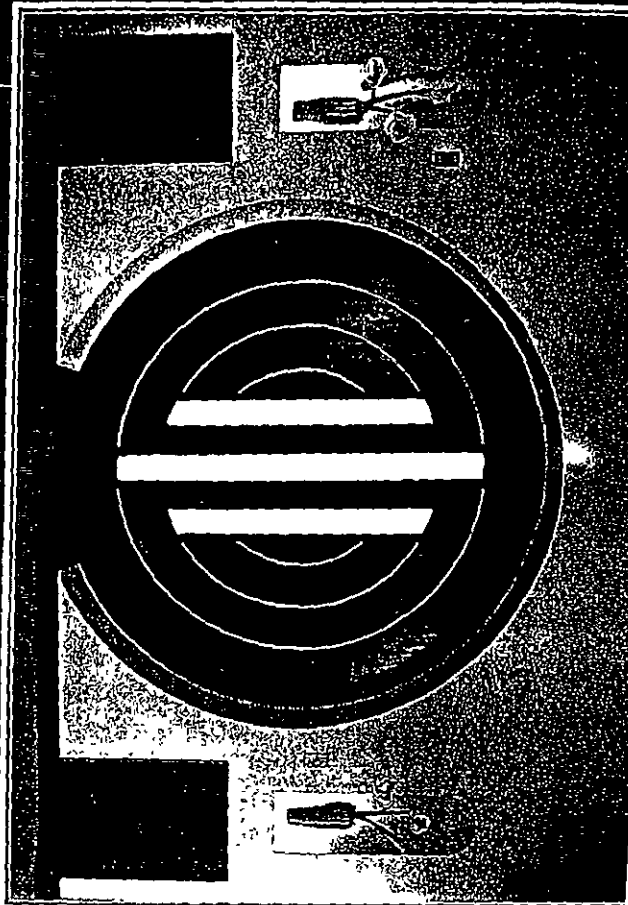
Like many before him, the young man has gathered up his courage and his camera, marched bravely up the litrope-bordered steps, and rung the doorbell of 1301 West 29th St. His mission: to ask if he might photograph the house.

Secretly, he has fantasized a scenario in which the owners invite him inside to have a look around. He often has wondered if the interior is as impressive as the outside. But today he's come face to face with Mrs. Brewer and reality. She tells him yes, he may take pictures of the exterior, but politely asks him to confine his photographic wanderings to the front lawn.

With a grin, gratitude, and gushing admiration for what he calls the house's "Art Deco" design, he bids Mrs. Brewer a nice day and starts adjusting his f-stop. Mrs. Brewer returns to her semi-circular solarium with its glass bricks, terrazzo floor, jungle of potted plants lining the casement windows. She has had many such callers before and is now resigned to the probability that she will have more in days to come. It's almost an everyday occurrence when you live in the legendary Bohn house.

To many people, such intrusions upon privacy might be a nuisance, but to Alice Brewer they are modest tributes to the extraordinary vision and talent of her first husband, the late Herbert Bohn, who designed the

An object of local curiosity since 1938, the fabulous Bohn house is Austin's unique example of the modernistic style



"The Magic Door," as the Bohm children called it, was inspired by the 1937 film *Lost Horizon*. Of matched, figured gum with cherry finish, its mystery is enhanced by recessed glass panels and inlaid polished chromium strips. Arched, rippled arches flanking it complement the shape, and are set off by matching wavy boards.

Special arrangements by Cowie and Flowers

house. "This house is strictly his design—every bit of it," she says proudly.

Bohm asked Roy L. Thomas, one of Austin's first practicing architects and a close family friend, to draw up the specifications for his design, although Thomas' experience had been mainly in church and school architecture. The contractor was Ernest Parker.

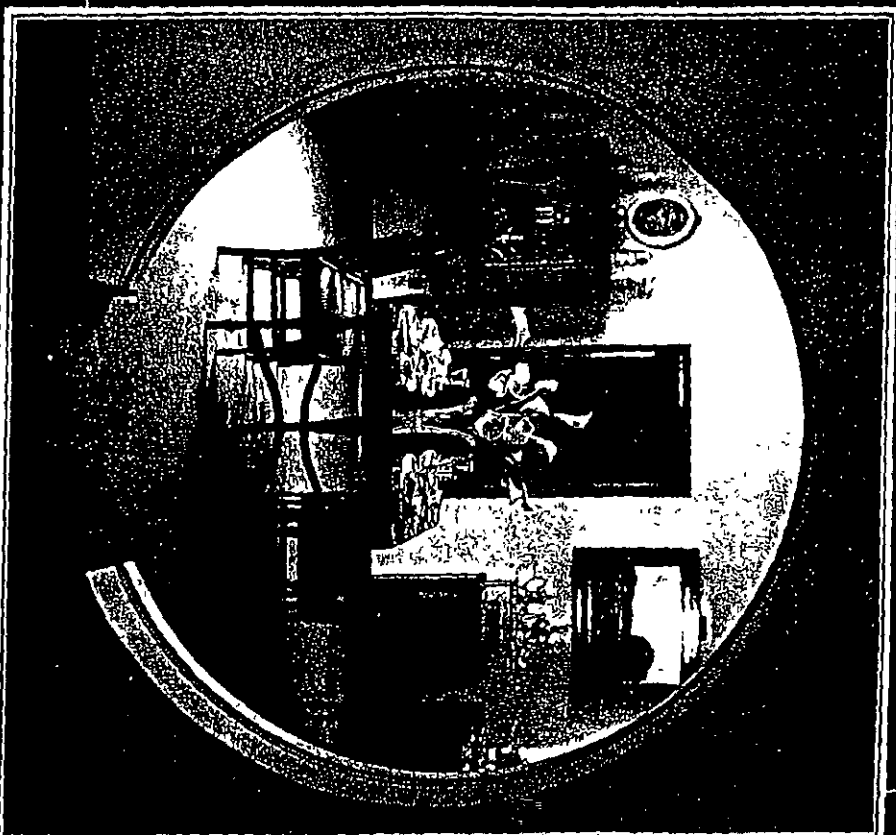
The Bohm house was well under construction in August 1938 when an article in *Austin Building Magazine*, titled "Austin's Most Unusual Home," called it "a castle in the clouds that has come to earth." That may have been the writer's euphemistic way of expressing a common opinion that the house looked like something from outer space, for at the time it was the only modernistic home in Austin. Even today it remains a unique landmark.

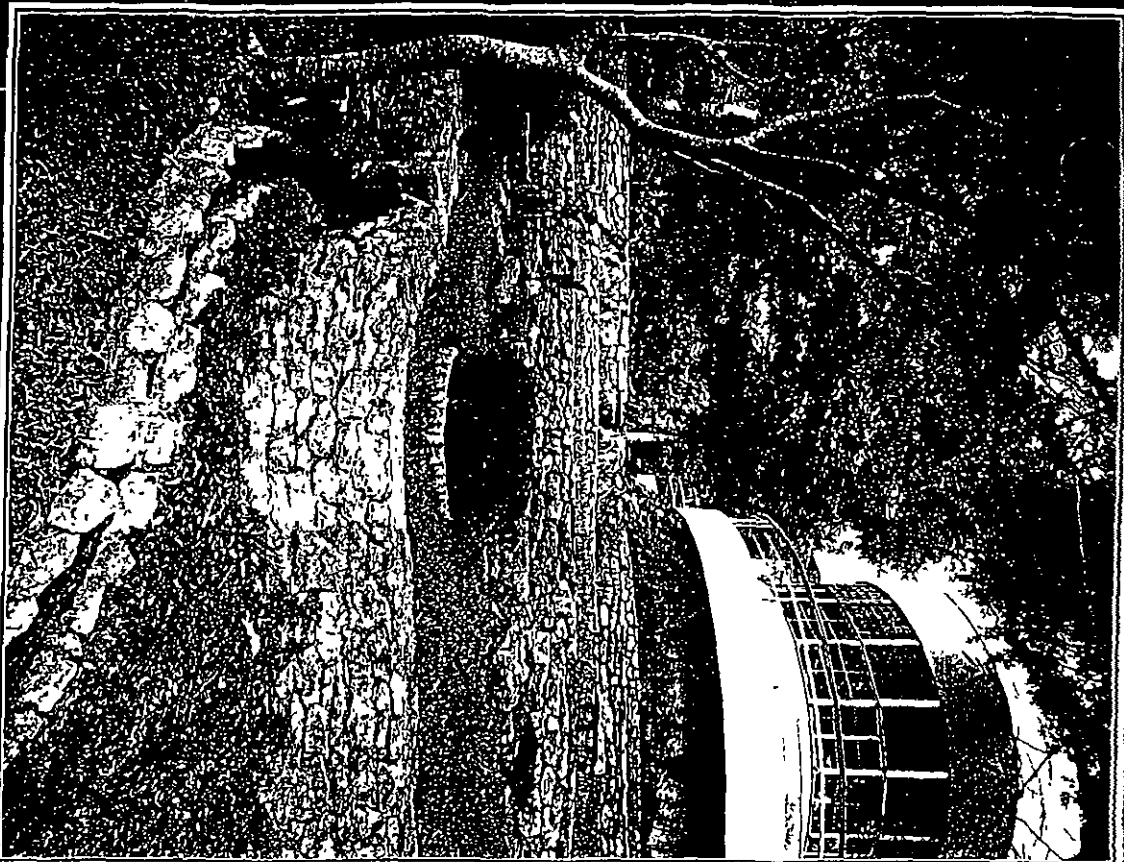
"Everyone thought we were 'far out' then," says Mrs. Brewer. And that was not only because of the astonishing futurism of the residence's design, but also because of its site, a high bluff overlooking Shoal Creek. Mrs. Brewer recalls that her mother-in-law expressed serious concern in those days that the Bohms' three young children—Coleen, Skip, and Bobby—might wander off the 80-foot precipice and tumble headfirst into the creek.

why a young family of five should want such a tiny house, with its three stories, four bedrooms, servants' quarters, and enormous grounds (an entire city block). Besides, it was situated way out in the country, across 29th Street from McGregor's horse farm and riding stables! Why on earth would they want to live so far from town?

What the curious folk living amid their post-Victorian bric-a-brac probably didn't realize was that the house was Herbert Bohm's dream. He meticulously worked out every detail, from the curving, polished aluminum stair railings to the suspended ceiling-light panels, to make that dream a reality. As Mrs. Brewer

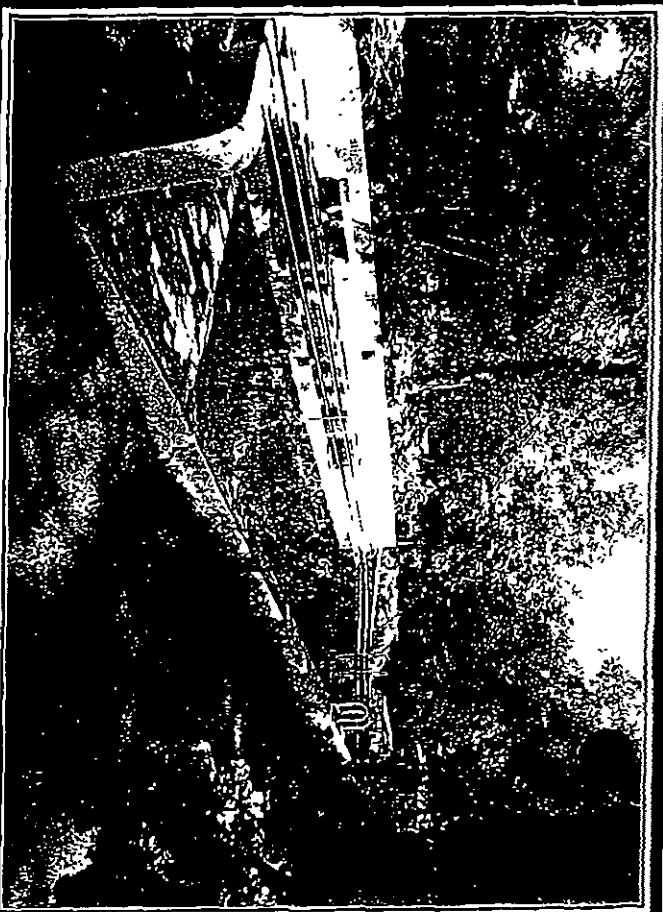
Seen through the round doorway, the dining room is a framed portion of stately elegance. The door is concealed in the wall above.





The exterior view of the semi-circular solarium—with its curved deck and aluminum railing above, porthole windows below—probably has given rise to an erroneous local myth that the house belonged to a ship's captain. The terraced lawn, foreground, features a series of rock-bordered streams and mini-waterfalls, which once emptied into a fish pond. Enterprising raccoons eventually depleted the pond's stock, and it was converted to extra parking space.

Austin Homes & Gardens—April 1983



The swimming pool, one of the first residential ones in Austin, was added to the west side of the property in 1945. Note the individual faucets, such as the blue lion head and curved concrete benches, also designed by Bohn.

remembers it, he reworked the plans at least 30 times during a three-week period before he was satisfied with them.

The result of his efforts was a unified monument to the 30s ideal of all that was modern and luxurious. Walls of the first-floor powder room were large sheets of peach mirror. A radio speaker was concealed in the living room's 15-foot acoustical ceiling. The solarium featured a blue and yellow tile goldfish-pond in the dinette and kitchen, the custom-designed round booth, built-in buffet, cabinets, and counter tiles all were color-coordinated to carry out a watermelon theme: pink, red, and green with black accents.

And the large scale of the living room required special seating, so Roy Beal, FASID, who had his own commercial furniture manufacturing company in south Austin at the time, was asked to make a modular, curved sofa especially to fit. The upholstery color matched the carpeting and walls. It was called "ashes of roses."

Surprisingly, Herbert Bohn never was trained as an architect or designer. He was a member of the family that since 1856 owned and operated Bohn Bros. de-

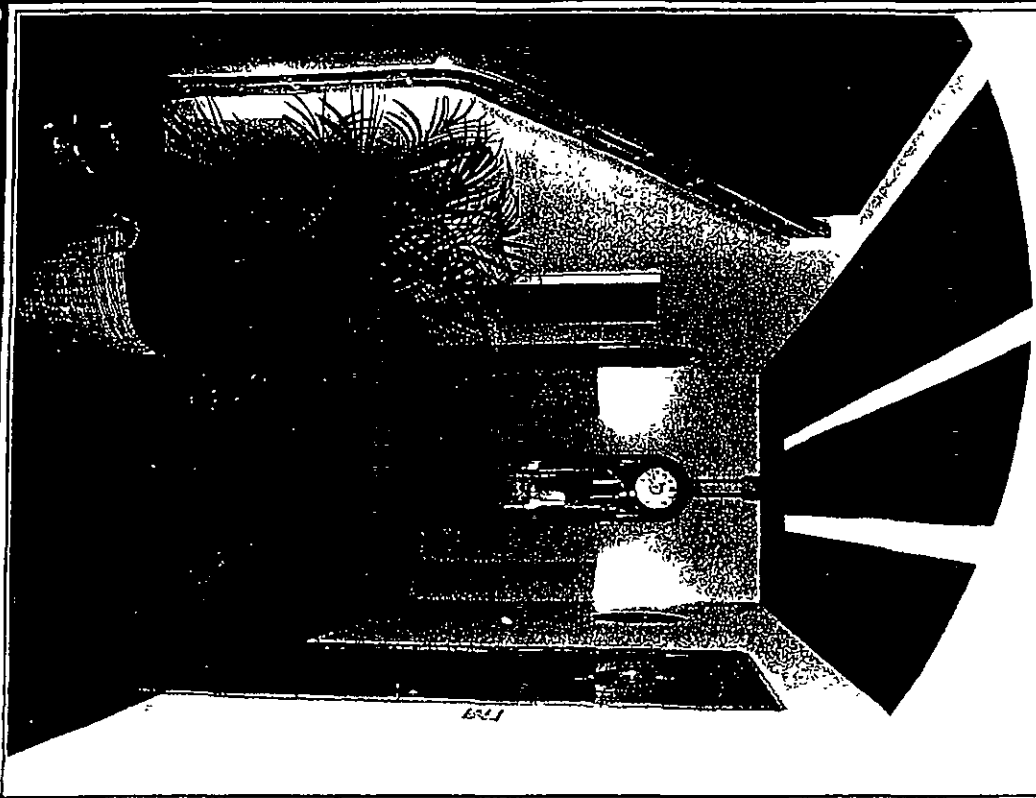
partment store in the 500 block of Congress Avenue. (The store was the first business in Austin to install plate-glass windows, and also the first to be air-conditioned, facts which seem to indicate that forward thinking must have run in the Bohn family.)

According to Mrs. Brewer, however, her first husband was "like a square peg in a round hole" as a merchant. "He had a secret passion for design," she says. Their daughter Coleen, Mrs. Doyle H. Moore, recalls that Bohn was always designing something, drawing, painting, or even carving. She still prizes a leopard sculpture he carved for her about a year before his death in 1937.

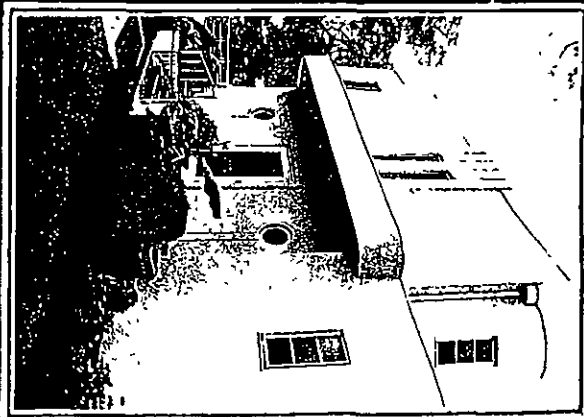
Early on, Bohn was an admirer of the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. He would read and study "everything he could get his hands on" about Wright's work, says Mrs. Brewer, "to see what 'modern' was all about, what made it different."

But an equally significant inspiration for Bohn's dream house, and the key to understanding his vision, was the film *Lost Horizon* starring Ronald Coleman and Jane Wyatt, which the Bohns saw in 1937.

Austin Homes & Gardens—April 1983 43



The entry hall is a marvel of '30s glamor. Stain-aluminum handrail on the stairway, left, is studded with large, clear glass beads. Porthole windows flank the front door, right, and semi-circular corner columns contain up-lighting. More light is concealed within stepped ceiling panels, painted black; another Bohm innovation. Red gum woodwork and arched doors are design motifs carried throughout the house. Fiction tile flooring was added recently.



Leaving attention to detail, graceful symmetry, and streamlined curves are hallmarks of Bohm's design for his "dream home," as evidenced in this northwest view of the facade.

Based on the novel by James Hilton and directed by Frank Capra, *Lost Horizon* is the story of a utopian society hidden in the timeless Valley of the Blue Poon, deep in the Himalayas. The name of Hilton's mountain paradise was Shangri-La, a place where kindness, peace, and beauty abound and people never seem to grow old. The film made Shangri-La a household word.

Art director Stephen Goossan won the Academy Award for his set design, a Hollywood fantasy of oriental mystery combined with imaginative, modernistic architecture.

Circular doorways were a stylistic motif throughout the film, Mrs. Brewer says, and that influenced Bohm directly in planning his home. He wanted a circle-shaped door between the living and dining rooms. When told that such a thing was, from a practical standpoint, impossible, he replied, "Then give me a conventional door within a circular doorway." The builder complied by installing a motorized door that slides up into the wall above its round frame with the push of a button.

Today, the door still remains a marvel, but to the children growing up in the Bohm house it was pure heaven. Colleen Moore recalls the part the door played in the family's Christmas ritual: "On Christmas Eve, our parents would close the living room and shut off the

door's electric switch. We children were not allowed to go in while they put up the decorations and placed our presents around the tree. Christmas morning, we would wait excitedly in the dining room. Then, the magic door, as we called it, would slowly go up to reveal the beautiful scene—the lights, the big, tall tree, and all our gifts. It was just like fairyland to us."

In 1945 the Bohms added a swimming pool, fed from an artesian well. Built on the west side of the property, it was one of the first home swimming pools in Austin. It, too, was Bohm's own design. He fashioned handsome lion heads along the wall bordering the pool and semi-circular concrete benches for the walkway around it. It was frequently the scene of swimming parties as the children were growing up.

Mrs. Moore, the only one of the Bohm children still residing in Austin, says, "Our parents entertained for us all the time. During our school days, anytime anybody wanted to have a meeting or a party, they asked to have it at our house, and our parents were very generous about it. They always welcomed our friends."

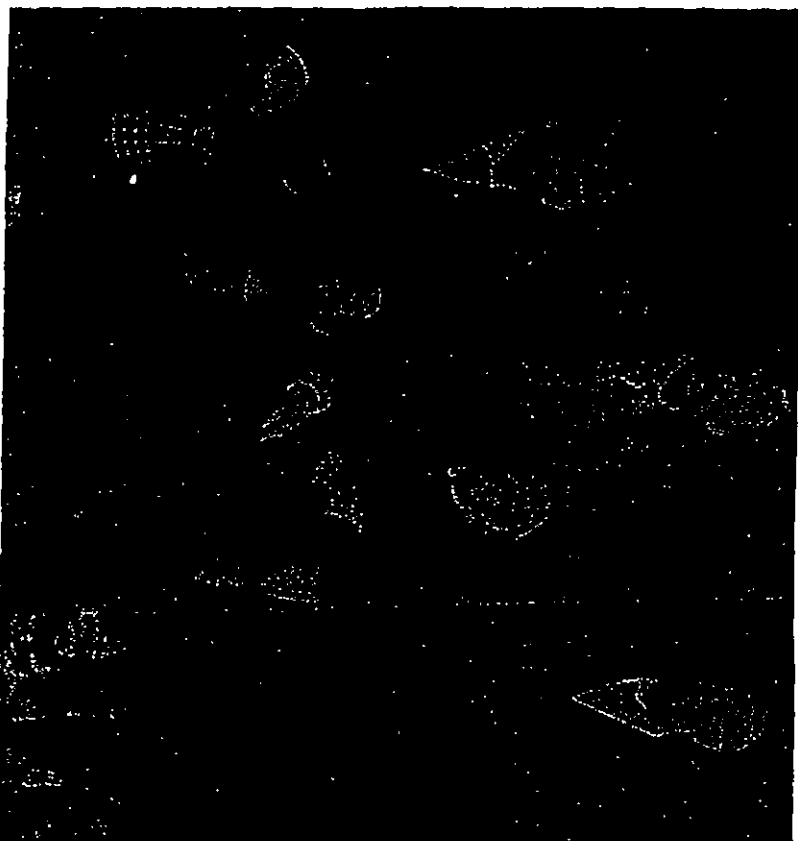
Looking at the cream-colored stucco residence on a sunny spring morning, with cicadas whirring in the live oaks, water trickling quietly over the rocks forming terraces on the east lawn, and a soft breeze ruffling the ferns hanging in baskets from various brackets, you are tempted to imagine what it was like to grow up in the Bohm house. It must have been a little like living in Shangri-La. ☺



Viewed from the northwest, the Bohm house appears forested into a cubic menagerie of boxes and cylinders. The corner room on the ground floor, center, features wrap-around casement windows. Now used as guest room and study, it is reminiscent of a ship's cabin, with built-in desk and horizontal aluminum strips around the center of the walls.

47-11100 (1)

The American Entrepreneur



These three brothers and their mother, who had come from their native Germany, founded the Bohn department store here in 1892. They are, seated, left to right, Henry Bohn and Mrs. Mary Martha Bohn.

standing, from left, William Bohn and Herman Bohn. During its 68 years of operation, the store has been in the hands of four generations of the Bohn family.

## AFTER 68 YEARS

# Bohn's Is Quitting Business Here

Austin's pioneer department store — Bohn's which has been in business continuously for the past 68 years in the same building at 517-519 Congress Avenue, will disappear from the downtown scene — a landmark that has been the store since its opening in 1892.

H. E. Bohn, active partner in the business, said a "winding down" of the store will be completed by the end of the year. The building owned by the Bohn family will be sold to the city of Austin, which will retain it in their possession and later will be leased, probably to another retail store operation similar to the Bohn store.

With their close-out from the retail merchandising field, H. E. Bohn and his father, Herbert Bohn, will depart their full-time business from Austin. The store has operated as an office in the Downtown Bohn building since 1932. The store was founded by the Bohn family in 1892. The store was founded by the Bohn family in 1892.

The Bohn store was founded in 1892 by the Bohn family. The store was founded by the Bohn family in 1892. The store was founded by the Bohn family in 1892. The store was founded by the Bohn family in 1892.

The founders purchased 1 1/2 store front Charles Schaefer who had operated a general merchandise business at that location. Herman Bohn worked for Schaefer and when the latter wanted to close down his store Herman purchased his business to join him in buying it. The result was the founding of a business in which three generations of the Bohn family have had a hand for nearly seven decades.

limited to San Antonio where he had been a partner in the Bohn business. Bohn's was the first store to be established in Austin. The store was founded by the Bohn family in 1892.

Herbert Bohn next became associated with sons of his two brothers in the store's operation. William Bohn Jr., son of William Bohn and F. J. Bohn, son of Henry Bohn. The latter remained only a short time.

Carl T. Wilson married Edna Bohn, daughter of Herman Bohn, and became an active partner in the store in 1914. Two sons of Herbert Bohn came into the firm — William Bohn Jr. and Herbert Bohn Jr. in 1923. The latter, however, died in 1930.

The original store building was remodeled for the time being in 1935 when the owners installed the first plate glass front in Austin. The store was again remodeled in 1939 and enlarged to a two-floor operation. The newly enlarged store was opened in 1940.

largest store was also the first to be established in Austin. The store was founded by the Bohn family in 1892. The store was founded by the Bohn family in 1892.

For the third time the store was remodeled in 1950 into a modern store. Five years later, a reconstruction took place when Herbert Bohn bought out the interests of the other owners — William Bohn, William Bohn and Carl T. Wilson — and turned a new partnership with his son, H. E. Bohn, the present active managing partner in the firm.

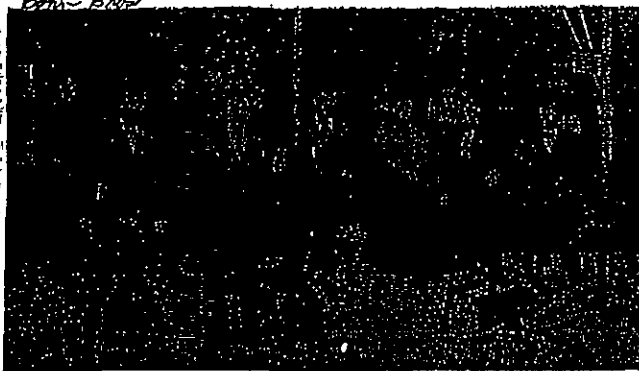
With the change in organization, the name of the Bohn Brothers to Bohn's. The store also was remodeled and redecorated into a modern specialty store.

The store managed to give with Austin and it obtained its largest year's volume of business in 1954 and its largest single month came in December 1954. Retirement from the retail merchandising field, however, meant a departure completely for the Bohn family. Bohn, a director and partner in the Capital National Bank and Trust Co., is a partner in the operation of two other shopping centers — Capital Village and Ford Village. William Bohn has kept in touch with retailing as a salesman for Joseph's Men's Shop and he also has investments which engage his attention.

Herbert Bohn is a stockholder in the Capital National Bank and is engaged in the real estate and retail field and has investments here. Henry Bohn is a stockholder in the Capital National Bank and is engaged in the real estate and retail field and has investments here.

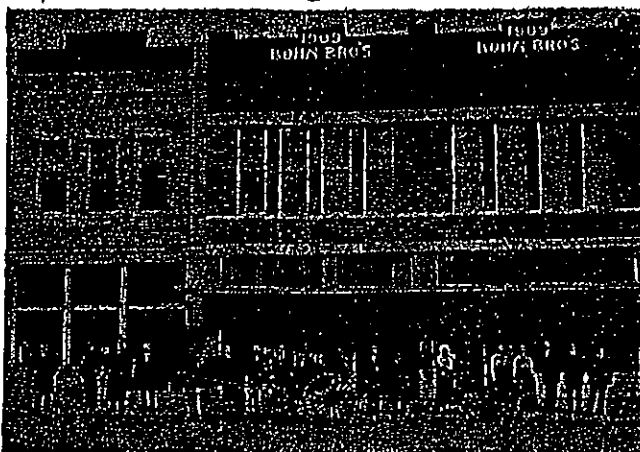
Henry Bohn is a stockholder in the Capital National Bank and is engaged in the real estate and retail field and has investments here. Henry Bohn is a stockholder in the Capital National Bank and is engaged in the real estate and retail field and has investments here.

# BOHN BROS. 47 YEARS AGO!



From this humble beginning nearly half a century ago Bohn Bros. grew into a firm of increasing importance in Austin and the years progressed, second from left is William Bohn and at its extreme right is Hermann Bohn, co-founders of Bohn Bros. Note the gulls hanging in the background, the mustached damian, and the pile of trash ready to be removed. The store was located in precisely the same place the modern, up-to-date Bohn Bros. Department store now occupies.

## BOHN BROS. 30 YEARS AGO!

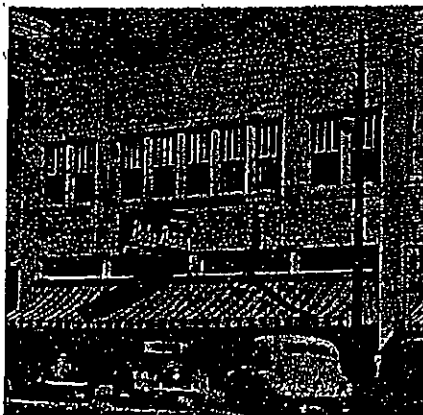


In only a few short years Bohn Bros. had grown into an outstanding institution. This picture was taken in 1909 and among those shown are left to right: Faiding G. Smith, Unknown, General W. R. Hamby, William Bohn, co-founder, Henry Bohn, Luther Jari, Joe Almas, Hermann J. Bohn, co-founder, (in buggy) Victor Frithof, Unknown, Unknown, Ross, Hodges, Bohn, Kasper, Arnes Thistepape, Freddie Jacobson, (on bicycle), H. E. Bruck, August Letterman and Joe Lorenson.

## BOHN BROS. TODAY!

A PROMISE MADE....  
A PROMISE KEPT....

Forty-seven years ago this company was founded upon the declaration and promise of selling the best quality merchandise at fair, reasonable prices. This promise has been kept through the years. A solid store is built with the same material with which any solid business is built. That material is the rocklike confidence of its customers. Bohn Bros. tries to engender it by intelligent, willing services; good regular stocks; attractive appearance and interesting personality. Therein lies the growth and success Bohn Bros. has attained. And therein lies the fulfillment of a promise made.



517-519  
Congress

**Bohn Bros**

AUSTIN,  
TEXAS

Ans. St. Mar. 24, 1939

AF-Depa#tment-Store  
Bohn Brothers  
STATES 6/1/42

## Bohns Observe Golden Anniversary

Fifty years ago, three young brothers opened a clothing store in the 500 block of Congress avenue, and the sons of two of them will help celebrate the store's golden anniversary during June.

The brothers were Hermann, William and Henry Bohn. Henry left the firm six months later and moved to San Antonio, where he now lives, and Hermann and William continued active in the business until their deaths.

Today Herbert, Walter and William Bohn and Carl Widen make up the firm. The three Bohns are sons of the original Bohn Brothers, and they are dressing Austinians whose parents and grandparents were customers of the original Bohn Bros. The other day Herbert and William Bohn were looking through ledgers from 1892 and noted many familiar accounts.

A few of these accounts, opened 50 years ago, are still active, while others have run through three generations.

From the store with displays on the sidewalk, Bohn's has grown into a complete department store, with clothing of all kinds for every member of the family. Back when whalebone corset stays were five cents a bundle and boots were \$1 a pair, the store was considered one of Austin's most modern "emporiums." Now, in a modern, air-conditioned building, it occupies the same role as a modern department store.

During June the firm will celebrate its golden anniversary with a number of special events, limited, of course, by the third war the organization has weathered. A 30-foot neon sign is being installed on the building, and other displays will recall the firm's half-a-century.

The first baby born in Austin during June will receive a \$50 war bond as a birthday gift from Bohn Brothers.

When William Bohn died in 1918, the firm was reorganized with Hermann and F. J. Bohn, Mrs. Bertha Bohn and C. T. Widen as the partners. Later, as the second generation of Bohn boys grew up, they were added as junior partners.

Many of the famous names in clothing, such as Swenson hats, Griffin clothes and Packard shoes, have been stocked at the store 45 to 50 years, with the ledgers telling the story of purchases of new merchandise every season.

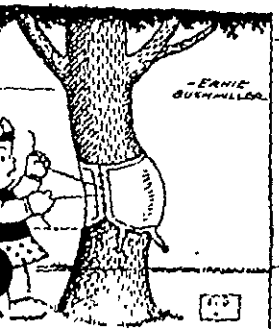
With departments for every age from infants to grown-ups, Bohn Brothers uses what is proudly called a "promotion" system for its customers. Children's clothes are upstairs, and when boys get to be about 14, they are given a "diploma" and sent to the men's department downstairs.

The store has led the way in modernization. In 1908, it installed the first plate glass display windows on Congress avenue, and in 1929, a complete remodeling gave it a moulded-plaster and -grillwork front, the first example of that type of architecture on the avenue. But, through the 50 years, the location has been the same.

Many employees have been with the company a long time. Continuously for 36 years Joe Almas has served this firm, except in 1917 and 1918, when he went to work for Uncle Sam and went with the AEF to France. He started to work for Bohn Brothers as a boy in 1895, and he went back to his job there the day he returned from the army. Other employees who have been with the firm many years are Mrs. Nellie Richter, Mrs. Ellen Sandstrom, Mrs. Anna Perry, Miss Louise Killan, Miss Lucy Ballerstedt, Miss Marjorie Lynchman, Mrs. Adele Eklund, Martin Engquist and Frank Lopez. More recent employees are Miss Mary Katherine Simms and Mrs. Kathryn Swenson. James Jackson, who was in charge of the shoe department, joined the army last month and is stationed at Camp Wolters.

The firm has always taken a keen interest in local affairs. Members of the firm have served as presidents of the Retail Merchants association, Lions club, Exchange club, and Austin Saengerzunde and





RENAULT. U.S. Dept. of Justice, New York  
Clara

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