

DAVID BYRNE

TRUE
STORIES



Wal-Marts Across Texas

Small towns like Mount Pleasant, Hondo, and Aransas Pass are being invaded by a billion-dollar five-and-ten. And they love it.

by Rod Davis

October 1983 The best thing about Hondo is the welcoming sign, "This is God's Country, Please Don't Drive Through It Like Hell," but the newest thing on the horizon is the Wal-Mart on Texas Highway 90. Bright and snappy, 40,000 square feet of panache, the Wal-Mart is a cathedral dedicated to the great names of modern civilization—WD-40, Black & Decker, Rubbermaid, WaterPik, d-Con, Coleman . . .

There are now dozens of discount chains. But there has never before been anything like Wal-Mart. At the Wal-Mart in Aransas Pass, a California woman stood next to me in a shopping line. "It's just like this at all these stores. It's got to where you can go across the country and everything looks the same."

. . . Wal-Mart is not merely a business but a system of organization, living, and thought. The chain's nearly 60,000 workers are not employees but "associates," motivated by rewards for performance. Employees get a percentage of the store's savings and may participate in stock purchases . . .

The company magazine, *Wal-Mart World*, is filled with articles about employee enthusiasm, and some outlets even boast cheerleading squads.

Wal-Mart! Wal-Mart! That's our name!

The retailing business is our game! We've got what it takes to be number one!

So watch out K Mart! Here we come!

Wal-Mart is about value . . . So-called upscale stores and manufacturers contort or disguise real value. They try to convince shoppers, through advertising, that the value of items is multiplied many times over by their association with illusions of status. Shoppers get confused and pay dearly for the brilliant subterfuge around an object. Wal-Mart is for people who see things as they are . . .

Another way of looking at Wal-Mart is from the cool, century-old, wooden, pigeonholed stock shelves in the back room at Luhn & Johns Rexall Drug Store in downtown Taylor. "What's it doing?" says pharmacist Bill Haase about Wal-Mart. "It's killing us."

Banker Ed Griffith of City National is also worried. "Just take a look out on Main Street," he snaps, gesturing toward the vacant stores there . . . Few businesses have taken their places and lasted. Wal-Mart is disruptive; its target cities are characterized by the disruption of population expansion, new industry, and new money . . .

It makes little difference to the residents of Taylor whether they buy their goods in funky old buildings or clean new prefabs, unless prices and selection are better at one place than another. And residents know where they're better. "Before Wal-Mart came here," said a cafe owner, "those stores downtown never heard of a sale."

Post-Modern Times

NorthPark dared to be different. It dared to be good.

by Michael Ennis

November 1985 Raymond D. Nasher's vision sits beneath him at the intersection of Park Lane and

Central Expressway in Dallas, one of those mixed-use small complexes that is more than a collection of stores; it's a full-fledged "urban node." There is a kind of ceremonialness to the structure that makes it easy to imagine the complex as a ruin; the great, pillared entrances lead not to halls echoing with the immortal footsteps of pharaohs and caesars but to the trade routes of the mighty American consumer . . .

The mall age as we know it today, for Dallas and for the world, really began back in 1960 . . . Nasher followed the same line of thinking as the other mall seers: the automobile would determine the movement of Americans . . . and the roads they traveled would lead away from Rome, away from the city center. But Nasher believed that a mall should be the nucleus of something that could eventually rival the great city centers of the Old World. The roads were leading away from Rome, so move Rome . . .

NorthPark has remained competitive in a young mall's game. There have been changes. There's Sunday afternoon family shopping; judging from the number of be-suited heads-of-households, malling is going to be a big post-church pastime. Nasher looks at today's NorthPark as a center of culture. He has decked the mall with museum-quality modern sculpture and introduced live chamber music. "What you're trying to create here is almost a university," he says. "You're trying to create an alumnus instead of a consumer. If you don't create an alumni association, then those consumers will be here today and gone tomorrow."

Cathedrals of Consumption

The Mall of America

An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise

by William Severini Kowinski

By Grady Clay

February 17, 1985 Since World War II in North America, concentrations of capital spilled out along new federally subsidized highways, covered old countryside with a new suburbia and concentrated around interchanges. And there we find the profitable new malls . . .

In the good old days, "all the things that made a community happened on Main Street." But now, downtown had lost its heart. "Everything that was happening was happening on the [new] mall." Shopping had become the chief cultural activity in "our united states of shopping."

. . . These new malls had their own rules and private police to enforce them. The theme behind their design and management was a three-part principle: enclosure, protection and control . . . No room here for bare-bones bargains, independent merchants—or for groceries. No tolerance at these malls for noise, political rallies, or petitioners to disturb the shoppers' fixation on fashions and trademarks . . .

Malls and television reinforced each other by preprogramming the Baby Boom generation to get on with the great American pastime, "earning their wings as junior consumers," sharing shopping dates and the thrills of buying . . . What television proposed, the mall disposed. Then came video cassettes to complete the mall-television-video-fashion cycle.