

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Town Lake Gazebo
Other name/site number: Fannie Davis Town Lake Gazebo; Women in Construction Gazebo
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 9307 Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail
City or town: Austin State: Texas County: Travis
Not for publication: [ ] Vicinity: [ ]

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[n] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National
Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the
property [x] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
[ ] national [ ] statewide [x] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [x] A [ ] B [x] C [ ] D

Signature of certifying official / Title: Mark Wolfe, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 12/11/19
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
[ ] entered in the National Register
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other, explain:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** Landscape: street furniture/object = gazebo

**Current Functions:** Landscape: street furniture/object = gazebo

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** Mid-Century Modern Nonresidential

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Stone; Wood; Concrete, Metal/steel, aluminum

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheet 6)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria:** A, C

**Criteria Considerations:** NA

**Areas of Significance:** Architecture; Community Planning and Development

**Period of Significance:** 1969-1970

**Significant Dates:** 1969-1970

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** J. Sterry Nill (architect); Ken Wendler, Anken Construction (builder)

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 7 through 12)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 13-14)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** Less than one acre

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

Latitude: 30.262406° Longitude: -97.748709°

**Boundary Description:** The boundary is a 20-meter-diameter circle centered on the gazebo.

**Boundary Justification:** The nominated parcel includes the gazebo and portions of the immediate landscape that retain integrity to the period of significance (1969-70), including the north portion of the pond south of the gazebo.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Lori Martin, on behalf of the City of Austin, and NR Coordinator Gregory Smith  
Organization: City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department  
Street & number: 200 S. Lamar Blvd.  
City or Town: Austin State: TX Zip Code: 78704  
Email: Kim.McKnight@austintexas.gov  
Telephone: 512-974-6700  
Date: May 2019

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets 15-17)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets 18-34)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets 35-47)

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Photo Log

All photos by Gregory Smith, December 2019

Photo 1

South elevation; Camera facing north

Photo 2

South elevation; Camera facing north

Photo 3

West elevation with steps; Camera facing southeast

Photo 4

East elevation; Camera facing west

Photo 5

West entrance; Camera facing east

Photo 6

Dedication stone; Camera facing east

Photo 7

Concrete seating; Camera facing west

Photo 8

West entrance, looking northwest over the lake

Photo 9

Glulam roof structure; Camera facing northeast

Photo 10

Detail of typical Glulam joist; Camera facing east

Photo 11

Roof oculus

Photo 12

Cover with drain opening over central fountain; Camera facing southeast

Photo 13

1984 rededication marker honoring Fannie Davis on east side of the gazebo; Camera facing northeast

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## Narrative Description

The Town Lake Gazebo in central Austin, Texas is an octagonal, open air, modern structure with a funnel-shaped hyperbolic paraboloid roof that resembles an inverted morning glory flower. The gazebo sits on the south bank of Lady Bird Lake directly west of the South First Street Bridge, adjacent to a small pond to the south. Stylistically eclectic, complex in its angularity, and finished in concrete, rough-hewn limestone, and painted wood, the gazebo defies simple categorization. It features an octagonal footprint, and is slightly elevated, with steps on the east and west sides. Tapered concrete piers finished with stone angle inward, supporting laminated wood roof joists that curve upward, covered by a folded plate plywood roof with a central tower that tapers into an octagonal oculus. The gazebo retains a high degree of integrity.

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The Fannie Davis Town Lake Gazebo (originally "Town Lake Gazebo") is an octagonal, open air, mid-century modern structure with a hyperbolic paraboloid roof. The gazebo was the first structure built on the south shore of Lady Bird Lake and stands in its original location. The piers extending from the pebble-finish, reinforced concrete foundation to the laminated wood roof beams have a stone veneer. The beams are attached to a steel compression ring at the top and eight aluminum bars connect the ring to the exterior of the roof. The gazebo's foundation is exposed reinforced concrete with a pebble finish. Piers extend from the foundation and are covered with a stone veneer. The 900-square foot floor is constructed of pebble-finish concrete. Four steps of the same material lead up to the west and east entrances of the gazebo. An accessibility ramp, a later addition, extends from the east side of the gazebo. A posterity box, or time capsule, is on the inside of the north support column and contains a Barbie doll, a Kennedy half-dollar, and a list of all contributors and members of the Austin chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), among other items. The interior houses precast concrete benches on the periphery. The interior of the roof is painted light blue. The gazebo is located on the south shore of Lady Bird Lake (formerly known as Town Lake), on the edge of the Auditorium Shores section of a public park, just west of the South First Street Bridge. The gazebo is surrounded by the lake water on the north and a reflection pool on the south. Gravel foot paths encircle the gazebo and connect it to the hike and bike trail and extend around the reflecting pool and the east and west sides. The gazebo is surrounded by native plants and large trees in a park setting next to Lady Bird Lake.

The "inverted funnel" roof of the structure rests on the piers and then extends upward to form a tower with an open octagonal oculus. The curved, glue-laminated beams that give the gazebo its characteristic form were shipped from the manufacturer, pre-shaped and ready to install. The benches that surround the interior octagonal outline of the gazebo are precast concrete, face inward and seat approximately 30 people. The original design included a center fountain of cascading waters but was removed in subsequent renovations.

Over time, plant maturity and improvements to area foot paths have served to enhance the overall setting. Reminiscent of Southern California's Googie-style architecture, with its wave shapes, the dome outline was designed to complement nearby Municipal Auditorium (demolished 2002) and invokes a time of change in architectural styles and preferences as well as Austin's growth and awakening to civic pride and community involvement. The gazebo is in good condition and includes moderate alterations since its construction in 1969 and dedication in 1970.

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### Statement of Significance

The 1969 Town Lake Gazebo in central Austin, Texas, was the first public structure built in the effort to beautify the south shore of Town Lake (now Lady Bird Lake), which was created after the construction of Longhorn Dam on the Colorado River in 1960. The Austin Chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), established in the 1950s for women working in the construction industry, spearheaded and raised funds for the project. Inspired by Lady Bird Johnson, a national leader in environmental beautification and later the honorary co-chair of the Town Lake Beautification Committee, the Austin chapter began planning and raising money for the structure in 1965. Over a dozen construction firms enthusiastically supported the gazebo project with donations of materials and labor. Construction commenced in 1969, and the gazebo was dedicated in June 1970. Project architect J. Sterry Nill (and husband of NAWIC Austin chapter president Lori Nill) designed the gazebo in keeping with the Town Lake master plan and described it as a “structure with a view.” The gazebo features a striking hyperbolic paraboloid roof with folded plate ridges and valleys. The design reflects diverse architectural trends of the 1960s, and playfully references Frank Lloyd Wright’s geometric experimentation and combination of organic materials with modern forms, the thin-shell innovations of Felix Candela, and the rustic park architecture found in central Texas. The gazebo is nominated at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development and Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The period of significance is 1969-1970, the years during which the gazebo was built and dedicated.

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### Origins of the Town Lake Gazebo Project

The city of Austin is downstream from the Texas Highland Lakes, a chain of six fresh water reservoirs formed by dams on the lower Colorado River. The dams were built to control flooding, provide a stable supply of water, and generate hydroelectric power. Heading downstream, the last of these dams is the 1940 Tom Miller Dam, approximately 3.5 miles west of the gazebo. The 1960 completion of the Longhorn Dam on the Colorado River, approximately 2.5 miles downstream from the gazebo, created Town Lake (renamed Lady Bird Lake in 2007), which served as a reservoir for the Holly Power Plant. The Austin Chamber of Commerce promoted the public bond measure that financed the Longhorn Dam, as well as planning and development of the lakefront. In 1961, at the behest of the Chamber, the Austin City Council formed the Town Lake Study Committee (TLSC), charged with overseeing and guiding development on the city’s public land.<sup>3</sup>

Town Lake beautification efforts were inspired in part by Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson. From the beginning of her tenure as First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson expressed interest in environmental conservation issues, working to beautify the national highway system, which was then visually cluttered with billboards and junkyards. President Johnson advocated for national beautification in his first State of the Union address, when he called for additional support for parks, improved landscaping of public lands, and the “legal authority for the government to block air and water pollution.”<sup>4</sup> In a message on “natural beauty,” President Johnson requested that beauty be “not just a holiday treat, but part of our daily life.”<sup>5</sup> Ladybird’s efforts began with her formation of the Committee for a More Beautiful Capital, where she emphasized community participation, stressing that “It is in our own communities that we can best participate in creating an environment which has beauty, joyousness, liveliness, as well as dignity.”<sup>6</sup> Almost concurrent with the beginning of her campaign for a beautiful Washington D.C., Lady Bird gave an interview with *U.S. News and World Report*, which was published in an article entitled “Ways to Beautify America,” in February 1964. The article

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<sup>3</sup> Kristin Hotopp, “Fiesta Gardens, Austin, Travis County, Texas” National Register of Historic Places nomination, 2019. In 1966, the committee was disbanded.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Gould, *Lady Bird Johnson and the Environment*. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Gould, 54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

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ended with this remark from Lady Bird: “The time is ripe, the time is now, to take advantage of this yeasty, bubbling desire to beautify our cities and our countryside. I hope all Americans will join in this effort.”<sup>7</sup> Lady Bird’s appeal to beautification inspired projects large and small, including the building of the Town Lake Gazebo.

### National Association of Women in Construction

In 1953, sixteen women working in the construction industry in Fort Worth began the organization “Women in Construction of Fort Worth.” Understanding that women had very limited participation in the construction industry, the group was formed as a support network for its members. To be open to as many women as possible, the only requirement established for membership was to be actively employed in the construction industry at least twenty hours per week. The success in Fort Worth led to a national charter in 1955, and the group became the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), with the core purpose to enhance the success of women in the construction industry.<sup>8</sup> In the fall of 1957, a member of the Dallas chapter contacted Miss Fannie Davis, executive secretary of the Austin Associated General Contractors, to gauge interest in starting an Austin chapter of NAWIC. Miss Davis passed along the information to Miss Maxine Studebaker of Frank Rundell Company, who reached out to other women working in the field of construction. The Austin chapter received its charter of February 15, 1958, the seventh issued from national headquarters, with approximately 35 members.<sup>9</sup> By 1966, the national organization had 5,000 members in 144 chapters.<sup>10</sup>

### Town Lake Gazebo Planning

Encouraged by the President Johnson and the First Lady, the Austin chapter of NAWIC (hereafter “Austin Chapter”) approached Mr. Beverly Sheffield, director of Austin’s Parks and Recreation Department, for suggestions on how they could contribute to the city. After this meeting, the group decided to build a gazebo as their beautification construction project.<sup>11</sup> On November 9, 1965, the Austin City Council unanimously voted to approve plans presented by the Austin Chapter to undertake a gazebo project on the shores of Town Lake.<sup>12</sup> In January 1966, fundraising for the gazebo began with a Saturday morning breakfast attended by 75 persons at the Gondolier Hotel. Mayor Lester Palmer observed that “not a member of the Council knew what a gazebo was, but we all felt every city ought to have one.”<sup>13</sup> Covering the event, the *Austin Statesman* helpfully explained what a gazebo was:

Not a creature from outer space, as the name may suggest, the gazebo (pronounced ga-zee-bo) is a proposed small circular garden house to be built on an island now planned for creation immediately off the south shore of Town Lake... The purpose of the gazebo is to provide, as the as the dictionary definition of the French renaissance word says, “a structure with a view” – simply a place to stroll and gaze.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gould, 57.

<sup>8</sup> “About NAWIC,” [http://www.nawic.org/nawic/About\\_NAWIC.asp](http://www.nawic.org/nawic/About_NAWIC.asp). Accessed May 31, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> “Our History,” <http://austinnawic.org/about/our-history/>. Today, the Austin chapter continues to provide training and education opportunities for its members and participates in the community with outreach programs for youth, scholarships for students pursuing careers in the construction industry. The national organization has over 5,500 members and 160 chapters.

<sup>10</sup> “Campaign Begun On Gazebo Fund,” *Austin American*, January 2, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Lori Nill to Miriam Tworek-Hofstetter, in preparation of “Women in Construction Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas” Draft National Register of Historic Places nomination, 2011. On file with the Texas Historical Commission. This was the chapter’s first effort to beautify the Town Lake shore. Another high-profile effort was the 1978 restoration of the Austin Fire Drill Tower (NR 2016) on the north shore.

<sup>12</sup> Glen Castlebury. “Gazebo Approved for Town Lake.” *The Austin Statesman* p. 6. Wednesday, November 10, 1965.

<sup>13</sup> “Gazebo Fund Bid is Launched Here.” *Austin American-Statesman* January 9, 1966.

<sup>14</sup> “Gazebo Fund Bid is Launched Here.” *Austin American-Statesman* January 9, 1966.



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Austin Chapter Vice President Wilma Williams explained that the purpose of the gazebo was to provide a place for viewing downtown Austin, and Town Lake in particular, explaining that “the city provides the view, and we wish to provide the structure to enjoy that view.”<sup>15</sup> The fundraising breakfast also provided an opportunity to reveal the plans, which proposed that the gazebo be placed on an island near the shore, with a footbridge for access. Architect J. Sterry Nill, husband of chapter President Lori Nill, presented a preliminary model of the gazebo, an austere neo-formalist composition with thin tapered columns, and topped with a fanciful mushroom-like dome designed to complement the nearby municipal auditorium. While the model bore little resemblance to the completed gazebo, the estimated size (1,000 square feet) was on target with the final plans.<sup>16</sup> In February, 1966, the chapter released a statement announcing their plans to construct the gazebo.<sup>17</sup>

Joyce Burton and Dorothy Wallace served as co-chairpersons of the “Project Gazebo” committee, which would raise the estimated \$6,000 required to fund the project, while local construction companies, material suppliers, and workers contributed in-kind donations valued at \$30,000. The *Austin Statesman* published numerous articles promoting various fundraising events, which in 1966 included: cupcake sales by the Travis High “Y-Teens” (the girl reserves club of the YWCA); a NAWIC-sponsored “games night” at the North Austin Lions Club; and a spring sports wear show sponsored by the Y-Teens (with a diving exhibition by Austin Aquatic Club). NAWIC and Austin Civic Theater collaborated on a musical revue (“Zip Zap Zowie” by Ken Johnson), to jointly raise funds for the gazebo and the civic theater, while the NAWIC Hostess Committee received a cash donation from the Austin Home Builders Association for the group’s assistance with the Parade of Homes.

In 1966, the Austin Chapter estimated that the project would take two years to complete, but that timeline was soon abandoned. The groundbreaking ceremony took place on July 1, 1968, with city council members, city officials and other dignitaries on hand.<sup>18</sup> Construction was expected to be completed by the end of the year, but progress was slow because all the work was provided pro bono. The *Statesman* offered an explanation:

It’s a rare thing to see anyone at work on the gazebo, as the structure is called, and progress seems tantalizingly slow...It’s a labor of love for all concerned. Probably any one of the builders could finish the job in a week if that’s all he had to do, but he couldn’t be expected to neglect his regular business. So when his workmen have a little spare time or are between other jobs, he sends them down to Town Lake and they put in a few hours on the gazebo.<sup>19</sup>

The gazebo structure was completed in August 1969, but in February 1970 the Austin city manager’s office ordered the parks department to fill in the partially-excavated reflecting pool, citing projected construction and maintenance costs. In March, the city council voted to fill in the pool, over the objections of the Austin Chapter.<sup>20</sup> With plans for a June 1970 dedication ceremony underway, representatives of NAWIC urged the city to complete site work and objected to the covering of a cascading fountain in the center of the gazebo. The work had not been completed by May 1970, and likely remained unfinished at the time of the dedication.<sup>21</sup> The gazebo dedication took place on June 8, with national NAWIC president Margaret Borg in attendance. At the ceremony, Lori Nill summarized the efforts to build

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Gazebo Anyone?” *The Citizen*, February 18, 1966.

<sup>18</sup> “Constructions Gets Underway on New Town Lake Gazebo.” *Citizen Guide*, July 3, 1968

<sup>19</sup> “The Gazebo At Lakeside, *Austin Statesman*, June 4, 1968.

<sup>20</sup> “City Kills Reflection Pool Plan,” *Austin Statesman*, March 5, 1970.

<sup>21</sup> “WIC Asks Gazebo Completion,” *Austin Statesman*, May 16, 1970. No record of exactly when the pond was completed has been found, but aerial photos show that it was in place by 1973.

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the gazebo, describing it as a “lasting tribute to the construction industry,” and hoping that it would “spur other organizations to contribute to the beautification of Town Lake and of Austin.”<sup>22</sup> Austin chapter president C.L. Reeves presented the gazebo to the Mayor Travis LaRue, who accepted it on behalf of the city.<sup>23</sup>

The Town Lake Gazebo was the first of many Town Lake beautification and development projects. In 1968, Congressman Jake Pickle had assisted with federal approval of the \$98,500 development grant (to be matched by the Austin Parks and Recreation Department) to develop a hike and bike trail along a five-mile-long stretch of shoreline.<sup>24</sup> Although Lady Bird Johnson was not involved with the planning, fundraising, nor design of the gazebo, the project is associated with her national beautification initiative as First Lady. Upon the end of the Johnson Administration in early 1969, Lady Bird joined the community’s efforts and focused much of her attention on Austin and the Town Lake Beautification Program.<sup>25</sup> In 1975, Lady Bird was photographed at the gazebo at two separate events promoting Town Lake beautification, an indication of the gazebo’s symbolic connection to the overall program.

### J. Sterry Nill and Loretta (Lori) Nill

Austin architect J. Sterry Nill, designer of the Town Lake Gazebo, was married to Austin Chapter president Loretta “Lori” Nill, who also served as the project coordinator for the gazebo.<sup>26</sup> Born in 1928 in Chicago, John Nill came to Austin in 1953 to attend the University of Texas School of Architecture and study under Harwell Hamilton Harris, whose work he had admired. With an aversion to cold weather, the Nills decided to settle in the city after graduation. Mr. Nill worked for several architecture firms throughout his career, including Jessen, Jessen, Millhouse and Greeven, with whom he worked on major projects in Austin, including additions to the Texas Department of Public Safety Building, St. Martin’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, and Palmer Auditorium. After establishing his own practice, Nill worked on projects for Catholic parishes in Austin, Lago Vista, Rockdale, Granger, and Brenham. His Austin projects included St. Theresa’s Catholic Church, and additions to St. Louis King of France Catholic Church.<sup>27</sup> Nill retired from the Texas Department of Health and Human Services, where he served as the chief architect for the Long Term Care Department.<sup>28</sup>

Lori Nill worked as a secretary and bookkeeper in the offices of several architecture firms in Austin, including her husband’s private practice, and became a founding member of the Austin chapter of NAWIC.<sup>29</sup> Lori began supporting John’s career shortly after they moved to Austin and even before he began practicing as a licensed architect. When John was still studying at the University of Texas, Lori and the wives of other students of architecture (and women architecture students) formed the Student Architects’ Wives’ Club. Lori served as historian for the club in 1955.<sup>30</sup> In 1965, while serving as the chapter’s president, Lori persuaded John to design the Town Lake Gazebo on behalf of NAWIC. Lori retired from the Architecture division of the Texas Department of Transportation. Lori played a significant role in many organizations, raising money and serving on committees and organizing events to benefit the

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<sup>22</sup> “\$35,000 Gazebo Dedicated To City During Ceremony.” *Austin American*, June 9, 1970.

<sup>23</sup> “Gazebo Dedication Set Today.” *Austin Statesman* (1921-1973), June 8, 1970.

<sup>24</sup> “Funds Awarded To Lake Project.” *Austin Statesman*, July 9, 1968.

<sup>25</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, Neil Sapper, "Johnson, Claudia Alta Taylor [Lady Bird]," accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fjocd>.

Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Modified on June 9, 2016. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>26</sup> Anne-Marie Evans. Staff Writer. “Gazebo – It’ll Open on Town Lake in Spring.” *Austin American-Statesman*, October 19, 1969; Christine Adame. *Stories from the Fannie Davis Gazebo*.

<sup>27</sup> Lori Nill (former President, Austin Chapter, National Association of Women in Construction) in discussion with the author, November 2016.

<sup>28</sup> “John Sterry Nill, Jr.” (obituary). *Austin American-Statesman*, August 18, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Author’s interview with Lori Nill, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> “Architects Wives Form UT Club.” *Austin Statesman* November 1, 1955.

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building and construction industry, including the Austin Association of Home Builders, the Women's Architectural League and the Texas Society of Architects' annual meeting.<sup>31</sup>

### Architectural Significance of the Town Lake Gazebo

The Town Lake Gazebo stands as one of the most prominent examples of 1960s exuberant modernism in Austin, featuring a striking hyperbolic paraboloid roof with folded plate ridges and valleys, and a central spire. Architect J. Sterry Nill referred to his final design for the gazebo as an "inverted morning glory."<sup>32</sup> Stylistically, the gazebo is difficult to categorize, but it reflects diverse architectural trends and influences, playfully referencing Frank Lloyd Wright's geometric experimentation and combination of organic materials with modern forms, the aesthetics of Felix Candela's thin-shell concrete roofs, and even the rustic park architecture found in central Texas. Many of these characteristics can also be found in mid-century commercial buildings, where eye-catching expressions of modern design were employed to bring attention to places of business through the use of bright colors, dramatic forms, and contrasting materials. This national phenomenon (sometimes categorized as "Googie" or "Populuxe" architecture) also took root in Texas and was at its peak in 1965 when NAWIC introduced its concept of a gazebo to the City of Austin.<sup>33</sup>

Architect J. Sterry Linn was a modernist, but no other work attributed to him is as expressive and whimsical as the Town Lake Gazebo, perhaps due the Austin Chapter's desire to construct a memorable landmark and set a standard for future lakeside improvements. Linn did not attribute the inspiration of his design to any particular buildings, but well-known examples of postwar architecture help illustrate the eclectic nature of design during the period in which he worked. The gazebo's striking angular plan and dramatic profile are tempered by the application of rough cut native limestone in irregular courses on the piers that support the roof. Similar juxtapositions are seen in Frank Lloyd Wright's First Unitarian Society Meeting House in Madison (1951), his Neil House in Minneapolis (1950), and Taliesin West (1937-59). The gazebo's juxtaposition of an exotic roof structure with natural stone may be a tempered version of Bruce Goff's flamboyant aesthetic, as expressed in the Bavinger House in Bartlesville, Oklahoma (1950). The gazebo's octagonal roof set on stone piers carries on the tradition of exotic park structure design seen in the Japanese Sunken Garden (1917) in San Antonio's Breckenridge Park.

The gazebo's plywood folded plate roof, supported by laminated wood (glulam) beams, is an angular variation of a true hyperbolic paraboloid form, reminiscent of the complex concrete shell undulating roof of Felix Candela's Los Manantiales restaurant (1958) in the Xochimilco borough of Mexico City.<sup>34</sup> While Candela pioneered the design of increasingly complex forms in thin shell concrete, the Douglas Fir Plywood Association promoted the use of plywood in hyperbolic parabolic forms, and in 1956 began a cooperative research project with Department of Architecture and Architectural Engineering at the University of Kansas to test the practicality of such designs. This team built and tested the first hyperbolic parabolic roof constructed with a lattice of twisted plywood strips, demonstrating that such a roof

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<sup>31</sup> "Women Aid Parade of Homes." *Austin Statesman* July 20, 1966; "Club Meetings This Week." *Austin American* April 17, 1966; "Blueprint for Fun." *Austin American* October 31, 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Author's interview with Lori Nill, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> The term "Googie" is derived from the name of a John Lautner-designed 1949 coffee shop on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles. Lautner, who had apprenticed with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin, often employed dramatically distinctive roof lines, integrated sign pylons, little distinction between indoors and out, and contrasting modern materials. Architecture critic Douglas Haskell first used the term "Googie" to describe an architectural style (somewhat pejoratively) in the February 1952 issue of *House & Home*.

<sup>34</sup> The building was referred to locally as "La Flor." "Recent work of Mexico's Felix Candela." *Progressive Architecture* 40 (1959), 132-141. In 1954 Candela delivered papers about his application of thin shell technology to American Concrete Institute conference in Denver, and at the Thin Shell Conference at MIT. Tyler S. Sprague. "Beauty, Versatility, Practicality": the Rise of Hyperbolic Paraboloids in Post-war America (1950-1962)." *Construction History*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2013), 182. O'Neil Ford and Arch Swank collaborated with Candela in the design and construction of the Great Southwest Corporation industrial park in Arlington, Texas (1958).

## Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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could be built with simple materials without the need for heavy equipment. Prominent examples of plywood roofs of this type, such as the Pier 99 Totem Pole Marina Building near Portland, Oregon (1960) inspired other architects and engineers to apply the process to their own designs, achieving the look of thin shell concrete at a lower cost. Architects and engineers also employed repeating patterns of premade concrete formwork to achieve the modern look of thin-shell design at a lower cost than large span roofs. In 1962, Candela presented the keynote address to the “World Conference on Shell Structures” in San Francisco, the proceedings of which were published by the National Academy of Science and National Research Council in 1964.<sup>35</sup>

The hyperbolic parabolic form – whether built of concrete or wood – appealed to a public desiring space-age forms. Following the example of Los Manantiales, Los Angeles architect Paul Williams designed a smaller yet equally expressive thin-shell concrete building for La Concha Motel (1961) on the Las Vegas Strip, which likely served as the model for Austin’s Cross Country Inn motel (now Los Jaliscienses Restaurant), built in 1963 on East Highway 290. Texas experienced a small movement in vaulted roof structures in the early 1960s, particularly emanating from Corpus Christi and along the coastal bend. *Texas Architect* devoted much of its September 1963 issue to the movement, illustrated with photos of twenty-five recent projects. Two of the featured projects by the firm Tanaguchi and Croft of Harlingen, Texas, were round: the Flato Pavilion in Kingsville, and the Casa de Sol tourist center in Harlingen.<sup>36</sup>

### Subsequent Work at the Gazebo

In the years since the gazebo’s construction, Ken Wendler, owner of Anken Construction, Lori Nill, and Austin Chapter members continued to support and protect the Town Lake Gazebo by raising funds and advocating for the maintenance of the structure, its reflecting pond, and landscaping, as set forth in the original plans.<sup>37</sup> The design of the gazebo remains virtually unchanged since its original construction, but by 1984, the structure needed major repair. NAWIC leadership developed a plan to raise funds for the repairs. At that time, the gazebo was renamed the Fannie Davis Town Lake Gazebo by City Council resolution.<sup>38</sup> Mrs. Davis was a founding member of the Austin chapter of NAWIC, and no structure in Austin had been named after a living honoree before that time.<sup>39</sup> In 1992, the small opening at the tip of the roof was covered by an acrylic bubble, allowing light to filter through the opening, while preventing water and rain from flowing into the opening of the roof. In 1995, NAWIC members funded the construction of an accessibility ramp in celebration of the gazebo’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 2010, the city considered a project to fill in the reflecting pond and repurpose the gazebo. NAWIC again intervened and, with the support of the community, convinced the council to spend money for improvements to the gazebo and its surroundings. In 2011, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department awarded a \$2 million grant to the Austin Parks and Recreation Department to make improvements to Auditorium Shores, with a portion of the funds for the transformation of the pond into an environmental element used to treat parking lot runoff. In 2012, the city of Austin spent \$137,000 to improve the pond, fix some structural elements, update some electrical wiring and repaint the gazebo to match its original color palette.<sup>40</sup> Also in 2012, the gazebo was given its most recent facelift that retained the existing wooden frame and roof membrane while replacing the roof, painting of the structure to match original color scheme, and adding an anti-graffiti coating to the concrete benches. Additional site work related to the surrounding landscaping and pond will be coordinated with the Watershed Protection Department through future phases of work along Auditorium Shores.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sprague, 179.

<sup>36</sup> “The Coastal Bend Revolution.” *Texas Architect* September 1963.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the City Council, City of Austin, TX, March 5, 1970, <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=24640>

<sup>38</sup> June 4, 1984, Council Meeting

<sup>39</sup> “History of the Fannie Davis Town Lake Gazebo.”

[www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Planning\\_and\\_Development/History\\_of\\_the\\_Fannie\\_Davis\\_Town\\_Lake\\_Gazebo%20pdf.pdf](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Planning_and_Development/History_of_the_Fannie_Davis_Town_Lake_Gazebo%20pdf.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Michael Barnes, “Gazebo by Lake Back in Pristine Condition,” *Austin American-Statesman*, November 3, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Kim McKnight, email message to author, November 8, 2016.

Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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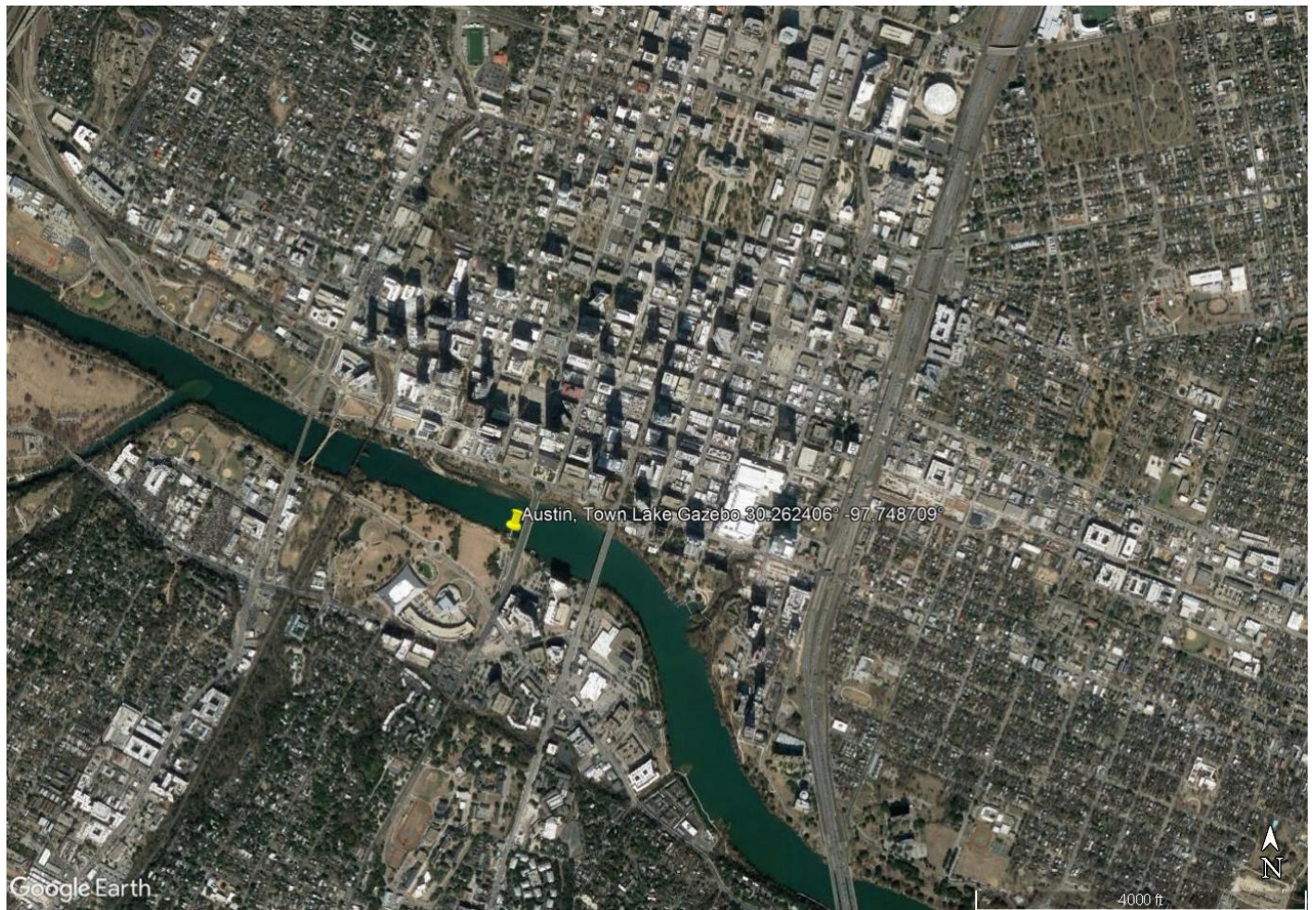
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Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas



Google Earth Map (accessed May 31, 2019).

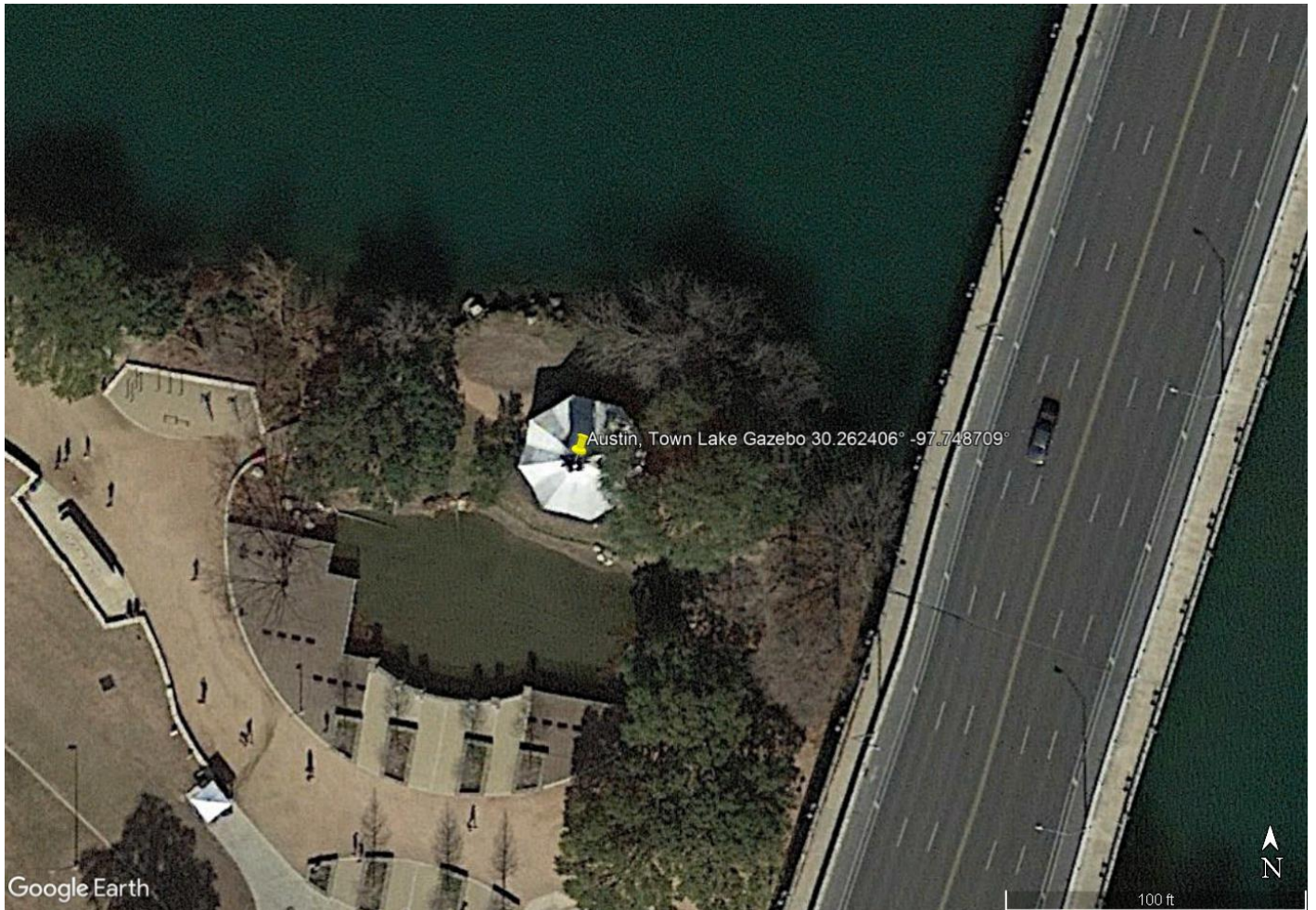
The nominated property is on the south shore of the lake, immediate south of the central business district.



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Google Earth Map detail (accessed May 31, 2019).





Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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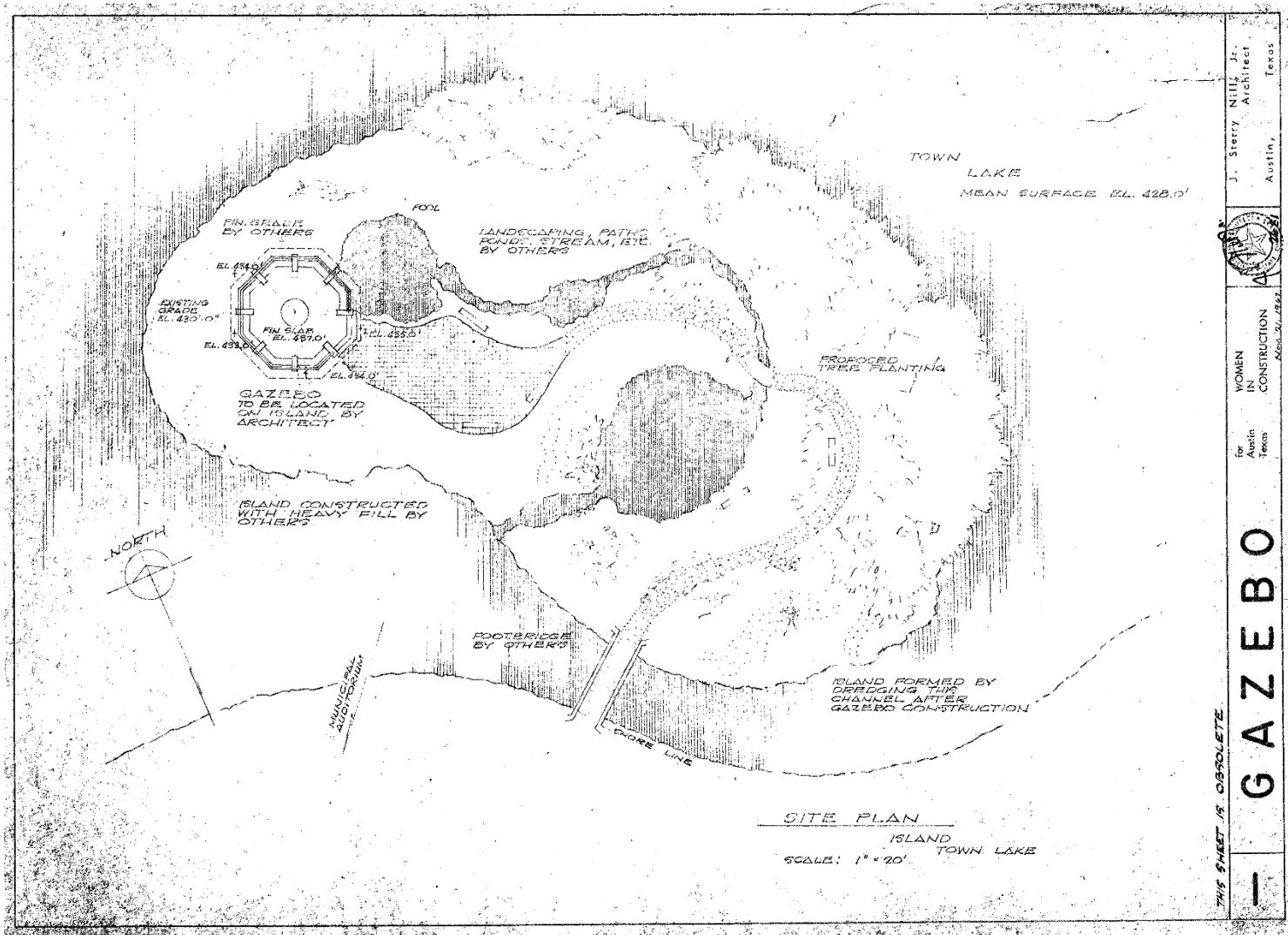
**Boundary Description:** The boundary is a 20-meter-diameter circle centered on the gazebo.

**Boundary Justification:** The nominated parcel includes gazebo and portions of the immediate landscape that retain integrity to the period of significance (1969-70), including the north portion of the pond immediately south of the gazebo.



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

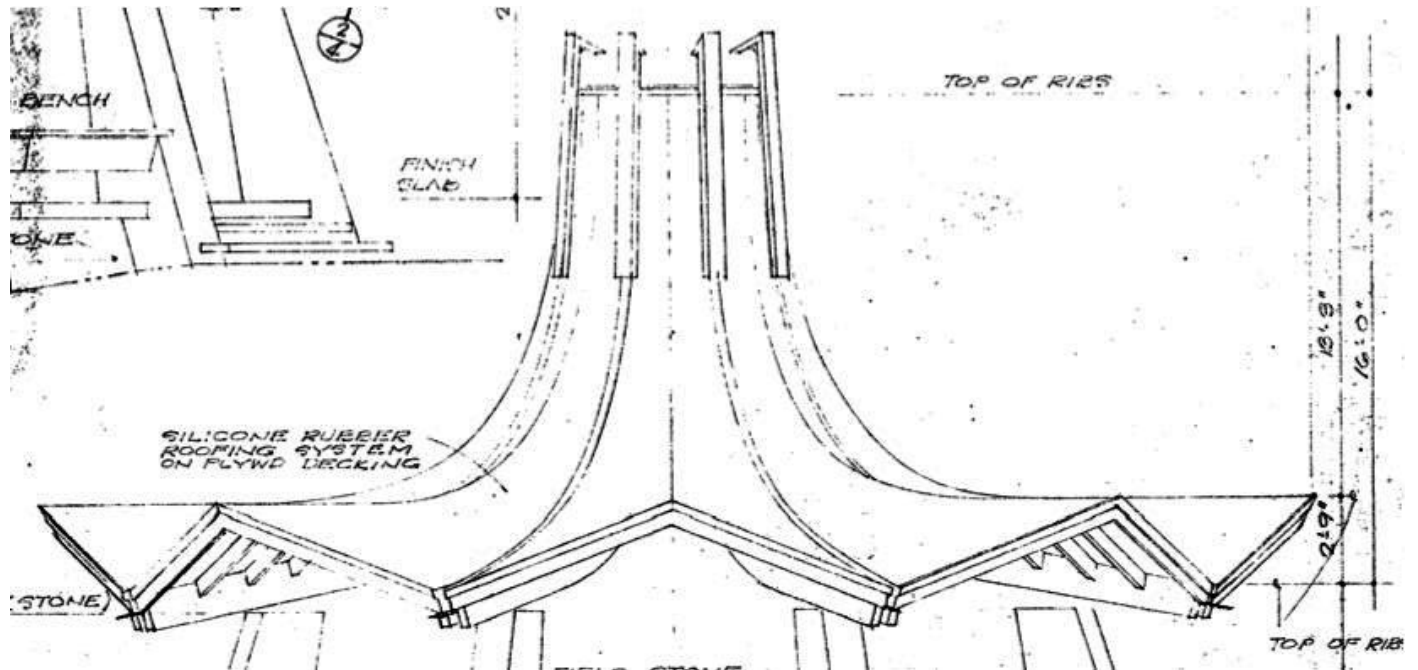
Original Site Plan (with notation "This sheet is obsolete") by J. Sterry Nill, 1967.





Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Roof Elevation (detail) by J. Sterry Nill, 1967.





Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Presentation of Gazebo Model, January 1966.

“Gazebo Fund Bid Is Launched Here.” *Austin American-Statesman*, January 6, 1966.



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Parks Director Beverly Sheffield and NAWIC Austin chapter president Lori Nill admire the model for the gazebo, June 1968. (Austin History Center)



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Groundbreaking Ceremony, July 1, 1968.

From Left: Ken Wendler, Kathleen Rhea, Councilwoman Emma Long, Anna Marie Houston, Dottie Davis and Lori Nill break ground for the Women in Construction Gazebo. (Austin History Center).





Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Aerial View of Town Lake looking north. The gazebo site is to the left of the First Street Bridge.  
Photograph by Neal Douglass, November 1968.

Original Source: Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Online source: The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries.

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph18890/>

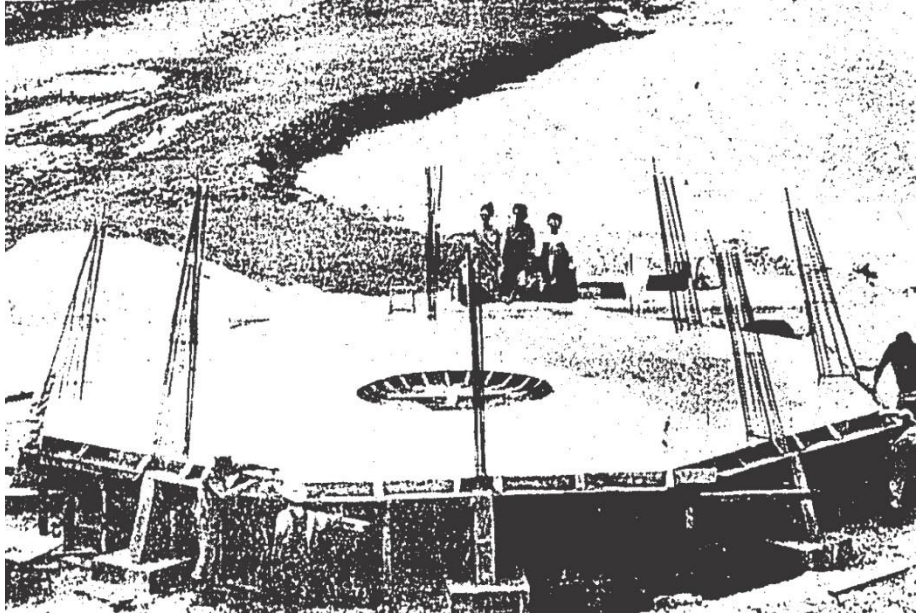


Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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“Gazebo-Shaped” *Austin Statesman*, Sept. 5, 1968.

“...the concrete floor was poured Wednesday.”



“Mrs. Alvie Rhea, forward, and Mrs. Royale Myers place the name of the organization in the drying concrete.”



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Construction photos from the personal collection of Lori Nill, as published in “Stories from the Fannie Davis Gazebo” by Christine Adame.

Setting up the formwork for the octagonal slab.



A crane raises one of the glulam beams.



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Construction photos from the personal collection of Lori Nill, as published in “Stories from the Fannie Davis Gazebo” by Christine Adame.

The gazebo begins to take shape.



A total of sixteen beams support the roof.



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photograph by Nolen E. Williamson (early 1970s).

Original Source: Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Online source: The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph124262/>



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Lady Bird Johnson, Les Gage (Co-Chairman, Town Lake Beautification Committee) and Mrs. John Burns (Co-Chairman, Town Lake Beautification Committee) receiving an award for beautification work at Town Lake. December 8, 1975.

Original Source: Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.  
Online source: The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas  
Libraries <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph124688/>



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Lady Bird Johnson, Michael Frary, and unnamed man with a painting of the Town Lake Gazebo in front of the gazebo, 1975.

Original Source: Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Online source: The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph124309/>



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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**Japanese Sunken Garden Pavilion**

Brackenridge Park, San Antonio

Designed by Park Commissioner Ray Lambert in 1917

Source: Brackenridge Park, National Register of Historic Places nomination (2011)



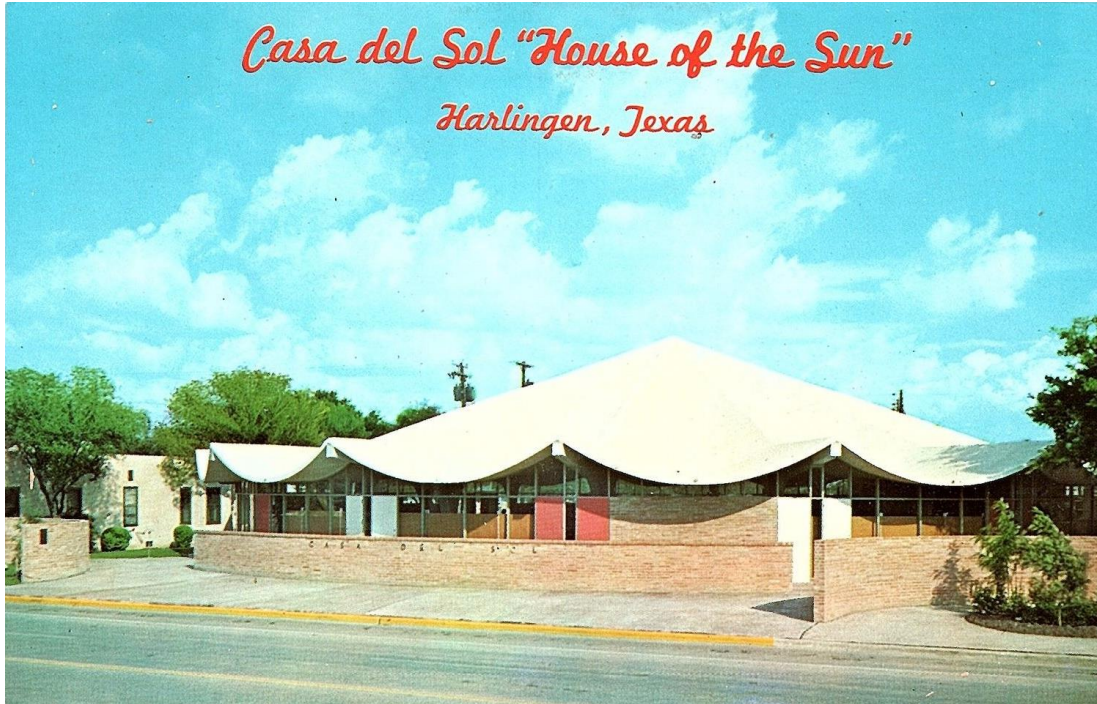


Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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**Casa del Sol Tourist Center** (Taniguchi and Croft, Architects, 1962)  
221 E Madison Ave Harlingen, Texas

Source: <https://www.hippocard.com/listing/postcard-tx-harlingen-casa-del-sol-tourist-center-b1/12653132>



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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**Los Jaliscienses Restaurant** (built 1963; originally Cross Country Inn)

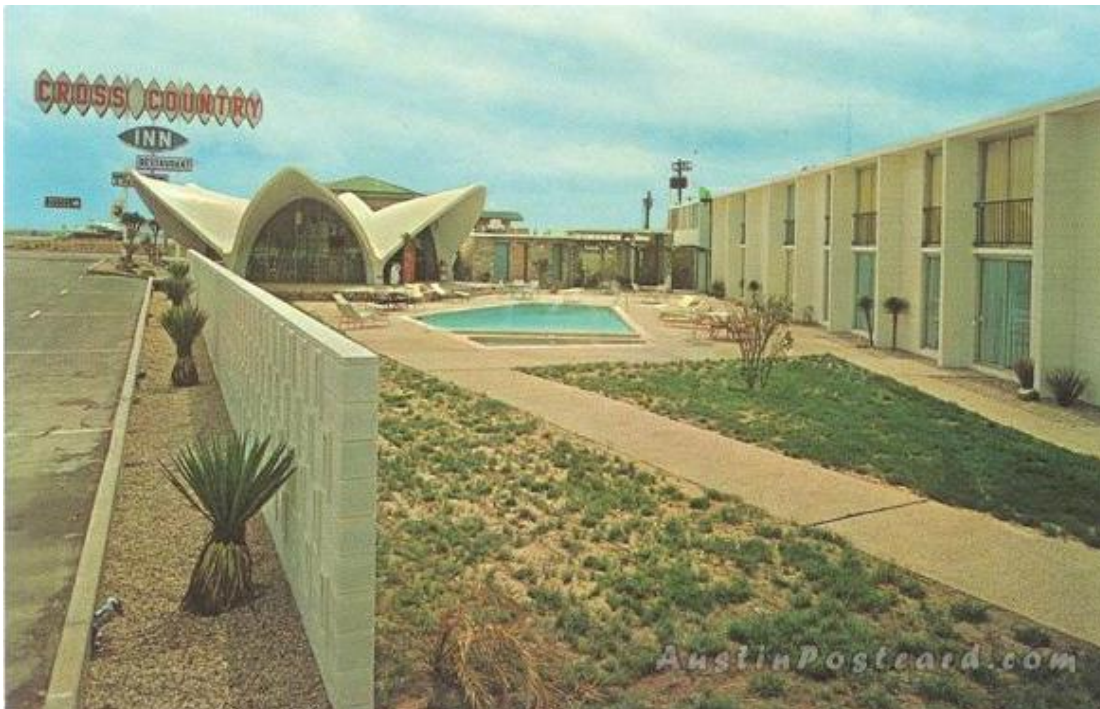
6201 E. Highway 290, Austin

Source: <https://arch-ive.org/archive/los-jaliscienses/>



**Cross Country Inn Postcard**

(<https://www.austinpostcard.com/view.php?card=1627&back=Y>)



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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**Current Photographs**

All photos by Gregory Smith, December 2019.

Photo 1  
South elevation  
Camera facing north



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 2  
South elevation  
Camera facing north



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 3  
West elevation with steps  
Camera facing southeast



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 4  
East elevation  
Camera facing west



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 5  
West entrance  
Camera facing east



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 6  
Dedication stone  
Camera facing east





Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 7  
Concrete seating  
Camera facing west



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 8

West entrance, looking northwest over the lake



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 9  
Glulam roof structure  
Camera facing northeast



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 10  
Detail of typical Glulam joist  
Camera facing east



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 11  
Roof oculus



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 12  
Cover with drain opening over central fountain  
Camera facing southeast



Town Lake Gazebo, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Photo 13

1984 rededication marker honoring Fannie Davis on east side of the gazebo  
Camera facing northeast



- end -