

FP-033

MAGNOLIA LOUNGE

This building, now called the Magnolia Lounge, looks like it is from a completely different era than the many Art Deco buildings around it. But it too was built for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition and is one of the 30 historic structures at Fair Park that remains from that fair.

Crafted in a more contemporary architectural style known as International Style, this building was built by the Magnolia Oil Company as a place for fair visitors to sit and chat in air-conditioned comfort.

The Exposition guidebook noted: "In the spacious lounge-room where comfortable seats are provided for 100 guests, continuous entertainment is provided. Talking motion pictures are projected here on a translucent screen in such a manner that they will be clearly visible while the room remains lighted."

In 1947, the Magnolia Lounge took on a new life as the Margo Jones Theater, where plays took place in-the round. The theater was America's first modern, nonprofit professional resident theater and also the first theater-in-the-round in the country. Over eight years, Margo Jones produced 85 plays in this location. Some were classics, others original works by several emerging playwrights at the time, including Tennessee Williams.

One of her trademarks was to name the theater according to the years, for example, "Theater 48," "Theater 49," etc. Sadly, her success and fame were short-lived. In 1955 Margo Jones died suddenly and unexpectedly after inhaling carbon tetrachloride fumes, which resulted from having her carpets cleaned. Within four years, the theater she created was closed.

For a while during the 1980s and 90s, the Magnolia Lounge functioned as a Fair Park Visitors Center, operated by a non-profit organization called the Friends of Fair Park. Their offices remain within the building today.

The building received a face-lift in 2003 and has once again become a home for theatrical presentations. The lounge is the home of a theatrical company known as Nouveau 47. Note the name pays tribute to the first year Margo Jones staged productions in this same space.

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