GERALD D. HINES
1925–2020
Elected in 2001

“For global leadership in engineering advancements that set the standard for innovative and efficient design in the commercial building industry.”

BY RONALD KLEMENCIC

GERALD DOUGLAS HINES, founder and chair of the Houston-based international commercial real estate firm Hines, died August 23, 2020, of cancer at age 95, surrounded by family at his home in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Started as a one-person operation in Houston more than 60 years ago, the firm’s portfolio of work today includes nearly 1000 developments and more than 100 high-rise buildings around the world, many of which were built in collaboration with some of the most renowned architects. At the time of Hines’s passing, his firm employed more than 4800 people in 225 cities, more than 25 countries, on five continents, and managed nearly $84 billion in investment assets.

He was born August 15, 1925, and raised in Gary, Indiana. His mother, Myrtle, was a teacher and homemaker, and his father, Gordon, was an electrician at Gary Works, US Steel’s largest manufacturing plant. At age 14 Gerry worked part-time in the plant, chipping billets, hammering steel bars into small pieces, and quickly learning that this kind of hard, manual labor was not in his future. “I saw the inside of that steel mill, and I said, ‘There is no way I want to work here for my career,’” Hines told his biographer, Mark Seal.1 “So, you

learn what you do not want to do. It was terrible being in the steel mill. It was grimy, and the language was pretty awful.”

As a boy he had marveled at downtown Chicago's Wrigley Building—with its soaring north and south towers (21 and 30 stories, respectively), delicate terra cotta tiles, and intricate Beaux-Arts architectural style—and told himself, “Someday, I'd like to build one of those.”

Between 1943 and 1946 Hines served as a lieutenant in the US Army Corps of Engineers, stationed in Fort Lewis, Washington. He then enrolled at Purdue University, and graduated in 1948 with a degree in mechanical engineering.

He went to work in the Houston office of Detroit-based American Blower, an industrial furnace and air conditioning manufacturer. He lived with Purdue fraternity brothers at a local chapter of the YMCA. Soon after that he was hired as a sales representative at Texas Engineering Company, which manufactured mechanical systems for commercial and industrial buildings.

It was while working at Texas Engineering, in 1951, that Hines made his first foray into real estate. He purchased for $16,000 the small home out of which the company operated, and in 1957 he sold the house for twice that amount. Thus, his eponymous firm, with himself as the sole employee, was born.

Hines developed roughly a dozen small warehouses and ordinary office buildings in Houston during the firm's earliest years. By 1967 the firm employed 35 people and had amassed a portfolio of nearly 100 office, parking, residential, retail, and warehouse projects in Houston. He burnished his reputation in the early 1970s with three flagship projects in the city:

- The Galleria: An upscale shopping center built on former prairie land and opened in 1970. It drew Texas’s first Neiman Marcus department store outside of Dallas. Hines insisted that the shopping center include an ice skating rink despite the added costs; he believed, correctly, that it would draw visitors and increase basement-floor rental rates.
• One Shell Plaza: Upon completion in 1971, the 50-story, 715-foot-tall office tower, designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, was the tallest building in Texas. According to Hines, “Winning the opportunity to build One Shell Plaza in downtown Houston almost five decades ago charted the course for our firm.”

• Pennzoil Place: The project’s distinctive 36-story, twin-trapezoidal towers were built with celebrated architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee and opened in 1975. Pennzoil Place was named Building of the Year by New York Times architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, who added, “It successfully marries art and architecture and the business of investment construction.”

These successes allowed Hines to expand his company to markets in the rest of the United States and throughout the world. Over the next 50 years the firm opened offices in Atlanta, Barcelona, Beijing, Berlin, Chicago, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Greece, Hong Kong, London, Mexico City, Milan, Moscow, Paris, Prague, San Francisco, São Paulo, Seoul, Warsaw, and other parts of the world.

Colleagues, friends, and family members recalled that Hines—always modest, humble, and soft-spoken—had unique, almost quirky, characteristics. He was known to keep an old-school slide rule handy, and during meetings would pretend to use it so that others wouldn’t call on him to speak.

With an early background selling HVAC systems for Texas Engineering, he was particularly interested in his projects’ ventilation systems. He fretted over the tiniest details and was never above testing hinges, handles, and doors. As he told Forbes in 2000, “[Customers] like to feel that heavy hardware. Just like a good Mercedes or Lincoln door—when you slam it, it sounds good.” Jeff Hines reports that when his father met with Shell executives to discuss building the 50-story One Shell Plaza in Houston in 1970, he brought along pieces of hardware to demonstrate what he planned for the building’s level of finishes.
Some of the firm’s most notable developments include Salesforce Tower in San Francisco (designed by architect César Pelli), D.Z. Bank in Berlin (Frank O. Gehry), Tour EDF in Paris (Pei Cobb Freed & Partners), Columbia Square (Henry N. Cobb) and City Center (Sir Norman Foster) in Washington, DC, and Diagonal Mar Centre in Barcelona (Robert A.M. Stern).

Hines formed a rewarding, long-term working relationship with Philip Johnson and John Burgee. The trio designed and constructed more than a dozen buildings, including two of the five tallest buildings in Houston—the 64-story Williams Tower and 56-story T.C. Energy Center—as well as 24-story One Post Oak Central. Around the country, they designed and built the 23-story 580 California Street and 48-story 101 California Street buildings in San Francisco, the 34-story building at 53rd and Third in Manhattan (nicknamed the “Lipstick Building” because of its curving, elliptical exterior and tapered form), the 25-story 500 Boylston Street building in Boston, the 45-story Comerica Tower in Detroit, and the 50-story Wells Fargo Center in Denver, among other structures.

In 2001 Hines and Johnson were honored by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) during a celebration that drew more than 350 guests to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. “I had heard about Philip Johnson and how ornery he was,” Hines told a Houston Chronicle reporter. “A mutual friend introduced us, and I didn’t find him to be ornery at all. I thought he was very cooperative.” For his part Johnson said, “I have only learned from Gerry. I don’t learn from the books or school. I learn from the builders.”

Hines also worked with the celebrated architects David M. Childs, Art Gensler, Bruce Graham, A. Eugene Kohn, Richard Meier, Charles W. Moore, Jean Nouvel, William E. Pedersen, I.M. Pei, Jon Pickard, and Kevin Roche, as well as the firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

The reasoning behind partnering with blue-chip architects was simple, according to Stephen Fox, an architectural historian and lecturer at Rice University and the University of Houston. “If you make a building that is distinctive, there
are tenants that will pay extra to have their offices there,” Fox told the *Houston Chronicle.*\(^2\) “That was kind of the Hines breakthrough—to understand and respect the power of architecture to create structures [that] potential clients would want to identify with. He put Houston on the map in terms of architecture by his imaginativeness and his business discipline in understanding how he could work with the best architects of the world within the economic constraints of real estate development and construction.”

In addition to developing projects with the world’s top architects, Hines’s projects are recognized by the US Environmental Protection Agency, US Green Building Council, Global Green USA, and other leading environmental organizations.

Beyond day-to-day business activities, Hines shared his knowledge and experience with emerging industry leaders. Professionally and philanthropically, he supported real estate, architecture, and urban planning programs at Harvard University, Rice University, the University of Houston, Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, and other educational institutions.

He also earned industry awards and honors throughout his career. In 1997 the University of Houston named its School of Architecture after Hines. Five years later, he received the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development—and donated the honorarium and additional funding to inaugurate the ULI Gerald D. Hines Student Urban Design Competition. In 2008 Harvard Design School presented its first Visionary Leadership in Real Estate Development Award to Hines.

He was named an honorary fellow of the AIA, earned honorary doctorates from Purdue University and the University of Houston, and was inducted into the North Texas Commercial Real Estate Hall of Fame. In addition, he received the National Building Museum’s Honor Award, the Lynn S. Beedle Award from the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitats, the

Good Design Is Good Business Patron Award presented by *Architectural Record* and the American Architectural Foundation, the Cornell Real Estate Industry Leader Award, and the History-Making Texan Award from the Texas State History Museum Foundation.

When Hines was 50, doctors told him he would need heart bypass surgery. Instead, he adopted a healthy diet and rigorous exercise program, often cycling 25 miles before breakfast. He also enjoyed climbing expeditions, backcountry ski trips, and sailing. He was an avid skier into his 90s, and developed the Aspen Highlands ski area as a coowner of the Aspen Ski Company. He owned homes in Houston, Aspen, New York City, and Greenwich. He celebrated his 90th birthday in 2015 at the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture on the University of Houston campus. The event drew more than 2000 guests.

Hines is survived by his wife Barbara (née Fritzsche), sons Jeffrey and Trevor, daughters Jennifer Hines Robertson and Serena Hines, 15 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Jeffrey joined the firm in 1981 as an assistant project manager; he was named president in 1990 and chair and CEO in 2020.

In the 2016 biography, Hines offered some insight into his career success:

When opportunities come to you, don’t take more than the ones you can be successful at. If you’re successful at one of them, then other opportunities will come. But if you’re not successful because you took on too many things, then opportunities will have a harder time showing up. So be successful one opportunity at a time.