



# THE HOUSTON SEMINAR

SPRING 2026





# THE HOUSTON SEMINAR

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Anne Schlumberger

The Houston Seminar mourns the death of its long-time Board member, Anne Schlumberger (1939-2025). Anne was a French émigrée who, happily for us, embraced Houston as her home. She was an architect and noted art patron but was best known as a lover of all things beautiful with an uncanny eye for the quirky.

## Spring 2026

PAGE









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### MARCH

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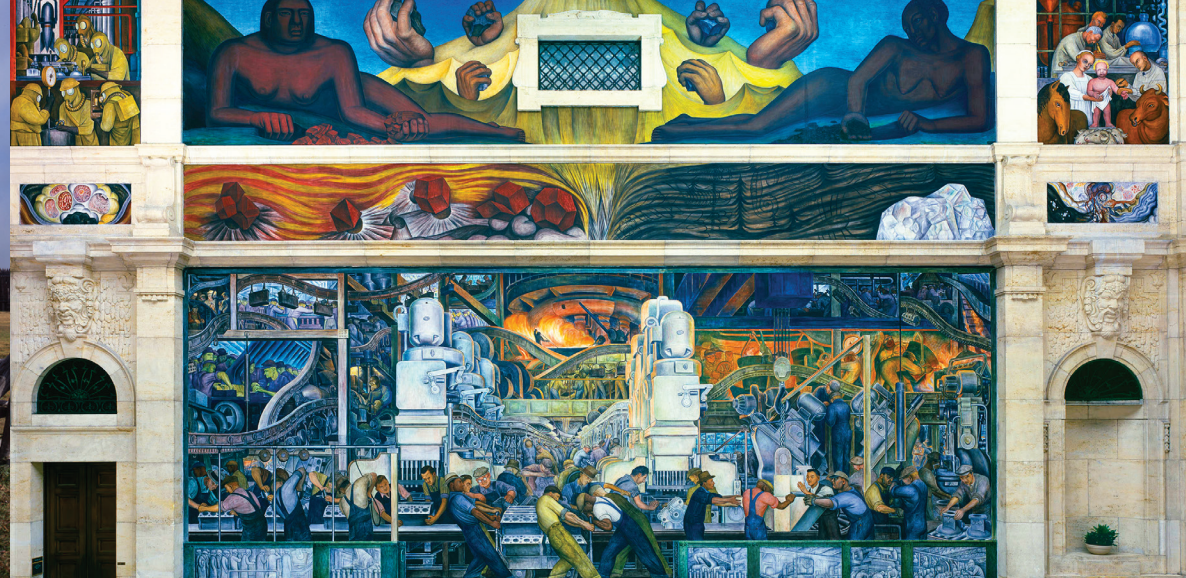
### MAY - JUNE

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Chip and Joanna Gaines



## STUDY TOURS

For trip pricing and further information, or to place your name on an interest list, please visit [houstonseminar.org](http://houstonseminar.org), email [registrar@houstonseminar.org](mailto:registrar@houstonseminar.org), or call 713-666-9000.



[houstonseminar.org](http://houstonseminar.org)

## The Heart of Texas: Exploring the Brazos River Basin

Thursday, March 12–Sunday, March 15

This spring we will continue our deep dive into Texas roots when we travel the backroads of Central Texas through the fertile Brazos River Basin. The Heart of Texas is full of stories from prehistory to the impact that Joanna and Chip Gaines's *Fixer Upper* television series and their subsequent Magnolia brand have had on the changing fortunes of Waco.

The four-day tour by motorcoach will include Washington-on-the-Brazos, the birthplace of the Republic of Texas; Old Fort Parker, the scene of the legendary kidnapping by the Comanches of Cynthia Ann Parker, the mother of Chief Quanah Parker; Chisolm Trail crossings; and noteworthy private homes. Travelers will stay in downtown Waco before visiting Temple and Salado on our return drive.

We will be joined by **Deborah Liles**, assistant professor and W. K. Gordon Chair of Texas History at Tarleton State University, who will share her extensive knowledge of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Texas history with us, as will **Kenneth Hafertepe**, professor of museum studies at Baylor University. Architectural historian **Stephen Fox** will also accompany the tour, which will feature a mixture of historical and contemporary sites and topics.

The Heart of Texas—cotton, cattle, railroads, fortunes made and lost, and the people behind the legends. Please join us!



## Motor City Renaissance: Architecture, Innovation, and Creative Transformation

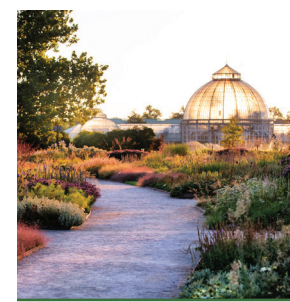
Wednesday, June 3–Sunday, June 7

Reinvigorated by new residents, investment, and imagination, twenty-first century Motor City is a welcoming cultural destination, and we invite you to experience some of its attractions with us in June.

Highlights will include an afternoon at the Cranbrook Educational Campus, with its schools, galleries, and homes by architects including Eliel Saarinen, Albert Kahn, and Steven Holl; a private visit to the Ford Motor Company's historic River Rouge assembly complex; an owner-led tour of Frank Lloyd Wright's Turkel House, which is not usually open to visitors; and an appraisal of Michigan Central Station's billion dollar transformation.

We will also explore local gems such as the iconic Detroit Institute of Arts, the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation, dazzling historic lobbies, the 1907 Pewabic Pottery studio and nearby Shepherd Arts Center, and Belle Isle, with its freshly renovated Conservatory and Aquarium, as well as its lush Piet Oudolf garden, which opened in 2024.

Detroit-based historian, writer, and tour guide **Jacob Jones** will accompany us, sharing the broader story of the city's industry, history, culture, and community. We will stay at the historic, newly renovated Hotel David Whitney in the heart of downtown; all destinations are conveniently located within 30 minutes of the hotel. Both first-time and repeat Detroit visitors will find new pleasures in this inspiring visit to a city on the rise.



*"Detroit is booming... the city's revitalization - its design-forward architecture and new shopping, restaurants, and cultural spaces - generate an energy that is palpable."*

- *The New York Times*,  
JULY 30, 2025



Photo: James Haefner Photography



## COURSES

**What is Music Made of?**

Wednesday, January 21, 6:00–7:30 P.M. Italian Cultural & Community Center, 1101 Milford, 77006.



Wood, hair, callused fingers, a seeking spirit, tree sap, and gut... This interactive cello recital/music-dissection is an introduction to the miraculous combination of “materials” that comprise an orchestra and follows music back in time, around the world, and into the substances of the earth and the imagination. Be transported to the sunlit sanctuary of Bologna’s ancient San Petronio Basilica in 1689. Tackle the riddles of Johann Sebastian Bach. Enjoy a sonic meditation, and open your ears to your own memories and visions, as we investigate the question: What is music made of?

Presented by **Evan Leslie**, managing director of the Texas Music Festival and director of community arts at the Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts, University of Houston, we will be treated to selections of *ricercari* by Domenico Gabrielli (Italian, 1651–1690), preludes and dances from the unaccompanied cello suites by Johann Sebastian Bach (German, 1685–1750), sonic meditations by Pauline Oliveros (American, 1932–2016), and other songs and musical games.

**Foods from the Motherland: The Cuisines of West Africa**

Wednesday, February 4, 11:30 A.M.–1:30 P.M.  
ChòpnBlòk Montrose, 507 Westheimer, 77006.

Houston’s West African population has grown explosively over the past decade, influencing the culture and cuisine of the city. Join us for lunch to learn why West African food has become a major global culinary trend and why ChòpnBlòk has taken Houston by storm and gained national attention.

Participants will receive a comprehensive introduction to West African food with a sampling of delicious appetizers and savory “pairings” of rice, curries, meats, vegetables, and plantains in a stylish space filled with textiles and art of West Africa.

The meal will be accompanied by a discussion of the countries whose cuisines are represented on the menu, the spices and ingredients that make the food unique, and the events and passions that led to the creation of the restaurant.

**Houston's History through Homes**

Two Tuesdays, February 10 and 17, 6:00–7:30 P.M. Rice University.  
Directions will be provided to subscribers.

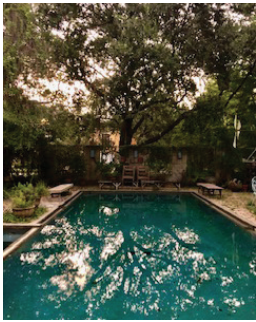
Join **Stephen Sherman**, housing researcher and scholar at Rice University’s Kinder Institute, as he relates the economic history of Houston through the stories of 19 homes, some of which are still standing today. These houses all reflect not only cultural expectations about the home and the family, but Houston’s evolving orientation to the local and global economy. Mr. Sherman will chart Houston’s evolution from agrarian market town, to railroad logistics hub, to oil boomtown, to the diverse global economic center it is today. Of emphasis are not necessarily the houses of “great Houstonians,” but everyday working people’s homes, which are concrete, physical manifestations of a specific economic and cultural order in which they lived.

**FEBRUARY 10:** In the first session, we will cover key concepts for understanding urban political economy through housing. We start with Houston homes from pre-colonial history until the early twentieth century.

**FEBRUARY 17:** The second session picks up with the post-World War II suburban housing boom, explaining both its causes and effects, and ends with contemporary homes and how they indicate contemporary threats to Houston’s seemingly forever growth.

Stephen Sherman is a research scientist at the Kinder Institute for Urban Research’s Center for Housing and Neighborhoods. He regularly appears on local news programs, such as Houston Public Media’s *Houston Matters*, as an expert on local housing topics. Mr. Sherman has published in both peer-reviewed journals and through the Kinder Institute, where he is the lead researcher for the yearly “State of Housing in Harris County and Houston” report. He earned master’s and PhD degrees in Urban Planning from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a BA in American Studies and English (with a creative writing emphasis) from the University of Iowa.





## A Coming Together

Friday, March 5, 4:00–6:00 P.M. Private residence. Directions will be provided to subscribers. Limited enrollment. Refreshments will be provided.

*“We were never cast out of Eden. We merely turned from it and shut our eyes. To return and be welcomed, cleansed and redeemed, we are only obliged to look.”*

- Margaret Renkl, *The Comfort of Crows* (Spiegel & Grau, 2023)



Our hostess and her husband collaborated with the dream team of Taft Architects and plant man extraordinaire, Will Fleming, to create a home for their family. The result is a unique assemblage of indoor and outdoor spaces suitable for this family's personal and social needs. The distinctive home is filled with art by family members, friends, and Houston icons such as Bob Camblin, Dorothy Hood, Jim Hatchett, Lucas Johnson, and Tim Walker; furniture by Michael Tracy; and works selected from around the world.

Join us for an afternoon in the serenity of a quiet refuge, this Eden if you will, in the middle of the bustling city. Come enjoy a home designed to delight the soul.



Courtesy: My Connect Community (MCC)

## Gulfton Community Tours

Two Wednesdays, March 18 and 25, 9:30 A.M.–Noon. Directions will be provided to subscribers. Limited enrollment.

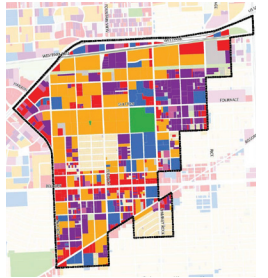
Join us for a two-day deep dive into Houston's Gulfton neighborhood focusing on the history, the community, and key neighborhood sites. Houston's dense, vibrant Gulfton neighborhood is home to more than 50,000 residents speaking more than 50 languages, which offers both opportunities and challenges. Since 2016, My Connect Community (MCC) has worked with area residents and public and private organizations to launch and support a variety of creative projects to provide mixed-income housing, workforce development, healthcare, green spaces, and more.

On two mornings in March, **Lauren Caldarera**, MCC's vice president of programs and strategy, will be our guide as we visit a variety of projects and hear from local leaders. What is next for this energetic community, and what can our city learn from these initiatives?

**MARCH 18:** After welcome remarks from MCC president and CEO **Alyssa Trometter**, our guided bus tour will include stops at the Burnett Bayland Park revitalization project (with **Maria Hernandez** of Madres del Parque); St. Luke's United Methodist Church Gethsemane, which offers an array of resources for refugees, immigrants, and at-risk youth (with the Reverend **Julie Ellerbrock**); and Étoile Academy Charter School's Hornwood campus, which serves predominantly Afghan and Pakistani students,

as well as children from 14 other countries (with Étoile Superintendent **Kayleigh Colombero**).

**MARCH 25:** During this combined bus and walking tour, we will first visit The Garden, St. Luke's new 52,000 square foot center for area youth, where PX Project founder and executive director **Meredith Davis** will introduce this culinary-based personal/workforce development program (and offer some baked treats). We will then tour the nearby MCC "15 Minute City" complex, including its new mixed-income High Star Apartments, Fabric Forge textile manufacturing center, and micro retail spaces for local entrepreneurs. Our tour will conclude with an overview of the neighborhood Legacy Community Health clinic, which serves 300-500 patients daily, with fully staffed pediatric, OB/GYN, and behavioral health clinics on-site (with **Blessing Adesuyi** of Legacy Health).



Gulfton: Land Use

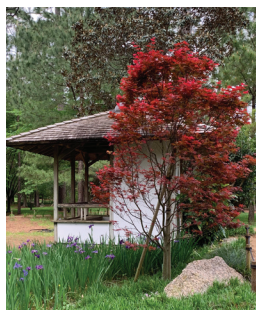


## Japanese Garden Tour

Thursday, March 19, 9:00–10:30 A.M. Japanese Garden, Hermann Park Conservancy, 6000 Fannin, 77030.

For over 30 years Hermann Park's Japanese Garden has served as both a cultural treasure and a tranquil green space in the middle of Houston. Designed by world-renowned Japanese landscape architect Ken Nakajima, the garden was built to symbolize the friendship between Japan and the United States and to recognize Houston's thriving Japanese community. Hermann Park Conservancy collaborates with the City of Houston to maintain and improve this vibrant yet peaceful space. With partnerships both across the city of Houston and internationally, Hermann Park staff preserves Japanese design concepts while managing the realities of maintaining a flourishing public garden. Join Hermann Park Conservancy's senior director of green space **Iris Clawson-Davis** for a walking tour of the garden. She will share the history, important Japanese design concepts, and horticulture present in the space.

Iris Clawson-Davis brings over 20 years of horticultural experience to Hermann Park Conservancy. Formerly the city horticulturist for Houston, she has led ecological restoration, urban design, and public engagement projects. A passionate leader, she combats "systemic green-blindness", connecting communities to nature through sustainable, inspiring landscapes.







## New Orleans: A Spicy Serving of Creole Culture

Tuesday, March 31, 11:00 A.M.–12:30 P.M. Kilroy Education and Visitor Center, Bayou Bend, 6003 Memorial, 77007.

We invite you to experience a taste of New Orleans without leaving Houston by imbibing in the culture, cuisine, and great music of this Creole-American City.

**Charles Chamberlain** will trace the evolution of the city through its cuisine and explain how specific meals represent the different cultures of the city's past and present. The experience encompasses the history of the Choctaw, the Wolof (Niger-Congo ethnic group), French Creole, and Congo. We will sample maque choux, gumbo, and étouffée, pairing each regional influence with relevant music. You will not want to miss this enlightening, entertaining, and delicious opportunity.

Charles Chamberlain is a professor of history at the University of New Orleans concentrating on Louisiana studies and music history. He received his PhD in U.S. history from Tulane University and is the author of *New Orleans: A Concise History of an Exceptional City* (LSU Press, 2025).

## Springing Up!

Tuesday, April 7, 9:00 A.M.–4:00 P.M. Transportation will be provided to subscribers. Lunch is included.



Louisiana Irises love the entire Gulf Coast, not just Louisiana. This year during the height of bloom season, the Houston Seminar will head out of Houston on a day trip to visit two stunning displays of irises.

We will travel by bus to Mercer Botanic Garden, where **Christie Jones**, director of education at Mercer, will give us a history of the Louisiana Irises and other plants at Mercer, and we will stroll around the grounds. After lunch, we will continue by bus to a private Louisiana Iris nursery and learn a little about hybrids and natives, courtesy of irisarian **Carol Price**, co-owner of Standards & Falls Iris.

Mercer Botanic Garden dates from the 1940s when Thelma and Charles Mercer preserved native trees such as dogwoods, cabbage palmettos, rusty blackhaw viburnum, and hawthorns, and introduced camellias and exotic tree species such as ginkgos, baubins, and camphors. In 1974, the property was preserved as a Harris County park. Today Mercer maintains several specific gardens as well as a conservation nursery and a seed bank for the Center for Plant Conservation.

Standards & Falls Iris was established in 2022 by Louise Jamail, Melinda Nickens, and Carol Shanks Price. The founders grew Louisiana Irises as

a hobby for decades before purchasing a soon-to-be shuttered nursery based near New Orleans and relocating it to Texas. Like any good gardener, please remember to wear sturdy shoes, a sun hat, and sunscreen.

## Literary New Orleans

Two Wednesdays, April 8 and 15, 6:00–7:30 P.M. Private residence. Directions will be provided to subscribers.

For more than three centuries, a remarkably diverse group of writers have had their creative juices stimulated by New Orleans and its environs, drawing upon the city as setting, inspiration, and example in the production of virtually every literary genre. Many of these authors, particularly those writing since the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, have tried to predict the city's future or pronounce its doom.

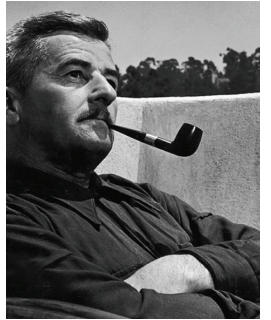
Over three meetings, **Logan Browning**, Rice University Professor in the Practice of English and Humanities, will guide us through some of the more notable instances of this New Orleans literature and examine its relationship to the city's languages, ethnic identities, musical heritage, visual arts, festivals, and cuisines.

**APRIL 8:** A brief overview of some of the more acclaimed New Orleans writers (e.g., William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Anne Rice) before homing in on some short stories by Eudora Welty and Maurice Carlos Ruffin.

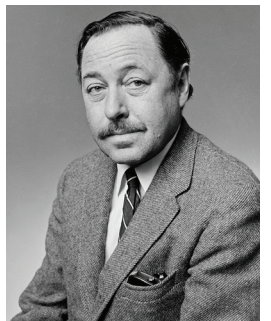
**APRIL 15:** A review of an "odd couple" of New Orleans books: Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* and John Kennedy O'Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*. The two protagonists of these novels, Binx Bolling and Ignatius Reilly, are vastly different in many ways, but each has captured the imagination of a great number of New Orleanians who find the pair wonderful avatars for their city.

In the third meeting, in the fall of 2026, we will look at Anne Rice's *The Feast of All Saints*, an extraordinary historical novel set in early nineteenth-century New Orleans. Spoiler alert: There are no vampires in the novel. New Orleans is also notable for the number of cocktail recipes that have originated there. We will enjoy one of those libations during each class to encourage our own creative attempts to understand the literary fascination with the "Accidental City," the Big Easy, the Big Sleazy, NOLA, or just plain old New Orleans.

Logan Browning is a specialist in Victorian literature and publishing history; a contributor to the *Oxford Reader's Companion to Charles Dickens*, the *Oxford Handbook on Dickens*, and other scholarly journals and reference works; and a faculty member of the Dickens Universe, housed at the University of California Santa Cruz. His current research also includes the study of writing in and about New Orleans.



William Faulkner



Tennessee Williams



Anne Rice



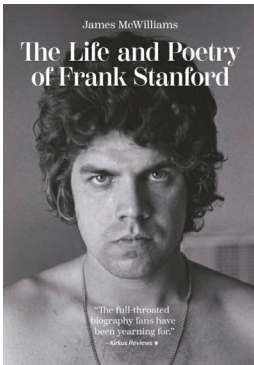
*The Light  
the Dead See*



SELECTED POEMS OF  
Frank Stanford

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY LEON STOKESBURY

James McWilliams  
**The Life and Poetry  
of Frank Stanford**



"The full-throated  
biography fans have  
been yearning for."  
—*Booklist*



## The Life and Poetry of Frank Stanford: A Conversation between James McWilliams and Kevin Prufer

Wednesday, April 22, 6:00–7:30 PM. Private residence.  
Location will be provided to subscribers.

*I don't believe in tame poetry. Poetry busts guts.*  
- Frank Stanford

Frank Stanford (1948-1978), a child of Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas, was published and known in his lifetime. Over the years, his poetry slipped out of the public eye, known mainly to fellow poets. **James McWilliams'** recent publication, *The Life and Poetry of Frank Stanford* (University of Arkansas Press, 2025), brings new attention to the artist and his work. Seven years of research and over 200 interviews resulted in a book that has received stellar reviews. Cyrus Cassells, former Texas poet laureate, writes:

*"James McWilliams treats the lightning-flash, tempestuous life of Frank Stanford with verve, unrelenting probity, and compassion. This astute, much-needed biography of a genuine American literary prodigy—a rambunctious southern visionary and iconoclast too often relegated to the back of the canon—is never anything less than essential and riveting."*

James McWilliams and **Kevin Prufer** will discuss Stanford's poetry, the American literary tradition, the south, and whatever else emerges in conversation.

James McWilliams is a writer and historian who teaches at Texas State University. His work has appeared in *Oxford American*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, the *New Yorker*, the *Paris Review*, the *American Scholar*, and *Mississippi Review*. He specializes in American history of the colonial and early national period, and in the environmental history of the United States.

Kevin Prufer is an award-winning author and professor in the creative writing program at the University of Houston. His first novel *Sleepaway* was published in 2024 and his tenth book of poetry *The Fears* received the 2024 Rilke Prize for American Poetry. Professor Prufer has edited several poetry anthologies and co-directs the *Unsung Masters Series*, a book series devoted to bringing the work of great but little-known authors to new generations of readers. He was recently appointed 2026 Texas State Poet Laureate.



## Living the Light: Zoroastrianism in Houston

Tuesday, May 5, 10:00 A.M.–Noon. Zoroastrian Association of Houston,  
8787 West Airport, 77071.

Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest religions, teaches a simple yet profound way of life—good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Founded over 3,000 years ago by the prophet Zarathustra in ancient Persia, the faith emphasizes truth, kindness, equality, and care for the environment—principles that remain deeply relevant in today's world. In Houston, Zoroastrians from India, Iran, and Pakistan have built a vibrant community centered around the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH), established in 1976. The ZAH is a place of worship as well as a cultural and educational hub. At the heart of the ZAH complex stands the "Atash Kadeh" or Fire Temple, where a sacred flame symbolizes purity and divine presence.

**Vehishta Kaikobad** and **Aban Rustomji**, members of the ZAH, will welcome us to the temple complex. We will have the opportunity to discover how Zoroastrians in Houston embody their faith through action, compassion, and civic engagement as we tour the campus.

Vehishta Kaikobad holds a diploma in Montessori education from St. Nicholas College, London, and has over 30 years of experience in the field of early childhood, middle, and high school education. Through her award-winning work in the Glassell Junior School, as an esteemed senior docent at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and in the ZAH classroom, she exemplifies Zoroastrian precepts. Ms. Kaikobad is dedicated to promoting interfaith and cultural bonding at a global level.

Aban Rustomji is the founder of the ZAH Library and co-chair of the FEZANA Information Research and Education System (FIRES). A career library media specialist with a master's in library science, she has dedicated her life to preserving and promoting Zoroastrian heritage. Raised in Pakistan, she immigrated to the U.S. in 1979 and has since been a driving force in cultural programs and Zoroastrian congresses, fostering intergenerational dialogue and mentorship to ensure a vibrant community future.



Silver Scroll Case



## COMING IN

# FALL 2026

## The Big Easy Study Tour of New Orleans

Thursday, October 22–Sunday, October 26

Next fall the Seminar will explore the rich history and vibrant food and music scene of New Orleans. Historians **Charles Chamberlain** and **Stephen Fox** have teamed up to guide us through the Creole culture—its architecture, music, cuisine, and literary influences. We will meet the chefs and musicians of today to learn about their current interpretations. New Orleans is an old story that always renews. Please join us!



## Discounts

Teachers and students with a school I.D. may attend classes for a discounted fee. Please call the registrar for details.

## Refunds

For refund requests that occur at least two weeks before a course begins, a 20% cancellation fee will be charged. If others have been turned away from a limited-enrollment course, no refund will be issued unless your place can be filled. Refund policies for courses involving travel will differ.

## Enrollment

All courses are available on a first-come, first-served basis. You may enroll by mail, email, phone, or online.

## Gift Certificates

These are available for a single session, a specific course, or a dollar amount, which the recipient may apply toward any course(s). Please call for more information.

## Social Media



TheHoustonSeminar HoustonSeminar

## Stay Connected

Sign up for our email list for announcements, course updates, and other news.



[houstonseminar.org/contact](https://houstonseminar.org/contact)

## PLEASE ENROLL ME/US IN THE FOLLOWING COURSES:

<b>The Heart of Texas: Exploring the Brazos River Basin</b> Thursday, March 12–Sunday, March 15	For trip pricing and further information, or to place your name on an interest list, please visit <a href="mailto:registrar@houstonseminar.org">houstonseminar.org</a> , email <a href="mailto:registrar@houstonseminar.org">registrar@houstonseminar.org</a> , or call 713-666-9000.
<b>Motor City Renaissance: Architecture, Innovation, and Creative Transformation</b> Wednesday, June 3–Sunday, June 7	
<b>What is Music Made of?</b> Wednesday, January 21, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> January 21
<b>Foods from the Motherland: The Cuisines of West Africa</b> Wednesday, February 4, 11:30 A.M.–1:30 P.M., \$95	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> February 4
<b>Houston's History through Homes</b> Two Tuesdays, February 10 and 17, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$40 per session	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> February 10 <input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> February 17
<b>A Coming Together</b> March 5, 4:00–6:00 P.M., \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> March 5
<b>Gulfton Community Tours</b> Two Wednesdays, March 18 and 25, 9:30 A.M.–Noon, \$125 per session	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> March 18 <input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> March 25
<b>Japanese Garden Tour</b> Thursday, March 19, 9:00–10:30 A.M., \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> March 19
<b>New Orleans: A Spicy Serving of Creole Culture</b> Tuesday, March 31, 11:00 A.M.–12:30 P.M., \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> March 31
<b>Springing Up!</b> Tuesday, April 7, 9:00 A.M.–4:00 P.M., \$200	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> April 7
<b>Literary New Orleans</b> Two Wednesdays, April 8 and 15, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$60 per session	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> April 8 <input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> April 15
<b>The Life and Poetry of Frank Stanford: A Conversation between James McWilliams and Kevin Prufer</b> Wednesday, April 22, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> April 22
<b>Living the Light: Zoroastrianism in Houston</b> Tuesday, May 5, 10:00 A.M.–Noon., \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>IP</b> May 5

NAME

ADDRESS

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