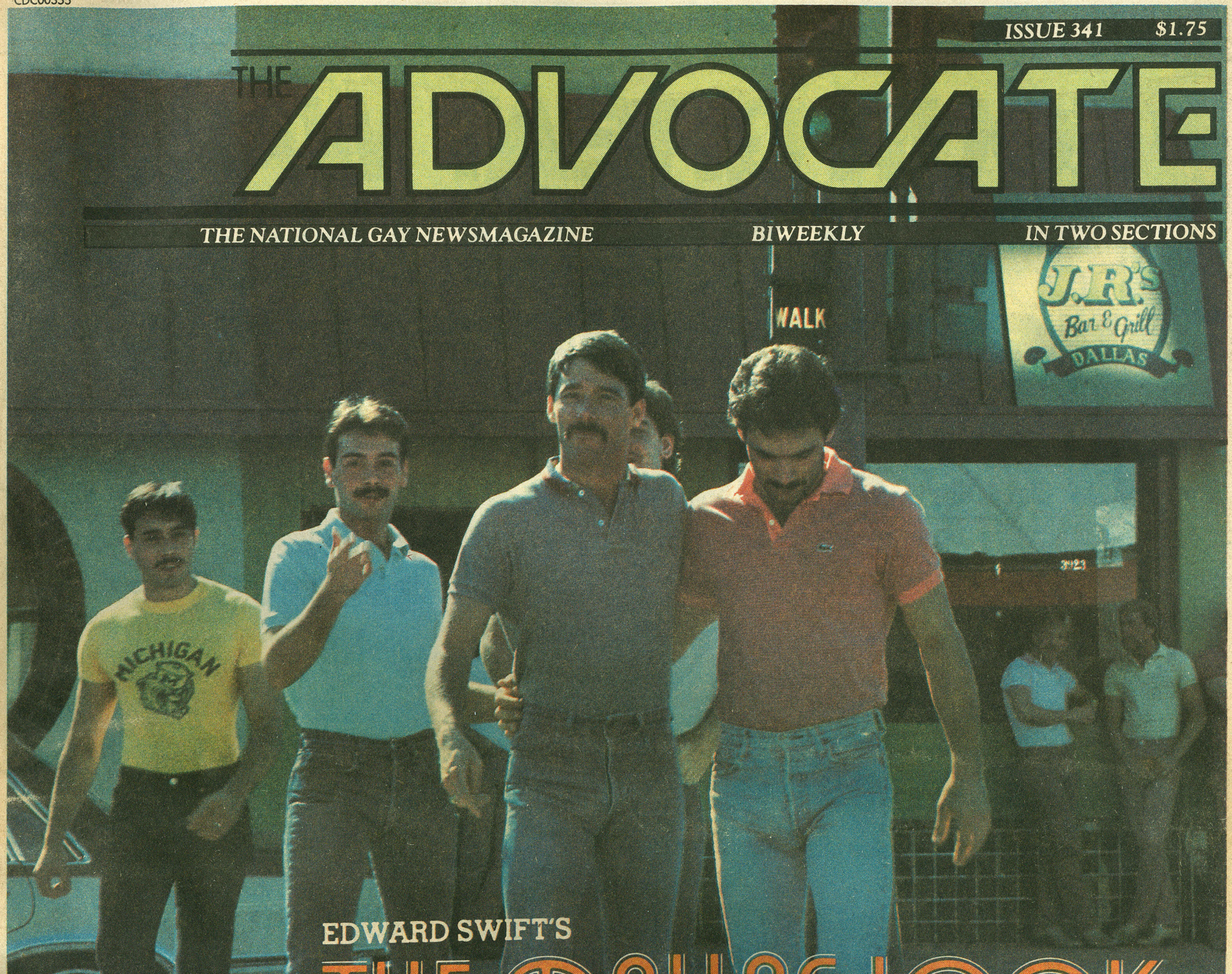
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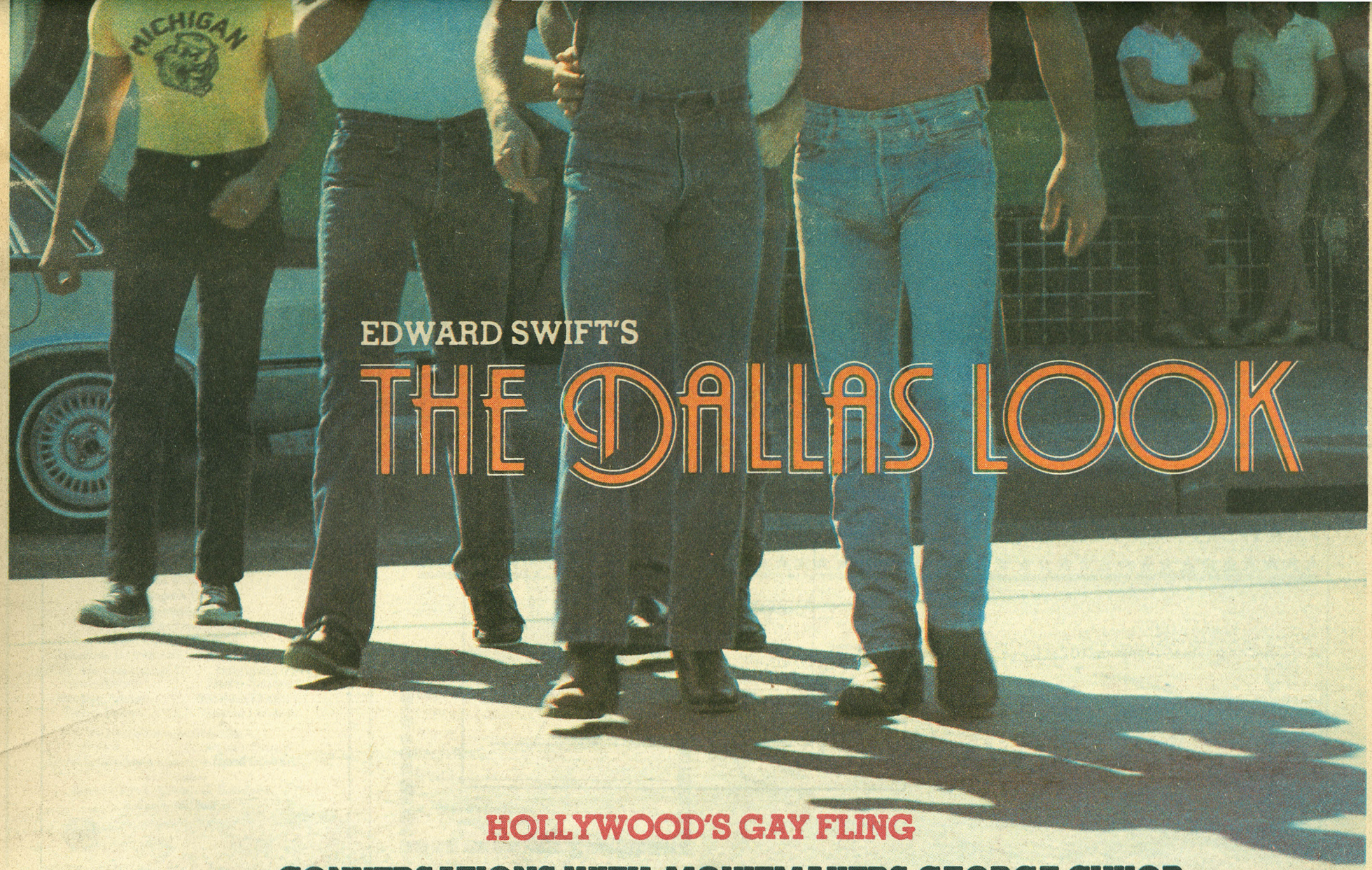
ISSUE 341 $1.75

THE ADVOCATE

THE NATIONAL GAY NEWSMAGAZINE BIWEEKLY IN TWO SECTIONS



EDWARD SWIFT'S



EDWARD SWIFT'S

THE DALLAS LOOK

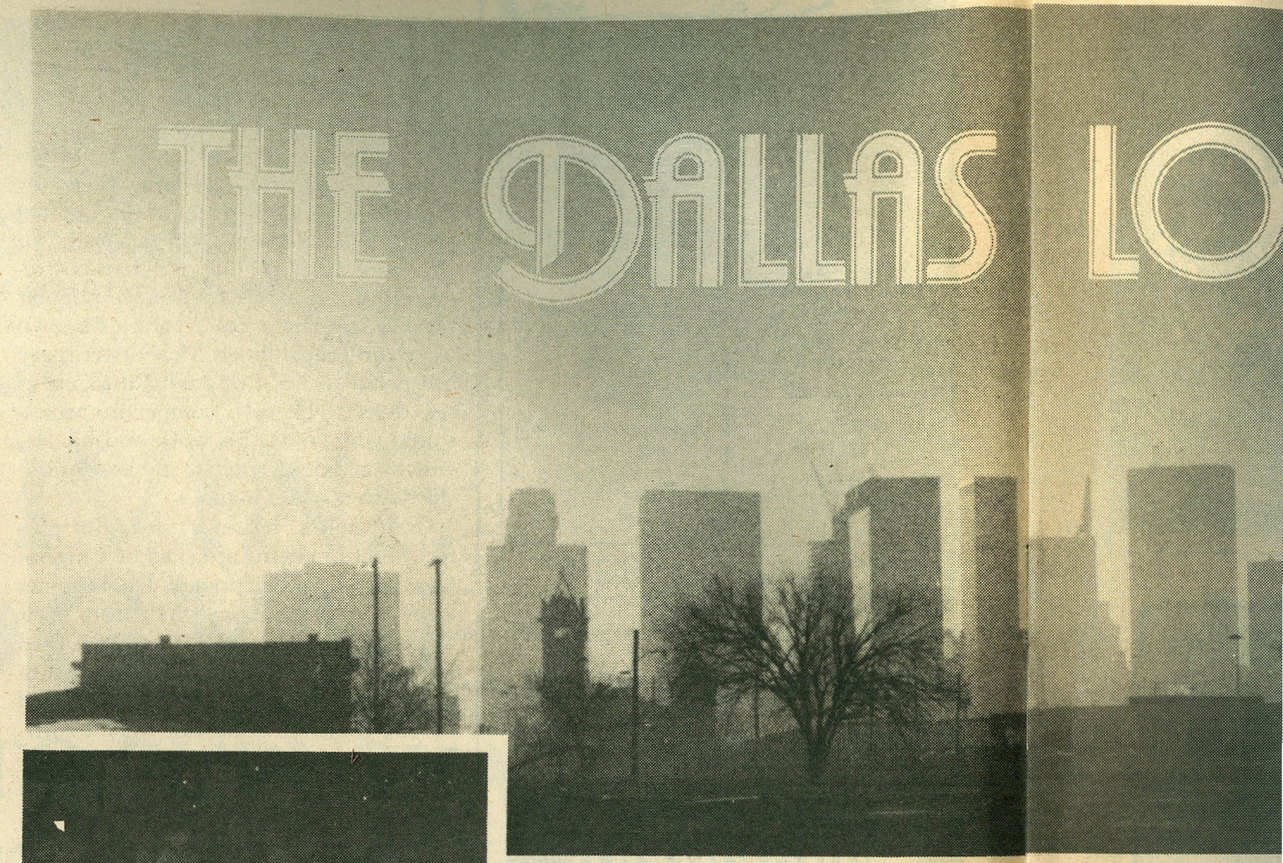
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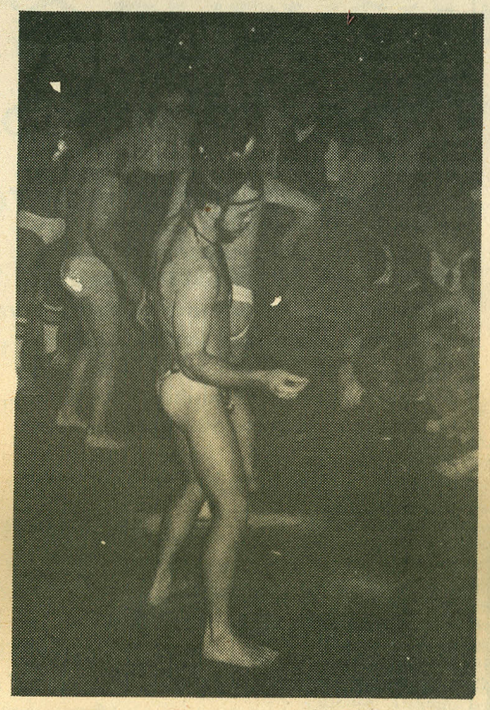
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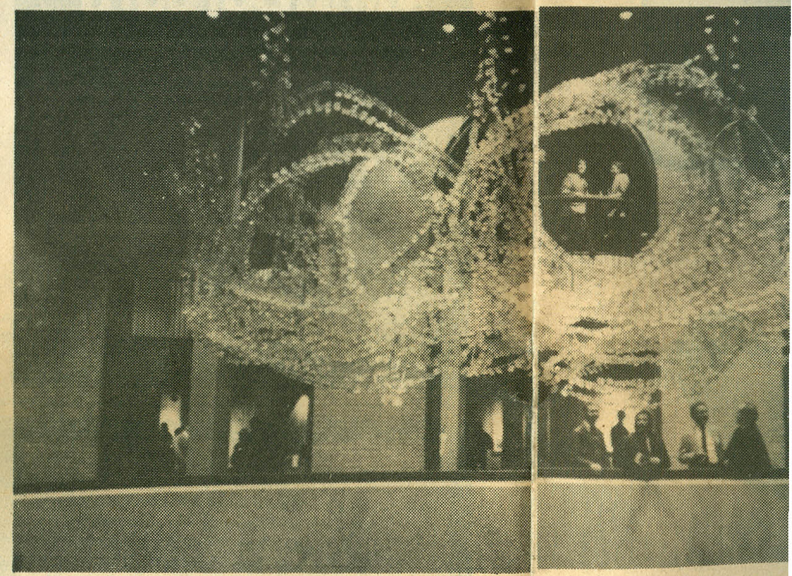
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THE DALLAS LO







It was Minda Lynn who encouraged me to move back to Texas. I met her by accident in Brooklyn. She told me about her rooming house in East Dallas, and before I knew it, I had moved into one of her small upstairs rooms. Minda's house is old and run-down, drafty in the winter and hot in the summer, but it's homey, and her rents are the lowest in town. She's an ex-fashion model in her early 40s, a sensitive woman who collects antique jewelry, reticules and hats, which she sometimes wears in public. She claims to be allergic to everything that blooms (she's been known to snip rosebuds so they'll never open) and refuses to have a flower in the house unless it's made of silk. She rents almost exclusively to theater people and runs what has been called The Only Theatrical Boarding House in Dallas.

It was Minda Lynn who first took me to the Steak 'n' Egg Kitchen. She claims it's the only establishment in Dallas that knows how to cook an egg. (She likes her eggs dry, very dry, although they do cook them other ways.) Minda also put me to work at the Apparel Mart, where I displayed clothes for the buyers' markets and still do when I need some fast cash. While working at the mart, I first heard the fashion term *The Dallas Look*. For years I've tried to figure out what The Dallas Look is. I've come to decide that it's nothing at all—except a term coined at the Apparel Mart to sell more clothes off the racks while calling attention to

windows I can look across the street into Oak Lawn, a section of town where a different kind of Dallas Look can be seen. Oak Lawn is known for its gay-owned and gay-operated bars and restaurants, its shops and tree-lined streets. It is known as "the last neighborhood left in Dallas," but it's changing fast. Businessmen are beginning to call *our* area Uptown. Old buildings are coming down, and new glass ones are going up at an alarming rate. This new look is happening so fast you can easily get the feeling that nothing is very safe or sacred anymore, not even Trinity Methodist Church, former home of a theater company and an internationally known school of music. The church, which had been declared a historic landmark, was recently torched by an arsonist. Popular opinion has it that the church was burned in order to make room for an expanding downtown, but according to the owner, who is trying to reconstruct the building, two transients who lived in the basement got into an argument over a woman, and one of them in a fit of anger—or was it passion?—set fire to the church.

Arson is common practice around here. The week Trinity Methodist burned, there were nine reported cases of arson in Dallas County. Often, it's a rich man's way of getting around the law—or making his own. Trinity Methodist does happen to be standing near an area slated to become the Rodeo Drive of

I have heard Southern Baptists compare Dallas and Fort Worth, our sister city only 30 miles away, to a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. Pity they don't have a broader range of comparison.

various available properties in Oak Lawn. The house that I remember most vividly (owned by a member of our per-

While working at the mart, I first heard the fashion term *The Dallas Look*. For years I've tried to figure out what The Dallas Look is. I've come to decide that it's nothing at all—except a term coined at the Apparel Mart to sell more clothes off the racks while calling attention to Dallas as a fashion center. I have collected a few statements that attempt to describe this nebulous look. For what they're worth, here they are:

"It's fresh, clean and scrubbed; it's long, bouncy hair on women, and short, neat haircuts on men; it's tall and lean; it has more to do with the way women look than the way men look; it's comfortable; it's dramatic, yet casual; it's for people who are moving fast and up in the world; it's wholesome."

However, a styles director at a leading department store told me:

"Dallas is a dedicated fashion disaster. Only a few people here know how to carry themselves in the clothes they buy, the rest come off looking like each other—right off the racks. Only along lower Greenville Avenue in East Dallas do people express themselves with what they're wearing. They may be leftover hippies, but they've got style."

Last year I moved from Minda Lynn's boarding house to the edge of Highland Park, an incorporated town within the city of Dallas. From my front

Edward Swift is the author of a comic novel, Splendora, *about a transvestite who lives in a small East Texas town. Swift is currently busy working on his next novel,* Principia Martindale.

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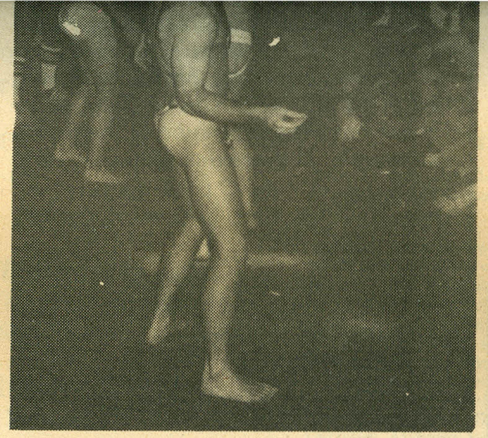
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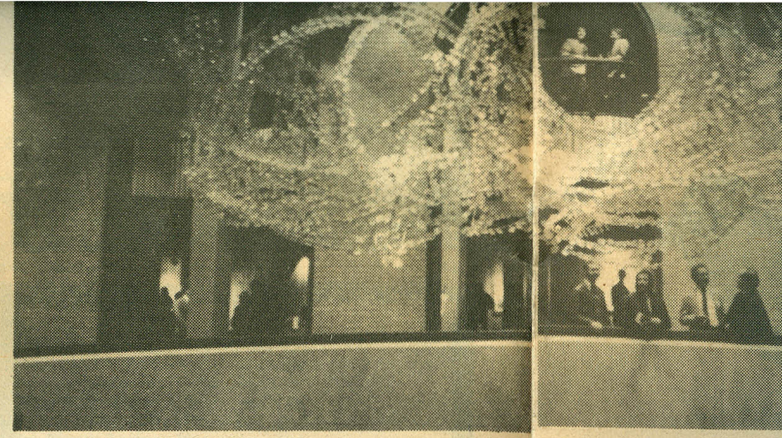
Oak Lawn is the new target for development. The area is sort of wedged between downtown and Highland Park. The Apparel Mart, World Trade Center and Market Hall are off to one side, and the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport is about 20 minutes away. It's a convenient section of town. Gays have taken it over and made it fashionable and notorious at the same time. Fashion and notoriety often go hand in hand; they make interesting, and sometimes dangerous, bedfellows.

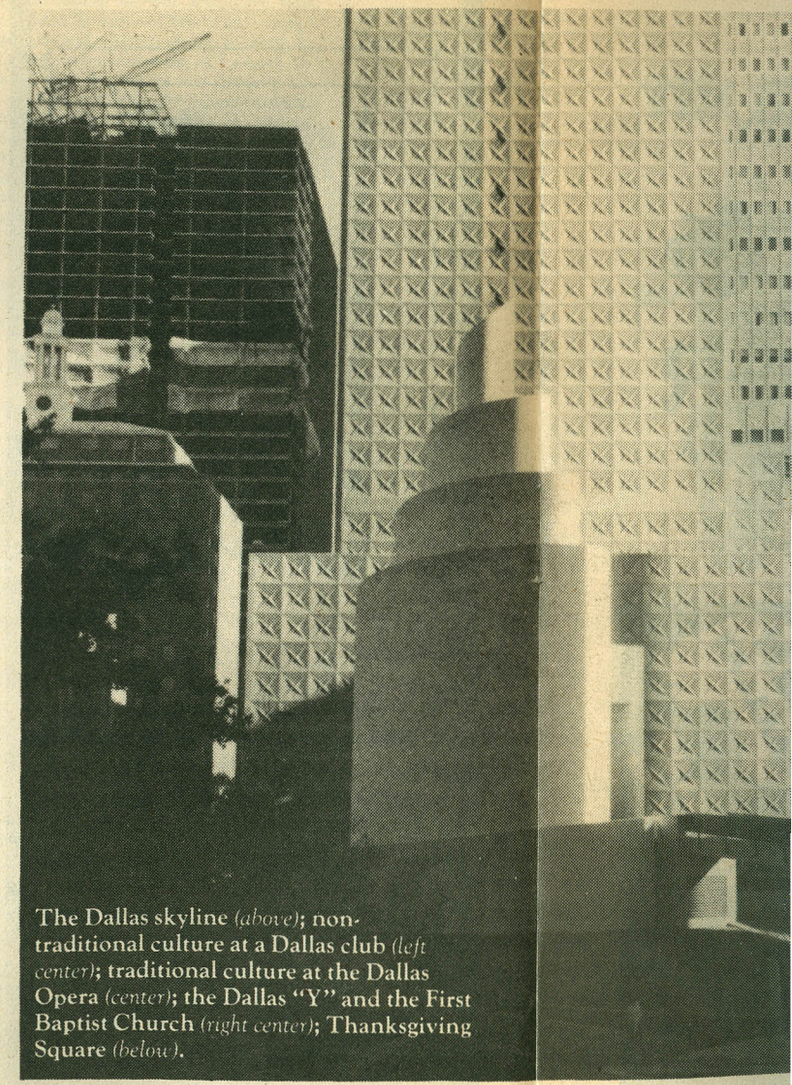
There are many Prairie-style homes in Oak Lawn, a large number of brick or frame houses built in the '40s and '50s and a few Victorians bumping up against modern apartment complexes going condo. Many of the old homes have been beautifully restored. Fortunately, only a few have been overdone, fixed up above and beyond what's necessary. Some gays, I've noticed, are like barbers in East Texas; they just don't know when to quit. The barbers will scalp you in nothing flat, and some gays, (straights too, especially in this town) will decorate, restore and rerestore until they lose sight of what was originally there.

Last year a friend of mine was looking for a house to buy, and I accompanied her on an excursion through various available properties in Oak Lawn. The house that I remember most vividly (owned by a member of our persuasion) was decorated almost entirely with teacups and matching saucers—thousands of them, or so it seemed. They were thoughtfully arranged on floor-to-ceiling shelves, on tables, chairs and TV tops. The owner's mother had started the collection, and he had continued it until there was no space left. He needed a bigger house. Like that collection of teacups and saucers, Dallas is growing too rapidly and without much regard for the future. The downtown area is always under construction, and North Dallas is practically another city. There are glass skyscrapers everywhere: silver ones, gold ones, icy blue ones; all reflecting the sun and blinding motorists on the freeways. Even with all this construction there's never enough office space, nor is public transportation anywhere near adequate. Corporations are moving their headquarters here; Canadians and Arabs are buying up every inch of property they can get; and the Texas accent is on the way out.

Dallas is becoming an ostentatious city that seems to be compensating with every breath. It has been said that there's no reason for this city to exist. Isolated as it is on the North Plains, it's just beyond the reaches of the Piney Woods of East Texas and hasn't quite made it to the arid deserts and cactus flats in the western part of the state. It's neither here



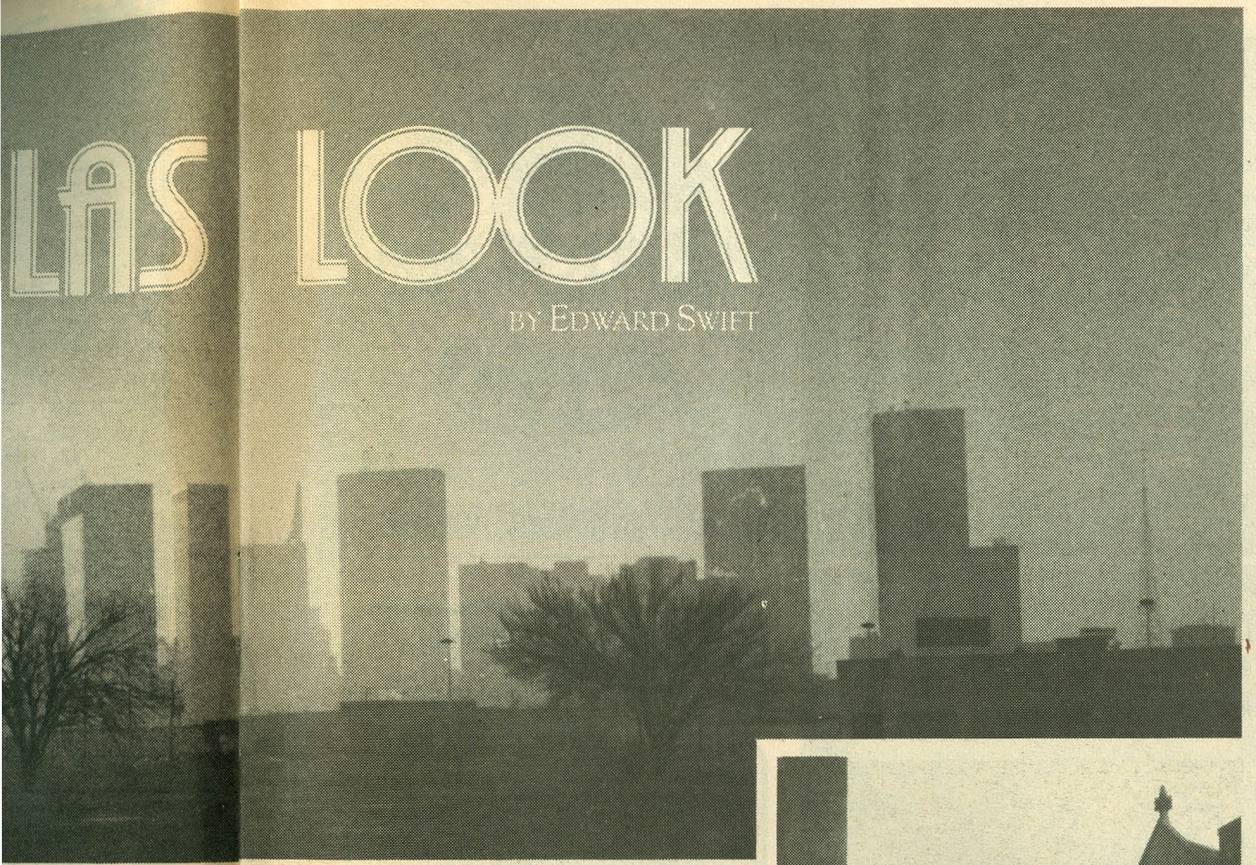


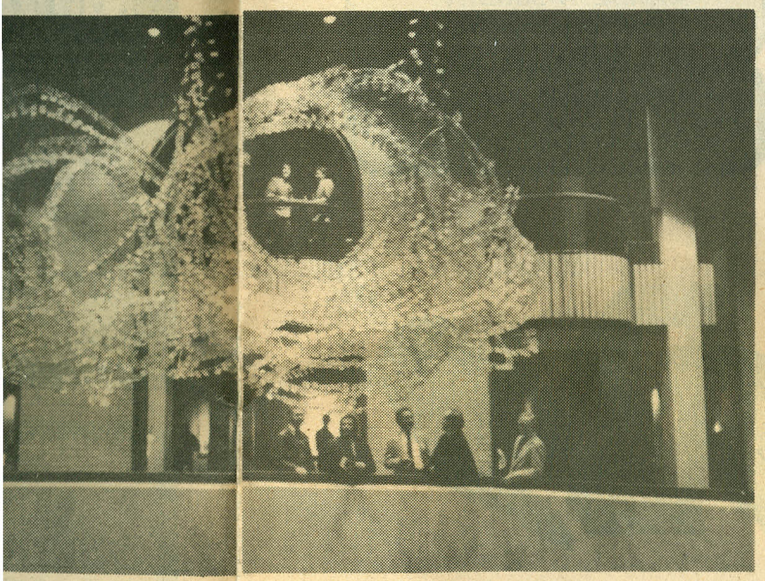


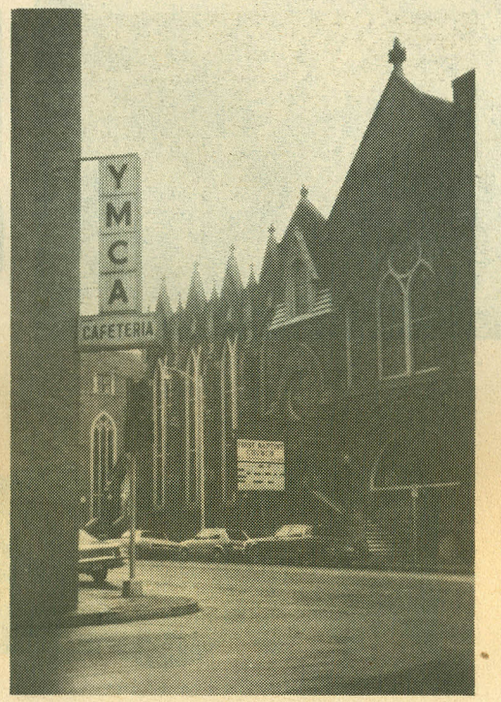
The Dallas skyline *(above)*; **non-traditional culture at a Dallas club** *(left center)*; **traditional culture at the Dallas Opera** *(center)*; **the Dallas "Y" and the First Baptist Church** *(right center)*; **Thanksgiving Square** *(below)*.

LAS LOOK

BY EDWARD SWIFT







nor there, and is forever in the throes of trying to prove that it deserves to exist.

Founded in 1857, Dallas is a new city,

Quarters, a bathhouse no longer in existence, the Dallas Y is the closest thing this city has ever had to the old Everard Baths in New York.

The Baptists have recently purchased the YMCA building and plan to demolish it as soon as humanly possible.

On weekends, the Dallas Y is always filled with gay kids who have traveled anywhere from 30 to 300 miles or more to start a new life in the city. For many of them, Dallas represents the biggest gay population within easy reach, so they arrive from such places as Muleshoe, Sweetwater and Rising Star. They carry few possessions, but their heads are brim-

For years I've tried to figure out what* The Dallas Look *is. I've come to decide that it's nothing at all.

ming over with ambitions and illusions. I recently befriended a guy from a small town in East Texas. He didn't know how to brew a pot of tea or wash his clothes (said his mother had always done those things for him), but he did know about the Apparel Mart, the World Trade Center and the Decorative Center. He wanted a job in one of those places. He was aware that Dallas has a half-dozen professional theaters, that commercials are filmed here every week and that feature films are always being cast from this town. He wanted to be part of all that too. But he ended up going back home.

Thousands just like him arrive each year. Some of them travel by bus to the Continental Station on Jackson Street, a hangout for hustlers, and hope to be picked up and taken to a swell address on Turtle Creek Boulevard. But most of them end up at the YMCA, and, after a night of passion, they awaken to a familiar hymn, "Let Others See Jesus in You," wafting from the bell tower of the First Baptist Church, infiltrating every corner of the YMCA and hanging over the entire city like a threat to behave, or else.

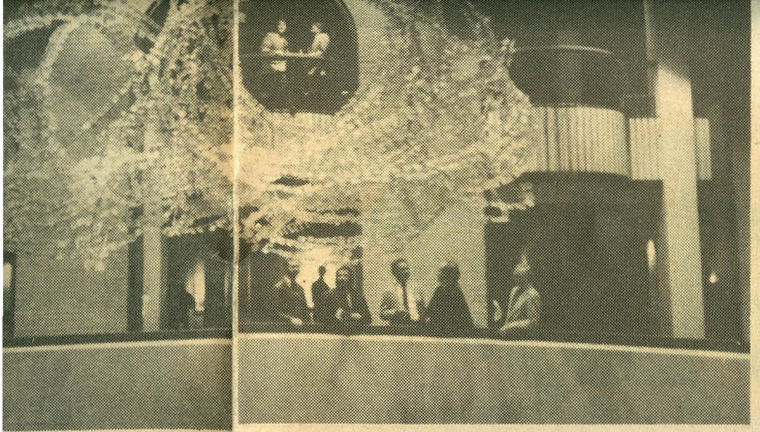
Because Dallas is the buckle on the Bible Belt, and because I've met few Christians I've liked or trusted (my prejudice is a product of a Baptist university), I have the gnawing feeling that Dallas gays aren't much more accepted now than when I first lived here. I tend to think that our power is seen as a threat, and, therefore, we're either ignored or merely tolerated until someone can figure out what to do with us.

Sometimes I feel as though I'm living inside something that's about to explode. Maybe I've been listening to too much talk at the Steak 'n' Egg Kitchen.

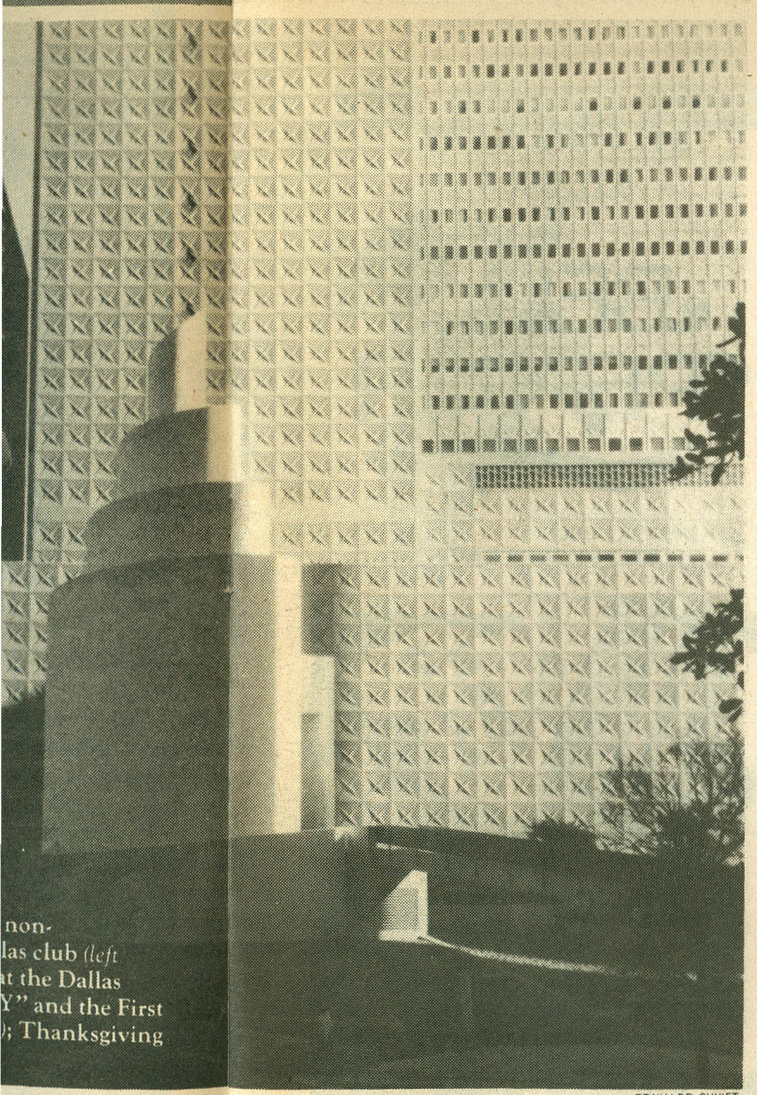
For some of us, the Steak 'n' Egg Kitchen represents the heart of the gay community. Local news is passed along the counter; assignations are made; lovers quarrel, patch things up and go on quarreling. The female prostitutes who work Cedar Springs Road often drop in, and drop out again fast. One of them once said to me, "Sweetheart, we'd starve to death if we stayed inside here very long."

No more than two blocks from the Steak 'n' Egg, near or on the corner of Throckmorton and Cedar Springs Road, there are five gay bars (as of this count) plus a gay bookstore, the Lobo. At night the area is crawling with streetwalkers. One woman in particular always stands out. She appears after midnight, dressed as the Queen of England in a tasteful suit, hat, gloves, sensible shoes, the works. She waves regally to the passing cars, and I understand she's awfully popular.

The large number of gay bars on this block doesn't seem to bother the whores. They know that gays will accept them, so they've remained there for years. Adair's, a redneck bar wedged between gay bars and businesses, has been there







non-
las club *(left*
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EDWARD SWIFT

nor there, and is forever in the throes of trying to prove that it deserves to exist.

Founded in 1857, Dallas is a new city, a city with growing pains, an adolescent that's crazy to be seen and heard.

At the Steak 'n' Egg Kitchen in Oak Lawn, I overheard someone say: "The thing that's wrong with Dallas is that it's overrun with Bible-beating Baptists. They'd just as soon murder anybody who crossed them, especially if the Lord told them to."

This may not be too much of an exaggeration. Religious zeal and bloodshed are often found in the same column of the daily papers.

The First Baptist Church of Dallas is located downtown on some of the most expensive property in the city. The church, Sunday school buildings, bookstore and private school take up several tax-free blocks. It's the biggest Southern Baptist congregation in the world.

As might be expected in a city where the conservative and liberal live side by side, often without a fence between them, directly across the street from the First Baptist Church is one of the sleaziest YMCAs I've ever known. It's an old building of about 14 stories. The corridors are dark and dusty; doors are often left half-open for the night—or at least for part of it. The air is heavy and damp, and the mattresses are old and sweat-stained. Other than the Bachelor

was aware that Dallas has a half-dozen professional theaters, that commercials are filmed here every week and that feature films are always being cast from this town. He wanted to be part of all that too. But he ended up going back home.

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I have heard Southern Baptists compare Dallas and Fort Worth, our sister city only 30 miles away, to a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. Pity they don't have a broader range of comparison.

What they need is someone like my friend Robin Inman, a gay, over-the-road, interstate truck driver who quotes William Blake, to remind them: "The road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

In 1967, when I first lived here, I couldn't walk down any street without hearing someone say: "There's another one of them *funny* boys." Even in a business suit and tie I didn't blend in (I still don't), but Dallas has changed since then. I don't hear as many rude comments anymore, because the gay community is better organized. That affords a lot of protection. Like many other cities, we now have every type of gay organization you'd ever hope to join. Our collective voice is stronger. The city council at least gives us an ear, and politicians openly solicit our votes. This year, the mayor of Dallas agreed to speak to one of our gay organizations, and even though he returned to City Hall and said he had no idea whom he had been addressing, it was at least a step forward to have him among us. But it's been a slow and very short step in comparison to the gains made other places.

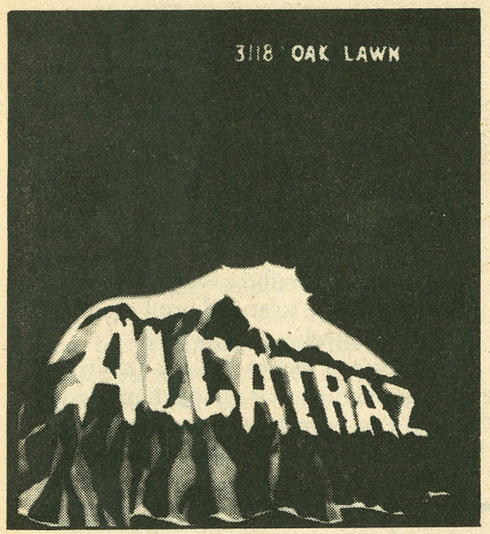
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The large number of gay bars on this block doesn't seem to bother the whores. They know that gays will accept them, so they've remained there for years. Adair's, a redneck bar wedged between gay bars and businesses, has been there for years too. The guys who go to Adair's say they were there first and will remain to the last no matter which way the neighborhood goes.

"These straight guys who frequent Adair's seem to thrive on an atmosphere of conflict and combat with the gays on Cedar Springs," says attorney Mike Williams, a gay rights activist. "Their fragile macho egos are somehow propped up by marching through the gays, whom they see as inferior to themselves, and into the safe haven of Adair's, their stronghold on the street. There they experience a classic form of gender-bonding all their own when, on warm summer nights, they stand just outside the doors in small all-male groups, beers in hand, and heckle gays who happen by. These mild aggressions are, in their minds, required in order to underscore to the world the fundamental difference between themselves and the others down the block. In fact, for all their strutting about, the world has a hard time telling the difference. The important thing is, they love being with their male friends at Adair's. It's hilarious!"

On this block there are two gay bars for those of us who like to play cowboys —The Round Up and the Wooden Nickel. There is also a disco—The

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 28)



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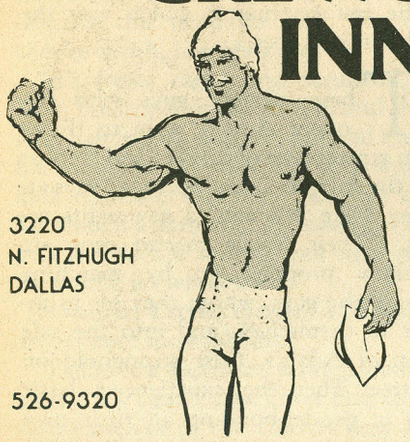
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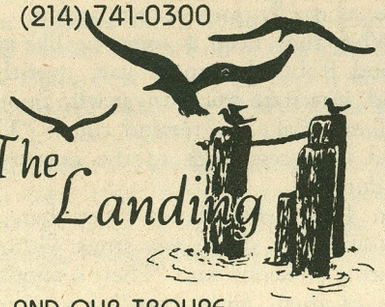


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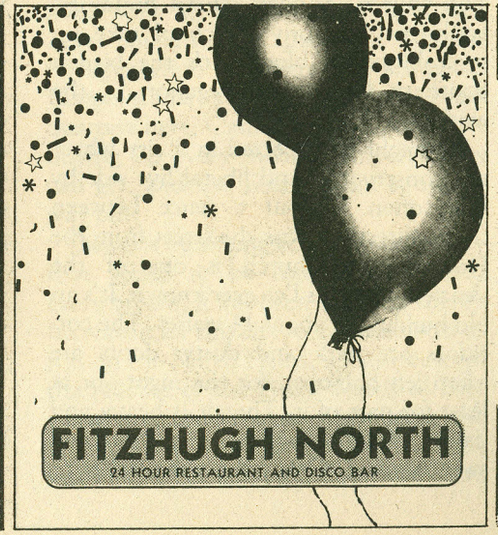
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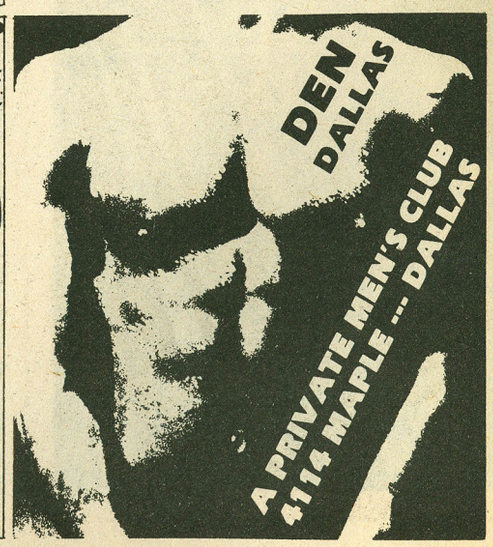
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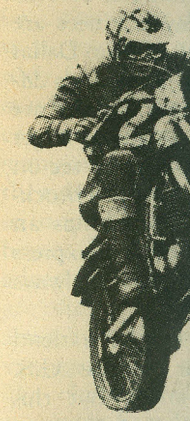
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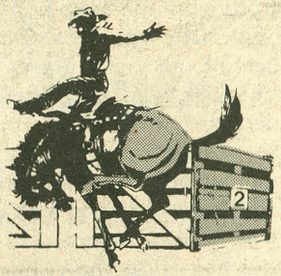
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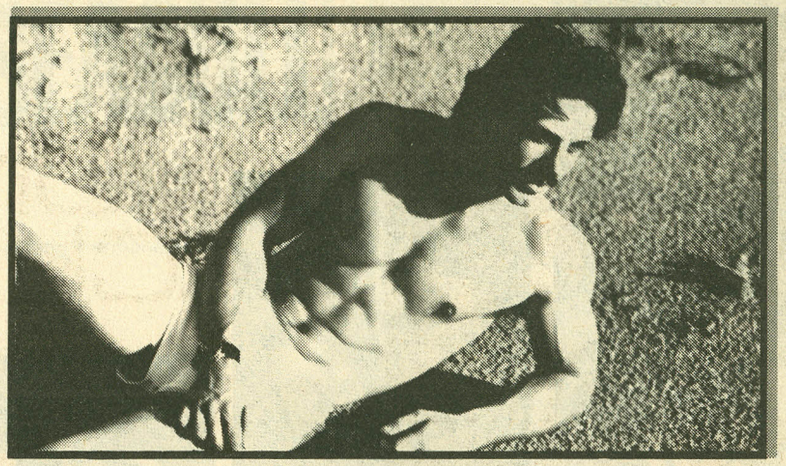
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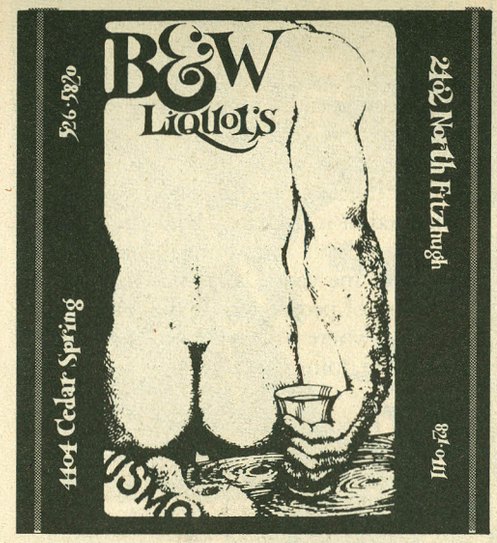
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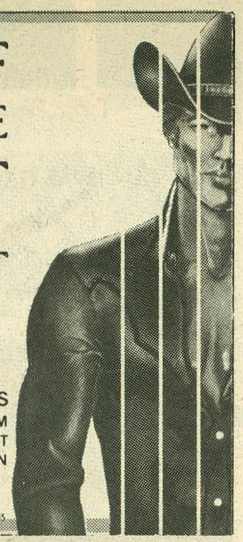
THE HIDDEN DOOR
"THE FRIENDLIEST BAR IN TOWN"



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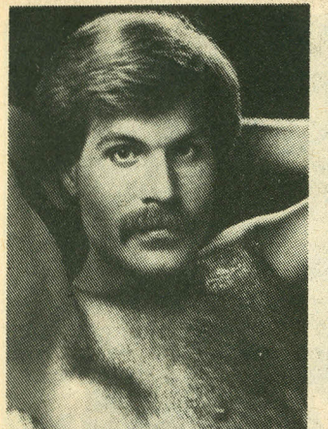


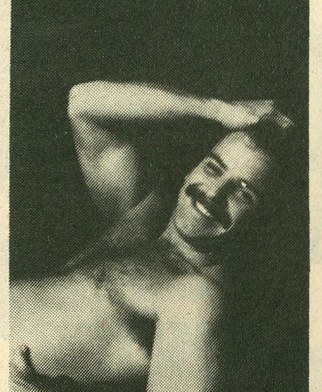
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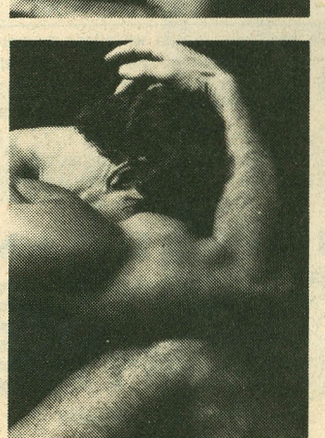
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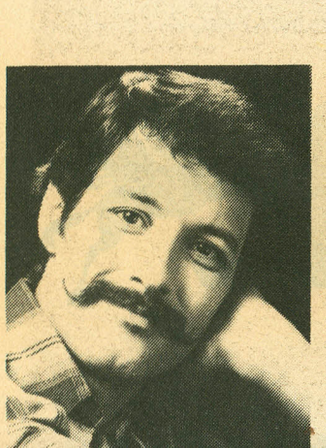
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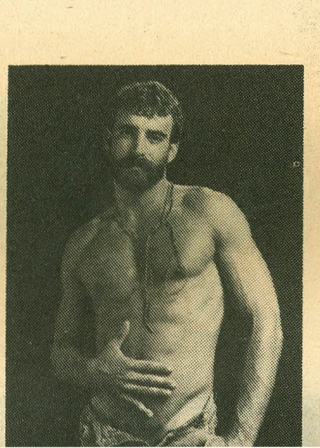












(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25)

Village Station—and a place called the Throckmorton Mining Company, which I've never known how to describe. Maybe that's its draw. Then there's J.R.'s, probably the most popular bar in town, especially with the well-established members of our community, as well as with the kids who come here to wear designer jeans, work at the Apparel Mart and be seen in the *best places*. J.R.'s is also popular with the guys who are living off Daddy's money—and with all the rest of us who wish we were.

If your hair is cut short short and you wear a uniform of labels, you'll be very popular there. Sometimes it's interesting to play this role, but J.R's (also known as Sue Ellen's) isn't one of my regular hang-outs. There's very little there to pique a novelist's curiosity. But on the other side of Oak Lawn there's a place called The Hidden Door, and when I go out, that's the place I enjoy. Types dissolve there. You're not always being judged on the threads you're wearing, your messed-up hair or whether your T-shirt has the name of your gym printed on the front of it. To most Dallas gays, The Hidden Door is considered too dangerous to be reckoned with. It's all owing to your state of mind, I suppose. The bar *is* located on a dark street that's off the beaten path, and it attracts a lot of rough-looking customers (they're actually lambs) who prowl the backyard, which is fenced in and private. Out there you can, if you're of the mind to, get your pants ripped off faster than anything, and your underwear too, if you're wearing any. It's no secret that almost music lovers come out and can discuss things."

"Were it not for the gay community the Sunday matinees would not exist,"

Oak Lawn's a convenient section of town. Gays have taken it over and made it fashionable and notorious at the same time. Fashion and notoriety often go hand in hand; they make interesting, and sometimes dangerous, bedfellows.

occasion. Therefore, she can appear to be as common as an old shoe. She considers herself above The Dallas Look, certainly not below it.

Like Mme Verdurin in Proust's novel, she usually has a certain artist under wing: a pianist who has never been known to make a mistake, not even a little one; or a painter whose sense of color makes her "swoooooon." She claims never to have entertained a Philistine in her home and is far too quick to say that members of the gay community are always invited to her little evenings, "just as long as they're talented homosexuals and can speak intelligently about something—so many can't these days, you know."

Catch her drift? It's not hard.

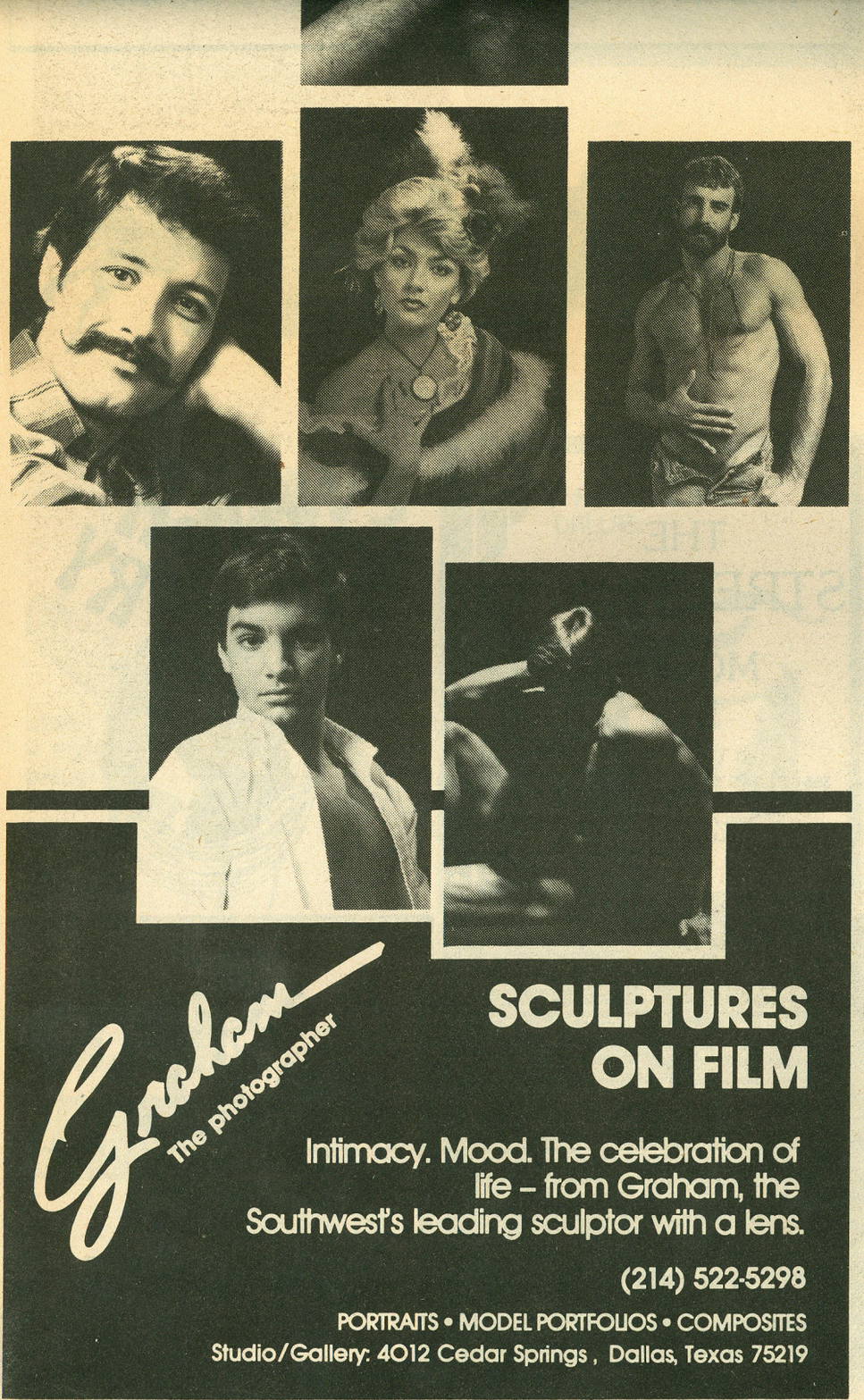
Forgetting her Texas accent, I can close my eyes in her presence and almost imagine myself in Proustian society. Whether she's read Proust or not, I can't say. I've always been afraid to ask, but I suspect she has—more times than necessary. I can say for sure, however, that she is not the kind of society hostess who would allow herself to agree with a friend of mine who's always saying: "Dallas is a city of aristocrats, but there's no aristocracy."

Not what you would call an accidental creature, she goes regularly to the Dallas Opera, but never to opening nights. Heavens no! She attends the Sunday matinees because "that's when the *real*

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you can, if you're of the mind to, get your pants ripped off faster than anything, and your underwear too, if you're wearing any. It's no secret that almost everyone wears underwear to The Hidden Door because after it's ripped off it's hung up on a grid over the bar. It's quite an honor to know that you're represented there. Some people, I guess, are ashamed of it. Maybe we all ought to be and just don't know any better, but it seems to me that Dallas has more than its share of people who have trouble admitting where they've been and what they were doing there.

On occasion, I've had the opportunity to see another side of Dallas by accepting invitations from a certain Highland Park hostess. At first her gatherings seemed relaxed and easy-going, but then I realized that I was only stepping out of one kind of Dallas hype into another. This hostess displays a contrived, carefully planned casualness that at first may seem refreshing. She and her husband own a cattle ranch north of town and a house on one of the most fashionable streets in Highland Park. He plays golf religiously, and she *simply worships* the arts. She's always entertaining a celebrity or two, is in the habit of appearing in public with her hair uncombed and is likely to be seen wearing an old, wrinkled caftan to the opera. She believes that she's reached the pinnacle of Dallas society and that it's no longer necessary to dress for the music lovers come out and can discuss things."

"Were it not for the gay community the Sunday matinees would not exist," or so you'll hear it said. It's an exaggeration, of course, but not much of one. The seats for the Sunday matinees are cheaper, and since not all of us in Dallas live off Daddy's money, that makes a difference. During intermissions, there are more practicing sodomites fighting to get to the bathroom than you'll ever see on the corner of Cedar Springs and Throckmorton. Everybody, of course, has an opinion and is much too eager to express it. It's safe to bet that there's always something wrong.

"It's too too boring for words," a friend of mine said last year at the U.S. premiere of *Orlando Furioso*. But this year, he remembers the production as "marvelous." Here, I must be a snob and quote Proust. I just can't help it. Of the Duchess de Guermantes he wrote: ". . . she continued to believe that to be easily bored was proof of intellectual superiority."

So many of us are just like her.

The Dallas Opera has just celebrated its 25th anniversary with a rather poor season, which will be remembered as *splendid*. But according to the program notes, back in 1883 there was another company: The Emma Abbott Opera. The repertoire consisted of 16 grand operas that Miss Emma Abbott herself had translated into English. She

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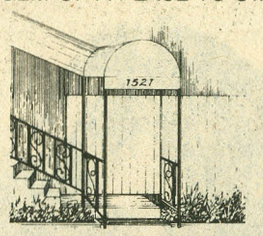
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directed her operas, sang in them, sold the tickets, designed the scenery and toured her productions. She also had her own opera house, which is more than we have today. Miss Emma Abbott became known as "America's emotional and popular prima donna assoluta." And, when box-office receipts were bad, she would simply work in a few bars of a favorite hymn, "Nearer My God to Thee," for example, and pretty soon her company would be playing to packed houses once again.

Miss Emma Abbott must have realized that Dallas wasn't quite ready for her, and that nothing, with the exception of regurgitation, is achieved through prolonged force-feeding. So she gave her audiences a little bit of what they could appreciate and approve of, mixed in with what they disliked or had no response to. That way she gradually won acceptance. She's a good example for those of us who have been standing on soapboxes and *demanding* our rights. Of course it is sometimes necessary to make demands, but we also need to know when to stop. I have friends who are gay activists (fortunately, most of them live in other states or cities), who, when they get going, sound just like Baptist preachers ranting and raving from the pulpit. It's just about impossible to turn them off. One kind of fanatic is just as bad as another in my opinion, and I don't think lasting changes are brought about through hellfire-and-brimstone tactics. The Dallas gay community tends to realize this.

Don't get me wrong, we do get on our bandwagons in Dallas, but we're not, for the most part, one-track minded gay activists who are dying to preach from anybody's pulpit. Elsewhere, we may be viewed as indifferent or apathetic, but that's not always the case. Sometimes our actions go unnoticed because we don't usually make big waves, just a lot of small ones that continue to add up. In my opinion, Dallas gays tend to mix and mingle with people outside the gay community more than gays in most other

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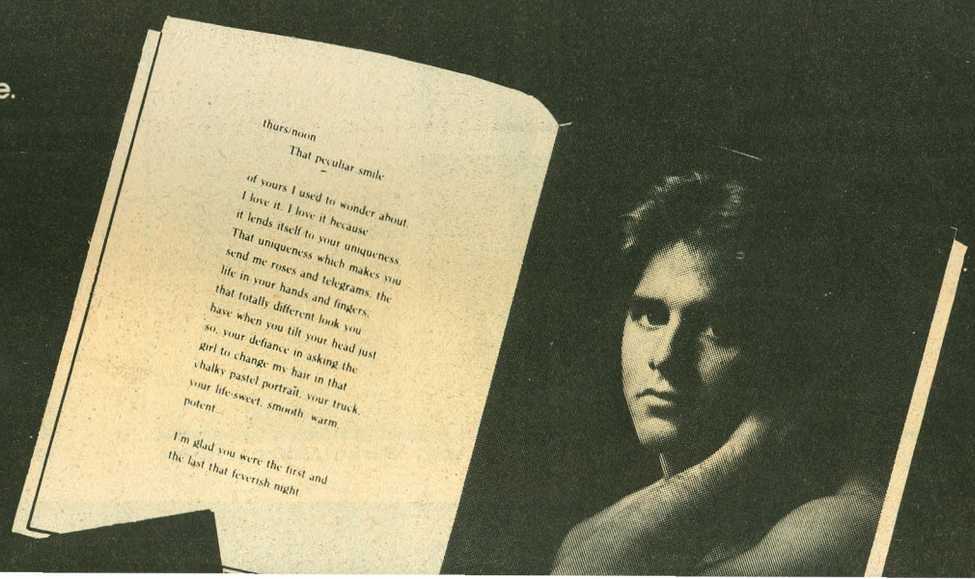
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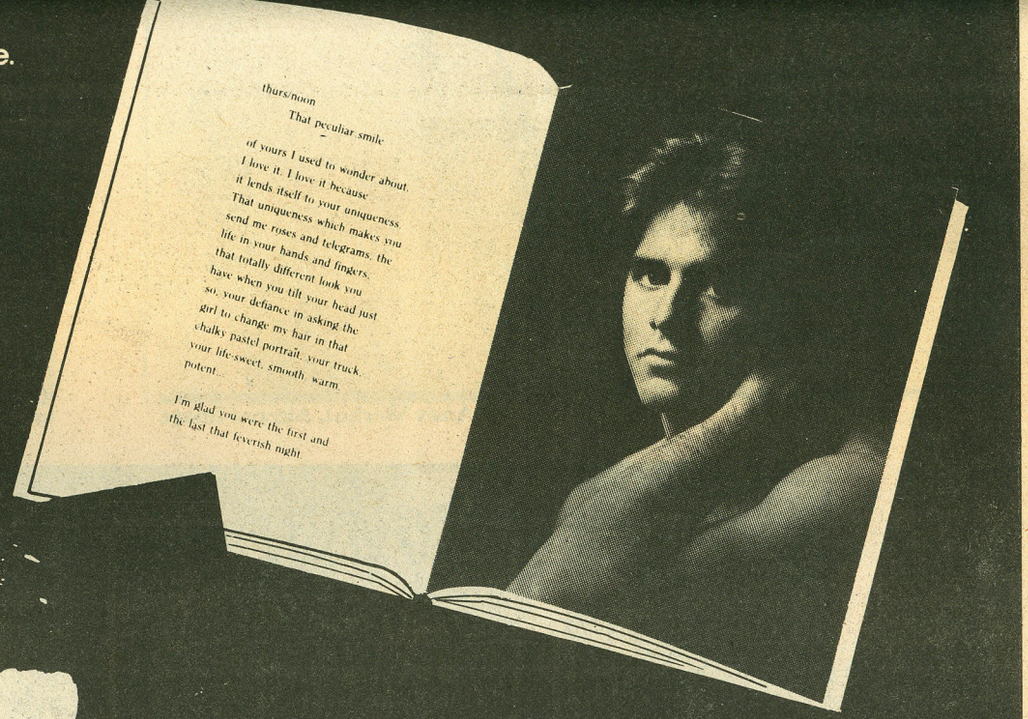
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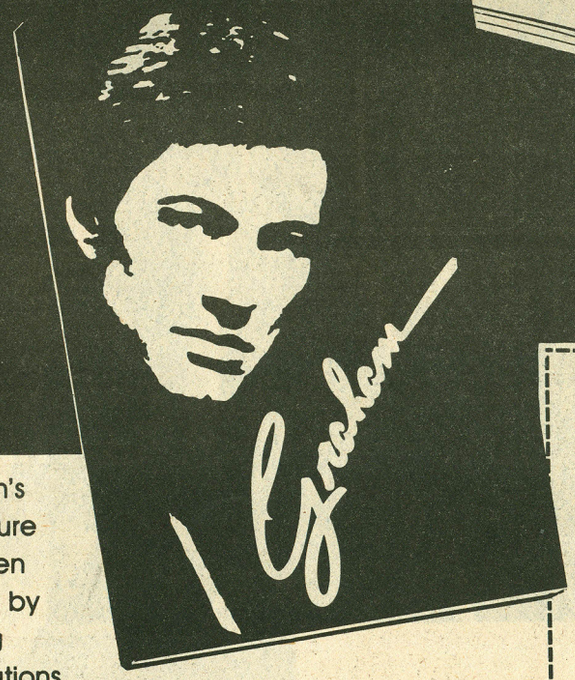
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One last comment. In 1901, Miss Emma Abbott's Opera House burned to the ground. I don't know if it was arson or not. ●

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