

This Month in Austin AGC History – February is Outstanding Construction Awards Month

February at the Austin AGC is one of our favorite times of the year as we host the annual Outstanding Construction Awards celebration to recognize and honor some of the best area building projects completed during the previous year by AGC member firms. This reception and dinner event brings together owners, architects, general contractors, specialty contractors, suppliers, and service providers, as well as family and friends of the award recipients. On this special night building professionals trade in their muddy boots and hardhats for fancier dress, and their conversations center not on the building headache of the day but on the celebration of jobs well-done!

A recently completed construction project is beautiful to behold for the skilled builders who for months, even years, dedicated their minds, hearts, and hands to bringing it to life. Whether the project is large and widely discussed by the community, or a much more modest production, the construction professionals involved are always proud of the finished product. The owner, too, is greatly appreciative of seeing a dream become reality.

Sadly, due to ongoing COVID restrictions, we are unable to host this annual event in 2021. We will still present awards to the recipients, either at our office or theirs, or at the project location. But we will miss the buzz in the air on awards night and seeing the pride on the faces of the winning projects teams. Years, even decades, down the road it is not uncommon to see an AGC award displayed proudly at an office, jobsite trailer or somewhere on the wall of the winning project.



Guests enjoying the AGC Outstanding Construction Awards event in 2020 at the AT&T Executive Conference Center

Each project submitted is judged by a panel on the basis of appearance, difficulties in construction, unusual or unique construction methods, and timeliness of completion. Reading over the entries is always fascinating because they offer a rare window into the many challenges of building construction, something that folks outside the project team rarely know anything about. Tough soil conditions, old utility lines uncovered, tight staging areas, heavy pedestrian and street traffic, fast schedules, and protecting worker safety are just a few of the regular difficulties these projects face.

Occasionally, we also get to go ‘back to the future’ and learn more about the history of Austin through a winning project. That happened this year when [Rogers O’Brien Construction](#) was selected to receive the Austin AGC Historical Renovation award for work on the iconic

[Commodore Perry Estate](#), a 1929 Italian-style mansion that now operates as a luxury hotel. This landmark near Austin's Hancock Park was originally built for Edgar Howard "Commodore" Perry who came to Austin in 1904 and enjoyed business success shipping cotton from Taylor, Texas, over to Europe until 1929. He also went on to develop numerous properties around town, including one prominent high rise at 8th and Brazos once known as the [Commodore Perry Hotel](#) (and now called [Brazos Place](#).)



The Commodore Perry Estate, built in 1928 and recently renovated by the Rogers O'Brien Construction Company

Now, for the purposes of our AGC history, this is where the story gets interesting.



Rex Kitchens, President of the Austin AGC 1948-49, and owner of the Rex D. Kitchens Construction Company

Turns out that the contractor for the Commodore Perry Hotel was Mr. Rex Kitchens, a prominent Austin builder and owner of the Rex D. Kitchens Construction Company started in 1933. (A number of drawings and other business documents from his construction company are housed in the Austin History Center and [available online here](#).) Construction of the hotel began in 1948 and completion came in late 1949. Over those same years, Rex served as the President of the Austin AGC. In fact, Chapter archives note that on December 20, 1949, he presided over his last AGC meeting, a dinner held in the ballroom of the newly built Commodore Perry



Construction of the Commodore Perry Hotel under way in 1949 by Austin AGC leader Rex Kitchens' construction company

Hotel that attracted 174 members, wives and friends for the evening. Prior to dinner ("A turkey dinner with all the trimmings...") guests toured the new building as well. ([Construction and other photos of the hotel here](#).)

Jumping ahead to the modern day, there's a Commodore Perry tie to the current Austin AGC leadership as well. Alan Codina is our 2020/21 Chair and he also serves as VP of Operations for Rogers O'Brien Construction, the same company that just renovated the Commodore Perry Estate. So here we are today with the leader of the Austin AGC again working on a Commodore

Perry project, just as happened back in 1948/49. Back to the future, indeed! It's also worth mentioning that the hotel was converted into condo residences in 2008, and an AGC company won an award for that project at the time as well.

As the Austin AGC celebrates 75 years, we love to learn and share these interesting sidebars to the history of local buildings many people still enjoy today. In a way, that's part of what drives any successful builder – knowing that while some day he or she may no longer be alive to walk the streets of Austin, the end results of their professional labor will continue to stand proudly as a testament to their commitment to building excellence.

With that in mind, whether you are receiving a building award this year or did so in the past, the Austin AGC salutes you and one more time says 'thank you' for your contribution to Austin's built quality of life!



(The current Outstanding Construction Award winners for projects completed in 2020 can be [seen here](#). For a look back at previous winners, [click here](#).)