

# FILM



— Photo courtesy Humanities Research Center

Renamed the Paramount, the elegant Majestic typified early movie houses phased out by multi-screen cinemas.

The theater owner was experiencing competition from a new source — the home itself. Exhibitors tried many approaches to improve ticket sales but finally looked to Hollywood experts for an answer. Surely the nation's innovator would have a solution. But they just shrugged and pointed east.

Swinney, executive assistant to the president of Austin-based Presidio Enterprises, never believed in the demise of the theater. "It's still movies . . . people like to go to the movies. I'm a firm believer that people will go wherever they are most comfortable. So we're going to give them comfortable theaters everywhere in town." Although he recognizes the competition from other sources, Swinney says, "it's fashionable to go to the movies."

The first of the theaters, the Southpark 3, opened with a black-tie premiere reminiscent of the grandeur of Hollywood.

The colors are welcoming, the concession stand is centrally located and even walking to the seats is inviting in the spacious auditorium. Southpark is also outfitted with the latest sound and visual technologies, boasting the new Lucasfilms THX system and 70-mm screens that can't be recreated in a living room.

It's a new direction for movie going and from it Swinney adds, "We have taken a whole new attitude about the market here."

The Austin theater-going audience is ranked 98th in size in the nation, but when the Southpark opened it had the 10th-highest box-office gross in the nation during the eight-week run of "Dune." Proof that people will travel farther for a better theater presentation and that is what Presidio is counting on.

"It means a lot to the people who own and run this company to do it as well as we can do it and then to try and do a little better than that. It's a commitment we made a long time ago and then just recently re-committed to."

Presidio's beginnings were small but distinctive. On July 13, 1973, the

Riverside Twin opened, Austin's first multi-screen cinema. Even then the owners of Presidio were ahead of the game. In the following years the company opened 13 more screens around Austin. Their philosophy has always been "to provide a cool, clean, comfortable environment in which to see movies." Now they have taken it one step farther.

Plans are on the drawing board for at least four more locations, and one, the Arbor, will open in July. Located in a new Northwest Austin development at Loop 360 and U.S. 183, the theater will have 1500 seats and a lobby designed to resemble a European village courtyard. Including a darkened sky outlined with clouds, there will be stars on the lobby ceiling arranged in the pattern of the sky on the theater's opening night. (Presidio even hired an astronomer to make sure the theater's sky was exact.) Another Presidio

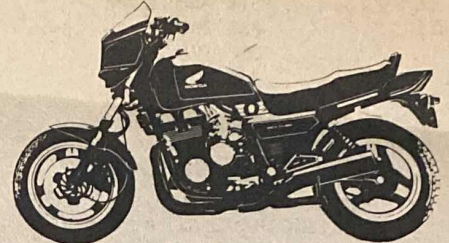
first: along with its improved sound system, the Arbor will have the largest screen in Austin.

The new Presidio theaters represent a return to elegance. They are being compared to the old standards of excellence once upheld in Hollywood. As Swinney says, "It's going to be a nice experience to go to the movies again."

From modest beginnings in 1915 to today, Austin has proven that innovation does not always begin in California. Seventy years after the Paramount symbolized the city's interest in progress, Austin has again created a sensation in the entertainment industry. By remembering the elegance of the past, Austin has claimed a stake in the future. So gather your feather boas and silver-tipped cigarettes as Austin challenges theater trends. Glamour and excitement are in the air again!

Special thanks to Decherd Turner.

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