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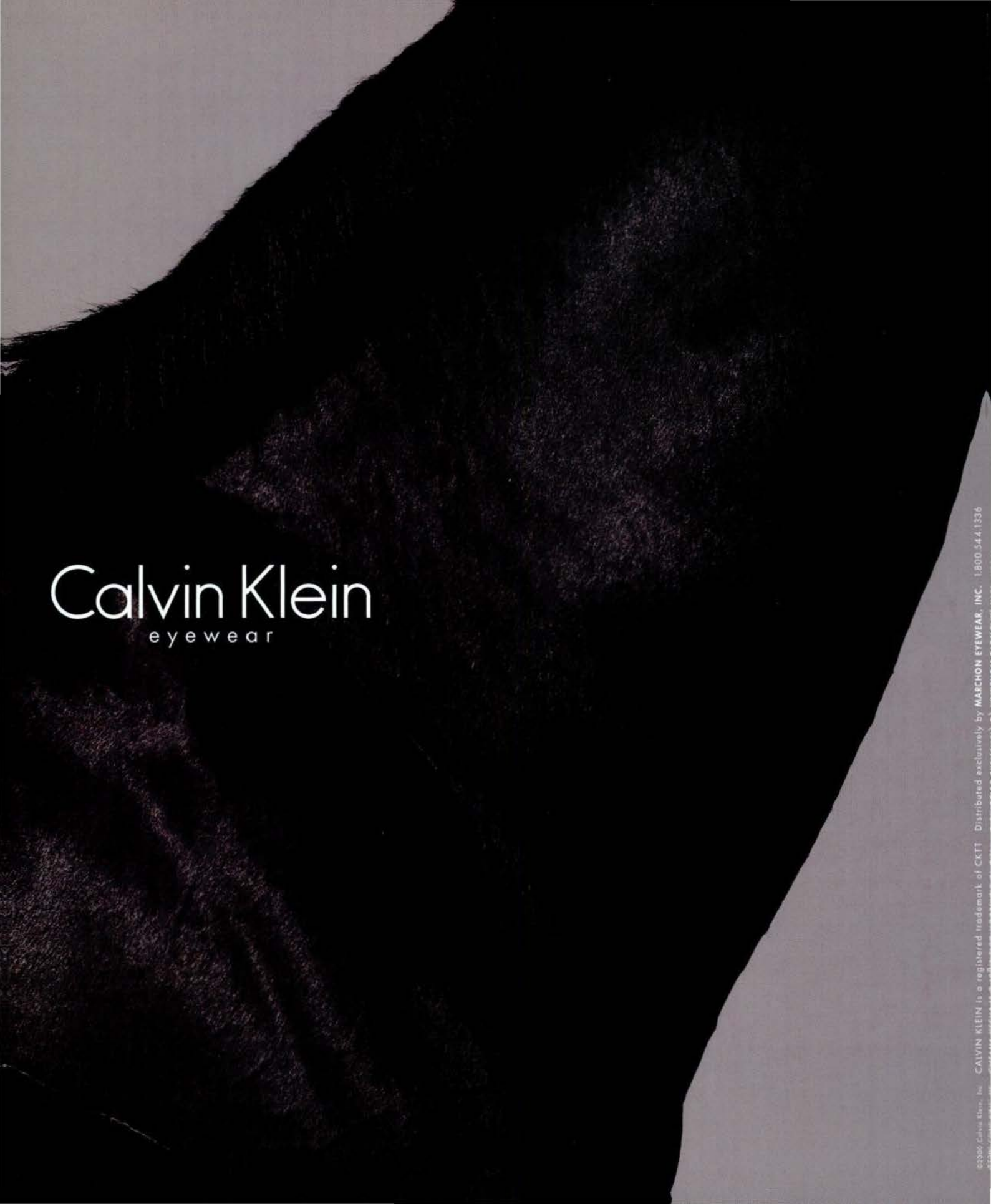
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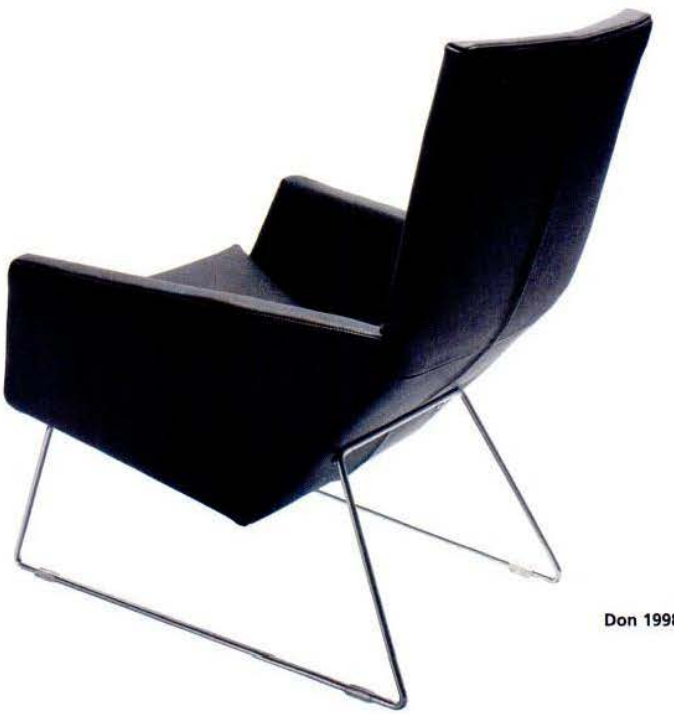

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COVER

Phoenix firefighter Marika McCue lounges outside a steel plated artist's studio beside the industrial-style home she, her husband, and a dedicated group of family and friends are constructing by hand. Photo by Doug Hoeschler

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Domestic Pioneers

"When I was growing up and when I lay awake at night listening to the sounds houses make in the dark, I made up other rooms in which to live." —D.J. WALDIE, PAGE 86






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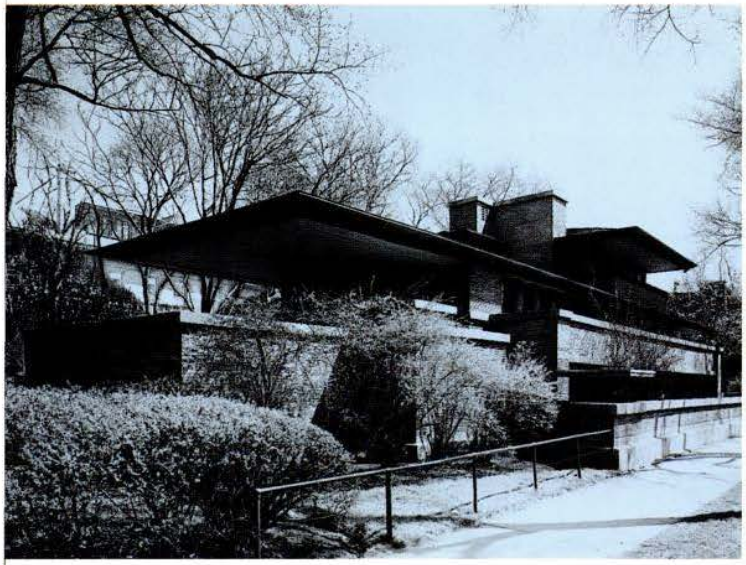

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FROM THE ROBIE HOUSE... TO OUR HOUSE

When asked why I would want to start a magazine, I am inevitably drawn to a memory of a warm afternoon in a History of Design class several years ago. On that day, it seemed as though I had seen thousands of slides of Victorians before I was suddenly jolted awake by the sight of Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House and introduced (finally) to the world of Modernism.

As I delved further into the ideas and philosophies behind Modernism, I was struck by how different this work was from any architecture that had preceded it. What was, and still is, most interesting to me is the way Modernism lends itself to new ideas and individual approaches. Instead of finding a style and adhering to its tenets, modern design allows you to grapple with your own ideas about how you want to live. Modern to me means being in our own day and age.

Don't we deserve our own movement? Many of the styles that are so replicated now were modern when they were developed. The architects were designing homes that best suited the circumstances of their own times. Somehow, times have changed but our houses haven't. Sure, there are economic and nostalgic reasons to build certain ways, but many people are finding they can address these concerns and have something that feels genuinely of this day.

I'm hoping this magazine will help foster a discussion that has already begun with architects. How can we best build our homes to respond to the cultural changes that take place? And, how do we do this in a way that fulfills our deep longing for home to be a place of meaning and beauty?

So, I welcome you to the first issue of dwell, a bimonthly publication that is the result of a long and thoroughly rewarding process that started in that muggy classroom. It is my sincere hope that, though we are not the Robie House, we might spark a similar sort of excitement for an architectural form well worth investigating. I encourage you to let me know what you think.

Thank you.

—LARA HEDBERG
lh@dwellmag.com
(middle row, fourth from the left)

dwell

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PR Jeff McKay, Inc.
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dwell magazine editorial
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THE FRUIT BOWL MANIFESTO

You know what this is, right? It's a bowl of fruit. Maybe you've got one this pretty, this perfect, sitting on your kitchen counter. Or maybe not.

Generally, in magazines concerned with the design of homes, fruit bowls abound. High-priced photo stylists spend hours arranging them. You see them in photographs of kitchens and living rooms. Often there's a bowl of unblemished green apples on the bathroom vanity or a bowl of pomegranates in the bedroom. The fruit bowl is sometimes accompanied by a vase of tulips, glistening with spray-on dew, and precious little else. No quart of milk. No crumpled bag of Pepperidge Farm cookies with only half of one cookie left at the bottom. No dish of Meow Mix on the floor. In short, no signs of life.

At dwell, we're staging a minor revolution. We think that it's possible to live in a house or apartment by a bold modern architect, to own furniture and products that are exceptionally well designed, and still be a regular human being. We think that good design is an integral part of real life. And that real life has been conspicuous by its absence in most design and architecture magazines.

We understand the impulse, the desire to show rooms that are insanely perfect. There is something compelling about an empty room or a house in which no one has lived. Something virginal. It would be an awesome responsibility to be the first one through that door.

Perfection is intimidating. You have to be on your best behavior to live with it.

By contrast, we want to demonstrate that a modern house is a comfortable one. That today's best architects are able to fashion environments that are at once of the moment and welcoming. And the only way we know to demonstrate that a home is truly livable is to show it as it is lived in. If a photograph in this magazine includes a fruit bowl, it's there because the homeowners eat fruit.

Our philosophy of fruit bowls is directly related to our feelings about modern design.

Here at dwell, we think of ourselves as Modernists, but we are the nice Modernists. One of the things we like best about Modernism—the nice Modernism—is its flexibility. Rather than being an historical movement from the first half of the 20th century, left over and reheated, we think of Modernism as a frame of mind. To us the M

WE THINK THAT THE CONNECTIONS TO SOCIETY, PLACE AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE—CALL IT CONTEXT—ARE EXACTLY WHAT MAKE GOOD ARCHITECTURE GREAT. THOSE CONNECTIONS ARE ALSO WHAT MAKES ARCHITECTURE INTERESTING TO PEOPLE WHO AREN'T ARCHITECTS.

word connotes an honesty and curiosity about methods and materials, a belief that mass production and beauty are not mutually exclusive, and a certain optimism not just about the future, but about the present.

Maybe that's the most important thing. We think that we live in fabulously interesting times. And that no fantasy we could create about how people could live, given unlimited funds and impeccable taste, is as interesting as how people really do live (within a budget and with the occasional aesthetic lapse).

While a lot of magazines show homes as pure space, so isolated from the particulars of geography or daily life that they might as well be constructed on a Hollywood sound stage, we think that the connections to society, place and human experience—call it context—are exactly what make good architecture great. Those connections are also what makes architecture interesting to people who aren't architects.

One more thing: Be grateful that we are not more like Adolf Loos, the Viennese architect who wrote the seminal essay "Ornament and Crime." He was one crabby Modernist. Take the following: "When I want to eat a piece of gingerbread, I choose a piece that is plain, not a piece shaped like a heart, or a baby, or a cavalryman, covered over and over with decoration."

Were we Loos-ish, we would denounce the styled bowl of fruit as an anachronism, an example of old-fashioned handicraft that has contaminated any number of otherwise pure Modernist environments. We would argue that the only truly Modern arrangement of fruit is one made by machine, a symbol of mass production: the canned fruit cocktail. We would slip cans of Del Monte (in heavy syrup) into every photo.

We would. But we're too nice.

—KARRIE JACOBS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

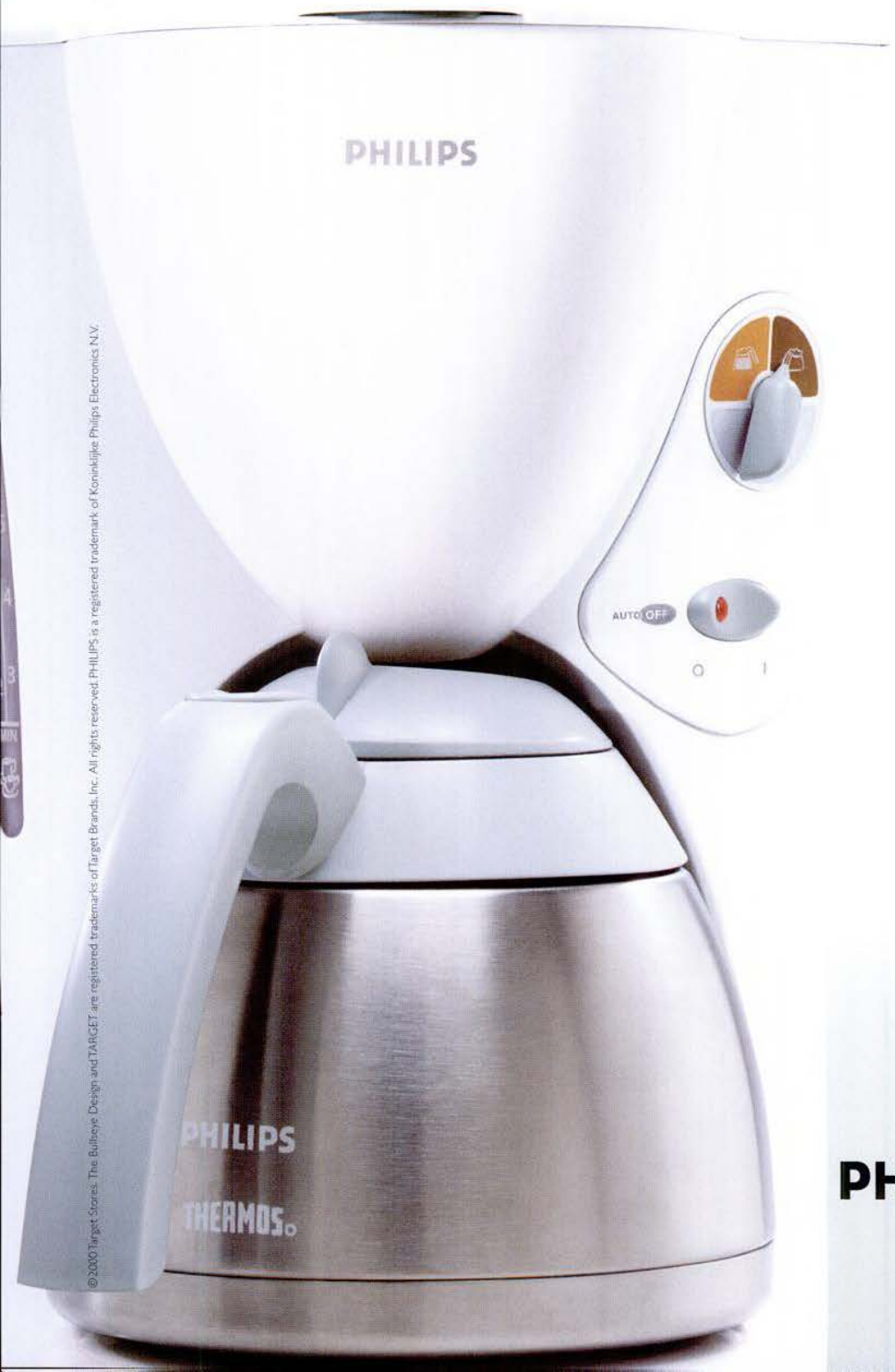
P.S. We prefer our gingerbread decorated.

Please let me know what you think about dwell: karrie@dwellmag.com.

PHOTO BY ROBERT CARDIN

2 PARTS thermology

3 PARTS oooh baby



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From concrete block to urban retreat, Tom and Nicole's house then (below left) and now.

PHOTOS BY JACK GOULD

"WE WALKED IN AND SAW WOOD PANELING, DROPPED CEILINGS AND STAINED SHAG CARPET. BUT WE ALSO SAW THE LARGE EMPTY ROOM OF OUR DREAMS."

Quietly occupying the corner of a block surrounded by strip malls and industrial buildings in Venice, California, the Carson/Bettauer house is an unassuming little structure that looks from the outside a lot like the simple houses a first-grader might draw. Though their friends thought they were crazy, (see "before" picture left), architect Tom Carson and his wife, filmmaker Nicole Bettauer, saw the potential of the basic concrete shell. "Our first impulse was to gut it," Carson explains, and they did just that, creating an open, airy space they describe as "a modern loft crossed with a treehouse."

The decision to create a loft plan out of a traditional configuration of rooms was an easy one for the pair. After living in a 550-square foot apartment, they were eager to have as much open space as they could get and set out to create a home that would bring people and things together. The kitchen/bar area opens onto the living space, thus addressing this desire by providing a space for eating, drinking, socializing, and playing with Salty the dog. Recently they turned their parking space into a garden, providing an open-air extension of their living space. At night, the garden lights cast shadows on the house's opaque windows, creating an atmosphere the couple describes as "peaceful and livable, at once open and warm."

—ALLISON ARIEFF

PHOTOS BY JONA FRANK
FILM STRIPS BY PATRICK LOUNGWAY
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THE TINY HOUSE

The cast

Susanna Dulkinys: *A 40-year-old graphic designer, currently an ad agency creative director working on interactive advertising campaigns.*

Nilus de Matran: *A 40-year-old architect. Studied with Zaha Hadid. Has built work environments for Razorfish and Red Sky (both are interactive companies) and residential projects in San Francisco. Owns a café called de Stijl.*

The house: *A 680-square-foot house on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco, noted on some tourist maps as the "Smallest House in San Francisco."*

12-01-98

Finding the House

Susanna: I always had this idea that I wanted a property on Telegraph Hill. I think it's an ideal place to live in the city. A developer friend of mine knew another developer who owned this little house. He said go drive by and look at it. I went and saw it that day. I loved it, but I knew it was a challenge because of its size. I also thought the size could be an advantage. I pondered it for a couple of weeks and thought it was a good idea to have Nilus look at it.

I remember him saying, 'If you don't buy it, I will.'

Nilus: We'd talked architecture before, about houses. But she hadn't said, 'I want you to design my house.'

Susanna: I thought I was going to renovate it, knock down the central walls and probably keep the façade the same.

Nilus: It's all pieces. Even though it's a little house, it was a collection of structures that were built at different times. There was no way to improve it and still get value for money.

12-22-98

Moving In

Susanna: I moved in three days before Christmas the year before last, and the TransAmerica building, that little point, they had it decorated like a Christmas tree. It was green, glowing with a little red tip on the top right through the bedroom. I didn't even have to get a tree.

I was living in the house in a non-functional way. The closets and storage are downstairs. The bed's upstairs because that's where the best electric heater is. The bathroom's in the back of the house, through the kitchen. The space just wasn't functional. But to rip out the bathroom and put it downstairs—you might as well start over.

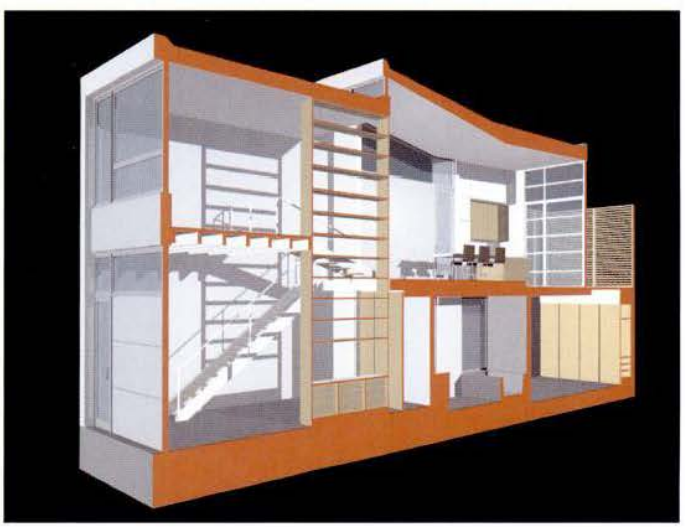
There were things about the house that I really liked. I liked the quality of light on that hill. I liked running up and down the different levels. I knew that there were some qualities that I wanted to maintain. I knew I wanted something very modern. And I knew Nilus and I had a kindred understanding. If we were to do something there would be an aesthetic, and it would be driven by function. But I didn't have a picture in my mind of what it would be. I just wanted a great bathroom.

03-05-99

The New House

Nilus: This is the way we're programming the house: We're calling the downstairs hall the bedroom, where it's private and enclosed. Then upstairs, we're just opening it up. The house is broken into three levels going up. It's not one continuous space. I think having small open spaces makes it feel bigger. We tried to play with the light within the space. I made different openings throughout the house so that, as the sun moves through, the light changes within. We angled the ceiling so it reflects the sun into the room. You get different natural light movements. You feel what time of day it is.

At the same time it's south-facing, so you can't completely open it. You'd just burn up. So we broke the house into two parts. You have windows in the middle that are much higher to give you privacy from the street. And if you're in the back looking toward the street, you get a little sliver of the TransAmerica building and the sun coming through. You get just a snippet of a view. ►



Homeowner Susanna Dulkinys (above) in front of her teeny, tiny house; architect Nilus de Matran (right) at the backdoor; and de Matran's cross section (far right) of the house reconstructed.

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05-15-99

A Roofdeck?

Susanna: I think in the original plan, we weren't going to maintain a back deck. We were going to build out that whole space and do something on the rooftop.

Nilus: Actually, we did work on the rooftop and then discarded it because she can use her neighbor's roof. Again, we're really tight for space. To get to the roof, you need a staircase—that eats up so much space.

Susanna: What we gained was the angle of the roof line. What would have been a roof deck is now angled at about 30 degrees to allow light to come into the back of the house.

Nilus: This is what I was saying about having a slant where the south sun comes in and reflects off the ceiling.

08-10-99

The Layout so far

Nilus: You come in and you have the office space. It's the main public area, so you have UPS coming in without interfering with the rest of the house.

Then downstairs, right under the back yard, you have the bedroom. This is what we're excavating. You have the bathroom connected to the office and then go down, like 12 inches, to the bedroom.

And then the kitchen is designed, so the dining and the cooking are happening all at the same place. There will be a change of level to define the kitchen, which opens up to the deck, so it could be indoor-outdoor.

The bookshelves go all the way from the studio space, where they're part of the office, all the way up to the ceiling. There could be a video projector aimed at the west wall instead of a TV.

When you're sitting in the house, it's a 50-foot room from one end to the other. I think it's great having a 50-foot space.

Susanna: Right, it's just a big feeling. I think the energy of one person will fill that space. I think it's perfect.

02-10-00

The Toilet(s)

Nilus: I think the thing that took up the most time was the program of the household, how it functioned. Did we need two bathrooms, one for upstairs and one for downstairs?

Susanna: Yes, there was the issue of sounds. You couldn't put a toilet in the kitchen. It wasn't even the space; it was the sound.

The Bathtub

Nilus: We were doing a bath and a shower and now we've just turned it into a big, poured concrete bath ...

Susanna: We were trying to remain kind of green and recycle what we had in the house, like my huge antique claw-foot tub. But the enamel is going, and we started thinking about a Philippe Starck bathtub.

Nilus: I looked at his tubs and wasn't very impressed. But, the other thing is, I don't think it's a compromise having a big, four-foot-wide bathtub, so the bathroom's ending up being much more generous than we were trying for ...

Susanna: Yeah, I'm excited how the bathroom has just changed within the last week. We'd had it as a separate shower unit against the wall, and now there's a shower in the tub.

03-30-00

Politics

Nilus and Susanna meet with the Telegraph Hill Dwellers association, Planning and Zoning Committee, at the San Remo Hotel.

About a dozen members are gathered around a long table.

Nilus is very tactful. "We're as good as tearing it down, but we'll stay in the same envelope. We just need to create some space for Susanna. At the moment she has 700 square feet. We're going up to 900."

Nilus shows a rendering of the new façade, with its big windows and pivoting wall.

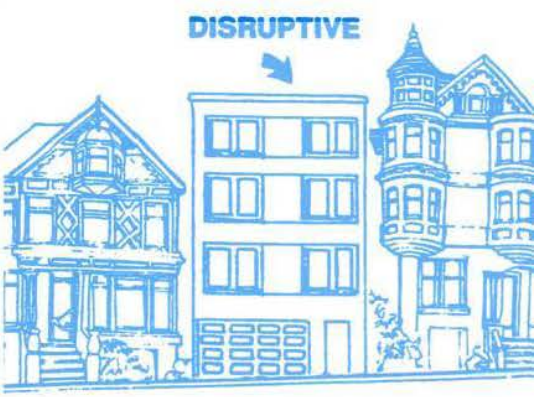
Someone advises adding an old-fashioned bay window and hands Nilus a copy of the design guidelines for the block, which seem to suggest that new houses resemble old houses.

"What strikes me is that it stands out as being different," someone comments.

The meeting is about to turn hostile, but one of Susanna's neighbors pipes up and commends her for coming directly to the Association. Then the moderator says, "We understand that this is really a tough site." Nilus and Susanna go to the bar out front for a beer. More politics to come.

To be continued . . .
For updates, check www.dwellmag.com

Susanna's future bathroom with four-foot-wide concrete tub (below); a rendering of the new façade (center); and an illustration (far right) from the San Francisco Department of City Planning's "Residential Design Guidelines."



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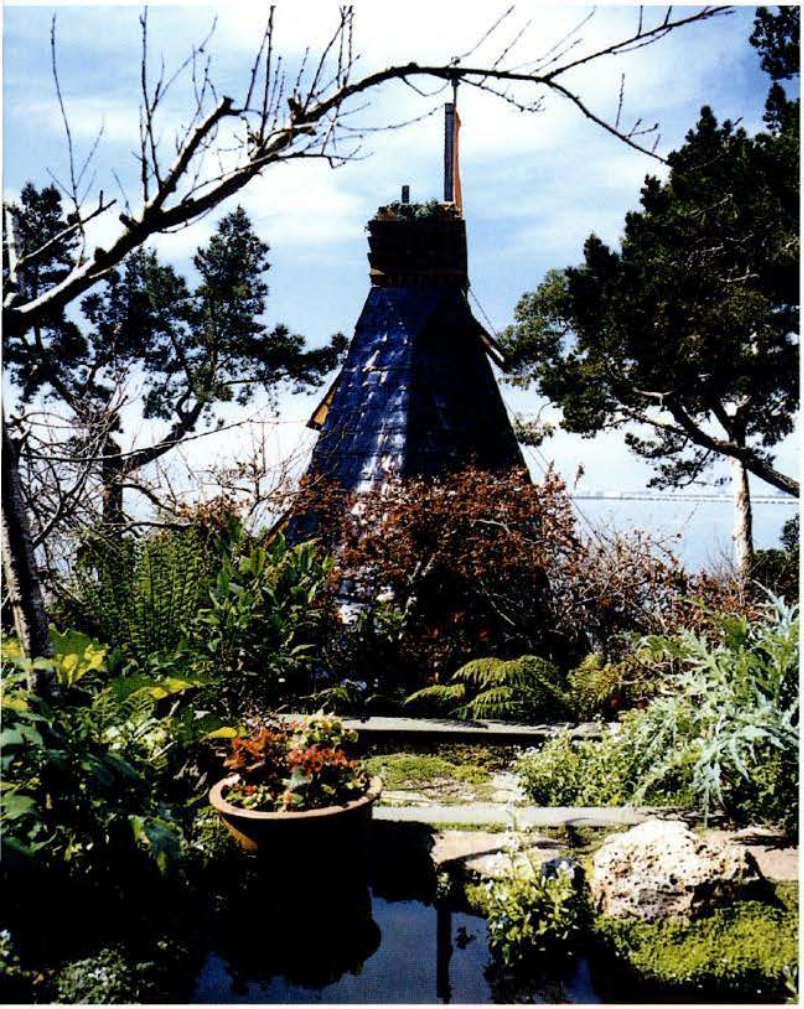

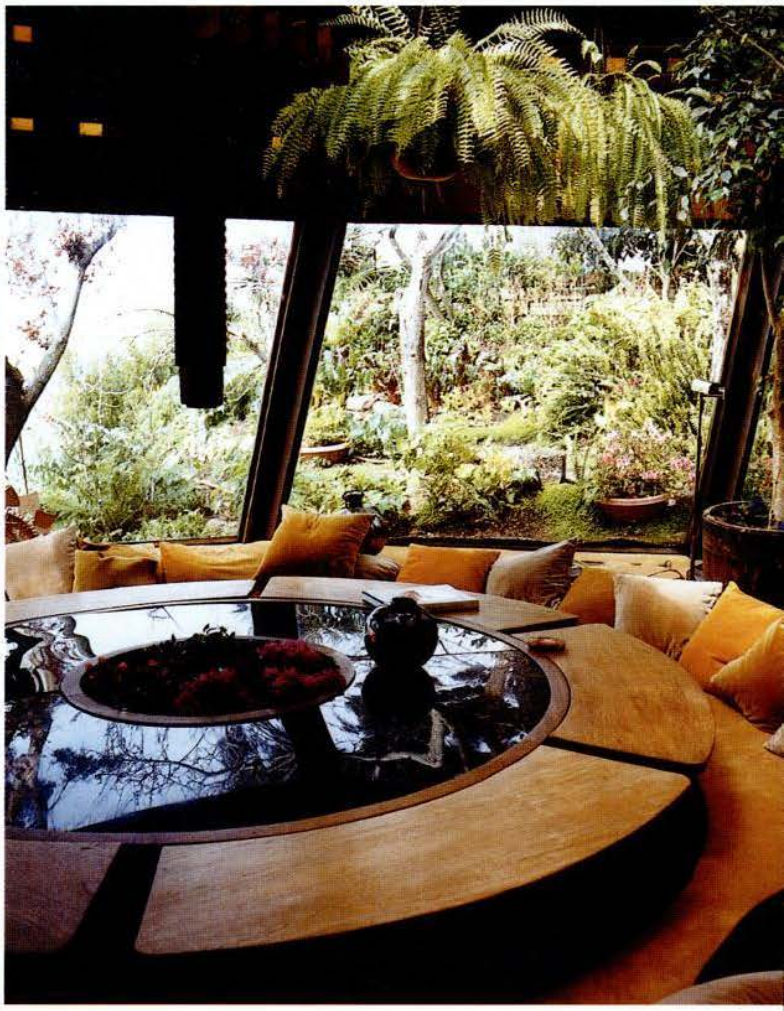

PHOTOS BY OLIVIER LAUDE

Despite its small size (1,100 square feet), Lumiere, as the house is called, boasts a breathtaking view of the San Francisco Bay and a cozy conversation pit that seats 24.

EDEN OFF THE INTERSTATE

A little town abutting oil refineries and Interstate 80 is not where you'd expect to find a modern day Thoreau. But just a few miles from Oakland, in Point Richmond, California, architect Walter Brooks has created a little version of Eden for himself and his wife, Jean. Covered in acrylic plastic tiles, Brooks' dwelling resembles nothing so much as a ship venturing out for uncharted territory or a kind of mutant-materials teepee, befitting the creator of numerous inventive architectural projects.

Brooks purchased this plot of land in 1972 for its breathtaking view of the San Francisco Bay and a climate conducive to his plans for a suburban "farm." Long before simplicity became trendy, Brooks espoused an architecture of what one might call humanistic minimalism, a belief that one's home should be "small, energy efficient, inexpensive to operate, easy to maintain, and above all, a beautiful, soul-satisfying space." The house is easy to maintain, requiring only a soapy rinse once a year. After nearly 30 years, its durable tiles have never needed replacing.

At the heart of this unconventional abode is the conversation pit that aims to restore what Brooks refers to as the "primitiveness" missing in our lives—communal dining, cooking over an open fire. The "edible landscape" surrounding the house hearkens back to an age when architecture and agriculture worked together. On it, the couple grows everything from squash to wine grapes; in spring, strawberries blanket the garage roof.

"If you create a good house for yourself, you help create a good family and a better society," Brooks explains. "Designing a house is a way of thinking; at the very base is a philosophical view as to what values are important in life."

—ALLISON ARIEFF

Featured: "Relexa [illegible] Model 28 276 000
Top: Shower Head featuring the SpeedClean® anti-lime system
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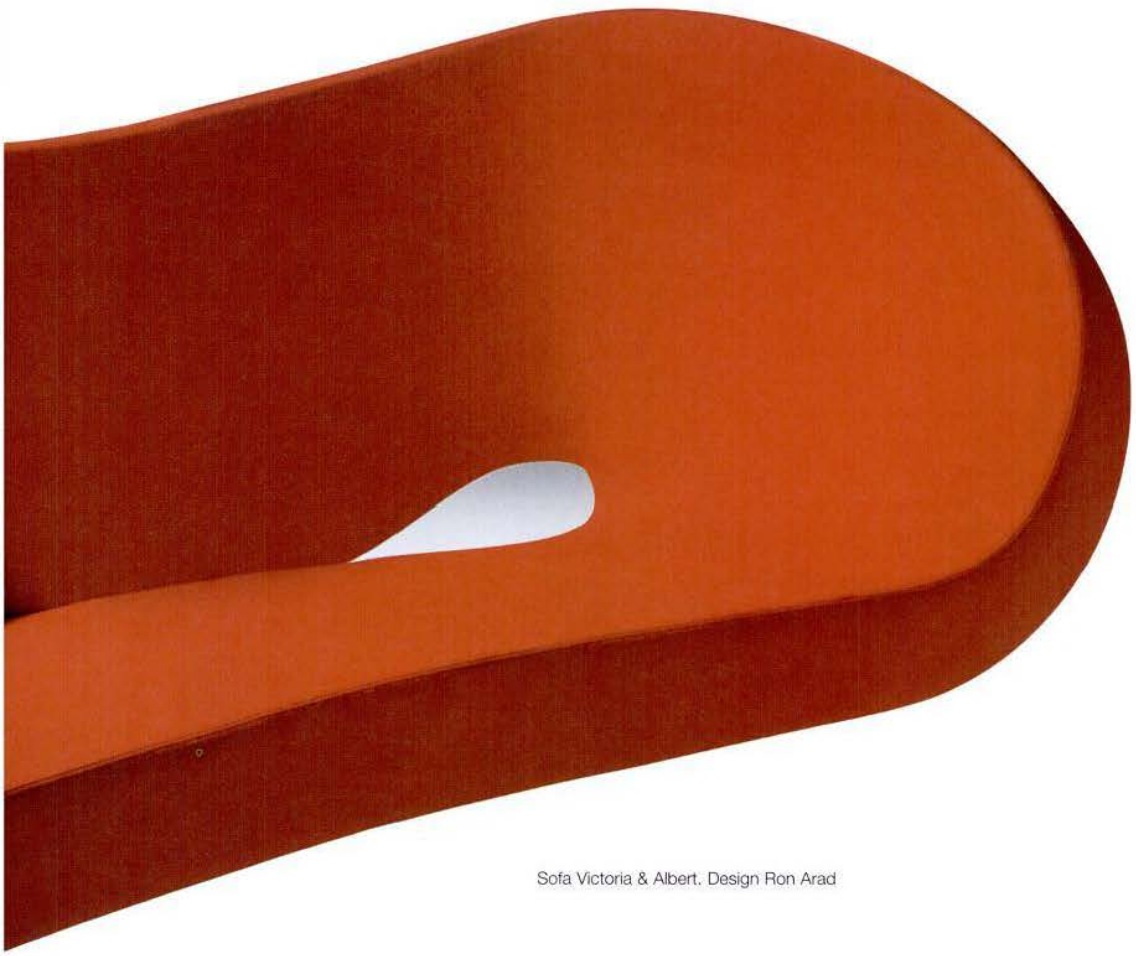

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WE'RE OPERATING IN A

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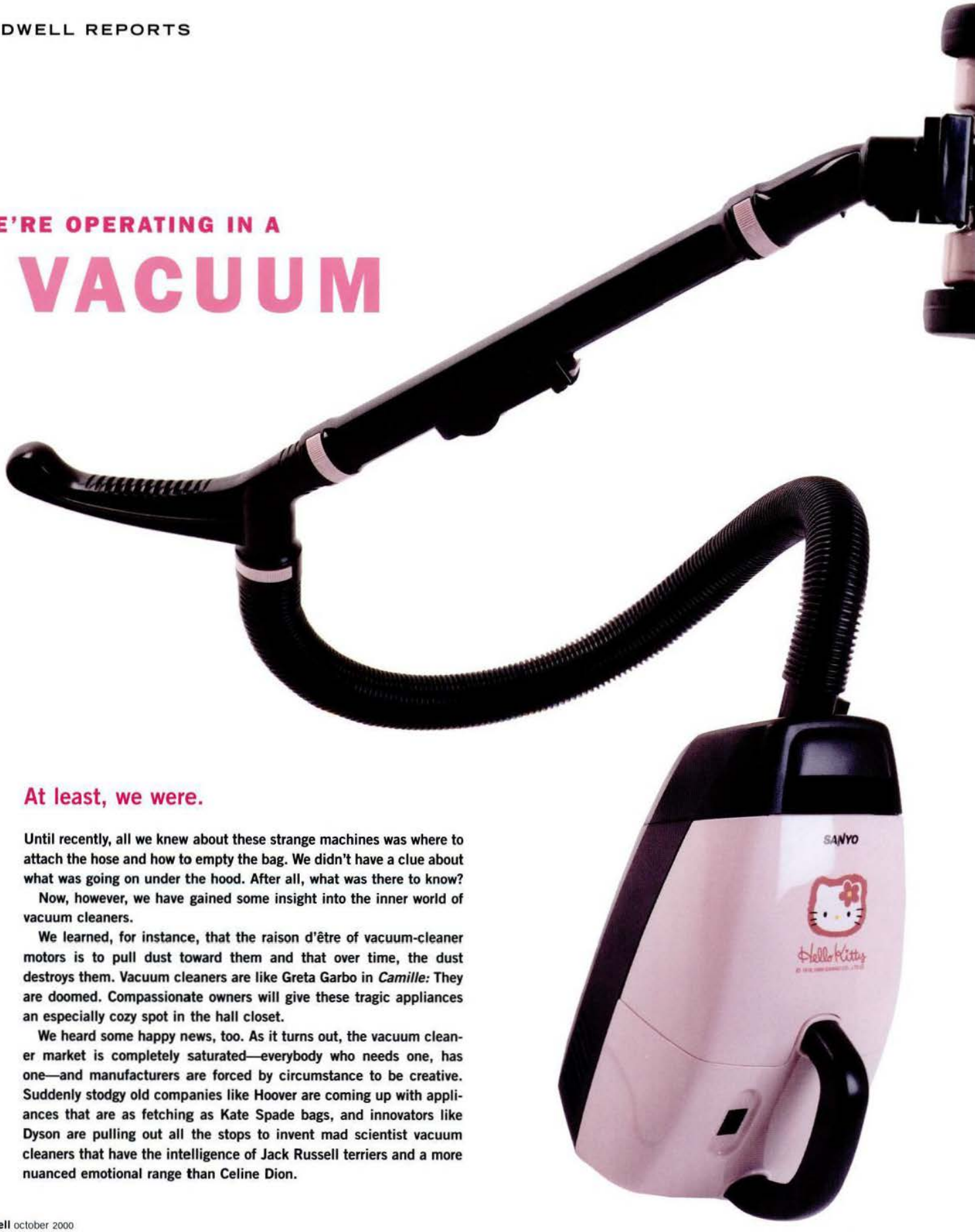


At least, we were.

Until recently, all we knew about these strange machines was where to attach the hose and how to empty the bag. We didn't have a clue about what was going on under the hood. After all, what was there to know?

Now, however, we have gained some insight into the inner world of vacuum cleaners.

We learned, for instance, that the raison d'être of vacuum-cleaner motors is to pull dust toward them and that over time, the dust destroys them. Vacuum cleaners are like Greta Garbo in *Camille:* They are doomed. Compassionate owners will give these tragic appliances an especially cozy spot in the hall closet.

We heard some happy news, too. As it turns out, the vacuum cleaner market is completely saturated—everybody who needs one, has one—and manufacturers are forced by circumstance to be creative. Suddenly stodgy old companies like Hoover are coming up with appliances that are as fetching as Kate Spade bags, and innovators like Dyson are pulling out all the stops to invent mad scientist vacuum cleaners that have the intelligence of Jack Russell terriers and a more nuanced emotional range than Celine Dion.

The Sanyo SC-KTK17 (aka The Hello Kitty Vacuum)

$89.95 (available in the United States and Japan)

All of the things you might normally say about a vacuum cleaner—that it's an upright that can be converted into a lightweight canister model, that it traps dust in a disposable paper bag, that it has a "powerful, yet quiet" 700-watt motor—are, in this case, completely beside the point. All you really need to know is that this is the Hello Kitty Vacuum cleaner.

Expert Opinion: Pete Anderson, proprietor of San Francisco's A&G Vacuum, who has been in the business for 28 years, is unmoved by the pink plastic shell or by Kitty's cute face. He knows it's just a Sanyo in cat's clothing. But the small device does pull a 70 (that's inches of water pick-up) on the suction gauge, almost as much as the more muscular Miele. Still, the Kitty has its limits: "It's for someone with hardwood floors and one throw rug in a studio apartment. That's who you'd sell it to," suggests Pete.

What We Think: We are in love. We can, with a straight face, make a case for Kitty's Minimalist pedigree. Just look at her: She isn't a cat, but rather the idea of a cat. She is Modernism with a feline face. And the machine itself is so sleek, so self-contained, so lightweight, that we like holding it long after the dust bunnies have been vanquished.

The Filter Queen Majestic

$1,200-1,800 (available in the United States and Canada)

There aren't many products like the Filter Queen. It's been on the market since 1933 with only minor design changes. The Majestic, which can hold an impressive two-and-a-half gallons of dirt, can be purchased only from an elite authorized sales force who have been sworn to sell the Filter Queen only to customers who have seen it demonstrated in person. The Filter Queen isn't an appliance—it's a cult phenomenon.

Expert Opinion: You know how some guys are about their ancient Chevy pick-ups? Well, Pete is that way about the Filter Queen. "If you found ten Filter Queens from any era, I bet nine out of ten of them would still work." He says they can pull as high as 100 on his suction gauge. "The motor is stationed in the center," Pete explains. "It pulls from all directions for maximum suction at all times." The Filter Queen, he boasts, is the vacuum cleaner the G-men bring with them when scouring jetliner wreckage for telltale traces of explosives. "The FBI uses it," he says. "The Livermore Lab uses it." And regular people who adore their carpets use it, too.

What We Think: We don't exactly know what to think. We are admittedly dazzled by the notion of this appliance that appears to have arrived at our offices by a time machine from the 1930s. It looks like a prop from a Busby Berkeley movie, a drum that some plucky showgirl would jump out of during an unlikely musical number about housework. We don't intimidate easily, but this one scares us just a little bit.

The Dyson DC06

$4,000 (available in the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, Japan, and Israel)

This Information Age vacuum cleaner is designed to clean rooms all by itself, starting from the exterior walls and spiraling its way like an ice rink Zamboni toward the center of the room. "By the end, it has completely understood the room," says inventor John Dyson. No mere vacuum cleaner, this Mars Explorer for the domestic landscape boasts over 50 sensory devices, 22,873 lines of software code and three on-board computers.

DYSON IMAGE COURTESY OF DYSON

Expert Opinion: "You've got a lot of electronic parts," Pete points out. "If you had a notebook computer on wheels, going around cleaning, how long would the electronic components last?" Okay, he is suspicious. After all, this is a lot of technology devoted to a pretty low-tech task. He also questions the longevity of the rechargeable batteries and their replacement cost. Pete also suggests that anyone who could spend $4,000 for a vacuum cleaner easily could afford to hire someone to vacuum for them. "It's a play toy," he declares. "It's not something I would have in my house."

What We Think: Still, we want one. Understand that our office has been a plaster-dust-coated construction site for months. We would love to have a DC06 scooting around underfoot, swerving to avoid confrontations with the Cairn terrier. We find the Dyson's unadorned Functionalist aesthetic irresistible and the little drawings of the tortoise and the hare on the machine's slow and fast buttons make the device seem somehow more personable. Maybe it is a toy, but we are partial to toys.

►

PHOTOS BY ROBERT CARDIN

The Miele Red Star

$699 (available worldwide)

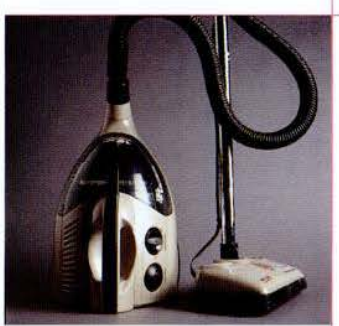
With Miele the word is function: 1,100 watts and a 4.5-quart dust bag. It comes with an upholstery tool, a crevice brush, and a dusting brush, not to mention a power brush, and it filters the air as it cleans the carpet.

Expert Opinion: Pete regards the Red Star with respect. How could he not? "You have to have suction, and you have to know how to use it," he likes to say. And with the Miele, there are so many ways to use it. As he rummages through the multitude of attachments, Pete observes that the brushes feel like natural bristle rather than nylon, which tend to wither and curl. Pete, however, is skeptical of the whole notion of vacuum cleaners as air filters. "Baby Boomers," he grumbles, "You want clean water. You want clean air. You want clean this and clean that. You control the world."

What We think: We respect the Miele. It's like having a little Porsche to drive around the house. We love its streamlined form (although we admit that wind resistance is not a factor in our living room). And we still can't decide whether we prefer the Red Star or the limited edition Platinum model.

The Dirt Devil Vision

$149-200 (available in the United States and Canada)



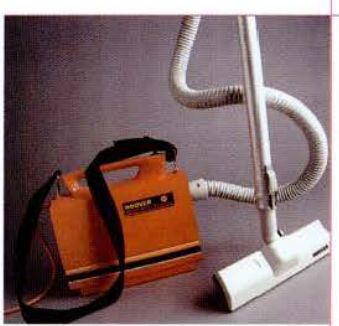
This new canister model, with its wraparound windshield, boasts "power you can see." But, in truth, it offers "dirt you can see." Here, the conventional opaque bag is replaced by a clear plastic vessel that fills as you watch.

Expert Opinion: Pete is skeptical. Okay, the Dirt Devil pulls a respectable 70-plus on the suction gauge, but the accordion filter doesn't grab all the dust, and the secondary filter that is supposed to protect the motor is decidedly flimsy. In fact, the whole machine seems less than sturdy. "I don't like this," Pete says of the plastic lid that hides the on-board tools. "This is going to pop off." And it's heavier than a small vacuum cleaner should be: "Get out of town!" Pete exclaims in response to someone's guess that it weighs four or five pounds. "This is 14 or 15 pounds."

What We Think: We are reminded of NASA's Gemini program and suspect that this vacuum cleaner has been modeled after a space capsule on purpose as a way of appealing to nostalgic Baby Boomers. We admire the strategy and enjoy watching dirt accumulate behind the windshield, but we have trouble snapping the container in once we've removed it for emptying—the parts don't meet with a decisive snap. If the Dirt Devil were a car, it would fail the door-slam test.

The Hoover PortaPower

$170 (available in the United States)



"If the bag is empty, you can turn it on, stick it to the wall and walk away from it," says Larry Tabacchi, a sales representative with the Hoover Company in Canton, Ohio. The message is that this compact unit, known in the trade as a "detail cleaner" is quite powerful. The PortaPower, with its jaunty shoulder strap, is intended for professional cleaners who must lug their gear up and down endless corridors.

Expert Opinion: "That motor could last you forever," says Pete, who is also impressed by how hard the little machine pulls—a 70 on the suction gauge. And it's also quite lightweight. "The weight of the machine has a lot to do with this cord," he says, pointing to its miles of electrical cable. "There's no filtration on this thing," Pete cautions, "but if you don't worry about the dust, if you just want to clean up some garbage, this would be a good machine."

What We Think: We saw this compact machine—it measures a scant nine by 12 inches—with its hard, modern silhouette and its chic, orange shell and assumed that Hoover was suddenly way ahead of the curve, designing appliances for the same fashionistas who would buy the orange Panton chair. But no. It's orange to appeal to the bureaucrats at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The PortaPower, intended for commercial use, is brightly colored so people don't trip over it. (The newest model—equally stylish—is black, but it still sports a bold, orange cord.) By the way, we tried, and it *does* stick to the wall. ■

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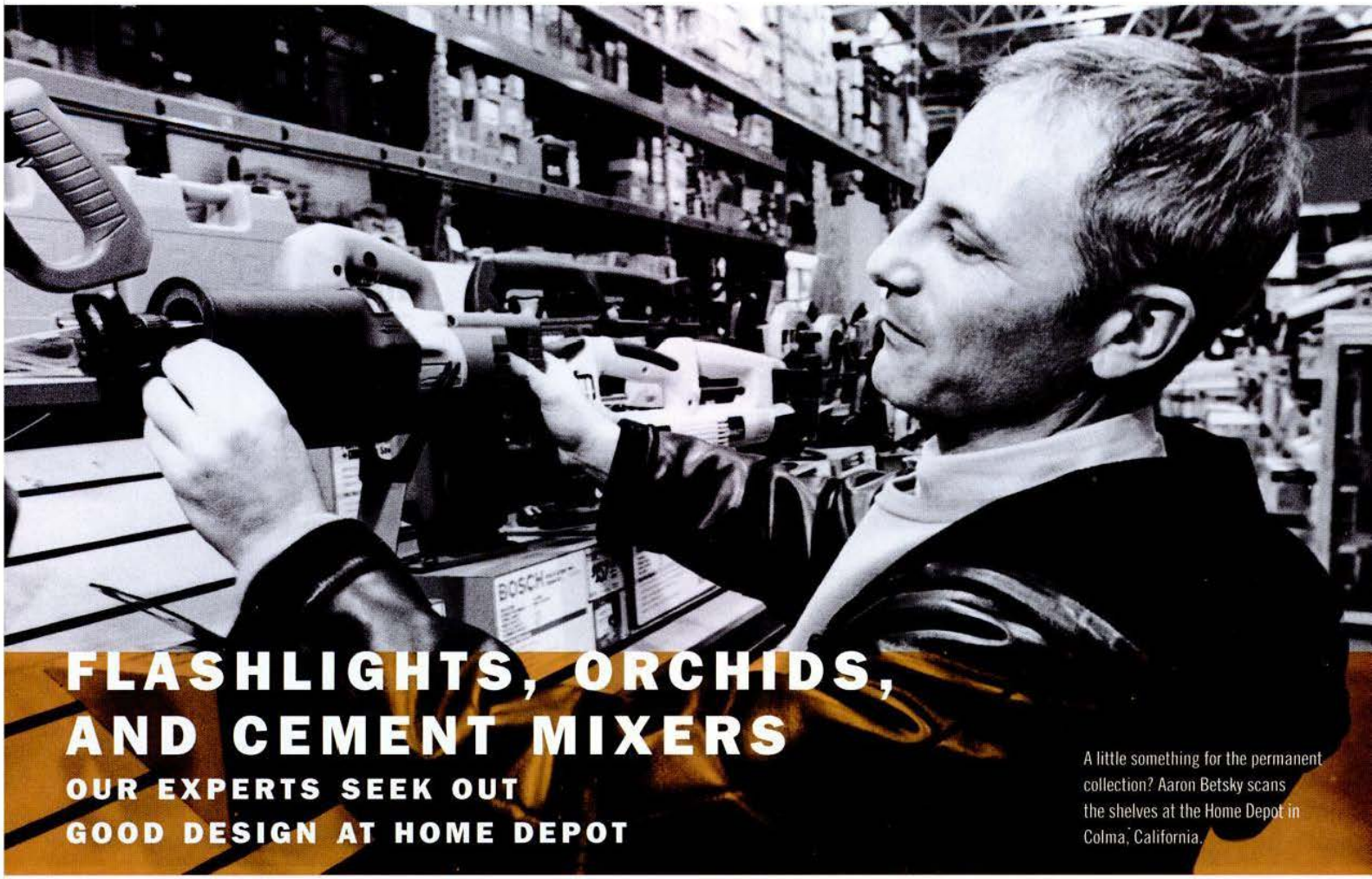


FLASHLIGHTS, ORCHIDS, AND CEMENT MIXERS

OUR EXPERTS SEEK OUT GOOD DESIGN AT HOME DEPOT

A little something for the permanent collection? Aaron Betsky scans the shelves at the Home Depot in Colma, California.

PHOTO BY ED KASHI

Aaron Betsky

Curator of Architecture, Design and Digital Projects at the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.

Home Depot really brings the industrial home. The store reveals how design has crept into the most mundane and ordinary aspects of our lives. Part of what is so great about the objects at Home Depot is that one can get straight at the tools and construction and penetrate the veils of bad taste thrown over the mass-production industry that is trying to sell us ticky tacky houses and suburban ranch burgers. One feels able to participate in the actual construction phase with the actual tools that have their own innate beauty rather than confront things that have been gussied up. But they really need to work on their graphics. Here are the objects I chose:

5-cubic-feet "Minute Man" portable cement mixer, $368

This is a cement mixer for home use, probably for laying your own patio. This is the simplest of all objects I've chosen and is just a really striking object. If you don't think about its function, it has a certain sculptural presence to it, much like a Martin Puryear sculpture.

Milwaukee "Sawzall" orbital super saw, $177

Here is a timeless object that comes in a bright red box—it has a certain amount of industrial-chic nostalgia about it, but it has over the years been refined so that it has become more curvaceous like all industrial design objects. The saw is red and black, the colors of anarchy. The red box is great, like a kid's lunch pail with Milwaukee in lightning script.

It is an ingenious artifact that allows you to cut through virtually any surface. It's the one tool you need to open up the world around you as Gordon Matta-Clark showed us when he sliced open buildings.

It has a certain resemblance to a gun as well so you get a sense of attacking architecture, of opening it up. I almost chose a power drill, but this was like the mother of all tools.

White Orchid, $15–$30

To me the orchid is symbolic of this notion that a place like Home Depot is really about building every aspect of your own environment, including the part that lives. But what's even more amazing about these orchids—like everything else that's industrial strength—is that they don't die! We got one last year, it went dormant and now it has come back and it's almost scary how big ►

it has become. They are really amazing.

Nature is the world's greatest designer and the combination of symmetry/ asymmetry, the intricacy of its composition, the delicacy of its surface combined with the rather scary forms, make it one of the most intricate pieces of design you'll see anywhere in Home Depot. But it comes in a horrible pot. You have to take it home and re-pot it immediately.

Susan Yelavich

Assistant Director for Public Programs, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution

If there were a Home Depot in Tribeca that was easy to get to, yes, I'd go back but in the end, I was a little disappointed by my visit. I did like that they offer more than just home products there and that the store was in actuality helping people produce things. The public-service end was remarkable. The culture of the store completely lived up to its sales pitch. It's not where I'd go to find well-designed products, but here's what I chose:

Dynamic Design, Inc., royal blue plastic planters , $2–$4
Here's a design idea that brings Karim Rashid's hallmark—plastic—to the masses.

These didn't do much for me until I saw them sitting next to the plastic terra cotta planters, which I've always hated. I think if you're going to go faux, or if you are going to use plastic, you might as well be really up front about it. And these planters are. They were very modestly priced and come in royal blue, lime green, and lavender.

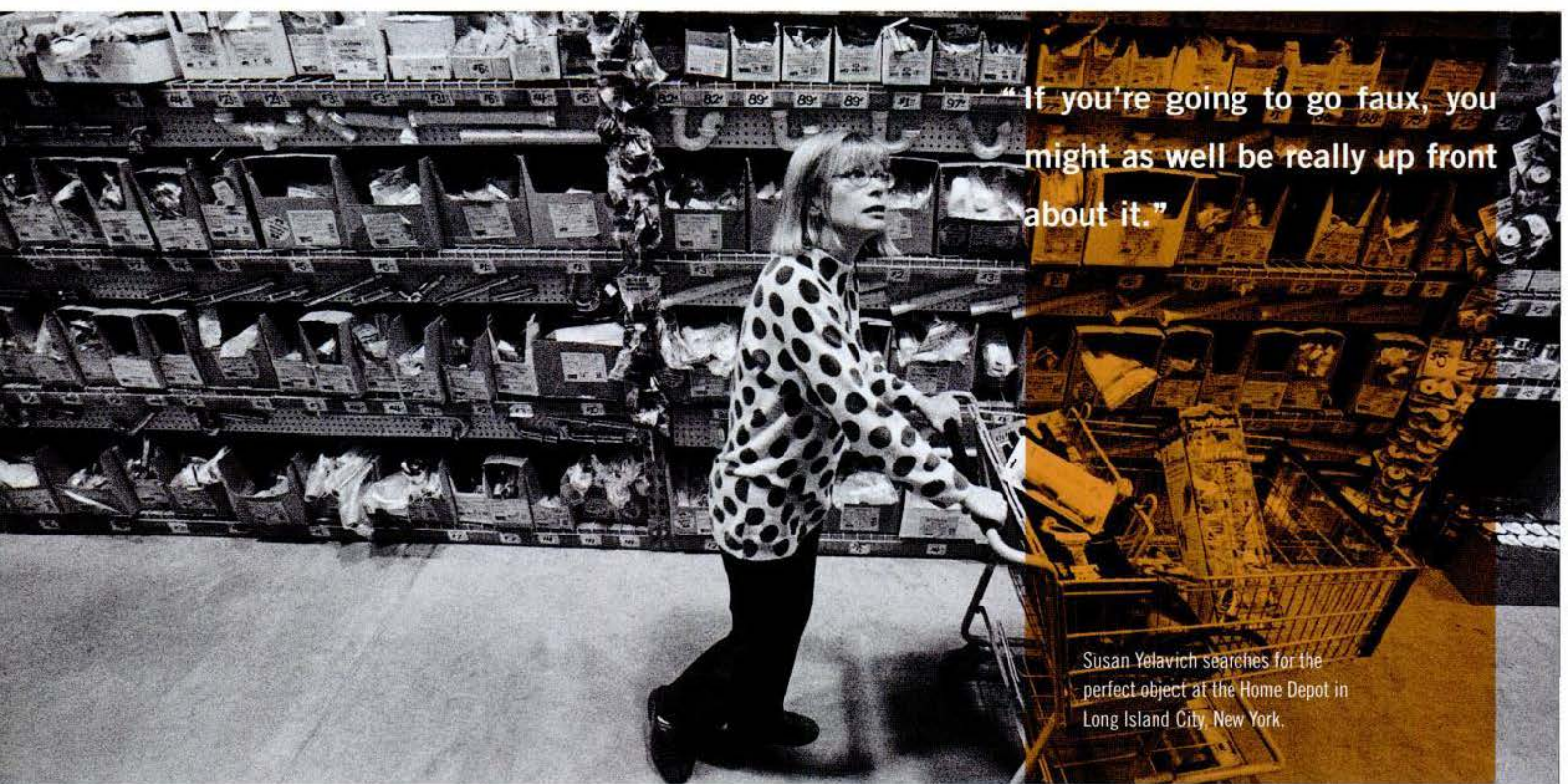
Hubbel light flashlight, $21
Now this struck me as a pretty wonderful approach to a flashlight. Its most obvious feature is that it's Day-Glo lime green. Second, was that it's got a faceted ABS body, almost like a pilaster or column, a distant architectural reference. It wasn't fluted but it was angular, shaped like a polyhedron. This flashlight can submerge to 2,000 feet and is impact/corrosion-proof. It was just a very gorgeous, simple thing. It was the color and faceting that drew me to it first, but then it was eminently practical and the price seems remarkably low, given its quality.

Fiskars tree pruner, Bypass lopper, $29.97
Fiskars products win design awards all the time, but I was particularly drawn to this bypass lopper with the trademark orange fiberglass handles. I should confess that I'm a gardener and my bias on this excursion, as you can probably tell, was definitely toward gardening tools. This costs $29.97, a very modest price for a tool that looks like it will last for a long time.

Tree pruning is probably one of the most arduous, least glamorous tasks for a gardener, and it's one of those things I usually forestall until the bitter end and end up doing in the wrong season. But this tool made it seem like the job would be much more manageable.

Clearly I'm finding a thread here: color. It seems that with design, from the Apple i-Mac to the royal blue plastic plant containers, color is becoming a way to differentiate everyday tools and make them more like fashion accessories. Had the tree pruner (a) not had the Fiskars brand and (b) not had those great orange fiberglass handles, I'm not sure I would have been drawn to it. ■

PHOTO BY SERGE J-F. LEVY



Susan Yelavich searches for the perfect object at the Home Depot in Long Island City, New York.

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Pictured: Kid's Biarritz club chair in Old America Ranch leather. Behind it: Zachary Sofa in white-denim slipcover over feather-blend duvet cushions.

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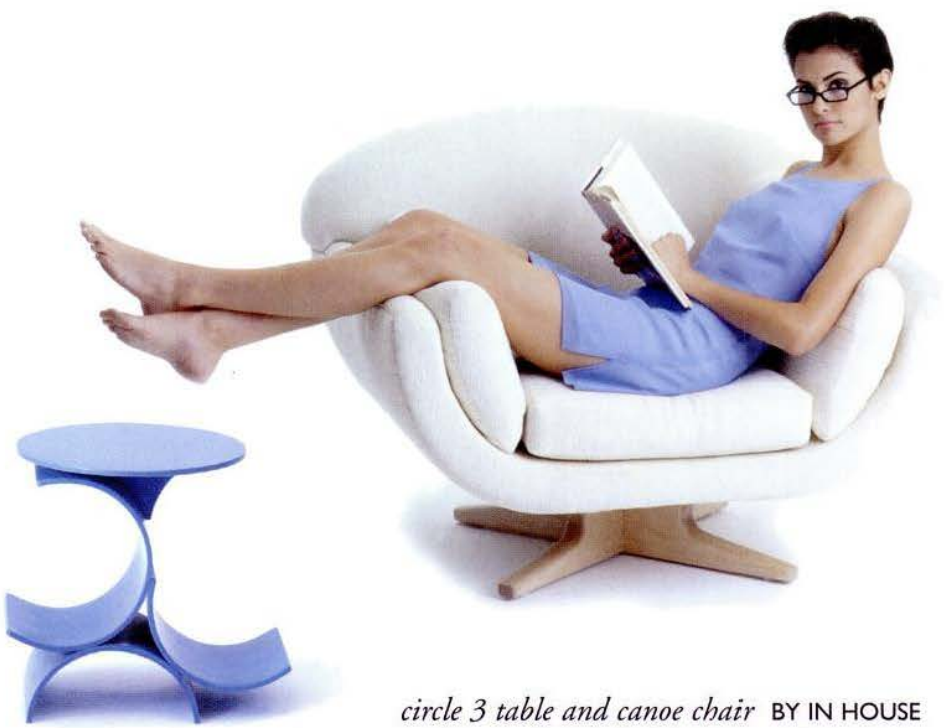

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PHOTO BY GARY CHANG

The world outside—Gary Chang's ultimate bachelor pad seen from the street.

330 SQUARE FEET OF HEAVEN IN HONG KONG

Architect Gary Chang, 37, the director of Edge, Ltd. (HK), lives in an ethereal urban oasis of his own design in Hong Kong. The pristine interior could not differ more from the gritty reality just out the window. It is a futuristic flight of fantasy, a refuge, a physical manifestation of a dream state—all-billowing white curtains and translucent surfaces. Blue fluorescent tubes bathe the floor with an otherworldly glow. In this squeezed space (just 330 square feet), the only tall object is a tower of solid cherry wood that efficiently incorporates a movie projector, refrigerator and kitchen, wash basins and laundry machines. With these quotidian elements out of the way, the central area of the apartment can function as a streamlined space for living. Chang, who has won countless awards for his projects, which run the gamut from serene private dwellings to bustling cinematheques, answered our questions about modern living in the ultimate bachelor pad.

What brought you to this neighborhood and what made you choose this apartment?

The apartment used to be the home for my whole family—my parents, my three younger sisters and me—until I moved out to go to university. Seven years ago my family moved into a new place, and I moved back to the apartment myself.

I seem to be getting used to this seemingly depressing and unsafe neighborhood that has drug dealers in the stairwells and poorly maintained building conditions. I was a bit lazy about finding a new place. Also, I might be one of the poorest bosses in the field of architecture. I never get rich enough to buy a new flat, considering the sky-high cost of housing in Hong Kong. My mother recommended that I buy this place. Before, we had just rented it. ▸

PHOTOS BY ALMOND CHU

Design for living (and working/eating/sleeping/chatting/dressing/reading) and watching films on the 120-inch-screen TV.

Was the small size of the apartment a function of choice or necessity?
The small size of my apartment to me means convenience and efficiency, more or less a microcosm of typical Hong Kong conditions. Nevertheless, a 330-square-foot place for one person is perhaps already a luxury in Hong Kong. My whole family cramped into this space was typical by Hong Kong standards.

Where do you put everything?
Ultimate spatial flexibility is created through the multiple operations of the partitions, lighting and mobile furniture. All the mundane necessities of bachelor life—books, CDs, clothing, pictures, stereo, video—are stacked on a chrome factory shelving system and hidden discreetly behind floating white curtains.

Briefly describe your daily routine.
I wake up between 8 and 9 A.M. and go to work until around 7 P.M. I teach on the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Hong Kong every Monday and Tuesday afternoon. Entertainment with friends until midnight. Watch some news from interactive TV or watch a movie before bed. I set up several alarm clocks to make sure I remember the dreams I have every night.

How do you get to work?
How long is your commute?
A taxi takes only four minutes, the train is four stops. It's a quick commute.

Can you get your morning coffee (or tea) in your neighborhood? How much does it cost?
Typical for Hong Kong is a set breakfast for around $3 (U.S.), which includes tea or coffee, omelet and noodles.

What is your mortgage/rent?
My mortgage is only $500 (U.S.) per month. I borrowed money from the bank for a down payment—the price of the apartment was $50,000 seven years ago, which was far below normal market price for Hong Kong. Now the market value is about $120,000.

Can you walk to the grocery store?
How much is a quart of milk?
There is a store downstairs, and milk costs around $1(U.S.).

How do you spend your time at home?
I spend more time at the office and in town. While at home, I spend a lot of my time watching my 120-inch-screen TV, listening to my movie-soundtrack collections, or in my bathroom, which is very big by Hong Kong standards. I seldom cook—mostly boiling water and instant noodles.

Do you entertain at home?
Because of the minimal kitchen, I seldom entertain my friends with food. Rather, I entertain them with wine, music and movies. Once I had around eight people on my sofa bed, watching movies and chatting. ■

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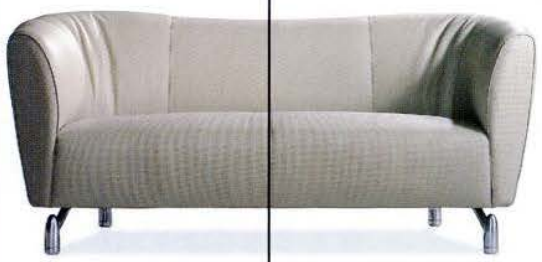

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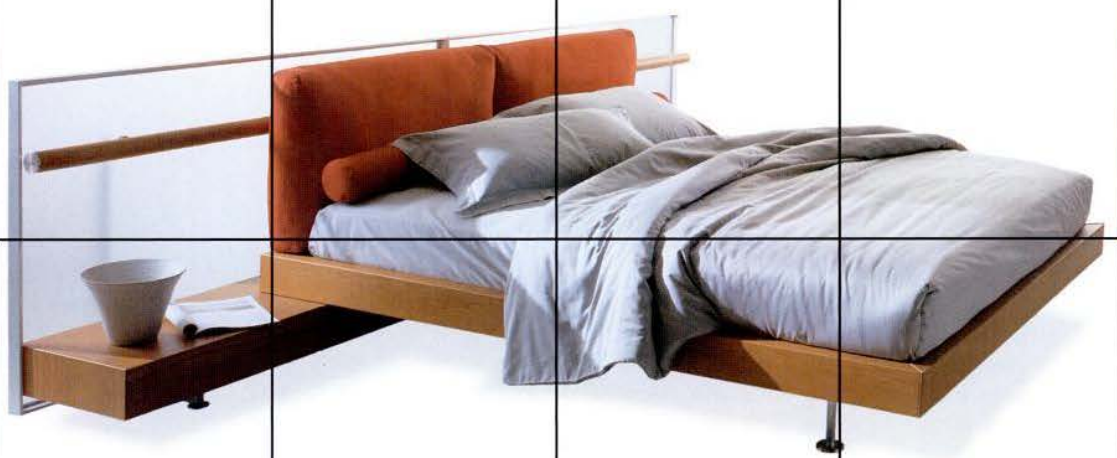

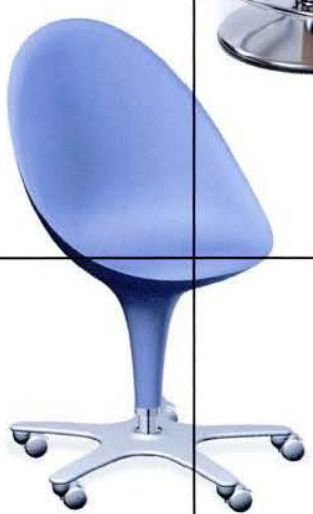

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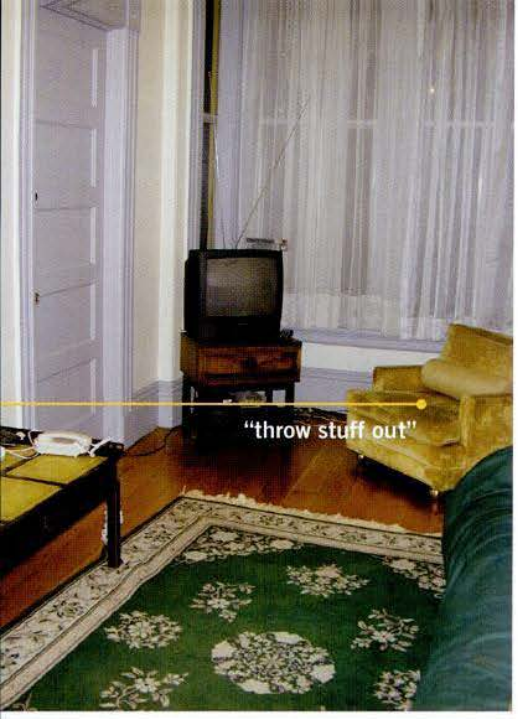
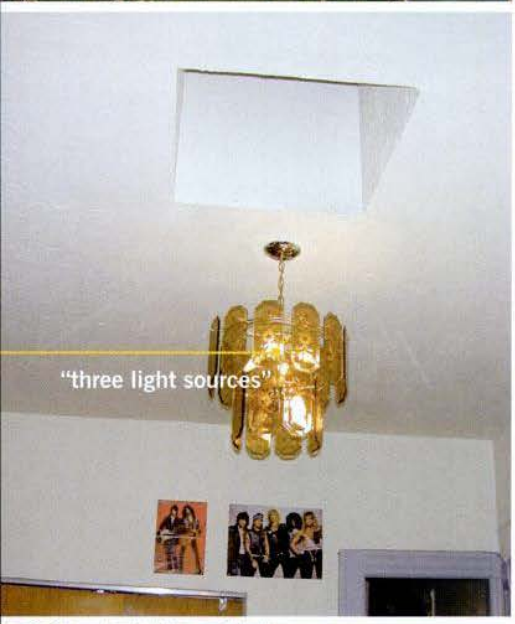
CAN THIS ROOM BE SAVED?!

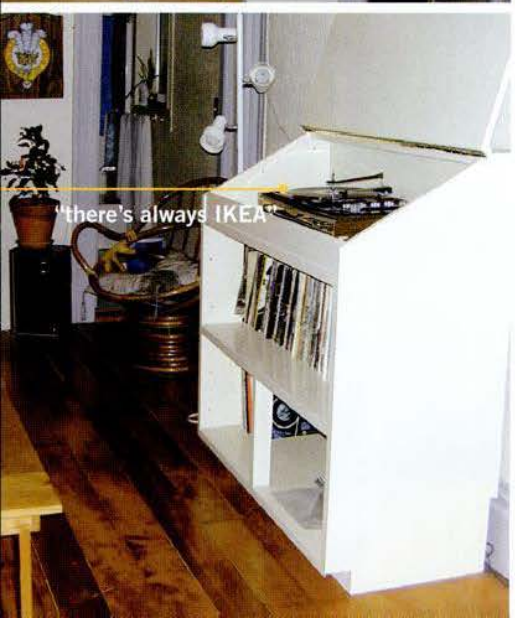
"It's nice, but it's not that nice," judges Sarah, in reference to the second-floor Victorian flat she shares with roommates Colleen and Ian. It's a common attitude for people her age who are still in the process of shedding their college lifestyle. Sarah, Colleen and Ian are in their early 20s, and their living options are restricted by the Bay Area's skyrocketing rents and paucity of real estate.

Their apartment is fairly typical of their demographic—a group used to transitory living but beginning to take an interest in making a home for themselves. One of the thorniest issues facing these apartment dwellers is what to do with the shared space—in this case, a living room with a bay window and an adjoining parlor this trio dubs the "record room" (where the hi-fi shares space with furniture picked up second-hand).

Colleen, Ian, and Sarah graciously let dwell solicit the opinions of four experts who offered a broad spectrum of solutions for making the record room a better place. Denny Daikeler is a Philadelphia-based interior designer; Matt Maranian is the author







of *Pad: The Guide to Ultra-Living* (Chronicle Books, 2000); Marco Pasanella is principal of the Polenta Group in New York and author of *Living in Style Without Losing Your Mind* (Simon & Schuster, 2000); and Cathleen Chua Schulte is a San Francisco architect and a content manager for buzzsaw.com, an architecture, engineering, and construction Web site.

Understandably, a major overhaul is not the way to go here. But a little money and some unified attention from the tenants can make a big difference in how these rooms play to first impressions and, much more important, how they are utilized and enjoyed by the residents on a daily basis.

Maranian began the task with an assessment: "This place has got three great things going for it: wood floors, interesting molding, and a nice big window." A skylight in the record room also complements the light from the bay window. The basic scheme is conducive to comfortable common areas that, as Daikeler puts it, create "places to enjoy conversation, play, and communion."

But a good floor plan isn't enough. The most common pitfall is to assume that a shared room is intrinsically habitable. "These rooms often have a kind of ceremonial function that doesn't really work," says Pasanella. So what's a roommate to do? "Make an inventory of what you've got; do you need all of that?" he asks. "People's impulse is to fill space. But really you probably want to throw stuff out first."

All the respondents made a case for the housemates getting together and discussing goals in a focused way. Keeping in mind the kinds and frequency of activities that the shared rooms should accommodate, plan for how many of these activities can go on at the same time without roommate dissonance. Then it's time to act. It doesn't require vast sums of time or money to produce results.

"If all parties can be committed for just one weekend, there's hope, because my favorite suggestion for roommate situations is to make decorating like a game," says Maranian. And there's no mandate that new furniture is required either, Chua Schulte asserts. "Take the big pieces and neutralize them. Get slip covers for couches and chairs to make them unified, go neutral with curtains and other finishes."

There are other quick fixes available, Maranian insists: "If you are absolutely limited to the furniture and accessories at hand, use the power of paint! I would make an extremely bold color choice: tangerine orange. Then leave the molding as is since sky blue looks good with tangerine." Pasanella, however, is wary of such ministrations: "When you paint over crummy surfaces, it can look worse than what you're trying to cover."

Lighting is the other thing that would make a dramatic difference without too much effort, said the panel. "You need a lot of little light sources, to make a warm glow," says Pasanella, "not just the one halogen light blaster that many people rely on." Maranian agrees that, "Nothing makes a space look worse than bad lighting, and nothing can make a bad space look better than good indirect lighting." Daikeler thinks there should be at least three light sources whose cones cross in the center of the room, and Chua Schulte suggests a few favorite lamps to remedy the situation: "The Fucsia hanging lamp, available at Design Within Reach (designwithinreach.com), and a cylindrical table lamp, which also comes in a standing floor model, by Pablo."

The three roommates think the bay window is one of the best features of the rooms, and pay their respects by placing the television nearby. Our panel, however, sees this as a wasted opportunity and proposes that the TV be moved elsewhere. Pasanella and Daikeler think the window should be made the focus of the room, and that the room's length can be maximized by moving furniture away from the wall and grouping it around the nook. The record room can also provide a more recumbent, decadent experience. Pasanella proposes: "Put the prized vinyl on a $35 picture rail, and put the rug and pillows all over the floor in there to make it more of a place to hang out late at night."

The suggested resources for a shared-room renewal range from the high end (Herman Miller) to the quotidian (McMaster-Carr, a supplier of industrial and lab equipment and furniture). Yard sales and thrift stores are the default home-furnishing source of choice, though they should be used judiciously. These are already the main suppliers for Colleen, Ian, and Sarah's apartment. And of course, there's always IKEA. Says Chua Schulte: "Anything from IKEA is compatible with more expensive pieces that they might acquire further down the line."

—ALAN RAPP

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ROOM REBELLIONS

Is the room as we know it dead?

Well, not quite.

We've all done it. Eaten dinner in the living room. Read a hardcover book in the bathtub. Surfed the Web in the back yard. Since the days when Mom told us not to play ball in the house, we have known the illicit pleasure of using rooms for purposes other than those for which they were intended. The cumulative effect of these little acts of defiance has gradually broken down the literal and figurative barriers between rooms, resulting less in new types of rooms than in a move toward a sort of Anti-Room. As the distinctions between public and private, home and office, inside and outside continue to blur at a rapid rate, the room as we know it is becoming extinct. The harbingers of this room revolution have been in plain sight for years. Lofts. Home offices. People who live in airplane fuselages.

In creating this issue, we hoped to find rooms with amazing new purposes, rooms that were demonstrably 21st century, and, indeed, in our quest we were shown the Deluxe Chill Out Room, the Master/Slave Unit and the No View Corridor. One room was designed with the express purpose of letting its owner watch storms roll in from the north; another is used for the display of a prized collection of kayaks. Quite a few rooms gave a nod to Virginia Woolf in their quest to provide space for solitude, thinking and reflection. Consumers can arrange their own rooms from the privacy of their i-Books by accessing www.roomstogo.com. At the opposite end of the hipness spectrum was the "New American Home" presented at the National Association of Home Builders convention in Dallas—a 4,495-square-foot home literally overflowing with cleverly named spaces like the Oasis Room, the Internet Alcove and, yes, the Imagination Room.

So is the room as we know it dead?

Well, not quite. Most of the "new" rooms we found are not particularly radical. Eclectic as they might be, what these various rooms share is a willingness to challenge the traditional ideas about what a room is and how it should function. We saw a lot of what one might call "de-designated" spaces, rooms with no set definition or purpose. These new rooms are a result of changes in our way of living.

So we wondered, "Is the living room obsolete?" Well, not quite. In terms of, say, the enclosed, formal parlors of old that required a butler with your calling card on a tray for entry, or my fourth-grade friend Nancy's parents' living room, one strictly off-limits to children, replete with white pile carpeting, white leather couches, Hi-Fi and a liquor cabinet, the answer is a resounding yes. But what has replaced it?

Living rooms seem to have adopted a more liberal admissions policy. The largely ceremonial function characteristic of many living rooms of the past is beginning to give way to spaces that one can actually live in. No longer a shrine overseen by the mom-in-residence, the living room has evolved in an acknowledgement of broader definitions of what a family is and what it does. The once-formal enclaves limited to the function of entertaining guests now host the gamut of everyday activities. They have become comfortable gathering places for the entire family that are no longer closed off by doors or use restrictions. In line with this shift, we noticed a prevailing trend toward what one might call "the great room" (or in Tokyo real-estate parlance, "LDK"—living room/dining room/kitchen), where the formerly distinct kitchen, living and dining rooms fuse into one versatile space.

The idea of using one room for multiple purposes is hardly revolutionary, but doing so by design rather than out of necessity is a more recent phenomenon. Fifty years ago, architects like Marcel Breuer began designing open plans for homes, spaces that blurred the distinctions between living and dining areas. He was onto something. Rooms opened up and were freed from isolation. Space was broken up not by doors but by angles or dividing screens. People are now designing living spaces according to their own particular needs rather than confining themselves to traditional domestic configurations. Changes in the way we live today affect the rooms we live in and so rooms, accordingly, are being re-envisioned. Even the most isolated room in the house—the bathroom—is, in some cases, losing its walls. And for better or worse, as we continue to acquire more and more stuff, the closet is growing ever larger, becoming a room unto itself.

In an age when we want one gadget to do everything—shop and ship, provide stock quotes and horoscopes, send e-mails, show movies and provide a sense of community—it's not surprising that we are now placing similar demands on the spaces we live in. And we should. This is the spot where a traditional shelter magazine names the "New Trend," but we can't (we won't!). The only thing we can tell you is that all bets are off. The only thing we can do is encourage a little room rebellion. Couldn't your house use a Deluxe Chill Out Room? ■

BY ALLISON ARIEFF

Culture in the Bath. TARA, shown here as a kitchen fitting in Chrome, is an example of the range of fittings and accessories by Dornbracht. Our foundation is a commitment to the highest quality materials, manufacturing, function and design. We collaborate internationally with photographers, artists, designers and writers to explore the wide variety of contemporary bathroom culture. TARA is a creation of SIEGER DESIGN. Our product magazine 'Kultur im Bad' may be requested by writing to: **Dornbracht USA, Inc.** A complete catalog and specification manual may be ordered for $15.00. 1750 Breckinridge Parkway, Suite 510. Duluth, GA 30096. Phone (800) 774-1181, Fax (800) 899-8527. www.dornbracht.com

50 YEARS DORNBRACHT 1950-2000

DORN BRACHT

PROJECT: WATROUS/WEATHERMAN HOUSE
LOCATION: BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
ARCHITECTS: LESLIE GILL AND BRYCE SANDERS

STORY BY VICTORIA MILNE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN

A STAIRCASE ISN'T A ROOM.

BUT IN THIS HOUSE IT'S THE BEST ROOM.

In November 1997 Peter Watrous and Bess Weatherman and their two kids moved into a newly renovated carriage house in Brooklyn that they had purchased in 1992. The renovation, designed by architects Leslie Gill and Bryce Sanders, retained only the floor slabs, windows, and plumbing. The architects took out a central staircase and built a new one along the side of the house. The 800-square-foot footprint is repeated in a full basement, ground floor (less an enclosed 200-square-foot garage), a second floor, and a 400-square-foot upper bedroom level. Watrous recently began to produce music and write a novel after working as a music critic for *The New York Times*, and his wife Bess Weatherman works in the private equity business in New York City.

Color The light in this building filters in from above ("like a church," says Gill) and plays with reflections off of matte and shiny surfaces throughout the house. "I am at home during the day, and sometimes I'm shocked," says Peter. "As the light changes, and the walls change color, it just knocks me out."

Light This building was dark, and the architects put in 11 new windows and skylights. Luckily and remarkably, the two sides of the back of the house get light, one because it looks into the neighbor's garden, and the other because it has a white-painted light shaft. So when the architects began putting windows in everywhere, the back kitchen table area, which had been enclosed and dark, became almost an open river of light from one side to the other. It is where the children do their homework every afternoon.

Snow Daylight comes through the skylights on the top floor and illuminates the big living room and spills down the stairwell to the other floors. When the skylights are covered with snow, all this turns gray-blue in "incredible silence."

Time Time has nothing to do with the house, in the way that light does. But it has a lot to do with how the family uses the house. Until recently, Peter was a music critic, which meant leaving the house most nights at about 8 and coming home around midnight. Bess works in Manhattan during the day, and so would often be sleeping when he came home. The architects designed the closets and bathroom to be separate from the bedroom so that one's ablutions would not wake the other.

New Room/No Room The new room here is not a room, it is a purpose. This is a busy family. Peter works at home, Bess travels a lot, and they have two nannies, one in the morning/day shift and one in the afternoon. People make deliveries, visitors come and go. The stairs are the new room/no room. All of the activity happens on, in and around the stairs. The family music system is there, books are stored there, art is hung there, every resident and visitor passes them, clothes are dropped from one floor to the next, people are called to—it is the core of the house. Yet because it is a stairwell, it is a void. ▸

Rhythm, Vertical From the basement, one ascends from small rooms to large ones. The low ceiling and close walls gradually recede, building a crescendo until you emerge into an open, light, and windowed space at the top of the house.

Sound Music is important in this family. Peter listens to music in his office downstairs. People call to each other through the stairwell. That's not true, they actually just call from where they are, because they know the building is all open, and they know, the way people in a family do, roughly which direction the others went.

Impossible as it may be to convey this family's experience of this house, perhaps it will suffice that they are happy in it.

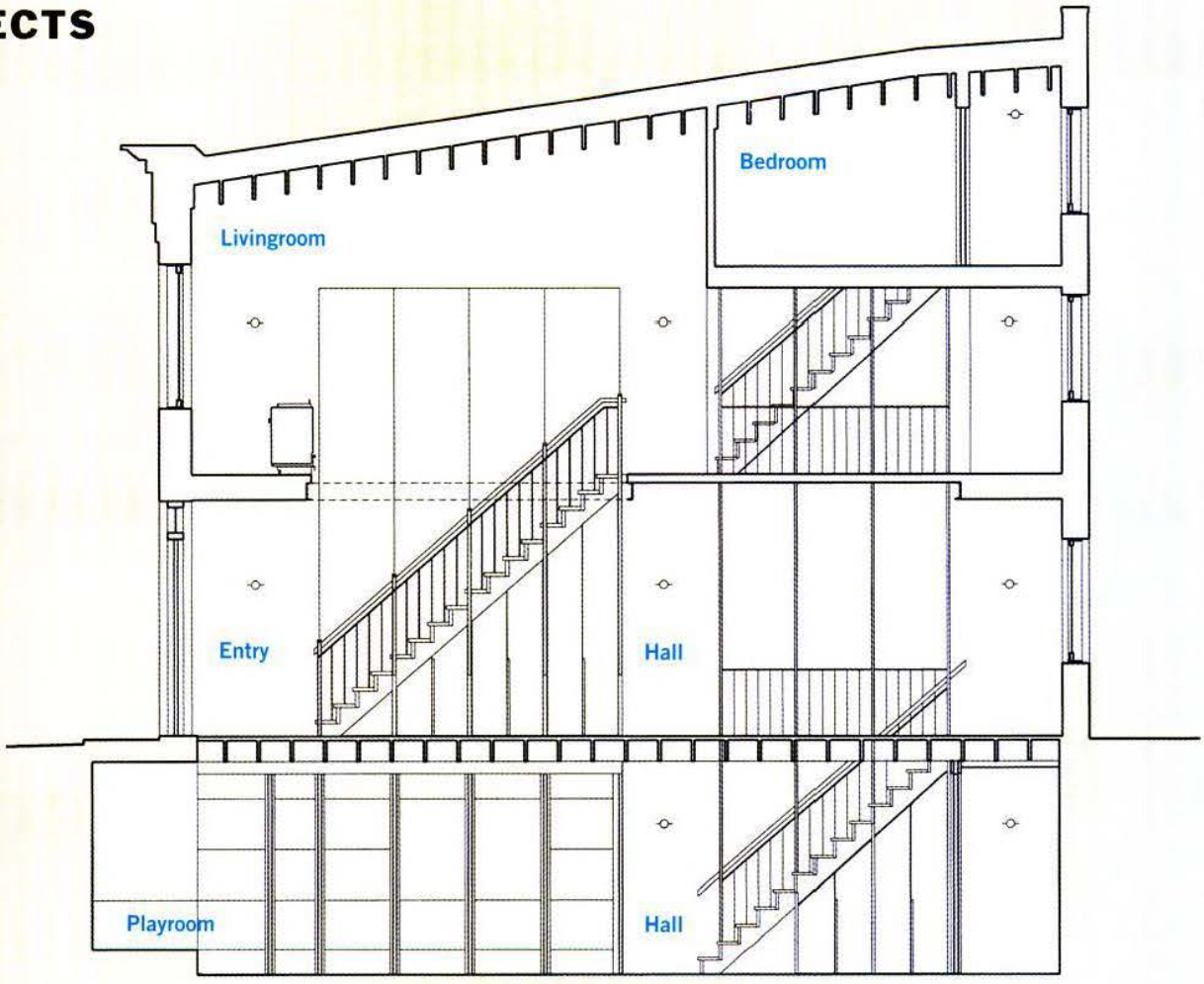
THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Brooklyn Heights is a nest, an enclave, a haven of sweetness in a (usually) dirty city. Not only are the streets small and full of strollers and old shops, but the neighborhood has the best edge in the city. Rather, it's not edgy at all, but it has a great perimeter. The city of New York has one failing so egregious that it suggests deep self-ignorance: It is built on a harbor and an island, yet has little waterfront access. Brooklyn Heights is the exception. Its western boundary is a promenade that looks over the East River to an incredible view of the Manhattan skyline and the Brooklyn Bridge. After the view, you turn to find a neighborhood of hundred-year-old buildings. In the 1960s local activism made this the first area in New York to be designated as a landmarked district, which means that alterations to all building exteriors must be approved by the city's Landmarks Commission.

"I never thought I'd live in a place like this.
I thought I'd be pumping gas in a place like Arizona." —PETER WATROUS

THE ARCHITECTS

Leslie Gill and Bryce Sanders each have their own practices, but when they were working on this house, they collaborated on about 25 percent of their work. Their process is complementary, starting with the client's needs. Sanders may become interested in issues of scale, shifting from the details to the overall plan, while Gill may look outside architecture for a project's themes. Gill studied painting at Cooper Union as an undergraduate, then studied architecture there before becoming a partner in Bausman & Gill Associates.



THE ARCHITECTURE

Axes Architects like to talk about axes. Axes usually don't seem especially interesting, except that you have to be sympathetic with the poor architects who need some place to start, after all. This house is caught in the fulcrum of two such theoretical axes, which happen to correspond with real-world alleys. Directly opposite the front of the house begins an alley that continues straight, perpendicular to the facade, through to the end of the block. Behind the house, skewed at about 20 degrees, is another, smaller alley that continues to the next street.

These axes do contribute to the experience of the house, especially the rear alley. Even though it is smaller and does not even seem to have access from the house, it configures the space in a way that gives long-ish views from the rooms in the back. And the alley also contributes to an arrangement of buildings in which none of the Watrous/Weatherman's many windows looks directly into a neighbor's. This is nice, and not so easy to achieve below the 40th floor in the middle of a block in New York City.

Stairs The stairwell is visually and physically dense. In addition to the working I-beam structure that is exposed and on which the stair is hung, there is another, lighter structure interlaced within it, also of exposed steel. The architects call this the secondary structure, and it supports storage cabinets, rails for art, bookcases, and railings. The architects drew these grids from the building's internal proportions. They began the design by retaining only the exterior walls, the floor plates, and the ground-floor garage. These structural proportions established the pattern that guided the interior relationships. On turning away from the stairwell, especially on the upper floors, you see open spaces. The visual density of the stairwell is also where the physical density—of storage—and the most movement are focused. Dense contrasts with open, busy contrasts with calm.

Victoria Milne is a writer, designer and curator who, since 1989, has had work published on three continents and in two hemispheres. She is currently working on a book on natural forms and design. ■

Impossible as it may be to convey this family's experience of this house, perhaps it will suffice that they are happy in it.

SAN DIEGO'S LITTLE ITALY IS HOME TO

THE ANTI-CONDO

The unconventional façade of renegade architect Ted Smith's latest building—a patchwork of cement block, steel, and light—provides the first clue that this is not just an everyday apartment house.

STORY BY DAVID HAY / PHOTOGRAPHS BY TODD HIDO

When Justin Marr, a software specialist, leaves work at Kinzan.com in suburban Carlsbad, California, he lowers the top on his 1967 Buick Skylark convertible and heads for the freeway. After reveling in the 30-mile reverse commute to downtown San Diego, Marr exits and passes through an inner-city neighborhood known as Little Italy. Minutes later, this 24-year-old steers into his courtyard parking space and looks up at the building that a year ago he embraced as home.

Named the Merrimac, after the famous ironclad ship of the Civil War, this complex of small, free-form lofts is a sight to behold. Designed by architect Ted Smith, it rests on a multihued, concrete-block base. High above, tilted 26-foot-high windows hang from a slightly concave roof. **From afar, it resembles an elegant Cubist take on a Chinese junk.**

Marr, a former collegiate soccer player, heads through a narrow door at the back of the 50-foot-tall complex. He jumps up a flight of stairs to his own front door, which opens onto a terrace. Five steps later, he slides back a huge glass window and enters what has become the bachelor pad of his dreams. "When people come over, they always say, 'I can't believe you live here,' " Marr boasts. The Missouri native is a born-again Minimalist, the sort who allows only a few cherished objects—an Eames rocker, a Kartell bookworm, a Driade coffee table—to invade his space.

He's more than happy to allow Smith's design to take center stage. Steel beams angle up the sides of the room. Windows reach to the top of the 13-foot ceilings. In back, a steep ladder leads from the concrete floor to a tucked-away loft bed. Despite its size—Marr's suite is barely 400 square feet—the view of the city beyond his adjoining terrace makes it seem more expansive.

Flipping open his computer to check his e-mail, Marr, a beer in hand, happy and proud, observes, "It's all very playful."

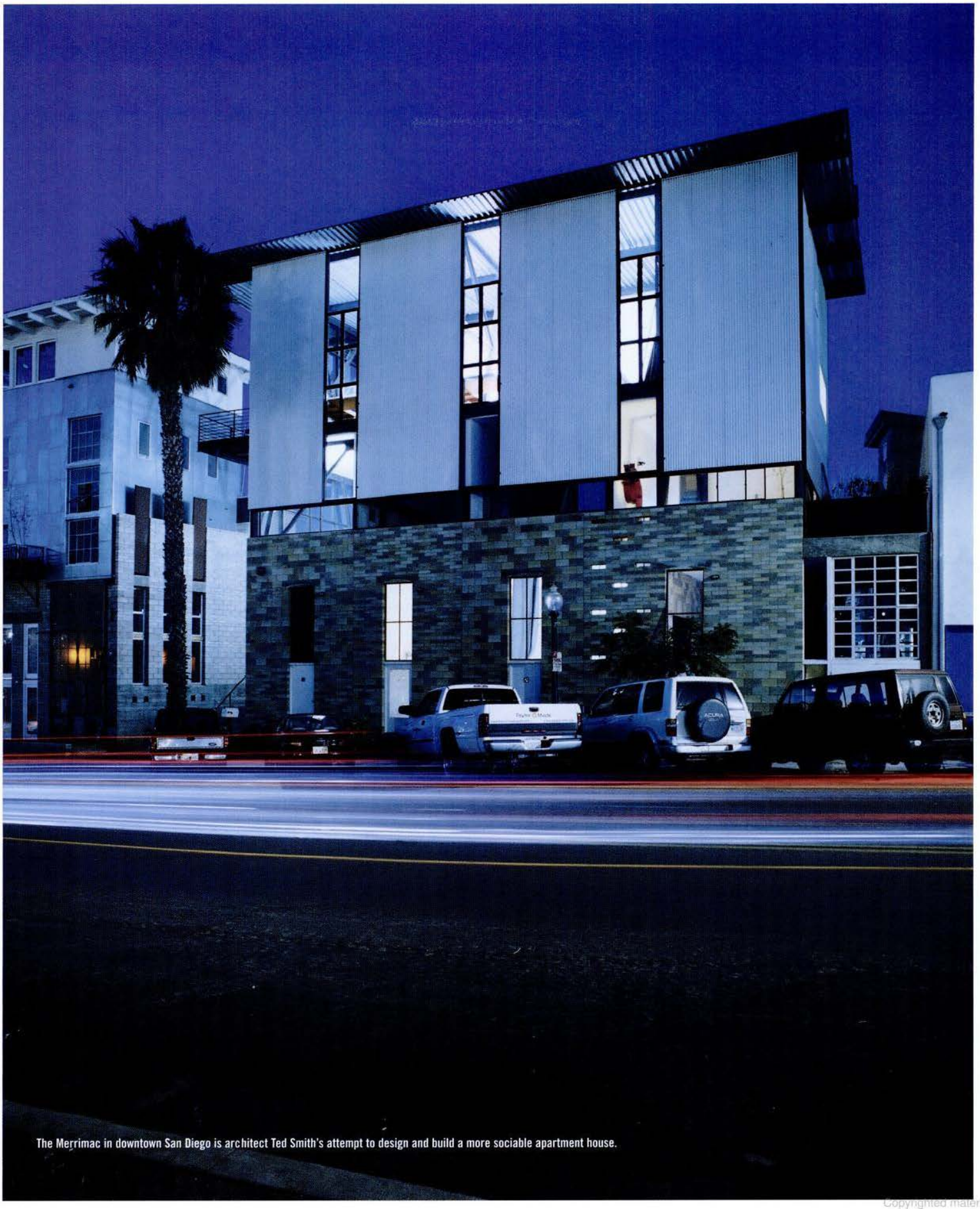
Marr is not alone in the way he has responded to Smith's vision. The Merrimac's unequivocal message—**This is Architecture! This is Form!—has inspired the tenants to rethink the ways they inhabit and decorate living space.**

"No more Elvis posters for me," vows Jack Clune, a 31-year-old lawyer. A master of tongue-in-cheek, he swears that buying his showpiece, an Eames coffee table, has cleaned him out.

Clune has a special reason to love his small loft. **With a garage door that opens the living area up to the street, he's able to set up his blue pingpong table, step back and get off a sweeping backswing.** "It's amazing how many people come out of the woodwork who've had previous pingpong experience," he notes.

Clune's next-door neighbor, 34-year-old Steve Williamson, agrees that all the Merrimac tenants have become "design-conscious." A thrift-shop aficionado, Williamson jokes about his "pink knock-off of a Saarinen tulip stool." He moved into the Merrimac "to get away from all the 'corporateness' of the downtown condo developments." This former club promoter now works at home, designing web products for an Internet marketing firm. A pack rat with little talent for Minimalism, Williamson still appreciates ▸

PROJECT: THE MERRIMAC
LOCATION: SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
ARCHITECT: TED SMITH, SMITH & OTHERS



The Merrimac in downtown San Diego is architect Ted Smith's attempt to design and build a more sociable apartment house.

THE GoHOMES

"We didn't refer to it as a low-cost housing project being built in the suburbs, we just stuck to the word 'house.' "

Built in suburban Del Mar, California, in the early to mid-1980s, Ted Smith's GoHomes are an example of architectural improvisation. Constructed out of leftover materials, each "house" is actually a cluster of private suites built around a shared kitchen. When he applied for financing, Smith labeled each suite "living room" or "master bedroom," as if it was just a room in a conventional house. ILLUSTRATIONS BY TED SMITH

his suite's raw industrial feel. "It has a soothing effect on me," he says.

To visit the architect who turned these young turks into design-magazine subscribers means climbing up a long, steel stairway that runs up an exterior wall of the Merrimac, opening a door, ducking under a ladder—a conference room is being installed in this upstairs suite—and scaling a flight of interior stairs. There, finally, is Smith, 51, deep in thought. Dressed in an old tan sweater, baggy Chinos and a pair of Stan Smith sneakers—an outfit that looks as if it simply fell onto him—he wanders around an open workspace full of drafting tables.

Later, relaxing in a worn, overstuffed armchair, Smith, speaking in a clear, dry tone, explains his desire to reshape our idea of the standard, inner-city dwelling: the large-scale, often-expensive, apartment building.

"There's a need to provide alternatives for a whole lot of people, especially young people,"

he says. Luckily, Smith is discovering that "there's a small swath of that alternative market that is interested in the same things I am: architectural forms and spaces."

When Smith talks alternatives, he's not just talking about avant-garde design and eye-catching materials. He wants to retool our sense of scale, preferring a number of small units to single, block-hogging, condominium building. Smith is only too aware that his home turf, downtown San Diego, is rapidly filling up with sprawling condominium projects and apartment buildings, which, at first glance, resemble chain hotels.

And that's just the outside. Smith is equally determined to refute conventional notions about how we configure the interiors of apartments.

"Most of us work cosmetically," says Rob Wellington Quigley, San Diego's best-known architect who designed a new apartment building around the corner from the Merrimac. "But Ted Smith is an authentic experimenter. He re-evaluates everything at the most fundamental level."

The Merrimac, completed in 1998, is a showcase for Smith's radical ideas about urban living. On this project, Smith, whose firm, Smith & Others, consists of Kathleen McCormick and himself, teamed up with another architect, Lloyd Russell. Russell, 33, had the computer-design skills Smith lacked. **They're a good match: Smith, with his boyish sense of wonder, and his Gen X counterpart.**

When they worked on laying the concrete-block base at the back of the Merrimac, they made their labors into what Russell describes as "a little competition as to who was the best mason." According to the younger architect, "Ted was faster, but mine was exactly the right height!"

The team began with a fairly straightforward set of goals. "I wanted to make interesting spaces, use interesting materials, and spend the money on the actual building, not on closets or counters of certain lengths or particular finishes," Smith explains.

But they had to figure out how to be "interesting" with a form they detested: the standardized condo with its underground parking garage and four stories of wood-framed units on top. Everything about these buildings—the double-loaded corridors, the need for elevators and security systems—added up, in their book, to an overpriced, unattractive space, in which no one interacts with his neighbors.

First they eliminated underground parking. By making the Merrimac only 32 feet deep and setting it—like true urbanists—flush against the sidewalk, they made room for a parking courtyard in the rear. Then they scrapped the condo innards. In place of elevators, they opted for stairways and outdoor passageways. The architects used the height of the building to their advantage, allowing for 20-foot ceilings on the top floor, 13-foot ceilings on the middle floor, and 16-foot ceilings on the ground floor, generating a wonderful airy quality in each suite.

By submitting plans to the bank which described the Merrimac as a four-unit building, a trick Smith learned in financing earlier projects, they obtained a loan at a lower rate than they would have gotten for a building with more apartments. **This freed up money to pay for high-end materials such as steel and brick, and lots and lots of glass.**

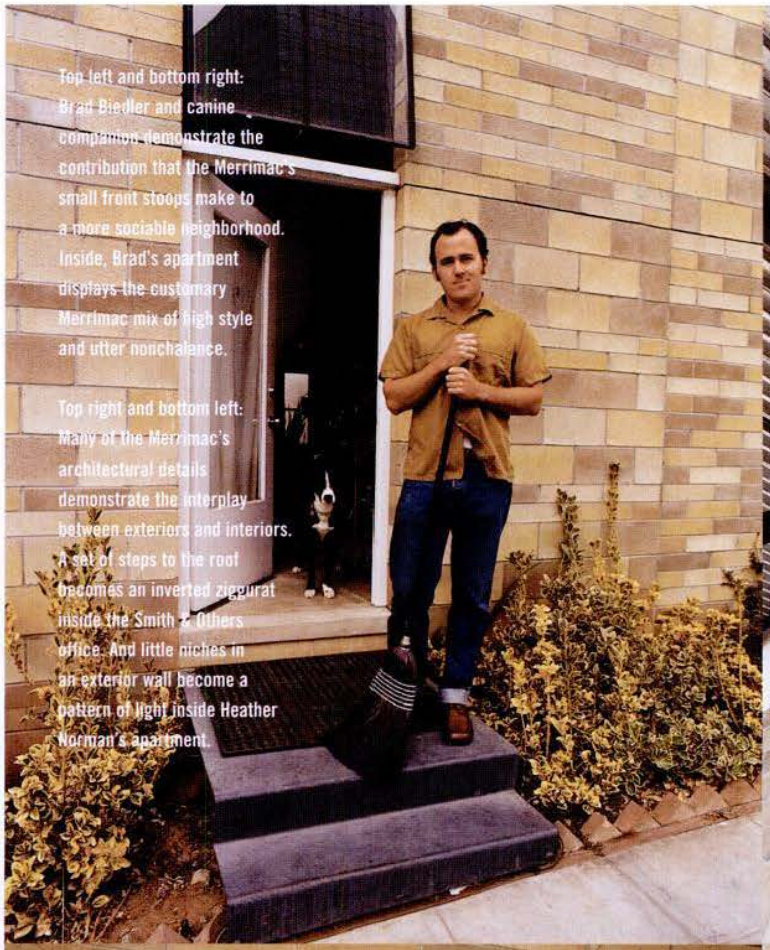
Later, the four official units were subdivided. Inside the Merrimac, each suite is one large room with the sleeping loft, the bathroom and closets tucked into nooks above or below the main space. Many of them rent for under $900 a month.

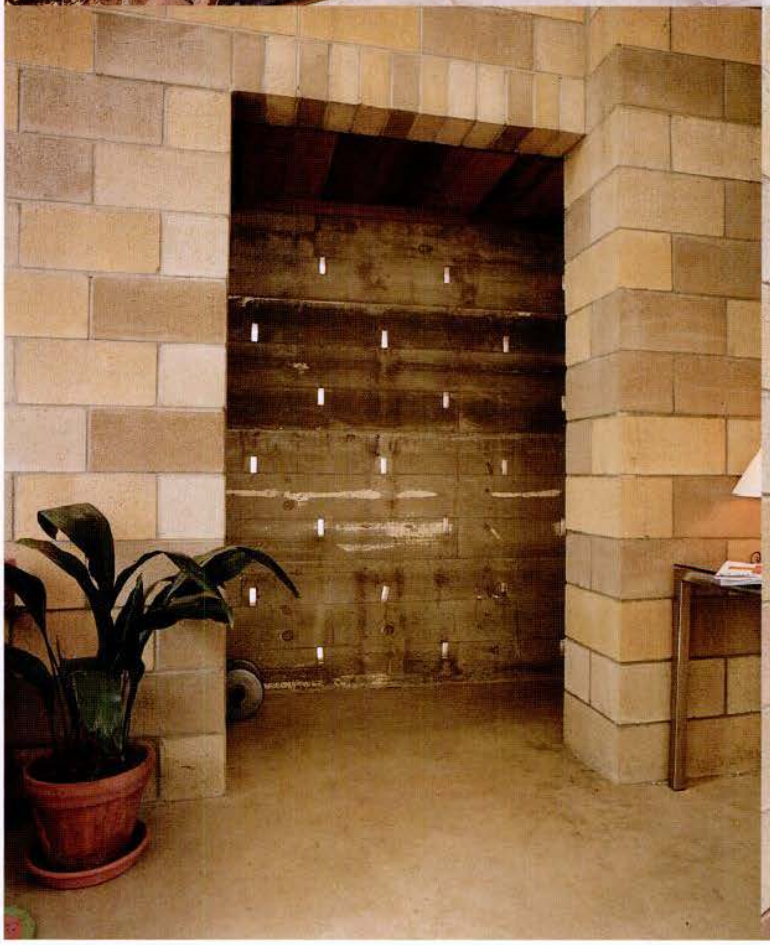
The Merrimac shares a stretch of Beach ▸

On the top floor of the Merrimac, Ted Smith and his partner, architect Kathleen McCormick run an architectural practice called Smith & Others. They share the floor with an apartment occupied by fellow architect and frequent collaborator Lloyd Russell and his girlfriend. The architects' woodshop abuts Russell's kitchen, and the borders between workplace and living space are unusually blurred, even by the standards of contemporary loft dwellers.

Top left and bottom right: Brad Biedler and canine companion demonstrate the contribution that the Merrimac's small front stoops make to a more sociable neighborhood. Inside, Brad's apartment displays the customary Merrimac mix of high style and utter nonchalance.

Top right and bottom left: Many of the Merrimac's architectural details demonstrate the interplay between exteriors and interiors. A set of steps to the roof becomes an inverted ziggurat inside the Smith + Others office. And little niches in an exterior wall become a pattern of light inside Heather Norman's apartment.





Street with three other contemporary buildings of the same scale and varying degrees of eccentricity. The result is that, by maximizing the amount of resident traffic to and from the sidewalk, a feeling of neighborhood has been created.

The raw, unstructured nature of the suites is Smith's way of saying to his tenants: Go out and experiment with how to live here.

"When we moved in, we knew we had to be real creative," says Heather Norman, 26. This bar manager and her boyfriend, 29-year-old Phillip Dunn, immediately bought a variety of organizing units to help them with storage. They even developed a way to watch two TVs, Phillip cuddling up to a small one up in the sleeping loft, Heather watching the big screen downstairs.

Open bathrooms require some adjustment. In some units, the bathroom is nothing more than an extension of the bedroom. "Sometimes if my girlfriend wants some extra privacy in the bathroom," says Steve Williamson, "she clues me in by saying, 'Why don't you go next door and see Jack.' " Of course, open spaces that showcase their construction materials are not for everyone. **"My parents say my place is like a holding pen for gorillas,"** acknowledges Clune, grinning widely.

Unlike the standard condominium complex that goes out of its way to promote privacy, the Merrimac, thanks to its shared stairways and balconies, is a highly sociable building. **"I've never lived in a place where people are so friendly,"** comments Norman.

Marr, who knew no one when he moved to San Diego from Atlanta, met most of his friends in the building. "You walk down some hallway and they invite you to go out to dinner or go play pool," Marr explains.

The suites, because of the way Smith drew up the building for financing, have connecting doors. In most cases these remain shut—some have been converted into shelf space—but with best friends Williamson and Clune, their shared door is always in use.

The Merrimac crowd is young and predominantly male, hardly surprising since there's a solitary, masculine aspect to Smith's sensibility. Reconciling the American man's need for privacy with his desire for greater sociability is a genuine dilemma for Smith. He has been romantically involved with architect McCormick for over 18 years. Yet it was only two years ago that he moved across the roof terrace of their 9th and Beach Street building to start living full time with her. He still seems uncertain that this is a good idea.

Walking through the Merrimac's suites, the architect tosses off macho phrases like "raw urban space" and "the attraction of hard materials." More telling is the way Smith banishes to distant corners the amenities that women traditionally favor: bathtubs, kitchens, and closets. In half the suites, there are no full kitchens, prompting a profusion of toaster ovens, although nearly everyone says they eat out almost all the time. Only Marr's suite boasts of a tub.

"Every girl that walks by and sees that tub says, 'I want to live here,' " says Russell.

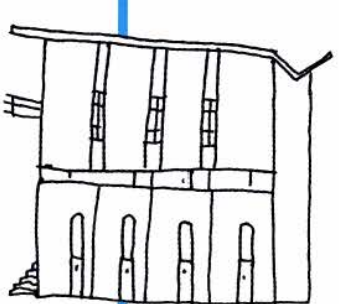
Happily, design needs are no longer as gender-specific as they may have been when Smith was growing up in a Navy family. The women who live in the Merrimac find its austerity and self-consciousness about design exciting. As Marr says, **"It takes a certain type of person who appreciates all this to live here, whether they're male or female."**

Indeed, lack of closet space was the straw that broke the camel's back for Patrick Velasco, 29. "I do some deejaying and all my records took up a lot of space," he says. "Every time my girlfriend and I went out shopping we'd have to think about whether we had room to store it." After 18 months, this couple decided to rent a conventional two-bedroom apartment.

Ted Smith is the son of an admiral, and he grew up, he claims, "in a million suburban cities." His first job as an architect was working for the very people he now holds responsible for the urban sprawl around him: the developers of "spec homes" in San Diego County. It was a brutal education in how market forces impact design. **"Every year those houses simply got bigger and bigger,"** Smith recalls. "Just like the Thunderbird." But, by the early 1980s, with interest rates soaring, the average Southern California family with two working adults could no longer afford these gargantuan suburban shrines. And Smith was soon out of a job. "I didn't have any money and I was breaking up with my wife," he remembers.

The architect decided he had no choice but to become a developer himself. He bought land behind a barely developed commercial strip in Del Mar, a northern suburb of San Diego. It overlooked Torrey Pines State Beach to the west. Here he began constructing his first design experiment, a multi-unit structure that was soon dubbed, by a song-writing friend, the "GoHome."

Today, driving up to what appears to be a small-scale, Post-Modernist barn, the rudimentary nature of this experiment is evident. As Smith tells it, he simply erected "two little shacks out of leftover materials and built them apart but with a roof between them. Then we went out and sold the airspace between them, and built another two little spaces." Windows of all sizes line the ▸



THE MERRIMAC

"I'm designing for a group of people that have the same interests that I have as an architect."

The Merrimac, completed in 1998, is part of a square block in downtown San Diego assembled by an ad hoc group known as the Little Italy Neighborhood Developers. This remarkably eclectic piece of urban design features apartment buildings and townhouses by Smith, Kathleen McCormick, James Brown of PUBLIC architects, Rob Wellington Quigley, Robin Brisbois and Jonathan Siegel.

Justin Marr (in his Eames rocker), a 24 year old software designer, has embraced Minimalism since moving in to the Merrimac.

THE ESSEX

"When we were doing the GoHomes we were wild men in the wilderness," says Smith. But the Essex proves that Smith and his colleagues are way beyond "some sort of fringe thing."

Smith's next San Diego building, The Essex, will have 40 units, some of them large enough to comfortably accommodate couples, and a second-floor parking courtyard. For Smith, it will be the first building where he won't also play social architect, hand-picking tenants and interacting with them.

front of the house, along with smaller entryways and a couple of garage doors.

Tamby Antell, Smith's former wife, emerges from one of these doors. Now 52 years old, she admits that she doesn't adapt as well as she did back in 1983 when the first GoHome was built. "I may like a little more quiet and a few less ladders now," she says.

Entering Antell's suite, squeezing past tables covered with the beads she uses to make her jewelry, Smith's original design for living—high ceilings, tucked-away loft beds, and small spaces divided into different levels—is obvious. Antell opens a small door to the spotless, communal kitchen. Angela Freeman, a marketing executive at Nordstrom, is making a cup of tea. Another door off the kitchen leads to Freeman's suite, an airy space with an upstairs loft bed, and a bathroom partially hidden by a four-foot-high steel door hung halfway up the wall. Although Freeman's boyfriend is a frequent visitor, she believes that a GoHome suite "works best for one person."

When they were first built, GoHome units rented for just $350 a month, and yet the project turned a profit. Encouraged, Smith built four more, this time using better materials. He drew up their plans to assuage the fears of the Southern California loan officer. "We named one suite 'garage,' another 'living room,' yet another 'master bedroom suite' and so on," Smith says.

"We didn't refer to it as a low-cost housing project being built in the suburbs, we just stuck to the word 'house,' " he adds. "And we got it financed in the traditional fashion."

The other residents of Del Mar, where prices for houses were hitting the $500,000 mark, were not happy. "Their reaction was, 'Oh my God, what are all these hippie, low-income houses doing to the value of our housing?' " Smith recalls. Smith's GoHomes eventually survived the lengthy challenges made to San Diego planning department, in part because of a California Supreme Court ruling that a family need not be blood-related. The tenants of a GoHome thus could be defined as a family and these divided housing structures were still single-family homes in the eyes of the law.

Smith's career as a revolutionary in suburbia took its toll on his personal life. In 1991, his marriage over, he saw an opportunity to move to downtown San Diego to design and develop a building with his new partner, McCormick, and he jumped at it. There, the zoning ordinances were virtually nonexistent and, states the architect,

"It was a very positive place, without all the NIMBY-ism you have in the suburbs where people are fortified and so afraid."

He and McCormick combined forces on a residential project at the corner of 9th and Beach. McCormick's section of the building consisted of three multi-story row houses, while Smith pieced together a vertical version of a GoHome with nine suites for rent.

Today Smith, buoyed by the response to the Merrimac, is expanding his revisionist approach to the apartment building. With Russell, he is designing the Essex, named after a class of World War II aircraft carriers. He is betting that his sociable clustering of spaces will work on a bigger scale; the Essex will have 40 units. Many of the suites will be generously sized. "That'll make it possible for couples to live more comfortably than they do here at the Merrimac," Smith believes. "And," he adds, "it enlarges the space available for home offices."

Flush to the sidewalk, with no elevators in sight, the Essex parking courtyard will, naturally, look like the deck of an aircraft carrier. Built into a slope, the parking deck abuts the Essex at the second-floor level.

A row of suites will be underneath the parking and, despite 17-foot ceilings, they'll have less light. Smith learned from his experience with the Merrimac that not everyone loves daylight as much as architects do.

"Many of those in our market are spending a huge amount of time in front of the computer and we've found they have an adversity to light,"

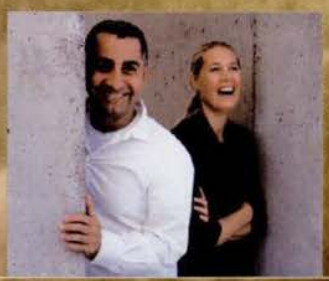
notes Smith. So he and Russell plan to bring light less directly—through narrow openings and setback windows—into the lofts at the Essex. The new complex should provide a huge boost to an architect intent on altering our assumptions about domestic space. "When we were doing the GoHomes, we were wild men in the wilderness," Smith acknowledges. Now his simple blueprints for a satisfying life have moved way beyond what he labels "some sort of fringe thing."

Not that the Essex is a sure thing. In all the buildings Smith has designed, he has played the role of live-in landlord, choosing the tenants. Now that he's going bigger—much like the Thunderbird did over 40 years ago—this personal contact with his chosen "swath of the market" will be diminished. His design experiments, more sophisticated now than they have ever been, will have to speak for themselves.

"There's a lot of interest already," Smith says, sounding like a developer. Without hesitation, he adds, "I feel a lot more confident."

David Hay writes about the impact of design on our daily lives. A playwright and journalist, he lives in Los Angeles.

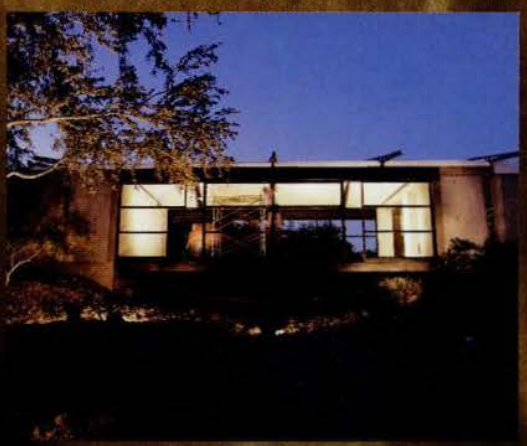
Scenes from daily life at the Merrimac: Lawyer Jack Clune plays ping-pong with whoever walks through his open door. Oversized steel-framed windows dominate Lloyd Russell's bedroom and bathroom. Justin Marr even extends his Minimalist aesthetic to his stripped down bachelor kitchen.



PROJECT: HOUSE OF EARTH AND LIGHT / MCCUE HOUSE
LOCATION: PHOENIX, ARIZONA
ARCHITECTS: MARWAN AL-SAYED WITH JANET FINK

ABOVE: Marwan Al-Sayed (left) came to Phoenix in 1994 to supervise the construction of the art museum addition for his employers, the New York firm of Tod Williams and Billie Tsien. Al-Sayed, who started his own firm in 1997, had explored "the softer side of modern architecture" in his interiors for several New York apartments, but the McCue project—designed with his former partner Janet Fink (not pictured)—is his first house. Mies Grybaitis (right), an Australian artist known for her work with cast glass, is fashioning the McCue's front door and a variety of glass details, both decorative and functional, including the bathroom sinks.

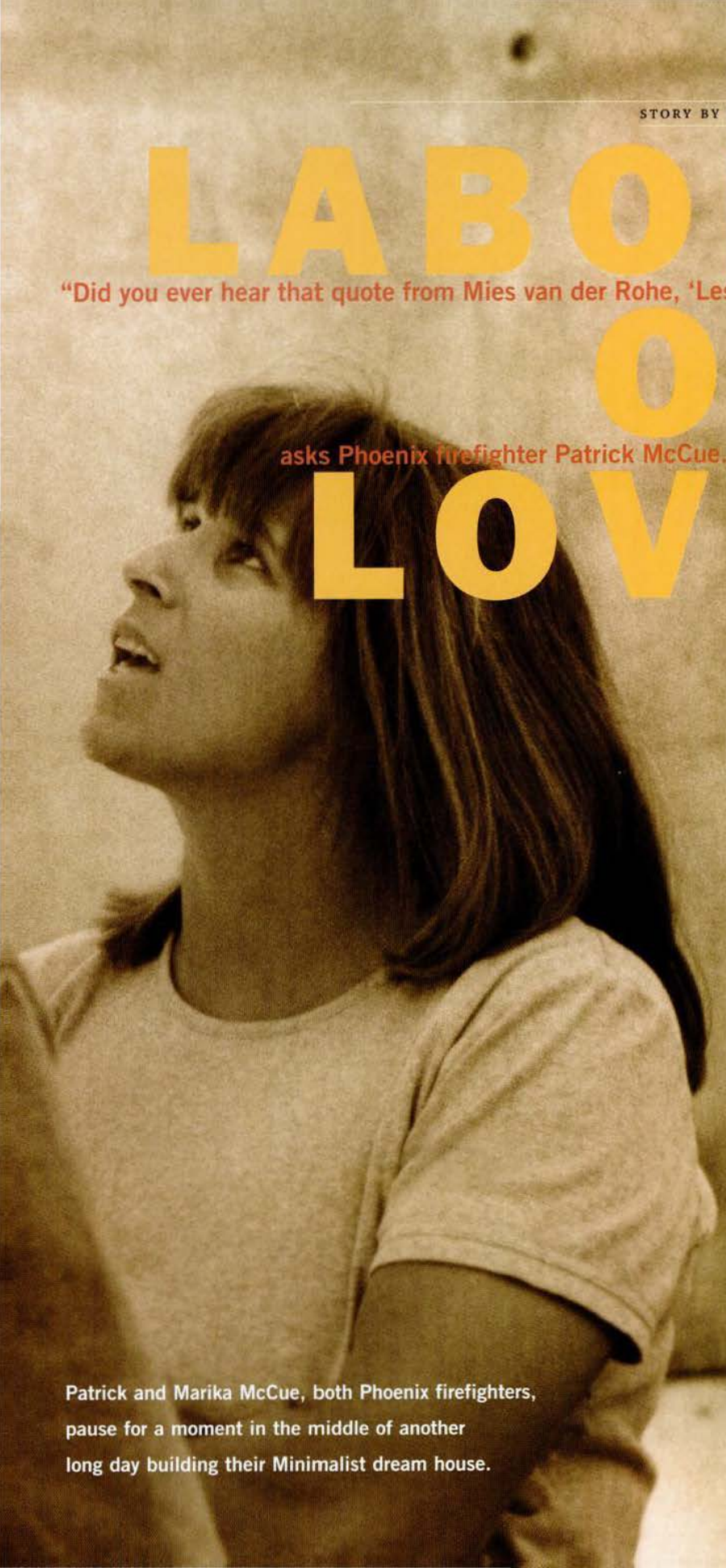
BELOW: The McCue house as it appeared in early May, the wide open living room traversing a desert wash and one layer of the fabric roof stretched across steel trusses.



STORY BY KARRIE JACOBS / PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOUG HOESCHLER

LABOR OF LOVE

"Did you ever hear that quote from Mies van der Rohe, 'Less is more'?" asks Phoenix firefighter Patrick McCue. "We've modified that; less is more work."



Patrick and Marika McCue, both Phoenix firefighters, pause for a moment in the middle of another long day building their Minimalist dream house.

For McCue, it's the end of another long day. He, his brother Terry and a bunch of his firefighter buddies have worked from early morning until sunset, when the last traces of daylight faded from the desert sky, building his dream home. Sunburned and coated with dust, McCue stands drinking a can of Red Dog beer in his newly built studio and metal shop, a high Modernist shed clad with black steel plates that McCue got cheap somewhere. "My specialty is salvage," he explains. McCue and his wife Marika, also a firefighter, have been building nonstop for 19 months (interrupted by their regular 56-hour shifts at the fire station), and he has, at this moment in late March, 109 days before the bank forecloses on the construction loan. In the process, McCue has learned firsthand what architects and contractors keep to themselves: Minimalism is a bitch.

At this point the walls are up, and the oversized window openings have been lovingly fitted with steel frames, but only a single section of the house's revolutionary fabric roof has been mounted on trusses (tossed out by the builders of Bank One Ballpark downtown and adroitly snapped up by the McCues). Lit from within, the fabric roof just glows. And on a clear night, you can look through the roof and see the outline of the moon.

The house and studio shed were designed by architect Marwan Al-Sayed, who originally came to town in 1994 to supervise the construction of the Phoenix Art Museum on behalf of his former employers, the New York firm of Tod Williams and Billie Tsien. It's an extraordinary piece of architecture for a city where tract houses with red clay ▸

A view of the steel structural elements fabricated by Patrick McCue, his brother Terry and their friends, and the earthen walls poured by a company called Aricon3.

A view from the future kitchen of the McCue home. To the right is a sunken study area where a long desk will poke through a hole in the poured-earth wall, into an exterior glass cube. Directly ahead is the master bedroom where a long low window will offer a view of Marika's 75 foot lap pool. Above is the middle layer of a fabric sandwich manufactured by a French company, Serge Ferrari, Ltd.. When complete, the roof will consist of a top layer to screen ultra violet light, a watertight layer, and an interior layer for insulation.

tile roofs (built, says Patrick, for "a public hornswoggled by Taco Bell and Santa Faux") are the standard.

To be fair, the McCue house is only the most recent addition to this North Phoenix enclave of good architecture. A stone chimney left over from a Frank Lloyd Wright house marks the entrance to their road. Two other Wrights are nearby. Across the street is an early Will Bruder, resplendent in its 1980s patinaed copper. In back is another, more subdued Bruder, and a Williams/Tsien.

The McCue house has walls the color of cigarette ash, made of poured earth, a new formulation somewhere between adobe and concrete in density. The poured earth process is a variation on rammed earth architecture currently in vogue among environmentally minded architects and builders. It works most efficiently with long, straight walls. The shape of the McCue's house, two simple rectangles connected by a bridge over a desert wash, was determined as much by the exigencies of working with the poured earth—and the peculiarities of the property—as it was by any sort of theory. A three-layer sandwich of durable, translucent fabric forms the

roof. Al-Sayed has named the project "The House of Earth and Light." For the McCues, though, it is something less ethereal. It is their odyssey, their obsession and, by the end of the year, it will be their home.

When complete, the house will be furnished with classic Modernist pieces by Eames, Bertoia, and the like that Marika has rescued from some of the most unlikely places. She tells of going out on a fire call to a defunct strip mall with a gas leak. There she discovered a dentist office with all its original 1950s fixtures intact.

"After the call was over, I asked the property owner what they were planning on doing with these metal cabinets and trash cans and all the dental lights," she says. Marika went back the next day and brought home, among other things, a number of doors. "Hundreds of dollars of hardware we salvaged out of those doors that were given to us for free," she points out.

"I always say I'm the most popular girl at the junkyard," Marika adds.

Al-Sayed's design is nuanced, full of details such as built-in niches for kitchen utensils and books, and an opening that allows a ▸

glass shower stall to poke through the exterior wall. And the roof is sublime. But the thing that makes this house truly miraculous is that it is being built, not by a pair of new-economy jillionaires, but by a couple of hard-working civil servants. When a shipment of green glass tiles from Mexico, which will someday line the pool, arrives damaged, Marika rationalizes the added expense: "I'll just work more hours."

When the McCues decided to build a house—their various collections and art projects were taxing the limits of their former home—they met with about half a dozen architects and showed each one a folder full

The McCues, aided by fellow firefighters, raise the roof.

of pictures, buildings, and architectural details cut from books and magazines.

Al-Sayed still has the folder. It contains, among other things, an article from *Sunset* magazine about concrete countertops, a shot of a Wright fence at Taliesin West, Philip Johnson's Glass House and a view of a covered walkway at La Villette in Paris. "The first image they showed me," Al-Sayed recalls, "was one of Tadao Ando's earliest houses, a concrete house with a single opening for the door and a blank façade."

"It's funny," Marika reflects. "Now we realize that he thought we had really sophisticated taste. But I had just clipped (the pictures) through the years. My mom was always clipping magazines."

Al-Sayed wasn't sure what to make of the Minimalist firefighters. But when he learned that they'd actually bought a piece of property and that Patrick was a skilled metal worker, he began to dream.

The notion of earthen walls came first. "I used to live in Morocco, and I've done a lot of traveling in the Sahara desert," says Al-Sayed. "And I've always been fascinated by thinking about that kind of architecture in a modern way."

The last thing that Al-Sayed designed was the roof.

"Marwan wasn't sure what he wanted to do with the roof," says Marika. "So we just kept ignoring that. We just kept on designing the house."

"One day I was just doodling," Al-Sayed recalls, "and I drew a drum. It was weird because I was listing to a Leonard Cohen song and I wrote it down: 'and the skylight is like skin.' " Al-Sayed postponed the completion of the design until after a sabbatical. "When I came back, I proposed the idea of trying to do a fabric roof."

A long period of research yielded a plan to make a layered roof with a top layer filtering out most of the light and heat, the second ▸

Lined up outside the black steel walls of the McCue's studio are a few of the orphaned designer chairs Marika has rescued from junkyards, abandoned buildings and other unlikely locations. The house will be largely furnished with her finds, including couches and light fixtures. "If there's something that I see that I like," she says, "I pick it up."

layer keeping the water out, and a third, interior layer that will create a pocket of insulation and give each portion of the house its own, distinct color.

Al-Sayed likes to say that the cool, white roof will provide the McCues with much-needed serenity. But Marika begs to differ: "We told him that if he said that one more time, that we were firefighters, that we needed serenity, we were going to have to muffle him because our co-workers were telling us we needed to get on Prozac."

In truth, the McCues might need some serenity—not because their professional lives are so stressful, but because the process of building the house has been an arduous one. There are the loan officers who can't understand why the McCues don't just buy all their fixtures at Home Depot, and city inspectors who refuse to sign off on the notion of a fabric roof, and the daily grind of fashioning level surfaces and flush corners in a house where, as Patrick observes, "There's nowhere to hide anything."

But, in the end, they will have a home that far exceeds the norm in Phoenix, where houses are practically built to be bulldozed, a home that exceeds the norm in most other places as well. The McCues buried a time capsule in one of the walls because, says Patrick, "I know this is going to last 300 years."

Karrie Jacobs is editor-in-chief of dwell. Once upon a time she lived in Phoenix.

A long view down the northside of the house where a fabric-covered walkway will lead from a carport to the front door, and further back to the steel studio building.

Two computer renderings show how the House of Earth and Light will look when complete. The master bedroom (right) will feature a glass enclosed, semi-outdoor shower stall that pokes through the exterior wall. The front door (left) will be custom made of translucent cast glass by Mies Grybaitis. Immediately to the left of the entrance will be a sunken study area. Tall niches in the earthen wall will function as built-in book cases.

Renderings by Nathan Koren

Tom Sachs' "room" anticipates a serious need for refuge. The interior of his Sony Outsider, a full-scale model of the Fat Man Atomic Bomb, is a living space complete with sink, urinal, and DVD player with remote. "In Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove*, Slim Pickens rode the bomb, as he would a bronco, toward Armageddon," explains Sachs. "Our fin de siècle progress from that primitive time is apparent in the abundance of technology that pervades our daily life. If, as some predict, the millennium promises to bring the real Armageddon, why not arrive in style? Or maybe it's really all about a cozy place to hole up and watch TV."

SONY OUTSIDER (1999) BY TOM SACHS, NEW YORK

PHOTOS BY DIRK WESTPHAL

If you've ever lived in a studio apartment, you've had the dream. From nowhere, a door appears, a door that had somehow escaped your attention all those years you've spent endlessly unfurling and refolding the futon as if it were a crumpled road map. But in the dream, the futon is conveniently outside your peripheral vision because there is that door and the promise of what lies behind it.

Intrigued by this idea of uncharted residential territory, we put the question to an eclectic cross section of architects, artists, designers, and authors: Free from the confines of space, money, practicality, popular opinion, and AIA guidelines, how would you conceive of a new domestic space? What would be your "new room"?

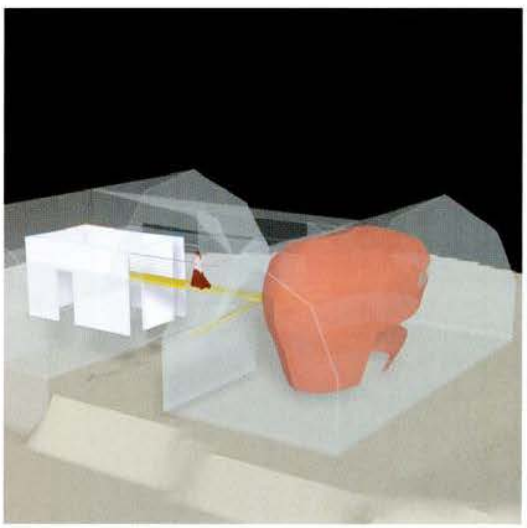
We loved the first response we received...

My ideal space would consist of Blue Bahia stone flooring with a view out to a serene body of water. A martini, stirred not shaken, would rest comfortably on a carved Kumaru wood stool. Miles Davis plays softly. Sunlight rakes across the textured foreground and a gentle breeze makes one aware there is a god. ***—John Mulliken, Hillier Architects***

...but did not anticipate that it would set the tone for nearly all the rooms to follow.

CHILL OUT

(damn it!)



In designing a new barn interpreted in modern materials and language as a companion to an older residential barn in Connecticut, architect David Ling came up with a creative solution for the lack of privacy in an open space. Ensconced within the new barn is an "egg"—a shape that forms a cocoon for the master bedroom and kitchen, providing a private sanctuary for its inhabitants. The shape also works as a sort of visual pun—an egg in the barn.

RENDERING BY DAVID LING ARCHITECTS ►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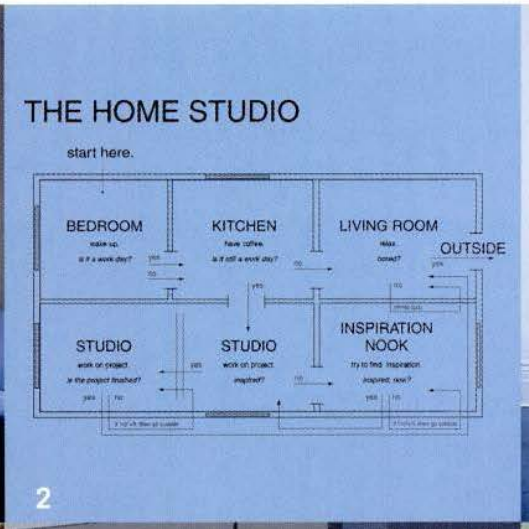

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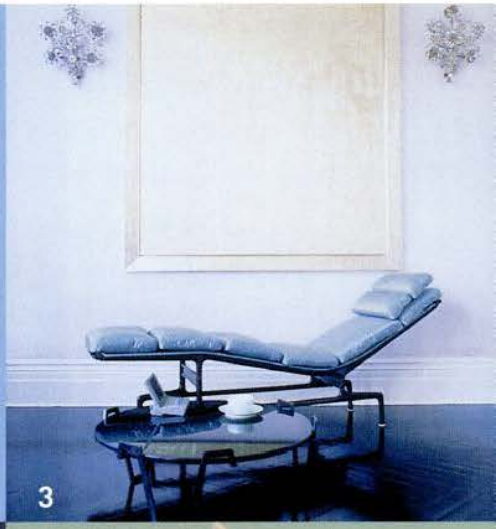
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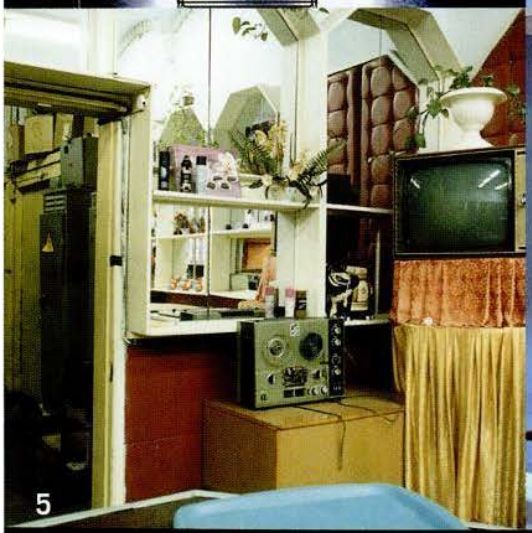
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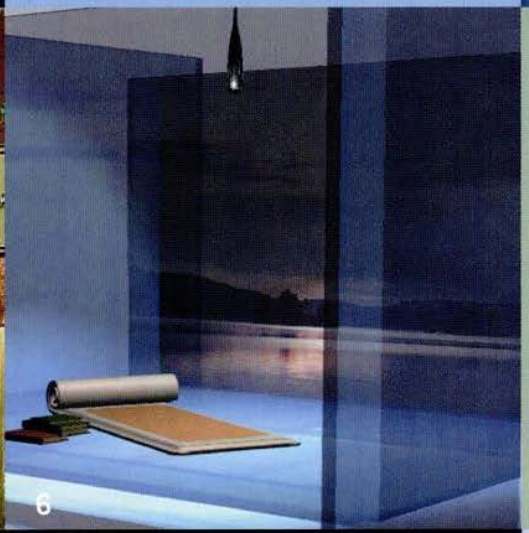
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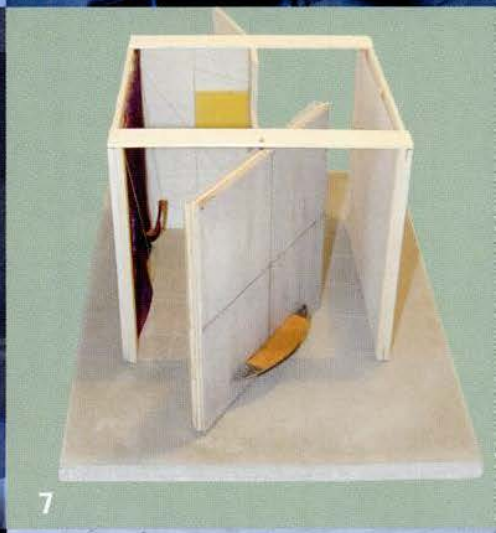
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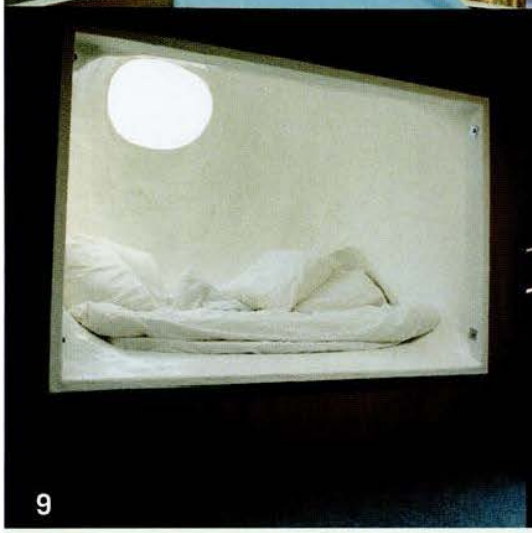
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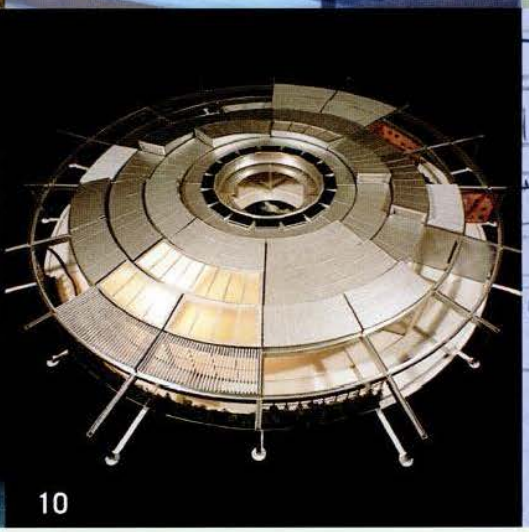
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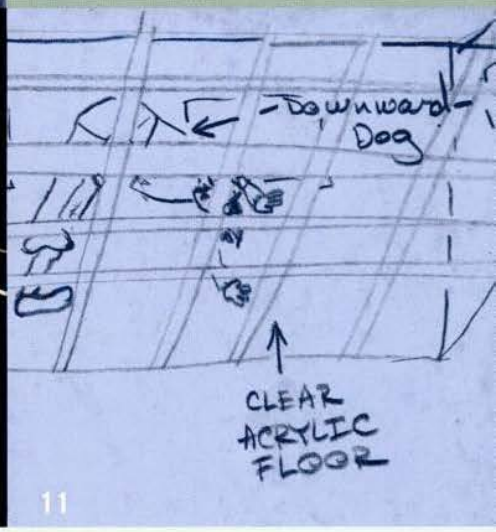

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"If, as some predict, the millennium promises to bring the real Armageddon, why not arrive in style? Or maybe it's really all about a cozy place to hole up and watch TV."


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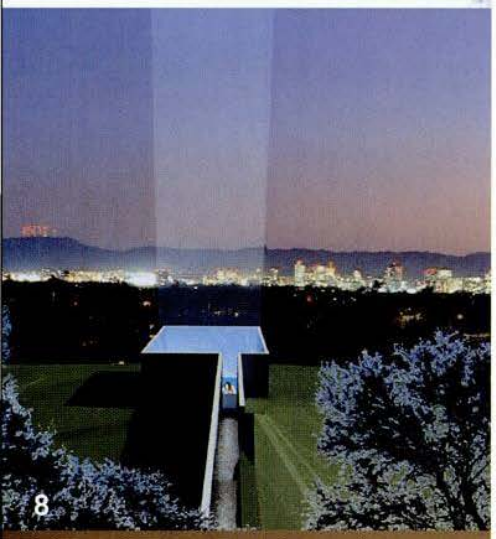
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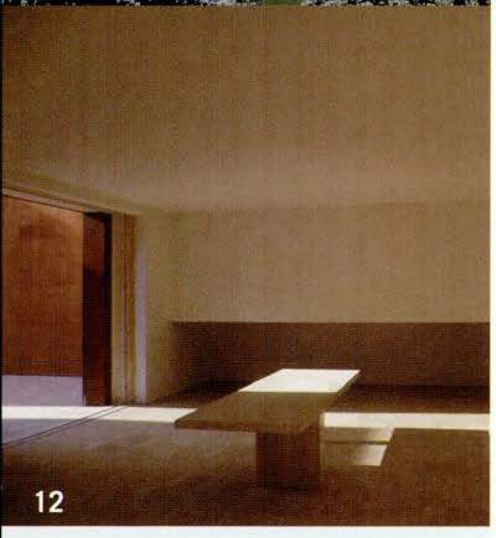
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ROOM TO RELAX

1 / In this sitting room (and throughout the whole apartment) architect Louise Braverman has created a **contemplative domestic environment** and an overall sense of aesthetic serenity.

LOUISE BRAVERMAN, ARCHITECT, NEW YORK

PHOTO BY SCOTT FRANCIS

2 / The Home Studio/Inspiration Nook

JEFF FASSNACHT, VISUAL THINKER, SAN FRANCISCO

3 / This is the **Deluxe Chill Out Room.** What more do you need to know?

DESIGN BY DAVID COLLINS ARCHITECTS, LONDON

4 / For graphic designer Bryan Burkhart, his restored 1962 Airstream Flying Cloud is a sanctuary, a simple but complete living system that encapsulates **all the comforts of home.**

PHOTO BY DEKE O'MALLEY

5 / Ice Cream Parlor, Olmsk, Siberia: "It was December and needless to say it was quite cold in lovely Olmsk. But nonetheless, Russians, like everyone else, love ice cream although most of us think of it as a hot weather treat. On entering the **ice cream parlor,** I was somewhat startled at the décor—a curious mixture of incongruous items. This incongruity was no longer apparent when one realized that all these items were useful and necessary in this place, and only our ingrained Western habits of design and decoration have narrowed our vision as to the infinite possibilities of practical décor."

PHOTO AND TEXT BY DAVID BYRNE, NEW YORK

6 / Industrial designer Yves Behar's **"room for a state of mind"** explores the boundaries of space, technology, landscape, and wallpaper. Indulging in one's escapist daydreaming, Behar explains, "this room allows one's mind to wander and dream."

YVES BEHAR, FUSE PROJECT, SAN FRANCISCO

ILLUSTRATION BY LISA LO, DIGITAL FOREST

7 / Mathias Rousset envisioned as his room **"a haven** in which I can do whatever strikes me—hide, dance, nap, meditate—all without interruption, a room specifically for the relaxation and rejuvenation of the spirit and body."

MODEL BY MATHIAS ROUSSET, 4X5 DESIGN, SAN FRANCISCO

8 / From the street, one sees a five-sided box of light, a glowing apparition within the dark landscape. Described by architect Wendell Burnette as a "frame for the elusiveness of time," this Arizona residence was designed as **"a refuge for life after work."**

RENDERING BY WENDELL BURNETTE ARCHITECTS, PHOENIX

9 / In this and other mobile environments that Joep van Lieshout calls Master and Slave Units, the goal is to offer the user/inhabitant **freedom to create, expand, or transform** their own space at any time.

IMAGE COURTESY OF ATELIER VAN LIESHOUT, ROTTERDAM

10 / In Michael Jantzen's Ephemeral House, the roof, wall and floor sections can be rotated into different positions allowing for limitless room configurations. Even the plants can be moved so residents can create **gardens throughout.**

MODEL AND PHOTO BY MICHAEL JANTZEN, VALENCIA, CA

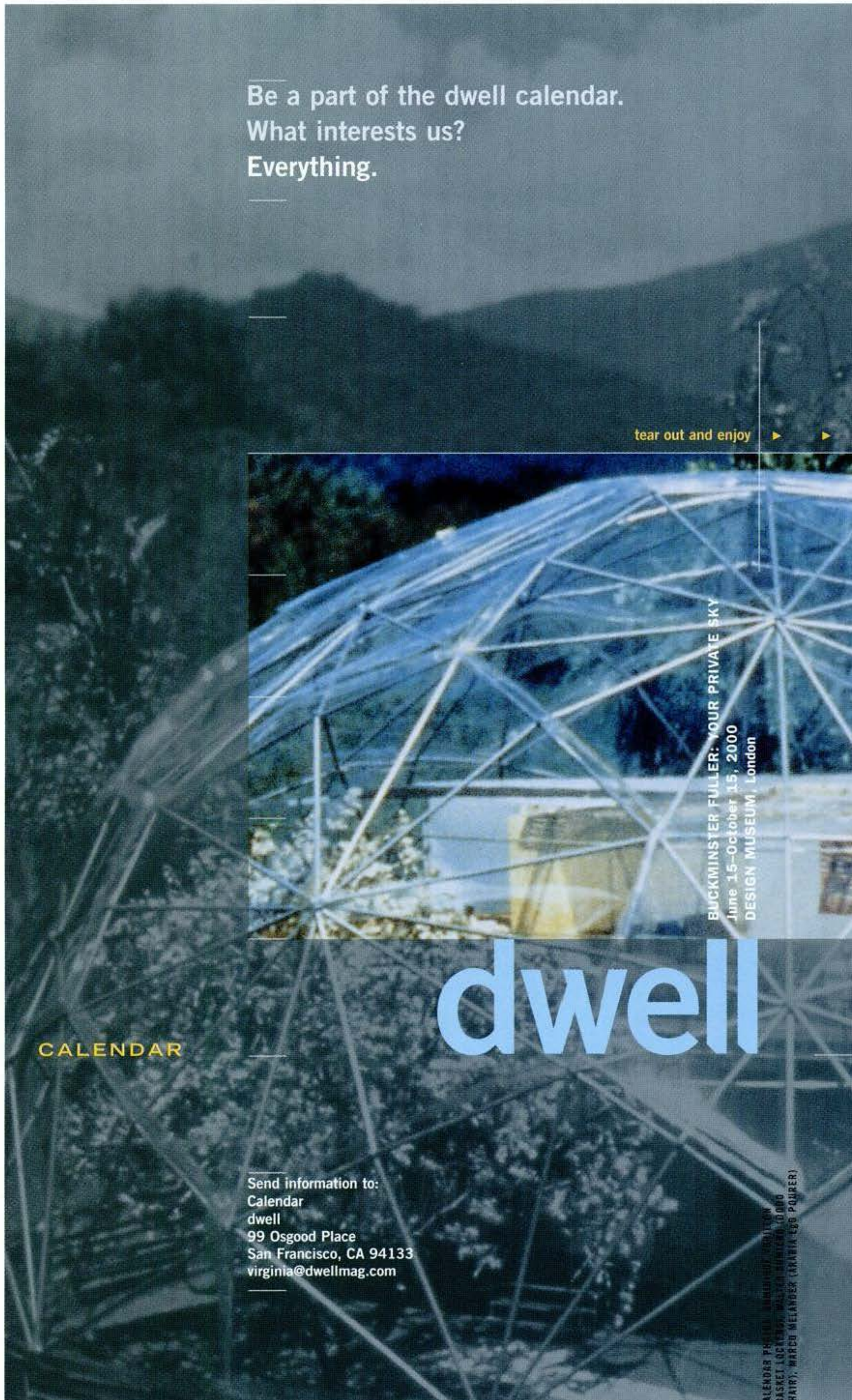
11 / The Meditation and Yoga Room is a small chamber with two-story high masonry walls, **an ocean view** and a transparent acrylic floor. Perched above rooftop pool level, atop a Miami restaurateur's Ocean Drive townhouse, the room is intended to promote serenity. However, with a see-through floor, vertigo is also an option.

JUAN LEZCANO, ARCHITECT, MIAMI

ILLUSTRATION BY VICTORIA MILNE

12 / Here is a room in which to feel serene, still, at peace, **free from disorder.** As envisioned by Claudio Silvestrin, architecture should bring to the fore spiritual energy; it should not be a matter of scale or proportions but of awakening people's sensitivity.

PHOTO BY CLAUDIO SILVESTRIN, LONDON ■



+ALU2000® The first aluminum kitchen by Poggenpohl. Discover the perfect union of form and function. **Kitchens with sense appeal.**

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Robert Motherwell's New York City loft, 1962.
Photo by Fred W. McDarrah.

STORY BY MIMI ZEIGER

THE LOFTING OF AMERICA

Pibs. You know who they are and you know who you are. People in Black, or Pibs, as Gail Andersen of Lofts Unlimited calls them. They wear funny glasses and cool shoes, drink double espressos and live in lofts. In the early '90s, when Andersen and her partner, Ray Kaliski, sold their first lofts in San Francisco, it was the Pibs who were their clientele. Who but the noble, artistic sort would find a safe haven in the bare bones chic of unfinished concrete and soaring ceilings? But as Starbucks brings the urban coffeehouse to Middle America, the loft, the domestic equivalent of the latte, is appealing to a range of people who may even wear floral print. The current real estate market finds the demand for lofts to be steadily increasing, booming, even. No longer confined to New York or San Francisco, loft sales are even brisk in Denver, Miami, and Atlanta.

It seems that everyone is vying for a bit of exposed brickwork.

For those of you who thought that Andy Warhol's Factory produced soup cans, a loft is a space in an industrial building that is converted to a varying degree into a domestic live/work dwelling. "The idea of the loft is that it is a long span of void, a high ceiling volume lit at both ends like a tunnel," says Diane Lewis, a New York architect and academic who has been converting industrial spaces into residential lofts since 1981. "It is a pre-existing space that contradicts the domestic function." Perhaps it is the 1961 picture of Robert Motherwell in his 242 W. 14th Street loft that best represents the duality of the loft aesthetic. The artist stands in the clutter of his studio, paintings stacked against the crusty, old walls, and leans against a paint-splattered easel. He is neatly dressed in a coat, tie, and a pair of window pane-check trousers.

While loft living can trace its roots back to the drafty garrisons of 19th century Parisian artists, its U.S. history begins in the 1950s in what would become New York City's SoHo district. From Post-War to the '70s, the draw of the loft was large amounts of raw space at rock bottom prices. Artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and members of the Fluxus group took advantage of the heady combo of cheap and big for action painting and happenings. The residential artist lofts replaced light manufacturing or sweatshops. Amenities such as central heating and bathing facilities were luxuries. Poor conditions made loft living without an A.I.R. (Artist in Residence) Permit illegal in New York City until 1975.

In the mid-'70s developers cashed in on the cachet of a SoHo address. Priced at the NYC market rate, these units attracted non-artist buyers who wanted the Bohemian trappings, the giant rooms, and the blue-collar chic of the converted buildings. As Sharon Zukin writes in her definitive 1982 book, *Loft Living*, "... there is an aesthetic component to the demand factor, a zeitgeist that finds expression in the inhabiting of old factory spaces and thus identifying in some existential way with an archaic past or an artist style of life."

Although the original SoHo loft buildings were cast iron and appointed with strange pulleys and freight elevators that were leftovers from the previous use, contemporary lofts express this desire for low-tech by installing restaurant-size Wolf ranges and Sub-Zero refrigerators. In a time when technology is streamlining and packaging away the mechanisms that make things work, items like the peek-a-boo i-Mac or loft domiciles that reveal their function to a certain degree are in high demand. **Current loft development seems to parallel this nostalgia for obsolete technologies and a quest for some sort of authentic lifestyle.**

Yet, loft living, in terms of use and function of the space, also offers a veritable connection to the artistic need to live and work at home. However, live/work lofts have bohemian appeal for architects, graphic designers, writers, telecommuting tech-heads, and entrepreneurs also. Kaliski of Lofts Unlimited attributes non-artist desires for loft living to the quality of the domestic and working space. "The live/work loft gives the option of not going into a small, second bedroom to work," he says. "Sitting there with the eight-foot ceilings is a really depressing environment. The loft environment allows you to sit at a desk in the living room with soaring ceilings and light pouring in through all the glass."

Converted factories and new loft developments, as opposed to traditional apartments or condominiums, are utopian. They are Modernist in their celebration of the volume of open interior space and, as Zukin notes, many of the early artist lofts had as much square footage as a conventional suburban home. Unlike the typical ranch house, the loft is relatively undivided by walls or partitions. Even now, in ground-up loft developments, there is a resistance to cordon off any rooms other than the bed and bathroom. The standard fare of loft living, tall walls for hanging artwork, non-hierarchical spaces, a free plan, and large expanse of glass have been working their way into mainstream, domestic consciousness for the last 25 years.

Since lofts are so ubiquitous and so desirable in urban centers like New York, San Francisco and Chicago, and there are only so many pre-existing buildings suitable for conversion, a new breed of loft living has emerged —the developer loft. This "lifestyle loft," as its critics call it, is a hybrid. It is a morphing of two polarities, the condo and the artist loft. ▶

The Condo Store's Lofts @ the Park, Atlanta, Georgia, 1999.

The developer and his architect decide the extent to express each part of the hydra. Some create faux interior brickwork and use industrial hardware in their new buildings, while others go straight for the marble countertops and plush carpet. In San Francisco some tenants are required to sign an agreement "authenticating" their artist status, but needless to say, there is precious little paint flung in these studios.

In San Francisco, live/work loft development is a political sore point. A multitude of developments have sprung up in areas not suited for high-end residential units and have taken the opportunity afforded by zoning to build what many see as hulking monstrosities that are totally insensitive to the areas where they are sited. Foreign objects in districts known for nightlife and light manufacturing, these developments make their neighbors bristle. Tenant complaints over early morning noise were responsible for some businesses' closures last year. Loft opponents cry "Yuppiefication," but developers claim that these projects (that house as many as 150 units) provide a much-needed solution to the city's housing crisis. Nevertheless, community action groups have put enough pressure on developers in San Francisco to slow new construction, thus causing them to move farther afield in order to build.

Cities that do not have dense urban cores have a very different relationship to the same projects that are sparking controversy in the City by the Bay. Atlanta, San Diego, Denver, Miami, Dallas, Austin, and Houston are all welcoming development with open arms. And now **even places that are more akin to small towns, with their single-family houses and low rise commercial buildings, are getting in on the act.**

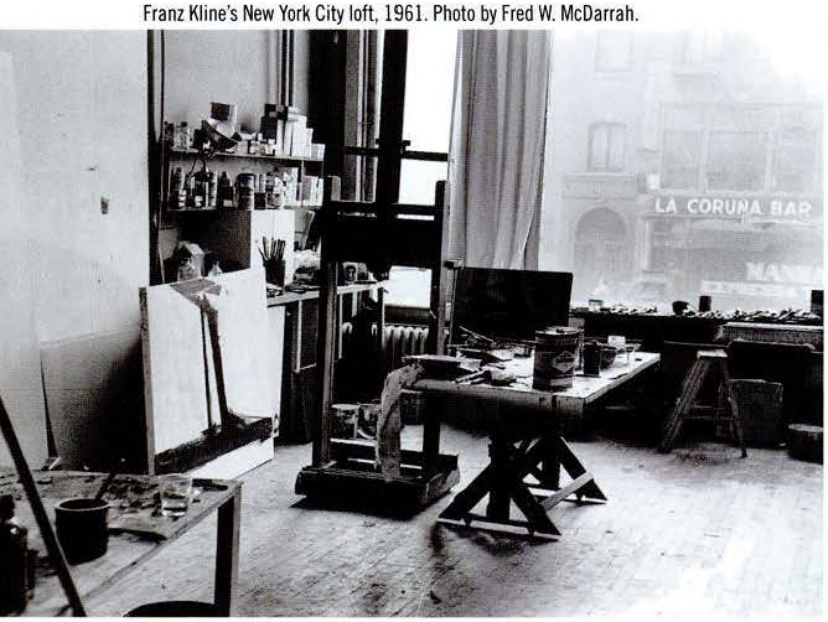
Though Lofts Unlimited has been selling loft real estate for the past ten years, interest outside of San Francisco has been relatively weak until recently. Now, their first development venture outside the city is going up in the California wine country, a good 45 minutes north of San Francisco. The town of Sonoma is best known for its Spanish Mission heritage, designer jack cheese and proximity to the area's wineries and tasting rooms. Recently, however, it has seen a rise in development of hotels and banquet facilities as large numbers of San Francisco couples jockey for places to hold wedding receptions amidst the trellises of grapevines. Andersen and Kaliski's new lofts are a first step in changing Sonoma's urban condition, and the town is behind them.

The first loft development in the area, Lofts Unlimited's project acknowledges the need for a new type of housing in the area. Live/work fills the gap for single owners or couples between a house and a conventional apartment. "Lofts address the in-between," says Kaliski, "There is an individualism to the lofts and it is a cool housing option." The development is a converted, single-story warehouse building. Units open up to a central courtyard and glass facades meet the street like storefronts. This gives residents the option of exploiting the work component of live/work.

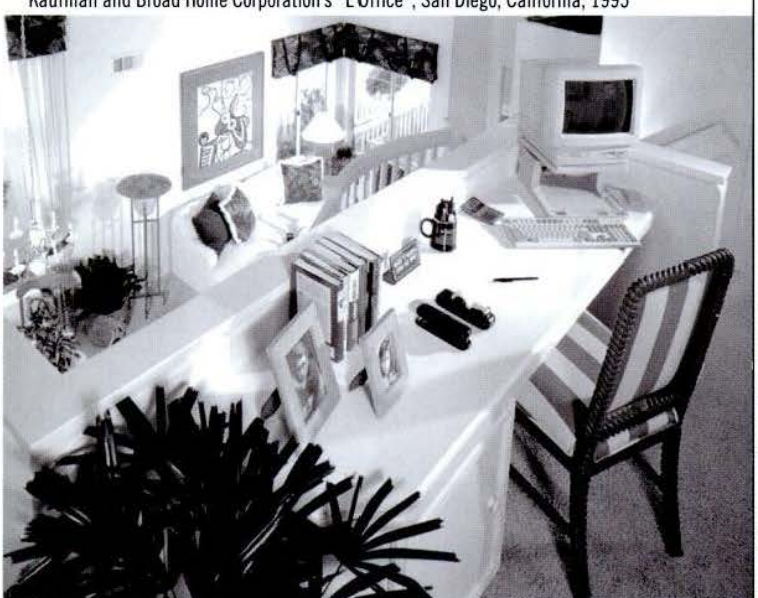
Andersen imagines wine brokers, graphic designers, or other creative entrepreneurs occupying the high-ceilinged, open plan spaces. Kaliski quickly adds that telecommuters to businesses in Silicon Valley are potential buyers as well as San Franciscans who are looking for a pied-à-terre in the country, or even dot.coms who are looking for a corporate getaway. "The last time we were up at the site three or four geese walked in front of the building on the main road and it made me think 'I sure miss the peace and quiet,'" says Kaliski.

The flexibility of the interior spaces is important to Lofts Unlimited, but what seems to be the most remarkable aspect of this project is that it embraces a building typology flexible enough to be transported from its urban roots to a suburban setting and still maintain a market demand. Lofts Unlimited's development is only part of a trend. Andersen has even consulted on floor plan layout for developments in San Diego and Miami's South Beach district. Just imagine the great, hulking cast-iron buildings of SoHo filled with tanned roller-bladers and you'll notice a strange phenomenon: Lofts are no longer the exclusive domain of people in black. Loft owners may now even wear purple, the dominant color of the Colorado Rockies, since on the web site www.denverlofts.com one develop-

Franz Kline's New York City loft, 1961. Photo by Fred W. McDarrah.



Kaufman and Broad Home Corporation's "L'Office", San Diego, California, 1995



ment, the Euro Loft, is sold by the tagline "Only one block from Coors Field."

Even the land of peaches and antebellum homes is graciously welcoming the loft concept. Despite being more marketing concept than artsy digs, new loft/condo projects are springing up all over Atlanta's Midtown. With the new development comes a reworking of the urban fabric. Traditionally, Atlanta is a city of suburban sprawl; it has notorious traffic since the work force commutes from surrounding communities to Downtown. Midtown is attractive to loft buyers because it is close to coffee shops (remember the latte), trendy boutiques and even an art museum designed by the prodigal son of Modernism, architect Richard Meier.

"Young, single professionals who have recently moved to Atlanta from California and New York and are working toward middle management at Merrill Lynch need to be close to midtown and downtown, yet they want to retain the urban atmosphere that they are used to," says Assaf Newmark who works at the Condo Store, a loft marketing enterprise. The Condo Store and its partner, the Piedmont Collection, are currently representing 37 loft developments in Atlanta and the surrounding suburbs.

In many of these developments, the word "loft" seems to be a new way of phrasing "authentic urban experience." A marketing brochure for Peachtree Lofts Condominium, which, according to Newmark, is the "truest" to the SoHo loft, sums up this sentiment. "While maintaining the integrity of the original exterior architecture (it is a 1953 office building) the interiors were boldly modified to reflect today's contemporary attitudes about urban living... The residents of Peachtree Lofts Condominium will realize a highly sought-after urban lifestyle." (Ironically, when Robert Rauschenberg moved into his SoHo loft in the '60s he used a hose and a bucket in the backyard to bathe.) The Peachtree Lofts Condominium complex houses a fitness center, a laundry center, and a swimming pool. Details in the units modulate between the rough and refined tastes of loft owners. Ductwork penetrates the gypsum board ceiling only in areas where it would be aesthetically pleasing and then disappears out of sight; crown moldings add a homey touch to the high walls.

The Lofts @ the Park, another development in the Condo Store quiver, takes the luxury of loft living one step further. "Impressive, open spaces, 12-foot ceilings, hardwood floors, airy balconies, and terraces underscore a home designed to satisfy your upscale lifestyle expectations," reads the brochure. The Lofts @ the Park is sited across the street from Atlanta's large green space, Piedmont Park. Newmark draws parallels between this park and its northeastern counterpart. "There is a shared theme between Central Park and Piedmont Park. Imagine having a loft in New York, but instead of it being in SoHo its balcony looks out over Central Park."

The equation of "loft" equaling "luxury" is only a bit younger than loft culture itself. It was born in the late '70s and early '80s, a time when lifestyle replaced culture.

Realizing that enormous spaces lurked in factory buildings, uptown clients flocked to SoHo. Allen Ginsberg might be content to sit in a giant loft with nothing but a typewriter and a hooka, but wealthy loft dwellers need a few more amenities, thus finished hardwood floors, high-speed Internet connections, and gourmet kitchens are all integral to the new loft experience. In fact, a marketing brochure for The Lofts, a "New York-style" hotel in Columbus, Ohio, tells us "that luxury is the little details found somewhere between necessity and extravagance. From linens so rich they seem to caress to Italian leather sofas that beg to be touched, you'll discover true luxury at The Lofts."

Located in the 1882 Carr Building, a former plumbing supply company warehouse, The Lofts stands next-door to the standard hotel fare of the Crowne Plaza which manages both hotels, at the edge of Columbus's Short North Area. The area is having an urban-shopping renaissance with cafes, galleries and restaurants all feeding the need of the hotel visitor and vice versa. Embracing all that is trendy, urbane and chic, The Lofts vies for the attention of the sophisticated traveler. Grand windows and concrete beams embody the spaces that the name implies.

Surprised to find lofts in Drew Carey territory? Brace yourself for Kaufman and Broad Home Corporation, the nation's largest new home developer. Kaufman and Broad build all across the West and Southwest and have been incorporating loft lifestyle elements into their tract homes since as early as 1994. Addressing the fact that live/work requirements affect even suburbanites, in-house architect, Mike Woodley created the "L'Office," a combination loft and office space. "The techno-revolution has hit the home front," reads the company's press release.

The L'Office is an alcove equipped with a built-in desk, power outlets and phone and data jacks. Tucked under the cathedral ceiling, it is located on the second floor of the house and is open to and overlooking the main, double-height living space. In the press release, Woodley describes the new home feature. "The L'Office is designed to be used as the home's command center. It allows people to work in an open space by removing the feeling of being closed in or completely isolated from family activities." The space, from its central position, makes it possible to occupy the large void in the middle of the floor plan. Spatially this is a radically inventive change for a company who not only built a life-size version of Bart Simpson's house, but also gave away a year's supply of Krispy Kreme donuts to anyone who bought a home last February.

Stripped of all loft decorative accessories and decidedly non-urban, the L'Office as a new room comes close to the essence of what historically defines the loft, the volume of space. Perhaps it is best to quote from the Crate and Barrel catalogue description of their Loft dinnerware. "The bright white, clean forms of our Loft dinnerware bring to mind the wide open space and funky chic of loft living."

While Diane Lewis may be hesitant, if not unwilling, to give her blessing to the L'Office or new loft development, it is her definition of the loft as a "palatial void," that resonates within the conceptual dreams of the other projects. Lewis says of the loft, "Definitely it is a piece of the city, an internal space that has an external size. In a way, it is a double industrial palace, since the cast iron buildings were the palaces of the 19th century and there is this great palatial room."

Even though the new loft developments embrace the decorative aspects of artist loft living, they still follow a model of luxury that came with the influx of cash into grungy industrial spaces. While nostalgia for something authentic in a tech-heavy age may be driving some sales, **all the exposed ductwork in America cannot turn condos into artist studios.**

When she is not listening to records in her Oakland flat, Mimi Zeiger is editor and publisher of the architecture zine, "loud paper."

FLATTENED FURNITURE

Story by Hope Reeves
Photos by Daniel Proctor

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

So, you're a young go-getter jumping from job to job, city to city, state to state. Mobility is essential to your existence but then again, so is comfort. Companies like IKEA have flourished by figuring out how to make almost everything they sell as easy to transport and assemble as a Lincoln Log bungalow. If you can handle a screwdriver and an Allen wrench (and in some cases these aren't even necessary), an easily transportable living room, bedroom, and/or kitchen is at your fingertips. And if you thought that convenience means the absence of style, think again. Three young designers and one old master reveal the secrets of two-dimensional furniture.

A stool in six easy pieces.

Jeff Covey

MODEL SIX

"A customer could just walk into a store, throw it under her arm and literally continue shopping."

You just know that designer Jeff Covey has told the story a thousand times, and, still, you can hear the incredulity in his voice. After all, most people don't walk into design guru Carl Magnusson's office at Knoll uninvited and wind up hours later with a contract to sell a piece through the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

"About three years ago, I called and introduced myself to Kathleen, Magnusson's secretary," recalls Covey, now 36. "Then I got in a cab, went to his office and put the stool together for her. She said, 'I'd like to show this to Carl.' " So Covey walked the streets of New York for a couple of hours and returned to find his stool standing on Magnusson's desk. The noted designer thought it would be perfect for MoMA, so he called a friend at the museum and got Covey an appointment that afternoon. The rest, as they say, is history.

The Model Six stool. It's a stylish thing made of wire rod, cast aluminum and a spun aluminum or plywood seat. The design is driven by simplicity, affordability, and Covey's sincere hope that he's not the only one who loves putting things together. When he set out to design the piece—way before he had any visions of big-shot designers or world-renowned museums—Covey had two very unpretentious objectives: to make a stool that could be packed in the smallest box possible; and to make opening that box and putting together its contents a purely pleasurable experience.

So Covey sat down with a piece of clay and molded things together until he was satisfied he'd met his aim. His mind was always working, he says, the whole time thinking: What is the body, the legs, the interior? How is something formed, put together, taken apart? How does this material relate to this and how might they attach and integrate in the easiest possible way?

What he came up with was a six-part adjustable stool. Three legs, a triangle to hold them together, a central hub with a big acme screw and a seat top. A piece of cake to put together... if you know what you're doing.

And that, of course, is where the directions and packaging come in. Covey hired graphic designer Raul Cabra, and what he came up with was ingenious: a set of directions surrounding an almost life-size image of the stool on a piece of 16-by-24-inch translucent paper.

It's so pretty you want to hang it on your wall and so clearly written and diagramed it makes screwing and snapping the pieces together a ten-minute job. The directions are even thoughtful, suggesting that you take care not to trap your fingers between any of the components.

"My idea was that a customer could just walk into a store, throw it under her arm and literally continue shopping," says Covey. "Then when she got home and put it together, it would be simple but gratifying. Like 'Wow, that wasn't hard, but look what I just did!' "

Covey remembers the first time he had that feeling. It was back when he was a 6-year-old kid, building things in the bedroom closet he had turned into a workshop. "I would draw stuff and then build it," he says. "When other kids were playing sports, I was holed up making myself a bed." An admitted troublemaker, Covey barely graduated from El Cajon High School outside of San Diego. But then, that wasn't the world he lived in. "My dad put awnings on trailers and my mom was a secretary for a doctor," he says. "All I wanted to do was build furniture."

And here he is, his piece sold by the Museum of Modern Art and Herman Miller, still giddy at the thought of how things turned out for him, how funny the world is.

"The people at MoMA told me they needed a few hours to think it over and gave me a pass to the museum," Covey remembers. "I couldn't concentrate on the art, I was too excited. So I went to a pay phone and called my parents. I told them what was happening and my dad said, 'Mona, who the heck is Mona?' "

►

STYLIST: YAEL GITAI HAIR & MAKEUP: TERENCE RANGER MODEL: WANDA BONNEVILLE

Monika Mulder

IKEA

When she went to design school, Monika Mulder never once thought she'd be making furniture for the masses. Now, at 27, she's in an Almhult, Sweden building surrounded by 400 other developers and designers churning out IKEA's next line.

"In school we were busy developing our form language," says Mulder, originally from the Netherlands. "It was philosophical, psychological, all about what I wanted to say. What I do here is much more practical. Design, transport, and money is the only thinking."

After all, with over 156 stores and a web site selling 12,000 products to people in 29 countries, it's essential that IKEA create furniture that's not just comfortable and good-looking, but movable. And that, as Mulder puts it, means everything has to be "knock-down-able," so it packs flat.

Here's how Mulder's job works: The product developers come to the six designers in her department and say something like:

"We want such and such new piece of furniture. Start sketching." The verbal instructions often come with a written design brief, essentially a list of demands including size, weight, and price range. Then Mulder and her colleagues each come up with their own designs and present them to the developers. About one in three ideas is accepted.

The next step is the difficult one—figuring out how a piece should come apart for the easiest assembly and requisite Saltine-thin packaging. IKEA's designers don't get any kind of special training on this front, says Mulder, but learn from each other and from the company's more successful designs. She usually begins with pen and paper. Then, when she's happy with her creation, she'll build a number of small-scale models and literally saw them apart in every possible way. In her experience, the

Left: The Up Series and its packaging, 1969 Right: The Up Series 2000

Gaetano Pesce

TA DA! THE UP SERIES

"You would come home with a flat box and gather everybody around to see this strange object growing up and becoming a chair."

Gaetano Pesce doesn't consider himself a furniture designer. How sad it would be, he reflects, to be one thing for your whole life. Rather, he'll tell you, he's an experimenter, a man who pushes the limits of society any way he can, whether by designing the first building made of silicone or ...the first living room set packed in a pizza box. "I am known for making political statements," he explains in his thick Venetian accent, "and for being very innovative with material and technology."

The idea for his first, and by far loudest, statement came to him about 30 years ago while he was taking a shower. Washing himself with a sponge, he suddenly realized that when he squeezed it, the sponge got small. When he released, it got big again. What might seem insanely obvious was a revelation for Pesce. He started thinking about polyurethane foam. Some 80 percent air, it could be deflated and inflated almost instantly—and when deflated, he imagined, it was wonderfully, perfectly flat.

Ta Da! The Up Series was seven pieces of vacuum-packed furniture. Produced by B&B Italia from 1969 to 1976, the collection shipped in thin boxes that, when opened, would spring to life like a jack-in-the-box. A dream to ship and an event to own.

"It was something magic for the family," says Pesce, then 28, now 60. "You would come home with a flat box and gather everybody around to see this strange object growing up and becoming a chair. It would be quite a strong moment."

Only about 1,000 of these pieces were made, and today they're quite rare. Sotheby's recently sold one for $30,000. So when B&B asked Pesce for permission to re-release the Up Series, the designer was hesitant. He didn't want to flood the market and devalue what was now considered art. He is also a man who believes in creating new things, not hanging onto old ones. Luckily, they came up with a solution: The Up Series 2000 consists of the same pieces but is made of an elastic rather than polyurethane and in very different colors. Released last April in Milan, the Up Series 2000 differs from its predecessor in one key way. Because Freon is now *verboten*, the pieces will be sold all blown up. Not to worry, the company is hard at work finding a replacement for the gas that transformed the original polyurethane pizza into a big, cushy, maternal presence.

"B&B explained to me how there is a whole new generation of people out there who have never seen the Up Series. So for them," says Pesce, "it is new."

The Herman chair is "knock-down-able."

"It's like having a big cake and wanting to bring it on a picnic, you just keep testing and trying until the box will close."

best dissection method usually emerges. The last step is doing the computer-generated technical drawings, which Mulder and her colleagues use to create 3-D animations.

"It's like having a big cake and wanting to bring it on a picnic," explains Mulder. "You just keep testing and trying until the box will close." And if it just doesn't, the designers have a fallback: the Technicians Department. Ultimately, it's the technicians' responsibility to make the pieces pack flat. And if they can't make the thing come apart and go back together in a sensible way, there's always stacking.

Another of IKEA's save-money-by-saving-space techniques, stacking furniture fits together like a jigsaw puzzle, one piece sliding into the next for efficient shipping and storage. "I think how these pieces can sit on top of each other, or what can go inside what," says Mulder. "In my mind I hear, 'It's too expensive to transport air. It's too expensive to transport air'—and that inspires me."

Of the 12 or so pieces Mulder has designed, the Myro is her absolute favorite. "Knock-down-able" and stackable, the freestanding tray can be carried around in one hand, making it perfect for a sunny day sandwich and lemonade on the terrace. The tray can be removed from its legs, and there's a rack for reading materials and a mobile phone.

"This is my dream job because I get to learn how to build everything," Mulder says. But someday, she admits, it'll be time to head back to Holland and do something different. "What I'm really longing for is not having to think about price. I want to use nice fabrics and make nice joints. But even so, I think I will always be making products for you and me."

The Gridlock: no screws, no glues.

Chris Baisa

GRIDLOC

"It's really cool when your obsession becomes a reality."

Granted, it sounds like a cliché, but the idea really did come to designer Chris Baisa in a dream. Something about wine crates, those boxes with all the intersecting partitions. He woke up determined to turn this phantasm into a light fixture, but when that didn't work, Baisa made his dream into a table. Gridloc, he calls it: 24 interlocking pieces that fit together to form a 16-by-16-by-18-inch piece of furniture to sit on, rest your feet on, leave your beer on—whatever you want.

The beauty of Gridloc is as much in its simplicity as in its versatility. There are no screws, no glues, just a one-page sheet of instructions with four clearly illustrated steps. Most folks can put it together in about four minutes.

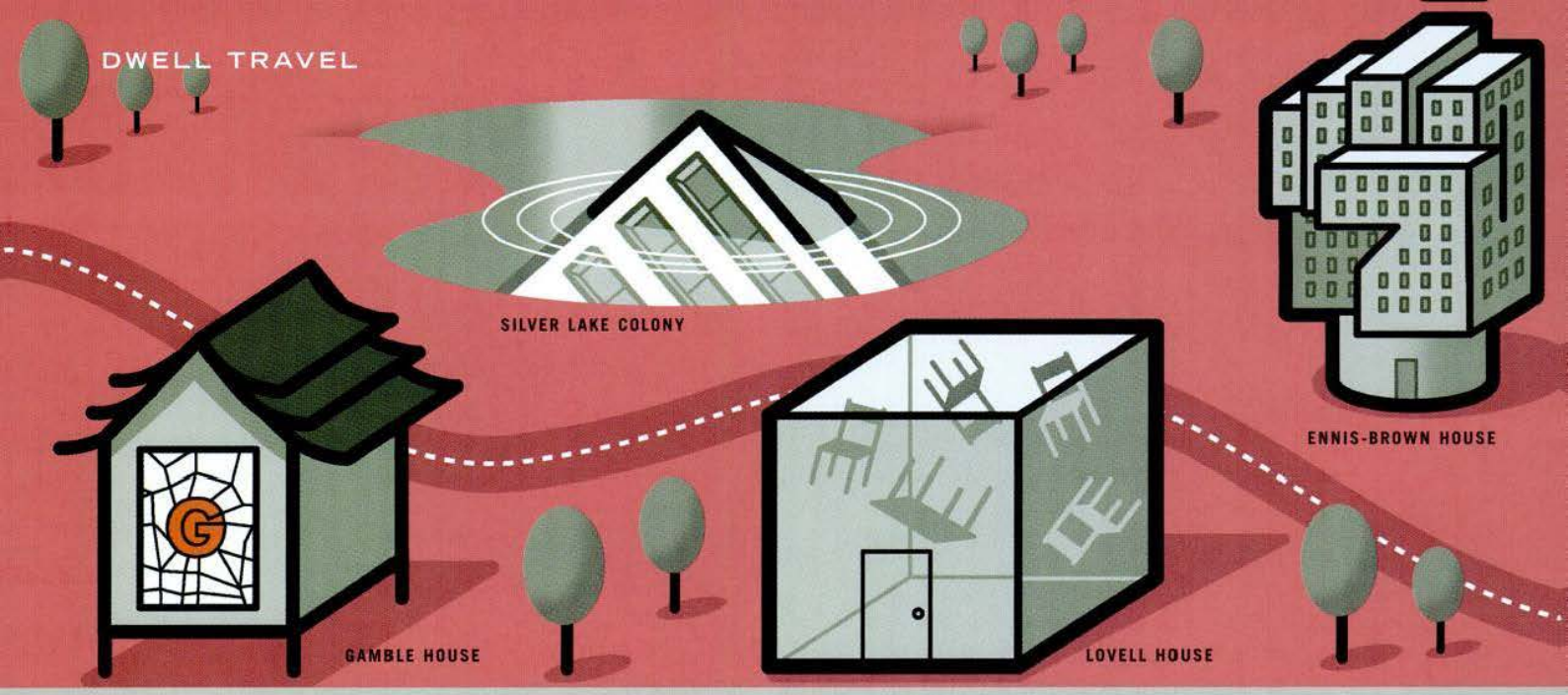
"Really, there's nothing worse than opening a box to find pages of instructions—your heart just sinks," says Baisa. "My whole idea was to make it easy to put together and easy to take apart." Baisa believes Gridloc is for a whole younger generation that doesn't have a lot of time, wants cool things, and needs furniture they can take with them.

But while this dream he talks about may have been the inspiration, the design process that followed was anything but an overnight affair. "I spent months cutting up pieces of foam core and gluing them together into models," he explains. "I had a very definite idea of what I wanted the scale to be and how I wanted it to come apart and go back together again."

Once he had exactly what he wanted, Baisa let a computer do the math. What came back was a bean counter's delight: The piece could be made with less than one sheet of 4-by-8-foot plywood set on a computerized system and routed out in a mere three minutes. That meant the table would not only be simple as Sunday to assemble, but cheap, too.

"It's really cool when your obsession becomes a reality," says Baisa. Sometimes, people see the table and want to buy it as is—all put together. It's sad, after all his hard work, but Baisa is an understanding guy. "People have had so many negative experiences with assembling furniture that they've developed a conditioned response," Baisa reflects. "Luckily, there are people out there who are as fascinated by putting things together I am." ■

Hope Reeves is a freelance writer living in New York City.
Her work has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Real Simple and Time.



A LONG DRIVE THROUGH L.A. MODERNISM

When my out-of-town friends come to Los Angeles for a visit, they expect me to show them the homes of the stars. And I oblige, dutifully leading them to the Mulholland Drive home of actress Kelly Lynch, designed by visionary architect John Lautner, or the Silver Lake home of transplanted East Village performance artist Anne Magnuson, designed by Richard Neutra, one of Southern California's most prolific Modernist architects.

Admittedly, these are not the stars that Hollywood tourists typically seek. Moreover, the celebrities I care about are not the current owners of the houses, but the men who designed them. The real attraction for me is the houses themselves, monuments to a brand of Modernism that flourished for more than 50 years in Los Angeles' benevolent climate, nurtured by the young city's receptivity to new ways of living.

The thing that makes L.A. Modernism special is that it is doled out in small, domestic packages. The most significant buildings there are not grand public institutions, but rather private homes tucked away on side streets, or in remote canyons and glens. To see L.A.'s best architecture, you have to know where to look. And you need to drive.

Just to prove that Modernism was a decisive break from the direction in which L.A. architecture appeared to be heading, I like to begin with the Gamble House in Pasadena, a lively 1908 Arts and Crafts experiment by Henry and Charles Greene. Built for Peter and Mary Gamble, of Procter & Gamble fame, the house is justifiably renowned for its lyrical arrangement of wood and stained glass. The Greenes drew heavily on Chinese and Japanese influences and, with their large covered porch, embraced strategies the Modernists would take much further.

A good place to get acquainted with those strategies is Silver Lake, eight miles east and roughly 50 years further along in time. There, I can stroll through the COLONY OF TEN HOUSES designed by Austrian-born architect Richard Neutra, primarily in the 1940s and 1950s—relatively late in his career. None of them is open to the public, but even from the street, it's not hard to see how this pioneering Modernist applied his theories. Looking up at #2210 Neutra Place, for instance, I notice a typical detail: a window stretching the length of the living room. A similar floor-to-ceiling, steel-framed window is built into the rear wall. I imagine the residents of this house riding a perfectly calibrated vessel through nature.

A mile and a half to the west, at the end of Dundee Drive in Los Feliz, I stop in on Neutra's breakout work, the 1928 LOVELL HOUSE, where I come face to face with the classic example of the design strategy—it was never called Modernism at the time—that he, along with his fellow countryman, R.M. Schindler, developed. Commissioned by Phillip Lovell, a naturopath who espoused the benefits of the good life in his *Los Angeles Times* column, "Care of the Body," the Lovell House was the first steel-frame home built in America. But seeing this steel, glass and sprayed-concrete box, perched atop a canyon, I'm reminded of another part of the Modernist canon: These architects professed such a love for nature that they threw open their industrial interiors to the Southern California chaparral.

Not far to the west, Frank Lloyd Wright had, two years earlier, finished what is now called the ENNIS-BROWN HOUSE. I include this home because, with the benefit of advance reservations, visitors can go inside, and because it offers a useful object lesson. This house possesses a grandeur that separates it from the works of the Modernists. Covered with Mayan-patterned, concrete tiles and with a monumental exterior, its wonderfully elegant interior befits the traditional American desire for privacy, space and the display of wealth—exactly the traits the Modernists railed against.

Craving Modernism's carefully scaled-down, infinitely more sociable approach to living, I move on to the 1922 R.M. Schindler KINGS ROAD HOUSE in West Hollywood. The architect designed his dream house for himself and his wife Pauline to share with their

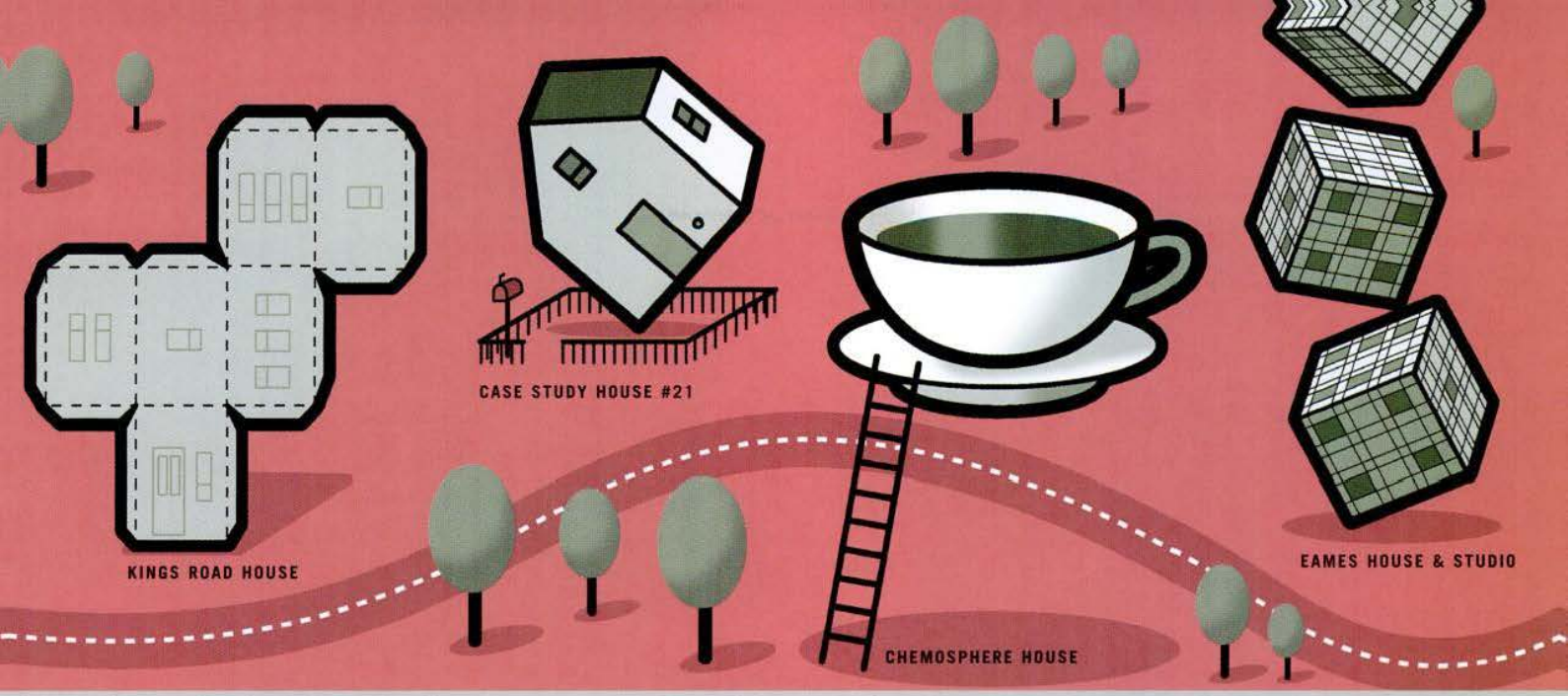


ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

friends, building contractor Clyde Chace and his wife Marian. In 1925 Richard and Dionne Neutra took over from the Chaces. Schindler's compact house, with its cardboard walls and sliding, paper-lined doors, was designed to promote a shared-living experience. There were two living and sleeping areas but there was only one kitchen. Unfortunately, the two ambitious architects and their sophisticated spouses transformed this delicate paper lantern into a pressure cooker. In 1930 the Neutras moved out; the fact that Neutra, rather than Schindler, who had designed Philip Lovell's first residence, got Lovell's grander Dundee Drive commission didn't promote domestic bliss.

As I drive through Laurel Canyon, into the rugged terrain above West Hollywood, I like to shift the focus of the tour to post-war Modernism as interpreted by American-born architects. Pierre Koenig's 1957 **CASE STUDY HOUSE #21**, for example, was built as part of a now-legendary program in which the magazine *Art & Architecture* asked architects to experiment with new technologies and materials. Even from my vantage point on Wonderland Park Avenue, I can see how, with the design of this 1,200-square-foot box, Koenig made the Modernist precepts even more precise.

At the top of Laurel Canyon, off of Mullholand Drive, I pull up to, almost under, another house which seems to float in space. John Lautner, who twisted the rigid lines of Modernism into wild and expressionistic forms, built the **CHEMOSPHERE HOUSE** in 1960. Standing below, I marvel at its engineering. A 50-foot, circular, poured-concrete pillar holds up a set of steel beams that support this homage to the flying saucer. The house, which has recently been purchased and renovated by the German publisher Benedikt Taschen, is off-limits to visitors. But even when viewed from below, it suggests a way of living markedly different from the one advanced by earlier, more doctrinaire Modernists. It feels sealed off from nature rather than a part of it.

I now make an 11-mile pilgrimage to a spot that surely qualifies as one of American Modernism's shrines. When I reach the ocean, I take a right into Santa Monica Canyon, and turn up Chautauqua, taking a lane on my left.

I then march directly up a gravel driveway at the end of the lane toward the **HOUSE AND STUDIO** that belonged to Charles and Ray Eames. This multicolored, two-story icon stands behind a row of tall eucalyptus trees. Peering through the ground-floor windows—that's all visitors are allowed to do—it appears as if the Eameses had simply stepped out for lunch. In the living room, family oddments lie about. Compared to other houses on the tour where daily life might have been held hostage to an architect's unyielding vision—the Schindler Kings Road house comes to mind—an astonishing ease pervades this place.

From right here, the spirit of innovation common to all the houses on my celebrity tour is most apparent. I can practically visualize the lives of Charles and Ray Eames. I can imagine years filled with constant experimentation and, without question, I feel inspired. Which would hardly be the case had I spent the day spying on Kirk Douglas or Katie Holmes. —DAVID HAY

The Gamble House 4 Westmoreland Place, Pasadena, off North Orange Grove Boulevard (Greene & Greene, 1908); open to the public, Thursday-Sunday, 12–3 p.m. **Silver Lake Colony** East Silver Lake Boulevard: 2300, Neutra House (1933); 2226, Yew House (1957); 2232, Kambara House (1960); 2238 Inadomi House (1960); 2242, Stokol House, (1948); 2250 Treweek House (1948); Neutra Place: 2218, Flavin House, (1958); 2210 Ohara House, (1958); 2200, Akai House, (1963). Earl Street: 2240, Reunion House, 2240 (1949) (Richard Neutra) **Lovell House** 4616 Dundee Drive, Los Feliz (Richard Neutra) **Ennis-Brown House** 2655 Glendower Avenue, Los Feliz (Frank Lloyd Wright); for tours call (323) 668–0234 **Schindler House** 835 North Kings Road, West Hollywood (R.M. Schindler, 1922); Wednesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m.; (323) 651–1510 **Case Study House #21** 9036 Wonderland Park Avenue, Hollywood Hills (Pierre Koenig, 1958) **Chemosphere House** 776 Torreyson Drive, Hollywood Hills (John Lautner, 1960) **Eames House and Studio** 203 Chautauqua Boulevard, Santa Monica Canyon (Ray and Charles Eames, 1947–49) **Entenza House** 205 Chautauqua Boulevard, Santa Monica Canyon (Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, 1949) **Bailey House** 219 Chautauqua Boulevard, Santa Monica Canyon (Richard Neutra, 1946–48) **For more organized tours** of L.A.'s Modernism, call: Los Angeles Conservancy, (213) 623–2489 or The Society of Architectural Historians, 1 (800) 972–4722.

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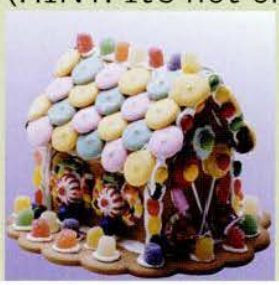


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KNOWING YOUR PLACE

STORY BY D.J. WALDIE

PHOTO COURTESY D.J. WALDIE

"Where are you going?" someone asks, as you leave the (bedroom) (boardroom) (bar). "My place," you answer, as you turn to go back to your (urban loft) (beach cottage) (prison cell). In turning away, you begin the adjustments that separate your life in public from the private life in your place.

As a matter of improbable coincidence (resulting from the collapse of the sugar beet market, the ambitions of Imperial Japan, and my mother's fears—contingencies that now have the feel of certainties), my place happens to be a 957-square-foot, suburban tract house of wood frame and stucco-over-chicken-wire construction put up hastily in 1942 on dead-level farmland south of Los Angeles and just far enough from a Douglas Aircraft Company plant that the bombs dropped by invading Japanese fighter planes might miss it. My older brother was born into this house. My father died in it. My mother died from it. I've lived nowhere else. My place is the only place I know.

Americans are understood to be restless. We move, on average, 11 times during our lives, according to the Census Bureau. Every year since 1980, nearly 43 million Americans—17 percent of the population—have made some other place their own, displacing annually the combined populations of Florida, Texas, and New Jersey. (Young adults move at more than twice the national rate: 36 percent of those between the ages of 20 and 24 move each year, and 31 percent for those between 25 and 29.)

Staying on against such a tide calls into question the American belief that a newer Jerusalem is always under development just over the next rise or at the end of the next cul-de-sac. In the early 1960s, as Southern California was assembled into more square miles of places that looked exactly like my neighborhood, only newer, my parents would take my brother and me in their pea-soup-green Ford station wagon to tour the model houses in new suburban tracts that invariably had the words "lake" and "wood" in them (Homewood, Lakeside, Woodbridge, Canyon Lake). My parents seemed ready to buy a new home on a block of houses that had been a grove of orange trees the month before—"getting a bigger place," they called it, but they never did. Perhaps their one big move, from the Depression in New York and through the World War to here, on the flat edge of Los Angeles, had been enough.

My parents' lives together seemed to be about that, too, about the idea of "enough." Their neighbors' lives weren't about "more" (despite the fury of social critics, who always assumed suburban places were about excess). My parents and their friends had enough of a public life and enough of a private life that it looked, from where I watched, like a life made whole. My life, alone now in what was my parents' house, seems to me enough, too.

Such place-bound intimacy, like a traveler's unexpected capacity to understand a foreign city, either takes a day or requires a lifetime. It's required mine, at least, along with the daily encounters with the much-handled things I grew up with. Before books became portable and paper for taking notes was common (that is, from the beginning of literacy until 1700), knowledge was mostly unaided memory. One trick for accurate recall was the ability to create a "memory palace" of rooms and furniture, based on actual places and things, in which memory could house the proofs of Euclid, the logic of Aristotle, or the orders of the seraphic angels—every fact intimately tied to a memorable, concrete detail in an unreal room. Information retrieval in Medieval and Renaissance Europe was a walk through a waking dream of loggias, salons, and chambers holding everything you knew. Enter a room in your "memory palace," take stock of the décor, and you had Aquinas' proofs of

Left: Waldie's mother and brother in front of the 957-square-foot Lakewood house in which he still lives, 1952. Right: A street of seven model homes, furnished in seven different styles (from Early American to Modern), helped sell 17,500 Lakewood homes in less than three years, 1953.

the existence of God. The longing for such places persists. The formal library is nearly gone from American homes, but it was identified not long ago in a magazine survey as the most wished-for room.

When I was growing up and when I lay awake at night listening to the sounds houses make in the dark, I made up other rooms in which to live. I still do. I still daydream of the past's houses-of-the-future, unambiguous and utopian architectural case studies from the 1950s when modernity last substituted its authority for memory. I go back to one imagined house again and again, past a wall of tan blocks of stone to a room mostly of windows and furnished in abstract Breuer, Corbusier, and van der Rohe chairs and tables, nothing like the French Provincial furniture in my place. My uncle Arthur bought the furniture for my parents in 1953 in an act of such generosity that each time my hand brushes the back of one of the dining-room chairs, the memory of it still comes as a shock. That is the power of my place. It resists my preference for forgetfulness.

That I have a place at all is an astonishingly recent invention. Until the chimney (circa 1200), all European houses were essentially one room, and that one entirely public. (Tolstoy remembered that in the Russia of the 1840s, servants still slept in hallways and on stair landings.) Until sheet glass for windows (circa 1600), most rooms were merely dim shelters from the cold and the wet. Life was lived in the street. Until electric lighting (available to the working poor only after 1940), ordinary life shut down at sunset. Until federally insured home mortgages (in their current form after 1950), not-quite-middle-class people like my parents shared four or five rooms in a walk-up apartment with their in-laws. Even in the suburbs in the 1960s, I shared a 10-by-13-foot bedroom with my brother until we both entered college.

The rooms in contemporary houses betray still-unresolved ambiguities about their domestication. How much living goes on in the middle-class living room? How much dining in the dining room? Perhaps these spaces no longer function, if they ever did, as necessary elements in the narrative of our lives. Closet space is a priority now, says Akiko Busch in *Geography of Home*, because "as we become a more transient society, we tend to define home by the accumulation of possessions as much as by place." The more untethered our experience of places, the more ballast we want.

We Americans are anxious about how we house ourselves, as we were a hundred years ago at the start of the movement toward the suburbs. We're certain about our own preferences to materialize our longing as a place to live, but we're uncertain about our choice. An American place is never just the neutral ground it seems, but a moral sign staked lightly to the ground.

A town-planning movement called New Urbanism believes houses should have, among other things, deep front porches because porches represent a longed-for public conviviality that might stand against the overwhelming privatization of everyday life. Porches are now, in this heightened political season, the concern of national policy makers. Candidates for state and federal office argue that porches should be mandated for all new construction. Some New Urbanists, like James Howard Kunstler (author of *Home from Nowhere*), believe so strongly in the order of these things that they see the shootings at Columbine High as a function of the landscape of Littleton, Colorado, where houses do not have porches.

I agree that my place has a power over me. It may even require my loyalty, in a time when all loyalties are suspect. I do not know why my place is adequate to the demands of my desire. I can't imagine it satisfying more sophisticated consumers of place. It's only the skin I won't slough off, the story I want to hear told, a carnal house, and the body into which I welcome myself.

D. J. Waldie's place is in Lakewood, California, where he is a city official. He is the author of Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir.

PHOTO BY ROTHSCHILD PHOTO

SO WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH ARCHITECTS?

Maybe you've seen them from afar: those funny people in the even funnier glasses, a roll of drawings tucked under one arm like a talisman to ward off the wrong impression ("I'm no mere businessman, I'm an artist!"). Or maybe you've seen them up close, even spoken to one, and discovered for yourself the strange contradictions of the architect: generally creative, often competent, but nursing some deep pain. Maybe you've even worked with one. For all of you we offer this peek behind the wizard's curtain, a quick guide to the mind-set of those who practice what might be America's least understood profession.

BY PHILIP NOBEL

As so many architects do, we should begin with a little history.

Sometime in the middle of the last century, perhaps during the crucible years of World War II, architects began to lose much of their power in the building industry. During the 1930s but blossoming after the war, **a whole new cast of characters** appeared to challenge them. Industrial Designers began to design our alarm clocks, planes, diners, and gas stations; Graphic Designers, through the power of advertising, took over television and many public spaces; Engineers, those perennial rivals, built impossible dams and bridges, the wonders of the age. Faced with the rigors of modern finance, specialized consultants emerged to crunch the numbers for every major building type—homes, schools, airports, hospitals—impinging further on the autonomy of the architect. More recently, interior decorators—once tellingly derided as "inferior desecrators" by a threatened Frank Lloyd Wright—have recast themselves as Interior Designers and are now actively lobbying government for their own professional recognition. **What is left for the poor architect to do?**

Younger architects today do seem to be more open to working with their peers in adjacent fields, and less likely—in these flush times, at least—to begrudge them their glamour or success. But only time will tell if they can keep from holding on to the strangely romantic notion of the persecuted architect. For at least 60 years, architecture has styled itself as **a profession under siege**. One finds more battle plans in the annals of the American Institute of Architects, the field's largely ineffectual public lobby, than in the files of the Pentagon. If your architect seems cranky, if he or she seems to have a chip on their shoulder, this perceived history of abuse and neglect may be one cause.

Why do architects dwell on such slights? It's comforting: us against them, truth against the world. Architects tend to see themselves as **heirs to a great tradition**—the Pyramids! Chartres! Bilbao!—and they are somewhat put out by their profession's current status in this country, marginalized within the building industry, not quite the artists they once dreamt themselves to be nor respected implicitly as the expert builders society needs them to be. Want some art to fill that plaza? Hire a sculptor. Worried that the new house won't stand? Better call an engineer. Doesn't society see, the architect asks, that our unique blend of **artistic vision and technical know-how** can solve the problems of the world? Short answer: No, it does not.

This is not quite just, for the architect is, still, the one professional to whom you can

PHOTO BY EVERETT COLLECTION

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Glossary: The Secret Language of Architects

Intervention Any architectural act, no matter how simple or small. "An intervention in this little bathroom could transform your whole house."

Site A patch of ground to be built on or any other location in which an architect plans to do something. "That towel rack is another magnificent site for an intervention."

Condition The way a thing is, a situation, a reality. "This condition will be quite challenging unless we expand the intervention to the entire site."

turn for synthesis—to bring together the work of contractors and other designers—and most architects are a safe source of unbridled imagination. If you are planning a design project larger than a single room, or if that room requires something more complex than changing the wall coverings, hire an architect. But you should be aware of the architect's imperiled position and difficult self-image. It could make things go a lot easier.

We've all heard the horror stories: a neighbor or a friend hires an architect for a job, large or small, and it quickly spirals out of control. The architect arrives with **visions of grandeur**, or at least grander visions than the project warrants, and it costs double, then triple. The client is left with much more than they bargained for: a work of architecture, when perhaps some light building might have sufficed. This can be avoided. Most construction nightmares stem from a simple misunderstanding of hiring the wrong kind of architect for the project at hand. It's important to understand whom you are talking to; architects come in more than 31 flavors. Because of the ambiguity of an architect's place in the world—which comes first, **service or creativity, business or art?**—they have evolved to fill every niche. There are architects who can make the most beautiful spaces in the world, but who might not be able to keep the rain out of them. There are architects whose buildings will ride out the worst that heaven and earth can throw at them, but who may not have the spark that makes those spaces sing. And between those stereotypical poles, architects exist in infinite degrees of competence and creativity.

While there is no foolproof way to tell who is who, there are two things you should always do when hiring an architect. First, spend some time in a space your prospective architect has built. Linger there. Close your ears to explanations and trust your eyes and intuition. The bizarre language that sometimes surrounds architecture might make you think you need special training to appreciate its subtleties. You don't; it's not rocket science. Ask some basic questions. How does the light come into a room? How does the building sit on the land? Are the materials right? Are they put together in a way that makes sense to you? Try to understand what the architect's objectives were for the project and judge for yourself how closely they were met.

As you examine an architect's work, consider the second crucial task and honestly assess your needs and desires. Are you looking to create a work of art that will find a place in one of the glossy magazines? Do you just want shelter? Come to terms with your expectations and then begin to sift through the prospects. Read between the lines. Don't settle for a portfolio of work and a list of references. **Look beyond the PR and archispeak affectations** and try to determine how they see themselves. Are they gunning for the history books? (If the answer is yes, you should be, too.) Do they see each new project as a chance to finally realize some lingering artistic vision? (If so, it better be one that you want to live in.) Do they focus on craft: How materials come together, what to do with a structural joint? (If yes, you may have found a winner.) Look deeper. Find out what school they went to and do a little research on it. Is it a place that trains architects to create in a vacuum? Many of the top schools today prepare students well for the creative tasks ahead but leave them woefully unaware of the more pedestrian skills they will need to succeed, from how to manage the business of an office to the fine points of new materials and contemporary construction techniques. Other schools churn out practitioners who have not had the chance to work through their artistic kinks. Some schools might do both. If what you want is creativity first—outlandish, shocking forms and/or thoughtful discussion on the place of your project in the world—then you might want to give extra value to an architect with a Columbia, Princeton or SCI-Arc pedigree. For dry competence, look for a more technical background. **Above all, be clear about what you want.**

If you want a problem solved, and you don't care for the frills, find an architect who will solve your problem: a builder. If you want a problem solved with grace, find an architect who can do so; they're out there. And if you want to be party to a masterpiece, **your misunderstood Mies awaits you somewhere,** hunched in front of his CAD station, clicking away in obscurity. Just make sure, going in, that you are shooting together for immortality. Then enjoy the ride.

Philip Nobel writes about architecture and design for Metropolis, The New York Times, and other publications. He was trained as an architect at the Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation.

Learning From Hollywood

The dark recesses of the architectural psyche were probed in *The Fountainhead* (1949) in which Gary Cooper (photo, upper left) plays Howard Roark, a visionary who destroys a building rather than allow his design to be compromised, and director Peter Greenaway's *The Belly of an Architect* (1987) in which Brian Dennehy's character can't see beyond his own throbbing navel. The profession is depicted more evenhandedly in the documentary, *Concert of Wills—Making the Getty Center* (1998), which tracks Richard Meier for a decade as he fusses and fights over The Getty Center. Less definitive are portrayals of architects by Paul Newman in *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and Charles Bronson in *Death Wish* (1974).

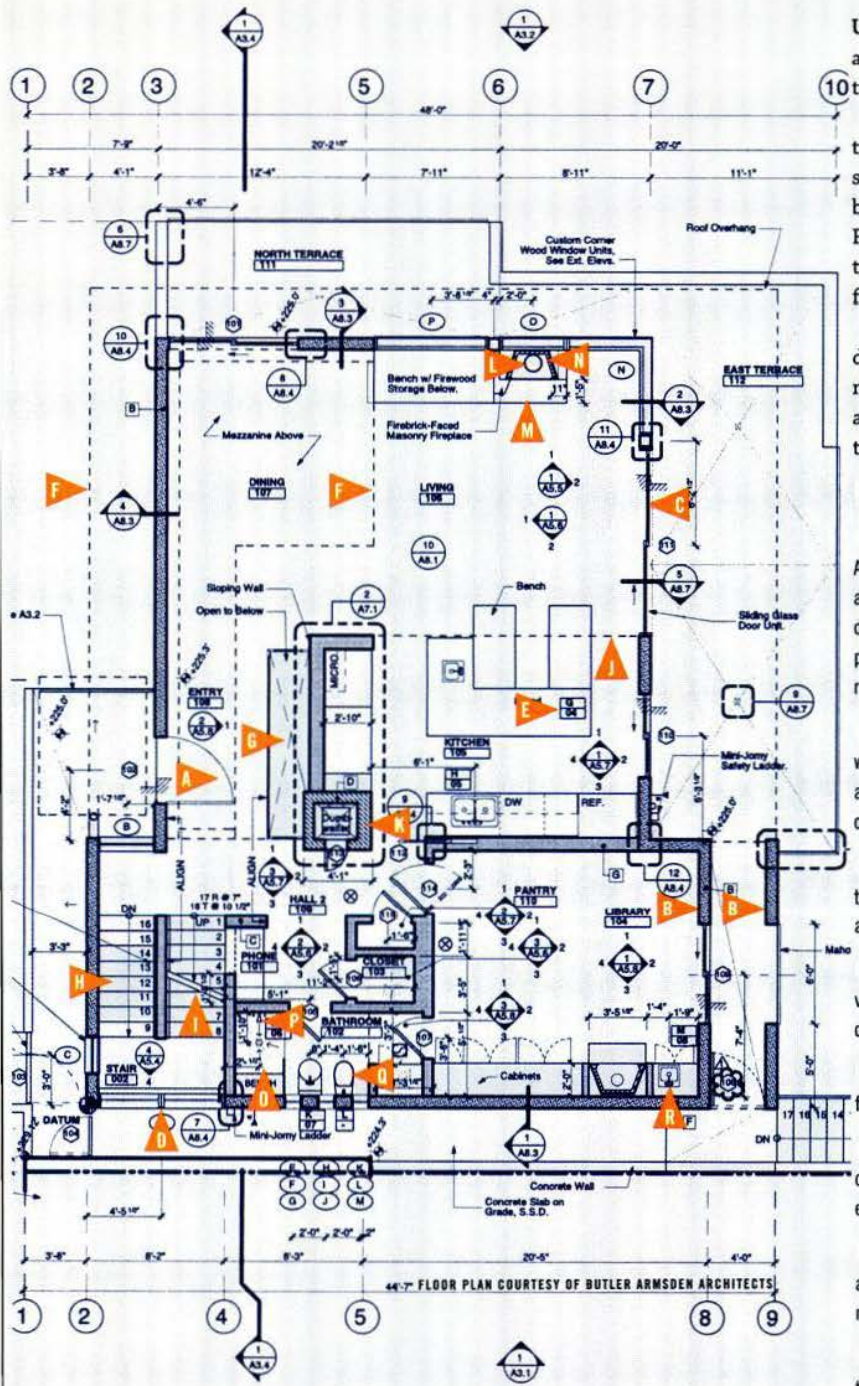
Space Any enclosure larger than a dresser drawer. "If we go with the titanium toilet, the space will really come alive."

Plan Any drawing of a space viewed from above. "As you can see in the plan, the relationship of the fixtures is a clear reference to Corbu's later work."

Elevation What you see when you look straight ahead at a wall, or a drawing of same. "I'm still studying the elevation just above the sink very closely."

Section The vertical arrangement of levels in a building or the cut-away drawing that describes them. "We need to resolve the placement of the hot-tub deck in the section." ▶

HOW TO READ A FLOOR PLAN



Upon first glance, a floor plan might seem as difficult to understand as. . . well, a floor plan. But, with a little practice, reading architectural plans can be easier than you think.

"In order to understand a building, and floor plan, you first need to look at a site plan and see how it's situated in its context. From the site plan you should be able to understand how you would enter the building," says Sandy Chan of Butler Armsden Architects in San Francisco. "Once this has been figured out, you are ready to pull out the floor plan and get a good grip on what an architect is proposing for your future home."

Most architectural symbols are universal, though drawing standards may vary slightly from firm to firm—just as verbal dialects may vary from region to region in a particular country. So, once you are able to understand line weights and symbols, you should be able to master visual archispeak.

Indicates which way the door swings. A solid line on one side of this symbol and a dashed line on the other will indicate double-action doors (doors that are pivoted from the top and bottom—"like a restaurant kitchen door").

Solid walls. The legend on the floor plan will generally reveal whether these walls are meant to be wood, concrete, fire-rated, or some other material.

Windows (when they are very close together), railings, partial height walls and/or sliding doors.

Mullions: indicated by a small square. A vertical member, usually of stone or wood, between the lites of a window.

Plumbing/Equipment Key: depicts the fixture model, appliance, or equipment.

Indicates what is visible from the floor of reference (catwalk, balcony, roofline, etc.).

Indicates a "void" that is open above and/or below, such as an elevator shaft or mechanical chase.

Stairs. Notation will indicate path of travel from floor of reference.

Cut line that signals where stairs scissor and pass above or below the next floor level.

Change in ceiling height, such as a dropped or raised soffit. This is typical for areas housing mechanical ductwork or recessed lighting fixtures or for other design intent.

This symbol varies with each office. At Butler Armsden it is a symbol of a one-hour fire-rated wall which, according to the UBC, must occur at garage walls, closets below stairs and shaft openings that penetrate two floor levels or more.

Fireplace.

Flue. This will appear on all floor levels above the fireplace as well as on the roof.

Hearth: a non-combustible surface in front of your fireplace, either at the floor plane or slightly raised. The size of your hearth is mathematically proportional to the size of your fireplace.

Shower.

Shower fixture.

Toilet.

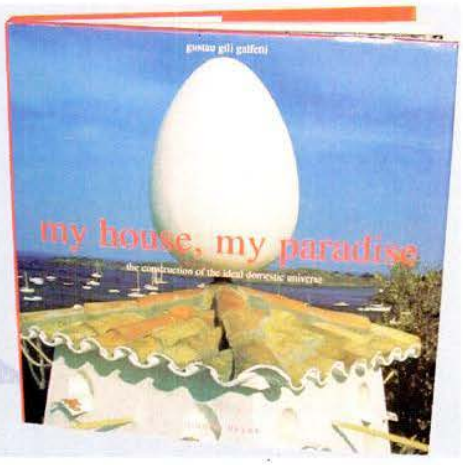
Bar sink.

Perspective Any 3D drawing or rendering, computer or otherwise, where you can actually see what's going on. Often used as a sales tool; not to be trusted. "This perspective, as seen from the toilet, shows the soul of your new space."

Moment An experience in a work of architecture, static. "The moment where the latex meets the Corian© is particularly successful."

Episode An experience in a work of architecture, dynamic. "There's an episode in the dressing room that is pure Louis Kahn."

BOOKS



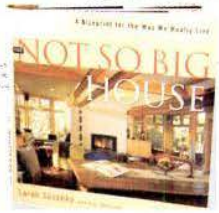
My House, My Paradise
The Construction of the Ideal Domestic Universe
by Gustau Gili Galfetti / Gingko Press, 1999, **$50**

O.K. Maybe some projects don't require an architect. This coffee-table book gives the reader great photographic and historical presentations of whimsical and outrageous projects, including the story of Sabato (Simon) Rodia, an Italian immigrant who, after purchasing a triangular plot of land in Watts, built his dream out of ceramic, glass, and found materials. Today, the towers, named the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria for one of Rodia's heroes, Christopher Columbus, still loom over the working-class Los Angeles neighborhood. Photographs diagrams, plans, and detailed descriptions are included to help the reader understand what exactly is going on.

Why Are Blueprints Blue?

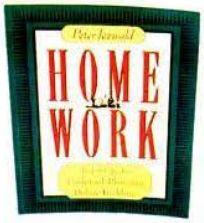
This was much more difficult to answer than one might expect, but we finally found the explanation at the University of Southern Mississippi's School of Polymers and High Performance Materials Web site (www.psrc.usm.com).

To make a (very) long story short, blueprints are blue because of the paper (diazo paper) that is used in the blueprinting process. Though initially white, the ammonium iron citrate-coated paper takes on its dark blue appearance only after being exposed to light and being placed in an aqueous solution of potassium ferricyanide. When potassium ferricyanide meets ammonium ferrous citrate, a new compound called Prussian blue (also known as "Turnbull's blue") is created. The blueprint is then washed and the new compound, Prussian blue, which, in fact, is blue, adheres to the paper.



The Not So Big House: A Blueprint for the Way We Really Live by Sarah Susanka (with Kira Obolensky) / The Taunton Press, 1998, **$21**

If lack of space adequately describes your place, this book is worth investigating. Susanka's latest effort takes a philosophical approach to this most physical task of building a house "that favors the quality of its space over the quantity." *The Not So Big House* is filled with large color photos that present feasible (albeit, not so modern) ideas for the Not So Big homebuilder of today. Susanka may be on to something when she writes, "It's time for a different kind of house. A house for the future that embraces a few well-worn concepts from the past."



Home Work by Peter Jeswald
Ten Speed Press, 1995, **$14**

This no-nonsense manual resembles a third-grade math workbook complete with fill-in-the-blank pages. Though it is not the most attractive thing (if you are going to carry this around onsite, you definitely need to disguise it or be pegged as a rookie), it is a good place to start. What you get here is a detailed account of a construction project from hiring to financing as well as definitions of words you'll need to know, like "program," "shop drawings," and "scale model."

Home Renovation by Francis D.K. Ching & Dale E. Miller
John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1983, **$34**

With more than 300 pages full of diagrams, it is easy to be intimidated by a book like this. Put all fears aside, though, and be prepared to learn. From task lighting to accent lighting, from floor framing to ventilation, this book is chock-full of useful facts that will aid you in gaining the practical knowledge you'll need while refurbishing your humble (or not so humble) abode. You should feel completely comfortable working with architects after having read this book, as many architects still refer to the Ching and Miller books.

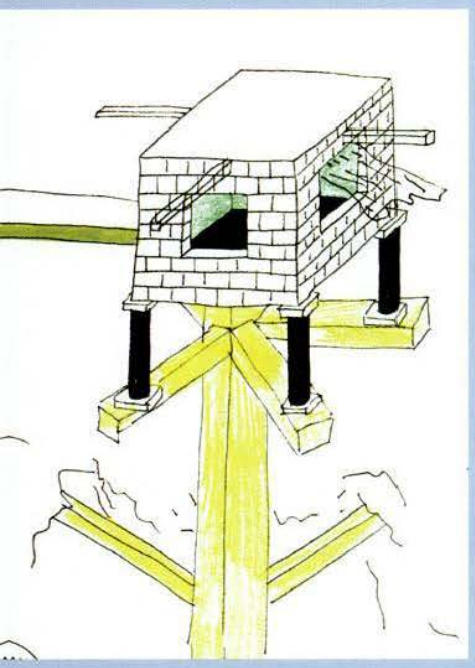
Interpenetration Any crisscrossing or merging of space or structure. "The interpenetration between the kitchen and the bathroom is quite satisfying."

Form The shape of everything else, often derisive. "Of course, there's so much more to the triangular bidet than just form."

Inform To acknowledge an inspiration or effect. "That carbon-fiber shower curtain informs the whole space."

Scale The relative size of a building, a part of a building, or a space within a building. "In the elevation you can clearly see that the Dornbracht faucets are not over-scaled." ▶

PLANS AND POSSIBILITIES:
ARCHITECTS ON CLIENTS



Ettore Sottsass, *Untitled,* watercolor on paper, 1989

Ettore Sottsass . . .

has worked in and around the field of design for over six decades. Based in Milan, Sottsass has helped to establish Italy as a leader in the world of modern architecture. Though he has completed projects of all sizes, from office chairs to the interior of Milan's Malpensa Airport, private homes remain of central importance to his work.

PHOTO BY GUIDO HARARI

What does it take for you, with all your experience, to design a private home?
No public institution has ever asked me to design their building. Bureaucrats, bankers, and politicians think my designs aren't 'serious' enough to represent how powerful and important they are. But to tell the truth, if I had to design any sort of institution, I would aim to disregard its 'power' and focus on the existence of people stuck inside that 'power.'

When I design a private home, I always talk with the people who will live there, using their words, expressions, ideas and hopes, all of which I usually come to understand—to know. At least, every day when I am alone, I contemplate their ideas and hopes.

What was the last house you designed?
I designed my most recent house with Johanna Grawunder, a young American architect. It's a house for my friend Ernest Mourmans, who runs design galleries in Holland and Belgium.

The house is huge, and has an unusual feature: An aviary surrounds it. You can watch exotic birds from the rooms; birds that Ernest tends to carefully. They are from equatorial forests and Siberian tundra, and are disappearing.

What do you love about designing homes?
I always start by designing the plan for a house. For me, the plan is always a representation of the paths that describe not only the body's voyage through a house, but the soul's voyage; social exchanges, gatherings, moments of solitude.

The colors and materials 'follow' that envisioned voyage: They explain it, they justify it, they make it possible.

Of course, I never begin with the idea that a house is a place of looking. I begin with the idea that a house is the place where one lives. Though one can see it, it is made to accompany life, not to be distanced from it.

Who is your ideal client?
My ideal client has something to tell me—not too precise—about his ideas on life, death, the passing of time, and solitude. And his sadness, sense of humor, need for company, etc.

I almost always become my client's friend, as far as anyone can become another's friend: We try to understand each other's every move. We try to understand and enjoy one another.

What is your ideal project?
I could be sly and say, 'My next project.' Which would seem calculated. And in reality, the ideal project does not exist for me.

Every project is part of the continuous project of existence.

Every project is a story of mistakes, of dismay, doubts, modifications, and inventions that occur first in the period of design, then during construction, then with the photos and the magazines and so on. Every project, when finished, throws me into a profound depression. I wait for it to pass, and start all over again. As people say, 'Hope is always the last to go.'

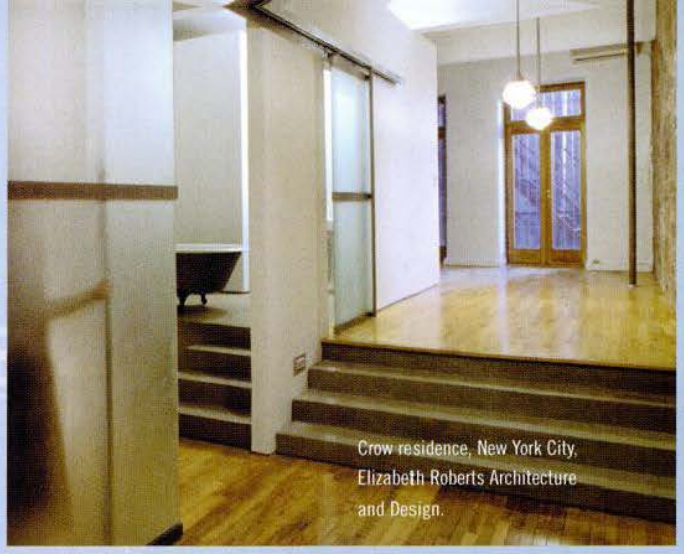
Massing The shape of a building's external bulk. "I'm not quite satisfied with the massing of the new master bath wing."

Horizon Any straight line. "The integrity of the horizon where the tub abuts the microwave must be preserved at all cost."

Strategy What your architect did, as described to his friends. "Our strategy was to insert a dynamic fluid-based waste-management technology that would act as an on-demand interface between the body of the occupant and the public infrastructure of the urban environment."

Elizabeth Roberts . . .

recently relocated from Manhattan to San Francisco to open her own firm, Elizabeth Roberts Architecture and Design. She has since completed a 6,500-square-foot office interior for a venture capital firm in San Francisco, and has just begun designing a private residence overlooking the ocean in Big Sur, California.



Crow residence, New York City, Elizabeth Roberts Architecture and Design.

What is the smallest architecture job you've accepted?
There are a variety of ways to measure the scale of a project. When I left a large corporate architecture office in New York City to open my own firm, I transitioned from working with a team of dozens on projects—like the renovation of Grand Central Station—to working alone on the renovation of a rent-controlled apartment in Manhattan.

The project was small by traditional measures, but the space was completely transformed by building large glass and drywall partitions that did not touch the existing walls or floors and by integrating freestanding cabinetry throughout the space so that it appeared to be built-in. It was a minute project with an enormous impact on how my clients live and interact with their home.

What is the smallest job you'd accept now?
The scale of a project is relative. Small by whose measure? The projects that I accept are never small in the client's eyes. At their best, small projects can be complete, effective, and satisfying; at their worst, they can be insignificant, unappreciated, and inconsequential. I don't accept projects based on scale or fee, but rather the impact that a given commission might have. I'm reminded of a common school project where students are asked to design a universal joint—a type of socket that will connect any type of material.

While the product and assignment are small, the potential impact is tremendous.

What is the largest architectural project you've completed?
Again, this depends on your choice of measure. The largest, in terms of significance to my career, was my first independent project where I learned how to balance my aesthetics and beliefs with those of my clients. I had the good fortune of getting my first commission three months out of undergraduate school, and I learned a lot about the reality of construction and my profession. Most importantly, I walked away with confidence that I was able to complete projects on my own. Additionally, it was extremely important that this project go well, as it was my mother's home—and if she wasn't completely satisfied, I never would have heard the end of it.

Who is your ideal client?
I feel that it's very important that a project be designed for and with the client, as it is not built for the architect but for the client. The architect moves on, while the client remains. Since I value this interaction so highly, my ideal client is one who knows themselves and what they like, while being open to change—one who exhibits a healthy balance of opinion, enthusiasm, and communication.

What are the first steps a client should take if they are thinking about hiring an architect?
It is important that a client be prepared to present themselves to an architect. We can be very persuasive, and it is important that clients assert themselves. I recommend that a client compile a file of things that they love, whether it's a color, a book, a work of art, or a word. All of these things will help an architect understand who the client is and translate that understanding into an environment appropriate to the client. Often, the best architect is the one who can delve into that collage and recognize the client's personality.

What is your dream project?
I would love to win a commission with the single goal of evoking a specific emotion or state of mind. As far as work-process is concerned, I would love to create a space with a team of friends who are experts from various and disparate fields that fascinate me: an industrial designer with a great knowledge of plastics and moldable materials, a steel fabricator with beautiful details, a poet, a sculptor, a structural engineer. An interdisciplinary collaboration—I would love to place myself at the nexus of all of these creative energies.

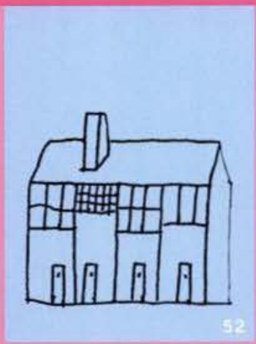
PHOTOS BY LAURA COPENHAVER (ROBERTS); E. IMBODEN

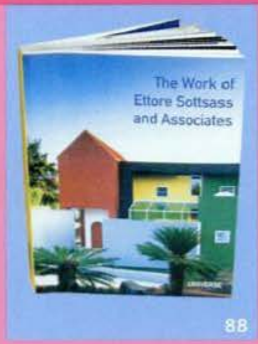
Program What happens in a space, specific or general. "We need to determine the program for your new sauna," or "The program of a linen closet is quite complex."

The Future Plausible Corrective Tense An archispeak staple. "I think your bathroom could actually begin to be completed very soon."

Charrette An all-nighter or a series thereof. Derived from the French for "cart", after the method for collecting work from students at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Harried students, the story goes, would step right in and keep working. "Sorry I haven't returned your phone calls, I've been on charrette for a very important project."—P.N.

THE MAGENTA PAGE





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Juan Lezcano, Architect
Miami, Tel: 310-858-8180

Atelier van Lieshout
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NL-3029 BT Rotterdam
Email: Lieshout@wirehub.nl

David Ling Architects
425 W. 15th St., 2R
New York, NY 10011
Tel: 212-741-5128

Mathias Rousset, 4x5 Design
3230 16th St.
San Francisco, CA 94103
Tel: 415-552-4947
Email: fourbyfivedesign@netscape.net

Tom Sachs is represented by the Mary Boone Gallery
745 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 10151
Tel: 212-752-2929

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Email: silvestrin@aol.com

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Public
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4441 Park Blvd.
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PHOTOS BY CHRISTINA ELINGSTON (PETE ANDERSON, BOOK, SAWZALL)

A view from the rear: the little green La Jolla cottage is subsumed by and preserved within an airy new masonry, glass, and steel shed.

PHOTO BY DAVID HEWITT & ANNE GARRISON

HISTORIC COTTAGE PRESERVED—ROMANCE SAVED

What could be better? We fall head over heels for someone. Or, rather, something: a house on a side street in the part of La Jolla that abuts the University of California. Then we discover that this house is deep and soulful in ways that we hadn't suspected.

Designed and built by James Brown and James Gates of Public, a San Diego-based architecture firm with a fondness for incorporating found components into new buildings, the Su-Mei Yu residence is the ultimate salvage job. Yu's original house, a 1950s prefab cottage, is preserved within the walls of a brand new masonry shed like a pioneer cabin in a historical museum.

"The existing house was this outrageously painted house, looking really bold on the block. We didn't want to lose that," explains Brown, who also mentions that the new masonry walls support the roof so easily that it can be tilted upward as if it's about to fly. The architect tells only half the story.

"I loved my old house," avows Yu, a caterer, cookbook author, and proprietor of a Thai takeout. She explains that the original house, which she's lived in almost 20 years, is a leftover from a period when newly hired university professors, many of them Jewish, found themselves shut out by local landlords. The university responded by building a cluster of houses. Yu's was one of them, and she regards it as a sort of marker, a reminder of the effects of racism. The problem was that it wasn't big enough for both her and her sweetheart, the sculptor Italo Scanga. "He has a different sensibility and lifestyle," Yu explains. "He likes a lot of things. He loves objects and music." Yu, on the other hand, prefers uncluttered rooms and quiet. But she also prefers life with Scanga. "I had to build him a space," she says.

Immediately inside the front door of the new house is a gravel-filled moat that separates the exterior wall from the green siding of the old house. The floor plan of the little cottage is just as it was, although its roof, windows, and doors have been replaced. Upstairs is Scanga's 900 square-foot studio.

"My kitchen is intact. My bedroom is intact, and Italo, he's ecstatic," says Yu. He can go upstairs and listen to his music, make art, and return to the old house for dinner and bed. Public has used modern architecture to preserve a memory of the past and the domestic tranquility of two complicated adults.

—KARRIE JACOBS

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