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APRIL 2001

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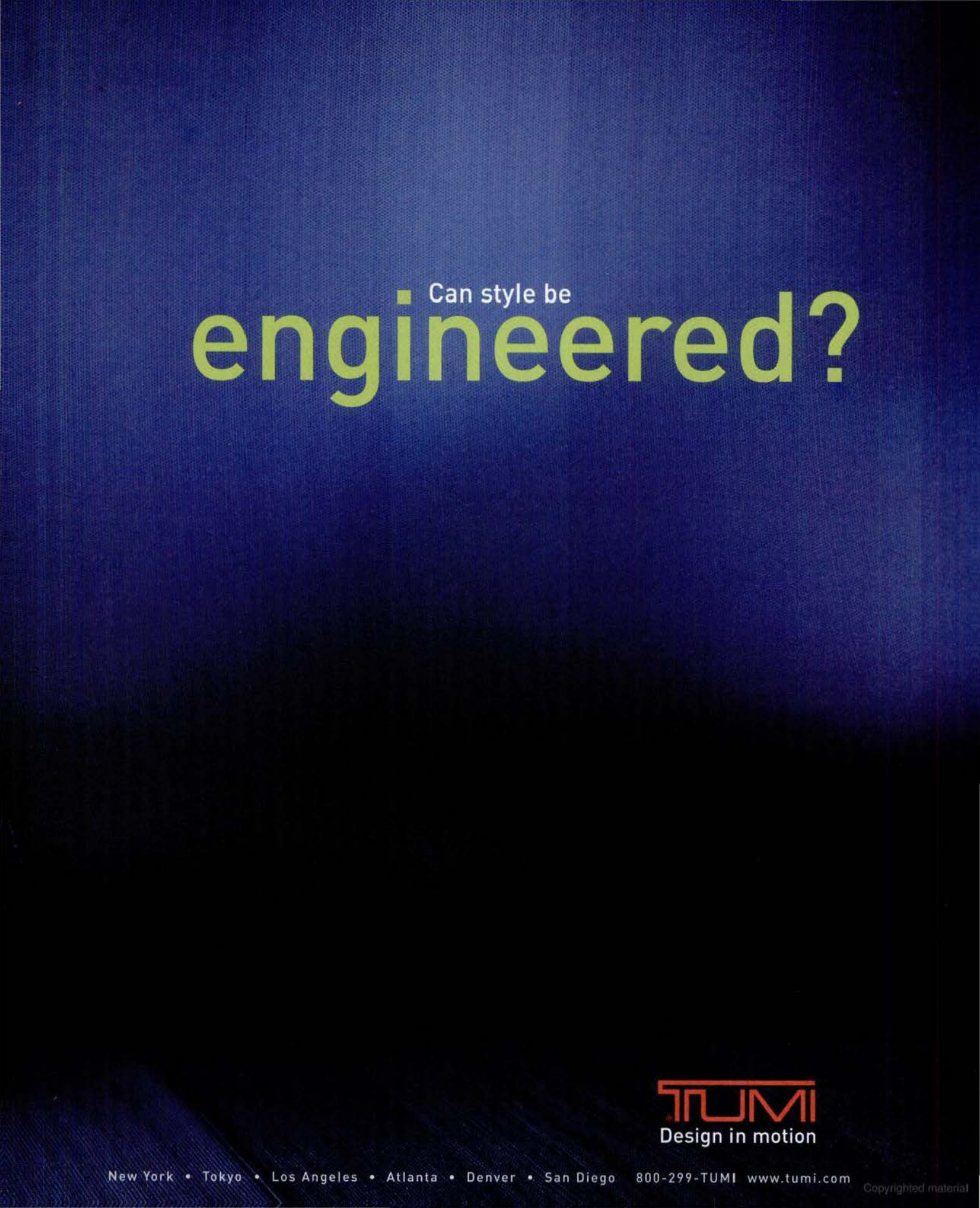

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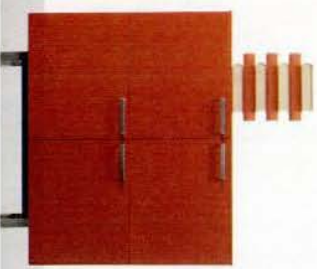

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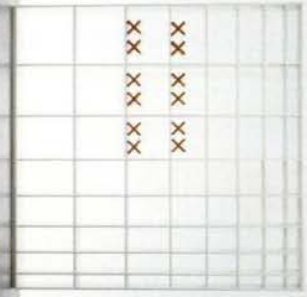
GAMMA - Jasper Morrison

LOOP - Barber Osgerby

SUZUKA'S TABLE - Christophe Pillet

BOOKSHELF - Shiro Kuramata



THREE SOFA DE LUXE- Jasper Morrison

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CONTENTS

APRIL 2001

"The first corporation to market a high-quality, high-tech housing unit . . . will make mobile homes and tradition-based designs irrelevant."

—JAY BALDWIN, PAGE 36

COVER

Beyond the terraced rows of tires (Firestone take note!), sits Melissa Kennedy's Fox Island, Washington, home. This design demonstrates the potential of prefabricated construction. Photo by Karen Moskowitz

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Photos by Frank Schott (Woodland), Karen Moskowitz (Fox Island)

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THE BOMBAY SAPPHIRE MARTINI. AS REVEALED BY DAN DAILEY, ARTIST.

POUR SOMETHING PRICELESS.

Even terriers like cow-trough tubs!

Hey, did I sense a little skepticism when describing the Emery McClures' steel cow-trough tub (dwell, December 2000)? We can tell you they are comfortable. We bathe in ours everyday. Great tub, lousy shower, unless one likes shower curtain wedgies.

Thanks for a fun mag!

KIT, DEBRA, AND LACEY (YORKIE) JOHNSON
Johnson + Johnson Architecture and Interiors
New Braunfels, Texas

dwell's presentation of modern design is both heartening and inviting. Despite being a failed art student, I believe that I have a keen eye for design. The clean, simple lines of modernist architecture have always drawn me. But as a pauper and student, still in school at 29, I defensively have regarded architecture as the milieu of those with more money than taste. Your magazine's perspective allows me to drop my childish cynicism. I will keep my eyes peeled for canned fruit secreted away in dwell kitchens. Fruit cocktail for the people.

KIRK SAUNDERS
Coeur d'Alene , Idaho

Your magazine stood out from the usual suspects here at the local Winn-Dixie mag rack this a.m. Being born at the tail end of the mid-century movement, I have a fondness for what modern was. Your admission of appropriation of the *Life* magazine composition for the "Put It Away" feature (dwell, December 2000) brought back memories of piles of that magazine as well as issues of *Look* in my parents' living room. I will be subscribing. Thanks!

JOE MACHOS
Jacksonville, Florida

Modern living is about life in the present, whatever conditions may have been dealt. It is not the cold, abstract, high-minded stereotype most of the population retains about architecture, design and [the] "Modern." There is broad space for interpretation and application.

Keep it simple. Keep it direct. Keep it open. Don't dumb it down. Everyone will benefit.

SCOTT DEMEL
New York, New York

It is very refreshing to read a magazine that is honest in its approach to modernism. While some other magazines treat the modern as nothing more than adding an abstract painting to a room, your magazine studies its philosophies and implementations . . . it's about time.

Architecture and design, I believe, have a challenging future. Everyday the world is becoming more crowded and some cities are almost reaching their limits. It will be interesting to see how designers tackle the lack of space and the challenge of creating innovative spaces that will be affordable to everyone.

JOSE E. CALZADO
Miami, Florida

I have followed the magazine with great interest and a burning question: Why is it that among such creative, bright architects, ideologues, and builders there is no one I am aware of who is spearheading the design and building of mass-produced modern middle- and low-income housing? Donald Wexler, Jerry Waters, Eichler, the "16 Houses Exhibition," et al. all built models of modestly priced dwellings and have stated it's (theoretically?) possible to mass produce these types of houses, yet no one is really doing it. What do you believe is the reason for this?

I live in Holland, Michigan. Here, as anywhere, we need this kind of housing. We want options. We want dignity of design and dwelling. We have vocations we knew weren't financially lucrative, but chose them anyway, because they were both what we needed to do and what the world needed doing. Some of us were born poor and live paycheck to pay- ▸

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check. We want to live in neighborhoods in town, not flee from them. We want more than bungalows. We want high design for ordinary people.

JENNIFER D. TENDERO
Holland, Michigan

I find it both telling and unfortunate that I must write this letter to request a correction to be printed in dwell. In architectural publications it is not common practice to print the proprietary names of products used in the represented building unless the architect is a paid endorser of the product, otherwise legal implications could arise. Therefore, it should be printed that I do not endorse Dornbracht or Resolute products [dwell, February 2001]. Such practice should be avoided in the future.

Since we are on the topic of corrections, it should also be noted that Molalla is spelled M-o-l-a-l-l-a and not, as you printed, M-o-l-l-a-l-a.

JERRY L. WATERS
Molalla, Oregon

Editors' Note: At dwell, we try to provide as much product detail as we can in the captions that accompany photos of homes. Our readers find this information valuable. Commercial endorsement is neither intended nor implied. We are, however, sorry about misplacing the "l" in Molalla.

My housemate and I are both graduate students in architecture at the University of Michigan. We have come up with a new solution to the storage problem (dwell, December 2000): Build it yourself. We spent a weekend buying materials and constructing the thing. The shelves are MDF, supports 2" x 2" pine, there is cable cross bracing, and the tube that runs through (standard flexible ducting) houses a light in both ends (see above) was a little more in our price range, and we got exactly what we wanted!

STEVE KUSHNER
Ann Arbor, Michigan

As a student of landscape architecture I can't help but yearn to see some acknowledgment of the profession's contributions to modernism as both a historical movement and a state of mind or way of life. Take, for example, Thomas Church's post-WWII garden for the Donnell residence in Sonoma, with its iconic biomorphic aqua-blue pool, which was seminal in defining not only a modernist California landscape but also the modern California lifestyle—casual, elegant, seamlessly flowing from indoors to outdoors and vice versa. Like these masters of the past, contemporary landscape architects, working alone or in collaboration with architects, are taking the "nice" tenets of modernism to address issues of today.

JAMES DINH
Berkeley, California

Editors' Note: Please see our June 2001 issue.

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Where's the Siding?

Last December we printed a story about Ruth and Kevin Wyatt's new home in Louisville, Kentucky. In it, Ruth joked about the cladding of the house, saying that she didn't have the heart to tell the neighbors about the corrugated metal. Just as dwell was hitting the newsstands, some of the Wyatts' neighbors were securing legal representation to prevent the family from completing their dream home. One neighbor complained that the Polygal siding would "force blinding light into her living room"; another called the metal "cheap material usually used for barns and dog houses." As Kevin explained, "Neighbors thought we were trying to pull something over on them, which was just not our intent." Eager to see their house built and to coexist peacefully with the neighbors, the Wyatts agreed to a few compromises but as we went to press, we learned that the neighbors had filed a suit against them. We strongly support the Wyatts' cause and sincerely hope that the neighbors will come around, too.

Meet the Andersons

Architects Peter and Mark Anderson, who designed and built the house on our cover, will be special guests on our Web discussion board from March 12–18. Log on to www.dwellmag.com to ask the Anderson brothers about panelized construction, prefabricated housing, and their book, *Architecture and Construction.*

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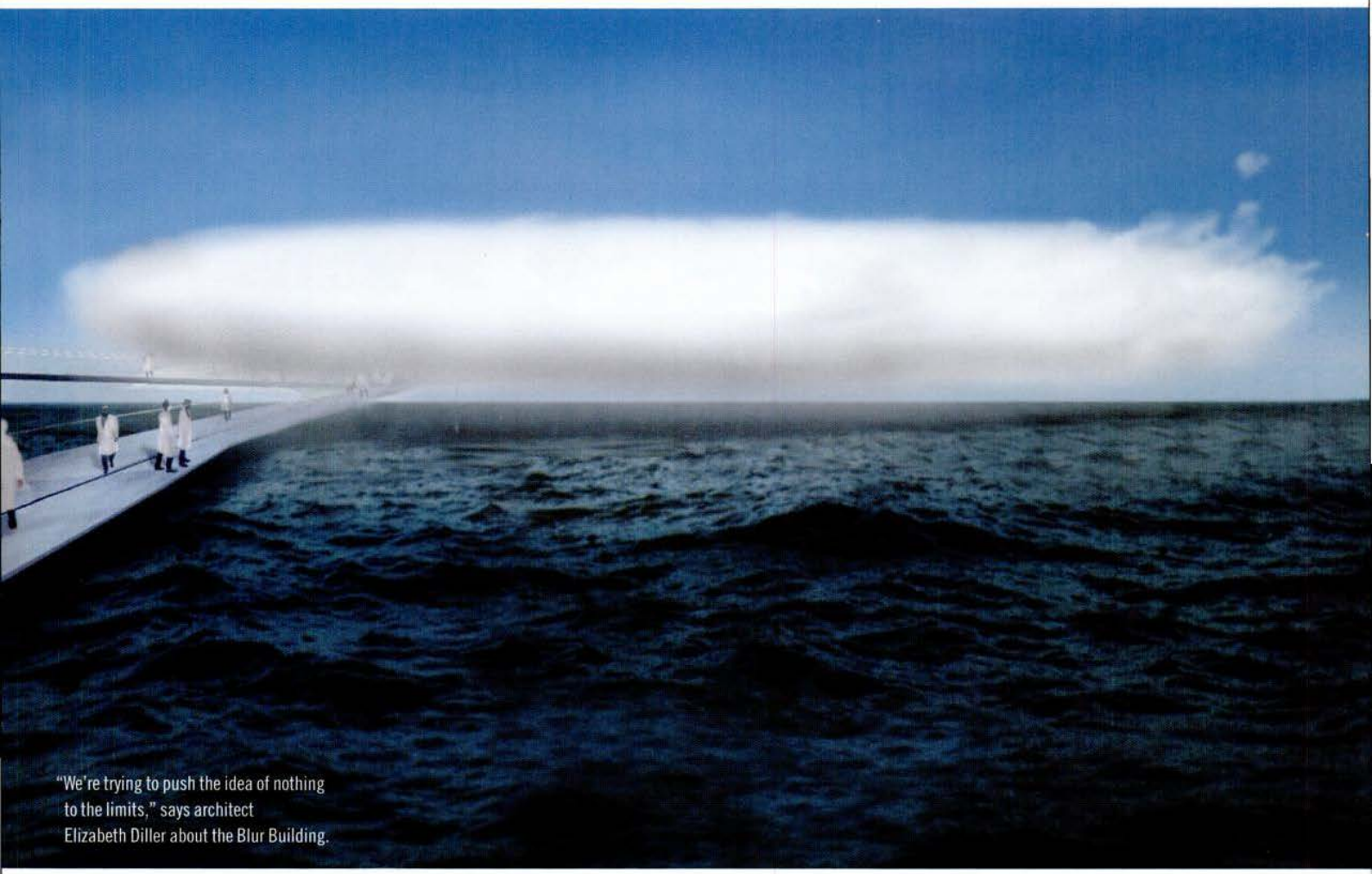


"We're trying to push the idea of nothing to the limits," says architect Elizabeth Diller about the Blur Building.

THE SOFTER MACHINE

"If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house, and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the 'House-Machine,' the mass production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful."

Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture: Guiding Principles*, 1920

Granted, this is the prefab issue of dwell, dedicated to the notion of the mass-produced house. But, while we're genuinely fond of the homes we present in these pages, we're uncomfortable attesting to their moral beauty or thinking of them as "House-Machines."

Even though dwell's mission is to publish houses that are inspired by modernism (arguably most of what we print is post-post-modern . . . don't ask), it's difficult for us to warm up to Le Corbusier's fervor and his utter certainty about what is and is not a dead concept. After all, if we learned anything in the 20th century, it's that most concepts refuse to die. The only way we can truly grasp Corbu's religious intensity is to imagine him in Silicon Valley circa 1994.

In November, I attended the "Doors of Perception" conference, a three-day symposium in Amsterdam about the culture and meaning of technology. On my last visit to this particular event six years ago, most of the speakers were anticipating a mass exodus to cyberspace. Besotted by new technologies, they were convinced that we were at revolution's doorstep. Corbu would have fit right in.

The theme of that year's conference was "Home." What I remember most was John Perry Barlow, the Grateful Dead lyricist who was, at the time, the loudest spokesman for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, holding his PowerBook aloft, waving it at the audience and saying, as if he could literally crawl inside his computer, "This is my home." Talk about the House-Machine.

Mass-produced housing, like cyberspace, is a technology-fueled dream. Utopian thinkers ►

long to manufacture the perfect house, one that rolls off the assembly line and simply falls into place. Wonderful prefabricated houses were designed by men—including Frank Lloyd Wright and R. Buckminster Fuller—smitten with the potential of technology, briefly manufactured, and abandoned when the financial backing dried up.

I returned to the "Doors" conference in November because I wanted to know what people were thinking about the electronic bubble that had been pumped up in the intervening years, and that now seemed to be on the brink of catastrophic deflation. The overwhelming message this time was: Forget virtual reality. Computers and microprocessors are moving out of their boxes and into what Barlow derisively referred to half a decade ago as "meat space." The new buzzword is not "virtual," but "ubiquitous." This point of view was perhaps best represented by Chris Pacione, a co-founder of Body Media, a company that helps people electronically map their bodily functions. "You wouldn't know it," Pacione said, pulling up his sleeve to reveal a thick, black armband, "but I'm wearing a computer on my body."

A more intriguing progenitor of the new ubiquity was New York–based architect Elizabeth Diller, who presented the Blur Building that she and her partner, Ricardo Scofidio, designed. Blur appears to hover above the surface of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland, and, through an incredibly sophisticated use of plumbing, is engulfed by a misty cloud. Visitors will be asked a few searching questions, assigned a smart raincoat—a "braincoat"—and sent out on a narrow walkway to the fog-shrouded pavilion. Inside, visitors will drift about in the fog. Occasionally someone's raincoat will light up—"blush" is the word Diller uses—when a sensor detects a compatible (based on the questions) soul nearby. It all sounds like a scene from an Ingmar Bergman movie.

What I took away from my three days of technospeak was the idea that the rhetoric is softening. People who had been deep in some virtual hidey-hole for years had been forced into the daylight by the end of the boom. The technological certainties are suddenly less certain. Even Diller and Scofidio, who have had a career-long fascination with the interplay of architecture and technology, are building with a substance that is soft, and very nearly natural.

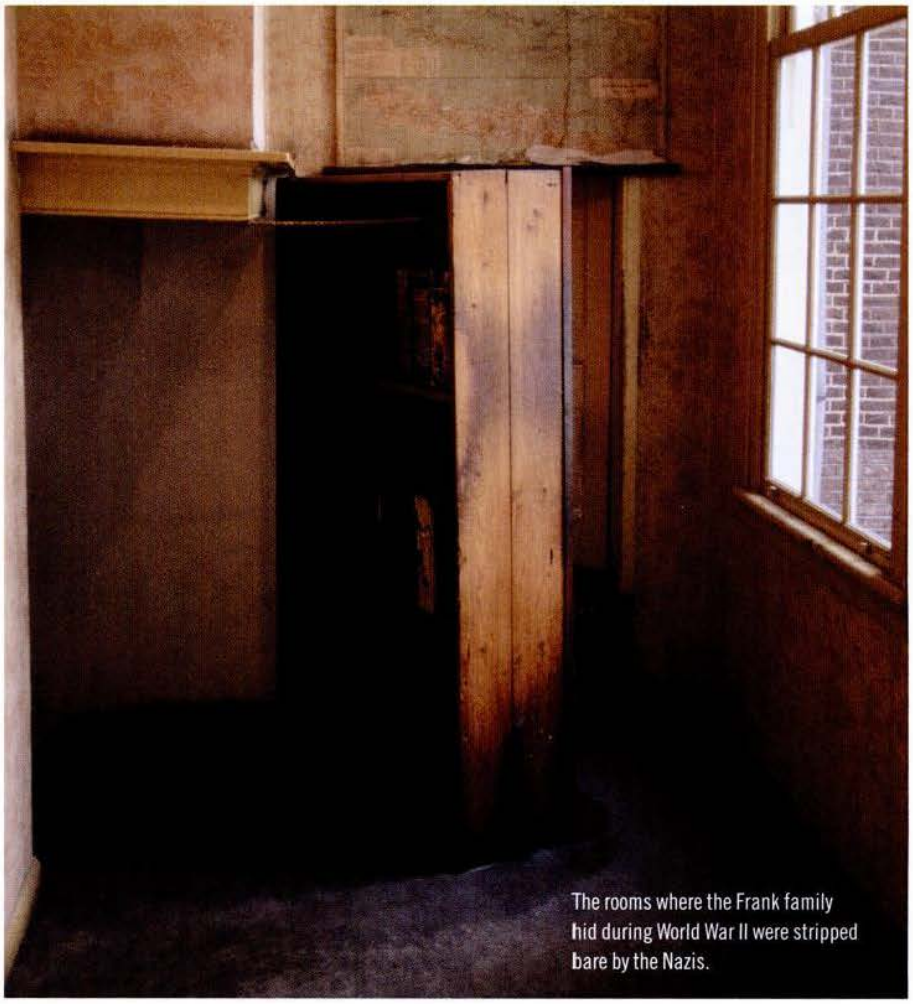
Whenever I go to a conference like "Doors of Perception," or even a plain old architectural gathering, I wind up searching for an antidote, something to remind me that the issues that seem important inside the hermetically sealed world of a symposium are not so relevant when you step outside.

This time around, I visited the Anne Frank House. I went on a special evening when every museum in Amsterdam was open until 1 A.M. and you could travel by canal boat to parties and concerts at everything from the Rijksmuseum to the Bible Museum. When I arrived, it was nearly midnight. The Anne Frank House was open, and blessedly devoid of other tourists.

The Nazis, when they raided the Franks' hiding place on the upper floors of the canal house, cleared out the human occupants and their furniture. Today the upstairs rooms remain unchanged: more or less empty, and, at night, barely lit. I was surprised at how moving these rooms could be. The Anne Frank House is, in its quiet, low-tech way, as eerie and disorienting as Diller and Scofidio's Blur Building is meant to be.

I left Amsterdam believing we are on the brink of a saner, more measured post-cyber moment. I'd like to think that dwell's contribution to this transformation is to offer examples of an architecture—the panelized houses by the Seattle firm of Anderson Anderson (page 44) or the modular social housing by the London-based architects Cartwright Pickard (page 54)—that divorces prefab or mass-produced housing from the dehumanizing vision of the House-Machine. At dwell, we think the machine and the house should live together without being one and the same.

—KARRIE JACOBS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
karrie@dwellmag.com



The rooms where the Frank family hid during World War II were stripped bare by the Nazis.

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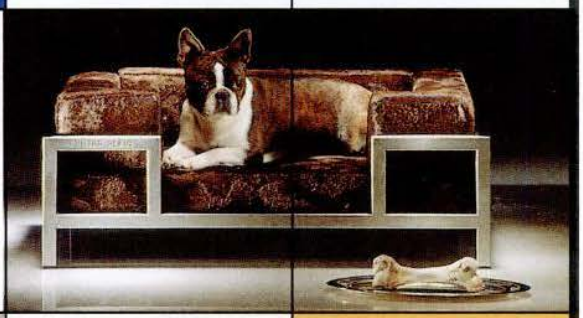

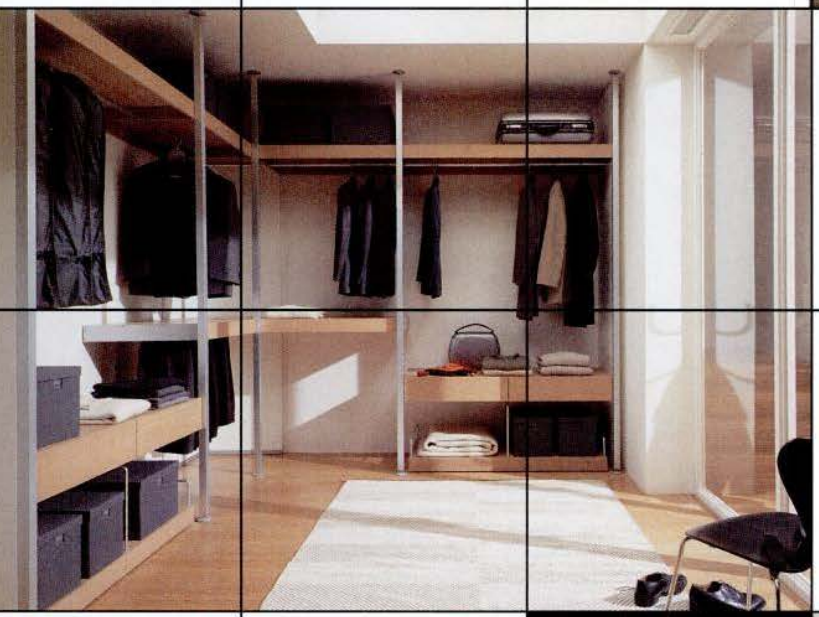

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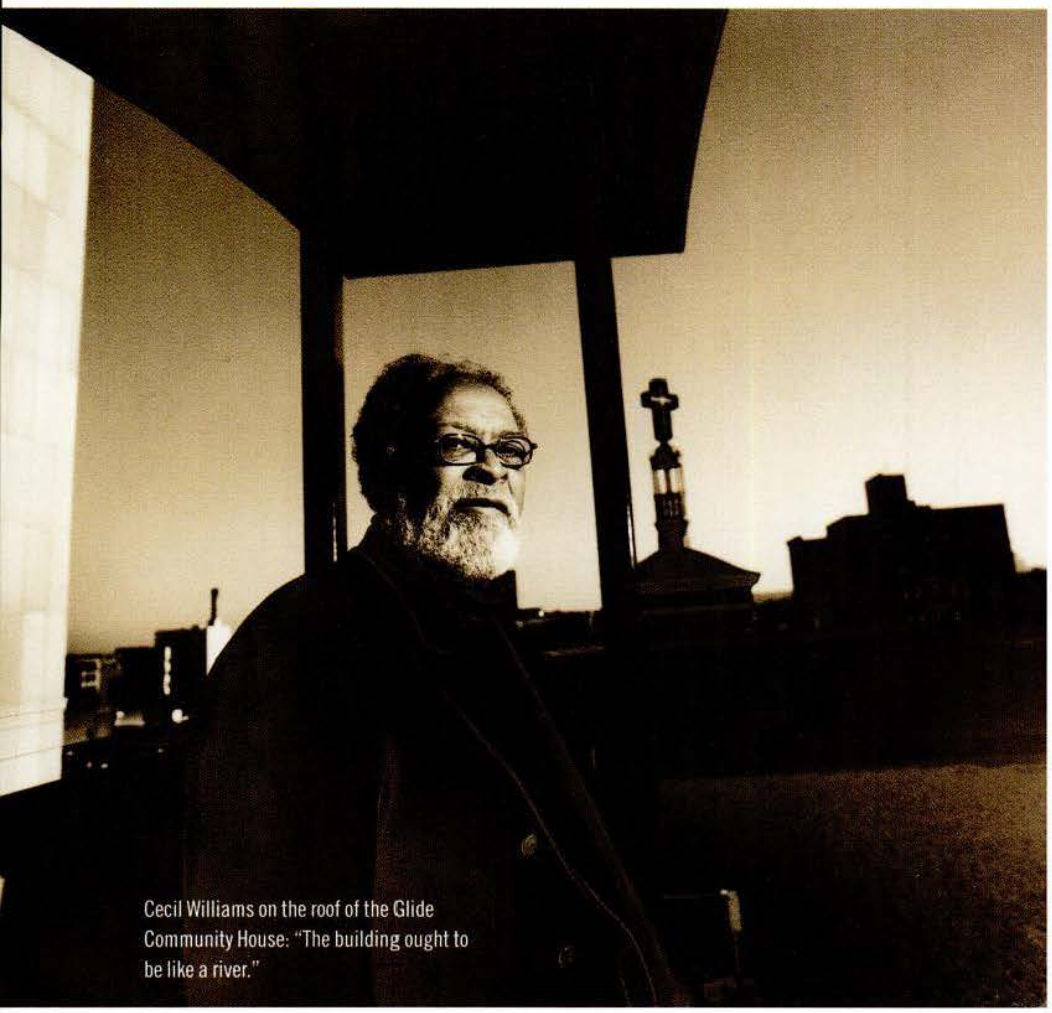
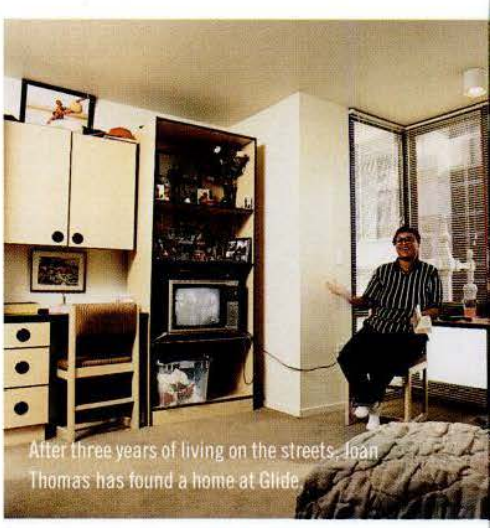


Cecil Williams on the roof of the Glide Community House: "The building ought to be like a river."



After three years of living on the streets, Joan Thomas has found a home at Glide.

The residential tower is in the heart of the Tenderloin, historically one of San Francisco's toughest neighborhoods.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTINE ALICINO

GIVING THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

In 1963, Reverend Cecil Williams came to Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco from Kansas City, Missouri. He immediately shook things up at what was then a small, relatively conservative church. He brought his unorthodox style of preaching, stepping down from the altar and telling the parish, "We're gonna get close, you're gonna see me all the time, you're not gonna rest." Music was central to his services; at his first Christmas service, John Handy's jazz group played. Since then, Glide has become a central part of San Francisco civic life, and serves the community through over 50 in-house programs.

Five years ago, Williams brought Glide's attention back to housing—one of the original goals set forth by founder Lizzie Glide. With help from many San Francisco institutions and the design services of Michael Willis Architects, the nine-story, 52-unit Cecil Williams Glide Community House was completed in 1999. Standing next to Glide Church, it is filled with permanent residents, both families and single occupants, from the at-risk population in the Tenderloin.

"As we began to develop this building, we said to people, 'Many of you have been living in shelters. Many of you have been sleeping in alleyways. Now what do you want in a residence?' And they said, 'We want something beautiful. Something to help us feel like we're not just having any old thing thrown at us. We've had any old thing thrown at us all of our lives. Most people don't ask us what we want. They tell us what we're gonna get.'

"So now, from the outside and the inside, this place looks so good that folks who are looking for a hotel drop by. We have to tell them, 'No, no, no, this is a residence for the homeless.'

"When it comes to building and housing, everything we do must have diversity in it. I don't want anything done if it is going to be all white; I can't accept that. And there's no way in the world that the people in this city would accept me. Here I am, preaching all the time about diversity and different people, race, class, etc., participating, and then we don't have it—I can't do that.

"Buildings can have soul and actually be the people who make them. If a diverse group contributes, the building will project that. Glide has the commitment of the hands of people who believed in what we were doing. So it worked. This building is a success."

—ANDREW WAGNER

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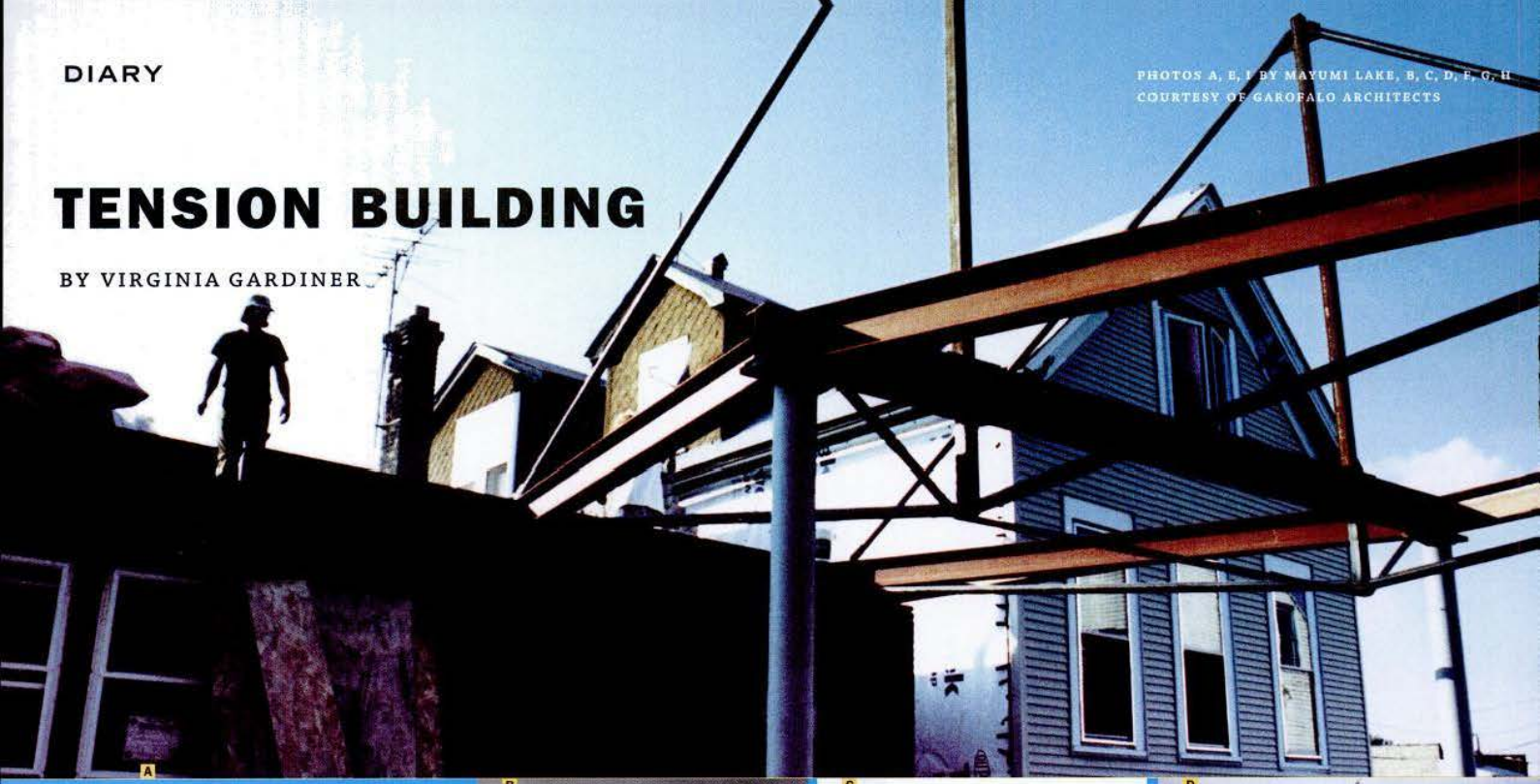

A

Architect Doug Garofalo's addition for Mike Goszczycki's Chicago house is half-tension, half-cantilever. Mastlike fire-troll columns support steel-truss triangles. A The rear triangles tie into the building like stays into a hull. In front, Mike's bedroom suspends like a boom. B Randy Kober is the project architect (see dwell, December 2000).

B

C

D

Bricks and Steel / Mid-July

Mike: We've been doing a lot of demolition. We've got the whole garage put back together now. I had the masons here for a good seven days—lots of brickwork.

Randy: Mike started tearing off the old roof, since we're planning to replace it. And as he started the demolition, he saw what bad condition the parapet was in. The parapet's the part of a brick wall that sticks up over the roof around the sides—it makes the whole roof work as a gutter.

The masonry is going to set us back. It's the right thing to do because the brickwork is in really bad shape. We have a good company of masons—one is a guy who plays soccer with Mike.

Mike: We're bringing in the two fire-troll columns—they're about seven inches in diameter, 800 pounds each. They're the support system for the whole addition. They're huge, and we'll put an I-beam across. Once that's set up, we can start assembling the steel frame—bolting and welding. It's going to be "Steel Erection Day."

The steel guy wants to use a crane for the fire trolls. But this big tree's in the way.

The Tree / Late July

Randy: We were going to trim back the tree, so we started inspecting it. It's split at the base. There are carpenter ants and sawdust all over the place.

Mike: My whole tree has to come down. It's a mulberry tree—a "weed tree," because it starts out as a weed, then grows into a bush, and then a tree. Don't get me wrong, I love that tree. But it's not in good shape. It's leaning toward my neighbors' houses, and a bunch of cars are parked directly below.

Randy: It really is a beautiful tree. It fills the whole yard. Probably a long time ago, somebody planted it as a mulberry bush, and through the course of changing owners it never got trimmed and was allowed to turn into a huge tree. But about two months ago, the same kind of tree snapped off in a park on the south side of town and killed this 85-year-old man. It was a weird story. A family met once a year under a certain mulberry tree and this year, it snapped. This old man pushed an old lady out of the way, and then the old man got squashed.

So these trees don't have such a good reputation. Insurance won't cover it if the tree snaps. They'll consider it negligence.

The Steel Structure / Mid-August

Mike: Tree's gone. They shredded all the branches and hauled the big logs away. A guy came and stumped out the stump on Saturday. C I have to get another Dumpster going.

Randy: It's really different at the site now. There used to be a huge canopy over everything, but now it's wide open.

Mike: So we got up the fire trolls and started putting together the steel frame that hangs out front. D I have a hard time believing it's all going to stand up. Some beams came on a truck the other day and I had to unload them. I said, "Where will these go?" And the steel guy said, "Out front," and I said, "WHAT?!?" They have to hang out in front, without any support underneath. But Doug has this truss-bridge system that should work—so long as it's tied into the back of the building well enough so we don't have to worry about heavy winds.

Doug: We're having two consulting engineers—Joe Burns and Laurice Eppers from Thornton-Tomasetti Engineers—come on-site. We're working out the details of how the hanging structure ties into the existing bricks, because there's issues of uplift—meaning when a strong wind hits the new portion, the steel beams will create force back in the brick walls where they're rooted.

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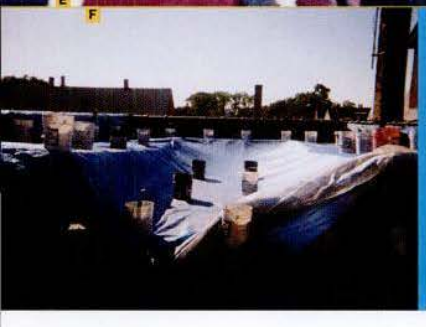

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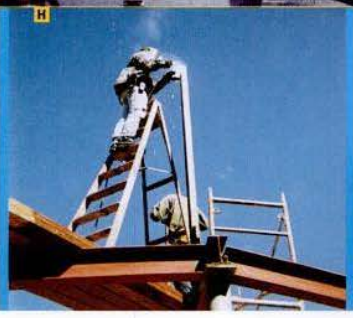

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Roughing It / Late August

Mike: My living space is a mess. E I have dust everywhere—the brick guys kicked up a lot. But I knew what I was getting into, and I don't have any kids or wife here to worry about, so I'm just roughing it out.

Randy: I can relate to how Mike is living now. I've lived like that, too, on construction sites where you have to sweep out your bed before you sleep in it. You only hope for a bedroom that won't crumble on you.

Mike: We took off that little attic, and I had been living right below it, on the second floor. When the attic was gone, there were still floorboards, but with so many gaps that all this shit would fall through. Now I've just got it tarped out for rain.

Randy: Mike has two huge tarps up on the roof. F They're serving as a huge gutter and anytime it rains the water collects on the third floor. But he has it set up so the water then goes down the back stairway, like a waterfall. It's a concrete structure, so it's OK. It's pretty funny, but Mike can put up with it. G

Mike: I'm moving from the second floor down to the first—it's been raining like hell and water's coming in up there.

The Frame / Late September

Mike: The steel frame looks like a 25-foot-long bridge from the back of the building sticking out the front into mid-air. From the side, you see two triangles holding up the front end and the back end, and then the fire trolls at the bottom. All the parts work against each other, pulling and pushing to support the frame. We've got a little American flag there, stuck on the end of it. Randy topped that off the other day.

Randy: It's a heroic structure. Mike has tenants in the building next door, and they've been more or less ignoring what's happening when they go past. I happened to be up on the roof when they stepped out the door, the first day we were affixing the cantilevered beams. H They just kind of glanced up nonchalantly like they always do, and then actually stopped and stared for a while.

Doug: The frame is incredible—hanging there like a bridge. We walked on it earlier this week. It's not all the way braced yet, so it wiggles a little. The rest of the structure—the wood and metal framing—will hang off the steel in mid-air, like its skin.

Winter / Early October

Doug: The garage is now a very solid structure—completely new roof—it'll be able to handle a lot more weight than it could have before. I think Mike's happy about that.

Randy: Now we have the majority of the steel up I—enough so we can start the wood-framing. We need to get the roof enclosed again before winter gets here—winter can start anytime at the beginning of November, but we're shooting for the extension to be enclosed by Thanksgiving now. It went from the Fourth of July to Labor Day to the solstice to Halloween, and now we're looking at Thanksgiving.

Doug: We're trying to concentrate (believe it or not) on getting some of the areas over Mike's existing building covered before winter sets in. Because that frame hangs out there in mid-air and there's really only the garage underneath, we could cover it gradually. It wouldn't be the best thing in the world—we'd get really cold working out there—but it can be done.

Mike: I moved all my furniture into the basement of the frame building next door. Now I'm sleeping on the first floor, which is watertight. And I have heat down there. So that end of it is all taken care of. It snowed on Saturday.

For updates, check www.dwellmag.com.

Trading cafes for cactuses: Kate Vigneron, with dogs Mackie and Belle, in the hills above her adobe ranch house in Balmorhea.

PHOTO BY BRYAN BURKHART

PARIS. TEXAS.

Not long ago when Kate Vigneron was living in Le Vésinet, just outside of Paris, she was what the French refer to as *une femme d'un certain âge*. Today, on her ranch in west Texas, Kate's a cowgirl. "I like the ruggedness of Texas," she explains. "You have to be well physically to live out here. It's no stroll down the esplanade along Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans."

Louisiana-born Vigneron fell in love with Texas on a 1991 visit to her brother's ranch just east of El Paso. Several months later, she purchased Madera Hills Ranch, a 3,600-acre property in Balmorhea, Texas. From her 19th-century apartment where she lived with her French husband and two daughters, the pull of Balmorhea grew stronger. She made return trips to Texas and began reading up on sustainability. When Vigneron was ready to build on her ranch, she hoped to set an example by building a house that was small, inexpensive, and integrated into the environment.

She hired Mark Wellen, of Rhotenberry Wellen Architects in Midland, Texas, who designed a 1,485-square-foot adobe house that updates the vernacular of the Texas ranch house. Passive solar heat, wood stoves, and propane heaters keep the home warm in the winter, and Wellen's simple design maximizes air circulation, keeping the house cool in the summer. Photovoltaics provide electricity and a windmill pumps the water to the house, barn, and livestock.

In 1999, when Vigneron's husband passed away, she decided she'd had enough of city life and left France the next year to take up permanent residence in Balmorhea. A therapist trained in the Alexander technique, she hopes to develop a practice on the ranch. She is also focusing her energies on the local community. Balmorhea battles persistent drought and the effects of a rapidly disappearing cattle industry, but Vigneron, its newest resident and most indefatigable booster, is on the case. She has formed a chamber of commerce, initiated a trades day in town ("cowboys always have an extra horse to sell"), and has plans for a store, restaurant, and an organic vegetable garden. Her vision is practical, her optimism boundless. "I love the harshness of it here. There are times when it is very sad, when there is no rain and things are drying up and dying. But then when the rain does come, there is incredible life instilled in something apparently dead."

—ALLISON ARIEFF

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SLEEP ON IT

Decades ago, when we found the homes of grade school friends infinitely more entertaining than our own, we developed a fascination with the Castro Convertible. The Castro had a steel mechanism that looked more like it belonged in a stamping mill than a living room, and the mattress felt as if it were stuffed with clamshells. The crunchy mattress was not, in those days, a problem, because sleep was the least important component of sleepovers.

We believed times had changed. But then, a year or two ago, our sweetheart, after months of deliberation, bought a $4,000 sofa-bed from a reputable New York dealer. It was a rectilinear hunk of brown Ultrasuede with a mechanism lighter than, but conceptually indistinguishable from, the one in the old Castros. It was still the sort of thing where, as furniture designer James Irvine nicely puts it, "You still see the sofa and the bed is sticking out like a big tongue."

The comfy showroom model, as it turned out, had a much better mattress than the one that was finally delivered. The bed, when occupied by two people, formed itself into a V. While our sweetheart snoozed happily at the point of the V, we were left to roll up and down the slopes. Sleepless, our faith in progress turned to despair.

Now, however, we are convinced that the old paradigm—mattress jelly-rolled inside torture device—is finally on its way out, replaced by more economical (in weight, if not in dollars and cents) sofas where one sleeps and sits on slices of upholstery that can be reconfigured like puzzle pieces. We would like to take a moment to stick our big tongue out at sofa-beds past. We urge you to do the same.

A NOTE ON OUR EXPERT

Who do you get to evaluate sofa-beds? A sleep researcher? A TV junkie? We opted for a member of one of the napping professions—an author. New York writer Thomas Beller has two qualifications: First, he wrote *The Sleep-Over Artist* (Norton, 2000), not a novel exactly, but a collection of closely linked short stories about a guy who likes other people's houses better than his own. Second, Beller is tall (6-foot-5), which makes him especially sensitive to the problem of undersized sofa-beds.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS BUCK

Nomade Express

by Ligne Roset

Designer: Didier Gomez

Price $2,200

This very straightforward piece by Parisian designer Didier Gomez, who is known for his furniture and his hotel interiors, is the most honest sofa-bed we've seen. With striped upholstery that resembles mattress ticking, this piece of furniture unashamedly demonstrates its dual nature.

Expert Opinion: "It did actually look like a mattress," observes Beller, "but it was kind of attractive. It was some combination of stylish and homey. And when you pulled it out, it felt the least like you were sleeping on some provisional thing and the most like you were actually on a bed." Beller believes that the Nomade Express' rows of buttons allude to fashion: "I don't know if it would be Chanel exactly, but some two-piece suit with big buttons down the middle."

What We Think: We had a long infatuation with the Ligne Roset model that preceded this one, the Orient Express. We even had a picture of it tacked on our bulletin board. And then, at the moment we could actually afford to buy it, we sat in one for an evening and decided that it looked better than it felt. This new model, we're pretty sure, is more accommodating to people who want to sit upright, as well as those who prefer to sprawl. ▶

Flap
by Edra
Designer: Francesco Binfaré
Price $11,000

The basics are that it's pricey, it's long (11 feet, 7 inches), and comes in either fabric or leather. But the manufacturer seems more interested in the metaphysics of the thing: "Flap offers a wide variety of seating positions, thereby creating a different system of interpersonal relations. Rather than as a new sofa, Flap is better defined as an invention that prefigures hitherto unknown comfort opportunities."

Expert Opinion: Beller was wowed by the Flap's mechanism. "You push it once, it goes up," he explains. "You push it again, it goes up higher. You push it a fourth time and it releases entirely and goes all the way back down. It's a click thing, but very fluid." But he detected a certain lack of sincerity: "I felt like I was in a playroom. It was like a kid's object for adults." Beller regarded it as something a villain in a James Bond movie might own.

What We Think: OK, this does not exactly suggest sweet dreams. And fitted sheets are not an option. But the Flap does offer more horizontal surface than any of the others. It might work best if you and your sweetie prefer sleeping end to end, but it will certainly accommodate the occasional houseguest as easily as a more utilitarian Jennifer.

The Lunar Sofa-bed
by B&B Italia
Designer: James Irvine
Price $2,600

This sofa is made of two oblong slices of polyurethane that merge into one with the drop of a pedal. Milan-based designer James Irvine explains: "The traditional sofa-bed has usually been designed to look like a normal sofa and then a bed appears deep from its guts with some mechanism which slices your fingers off. This [old] typology is a bed hiding inside a sofa. My concept for Lunar was to use the same volumes as bed and sofa."

Expert Opinion: "It was really impressive as a design object," says Beller. Though he believes the Lunar is more about style than creature comfort, he appreciates the simplicity of its mechanism: "You step on this pedal, and then it releases some things, and you pull very gently out, and it kind of flops forward." Beller adds, "It wasn't like a couch-potato dream. It's made more for sipping cocktails than collapsing and watching a rented movie."

What We Think: We've also had a little flirtation with the Lunar. We've gotten to second base with it, sitting on it, nudging its pedal. We regret that we never went any further. We never took it home with us. We agree with Beller that the Lunar does trumpet its status as a design object, but we admire the way Irvine expressed its dual nature.

Brimstone
by The Terence Conran Shop
Designer: Terence Conran
Price $2,600

Upholstered in Ultrasuede, this is actually quite clever. The slats that support the mattress pull straight out from the front of the sofa, and the back cushion of the sofa is repositioned atop the slats and zipped into place to become a firm, secure mattress.

Expert Opinion: The Brimstone, Beller says, has "a schleppy quality to it." This is both good and bad. The look, he thought, was "a little bit generic," but "it gets good marks for functionality." Beller saw the Conran sofa at the beginning of his day of sofa testing and, after visiting "all these really stylish things," warmed up to the homely qualities of the Brimstone. Schleppiness rules.

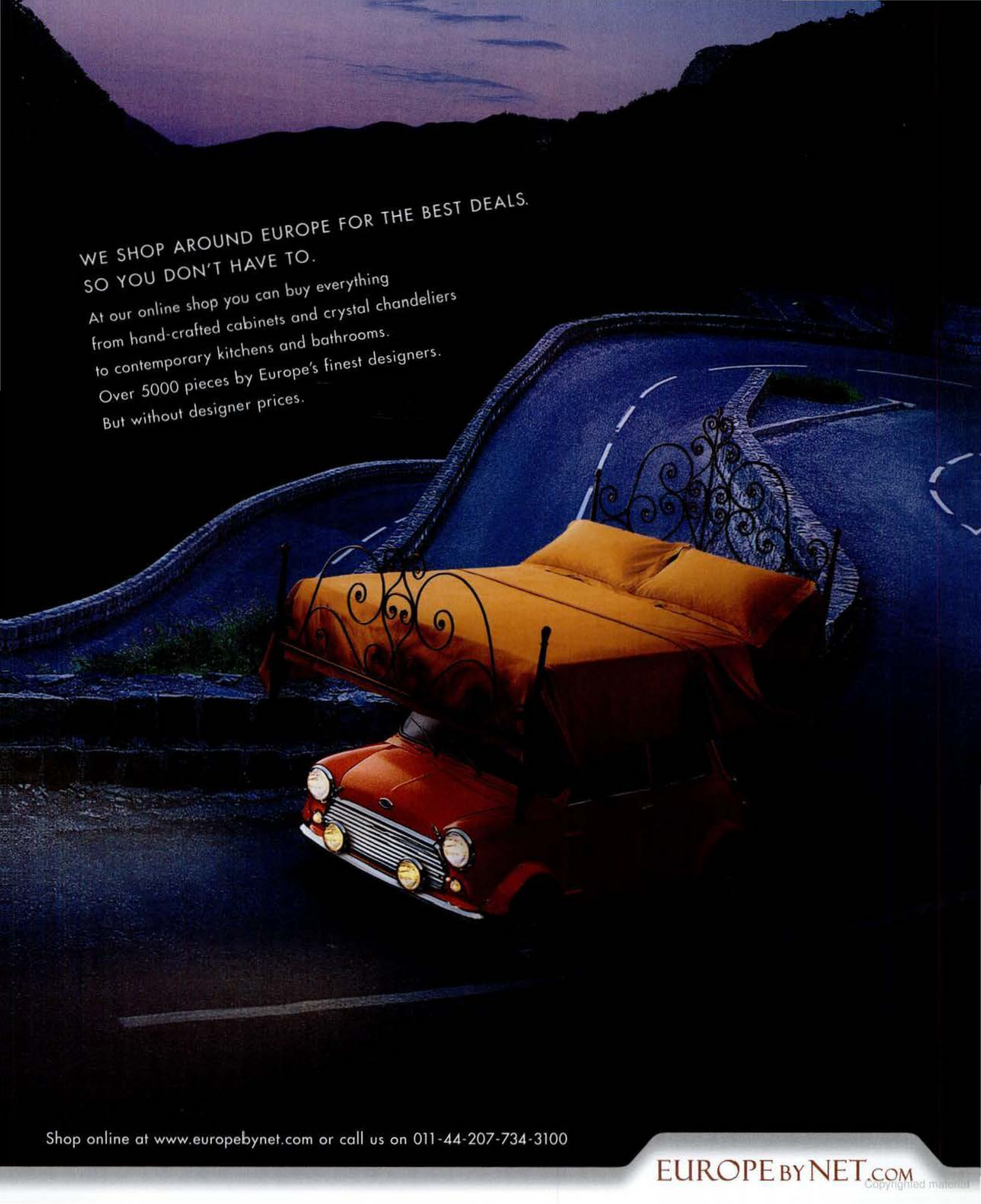
What We Think: The color choices we've seen so far—violet or mustard—would keep us from getting too serious about this one. But we appreciate the brilliance of its (literally) straightforward mechanism. And it looks like it could accommodate two people without creating a ravine.

PS Sofa-bed
by IKEA
Designer: T. Sandell and C. Martin
Price $399

Covered in washable polyester/cotton, this is, in essence, a futon—OK, the mattress/cushion is stuffed with foam rather than cotton batting—attached to a metal frame. Wooden slats support the mattress, and the PS goes from sofa to bed with a simple tug.

Expert Opinion: "Cool looking and functional," states Beller. "But something about the wheels made the whole thing feel like a hospital gurney. Though I suppose the condition of guest and patient bear some similarities."

What We Think: We wonder at whose beach house Beller has been spending his weekends. In our experience, Amagansett beats Roosevelt Hospital any day. Though we are hugely ambivalent about IKEA's upholstered furniture, we like what they've done here, liberating the futon from its customary clunky wooden frame and, in the process, updating it. This is not your hippie cousin Jeremiah's futon. ■



TURIN UNSHROUDED

Nicola Di Molfetta's parents bought him this Turin, Italy, apartment when he graduated from law school two years ago. Located in the Gran Madre area (named after the local church frequented by Italian royalty when Turin was the country's capital), the first-floor apartment was charming but desperately in need of refurbishment. He turned to architects Subhash Mukerjee and Martina Tabó, who had designed the apartment of one of his friends.

It was a perfect project for the pair, who have a particular interest in the relationships between new architecture and historical context. The stark, contemporary interior is the very antithesis of the building's 19th-century shell. India-born Mukerjee and Tabó, a Turin native, transformed the space's three vaulted rooms into one large space, subdivided into three parts by a single living unit made of blue polyurethane and birch wood. The bedroom, just a small walnut platform on wheels, features a bed that hangs over the staircase. It is an architectural conversation piece, like the blue light emanating from the heart of the house, that Di Molfetta thoroughly enjoys.

Though Turin is home to the Shroud, the Italian auto industry, and the Lavazza espresso company, as well as the birthplace of Italian communism, vermouth, and the Red Brigades, it has generally gotten a bad rap. But recently the city has witnessed an upsurge in popularity with tourists and longtime residents alike. Di Molfetta, Turin-born and bred, is one of those happy inhabitants. He spoke with dwell about his life in the city.

What brought you to this neighborhood? What are its advantages? What makes it livable?

I like Turin for its climate, its architecture and atmosphere, and for the fall, which can be so charming here. And for its nightlife, which in the last years has become really intense and fun. This neighborhood is very nice and quite fashionable at the moment because it's close to the city center but still retains a kind of "village" feeling, very quiet but still quite lively. It is served by a lot of nice (and expensive) stores. It is almost impossible to park your car. Many people are moving here because the area has been gentrified and it is now quite "cool." Many of my friends live here already, and many come to this area to go out at night.

PHOTO BY SUBHASH MUKERJEE & MARTINA TABÓ

Polyurethane and birch were used to create the blue volume (left); the bed, illuminated by yellow neon, looks over the stairwell.

What made you choose this apartment? What do you like best about the apartment? Least?

I was looking for a small apartment in the area and I liked this one because it was so different from the average apartment in Turin: the staircase from the ground floor especially. I like the spaces and the spaciousness of my new house. I like the fact that I can live in my home in two ways: by myself almost as if it were a nest, or with all my friends. I like the light.

There is not really anything I dislike about the place. The architects and the workers did a good job, and it is exciting to sleep with your head overhanging on the stairs!

Briefly describe your daily routine.

I am a lawyer for SI.tel.com, an Italian telecommunications firm. I wake up early and have my breakfast at a cafe near home. I drive to work, finish around 6:30, and have dinner either at home or at a restaurant. Then I spend some time reading at home and go to bed. I spend a lot of time at the office but when I am at home, I read books, spend time with my girlfriend, watch TV.

Where do you get your morning coffee in your neighborhood and how much does it cost?

I usually have my typical Italian breakfast of cappuccino and croissant at a nearby cafe that is well known for making some of the best coffee in town. It costs about 3,500 lire (U.S. $1.60).

Do you entertain at home? What is your favorite place to go out for dinner or drinks?

I like to use my home both as a very private place and as a place for entertaining friends, and I invite friends for dinner quite often. My favorite restaurant is called Monferrato. One of my favorite bars is Societè Lutece, a very popular place downtown. The place I really love to go to in Turin is called Giancarlo, a club located at the Murazzi, on the banks of the river Po. Giancarlo is one of the most popular places in town, one of those places where you can drink and dance until the early morning.

—ALLISON ARIEFF

PHOTOS BY STEFANO VIDETTA

Laurene, Constantin, and Bobby Boym take a spin around Toys "R" Us, keeping their eyes peeled for fine design.

PHOTO BY JEFF MERMELSTEIN

PLAYTIME IN PARAMUS

dwell recently asked New York–based product designers Constantin and Laurene Leon Boym—known for their housewares and Missing Monuments, a collection of souvenir-size buildings—and their three-and-a-half-year-old son, Bobby, to visit the Toys "R" Us store in Paramus, New Jersey, to assess the current state of toy design. "We expected to find a lot more funky and bizarre objects, and to be sure we found some," Constantin told us, "but all in all, they were pretty good looking and well intended."

1 / Magic Doorbell Playhouse $133.99
Little Tikes

Constantin: This was Bobby's selection—he went for big things. It has a buzzer on the door, which makes very different sounds—from the normal-sounding buzzer to the dog barking inside to somebody screaming outside. The really interesting part about it is [that] the walls have these furnishings sort of molded into them, not only a fireplace and shelves but also a TV set and portraits with frames. This is proof, I think, that even though all these companies that produce toys are always trying to promote these abstract things, the kids prefer these highly realistic items.

Laurene: You know, the funny thing is, no matter what, kids gravitate towards kitsch. They gravitate towards realism. You know, they get a bunch of blocks and they're like, "What is this abstract stuff? What am I supposed to do with this?" Educators call them open-ended toys.

Constantin: We have our child psychologist here . . .

Laurene: OK, so I'm not a child psychologist, I'm just a mom, but he [Bobby] likes things like that. He also loves the foot-pedaled cars; anything that imitates adult behavior. It's a kid thing.

2 / Powerpuff Girls Costume $19.99
Rubie's Costume Company

Laurene: These were the best things I saw and the most stylish. The Powerpuff Girls are heroes to young women across the U.S. right now. They are cartoon characters on the Cartoon Network, and they look like three bees. They do things like open a jar of pickles for old ladies and stuff like that. And then they'll play their guitars so they're a little bit Shonen Knife, a little bit Superman. Actually, Wonder Woman. But they are really hot. ▸

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PHOTOS BY DWIGHT ESCHLIMAN

The costumes, though, are really bizarre. The actual characters are very round and these are very angular and blocky. There are these striped kind of mini-dresses so when you put them on, it's either like you're a bee or the B-52s. There is this very heavy New Wave vibe going on here.

3 / TVP2CT Black & White TV **$49.99**
GPX

Constantin: This looks kind of like a poor man's iMac. It has a lot of thoughtful features, like a headphone jack, and it also has an AM/FM radio. I thought it would be perfect for a bigger kid or a teenager, although, for a minute, the thought did cross my mind to indulge myself.

4 / King T-Rex R.C. Dinotronic **$39.99**
Wow Wee International, Ltd.

Constantin: This was probably the most sophisticated toy I saw. It is a mechanical, remote-controlled toy that is covered with soft skin. It has a great variety of motions and is very lifelike. Two years ago this technology was considered to be the cutting edge; now it has already penetrated the mass market and is readily available. A dinosaur is usually a scary thing for kids, but here it is reduced to the size of a kitten and there is a certain cuteness to him. Bobby liked him quite a bit as well.

5 / Dr. Drill and Fill **$9.99**
Hasbro

Constantin: This was perhaps the most bizarre selection—it is really going to the land of the weird here. The toy literally is a head, kind of a generic white, middle-aged, bald male. But it is done in a cute, life-affirming way; there is nothing macabre about it.

The teeth of this guy are filled with cavities. The set consists of various kinds of Play-Doh: silver-colored Play-Doh for fillings, white Play-Doh for more expensive fillings, a drill tool, and an extraction tool. Once you pull his teeth out, presumably you can mold new teeth out of Play-Doh.

This is for the aspiring dentist, obviously. Even though it is for ages three and up, Bobby had no interest in it, which gives me some hope about his future profession.

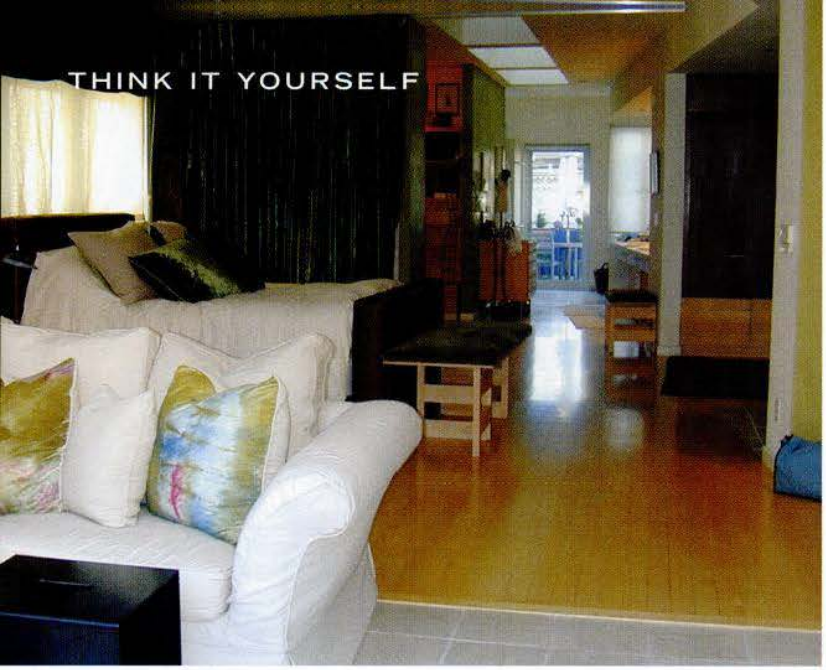
6 / Street Flyers Sneakers **$99.99**
Street Flyers

Laurene: This is the first street shoe with retractable in-line skates. It only has two wheels, one in the front, one in the back, and they're smaller than your typical in-line skate. It's a really cool thing 'cause it looks like this banal, underdesigned, ugly sneaker, but then you flip it over and you see these wheels and you're like, what is this?

Constantin: I wouldn't use the word "cool." They look like geriatric Air Jordans.

Laurene: As design objects, they don't really do anything. If you don't know they have little wheels underneath, there isn't any reason to buy them.

Constantin: A cool concept but not fully thought out. If the concept takes off, we will see them all over the world. ■



IS THIS BEDROOM DYSFUNCTIONAL?

Just when you thought all you had to do to ensure spatial harmony in your home was to have it vetted by a *feng shui* expert, out of the woodwork comes a whole host of other spiritually based, space-evaluating practices hailing from cultures near and far. There's *powaha*, a Native American framework based on wind, water, and breath; *vastu*, an Indian principle connected to the five elements; and *tshiakani*, a practice that devotes itself to creating harmony between man and nature that finds its roots in the Luba people of the Congo. Then there are uniquely Western amalgams, including color therapy, which holds that environments aren't healthful unless the full color spectrum is represented in them; SpaceTherapy®, which offers principles from Jungian psychology, classic interior design, and feng shui; and Westernized *feng shui*, a New World approach to ancient Eastern beliefs.

dwell asked Claude Muya, a *tshiakani* practitioner; feng shui experts Valerie Pasquiou and Constance Delorme of Kenli Design; Kathleen Cox, a *vastu* consultant; Terry Cline, a SpaceTherapist; and color therapist Laurie Zagon to examine with meticulous care the same San Francisco bedroom and offer their impressions. How did a space in which the inhabitants are perfectly happy fare with our experts? Let's put it this way: If the experts have their way, change is in the offing.

Sleeping Area

According to color therapist Laurie Zagon, the overall impression of this space leans too heavily on the yellow and green part of the spectrum, creating a jaundiced look reminiscent of a hospital. Yellow dominates the floor, she points out, and green is used on the walls and curtains. While yellow represents the sun and often symbolizes optimism, clarity, and intellect, and green is the color of unconditional love and nature, blues and violets, which symbolize serenity and spirituality, respectively, are missing. By way of remedy, she would add them into the mix.

For SpaceTherapist Terry Cline, the movable drapes that can be drawn around the bed, the sleeping surface—whose shape he finds suggestive of an adjustable hospital bed—and the sterile, white bedspread also remind him of an institutional environment. His suggestions? "Remove the drapes and install a more permanent space-defining element, such as a bookcase or storage unit. Place a dark, warm-colored rug under the bed—large enough to hold the chair, side and end tables—to anchor the elements in the tunnel-like stream and increase acoustical softness and intimacy. And shift the bed to a more tranquil corner of power, facing the head of the bed north to provide for better body-earth-energy alignment."

Feng shui experts Constance Delorme and Valerie Pasquiou of Kenli Design also recommend that the couple refrain from sleeping with their heads below the window. They, too, would remove the heavy curtain to open up the space and create a greater flow of energy between the bedroom and bathroom. Like Cline, they would prefer to see the head of the bed along the north wall, facing the south deck, and suggest that the headboard should be lowered to allow the energy between the bedroom and bath area to flow more continuously.

Vastu expert Kathleen Cox disagrees. The couple should sleep with their heads to the south, she says, which is calming and relaxing, or to the east, which is the source of inspiration and creativity. West (where the bed is currently located) is darkness, an unknown and neutral area. "I would turn the bed so that it is positioned in the south," Cox decides, "adding a lattice screen behind it instead of the curtain. I would place the leather chair and ottoman slightly west of the northwest corner, so that they angle out to the southeast." In *vastu* thinking, the north and east of every space should be light and airy, while south and west should bear the greatest weight to block in the energies and keep them moving in a positive manner. Cox also suggests that the couple hang a mobile from the ceiling so that when they wake up the first thing they see will spur them to start their day with good feelings.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTINA CLUGSTON

Deck and Sitting Area

While few would deny that outdoor space is a boon to any city dwelling, our advisers had some trouble with how these indoor and outdoor spaces relate to one another.

More interaction is needed between the interior and exterior, says *tshiakani* expert Claude Muya. "The design of the sitting area should allow for a wider view, including sky, if possible. The impression I have of this sitting room is that **I am looking at the blue sky while a cloud is hanging over my head: Harmony is damaged.** I would treat this area like a conservatory with the aim of widening the view and inviting the sky into the building. The cloud should be removed. I would also like to bring in natural life like water effects, perhaps an aquarium along the east wall. Because the people who live here have a cat, there is an indication of their attraction toward nature, but the space they live in is like a desert; natural life is missing."

The transition between the hardwood floors of the bedroom and the tiles of the sitting area and deck is in conflict, offers the Kenli team. "There is too much contrast, and a blocked flow of energy results. There are not enough plants on the deck and not enough wood. We would remove the sofa, which seems too large for the space, and create a nice, breezy sitting area instead with a chair, ottoman, and small table. The tiles should be swapped for an earthy material in a warm color; terra cotta would be good. And we would replace the metal furniture with teak outdoor furniture and comfortable cushions, since **metal can thwart the flow of energy.** Plants and water need to be added, water because it is meditative and calming, plants to offer privacy, a connection to nature, and perhaps even some fragrance."

SpaceTherapist Cline believes "the sitting area seems more loyal to the outdoors than the indoors, as it shares the same, light-colored, cold-and-hard-ground plane as the deck. The space turns its back on the inner sanctum, and it is acoustically hard, making it less intimate. **The couch is opening its back to the unknown vastness of unprotected space behind it.** Perhaps it is even turning its back on the atavistic, primitive tiger stalking up the stairwell. I would install a dark, warm-colored area rug under the couch to anchor this event, as well as a narrow table behind the couch with a lamp and plants on it to provide a protective backdrop."

As far as the deck area goes, Cline continues, there is no sense of being held, no sense of dwelling here. "I would add some potted plants as transition elements between the inner sanctum and the outer area. Candles on the table would create a strong sense of place, a sacred fire, even. And a larger table and more comfortably cushioned chairs would encourage people to linger."

Color therapist Zagon's two cents? "The gray tile is nice and refreshing, but again yellow and green dominate. I am assuming the lighting is yellow-based halogen as well, so I would add full-spectrum bulbs and some cooler-spectrum fluorescents to balance things out. Full-spectrum color helps us feel connected to nature. A one-color overdose can have the opposite effect. I would counterbalance the colors throughout this space with complementary tones: red-violet, blue, deep plum. I do like the value scale used throughout the house; using a dark-to-light value scale of colors helps to create a sense of movement. You can trace the ten steps of dark to light like a path that takes you to the outside and helps you find your way."

—BONNIE SCHWARTZ

Deborah Bishop and Michael Lieberman, the room's inhabitants, took the experts' advice with a grain of salt. "I was initially freaked out," Bishop explained, "yet also relieved to discover the cause of my occasional free-floating malaise: a pesky west-facing window, green walls, and the dearth of fish! We're pretty relieved that the cat can stay, and she's understandably excited by the prospect of an aquarium—but has her own opinions on which way it should orient—so we've decided to consult the kabala."

WE DREAM OF PREFABS...

Story by Jay Baldwin

"Soon as we could get saw boards and fly wire, we built ourselves a real house," said my great-grandmother, describing her rural Iowa family's early 1900s move up from sod house to modest Victorian—the high style of that time. The home was built from a kit ordered from a Sears catalog.

Today, Great-Granny might order a kit such as a Lindal Cedar Home, but with house-raisings being a thing of the past, she'd probably have to settle for a "manufactured" home. Prefabricated homes seem classier than mobile homes—many of which are rather crudely styled—and they might feature plastic Victorian trim and a plywood (!) chimney intended to evoke the elegance of real Victorians past.

Closer inspection of the average prefabricated home would reveal that the "traditional" details go along with an equally dated friction-and-gravity structural system that has proved unable to withstand earthquakes and extreme weather conditions. The "traditional" detailing comes with "traditional" materials. Despite an avowed disgust with planned obsolescence, most people still choose to build with easily degrading (but not biodegradable) stuff requiring Sisyphean maintenance. If this view seems extreme, note that San Francisco's Yellow Pages contain no fewer than 22 pages of listings for (re)roofing services.

Traditional materials, details, and structure are accompanied (and supported) by the oldest tradition of all: finance. With the large interest due on a 30-year mortgage and realtors receiving a percentage of the selling price, it's no surprise that there is little incentive to make housing more affordable or resource efficient.

In the wake of this priority structure, prefabs have been relegated to second-class citizenship. The very fact that they cost less suggests that they may be of low quality, yet they are fabricated by the same traditional tradespeople wielding the same tools employed in on-site building. Unfortunately, whether the structure is built indoors or out, the 200-year-old prefab building techniques bestow few of the advantages and all of the disadvantages of handicraft.

Precision is to the nearest half-hoe-handle, with components wedged and pummeled into approximate correctness—which is also the case in conventional site-built homes. Many prefab models are certainly CATNAP (Cheapest Available Technology Narrowly Avoiding Prosecution) and destined for an early demise. As always, quality of workmanship depends on the attitude and skill of the workers involved.

The prefab's rep may be partly a bad rap engendered by poignant TV shots of tornado damage to mobile homes. The principle destroyer, however, isn't nature; it is a design that requires messy, costly demolition for even minor remodeling—a flaw found in all classes of housing. The environment suffers as a result: Junked building materials place a major burden on increasingly overstressed landfills.

The prefab predicament seems so inevitable that little attempt is made to rectify these obvious irrationalities. We can do better and increase profits by doing so, so what's holding us back?

First, small-building construction is the only major human endeavor that has not yet entered the industrial, much less the information, age. In fact, there is no "building industry." Architects, builders, developers,

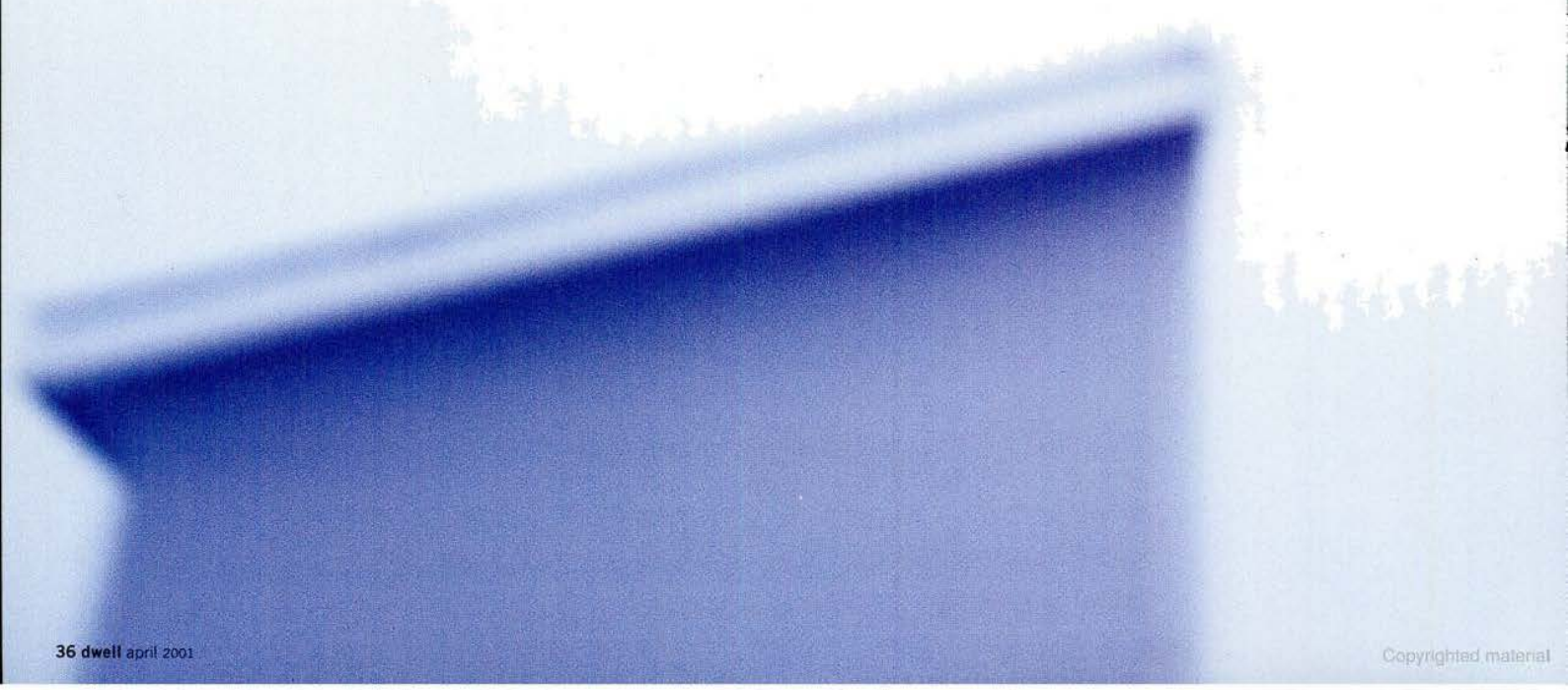


PHOTO BY FRANK SCHOTT

and lenders generally act locally, as do code-enforcing inspectors. There is no central organization doing the necessary research and development for a nationwide advance.

Second, banks resist approving loans for innovative housing that could make the homes for which they hold mortgages obsolete. Many efforts have failed because of this lack of funds, including R. Buckminster Fuller's 1946 Dymaxion "Wichita" house (and its contemporary, the Tucker automobile).

The few prefab homes that have gone into production (e.g., the steel Lustron House) soon failed, mainly because of the expense of forcing each example through the local inspection process. Imagine if automobiles were regulated in this way!

Third, the general public and building professionals have long agreed that mass-produced homes are inherently second class. Back in 1928, the American Institute of Architects published the following: "Be it resolved that the American Institute of Architects establish itself on record as inherently opposed to any peas-in-a-pod-like reproducible designs."

That now-absurd prejudice helped to delay the development of high-tech, maintenance-free, energy-efficient homes that could be erected in one day and paid off in five years, just like a car. People are beginning to realize that there is little difference between leasing a product and renting the money to buy it.

Automobiles are now mostly leased, paving the way for a new comprehensive automotive service including maintenance and insurance, billed monthly or even hourly. Will advanced affordable housing be next?

The "Global Dwelling Service" proposed by Fuller and others seems increasingly interesting and practical. Attractive, foundationless, "autonomous" (not connected to a network of utility umbilicals) housing units could be installed, modified, or removed in a day or two. Inside, high precision would allow wall panels to be repositioned or interchanged in minutes, a stage set (with changeable scenery) in which you could live and express your multifaceted, ever-changing private life.

These homes could be transportable, upgradable, and produce more energy and resources than they consume. They could dramatically reduce housework and be elegant in a technological way that is appropriate for our time, rather than "retro"—the last resort of unimaginative minds.

The complex social obstacles that keep this reality at bay aren't insurmountable. The technology needed to bring housing into the 21st century has been available for decades, but it has been grossly underutilized.

The first corporation to market a high-quality, high-tech housing unit as part of a whole system shelter service will make mobile homes and tradition-based designs irrelevant, in the same way that laptop computers vanquished typewriters.

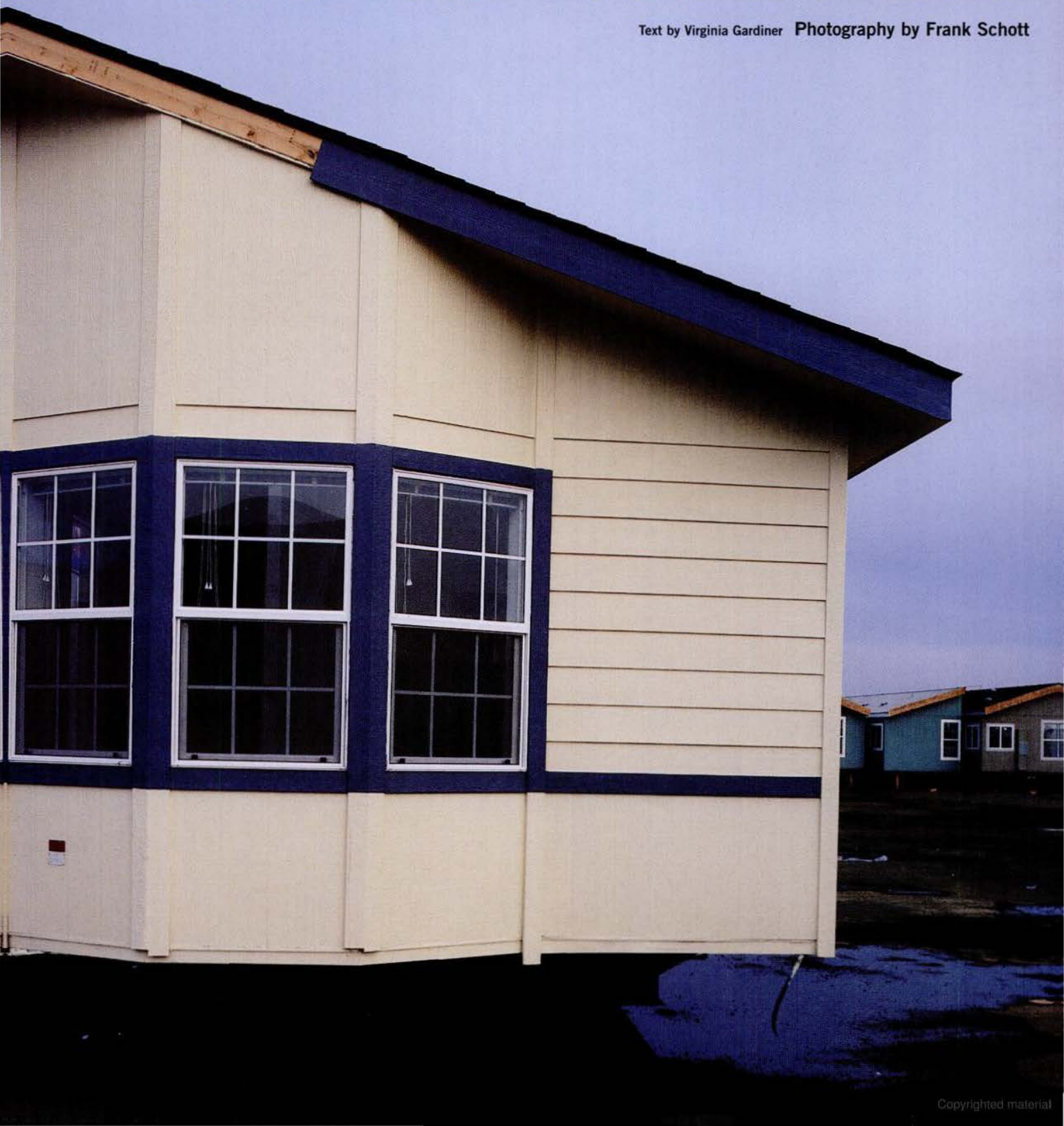
In fact, it is already happening. Cautious, not particularly radical, versions of these homes (from Toyota!) are already available in Japan. They take about 22 days to erect and are ready for move-in. There is nothing second class about them. They represent a good start, but they do not yet approach what is possible.

Ecological designer Jay Baldwin teaches at San Francisco Institute of Architecture and CCAC and is the author of BuckyWorks: Buckminster Fuller's Ideas for Today.

Woodland, CA: Silvercrest Western Homes manufactures three houses every day.

...BUT WAKE UP IN WOODLAND

Text by Virginia Gardiner Photography by Frank Schott



In this 85,000-square-foot room, 300 assembly-line workers go through two million dollars' worth

of materials every two weeks. They never lose a day to weather.

Wall-to-wall carpeting hides seams between sections inside Silvercrest's "Manor" series.

Ready for the truck. The steel base (minus wheels) stays with the house forever.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

The Seattle-based Anderson brothers export houses—carefully broken up and packed in shipping containers—to Japan. And sometimes they assemble the pieces closer to home.

The incline of the Fox Island, Washington, site (right) was the obstacle-turned-inspiration for the Anderson brothers' use of their panelized building system. A prefab panel (above) is lifted off the flatbed. The size of the truck's bed determined the maximum size of the panel. The panel is then lowered by crane onto the foundation and braced into place. Details such as the curvature of the roof and window openings are designed into the prefab panels.

CONSTRUCTION PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANDERSON ANDERSON ARCHITECTURE

Story by Mimi Zeiger / Photographs by Karen Moskowitz

PROJECT: KENNEDY RESIDENCE
ARCHITECT: ANDERSON ANDERSON
LOCATION: FOX ISLAND, WASHINGTON

Melissa Kennedy had lots of help in the construction of the house. Her brother's friend installed the kitchen cabinets and counters, while her stepfather welded the steel loft railings and always-handy chin-up bar.

The upstairs loft was originally designed as the bedroom, but because the flood of light let in from the expansive windows would wake Melissa up in the morning, she converted it to a den and workspace.

Trucks and mud. From everything I've read about Seattle architects Mark and Peter Anderson, I'm half-expecting to meet them on a mucky job site swarming with drywallers, roofers, and plumbers. And, of course, big trucks. The new book on their firm, *Anderson Anderson: Architecture and Construction,* published by Princeton Architectural Press, is rich in colorful on-site histories and hammer-swinging moments. So when I do meet a stocking-footed Peter in the kitchen of his parents' house—built by the brothers, with a glorious view of Mount Rainier—I am a bit surprised at the lack of heavy machinery, or even a tool belt.

It makes more sense that the only implement in Peter Anderson's hand the day we met was his new Motorola cell phone. Although the firm, Anderson Anderson, still operates under a herald of the double-headed wrench, the firm's logo, the Andersons have moved away in recent years from the job-site day-to-day, focusing instead on the systems and technology of construction. They don't seem too eager to return to applying siding in Pacific Northwest rainstorms. The panelized prototype housing systems the firm has developed for use in the United States and Japan are a lucid reconsideration of the typical wood-frame house. They could only have been conceived by architect-builders who have spent many a year loading lumber into pickup trucks. Every two-by-four counts.

It is precisely the two-by-fours and two-by-sixes—the typical building components of an American wood-frame building—that distinguish the Andersons' panelized, prefabricated structures. Historically, modern prefab housing has been fabricated from a "kit of parts," a favorite term of architects. In traditional prefab structures, the emphasis is on creating specific, rational pieces ready to fit together in a modular framing system. These highly engineered systems closely resemble model airplanes in their manufacture. Ready to be snapped out of the package and glued together, each part is unique for efficient assembly and production. Problems arise when a piece gets lost under the couch in the den. The project has no flexibility. Legos, with their endless combinations of modular rectangular parts, provide many more building possibilities than do model airplanes built from a kit.

The Andersons used the framing equivalent of Legos, balloon platform framing, in ►

Kennedy Residence / Fox Island, Washington

Melissa Kennedy extols the virtues of the siding on her Washington State home. "The dogs chewed off a section down below and I was able to cut it out and replace it." Anderson Anderson designed the deck-chair-striped façade to be installed by Kennedy and her family, in order to cut the overall labor cost. The architects' budget was around $86,000. "All I remember is standing," she recollects, a little less enthusiastically, "my brother-in-law, Dad, myself, and a friend of my brother-in-law nailing away." The actual contractors on the project had it surprisingly easy; the prefabricated panel system went up in a mere eight hours.

Although they required painstaking work to install, the light-gray and charcoal-colored stripes of asphalt were worth the effort. The small house, 956 square feet, takes on the chiaroscuro banding of a Venetian chapel. The large expanses of the Andersons' trademark windows, installed on the exterior of the balloon framing, reflect the light and dark patterns of sun and pine trees.

Inside the house, under the arc of the curved roof, the space is a light-filled volume. The kitchen is open to the living area, which, in turn, is a double-height space linked to the upstairs loft. Many of the construction and finish details were designed by Anderson Anderson to be installed, like the siding, by Kennedy and company. Melissa's stepfather is a Navy welder, so all the steel handrails and the beams that support the loft were designed to be constructed with ship-welding methods. One detail not in the original set of plans is a chin-up bar for Kennedy, who is a firefighter. It hangs off the steel beams—an illustration of how to customize a prefab house.

the construction of their first prototype, the Kennedy house on Fox Island, Washington, outside of Seattle. The practical reasons for developing the panelized house came from the need to reduce building costs and deal with an awkward site condition. The house was on a bit of a slope and didn't have a whole lot of room for staging the construction. The panels were built five or ten miles away and then driven to the site. As a result, the width and length of a flatbed truck determined the maximum width and height of the house, since any piece larger than the truck bed would have been considered an oversize load.

"We were trying to figure out how to achieve a house that is rationalized but is still special. It is prefabricated and a prototype but has the flexibility of being somewhat custom," says Peter Anderson of the new system. Up until this point the Andersons had primarily been designing one-off, high-end custom homes.

The best way to understand the difference between standard balloon frame construction and the panelized system is to see it in place. Peter slips on his shoes and we drive out to the Kennedy house in Mark's red SUV, which Peter has borrowed for the occasion.

"We have always been interested in site issues. We saw a lot of houses which didn't work with the site, especially the prefab packaged houses built by developers in Japan. We wanted to come up with a system which was a response that allows for site adjustment," says Peter Anderson. He muses on the subject in *Architecture and Construction:* "In Japan—as in larger developer projects in the United States—affordable housing sites are often developed as massive land-engineering projects that reduce complex natural and urban environments to flat, easily buildable sites."

Standing in the basement of the house, I begin to really understand the panel system. ▸

Expressive wood detailing is a signature of Anderson Anderson's custom and prefab homes. The entry stair leads up to the main living space and loft; the open risers give the staircase a buoyancy consistent with the rest of the house.

The ceiling vault over the main living space (left) dissolves into a glass grid. The tongue-in-groove wood ceiling is typical of all the finishes in the house: an inexpensive but robust use of construction-grade material. (Above) Naked two-by-six wood studs—the structural elements found inside the walls—pass in front of the windows.

In front of me, the concrete foundation wall steps up the contour of the site in eight-foot-wide sections. The narrow dimension of the panel allows for great flexibility. The same house could be built on a flatter or steeper grade just by shifting the foundation wall and the overall length of the panel.

Each section is an "open panel," meaning the panel arrives at the site framed and sheeted with plywood on one side but without insulation, siding, or any type of utility inside. These will come later. Each panel is then crane-lifted onto the foundation. Since the Kennedy house is a prototype of the houses Anderson Anderson designs for overseas developers, its open-panel construction is meant to facilitate the panels going through building code inspection when they are shipped as individual units to Japan. An unassembled house fits in two 20-by-8½-foot shipping containers.

The size of the house and the shape of the roof are linked also to the firm's use of stock building materials in its modular system. The 18-foot width of the Kennedy house is determined by the maximum clear span that can be achieved with off-the-shelf materials. This allows for a loftlike, column-free living area.

"There are all the same issues with us throughout our projects: interactions with the site and with the materials," explains Mark Anderson. The curvature of the roof is a straightforward example of how the Andersons' hands-on experience as contractors has affected their design practice. The gentle curve not only gracefully plays against the stripes of the building façade, but the radius represents the maximum the roof panels could be hand-bent in the field. The panels didn't have to be premanufactured and could be shipped flat. This saved fabrication time and cost, ultimately making the house more affordable to build without causing it to lose design value.

Perhaps the most characteristic design element, one that carries through the firm's work, from the most elemental, down-to-earth projects to the highest-end custom homes, is their treatment of the windows. In Anderson Anderson homes the wood structure, the two-by-six studs, extends from floor to ceiling regardless of whether there is a wall or a window. As a result, a timber skeleton appears in front of the glass, with no headers. The windows skin the house like ▸

The Shinohara Panelized House Prototype / Tsuruga, Japan

The prefabricated homes designed by Anderson Anderson and built by Japanese developer Amerikaya Corporation face a unique East-meets-West dilemma. "Everyone [in Japan] thinks that two-by-four houses come with gable roofs," says Peter Anderson, explaining the Japanese market for American-style homes. "From the late 1980s until fairly recently, there was a real [desire] for bad suburban chateaux, mini-cathedral homes," adds Mark Anderson.

Rather than finding that their Pacific Northwest–born wood-frame panel designs were too Western for Japanese tastes, they found that their houses were, at times, not American enough. Ironically, the Shinohara house comes closer to the openness and transparency of the traditional Japanese house—with the shoji screens and layered spaces flowing into each other—than the ranch homes in a nearby subdivision. The Andersons found that when a typical Japanese house gets "modernized," it closes up. Room divisions, previously shoji screens, are turned into full-height, gypsum-board walls with simple-framed doors. Moreover, in order to make the most of the expensive land, the houses are built out to their maximum lot dimensions. The Shinohara house delicately combines Eastern and Western elements. The construction is of American stock wood lumber, although the working drawings for the house are noted in feet and inches, metric, and conventional Japanese building units. Made of predesigned modular units, the house is arranged around a central courtyard, maximizing the small, terraced lot. The interior and the exterior weave together, interlocking Western building practice with a sensitivity to the site condition and beautiful spaces.

PHOTOS COURTESY ANDERSON ANDERSON ARCHITECTURE (JAPAN)

Supported and suspended by bright yellow steel struts, the deck wraps around the side and front of the Kennedy residence. By extending the small square footage of the home, it provides just enough room for naps and treats. The striped walls are an Anderson idiosyncrasy. The light and dark banding helps to dissolve the mass of the wall. The roll asphalt roofing used to create the stripes is also a continuation of their desire to experiment with commonplace building materials.

a modernist curtainwall, framing views and standing independent from the weight of the wall.

"Some people think that to see a view you need a whole, open span. A view needs a foreground and a background. The exposed two-by-fours on the interior give you a reference plane. You might feel psychologically more cold, feel more exposed with the glass expanse. The wood verticals—close to the body—are warming, and frame the view," theorizes Peter.

As the Andersons have experimented more with housing systems, designing prototypes for the Japanese market, they've modified their concept of prefabrication. The balloon framing and curtain-wall windows are still crucial elements in houses, but they are one of a few repeating elements that can be recombined. Peter sees this new concept as challenging prefab preconceptions. "When people think about prefab, they think that it is a whole—a mobile home. Ours is its own kind of system made out of bigger chunks. The cross section itself is a prototype." The Shinohara Panelized House Prototype in Tsuruga, Japan, expresses this concept of "predesigned modules." The structural system, the windows, or the kitchen and bathroom layout come together with six or eight other units to form a house. "The system is standardized enough that it is clear in how it goes together, but open," Mark explains.

Peter and I drive the loop road around the Port of Tacoma. It is a low-lying landscape of metal sheds and warehouses—manufacturing central for the SeaTac area. Peter thinks of it as Anderson Anderson's spiritual home. Every house shipped to Japan goes out through the port. "Everything you could ever need to have fabricated is somewhere in there," he says wistfully, looking out at the jumble of metal buildings. A contrast can be made between the firm's simple systems of construction and the rusty port tableaux. If anything, the incongruity underscores Anderson Anderson's devotion to the link between materials and good design, high tech or low: some assembly required, mud and trucks not necessarily included.

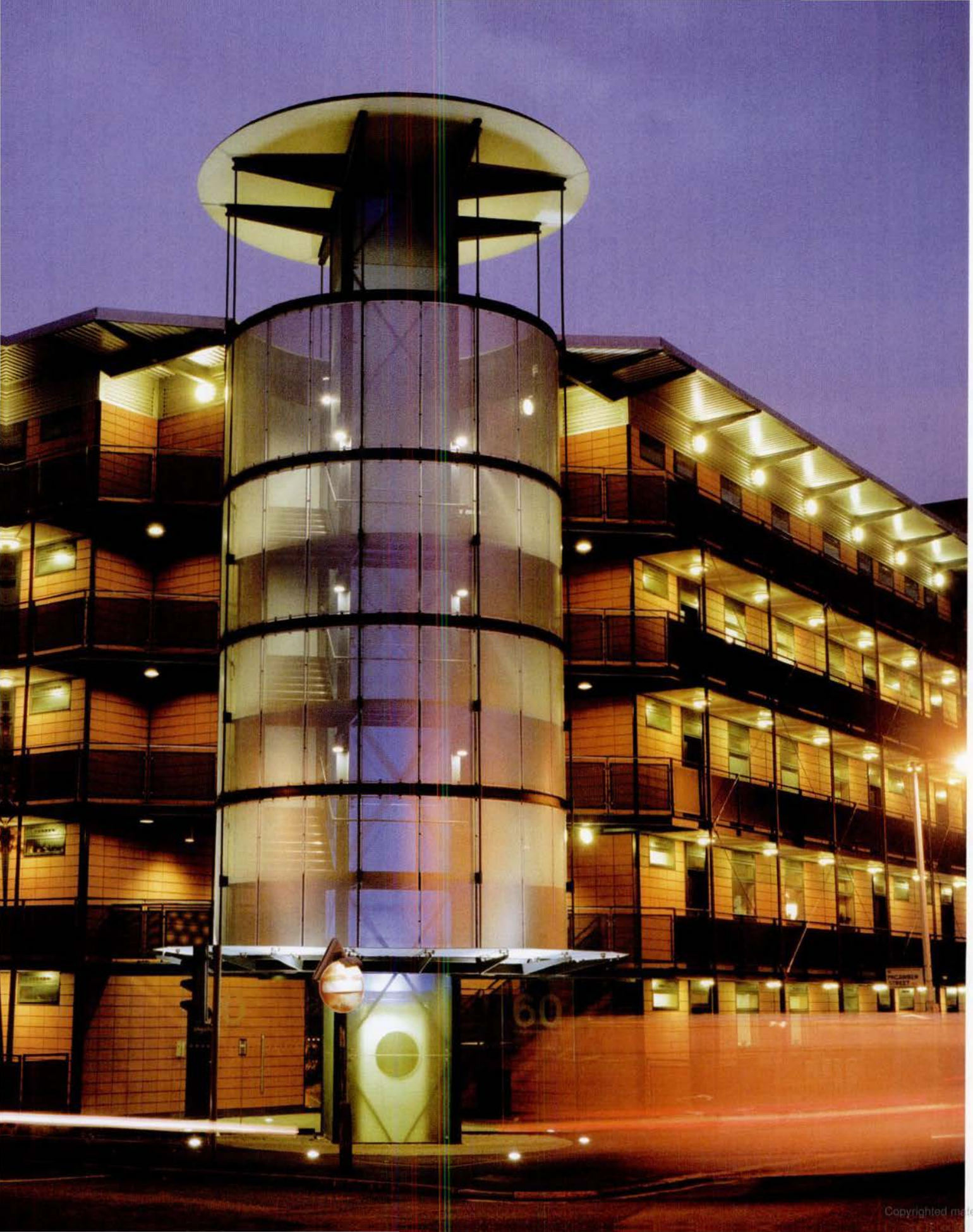
Mimi Zeiger, editor and publisher of the architecture zine loud paper, *is currently teaching at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc).*

THE MODULAR INVASION

Can Prefab Cure Britain's Housing Woes and Heritage Hang-ups?

STORY BY DEYAN SUDJIC
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER MARLOW/MAGNUM

PROJECT: MURRAY GROVE APARTMENTS
ARCHITECT: CARTWRIGHT PICKARD ARCHITECTS
LOCATION: LONDON, ENGLAND



In a London gripped by a feverish surge of lottery-funded, bread-and-circus building that has given the city everything from the ill-fated Millennium Dome to the Tate Modern, and against a background of an economic boom whose imminent end is now clearly being signaled by a deluge of ultra-high-rise skyscrapers, Murray Grove is so modest as to be almost invisible.

It's a simple L-shaped block of flats, just five stories high, in a scuffed and worn-out neighborhood near London's financial district. The flats are not large; the smallest are no more than a couple of rooms totaling less than 600 square feet. And yet Murray Grove, in the year since it was completed, continues to collect awards of every description. It has turned into an essential stop on the London architectural tourist trail. It is the subject of a raft of studies and evaluations to determine just why it has been such a success, and how its lessons can be applied to affordable new housing elsewhere. And, most importantly, it is a place in which people who can afford no more than the modest rent of $225 a week actually want to live. With its heavy concentration of twenty-somethings, it would make a perfect set for a British version of *Friends*.

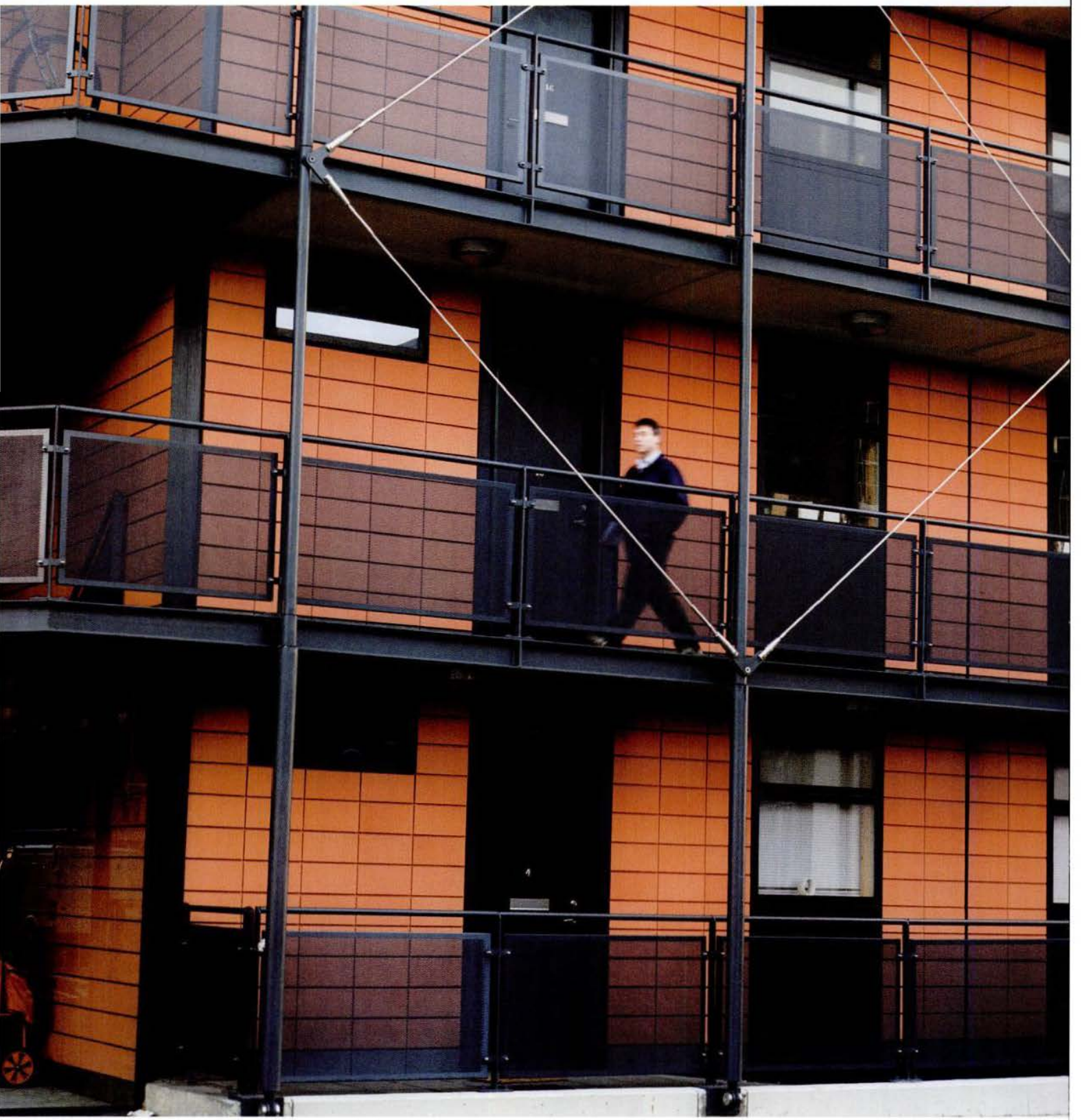
Under the direction of a 140-year-old housing charity, Murray Grove is a project that has attempted to tackle all the great sacred cows of English housing. And remarkably, it has somehow contrived to kill them off, one by one, with a deftness that borders on ruthlessness. England's housing, it should be understood, is still at the stage that English food was at not so long ago, before the country discovered green vegetables and extra-virgin olive oil. For the most part, it is the architectural equivalent of Spam. It doesn't have to be this way, and certainly Murray Grove offers richer flavors.

In the 1960s, many of the best and most idealistic of Britain's architects devoted their careers to designing high-minded contemporary housing for the welfare state. Precisely because of their efforts, good design found itself fatally tainted with the stigma of welfare housing. Public housing was linked with modernism and so-called good design. So the private sector set out deliberately to make its housing look as un-architect-designed as possible. That meant fake Tudor, Kentucky Fried Georgian, and tacky layouts. Nobody, it seems, ever lost money underestimating the taste of the British public.

It's a legacy that has persisted. To this day, there is a belief in Britain that when it comes to designing crowd-pleasing homes, high kitsch is a better bet than high tech.

There is an equally pervasive preconception that no self-respecting Englishman is going to opt for a flat when he can live in a house with a garden. Then there is the belief that the British want their homes built using so-called traditional building methods, preferably involving bricks laid by hand. The conviction that a prefab is not a proper home runs deep. In Britain the very word "prefab" is indelibly marked with the distant memory of wartime austerity, when returning servicemen were expected to start civilian life with their families in prefabricated houses erected on bomb sites. These homes, then, are about as welcome in the more prosperous ▸

Interior designer Patrick McKinney's second-floor flat features an inspired mix of high design and second-hand finds. In the kitchen (left), Eames chairs surround the table, a Ben Kelly design, which was spirited away from the now defunct Hacienda nightclub in Manchester. In the living room, an Eames aluminum lounge chair and Tom Dixon lamp spruce up the standard-issue futon.



The 30-unit building was formed from steel volumetric units that were constructed off-site and then transported to the site by truck. The modules were then lifted into place by crane—a process that took just ten days—and clad with terra cotta. The entire structure can, in theory anyway, be taken apart as quickly and easily as it was put together.

Britain of today as wartime recipes using powdered milk.

Murray Grove has set out to demolish all of these myths. Architecturally it may not quite be Zaha Hadid, but it has clearly been designed by an architect with ability. James Pickard is a 38-year-old partner in the recently established firm of Cartwright Pickard. Interestingly, he had never designed a house of any kind before he entered the competition to build the Murray Grove Apartments. For 15 years, though, he had been convinced that Britain was not going about building houses the right way. "The northern Europeans make us look primitive," he says. Murray Grove is the result of his personal crusade to show that there is a better way of doing things.

Pickard has given the building a terra cotta cladding on the street façade and a cedarwood skin on its garden front. It boasts a lift tower topped by a steel hat and energetic exposed steel diagonal bracing that can trace its ancestry to the Centre Pompidou in Paris. It makes no concession to the image of the traditional house. You get to your front door on an external walkway. Apart from the communal lawn, the nearest the flats get to a garden is a modestly scaled balcony—which also serves as an excuse to sheath the south and west façades of the block in undulating waves of perforated steel.

Most startling of all, in the British context, is that the greater part of the building has been prefabricated in a factory. Murray Grove is an exercise in proving that prefabrication does not have to be shoddy or cheap looking. Indeed, it has succeeded well enough for at least one of its tenants to have not had the faintest idea that she was living in a prefab until she was asked by a researcher what she thought about it. The individual rooms were assembled by Yorkon Limited, a British company that specializes in making budget hotels and fast-food restaurants. It has adapted these building techniques to housing for the first time.

The prefabricated modules—74 steel-framed boxes in all—were trucked down to London on a stream of lorries, and craned into place. There is no structure as such; the boxes are simply stacked up one on top of the other and supported on a simple concrete strip foundation. "We were able to build a prototype in the factory to make sure that we got it right," explains Pickard. "The money we were able to save by building fast could go into good-quality doors and windows, fixtures and fittings, that were all screwed into place in the factory." Technologically, this is not rocket science, but it did cut the building time in half to just 27 weeks, compared with the year a conventional building program would have taken. And the most dramatic part of the installation was done in a matter of days. Patrick McKinney, one of the tenants, remembers working next door while construction was underway and seeing the whole five-floor block take shape in the course of a single week. "I was impressed enough to call up to find out if I could get one of the flats," he says.

All the tenants moved in at the same time. Most had come to an open house where they were asked to provide evidence of their earnings—not so low that they couldn't ▸

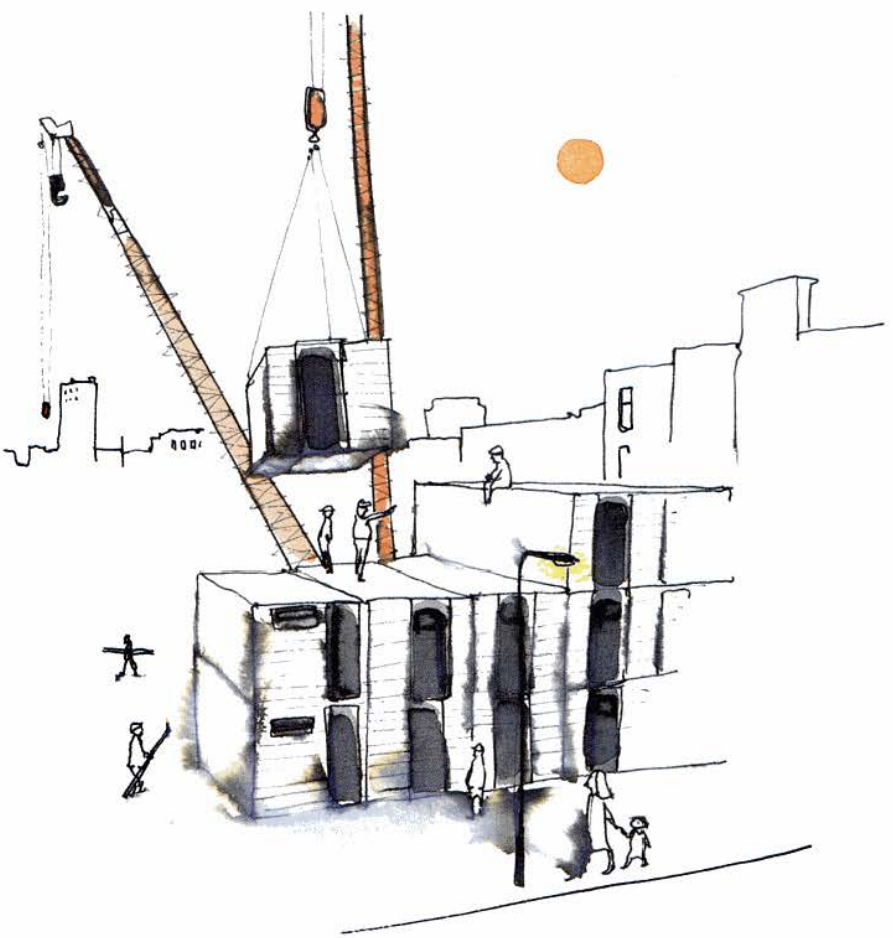


ILLUSTRATION BY STINA WIRSÉN

afford the rent, but not so high that they could afford market rent in the neighborhood. McKinney recalls the whole process as being surprisingly easy and unbureaucratic, and "it got me out of a damp, dark basement." The experience of creating an instant community has clearly left the tenants curious about how others have arranged their identical flats. "You can look out of your window and see how some people fill their places with plants, other people have lots of their old furniture," says McKinney. "I think that somebody has painted all his walls pink."

As a place to live, Murray Grove, of course, is shaped by the tenants as much as by the ambitions of its architects and its owners. Pickard could not have known that the place he designed so carefully would be occupied by so many people who could be expected to lean over his shoulder at the drawing board. Architects and designers seem to have become a new category of key worker in London, and they are well represented among the tenants. Joanne Stevens, who is training to be an architect, lived in one of Murray Grove's single-person flats for almost a year, and even though she has moved out now, she is still positive about the experience. "The flat was very thoughtfully put together and I wouldn't have changed the plan. For me the real trouble was that it still is too expensive. It works for two people, but not for one." McKinney lives with his Swedish partner in one of the flats designed for couples. You can tell that he is a designer—there is a Tom Dixon lamp in the living room, and there are Eames chairs at the kitchen table—and he is impressed by Murray Grove. "The carpets are a bit dodgy, but the place really works," he says.

Murray Grove was made possible through The Peabody Trust, one of the products of Britain's great wave of 19th-century philanthropy. Originally known as The Peabody Donation Fund, The Peabody Trust was born from the profound sense of shock of the British middle class when confronted with the reality of life in the underbelly of London as portrayed by Charles Dickens and others. The Trust was established in 1862, a time when 26,000 Londoners were documented as living six or more to a room. By 1900, it had built more than 11,000 so-called hygienic flats. They had to be cheap, if the people ▸

McKinney's bed is flanked by a pair of ammunition boxes given new life as night tables. Clever design touches are found everywhere, even in the bathroom (below). A showerhead bath mat that hangs up to dry came from a design shop in Islington; the toilet paper holder was picked up in Sweden.

that the Trust was targeting could afford to live in them. London's inner ring is still marked by the grim blocks of tenements that the Trust built to deal with the problem. They weren't pretty but they worked, mainly because The Peabody Trust set an exemplary standard in managing its properties and looking after its tenants.

The Trust has continued to flourish, and now, with its energetic development director Dickon Robinson (himself an architect), it has become one of the most innovative housing providers in the country. Just as it has always done, it seeks to house people who cannot afford to pay market rents. But in 2000 those people are as likely to be young professionals like teachers, policemen, mechanics, and nurses as the traditionally disadvantaged.

At Murray Grove, Robinson was driven by the conviction that a city in which teachers and policemen can no longer afford to live is on the edge of becoming dysfunctional. So with a site provided by the local authority, the Trust set out to build accommodations that would attract the so-called key workers, the modestly paid who make a city function, and to build flats at a price that they could afford to rent.

The site was key to the success of the project. It's an easy walk to the City of London and the newly fashionable hot spots of Hoxton. There are fragments of Georgian terraces here, but most of the area is characterized by the legacy of Britain's daunting social housing from the 1930s, old factories and boarded-up shops. The block is called Murray Grove by the Trust but the address is really Shepherdess Walk, which despite its picturesque ring has until recently been one of London's tougher neighborhoods. This was an area that didn't take kindly to outsiders, particularly gentrifiers. It's a place where the dislocations of London's transition from the old economy to the new took their toll on a working-class community that found its skills no longer in demand. To add insult to injury, the neighborhood's proximity to London's financial center meant not only that the old community found itself starved for work but also that it was priced out of its homes. Private rentals and houses for sale started to take a vertiginous turn upward a decade ago.

The other side of the great London boom has been that, as in other successful cities, its very success has undermined its original appeal. Central London and vast areas of what were once seen as workaday suburbs have become too expensive for people to live in, unless they're dot-com millionaires or bankers. In a modest way, Murray Grove attempts to demonstrate how central London can avoid the fate of Manhattan or San Francisco, by not turning into a ghetto for the affluent who will one day find that there is no one to work in their restaurants or teach their children.

Deyan Sudjic was educated as an architect at the University of Edinburgh but chose not to practice. He is editor of the Italian architecture and design magazine Domus, *and architecture critic for the London* Observer *newspaper.*

In the summer, tenants have parties in the central courtyard, but when the weather turns, this space is better suited to scooter parking. Polly Flynn (left) loves how the balconies have helped to create a sense of community: "Everyone shouts across the courtyard to each other." An architect with Anouska Hempel Designs, Flynn is particularly fond of her flat's kitchen and its floor-to-ceiling windows.

RAISING INDIANA

With its corrugated metal siding, the Schneck house looks prefab, a product of heavy industry, but it was actually built by traditional Amish carpenters.

PROJECT: THE SCHNECK RESIDENCE
ARCHITECT: SHANE SCHNECK
LOCATION: MILAN TOWNSHIP, INDIANA

STORY BY PHIL PATTON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHAD HOLDER

Projecting from the factory-painted, corrugated steel façade of the home Shane Schneck designed for his parents is a horizontal "tower," a structure that alludes to the corn cribs that a real Indiana barn would have. Underneath the far end of the tower is a cedar patio facing a man-made pond: "Because my dad has dug so many, he wanted one for himself," says Shane.

Outlined against a horizon of gray autumn cornfields in the Indiana countryside, just northeast of Fort Wayne, rise large blocky buildings—simple foursquare structures, some white, some barn red, and all about the same size and shape. Some of these buildings are new, some old. Some are wood, some metal, some concrete. But their shapes are remarkably similar: shapes as old as the American landscape and even older.

Among these buildings is one that shares their large, simple shape, but with differences. The house Shane Schneck, 30, designed for his parents combines a house with something like a barn. This barn, however, stables not cows and horses but the earth-moving equipment of Schneck Excavating, the business run by his parents, Ed and Deb. At first glance, the structure looks like your average prefab industrial building, but it's far from it. It translates shapes first executed in metal or poured concrete into steel and stud construction, and is carried out by craftsmen who grew up with post-and-beam.

"Love thy neighbor" reads a sign on the road nearby. This is Amish country, and in the context of its neighbors, the Schneck house looks very different than it would in suburban Connecticut, say, or the dunes of Florida. Amish construction workers dominate the trade in this part of the world; they built the Schnecks' house.

The family joke is that Shane has gone from Milan, Indiana, to Milan, Italy. Milan Township is characterized by an upright large building, the grain elevator; Milan, Italy, by an upright large building, the cathedral. For the last year and a half, ▸

At one end of the "light corridor" that runs the length of the house is a freestanding fireplace flanked by a pair of benches from Stockholm-based David Design. "We bought those at Totem," notes Shane. The low coffee table is "something we found at a tag sale for 55 cents."

Schneck has been designing furniture for Piero Lissoni in Milan. It was the difficulty of getting the Indiana house built to his satisfaction that drew him to furniture design as more manageable and intimate.

Parents who become the indulgent patrons of their architect children have a long history. Robert Venturi's mother, photographed beside the house he designed for her, has become almost the architectural equivalent of Whistler's mom. Ed and Deb Schneck had been talking about having their son design them a new house ever since he began studying at Ohio's Miami University in the early 1990s. For years they'd lived in a house with the business—and its big storage facility for equipment—next door, but they hadn't found land for a new house that would combine the living and working quarters. "We didn't have our ground" is the way Ed puts it in the Hoosier vernacular.

"What started it, though," says Ed, standing in the office in front of his collection of toy bulldozers and cranes, "was that Deb accidentally sold our house."

At the time Deb was working in real estate. Her colleague had a client coming in from Terre Haute. "Deb," he said, "there's not much listed now. I need something to show them so they won't feel their trip is wasted. How about your place?" She agreed, and lo and behold, the clients loved it and wanted to buy nothing else.

So Ed and Deb hurried to find a lot. They lucked out: The place they found is close enough to the new interstate for their trucks to move quickly to and from job sites and yet is a mile or more from any neighbor.

Once planning started, however, the parents and son found themselves trying to work out conflicts over everything from size to color. "We nearly got divorced," Deb says, "if you could divorce a kid." They disagreed about whether to use steel—Shane's preference—or wood, the material Ed was most familiar with and preferred for later alterations. Ed can claim partial victory—dramatic laminated pine beams are visible in the high, bright clerestory window, through which light seeps into the whole house. Over the domestic space the clerestory is glazed; over the work areas it is simply a ghost structure of metal grille, suggesting some sort of Hoosier widow's walk.

Local contractors, Shane explained, had trouble with the idea of using steel in a residential structure, especially when he

The maple plywood bed was one of Shane's first furniture designs. The painting, likewise, is by Shane. The white plastic chair, however, is by Antonio Citterio.

Below, Deb Schneck rides the metaphorical hay elevator to the garage.

specified that the material be installed horizontally rather than vertically. They also had trouble with the idea of one building serving both residential and commercial functions. So did the local building board. The initial scheme, shared by Shane and his parents, was of a basic barn for living. What survived of that was a straightforward shape and axial arrangement.

It is not easy for an architect to have a client who is also his own general contractor. And having that client also be your father was a challenge, Shane explains. Ed was not sure just how big the area for his equipment needed to be, for example, and kept changing his mind during planning and design, and even after construction began. The walls had actually begun to rise when one day Ed took advantage of an opportunity only the proprietor of an excavating business could have: He hopped on top of one of his own bulldozers and knocked down a wall. The place had to be bigger, he decided.

And when it came time to construct the elevator that supplements the stair in the core of the house, Ed built it himself, of steel frame with Lexan (a virtually unbreakable clear plastic) walls. He adapted the planned electric motor with a device of his own design that runs on compressed air pumped in from the shop. Steel cable holding up the elevator runs through a giant I-hook screwed into a beam. Ed also supervised the details of the prowlike wooden deck that works to soften the metal building, and reaches out toward a round pond. Ever the professional excavator, Ed points out that the pond, now lined with gravel pebbles, also served ►

as the source of landfill for the house site.

Ed's version of a stable is attached to his house. It is the high open space where live the tools of his trade—the mechanical beasts of burden that dig and lift and carry for him. Oxen and horses by function, by sight the inevitable association is with dinosaurs: the pteranodon-like blades of the bulldozer scoop, the tyrannosaurus-like neck and head of the backhoe. The heat seeping slowly from the engine blocks of these beasts, Ed explains, means that the big space is rarely cold, even during the Indiana winters.

Shane is now a continent away, but his touches are clearly discernible inside and out. "I ended up a sort of long-distance interior decorator," he jokes. There is, for instance, the miniature Pop Art accent of three boxes of Kellogg's Corn Flakes set atop the kitchen cabinets. On the dining room table sit two bowls filled with miniature white pumpkins, a feature worthy of Martha herself. Deb confesses that the choice of furniture and other décor was Shane's as well. In the master bedroom two wooden tables of Shane's design seem to baffle Ed and Deb. They are rough-sawed in a zigzag pattern like a crinkle-cut French fry or a Brancusi. Shane also designed the built-in shelves and cabinets for the office and desks with metal plumbing-pipe legs. For the living room, he did a couch and chair system. The big wood stove in the living room is a custom piece of solid block, covered with the same gray tile used in the bathroom and on some floors.

"Shane calls this style minimalist," Deb says, haltingly. It is not a word that comes naturally to her.

"A lot of things he wanted," Ed said, "the contractors wouldn't do." But as frustrated as Shane claims to be with some details, the place radiates careful finish. There is a wonderful contrast between finely crafted, custom cherry woodwork and built-in furniture—from kitchen cabinet to bathrooms—and off-the-shelf materials like the corrugated metal.

Downstairs in the company office, in a corner window of the bright room, Megan, the family schnauzer, dreams blissfully on her pillow. Specially fabricated cases on the walls display Ed's collection of toy excavating equipment—bulldozers and backhoes and front-end loaders and cranes in all manner of yellows. They bear such names as John Deere, Caterpillar, and International Harvester but also more exotic brands seen on

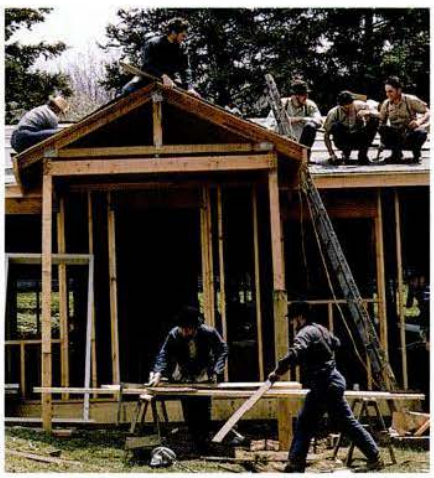
The back half of the Schneck home is devoted to heavy equipment (inset, right). The front of the house is divided between living quarters upstairs and office space downstairs (inset, left). On the roof, a clerestory "corridor" brings light into both live and work portions of the building.

laptops and television sets, like Hitachi, Toshiba, and Mitsubishi.

Ed has been building this collection for years. It is made up of dozens of models, some very serious scale models, others toys. It has become a family tradition for the Schneck siblings to add items to it as holiday gifts. Shane recently found a great new addition in Italy—a small street sweeper that picks up table crumbs.

We piled into Ed and Deb's Grand Cherokee and headed off to watch the same Amish builders who had constructed the Schnecks' house work on another. We passed big barns and big white houses. I spotted several Plexiglas basketball backboards rising above black buggies with their incongruous Day-Glo orange safety triangles—a *National Geographic* photographer's cliché. ►

The kitchen cabinets were fabricated by Abe Graber, a local Amish cabinetmaker who also fashioned the sink and countertop out of a Corian-like material known as Graberstone. The Corn Flakes are a decorative touch but, insists Shane, "My dad actually eats them."



Amish construction crews like this one erected the Schneck home and dominate the building industry in southeastern Indiana.

This Indiana Amish community is one of about 200 in the United States and Canada, which total about 150,000 people in 24 U.S. states and Canada. It was not the neat, crisp sort of Amish landscape I had seen in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Things have been tough for the Amish here.

In the Fort Wayne area, a few furniture shops and construction work supplement farm income. But as with most big families—sometimes ten children or more—and with the cost of land rising, it becomes harder and harder for the Amish to support themselves through agriculture alone. Many have gone to work as builders in the wider community—the world of "the English." This seems to be a culture being battered by the pressure of the world around it.

Some Amish enterprises proudly consider themselves among the last to use post-and-beam construction of the sort displaced in the United States by the invention of balloon framing almost two centuries ago. Occasionally I spotted a half-finished barn with the rafters close together, the beams thick and solid. But nowadays the Amish have moved to modern methods in construction.

We arrived at the house to find a leaping fire, feeding on construction scraps. Its light bounced off the browned and weathered faces of elfin figures: Amish in beards and black hats and denim coats incongruously gripping big power nailers and electric saws. Thick orange extension cords snaked through the house they were working on. Amish custom allows workers on the job to use power tools plugged into the grid of the English world, but not to tap into the power

Ed and Deb Schneck run Schneck Excavating from the downstairs office. Ed reclines beside a custom maple plywood desk with pipe legs and open compartments for his stacks of site plans.

supply at home. One boy looked no older than ten, although he said he was 15. Amish boys typically leave school at 14 to begin work on jobs like this, but this one proudly told me he'd been watching the work since he was five.

Ed and I chatted with Andy, a taciturn man who laughed often and nervously, and a more outgoing Pete. Both were willing to swap gossip about other contractors and goings-on in the area. They work nine or ten hours a day, Pete tells me with a ready smile.

The culture of the Amish is one caught in an uneasy truce with the world around it. So, it occurred to me driving around Indiana, is the modernist culture reflected in the Schnecks' house. Like the ideals of the Amish, it has for decades been forced into compromises with the wider, impure world—codes and construction standards, indifferent craftsmanship, and simple practicalities, the world of flush baseboards no contractor wants to undertake and of neat rooms that human beings quickly mess up.

More and more in recent years minimal architecture has laid claim to spiritual and not just rational power. Its own form of *gelassenheit* involves submission to the purity of material and geometry, whether in the inspirations of Zen or the metaphysics of Peter Zumthor. There is submission, too, to the views of the world at large—but also defiance of them. As I drove out of town I passed one of the big-box discount stores. Next to it I noticed a small red shed. Around a corner, two young Amish women were transferring groceries from a wire pushcart into a black buggy and I suddenly understood that the shed had been built as a shelter.

The shed, which appeared to be a prefab metal structure, suggested that in building, people willing to stick to their vision can bend the commonplace to accommodate it. Architects can make standardized parts their own, and people of spiritual beliefs can make even the commercial "monoculture" change to suit their ways of life.

It was a strangely touching scene, this architectural accommodation reached between cultures, and oddly encouraging to see mainstream "monoculture" bend to alternatives as old as the horse and buggy.

Phil Patton is a contributing editor of Esquire, Wired, *and* ID. *He is the author of* Dream Land: Travels Inside the Secret World of Roswell and Area 51.

WE DREAM OF PREFABS...

...and wake up, every so often, to a project that fulfills the potential of mass-produced housing. Here are six examples:

FIRST PENTHOUSE

ANNIKA AND HÅKAN OLSSON

"Prefab" and "penthouse" are two words rarely put together—unless you're talking about the reading material of choice for a lonely guy living in a double-wide.

But with their company, First Penthouse, Swedish civil engineers Annika and Håkan Olsson have brought these seemingly disparate elements into blissful coexistence.

"The rooftops of the central London skyline are a resource that has been left uncultivated for too long," reads the company brochure, "but one that is really only accessible if the heavy construction process is moved off-site." With property values soaring and urban density increasing, this is an idea whose time has come.

Founded in 1992, First Penthouse has developed projects in some of London's wealthiest neighborhoods and plans for New York and Paris development are in the works. The husband-and-wife team negotiates a deal with a property owner to purchase a roof as if it were an empty lot and then designs an aerie per customer specifications. The luxury units are assembled as modules at a factory in Sweden—the process takes about ten weeks. After the units are outfitted and factory-tested, they are brought over from Sweden in shipping containers and lifted by crane to their top-floor destination. Once a module is positioned on the roof (which has been prepared for its arrival), it has a roof surface, working electricity, heating, and plumbing in about a day. The finishing touches on upscale, owner-specified amenities take about four weeks to complete.

Factory construction methods notwithstanding, these residences have price tags commensurate with their penthouse status—the Albert Court units sell for $4 million to $5 million—and the Olssons remain committed to serving this demographic. There are, unfortunately, no plans for a First Studio Apartment. —ALLISON ARIEFF

The modules arrive on-site fully equipped with fireplaces, hardwood floors, and custom kitchens.

PACIFIC YURTS

Yurts. The very word makes people's eyes widen in curiosity. It suggests a deep mystery that only an exotic form of construction can generate. Simplicity, however, is actually the most intriguing component of this prefabricated housing form, which originated in Mongolia and Turkey.

In their Eastern homeland, yurts are prefabricated and also portable, allowing for a nomadic lifestyle. Constructed of simple wood poles and animal pelts, the tentlike yurts can be packed up and carted off in a matter of minutes. Nomadic life as it is known in Asia simply doesn't exist in the United States—unless you count Road Warriors or RVers—but that doesn't mean there is not a market, even a yearning, for yurts.

For the past 23 years, Pacific Yurts, of Cottage Grove, Oregon, has been dedicated to the production of the "modern" yurt. The main building block of a Pacific Yurt is a lattice wall, wrapped in an acrylic-coated, woven polyester. A ceiling structure of kiln-dried fir rafters fans out around the ceiling's center ring, which doubles as a skylight. The roof is then covered with a vinyl-laminated fabric. After door and window installation, the yurt is complete. It takes just a couple of days to set up a 30-foot diameter Pacific Yurt (the largest size). All the materials fit in a pickup truck. And the basic yurt, which keeps you (somewhat) warm, (fairly) safe, and (adequately) comfortable, costs about $8,000 (excluding land cost).

The Pacific Yurt offers practical advantages, but really, who would live in one? A lot of people, from the Ozarks to the Caribbean, according to Alan Bair, president of Pacific Yurts. "Some sit in backyards of mansions," adds Bair. Still, it is safe to say that the "yurt as home" concept seems to be best suited to the individual who, while not necessarily nomadic, dreams of a freedom from convention that only a yurt can provide.

—ANDREW WAGNER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FALLING WATERS RESORT

THE BINISHELL

DANTE N. BINI

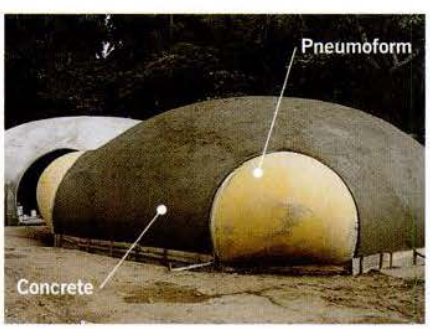
Asking an architect to design a building that could be raised within an hour would likely elicit a blank stare. But not from Dante N. Bini. For the last 40 years, the Italy-born and educated pioneer of "automated building construction sequences" has sought to defy our conceptions of the building process.

The Binishell, and its diminutive offspring, the Minishell, are Bini's most popular designs (more than 1,600 have been built) and are used for a variety of functions, including shopping centers and gymnasiums.

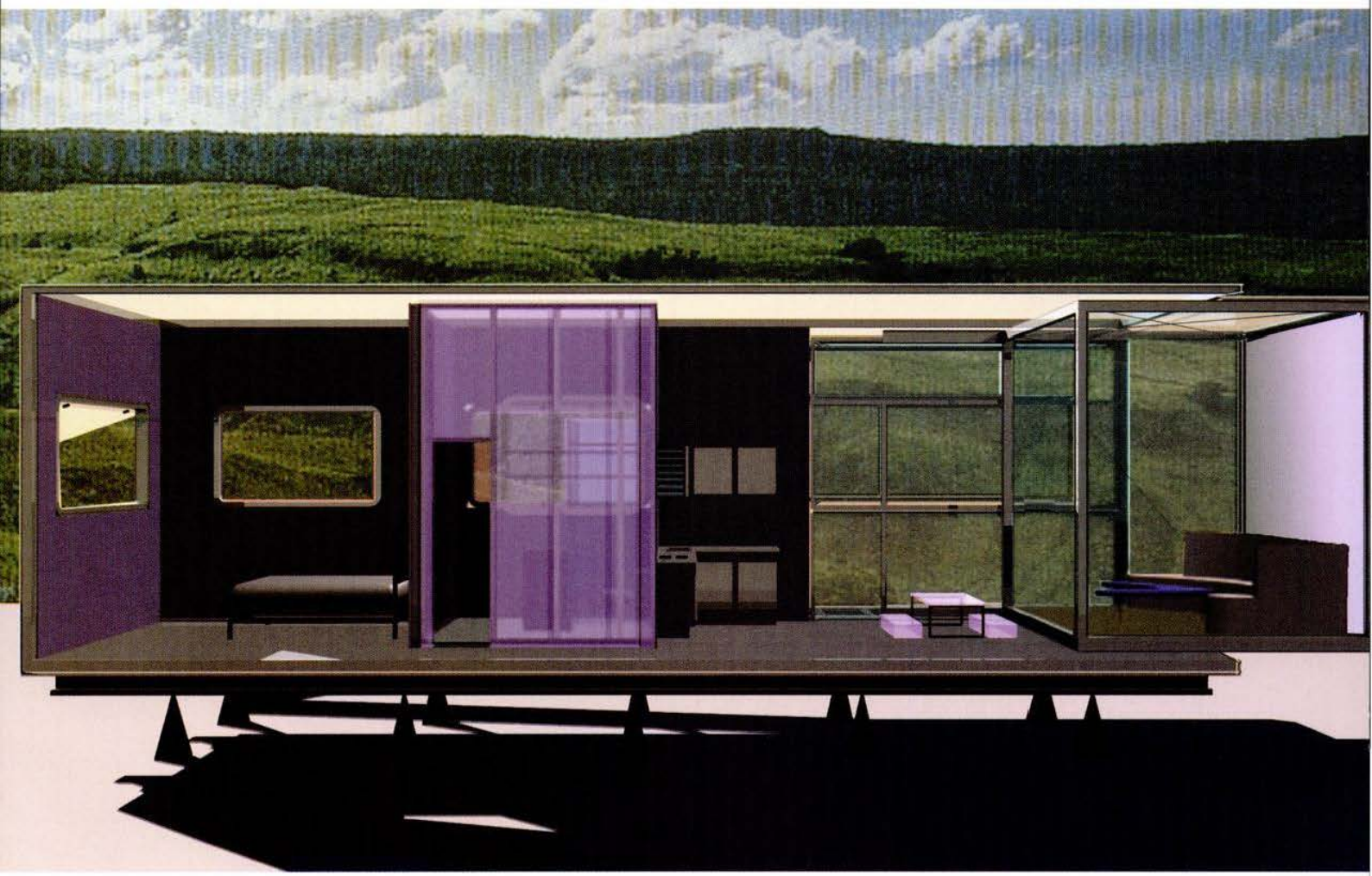
While these sturdy structures may look like they require a serious amount of time and effort to construct, amazingly, most are raised in under an hour, with, as Bini proudly states, "less air pressure than it takes to puff a cigarette." Here's how:

A pre-shaped "Pneumoform" (basically a sophisticated balloon) is rolled out and affixed to an anchoring system on a flat, octagonal base. PVC sheeting protects the surface of the Pneumoform so it can be reused. The most time-consuming part of the operation follows—laying out an intricate, crosshatched system of stretched, steel-reinforced springs. Concrete is then poured, covered with an external membrane, and with a flip of a switch, inflation of the Pneumoform begins. In under an hour the Binishell (or Minishell) has taken its final shape. Air pressure and springs with steel reinforcement keep the concrete from sliding down the sides of the dome. For two days the concrete sets and dries, then the Pneumoform is deflated, and fixtures are added to the openings.

Bini has since turned his attention to other projects, such as the Binishelter—low-cost, self-erecting housing for disaster relief. Reflecting on people's resistance to residential domes, and the dominance of right angles in home architecture, Bini says, "Only a few special people may choose a dome structure for living in." —SAM GRAWE



PHOTOS BY DANTE N. BINI



The Portable House uses materials like glass, aluminum siding, Homasote, and P95 plastic.

THE PORTABLE HOUSE

OFFICE OF MOBILE DESIGN

"What we're proposing is a rethinking of the trailer park and all the stereotypes that go along with it," explains architect Jennifer Siegal, principal and owner of the Office of Mobile Design in Los Angeles. "I like the idea of a contained, self-sufficient community, which a trailer park is. The ability to live and work in a compact environment is very appealing and allows you to create a sense of neighborhood—something you don't get in sprawling communities."

Siegal has focused on various aspects of mobile architecture throughout her career with projects like the Mobile EcoLab, an environmental workshop on wheels that travels to L.A. schools to teach students about environmental issues, and the iMobile, an online roving port for accessing global communications networks. Recently, OMD was commissioned to design a new mobile city for Pallotta TeamWorks, the creator of multiple-day fundraising events like Tanqueray's American AIDS Rides and Avon's Breast Cancer 3-Day Walk. The commission includes overall campsite master planning for Pallotta's multiple-day events, as well as mobile structures to accommodate the events' service, transport, housing, and vending needs. Siegal's Portable House is a natural extension of these projects.

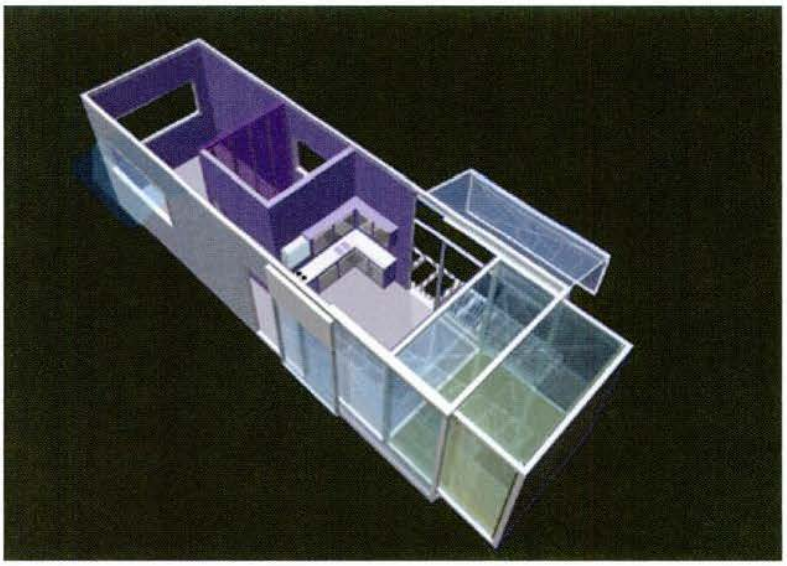
Inspired by visionary housing schemes from Archigram to Arcosanti, Siegal sees endless possibilities in the Portable House. The 40- by 12-foot mobile structures are very compact and not exactly luxurious, but they can, as Seigal explains, "exist in any situation. You're not bound or rooted to place. It's an idea that harks back to nomadism, and I

RENDERINGS BY THE OFFICE OF MOBILE DESIGN

see our generation responding quite well to that due to new technologies, the global economy, etc. I think this project is a response to the way we live and work today."

Siegal, who lives and works at the Brewery complex in downtown Los Angeles, hopes to buy some land in Venice, California, and produce a portable house for herself. Her ideal is to group three trailers together in a U-shape forming an inner courtyard: one you live in, one you work in, and one used as a communal space. But the configurations are endless: They can be stacked to expand vertically, for example, or attached to one another.

"I have a firm belief in doing what you spout forth, especially as an architect," Siegal says. "I want to prove this scenario is a good one by living in it myself." —A.A.



ACORN HOUSE CONVERSION PROJECT

KENNEDY & VIOLICH ARCHITECTURE

Since 1947, Acorn Structures (now part of Deck House, Inc.) has been producing "individually designed, pre-engineered houses," assembled on-site from factory-built panels. Where many prefab housing companies have failed, Acorn has succeeded—mostly because of the high degree of customization offered within the confines of "pre-engineered" design (six different Acorns can almost look like six entirely different houses). Kennedy & Violich's (KVA) clients purchased two older, smallish, linked Acorn houses atop a wooded hill on Cape Cod, with the intention of transforming the suburban structures into a "contemporary living and working environment," and the Acorn Conversion Project was born.

Because KVA was asked to work within the existing footprint of the building, they developed an unusual solution to the client's desire for more space. They removed the low-slung ceilings, exposing the Acorn's prefabricated trusses and painting them white. In keeping with the Acorn vernacular, skylights were added above the revamped kitchen (set apart from the rest of the living space by a translucent glass wall that acts as both light source and diffuser). The newly reclaimed spaces were further transformed and obscured by hanging perforated aluminum panels, which, according to architect Sheila Kennedy, "under different lighting conditions appear alternately opaque, translucent, or transparent." Computer-aided manufacturing determined the exact amount of perforation needed to achieve the desired optical effect; as day becomes night the panels dissolve, revealing the exposed trusses and hidden recesses of a "ceiling landscape."

In this renovation, KVA not only met their client's desire to reinterpret a conventional home, but with state-of-the-art manufacturing technology created, as Kennedy says, "a constantly changing perception of the volume."

—S.G.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KVA

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ESTATE OF R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER. SEBASTOPOL, CA

DYMAXION BATHROOM

R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER

In the 1930s, R. Buckminster Fuller invented the Dymaxion Bathroom, one of the first prefabricated bathroom units, and the first ever manufactured from die-stamped metal, like a car body. The interior, made from two sections of waterproof, watertight sheet metal and two laminated plastic hoods, had a pre-plumbed sink and tub. There were no corners or crevices for mildew to fester. In less than an hour, two people could install it, even in a retrofitted house. The whole bathroom weighed—and cost—slightly more than a standard '30s bathtub. And in a spare, metallic way, it looked magnificent.

Fuller's ingenious design briefly charmed the Phelps-Dodge Research Laboratories, then got thwarted in prototype stage by unions of American plumbers who believed it would hurt their business. But Fuller's idea, enhanced by the advancement of plastic, has caught on outside the United States. In Japan, Sekisui House Ltd. builds adorable units that "adopt the principles of universal design." In England, European Ensuites Ltd. builds one-, two-, and three-function units, all made to order off the Web.

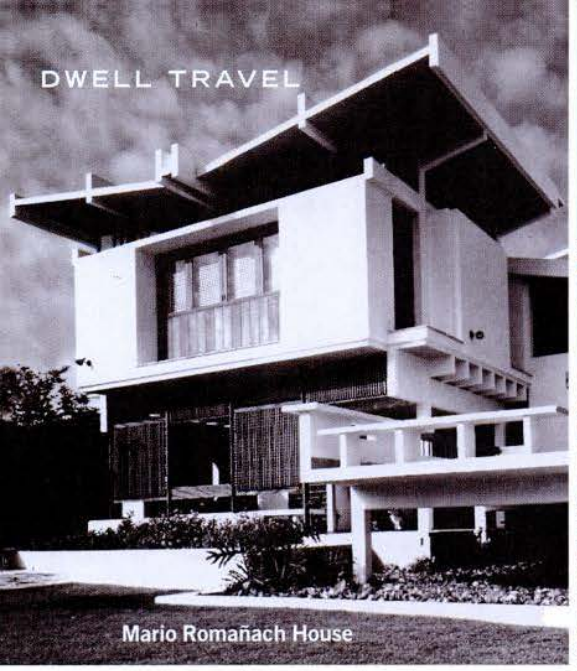
U.S. manufacturers have all but forgotten Fuller's vision. Charles Robertson, founder of www.restrooms.org, has read bathroom feedback from thousands of Americans. "Everybody," he says, "wants to put their personality into their bathrooms. They want to hang pictures. And they're traditional about bathroom fixtures. They expect their bathrooms to be just like what they had as kids." As much as they rely on bathroom rituals, they relish the cumbersome construction ceremony: lugging the tub, installing the pipes, grouting the grout, wallpapering the walls.

Robertson's wisdom explains why prefab bathrooms haven't caught on in America. But his reasons, like bathtub rings, are depressing. In the words of Alexander Kira, author of the famed ergonomic study *The Bathroom*, "American society at the moment is turning aside functional innovations for personalized extravagance."

—VIRGINIA GARDINER

1970 - 2000

cappellini


Mario Romañach House


Centro Habana


Malecon Surf


Richard Neutra House

HAVANA: CITY UNDER GLASS

STORY BY ROBERT NEUWIRTH

Havana is. Havana is not. It is colonial, it is communist. It is revelatory, it is repressive. It is beautiful, yet it is the dirtiest city you've ever seen. It is intensely patriotic but it runs on American dollars, and the government even mints its own representations of quarters, nickels, and dimes to provide change.

Spend your first couple of days in Havana drinking in the life. Not tourist life. Cuban life. Try to find a *casa particular* (a private home that legally rents rooms to foreigners) rather than a hotel, to get closer to living Cuban-style. Then, once your heart begins to beat a soft *canson* or *bolero* in time with the rhythm of the sun, you'll be ready to tackle the architecture.

To start with, you'll want some background. Modernist architect Eugenio Batista (no relation to the last U.S.-backed dictator) has said that the form of the traditional Cuban home derived from three items designed to regulate the sun: patios, porticos, and *persianas* (louvers on window blinds). Batista also suggested that Cuba's building materials—bright, lime-laden concrete and soft red tile—work perfectly to reflect or amplify the sun. Wherever you go—from the graceful loggias of the Prado, Havana's central boulevard, to tenement districts where buildings are kept shaded and cool with massive wooden shutters and exceedingly narrow doorways—the city reflects Batista's dialogue with the sun.

But you'll also need two warnings. First, Cuba's in a slump, and aside from a few isolated *inmobiliarias*—apartments for the executives of foreign companies—there's not much new construction. And most communist-era construction is simply depressing. From the late '60s through early '80s, the government created Alamar, an assemblage of dour, Soviet-planned apartment blocks a few miles east of downtown. More recently, Cuban architects designed a pleasant mixed-use complex called **Pan American Village.** But this project was a one-shot deal: It was built for the 1991 Pan American Games and turned over to families of the construction workers after the sporting event was over.

Second, even in the newer areas, Havana is crumbling. Ancient and modern buildings have the same flaking paint, the same corroding concrete, the same patina of grit encrusting their façades (blame the picturesque but gas-guzzling vintage cars and trucks, which roll out blankets of black smoke). For all its bright forms, Havana is a city of darkness.

For most tourists, the city starts in Habana Vieja (Old Havana)—a bazaar of so many 16th-, 17th-, and 18th-century buildings that it has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Check out the cool stone walls of the Castillo de la Real Fuerza (mid-1500s) and the graceful portico surrounding the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales (mid-1700s). This is Ernest Hemingway's Havana, though some of the haunts from the three decades he spent here—like the Bodeguita del Medio restaurant and El Floridita bar—have been renovated into pricey tourist traps.

The colonial city continues in adjacent **Centro Habana,** where it's a bit worse for wear. Here, narrow tenements lean out onto the street. In the Centro barrio, one building on the Calzada de Infanta seems to symbolize the struggle. It is almost entirely destroyed; its rusting and twisted steel guts open to the sky. But tenants have stabilized a tiny portion, building a wooden lattice to prevent the metal beams from caving in, and are living in this surviving corner.

The colonial forms become more contemporary in **Vedado,** a graceful neighborhood of broad-porched houses that became the city's middle-class district during the Roaring Twenties. In Vedado, classically inspired single-family homes join forces with a few startling modernist boxes. All are quietly decaying under a canopy of trees. Unlike the older sections of the city, trees are plentiful here—forming a natural canopy that makes the community a pleasure to promenade. Urban-planning enthusiasts should notice how Vedado's grid is gracefully twisted 45 degrees from the ocean so every street terminates at the **Malecon,** the city's famed seafront boulevard, where waves wet the westbound lanes.

While at the ocean, be sure to also visit McKim, Meade, and White's oddly old-fashioned Beaux Arts-meets-Deco **Hotel**

PHOTOS FROM *THE HAVANA GUIDE*, PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS, 2000 (ROMAÑACH, NEUTRA, ESCUELA)


Escuela Nacional de Arte


Pan American Village


Vedado


Hotel Nacional de Cuba

PHOTOS BY ROBERT NEUWIRTH (PAN AMERICAN VILLAGE), HAZEL HANKIN (VEDADO AND HOTEL)

Nacional de Cuba (1930). This monumental pile stands apart from the city on a rock outcropping overlooking the sea. More than 40 years after the communist revolution, it remains a bastion of colonialist privilege—particularly on the veranda, where you can sip rum drinks while looking out on the bluest ocean as the gritty city backs off in silence. You can still stay here, too—approximately $150 buys a double in one of the city's plushest hotels.

Havana also has a little-known belt of modernist homes. Throughout the 1950s, Cuba's leading architects revamped the traditional Cuban home for the country's emerging haute bourgeoisie. These high-style homes are spread through the seaside neighborhoods a few kilometers west of downtown (you'll probably need to hire a car for half a day if you want to take this tour), in areas like Cubanacán (before the revolution it was called Country Club Park) and Siboney (formerly known as Biltmore).

Check out the abundantly angular 1956 home designed by Mario Romañach on Calle 216A (unfortunately, greatly changed over the years), or his 1957 villa on Calle 214 that uses a series of interrupted planes to create a pagoda-like façade. Also look for the elegant, breezy Stanley Wax house (designed by Frank Martínez in 1959) on Calle 198, or the formal geometric confection, also 1959, created by Manuel Gutiérrez for Gabriel García on Calle 176. There's even a 1956 Richard Neutra home on Avenida 19A. Most of the families who lived in these areas fled soon after the communists came to power, as did most of the architects. But their mannered, modern mansions remain; even now they're status homes for diplomats and the city's emerging moneyed class.

While you're in the area, you'll need to make a pilgrimage to the most moving relic in the city: the Escuela Nacional de Arte (Avenida 23 and Calle 120 in Cubanacán). This complex, a series of gently undulating pavilions of brick and terra cotta, with Catalan vault roofs, designed by Ricardo Porro, Roberto Gottardi, and Vittorio Garatti, was spawned by Fidel Castro in 1961 to replace the country club golf course with schools that would nurture true Cuban culture. The designs recall the themes of the traditional Cuban house, with arcaded avenues, shaded porticos, and graceful galleries, all open to the air but sheltered from the sun.

Almost immediately, these structures came under fire. Some dedicated cadres claimed they were idiosyncratic and undemocratic. Others fretted that they were too individualist for the standardized forms promoted by the Soviet Union. The Cuban government cut off funding in 1965. The vacant ballet complex, though stripped and scarred, pulses with life. The amphitheater—a luminous grotto where vines snake along the overhead lighting array and spider webs create shadows on the stage floor—evokes the magical-realist vision that engulfed the country during the early days of the revolution but today seems sorely absent.

Back in Habana Vieja, façades are propped up waiting for the investment dollars to fill the voids behind them. "Will it be only for rich people?" I ask Maria Elena Martin Zequeira, a professor of architecture and a coordinator of this year's international art biennial. She is reassuring: "One year ago, I was very afraid of this. But the government passed a resolution stopping development. The government is controlling it." She notes that in barrio San Isidro, just to the south of the tourist zone, long-term residents will retain their apartments after renovation. But locals tell me that along the Prado, with its huddle of tourist hotels, the government plans to evict hundreds of families to make more room for tourists. They have been promised new homes in the oppressive barracks in Alamar.

So far, this hasn't happened. For now, Havana will embrace you with the possibilities of decay. Epochs disappear in an instant and ancient and modern buildings begin to look the same. Yet, despite the decay and the difficulties of dashed expectations, the city still, somehow, seems bathed in light.

Robert Neuwirth writes on business, politics, and urbanism for numerous publications. He is currently working on a book about self-built squatter communities around the world.

RIGHT BACK WHERE I STARTED FROM

STORY BY CAROL TAYLOR

Much to Carol Taylor's surprise, subtle elements of the décor she grew up with (above) have surfaced in the Manhattan loft where she lives today.

PHOTO BY MARK HEITHOFF

In America, Canada, and England, many West Indians grow up in houses filled with pseudo French Provincial furniture wrapped up tightly in a protective plastic skin that clings to the body in summer like a wet tongue kiss. West Indians love to live in a faux world: Faux mahogany dining sets, nestled comfortably in retro Edwardian living rooms. Implausible ornaments crowded ten deep on a side table. Elaborate wicker displays and fake-flower arrangements. Wall-to-wall carpeting protected by plastic runners, crisscrossing every possible walkway.

In my West Indian family, I was definitely the apple that had fallen far from the tree. Actually, I'd fallen and rolled all the way down the hill. For me, plastic was for storing food, not covering furniture. Inconceivably, I was born a modernist into a family of ceramic figurine collectors. My childhood bedroom, incongruous in my parents' overstuffed world, was a monastic, whitewashed space embellished only by the black-and-white Ansel Adams photographs I'd cut out from a wall calendar. My wooden floor, polished to a high gloss, was a natural oasis in a world of wall-to-wall. I lived "less is more" long before I knew who to attribute the quote to. I was eight years old.

Today I am an unrepentant aesthete. I can tell an Eames from a Saarinen. I can discern the curvature of a Jacobsen from the sharp lines of a Mies van der Rohe. And these pieces would all go well in my place, for I am a loft dweller in Manhattan, at a time when only the rich can afford to live this way.

Yes, I live alone in a loft on Millionaire Island. I am decadent, important, powerful, like a media mogul, a dot-com maven, or a trust-fund baby. But I am none of these things. In fact, I am as far from them as you can get. I am a writer, who somehow lives alone in a 2,000-square-foot loft in the East Village, which now appears to be the most expensive neighborhood in New York. Three floors above Avenue A and Second Street, at the crossroads of affluence and apathy, I live and work under 14-foot ceilings and windows that are six feet tall, the light flooding in from three exposures.

I have a bathroom about the size of most Manhattan studios, a bedroom the size of most one-bedrooms, a dining room, an open kitchen, a walk-in closet, a guest room, two separate offices, and not one but two living rooms, one at either end of the loft, which runs for a quarter of a block.

Don't hate me because I have square footage. I get up and thank God every day for it, believe me. And no, it wasn't easy. I lived for two years in a construction zone of plaster dust and Sheetrock, paint cans, and joint compound. Two hard years of working 9 to 5 during the day and then 7 to 11 on the loft at night. Years of paint fumes and sawdust, of broken nails and smashed fingers, of putting up walls, painting, and plastering. But it was all worth it because I can never take what I have for granted.

When I moved in six years ago, on the cusp of the great East Village makeover, I was struck dumb by the soaring space. Not knowing which end to walk to first, all I could do was stand in the center of the loft and turn slowly around. When I first moved in I kept losing things. I'd put my toothbrush down and it would disappear, or I'd spend half the morning looking for my coffee cup. Now, when I go away on vacation I come back and am struck again by those first moments of space and height. So I understand when people come over and float disbelieving from room to room, repeating, "What a great place. You live here alone?" My answer is always the same: "I know, I can't believe it either."

I don't really know how it happened. Every morning when I wake up and walk the 50 feet to the other end of the loft to look out over Avenue A, I shake my head in disbelief that the Space Police have not hauled me off and divided the place into five apartments. "Can I afford to live this way?" I ask myself daily. I pay a buck a foot, but it's worth it. Cheap, even, when you consider that you now need at least five grand to move into an apartment in Manhattan. Pretty soon you'll need that amount to move into an apartment in Queens. Forget Brooklyn, it's already too late.

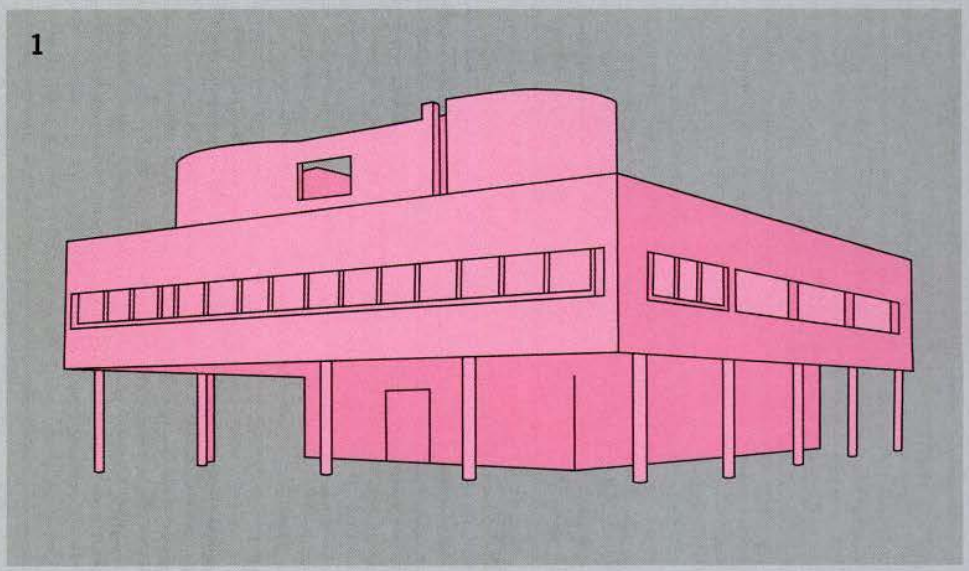
Sure, I could get a roommate and have them pay most of the rent. But the thrill of having my own place, of living alone for the first time in my life, is beyond compare. I am now blissfully, excitedly, thrillingly alone to wander around naked, to sleep with my door flung open. I can leave things draped over chairs or strewn on the floor. I find now that without the constant vigilance of making sure that things are where they should be, I am—surprise—a more relaxed and happy person. The books and CDs are still alphabetized, but now I can leave them lying around and not lie sleepless at night after having done so. Now, living alone, I am no longer anal, only orderly. At 34, I am finally relishing the peace and tranquillity of life on my own, but more importantly, life on my own terms.

When my ex and I broke up after ten years together, I spent a month going through every drawer and every closet, and reassessed what was mine and why. I moved everything out of storage into my loft only to turn right around and give it all away. I didn't know how much I liked, no, needed the space until it started to fill up. So my motto became "when in doubt, throw it out," and I did. If it wasn't built in or breathing, out it went. I can now see the space without all the things filling it up. I am left with the bones of the rooms and my vision for them.

Oddly enough, what I see is that my place, though light-years from my parents' house, is not so much unlike it. I have my father's love of plants and antique rugs, for example, and have inherited my mother's eye for pictures, which we both frame and arrange in hanging collages. While researching pictures for this piece, I was rocked when I saw, in a new light, the photos of the house I grew up in. The living room was almost the exact same aquamarine blue of my bedroom, and the kitchen the same burnt sienna as my kitchen and bathroom. And so it goes. The further you go away from your origins, the closer you get to finding yourself right back where you started.

And, you know, it's not such a bad place because I now know where I got my style.

Carol Taylor's roots are in Kingston, Jamaica, and Brooklyn, New York. Her place is in the East Village. She is the relationship advice columnist for flirt.com and has just published Brown Sugar: A Collection of Erotic Black Fiction.

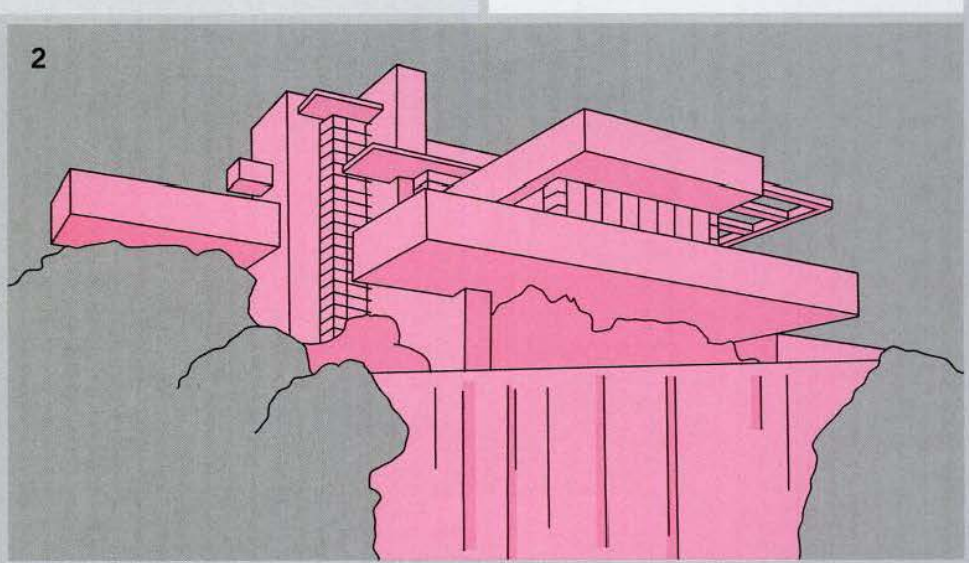


A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO MODERNISM

A rather vague understanding of the term "modern style" is evident throughout our culture. Twentieth-century modern has become a catch-all term now used to define current trends as well as historical periods that were once considered inventive and progressive. To better understand the range of 20th-century modern style, there are a few simple elements that are essential to these different periods—modern (1900s–1930s), mid-century modern (1940s–1960s), and contemporary modern (1960s–1970s)—that can help to easily define them. While they all share threads of ideas such as an open plan for the kitchen, living, and dining rooms, large spans of glass, and low-pitched or flat roofs, each period has contributed different aspects that clearly differentiate them. Here, a look at the houses and furnishings that characterize each period.

By Joseph Rosa

Joseph Rosa is curator of architecture at the Heinz Architectural Center at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. He is also the author of numerous books and essays on modern architecture and architectural photography, including Albert Frey, Architect.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY SHAWN HAZEN

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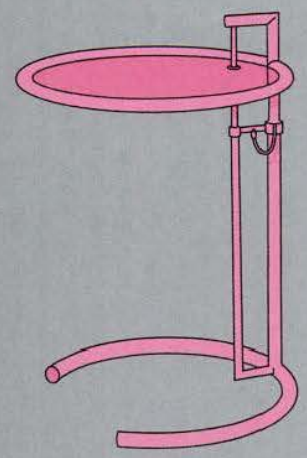

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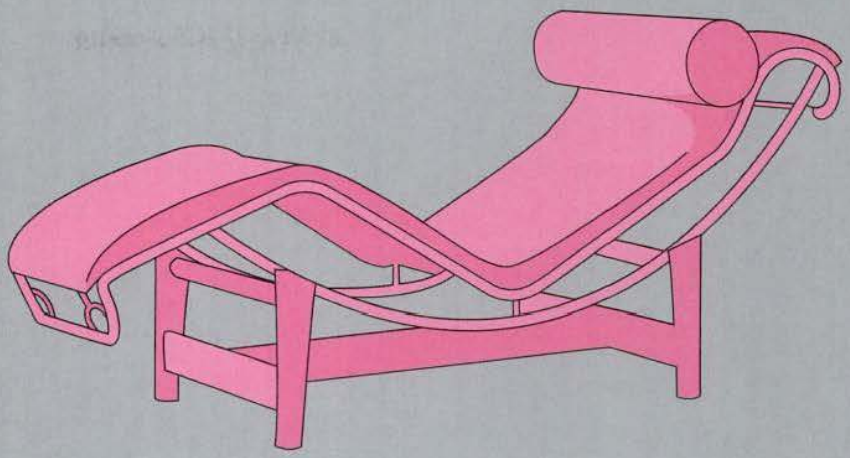

Modern 1900s–1930s

During this period, architecture was revolutionized by new aesthetic sensibilities rather than new technologies. The architects' vision was for an aesthetic devoid of historicism and ornamentation. Inherent in this aesthetic was a broader social project, one that linked good design inextricably to progress and the human spirit. This was the period of the modern masters such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier. Quintessential to this period are Wright's 1909 Robie House in Chicago and Le Corbusier's 1931 **Villa Savoye** in Poissy, France. Wright's Robie House has a large, low-pitched roof that cantilevers out from the perimeter. The exterior brick wall is separated from the underside of the roof's overhang by a strong horizontal band of windows that wraps the house, visually separating the roof plane from the perimeter vertical walls. In 1935, Wright built his most famous house, **Fallingwater,** in Mill Run, Pennsylvania. Clad in stone, with large concrete cantilevering balconies that protrude from it, this house straddles a stream of water and best typifies Wright's notion of an organic architecture. Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye is a whitewashed rectangular box set on top of pilotis (columns) that has extensive roof gardens and decks, connected by an interior ramp that runs throughout the home. Any shapes that recede into the pristine white box, such as the entrance level of the house or roof terraces, are painted a color to allow the pure rectangular shape of the house to stand out.

A great deal of the furnishings of this early modern period were mass-produced, and the primary materials used usually included square or round sections of tubular steel and cushions wrapped in leather, pony skin, canvas, or rattan. **Mies van der Rohe's chaise, chair and ottoman,** and coffee table were designed for his 1929 Barcelona Pavilion in Spain and are all examples of an elegant, restrained modern style. Le Corbusier's 1929 furniture designs with Charlotte Perriand charted a different course. Their Cube chair (Grand Comfort) and **Chaise Longue** are scaled for a smaller torso and are very comfortable. In 1928, **Eileen Gray** designed the ultimate end table, which could be adjusted vertically to accommodate any height. But not everything from the 1900s to the 1930s was fashioned from steel, glass, and leather. Paul Frankel and Kem Webber in America, and Jean Michel Frank in France, created some of the most opulent yet simple modern furniture in textured fabrics and rich wood veneers. ▸

1 / "The house must not have a façade," wrote Corbu of Villa Savoye, "it must open on to all four directions." (Visitor info: +33-139-6501-06) 2 / Fallingwater is also open for guided tours (for info, call 724-329-8501) even though the roof is falling down. Wright modestly considered this house to be "a great blessing, one of the great blessings to be experienced here on earth." 3 / Eileen Gray designed this as a breakfast table for the guest room in her E-1027 house. 4 / Corbu called his chaise longue a "rest machine." 5 / The king and queen of Spain sat on these chrome and leather chairs on their official visit to Mies' Barcelona pavilion in 1929.

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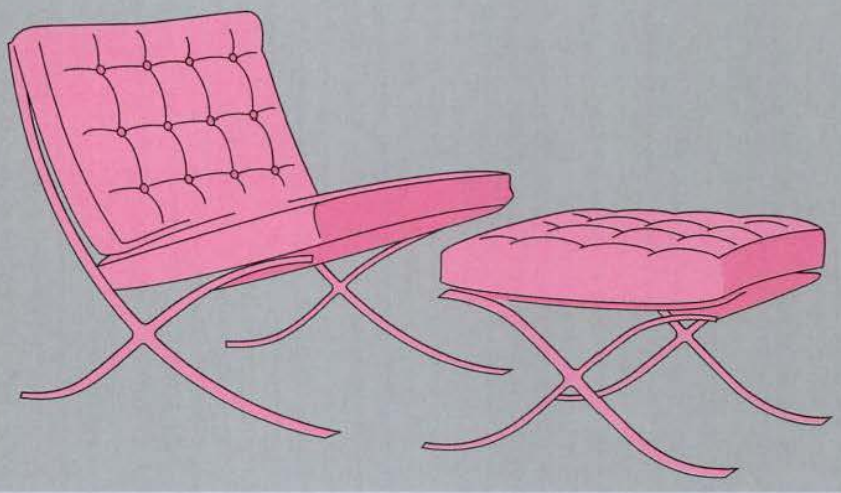

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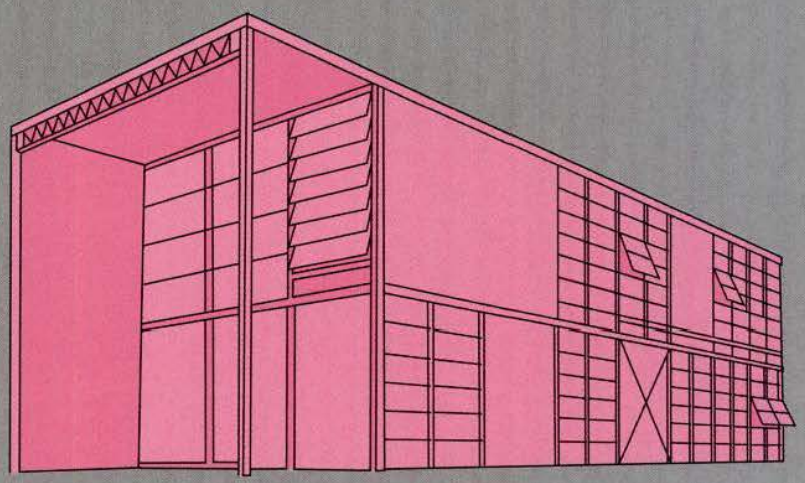

Mid-Century Modern 1940s–1960s

The architectural transformation of this period came from new material and technologies that grew out of World War II. Harnessing these possibilities enabled America to manufacture an affordable modernism. From the technology that produced bent plywood for wartime leg splints to **Charles and Ray Eames' chip chairs,** the divisions between technology, innovation, and design became seamless. Houses most representative of this period include Charles and Ray Eames' 1949 Case Study House #8 in Los Angeles; Marcel Breuer's 1945 Geller House in Long Island, New York; Richard Neutra's 1947 Kaufmann House in Palm Springs, California; Philip Johnson's 1949 Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut; and Pierre Koenig's 1960 Case Study House #22 in Los Angeles.

The most emblematic house of mid-century modern design has to be the **Eames House.** Designed from off-the-shelf components, this house perfectly illustrates what means and economy can produce in the name of good design. Clad in vertical siding with its signature "butterfly"-shaped roof, Breuer's Geller House exemplified the postwar modern style on the East Coast. Neutra's elegant 1947 Kaufmann house, with its strong horizontal roof planes, stone and stucco-clad walls, and large spans of glass that allowed the desert to visually enter into the house, became the model for West Coast domestic architecture. Roughly contemporaneous with Mies' 1950 Farnsworth House, Johnson's 1949 Glass House became the quintessential glass-and-steel-framed home. Its only private room was a cylindrical brick bathroom. Koenig's 1960 Case Study House #22, perched high in the Hollywood Hills, was a more livable glass structure with 60 percent of its walls made of glass.

New materials such as light aluminum, fiberglass, resin plastics, and molded plywood techniques were prevalent in many of the new furnishings on the market during this period. These new materials lent an evident lightness to the furniture, in contrast to earlier pieces designed by Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Breuer. New furniture companies such as Knoll and Herman Miller began hiring talented, young designers, who created some of the most significant and affordable designs of the 20th century. Pieces like the Eames' fiberglass chair with changeable bases, Bertoia's wire chairs (originally designed for the garden), and the Nelson bench and **starburst clock** are integral pieces in the canon of modern furnishings.

6 / The Eameses made their own plywood-molding apparatus, a kind of curing oven dubbed the "Kazam! machine," from scraps of wood and spare bicycle parts. 7 / After 13 years of living in a house with an exposed steel frame, Ray Eames observed, "The structure long ago ceased to exist. I am not aware of it" (for info, see www.eamesoffice.com). 8 / "Suddenly it was decided by Mrs. America that this was the clock to put in your kitchen. Why the kitchen, I don't know. But every ad that showed a kitchen for years after that had a ball clock in it."—George Nelson 9 / Of his chair produced in violet, turquoise, red, orange, beige, black, and white plastic, Verner Panton said, "One sits more comfortably on a color that one likes." 10 / "What is commonly known as architecture are Styles—Greek, Colonial, French, English, Modern, etc. These are known merchandise the Bankers will finance and Real Estate sell. Styles are copies."—John Lautner 11 / "Design demands observation," said Achille Castiglioni, whose Arco fixture lamp was inspired by a street lamp. 12 / Karim Rashid's plastic "Oh" chair is available at Bed, Bath & Beyond for just $39.95.

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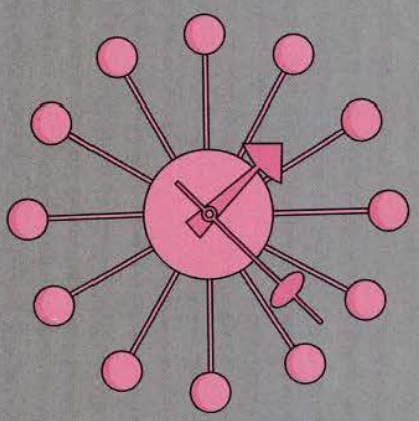

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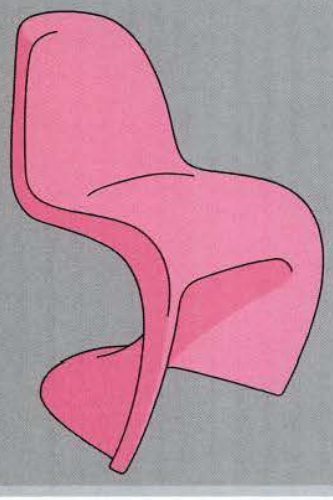

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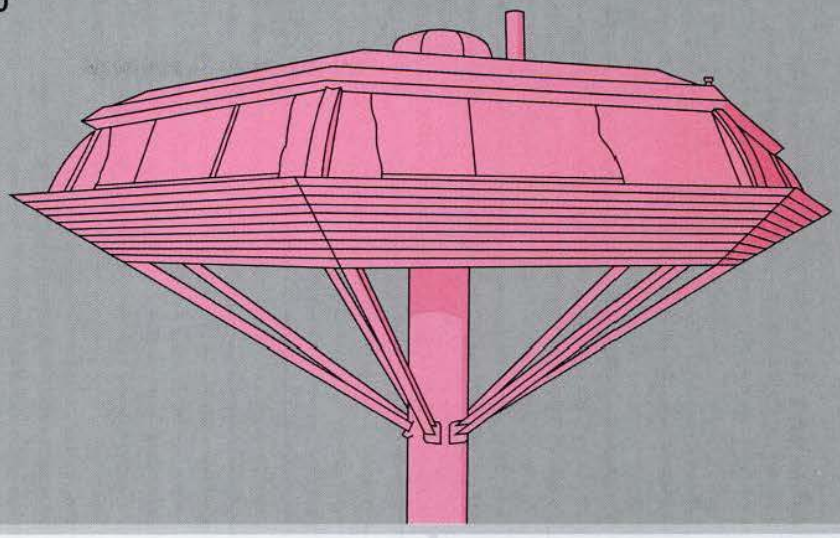

Contemporary Modern 1960s–1970s

This period marks a return to the modern masters of the 1900s–1930s genre. Architects and designers felt that the post-WWII technological advances had taken their toll on the pedagogical discourse in architecture and looked to reactivate the ideological discussions of the earlier modern masters. This formalist revival is most evident in Richard Meier's 1965 Smith House in Darien, Connecticut, and Charles Gwathmey and Richard Henderson's design for Gwathmey's parents' house and studio in Amagansett, New York. Highly derivative of the Le Corbusier "white period," Meier's whitewashed, wood-clad house with large spans of glass has become his signature style for all his architectural commissions. In contrast to Meier's white formalism, Gwathmey and Henderson's design for the 1967 Gwathmey House and Studio is comprised of bold geometric shapes and clad with weathered vertical siding both inside and out. These two houses became models for the many marginal modern designs by other architects that have dotted our eastern shores since the 1960s.

While the East Coast set was busy reviving the rhetoric of modernisms past, West Coast practitioners were exploring their own postwar architectural identity. John Lautner's 1960 Malin Residence (better known as the **Chemosphere House**) in Hollywood, California, and Frank O. Gehry's alterations to his own Santa Monica, California, home in 1978 marked the West Coast as a progressive and experimental environment for architecture. For a young aircraft engineer with a steep mountain lot in Hollywood, Lautner designed the Chemosphere, a gravity-defying steel, wood, and concrete octagon built onto one central concrete column. Gehry's house interventions radically challenged the normative idea of modern architecture. His modification to his bungalow, wrapped in exposed wood-framed construction along with a chain-linked fence, created a new idiom and material palette that rejected the earlier tenets of the 1900s–1930s modern aesthetic.

The furniture of this period is as split as the two architectural coasts. Gwathmey and Henderson's and Meier's houses were always furnished with classic Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Breuer pieces in homage to the great masters. Gehry opted for anything but classic pieces. Lautner favored shag carpeting (!), **Verner Panton** chairs, and **Castiglioni lamps** as well as his own opulent, custom-designed pieces (mostly because they fit into his unorthodox shapes).

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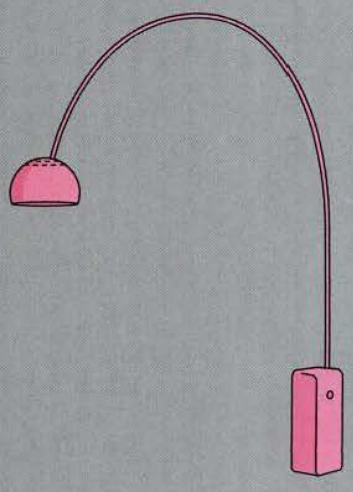

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All this raises the bigger question: What does the term "modern" mean today in architecture and furniture design? Is the next generation of "moderns" in the architectural canon UN Studio (Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos), Greg Lynn, Reiser + Umemoto, Kolatan/MacDonald, and ShoP? Are the furniture and product designs by Marc Newsom and **Karim Rashid** the models from which today's modern should be measured? As with the birth of every new century, design fields establish new directions while leaving behind the old century that rushes to sum itself up. It might be years before a call can be made on what the next modernism will be. ■

The Modernist Bookshelf

Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture
By Ulrich Conrads (editor)
The MIT Press, 1999 (First published 1964)
Never underestimate the importance of primary sources. This anthology gathers together a century of passionate declarations on building from Wright to Malevich to Debord.

Mid-Century Modern: Furniture of the 1950s
By Cara Greenberg
Harmony, 1984, 1995
This clear and informative guide to '50s furniture was first published in the mid-'80s—back when you could buy Eames chairs for ten bucks at the flea market, and long before Pauly Shore had ever heard of Richard Neutra.

Modern Architecture Since 1900
By William J. R. Curtis
Phaidon 1982, 2000
Covering everything from Hector Guimard's Paris Metro station to Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, Curtis' book is considered by many to be the standard work on 20th-century architecture.

Towards a New Architecture
By Le Corbusier
Dover, 1986 (First published 1931)
In this passionate call to arms, Le Corbusier expounds on the noble calling of architecture. Disciples take note: round spectacles not included.

Case Study Houses, 1945–1962
By Esther McCoy
Hennessey + Ingalls, 1962, 1977
Just after WWII, John Entenza, editor of *Arts & Architecture* magazine, commissioned 30 architects to redefine home building. McCoy's book is the definitive account of one of the most influential and unorthodox design projects ever undertaken.

From Bauhaus to Our House
By Tom Wolfe
Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981, 1999
Back in 1981, Wolfe argued that modern architecture was nothing more than a hodgepodge of pipe railings, plate glass, and cylindrical shapes, and its fans were simply slaves to fashion. A rant to be sure, but an amusing one.

Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century
By Pat Kirkham
The MIT Press, 1995
Modern design just wouldn't be modern design without Charles and Ray Eames—perhaps the most famous (and multidisciplinary) design duo of 20th-century America. Rarely has anyone had as much fun with plywood.

The Natural House
By Frank Lloyd Wright
Horizon Press, 1954
Insisting that "the house you build to live in as a home should be integral in every sense. Integral to site, to purpose, and to you," Wright succinctly captured the highest aims of modern architecture.

PHOTOS BY DWIGHT ESCHLIMAN (RADZINER)

Ron Radziner *is design principal of Marmol + Radziner Architects, a design/build firm in Santa Monica, whose clients include Yves St. Laurent, Propaganda Films, and TBWA/Chiat/Day. The firm is well known for its restoration of modernist classics, including Richard Neutra's Kaufmann House in Palm Springs.* ►

INTERVIEWS:

PHOTO BY TIM CLINTON (DAWSON)

Paul Dawson *is the proprietor of Dawson/Clinton Custom Flooring Company, a San Francisco–based firm that concentrates on modular floor systems for single-family homes, apartments, and corporate clients.* ►

Louis Ravano *is a head contractor at Ravano & Cooney, a residential contracting company in San Rafael, California. The company has recently shifted its focus from single-family homes to live/work projects.* ►

Bob Johnson *is the vice president of sales for Windovations in New Jersey, a company that installs custom-designed windows, doors, skylights, and architectural elements of steel, wood, bronze, and glass.* ►

In the case of restoration, the process of stripping away the additions and the changes that occurred to a house is incredibly enlightening. It's like archaeology—as you peel away these new parts that have been placed, you find some of the old things buried beneath. With the Kaufmann house, it was completely appropriate to bring it back to what it had been in 1946. But you have to know when it is really worth restoring or remaking something as it had been versus designing something that's in the spirit of the original. **To just blindly restore a modern home back to what it had been can be a mistake.**

In restoration or reconstruction, we're always faced with the difficulty of achieving a high level of finish. Since most modern homes don't have any molding at the floor that masks the transition between a wood floor and a plaster wall, for instance, everything has to be done very precisely. The traditional home has things like molding or window trim that cover up the places where two materials meet. The modern home doesn't. To somehow find the quality and workmanship to address this challenge is something we always confront. In our practice, we typically build our work ourselves with our own staff because it is so difficult to find people willing to really achieve that quality you need in the modern home.

We probably design three new homes for every one we restore. The restoration work absolutely influences the new work we do. You can't help but learn so much from the projects of these great architects. In a new design, because it's a modern home and it is relatively spare, everything needs to be located very thoughtfully. **Every light fixture, smoke detector—if the thing isn't placed correctly, you notice it forever.** In designing a new modern home, the challenge is to develop a concept that expresses a clear architectural intent but still provides for all of the client's pragmatic needs and creates beautiful and meaningful spaces. Even as we're designing the details of how the walls meet the floor, we're constantly coming back to that original idea and making sure that the clarity is still there.

Somehow you want to achieve a house that is comfortable and very livable. You hope that its soul is coming from its site and the people who are going to live there. You don't want to design something that feels constraining on someone's lifestyle. It can be liberating. You can have a modern house that respects the site and the people who live in it.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE OF BUILDING A MODERN HOME?

Modern means custom which means don't ever do it 'cause it's a nightmare. But seriously, it's difficult because custom flooring is . . . well, that's what it is, it's custom. It's a process of trial and error. You can't build the floor and then try it out somewhere and then sell it as a product. It is different every time.

We have basic systems of flooring and if people want this basic system, we've put this down enough to know how it works and it's fine to do it. The systems we do are modular and you can put them anywhere. You can put it on the wall, you can put it on the ceiling. The good thing about our systems is we build them away from the residence. We come in and install the floor in a few days. It's not like a conventional floor where they come in and tack it all down and they've got to coat it and you have to vacate the residence for a few days. We like the client to approach us and say, "I like the floor you put in for so-and-so and I want that floor." For us, that's the easiest thing in the world, we love that. But what happens a lot instead is that we go to someone's house, they bring out a stack of magazines, and they go from glass to stainless to stone to wood. You get lost because the possibilities are endless and it is really hard to narrow it down. You just stand there staring into space because you're thinking, "Come up with a bloody idea, will you."

You don't want to push the client into a corner because if the floor turns out badly or if you have too much influence on what the floor is going to look like, you're liable for that. They can turn around and say to you, "You know, you pushed me in that direction and I don't like it." **Well, that's a big problem. Just because you see things in a magazine doesn't mean it can be done.** A lot of these are photo shoots that you see. I've done projects for shoots—the floors are never going to be walked on but they make for a beautiful picture.

We try to educate our clients about the process we go through. That is one of our sales pitches. A lot of our clients are actually very well educated about materials. Most of them are really into design in the first place so they are looking for something of high quality. To be successful doing what we do, you have to have a really fine attention to detail, which I think we have. And that is a really important factor because with our systems any slight mistake shows because it is all interlocking. With custom floors, modern floors, you really have to have that fine, fine, attention to detail.

Building modern, single-family homes has gotten tougher, mostly because there are so many new and different materials. Everybody wants to use limestone, granite, marble. And architects want to make their mark, too. They are always coming up with new ideas and are wanting to use materials in new ways, and you have to produce them on the job site. So if a client wants difficult trim work or custom stairs, **you really have to shop around to find someone who's qualified enough to do it.** Then they might want stainless steel for rails, which is very costly. And hardwood floors aren't just your basic oak anymore. People are into bamboo and all sorts of woods, which are tough to work with because they expand and contract in different ways. So you need excellent craftsmen at every step. **The problem is that we don't have the labor force that we used to,** be it union or nonunion. Young people are not going into construction. They're going into the dotcoms and everything else. We're losing a lot of our good carpenters and craftsmen.

In response to these challenges, we've been focusing on building loft developments because there are fewer finishes involved, and that solves a lot of the problems. With a loft project, you can get more units within a site, which provides more housing at lower rent prices. Our lofts are simple: concrete counters, granite counters, stained concrete floors. The façades are stark looking, not cozy.

I would have to say that one of the biggest challenges for building the new-style modern homes is the fact that **architects and owners want to have vast expanses of glass** and it takes the right technology and skill to accomplish that. They want to have the spaces as open, as airy, as lighted as possible but the [exterior] lighting needs to be controlled. So they want the largest amount of glass space with the smallest amount of what we call sightline, which is actually the window frame itself. From there the next challenge is to provide the type of glass that suits a particular need. A home being built in Arizona or California, for example, is definitely going to be different from one that's being built in Connecticut.

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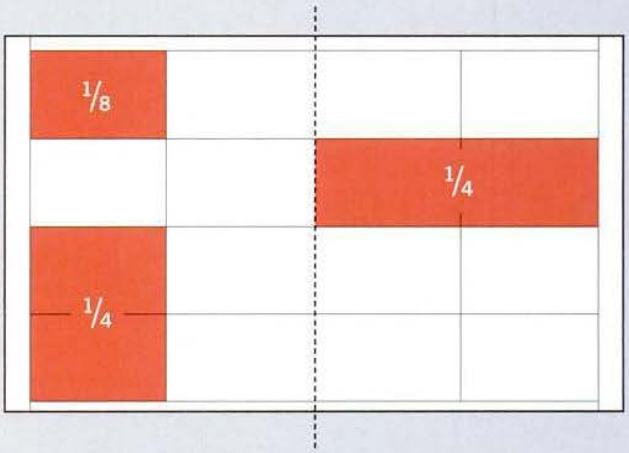

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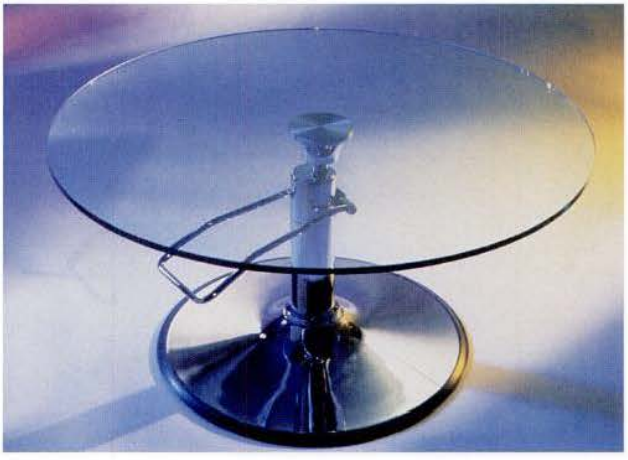

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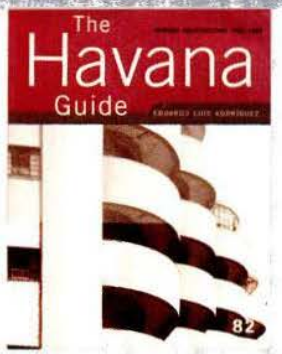

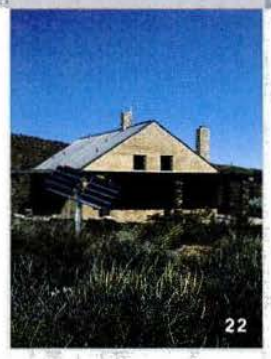

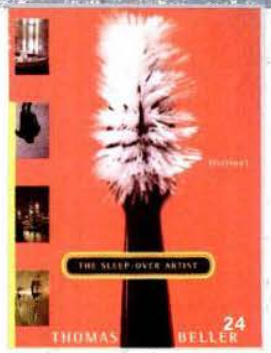

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Three offset rectangular blocks constructed of four-foot-wide stuccoed panels help give shape to the New London Motohome.

PHOTO BY TED HENDRICKSON

WAS IT MOTOHOME-O-PHOBIA?

"Out of the stagnation of an obsolete building industry arises, at a crucial hour, a new industry which will create new opportunities for American men and new freedom for American women. Such are the great underlying irresistible forces by which civilization progresses."

Sarah Delano Roosevelt in a 1935 catalogue for American Houses, Inc.

What ever happened to American Motohomes, those prefabricated houses designed by Robert McLaughlin in the 1930s and thrust onto the American housing scene with patriotic fanfare rarely seen outside wartime or election season?

The sad demise of American Houses, Inc., McLaughlin's company, is a typically long and tragic tale of American finance and marketing gone awry. Though the company no longer exists, several examples of these innovative houses do—including a particularly well-preserved model open to the public in New London, Connecticut.

Tucked away in a quiet corner of the Connecticut College campus, this 1933 Motohome represents one of 12 models marketed by American Houses, Inc., ranging from a four-bathroom, six-bedroom, two-car garage model down to a basic four-room home. Fabricated in a New Jersey factory, the homes could be assembled onsite by "six unskilled laborers" in two to three weeks. Each Motohome was meant to be turnkey and even came "complete with food in the kitchen."

This house was commissioned by Winslow and Anna Ames, who used it as a rental unit until 1949. It was then sold to the college and used as faculty housing until 1985.

The Motohomes never captured the American imagination as McLaughlin had hoped, and American Houses, Inc. was forced to direct its attention toward more conventional prefabricated home building. Eventually, the Ames house fell out of favor, too. The home stood vacant from 1985 until 1994, when it was made a historic landmark. The building has now been fully restored and functions as the headquarters for Connecticut College's Center for Arts and Technology. While no longer a home, the house stands as a testament to McLaughlin's unrealized dream of putting houses that possessed "durability, beauty, economy, and convenience to a degree the world has never known before" within the reach of all middle-class Americans.

—ANDREW WAGNER

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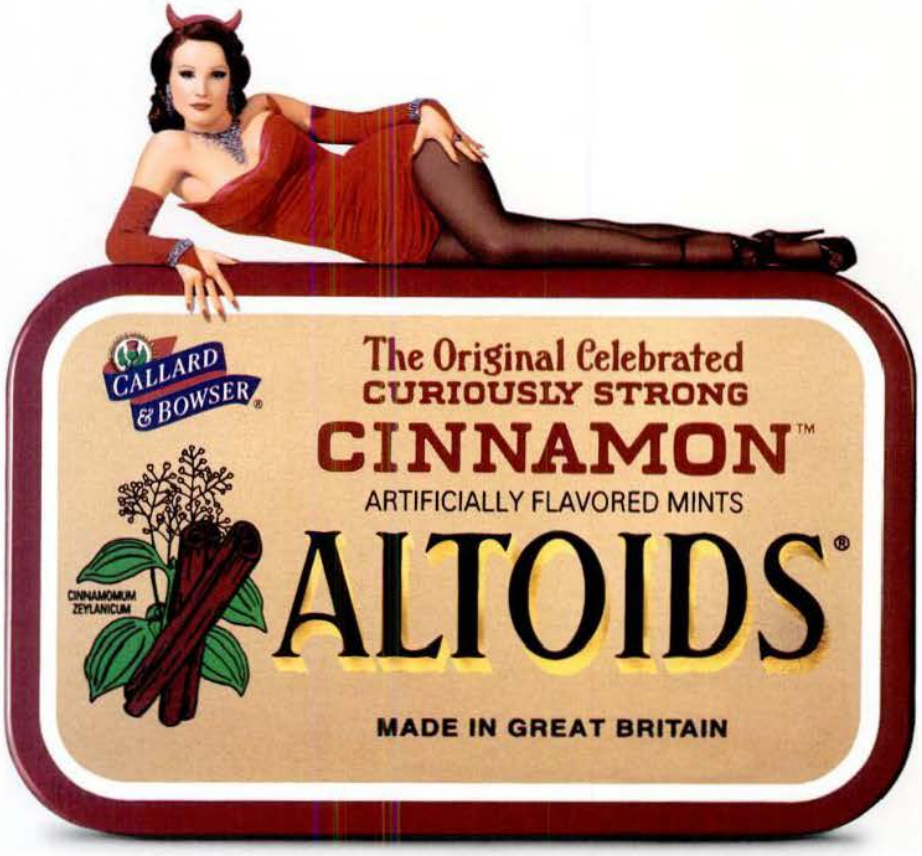

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