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February 2007
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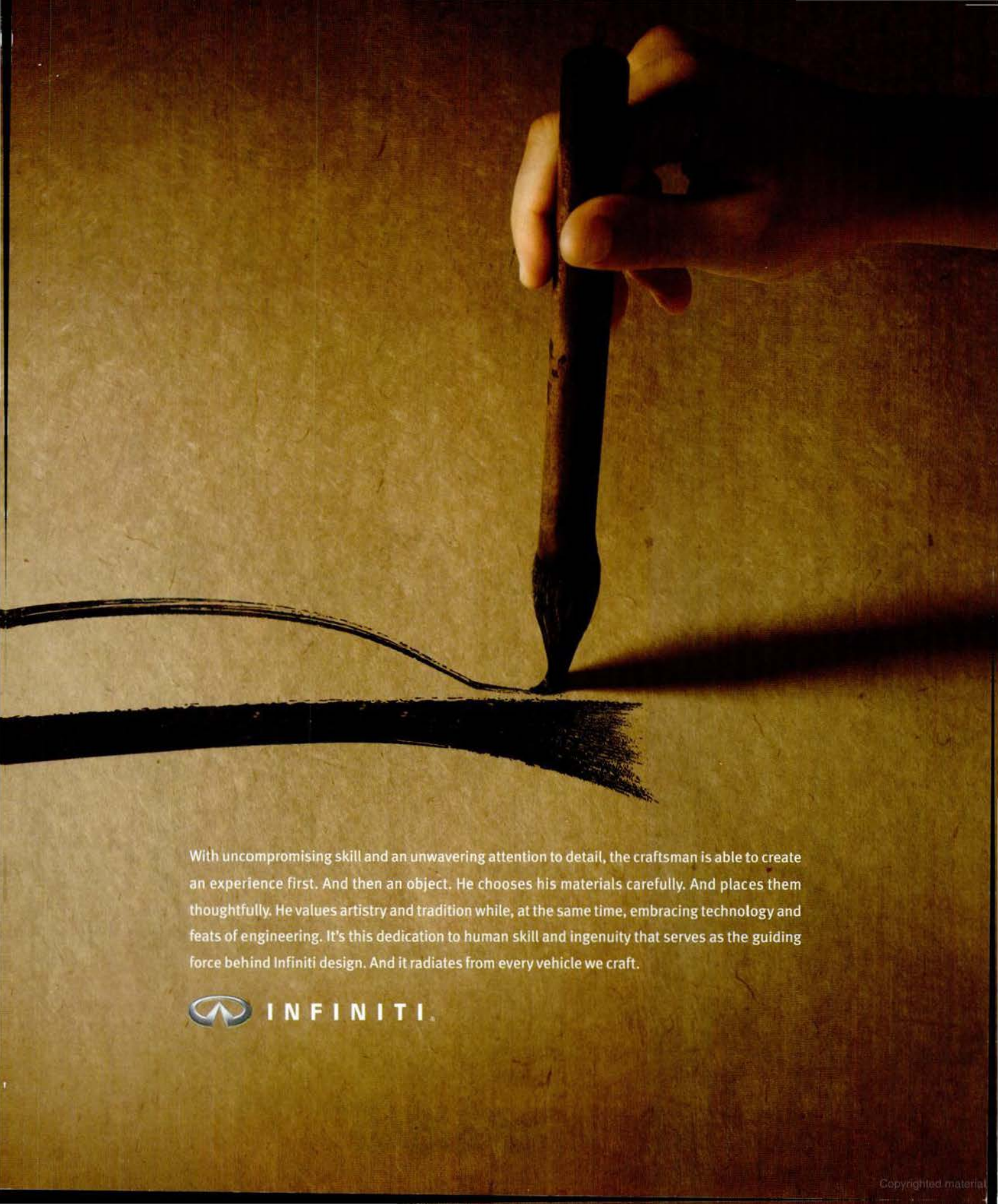

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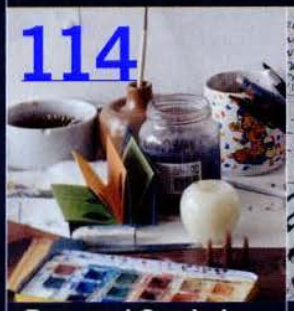
Craft

Shear Talent
Raw and wild are the criteria for Claudy Jongstra's material, but that may not mean what you think. Tending to her flock of sheep in the Dutch countryside, she spins her yarns beyond fashion and into architecture.

Cutting Edge
Showing the beauty in "deformity," Thom Faulders built a unique addition for his equally unique San Francisco client, Jeff Dauber, who, having run out of walls and skin to tattoo, let Faulders get creative with the ceilings and walls.

The Craft of Design
February 2007

"I don't think that it's always desirable to make something perfect, because perfection has its own oppressive weight." —**Roy McMakin**



Pure and Symbol
Satyendra Pakhalé, cultural nomad and darling of the design world, weaves together ancient and modern production techniques.

Letter Perfect
Founder of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine and Typotheque type foundry, font master Peter Bil'ak gives words their shape.

Cottage Industry
With the power, cunning, and strength of craft's Old English roots, Roy McMakin turned his background in conceptualism into a house that is a work of art created with the craft of furniture.

Outside In
Leonardo da Vinci drew plans for a camera obscura in the 15th century, but Abelardo Morrell's images are very much a product of present times.

Cover: Roy McMakin's Shop, Seattle, WA, page 126
Photo by Dave Lauridsen

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A spate of spam from curious characters (Landsliding R. Snotting, Mouthwash J. Cutlets) inspired the amateur cartoonists in editors Sam Grawe and Amber Bravo.

PHOTO BY ANDREA LAWSON

I'm in the market for a refrigerator, and I wonder if Dwell has any recommendations.

Grant Bush
Los Angeles, California

Editors' Note: *Our April 2007 Dwell Reports will review the latest refrigerators, but if you can't wait, you might also check out our February 2001 Dwell Reports in which we (and celebrity chef/expert Anthony Bourdain) reviewed the best refrigerators of 2001. While this article is not yet available on our website, we are working to build up our online archive. In the interim, you can order back issues by visiting www.dwell.com/service/issuearchive.*

You are amazing! This was the best issue ever ("Prefab Now," November 2006). The subject of prefabs is so important to the building community and future homebuyers, I think you should have a section devoted to the progress in this area every month.

Sharon Ashton
Carmel Valley, California

You folks at Dwell have done quite a good job finding available prefab, but I have to take issue with some of these prefab houses you are showing. They look like little more than gussied-up farm sheds. Not only do people not want to live in a garden shed, but these structures would blow away in a good storm. And they do. Year after year.

The Marmol Radziner home ("Desert Utopia," November 2006) looks great, but it, too, brings to mind the trailer parks that are such eyesores in every city. No matter how they are laid out on the landscape, you can't hide the fact that they are bolted-together 12-foot-wide modules that arrived on the back of a truck. Even I went "Ewwwww!" when I saw the schematic.

The city of Dallas, for instance, has passed a law against prefab housing. The crappy companies that are still manufacturing crap are ruining it for the high-end companies trying to make a difference. Until you get rid of the crap, I think nothing is going to change for prefab.

It is sad, because in Texas, there is at least one company putting together very high-quality steel-kit-type homes that I've seen in my own search for prefab. Businesses are building with this kind of structure, but I haven't seen any homeowners using these here yet.

Gregory Berg
Arlington, Texas

I applaud Dwell for providing a place where both the professional and the consumer can look for inspiration and find an emphasis on the ▸

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modern and environmentally responsible aesthetic. However, you should understand that great responsibility comes in serving this large and diverse audience.

The article "The Proof Is in the Prefab" (November 2006) is an example of irresponsible editing. The article presents to the reader a controlled experiment and even specifically references the "perfect laboratory." Yet there is no reference in the article to the many variables that impact any real analysis of the two delivery methods.

For example, the article conveys that the architect was at least somewhat new to using structurally insulated panels (SIPs) and had no experience with prefabrication methods. Site conditions and jurisdictions are never equal for comparison, and judging from the photos, the conditions appeared to be different. And lastly, a conventional stick-built home of this project's scale and complexity should not require the timeline conveyed for the site-built SIPs example. Although I applaud the writer's enthusiasm and conviction, I question her experience and ability to evaluate the two scenarios.

Any credible experiment would start with a team experienced in the design and delivery of both systems and attempt to reduce or eliminate the real variables that would impact the outcome. In short, this would have been a great story for Dwell if it had simply profiled the two beautiful projects while referencing the scenarios that impacted their delivery. It is certainly not an experiment providing any "proof" as suggested in its title.

Please take the time to be more diligent in your journalism, and remember your audience and responsibility. If not, consumers will continue to be misled and design professionals will lose respect for your publication.

Paul Michael Scanlon
Seattle, Washington

Editors' Note: *Featured architect Michelle Kaufman responds:*

Thank you for your letter and your thoughts. I agree with you that Dwell should be applauded for its focus on residential-scale projects that are inspiring and informative for both designers as well as homeowners. Too often magazines highlight pretty pictures, but do not talk about the reality and challenges in the construction, or discuss options in methods of construction.

As the designer of both Glidehouse homes in this article, as well as the homeowner of the site-built version of the Glidehouse, I can assure you that the writer and editors of this article were accurate, and that the information shared was reliable.

Your assessment that the site-built Glidehouse should have taken less time is your opinion, but not the average reality. The timeline for our site-built home was average for a single-family, nondeveloper/builder, architecturally designed home of this scale and complexity in the San Francisco Bay Area. Although SIPs offer some time-savings for the framing, this is actually a very small portion of the overall site-built project. We did have representatives from the SIPs supplier on site to aid in the construction. Even if we had more experienced SIPs builders, it would not have changed the overall timeline more than a week or so.

Although our intention in building our house was not to set up a case study (it was rather to create a place for my husband and me to live), the result of our building a site-built home, and then working with a client on an identical modular home, ended up being a unique experience with interesting information that we wanted to share with people. So many people talk about pros and cons between site-built and modular construction; our story and experiences offer real information and data. The writer shared various aspects of this experience, so people can evaluate for themselves the pros and cons and draw their own conclusions. Thank you for sharing yours.

How silly of me to write you a letter about your letters column. But with all you have going for you that keeps me waiting impatiently for the next issue to arrive, it may be the letters that I find the most amazing about Dwell.

All those other magazines, full of congratulatory letters, almost seem to be trying to convince us that it is worth reading the issue. You, instead, use it as a conversation among readers. It is interesting, enlightening, delightful. Where else do you hear from someone rehabbing an apartment and looking for help, or someone like Dion Neutra correcting you and sharing their stories with us, all in one issue? The number of pages you give over to letters shows how much you value your readers. It is nice to be respected.

I am a graphic designer, and I find Dwell the most inspirational of all the design magazines I read. So, don't view this as a congratulatory letter. See it as a warning not to change. You do an amazing job.

Ron McClellen
Iowa City, Iowa

That was a nice article on the Austin airport; the photographs were beautiful ("How Transportation Shapes America: Volume Three," November 2006). I agree it is a very unique airport, and the people running it are special. You might like to know that the sculpture pictured is of Barbara Jordan and was done by the artist Bruce Wolfe. Since Matthew Monteith took such a great photo of it, it seems fitting to mention the artist.

Linda Wolfe
Piedmont, California

I am writing in regards to "The Thin Green Line" (June 2006). Please forgive my tardiness but I am currently living in a remote village in Zambia serving in the Peace Corps. I am a huge fan of your magazine and was delighted to find the article by Jennifer Roberts on green living.

I am also a huge fan of environmentally friendly living, and living in the African bush lends itself quite readily to such an endeavor. Since I am living in a house made almost entirely of materials found within a one-kilometer radius of where I live, have no car, and use only electronic devices that can be recharged from the sun, I am living greener than I ever have in my life. I was happy to see that there is a wide array of resources out there for when I decide to build a house back home.

There was only one thing that bothered me about the article, and it deals with the section on alternative fuel sources for transportation. I think all the information on biodiesel is awesome, but as an avid biker, and since cycling is my only mode of transport now, I was a little disheartened that there was no mention of transport options that use no fuel at all (cycling, walking, skateboarding).

The option of using the legs we are born with seems to always be missing from the discussions on greener living. Instead of spending all our energy on finding alternative fuel sources, why don't people take advantage of a free, environmentally friendly source of transport that will not require 20 years to perfect? And it's not as though the American public couldn't stand to do a little exercise.

The fast-paced lifestyle of our rapidly modernized world seems to have distracted us from the simple solutions to our everyday problems. I wish that everyone could slow down to "village pace," as we like to call it around here, if only so they could realize how wonderful the simplest things in life really are.

Topher Chavis
Mufumbwe, Zambia

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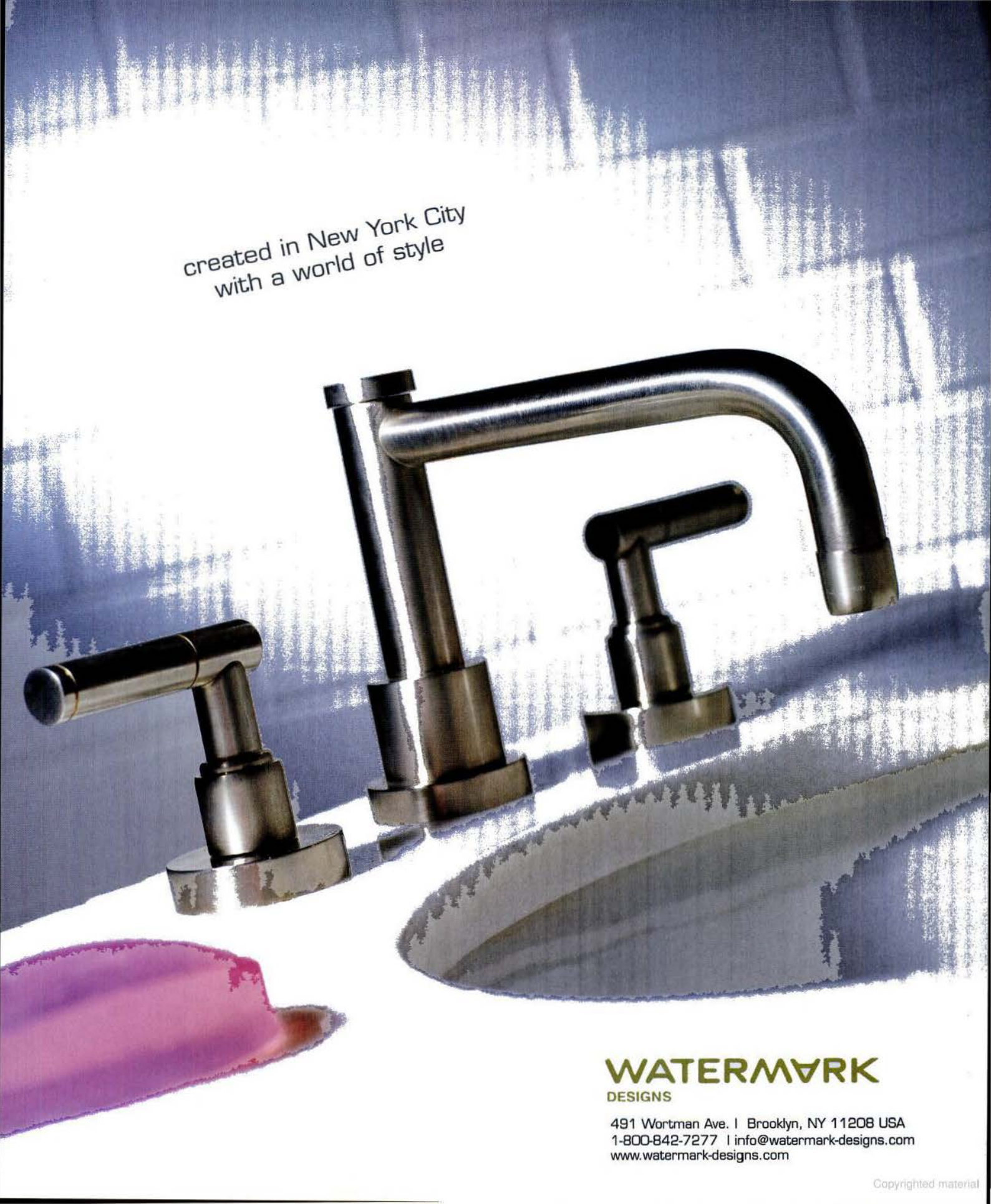

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Two exhibition attendees take in the information wall at the OMA Dubai pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Contributors

Iain Aitch ("What We Saw, London Design," p. 84), Dwell's London contributing editor, was left to ponder the amount of waste produced by large-scale exhibitions as he took note of the visible lack of eco-conscious designs on show around London Design Week. Luckily, he did find some neat design items amidst the discarded plastic cups and catalogs. But next year, he will be taking his recycling bin along.

Kathryn Harris ("Well Thawed Out," p. 67), a freelance writer, was responsible for writing this month's "Off the Grid" story about an Icelandic couple's first sustainable Los Angeles home, which they've infused with elements of their homeland. It left Harris, a British transplant, feeling wistful about Europe, and after 17 years stateside, she's determined to infuse herself back there, splitting her time equally between Los Angeles and Rome.

Gabriela Hasbun ("Tipping Point," p. 78) is a photographer based in San Francisco. Originally from San Salvador, El Salvador, she works for lots of national publications, such as *Newsweek*, *Forbes*, *Vibe*, and *Wired*. For this issue, she photographed Josh Greene, a 35-year-old artist who donates one night's worth of tips each month from his job at the San Francisco restaurant Coi to fund an art project. "Coincidentally," Hasbun says, "I met Josh through a friend who used to manage the SF Arts Commission Gallery about four years ago."

Marc Kristal ("Breaking Tradition, Making Tradition," p. 89), Dwell's New York contributing editor, was deeply affected, not only by his in-depth encounter with the work of the 20th-century design master Poul Kjærholm, but by the opportunity to meet and speak with his wife, Hanne, one of Denmark's great modern architects, at the home she designed for the family. After nearly half a century (and with virtually no maintenance, Hanne claims), it remains in perfect condition.

Dave Lauridsen ("Cutting Edge," p. 108, and "Cottage Industry," p. 126) is a Los Angeles–based photographer who traveled to San Francisco and Seattle to shoot for this month's issue of Dwell. Lauridsen has a passion for woodworking himself, and after seeing Roy McMakin's state-of-the-art shop and level of craftsmanship, it was difficult to resist the urge to beg them to let him stay a few extra days and hone his skills.

Dan Maginn AIA ("Your House, Your Sandwich," p. 155) is a principal with El Dorado Inc., an architecture and fabrication firm based in Kansas City, Missouri. He enjoys writing enigmatic essays as a counter to the daily grind of running an architectural practice with his four partners. Is his puckish, self-deprecatory writing style at odds with his Atticus Finch–like demeanor and chiseled yet windswept physique? He does not think so.

Nathaniel Russell ("Your House, Your Sandwich," p. 155) is an artist, designer, and illustrator living and working in Oakland, California. His drawings, which accompany this issue's "Essay," drew upon years of a painstaking search for the best sandwich in the Bay Area, which he claims can be found at a small storefront market near Ocean Beach.

Noah Webb ("Lost and Foundation," p. 59), now a Los Angeles–based photographer, was at home shooting the Mill Valley, California, feature. He lived in Marin, San Francisco, and the East Bay while growing up and always enjoys returning to the beauty of the Bay Area. "The shoot was hardly work, with a clear and sunny day and views of the whole Bay Area. I felt like I was on vacation." Webb's recent work can be seen in magazines such as *Giant*, *Newsweek*, and *Wallpaper*, to name a few.

Paul Young ("Cottage Industry," p. 126) is a writer based in Los Angeles, where he relentlessly pursues a life divided by contemporary art on one hand and Hollywood on the other. In writing about the artist, designer, and architect Roy McMakin, he developed a slightly unhealthy taste for mansard roofs, oversized doors, and a kind of pure, unadulterated hippie funk. Of course, being in Los Angeles, he's found a support group for all that and he's making progress. ■

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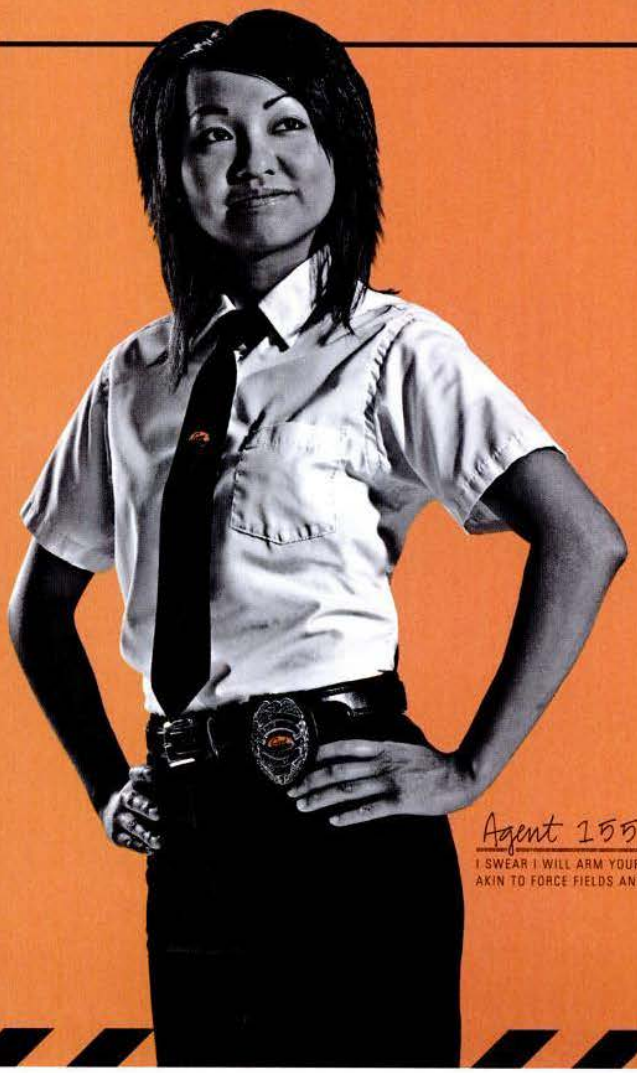

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Industry Meets the Artisan

At Typotheque, the type foundry run by designer Peter Bil'ak and his wife Johanna in a converted school building near The Hague. The tools may have moved into the digital age, but Bil'ak views his work as part of a lineage that extends to the time-honored art of typesetting.

Craft: Has there ever been a more misappropriated and misunderstood word in the English language? Of course there has, but the question remains. The word "craft" has been used to express a refinement in the process of making something, from the construction of a short story to Grandma's toothsome apple pie. And right there lays the beauty of the word—it's a hard one to pin down. Unlike its brethren in the annals of misunderstood words, the definition of craft is fluid and—so long as some type of manual (or mental) skill is involved—the word can be applied to any number of pursuits.

From architecture and design to fashion and industry, the past decade has seen a growing demand for the human touch despite the relentless dispersion of technology. Sensing craft's slow, determined build and its emerging influence on many aspects of contemporary life, we wanted to explore how this was playing out in disparate but interconnected fields.

Our first foray took us to the Netherlands and the felt studio of artist Claudy Jongstra. By controlling the entire felt-making processes (including keeping her own sheep), Jongstra is intent on interpreting the age-old textile in a contemporary way, as well as bringing traditional methods up to speed. Back in the Bay Area, we visited Berkeley architect Thom Faulders, who has found a way to combine the inherent delights of drawing with the wonders of the CNC machine. Returning to the Netherlands, we met up with furniture maker and designer Satyandra Pakhalé, who melds ancient symbology with modern furniture production techniques, and visited the studio of typographer Peter Bil'ak to investigate how the idea of craft has filtered into his finely tuned approach to type. Finally, we visited Seattle-based Roy McMakin, who's merged art, architecture, craft, and design into something that is compelling and original.

It's ironic that as our country shifts to a knowledge-based economy we are seemingly losing the very understanding of how our things (from houses and boats to books and shoes) are made. But as we've learned in the process of putting together this issue, all is not lost. Craft is evolving at a remarkable rate, alongside the very technology and industry that purport to depose it. ■

ANDREW WAGNER, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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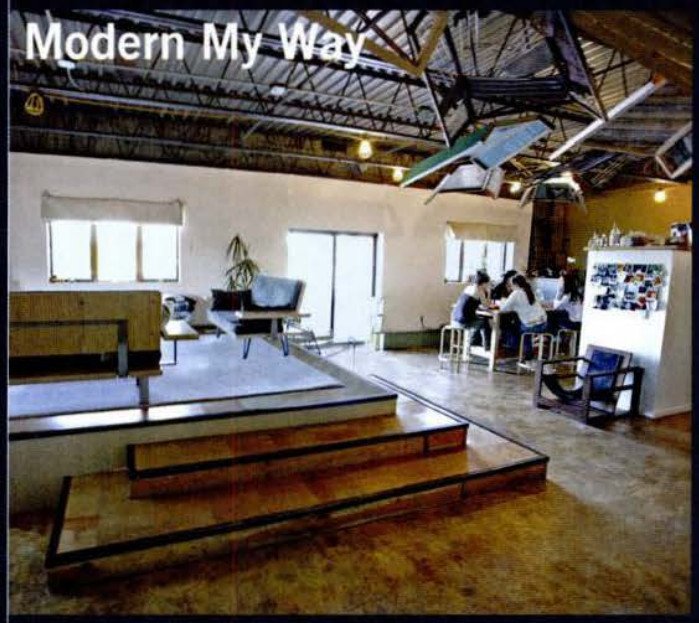

Designers Thom Jones and Brendan Callahan transformed a Brooklyn office into a live/work space, with room to prototype chairs, stretch canvas, and skateboard.

Designer Peter Stathis and interior designer Suzette Sherman limit the vintage furniture on display in order to avoid visual clutter in their San Francisco loft.

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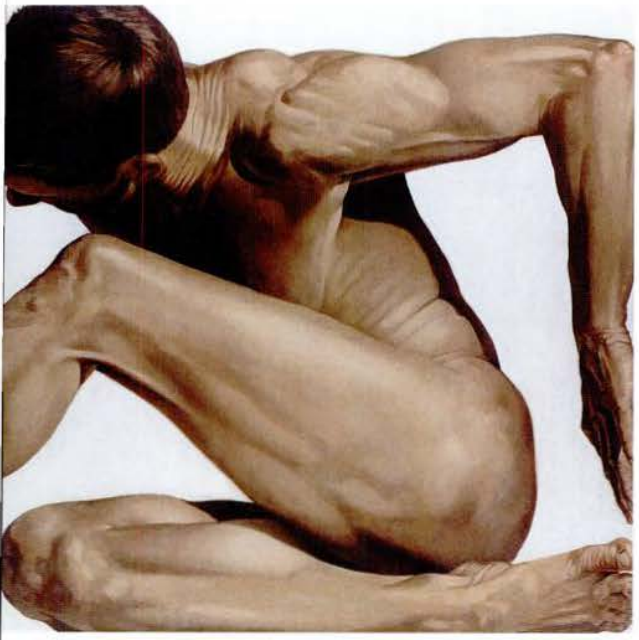
Explorations of Space / Three seemingly disparate exhibitions illustrate the varied meanings and manifestations of architecture through the lenses of Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, postwar artist Vija Celmins, and contemporary painter Brian Biedul. Together, these investigations shed new light on the impact and breadth of our constructed environment.

Brian Biedul (above)
Rectangle 1, 2006

Brian Biedul (opposite)
Rectangle 8, 2006

Ibirapuera Theater, São Paulo / By Oscar Niemeyer / Oscar Niemeyer may be the last true modernist practicing today, and his latest project, the music theater in São Paulo's Ibirapuera Park, makes a good argument for the 98-year-old architect. The auditorium's construction was halted for five decades as a result of administrative feuds and lack of funds. Thankfully, the Hatfields and McCoys seem to have made a truce, as the theater was finally completed last year.

PHOTOS BY LEONARDO FINOTTI (THEATER)



Vija Celmins
Untitled (Big Sea #1), 1969

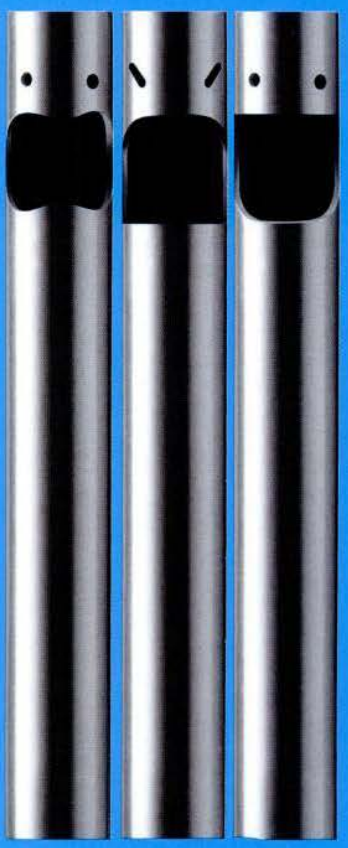
Vija Celmins
Untitled #14, 1997

IMAGES COURTESY MCKEE GALLERY / NEW YORK (OCEAN, GALAXY)

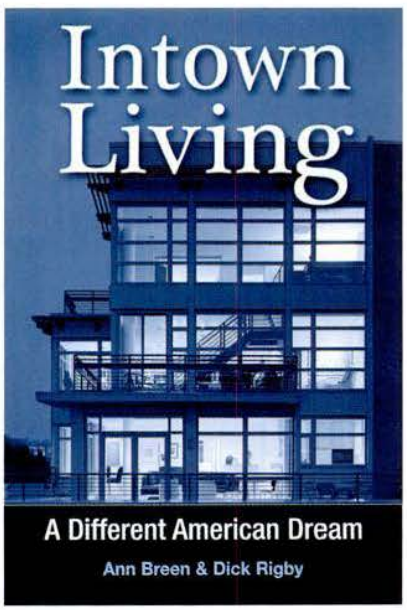
Brian Biedul: Rectangles / 12 Jan–26 Feb / 43 @ Racquet Club / Palm Springs, California / www.biedul.com / Brian Biedul's first installment of a three-part series titled *Rectangles* ventures into the world of "theoretical architecture," his term for the point where interior and exterior spaces coalesce. The exhibition explores this compelling concept using the accessible inroad of the human form as reference—something we should all be able to relate to.

Vija Celmins: A Drawings Retrospective / 28 Jan–22 Apr / UCLA Hammer Museum / Los Angeles, California / www.hammer.ucla.edu / Nearly 70 works on paper from each era of the artist's catalog will be on display at the only U.S. venue of this traveling exhibition. Rare drawings by Celmins of oceans, deserts, clouds, and galaxies feature exacting details that discuss the idea of spatial ambiguity and elicit larger conversations about perception.

Muunto storage system / By Pentagon Design / www.muunto.fi / *Muunto*, which means "transformation" in Finnish, is an apt moniker for this flexible storage system capable of displaying your unruly collection of *Star Wars* action figures or perhaps concealing them. A backbone for the structure is attached to the wall by a series of metal inserts, which also provide hooks for a variety of options like shelves, cabinets, or closets. Myriad colors and materials—light blue, olive green, and walnut veneer, to name a few—add to the astounding range of configurations possible with this customizable marvel.



What's Your Mood bottle opener / By Poketo / www.poketo.com / Admit it. You suppress the impulse to use emoticons, relying instead on the noncommittal ellipses, the affected "ha ha," all the while wishing you could just colon plus parenthetical that sentence and be done with it. We understand—that's why we recommend you scoop up these emotive bottle openers to better facilitate drinking your sorrows away :(...



Intown Living: A Different American Dream / By Ann Breen and Dick Rigby / Island Press / $29.95 / www.islandpress.org / Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Memphis, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Portland, and Vancouver are coming up big on real estate's radar. *Intown Living* investigates the urban renaissance and why a new wave of people are seeking homes in cities over subdivisions. Breen and Rigby propose that this energy and interest, if properly channeled, has the potential to alter the downward spiral of sprawl. As an aside, their in-depth research has also created the ultimate real estate guide.

Carrie bike basket / By Marie-Louise Gustafsson for DesignHouse / www.marielouise.se / Swedish studio Design House lives by the motto "Don't make something unless it is both necessary and useful; but if it is both necessary and useful, don't hesitate to make it beautiful," which is how the utilitarian bike basket got its frills without being frivolous.

Hal stool/table / By William Earle / www.williamearle.com / Rumor has it that William Earle, who works solely by hand in Hangtown, California, bleeds on every piece he creates. To some, that might be the ultimate mark of craft; for others, it might turn stomachs—regardless, the Cooper-Hewitt loves it. Hal's curves show off Earle's precision, and functions well as a stool, side table, or in a cluster that's perfect for a bevy of cocktails.

Placemats / By Ecoist / www.ecoist.com / Your sticky Now and Later wrapper could really go to better use, like these placemats made from factory-discarded candy wrappers that would otherwise be landfill. Not to mention they're 100 percent handmade by fair trade workers in Mexico and Peru, and Ecoist plants a tree for every item purchased.

Georgia Tech Ventulett Chair Installation 2006 / www.coa.gatech.edu / If you've been to architecture school, you will clearly see that this project merges "three different structural typologies: a vector active, a surface active, and a stacked aggregate slab system." To us, it's simply cool. On the south side of a banal campus building, students supervised by office dA's Nader Tehrani interwove a flowing ripple of more than 1,500 digitally cut Makrolon polycarbonate sheets.

PHOTOS BY NADER TEHRANI (INSTALLATION)

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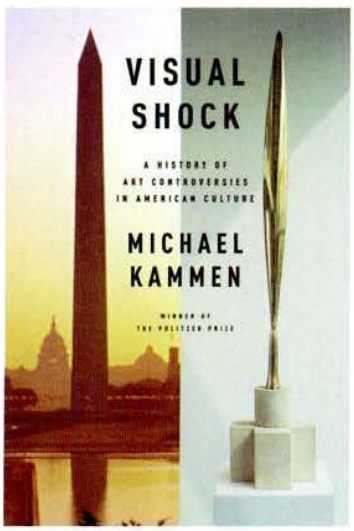
Manhattan line / By Bodum / www.bodumusa.com / Most glass is made of silicate bonded together by soda and lime. Bodum uses boron oxide as their glue, creating glassware that is clearer, stronger, and lighter than other designs. The Manhattan line, as uptown as its namesake, also features Bodum's double-wall design, keeping your martini ever cool or your spiked cider nicely warm.

Felt bags / By Marielle van Herpen / www.mariellevanherpen.nl / If you're as excited as we are about all things felt, you'll love these bags. In this collection, inspiration is found in ordinary objects, such as water bottles and umbrellas, that usually don't fit into a purse. Van Herpen molds the shape of that object into the design. Perhaps her background in fashion has helped her take a form and make it function.



Visual Shock / By Michael Kammen / Knopf / $35 / www.aaknopf.com / Pulitzer Prize–winning author Michael Kammen examines the history of art controversies in American culture, from the birth of the republic to the present. Despite vicissitudes over such a long time span, the most vehement outcries are inextricably linked to modernism and raise the question: Are such polemics America's most singular art form?

Lineground collection / By Jacob Marks for Skram / www.skramfurniture.com / American designer Jacob Marks was seeking to create "dramatic forms set against contained negative space" with the Lineground collection, but our inclination is to play peek-a-boo with these attractive geometric pieces of furniture. We're enticed by the quality as well, with superior details such as solid wood mortise-and-tenon construction and recessed drawer pulls.

Model Tess design S. Barsacchi

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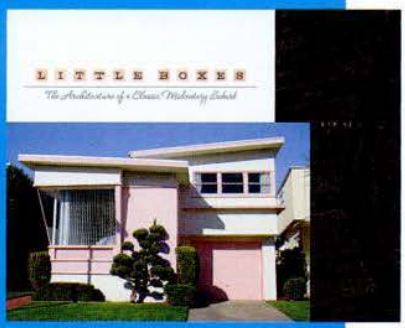
The "best seller" from Italy

Little Boxes / By Rob Keil / Advection Media / $35 / www.advectionmedia.com / *Little Boxes* (so named after Malvina Reynolds's folk song) is a scrapbooklike exploration of the Westlake neighborhood in Daly City, California. This icon of American suburbia, developed in the 1950s by eighth-grade dropout Henry Doelger, was one of the first cities within a city—tied together by a quirky modernist design language.



Paints + Interiors Guide / By Pantone / www.pantonepaint.com / If color is a language, then it just got an expanded dictionary. Pantone has always prided itself on the communication of color, and now its partnership with Fine Paints of Europe answers its customers' constant request: to be able to match Pantone colors with paint chips.

Gilbert & George
Death Hope Life Fear, 1984

Gilbert & George
The Wall, 1986

Gilbert & George / 15 Feb–7 May / Tate Modern / London, England / www.tate.org.uk / Britain's first retrospective of subversive art duo Gilbert & George will fittingly occupy two wings of the Tate—a first for the institution, which has never honored living artists with this much square footage.

IMAGES COURTESY MARIO TESTINO COLLECTION (ART)

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Alexander Girard: Vibrant Modern / 14 Oct–25 Feb / SFMOMA / San Francisco, California / www.sfmoma.org /

"Charles [Eames] really hated the custom orders for 2,000 orange chairs...that made him crazy," recounts Marilyn Neuhart in a 2003 interview concerning Herman Miller's most color-conscious employee, Alexander Girard.

Alexander Girard
Cutout tablecloth, 1961

Alexander Girard
Three-Passenger sofa, ca. 1968

Alexander Girard
La Fonda chair, 1961

Alexander Girard
Salt and pepper shakers for La Fonda del Sol Restaurant, New York, ca. 1960

In modernism's darkest hour of black leather, Alexander Girard, who served as the design director of Herman Miller's textile division from 1952 to 1973, turned to the energetic color palettes of India and Mexico, countries that had yet to face severe industrialization. It was Girard's love of folk art from these countries and around the world (his collection of 100,000 pieces was donated to Santa Fe's Museum of International Folk Art) that informed his "more is more" design direction as evinced in design for New York City's La Fonda Del Sol restaurant and Herman Miller Textiles & Objects store. Unfortunately, this meager exhibition only peeks at the proverbial tip of the Girard iceberg.

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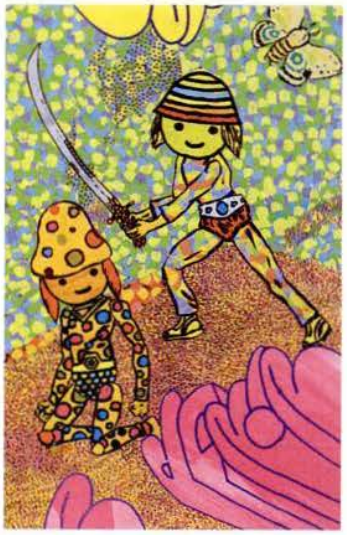
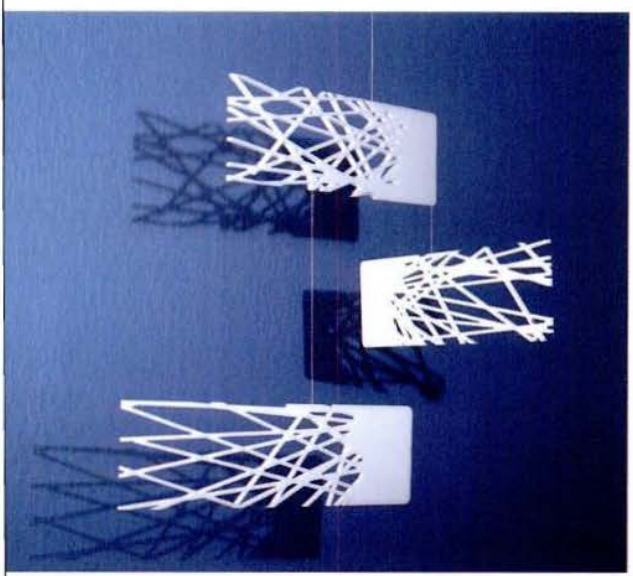


Ninja / By Brian Chippendale / Gingko Press / $34.95 / www.gingkopress.com / What adolescent boy hasn't disguised himself in black pajamas, socks, and ski cap to become a silent ninja, master of martial arts and annoyer of parents? Drummer for experimental noise-rock band Lightning Bolt, former RISD student, and author/illustrator of this 128-page graphic novel, Brian Chippendale uses intricate pen-and-ink drawings and a variety of fine-art mediums to tell a fantastic story. The plot centers on the adventures of an assassin who is being hunted by evil nemeses, and serves as an allegory for the artist's struggle with the trappings of money and discontent with the current state of political affairs.

Erosion sink / By Gore Design Co. / www.goredesignco.com / Over thousands of years, rainfall and melting snow gradually wear down the earth, leaving behind gently worn layers of rock, stone, and dirt. The Erosion sink was inspired by this process, fitting for a company committed to sustainability and green design. But feel free to wash your hands as often as you like; this kind of precipitation won't hurt the ecosystem.

Robes / By Fluff / www.fluffpillows.com / These plush reversible robes make it easier to don morning wear for the duration of your Sunday without feeling frumpy. Made from two-ply linen, these kimono-style wraps have individually hand-screened designs printed on one side to display when you need to impress weekend guests. Other features, like the deep patch-front pockets and matching sleep mask, are enough to make Hef and the Karate Kid jealous.



Mobiles / By Chris Luomanen for Thing Tank / www.thing-tank.com / Kick-start stagnant chi lurking in a corner with these "grass" mobiles—or just hang them because they're pretty. The 30-by-20-inch pieces come in oiled mahogany plywood or white acrylic, in six organically inspired designs.

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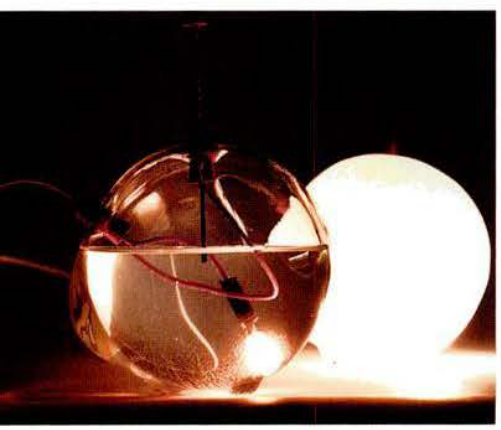
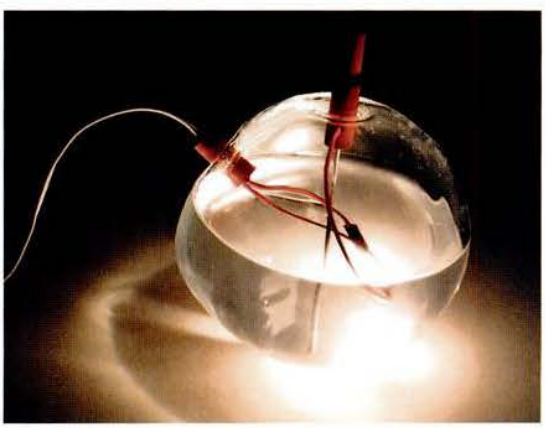
Heath Ceramics: The Complexity of Simplicity / By Amos Klausner / Chronicle Books / $29.95 / www.chronicleblooks.com / Edith Heath pieces created in the '50s still sit proudly on tabletops today. Although ceramic's durability is second nature to its simple beauty, it speaks to the ethos of the woman who, despite being born to immigrant parents in Iowa during the Depression, had the independence of spirit to quietly create a movement in modern design. The book elucidates the culture surrounding Heath, as well as the remarkable influence of her work, from tableware to tiles and techniques that are continued today.

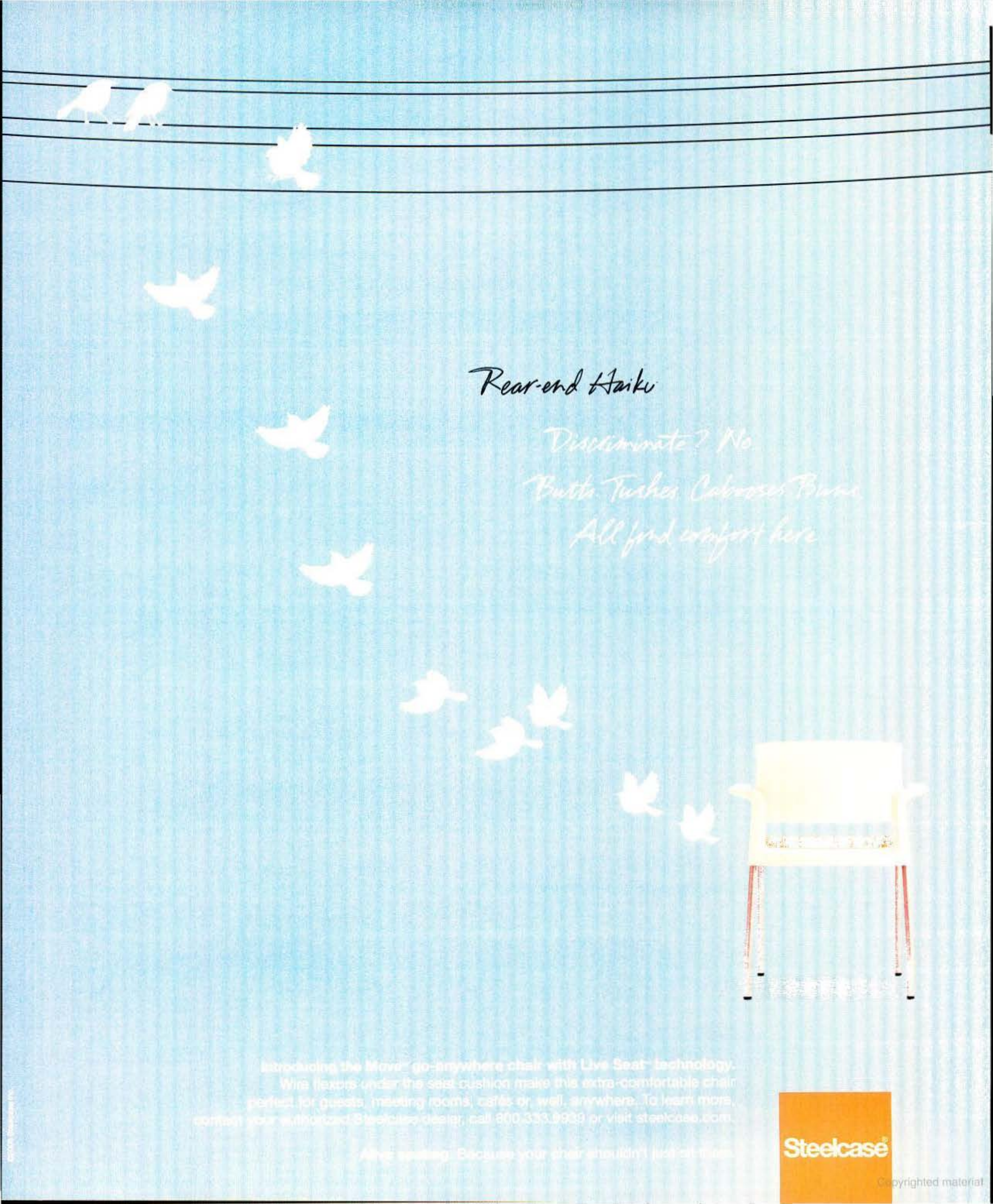
Good Grips eight-foot vinyl tape measure / By OXO / www.oxo.com / This compact tape measure is designed to attach to your keychain and fits in the palm of your hand, eliminating the frantic hunt through the junk drawer. The flexible vinyl tape doesn't scratch surfaces, and allows you to hug curves—perfect for on-the-fly inseam measurements.

LEGEND bookcase / By Christophe Delcourt for Roche Bobois / www.roche-bobois.com / If you have small children, beware: This tree design will be too enticing not to climb. Christophe Delcourt's background in drama and agriculture create a beautiful fusion of function, form, and material. Each limited-edition bookcase of sustainably harvested burgundy oak is signed by Delcourt as part of the eco-sensitive collection.





Wet lamp / By Scott Franklin for Non Design / www.apartmentzero.com / Water and electricity don't usually mix, but we're willing to take a leap of faith for this unique lamp design. The saltwater in these hand-blown vessels acts as both a conductor for the electricity as well as a dimmer for the submerged bulb. The light is turned on by lowering a silver rod into the liquid, and becomes increasingly brighter the farther it is pushed down.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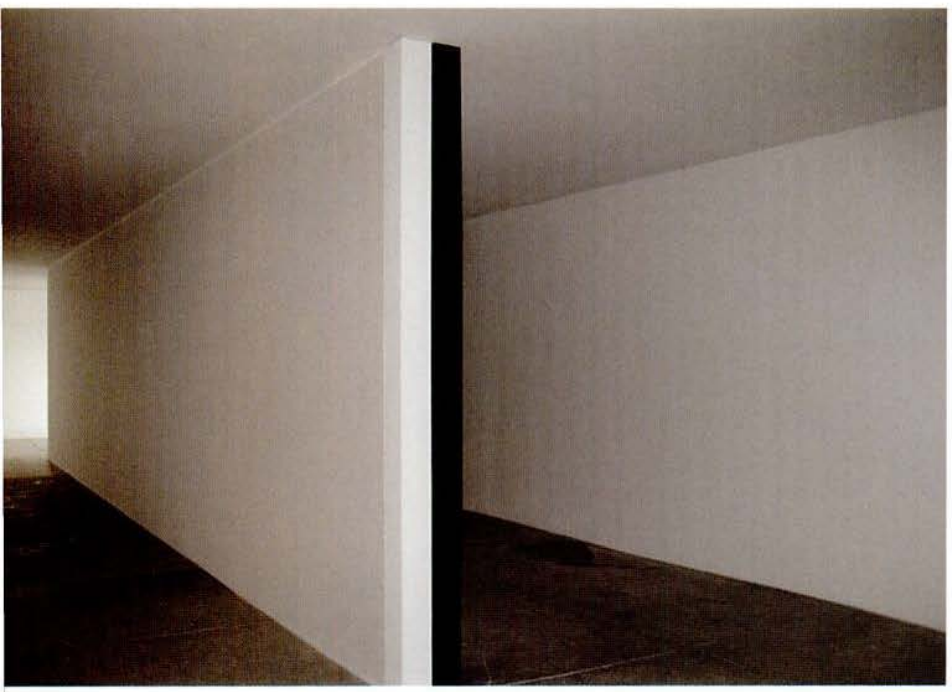
Hoganas Keramik / www.terrestra.com / Is your dinner table boring and disjointed? Thanks to Hoganas Keramik, this array of 11 matte-finish colors from the acclaimed Swedish stoneware company will bring freshness and harmony to each meal. The mix-and-match vibe of shapes and colors will make setting the table a new form of creative expression rather than a pesky task.

StreetSport textiles / By Carnegie / www.carnegiefabrics.com / For anyone who spends their days popping ollies and catching air, this upholstery collection should suit their seats fine. Though pattern names such as Havoc and Grip seem self-consciously hip, the graffiti- and skateboard-inspired designs are a welcome alternative to plaids and plain prints, and won't cause embarrassment should your home become a crash pad for friends.

Robert Irwin Installation / Through August 2007 / The Chinati Foundation / Marfa, Texas / www.chinati.org / This is a unique opportunity to see Irwin's masterful use of light and space. His installations in architectural settings skew the viewer's perception, taking the focus off the canvas and placing it in the mind of the audience.



Robert Irwin
Marfa Project, 2006

PHOTOS BY KATHERINE KORDAIS (INSTALLATION)

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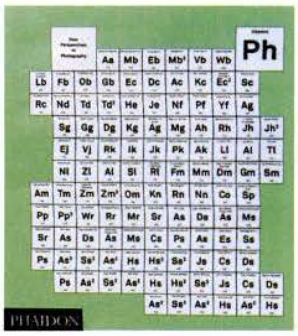
Florian Maier-Aichen
Untitled, 2005

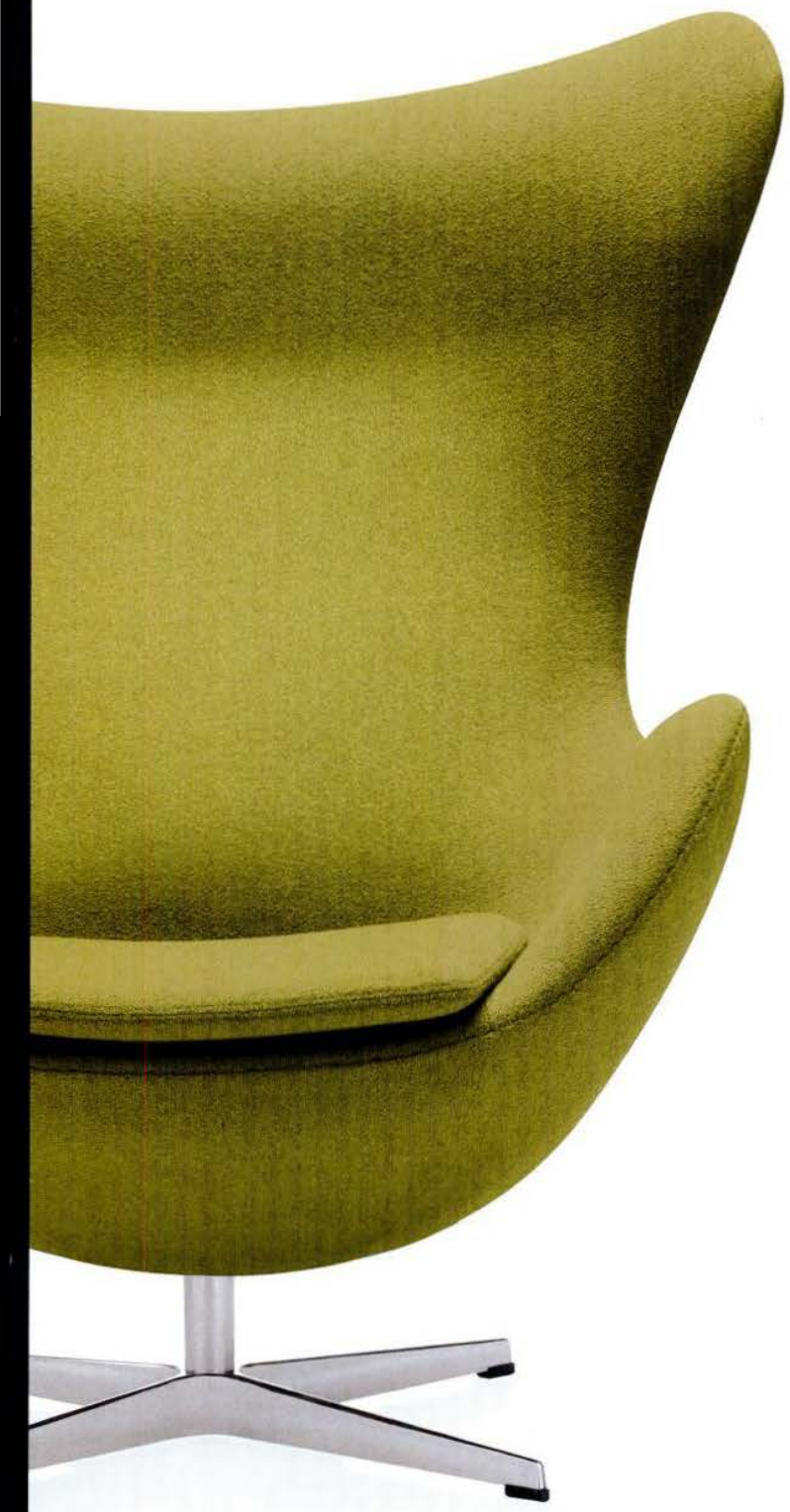
Narita iPod case / By Dexter & Byron Peart for WANT / www.wantessentials.com / So you're all grown up now and gone are the days of exciting "Collect them all!" editions of trading cards and action figures. Well, the WANT Les Essentiels de la Vie collection combines grown-up business with pleasure. Each item in their new line of leather accoutrements is named after an international airport, from the Narita iPod case to passport holders and laptop bags—collect them all!



Vitamin Ph: New Perspectives in Photography / By TJ Demos / Phaidon / $69.95 / www.phaidon.com / Following P (painting) and D (drawing) of the Vitamin series, Phaidon put out a call to the cognoscenti to nominate the best living artists working with photography, as either their medium or primary source material. In the end, 122 made the cut, from Florian Maier-Aichen (above) to Tobias Zielony.

Ryder entryway table / By Onelink / www.modernlink.com / Some things in life should be kept separate, no matter how cloyingly close a couple lives. But the concept of "his and hers" isn't just for the bathroom. The Ryder table lets you separate your mail in a tidy yet noncompulsive manner. Because if there's one constant in life, it's junk mail—let him or her sort out his or her own.

PHOTO BY FLORIAN MAIER-AICHEN / COURTESY PHAIDON



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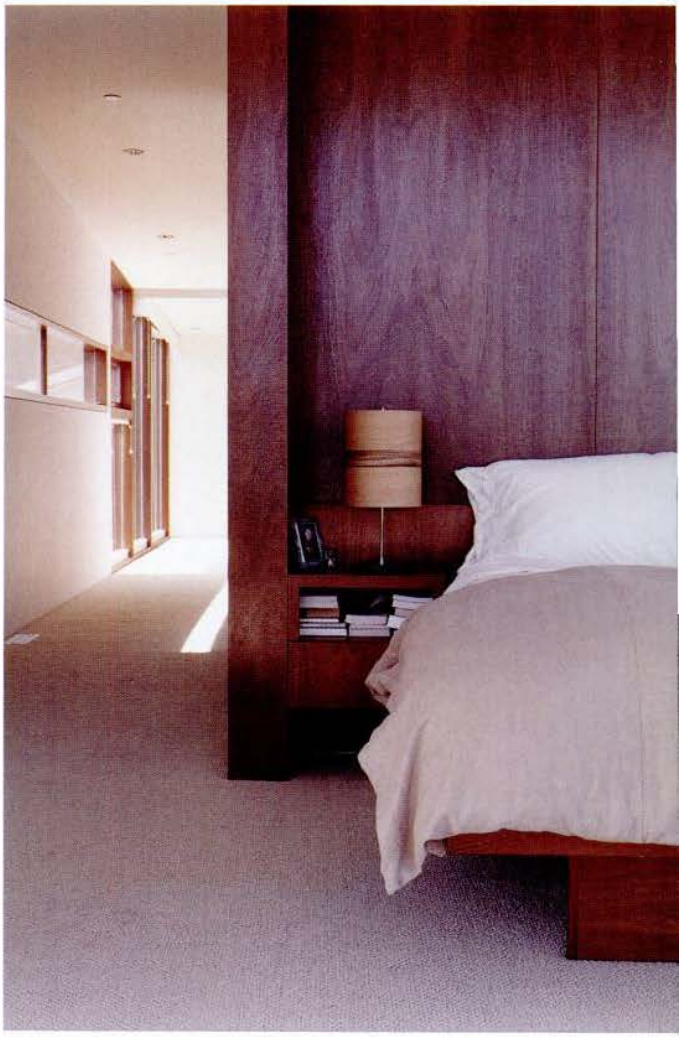
Lost and Foundation

Tony and Rachel Sherman were simply trying to buy a house, but what they found instead was a foundation—a discovery that transformed them from home buyers to home builders virtually overnight.

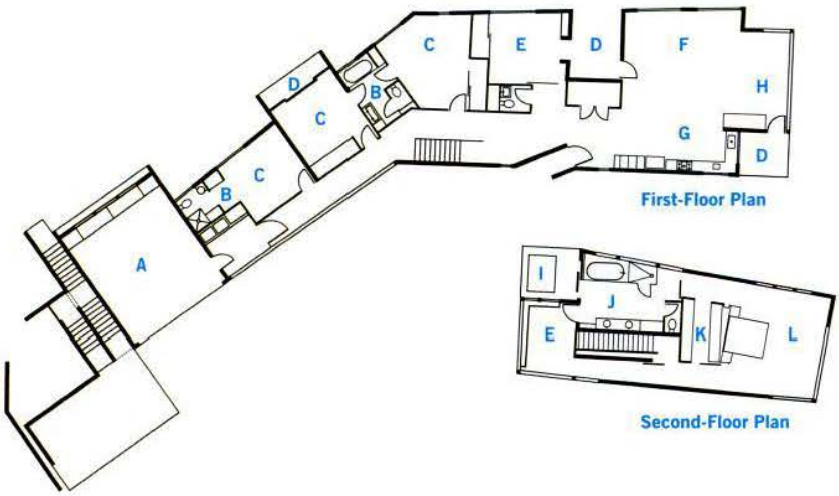
The foundation, a listing that surfaced accidentally in an Internet search for a house in Mill Valley, California, was a massive slab of concrete on a beautiful hilltop with heart-stopping views. "I felt like I was in an airplane the first time I saw it," says Tony, a private pilot and a professional real estate investor. "You could see everything—San Francisco Bay, the Pacific Ocean, the Marin Headlands, the city, the Golden Gate Bridge."

An 8,600-square-foot supermansion was planned for the site, but its owner had headed off to other hills. The slab stood abandoned for almost ten years. "It looked like a derelict relic, an ancient Greek ruin," Rachel recalls. ▸

Architect Lorcan O'Herlihy designed the Shermans' Mill Valley, California, home on top of an existing foundation that was intended for an 8,600-square-foot McMansion, but left abandoned for ten years.



The Shermans' living room (above) is outfitted with Ligne Roset Smala sofas by Pascal Mourgue and a Kenga rug by Angela Adams. The master bedroom interior (right) is finished with cherry wood. p. 190



First-Floor Plan

Second-Floor Plan

Sherman Residence Floor Plan

A Garage
B Bathroom
C Bedroom
D Balcony
E Multipurpose Room
F Dining Area
G Kitchen
H Living Area
I Hot Tub
J Master Bathroom
K Walk-in Closet
L Master Bedroom

At the time, the couple's house hunt seemed doomed to fail anyway, and they paused to reconsider their situation. In 2001, recently married and living in San Francisco, Tony and Rachel had decided they wanted to buy a modern house. Because they like to hike and ride mountain bikes, their search led to leafy, hilly Mill Valley, a 20-minute drive north across the Golden Gate Bridge. But this genteel Marin County enclave is steeped in a rootsy tradition that wasn't necessarily hospitable to modern design. The Arts and Crafts style seemed to hold pride of place. "We wanted to buy something modern," Rachel says, "and we just weren't finding anything." So they took a deep breath and sprung for the concrete colossus.

The Shermans then began searching for an architect in sync with their unusual dilemma: how to build a light, modern house of 4,000 square feet on a platform meant for a house more than twice that size. Fortuitously, they happened to read about Lorcan O'Herlihy. The Los Angeles architect had just completed a svelte, airy house on a hefty hillside foundation decreed by L.A.'s tough new earthquake code requirements. O'Herlihy ▸

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The Shermans' home is designed to blend effortlessly with the hillside on which it rests by using a muted material palette of troweled plaster and cedar planking.

also seemed to appreciate the warm side of modernism, which the couple preferred. "We called him right away, and he came up to see us the next week," Tony says.

"Tony and Rachel were excited about the prospect of having a modern house," O'Herlihy recalls. "But Mill Valley's design-review board is very strict—they weren't known for embracing contemporary architecture."

As the Shermans learned, to their chagrin, they'd be facing yet another dilemma: how to convince the tradition-minded civic authorities to approve a modern house in a highly visible hillside location.

O'Herlihy's solution seems simple in retrospect. "I knew I had to stay true to the indigenous environment," he explains. "I had to tie the house to the existing geography, its spiraling movements and folding planes, and to the spectacular view. I also decided to use Mill Valley's traditional material—wood—but to use it in an untraditional way."

According to Tony, "The first sketches looked like a spaceship, and I said, 'Oh boy, that doesn't even look like a house.'" A few months later, the couple saw a more refined model. "This one was brilliant," he says, "and it's essentially what we live in now."

Like a natural outcropping, the house follows the folding, bending contours of the hill. Its 4,000 square feet are stacked on two levels resembling long angled bars, with the upper layer offset to one side and cantilevered over the precipitous hill toward the view. The lower volume is wrapped in a floating cedar skin and the top is covered in smooth troweled plaster, mimicking the hillside in color and texture (at least in summer) as well as form. O'Herlihy's strategy was a success: The board approved the house without a single dissenting vote.

On Christmas Eve 2004, with a sigh of relief, Tony and Rachel and their newborn daughter moved in. "Living here is different from anywhere I've ever been," says Rachel, who grew up in a traditional house in Poughkeepsie, New York. "It's light and open with big windows framing our views. There's lots of wood—mahogany window frames, floors and furnishings Lorcan designed—so it's a modern house that always seems warm, never cold." She continues, "At night, the house really shines. The angles rise, you see the stars—the bay lights twinkling—and it feels like we're living outside." ▸

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How to Make My House Your House

A Poliform Kitchen / www.poliformusa.com / The family gathers in their sleek, open Poliform Varenna kitchen, which has white oak cabinets and countertops and a stainless steel backsplash and cabinet pulls. The island is capped with black honed granite. Poliform, an Italian company, has a growing presence in the United States; they're even supplying the kitchen for Dwell Home II.

B Top-Down and Bottom-Up Shades / www.hunterdouglas.com / www.mechoshade.com Views as big as the Shermans' can overwhelm. O'Herlihy built in flexible control by segmenting the windows and installing top-down shades on some and bottom-up shades on others—producing a modern, Mondrianesque design that's practical too. Living-area shades are Hunter Douglas Duette, and master-bedroom shades are by MechoShade.

C Structural Glass Wall / www.pilkington.com / O'Herlihy jazzed up a long hallway with a luminous outer wall of Pilkington Profilit glass. This semiopaque structural glass lets daylight in, illuminating hazy images from the outside, but it's opaque enough for privacy. "It's like looking through water," Rachel says.

Indoor / Outdoor Fireplace / www.heatnglo.com / An innovative see-through indoor/outdoor fireplace sits between the living area and the dining terrace. The Twilight II model, by Heat & Glo, is gas fired and remotely controlled. "It acts like another window," Tony says. "You can look out through the fireplace, through the glass doors, and see the ocean." ■

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Well Thawed Out

The Minarc House takes full advantage of its temperate Southern California location with an open design that allows for passive cooling and heating—and even includes an outdoor dining room.

At the end of 2000, Tryggvi Thorsteinsson and Erla Dögg Ingjaldsdóttir, Icelandic natives and partners in the Santa Monica–based design firm Minarc, bought what was essentially a teardown in the West Village neighborhood of Los Angeles. "We liked it for its simple lines and flat roof and thought we could do something with it," Thorsteinsson says. But soon after the purchase, Ingjaldsdóttir's first pregnancy and projects ranging from a Protestant church in South Central L.A. to a boutique hotel in Nigeria took precedence over the renovation. Five years and many spirited design discussions later, the new addition penetrates through the old frame, finally allowing the couple and their two children to call Minarc's first environmentally conscious house home.

Where the structures merge, slots and gaps gracefully filter light announcing their separateness, as do contrasting materials: stucco for the original house and concrete panels by U.S. Architectural Products made of 30 percent recycled fibers for the new. "They were introduced as a faster way of building, intended to go underneath stucco," says Thorsteinsson, whose interest in materials dates back to his years as assistant manager at Iceland's largest hardware store, BYKO, in Kópavogur. "We come from a large country, relative to its small population, that doesn't always think 'green' is so important," he continues. "We believe being conscious about the environment, recycling, and using existing materials is vital. It doesn't matter where you are in the world."

In their all-in-one kitchen/living room-turned-playground, their daughter, four-year-old Carmen Inga, careens carefree around the oversized orange Corian kitchen island. The sides are clad in tough rubber recycled from tires, allowing her parents freedom from having to watch her every move. "I read rubber takes over 2,000 years to decompose. Perhaps it never really does, so we thought to reuse it and the kids would have a hard time wearing it out," Ingjaldsdóttir explains of the material used more frequently in gyms and playgrounds.

During the renovation, the couple was not only committed to the reuse of materials but also rethinking ▸

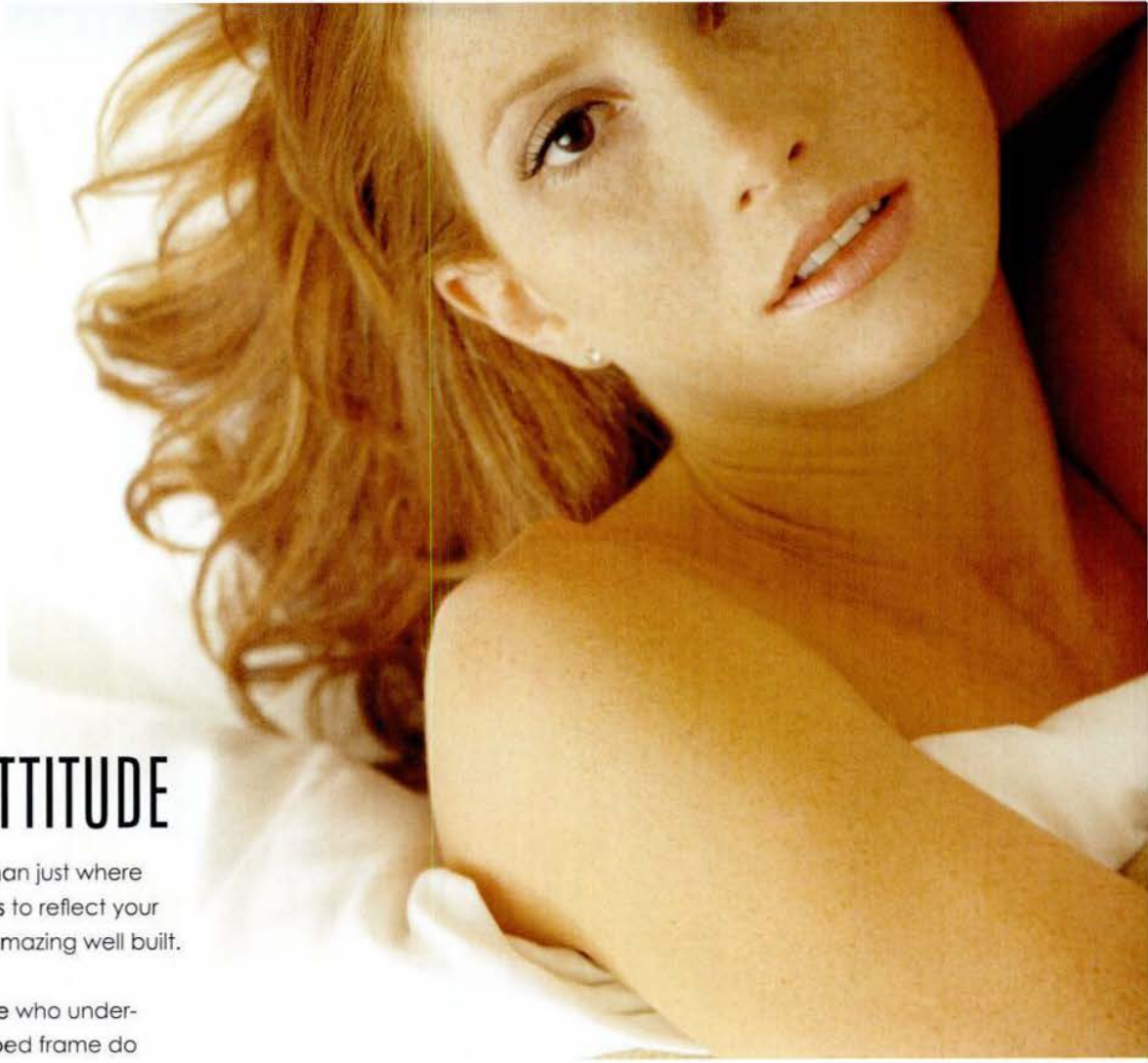
Thorsteinsson (above left, standing in doorway) relaxes with his daughter Carmen Inga (standing) and friends on the outdoor sleeping pavilion. The platform is surrounded by black lava rock, which acts as a deterrent to keep children away from the edge of the second-story deck. An 8-by-12-foot piece of tempered glass on the front of the house (above right) serves as a window for the first-floor den and a railing for the second-floor office.

the usefulness of materials, resulting in exceedingly simple organic solutions. All the walls, for example, are paint-free. "Why cover up the matte of the drywall? It's white and the texture gives depth and richness. Let that be a part of the house, it's beautiful," says Thorsteinsson, indicating the exposed aluminum door jams. "We like to allow the materials to be what they are."

Another significant aspect of the home's earth-friendly approach is its ability to cool, and to a large extent heat, itself. During the five years before the renovation, the couple lived in the house and studied the movement of the sun and wind. When it came time to draw up plans, they oriented the new structure accordingly. "The sun rises behind the house and heats up the concrete mass during the morning, and [comes] through the front of the house in the afternoon; if need be the radiant energy warms up the house when temperatures drop in the evening," says Thorsteinsson. Thanks to the thoughtful process, the couple was able to leave out the air-conditioning, and the house's under-floor radiant heating system has turned out to be almost superfluous. Additionally, an enormous, pivoting front door ushers the Pacific Ocean breezes from the west inside, while a bank of sliding glass doors help keep the climate comfortable on the east side. On the second story, large openings—a sliding glass door in the master bedroom and sliding glass window in the office—dominate the front and back, recirculating fresh air, while narrow windows located at the south side minimize direct sunlight. "Even though we expanded the square footage of the house from 900 to 2,400 square feet, we have been able to cut our energy costs by two-thirds," says Ingjaldsdóttir.

In what might be called a tip of the hat to the family's infatuation with their natural surroundings, they positioned their only dining room outside. "At first guests don't even notice they're no longer in the house," laughs Ingjaldsdóttir. "But this is California and it's really about taking advantage of what you have around you."

Another favorite spot is the outdoor sleeping pavilion on the southern side of the second story, complete with a mattress and a swing. "Coming from Iceland, sleeping outside is really an exotic idea," marvels Thorsteinsson, who says the sleeping pods at Rudolf Schindler's Kings Road home inspired the design. ►



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The simplicity of the design is complemented by the unfussy use of materials, including the exposed edges of the bedroom furniture and paint-free drywall (above left). The sides of the orange Corian kitchen counter are clad in recycled rubber.

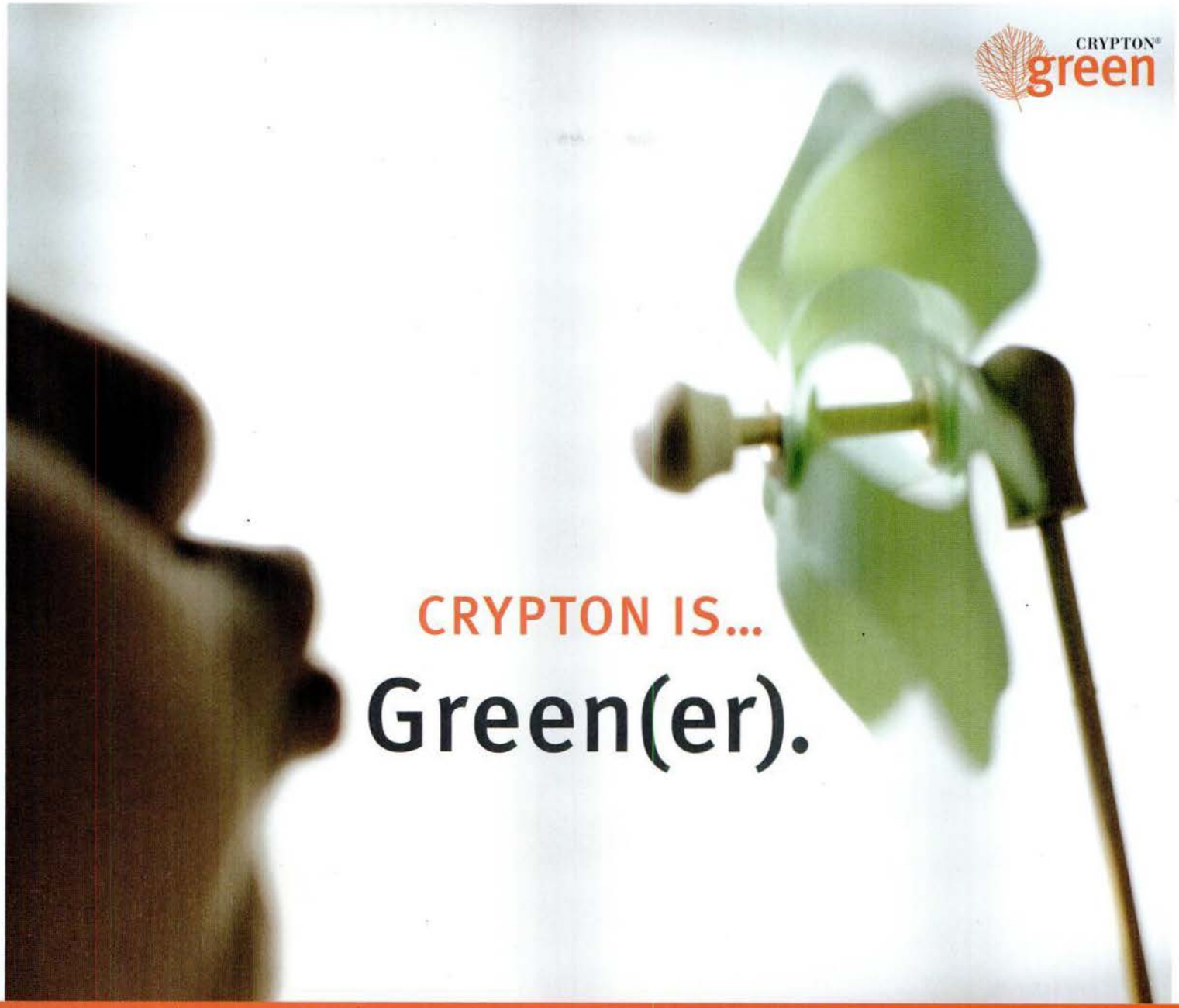
Back inside, the upper level, consisting of an office, master bedroom, and bathroom, is a grown-ups' sanctuary. "It feels like a spa and keeps our relationship alive," says Ingjalsdóttir, pointing out the floating staircase designed in part to discourage wandering guests at their numerous social gatherings. Coated in cobalt blue liquid rubber, it is one of the playful elements the couple has introduced to reference their origins. "It reminds me of the waterfalls and glaciers back home, while the orange Corian kitchen counter is reminiscent of the glowing fire inside the volcanoes. Iceland will always be an important part of our lives," Ingjalsdóttir says, acknowledging that it's easier to embrace all of the elements and be nostalgic about a frostier past when sheltered by their own design in a place where the mercury level rarely dips lower than 70 degrees year-round. ■

A Grand Entrance

Expansive glass openings play an essential energy-saving role at the Minarc House, alternately pulling breezes and the sun's warmth inside. The eight-foot pivoting entry door was a collaboration between Thorsteinsson, Five Star French Doors and Windows, and Rixson hardware company. "The challenge was to make a door this size that would pivot," says Thorsteinsson. They calculated that given the excessive weight of approximately 150 pounds, no more than four and a half feet could extend from the center pivot. They positioned the pivot off center and left only a foot and a half extending over the exterior threshold. "More out-swing might have been hazardous with kids around," Thorsteinsson explains. A standard hinged door next to it allows a total nine-foot-wide opening. Both doors are made of vertical-grain Douglas fir with white laminated glass for light and privacy.

On the opposite side of the room, a 30-foot stretch of glass doors framed in Douglas fir sit on a tracking device called lift and slide, by Alban Giacomo. A detachable lever raises the doors about a half inch and all three glide out of sight, becoming one with the wood grill in front of the bedroom window. The result is a living room that's completely open to the backyard. —K.H.

PHOTOS BY BRAGI JOSEFSSON (KITCHEN AND DOORWAY)



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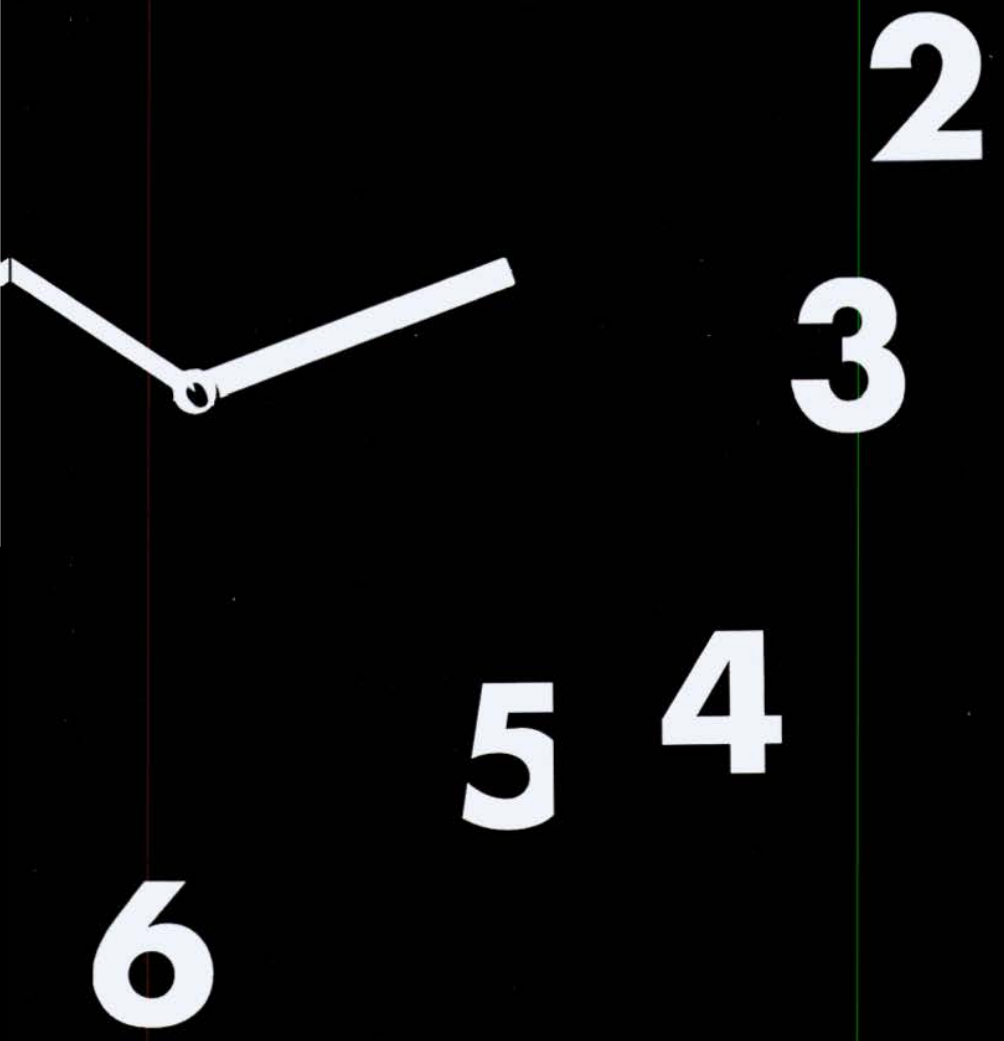
Story by Christopher Bright | Portrait by Nathan Perkel

How Soon Is Now?

From the traditional with a twist to completely conceptual, these timely wall clocks will tell the hour, impress the guests, and earn you the design-savvy stamp of approval.

A Note on Our Expert: Tony Espinoza is the man behind San Francisco Soundworks, a full-service multiroom recording studio that's putting the city back on the map as one of the top places to hit the charts. The four-story structure features every piece of cutting-edge equipment imaginable, with four control rooms, five recording spaces, a lounge/edit suite, and two swanky apartments to keep the talent happy and pampered. Espinoza, who studied at Stanford's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics, likes to work with struggling indies as well as the recognized platinum sellers, and played in garage bands long before his former role as VP of AOL Music Services.

Photos by Peter Belanger



RND_Time infinite wall clock / $185 / www.unicahome.com / Designed by Progetti in 2003; 2.3" cubes; available in black or white; nylon plastic construction; battery-powered quartz movement.

Expert Opinion: This one is my favorite; it's very Brian Eno. At first I thought it was just asking for trouble—maybe difficult to install and read—but the more I thought about it and played with it, the more I realized it's just what we need around the studio. Recording music is a process of capturing moments. Mixing music is a process of putting all those tracks together to create a moment for the listener. We spend all day worrying about three minutes, so we'd go crazy if we looked at the same old clock day in and day out. This is a clock that says "Time is what you make it." What a wonderful concept.

What We Think: The RND_Time is definitely different, and more conceptual than the rest of the traditional form clocks. Because it draws the eye and takes up more space, this DIY wall decoration has a dual purpose, simultaneously telling time and serving as a sculptural accent. The autonomy of configuring the arrangement to your personal preference is attractive, but we're a bit wary of the hassle.

Time is the universal commonality between cultures, countries, genders, and generations. It's this omnipresent shared experience that links dentist appointments with rodeos, sprinters with sommeliers, and even virgins with Viagra; duration has a bearing in everyone's life. It's all relative, of course, as Einstein taught us.

Humans have tried to quantify this evasive commodity through the use of clocks for thousands of years, attempting to measure the past, present, and future in myriad ways. Magellan used an hourglass to aid his circumnavigation of the globe, Romans kept time with a sundial, and Egyptians relied upon water clocks to plan for the afterlife. Some devices are more accurate than others, but saving the correct hour, who's to say which is best?

Enter Tony Espinoza of San Francisco Soundworks, a recording studio that provides high-end client services as well as lo-fi options for newcomers. Espinoza makes a living by producing music, and has worked with artists as diverse as Ice Cube, REM, and Radiohead. It's no secret why so many would want to lay it down at his spot: Aside from the acoustic expertise, the studio is one of the slickest around. The working space is clad in rich wood paneling, punctuated by the rough industrial texture of concrete and plump organic softness of sound baffling.

Espinoza's forte is harnessing abstract expressions of time and emotion into tangible, danceable manifestations. Who better to opine on wall clocks than someone who not only keeps an eye on the session time everyday but also crafts the soundtracks that chronicle the memorable minutes of our lives? We clocked a few hours in the studio with Espinoza to see which devices did the best job keeping time. ▸

Cuckoo clock / $375 / www.momastore.org / Designed by Tobias Reischle in 2006; 9" H x 6.25" W x 3.75" D; wood, MDF, and metal construction; weights provide movement.

Expert Opinion: The modern twist on the cuckoo classic is an interesting concept. Feels like you should be able to download your favorite MP3 ring tones into it. Actually, the point doesn't seem to be tech, so much as the strictly modern philosophy. I really don't know what to make of it. Somehow it takes the fun, light, woody feeling of the classic and replaces it with a serious, heavy, almost monastic vibe.

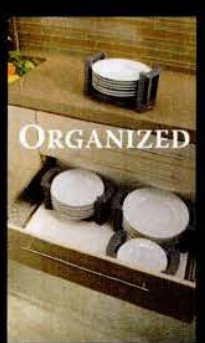
What We Think: We love the combination of tradition infused with the simple, clean lines of modernism, as well as the air of humor about it. The allusion to the cuckoo archetype is a perfect complement to the matte black accent, and this balance allows it to work in almost any decor.

Banker's clock / $360–$740 / www.velocityartanddesign.com / Designed by Arne Jacobsen in 1971; 11.4" or 19" diameter; aluminum and curved crystal construction; battery-powered quartz movement.

Expert Opinion: Few designers would argue with this one. Clean lines and a striking arched top like a Gibson 335 guitar. It looks expensive and very well crafted. The typography is unique, with mesmerizing Edward Tufte–esque symbols. From a distance this one says "Time is money." Up close it says "Time is a design study."

What We Think: The Banker's clock, which was originally created for the National Bank of Denmark, may be our favorite of the group. The pragmatic yet sublime sequences of blocks that represent each hour are impossible to misinterpret, and the deft execution of the graphic design makes discerning the time completely intuitive. ►

IT'S...



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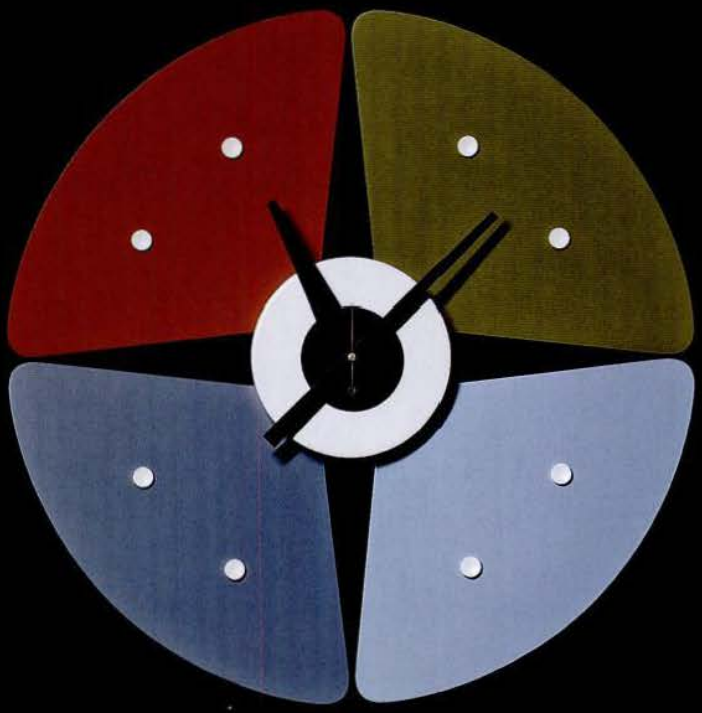

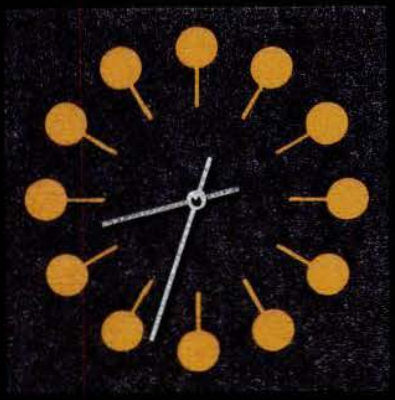

Art clock / $35 / www.elsewares.com / Designed by Andrzej Bialuski in 2004; 9.75" square; available in gray/orange, lavender/lime, pink, and white; felt construction; battery-powered quartz movement.

Expert Opinion: I guess you could say this is the warmest and fuzziest of the bunch. Also, since it's made of fabric, it's acoustically transparent so I could actually hang it in one of the isolation booths where we record vocals. I like the orange, but other than that it falls a little flat visually.

What We Think: Finding a colorful, design-credentialed clock that's not over the top can be a difficult task. The simple geometric pattern alludes to George Nelson's Ball clock, and is a pleasant contrast with the warmth of the felt. We have to agree with Espinoza—it's a bit basic—but a great option, considering the price.

Max Bill wall clock / $400–$445 / www.mossonline.com / Designed by Max Bill in 1957, manufactured by Junghans; available in 8.7" or 11.8" diameter; aluminum case with polished edge and mineral glass construction; battery-powered quartz movement.

Expert Opinion: Remember your Swatch watch? It's difficult to argue with a clean, somewhat retro, minimalist design. I could see a lot of the electronica folks I work with digging this one. This clock falls somewhere between analog and digital because it has the minute counter printed on the outer ring, so you can actually read it precisely as 1:52. Geek is chic, right?

What We Think: It's hard to find fault with this design benchmark by Bill. The stark palette draws attention to the details of the typography; it's simple, functional, and versatile. Like the Banker's clock, the attention to materials and assembly radiates quality.

Petal clock / $275 / www.momastore.org / Designed by George Nelson in 1956–58 and reissued by the Vitra Design Museum; 18" diameter; lacquered MDF and metal construction; battery-powered quartz movement.

Expert Opinion: I could see this one in a hip mid-century-modern kitchen. It has great colors, and the subtle texture is nice too. If you look at it long enough, you begin to see the reverse image in white, and it almost looks like you're looking head-on at the propellers of an old World War II fighter plane. Not the easiest clock to read, but given the right room, I think it could really tie things together nicely.

What We Think: George Nelson has a posthumous monopoly on the mid-century clock market, and is responsible for more reissued classics than his country-singing counterpart Willie. Others he's designed—like Talulah the Tucan and Fernando the Fish—are playful and fun, but don't have the refined staying power of the Petal's colorful simplicity. ■

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Tipping Point

Josh Greene chooses the recipients of his monthly grant based solely on his interests. Proposals need not be artistic, just engaging and able to be completed in about three weeks.

While the MacArthur Foundation gives out $200 million in grants annually, Josh Greene's program deals in denominations of tens and twenties. The 35-year-old artist and waiter is both benefactor and administrator of the Service-Works grant, a monthly award of about $250 based on tips from a night working at a fine dining establishment. The endowments are given to whichever projects Greene deems worthy and range from writing a speech for George Bush to the support of immigrants' rights. If all of this sounds like ethereal art or common community service, take a closer look. At the root of Service-Works is an investigation into the trajectory of daily life and how we can learn to guide its direction.

The Service-Works rules are simple. There are no prerequisites for applicants, just an itemized budget with a summary detailing the proposed project. Recipients receive half of the funds up front and the remaining half when the completed project has been documented for display on Greene's website.

The first iteration of the project produced seven applicants, but since then Greene has been receiving around 35 submittals per month, largely as a result of his project garnering exposure on the New York Foundation for the Arts website. The June 2006 recipient was Michael Berens, who used the funds to make himself available to desperate souls who needed help finishing a last-minute project—one of whom was Greene himself.

But Greene doesn't think of himself as generous or altruistic. As he says, "Helping people isn't that interesting." By his own admission, the motivation behind Service-Works is unapologetically opportunistic. Greene uses the grant as a tool to help understand social structure and interaction—a case study of how the world works. The goal is to learn how to better control his future, an example we all could learn from. The Service-Works program is a way to upend perspective, to focus on ourselves, our purpose, and how we can harness the inertia of common experience. He explains, "Artists don't effect change, they plant seeds to get people thinking."

And while Greene may not be an altruist, he's giving away something much more valuable than the cost of designer sunglasses; he's doling out self-reliance. ■

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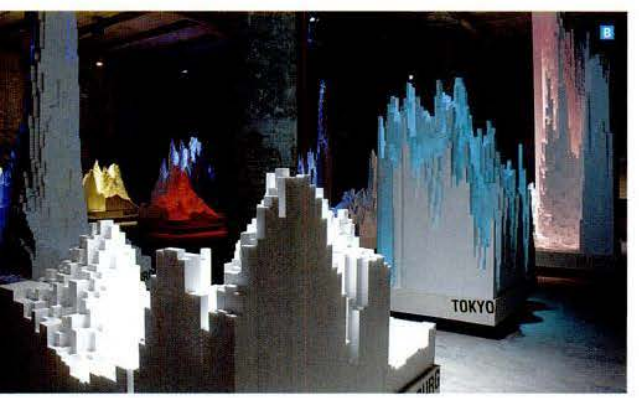
BIENNIAL



The Venice Architecture Biennial has three uniquely incongruous stomping grounds: the exhibit in the medieval Arsenale, the garden of international pavilions, and the city of Venice. In the Arsenale, the curator tackles a chosen theme; in the pavilions some 50 countries present a panoply of interpretations. Venice, of course, defies explanation, much as it seems to defy its own existence when you ride the *vaporetto* along sinking streets.

Curated by Richard Burdett, this year's biennial was titled "Cities, Architecture and Society." The theme was political, refreshingly divorced from architectural vanity, with the potential to address germane problems like sprawl and climate change.

The results, however, fell short of expectations. In the Arsenale, scores of urban investigations and statistics were presented on what could have been blown-up book pages. The pavilions were more imaginative, though many suffered the same dearth of 3D.

A Office for Metropolitan Architecture
In the "Urban Research" section, OMA filled a room with data about rapid expansion in Persian Gulf cities and Lagos. The topic offered a dose of controversy—which this biennial generally lacked. Rem Koolhaas's writing was on the wall: "Recent Gulf developments, much like Singapore and China in the 1980s and 90s, have been met with derision: 'Las Vegas in Arabia,' 'Lawrence of suburbia,' 'a bubble built on debt,' 'skyline on crack,' and—most damning—'Walt Disney meets Albert Speer,' echoing the condemnation fifteen years ago of Singapore's Disneyland."

B Population Density Display
The Arsenale's highlight was a room full of graphs presented three-dimensionally on 16 square platforms. Each platform represented a city divided into an aerial grid, in which each box had its population counted; the grid boxes then extruded vertically to a height representing population. The result was a density topography—a fascinating abstraction of urban landscape, centrality, and sprawl. Unfortunately, this room was the exception that proved the rule in the Arsenale: Too much data suffered from banal means of display. Burdett would have done well to reread Edward Tufte's trilogy. ►

PHOTO COURTESY AMO (GROUP)

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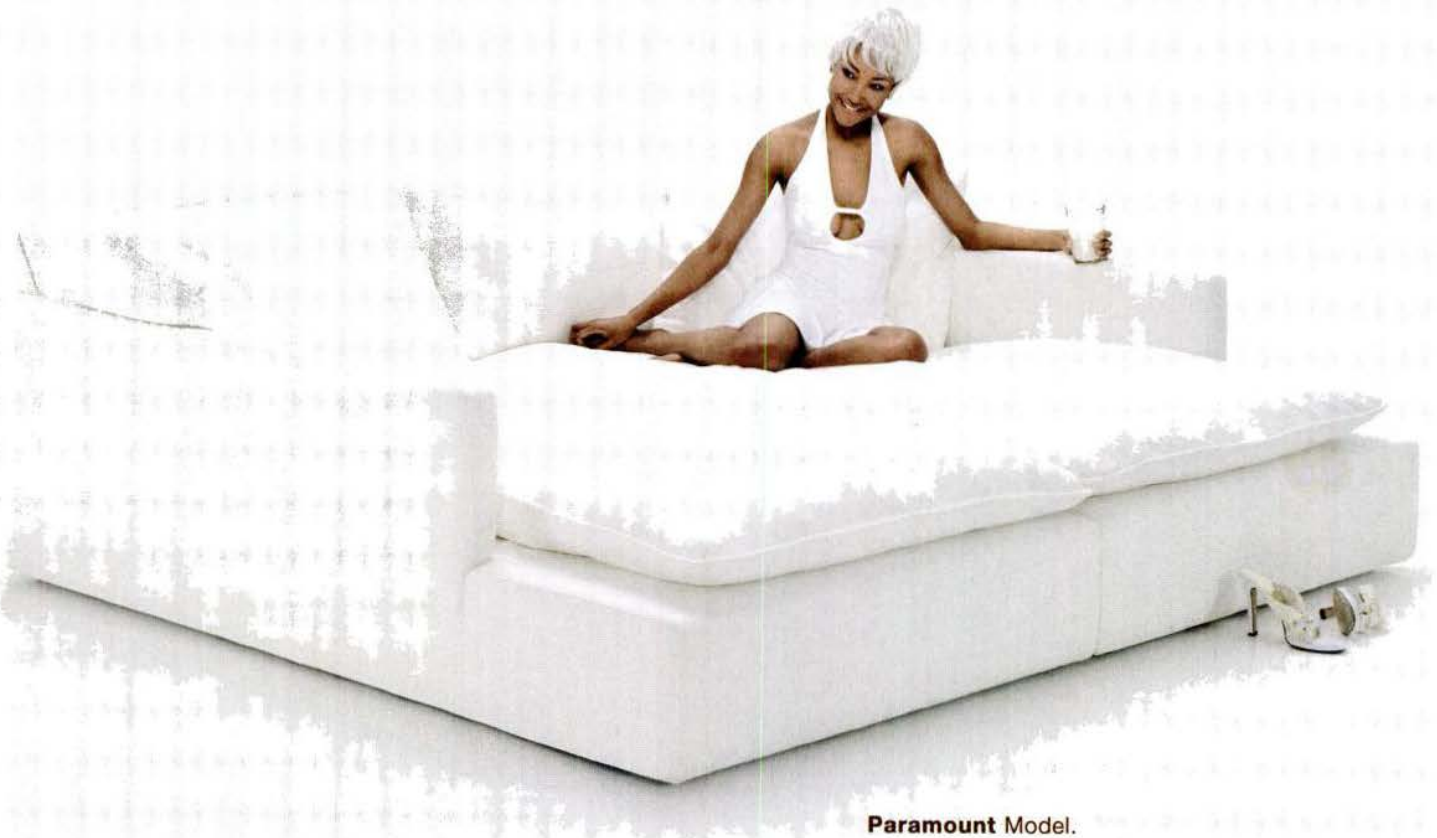
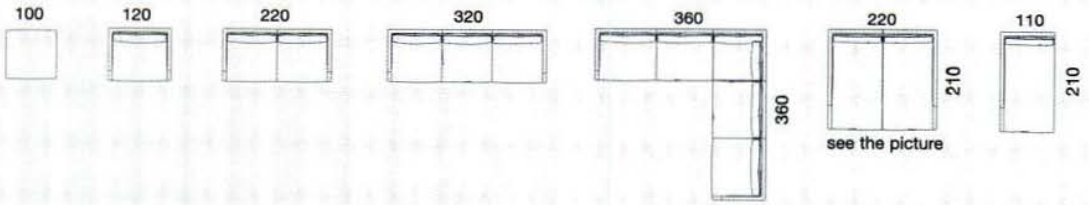


Paramount Model.



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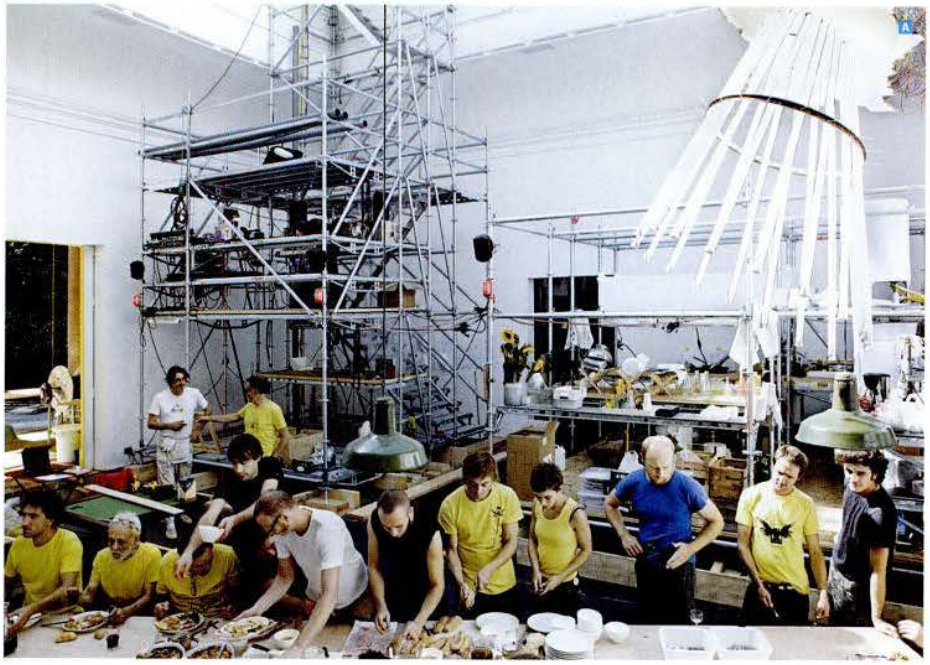

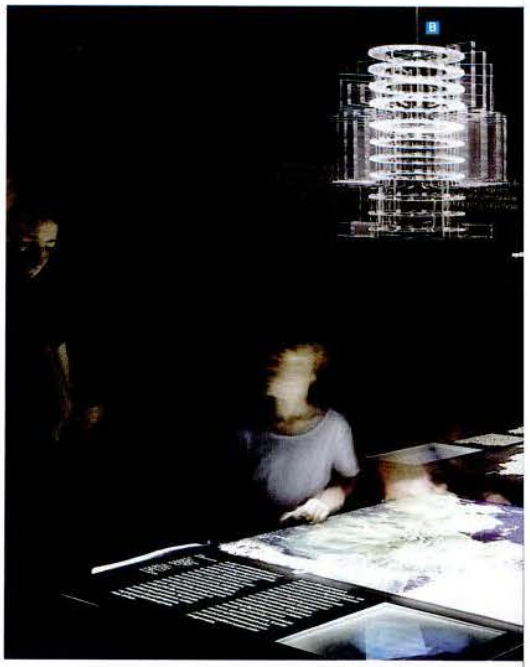

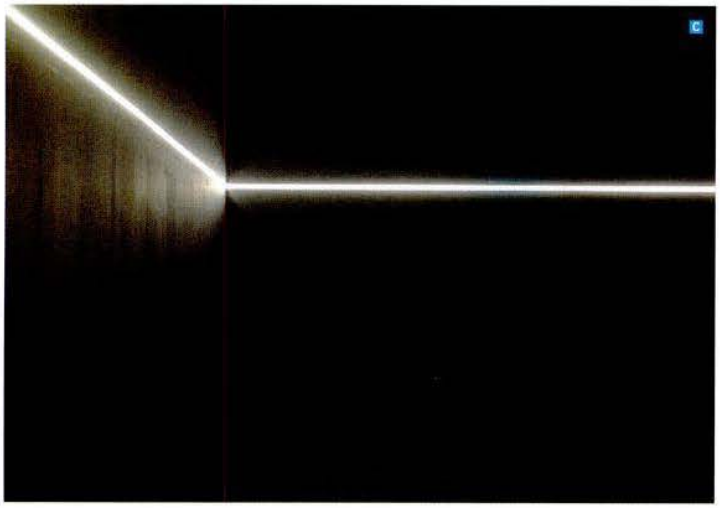

PHOTOS BY CYRILLE WEINER (FRANCE), ROS KAVANAGH (IRELAND), KIM STAYNER (UNITED STATES) AND COURTESY CAMERAPHOTO ARTE/VENEZIA/THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA ART CONTEMPORARY (YOUR BLACK HORIZON)

A France
An occupation was staged in the French pavilion: architecturally trained youth built inhabitable scaffoldings that extended inside and up to the roof of the neoclassical building. There were beds, offices, and a well-equipped kitchen; the inhabitants tended to be glamorous and thin. Calling an occupied palace an embodiment of "the hope for justice, by way of an equitable redistribution of space," the pavilion, with its elegantly written statement, became an "architectural act." It was also a good place to fix a sandwich.

B Ireland
For an exhibit titled "Sub-Urban to SuperRural," nine Irish architecture studios suggested ways to reverse the urban sprawl that has tainted Ireland's landscape and quality of life in the past decade. The walls were awash with relevant statistics—e.g., the per capita driving average in Ireland is 25,000 kilometers per year, versus 19,000 in the United States. Imaginative proposals—such as Dominic Stevens's "Fluidcity," which carries a floating urban infrastructure to villages along the river Shannon—brought forth the exciting prospect that architects might change the country's future, as they did with Dublin's Temple Bar in the 1990s.

C Your Black Horizon
A 20-minute boat ride out of the Grand Canal to the island of San Lazzaro became an otherworldly experience. Here, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Contemporary Art Foundation inaugurated the first of what will be a series of site-specific, environmentally sustainable art pavilions all over the world. A sculpture by Olafur Eliasson, in which a horizontal line of light at eye level circumscribes a pitch-black room, is housed in a pavilion by David Adjaye. One enters the pavilion through a long passageway with a slatted view of the water along one side, and then blinks in the darkness at the artificial horizon. A metaphor for finitude among other things, the sculpture formed a peaceful antidote to the commotion.

D United States
Representing the United States, *Architectural Record* organized "After the Flood: Building on a Higher Ground," in which architects presented housing solutions in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Students offered more radical ideas, such as the tethered floating cubes conceived by Kiduck Kim and Christian Stayner. This was one of two Katrina exhibits at the biennial (the other was hosted by University of Texas at Austin in the "Urban Research" section), while the tsunami of December 2004 was absent—a telling oversight. The Guggenheim Venice hosted a lavish party for "After the Flood," over which hovered an ironic cloud of smug: The wine budget alone could probably have erected some roofs in Mississippi. ▶


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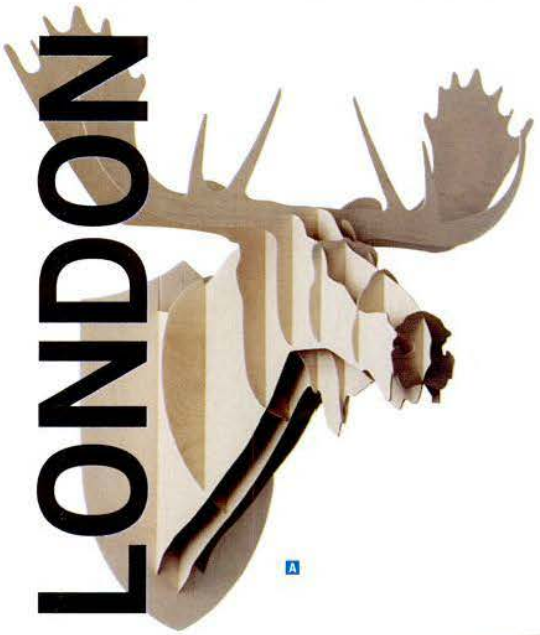
LONDON



A

B

C

The London Design Festival has expanded so much in recent years that it now requires a thickly bound book to detail all the events. It was good to see a number of exhibitors showing their love for London in their designs this year, though there was a surprising lack of eco-sensitivity, betraying the fact that the mainstreaming of green design may have caught some by surprise.

D

E

A Animaux by Big-Game / www.big-game.ch
Exploring the sometimes awkward meeting of heritage and contemporary design with their Heritage in Progress collection, this Swiss design collective have come up with a choice of self-assembly stag, doe, or moose heads. A boon for modernist vegetarians who guiltily covet their friends' kitschy taxidermy.

B Angles by Erica Wakerly / www.printpattern.com
This striking design made for an impressive debut in a show that consistently turns up interesting and innovative wallpaper. Other designs range from geometric shapes to fun illustrative papers.

C Mobile Dining by Nobuhiro Teshima / inkwith.main.jp
If you feel the need for a tea ceremony or just a low dining table in your tiny apartment, then this eccentric-yet-practical piece of design may be what you've been waiting for. Stored in a small cupboard unit, the table folds out to comfortably seat five.

D Hulger Penelope Phone by Nicolas Roope / www.hulger.com
As cell phone manufacturers struggle to fit more gadgets into a smaller box, Hulger has taken a step back and come up with a range of retro-modern handsets that can connect to your cell phone or computer (for VOIP services) via a satisfyingly corkscrewed cable or Bluetooth.

E Branch by Louise Jones / www.louisejonesdesign.co.uk
This plywood bookshelf was the deserved winner of the 100% Design Award at New Designers in July. The way that the childlike impression of a tree stores your books on a mild slant is both friendly and comforting. ►

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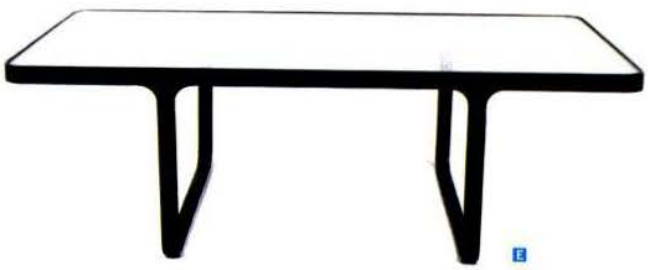

A Changing Guards at Buckingham Palace by Lizzie Allen
This stunning hand-screen-printed wallpaper, which depicts the changing of the guard, mixes humor with a retro feel in its saturated colors and illustration style. The paper is printed to order and certainly makes a more striking souvenir of the city than a postcard of Big Ben.

B CurlyShade by Sixixis / www.sixixis.com
Sixixis is an environment-friendly collective from Cornwall, in southwest England, that makes unique beds, chairs, and lampshades using local wood and steam bending techniques for its designs. CurlyShade was a real standout at the show with its feathered wood and contrasting energy-saving bulb recommended by its designers.

C Mr. Chair by Gae Yeon Chang / www.thedelicious.com
Sometimes you see something at a show and think, I like that; what is it? Mr. Chair is a perfect example, with its chrome frame offering both a trolley and comfy seat to rest on when the strolling or shopping becomes all too much.

D Tower Bridge by Snowden Flood / www.snowdenflood.com
A quick note to Fergie of the Black Eyed Peas: This neatly embroidered cushion displays an image of London's Tower Bridge. It is the one that goes up and down. London Bridge does not. Still, the cushion is great. Fergie was not involved in the design process.

E Trace Table by Stefan Bench for Naughtone / www.naughtone.com
There is beauty and simplicity in this handmade, steel-framed glass table, which is available in colors ranging from a sedate black to shocking pink. The one-piece design is available high as a dinner table or low as a coffee table.

F Opus Incertum by Sean Yoo for Casamania / www.casamania.it
A room divider that does double duty as a display-shelving unit. Made of expanded polypropylene, the lightweight honeycomb-style design is as mobile as it is stylish. ■

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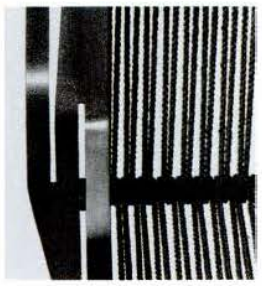


At Denmark's Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (left), fans of all ages attended Kjærholm's first complete retrospective since his death in 1980. Kjærholm's graduation project, the PK 25 (above), was made with a blacksmith's help from a single piece of steel, and is still in production today.

PHOTOS BY POUL BUCHARD/BRONDUM & CO (EXHIBITION); KELD HELMER-PETERSEN (CHAIR, DETAIL)

Breaking Tradition, Making Tradition

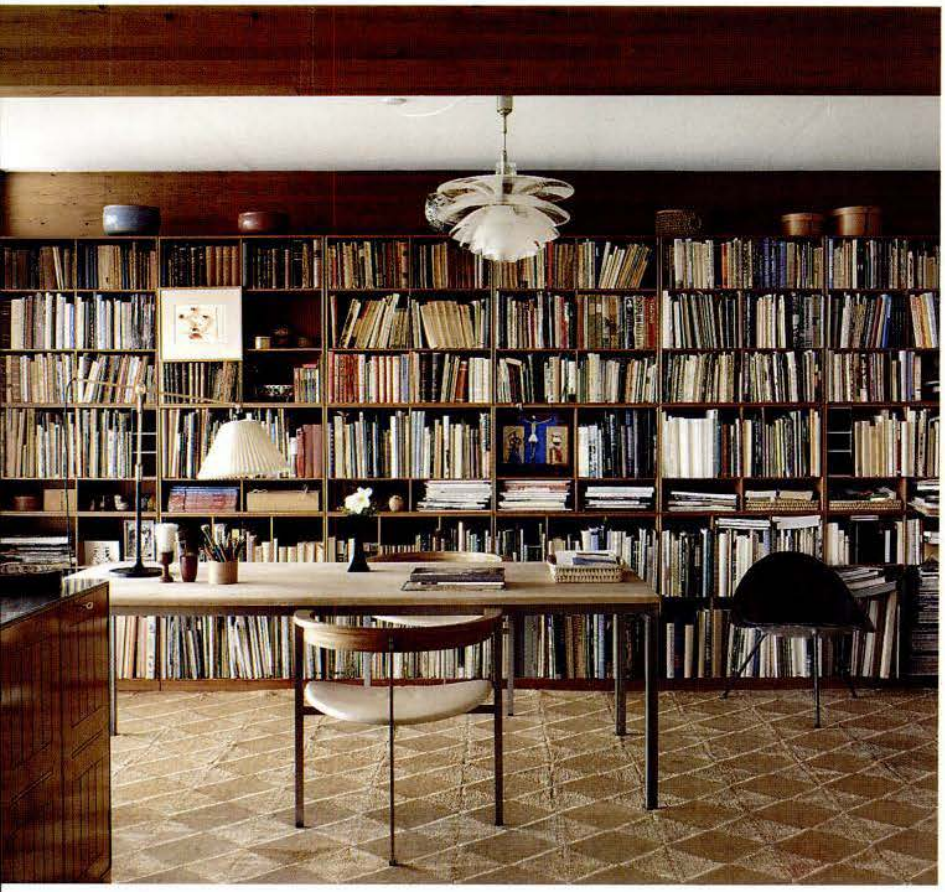
"The time has come to recognize that Kjærholm is one of the primary figures of the 20th century," declared curator Michael Sheridan, at the opening of his exhibition, "Poul Kjærholm: Furniture Architect," in June. Exploring the show at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark—surrounded by designs that seemed startlingly contemporary—it was hard not to ponder a question Sheridan himself raised: "Why does this work, that in many cases was designed fifty years ago, still exert a certain power?"

The answer, as the exhibition makes clear, is that in his brief life, Kjærholm (1929–1980) managed quite a feat: He bridged one of design's most persistent divides—the gulf between craft and industry—achieving a synthesis that, in its material expressiveness, clarity of conception and execution, and compelling sense of narrative, remains virtually unequaled.

It wasn't easy. Apprenticed at 15 to a cabinetmaker in his hometown of Hjørring, Denmark, the designer embraced the craft-based traditions of 19th-century Danish woodworking. Yet when he began his studies at Copenhagen's School of Arts and Crafts, Kjærholm—thanks to an industrial design class taught by the architect Jørn Utzon—found himself drawn to steel and the utopian potential of mass production. This culminated, in 1951, in his graduation project, the PK 25: a lounge chair made from a single piece of bent steel, its back and seat strung from flagline. The piece, which achieved the unity of fine cabinetry in an industrial material, galvanized the Danish design world—Sheridan calls it "radical"—and launched Kjærholm's career.

Most designers would have stuck with what worked. For Kjærholm, however, the PK 25 marked the start of a difficult struggle, one that flowed from the designer's nature. "He was more curious and studied more than the other furniture architects," recalls his wife, Hanne—herself one of Denmark's foremost architects—seated at Kjærholm's worktable, in the classic home she created for them in 1961 in Rungsted Kyst on the Øresund coast. "Because he was not interested in money, or production. He was interested in trying experimental ideas."

Experiment he did. For three years—first at the Fritz Hansen company, which hired him in 1952 to explore new materials, then as a freelance industrial designer—Kjærholm searched for a language that might reconcile his interests, producing a stream of projects, ranging ▸



Kjærholm's work table (far left) in the home his wife Hanne designed in 1961 remains precisely where he sited it 45 years ago. The designer's interest in sculptural forms and painstaking attention to detail are evident in his PK 9 dining chair (above), created in 1960.

from cast-concrete modular furniture to wood-and-steel chairs requiring careful assembly, that amounted to a bad case of the creative Hamlets: industrial production or *håndværk*? That was the question.

In 1955, Kjærholm was asked to design desks for the architecture school at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. By setting a pine work surface atop a ready-made steel base, Kjærholm experienced a breakthrough. For the ensuing 25 years, his furniture would combine natural and industrial materials, unified with workshop techniques that brought out the characteristics of each, and machine-made joinery handled with a cabinetmaker's precision.

Much of this combination's enduring vitality derives from its contradictions. Not only did Kjærholm treat steel in a craftsmanlike way, he contrasted it with woven cane, traditional leather detailing, and richly veined, matte-finished stone. "The furniture's unity is sacred to me," Kjærholm said; yet while his pieces are as seamless in their assembly as one of Hans Wegner's finger-jointed wood chairs, the designer's use of machine screws and O-rings to couple his components expresses their apartness even as it unites them.

Kjærholm's relationship to architecture was also complex. He came of age as California's Case Study program was influencing Danish residential design, nowhere more apparently than in Hanne's modernist plan for their home. Kjærholm described this as "an order that is not oppressive" and observed that "I try to work together with modern architecture that seeks out this simple order." Pointing out the pieces her husband designed to establish working, living, and dining areas in their house's public room, Hanne says, "He wanted furniture to influence a room as part of a room—to make spaces that express the architecture."

Yet Kjærholm's designs, with their sculptural profiles and quality of what Sheridan calls "pure construction," are architectural in their own right. Jørn Utzon captured this blend of deference and self-assertion when he observed, "A piece of Poul's furniture is like an elegantly written character that gives the room in which it stands solidity and calm."

"I lived with him, I never thought about it," Hanne admits. "Only now, after all the discussion, can I see the difference between him and the others." Indeed, Kjærholm's undemonstrative ethos often belied his genius. He was, noted the architect Nils Fagerholt, "not curious in the usual or accepted way. He saw and sought only what he needed." Apparently it was enough. "You look at other masterpieces from that period," Sheridan says. "And they're beautiful, but they look like they were designed in the 1950s. Kjærholm's pieces don't—they exist out of time." ▸

PHOTOS BY THOMAS LOOF (INTERIOR), KELD HELMER-PETERSEN (DETAIL), AND COURTESY FRITZ HANSEN (CHAIR)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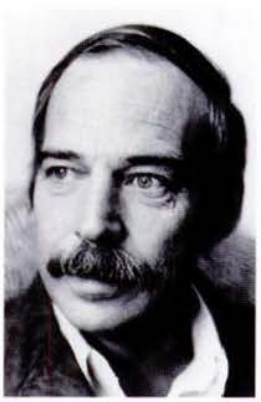

Kjærholm experimented extensively with materials and production methods. Clockwise from top left: a 1954 exhibit of three-legged, molded-aluminum chairs; the PK 12 (1964) with a custom cane seat; Poul Kjærholm; the 1959 PK 33 stool without its cushion; and ash-slatted seating for the Louisiana Museum's concert hall (1976).

Ten Things You Should Know About Poul Kjærholm

1 / Kjærholm was born in 1929 in Østra Vrå, Denmark, and raised by ultratraditional parents who, according to hife wife, Hanne, apprenticed him to a cabinetmaker because he refused to give up painting. "An artist! That was the worst thing their child could be doing," Hanne says.

2 / His apprenticeship not only included coffin building but also placing the bodies in their new homes, after which the irrepressible artist painted pictures of the deceased.

3 / As a result of a childhood infection, one of Kjærholm's legs was shorter than the other, resulting in a limp. "He could have been helped by a special shoe, but he wouldn't do it," Hanne recalls.

4 / In 1949, Kjærholm enrolled in Copenhagen's School of Arts and Crafts, where he studied with furniture designer Hans Wegner.

5 / Kjærholm was influenced by Gerrit Rietveld, whose furniture used simple forms and structural elements to shape and defer to space, and Mies van der Rohe, for his use of steel and commitment to refining and perfecting essential furniture typologies.

6 / From 1953 through 1979, Kjærholm held various teaching positions, first at the School of Arts and Crafts, then at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts School of Architecture.

7 / In 1955, Kjærholm partnered with furniture dealer E. Kold Christensen, who assembled a team of artisans to produce individual components, and encouraged the designer's interest in assembly, as it enabled the work to be shipped in pieces. They remained in business until Kjærholm's death in 1980.

8 / Between 1953 and 1980, Kjærholm also designed some 25 exhibitions—characterized by the use of photomurals, simple architectural elements, and plants—that showcased his own work, Denmark's applied arts, and modern photography.

9 / In 1965, Kjærholm was selected to design furniture for Washington's Kennedy Center. Though his designs weren't used, the commission rekindled his interest in wood; Kjærholm's wood furnishings during the 1970s included theater seats for the Louisiana Museum's concert hall.

10 / Despite his famous seriousness, Kjærholm "was very free and fun," says Hanne. "He had a great sense of humor." ■

PHOTOS BY KELD HELMER-PETERSEN (THEATER SEATS, CHAIR, TABLE) AND COURTESY HANNE KJÆRHOLM (INTERIOR); FRITZ HANSEN (PORTRAIT)

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Story by Christopher Bright

Photo by Peter Belanger

Dear Dwell,
I'm tired of my old generic broom. Are there any specialized products on the market that are both hip and functional?

—**Edward Charles,** Austin, Texas

With the ubiquity of Swiffers and DustBusters, interesting and effective brooms are few and far between these days. But if you have hardwood or concrete floors, old school is the way to go. We've managed to round up several task-masters that will have you sweeping stylishly in no time.

Mago broom by Stefano Giovannoni for Magis / $56 / www.unicahome.com
Brooms have changed little from their straw and felled-branch predecessors. Magis's twist on the old standard comes by way of a colorful, all-purpose indoor broom that's good for everyday spills and fumbles. Users can choose from myriad color combinations, specifying down to the handle and brush. An optional wall hook is available, should you wish to display this attractive utility.

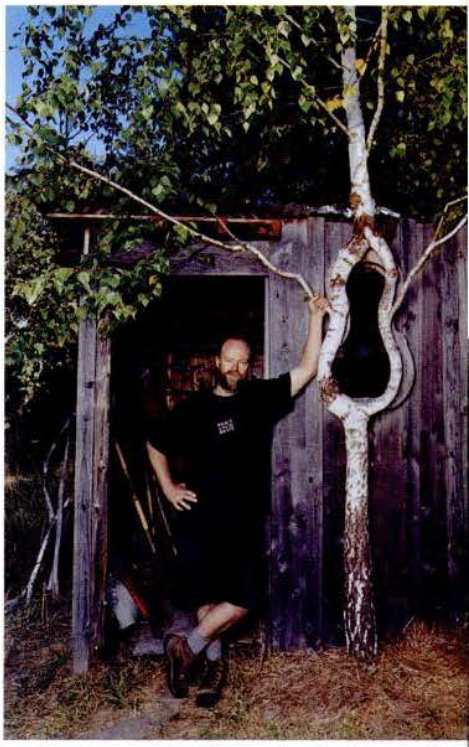
FURemover broom / $14.99 / www.stacksandstacks.com
If this looks like late-night television infomercial fodder, there's a good reason—it is. But all snobbery aside, the FURemover's rubber bristles serve an essential purpose (especially for pet owners) that other household brooms do not—whisking away the pesky dog hair, loose carpet pile, and ever-present lint that clump around the living room like fluffy flotsam.

Quickie Super Bulldozer 2-in-1 push-broom / $19.97 / www.homedepot.com
It's easy to assume that all brooms are essentially the same—handle, brush, what else is there? The Bulldozer's versatility disproves this common perception. The soft outer fibers and stiff inner bristles are designed for sweeping refuse both big and small, and are useful for work in the garage as well as the yard. This broom also has a squeegee side that's perfect for sloughing off wet messes, and its cushioned handle helps to fend off unsightly calluses.

Dustpan and brush by Ole Jensen for Normann Copenhagen / $25 / www.fitzsu.com
Inspiration can strike at any time. For Ole Jensen, it happened while using a folded newspaper to clean up a mess in his studio. After realizing its usefulness, he substituted his morning read with a thin sheet of polypropylene, which collects even the most minute grains of dust and grime, and a natural-bristle beechwood brush. When you're done cleaning up, simply slide the brush handle through the grommet of the minimalist pan and hang it for easy storage. ■

Story by James Nestor

Photos by John Clark



In 1947, a kooky Swede by the name of Axel Erlandson opened an arborsculpture amusement park called the "Tree Circus" in the Santa Cruz mountains. Says Richard Reames (above), "I guess that's what first got me interested in all this."

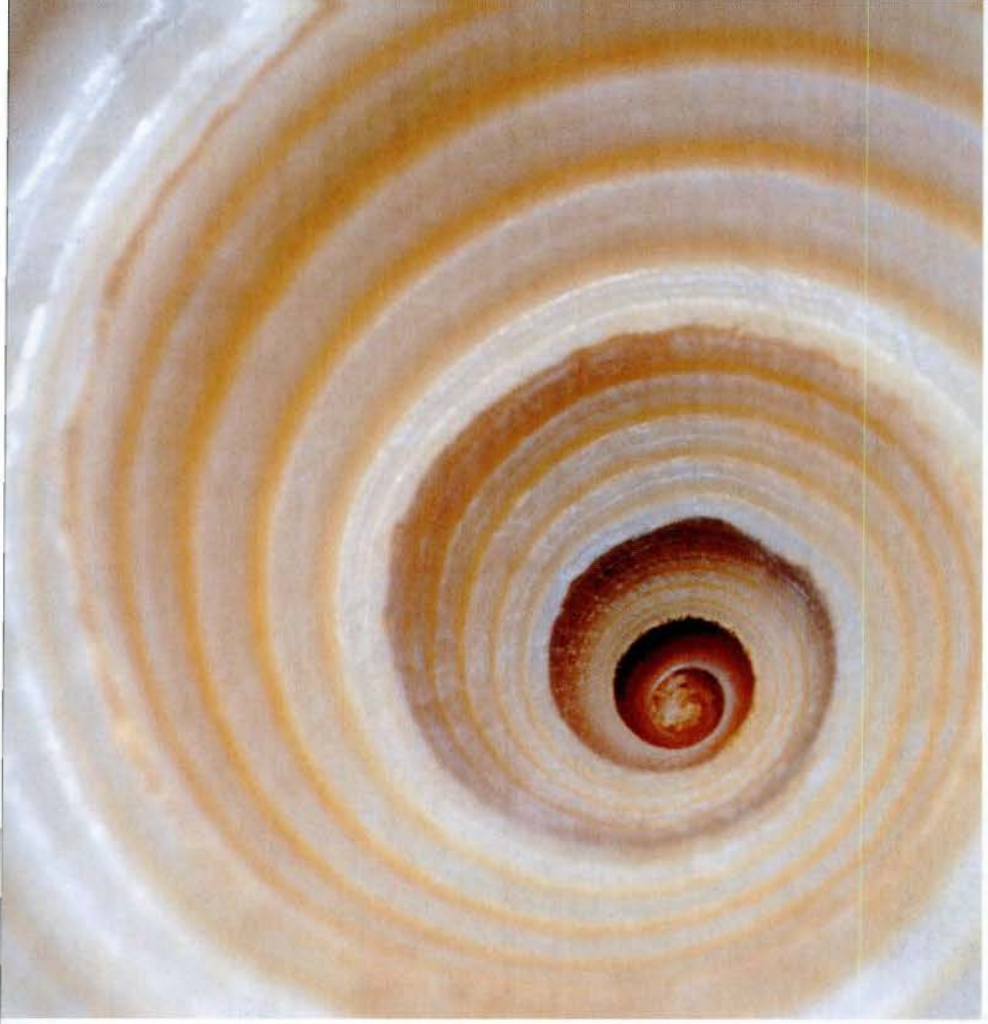
Branching Out

Ask an engineer to build a 300-foot-tall, freestanding, tapered column with a 20-foot base and he'll most likely tell you it's going to be impossible—or really expensive. But an arborsculpturist knows otherwise. He'll simply dig up some dirt and drop some seeds. He knows the tree growing there will be malleable and as structurally advanced as any modern material. For him, the living tree is the perfect architectural building block. It's the only construction material that will become stronger and taller with age, and the only material with which the sculptor and substance enjoy a symbiotic relationship, both working together for a single greater good. There's no "I" in "arborsculpture."

Arborsculpture is the art of shaping living trees into furniture, sculpture, and shelters. Part grazing and grafting, pleaching and patience, it exists in the shady area between landscaping, gardening, and furniture design. Arborsculpturists figure that anyone can shape objects out of dead wood, but it takes a special set of skills to make things out of living wood, to allow the tree to flourish as you meld it for a human purpose.

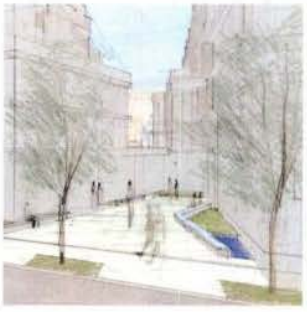
"Think of it as the opposite of topiary," says Richard Reames, arborsculpturist and author of the books *Arborsculpture* and *How to Grow a Chair*. "With topiary, you're just shaping foliage, controlling it all the time; you have to prune constantly to keep that shape. With arborsculpture, once you've shaped the trunks, you don't need to do anything else. You just let it grow through the years."

The practice dates back centuries, first documented in the 500-year-old miniature painting by Jean Perréal in which an angel is depicted sitting on a lavish (and very psychedelic) "living" chair. The earliest existing example (another chair) was planted by John Krubsack of Embarrass, Wisconsin, in 1903. "Dammit, one of these days I am going to grow a piece of furniture that will be better and stronger than any human hands can build," he told a friend. Twelve years later he debuted his "Chair That Grew" at the 1915 World's Fair in San Francisco. The Bilbo Baggins–esque throne—replete with ornamental backrest, armrests, and a six-branch seat—was an instant hit, garnering numerous newspaper articles and running ▸



"We see a renewably powered world full of safe and healthy things, with clean air, water, soil and power, economically, equitably, ecologically, and elegantly enjoyed."

–William McDonough, FAIA



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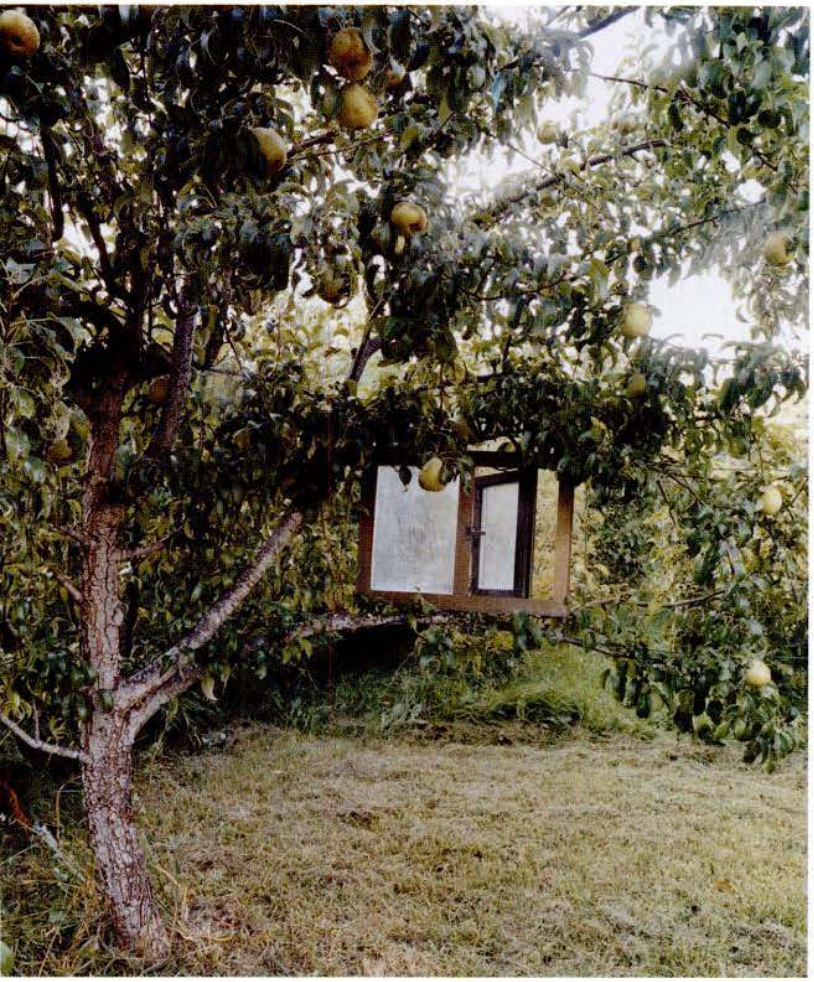
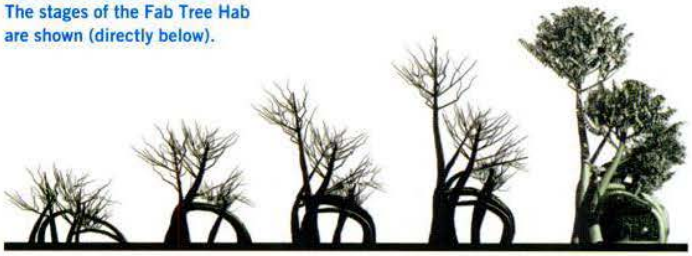


The outstretched arms of a pear tree (left) cradle an old window frame, while two branches of a 20-foot-tall poplar (below) spiral around one another. After being held in position for a few years, this ash tree (below right) will cast a new shape. The stages of the Fab Tree Hab are shown (directly below).



repeatedly in *Ripley's Believe It or Not.* And the modern age of arborsculpture was born.

Reames has spent the past 16 years making more than 100 sculptures, chairs, pieces of furniture, tool handles, mailboxes, and fences out of living trees. "It's just overwhelming how many people have gravitated to this in the last few years," says Reames, who directed "Growing Village," an arborsculpture park for the 2005 World Expo in Aichi, Japan.

But what Reames is most excited about is not the largely ornamental tenets of arborsculputure's past; it's the future, what he calls "arbortecture": the construction of living houses. One of his plans is to grow a circle of trees around a cement floor slab with preinstalled radiant heat. As the branches grow, window frames, electrical, and plumbing would be routed throughout the interior. Trees would be coaxed together in a tight weave so branches would meld together to create one solid, weather-tight structure. "A house like this would contribute to the environment—the exact opposite of housing today," he says. "It would be eco-positive and self-repairing, could last hundreds of years, and produce wood, fruit, and flowers to support its tenants."

It's a cosmic vision, perhaps better suited to Syd Barrett and Peter Gabriel–era Genesis songs than practical home construction. But recently, Reames has been joined in his mission by a group of decidedly unspacey architects. Mitchell Joachim and the Human Ecology Design team of MIT published plans in 2003 for a spacious, self-supporting, three-bedroom house composed of 100 percent living nutrients. The Fab Tree Hab consists of a weave of live branches on which a thermal clay and straw-based composite is layered in a stucco-like interior. Water enters the house from the rooftop collector and exits via transpiration. Temperature is moderated through solar-powered radiant tile floors and buoyancy-driven ventilation. Graywater flows not into a sewer but into a "Living Machine," where it is purified by bacteria, fish, and plants, and enters cleanly back into the environment. It's Corbusier's "machine for living in"—naturally. The Fab Tree Hab has been exhibited internationally, and has won awards from Habitat for Humanity and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art.

Environmentally beneficial, very affordable, not to mention unique, arbortecture and arborsculpture could indeed become practical alternatives for producing smart, eco-positive furniture, landscaping, and shelter.

If only trees didn't take so damn long to grow. ■

Story by Amara Holstein

Meet Your Maker

Tired of trawling crafts fairs for handmade goods? Exhausted by the plethora of mass-produced dreck on the Internet? Etsy, a website that links buyers directly with designers and crafters, might just be your shopping nirvana.

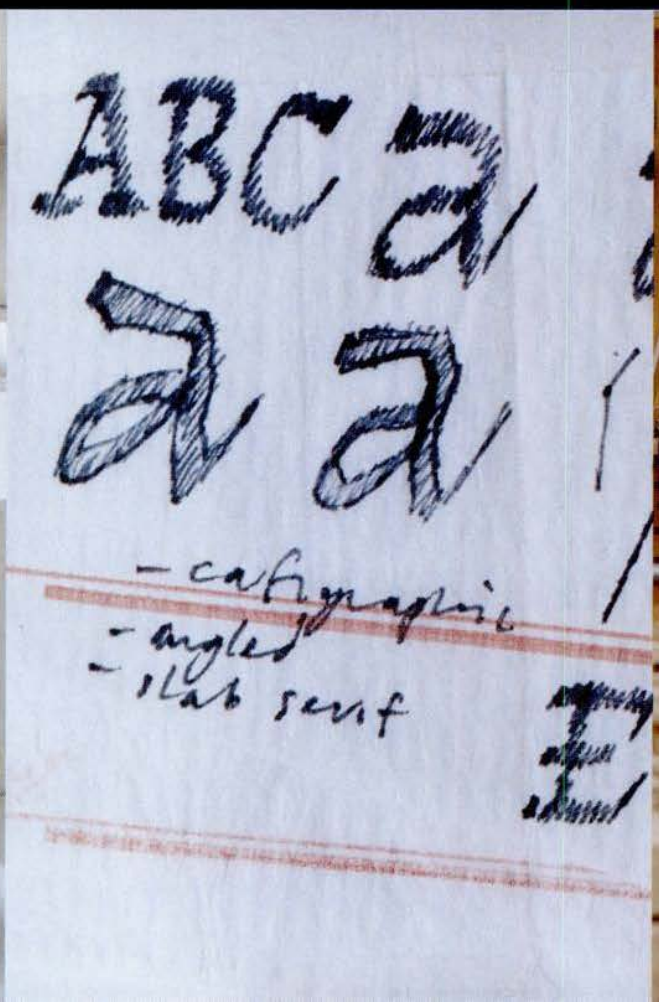
A 26-year-old Web designer who dropped out of four colleges in five years may seem like an unlikely person to save craft from the sad-looking booths of dusty flea markets and weekend crafts fairs, but with his website Etsy, that's exactly what Rob Kalin is hoping to do. "I don't think handmade goods are a fad," says Kalin, who grew up in a woodshop in Massachusetts and likes to make all his own stuff, from furniture to custom computer cases. "I think they're tying in to sustainable living, to making things people will want to keep, and to seeing that these objects should have more meaning. If you look back 150 years, everything was made by artisans. Then along came the Industrial Revolution, and there was a huge swing toward mass production. What I really want to do is swing the pendulum back the other way."

Locally made, locally sourced, locally farmed—there's a certain appeal to knowing your food and goods have been cultivated by human hands rather than by the steel

claws of an enormous machine. Plus, buying from the producer ensures a direct connection to your purchase, a tangible link to your goods beyond a cash exchange at a big-box store. But while it's easy enough to buy produce from a farmers' market, it's more of a dilemma to ensure that the tote you're buying for your best friend's birthday will come directly from the designer. Ironically enough, Kalin saw that the solution just might lie in the Internet: a confluence of the low-tech appeal of crafts with the high-tech mass-marketing potential of the Web.

Enter Etsy, an online marketplace selling handmade items directly from designer to consumer. Launched in 2005, the website is an active community of more than 25,000 crafters from as far away as Singapore and Australia, all hawking handmade goods. Membership is free, and each seller is assigned an Etsy address for a minimal percentage of each purchase. The site is designed simply but elegantly: Users can sort items by numerous options, including color, material, or type, and there's even an option called Alchemy, where buyers can post requests for custom designs. In its first year, more than 150,000 products, from wooden wedding rings to metal beds to patchwork dresses, were sold through Etsy.

As a result, Etsy has given crafters a retail platform—and sometimes their only voice in a marketplace glutted by the cogs of invention. After all, it's hard to compete with Amazon and eBay when you're assiduously making only one or two items a day. "Etsy has impacted my career in every way," says Ashley Goldberg, an illustrator who, along with her boyfriend, Drew Bell, creates prints and T-shirts decorated with poignant characters. "First of all, it gave me one." Other sellers echo this sentiment. Erin Currie, whose eerie vinyl toys and illustrated stories couldn't possibly be re-created by an assembly line of machines, states, "Etsy truly is a community of artists that spans the globe." ■



Shear Talent

In the small village of Spannum, in the Dutch province of Friesland, Claudy Jongstra heads a felt-design studio whose modesty in process and material belie its overwhelming commercial appeal and architectural scale.

Story by Amber Bravo | Photos by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

"To me craft is a skill set. It's about attention, time, speed—it's really about making and experiencing the process and seeing the result and how you can influence that process. It's a manual process and it's a certain type of person doing this. Everyone who works with me loves to work with her hands, but it's very important that it's contemporary, that it's your vision from today."
—Claudy Jongstra

Claudy Jongstra kneels with a family cat (inset, opposite) in the yard behind her office and home, which she shares with her partner, Claudia Busson, and their two sons, Eabal and Jesk. Behind her is a small dinghy that the family uses to navigate the numerous irrigation canals that traverse the farmlands throughout Friesland. Despite its modest scale, Jongstra's studio has worked on major collaborations with Hella Jongerius, Tord Boontje, Steven Holl, and Rem Koolhaas, in addition to fashion design for Alexander van Slobbe and costume work for *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*.

It takes about two hours to get from Amsterdam to Spannum, where felt maker Claudy Jongstra lives and works. According to Suzanne Oxenaar, artistic director of the Lloyd Hotel, the train is the best way to travel. "You get a real sense of the Dutch countryside," she says, drawing her hand horizontally through the air with a whistle: Dutch for "flat." I sit with Oxenaar in the capacious restaurant/common area at the Lloyd, where Jongstra is one of several Dutch artists and designers commissioned to furnish the place. In front of me, Jongstra's Japanese-inspired shutters dress each of the double-height windows; to my left, a Jongstra-designed throw shrouds a leather sofa, looking much like the pelt of some fauvist beast, dyed in a hue that would shock Elsa Schiaparelli. Even from this cursory survey, it's clear that despite the humbleness in material and process, Jongstra's interpretation of felt, civilization's oldest textile, is to be prized.

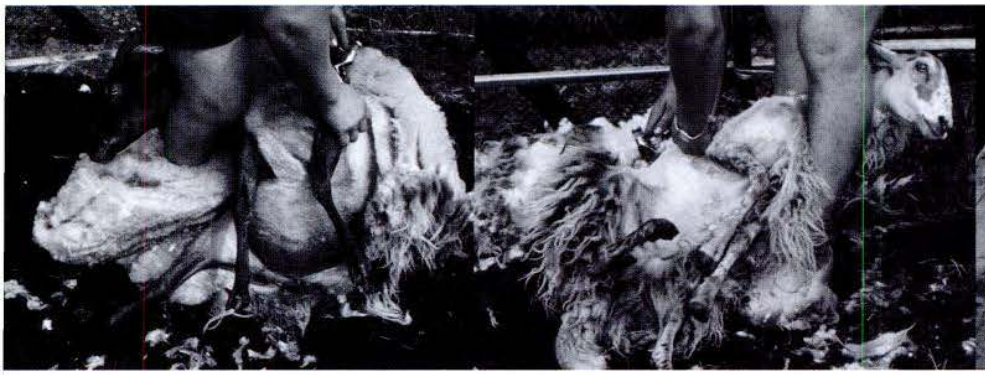
Jongstra meets me at the train station in Leeuwarden to take me to her studio in the outlying village of Spannum. As we drive out, the bustle of Leeuwarden gives way to what to me is a quixotic countryside, polders traced by tiny canals and punctuated by windmills and cattle. The move from Amsterdam to Spannum, which is in the province of Friesland, was a positive one, Jongstra explains, adding that despite the area's relative provinciality, she likes the open space and being closer to her sheep. Other creative workshops, like Royal Tichelaar Makkum, are located nearby as well, ensuring that she and her team do not feel creatively marooned. When we arrive at her studio, which is composed of three buildings (her home, a small studio office, and the *werkplaats* where all of the felting is produced), I am surprised and charmed by its diminutive scale.

In the *werkplaats*, three women crowd around a ▸

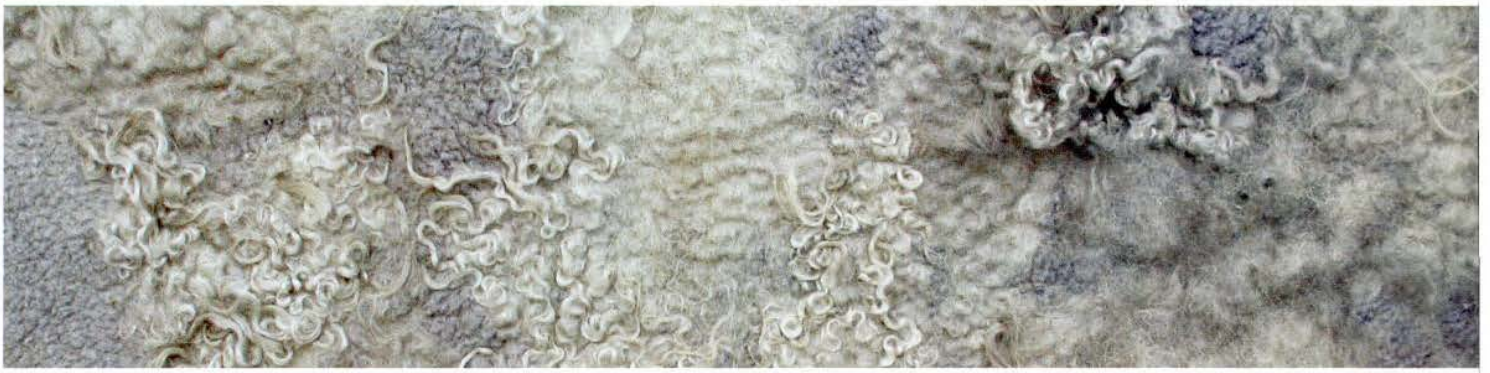
metal table lined with plastic bubble wrap, wafting handfuls of raw silk onto its surface. The antediluvian gesture is contrasted by coils of blue tubing and the stainless steel components of the mechanized process Jongstra developed eight years ago. The team (six felters, two dyers, three designers, Jongstra, and a business manager) is hard at work fashioning 16,000 square feet of fabric that will cloak Claus en Kaan's dome-shaped conference area for the House for Culture and Government in Nijverdal. It will take about four months for the felters to finish. Looking at the model, felt maker Geertje Harkema explains that the angles make this project particularly difficult. As felters and laypeople alike know, the mixture of wool and hot water—the basic process of felting—leads to shrinkage. When I ask what would happen if one of the pieces were to shrink, Harkema's eyes widen and she smiles: "Well, we have to start over!"

Jongstra's operation will soon include a natural dying component headed up by Marjo Moeyes, who studied and documented natural dying processes in Thailand for five years. "One of the challenges with the felt making was not to do it in the 'hobbiesphere' but to do it in a larger scale," explains Jongstra. By vertically integrating, she feels she'll have more control over the final product. "This is really important," she explains, "because we want to ensure that this knowledge will be kept." Jongstra even hopes to grow Wouw, the flower that 17th-century Frieslanders used to dye their trousers and from which she derives a vibrant celadon-tinged yellow.

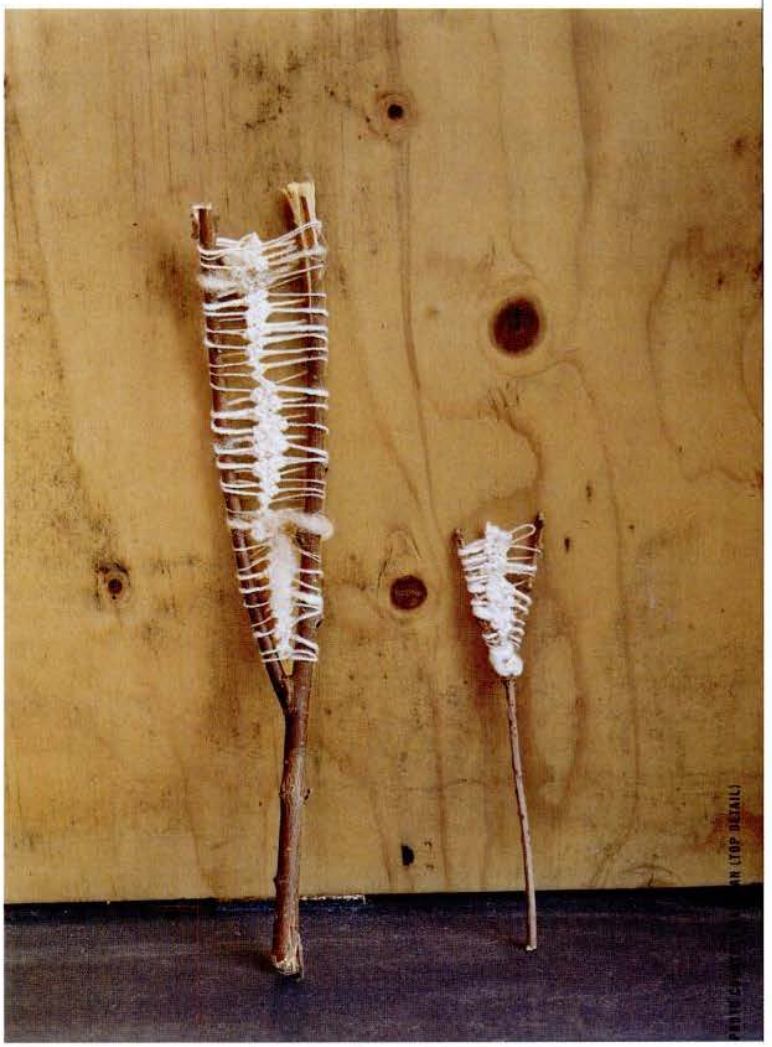
Jongstra keeps a flock of 200 sheep, 150 of which are indigenous Drenthe Heath sheep, a long-haired breed employed mainly for vegetation management. This is why they (and now we) are on the move, driving around the countryside, trying to contact the shepherd via a mobile phone. The humor is not lost on Jongstra, who laughs and rolls her eyes when we arrive at the wrong plot of land. Jongstra strives to run a thoughtful, creative company, but she is also a sharp businesswoman. ▸



The back entrance to Jongstra's office (opposite left) is outfitted with a sandbox and littered with her sons' toys. A felt maker lays Drenthe wool and raw silk onto a large table lined with bubble wrap (opposite right). Jongstra's flock of Drenthe Heath and Schoonebeeker sheep are sheared yearly (above) and provide the raw material for most of her work. The sheep roam the countryside as part of a conservation initiative to help reinforce the polders and dykes throughout the province. A dark cloak of Jongstra's felt covers the ceiling and walls of a private residence in Amersfoort (below left). Tiles of natural felt dot the walls in the Universitair Medisch Centrum, Utrecht (below right). Jongstra was asked to create a warmer feeling for this wing of the medical center, where people come for radiation and chemotherapy treatment.



A detail of one of Jongstra's "hides" (above) distributed by the textile manufacturer Maharam. Each hide measures about 4¼ feet by 8½ feet, retails for about $4,000, and is produced in the Spannum workshop. An architectural model for Claus en Kaan's dome-shaped conference area for the House for Culture and Government in Nijverdal (below left), which will be covered by 204 pieces of felt measuring approximately 16,000 square feet total. Jongstra's studio will also produce a wallpaper and tapestries for a multifunctional space in the building. An example of the traditional 17th-century knotting technique, *guipere* (below right). Piles of felt samples fill the rafters in Jongstra's office (opposite). A delicate Japanese screen-print motif, similar to the shutters Jongstra designed for the Lloyd Hotel, rests on the top of the pile and highlights Jongstra's versatility as a designer.



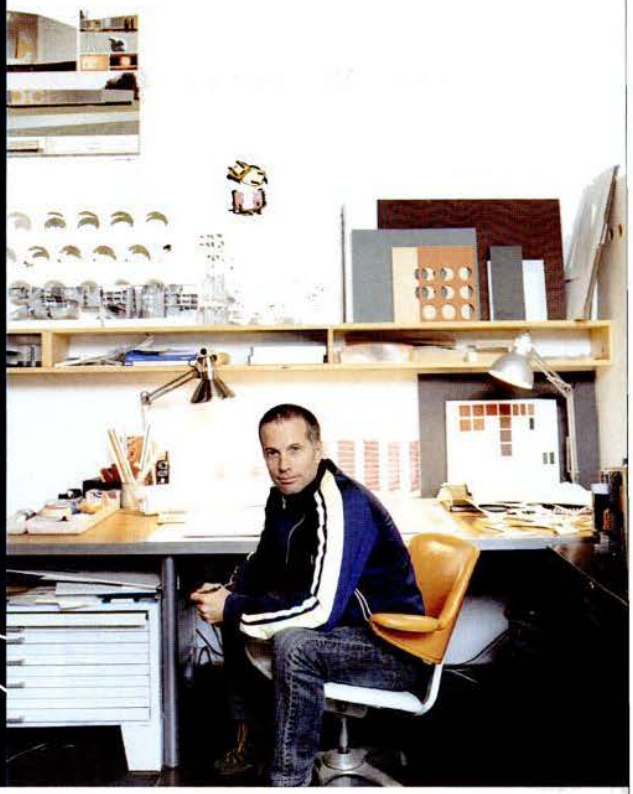
She hires people to maintain each component of the operation: shepherds, shearers, spinners, dyers, felters. At times, she admits, it's a struggle to communicate her artistic vision to the spinners, who, by trade, strive for uniformity and precision in their thread. "I don't like the thread to be like that," she explains. "I like the quality overspin. So it's about finding the right language."

When asked how large she wants the business to get, she says, "Of course we have to grow, but it isn't a question of how to grow. I think we want to do one or two big projects a year, and then just small work. You know, because what is your happiness?" "Worth" is lost in the translation, but I take her point. And for Jongstra's patrons, her happiness is worth quite a lot. Murray Moss, founder of the New York shop Moss, sells a long, loosely knotted strand of hand-spun drenthe wool for $550. Michael Maharam, principal of the eponymous U.S.-based textiles manufacturer, says of his company's collaboration with Jongstra, "We're interested in exploring luxury right now—the luxury of simplicity." Jongstra's overarching appeal suggests a collective desire for simplicity. The fact that consumers would find value in a strand of yarn that, to a traditional craftsperson, would be considered poorly spun and thus worthless, is telling.

Jongstra works in a medium that for centuries has existed in the realm of craft—craft being, in its very essence, artistry subordinate to function. But she is an artist who "likes to work with her hands" and hopes to create work that people live and interact with. One senses that she directs her company from a moral compass—what she feels is right and good, she deems best for her company. "It is a desire for me to do social works, which is why I keep these sheep," she says. "It seems that people can be touched by this process, and I think that's important. I'm not talking in a missionary way or anything, but if I can change something by utilizing what is already around us, I feel lucky." She pauses for a minute. "In that way, it is a small mission." ■

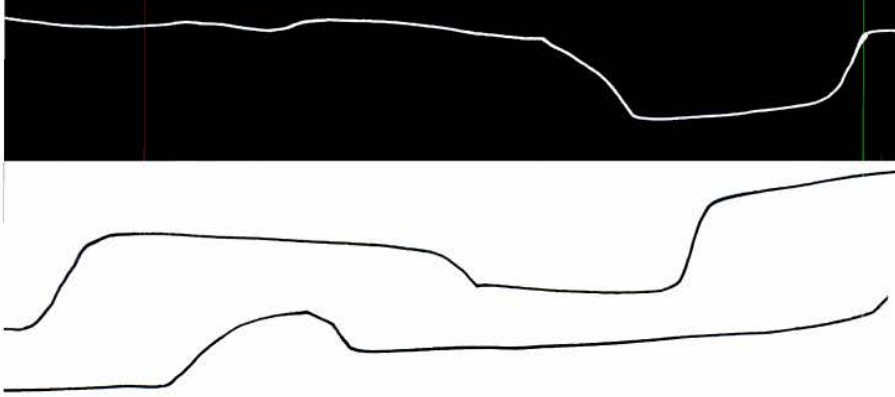
Cutting Edge

Asked to design a space for an art collector whose body and walls were already covered in decoration, architect Thom Faulders capped off the project by creating a piece of art out of an often-overlooked canvas: the ceiling.



Story by John King | Photos by Dave Lauridsen

"In my work, 'craft' is another word for 'innovation.' As I explore new means and materials to create architecture, I must continue to invent a path through alternative processes and means of production. In order to do this with a high degree of inventiveness and success, craft is applied throughout—from digital methodologies to determining alternative means for application (production). Craft is an exponential attention to an increased set of variables generated by trying out something new." —Thom Faulders



Architect Thom Faulders (pictured opposite, inset, in his Berkeley studio) dubbed this Potrero Hill home renovation and expansion the Deform House because the pattern of lines on the ceiling (opposite) "visually deforms the ceiling plane into a shifting presence of valleys and bulges."

In today's design culture, with its fascination for novel materials and eye-catching forms, ceilings tend to be an architectural afterthought—the surface that caps the space and spans the walls.

But when Berkeley architect Thom Faulders had the chance to add an extra floor to a house that doubles as a private gallery filled with provocative art, he made the ceiling an intricate piece of art in itself. This is art forged from nothing more precious than medium-density fiberboard and white paint, brought to life through digital design and old-fashioned sweat.

"It's been great to take such basic materials and manipulate them through methodology that allows you to explore new potentials," says Faulders, who talks like the architecture professor that he is (at the California College of the Arts). "I like creating, by digital means, what in effect is a 1,200-square-foot drawing."

It's an unusual approach—but one in keeping with the wishes of a client who had already covered much of his body with tattoos and most of his home with paintings and sculptures. "Thom asked me, 'What are the ground rules?' and I responded, 'Big flat walls, and the walls are mine,'" recalls homeowner Jeff Dauber, who manages computer development for a Silicon Valley firm and lives on San Francisco's Potrero Hill, a neighborhood with blue-collar roots and a boho reputation. "He said, 'That's great, I've got an idea for the ceiling.'"

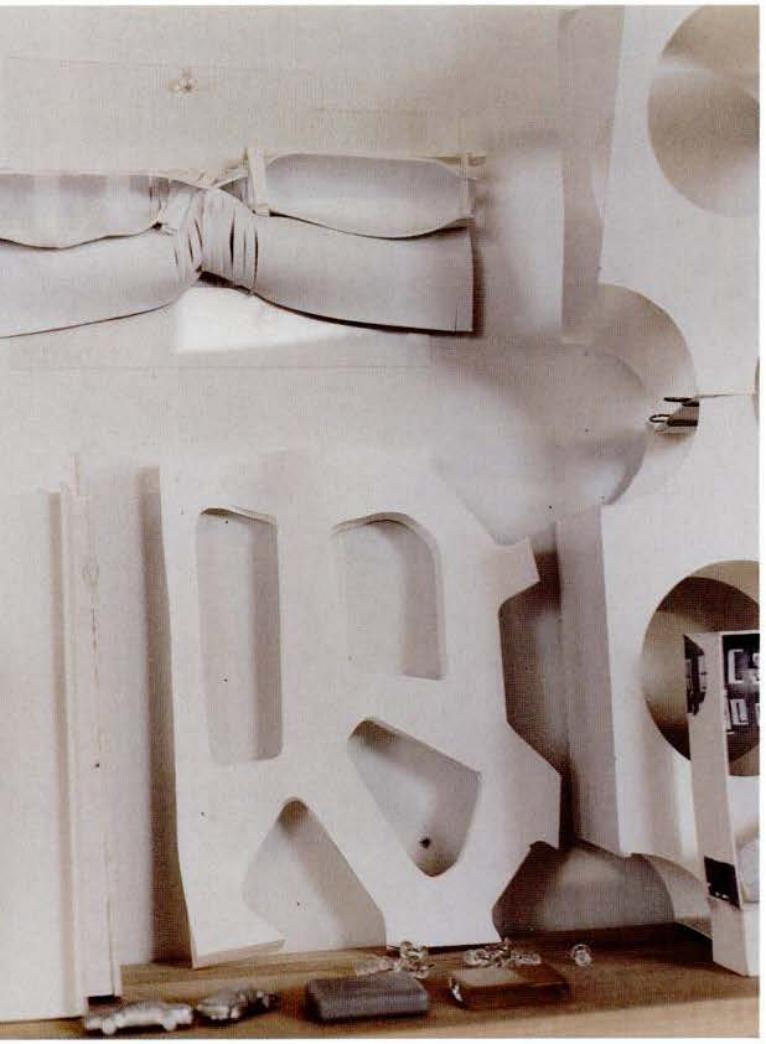
What now exists on the new third floor behind a subdued gray stucco façade is the visual equivalent of a rhythmic drone, or a procession of EKG readings that have been stretched and smoothed and laid side by side. Line after line after line runs from north to south along the ceiling; they never overlap, there are no sharp turns, and no two are alike. ▸

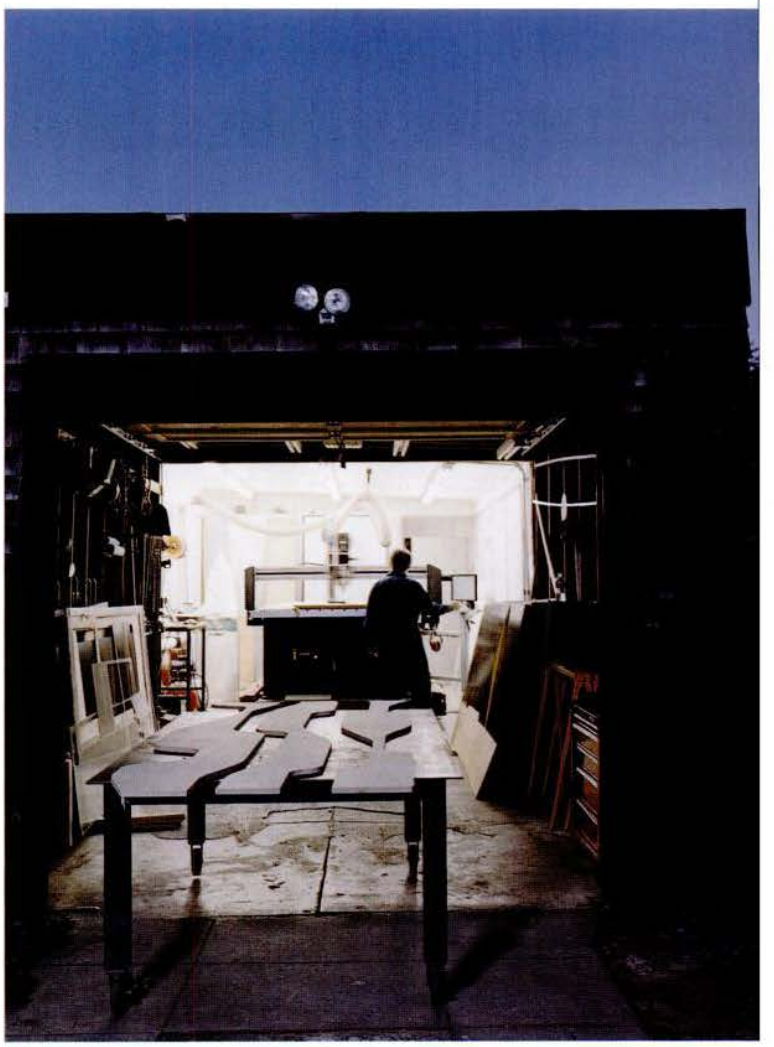
The idea is to provide a backdrop to a room where part of one wall is filled by radical artist Hung Liu's *Gas Masks* and where there's a Native American constructed from pushpins above the stairwell by Rigo. The artwork is the focus, yet the ceiling's linear bands slide above you and around you, a soft warp of patterns that never quite snap into focus.

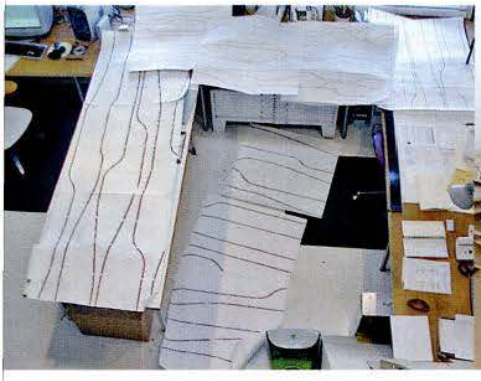
That ambiguity evolved digitally as Faulders fleshed out his initial concept of unique but interrelated lines: "Let's create this system where you don't know what the visual result will be until you experience it in reality." A set of rules was programmed; for example, any shift in a line's direction must follow a 10-degree or a 45-degree angle, and a line could not get within one and a half inches of its neighbor. Each of the lines was then "drawn" by Faulders or one of his associates—but steered by the parameters of the initial code.

"It's a very regular system, yet because it's not purely programmed, we introduced additional levels of unpredictability and irregularity into the process," Faulders says. "The system was generated in the computer and it relies on digital means, but the program didn't determine the final outcome."

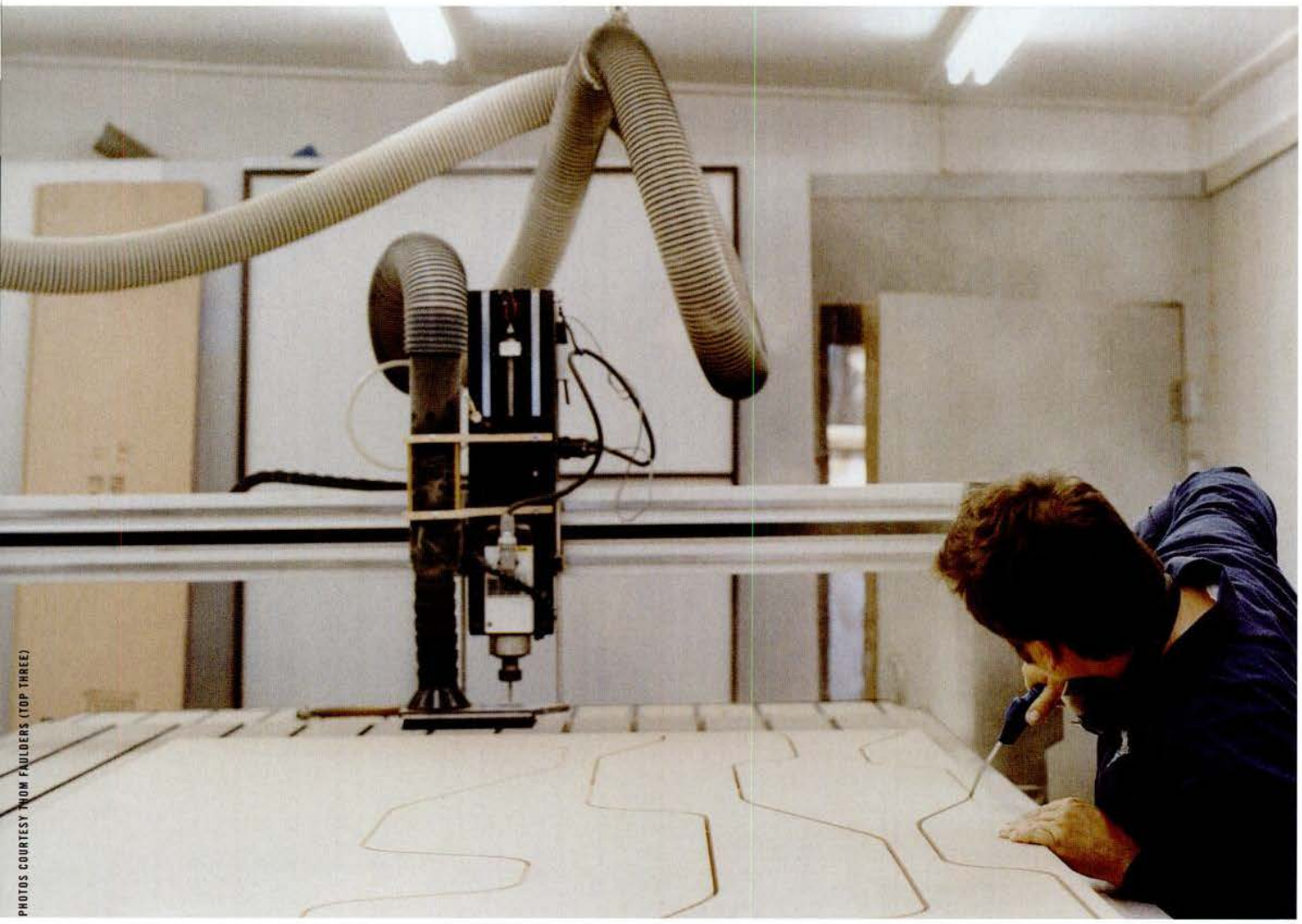
To bring the design into three dimensions, Faulders called on Andre Caradec of Studio Under Manufacture, an Oakland design and fabrication firm that specializes in digital millwork. Caradec translated the digital files into software commands that would power his equipment, a milling machine that can glide above sheets of wood as large as four feet by ten feet. Each of those large ▸



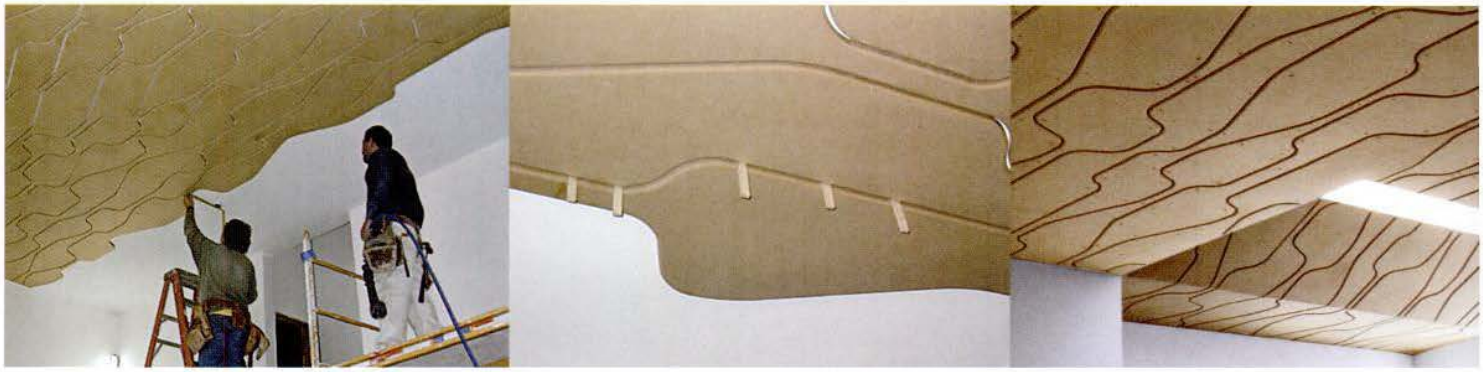




It's one thing to design an apparently random pattern on a computer and print it out (above left); it's another to turn streaming lines into layers of plywood. The firm Studio Under Manufacture—located in Andre Caradec's home garage in Oakland (opposite)—used a digitally controlled milling machine to slice through fiberboard, with Caradec using an air hose to clean out the wood dust between each pass of the mill (below). The pieces were then stacked in sequential order (above center and right), ready for installation in the Deform House.



PHOTOS COURTESY THOM FAULDERS (TOP THREE)



Installation of the ceiling, as well as similarly patterned walls in the upstairs bathroom and bedroom (opposite), was a laborious six-week process that included the painstaking and evenly spaced assembly of each row of panels, one carefully placed piece at a time. Finally, three coats of white paint were applied as the finishing touch. The specificity and uniqueness of the panels, despite the time-consuming installation process, was intrinsic to the overall desired final appearance.

PHOTOS COURTESY THOM FAULDERS (ALL)

boards was sliced into an average of five elongated jigsaw puzzle–like pieces, then numbered by hand so that they could be attached to the ceiling in the proper location.

"Crafting with these machines is like any woodworking tool. You have to know how it responds to the limitations of both the machine and the materiality," Caradec says. "The big hurdle here was fighting the modularity of the [four-by-ten-foot] sheet—the ceiling had to be devoid of any sense that it had been sliced from larger pieces."

The jigsaw pieces were shipped to Potrero Hill, and workers from Capron Construction spent six weeks assembling the overhead puzzle. Working one row of forms at a time, pieces were matched to their corresponding numbers and attached using glue and as few nails as possible—with pegs between each piece to keep a steady quarter-inch spacing that was essential to the final effect ("lots of pegs, everywhere," Faulders recalls).

Caradec sees this approach becoming more popular in the years ahead. "The standard of handing off the baton to the contractor doesn't fit with the direction that architects are going," he says. "Digital milling isn't that much more complicated than a table saw. You just run it with software."

Dauber is thrilled, calling the ceiling "another work of art in my collection." And Faulders is glad that he plunged into the unknown. "Through digital means it's possible to reengage in the sort of customization that didn't seem possible a decade or so ago," Faulders says. "Suddenly I'm in the construction process. We're right back to the craft guilds of the Renaissance." ■

Pure and Symbol

Steeped in the past but firmly grounded in the present, the designs of Satyendra Pakhalé merge futuristic shapes with centuries-old crafting techniques.

Story by Jane Szita | Photos by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

"Craft is universal, it's human reality; it's neither exotic nor ethnic. It's a repository of human warmth, of all the qualities that we have lost in standard industrial production. In my work, I want to extract these qualities from craft again, and put them into items that can be made in a modern, industrial way." —Satyendra Pakhalé

"Constant labor is the law of art as well as the law of life," reads a quote from Balzac that serves as one of Satyendra Pakhalé's many desktop inspirations (opposite). The designer is pictured here (inset) on a prototype of his Horse chair, a design that has become iconic for him. Eminently suited for a wide variety of settings, the seat has been executed in materials including bell metal and Corian.

A trained mechanical engineer and industrial designer, Satyendra Pakhalé seems an unlikely champion of ancient craft techniques. But avoiding the supposed opposition between industry and craft is exactly what his work is all about. "We design these technological objects with no human content, all these little gray boxes that look the same and are difficult to use," he explains. "It's linear, it's fanatical, and it doesn't make life better for people. We glorify technology unnecessarily; it is almost a god. But I don't see why my grandmother shouldn't be able to use a DVD player."

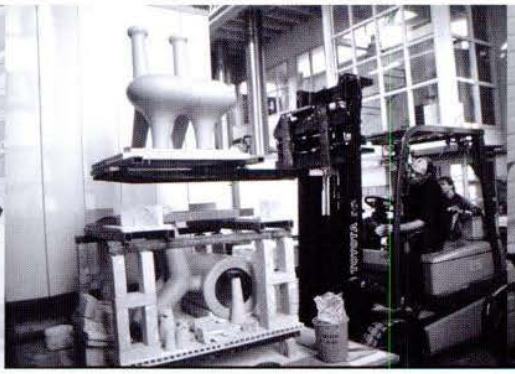
A self-titled cultural nomad, Pakhalé was born in India, lives in Amsterdam, and travels constantly in his work for clients like Alessi, Cappellini, Magis, Moroso, and many more. He studied at IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) Bombay and the Art Center College of Design in Switzerland, then worked for Frog Design (best known for its work with Apple) and later Philips (where he created the interior of Renault's influential high-tech concept car, the Pangea). Disenchanted with life as a technology designer, he returned to India to explore craft traditions: metalwork, woodwork, marble, and ceramics. It was a bold move, especially coming at the peak of the 1990s high-tech boom. Today, Pakhalé couples qualities derived from the primeval techniques he studied in India with modern industrial processes, creating pieces of decided originality.

Immersing himself in traditional Indian craft techniques—even weaving himself a scarf—was a process he describes as a means of learning to "understand creation for the sake of creation." On returning to his newly opened studio in Amsterdam in 1998, Pakhalé produced the remarkable Panther seat for Moroso's 2002 50th anniversary. Panther shows how quickly Pakhalé was ▸

able to devise a new design vocabulary, consisting of a kind of functional sculptural engineering coupled with a poetic shorthand of form. A zoomorphic shape, embodying an essential animalist quality, creates a sophisticated effect through a hieroglyphic simplicity. Functionally, it's an incredibly versatile piece of furniture for sitting (the word "chair" seems a wholly inadequate description here); aesthetically, Pakhalé notes that people are often taken aback by the ambiguity of Panther's form, and have to ask how to sit on it—although, he adds, "kids don't have to be told, they instinctively see the possibilities."

Panther was followed by the elegant Fish chair for Cappellini, the slender Bird chaise, and the iconic Horse chair. In this series, Pakhalé conjures a whole bestiary of symbolic forms. "In industrial culture, we have lost symbology and things don't mean anything anymore," he explains. "I am trying to bring this back, almost in the form of an algebraic language." The symbolic language he uses, with its expression of what he sees as the essential qualities of birds and fish, is coupled with the use of craft techniques that he has exhaustively researched so as to transform them into industrial processes allowing for mass, or at least serial, production.

The combination lends his work a remarkable ambiguity: It appears both archaic and futuristic. Take Pakhalé's extraordinary ceramic designs, the Roll and Flower Offering chairs, which suggest nothing so much as archaeological artifacts from an alien planet. Ceramic was an obvious choice for a designer with a taste for paradox to explore: "I wanted to make ceramic chairs because chairs aren't ever ceramic," he says. "So first I found some ceramicists and we experimented with hand-thrown shapes—they hated this because of the nostalgia aspect, but it doesn't affect me that way." This traditional ▸



Pakhalé spends up to six months working on prototypes. Models (opposite) "are the perfect way of testing the human qualities of design." Ceramics are not often associated with seating, but Pakhalé's pottery chairs are some of his most evocative designs. The prototypes are made using traditional throwing techniques (above), then the chairs themselves are made at a factory near Venice. Pictured below are a selection of objects that have resulted from Pakhalé's craft-meets-mass-production process. Shown below (clockwise from bottom left) are the Roll-Ceramic and Ceramic Pottery chairs, as well as the B.M. Spoon, and B.M. Vase, both based on Pakhalé's study of wax bell metal castings.

PHOTOS BY ATELIER SATYENDRA PAKHALÉ (PROCESS), CORNÉ BASTIAANSEN (CERAMIC CHAIRS), FRANS FEIJEN (B.M. OBJECTS)

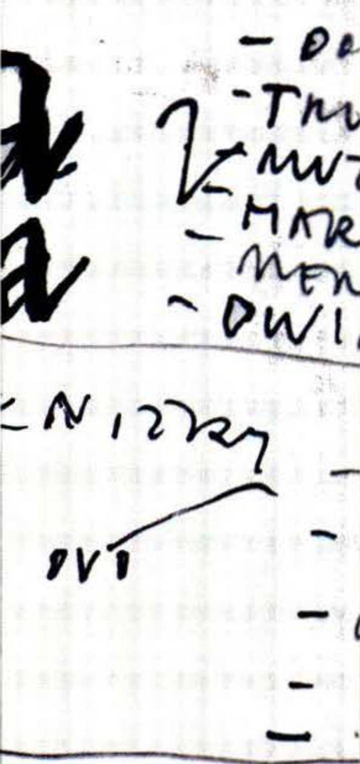
A lineup of Pakhalé's working models is shown above, including two prototype versions of the Fish chair, designed for Cappellini. The simple forms are used to dramatic effect when the materials vary, from Corian to bent glass. Designed for Moroso's 50th anniversary, the Panther seat (below right) as well as the B.M. Horse chair (below left) are two in a series of zoomorphic forms that seek to restore symbology to design. While Panther's ambiguity nonplusses adults, Pakhalé notes that "kids don't have to be told [how to sit in it], they instinctively see the possibilities." The early prototype (opposite) was made using the traditional lost wax casting technique and forever preserved in acrylic block.

PHOTOS COURTESY FRANS FEIJEN (HORSE CHAIR), ATELIER SATYENDRA PAKHALÉ (PANTHER CHAIR)

technique produced volumes that Pakhalé used to create a prototype. "When I was ready to put it into production, we found a mold maker near Venice who could make the molds. The elements had to be cast separately, and we developed a special joint to connect the pieces, which were then glued together using a polyurethane glue used in space technology." The final pieces are evidence that the manufacturing process is always intrinsic to the development of the object in Pakhalé's work.

Now that so much design looks as if it has sprung directly from a computer, and probably has, Pakhalé's work makes a particularly powerful statement. "No software can do this," he says of his Akasma glass baskets—deceptively simple-looking objects that nevertheless require the manipulation of laser jets, heating, and hand-bending to achieve their elegant parallel lines. As the designer puts it, the process is "craft, complete with all the modern technology. Humans are all about touch and feel," he says simply. "This is what we've lost through industrialization. This is what led me to go back to basics. Craft is universal, it's human reality, it's not exotic or ethnic. But on the other hand, I don't want to sit in the corner casting metal—I want to make things in a modern way."

Clearly, Pakhalé wants to bring crafts back into everyday design. "It's not from nostalgia for the past that I study crafts, because I don't have that adoration of handmade things," he explains. "I'd rather not have to see my thumbprints in the things I make. It was more as an antidote to industrial culture, a reality check, that I went back to India to look at crafts. I want to recapture that basic feeling, the way children in the act of drawing are so in tune with themselves, the way that craft allows you to explore the sensory quality of materials." ■



Letter Perfect

The alphabet is as easy as ABC, but for typographer Peter Bil'ak, the way language looks is a never-ending exploration.

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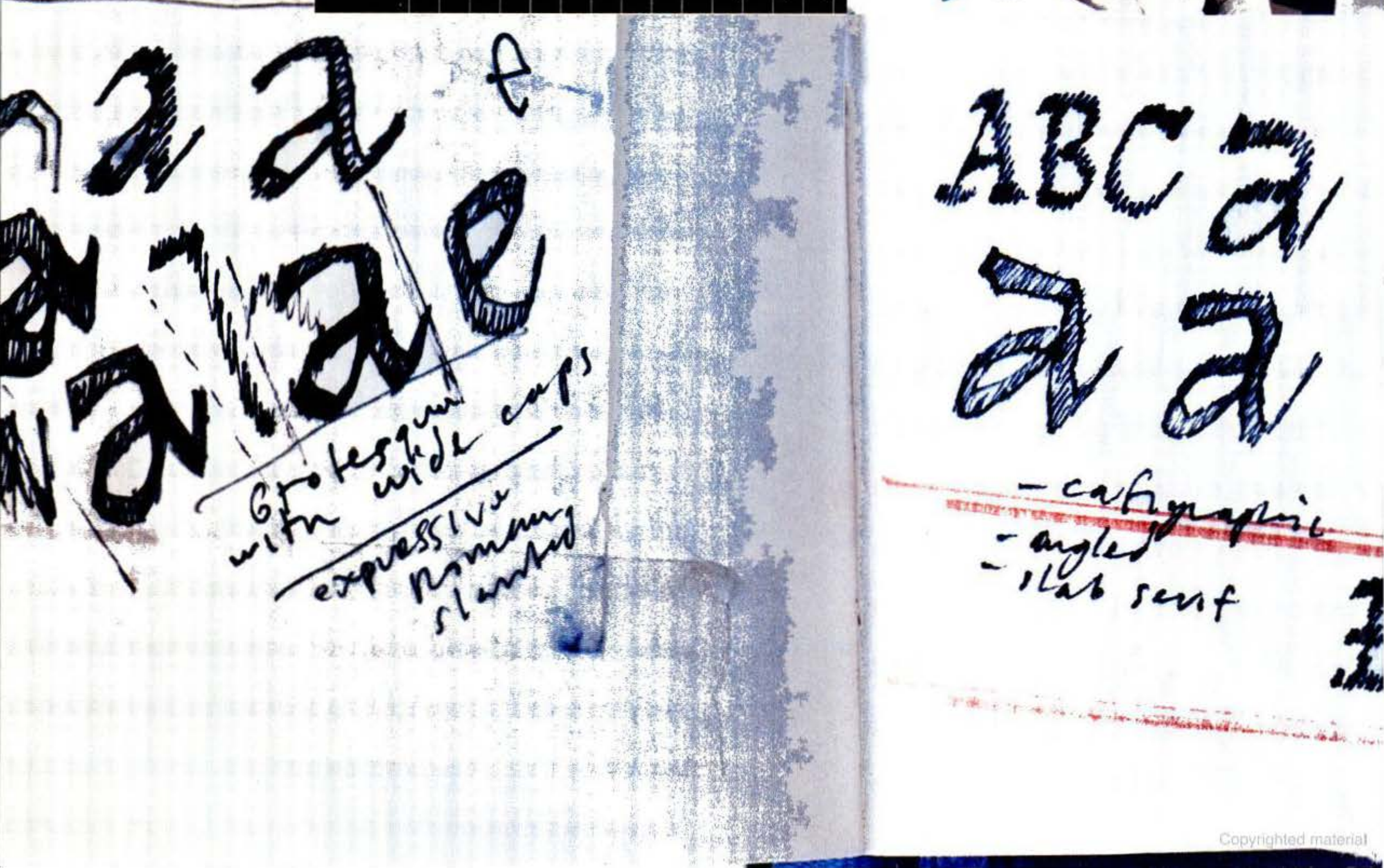
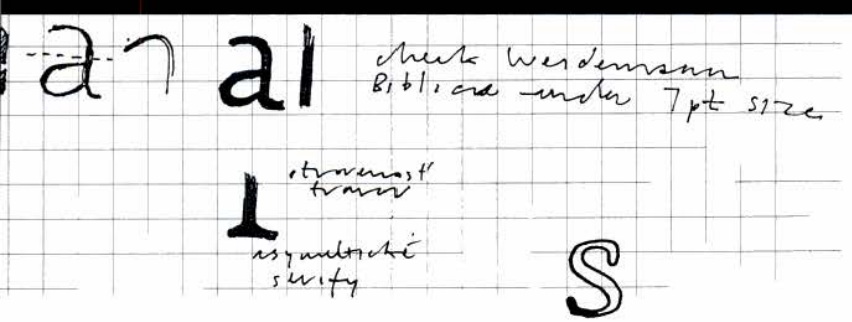


Story by Kieran Long | Photos by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

"I realize that traditionally the discipline in which I primarily work, which is type design, has been considered craft. But because I had been involved in so many things, I forgot to think about myself as a craftsman. I guess putting hands on [something] is a definition of craft now, not separating production from the conception phase. Somehow I guess I became identified as a maker. I'm very happy with making things, creating things, which probably is a synonym."—Peter Bil'ak



Peter Bil'ak (inset, opposite) started the type foundry Typotheque with his wife and business partner Johanna in 1999. In one of Bil'ak's many notebooks (opposite), he works with rough sketches, here redrawing the unique lowercase "a" hundreds of times to study different widths and stresses. His fonts are later redrawn on the computer, and subjected to many rounds of further revision.

Peter Bil'ak is a polymath of a designer. His activities encompass type design, typography, graphic design, Web design, set design and choreography, publishing, writing, and much more that can't even be categorized.

Born in the former Czechoslovakia, Bil'ak moved to the Netherlands in 1997. His studio is in a converted modernist school in The Hague, near the quiet harbor of Scheveningen—a far cry from the design ghettos of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the Netherlands' renowned creative hubs. But this suits his practice, which exudes self-sufficiency. Here, Bil'ak generates much of his work, and his core role as a type designer exists in a rarefied world more typically distinguished by technical expertise than creative flair.

"Type design is formally a printing business," says Bil'ak. "You work in the print industry. I teach type design, and I'm always struck by the technicality of the discussion. You're almost blocked by the technical aspects of typography from looking at the larger issues."

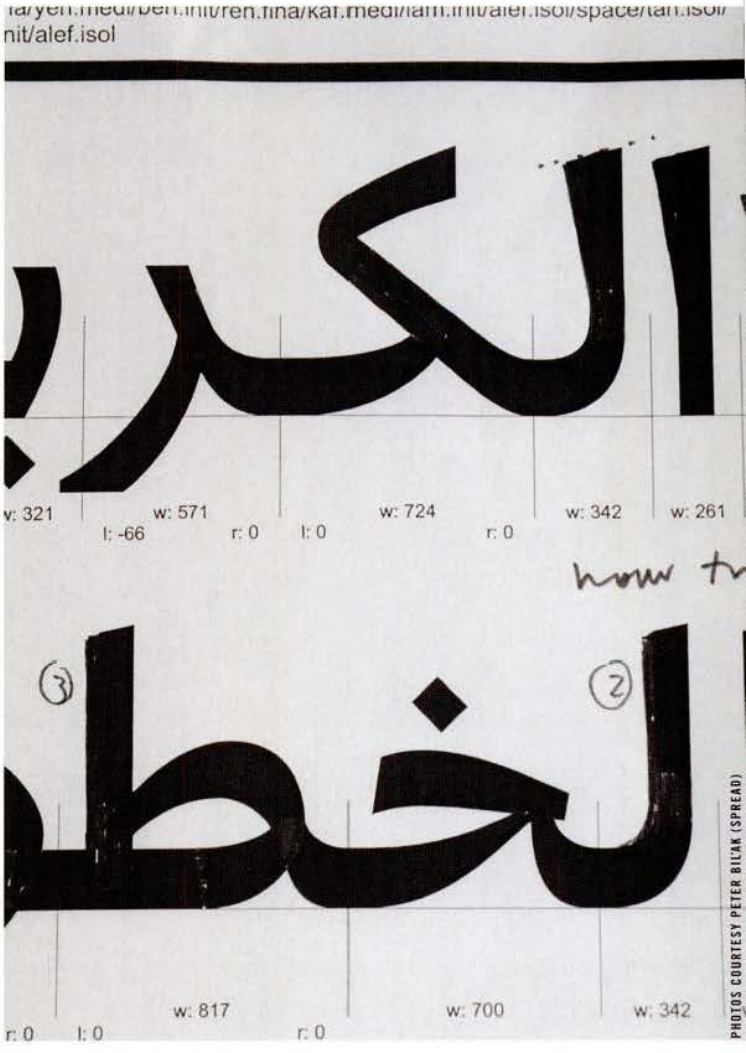
Bil'ak trained at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, in what is today Slovakia, but his experience there was rounded out by time studying in the United States, England, and Paris. He ended up in the Netherlands after spending two years at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, taking a job with the graphic-design firm Studio Dumbar in The Hague.

Now running his own type foundry, Typotheque, with his wife and business partner Johanna, Bil'ak has created typefaces that have been used on everything from postage stamps to dictionaries. A specialty of Bil'ak's work is developing fonts that work in both Latin and non-Latin scripts. He first started working with polytonic Greek and Cyrillic, and is now working on Arabic typefaces, despite the fact that he does not speak the language ("I know ▸

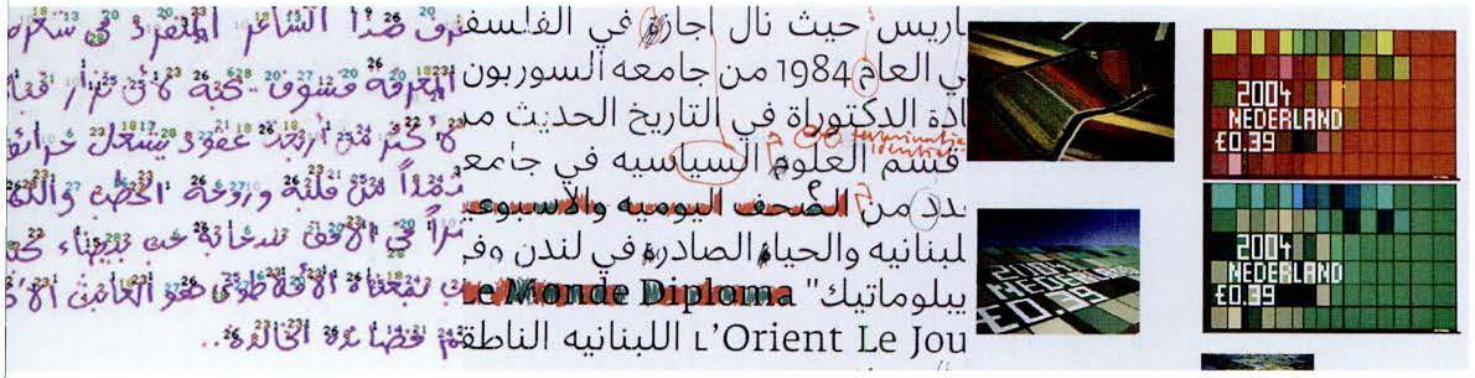
about 15 words. And I can count," he says). "When I was in India, people were saying, "You really should work on Hindi scripts," but I don't know. If you had told me two or three years ago that I would be working on Arabic, I would have laughed." Despite his incomprehension of the words he creates, his fonts use standardized baselines and orientations for letters, to give complementary characteristics to different alphabetical systems.

One of Bil'ak's most high-profile commissions as a type designer was developing a new font system for Collins dictionaries, with HarperCollins art director Mark Thomson. The new dictionaries, which are available in the United Kingdom, the U.S., South Africa, and Australia, are clear and spacious. Bil'ak and Thompson removed the bells and whistles produced by the marketing mentality of publishers in favor of a calmer attitude that recalls a lineage of great typographers of dictionaries who didn't have contemporary visual tricks at their disposal. "Mark did a whole research into it," Bil'ak explains. "There's surprisingly little difference between dictionaries from Samuel Johnson's era and today, and that was the motivation for the change. If you look at that dictionary from 1755, it worked. It didn't have the luxury of having different weights of fonts, bold and light; they didn't exist. They didn't have small caps. Basically all these layers have since been put on top, and we had to remove some of that." The dictionary uses a single Bil'ak font family, Fedra, in different weights and with italic and bold versions to denote different functions.

Bil'ak's work is meticulous and often done at the micro scale of an individual descender (the part of a lowercase letter that hangs below the body). But he has a parallel interest in the metanarratives of his métier. He writes regularly, and is coeditor (with British graphic designer Stuart Bailey) of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine, which he founded in 2000 as a critical journal of theoretical texts accompanied by Bailey's experimental graphics. His theoretical education took place principally at the Jan van Eyck ►

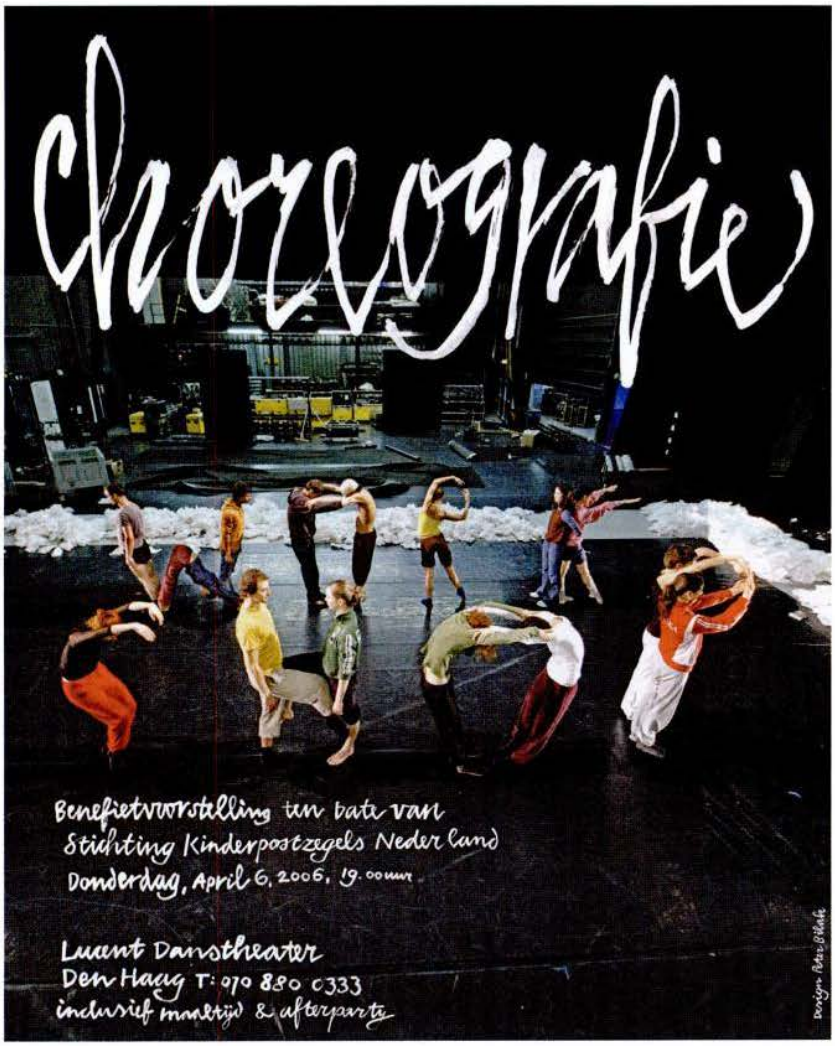


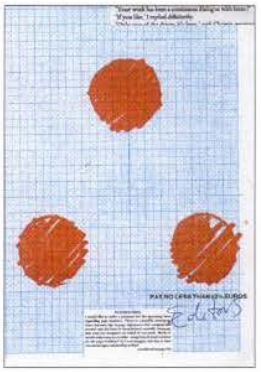
PHOTOS COURTESY PETER BIL'AK (SPREAD)

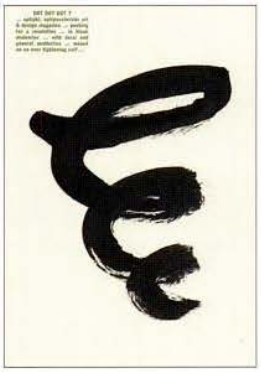


Bil'ak collaborated with Mark Thomson, art director at HarperCollins, on a new set of dictionaries that exclusively employ the Bil'ak-designed font Fedra (opposite left). Bil'ak takes a similarly meticulous approach to Arabic type design, although he is unaware of the words' meaning (opposite right; above left, center; below left). Bil'ak's designs for the 39- and 78-eurocent stamps (below right) were inspired by the patchwork of the Dutch landscape as seen from the air (above right). The width of each letter, set in Bil'ak's Fedra Serif, determines the width of the surrounding color block, echoing the centuries-old art of metal typesetting. Bil'ak sees the stamps as an homage to Dutch traditions.

Bil'ak conceived of the dance performance *Due a due* (above left), in which what appears to be a dancer's shadow is in fact a projection of another dancer. Bil'ak designed the NDT Choreography Workshop poster (below) using dancers to spell out "workshop." In 2000, Bil'ak founded *Dot Dot Dot* magazine with British graphic designer Stuart Bailey. In Bil'ak's studio (above center, right), he and his staff assemble and hand-draw the cover for issue #7. A selection of covers (below right) graphically riff on the magazine's title. In another of Bil'ak's notebooks (opposite) he works out possible letter combinations and ligatures. The space between the letters is as important a consideration as the letters themselves.







PHOTOS COURTESY PETER BIL'AK (THIS PAGE)

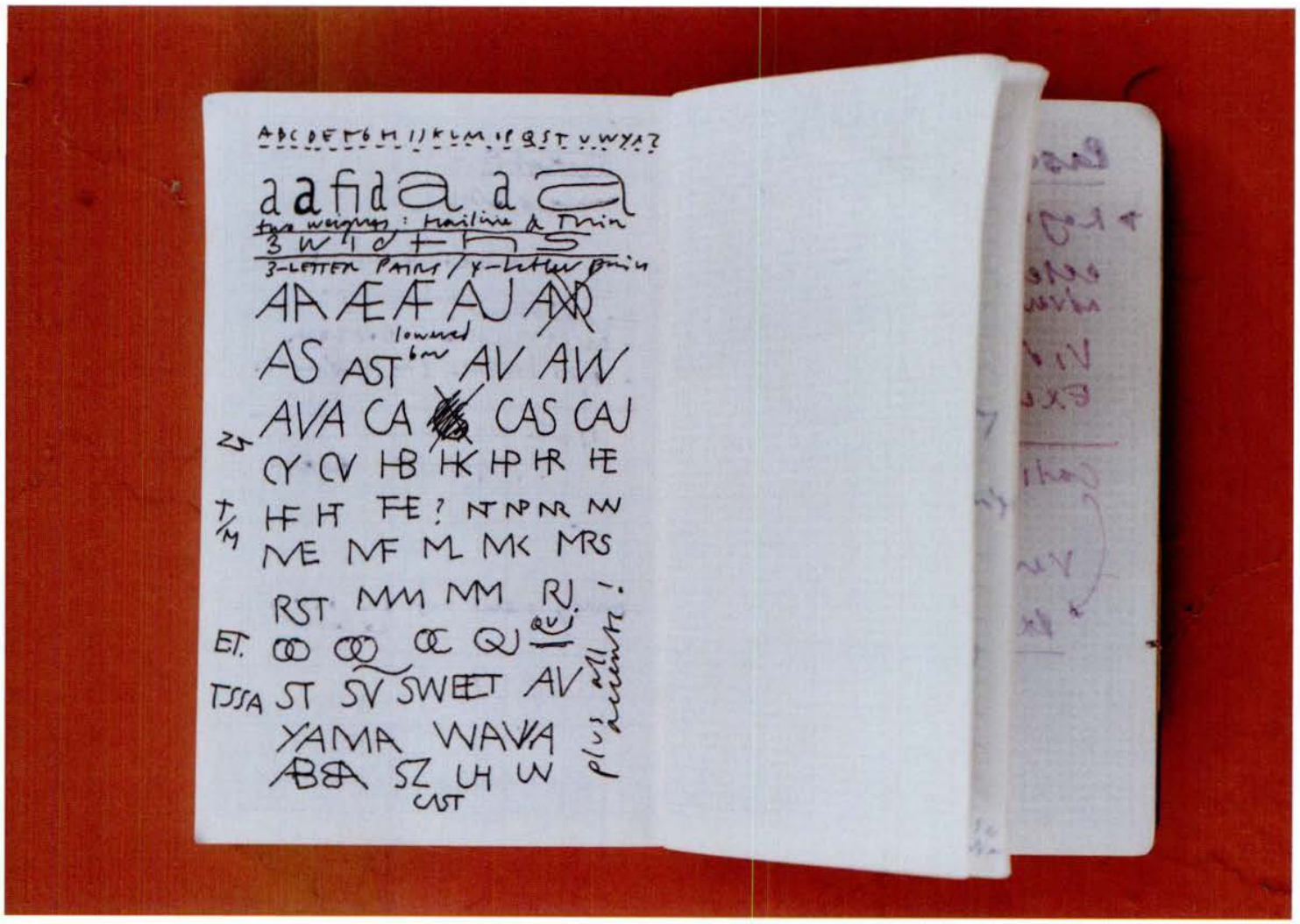
Academy, where he was initiated into poststructuralist linguistic theory. But isn't there a contradiction between the craft-oriented, intuitive method of the type designer, and the views of the academic intellectual?

Bil'ak responds: "Printers used to design [fonts], and they're not really intellectuals who would be able to articulate theories. But you're talking about the representation of language in form, which is fascinating."

Bil'ak's fonts start life as sketches of individual letters in notebooks, which are then redrawn on a computer in FontLab, a Russian-made type-design tool. "The computer production process is part of the creative process, too," he says. "The computer is not just digitizing [something already fully formed]. We use it to decide the rules of the typeface. I don't separate production from creation; before, it was always separated."

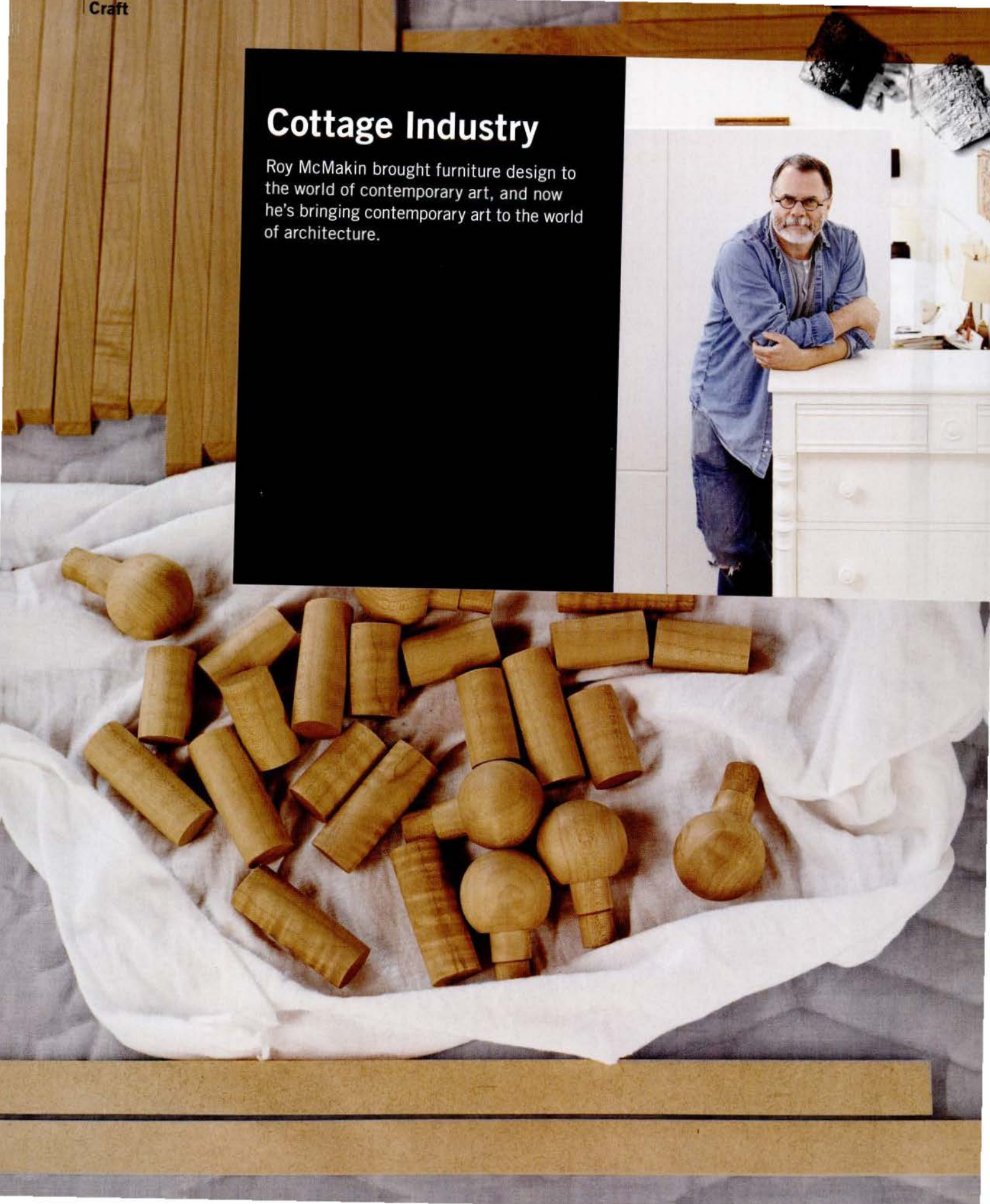
He begins in earnest to explain the process of making a typeface work. "An interesting thing about looking at type is that you think that you design a letter 'e' and it's isolated. But if you look at an 'e' standing next to an 'a,' what you start perceiving visually is not just those forms, but a silhouette between letters." He sketches an abstract shape between the right edge of a letter "e" and the left edge of an "a." "As soon as I have a few letters, you already make tests using different combinations to see what happens when one is followed by a straight character, or if it's followed by a round or semi-open character." Despite the methodical process, the results of these tests are not objectively measurable.

Bil'ak's attitude is that the legibility of a font, and therefore its success, cannot be concluded until it is in use. He writes, in an essay ironically titled "In Search of a Comprehensive Type Design Theory," that "type design is not an intellectual activity, but relies on a gesture of the person and his ability to express it formally." In other words, success in this highly technical field still depends on the artist or designer's ability to make formal gestures of beauty and appropriateness. ■



Cottage Industry

Roy McMakin brought furniture design to the world of contemporary art, and now he's bringing contemporary art to the world of architecture.



Story by Paul Young | Photos by Dave Lauridsen

"I think craft is a very interesting thing, and a lot of my life tends to deal with the issue of craft and how to work with people to achieve a certain thing.... By definition, craft is just the process of the making of something—that's craft with a big 'C.' And it can either be highly finished or rough. Both can be a form of craft. And then there's craft that's really the entire process and the outcome of that process. And I think how you control and modulate that [process] is a huge part of what you do." —Roy McMakin

Roy McMakin (inset, opposite) uses furniture and architecture as a starting point for poetic recontextualization. For the better part of the past 25 years, he has made sculptural pieces that resemble furniture in an attempt to explore the emotional and psychological effects of domestic iconography. In his Seattle-based shop, drawer pulls and various other pieces (opposite) are culled before being used on commissions.

The word "craft" is said to derive from the Old English word "craeft," which meant "power, strength, and cunning." Thus it quickly became affiliated with skill above all, and eventually served as a fitting description for nautical ships. But it also had negative connotations, as in witchcraft, the "art and cunning" of a witch.

"'Craft' is a funny word," muses the Seattle-based artist/architectural designer Roy McMakin. "At its root, it means a certain skillfulness, but I don't think it's a value judgment. It just is."

McMakin should know. His entire career has been defined by a sometimes obsessive, sometimes uncomfortable relationship to craft. When he was hired to produce the furnishings for Santa Monica's J. Paul Getty Museum in the mid-1990s, it was precisely because he had gained a reputation for making warm, finely crafted pieces of furniture. And that same furniture, which borrows liberally from Craftsman and Mission styles—with a weighty appearance and a deliberate, handmade quality—ran counter to Richard Meier's slick veneers and absolute, machinelike consistency.

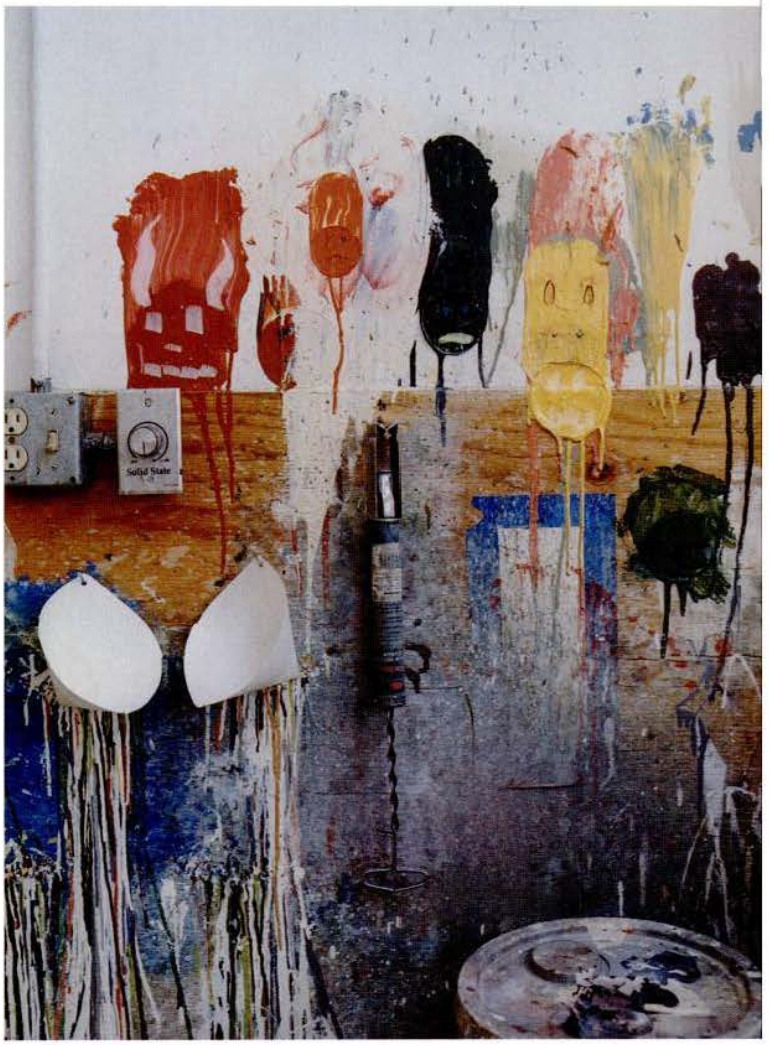
That in turn inspired many to label McMakin a designer, which wasn't something he counted on. "I was getting commissions, but it just didn't feel right," he says. "I didn't feel like a designer."

After all, McMakin came of age during the period of 1970s conceptualism, and he deliberately fabricated furnishings as artworks (creating furniture that acted like sculpture and vice versa) not so much as designs, but as conceptual conceits. "You never wanted the virtuosity of [an artwork] to trump its content," recalls McMakin of the prevailing ethos. "Those things have to be in sync. Which is not to say that well crafted is bad and loose is good; it's the way a piece feels that is important." ▶

Today, the 50-year-old McMakin remains utterly committed to that very same idea in both his artistic practice and what he calls his day job doing major renovations, furniture pieces, and architectural additions. And nowhere is that more evident than in his recent residential commission in Manhattan Beach, California.

Situated on a small 30-by-90-foot lot along the walking streets of the beachside community (cars are restricted to alleys), the three-bedroom house is the first ground-to-ceiling design McMakin has executed. As a result it distills many of his most precious ideas. There is no single overall vernacular, for example, and yet there are dozens of style references throughout. The old-fashioned diamond-paned windows on the front façade and the classically rendered deck—complete with swing—evoke 1920s California, while the lamps in the living room and the collage of tiled windows on the outer west wall suggest a modern aesthetic. "When I started designing furniture a long time ago," says McMakin, who cites fellow artists like the late Scott Burton as inspirations, "I was really interested in creating things that people couldn't place stylistically in any particular time or era. And you can see that in this house."

Indeed, if you take a closer look you can see that any stylistic references are deliberately subverted through a clever use of scale or materials. The unusually hefty deck out front is actually a freestanding structure, and the screen door has no screen at all, but rather serves as an iconic, albeit functional, introduction to the house. What's more, some of the windows are placed horizontally or up into the ceiling line as if by mistake; light fixtures hang beyond their connector base; and what looks to be an old-fashioned wooden stairway is in fact cantilevered off a free-floating steel tube. "I think a lot of homes are too well built," explains McMakin, who is currently working on several other houses, including ▸

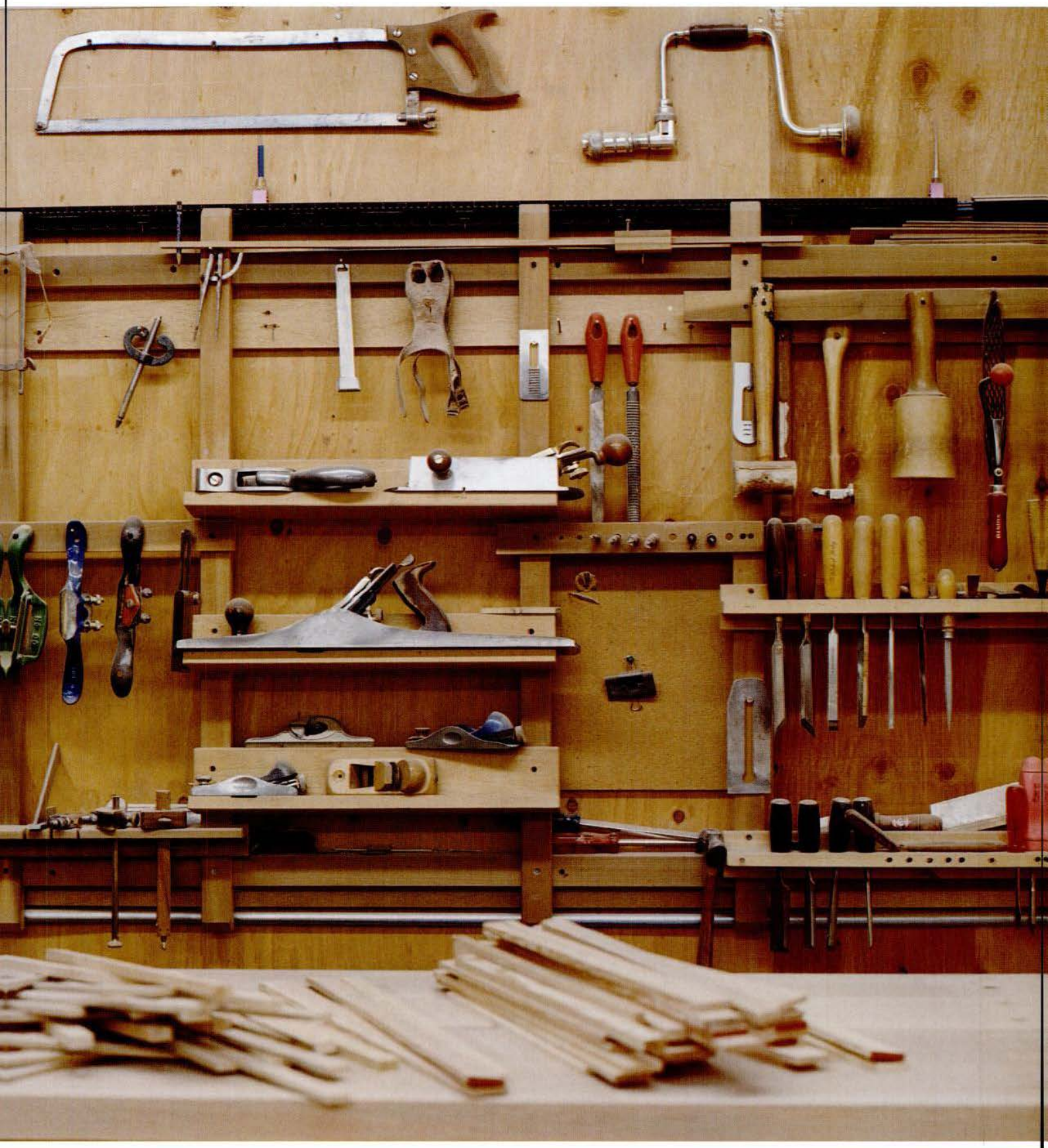


In McMakin's Seattle shop (opposite), he and a relatively small team of woodworkers manufacture and test various types of furniture designs. "My work is a lot about people and relationships," says McMakin. "It's very much about this team." The Duffy House in Manhattan Beach, California, includes (clockwise from top left): a vintage-style porch complete with swing; a loftlike kitchen space that opens up completely to the sun deck; an upstairs living area with a McMakin-designed coffee table and sofa; a "collage" of window frames on the west wall that reveals McMakin's playful spirit; a modest façade that embraces the beachy feel of Manhattan Beach's famous walking streets.

PHOTOS BY MARK WOODS (THIS PAGE)

In the Duffy House (clockwise from top left), the kitchen has a specially designed refrigerator that looks like cabinetry and a polished-concrete floor for easy cleanup; the main living room downstairs employs a wealth of windows, some of which were deliberately placed sideways, and original McMakin furniture; the exterior of the east wall shows the view from the master bedroom upstairs; the massive 1940s-style staircase connects all three floors without connecting to the walls themselves.

PHOTOS BY MARK WOODS (THIS PAGE)



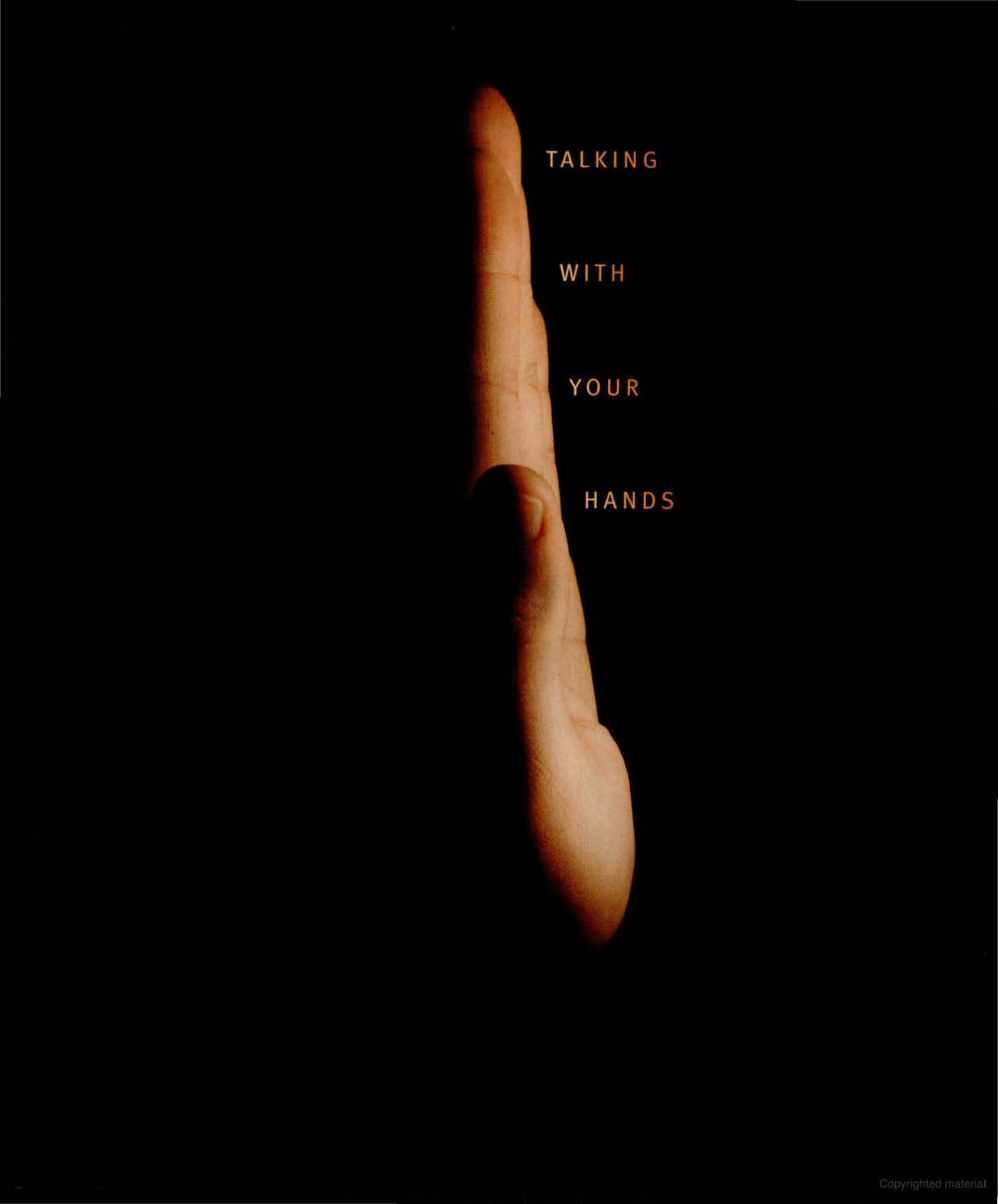
At McMakin's Seattle shop (below left), he and his designers like to experiment with various types of chairs—a favorite subject of McMakin's. His Slat Back chair (below right), for example, is, in his words, an attempt to "design my own iconic chair, the chair that I would want to live with, the chair that feels right."

one of his own. "They're sort of these perfect things, but soulless, and I don't think that it's always desirable to make something perfect, because perfection has its own oppressive weight."

Homeowners Robert and Jennifer Duffy and their daughter Danika sought a house that was airy, open, and lived in, yet easily maintained. Thus, the ceilings were raised to 11 feet, double doors open up to invite the outside in, and the reclaimed-wood and poured-concrete floors are easily cleaned. But what they didn't count on was how it would all fit together. The L-shaped couch in the front room, for example, mirrors the L-shaped couch in the rear family room, and an orange window at the top of the east wall echoes a single orange door at the base of the lower west wall. As Robert explains, "Seeing how precise all these connections are, and how everything fits together, the house feels like it was designed from the inside out."

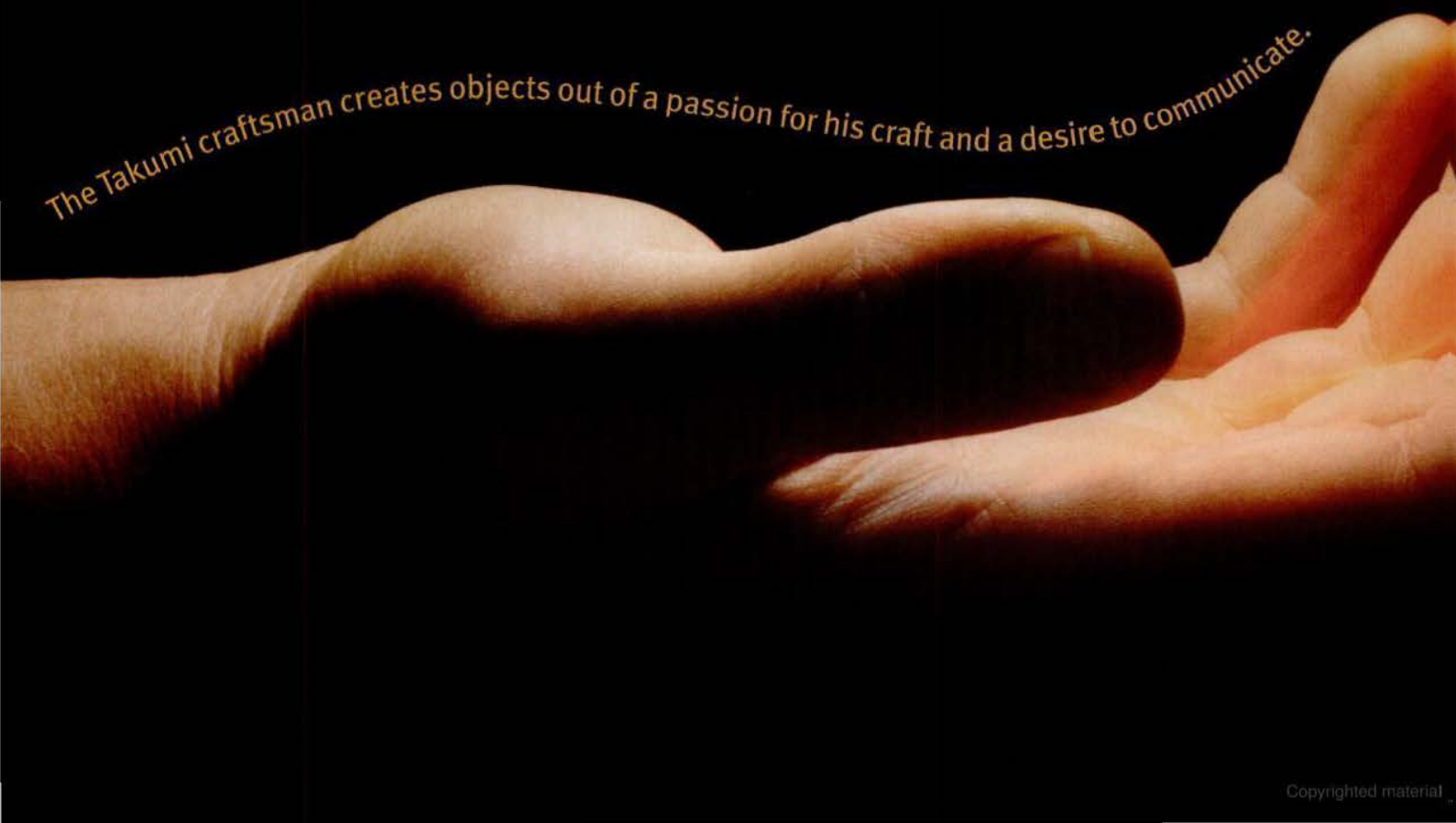
Indeed, McMakin confesses to being a self-taught architect whose education came from living in and restoring a number of homes by the late California architect Irving Gill. According to McMakin, Gill achieved an extraordinary humanism in his work, which occasionally borrowed from Craftsman and Prairie styles, yet remained utterly individualistic. "I was always greatly impressed with [Gill's] movement lines," McMakin says. "Because a house is an object and a thing that both channels and determines movement. I think that a lot of architecture fails when it becomes too much of an object and not enough of an instigator of behavior."

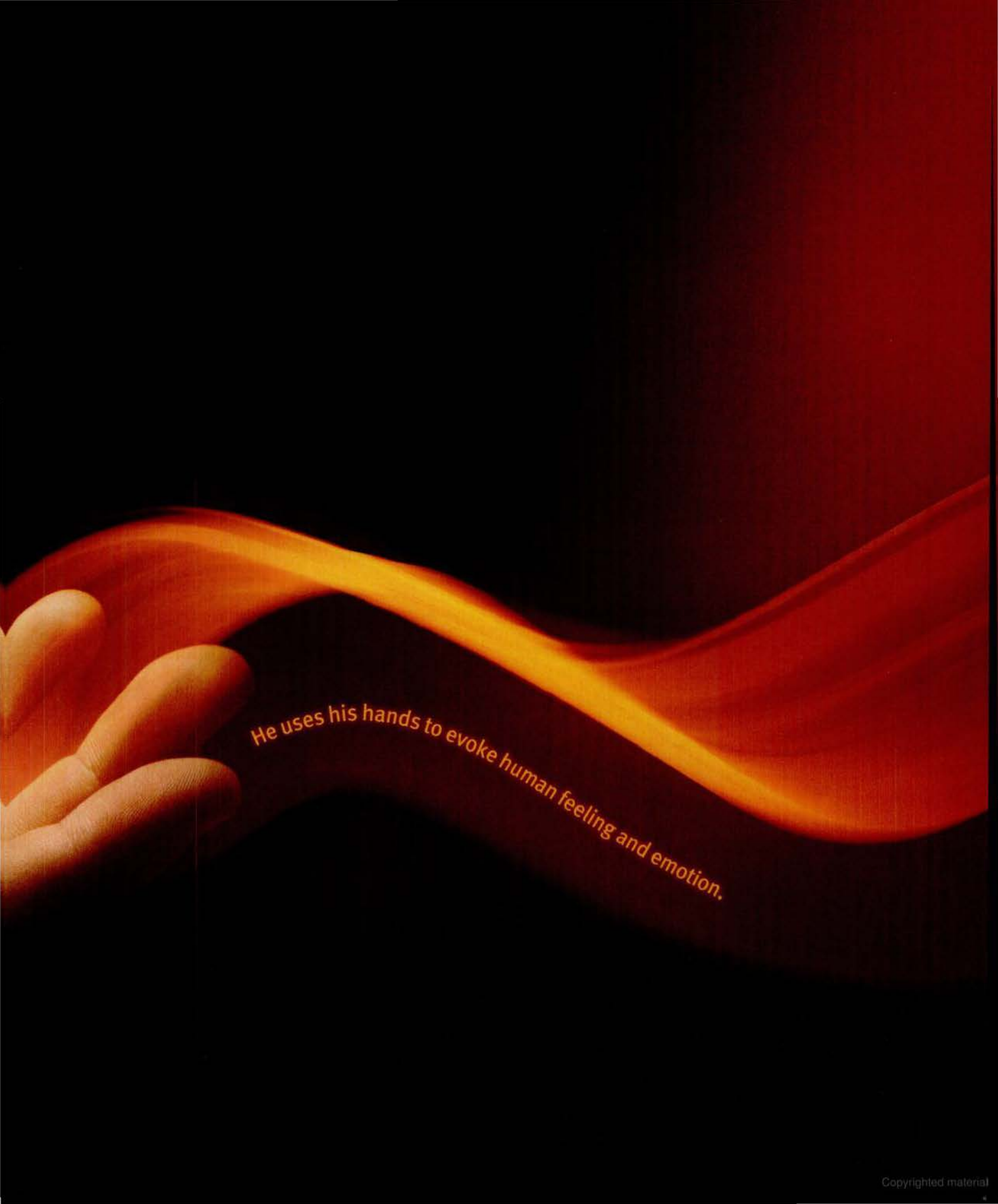
If that sounds "crafty," that's okay with him. As he says, he no longer has a problem with being labeled a designer or being dogged by the "craft question." "I'm happy with what I do," McMakin says. "And I try not to concern myself too much with what you call something. I mean, it's really just a language issue, isn't it?" ■



In Japan, it is believed that a highly skilled craftsman can actually make you feel nostalgia for a time and place you've never experienced. This is a result of Takumi, the Japanese philosophy of craftsmanship. Takumi reveals a touch that a machine simply cannot match. A precision that the computer cannot imagine. And an attention to detail that an assembly line could never replicate. It is revered as the highest skill of the human hand. It takes its cues from nature. It instills warmth and passion. It enlivens the human experience of an object.

Takumi is the guiding force behind Infiniti design. Its presence is felt in every vehicle that wears the Infiniti badge. And the all-new G takes it to the next level with a whole host of seemingly minor touches, some of which you may never notice, that make a big difference in how you perceive the finished piece. One of the more telling "minor touches" can be found along the steering wheel. Each is hand-stitched and requires an additional hour to produce. But the result is well worth it—no matter how you grip the wheel, your fingertips never touch the stitching.





He uses his tools to alter our perception of something we might otherwise have taken for granted.

While Takumi is the guiding force behind this attention to detail, what defines the intent of every vehicle built is expressed by simple brushstrokes. And while you can appreciate them for their artistic qualities, you can feel that there is more meaning in it than this. You are not wrong. These brushstokes are derived from the ancient art of Shodo or Japanese calligraphy. Shodo is not only an art form – it's a ritualistic expression of harmony between body and mind where the artist's energy comes to life in bold, sweeping black brushstrokes.

Infiniti adopted the Shodo technique as an exercise in reduction. It reminds the designers to focus on creating big, simple messages that value forms which follow emotion. Not the other way around. "A clear message with simplicity and strength," explains Infiniti Design Director Shiro Nakamura, "can be expressed by the two lines of our gesture."

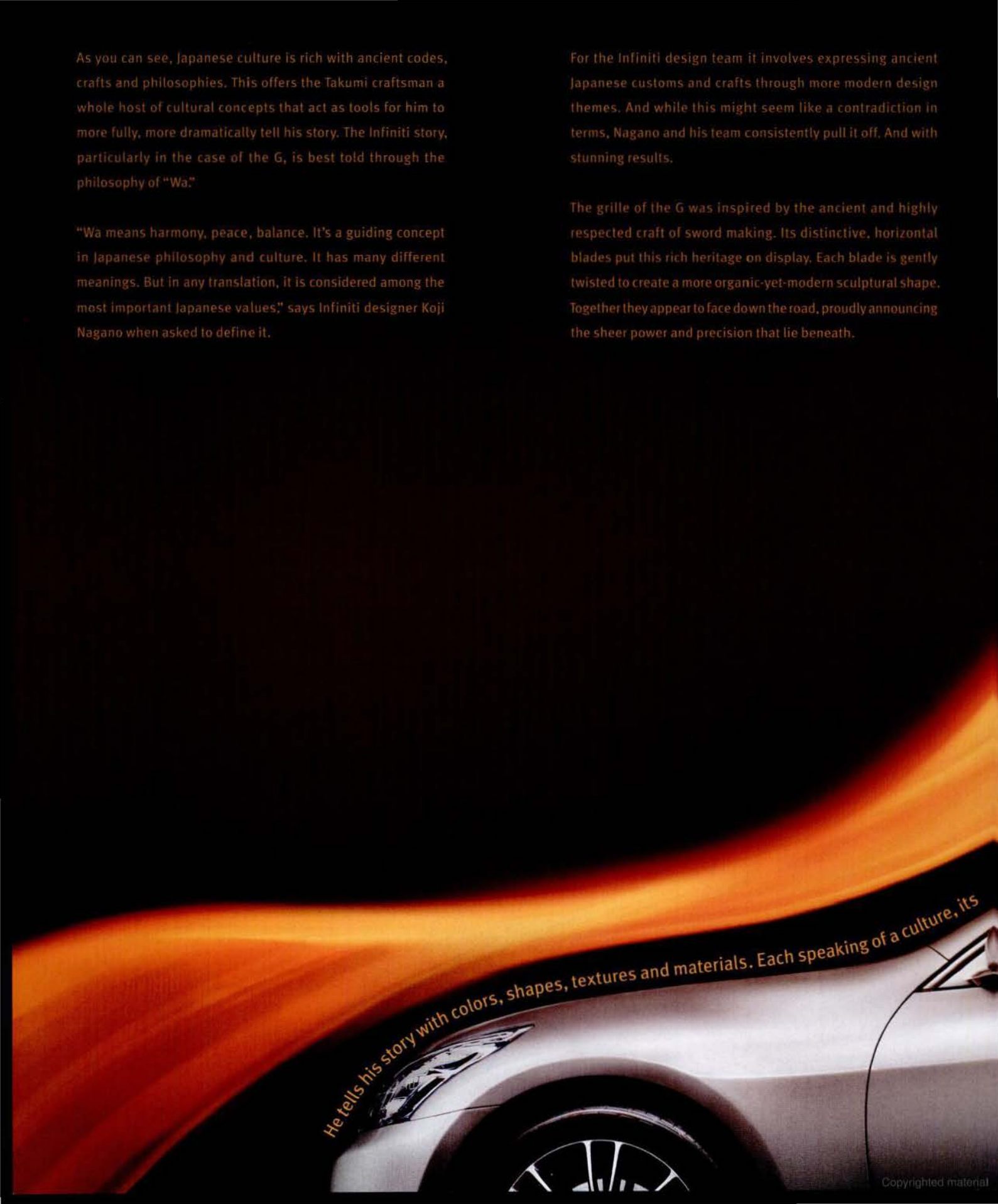
In creating the gesture for the G, Infiniti designers wanted to express a modern feeling of natural perfection, as well as project the performance aspects of the vehicle. Once perfected, this gesture is never altered during the course of production. Just the opposite. When production workers found that the wave-like shape of the hood made it impossible to install the headlamps, the design team went back to the drawing board. And rather than compromise the intent implied by the gesture, they added another step to the assembly line where they could fasten the headlamps by hand. This also made it possible to maintain the shape of the hood. And while this extra step may be something you'll never see, it clearly changes the way you look at Infiniti as a company.

As you can see, Japanese culture is rich with ancient codes, crafts and philosophies. This offers the Takumi craftsman a whole host of cultural concepts that act as tools for him to more fully, more dramatically tell his story. The Infiniti story, particularly in the case of the G, is best told through the philosophy of "Wa."

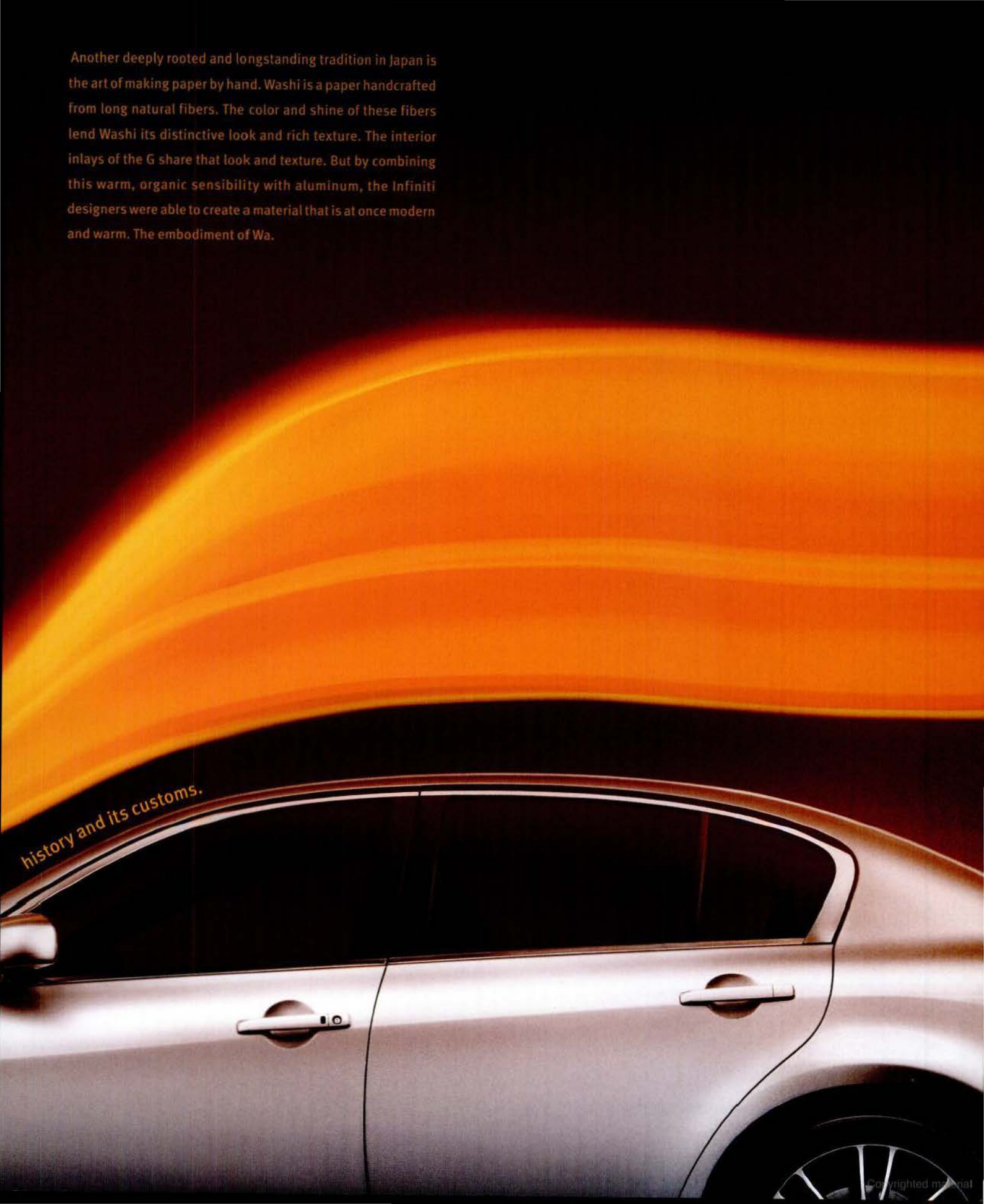
"Wa means harmony, peace, balance. It's a guiding concept in Japanese philosophy and culture. It has many different meanings. But in any translation, it is considered among the most important Japanese values," says Infiniti designer Koji Nagano when asked to define it.

For the Infiniti design team it involves expressing ancient Japanese customs and crafts through more modern design themes. And while this might seem like a contradiction in terms, Nagano and his team consistently pull it off. And with stunning results.

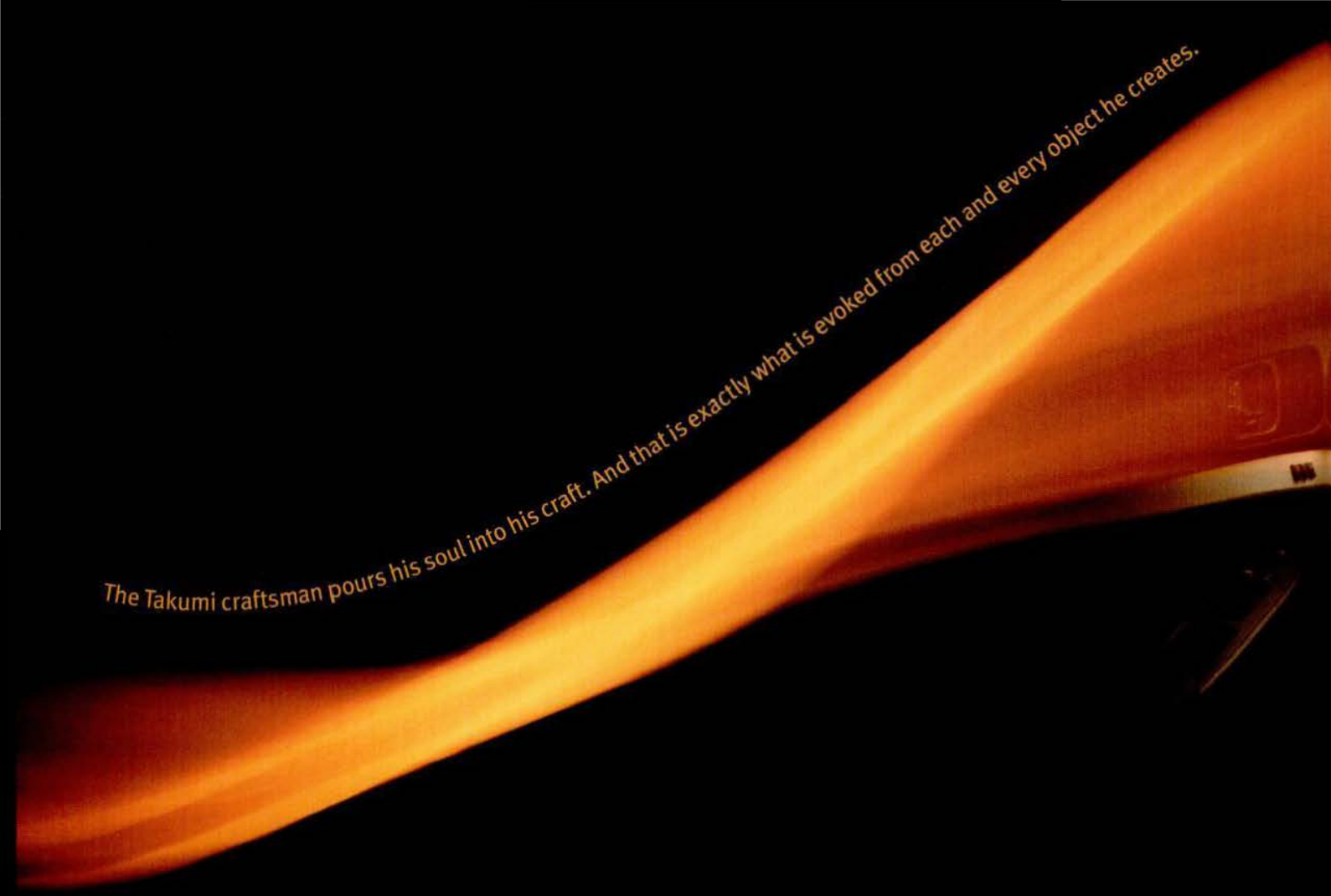
The grille of the G was inspired by the ancient and highly respected craft of sword making. Its distinctive, horizontal blades put this rich heritage on display. Each blade is gently twisted to create a more organic-yet-modern sculptural shape. Together they appear to face down the road, proudly announcing the sheer power and precision that lie beneath.



Another deeply rooted and longstanding tradition in Japan is the art of making paper by hand. Washi is a paper handcrafted from long natural fibers. The color and shine of these fibers lend Washi its distinctive look and rich texture. The interior inlays of the G share that look and texture. But by combining this warm, organic sensibility with aluminum, the Infiniti designers were able to create a material that is at once modern and warm. The embodiment of Wa.

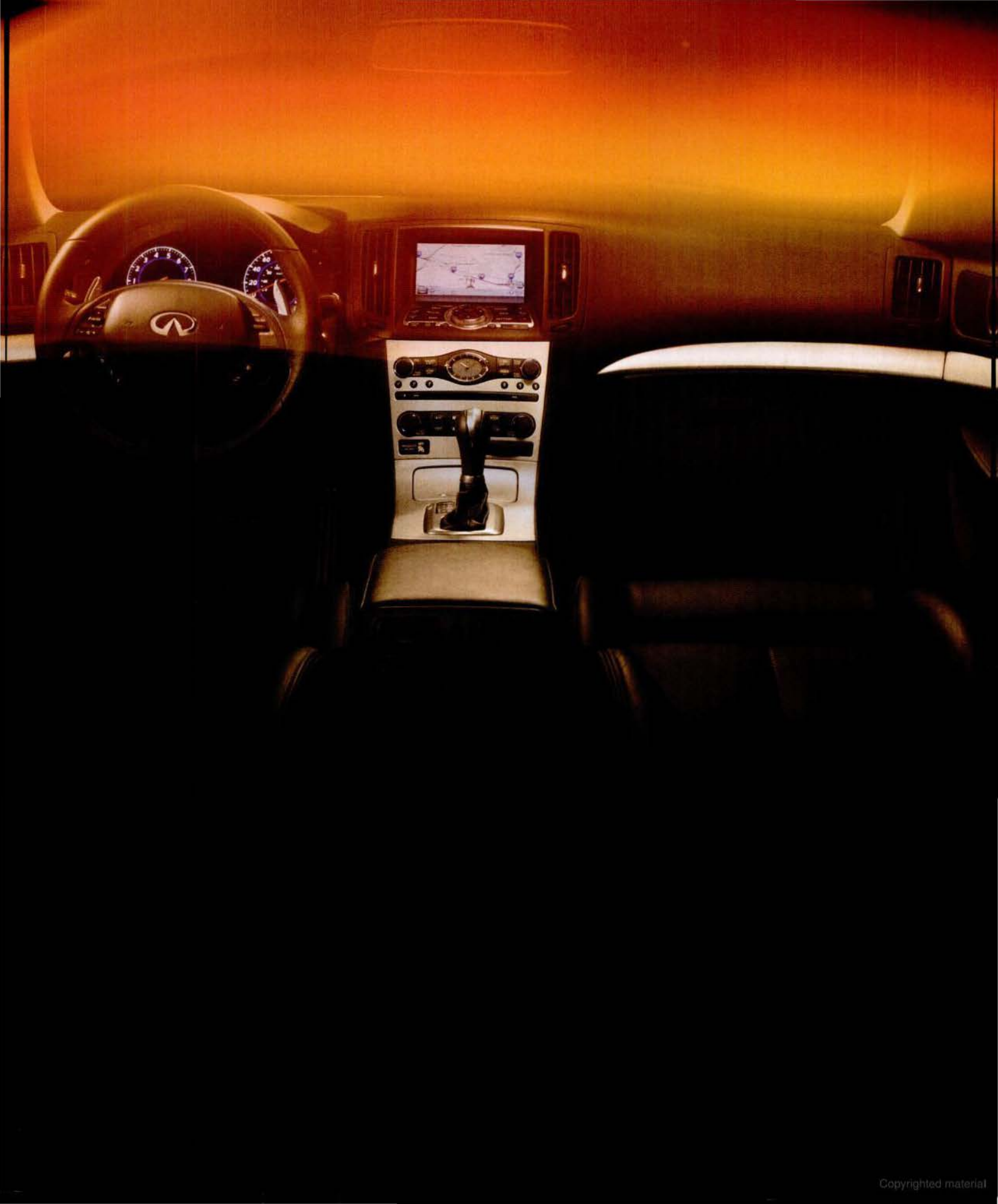


history and its customs.



When you experience the Infiniti G, it's easy to point to any number of thoughtful touches as the reason why the car is truly different, better: the real magnesium shift paddles; the fact that every button throughout the car feels consistent; the Washi aluminum inlays; the warm, inviting, reassuring cabin space. Each evokes a feeling of appreciation for the effort and the materials used. And we appreciate it because it was done for us.

But on a more visceral level, the sum total of all of these tangible features equals something not so tangible: an enduring emotional bond between the car and its driver. What comes from the hand of the craftsman is what is felt each and every time you touch the wheel. And it's not made of wood or steel or rubber or glass. It's made of real human emotion, trust and an unheard-of level of obedience, humility and reverence for the craft. Where the car becomes an object that is exchanged as an unspoken gesture of mutual respect and admiration between the craftsman and the driver. For this is the true effect of Takumi.



To learn more about craft's impact on Infiniti design, visit Infiniti.com.

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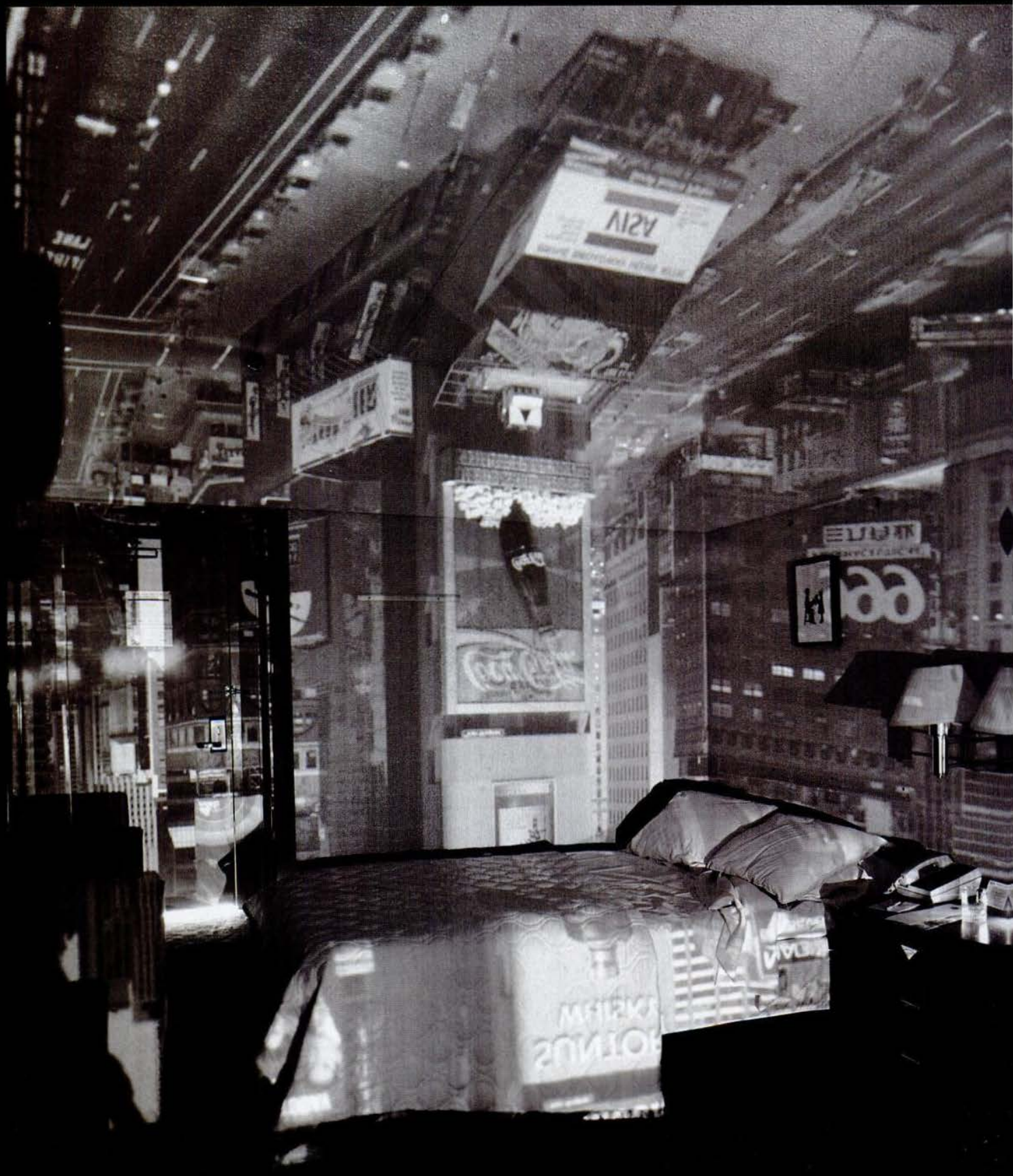
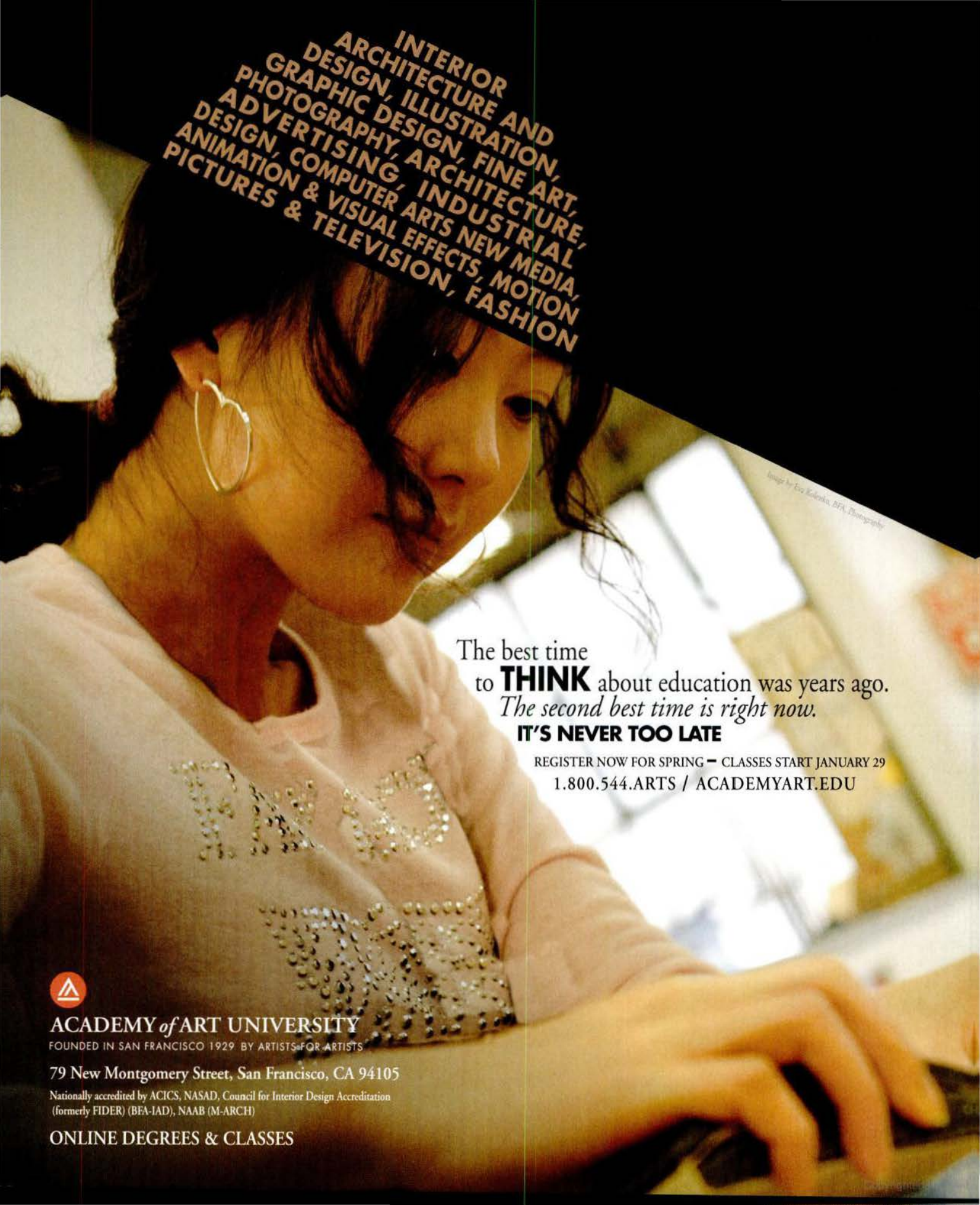
OUTSIDE IN

When Abelardo Morell began teaching introductory photography classes at the Massachusetts College of Art in the 1980s, he would often transform his classroom into a camera obscura by blocking out all light in the room save for a small fissure in the window coverings; to the delight and awe of his students, this prick of light would project an image of the outside world upside down along the walls. Intrigued by the quality of the images created by this rudimentary photographic principle, Morell began documenting the phenomenon in large-format prints situated in a variety of places throughout the world.



Times Square in Hotel Room
New York, NY, 1997

St. Louis View, Looking East, in Building Under Construction, St. Louis, MO, 2000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Santa Maria della Salute in Palazzo Bedroom
Venice, Italy, 2006

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The Grand Tetons in Resort Room
Jackson Hole, WY, 1997

Boston's Old Custom House in Hotel Room
Boston, MA, 1999

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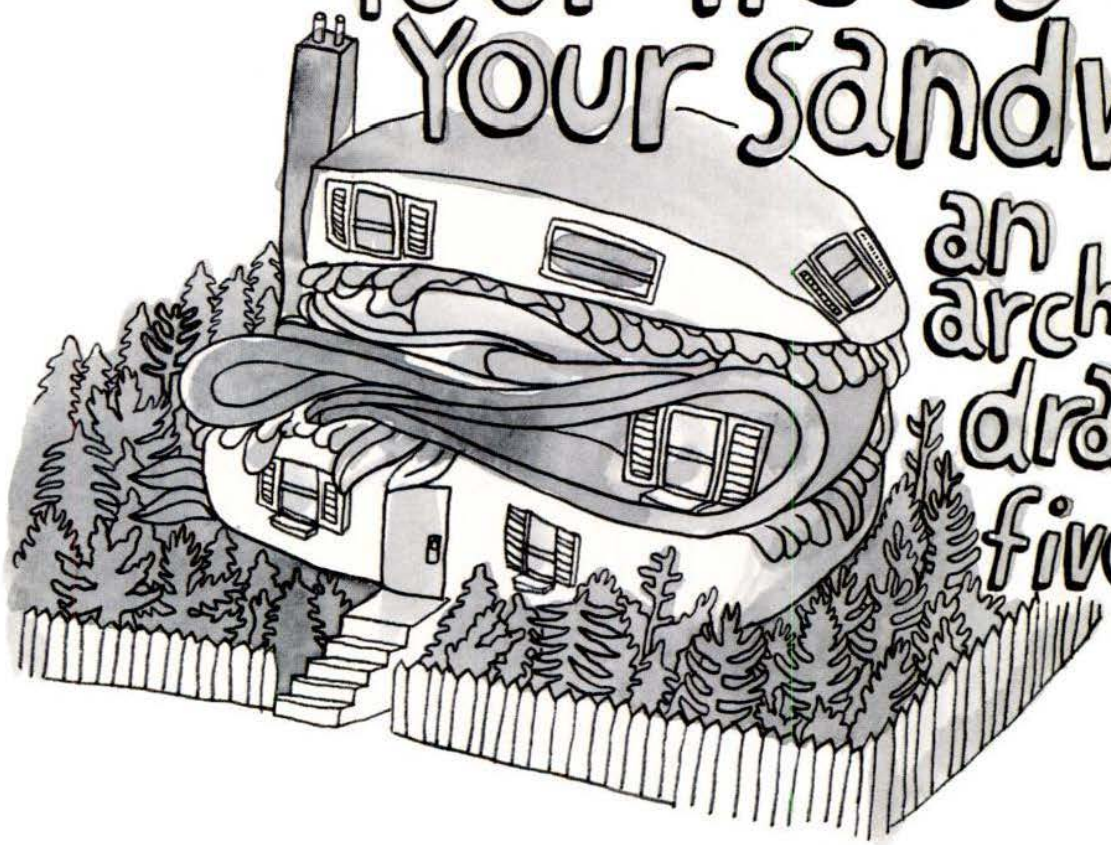
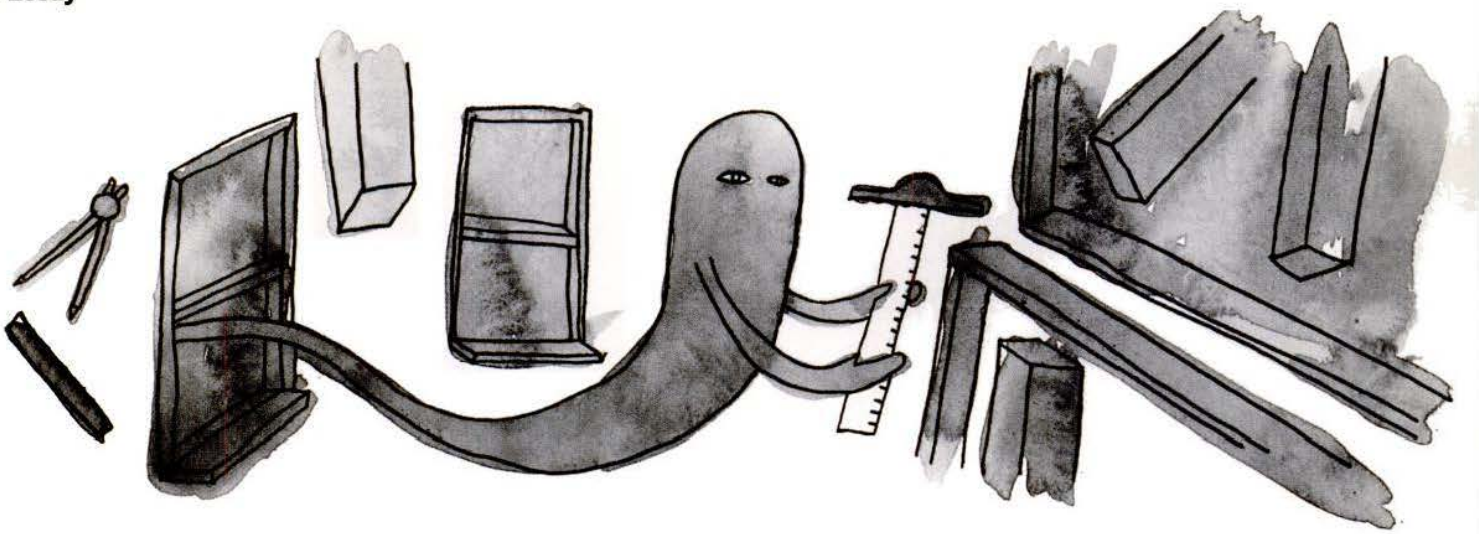
Your House, Your Sandwich: an architectural drama in five parts



In architecture school, I was taught all kinds of things about buildings, but I learned very little about people. Now that I have been practicing architecture for nearly 20 years, I find myself increasingly drawn to the human drama that accompanies an architectural commission. I have come to realize that, for me, the real varsity-level action—especially in residential architecture—resides not in the bricks and mortar, but in the metaphoric sweat lodge of the architect-client relationship. Although each project is different, I have begun to recognize the same universal human themes over and over again: Exhilaration. Fear. Envy. Empathy. Betrayal. With each project I find my clients and myself starring in site-specific versions of the same high-budget, convincingly acted reality show.

There are five episodes in a typical show. I'll capitalize them so they sound official: Programming, Design, Documentation, Bidding, and Construction. If you've worked with an architect before, you might recognize some of these terms. Even if you haven't worked with one and the biggest project you've ever completed is a ham sandwich, the concepts behind the episodes are probably familiar. The difference between architecture and a ham sandwich is that architecture is a far bigger sandwich—so big, in fact, that you need a sandwich specialist like me to help you make it. Architecture is unlike making a ham sandwich in that you don't succumb to a psychic meltdown when you feel your ham sandwich is a wee bit different from what you ordered. And when making a ham sandwich, I don't stare in the mirror in the morning and ask myself, Why are these nice people paying me to make them a ham sandwich when I can't even make a ham sandwich for myself?

Let me illustrate my point with a simple role-playing exercise. I'm the architect and you're the client. Your name is Marla. You need to renovate your house. You ▸



give me a call, and we go have coffee, and after sufficient schmoozing you decide to hire my firm to help you renovate your house and add on a 600-square-foot master bedroom and bathroom. Your husband's name is Earle, and you have two boys, JoJo and Ben.

EPISODE 1: PROGRAMMING

Programming, Marla, is the premiere episode, in which I help you figure out what, exactly, you want to do. Based on our preliminary coffee-shop interview, I know you and Earle like your house for the most part, but you are starting to feel cramped. JoJo is six and he's obsessed with jam. He drips it everywhere. Ben is 13, his voice just changed, and he's got these bushy eyebrows as of last week, and he's started to take alarmingly long showers at night. As the architect, I help you through this discovery process by asking a lot of questions to get a sense of what exactly you want your renovation project to accomplish functionally, and what you want it to look and feel like. This is the phase where pages are ripped wildly out of design magazines. This is the phase where we bandy about words like "streamlined" and "eclectic," and where I ask extremely specific questions about your toilet paper and shampoo preferences. So we do that for a while, Marla, talking and doodling and looking. We're starting to need each other already: I give you attention and a sense that I can help you organize your ingredients and then construct your enormous sandwich. You give me attention and maybe some money.

EPISODE 2: DESIGN

Design is the episode in which we turn the program we developed during the first episode into architectural ideas. This is the phase where I sketch out lots of wild ideas at first, and then fewer wild ideas and more variations on one pretty good idea. You and Earle are pleased, and I'm feeling good, too. My design intuition begins to kick in: One by one, bad ideas fall by the wayside, leaving good ones in their wake. I hole up at my office and crank. We talk less, and the design takes on a life of its own. I feel like I know each of you intimately. The contents of your goal-vs.-constraint shopping bag have distinctive shapes and flavors, and their composition into a workable sandwich requires complete balance and focus. It grows dark outside, Marla, night after night, and I'm still working. As I draw and redraw on my computer, I feel like a ghost floating through your actual house—taking mental pictures and spiritual measurements. Finally, I get it right—I think. Although it might suck? I don't know. I draw it up. I call you the next morning and tell you about the changes, and you like what you hear, which makes me think it doesn't suck after all. I send you the final pretty good idea for your review. You're pleased and you want to show the plans to your neighbor, whose wife is an architect. I also send you a bill.

And you get mad. You inform me in a terse email that the design I sent along with the bill (which you felt was surprisingly high) was not what we talked about on the phone. Not at all. It just doesn't seem that I'm listening to you and Earle as much as I did at first. Where is this hostility coming from, Marla? I want to disagree with you, but I realize I'm guilty as charged. I'm not listening. (I mean, I still am, but not as much. It's true.) I'm trying to get a basic design buttoned down. I think I understand what you need pretty well, and I'm trying to get the thing figured out so you can move in by Christmas, which is the new deadline that Earle sprung on me Saturday morning, out of the clear blue sky. (And I think, but don't say to you, This is our ham sandwich, Marla. You, me, Earle, and the boys—we're in this together, and our ham sandwich is going to be a tidily crafted sandwich and not some Cajun pork wrap.) I realize again that I need to do a better job of communicating that design is an inexact process, and that missteps are an important part of the process. In not carefully walking you through the design I came up with in my ghost journey, it's true—I do suck. But give me another chance. Marla, for the love of God, let me into your life again. I send a calming email to you, ramp up the charm to initial chit-chat levels, and then call you a few hours later and set up a time to get another cup of coffee. ►

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Later, as we have coffee, I listen to you, Marla. For the first time, you allow me into the complex reality of your life. Some of the things you never told me in our Programming episode: JoJo's exploring new types of jam. You think Ben might be addicted to, you know, showering or something. On top of that, it seems like Earle's been cracking open an extra Mike's Hard Lemonade every night—he wasn't like that before the boys. Disarmed by your honesty, I open up about my insecurities as a designer and a communicator. As we become human in each other's eyes, we realize that this isn't even about your house—that your house is just a physical expression of your life and your relationships. I relearn (for the hundredth time since my career started) that as an architect, I can only really be of value if I truly understand your life. We get more coffee, and start sketching over the renderings I brought. It's a very special episode, this one...and it ends there on the street in front of the coffee shop, maybe with a little hug. As the music wells up, the camera pans to me waving goodbye to you, Marla, with a roll of red-marked drawings under my arm.

EPISODE 3: DOCUMENTATION

Documentation is the episode of the show in which I immediately fall back into my pattern and become incommunicado and hole up and crank, making construction drawings of the final red-marked design from the coffee shop. This is the longest episode, aside from Construction itself, during which I shoot you a couple of the fattest bills of the show. But you're not mad at me, see, because you keep changing things, Marla, and you don't want me to get mad at you for all the late changes, and perhaps charge you even vaster sums than I already am, out of contractual spite. This is the episode where you call me at home and start the conversation by saying, "Don't kill me, but Earle and I've been talking and..."

Marla. Am I upset that you keep changing your mind? That you want polished-concrete vanity tops in your bathroom, even though you initially wanted the iffy resinous translucent slabs you saw in Toronto, which I subsequently drew in about 23 details against my better judgment? No, I don't get mad. Do I get mad that you want to go back to a separate laundry area pocketed away in JoJo's closet, which we'll have to enlarge somehow, even though we just made this same closet smaller last week because Earle thinks he needs to learn how to organize his jam-encrusted toys? Am I mad, Marla? Of course not, because I'm a professional, and because you're human and I'm human and this is our sandwich. So I make the changes. I find a stackable washer/dryer that fits nicely. I give JoJo an elevated bed that I would have killed for when I was six and that he probably won't fully appreciate, and figure out a way to cram all his toys into a built-in storage unit. We give Ben an upgraded lock on his room, and a bell, so he can alert you when he is done showering and needs to be fed. During this episode, you definitely get your money's worth. I come over quite a bit and ask a lot of questions and show you lots of drawings and specifications that look complex and official, and you and Earle both feel a sense of calm inevitability about your future house, which is good. If this episode were associated with a season it would be autumn: stormy, windy, smoky, beautiful. When it's over, I rake up all the sheets of drawings into a nice tidy pile.

EPISODE 4: BIDDING

Bidding is the episode in which you find out how much your sandwich is going to cost. This is winter, Marla, the darkest episode of the show. After a few weeks, the contractor comes back with a bid, and then you're mad at me. You feel betrayed: I've led you down a path and you're disappointed, frankly, that I apparently have no clue as to how much things cost in the real world. Your anger stops me in my tracks. Perhaps you're right. I live in my ivory tower, drawing my little lines. I may very well suck. But on the other hand, I did try to talk you out of quite a few things that we both knew you couldn't afford, Marla. This I say calmly, though my hands are shaking under the table. We meet and cut scope out of the project, switch out Trespa for polished concrete on the vanity tops and try again. The numbers come back. You're mad at me. I'm sorry, Marla, I'm trying. I can't ▸

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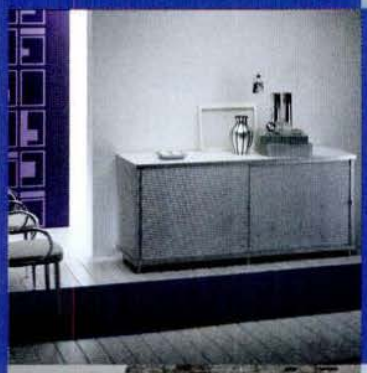

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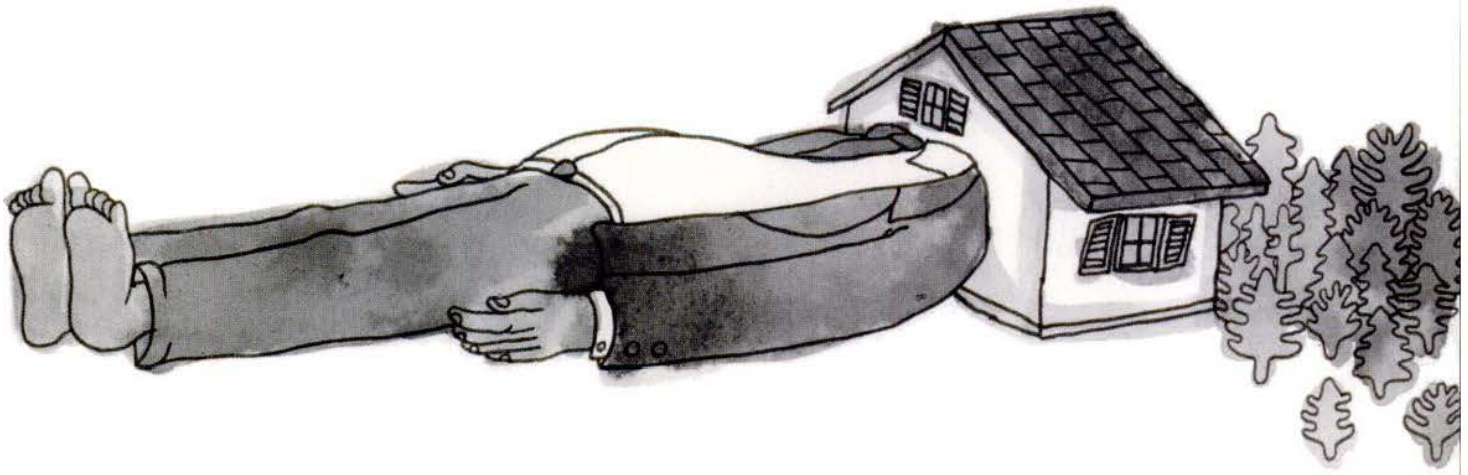

tell the contractors how much they can charge. We cut more, lose the Danish woodstove, try again. You bump up your budget a bit. We narrow down the contractors to the lowest bidder, a guy named Darryl, whose card says "Dubble Barrel" and who insists you call him "Dub." We're still over budget. He trims his fee a bit. He blames everything on "China." We're still high. Earle freaks. I switch the Sheetrock from 5/8 inch to 1/2 inch, we lose the center-pivot door, the cast-stainless fittings, and roll the dice again, shouting out the number we need to hit like Don Rickles at Caesar's Palace. Finally, we hit it, and the bells ring. You sign a contract with Dub. The end of this episode resembles a Gatorade commercial: We're sweaty and bleeding, we smell of moths—but we won, Marla, we won. You point at me, slo-mo, from the bottom of the roiling man pile, as I catch my breath in the end zone a few yards away. Hands on knees, ball at my feet, I nod and point back at you.

EPISODE 5: CONSTRUCTION

Construction is the final episode of the show, in which Dub makes your sandwich. As he frames up the addition, he pulls you aside at the end of work one day and tells you that it seems to him like a lot of money to spend on a bedroom that's two feet too small. So you give me a call at home that night. You tell me what Dub said and wonder why the hell we didn't make the bedroom two feet bigger, like Earle asked for in the beginning. What happened to listening? I calm you down, and tell you that everything is fine: Framed-in space always looks small before it's Sheetrocked. It happens every single time, without fail. I know what I'm doing, Marla. I don't suck. I meet you at your house the next morning to show you what I mean. I arrive early and just about have a heart attack when I see the bedroom framing. It does look too small! It looks way too small! The bathroom looks too small, too—there must be a mistake! Dub must have framed it wrong! The dude is incapable of reading drawings. I quickly measure the rooms before you arrive, and determine they are framed out exactly as designed. Jesus Christ! My confidence drains out of me, which creates space for industrial-strength panic, and I realize I really do suck and that I need to hang it up and get cracking on my next career as a mailman. I sit on the floor in a sawdusty corner, rocking back and forth, mouth agape, when you arrive and are in a good mood. You talked to your neighbor's wife, the architect, and she thinks the room size is fine. It's fine, she says! And she's right! That woman is an architect and a genius and she's dead-on right! What was I thinking? I don't suck. Not at all. And neither does Dub, that wily little so-and-so.

And Dub puts on the Sheetrock later in the week. And it's fine, indeed. And the rest of construction plays out in a similar manner: Something sucks when it's getting built, and then it doesn't suck at all once it all comes together. Once in a while something actually does suck and we need to fix it. And then you're mad at me. And I'm sorry, Marla. And then it's done. Your house is done, and you're happy. Earle and the boys are happy. And I'm glad, too. Sort of.

Our season is over. It's hard to quit you, Marla. I've spent so many hours dedicated to you and your family—to our sandwich, sweating out the details, projecting you and your family into all the spaces. I feel an ownership of sorts in what we created. There's even a wee bit of resentment in my subconscious as I imagine you abandoning me like an old popsicle wrapper after you've mined my creative soul and glued the golden nuggets onto the paper plate of your life. Of course, you've handed over a stack of money. But what is money? It's paper. It smells of desperation and service and it gets wet in the shower. I have paper, and you have Earle and JoJo and Ben and your new house and your great life.

And you never call me anymore, Marla.

And when I call you, you don't really seem to be quite as interested in what I have to say.

And we drift apart, your nice family and me. Me: a clown-faced helium balloon, let go and floating skyward as you move inside. You: a pile of bricks and people, shaped like a house. ■

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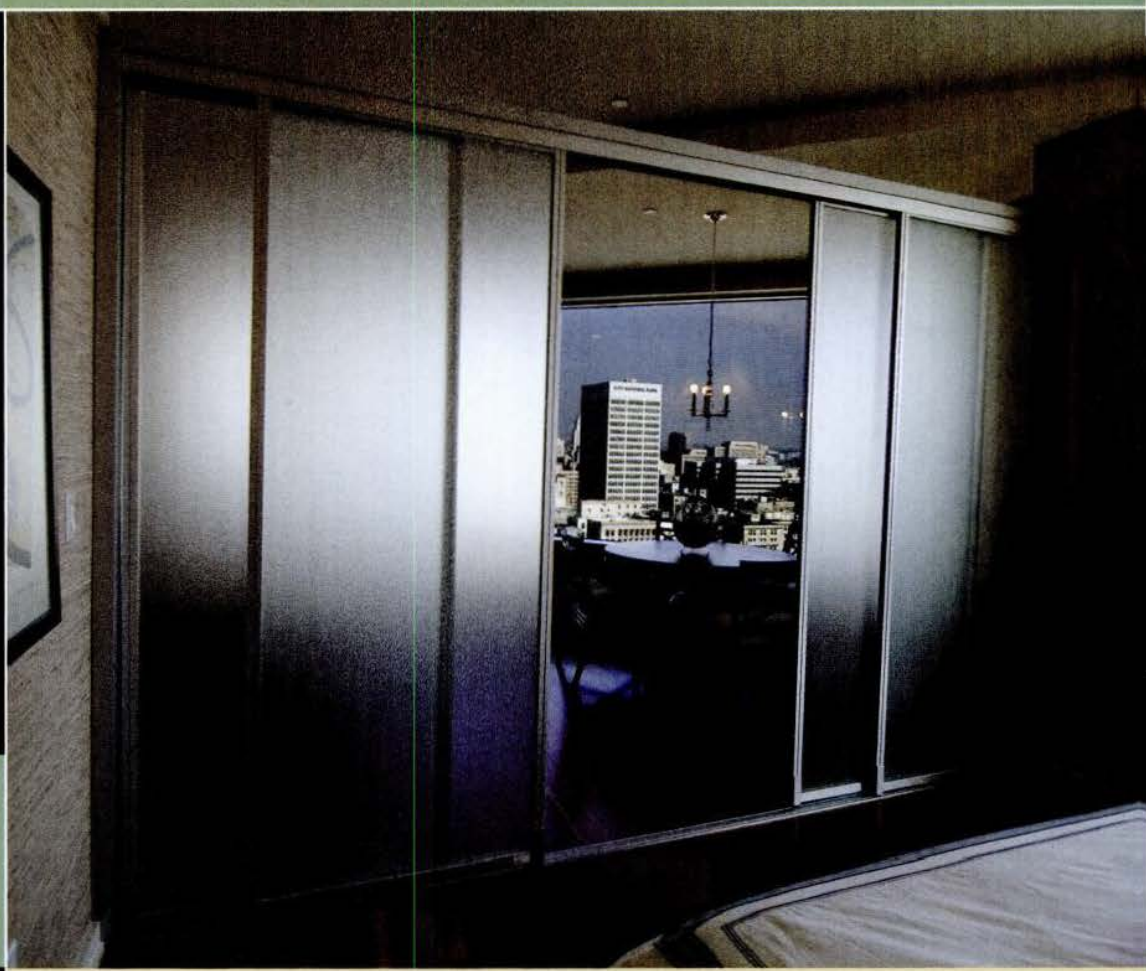

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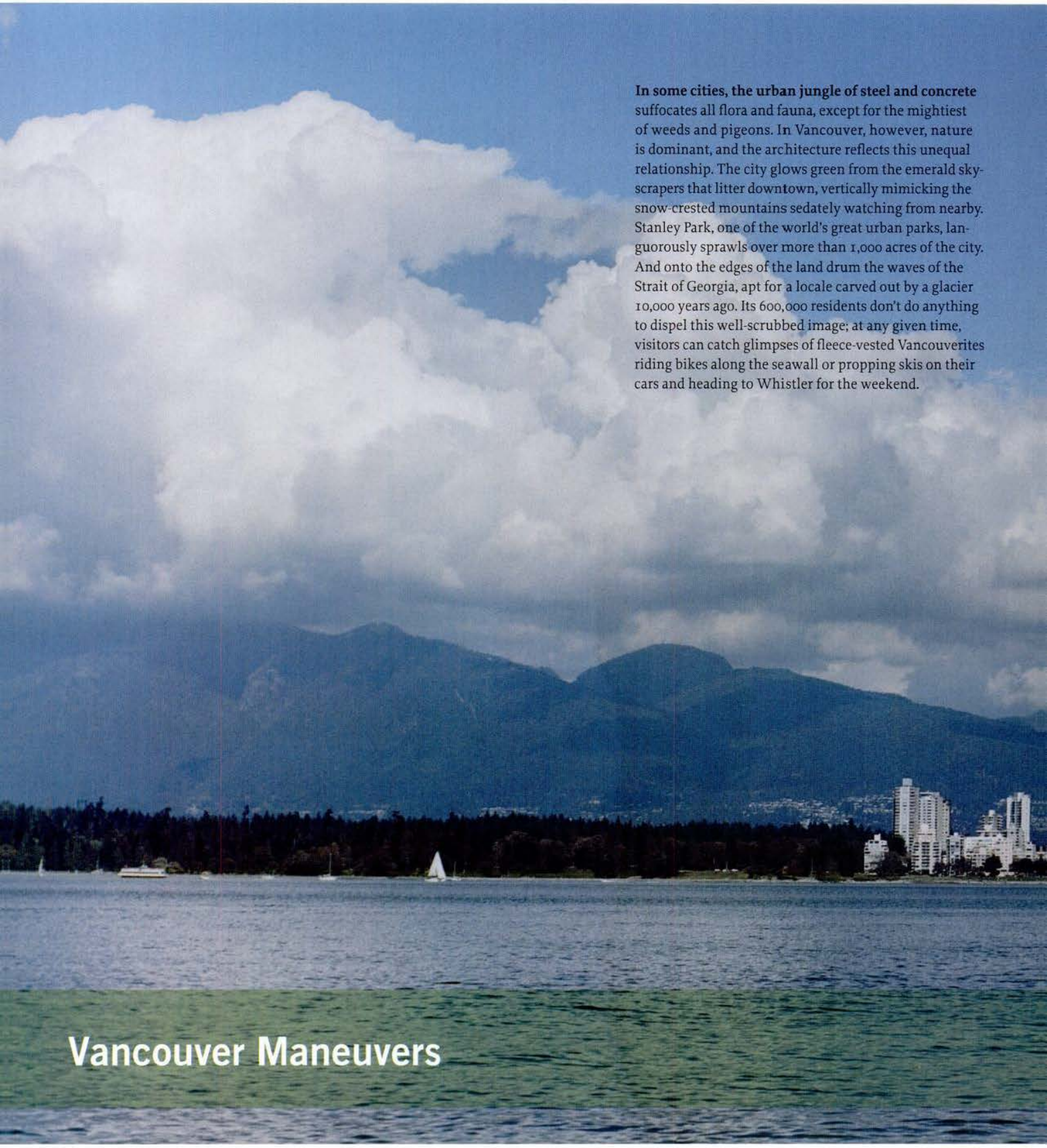


Vancouver Maneuvers

In some cities, the urban jungle of steel and concrete suffocates all flora and fauna, except for the mightiest of weeds and pigeons. In Vancouver, however, nature is dominant, and the architecture reflects this unequal relationship. The city glows green from the emerald skyscrapers that litter downtown, vertically mimicking the snow-crested mountains sedately watching from nearby. Stanley Park, one of the world's great urban parks, languorously sprawls over more than 1,000 acres of the city. And onto the edges of the land drum the waves of the Strait of Georgia, apt for a locale carved out by a glacier 10,000 years ago. Its 600,000 residents don't do anything to dispel this well-scrubbed image; at any given time, visitors can catch glimpses of fleece-vested Vancouverites riding bikes along the seawall or propping skis on their cars and heading to Whistler for the weekend.

The natural surroundings are so spectacular as to overshadow human structural achievements, and noteworthy architecture has often taken a backseat to the landscape. But it's not for lack of local efforts, since the city keeps trying to get it right with its penchant for constant redevelopment. Incorporated in 1886 by the British, who successfully ran out both the Coastal Salish people who had lived there since 16,000 BC and the more recently arrived Spaniards, the city established its love for rebuilding early. In the first year under new rule, a brush fire burned the place to the ground and the mayor started reconstruction efforts within a few days. A similar bulldozing of downtown followed by a period of rapid growth (though subsequent events were artificial, not natural) happened in the 1960s in a postwar building frenzy, then again in the '80s in preparation for the World's Fair. All this results in a metropolitan area that feels startlingly new and clean—an effect heightened by the omnipresent drizzle that washes over the city.

Today, Vancouver is looking forward to hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics and again finds itself in a hyper state of construction. It's an interesting time for architects and designers like Omer Arbel, creative director of Canadian firm Bocci and also head of Omer Arbel Office, who tries to dispel the image of his native metropolis as a sleepy Outward Bound town that's impervious to design. "Vancouver is a city that's awakening," he says. "You go to Milan or Barcelona, and there are centuries of excellent design. There's nothing like that here; it's being born now. We get to shape the city." With his unfettered optimism in tow, Arbel shared his favorite parts of Vancouver with Dwell. ▸

Nicknamed "Hollywood North," Vancouver has become a favored filming spot for innumerable movies due to an offering of tax breaks, temperate climate, and attractive appearance. But more than just a pretty face, the city is currently in the midst of a frenzy of design activity and urban development.

With the Coast Mountains in the background and the Strait of Georgia in the foreground, there's no bad view if you live in one of Vancouver's many midrises.

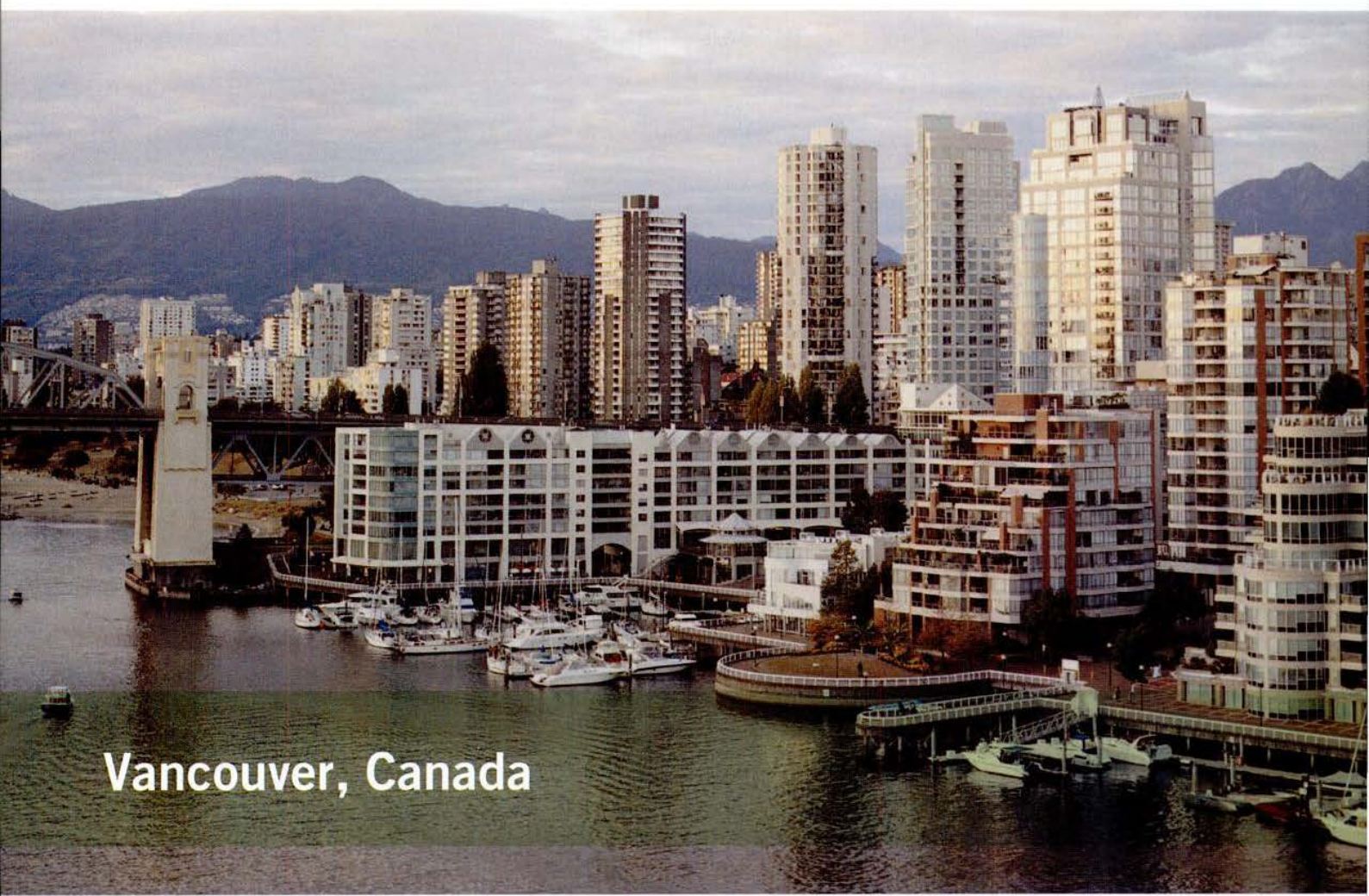
Driving toward downtown from the airport, my first impression of the skyline is always of those midrises of uniform appearance that seem particular to Vancouver.

Those glass towers you see are a Vancouver invention. They're called point towers, and the reason for their form is that they're the most efficient way to build around a central elevator core while maximizing views for every unit. It's one of the first building codes in North America to allow a single elevator core in a residential tower to contain a scissor stair—which is to say two separate fire escape stairs organized in a double helix. And since housing has become homogenized in Vancouver, every unit is identical. It's a formula for making money. There are so many people coming to Vancouver right now that the developers feel there's no reason to have discriminating taste.

The positive side of the story is that all of the units are relatively high-end, so they get furnished very well. For some reason or another, there's a much more sensitive market to well-designed objects than to well-designed buildings. The majority of people will agree that an iPod is beautiful, but then they'll go and spend their life savings on a very mediocre condo.

Does that have anything to do with the fact that the natural surroundings are so impressive that the buildings are almost an afterthought?

That's definitely architect Arthur Erickson's position. He says that Vancouver is an extroverted city in the sense that energy is focused outwards, toward the landscape. Everything is so beautiful that when people have free time, they don't do urban ▸



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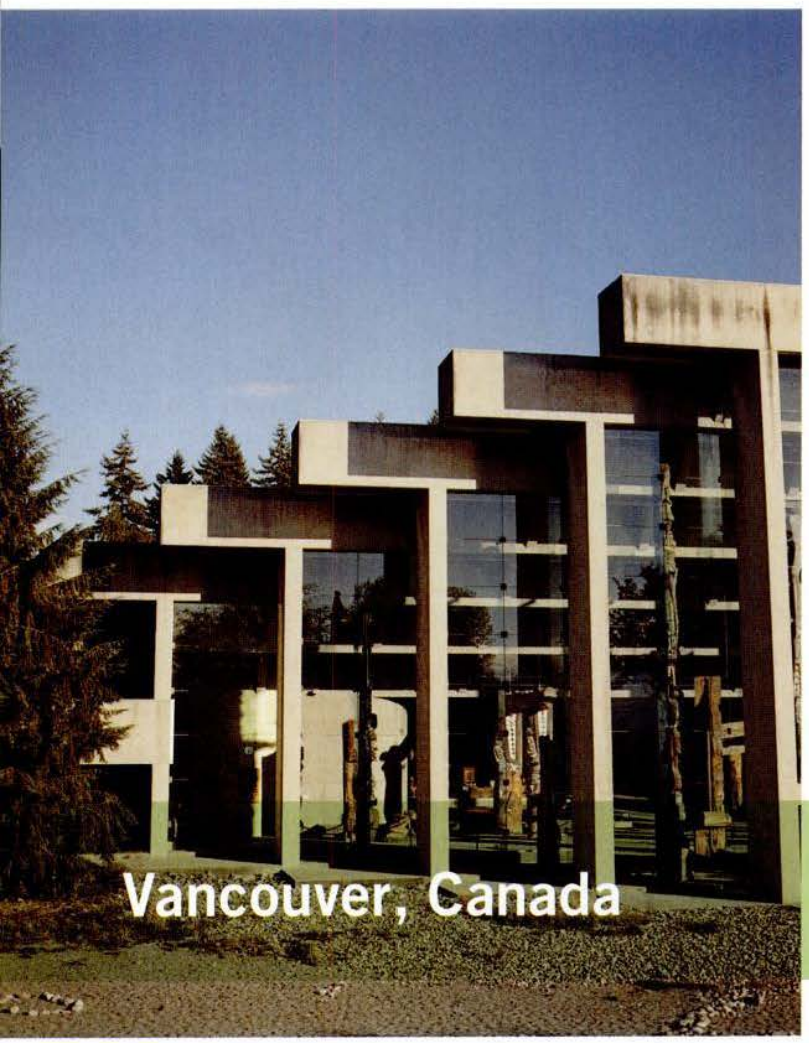
"Many of Erickson's buildings have a cold Brutalism about them; [with the Museum of Anthropology] he's achieved a balance between that with the warmth in his treatment of windows," says Omer Arbel. "The way the light comes in is almost a mystical experience."

things—they go into the wilderness to hike or ski or kayak. As a result, the city feels sleepy on the surface. And Erickson says that's also a cause for the blandness of the architecture, because people are surrounded by such beauty that even ugly buildings look okay here.

You mention Erickson, who's helped shape the architecture of Vancouver the way that, say, Alvar Aalto shaped Helsinki or Louis Sullivan designed so much of Chicago. Are there any of Erickson's structures that you think are especially noteworthy?
Absolutely. A visit to Vancouver is not complete without seeing some of Erickson's early works, especially the Museum of Anthropology [at the University of British Columbia], which is a masterpiece. The most important thing about the building is the relationship it has to its site. The structure falls into the site almost like a narrative or movie; there's a cinematic quality to the sequencing of spaces.

And of course you have to include Robson Square, a visionary piece of urban design in the center of Vancouver. It spans three blocks in the middle of downtown, and includes the art gallery, the law courts, and municipal offices. It feels dated in the sense that it was completed in 1980. But Erickson's vision of public space stretching across three city blocks, flowing under one street and over another, is a visionary piece of urban architecture.

Any other older architecture worth seeing?
The Marine Building, a beautiful Art Deco structure that's got the most unbelievable marine-inspired detailing, with ships ▸



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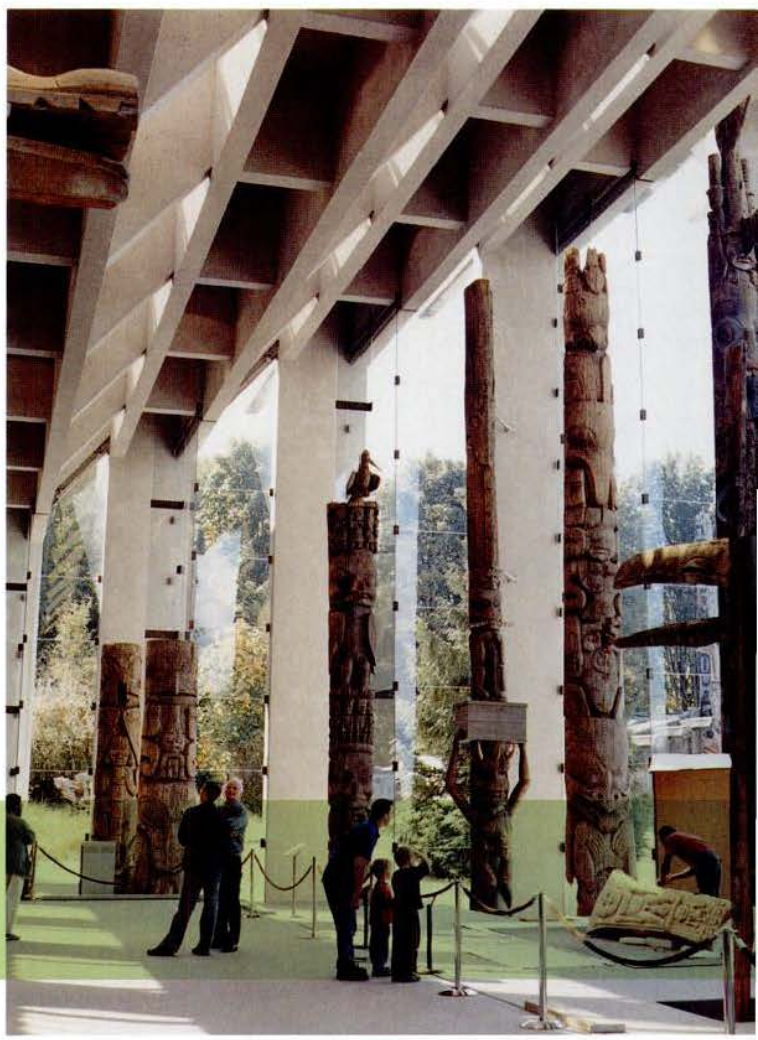

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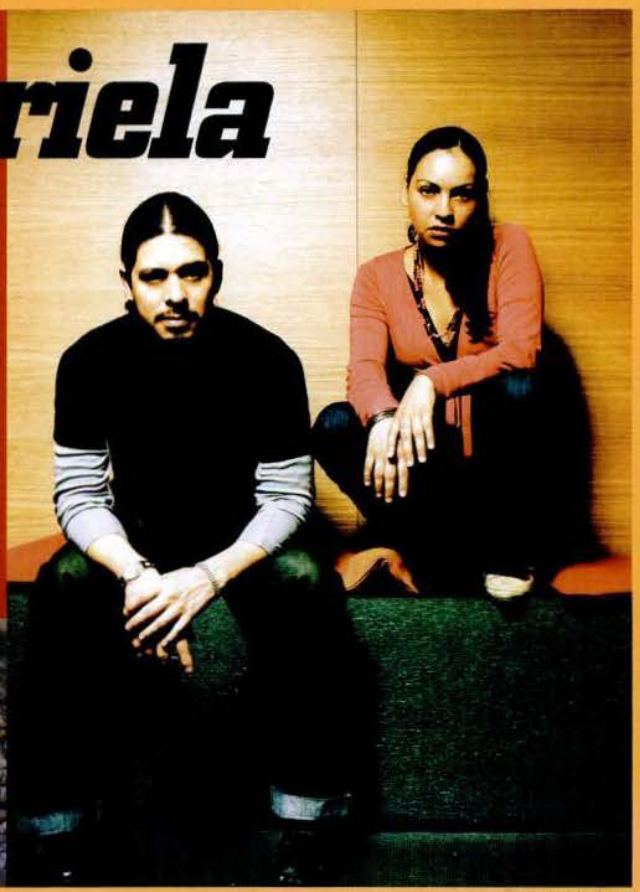

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and mermaids and starfish and octopi. Everywhere you look, every piece of millwork, every door, every stone has this incredibly obsessive and rigorous motif of marine decoration. And it's all carefully handmade. It's very impressive.

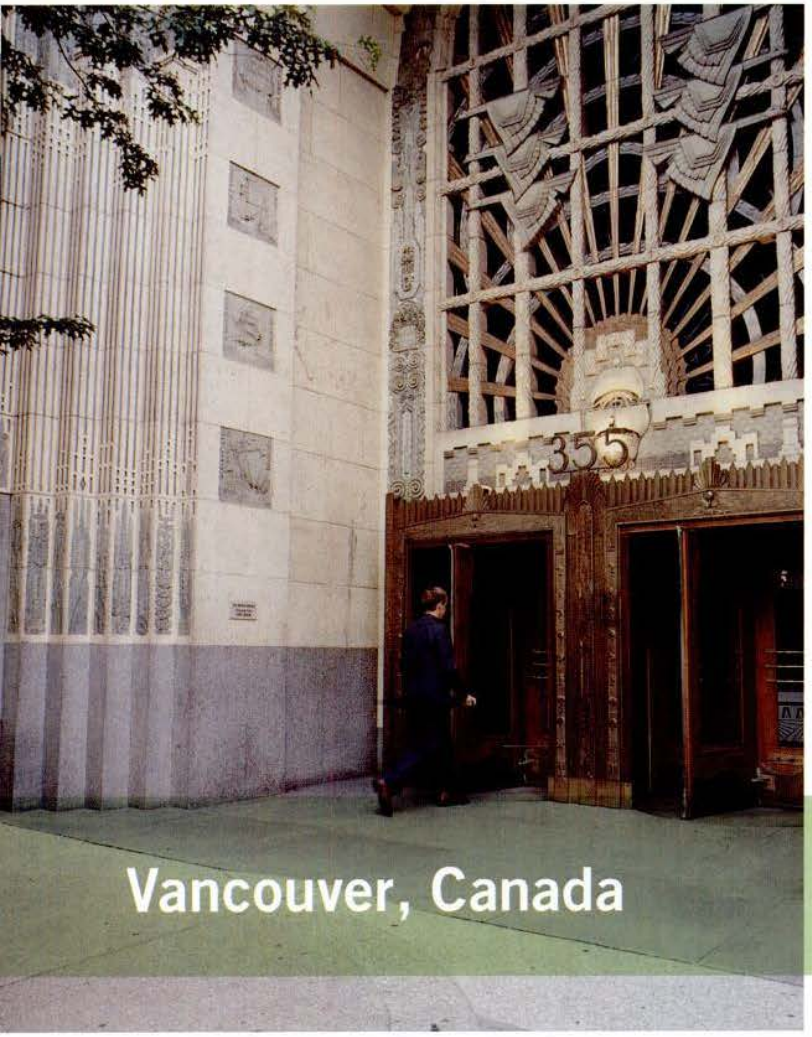
The architecture you've mentioned was all built before the 1980s. There must be some interesting recent architecture?

Yes, John and Patricia Patkau's work. I started my career as an apprentice in their office. I would call them the heirs to Erickson's language.

There's not a lot in the center of the city, but if you're willing to travel, you can see some incredible pieces by them. Their best project is called Strawberry Vale Elementary School [in Saanich, on the southern tip of Vancouver Island]. It's difficult to see because it's an elementary school and parents are justifiably concerned when strangers arrive en masse to look at the building. But if you can see it, it's worth it. It's a series of four-sided pods, where one side is always askew and they're distributed on the site the same way you'd see a bunch of leaves falling on the ground in an erratic pattern. The geometry and form are extremely rigorous and almost logical, but the logic of the building obeys the logic of the site.

When you're done driving and walking around, where would you stop for dinner?

My favorite restaurant is called Vij's. Vikram, the owner, has brought Indian cuisine to a whole new level. People travel from all over the world just to eat there. They don't take reservations, but they have a courtyard with a bar in back. So you're waiting maybe 45 ▸



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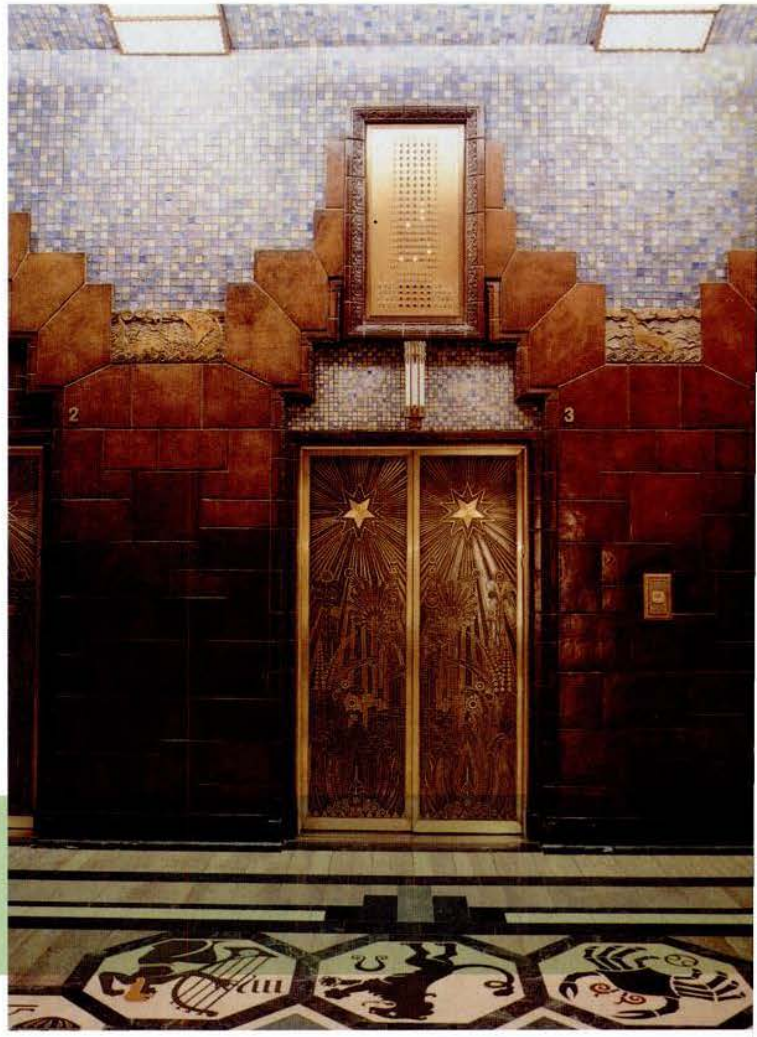
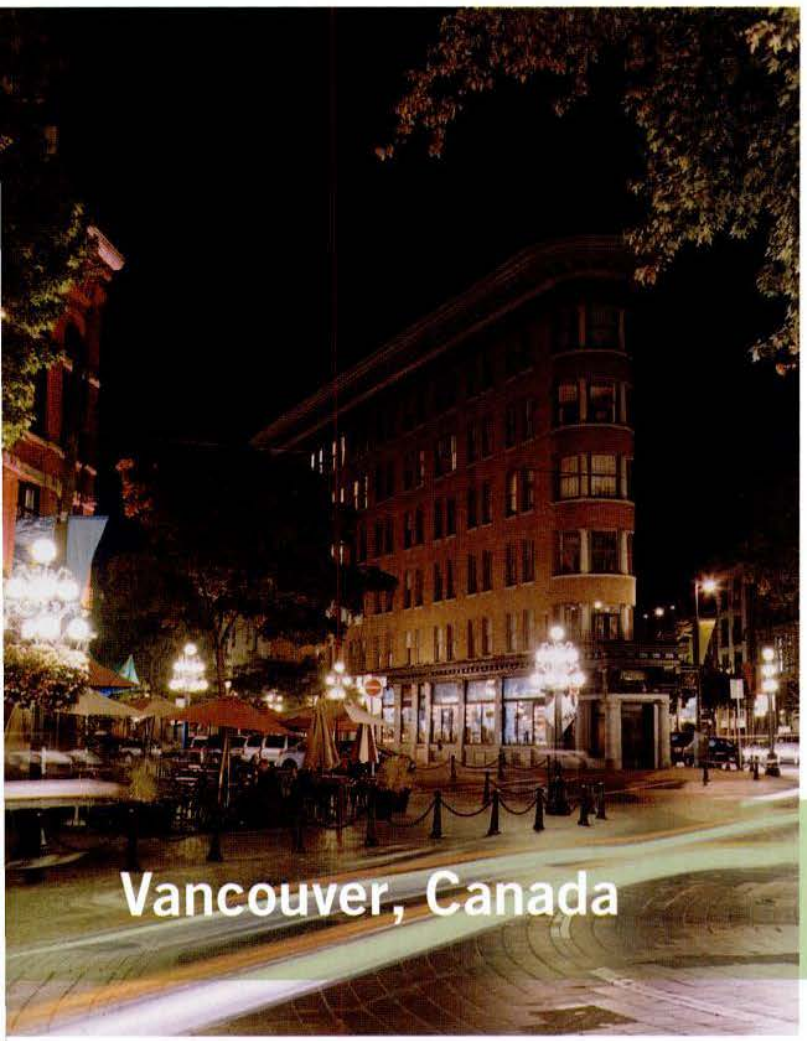


"Things that happen in other cities in five or ten years happen here in half a year," says Arbel, pointing to Gastown (below left) as one example of rapid recent development. The Salt Tasting Room (below right) is the perfect place for a nightcap after a long day of seeing the sights.

minutes for a table, but it's the most enjoyable 45 minutes ever because you're having drinks with friends, you're running into people you know, and Vikram comes around with beautiful little things he prepares. I really like the experience.

Are there any stores you'd recommend checking out?
I'd recommend the new store for Inform Interiors. It's in a neighborhood called Gastown, the historic center of Vancouver but also the entry point of heroin into North America—it's quite an afflicted neighborhood. Then there was this revolution where developers bought all the scary crack houses to turn them into cool places. Inform did just that and has an amazing collection of fine objects and furniture that they inserted into this deteriorating landscape.

Vancouver still seems pretty quiet after dark. Are there any places to go after dinner if you don't want to hang out at your hotel and simply partake of the minibar offerings?
There's a restaurant called Salt Tasting Room, one block over from Inform. You have to walk through a cobblestone alley called Blood Alley to get there; it might have gotten that name because there was crazy gang warfare there in the 1800s. Since then, it's become a rough alley with heroin use. But then Salt put in a great wine and tasting bar. And you're sitting there having a glass of wine, eating honeycomb from the Okanagan Valley, and some cured meats from Spain, and right across the glass from you, someone is shooting up—it's this completely insane juxtaposition. It's shocking gentrification on one hand, and on the other hand, a feeling that this is how a city grows. ■



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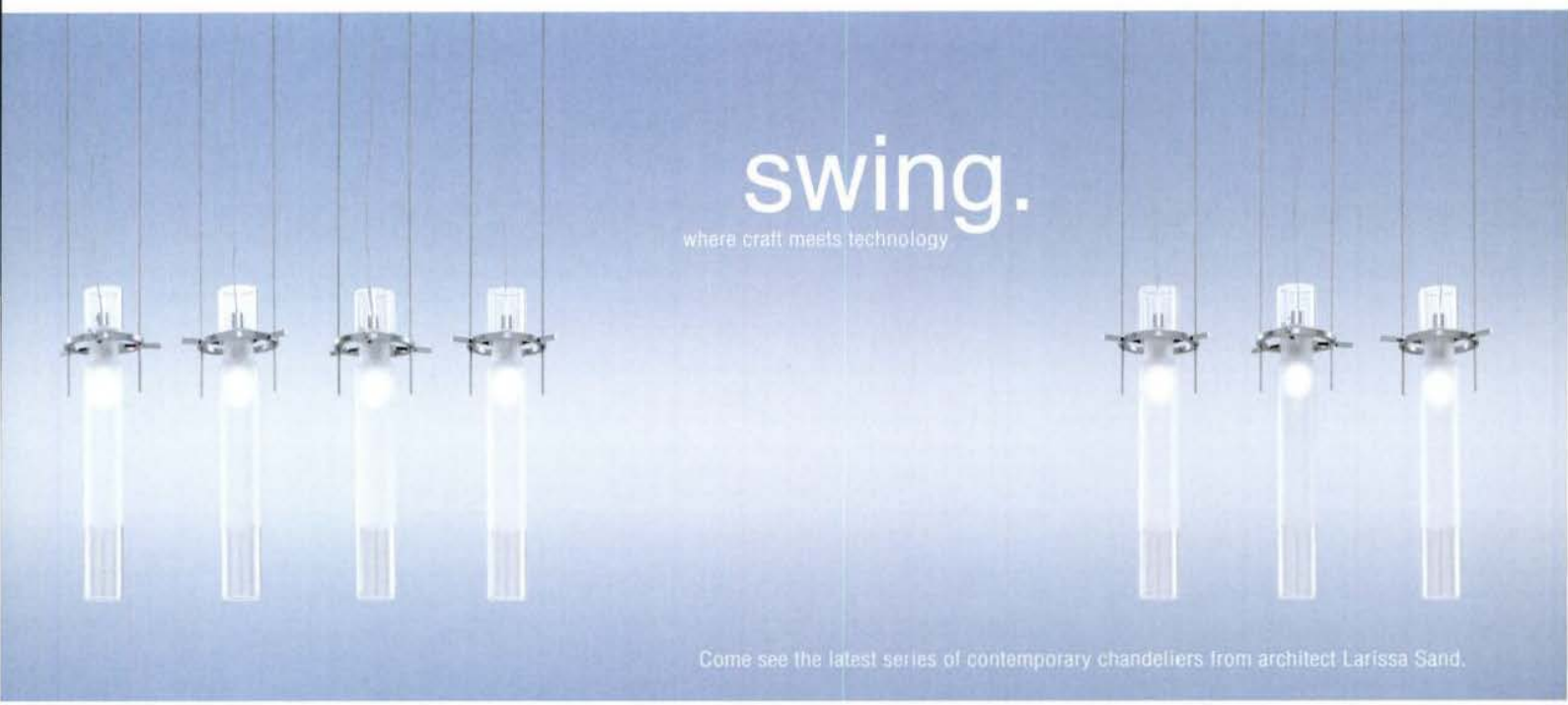

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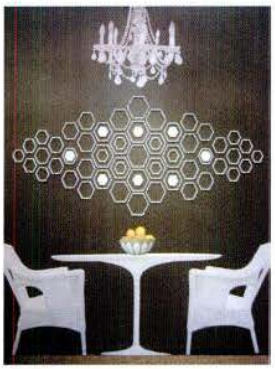

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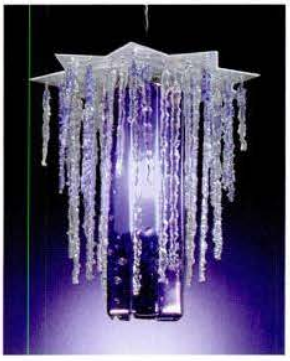

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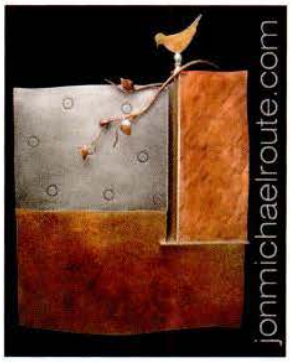

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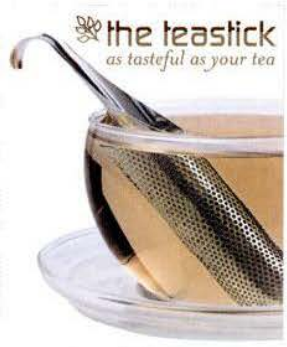

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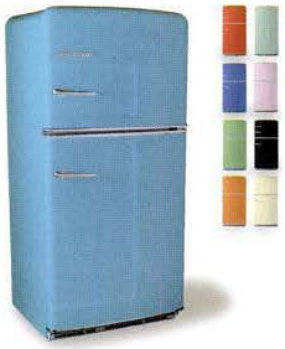

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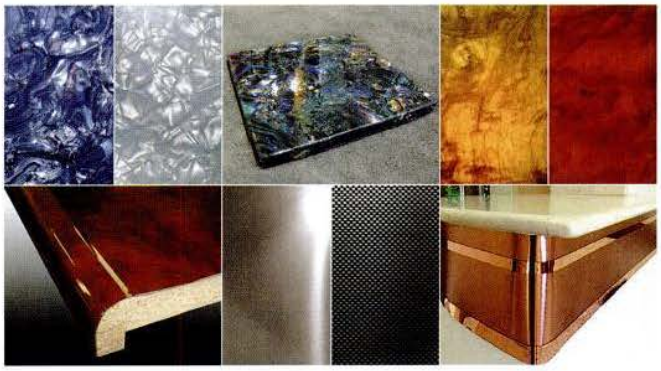

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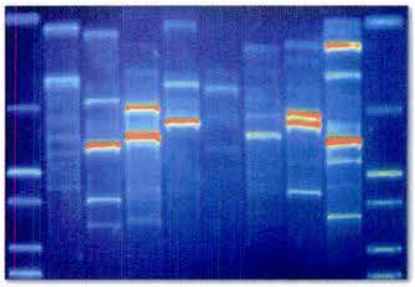

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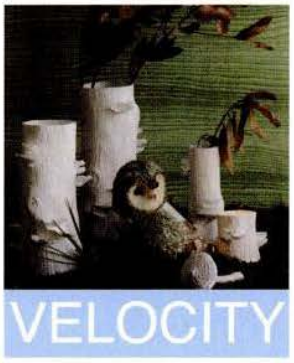

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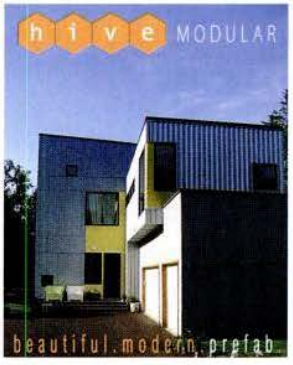

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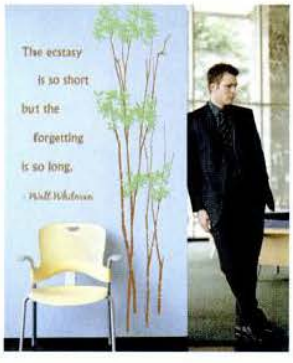

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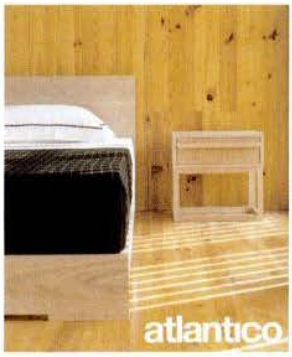

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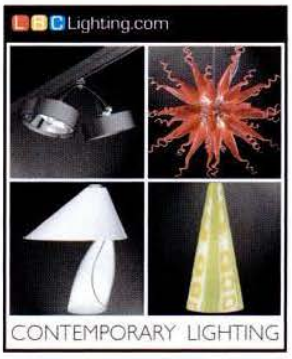

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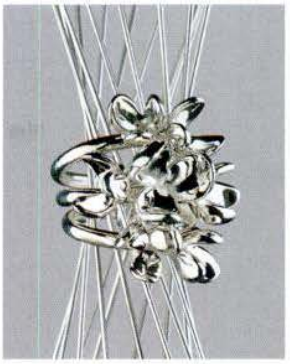

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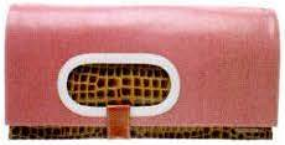

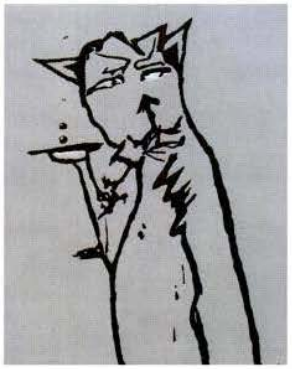

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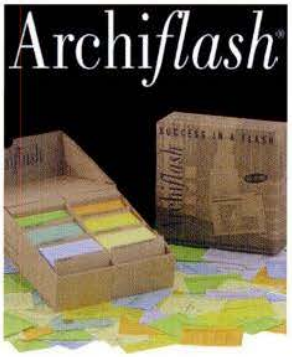

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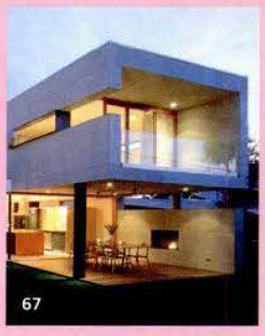

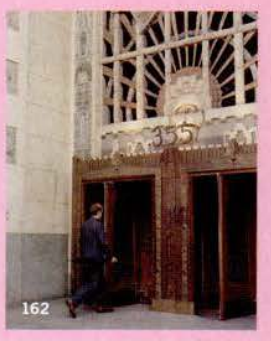

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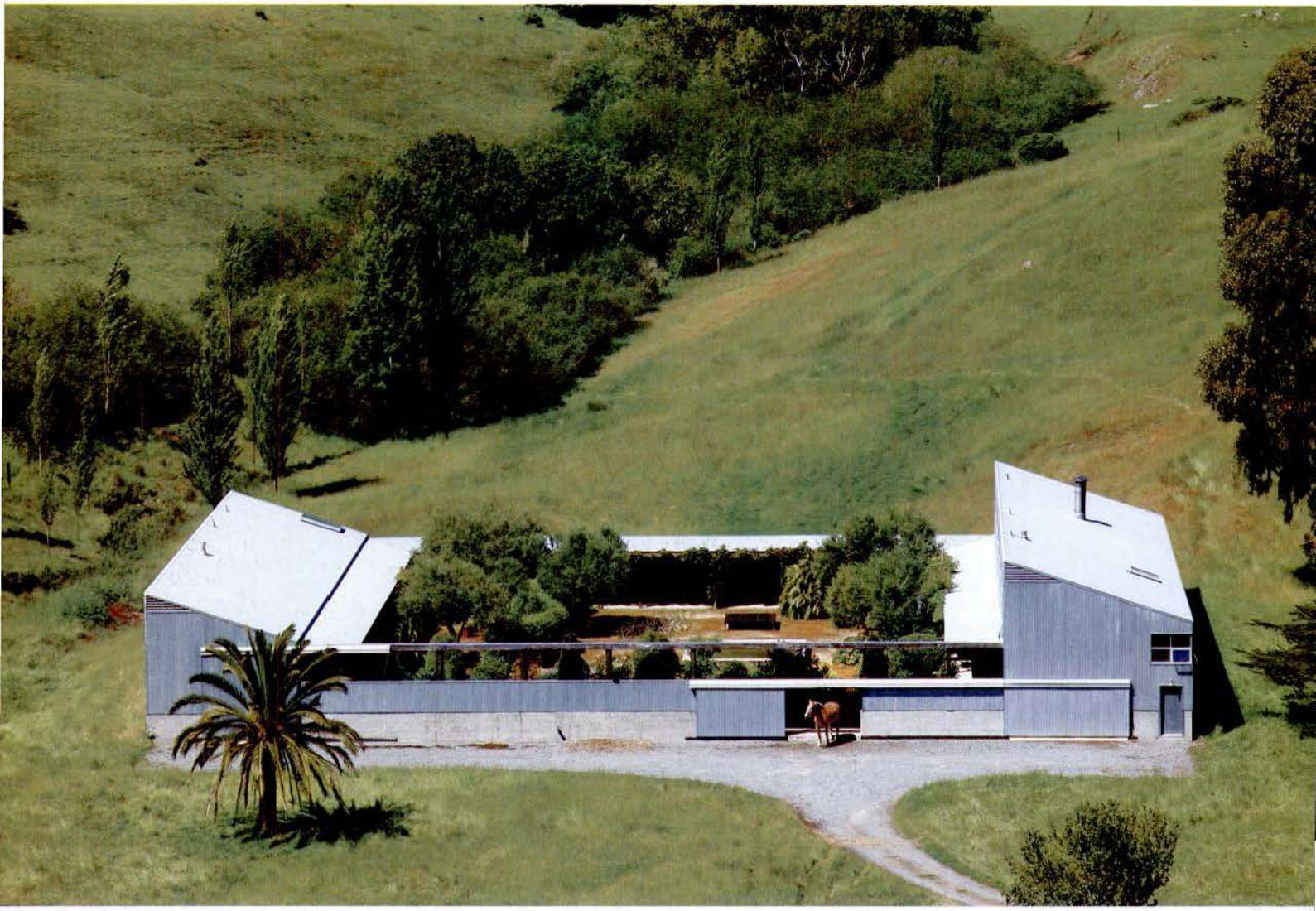

Back at the Ranch

Nestled in the hills of Marin County, California, overlooking Tomales Bay and the absolving tide of the Pacific Ocean sits Hillclimb Ranch, home of Big Betty. The 28-year-old Belgian draft horse isn't the only resident, however; owner Jeff Zwart, his wife, Terri, and their two children also occupy the modern steel-clad ranch home from time to time.

The first thing one notices after crossing the concrete bridge approaching the property is the expansive 5,000-square-foot enclosed courtyard. Olive trees, California poppies, and grape plants create a private reserve between the geometric structures that bookend the enclosure. "It's the way that it utilizes the outdoors that makes it so nice," says Zwart. The yard is protected from the wind, giving it an intimate feeling, while the vast 667-acre property stretches toward the horizon. The juxtaposition creates a pleasant tension, welcoming nature to coalesce with the controlled comfort of the constructed space.

Original owners and architects David Morton and Thomas Cordell integrated the landscape into the design of the house, putting the structure in tune with its surroundings and creating a dialogue between the interior and exterior areas. Zwart credits the original homestead site as the ideal environment to accomplish this exchange, located amongst a thicket of trees and near the year-round stream that bisects the property. "It's exactly where the house should be," he assures.

Betty, like the rest of the natural elements, is often brought into the cozy confines of the courtyard. After years of pulling carriages around town in Colorado, her only responsibility now is to serve as the "giant lawn mower," keeping the sod trim and enjoying the elements from the pastoral repose of Hillclimb Ranch. ■

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