

A portrait of Peter Bohlin, an older man with light hair and a slight smile, wearing a light blue button-down shirt over a red t-shirt. He has a pen in his shirt pocket. The background is a gradient of yellow and blue.

residential architect

A HANLEY-WOOD PUBLICATION / JUNE 2000

master of the house

peter bohlin
wins the
hall of fame award

the 2000
leadership
awards

top firm: centerbrook architects /
rising star: SALA architects

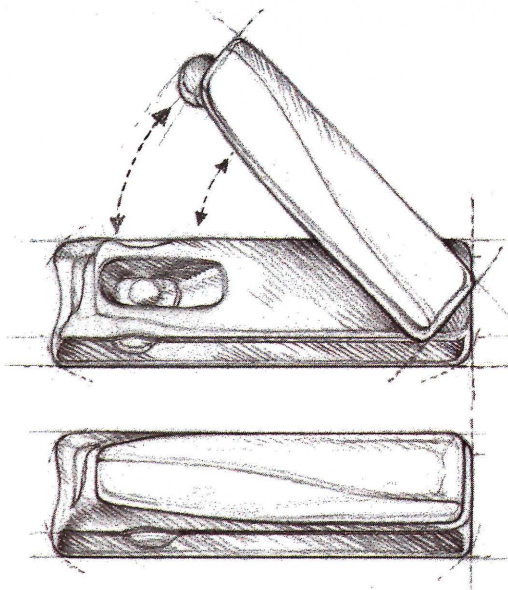
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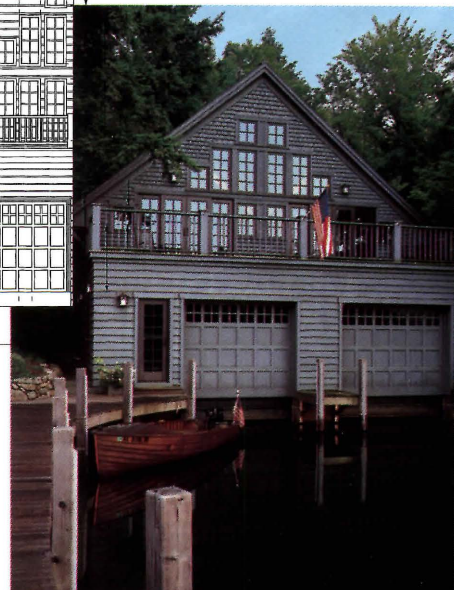


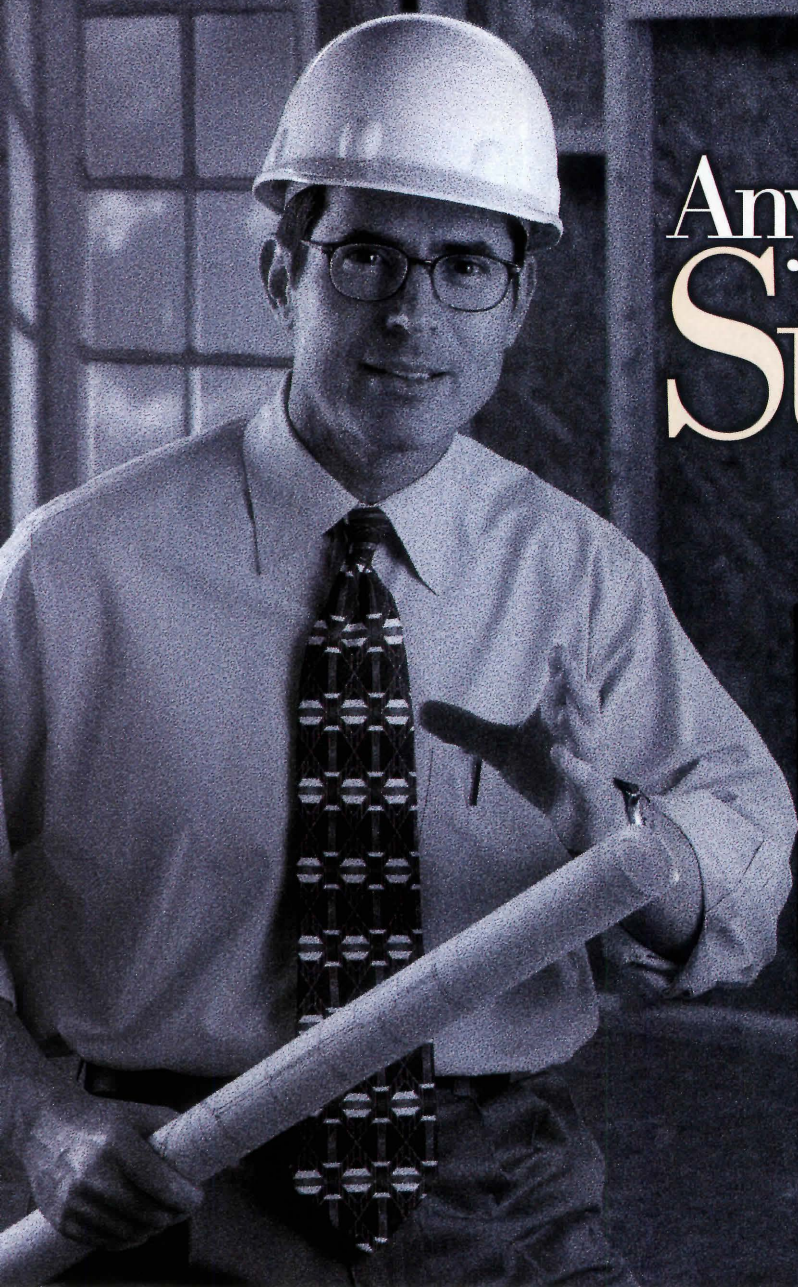
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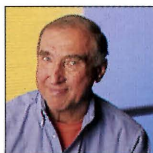


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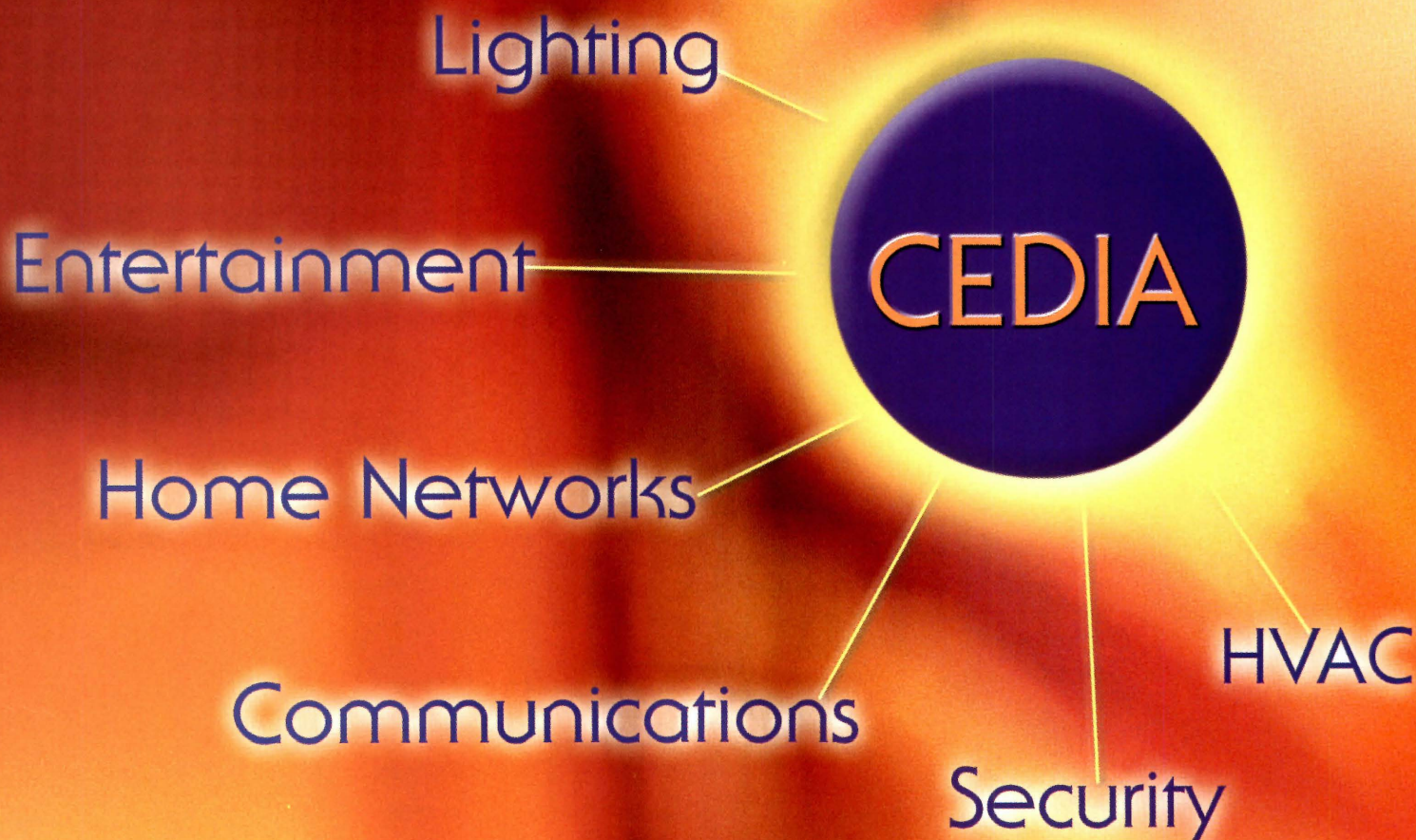
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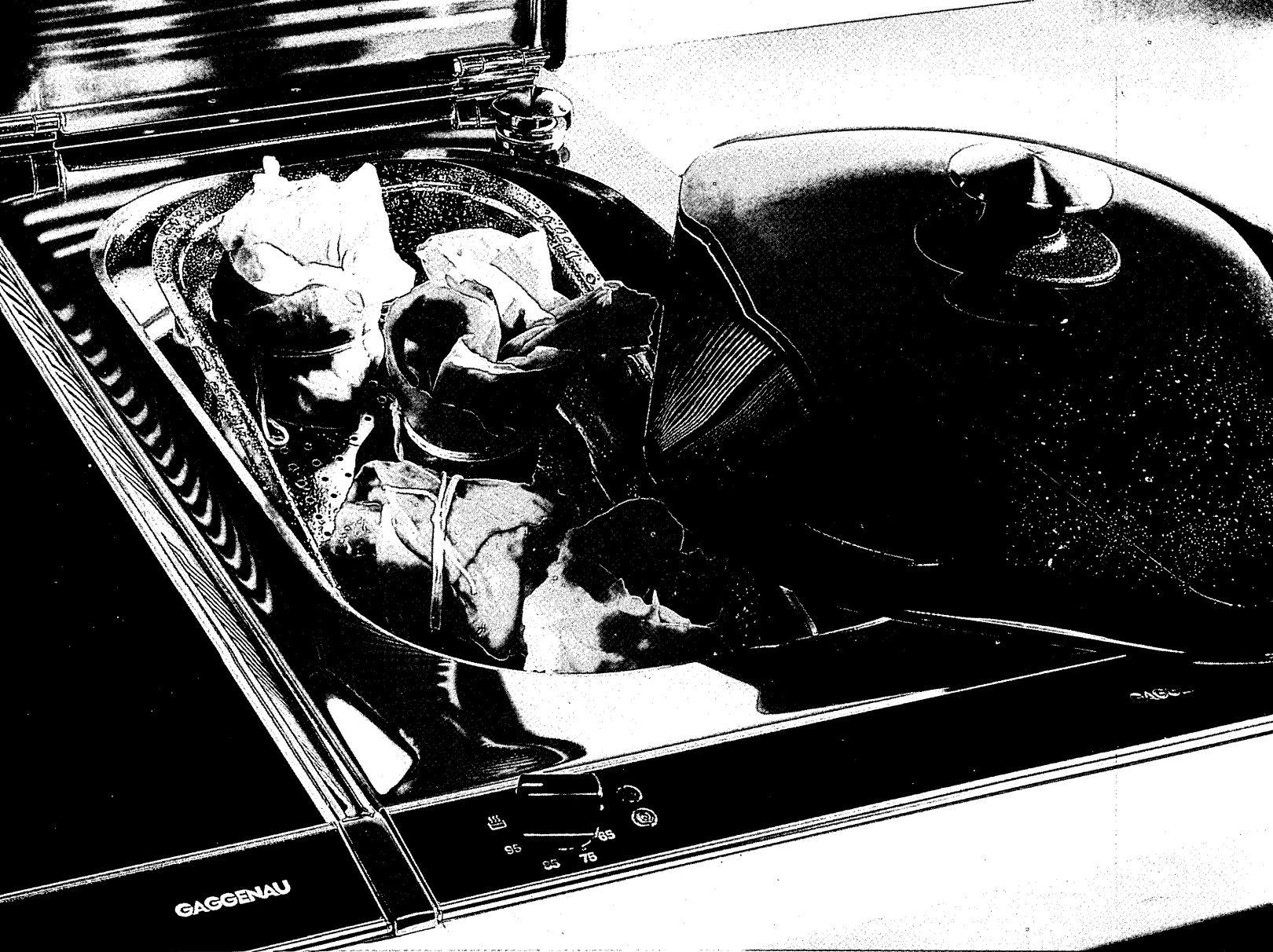
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S. Claire Conroy / Editor / 202.736.3312 / cconroy@hanley-wood.com

Judy H. Neighbor / Art Director / 202.736.3331 / jneighbor@hanley-wood.com

Amy Doherty / Managing Editor / 202.736.3442 / adoherty@hanley-wood.com

Meghan Drueding / Senior Editor / 202.736.3344 / mdruedin@hanley-wood.com

Nigel F. Maynard / Associate Editor / 202.736.3438 / nmaynard@hanley-wood.com

Shelley Hutchins / Assistant Editor / 202.736.3407 / shutchins@hanley-wood.com

Katy Tomasulo / Assistant Editor, Products / 202.736.3403 / ktomasulo@hanley-wood.com

Kristina K. Goings / Graphic Designer

Catherine Underwood / Production Director

Karen Fulcher / Production Manager

Greta Springett / Ad Traffic Manager

George Brown / Digital Imaging Manager

Betty Kerwin / Digital Imaging Coordinator

Lucy Hansen / Marketing Director

Tim Ahlering / Publisher

Contributors

Susan Bradford Barror

Rich Binsacca

Vernon Mays

Rick Vitullo

Cheryl Weber



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Editorial and Advertising Offices:

One Thomas Circle, N.W., Suite 600

Washington, DC 20005

Phone 202.452.0800 / Fax 202.785.1974

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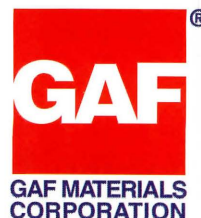
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from the editor

follow the leaders

some of the best in the business share the secrets of their success.

by s. claire conroy

Why do we love stories about successful people so much? A&E built a hit cable station largely on the popularity of its celebrity biographies. But every medium has plumbed the lives of the rich and famous, looking for the secrets of their success. Maybe if we watch, read, or listen closely enough, we'll figure out how to grab the brass ring for ourselves.

Learning by example is very effective. And finding great examples for you to learn from is the essential mission of *residential architect*. We're here to help you improve your business by introducing you to the best in the profession. Nearly every issue profiles a talented residential architect or architectural firm, and if you look closely at the chronicle you'll find the reasons behind those triumphs.

In this issue, we pay special tribute to several outstanding residential architects with our 2000 Leadership Awards. Selected by the editors of *residential architect* for their exceptional accomplishments in both design and practice, these architects are leaders by example. They've set standards that all residential architects would do well to

emulate. And so, we choose Centerbrook Architects and Planners as our Top Firm of the year and SALA Architects as our Rising Star winner. But we've also singled out one individual for a Hall of Fame award: We honor Peter Bohlin, FAIA, of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, for his outstanding career achievement as a designer of beautiful, one-of-a-kind houses. Our winners' stories begin on page 41.

You'll want to give extra attention to their profiles, because these architects don't just excel in one area—they do everything exceedingly well. Oddly enough, the one thing our Leadership Award-winners do best is follow. They follow their clients' hearts, the spirit and topography of the sites, the exigencies of the budgets. Filtered through their prodigious abilities, this talent for following has led them to create a remarkably diverse portfolio of custom houses.

Peter Bohlin claims he learned some of his most valuable lessons in residential design by following—of all things—trout. "I was a fisherman, and developed a kind of empathy with the trout, where and how they would be moving," he explains. "I began to understand the nature of the place—its sense of life, a



Photo: Katherine Lambert

sense of the breeze. I think making terrific places has everything to do with the way we relate to those places. We try to fuel that web of connections that centers around people."

The houses our winners design are people-pleasers in the best sense of that expression. And the most important person to please is the client. "I'm not a believer in making architecture that disturbs people," says Centerbrook partner William Grover, FAIA. "It is arrogant of architects to project their own ambitions on clients."

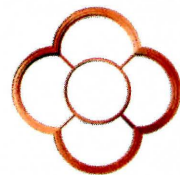
The partners at Centerbrook learned that lesson from the firm's founder, icon Charles Moore. "A lot of things in the architectural life push you to give up:

timid clients, money issues, value engineering—all these things that normally would fight against good design," says partner Mark Simon, FAIA. "Chuck would look to all these problems as opportunities. He'd say, 'OK, how can we make the project more interesting when we edit it down? Not *as* interesting, *more* interesting!' That has stuck with us."

Maybe some of our leaders' lessons will stick with you, too. Start reaching for that brass ring now. **ra**

Questions or comments?
Call me: 202.736.3312;
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letters

keep those cards, letters, and e-mails coming, folks.

a different perspective

the Perspective article by Jonathan Eck ("Quality Time," March, page 42) regarding the role of architects—or the lack thereof—in the production housing market is the third article of this nature I've read during the last year. Finally! The architectural community at large (well, at small, maybe) is seeing the potential of this market

and the design challenges presented within.

I've been servicing the builder market for the last 10 years. My client base is made up of some local builders and a couple of builders out of state. All of my work comes to me by word of mouth. Such referrals are based on my reputation for clear, concise working drawings and for home designs that are marketable as well as cost-effective.

The cost-effective part is where so many architects have failed. Most builders have an idea of the target price that they want to present to a given market. That includes a target cost that they can afford to build per square foot of living space. That cost may vary from builder to builder, but to hit that mark, the quality of the design of the "product" will be based on efficient use of standard materials (floor joists,

sheathing, roof trusses).

Design must begin with an understanding of these materials and their inherent capacities while creating the product that the builder wants to convey to his market. Too many times, we architects try to design first and force the structure to follow "our" designs. The result is usually a great-looking house with a prohibitive construction cost through materials misused and wasted.



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Gary M. Wancour
G. Michael Wancour
Architects
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touché

all I can say is “touché” in response to a statement in the January issue’s editorial that I think should go down in architectural history: “But what is the rest of the world to live in? A builder box with a Palladian window?” (“Good Neighborhood Policy,” page 13.)

My colleagues and I live in a state dominated by production/volume builders. They literally define the look of housing here. I guess you hit it on the head: We have no one to blame but ourselves. Your brief but poignant article has caused all of us to rethink our position on designing production homes. Utah doesn’t have to be the Cookie-Cutter-House Capital of the West!

Thank you for your insights.

James Fennell
via e-mail

redlines

In “Architects’ Choice,” in the April issue, we ran the wrong photo for Marvin’s Inswing French Door (page 81). The correct photo and text follow.

head of the glass

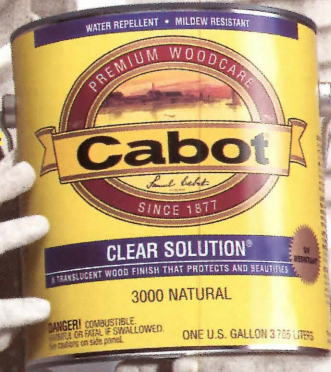
Marvin’s Inswing French Door comes in a variety of sizes and configurations, with authentic or simulated divided lights. The company has released several new products over the past year, including a line of swinging screens for its French doors, a double-hung window designed for easy cleaning, and new



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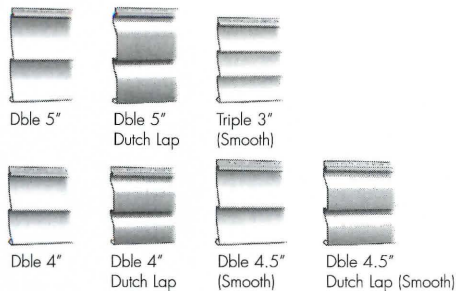
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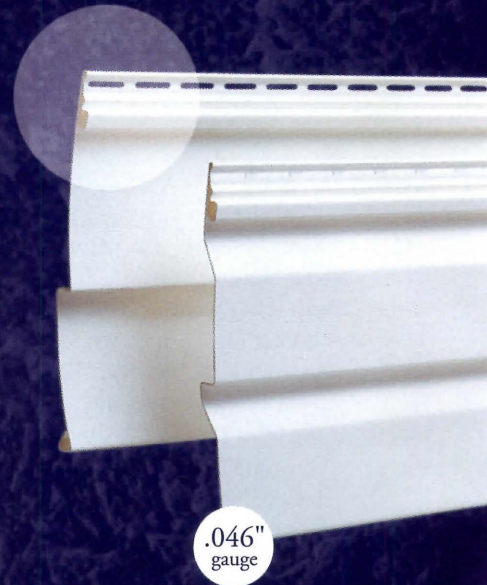
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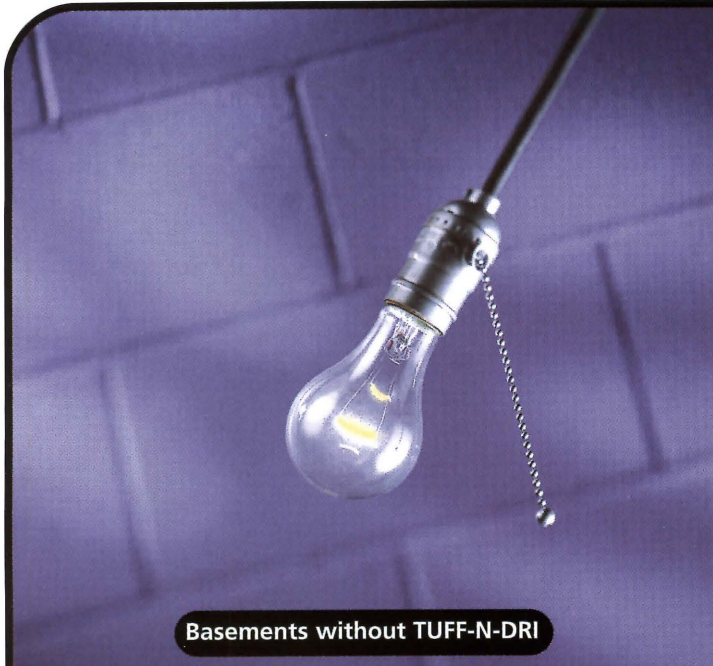
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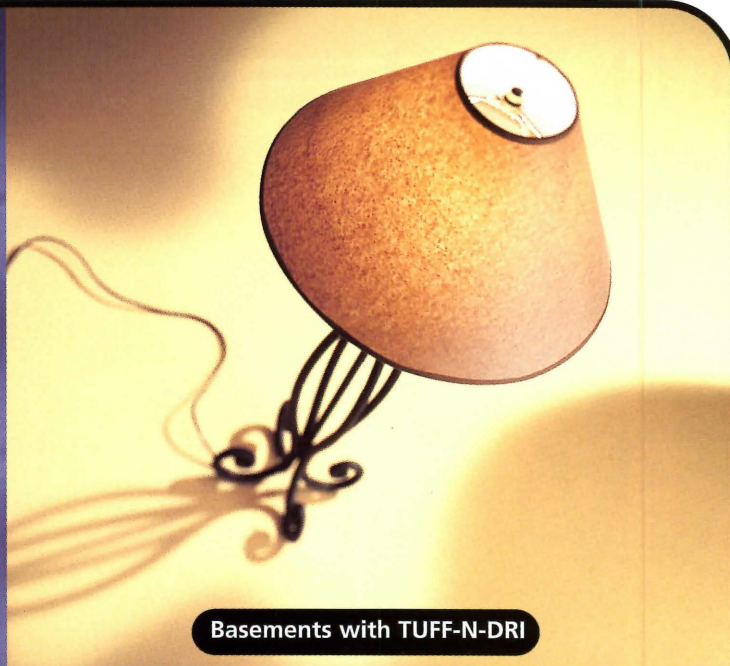
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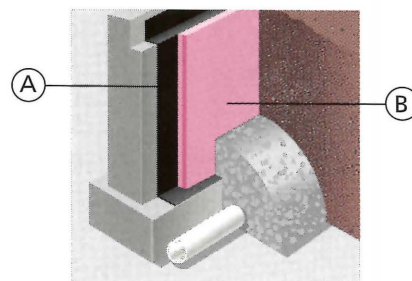
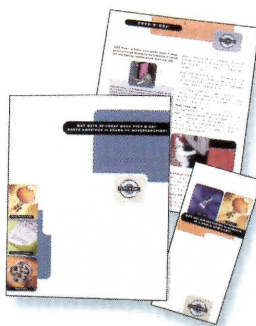
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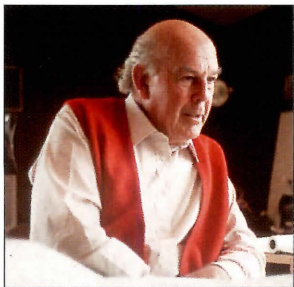
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home front

tips and trends from the world of residential design

lauding lautner

With their arresting geometric forms and wide-open interiors, the homes John Lautner created expanded the boundaries of American residential architecture. Although he was strongly influenced by his mentor, Frank Lloyd Wright, Lautner's work bore the unmistakable stamp of his own innovative approach to design. "My father's homes are each an original and there's no duplication anywhere," says his daughter



© John Lautner Foundation

Karol Lautner Peterson. "One of his fellow Taliesin apprentices said to me that my father had gone beyond Wright and found a style distinctly his own."

Viewed as too radical during much of his lifetime, this prolific architect's work has recently begun to receive the recog-

nition it deserves. Two books about him have been published over the past year; another has been reissued. And now, thanks to the efforts of his daughter and former associates, there's a foundation dedicated to preserving his legacy.

The idea for the John Lautner Foundation first took shape in Peterson's mind after her father's death in 1994. Some six years later, the foundation is up and running. Its immediate goal is to catalog the vast archives of Lautner's work, but its long-term mission is to "further educate the public on the understanding of his work and principles," Peterson says. To find out more about the organization, or to volunteer any information you may have about a Lautner house, call 323.951.1061 or visit www.johnlautner.org.—shelley d. hutchins



"the purpose of architecture is to improve human life."

—john lautner

book report: picture perfect

Leland Roth's *Shingle Styles* and Ann Wall Frank's *Northwest Style* will look nice on a table in your office. If beauty alone is enough for you, reach for Frank's tour of residential design in the Pacific Northwest. If you want brains, too, you'll find Roth's book a more satisfying browse. Both publications are sorely lacking in floor plans, however, so it's a stretch to call them serious architecture books.

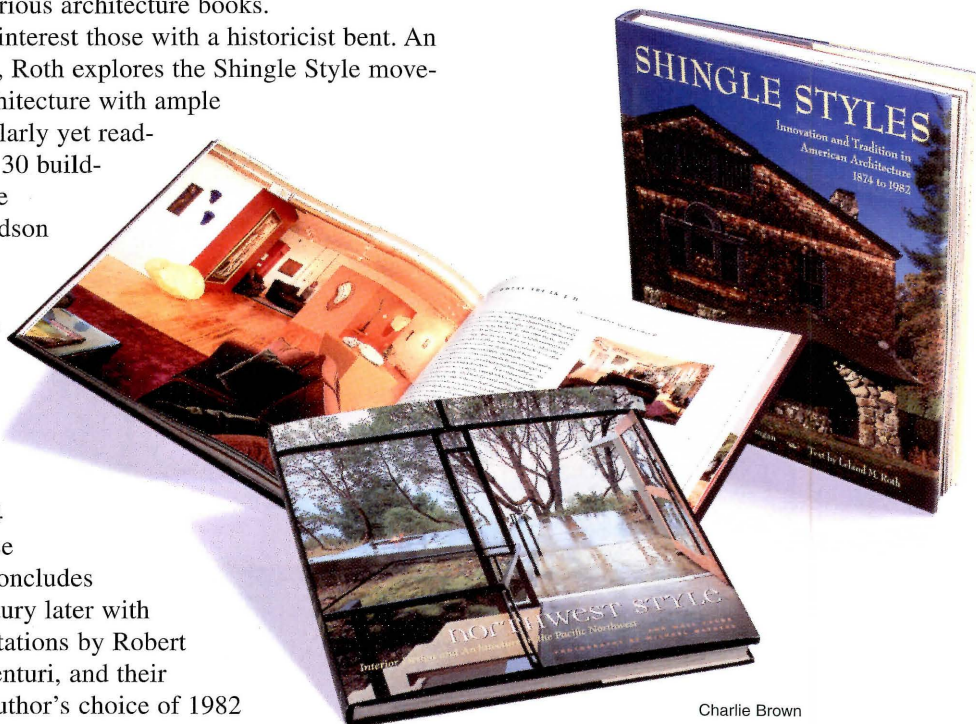
Shingle Styles will interest those with a historicist bent. An architectural historian, Roth explores the Shingle Style movement in American architecture with ample photography and scholarly yet readable text. He presents 30 buildings by eminences like Henry Hobson Richardson and McKim, Mead & White, and by less-known architects such as the colorful Kirtland Cutter of Spokane, Wash.

Roth organizes the book chronologically, starting in 1874 in the style's birthplace of Newport, R.I. He concludes the book nearly a century later with Shingle Style interpretations by Robert A.M. Stern, Robert Venturi, and their contemporaries (the author's choice of 1982 to close the book seems inexplicably arbitrary).

Roth's lengthy introduction is the most compelling part of the book. In it, he traces worldwide influences that shaped the exuberantly American Shingle Style. The individual building profiles are well researched and presented, and the photos are lovely indeed. But the dearth of floor plans is frankly frustrating.

Ann Wall Frank's *Northwest Style* is long on style and nearly devoid of substance. It is graphically crisp, and the houses Frank presents are diverse and well-designed. The author is careful to drop names—of owners, interior designers, and, oh yes, of architects, too. She is far more coy about revealing the ages of the houses she writes about, which leads me to suspect that we are not seeing the region's most current work.

Enjoy this book for its fine photography, for the text reads like a decorating magazine.—*susan bradford barror*



Charlie Brown

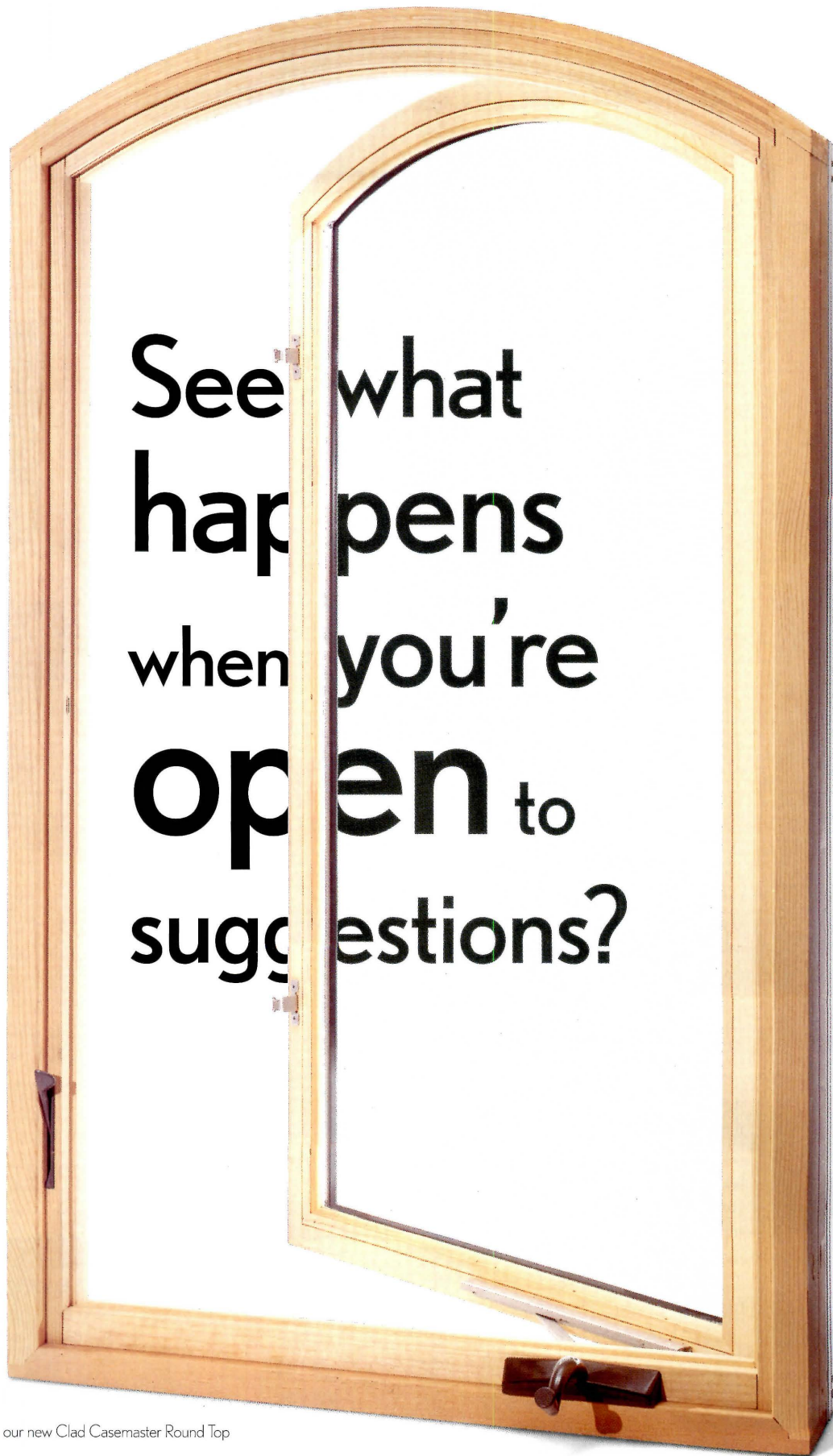
Shingle Styles. Leland M. Roth; photography by Bret Morgan. 238 pages. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers. 1999. \$50 (hardcover). 800.759.0190; www.abramsbooks.com.

Northwest Style. Ann Wall Frank; photography by Michael Mathers. 203 pages. San Francisco: Chronicle Books. 1999. \$40 (hardcover). 800.722.6657; www.chroniclebooks.com.



Photos: Julius Shulman

John Lautner (far left) designed houses that respond to their sites in bold yet practical ways. The concrete wave sweeping over the 1968 Stevens Residence (above) combats the effects of salty sea air. The 1960 Chemosphere (left), a wood and steel structure supported by a concrete column, satisfied stringent earthquake requirements.



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a way of life: an apprenticeship with frank lloyd wright, 1948–89

through june 23

aia headquarters gallery, washington, d.c.

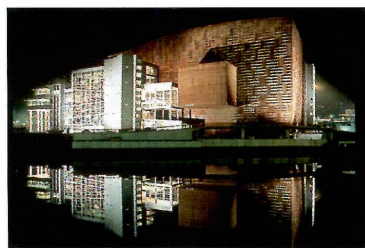
This photo of Mr. and Mrs. Wright in their Taliesin garden was taken by architect Lois Davidson Gottlieb during her time as an apprentice to Frank Lloyd Wright in the late '40s. The exhibit features 57 of her photographs from Taliesin and Taliesin West. Call 202.626.7387 for gallery hours.



bilbao: the transformation of a city

through july 16

art institute of chicago



© Aitor Ortiz

This collection of plans, drawings, models, and photographs highlights about a dozen recent architectural projects in Bilbao, Spain. Shown here: Euskalduna Performing Arts and Conference Center, 1999. For more information, call 312.443.3600.

the white house in miniature

through september 17

national building museum, washington, d.c.

Using models, photographs, drawings, and artifacts, this exhibit explores the ways in which the White House has been refurbished, redecorated, renovated, and rebuilt over the past 200 years. The show's centerpiece is a 10-ton, 60-foot miniature model of the executive mansion. To check museum hours, call 202.272.2448 or go to www.nbm.org.

collecting architecture

through october 13

the athenaeum of philadelphia

This exhibition features highlights from the Athenaeum's collection of more than 180,000 original American architectural drawings. Shown here: Thomas Ustick Walter's design for the new dome and wings of the U.S. Capitol. Call 215.925.2688 for more information.



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d2k: connecting the dots the aia diversity conference 2000

august 4–6

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The biennial conference of the AIA's Diversity Committee will focus on practice, design, and leadership. For more information, visit www.e-architect.com/pia/diversity; call 800.242.3837; or e-mail athompson@aia.org.

continuing exhibits

National Design Triennial, through August 6, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York, 212.849.8300; **At the End of the Century: One Hundred Years of Architecture** (traveling exhibit), through September 24, Geffen Contemporary, Los Angeles, 213.626.6222; **The Home Show**, including the traveling exhibit *The Un-Private House*, June 3–August 20, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 612.375.7622.

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WHEN	THE EVENT	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
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JUNE 19	Building Evaluation Training Series One-Week Live Course	Utah	The architect will be better able to identify some of the most important and common defects in existing homes in such areas as structural, exterior, basic roofing, electrical, plumbing and heating, and air conditioning. Contact Donna Harbuck at info@hometraining.com .
JULY 8	Solar Hot Water Design and Insulation	Hopland, CA	This class will provide you with a survey of various passive and active solar hot water systems available for domestic and small commercial applications. Contact Karen Hensley at isl@rgisl.org .
JULY 12-16	AIBD's 50th Annual Convention	San Diego, CA	AIBD's 50th Annual Convention is the most comprehensive marketplace for building designers to exchange information and ideas and earn continuing education credits. Contact aibdnat@aol.com .
OCTOBER 2	Accessibility and Historic Integrity	Alexandria, VA	Learn how to preserve the significance and integrity of Historic structures, while making them accessible to people with mobility, hearing, sight and other disabilities. Contact Jere Gibber at info@npi.org .

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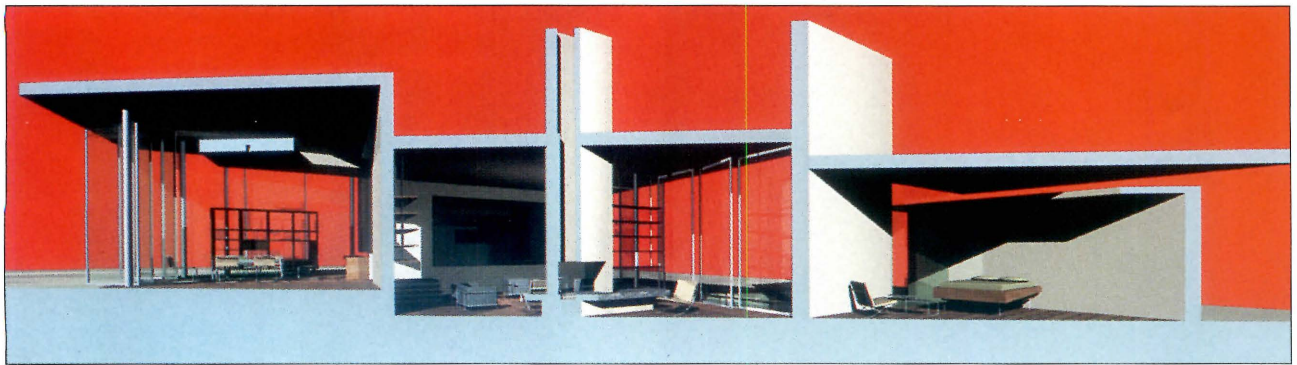
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Renderings courtesy Kanner Architects

hot house

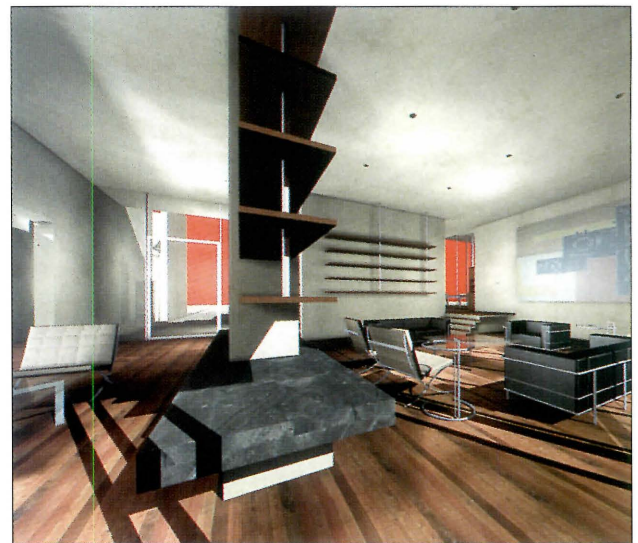
this house in hot, hip Palm Springs, Calif., won an award for unbuilt projects from the Los Angeles chapter of the AIA. Sited on a hill overlooking the main shopping street, the home will blend right in with that mecca of vintage modernism.

“The design ethic responds to the desert quality, light quality, views, and vista,” says Stephen Kanner, FAIA, whose firm, Kanner Architects, Los Angeles,

designed the house.

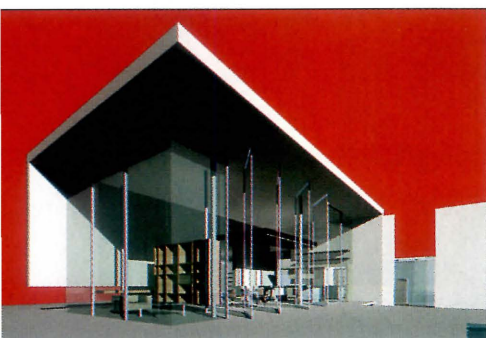
Poured-in-place concrete forms, clad in travertine marble, will become wings that pierce and slide past each other. In a nod to Richard

Neutra, the same paving systems go inside and out, linking interior and exterior. Deep overhangs cloak the house in cool shadows, and floor-to-ceiling glass panels on a



central pivot welcome the evening and winter air. “Most people in Palm Springs keep their windows closed,” Kanner says. “We tried to achieve sculptural forms rather than a wall with little window punches.”

The clients, empty-nesters, didn’t need more than 3,000 square feet. But the living areas have a flowing plan and flexible elements such as a room divider in the library that will rotate on wheels to open up an entire kitchen/sitting wing when the space is needed.—*cheryl weber*





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show buzz

More than 40,000 architects and other design professionals braved blustery April weather to gather at the 2000 Kitchen/Bath Industry Show in Chicago. The show featured the latest in kitchen and bath products, as well as lectures

and trend forecasts from industry

experts. Some oft-mentioned concepts:

Ease of use. Integrated drawer systems, “smart” appliances, mobile islands, butcher-block countertops, hanging pot racks, second sinks, quick-cooking ovens (Maytag’s Accellis range is shown at left), commercial-style ranges.

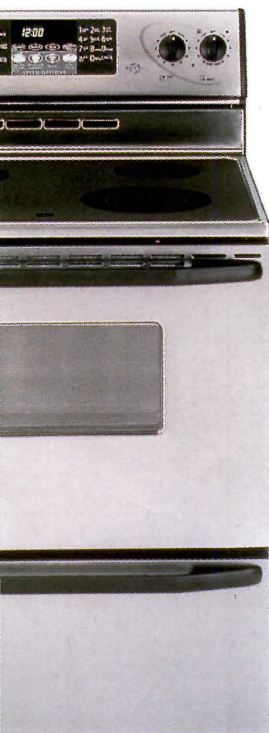
Universal/accessible design.

Ergonomically placed appliances, varying counter heights, better

task lighting, auxiliary kitchens.

Bath as sanctuary. Clear or translucent finishes, light blues and greens, natural woods, soft curves, “high-touch” faucets and fixtures.

Back to nature. Bamboo and cork flooring, faucets with built-in water filters, indoor and outdoor grills, energy-saving products.



John Massengale

Andres Duany speaks in Leon Krier’s meeting hall at Windsor, in Vero Beach, Fla., during the Institute of Traditional Architecture’s inauguration.

new school

the Prince of Wales’ Institute of Architecture in London closed its doors two years ago, but a similar venture is being reborn on this side of the pond. In May, Andres Duany, Leon Krier, and Ray Gindroz—architects well-known in the New Urbanism movement—launched the Institute for Traditional Architecture.

“The energy and momentum of what had been going on in London needed to be perpetuated,” says ITA executive director Richard John, the former director of the Prince of Wales’ Institute. “The Classical tradition, regional vernaculars, and local crafts are in increasing danger of being lost.”

Based in Miami, the ITA is the brainchild of professors at the University of Miami School of Architecture, though it operates as a legally autonomous organization. It seeks out three types of constituents: architecture grads wanting a remedial course in Traditional design; those in related disciplines, such as landscape architects, builders, and craftspeople; and career changers who need a portfolio to get into a university program or to be considered for advanced standing. For one full year of study, which costs \$6,000, the ITA offers a certificate in Traditional design, but no formal education credits.

Paced to allow students to hold down full-time jobs, the year-long program combines local apprenticeships, long-distance learning via the Internet, and three on-site symposia. Students will work with a network of local tutors on nine juried projects throughout the year. Then, says John, “students will send in their work, we’ll assemble a jury in Miami, and students will log on and present their projects.”

The network of tutors also amounts to a kind of support group for Traditional-minded architects who might be excluded from teaching in universities, John adds. “It gives them an opportunity to come together with like-minded practitioners.”

For more information, call 786.268.0147 or go to the ITA’s Web site: <http://intranet.arc.miami.edu/rjohn/ita.html>.—c.w.

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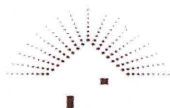
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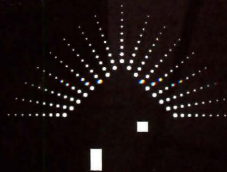


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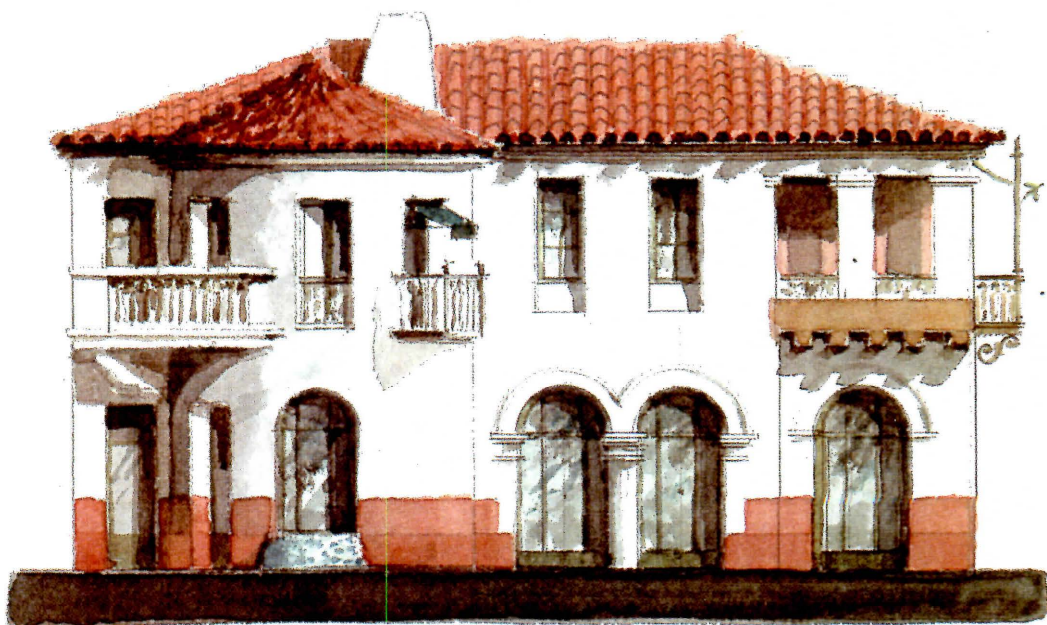
CAD programs may rule the workaday architectural world,
but for client presentations, the pen is still mightier than the computer.

by cheryl weber

even after poring over a half-dozen computer-generated schemes of his proposed home, architect David Biek's client was still waffling on whether to build the house or sell the lot. Like many lay people, he wasn't fully comprehending all those little black lines. It wasn't until Biek, of Arcadia, in Boulder, Colo., presented a loose, hand-rendered perspective that—voilà!—the design came to life for the client. And, eventually, so did the house.

Given the sophisticated capabilities of today's CAD programs to map out quite precise forms and details, and even virtual walk-throughs, common wisdom would say there's no clearer way to convey a design idea. And yet, just the opposite is often true. When it comes to picturing their homes and communities, clients see best in softer lines.

It's a paradox with which many architects are familiar, and it has to do with both aesthetics and psychology. "There's something about approaching a project from an artistic rather than a mechanical point of view," says



Henry Lenny

Rather than laboring with CAD for the schematic, architect Henry Lenny, an experienced watercolor artist, sketches freehand to convince himself he's headed in the right direction.

Henry Lenny, AIA, an architect and watercolor artist in Santa Monica, Calif. "I never show CAD drawings until clients approve the conceptual and preliminary stages. Particularly if a project has to be approved by an architectural review board, it's a big mistake to show too many computer drawings. The board becomes reluctant to approve them."

a softer sell

One reason is that the more shadowy, quirky, and complex effects of hand drawings give the impression that clients are get-

ting a one-of-a-kind art piece, whereas computer drawings tend to make a house look sterile and mass-produced, no matter how imaginative the design.

"I can't remember a single time when I've shown up in front of a client or review committee where I was sent away to study the house or show alternate ideas," says Lenny, who has designed custom and commercial projects all over the U.S. and France. "And that's not to say the architecture was good. Just that the presentation was so stunning,

there was no ambivalence."

Architect Stephen Varenhorst, AIA, of Conshohocken, Pa., who also specializes in high-end custom homes and commercial projects, believes showing clients a loose sketch initially helps them relax and ease into the process. "After the first impression those drawings are left behind," he says. "They reflect where we are at the preliminary stage. We haven't figured everything out yet."

On the other hand, right or wrong, rigid computer drawings scare people by giving the impression the

continued on page 34

etermination



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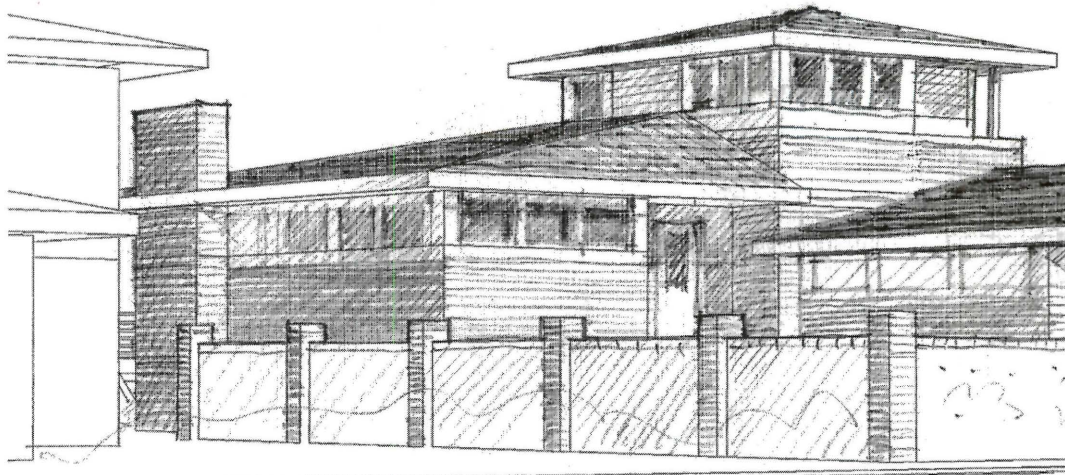
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design is done. "It's a funny perception people have about hand drawings," he says. "After the presentation, I start over to refine the design, whereas a computer drawing is easy to manipulate."

pen money

Aside from their ability to sell a project by offering that indefinable human touch, hand drawings can also make sense from a cost standpoint. Rather than viewing them as a time-consuming extra step to prepare for a presenta-



For client presentations, David Biek often draws by hand over a 3-D computer model of a project.

tion, some architects consider them an integral part of early design-making.

"We probably explore quicker by hand on tracing paper than having someone plugging away on CAD," says Mark Wolf, AIA, of

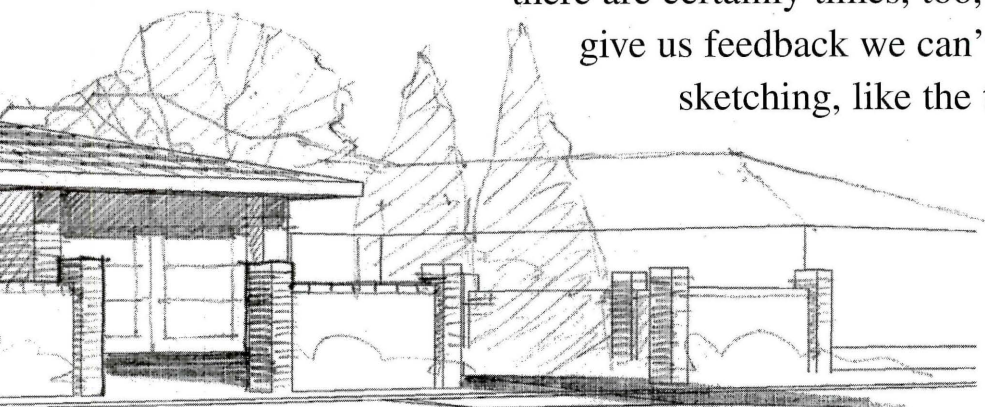
James, Harwick + Partners, Dallas, whose firm specializes in commercial work and multifamily housing. "Besides, we think designers quit exploring and lock in too quickly when they go to CAD. Everything gets

neat and crisp and looks like it's done, and it's really not."

Among its 30-member staff, JH+P tries to keep a balance of generalists and those with an outstanding hand. Elevations, and all color renderings

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David Biek

“there are certainly times, too, when the computer can give us feedback we can’t get when we’re just sketching, like the transparent effect of glass.”

—david biek, architect

for public presentations, are done in-house. But projects that require the more labor-intensive perspective sketches are sent to outside artists.

Varenhorst, too, explores a design by sketching

large on trace or Clearprint paper. Then he’ll reduce the drawing, color it with pencil, scan it into the computer, and make a print to show the client. “It softens the image to another level,” he says. Like

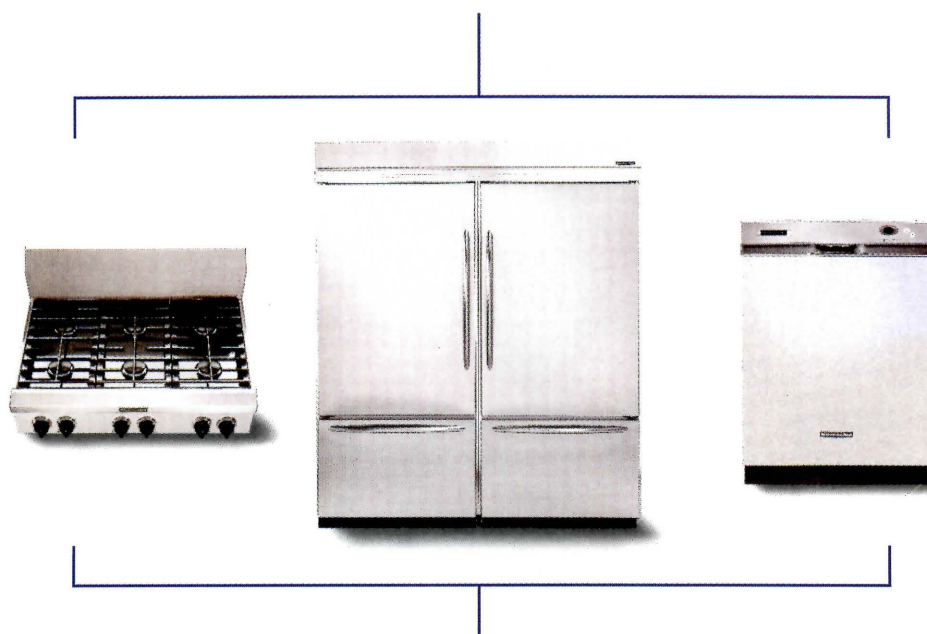
JH+P, Varenhorst handles elevations himself. And when a large-format colored perspective is in order, he’ll hire a freelance artist. The cost—typically \$2,500 for a 2-foot-by-3-foot board—is passed on

to the client in design fees.

big draw

Even production builders, who read bluelines like the back of their hand, prefer loose sketches to sell their

continued on page 38



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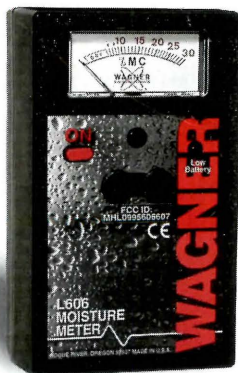


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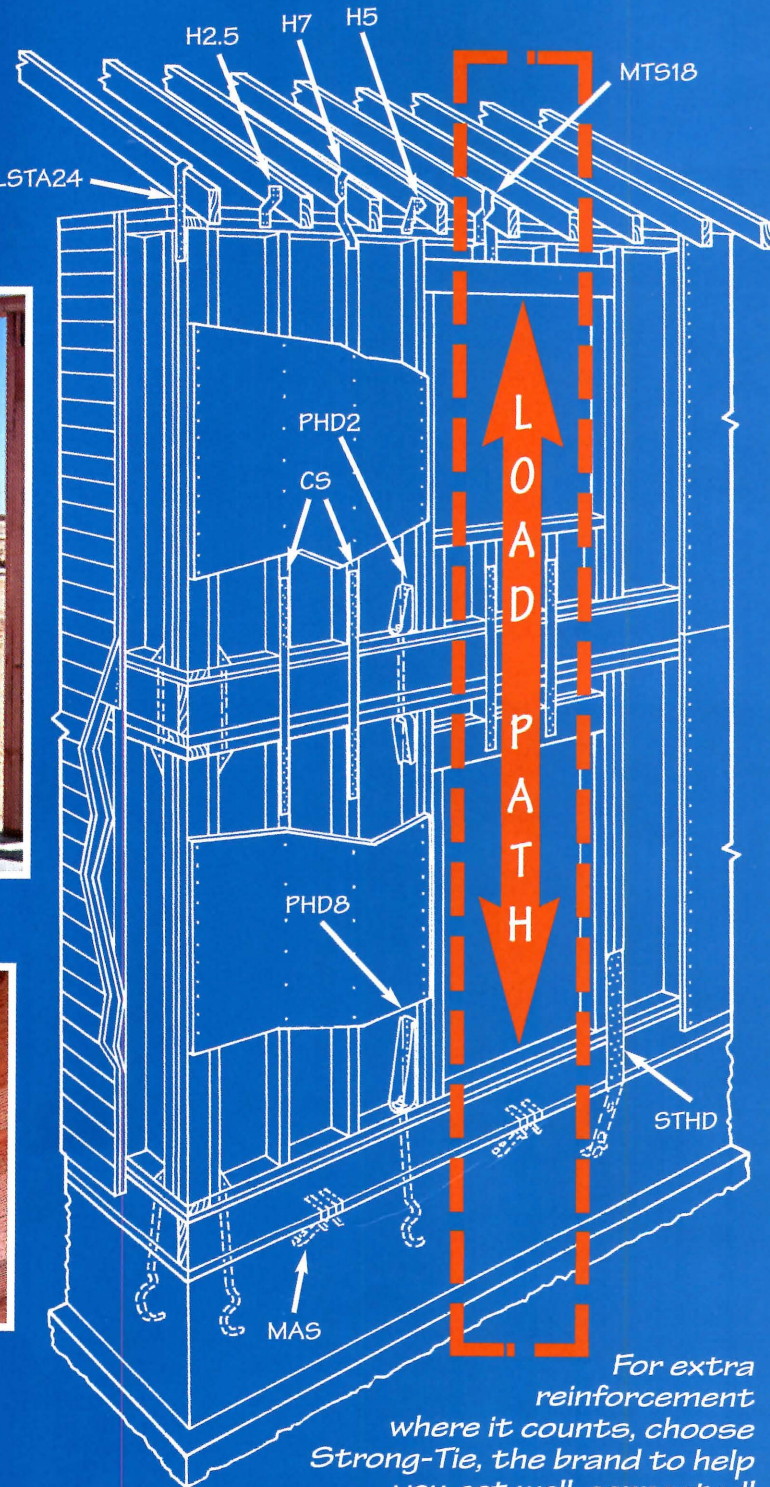
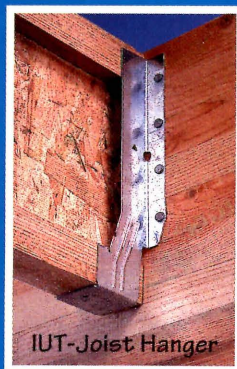
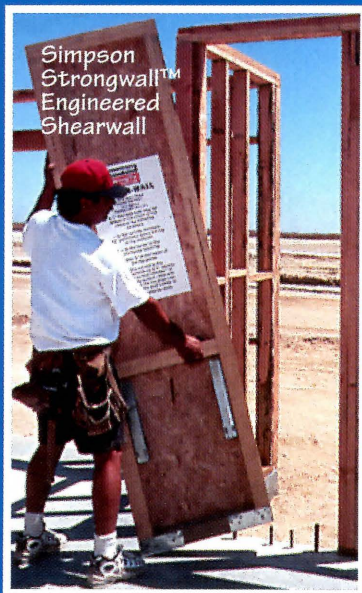
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practice

At James, Harwick + Partners, artwork is frequently a collaborative effort. For these renderings of two multifamily projects, New York City artist and designer Corvin Matei did the base drawings in pen and ink, and then JH+P associate Bob Bullis, AIA, painted the images with watercolors.



own services. But they're more selective than commercial clients about paying for elaborate ones. "From a builder's point of view, cost drives just about every decision," says Scott McIntyre, McIntyre Batchelor Capron Architects, Paoli, Pa., who designs houses for East

Coast builders in a range of price markets. Although he believes builders are less swayed by fancy presentations than private clients are, the firm's policy is to render all initial drawings—both elevations and perspectives—by hand. Those skills are covered

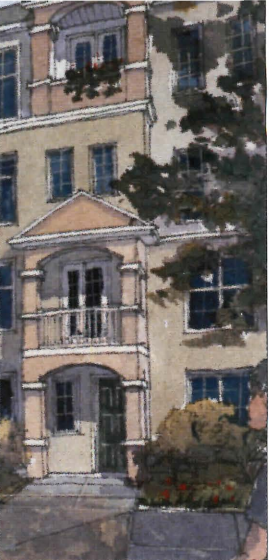
in-house. "Costs are similar to CAD drawings, and we think hand rendering is better in a competitive situation because it makes a project seem more valuable," McIntyre says. "It's a level of standard we apply."

Builder Brian Bailey,

of Brian Bailey Homes, Austin, Texas, uses his architects' freehand drawings for general marketing. "Most of our spec houses are sold just prior to completion of framing, but people call us routinely and ask for information," he says. "We make 8½-

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Courtesy James, Harwick + Partners

by-11-inch copies of the sketches to distribute, and also post them on our Web site."

And for custom clients, whose homes start at \$1.5 million and can take two years to complete, the company makes a 24-inch-by-36-inch framed photo-

graph of the drawing. "It really gives the client something to hang on to, like a light at the end of the tunnel," Bailey says. "We'll keep a copy in our office, and the architect will keep the original. It's good marketing for both of us." Mounted on the wall under

the lights, a framed CAD drawing would be unbearably explicit, and fall far short of portraying architecture as the art it truly is.

"The computer does exactly what you want, in the exact manner you want," says Lenny. "When I wet a watercolor brush,

there's a series of possibilities that happen. The wiggly lines and accidents often set me off in a wonderful, very fortunate direction." **ra**

Cheryl Weber is a freelance writer in Severna Park, Md.



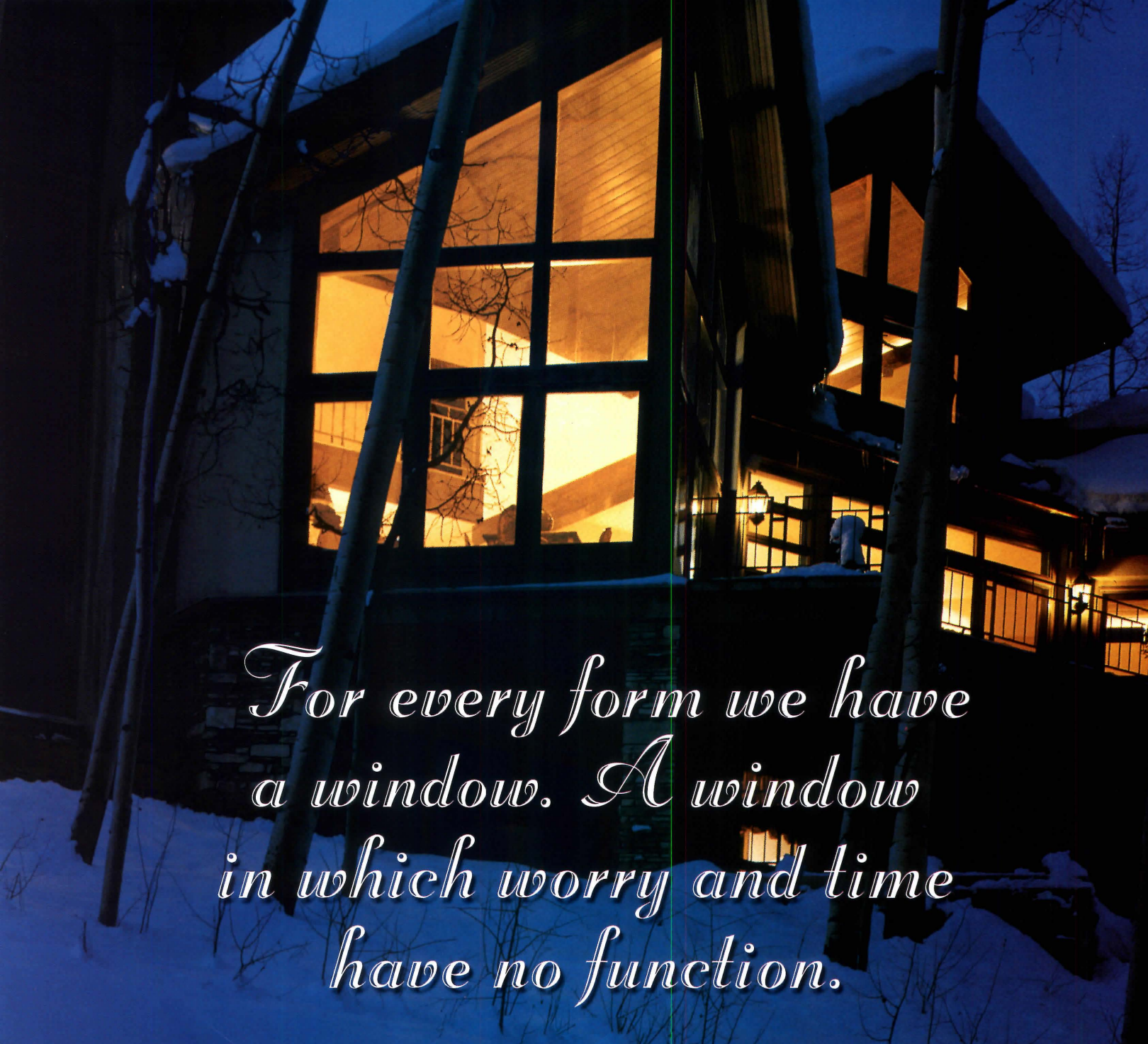
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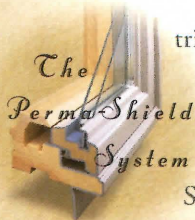


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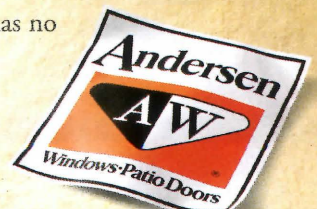


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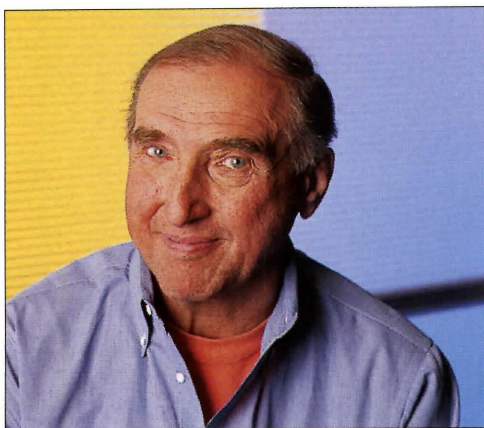
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the 2000 leadership awards



Steven Freeman



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Ingrid Werthmann

The winners of this year's Leadership Awards (from the top): Peter Bohlin, Hall of Fame inductee; Centerbrook Architects, Top Firm; SALA Architects, Rising Star.

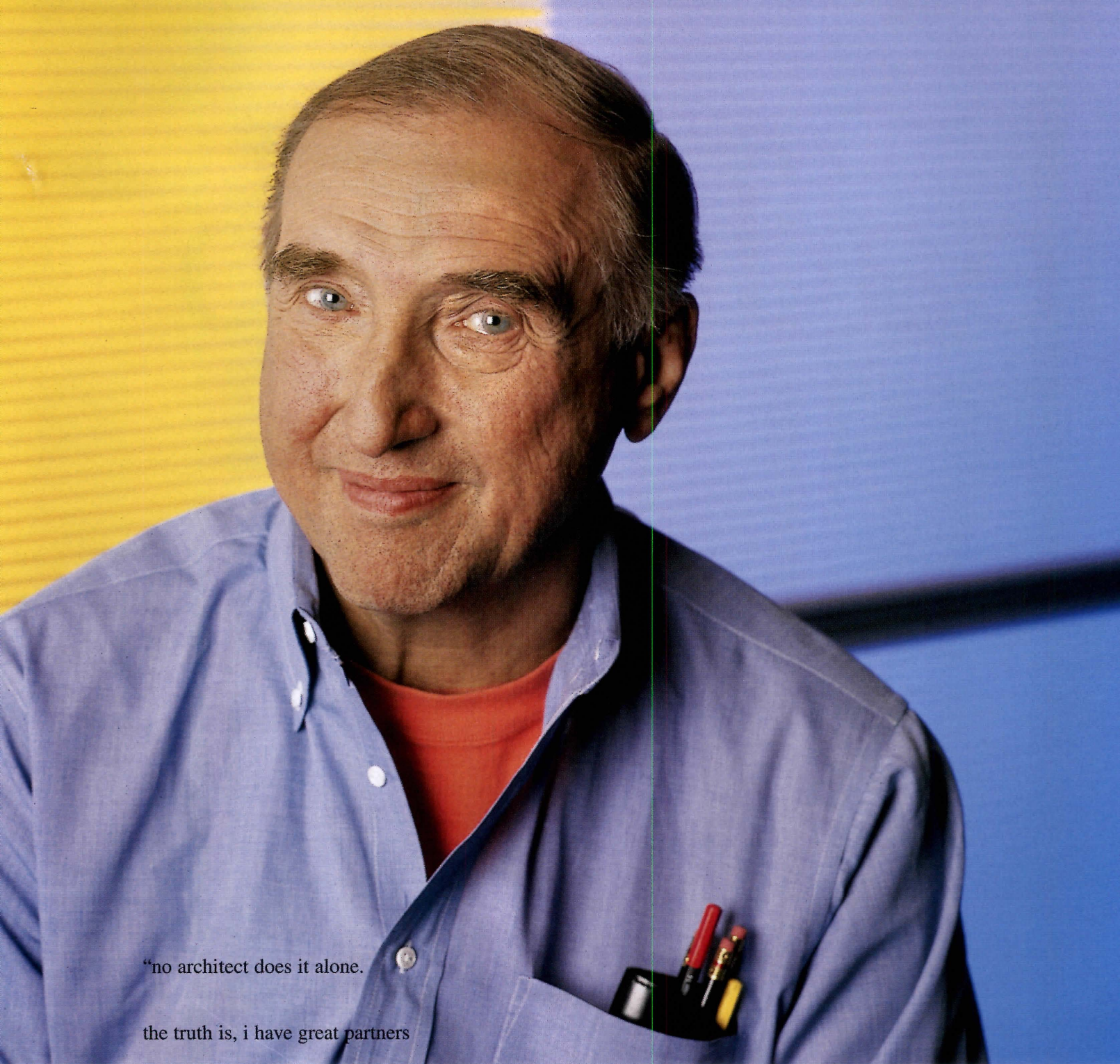
What the world needs now is another awards program. Yes, really.

True, *residential architect* magazine has several awards programs already. Our Homes for Habitat competition selects the best plans for a Habitat for Humanity house. Our *residential architect* Design Awards program honors the best built work among a variety of housing categories and the most impressive work on the boards. Both programs have calls for entries, and both are project-driven, juried competitions, during which we editors hold back our opinions and let outside judges make the decisions. But we're an opinionated bunch and we like to think we know something about residential architects and architecture. We have, therefore, launched one more awards program to recognize bodies of work and leadership in the field of residential architecture. And this time, we did the choosing. We had no call for entries; we simply selected the architects we deemed most worthy, based on our knowledge of their work.

And so, on the pages that follow, we profile our picks for this year's Top Firm and Rising Star, and we establish a Hall of Fame award for career achievement. We call this program the Leadership Awards, because we believe these architects have set high standards for both design and practice that all residential architects would do well to emulate.

You'll notice that we've given two firm awards: Centerbrook Architects and Planners is our Top Firm of the year; SALA Architects is our Rising Star winner. But we've also singled out one individual, Peter Bohlin, of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, for his outstanding career achievement as a designer of beautiful, one-of-a-kind houses and as a leading light among residential architects. He is our first Hall of Fame inductee.

They're a great group of architects, and their impressive, influential work is reason enough to make room in our magazine for just one more awards program.



"no architect does it alone.

the truth is, i have great partners

and terrific people within our practice."

—*peter bohlin, faia*

Steven Freeman

The work of Peter Bohlin (above) and his partners is largely about expressing the essence of natural materials. At right is a pool pavilion on the Bill Gates compound in Seattle, designed in a joint venture with James Cutler Architects.

the 2000
leadership
awards
hall of fame

peter bohlin

the partnership of bohlin cywinski jackson does brilliant architecture of all varieties, but we single out peter bohlin for his special contribution to residential design.

by
cheryl weber

"What a treat to be an architect!" says Peter Bohlin, FAIA. The charismatic founder of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson has good reason to think so. Once a small practice in the former coal town of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., his firm now has five offices and works with some of the most coveted clients and sites in the country. In the nearly four decades since BCJ began in 1965, it has become renown for an unusually broad and well-received range of work, from a spectacular log house in the mountains of Maryland to a 2,000-square-foot residence in Seattle; from a Girl Scout camp in Pennsylvania to the Software Engineering Institute at Carnegie Mellon University. In 1994, Bohlin and partners received the American Institute of Architects' prestigious Architecture Firm Award. And after its coup in the early '90s—the plum commission, with architect James Cutler, to design Microsoft chairman Bill Gates' \$60 million mansion—there was no turning back from the rush of public attention.

One recent week found Bohlin crisscrossing the country, jetting between clients in Seattle, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, and back to Seattle. But he isn't complaining about his nomadic lifestyle. "We've been lucky to get houses on terrific sites in different parts of the country," he says, ticking off some



Karl A. Backus

of his current residential projects. "We're doing a ranch in Montana, a family compound in Rhode Island on beautiful fields stretching between forest and ocean, a summer house on the Michigan peninsula, and a tiny house on the Florida panhandle. I'm involved in all the houses and most of the other buildings. It's a real treat for me."

At 63, Bohlin has reached an exhilarating pinnacle in his career. He can't wait to meet each new client, tape a piece of paper to the drawing board, and, with his trademark intuitive eye, bring a fresh, eclectic perspective to an architectural world he has yet to tire of.

romancing the land

Architecture critic Paul Goldberger has described Bohlin as "a romantic modernist, determined to use the forms of modernism to achieve the emotional impact of traditionalism." Rather than aspiring to a preconceived aesthetic theory, however, Bohlin believes a building's highest calling is to evoke human emotion and possess a strong sense of place.

"He is probably the finest intuitive architect I know," says James Cutler, FAIA, Bainbridge Island, Wash. "When we joint-ventured on Gates, I'd take the rational approach and constantly hammer him to stay on concept, whereas he had a drive to make things visually delightful. He has one of the best eyes of anyone I've ever met."

The small summer house in Connecticut Bohlin designed

for his parents, published in *The New York Times* in 1976, is still a prime example of the ethic that defines the firm's work. The long, slim house is set narrow side to the road, at a point in the forest where dark evergreens give way to a

sunny deciduous landscape. It's clad in cedar, stained green to match the trees. A carefully orchestrated entrance sequence, marked by a series of red landmarks, progresses along a bridge, down some steps to a breezeway, then into a small vestibule. Ahead is the two-story living room, its huge, gridded, industrial corner windows playing off the leafy views. In

the sunken living room, a spare fireplace and built-in seating evoke Frank Lloyd Wright's warm, orderly interiors. The *Times* described the house as at once artistic and practical, airy and anchored to earth. And this sensibility has been remarkably consistent in Bohlin's work ever since. Whatever the size or purpose, he designs buildings that delight people and bring out the subtleties of their surroundings.

Bohlin's love for the land traces back to childhood summers spent in Connecticut, near the future summer house. "I was a fisherman, and developed a kind of empathy with the trout, where and how they would be moving," he says. "I

began to understand the nature of the place—its sense of life, a sense of the breeze. I think making terrific places, whether houses or larger buildings, has everything to do with the way we relate to those places. We try to fuel that web of connections that centers around people, whether the site is in the city or country."

Bohlin had a chance to develop those ideas at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., where he did his undergraduate work, and while completing a master's at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Mich. And rather than being lured by big city lights, he chose to return to Wilkes-Barre, where his parents lived. "I saw Wilkes-Barre as a way to get out and do buildings immediately," he says.

an archipelago

BCJ is still headquartered in Wilkes-Barre, where Bohlin lives. Although only Peter Bohlin, Bernard Cywinski, FAIA, and Jon Jackson, AIA, show up in the firm's name, there are eight partners. The other five—Dan Haden, AIA; Frank Grauman, AIA; Cornelius Reid, AIA; Russell Roberts, AIA; and William Loose, AIA—are scattered between headquarters and offices in Philadelphia, Seattle, Pittsburgh, and Berkeley, Calif. Cywinski describes the 100-person firm as "an archipelago" rather than a main



Joseph W. Molitor, courtesy Avery Library

Bohlin designed this weekend house (above) in the Connecticut woods for his parents in 1975. The huge industrial window looks north, to a view of the forest sunlit from the south.



Courtesy Bohlin Cywinski Jackson

The partners at BCJ are (from left) Bernard Cywinski, Russell Roberts, Peter Bohlin, Dan Haden, Jon Jackson, William Loose, and Frank Grauman. Cornelius Reid is missing from the photo.



Tree columns and a gable of over-scaled logs mark the entrance to a vacation house in the Adirondacks (left). Inside, a massive granite fireplace rises through the structure, linking the interior with the forest (below).



Photos this page: Karl A. Backus

“to do well in this profession you
have to be able to schmooze people,
be passionate, count numbers, and
make budgets. peter has all those traits.”

—james cutler, *faia*

the 2000

leadership / hall of fame / peter bohlin

awards

office with branches. "You can't define one office by itself," he says. "The whole sharing of experience between all the offices is what I think gives the richness to the architecture. We have a built-in peer review opportunity."

The setup fosters a warm, egalitarian environment that makes attrition virtually nonexistent. "There's a certain energy in the everyday of this office that inspires people to keep getting better at what they do," Cywinski says. And, in the crossover of work based in other offices, a more global view emerges on how to see a problem. The East Coast offices, for example, often get a heads-up on technologies in experimental stages on the West Coast.

the large and the small

The Gates assignment certainly deepened the entire firm's intellectual base on many different levels. It gave the architects the opportunity to research materials, such as the technology of building in timber. "We also had to figure out how to make a sprawling compound livable for two to five people, and how the computer would take its place in the house," Cywinski says. "You don't see one wire; there's nothing to give you a clue that this is the most technologically sophisticated house in the world."

At the new Liberty Bell pavilion on the redesigned Independence Mall in Philadelphia—another hot commission—BCJ faces the issues of public vs. private space on a much

larger scale.

"We're placing a tiny object—a bell—in an environment of three very large city blocks," Cywinski says. "How do you give the bell an honorific place but also an independent scale for when the human encounters the bell?"

"We all learn from doing houses," he adds. "They force you to think at that intimate scale for all projects, no matter how large they are."

The challenge is different at Pixar—Apple CEO Steve Jobs' animation and special effects studio that created "A Bug's Life" and the "Toy Story" movies—in Emeryville, Calif. There, the archi-

tecs need to design for rapidly changing high-tech systems. They also need to create a balanced environment for the workers who inhabit the space.

"The computer is very one-on-one," Cywinski says. "You have to overcome that introversion with spaces that are more social. You can't drain the energy on one end and not recharge it."

abiding passion

Collaborating with his staff is one way Bohlin charges up his own energy, and he's quick to acknowledge the talents

of those around him. "No architect does it alone," he says. "The truth is, I have great partners and terrific people within our practice. We've chosen each other."

Natural talent notwithstanding, Bohlin has honed an even-handed repertoire of skills crucial to succeeding in his profession. Says Cutler: "In a lot of ways he's extremely practical, but visually he's exuberant. And he's a very savvy guy. You have to be able to schmooze people, be passionate, count numbers, and make budgets. Peter has all those traits."

Where do you go after you've been the architect for the richest man in America? Bohlin wants to continue an experiment the team began at the Gates compound: trying to reveal the nature of building materials by layering them. "Reading a costly material in front of a less expensive one implies it goes on, but it may not," he explains. "The idea has uses for larger buildings for economic as well as psychological reasons." He also looks forward to designing a house almost entirely of composite materials, and expressing them instead of hiding them.

For now, Bohlin is reveling in learning from each new client and site. "I think we're on a roll as far as having wonderful opportunities to build in many environments and circumstances, from the Bell pavilion, to firms such as Pixar, to houses on interesting sites for interesting people," Bohlin says. "I'm so tickled we have that range." *ra*

Cheryl Weber is a freelance writer in Severna Park, Md.



Matt Wargo

On a house in Pennsylvania's Endless Mountains, mullions bring a huge glass wall down to scale (above). The soaring stone chimney was modeled after industrial furnaces in the region.



James Frederick Housel

A Seattle house shows off its structure. The 3,000-square-foot home will be clad in fiber-reinforced cement with exposed flashing on the horizontal joints.



“bcj is not a main office with four
branches but an archipelago.

the whole sharing of experience
between all the offices is what gives
the richness to the architecture.”

—bernard cywinski, faia

residential architect / june 2000



Bohlin is known for complex structures that look simple. Ledge House, in Maryland, skirts the contours of a stone clearing (left). The rocky ledge seems to slip under the walls to become a place for lounging in the living room (above).

Photos this page: Karl A. Backus



"we operate together on a social plane.

as well as on a workaday plane.

we think of it sometimes as a brotherhood."

—chad floyd, faia

© 1999 Robert Benson
Centerbrook's partners gather beside the Falls River dam that channels water beneath their building. They are (from left) James C. Childress, William H. Grover, Jefferson B. Riley, Chad Floyd, and Mark Simon.

the 2000
leadership
awards
top firm

centerbrook architects and planners

out from under the shadow of charles moore, the five partners at centerbrook have built an enviable portfolio of eclectic, imaginative, site-specific houses.

by
vernon mays

Rarely has so varied a partnership worked for so long and with so much success as the partners at Centerbrook, a uniquely collaborative architecture firm that sprouted 25 years ago from a seed planted by master eclectic and Yale architecture dean Charles Moore.

Talented, inventive, and divergent—driven more by client desires than the aesthetic leanings of its five partners—Centerbrook Architects and Planners has made a reputation for producing houses that are comfortable, cozy, and conducive to the clutter of life. For its consistently distinguished record of making decidedly American houses, *residential architect* honors the partnership as this year's top residential architecture firm in America.

mixing it up

Accolades are nothing new to this team-oriented firm, which employs enough people (80 at last count) to fill an NFL team roster. Since its establishment as Moore Grover Harper, the firm has evolved from a struggling studio to a polished practice that is a model for design accomplishment and business acumen. In 1984, the company renamed itself Centerbrook after the village in Connecticut where the staff resides in a rambling old drill-bit factory overlooking the Falls River. In 1998, its achievements were recognized by the American Institute of Architects with the national Architecture Firm Award.

Centerbrook operates much like five individual studios, with each partner bringing his own projects into the firm.



A new vacation house on Martha's Vineyard by Simon combines a stylized facade with traditional shingles and wide overhangs (above). Generous openings reveal the central vaulted space that serves as both entryway and formal dining room (left).

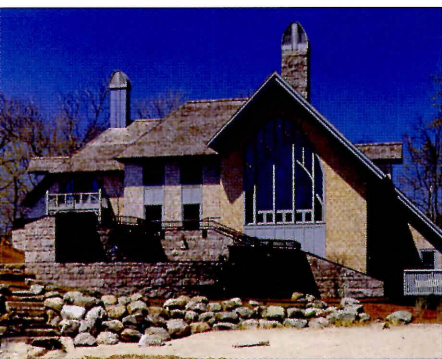
Photos above: © Jeff Goldberg/Esto

Such an arrangement yields a design portfolio that defies narrow categorization. "One thing that makes us distinctive is our eclecticism," says partner Mark Simon, FAIA. "It comes from our willingness to do different things for different people, different things for different sites. And our eagerness to mix things up."

He and partners William Grover, FAIA, Jefferson Riley, FAIA, Chad Floyd, FAIA, and James Childress, AIA, bring wide-ranging backgrounds to the firm. Grover began his career as an industrial designer at General Motors. Floyd studied drama. Simon was a sculptor. And Riley, who by reputation is the best drawer among the partners, majored in art. Only Childress, whose degrees in fine arts and architecture come from the Rhode Island School of Design, did not pass through Moore's tutelage at Yale. His indoctrination came at Centerbrook, where he has hung his hat since 1979.

a belief in the client

But Floyd insists it is not training but method that produces so much variety in the Centerbrook portfolio. What makes



© Jeff Goldberg/Esto

Simon's clever nod to Carpenter Gothic tradition distinguishes the Guyott House, which ends a row of Stick-Style Victorian houses on the Connecticut coast.

their houses so different, Floyd says, is that the partners share a belief in making the client the main source of inspiration. "We look to the clients and the site—especially the clients' dreams and aspirations, their travels, favorite places, what their interests are—and try to respond to that in devel-

oping a house that really fits them as well as the site."

For all the adjectives suitably applied to Centerbrook's work, "trendy" is not among them—a fact that the partners take pride in. "We work very hard at not being fashionable, but rather at providing built environments that respond to innate human needs and that last forever," says Riley. "So natural materials, texture, and all the things that humans love are much more important to us than the latest technology."

In addition to addressing the particulars of a client's brief, Riley says there

are two key things he and his partners provide. The first is clarity of organization. "And the second is emotional impact—we play with spaces that contract and then expand; we manipulate daylight, reflection, materials, and textures," Riley says.

Simon likens the process to playing a piece of music. "It might be very traditional or very modern. But you play it with your own spirit, you play it with as much artistry as you can give it," he says. "I think this effort to interpret other people's visions is a matter of being practiced at what you do. We always strive for freshness and not reproduction—we are not the Ralph Laurens of architecture."

How they elicit that information from their clients is fundamental to what they design. Grover, for one, asks his residential clients to clip pictures from magazines and then probes to find out what about the picture triggers their emotional response. "Then I ask them to write a one-page essay about what they want this house to be, in philosophical terms."

Riley, on the other hand, makes a point of visiting residential clients at home. "The communication of thoughts and emotions and needs and so forth is only partly conveyed verbally," he observes. "There is some other sixth sense that it is the architect's duty to have."

tapping into the essence

Although Moore left Connecticut for California more than a quarter of a century ago and died in 1993, his presence at the firm remains palpable. "We long ago stopped copying his shapes, although there are some ideas of his that still sneak through," says Simon. "And his design ideas aren't quite as forceful as they used to be." But Simon believes one lasting influence was a self-imposed demand to do good work—and not give up. "A lot of things in the architectural life push you to give up: facilities managers, timid clients, money issues, value engineering—all these things that normally would fight against good design," says Simon. "Chuck would look to all these problems as opportunities. He'd say, 'OK, how can we make the project more interesting when we edit it down? Can we make it more interesting—not *as* interesting, *more* interesting!' That has really stuck with us."

Moore's work often strayed toward fantasy environments, but Floyd says that approach has not flourished at Centerbrook as much as the mentor's ideas about how to create places based on human needs. Consequently, the firm's emphasis is on making houses that are not only resolved in formal and technical terms, but that also make people feel good. "I'm not a believer in making architecture



"we always strive for freshness and
not reproduction—we are not the

ralph laurens of architecture."

—mark simon, faia



© Mick Hales

© Jeff Goldberg/Esto
A richly articulated entry hall (above) frames views of Long Island Sound in a house by Floyd and associate Susan E. Wyeth. Located atop a historic quarry, the 7,500-square-foot house is organized to take full advantage of its dramatic site.

that disturbs people," says Grover. "It is arrogant of architects to project their own ambitions on clients." The word that gets bandied about the office is "situationist," a term coined by Floyd to describe a design approach tailored to the particular situation—which encompasses client, locality, zoning board, budget, economy, and the like. With this approach, says Riley, "sometimes the buildings don't even look like buildings. They look like a fence, or a mound of earth, or trees growing out of a marsh. When that happens, you really succeed in tapping into the essence of the place."

Little surprise, then, that there is no signature look to a Centerbrook building. Riley's houses often flood the senses with curvilinear forms and a rush of colors. Simon is prone to invent new forms, as with the Guyott House, which features windows shaped like Gothic arches with one flat side and clipped-off tops. Floyd leans more to the theatrical, choreographing the experience and rotating rooms toward carefully framed views of the outdoors.

brotherhood

Spending time with this group of strong individuals makes one wonder: How do they stay together? Floyd says the partners are bonded by their

longtime familiarity with each other and the shared experience of the firm's early tumultuous years. "But we have instituted a number of processes that help," he says. "We have lunch together every Friday. That is one of

© Jeff Goldberg/Esto

In renovating this flat-roofed 1970s house, Grover added a gable roof to the garage and built a new two-story wing. Each volume was painted a different color to clarify the complicated mass and reduce the scale.

the keys to what keeps us sharing and being comfortable with each other, because we operate together on a social plane, as well as on a workaday plane. We think of it sometimes as a brotherhood, not to be gender-specific about it. And there was at one point a father figure, Charles Moore."

Simon pinpoints another drop of glue that holds Centerbrook together: Each of the partners gets paid exactly the same. "We get the same salary, we get the same bonuses. And our profitability from year to year varies. We track it, in fact, to embarrass those of us who are

lagging into doing better on the profit side, and to remind ourselves that if we don't pay attention to profit—as we saw early in our careers when we were working for that parent figure who did not—we're going to go out of business. So we pay attention to profit, but it is second to our concern about architecture and art."

By declaring the partners even-Stephen, competitiveness among them is greatly diminished, Simon adds. "It's all for one and one for all. That means that I am a little less jealous when Chad gets a great job, because I am going to share something out of it."

The other factor that has fostered the firm's longevity is its willingness to look inward, says Grover. "We periodically re-examine the situation to decide if we are having fun," he says. "If we are having fun, we might throw a giant party and blow the year's entire profits. But if we're not having fun, then we will do something about it—fire people, make the firm smaller, do whatever we've got to do, including buying out a partner." Each of those things has happened.

give-and-take

Centerbrook's formula for success also includes giving its most promising employees a stake in the firm. When younger architects begin to distinguish themselves, they are invited to become associates and actively participate in running the business. The 14 associates—together with the five partners and principal Jim Coan, AIA—meet over lunch every Friday at a nearby restaurant to discuss billing, scheduling, and management issues as varied as computers, insurance, and firm finances.

Each associate also belongs to one of several management committees that must vie for a piece of the firm's annual budget. The associates make their case for the purchase of umpteen more computers or an increase in health benefits, for example. "Then the rest of us decide whether we accept the proposal or not," says Floyd. "So they get to understand all of the issues and pressures that go into making a business happen."

Childress stresses that the collaborative nature of the firm also gives the entire staff opportunities for growth. "I'll have a dozen jobs and a dozen people working with me, each one heading up a job. It's not like you design it, hand it to someone and say 'Here, draw what I want.' There's a give-and-take. Obviously, the stronger designers start floating to the top and taking on more and more tasks." Everyone, including the partners, works in open loft space, which makes for a free exchange of ideas and learning by osmosis.

Centerbrook's partners say they look to a variety of





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—william grover, faia



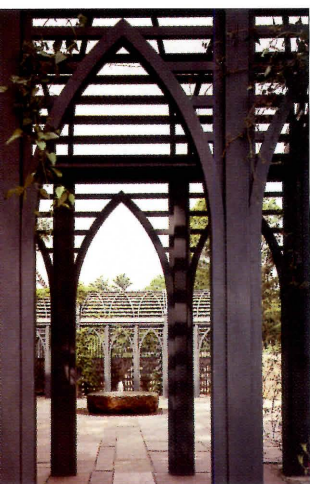
© Norman McGrath

Floyd developed a barnyard scheme with an axial gateway leading to this Lyme, Conn., house (above). Its highlight is a living room designed to seat 30 for duet performances (left). The ceiling and trusses are painted in dark hues that lend a medieval richness to the space.

© Jeff Goldberg/Esto

sources for inspiration, from great buildings seen while traveling, to the mundane details of hotel bathrooms. But the name invoked most enthusiastically is not an architect at all, but a landscape architect—Lester Collins, a frequent collaborator until his death seven years ago. “Before Lester, I tended not to think as clearly about the relationship of the building to the site,” recalls Floyd. “Then we began to work with Lester and it was a revelation. I learned as much working with him as I learned working with Charles. He worked with all of the partners on many projects, and I think he had a huge impact on the way we think about making a place. It’s very one-dimensional for architects to think only about the building, and not the landscape around the building.”

Although Centerbrook began almost exclusively as a residential firm, its growth and prosperity have been driven by a diverse portfolio of university, museum, library, church, and theater projects. Now only 15 to 20 percent of the firm’s work is residential, with projects in the works ranging in size from 800 to 6,000 square feet.



© Jeff Goldberg/Esto

Simon and Childress worked with landscape architect Lester Collins to create this soothing urban garden. Against the backdrop of a Victorian house built in the Gothic style, they defined an outdoor room with trellises and flower walls.

staying in shape

So why do they keep doing houses? “The best thing in life is to do the things that give you satisfaction—and houses are one of them,” says Grover. “But they are tough. It’s harder to do a house than to do a \$50 million building.” Adds Riley: “Just as any athlete keeps tuned up and in shape, houses keep our eye on the ball. They keep us in shape.”

The partners also keep themselves charged up creatively with a wide range of interests, architectural and otherwise. After having produced two monographs of their work in the past seven years, they will soon release a third book called *The Enthusiasms of Centerbrook*, an eclectic collection of musings set for publication this year by The Images Publishing Group of Australia.

And what are those enthusiasms? Grover and Floyd are jazz musicians, so Grover wrote about that, as well as his view of architecture as a problem-solving discipline. Floyd focused on his interest in stagecraft, and his effort to approach architecture in the way a scene designer



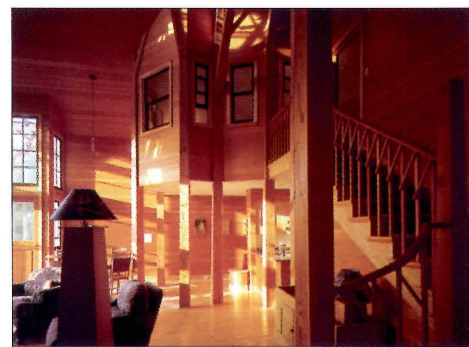
responds to a script. Simon, the son of a sculptor, wrote about his interest in sculpture, which he has taken up again in his middle years.

Childress wrote a chapter about the firm’s collaborative process and another on what he calls the search for a house’s genetic code. Riley’s chapters reflect on the pursuit of happiness vs. the pursuit of joy and his appreciation of villages as a metaphor for single buildings.

Subtly, of course, these enthusiasms make their way into Centerbrook’s architecture—whether in the syncopated openings of a wall, a sequence of experiences scripted by the flow of space, or a central room where the household village gathers for meals and entertainment. In a sense, these houses are like the fruits of a garden, cross-pollinated by architects who draw from each client and each site to produce a solution that is, in their way of working, organic.

“Design requires an act of selflessness,” Riley muses. “T.S. Eliot said the whole creative act is one of letting go of yourself. You really have to get to the point where you are not pursuing something. You have to get to the point where you are discovering joys that are already there.” **ra**

Vernon Mays is editor of Inform, the architecture and design magazine of the Virginia Society AIA.



Photos above: © Brian Vanden Brink

This addition in the Hudson River Valley by Riley and associate Charles Mueller extends outward from a 19th-century farmhouse like a string of barns (top). Fir paneling and stylized “trees” inside the great room recall Adirondack lodges (above).



"communication is only partly conveyed

verbally. there is some other sixth sense

that it is the architect's duty to have."

—jefferson riley, *faia*



Riley and senior associate Jean Smajstrla envisioned this vacation house as a fantastic ship, with berths inside and decks at different levels (above). The residence features a screened "bow house" (left) and, at its highest point, a pinnacle deck commanding a 360-degree vista of harbor and ocean.

Photos above: Timothy Hursley



“we never thought we’d end up
as a primarily single-family

residential firm.”

—dale mulfinger, aia

Ingrid Werthmann

The SALA partners: (back row, from left) Katherine Hillbrand, AIA, Dale Mulfinger, AIA, Tim Fuller, AIA, and Joe Metzler, AIA; (front row, from left) Kelly Davis, AIA, Eric Odor, Wayne Branum, and Michaela Mahady, AIA.

the 2000
leadership
awards
rising star
sala architects

in making even small house dreams come true, sala architects turned a design philosophy into a blueprint for living.

by
meghan
drueding

If SALA Architects were a public company, Wall Street analysts would be warning investors to steer clear of its stock. The 17-year-old Minnesota firm recently changed its name, giving up the national brand recognition it had earned as Mulfinger, Susanka, Mahady & Partners with its 1999 *Life* magazine Dream House design. One of its two founding partners resigned last summer. Most of SALA's 35 employees cheerfully admit that they still do their drafting by hand, rather than on the computer. And the firm continues to include small remodels and additions in its nearly exclusively residential portfolio, rather than concentrating only on more lucrative, attention-grabbing big houses.

But Wall Street analysts aren't the ones who decide who gets the most work; clients are. And clients have been beating down SALA's door, at its offices in bustling Minneapolis and picture-perfect Stillwater, Minn., for years. They're attracted to the firm's relaxed atmosphere. They're intrigued by its sensible design strategies. And they're delighted by the personal attention they receive as a consequence of its lateral structure. None of these qualities are part of a planned positioning scheme or a carefully controlled image. They're simply the ideals upon which SALA was founded, and to which the firm has held fast throughout its history.



Katherine Hillbrand designed this Sun River, Ore., timber-frame home with associate Jean Larson, AIA.

flashback

In 1983, Dale Mulfinger was a professor of architecture at the University of Minnesota (he still is) and Sarah Susanka was a teaching assistant. Both architects were doing small additions and remodels on the side, “to pay the rent,” as Mulfinger puts it. The pair collaborated on a house based on the seminal architecture text *A Pattern Language*, and the partnership of Mulfinger & Susanka was born. “We never thought we’d end up as a primarily single-family residential firm,” Mulfinger remembers. “Sarah’s specialty was energy-efficient design, and mine was really multi-family. But houses were what people were asking us to do. The market told us what they wanted, and we realized that’s what we should aim for.”

That instinctive ability to connect with their market—and to recognize an even larger, untapped market—set the firm apart from other residential architects struggling to find commissions. Mulfinger and Susanka realized right off the bat why people weren’t hiring architects to design their houses: They didn’t know they could afford to. “Dale and I were absolutely convinced that there was this market, under our noses,” says Susanka, who left the firm after the smashing success of her 1998 design book, *The Not So Big House*, to concentrate on writing and lecturing. “We just kept tapping into it.”

They spread the word about their populist-minded firm in smart, common-sense ways that most residential architects hadn’t thought of: setting up a booth at the annual Minneapolis Home and Garden Show, writing articles for local and national publications, and conducting communi-



Dale Mulfinger

Dale Mulfinger's design for his own house in Minneapolis incorporates rural forms while respecting the scale of its neighbors.

ty workshops on how to work with an architect. Their efforts paid off. Within a few years, the pair was busy designing everything from kitchen remodels to million-dollar homes.

All the while, they kept their rates reasonable, with a vast menu of services clients could choose from, starting with



Karen Melvin

rough sketches and ending with full project management. In doing so, they lured clients away from builder-“designed” houses and convinced them to trade a little square footage for a lot more livable house. “We figured out how we could give people the most bang for their buck by eliminating wasted space,” Susanka says. “Even rich people could appreciate that.”

growth margin

By 1991, Mulfinger and Susanka had more work than they could handle. They added another partner, Michaela Mahady, and changed their name to Mulfinger, Susanka, Mahady & Partners. The name reflected a desire to continue expanding. “We always knew there would be other partners,” Mulfinger says.

The horizontal structure they had established was designed to accommodate growth; each partner handled a project independently from start to finish, so more architects simply meant the firm could accept more commissions. The unique setup, more like that of a law firm than a traditional architecture firm, also gave young architects the opportunity to do more substantive work than they’d be able to do elsewhere. “Right away, I was able to dive into projects and develop relationships with

Natural light suffuses Kelly Davis’ remodel of a Prairie Style house in Medina, Minn.



"right away, i was able to dive into
projects and develop relationships

with clients."

—michaela mahady, aia

Phillip Mueller

Its storybook appearance and livable floor plan have made Maple Forest, in Minnetrista, Minn., one of the firm's most high-profile projects. It was designed by Michaela Mahady, Wayne Brantum, and M. Christine Johnson.

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clients,” recalls Mahady, a former student of Mulfinger’s.

The firm continued to grow throughout the ’90s, creating an associate level for newcomers. Incoming architects serve at the associate level for a minimum of two years, then are eligible for promotion to partner. Associates manage smaller projects autonomously and work with partners on the larger ones. The system requires a hefty amount of trust between the experienced and less experienced architects; luckily, that faith is in abundant supply in both the downtown converted warehouse that houses the Minneapolis office and the quaint storefront containing the Stillwater branch.

“This office is unlike any architect’s office I’ve ever seen,” says associate Paul Hannan, who had his own practice for 10 years. “Everyone helps everyone else improve. You do better work when you’ve got that kind of support.” Interns and students, too, are part of the equation—a big part, according to Mulfinger. “We’ve probably had 200 of them work here over the history of the firm,” he says. “We have to spend time educating them about the way we do things. But they bring a lot of positive energy to the office.”

good vibrations

That exuberance propels the firm briskly into the new millennium. SALA had revenues of \$2.3 million and completed 233 projects in 1999. The firm has projects on the drawing boards or under construction in 18 states and in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Along the way, it has rewritten conventional wisdom, turning what may look like liabilities into assets. The new name, which translates into “a special room” in Latin-based languages, zeroes in on the firm’s philosophy. “Having our name be a single word instead of the partners’ surnames shows that we’re not structured traditionally, with just a few principals in control,” says Mahady. And Susanka’s departure hasn’t left the architects feeling abandoned. Instead, it’s demonstrated the strength of the firm’s organization.

Why, in the computer age, do most of SALA’s architects still draw by hand? Because they enjoy it. Many of them claim it’s faster than drawing a house digitally. And their reluctance to relinquish smaller projects is based on practicality, not sentimentality: Doing remodels and additions, they say, keeps their design skills sharp.

SALA’s wisest strategy of all may be its kid-glove treatment of its employees. Each architect is encouraged to discover and hone his or her particular talents. For example,



© Karen Melvin

partner Katherine Hillbrand specializes in designing timber-frame houses, while partner Joe Metzler is known for historic preservation work. To encourage the pursuit of their passions, all full-time employees receive a \$1,200-per-year “professional development” stipend, which they can use as they please. A company retreat at a nearby lake resort is held every couple of years, and each January the firm holds an open house for its employees, clients, and colleagues in the home building industry.

Career development isn’t the only perk SALA offers. In fact, it supports any pursuit that contributes to its employees’ quality of life. Partner Kelly Davis works a flexible schedule from 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. so he can indulge his enthusiasm for afternoon rowing on the St. Croix River. Michaela Mahady is a talented stained-glass artist whose work graces many SALA projects. And employees at the Stillwater office drink out of mugs created by partner Wayne Branum, who is also a potter.

SALA’s holistic approach attracts skilled people and frees them to do their best work. It’s largely responsible for the firm’s rising-star status, and it virtually guarantees an ever-widening universe for the practice. “They ask you what you’re interested in and give you a chance to do that,” says one intern. “It’s an incredibly nurturing environment.” **ra**



A Minnesota farmhouse by Jean Larson (above left) and a Minneapolis remodel by Joe Metzler (above) both showcase a SALA hallmark: painstaking attention to detail.

“everyone helps everyone else improve.

you do better work when you’ve got

that kind of support.”

—paul hannan

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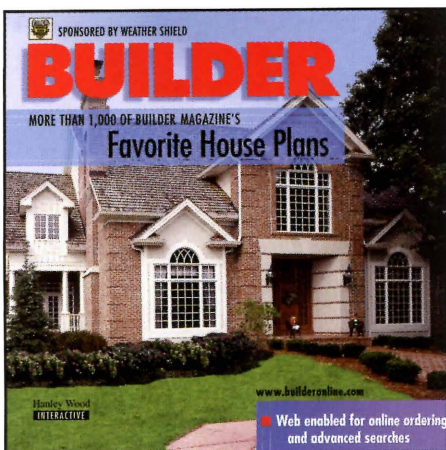
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—katy tomasulo



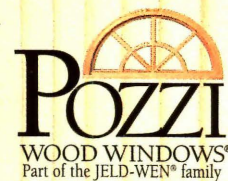
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mantel magic

hidden support systems help keep these two designs simple.

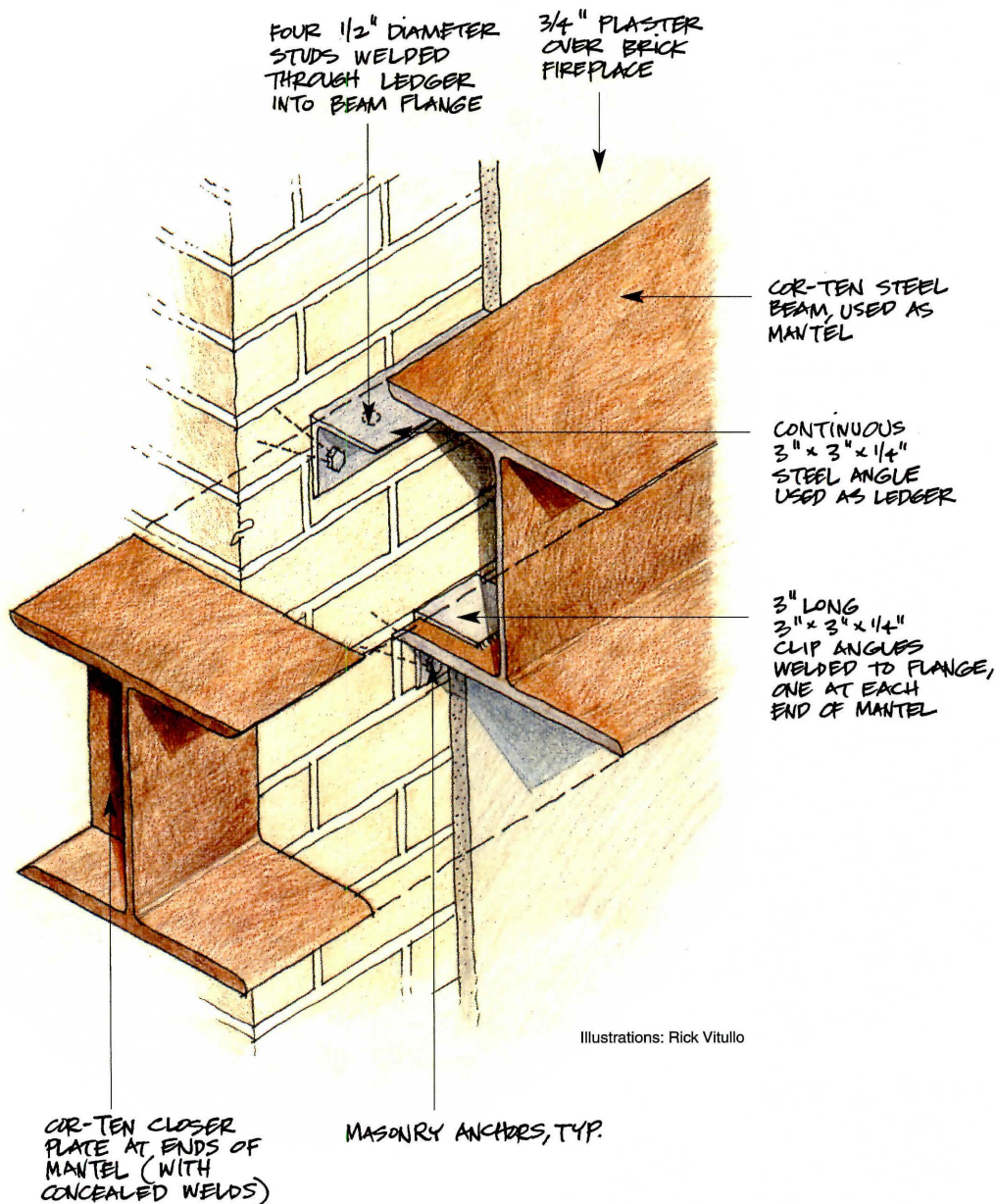
by rick vitullo, aia

mantels play a special role in the American home. They often serve as the focal point of important rooms—such as the living room—where functions that bring together family and friends take place. Captured in photos, trophies, and mementos, a family's proudest moments rest on the mantel, demonstrating to visitors the soul and character of this particular clan. Thus, it makes sense architecturally for the design of the mantel itself to embody the soul and character of the surrounding house.

Such was the idea behind these two mantels by San Francisco architect Dan Phipps, which preside over the living rooms of two local Modern houses. Although they occupy separate homes, each mantel reflects the pared-down simplicity of its environment. In particular, hidden support systems keep fussy details to a minimum.

In the first house, Phipps wanted a maintenance-free material for the mantel that would match the color and feel of the redwood trees outside. So he used Cor-Ten steel for both the framing and the mantel itself; when rusty, the metal mimics almost perfectly the distinctive hue of redwood bark. (By "watering" the steel daily with a spray bottle while it was on the construction site, the owner hastened the rusting

continued on page 70



Most of the weight of the steel mantel hangs from a continuous angle set under the top flange, with secondary support and bracing provided by two clip angles attached to the bottom flange at either end.

He, takes Thai cooking classes.

She, has an extensive collection of Miles Davis records.

They, both have a fondness for Mexican Folk art.



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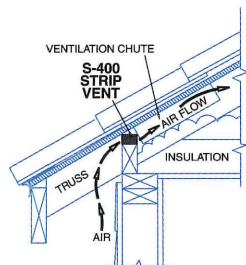


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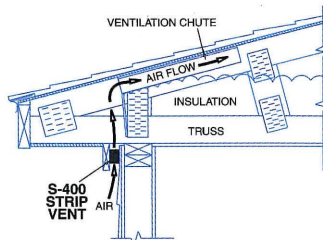
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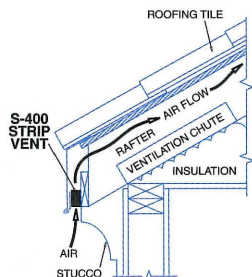
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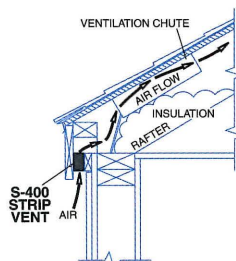
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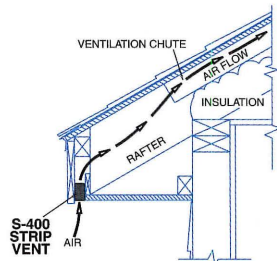
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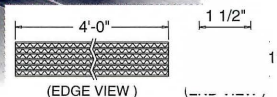


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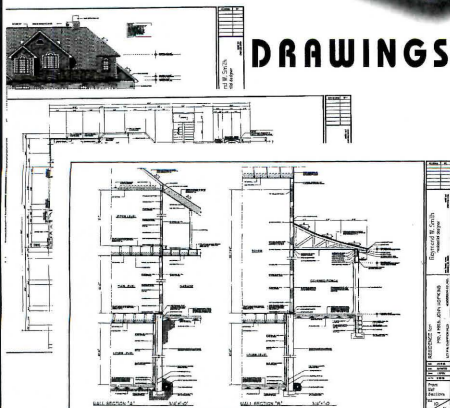
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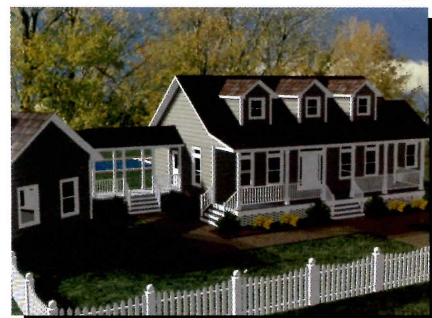
material list &

Material List & Cost Estimate

Material	Description	Qty	Units	Cost	Material	Cost
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2260	hlf	0.05	10.00	5.00	247.80	
2058	hlf	0.15	10.00	5.00	442.67	
Subtotal						
EXTERIOR FINISH						
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1857	hlf	1.80	15.00	10.00	257.00	
1858	hlf	1.80	15.00	10.00	240.40	
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1895	hlf	1.80	15.00	10.00	14.00	
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1898	hlf	1.80	15.00	10.00	14.00	
1899	hlf	1.80	15.00	10.00	14.00	
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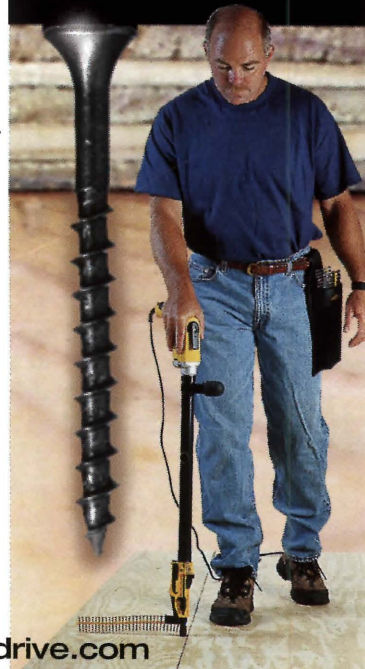
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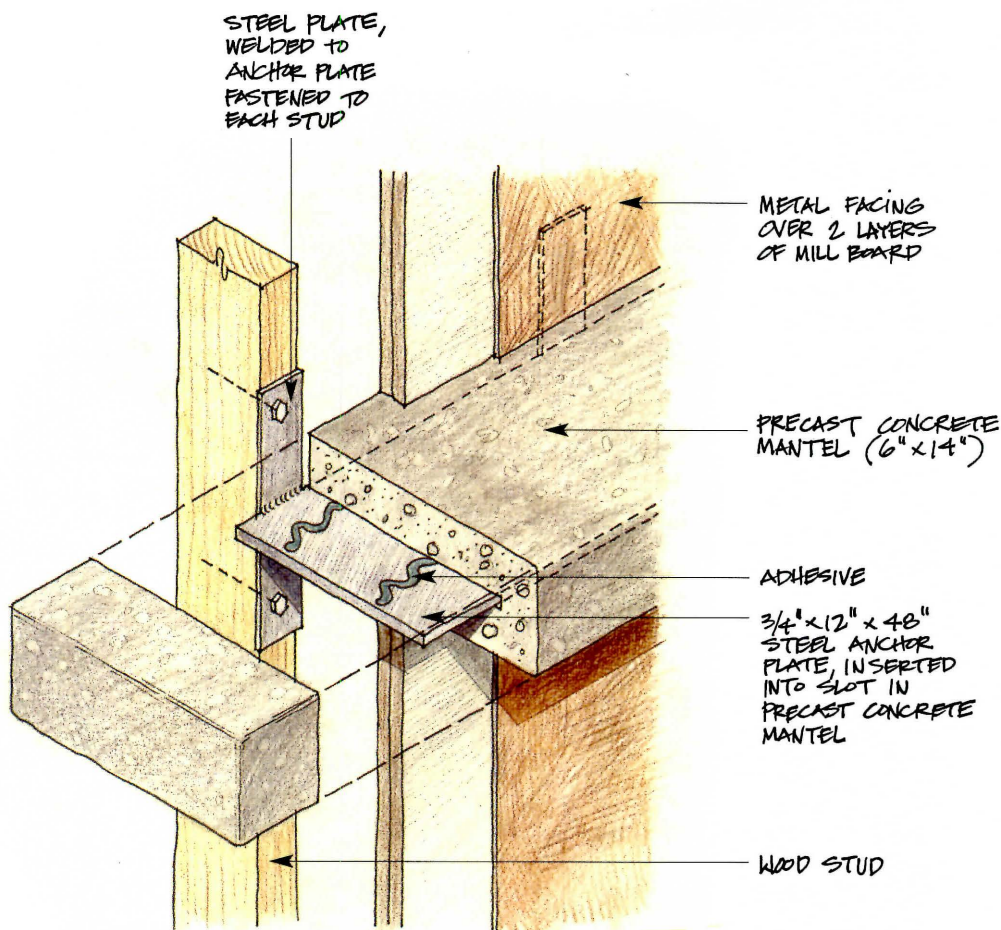
Circle no. 86

process. Otherwise, it would have taken about a year of natural weathering to achieve the desired finish.) Phipps made the 335-pound steel beam that serves as the mantel appear to float above the fireplace by hanging it from hidden steel angles. He closed off the ends of the beam with Cor-Ten steel cover plates, which are attached with hidden welds. The surface of the steel is sealed with beeswax.

In the second house, Phipps also used steel as a finish material, but in this case as a facing for the fireplace surround. The mantel itself is concrete, a material that shows up elsewhere in the house in the form of tiles. He hired Dave Holsenback, of Reification, also in San Francisco, to "patinize" the steel with a special acidic process that lends the metal a rich, warm character. And he hired specialists from the local firm Buddy Rhodes Studio to give the concrete a unique, earthy look of its own. They dry-packed the concrete into forms, which created little air pockets on the surface that were later filled with a lighter-color grout. The finished material boasts the texture of travertine and—thanks to coloring agents—the color of limestone.

Early in the process, while the concrete was still malleable, Phipps had cast a long, deep slot into the rear of the mantel. Hanging the finished piece involved sliding a 48-inch-long steel anchor plate attached to the wall framing into this slot. **ra**

Rick Vitullo, AIA, is founder and principal of Vitullo Architecture Studio, Washington, D.C.



Phipps squeezed adhesive into the concrete mantel's cast-in slot to attach the ledge more firmly to its support. He also bolted the five vertical anchor straps welded to the rear of the horizontal plate to each stud, at the top and at the bottom. He used mill board (or MDF board) behind the steel facing, which provides a firm support for the anchors.

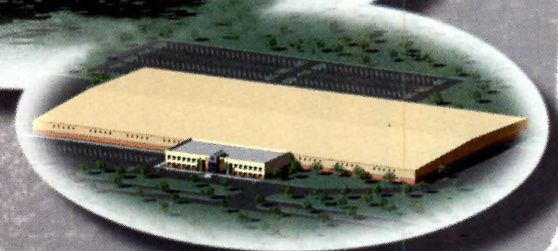
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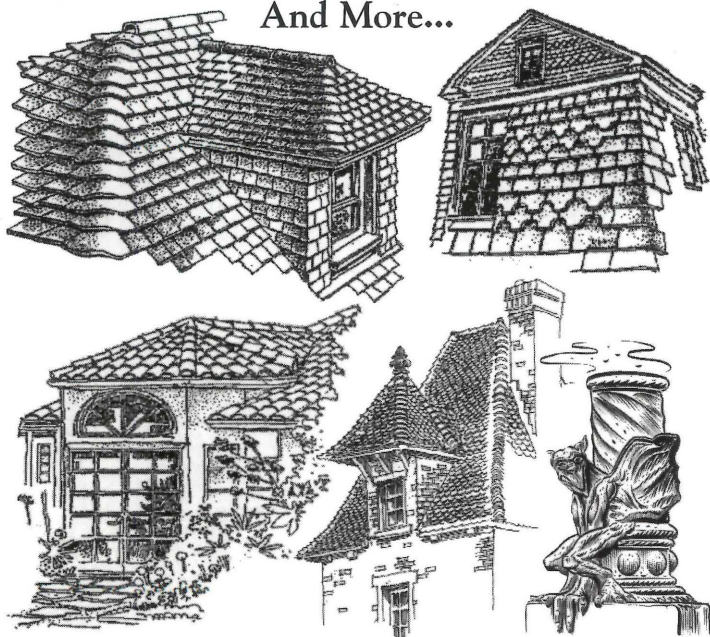
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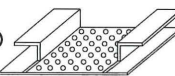
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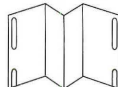
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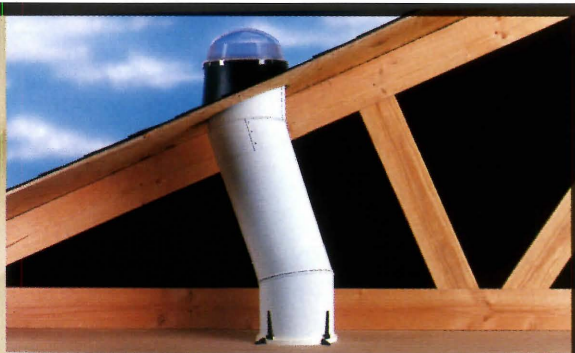
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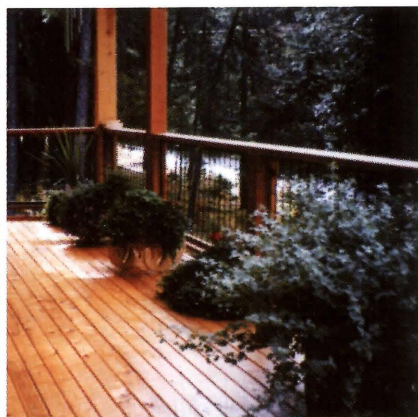
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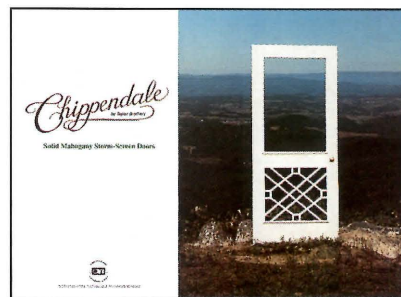
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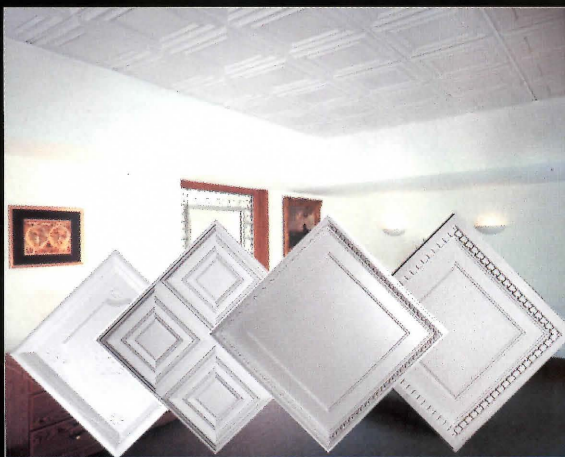
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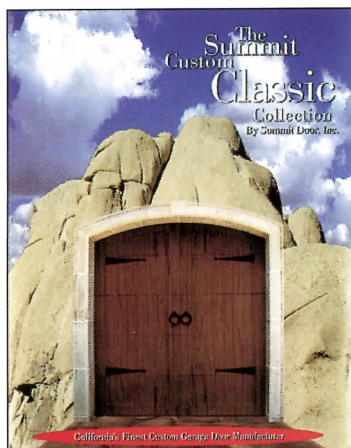
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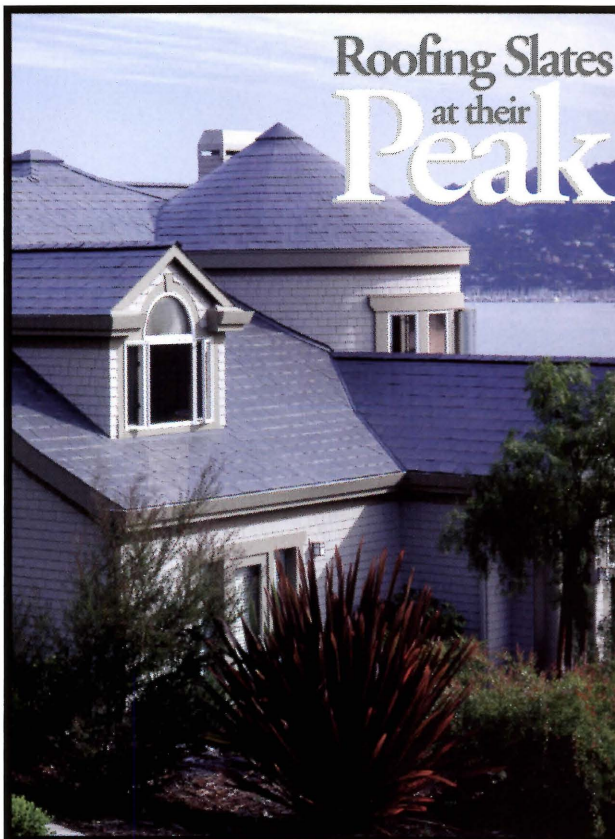


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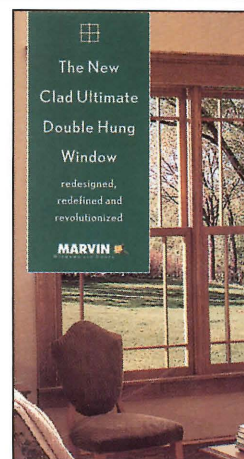
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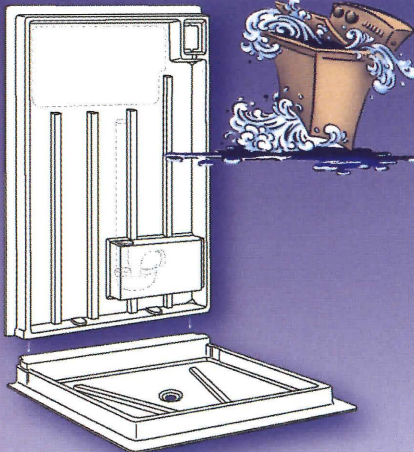
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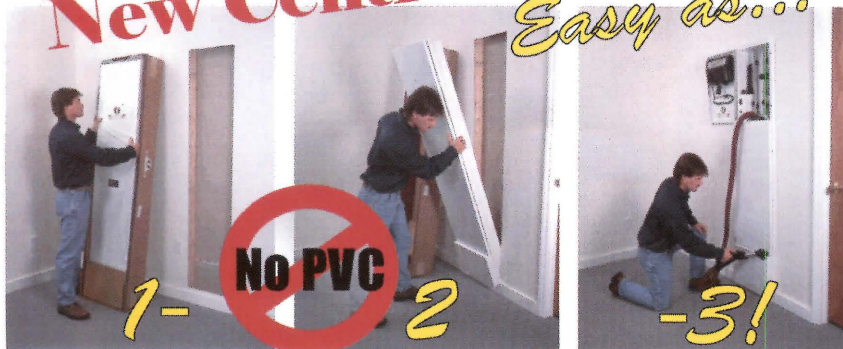
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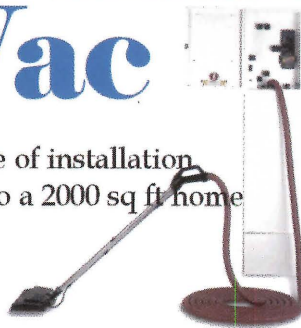
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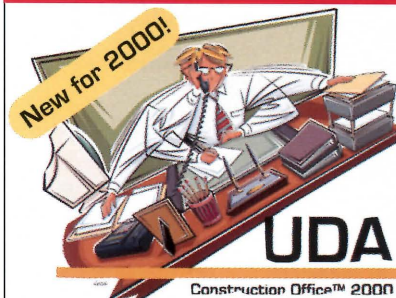
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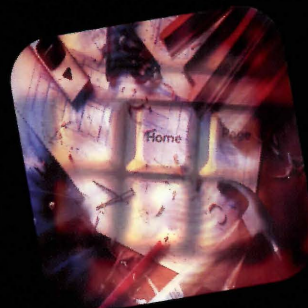
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new jersey architect michael ryan sees the light
at pierre chareau's paris masterpiece.

Pierre Chareau's Maison de Verre (glass house) in Paris inspires on many levels. It's a fine example of client patronage; it successfully links art and finance, and living and work.

Inserted into an 18th-century town house, the 1932 home and doctor's office is an unapologetic solution to the urban exigencies of re-use and reconstruction. Chareau used these constraints as stimuli. Despite a radical intervention, there is a humility that derives from specificity. There appears

to be no intent to influence anyone or anything beyond the place itself. The house is rational, not theoretical. Inside, the application of fittings obscures the boundaries between architecture and furniture, design and fabrication.

The Maison de Verre exists in contrast to the contemporary assumption that transparency is the way to blur the distinction between inside and outside. Chareau blurs it literally, collecting the phenomena of the outside world in hundreds of glass panels, whose flecked and faceted texture resembles skin. The favor is returned in the evening, with the interior world projecting through the same glass screen. **ra**

Michael Ryan is principal of Michael Ryan Architects in Loveladies, N.J.



Photos: (left) © Meredith L. Clausen; (above) Pete Morelewicz