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Natural by Design, space 279/289

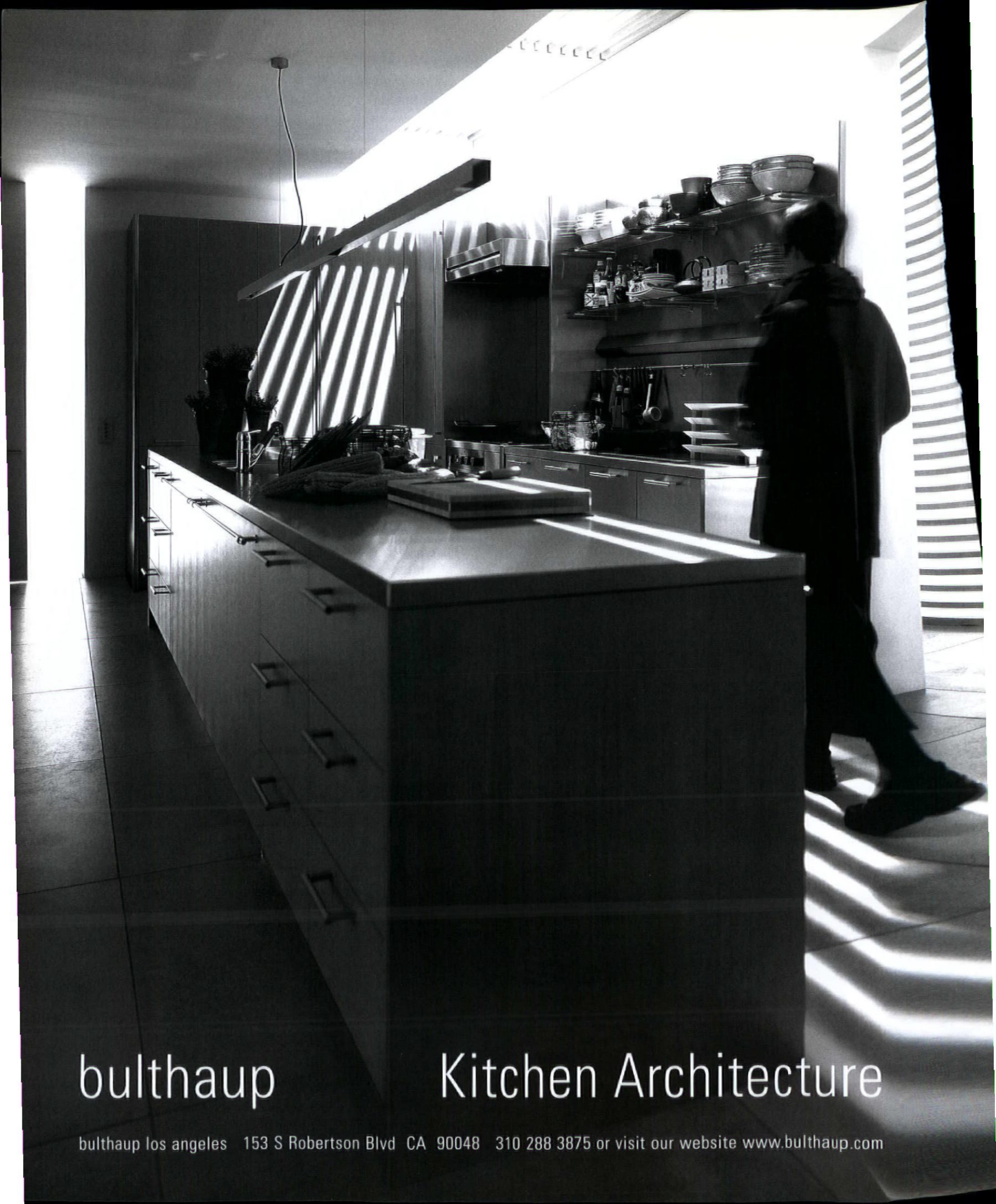
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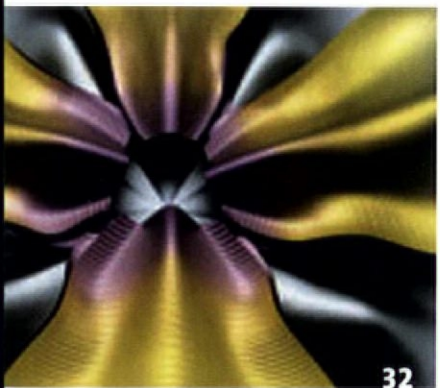
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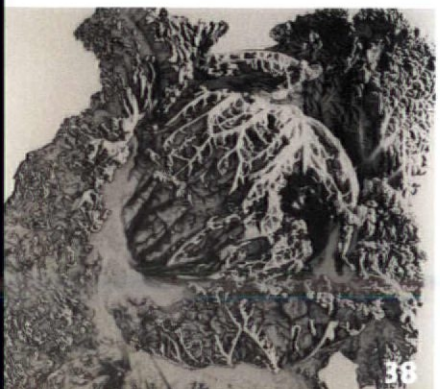
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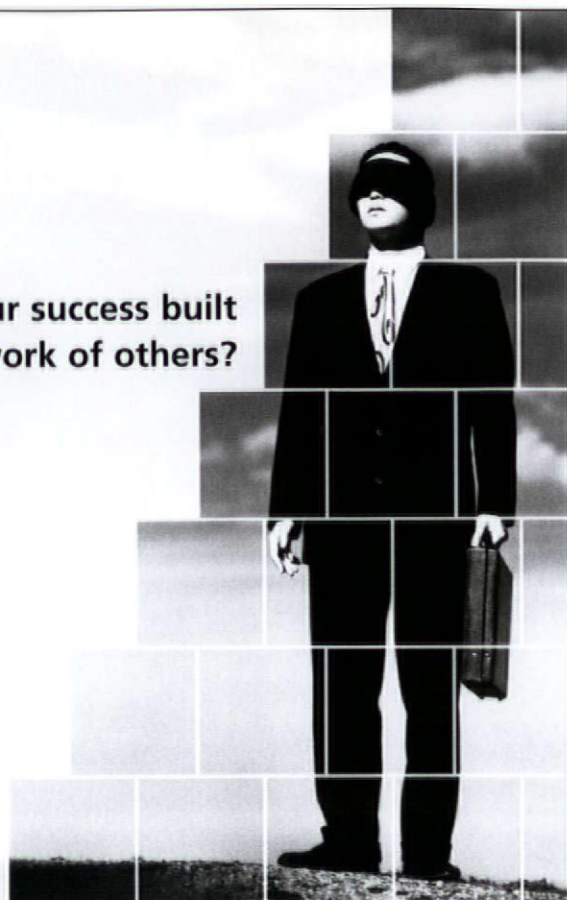
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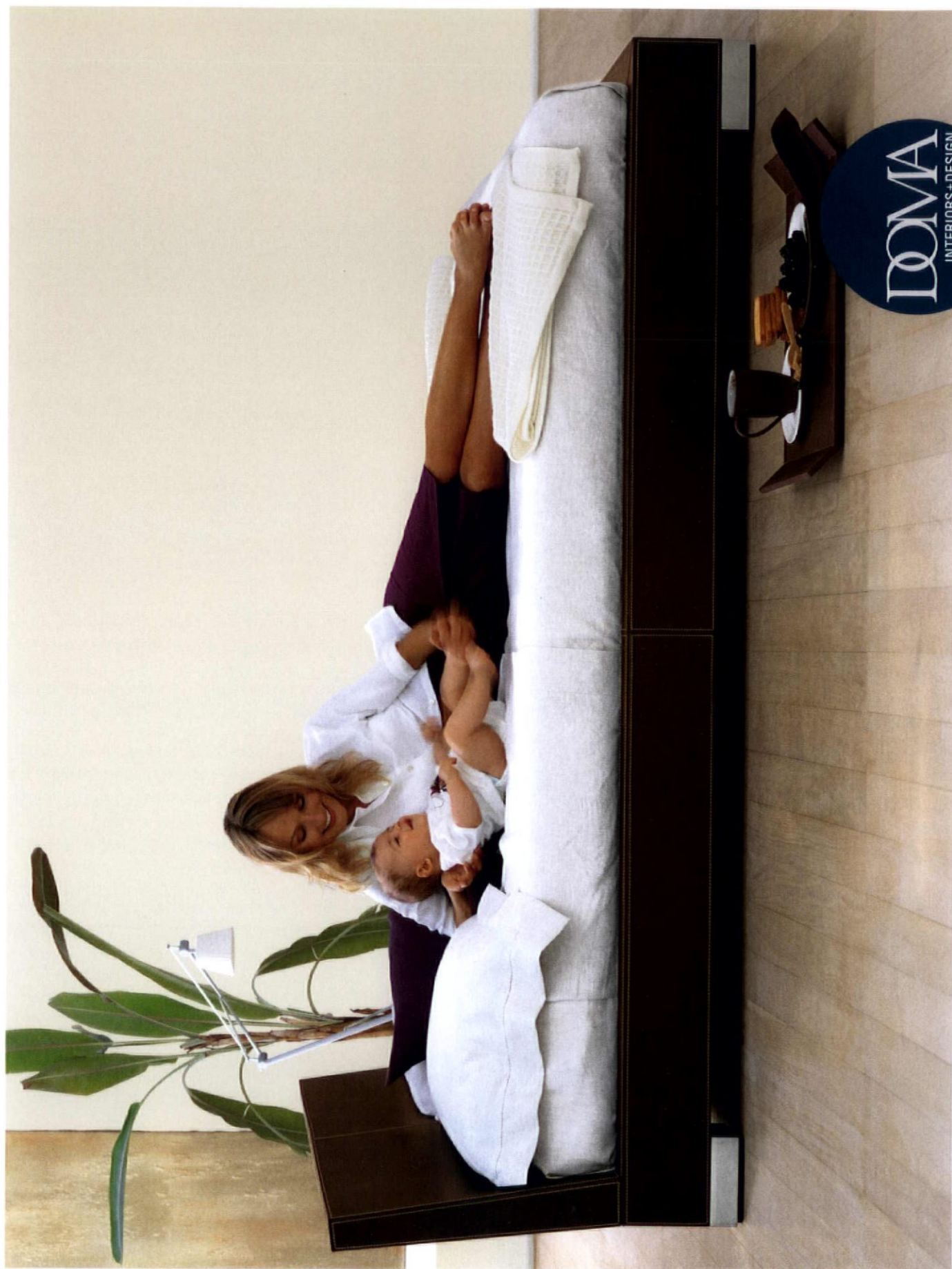
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KAZYS VARNELIS received his Ph.D in architectural history and urban development at Cornell University. He teaches history and theory at SCI-Arc and the Art Center Program in Environmental Design and is a founding principle in AUDC. Kazys is editing a book on "simultaneous environments" for publication in 2004 and working on a long term project on Late Modern architecture.

MICHAEL WEBB was born in London and has lived in Los Angeles for 24 years. He is the author of 18 books, including *Through the Windows of Paris*, *Modernism Reborn: Mid Century American Houses*, *Richard Sapper*, *Architecture + Design LA* and *Architects House Themselves*. Besides reviewing books and exhibitions for *LA Architect*, Michael is a regular contributor to *Architectural Digest*, *The New York Times*, *Domus* and other American and overseas magazines.

CORRECTION

In "Delineating the City," by Paulette Singley, from the March/April issue of *LA Architect*, the series of three maps produced by **Johnson Fain** on page 40 were incorrectly credited to Gandelsonas.



Existing open space
and river courses



Proposed greenways



Proposed development
along the greenway



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editor's letter

IN THIS INFORMATION-PACKED WORLD, THE LONE CREATOR HAS BECOME

an exception rather than a rule—collaboration is our new template for success. The World Trade Center competition propelled the issue of architectural collaboration into the public realm. Add to this the recent explosion of new collaborative firms and interdisciplinary coalitions formed by recent graduates as well as seasoned veterans, and the notion of teamwork becomes the *idée du jour*.



This fundamental shift toward collective interaction has evolved partly from the common language of the information sciences and partly through specialization. With the ubiquitous computer as our universal tool, one is now able to mix graphics, text, sound and animation in real time. The resulting common language has created an expanded dialogue between varied disciplines and blurred the boundary between design and production. Placed next to this is the post-war emergence of specialization, which requires that experts share their knowledge in order to produce a whole. As specialization flourished in the 60s, a debate began on what this new phenomenon would bring to our society. Perhaps collaboration itself is that byproduct. Where, after all, would Frank Gehry be without modelers, acousticians and engineers?

The concept of collaboration officially came to modern architecture through the formation of The Architects Collaborative (TAC) in 1945 by Walter Gropius. Along with a handful of Yale alumni, Gropius, then at Harvard University, infused the group with his idea of a socially responsible architecture. The collaborative formed around profit sharing, teamwork and joint acknowledgement. As the idea of collaboration matured, it entered the counter culture of the 60s (Archigram, Superstudio) and eventually wound up in the lap of Rem Koolhaas, who waved the communal flag while retaining his super star status.

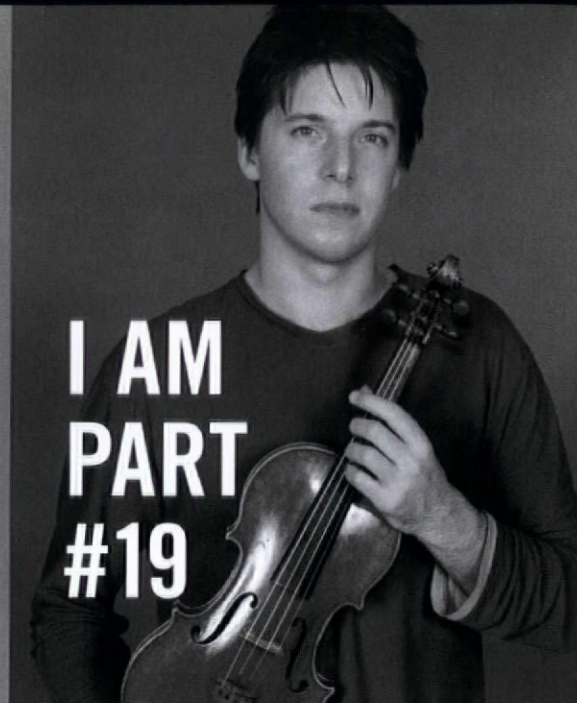
Although fraught with complexity, the practice of collaboration has become firmly established. In response, this issue of *LA Architect* explores its local evolution with a glimpse into the work of Greg Lynn FORM, a project by SPACE International, an intimate dialogue with four Los Angeles-based couples who collaborate both at work and at home, and a look at the Eames Office through the work of Herbert Matter.

Endemic to the structure of collaboration is the belief in 'multiple' rather than 'singular'. This conviction has affected the design of our workplace (communal work stations that promote shared ideas through cross fertilization) and influenced our basic creative processes (non-linear dialogues, flexible thinking and expanded perspectives). Even with its negatives (too many cooks, digressing into bureaucracy), the phenomenon of collaboration is ever entwined in our future. Collaboration in a digital world has approached its adolescence. ■

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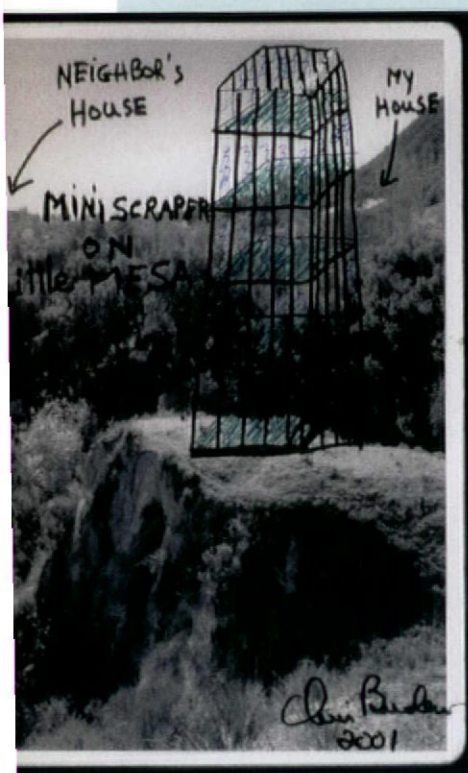
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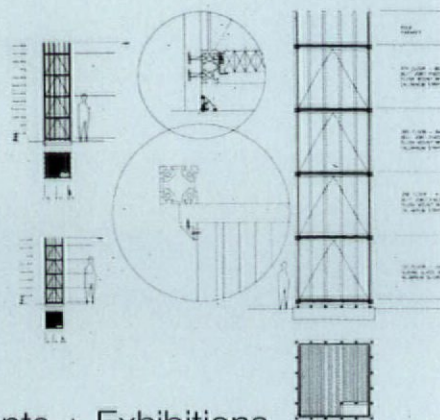
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Events + Exhibitions

Exploiting a loophole in the Los Angeles County building code, artist **Chris Burden** created a quasi-legal sculpture/building entitled *Small Skyscraper*, on view at **LACE** (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) through July 13. Allowed to build without a building permit if an outbuilding remains under 400 sq. ft. and under 35 feet high, Burden simply used up his allotment with a planned "small scraper" that consists of four 400 sq. ft. rooms stacked on top of one another and stretching toward the 35 ft. height limit. A prototype of the structure is reproduced in the gallery horizontally. The lightweight prototype of the scraper was built by untrained builders in collaboration with Linda Taalman and Alan Koch of **TK Architecture**, from a kit of aluminum parts. www.artleak.org or 323-957-1777 X 17



Alessi, the Italian manufacturer of design-driven household objects, commissioned more than 20 architects to envision functional tea and coffee sets that take the shape of towers and other structural forms.

Based on a similar project conducted 20 years ago, the outcome is an exhibition entitled *Tea and Coffee Towers* at the Max Protetch Gallery in New York City (through June 30). Thom Mayne of Morphosis and Greg Lynn of Greg Lynn FORM were among the participants, which included David Chipperfield, Zaha Hadid, Toyo Ito and Jean Nouvel, to name a few. Max Protetch Gallery 212-633-6999.



SCI-Arc summer shows include an exhibit by Spanish Architect and SCI-Arc faculty member **Marta Male**, on view in June and July. Male, who splits her time between Spain and LA., balances a European polytechnic background with an American research-driven cutting-edge creativity. From this position, she is currently investigating the flourishing new digital technologies for design and manufacturing. www.sciarc.edu or 213-613-2200

Case Study House #8, otherwise known as the **Eames House**, will be open to the public on Saturday and Sunday, June 21 and 22. The tour is available through pre-registration only at \$90 per person by fax, mail or online. Proceeds from the event will help maintain the Eames House, currently not supported by foundation or government funding. The event is hosted by Lucia Eames, daughter of Charles and Ray Eames. www.eamesoffice.com or 310-459-9663

People

AC Martin Partners, Inc. recently appointed Craig W. Wilson to its Board of Directors. Dusty Rhoads has been named partner at Portland, Oregon based, **Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership**. He joined the Los Angeles office in 1990. The **LACMA Institute for Art and Cultures** recently announced that their founder and director, Paul Holdengraber, has been awarded the distinguished title of *Chevalier of the French Order of Arts and Letters* by the French Government. Holdengraber joins LACMA's president and director, Andrea Rich, and Carol Eliel, the curator of modern and contemporary art as prior LACMA recipients of this prestigious award. Local architect, urbanist, and preservationist Christi Van Cleve, co-founder of **Roschen Van Cleve Architects**, has been elected chairperson of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. **NBBJ** has recently promoted Steve Reuf to Principal, and Fred Coons to Senior Associate. Peter J. Davoren was recently named President of **Turner Construction Company**.

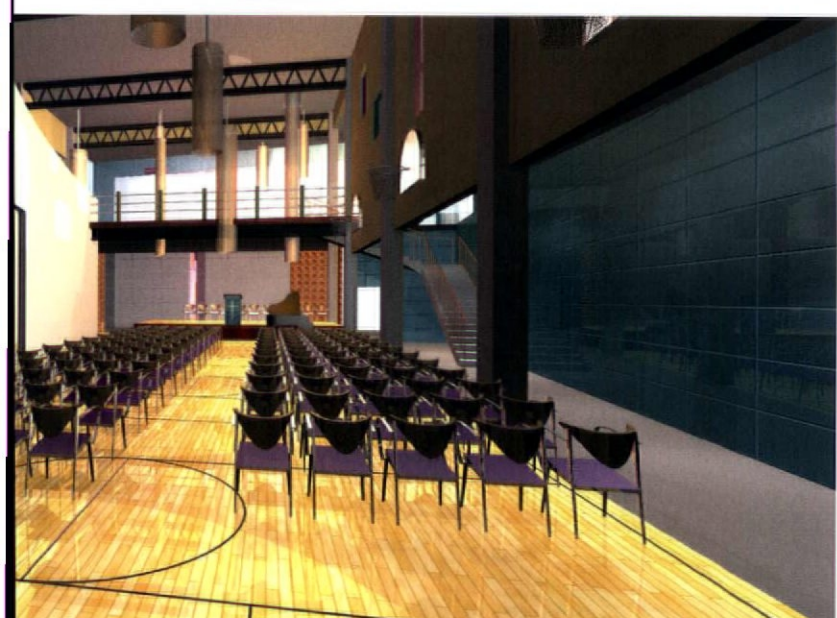
Crossing the Pond?

If you're on your way to Europe this summer, the first **International Architecture Biennial** continues through July 7 in Rotterdam. Held at two sites, The Nederlands Architectuurinstituut (NAI) and Las Palmas at Kop van Zuid, the Biennial focuses entirely on the theme of mobility, examining the issue of modern-day mobile culture and the consequences for architecture and urban development. Architects, civil engineers, urban planners, traffic experts, landscape architects, students, filmmakers and photographers from around the world will present exhibitions, lectures, publications, debates, films and excursions. The curator is Francine Houben, partner in the Mecanoo architecture firm and professor at the Delft University of Technology. For more information visit www.biennalerotterdam.nl.



MOCA at the Geffen Contemporary presents the first solo museum show of Los Angeles-based Japanese artist **Yutaka Sone**. The site-specific installation, entitled *Yutaka Sone: Jungle Island*, features four 4 ft. x 4 ft. free-standing marble sculptures of Los Angeles freeway interchanges set within a staged environment of tropical plants and pathways. The detailed sculptures represent the interchanges of the 10 and the 110, the 10 and the 405, the 110 and the 105, and the 14 and 5. On view through July 27. www.MOCA-LA.org

Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership was selected to build the Robert Mondavi Institute for Food and Wine Science at the University of California, Davis. Groundbreaking for the \$78-million, multi-building complex is expected to begin in 2004. The project includes three separately funded elements for the Department of Viticulture and Enology and the Department of Food Science and Technology: a 129,600-sq. ft. academic building with research and teaching labs, a 41,000-sq. ft. teaching winery, and a food processing facility, teaching labs and brewery. The institute will be designed to accommodate the largest and most prestigious wine and food science academic program in the world.



church and community center in Los Feliz
Student project by Christopher Pae

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Awards + Competitions

Catherine Johnson and Thea Massough of SCI-Arc are the winners of the 11th annual **1:2 Student Competition for Interior Design**, sponsored by the AIA/LA Interior Architecture Committee. Held at DMJM Rottet, the competition was open to all Southern California schools of architecture, interior architecture, and interior design. Student teams of two, selected by their school, competed for scholarship prizes totaling \$20,000. Teams arrived for the one-day design charette without any prior knowledge of the proposed project. The competition required that all design and presentation work be done by hand in a period of six hours, after which the teams were evaluated by the jurors: Lauren Rottet, FAIA, Nila Leiserowitz, FASID and Hagy Belzberg, AIA. The jury short-listed six finalists from 14 school teams; second place went to Otis College of Art and Design and third place to Cal State Long Beach. The remaining three finalists were from Intercontinental University, Pasadena City College and USC.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) selected six merit finalists for their 2003 Outstanding Civil Engineering Achievement Award. Among the finalists were the Alameda Corridor in Los Angeles and the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. The award recognizes civil engineering ingenuity for developing innovative solutions to everyday challenges.

MDA Johnson Favaro Architecture and Urban Design recently completed The Shops on Lake Avenue in Pasadena, a new pedestrian-oriented complex of 27 retail stores. Incorporating walkways and open park-like plazas, the two level complex envelops the historic 1947 Macy's building, originally designed by architect Welton Becket and presently undergoing refurbishment by **Starwood Wasserman LLC**. Conceptual artist **Vito Acconci's Mobius Bench** was commissioned for the project, a public artwork that simultaneously functions as furniture and a fiber optic illuminated light source.

A team of **USC** architecture students was chosen as one of four finalists in the **ULI** (Urban Land Institute) Gerald D. Hines Student Urban Design Competition. The teams were charged with the redesign of a transitional portion of South Capitol Street near the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. The USC team reinterpreted the grandeur of L'Enfant's baroque boulevard as a twenty-first century urban promenade that retains its formality and intersperses it with enlivened streets as it extends towards the river, transitioning from a civic to live-work to natural environment. The four finalists (USC, Harvard, MIT, and Penn) were selected from 45 submissions generated from 26 universities. Among three teams selected for honorable mention was a team from SCI-Arc. www.udcompetition.uli.org

Firm News

DeStefano and Partners of Chicago and Keating/Khang of Los Angeles have announced their merger, forming **DeStefano Keating Partners Limited**. Leading the firm are James R. DeStefano as Chief Executive Officer, and Richard Keating, as President and Design Director, both formerly partners at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. Raymond Clark and Bonnie Khang are the managing principals of the Chicago and Los Angeles offices, respectively. **Johnson Fain** is creating a master plan for the Beijing Zhongguancun International School (China's first international school). It is the firm's second project in Beijing, and will occupy a 140,000-square-meter campus in the Haidian district of the city. **Killefer Flammang Architects** has won the competition to build the new 20,000-sq. ft. Public Library in Lafayette, CA. The \$10-million, 83-acre project is planned for completion in the spring of 2006. Construction commenced on a 135,000-sq. ft. science building for U.C. Riverside by **HGA**. The \$40-million building will house 65–70 state-of-the-art laboratories. Architect **David Denton** has begun an adaptive reuse renovation of the historic Mercantile Arcade Building in downtown L.A.'s Historic Core. The 220,000-sq. ft. building will include 115,000-sq. ft. of luxury residential space above 28,000 net sq. ft. of ground floor retail space. The Beaux Arts building was modeled on London's Burlington Arcade, and was originally built in 1923 as a result of a design competition held by the AIA. Denton hired **Killefer Flammang Architects** as executive architects

on the project. **AC Martin Partners, Inc.** has begun construction on RiverPark, a 700-acre mixed-use community in Oxnard. Working within a ten-year building timeline, the project will include 2,800 housing units, 3 public schools, 2.5 million sq. ft. of commercial space and neighborhood parks and open space for the residents of Oxnard. **Frederick Fisher and Partners Architects** has been selected for three major art building commissions: a 16,000-sq. ft. addition to the Virginia Steele Scott Gallery at the Huntington Library, a 24,000-sq. ft. addition to the Oceanside Museum of Art, and an extensive renovation and expansion of the Flint Institute of Arts, in Flint, Michigan. The firm also completed Hampton Court and North Venice Court, lofts that provide live-work space for artists and creative professionals. **Pugh Scarpa Kodama** was selected as one of nine winners of the AIA's 2003 Housing PIA (Professional Interest Area) Awards for Colorado Court in the category of multi-family projects. The Santa Monica project is 100% energy neutral, incorporating energy efficient measures that exceed standard practice, optimize building performance and minimize energy use during all phases of construction and occupancy. 40 hotels by **Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo (WATG)** have been recognized and ranked by *Travel + Leisure* and *Conde Nast Traveler* as among the "Best Hotels in the World." The rankings were determined by the readers of *Travel and Leisure* magazine, as well as over 28,000 *Conde Nast Traveler* subscribers.

The **LA Forum**-sponsored *Dead Malls Competition* selected five winners from a pool of 21 finalists. Entrants in the international competition were asked to select a dead or dying retail mall and propose a scheme for its resuscitation. Responses ranged from the expected multi-use and housing, to exotic farming, e-commerce service center and prison. Among the winners were three LA-based teams: Central Office of Architecture (Eric Kahn, Ron Golan, Russell N. Thomsen, Heather Flood, Sameena Sitabkhan, and Gavin Farley) from Los Angeles; Pierre De Angelis and Carmen Suero from Culver City; and Elizabeth Meyer and Anne Rosenberg from Santa Monica. For winning schemes visit www.laforum.org.

Interior Space.



Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
Jose Rafael Moneo Arquitecto, Madrid
Leo A. Daly, Executive Architect

[Impressive.]

"The most impressive large interior space ever built in Los Angeles," Wall Street Journal

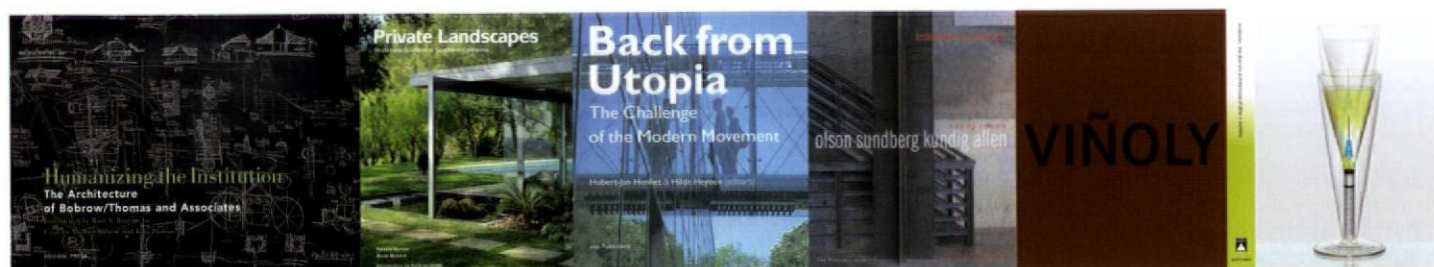
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places for people

Humanizing the Institution: The Architecture of Bobrow/Thomas and Associates

(EDIZIONE PRESS, \$35 HC) ISBN 1-931536-11-2

Too many hospitals—Cedars Sinai is an example—are vast, oppressive labyrinths, discouraging practitioners and patients alike. The LA firm of Michael Bobrow and Julia Thomas have infused their care facilities with cool design, warm colors, light, air, and glimpses of nature. They've carried that same spirit of humanity into offices, laboratories, and college buildings. This well-illustrated overview, introduced by Raul Barreneche, shows that architects really can enhance the quality of life.

Private Landscapes: Modernist Gardens in Southern California

(PAMELA BURTON & MARIE BOTNICK, PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS, \$40 HC) ISBN 1-56898-402-2

Kathryn Smith's erudite introduction and the authors' texts add historical resonance to this enticing collection of new and original gardens (including several by Burton) that set off classic houses by Schindler, Neutra, Soriano, and Quincy Jones. The plans and photographs are reminders of how Garrett Eckbo and others led the way in integrating modern architecture with landscape, inspired by Neutra's vision of the house as "a machine in the garden."

Back from Utopia: The Challenge of the Modern Movement

(EDITED BY HUBERT-JAN HENKET & HILDE HEYNEIN, 010 PUBLISHERS, ROTTERDAM, \$40 PB) ISBN 90-6450-483-0

A sharp-tongued polemic, *Miestakes*, from Rem Koolhaas on his proposal for IIT, a revaluation of Chandigarh, and another on fascist architecture in Italy are among the 42 short essays by architects and critics comprising this multi-faceted portrait of modernism—its promise, failures, and potential. Henket co-founded DoCoMoMo to document and save modern buildings world wide, and he's helped create an anthology that's generally lucid, provocative, and free of academic mumbo-jumbo.

Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects: Architecture, Art, and Craft

(THE MONACELLI PRESS, \$65 HC) ISBN 1-58093-078-6

In a characteristically perceptive and graceful introduction, Paul Goldberger suggests that the world has caught up with the good sense and refined sensibility of this Seattle firm. This is a handsome, expansive study of a dozen houses, built for people of means and taste—a rare combination. All but two are located in the northwest, and each immerses you in the natural beauty of its site and its inner serenity.

Rafael Viñoly

(PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS, \$85 HC) ISBN 1-56898-373-5

As the senior member of the ad-hoc Think team, Viñoly came in a close second in the competition to rebuild Ground Zero, and earlier won acclaim for the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts Center in Philadelphia, and Tokyo International Forum. Each lifts the spirits, as surely as this ugly, congested compendium depresses them. However, Viñoly's account of leaving junta-run Argentina and re-establishing himself in New York is riveting.

Scanning: the Aberrant Architecture of Diller + Scofidio

(WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART; DISTRIBUTED BY HARRY N. ABRAMS, \$45 HC) ISBN 0-87427-131-2

The companion book to an exhibition at the Whitney, which runs through June 1, is a work of art in itself. The lenticular plastic cover shimmers enigmatically; folded pages with elliptical cuts allow you to peer inside, propelling you through the book in search of what can be imperfectly glimpsed. It's an appropriate, teasing metaphor for this collection of installations, exhibits, and as yet unrealized projects, plus *Blur* from the Swiss Expo 02. Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio ponder our obsession with display and call everything into question.



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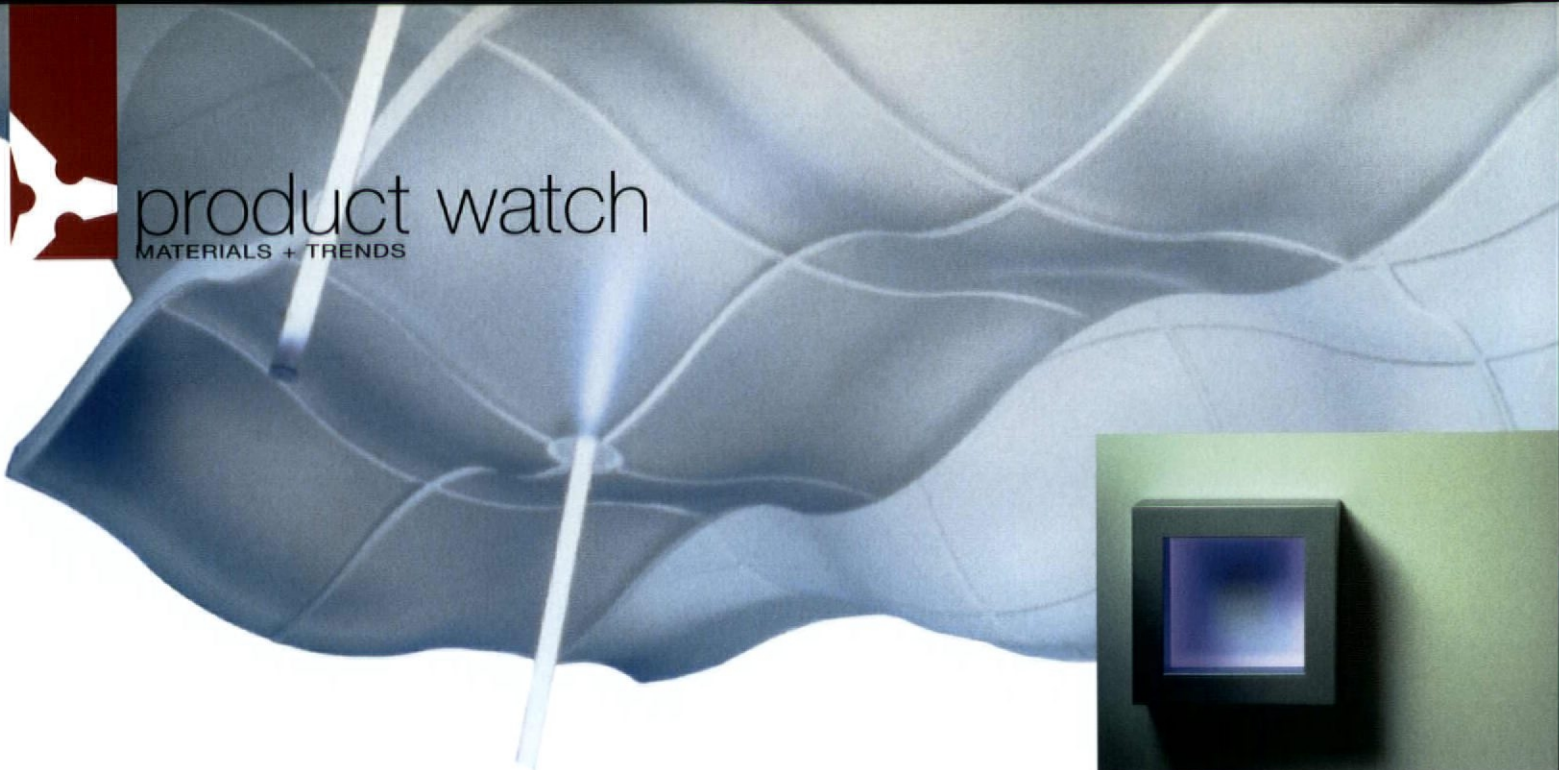
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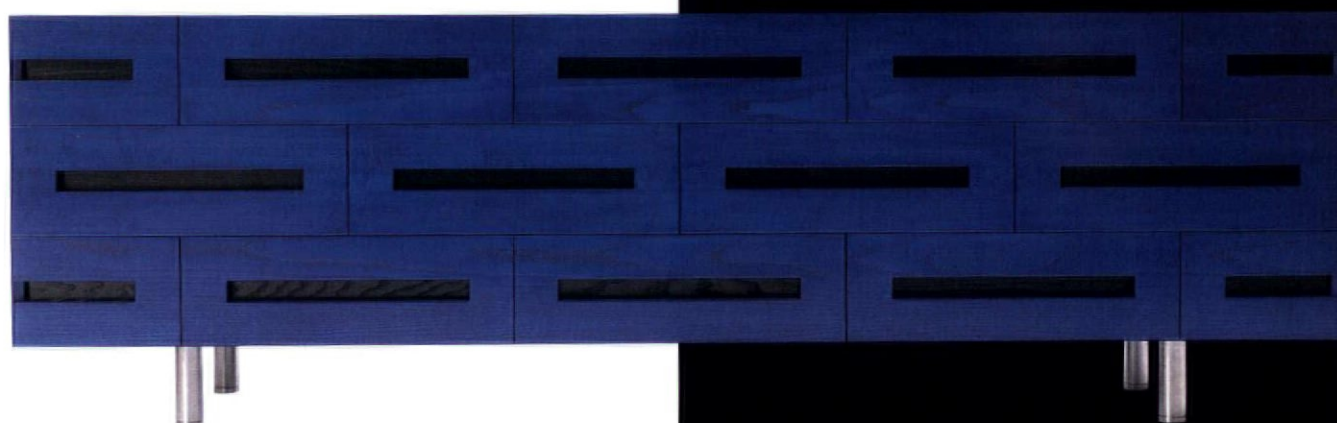
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McMakin @ MoCA

Roy's Surreal Furniture and Useful Art

By Michael Webb



Installation photos by Brian Forrest. Chair photo courtesy Roy McMakin.



AS THOUGH IN A DREAM, YOUR GRANDMOTHER'S HOME HAS SHRUNK TO A SINGLE ROOM. THE familiar bed, chairs, and chests are piled together and have turned a spectral gray. The refrigerator has tipped on its side and multiplied to fill the wall with cooling coils. Welcome to the surreal, inventive world of Roy McMakin, where art and design are interwoven, and nothing is quite what it seems. The gray room is a new installation in the mid-career retrospective, "A Door Meant as Adornment," which Michael Darling curated for MOCA's outpost at the Pacific Design Center.

The drab block on the PDC plaza may be the worst-designed gallery in the city, but McMakin has mastered the challenge, subverting its banal façade with a fragmented white porch, and scaling down the verticality of its interior with a wall of refrigerators that block off the freight elevator, and industrial shelving that evokes a storeroom. "It's Alice in Wonderland," he says. "As you enter, the tabletop model of the house I'm building makes you feel bigger; standing below the shelves, you feel smaller."

Continued on page 45 >>

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Corporate CAMOUFLAGE



SPACE International's Noevir USA Showroom

By Kazys Varnelis
Photography by Benny Chan

HOW TO SHINE IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION? IF THE HISTORICAL MYTH OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

building is that it takes place in a limitless tabula rasa, the reality is that architects here increasingly face compromised, demanding sites in which opportunities to maneuver are restricted. With their showroom for the Japanese cosmetics corporation Noevir USA, Space International proves that this is precisely where architectural invention can flourish.

Noevir hired SPACE International, led by principals Mike Ferguson and John Hirsch, to renovate a lounge area within an existing industrial building into a retail showroom. The initial condition seemed inhospitable; the lounge was unduly vast, some 3,500 square feet in size, bisected by an awkward level change, and adjacent to the company's cubicle-filled offices and warehouse space. The Noevir headquarters itself was in the sort of aggressively non-descript corporate office building that immediately brings to mind the photography of Lewis Baltz. External interventions were not allowed.

Although the site's merits were low, the corporation's goals were lofty. Besides its role as a showroom, the space would serve as the public face of Noevir in the United States, to accommodate receptions and the training of a retail sales force. As Noevir specializes in creating high quality cosmetics derived from natural ingredients, they believed that the showroom should embody the company's philosophy of scientifically enhancing nature's benefits.

To engage in this condition, SPACE International employed a tactic of "camouflage," originally developed by Ferguson at SCI-Arc. In this approach, SPACE takes an existing object or condition and transforms it into something else, albeit without annihilating the original. The result is, in Ferguson's words, "architecture which ceases to be that which is perfectly clear and becomes, instead that which is clearly ambiguous." Noevir's desire to avoid any external interventions made establishing a relationship between interior and exterior difficult. Utilizing camouflage, however, SPACE International was able to establish a relationship between the new interior and the existing shell and to make connections to Noevir's philosophy of transforming nature through technology.



As the visitor enters from a parking lot, the showroom comes as a surprise. At first glance, the project, with its highly modern aesthetic, looks acontextual, along the lines advocated by Hans Ibelings in his polemic tract *Supermodernism*. SPACE International refused that approach, instead deploying a translucent “curtain wall” along the perimeter with a series of randomly-spaced, slotted apertures to give veiled glimpses of the outside office park. Inserted into the wall is a horizontal display shelf offering further glimpses of the industrial landscape beyond as it highlights the products displayed upon it.

Both the level change and vastness of the space are mitigated through three monolithic furniture pieces custom-made of acrylic polymer and mounted on translucent columns. Dividing the space into a series of ten-foot-wide spatial bands, the counters bridge the level change but remain at a constant height. As a result, the relationship of the pieces to your body changes as you walk through the space, an experience that acknowledges the level change as it undoes it. Productive ambiguity also informs the counter’s programmatic role: normally dedicated to the display of product, they serve as buffet tables during special events.

Four other spaces are adjacent to the showroom: a conference room, a salon spa, a back office supporting Noevir's operations, and a kitchen. SPACE International hints at these subtly. A floating limestone-clad panel reveals the conference room. Casters of Herman Miller office chairs peep out from below, like legs of giraffes at the zoo. A second limestone volume marks the kitchen, while the back office and salon spa are glimpsed through slots in the glass walls. Dual laminated glass behind the reception desk allows employees in the back stage area to see when new visitors arrive.

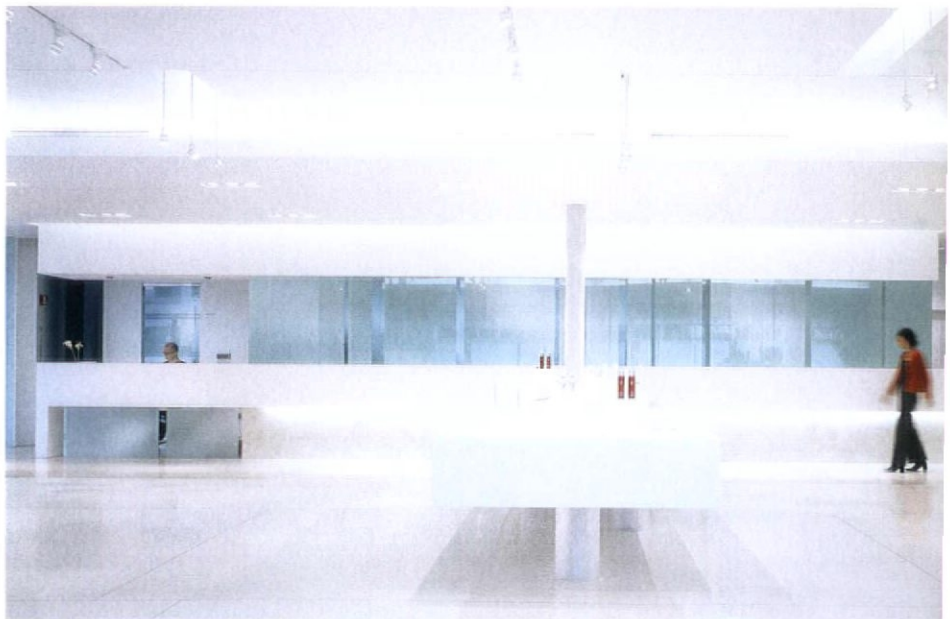
Throughout, SPACE International combines natural and artificial materials that suggest the play between science and nature. The honed limestone covering the walls and the lowest level of the floor is a product of nature, yet is laid in a random pattern evocative of a bar-code and transitions smoothly into microterazzo epoxy flooring on the upper level. Defined with a similar pattern, the ceiling uses point lighting to create a bright, crisp light for cosmetics application as it gives the showroom the feel of a sun-lit landscape. SPACE International's Noevir USA is an admirable project, but it is more than that, it is evidence of the kind of work an emerging generation is pursuing—taking a limited condition and turning it to an opportunity, creating the new without obliterating the existing, affirming the role of the architect as a highly intelligent, situationally-aware problem solver. Increasingly, there is much to be optimistic about in Los Angeles architecture. ■

CLIENT: Noevir USA

ARCHITECTS: SPACE International, Inc.

PROJECT TEAM: Mike Ferguson, John Hirsch, Robert Sumrell, Yuko Takenaka, Phill Trigas, Rocio Romero

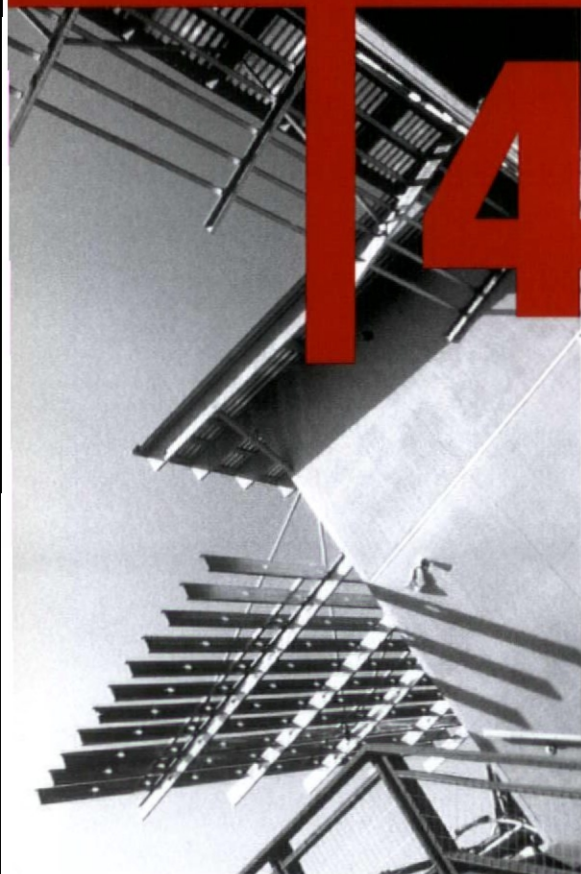
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: TODA Construction



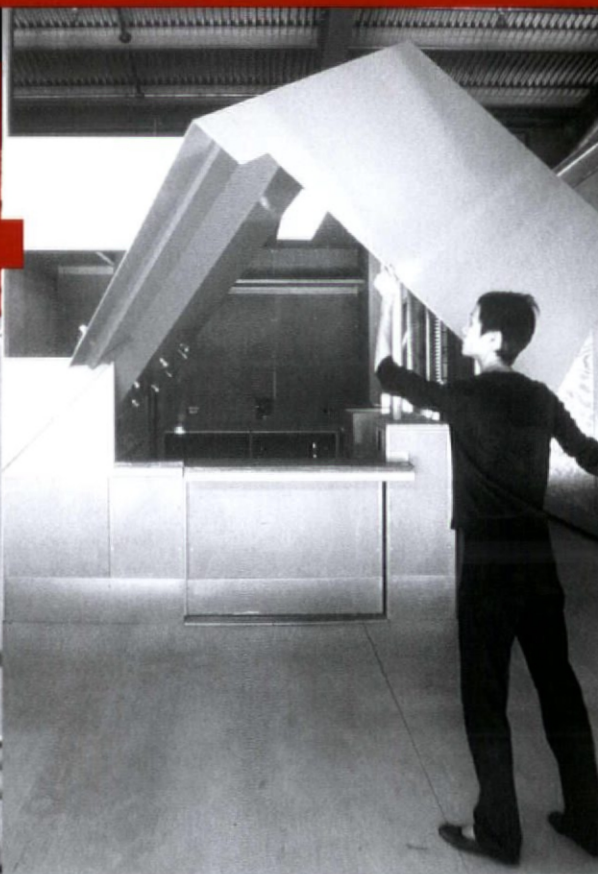


four creative couples TALK ABOUT LIFE & WORK

by Lisa Rosen



Miyoshi Residence, 2002, Fung & Blatt, Photo: Derek Rath



Art Center, Hodgetts & Fung, © Hodgetts & Fung



Electric Sun, Escher & GuneWardena, Photo: Gene Ogami

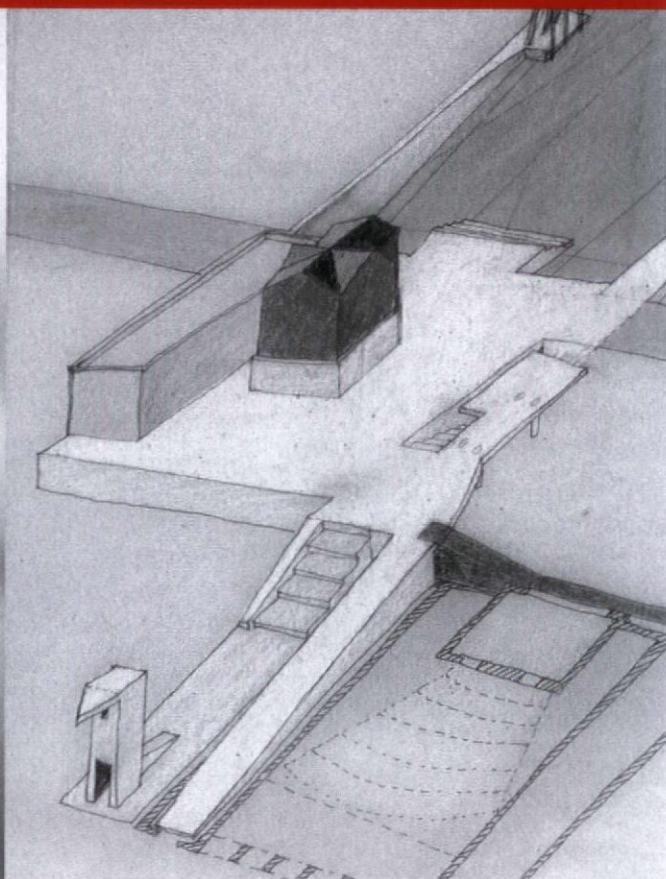
"You already share certain common values. You know how to read the other person's mind." —Ming Fung

For better and for worse, architecture is more of an all-consuming passion than a career. It's also highly collaborative; even the biggest master builder learns how to work with clients, engineers, builders—the list goes on. So it isn't surprising that an ever-increasing number of architect couples are collaborating with each other. *LA Architect* asked four such couples about the work life and home life that results when both are one. What happens when consuming passion meets romantic love?



Miyoshi Residence, 2002, Fung & Blatt, Photo: Deborah Bird

Alice Fung was working at Fred Fisher's office in the late 80s when Michael Blatt came in to engineer a project. They soon began dating, and within five months moved in together. The working partnership soon followed. Michael got a job remodeling a house, and he asked Alice to help with the project. She made it clear that—as with their personal relationship—they would work on equal terms, or not at all. So in 1990, they took two plunges: they married, and they opened their first studio, Fung + Blatt. "We didn't start off with a shared architectural vision," Michael says. "We started working together because it was the only thing the relationship would allow."



Grand Center Master Plan, Studio Works, Photo: Studio Works



Dillon St. Residence, Compl. 1990, Fung & Blatt, Photo: Derek Rath

"In a couple, as in any group, you have as much invested in attaching yourself to the product, but you give up a bit of your personal ego to be part of that group in the first place." —Ravi GuneWardena

Collaboration was a struggle at first. "We started working together before we really deeply knew each other," Alice said, "so we got to appreciate each other's strengths and admit our weaknesses, and eventually evolved to where we have a pretty fluid process now." Alice credits Michael with having the more logical head. He in turn relies on Alice for her acute editing skills. The two don't work on the same project at the same time, but rather switch off, adding layers to each other's work. They each have their own agenda, which they don't discuss with each other during the process.

"Ultimately, architecture is about space and the experience," Alice said. "It's a real physical thing, it doesn't really matter why you did it." Both find their work together extremely gratifying. From Fung + Blatt Architects' very first project, which won the AIA/Sunset Magazine Western Home award, "it was very obvious to me that it was not something I could have done on my own," Michael said.

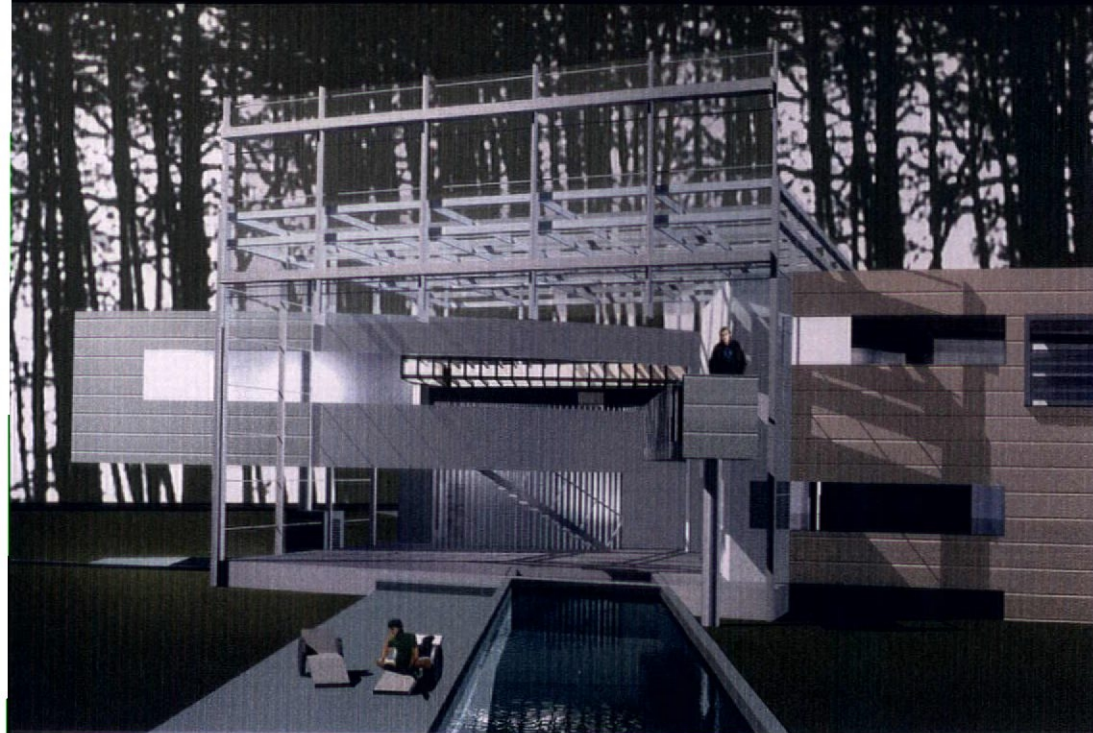
"The real strength of being a couple is that in a normal collaborative partnership you don't really have to resolve everything and be utterly fair," says Craig Hodgetts. Of his union with Hsin-Ming Fung, he adds, "I wouldn't be able to live with Ming if I weren't trying my best to be utterly fair, and I think she feels exactly the same way." The two of them have diametrically opposed views about architecture, and their process can be described as Craig jumping off a cliff, with Ming telling him



Fung & Blatt Residence, 2003, Fung & Blatt, Photo: Deborah Bird



Fung & Blatt Residence, 2003, Fung & Blatt, Photo: Deborah Bird



Sagaponac House, Hodgetts & Fung, © Hodgetts & Fung

where to land. Without pulling rank or exerting force in order to prevail, Hodgetts + Fung have to reach a



compromise between each of their ideals, and then make that compromise the ideal itself. "It's a curse and a blessing," Hodgetts says of their methods. "In many ways it accounts for the extreme variety in our work. Neither one of us would have singlehandedly produced such variety." That's the blessing. And the curse? "The process is exhausting," Ming says.

Friends for years, the two became a couple when she asked him to help her with a project she was working on, back in 1982. He had just decided to quit the field, but that all soon changed. "Sparks flew," Craig recalls, joking



Art Center, Hodgetts & Fung, © Hodgetts & Fung



Towell Library, Hodgetts & Fung, © Hodgetts & Fung

that Ming seduced him back into architecture. They next worked on a small commission he received. They had a great time working together—and the job won a PA Award—so in 1984 they decided to open an office. They don't recall knowing any other couples together back then, but now they know dozens.

Like Craig and Ming, Frank Escher and Ravi GuneWardena had been good friends for years before getting involved in 1995. And like Alice and Michael, once they did get involved, within five months they moved in together. They got along well, appreciated each other's work, and had similar interests in contemporary art and 20th century modernism, so the natural next step was for them to start Escher GuneWardena Architecture.

Frank and Ravi don't split up tasks or projects; rather, they discuss every aspect from concept to final execution. "The way we work is not so



Electric Sun, Escher & GuneWardena, Photo: Gene Ogami

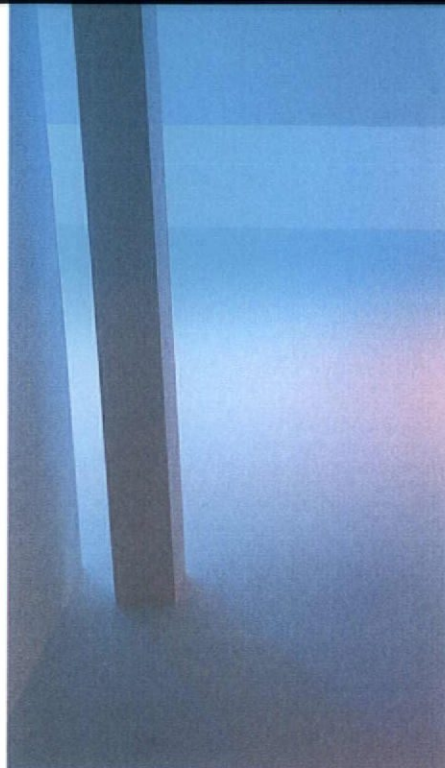


Towell Library, Hodgetts & Fung, © Hodgetts & Fung





Electric Sun, Escher & GuneWardena, Photo: John Ellis



Electric Sun, Escher & GuneWardena, Photo: Gene Ogami



Doyle-Wilson Hair Salon, Escher & GuneWardena, Photo: Gene Ogami

much about designing as it is about developing a strong concept for a project," Frank says. Ravi



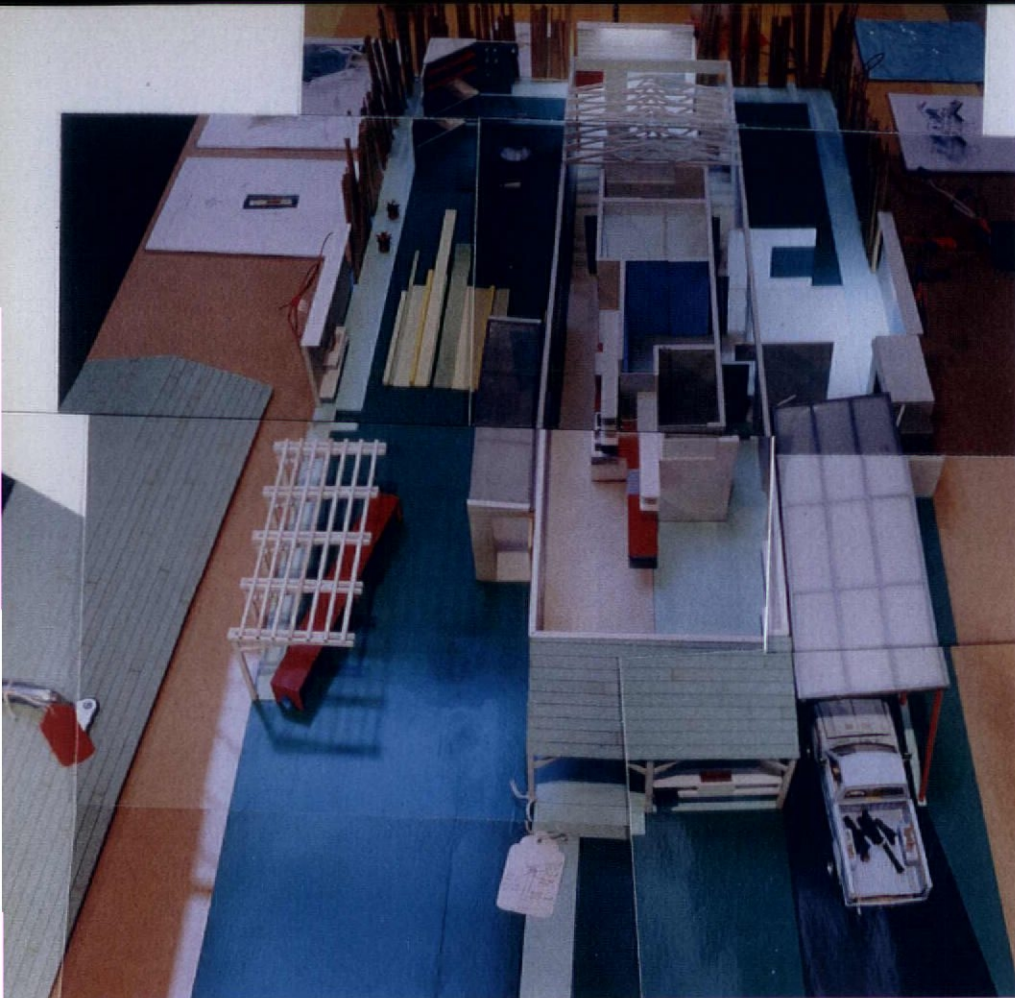
adds, "once we decide on a particular approach, then everything else falls in line with that concept." Using each other as sounding boards for ideas, or to express doubts about a project, only serves to improve the work. Their dialogue forces them to be very precise about their thoughts, "because we have to convey them to another person, and convince the other person that this is the right thing," Frank explains.

They agree that sometimes they talk too much, and can get carried away with the discussion when a project needs to come to a conclusion. But even that drawback has its advantages. The pair often finds that if a project is put on hold, they will revisit it, usually arriving at an entirely new and better design.

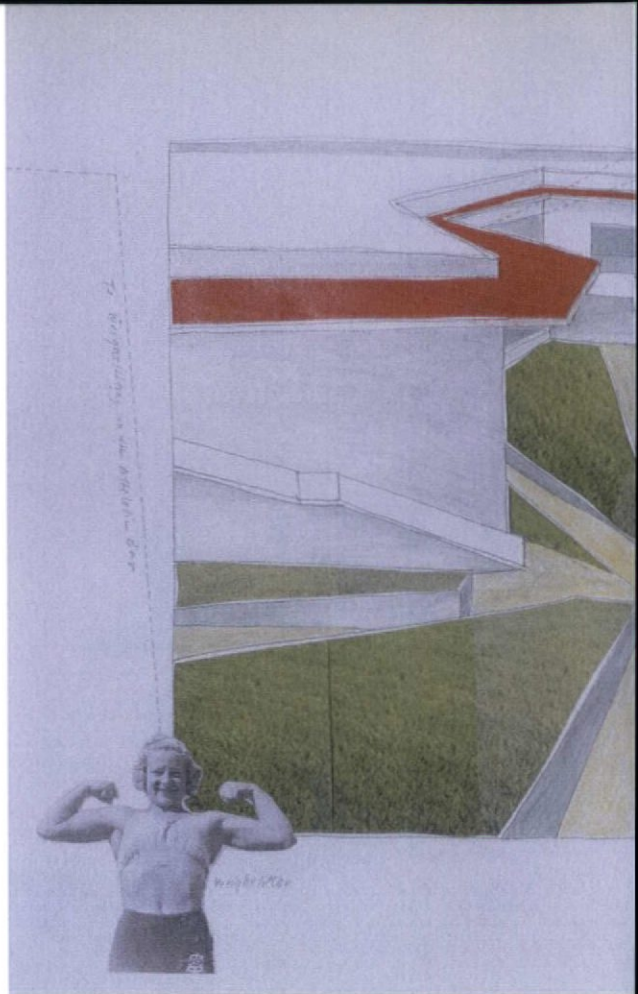
Mary-Ann Ray and Robert Mangurian of Studio Works don't debate the work much, they just do it. "When it's on the table in front of you, it's pretty clear to see where the strongest work is emerging," Mary-Ann says, "and then you get on board and support that." Robert sees that as a strength because the work flows. But it can also be a weakness, when the work isn't questioned hard enough.

The couple met when she was a student at SCI-Arc, and he was director of the graduate program. But they didn't get together as a couple until James Turrell needed both their help with a model for his Rodin Crater. They started working together immediately. Robert had formed Studio Works in 1969 (with Craig Hodgetts and two other collaborators) but he and Mary-Ann have been the principals since 1986.

The two approach architecture from different angles, which they believe is essential to their work, as is their personal partnership. "If we were identical in terms of our skills, talents and interests, that wouldn't be interesting," Robert explains. "But to make those differences work, you need something else that binds it. A couple is a strong bond." So is their interest in creating projects that will produce "the shock in some form, the jolt, so that people will be effected by it," Mary-Ann says. They work on all projects together, starting with one shared piece of blank paper on which they draw and write notes in tandem.



InsideOutside House, Studio Works, Photo: Studio Works



Couples who work together, though not new to architecture, have been a rare breed until recently. Mark Stankard, architect and architectural historian, named eight couples who worked together before 1970 (See Side Bar). Among them, Ray and Charles Eames were cited by a number of those questioned as role models, not for their marriage but rather for the way they incorporated architecture, filmmaking, art, and graphic design into the very fabric of their life. Education seems to be the leading reason for the recent groundswell of couples collaborating since the Eames's time. In the 1960s and 70s, as women entered architecture programs in growing numbers, the opportunities for men and women to meet and work together as well as get personally involved grew exponentially. Alice Fung recalled that by the 80s, her early architectural models—both at school in Pennsylvania and at her first job—were couples. As for same-sex couples working together, Frank and Ravi note that even a generation ago, gay architects wouldn't let



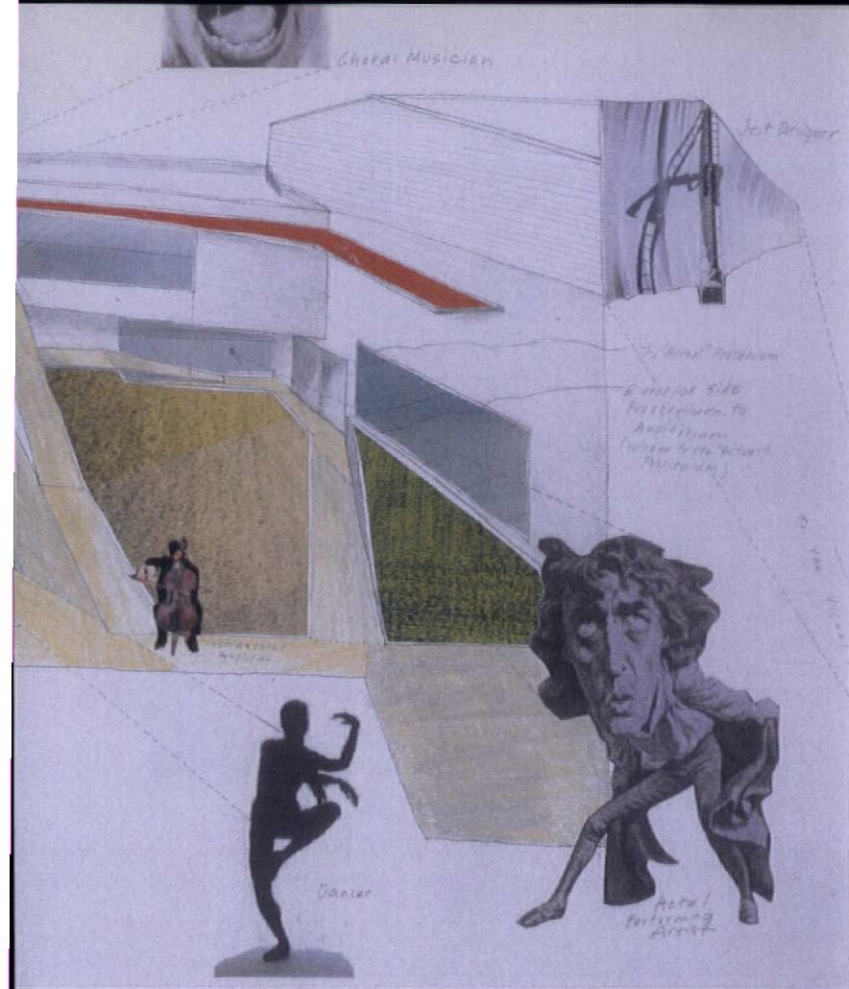
other people know that they were domestic partners as well, thanks to a conservative viewpoint held by many architects and clients. The couple also notes that while they never hide their relationship, they also don't make a point of discussing it. As with everyone, doing good work is what matters.

The collaborators clearly have no interest in the concept of the star architect. In a partnership, the ego of the individual is subsumed for the greater goal. To Mary-Ann Ray "working together from the get-go, you're admitting in a healthy way a kind of incompleteness, or a desire to be checked." This admission in turn makes the work stronger. Michael Blatt found that the personal attachment actually made the ego issue easier to deal with. "It was very easy from the beginning of the relationship just to think of myself as being part of this unit. Our name goes on everything we do, and I don't even think about it." Robert Mangurian pointed out that when working with a partner you feel strongly about, you're happy if they produced something you didn't, rather than feeling jealous. Ming Fung says, "When you love someone, you don't have an ego. You want them to be happy." Along those lines,

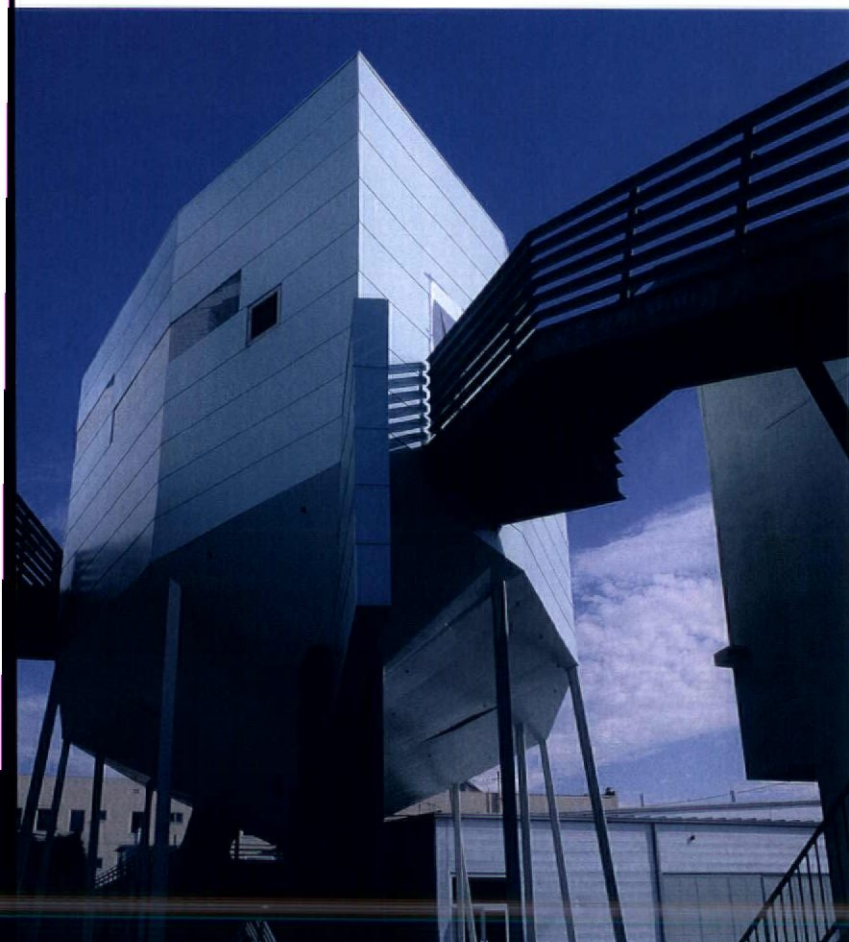
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"It's not about whether this is your idea or mine, it's about trying to get the product to the highest level possible."

—Frank Escher



Central High School #2, Studio Works, Photo: Studio Works



Rose + Alex Pilibos School, Studio Works, Photo: Studio Works

HOOKING UP

A Scattershot Collection of 20th Century Architectural Couples

By Mark Stankard

WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN AND MARION MAHONEY GRIFFIN

worked for Frank Lloyd Wright at the beginning of the twentieth century, until they won a competition for the municipal center of Canberra, Australia in 1912. Marion Mahoney (her pre-marriage name) was primarily a renderer, but she also collaborated on design with Wright and with her husband until his death in 1937. She was the first woman in the world to become a licensed architect.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe collaborated on several interior projects with Lilly Reich, a German designer Mies had a romantic relationship with. Although they kept separate offices and separate residences, they produced highly influential modern interiors, mainly for exhibitions.

The Finnish architect Alvar Aalto worked with his wife Aino in the 1940s, until her death in 1949. He married another architect from his own office, Elissa Makiemi, in 1952. Both of the wives reportedly carried out the designs of their famous husband, rather than truly collaborating.

Ray and Charles Eames, perhaps the first "out-there" architectural couple, practiced together from the 1940s until Charles' death in 1978. They famously photographed themselves at work and at home and everywhere in between, revealing intimate details about all aspects of their lives.

The British architectural couple Alison and Peter Smithson, in many ways counterparts to the Eames, produced architecture as the leaders of Team 10, and the New Brutalism beginning in the 1950s. The Smithsons vowed to work as much with three children as they would with none.

Louis Kahn collaborated with Anne Tyng in the 1950s in Philadelphia. They had a relationship while they were practicing architecture and she had his child. Their work together, on theoretical projects and urban designs, has often been described as truly collaborative.

The British wife and husband team, Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry, worked for Le Corbusier at Chandigarh in the early 1950s and practiced architecture for themselves between 1946 and 1973. Fry, Drew and Partners built extensively throughout England and Africa.

In 1997, Robert Venturi wrote about the Eames, "what a nice prototypical example of spouses as partners, which Denise Scott Brown and I especially appreciate." Venturi and Scott Brown began working together in the 1960s and still collaborate today, running their office much like a big family. They share most of their architecture, carry out work independently, and act as critics for each other's projects. ➤

—Mark Stankard is an architect with Osborn in Glendale. He currently teaches a Community Design Studio at USC and has taught courses on twentieth century architectural history, theory, and urbanism at SCI-Arc and Art Center College of Design.



World Trade Center, New York, courtesy Greg Lynn FORM

collaborative FORM

KEEPING UP WITH GREG LYNN

By Allison Milionis

IT'S TWO MONTHS LATER AND GREG LYNN IS STILL COMING DOWN

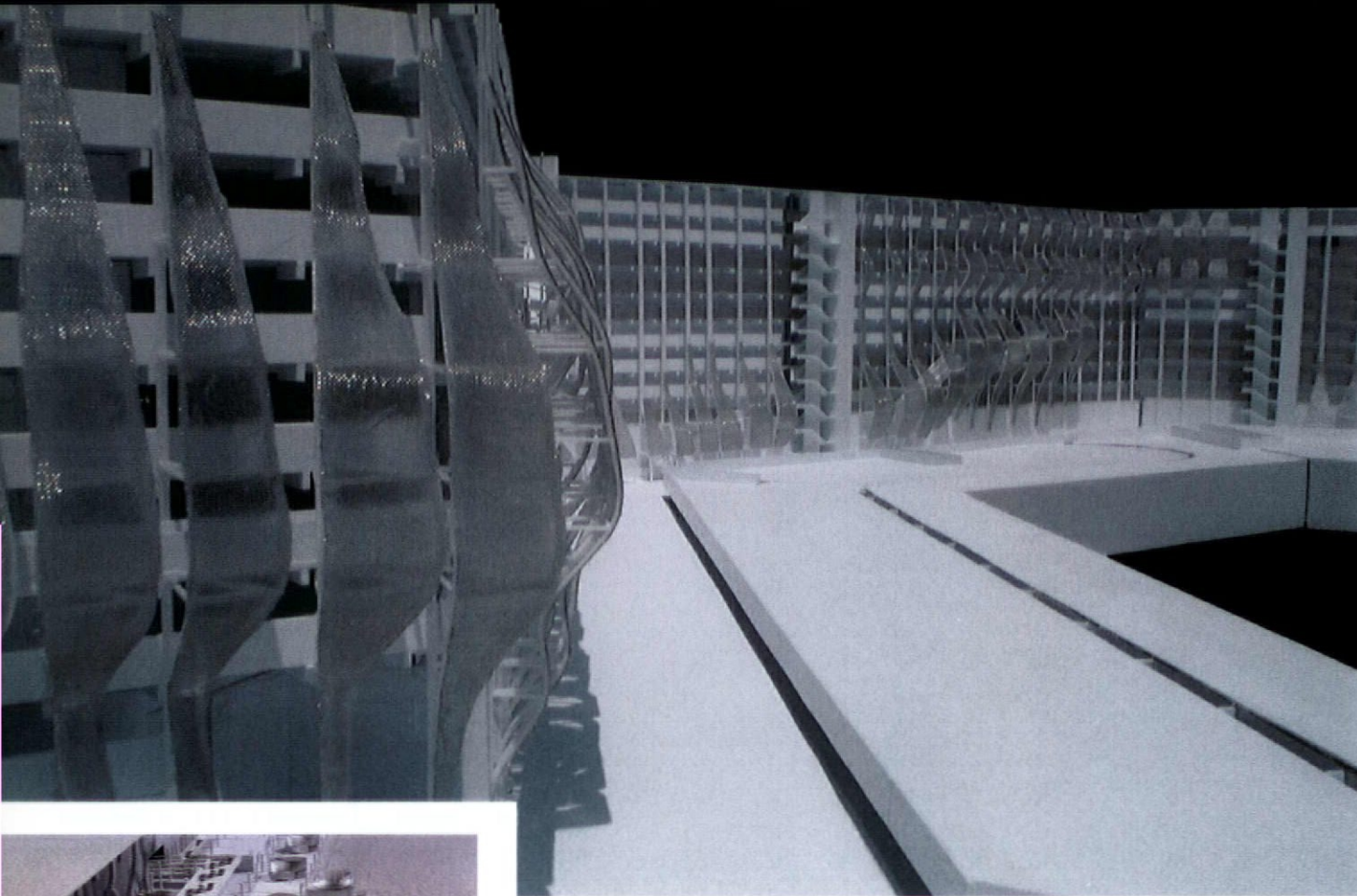
from the World Trade Center competition adrenaline rush. "The end of the project left such a void," said Lynn referring to the experience he had as part of United Architects (UA), one of 6 teams chosen for the final phase. The pressurized conditions of the competition—though intensely stressful—forged a global collective of extraordinary minds, all willing to set aside ego for the good of the whole. Understandably, the experience will resonate for a long time, making solo efforts seem perhaps, a bit less exhilarating.

Collaboration is often necessary for practical reasons, such as managerial and production expertise. But real creative synergy can intercede when the right combination of forces join, and the right opportunity presents itself. Lynn has been fortunate in that way. During his career he has teamed up with some of his closest friends and respected colleagues to work on distinctive projects, and most of the time the experience has been exceptional, if not amazing. In 1995, Lynn collaborated with friends, Doug Garofalo (Chicago) and Michael McInturf (Cincinnati) on the Korean Presbyterian Church in New York. "When this big job fell into my lap, I had two part-time people and was teaching at a couple of places. I thought I should team up with people for the practicality of it, as well as for fun. It was a great experience, though not reproducible because we were so much the same—same age, same skills, and the same interests."

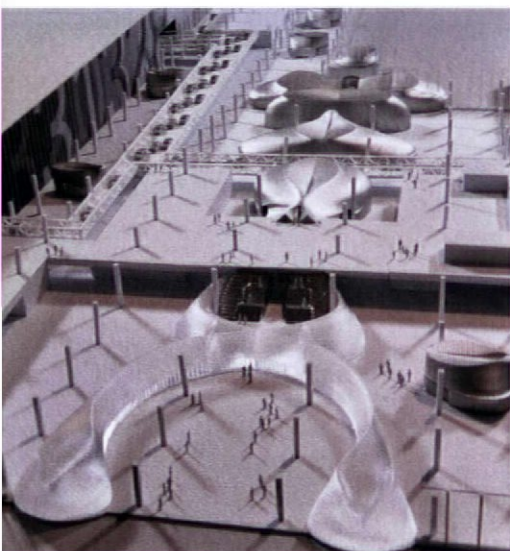
That successful and rewarding experience set the trend for other team ups, with Lynn expanding his circle of collaborators to include graphic artists, painters and media artists on projects less predictable than buildings. In 1999,

Lynn and painter/friend Fabian Marcaccio melded minds to create *The Tinger*, a radical spatial construction of aluminum poles clad with extended Marcaccio paintings. Perhaps it was the thrill of that enterprising synthesis of technology, art, and architecture that motivated the next project—the wild and fabulous *Predator*, an unprecedented construction of molded panels with digital paintings by Marcaccio, assembled to form a three-dimensional environment at the Wexner Center of Art in Columbus, Ohio. The project required the development of new construction techniques that held Lynn's attention but was far less engaging for Marcaccio. "In that collaboration, it wasn't right to use Fabian," admitted Lynn. "It just wasn't interesting for him, so we had to find a technique for texturing these things [the sections of *Predator*] and putting color into them, without Fabian. Collaborations can't be kept together for perpetuity; they're not right for every single project."

During the Wexner exhibition, a casual introduction to the computer graphics firm, Imaginary Forces, proved to be rather fortuitous for



Housing block, Bijlmermeer, Holland; courtesy Greg Lynn FORM



BMW Central Building, Leipzig, Germany; courtesy Greg Lynn FORM

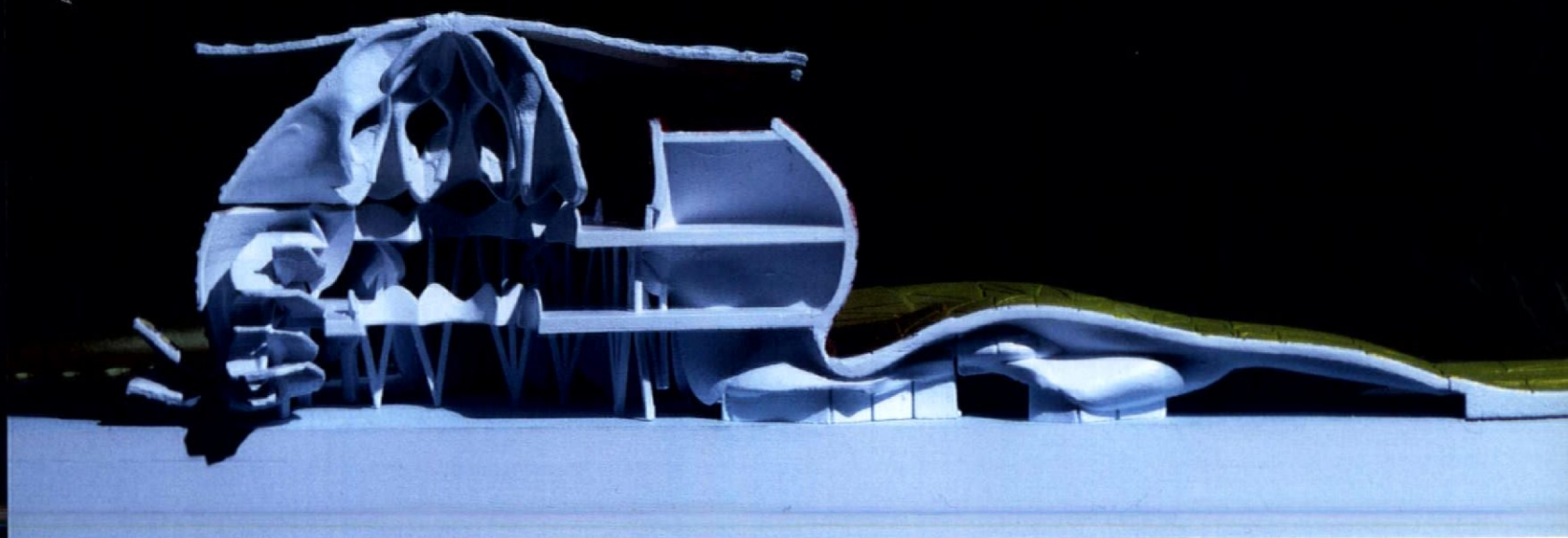
Lynn's studio, FORM, and the UA team. Shortly after their introduction, Imaginary Forces hired Lynn to design an exhibition installation of their work and then the interior of their New York office. Soon after they teamed with them on several projects, including the 2001 BMW competition in Leipzig. Coincidentally, Imaginary Forces worked with Kevin Kennon (a UA partner) on the 745 7th Avenue project in New York, and again with Kennon and Jesse Reiser (Reiser + Umemoto) on the I-Beam project. Having collaborated with three of the five offices that comprise UA, the inclusion of Imaginary Forces on the WTC team made sense on a practical and creative level. In addition they, like the offices of UA, had a team of savvy 3-D designers, many of whom had backgrounds in architecture.

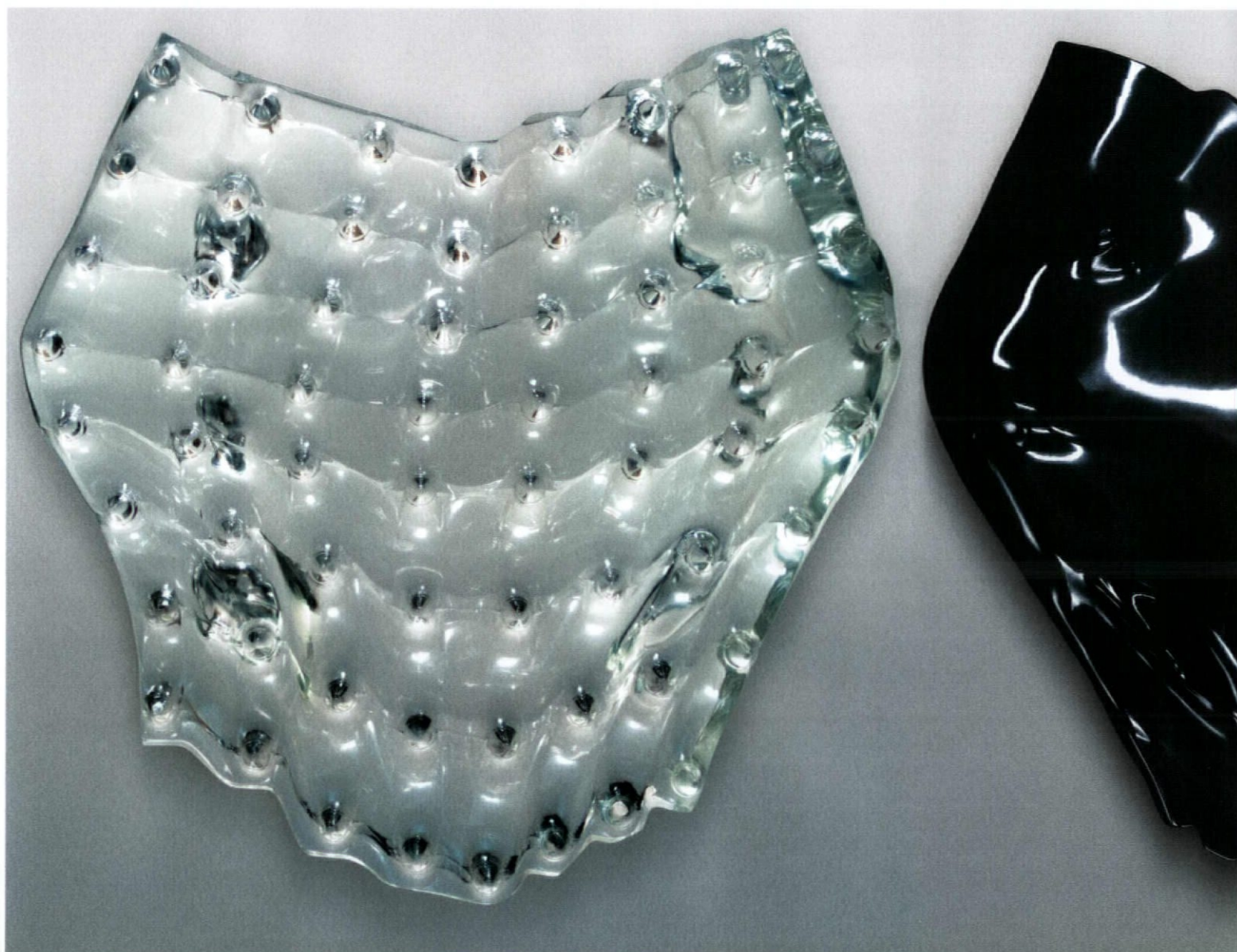
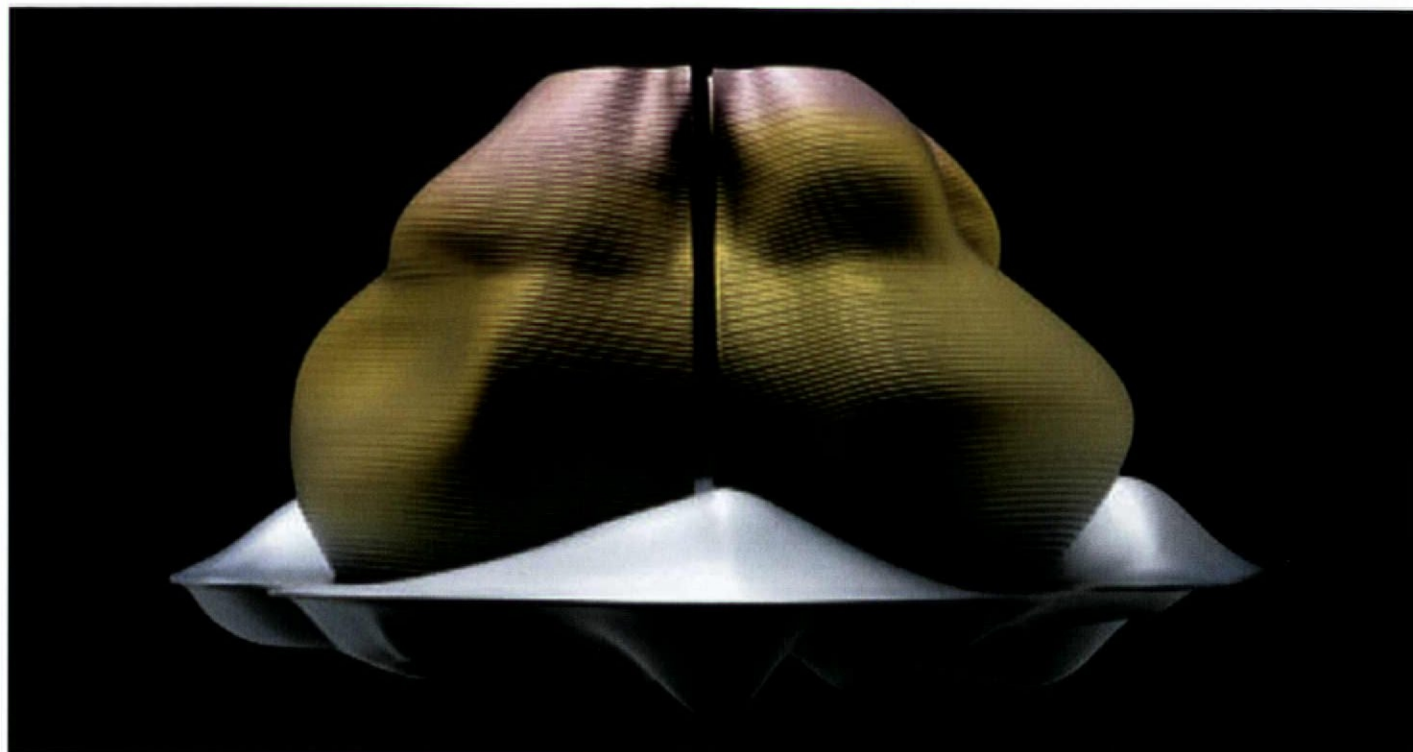
The blends of expertise that make up UA are complimented by the fact that the partners are friends, former classmates, and colleagues; all experimental minded and technology-driven designers. They are each other's closest competitors, and are frequently short listed on the same competitions. During the WTC project, friendship and mutual respect proved to be a powerful elixir for the team. Under such pressurized conditions the partners had to suppress egos and put forth a willingness to support the individual strengths of each team member and their office. "I was happy to say, 'Ben [van Berkel], Farshid [Moussavi], you two do that better than me and I admire it, so you take that responsibility.' And they might say they love sculpting forms, but I was better at it and had more facility with it, so that was my part," explained Lynn. "We were just so panicked about finishing, everyone was eager to delegate authorship."

"Another thing about the collaboration," adds Lynn, "was that two of my best students from UCLA were working for Ben; a student of mine from Columbia works for Alejandro Zaera-Polo and Farshid; and I had two Columbia graduates in my office who knew all the other people. When we moved into the office with our staff, everyone knew each other, or was only separated by one degree. So there was a friendly, collegial bond among the partners that extended to our staff." Will the close-knit UA remain intact to pursue other projects? The team will look for more opportunities similar to the WTC project, or for one that fits the prescribed criteria—at least they are willing to give it a try for six months to a year. As for the WTC scheme, there's a good chance it will appear on the skyline of another city one day.



Predator; photo courtesy Greg Lynn FORM







Coffee and Tea Piazza for Alessi, Titanium; left: closed, right: open; photo by Carlo Lavatori



Invisible Chess Set, urethane; left: board face, right: board base; far right: chess pieces designed by Greg Foley; photo by Dan Forbes

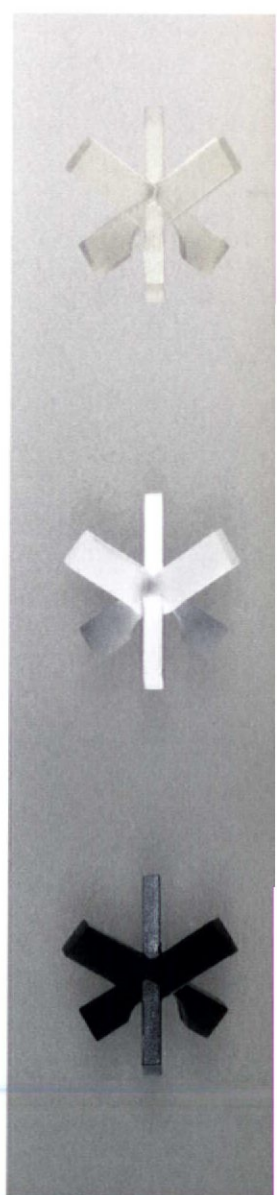
Since returning to his Venice studio Lynn and his staff have re-focused their attention on their outstanding projects, which are considerably smaller in scale, though no less dull. One of the projects underway is a housing renovation in the Bijlmermeer neighborhood of Amsterdam. The 1970s housing block is one of 31 other buildings that constitute one of the largest housing experiments in Europe. Lynn's scheme is based on transformation rather than demolition and rebuilding. By integrating a combination of elevators and escalators, supported by a series of over 150 vertical steel trusses and attached to the existing concrete structure, new tenant-friendly circulation patterns are created and the daunting scale of the blocks are reduced into manageable "neighborhoods."

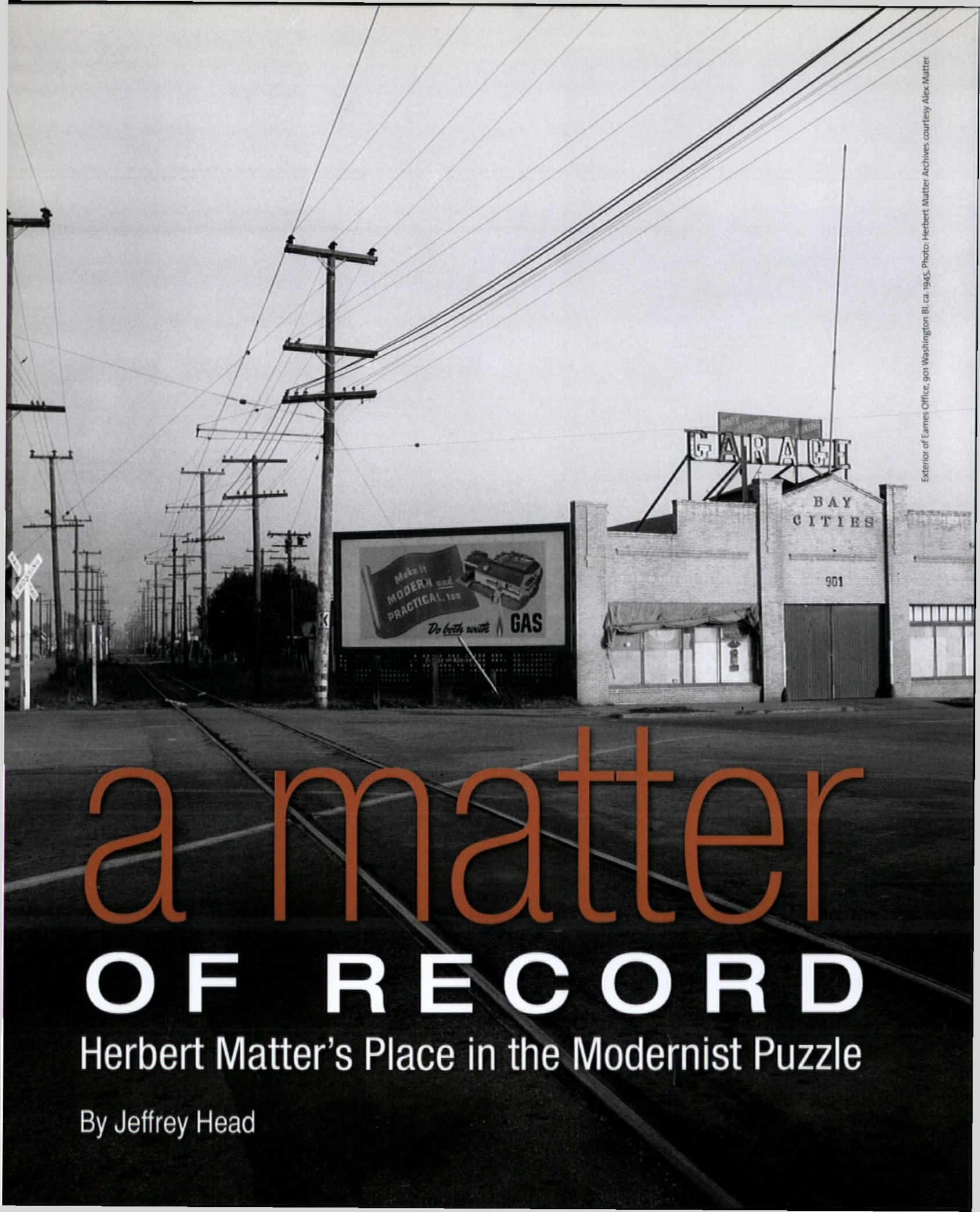
Design schemes for Ark of the World, a combination natural history museum, contemporary art museum and ecology center in Costa Rica, were recently completed. Located in the mountainous region between San Jose and the sunny beaches on the Pacific Ocean side of the island, the design is as organic as the rain forest that surrounds it. Entering through a garden of water-filled columns, visitors will have the option of accessing the three types of exhibits by ascending a helicoidal stair in the central space, or remaining on the ground floor which extends beyond the structure like tree roots, terminating in a stage and amphitheater.

Some of the most exciting projects coming out of FORM may one day sit on a table or credenza in millions of homes worldwide. (Think Michael Graves's teapot). The new Coffee and Tea Piazza, commissioned by Alessi for its 20th anniversary, is an incredibly lightweight pod-like setting. The ensemble is constructed of thin titanium sheets, and manufactured using a method similar to the vacuum forming technology that the studio has developed for architectural interiors. Though they have designed over fifty different ensembles, the cost of using titanium is prohibitive, so for now or until they decide to reproduce them in sterling or even plastic, they will likely be acquired by museums or art collectors.

The Invisible Chess Set, commissioned by Jeffrey Deitch Projects, and in collaboration with the magazine Visionaire and The Organization for Returning Fashion Interest in New York, is the other patron-driven creation to be released. The chess set is extremely conceptual, drawing on symbolic images of power, technology, and territory—a contemporary perspective on a medieval game. FORM CNC manufactured the board, first in wood, then epoxical resin, before casting a silicon formwork, finally completing the process with a urethane cast. Like the Coffee and Tea Piazza, the set will be introduced as a limited edition, and though it could be mass-produced some day, it's unlikely the Invisible Chess Set will be running Milton Bradley out of business.

At last it seems that Lynn's provocative, yet esoteric designs are being freed from their academic moorings to be enjoyed by a consumer (albeit sophisticated) culture. "I'm committed to this idea of finding clients with an image problem," said Lynn. "Not where they're just looking for tasteful, beautiful things, but really want something totally new." It seems Lynn isn't having trouble finding that type of client, nor does he lack willing collaborators who are happy to join in on a wild and innovative ride. And with an endless supply of product designs and interiors that could benefit from a vacuum form, he will undoubtedly remain busy, and constantly challenged to create and re-create. ■





Exterior of Eames Office, 901 Washington Bl. ca. 1945, Photo: Herbert Matter Archives courtesy Alex Matter

a matter OF RECORD

Herbert Matter's Place in the Modernist Puzzle

By Jeffrey Head

arts & architecture

PRICE FIFTY CENTS

Cover September, 1946 Arts & Architecture, Photo: Herbert Matter and Arts & Architecture



SEPTEMBER 1946

IN SEPTEMBER 1943 CHARLES EAMES INVITED HERBERT MATTER, the Swiss-born photographer and graphic designer, to join the war efforts of the Eames Office. Eames wrote "...we would like you to come and spend most of your time developing some schemes for post war furniture—you would be under no 'routine' and would be free to experiment in many new materials." A month later, Matter, his wife Mercedes, and their son Alexander made the move from New York to California. What followed was a three-year collaboration between Matter and the Eames Office.

The initial association of Eames and Matter came about from an early and long friendship between Ray Eames and Mercedes Matter. The two met while students at the May

Friend Bennett School in New York, and shortly after graduating began studying painting with Hans Hofmann. Mercedes had become friends with the painter Lee Krasner, whose painting classes with Hofmann overlapped with Ray. Over the years it was through the friendship of their wives that Jackson Pollock, Herbert Matter and Charles Eames came to know each other.

In early 1942, Charles Eames stayed with the Matters in Manhattan where they discovered a shared interest in art and design. Matter showed Eames his photographs and graphic design work for the 1938 Alvar Aalto Exhibition at MoMA, and prints of his displays for the 1939 World's Fair. Eames' high regard for Matter's artistic eye and knowledge of photography and printing ultimately lead to their collaboration.

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Arts & Architecture magazine, cover, December, 1946. Photo: Herbert Matter

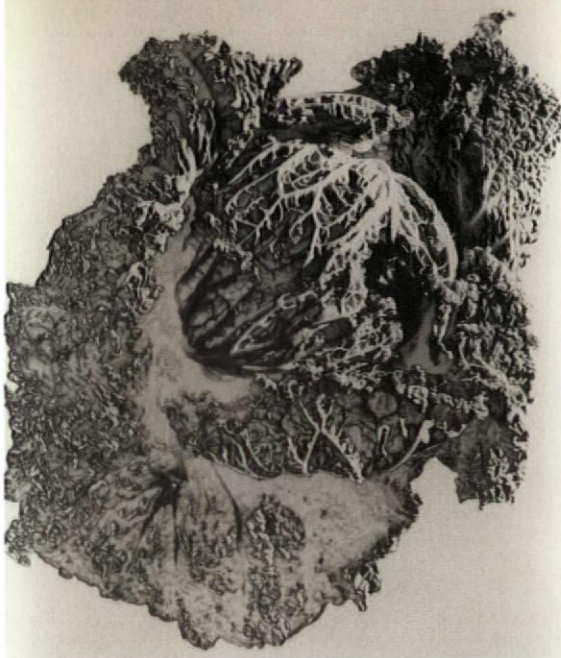


Before coming to New York City, Matter studied painting at the École de Beaux Arts in Geneva, followed by a trip to Paris where he studied under Fernand Léger and Amedée Ozenfant. An introduction through Ozenfant led to Matter working on exhibition displays for Le Corbusier. When Matter left Paris in 1932 he returned to Switzerland and created his best-known early photomontage work, a group of billboard-sized posters for the Swiss National Tourist Office. These innovative travel posters were seen throughout Europe and served as a calling card for Matter when he arrived in New York City in 1936.

During his first several years in New York, Matter photographed for Condé Nast Publications and the Museum of Modern Art and designed displays for the Swiss Pavilion and Corning Glass Pavilion for the 1939 New York's

World's Fair. In 1943, the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York opened Matter's first one-man exhibition. For many viewers this would be an introductory glimpse at photographic collage, solarized images, enlarged scale prints, and stroboscopic effects.

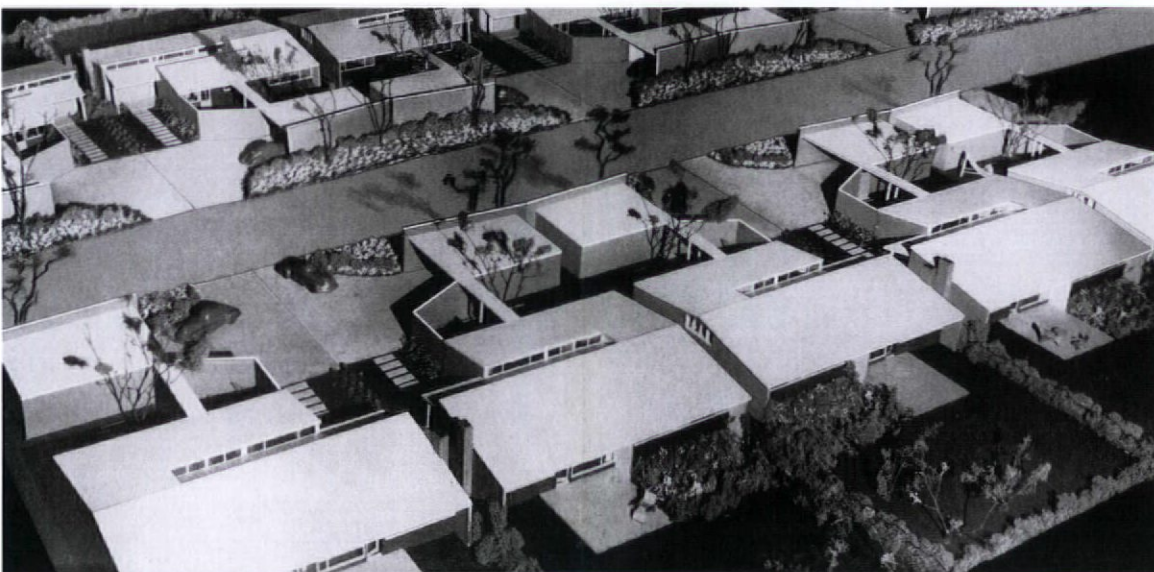
When Matter began work at the Eames Office in the fall of 1943 he joined other collaborators early in their careers such as Gregory Ain and Harry Bertola. In late 1945, Don Albinson joined the Eames Office. Years later, Matter, Albinson and Bertola would work together again designing for Knoll. Matter's primary role in the Eames Office was to photograph the designs, not merely to document them but to present the designs in new ways. He often used montage, multiple exposure and abstract scale to highlight the qualities of the furniture in an artistic, yet commercial way.



Cabbage (solarized) 1943, Photo: Herbert Matter Archives courtesy Alex Matter



Architect: Gregory Ain, 1945, Photo: Herbert Matter Archives courtesy Alex Matter



Gregory Ain's "Park Planned Homes" November, 1945 Arts & Architecture
Photo: Herbert Matter and Arts & Architecture

Subdivision by
GREGORY AIN, A.I.A., Architect
for Park Planned Homes

The long awaited era of the postwar house is at hand, and millions with hopes based on widely publicized visions of the house of tomorrow will be disappointed. No miracle has made available to the average owner shimmering fabric of plastics and electronics on a secluded acre of gently rolling woodland. The construction of homes is now about to be resumed on an enormous scale, and it is no advantage whatever to the prospective home builder that modern materials,

techniques, and regional planning are theoretically capable of providing far better and cheaper dwelling units than accepted standards. Our technology, industry, economics, and real estate practices are not organized and coordinated to take full advantage of the obvious theoretical possibilities, nor is the public organized to demand that they do so. Enough time and enough pages have been devoted to dalliance with hypothetical dreams of a more perfect housing

Arts & Architecture editor John Entenza was clearly an advocate of Matter's talent. Early on Matter had become involved with the magazine as a consequence of working in the Eames Office. He continued to produce cover artwork and editorial layouts until 1963, years after returning to New York.

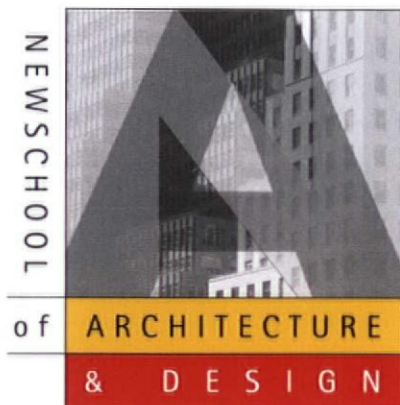
Early in 1946, Eames had exhibited his furniture at MoMA in New York. This was the first public appearance of the molded plywood furniture and the exhibit was supposed to give credit to a number of people at the Eames Office who worked on the designs, most specifically Harry Bertoia. Charles Eames was the only one who received credit, although Matter garnered acknowledgment for the display panels. Later that year, the September issue of *Arts & Architecture* would dramatically change the nature of the Eames Office. The cover story featured 20 pages of photography and layout work by Matter to accompany an extensive article

written by Eliot Noyes. The issue formally introduced the definitive molded plywood furniture "by Eames." Don Albinson describes the situation following the publication of the article "... (it) erupted the office into people who left and people who stayed...there was a sort of mass exodus of people who worked with Charlie in the development of the chairs. When they discovered it was all designed by Charles and nobody else got any mention, they were all surprised. They thought it was a team effort." Ain, Bertoia and several others left the Eames Office by the fall of 1946.

Matter was soon to follow. Frustrated by not being able to develop the furniture schemes that Charles had used to lure him to California, the Matters returned to New York where Herbert began his photography and graphic design work for Knoll. During this period Matter produced films and taught at Yale. He stopped working in 1980 and died in 1984 at the age of 77. ■

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>> "Creative Couples" – Continued from page 30

when work arguments threaten to get too personal or painful, the couples have learned when to walk away. After all, what's more important, the project or the relationship?

But with all that work, how do the couples separate their professional and home lives? "We don't," Michael quickly answers. (Although in his and Alice's case, their two children have given them a new perspective on what's important to them.) The various partners talked about going on vacations to look at buildings, working together in the office until 10 p.m., working at home on weekends, or in the case of Mary-Ann and Robert, actually living in their studio. A number of them do spend some

time apart, of course in architectural arenas such as teaching at SCI-Arc (Robert, Mary-Ann, Ming), at Art Center (Alice) or as president of the Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design (Frank). The outside work gives them some needed space from each other, although Ming and Craig don't much like the hours spent apart. "I always tell Craig we don't have enough time together," Ming says.

In all cases, the point was made that separating work and home life wasn't necessary, or even natural. Craig pointed out that the concept of a job is in itself a 19th century invention. With this more organic style of working and living, one's social life and intellectual interests

are all part of one experiential piece. Mary-Ann noted that other cultures don't have such a distinct work/home distinction. Further, as she put it, the separation between the life and work of the artist is never questioned. "If there is a separation," she says, "people find it peculiar." All agree that the advantages of working with an architect follow them home. The intensity of life and work are fully integrated. "You can't be an architect and do it halfway, that's the reality," Craig says. "Either your significant other is left out in the cold all the time or you find a mate who really enjoys doing what you do, so you can do it together all the time." ■

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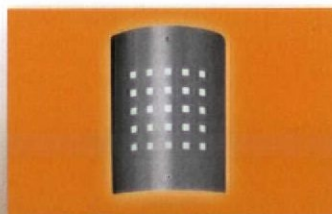
LIGHTING

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McMakin was trained as an artist at University of California San Diego in the late '70s, and later moved to LA, where he restored his classic Irving Gill house, and launched Domestic, a store on Beverly Boulevard that sold simple, impeccably crafted furniture. Collectors commissioned unique pieces—notably John Walsh, director of the Getty Museum, who invited him to furnish the offices and reading room. Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the order and fearing this success would take him too far from art (much as Frank Gehry dropped Easy Edges cardboard furniture to concentrate on architecture) he closed Domestic and moved to Seattle. There, he established a studio, currently employing 20, that designs houses and one-off furniture, while executing McMakin's art projects. In the northwest, he feels close to nature and the craft tradition, and his skilled collaborators patch damaged wood that others would reject and detail it with a refinement that the Greene brothers would admire.

"No one since Donald Judd has balanced art and design as well as Roy," says Darling. "Other people who try to do both usually end up folding it into one practice. He's dedicated himself to making furniture and spaces that work for his clients. Art is a more abstracted avenue for playing with forms and ideas that seep back into furniture in different ways."

Two exhibits illustrate the distinction. In a low table that was borrowed from the Dan house, the legs respond to the rectilinear shape at the center, edging beyond or retreating within the free-form curve of

the rim. The piece is quirky but functional, unlike a pair of chests, one with drawers that cannot be opened, the other with a stack of drawers that are too deep to fit the openings. That dichotomy recurs throughout the exhibition, but sometimes it's more an issue of perception than reality. A Breuer chair on display at MoMA is the same masterpiece of functional design that it was when you last sat on it. In contrast, McMakin's pieces seem to change their character when they switch contexts.

The artist's other great skill is to indulge in whimsy without becoming cute. There's a peaked ottoman that your feet would slide off, and a three-legged stool that even a three-year-old might find too small. They bring a smile but have dignity. Tops and doors of cabinets are cut away to reveal the contents they are supposed to protect, and a chest has odd legs and pulls, or one white drawer in a sea of pink. Alphabet Sketches comprises a long tabletop that's crammed with architectural models, surreal in their uniform whiteness. A ceramic coffee pot with a severed handle and blocked spout morphs into a flower vase. Across the street, McMakin has installed Set/Seat, which combines bench-like concrete letters with a swing-set to add the "A."

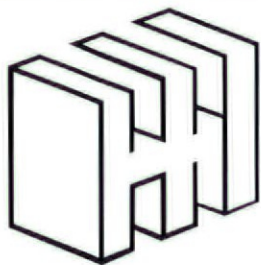
A witty inventor, a straight-faced clown, a dedicated craftsman, McMakin is above all an artist, bubbling over with ideas. The exhibition (which runs through June 29) is a delight and should spur interest in the PDC's long-sequestered plaza, which is belatedly seeking to reach out to the neighborhood. ■



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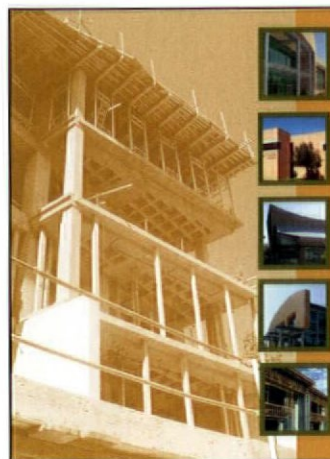
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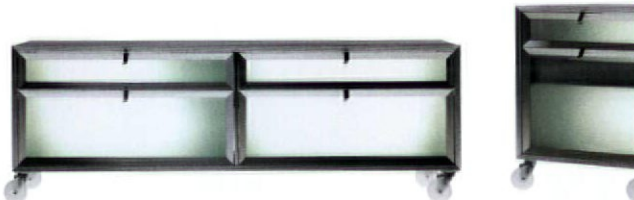
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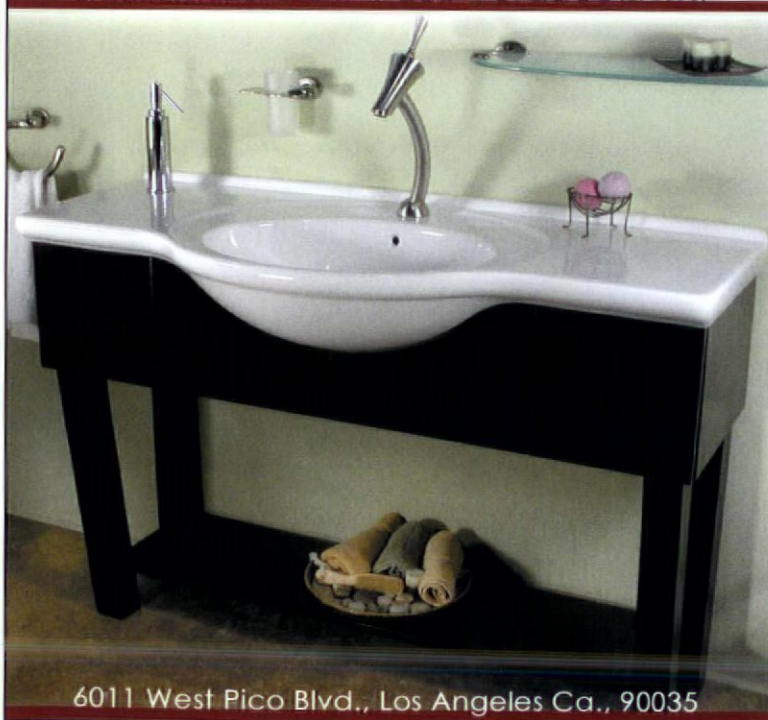
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backpage

UPGRADING THE AERON'S BACK SUPPORT
BY MICHAEL WEBB



I'M A TECHNOPHOBIC, BUT I LOVE DEPENDABLE TOOLS THAT ARE PLEASING to the eye. Lined up on my desk are IBM's Net Vista 40 with its floating black screen, a Bose radio, a Siemens cordless (one of the few that doesn't look like a game station), Ingo Maurer's Mozzkito lamp, and a classic Olivetti Lettera 22. Banished to a lower shelf for unsightliness and bad behaviour is a Xerox Workmaster. That leaves one indispensable item. From the executive suite to the home office, a supportive chair is the single most important work tool. You can leave your desk and wheel over to a window with a laptop or a legal pad, but you won't do good work if your back is aching.

So, when the warning twinges started, I sold my elegant Eames Softpad, and bought one of the first Aerons, which I've used every day I've been at home for the past nine years. Recently, I upgraded it with the PostureFit—an adjustable, butterfly-shaped pad that pushes against the pelvic area and straightens the spine. A team at Herman Miller worked with back expert Brock Walker and Aeron co-designer Bill Stumpf to design this nifty substitute for the original lumbar bar. It comes with clear instructions, and even a klutz like me can screw it on in about fifteen minutes. A wishbone of hard plastic is slotted into the back frame to hold the pad in place. Surprisingly, it looks better than the old support.

This is the latest innovation from a company that has repeatedly shaken up the hidebound furniture industry, achieving success by breaking the rules. In 1931, Gilbert Rohde saved Herman Miller from bankruptcy by convincing founder D.J. DePree to embrace modernism, and, when Rohde died in 1944, he persuaded George Nelson to become design director. Nelson (an architect who had done no furniture but a bench and a storage wall) launched a new range of ninety modular units, hired

talented designers to develop show-stoppers like the Coconut chair and Marshmallow sofa, and brought in the Eameses to create enduring classics. Herman Miller pioneered the first open office system, and later turned to Stumpf and Don Chadwick to design office chairs. The duo collaborated on the revolutionary Aeron, which was launched in 1994.

Early reviews likened the Aeron to the Stealth bomber, and wondered if so radical a departure from the norm would win acceptance. Now it's so ubiquitous that it's taken for granted—as the most admired and widely copied chair since the Eames' fiberglass seating. However, sales of office furniture have dropped precipitously over the past three years, and it's easy to find bargain Aerons, unloaded by failed dot-com companies. The PostureFit should renew public interest in a chair that has proved its worth, and make it an even more desirable acquisition for the sixteen million Americans who consult doctors on back problems, and the many more who would like to avoid such encounters.

Dr. Walker knows all about that: back injuries took him off the ski slopes of Michigan and into a new career as a chiropractor and expert on spinal care. Research became his passion, and he consulted with leading corporations and the military, contributing to improved seats for jet pilots and racecar drivers. He discovered that everyone needs proper lower back support for optimal concentration, endurance, and good health, and helped develop the PostureFit to work with the body's biomechanics in supporting the natural forward tilt of the pelvis. I've always found concentration an elusive commodity, but I can feel the physical benefits and enjoy the lines, so I tip my hat to the good doctor, and thank Herman Miller for looking over the horizon once again. ▀

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