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PHOTOGRAPHERS OF RECORD INTERIORS 1987

Peter Aaron (118)
ESTO
222 Valley Place
Mamaroneck, New York 10543
914/698-4060

Richard Bryant (84, 156)
6 Latchmere Road
Kingston-on-Thames
Surrey KT2 5TW
England
01-546-4352

Mark Darley (90, 130, 162)
135 West 70th Street
New York, New York 10023
212/787-3589

Oberto Gili (112)
1775 Broadway
New York, New York 10019
212/243-5454

Elliot Kaufman (114, 124)
255 West 90th Street
New York, New York 10024
212/496-0860

Tom Vack with Corinne Pfister (102)
1665 Pratt Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60626
312/262-9554

Paul Warchol (91, 92, 106, 142)
133 Mulberry Street
New York, New York 10013
212/431-3461

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Charles K. Gandee, editor-in-charge
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Museum Tower Apartment, New York City

Steven Holl Architects

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Record Interiors 1987

Record Interiors is different from RECORD. Come mid-September we put aside the studied diversity that gives RECORD its editorial equilibrium, the balanced report on the current state of the art. Instead, we tip the scales dramatically, and deliberately, and present a decidedly slanted picture of design on the cutting edge, meant not to identify where the profession happens to be right now, but rather to gauge where it is heading. This was not our agenda when we conceived Record Interiors 17 years ago. In 1970, many architects were new to interior-design work, and the more cautious mood that prevailed in Record Interiors' early years very accurately, and naturally, reflected that somewhat tentative stance. In recent years, of course, economics as well as the opportunity to produce a cohesive esthetic (outside and in) have kept architects and interiors married. But what began, for many, as a shotgun wedding (economically speaking), has now evolved into an affair of the professional heart. Gone is the tentative "this will do until something better comes along" attitude. And happily so. For many, interiors' commissions represent a welcome opportunity for formal exploration that building commissions cannot offer. It is this laboratory-of-design aspect that we have sought to capture in recent years, and for 1987 that remains unchanged. Our method, however, has.

Traditionally, Record Interiors has subscribed to the case-study method—i. e., we compile a series of projects that make up a synergistic whole. This year, however, we decided to step back a pace or two, and try to draw a larger picture of individual, and influential, architects and designers by assembling portfolios which offer a more comprehensive overview on precisely what this architect or that designer stands for. What is it about Steven Holl's work, for example, that his peers find so captivating? What are his concerns, priorities, . . . obsessions? And how are they manifested in his most current work? We asked the same questions of Paris designer Philippe Starck and London architect Nigel Coates, two other subjects we chose to study this year in depth. The fourth portfolio we include this year focuses on the work of the late New York architect Alan Buchsbaum. Critic Martin Filler reflects on Buchsbaum's 20-year-long commitment to interior design, and his final three projects. Also new for 1987 is our approach to the problem of open-office design. We considered showing examples of model installations, but opted, instead, to address the issue—again, in a larger context. We looked to the perennially provocative West Coast architect/theoretician/author/educator Christopher Alexander, who has been studying the open-office landscape for some time, and, finding it . . . shall we say, barren, designed an alternative furniture system. Alexander's article, "Toward a personal workplace," is as much a critique of current attitudes and practices as it is a proposal for a new system of furniture. At total odds with Alexander and his conclusions is London architect Norman Foster. Though he too found the available line-up of office systems wanting, the *Nomos* system that he designed for Tecno speaks of the cool perfectionism and machine-age esthetic we have come to expect from the high-tech wizard. Two other departures for Record Interiors 1987 come in the form of a pair of articles focusing not on architects or designers, but on two remarkable clients. V'Soske, the New York-based carpet manufacturer, has commissioned some of the brightest stars in the architectural firmament to design a series of rugs, and Doug Tompkins, CEO of the San Francisco-based clothing manufacturer Esprit, has assembled a no less stellar line-up for his company's rush to the retail marketplace. (Some things never change, of course, and so we also include this year a series of feature articles focusing on individual projects that we found, editorially speaking, irresistible.)

Architects have come a long way since that time, not so very long ago, when they approached interiors with less than unbridled enthusiasm. One has only to gaze through the window of Zaha Hadid's townhouse interior in London (below) to know how far. *Charles K. Gandee*

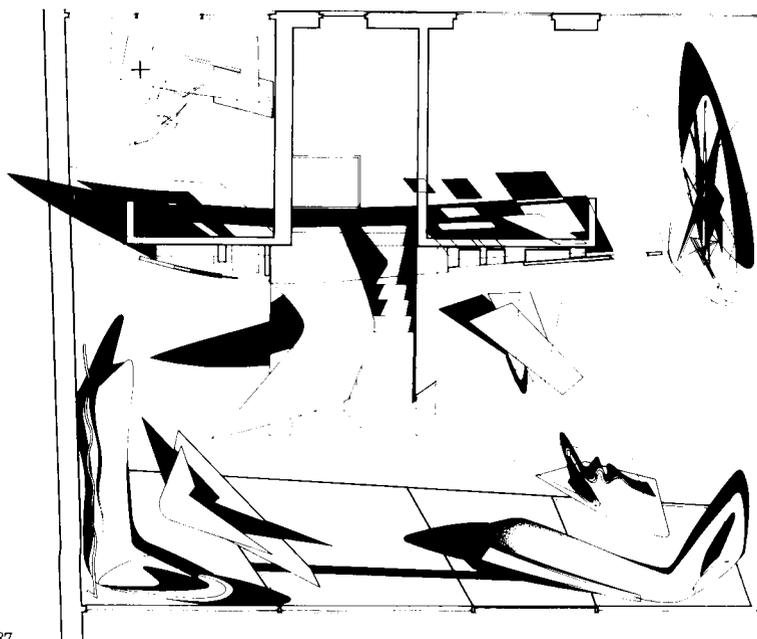


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A room of one's own

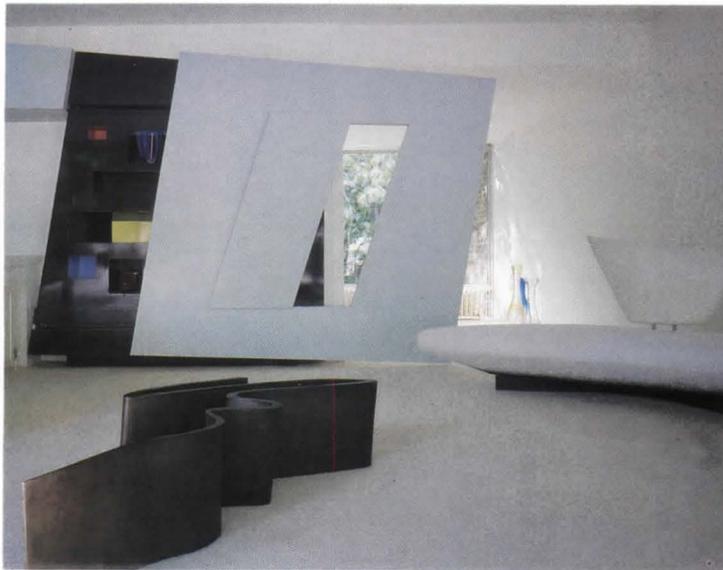
Living Room Suite
London
Zaha Hadid, Architect

Granted, five pieces of furniture within a minuscule 548 square feet hardly constitute a magnum opus. But they do prove that Zaha Hadid is able to translate the seductive drawings that have won her international acclaim (RECORD, June 1987, pages 118-129) into real details and materials without compromising the sensational energy of her "Suprematist geology." That Hadid's first built work should be a living-room suite within a London townhouse isn't surprising. A year before winning the Hong Kong Peak competition in 1983, she was awarded a gold medal from the British magazine *Architectural Design* for a proposed Belgravia apartment renovation; in 1985, she designed four more London flats, only to be disappointed by the clients' refusal to construct her forceful visions. Within these projects, as in all of Hadid's 2-D explosions, furniture serves to divide a space into specific functions. The wall unit, two tables, and two sofas that constitute her 3-D debut play the same architectonic role in restructuring the open plan of an International Style house in London's Kensington borough. Designed in 1962 by a local architect, the glass-fronted box provided Hadid with a sympathetically Modern backdrop to her dynamic abstractions. Since the client had recently "rehabilitated" the house, he was, not surprisingly, reluctant to alter its two floors yet again. Despite the imposed constraint, Hadid shielded the upper-story living space at the front from the kitchen and study at the back with a changeable storage wall of layered, sliding, and hinged planes that activates the boundaries of the room. Along the gridded window wall, she created two seating areas with furniture whimsically dubbed the "wavy back" and "whoosh" sofas, "metal carpet" and "spermatozoon" tables. For phase two of the project, the architect has developed a pivoting dining table (right of plan), a staircase canopy (center), and a desk for the study (top left). Unlike so many other architects who have entered the now booming domestic accouterment industry, Hadid shuns the view that furniture should be designed as miniature buildings. "Architecture and furniture can evoke the same spirit, but they shouldn't duplicate each other." In capturing the kineticism of her plan, the architect's sofas and tables indicate that she is moving beyond the linear language of Suprematism. While not exactly ergonomic, the furniture's boomerang shapes are grounded by an earthy sensuality: months were spent on the research of materials, colors, and methods of assembly. As her first completed work, Hadid views the furniture as evidence that her architecture is, indeed, buildable. "Every time I exhibit a drawing with squiggles in it, people ask 'what can she possibly mean by that?'" Now they know. *Deborah K. Dietsch*









Zaha Hadid's furniture for an International Style studio house in London's fashionable Kensington neighborhood creates two seating areas within the open plan of its second-floor living room. The "whoosh" sofa, "spermatozoon" table base, and wall unit spanning a central staircase (top left) combine the dynamism of her drawings with an unexpected subtlety of color and material richness. Intended as a cushioned bench for receiving guests, the "whoosh" sofa sweeps around from the gridded window to form a seating area at the end of the dining space. "It can seat two or ten," boasts Hadid. The sofa's backrests are constructed from a "beam" covered in wetsuit rubber (bottom left) and a trapezoid cushioned in fabric and framed by a lacquered wood back (opposite). "I decided not to use leather because it would show a lot of seams," notes Hadid. The roughly woven, blended wool and silk fabric covering the seat cushion above the steel base of the sofa was spray-painted a deep, blackish green to achieve a gradation of color as if illuminated from one side. Its companion piece, a burnished, cast-bronze base topped by glass, was dubbed the "spermatozoon" table for its whiplash line, a squiggly shape characteristic of Hadid's most recent drawings. Separating the dining area from the kitchen at the back of the house is the right half of the wall unit (top left). A wooden panel slides to expose a lacquered bar, and a hinged door within the panel swings open to form a window to the kitchen. Hadid points out that none of the furniture is really finished in pure black, white, or primary colors; the tones were muted just enough to resonate within the neutral volume of the room.

The "wavy back" sofa that flanks the living area nearest the study was designed by Hadid to exude the same curvaceous abstraction of her furniture at the opposite end of the room, but in a brighter rush of color. Intended for "long-term sitting," relaxing, and watching the television housed in the wall unit, the sofa is divided into three parts: an undulated, cushioned backrest fixed to the wall; a fabric-covered bench on a wedge-shaped steel base; and a lacquered wooden nook that screens the occupant from the window. In front of the sofa, a lacquered wooden tabletop is supported by a steel and bronze base that diagonally extends over the floor (below right), inspiring Hadid to call it the "metal carpet" table. Framing the ensemble, the left portion of the wall unit extends to form a sliding door between the living area and study at the back of the house, revealing a grid of lacquered shelves behind the panel for books and video equipment (top right). The architect admits that the idea of designing the furniture seemed easy until confronted by the limited skills of craftsmen unwilling to experiment with unorthodox materials and fabrication techniques. Though the built results are not quite up to her expectations, Hadid is eager to augment her present range with additional pieces and, eventually, to join the swelling ranks of architects who have teamed up with manufacturers and put their furniture designs into production.



*Living Room Suite
London*

Owner:
William Bitar
Architect:
Zaha Hadid, Architect
Studio 9
10 Bowling Green Lane
London EC1
England
Zaha Hadid, Michael Wolfson,
project designers; Brett Steele,
Brenda MacKneson, Nan Lee,
project team
Engineer:
Ove Arup & Partners—Peter Rice
(dining table)
Photographer:
©Richard Bryant





In 1982 Steven Holl was tapped, along with a dozen other under-forty colleagues, as an "emerging voice" by The Architectural League of New York in its first annual survey of the "new generation of architects in America." Five years later, however, it is apparent that Holl's "voice" has risen above the roar of the young crowd. In fact, last May, when Knoll International assembled an all-star cast for its 50th anniversary symposium entitled "20th Century Design and Architecture: Defining a New Tradition," Michael Graves, in his lecture, went so far as to group Holl with such recognized visionaries as Eero Saarinen, Charles Eames, and Frank O. Gehry. Graves argued that while Gehry and Holl reveal the expressive potential of technology, as did Saarinen and Eames, only Holl's work suggests strategies for an urban scale. (Could Graves have been publicly passing the baton?)

Though rooted in the elementarist esthetic of the Russian Constructivists of the '20s, Holl's vocabulary deliberately defies any strict categories of style. The architect, in fact, shuns any allegiance to Postmodernists, whom he accuses of producing "overembellished and cynically decorative works;" high-tech Modernists, whom he reproaches for ignoring the more sensual, phenomenal aspects of architecture; and contextualists, whom he chides for picking a point of departure that is "not meaningful." Instead, Holl prefers his own, more elusive agenda, which he defines as the pursuit of "the poetry of construction."

This pursuit began in earnest in 1970, when the architect took leave from his undergraduate studies at the University of Washington and went off to Rome to study under Astra Zarina. Although he eventually returned to Seattle to complete his degree, Holl's disenchantment with the American scene persisted, and he left his job in San Francisco in search of "polemical action." Unable to work for his only hero, Louis Kahn, who died just as Holl was about to apply for a job, the newly licensed architect left for The Architectural Association in London to rub elbows with faculty members Leon Krier, Rem Koolhaas, Elia Zenghelis, Charles Jencks, and Bernard Tschumi. During his brief stay, Holl worked on his manuscript "An Order of Ideas." (In a turn of events that the architect is now grateful for, the text was never published.) In 1976, Holl went to New York on a round-trip excursion ticket to visit his brother, a sculptor, but soon forfeited his return fare and moved into his sibling's studio. For income, he took a part-time job at an engineering company doing technical drawings on salt-dome storage cabins in Texas. After lunch and in the evenings, Holl worked on his own projects, fueled, no doubt, by a vision of himself as an angry young man set against the architectural establishment. His first break came when he was invited by the now-defunct Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies to submit a scheme for a limited competition. Holl credits the exposure that his project for a bridge in the Bronx received for landing him on the teaching circuit.

Though teaching has given Holl a forum for his ideas, it is the gradual trickle of commissions, which has now given way to a steady flow, that has allowed him to methodically refine both methods and palette. His modest portfolio of completed work contains alluring testimony to his view of architect as master builder. While his potent material assemblages have caught the eye of purists at heart, it is the breadth of topics he explores that has held the attention of Graves, among many others. Holl's general concerns span the chasm between the lofty and the prosaic. Topics range from the transformation of a building type, documented in the *Pamphlet Architecture* series that

occupied Holl's time during his leaner days, to precisely detailing a piece of furniture as an emblem for an entire project. Specific sources of inspiration are as diverse, and often as cryptic, as a literary text (a passage in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is the basis of a house currently under construction on Martha's Vineyard), the elemental modes of composition (line, plane, and volume were the subject of a 1983 apartment renovation [RECORD, mid-September 1984, pages 156-163]), and an abstract analysis of the site to determine what Holl terms "the phenomenological link."

It is this search for the missing "link" that continues to preoccupy the architect. At the diminutive Pace Collection showroom, located at a busy intersection in New York (RECORD, April 1986, pages 98-103), Holl responded to the kineticism of the site by pitting the horizontal mullions of one all-glass facade against the vertical mullions of the other. In developing this theme of point/counterpoint, the architect relied heavily on skills that he had been honing on his own—namely, an interest in geometry and systems of proportion. Like the ancient Greeks before him, Holl realized early in his career that, in architecture, these mathematical operations could be performed three-dimensionally. Since then, he has used their rigorous laws to lend both plot and content to everything from a trio of porcelain buffet plates for the Swid Powell

Collection (the firm responsible for manufacturing the patinaed bronze candlesticks Holl designed, shown at left) to the New York apartment and boutique shown on the following pages.

Holl's chosen motif for the apartment—a 42nd-floor, 1,500-square-foot space in the Museum Tower—was inspired, not unlike the Pace Collection showroom, by the site itself. Because the tower was constructed on its lot line, from inside the apartment the building appears to be cantilevered over the street below. This optical illusion, according to Holl, serves to "heighten the condition of the city grid—i.e., the Z [vertical dimension] seems more powerful than the grid itself." It also suggested the Cartesian coordinate system as theme to Holl, who organized the apartment around a domestic-scale "block," with intersecting "avenues" and "streets."



Holl's patinaed bronze candlesticks for Swid Powell

For GIADA, a tiny shop squeezed into the base of an imposing Madison Avenue midrise apartment house, Holl developed the suggested theme of compression by making a glass panel bulge out from the facade's bolted etched-brass frame. By making a diagram based on the dimensions of the store's section, the architect was able to place the elements of the storefront and the interior in such a manner that their relative proportions are ruled by the somewhat mystical properties of the golden ratio.

In attempting to decode Holl's mathematical machinations, it becomes apparent that they are not just the meter to his "poetry." Holl's obsession with geometry provides him with a rigorous method of organization that is the perfect foil to his sensuous material choices. Furthermore, by using these systems of proportion, Holl's work takes on even greater significance by making connections, even if only subliminally, to something beyond the inherent limitations of any single project. The architect's real ambition is not to develop some scientific dialect all his own; instead, the calculated mystery of his creations is intended to arrest the attention of even the most casual observer, and instigate a meditation on the language of composition. It is in exploring just how to achieve the delicate balance of control and serendipity that Holl will test his own already-powerful voice. *Karen D. Stein*



Material world

Museum Tower Apartment
New York City
Steven Holl Architects

The 42nd-floor apartment in New York's Museum Tower that Steven Holl masterminded for a Japanese business student and his older sister represents one of the architect's latest studies in materials and mathematics. Because the curtain-wall tower, designed by Cesar Pelli & Associates, was constructed on the lot line of its site, from inside the apartment the building appears to be cantilevered over the street down below. This optical illusion, which intensifies the already terrifying dimensions of the city grid, suggested to Holl the Cartesian coordinate system as theme.

To recreate the pattern of the neighborhood, Holl inserted a series of planes into the 1,500-square-foot shell, which he positioned parallel or perpendicular to one another to form rooms. Holl had them rendered by some of the craftsmen he frequently "collaborates" with in the smoothest of trowel-applied plasters, each directional sub-group in a different color. The charcoal-gray walls, which run north-south like Midtown's avenues, are intended to represent the X axis. The butter-yellow walls, which run east-west like Midtown's streets, are intended to represent the Y axis. Holl repeated the pronounced Z dimension of the skyscrapers framed between the mullions of the windows in domestic-scaled counterparts, including a polelike light fixture, an erect latch on custom-crafted hardware, and slender table legs. The architect's chosen theme also provided inspiration for individual pieces of furniture—including three rugs that represent, according to Holl, "more intuitive interpretations" of X, Y, and Z.

The architect had no difficulty incorporating his clients' program, since they specified only, "No chrome. No bright colors. No shiny materials." Holl gave them visual richness without ostentation: the chocolate-brown wool-and-silk rug bordered in royal blue, in front of a dove-gray mohair sofa, against a darker gray frescoed slab (opposite) would no doubt have moved Mark Rothko, whose moody tripartite paintings are echoed in this *tableau vivant*. K. D. S.



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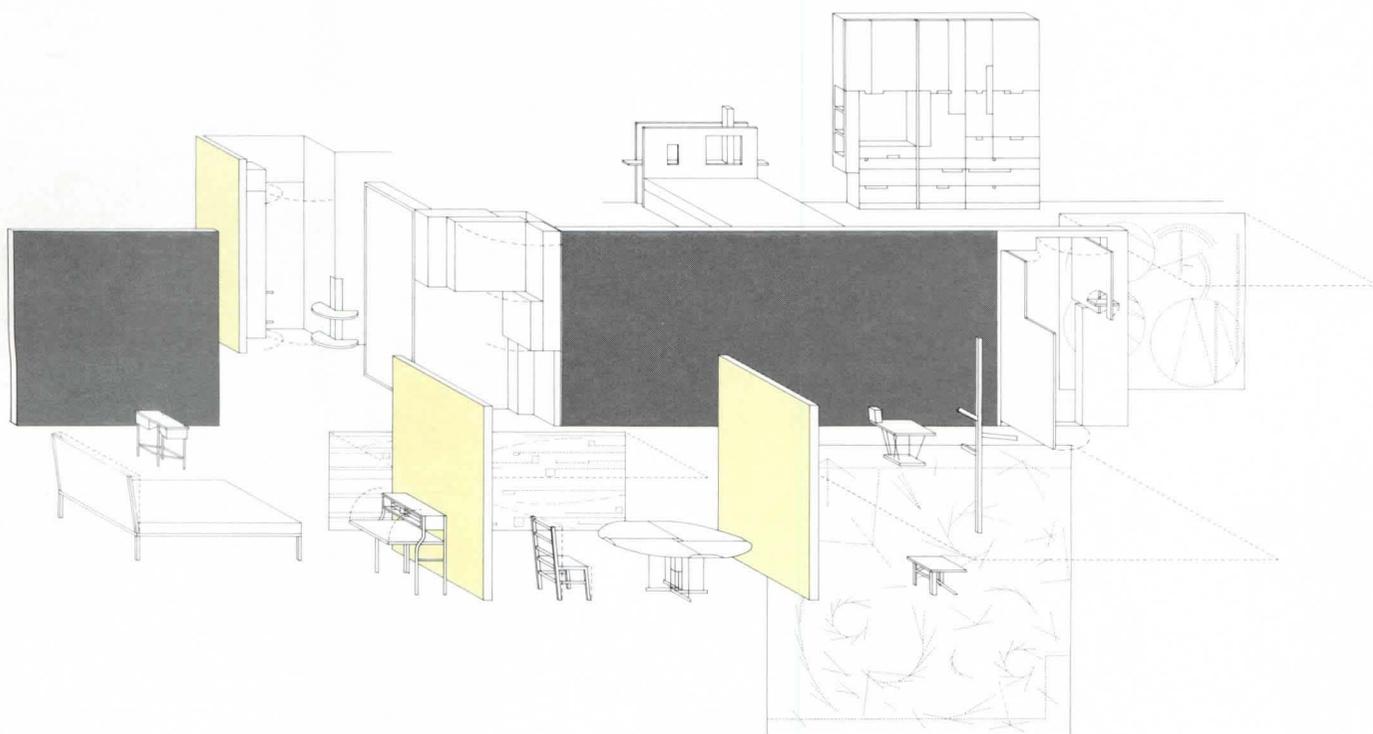


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Although Holl admits to an obsession with geometry, he insists that mathematics is only one of many available means to a desired end. Holl employed the X, Y, and Z axes to arrange and inspire the various elements of the apartment, though he maintains that the main purpose of the Cartesian coordinate system is as a frame of reference. "What interests me," explains the architect, "is not X, Y, and Z per se, but having some thread of thought that helps organize all the parts in the project, which is fluid enough so it doesn't hold you to anything you don't want." However, these

rationally ordered principles do more than supply thematic direction. Their rigorous methods suggest an economy of elements, evidenced in the "library" (opposite, bottom left), which displays books when open and is a neat transition from foyer to living/dining room when closed (the preferred position for the owner, who doesn't like to look at bindings).



The architect's obsession with mathematics is matched, perhaps, only by his attention to detail. Holl is a fanatic not only about the selection of materials, but also about how they are installed, treated, and revealed. During construction, however, he acts more as conceptual director than creator, and claims, "In the parts and pieces I depend on the craftsmen 100 percent." A Swiss cabinetmaker devised hinges that allow the library doors to swing open

without spilling their contents, a carpenter achieved the freeform shape of the dining table top that is in delicate counterpoint to its linear legs, and a team of experts (pages 152-155) made three carpets to order from Holl's watercolors. "The Greek idea of *Techne*—the combination of artistic thought and skill—is what really guides it all," concludes Holl.



The Zenlike directive of Holl's sibling clients is in evidence in their bedrooms. The sister's room (top right) contains a simple platform bed framed by nightstands, and an armoire (not shown). In her younger brother's lair (bottom right and opposite), Holl had more opportunity to develop his Cartesian theme. The headboard, for example, boasts a "Z-dimension light fixture" (a reading lamp that pops up when turned on), and the adjacent dresser (see also page 91) creates a shifting pattern of horizontals versus verticals and solids versus voids as individual cabinets and drawers are opened and closed. There is additional storage space in the desk-side credenza, which features folding shelves. Although the cabinetry is custom-crafted and the three rugs were designed especially for the apartment (and can be made to order by V'Soske), several pieces of the furniture, including the dining-room table and chandelier and sofa side tables (page 92), are currently under larger-scale production by The Pace Collection. (In fact, Pace has been manufacturing the architect's Shaker-style Linear chair since it first appeared in a 1983 apartment renovation.) Holl's strong hand is present in every detail, including his variation on a transom, which "articulates the axial dimensions" and "allows him [the client] to organize his views" and, since Holl located the movable panel at just the right height, enables his client to walk through the wall.

Museum Tower Apartment
New York City

Architect:
Steven Holl Architects
133 West 19th Street
New York, New York 10010
Steven Holl, principal-in-charge;
Peter Lynch, project architect; Ralph
Nelson, Stephen Cassell, assistants

Consultants:
Stefan Rohner (woodwork and
cabinetry); The Pace Collection
(furniture); Alvin Cooke (brass and
steel work); Niki Logis (steel work);
V'Soske (carpets)

General contractor:
C. Clark Construction
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supervisor

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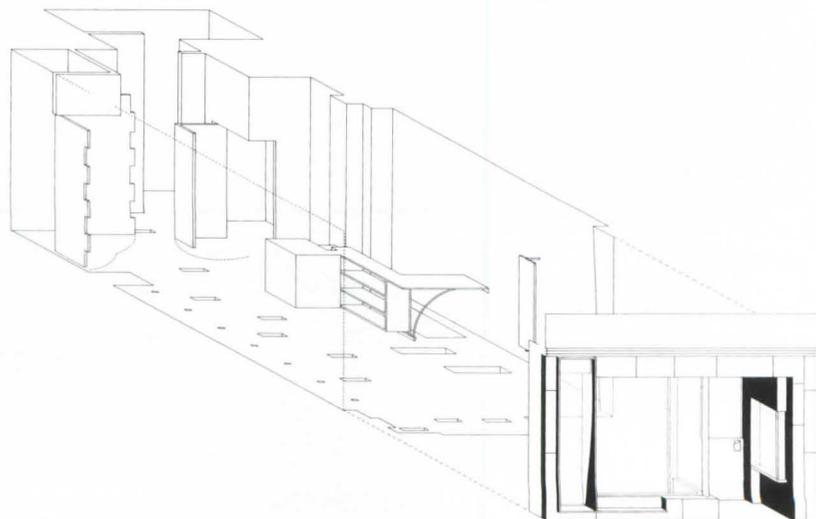
©Paul Warchol



Window dressing

GIADA, Inc.
New York City
Steven Holl Architects

The owner of GIADA invited Steven Holl to design her New York boutique not only because the architect was working on an apartment for her and her brother some 20 blocks away (previous pages), but also because his material sensibility mirrored her own aspirations for the women's wear she planned to carry. The contrast of the diminutive shop in a venerable Madison Avenue midrise inspired the theme of compression. To organize each element of the motif, Holl made a diagram of a golden section based on the height and width of the space, and traced in it a logarithmic spiral of rectangles proportional to the original one. The architect was thus supplied with a series of dimensions with the same ratio, equal to 1 to 1.618, and he designed everything in the store—from trap doors to checkout counter—according to these golden section proportions. In addition, this system produces the subliminal suggestion of some hidden order greater than the thematic one. The theme itself, however, is expressed in the curved glass panel that bulges out of the bolted etched-brass storefront frame (overleaf) and its opposite, decompression, is expressed in the interior, where ash dressing room doors swing outward, "giving back their volumes to the overall space;" bronze-wire-screen light fixtures appear to have popped down from the ceiling; and swirls in the cerulean plaster and the cloudlike pattern of the terrazzo tiles suggest a release of "pressure." The tiles, in fact, are suspended eight inches above a subfloor to form pockets for the sculptural wire mannequins with cast-glass shoulders, which remain hauntingly bare because the owner has yet to find a wardrobe worthy of them. *K. D. S.*



Architect:

*Steven Holl Architects
133 West 19th Street
New York, New York 10010
Peter Lynch, project architect;
Steven Holl and Lorcan O'Herlihy,
design team; Stephen Cassell and
Darius Sollohub, assistants*

Consultants:

*Light & Space Associates—Peter
Barna and Renée Cooley (lighting);
Stefan Rohner (woodwork); Oscar
Williams (plaster); Phil Fauchel
(storefront); Alvin Cooke (brass and
steel work); Jan Larsen (brass work);
Niki Logis (light fixtures); Chris
Cosma and Tina Aufiero (cast glass);
Jorge Rodriguez (sandblasted glass)*

General contractor:

*C. Clark Construction
Corporation—Frank D'Amico and
John Houshmand, job supervisors*

Photographer:

©Mark Darley







The world according to Starck

Portfolio
Philippe Starck, Designer

At 38, Philippe Starck is one of the most prolific, and irreverent, designers of our time. This self-styled "rock star of architecture" commutes by Concorde to work in New York and Tokyo, and has purveyed his talents to clients as diverse as French President François Mitterrand and the Panzani pasta company. RECORD caught up with France's man of the hour at his lair in Manhattan's Morgan's Hotel, where he shared more than a few bon mots on the current state of his art.

Karen Stein: The Manin restaurant in Tokyo [pages 106-107] is your latest completed interior. What did the project entail?

Philippe Starck: The problem posed by Manin was to design an underground restaurant with no windows. What was also interesting was to do this project entirely by correspondence. That is to say, I went to Tokyo the day of the opening and not before. Everything was communicated by telefax. It's interesting to find out to what point a scheme can be "modern" in the manner in which it is done. Manin also interests me because it's a project in which you can see the most clearly (and in which I have succeeded the most clearly to reveal) my point of view about interior design. Interior design is, above all else, *mise en scène*. It is, above all else, opera. I've always said that I do interior design (rather, I *did*, since now I don't *do* it anymore because we closed the interior design department of the firm about nine months ago) to provide the only service it can actually offer public spaces: emotion. At Manin there is perpetual emotion. You enter the restaurant by dark hallways, and you cross the fragile little bridge in aluminum, which shakes a bit. This bridge is the link between the exterior world and the interior world; the passage between reality and opera. When you arrive in the single, big room you immediately see the play of the actors. In this room is the palpable emotion of the enormous black stair, which is scary. The opera itself is very simple: the male "actor" (the stair) is very powerful and aggressive, and is face to face with the female "actor" (the wall covered in red velvet that is inclined towards you), which is very feminine but also very oppressive. Then there is the choir—like the corps de ballet—those black beams that cross between the two actors and attempt to unite them. It is successful because you can feel that you are in the middle of a drama. This project confirmed my reasons for choosing to design public spaces—to create the violence and drama that is impossible in private spaces—and my intuition that with inanimate objects you can create action, tension, and dialogue.

KS: Why are you closing the interior design department of your firm when your work in that area is such a resounding success?

PS: I'm stopping interior design work, because, for one reason, I am scaling down all of my activity to about a tenth of last year. Instead of working on about 100 projects, I will work on less than 10. I am returning to the idea, which I never entirely abandoned, of providing a service of haute couture, even if it is a democratic one. Another reason, (and this reason is a little pretentious), is that I know how to do interior design. There are no new adventures . . . I'm only interested in doing things I have never done before . . . Actually, I wanted to stop all interior design and do only one piece of furniture per manufacturer per year. I'd like to have more time to do fundamental research, but, alas, I can't do that because, one could say, of success and the press. If I stop altogether, people will say it's because I'm finished. Instead I will do less, and will select only the best projects.

KS: You are currently working on a hotel in New York, various

projects all over France, another restaurant or two in Tokyo, and product designs for at least half a dozen different European manufacturers. Does your hyperactivity make it hard for you to devote the attention necessary for each project?

PS: I don't have any problems doing my work. I adore it. It's a drug. But I am a dreamer. The realization of things, the concrete thing, doesn't interest me at all . . . Even though I spend so much time traveling, I now produce more and better than I did before. It takes me less time to produce what it used to take me years to figure out. . . I can really do a building that I like a lot in one day.

KS: Tell me about the high-tech bathrooms you design. Why do you devote so much attention to such, shall we say, low-profile endeavors?

PS: Architecture itself doesn't interest me at all. Interior design doesn't interest me at all. For me design is just a means of expression like any other. And this means of expression has pedagogical effects. What I like is to take risks and to try to teach people how to live better. And I like to show people examples in ways that will surprise them. In general, no one cares much about bathrooms because they are a bit taboo and not very chic. At best, bathrooms are completely standardized and at worst they are ignoble. Everyone complains about bathrooms, but I maintain that is because they don't respect them. I maintain, and I have proven, that the bathroom can be made a noble place. If the effort is made, people will notice it and the places will be pleasurable. But to tell the truth, I like designing bathrooms because I find it subversive.

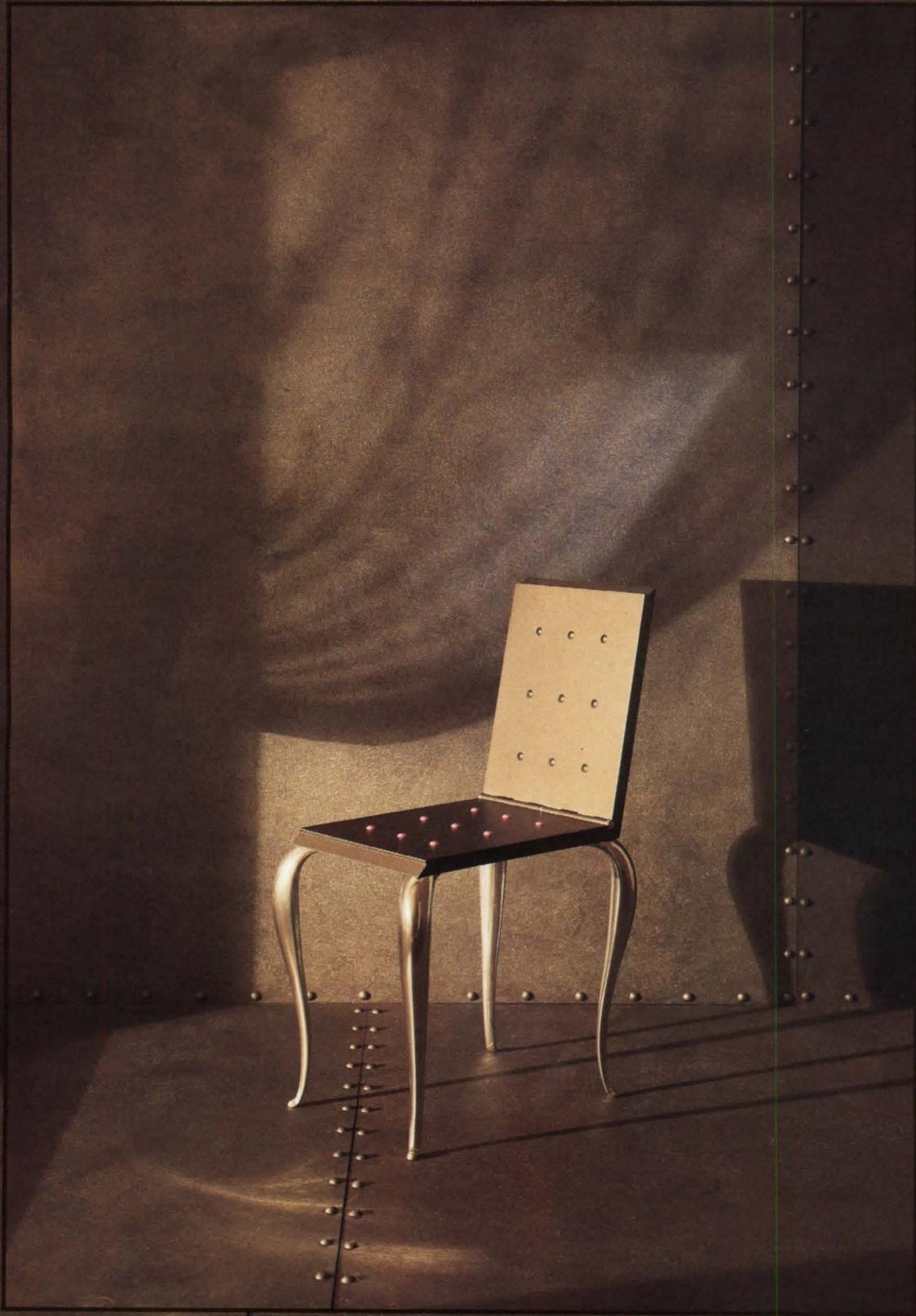
KS: Are you taking the same care with the bathrooms for the renovation of the Royalton Hotel in New York City?

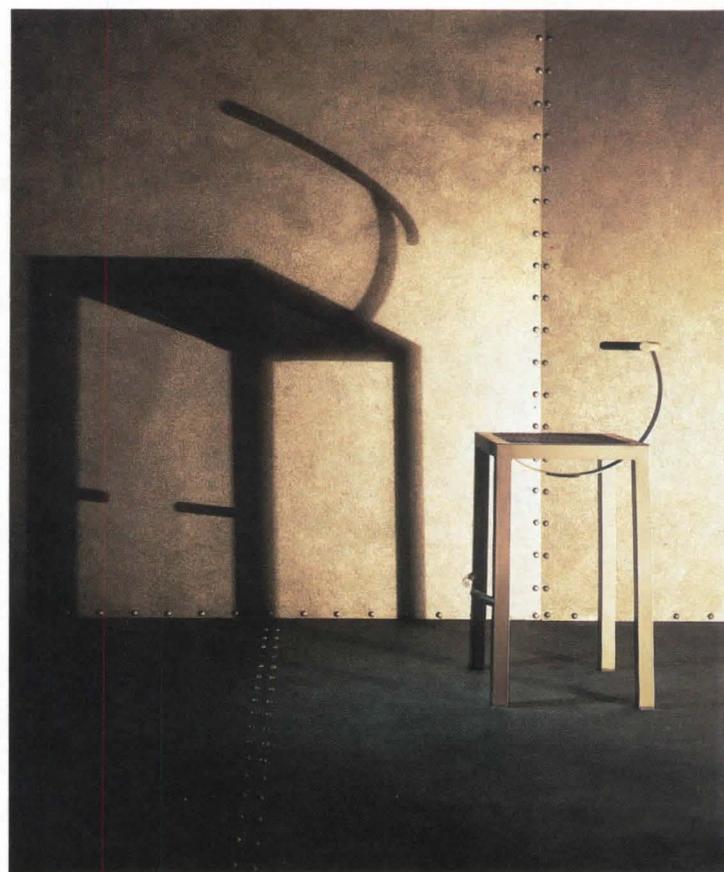
PS: The bathrooms in the hotel will be fantastic, but, alas, I am impeded by American hygienic regulations, which hinder all fantasies. American regulations force you to buy existing products. If you create them, they have to be approved; approval takes more than a year and has risks. Here, I build less at ease, because of the American system of construction, which forces you to arrive at a very standardized method. It is the architecture of catalogs. With lighting you can hardly do anything because of all the rules. We can't make magic anymore in America . . . I think there is an enormous danger of poverty for architecture here, because designers lack liberty. In the coming years Americans will have a completely standardized architecture with only a few exceptions, like Frank Gehry.

KS: Are there limits to what you are willing to design?

PS: I like doing it all, designing it all, trying to twist it all . . . Whatever others don't like to do, I adore. I was very happy to design pasta [page 104] and sheets—ones that aren't very expensive. I will stop doing architecture when I do the project that interests me the most, which is to make those little houses that aren't very expensive, which you see all over—those crummy little things. I would like to make something good out of that. That is my real project in architecture. I'm not interested in making big buildings. I think the biggest building in the world is made up of all those little houses. If you put one on top of the other, you'd have the biggest tower in the world . . . You can construct skyscrapers to make yourself happy. But that's easy, although they *are* necessary because they hide the real architecture, which are the little houses. I want to solve the problem of those crummy little houses that disfigure the landscape. Me, I like the dirty work.





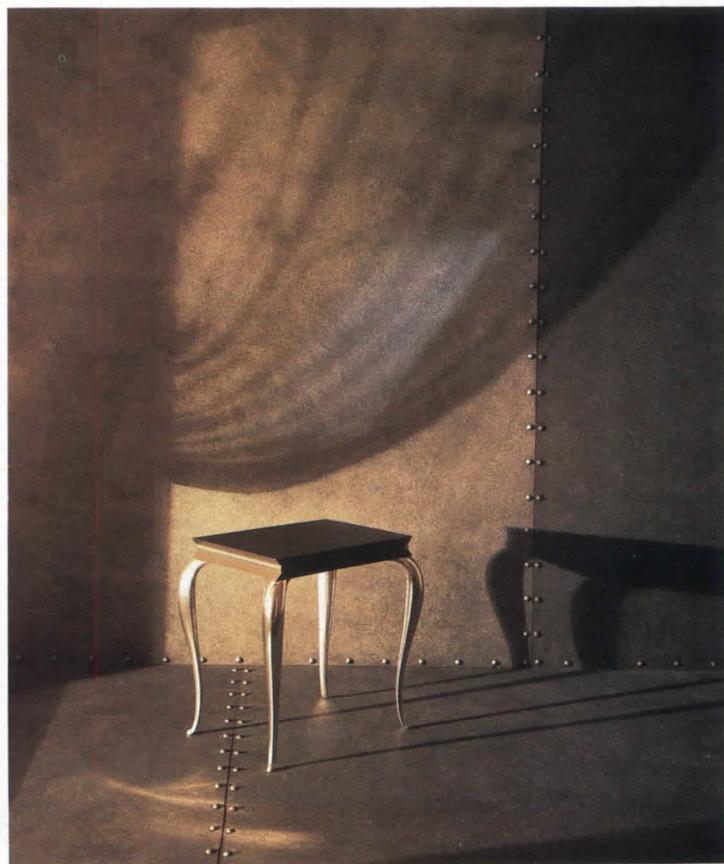


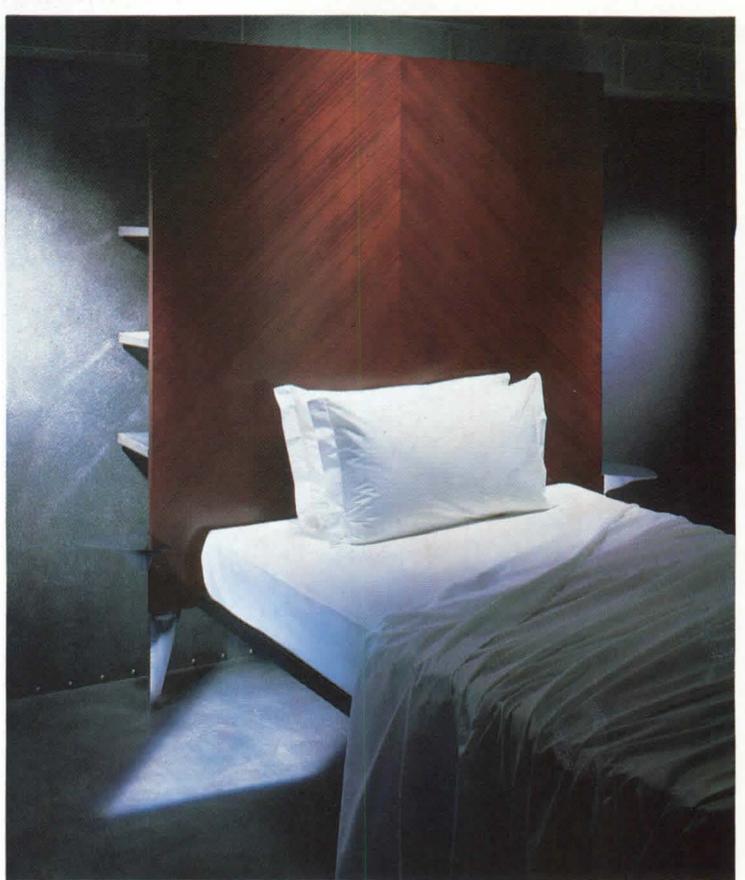
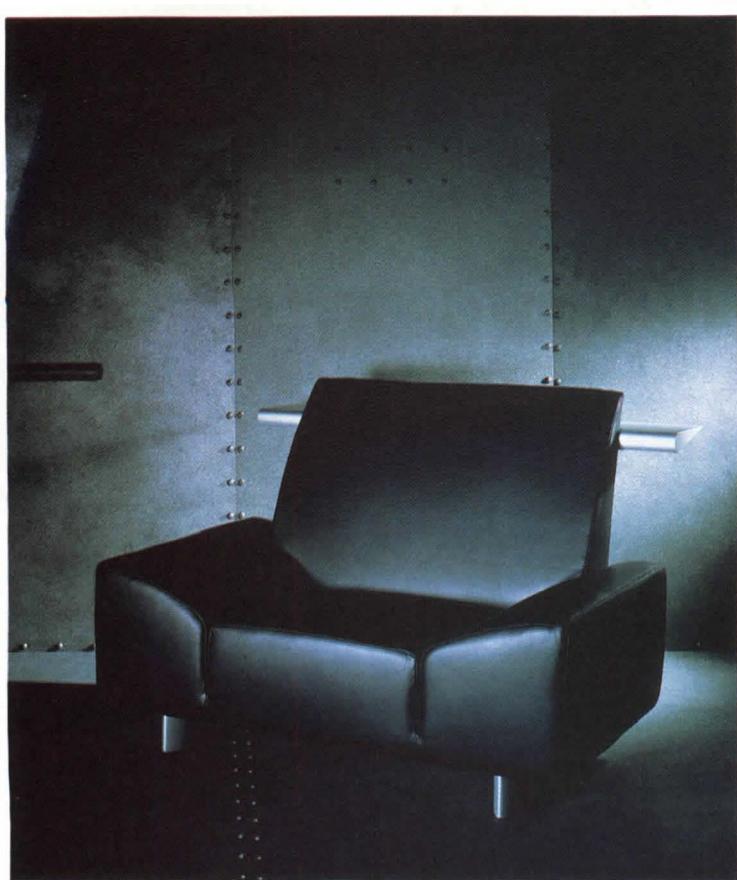
"I can design a good piece of furniture in two hours," boasts Philippe Starck, whose latest collection is previewed here and on page 103. Although he has charted some startlingly new directions in designer products—an elephant stool, a headboard, and pasta, to name but three—Starck continues to produce variations on his now familiar table-and-chair-theme. Starck



began designing furniture as a teenager, after he dropped out of school, but it wasn't until he made his mark on the architectural map with the Café Costes in Paris in 1984 that manufacturers from all over Europe began clamoring to produce his stockpile of sketches. Unlike many of his colleagues in the field, however, Starck does not conduct research. "I design one piece at a time, at a

small scale, and we never retouch the prototype," he explains. Though Starck has designed furniture for the private apartments of President and Mme. Mitterand in the Elysée Palace in Paris and for France's former Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, he insists that his "haute-couture" service is democratic. To prove his point, several of the items made for the French





President were also offered to the general public by the Les Trois Suisses mail-order company. Starck, who fancies himself a "war correspondent" (and his products, "propaganda"), believes that making his work accessible to a wide audience is the most important part of his esthetic mission. Toward that end, the most recent addenda to his design manifesto contain something for

everyone. Starck confesses that among his latest batch of new products his current favorite is the pasta he created for the "Pasta del Maestro" collection, which he designed to, quite simply, "better hold the sauce." A sampling of Starck's latest domestic accouterments includes, clockwise from upper lefthand corner: J. Lang chair designed for the Italian company, Driade; Serapis



chair, Driade; leather easy chair, Driade; Shepherd bed/headboard, Driade; Colucci elephant stools, Driade; water bottle, designed for the French company, Vittel; M. Lang table, Driade; chair that folds into a side table (for open position, see page 103), Driade; leather side chair, Driade; and Quartella pasta from the "Pasta del Maestro" collection, for the French pasta company, Panzani.



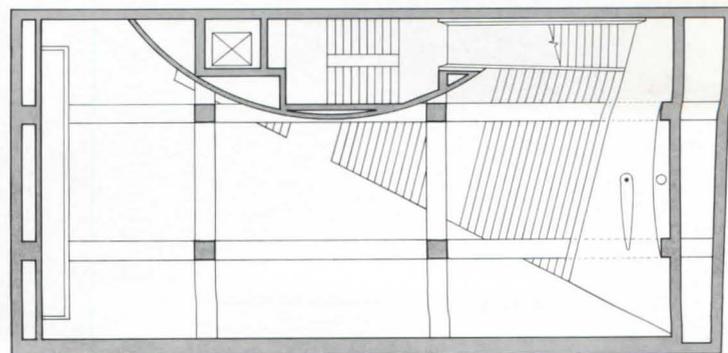
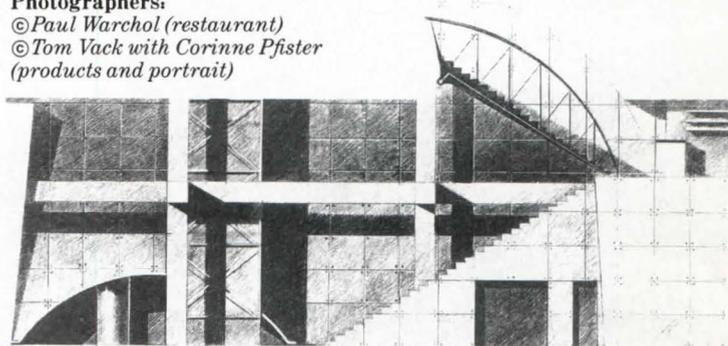
Tokyo rose

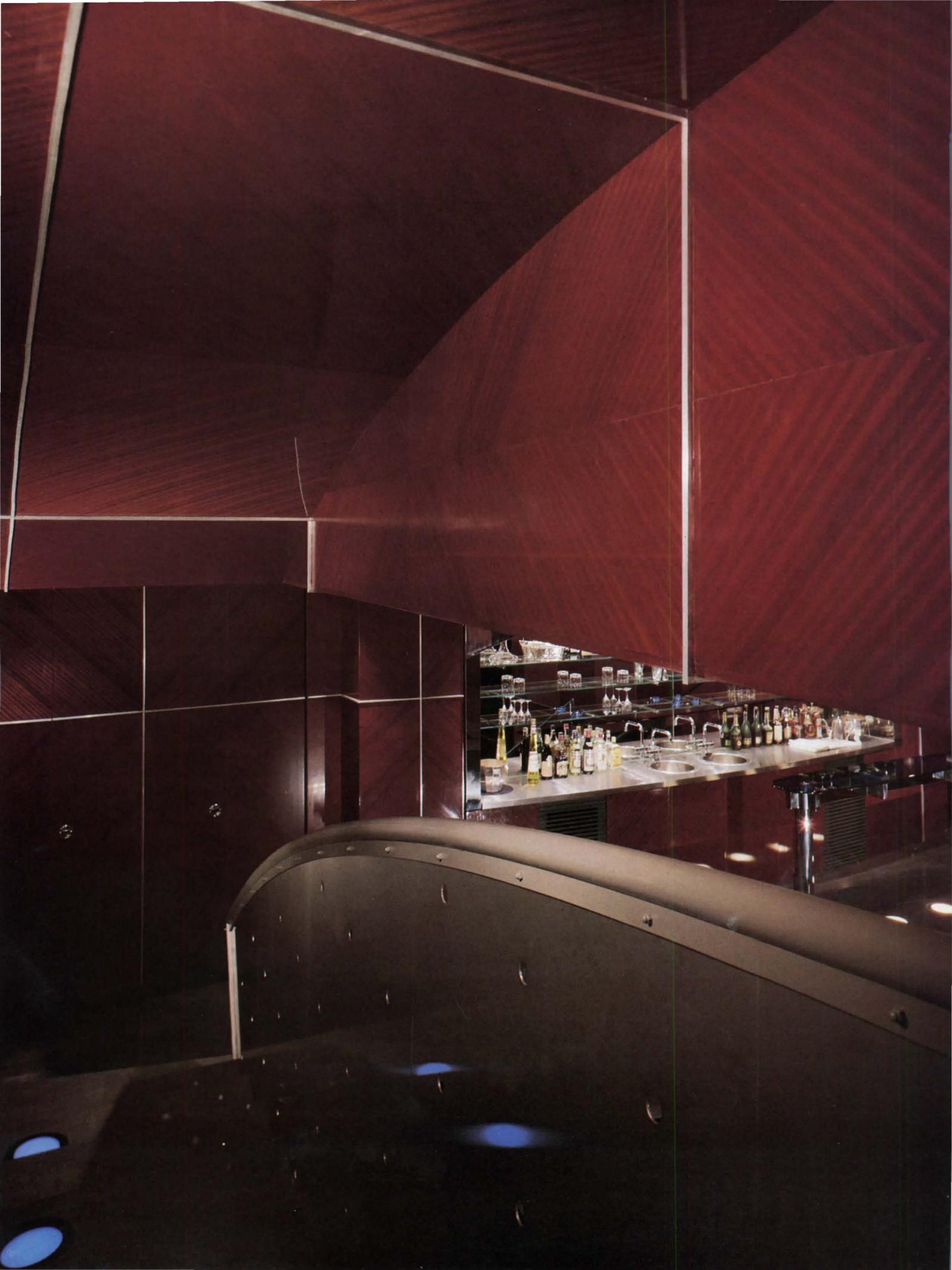
Manin Restaurant
Tokyo, Japan
Philippe Starck, Designer



Faced with a double-height concrete cavern with the configuration—and charm—of a freight-elevator shaft, Starck chose to exploit the theme of descent in his design of the Manin restaurant. The designer transformed the potentially unwieldy path from entrance to table into a stageset for a parade by inserting a fragile aluminum bridge that leads past the midnight-blue glass bar to a sharply-angled staircase. Starck was equally flamboyant in rendering the subterranean room; he tufted one wall with red velvet and lined the remaining surfaces with a sumptuous russet mahogany. Although the designer describes his esthetic as “Japanese,” the wood-clad walls were a concession to his Asian client’s request for something distinctly “European.” Tables encircled with fierce-looking, three-legged, black leather chairs are in the spotlight as are patrons, who—as Starck predicted—are queuing up outside Manin, waiting to make their grand entrance.
K. D. S.

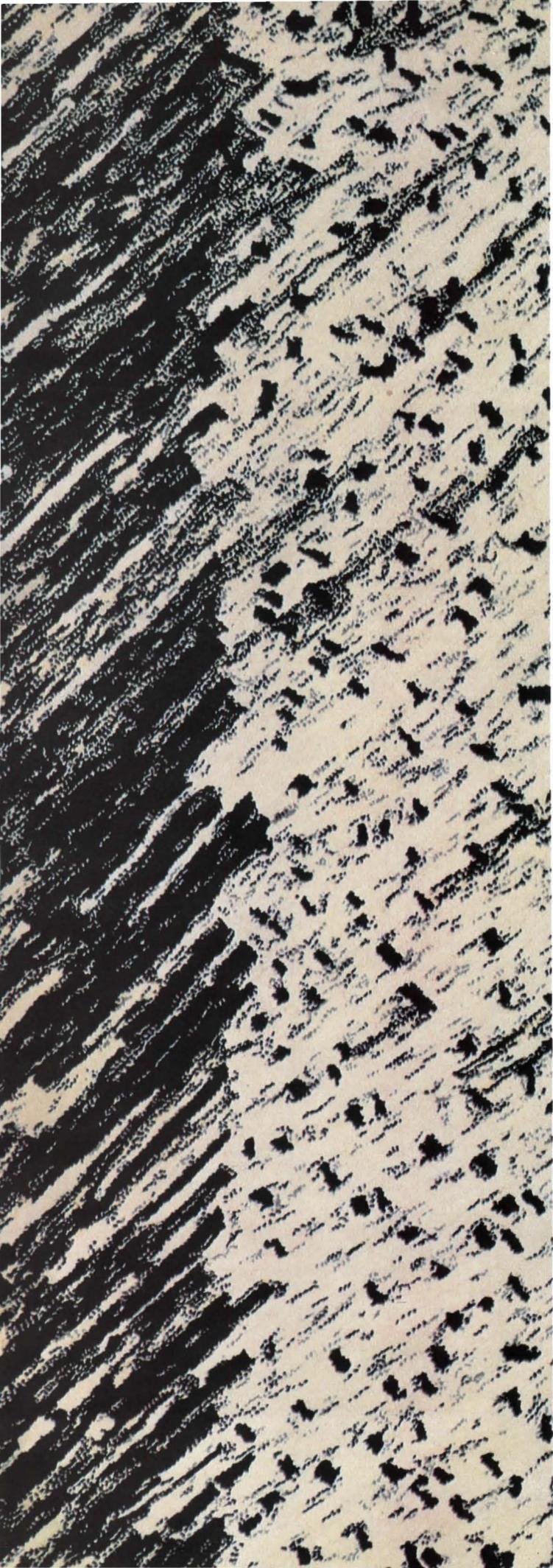
Designer:
STARCK
4 Rue de Dion
78490 Montfort L'Amaury
France
Philippe Starck, principal-in-charge;
K. I. C., Philippe Terrien (project
coordinator)
Consultant:
Castec Limited
Contractor:
Kumagai Company Limited
Photographers:
© *Paul Warchol (restaurant)*
© *Tom Vack with Corinne Pfister*
(products and portrait)





Eye of his times





The singular designs of architect Alan Buchsbaum have redefined the ways in which interiors have been conceived, executed, and inhabited during the past two decades.

By Martin Filler

Alan Buchsbaum, who died of AIDS on April 10 at the age of 51, was a figure of central importance on the American interior design scene during his two decades of independent practice. After receiving his B. Arch. from MIT in 1961, Buchsbaum worked for the New York firms of Conklin and Rossant on their new town of Reston, Virginia, and later for Warner, Burns, Toan, and Lunde on their Princeton Mathematics Building. After establishing his own office in 1967, Buchsbaum developed a special interest in interior design, and it is in that sphere that he made his strongest mark and will be best remembered. Buchsbaum was one of the first and most talented members of his generation to recognize that interior design could be the worthy focus of an architectural career. The postwar building boom and its allure of large-scale commissions led many architects to view interior design as an activity of lesser importance and prestige than the construction of major landmarks on an urban scale. Responsibility for interiors was often relegated to subservient operations within large architectural organizations or was farmed out to other firms entirely. Buchsbaum, however, understood that the success or failure of architecture on the most direct human level depends largely on interior design, and he addressed himself to it with an attentiveness that would later be emulated by other architects, though rarely with his uncommon degree of sympathy and conviction.

The '60s were without question the pivotal phase in Buchsbaum's personal and professional development. The new and sometimes unsettling attitudes that grew out of that period of extreme political and cultural upheaval were rapidly reflected in architecture, that inevitable (and pitiless) mirror of social change. The cracks in the Modernist image had already begun to appear by the time Buchsbaum set up The Design Collaborative 20 years ago, and he did his part to drive a wedge further into the fissures. His especially subversive form of rebellion was to use the familiar range of Modernist materials and motifs in inverted contexts and to vastly different ends than those being pursued by mainstream architects. Though often humorous, Buchsbaum's early commercial interiors—for enterprises with such quintessentially '60s names as The Paper Poppy, Lucidity, and Metamorphosis (a card shop, a plastics boutique, and a hair salon, respectively)—were functional as well as playful, qualities that persisted in his work even after he outgrew his Pop period.

Unlike his contemporaries who revolted against Modernism by abandoning it in favor of an imagined pre-Modern past, Buchsbaum always remained an unabashed enthusiast of the basic principles he had learned at MIT during the ascendancy of the International Style. Jean Labatut's famous exhortation to obtain "the maximum effect with the minimum of means" could have been Buchsbaum's own, and his adherence to that ideal gives his oeuvre an essential consistency beneath its mutable surface characteristics. His lasting loyalty to the Modernist esthetic makes Buchsbaum's late work seem like a fresh rejoinder to the already dated clichés of Postmodernism, but it was an instance of taste catching up with him rather than vice versa.

Buchsbaum's belief in innovation as the only acceptable creative stance put him at odds with the philosophical challenge to Modernism that became a major preoccupation in architectural interior design during his last decade. But just as he was unswerving in his support of Modernism's best tenets—clarity, simplicity, and utility—so was he mindful of its amply documented shortcomings, and his late designs embody implicit critiques of the rigid, diagrammatic quality common to much Late Modern and Postmodern design alike. His refusal to supplant one dogmatic approach with another placed him outside critical attention to an extent that now seems surprising in light of the consistently high standard of his output. But there was at least one

benefit to Buchsbaum's distance from the ideological fray: he was able to develop his ideas without undue concern for extraneous matters, attending to the needs of his clients rather than fixing on real or imagined issues of a theoretical nature.

This orientation won him a small but devoted following among a creative segment of the generation that came of age during the '60s and became patrons during the '80s. For many in that demographic group, Buchsbaum was the ideal interior designer. His schemes were invariably practical, extraordinarily comfortable, and ingeniously adaptable, stylish but unpretentious and advanced but easily livable. He managed the difficult trick of creating spaces that were absolutely up-to-the-minute without seeming trendy or ephemeral, though he would be the last one to aver that he was designing for the ages. That sense of authentic immediacy gives his designs the rare ability to simultaneously define and epitomize a given moment, and will no doubt contribute to his work of the '80s being viewed in retrospect as among the most focused in a period of considerable confusion.

Buchsbaum's gift for social observation and acute intuition as to how changing behavior affects the designed environment led him to a number of new strategies well before they become widespread practices. He was one of the first architects to grasp fully the potential that commercial loft space could have for the creation of dynamic domestic interiors; he excelled at the imaginative recycling of ready-made industrial components and is credited as a founder of the '70s High-Tech style; he rediscovered classic furniture designs of the past (such as the generously scaled upholstered seating of the '30s and '40s) not for their nostalgic associations but because of their inherent suitability for a new kind of residential space; he designed furnishings not to impose a signature style on his interiors but to provide solutions unobtainable through commercially available products; he willingly accommodated new kinds of technological paraphernalia, from VCRs to Jacuzzis, regarding them as desirable enhancements of modern life rather than as obstacles to a state of design perfection. He was famously flexible in what he would allow, but beneath that openness lay a set of principles so solid that his designs never seem wantonly permissive. Order without obsessive control was his aim, and he was invariably on target.

The final sequence of projects seen on the following pages found Buchsbaum at the very top of his form, working with effortless command of what Charles Moore has termed "the loose fit," a state of design grace best defined as the big things so well thought out that the little things fall into place without undue disruption to the whole. Taken separately, some of the individual elements Buchsbaum used seemed wildly improbable: a turquoise velour armchair bearing the outline of a guitar on its back, carpeting patterned with the zingy vectors of Wassily Kandinsky, marble handled with the casualness of plastic laminate, and plastic laminate handled with the seriousness of marble. Assembled by Buchsbaum, however, they attain a cohesive correctness that seems nothing short of alchemical, as if the architect were able to decree a state of design disbelief, permitting us to accept in ensemble what we might well have rejected as components in isolation. This was surely one of his most admirable skills. Buchsbaum employed certain motifs again and again in his last works, especially the jagged edge (opposite) that now in hindsight seems like a metaphor for a career broken off at its peak.

But it is not the repeated themes that linger in one's cumulative impression of what Alan Buchsbaum was able to accomplish; it is his capacity for seemingly limitless self-renewal that comes through most strongly, and which seems so thoroughly at odds with the ultimate fact of this portfolio. Contemporary, optimistic, and forward-looking, these three beautiful schemes strike their only discordant note when one realizes that they now belong to a completed chapter in the history of 20th-century design.

Martin Filler is editor of House & Garden and writes on architecture and design. In 1985 Alan Buchsbaum remodeled the kitchen of the New York apartment that Filler shares with his wife, the architectural historian Rosemarie Haag Bletter.

Buchsbaum's brilliant way with details is demonstrated (preceding pages from left) by his free-form low table for the Nevele Hotel lobby, his Serious Leaves and Pencilmarkings rugs for V'Soske, and his armchair, upholstered in Gropius-print velvet, for the Billy Joel/Christie Brinkley penthouse in New York. The architect's unexpected juxtapositions often include tables made from slabs of rough-edged

marble, Bank of England wooden swivel chairs, and Italian hanging lamps, here in the Joel/Brinkley apartment (below). Actors and entertainers formed a significant portion of Buchsbaum's clientele, responding to his thoroughly individual and yet highly glamorous interiors as a welcome alternative to the conventional trappings of worldly success.



Uptown world

Joel/Brinkley Penthouse
New York City
Alan Buchsbaum, Architect

As one of the most adept exponents of the converted commercial loft—the archetypal urban residential format of the '70s and '80s—Alan Buchsbaum was often asked to transpose the easygoing, expansive air of those downtown spaces into more conventional uptown settings. Among his clients are rock-musician Billy Joel and his fashion-model wife Christie Brinkley, whose apartment overlooking Central Park is large enough to make that concept work remarkably well despite the absence of spindly cast-iron Corinthian columns running through the middle of the living room. The ample scale of this 2,500-square-foot penthouse is matched by a baby grand piano, an enormous overstuffed sofa made to the architect's specifications, and a trio of big fat club chairs upholstered in an array of eye-popping fabrics. Bank of England swivel chairs, a Buchsbaum favorite, are used for dining, painted white in that slight but significant twist he liked to give his found objects.

Claiming a broad expanse of living-room wall is one of the storage units Buchsbaum was capable of raising to a level of visual interest at least equal to that of a Louise Nevelson sculpture. Joel needed an elaborate sound system and room for his vast collection of records, CDs, and tapes. Many designers would have hidden them behind closed doors in the interest of design purity, but in characteristic fashion Buchsbaum left the components exposed and affixed a new marble-and-glass fascia in his eroded-edge motif for decorative effect. His instinct for which elements of an interior-design scheme are worth troubling over and which are not is evident here, and that relaxed discrimination lies at the heart of why this apartment seems so inherently right for its owners. It's glamorous without being glitzy, fastidious and yet funky—distinctions that Buchsbaum always understood.

*Joel/Brinkley Penthouse
New York City*

Owners:

Billy Joel, Christie Brinkley

Architect:

Alan Buchsbaum, Architect

12 Greene Street

New York City 10013

Alan Buchsbaum, principal-in-

charge; David Culmer Skelley,

project architect; Corey Delany,

project coordinator

Consultants:

Klepper, Marshall, King (acoustical);

Johnson Schwinghammer, Inc.

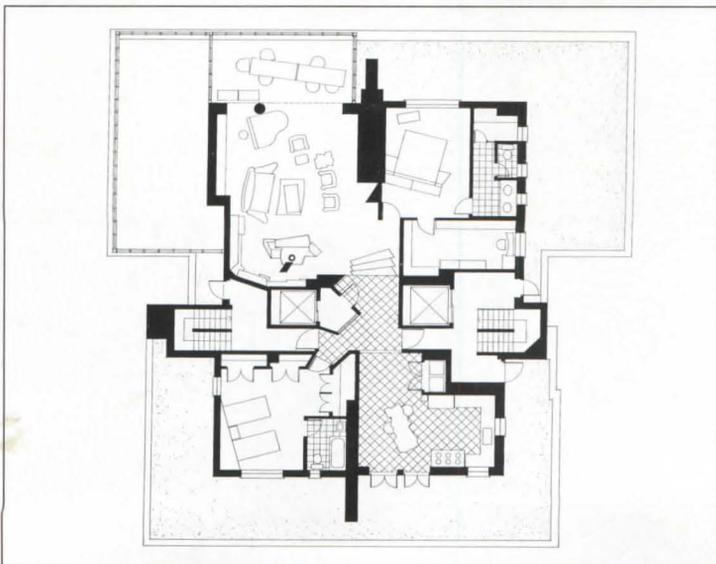
(lighting)

General contractor:

J. Nolan and Sons, Inc.

Photographer:

©Oberto Gili



Buchsbaum's own furniture designs include an extravagant custom-made sofa (opposite), the Wintour Table (opposite and top), the Pencilmarkings rug (center), and custom-made club chairs (left), including one emblazoned with a guitar motif (not shown) in honor of the owner, musician Billy Joel. The open incorporation of Joel's audio equipment as a positive design element is typical of Buchsbaum's philosophy that usefulness and comfort are paramount in residential interiors, and that functional imperatives should be given preference over preconceived formal considerations.

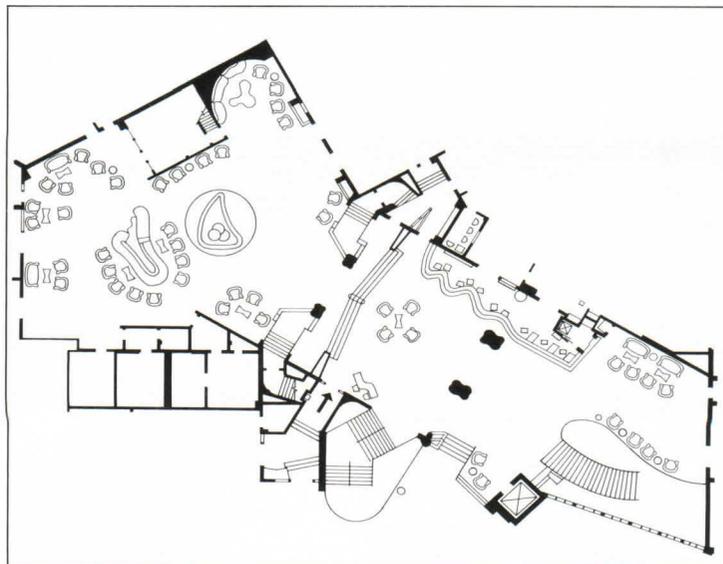
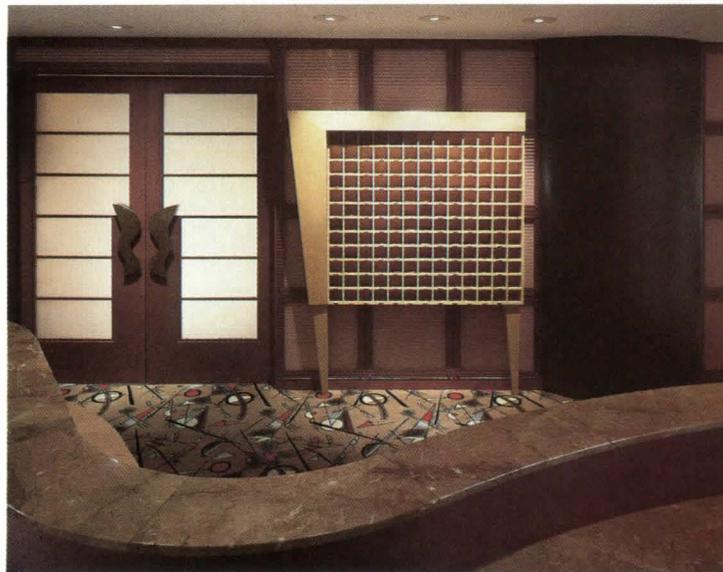




Lapidary finish

The Nevele Hotel and Country Club
Reception area and lobby
Ellenville, New York
Alan Buchsbaum, Architect,
with Marc Litalien

The serpentine reception desk (opposite) is echoed overhead by an undulating canopy of perforated brass back-lit by metal halide lamps. The wall-to-wall carpet, designed by Alan Buchsbaum, was inspired by the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky, himself a major influence on designers of the '50s. Handrails are original to the lobby, circa 1955. Another '50s touch, Flutex glass, was used by Buchsbaum on walls and doors leading to offices (below). Massive new plaster columns (right) help define the amorphous lobby area. The fountain and starburst are also original to the space.



The beginning of the end of Modernism was signaled with devastating irony during the '60s in the emergence of a most unlikely cult figure: Morris Lapidus, the maverick *Meister* of Miami Beach. His exuberant hotel concoctions, which gave the vocabulary of Modern architecture a preposterous incongruity—imagine Jayne Mansfield reciting *The Waste Land*—nonetheless possessed an antic spirit that had long since fled the International Style, which in its early days had lacked no vigor. The Lapidus look spread rapidly during the Age of Eisenhower, and found fertile ground in the Catskill resort region of upstate New York.

One of the finest groupings of '50s architecture in "The Borscht Belt" was designed by a former Lapidus associate, architect Herbert Phillips, who carried out an extensive expansion of the Nevele Hotel between 1955 and 1965. The Nevele ("Eleven" spelled backwards) was begun in 1901 and has remained in the ownership of the Slutsky family ever since. They have added on to the complex incrementally throughout its history, but never more ambitiously than during the boom years of the '50s, and the brash energy and buoyant outlook of that period is still abundantly evident in those lively structures. Recently it became obvious that a major rehab was in order, and Jeffrey Slutsky, great-grandson of the founder, took it upon himself to commission a scheme that would be, in his words, "not like a Ramada Inn."

Slutsky's clear idea of what he wanted—a design that would be a homage to the best qualities of '50s Modernism—led him to Alan Buchsbaum, who rarely worked in a revivalist mode but whose broad visual culture made him ideally qualified for the job. Buchsbaum was by temperament conservative when it came to money and materials; he preferred to retain whatever he could in his remodelings, and at the Nevele he found a lot that he liked. It was a veritable living museum of Populuxe, and he got into the spirit of the place with the seriousness of a curator and the verve of a flea-market fanatic. The original light fixtures were deemed perfect, as were the brass slanted-script lobby signs, the gold-flecked black mosaic fountain, and the vast ameiboid ottoman with a planter growing out of it.

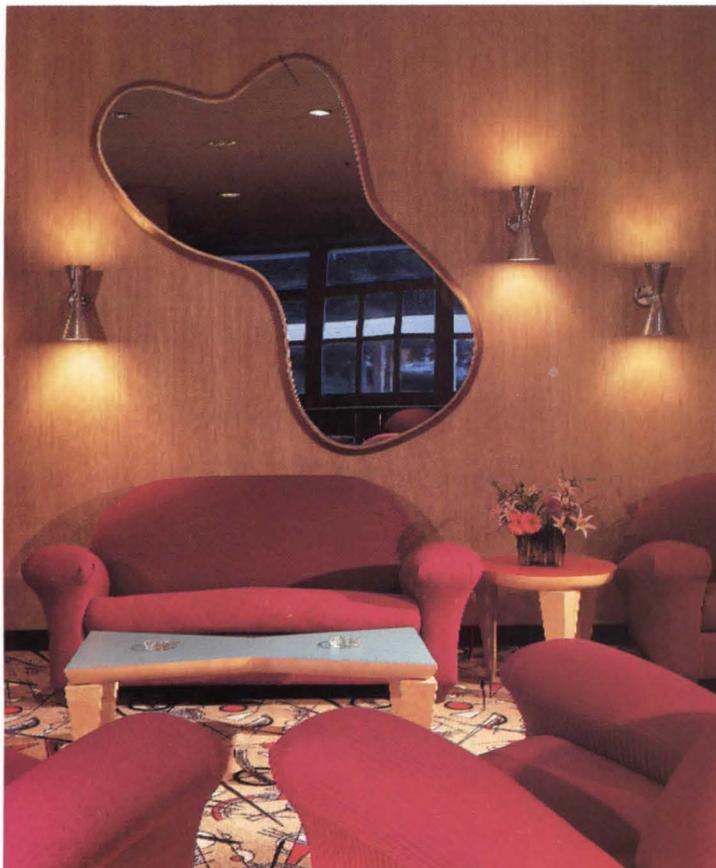
Far less fabulous was the space he had to deal with. The reception area and lobby, one broad flight of steps above the main entrance, had no organizational logic whatsoever. It revealed all too clearly that, although the hotel had been frequently enlarged, it had not been

adequately rethought. Buchsbaum proceeded to do just that with his keen grasp of space planning, but came up with a strategy that did not require any major structural refitting. Four insignificant existing columns—one pair in front of the reception desk and the other two facing them in the upper lobby—were furred out with plywood and covered in float-finish plaster. Painted turquoise and surmounted with coronas of indirect cold-cathode lighting, these tapering trunks became the new anchors of the meandering expanse, as decisive as the *pilotis* of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation*, which certainly inspired them.

Equally assertive is the new reception desk. It, too, seems to have a famous Modernist precedent, recalling (albeit in far flashier finishes) the undulating forms of Alvar Aalto's interior for the Finnish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. The dazzling range of materials used here—perforated brass for the canopy, *Zolatone* paint for the counter, and panels of crimped *Flutex* glass—announce that even at the cashier's desk things aren't business as usual.

Accustomed to furnishing lofts with objects weighty enough to claim the space, Buchsbaum knew that upholstered seating for the Nevele had to be proportioned to withstand the demands of this big interior landscape, to say nothing of heavy wear from users in a holiday mood. His new pieces for this commission—mirrors, tables, sofas, and above all the vibrant Nevele chair—are not only his most accomplished and most confident furniture designs, but also outstanding when viewed in the context of today's shameless copies of copies of copies.

Even when going directly to specific sources—such as the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky during his infatuation with Russian Constructivism around 1920—Buchsbaum had very good reasons for doing so. Carpeting for well-trafficked public floors must have a strong pattern to obviate wear, and this was an exceptionally knowing choice in that Kandinsky's bold, graphic motifs (vectors, boomerangs, planetoids, and other flying objects) finally filtered into popular design during the '50s. Space, surfaces, and seating here achieve a synergy in precise harmony with the architecture that surrounds them. The evocation of the recent past in interior design can quickly descend into an exercise in camp, which the Nevele definitely is not. It is Alan Buchsbaum's fond and funny tribute to the America he grew up in, a land of plenty and of hope.



Buchsbaum's winningly witty furnishings for the lobby belie his affection for '50s flamboyance as well as his sharp eye for satire. His Nevele chair (opposite) might have been dreamed up by Claes Oldenburg as seating for the inflatable balloon version of Minnie Mouse. Playing off its biomorphic curves are mirrors designed freehand at the factory by the renovation architects. Hourglass-shaped sconces (top) are recycled originals. Fifty Nevele chairs and six sofas, upholstered in four slightly different red fabrics for variety, give needed mass to the sprawling space. Low tables, lacquered maple topped with solid plastic laminate, are also by Buchsbaum. A free-form ottoman-cum-planter (left) is another '50s survivor.

*The Nevele Hotel and Country Club
Reception area and lobby
Ellenville, New York*

Owner:
*Nevele Hotel, Inc., Jeffrey Slutsky,
president*

Architect:
*Alan Buchsbaum, Architect
12 Greene Street
New York City 10013
Alan Buchsbaum, principal-in-charge; Marc Litalien, project architect/designer; Corey Delany, project coordinator*

Consulting architects:
*Anderson/Schwartz Architects
(construction supervision)*

Consultants:
*Johnson/Schwinghammer, Inc.
(lighting); Petar Jevremov
(metalwork)*

General contractor:
*Nevele Hotel/ Alan Buchsbaum,
Architect*

Photographer:
© Elliot Kaufman

*ke
Shop*



Erosion control

O'Keefe Duplex
New York City
Alan Buchsbaum, Architect,
with Marc Litalien

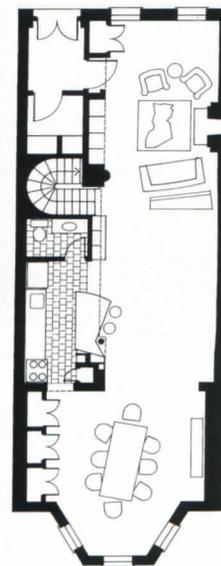
The perfect illustration of Alan Buchsbaum's ability to mine formal concepts for their utmost functional value is found on the parlor floor of the duplex he designed with Marc Litalien for the actor Michael O'Keefe, one of the many show business personalities (including Ellen Barkin, Diane Keaton, Bette Midler, and Mandy Patinkin) on his roster of clients. This Greek Revival townhouse in New York's Chelsea district is only 19-foot 3-inches wide, and offers very limited scope for lateral spatial development. Forgoing piecemeal measures, the architects decided to exploit the illusionistic potential of the long internal wall of the main living area, which they turned into the most spectacular of all of Buchsbaum's versatile storage units.

The wall-as-ruin has been a recurrent theme in much recent interior design, but never has it been so cleverly finessed as it is here. The existing galley kitchen, formerly opening onto the living room via a small pass-through, has been fully exposed and imparts a feeling of considerable depth despite its rather narrow dimension. Demolition of the kitchen wall revealed a waste pipe that was left exposed for compositional interest. Around its base are shards of polychrome marble. Counters are surfaced with boldly patterned Italian plastic laminate, cabinets are paned with custom-designed cut-outs of clear glass, and the raised floor is paved with Italian ceramic tile and edged in Crema marble.

Elsewhere along the wall there was even less depth to work with, and the deployment of storage space for books, sound equipment, and clothing was dictated by where they could be fit in most effectively. That improvisational arrangement is deceptively obscured by the rich appliqué of surface effects that give the elevation an authoritative presence. An engaged red column supports a concealed up-light, while tromped-up layers of gybboard and plaster imply archaeological strata. The stairway next to the column leads down to private quarters on the ground floor. A back-lit oculus centered over the front entry hints at Classical grandeur, though the door itself, faced with steel with a ground finish, is reminiscent of the sculptures of David Smith. This wall is as close to Postmodernism as Buchsbaum ever got, but it stops far short of historical recall or scholarly reference. Throughout his career he enjoyed playing with current ideas, but here, as always, he made them uniquely his own.



Owner:
Michael O'Keefe
Architect:
Alan Buchsbaum, Architect
12 Greene Street
New York City 10013
Alan Buchsbaum, principal-in-charge; Marc Litalien, project architect/designer; Corey Delany, project coordinator
Consulting architects:
Anderson/Schwartz Architects (construction supervision)
Consultants:
MarvelAire Mechanical (hvac/electrical)
General contractor:
Dandt Contracting, David Berndt, partner-in-charge
Photographer:
©Peter Aaron/ESTO







ESPRIT



Clothes make the man

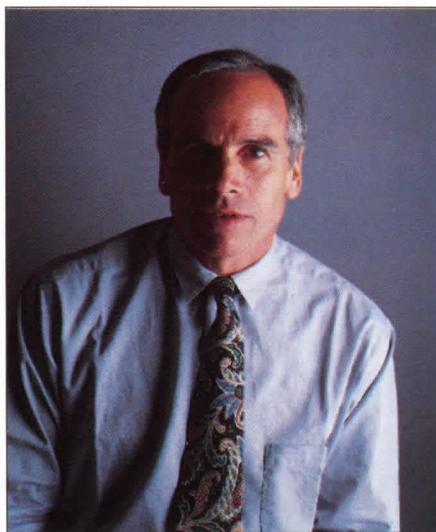
Three years ago Doug Tompkins decided to convert Esprit, the San Francisco-based clothing company he co-owns with wife Susie, from a wholesale to a retail operation. To do so, he enlisted the assistance of some of the architectural world's most creative talents.

Shortly before I was to meet Doug Tompkins for lunch in New York, he called to ask, somewhat accusingly I thought, if I had made reservations at a restaurant that required men to wear jackets. I said I had, to which he said, "I don't have one." My move. "I'll borrow one from somebody here in the office," I offered. "OK," came the reply. But it wasn't necessary. At 12:30 Tompkins arrived at the restaurant wearing a denim work shirt with a funky tie and an oversized cotton painter's smock, of sorts, that he had appropriated from a female employee. The maître d'—who seemed uncertain as to whether Tompkins's smock passed muster—ushered us to an out-of-the-way table in a dining room off to the side: "It will be quiet here." Though Tompkins could have matched financial portfolios with any of the men in the gray-flannel suits and Hermès ties out in the *not-so-quiet* dining room, his style, attitudes, and priorities set him apart from the typical CEO. His company may top the billion-dollar mark in worldwide sales this year, but he's not letting on—at least not in the conventional ways. Instead, the image Tompkins has created for himself is that of a reluctant tycoon. Oft-repeated points of personal pride include the Volkswagen he drives, the tourist class airplane tickets he insists upon, the academic credentials (high-school dropout) he boasts, and, of course, the minimal wardrobe (10 shirts and 6 pairs of trousers) he selects from. He speaks in a kind of hip, new-age lingo—referring to the "psychographic" of the Esprit customer and the "iconography" of the Esprit product line—and he espouses a curious, somewhat nostalgic, sociopolitical philosophy that harkens back to the time when Bob Dylan passed for a prophet. There is still in the 44-year-old millionaire more than a bit of the young dropout who dove into San Francisco in the '60s and got swept away by the Love Generation. He will tell you without so much as a hint of a smile that, though his title is Chief Executive Officer, his true function is to oversee Esprit's "aura." Not surprisingly, Tompkins has some difficulty making peace between the hippie in him and the tycoon that he is. "Personal wealth is a liability," claims the hippie, but the tycoon collects Francis Bacon paintings. "It is socially irresponsible to buy a \$600 sweater," cries the anti-elitist, but the captain of industry stocks his linen cupboard with \$20,000 worth of hand-stitched sheets. In short, Tompkins is a man of many contradictions, who acknowledges that fact with a most forgiving "I'm not sure that I have a macro view on this yet."

Tompkins's own "psychographic" is important because his role at Esprit is establishing the company image, which is very much a *reflected* image. He and his wife, Susie, who acts as design director, are sole proprietors of the U. S., Japanese, and Milanese operations (as well as majority shareholders in many of the other European, Far Eastern, and Australian partnerships), and though the picture they present is a contemporary variation on the traditional mom 'n pop theme, they exercise a degree of control over the Esprit empire that borders on the totalitarian. Their 4,400 employees in 25 countries know who's boss. "Esprit isn't just fashion, it's a way of life," explains Susie. "We're not selling clothes, we're selling lifestyle products," further clarifies Doug. We understand that it is the Tompkinses' "way of life" that Esprit is selling. One way the company markets that "lifestyle" is through its "real people" advertising blitz, designed by the peerless Tamotsu Yagi. A single example will suffice. Fresh-faced young Julie Q. (a "real person," age 21), clad in a black miniskirt and a hot-pink blazer, is in a confessional mood as she smiles her secret smile for the camera: "I'm looking for a sensitive man who is a Sushi chef. I think I'll be on the

opera stage one day, but for now I stand in front of the glass at home and try to crack it by singing high notes." To some, this stream-of-barely-consciousness is pure gibberish, but to a sizable number of the world's young hipsters, such flip, off-the-wall musings, and the "lifestyle" they imply, are right on target. They identify. They buy.

Bolstered by Esprit's phenomenal success since the advent of the "real people" mail-order and advertising campaigns, Tompkins recently decided to chart a new, more ambitious course for his company. He decided to convert Esprit from a primarily wholesale to a primarily retail operation. His motive—in addition to the obvious financial incentive—is quite simple: "to gain total esthetic control over the environments our products are displayed in." There are any number of ways that Tompkins might have elected to accomplish his goal, but he

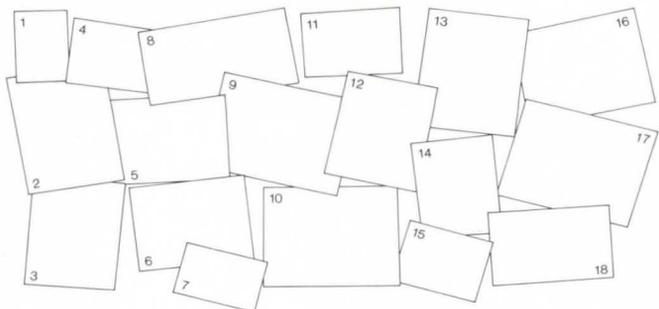


chose to enlist the assistance of some of the world's most creative architects and designers to build for Esprit an extraordinary portfolio of retail spaces, from Singapore to Berlin. Though this strategy is less efficient and more costly than the "clone" approach of competitor Benetton, Tompkins is nonetheless committed to custom design wherever possible because "doing it McDonald's-style isn't very satisfying personally." There have been, of course, other corporate clients who sought to gain the competitive edge by hitching their commercial wagons to architectural stars—the contract furniture industry is an obvious case in point. Esprit, however, caters not to the architectural cognoscenti, i. e., "the trade," but rather, according to Tompkins, "to the contemporary working woman with sporty, healthy attitudes"—in other words, to the general public. Whether deliberately or not, Esprit is effectively giving that public a crash course in

au courant design that it can get nowhere else in the marketplace.

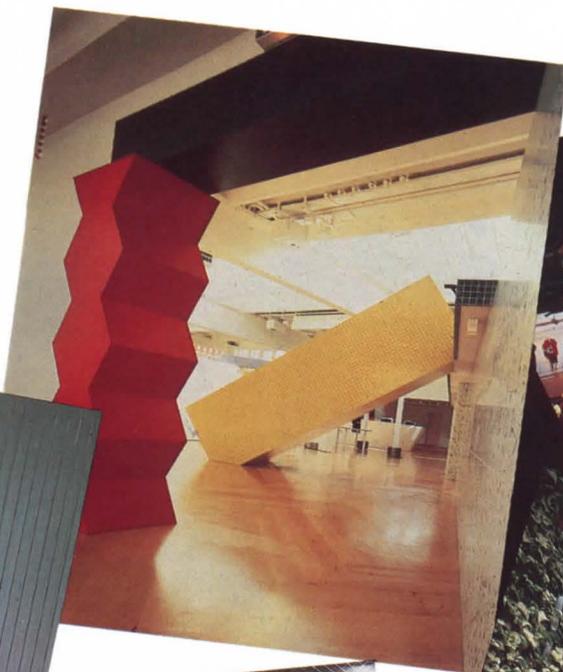
Since embarking on the retail path three years ago, Tompkins has become to interior architecture and design what Gerald Hines, the megadeveloper from Houston, is to high-rise construction. But while Hines, for the most part, sticks to blue-chip architects (most particularly, I. M. Pei and John Burgee with Philip Johnson), Tompkins is considerably more adventurous in his choices: Tadao Ando, Antonio Citterio, Joe D'Urso, Norman Foster, Shiro Kuramata, Ricardo Legoretta, Ettore Sottsass, Harry Teague, and Shigeru Uchida. As the range of talents tapped for Esprit suggests, Tompkins has no prescribed esthetic formula. He likes contemporary *Modern* design, in all its manifestations—from Memphis to high-tech. But what truly distinguishes Tompkins is the degree of financial and personal commitment he brings to the cause. He terms himself a "roll-up-your-sleeves" client, and his relationship with Esprit's architects as a "collaboration." Though such involvement frequently signals trouble—a client who really wants to be a designer—Tompkins appears to be a supportive catalyst, not a meddler. What he is after is "not another good project by a good professional, but one of their best." Judging by the results (overleaf) that is precisely what he gets.

Critics have noted a fundamental disparity between the couture environments Tompkins builds and the "upper-moderate" sportswear Tompkins sells. Detractors sneer, "He's serving up cotton candy at the Four Seasons." Does the average Esprit shopper, whoever she may be, appreciate the remarkable (and remarkably expensive) \$15.5-million SuperStore Joe D'Urso designed in Los Angeles, for instance? "Probably not," admits Tompkins, "but she realizes it's something special." Of all the attitudes and luxuries Doug Tompkins indulges himself in, I like that one the best. *Charles K. Gande*



1. Retail Store, Aspen. Harry Teague, Architect.
 2. Showroom, Dusseldorf. Sottsass Associati (Aldo Cibic), Architects.
 3. Retail Store, Amsterdam. Antonio Citterio, Architect.
 4. Showroom, Berlin. Sottsass Associati (Aldo Cibic), Architects.
 5. Retail Store, Melbourne. Daryl Jackson, Architect.
 6. Caffè Esprit, San Francisco. Bruce Slesinger, Architect.
 7. Factory Outlet, San Francisco. Bruce Slesinger, Architect.
 8. Retail Store, Sydney. Jerry Taylor, Architect.
 9. Retail Store, Hong Kong. Shiro Kuramata, Architect.
 10. Showroom, Hamburg. Sottsass Associati (Aldo Cibic), Architects.

11. Corporate Headquarters, San Francisco. Hanns Kainz, Architect (with J. Evans and B. Slesinger).
 12. Retail Store, Singapore. Shiro Kuramata, Architect.
 13. Showroom, Dusseldorf. Sottsass Associati (Aldo Cibic).
 14. Retail Store, Hong Kong. Shiro Kuramata, Architect.
 15. Retail Store, Hong Kong. Shiro Kuramata, Architect.
 16. "SuperStore", Los Angeles. Joe D'Urso, Designer.
 17. Office/Guesthouse, Tokyo. Shiro Kuramata, Architect.
 18. Factory Outlet, San Francisco. Bruce Slesinger, Architect.



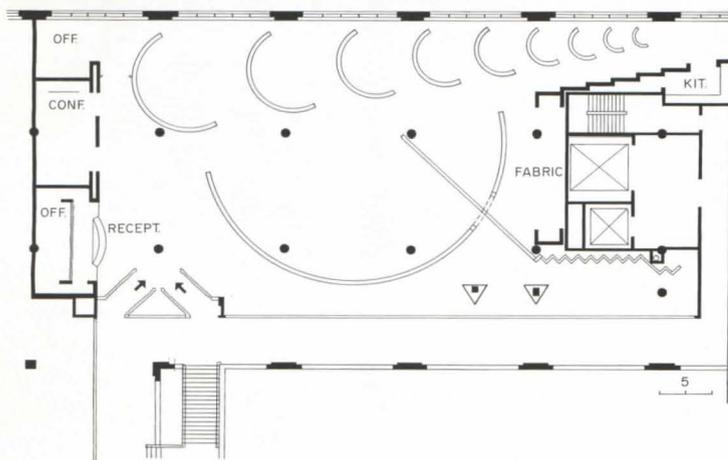
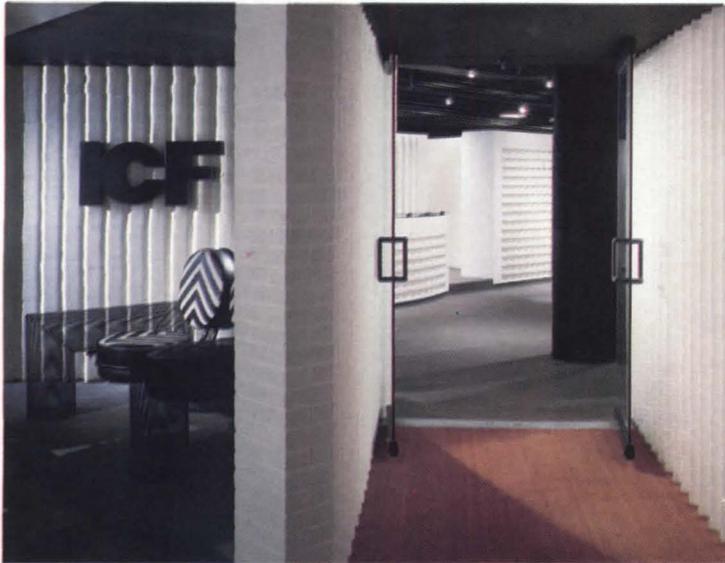
One searches Esprit's architectural portfolio in vain for even a glimpse of Postmodernism. No accident, as client Doug Tompkins explains: "Esprit is contemporary, not nostalgic." Though many would argue that Postmodernism is "contemporary," Tompkins defines the word to mean Modern. Not the International Style rendition of Modern, of course, but the current, expanded version. Personality, as might be expected, given Tompkins's humanistic approach to life and work, also plays a critical role in deciding whom to sign up for the Esprit cause. He frequently explains the selection of a designer with "I like him, he's a good guy and a personal friend." In a building program as vast as Esprit's, there are bound to be occasional snafus. The first retail "SuperStore," designed by Joe D'Urso for Los Angeles (16), careened

60 percent out of budgetary control to a staggering \$15.5 million. When asked how such a phenomenally costly shop jibed with his anti-elitist attitudes, Tompkins confessed that it did not: "Shame on us, it wasn't Joe's fault, it was ours. We were in a rush, so we paid rush charges." Also, when plotting his move into New York, Tompkins bought a midtown Manhattan building first, and realized renovating it would be too costly second. The building has now been sold. There are other, more perplexing, inconsistencies in Tompkins's attitudes toward retail design. For example, he praises Shiro Kuramata's elegant and minimalist store in Singapore (12) for providing a neutral backdrop against which Esprit's clothes "pop

out," but then he commissions Sottsass Associati to build a flagship store in Cologne, West Germany (RECORD, mid-September 1986), that is every bit as graphically aggressive in its design as the eye-popping clothes Esprit displays are in theirs. "A fixturing mistake that we have since rectified," concludes Tompkins. As the numerous Memphis-style images above suggest (2, 4, 10, 13), once Tompkins decides he likes a designer (in these instances, Sottsass Associati), he sticks with him. Sottsass Associati has now completed nine projects; Joe D'Urso has completed three; and Shiro Kuramata, seven. To ensure that licensed shops in department stores and shopping malls bear the Esprit stamp, Tompkins has devised prototype models with in-house architect Bruce Slesinger (who also designed a series of retail stores and the company café, 6). Tompkins also

worked with San Francisco industrial designer Bruce Burdick to create Esprit's own display fixtures. Recently, he replaced that system with a more delicate one designed by Shigeru Uchida of Tokyo-based Studio 80. In the coming months, Tompkins will unveil yet another round of Esprit stores and facilities: Joe D'Urso is polishing up a new store in Georgetown, Ricardo Legoretta is putting the finishing touches on a flagship store in Mexico City, and Norman Foster will sign off on the first store in the United Kingdom. Foster is also charged with developing a master plan for Esprit's corporate headquarters in San Francisco, which may include a Tadao Ando-designed employee gymnasium and daycare facility.

A little bit timeless

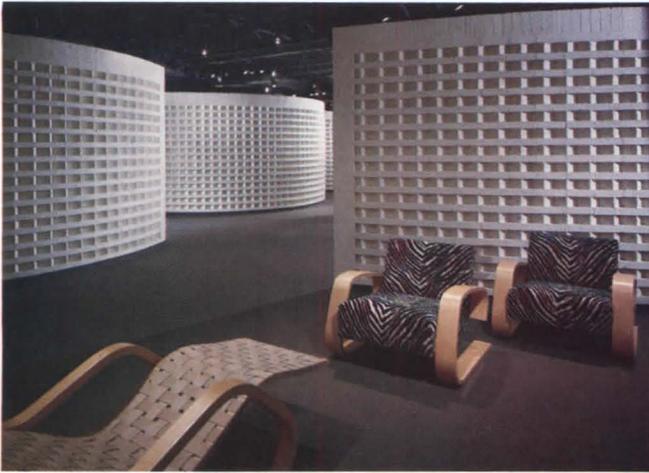


If Modernism has a future, it lies with architects like Mario Botta. In a catalog essay accompanying the current exhibition of his work organized by the Museum of Modern Art (the first one-man show at MoMA ever devoted to a living architect), curator Stuart Wrede writes that Botta's work clearly represents a movement away from the functional determinism of the International Style "toward a man-centered Modernism that seeks fundamentals within a more humanist framework." The question is, can the 44-year-old Swiss architect's idiosyncratic brand of humanism—a mode of design whose simple geometry, masonry construction, and deliberate symmetry have come to be closely identified with the sturdy vernacular buildings of his native canton of Ticino—be transferred to something as geographically distant, and typologically prosaic, as a furniture showroom in New York City? To be sure, Botta's first completed American project isn't just *any* furniture showroom: it is the new quarters for International Contract Furnishings (ICF), the 25-year-old company that helped popularize Alvar Aalto in this country when it began importing the Finn's furniture designs in 1962, and continues to be one of the industry's leading advocates of innovative, mainly architect-designed furniture. Two years ago, when ICF partners Sam Friedman and Pat Hoffman decided to join the ranks of furniture manufacturers opening showrooms at the new International Design Center (IDCNY) in Long Island City, Queens, they were determined to avoid the bland warehouse-style spaces that some other companies had carved out of IDCNY's loftlike industrial interiors. They were also convinced that the columns and cornices of Postmodernism, while fine for a purveyor of traditionally styled casegoods, were inappropriate for a company whose furniture is, in Friedman's words, "a little bit timeless." ICF had been carrying a line of Botta-designed chairs and tables since 1982 (his *Sesta* chair is shown opposite), and Hoffman in particular found Botta's esthetic in harmony with her own instincts. "I had been searching for Mario Botta for 20 years without knowing it," she explained, and when it came time to select an architect for their IDCNY facility, she and Friedman logically ended their search in Lugano.

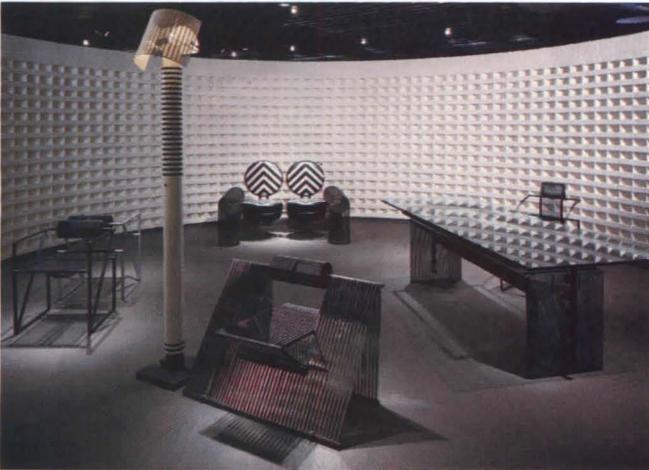
By utilizing his signature concrete-brick walls to subdivide ICF's 10,000-square-foot showroom space into one large exhibition area and nine subsidiary niches, Botta addressed three primary functional and visual concerns. First, the semicircular niches give ICF separate, appropriately scaled zones to display an eclectic collection that begins with Josef Hoffmann's 1903 Purkersdorf table and chair and extends to Tod Williams's Tavern Island chair, designed just last year. Second, the deliberately varied texture of the walls—a tour de force of the bricklayer's art, ranging from smooth and straight to zigzag and curved—together with the shimmer of taut, backlit steel wire that partially masks pipes and ducts on the ceiling, introduce a subtle tension, or "vibration," to use Botta's word, into what is frequently a static interior type. Finally, the raw monumentality of concrete-brick walls, minus their usual gypboard veneer, confirms one's suspicion that, despite the relatively modest size of this *interior* job, Botta was thinking architectural *exterior*, perhaps even to the point of envisioning a European city in microcosm, complete with the narrow "street" of an off-axis entrance corridor (left) and the public "piazza" of the main display area (plan), which is defined on three sides by the curve of an arched "viaduct" (page 128) and on the fourth by the chapel-like niches.

Due to the inevitable dimensional constraints of any showroom, the ICF facility represents, for Botta in the United States, only a beginning—an intriguing footnote in the ascendant career of a major artist. While it is gratifying to see one of architecture's most internationally respected figures adapt his sublime, regional idiom to the exigencies of the American contract-furniture marketplace, it is difficult not to look ahead, toward a larger commission in this country that would allow Botta the physical space, and public prominence, his work demands. *Paul M. Sachner*





Unlike many other contract-furniture manufacturers that operate showrooms at New York's International Design Center, ICF needed a facility that could accommodate, both visually and physically, an unusually diverse collection of classic Modern furnishings that spans the 20th century. Toward that end, Botta divided the 10,000-square-foot showroom into zones by means of nine 8-foot-high semicircular niches that partially conceal the company's various lines. Diminishing in diameter from 22.5 feet down to 4.5 feet, the niches are constructed of Botta's favored building material, concrete brick, laid up with alternating bands set at a 45-degree angle. Depending on their size, the niches might showcase an entire collection—Botta's own furniture designs, for example, occupy the largest niche (middle left)—or perhaps just a pair of chairs (two designed by Eliel Saarinen are shown bottom left). Display areas outside the niches accommodate the remainder of the company's "name" collections, which range from the laminated bentwood furniture by Alvar Aalto that gave ICF its start in 1962 (top left) to a more recent group of tables and chairs designed by France's man of the moment, Philippe Starck (opposite).







Initially conceived as unfinished concrete brick, ICF's sweeping masonry walls were ultimately painted white—a decision that diminished the power of Mario Botta's architecture but was felt necessary in order to provide a neutral background for the display of furniture. Three-quarters of the way around the curved wall that encloses the main exhibition space, Botta opened up a semicircular arch and inserted a straight 38-foot-long wall that helps separate ICF's Unika-Vaev fabric division from the furniture (top and middle photos). Used primarily by ICF for its standard line of office casegoods, the principal showroom space (bottom) is divided into four zones by black-painted, perforated-steel panels, hung from the ceiling, that Botta also specified for the showroom's window shades and sliding conference-room doors (opposite). The Swiss architect had earlier utilized perforated steel in his design of ICF's Prima, Seconda, and Quinta chairs, and its industrial quality seems appropriate for a showroom located in a former battery factory. Ditto for the facility's unpainted epoxy-resin flooring, which is usually reserved for manufacturing applications, and the exposed ducts and pipes of the ceiling, whose roughness is considerably softened by a coat of black paint and by a delicate 6-inch grid of steel wires anchored at one end by plumb bobs.

ICF Showroom
Long Island City, New York

Owner:
International Contract
Furnishings, Inc.

Architect:
Mario Botta
Via Lavizzari, 10
6900 Lugano, Switzerland
Mario Botta, principal-in-charge;
Ugo Früh, project architect

Associated architects:
Stephen Lepp Associates

Engineers:
Salmon Associates (structural);
Andy Kim Associates (electrical/
mechanical)

Consultant:
Howard Brandston (lighting)

General contractor:
SLS Construction Corporation

Photographer
© Elliott Kaufman





Toward a personal workplace

Portfolio of interiors and a new system of office furniture
Center for Environmental Structure, Architects

By Christopher Alexander, Artemis Anninou, and Gary Black
with John Rheinfrank

For those who have persevered through its daunting 2,388 pages (and for many who have not), few books on the shelf of contemporary architectural theory command such reverential esteem as Christopher Alexander's five-volume treatise for Oxford University Press: The Timeless Way of Building (1979), A Pattern Language (1977), The Oregon Experiment (1975), The Production of Houses (1985), and The Linz Café (1982). Alexander and various co-authors advocate nothing less than "an entirely new attitude . . . intended to provide a complete working alternative to our present ideas about architecture, building, and planning—an alternative which will, [they hope], gradually replace current ideas and practices." Last November, I visited Alexander in Berkeley at his Center for Environmental Structure and discovered that, despite a flourishing building practice, he has not abandoned the critical ruminations that first brought him to our attention in the '60s with the publication of Notes on the Synthesis of Form (Harvard University Press). Alexander revealed that for the last few years he and his colleagues have been studying the problem of office interiors, furnishings, and systems, and, having found them sorely wanting, devised an alternative. I invited Alexander to offer a capsule view of his research and findings; to trace the development of his general theories through a portfolio of recently completed interiors projects, both residential (opposite and overleaf) and commercial (following pages); and to present, for the first time, his particular vision of the "office of the future."

Alexander and his co-authors call more than one generation of architects, interior designers, and furniture manufacturers to task for what they see as gross insensitivity, if not malicious negligence, toward unwitting end-users. Their immodest proposal to discard the currently accepted truths of office design and replace them with a "new attitude in which human feeling dominates" is more than provocative—it is revolutionary. What Alexander and company offer instead—the furniture, walls, and rooms they have designed for production—are, given the current state of the art of office interiors, nothing less than defiant. Charles K. Gandee

Introduction

People spend most of their time at home or at work. The house (or apartment) and the office (or workplace) are therefore the two environments that play the most significant role in people's lives. Yet in our time, houses and offices are almost universally empty of real vitality. They are missing a depth of feeling and richness of function that lets people reach into those parts of their everyday life and work that are really important. Of the two, houses are slightly better because, in a few cases, people's own idiosyncracies produce something which has some kind of life because it comes from the heart. This does not happen, of course, in large housing projects.

When it comes to offices, the disease is almost lethal. The current open-plan office has become a stereotyped environment—dry, image-ridden, . . . utterly without human qualities. Our research has shown that office workers are almost unanimous in their dissatisfaction with the places where they work.

And yet the manufacturers of office furniture, who control the modern new-office environment, continue to make products that are disturbingly similar in their tasteful sterility: cloth, steel, plastic, gray, pastel orange, brown, soft carpeting, uniform light, modular partitions, hung worksurfaces, white noise. The environment produced by office furniture has realized the nightmare of Orwell's *1984* at a level so subtle that many managers are not even aware of it. This is the deathly world that 58 million people in the U. S. are forced to inhabit eight hours a day. Producing this environment is a \$7-billion-per-year industry.

During the last few years, we have been trying to find some drastic way of cutting through this enormous problem—trying to find a way in

which office space, produced on such a gigantic scale, can get some life, can support the life of the people who work there. During the studies we have made, we have come to a number of dramatic conclusions about the nature of office environments, the nature of production, and the nature of design.

What follows is a short description of our conclusions. We are trying here to project a possible new world in which a person's work environment is ordinary and pleasant—a place to be loved, where real work can be done, a place where the plastic imagery is gone. The results of our work exist in the form of an office-furniture system conceived and designed for mass production, and now almost ready to be produced on a preliminary basis. It is unlike any furniture system now available in its hardware, materials, space conception, and design. It is intended to launch the creation of an entirely new kind of workplace. We believe that this type of furniture has the capacity to "sweep the board" in sales.

New sensibility

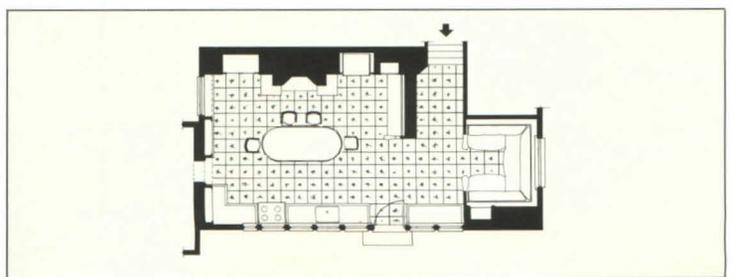
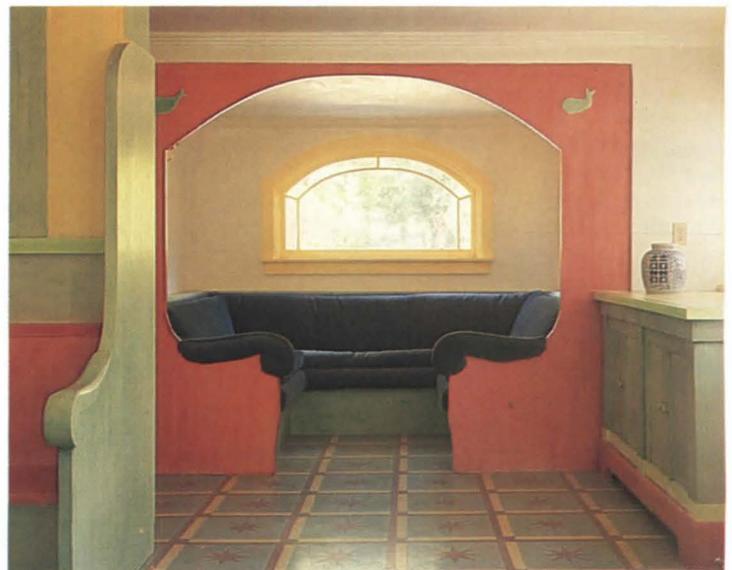
The work on this new system of office furniture is part of a general effort we have made during the last 10 years to create new environments for single-family houses, apartment houses, mass housing, public buildings, office buildings, and urban space. All these projects show a new sensibility and a new effort to make things that are more childlike, more rooted in human feelings, and more comfortable as environments: you want to be there in the same sense that you want to curl up in a corner with a pillow on a Saturday afternoon, or be in the shirtsleeve atmosphere of your own workshop.

The fundamental problem being confronted in all these places is the same: What is the nature of an environment where a person feels the weight of his own heart, the sweetness of his own existence, the sweetness of the world, and the comfort of real life, as opposed to the mass-existence and manipulated efficiency of Modern and Postmodern architecture?

These concepts are easy to grasp at a small scale, but much harder to deal with at a large scale. Nevertheless, it is at the large scale, embodied in our firm's largest building projects and new system of office furniture, that the significance of the problem and its solution reach their most important level. Especially in the area of office furniture, this represents an enormous challenge, since present manufacturing, responsible for a huge part of the environment in which people spend their lives, has not even begun to address this problem. So far, the problems addressed have been either the problem of efficiency (as in the *Action Office* and its successors) or the problem of image (as in most lines of furniture now being produced).

We are concerned with the problem of the worker's genuine comfort and well-being, and in a recent series of industry discussions, we discovered that some office-furniture manufacturers explicitly reject these concerns in favor of the opinion and comfort of the architect, interior designer, facilities manager—i.e., whoever buys the furniture.

Even workers themselves are brainwashed into believing that their emotional well-being is unavailable *in principle* in the late 20th century. For example, during the process of making the living room for a house outside San Francisco (opposite and following pages), our client asked: "Is it really all right to have this much fun?" He is a banker. The possibility that an environment could create such a joyful feeling, and yet be normal and accepted, was amazing to him. The people who work in offices have similar expectations. Although many of them hate the environment they work in, few imagine that anything fundamentally better is even possible. Yet it is just this which we are trying for in all our building projects, and in the office furniture we describe in this article—a new sensibility, in which human activity, human feeling, color and light together create an ordinary human sweetness, something almost entirely missing from the works of this century.



The San Anselmo room

An example of this is a room (opposite and right) from a house we recently completed in Marin County, California, for Dan Potash and Maureen McCabe, a young couple with one son. This room has structure, windows, and built-in furniture. Perhaps most importantly, it has hand-painted walls, with a color sensibility that is entirely missing from the work of our time. Kitchen, living room, hearth, and alcove all together, the room opens to the south onto a small paved kitchen garden, and looks west to another patio and to lawns and orchard beyond. The room is defined mainly by its windows, low ceiling, built-in furniture, and its table (we designed and built all of this). Perhaps most significant of all is the color of the room.

Very early on, I asked Dan and Maureen if they wanted to have color. They said they had liked the floor in our office, and asked for a terrazzo floor of the same kind. After experiments with paper I found out that, on the floor, the light in the room seemed to need 51 percent green, 35 percent red, and 14 percent yellow. I then invented a pattern that had the right proportions of these colors, and we made the floor.

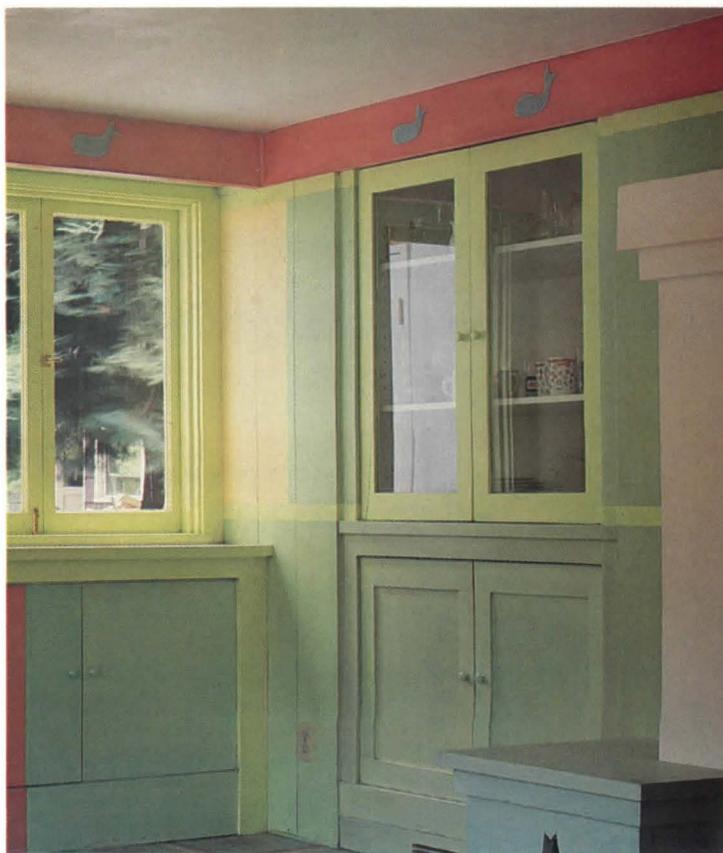
Later, when we had built most of the furniture, we came to the colors of the room itself. I had always assumed it would be mainly yellow. So had our clients. However, they asked me to find the most beautiful colors possible, so I began, once again, testing papers on the walls to find out which colors in what proportions created beautiful light. After experimenting I found that the light of the room needed a pale sea green, a light transparent yellow, a pale blackish red, a very pale blue, and a light yellowish green. After stapling these five colors to the wall to check the proportions of color and their effect on the inner light of the room, an assistant and I laboriously painted gouache on butcher's paper. Then we began placing these papers on the walls until the light in the room became as calm and beautiful as possible. We made the most elaborate color mockup I have ever made in such a situation, and at the end of our work the room was entirely papered in rough samples. We then faced the extremely difficult task of transferring these colors to permanent gouache on the real walls of the room. To appreciate the difficulty of this process, one must remember how sensitive color is to minor disturbances. It was impossible, for instance, to take down one of the mockups and build it again, because details of configuration and dimension critical to the eye would get lost in rebuilding. The colors were also incredibly hard to match. We prepared the walls with gesso and then placed a wash of gouache over it. Achieving a slight transparency, which gives the color its light, was technically very difficult. It took days to match each of the colors, which vary in different parts of the room and which were mixed and matched, originally, by eye. Getting the colors right took two or three days for each of the five colors. It must be emphasized that the kind of color harmony achieved here cannot be realized by matching from a chart, or by using proprietary colors or formulas. As a final touch, I cut the whales and dolphins out of hand-painted blue paper, glued them on, waxed them, and varnished them.

I believe we succeeded to some extent. The color is neither bright nor garish. The amazing thing is that even though the room has five colors on the walls, in an arrangement that many people would consider wild, it is in reality calmer than any other coloring I was able to find and calmer than almost any room I know. The apparently wild color, which is really quite subdued in its harmonies, came about because I placed the paper in a way that was not only calm and quiet, but also full of life.

This room is an example of what we mean by the "new sensibility" or new awareness which we try to put into our houses and public projects. We use it as a starting point to illustrate concretely what we are aiming for in the new system of office furniture.

A new system of office furniture

We now come to the problem of office furniture. The system we have been developing is entirely unlike the example of the San Anselmo room because it is intended for mass production. It is capable, in principle, of creating the environment for millions of workers, in an endless variety of specific configurations. Nevertheless, its essential aim is exactly the same as the San Anselmo room. It is intended to produce places where people feel *normal*, where people feel themselves, as people, with all their human foibles, deficiencies, oddities—everything, in short, that makes life ordinary and worth living. To do this we have tried to define a complete system of furniture that would satisfy people in the workplace in a way that is entirely different from today's technocratic environments. We posed the question: "What would the office be like if



people felt as comfortable while they are working as they do in their own homes?"

The system we have designed to answer this question has the following key features:

1. It goes beyond the worksurface/chair/filing cabinet approach and takes full responsibility for the work environment as a whole.
2. It has about 50 components, of which approximately one-half are freestanding pieces (with the balance a series of thick wall panels and other enclosure elements such as floors, ceilings, and doorways). For reasons that will become clear later, most of these components are designed to be manufactured in a wide range of dimensions.
3. We have a layout process that enables groups of workers to lay out their workspaces for themselves, and another layout process that enables each individual worker to lay out his own workspace within the group design, according to his own needs. For simplicity, speed, and efficiency, both layout processes are available on a computer disk.
4. The system has a unique set of "thick wall" components, which are premanufactured stable structures, out of which the rooms are made and which have the solidity and flexibility of design that allows a "custom" atmosphere to be created.
5. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the actual pieces of furniture—their design, feeling, and physical character—are entirely different from the kind of furniture now being used or manufactured.

After years of pretesting this material, we are convinced that the physical character, the "style," the feeling, color, and surfaces of the new items of furniture are the backbone of what we have done, and perhaps the necessary framework for any attempt to make a system of mass-produced furniture that is capable of "going to the heart."

The archetypal character of office furniture

If we decide to make an office-furniture system that is truly responsive to the needs of users, then the individual items must have a special character that is not clearly predicated by any other thing. We take it for granted that people should be able to imagine the workplace they want, and that the "system" is then capable of responding to and implementing the workplace they have imagined. If we take this requirement seriously, it places an unusual demand on the system. It may be explained as follows.

When a person forms a mental picture of his ideal workplace, this picture will always be made up of elements we may call "archetypal." For example, if a person visualizes a desk, the desk he visualizes tends to be an archetypal desk—a desk which is full of *deskness*. This puts it in a childlike way. However, the psychological requirement is real. If the desk that is actually available in the system is a flat plate hung off a partition, then it will *never* correspond to the thing the person imagines when he imagines his ideal desk. Thus the system and the person imagining ideal workspace for himself have parted company. If the system is to keep company with the user, and satisfy that person deeply, then it must be made of elements corresponding to the archetypal images a person has inside his mind.

One possible objection is that the images a person carries in his mind are variable, they change with style from decade to decade. According to this view, the fact that a person has an image of a so-called archetypal desk is just a throwback to the 19th or some other century, and as soon as people "catch up" with 1987, they will begin to have an image of a flat worksurface cantilevered off a partition. It is precisely this assumption that is fundamentally untrue. Research in images and archetypes makes it clear that these "modern" idioms do not inevitably replace the old ones. For example, in one famous experiment, children who grew up in apartment houses in France and had spent their whole lives in the environment of buildings with flat roofs *still* drew a small house with pitched roof and chimney as the archetypal house of their dreams. The problem with the desk is similar. When we speak of an archetypal desk, it does not mean a desk that physically resembles or imitates an old desk. It is simply that some things have the recognizable and fundamental character of a desk, and allow people to form a relation of the kind they would like to form with "their" desk.

The desks that we have proposed as part of the office-furniture system have this character. One has a sloping top and a back with pigeonholes (opposite, bottom left). The other is flat, almost like a table, with shallow drawers (opposite, top right). Thus they are quite different, but both have an archetypal character. When people see these desks, they tend to say, "I have always wanted a desk like that." This is what we mean by the archetypal character. It is a thing that

evokes the response, "I have always wanted an X like that." In the system we have proposed every element has this archetypal character.

The archetypal character not only means that it corresponds to some image in the user's mind—some very ancient image—but also that the thing has a fundamental, practical character that almost cannot be improved upon. For example, consider the low bookshelf with drawers (opposite, bottom right). It has a flat top with an elevated surround that keeps things from falling off. The wide, open shelves allow for a great variety of papers, books, and packages without any unnecessary complexity. The three drawers provide space for a few things that need to be put away in a less dusty or less vulnerable place. Altogether, this is a fundamental and practical object. If you have one in your workplace, it makes you feel comfortable and solid. The comfort is much more than skin deep. It is a fundamental comfort that comes from the fact that you have something basic, solid, and practical around you. An ordinary workhorse. You can rely on it. There is nothing to go wrong. And it makes you feel comfortable not only because it is so practical in the obvious sense but also because it reminds you of the best and most uncomplicated part of yourself. We believe that all the items in the new furniture system must have this character.

It is not hard to see that this "archetypal" character is absolutely part and parcel of the user-layout process. If we want a person to feel free to imagine a simple and practical work environment for himself, he will, most naturally, build up his mental picture from archetypal elements or objects. If the elements in the system all have this archetypal character, the system will perfectly fit his mood when he tries to define his own workplace. As a result, any minor technical inconveniences or hitches that develop during the process will seem minor because the essentials have been satisfied. On the other hand, a system that tries to satisfy a user-layout process but fails to have this archetypal character will easily irritate the user. If the slightest thing goes wrong, the errors will ultimately not be solvable because the system's elements do not have this fundamental archetypal relationship to the person. If the system does not satisfy him at this essential level, then the details are unimportant. It will never really seem quite right.

Actual furniture

The furniture itself is entirely different from furniture systems in current use. Much present-day office furniture feels uncomfortably slick and cheap. In order to create a new line of office furniture in which a person's feelings and well-being are the central focus, we changed the actual character of the furniture completely.

The key to its character is quality—genuine quality, the kind that can be perceived by everybody, the kind that cannot be faked. At the most basic level, the furniture is designed not by slickness of line, not by image, but by the quality of working, performing better than any other.

The pieces of furniture are personal in character, rich and clear in their form and color. Each piece is characterized by its emphasis on detail, accuracy of dimensions and shape in every curve, corner, and edge. Materials are real and solid. Color is life-giving, not neutral. All in all, the pieces are made of simple materials, made with great feeling, and with a variety of materials that emphasize human use and comfort. After preliminary field testing we have found that these items provide an entirely new level of comfort and convenience. The main thing is that they provide genuine dignity. Your work is not an aggressive money-making interlude in the middle of the day, but a part of your life. The feeling you have when you work in the environment created by this furniture is that you are free to work.

The user-layout process

The essence of this new system of furniture is that it is intended to make people genuinely comfortable and able to work with enjoyment. This cannot happen if a person feels like a pawn in someone else's game, a cog in a machine. It requires that people are able to define their own workspace for themselves. In order to make this practical, we have devised a new layout process (related to our previous work in pattern languages and generative systems) which enables people to lay out their own workspace. From the outset, the process also builds in the new space conception we have described.

[The following pages present a selection of the individual components in the authors' new system of office furniture, after which they continue with their discussion of "The user-layout process." Text continues on page 136.]

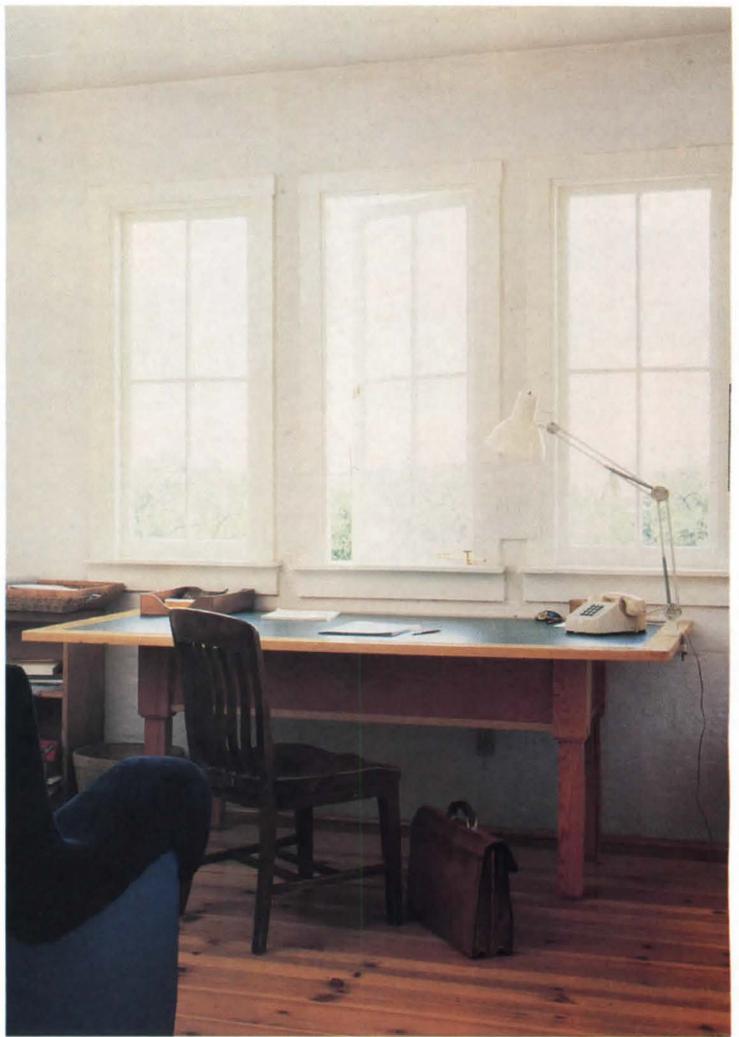


In Alexander's words: "The photographs on this page show parts of our office in Martinez, California, where we use prototype versions of many of the new items of furniture we have designed in sample situations.

"Because of our contracting business, we have our own workshop in Martinez. During the last few years we have had a continuous, ongoing program of design, experiment, construction, and field-testing, to find out which of the

pieces of furniture are really useful and comfortable. We start with cardboard mockups, then functioning plywood mockups, then more and more realistic working versions of each piece. When an item finally gets good enough, it becomes a permanent part of our office, and we can then watch it in operation even more closely.

"The black rolling table [overleaf, figure 7] has existed in at least four versions during the last years. Although it appears ultra-high-tech,



it is extremely comfortable, and everybody in our office (and in other offices where we have tested it) wants one—because it is so convenient. The tall red desk [below left], though so appealing to look at, has not yet reached the same level of comfort; its practical comfort does not yet match its elegance or the sensuous quality of its materials. On the other hand, the flat red desk, which is more cheaply made [top right], is unbelievably comfortable—perhaps our most successful piece so far.

"Other pieces that we are currently testing include filing cabinets, screens, curtains, lights, tables, and, above all, the all-important problems of manufacturing, assembling, and re-assembling thick walls [top left and overleaf], so that they can be moved, rearranged, and rebuilt, but still keep their solid, custom character."



"The individual pieces in our new system of office furniture are personal in character, rich and clear in form and color. They are made with feeling, and emphasize human use and comfort. Materials are real and solid. Color is life-giving, not neutral. We hope to interest one of the major manufacturers"

1. Low bookcase of white enameled wood, with a flat top, elevated surround, and fixed shelves made-to-order.

2. Work sofa: This heavy blue corduroy sofa encourages upright posture and is compatible with worksurface heights.

3. Thick wall panel with shelves and counter: This enameled wood unit has shallow shelves, deep drawers, and a varnished wood counter.

4. Thick wall panel with built-in sloping catalog counter.

5. Thick wall panel with built-in work counter.

6. Upright desk made of red lacquered wood contains shelves and pigeonholes, and has a sloping surface. A brown leather writing surface is set into the top.

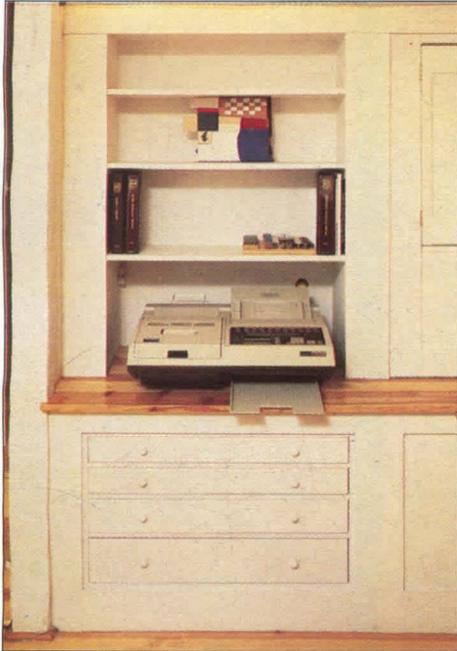
7. Rolling side table: This side table with heavy brass castors has an easy-cleaning black plastic surface.



1 Dennis Anderson



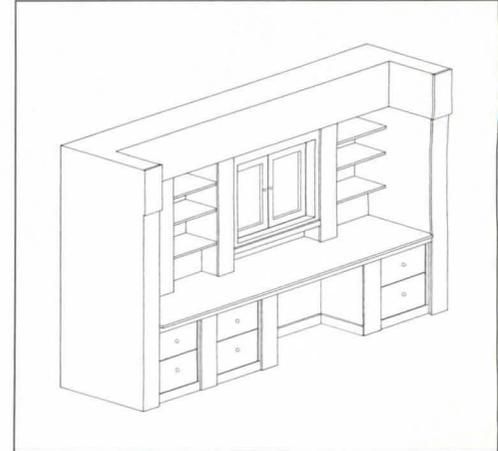
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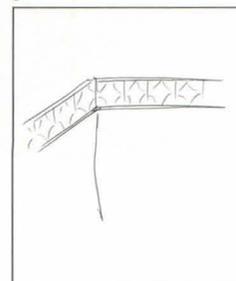
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11 Artemis Anninou



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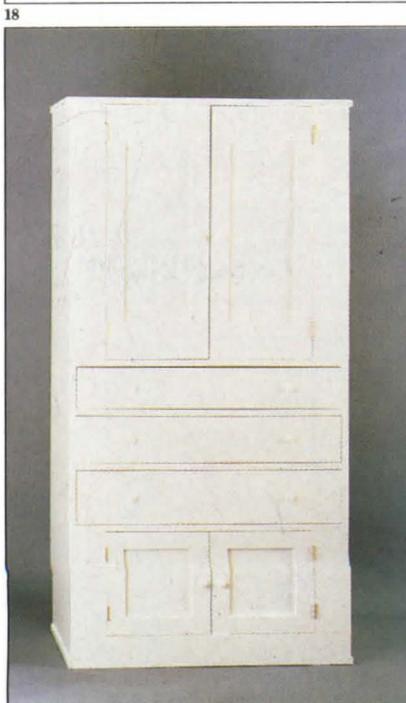
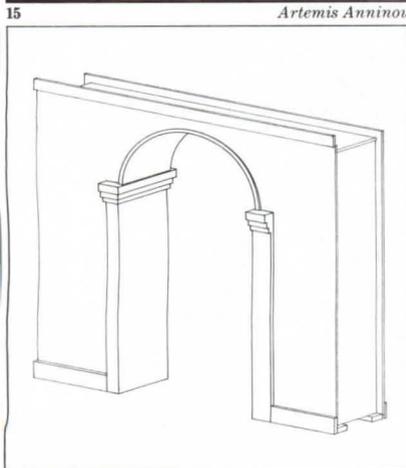
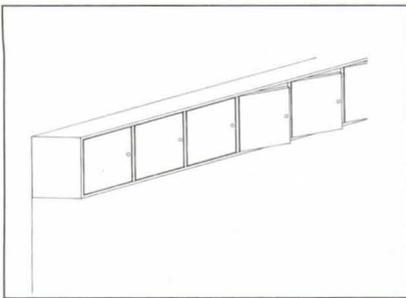
13 Artemis Anninou

- 8. Sliding screens made of red watered silk over a wood frame.
- 9. Frieze with patterns.
- 10. Wall cove light: This fixture, made of white enameled metal with frosted glass on the sides, has a cut-out ornament on the front.
- 11. Flat ceiling with geometric patterns and hand-painted flower ornament.
- 12. Counter with drawers, and elevated surround on top surface.

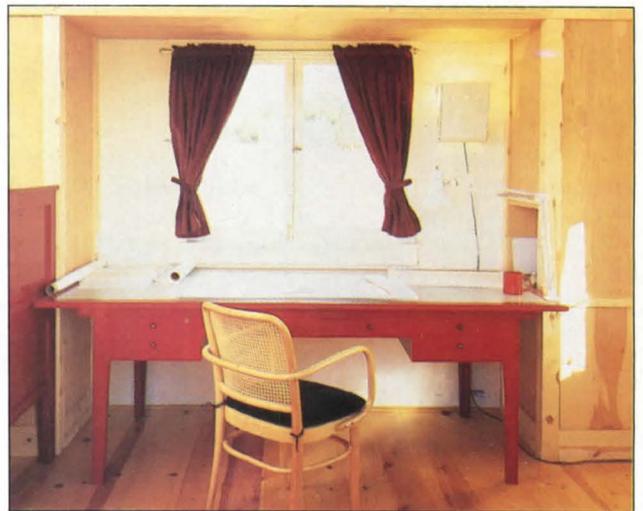
- 13. Lightweight chairs that can be made in a variety of shapes and sizes to fit the user.
- 14. Series of storage compartments high on the wall.
- 15. Floors: The floor is constructed of varnished pine blocks in a variety of patterns.
- 16. Rolling black cabinet with drawers.
- 17. High-quality flat-topped desk: This red enameled structure has a

- gray laminate worksurface inset.
- 18. Doorway manufactured as wall panel.
- 19. Thick wall: This unit is made of three panels, with built-in drawers, shelves, and cupboards.
- 20. Thick wall: This unit is made of two panels, with a built-in counter surface, drawers below, and shelves and cupboard above.
- 21. Cupboard chest for storage made of white enameled wood.

- 22. Alcove front: A curtainlike enclosure made of deep red corduroy with tie ribbons.
- 23. Pinboard made from particleboard covered with handmade Japanese silk.
- 24. Armchair.
- 25. Sliding door.
- 26. Conference table: This varnished wood table has an inset worksurface of green laminate and a pronounced overhang.



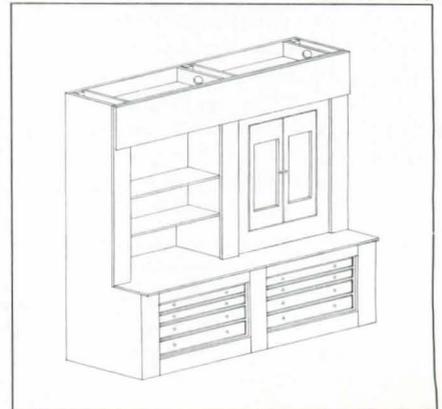
16 Dennis Anderson



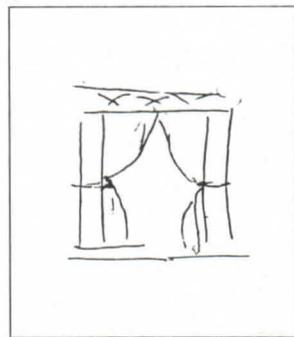
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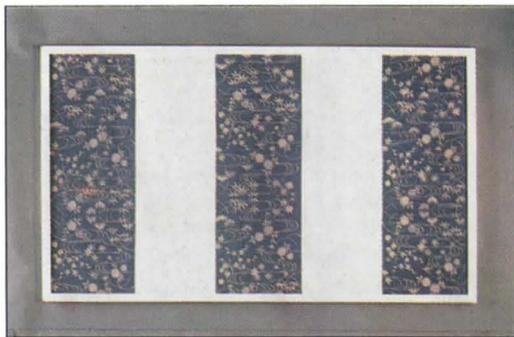
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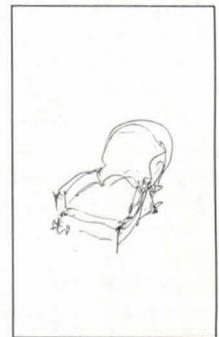
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Our user-layout process has three levels: 1. Layout of the whole office. 2. Layout of a department (5-20 people). 3. Layout of the person's individual workspace.

We built a sample installation as an experiment: an office for the administrative headquarters of Sweet Potatoes, a children's clothing manufacturer in Berkeley (opposite). The installation is in the upper floor of an old warehouse. There are two partners and 11 employees. We began by showing the owners and their employees a written version of the layout process together with a catalog of available furniture components. The following sequence (below right) describes the layout process that was then used for the installation.

Step 1: Definition of work-groups. The three group managers (design, administration, and production) are asked to decide the best working groups, the number of people in each group, and the approximate size of space each group will occupy.

Step 2: Definition of common space. The employees are asked to identify and locate the size and nature of common areas. These are specified by the program to be about 15-20 percent of the total available area.

Step 3: Definition of boundaries. The group managers are asked to decide the degree of connection and separation between groups.

Step 4: Main center for each working group. The people in each work group are asked to fix the main center of their group space.

Step 5: Location of individual workplaces. The workers in each group are asked to work together to choose the position of each person's workplace within the group. The program asks for three things: size, orientation, and degree of enclosure of each individual workplace.

Step 6: Choice of furniture for common space. The owner is asked to locate the main furniture for common spaces.

Step 7: Main centers within the individual workspace. Each worker fixes the main points in his workspace: desk, orientation, chairs, main shelves, and cabinets.

Step 8: Minor centers in the individual workspace. Each worker fine-tunes the workspace by means of minor elements.

Step 9: Measuring furniture. From the final layouts, dimensions of each item of furniture to be used are measured off the given configurations and placed on the order list.

The above nine steps are only part of the full available sequence. The plans, sections, and elevations (opposite) reveal that a great variety of spaces results from this process. The space is more personal than conventional office layouts, both in the group structure and in the individual structure. Knowing how to make a furniture system that has these attributes is the trick behind the whole idea of this process.

It is essential to stress that this process is entirely different from the layout process available in computerized systems using modular components. These systems allow the user to arrange and rearrange the modules. Our research shows that any process of arranging and rearranging modules is fundamentally limited, and cannot produce the kind of comfort—the deep and simple feelings—that we are seeking.

The reason for this limitation is complex and beyond the scope of this article. It is, however, demonstrable (as a mathematical theorem) that profound adaptation in which things are comfortably related to one another can only occur when the elements involved are all capable of very fine dimensional variation. This limitation is related to the looser and more "organic" quality of the space conception already described. What it boils down to may be explained by a simple experiment. If we give a person a certain office and then ask him to make a comfortable arrangement of furniture with pre-ordained modular components inside that office, it will be very difficult, and most often impossible, for him to reach a comfortable solution. If, on the other hand, we allow him first to place things he needs roughly (without reference to their size)—first simply putting them in position, and only then defining the sizes and dimensions of the pieces he needs in relation to the whole configuration he has created—then it is possible for him to reach a very high level of comfort and efficiency. The crux is that these pieces can then be made in dimensions that fit the particular circumstance. This "non-modularity" theorem is fundamental to the layout process.

The aspect of the layout process itself which is necessary to make this non-modularity work is that it is a process of differentiation (similar to the process of embryonic development) in which the parts are gradually differentiated from the whole—instead of the whole being made up from modular parts. It starts from the whole as one space, proceeds by dividing it into departments, then into large rooms, and then determines the locations of workplaces, then their shape, then the

location of the items of furniture that make the workplace, then their shapes, and, finally, their dimensions. This is entirely different from the mechanical "modular" layout processes that can easily be realized in computerized systems. An organic and lively feeling comes about because the process lays out the large structure and then creates the smaller differentiations within that structure. It is the process of differentiation that is necessary to obtain the kind of feeling represented here.

We also found that the layouts produced by this layout process are more fulfilling for the user, and much more profound in the way they are experienced, than the layouts that can be produced by conventional methods. The process itself is also more fulfilling and creates feelings of participation, ownership, and dignity among employees. It also increases feelings of cohesion in the workers' groups. These feelings are of immense importance from the point of view of workers and management.

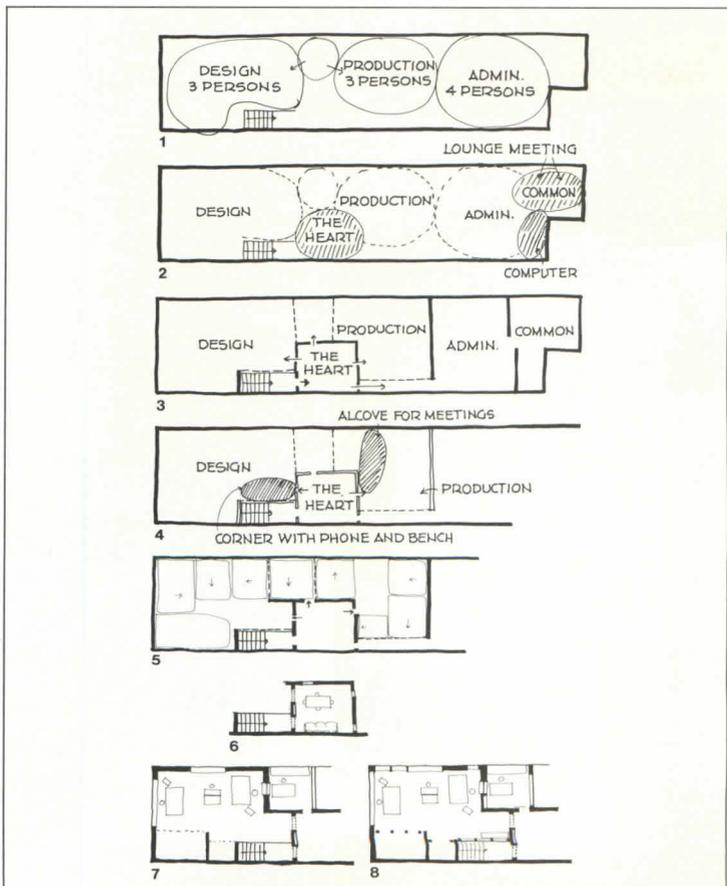
New conception of space

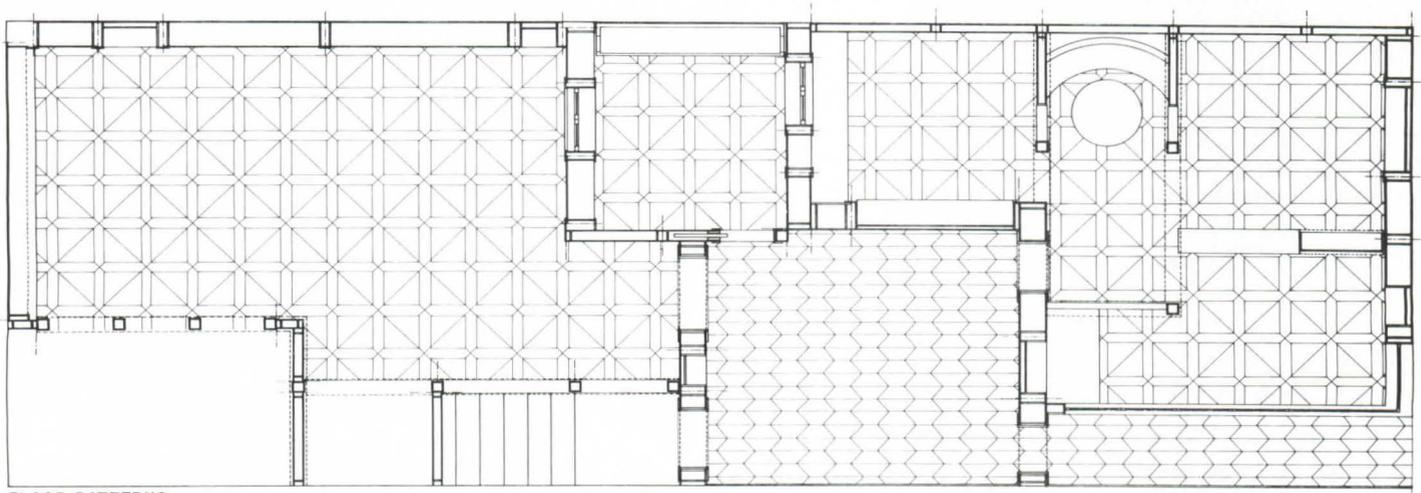
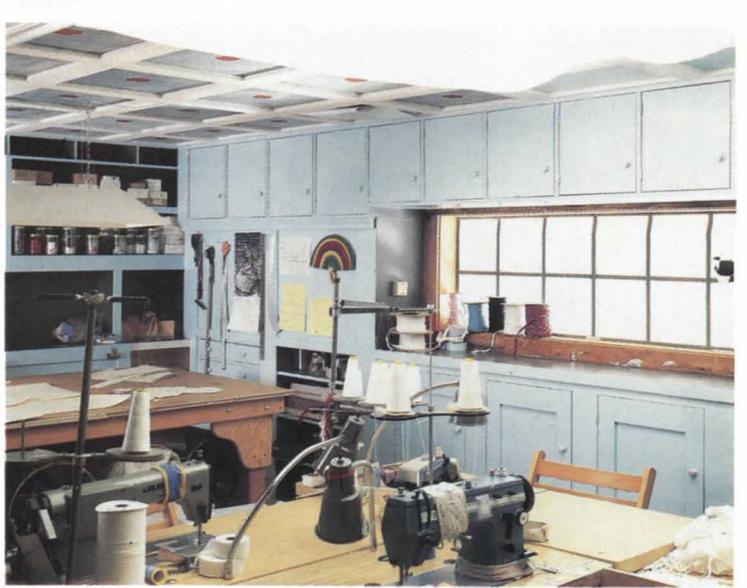
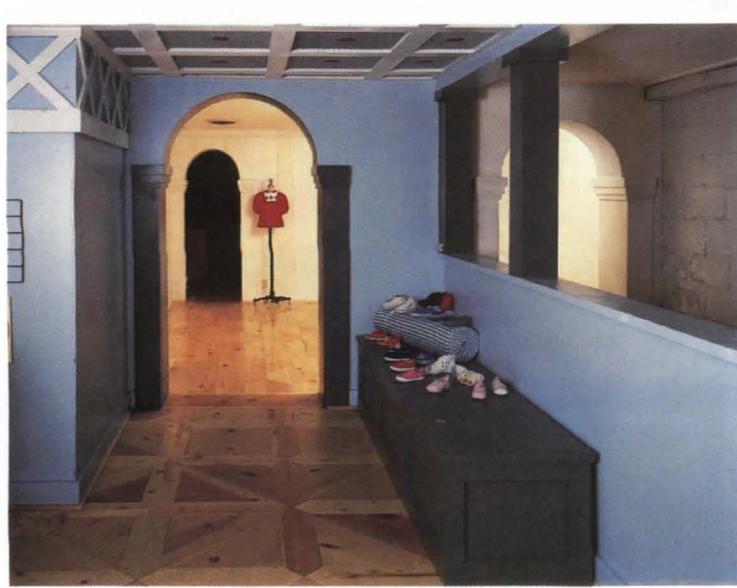
Our layout process and furniture system are coupled with an entirely new conception of space. Present-day offices are based almost entirely on the conception of the open-office landscape and the system of panels and components, the two dominant ideas that have pioneered work in office design over the last 30 years. However, there are abundant and serious failures in this kind of environment. In our interviews, for example, we found that people frequently felt isolated or, worse, as if they were in a rabbit warren or rat maze. We also found that people's productivity and energy for work are entirely different in new offices and old ones.

Very roughly, we may isolate four main features of the space conception inherent in our new system:

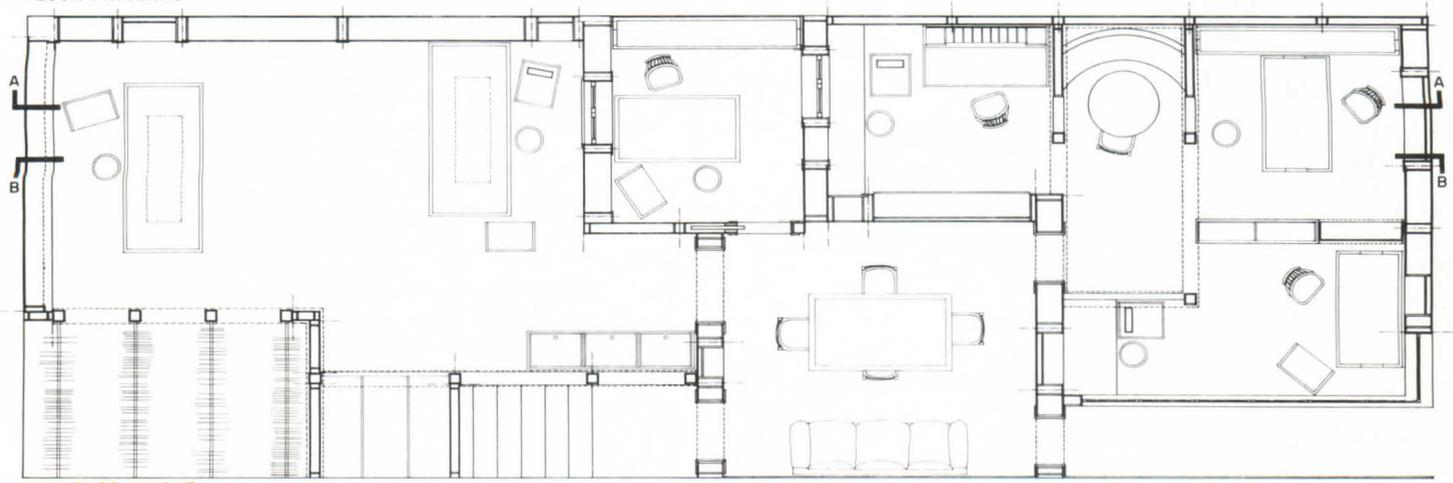
1. It is based on the conception of rooms.
2. It is more rambling and looser in its character than existing systems.
3. It uses "thick walls" to form boundaries and to create space.
4. It gets rid of the external, "public-relations" image of cleanliness and replaces it with a personal feeling, in which each room and each workplace gets its character, its own personality, and its own feeling.

The new space conception we have aimed at has more to do with the nature of work, and with the messiness that implies. It is also much looser in its organization. Pieces of furniture are not stiffly attached to panels in a rigid system. Instead, pieces of furniture are loose and free-

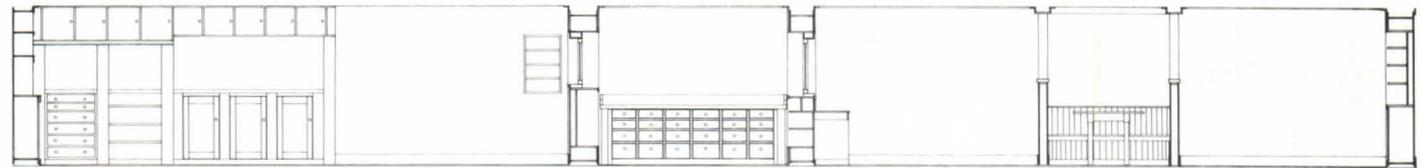




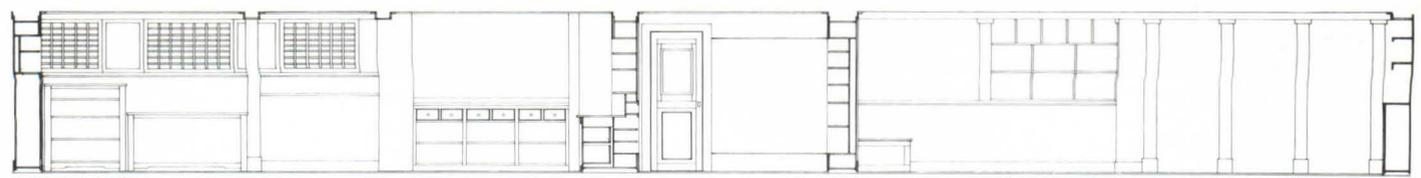
FLOOR PATTERNS



FURNITURE LAYOUT



SECTION A-A



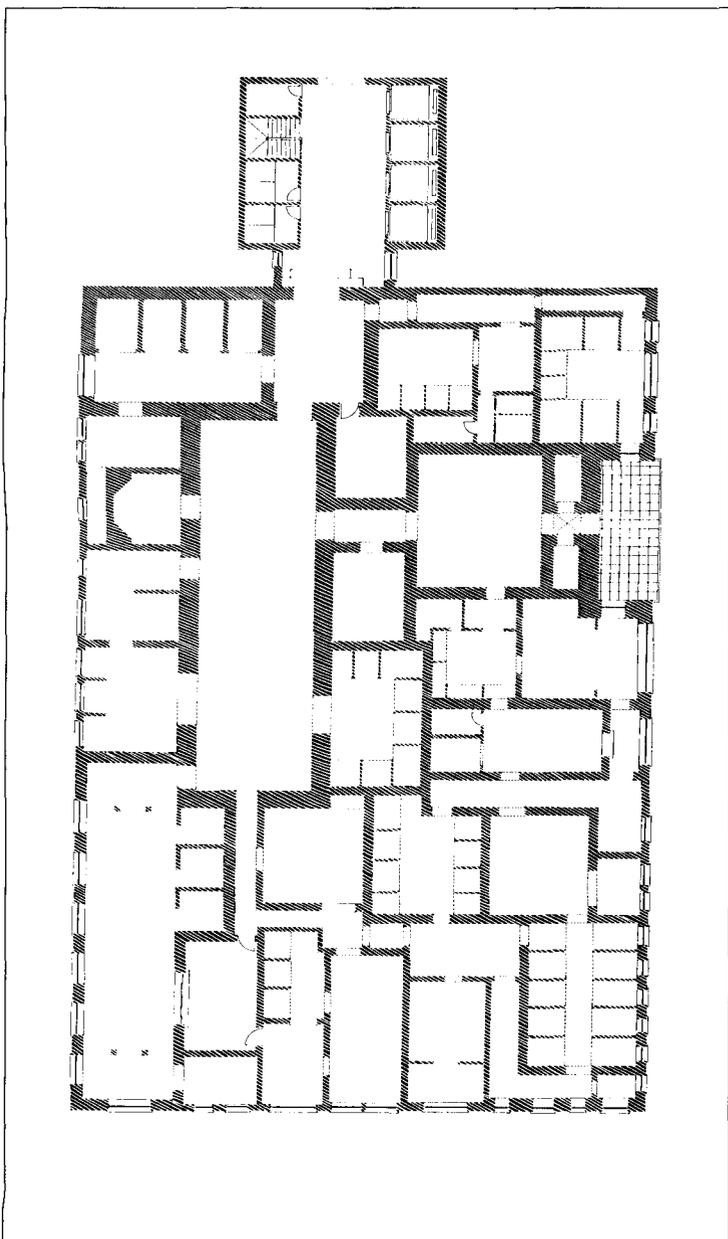
SECTION B-B

standing elements that people can place, combine, and recombine as they wish. The walls are thick and they connect with the existing structure of the building. They enclose space in all dimensions.

The plan (below left) shows a floor in a typical multistory office building. This illustrates the geometric character of the new space conception. The building is assumed to be 180- by 118-feet, which is typical for a contemporary high-rise building, and the floor shown contains working space for about 120 people. The watercolors (opposite) show impressions of the physical character the space might have, if carried out within our system of furniture. The plan and watercolors together are intended to give an over-all sense of the character and atmosphere such an office might have, given the nature and capabilities of the new system.

Large-scale production

We have spent a good deal of time preparing for the large-scale production of this new system of furniture. The furniture itself will need new kinds of tooling, especially since the materials and finishes are unusual (at least by present industry standards). Furthermore, the fact of the dimensional variation hinges on a number of technical maneuvers not described in this article. In any case, mass-production methods are feasible and may be combined, without too much trouble, with the new kind of furniture we have described. It is possible that distribution and service of the furniture may need to be less centralized than most current systems. Although many major manufacturers already keep local showrooms and distribution centers, we believe that the kind of furniture we envision will need further development of this decentralized system of sales, marketing, and service. The computer



programs used for layout will be linked to sales and distribution. Since this represents a project of considerable scale, we believe it will be best to begin by manufacturing a small number of pieces of furniture each year (four to six, perhaps) and then slowly building up the repertoire of available elements. This is an almost risk-free method. As the number of available elements grows, the more sophisticated aspects of user-layout and local service can be brought in line with the demand.

It is our hope, and our goal, that this system of furniture will gradually reshape the industry. The individual elements, the process of user design, and the space conception described above are all feasible and practical for the very large buildings that now exist. We believe that the system and furniture described above are as suitable for high-rise buildings in New York and Chicago as they are for low-rise buildings in Phoenix or Los Angeles. The clincher is in the comfort and pleasantness of the furniture, and of the space that it creates. In field tests we find that the furniture creates an entirely different *human* relation between people and place from the one most people are used to today.

Instead of being alienated, and trying to tolerate the work environment, people feel as comfortable with this furniture as they do in their own homes. It creates environments that bring out the best in people because it leaves them *as* people. We hope that the slick and image-ridden workplaces of the present will give way to a world of genuine comfort in which people can think, work, and be themselves.

We are now full circle. The new sensibility described at the beginning of this article—and already realized in a variety of our recent building projects—is, by its nature, personal and unique. It is non-mechanistic, concerned with feeling and with life. It creates deep feeling because it relies on deep feeling during the process of creation. Of course, some people are skeptical about the possibility of capturing this quality in a mass phenomenon of *any* kind. We believe that what we have illustrated here is a marriage of high technology, modern production methods, computers, and ultrasophisticated theory of generative processes which is capable of bringing these human qualities to light, even in a mass phenomenon, and on a level which will, one day, produce environments for thousands, or millions, of people.

At present, the office-furniture industry in this country manufactures the equivalent of some 742,000 workstations per year. We believe the process and concepts we have shown here are capable of transforming the mechanistic process and attitude that has dominated the industry during the last 30 years by introducing a new attitude in which human feeling dominates. We are convinced that this new attitude can be successfully married with large-scale technological transformations, and that the new furniture that we have described here has the power needed to make this transformation.

Some parts of the work described in this article were done in communication with the design staff of RichardsonSmith, Columbus, Ohio. Credit is also owed to other companies, including Patagonia, Inc., Sweet Potatoes, the Xerox Corporation, Philips n.v., and to individual clients including André and Anna Sala, Dan Potash and Maureen McCabe, and Ann Medlock and John Graham. Among them, they have given us the opportunity to conduct an almost continuous, in-depth inquiry. We should especially like to thank Dick Haworth, whose ideas for a new and vital workplace have been an important influence. Through his patronage, he provided the first opportunity for the Center for Environmental Structure (CES) and RichardsonSmith to work together. We should also like to thank Tom Hench for his encouragement.

The following members of CES are responsible for the design and construction of the San Anselmo room: Christopher Alexander, Gary Black, Mark Briner, Chester Cervellino, Stephen Duff, and Kleoniki Tsotropoulou.

The following members of CES are responsible for the conception, design, and development of the furniture system described in this article: Christopher Alexander, Artemis Anninou, Gary Black, Mark Briner, and Eleni Coromvli.

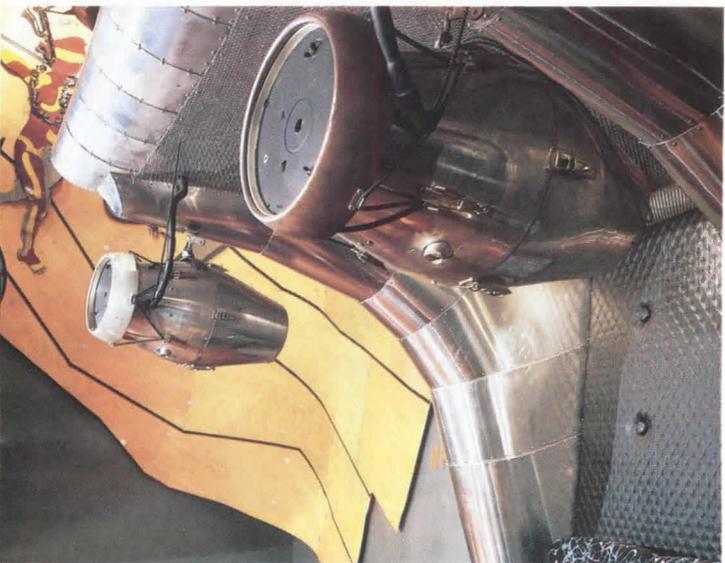
The watercolors are by Christopher Alexander.



Frankie Story 1985



The Empire strikes back



Visiting Tokyo is like stepping into a scene from *Blade Runner*. You arrive on traffic-laden freeways that slash through the city center, crisscrossing dense canyons of cheaply constructed highrises ablaze in neon signs. Spec office towers jam up against one-story shops and houses along teeming streets, and the sheer density of the place seems to extend endlessly in every direction. Where in this hallucinogenic setting, you wonder, is the zen of spare concrete that contemporary Japanese architecture is famous for? In giving directions to the city's most notable landmarks—Fumihiko Maki's Spiral Building, Kisho Kurokawa's Nakagin Capsule Tower, and Kenzo Tange's National Gymnasium, for starters—your local host is apt to recommend at least one restaurant designed by Nigel Coates.

Along with Philippe Starck (pages 106-107) and Norman Foster, Coates is Tokyo's latest discovery from Europe. Tired of copying the West, the city of fad and fantasy has begun to import the real thing, in search of colorful, maximalist alternatives to the sobriety of its own gray minimalism. Though not well-known outside fashionable London circles, the 38-year-old Englishman has succeeded in outshining his European colleagues by pinching the very nerve of Tokyo itself. Flamboyant and fragmented, his interiors encapsulate the visual chaos of the city's obsession with conspicuous consumption through a frenzied, theatrical display of knowing kitsch. For Coates, they represent the fruition of his theories on creative urban decay first formulated during his student days at London's Architectural Association (AA) in the early 1970s. He credits his interest in process over predetermined form to the teachings of Bernard Tschumi, the architecture-as-film conceptualist whose master plan for La Villette in Paris is currently under construction. Under his influence, Coates developed a method of architectural representation to stress the importance of occupying a space, rather than its finite enclosure. Dubbed X-ray drawings, his distorted perspectives fully reveal the inner workings of a space, emphasized by penciled-in arrows that direct the eye through a sequence of rooms. But unlike AA contemporaries such as Zaha Hadid (pages 84-89), Coates does not cloak his fragmentation in the abstraction of high Modernism. The sources of his inspiration are far more eclectic, ranging from Italian Renaissance and Baroque gardens and piazzas to contemporary theater and street culture. And though the exaggerated, mannerist spectacle of his recent projects has been labeled "New Baroque," Coates is quick to point out that his drawings and interiors project an attitude rather than a style, adapted according to a given site. "Architecture is like a changing set design where the play isn't prescribed," he explains of his intent to engage the viewer through a shocking, disjointed backdrop, whether real or imagined. Over the past decade, Coates has primarily taught, rather than practiced, and, not surprisingly, his X-ray method and his unconventional instruction at the AA have provoked considerable controversy. In 1983, controversy escalated to scandal when a Royal Institute of British Architects board of external examiners, including James Stirling, was brought in to assess the abilities of Coates's graduating class. The ensuing furor over whether or not to pass Unit 10 on the basis of its "bunch of sketches with a few cartoons," in Stirling's words, resulted in a lasting alliance between the unit master and his students. NATO was born.

Though it officially stands for Narrative Architecture Today, NATO has been unofficially labeled "Nigel And The Others" by skeptics who view the group as an artsy brat pack firmly under the thumb of Coates's strong hand. "We're deliberately inelegant, emotive, and antagonistic," he explains of NATO's anti-style, which aligns itself with London's fashion and art scenes, rather than a particular British architectural faction. Over the past four years, NATO's theoretical musings on subjects ranging from the redevelopment of the Surrey docklands to the dismantling of the Greater London Council have appeared in three manifestos (magazines published by the AA) and

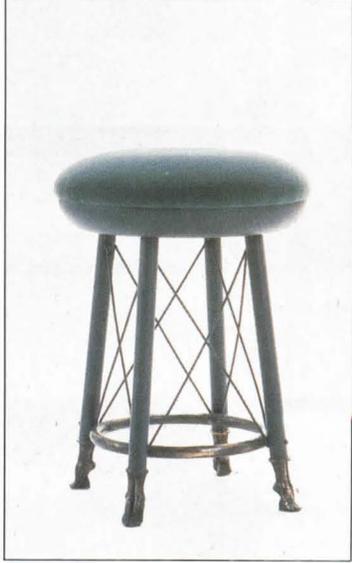
"Tokyo is overfertilized financially, yet undernourished in terms of ideas. It is both naive and prophetic: while we're acting as a sort of cultural attic for the new Japan, they're using their money to build what in Europe would be dismissed as unreal." Nigel Coates

several gallery exhibitions. The group has served as a kind of new wave William Morris workshop for Coates since he received his first commissions, fueling his vision with a multimedia resource of talented artists and craftsmen. This ongoing collaboration has resulted in an unfinished look to the architect's interiors, as if their mismatched accouterments were collected over time by several owners who didn't quite have the heart to throw anything out. "I like the hand of other people in my projects," explains Coates, who compares the conflicting results his collaborations produce to a microcosm of the city. "I like to convey how people really live. You wouldn't know our interiors were designed unless you already had a certain eye to take them apart."

Fortunately, entrepreneur Shi Yu Chen had such an eye when he flipped open an issue of *Brutus*, a trendy Japanese men's magazine, and spotted photographs of Coates's own apartment, which in 1984 happened to constitute the architect's entire portfolio of built work. The ruined, Anglo-Italian atmosphere of the place, including a cloud-painted ceiling, prompted Chen to drop in at the architect's office, a storefront in the quiet Pimlico section of London, where Coates was busily designing his first commission, the renovation of fashion designer Jasper Conran's London townhouse. "We're interested in your mix of classic and artful scraping-the-paint-away. We would like to offer you shops, restaurants, offices," he told Coates, who understandably was skeptical of the agent and his company, Creative Intelligence Associates (CIA). But Chen persisted, and in early 1985, presented Coates with a firm offer to design a Chinese restaurant in a former garage located in Tokyo's glittery, upscale Roppongi district. This was followed by a café in the Shibuya branch of Parco, a leading Tokyo department store, and three floors of a Tadao Ando-designed building owned by fashion designer Takeo Kikuchi. To help with the sudden deluge of these long-distance commissions, Coates called upon the creative talents of NATO, his circle of artists and fashion designers, and a fellow architecture student from his AA days, Doug Branson, who, in 1985, became his partner—"the strategist for my madness."

Chen's role as a "producer" who packages an entire project—from coordinating the design of a building to the sign over the door—has allowed the architect to express his wilder side with few budgetary constraints. His encouragement of Coates and his NATO entourage typifies the Japanese attitude toward making someone a star—they do it in a big way, offering not one, but several, chances to succeed, including the manufacture of Coates's furniture designs (right), now under license by Rockstone, a Tokyo-based company. As a result of these opportunities, Coates has grown more confident to push the slightly offbeat classicism of his early London renovations into the wacky explosions of his X-ray drawings with each successive project, as this portfolio illustrates. The exaggerated stageset of *Metropole*, the Chinese restaurant that marks the architect's Tokyo debut, looks positively genteel in comparison to the apocalyptic fragmentation of *Caffe Bongo* and the bright expressionism of the *Bohemia* jazz club. But whether festooned with a tasseled velvet curtain (middle opposite) or an airplane wing (top) and engine (bottom), every project is grounded in a controlled spatial sequence into which zany NATO decoration is layered. The particulars of the imagery, derived from pop culture as much as history, are created according to the site. Coates's latest renovations, for example—a boutique for Jasper Conran and a jewelry store off Bond Street, called *Silver*—are designed with suitable English restraint rather than the freneticism of his Tokyo interiors. "One is able to be more freely expressive in Tokyo," the architect admits, citing a Japanese willingness to experiment with avant-garde design that few European or American clients are prepared to risk. He also recognizes an inherent bond between the jarring decadence of his theatrical collages and the world's fourth largest city. As he points out, "Tokyo is just like a NATO city already built."

Deborah K. Dietsch

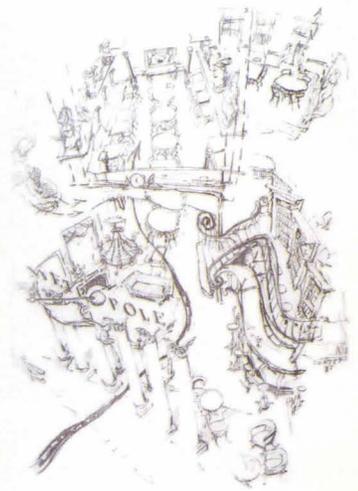


Setting the stage

Metropole
Tokyo
Branson Coates Architecture

The program for the Metropole restaurant might be best described as *East meets East, East meets West, and West meets West*. The locale is Japanese and the food is Chinese, the owner is Chinese and the designer English, and the interior is a hybrid of a European café and a British gentleman's club. It is an unusual combination even in Tokyo, where ethnic restaurants usually assume the ersatz character of a theme park. Branson Coates has added its own quirks to the cross-cultural equation, beginning with the restaurant's location, a former garage at the base of an apartment block in the yuppie Roppongi district. After dividing its double-height space into a bar area at the front and two dining rooms at the rear (plan), the architects introduced references to other building types, treating the space over the bar as a library with book-lined shelves, the main dining room as an artist's studio with plaster busts (bottom), and a smaller dining nook in the corner as an orangery, with a key-patterned tile floor (bottom).

At first glance, the result might be dismissed as just another chic restaurant—the project “producer,” Shi Yu Chen, after all, used to own L. A.'s trendy China Club. But its Neoclassicism is exceptional in a city where minimalism reigns, and unusual even to jaded Western eyes for the threatening edge it gives to familiar images. The busts in the main dining room are flanked by dangling legs (bottom), the curved balustrade to the library stair is distorted beyond acceptable proportions (opposite), and the dining chairs and torchères assume a dangerously spiky profile. To fulfill Chen's request for authentic antiques, the architects imported leather-bound books for the library, a fireplace from a London post office, and carved wooden doors. Coates designed most of the furniture himself (now under license by a Japanese firm) and commissioned seven artists to paint the restaurant's murals and create its light fixtures. A velvet-curtained proscenium arch complete with cherubic scenery (top and opposite) was installed between bar and café to ensure that every diner makes a grand entrance. *D. K. D.*



Architects:
Branson Coates Architecture
61 Cambridge Street
London SW1 V4PS
England
Nigel Coates, Doug Branson, Peter Sabara, Alan Mitchell, Carlos Villanueva, Anne Brooks, design
Associated architects:
Uni Planners, Tokyo
Project coordinator:
Shi Yu Chen

Engineer:
Tim MacFarlane
Artists:
Edward Allington, Tom Dixon,
Adam Lowe, Zaza Wentworth
Stanley, Valerie Robertson, Joao Penalva, Michael Scott
General contractor:
Shinnichi Construction Co. Ltd.
Photographer:
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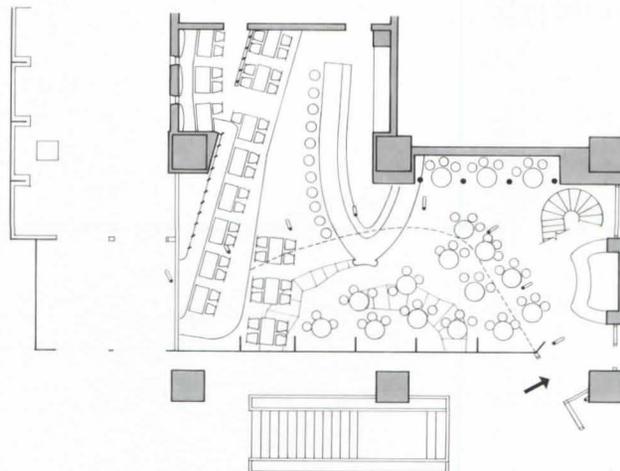
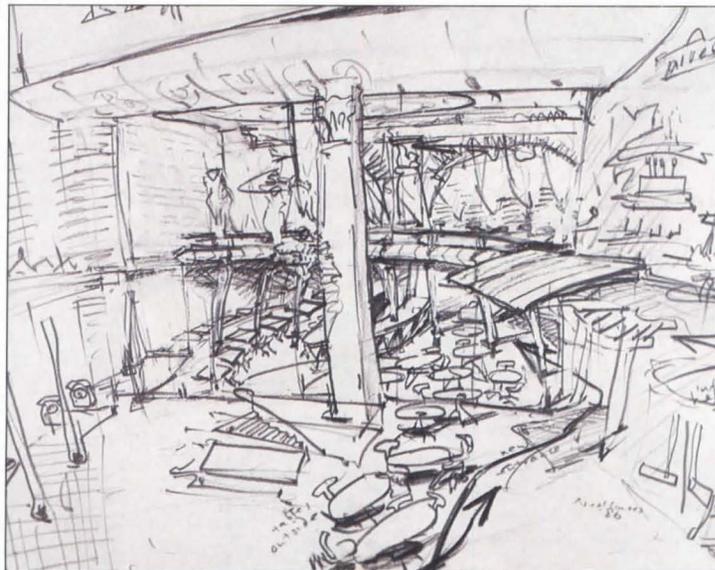


Apocalypse now

Caffe Bongo
Tokyo
Branson Coates Architecture

With its riotous combination of archaeological excavations, homoerotic statuary, and exploded aircraft parts, Caffe Bongo captures the Fellini-esque excess of Coates and his school of architect renegades, NATO, better than any other of his interiors. "Piranesi meets '50s espresso Modern" is how the architect characterizes the project, a renovation of the ground floor of the Parco store in Shibuya, a Tokyo shopping district frequented by students. Like his other projects, Bongo began as an X-ray drawing—a forced perspective that reveals the control behind the chaos. Organized as a theater-in-the-round, the space focuses on the bar and opens to the street activity outside Parco's plate-glass front. To attract his young audience and disguise an ugly soffit, Coates crowned the entrance with a huge airplane wing (right), based on details from a Russian fighter-plane manual bought at a junk sale. The aeronautic imagery is carried inside with riveted, aluminum-covered wing canopies encircling the stainless-steel bar and reception area (opposite). Engulfing these streamlined forms is a maelstrom of classical moldings, columns, and sculpture; a baroque mural depicting the birth of the universe and a solar system chandelier that swirls overhead; and a Pompeiian ruin complete with buried tools and fissures that erupt in the floor.

Though the architect compares his juxtaposition of images to "a half-architectural, half-theatrical solution," Caffe Bongo's crashing airplane and bombed-out interior evoke more provocative associations. Coates has symbolized his invasion of Tokyo with a twisted irony that should make his audience think twice. *D. K. D.*





The decayed ruins of Caffè Bongo are the result of a collaboration between Branson Coates and six London artists and designers: Adam Lowe, who painted the birth of the universe on the ceiling (right); André Dubreuil, who sculpted the solar system chandelier (opposite); David Phillips, who designed the fabric under the bar (opposite); Zaza Wentworth Stanley, who constructed a wall of archaeological fragments; Ron O'Donnell, who composed a photographic montage; and Jasper Conran, who outfitted the waiters and waitresses. The leaning cast-iron columns (opposite) that support the riveted, curved aluminum soffit over the bar were salvaged from a 19th-century London warehouse. One of Coates's sources of inspiration for the interior is continually televised on miniature video monitors embedded in glass-topped fissures in the floor, Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*.

Caffè Bongo
 Parco Department Store
 Tokyo

Architects:
 Branson Coates Architecture
 61 Cambridge Street
 London SW1 V4PS
 England

Nigel Coates, Doug Branson, Mike Tonkin, Alan Mitchell, design team

Associated architects:
 Parco Space Planning Dept.

Project coordinators:
 Shi Yu Chen, Mari Kida

Engineer:
 Tim MacFarlane

Artists:
 Jasper Conran, Ron O'Donnell,
 André Dubreuil, Adam Lowe, David
 Phillips, Zaza Wentworth Stanley

Photographer:
 ©Paul Warchol



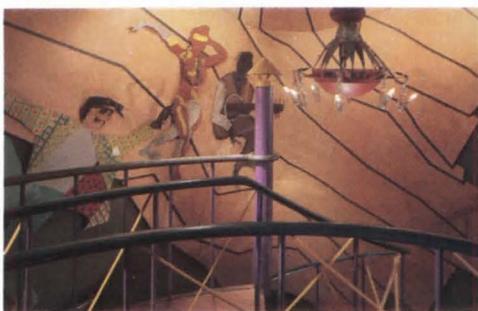
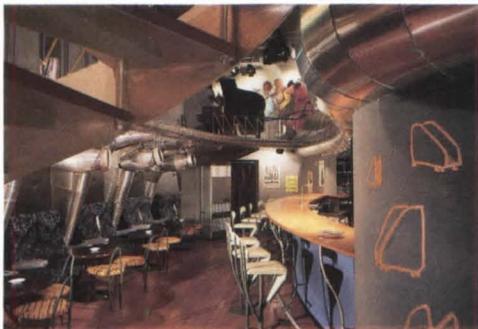
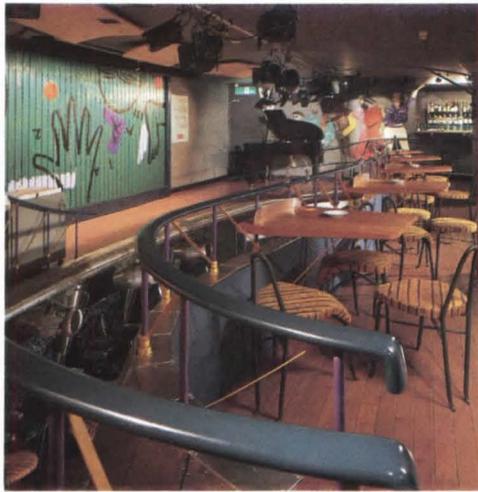


Blame it on the bossa nova

Bohemia
Tokyo
Branson Coates Architecture

Bohemia is one of three interiors created by Branson Coates for owner Takeo Kikuchi, a Japanese fashion designer whose boyhood dream was to own a jazz club. "We were given the impossible brief to design the interior as if the building was an English house," explains Coates, who domesticated the stark concrete shell supplied by architect Tadao Ando through his usual theatrical methods. Utilizing an existing curved wall in the basement, he raised the stage of the club and separated it from the main seating area by a sunken bar that also offers views of the musicians (middle right and drawing). "Bohemia doesn't have a stitch of classicism in it, but it has been planned in a classical way with the focus directed to the stage," explains Coates.

The architect characterizes the club's bold syncopation of color, pattern, and materials as an attempt to express visually the musical improvisations ad-libbed on stage. "It's like a London Soho basement during that period of relaxed Brazilian jazz, Astrid Gilberto, and airplane travel." Though Bohemia marks a departure from the historicism of Coates's other Tokyo interiors, it conveys the same artfully makeshift atmosphere, assembled from witty objects designed by a coterie of artists: Catrina Beevor's 3-D stage curtain (top); Mark Prizeman's "audience" crowding the plywood veneered walls (bottom); and refinements made by Peter Sabara and Peter Thomas to a row of British Airway plane seats (opposite) that allow the seated listener to adjust fans in the aircraft engines above. Coates, of course, strikes the last note with his chandelier composed of miniature saxophones. *D. K. D.*



Architects:

Branson Coates Architecture
61 Cambridge Street
London SW1 V4PS
England

Nigel Coates, Doug Branson, Peter Sabara, Jeremy Pitts, Alan Mitchell, Anne Brooks, design team

Project coordinator:

Shi Yu Chen, Mari Kida

Engineer:

Tim MacFarlane

Artists:

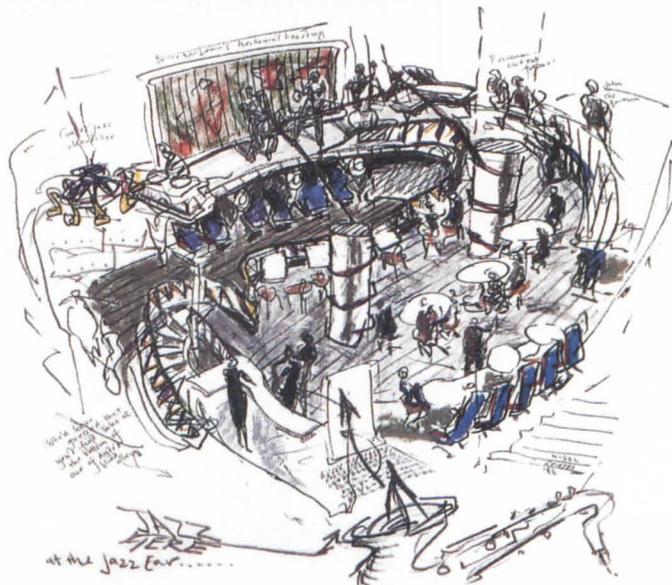
Tom Dixon, Judy Levy, Adam Lowe, Bruce McLean, Catrina Beevor, Mark Prizeman, Carlos Villanueva, Peter Sabara, Peter Thomas

General contractor:

Shinnichi Construction Co. Ltd.

Photographer:

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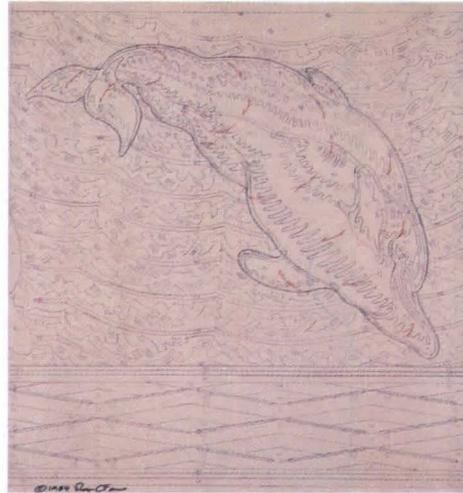




Fancy footwork

The nimble tread of architects and the guiding hand of a visionary manufacturer raise the craft of rug-making to high art.

We are all too accustomed nowadays to seeing ambitious architectural schemes translated into mediocre materials and shoddy workmanship. Fortunately, one need not resort to muttering about the good old days, and storm off in search of battered landmarks to restore, antiques to furnish them with, and Old-World artisans to do the work. There are contemporary American craftsmen with a profound respect for original design and fine materials—and the skills required to warrant acclaim as artistic collaborators. No individual or firm better exemplifies this role than V'Soske, Inc., the 63-year-old rug- and carpet-maker based in New York City. Besides continually expanding the technical boundaries of its own medium through inventive hand- and machine-tufting methods for wool and silk,



V'Soske has brought its formidable capabilities within the grasp of architects as diverse as Frank Lloyd Wright, Eero Saarinen, and Warren Platner, all of whom have worked with the company to produce custom designs (RECORD, January 1984, pages 152-153). This encouragement of creative exploration has most recently inspired a limited-edition series, *The New Level: The Architect's Rug*, inaugurated in 1978 with Michael Graves's *Rug #1* (overleaf), and now comprising 27 offerings by 13 different architects. Though modest in volume compared to V'Soske's total contract and residential lines, the architect's series already represents an extraordinary esthetic spectrum. Just as importantly, in the eyes of V'Soske's directors of design and marketing, Roger McDonald and Ellen Hertzmark, this diversity also constitutes a point of departure for future experiments. According to Hertzmark, "The body of work as a whole has made people think of the floor in a different way."

At the time of Michael Graves's first venture (his *Rug #2* followed in 1980), the very notion of a deliberately ornamental textile floor covering marked a bold break with prevailing minimalist trends, and a harbinger of things to come. In the mid-'80s, Roger Ferri's *Rug #1*, a bold plunge into figural illusionism (photo opposite), reanimated yet another long-neglected realm in the decorative arts. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret the architect's rug as mere mimicry in fiber of stylish gestures better executed in other media; it is not surrogate architecture, painting, or graphics, or would-be anything else. "We work predominantly with architects," Roger McDonald explains, "because they understand interior space. The rug has to ground that space and relate back to its surroundings." The rug must also possess an identity true to the nature of its own materials and fabrication. To further that end, and advance its own professional commitment to innovation, V'Soske's only inflexible rule is that each new entry in the *New Level* project utilize previously untried hand-tufting and dyeing techniques; the firm imposes no esthetic or budgetary limits. Architects invited to work with V'Soske have consistently risen to the challenge to exercise their versatility in a craft previously unfamiliar to most of them. "Through understanding structure, architects understand process," Ellen Hertzmark observes. "And they want to understand everything. So we're all addressing the medium together. That makes for mutual trust—a thread that's never broken, from the artist's mind to the hands of the stitcher and shearer at our plant in Puerto Rico." Trust is essential at every stage of the collaboration, since each nuance of design must be translated into exact specifications to ensure equivalent subtlety in the final rug. The actual procedure for communicating these values, and for evaluating results along the way, varies to suit the working style of each architect. The initial expression of the idea for a rug may be realized in a variety of media: Richard

Meier submitted a colored-paper collage for his *Rug #1* (page 155), Alan Buchsbaum used one of his own photographs as the basis for *Serious Leaves* (page 108) and a freehand graphite-on-paper scrawl for *Pencilmarkings* (page 109), and Henry Smith-Miller and Laurie Hawkinson painted the prototypes for their *Task System* (overleaf). Every prototype must be converted into a full-scale diagram, or cartoon, which can then be traced in reverse onto patterns and transferred in turn through inked perforations onto the cotton rug backing. The resulting outline is still only a preliminary schematic phase in a complex evolution.

Besides revising the cartoons, designer and fabricator must discuss a formidable range of possible choices in yarn selection, treatment, and dyeing, multidirectional tufting patterns, looping, pile cutting, and carving—all of which

recreate textural and chromatic refinements of the original concept. "If we want a texture that absorbs light," notes McDonald, "we would probably want a strand of wool, and if we want one that refracts light, silk. If we use a wool loop, we know it's going to absorb more light than a wool cut-pile texture. With a cut pile, you see the side yarn, which is usually three shades lighter than the cut surface. When someone walks across that surface—and these rugs are meant to reveal their sensibility with use—you get both the side color and the cut color. Among cut-pile textures, there are some that take on a dry sheen and others that look almost wet. What interests us is making these subtleties work in combination or alone, and always in terms of expressing an artist's attitude about a specific rug."

The genesis of Roger Ferri's contribution to the V'Soske series is an illuminating case study, not only because of the intricacy of the design and the virtuosity of its execution, but also because the architect took full advantage of the opportunity to participate in every phase of the process. Ferri welcomed the chance to further his own philosophical and professional commitment to an integration of architecture and the decorative arts founded on a shifting balance between rhythmic pattern and naturalistic illusion. His own background in classical figure painting suggested iconographic themes and formal devices. Working from studio drawings of male and female human models as well as from studies of porpoises sketched in an aquarium, Ferri developed small preliminary schemes in colored pencil and then a full-size painting in oils on canvas. On this he overlaid a sheet of clear plastic on which he outlined zones coordinated to contour lines and gradations of hue and keyed numerically to color charts based on paint daubs from his palette (a detail of a print from the minutely zoned cartoon appears above, annotated with red arrows to indicate tufting directions). An exhaustive exchange with Hertzmark and McDonald followed, to establish critical details such as the use of *ombré* (randomly multihued) yarn to yield painterly blended shadows, silk "overstitching" to make the stars twinkle softly, cut-pile to make the porpoises sleek, and looped wool to emphasize the impasto-like density of the nudes. Not content with reviewing intermediate test samples from the V'Soske plant, Ferri flew to Puerto Rico to consult with master yarn-carvers on the exact degree of shearing needed for sculptural definition. Looking back, he is pleased with the outcome, if slightly wistful: "You know, it would have been spectacular to have the whole thing in pure silk. But we talked a lot about affordability and, well, the rug would have been *untouchable*." How much *does* it cost to have architectural inspiration underfoot? "We prefer not to discuss prices," Hertzmark replies. "We charge according to what it costs us to make them as rugs." Their resale value as superlative objets d'art is another matter. *Douglas Brenner*



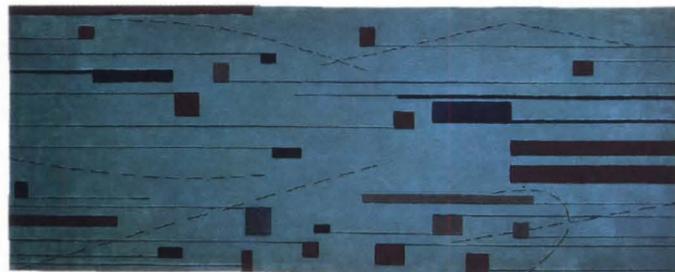
V'Soske is currently developing rugs with designers already on the firm's roster as well as with new invited participants (the latter, as yet unnamed, will reportedly extend the list of contributors to the West Coast). The nine-year-old New Level series made its debut with Michael Graves's 5- by 7-ft wool Rug #1 (18), which the architect has termed an "exercise in geo-logic." (With a list-price of \$7,855, #1 is now among the least expensive rugs in the line. The higher prices of subsequent offerings, such as Roger Ferri's #1, reflect more elaborate workmanship and increased material costs.) Graves's Rug #2 (1), also wool, incorporates references to "the idea of the interior as an extended garden." A different perspective on the landscape gave rise to Charles Gwathmey's Le Soleil Couchant (2). Tufted of wool, it is meant to serve either as rug or tapestry. *Arquitectonica* encapsulated a hieroglyphic universe into its irregular 5- by 7-ft Cosmos (7). Terrestrial nature close up inspired Alan Buchsbaum's Serious Leaves (page 109) and floral-patterned For Imogen (12). The same architect's 3- by 8-ft Pillow Rug (13) relates directly to the human figure. Dense tufts of silk and worsted wool cushion the head, while the body rests on sheared pile. "Burned" edges compose a visual play on the rug's intended use at hearthside. *Trompe l'oeil* recurs through Shelton Mindel's trio, Yellow Brick Road (6), Peel (9), and Crack (10). The illusions owe much to the rug-maker's skill. In Crack, for example, the "cement" takes its masonry texture from a tufted wool grid, while the fissure exposes a "molten" infill of smooth cut pile. Double meaning also informs Tod Williams and Billie Tsien's Silk Scarf (4), in which a pink silk "scarf" appears to have been cast upon a gray wool grid; Wool Scarf (17), appropriately, is wool on wool. Ascot Williams (16) explores the textile leitmotif on a less literal level. Fascinated by the relation of craft to modern technology—a duality pertinent to V'Soske's own enterprises—Tsien and Williams specified a machine-tufted field with lines tufted and incised by hand. Specifically architectural imagery surfaces in Richard Meier's Rug #1 (11) and in Anthony Ames's Villa Study #1 (15). Meier comments: "I have taken particular care in retaining the visual elements of an architectural floor plan for a residence (it is, after all, a rug) as the outline, but adding the element of color to dramatize what might otherwise be construed as a black and white drawing." Ames conceived his chiaroscuro scheme by altering photocopies of photographs of Le Corbusier villa models. With Task System, a five-rug series by Henry Smith-Miller and Laurie Hawkinson, the role of the floor in defining space as well as the interplay of color and texture are reduced to minimal variations on "basic black" modules (figure 5 is Rug #4). A new addition to the system, in yellow, launches The Primaries (14). Steven Holl carries the New Level to pure abstraction. His #1 (8) uses tufting methods to "etch" a network of lines. Cartesian coordinates underlie #2, which Holl has dubbed X (3 and pages 92-95).



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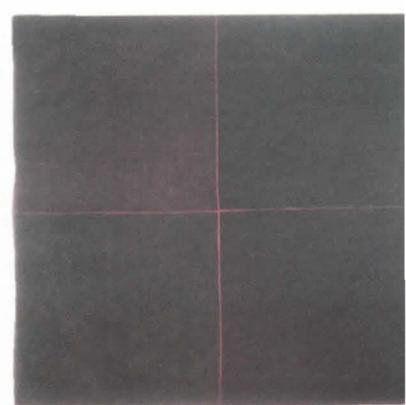
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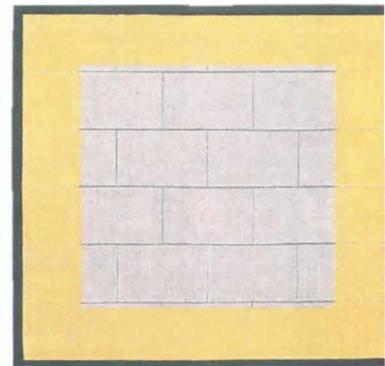
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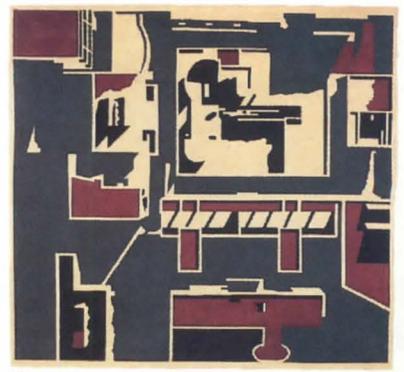
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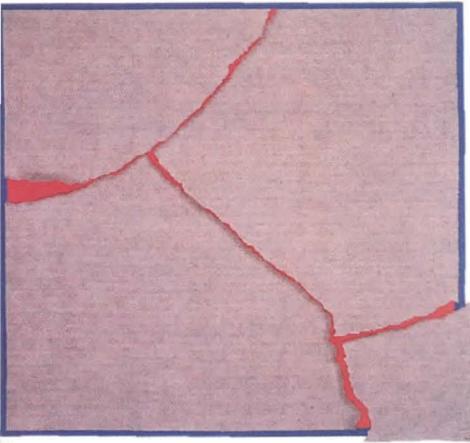
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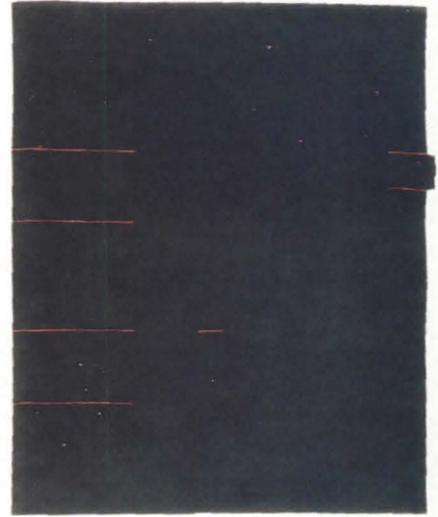
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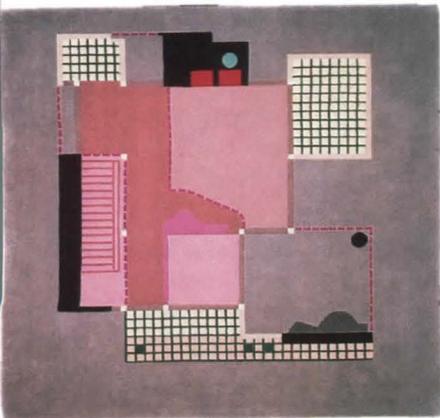
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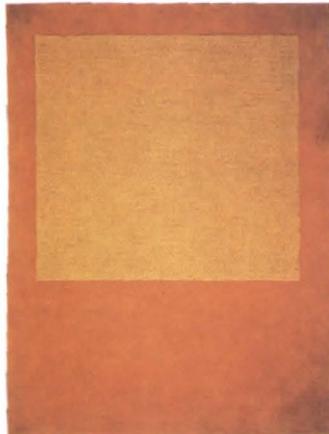
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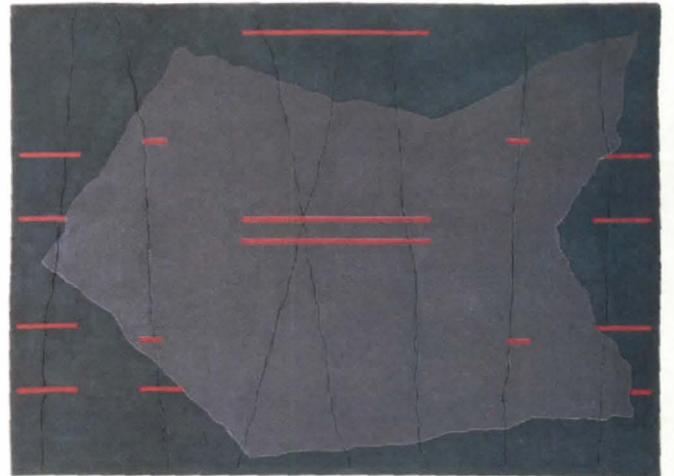
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11



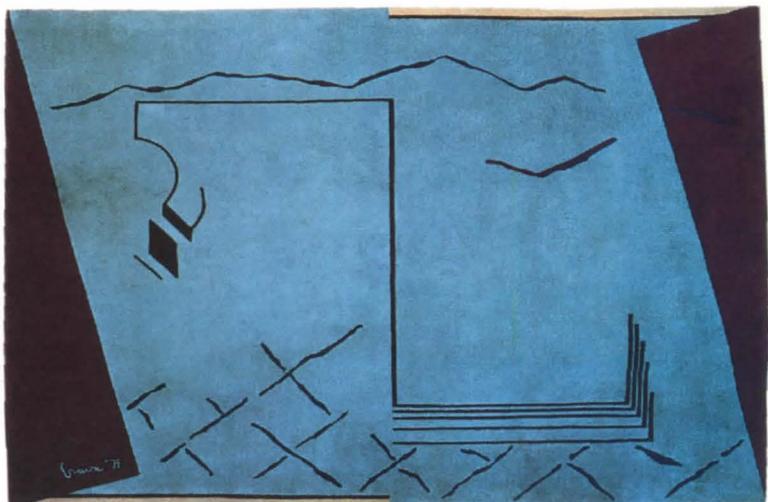
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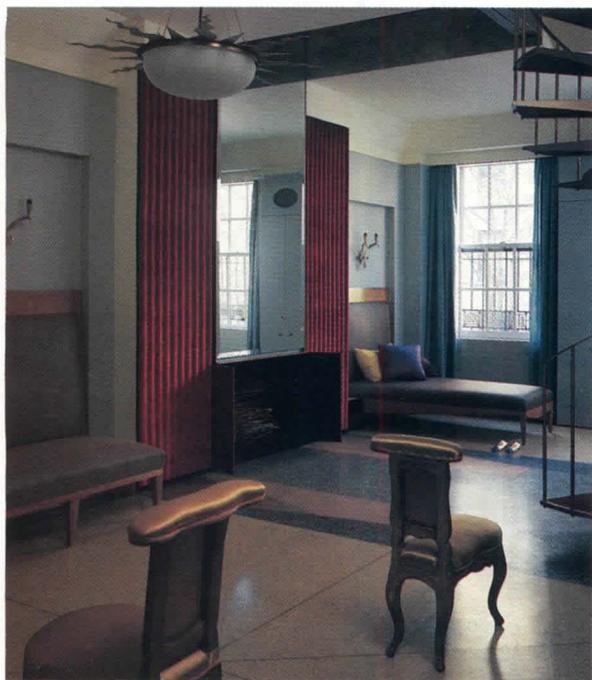


12



18

Portrait of a lady



The living-room chimneypiece, terrazzo floors, ceiling coves, and wall niches hark back to the symmetrical formality of the Greek Revival parlor gutted in an earlier remodeling. This ceremonial order—reinforced by the architects' built-in banquettes and chaise longue—is also akin in spirit to neoclassical salons of the 18th century, one of the owner's favorite periods in history (the two chaises voyeuses, with armrests across the back for elegant kibitzers, are genuine Louis Quinze and Seize; the brass sconces, also French, are Rococo-Modern, circa 1950). The slender bracketlike object centered above the settee beside the fireplace (opposite) is one of a pair of Trish McKinney paintings commissioned to harmonize with the architectural envelope. Tsao & McKown conceived the sunburst chandelier (above) as "somewhat like a Masonic emblem; it could symbolize the Mystic Order of Designer Architecture."

The mellow brick facade of the Greenwich Village row house evokes the old New York of Henry James's *Washington Square*, but the lady who dwells within inhabits a realm far removed from the genteel spinsterhood James memorialized in his novel. Mary Ann Tsao is very much a woman of the modern world: a well-traveled native of Hong Kong and a busy physician, as yet unmarried, who plans on raising a family when she is ready. Dr. Tsao practices pediatrics in the garden level of her three-story residence, lives in the spaces immediately behind and above her office, and currently rents out the topmost rooms into which she expects her own household will eventually grow. The interiors of office and home were conceived as a two-stage "portrait" of their owner by her brother, Calvin Tsao, and his partner, Zack McKown, masters of the architectural character study (see *Record Interiors* 1983, pages 152-159, for Calvin's *self*-portrait). Because both segments of the present diptych are so closely joined, the architects stressed the importance of representing quite different aspects of their subject in each part: the office (not illustrated) "expresses Mary Ann's philanthropic, social, technical side," while the residence "reflects her private, more soulful side." Fragmentary clues to the identity of the latter came from Dr. Tsao's personal creed, her fantasies, and esthetic predilections—a Buddhist upbringing, girlhood daydreams of life as a princess in an enchanted castle, and a grown-up taste in art and music that reaches from the Italian Renaissance to the French Enlightenment, and beyond to Surrealism. In attempting to encompass this cosmopolitan frame of reference inside a distinctly American setting, Calvin Tsao and Zack McKown were to some extent fortunate in having the freedom allowed by a previous owner's otherwise deplorable removal of all original interior detail. Not that a *totally* blank slate would have been to these architects' liking; the ironic and paradoxical gestures that animate all of their designs require some recognizable armature of historical reference and convention. This need for a thematic foil—and the basic proportions of the 1841 shell—suggested a roughly axial layout like the front- and back-room configuration of a typical 19th-century town house (plans overleaf), and a functional arrangement which acknowledges the classic hierarchy of basement kitchen (not illustrated) and parlor-floor reception room (left and opposite). The remembrance of New York past stops there.

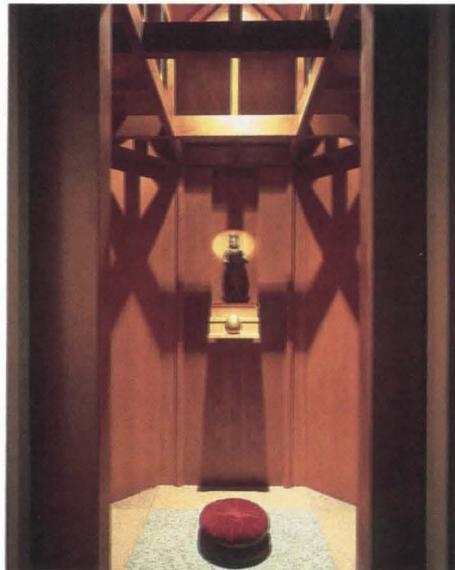
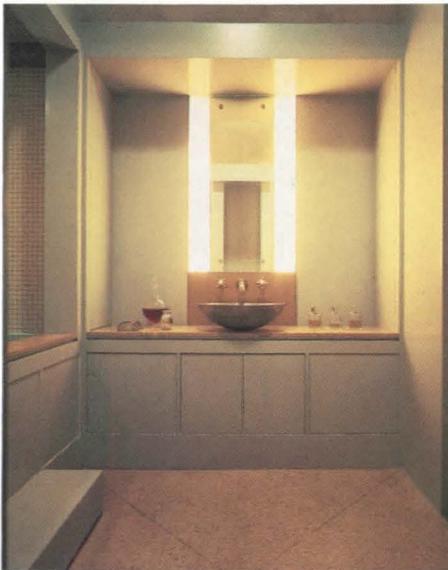
Knickerbocker society would never have approved Tsao & McKown's placement of a lady's bedroom in full view of her salon, or their assemblage of allusive décor more indebted to Carl Jung than to Edith Wharton. As in a dream, nothing here is quite what it appears to be, and significant incongruity rules. "We try to make the frivolous serious and the serious frivolous," says Calvin Tsao. Ambivalence lurks in red velvet draperies/pilasters and in a pair of antique *voyeuses*, chairs meant for sitting astride or sideways with elbows perched on padded backrests. A gap in the living-room ceiling above a mirrored mantelpiece opens two-story vistas upward through a gilded metal catwalk disconcertingly reminiscent of a Manhattan subway grating. In the intermediate zone between parlor and boudoir, profane mingles seductively with sacred. Besides concealing closets, a series of doors gives onto a bathroom on one side and a meditation room, complete with altar, on the other: temples, respectively, to the body and to the soul. Telescoping walls in the central passage create the provocative illusion of doors always ajar, an effect inspired by a Jean Cocteau film. The form of the bed in the not-so-private boudoir beyond derives from an Annunciation painted by Piero della Francesca. Characteristically, Tsao & McKown transformed the chaste Quattrocento four-poster into a luxurious divan heaped with cushions and veiled in mosquito netting—a room within a room where company is invited to lounge. The hostess's gold Moroccan slippers (architect-specified) sustain the mood of a liberated woman's willing retreat into a seraglio. Her dressing-table chair, a bizarre confection retrieved from a Victorian brothel, finishes the portrait with a smile—and a wink. *Douglas Brenner*



Preliminary inspection of the historic structure uncovered badly charred beams above the living room, the legacy of a long-ago fire. Removal of the damaged members enabled the architects to cut through the ceiling and borrow natural light and space from a second-story guest room/study. An open metal catwalk preserves this openness while retaining usable floor space in the upper chamber (photos this page). The proportions of the deck grid were keyed to the geometry of treads in a spiral staircase installed as a private alternative to existing stairs in the entry used by tenants. (Dr. Tsao intends eventually to convert the rental apartment into bedrooms for her own family, keeping the present main-level bedroom unchanged, but using it solely as an informal sitting room.) Tsao & McKown's sleight of hand in stretching the mantel mirror behind the catwalk and into the room above makes for astonishing perspectives and surreal tableaux of figures aloft—like street-level pedestrians viewed from below the sidewalk gratings over New York subway stations. "This became a space 'about' movement," says McKown. "Since you usually move with your feet on the ground, we decided that the most important plane to concentrate on here was the ground plane. So this room is also 'about' the floor." These dynamics accord with Dr. Tsao's own training as a dancer, at an earlier stage in her life. The calculated surrealism responds to her continuing study of early 20th-century art theory. Besides acquiring modern European "antiques" that recall the weird imaginings of Magritte, Cocteau, and Delvaux, the architects concocted cryptic set pieces of their own. The fireplace, for example, is flanked by angled steel panels painted gold, alternatively suggesting the doors of an open shrine or a Franklin stove. To either side stand pilasterlike forms, sheathed in red velvet, which to Tsao & McKown are "frozen draperies." Heightening the magic of the mirror is a pair of small glass hemispheric protrusions centered above the fireplace. Not the ornamental screw-head covers they at first glance appear to be, these medallions are miniature lamps, aglow like headlights or spectral eyes.







The parallel symmetry of bathroom (lower left) and meditation room (lower right) emphasizes the complementary roles of various daily rituals. The lavatory "altar" is a bronze sink designed by architect Bruce Tomb. A Tang goddess of mercy presides over the octagonal chapel, whose timber structure was loosely based on Tibetan monastic prototypes and scaled to a numerical sequence abstracted from Dr. Tsao's mantra. In the rear bedroom (top left and right), a visually punning "postage-stamp" fireplace (opposite) enhances the space's alternative role as an informal living room. Bed-finial torchères and cove fixtures softly highlight cherry woodwork, green satin upholstery on a Victorian "cockfight" chair, the gilded-steel chimneypiece border, and wall surfaces scumbled with graphite, linseed oil, and face powder.

*Mary Ann Tsao Residence
New York City*

Owner:

Mary Ann Tsao, M. D.

Architect:

*Tsao & McKown, Architects
41 East 42nd Street, #1610
New York, New York 10017
Calvin Tsao and Zack McKown,
partners-in-charge; Stephen
Beacham, Nina Clabaugh Teng,
Scott Tucker, design team*

Engineer:

Michael Guilfoyle (structural)

Consultants:

*Trish McKinney (artist for living-
room paintings); Anne Philippe
(graphite-and-pigment wall textures)*

General contractor:

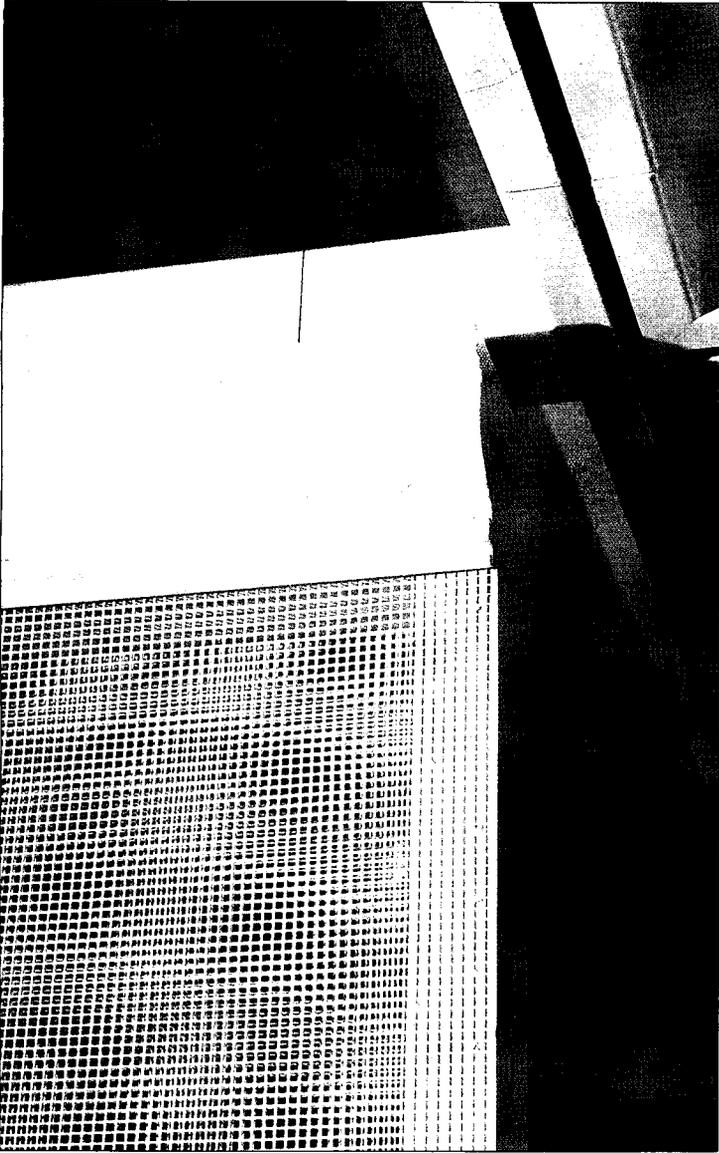
*Clear Cut Construction—Scott
Tucker, partner-in-charge*

Photographer:

©Richard Bryant



Out of the commonplace



Though formed of seemingly simple, familiar hardware that might have come from the shelves of the local building-supply house—steel-framed perforated-metal panels suspended from an overhead channel/grid—SITE's floating wall system achieves refinement through painstaking engineering and craftsmanship, abetted by classical cornice and base moldings that recall the historic roots of its setting.

Fans (and what red-blooded American would admit to being other?) who thronged the show that marked the opening of the new permanent quarters of the Museum of the Borough of Brooklyn found there a cornucopia celebrating "The Grand Game of Baseball" with a feast of art and artifacts rich and varied enough to satisfy the most avid enthusiast—more than 100 works by artists from Currier and Ives to Red Grooms, tracing the evolution of both the national sport and the nation's art; Claes Oldenburg's "Batcolumn" of welded, red-painted steel and a life-size, polychromed-wood, turn-of-the-century "cigar-store" ballplayer, with bat poised and handlebar mustache aquiver; a 9 1/2-inch-diameter sterling-silver baseball and the trophy ball commemorating the [Brooklyn] Excelsiors' triumph over the [New York City] Union club in nine innings on October 5, 1859; a turnstile from Ebbets Field and the last home plate tapped by the *real* (i.e., Brooklyn) Dodgers; baseball cards and watches and toys; posters and photos and paraphernalia; and more, much more.

Nor was the diversity of objects displayed a phenomenon peculiar to this first show but a consequence of the museum's strategy of treating its untractable subject—the visual and cultural history of Brooklyn—by cutting broad swathes across narrow themes, illumined by fine art and rare treasures where appropriate but also by local ephemera and memorabilia, and even complete created or recreated environments.

With flexible display space the sine qua non for exhibitions so motley, the new home offered the museum seemed at first glance unpromising. LaGuardia Hall, a neo-Georgian building with Moderne details that betray its late-'30s origin, was once the centerpiece of the Brooklyn College campus, later a library, and last abandoned to student organizations, emerging rundown and riddled with makeshift partitions. SITE, however, detected in both the old structure and the new program an opportunity to exercise its fascination with design as a frozen moment in an ongoing process of building and "unbuilding"—in this case made explicit by the demand for rapid and frequent change.

LaGuardia Hall's ground floor, accordingly, was gutted to make way for the new gallery and its support spaces and outfitted with new mechanical systems to provide the stringent climate control demanded by art lenders. Overlaying the concrete floor with white terrazzo and sprucing up abused wall surfaces set the stage for a lacy entry arch (opposite) that echoes the Moderne decor of the outer lobby and introduces the wall system that floats within the warm, white shell, fulfilling with deceptive ease the need for flexible, malleable space.

In essence, the system consists of a grid of conventional channels from which hang sliding steel-framed wall sections faced with perforated metal extrusions. Just run down to the hardware store, right? Wrong. Like any skilled conjurer, SITE delights in making the difficult look easy and to do so pushes its fabricators to innovate, replacing the often-prickly relationship between designer and builder with a collaboration between artist and artisan exemplified by the detailing of the display system's simple standard components—which represents six months of research and development, testing, and refinement to achieve its understated elegance.

"Easier to move than your couch," says designer Alison Sky, the wall sections glide omnidirectionally along the overhead web to form almost limitless configurations, from a sculpture nook to a complete room. The perforated surfaces allow hang-anywhere mounting against backgrounds transmuted by varied combinations of extrusion patterns to densities ranging from solid to filigree to none at all, though always bounded by classical cornice and base profiles that subdue the hard-edged components to consonance with the handcrafted historicism of the surround. But above all, the overlapping membranes and the interplay of background and foreground as successive spatial layers are revealed, conjoined with blurred glimpses of others in motion, evoke a sense of anticipation that lures the passive museum-goer to active discovery. *Margaret Gaskie*

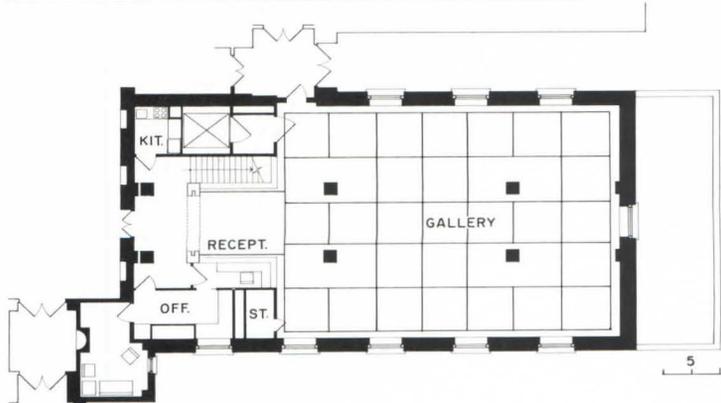
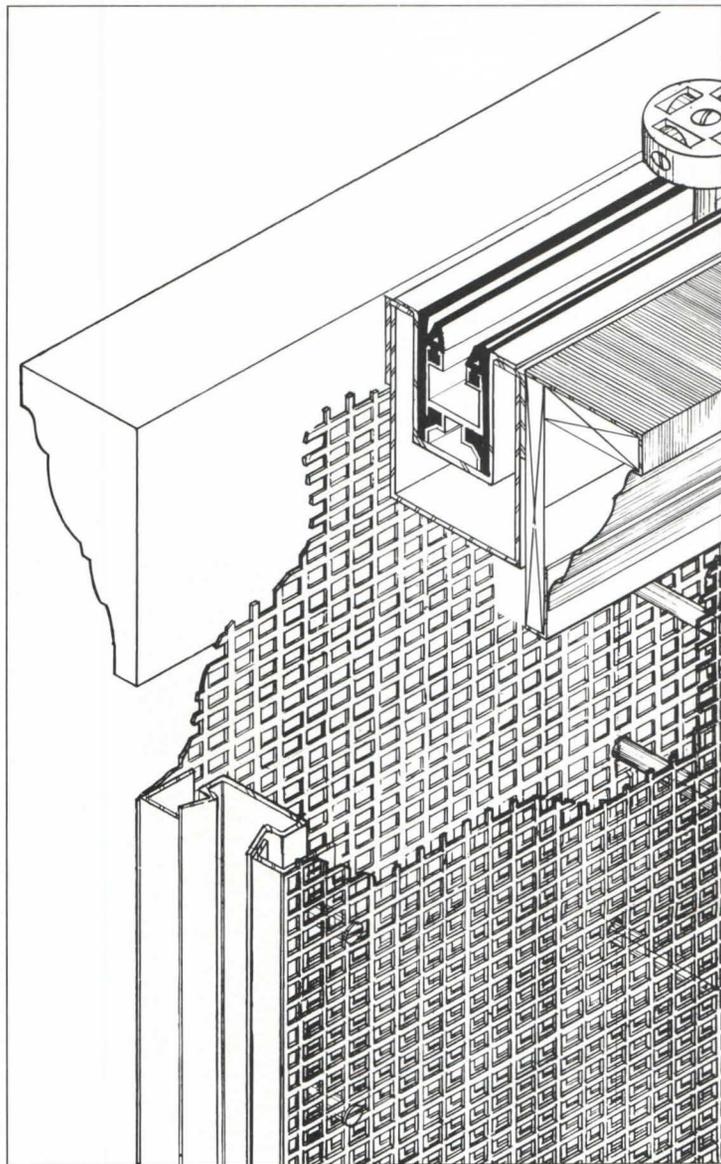
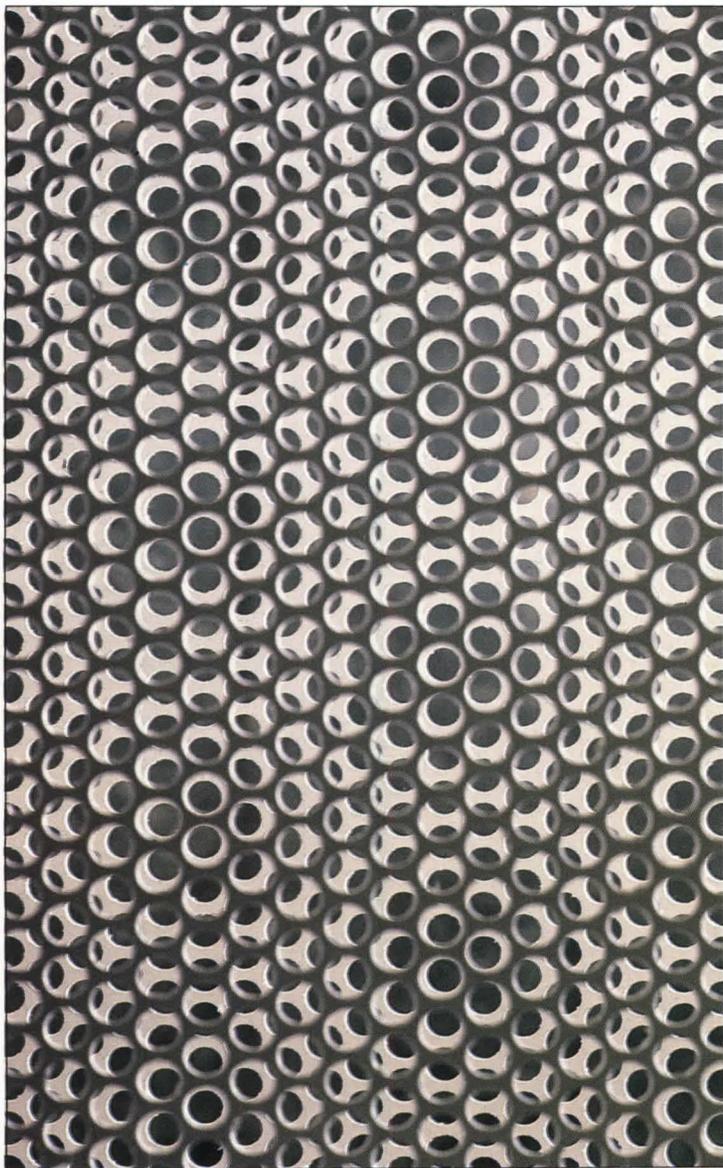
To match the variety of exhibits recalling the history of Brooklyn in art and memorabilia that may range from a tiny etching to a full-sized room, SITE's virtuoso display system of mutable floating walls creates an ever-changing environment with a never-changing air of animation and anticipation.



Engineering

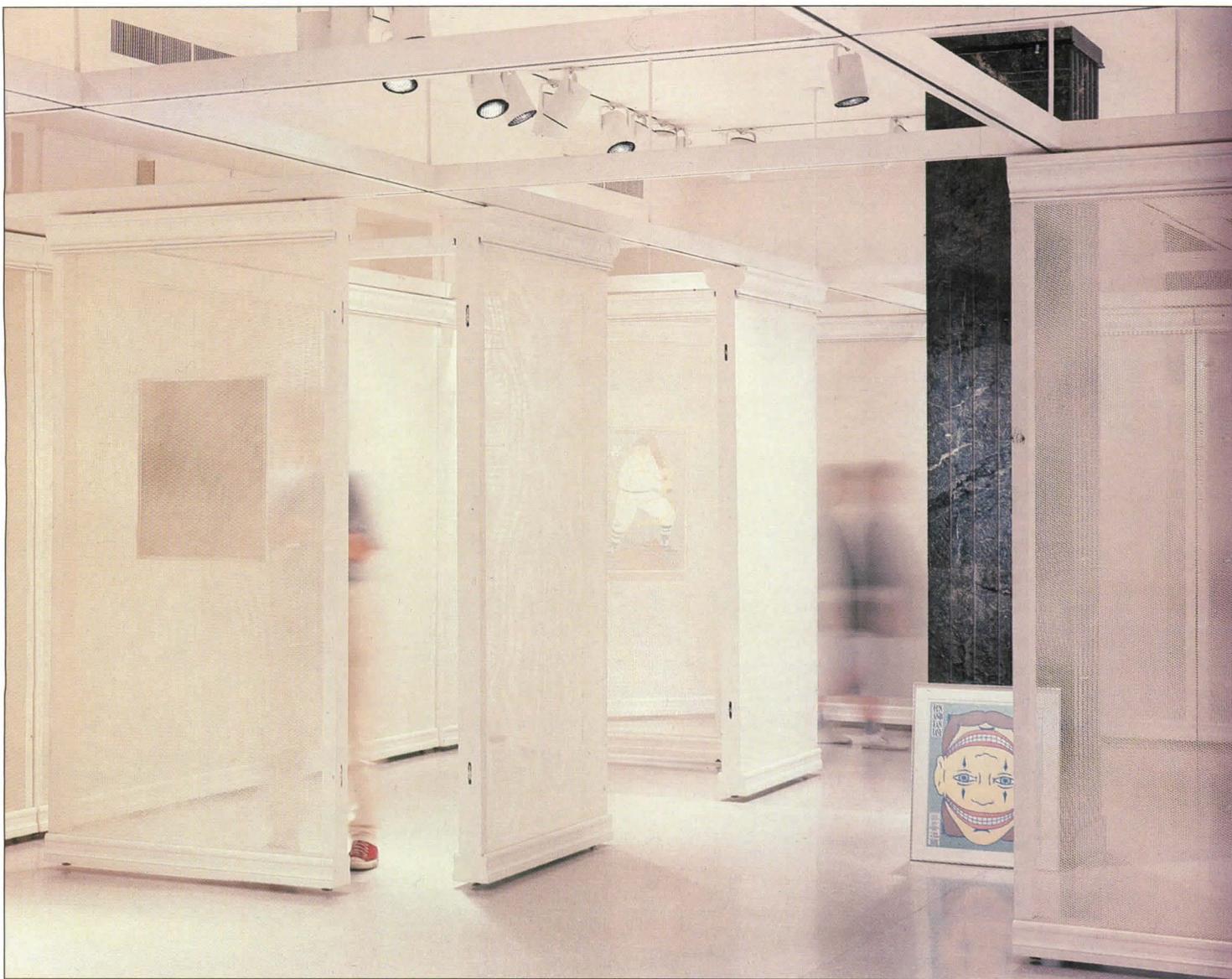
A repertoire of eight patterns of round or square perforations and the ability to mount different perforation patterns on either side of each wall section yield almost unlimited variations in background density to complement displays. At the extremes, complete transparency is made possible by a picture molding that allows hung objects to float in an empty frame, while complete opacity can be achieved by

inserting hardboard panels, wrapped in any desired material, into discreet slots at the top and bottom of the panel frames. Slim screw-in spacers brace the perforated metal faces against deformation under the weight of displayed objects, which are mounted with standard S-fasteners. The embossed metal of the egg-and-dart cornices is backed by nailing blocks; the sturdier wooden bases attach directly to the frame.



The versatility of the floating wall system is rooted in the ease of placing its 4- by 8 1/2-foot suspended sections at any point on the nominal 8-foot grid, including the diagonal. (Recessed locking devices firmly join the sides of adjacent frames, and bases are stabilized with hidden feet like those used to level household appliances.) But its virtuosity does not end with providing almost limitlessly mutable display

configurations and backgrounds. The lighting, for example—an off-the-shelf track system hung in a grid that bisects the panel grid at its half points—allows fixtures to be canted at an ideal lighting angle whatever the placement of wall section or displayed object and creates a false ceiling of light that further defines and enhances the come-hither liveliness of “rooms” sketched by the peek-a-boo panels.



*Museum of the Borough of Brooklyn
Brooklyn College
Brooklyn, New York*

Owner:
*Museum of the Borough of Brooklyn
Brooklyn College*

Designers:
*SITE Projects, Inc.
65 Bleecker Street
New York, New York 10012
Josh Weinstein, James Wines, Alison
Sky, Debbie Stuart, Naoto Sekiguchi,
Victoria Mohar*

Engineers:
*Berkenfeld-Getz & Associates
(structural); Lehr Associates
(mechanical/electrical)*

Consultants:
*Howard Brandston Lighting Design
(lighting); Exhibitgroup New York
(SITEWALL contractor)*

General contractor:
Gordon Construction Co.

Photographer:
©Mark Darley

New products

Law and order

Open office systems are potentially the most architectonic of all contract furniture, but, ironically, architects have shied away from their design. An exception is Norman Foster, who, in collaboration with the Italian manufacturer Tecno, has created *Nomos*, first unveiled at last year's *Salone del Mobile* in Milan and now expanded with additional componentry.

As an encapsulated version of his technology-inspired buildings, the system directly stems from Foster's kit-of-parts philosophy and earlier experiments with furniture design. In 1979, the architect devised an adjustable, steel-supported surface for use as a drafting board, display stand, projection screen, and conference table for his London office, which he modified as a desk in furnishing the interior of his 1983 Swindon distribution center for Renault. In echoing the center's masted exterior, the desk's thin, splayed steel legs and perforated supports caught the eye of Robert Timosci, chairman of Tecno's United Kingdom operation, who persuaded Foster to further develop his furniture into a line of factory-built system components.

Taking advantage of Tecno's superbly skilled technical engineers and craftsmen (they also produced the underwriters' boxes for Richard Rogers's Lloyds of London), Foster spent two and a half years developing *Nomos*, streamlining the welded structure of his original table into a bolted assembly of tubular steel (blue elements in exploded axonometric, right), aluminum (red), and synthetic (green) castings. Tecno's investment in the product was considerable; \$500,000 of the \$3-million price tag was spent on robotics to fabricate the steel components alone.

The collaboration between architect and manufacturer was conducted in the same way as Foster Associates designs a building—a team approach using full-scale mock-ups to continually refine the prototype. "This was our first venture into mass production," remarks Martin Francis of Foster Associates. "Although our buildings are a metaphor for mass production, they are, in fact, craft products."

The resulting open workstation reflects Foster's obsession with structural "honesty" and his disdain for the concealment characteristic of paneled systems. *Nomos* (Greek for law or musical rhythm) is based on a demountable structure of tubular steel beams and legs, which supports a variety of work surfaces, overhead storage units, light fixtures, and wiring spines, added

on or subtracted from as necessary.

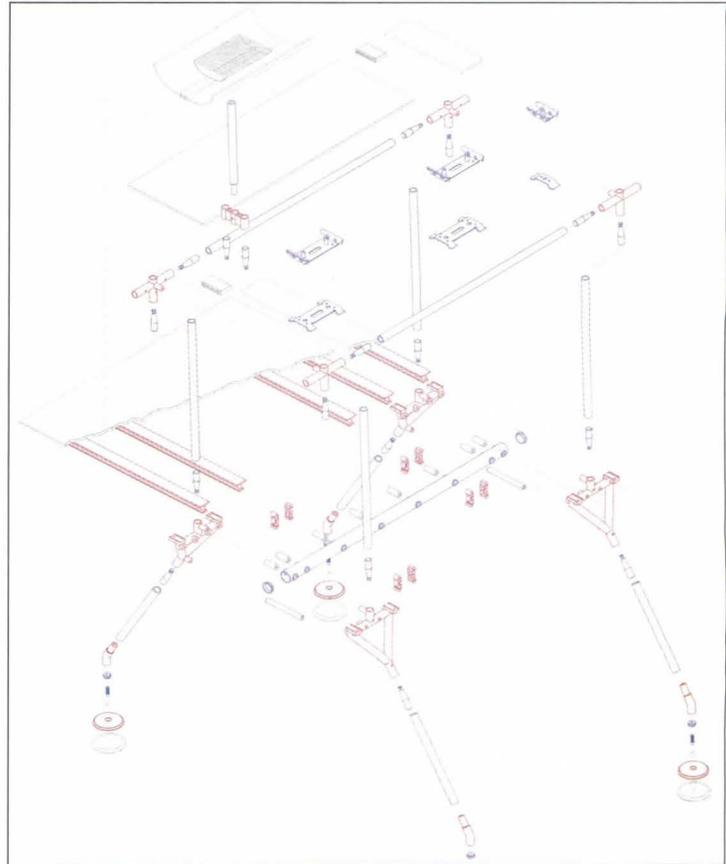
The desk and table tops are changed from a standing to a sitting work height by changing the length of the stem extending from the pod foot, which adjusts to compensate for an unlevel floor. A mechanism fitted into the table base allows the top to be tilted into a vertical plane for use as a drafting or display board (right). Overhead storage for books, telephones, computer terminals and printouts (including WrightLine's hanging binders) is hung from a steel superstructure, which also incorporates a halogen upright (opposite top). The wiring spines, which look like vertebrae, are offered in two widths and are strung vertically or horizontally as separate elements (opposite top). "Nomos is really an inventory of precision-made parts which offer . . . infinite possibilities," maintains Foster. "These parts can create a total environment, a kind of 'building within a building,' that goes far beyond the traditional concept of furniture."

With its variety of components supported by a central beam, *Nomos* continues a tradition of open workstations begun by Herman Miller's *Burdick System* and Kinetic's *Powerbeam*. What is different about the Foster-designed system from its North American precedents is its unusual method of wire management. As an external system of clipped-on spines that does not interrupt the desktop, it is a welcome relief to all the integrated raceways of recent models, adding a sensual touch to the workstation's metal-cast precision. But the application of this feature seems suitable mainly to small firms using minimal levels of automation. It is hard to imagine companies with up-to-the-minute computer technology using *Nomos* in large installations, since more complex applications require spines to be ganged in unwieldy numbers.

While *Nomos* may not find many applications in sophisticated corporate environments, its flexible simplicity is well-suited to smaller companies interested in a combination of private offices and open work areas. Foster plans to develop the system further with freestanding screens and seating. In the meantime, *Nomos*'s lean, steely elegance looks perfectly at home with Charles Eames's *Aluminum Group* chair series (a Foster favorite) and Bill Stumpf's *Equa* chair. *Nomos* is a workstation designed by architects for architects, and it may end up being the only "classic" systems furniture on the market.

Tecno s.p.a., Milan, Italy.
Deborah K. Dietsch
Circle 300 on reader service card

British architect Norman Foster has designed an open office system for the Italian manufacturer Tecno that embodies his credo "furniture, in every respect, is architecture in miniature."



*For more information,
circle item numbers on
Reader Service Card*





Oak flooring
Solid oak *Hartco* parquet for commercial, retail, and residential floors is shown in a full-line catalog. Construction details, installation requirements, cost information, and maintenance suggestions are given; color photographs illustrate typical applications and wood finishes. Tibbals Flooring Co., Oneida, Tenn. *Circle 400 on reader service card*



Nylon carpeting
An introduction to carpet as a commercial floor covering, a 24-page booklet explains the significance of fiber type and pile construction in successful carpet installations. Terms such as fusion-bonding and density are defined, and the components of a typical carpet specification are explained. Allied-Signal Inc., New York City. *Circle 406 on reader service card*



Custom patterned carpet
The design potential of patterned carpets is illustrated in a 24-page color portfolio of custom installations. Applications include restaurants; hotel lobby, corridor, and dining rooms; and office and conference interiors. Durkan Patterned Carpet, Dalton, Ga. *Circle 401 on reader service card*



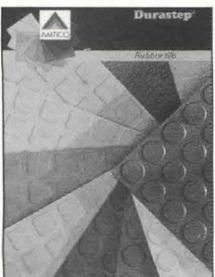
Ceramic tile
All of this German manufacturer's floor and wall tiles are illustrated in a 32-page catalog, including both vitreous and nonvitreous types. A key is provided with each product presentation to suggest its correct application in commercial and residential construction. Villeroy & Boch (USA) Inc., Pine Brook, N. J. *Circle 407 on reader service card*



Italian marble
A 6-page folder highlights marble, granite, and travertine as used in three office interiors in Boston. Text explains the fabricator's ability to provide samples, design and engineering assistance, and shop drawings from a North American office in Rhode Island. Euromarble, USA, Inc., Lincoln, R. I. *Circle 402 on reader service card*



Carpet replacement
"Renovation Project Profile/Step-by-Step with Modular Carpet" explains the cost- and time-saving advantages of free-lay squares over broadloom in office interiors. Photos show each stage of an actual overnight installation; text highlights the wear and appearance values of *Antron XL* nylon. Milliken & Co., LaGrange, Ga. *Circle 408 on reader service card*



Heavy-traffic flooring
Three patterns of *Durastep* rubber tile flooring are described in a color folder with close-up and installation photographs, technical data, and fire ratings. All floors are made of homogeneous rubber; three profile depths provide resiliencies for different project requirements. Amtico, Lawrenceville, N. J. *Circle 403 on reader service card*



Terrazzo tile
High-traffic, flexible flooring tiles composed of genuine marble chips set in a clear, fiberglass-reinforced resin are covered in a 4-page architectural catalog. Color photos show *Fritztile* used in typical school, retail, and health-care applications. Fritz Chemical Co., Dallas. *Circle 409 on reader service card*



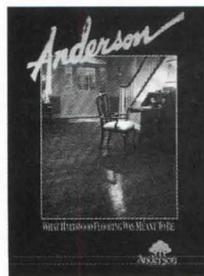
Contract carpet
A 30-page Selection and Specifications Guide is offered to help the design professional choose the *Zeftron* nylon yarn system and construction type most appropriate for various traffic and occupancy requirements. Representative carpets from 47 manufacturers are illustrated and described. BASF Corp., Williamsburg, Va. *Circle 404 on reader service card*



Carpeting specifications
Prepared by a firm that has installed over 100-million sq ft of modular carpet, a Specification Assistance Manual provides generic carpet information for the design professional. Chapters cover *MasterSpec* for modular carpet; terminology; flammability; and performance testing. B. Shehadi & Sons, Whippany, N. J. *Circle 410 on reader service card*



Rubber floor tile
A full-line catalog covers stair treads, raised-design flooring, nosings, and accessories made of resilient rubber, as well as vinyl cove base and trims. Complete technical and performance data are given for all products; special-purpose adhesives and floor-care products are included. Roppe, Fostoria, Ohio. *Circle 405 on reader service card*



Hardwood flooring
The width and color variety of plank and parquet hardwood flooring is illustrated in a 16-page color brochure. The floor protection offered by *Diamond Vinyl* finish is explained; tips on floor care and installation are included. Anderson Hardwood Floors, Clinton, S. C. *Circle 411 on reader service card*
More literature on page 174

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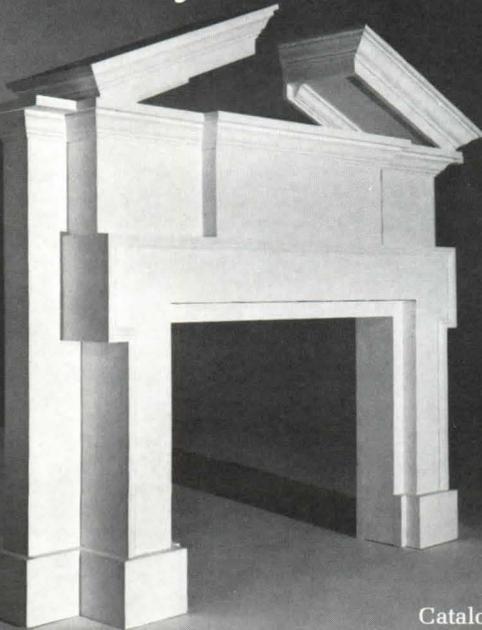
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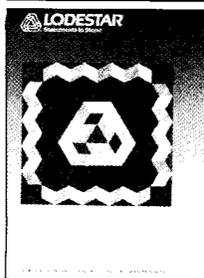
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Stone mosaics

Florentine-style mosaics for interior walls, light-traffic floors, counters, and furniture are displayed in a design portfolio. Marbles, onyx, sòdalite, and other cut stones are hand-polished and set into a permanent epoxy matrix in stock and custom designs ranging from geometries to complex florals. Lodestar, New York City.

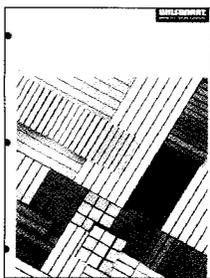
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Contract fabrics

Multiple fabric applications in the office environment are highlighted in a full-line brochure from a major supplier of textiles to the contract office-interiors market. End-users for panels, acoustical walls, wallcoverings, upholstery, and ceilings are identified in a resource list. Guilford Industries, Guilford, Maine.

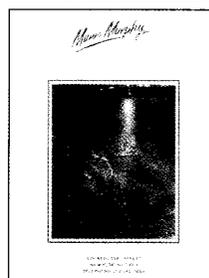
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Decorative tambours

For interior use as wallcovering, wainscoting, column cladding, and on casework, decorative tambours and grooved architectural surfaces are available finished in plastic laminates, metals, solid and veneer woods, and melamine. A 12-page design guide provides product data and on-site photos of various styles. Wilsonart, Temple, Tex.

413 on reader service card



Custom finishes

Decorative finishes on projects ranging from hand-painted furniture to large-scale murals for commercial and residential spaces are pictured in a 4-page folder. Techniques include faux bois, marbling, stencils, gilding, and trompe l'oeil murals, applied *in situ* throughout the U. S. Maer-Murphy Inc., New York City.

Circle 419 on reader service card



Interior partitions

A specification catalog contains detail drawings of all components for this maker's three partition types: movable; totally disassembled, demountable walls; and fixed partitions. All systems are based on painted or anodized aluminum extrusions; acoustical and hazard classifications are listed. Wilson Partitions, Los Angeles.

Circle 414 on reader service card



Seamless wallcovering

A number of textiles in plain and jacquard weaves are offered in room-high (106-in.) bolts, hung from end to end around the room rather than floor to ceiling, producing a wallcovering with no seams, shading, or pattern breaks. A mailer introduces the *Seamless Textile* line, said to meet the most stringent fire codes. MDC, Chicago.

Circle 420 on reader service card



Architectural settings

An international roster of architects, represented by the *Swid Powell* collection, has designed over 100 products for the table, the sideboard, and the desk. A color foldout brochure presents porcelain, silver, and bronze objects, along with capsule biographies of the designers. Swid Powell, New York City.

Circle 415 on reader service card



Suspended ceiling grid

A 16-page brochure highlights components of each of 10 different *Designer Ceiling Systems*; application photos illustrate each design within a contemporary setting. Product and load-test data, face dimensions, and profiles are compared for each grid. Chicago Metallic Corp., Chicago.

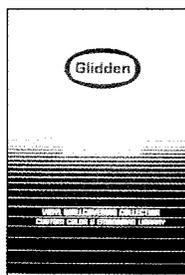
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Mirrored walls

Made with specially processed glass in a range of colors, *Prisma* tambour wallcovering has reflective tiles mounted on a flexible cloth backing, and has a Class A rating. *Prisma* is described in a color folder as an easy-to-install, space-enlarging treatment, which can be repaired on-site if damaged. Prisma, Louisville, Ky.

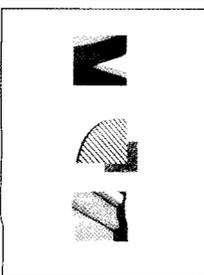
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Embossed wallcoverings

Described as a fingertip library, a sample folder contains representative swatches of all colors and textures of this maker's embossed vinyl wallcovering. Backings include lightweight sheeting, osnaburg fabrics, and nonwoven textiles; patterns are offered in Type I and II lines. The Glidden Co., Cleveland.

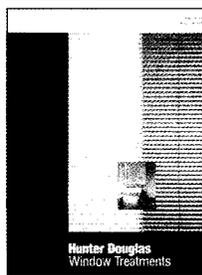
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Laminate products

A 30-page booklet illustrates the design potential of a full line of laminate products, including *Color Grid* and *Color Core* solids; stone, wood, and leather textures; and access flooring, tambour, and fire-rated laminate products. Design and fabrication services for architects are explained. Formica Corp., Wayne, N. J.

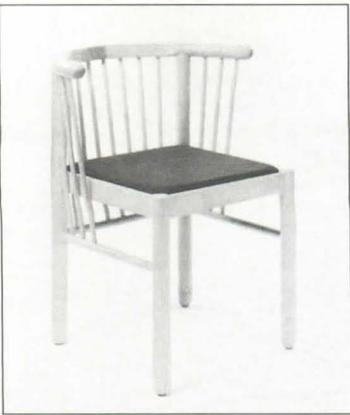
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Window treatments

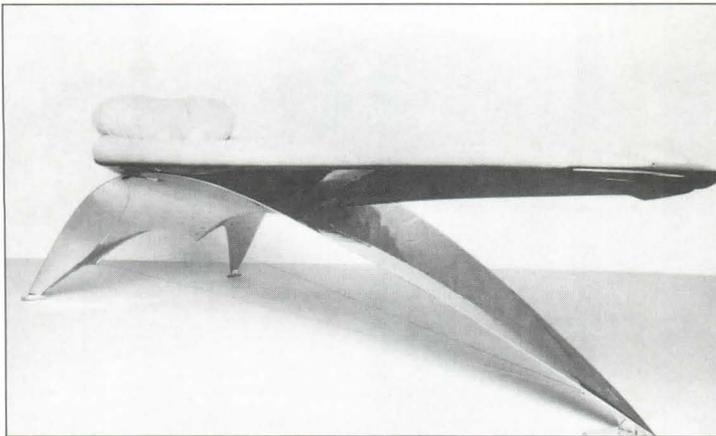
An architectural catalog supplies product data, installation details, and application photos for commercial window treatments. Included are blinds for energy management in large and sloped glazing, unusual window shapes, horizontal and vertical blinds, and *Duette* shades. Hunter Douglas, Inc., Upper Saddle River, N. J.

Circle 423 on reader service card



Wood chair

The *Lara* chair is made of solid beech, maple, or ash wood, with double dowel construction and finger-jointed corner blocks under the plywood-base seat. Designed by Jan Armgardt for contract applications in executive offices, dining rooms, and restaurants, this version of the Captain's chair is offered in side and armchair models, in a natural or matte black finish. Monel Contract Furniture Inc., Oakland Gardens, N. Y.
 Circle 301 on reader service card



Signed chaise

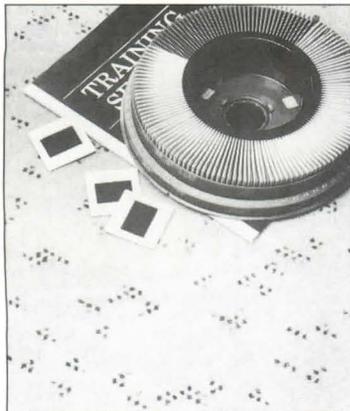
Designed, numbered, and signed by Santiago Calatrava, his *Espada* chaise for *deSede* rests on a flowing curve of chromed steel. The

platform and headrest are a padded wooden shell, upholstered in two tones of leather. Stendig International, New York City.
 Circle 304 on reader service card



Sideboard

Designed by Ron Carter for *Miles/Carter*, the *Brassington* sideboard uses solid timber, cut in angular shapes, to display the dramatic grain of the English oak. The cabinet and drawer fronts have a precise lip detail; storage space may be fitted out to order. Either blond or dark finish may be specified, as well as other wood species. Interna Designs, Ltd., Chicago.
 Circle 305 on reader service card
 Continued on page 179



Cut-pile carpet

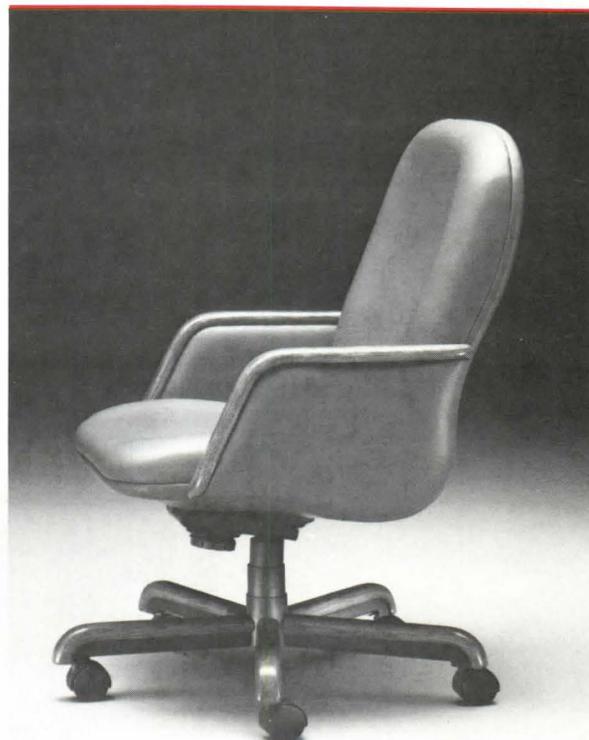
Particularly suitable for hospitality and office applications, *Medora* is constructed of *Anso X* nylon for heavy-traffic areas, with an open ground pattern with a design of multicolor flecks that coordinate with the manufacturer's solid-color carpets. *Medora* comes in 17 different colorways. J. P. Stevens & Co., Inc., Aberdeen, N. C.
 Circle 302 on reader service card



Vinyl wallcovering

An addition to the *Sun-Tex Acclaim* collection of fabric-backed vinyls, *Arrowhead* uses offset rows of pattern to create a dimensional effect. The washable wallcovering comes in five colors, with coordinating textures and borders. Sunwall of America, Norcross, Ga.
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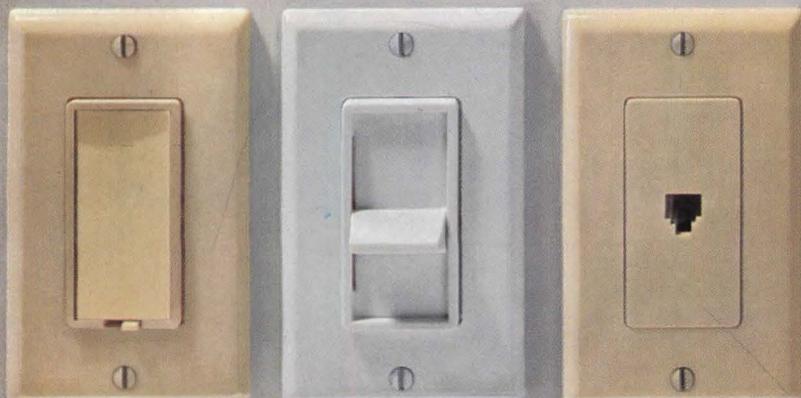
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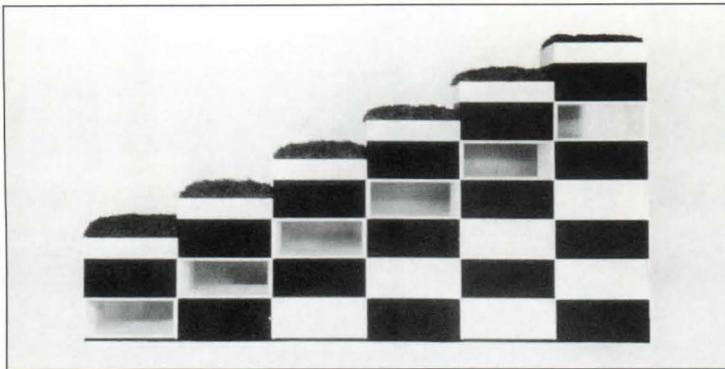
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Contract chair

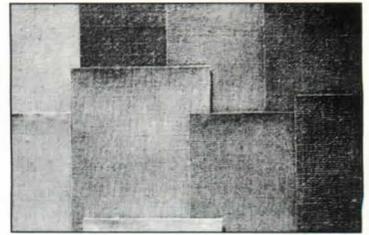
Aptly named, the *Stiletto* chair is both very modern and reminiscent of Eliel Saarinen and Charles Rennie Macintosh. It has slender, tapered legs meeting arms and back at right angles; the cut-out pattern of the back reflects the taper of the legs. The designers, Neil Komai and Joseph Ricchio, describe the chair as being appealing and cost-effective. Stendig International, New York City.
 Circle 306 on reader service card



File cubes

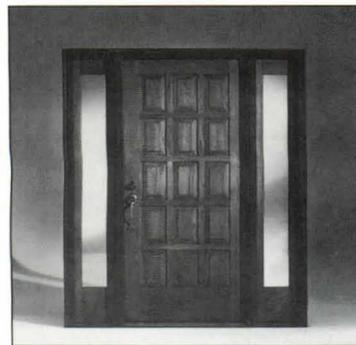
An interlocked steel file, the *Stackable Storage System* can be configured as a functional space divider, with vertical cube units set one on top of the other. Internal lateral file and storage components have reversible drawers for access

from either side; pass-through units allow visual contact between spaces and provide additional work or display space. All exterior surfaces are finished in any of 37 standard matte enamel colors. Meridian Inc., Spring Lake, Mich.
 Circle 309 on reader service card



Fabric wallcovering

Offered in a yarn selection that coordinates with fabrics used on acoustical panels and system furniture, *Kyoto/Tussah Silk* contract wallcovering from *Vicrtex* is paper-backed to prevent distortion of the fabric face during installation. The 15 standard colorways are neutrals and pastels; all products are Class A L.E. Carpenter & Co., Wharton, N.J.
 Circle 310 on reader service card



Wood entrance

A new product line for *Pella*, residential entrances are constructed of solid wood and oak veneers, using a *Warpguard* laminated, cross-grain assembly process. The solid wood core of each panel is sandwiched between sheets of aluminum acting as a vapor barrier; all exterior wood surfaces are covered with a special pre-sealer that screens out UV rays and prevents the wood from graying. One of seven styles offered, the *Sherwood* is a 15-panel door, available in either single- or double-door configurations, with or without sidelights. Pella Rolscreen Co., Pella, Iowa.
 Circle 307 on reader service card



Geometric fabric

From the *Masterworks 20th Century* collection of contract textiles inspired by the strong prints of the Vienna Secession, *Cabaret* comes in contrasting values or tone-on-tone shades. The pattern has a 13-in. repeat. Jack Lenor Larsen, New York City.
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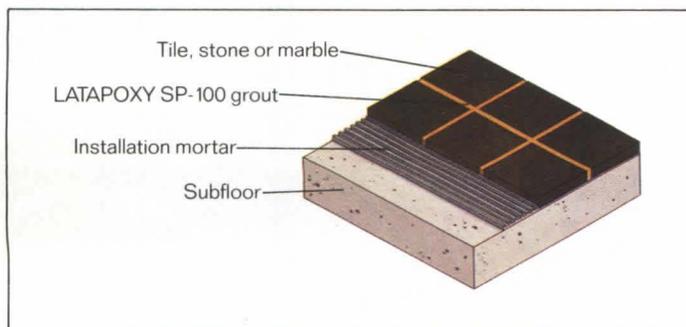
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