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EVIEW

DIALOGUES WITH:

RICHARD STEIN

ERICH SCHNEIDER-WESSLING

ANTON ALBERTS

PETER CALTHORPE

ON-KWOK LAI

Green Design Praxis

SUSAN UBBELOHDE

The Myth of the Vernacular

ANDROPOGON

Restoring Nature

SUSANA TORRE

on Women in Design

DIANE GHIRARDO

The Complete Los Angeles

RICHARD CLEARY

on New Classicism

SYLVIA LAVIN

on Imagining Ancient Egypt

Eight Dollars

Architecture

Urbanism

Landscape

Design



ECO-CHIC THE UNFASHIONABILITY OF ECOLOGICAL DESIGN

Issue 20 - Spring 1991



11

6

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"I Lost My Valance", "And Then I Lost My Shirt"

Chicago... "My client fell in love with a drapery treatment in Casa Vogue", said designer Molly Offerwall, "and asked me

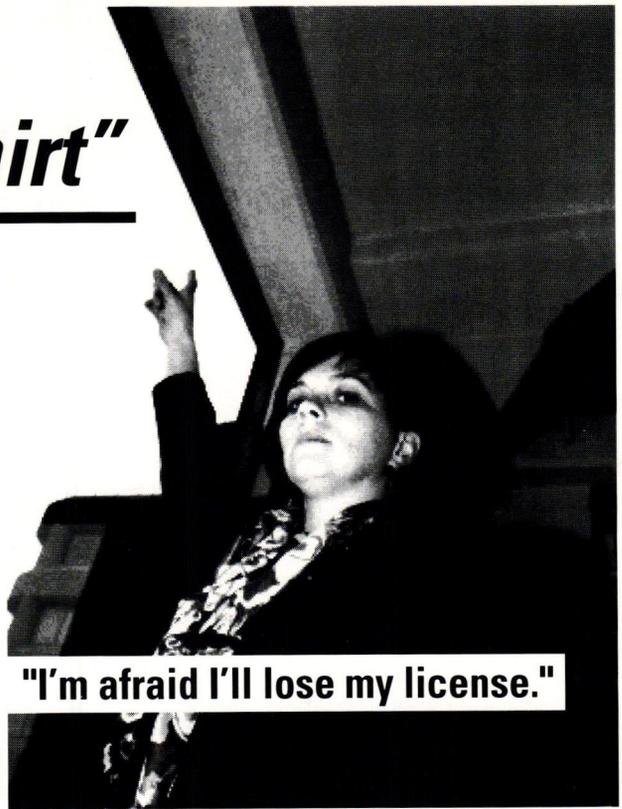


to finish her living room along the same lines. After spending one hundred and twenty billable

hours trying to identify the products, I substituted furnishings from our local showrooms. My client had a screaming snit fit and

refused to pay. They asked why I didn't call LIMN for help researching the products and questioned my credentials. From now on I'm faxing LIMN at (415) 543-5971 for help with any unidentified

furniture products, and I'll let them take care of all the ordering as well."



"I'm afraid I'll lose my license."

Architect Eats It In Boston !



"My Interior Was Stolen By Aliens"

Santa Fe... Architect Dan Freehand learned the hard way that sophisticated building design can't compete with an interior designer on the rampage. After completing his masterwork, a residence that absorbed seven years of continuous labor, Freehand was approached by several prestigious architecture magazines for a story. But when he returned to the site with a photographer, an unknown decorator had retrofitted the sleek contemporary abode with a potpourri of pink lace, puce carpet, and reproductions of the furniture at Hearst Castle. "My reputation is down the drain", said the despairing architect. "I'll never forgive myself for not calling LIMN Company as a resource and supplier of furnishings."

Boston... When architect Bobby Muncher landed the remodel for Computer Connption, he thought his firm had finally arrived. One hundred and forty

three ergonomically perfect but extremely ugly chairs later, Muncher (brother of film director Michael Lucas, best known for "Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls") asserts that he'll have to start munching upholstery in order to survive. "I'll had no idea computer people could be so picky," says Muncher.

"All I have left in the world are these chairs—I hope they're nutritious."

Muncher wishes he'd called LIMN, the contemporary furniture resource in San Francisco, for suggestions.



LIMN... We can help. The best contemporary design from 500 manufacturers around the world. Scores of custom furniture pieces successfully completed as well. We delight in finding solutions for our clients, so your clients will be delighted with you. **Serious furniture for serious people.**

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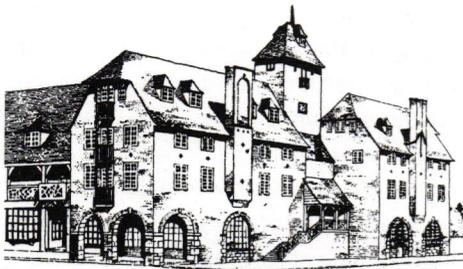
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In this issue of Design Book Review . . .

19

Richard Ingersoll

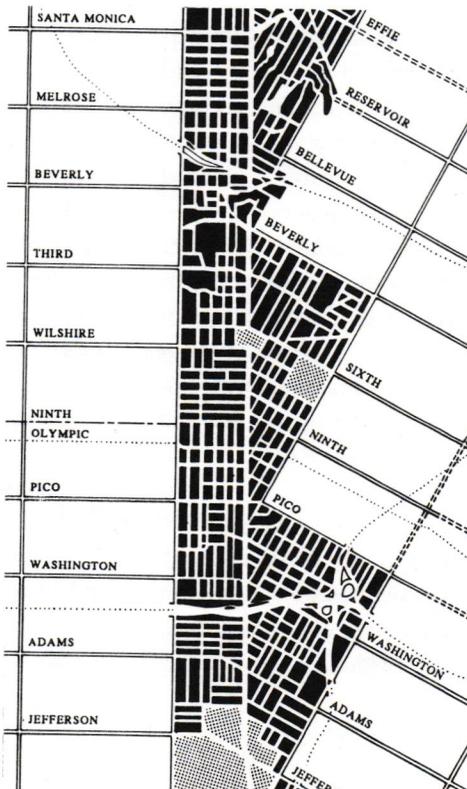
Unpacking the Green Man's Burden



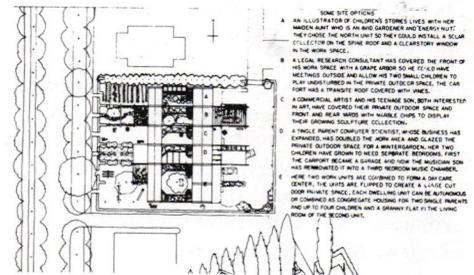
55

Michael Saler

The Two Paths from John Ruskin



A Feminist Approach to Architecture



74

Susana Torre

Women in Design

86

Diane Ghirardo

The Geography of Postmodern Los Angeles

DESIGN BOOK REVIEW 20

Spring 1991

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Eco-Chic: The Unfashionability of Ecological Design

If only Andy Warhol had lived longer he might have made a silkscreen print of the famous satellite view of the earth that has come to symbolize ecology consciousness. "Famous for fifteen minutes" would have been a fitting epithet for last year's revival of Earth Day. Ecology, as it has entered the information chain of mass media, rather than becoming the central issue to which everything else is connected, is treated just as superficially as any other novelty that helps to sell advertising.

A year after Earth Day, the overriding importance of the economic cataclysm fomented by junk bonds and savings and loans extortions, combined with the new militarism spawned by the Gulf War, have crowded out environmental issues as a high priority. Imperatives for economic growth and military "defense" now attract more advertisements than strategies for sustainable environments. The popularity of the Gulf War has in fact been used to usher in some astonishing legislation that will cause great setbacks for the environment, such as legislation favoring new highway construction over public transportation and the National Energy Security Act, which would authorize more offshore drilling and the exploitation of wildlife reserves. To affect government policy, the earth will need solidarity for more than a day or a week—Earth Decade would perhaps be better timing. Considering the short-term commitments of most media to the matter of ecology and especially to ecology as it relates to design, it is with a certain sarcastic pessimism, yet inspired by a critical and transformational attitude, that DBR addresses it as "Eco-Chic."

Ecology was previously "fashionable" in the late 1960s and early 1970s, although the formal results, such as the wood-butcher houses or the polyhedron domes with their intended lack of aesthetics, were never

mistaken for chic. The energy crisis of 1973–74 was quite effective in frightening those who control the codes to require energy conservation measures, leading to an eventual savings of 35 percent in successive years. But despite President Carter's well-publicized gesture of installing solar collectors on the White House and the appearance of many design competitions for energy efficiency, ecology never became a lasting ethic among designers. In the deregulated 1980s, when the price of fossil fuels was lowered, standards were relaxed, federal funding for alternative energy research was severely cut (for example, funding for photovoltaics was cut 75 percent), and the Reagan administration unceremoniously removed the token solar collectors from the White House.

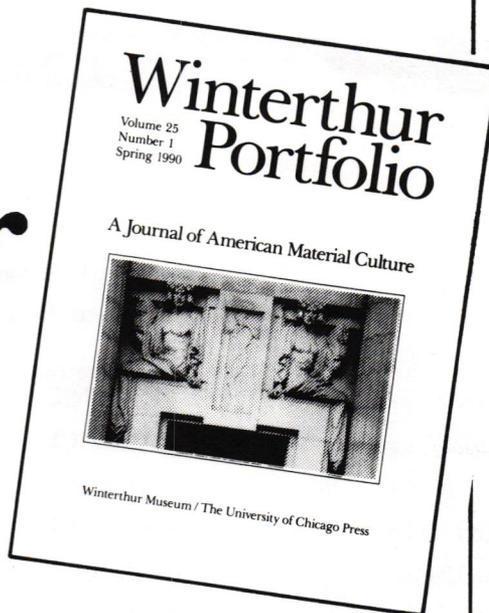
Architecture and urbanism contribute immensely to the pollution of the environment. In the interviews and articles that follow, positions about buildings and urban life are sketched out in an attempt to locate the responsibility of designers and planners within the mounting environmental crisis. Ecology in design never really became fashionable, and maybe it is best that it resists the whole notion of fashion, as fashions are doomed to rapid change. If sustainability were to become chic, it might discourage the creation of an ecological design ethic. On the other hand, to assume that ecological design must be unaesthetic, or that works with ecological priorities necessarily lead to good design, or that works conceived within the fashion system should not be considered, is counterproductive. Ecology, during the Earth Decade, should be seriously defended as the central, but not the sole, criterion in the design of products, buildings, landscapes, and cities.

Richard Ingersoll

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