

# House Beautiful

FINDING  
**SERENITY**

**4 GREAT  
HOUSES  
COAST  
TO COAST**

STORYBOOK  
**FABRICS**

**TOILES OLD  
AND NEW**



JULY 1999 \$3.00

07



0 74851 08458 8

# MOMA COMES HOME



Reclaiming its historic role as champion of the modern house, New York's Museum of Modern Art surveys startling changes in recent design

BY MARTIN FILLER



One of the most amazing things about "The Un-Private House," an exhibition on view at New York's Museum of Modern Art from July 1 through October 5, is that this will be the first show there devoted wholly to domestic architecture in more than thirty years. From the 1930s through the 1960s, MoMA mounted a number of hugely influential exhibitions on the modern house and its furnishings, acting as primer for a public eager to embrace in its daily life what it saw on display at this pioneering institution. Most memorable of all were the full-scale houses temporarily erected in the museum's sculpture garden, making it easy even for those who could not read a floor plan or imagine a photograph in three dimensions to understand the exciting but unfamiliar modern movement in architecture.

Once the case for modernism had been successfully made and that style was widely accepted, such proselytizing no longer seemed necessary. >

Clockwise from top left: Two views of Shigeru Ban's Curtain Wall House, Tokyo; two views of Bordeaux House by OMA; Steven Holl's Y house, New York; Joel Sanders's House for a Bachelor, Minneapolis; Michael Maltzan's Hergott Shepard house, Beverly Hills; Herzog & de Meuron's Kramlich house, Oakville, California; Scogin Elam and Bray's 64 Wakefield, Atlanta; interior and exterior of Van Berkel & Bos's Möbius House, Het Gooi, the Netherlands; Holl's Y House. Center: Lupo/Rowen's Lipschutz/Jones apartment, New York.

HERZOG & DE MEURON ARCHITECTS; © STEVEN HOLL ARCHITECTS; © BY ARCH PHOTOS, INC.; EDUARD HUBER; © MICHAEL MALTZAN ARCHITECTURE; © JOEL SANDERS ARCHITECT; © TIMOTHY HUNLEY; © HERZOG & DE MEURON; © MICHAEL MALTZAN ARCHITECTURE



The MoMA exhibition includes Gisue and Mojgan Hariri's digital design (left), commissioned by House Beautiful for the "Houses for the Next Millennium" series and published in the October 1998 issue.

inside on display, even more so than traditional houses in Holland, where no one closes their curtains. In a world where people walk down the street with cell phones while they talk about their love lives, privacy does not seem to be so compelling, especially for this younger, media-hooked generation."

However, the show's title is contradicted by another emerging trend. Particularly revealing is 64 Wakefield of 1997 in Atlanta, built for themselves by husband-and-wife architects Mack Scogin and Merrill

Elam. As Riley points out, this Deconstructivist design "has had several incarnations: he renovated it before they married and afterward his son moved in. They actually built him his own house—a freestanding structure behind the main building with a bedroom and sitting room. Experience will tell you that with children of a certain age, having open family areas and very segregated private areas is the way to do it. Several of the other houses in the show also make a separation between parents and children. In Rem Koolhaas's Bordeaux House of 1998 in France, which is very open and uncellularized in its public areas, the kids go up one stairway to their bedrooms and the parents use another, with no interconnection on that floor between them." Tellingly, Koolhaas has lived for a number of years in a city other than that of his wife and children.

Among the other schemes in the exhibition, some of the most striking departures from earlier conventions are more purely sociological. For example, the Hergott Shepard house of 1999 in Beverly Hills was designed by Michael Maltzan for two gay men who could find nothing on the real-estate market that approached the way they wanted their house to function. In the house they built there is only one bedroom, and the largest room is a gym. Separate offices are positioned at opposite ends of the house for both men, one of whom works at home all day, the other only occasionally. There is no traditional living room, but rather a two-part area that's half art gallery and half public space. Because the owners seldom dine at home the kitchen is tiny, but to accommodate their frequent charity fundraising events, the kitchen backs onto a large garage where caterers can work. Says Riley, "This is not what people meant by a 'private' house."

Major demographic shifts have made the housing market vastly different than it was in the family-centered postwar period. As Riley found, "Six out of ten women today are part of the workforce. Half the households in America today are couples with no children at home, and that's not just at the upper end of the age spectrum. And 25 percent of all households in this country have a single dweller, as opposed to eight percent just after World War II, or virtually zero under the Puritans, who actually forbade solitary living." (Continued on page 114)

Riley explains the startling changes in living habits he discovered while considering his choices for the exhibition: "I started to realize that the most interesting-looking houses were those that embodied the most drastic social changes," he says. "Work is back in the house as it hasn't been for hundreds of years, since those who could afford to separated living and labor. For example, Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos's Möbius House of 1998 in Het Gooi, the Netherlands, has a fascinating Möbius-strip shape that reflects the fact that the owners live and work at home and go back and forth between the two. In the Lipschutz/Jones apartment of 1988 in New York by Frank Lupo and Daniel Rowen, the central space incorporates an electronic stock-trading room that can be seen from almost everywhere, with additional screens—next to the bed, in the bath—so that even when they wake up they can check on trading. To some people that might sound like a nightmare, but the owners know how to turn it off."

The somewhat puzzling title Riley chose for the exhibition reflects one of his major findings. "There's a distinctly different sense of privacy today," he says, "signaled by the comeback of the Miesian glass house. The Curtain Wall House of 1995 in Tokyo by Shigeru Ban has glass walls that slide back—the owners are living practically on the street—with three-story Christoesque curtains that can be pulled all around the outside of the building. Two rowhouses in Amsterdam by Winy Maas are so transparent that they put the

had come with a car and adequate petrol, we would go on a jaunt to the beach at Parthmadog or Portmeirion, but most often, on sunny afternoons, my mother and her friends sat outside in deck chairs on the grass slope beside the house, sunbathing in halter tops, skirts hiked up, murmuring in the peculiar code of adulthood. I would play nearby, using fallen roof slates to build barns and sheds and paddocks for the brightly painted wooden animals my father had sent me from India. Tigers and camels and elephants stood placidly in their stalls while the cows and sheep were scattered over the grass in imitation of the cows and sheep around us.

Some guests were constant and familiar, others occasional, like the tall American lieutenant, who came only once but nearly set all the gorse bushes by the house on fire with a careless cigarette. My mother sat in the deck chair, helpless with laughter as he and I ran back and forth with buckets to the waterfall. We put the fire out but I never forgot the orange flames among the yellow flowers.

There were people staying the day the war in Europe ended, a Hungarian friend of my mother's named Lys and her daughter, Caroline. The visit was practical since both Caroline and I had whooping cough and could keep each other company. Evans-the-Post came racing red-faced across the moor to tell us.

"The war is over!" he shouted.

Caroline and I were given hankies with Union Jacks printed on them. I wanted the white one but had to give it to

her and take the yellow because she was the guest. I had a fit of coughing.

We left Wales early that year, as the bracken was just turning its red-fox color. When Gillian, Jennifer, and Rosemary came bobbing across the moor to fetch us, there was already light in the eastern sky. I fell in a cow pat that time, just across the Roman road. I was taken back to the cottage, cleaned off, re-clothed and scolded, and we set out once more. My Wellingtons squeaked on the wet grass and mist lay pure white in every hollow. Sheep scattered as we passed them, disappearing in the mist. This time my mother took my hand while Rosemary chattered behind us.

"Do shut up, Rosemary," Gillian said amiably. And, in Rosemary's moments of silence, I could hear the lowing of the bullocks, the bleating of the sheep. Slowly we drew near the village, the last field, the stone wall, and Jones-the-Taxi waiting.

I didn't know that morning that a part of my childhood had ended with the war. I didn't know what was in the wind—that my mother would divorce my father and marry the tall American, or that I would grow up in another country across three thousand miles of ocean. But this is childhood's gift: to be unaware of the future, as I was unaware the last morning in Wales. ■

*Perdita Buchan has published short stories in The New Yorker and other national magazines, as well as a novel, Called Away (Atlantic Monthly Press). She lives in the Boston area.*

## Gallery Talk

Continued from page 42

Although Riley doesn't mention it, "The Un-Private House" is unusual among recent architecture exhibitions at his institution. In addition to repeat appearances by such Riley favorites as Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, Steven Holl, Rem Koolhaas, and Bernard Tschumi (semifinalists and finalists in the almost all-male 1997 MoMA expansion competition), this show is noteworthy for its comparatively high representation of women architects. Among those included are Liz Diller, Winka Dubbledam, Merrill Elam, Danelle Guthrie, Victoria Meyers, and Kazuyo Sejima. Of particular interest to readers of *House Beautiful* will be sister-architects Gisue and Mojgan Hariri's Digital House, commissioned for the magazine's three-part "Houses for the Next Millennium" series and published in 1998.

Although the exhibition does not include any full-scale mock-ups of interiors, let alone a freestanding house in the old MoMA tradition, Riley (who is also a practicing architect) carefully designed the installation to seem, as he puts it, more like "a loft with a lot of strangers standing around in it" than a white-walled museum gallery. Instead of being mounted on pedestal vitrines, architectural models will be placed atop very simple wooden tables, chairs, and beds designed by David Schaefer of Furniture Co and casually

positioned throughout the spaces to imply a domestic setting.

Using new digital techniques, photographic images of the houses will be printed directly onto wallpaper, avoiding the jumble of picture frames typical of conventional exhibitions. And two 47-inch plasma monitors will display three-dimensional renderings of the Hariris' Digital House and Van Berkel and Bos's Möbius House, giving the public a vivid sense of the importance of computer-generated design.

How much will all the significant new directions traced in "The Un-Private House" affect housing in the United States, the vast majority of which is still created by contractors, not high-style architects? Anyone who has built or bought a house in this country is well aware of the looming specter of resale, which, conventional wisdom tells us, favors traditional over modern architecture. "I make a prediction at the end of the show," says Riley. "The housing industry is going to deal with all these changes, just as they have begun to deal with the aging of the population. They're not in the ideology business, they're in the money making business. And as for the idea that resale value is what governs all your decisions, I find it impossible to believe that in a free-market economy the very different ways in which more people are now living are not going to be addressed." ■