

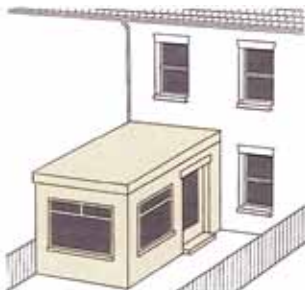
A living-room extension can provide either a separate extra room or enable an existing room to be enlarged. Much will depend on whether there are other windows in the room covered by the extension. If there are not, and new windows cannot be added, it will probably be necessary to remove most of the wall between the old and new rooms for light and ventilation.

Either way, living-room extensions are relatively straightforward as they are usually on the ground floor and no new drains or plumbing are involved. A prefabricated extension may provide a simple answer – either a sun-room with a glazed roof and walls or a fully insulated structure for using throughout the year.

The schemes shown may not in all cases comply with the building regulations, but these may be relaxed in some circumstances.



**HALF-WIDTH SUN-ROOM** Ready-made extensions can be bought to fit almost any available space, with a choice of glazed or solid panels. A wall on the boundary, as here, would have to be fire-resisting and clad with non-combustible material.



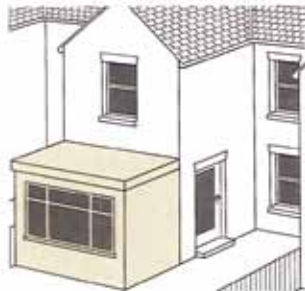
**INSULATED HALF-WIDTH EXTENSION** Whether brick-built or made with insulated panels, this room could be used for a variety of purposes throughout the year – if necessary doubling-up as a spare bedroom. A rooflight would brighten the inner room.



**FULL-WIDTH EXTENSION** If built on to a house without side windows, large openings would be needed in the original back wall to provide light and air in existing rooms. Alternatively, a sun-room with a glazed roof could be added.



**EXTENSION BETWEEN WINGS** Space can be gained at minimum cost by adding an external wall and a roof. A rooflight is almost essential to avoid making the inner room too gloomy. If one wing belongs to a neighbour, he must give permission.



**END EXTENSION TO A WING** This could provide a separate room, so long as the existing room in the wing has ample side windows. Otherwise, it could enlarge an existing room, if given a large end window and perhaps a rooflight as well.

# Disko

## 21

### Charles Holland

# A Secret History Of Architecture

master of architecture

**Charles Holland**

**A Secret History of Architecture**

## **Impressum**

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akademie c/o Architektur und Stadtforschung, AdBK Nürnberg

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*Disko 20-25* originate from two symposia with the title **Architecture without Architecture**, organized by the Department of Architecture and Urban Research in 2008/09 at the Academy of Fine Arts (AdBK) in Nuremberg. The initial hypothesis of the symposia is articulated in two problems: a) Architecture after the „collapse of Modernism“ disposed not only of its social project, but was also effectively discredited as the discipline that could represent any social interest. b) Contemporary architecture is prisoner of its own power of representation in the media (and exploited in the building economy), with the result that it withdrew from the real potential for a built environment. *Architecture without Architecture* intends to set a coordinate zero to the entire discourse. The booklets are a contribution to an alternative writing of history, and they serve as a starting point for a renewed architectural practice. – Silvan Linden





## Do It Yourself: A Secret History of Architecture

*It is only the superficial things that last.*

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Second-hand bookshops hold secrets, sometimes guilty ones. I spend a lot of time in them, looking for skeletons in architect-designed closets. From this activity a kind of junkshop history of architecture emerges, a counter-story of lame-duck movements and flash-in-the-pan designers, briefly fashionable techniques and long-forgotten obsessions. The most revealing books to come across though are those at the fringes of architecture and design even when they were written. TV design guides, interior decorating handbooks and Do It Yourself manuals reveal the shifts in popular taste and domestic arrangement that have taken place in our houses over the decades. Away from the exciting formal ruptures and experiments of 'proper' architectural history, this is where we leave a record of the spaces that we live in.

There is a secret history of architecture revealed in these books. The following images and texts record moments within it. This takes the form of a more or less chronological trip through a series of home décor books from the early 1970's to the early 1990's. Such a story raises a number of provocative questions, ones which architects generally like to suppress: Who is the author of a building? What is the relationship between architecture and fashion? How much should buildings be preserved according to the designer's original intentions or be modified to suit current uses?





### **Seduction Den**

**(The Bed and Bath Book, edited by Terence Conran, 1978)**

*The dedicated playboy or girl may decide to invest in audio-visual equipment. In this highly erotic room, its bed surrounded by a velvet cushioned lip, sexy music and blue movies help to create a den for unbridled lust.*

Much of the text of Terence Conran's *Bed and Bath Book* is written through a bizarre haze of soft-core eroticism. The priapic tone suggests that the author might be overcompensating for a perceived lack of manliness in writing about bathroom fittings to start with. Semi-naked women crop up everywhere: taking a shower, lying in a wicker armchair in sun dappled soft focus, lolling around in bed enjoying a champagne breakfast. There are chapters on how to make something called a Seduction Den, and special features on waterbeds and such continental exotica as bidets and musk. The book is dedicated by Conran to "co-habitants of my bed and bath, past and present".

## **Radical and Conservative Homes**

*The work of art is revolutionary, the house is conservative.*

Adolf Loos, Architektur, 1910.

The history of architecture is a story of heroic individuals and dramatic paradigm shifts. Canonic buildings appear in it as discrete milestones along a linear progression, always pushing forward to an imagined future. But the formal and technological developments reported by architectural history do not necessarily relate to changes in the way that we live. Adolf Loos' Villa Müller, for example, looms large in the story of modern architecture but its notoriety is, arguably, out of proportion to its impact on housing design in general.

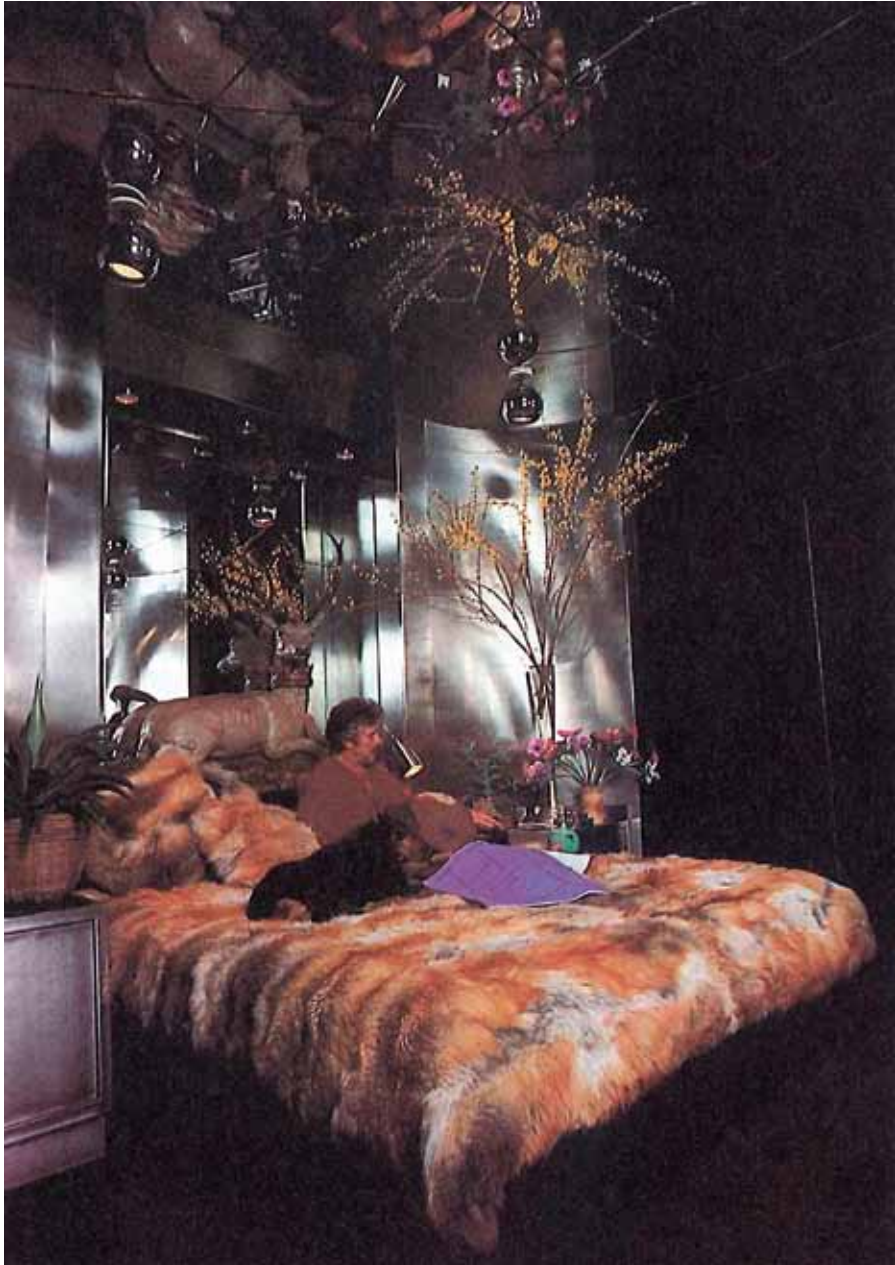
As Loos himself observed writing at the start of the twentieth century, the house is a paradoxical subject for the avant-garde. Loos maintained that we look to our houses for stability and comfort, rather than challenges to the way we live. In fact, for Loos the violent ruptures and existential anxiety created by the modern condition made the reassuring role of the house particularly critical.

The revolution promised by the avant-garde runs in parallel but at an entirely different speed to the slow evolution of housing design. The history of the home is mostly one of incremental shifts and minor alterations that only add up to significant changes in how we live over time. It often involves anonymous amateurs tinkering at the edges of architecture, moving it mostly neither backwards, nor forwards, but sideways. It lies at the intersection of architecture with fashion, technology and shifting social mores.

The history of our homes is then only partially a history of architecture, at least as architects see it. The modifications and adaptations of pre-existing typologies often tell us more about the way our lives have changed than dramatic shifts in architectural style. Changes in social organization, in family forms and in evolving class and taste cultures are played out in the decorative and spatial history of the home, not as written by architects but inscribed within the artifacts with which we surround ourselves.

This is not the place to look for radical theory, and especially not radical politics. DIY is often denigrated because it is the manifestation of an essentially conservative, home-owning class. Whilst the ad-hoc, self-build activities of the counter culture and marginal social groups may occasionally interest architects, the activities of DIY home improvers are regarded as irredeemably petit-bourgeois.

Whilst the relationship of home improvement to conservative politics is obviously real – particularly in the UK and Margaret Thatcher's 'Right to buy' policies of the 1980's – the history of DIY might still have useful lessons for architects, not least in the way that it undermines many of the profession's most sacred cows.



**David Barrett's Bed**  
**(The Bed and Bath Book, edited by Terence Conran, 1978)**

*Fur on the floor is not practical, but a thick absorbent carpet is an adequate substitute.*

Celebrated designers of the day make cameo appearances in *The Bed and Bath Book*, often reflecting with disturbing honesty on their own sexual history. In this picture David Barrett is pictured lying on his large, fur covered bed accompanied by an obedient hound. The fur cover is like something from an alpine hut but the bed appears to be in a large, grandly proportioned space, a city-centre apartment in a glamorous European City perhaps. A mirrored ceiling doubles the proportions of the room while polished metal alcoves further dissolve its boundaries. Behind the man is a carving of another large dog, crouching as if about to pounce on its prey. A vase of flowers offers a feminine touch.



## Period Dramas

John Schlesinger's adaptation of Thomas Hardy's *Far From The Madding Crowd*, filmed in 1967, is a period drama in more than one sense. The hair styles and make-up of its stars Julie Christie and Terence Stamp are as redolent of the era in which the film was made as the one in which it is ostensibly set. It is a film about the 1870's which is, unintentionally perhaps, also one about the 1960's.

Attitudes to historic architecture are in a way analogous to the period drama. Buildings, like canonical texts, can be read in different ways. How we treat them reflects our attitude to history. Levels of reverence vary from era to era and the things that are considered important and valuable change too.

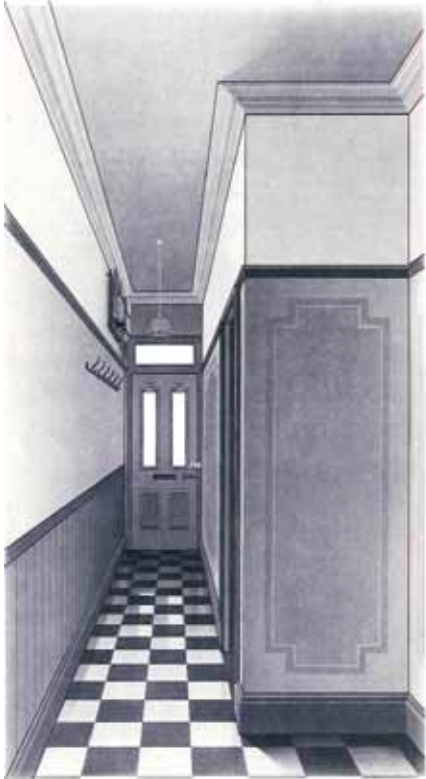
The UK conservation body English Heritage recently produced a guide on how to sympathetically restore Victorian or Edwardian houses. The guide took the form of an interactive website that highlighted inappropriate modifications such as pebble-dashed facades, uPVC windows and garishly painted front doors. Another section showed how to get it right by using heritage paint colours and conservation-approved details. One can see a real life version of this guide following the gentrification of areas of what were once working class London. The prosperity of areas is subtly revealed through the changing front door colours and the removal of unsightly porches and non-original windows.

Our supposed sensitivity to historic architecture today will no doubt be revealed in time as another aberration, another version of history. If you look at interior design and DIY books from the late 1960's and 70's though, one of the things that is immediately striking is the lack of interest in preserving the original features and historic detail of such houses. The 1974 edition of the Reader's Digest DIY Manual, for example, suggests ways to place MDF panels over old mouldings, rip out Victorian fire places and paint garishly over exterior brickwork (usually in dark brown and/or orange). Apart from a certain invigorating lack of taste, the manual is significant because it illustrates the way that attitudes to historic architecture have changed over the years.

It offers a very different attitude to living in traditional housing than English Heritage's interactive gentrification tool. Un-hung up on notions of authenticity or good taste, nothing could have been further from the mind of the mid-70's home improver than unearthing and fetishising period features. Lowered ceilings, conversation pits, tongue and groove cladding and hammocks (for some reason) predominate in an attempt to turn London's ubiquitous Victorian housing stock into a mix of Scandinavian modernism and American suburbia.

### HALL BEFORE CONVERSION

This badly proportioned hallway, 25 ft long, 10 ft high and only just over 3 ft wide, was typical of many turn-of-the-century semi-detached and terrace houses. It not only created the sensation of a cramped and uncomfortable interior but also wasted heat at ceiling level. The meters, fixed to the wall at high level just inside the front door, were unsightly and difficult to conceal.

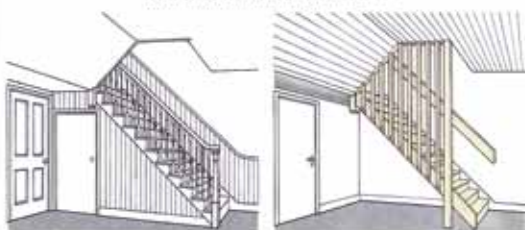


### HALL AFTER CONVERSION

A false ceiling throughout the length of the narrow portion of the hall, creates a better proportioned interior and a more comfortable scale for the occupants. The meters are accessible through a removable grille in the ceiling, which also allows light to filter in from the fanlight above the door. In the foreground the ceiling rises to its original level in front of and beside the stairs.



### HOW THE STAIRCASE WAS ALTERED



**BEFORE** The balusters and the cupboard underneath the stairs were in a poor state of repair. The panelling on the party wall also needed attention.

**AFTER** A full-height newel was inserted, to support a sagging ceiling. Full-height balusters and a handrail were fitted; the cupboard and panelling removed.

### ACCESS TO THE METERS



The slats conceal the meters but allow light to filter through.

A REMOVABLE GRILLE was made from 24x9 mm (2 1/2 in.) softwood slats, glued and pinned together. It can be slid along above the false ceiling to provide access to the meters.

## Modernising a Victorian hallway and staircase (The Reader's Digest Guide to Home Improvements, 1976)

*Hallways in many small Victorian and Edwardian semi-detached houses are long, high and narrow. They are difficult to heat and can be cheerless to enter, lacking the coziness promised by the small scale of the exterior.*

The section on refurbishing a Victorian hallway is particularly salutary in this respect. With an admirable lack of deference, the manual suggests removing every feature that might be found desirable today: timber mouldings, high ceilings, original panelling. Elsewhere, pebble dashing, oversized dormer windows and other crimes against contemporary taste diktats are described in a series of lovely 'how to' diagrams.

## **Fashion and Architecture**

In the House Style Book (first published in 1984), editor Deyan Sudjic compiles a paean to architectural Post-Modernism. The House Style book is happily pluralist, offering a range of taste cultures including high-tech, country, city traditional, classical and urban. In a fairly standard piece of PoMo writing, modernism is taken to task for banning decoration and suppressing colour, fun and difference.

The book contains work by architects including Eva Jiricna, Peter Eisenman and Michael Hopkins, who would, no doubt, be horrified to be reminded of their complicity in Post Modernism. Po Mo is itself hugely unfashionable today, as easy to date as the frilly shirts and knickerbockers of New Romanticism, which is what gives it a compelling fascination.

The American artist Dan Graham once said that there was nothing as dangerous as that which was most recently fashionable. Fashion works as a form of Orwellian un-think, a cultural amnesia that allows us to believe that the present is infinitely preferable to the past, always has been and always will. The recently fashionable must be conveniently ignored, its obsessions simply too troubling to one's current self-image.

The relationship between fashion and architecture is a thorny one. Reference to it usually involves formal analogies between cladding and clothing, or, more literally still, collaborations between architects and fashion designers. Very rarely are the fashion cycles within architecture itself considered. Architecture is generally considered to be above such things, aloof from ephemeral preoccupations and superficial matters of style. This aloofness is an absurd conceit though, serving only to draw attention to an underlying anxiety.

Architecture's fashionable obsessions must always be justified through other means. So, its current obsession with pattern making and neo-Baroque facades is justified with recourse to a technological determinism – we now have the means to make such complex shapes, therefore we should – that

sits well with modernist theory whilst pursuing decidedly un-modernist forms. Post Modernism is dismissed as an aberration, a trend about which the profession is in powerful denial.

Rather than something to be avoided though, perhaps the dead styles of the very recent past offer something useful to us. In accepting the cycles of fashion within architecture we may discover something important. Not just in the sense of a *recherché* pleasure in bad taste and kitsch – although that too has its uses – but in the lessons that might be learned about decoration, taste, style and communication. The relationship of these issues to fashion is partly why they have been marginalised by 'proper' architectural theory. Paradoxically, by embracing the supposedly ephemeral characteristics of architecture we may discover more profound things about we experience it.



**The Post Modern interior  
(The House Style Book, edited by Deyan Sudjic, 1984)**

*All the elements of post modernism are here: conspicuously redundant columns, laminate surfaces, ceiling and walls painted like clouds.*

The degree of advice on hand in the House Style Book is remarkable, ranging from defining the essence of Post Modernism to practical information on the perfect toaster (“Make sure that the slots are wide enough to take slices of homemade bread.”). The sex of the 1970’s has gone, replaced with a neurotic interest in dinner parties and lemon squeezers.

## Taste Not Space

Interior design has always been the fickle, flashier younger sibling of architecture. While architecture strives for timelessness, interior design is happy to engage in the ephemeral pleasures of the moment. Architects have spent the last hundred years stressing structure, materials and space. Commodity and firmness, more than delight. Interior design deals with ornament, decoration, colour and fabric – those aspects of buildings that Modernist rhetoric dismissed as unnecessary, extrinsic to the ineffable substance of architecture. Literal frippery.

They are also the aspects of architecture historically given feminine characteristics. Similarly, the persona of the architect – serious, professional, aloof – is seen as distinct from that of the interior designer: more often a woman, and if not then theatrically camp and unflinchingly pretentious. Whilst the architect strives to be taken seriously as a professional, the interior designer is happy swimming in the dangerously shallow waters of fashion and style. In films, architects are represented as decent, dependable and principled – think Woody Harrelson's unintentionally comic turn in *Indecent Proposal* – while interior designers are vain and pretentious pseuds – think Otho in *Beetlejuice*.

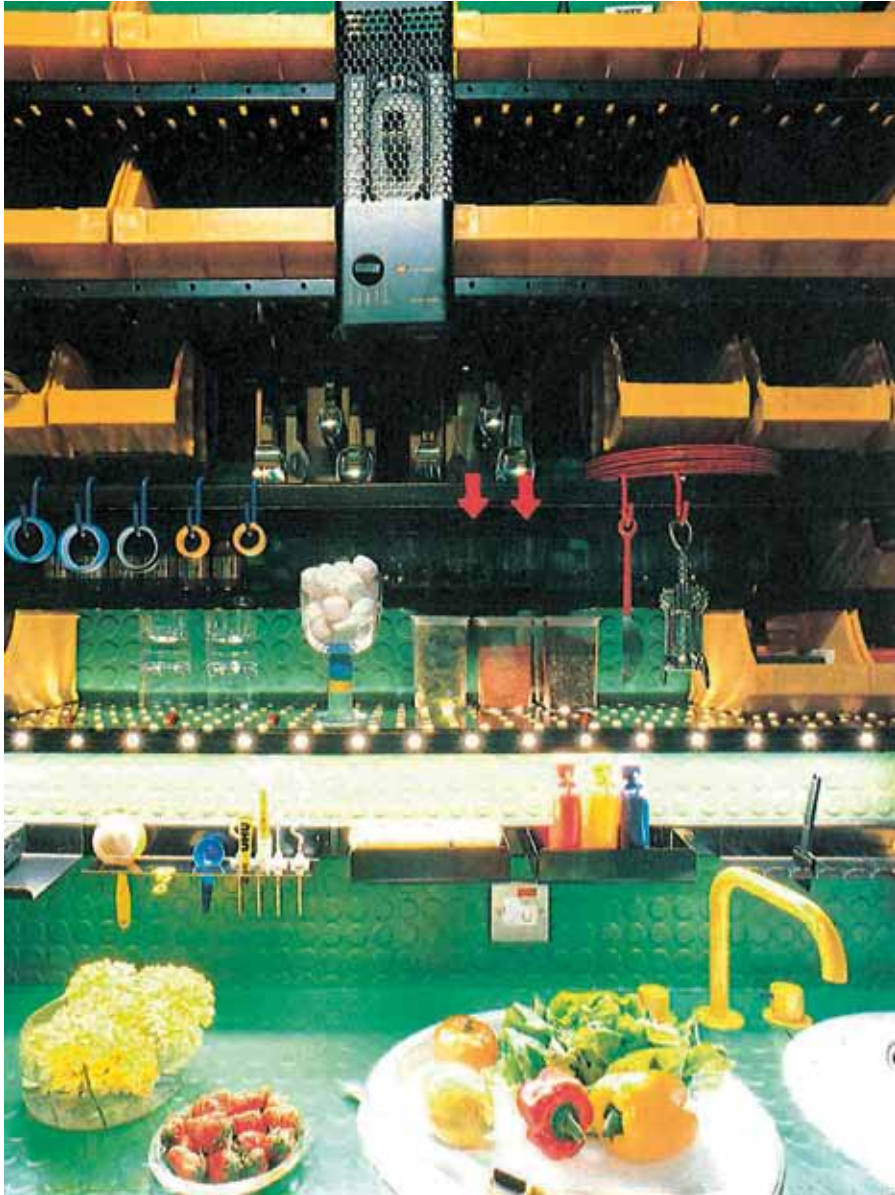
But perhaps they're not so different in reality. Anything that claims timelessness is probably motivated by a fear of seeming ephemeral. The distance architecture puts between it and interior design communicates an underlying concern that they might actually be the same thing. Very few architects attempt to theorise their approach to interior design. Those that do – most notably Adolf Loos in his *Theory of Cladding* – risk being chronically misunderstood.

The emphasis on the heroic, sculptural aspects of architecture have led to its marginalisation from mass housing design. While architects have pursued every more esoteric directions, the early moderns' interest in mass production has been put into (partial) action by volume house builders. Precisely

because of the effective way that this element of industrialisation has been camouflaged by bastardised historical forms – neo-Georgianism, faux-rustic detailing – architects have failed to notice their ideas being usurped.

An engagement with the taste cultures of ordinary house owners and the stylistic freedoms offered by mass-production might have allowed architects to have had more influence in this realm. But, focused on the abstract values of space and form, they have become increasingly marginalised, useful mainly as specialist suppliers of houses for the wealthy.





**Eva Jiricna's Kitchen**  
**(The House Style Book, edited by Deyan Sudjic, 1984)**

*Confined spaces mean it's possible to be much more adventurous with colour than in larger areas. Here yellow industrial storage trays contrast vividly with the green studded rubber on the walls.*

Well known architects make brief, mostly unnamed cameo appearances in the *House Style Book*. We get to see the inside of Eva Jiricna's toilet, for instance, and the stair from Peter Eisenman's House XI which is pulled up short for not having a balustrade. Their projects appear as disembodied moments, no longer part of the architect's oeuvre, but part of a low-key history of the home.

## **The Death of the Architect**

The history of architecture is a history of proper names. It assumes that the authorship of buildings is clear and final. In this model the architect designs the building and it remains – in a sense – his or her property. This model assumes too that buildings don't change but exist instead in a permanent state of newness, as if the architect has just left the building site, the thunderous applause of critics still ringing in his or her ears. The architect's explanation – their artistic vision – presides over the building, forever setting out the terms through which we should assess it. The building is conceived as a static sculpture, the timeless creation of its author's will.

Architects go to great ends to protect their authorship. Photographs of their buildings are taken when newly completed and rarely updated, however many years have passed since. They carefully control the dissemination and representation of their designs so that authorship is maintained and the vagaries of time, modification, deterioration, and degradation ignored. Some – most famously Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos – carefully doctored the photographs of their designs to edit out realities they disapproved of. Others – like Peter Eisenman – name or number their designs like a collection of paintings or an art catalogue, further removing them from the possibility of messy existence.

Iconic modernist houses that have been significantly altered over time, or have fallen into disrepair, are described as being 'saved' when they are bought and returned to their original state. Many become museums dedicated to the architect that designed them, like Loos' own Villa Müller. In this sense, any form of domestic inhabitation is perceived as a threat to the architecture and the architect's vision so that, in the end, they can no longer be houses and must become exhibits in the history of architecture.

Do It Yourself culture questions these assumptions of authorship and signature. It suggests instead that architecture is always a work in progress, a process of negotiation and change rather than an emphatic artistic statement. The Do It Yourselfer is forever modifying the original building, messing up

the architect's vision and becoming a kind of joint author. Over time other owners make further changes, altering the alterations already undertaken so that the building becomes a piece of collective bricolage, or a game of exquisite corpse where each modification alters our understanding of what has come before.

Unlike the one-off architectural statement, the generic house has no single author. Following Roland Barthes' *Death of the Author*, DIY points to the *Death of the Architect*. DIY is a form of reading which changes the meaning of the original text irrevocably. It is an action on a found object, or a ready-made, where it is the artwork that is changed rather than its container.

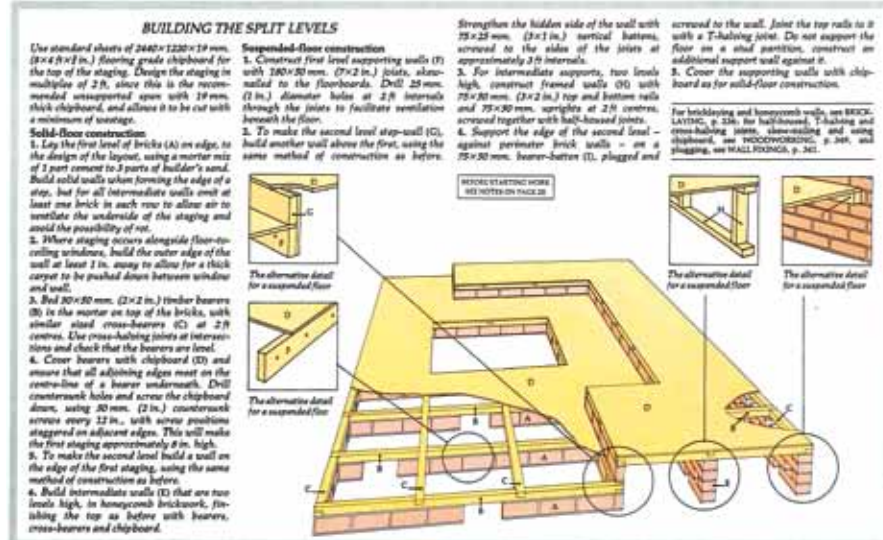


**THE COMPLETED LIVING-ROOM** The area at the centre of this room, which forms a 'conversation pit', is the original floor level. Staging around the sides of this area creates the first raised level, with large cushions placed along two sides for viewing and listening to hi-fi. The second level, linked to the staircase and hallway, provides a raised level behind the seating area. The use throughout of a shaggy, tufted carpet unites the three areas to make the living-room seem considerably larger and give it a completely different character.

## Building a split-level living room (The Reader's Digest Guide to Home Improvements, 1976)

The use throughout of a shaggy, tufted carpet unites the three areas to make the living-room seem considerably larger and give it a completely different character.

A series of beautiful and highly explanatory diagrams allows readers to undertake large-scale alterations of their homes. Obviating the need for an architect or interior designer, these drawings operate at a scale between the furniture assembly diagram and the production information of the architect.



## **Space, Time and Architecture**

Architects privilege space as the medium of architecture. Decoration, surface and style are dismissed as superficial issues that obscure the real substance of formal and spatial essence. Abstract values of geometry and sculptural form are considered superior to the quotidian aspects of dwelling and inhabitation. Profound meaning is assumed to lie in the volume of the building rather than the activities it houses.

As we have seen, this conception of architecture ignores the realities of occupation. You could say that it is fundamentally uncomfortable with the fact of inhabitation, always attempting to return architecture to the architect. Occupation is a threat to architecture, messing up its pristine spaces through the vagaries of time and human activity. Occupation is never static and is not necessarily reverential.

The architecture of the home is, then, an architecture of time as well as space. It is about the spatial adaptations of owners over the lifetime of the building. The 'success' of the architecture may lie therefore in its ability to absorb and accommodate change as much as in its ability to convey essential and immovable meaning.

Houses that are successful in terms of their ability to be adapted over time might not be the most highly considered by architects. But, it is probably those types of housing that are the most generic and the least special in architectural terms – the Victorian terrace, the inter-war suburban 'semi' – that are also the most useful and successful as houses. Spatially, formally and materially such houses are unspectacular. Their qualities are only revealed over time as they prove their versatility and adaptability.

Modifications reveal subtle changes in family and social life. Front lawns disappear to make way for garages. Walls separating kitchens and living rooms are removed. Extensions appear at the sides and rear and home

offices take over loft spaces. Neither the original houses nor their subsequent accretions are of individual architectural significance but accumulatively they tell us more about how we live than more architecturally distinguished homes.





**Sleep centre 2002**  
**(The Bed and Bath Book, edited by Terence Conran, 1978)**

*An Impossible dream? In fact, this futuristic “sleep centre 2002” will be on the market in the 1990’s.*

Perhaps the most dangerous waters for the tastemaker are those filled with future predictions. This is where you can come spectacularly unstuck because architecture and design taste doesn’t tend to react very predictably to technological innovation. In fact, houses are more likely to reverse backwards in their styling as gravitate to a seamless, perfectly moulded future.



## Illustrations

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- p.8 T. Conran (ed.): The Bed and Bath Book. London 1978; photograph credited to Camera Press/Schöner Wohnen
- p.12 T. Conran (ed.): The Bed and Bath Book. London 1978; photograph credited to Peter M. Fine
- p.16 B. Fraser, K. Resanceff (ed.): The Reader's Digest Guide to Home Improvements. Reader's Digest 1982; design credited to Derek Hall
- p.20 D. Sudjic (ed.): The House Style Book. London 1984
- p.24 D. Sudjic (ed.): The House Style Book. London 1984; design credited to Eva Jiricna, photograph credited to Richard Bryan/Arcaid
- p.28 The Reader's Digest Guide to Home Improvements. Reader's Digest Association, London 1976; design credited to Richard Banks
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## The author

Charles Holland is an architect, writer and teacher. He is a director of the London based architecture practice FAT, whose work includes housing, cultural and education buildings. He is a visiting professor at Yale University and a design tutor at the University of the Creative Arts, Canterbury. He writes about architecture and design for various magazines and blogs at [fantasticjournal.blogspot.com](http://fantasticjournal.blogspot.com).

## Disko im Überblick

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**Disko 2** Bruno Ebersbach: *sido, die Maske und der Block*

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**Disko 25** ifau und Jesko Fezer: *12 Arbeitsthesen*

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