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viewpoint

Issue 08

DESIGN AND MARKETING FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM



THE FUN ISSUE

FROM GLUM TO GLAMOUR AND BEYOND – MARC NEWSON,
JONATHAN IVE, MALCOLM GLADWELL, ANOTHER.COM, CAKE,
THE NEW HEDONISTS, ELAINE CONSTANTINE

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"This is the happy house. We're happy here. In this happy house. And we'll have fun, fun, fun!" *Shawn Stone & the Washboard* 2000

text Nilgün Yusuf

Tasty, tactile, delicious and decadent are some of the many words we'll need to describe tomorrow's happy house.

The happy house



Imagine what a difference it would make to your equilibrium if you spent ten minutes each day simply looking at the sky from your bathtub. Think how soothing it would be to feel the soft tread of grass underfoot in your own home.

Try to visualise a house where pillows are as yielding as candyfloss, the wallpaper changes to suit your mood and every single product and appliance, even the building itself, is focused on your happiness and wellbeing.

This day is coming. Over at Philips research lab, based in the Netherlands, Josephine Green, Trends and Strategy Manager, believes the future home 'will offer an intense, complete environment of pleasure and enjoyment; one that enriches us and extends our creativity; a place of rebirth, transformation, vitality and personal expression'. Not so much the Zen-inspired white and wenge sanctuary of the nineties, more a technicoloured pleasure dome, a vibrant recreation centre, a domestic amusement arcade, somewhere that will free the spirit, delight the senses and unleash the personality.

In the nineties, vast numbers of consumers became aware of the look and style of their home environment for the first time. This formative period will, believe some, lead to the next phase, which will reflect more advanced needs and a heightened sophistication. 'People will increasingly learn to buy things with their fingers, not just their eyes,' believes Lisa White, Editor of Bloom, *In View* and *View on Colour*. 'Anyone can buy a tasteful concept, from M&S up, but once consumers grow in confidence, they can investigate aspects of their life on a deeper level and make more intelligent choices.'

Ilse Crawford, former Editor of UK style magazine *Elle Deco* and recently appointed Editor of new magazine *Bare*, which explores good living and wellbeing, would agree. 'Our attitude will be more about connecting than consuming, getting closer to the warm stuff of life. Homes won't just be about spaces that look good, but about places that make us feel good, physically and emotionally, as well as meaning something personally,' she believes. Interior and product designers are already anticipating this, and the evidence can be seen in a burst of feel-good products on the market, from 'blistered' rubber tiles (like pod shoes) that massage bare feet as you walk on them and giant-looped carpets that really do herald the end of hard-floor surfaces, to wild wallpaper and colourful furniture design.



1-3. Soft, round shapes that suggest Philips

4&5. *Softroom* kitchen at 100% Design 1999

Tasty, tactile, delicious and decadent are one family of words to describe tomorrow's happy house. It will be a place that will stimulate the senses and be sensitive to nature and the elements. It will relieve us from the mundane chores of domesticity, while preserving those essential ones deemed good for the soul. Rather than being something between a temple and fortress, where the outside is kept out, this will be a place we want to share with others. While embracing the wealth of new technology and its potential uses, the new home will also enhance some of the simple, timeless aspects of good living, lost in the whirling passage of fashion and fad.

In the future, things will genuinely look good enough to eat. An abundance of texture, colour and pattern combined with embracing, inviting forms that appeal to our sensual natures will all provide the background. But according to Dr Jenny Tillotson, specialist in smell technology works and smart materials, who works for Charmed, a subsidiary of Media Lab, MIT, the senses will not only be stimulated on an immediate level, they will also be harnessed via technology to redefine our future homes. She believes that an electronic nose sensor will eventually be something that can be embedded into any product, with a whole range of functions and applications. 'You could, for instance, have a nose sensor in wallpaper that would respond to your individual smell and change accordingly.'

So, for instance, if you woke up feeling depressed or down, the sensor would respond to this by changing the paper into a bright, cheery colour. Or, if you woke up with the beginnings of a cold, it could release the smell of eucalyptus. The possibilities of an electronic nose sensor are endless: pheromones in the bed would make us feel more sexually aroused; security systems could smell intruders; telephone handsets could monitor breath and e-mail the doctor with an early warning analysis; nurseries could release the smell of a mother to soothe a crying infant; urinals could analyse human waste for the first signs of pregnancy or cancer. It sounds incredible, but smell technology could eventually take us there, giving our health and wellbeing a new value and status in the home.

Technology will obviously feature in more overtly functional spaces such as the kitchen, while simultaneously becoming less intrusive, being integrated into walls, furniture and appliances. London-based architectural practice Softroom, whose clients include Alessi and the Richard Rogers Partnership, presented its visionary future kitchen concept at 100% Design last year in conjunction with Jam, Corian, Whirlpool and Linbeck Rausch. While many of the appliances were self-operating and regulating, other aspects, such as cooking and food preparation, were retained for their inherent relaxing or pleasurable qualities. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab has a five-year

programme to develop domestic technologies, and Professor Neil Gershenfeld believes the self-governing kitchen is fast heading our way.

From General Electric, there are already bar code reading microwaves, web-enabled ovens and voice-activated fridges. Their portable scanner which emits a laser beam allows you to create a database and access other databases, which will enable us to download a recipe in the office and check it against the ingredients in our fridge at home. Philips has created an intelligent apron with a built-in power circuit and microwave to voice activate appliances, while the Intelligent Garbage Can proposed by Philips will optimise waste disposal by sorting and compacting refuse and removing odour ready for collection.

While more aspects of the home will be absorbed by technology, these advances are not the total picture. Smart these appliances may be, but they don't come close to the miracles of nature, which will seem more wondrous and precious as we become increasingly aware of the fragility of our ecosystem. Luxlab, a group of French designers comprising Thierry Gaugin, Patrick Jouin and Jean-Marie Massaud, believe this new sympathy with nature is not about ecology, but 'the physical and spiritual sensuality of the elements... a naive seduction... a generous innocence. Emotions are brought closer to pure sensations, leading to the rediscovery of a tactile, visual, olfactory serenity that does not depend on one's cultural references. The only form of ostentation is that of wellbeing'.

At the Milan Furniture Fair this year, they presented '3 Elements' based on three sensations: lying down in the grass, looking at water and contemplating fire. Designs included 'mutable' floor tiles made from pressed aluminium frames and turf (nourished with microcapsules and anti-fungal protection).

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Homes won't just be about spaces that look good, but about places that make us feel good, physically and emotionally, as well as meaning something personally



These would allow us to have gardens and borders inside a home. In a similar vein, The Rooftop Garden by Patrick Nadeau and Vincent Dupont-Rougier won the Grand Prize at the Paris Furniture Fair in January. A portable garden zone that unfolds, it is crafted from teak and aluminium and can be used indoors or out. Suddenly gardens become a flexible zone, something well beyond the humble window box, waiting to bring joy (and increased oxygen levels) to any home environment, no matter how small or high up.

The Unprivate House, an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, featured the work of Australian architects Glen Burke and Peter Strutchbury, who are creating houses that let the outside in and are more responsive to the seasons and nature with, for example, twisted roofs that let winter light in. Erwan Bouroullec's House Within A House is a modern treehouse with metal legs and a platform with slatted aluminium walls, and was a huge hit in Milan when shown by Capellini. It would work as well in a garden as in a house. Simple devices, such as roofs that slide back promoted by Paxton Locker, are something that would make a huge difference to our quality of life. Apparently, Richard Rodgers has one in his bathroom – obviously his own, which means he can have a bath in the rain, or by moonlight, if he so wishes. Nice idea.

As well as connecting with the natural world, it is our contact with other humans that transforms a house into a home. Philips again: 'The individualist tendency of recent years is leading people to reflect on questions of identity and meaning. Is the self just a collection of satisfied needs, or is there more? ... a home that fosters interaction and sharing, both inside and outside its walls. A home that allows the self to breathe'.

The compartmentalisation of needs in the nineties, with fixed 'zones', is giving way to a more flexible way of thinking. Lisa White describes it as 'a more generous spirit', which is reflected in the growing numbers of designs that are conceived to encourage interactivity and sharing. French company GlasseXchange produces mobile objects with multiple uses that only make real sense with human interaction. The Tel-Aviv-based design company, Umani, has created a witty, Fast Food table and communal stool on wheels. The strongest example of communal design, however, is the reworking of the humble sofa. For decades, it has looked roughly the same: flat and

horizontal, like something from a bus shelter, where people sit next to each other, in front of a TV, à la The Simpsons. But designs such as Flap by Francesco Binfare for Edra, which look like a giant paw, are specifically created for communal

interaction and comfortable conversation. They encourage a more open, convivial atmosphere allowing people to look at each other, share peanuts or philosophy.

Ilse Crawford comments, 'In the 16th century, the French decided we should sit like kings and we have been doing ever since in a very rigid way. Arab cultures, on the other hand, have laid and lounged for thousands of years, because it's more comfortable.' The new 'loungescape' and socialising generally involve a flatter, more horizontal activity, which some believe explains the return of soft carpets – so much more comfortable than hard floors to sprawl on.

In an ideal world, every home would be individual. Gone would be the showroom effect of a fashion taking grip and encouraging clone homes while annihilating the individual inside. Dutch Company, Do Create – 'an action – not just a

brand' – has produced a range of objects that are not completed until the consumer interacts with them, 'leaving social footprints'. Do Hit by Martin Vanderpoll is a steel chair that comes with a sledgehammer, so the owner can sculpt their own shape before sitting on it. Likewise, Do Scratch by Marti Guixé is a matt black light box that emits light only once the owner scratches marks on to it. It may be idealistic to suggest the end of designer dictatorships, but it certainly indicates a less precious approach to furniture and objects in the home.

What, however, could be more personal than your very own building? Hyper surfaces are one of the sexy sciences many theorists are looking into which offer a mind-blowing array of possibilities. 'Soft' buildings, based on helices, circles and spirals, which can be created by computer and built anywhere, herald a new era of chaos, fun and fluidity in architecture – the ultimate in emotional, or happiness, buildings.

vp view

For the past decade the home and interiors business has constantly outstripped apparel in terms of profits and sales. This tendency will continue as the home moves on from being regarded simply as a place of rest to one of retreat and security in an increasingly aggressive, stressful and unsafe world.

The New Tasteocracy also sees home as a meeting point to share food and interests with like minded friends. A place of privacy in which to indulge their gourmet tastes in wine and cigars (see The New Hedonists). Remember too, that in a time stressed world, home will become a personal service centre (hairstylists, masseurs, and therapists will come to the client rather than vice – versa).

As the trend to individualism, personal statement and self fulfilment grows it is only to be expected that the home will also become more than a container for a collection of status artefacts and fixed rooms.

It will become an interactive knowledge centre based on modular nomadic components, hybrid objects (fabric screens that serve as lights and so on), and intelligent work tools.

It will also nourish the spirit with its aromatic textiles and furniture, its light shimmering walls, its floors and ceilings that can be re-configured to allow us to feel grass under our feet, or gaze up at the sky while bathing. It will become our office, retreat, place of sleep but also for solace and entertainment, a functional but aesthetically complex structure that exudes life 24 hours a day.

Further Reading:

Bare, edited by Ilse Crawford, published by John Brown Publishing, available in newsagents now, tel +44 (0)20 7565 3000

Bloom, In View and View on Colour, edited by Lisa White, published by United Publishers, tel +331 4408 6898

La casa prossima futura by Philips Design (contact Laura Traldi on +31 40 27 59115)

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The new 'loungescape' and socialising generally involve a flatter, more horizontal activity

