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los angeles

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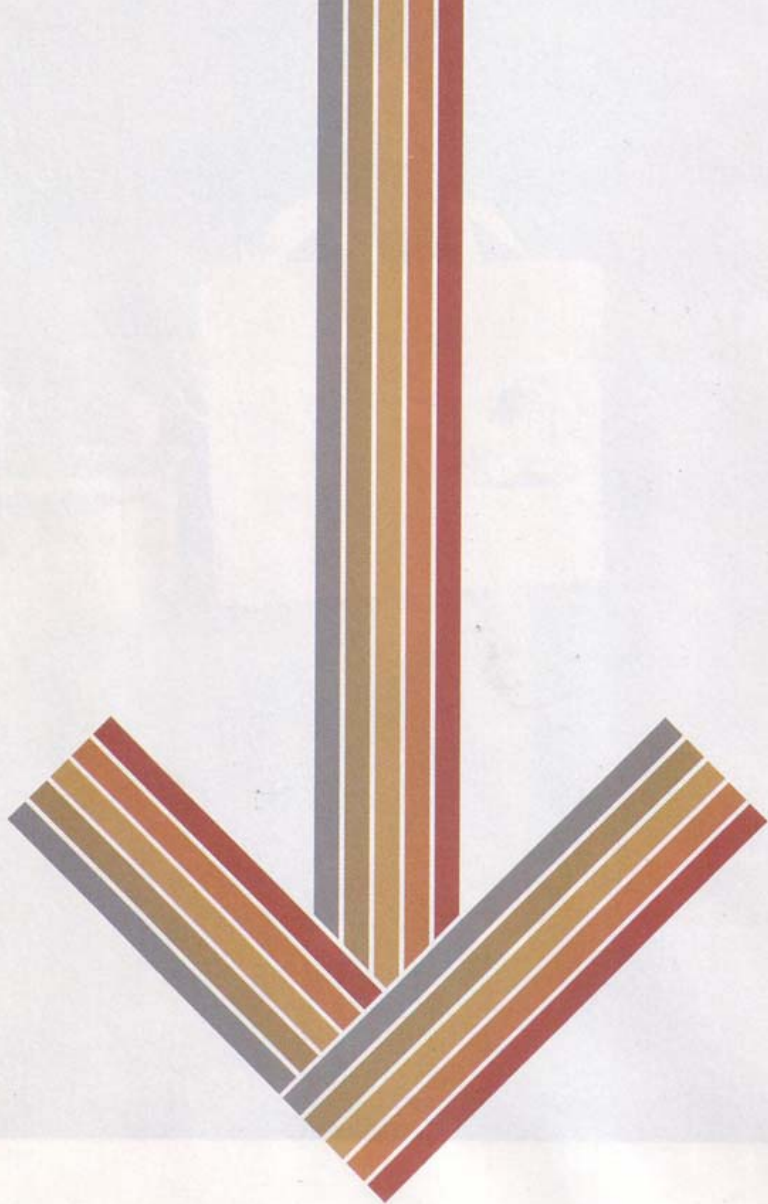
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Relish It:

A dog with the works
at the Stand in Encino





DOWNSIZE ME

An architect disproves the big box theory by building himself a smaller, smarter house **by Emily Young**



NO MONSTER GARAGE:
Roger Sherman's driveway spans an entire side of his Santa Monica lot and leads, from under the living room, to a gravel parking lot/play space





GO WITH THE FLOW: *Opposite:* A counter, a staircase, and a wall—all finished in birch—make it hard to tell where one ends and another begins. *This page, from top:* A laminated chipboard shelf that winds through the office and dining room continues into the kitchen. Where the house steps down a level, the concrete floor becomes a concrete counter. A multipurpose wall unit in the living room—for a fireplace, books, and audiovisual equipment—is clad in the same bonderized sheet metal used as exterior siding



“TOO MANY HOUSES TODAY ARE BUILT TOO BIG,” Roger Sherman says as he sits outside the remarkably compact and space-efficient hillside home he’s built in Santa Monica. Inside, a host of clever touches underscores his preference for doing more with less, from the big picture to the smallest detail: Garden views create the illusion of larger rooms, concrete slabs morph seamlessly from floor to counter, a hole in the wall becomes a whimsical mail slot.

As director of the new Fresh Urbs postgraduate program at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, Sherman studies, among other urban design issues, housing that would stop creeping McMansion-ization cold. Two years ago he put esoteric academic theory into stylish real-world practice with a house that’s as much radical architectural prototype as it is cozy family abode.

Part home, part office, and part rental unit, Sherman’s aptly named 3-in-1 House represents his general take on architecture and urban development. “There’s a German term—*existenzminimum*—and in modern living it translates as ‘doing with as little as necessary,’” Sherman says. “That’s what I did. I sacrificed quantity of space for quality of space.”

Sherman’s grand experiment—his first ground-up residential project—occupies an Ocean Park lot that slopes downhill from the street. Along the front facade, a rental unit and an office flank the home’s entrance. The 630-square-foot one-bedroom apartment, which Sherman included to help pay the mortgage, has its own entry. Sherman’s 250-square-foot workspace, necessary for his private practice, is tucked under the tenant’s bedroom and opens to a neighborhood-friendly courtyard.

The rest of the building is devoted to the 1,830-square-foot living quarters Sherman shares with his wife, Jennifer





IN AND OUT: Opposite: Since the house descends the hillside, virtually every room has a backyard view of low-maintenance landscaping by Sasha Tarnopolsky of Dry Design. *This page, from top:* The facade features the rental unit entry to the right of the front door and the office to the left. A skylight, a window, and polycarbonate panels illuminate the master bedroom. Like the shimmering office curtain, metallic wallpaper selected by interior design consultant the Desk of Lola contrasts with the exposed studs

Schab, an architect and senior associate at Rios Clementi Hale Studios, and their daughters, Olive and Lucy. The house unfolds like a railroad flat, with the ground-floor rooms arranged in a straight line. Thanks to an open plan, Schab is able to stand in the centrally located kitchen and see her husband at his desk and her children watching TV or playing outside. "I can feel part of all the activity from here," she says. "We're all together but still free to do what each of us wants."

With the money Sherman saved by designing a smaller house he splurged on more adventurous construction. Instead of conventional materials, he opted for a steel frame, sleek birch veneer plywood, translucent polycarbonate paneling, and bonderized sheet metal. "Many of these materials aren't expensive, but the labor to apply them was more than what it would've cost to paint wall-board," he says. A few raw studs were left exposed in an obvious nod to Frank Gehry, then juxtaposed with metallic floral wallpaper as a wry reference to more traditional forms of domesticity.

Unlike many hillside homes perched midair on stilts, Sherman's house hugs the ground, stepping down the slope in three levels, each of them the maximum 23 feet high allowed above grade, so that backyard terraces act as extensions of the glass-walled rooms. "It's actually a pretty narrow house," he says, "but I followed the contours of the land to keep it laterally connected to the outdoors."

Sherman was particularly interested in exploring alternatives to the customary box. On the lower floor he eliminated doors to "alleviate that sense of compartmentalization" and to suggest more expansive public spaces. On the mezzanine-like upper floor, between the three bedrooms, he cut light wells in the ceiling to brighten interiors below.

"Almost every space was meant to do double duty," he says. During the day, a curtain can be pulled back so that the dining table functions as a conference table. The living room features a combination fireplace-bookcase-entertainment center. To avoid building a dedicated garage, Sherman shifted the house to one side of the lot, stretched a driveway down the other, and at the rear of the property laid out a gravel car park that also serves as a play area.

He blurred boundaries in other ways, too. Just as concrete—poured for floor and counter—unites the dining room and the kitchen, birch veneer plywood erases the distinctions between another counter, a staircase, and a wall. An ingenious built-in wood shelf starts off in the office, where it displays architectural models; snakes into the dining room, where it becomes windows and a wall clock; and finally wraps around the kitchen, where it provides open storage.

"Roger took enormous risks—in terms of structure, privacy and openness, materials, finishes—to come up with an original house," Schab says. "He made the choice to express ideas rather than have greater square footage, and it turned out even better than I imagined." **LA**