

# HOMEDESIGN

The New York Times Magazine

PART 2 / \$5.00 NOV. 2003



TRANSITIONS

## CONTENTS

**24 THE BROOKLYN LODGERS**  
*Virginia Heffernan on a town house that's home to many.*

**28 FASHION TAKES A SEAT**  
*Susan M. Kirschbaum on two routes to the homespun look.*

**34 I MARRIED A DESIGN DESPOT . . .**  
*Nancy Hass goes it alone.*

**42 MEMPHIS HAS LEFT THE BUILDING**  
*Horacio Silva on the Italian 80's design collective.*

**52 HOUSE OF DAMES**  
*Charles Gandee ponders the appeal of 'The Golden Girls.'*

**58 SMALLVILLE**  
*Carole Nicksin squeezes into Harry Bader's 350 square feet.*

**63 TRANSITIONS**  
By Pilar Viladas

**64 JUMBLE FEVER**  
*Décor as personal history.*  
By Suzanne Slesin  
Photographs by Bob Hiemstra  
Styled by Barbara Kurgan

**72 FOOTNOTES**  
By Maura Egan

**74 MOBILE HOME**  
*Keeping design options open.*  
By Ken Gross  
Photographs by Andrew Bordwin

**80 ENEMY OF THE AVERAGE**  
*Ganna Walska and Lotusland.*  
By Sean K. MacPherson  
Photo illustrations by Michael Elins  
Produced by Elizabeth Stewart

**84 FOOTNOTES**  
By Sean K. MacPherson

*Continued on Page 20*



The movable guest room, left, designed by Mike Latham for his Brooklyn loft.

### ON THE COVER

One of three mobile glass "vitrines," which function both as storage units and room dividers in the Latham loft.

## CONTENTS

Continued from Page 16

- 86 MANHATTAN TRANSFER**  
*Furnishings you hate to pack.*  
Photographs by  
Sivan Lewin  
Styled by Elana Frankel
- 92 MIXMASTERS**  
*An urbane London town house.*  
By Pilar Viladas  
Photographs by  
Neil Mersh  
Styled by Suzanne Trocmé
- 98 THE MOTHER OF  
REINVENTION**  
*At home with Linda Oldham.*  
By Bonnie Schwartz  
Photographs by Todd Oldham
- 104 RESOURCES**
- 114 DON'T CHANGE A THING**  
*Is entropy the best policy?*  
By William Norwich

STYLE EDITOR  
Amy M. Spindler

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR  
Andy Port

MANAGING EDITOR  
John Hyland

EDITOR  
Pilar Viladas

DEPUTY EDITOR  
Maura Egan

ARTICLES EDITOR  
Horacio Silva

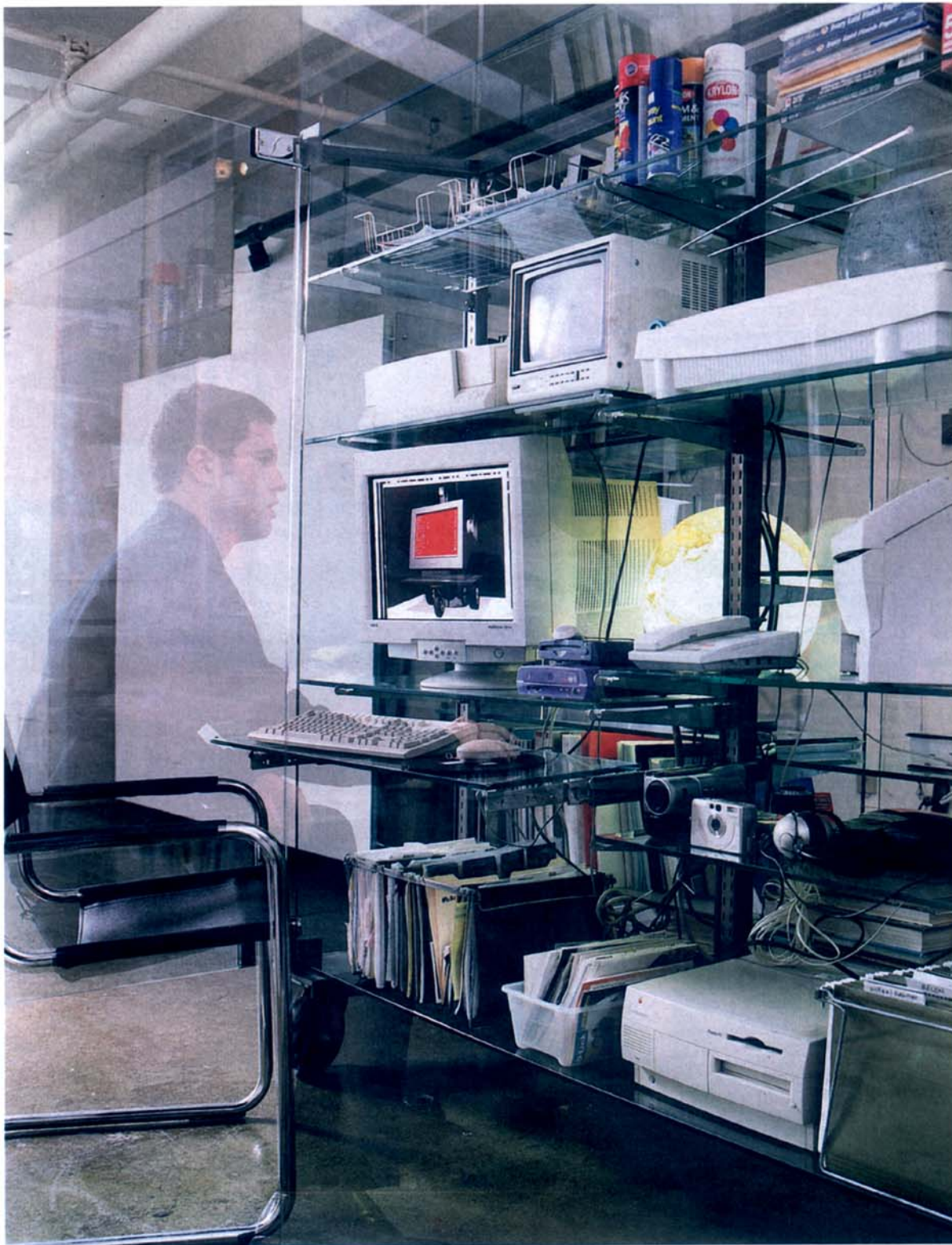
COPY EDITORS  
Andrew Webster,  
Peter Lucas

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATE  
Francis R. Lomento Jr.

RESEARCH EDITORS  
Joy Dietrich, Ian Keldoulis,  
Vinita Srivastava

FEATURES ASSOCIATE  
Jonathan S. Paul

ART DIRECTION  
David Sebbah,  
Gregory Smith



Mike Latham designed glass shelves on steel brackets for the work area of his loft. Photograph by Andrew Bordwin. For more on Latham, see Page 74.



## MOBILE HOME

Not interested in settling down? Not even at home? Ken Gross visits a man who likes to keep his options — and closets — open.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW BORDWIN

*"All is flux, nothing stays still."*  
— Heraclitus

You often hear a particular complaint about young men of Mike Latham's age, which is 26: they all seem to have a fear of commitment. Usually, it's about relationships. In Mike's case, however, the issue is a little broader. He has a fear of anchoring down the furniture.

Fortunately, Mike is trained as an architect and designer, so he has created a world in which things like closets and cabinets and workstations — even rooms — need not be married to the floor. They can be free-floating, or at least capable of having a fling in another part of his loft.

He has devised an ingenious way to keep his freedom-loving paraphernalia from being pinned down by long-term engagements. Everything is on wheels.

For example, when you enter his third-floor Williamsburg loft, you come upon something odd: a huge glass box illuminated from within by fluorescent lights and filled with exposed wires, bicycles and bedding. It's the guest room. He forgot to put it away.

But he can. All he has to do is shift the closets (on casters), relocate his office (on casters) and stash the guest room (on casters) near the windows, where it is, for the moment at least, out of the way.

The loft's poured-concrete floors were originally built to withstand heavy industrial equipment, so they can easily support two tons of rolling glass. And glass is what Latham works in. Most of the loft's interior walls are made out of it, which explains the number of commercial glass-

---

*Ken Gross is a journalist and mystery writer in New York.*





Mike Latham, opposite, designed the rolling guest bedroom unit that rests in the front of his Williamsburg loft.



Two rolling closets separate the sitting area, top, from the bedroom, above. The kitchen cupboard, opposite, is a party on wheels.

cleaners visible through the transparent surfaces.

"I like transparency," he says, which is obvious from the exposed wires and raw pipes evident throughout the 1,900-square-foot space. It also explains why he prefers New York to Miami, where he grew up. "I've been here for 10 years, and I love New York, with all of its exposed infrastructure — the steel bridges and poorly paved streets and uncollected garbage."

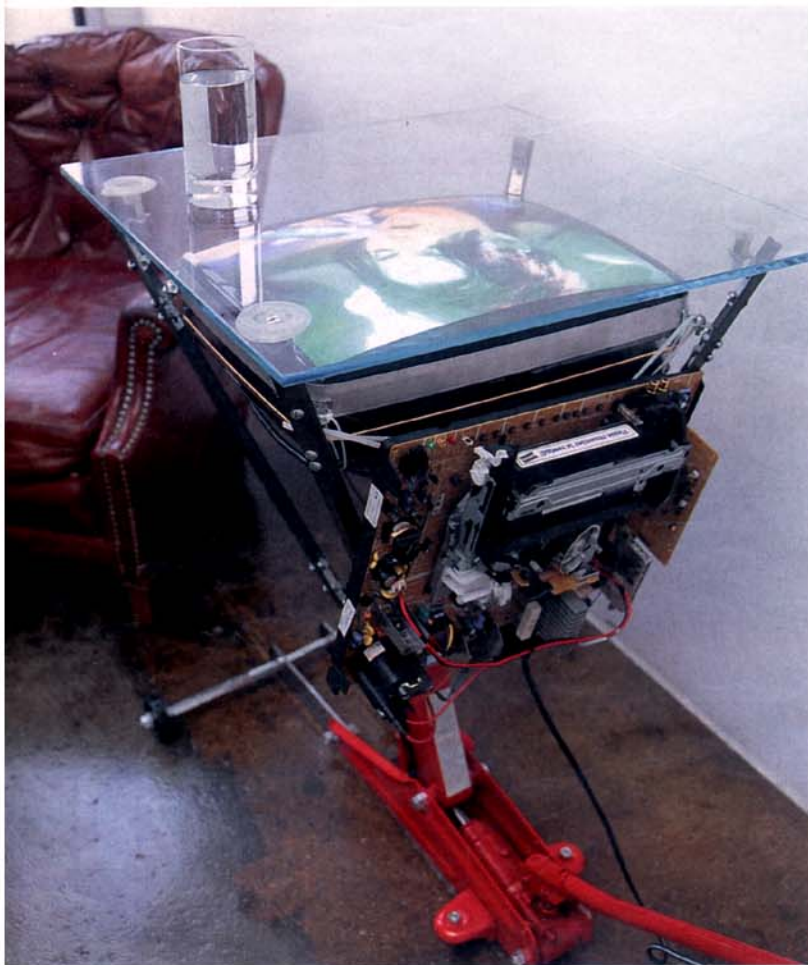
But what about privacy? Say you want to be unobserved.

"Glass can be very private," he insists. "You can lacquer or coat it. And you can fill cabinets with clothing and books. You get privacy, and you also get different colors. It's wonderfully complex. By moving objects around, you can play around with the effect."

This business of movement satisfies something else close to Latham's heart. He has a natural inclination toward anarchy. "Anarchy is good," he says. "That's a good place to start. In architecture. In design. With anarchy anything is possible."

He has a vintage Danish modular sofa and a lacquered





goatskin table, which was reclaimed from some house of ill repute, or so he'd like to believe. On one wall there are abstracts and framed plans for a bridge and a mural of magic numbers. The overall effect is like being on a movie set, about to shoot "2001: A Space Odyssey" on a Lazy Susan. Anarchy.

An unlikely position for someone in a field based on classical form and Platonic ideals. "It's complicated," says Latham, who views complexity with warmth. "Complexity is interesting. So many different ways to achieve your goal."

How did he arrive at such an unsteady state? For one thing, he played with a lot of Legos as a child. (He plays with them still, albeit with the more high-tech Lego Robotics Invention System, which he uses for research.) He would have followed in his father's footsteps and become a surgeon, only his hands "are too shaky," and he holds out the proof. This doesn't seem to present a problem in drawing designs. The dark and nervous Latham would have become a registered architect, only he rebelled against the "Byzantine" requirements to obtain a license. He spent three years obtaining a master's degree in architecture from Columbia University, then refused to spend three more as an apprentice.

Instead, he started his own company — the (1999)Project — which, he says, addresses architecture's current intersection with art and technology, whether at the scale of big buildings, rooms or robotics. He also produces high-tech furniture for people with a lot of money. He charges \$10,000 for the six-foot-high-by-six-foot-wide vitrines (his name for his rolling glass cabinets), and \$10,000 for a glass table with a projection television in the middle. He is baffled by the strange economics of the marketplace: "People spend thousands of dollars on first-class air fare, but won't buy a table for a few thousand dollars."

Latham's loft is on Kent Avenue. It is in a thick, squat, six-story building near the East River that resembles a bunker. It was one of the many industrial parks that sprang up at the turn of the 19th century near the rivers of Manhattan. "I used to be able to see the World Trade Center from the south window," he says. Now there is only the Williamsburg Bridge and a hole in the sky. "Shows you how impermanent things are."

Latham's point is about the creative jumble of change, the complexity of movement. It is all here in this neighborhood of Polish holdouts and Hasidic traders and avant-garde strivers. Bedford Avenue is freckled with Japanese tourists — you can buy art and pashmina on every corner, but the Polish supermarket, a mile away, has shortages, like a real Polish supermarket. "They run out of milk."

Latham shrugs. It is the new SoHo. You see what he means about change. ■

Top: the Latham-designed TVTable marries a television, VCR and car jack. The leather library chair is a family heirloom. Left: in the bathroom, which is the only enclosed room in the loft, the medicine cabinet uses a two-way mirror.