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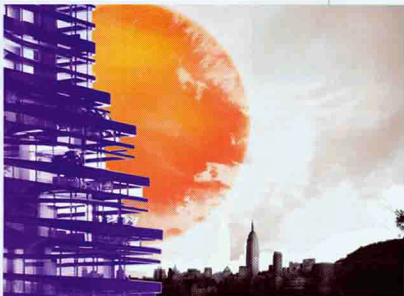
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Rising in the West

Is this the dawn of Manhattan's first existential condo, ponders Eva Hagberg?



Ben van Berkel wants to talk about space-time. At 9am, it seems a little early to be talking time-warped continuums, the potentials of looped narratives and the applicability of the tri-fold diagram. It also seems a little out of context, as we're in the breakfast lounge of Gramercy Park Hotel, Ian Schrager's pre-40 Bond trial run at an extra-louche ('Schnabel was here'), darkly nostalgic Manhattan joint. But van Berkel's on a roll.

However, let's start at the beginning. Twenty years ago, Ben van Berkel and his wife Caroline Bos founded Amsterdam-based architecture firm Van Berkel & Bos. Van Berkel was the architect and Bos, an art historian and former journalist, was the critic-in-residence, composing everything from essays to project descriptions – roles they continued once their practice transformed into its current incarnation, UN Studio, in 1998.

Van Berkel & Bos was behind the Erasmus Bridge in Rotterdam, a single-pylon engineering marvel completed in 1996, and the Möbius House in Het Gooi, a fluid space inspired by the continuous, one-sided Möbius Loop (most often seen as the recycling logo). It was this house, completed in 1998, that ignited the architectural duo's interest in space

and time, the idea of folding dimensions diagrammatically and architecturally, and inspired their desire to re-evaluate the way they look at shape.

The same year, van Berkel, unhappy with the way the firm was mono-focused on architecture and its articulation, and inspired by the fact that he wanted to work on many different scales, formed the looser collective, UN Studio. It went on to design everything from bridges and houses to museums and masterplans, and even a 55m table. 'The World's Longest Table for all Cultures'. But the collective was in Europe. The old world. And very much part of the Dutch group of architects – such as Winka Dubbeldam, West 8 and MVRDV – who were as good at engineering pig farms as they were at folding a façade; as interested in books as they were in buildings. Now, UN Studio is breaking free.

'I believe in the kaleidoscopic aspect of life,' van Berkel says. 'Today, you're on the phone, you're e-mailing, you're communicating with 200 contacts, and they're all in different parts of the world.' It sounds exhausting, but not unfamiliar. 'That's our space-time condition,' he says. 'And I want to bring that to architecture.' Sitting with me at the Gramercy Park >>

Up-and-coming

Why Tel Aviv's creatives are migrating south for Florentine charms

The historic home of Tel Aviv's carpet, fabric and furniture industries, the Florentine district was once filled with factories. Production has shifted to China, but small-scale ateliers still thrive in the now grungy-glam area, alongside spice merchants from the Caucasus, foreign workers needing cheap housing and post pioneers seeking sleek lofts.

It's an exotic, enticing mix that's luring some of the capital's important interior and furniture designers, chief among them Israel's leading high-end furniture maker, Kastiel. Earlier this year the 65-year-old company relocated to a 50,000 sq ft compound, crafted from an Ottoman-era one-time corral and a 1950s warehouse (36 Alfasi Street, tel: 972.3 683 6334, www.kastiel.com). Kastiel's arrival has spurred a mini-migration of the like-minded, including politically charged painter Tsibi Geva, now working in the Kastiel complex's top floor studios. Designer Gal Feldman has opened a boutique (20 Alfasi Street, tel: 972.3 685 0133, www.galfeldman.com) for his colourful leather bags, which have been sold in San Francisco's MoMA shop. Bedding firm B Knit – a former Donna Karan supplier – has set up an airy store selling bed linen and a capsule clothing line (34 Ben Atar Street, tel: 972.3 518 1138, www.bknit.com). And architects and interior designers Gali Amit and Sigal Baranowitz have taken a studio in an artist-filled former warehouse (16 Abulafia Street, tel: 972.3 681 6265).

Meanwhile, an early Florentine pioneer, lighting and industrial designer Ayala Serfaty, has upgraded her Aqua Creations to a larger space just beyond the area's borders (29 Ben Zvi Road, tel: 972.3 515 1225, www.aquagallery.com). Her latest shift southwards suggests Tel Aviv's current talent trek may be far from over. David Kaufman

HIGH FIVE

Due for completion at the end of 2008, UN Studio's Five Franklin Place condo tower is encased in steel bands that reference Tribeca's traditional cast-iron detailing (but also create 'a second body around your life', says architect Ben van Berkel)



Hotel, he's living what he's saying – his BlackBerry keeps buzzing and ringing, and he's trying to find time in his tightly scheduled day of photo shoots and interviews to keep this conversation going. He wants others to be aware that this is how they're living too, and he believes you can do that with architecture by making a building work as a mirror. He believes you can use the way a space is shaped – the way the hallways are formed, the windows are detailed and the layouts are designed – to show people that these shapes are just architectural articulations of their existing reality.

Van Berkel's latest existential experiment is Stateside, in New York, where UN Studio is joining the ranks of Manhattan luxury condo starchitects. A whirlwind few years of condo-building in the city has seen the completion of Philip Johnson and Annabelle Selldorf's Urban Glass House; the launch of Neil Denari's HL3; the opening of Jean Nouvel's 40 Mercer; the construction of Deborah Berke's 48 Bond and Herzog & de Meuron's collaboration with Ian Schrager up the street at 40 Bond; the unveiling of Asymptote's 166 Perry Street (next to Richard Meier's two towers); and \$2bn in sales of Robert AM Stern's Central Park West apartments. It seems as if the city can't possibly hold another condo.

But New York is about potential, and Manhattan is about ambition, so this latest addition, UN Studio's Five Franklin Place in Tribeca, is going to be just fine.

'Let's liberate architecture from any kind of stylistic reference,' van Berkel says. 'Who cares about the box, who cares about the blob?' Five Franklin is neither. It's a 20-storey, 55-unit condo building, slipped into a historical street in a historical neighbourhood, and the big architectural articulation that van Berkel



CONDO ATTITUDE

The lobby has curving lines and flowing shapes, designed as an architectural articulation of daily life. For a profile of architect Ben van Berkel and for more images of Five Franklin Place, see [www.wallpaper.com](#) ★

wants everyone to notice is the series of steel bands that sweep along the side of the building, turning and twisting into balconies and terraces and ornamentation and back into function. The steel is historical (Tribeca is famous for its cast-iron detailing) and the ornament is polemical (modernism is, finally, dead?). The twisting and turning is simply van Berkelian play. 'The bands are almost creating a kind of second body around your everyday life,' he says. They also give the building more than one facade. More than two. Three, even. If you study the building from far away and close and super-close, 'you discover that there might be one thousand and one facades'.

Van Berkel sees an architectural continuum, with the impeccable detail of Miesian articulation on one side – all corners and angles and proportions and planes – and the experiential all-the-buildings-are-a-stage emotion of a David Rockwell on the other. He sees the formal continuum, from blob to box. But he also sees the time continuum, from past to present, from five minutes ago to the oncoming second. Yet he doesn't take these three lines and hold them up against each other. Instead, what van Berkel does in his architecture is take each

end of the lines and hold them together so that they stop being continuous, and start being a circle. He sees the one thousand and one facades as dots on this conceptual circle. It's a diagrammatic approach to architecture – and a move that is both bold (given how stylistically a formal fold is played out in these post-Greg Lynn days) and takes a lot of translation – but it works.

'You have to instrumentalise it,' says van Berkel, explaining how he turned his abstract concept-diagram into a building like Five Franklin. 'If you don't know how to instrumentalise, you can't do architecture.' It seems an ambitious approach, folding and warping ideas, rethinking and recontextualising facts. But van Berkel says it comes down to having no more than two or three points per project. They just have to be good ones. So, with Five Franklin, we have an update of history with the steel; a play on recognition and identification with the movement of the bands; and the dynamics of everyday life with the expressive interiors, a collaboration with B&B Italia.

The project is aspirational. It's a building that affects how you want to be at home, how you want to pick up a book (from the two-storey bookshelf on your way up the curved stairs), and how you want to step outside (through a slot in the series of bands). Each of the interior layouts seems to sweep and move with its potential occupants, the Corian kitchen island blending itself into the living room with a dramatic swoop, the multiple and moving bathroom mirrors reminding us of the multiplicity of self-identification.

'Architecture in itself is only mirroring and embracing a particular kind of event,' explains van Berkel. In the case of Five Franklin, the event is life. ★

FREQUENT FLYERS

Wallpaper's round-up of the big hits in our best-loved stores around the world

Marais, Melbourne

Biker jacket, by Balenciaga
Melbourne's most fashionable are stocking up at elegant, salon-style boutique Marais. Inspired by the Parisian neighbourhood, Marais is home to well-chosen labels such as Kim Jones, Preen and Bruno Pieters. If you can get your hands on Balenciaga's two-toned biker jacket, snap it up: it's the most prized commodity in store. A\$3,500 (E1,630), from Marais, 1st Floor Royal Arcade, 314 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, tel: 61-3 9639 0314. [www.marais.com.au](#)

Watson Kennedy, Seattle

Vintage watch cufflinks
Ted Kennedy Watson, owner of lifestyle store Watson Kennedy, has made his name keeping his three outlets filled with luxury essentials (from glassware to washing-up liquid) from obscure boutique brands. Amid the eclectic stock, discerning shoppers hone in on the vintage watch cufflinks, each comprising parts of watches that date from the 1940s to the 1970s. \$195, from Watson Kennedy, 1022 First Avenue, Seattle, tel: 1.206 652 8350. [www.watsonkennedy.com](#)

Persephone Books, London

Novel by Winifred Watson
At Persephone Books' new Notting Hill store, bookworms are clearing the shelves of Winifred Watson's 1938 novel, *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*. A specialist in reprints of 20th-century novels, just like Persephone's Bloomsbury outpost, the new store is packed with short stories, diaries and cookery books. £10, published by Persephone Classics, from Persephone Books, 109 Kensington Church Street, London, tel: 44-20 7221 2201. [www.persephonebooks.co.uk](#)

Idée, Tokyo

'AO' sofa
Cult Japanese furniture company Idée, with five Tokyo branches, has collaborated with Philippe Starck, Marc Newson, et al, but its own, low-rise 'AO' sofa (below) is the big seller right now. ¥29,150 (\$1,180), by Idée, 2-16-29 Jiyugaoka, Meguro-ku, Tokyo, tel: 81-3 5431 5720. [www.ideo.co.jp](#)
Pei-Ru Keh

