

# HOME

& Garden

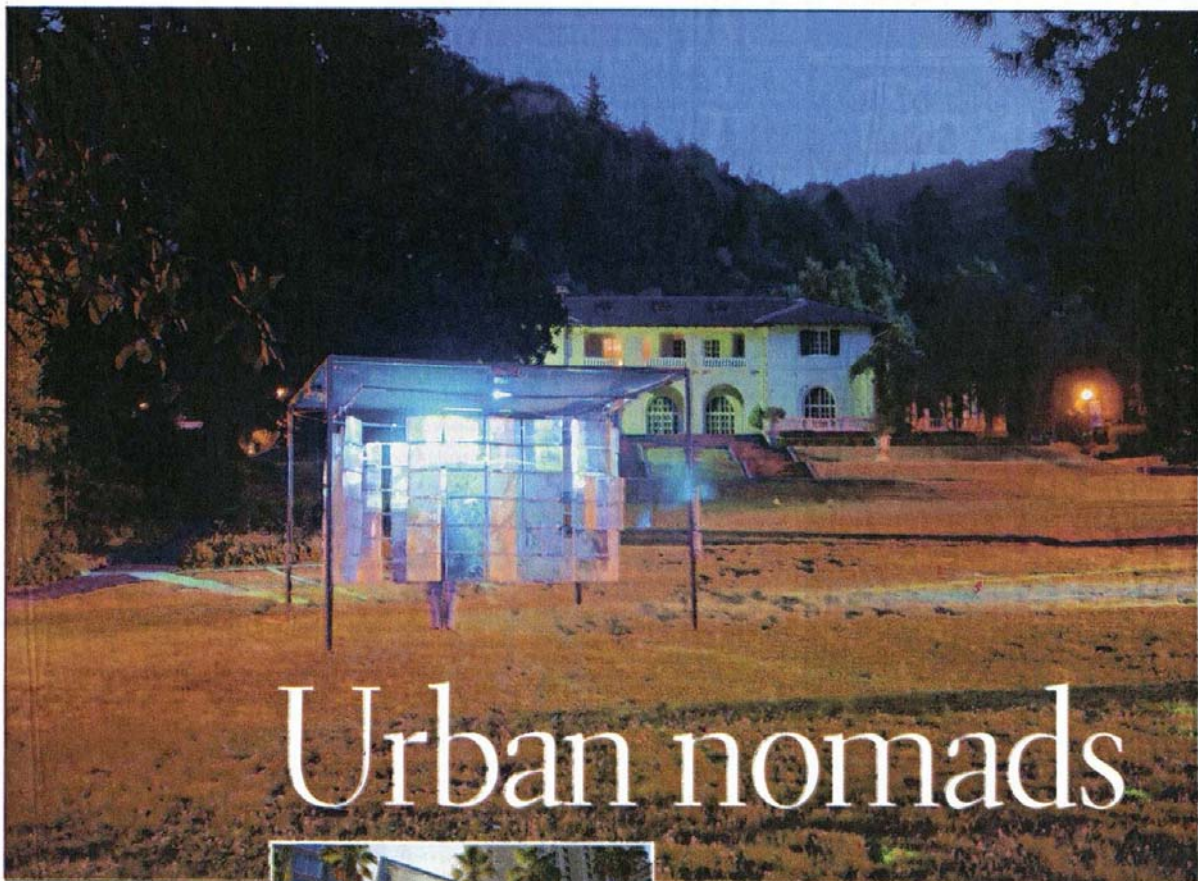


## Two in one

Multifunctional furniture is a must for those who live in a small space. And style is even more important when that space can't contain a lot of furniture. Marina Bautier's Chaise & Tabouret multitasks beautifully as a wooden chair that holds an auxiliary stool beneath it. The piece was introduced this month by Atlantico, a more affordable subsidiary of De La Espada, at the Oporto Show, Portugal's Trade Fair of Design, Interiors and Architecture.

A mere 15.1 inches wide, 16.5 inches deep and 33.1 inches high, the unit packs a lot of seating style into a small space. In oak at \$445 and walnut at \$645, from De La Espada, at [www.delaespada.com](http://www.delaespada.com), or order it through Limn, 290 Townsend St., San Francisco, (415) 543-5466.

— Lynette Evans



# Urban nomads

In **Urban Observatory**, a portable tourist space at Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, above, and previously, on a San Jose plaza, right, users select spots on a digital map, then watch Internet images projected onto fiberglass panels, being adjusted by its creator, architect Michael Herrman, below.



Traveling light with temporary structures that can fit into a suitcase — and into any space — may be the wave of the future

**A**ir travel may soon be the most significant contributor to global warming. But people are still on the move and consequently, according to artist-architect Michael Herrman, a recent resident at Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, tourism will be a bigger industry than oil in the near future.

With that in mind, Herrman inaugurated his art piece — a portable tourist information space called **Urban Observatory** — in the center of Fairmont Plaza in San Jose during the recent second biennial (01S) festival, a technology-meets-art event.

The space is made of a 15-by-15-foot cube-shaped, bolted steel frame with suspended walls of translucent fiberglass and polyester resin panels, held together like chain mail in a flexible armature and lit from within.

The prototype **Observatory** is Herrman's latest relatively lightweight, easy-to-assemble structure, designed while he was a fellow at the American Academy in Rome. Herrman has also lived in Tokyo, where he worked for architect Arata Isozaki, and in Paris, where he now lives, he has worked with architect Jean Nouvel. Perhaps that's why this urban nomad from Miami is so interested in what happens to cities with very fluid populations and how a young ar-

chitect can build flexible, reusable spaces without destroying or adding to buildings.

Why? Because cities are fixed places, but public gathering places — and even their buildings — can and should be flexible.

It's a valid argument, especially when you consider the just-opened Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco designed by architect Daniel Libeskind. Among the defining qualities of this structure have been its flexibility and portability, and yet surprisingly, the wonderful expensive spaces constructed within the shell of the former PG&E power station seem confined.

The building's historic brick facade by Willis Polk, viewed from the new plaza laid before it, is a demanding beauty that requires that all eyes remain on it. If the museum had not been forced into a historic building, it could have been a flexible structure, like Herrman's glowing **Observatory**, and better reflected the adaptable spirit of his work.

In Rome, where the new European economic structure allows itinerant people to gather unexpectedly in squares, Herrman was thinking of flexible "virtual" spaces, which could be a center of interest. On some weekends,

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Photos by MICHAEL HERRMAN



# Tourists can use Urban Observatory to tailor their itineraries

## ► DESIGN SPOTTING

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he noticed Romanian immigrants converging to receive fresh busloads of Romanians, who formed spontaneous outdoor markets, without any formal structure or shelter.

"At the same time, a priest would be giving a sermon nearby," he says. Drawn to this "changing cultural landscape," Herrman wanted to explore an equally flexible form of architecture for the Romanians.

So he decided that his structures, made from a kit, would make a town square many things at once. The exterior walls could morph every few hours, with movable planes and, with the help of digital imagery, into various building types as needed: a mosque, a church, a synagogue or simply a temple for tourists.

With a budget of only \$15,000, Herrman and Ethan Miller and Bruce Gardner, artists who use technology as their medium, collaborated on the project. They did not want traditional LCD monitors, so they simulated the wall effects with computer projections and digital prints installed in the hollow resin panels.

Part of their inspiration was the Cave, a room with computers that projected sound and pictures to simulate 3-D environments that appear to exist beyond the room's actual boundaries. The Cave was a project at the University of Chicago in 1992.

A lot of art has evolved from the Cave, including many of the digital and kinetic art installations that are a part of Superlight, an exhibition at the San Jose Museum of Art done in conjunction with 01SJ.

Outside the museum during the festival, Herrman and his team, with the help of volunteers, quickly set up the frame and rigged four computers to simultaneously gather information and images about the Bay Area and San Jose from the Internet and project them onto the fiberglass walls. As the skies darkened, crowds were drawn to the Urban Observatory.



Photos by MICHAEL HERRMAN



Tourists can visit the Urban Observatory, above, to create itineraries using the Internet. At left, tiles on the walls display digital projections.

At standard tourist offices, you might find pamphlets about a place you want to visit, "but they steer you to just a few sights and determine the experience you might have," Herrman said. He argued that that approach is too confining, while his approach allows travelers to design their own itineraries and have custom-made experiences.

Visitors to the Observatory could also activate a digital world map with (perfectly functioning) foot controls and pinpoint an area of interest; the computers were programmed to cull information for itineraries anywhere

## If you go

For more information on the next 01SJ Global Festival of Art on the Edge, presented by Zer01, go to [www.01sj.org](http://www.01sj.org).

**Superlight:** The lead exhibition of the second Biennial 01SJ festival, sponsored in part by the city of San Jose, includes algorithmic films, kinetic sculpture and printed materials that address questions about the impact of technology and digital art. Through Aug. 30. San Jose Museum of Art, 110 S. Market St. (408) 271-6840, [www.sjmusart.org](http://www.sjmusart.org).

**01SJ co-sponsor Montalvo Arts Center** sponsors an invitational artists' residency program for the audio, visual and cooking arts. Nominees are given about a three-month stipend to live and work on public art projects while on campus. [www.montalvoarts.org](http://www.montalvoarts.org).

**Contemporary Jewish Museum:** 736 Mission St., San Francisco. (415) 655-7800, [www.theqjm.org](http://www.theqjm.org).

on the globe.

Shortly after 01SJ's five-day run, Herrman dismantled the Observatory and reinstalled it for ten days on the lawns of Villa Montalvo, with significant changes. He eliminated the floor controls, planted the frame directly into the grass and added an easy-to-use joystick inside to navigate the digital map and go online.

"The way people inhabit cities is changing because of transient populations that usurp spaces as their own for a short time," Herrman said. "Cities are permanent places, but with such buildings, we can make them flexible. It's a new kind of time share."

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