

CLOSET ARCHITECTURE

is the terminology designated by New York City architect and sculptor Allan Wexler for his series of wood cabinets that are intended to make the mundane interesting.

This was recently demonstrated by Wexler through his commission from the Department Of Architecture And Environmental Design at Parsons School Of Design in New York City. The brief required an F&B unit for permanent use which would be storable when not needed to service guests after seminars and lectures. Expanding on his personal theories regarding 'the folding up and opening of space,' Wexler designed a collapsible kitchen. During the project, funded by Wilsonart, a well-known US manufacturer of plastic laminate materials, Wexler approached the problem as a means to further analyze the analogies between architecture and sculpture.

The project was conceived after the client noticed an empty space behind a wall suitable for the end purpose of a kitchen source area. Wexler envisioned the void as a mould, which determined the form and, to some extent, the function of the kitchen. The form (kitchen) created was to be easily removable and replaceable within the space.

Wexler elaborates, "I carefully removed the wall hiding the enclosed space so as not to disturb the patina of age. I left the existing space untouched, with peeling paint, vertical heating pipes and decayed mouldings. The kitchen's form is the negative of the space it comes out of. The irregularities of the space makes the crate shape interesting. Slots in the countertop allow the crate to slide past the pipes inside the space."

Composed of four units, services of a common wet bar would more accurately describe the functions of the structure, as conventional cooking surfaces were not required, nor developed into the piece. The main unit, in its closed position, measures 3' 9" wide x 7' 2" deep x 6' 3" high. The unit unfolds into red laminate-covered work surfaces and storage for glassware, serving utensils and beverage stock. Waste receptacles and maintenance supplies were designated for other sections of the unit. Twin components, each measuring 63" high x 18" wide x 18" deep were



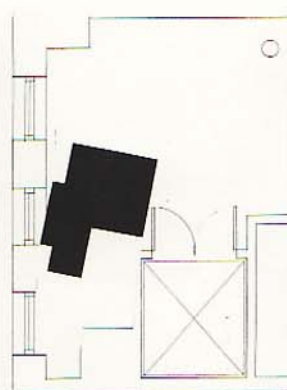
Closet architect Allan Wexler.

designed to house a sink and water connection to chill wine with the other component as a framework for a refrigerator and full coffee service location. The fourth unit, lined (as the other units) with neutral grey laminate, reflects a compressed verticality in form, more sculptural, but practically, a storage slot for aprons.

Wexler designed the interior of the unit in a sculptural format, addressing the juxtaposition of the divisions and utensils, studying the aesthetics as well as practical space allowances and usage conveniences.

According to him, "The ordinary kitchen and utensils can be isolated and looked at closely, as if historical relics. I try to use architecture as a means to turn everyday human activity into theatre like the Japanese tea ceremony, which carefully and meticulously locates a ladle to look casual. It shows the uniqueness of the mass-produced; a slowing down, instant replay of life as a 'kit of parts,' microscopic views. The knife, spoon, napkin, water, fire, screw, plywood - these things I will turn into sculpture and their use into dance."

Interested in the contrast between the handmade, the rustic, the mass-produced and generic kitchen equipment, Wexler specified typical American construction grade AC Fir Plywood for the exterior of the structure. The interior surfaces contrasted, with the precision finish of Wilsonart laminate. Unsanded and unfinished coarse exterior surfaces balance the uniformity of the interior and its



Original concept drawing showing how the existing void acts like a mould for the collapsible kitchen.



The collapsible kitchen designed by Wexler.



The collapsible kitchen when pulled out from the niche.

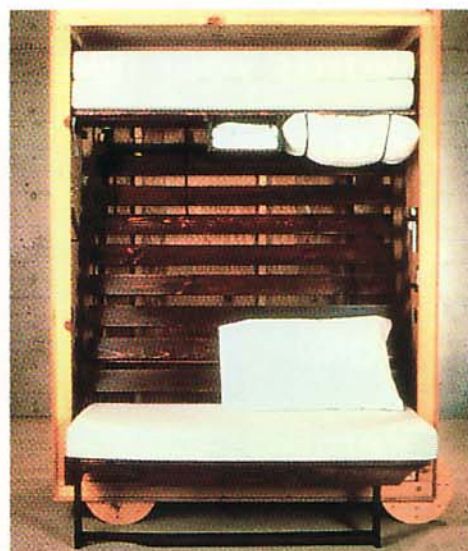


...And interior of the kitchen when opened out.



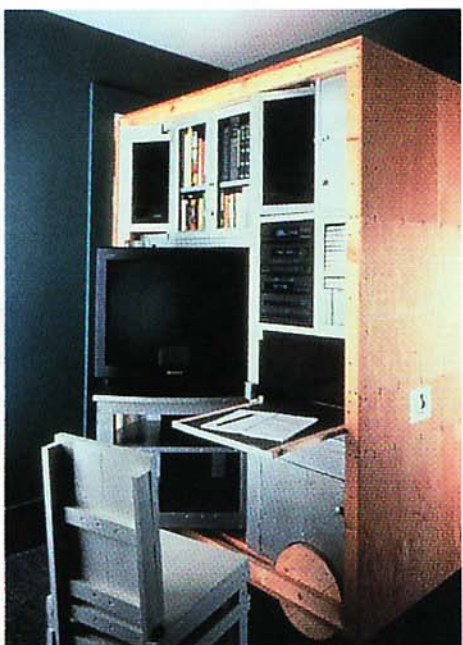
D. JAMES DEE

Another Wexler creation, the *Crate House*, consists of four crates which wheel into a 8' cube. On being opened, each crate can equip a room.



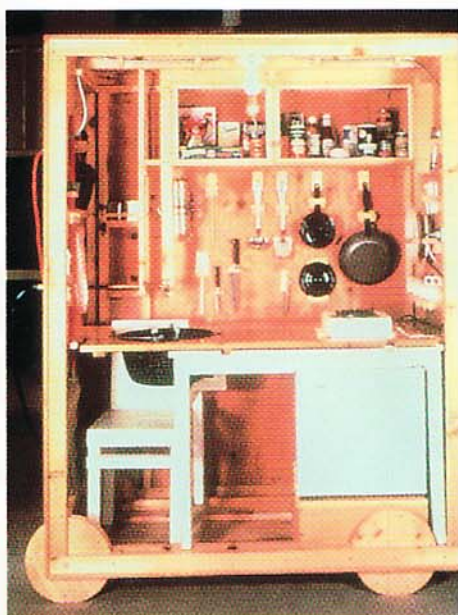
BEN BARNHART

Bedroom.



BEN BARNHART

From the *Crate House*: living room



BEN BARNHART

Kitchen.



Bathroom.

practical expectations. Wexler noted that exposing all hardware 'reveals the process of construction and redefines the hardware as decoration.'

Prior to completing the Kitchen, Allan Wexler completed a *Crate House*, sponsored through the University of Massachusetts, which con-

stituted an entire house folding into an 8' cube. On a budget of US\$4000 (about HK\$31,000), the *Crate House* basically comprises an empty white cube with a door opening in each of the walls and four crates with a door opening in each of the walls. Four crates, mounted on wheels, can be pushed through the door openings and locat-

ed within a room, as required. The crates hold furniture and utensils needed to equip a two-person household to Western standards for a kitchen, living room, bedroom and bathroom. It offers a minimalistic approach to the complexities of a conventional living space.