

Allan Wexler: Between Architecture and Art

In tiny but habitable houses serving only one function at a time and in rough-hewn models, handmade furniture, and purposeful-looking follies, **Allan Wexler** explores "the relationship between art and architecture," as he puts it. The new monograph, *Allan Wexler* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 64 pages, 8 1/4 x 10 1/8, 99 illustrations, 56 in color, paper, \$25) with an introduction by Bernd Schulz, traces the career of the New York artist who holds degrees in both art and architecture, shows his work at the Ronald Feldman Gallery, and teaches architecture at Pratt Institute.

In 1973, when he arrived in New York, Wexler proposed timing the lights in the new World Trade Center to

create images of the Empire State Building and other monuments on its facades at night. But soon he was making simple wood structures that explicitly showed how they had been made. By 1980, he had begun to zero in on functions—sheds with fold-away dining tables, chairs, and beds that slid through the walls. He built changeable, freestanding rooms where avant-garde plays were performed. As the rituals of life became the subject of his art, architectural forms became his language.

Wexler's art constitutes a kind of architectural "research," as Schulz calls it, and some of his works, like the fold-away Parsons Kitchen of 1991 (OCULUS, December 1998, p. 6) have impressive lessons to teach about efficient storage. But there is always a super-rational quality that, combined with raw craftsmanship, gives Wexler's work an iconic quality. It looks like art because of its simplicity, straightforwardness, and Wexler's control. More than the size (small) or the setting (usually a gallery), it is the fact that no one but the artist has had a hand in its creation or use that distinguishes it from architecture.

The projects "suggest an everyday kind of usefulness," though "their creator was much less interested in solving problems than in exploring fields within which certain phenomena (such as collecting rainwater or eating a meal together) give rise to a whole range of questions," Schulz writes, placing Wexler "firmly within a tradition of humane and ecological thought that goes back to Thoreau, Emerson, and Buckminster Fuller."

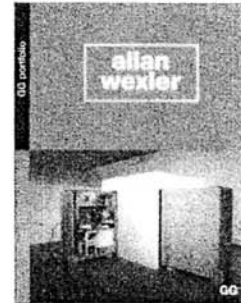
For the last few years, Wexler has been working with his wife, Ellen Wexler, an artist, designer and educator,

Merkel, Jayne. "Allan Wexler: Between Art and Architecture." *Oculus*, 61.6 (February 1999): 16-17.



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on a series of projects in public places and museums. In 1996, the pair collaborated on a permanent, interactive exhibit at the Henry Luce Nature Observatory at Belvedere Castle, in Central Park. Now, for the High Museum in Atlanta, they are working on an environment which fosters new ways to experience the art with the architecture (by Richard Meier). At the Albany Institute of History and Art, they are building the "smallest museum in the world," the 5 x 5 x 6-foot Museum of Egyptian Art. And for Expo 2000 in Hannover, Germany, they are creating an artwork which "brings the wind turbine's graceful shape and majestic scale down to earth" for the public to experience firsthand. —J.M.



Allan Wexler, introduction by Bernd Schulz



Parsons Kitchen, Allan Wexler



Yardsaver Houses, Allan Wexler



Picket Fence Furniture, Allan Wexler