

Exhibit: Movable Building Models

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By JOSEPH GIOVANNINI

"DINING Building With Window Chairs" — one of 50 hand-built architectural models now in "Small Buildings," a show of the work of the New York architect Allan Wexler at the Ronald Feldman Fine Arts gallery in SoHo — appears to be a wooden garden shed, but, in fact, the structure shelters a wall-to-wall table inside and might be called a dining folly.

Small and modest even by doll-house standards, the structure has six windows on its four sides; each of the windows, when it is pulled out from the model, reveals itself to be the back of a dining chair belonging to the miniature table inside. The dining building is only slightly wider than the dining table.

The pavilion is one of a number of fantasy structures that take a simple, everyday activity like eating and surround it by the smallest of buildings.

While each model may pass for a whim, each in fact contains a humorous or serious idea; together, the models blur the distinction between furniture and architecture. In some cases the furniture is a small building, but in others, the small building is furniture. For example, the walls of "Building With Doors and



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Model of Allan Wexler's
office for a garden site.

Drawers" are completely made up of drawers, and the whole building is a type of chest. The four walls of another small pavilion, "Slide Away Wall Building No. 3," all slide in separate directions to reveal a dining table inside, almost an outdoor armoire.

Mr. Wexler is designing architecture that makes a feature out of its operable parts — entire walls slide, windows pull out, roof gables flap up, shutters open and close, and awnings collapse. If, in the show, there are signs asking viewers not to touch the models, it is because so many parts move, and the fragile models invite handling. The architect is proposing participatory architecture within arm's reach — buildings that respond to the human touch.

In the center of the show is a full-size structure made up of operable parts that combine in clever ways for different uses. Designed and built by Mr. Wexler for last summer's "Art on the Beach" program in Manhattan, the structure is made of four separate fabric and metal sheds, 8 feet high and 2½ feet square, which, when they are attached, form one large 5-foot room. Mr. Wexler notes that it can be used in many ways, among them, "four toy boxes that become a playroom; four lockers that become a changing room; four closets that become a guest room."

Taking the simple idea that it is in some way desirable for people to affect their environment by being able to act upon it, the architect has designed a real house, a model of which is in the show. Designed for Eve and Hal Levy, and now under construction, the model shows a modest beach house surrounded by four small pavilions, each with a separate use. The floor plans indicate that one interior sliding wall can close down a den area, making it into a guest bedroom. The same wall can slide in front of the service core, to hide it, or close off the kitchen. Large exterior sliding shutters protect the north windows when the house is closed in winter. A pavilion for shade has an adjustable roof canopy. This is not a cool push-button house, but the most direct, palpable and workable of homes.

Also at the gallery is a show of wood constructions by the New York architect Susana Torre, called "On (Post Modern) Architectural Space." Both shows will run through Feb. 16 at the Feldman gallery, 31 Mercer Street (Grand Street); 212-226-3232. Hours are 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. Tuesday through Saturday.