A photograph of a modern, minimalist house at dusk. The house features large glass windows and a balcony. The interior is warmly lit, showing a bedroom with a bed and a living area with a piano. The house is reflected in a pool of water in the foreground. The sky is a deep blue with some light clouds.

MICHAEL WEBB

BRAVE NEW HOUSES

ADVENTURES IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LIVING

RIZZOLI



German precision and Japanese serenity mingle in a house that borders a canal. This idyllic enclave of landscaped waterways is a fragment of a failed real-estate venture of the 1910s—an attempt to recreate Venice beside the Pacific. A tall ficus hedge conceals the white stucco cube from the public footpath and the entrance off a service alley is impassive, but the interior is full of light and surprises. It's a machine for living that works in interesting ways and an experiment in minimalism that is enriched by views of water, sky, and greenery.

Holger Schubert, who grew up in Hamburg, trained as an industrial designer at Art Center and was planning to build on a beachfront plot when he chanced on the canals. He and his Japanese girlfriend, Yuriko Nagasaki,

wanted to marry and raise a family and they decided that it would be quicker to remodel an existing house than to start from scratch. Schubert bought a ten-year-old, 2,800-square-foot contemporary residence, intending only to upgrade the kitchen and master bathroom. One thing led to another, and it took three years and half a million dollars to refine the entire house.

"I decided to tear out all the stuff we didn't like, saving whatever we could, and then design new window openings, built-ins, and finishes," he says. "I was naïve, thinking it was just a matter of drywall, glass, and paint." Imported windows and pivoting doors, limestone paving and white-oak paneling demanded expert installation. Schubert learned the hard way that few shared his sense of perfectionism,

and that you don't demolish anything before deciding what to put in its place. "You have to know where you are going, or it's costly, time-consuming, and messy," he admits ruefully.

Now that the house is finished, harmony rules. In contrast to most neighboring residences, where the ground floor is for living and upstairs for sleeping, the couple's bedroom opens onto the enclosed garden, and the bathroom is suffused with natural light from a side wall of translucent glass that is screened by feathery bamboo. Both were inspired by Schubert's three-year sojourn in Tokyo working for the Toto corporation, where he learned to live with a minimum of possessions in one room, and cherish the alternation of light and shade, the sensuous and the austere.

- 1 An impassive entry facade, which opens onto the service alley
- 2 First, second and third floor plans





A deep soaking tub occupies much of the bathroom, and the open shower can be screened off by curtains. The floor slopes to a concealed strip drain and a mirror slides across on an overhead track. Essential tools, like electric toothbrushes and a water pic, are clamped to built-in storage cabinets above a pair of walnut-encased pedestal sinks. The bedroom ceiling was lowered to achieve intimacy and conceal a structural beam, and a flat television screen pivots on a central column so that it can be viewed from the bed or the facing sofa.

Aluminum-clad steps, lit from tiny downlights in the brackets that support the stainless steel handrail, lead up to the second-floor living areas and office, and to the upper-level guest bedroom, Japanese-style sitting room, and roof

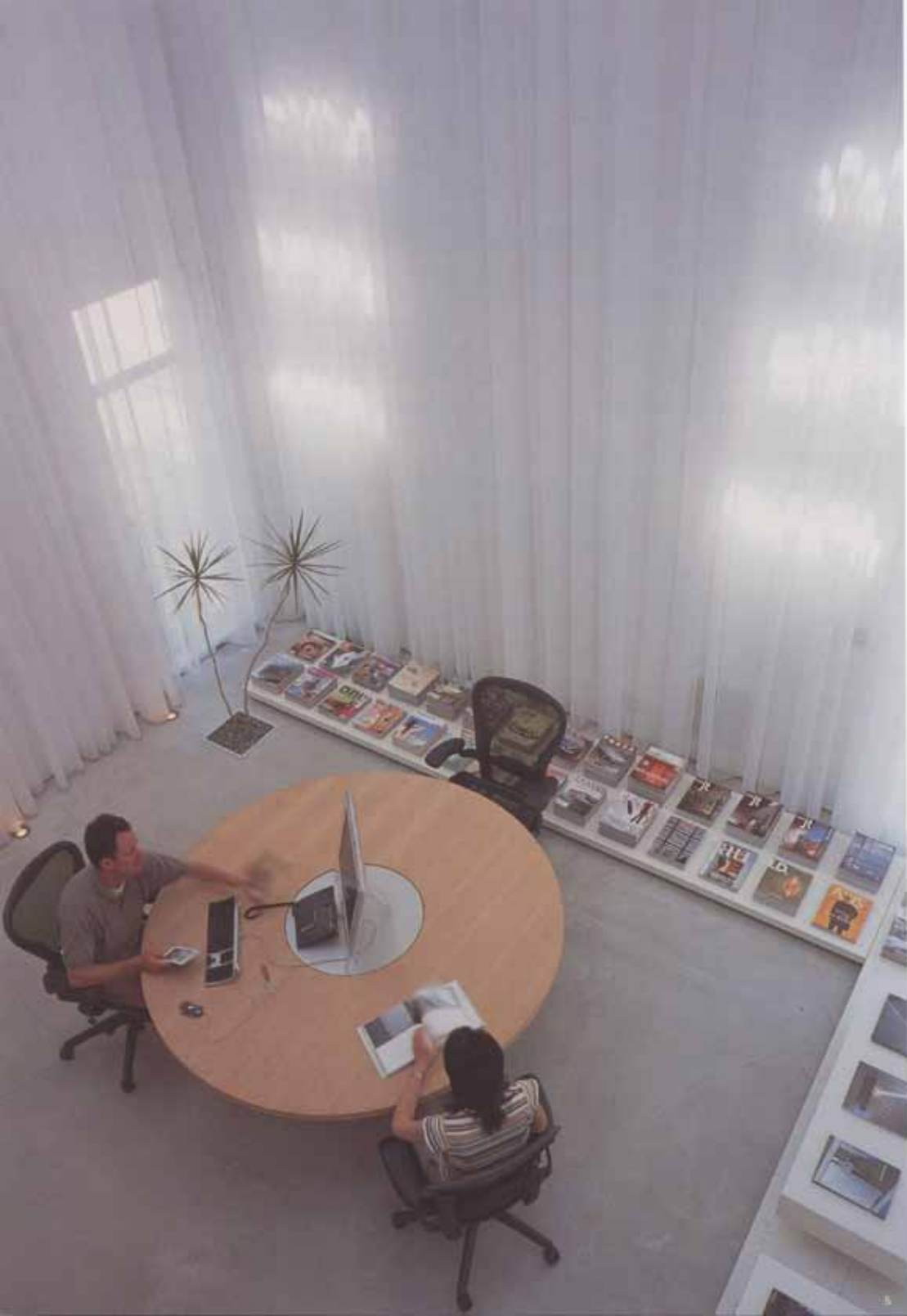
terrace. The kitchen and dining area flow out of the double-height living room, and sunlight from eleven south-facing windows plays over the white walls and concrete floors. Expansive sliding windows to the west frame the canal. Schubert designed the dining table: a rectangle of medium density fiberboard with a matte white finish supported on two aluminum-wrapped poles set in the concrete. An opening at the center accommodates a metal container for *shabu shabu*, or a glass dish that can be illuminated from recessed spots directly above and below to cast shadows on the floor and ceiling. Sheer white organza drapes surround the twenty-foot-high office on three sides, turning it into what the designer calls "a floating work tent," and a circular pedestal table revolves

to keep the computer screen out of the sun. The table can get cluttered when two people are sharing it, but Schubert has acquired a space in Culver City for Archis, his design practice.

As a first house by a designer with no architectural training, the project has turned out amazingly well. Schubert has given functionalism a human face, and he's constantly surprised by the way the house changes its character throughout the day. They wish they had more storage space, but realize they'd quickly fill whatever they had. Kaya, the couple's two-year-old daughter, has brought changes. "I love the sun, but for her it's too bright, so I've had to install drapes," admits Schubert. However, he is busily planning the beach house, incorporating the lessons he has learned from this one.

3 Expansive windows on the upper levels overlook the canal
4 Looking back from the living room to the open kitchen and gallery





- 5 Looking down on the office, wrapped in sheers like a cocoon
- 6 Felt seating pads and a ground-hugging table on the third floor
- 7 Walnut-clad sinks in the first floor Japanese-style bathroom
- 8 Pedestal dining table is pierced and lit from above and below

