

INTERIOR DESIGN

\$8.95

MARCH 2002

A photograph of a dining room. In the foreground, a dark wood dining table with a thick, rustic top is partially visible. Several dark wood chairs with black leather upholstery are arranged around the table. The background wall is made of horizontal wood panels. The text "In California" is printed in a light yellow font on the table's surface.

In California



TAKING CUES FROM the quasi-universal language of their medium, film production houses are increasing their global presence. Neue Sentimental Film, a Frankfurt-based producer of commercials, music videos, and corporate-identity campaigns, has 11 offices worldwide. For the one in Marina del Rey, California, the company made a point to profit from the area's perks, notably the proximity to the ocean and availability of capacious bow-truss buildings, by leasing a 12,000-square-foot warehouse. Then Neue Sentimental commissioned Graft, a consortium of five young architects, for the renovation.

Neue Sentimental art director J.P. Flack had previously collaborated with Graft on a music-video set. (He also eventually participated in the design charrette for the new space.) With offices in Berlin and the Silverlake area of L.A., Graft's own studios resemble a "middle-class version of a hippie commune," says cofounder Wolfram Putz, but that wasn't a viable option for Neue Sentimental. Though the job came with a loose program and, surpris-

ingly, no aesthetic preferences on the part of the client, the company did require an environment supporting teamwork, a good party place, and a plan to accommodate growth and contraction as personnel fluctuates according to the production stage of each film. These concerns, coupled with building type, clearly indicated an open, exuberant space. Putz and partners Gregor Hoheisel, Christoph Korner, Lars Krückeberg, and Thomas Willemeit came up with an imaginative amalgamation of their own completed work in exhibition, commercial, and residential design. (In a case of beginner's luck, the firm's first paying project was a studio for Brad Pitt.)

Faced with a clean shell, existing skylights, and a mezzanine, the architects devised a new scheme based on an urban metaphor. It begins at the entry, with a concrete tunnel fabricated as an anteroom. Analogous to the gate in the walls of a medieval European city, the element creates a "strong spatial effect as one arrives at the threshold," Hoheisel says. The compressed area then opens up to a grand volume, where the allegory continues.

Graft imagined row houses configured along a street. Translated, the concept takes form as five work units, double-height towers constructed of dry-wall and steel frames with inset panes of transparent or translucent acrylic. →

Previous spread: Film production is a mad, mad, mad, mad world, and Graft alluded to it with the padded white vinyl walls of Neue Sentimental Film's conference room, housed in two shipping containers.

Opposite: A concrete tunnel acts as an antechamber to the contrasting 20-foot-high main volume. Graft's interventions at the former warehouse include the conference room at left and work towers, right.

Above: The five towers incorporate storage, meeting, and work areas. Suspended belts have wiring snaked through their support columns.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BENNY CHAN

High Production Values

Lights, camera, action—Graft converts a warehouse for Neue Sentimental Film

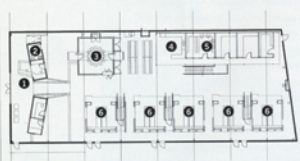




Left: Stairs afford access to semiprivate offices.

Below: The work towers are constructed of drywall, steel, and acrylic.

Opposite: Birch plywood tables and benches, another work option, accommodate personnel overflow during various production stages.



- 1 RECEPTION
- 2 REST ROOM
- 3 CONFERENCE ROOM
- 4 KITCHEN/LOUNGE
- 5 LIBRARY
- 6 WORK TOWER

0 10 20 40





Three of the towers are for Neue Sentimental's permanent staff; the remaining pair is for transient collaborative production arms. Self-contained mini-suites, these inspired units offer solutions for storage and meetings on the ground level; above, personal work spaces fall midway between private and open offices. Bona fide private offices, arrayed on the opposite mezzanine, are fronted with tension-curved acrylic panels.

Both options provide occupants with easy physical and visual access to 5,000 central square feet of open space—the mark of true luxury and an enlightened client, according to Putz. The open swath, symbolic of a street or marketplace, beckons with a staff kitchen, long tables and benches, the de rigueur basketball hoop, and a conference room constructed from shipping containers. Yes, we've seen this last solution before, but Graft brings an unusual level of refinement to this tough little building-within-a-building.

The architects actually joined two containers and bridged the junction at two positions. A plywood arch signals the entry, continuing upward to form a 3-foot-long canopy inside. The dark, solid plane then literally lightens up as plywood gives way to frosted acrylic backlit by pendant fixtures. With the conference room's walls, which Graft covered in white vinyl, there's no denying the similarity to a padded cell, especially with the red cross on the built-in bar. "We did think of people bouncing off the walls," Putz concedes. The instant the installation was completed, though, he immediately had another thought: nightclub.

On the whole, materials are basic. "We didn't want them high-end," Hoheisel says. Custom furniture, stained a rich brown, may look expensive but is made of affordable birch plywood. And nothing illustrates the point better than the flooring. It's a recycled rubber product used for running tracks and sports arenas. Adding an inexpensive jolt of vivid blue, the rubber furthermore addresses acoustics, as the metal and concrete shell needed at least one sound-absorbing surface.

The interior landscape, brought to its current state of completion in nine months, still awaits some finishing touches. Graft envisions a roof garden for the conference room. Nondescript views through windows, built to comply with fire codes, may also be enlivened. Plans call for film images of the client's own making to back the apertures.

—Edie Cohen



Opposite: The two shipping containers that form the vinyl-padded conference room are joined by brown-painted birch plywood.

Above: Piercing the container's skin, the built-in bar is accessible inside and out.

PROJECT TEAM: STEFAN BEESE.

UPHOLSTERY (CONFERENCE ROOM): FELIX UPHOLSTERY; ACRYLIC PANELS: SOLTER PLASTICS; RUBBER FLOORING: AMERICAN RECYCLING CENTER; PLYWOOD: PLYWOOD & DOOR; WINDOWS: TORRANCE STEEL WINDOW CO.; STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: C.W. HOWE ASSOCIATES; ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR: PETER WEICH ELECTRICAL; GENERAL CONTRACTOR: PROCREATIONS.