

PIN-UP



Fantasy

Featuring

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NIGHTLIFE
CRUISING
ALIENS
COUCHES

Plus

Anna Aagaard Jensen, Marc Held, Black Quantum Futurism, Shawn Maximo, Carola Bestetti, Formafantasma, Victor Vasarely, Jimmy Robert, Zheng Mahler, Troy Conrad Therrien, Colleen Weinstein, Kayode Ojo and Rafael de Cárdenas, Doug Aitken, Oana Stănescu and Something Fantastic, Paul Kopkau, and the new Tantini Legend

ISSN 1933-9755



MAGAZINE FOR ARCHITECTURAL
ENTERTAINMENT ISSUE 27
USD 25.00 *FALL WINTER 2019/20*

Utopia for Sale

A lake house near Paris in need of a new owner



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Utopia, as imagined by Sir Thomas More in 1516, was an island. And were you to acquire this house, in the valley of the River Yvette, south of Paris, you'd be purchasing an island of sorts, since this *Maison de l'Utopie* (1974–78), as it's known, floats on concrete *pilotis* rising from the bed of a small lake. Speaking of beds, the house's architect, Marc Held (born Paris 1932), is perhaps best remembered for the bed he designed for a vacation village built by Georges Candilis at Port-Barcarès, on the Mediterranean just north of Perpignan, in 1962–76. Aimed at a low-income market, the holiday homes were to be sold furnished, so low-cost, practical pieces were required: Held designed a double bed with integrated nightstands and lamps that could be cast from just two mirror-image molds in polypropylene-reinforced fiberglass. This utopia of sorts — bringing affordable design to the masses, in line with convictions he had acquired in the working-class, communist milieu of his childhood — was afterwards taken up by discount chain Prisunic, who famously featured it on the cover of their 1968 catalogue. Held would subsequently attempt a similar democratization in partnership with Knoll, after falling in love with Arne Jacobsen's celebrated *Egg* chair on a research trip to Denmark. "I sat down in it, it pivoted, and I said to myself, 'I'll never be able to afford to make the mechanisms, the ball bearings.' So I had an idea: all we needed to do was sit the chair on its ass." The result was the round-bottomed *Culbutto* (1967) — *culbuter* literally means "to fall on your ass" — which, though it never sold well, became a cult design collectible.





Much has been written about the role women played in the creation of iconic 20th-century homes, and the Maison de l'Utopie was no exception. While it was paid for by a male industrialist, Held claims hardly to have met him, the figure behind the commission being the industrialist's wife, whom he discreetly refers to as "Annie W." After the couple acquired a 5-acre marshy site on the floodplain of the Yvette, Annie launched an architectural competition for a building that would serve both as a home and "a sort of private cultural foundation," inviting Held to take part. "While I'd always hated competitions, I don't know why, I entered an extravagant project." In response to the unstable boggy ground, he proposed a lightweight wooden structure on concrete stilts, cladding it in Cor-Ten steel that would safely rust in earthy harmony with the bucolic setting. "With an engineer friend specialized in metal, we designed every part, right down to the smallest bolt. The whole lot was prefabricated in a factory." Grouping octagonal accommodation pods around a giant, space-frame-roofed living area, Held also designed every interior detail, including the furniture.

But the utopia, at any rate for the Ws, would not last long, since shortly after completion of their house they divorced and sold up. Today, like a ship wrecked on the shores of an enchanted island, the Maison de l'Utopie appears ambiguously nostalgic — still optimistically futuristic but also prophetically dystopian, the rusting hulk of the postwar economic dream sinking elegiacally into the primal bog.

The Maison de l'Utopie is being offered for sale by Architecture de Collection, which specializes in notable buildings of the 20th and 21st centuries. contact@architecturedecollection.fr



