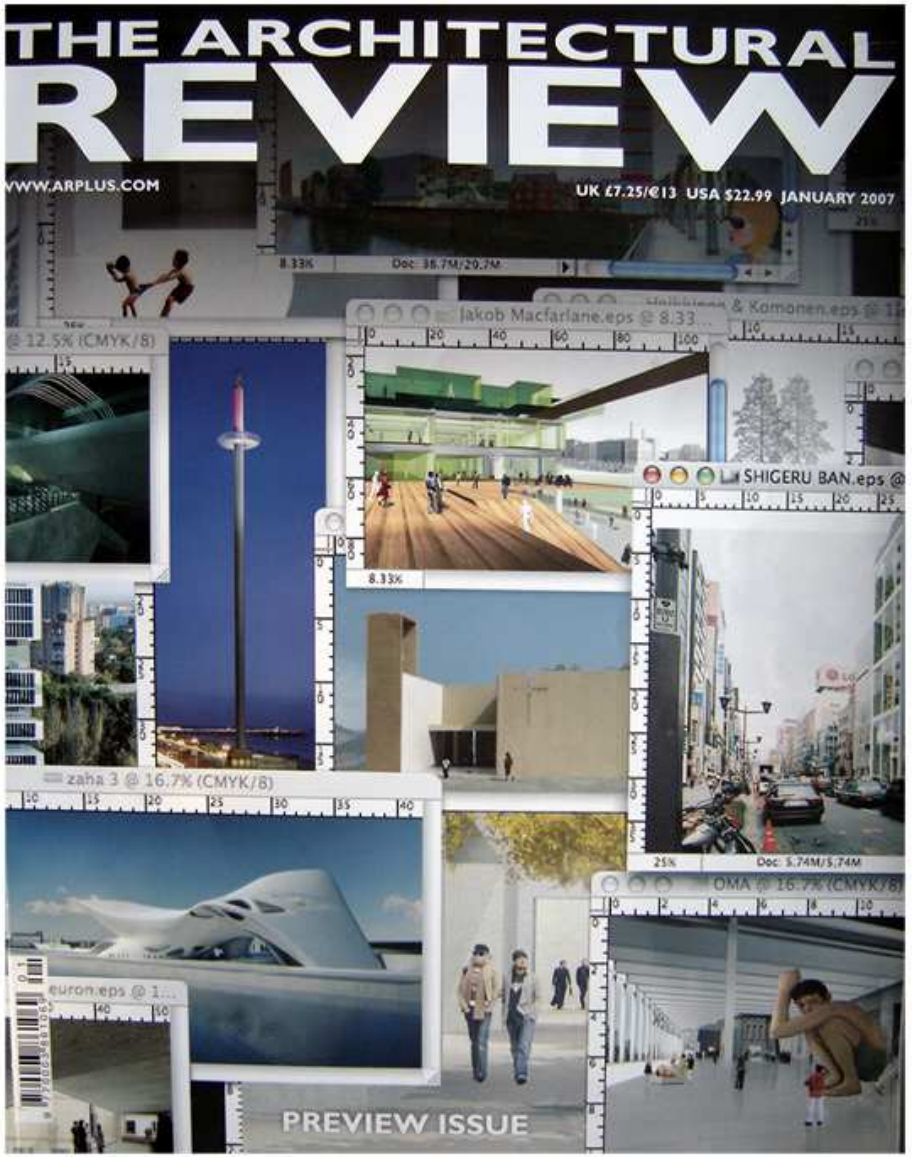
THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
1319 PREVIEW ISSUE

66 67 : GERMAN DEL SOL
HOUSING, MADRID SPAIN

2007 JANUARY
EMAP CONSTRUCT
LONDON, ENGLAND



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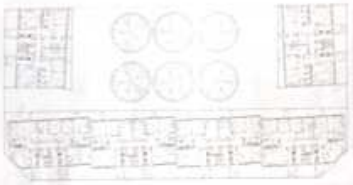
Dwelling Houses and housing continue to provide fertile ground for formal experimentation.



site plan

principal

GERMAN DEL SOL

HOUSING, MADRID, SPAIN

side

Best known for his series of sybaritic hotels in the remote extremes of Chile, German del Sol now turns his attention to the more prosaic needs of social housing in Madrid. But his poetic urges still prevail. Though these are a relatively standard housing type, typical of walk-up blocks all over Europe, they are softened and animated by planted pergolas that will progressively flourish and add a living layer of greenery to the architecture.

Del Sol's use of planting revives the Hispanic tradition of parrones, or plant covered pergolas, to diffuse light, soften elevations and create shade. In Chile's intensely hot, dry climate, parrones add a cooling layer of lush visual and physical texture. Though more common to individual houses, the technique can also be applied to larger buildings. Here in Madrid, the six-storey blocks are magically and simply transformed into modern Babylonian hanging gardens. The form of the pergola structure is partly inspired by the delicate twig constructions of land artist Andy Goldsworthy.

With the poetry, however, also comes pragmatism. The 68 units are divided into three blocks arranged around a courtyard. Blocks are tightly and economically planned around service cores, the potential monotony of the largest and longest block alleviated by a slight staggering of the plan. Views are filtered through the pergolas, which are set well beyond the external wall line.

As well as being ecologically appropriate and environmentally responsive, the planted screens are also a highly adaptable and relatively economical means of reducing energy use in buildings. However, realising such green, humanistic aspirations on a larger scale and under the scrutiny of tougher commercial and functional imperatives will prove a formidable test of architectural ingenuity. C.S.

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