RESIDENTIAL MODERNISM REBORN

CALIFORNIA COOL

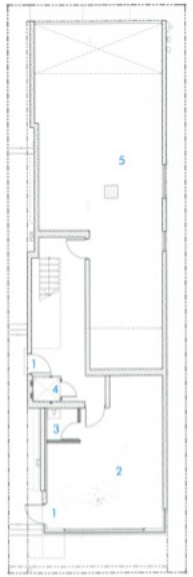
The House is a (Recycled) Machine for Living

David Hertz Architects Inc., Studio of Environmental Architecture

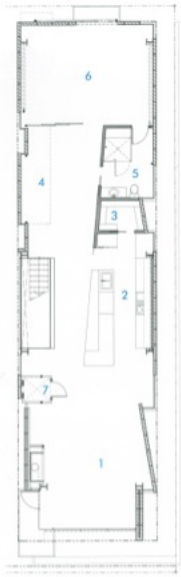
David Hertz is a Southern California boy. He says he always wanted to be an architect and seems to have taken the right steps. After graduating from SCI-Arc, the avant-garde architectural school founded by Ray Kappe, he went to work for John Lautner, one of the legendary modernists of the 1950s. After leaving Lautner, he worked for Frank Gehry for a number of years before starting his own practice. Materials have always been a key interest for Hertz. He developed a type of lightweight concrete using recycled materials and pioneered the use of concrete countertops and decorative tiles. Going green has been a large part of Hertz' design work from the beginning. Many of his projects involve recycled materials, some in very unique ways.

The Panel house on Los Angeles' Venice beach sits on a slim lot wedged between other beachfront houses. Like spectators at a parade rope line—some fat, some tall—all sit in anticipation of the show before it. The show, of course, is the pedestrian promenade, the beach and the Pacific Ocean as the infinite backdrop. All day long, people stroll, rollerblade, or bicycle along the pedestrian path that separates the houses from the beach. They provide a continuous people-watching show that is rich with eccentricity, humor, and old-fashioned family life. Having a picture window on Venice Beach is somewhat like having your own 8-meter-wide flat-screen TV that plays a reality show of L.A. life 24/7.

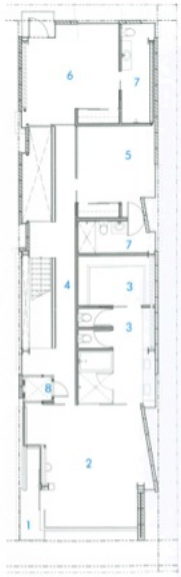
With the Panel house, Hertz has given new meaning to Le Corbusier's famous dictum, "The house is a machine for living in." With the Panel house, this "machine" uses recycled materials as a major building component. The wall panels are the same as those used to make industrial refrigeration buildings. They have foam inserts, are skinned with aluminum and painted dull metallic silver. The panels fit into a muscular steel frame that articulates itself throughout the building. The house stacks up three-plus stories from street level to roof deck, connected by an open steel staircase and open industrial elevator. Light wells and skylights illuminate the core of the building while expansive window walls open out to the ocean views. The house's owner is a well-known inventor and entrepreneur. As a consequence, the house contains numerous technologically innovative building conventions not found elsewhere. For example, the entire front window opens vertically, giving a truly unobstructed view of the beach and ocean. The living-room fireplace is a small pile of shattered tempered glass with a concealed natural gas source and sits conveniently under the large flat-panel TV suspended on cables. Passersby strolling the promenade are greeted by a compact waterfall that shimmers over a low retaining wall and is topped by a 30-by-50-centimeter piece of grass the owner has dubbed the "world's smallest front yard." The owner, a man with a rich sense of humor, relishes both his public persona and access to the ocean. If public display is something of a religion in L.A., Venice Beach is its holy city and the Panel house could easily be considered its newest temple.



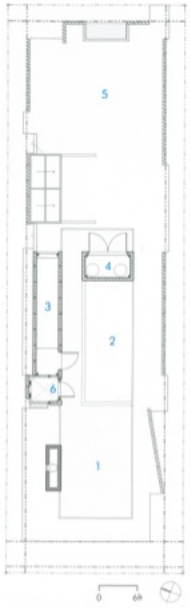
First floor plan
1 Beach entry
2 Guest bedroom
3 Guest/beach bathroom
4 Elevator
5 Garage



Second floor plan
1 Living room
2 Kitchen
3 Pantry
4 Dining
5 Bathroom
6 Media room
7 Elevator



Third floor plan
1 Master balcony
2 Master bedroom
3 Master bathroom/closet
4 Hallway
5 Bedroom
6 Bedroom
7 Bathroom
8 Elevator



Roof Plan
1 Roof deck
2 Swim-in-place pool
3 Stairwell
4 Mechanical
5 Photovoltaic solar array
6 Elevator