

BLUEPRINT

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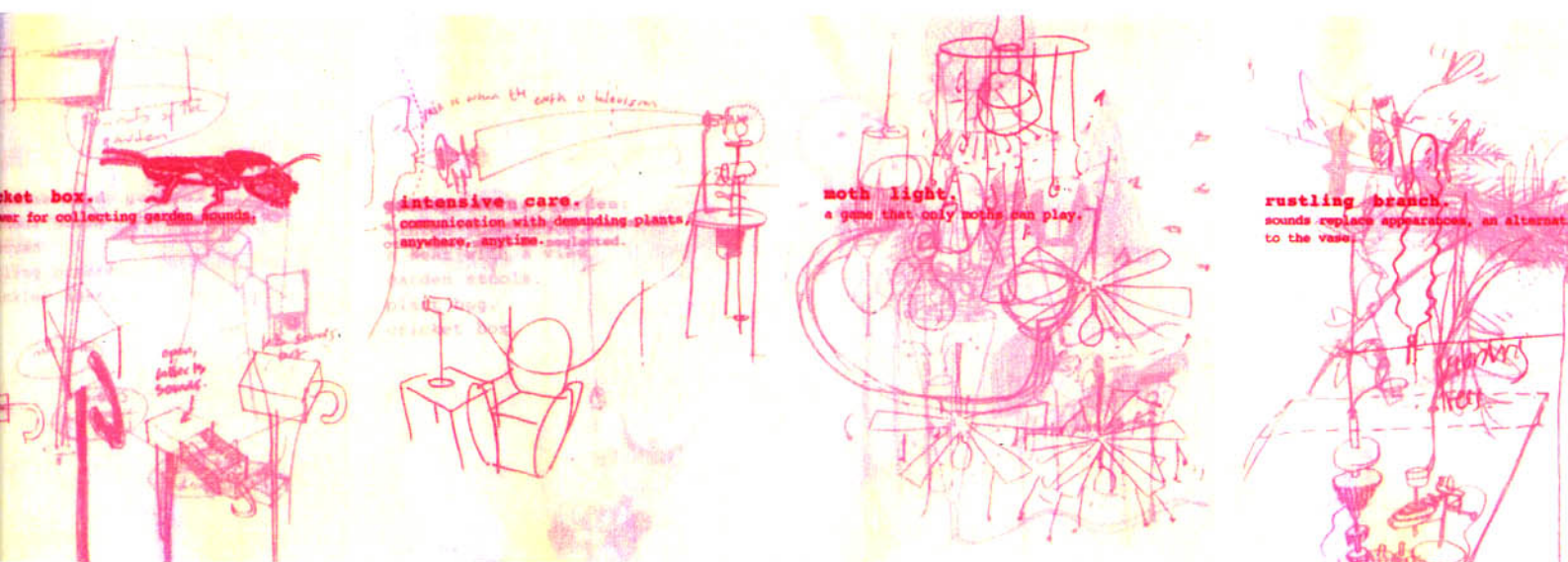
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STRANGE DESIGN

Planting ideas

Weeds, Aliens and other Stories is the intriguing title of a show which opens this month in the Window Gallery of the British Council offices in Prague.

Where in conventional window displays you might expect to see a mountain of consumer goods, here that expectation is challenged by a range of experimental "furniture".

The exhibition began as a collaboration between RCA research fellows Tony Dunne and Fiona Raby and industrial designer Michael Anastassiades. A 1930s book, *From Garden to Kitchen*,

provided the initial inspiration in its descriptions of the process of growing and nurturing plants before killing them for consumption.

From this the idea developed of making products which might stimulate people to think about their ambiguous relationship with nature and at the same time draw attention to the potential unpredictability of domestic furniture and products.

A sketchbook of concept pieces was produced and nine of these have been made for the show. Among them is

Intensive Care, "an intercom for speaking to plants from indoors". In this piece music and voices can be transmitted to a plant outside, playing on the tradition of English eccentrics talking to their gardens.

In *Cricket Box* a small table with a drawer contains a device for capturing sounds in the garden and then playing them back inside.

Among the more sinister pieces produced for the show are *Moth Light* and *Rustling Branch*. In *Moth Light* (subtitled "a game that only moths can play") a light bulb is fitted with a surrounding framework of soft flaps. As a moth approaches it activates a sensor which sets the flaps whirling, repelling the moth and so saving it from burning.

The potential death of the insect through exhaustion is equally important – as Dunne says, the products are not supposed to romanticise our relationship with nature.

In *Rustling Branch* a piece of foliage is attached to the underside of a shelf. This surreal arrangement is made all the more spooky when a small motor stimulates the branch into movement and noise.

There is no correct response to these pieces. The intention, says Dunne, is merely that they "should provoke reflection in a gentle way".

Weeds, Aliens and other Stories is at the British Council Window Gallery, Národní Trida 10, Prague, Czech Republic, from 26 January to 31 March

SHOWROOM

East End promise

Much of the hype surrounding London's Shoreditch has so far involved the scrabble for cheap loft spaces and a proliferation of clubs, bars and pubs. Bulldozer Design's new showroom in Charlotte Road, which opens later this month, will provide a window on some of the design-led activity in the area.

The showroom, below, designed by Andrew Waugh and Anthony Thistleton, will provide a selling space for a new range of ready-mades, including a bookcase, coffee table and glass vase, by Bulldozer's Mike Stoner. It will also

serve as a design consultancy facility for larger projects and one-off pieces. Stoner's previous commissions include the dining chairs for Belgo restaurant in Chalk Farm.

The low-budget design, below, incorporates a new shopfront in glass and sustainable Wenge wood, a display stand made from white body glass ("the kind you used to find behind urinals in men's toilets", according to Waugh) and light

fittings from Habitat.

Since setting up their practice in Rivington Street in April last year, Waugh and Thistleton have designed the extension to the Cantaloupe bar and restaurant (also in Charlotte Road), which won the *Time Out* Bar of the Year Award in 1997, and the new knightsbridge store for fashion designer Anya Hindmarch.



Paul Smith: empire building

For years fashion designer Paul Smith resisted the temptation to expand his retail empire in Britain beyond his quirky shops in Covent Garden and Nottingham. But now he has finally given in. Last year he opened a store in London's Sloane Avenue and this spring he plans to open a new mini-department store in Notting Hill.

The four-storey shop occupies a site at the end of a terrace of houses on Kensington Park Road, above. This residential setting provides the perfect context for Smith's eclectically furnished domestic-style interiors. Clothes for men, women and children and accessories will all be stocked. The store, which has a double bay front, glazed side elevation and main light fitting by Tom Dixon, is being designed by architect Sophie Hicks.