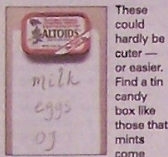


IN GARDEN

The world of leaves is vast and beautiful. Their physical characteristics give them individual charm. Find out how each part works to create a lesson in nature. **GARDEN 3E**

HOME FRONT

Turn tin into something priceless



These could hardly be cuter — or easier. Find a tin candy box like those that mints come

in. Glue a piece of magnetic strip to the back. (Find this at office-products stores, or just look on your refrigerator. You probably have somebody's magnetic business card stuck there. We used Gorilla Glue for a strong hold.) Let it dry, then stick it on the refrigerator door or a filing cabinet. This idea comes from the August issue of *Country Sampler Decorating Ideas*, which also shows how to use candy tins for drawer pulls, picture frames and other finishing touches.

Going away? Defuse electric mishaps

Before you leave on vacation, take these safety tips from Mr. Electric, a franchised electrical installation and repair business:

- Unplug all electrical appliances, including hair dryers, toasters, blenders, televisions and computers. They are susceptible to lightning strikes and power surges.
- Use metal power strips rather than plastic ones, and unplug them before you leave.
- Make sure extension cords are not overloaded.
- Use a random-patterned timer that will vary the times indoor lights and radios turn on and off every day.
- Install adequate lighting and a motion-detecting light outdoors.

Safety by design

If your home has a key-operated deadbolt on an exterior door, it can be an irritation to get out the key and turn the bolt every time you leave. Almost half the homeowners with such locks don't bother to use them. The Turner deadbolt lock has a rotating metal collar on the outside of the lock. Just turn the collar and the bolt is thrown. It's \$45 for the lock, \$55 for a lock/key combination. Order online at www.turnerlock.com.

Keep cordless tools ready

Next time a hurricane heads our way, start charging the cordless tools you'll need to make repairs, particularly drill-drivers and saws. If you are without power after the storm, electric tools will be useless. Cordless tools won't help if their batteries are dead. It's worth it to stockpile some extra batteries and keep them charged.

—Compiled by Homes editor JUDY STARK

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SEARCH hundreds of homes in your area for sale or rent. VIEW color photos of homes for sale.

RESEARCH mortgage rates, local agents and community information before you move.

one-man SHOWPIECE



When general contractors pass on building a unique house designed by a young architect, he takes on the project himself. It could be his defining career moment.



Times photo — SKIP O'ROURKE

ABOVE: The neighbors call it "Fort Ruskin." Architect Michael Calvino dug the foundation and poured the concrete himself. "I love to have my hands on the thing I'm making," he said.

TOP: Calvino cuts galvanized steel pipes to size for a guard rail on a balcony. Behind him are planks of eucalyptus, which he cut by hand from a fallen tree.

By S.I. ROSENBAUM
Times Staff Writer

RUSKIN

The house looks like a ship, or a shell, or a superhero's secret fortress. It soars up three stories, seemingly anchored to Earth by four huge wooden beams arcing toward the Little Manatee River. The top floor juts into empty air, hanging from the long curve of the wooden roof.

Architect Mike Calvino's first major project seems to belong to an altogether different planet from his single-story-bungalow neighbors on Canal Road. The only thing more remarkable than the building's

design is its construction.

In the five years since the house was commissioned, Calvino has built most of it with his own hands.

Calvino, 34, dug the foundation, poured the concrete, even stretched cypress planks on a mold to create the unique wooden beams.

"He's had a hand in making every single part of this place," said Brad Cooke, a University of Florida student who is part of Calvino's two-man crew this summer.

It was the only way to preserve the integrity of his design, Calvino said.

If he used a general contractor, he said, "the design would constantly be cut back... there would be someone

Please see **ONE-MAN 5F**

THE ART OF LIVING WELL

Pull up a chair and check out this Dali.



Salvador Dali Museum This chair imprinted with Dali's *Halucinoide Taveador* sells for \$2,995. Yes, you can sit on it.

It's a little too elaborate and expensive to be called a souvenir, but it certainly will remind you of your trip to the Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg. The Dali thinks it is the first museum in the United States to offer a chair imprinted with a work of art, in this case Dali's *Halucinoide Taveador*.

The chair is made in Europe of ArtDeco glass, a transparent, high-grade acrylic similar to Plexiglas. Darc Deco of Tampa is the importer and distributor. The gift shop at the Dali, at 1000 Third St. S., expects a chair to arrive from France by the end of the month. Or visit the museum's Web site, www.salvadordalimuseum.org, for a look.

The chair is intended to be used, museum spokeswoman Dianne Birmingham said. "It's very durable and functional."

The price is \$2,995, and delivery takes nine to 11 weeks, Birmingham said. That price is well out of the range of most souvenir shoppers, but the museum is optimistic about sales, given the success of a line of lithographs priced from \$1,200 to \$2,300.

That suggests, Birmingham says, that "there is an art audience" out there for items in this price range. Museums in Europe offer chairs from Darc Deco with Picasso images. If this one does well, the Dali will consider expanding the line.

—JUDY STARK, Times Homes editor

Finish the remodeling — or else

JUDY STARK
HOMES EDITOR

Sure, we all wish our remodeling contractor or builder would finish the job sooner, but death threats? C'mon!

That's how an ex-New York City cop, charged with acting as a mob assassin, tried to persuade his contractor to get a move on, court papers say.

The *New York Times* described the situation this way:

Louis J. Eppolito, 56, is a retired police detective whose family he freely admits, has ties to the Mafia. Eppolito became unhappy when the contractor working on his home fell behind on the job. According to court papers, Eppolito told a government informant that he grabbed a hatchet from the contractor's haversack and said, "If you don't finish this job today or tomorrow, I'm personally going to kill you in front of your friends. Then I'm going to kill your friends."

Then he raised the ante, the papers say, threatening, "I will personally kill you and I'll do it in front of your mother and father. And then I'll kill them, attempt to kill your wife."

If this sounds like something out of Elmore Leonard or George V. Higgins, it's no surprise. After Eppolito left the force, he aspired to write screenplays. He told the story of his family's Mafia connections and his experiences on the police force in a book, *Mafia Cop: The Story of an Honest Cop Whose Family Was the Mob*, written with Bob Drury (Simon & Schuster).

Eppolito and his partner, Stephen Caracappa, are charged with taking part in at least eight murders for the mob. The papers were filed in Brooklyn federal court as their lawyers attempt to win their release pending trial.

The architectural connections between the democracies of Greece and Rome and the emerging democracy, the United States gave rise to hundreds of beautiful Greek Revival courthouses in the first decades of our life as a nation.

But that golden era of architecture ended after World War II. We became wedded to the ideas of utility, efficiency and cost containment, "and the aesthetics got lost," says E. Joseph Moravec, commissioner of the Public Buildings Services of the U.S. General Services Administration.

PBS owns or leases nearly all civilian federal office space, courthouses, border stations, laboratories and storage facilities.

Things changed for the better in the 1980s, Moravec says, and now the federal government is "a preferred patron of architecture and art," seeking out eminent architects to design "iconic buildings."

They face some tough challenges. Since the 1945 bombing at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, security concerns have catapulted to the top of the list of design considerations. No more close-in parking; larger setbacks; anti-blast glass, antipolluting construction: How does an architect incorporate these "and not diminish the aesthetic appeal or create a climate of fear?" Moravec asked. He spoke at the spring conference last month of the National Association of Real Estate Editors.

In the post-9/11 era, we come to equate ugliness with lots of security. A building ringed with concrete Jersey barriers looks awful but it says "safe."

"Architecture has always been about security," architect Stuart L. Knopp, who specializes in government facilities, told the real estate editors. "It provides protection from bad guys, whether it's the lock on the door or the moated castle."

The Renaissance palazzos of Italy, he said, have gridded windows, massive doors and rough stone exteriors at the lower levels to keep intruders out. The materials and design "are refined as you go up," leading to smoother walls, larger windows and open balconies on higher floors. "Security builds the architecture," he said.

One of the unintended consequences of making some buildings window-free or more secure is that those who want to do harm will target substitutes — hotels, shopping centers and offices.

We've come to think of glass openings as hostile, because people can be killed by flying glass in a bombing. So we reduce the amount of glass. "But does a window-free building have to be ugly?" Knopp asked. No, he answered, citing theaters, banks, art museums and performing-arts centers as traditionally window-free buildings that can still be beautiful.

Judy Stark can be reached at (727) 883-8448 or stark@sptimes.com.

One-man from 1F

else controlling the end product. It would always get changed."

Besides, he said, "I love to build. I love to have my hands on the thing I'm making."

■ ■ ■

Calvino grew up in Orlando. As a kid, he built plastic models from kits. Then he re-created each part of the model in wood, from scratch, and built it again.

He studied architecture as an undergraduate and then as a graduate student at the University of Florida. After graduation, he worked in the New York office of legendary architect Richard Meier.

Calvino was happy there. The atmosphere was a heady mix of commercial work and intellectual debate about principles of design, light and shadow.

But in the late 1990s, he took a chance on a friend who seemed to have freelance design work lined up for him in Orlando.

The friend's promises fell through — "none of it was true," Calvino said — and instead Calvino ended up designing the additions to Tropicana Field with the now-defunct Tampa architecture firm Lescher and Mahoney.

All the while, he was moonlighting as a designer, building everything from coasters to furniture to a space-age garage for a family in Tampa.

Then in 2000, a friend introduced him to Stanley Woodruff, then 66, who had just bought a piece of land in Ruskin and was looking for an architect.

As Woodruff remembers it, the mutual friend, Tampa sculptor J.J. Waits, told him Calvino was "the sharpest thing she'd ever run across in her life."

Woodruff, a retired prosecutor from Macomb County, Mich., had always been of conservative tastes. He told Calvino what he was looking for: "a simple house with a bedroom on the right and a bedroom on the left."

"Then I went to his loft," he recalled, "and there was this model of something out of *Star Wars*."

Even now, Woodruff can't explain why he and his wife, Sharon, took a chance on the ambitious young architect who had never built a house. It is, he concedes, perhaps the craziest thing he has ever done.

"All of my friends at first told me I was nuts," he said. "Then as time went by, and they saw what Mike was doing, but they were flabbergasted. It was a gamble, but it was worth it, because the kid is so talented it's unbelievable."

■ ■ ■

At first, Woodruff showed Calvino's plans to traditional builders. They all said the same thing: "Oh, my God, it's beautiful. But



Times photo — SKIP O'ROURKE

At the house architect Michael Calvino is building in Ruskin, four huge wooden beams that arc toward the Little Manatee River seem to hold the house to the earth. Calvino stretched cypress planks on a mold to create the beams.

I don't know how to build a house like this."

After the general contractors turned Woodruff down, Calvino offered to build the house himself. But he realized it would cost more than the \$200,000 Woodruff wanted to pay.

Calvino said he could do it for roughly \$400,000, Woodruff agreed.

Calvino has spent more than \$400,000, but he doesn't mind, he said. He views it as equivalent to paying the interest on a small-business loan.

By now, he said, if he and Woodruff had used hired labor, the house, with 2,050 square feet of air-conditioned living space, would have cost close to \$1-million to build. It could be valued at twice that amount, Calvino said.

In fact, some neighbors are concerned that Calvino's house will raise their property values, and hence their taxes, said Nancy Wilson, 52, who lives across the street in a single-story house.

"The neighbors call it Fort Ruskin," she said. "They say it doesn't look like a house at all."

But Wilson said she's personally thrilled to watch the house go up.

Like most neighbors, she's gotten to know Calvino, and she's fond of him. "He's going to be famous," she said.

■ ■ ■

Daniel Currea, a 26-year-old University of South Florida grad student, is welding steel high above the ground, making a bridge from one of the house's lofts to the other.

Currea met Calvino when he was a student at Hillsborough Community College, where Calvino teaches architecture. This summer,



University of Florida student Brad Cooke, 19, cuts a piece of steel at the job site.

Calvino asked Currea to work on the Ruskin house.

"I'm so proud to be a part of it," said Currea. "This is probably the best thing I've ever done."

Currea and Cooke, 19, have spent the last few months working on the house. They say it's the education of a lifetime.

"This is just stuff used in regular construction," said Cooke, pointing to the steel railing that traces a graceful curve along the length of the house. "But Mike knows how to get what he wants out of it, how to make art out of it."

The house is as unique in its details as it is in its general design. The kitchen walls aren't built up from the floor but instead hang from the ceiling, so that the counters and walls seem to float just above the floor.

The floor is dyed concrete, except for large wood and glass inlays — the latter letting in light from below. Stone shelves are set asymmetrically into the concrete walls in the living area, bedrooms and bathrooms, and look as if they had grown there.

All of this was accomplished by Calvino and his student assistants.

"He teaches us that it's not all about the building," said Cooke, whose father is an architecture professor at USF. "You're learning about life through making the building. Working this way is like a lifestyle, it's a way of living."

Calvino's approach is not unique, said Santiago Perez, an assistant professor of architecture at USF. Perez has track of the Ruskin house's progress over the years, sometimes bringing his students to the site.

A group of "renegade" architects in Arizona share Calvino's philosophy, Santiago said. They design innovative buildings and have a hand in all aspects of construction.

"They've got clients, they've got publicity," he said. "All of them are extremely sought-after... and all of them started more or less the same way Mike Calvino has started: building their first commission more or less on their own."

Will Calvino's work be important?

"I think it will be," Santiago said. "Here's the question: What will he do next? If this is just a one-off and he quietly slips away... there are a lot of architects who have built one brilliant project and then disappeared off the map. For this to be important, something has to come after. Then it will be seen as his seminal work, his point of departure."

■ ■ ■

Where does Calvino's ambition lead?

When asked, he is quiet for a moment. Then he says: "Skyscrapers."

But he quickly says that he'll be happy with less. "If I just do 10 of these houses in my whole life, that will be fine. Or five — that will be enough for me. As long as I don't compromise the quality of my work."

He's standing on the second floor of the Ruskin house. It's hot, and there's thunder in the distance. From this height, he can look out over the river. In fact, he's compelled to do so by the lines of the house he designed.

Calvino is in love with the house. He could spend weeks photographing it, he says. Yet he'll have no problem parting with it when the time comes. After all, he built it to be lived in.

The house should be ready for the Woodruffs by December.

Then, Calvino will get to work on his next project.

He's not sure what that will be. But he has some ideas.

"I'm going to try to build the smallest home possible," he said.

THE ART OF LIVING WELL



Design Within Reach

The Bloom Pot doubles as a planter and outdoor light, with more than 40,000 hours of illumination.

Camp at home? No sweat. And take a shine to that planter.

No postmodern deck should be marred by unsightly heaps of kindling and twigs that look like the leftovers from a summer camp singalong. For urban-sophisticate marshmallow toasters, the only answer is the Atrio Fire Basket (below). The double-walled stainless-steel bowl holds kindling and small logs; the inner bowl lifts out to discard ashes. It stands 12 inches high on heavy tripod legs and is 21 inches in diameter. \$498 from Design Within Reach, www.dwr.com.

There's something surreal about the Bloom Pot (above), which functions as planter and outdoor light. Four LED lights in the bottom provide more than 40,000 hours of illumination. You can connect a hose from the bottom of the planter out through the bottom of the pot to drain plants, bypassing the electricals. The potting materials don't show when the pot is illuminated. \$328 each from Design Within Reach.

— JUDY STARK, *Times Homes* editor



Design Within Reach

Keep your deck tidy by using the Atrio Fire Basket, which holds kindling and small logs.