

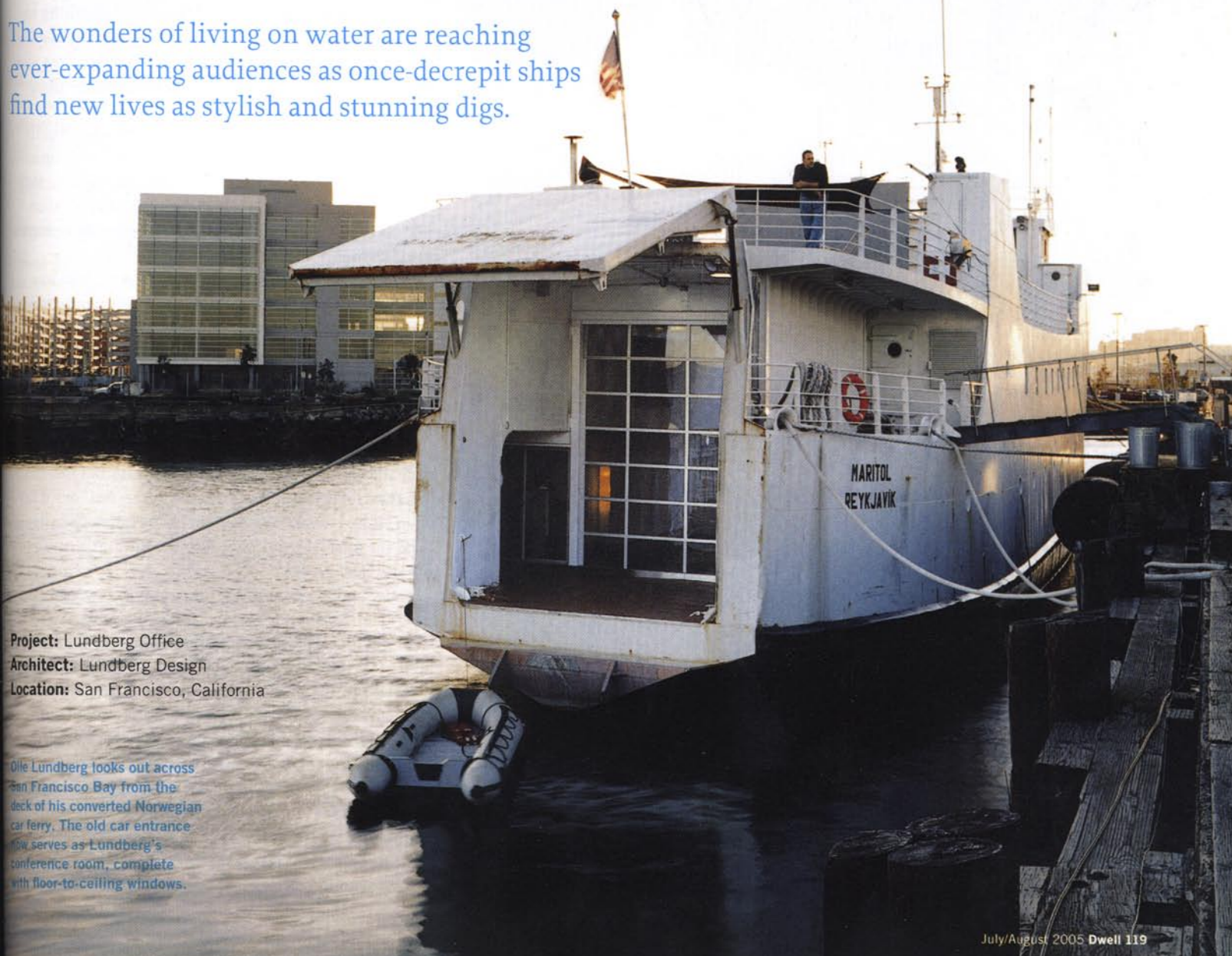
Just like seawater, our blood, sweat, and tears contain plenty of salt. We feel good by the water because we came from the water. Ask any sailor, surfer, or swimmer what draws him or her back to it day after day. The reasons are not aesthetic—they are physical and chemical. Because when we return to the ocean, we can feel ourselves going back to our origin; we are going home.

Living on the water is the closest we can get to living in the water. On it you are immediately affected by the slightest shift of currents, winds, the constant ebb and flow; every second you are reminded of precisely where you are. Your world is less seen than felt. Perhaps it is this immediacy of the environment that has attracted hundreds of thousands of people to make their homes on sailboats, houseboats, and ships. Or maybe it's just that living on water can be cheaper than living anywhere else on earth.

For the past 150 years, land booms across the U.S. have forced thousands to seek what was once a rent-free refuge on the water. In Seattle, the sudden rapid growth of the logging industry in the 1870s forced workers and

Liquid Assets

The wonders of living on water are reaching ever-expanding audiences as once-decrepit ships find new lives as stylish and stunning digs.



Project: Lundberg Office
Architect: Lundberg Design
Location: San Francisco, California

Olle Lundberg looks out across San Francisco Bay from the deck of his converted Norwegian car ferry. The old car entrance now serves as Lundberg's conference room, complete with floor-to-ceiling windows.



Lundberg's sunny roof deck (above) provides ample opportunity for leisurely pursuits or more business-minded endeavors. The busy San Francisco Bay is the office's backyard.

Inside, a wood-burning stove (right) heats the cavernous interior while the flat-screen television offers visual escape when the weather won't allow for enjoyment of the expansive views on deck.



their families off expensive land and onto "floathouses." When San Francisco was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake, people moved to the safe harbor of houseboats, and during the Great Depression, thousands who could no longer afford land moved on to bays, rivers, and lakes. Property on water was free, it offered free food, free views, free "toilets," and plenty of room to expand. In the 1960s and '70s, many houseboat communities were dismantled at the behest of homeowners and real estate moguls trying to boost the value of their oceanfront property. Deemed "ghettos on the waterfront," some communities survived but have never fully recovered.

Today, with even the humblest beachfront property in most metropolitan areas ranging in the millions, some are again returning to the water. The attraction now is economic, aesthetic, and philosophical.

"Here we are in San Francisco, this amazing city surrounded by water, but in most of the city you are totally unaware of it," explains architect Olle Lundberg, founder and CEO of Lundberg Design. "That got me thinking about getting a ship that my wife and I could transform into an office."

For Lundberg, a self-professed "hoarder," spending so much time in the hull of a tiny sailboat had no appeal, but any decent beachfront property in the Bay Area was out of the question. "I liked ships for their scale—plus, they just seem really cool."

Lundberg discovered that buying a ship was actually quite feasible: The world's ports were littered with unused, outmoded ships, all bafflingly inexpensive. "Once a ship outlasts its designed use, it becomes essentially valueless," he explains. "After a while, people are just trying to get rid of them!"

Lundberg contacted a broker, who referred him to a retired 1975 Norwegian-made small car ferry harbored in Isafjord, Iceland. "My wife and I flew over in October of 2001 to check it out. We liked it, and bought it."

Though buying a ferry in Iceland may be easy, getting it to California proved more arduous. Even without considering the costs (which were plenty), the organization necessary to make the seven-week, 7,000-mile journey made the prospect daunting to say the least. But that didn't stop the captain and crew. "I wasn't sure what they'd say when I asked them," says Lundberg, "but they actually loved the idea—I think they felt like Vikings storming into the New World."

In just under two months, the captain, crew, and 450-ton ship arrived unscathed in San Francisco Bay.

Lundberg relays this adventure while seated at a glass table in the former car deck of the ship, which was converted into a conference room. Above the recently installed fireplace are glossy white walls strewn with stenciled red Norwegian signage and a skylight that leads to the upper deck, now used as a patio. Afternoon sunlight floods in past an enormous half-opened retractable glass door at the stern of the ship. "I love it here because it is such an extremely serene existence smack in the middle of the city." As Lundberg talks, a freighter the size of a football field slips across the flickering bay,

From the roof deck of Quinze & Milan's converted barge, there's little evidence of the sleek spaces created inside.

Project: Propatria
Architect: Quinze & Milan
Location: Amsterdam, The Netherlands



In Amsterdam, Quinze & Milan's converted ocean barge has raised the standards of houseboat aesthetics.

its distant perspective making it appear as if it is exactly entering his left ear and exiting his right. It is impossible to imagine a more stunning work space.

In Amsterdam, city dwellers have been living on converted ships for decades. With land as scarce as it is expensive, and with seemingly as many canals as there are streets, living on water has become the natural—and sometimes only—option for the swelling population.

"Water is the new real estate," claims Arne Quinze, self-styled futurist, "creator of atmosphere," and founder of the Belgium-based design company Quinze & Milan. "People don't consider houses near the water because they are so expensive, and no one thinks of the space on the water," Quinze explains. "They should, it's the most beautiful place to live!"

But living on barges or working ships can be a claustrophobic existence. Narrow halls, few windows, low doors, and tiny rooms may make for an efficient, seaworthy vessel, but often translate to dark, dank, and awkward living spaces. "We tried to create a loft feeling in the ship, make it livable," Quinze explains, describing his recent redesign of the *Propatria*, a 50-year-old retired



Quinze & Milan's minimalist furniture (above) adds to the *Propatria's* luxe living quarters. Small portholes throughout the space bring in natural light.

The kitchen (below right) is so nice it's easy to forget that you're docked on the murky waters of the Port of Amsterdam.

The entertainment console (right) helps relieve any tedium one might encounter onboard. Full-size portholes lining the south wall help open the interior to the surrounding waters.

barge in the Port of Amsterdam. To create more open space, he began by removing the 17,000-pound engine and cockpit areas and raising the doors; multiple windows were added to maximize the natural light.

The clients, a young family, were also concerned about privacy. Quinze's solution was to create a number of modular panels, each folding in and out of walls to either open or close rooms off. "The most difficult part of making a ship livable, though, is keeping it warm," Quinze explains. For this purpose, he developed a heating and cooling system that pumps hot water through the ship's walls in winter and cold water in summer.

Completed in 2004, the *Propatria* has over 3,000 square feet of adaptable interior living space with an additional 1,600 square feet of outside terrace space. And most impressive, after all this, it still floats. "When you're out there on the water," Quinze says, "you feel like every day is a vacation."

The connection to the elements. The horizonless backyard views. The industrial-scale living space. Of all the benefits to living on water, none compares to the freedom it seems to offer. As Olle Lundberg likes to say, "If we ever get bored of being here, we can just sail away!"

