

HOUSE PROUD

## The Scavenger's Guide to the Galaxy



Photographs by Peter DaSilva for The New York Times

**DEBRIS DÉCOR** Olle Lundberg and Mary Breuer on the "terrace" of their salvaged car ferry, found in Iceland and tied to a pier in San Francisco, inset. Mr. Lundberg, an architect, added the glass garage door.

By RAUL A. BARRENECHE

SAN FRANCISCO

**O**LLE LUNDBERG has a client list most architects would kill for.

In the last nine years, he has designed a minimalist pied-à-terre in Pacific Heights for Lawrence J. Ellison, chief executive of Oracle; a weekend ranch for John Pritzker of the Chicago hotel dynasty; and a Napa

home for Leslie Rudd, an owner of Dean & DeLuca.

Although he is known for polished modernist houses for high-profile clients, Mr. Lundberg, 51, is no smooth-talking, Prada-draped operator. On the contrary, he is a slightly scruffy scrapmaster, a no-nonsense guy who lives in homes he fashioned from found parts.

Architects are notoriously fond of industrial refuse, from the corrugated metal and chain-link fence that Frank Gehry installed around his Santa Monica bungalow in the 1970's to the shipping containers that Shigeru Ban stacked on a Manhattan pier this spring to create a

temporary gallery. But Mr. Lundberg has taken the romance of refuse a step further by surrounding himself, at home and at work, with reclaimed materials. During the week, he and his wife, Mary Breuer, live aboard the Maritlo, a decommissioned Icelandic car ferry docked at Pier 54 in the Mission Bay neighborhood of San Francisco. "Is there discomfort?" said Ms. Breuer, 61. "Yes, but the trade-off of living where we do is worth it."

On weekends, they drive two hours north to Cazadero, Calif., where they have assembled a cabin from materials salvaged from houses and offices that Mr. Lund-

berg's firm, Lundberg Design, built or remodeled.

"I like getting dirty," Mr. Lundberg said. "If you build a house yourself, it becomes more personal. It takes on a life of its own and keeps evolving."

Mr. Lundberg and his staff are well accustomed to getting dirty. They fabricate steel staircases, aluminum coffee tables and other custom items for clients in the expansive shop that is the centerpiece of their studio housed in a former mattress factory. Mr. Lundberg and

Continued on Page 5

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2005

YT D5



## A Scavenger's Guide To the Galaxy

Continued From Page 1, This Section

Ms. Breuer started looking for industrial buildings to buy years ago. But despite the vacancies created by the dot-com crash, they could not find a suitable building. "I'd seen tugboats that had been converted," Mr. Lundberg said, "so I thought, 'What about a small ship?'"

He found the Maritlo, which was built in 1975, listed for \$260,000 on a Web site, shiprepo.com, which deals in used and repossessed ships. He and Ms. Breuer flew to Iceland to buy it and hired five of the ship's crew members to deliver it through the Panama Canal to San Francisco, a seven-week trip. They spent another \$600,000 repainting the exterior, rebuilding the engine, converting the electrical system to United States standards and other alterations required to make the ship habitable. (They pay \$1,500 a month in docking fees.)

The deck once filled with Volvos and Saabs is now a sunny, loft-like living room and bedroom. Mr. Lundberg spent \$4,000 on a glass garage door to protect the open stern from spells of bad weather while the aft gangway is left open. In really big storms, the aft gangway itself is closed. Rough seas in winter can rock the boat "enough so that you can see the propellers come out of the water," Mr. Lundberg said.

The dining room is one deck down, just below the water line, in what had been a passenger cafeteria. Before leaving Iceland, Mr. Lundberg cut a hole in the car deck so that natural light can pass through the living area to the dining room one deck below.

Meals are served at a table made from an 18-foot-long slab of cypress left over from the Slanted Door, a popular Vietnamese restaurant Mr. Lundberg designed in the newly restored Ferry Building. It was originally purchased for the restaurant from the Ur-

A high-end architect digs deep in the refuse piles.

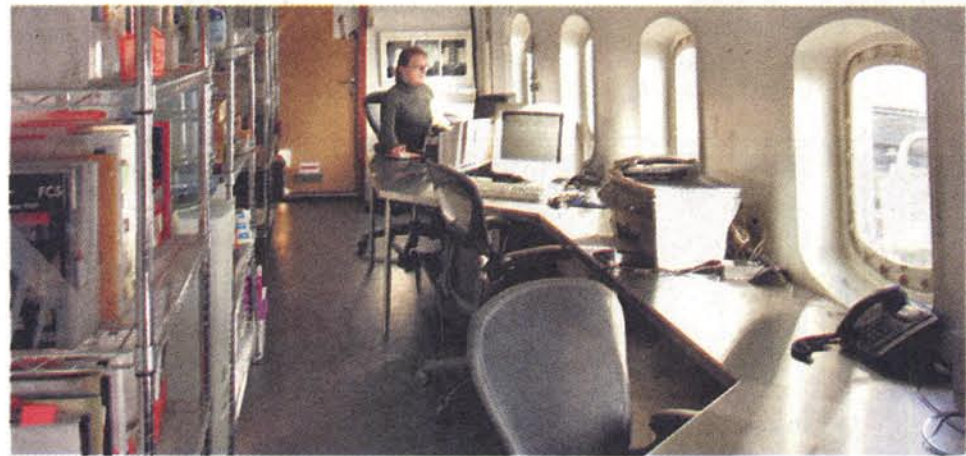
ban Tree Mill (urbantreemill.org), a non-profit group based in Oakland, Calif., that recycles trees removed during street improvements.

Ms. Breuer spends the most time on board, since she runs her business, a recruiting firm for design offices, from an upper deck. "I feel like one of those salty John Steinbeck characters from 'Cannery Row,'" she said. "For eight or nine months a year, the water is calm and there's lots of sun."

Ms. Breuer and Mr. Lundberg have no real neighbors. The Maritlo's commercial berth is eerily quiet, overlooking the wooden foundations of a dilapidated pier and the East Bay hills across the bay. "We're in the middle of the city, but we enjoy a very quiet, private enclave," Ms. Breuer said.

The couple's weekend cabin is another work in progress. Nine years ago, they bought 16 acres for \$158,000. The previous owner, a retired teacher, had started building a one-story cabin, but sold the property before completing it. There was no electricity or plumbing; a septic system was installed but not connected. Mr. Lundberg worked weekends to adapt the existing structure to his own design. Until the roof was finished, he and Ms. Breuer slept in a tent pitched in the living room.

The cabin became fully habitable only four years ago, when the bathroom was completed. Like practically everything else in the house, the bathroom is made of leftovers from one of Mr. Lundberg's projects, in this case marble from an office lobby.



**TWO HANDS ON DECK** The ferry's onetime passenger lounge on the upper level is now an office for Mary Breuer, who runs a recruiting service for design companies.



**SAVERS** Olle Lundberg and Mary Breuer in their weekend cabin, left. Mr. Lundberg salvaged materials from other projects, including steel sash windows, an aluminum coffee table and a pool, inset, that was a livestock water tank and has replacement slats from wine barrels.



The old-fashioned steel sash windows came from five different jobs, including the house in Pacific Heights that Mr. Ellison tore down to make way for the home designed by Mr. Lundberg. Others came from a demolished warehouse in San Mateo, Calif. "I told the guys tearing it down that I'd pay them \$50 a piece if they took the windows out carefully," Mr. Lundberg said.

Much of the furniture in the cabin was custom made for clients, but was not used because of imperfections, and was then adopted by Mr. Lundberg and Ms. Breuer. The aluminum coffee table, for example, was made for the Diva Hotel in San Francisco, which Mr. Lundberg remodeled in 1999, but it had a flaw in the casting. A cypress coffee table built for the Slanted Door restaurant was too thin; a custom Corten steel firewood holder left rust stains on a client's limestone floor.

The pool is an old wooden water tank — 25 feet in diameter and 14 feet deep — from a cattle ranch one of his clients bought. "She was ready to bulldoze it, but I told her she couldn't," Mr. Lundberg said. "So I took it."

He considered hiring a helicopter to deliver it to his property, "but we were worried about the wind," Mr. Lundberg said. So he took it apart and trucked it to his cabin in pieces.

About 5 of the tank's 150 slats had holes in them, and Mr. Lundberg replaced them with pieces of redwood used in wine tanks at a nearby winery. "When we swam in the pool the first year it smelled like cabernet," he said.

The only feature Mr. Lundberg and Ms. Breuer paid full price for was the copper

roof, which cost about \$25,000. "I considered doing it in the shop," Mr. Lundberg said.

"We have the technology, but it would have taken three seasons to do it." Aside from his original purchase, his only cost was materials, which came to about \$150,000, Mr. Lundberg said; to have the cabin built would have cost roughly \$750,000, he estimated.

Mr. Lundberg has built most of the cabin himself, but his staff has contributed plenty of work. Three or four times a year, Mr. Lundberg holds "building parties," in which employees help Mr. Lundberg with tasks like pouring the foundation, putting up wood framing and installing windows.

It may sound like forced labor, but it's accompanied by kegs of beer and golf outings, and Mr. Lundberg and Ms. Breuer make the

cabin available to employees when they aren't using it.

"It's great to come up here and build cool stuff and then eat like kings," said Alan Owings, one of the designers in Mr. Lundberg's studio.

Or like Vikings. When he's not building, Mr. Lundberg, the son of Swedish immigrants who looks every bit the towering Nordic hero, is cooking. "We've got three smokers, two barbecues and a rotisserie where we usually cook a whole pig," he said. "We set up sawhorses as tables and can fit 30 people for dinner."

A party is officially a hit when Mr. Lundberg, or one of his guests, ceremoniously dons the metal Viking helmet that a neighbor gave him as a birthday present. "Now it's a tradition," Mr. Lundberg said. "You have to drink to the point where you're willing to put on the helmet, and be photographed."



**SHOP CLASS** The centerpiece of Mr. Lundberg's San Francisco studio is a prototype and steel workshop, where a prototype and steel stairwell for a client has found new purpose as an access to a sleep space for staffers.

## One Man's Trash: A Resource List

**W**HERE to find those salvaged goods? Online and around the world.

Olle Lundberg's \$260,000 used ferry came from Iceland and was delivered to San Francisco by its former crew (add \$60,000). "I was trying to find cool industrial space to live in, but all the commercial space had been bought by the dot-com people, so it occurred to me to bring the commercial space here," Mr. Lundberg said. He found the ferry through Ship Repo in Coral Gables, Fla., shiprepo.com or (305) 777-0478.

Steel pipe and plate and salvaged anchors (\$200 to \$2,000) came from **Alco Iron & Metal** in San Leandro, Calif., (510) 562-1107. Mr. Lundberg buys stainless steel, aluminum, copper and brass by the pound at **Alan Steel and Supply** in Redwood City, Calif., (650) 369-2526.

Slices of trees cut down in cities became tops for tables designed by Mr. Lundberg for a restaurant and for his home, left. Custom-milled salvaged wood is \$1.25 to \$4 a board foot at **New Life Millworks** in Richmond, Calif., (510) 376-9994.

**Olde Good Things**, oldegoodthings.com, has used doors, door knobs, mantels, columns and other things at stores in Los Angeles, (213) 746-8600, and in New York, 124 West 24th Street, (212) 989-8401. **Demolition Depot/ Irreplaceable Artifacts**, 216 East 125th Street, has salvaged chandeliers, doors and fireplaces (priced from \$350); (212) 777-2900.

In Boulder, Colo., **ReSource**, run by the Center for Resource Conservation, sells used doors, windows and cabinets, priced at about half retail; (303) 419-5418. **ELAINE LOUIE**

