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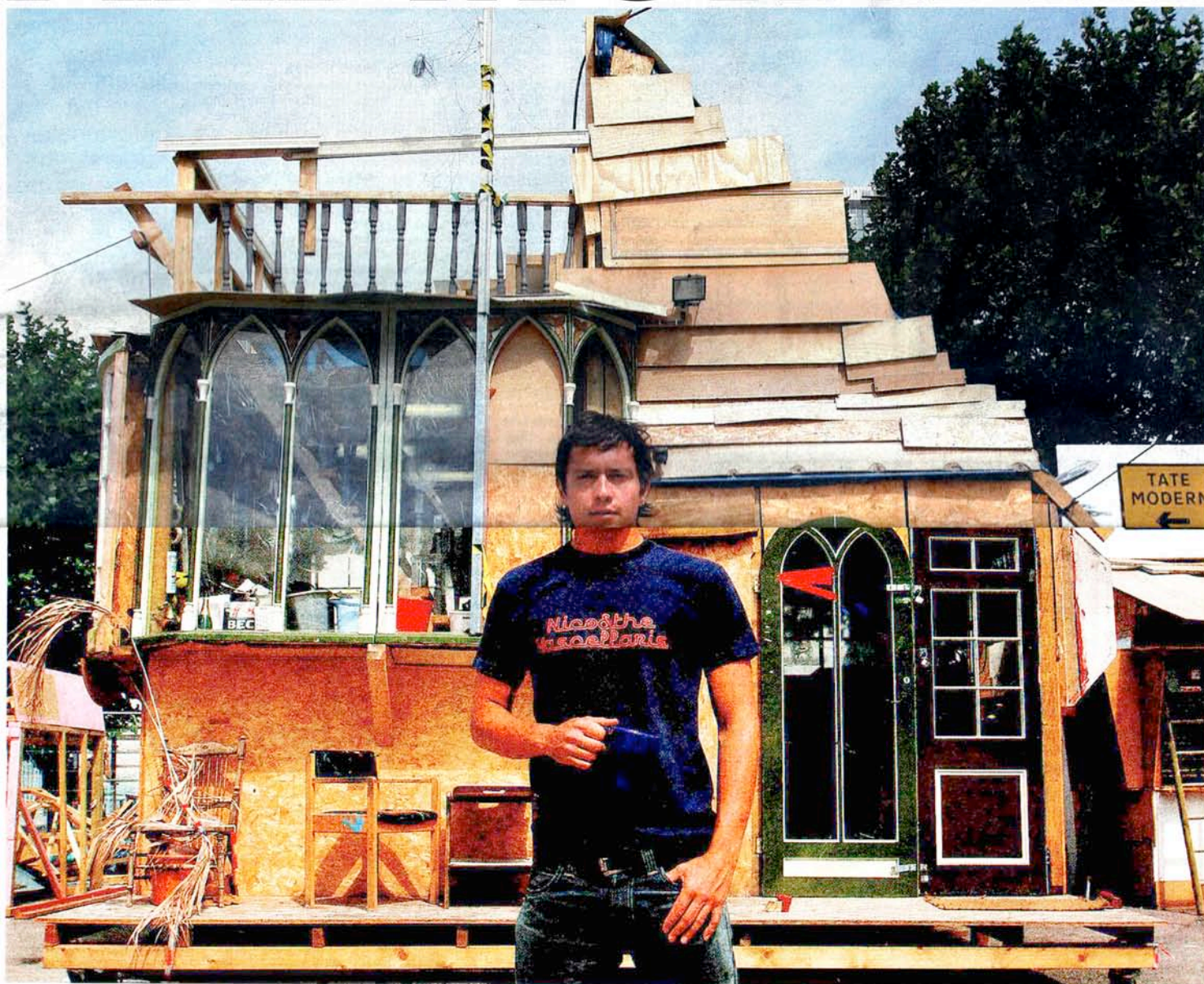


THE TIMES

Facts, figures and fantasies from the world of property 11 AUGUST 2006

FRIDAYS

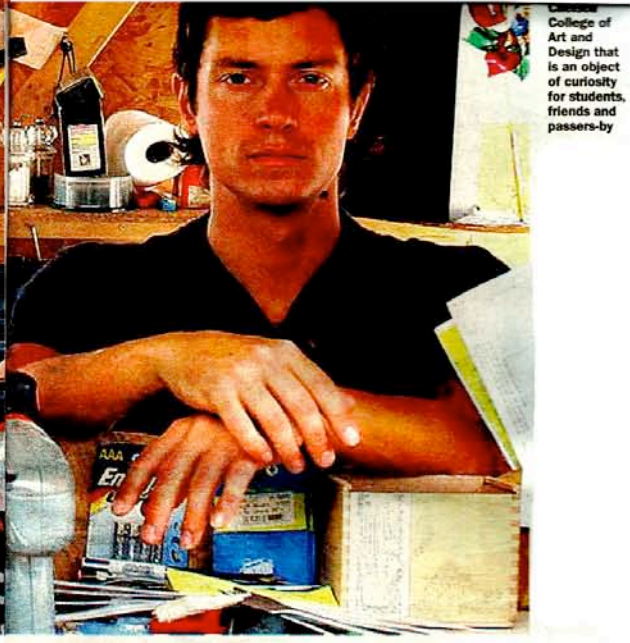
AND MORTAR



THE HOUSE THAT SCRAP BUILT

THIS ARTIST IN RESIDENCE CREATED A £250,000 RIVERSIDE HOME BY RAIDING SKIPS **12-13**
PLUS WHY SANDBANKS IS STILL ONE OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE SPOTS IN BRITAIN 06

PHOTOGRAPHS: CLARA MOLDEN



College of Art and Design that is an object of curiosity for students, friends and passers-by

MY HOUSE IS RUBBISH

This sculptor turned skiploads of junk into a unique bachelor pad, says Adam Barnard

IN THE elegant swath of London between Pimlico and Westminster, in the shadow of Big Ben and just behind Tate Britain, sits a ramshackle structure ill at ease with the colonnades and balustrades around it. By its shape you'd judge it to be a house — though it slants and bulges like a cartoon gothic mansion. Look closer and you'll see that its roof is a patchwork of cardboard boxes and its walls are mishmashed objects of wood. Here dwells Graham Hudson, who has built himself a house out of other people's rubbish.

"I was renting in Hackney, a standard flat-share," says Hudson, 29. "It was a basement flat, Victorian conversion, paying £455 a month. An en suite shower was its best feature."

For some this is precious normality. But Hudson, a larger-than-life sculptor whose creations fill entire rooms, was "bored to tears". Boredom, in the hands of a DIY enthusiast who can genuinely call himself an artist, has delivered a vision for affordable, ecologically sound housing on the doorstep of the House of Commons. John Prescott dreams of the £60,000 house, but Hudson has knocked together a recycled house for less than £1,500.

He used his standing in the art world to solicit a prestigious backer. The Henry Moore Foundation supported his proposal for a residence in the parade ground of the former Royal Army barracks at Millbank. The barracks became the new home of Chelsea College of Art and Design

last year. What no one knew was that Hudson would take the term "residency" at face value. "I thought I needed to compress my flat and my studio into one," he says.

So he spent his winter scabbling in skips, trawling pound shops on the Hackney Road and rooting through the college's storerooms.

The roof is sheets of tarpaulin covered with cardboard boxes

He found the website howtobuildahouse.com, a compilation of construction advice "which confirmed my suspicion that a house is just walls and bits across".

He also bought frames and panels from a timber merchant; apart from transport, this was Hudson's only significant outlay. The standard dimensions of the panels helped to regulate the structure. Armed with a jigsaw, a cordless drill and a lot of screws, he set to work in March.

Hudson, who worked alone apart from three days when students lent a hand, makes building your home sound easier than putting up an Ikea bookshelf. With a cheeky wink towards the opulent houses around him, the Residency, as it is known, includes three rickety but sub-

stantial bay windows. The roof is sheets of tarpaulin covered with old cardboard boxes. The design on a box for an Epson printer stands out like an advert. The end result offers nearly 400 sq ft over two floors. The entire ground floor is a bright, open-plan kitchen-living room, with a maximum ceiling height of 10ft. Ascend one rickety staircase and you reach a ledge with an inflatable double bed. Ascend another and you are on a roof terrace with a view of the Thames.

There is a fridge and an oven, concealed by a panel in case health and safety inspectors object to cooking in a wooden house. Hudson makes me a cup of tea as the hi-fi blares, showing off the newly installed mains electricity — previously he drew power via an illicit extension cable running through a window of the college.

His approach to interior design is a kind of functional chaos. Shoes hang from screws jutting out of the wall or are lodged between beams. Champagne bottles hold industrial glue sticks. Some old carpet on a slab of wood makes a window seat.

The house constantly evolves. "We are obsessed with preservation, of art and of homes, but I wanted something organic," says Hudson. Heavy rain in May flattened and discoloured the cardboard roof. Hudson remodels his house at will: if he needs a shelf, he hews it from a panel between the central supporting struts.

Visitors have also contributed to the decor, daubing graffiti on the staircase.

It must be a babe magnet, I say. "You'd have thought a man-built house would have primal appeal, but girls don't like the Portaloos." He is referring to the camping toilet concealed in a wall cavity behind a revolving wooden offset. If you duck under the panelling to sit on it, your head emerges on the other side of the wall — outside the house.

The Residency lacks running water, so Hudson showers in a local gym each morning. It is a small price to pay, given that he is living rent-free without bills. There is no heating, Hudson figures that, if the homeless who sleep in nearby doorways can survive, so can he.

Initially he told security guards who patrolled the grounds at night that he was working late. But since he had defined his house as an evolving artwork, and had permission to conduct his work on-site, he could always claim that whatever he was doing was part of the creative process. "You can't really say when an artist is and isn't working," he says. "We are always at work."

The college enlisted the consulting engineering firm Harold James "to check the house wasn't going to fall on an old woman suddenly". Although the building fell short of several safety requirements, the report concluded that "if adequate corrective action is taken, there is no doubt that the structure could be made safe".

So Hudson asks visitors to sign a disclaimer, which begins: "This is a sculpture, not a house."

"The trick is that it meets building regulations outside, but inside you're in an exhibition. So that's not a staircase, it's a..."

He trails off. I follow his gaze and see that my surprise guests have arrived. I have summoned two estate agents from Douglas & Gordon to find out how they would sell a house built out of junk and, crucially, at what price. They duck in and are left speechless, but only for a few seconds. "It's interesting," says James Baring, after a deep breath. "My initial reaction is it's a rather good-looking property."

"It's pleasing to the eye," chimes in his colleague, Henry Woods, who immediately

There's also the question of whether permission would ever be granted to leave a house made of rubbish in the grounds of a Grade I listed property — and what you would have to pay for the land it stands on.

But even turfed out of Millbank, the agents see value in Hudson's project. "Another way to look at it is like a treehouse," says Woods. "People are spending £70,000 to £250,000 building quite substantial treehouses or sheds in their gardens, which they use as studies or offices."

Hudson claims that for less than £15,000 he could make the house comply with every regulation. Which still leaves him spending a quarter of the £60,000 that John Prescott established as the target cost for building an affordable home.

In 1978 about 2,000 self-built homes went up in Britain. Now we build more than 20,000 a year. A flurry of new approaches to living have hit the market recently, with homes constructed using old tyres in Brighton, straw in Herefordshire and disused grain silos in Stratford-upon-Avon. Last year a company called Double Decker Living began converting old London buses into affordable modern homes.

Under Hudson's tutelage, other smaller, scrap buildings built by students are taking wacky shape in the parade ground. There is a cardboard pagoda and a mock landscaped garden in which piles of scrap metal and plastic are arranged in the shape of hedges and flowerbeds.

As part of his project, Hudson would consider a short-term let, providing a suitable waiver of traditional housing regulations can be agreed. In the longer term, the house will probably be relocated. But even if he does not move with it, Hudson won't be back in the market for boring old Victorian conversions. "I'm going to try to avoid paying rent for as long as possible," he says. "I feel claustrophobic in normal flats."

He spent less than £1,500 building a £250,000 des res

cites a photographer on his books looking for a studio apartment with work space. "It would probably be absolutely fine for him," he muses.

Crunch question: what price? "The fact that it is designed, built and lived in by an artist adds value," says Baring. "The location is incredible, obviously. You've got Government and a lot of offices, so there's a massive demand for small property. I'd say £250,000."

It is Hudson's turn to be speechless. He has spent less than £1,500 building a quarter of a million pound des res. "I think the assumption here is that it is entirely legal and fulfils any building criteria and fire, health and safety regulations," says Baring, bringing us back to earth with a bump. "Which obviously, at present, it doesn't."