

I.D.


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Chuck Hoberman's
Kinetic World
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PLAYTIME
IS
NOT
OVER



...note

Rockwell Group's
Imagination Playground in
a BOX, in New York City
(See "Recess, Rethought,"
page 52)



By Jesse Ashlock

Play It As It Lays

*In tough times,
designers can still
have fun.*

We're starting to get accustomed to living in an economic downturn. The furniture fairs came and went, and were, as predicted, more subdued than in years past. The eulogies to boom-era design have been penned, and the theories about what happens next have been offered (a renewed focus on public works; rethinking production in order to deliver more affordable products). Words like "frugality" and "austerity" have become part of our daily discourse.

And that's all probably as it should be. But things don't have to be so *dire*. Regardless of economic circumstances, design possesses a wondrous capacity to

delight—after all, as Charles Eames, a master of innovation in lean times, once asked, "Who ever said that pleasure wasn't functional?" That's why we decided to use this issue to explore design as it relates to play—in all the senses of the word, including organized sports and surfing, video games and board games, toys and playgrounds, music and theater. In doing so, we found that community-sourced design is especially powerful in designing play experiences, that play is a remarkably potent educational resource, and that remembering childhood toys brings out the poet in all of us.

Like the rest of the world, I.D. has been changing. For proof, look no further than my byline here. It is my great privilege to inherit the stewardship of this magazine from Julie Lasky and her talented team, who made I.D. more incisive and more relevant than ever during their tenure. Along with William Bostwick, I.D.'s new senior editor, I hope to keep up their great work while striving for even greater heights. You can help. Please let us know what you'd like to see in the magazine (and on our soon-to-be-overhauled website) by emailing me at jesse.ashlock@id-mag.com.

...on the web

...more from Astro Studios

Check out photos of the designers' work and more from their San Francisco offices.

...more Playgrounds

Watch a slideshow of the world's coolest parks and playpens for kids.

...more from

Hoberman Associates

See the Expanding Video Screen in motion.

...more Toys

Watch a slideshow of all the iconic playthings featured in the issue, plus more.



RECESS, RETHOUGHT

A host of designers is building interactive landscapes for kids to learn by having fun.

By ALISSA WALKER

WHEN MICHELLE OBAMA hoisted a hammer to show her support for a community-built playground in San Francisco last June, the gesture also symbolized a resurgence of interest in creating engaging public spaces for children. "The type of childhood that kids are having today is vastly different from just a generation ago," says Darrel Hammond, director of play advocacy group KaBOOM!, which coordinated construction of the San Francisco playground. He's concerned about the lack of inventiveness—what he calls "child-motivated free play"—today's kids display. In recent years, this apprehension, along with worries over skyrocketing childhood obesity rates and a desire to create more meaningful public spaces, has led many communities and institutions to rally behind a wide range of interactive playscapes.

"Child-motivated play is like a twin engine when paired with physical activity," says Hammond, expressing his hope that formal studies will soon prove what many parents already believe: Collaborative, experimental play produces smarter, more well-adjusted adults. Designers have been responding to this emerging desire for better education through play with innovative, sustainable spaces that use a mix of adventure narratives, natural elements, and nontraditional materials to nurture new forms of creative, experiential learning. ★

Alissa Walker is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles and the author of City Walks Architecture: New York, published by Chronicle Books.



Rockwell Group's
Imagination Playground
packed up (opposite)
and assembled

IMAGINATION PLAYGROUND

Designer Rockwell Group
Teaching Goal Design

The concept for the Imagination Playground, a unique collaboration with New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation, came just after September 11, when architect and designer David Rockwell was looking for a way to help revitalize Lower Manhattan. The playground includes water, sand, and "loose parts"—abstract foam pieces—as well as a gaggle of found objects like blankets, traffic cones, and PVC pipe, which function as props. The materials facilitate unstructured child-directed free play in which kids work together to engineer their own playscapes. "In most cases kids would take pieces and try to create individual things," says Rockwell. "But at some point, maybe 15 to 20 minutes later, they'd start to get curious about what would happen when they'd link their thing with someone else's."

The Imagination Playground in Manhattan won't open until next year, but Imagination Playground in a BOX, a mobile version produced in cooperation with KaBOOM!, was recently deployed to recreational sites in all five New York City boroughs, and will soon be found across the country. After the shipping container-like boxes full of loose parts and found objects are opened, trained "play associates" monitor the fun until it's time to pack them for the night.