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# Insects



Museum of Unnatural History, Room XXIV, Large Sculptures: Dario Ghibaud, *Et Cauda Superior Et Alterum Inferior*, 2018-2017. White cement, white Carrara marble dust, acrylic resin, inner metal structure.

## All You Need is Love

We build walls to keep the wild out, then buy expensive furniture just to give the bugs a place to crash and share our snacks

For a design magazine, it would make sense to write about the overachievers – bees, termites, ants – all the A+ architects whose collective labor gets held up as a model of efficient, intelligent world-building. But when I think about insects and interiors, my mind goes straight to our least-loved cohabitants: bed bugs.

Bed bugs build nothing. They don't produce honey or teach us biomimetic lessons on passive cooling or network design. They suck our blood, shit it out on our sheets, and disappear by morning. What they produce instead is suspicion.

What links humans and bed bugs is less biomimicry than convergent evolution. Like humans, bed bugs have evolved as consumers inhabiting infrastructures they did not build. They don't fly. They hitch rides. They don't build. They consume. They make homes in our homes, settling into the soft infrastructures of domestic life – mattresses, upholstery, bedframes, even books – where we are most vulnerable.

It is a messy comparison, or maybe just a Kafkaesque provocation. But I am a writer, so I traffic in lived experience and questionable habits. Years ago, while living in a Bushwick mansion with nine other twenty-somethings, I found out just how quickly a bug can reorder a house. I may have been responsible for bringing bed bugs in through my habit of hauling furniture home from the street: an IKEA Billy bookshelf I carried for blocks by myself, a box of discarded Dunkin' Donuts posters, and other domestic detritus. It might not have been me – I was hardly the only roommate dragging found objects into the house – but I

was the whistleblower. I sent the first house email: "I found an adult male bed bug in my bed last night," followed a few lines later by "Please don't stigmatize me!" Just by saying those two words – bed bugs – I was implicated in the infestation, following an unjust whoever-smelt-it-dealt-it logic. The welts were stigma enough, a kind of scarlet braille. Before the infestation, a head count of the adult males in my bed, insect or otherwise, was a private

An essay by Eric Schwartau

matter. After the infestation, it became a matter of public record. Bed bugs had produced a new mode of household governance, organized around containment, communication, and an undertow of paranoia.

And yet for all the panic they inspire, bed bugs aren't deadly. They don't spread disease like mosquitoes or damage houses like termites. What they attack is your confidence in comfort, producing itching, insomnia, shame, anxiety, and paranoia. Their small physical presence is outweighed by a psychic occupation.

If comparing humans to bugs is off limits, fast furniture offers a more useful analogy. IKEA, the world's largest furniture retailer, has built an empire on flat-pack design: lightweight, cheap to distribute, and ready to assemble on site. It has spread across the globe by solving the same logistical problem bed bugs do: how to travel efficiently, enter the home with minimal friction, and outsource final arrangement to the host. Not biomimicry, exactly, but convergent evolution.

The timelines overlap, too. In the early 20th century, bed bugs were rapidly eradicated through the widespread application of now-banned DDT, along with new technologies like vacuum cleaners and design solutions like metal bed frames, which were less hospitable to infestation. Together, these interventions sharply reduced bed bug populations. After World War II, more travel, more trade, and the eventual prohibition of DDT created favorable conditions for their return and spread.

IKEA expanded through many of these same conditions, spreading flat-pack minimalism and democratic design across the globe. Two compact domestic forms, each flourishing under the same logistical system.

Cut to 2010, when panic over the spread of bed bugs was rising in an increasingly travel-saturated world. A New York cover story on the Upper East Side reported unmarked exterminator vans, co-op board denial, fears over property values and social stain, much of it voiced through anonymous sources. In Paris in 2023, bed bugs became an Olympic-season media panic, generating global headlines. In 2025, Frank Gehry's former American Center, now home to the Cinémathèque Française, had to close for a month after sightings on theater seats. No amount of starchitect can save you. Chaotic communication and disclosure often have the opposite of their intended effect. Rather than containing the problem, they can prompt people to dump infested furniture and clothing on the street or decamp elsewhere, redistributing the very infestation they are trying to escape.

Bed bugs do not just infest beds. They infest attention. The mention alone is enough to transform a room. Writing this article from a hotel in LA, all I could see was potential habitat: plush carpet, a built-in armoire, a wooden bed frame, a fabric ottoman – even the chic poured-concrete walls seemed porous enough to house brutalism-loving bugs. I could feel paranoia setting in, and I can feel it now, too, as I implicate myself: a globe-trotting design writer moving through the same circuits of travel, taste, and domestic circulation that carry these blood fiends from room to room, if not on my body, then across the page itself, stained with itchy ink. 1



# Honey, I'm home

Project by **Green&Blue**  
Country **United Kingdom**

Climate Realignment: Tactical Adaptations to Urban Heat reveals the invisible forces of heat shaping contemporary cities and explores how existing buildings can be adapted to a warming climate. Developed by Roofscapes, the installation presents thermally activated models of typical Parisian buildings, comparing a prevailing 'status quo' scenario with a set of passive, low-tech adaptation strategies. Focusing on the 1.5-meter offset around existing envelopes as its intervention zone, the project pro-

poses roofs and façades as productive climatic interfaces capable of providing shade, supporting vegetation, collecting rainwater, producing energy, and hosting new forms of outdoor life. By making heat visible through infrared imaging and material experimentation, the installation advocates for a right to adapt, offering a practical roadmap to reduce reliance on air conditioning while enhancing urban biodiversity and domestic comfort.

*Photo courtesy Wildcare*



# Bee My Guest

Project by **Judi Harvest**  
Country **Italy**



In Murano there is an oasis where glassblowing furnaces coexist with the steady hum of 200,000 honeybees. Here, the survival of a centuries-old glassblowing craft is being tied directly to the survival of the fundamental insects that pollinate the world. Since 2013, Judi Harvest has been transforming a forgotten field into the Murano Honey Garden, planting flowers and trees and installing beehives right in the middle of a manufacturing zone, turning it into a functional habitat where insects and artisans work side by side. Her art, like her glass pomegranates and golden honeycomb vessels, highlights the mechanical similarities between a bee building a hive and a master blower shaping mol-

ten glass. They both use heat, rhythm, and collective effort to make something structural and magical using instinct and natural materials. By installing nature in the middle of a factory district, Harvest treats the environment less like a fragile museum piece and more like a messy, necessary and natural roommate. Her work frames the city as a shared piazza where humans, bugs and furnaces all have to figure out how to live together and prosper without getting in each other's way, even on the vaporetto. It's a grounded look at how domesticity works when you realize your neighbors have wings and a mission.

# Wild Courting

Project by OFFPOLINN  
Country Spain

Since the 1980s, vast stretches of land in the formerly rural county of Molina de Segura (Murcia) have been exploited to create suburbs, flattening topographies and destroying the territorial system of ravines (ramblas). These ramblas – veins carved by seasonal rainfall – accumulate humidity and foster biodiversity, acting as corridors of freshness, carbon fixation, and ecological entanglement essential to the region’s stability. The Rambla Climate-House works as a climatic and ecological device within a series of citizen-led initiatives addressing environmental damage caused by over-urbanization. The family aspired for insects, birds, and the climate to pass through the house, making this its primary objective, together with the repair of a small node within the ramblas’ wet ecology. The house collects pooled rainfall and gray water to regenerate the rambla’s ecological and climatic conditions. Sensors activate an automated meteorology that escapes human control to meet the needs of the reparation process. Organized around an elliptical section of rambla, the house acts as an observatory and a sequence of interconnected spaces.

*Photo courtesy José Hevia*



INSECTS





# Shell We?

Project by **Terreform ONE**  
Country **USA**

One line of thought, framed through the lens of climate change, invites us to reconsider housing not as a hermetically sealed container but as a platform for ecological cohabitation. At Terreform ONE, the Fab Tree Hab advances this idea by treating architecture as a living process rather than a finished object. Instead of assembling inert materials, the project cultivates structures grown from grafted trees. Permanence and monumentality are no longer the ambition; what matters is an architecture that evolves alongside its environment. In this sense, the Fab Tree Hab becomes multispecies biotecture: a hybrid organism that unsettles the boundary between artificial and natural, shifting from designing for humans to designing with the full ecology of life. We call the result a terrestrial reef, a co-

ral-like system for land designed to stimulate biodiversity. Henry Thoreau once placed a small cabin within a vibrant natural world. Our terrestrial reef project, by contrast, seeks to reintroduce ecological richness into diminished landscapes. The Fab Tree Hab acts as a living scaffold that supports nests, burrows, hives, and dens as integral components, functioning as refuge, stabilizing platform, and ecological catalyst. Underlying this work is the recognition that dwellings operate as mediating systems, shaping how humans, other species, materials, and climates intersect – shifting the home toward stewardship, adaptation, and reciprocity.



# The Hive-Rise

Project by **Snøhetta**  
Country **Norways**

Insects, birds and other pollinators are an integral part of our ecosystem, vital to the propagation of both wild and cultivated plants. Amongst the world's most important pollinators are bees, which support fully one-third of all food growth in the world. In recent decades however, bee colonies have suffered devastating damage caused by pesticides and habitat loss. In 2014, Snøhetta began a close collaboration with the passionate apiarist Alexander Du Rietz, who approached the studio with the goal of expanding his traditional beekeeping practice into an urban context. The Vulkan Beehives were born out of a joint mission to raise social consciousness around colony collapse, and to provide a new model of urban housing for our agricultural partners.

*Photo courtesy Morten Brakestad*

