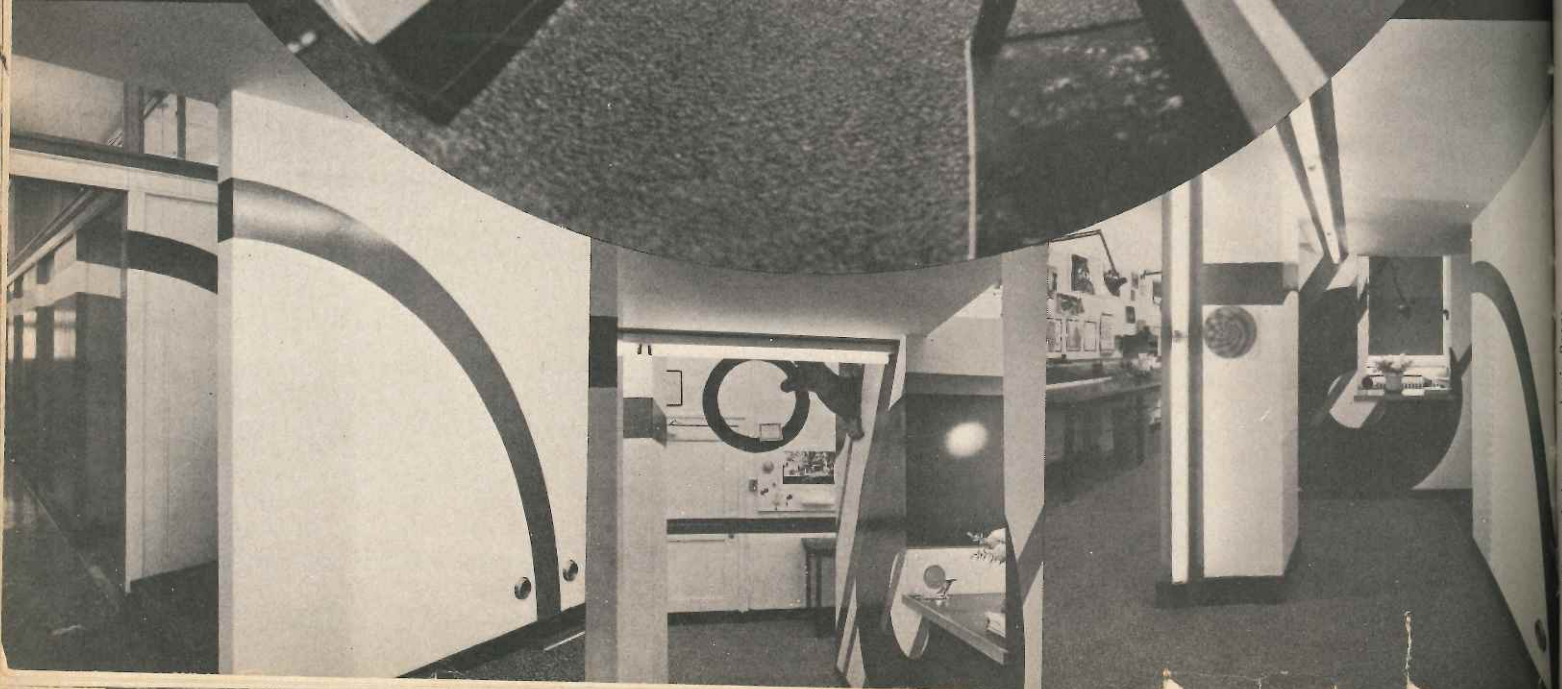
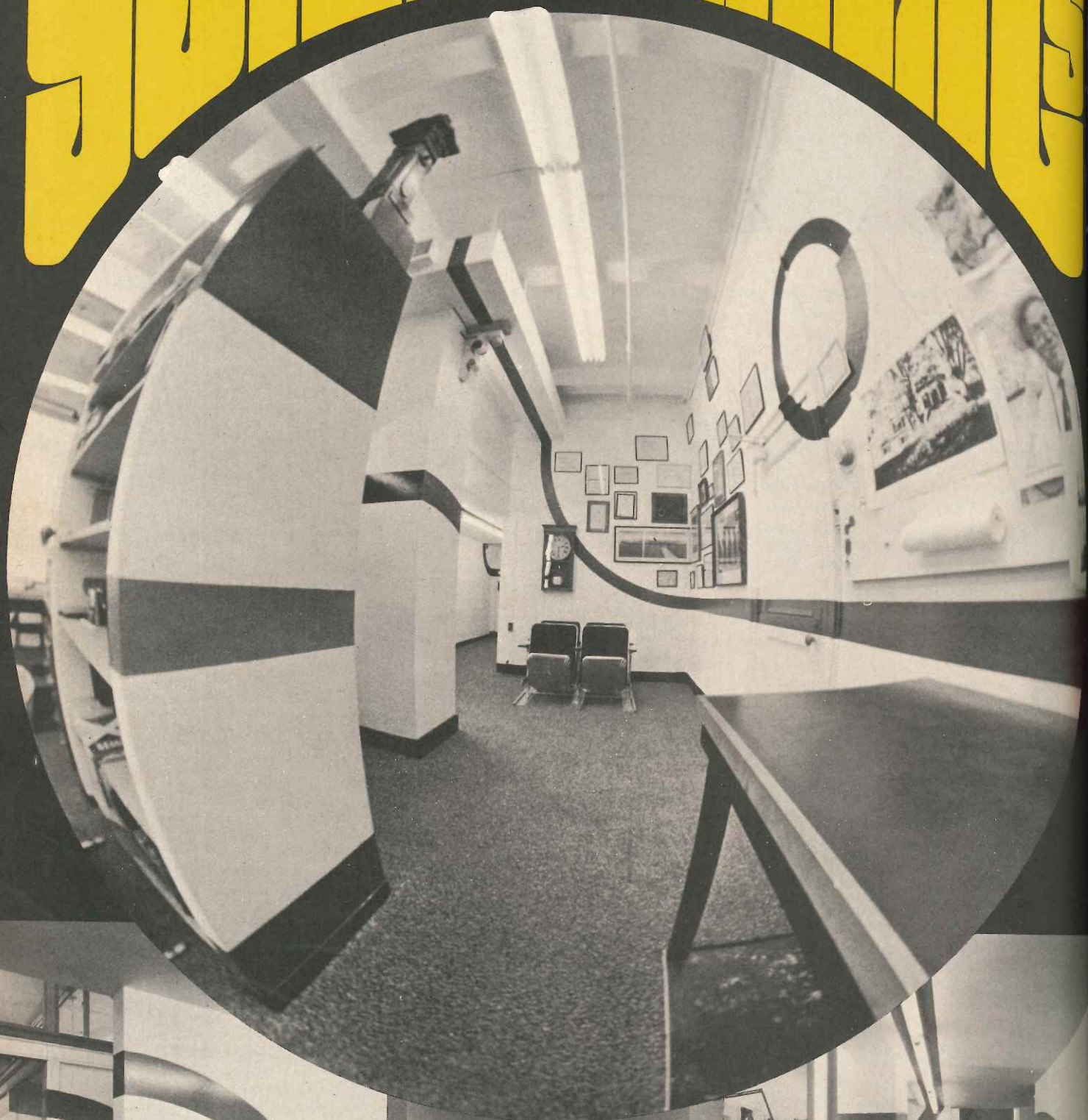


SUPERGRAPHICS



Not a decorative device — repeat — *not* a decorative device, the Supermannerists' use of bold stripes, geometric forms, and three-dimensional images at a super scale is, emphatically, a spatial experimentation.

These Supergraphics "start with a two-dimensional thing that becomes a three-dimensional overlay," says Doug Michels, who executed Charles Moore's interior designs for the Sea Ranch condominium in the winter of 1965. (As far as can be determined, these were the first such graphics in the new idiom.)

In this technique, architectural surfaces are painted or applied with such gigantic forms as two-dimensional typefaces and signs or flat outlines of geometric solids. Generally, they produce abstract effects. Three-dimensional photomurals made with billboard advertising have also come into the picture.

The aim in using such graphic devices

is to produce optical effects that destroy architectural planes, distort corners, and explode the rectangular boxes that we construct as rooms. Supergraphics ultimately blast the inhabitant into an outer space. They carry him out beyond the space he is in, giving him the giant vision of an extraterrestrial observer, as if he were Superman in orbit. In that way, Supergraphics make Superman of us all.

Discordant scale is the fundamental force of this graphics technique: It juxtaposes to the room in which they appear images at a scale that is out of context — grossly.

Always, Supergraphics are so gigantic that they cannot be contained within the frame of a single architectural plane. Either they extend onto adjacent planes — from wall to floor or ceiling if their forms are painted in toto — or they appear as fragments of an over-all graphic image.

In both cases, the space extending process of this super scale induces one man to infer that the gigantic graphics are part of a world beyond the one he is in. Patterns overlapping from one plane to another imply a place where they might fit on a single surface. Fragmented graphics imply a form that the viewer completes by gestalt or that the architect implies by the use of mirrors. The implication is that the graphics continue beyond the plane of wall or floor, beyond the room, and even beyond the volume of the building.

Arcs on a wall, for example, can suggest huge wheels somewhere outdoors (see Charles Moore's house, p. 158, MAY 1967 P/A). Billboard photomurals make a man feel he is as big as the fragmented human image he sees on his wall. Diagonals indicating section cuts through a room suggest that the room is the size of an architectural model and that a bigger architect somewhere beyond the section cut is studying it.

For ages, architects have been looking down onto plans and into models, but the layman seldom shared this private, lofty view. Today, the fragmented super-scale graphics of the Supermannerists make a superarchitect of even the layman.

As Doug Michels says, "These are space trips."

In addition to this vision of an astronaut, the normal earthbound view of the interior is still apparent. This is the double, almost polarized vision that the Supermannerists provide through their use of scale.

Not all large graphics, however con-

fusingly similar in appearance, are what we call Supergraphics, since some of them derive from different objectives. For example, the hard-edge school of painting has also brought recognition to the use of abstracted signs, symbols, and typography. Also, the work of graphics designers has found its way into interior decoration — most prominently the work of California's Barbara Stauffacher at the Sea Ranch athletic club in the winter of 1967 (see MARCH 1967 P/A).

"There is an inherent need for decoration of one sort or another," says Thomas Geismar of Chermayeff & Geismar, graphic designers. "And a lot of large painting today is good only because it is large."

Hugh Hardy adds, "We like to see those great big letters blown up on walls till they become fragments and look abstract. But many of these designs start and end with the two-dimensional surface."

"Some of the graphics people are not concerned with space," says Doug Michels. "Mostly they are interested only in scale and color. And many of their things just look faddy — too pat, too In."

Supergraphics sometimes are too Out, however. Often they seem like literary ideas and intellectual exercises rather than spatial effects. In these cases, the biographical concept or intention of the design is stronger than the affective response. On the other hand, as with most optical tricks, once the intention is known, the graphics usually can be seen in no other than the intended way.

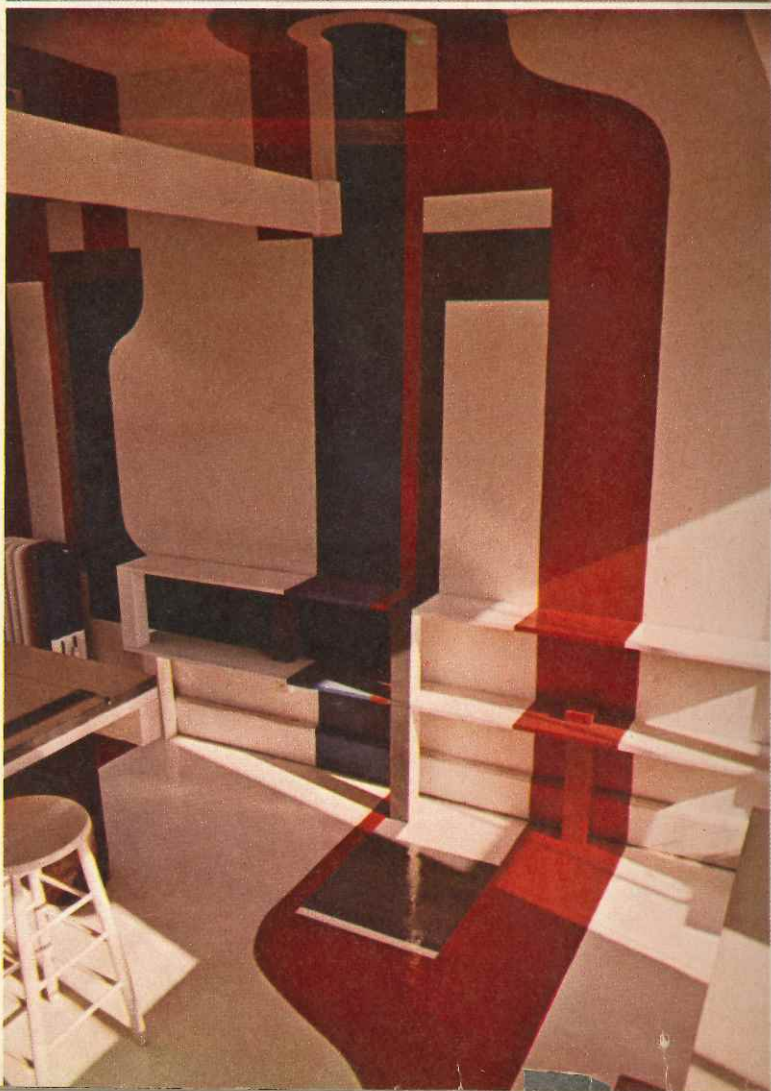
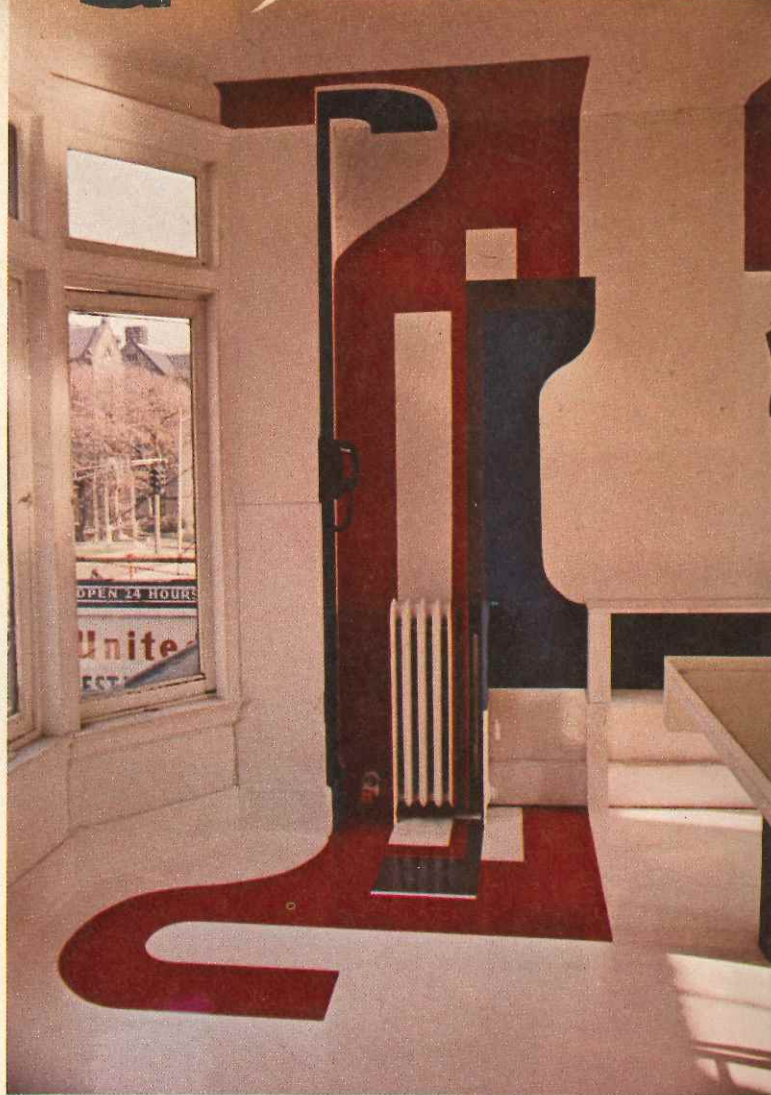
"When Moore started the whole thing off with his interest in painting big circles and squares on the walls of the Sea Ranch houses," Doug Michels recalls, "it wasn't so clear as it is now that you could just paint on the ceiling and on the floor as a continuation of the wall. But the idea was to extend the space." (For Moore's own words, see p. 159, MAY 1967 P/A).

The latest and most electrifying manifestation in this direction is probably not the flat abstract graphics, but graphics made from highway billboards, which are used as super murals. Not only do they derive from bringing the freeway indoors (see OCTOBER 1967 P/A), but they are also an extension of the Supergraphics technique with three-dimensional elements from our popular human experience, and makes the viewer feel almost as large as Gulliver in Lilliput.

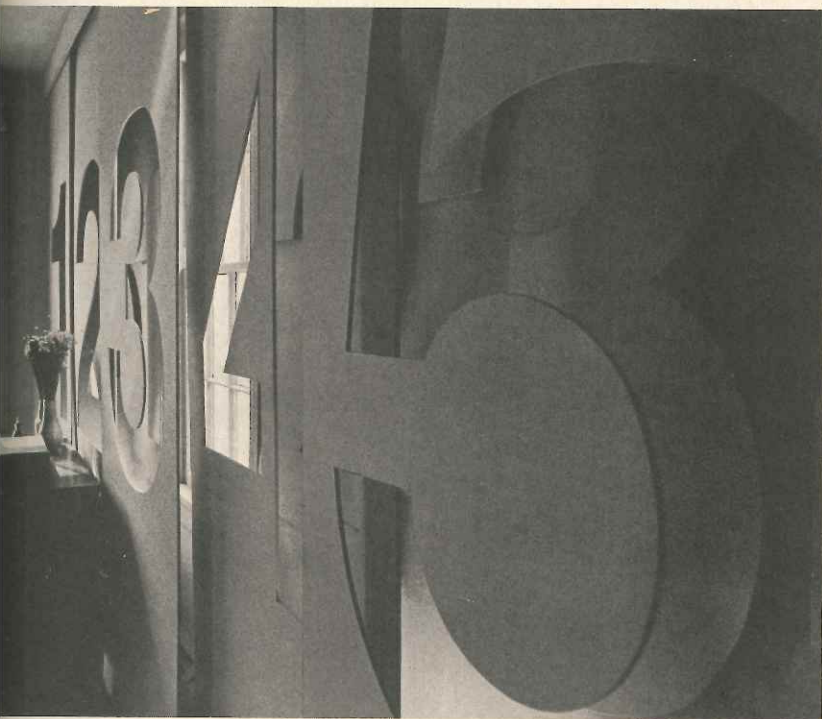
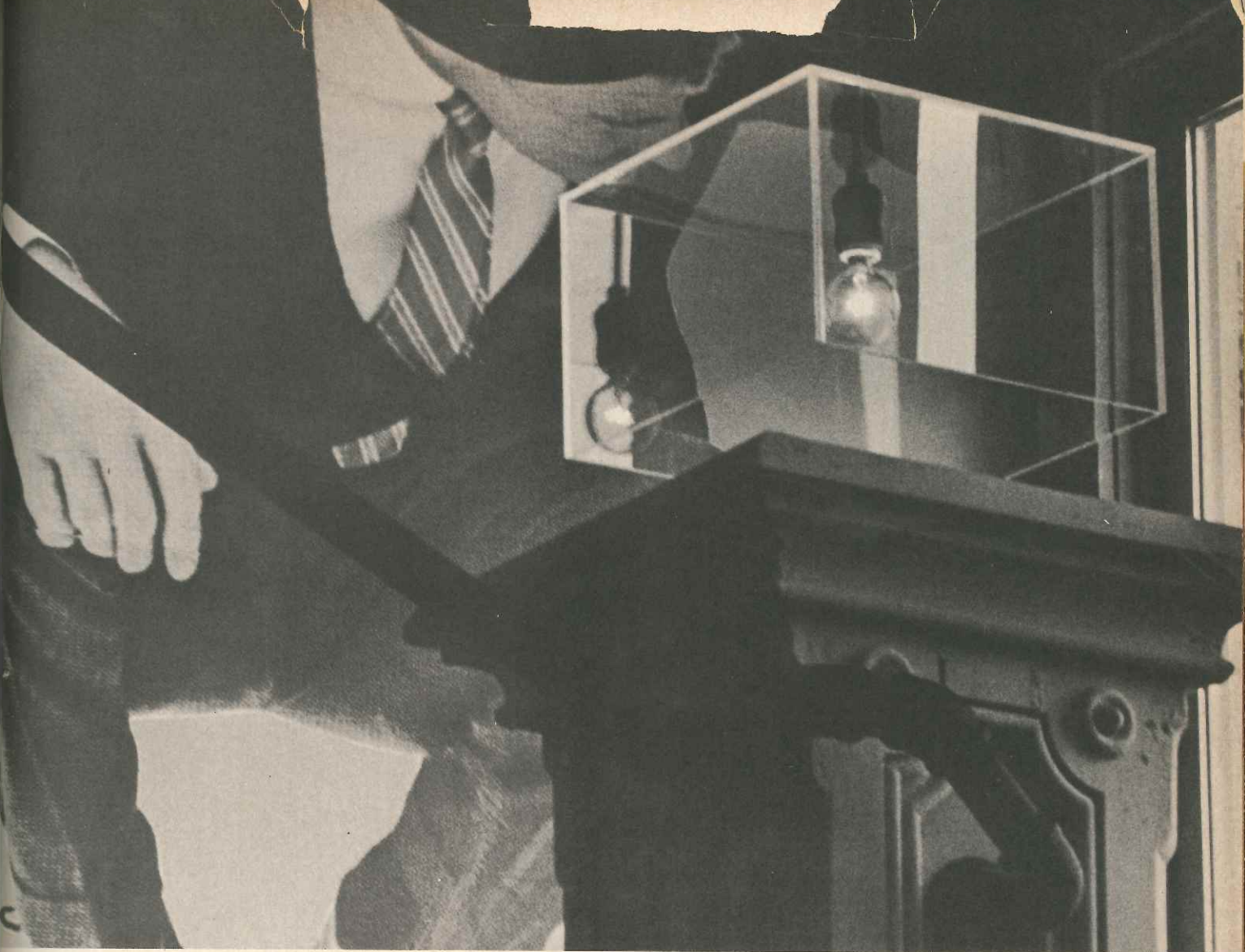
This going into a world beyond our own is what distinguishes graphics from Supergraphics. — CRS

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hat started Hugh Hardy & Associates on the Supergraphics kick, Hardy says, was "passing imaginary geometric planes and solids through a room so that each irregular plane of the room is cut through. This describes the forms wherever they touch the room surfaces and they get patterns that are more prominent and often more pleasing than the original conditions." Looking down the hallway of their office (painted in the winter of 1967), one sees a cylinder that cuts through the entire length and implies that it goes on forever, Hardy explains (facing page, bottom left). Another cylinder swings through the reception area in a different direction (fisheye view), and a bold green one blasts open the reception desk (bottom, center); a red fourth cylinder at the entry has fluorescent tubes fixed onto the cut line (bottom, right). Diagonal planes also bisect the entry, some of them implying diagonal sections of the room, like those in Hardy's own apartment done in the fall of 1966 (see May 1967 P/A).



Doug Michels's Supergraphics for Charles Moore-William Turnbull's drafting room in New Haven (designed in September 1965) are the most intricate examples of interwoven painted planes. Michels's red, blue, and green stripes pass over floor, walls, and ceiling and also over, under, and through the radiator (above) and bookcase (right). Glossy red paint and glossy gray paint offset the matte blue and set up reflections that produce other dimensions. Michels calls these "space trips." "For a while nobody would step on it because it was Art," he notes mockingly.



Photos this page: Maude Dorr

Charles Moore seems to have originated billboard Supergraphics in his New Haven house, which was executed by William Grover. On the wall of the staircase leading down to the kitchen, a photomural of a superscale man is placed so as to make him seem to look out the back door or into the light over the newel post (below). Actually, the man is the left side of a billboard advertisement for Volkswagen in which he is inspecting his automobile. Since the billboard man's left hand, as well as the VW he is looking at (the right side of the ad), are installed on the wall of Doug Michel's apartment (see October 1967 P/A), which is 3 miles away in New Haven, Moore's billboard is probably the biggest space extender of them all. It also combines Supergraphics with bringing the freeway indoors. Of course, Moore's wall of oversize, cutout numbers on superimposed sliding panels (left) is portable Supergraphics.

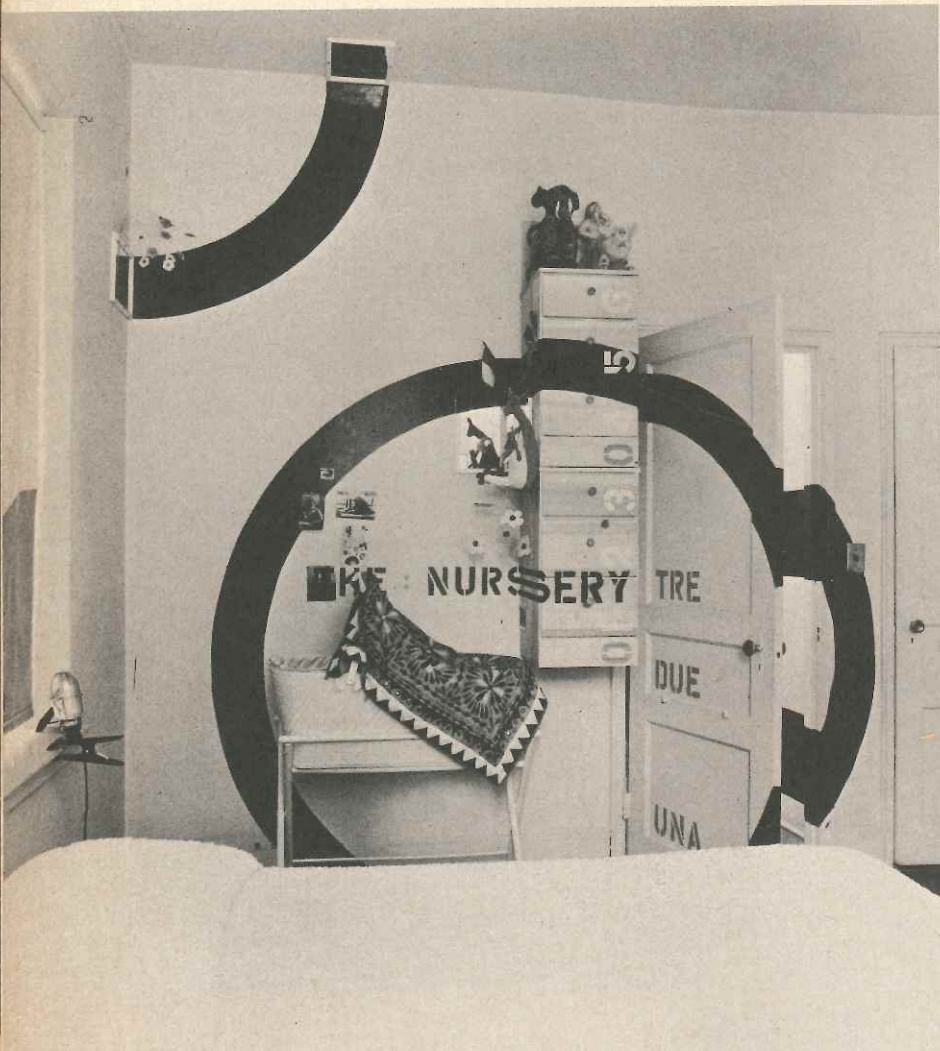
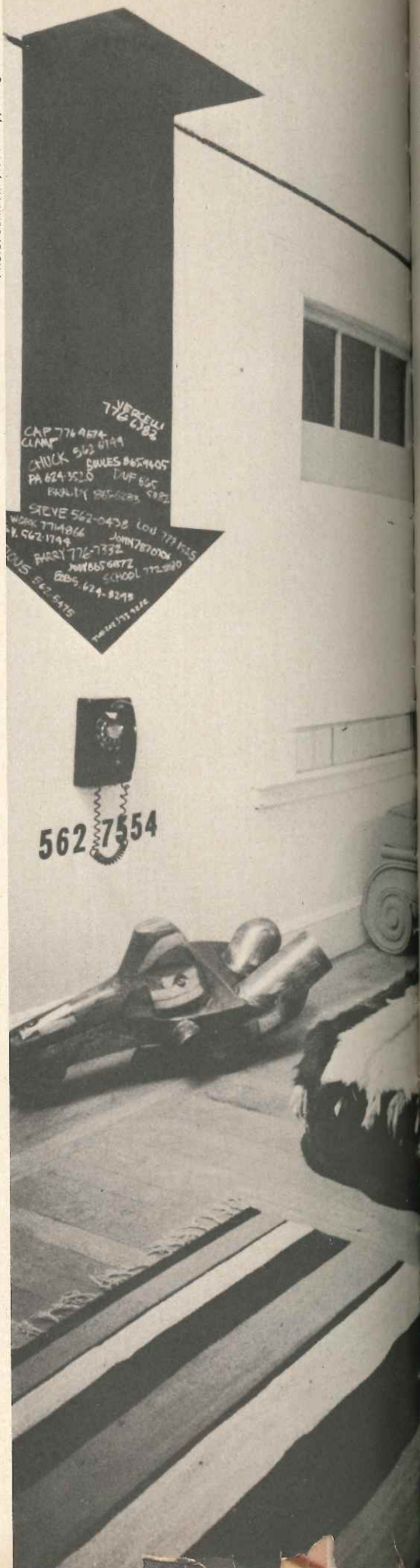


Photo: Louis Reens

Photo: John Hill; Courtesy, Doug Michels



“**M**inigraphics” might be the more appropriate term for the symbolic cylinder that carves out a nursery for Hugh and Tiziana Hardy’s newborn son, Sebastian (above). The circular section of the imaginary cylindrical form is complete when the door is closed; when the door is open, the cut line is seen to continue out along the hallway. This same three-dimensionality is apparent on the suspended chest of drawers, where both the circle and the letter “S” read in depth. Segments of arcs are also on the window shade and on the ceiling; the latter has mirrors on adjacent planes to prove that it continues out beyond the room into a larger world.

When Beatle-browed Doug Michels was a student in New Haven in 1966, he painted a big black arrow pointing to the telephone in his apartment and big black phone numbers so that both would be easy to find (right). He also did it because he was conscious of the prominence of the telephone in our culture. He painted them with blackboard paint so that the sign could be used as a memo pad for chalked-on numbers. (No more hunting around for paper. Telephone booth designers please take note.) He also drew the thinnest ink outline across the ceiling to connect the solid base of the door to the head of the arrow on the opposite wall. It was a discontinuous Supergraphic.



Y

ale-Architecture student Bill Grover has designed

a playroom with "perspective distortion" as the energizing principle. The hallway to the basement room is 30-ft long, but by broadening a stripe as it goes along the hall, the perspective is inverted and the hallway shortened (above). The stripe comes down from upstairs. Inside the playroom, the stripe continues along the wall, turns a corner, goes up over the ceiling and down the next wall, where it broadens to the width of a piano (below, right). "It is a way to change architectural space without punching holes in walls," Grover says. The piano that the stripe envelops is orange with green contour lines; they make it rise up—or is the phrase "blow its lid"?

