show how well he could focus grandiose emotions into a few moments of vinyl. The sound is steeped in a spirituality that is deeply Californian: Even when the mood is apocalyptic, sunlight floods his productions. He always sounds groovy. Come the end of days, Axelrod will be the one wearing freaky bell-bottoms.

Axelrod's Earth Rot

FROM HIS APARTMENT IN NORTH HOLLYWOOD AXELROD has been plotting a new album, commissioned by James Lavelle for the Mo' Wax label. He's using musicians, he says, because although he likes what folks like DJ Shadow are doing, he finds most sampling soulless. A machine "can sound like the blues," he says, "but it don't feel like the blues."

But what really seems to excite Axelrod one recent afternoon is the prospect that a work he composed in 1993, *Requiem: The Holocaust*, might finally be heard. The way he tells it, politics at EMI kept this brooding, atonal, yet strangely jazzy meditation on the death camps from international release. It was only briefly available in the States, and Axelrod is hoping the proposed merger of EMI and Bertelsmann AG will fling open the door. He notes that Bertelsmann is owned by Germans—surely they'll be too embarrassed to be viewed as sitting on a major work about the Holocaust. That's what he's counting on, anyway.

Axelrod cues up *Requiem* in his apartment, then plunks down in a folding chair. He wears a blue *Planet of the Apes* T-shirt. Both of us stare slack-jawed at two huge speakers resting on plywood shelves as the piece booms out. Every once in a while Axelrod emits a blast: "Damn it, someone has to put this out!" There are no drums on the recording, no obvious break beats; the deejays of the world will not be sampling this one.

"Can you imagine what would happen if this were played in Germany?" he asks, just as a bleating string passage gives way to a bluesy bass line. The neighbors have noticed the noise and crank up *rancheras* in defiance. But they can't drown out Axelrod.

A record executive once told him he was the most mismanaged artist since Mozart. "But that's too easy," Axelrod says. "Because, you see, I didn't *have* to go with those people. The fact that I chose to means that I have to be responsible for my choices. It's the basis of existentialism—you must be responsible for the choices you made in life."

If, in some existential scheme, his life has brought him to this room in North Hollywood, with the window shuttered in the middle of the day, he now talks as if the windows are easing open again.

"How much time do I have left? I'm 67, for God's sake. All the attention came out of nowhere. Suddenly I'm in *Mojo* magazine's list of 100 cult heroes. Half of them are dead. But the thing that really bothered me was, I didn't know Screamin' Jay Hawkins was dead! I loved that guy.

"Who knows what will happen to me. It doesn't bother me. I've had such a great life. It's just been one great adventure. Maybe I haven't left big footsteps, but I've left something. People all over the world seem to be listening to my music. So, what the hell?"

Axelrod's Songs of Experience

ART

I Dream of Jeannie's Love Seat

MARK BENNETT REDEFINES REALITY TV WITH HIS BLUEPRINTS OF FAMOUS SETS

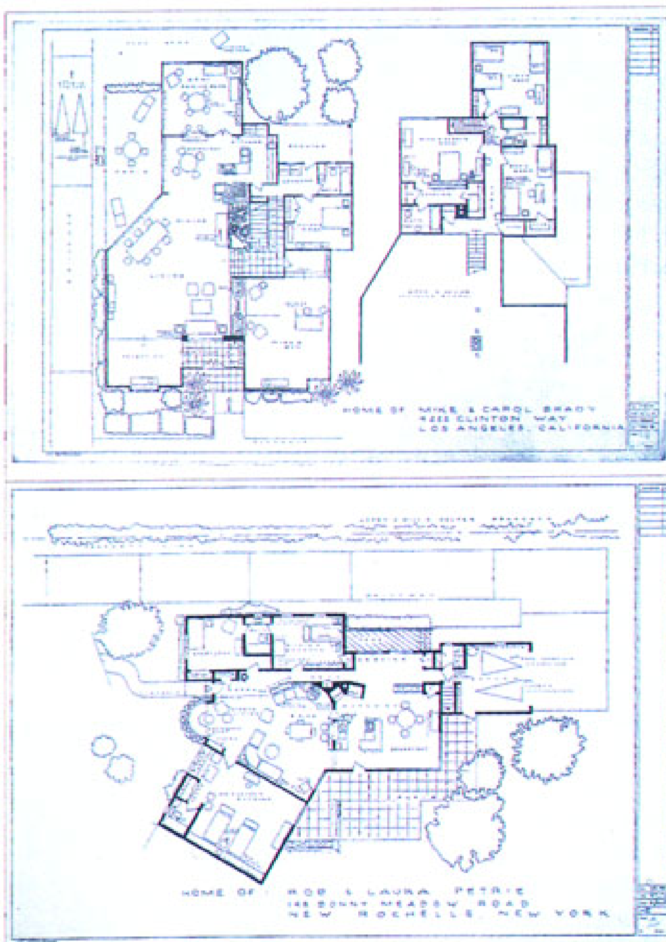
BY BERNARD COOPER

IN 1985, MARK BENNETT COMpleted a series of 53 blueprints featuring some of the best-known residential architecture in America. Among them were Ricky and Lucy Ricardo's cramped Manhattan apartment, Herman and Lily Munster's dilapidated mansion, and Ward and June Cleaver's two-story colonial. Imagine the hours of TV watching that made these drawings possible. As with John James Audubon's renderings of birds, the exactitude of Bennett's work stems from an abiding curiosity about, and close observation of, his subjects. In *The*

PHOTOGRAPH OF MARK BENNETT BY MARIO DELOPEZ

Dick Van Dyke Show, for example, an ottoman appears just beyond the entryway steps, waiting for Rob Petrie to trip over it at the beginning of each episode. On the upper elevation of *The Patty Duke Show*, matching beds and nightstands fill a corner of Patty and Cathy's bedroom, the quaint teenage nerve center where the twins routinely swapped identities, causing all manner of havoc. Dutch doors forever swing open from the west wall of *Mr. Ed*, allowing the horse to poke his head into the office of his owner, Wilbur Post, and offer the architect advice regarding his marriage and career. Who dreamed this stuff up, and why did we watch as though it were the last campfire on earth?

Mark Bennett depicts the living rooms and kitchens in which, for the children of his generation and for every generation since, a common mythology unfolded, the homiletic dramas and wacky interpersonal predicaments that were resolved in half an hour. For those of you who disdain television, let me say on behalf of those of us who don't that there's something comforting in the tidy, Aristotelian structure of a sitcom, especially when it's punctuated by canned laughter, which is a quick and convenient way to satisfy the need for human noise, and by commercials that make Salvador Dalí seem as unimaginative as a housepainter. Even at the dawn of our TV-watching careers, we, the mesmerized children of America, didn't care that our worlds bore little resemblance to civic dreams like Hilldale and Mayberry RFD, towns populated by temperate fathers, satisfied mothers, and siblings who possessed the patience of saints. It wasn't verisimilitude we were after. Those shows were fictions into which we fled after school or before bed. We longed for a life other than our own, an elsewhere we could inhabit if for no other reason than that the grass was always greener, even in black and white. TV transported us without making us budge from the couch. Our parents occasionally stumbled upon us, slack-jawed and inert, statues of the offspring they'd birthed. Yet no matter how often they stood in front of the set, blocking our view, warning us that our minds would turn to mush, we watched anyway, drawn like moths to the cathode tube.



HOME AWAY FROM HOME:
The Brady residence (top) and the Petrie abode

The obsessive nature of Bennett's enterprise can be seen as an outgrowth of work by artists such as On Kawara in the 1960s and Mitchell Syrop in the 1980s, artists who devoted themselves to long-range, meditative projects that involved subject matter so banal, it seemed unlikely to yield the slightest aesthetic payoff. Most notable among Kawara's projects were his date paintings, uniformly sized canvases on which the artist painted that day's date, white against a black background, almost every day for years. I say "almost" because Kawara worked slowly; days elapsed between one painting and the next, and when they were exhibited together, the gap between *JULY 7, 1966*, and *JULY 11, 1966*, conjured up an image of the artist hunched over a canvas, daydreaming while he worked, the sun rising and setting outside his studio window. Although the paintings contained nothing but numbers, Kawara had found a way to memorialize the passage of time.

Mitchell Syrop hoarded high school yearbooks, blowing up student photos and categorizing them according to types: guys with long sideburns, women with short Afros. He then displayed these physically similar groups in wall-size grids. This body of work gives the impression of a herd of mammals rather than a class of *Homo sapiens*. The blunt yearbook lighting, three-quarter pose, and nondescript backgrounds somehow manage to both emphasize the sameness and accentuate the difference of each person. Syrop's photomosaics give off a hallucinatory shimmer that makes ordinary human faces appear disconcertingly strange.

Kawara and Syrop earned critical recognition. Some, however, have dismissed Bennett as a folk artist, in part because of the popular (some might say trivial) nature of his subject matter. Much of his work is rendered with felt-tip pen and on a scale that never exceeds the artist's easy reach; it has about it the look of a pastime that, like crochet or crossword puzzles, one might indulge in while, say, watching television. Yet the care and concentration in his work reminds me of Vladimir Nabokov sketching aspects of the novels he most loved: Gregor Samsa's apartment from *The Metamorphosis*, Charles's cap from *Madame Bovary*. Unlike "outsider" artists, Bennett studied art (pursuing a master's at New York University) and is savvy when it comes to his art-historical influences, citing Warhol's Brillo boxes as his awakening to the glories of the ordinary. Just as Warhol made his first silk screen of money in response to a friend's suggesting he paint what he loved, Bennett was drawn to the imagery of television out of affection; he often refers to his work as "valentines" to his favorite shows. To heed one's fascination, to make manifest an imaginary world—these are the very rudiments of the creative impulse, and Bennett rivals Kawara and Syrop in his drive to do just that.

MARK BENNETT/COURTESY MARK MOORE GALLERY

There was a time when Bennett himself doubted the value of his work, particularly after successive rejections by New York galleries. While employed full-time as a mailman (Bennett still maintains his Beverly Hills route), he began to display his blueprints at craft fairs, where he was looked upon as an oddball. "I'd be showing my blueprints in a tent next to some guy who was selling ceramic birdhouses," he says, "and even *he* thought I was nuts." Not until dealer Christopher Ford came across Bennett's work at the Silver Lake restaurant Cobalt Cantina had anyone taken more than a passing interest. With typical candor, Bennett claims to have hung his work there in the hopes of getting enough cash to pay off his Visa bill. Ford gave the artist his first solo show at the Mark Moore Gallery in 1985 and titled the exhibit after a refrain from the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* theme song: "You're Gonna Make It After All."

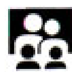
BENNETT WAS RAISED IN A PENTECOSTAL HOUSEHOLD. While his parents were away at work or rehearsing with the choir, Bennett and his brother managed to find diversions in their Chattanooga, Tennessee, suburb. His parents forbade visits to the local theater—they considered moviegoing a vice on par with smoking and drinking—yet television was not only allowed but encouraged. "My parents had no idea what to do with us," says Bennett. "They wanted us to join the choir but gave up because neither of us could sing." He remembers one particularly dull afternoon at the age of 11 when he and his older brother had the house to themselves. "We tuned in to a new show, *Leave It to Beaver*. I was completely enchanted by the afternoon light coming through the Cleavers' living room window," says Bennett. "Right then it was afternoon at our house, too." Bennett's enchantment was bittersweet; his Middle American home life suffered by comparison. That day, using stationery from his father's job at the children's clothes division of Buster Brown, Bennett sketched a floor plan of what he imagined to be the layout of the Cleavers' house.

The early drawings were crude, but he eventually found ways to refine his technique. To determine the scale of a certain room, he observed how many steps it took for a character to walk from one end to the other and was able to extrapolate the square footage of the house. He took a drafting class at his high school to improve his renderings of TV homes.

Blueprints are the perfect form for Bennett's game of truth versus illusion. An architect's floor plan invites you to project yourself into parcels of empty space, to imagine the kind of life you'd live within its walls. Looking at a Bennett blueprint of a show you used to watch is like recollecting a home you once inhabited but that never existed. You remember the flowered wallpaper, the telephone table at the bottom of the staircase, the family whose faces and traits you knew as well as those of your own, yet all the while you're aware that the family were actors, the telephone a prop, the floral walls a flimsy backdrop, the whole sweet frisson of shelter nothing more than signals beamed through the air. To complicate the paradox, the nonexistent homes seem tangible now that the artist has made them so graphic, so persuasive in their particulars; how can one deny there was a Ward Cleaver when his easy chair is sitting right in the living room, drawn in exactly the spot you recall it? In each blueprint, Bennett reifies a fiction, treating it with an architect's rationalism and an interior designer's eye.

Most of these television shows took place indoors; their interiority, with its diffuse artificial lighting, accentuates the sense that they are privately recollected dreams rather than shared cultural phenomena. Yet the artist's blueprints often include a landscaped exterior. Bennett employs the standard architectural symbols for trees and driveways and flagstone paths. In some exteriors, he indicates the homes of secondary characters such as Rob and Laura Petrie's next-door neighbors, Jerry and Millie Helper.

Some might be tempted to categorize Bennett's TV homes as exercises in nostalgia. Certainly his art depends upon nostalgia for its effect, but with a twist; we look at his work and yearn not for childhood but for a show that preoccupied us during childhood, a narrative parallel to our own. For those of us who grew up watching images flicker on a picture tube, lost in the limbo between familial reality and its representation, Bennett's work stirs a longing that is at once dubious and elegiac: for made-up people, scripted lives, and homes that don't exist.



FILM & TELEVISION

Rose Garden Strategy

CONSERVATIVE SPOILER AINSLEY HAYES IS THE WEST WING'S *MOST RECENT COUP*

BY STEVE ERICKSON

WITH ANY LUCK, BY the time you read this Aaron Sorkin will have freed Ainsley Hayes from the White House basement. Like a lot of people, I've been obsessed with Sorkin's television series *The West Wing* since it premiered a year and a half ago, and I think nothing speaks more to how much it means to its audience than the curious criticism frequently lodged against it. "It's a fantasy!" people exclaim, chagrined that writers and directors and actors are just making it up, unlike all those documentaries about existential emergency rooms and ruminative police precincts and haunted high schools that otherwise dominate network programming. Even as we're drawn to *The West Wing*, we feel betrayed by the show in a way that we don't by *ER* or *NYPD Blue* or *Buffy the*

Emily Procter

MARK BENNETT/COURTESY MARK MOORE GALLERY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVE BRODNER