



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

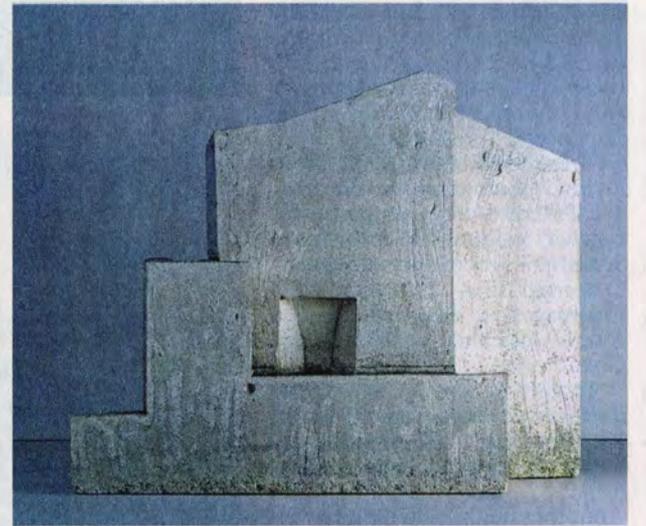
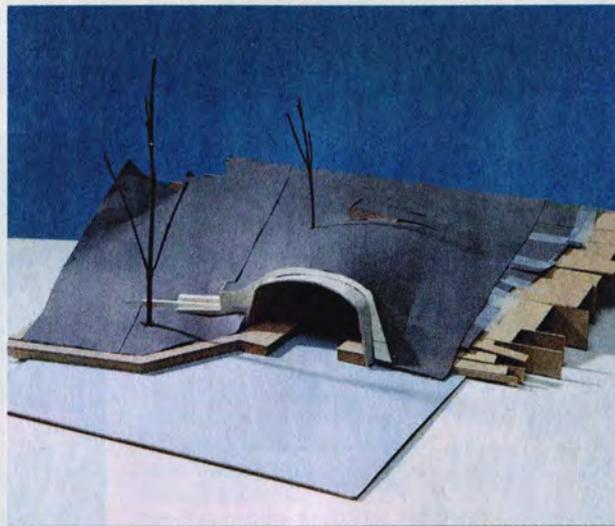
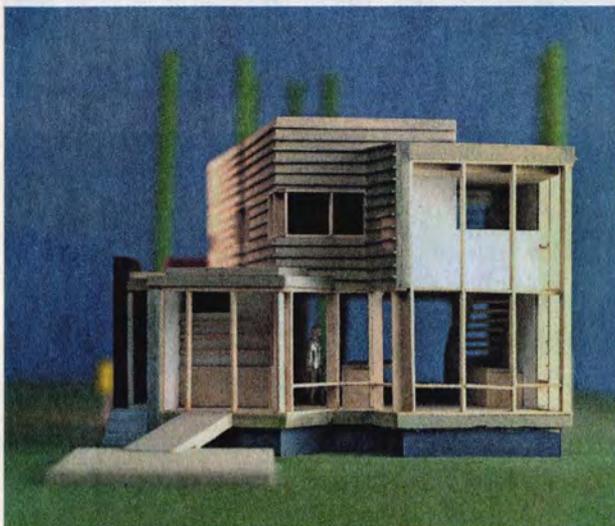
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SECTION G

Globe Real Estate

MODEL HOMES



Intricate hand-crafted miniatures guide the architects of Agathom in their work.
'The model beholds the project in its purest form' PAGE 2

PHOTOS BY AGATHOM CO.

'Model beholds the project in its purest form'

Agathom architects worked their ideas into three-dimensional forms; now, a book celebrates the possibilities they represent



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Some are semi-abstract and rendered in concrete, others woodsy and literal. A little one, over here, is a frozen zoom-in of a particular detail – a fireplace chimney – while a sprawling one, over there, contains a slice of hilly landscape with a house, tiny people and abstracted jack pines.

Beautiful, yes, but perched on top of every flat surface, wedged into bookshelves and balanced on top of the refrigerator even, the architect's models at Agathom Co. were clearly taking up too much space.

"And I threatened to throw them all in the blue box or burn them in the fireplace," says architect Adam Thom, his voice still scratchy from a recent cold.

"We had a real serious fight," admits the other half of Agathom, the Danish-born Katja Aga Sachse Thom.

More like a lover's spat, really, since the husband-and-wife team at the helm of the city's most artistic architecture practice acknowledge that model-making is a key ingredient to the success of their award-winning ways.

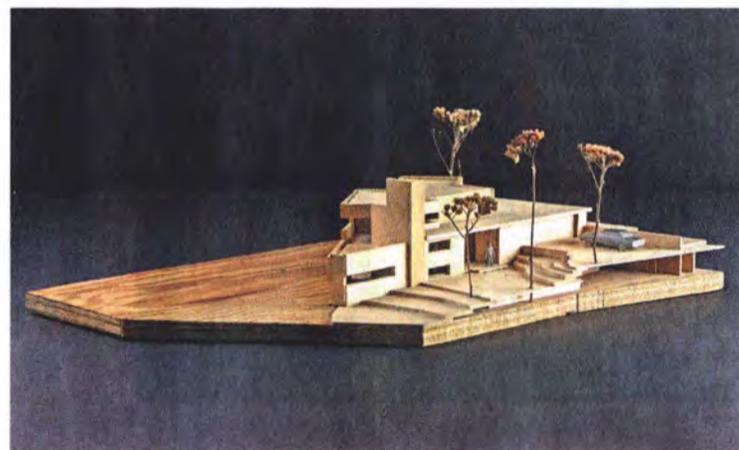
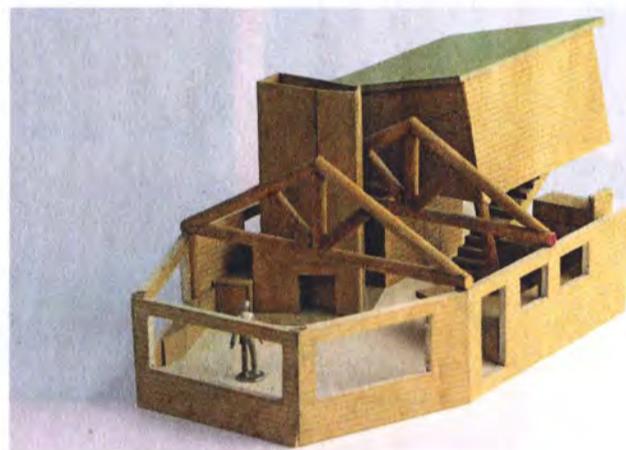
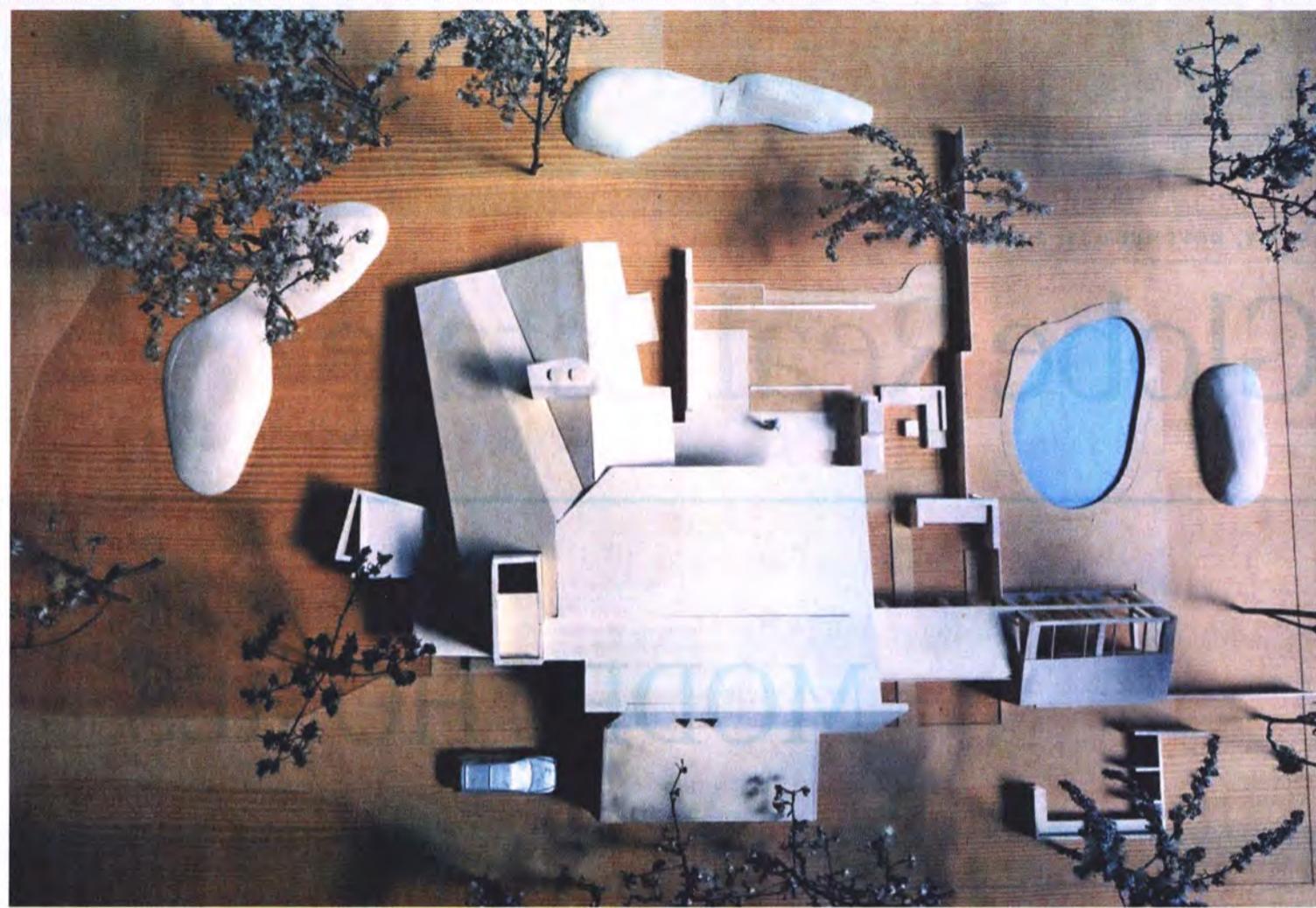
So, the decision was made to lovingly photograph the dozens and dozens of fragile and not-so-fragile creations. Staff member Serafima Korovina was assigned to the task, and, as she shared the images she produced, the couple was able to see this body of work with fresh eyes.

"That's when we started to realize there's a subject-matter here," Mr. Thom says. "The model beholds the project in its purest form."

But that realization didn't necessarily mean they were safe from becoming wood-smoke. Luckily, a cooler head – the one belonging to Carleton University instructor, architectural historian and theorist Paul Holmquist – stepped in. "I've always really admired Adam and Katja's work," says the California native who now resides in Montreal. "For me, it's always been a special, intense kind of work that I wish I could do."

Mr. Holmquist had been looking for a way to write about Agathom's artistic process for a while, and, after the Thoms showed him the new photographs of the models, he decided that this was the right vehicle.

Two things should be noted, however. First, these models were never meant to be seen by clients; they were created – often at great expense of time and money – purely so the couple could touch, hold and work through the design. Routinely, several models would have to be made until they felt they'd gotten it right. Secondly, it was Mr. Holmquist who introduced the Thoms to each other when all attended SCI-Arc (Southern California Institute of Architecture) in the mid-1990s. Interestingly, each had arrived



PHOTOS BY AGATHOM CO.

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Each of these models holds this little potential idea, a 'what if' for the project that comes through by virtue of how it's made, the materials, the mode it's constructed in – this is why they're all so fascinating.

Paul Holmquist
Carleton University instructor

there as trained fine artists (Mr. Holmquist as a painter, the future Thoms as sculptors) who had decided to pursue architecture a little bit later in life.

The book, Mr. Holmquist says, will be titled *1000 Cuts*, but his decision to write it "wasn't as straightforward as me being a journalist and saying 'I want to talk about your work,' and it

wasn't as straightforward as them saying 'Okay, we've got a bunch of stuff, we need someone to write about it.'

"We both have interests in this for our own sakes, and we can collaborate on this."

And it's hoped that, when it comes out in 2018, any lover of residential architecture, any design student, artist, or layper-

son interested in the creative process will get something out of seeing the images as well, since the husband-and-wife team are "intensely invested in this," Mr. Holmquist says.

"But I'll say this," he adds, "Adam and Katja, from the get-go, said: 'This isn't about us.'"

That humility, he says, will shift the focus to an examination of how models are "still relevant" in an age of virtual-reality goggles on client's heads and churn-'em-out firms that do every drawing, every detail, on the inside of a computer. And while Agathom does use computers (it's a thoroughly modern firm save for the old-fashioned charm), it still makes physical models of everything that gets built. Sometimes, they're constructed on the fly with whatever is at hand, giving them an unfinished, even ugly quality. But Agathom's mess of curling craft paper and Scotch tape for the Balsam Lake Boat-house, or the chunk of concrete representing the fireplace in the Dove Lane Residence (now under construction), and the spindly roof beams and hacked-out

openings that became the award-winning Molly's Cabin, all have something to teach us, Mr. Holmquist says.

"This is where the action is: We're no longer arguing if this is an accurate representation of the project ... each of these models holds this little potential idea, a 'what if' for the project that comes through by virtue of how it's made, the materials, the mode it's constructed in – this is why they're all so fascinating.

"The temporality of a five-minute model, the scrappiness of it, it can't exist in a digital form," he adds.

It also can't exist in the form of the slick-and-shiny showroom show-ponies made by big developers to sell condominium units: Those are all about ideals, not ideas. That's why, despite Mr. Thom's threat of recycling or incineration, the shelves at Agathom will always groan under the weight of too many ideas.

Besides, finishes Ms. Thom, "when a project isn't realized, that's the only thing you have left.

"It lives on in that way."