

Pine Island Designs

By Mark Turpin

I cannot remember a time when I was not constructing houses from all sorts of building materials. In childhood there were the standard wooden blocks, then Legos, of which I must have had thousands. My houses became larger and more elaborate. After school my friends would tell me their favorite house style and I would draw them a house.

My first exposure to miniatures was John Zweifel's White House replica, which toured the United States for the nation's bicentennial in 1976. This was a pretty impressive house to a 9-year-old boy who already had a fascination with architectural models. At age 11 I assembled a miniature house from a kit and sold it to a collector, but I was not satisfied to assemble manufactured houses; I wanted to build my own designs. My father showed me how to use the power tools and saws, and soon I was busy gluing pieces of wood together on my own. I built houses for any reason or no reason at all. I even built a house for the family cat. While I was in high school, I built a much larger playhouse, which I sold to the owner of four cats. She devoted an entire room to her playhouse, which included a gymnasium with wood floor, and 25 other rooms on two levels. The cats moved in immediately and took over the house.

After graduating from high school in northern California, I attended Chapman University, where I studied film production. Still wanting to build, I started framing an enormous set of Victorian row houses on the two inch to one foot scale, right in the middle of my apartment. They towered eight feet ceilingward. My own kitty took over the row houses, climbing eight feet to sleep in the attic.

Photo by Mark Turpin



This is one of Mark's few replications. *Lurie Lane* is a composite of a South Florida residence. Mark built approximately half of the actual house, including the living areas with the general look and feel of the home. He added a loft to give a more expansive feel to the interior.

Upon graduation, I embarked on a corporate career as director of development for a health care company, but the urge to build remained strong, and miniatures seemed to offer the best scale for my grandiose ideas. I envisioned a series of estate style homes, which could be built as a group or collection.

By 1994, I was working through ideas on paper for how I might start my neighborhood of houses. I figured the sale of each house would finance the next project. Looking back, I was rather naïve. My family and friends probably thought my dream was a little crazy, but it was my dream after all. In 1994 I came up with my company name, Pine Island Designs, after a name I had seen while on vacation in Florida.

It was another five years before I would have the chance to start my business. In the meantime, I studied AutoCAD to produce designs I first sketched in pencil. I also began to research



Photo by Richard Turpin

Chateau du Bois was Mark's first house on the miniatures market.

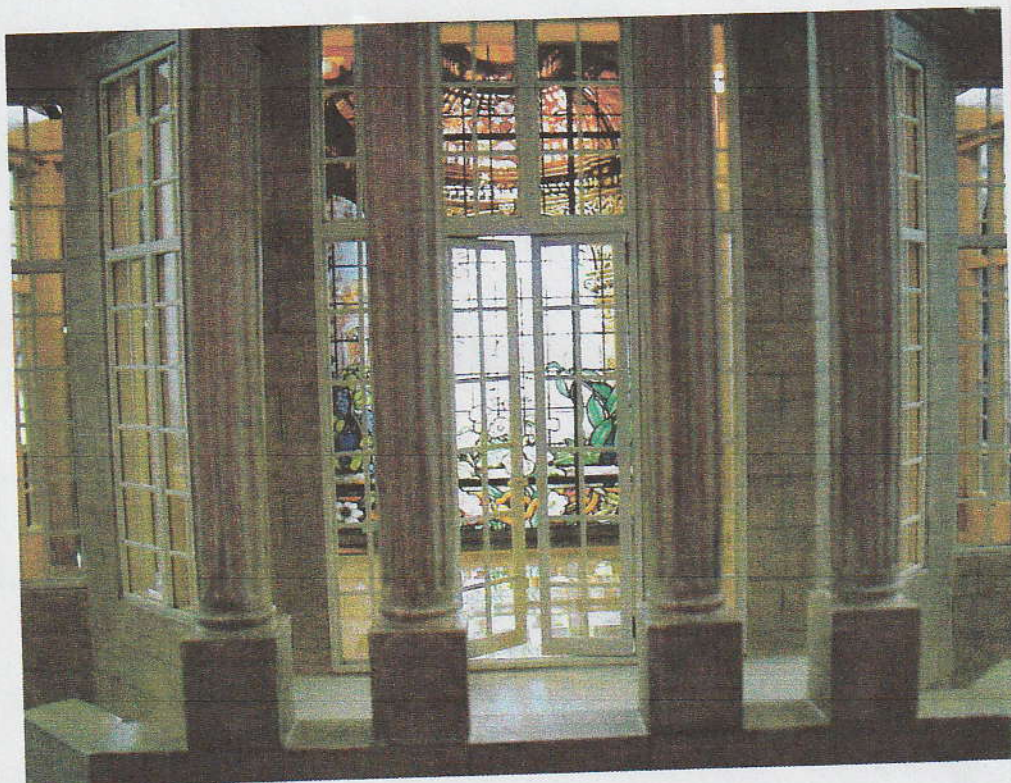


Photo by Richard Turpin

Mark visualized walking up the front steps of *Chateau du Bois* to enter a massive entry hall bathed in light. The stained glass window on the back wall extends the view, using forced perspective to enlarge the room. Twin staircases are designed to sweep the viewer up to new levels. A pipe organ towers over the room for added drama.

the market, and in 1997 attended my first real miniatures show in Florida.

What impressed me was the quality and artistry of the furnishings and accessories offered. But there were no houses! Where was everyone putting all these beautiful things? I soon realized that many people were constructing their own kit houses, and some had commissioned beautiful custom homes. Most of the styles were very tradi-



Photos by Mark Turpin

Above and below, Chambre du Ciel was a commission following similar lines of a previous structure Mark had built. This orangerie with classical features has a large dome and high ceilings. A stained glass window provides a room partition. Commissions require six to 12 months to complete.

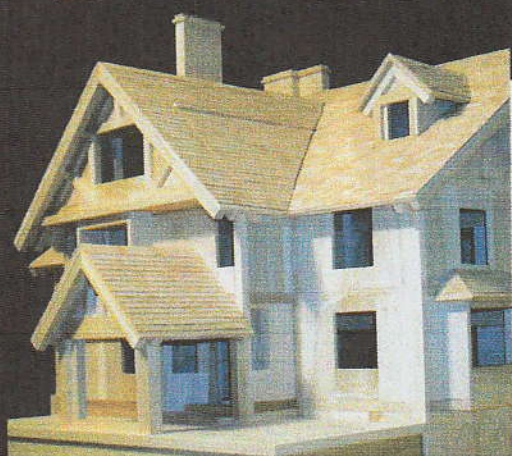
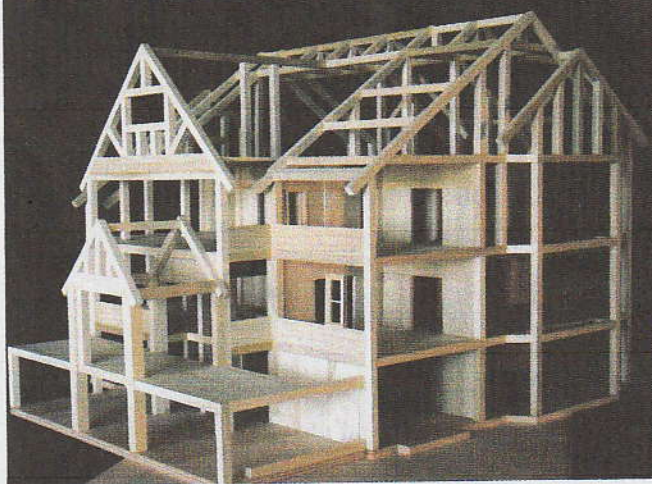




Hill House, a Tudor Revival replica, has four stories and nearly thirty rooms. Mark hand-carved the exterior brick and glued the 10,000 hand-cut wood shingles one at a time. Sue Veeder created lovely leaded glass windows and doors based upon the originals.



Side view of *Hill House*.



These photos show the construction of *Hill House*, the childhood home of an Illinois native. The actual house is so large, at 12,000 square feet, that Mark and his client decided the model would be 1/2-inch scale.

tional, so it seemed there might be a niche for more contemporary designs.

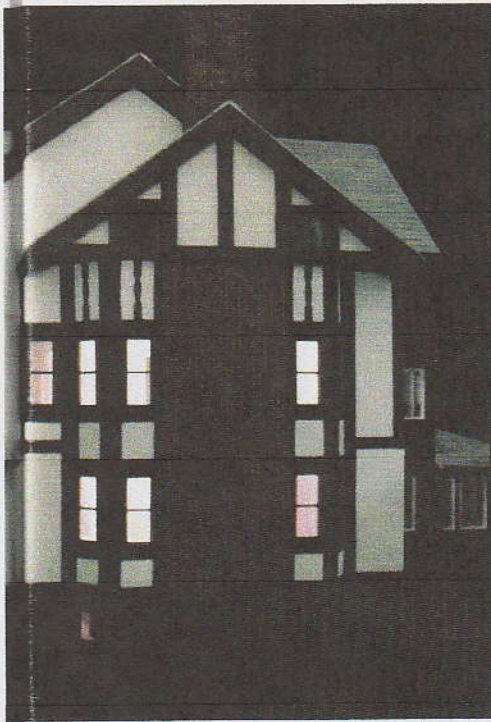
In 1999, I was forced out of my corporate rut when I was laid off from my job. I looked to my dream and decided it was now or never. With my severance package and some additional capital raised from investors, I formed my business and did not look back.

I set out to build a range of styles that would be completely different one from another, a blending of styles to create my own look. *Chateau du Bois* was my first real attempt to offer something new and different to the miniatures industry. It was a completely stylized French country house, a chateau unlike any I had seen, except in my mind. This was January 2000. My next project, a 30-room mansion called *Tamarind Manor* was a blend of Federal and neo-classical architecture. I got carried away, adding features no doll should have to live without: a ballroom, library,

indoor swimming pool, along with six bedrooms and five bathrooms. It was a four-story mansion made for hours of playtime. But it was time to get serious. Now, with 18 of 30 planned houses completed and a new series of rooms under way, I still have more concepts than I will probably ever have time to build.

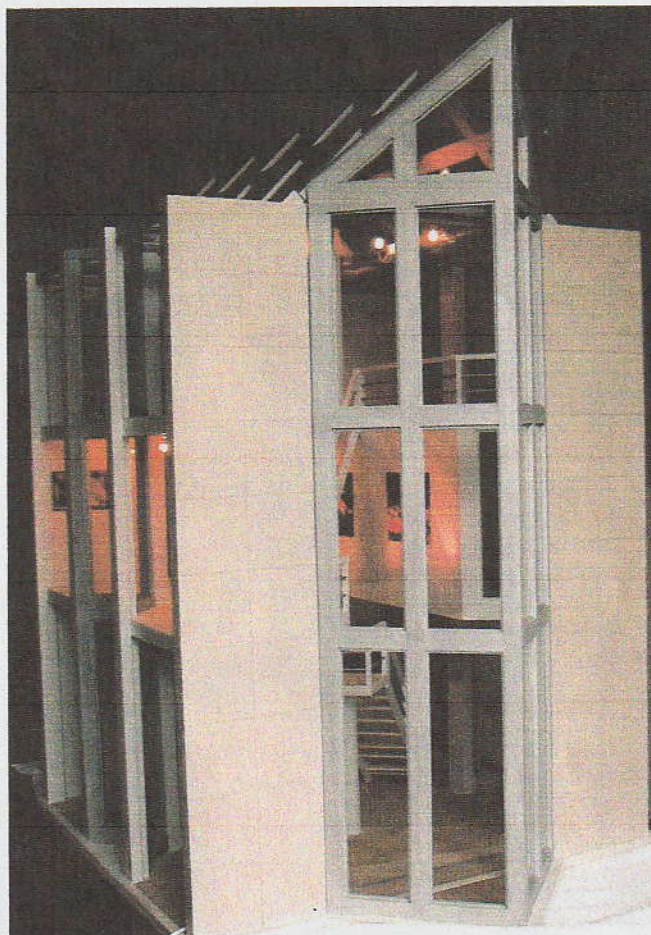
"Where do you get your ideas?" exclaimed one collector at my first show in Arizona.

Ideas can come from almost anywhere. Film school taught me not just production techniques, but also how to see the world through the eyes of an artist. This means observing shadows and light, ranges of color, proportion and perspective, etc., in everyday surroundings. An architect or artist looks for form and discovers hidden clues everywhere. A tile pattern can reveal a floor plan. A mountain range might resemble a jagged roof line. The easiest math course for me was geometry, and there is a lot of geometry found in architecture. My favorite architects use geometry to

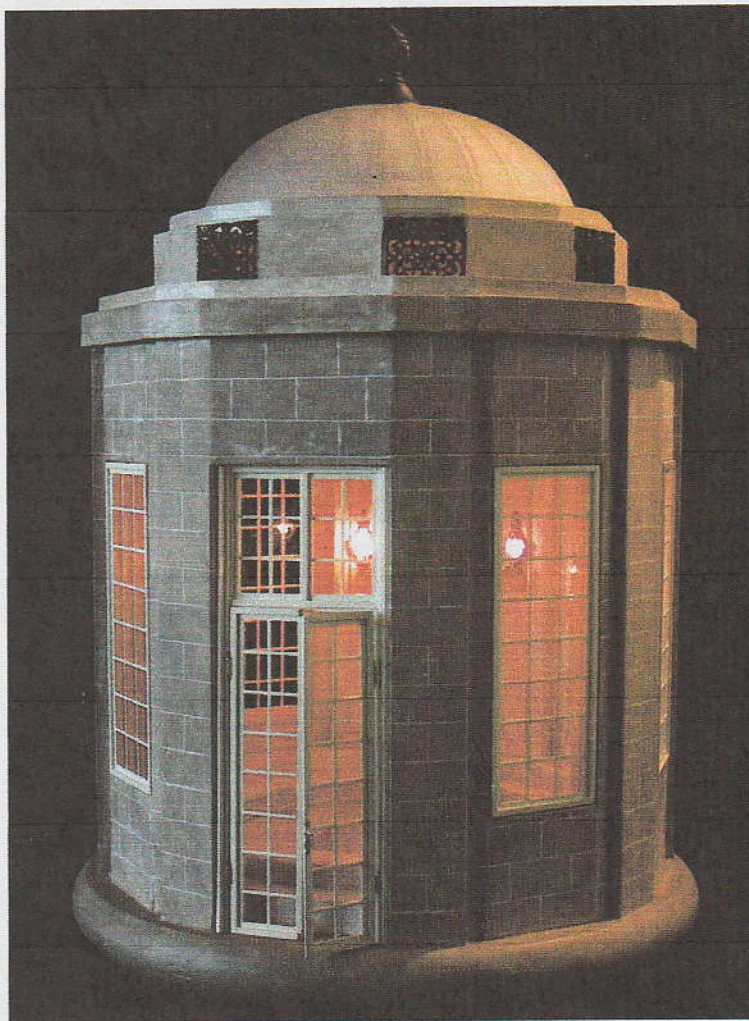


Diamante, a structure Mark built in 2002, appears different from every angle. It features faux stone, steel and Plexiglas windows. Although Mark designed it as a modern house, its buyer uses it as a contemporary art gallery in which she displays ever-changing exhibitions of miniature art.

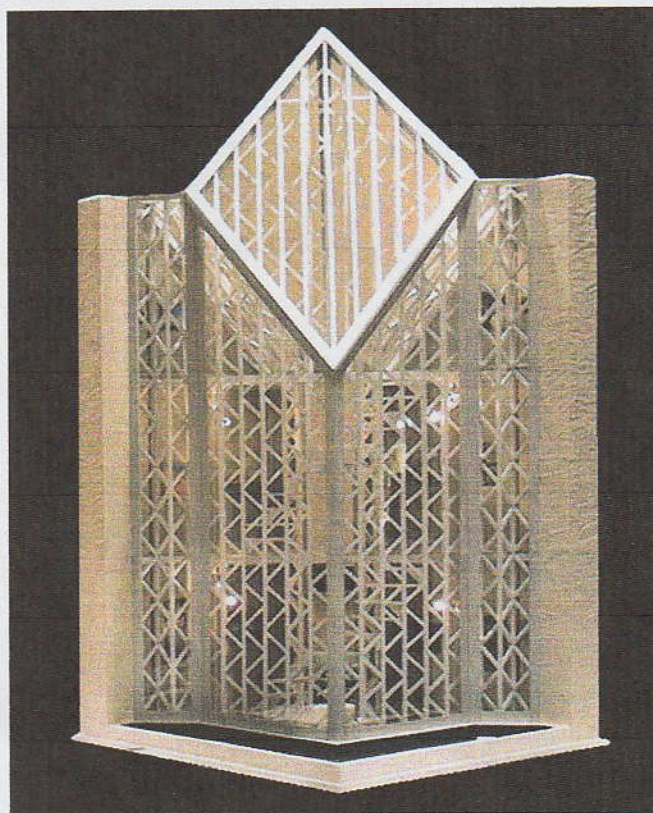
Our cover shows two views of this building.



Photos by Mark Turpin



Chardin was the second in a series, following the pattern of an earlier small structure. Mark said this was some of his finest faux stone finishing, as he continued to refine his technique.



Of all his structures, *Aqualina* was probably the most work and also the most fun, Mark said. It was intended as a modern art gallery. There are plenty of walls for paintings, and open spaces for sculpture.

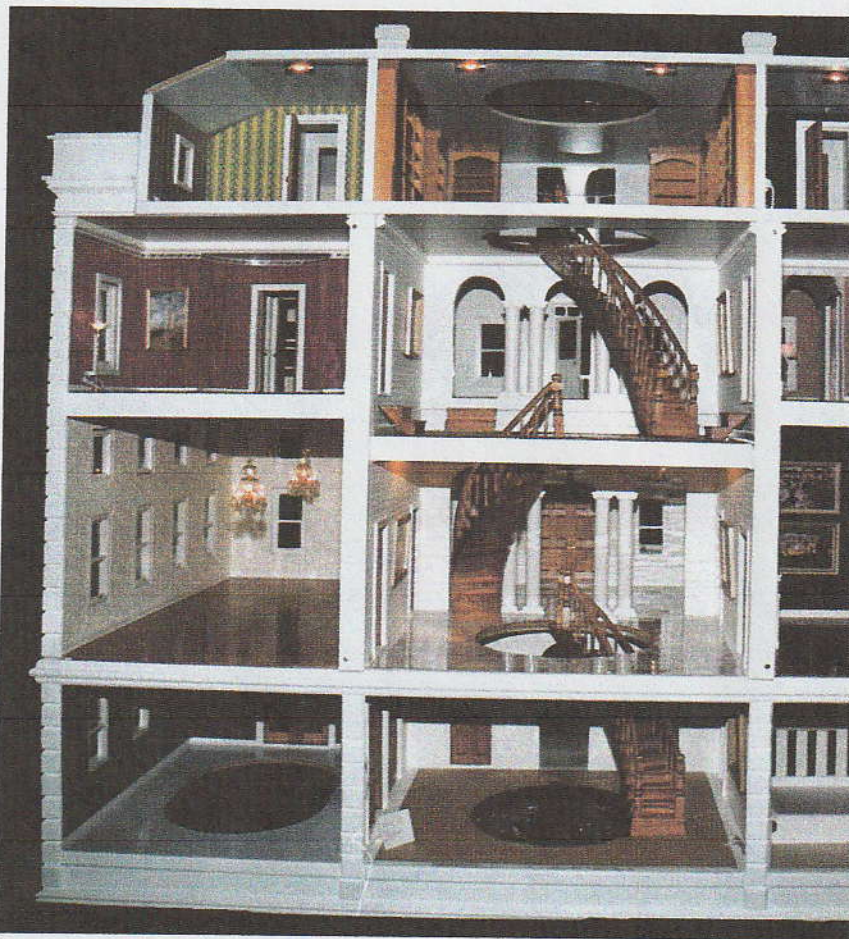
engineer some of the most interesting spaces. I think people are drawn to these dynamic forms in part for the emotions they evoke. I like to do structural framing to create those forms, and engineer things similar to the way a full scale building would be built.

The first films had the simplest of subject matter and acting, camera angles, lighting, etc., but from those rather crude attempts, the industry moved forward at light speed to produce visual extravaganzas to delight the audience. Miniatures have followed the same kind of path, moving beyond elementary furnishings and accessories to the creation the most amazingly detailed objects. Whether an original or replica, it is this painstaking attention to detail that ultimately makes a miniature a work of art.

Mark's houses and structures sell for \$2,500 to \$25,000; rooms start at \$900.

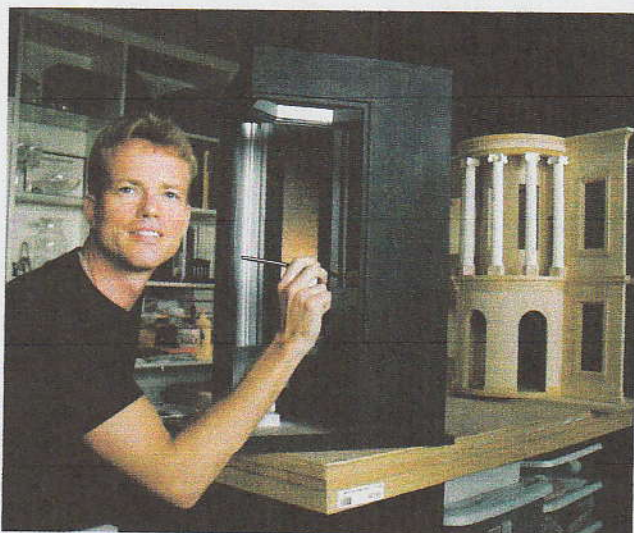
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Photo by Richard Turpin



Tamarind Manor, a 30-room mansion, features an indoor swimming pool.

Photo by Mark Turpin



Mark works on a new roombox in his studio.

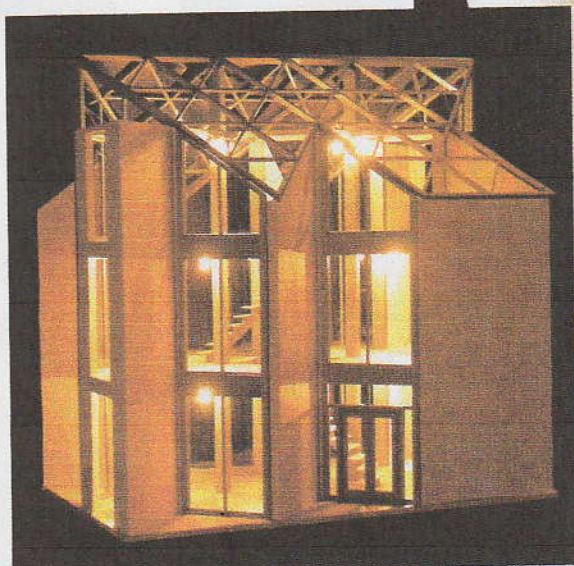
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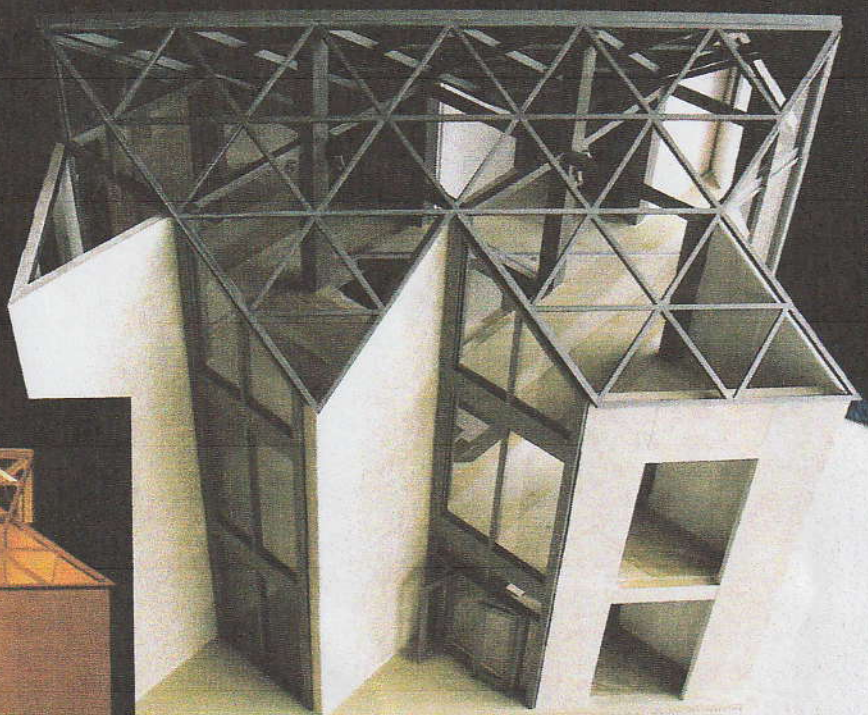
Riverbend, the second of Mark's new room settings, was unveiled in September 2003. In contrast to his first roombox, a city loft, Riverbend is warm and natural, with nothing man-made in the view except the symbolic wagon wheel. Sue Veeder made the cat.



Photos by Richard Turpin



Night view of *Miramonte*.



Miramonte was a commissioned modern art museum for a California client. This plan is a reversed mirror image, and the sharp angles in the floor plan create spaces for bronzes or other sculpture, while the walls of stone give plenty of interior room for paintings.

Mark's Tips:

All of architecture is a blend of old and new, styles we have seen before and new ideas we had not yet considered. Miniatures provide a platform for unlimited ideas and potential designs. The important thing is to create a space with which you feel comfortable.

If you have reached a plateau in your collecting or creating, consider these tips for embarking on a new project:

- Create floor plans you would want to live with in your own home.
- Combine styles carefully, creatively—make your own eclectic blend. Why imitate if you would rather innovate? What does your dream house look like?
- Move through history, working on styles with which you feel an affinity.
- Study proportions to ensure accuracy—windows, doors, ceiling height, roof lines, etc. Architectural masters developed proportions using strict mathematical principles. Each detail has significance.
- Research the innovators to discover where the styles came from and why.
- If you can't find something, whether a component or color, make it yourself!
- Learn new techniques or create your own. Experiment and keep notes of the details. Go to the library or bookstore to research your style.
- Don't be intimidated. An artist cannot be afraid to stand alone.
- Enjoy the process. Step back and take in the view. Appreciate your efforts.
- Share your work with everyone you know, and when you run out of space, consider donating from your collection to a museum or children's hospital.