

German skill at building inventive, affordable housing on disused urban spaces goes on show at the V&A next week as part of the London Design Festival. There's a lot to learn, says Fay Sweet

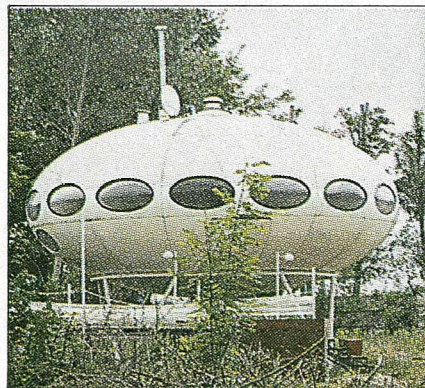
DESIGN
FESTIVAL

Daring to be different

IN ONE of the most innovative architecture shows for years, visitors to the Victoria & Albert museum are invited to walk through a fantasy landscape made from a room-high, photographic collage, dotted with a range of exciting contemporary-style homes, schools, offices, a hotel and even a car park. All the highlighted buildings have been completed since 2000. Based around an 80-metre-long panorama, the *Deutschlandscape* exhibition comes to London from Germany where, as with every European country, debate is growing about

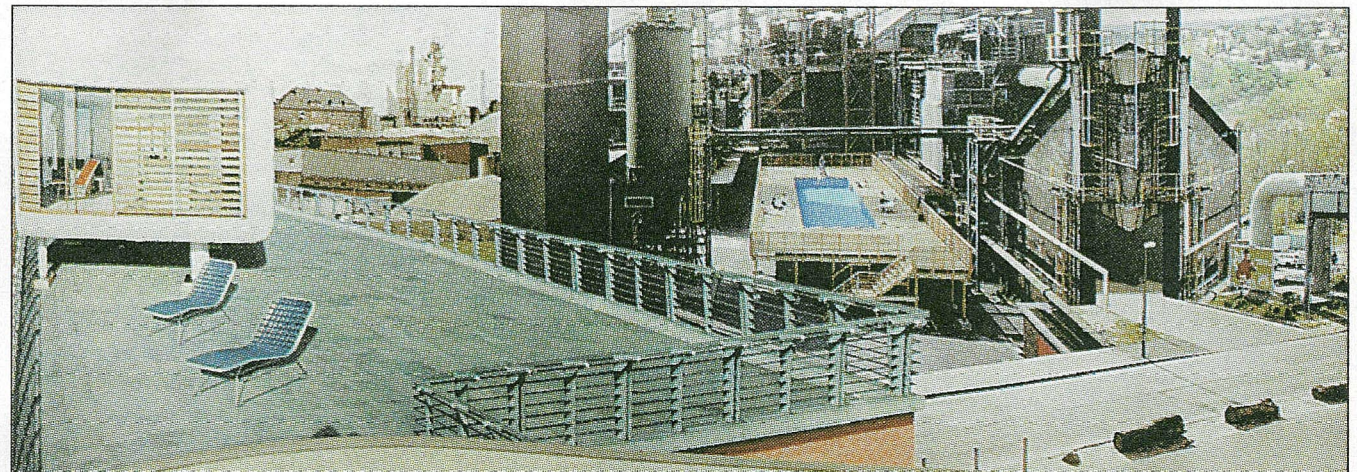
how to enliven and reinvent suburban areas, derelict, post-industrial landscapes and the nondescript fringes of towns and cities.

"There is a huge amount of attention given to large and impressive new buildings in our city centres, but rarely do we see a fuss made of the smaller projects on the periphery," says the show's curator, Berlin-based Francesca Ferguson. This point was illustrated when it came to finding projects to include in the show — it took months to research the collection because smaller, innovative designs are so unknown. "How we reinvent and build in the suburbs and on the edges of towns is crucial right now," says Ferguson. "Through newspapers, magazines and TV programmes like *Grand Designs*, new ideas have been introduced and even



The Plug-In, a prefabricated pod, is designed to be mobile and can be attached to other modules

changed the way people think about contemporary architecture." Most of the projects on show have challenged or subverted tough planning laws to produce inspiring results. Among the most eye-catching schemes are the town house wrapped in timber with a distinctive chequerboard pattern of windows and a bedroom which slides outwards like a giant filing-cabinet drawer; a suburban house with exterior walls made from 40,000 rocks held in metal cages, and a swimming pool built inside a disused colliery.



The V&A's *Deutschlandscape* features rooms of huge photographic collages showing new uses for disused urban sites, such as a pool in an old colliery

Along with the panorama, the exhibition includes computer terminals where visitors can explore individual schemes in detail.

One of the central messages of the show is that "it is possible to create beautiful and interesting small buildings within tough

planning laws and limited budgets", says Ferguson, adding, "don't be afraid to experiment." *Deutschlandscape* was first shown at last year's Venice Architecture Biennale. It is funded by the Federal German Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing and the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations.

Deutschlandscape is at the Victorian & Albert museum, Cromwell Road, SW7, from Tuesday to 29 January 2006 (020 7942 2000; www.vam.ac.uk).

For more details on the London Design Festival, (opening tomorrow until 30 September), visit www.londondesignfestival.com.

For more on the London Design Festival, see page 14