

habitus

LIVING IN DESIGN

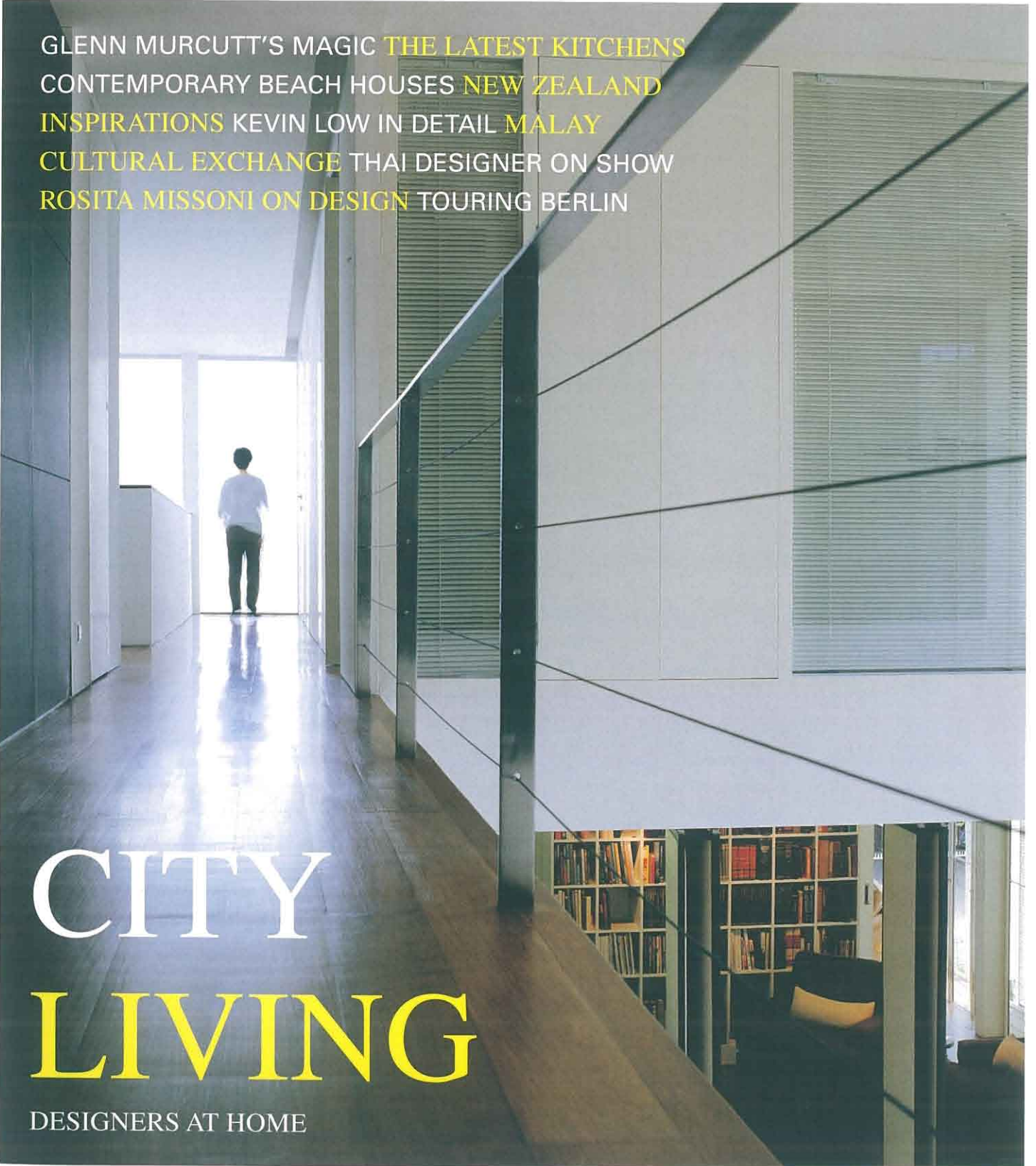
ISSUE 02 JANUARY - MARCH 2009



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GLENN MURCUTT'S MAGIC **THE LATEST KITCHENS**
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CITY LIVING

DESIGNERS AT HOME

The Prodigal Son

| The organic forms created by *Kenneth Cobonpue* are inspired by his native Philippines, but also have a place in the wider world. How has he achieved this relevance, *Stephen Crafti* asks.

Kenneth Cobonpue sits surrounded by bamboo twigs, sea grasses, hemp and rattan. In his studio on Cebu, a bustling island in the Philippines, Kenneth creates contemporary furniture and lighting using traditional materials. Organic shaped rattan lights are shipped to furniture stores in almost every country of the world, including KE-ZU in Sydney and Hermon & Hermon in Melbourne. Wall lamps, pendants, screens, chairs and beds are ready to go, each piece conveying a sense of the handcrafted. Bamboo twigs are tied to a welded metal frame, creating a screen, and rattan lamps are inspired by jellyfish and sea anemones.

For Kenneth, the choice to pursue a career in furniture wasn't a difficult one. His mother, Betty Cobonpue, founded a furniture design and manufacturing company in the Philippines in the early 1970s. "She built a reputation for her innovative use of rattan. It was the type of furniture that could be placed in a thatched hut or a contemporary Western home," says Kenneth. However, rather than stay and learn from his mother's skills, he went to New York in 1987, studying industrial design at the Pratt Institute and in 1994, studying furniture marketing and production in Germany.

Ten years ago, the prodigal son returned. And like his mother before him, Kenneth has developed a reputation for beautifully made furniture and lights. While his New York studies and work experience at a leather and wood studio in Florence were crucial to his development, his career path was determined as a child. "I can still remember when my mother set up her first work station in our