



**HOLLYWOOD'S
GLAMOUR COUPLE IS
BUILDING THE HIGH-
TECH HOME OF THE
FUTURE. THERE'S NO
PLACE LIKE IT**

BE IT EVER SO SMART

by Curl Steinberg



- ① Wind turbine
- ② Reclaimed strip mine
- ③ Carbon-fiber cables
- ④ Inverse smokestack
- ⑤ Geodesic greenhouse

CAPTAIN OF DIGITAL INDUSTRY MICHAEL RHEINGELT was a household name even before he landed the biggest private infrastructure contract in the history of the galaxy. His pioneering broadband network, BigBand LLC, cast a net of glittering glass fiber over the entire United States of China. Then China Unicom bought Rheingelt out for a sum of money that left old man Gates looking

hard up. It's safe to say that Rheingelt now has some spare time on his hands, but what to do with it? He's rich, successful, and married to gorgeous three-time Oscar winner Genevieve Welch. How could he possibly add to a life so crowded with success?

Well, by finally fulfilling his childhood dream of building a home for himself and his family. But not just any home. Rheingelt's "electronic cottage," as



he calls it, is a daring breakthrough in postindustrial construction. It is the largest and most ambitious smart home ever designed. With it, Rheingelt hopes to create a new architectural ideal, one that combines elegant design and cutting-edge conveniences with the highest ideals of ecological awareness.

Of course, the public expects nothing less from a couple that happens to be one of America's most glamorous in two of its most glamorous industries, technology and entertainment. Success has not spoiled them. When we caught up with Rheingelt and Welch on the construction site, they still showed the charm that has made them media darlings.

"I couldn't tell you what it was that first attracted me to Genevieve," says Rheingelt, who had swapped his trademark geek uniform for a Kevlar hard hat and denim overalls. "I guess it's a tradition—almost a cliché—for us network moguls to fall for eccentric left-wing actresses."

"Who are *you* to call *anyone* eccentric?" Genevieve retorts, hugging her husband as their army of computer-guided bulldozers rumbles in the background. "Did you know this guy still sinks money into cold-fusion research? It's true!"

"Cold fusion could still happen," says Rheingelt defensively. Then, staring out at the West Virginia strip mine destined to be the site of his new high-tech mansion, Rheingelt begins to prophesize.

"We're going to make jokes out of Gates, Dell and Ellison,"

he says. "Those dorks had no sense of style. If good taste had bitten them in the leg, they would have screamed in horror and whacked it with a rolled-up newspaper."

Welch, clearly, has heard all this before, and she rolls her eyes affectionately.

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"Look at this place," Rheingelt goes on, his arm sweeping the horizon dramatically. "See what I mean? Gates built his house in an earthquake zone, for crying out loud! Compared to

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me and Genevieve, Gates, Rockefeller, Jobs, Ford, Edison—the whole 20th century lot of them—were crude, cave-fish versions of wealth. We are the fully evolved, *civilized* rich people. And we're about to prove it to the world."

Both Rheingelt and Welch are fans of classic architecture. Rheingelt favors the severe industrial style of Lord Foster of Thames Bank, designer of the Hong Kong Airport and restorer of the Reichstag in Berlin. Welch prefers the work of Art Nouveau geniuses Hector Guimard and Victor Horta, who pioneered curving, organic forms in their buildings in the late 19th and

The walls of the Rheingelts' West Virginia dream house are literally alive—grown from specially engineered colorful algae

early 20th centuries. The couple points out that their 20th century tastes unite the two periods before and after Communism. But how to bring these divergent styles together?

Rheingelt and Welch decided to sponsor an international competition. All entries had to be certified with the highest possible Environment Rating, and the winner would receive a prize of \$30 million. That prize was ultimately claimed by the Amsterdam-based architecture firm Slippery Logic, in partnership with the Berlin engineers Grunen & Grunen. The result is a vast, sprawling, truly fantastic blend of the organic and the geodesic.

The Rheingelt compound is located on the bare, scalped wreckage of a former West Virginia strip mine. The state paid Rheingelt to take the toxic real estate off its hands, hoping—but not really expecting—that his determination and gobs of capital might somehow restore the barren, polluted eyesore. Though the miners did their best to destroy it forever, there are distinct advantages to the site. For instance, the mine shafts and the empty coal seams to

which they lead give Rheingelt a storage basement roughly the size of New Hampshire.

Slippery Logic's design has an airy, floating quality. This is partly a result of its massive system of tensioned cables, spun from microcrystal carbon fiber. It is also because many other elements of the structure possess a gentle, naturalistic appearance. No wonder: much of the building is literally alive. The spongelike wall panels are algae-based and, in most cases, have been grown into place, creating spontaneous organic fantasies of form. The

It uses the shapes of shells and anemones to create a remarkable sub-aqueous theme. Cushions are provided by specially engineered mosses of every conceivable color.

LIKE EVERYONE ELSE IN TODAY'S CAPITALIST ELITE, RHEINGELT IS fed up with the greenhouse effect. But unlike most of us, he has decided to make his new house a bunker where he'll fight back against unseasonable rainstorms and heat waves. Carbon sequestration is one of the keynotes of the Rheingelt home. This technique sucks carbon dioxide—which traps heat in earth's atmosphere—right out of the air with solar-powered catalytic converters. What to do with all that spare carbon? Rheingelt and Welch will process it into valuable flakes of industrial diamond. If the whole undertaking sounds unsightly and, well, industrial, don't worry. Their "inverse smokestack," as the carbon-sequestration facility is called, will be tastefully concealed in towers sheathed in acres of iridescent mother-of-pearl (cloned from the cells of one of the few surviving Alaskan abalone).

But don't get the idea that the couple will be living in a laboratory. Genevieve Welch was a debutante before she was an actress, and she remains a socialite at heart. The mansion is amply equipped for entertaining, with everything from a subterranean brewery to a sumptuous in-house mudrufflage facility (*see* GAMES). "I'm sick and tired of living my life through scripts from no-talent hacks in L.A.," says Welch. "Just wait till we hold a Renaissance Weekend in this joint, or maybe even the Technology, Entertainment and Design Conference. I'll have every decorator in the civilized world kicking and screaming just to know the color of my wallpaper." (By the way, that wallpaper? Variants of Roman red and lemon, according to the floor plans.)

Rheingelt and Welch are obviously a force to be reckoned with, but when they choose, they can also be diplomatic. With its tasteful giant windmills and every viable surface coated in solar lacquer, the intelligent mansion not only is self-powering, but also supplies free energy and Net access to all of the couple's West Virginia neighbors within a 30-mile radius. This clever inspiration put a quick stop to all the usual "not in my backyard" activists who might otherwise have objected to such a gigantic installation. "I have to admit," laughs Rheingelt, "a year or two ago, I couldn't have cared less. But Genevieve has taught me to understand and appreciate my public image."

Puffing on a Turkish hookah, with the geodesic girders rising

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CEO, BIGBAND LLC**

massive, gleaming support pillars are nacreous limestone, accreted from natural seawater through an industrial version of the same process that creates coral reefs. The mansion's gardens, five times larger than those at Versailles and lush with endangered species of tropical greenery, are sheltered under vast geodesic domes of fretted glass.

Bamboo, genetically altered for strength and color, is grown on-site and used to form the mottled flooring and ceilings, while also removing any remaining toxins from the strip mine's soil. The furniture—chosen by Welch—is tailored to an era of rising sea levels.

majestically behind him, Rheingelt looks the picture of contentment. "I used to be an uptight, type-A overachiever," he says, "worried about three things: precision, discipline and total psychological dominance over my underlings. Well, I don't need a corporate title to do any of that fun stuff. I'm already ridiculously rich, and the time has come for me to lead the world by personal example. Genny and I are building a palace here to such high standards of art and science we will leave the world awestruck." As if there were any question, he adds: "You know, it's good to be me." ■