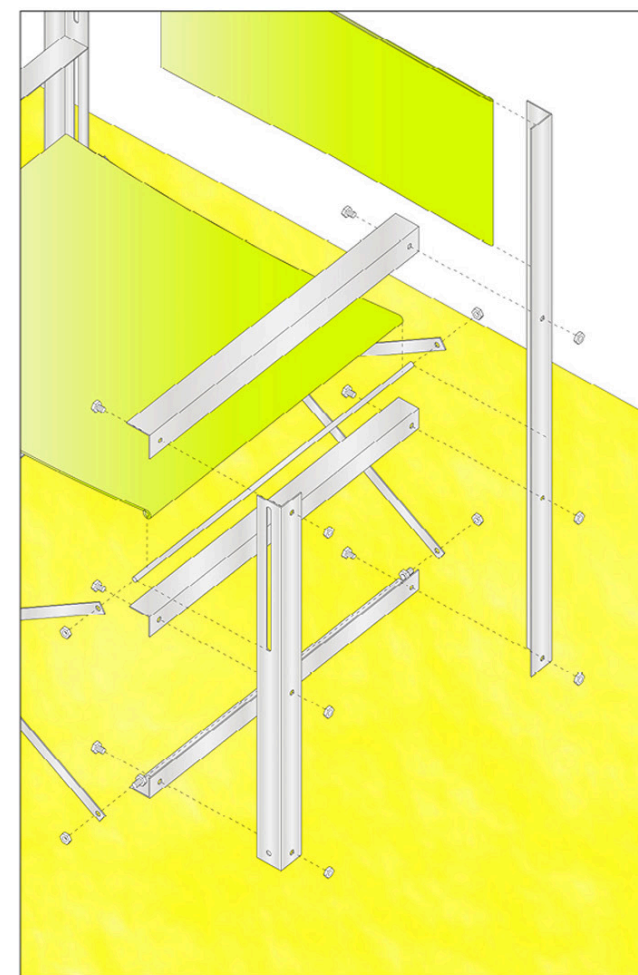
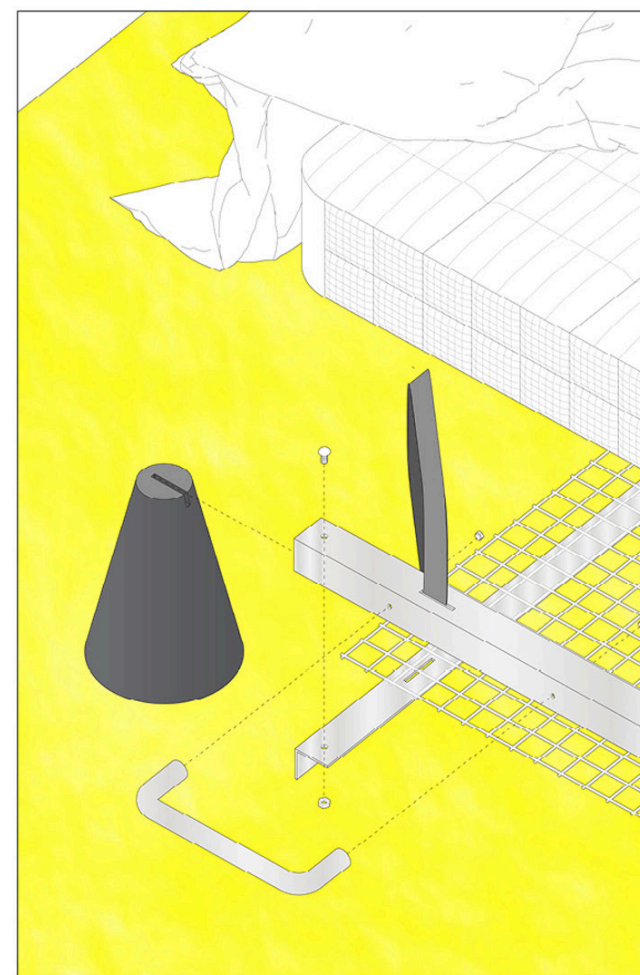
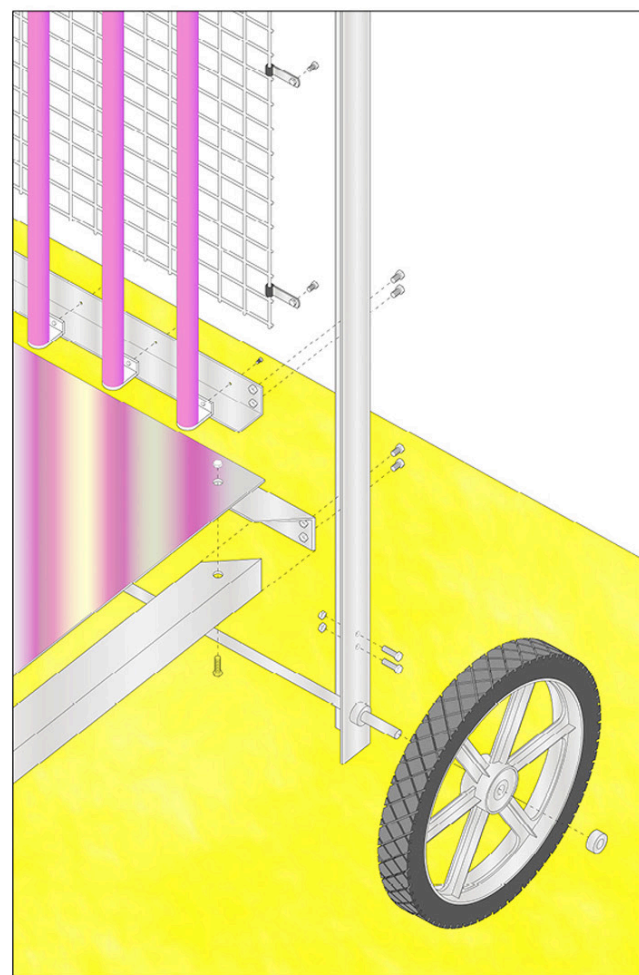
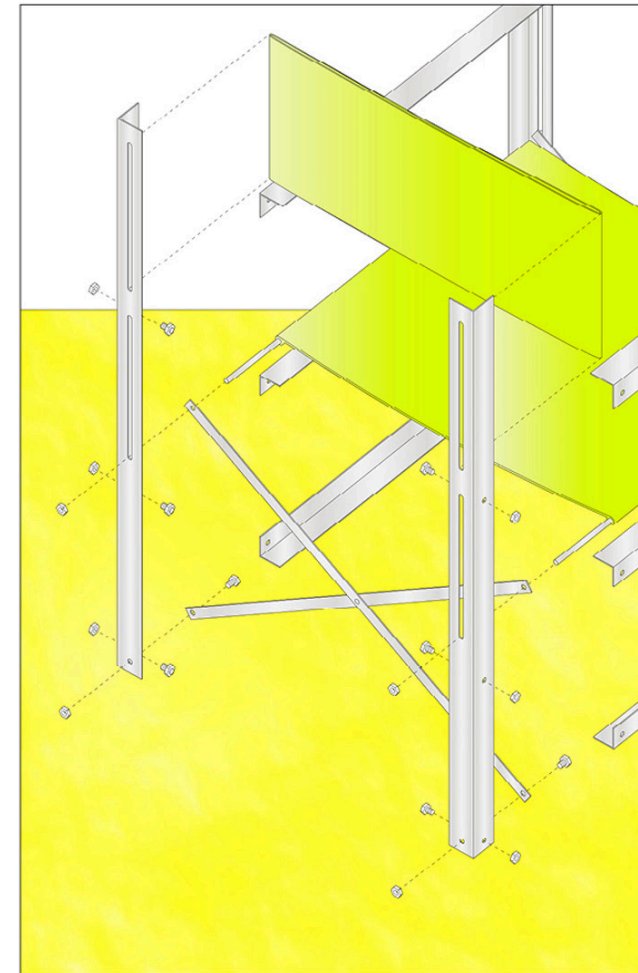
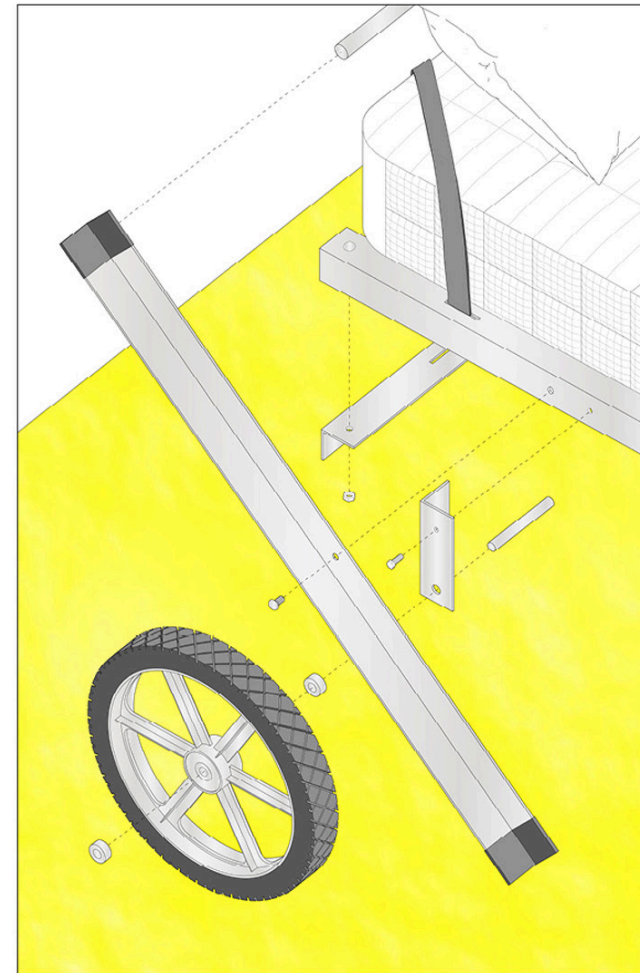
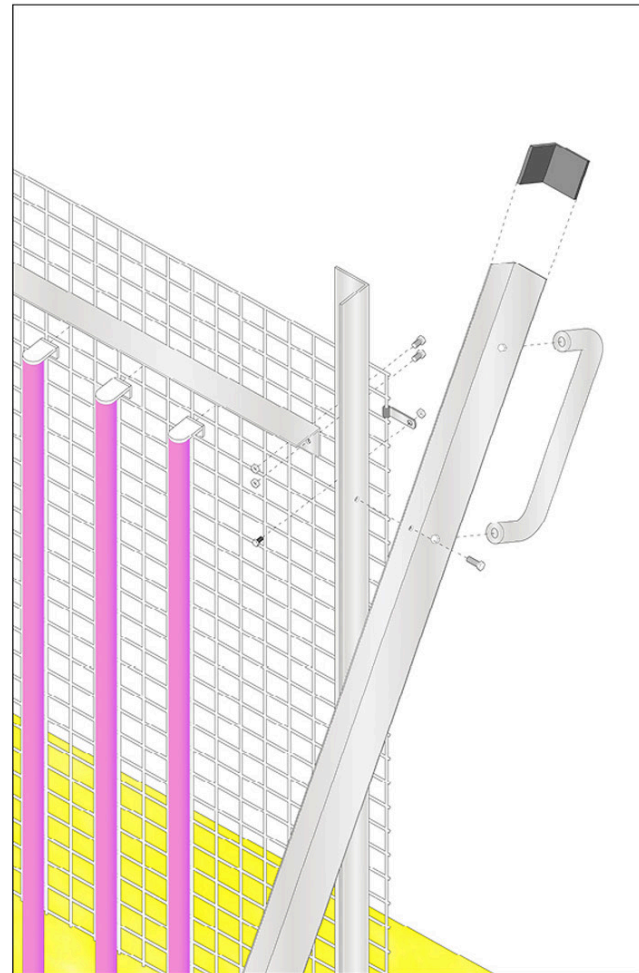


HOT-WALL: A Simple Machine

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The *Ravenea rivularis*, popularly known as the Majesty Palm, is a species of tree native to South-central Madagascar. While millions of specimens circulate globally as an abundant and affordable commodity (just \$15 at your local Ikea, or \$20 at Home Depot), the species is considered vulnerable in its native habitat. Only an estimated 900 specimens survive in the wild, threatened by a profound loss of habitat due to deforestation, pollution, and forest fires. Although it can grow to a height of 100 feet in the wild, since its domestication in the 1980s it commonly takes the form of a modest potted palm inhabiting the background of the contemporary domestic lifestyle: leafy yet minimal, lush yet manageable. In Home Depot's Product Overview for the *Ravenea Majesty Palm 10"* by Costa Farms, the plant is described as follows: "Beautiful, arching, mid-green, feather-like fronds. Adds beauty and class to any room. Direct from farm, farm fresh." The palm's highly desirable tropical imaging, combined with the species' relative ease of industrial cultivation, has produced an imbalance between the number of specimens in their natural habitat relative to the number in the global domestic interior.

If the *Ravenea* exists more firmly in the flows of consumer capitalism than in the soil of its indigenous habitat, what does this global displacement of biomass reveal about our current relationship to nature and the domestic interior? Even though Ikea's website claims that the palm is "Native to Madagascar,"² the houseplant on offer was in fact grown on non-indigenous soil (predominantly Floridian, for U.S. markets). In this case, the native range of the specimen is used as a selling point for the commodity, fulfilling a consumer desire to cultivate "exotic" houseplants. Does this "preservation" of the *Ravenea* within the foreign domestic interior constitute a new form of ecological stewardship, or does this migration constitute yet another form of ecological imperialism? The ability to produce an impossible bouquet³ of imported tropical plants within the home creates a relationship with nature that implies a cheapness and abundance, concealing the environmental and logistical relationships that undergird such horticultural exchange.

This tropical commodity market is fueled by a profound desire to cultivate a specific fantasy of interior life: a Rousseauian⁴ dreamscape of lush foliage that requires careful cultivation. This domestic interior and its horticultural labors serve to comfort its inhabitants as they cope with the increasing normalization of domestic confinement (as much due to the pandemic as to the contemporary work-life collapse). These ornamental houseplants are further marketed not only for their exotic imagery, but also for their presumed health and productivity benefits. Countless lifestyle magazine articles and scientific studies tout the psychological, emotional, and physical

advantages of living with indoor plants. These texts claim that "companion species" plants can reduce stress, increase work-life efficiency, and even change the chemical composition and quality of indoor air. This staging of the domestic interior has been further streamlined through premium subscription plant services, creating a new materiality of luxury for the home/office. The increasing trend-ification of the tropical aesthetic (not just of the *Ravenea rivularis* but also the *Monstera deliciosa* and the *Ficus lyrata*), has resulted in a near ubiquity in hip office interiors and well-kept homes, fetishized through lifestyle publications like *Cereal* and *Kinfolk* that celebrate this bourgeois encrustation. Our interest in this cultural desire stems from our own immersion in this newly-foliated interior, masking the overpriced and undersized habitat of the immaterial laborer. While acknowledging the particular status, social class, and privileged lifestyle to which these aesthetics are explicitly tied, how can architects position themselves in relation to the uneven geographies of the still life?

Working both within and against these systems of commodified nature, SIMPLE-MACHINE presents a new type of household equipment for the cultivation of nonhuman life. The project asks how we might reformat our interior worlds: reorienting spatial arrangements, technologies, and labor habits towards the care of other organisms, such as the *Ravenea rivularis*. Any system sympathetic to the biological and environmental needs of the plant inherently alters the aesthetics that the tropical tableau presents. What results from this set of requirements is a domestic object that juxtaposes the biotechnical systems with norms of domestic comfort, producing a Brechtian⁵ object whose size, disposition, and awkward kinetics resist the minimal-tropical imaginaries.

Conceived as a reaction to Hannes Meyer's *Co-op Interieur*, the project recreates the minimal room of the contemporary dweller. Meyer's *Co-op Interieur* is characterized by a sparse and precise assemblage of elements required for collective life in the modern city: a cot-like bed, two folding chairs, a few belongings on shelves, and a gramophone in the corner. Taking as a cue Meyer's techniques of estrangement, HOT-WALL proposes the replacement of the gramophone with a new type of domestic equipment: a sensorial accessory for the distribution of ecological sustenance rather than the mass experience of recorded music. By using the ethos of the *Co-op Interieur* as a substrate—along with its implications of anonymity, frugality, and nomadism—this simple machine is neither domestic appliance nor luxury object. Instead, it lays bare the lush and creaturely conditions of ecological care within private life. Through this simple gesture of substitution, the project examines how domestic confinement has not just

redefined social life, but has extended the regimes of care to produce a simple bond between humans and non-humans. The over-large, awkwardly mobile, and weirdly ambient object renders visible these forms of kinship through a discomfiting and *unheimlich* proximity.

Composed of a light-weight aluminum truss structure, each cart is constructed from nine 2" aluminum angles of various lengths, two handles, two rubber wheels, one aluminum axle, a sheet of 1/8" thick aluminum, and a threaded stabilizing rod. Spanning along the back of the truss, each cart is equipped with six red/blue spectrum emitting LED lights that stimulate the abundant growth of leafy foliage. Although equipped with robust wheels and ergonomic handles, the cart is a large and clumsy object, awkwardly monumentalizing the domestic interior. The glowing lights produce an ambient yet agonistic form of coexistence, intimately confronting the human cohabitant. The space, bathed in the artificial pink wash of the grow-lights, lays bare the explicitly energy-intensive and alien qualities of the plants' ideal habitat. The aluminum shelf supports the heavy weight of the plants as well as evidence of the dirty work of cultivation: earthy piles, stray leaf clippings, misting bottles, and soiled gloves. These simple machines produce a form of stewardship that troubles asymmetries between companion species and their human care-takers, operating within the technical, ecological, and social systems of survival to propose a new form of creaturely comfort.

Disturbing the familiar facades of our usually well-tempered and well-kept domestic sphere is a harsh pink glow, creating an ambience that is distinctly *unfamiliar*. Walls become pink, whites become green, and greens transform into a dull and ruddy crimson. Immersed in the denatured and displaced profusion of *Ravenea* fronds (and in constant risk of receiving a censure from an HOA suspecting your involvement in a clandestine horticultural enterprise), we are confronted with a domestic space that is distinctly not in keeping with the usually understated and minimal interiors of the cultivated life. This condition of *unkeptness* demands a rethinking of care and its attendant aesthetics. What is an *unkept* household, and what sorts of new freedoms, hybrids, and gestures does it afford? The *unkept* household demands a restructuring of our eco-spatial practices of cohabitation and care. The *unkept* household demands a more intimate relationship to our wild lives and our familial ties, our worldly bodies and our soiled spaces. While the well-kept room—maybe in *Kinfolk* or perhaps in the *Co-op Interieur*—appears on the surface to be quietly tended and tenderly maintained, this HOT-WALL offers a stranger tableau, proposing a more compromised machine for *unkept* living.

1 Home Depot Ravenea Product Website: <URL: <https://www.homedepot.com/p/Costa-Farms-RAVENEA-MAJESTY-PALM-10IN-MP10/315994970>>

2 Ikea Ravenea Product Website <URL: <https://www.ikea.com/us/en/p/ravenea-potted-plant-majesty-palm-70038127/>>

3 The "impossible bouquet" is a 17th century typology of Dutch still-life painting containing a constructed arrangement of botanical specimens that could never bloom simultaneously in nature and were sourced from disparate geographic and climatic regions.

4 Henri Rousseau's jungle landscapes were inspired by his visits to Parisian botanical gardens. He famously never left France or visited the tropics.

5 Brecht, Bertolt. 1949. "A Short Organum for the Theatre," *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, Ed. and trans. John Willett. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

HOT-WALL, a prototype by HOME-OFFICE, 2021