



THE SUNDAY TIMES

28 PAGES OF SPORT

**BEST VALUE
OVERSEAS**

8 sections 24p

**We feared for our
LIVES**

 in flight 327 when 14 Syrians
suspiciously. **NEWS REVIEW**

o) OVERSEAS PRICES, page 26

computer

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utes of a meeting reveal that
ministers have privately agreed
to the national children's data-
base, rejecting proposals for the
system to cover only those chil-
dren thought to be at risk.
The minutes record: "Turn-
ing to the question of who the
database should cover, the min-
ister for children, young people
and families (Margaret Hodge)
said that all children should
be included. This fitted with the
Continued on page 2

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m Saudi
und**

 volunteered from Traveller's
World, his company.

 Last week Gardiner said his
company had acted entirely
properly. He approached the
SFO in March and has been
helping them and the police
uncover full details of the slush
fund since then.

 The possibility of a criminal
investigation into BAE marks a
new low for the defence com-
pany, once the darling of new
Labour. It has fallen out of
favour after being accused of
massive overspending on a
series of Ministry of Defence
contracts.

Gardiner's evidence spans

**How the secret fund
operated, page 5**

 much of the period of the
Yamamah arms deal, Brit-
ain's biggest export contract. It
resulted in the sale of more than
£10 billion worth of aircraft,
such as Tornado and Hawk jets,
and other military equipment to
the oil-rich state.

 Whitehall officials said last
week they were shocked by the
scale of the alleged slush fund.
The government is determined
now that all cases of alleged
overspending will be fully investi-
gated, but the case is highly
sensitive.

 They fear, however, that a
scale inquiry into BAE, a
company worth £6.5 billion,
could damage the busi-
ness's future prospects.
Gardiner says he was first
approached by Wing Com-
modore Tony Winship, a retired
officer and BAE em-
ployee in 1989.

 A travel agent said: "He
has been very much on a
Continued on page 2


JULY 25, 2004

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Home

Bath party

**Make your bathroom the most
seductive room in the house**

Helena Frith Powell

 To all my friends: please don't stay with
me in France. Rent a gîte instead

page 10

Brave new waterworld

 The property pioneers who are finding
ingenious ways to live on water

pages 40-41


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Brave new world of

Forget houseboats.
Houses moored on water
are an inspirational way
forward, suggests
DOMINIC BRADBURY

Some people just aren't that suited to living on land. They don't much care for gardening and mowing the lawn. They don't much like the feeling of being fixed and hemmed in. For these kinds of people the good life is all about living on water, especially now that a new generation of contemporary floating houses offers a neat alternative to cramped houseboats. These are houses that have everything your average landlocked home might have, plus a spot to moor your rowing boat and a deck for fishing off rather than watching the marigolds grow. When you get bored with the view from your bedroom window, you can turn the house round another way or get towed to a fresh spot altogether. And in an age of rising sea levels and flood risks, floating homes are starting to make more sense than ever in countries all over the world.

"We were living in a small apartment and one day my wife said, 'Do you want to stay here all your life?'" says Frank Archer, a consultant pharmacist who lives with his wife Marchien on a floating home in a marina at Delta, Canada, just south of Vancouver. "I said, 'I don't want a normal house', because I get serious hay fever and didn't want a garden. She said, 'What about a floating home?' We took a look at a few that were on the market but weren't taken by any of them. So we decided to build our own."

They turned to the Vancouver architect Russell Chernoff, of Chernoff Thompson, who has built a dozen new floating homes. Two years later, the Archers moved into an 1,100sq ft houseboat moored on the southern side of the Fraser river. Around them are another 16 floating houses, many newly built.

"It's a very picturesque place," says Archer. "It's a great area to paddle around in a kayak and right across from us is a nature reserve that we know will never be built on."

Jeff Vinnick



Dutch architect Art Zaaier has built six prototype houses at a development at IJburg

In British Columbia, floating homes grew out of the tradition of the old logging communities, which had floating houses and even schools and bordellos sitting on log rafts. These would get towed up and down the coast and moored in bays close to logging sites. In the Depression of the 1930s, floating homes became a cheap alternative way of living in Vancouver, while in the 1960s, the bohemian credentials of floating houses were reinforced when hippie villages took to the water.

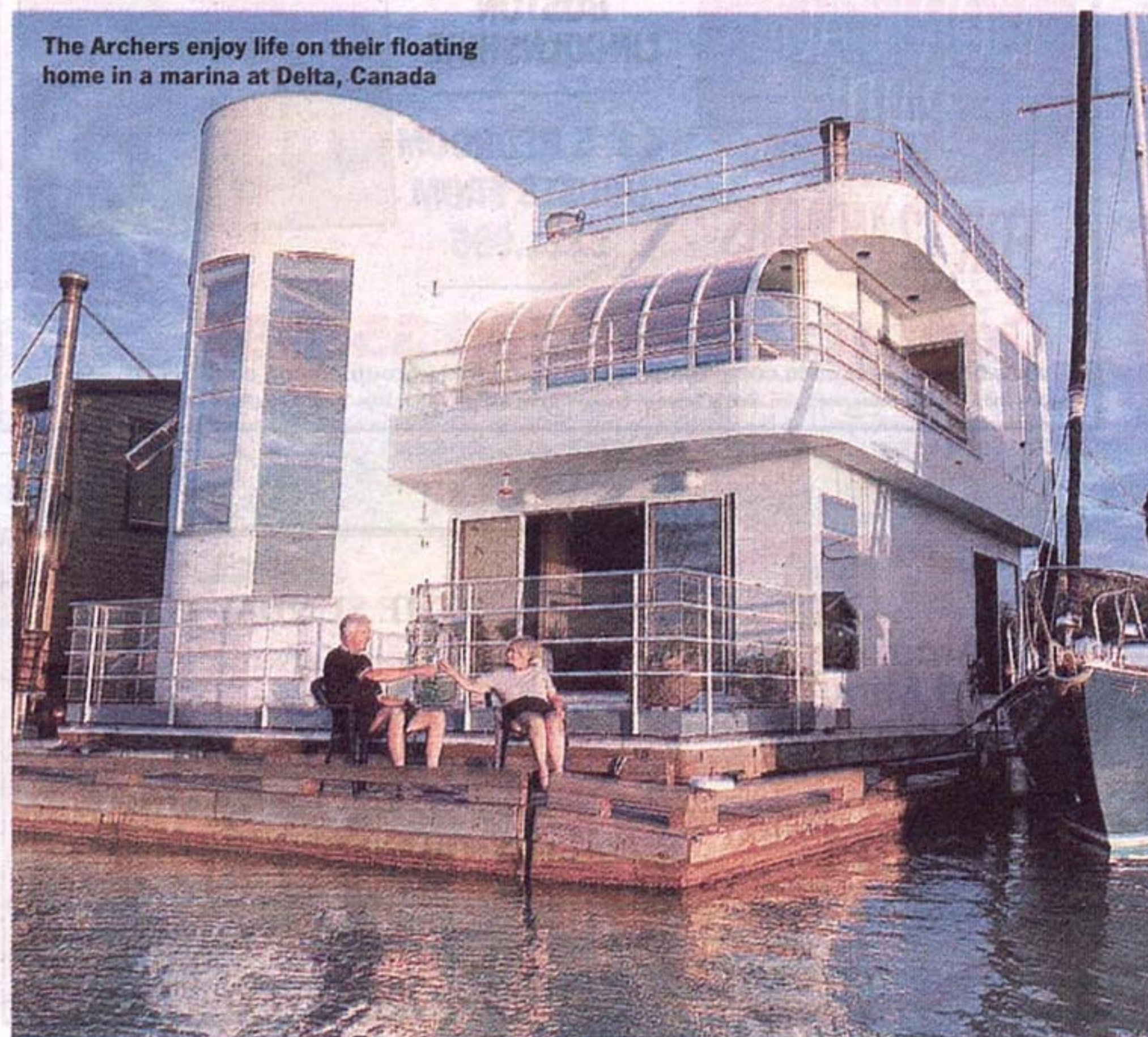
"Since then it's evolved quite dramatically," says Chernoff. "There's always been something almost anti-Establishment about it here and even today, the people who live on the water tend to be individualistic. It's a special way to live and a conscious lifestyle choice, especially with the kind of money you have to spend now. It can cost more than it would to live on land in a similar-sized home. These are sophisticated, contemporary

structures; one of the houses we've designed has a hot tub."

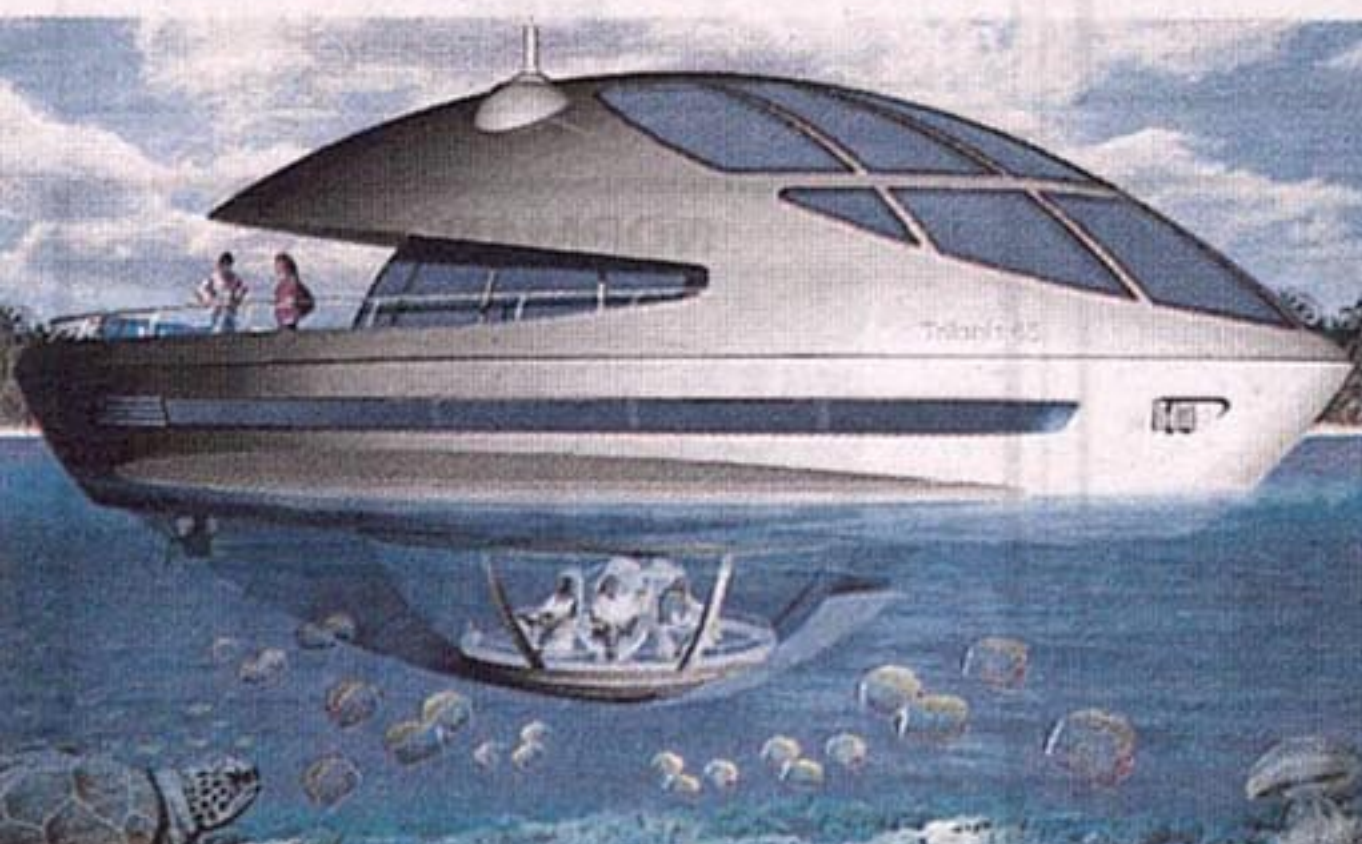
Plus they have to float. Chernoff has been working with a flotation system designed by the Canadian market leader International Marine Flotation Systems (IMFS), which has developed a high-tech, unsinkable platform made of a foam core covered in a concrete shell. These platforms can take a two- to three-storey house of anything between 1,000sq ft and 3,000sq ft. Chernoff estimates the average cost of one of his floating houses at about £165,000 including the platform. Added to that there are mooring costs, and maintenance bills can be higher than for a normal home if, like the Archers' home, it sits in a tidal zone exposed to the wind and storm waves.

"There is limited mooring space in and around Vancouver and the people that can afford to do this at the moment are not that numerous," says Chernoff. "The houses hold their value if they are well-designed and

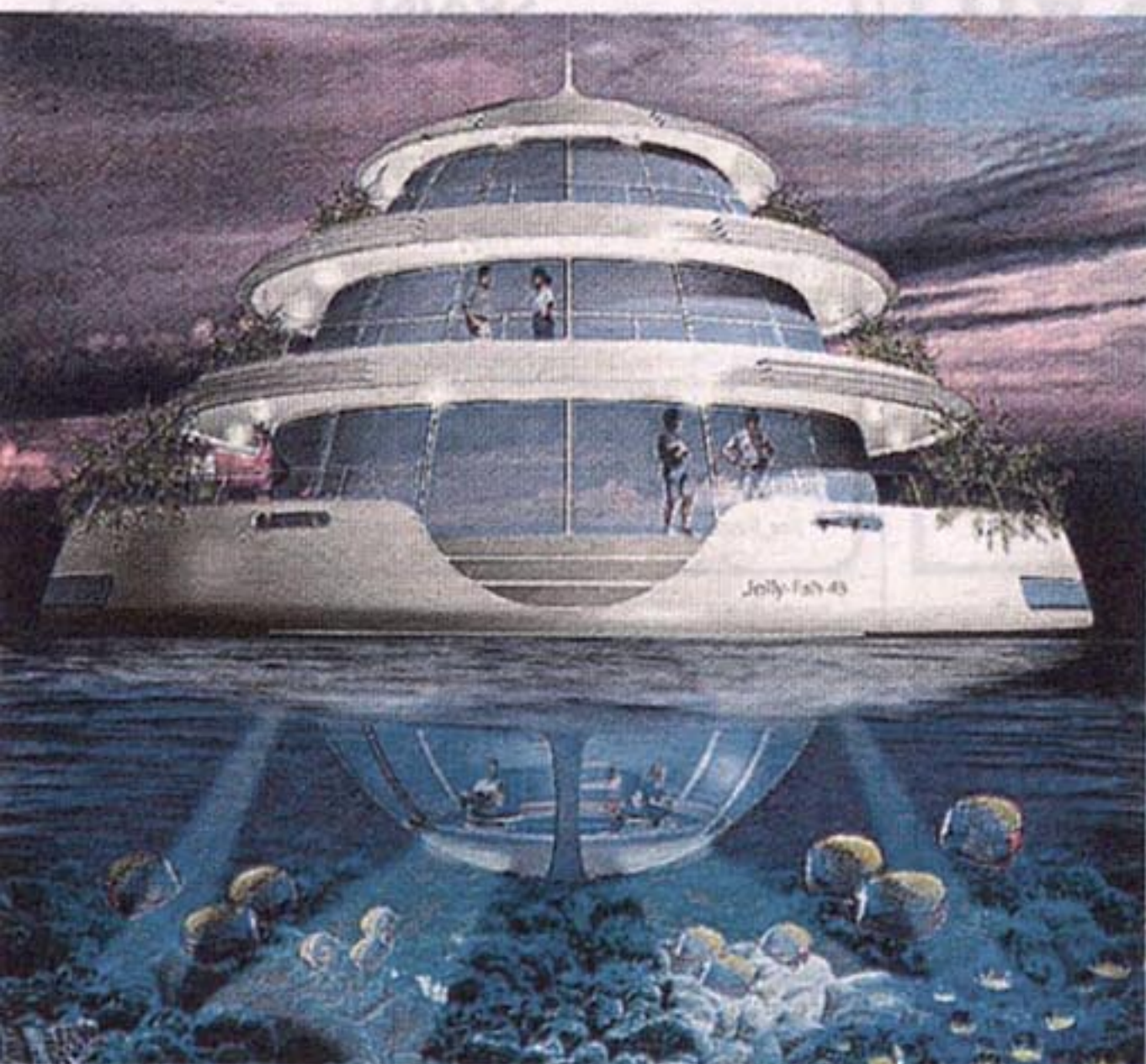
The Archers enjoy life on their floating home in a marina at Delta, Canada



houses that float



Two designs by the Italian naval architect Giancarlo Zema: the Trilobis, above, features an underwater viewing chamber



While Britain's new floating houses exist on drawing boards rather than storming Little Venice, other countries forge ahead

sell. They increase in price with inflation and market pressure.

"It's actually the authorities who are one of the biggest problems with floating homes because they are trying to grapple with something that's completely new and have a whole lot of issues to deal with in terms of planning, design, zoning and mooring."

A coterie of British architects is starting to look at floating houses. For the Royal Institute of British Architects' (Riba) new Future House London exhibition, Squire & Partners has put forward a new floating-house concept. The design comes among stark warnings about the future of the Thames and surrounding areas (including parts of the new Thames Gateway development), which are at risk from annual rises of 7mm

in flood levels and the threat of surging winter tides. Its floating houses would be flood-proof and linked and serviced by the Thames itself, London's greatest and now strangely under-explored transport artery.

"Until the 20th century, the Thames was a crowded and animated part of London, a place of frenetic activity," says the architect Niall McLaughlin, who has designed a futuristic houseboat included in the Riba exhibition. "We saw the houseboat as a prototype that flags up the idea of water living and the possibilities."

While Britain's new floating houses exist largely on drawing boards rather than storming Little Venice, architects in Sweden, Germany and other countries are forging ahead. Around

Berlin, the development agency Wasserstadt is working on a pilot project of 16 new floating houses to be moored on Lake Spandau and Rummelsburg Bay, costing about £200,000 to £335,000.

The Italian naval architect Giancarlo Zema has been working with Canadian company Underwater Vehicles on the prototype of the Trilobis, a Thunderbirds-style floating dream house for marinas, bays and rivers, now being built in Singapore. It will have four floors and comes with underwater viewing chamber, for about £2.15m.

In Europe, though, the greatest impresarios of water dwellings come from Holland, where architects have been designing and engineering a new breed of aqua houses that could change the vibrant Dutch water world. Unlike Vancouver, where there is room to roam, Amsterdam faces the threat of flooding and mounting pressure to build housing to keep the growing city happy. Water houses are starting to offer a new model of living and a pleasing replacement for the thousands of ramshackle houseboats clogging up the city's best mooring spots.

"All kinds of contractors, developers, architects and inventors are coming up with floating houses of all shapes and sizes," says the Dutch architect Art Zaijier, who has built six prototype houses at a large development at IJburg, east of Amsterdam, with space set aside for 250 floating houses. Zaijier's creations have been designed as middle-market family homes, using Canadian flotation platforms.

"The ideal situation is that you order your house knowing you have a spot on the water with a licence to moor it," says Zaijier. "The houses are then built in a shipyard, launched, and towed to the mooring site. The problem is that we are a small, densely populated country and even though water is everywhere around us it is usually part of a protected ecological zone. So in practice, at the moment, it means that there are very few spots like IJburg where you can moor your floating home."

Bart Mispelblom Beyer, of Tangram Architecten, has come up with a water dwelling in an eco zone at Schillingdijk in western Amsterdam. The practice has created 18 houses that sit neatly above the water

supported by concrete "plugs" drilled down into the bed of the dyke. Water levels are controlled in the zone, so the house has no need to float up and down. Apart from the concrete plugs, the Schillingdijk houses were largely prefabricated and priced at about £150,000. Some have since resold at double the price.

"Usually you are not allowed to build houses in an eco zone," says Mispelblom Beyer, "but the city council approved the scheme because what these houses do is give back more greenery than they take away. That's the reason we lifted the houses up on a

pedestal, which allows the water and plant life below to get enough light, and why we gave the houses grass roofs that the birds can use.

"The owners are not allowed to do anything in the area around the house, which is maintained by the council, and the only outside space is a wooden terrace over the water. "Amsterdam has always had water dwellings and they go in and out of fashion. Now we are seeing some very interesting experiments in water housing."

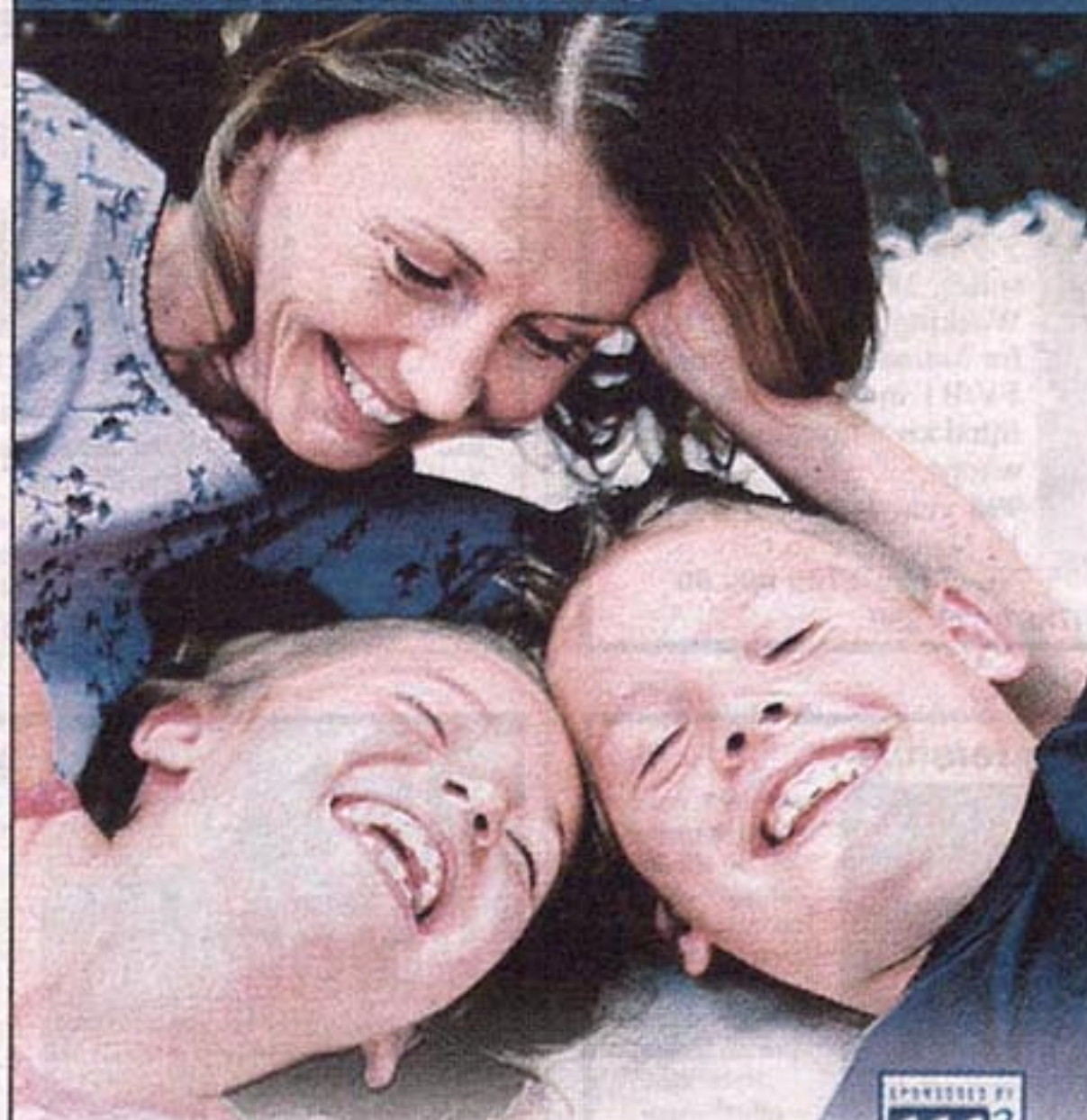
Art Zaijier estimates that as many as 8,000 people in Amsterdam have registered interest in floating houses.

Back in Vancouver, at least one fortunate floating family is happy. Rob Carson, an economist, his wife, Anne, and their two boys, are taking delivery of their second floating home. A bespoke design on two and a half levels by Russell Chernoff, it's bigger and better than the old place and even has a semi-submerged "basement" playroom for the boys. They have a place to put the house, at Falls Creek, Granville Island. "Boats come and go and I can swim off my house," says Carson. "I can jump off my roof and into the water. I don't get to do that anywhere else."

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GUIDE TO
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