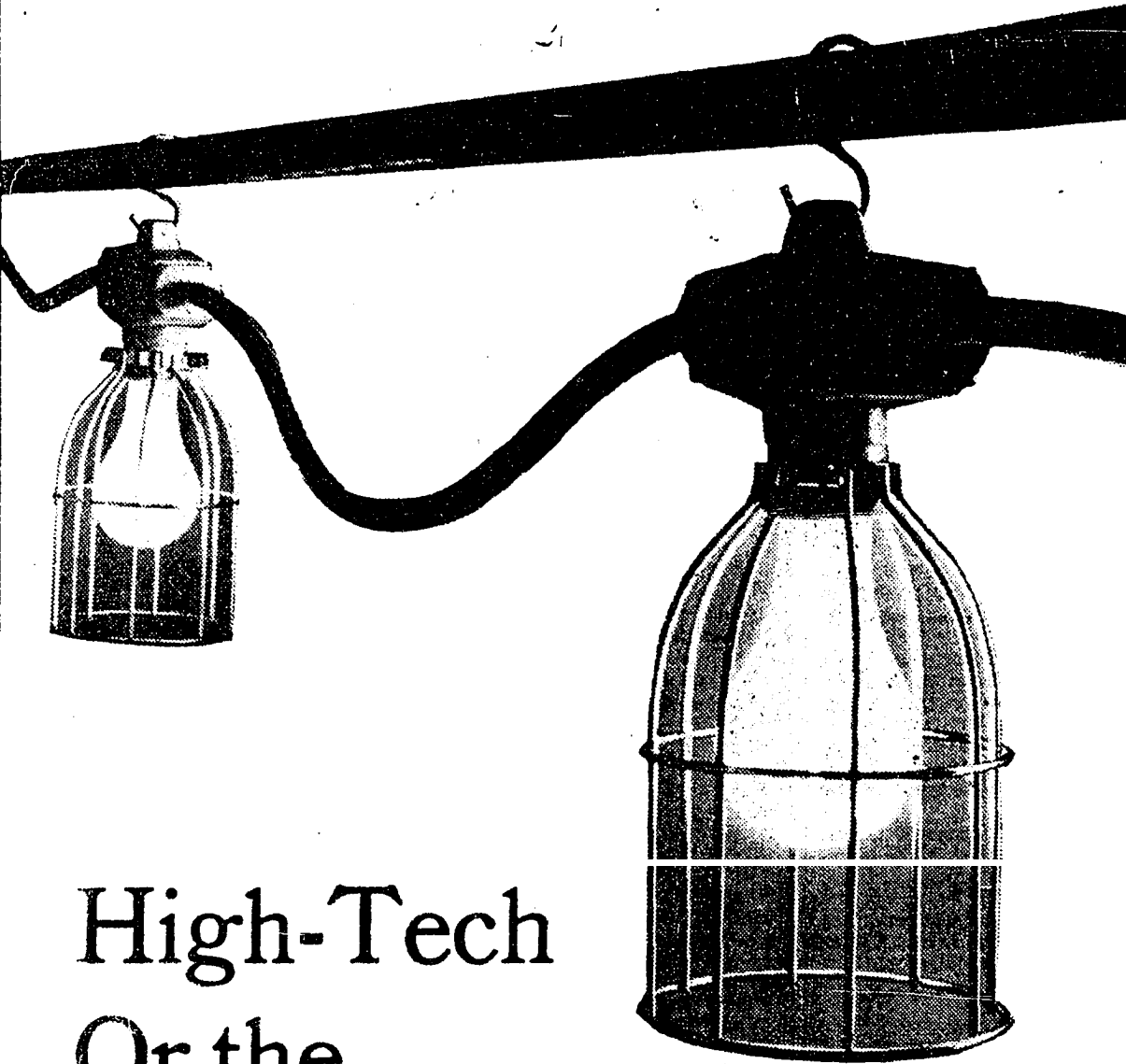


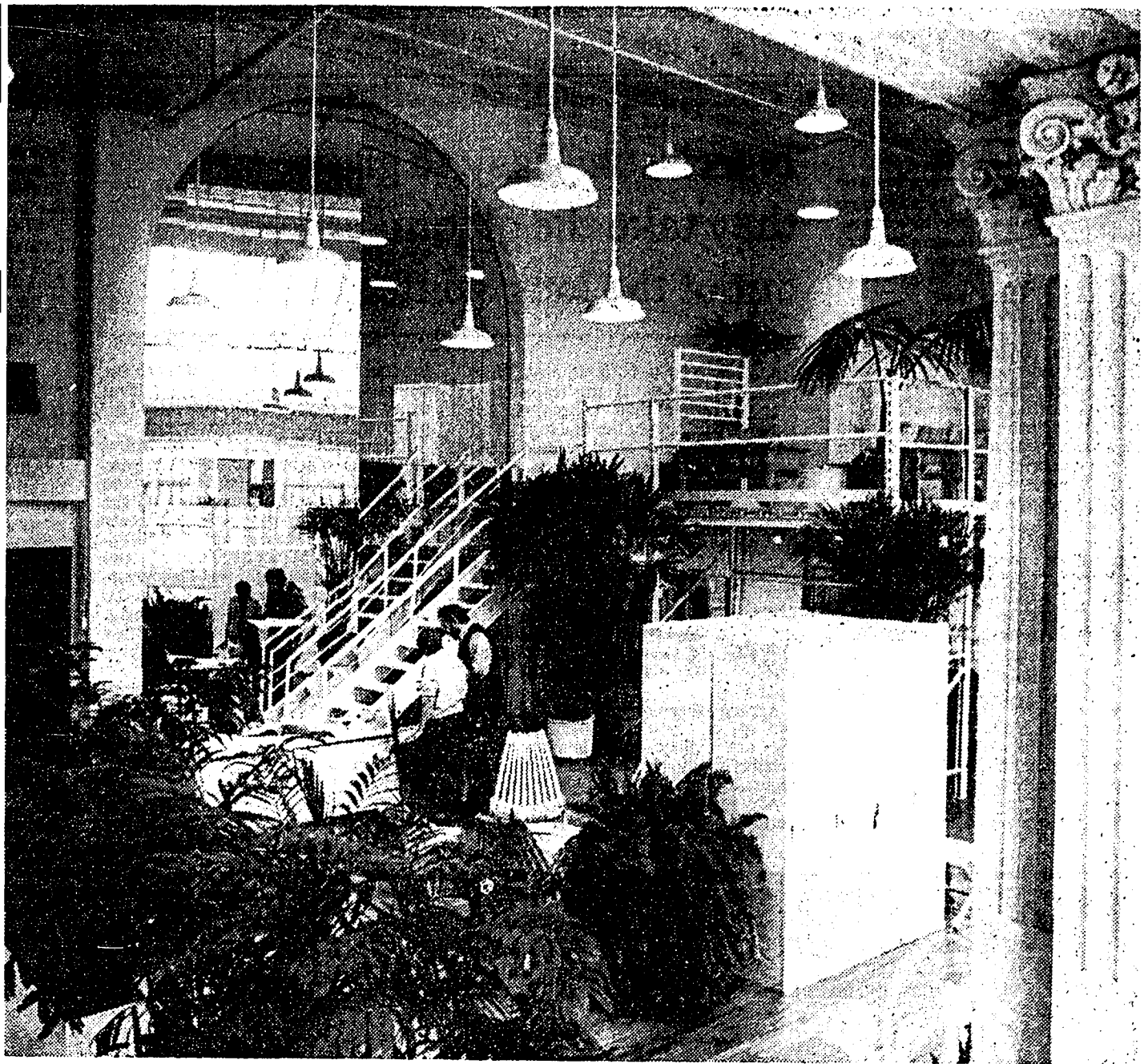
High-Tech Or the: Handcraft Look?

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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The industrial look: In "High-Tech," authors Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin present functional, spare designs adapted to home living.

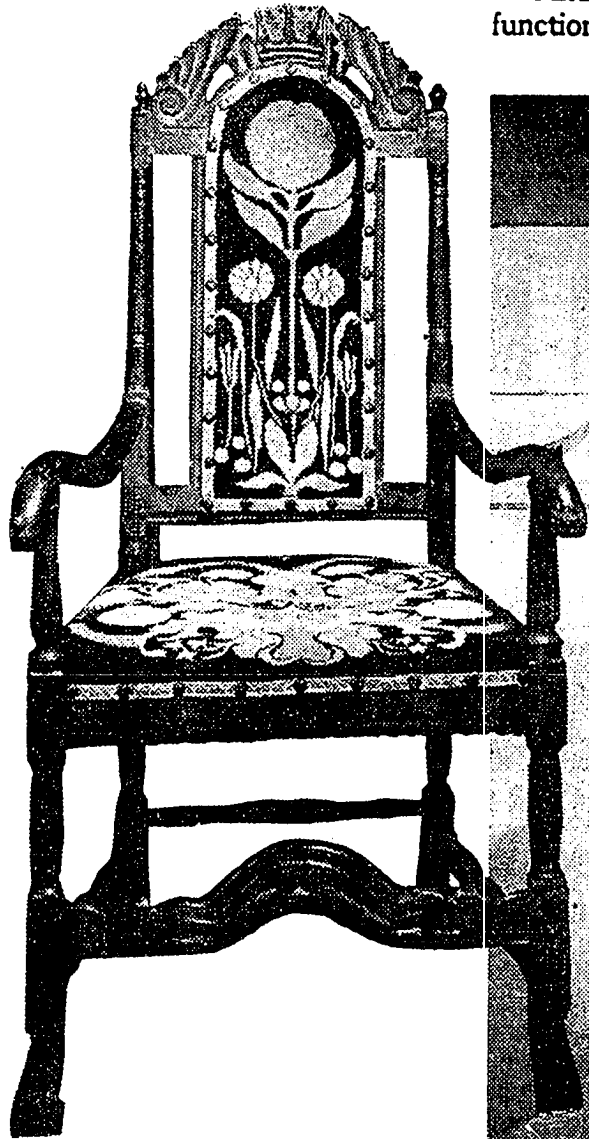
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PLURALISM is the word in architecture and interior design today. Those who make taste tell us that there is room for every kind of taste, and books are published daily to prove it.

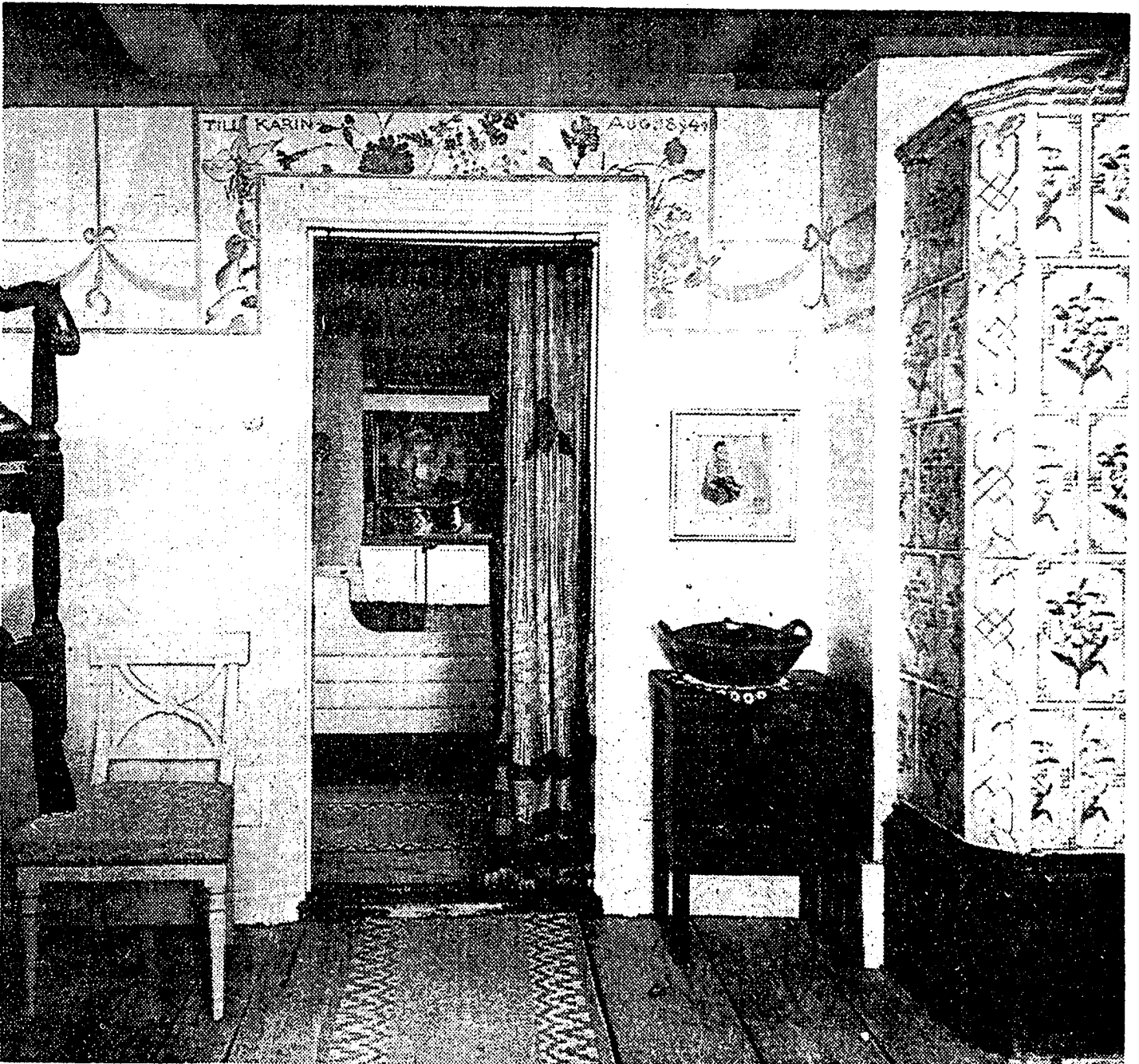
But taste exists on at least two levels. It is both a personal expression and a product of its time. Two new volumes make the point so well that they can serve as models of social and design history.

"Carl Larsson's Home" (\$6.95, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Jacob Way, Reading, Mass. 01867) documents the individually handcrafted artist's house that is the product of intensely personal sensitivities, a place full of intimate artifacts and memorabilia. This book is the American edition of a Swedish publication about "Little Hytt'näs," the home built in the village of Sundborg in central Sweden at the turn of the century by the famous Swedish artist and illustrator who was virtually a national cultural institution. It is now a lived-in museum. The style it celebrates grows out of the traditional values of family life in a secure society and a rustic setting.

The text by Ulf Hard af Segerstad and the photographs by Karl-Erik Granath detail the al-



The handcrafted style: Intimate artifacts from Ulf Hard af Segerstad's "Carl Larsson's Home."



Contrasts in tastes and use of space to live in

terations and extensions made by the Larsson family from 1889 to 1912, a kind of homemaking that was clearly an act of art and love. This is a small, soft and thoroughly beguiling book.

"High-Tech," by Joan Kron and Suzanne Slesin (\$27.50, Clarkson N. Potter, New York), is, by contrast, a book very much of this moment. It deals with the kind of living space that could have resulted only from the radical technological and sociological transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the complex changes in life styles and manufactured goods that followed. It caters to the standards and preferences of a highly sophisticated, temporal and stylish urban society. This kind of home is not characterized by nostalgia or memorabilia. And this is a large, hard and slickly handsome book.

"High-Tech," subtitled "The Industrial Style and Source Book for the Home," defines and codifies the current hot "look" in interior design, a style that is now the status symbol for those to whom fashion, in all fields, is as essential as breathing. But it offers considerably more than passing chic.

The book is a carefully researched and well-organized presentation of industrial and commercial products that can be used as is, or adapted to related needs in the home. It stresses structural elements and mass-produced artifacts notable for their "undecorated" good looks and their ability to fill any number of domestic purposes attractively and rationally.

From warehouse shelving and greenhouse rooms to restaurant equipment and chemical glass, from the tough to the trendy, the authors have searched out a vast range of these objects. And they have done the job with intelligence, taste and a contagious enthusiasm.

Like so many other furnishing styles, high-tech has filtered down from trend-setting architecture. The emblem of high-tech is the Centre Pompidou in Paris, with its exterior jungle-gym frame and brilliantly colored exposed pipes and ducts that treat the structure's functional elements as its style. Buildings with taut, smoothly gasketed glass- and metal-paneled skins serve everything from factories to arts centers. High-tech has come to mean anything that has a look of slick, pared-down, hard-surfaced, functional,

minimal elegance, achieved either through the actual use of industrial components, or through a kind of design that suggests them.

Also known as the industrial esthetic, this is a taste that manages to combine long-recognized elements of 20th-century machine art — those beautiful nuts and bolts and beakers endorsed almost a half-century ago by the Museum of Modern Art — and attitudes of the counterculture of the 1960's, which sought alternatives to the traditional paraphernalia of the home in "found" manufactured objects. Its shiny chrome surfaces, rounded, polished corners, plain pipe railings, factory lights and industrial wall and floor finishes are ready to be popularized for a mass market and knocked off on a grand scale.

This is the book that will do it. For those who need to follow a script, they have it now. Here are well-chosen interiors whose every artful, minimal stroke has maximum esthetic impact, as well as a "technical directory" of sources and suppliers. Admittedly, you have to be a special kind of person to call a rolling, portable loft bed a home. You've got to like a tangle of pipes a lot to want some of these "systems" instead of more obvious and sometimes simpler solutions. And you must believe in the delusory advantages of assembly and disassembly in which only one all-purpose glöget is needed to change your life. And, oh boy, does neatness count.

I, for one, am less than wild about evoking traumatic memories with hospital equipment at home. And as someone who has been through the fishnet curtains, photographer's lights and brick-supported bookcases of earlier functionalist fetishes, I can attest to the pleasure of throwing them all out for a decent piece of furniture.

But the freshness, logic, clarity and esthetic distinction of some of these solutions is exemplary. The authors are obviously endorsing, as a corollary thesis, the "rejection of the hoked-up materials, the phony brick floors, ersatz tile pretending to be Alhambra ceramics, that pass as home furnishings today." You can't argue with that; you can only hope that in the relentless process of popularization one kind of hokum will not ultimately substitute for another.

Nothing, of course, is ever really new. A historical section traces the industrial esthetic from the London Crystal Palace of 1851 to Charles Eames's off-the-peg house in Santa Monica in 1949, with familiar and esoteric examples between and beyond. Today's highly polished definition of high-tech shares none of the earlier Italian version's inspired outrageousness in the 1950's, with its willfully trailing electric cords and snaking, articulated hoses in a sea of shining plastic. That high style was also high wit.

The wit in Carl Larsson's house is gentle, and so is the preindustrial style; this is a totally different world. The text and pictures give an unhurried tour, from page to page and room to room, of one-of-a-kind handmade objects of sentiment and charm. The rooms are small and full of intimate, warm details of past lives that linger in them with the gossamer air of the sheer, starched curtains at the windows.

Carl Larsson's portraits of his lovely wide-eyed wife and seven Kate Greenaway children are on doors and walls; painted mottos and murals encircle and enrich familiar spaces. Hand-woven fabrics soften plain woods colored green, white and rust red, and hand-painted flowers spill up and onto a ceiling corner from the matching flowers of a tile stove below. Everything contains a memory — high-tech has no memory at all.

One could simply call this house charming, but it is so much more. The interiors are supremely artful arrangements that are anything but conventional for their time. There are influences from the English Arts and Crafts, which was the "modern" of the day; impressions from London, Paris, Vienna and Berlin, where new styles were being explored; echoes of the designers Mackintosh, Voysey and Hoffmann. Binding it together is a sense of joy in art and life, of beautiful things to see and hold.

There is only one characteristic that Carl Larsson's home and high-tech share: a liberating simplicity. But they are as far apart in taste and style as the earth and the moon, and so are the lives and values that produced them.