

Glass block design enjoying a revival

BUILDING materials come and go in cycles. Glass block, now the subject of an unprecedented revival, is a prime example.

It had its first heyday in the art deco era, when the shiny surfaces and slick geometry fit the futuristic look of the late '20s and early '30s and enhanced the up-to-date machine style of the modern era. But when deco died, so did the block.

The '50s saw something of a revival as block appeared in factories and bars. But then it died once more, only to arrive again in the '80s.

ARCHITECTS AND designers are using it with unusual and often brilliant effects. Glass-block stairwells curl up new houses, a solitary glass block sitting at the top as a focal point.

Glass-block ceilings allow rooms to be bathed in light but insulated against heat. There are glass-block

windows — small ones in a simple quartet of blocks and huge ones stacked together to form a whole window wall.

A few tricky people have even created glass-block swimming pools and floors.

One of the prime uses of glass block today is for shower walls: It's semi-transparent, but it lets plenty of light into small spaces — and it's easy to wash down.

Another important quality is the wide number of patterns and sizes now available.

Traditional glass blocks could be awfully boring, but manufacturers today are turning out blocks in a multitude of motifs. Geometrics, meteors, diamonds, waves, ribs and cross-ribs, trees, stars and the entire aurora borealis.

Some also introduce color, soft amber or gold as well as bright blue, green and red.

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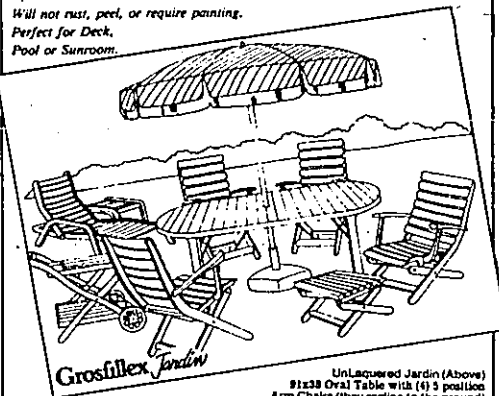
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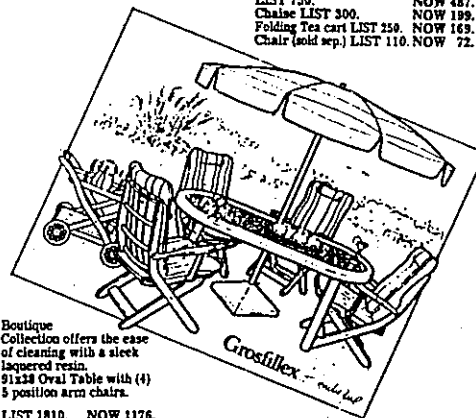
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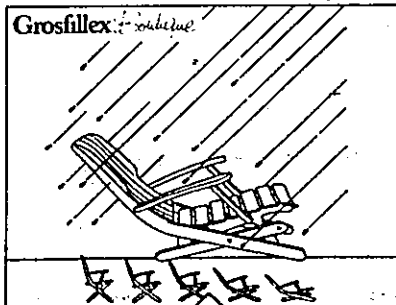
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