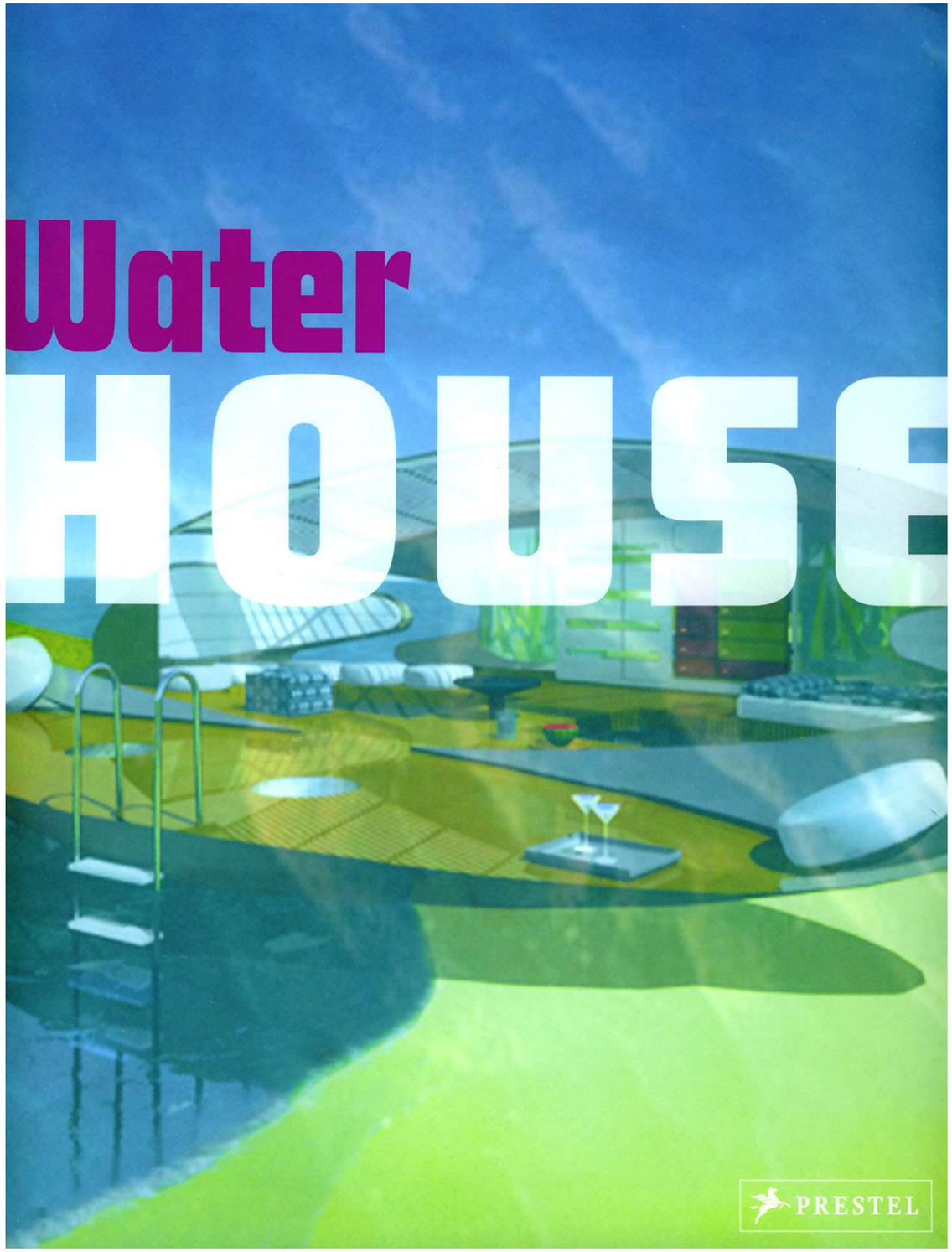

Dirk Schumann

Kamar, No fixed Location, Project, 2002

"Coming Home." Could an artificial island really be called home? Could people really feel "at home" there, as they would on terra firma? From a distance the water village of Kamar, with its pointed oval dwellings—two sidewalls propped against each other, has a welcoming air. It is only from a bird's-eye view—or from a frog's-eye view—that we see the complexity of the architecture devised by the north-German industrial designer Dirk Schumann, who has succeeded in connecting natural forms with spaceship design asceticism to create a stunning new aesthetic.

These floating islands are in reality conceived as stationary units anchored in sheltered bays and atolls. Each oval platform can hold up to five dwellings, and several modules grouped around a central docking station—which also serves as a helipad—form a larger complex in the shape of an open blossom.

The most important parts of the artificial island, however, are found below the surface of the water. In fact, Kamar has two further functional levels, designed according to very different criteria. On the sloping floor of the sea there is an angular metal and concrete foot, which anchors the island by its sheer weight and connects to it by means of a long tunnel. This underwater tunnel, not unlike the passenger bridges at airports, is a place where people come together, share meals or simply relax and observe the fascinating underwater world through large, semispherical windows.

An important part of Schumann's concept is that the living units should continue underwater so that the sight of the underwater world plays an intrinsic part of everyday life. The floors are provided with sight slits, and a large glass dome—a magnificent viewing space and laboratory combined—ensures that the residents truly feel part of the marine world.

The Kamar project was inspired by the designer's longing to lead an amphibian life on water, and by his awareness that maritime architecture can open up new realms of communication. Even as a child, Schumann was already experimenting with improvised, plastic underwater housing, and he later became a keen diver. Schumann's first design for a diving boat (called Palinurus) was awarded a gold medal in 1997 at the International Design Exhibition in Osaka, which in turn encouraged him to continue work on his dream project.

The fascination of Kamar lies both in the overall concept and in its unusual aesthetic. Rather than being motorized, this artificial island is anchored in a sheltered bay. The anchor is partly an inhabitable substructure, and the living areas are all below the surface of the water.

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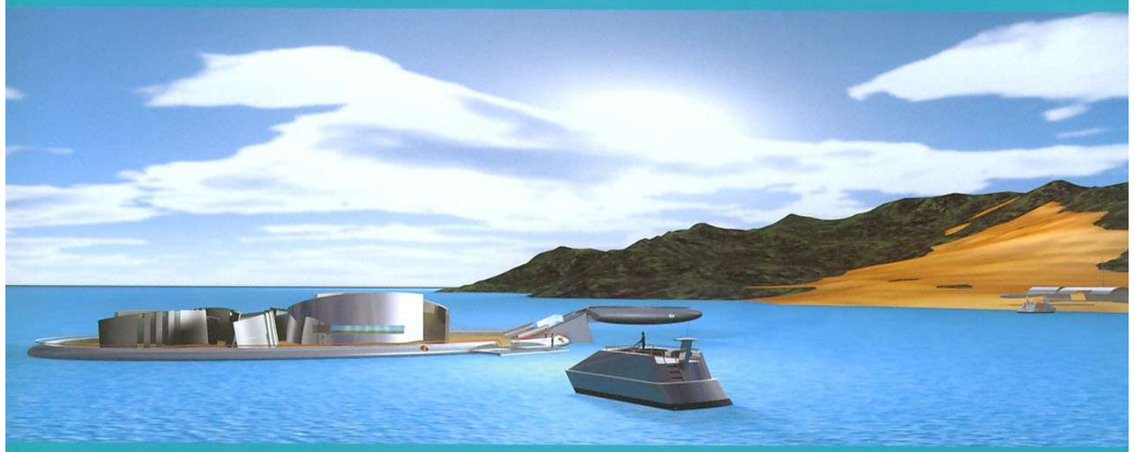

Dirk Schumann
Kamar, No fixed Location, Project, 2002

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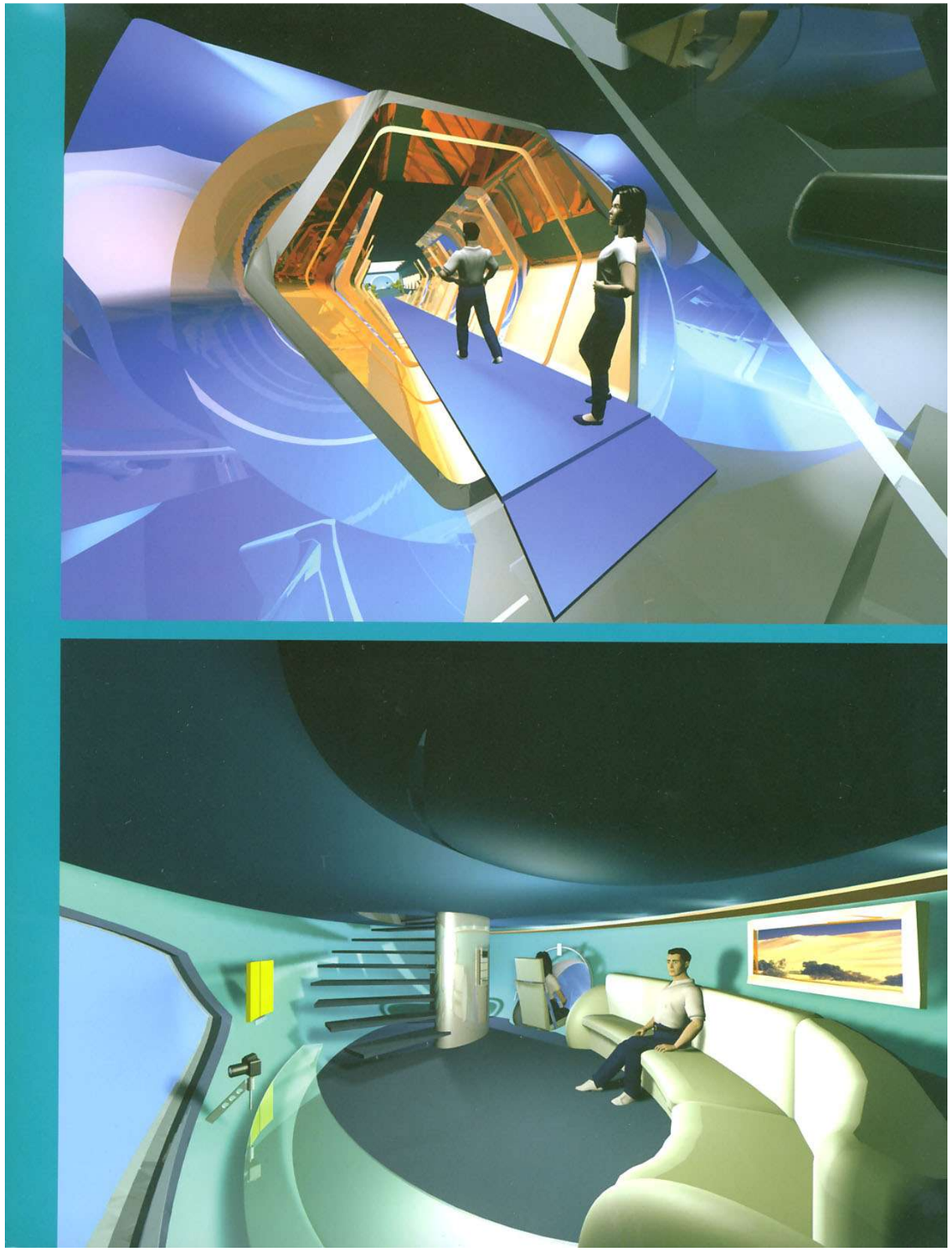
The island of Kamar is anchored to the seabed by a steel and concrete jetty. This elongated block can be used as a social meeting place with seating areas in the hemispherical portholes that are designed to adjust to the horizontal.



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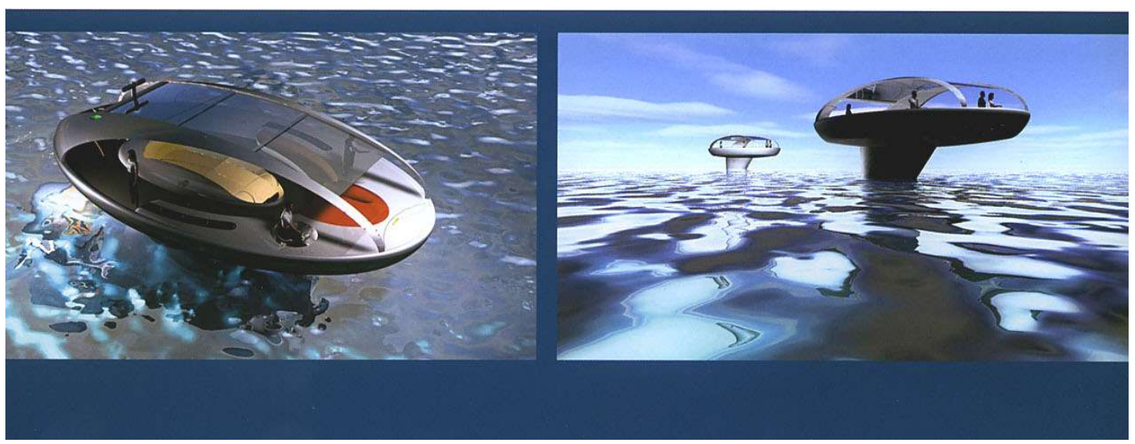
Dirk Schumann

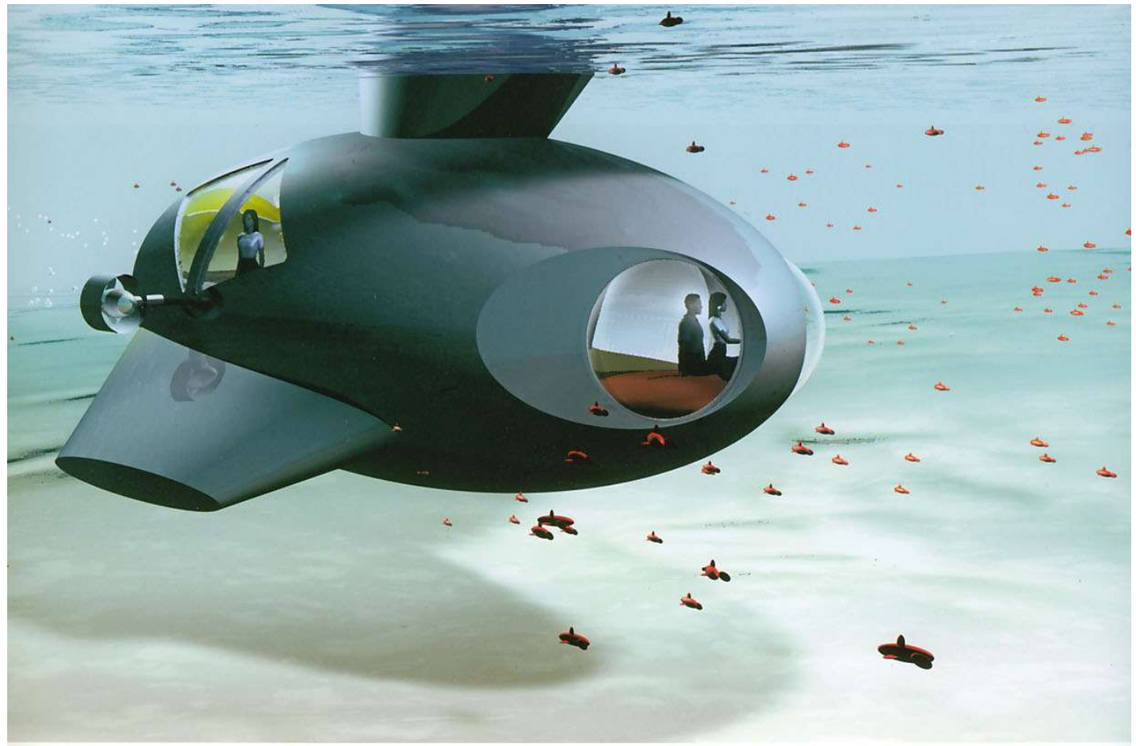
Palinurus, Project, 1997–2003

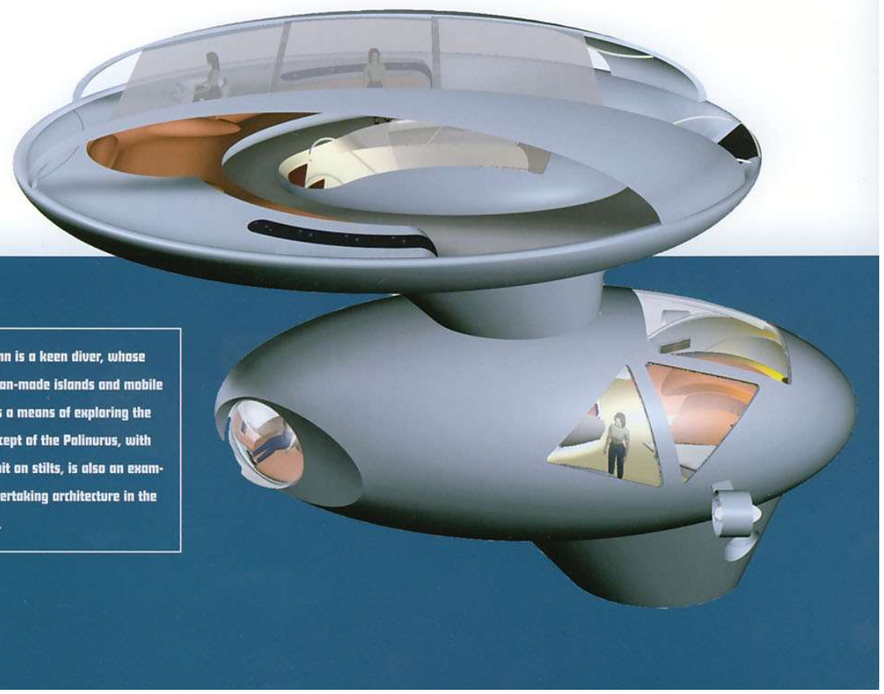
It may move in the water, but that is about the only thing that German industrial designer Dirk Shumann's visionary concept has in common with a ship. The visible part of the Palinurus submarine extends one meter out of the water, like an oversized periscope or the head of some mythical sea creature. One meter below the surface, the large, streamlined oval section—made of heavy materials and acting as a stabilizing keel—houses the living and sleeping areas, a library, and service facilities. Models were built to test the structure and side stabilizers were mounted to balance it out. The structure is able to compensate for minor wave movements, thereby creating two stable areas, one above water and one below.

Schumann presented the first Palinurus model in Japan in 1997 and was awarded the prestigious Golden Prize of the Japanese Design Foundation. In this prototype, Schumann developed the concept of the keel as a functional space in the form of a glass sphere with seating for panoramic views. The latest version has an underwater cabin for five to six people and is 13.4 meters long by 8.5 meters wide. The glass capsule is located at the front and allows residents to feel part of the marine life, as there is no visible barrier between the interior and exterior worlds. A transit area in the connecting tower leads to the above-water section with its special diving facilities. The concept now also includes a full-scale service station, for use in sheltered bays as a maintenance dry dock.

The Palinurus project is being further developed by Architectura Navalis in collaboration with various university institutes. Compromise is inevitable in the interests of feasibility; whereas the first design did not envisage any form of propulsion, in the interests of a more sensitive approach to nature, the later designs have engines.







German industrial design Dirk Schumann is a keen diver, whose love of the sport led him to think of man-made islands and mobile units complete with service stations as a means of exploring the underwater world. The pioneering concept of the Palinurus, with its functional keel and above-water unit on stilts, is also an example of how industrial design is now overtaking architecture in the field of innovative technical aesthetics.