

**JOY & ALAN
OHASHI**
SELF-APPOINTED
CHAIRPERSONS

All married couples are partners of a sort, but few have to test this idea in the workplace. Alan and Joy Ohashi have been married for 11 years; since 1983 they've also been in practice together as architects. Because of their dual partnership, they can find it hard to draw a clear line between their private and professional lives. "It happens all over the place," says Alan about their work together, "that's the tiring part. But," he adds, "it's a very good process."

And what is that process like? "I'll do a sketch and throw it on her desk. She'll do something and throw it back. It's sort of the 'catch and toss' school of design."

This kind of facile back and forth is easier to carry off when two people understand each other very well. In the case of the Ohashis, the natural convergence of husband and wife has brought them closer together as designers. "Over the years," says Joy, "because we're married, we've come to like the same things." Alan makes a similar observation: "We're on the same wavelength, definitely. I can trust her, and she can trust me, not to come up with ideas that are out in left field."

The Ohashis' relationship began at U.C.L.A., where Joy was majoring in East Asian studies and Alan was working on an M.F.A. in cinematography. She went on to study law at U.C. Berkeley, and they commenced a long-distance relationship that was only shortened by a change of plans. Joy recalls their approach to the problem: "We both decided that since we always talk about art and architecture, we'd abandon both our careers and do architecture." Their backgrounds made them ideal candidates for the graduate program at U.C. Berkeley, which tends to attract people from diverse majors. Alan entered first, "since we didn't want to be in the same class," and they graduated in the early 1980s. He went to work for ELS (Elbasani & Logan

Architects) in Berkeley; she for a number of Bay Area firms, including Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones.

Ironically, these two architects have become better known for furniture than buildings, especially in Japan, where they have been promoted by Conde House, a company that produces a successful line of wood tables and chairs the Ohashis have designed. Architecture has been a harder go, says Alan. Since starting their own business, the Ohashis have tackled a variety of projects, including the design of a kite store and an Indian restaurant at



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the Cannery complex in San Francisco; the creation of a five-year space plan for Landor Associates, a large, international design firm; and the modification of two residences for the Rockefeller family, one an 1832 farmhouse in Vermont, the other an 1895 shingled building in the city. They have yet to build any really large projects, but that may change soon: Construction begins this year on a 30,000-square-foot church complex designed for a Methodist congregation in Fremont.

Partners in more ways than one: Joy and Alan Ohashi share their personal and professional lives, as well as a passion for good design.

A commission to remodel a dwelling in the Berkeley hills brought about the design of the Conde House chairs and tables. The owner of this all-concrete structure built in the 1920s asked the Ohashis to design a dining table for the living room, a long, large space with minimal details. The Ohashis responded with a heavy black rectangle suspended over stout black legs. The table's edge is beveled in such a way that it appears to be

a thick surface from a distance, but gets thinner as you get closer to it. The smooth top is accented with polished squares of black marble, which are inset "as elements of brilliance and interest," according to Alan. These match the black marble of the original fireplace at the other end of the room and provide a measure of human scale by suggesting the space of an individual person at