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Where Teachers Say 'Ribbit!'

By ANNE RAVER

THE moment Velarian Francis, a fourth grader, reached the top of the rocky hill, he swiveled the high-powered telescope onto the marsh below and shouted, "see little bugs!" the New York Botanical Garden's new Everett Children's Adventure Garden leaped to the forefront of children's education.

"Children need natural environments they can get their hands on, explore, discover things about," said Robin C. Moore, a landscape architect and designer of children's environments. "I think the adventure garden is breaking new ground. I'm not aware of any other environment like this in a botanical garden."

The \$9 million, 12-acre Everett Children's Adventure Garden, which opens officially on Saturday, is the largest and most ambitious children's education project of its kind. Considered a model by the National Science Foundation, it meanders past a marshy pond and across a bridge into the oldest forest in New

To learn about frogs, get knee-high to one.

York City. Along the way, children can pretend to be lost on the "kids only" meadow path. They can learn the difference between petal and stamen, pollen and pistil. (It isn't a gun.) They can see a flower the way a bee does — with ultraviolet vision — so that a stripe on a petal looks like a runway right to the nectary.

They can look for frogs in the pond, then examine the water's teeming life under a microscope in a lab inside an Adirondack-style cottage designed by the architect Richard Dattner. Who needs to go to the Adirondacks when nature is here in the heart of the Bronx?

Last week, 46 children from two elementary schools gave the adventure garden a test run. As they hopped like sparrows over the boulder maze — heading for the telescope — teachers and designers watched them like hawks. Many minds from the worlds of science and education worked for more than a decade to

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Fred K. Conral/The New York Times

NEST BUILDING Fourth graders at the Everett Children's Adventure Garden.

TURF

Lover's Leap Mentality Hits Co-ops

By TRACIE ROZHON

IN Manhattan, fear and greed are fueling the white-hot real estate market. Deals are falling apart at record levels. Bidding wars occur every day. And even brokers and lawyers are starting to urge caution.

"There's a hysteria that's kind of crept into the real estate community," said Deborah Beck, executive director of the Real Estate Board of New York, a trade group that represents more than 1,000 Manhattan agents. "It's not good for brokers, and it's not good for buyers and sellers."

In this incendiary market, deals fall apart twice as often as they did five years ago. These are deals that fall before the contract is signed and way before the buyer gets near a co-op board interview.

According to a study released this week by the Halstead Property Company in Manhattan, broken deals below 14th Street have skyrocketed from 16 percent in the sluggish 1997 market to 32 percent today; uptown, they have gone from 10 percent to 24 percent. Agents blame sellers' renegeing on an accepted offer to get more money elsewhere — and equally buyers' cold feet, often the morning after.

Nick Brown, a Wall Street executive, promised himself he would buy his own apartment by the time he turned 30. Right after he bid \$250,000 on a one-bedroom on West 70th Street in January, the Dow dropped 220 points, only to recover quickly. But he was scared. When his

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DESIGN NOTEBOOK

Young Turks Nip Kips



It's show house season again, and at Kips Bay at least, there's a fresh wind blowing.



Photographs by Fred K. Conral/The New York Times

DECORATING, MORE OR LESS At the Kips Bay show house, Zen minimalism weighed in (at 800 pounds) with a stone bathtub and a craneflake faucet, from Clodagh, top. Eve Robinson wove walls from maple, like basketry, center left. Katina Arts-Meyer's attic alcove, however, had the grandeur of a salon, above. Background, taffeta draperies gave Noel Jeffrey's library a colorful ballroom whirl. Keller Donovan came up in clover (70's Italian table, left).

By PATRICIA LEIGH BROWN

THE death of chintz — arrideerci, baby — will be made public next week at the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club Decorator Showhouse, where it will also be revealed that the bridge to the 21st century is really an 800-pound concrete Zen bathtub.

It's show house time again, that rollicking seasonal decorating ritual in which a beady enu d'affluence fills the air and \$100,000 gift clocks ting in unison on the quarter hour.

Strange as it may seem, however, a sort of Kips Bay Liberation Front has taken up residence at 32 East 70th Street, a comparatively swag-free environment this year with a lower-than-usual knickknack quotient, where the work of 20 designers — a record eight of them first-time Kips Bayers — goes on view from May 5 through May 27.

In the past, the show house has been predominantly a starched bastion of Park Avenue decorating, pure Brooks Brothers, a place where breathless decorators used words like "timeless" and "eclectic" to describe the status quo. Nevermore. Facing the fin de siècle (and possible extinction by Martha Stewart), the predictable Kips Bay has turned bracingly unpredictable this year, as many designers up the ante to redefine what "good taste" means as the year 2000 approaches.

They are looking to remote nonwestern cultures, humble materials, Popsicle-color palettes — and the feel of the human hand. They are perfecting the Deepak Chopra School of Decorating, viewing interiors as "a meditative state" (Kitty Hawks) and a "life-enhancing situation" (Clodagh).

Liza Cousins and Natasha Bergreen painted a wall in the 30-



room 1912 mansion with henna, inspired by mehndi, the ancient Indian art of body painting. Eve Robinson, 33, a designer new to Kips Bay, took a love of common objects, specifically the apple basket, and reinterpreted the conventional paneled room with a basket-weave wall of interlaced maple strips. In the nothing-is-sacred department, David Kleinberg, an architect, brazenly enveloped Regency antiques and a \$15,000 thin-screen television in a room of pinstriped burlap (save those potato sacks).

Grass is still the pet accessory, and it sprouts from steel ledges (Clodagh) and bathtubs (Ms. Robinson), raising the question of whether venture capitalists ought to be investing in hand-held indoor lawn mowers.

In Clodagh's mystically sybaritic sanctuary, light emanates mysteriously through sauna-like wooden slats, and crystals dangle beside the doors. Fittingly for an era in which it is difficult to tell where National Geographic ends and Elle Decor begins, an antique Nepalese ox cart wheel hangs on an artisan-plaster wall. Pebbles and Bam-Bam have gone spiritual and joined an ashram. It is

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DECORATOR LUXE FOR LESS