

AD

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

Fresh Attitude

CREATIVES AT HOME
COAST TO COAST





1. A GLASS-BLOCK BATHROOM BY CHARLAP HYMAN & HERRERO FOR MICHAEL AGUIRRE IN L.A.
2. MAISON DE VERRE IN PARIS, DESIGNED IN 1928 BY PIERRE CHAREAU.
3. A WISCONSIN HOME BY TIGERMAN MCCURRY ARCHITECTS. 4. A SHOWER FLOATS IN A NEW YORK CITY LOFT BY DARREN JETT.
5. BRIDGES, A NEW MANHATTAN RESTAURANT DESIGNED BY BILLY COTTON.

Block Party

After doing its time in trend jail, this building material is back in fashion

When the French architect and designer Pierre Chareau conceived Maison de Verre in 1928 for the Parisian Dr. Dalsace and his wife, the home's glass-block façade, which allowed light to pour in by day and glow from within at night, was radically modern. At that time, Saint-Gobain, which produced the vitreous bricks, couldn't even guarantee that the still-new building material was weatherproof. But nearly a century later the house—and its namesake *verre*—has shown its staying power in more ways than one.

The earliest examples of glass blocks—sometimes called glass lenses—were actually a quite artisanal product. Handmade from blown glass, the varieties that emerged in the late 1800s were praised for their ability to regulate climate, fend off moisture, and create privacy without eliminating light. Ripe with industrial potential, the hollow blocks found their way into the pioneering International Style architecture of Le Corbusier and others. Still, it wasn't until the '70s and '80s that, cast en masse and relatively simple to install, they became a fixture of Streamline Moderne buildings, SoHo lofts, and, we would be remiss to omit, weird postmodern bathroom renovations.

Today, after doing some time as a “design don't,” they're back in vogue. At Bridges, a new Manhattan restaurant by AD100 designer Billy Cotton, glass-block walls delineate space while maintaining airy elegance. At a chalet in Megève, Elliot Barnes used it to clad a passageway to an indoor pool. And in a block-encased Los Angeles bathroom, Charlap Hyman & Herrero created a luminous honeycomb.

“I use it in areas where a bit of privacy and light are needed,” explains interior designer Darren Jett, who says, “my favorite applications are showers, like the round one floating in the middle of a bedroom in our SoHo loft.” He doesn't mind the '70s connotation but emphasizes the material's versatility. “I imagine a glass-block room with Napoleon III furniture or Art Deco seating and rugs—the tension it creates can be heavenly.”

—HANNAH MARTIN

