

WIRED

Electric Word

New Blue Chip

Already getting charged up about voice-activated Palms? IBM aims to power tomorrow's wireless apps with its new CU-11 ASIC chip. The high-performance circuit - which sucks less juice and computes 30 percent faster than the current record holder - gives Big Blue a two-year lead over competitors, says IBM senior manager Ron Goldblatt.

Building on an earlier breakthrough - the leap from aluminum to copper wire - the new chip features wiring 900 times thinner than a human hair. But as millions of circuits are squeezed closer together, insulation becomes more critical to prevent signal interference. So the CU-11 also takes advantage of Dow Chemical's new SiLK polymer, which insulates better than the silicon dioxide traditionally used.

With some 40 million gate arrays, the customizable CU-11 ASIC runs at 1.8 GHz. The chip ships to developers this month, and will crop up first in servers, routers, and hubs. IBM's promising those superpowered portables by 2002.

- Jennifer Hillner

Design Eenterprise

Renowned for its collections of 20th-century design, Switzerland's Vitra Design Museum (www.design-museum.de) is going global - with plans to open satellites in Paris, Milan, Barcelona, and New York over the next couple of years. First stop: a bohemian district on the east side of Berlin. The new Vitra occupies a 1920s transformer station, designed by German industrial architect Hans Heinrich Müller, that could have doubled as a set for *Metropolis*.

Vitra Berlin opens in July with a retrospective of trippy Danish designer Verner Panton; his organic furnishings and "living environments" will be displayed in a 300-foot-long, wood-floored space that once housed the equipment governing East Berlin's electrical system. But the new museum's greatest treasure may be the former control room, pictured here, now reserved for lectures and receptions. Complete with the original knobs and switches, it's even cooler than Captain Kirk's Bridge: The buttons, at one time, really worked.

- Bonnie Schwartz

Long-Term Memory

If postapocalyptic roaches ever learn to read, they'll know the story of Adam and Eve by heart, thanks to artist Jim Mason. Mason is leading a team of linguists, engineers, and designers in the creation of the Rosetta Disk, part of the Long Now Foundation's 10,000 Year Library effort (www.longnow.org/10klibrary/library.htm). The nickel disc, 2 inches in diameter, holds 1,000 translations of the first three chapters of Genesis, as well as several indigenous myths, and an array of tools for deciphering lost languages.

Despite their many advantages, digital archives aren't built for the long haul, and this project, funded by the Denver-based Lazy Eight Foundation, aims to highlight the need for better archiving systems. Mason's disc, a Los Alamos National Laboratories innovation being marketed by Norsam Technologies, is "nano-analog" - text is saved in microscopic engravings. "It's like microfiche," Mason says, "but with a 2,000-year life span."

- Brad Wieners

Inner Light

This laminate panel wears a dull gray until darkness falls. Then turn it on, and the sheet transforms, emitting an eerie bluish glow. The fixture is one in a collection of organic, luminescent works featured in *Bugs, Fish, Floors, and Ceilings*, a book edited by architect and Harvard professor Sheila Kennedy and just out from the university's press. The volume documents Kennedy's collaboration with advanced design students and lamp manufacturer Osram Sylvania. The Harvard team incorporated electroluminescent films and phosphors into building materials. (Both substances emit short-wavelength light when stimulated by low levels of electricity and sunlight, respectively.) The result? Radiating glass tiles, shimmering cement pavers, and wall lamps that are wallpaper thin. Requiring low or no power, the materials can replace more expensive systems in environments such as movie theaters, where a cool-glowing ceiling would provide adequate illumination.

Says Kennedy, "I work with the Duchampian idea of taking ordinary materials and making them extraordinary."

- Maureen Foley

The Cyberspace Agency

Like every sprawling government bureau, NASA has a sprawling Web site - including 900,000 pages of news alerts, science reports, and educational materials, and more than 300,000 downloadable images. The site is actually a web of sites, maintained individually by NASA's 10 field centers and connected by www.nasa.gov.

Brian Dunbar and six coworkers manage the site from the Office of Public Affairs in Washington, DC. A shuttle launch, new Hubble images, a meteor shower, a shuttle landing. Story, image,

links; story, image, links. "My job is to make the NASA homepage the best tool it can be," the webmaster notes modestly, though he could easily say, "Every week, over 1.7 million pages served."

- *Carolyn Rauch*

Pac-Rat

It's 1982 all over again inside this Kansas City limestone mine-cum-warehouse, where stacks of *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Asteroids*, and other classic Atari games - in their original, unopened boxes - are waiting to be shipped. The stash is what remains of Atari, which quietly liquidated its stock in 1991. The 2 million 2600 and 7800 cartridges were ultimately bought by O'Shea Ltd., a Missouri operation that hawks anything, cheap. The company's ragtag Web site (www.oshealtd.com) advertises more than a million games, and CEO Bill Houlehan says he's "still unpacking boxes and finding games I thought we were out of."

All in all, bonus points for collectors and Atari fans the world over. Even more retro than the piles of cartridges is the price: 80 cents a pop.

- *Heather Sparks*

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