

GADGET

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FISH CONDOS. Manufactured by: Joey Skaggs, 107 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10011. Price: \$1,000 and up for hand-crafted prototypes.

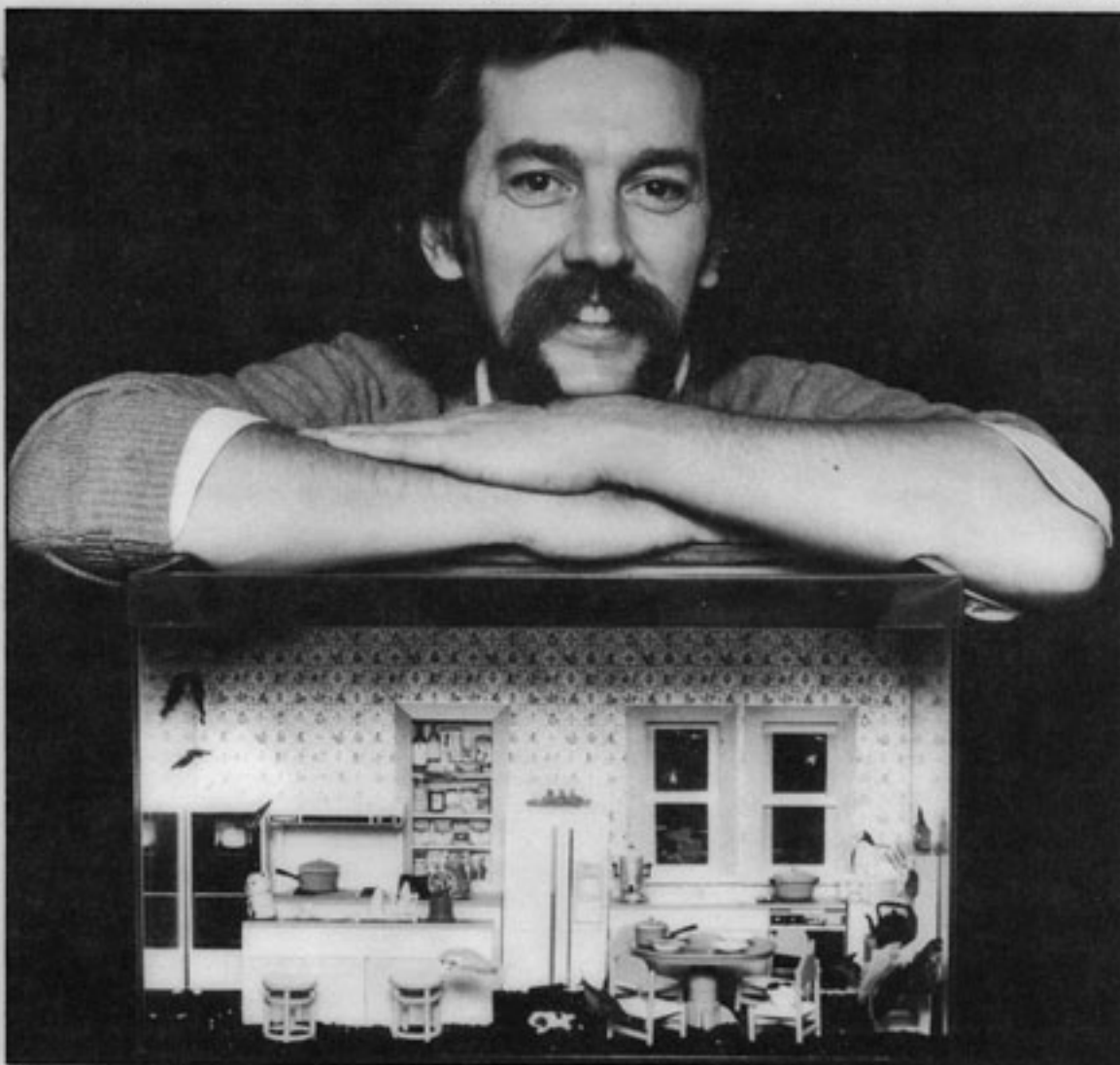
GADGET readers of a certain vintage may recall the "sea monkey" advertisement which used to appear a couple of decades ago in the backs of comic books. What made the ad notable (and probably a steady mail-order draw) was its illustration. The "sea monkeys" were depicted in a Leave-It-To-Beaver-style family group, relaxing around the living room, watching (if memory serves) television.

Although Joey Skaggs says these pulp

press ads weren't his inspiration, the artist's *Fish Condos* partake of the same anthropomorphic zaniness. Instead of castles, deep sea divers and treasure chests for fish to swim around, Skaggs reasoned after seeing an exhibit of antique doll houses, why not give aquatic pets every benefit of home life? And thus were born the *Fish Condos*.

Designed for use with a standard five-gallon aquarium tank, each *Fish Condo* is a miniature replica of a standard human-type room, including (in prototypes built thus far) a bedroom, bathroom, living room and kitchen. A tiled bathroom, besides tub, mirror and sink, might include a bidet and a rubber duck for bath fun.

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FISHER STEREO MUSIC COMPOSER SYSTEM

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chord (the most unsatisfactory in terms of fidelity to the non-electronic model), organ, violin, flute, horn, "mellow" (as in the universal cocktail-lounge keyboard) and "fantasy," reminiscent of the audio atmospherics of horror flicks of the past. Eighteen rhythms are available from the Fisher's pre-programmed battery—waltz, ballad, swing, "enka," 16 beat, rock 1, 2 and 3, disco 1 and 2, bossa nova, samba and 6 arpeggio selections.

With memory play, further variations become available. Using this function, melody and chords can be stored and played back in various modes, including "auto play" and "one key play." "One key play" allows the user to play or phrase a stored melody in time with a selected rhythm. "Auto play" allows compositions to be edited, changing sequences and arrangements.

Music is stored in the SCK-30's electronic memory digitally, and can be recorded onto the SC-300K's tape deck. In order to play back, the taped music is reloaded into the keyboard memory, which will reproduce it, a function engaged with a single button, allowing the user to add further layers via the keyboard itself.

In the memory playback mode, a selection originally played and recorded as, for example, "piano" music can be reproduced as "horn," "violin" or any of the other instrumental sounds available. Keys and chords can also be modified or changed for entire compositions. These functions are much more complicated in description than in actuality. Just in case, Fisher has been careful to develop a step-by-step instruction manual, taking the user through each function and mode.

Although the price tag for the Fisher Stereo Music Composer System seems hefty (isn't this what second-hand pianos used to sell for?), the capabilities of the

SC-300K/SCK-30 may justify the cost for the right buyer. This would seem an ideal music gadget for the aspiring composer or musician, or perhaps the perfect entry to music making for a motivated offspring. However, there are a couple of accessories which, while not included, would seem important.

After four days of testing, other GADGET staffers began to firmly close the door between them and the tinkling, cheerful sound of the SCK-30 keyboard. Perhaps if we'd been more adept musicians, it wouldn't have been necessary. But if an aspirant to music begins working with this electronic arsenal near you, closed doors or even sound-proofing may become an important component of the Fisher Stereo Music Composer System.

Finally, try as we might, we couldn't find the one button absolutely essential to musical success. Despite the profusion of controls and modes, Fisher forgot to include a function designated "soul."—G.A.

FISH CONDOS

(Cont. from p. 1)

In the kitchen, the fish have the option of eating from plates, each part of a full place setting. In the living room, guppies (who in this setting become the aquatic equivalent of yuppies) can gather to watch a home video screen or gaze at a seascape mounted on the flower-print-papered walls. So as not to disturb the illusion, pumps and filtration systems are hidden behind partitions.

Skaggs reached his current set of designs and techniques through trial and error, learning along the way that the paint on scale-model furniture is often toxic to fish, solving the problem of weighting the furniture and accessories without introducing another toxic substance into the tank and so forth. Those fish lucky enough to be lodged in one of



these *Condos* won't be poisoned by their surroundings or find their coffee table floating on the surface. But problems remain.

Despite extensive publicity in *New York*

magazine, *Life* and via television here and overseas, Skaggs hasn't been able to make the leap from handmade prototype to mass-produced *Condos*, which he estimates could be retailed for \$100 a unit, or less.

While his search for capital continues, Skaggs remains willing (if less than eager) to build handmade condos for those whose sense of aquatic humor is matched by their bankrolls. We think this charming goof deserves a mass market, too. Part of the problem, according to Skaggs, is that his amusing invention falls between market segments. Toy manufacturers, for the most part, have no experience or knowledge of the home aquarium market, while the aquarium industry and related businesses are "still thinking in terms of 50 years ago." Maybe Skaggs should seek out the company that marketed those sea monkeys.—G.A.

