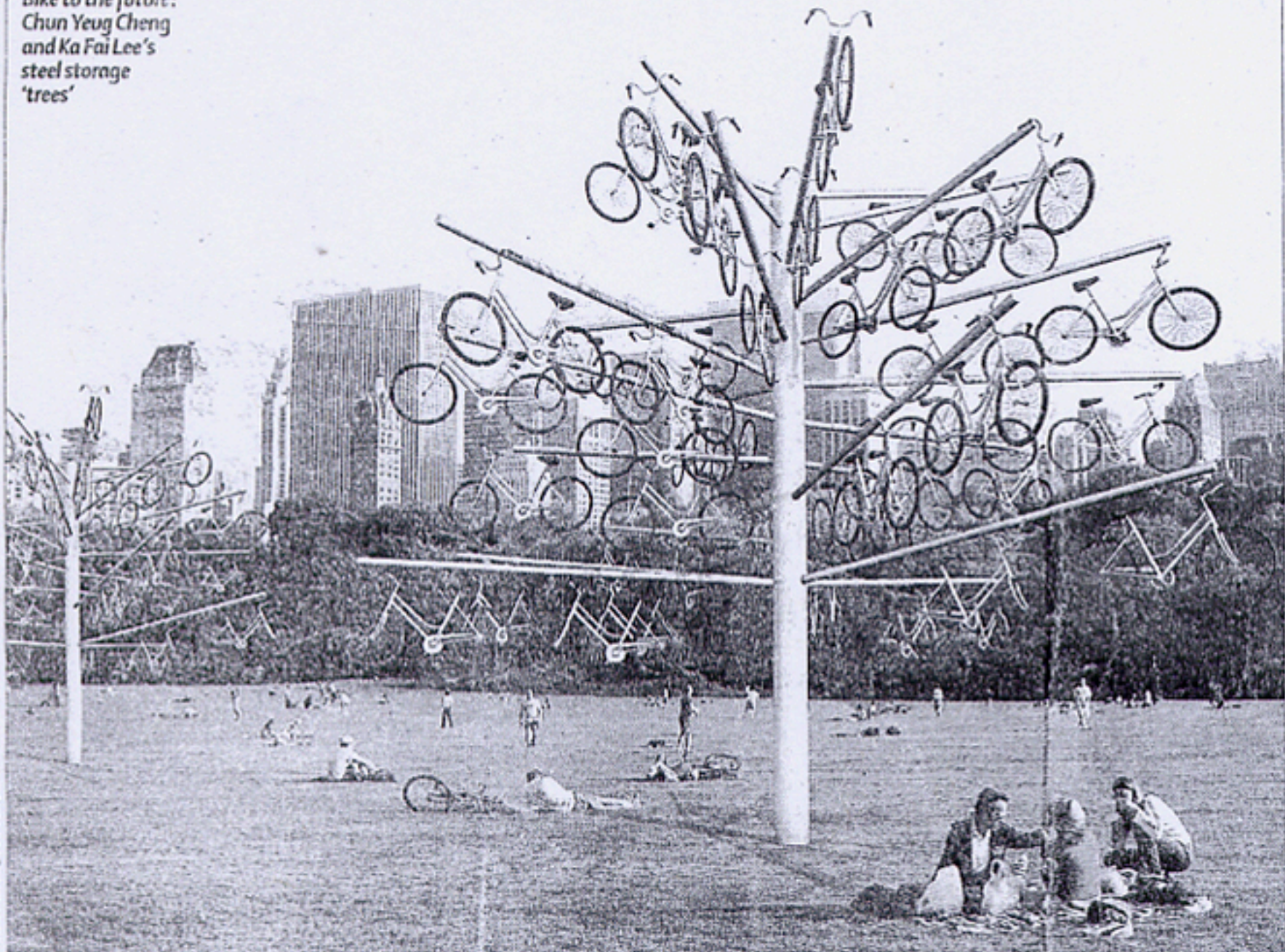


TELEGRAPH REVIEW / 21st October 2001

Saturday, October 21, 2001

 Let's all do a 'muni'
 Discover the unicycle that thinks it's a mountain bike – in today's Weekend

 Bike to the future:
 Chun Yeug Cheng
 and Ka Fai Lee's
 steel storage
 'trees'


Shed your preconceptions

 What happens when architects reinvent the bike shed? **Ellis Woodman** reports

The British are getting back on their bikes. In the past five years, the number of bicycle journeys being made in London each day rose by 50 per cent. But cycling to work in this country remains nothing short of an extreme sport, and if you do make it to your destination in one piece, you may still need to manhandle your bike up several flights of stairs if you don't want it to be pinched.

Next week sees the opening of an exhibition called *Reinventing the Bike Shed*, which offers some solutions. It presents the entries to an architectural competition which called for innovative and even beautiful ideas for storing bikes securely. The submissions ranged from the pragmatic to the Heath Robinsonian.

In the practical camp, there is Anthony Lau's Clamp-on Cyclehoop – a steel ring which can be bolted on to street signs and lamp posts, enabling bikes to be secured without the risk of them being lifted free. Chun Yeug Cheng and Ka Fai Lee propose hoisting bicycles into steel "trees", where they can serve as a decorative addition to the urban environment while hanging beyond the reach of the light-fingered.

Finally, staking out the far left-field, we have David Eburah's Placycle. His proposal would allow you to store your bike in its own inflatable pod. Tethered back to the ground by gas supply lines, the massed

THE VIEW FROM THE SADDLE

The Bike Shed Effect is a syndrome first identified by the noted academic C Northcote Parkinson in his groundbreaking *Parkinson's Law and Other Studies in Administration* (1957). He suggested that while it is easy to get planning permission to build an atomic power plant because no one knows the first thing about it – and so everyone assumes that someone else

has checked the plans – getting a bike shed built is virtually impossible because everybody knows something about bike sheds, and no one is afraid to chip in their ha'p'worth. For me the ideal bike shed is exposed and well-lit, but uncomfortable enough to discourage any malingers. It ought to have something against which to lock my bike that appears to have its base

buried in the earth's mantle. And I hate to think of my bike sitting out in the cold and wet. This is partly anthropomorphic – the poor thing! – and partly practical: a soggy saddle is just as disgusting as it sounds. So the ideal shed has to have a roof. More than that, as you can see from the entry above – well, there are as many opinions as cyclists.

Toby Clements

One proposal is to store bikes in an inflatable pod tethered by gas supply lines

Pods would build up into a triffid-like assembly.

Alongside the competition entries, the exhibition rounds up some of the best cycle storage structures from around the world. Unsurprisingly, it is the Dutch who lead the field. The building that is surely the Taj Mahal of bike sheds is the work of architects VMX and stands outside Central Station in Amsterdam. It was built in 2001 as a temporary measure to deal with the fact that planned work on a new metro line was set to stop cyclists parking in the station's forecourt. While that work was ongoing, there weren't many places to put the building, prompting the radical decision

to construct it over a canal. Resembling a boat moored against the quay, essentially it is no more than a continuous ramp – finished in the same red asphalt used on Dutch cycle lanes – which tracks languidly back and forth until an epic 2,500 parking spaces are provided. However, the building is no behemoth: its steel structure has been honed to appear as lightweight as the most refined of racing bikes. It comes down after the works to the station are completed next year.

While we can safely assume that inflatable triffids won't be drifting over British pavements any time soon, a couple of manufacturers are assessing the competition entries to see if any have the makings of a commercially viable product. It is to be hoped that they do. For all the recent uptake in bicycle use, the UK is still among the most cycle-shy nations in Europe: only two per cent of our journeys are made by bike, compared with 27 per cent in the Netherlands. Major investment will be required if more of us are to be persuaded of the joys of two-wheeled travel. But, as this exhibition makes clear, laying on the odd bike shed might not be a bad place to start.

✦ *Reinventing the Bike Shed* is at the Building Centre, London WC1 (020 7692 4000), from October 30. Ellis Woodman is buildings editor of *Building Design*.