

By Theresa Agovino



Silicon Village

Architectural-software firm Graphisoft got its start in an attic in communist Hungary. Now the maker of ArchiCAD has a more fitting home—Graphisoft Park, Budapest's first office complex.

When Gábor Bojár started his 3-D modeling software company in 1982, Hungary was still a communist country and resources were scarce. Today Graphisoft has offices in Munich and San Francisco and recently constructed a technology office park to house its new headquarters (right) in Budapest.



Photographed by Mark Milstein

Seventeen-year-old personal computers are just not as quaint as other obsolete technologies, such as rotary phones or manual typewriters. A case in point is the 1983 Apple Lisa in the lobby of Graphisoft headquarters, in Budapest. It looks downright ancient sitting in the modern, two-year-old office along with an expansive mural made of Murano glass, soaring skylights, and sleek blue-and-gray decor. But the architecture of this office complex is inspired by that of Japan, where the elderly are respected. Although it may look stodgy now, in its day the pre-Macintosh Lisa was so cutting edge that it was forbidden to import it into the then-communist Eastern Bloc. Graphisoft's founder, president, and chief executive, Gábor Bojár, had to smuggle the computer into Hungary in the trunk of his car. That illicit act was crucial in creating what is now a \$26 million firm—one of the most successful companies in formerly communist Europe and a leading maker of three-dimensional architectural software.

Graphisoft's Lisa housed the first version of ArchiCAD, the company's flagship product, which is now the electronic pen and pencil for more than 75,000 architects in 80 countries—not bad considering the major competition is California giant Autodesk, with annual revenues of \$820 million. "I like to look at the computer," says Bojár, a jovial, bearded, and balding 51-

year-old. "I'm very proud of it and what it has led to." It's only fitting that the computer that launched the company should rest in a place of honor in Graphisoft Park, an 18-acre testimony to the company's success overlooking the Danube River: the complex's six existing buildings, as well as three currently under construction, were all designed with ArchiCAD. The office park houses several software companies, including IBM and Microsoft, a juxtaposition that Bojár hopes will one day be as vital to the growth of Hungary's high-tech industry as the Lisa was almost two decades ago.

Bojár decided to build a corporate park five years ago, when he was planning to add an extension onto Graphisoft's then headquarters, a three-story villa in a residential neighborhood. But even before the addition was built Bojár knew Graphisoft would outgrow it almost immediately. "One of the architects said to me, 'If your investors come here to see limited space, they might think the company has limited growth,'" Bojár recalls. He canceled the plan and started to look for a larger space. He was on the verge of buying a building in downtown Budapest when he remembered visiting a corporate park in London that housed Apple and several other technology companies. "I thought, 'We have the money—let's do that here,'" he says.



Graphisoft Park was the first business complex in Budapest, where old warehouses are a more typical home for growing companies. Its large windows, spacious offices, and outdoor common areas make Graphisoft one of the city's best working environments.

to the entire area of the company's original office in Bojár's attic.

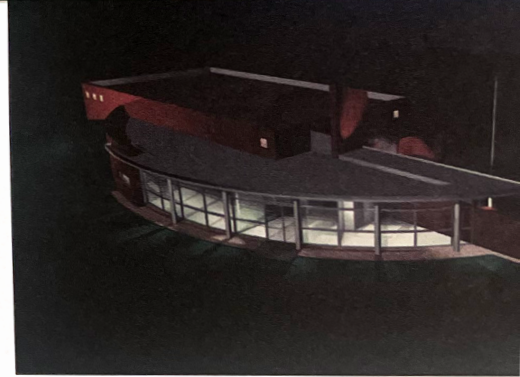
mind-set. Now there is a second corporate park on the bank of the Danube, and the old shipyard buildings that have become popular with creative firms, such as advertising agencies, are being renovated to draw more mainstream tenants.

"Over the last few years companies are realizing a comfortable and healthy workplace is important," says Gyöngyi Bakonyi, editor of *OFFICE* magazine. "But some of the best furniture and lighting is still very expensive for Hungarian companies. Much of what companies do is dependent on their philosophy and budget."

Still, limitations aren't what they were in 1982, when Bojár started the company in his attic. He and his employees didn't mind the cramped space; they were simply thrilled by the challenge of embarking on a private, money-making venture in communist Hungary. Graphisoft still provides stimulating work, but today it is enhanced with comfortable interiors by the firm Tér Eptész Múterem, which also designed two of the complex's other buildings. Each of Graphisoft's 187 employees has 108 square feet of space—equal to the entire space of the now-abandoned attic. The huge windows at Graphisoft not only let in lots of natural light but provide programmers with a soothing view of the Danube. The blue-and-green, geometric-patterned carpets—custom made for Graphisoft—are designed to be a calming influence. The hallways and stairwell land-

ing have been made wide enough to give employees space to chat. Management hopes that in addition to discussing their respective holidays, they might also talk about work and spark some innovative ideas. When employees return to their desks, they sit on \$1,000 ergonomically correct Vitra chairs designed by Antonio Citterio. "I like working here; it's a nice atmosphere," says Ádám Korbuly, a 26-year-old software engineer. "I work 10 hours a day, but it doesn't feel like I'm here 10 hours."

Bojár says enticing people to join Graphisoft was easier when Hungary was a communist country, because there were so few other enterprises that provided employees with a challenge. In 1982 Bojár was working as a programmer at Budapest's Geophysical Institute, where he created a three-dimensional software program to illustrate the earth's layers and locate natural resources like oil and coal. His ingenuity gained him a small monetary reward and the disdain of his colleagues. "Communism kills innovation," says Bojár. "You're supposed to *continued on page 131*



All the buildings of Graphisoft Park (top) were designed with ArchiCAD, the architectural software program that made Graphisoft a success. A recent addition is the company's production department (above), designed by András Vikár.