

TALKING TO HOUSES

Introduction by Carol Bishop

People go in and out of buildings all day, but how much do they know about architecture? Think about your relationship to buildings. Are you friends with your house or any other building? Do you speak with them?

TALKING TO HOUSES provides tools so anyone can decipher the world of architecture. Readers become house adventurers, historians, archeologists, and connoisseurs. They begin to “talk” with houses.

TALKING TO HOUSES is written in accessible language, with insights into the history and styles of buildings. It demystifies the people, places and things that contribute to the creation of buildings. You'll get acquainted with both the architectural design processes and the language of buildings. By entering the world of architecture, conversations will flourish, not only with your own house, but also with every building you encounter.

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Chapter 1

TALKING TO HOUSES

"Home Sweet Home" - John Howard Payne

TALKING TO HOUSES

In the early part of the twentieth century, hundreds of brick bungalows were erected on Chicago's South Side to house the families of industrial workers. Block after block of small, efficient structures gave rise to neighborhoods fanning out from the city center to the edges of the suburbs. These enclaves became the homes for numerous first, second and third generation families: Italians, Poles, Irish, Spanish, Lithuanians, Czechs, Germans and all who came to seek a new life. The inhabitants, both American and foreign born, settled in mid-America to work in nearby factories.

The first house I grew up in was a brick bungalow in the Chicago Lawn district (while living in Chicago for almost thirty years, I never heard any resident

call their house, “a bungalow,” they simply referred to their home as “my house.”) Those single-family, one story, or occasional two-flat dwellings were similar to each other except for slight differences in brick patterns, window shapes, front porches and landscaping. Such details provided a sense of originality and a point of pride. Individual beautification projects were the center of friendly competitions as families planted rows of bright flowers, erected statues of their favorite saints, painted house trim in contrasting colors, and hung elaborate holiday decorations.

Very few new ideas about home decorations were tried, but once in a while someone broke into new territory; like when a newly arrived family of Italians covered their house with green, glassy tiles. We were certain they brought a treasure from the Old Country. Our street was on the rise!

All the bungalows were relatively small with two or three bedrooms, one or two bathrooms. Each was equipped with a large basement and attic running the length of the structure; some of these spaces became extra bedrooms or “rumpus rooms” - areas we now call great rooms or spaces we make into home offices. Garages played an important role. Besides sheltering the family car, they acted as the dining rooms for summer Sunday get-togethers. Bad weather never stopped a potluck or barbeque because, sun or storm, the food tables were set up in the garage. No matter what additions or extra rooms were added to these buildings, every one of the structures fit into the overall plan of the street.

Our home was a “Georgian Style” bungalow. Not very different than all the other houses on the block, but our bedrooms and bathroom were upstairs instead of on the main floor. I still recall hours of play in the cool basement of that

first house, especially on humid and hot summer days. The huge, empty lot next door, “the prairie,” was the meeting spot where the neighborhood kids established headquarters for building cardboard forts and playing team games, like jump rope or red rover. The unpaved cinder alley behind our block sprouted rows of wild hollyhocks; the youngsters enlisted the tall vines as hiding places for hide-and-seek. The teenagers had other ideas; they set up body shops in the alley behind the backyards. They blared loud rock and roll music, washed their hotrod cars, and snuck lots of beer. At night families gathered on the front porches to catch up with neighbors and watch the kids catch fireflies in glass jars. Until I went to elementary school, this neighborhood was my safe, happy world.

When I was six years old, my father drove the family about a mile away to look at a house for sale. To my child’s eyes, not much about that house looked any different compared to our current home, except this bungalow had darker bricks and a bigger tree in front. The main attraction for my parents was that all the living spaces were clustered on the first floor. Another selling point was that unlike our home, that house had two bathrooms instead of our single one. Mama took one look inside and announced we were moving. I cried to think about leaving my friends, my room, my yard and my home. No tears or tantrums changed her mind. Mama insisted this new place was better for all of us. Her simple and final explanation was the house “spoke” to her.

I doubt that my mother’s comment was to supposed be taken literally, but back then I questioned if she really heard the house speaking. “Silly Mama,” I thought, “houses can’t talk.” Or if they could, why wasn’t the house saying

anything to me?" I couldn't stop wondering if this strange new place might be part of a magical world, or worse, a haunted house.

DRAWING OF BUNGALOW

Soon we moved into the other bungalow. I hoped this new home would have the power to speak to me just as it spoke to Mama. This childish quest challenged me to adjust to the new surroundings. I explored the house's interior; I searched every room including the garage, the attic and the basement, all the while whispering greetings as I entered each space. I studied and watched for any movement from both inside and outside the house. I walked down the new street with curiosity and wonder. Eventually, after inspecting every inch of the house, going up and down the surrounding streets, meeting new neighbors and finding new friends, I began to love that building and neighborhood just as much as the first one. But still it seemed as if it would take forever to find what I wanted most - I waited and waited to hear the house talk to me. And finally it did!

For a long time now I've been talking to buildings and listening to what they say. Like most people I spend my life constantly going in and out of structures. Whether it was the determination to hear my childhood house talk, or if I simply picked up the language of architecture by taking the time to learn it, I found I could speak in the tongue of buildings. When I began to speak to them, the buildings listened and talked back. In our conversations they shared their personal histories and adventures; they included me in their lives. Today I still have conversations: the houses tell secrets about the world of architecture and the humans who use buildings. This has made life richer, deeper and more

sensual. Anyone can learn to talk to houses and hear what they have to say. Since you spend so much time with buildings, why not learn more about the places around you and listen to what they want to tell you?

This book provides steps for learning the language of architecture. I'm not talking about simply learning a vocabulary; you'll develop friendships with places and communicate with them. You'll get to explore buildings, empower your feelings, decode the structures and styles of houses, and sharpen your thinking about architecture. Soon, you'll be talking to houses.

Chapter 2

WHY TALK TO HOUSES

"We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." - Winston Churchill

WHY TALK TO HOUSES

If a talking house seems like a child's fantasy, or the way a character out of a Disney film acts, recall your own experiences with buildings. Have you ever heard a building call out to you? If the answer is no and you deny that it's ever happened, it's possible houses have been jabbering at you but you haven't heard them. Because houses are viewed as "objects without voices," it sounds silly to believe they can talk. Unknowingly you've just been resisting their voices. It's a misguided presumption that buildings can't speak. They can and do.

Unfortunately, buildings are categorized as service providers, not conversationalists, yet considering the sheer number of hours you spend in and around architecture, your interactions with buildings will be more rewarding if you take the time to open yourself up to their language. New feelings and ideas flow once you start treating them as individuals. Soon you'll be sharing conversations with all kinds of architecture.

The search for shelters to accommodate life's undertakings has been going on since humans climbed out of the trees. From the beginning of existence, structures have supplied our basic needs; they've sworn their duty to support domestic, professional, educational, entertainment and work-related activities, including an extraordinary range of human goings-on too numerous to list. Buildings are essential for survival; learning how to use and embrace architecture is a requirement for living on the planet. However, while we need shells to cover us for all our pursuits, there's more to the story of architecture than its ability to keep us warm and dry.

Recollect the buildings you've been in contact with today. Besides the structures you've entered, how many have you breezed by, biked around, walked near? Which ones caught your attention through the windows of a car, train, or bus? How many houses did you view close up, or notice in the distance? Which buildings passed through your thoughts, entered your dreams, or popped up in memories? You've seen houses grouped together in neighborhoods, rise up in the landscape, stand isolated on lonely roads, provide protection from the elements, and service people in all human pursuits. But how attuned are you to

the presence of buildings? Did you stop and reflect on those places or set up a relationship with any of them? Did you respond to their whims, answer their whispers, or touch them? Did you *talk* with any houses?

Decoding architecture, knowing how it works, and engaging its vitality opens pathways into the meanings and messages of both *buildings and human beings*. Within a building lies a discourse with the people who commissioned, designed, built, and used that structure. This includes your contributions to the buildings you've used. Every time you enter a space you insert your own role into the narrative of that place, your story gets embedded into the wood, plastic, bricks and plaster. If you make the effort to know the essentials of architecture and learn to speak with houses, your thought processes and senses become heightened and you're given entrance to the excitement and knowledge that houses possess. Buildings are inviting you to join in on their parties.

To talk to architecture, resist treating buildings as mere utilities. Think of architecture as a source of energy with each place having a distinct nature. The first step begins with refocusing. When you see a structure, bypass the usual description of the building, such as "the bank," "the office," "the café" or "the house." These are words that simply denote a building's assigned function. Such titles are branded into the structures to communicate the main job they were built to carry out. Designations also help to make sure people enter the "correct" place. Since we don't always listen to buildings, we just go on automatic pilot. We've all missed the "correct" place we were headed towards, such as ending up in a café when we really needed the hair salon, a bar instead of a church. Those

were times we just weren't listening.

Instead of pinpointing how a building is supposed to be used, try to imagine an alternative. See who or what the house reminds you of; identify something unique. The shape, color, style or some unusual part of a house will start some creative thinking. Conjure up a new description that labels more possibilities than its functional role, such as "this residence is like a sculpture, or this skyscraper is like a mountain, or this house looks like my mother-in-law." Or think, "This home will listen to my dreams," or "I can share my day with this place."

By rethinking the role of a building and putting it into a new context, you're refocusing the way to categorize a building's "meaning." Suddenly you get a glimpse of the character of that place in a fresh way. It may not be what that architecture was built for, but instead of mere function, this approach produces an inventive viewpoint. Buildings are as varied in purpose and personality traits as any living species. To talk with houses, you have to acknowledge that architecture can be functional but also art or poetry; it can act as our enemy or buddy, or it can show good or bad qualities. Later in this book, we'll review their numerous identities as we get to know individual places.

A building's exterior sends messages out to all who pass by. Consider your own house. It has a distinct personality and you constantly respond to its character by noticing the elements it throws out at you. You might think of your house as a quiet little mouse or an aggressive bull. Or you envision it as a big brother, or little friend. This personification may be a natural outgrowth of the way

it looks, or you might be laying on some symbolism culled from your relationship to its constant presence. Either way it helps “anthropomorphize” your place - giving it human qualities that help you respond to its personality.

But it's the interior of a house that really reveals a home's personality. Everyone's domicile is a storage site of objects, ideas and feelings. Your house is a vault holding numerous riches - exciting valuables piled up like the treasures in King Tut's tomb. This stuff will be the source of many discussions between both of you once you decipher the way they interact with you and the house.

My house is over a hundred years old and it flaunts itself as a Sage. Like a shrewd old Shaman, it speaks about many wise things. Besides sharing numerous revelations about love and life, the house has a streak of wanderlust. It travels around multiple eras like a time machine. In addition to its protective role, the house tells me amazing secrets that cause me to reflect on the beauty and pleasures of life; it constantly points out things I never would have noticed on my own.

My house has led me to discover fascinating clues about how humans lived in bygone eras; I track the building materials previous residents preferred, such a wood and brick, the color palettes of soft ochers and subtle greens (probably lead-based,) strange labyrinths of heating pipes with their handles and turn keys jutting out from the walls like little steam-punk machines. I know that in 1912 people had smaller storerooms and fewer possessions (at least less clothing than most people own today, as evidenced by the miniscule closets.) Bathrooms were tiny, while kitchens were both efficient and plain. There was no

need for air conditioning; the windows were positioned to catch the breezes through the olive trees lining the front yard. The house talks to me about the main room where families huddled around the fireplace on chilly winter evenings to watch the flames dancing and where they watched their fantasies waltzing over the embers of the fire. I can imagine those ancient residents greeting neighbors at dusk as they gathered on the wide exterior porch to watch the sun set across the purple California Mountains.

Drawing of My House

During one mini renovation on my house, the Sage directed me to a precious object - an old book of poems by Emerson. A young girl named Emily hid it in the walls. I'm guessing she was in her late teens. Emily lived in the house around 1917. In her book, Emily wrote a boy's name after each poem, marking which one best fit the poem's subject. Why was it hidden, Emily? Were you in love with William or David? Did you eventually marry one of these men? Do you mind that the house told me where to find your little love diary?

While my Sage constantly exposes riches that are clues to a lost way of life, it also discusses problems such as rickety plumbing, flimsy lathe and plaster walls - perfect for mice nests. It points to constant electrical glitches. Crevices open and cracks appear overnight. But all houses need care, so of course the buildings whine about the chores we should be doing. I listen and agree. But it's our other conversations that really interest me.

Beyond talking about its gifts and problems, my Sage helps me time-travel to another world. Comparing and contrasting human activities from the past to

the present, I'm forced to think about what was successful for everyday living at the first part of the twentieth century and what works now. I'm given a wide glimpse into what it is and what it was to be a human living in this place.

New or old, your house has much to share and lots to discuss. Allow your house to be a magician, pulling back its cape to reveal its hidden secrets. Or, like me, use your place as a time device; hang on as your house takes you on its adventures through space and time. You can travel to meet the people who lived or worked in your house, those who designed it, or helped bring life to the building. And at bedtime, as you slip off to sleep, listen closely as your house whispers "goodnight."

Chapter 3

FIRST WORDS

First Words

"Find a place you trust and start trusting it for a while."

- Corita Kent, Immaculate Heart College Art Department Rules

FIRST WORDS

When I'm in a theatre and people are yelling up at the screen, it reminds me of when we went to the movies as kids. We thought film characters were real-life people, even in cartoons. We screamed warnings out loud, cautioning the

hero of oncoming dangers. “Watch out Batman!” “Look out!” “The murderer is behind you!”

Youngsters talk to invisible friends, dolls, teddy bears and action figures. When we grow up, we forget about our guardian angels and the monsters under the bed, so we substitute other beings to share our conversations. Humans say goodnight to the moon, speak to the stars and make wishes out loud. These verbal exchanges can be applied to houses too. If people talk to animals and plants, ghosts and aliens, Siri, Alexa and cars, it’s just as logical to talk to architecture.

Drawing ?

Begin by talking to your own house. Stop and say “hi” out loud when you enter the building and “goodbye” when you leave. Look directly at your place and speak up. Those few focused interactions are moments where communication begins. Use your main exit door as the first practice stop, and afterwards try your greetings at different vantage points. Give a hello at the side door, entering the garage, and at the window. Do the same for your farewells. Turn back, look at the house directly and say “bye.” Keep your voice loud and clear. Compare the way it feels when you talk to your house at the various locations and decide where a “conversation spot” is most comfortable.

Don’t worry if your neighbors overhear you saying “hi” and “bye” to your house. It doesn’t matter if eavesdroppers think you’re crazy. Usually, it appears that you’re talking to someone on the other side of the door. However, should someone witness your discussion up close, and see, that in fact you are

speaking with a building, smile and explain you are chanting a mantra in a deep meditation. You'll actually find this to be true. When you stop and take time to concentrate on a building, those few minutes are a meditation between you and architecture.

When we speak to people, we call them by name. If you haven't bestowed a title or moniker on your home, now is the time. Pick a human one, like Bob or Sue, or use an animal designation like King, or Fuzzy, or Muff-puff. Pretend it's a ranch, like the Lazy Lasso, or the Redwood Farm. It's just like baptizing a new pet or child. A name gives your house an identity.

My ongoing venture, *The House/home Project* (1) tracks the relationships people have with their homes. When subjects were asked if they respond verbally to their houses, with a "hi" upon arrival, very few say yes. It's not a surprise. Talking to buildings sounds irrational. Yet those who address their homes say that they love them; they respond that it's a pleasure to go inside their own space. Reacting to your house as a personality, instead of a box that holds possessions sets up an intimacy that feels very positive, especially when you return home. Whenever you leave or enter a place, no matter how rushed you are, always offer greetings. It's one step towards talking with houses.

Chapter 4

FRIENDSHIP

"Friendship is always a sweet responsibility, never an opportunity."
- Khahil Gibran

FRIENDSHIP

Who's your best friend, the one who protects and stands by you? Who listens patiently when you're complaining about your problems, or sympathizes when you're throwing tantrums? Who shares both your happiness and your sorrow, never criticizes, nor makes demands? Who's there for you no matter what comes your way? No, it's not your spouse, nor lover, not mommy or daddy, not your high school buddy, and no, not even your loyal pet. It's definitely not the cat. Your best friend is your home.

The place you inhabit might be a mansion, a boat, a RV, or a tent. You could be living in a huge estate or a tiny shack. Whatever structure you call home, it's that apartment or house, that hovel or castle who is your most faithful ally. But how often do you speak with this loyal friend? Working on a close relationship with your dwelling is essential for talking with architecture. Your own home is the best place for practicing communication since this is the building that provides your shelter and gazes into your face every day. At first your house probably won't do much talking, but don't give up. We all have human friends that aren't big talkers either. Soon enough there will be real conversations between you.

The reasons for choosing domestic habitats are as varied and complex as the bonds you've formed with human friends. Those hours we put into making successful friendships can produce lasting ties. Put in the time to make friends with your house too. Once you establish a potentially intimate understanding of your environment, you'll not only learn more about its unique personality, you'll be able to approach other buildings in hopes they'll also become your acquaintances.

Let's look at how friendships develop. Whether it's human companionship, getting a pet, or choosing your house buddies, the process is similar. Developing friendships can be great experiences, or worse, a lot of wasted time. The key word here is developing. It takes work not only to start a relationship with architecture, but also to maintain it just as with people and animals.

Generally, friendships are built on shared community, culture, beliefs, family ties or other familiarities. Researchers document that people tend to be friends with individuals who see the world in a similar way. (1) Since we don't share the genetic makeup of buildings, and buildings don't immediately reveal their likes and dislikes, you'll have to find other ways to create links to strengthen a friendship with your house.

Consider why you first connected to your domicile. Recall how you selected your current living space - was it "love at first sight" or a longer procedure of "getting to know you." People end up in places because of responsibilities, location, economics, and for millions of other reasons. Perhaps you chose your dwelling because it was the only apartment that allowed dogs, or

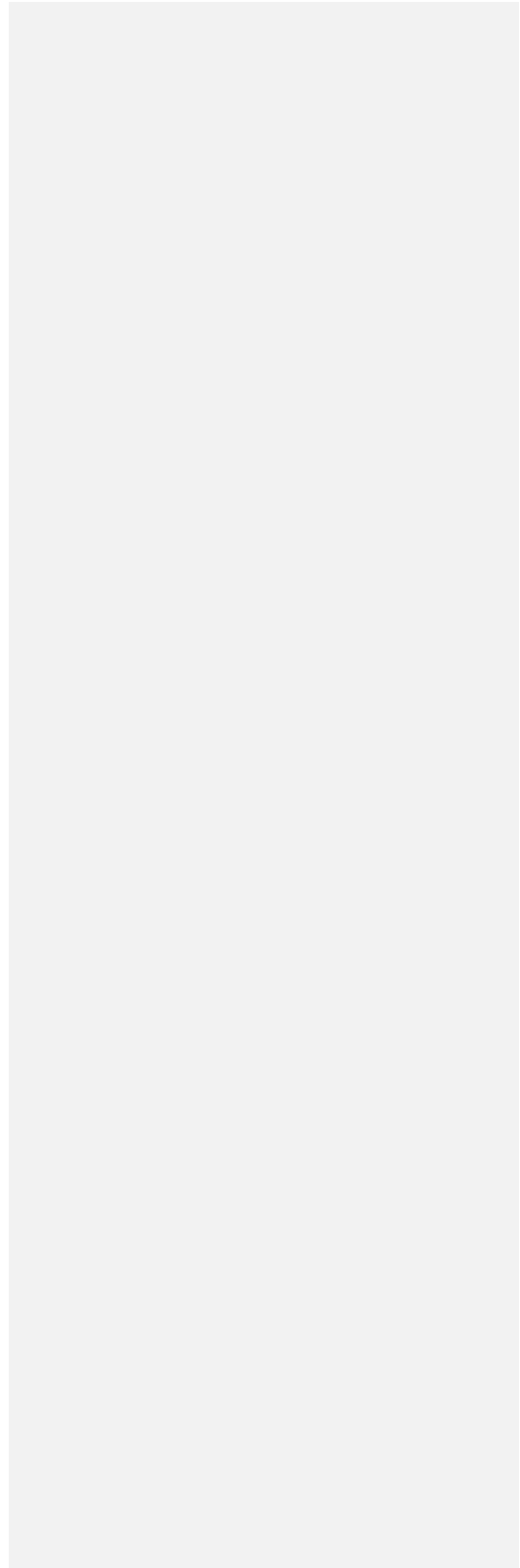
you inherited a lavish mansion from your rich uncle. Maybe you bought a beachfront condo because you love the sea, or you found a place that was close to work or near to family. Was it the huge kitchen, a beautiful setting, or the fulfillment of a long-nurtured dream of big closets? Often, it's a question of economics. Did you have to move back in with Mom and Dad? You could be in a house as a result of an intense search, practical considerations, or purely by chance. Whether you live in your car, loft, van, penthouse or castle, it's essential to develop an intentional friendship with that place.

Like most folks, I sometimes think about moving. People get tired of their houses, neighbors and neighborhoods. Crowds, traffic congestion, rent raises, new opportunities, or just a bad case of "possibility" – some intense desire to see new places. There are many reasons why we're tempted to try something else. We look at the houses for sale when traveling and check out the real estate ads in our towns. At Sunday open houses we pretend to be serious buyers instead of nosy looky-loos. Friends seduce us by saying, "Come, Wisconsin has so many job openings." Or you hear, "Move back here to be with your family," (wherever home once was.) or "Go with me to the Big Apple where all the action is." Or "Now's the time to live in Paris!" It seems everyone has advice for where others would be better off. These ideas are seductive but it's your life and your house.

Once a small efficient house seduced me. It was close to my job and would be easier to maintain than the place I was living in at the time. I actually purchased the house, but never moved in. Even with neighborhood deterioration and hungry termites devouring my floors, I couldn't give up the contentment of

my little, old wooden house. It had become a good friend. Someday I might have an opportunity that I can't pass up. It might require leaving my town for a different place with no options for keeping my current home. No matter, like some school pal I'll never see again, I know my Los Angeles house will be my friend forever. The important thing is not only to make friends with whatever place you live in, but also figure out why you reside there. The buildings that draw us in will be the ones we can talk with first. Whatever or wherever you call home, your own place is the best building for learning how to speak with houses. And this will be easier if you are friends.

Drawing-Making Friends with famous building



Chapter 5

SAFETY

“The Ache for home lies in all of us, the safe place we can go as we are and not be questioned.” - Maya Angelou

SAFETY

No matter what relationships you develop with architecture, Safety should be a top concern. In your daily encounters with buildings, do you ask yourself, “Am I safe in the structure I just entered?”

Protection is the decisive role for architecture. When any building is created, hopefully Safety is a top priority. Demanding protection from buildings is based on our ingrained human survival instinct and just common sense. Even if a house is beautiful, functional, entertaining or sweet, we have to factor in our personal security and seek environments that shield us from danger. Most houses step up to the task of guarding humans, but there are always exceptions and unavoidable problems that leave the buildings, and we the users, vulnerable to hazards.

Buildings can be victims of falling roofs, disintegrating walls, earthquake devastation, tsunami destruction, and other natural and human-made terrors. These are real and present dangers not only to the structures, but also to the humans that use them. While the word “danger” sounds extreme, Psychology (1) tells us that when looking at a building, entering a room, walking into a structure, or physically going in any environment, we depend on our basic instincts to avoid

risks. Unconsciously our eyes sweep over a place to alert us whether or not there might be a threat ahead. You've probably run into a scary situation, a dark shadow, a chaotic pile of junk, an unfamiliar object, or fuzzy silhouettes – things that raise the hair on our arms and send warning signals directly to our nerve endings. If the menace persists and we can't identify the source, we run. And when there isn't enough time to flee, we become paralyzed in a state of panic. This leads to us becoming fatalities of terrible events. (Think about the exploding volcano, Mt. Vesuvius, when in 79 C.E. it's gas and lava covered ancient Pompeii so quickly that few people escaped.)

Some of the time it's easy to sense dangerous situations. Familiarity with a space generally clues us in on a building's warnings of unexpected hazards. If you're in a recognizable situation, like your own yard or home's interior, you just somehow feel when things are out of place - instinct tells you if anything's abnormal. This might seem like "psychic" power, but it's actually your long involvement with a house that's trained you to "feel" or "read" irregularities. The house is telling you something is wrong. Time and experience hone the ability to catch most problems.

But there will be situations when danger appears out of nowhere. Earthquakes, storms, floods, any number of perilous circumstances can attack quickly without warning. If your house is a friend, it will tip you off and you'll know when to stay or when to leave if possible.

Sometimes danger is about the actions of the building, other times it's about people connected to the place. With certain houses wicked reputations

seem to expand like high school gossip. The actions of the people who currently live in such a house, or were previously part of the home's past might have created an ominous narrative. No one wants to live in, or even enter a place with a bad history; real estate agents have trouble selling the house where a dead body was discovered.

For youngsters, every neighborhood has a "haunted house" or "witch's cottage." Films glorify stories of creepy encounters with architecture where people are trapped inside a horrible house and there's no escape. Newspapers can't resist printing a juicy story about some poor structure acting as partner to a serial killer, or providing a hiding place for terrorists. Because buildings have personalities, menacing tales are blamed on the structures instead of the humans who commit evil deeds inside of them.

If you have an interest in a questionable home that was the site of murder or mayhem, you can amuse yourself as an amateur detective by trying to solve the back-story of the crime. Or just flee from that weirdo house as fast as you can. The building might not be a physical hazard, but emotionally it might be treacherous.

Dangers can't always be prevented: houses, like people, succumb to random disasters. As a youngster I saw up close that unavoidable destruction sometimes happens without warning. When I was about thirteen, an airplane crashed on my street. I can't let go of the images of the fire sweeping across the neighborhood, destroying homes, one after the other. By nightfall, I witnessed beautiful apartments and wonderful houses descend into charred black ruins. Nor

can I forget the terrible lingering odors of the burnt architecture and the prized possessions that make up life which were inside these places. In my memories those houses, ravaged and in debris, come back to haunt me. Now when I'm near a house that has a smell of fire, whether it's someone igniting a fireplace, or a family barbequing in the yard, it sets off my panic alarm. Logically I know the fire smells are probably not related to a burning home, and that the fire stench is personal to my own past experience. Nevertheless, I get scared anyway. The main idea is not to blame any burned house with its horrible odors for something that it isn't responsible for.

You'll figure out very quickly if there's a perilous situation in your home's environment. There are numerous actions we can do to protect the house and ourselves if there's trouble. Take the time to diffuse the risks. Some chores, like fixing plumbing leaks, cutting the grass, patching the roof, etc. are obvious, but maybe not immediate emergencies. But if your home constantly reflects on its bad wiring or rotting structure, or if it whines that it hasn't been checked for earthquake readiness or bolted to its foundation, listen to it and make some changes.

Mt. vesuvius

It's important to check for the exit sign in every airplane, every school, every public building and every structure you enter. Figure out the escape routes from your own home and the places you use inside and outside. If you feel safe, you'll learn to trust architecture.

Chapter 6

JUDGMENTS

“Experience never errs; it is only your judgments that err by promising themselves effects such as are not caused by your experiments.”

- Leonardo da Vinci

JUDGMENTS

You won't be interested in every building you run into. Some places will attract you and others will turn you off. Intense reactions arise instantaneously when you encounter architecture, so it's only fair to investigate the sources of your positive and negative judgments. By identifying how your biases come into play, you'll be able to open up yourself to houses that at first seem really dreadful, but might not be so bad once you become more familiar with them.

The lightning-fast reaction that flares up every time you meet a building usually goes one of three ways: 1. You immediately approve of it. 2. You quickly disapprove of it. 3. You dismiss any more interactions with the building (unless you're stuck using it, such as your office, school or residence.) All is O.K. if you approve of a place. However, if your response is number 2 or 3, and you rapidly dismiss or disapprove of the building, this could be translating into thinking it's a "good" or "bad" building. Often, you're not sure why you can't stand a place, but something about it creeps you out. If you can identify what's behind your reactions, you might have a change of heart about the architecture - especially if you're required to be in that structure for any length of time. Or more importantly if it's the place you call home.

When we rely on quick emotional reactions to events, it's called a Subjective Response. To talk to houses successfully includes mental analysis paired with heightened feelings; using a "Subjective Response," a viewpoint based on feelings alone, is perilous and destructive. This self-centered, emotional approach closes the door to an acceptance of buildings beyond that first feeling. The preferred tact is to use an Objective Response. This reaction means absorbing information, then balancing what you're feeling with a thoughtful evaluation. Looking at houses with objectivity provides time for analysis, peppered with feelings; it's the cooling off period to sort out hidden prejudices. When you feel uncomfortable with a building, be on guard for all the reactions that pop up. And no matter what, don't reject the structure outright. By developing ways to arrive at an Objective Response your experiences with a building provide the potential to allow that structure to disclose things that you haven't previously thought about, believed in or connected to emotionally.

The process of judging architecture is similar to the process of judging most visual things. Let's use an art example. When people look at one of Picasso's Cubist paintings, the response is often, "I don't get it." The jumbles of shapes are confusing. The puzzling information moving around the canvas increases rejection. When we can't figure out what's in front of us, we dismiss it. Taking that example further, if the Picasso painting has a title like, *Musician with Guitar*, the viewer becomes anxious; they can't find a musician, nor can they identify a guitar. The only legible things are a mouth here and an eye there, and mazes of lines and squares. Frustration sets in. Inevitably the viewer gets

defensive with remarks like, “this guy’s a scam artist” or “he paints like a six-year-old.” They reject a potentially positive experience by insisting, “it’s not art - I know what I like.” Or worse they exclaim, “I wouldn’t put that over my couch.”

These reactions are Subjective Responses. They’re reactions completely about me, me, and me. People unconsciously feel insecure and threatened about their lack of knowledge and inability to see anything concrete in the painting. Some background on Cubism would help, but if a viewer fails to become enlightened about the Cubist program, the art is completely dismissed as a fraud. A personal bias works as a protective comfort zone, but halts any deeper excavation into understanding the visual world.

People tend to use the same Subjective Response when dealing with architecture. Of course, no one thinks about hanging a house over his or her couch, nevertheless, they criticize too quickly. Unfortunately, some houses dredge up negative memories: a building could remind you of a place where you lived when you were in deep pain, or you encounter a house that’s identical to the place where the neighborhood bully laid in wait. All kinds of disasters might have occurred in a house where you spent some difficult times. Suddenly, looking at similar places, these buildings dig up all the submerged horrors lying dormant in your heart. Even if it’s not the exact house of your bad memories, but has a similar style or color, you transfer those repulsive feelings to any house that drums up dark recollections. Realizing these feelings are rooted in past experiences frees you to separate your negative reactions from acknowledging real potential in the home. You’ll attack the architecture with your “Subjective

Response.”

Taste is a big consideration when assessing architecture. We have strong preferences that are hard to break. If you love clean new structures, and come upon a house with a rustic patina (a surface coating made to look like a weathered antique) even if the designer’s intention was to create beautiful textured effects, it might appear to you like it’s just old and ugly. If you despise climbing stairs, possibly connecting to any two-story place is out of the question. Green painted houses might remind you of the Brussel sprouts you hated as a child (and still won’t eat.) Flashbacks of the architecture in our nightmares resurface because most bad activities in both our waking lives and dream states probably took place in a building.

Whenever you enter a building, a strong taste factor translates into an immediate Subjective Response. Maybe you’ve visited a friend’s house for the first time and your reaction was “Ugh!” “Eek” “Oh no!” because your preconceived idea of the kind of place they should live in instantly evaporated when you saw that the real environment wasn’t equal to your expectations. Many times, our projections are unrealistic. What about the hotel that looked so wonderful on-line, but was miserable in person? It’s a fantasy of your own making that led you to believe it would be perfect. Another common example is the “countryside myth”- the anticipation of a “back to nature ecstasy” as symbolized by a home in the country. But the real country experience could turn out to be a decrepit barn filled with mosquitos. Our daydreams may be beautiful, but reality doesn’t always fulfill those promises.

Let's say you come upon an ancient wood building with a big porch enclosed by a wild garden. You dislike the place right away. You have strong negative feelings, a strong Subjective Response, but can't figure out why. Take a minute to search out the source of your reaction. Was it too messy, or do you hate wood houses in general? Was it painted a color you can't stomach? Are you picking up an aroma (real or not) of ancient decay? When these feelings erupt, don't panic. Even if you don't come to any conclusions, at least you've stopped and engaged the building. This allows a moment to identify some of its saving graces. Of course, there are horrible, horrible houses, but sometimes negativity is our own problem and not any fault of the building. Don't feel you have to alter your taste, but at least give a house a fighting chance.

Sometimes the problem with a house is simply we don't have the background to understand it. Just like the example of misunderstanding the Cubist painting, some buildings are just incomprehensible. When we're too set in our ways, it's easy to ignore unfamiliar architecture. Using contemporary materials, creative designers have the power to make strange new shapes, add fresh variations and build odd structures. These places can be challenging, especially if your preferences move towards traditional architecture. But inevitably, it's the most unusual houses that will carry on the best conversations. When Frank Gehry designed the Guggenheim Art Museum in Bilbao, Spain, reactions ran the gamut from horror to obsessive love. The structure certainly was unusual for its time; slabs of metal were piled up and projected out, like an exploding deck of cards. Similar to the Guggenheim, many experimental

buildings stretch the conventions of how a building should look or function. When

I.M. Pei designed the Pyramide in the court of the Louvre in Paris, groups attempted to have him fired, and get his design thrown out. That Pyramide proved to be a structure of beauty and is now a monument that visitors adore.

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One of my favorite buildings, the Villa Savoye in Poissy, France is a perfect if perplexing example. Le Corbusier, a Swiss architect, designed it in the 1920's as a family residence. The house has a simple shape, an approach to design dictated by the International Style. This style pares back everything to a bare-bones minimum - it's a white rectangular box sitting on thin columns. There are strips of windows pulled across the space in a long continuous ribbon. A big curving tube rises from the roof. Sitting alone outside in the huge grassy yard, the house resembles a gigantic machine teetering on stilts. Ironically the architect referred to it as a machine for living.

The first time I visited this famous house, I anticipated seeing a masterpiece, but instead I was dumbfounded. As it turns out, many people share my experience. When I bring friends to see the Villa Savoye, inevitably the first reactions are negative because their Subjective Responses kick in. One friend insists the weird exterior looked like a huge kitchen appliance, a kind of mammoth food processor. Another claims its plain shape resembles a cheap, gargantuan, donut box. One describes it as a robot with a water tank for a hat. Shrugged shoulders, negative reactions and disbelief are common denominators at the first quick engagement with the Villa.

The interior surprises of the Villa Savoye don't let up either. There's a sink in the entrance near the front door. This water source doesn't share the usual role of a sink - it's placed far from both the bathroom and the kitchen; mysteriously it sits alone in the path to the main room. Moving into the central space are double pathways, one spiral staircase and one regular set of stairs going to the same second floor. And with all the space around the building's exterior, the garden is on the roof instead of in front or back of the structure, *like most houses*. These unusual quirks challenge the concept of where things in a house "belong."

Instant rejection of the Villa Savoye is a lesson for judging all challenging buildings. Its simplicity is alarming and its personality is mystifying, yet it's a pilgrimage stop for all who love architecture. (It's a designated World Heritage site and on the list of great houses that most architects want to visit.) As soon as it was built, an immense amount of publicity surrounded its innovations; it was fresh, new, and Modern. And its importance as a groundbreaking building continues today. But don't be misled that the hype surrounding the place implies glitter and buzz. Because it's an architectural celebrity, people buy into a distorted pre-visit myth about it. It's a big disappointment to arrive at this legendary house only to find a child's big, silly, white Lego toy. But neither photos, nor descriptions communicate why this house is special. It has to be seen in person and seen over some time. Let it speak. Then the magic begins.

The Villa Savoye is a shape-shifter. If you give it time, it reveals a kind of enchantment as you walk around it, position yourself in front of the entrance, and

look at its details. Going through the interior and walking around opens up a strange new spatial world. Depending on where you stand, either inside or outside, the light, sun, shadows and space transform the shapes and moves of the walls. What seems to be an empty volume suddenly fills with transparent colored light like an architectural kaleidoscope. The house dances slowly and gracefully as it changes shape. Moving through its rooms, you become part of its ballet.

Villa Savoye drawing

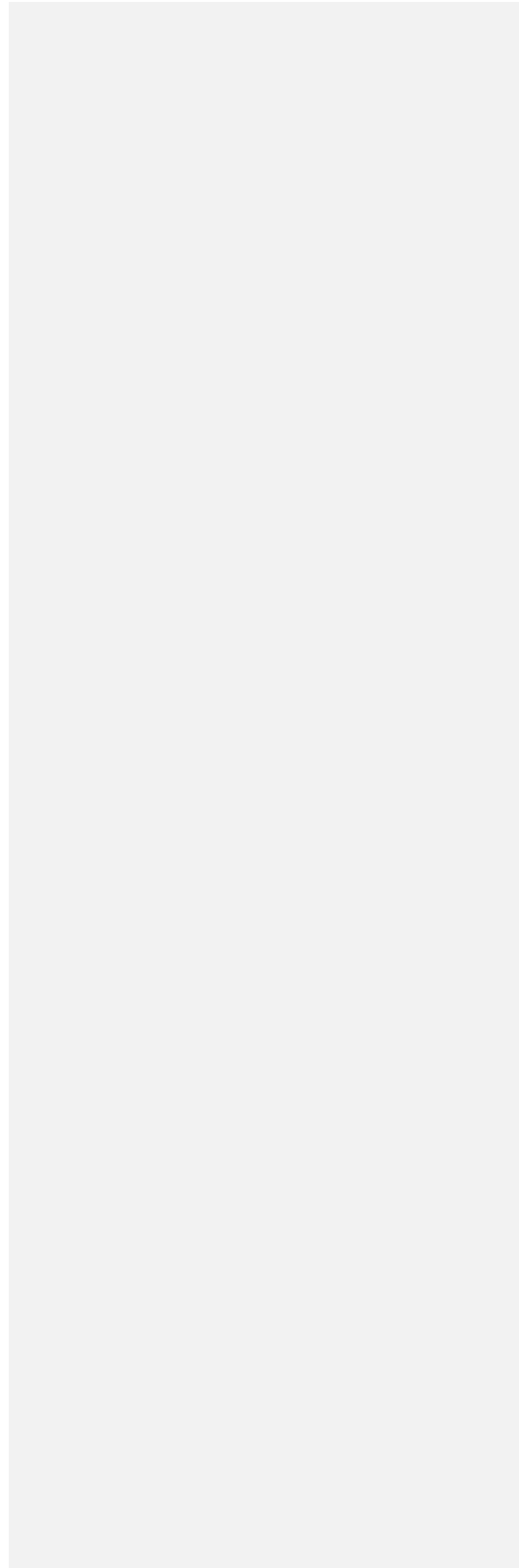
The Villa Savoye dilemma proves why a viewer needs to hold back on “Subjective Responses” and make an effort to add “Objective Responses” when judging architecture. Some people will end up disliking a house. But an open mind allows for a balance of thinking and feeling. Given some time, naysayers might recognize a house that’s truly amazing.

When I first visited the Villa Savoye, I expected a palace and got a brainteaser. I quickly realized that my biases towards houses, like those of many visitors, came too fast; they were too personal and out of whack. Now, if possible, I spend time with structures to weigh my feelings and thoughts before I condemn them; I leave all the pre-information in the back of my mind and establish an authentic face-to-face connection.

The best approach to both familiar and unfamiliar buildings is to blend your Objective Response and Subjective Response. First, allow the Subjective reaction of your own thoughts and feelings bubble up. Then take a breath and make an Objective analysis. And remember, “what you like” over “what the

building has to offer” is a bad choice. “What you like” is not necessarily going to give you information about the building’s structure, help you find its soul, nor provide a kinship with houses. Search to find what the building tells you.

1. Taylor, Jim Ph.D., Is Our Survival Instinct Failing Us? | Psychology Today
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the.../is-our-survival-instinct-failing-us>



Chapter 7

ARCHI-SPEAK

“There are no facts, only interpretations” – Friederich Neitzsche

ARCHI-SPEAK

To carry on house conversations, you'll need to brush up on architectural lingo. I call it archi-speak. This is the language used for discussing visual forms and provides a common tongue for speaking about and to buildings.

Understanding archi-speak gives you insights into architecture and provides the words to communicate your ideas to buildings. Once you master the visual mother tongue, you can easily decode a building's character, history and design. This archi-speak also clarifies what buildings say to you. In the following chapters we'll cover the specialized vocabulary of buildings, but we'll first start gathering basic information and look at the common phrases, as well as the necessary words to have at our fingertips for face-to-face experiences with houses.

Learning architecture language comes with some warnings. It might seem obvious to immerse yourself in texts and digital sources, just as if you were studying Spanish or French. But in the case of archi-speak, unlike cultural dialects, direct contact with buildings is essential. (You don't have to go to Spain or France before learning those languages, but with buildings it's best to have contact with buildings.) Interactions with houses, paired with research, strike the perfect balance.

Once you pinpoint houses you want to converse with, your initial impulse

will be to look up information about them online, such as architecture history, the back-story on the neighborhood, a city overview, etc. but once you begin searching, it's hard to sift through all the available choices. Many of them are dead ends for understanding a house and certainly won't help you learn archi-speak. Learning the language requires finding sources that can help, not hinder. Sadly, many architectural publications are filled with a difficult vocabulary that's understandable only to those in the design profession. Reading these articles demands keeping a dedicated design dictionary handy as you try to untangle the information. Every discipline and profession develop their own vernacular; groups build a language filled with phrases to share meanings with others in their alliance. It's only the inclusive participants who generally understand this language. Take for example, an astronomy journal. An essay on the chemical composition of an obscure planet might be overwhelming to read and impossible to understand for those inexperienced in scientific jargon. But a trained scientist would have no trouble defining the words and deciphering meanings.

Like science, and most other disciplines, the visual world uses a distinct lingo. Let's say you read that Zaha Hadid, an architect noted for her complex structures, used long planes in her buildings. To a novice reader it sounds as if she incorporated big airplanes into her designs. But planes in archi-speak have nothing to do with air travel. In architecture, planes are straight surfaces such as continuous walls. This means that Hadid's wall surfaces are made of long angles. If you find a phrase that's incomprehensible, and you can't decode the basic archi-speak lingo, simply write down the word and the way it's used. The more

Commented [12]: Does it make sense to add a short bibliography of your favorite books on architecture? Perhaps you could limit it to the architects mentioned in this book.

you encounter the unfamiliar phrases and try to use these words, the language becomes clearer, easier. If you go to Berlin without one word of German under your belt, once you're ready for dinner, you'll figure out a few words in the foreign language to order something at the café to keep from starving. Your hunger for archi-speak works the same way. After a while you'll be fairly proficient.

Since related information on architecture is important for your ability to speak to houses and to hear them speak back to you, begin by digging up the background of your own house. But watch where you go. We're all addicted to digital shortcuts because these sites provide quick data on every imaginable topic and whose to know what's really accurate. For example, type in your address and see what comes up. You'll probably get an instant Google map of your building and the surrounding area. It includes nearby hotels, museums, restaurants and places of interest (car dealerships, fast food stops, rivers, etc.) Also marked are transportation facts such as highways, streets, where to catch trains and buses. But these facts don't give you insight into your house's character, nor any of its history, so keep going. Hoping you'll "know" about your place by reading fast digital sources doesn't usually work. (Similar to a digital dating service, it's hard to separate truth from untruth.)

Another thing that comes up about your home on a quick digital search will be its current real estate assessment. This includes the prices of other "comparable" buildings in the area. The hierarchy of a basic search is geared to information on the last sale of a building. You'll see an approximate selling price of your place and a description of the sizes and number of rooms, all data that

influences the building's projected worth. Since your quest is to talk with houses, not to go into real estate transactions, this research won't be particularly helpful for learning to talk with houses.

To find more concrete information on your place, go to professional sources such as designated design blogs and specific architecture web sites. Look up your house on advanced searches. Or start with styles. If you can identify the shape or the design of the place, some similar style types of buildings might emerge. It's a start. Keep in mind that professional sources will be written by people such as architects, architectural historians and critics, or people knowledgeable in the field, so remember that most of this information is filtered through strong viewpoints. It's possible to read a review on how ugly a Queen Ann Style house is or that simple block apartment buildings should be destroyed because they aren't tasteful to the writer. The writer could be correct, but more often than not, it's just strong opinions. Collect this information, but never take it as the final law. Listen, but don't be completely swayed by what people say about style, appearance, function, etc. It's fun to compare your face-to-face interactions against "facts" written by others to see if your instincts are in line with what authorities believe. You probably already do this with film, television programs or political reviews. Likewise, the facts on your house are not about right or wrong, it's your collection of ideas about what you know, read about or experienced personally. So, while specialists, such as writers, researchers and critics know quite a bit about architecture - it's their profession after all - they might have a point of view that doesn't connect to your experience. And sadly, being an

authority on architecture doesn't mean that they can actually talk to houses.

Pictures also jump out during a background search on your house. But images have their own challenges. A picture might be worth a thousand words, but house illustrations can be very frustrating and worth nothing. Architectural diagrams show plans and elevations. Plans are drawings of the flat arrangements of buildings. Elevations illustrate the vertical exteriors of buildings. While these examples might excite an engineer or designer, they are pretty much incoherent for most people. These representations are technical drawings that can morph into complicated charts that seldom relate to how a house actually looks or feels. Rather than enjoy the building, you spend time figuring out how to decipher the mathematical specifications and where the directional lines correspond to the parts of a real house. Later when you become adept at the language of architecture, these charts will be easier to "read," but until you develop conversational architecture language, put charts on hold.

Even photographs of houses, those frozen documentations that record one or two sides of a building don't deliver real clues about a structure's personality. Photos allow recognition, but not intimate connections. Just like photographs of human beings, portraits of buildings end up with some identifiable orientations, but fail to capture any spirit. Think about your family photos taken at Thanksgiving when everyone is supposedly on their best behavior. Is the character of your strange uncle or devious cousin revealed in those photos? Sitting around a holiday dinner allows the festive environment to hide the truth of personality. Houses, like people, know how to promote their good side for

photographs. Lovely light, lush environment, good cameras, skilled photographers and any number of filters that are used to get a good shot can help a house hide its character. Try to get acquainted with houses in real life before trusting photos. It's like reading a cookbook; eating a real plate of pasta is superior to looking at it in a magazine. The best use of architecture photography is for a reference collection that we'll create later.

A preferred way to document buildings is to make quick sketches. Even if you can't draw, "thumbnails" (quick lines or gestures) manage to encapsulate both description and emotions. The action of drawing is like pulling your fingers across the house. It's a process that etches the image of the building into your memory bank forever.

Gesture Drawing of house

When I see a house I like, I make quick "gesture" drawings – quickly sketched references that only take minutes. They sometimes resemble a kid's doodle drawing, yet it's not about being accurate. Just to clarify my thoughts, I also make notes about what stands out, what I like or dislike about the house, or I scribble observations that catch my eye. If the house is interesting, I snap a bunch of pictures and let them sit on my phone for a few days. When I review them later, I compare my physical experience to what was caught in the photos. Seldom do the photographs give me the same information or feelings as I had in my visit or created in my sketches. I edit the photos, erase a bunch of bad shots and put the best ones into an archival collection. If I really like a house, I'll make

an effort to get back to see it. Engaging a house multiple times builds communication.

All of the time spent searching data and thinking about architecture gives you a jump-start for understanding the archi-speak language. Focusing on words and phrases specific to the vocabulary of archi-speak shows how words matter. In the next chapters we'll go over words we can use to better understand architecture and review how to use the language to talk to houses. We'll also see how houses use archi-speak to talk to us.

Chapter 8

THE ESSENTIALS

“The public is more familiar with bad design than good design. It is, in effect, conditioned to prefer bad design, because that is what it lives with. The new becomes threatening, the old reassuring.” - Paul Rand

THE ESSENTIALS

If you don't know much about architecture, talking about it or even looking at it can cause a lot of discomfort. We tend to feel we're on shaky ground if we don't completely understand a subject. Our knowledge of architecture is based on using it, rather than learning about it. Schools seldom educate students about architecture, even though in our daily lives we use buildings more often than math or history.

Endless TV shows do house makeovers, but for all the pounding and decorating, we're still in the dark about what makes the style, structure, meaning or character of a building. How many museums in your town present the background and importance of architecture? In my city there are music museums, craft museums, film museums, torture museums, art museums, car museums, wax museums, VR galleries, on and on, but no architecture museum.

We have some knowledge about houses because of using them daily. However, going into buildings is very different than understanding what make them tick. We can discuss our experiences and talk about our building preferences, but these are personal observations. Learning basic essentials about architecture helps decode its complexities.

To begin the quest to “get” architecture, familiarize yourself with three basic concepts: Idea, Design and Craft. Each of these categories contains information linked to how a building is “born” and “lives.” Knowing how Idea, Design and Craft are interrelated provides a foundation for understanding the world of architecture. It’s like traveling to a foreign country; if you figure out what the signs mean before you go, you can more easily navigate your way through any place. This approach works the same for buildings. The more you know, the easier it is to converse with them.

Some phrases used for Idea, Design and Craft will be familiar. It’s a similar vocabulary also used to describe most visual things. By putting those phrases into a specific architectural context, and understanding how they relate to buildings, you’ll be surprised how the Idea, Design and Craft interactions clarify what goes on in architecture. While Idea, Design and Craft vary depending on the particular structure, every building contains these three components.

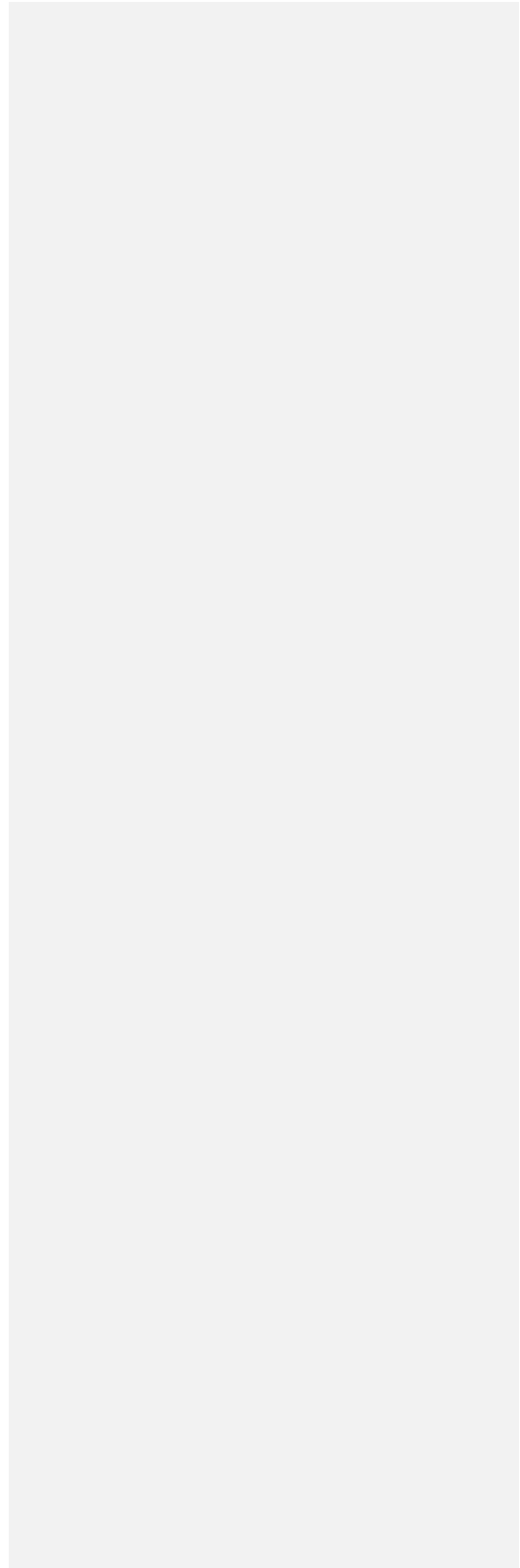
Drawing of ?

Idea covers the origins of a house and clarifies why and how a place was built. Idea also addresses a building’s nature, function, its back-story and its current and future roles.

Design, constitutes how the visual elements are organized within a building, including any variations in its form and style.

Craft, addresses materials, building skills and the contributions of people that make a house come alive.

We'll go over Idea, Design and Craft one at a time then see how they shift and move to bond together to make architecture.



Chapter 9

IDEA

"Ideas come from everything" — Alfred Hitchcock

IDEA

Idea is the first of the three essential concepts related to architecture. The purpose behind a structure is called the Idea. Besides the reasons a place was originally conceived and built, Idea covers how humans use or have used it, and eventually what it might become over time. Idea encompasses a building's history, its life force and the tales it tells. Searching out the Idea of a house intensifies your ability to delve into its personality and share an emotional connection with it.

A building's Idea carries the agendas of the clients, designers, architects, builders, and workers. Idea incorporates the visions of all the people who were part of the original and ongoing treatment of a house. These multiple facets merge together to create a home's character. In fact, you've added to a home's Idea much like a parent's influence molds a child. For every place you've inhabited, you've left your mark on its structure and helped frame its Idea.

The rudimentary Idea behind creating a building is to serve human interests, so logically buildings are made to support and protect us. Structures such as a house, church, school, hotel, etc. provide spaces for specific activities. Unfortunately, sometimes a building's Idea is more about the designer's ego or builder's monetary gain, not about its function. But most buildings attempt to

provide a practical role in some way or another. Hopefully every building lives up to its mission.

Think about the buildings you use daily. Is your workplace a good environment to carry on its business affairs? Is it efficient and well suited to the specific kind of professional activities going on inside? Does a church you know promote feelings of spirituality? Are the patrons comfortable in that space of God? How about your neighborhood places? Can you pick up lunch easily going through the drive-thru? Is the playground in the park safe? Can you exit the theater quickly and see the screen from every seat? (And are there enough bathrooms?) Every building sets up a challenge relating to the way it handles its intended role. In this regard, some work better than others. Be ready to question the function of all the buildings you encounter and ask if their role is met in the best possible way.

You can usually identify a place's major job (such as a residence, food emporium, barn, etc.) by merely looking at it. A building carries signals, usually attached by the current users, such as size, decorations, placement or signage that communicates what job the place is meant to do. These signs help us surmise if a structure is a factory, a school, or café, or has some other designated identity – these hints lead us to figure out a building's original Idea.

While some structures are conformist, built with recognizable styles and conventional roles, others make it a point to be downright mysterious. In these situations, the Idea behind the house is harder to guess, it's more obscure. This doesn't mean these places aren't successful or functional. It merely indicates that

from the outside they can't be pigeonholed into a familiar type. Architects may have designed a building for a specific group, or for a particular job that isn't common to most people, like a temple open only to its congregation or a pet shelter, only recognized by dog and cat lovers.

It's important to remember that architecture exteriors are very different than the interiors. After using buildings all of your life, unless the Idea of a building is intentionally puzzling, or if the building is different than most others doing the same job, you can generally figure out its major idea by simply "reading" its visual information. "Reading" buildings is using your eyes to decipher the clues that architecture communicates. If a building is playing hide and seek, you'll have to take a few minutes to decode what you see in order to make an educated guess about its role. But after practicing you'll learn to read buildings really quickly. If you still can't figure out the Idea of a place, knock on the door and ask someone inside what the building is used for.

Buildings and time are bedfellows. They influence each other and tell us about intervals of change. As you study a building, attempt to pinpoint its chronology. Try to find out how a building is used, not just currently, but also during its entire existence. By searching its timeline, you might find it had multiple roles -- maybe a life full of clarity, or a pattern of devious masquerades. Buildings are like chameleons, they can shed their original skins and transform into new, multi-faceted characters.

Often lurking within buildings are concealed Ideas that lie beyond their obvious roles. These mini-ideas or subplots are piled into a structure like layers

in a cake. A place that was once used as an FBI safe house, a house where Marilyn Monroe once lived as a kid, or a bar built during the Prohibition with secret rooms, all have hidden dramas. Identifying the meanings of these secondary characteristics can be more difficult to “read.” This is when it’s necessary to do more snooping especially when searching for information on the house’s past life.

But many “past lives” of houses can be deciphered by looking closely at architectural details. A repurposed structure, such as a 19th century church recycled into a café, a garage revitalized into a bank, or a private family mansion reborn as an expensive hotel usually carry obvious traces of the first life. Building materials, old signs, trademarks, etc. are a few hints from its other role.

Sometimes a building that was previously the site of strange or important historical activities might be keeping that information under wraps. (For example, the Ambassador Hotel where Bobby Kennedy was assassinated is now a school so you have to find the plaque with this information.) In cases where there are no texts or signs, you’ll have to do online searches and background research on the neighborhood or people involved in the timeline of the place. Unearthing the past background provides insights into the concepts that helped in the development of the building’s personality. To identify a building’s Idea, use a simple formula:

Look-Search-Question-Analyze. This system helps distinguish the function or Idea as well as the history of a house.

Excavating the Idea behind your own residence should be first on your list. Your house could be brand new, without much background or if you’re the first

owner it might have a limited history. Or you might reside in an older place that's gone through many changes. Some buildings go back a long time, many even hundreds of years, so the idea could have changed multiple times. But every house, young or old, is an individual and has some quirks that contribute to its particular idea. Try to envision the beginnings of your own place. Don't take it for granted that because your place is now a domicile, that it was a living space from the start. Guess how and why it was made. What do you know about the architect, developers, clients or builders? You can go to texts and sources for information or take a trip to your local Department of Building and Safety to get answers. But to hone your ability to analyze a home's idea, practice your search starting at the physical site. In other words, study your own house closely.

One tip for unearthing your home's idea is talking with the locals. It's fascinating to speak with past residents and neighbors, or any folks who spent time around your house. When doing so, you might find interesting, personal gossip, even if they're rumors and wives' tales. You'll want to know the authentic background eventually, but a home's reputation becomes part of the home's legend, so first have fun with the anecdotes. Begin a few discussions with the neighbors to hear the stories surrounding your house. And if you're buying a house or renting a place, make sure to talk with the last residents so you'll know about any tales of hidden treasures or sightings of the ghosts living there. When you buy a used car, you try to find out its history; good or bad; a home's background is more important.

After getting the local accounts, check for visual signs relating to your home's life span visible in the exterior. Set yourself up directly in front of the house and focus on the façade (the face of the building.) If you've already been greeting your structure at the rear or side of the house, switch to the main entrance. This is the place where many visual changes take place and where the telltale signs of the past linger. Make notes on things that look old, have been added, are inconsistent or seem relatively new. Scraping a bit of paint might reveal past color layers. Look at the doorjamb. See if your place was part of a group of similar homes. These and other signs help to recreate the timeline. Be mindful that whatever goes on outside of a house isn't necessarily a picture of what's happening inside. Excavating interior Ideas will be addressed later in this book. We can't enter every house we see, but we can analyze all of them from the exterior.

Besides figuring out the Idea of your own place, you'll inevitably want to delve into the background of other buildings. An example that intrigued me was to find out the story about a place that caught my eye on my daily hikes in Los Angeles. Walking along a meandering road, I came across an exotic building complex reminiscent of a movie set from a 1930's film.

DRAWING OF KROTONA HERE

Sitting high in the hills, I surmised that the people who originally built this strange place chose the site for its striking view of the magnificent mountains, or maybe they picked the location to escape the chaos of city life. Like many old fantasy

buildings in the Hollywood Hills, I could tell it's been recycled, redecorated, and repurposed.

Walking up the stairs and through an arched entrance, I confronted a picturesque garden bursting with exotic flowering plants and a gurgling lily pond. I realized I stumbled upon a real Shangri-La. Around this pool in an overgrown, vegetated courtyard were small cubicles, just big enough to be living or working chambers. A larger path led up to an ornate centralized dome. Like a cupola rising on top of a Renaissance cathedral, this dramatic detail reflected glowing sunlight across the whole yard. My mystery building definitely had a mishmash of influences; the central tiled court resembled the layout of a Spanish hacienda. The cracked, colorful mosaics, and Arabic line work carved into the doorways were quoting the structures of the ancient Near East. It was if I was walking in the gardens of Babylonia with its mysterious dome, fountains, arabesque tiles and statues.

Clearly this strange compound with so many little quarters was once some sort of a multiple residence. The repetition of cells could have been sleeping rooms or workshops. With the gleaming dome rising from the center point of the roof, I suspected it might have been a monastery for monks, a mosque, or a hermitage for religious followers. Did those little spaces indicate a first-stop residence for young starlets hoping to make it big in the movies? Was it a medical facility for old folks, or a hotel or a nightclub? A repurposed movie set? I was sure this place was built as someone's utopian hideaway.

The formula, **Look-Search-Question-Analyze** provided some insight into the building's changing Ideas. At the front entrance after poking around I noticed an old peeling sign with the name, *Krotona* written in antique typography and covered with overgrown weeds. Nailed directly above, using the same pole, was a newer sign advertising apartments for rent. One mystery solved, no matter what it once was, *Krotona* is now a studio-apartment building. But by its age and location it was obvious that its Idea transformed over time. Relying on my first face-to-face observations, (**Look**) then doing historical investigation, (**Search**) I was able to find more about the structure. As I began to decipher *Krotona's* background, it turned out that some of my earlier hunches were correct. Doing on-line searches on the name, *Krotona*, I discovered that at the beginning of the 20th century the area now called Hollywood was a thriving religious community, home to many spiritual groups. A trolley ran down the bottom of the hill drawing people who desired to find a peaceful area near but not directly inside Los Angeles, to move up and away from city. *Krotona* was one such haven, built by the followers of Theosophy. This spiritual group built many exotic buildings in the hills right under what is now the Hollywood Sign. Nevertheless, they fled the area in the 1930's to avoid the influx of real estate developers and movie moguls usurping the hills to build homes for famous actors.

One afternoon as I was pursuing my quest, I noticed a man who happened to be standing in the garden. He was the current owner and welcomed my curiosity (**Question**) Luckily, he directed me to a used bookstore where I found an out of print book on *Krotona* written twenty years ago.

Tempered with a bit of daydreaming, taking time to view the building, and looking up some facts, I was able to sort through *Krotona*'s various scenarios surrounding its past and current Ideas. (**Analyze**) I learned *Krotona* started as a religious compound, but later the complex became a hotel for the fledgling motion picture industry. Would-be actors found a reliable source of rental rooms, probably hoping that the tiny chambers at *Krotona* would someday be traded for the mansions up the hill. For a short period, it was used as a hotel. Eventually the architecture was transformed into an apartment building, its current function. Armed with these background facts, I compared my personal observations with the how and why the building went through so many changes. The **Look-Search-Question-Analyze** system worked to uncover the Ideas of *Krotona* and allowed me to get close enough to the building so I could hear its tales. With each evolving life, the complex laid out its fascinating stories.

Your own home may not have a background as colorful as the history of *Krotona*. No matter, even new buildings have a changing backstory, sometimes short, but hidden somewhere. Use a process of engagement: look, ask questions, intrude on the past, and make an assessment based on your findings. With this system, your house will share its Idea with you.

Chapter 10

DESIGN

“Design is a plan for arranging elements in such a way as best to accomplish a particular purpose.” - Charles Eames

DESIGN

Design is architecture's second essential concept and refers to the organizational systems for a building. It's the arrangement of visual elements: Line, Form, Space, Color and Texture. These visual elements are systematized, juggled together, and articulated to produce a building. It's the same as baking a cake: flour, sugar, eggs, flavorings and milk are ingredients with individual characteristics--mix them together, then bake the batter, and presto, you have a cake.

Each element, whether acting alone or integrated as a team player within the whole construction, helps define a house's overall scheme. Acquainting yourself with the role of the elements lets you examine how the organizational process works. It's just like pulling back a layer of skin to witness the lungs, bones, muscles, and other parts of anatomy functioning within the human body. Very creepy, but looking inside reveals how the human body is composed. Similarly, by familiarizing yourself with each visual element, then watching their interactions in a building, you can assess how they stand alone or work with one another. The simple definitions of the elements are:

- a. Line - the directions of a building.
- b. Form - the shapes and volumes of a building.

- c. Space - the areas inside and outside of a building.
- d. Color - the pigments of a building.
- e. Texture - the look and feel of a building's surfaces.

Since buildings are made of all five visual elements, someone, such as the architect, builder, contractor, or client (generally it's the architect) chooses the program so the elements will operate in harmony. This is why the person is called the "designer." The designer's task is to review the elements and decide how to make all the parts work together to make a "successful" building. He or she also depends on the help of all the people involved in the process of constructing the place. The architect's ultimate challenge is to shepherd together the elements towards a satisfying conclusion.

Architects apply the elements by using Design principles such as balance, contrast, proximity, rhythm, unity, proportion, emphasis, movement, variety, and repetition. Many of the definitions for the Design principles will seem familiar from your experience with things like, film or clothing, pictures, etc. These are words used to describe most things in the visual world. In architecture, each of these principles demands thoughtful application, since there are hundreds of considerations that play into how the elements will be used, such as economics, functionality, ethics, environment, safety, code compliance, etc. They include the needs of people who'll use the building, where it sits, how it works in a neighborhood, the cultural and social considerations of the people in the vicinity, the materials used, etc. It's similar to the system we use for dressing each day; you pick the clothes, shoes, coat, hairstyle, etc., to "fit together" in order to

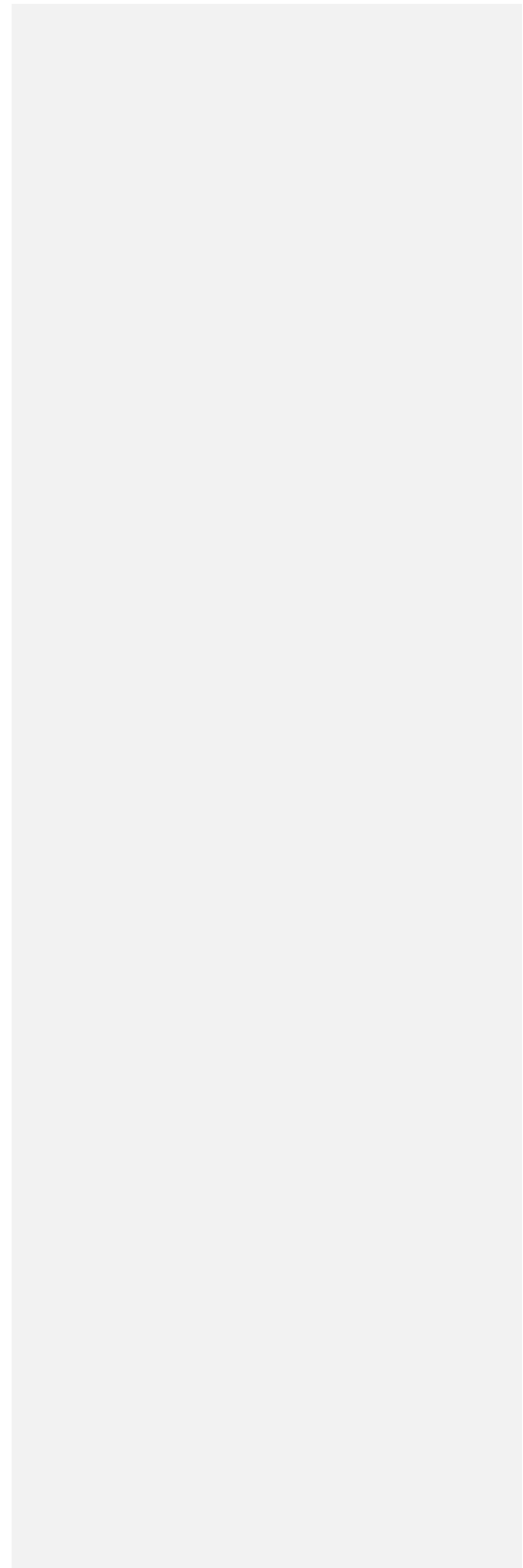
produce some effect (unity, beauty, sophistication, punk style, serious business appearance, power, etc.) Or you grab whatever is clean in the closet.

Likewise, when planning a dinner, you choose food in patterns: first soup, then salad, then a main course, followed by dessert. Or you serve everything at the same time, willy-nilly. These multiple exchanges are the way the Design elements function in architecture. Some structures have line, space, form, color and texture integrated into harmonious relationships. Other architecture is a tossed salad.

As you search for connections to a house, your individual values will figure into what elements you think work or don't work, which you like or dislike, which ones you focus on, and those you ignore. But all five visual elements will be present, each with personalities and contributions to the character of the house. Design is not only the structure's skeleton; it's also is a mechanism that infuses meaning and personality into the mix. Design not only contributes to the building's Idea, it can be main focus of a house.

First, we'll identify the elements separately, and then discuss how the elements work together. As you start to talk with houses and recognize the interaction of the elements, you'll develop the ability for analyzing not only architecture, but also most things in the visual world.

DRAWING OF???





Chapter 10a

LINE

"All that is important is this one moment in movement. Make the moment important, vital, and worth living. Do not let it slip away unnoticed and unused." — Martha Graham

LINE

If you think about Line as it relates to a building, you might expect to see a continuous mark, like a pencil line. Line can be used this way, but in architecture, Line is the momentum of things moving in a direction, covering the distance between points. This is called an axis. An example of architectural Line is found in the temples of the ancient Egyptians. Their obsession to move in a straight path was not only practical since they had to go through a gate, a courtyard, a hall and finally into the sacred room where the gods visited daily, but it was also efficient to keep the massive stone blocks and columns in a straight line for stability. Besides practicality, going on a straight axis was symbolic of the Egyptian belief that after death you went directly into the next world, straightforward.

Drawing of Egyptian Temple plan

The definition of line can be confusing. If a friend mentions that he noticed a girl at the beach with "great lines," it doesn't mean the girl had long marks on her skin. Rather, it expresses how her body moved in space. Another example is car

description; if someone tells you they saw a sports car with “great lines,” the car didn’t have a drawing on it. In this case Line meant that the vehicle’s form had an aerodynamic direction. Line as direction is a way to describe both marks and movement in space.

To observe the element of Line, watch how structures progress in space. Some buildings, like skyscrapers and tall office buildings, go up vertically, reaching their heads towards the sky. Others are low and long, moving horizontally like lizards crawling through grass. The direction of a house can be animated, like a ballerina curling her body in a graceful pirouette. You've witnessed fast, animated structures, blasting outwards, like rockets into space. Or you've encountered stationary buildings, frozen and static, lumped in a heap, oozing into the earth.

Line exists both inside and outside a home. Houses interiors can have a midpoint with rooms flowing outward, or rooms are lined up in succession, or organized in curved arrangements. These are common linear patterns. Now and then places have an irregular bunching of forms, while other structures are a conglomeration of shapes stacked on top of each other like a mountain of old shipping crates. All these directional organizations create linear movement.

Humans are conditioned to use the straight path. We follow the continuous trail on a sidewalk, walk directly along a route, hike in unison around a lake, travel in consecutive motions, queue up at a hot dog cart, and stand one behind the other for movie tickets. For these “Straight-line” people, walking the curves in their homes might feel uncomfortable; they unconsciously resent erratic, twists

and turns. Yet irregular directions bring a forceful energy to both buildings and to the people taking these curved paths.

“Curve-prone” people, on the other hand, might be frustrated with the consecutive, tidy lines of straight paths. These residents can’t stomach the repetition of the conventional axis in buildings. They are bored to death walking in a straight direction. But clarity and organization result from this system.

Because you’re constantly engaged with your house, its linear directions have a direct influence on you. You may not realize it, but you under a spell. No matter how conscious you are about how you’re moving through space, the wonderful thing about linear axis is that once you become sensitive to your home’s lines, it’s easy to embrace or change them. Decide if you tend to be “curve-prone” or “straight-line.” To test yourself, just walk outside the implied pathway Lines when entering or leaving your house. Cut through rooms walking in diagonals. Try new directional configurations. You’ll soon realize which works best for you.

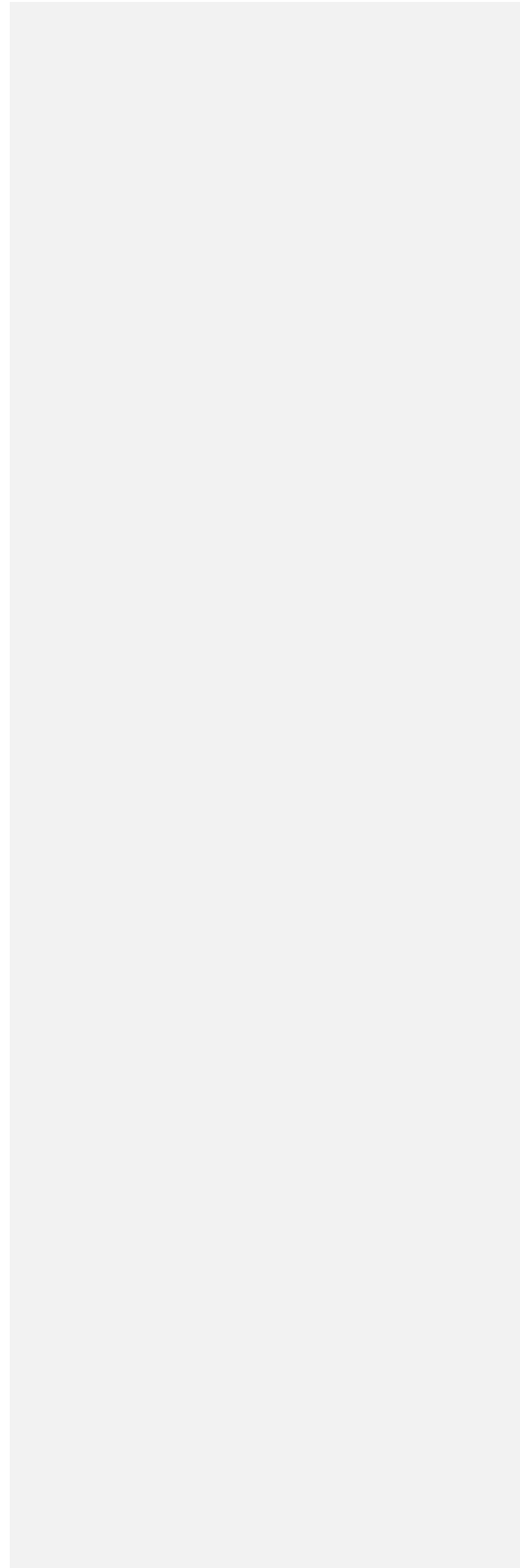
In addition to these invisible paths, the decorations, furniture, equipment, people, pets, and everything within a house make Lines. Many objects move in repetitive intervals. Multiple windows, one after the other, contribute to directions. Kitchen door handles, with their little flashes of metal, set up linear patterns. These multiple objects, similar to text symbols, become a series of dots or dashes - our eyes follow the patterns of rows. Hypnotized, we also walk in those directions. Once you become aware of linear movements, you may feel the need to alter parts of your house. Moving windows and doors to create a preferred

rhythm is a huge undertaking. But some characteristics can be easily changed. Try adding lights in various directions, put carpets on an asymmetrical axis, repeat a single color over and over, and connect the furniture in a linear beat. New arrangements might express a better fit for your own personality. The list of possibilities goes on and on as you individualize the Lines in your environment.

Besides the house itself, the exterior areas around houses, such as the landscaping, walls, or outbuildings are "lined up." Plants, trees, doors, columns, add-ons, lights, colors, or anything in sequence expresses directions. If your lines aren't quite right, plant trees in new configurations, move the entrance off to the side, install sharp cacti and thorny roses in rows. These thorny patterns encourage human movement along a defined linear path.

Line refers to the directional paths of a single house, as well as to groupings of multiple buildings. A set of townhouses, one after the other, all sitting the same distance away from the street form a Line. Most neighborhoods have strict laws demanding that houses be built a few feet back from the sidewalk or street to create a regimented, linear direction down the block. Now and then someone breaks the rule, or gets a variance so that a house sits close to the sidewalk. My heart goes out to those pathetic buildings, sticking out and breaking the Line. They look pushed from the rear, kicked in the pants. The broken Line feels uncomfortable, not only for the residents, but also for anyone walking along the street. We feel accosted by the irregularity created by an attack on order.

Keep looking at the assortments of Lines moving throughout and around your home, as well as in other public and private architecture. Be ready to react and to analyze the role of Line in your life so you can control it to fit your personality.





Chapter 10b

FORM

“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” – Leonardo da Vinci

FORM

Form refers to the volumes of both the interior and exterior of a house.

Forms are the main physical shapes as well as the extensions, such as the roof or eaves. Forms are areas blocked together, creating a single arrangement from multiple parts. Inside a house, a kitchen is one Form, but its connection to another section, like the dining room, becomes one longer Form.

Architecture Forms can be identified in two categories. Most Forms are “positive” shapes. They are visible volumes, made of physical materials and take up space. These shapes are placed together to make the sculpture you call home. The areas between the Forms, those empty spaces around sections, such as voids under hanging roofs, or spaces between extended rooms, are “negative” Forms. These are the leftover shapes cut out by the massing of the positive Forms. While the word “negative” has an adverse connotation in regular speech, in architecture negative shapes help balance all the positive sections. It’s better to think of the Japanese concept of Notan, where the positive and negative shapes have equal respect- negative shapes are the left-overs from the positive

Forms, and both Positive and Negative contribute to the building's harmonic design. It's like the yin yang symbol - a good example of perfect balance in two dimensions. In architecture, when three-dimensional blank areas (negatives) interact with fully visible shapes (positives) hopefully the result creates a balanced equilibrium.

Some house designs follow a tight formula, while others are the results of wild experiments. Because humans are drawn to geometry, often boxy, simple Forms are used to make the overall shape of buildings. This approach is cheaper and more efficient than the pain and expense of cutting strange or odd configurations. However, today more and more we see "bizarre," oddly shaped buildings. If you could take off the exterior decorations and weird angles of the majority of wild-looking architecture, what's left would look like a pile-up of giant packing crates. A widespread design trick is to cover simple Forms by adding "stylistic" decorations. For designers the challenge is making an efficient Form, but also producing an interesting experiment.

With the use of sophisticated computer programs and 3-d printers designers make buildings extremely irregular and exciting. For example, the architect, Frank Gehry, is noted for crumpling paper, tossing it to the floor, and then designing a building based on the glob. His creations are stacked volumes, jumping around and moving into space every which way. Disney Hall is one example. From the outside the shapes look like metal wings flying in the air and falling on top of one another. But this structure, like most of Gehry's buildings,

has a functional interior; he organizes the interior Forms along geometric lines so the spaces work successfully for public access to the concert space.

Disney Hall drawing

To understand architectural Form, it's fun to build a mini-house. Hopefully you've played with Legos, Block City, Erector Set, Lincoln Logs, or some construction set. If not, invest in a set of blocks. Use a pack of cards. Make a snow house or sand castle. Play with Minecraft. Stage a gingerbread house competition with your friends. Build a dollhouse or birdhouse. These projects help you understand the interactions of Forms and how one section expands into different formations. Possibly you've already been making prototypes. Remember those childhood dinners when you "played with your food." Did you make skyscrapers out of mashed potatoes? Cities built out of carrots? Organizing masses of Forms is primal since the human searches for protective structures. When you complete a building, whether with food, blocks, or building materials, you feel successful and exhilarated. It makes it easier to sympathize with the designer whose job is to get all the Forms to make a building into a cohesive entity.

Unifying the Forms of a building is a challenging task for the architect. Consider the overall rectangular Form of a log cabin - its shape is made of multiple rounded logs. The two shapes, the rectangle Form of the whole building, and the individual Forms of the cylindrical logs have to be synchronized to make a finished house. If the logs aren't integrated into the rectangular Form, it isn't a traditional log cabin. It's a house with goofy, protruding wood shapes. As you

analyze homes, always check out how the parts to the whole correspond to each other and see if the designer's solution paid off. Decide if the structure looks really awful because some Forms don't fit together or if harmony was accomplished.

The outside Forms of a building may, or may not, dictate the kinds of shapes that exist inside a place. We've all entered buildings that fooled us with different interior configurations than we expected. Besides the overall shape of a house, multiple smaller shape relationships are established inside and outside. A big wall with little windows, an entrance made of arches set into a rectangular space, or tiles repeated in a curved enclosure are examples of how big and small Forms exist together. Geometric, biomorphic, globs and blobs are various configurations of house Forms.

While Forms emerge from the sizes and shapes of standardized house materials, like rectangular bricks, or 2x4 wood sections, other additions have random Forms. Take for example, a window box filled with flowers. The natural irregularity of plants makes a stark contrast to orderly architectural Forms of a simple, geometric house. In many buildings you'll see linear Forms fighting with organic Forms. Or because of a brilliant designer, these two elements complement each other. Besides decorations and additions, many do-it-yourselfers try to integrate irregular shapes, like coats of arms, slanted bookcases and jerry-rigged plumbing. Depending on if the structure is formal or free form, those combinations sometimes work together, but other times they don't balance at all.

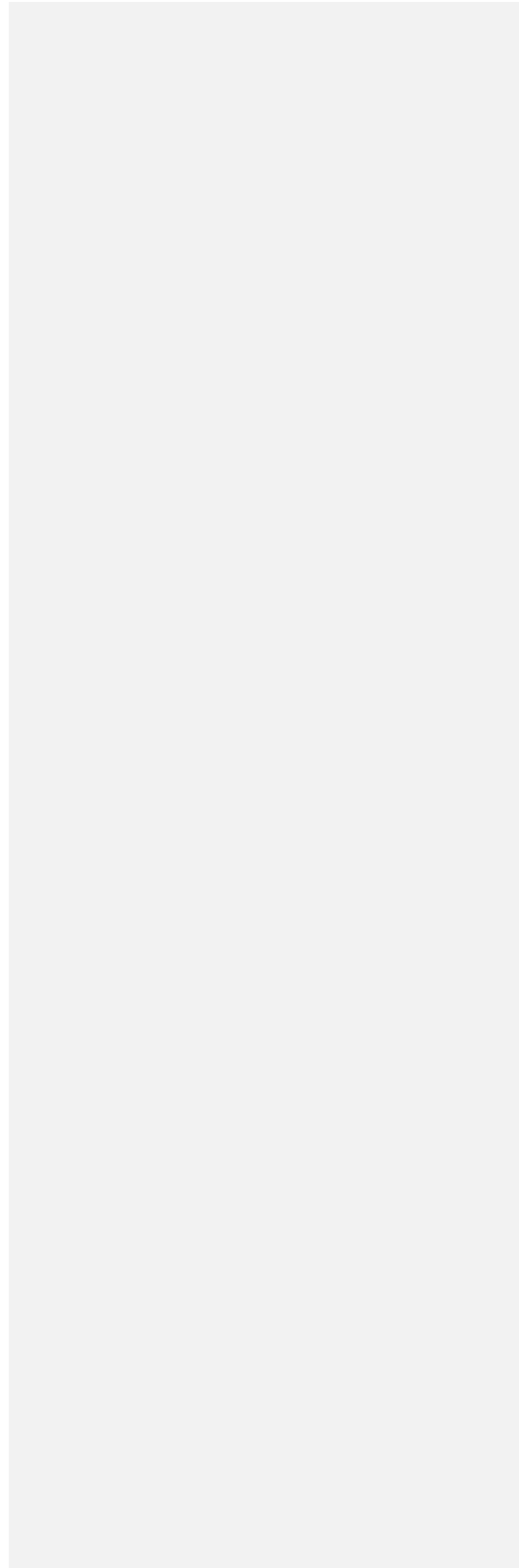
Speaking of plumbing, HVAC, the engineering contributions to architecture, such as heat, water, air, ventilation, etc. were traditionally hidden within a building's walls or basements. These Forms were too "industrial" and too ugly to be seen. No more. Today architects leave conflicting shapes visible, as when metal or cement sections are covered with transparent glass or conveniences are left hanging out over the walls or jutting out from the roof. The Pompidou Center in Paris is one inside-outside example where the utilities dangle on the outside of the building. The Forms of the heating units, water and air conditioning modules extend outward against the more conventional walls. Ironically those pipes and boxes are similar to some of the Modern art housed in the galleries inside the museum. Buildings are like puzzles; to finish the game sections have to snap together to create a balanced Form.

An older tradition of using different Forms is found in Gothic Cathedrals. Those builders extended the buttresses (extended supports) outside the churches. These supports were necessary so the structures wouldn't collapse. Visit the exterior of one of these buildings, such as Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, and you'll see long tentacles of stone and bricks spreading across the ground and curving upwards. The elegant Form of the Cathedral, high and geometric, contrasts with the Forms of the dragon-like tails emerging out of the rear of the church.

[Drawing of Pompidou or Gothic cathedral](#)

We're all drawn to particular shapes. Some people prefer weird, ballooning bubbles, or sedate, clean geometrics, or shapes in other odd

combinations. Whatever are your home's Forms, those areas should be helpful to your life. Think twice about covering or filling every section of your house to a point where the shapes are distorted to the point of invisibility. A house is at its best when its Forms can be seen.





Chapter 10c

SPACE

"Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or to be beautiful." -- William Morris

SPACE

In architecture Space refers to the areas filled with physical forms as well as the sections between forms. It's the areas that buildings sit in and the expanses around them. In music, Space is a pause, or in light, it can refer to shadows made by blocking the light waves. Basically, your house sits in Space.

Space is within, without, above and below. Just like Form, Space can be positive or negative. The physical materials of house take up the area called positive Space. The backgrounds, those areas around the house, are the negative Spaces. The sky and the air pockets around architecture are negative Spaces. Because we don't always see a physical entity in these areas, you might think the negative Spaces are empty. But these Spaces are filled with something; for example, the sky is a blue color, and the air can be wet and grey. Think of negative Space as sections cut out by the positive Forms of a building. When these negative Spaces complement the architectural Forms, whether in color or shape, harmony results.

Space is a bond between architecture and the environment. The architect must think about how forms fill up the dimensions set for the house's designated

site. Architecture is confined by the amount of available land. The building site informs whether a house is built vertically or horizontally. High buildings, like skyscrapers and monuments penetrate Space. They seem to move upward into the stars. Other buildings crawl, hardly coming up for air; they hug the ground like snakes creeping through the marshes. Some elegant structures twist and turn, curling through Space, appearing as ballerinas making graceful pirouettes. Other houses, low and deep, ooze into the ground as if they've fallen into quicksand.

Besides the forms of the house, the gardens, the out buildings, city codes, garages, and a million other considerations must be considered when placing a building in Space. Houses can be sited in an immense landscape, wooded forest, or an enormous lot. Rolling hills and wide perspectives give distinction to the structures where architecture and earth live together. Urban houses, built closely together, produce strong synchronizations, blending one with another. In cramped cities Spaces give birth to buildings rising up willy-nilly in unbearable congestion. Buildings sitting in their sites, either beautiful or ugly, are attached to other shapes, such as blocks, neighborhoods, districts counties, states, countries, etc. These combinations become bigger shapes taking up more Space.

Drawing of plants through a window

How people use and react to Space is subjective. We all have intense preferences for particular Spaces we can handle. Comfort dictates an individual's sense of personal Space. For example, how do you feel when someone stands close to you in a checkout line or elevator? This is one way to evaluate good or

bad personal Space. One person might crave living in a space twice the size of a football field; in their home they want to feel as if they're walking through an expanding galaxy. Another might insist on a single tiny room, so that Space is like a fuzzy blanket, holding the resident tightly. Others insist on high ceilings and big rooms, or low ceilings and small rooms. If you didn't design your house, unfortunately you're stuck with another person's spatial preference (the designer or city restrictions might be working the opposite of your desires.)

You might not think much about Space. But some people are really demanding and feel uncomfortable in certain places. You could be obsessed with living on top of a massive mountain and scream claustrophobia when your neighbor's house is in viewing distance. Another person might feel anxiety and out of control if they have lots of Space all around their place. One of my friends insists she needs a place set in a clean-cut desert, with a view of a hill. This is the only Space that works for her. Many people want to live within a lush forest, or to see water details surrounding their entire structure. Others like a view of concrete, (it's true, some city folks abhor green space.) Think about the way your home is "sited" and what affect its exterior Space produces. The site is your extended home; it's your building's nest.

For my Space passion, I love a small house with little rooms, and big windows, sitting on flat ground with lots of surrounding foliage. Looking out my windows on a foggy day, beyond the thick plants, I conjure up images of imaginary domains. Those Shapes and Spaces form new worlds floating around my place. It seems that a secret garden, hidden by the ivy, is growing next door.

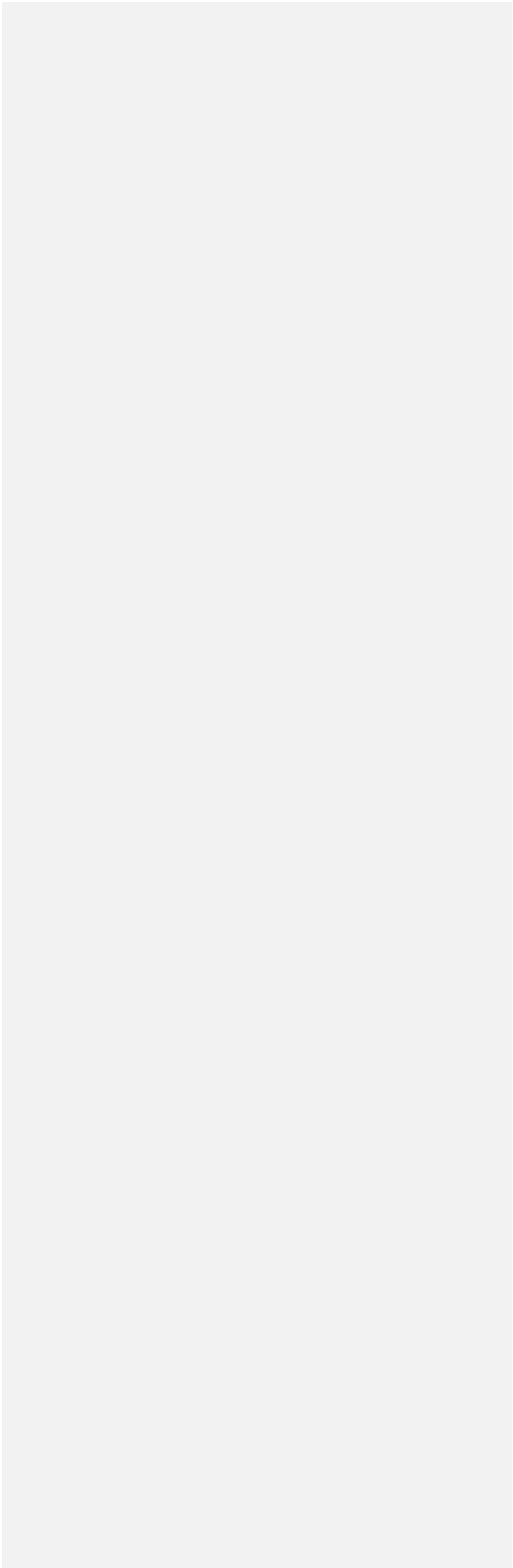
The coziness of vines, trees and ferns surrounding my house is womb-like. It's Nature's church. Beyond this pastoral setting, the ambiguity of the Space fuels other possibilities. A sci-fi city with robots and futuristic highways may be a few feet away.

On sunny days from the same viewpoint I see clear, verdant growth outside my windows; the bright light won't let me hallucinate about hidden, dreamy places. The visible Space is a realistic vision of the immediate ferns and succulents, and then going beyond, I see the sidewalk, and finally the buildings moving down the street. What I see is my neighborhood. The Spaces of our house and the Spaces made by the buildings become familiar and a package deal - all of it is home.

Interior Spaces open up a can of worms. Inside a house are the "living" spaces. Interior rooms act as vessels for various human activities. Architects and designers attempt to work out the problems and pitfalls of living Spaces so that residential or working areas can be useful and attractive. Some work well and others are horrible. It also depends on who lives there, and what they bring into the Space. We'll later discuss ways to understand the inside Spaces of your place so you can find more ways to enjoy them.

Space reveals both the character of a house and human predilections. Unless you live alone, often the arguments of a household are about sharing Space. What furniture should be put in that entrance hall? Who gets what bedroom?" Listen to the arguments-I need an office area!" "Pick up your socks! "Let's add on more rooms." "Where do the computers go?" "We need to replant

the garden.” Coping with the things inside and outside to adjust to the Space yearnings of all the residents is a challenge. Think about how you balance your home’s spatial relationships. Would different space configurations inside or outside make your life happier? Would the people who share your home be less crabby if you could agree on perfectly balanced Space?





Chapter 10d

COLOR

“The whole world, as we experience it visually, comes to us through the mystic realm of color.” - Hans Hofmann

COLOR

Color is a building's palette. In visual language, color is also called hue or can be referred to as chroma. While most people claim they're "good" with color, applying it to a house is a trial. Color expands in intensity (brightness) and value (dark and light) when it's painted on a large surface. The small sample in a paint store never looks the same when extended across a wall or building. It turns out too bright, too dark, or too light. Or it's just a big mistake. Hopefully all the colors you've applied to your home, don't create conflicts with one another. If so, you'll get a throbbing headache looking at them, but with no idea where the source of this headache comes from.

House colors are often trendy, prescribed, or non-negotiable. Some housing developments encourage multicolor structures, while others insist on very neutral palettes. A condo board may demand that residents paint their places blue or green or whatever colors the design dictators decide on for all. Keeping houses similar is determined to a great degree if the colors of the homes "match" (what makes colors match is always up for grabs) or if they look like they're grouped as some sort of family.

Freedom of choice doesn't always sit well with neighbors, home associations or the house itself. I believe people should have the right to paint their house any way they want if those selections respect the architecture. Color must complement the character and style of the house. A building's colors work best if they're chosen to accentuate the forms of the house, the site where the house sits, the landscaping, and how lights and shadows fall across the space. Think about house Colors as a way to personalize and set up a good relationship with your domicile. Put yourself in the building's shoes and ask yourself, "Would I wear those colors together?"

Balancing colors of multiple materials such as wood, brick, paint and plastic takes strong organizational talent. Putting these resources together with the various and incompatible palettes that make up a building takes practice. For architecture constructed with natural materials, the designers often stick to the original colors. And by the very definition, natural colors end up at war with non-natural areas. Never paint a house or room without getting some advice from a paint colorist. Anywhere they sell paint you'll find a knowledgeable color mixer. This saves you from the torture of repainting three or four times in a row.

There are so many TV shows, friends, advertisements, magazines and blogs that tell you how to choose colors for your home's interior. It must be a nightmare for people who get a "surprise makeover." Imagine when they open the door to see the finished project painted in colors they despise. Could you live with color decisions that are the signature taste of a crazy designer? If you need a calming color in your bedroom, there's no way a, bright red will work. Ghastly

palettes picked by color gurus who choose color by instinct, false authority, or bad taste, rather than consideration of the structure need to imagine how long they could exist in these places themselves. Color palettes shouldn't be forced on anyone. Remember it's not what you like, but what works for yourself, your lifestyle, and your house.

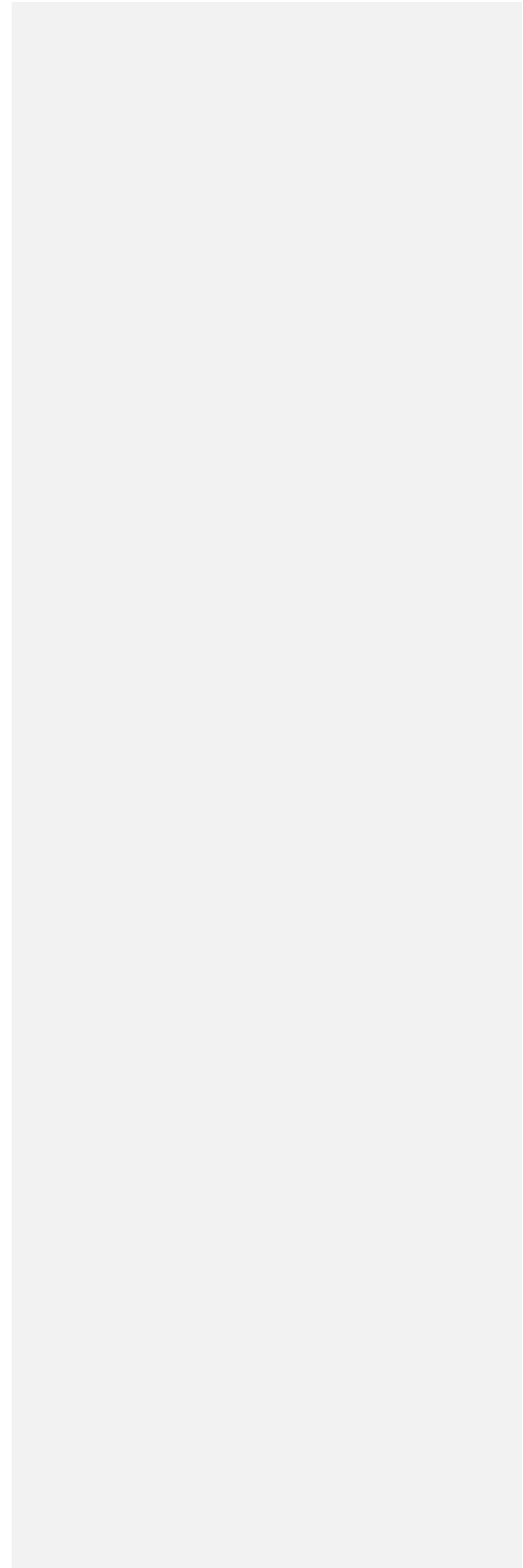
Certain house styles reflect signature color palettes. For example, the fancy wood decorations of Victorian houses are painted in multiple, strong Colors. This is how they earned their name, "painted ladies." Other styles eliminate most Color. Many International Style houses, those simple, Modern, geometric buildings are generally plain, muted white. These examples reinforce the styles of the architecture. Walk down your street and see how many places are covered in really goofy colors.

Drawing of Modern house or Victorian

There's no doubt that when a house is conceived, that the Color is visible in the mind of the designer. Some of these people are very color sensitive and others, not so much. But since Color gives the house it's energy, picking the house Colors is important.

Over one hundred years of its life, my American Craftsman house has been painted a series of colors - green, red, then white, and finally once again green. Its Color history is revealed each time the walls are sanded down for the next re-coat, about every ten years. When I moved into the house, the exterior was a weird, bright, green. It had a glowing yellowish tint, like an evil alchemist's potion. I realized it was begging for some Color fine-tuning. Granted, this is a

house that cried out to be green (we decided together, the house and my family) but it had to be a green to work with all the spaces in and around it. Mixing a gray-green with ochre trim was the perfect answer to complement the home's personality. The new green allowed the house to interact with the plants and flowers on the site. The Colors also nod to the historic colors of the British Arts and Crafts Movement, the style that originally inspired the house's design. As for the original white and red paint coats, what were those residents thinking? Contemplate the colors of your house. Yes, black, white, gray and brown are also colors in this context. Whatever your house Colors, figure out if you'll eventually want to change them to make the house happier, louder, or silent. Color conversations will be endless between you and your house.





Chapter 10e

TEXTURE

“Most of our childhood is stored not in photos, but in certain biscuits, lights of day, smells, textures of carpet.” - Alain de Botton

TEXTURE

Texture is architecture's design element connected to the sense of touch. It's the physical response we feel when we have bodily contact with a building, or simply look at a building's surface.

There are two main kinds of Textures, tactile and visual. Tactile Texture means physical engagement with a surface. As you slide your hand down a wall of a house, you experience a sensation with your nerve endings. Smooth or rough, bumpy or slick - there are numerous words to describe how a surface registers through your fingers then goes up into your brain.

The second surface is called Visual Texture. When an object enters your line of vision, you anticipate the surface Texture. In other words, looking at the wood shingles on a home, our experience communicates the sensation of flat, sanded oak. You presume it's real wood. Most of the time your predictions are correct, but depending on your vision alone can mislead you. Because we live among physical things and have lots of practice touching objects, you think you know how things will feel just by looking at them.

Visual Textures are patterns or fake finishes (sometime called faux finish or trompe l'oeil – “fool the eye.”) Our eyes trick us into believing what isn't true. A building covered with an overall stone pattern forces us to believe it's real stone, but it could be a surface of paint patterns or printed material. Substituting visual Textures for tactile Textures is an effective tactic for designers. Wood veneers, plastic household materials and all those patterned stone and paper coverings; inside and outside our homes communicate particular materials. If we touch those surfaces, they wouldn't feel like the products they claim to be. Take wood patterned plastic floor covering. It looks like maple, but when rubbing it with your hands, you feel a smooth texture, not the irregularity of real sanded wood.

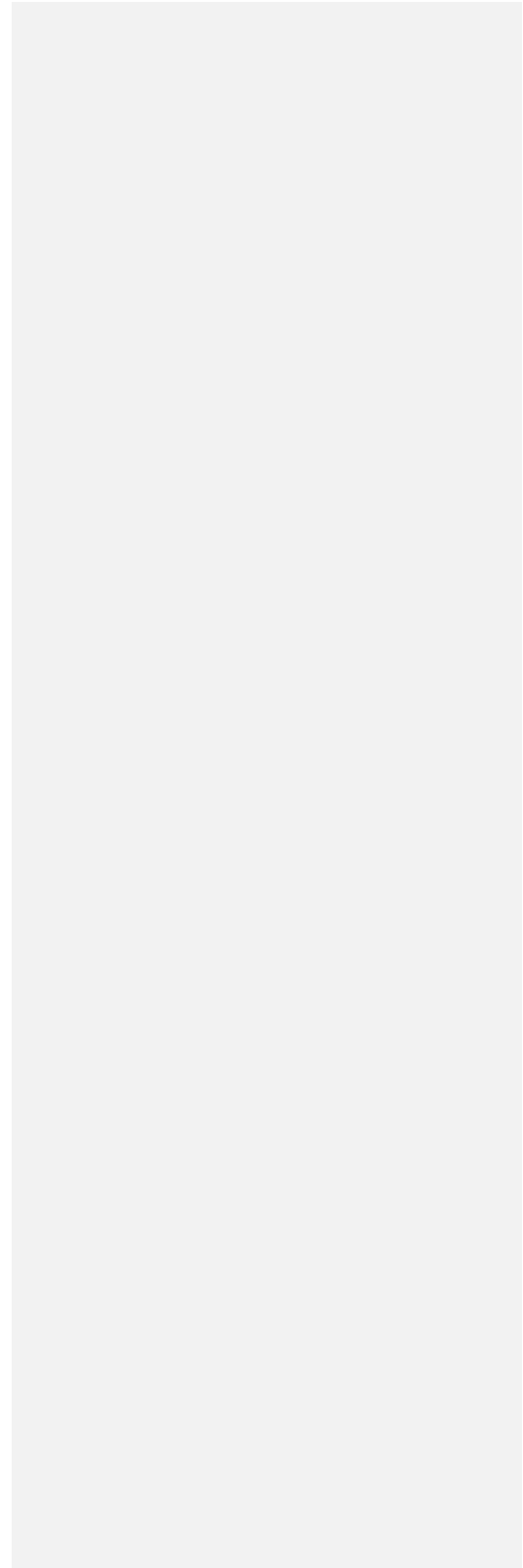
Drawing of a cactus?

In the 17th century, numerous European Catholic churches were built in the Baroque style. Gold and marble adorned the walls. Stone and brass sculptures filled the niches and magnificent oil paintings covered the walls. The objective was to produce houses of worship that would provide a preview of heaven. But not all the parishes had enough money or craftspeople to make grand statements. Often the “marble” columns were wood, painted to look like stone, and the “gold” trim on statues was a coating of cheap, metallic tempera or metal leaf. Nevertheless, those visual illusions were believable. A churchgoer was not about to scratch the walls to see whether or not the Textures were genuine. Bathed in candle light and glowing with stained glass reflections, all the fake surfaces appeared to be authentic. Their sensual character and elegant design promised the worshipers a taste of Paradise. Texture is a design element

that relates strongly to our senses; it provokes powerful emotional responses whether it's real or fake.

We'll look at Texture again when we practice using our senses to talk to houses. But for now, the main idea is that your house, with its varied visual and tactile Textures, has the power to make you think and feel deeply about its materials and surfaces. Texture wakes up our physical connections to buildings.

All of the elements have personalities. After searching out Line, Form, Space, Color and Texture separately, notice how they push their own agendas and unite their strengths. You'll be thinking a lot about these elements as you start talking with your house.



Chapter 11

STYLE

"It's kind of fun to do the impossible." – Walt Disney

STYLE

When Idea, Design and Craft are merged together, the result is Style. Architecture Styles contain the features that distinguish the look of a building. Style includes such elements as distinctive forms, methods of construction, duplication of building materials, or regional character. Styles have identifiable visual signs. For example, plaster floral decorations or metal curves in wrought iron trim can be clues that a house is Art Nouveau Style. Structures with heavy concrete forms might be Brutalism Style.

Art nouveau image drawing of Maison de Verre

The shapes and decorations of a building's "look" are dependent on factors such as economics, building systems, and urban planning. Style can emerge from adaption to particular environments, popular trends, or simply, the whims of designers. Styles are generally recognizable by their particular characteristics repeated in numerous buildings, like the pointed windows in Gothic Cathedrals, or Doric columns in Classical structures. For example, it's relatively easy to spot a Mid-Modern house by its simple, geometric shapes, or a Victorian building by its colorful, gingerbread trimmings. But not all buildings sharing a Style are clones of one another; some might carry just a few attributes, but still get accepted into the Style club.

Architectural Styles are most identifiable in a structure's exterior, such as the roofline, volumes of shapes, color palettes, and decorations. Interiors also get "stylized" and may or may not be different than the outside of the building. An old Craftsman house could be filled with contemporary décor. A log cabin might have a clean, modern kitchen and likewise, a contemporary Style home might have an interior that better suits a Renaissance villa. Most Styles have variations. A castle can be a beautiful, fairyland chateau, or a heavy Scottish fortification. A mansion can be a stately English manor house, or an overdone Beverly Hills extravaganza.

Architecture Styles often evolve from available technologies. For example, in the late 1800's when industrial buildings were going up all over Europe, some architects applied the look of factories to family homes. The idea was to replace the ornate and decorative mini-palaces of the rich bourgeoisie with a basic box – something exciting and different. They built new-fangled, factory-like houses for the wealthy avant-garde. The experiments capitalized on industrial brick walls; metal trimmed windows, thick glass sections and unusual metal parts. The structures looked very much like sweatshops waiting for the workers to come inside to sew, cut or build products. But clients were lined up to get one of these places. A modern, factory-like house showed off their individualism, bravery and wealth (those houses cost as much as fancy mansions.)

One prominent example of the factory Style trend is the Glass House (Maison de Verre) built in Paris, in 1932 by Pierre Chateau. The client was Dr. Dalsace, a man who loved the simplicity and clean lines of industrial glass, and the unique look of mechanical fixtures (his weird, metal, obstetric tools still sitting in the

house attest to this passion.) The wall of the exterior entrance is made of glass brick tiles. This was a radical material for a house; glass tiles were not high quality media, nor particularly attractive. They were mostly used in factory bathrooms. The doors, stairs and room dividers are exposed industrial metal. They resemble tools and machines. The Glass House became popular, especially among people who wanted to embrace the latest innovations and own a similar Modern Style house.

Today new technological Styles continue to be popular. Just like owning a modern factory-type house was fashionable in the past, in our times loft living is the rage. New constructions are made to mimic old factory spaces, and abandoned factories are repurposed. Living in industrial Style spaces, factories or shipping containers is both a nod to non-conformity and a way to appear very chic. But these places are often efficient structures, filled with ecologically conscious materials and time saving machines. If simple industrial interiors are too severe, residents can take a hint from the occupants of Maison de Verre: the family filled the inside of that home with Art Deco furniture and colorful fabrics as a counterpoint to the metal and glass.

Novel Styles arriving out of new materials and technologies are sometimes shocking. You might shake your head and hope that a new bizarre Style trend is a fluke, a radical experiment that will inevitably disappear. But not all of them do. In 1887, Gustave Eiffel, a French engineer, designed his Eiffel Tower for the Paris World's Fair. Its radical appearance and unique innovations could only be built with the development of reinforced iron and the elevator system of Elisha Otis. At first the building was a laughing stock. Its odd shape and weird materials were scandalous. Even before it was finished, the Tower's appearance fueled demands for its immediate destruction. Yet the builders didn't falter, nor bow to public hysteria. When

the 1889 World's Fair opened, attendees were treated to an awe-inspiring monument. People fell in love with the Eiffel Tower. Instantly it became the symbol of Paris. Those materials and spread like wild fire and new constructions all began to use them.

Today 3-D printers extrude buildings on site. Outrageous computerized drawings transform buildings into strange shapes with weird materials. Experimentation lends itself to exciting new Styles. But these new structures don't excite everyone. If the new stuff is off-putting, try to hang on. Like the Eiffel Tower and early factory houses, these "horrible" styles might become the mark of our times and sure enough, we'll eventually love them too.

Some house Styles emerge out of practical considerations, others from utopian agendas. When Tel Aviv was born, the city was planned from scratch. To make a new city for the new country of Israel, the residents rejected the house Styles of their homes left behind in Europe. Nor did they want to replicate the structures of nearby Arab cities. They sent their young architects to schools in Europe, like the Bauhaus in Germany, a design school with innovative ideas stressing simple Modern architecture. Modernist programs helped the designers come up with structures that were functional, unique and worked with Tel Aviv's environment. Over four thousand International Style houses were built in the Bauhaus Style resulting in a beautiful new city.

I live in Los Angeles where fantasy reaches its arms into numerous architecture Styles. We have buildings in the shapes of oranges, cameras, donuts and witches' dens. The canals in Venice were a copy of the water city in Italy with the addition of palm trees. People build houses in the Style of Disneyland castles,

medieval battle tents and domed religious shrines. Some of these Styles quote history and cultural identities, begin new building crazes, or just give us the giggles.

The “build whatever” attitude can spread quickly and signify the Style of a generation. In the 1960’s, Post Modernist architecture, a look combining ideas from multiple past Styles, was a smorgasbord of everything under the sun. Architects merged past and present Styles in order to replace the simple cold Modernist buildings that spread over America’s cities since World War II. Remarkably, Post Modernism is being revived today. This “everything but the kitchen sink” approach has its critics, but the pulse of society fuels architecture Style, and these buildings seem to reflect our civilization.

Getting to know house Styles is a process of “reading” the look of a building. Eventually the houses will tell you who they are. Until you get into those conversations, pick up a handbook on Styles. Like bird watchers, house watchers have to get out their binoculars and guides to hunt down and identify architecture Styles. Look at the physical forms, decorations, colors, size and anything else that’s repeated among a group of buildings. Track down the Style name. Photograph the building. Do a few quick sketches. Search out similar places. These collections will give you a basis for deciding the Style for you. No matter what buildings seduce us, we end up loving certain Styles. And if you don’t live in your preferred Style, don’t worry; you can still make friends with those buildings.

CHAPTER 12

CRAFT

"Without craftsmanship, inspiration is a mere reed shaken in the wind."
- Johannes Brahms

CRAFT

Craft, the third essential characteristic of architecture, covers the materials used to build and decorate buildings. It also encompasses the skill level of the

people who design and work on a house, including the wear and tear of the residents that live, contribute and care for a place. Making a house with top-notch craftsmanship is an immense undertaking. Doing it well is a rare gift.

The designer (architect, developer or client, etc.) comes up with a workable proposal that fits function, economics, environment and client approval. After the plans are agreed upon and the contractor is hired, the construction begins. Think about all the people involved: the city or township with their rules and regulations, the equipment and materials manufacturers, earth movers, landscape architects, people who transform raw materials into boards, siding, roof tiles, interior and exterior experts for handling walls, bricks, electricity, heat, and water, etc. There are craftspeople making, perfecting, and finishing each element. And there are people, selling, transporting, and delivering the stuff. Also involved are the bankers, real estate brokers, landscapers, cement pourers, interior decorators, and of course the clients or potential owners, and anyone and everyone who participates (and all those friends and relatives who give advice if you are building a house.) Considering start to finish, the list of people involved is massive. The hope is that individuals understand the big responsibility looming in the beginning to the end of creating a successful entity. If they do their jobs well, they are effective midwives, helping give birth to an exceptional structure. If not, the building will be shameful.

Once you start conversing with your house, beware - it will complain about any of its sloppy handiwork or craft flaws. It will point out bad wiring, rotting structural boards, mice holes, etc. You should take those suggestions and make

the needed repairs. Any problems you can't solve yourself should be contracted to those who can correctly fix them. Houses are very weary of do-it-yourselfers.

Cultures pass on important warnings about the importance of Craft when building a structure through children's stories. Take the tragic tale of the *Three Little Pigs*. First Little Pig built his house of beautiful, yellow straw (an ancient and often economical material still in use around the world.) But straw was an unfit material for his site. That plant material wasn't strong enough to protect First Little Pig from the huffing and puffing of Big Bad Wolf. One blow and the straw house was blown to bits. First Little Pig was Wolf's dinner that night.

Second Little Pig used trendy, natural sticks for his building. This material was lightweight and brittle. He loved the appearance of the woody texture, but he didn't have the expertise (nor hands) to handle the media efficiently, nor did he use the correct glue to connect the sticks properly. Still hungry, Big Bad Wolf blew down the stick house, destroyed Second Little Pig's home and consumed the second little porker, just as he devoured First Little Pig.

Third Little Pig understood that to build a strong house, the balance between environment and materials is important. He realized both wind and rain could damage a lightweight construction, and he knew that a successful house had to be strong enough to dissuade any predator who might be coming to knock it down. He searched for solid materials and honed up on Craft skills to provide strength and protection for his building. And so, Third Little Pig built his house of bricks and outsmarted the Wolf Gourmand. We root for Third Little Pig for his porcine cunning and smart material choices. Third Little Pig, with his knowledge

of strong Craft practices, lived happily ever after. But we must also give credit to the house. It kept its unspoken oath to protect and serve, and saved the Third Little Pig from becoming pork chops. (However, the story ends without mentioning if these events took place in an earthquake-prone area where bricks aren't a good choice.) Always keep in mind that materials and craftsmanship are connected to place. The main point is, while we're attracted to inexpensive, trendy, new, and beautiful materials, there are more issues to consider than our subjective appreciation of what something costs or how it looks.

Three little pigs drawing

Check out your own domicile. Look at how craftspeople constructed the entrance of your home. You can usually surmise that if the door closes well, it was cut properly, was sanded carefully, and painted correctly. This brings hope that other parts of the house had some love directed toward them as well. Imagine what it would take to have your structure crumble before your eyes. Our hearts are pulled when we see fire and earthquakes, tsunamis and floods, twisters and storms destroy homes and people's lives. Inspect things regularly so your house holds together come what may.

I'm always intrigued with the adjective, "crafty." It implies someone smart, but questionable in character. The implication of a dubious nature doesn't add up when it comes to the people who work on houses. Craft requires training, knowledge, and practice; good Craft is a highly developed activity, not a scam.

There was a time when Craft referred to the guild system. Craftspeople made things solid and beautiful. Skills were passed down by the master

craftsperson to the younger apprentices. It was a lifetime commitment; it took years for anyone to be really, really, good at what they could make. Training, repetition, and experimentation are necessary to know how to build at a high level. There are still great craftspeople around: a genius wood worker, talented tile setter, or even expertly programmed robots who can make stunning, lasting homes – talents that add to the beauty and integrity of a building. Always demand a high level of Craft for your house. Spend what you can for the best materials possible and hire the finest people you can find. It pays off in the long run, and you probably won't have to replace the work very often, unlike those poor souls who hire mediocre craftspeople or invest in cheap materials. By using their boyfriend's cousin to do the work on their house, they end up forced to repeat the process over and over.

We've discussed Idea, Design and Craft, as three basic foundations of architecture. While there is emotional feedback inherent in all of these areas, the emphasis has been on *thinking* about how each characteristic acts out in a house. Now it's time to start using other means, our senses and emotions to learn the language of buildings so you can get your conversations going.

Chapter 13

INSIDE

"Architecture is basically the designs of interiors, the art of organizing interior space." - Philip Johnson

INSIDE

Investigating house exteriors is a great way to understand architecture, but those outside layers aren't telling the whole story. There's another world of

action found inside every building. Exploring inside spaces reveals significant information about the house, about people and about you.

A building is at the mercy of those who inhabit its space. A house is like Pandora's Box. In Greek Mythology when Pandora opened her container, all the evils of the world were unleashed. When someone opens their home's door, their life explodes for all to see. As you enter an interior you can surmise a lot about the people who live there; our possessions and decorating styles are extensions of ourselves. Not that stuff is always bad. Unlike Pandora's situation, the things inside a home tell a rich story about the resident's personal life; good and bad go hand in hand.

People should live any way they like and fill their homes with whatever they want. But sometimes the things humans add to the inside of their places obliterate a building's authentic character. To live coherently within your home's spaces, the belongings you bring inside should also be welcomed by the building.

We decorate our houses to surround ourselves with things that keep us safe, efficient and happy. We bring in stuff that's functional, reliable, beautiful, and lots of things to make us feel good. But for many, emotions guide our lifestyles. You might buy a chair because you like it, not thinking about the way it fits in the house. Other stuff piles up over time: artworks, posters, lamps, machines, technology gadgets, kitschy remembrances, and Aunt Bernice's pillow collections fight for space. These and other products, such as memorabilia, necessary work papers, books, and of course our clothes stuffed into drawers

and overflowing in closets seem to multiply. All these non-essentials creep up into our spaces besides all the other functional necessities of life which seduce us all. But where do they go? Our consumer society encourages the purchase of more and more products, many you don't need and certainly your poor house doesn't want in its space. It's important to think about your trappings carefully. We sometimes buy what we fall for by impulse, rather than thinking about the discord it creates within our homes. Extraneous things clutter space. And places get covered over, bursting with possessions to the point where the house itself gets hidden under all the acquisitions. Acquiring objects has immense pleasure, but the real challenge is, "Will they balance the spaces and energy of the architecture?"

For example, an interior remodel can end up like a silly, trendy craze from a current design magazine, instead of unifying the look and feel of the house, A friend once confided to me that when she was building her house, the contractor insisted that she install heated towel racks in every bathroom. "Any house built today must have them!" he demanded. She fell for his sales pitch. After a few months she realized those expensive towel racks took up needed space, wrecked the visual layout of the room, raised the electric bill, and constantly broke down. After bumping into them once too often and seeing how the ugly forms protruded out from the walls, she removed them to regain better visual organization and larger room spaces.

Our homes become storerooms for collections. Whether you adore dolls or paintings, lamps and tables, shoes and books, video games and cookware, or

whatever acquisitions fuel your hunger, gather and enjoy as many things as you want. Film memorabilia, plants, and Grandma's glassware--go ahead, surround yourself with personal things that might be necessary for your mental health. But for a moment, stop and imagine what your poor house, all gussied up with all that stuff on every wall, in every corner, on every shelf, would say about things you bring into its space. I've been in places that double as Frankenstein's laboratory, look like an overcrowded animal shelter, have more books than a city library, can be mistaken for a shopping mall, or pose as a natural science museum. Some of these places are really exciting and others are downright scary. We've all seen the tragic photos of hoarders' homes, those obsessive gatherers who can't throw away old yellowed newspapers or a two-inch piece of a string. Houses don't like this. They want some of their personality to shine through. Think about how to add things into your space with the house as a player in the overall effect.

Most people claim to want less (1) rather than more stuff in their life, but this is a difficult challenge. It's not that you need more or less, it's that you crave satisfaction with your space, a sense of fulfillment. This means contentment with "body and soul" – to inhabit a harmonious environment. If you look around and your possessions seem uncomfortable together, they're probably not working in coordination with the volumes, lines, shapes and spaces of your house. That means there's a breakdown in balance.

Buildings are composed of structural components. Walls and doorways, windows and floors, all forms of foundational areas must work together with your possessions to thrive in a house - and for you to thrive too. Set up the time to get

rid of things. I'm a certified pack rat, but twice a year I make a material purge, a thoughtful, do-I-really-need-it sweep of at least one room in my house. Hopefully someone else can use the big cabinet, old skirt I'll never wear again, or a silly kitchen gadget. To keep the amount of stuff from expanding I use a simple rule: If something new comes in, something old goes out. To establish an agreement with your living spaces, look at an area carefully before you add something and listen to the feedback the house gives you whenever you alter its interior.

The Villa Necchi Campiglio, a house in Milan Italy, was built in the 1932. It's a breathtaking Modernist House designed by renowned Milanese architect, Piero Portaluppi. A visitor is immediately struck by the elegance and beauty of this villa. Whenever the house comes up in conversations with people who have visited the place, they comment that the Veranda is their favorite room. It's a section of the house that was bypassed during a redecoration blitz in the 1950's. The glassed Veranda contains a few paintings, a small amount of furniture, and is painted in a simple green color palette. The huge double windows provide a view of the garden. It's a place that displays perfection both in structure and atmosphere. You immediately sense peace and unity in that room.

Drawing of necchi House

Throughout the rest of the house, the rooms that have the least decorations are the ones that are more hypnotic, because those areas are where the home's details and the human collections balance one another.

Unfortunately, some of the rooms were replenished about twenty-five years after the house was constructed. The Second World War was over and it was time for

indulgence. The owners wanted something new and different to forget those bad times. The elegant, graceful house became a showplace for fancy, popular décor. I'm certain the residents adored all the fussy, ornate objects, but the Veranda's style and the way one feels in that space trumps every other room. Clean and elegant, it's the best of what a house can offer.

Have you seen your house naked? It's marvelous to be in a place without any furniture or added stuff. An empty house reveals its primal design. But it's rare to have this opportunity, since the minute we move into a place, things are hauled inside and soon fill up the whole interior. To work on the harmony of your home, pick one room. Empty it. If it's impossible to do this due to limited space or heavy lifting, take out as many things you can (it might be a good time to repaint as well.) Make a special effort to play with light and light sources. Look at your place with fresh eyes. Now stand in the corner and gaze around the room. Focus on the walls, windows, trim, shapes, and electric outlets, ceiling - all of the elements that make up the bones of the home. Finally, decide what you can bring back into the space. It may take some rearranging, transferring collections, grouping furniture or dumping things. This can cause problems with other people living in the space, but remind them they will benefit from paring back. Resolve to go through this process in every room. You may want to keep some rooms empty permanently. Keep working towards equilibrium.

If you live with a cat, you'll notice she's a good example of how to explore the spaces of a house. Sleeping on top of the refrigerator, squeezing into cabinets, jumping up on chairs and lying in front of the fireplace, checking out the

nooks in the kitchen, and crannies below tables – all those places we never think to use ourselves are missed opportunities. But it's a good idea to intentionally move through spaces to get to know your home. Looking at things with a renewed eye helps you rethink your personal environment. For a week, eat in a different room or unusual spaces. Include the closets, bathrooms, living spaces, attic, garage, porches, etc. Yes, set up dinner in the bathroom and breakfast in the attic. Get a sleeping bag and settle for a night in the kitchen, then the bathroom the next day. Make other adaptations. Change the lighting, pick new seating arrangements, play other kinds of music. These disruptions will seem odd and might be difficult for a big family dinner, but it forces new viewpoints in those spaces. You'll come face to face with more of your house's character and structure.

A woman I know who lives in a Frank Lloyd Wright House explained that she never bought one stick of furniture, nor added a single decoration. Since Mr. Wright designed and laid out every chair, table, couch, and bed, all the furniture was in its "correct" place. She wasn't unhappy about not being able to buy new furniture or decorations. She said that living in the house, she constantly felt the unity of all the parts. The main point is that you need to set up an agreement that's a contract between both you, your things and your house.

Homes, inside and out will show your signature. When I entered the house of a friend for the first time, I found myself expecting Goldilocks to appear. The place was so cute, so unique, so sweet; it had been the home of the Three Bears. She had created a true otherworld that reflects her personality. This look

is not for everyone, but never worry if your place doesn't fit into a proscribed formula. You must live there, so stand by it - together it's you and the house.

Goldilocks house Drawing

Most people love their homes. (1) Be mindful about what makes you happy when you enter your place. Work to create an atmosphere where you and the house create your own heaven.

Chapter 14

THE SENSES

"All credibility, all good conscience, all evidence of truth, come only from the senses." - Friedrich Nietzsche

THE SENSES

In the last chapters as you pondered Idea, Design, Craft, you thought about how each relate to architecture. You also mastered physical learning activities, flirted with basic architecture vocabulary, analyzed the visual elements and considered what it takes to create personal relationships to architecture. You

thought about all the junk we use, analyzed the visual elements and considered what it takes to create personal relationships to architecture. You thought about all the junk we collect and subject our poor home to deal with. So now you might seem you're ready to converse with houses. **Not yet.** Those activities mostly demanded an intellectual approach to architecture. You had to think, think, think. What should I say? What should I remove? What can I do? These are all mental exercises.

Nevertheless, while you were doing all this thinking, you probably noticed that beyond using human reason to practice those exercises, you also had some strong emotional responses. Now we'll concentrate even more on using feelings as we move towards deeper house interactions.

One way to get the emotional dialogue going is to tap into your senses. Humans exploit their five senses to navigate the world: Sight (vision) Touch (texture), Hearing (sound), Smell (odor) and Taste (flavor.) These tools provide us with a direct connection to the buildings we inhabit. Engaging your five senses is essential to maintain real dialogues with architecture. Your senses provide focus and tenderness towards the buildings you see and use. Balancing thinking and feeling, that is using your mind and your heart together opens the door to the character of architecture and jumpstarts your ability to talk to houses.

IMAGE DRAWING?



Chapter 14a

SIGHT

“Architecture is a visual art, and the buildings speak for themselves.”
- Julia Morgan

SIGHT

We engage buildings with our Sight. Architecture is composed of forms, shapes we see with our eyes. When you look at buildings you might be very conscious about what you're observing. Or you might pass houses without a second thought. Training your eyes to pick up on a building's physical traits helps you capture more information about architecture than just catching random forms falling across your line of vision. The sense of Sight allows you witness the vitality and character of architecture.

Sight helps us exist in the world; our eyes manipulate the connections between spaces, objects and ourselves. Sight varies from one person to another due to the diversity in physical makeup (and the cones in your eyes that you inherited from your Grandma.) But there are basic steps most everyone can use to train their eyes to see buildings. To circumnavigate the world of architecture, those who have little or no Sight will depend on other senses. If one sense isn't working, others can be tapped.

Rashomon, the brilliant Japanese movie directed by Akira Kurosawa, presents a series of events from different perspectives. Each person involved in a common incident, recites his version and comes up with a completely different scenario. It's similar with architecture (and any event from your childhood when you get a family group together to remember.) Ask anyone what they saw when you both encountered the identical building and you'll get a response different from your own. The responses will be so unbelievable that you'll wonder if you and this person encountered the same architecture. You already know that we all see things differently-ask any divorced couple. But it only shows that with

architecture, like people, buildings are not frozen entities; they are complex characters that reveal various aspects of themselves to different viewers.

You've reviewed the design concepts of Line, Space, Form, Color and Texture separately. Now focus on these elements as a total Sight experience. In other words, compress all that information into a Sight spectacular – intensely look at your home and don't think about anything else but what you see.

As you've already been doing, stand in front of your home's exterior but now try for deeper visual concentration. Look at your house as if you were looking through a microscope – focus on every “detail,” “cell” and “hair.” This is observational engagement, where you'll observe characteristics as they are, not what you think they look like. Allow yourself to feel any emotional connection that you never felt before. Focusing eliminates the clichés bouncing around in your head and centers on the authenticity of the house. As you gaze at the building, it's a good time to take notes and draw some quick sketches.

Eventually pull back from the close-up and move away from your house as far as possible, even if it means crossing the street. Take in the activity around your building from this vantage point. Make sure your eyes encompass things like the ground and sky, driveway, adjacent buildings, gardens or sidewalks. Looking at both the structure and the surrounding areas so you have multiple reference points. As you stand at a distance from your house, ask yourself if it feels well fitted to its environment. Does it sit comfortably next to its neighboring structures? Are the trees and foliage all the same size, or different heights? Do the colors of the house balance with the colors of everything surround the place?

What kinds of shapes do you see on the exterior sections of the house? Do you notice bushes, walls, signs, or gates? Stay cognizant of anything that jumps out at you. Identify visual information you've never noticed before.

Continue moving around the house, getting closer with each rotation. Keep your eyes open for what seems interesting, but also let the house throw things out to you. Have you ever noticed the length of your home, how it blends into the shrubbery, or the repetition of the windows across the front? Are you staring at the door, the steps, or does some other visual characteristic jump out? Identify things on your place that you've missed for as long as you've lived there.

Walk even closer. Make more observations. Check out the inset of the windows, the decorative bricks around the door or the gutters going down the wall. Then move forward once again and concentrate on some other exciting detail. Take an interest in the door handle, the window latch, and the glass. Warning! Don't use this activity as a call to begin fixing all the obvious problems. If the place needs paint, new shutters, weeding in the garden, or any of the other relentless upkeep chores, put them on hold. You're searching for the soul of your house, not its flaws. When you find a comfortable space between yourself and the building, fix your eyes on that part of the house while standing still. Repeat this over and over as you move closer towards or away from the house.

As you practice this Sight exercise, you'll recognize if you're a "Panoramic" - someone interested in a scene where landscape and other surroundings are included with the structure. Think of a Panoramic as a kind of "big picture" viewer. Or you could be a "Tight Focuser" - a person whose

attention is directed to close-up sections of houses. Tight Focusers are interested in the buildings themselves so they tend to dismiss the stuff around architecture. Maybe you're a "Detailer" – those who concentrate on fragments, such as little architectural pieces like keyholes or window latches. All of these approaches will pay off later when you fill your archive with your personal collection, but to get started, pick only one view- Panoramic, Detailer, or Tight Focus.

Identify your most enjoyable visual points. Don't fret if what you like best seems unsubstantial; this fondness for any attention-getter will transform into connoisseurship. Even if you're drawn to doorbells or rain spigots, you'll use this favorite viewpoint to become an authority on one aspect of architecture. You'll soon become a scholar (and lover) of house styles, building nails, rooflines, or any one of your particular architectural interests.

Besides the physical qualities that are obvious with Sight, houses have characteristics related to culture, society and economics that are conceptual, theoretical or impossible to decipher when looking at buildings. Your real interest might be "invisible" issues such as who designed the house, or how much it cost to build, what people lived in the neighborhood, etc. One-on-one with buildings won't necessarily provide this information; these kinds of inquiries depend on investigation. Do that research, but only after going face to face with architecture.

The experience of looking at architecture intensifies strong emotions. As you linger in front of your dwelling, you'll be affected by your internal reactions. Locking your eyes on house jump-starts hidden sense memories. Do you remember the feelings you had at the first Sight of your residence? Did you like

or love it instantly? What are your current emotional connections? Are you responding to, envy, disgust, jealousy, anger, joy, nostalgia, happiness, etc.? Sensitizing ourselves to a building's visual information boils down to what goes on in our heads, paired with what's emerging in our hearts. Relying on Sight is both thinking and feeling at the same time.

I like to look at houses wearing sunglasses. It forces me to look more closely at things that appear very different when I'm wearing scrims of filtered color over my eyes. Put on a pair of shades or hold up a piece of transparent plastic in grey, brown, blue or red in front of your eyes. These chromatic covers flatten the wavelengths of light so house colors appear as darker or lighter than when looking at them straight on. These techniques force you to focus on things you usually miss when you use your regular eyesight. By playing with perception, the house will let you in on some of its hidden visual quirks that might not have been obvious to your normal Sight.

When the artist, Claude Monet, gave birth to the Impressionist Style, critics thought he lacked painting skills, his eyesight was challenged, he suffered from severe cataracts, or he was a horrible, sloppy painter. Looking at his hazy, soft colors and blended brush strokes one can't help but see landscape in a fresh way.

Drawing of a Monet Painting

Monet's paintings are beautiful expressions of radiant colors – you feel the wind, the air, you smell the grass, the water, and you feel the beauty of nature. Could it be that he's just a good example of someone who used his eyes and

talent to allow us to see and feel more deeply looking at his fantastic paintings?
Look your house directly in the eyes. Whatever the response, using your Sight
will get the relationship going.



Chapter 14b

TOUCH

"See me. Feel me. Touch me." - The Who

TOUCH

After exploring the sense of Sight, focus on the sense of Touch. Strong reactions to Textures (how a surface feels) occurs both when sliding your hand across a surface or form as well as when you just look at the surface or form. Both experiences incite feelings misleading you into thinking you're physically connecting to a surface. When stroking a real physical form like a puppy, or merely viewing the dog from afar, both experiences send messages to our brains. Our first reaction is our brain trying to clarify whether or not we're familiar with the substance or thing. In a split second our nerve endings respond positively or negatively. This sense of Touch, whether activated with our bodies or our sight, alerts us if the surface is dangerous or welcoming, pleasant or disgusting.

Texture is a design element present in every visual form. Its power connects to both senses of Sight and Touch. We've discussed how textures can be real or fake. We've already discussed how real surfaces are "tactile" textures. When we Touch a real flower, our hands slide over the soft petals and we sensually experience the outer layers of the flower's soft surface (unless you touch a thorn.) While Touch reactions are strongest with tactile surfaces, visual surfaces still have a lot of power. Reviewing "visual" textures, we see (using Sight) patterns that convince our brains that a surface is made of particular materials, like a bunch of flowers strewn across a table. But those plants might be floral decorations on a tablecloth that aren't real flowers, just dyed or painted pictures. These designs can reproduce the "feel" of a particular object, even if it's an illusion. A wall might look like marble, yet it's really a plastic surface with

designs (like wallpaper or contact paper) that produce the appearance of stone. When perceiving the object, we believe that it's made of rough, natural material. But if we Touch it, the plastic would be smooth, without the cool temperature and irregularities of genuine stone.

Photos of objects with all of their “realistic textures” caught in the image can induce feelings of Touch just as much as real objects. When you look at a picture of a carpet, your brain deciphers its patterns to understand that the surface of the carpet is a pile of knotted yarn – you imagine that if you Touch it, you'll feel a fuzzy, soft surface. But our eyes play games. This photo is fooling you with its visual texture. If you see a photo of a friend, you think it's a human being with all the familiar textures. Sliding your hands across the photos only produces the sensation of a slick paper texture. You might get a paper cut, but you won't feel actual tactile textures of either the carpet, or the friend. However, if you rub your hands over the surface of the real carpet, you'll feel the true, soft, bumpy tactile texture of woven wool just as Touching another person telegraphs strong, familiar feelings.

Think about all the paintings you've looked at and how the illusions of textures are convincing, but phony. Can you feel the softness of *Mona Lisa's* hair or the scratchy seeds in Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*? These are painted illusions. If you dare to Touch them, you'll only feel dried paint on top of the canvases. (Make sure the museum guards aren't watching.) This is not a painter “cheating” to fool the viewer, nor is it a devious way to create sleight of hand. Textural

Illusions are what artists use to make us believe. Architects use it too. The power of texture and the ways people create texture are magical and illuminating.

Sight and Touch work in unison to help us decipher textural surfaces. As we perceive patterns that appear to be smooth, rough, wet, dry, sharp, etc. we make assessments whether the texture is positive or negative. The fluffy fur of a kitten, a cashmere sweater, and the soft skin of a newborn baby all give us considerable pleasure merely by looking at them in a film, photo or any visual format. To accelerate these wonderful feelings, we could go to the source and lay our hands on their true tactile textures. Touching the fur, the sweater, and the baby's soft skin would result in upbeat, positive sensations. Often tactile textures, like silk and puppy fur, are seductive invitations, beckoning our fingers to slide over their surfaces. Notice how many people can't resist petting a dog or cat. You know the people who can't stop playing with their hair or rubbing their sweaters. Our brains are wired so that touching these textures will impart delightful feelings into our nerve endings, and reverberate through our minds and bodies.

Touch won't always be pleasurable. Harmful sensations might be lurking in surfaces. "Don't touch!" is one of the most universal war cries of parents to protect their children from hazards. From an early age we learn that patterns that imply sharp nails, broken glass, pointed metal, and other piercing surfaces send an instantaneous warning, "Ouch!!" Even when these harmful material surfaces are visual Textures, not tactile, the mind makes an immediate assessment of how they'll feel in direct contact with our bodies. Images with cacti and sewing needles are flashing stop signs sending a red flag warning that we're about to

encounter a dangerous, painful trap. A lion with sharp teeth in a movie or a bloody knife in an oil painting can scare you. This is because we know that touching these things in reality is really risky.

Growing up you probably had your share of scratches and splinters from wood, broken glass, spikey plants and other aggressive tactile surfaces. We rely on past experiences to recall that hot surfaces burn and sharp surfaces cut. Adults know to use caution before grabbing certain materials. Your brain remembers the pain of previous experiences and it warns you to touch at your own risk.

The textures of architecture are rich and complex. Buildings are made of multiple visual and tactile textures, illusions and truths. If you explore which house textures are visual or tactile, you'll enjoy using your sense of Touch as a way to engage buildings. First work with visual textures, the ones you don't feel, only see. Without any physical contact with the house, predict what the outside of your place will feel like when you touch it. Picture your hands sliding down a wall panel, or gliding over the concrete. Imagine pulling your fingers across metal, and rubbing your hands on old stone. Mmm. Feels good (at least in your imagination.) Chances are that in reality the surfaces won't feel good at all.

Try to identify the authenticity of your home's textures. Is the wood really wood, or is it laminated board? Is the glass real glass or is it plexiglass? Is the house trim made from metal or plaster? Is the copper pipe painted orange and green to appear as copper or is it the real thing? But be careful not to become a texture snob who believes that only the "real thing" counts. Illusions can be as

meaningful as authentic surfaces. Real materials are not necessarily superior to the fake substitutions, or vice versa. A painted plastic column, for example, might be more beautiful than one made of real stone and certainly more economical when weighing the cost of buying and installing a real granite column. The main idea is to be able to distinguish if a texture is real or fake so you have some concept of what it will feel like before you jump in.

After you've played with the visual illusions of your own place, begin to connect physically (tactilely) with your house's exterior. This is called "Hugging." Hugging occurs as you physically stroke the house. The act of hugging buildings activates your nerve endings; it lets you fine-tune your sensitivity with architecture. It's also a great method for getting a conversation going with buildings. Stroke a wall or window. Touch and caress it. Feel if it's soft or hard, rough or smooth. Try leaning or lying on sections of your place. Pull your leg along a wall of wood or stone (or plastic or contact paper.) Rest your cheek on a windowpane. By taking the time to check out the irregularities in your home's building materials by both Sight and Touch, you can figure when to engage a tactile texture that lets you enter a state of intense sensuality. Or at least you can identify the aggressive tactile textures that are dangerous and can help you avoid any spilled blood and pain.

Now look inside. Most house interiors are a circus of sensations. The textures of furniture, carpets, decorations, machines, etc. can turn a home into a Big Top of overactive sensual experiences. Unconsciously we might love or hate our homes just by the dynamism of the textural surfaces. You've probably been

in an environment where there was so much textural paraphernalia that it felt as if your body was literally being swallowed up. This isn't just claustrophobia, it's a panic attack brought on by an overabundance of textures. If you are bullying the people you live with and complaining constantly, have headaches and feel depressed it could be texture overload. You might become very sick living in your own uber-textured environment.

Drawing here

Most people crave living in a place of peace. This means with less stuff. (1) Becoming aware of the textural energy inside and outside your home is the opportunity to heighten your senses and emotional contact with architecture. It's also a wakeup call to disengage with things you don't need and to analyze how to balance all the house patterns and textures. Jump in and get some help to clean up and throw out. Your house will reciprocate and your migraines might go away.

As I walk around looking at architecture, I practice Touch by Hugging houses. After I greet a building, I slide my hand down its front wall, window, or doorway. Witnesses look puzzled. Bank guards, security people, and doormen harrumph as they worry about what's going on. They have no idea why someone would feel up a building. But I ignore them. Touch is primal. It gets me closer to the character of a house and my sensitivity to the world becomes sharper. Hug your house today.



Chapter 14c

HEARING

"I call architecture frozen music." - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

HEARING

Houses make noise. They creak and squeak as they swell and contract in drought and rain. They twitch and grumble in the heat and cold. As houses are

tugged down with gravity, expanded by weather, and yanked up by wind, our human ears become the catchall for their cacophony of sounds. Depending on the structural forces of a building, most architectural materials are under immense pressures and various stresses. As we gaze at the exterior of a house, it's more than a visual experience; the racket of that structure strikes our ears and penetrates our bodies.

The interiors of buildings accelerate sound damage; inside there are concentrated noises, loud and soft, bouncing around everywhere. Living spaces contain inhabitants, tools, objects and machines that screech, hiss, bleat and talk. Think about your home. You might be overloaded with blaring background music, a sizzling stove, knocking pipes and laughing kids. The purr of a cat, growl of a dog, laughter of a baby and the streaming programs of digital media add to the voice of a house. "Turn it down!" is the battle cry of every parent. Yet these sounds are rhythms we create in our residences. We make choices on volume, decide where to place noisemakers, pick the places for arguing with our partners and siblings, and invest in machines that ring and talk. As much as the house contributes to sound, people add most of the noises that attack our ears.

House sounds are individual to a particular place. Consciously opening up your ears to your own environment is like listening to an orchestra tuning up their instruments. Certain house noises can drive you crazy. Anyone who's suffered through apartment living with a teenage drummer who practiced directly above their bedroom can agree that not all house noises are positive. As you listen to your own place, you'll realize that the house is using hums and whistles to tell its

Commented [13]: Cacophony?

story. Try to identify all the vibrations and figure out where they come from. It's particularly interesting to listen in the same place at different times of the day. In morning, noon and night the clatter of a place and its surroundings resonate with varied sounds; the breakfast dishes, the sleepy afternoon winds, the evening news shows all produce varying aural feedback throughout the day and night. In addition, the point at which you position yourself inside a house will affect how you hear the shifting sounds. Standing or sitting changes everything. So does silence.

Home musicals are concerts. Does your house ring loud and clear? Is your place hip-hop, or classical, or just some avant-garde music machine? Is the house singing a ballad or creating a jazz ensemble? Don't forget that "noise" is the individual music of your house with added help. You are constantly adding your own melody into the song.

My screeching front door is perfect for a role in a horror film. When the door opens its creepy "Errrrrrr" sound can easily scare a stranger hearing that frightening whine. In wet weather the door expands and rubs against the jam so the squeaks intensify. While it would be easy to sand the wood to get rid of the terrifying squeal, this sound is welcome to my ears. It warns me when people come in or out. I also think it's my house's way to wish me well as I close the door to leave for the day.

In addition to a building's own noises, the unrelenting din of the neighborhood, the murmurs of the nearby environment, actions happening around the site, street noise, and people going about life, all generate a strong

sound presence. These combinations meld into a sound squad directly attacking our sense of Hearing. Much depends on where you live. The sounds of screeching birds in the country are very different than the sounds of screeching cars in the city. Is your house overwhelmed with the clanking of the surrounding street activity? Does the neighborhood scream over the voice of your home? Are the sounds of the structure balanced with the sounds of cars and bikes zooming around? Your building's exterior is a good place to reflect on its ambient sounds. It takes a bit of maneuvering to separate the pings from the screams, but isolating each source is like identifying each instrument in a band. After becoming aware of so much sound, you may be able to turn the volume up or down.

When a big construction project was going on in my neighborhood, the neighbors complained day and night about the deafening noise. Our poor houses shook and rattled inside and out; the drilling and banging drowned out the usual sweet sounds (and also unpleasant ones) on our block. After the buildings were finished and we could pull the cotton out of our ears, the original jingles and knocks of our houses still made music, but with completely new vibrations. The extra buildings added unique sounds to the mix. It didn't take long to start humming along with the fresh new melodies.

Sounds, like other sensual characteristics, thrust us into any number of emotional states. You might find yourself nostalgic, happy, sad, or depressed when Hearing your house sounds repeating over and over, like earworms you can't get out of your head.

My Grandma's refrigerator hissed in regular intervals to the point where the walls of the room would creak. No one ever thought to fix the motor or move the fridge. As we stood around the kitchen table helping her wrap the pigs-in-a-blanket, that noise became the deep-toned bass of our conversations, the tempo of learning how to cook, and the background beat of three generations laughing and loving together. My Grandma is gone and her house may be too, but now and then when I enter a building and hear similar sounds, her house comes back to me. This jolt in time produces clear, sweet joy. Listen to the sounds of your house. Sing that tune as your feet tap in time. Feel the repetition and rhythms of the song. Document the noises and make a recording. Your house will play its concert for you.

Drawing of Refrigerator



Chapter 14d

SMELL

"Nothing revives the past so completely as a smell that was once associated with it." -- Vladimir Nabokov

SMELL

Smell is an odd, but useful sense for connecting to architecture. The odor of a building reveals a lot about the structure itself, as well as its surrounding area. "Sniffing around" lets you uncover hidden characteristics about your house and its environment.

The human olfactory system mainly consists of the nostrils. Odor molecules enter into the nose when inhaling, but they also come in through the mouth. These particles then transmit information about smells to the brain. Smell and Taste are closely linked, so we Smell and Taste houses at the same time.

Substitute your senses of Sight, Touch and Hearing with Smell. Stand beside your house. Close your eyes and explore your home's surrounding area by taking a long hard whiff. If a structure is urban based, the surrounding city has its own particular perfumes - odors of cars, food, air and building materials mix with passing pedestrians, lurching bikes, hot cement and dog poop. Notice how they're all mixing into a distinct smelly soup. The countryside makes a different perfume; those areas emit natural fragrances like grass and earth with cow poop fertilizer and cut wheat added into the mix. Some smells are shared senses no matter where you live. Urban car emissions, or farm machine exhausts are similar perfumes. While breathing in those scents you'll identify various kinds of plantings, animals and human-built edifices. Unfortunately, pollution, chemicals and vehicles all produce odors in both city and country. All in all, nature, and humans create Smell together, so in partnership they infuse a building's bouquet.

Some people are highly sensitive to odors. Like perfume connoisseurs, or wine tasters, they are gifted with bloodhound noses; they can tell if a house has a

mold problem, unclean air ducts, or rotting wood. Just walking past, they know if the residents served sauerkraut two days ago. Their senses get overloaded by cigarette smoke, gas leaks and old food penetrating the inside and outside of a house. These folks are born with more odor receptor cells than most people, but if you aren't at this level, with practice, you can become proficient at recognizing and analyzing house smells. The more you understand what aromas emanate from a place, the easier it is to mix your own home's cologne.

Weather, building materials, landscaping, sites, and air-quality - the list that impacts Smell goes on and on. These brews conjure up strong memories and emotions and like the other senses, positive and negative feelings. A common universal for suburbanites is the fresh cut grass smell on a Sunny Spring Day. Running into that experience years later instantly takes us back to a place of joy. The odors of our first homes, the people we love, the natural scents of flowers, and our childhoods full of snow or sunshine - all these nose-to-brain attacks jumpstart a reverie of your past. Scents are time travelers and the good ones fill us with bliss. The bad ones, either too strong for the human nose to tolerate, or those that carry difficult memories, arise easily and have to be forced back or pushed aside so you don't blame a house for bad "vibes."

A building's body, the materiality of the house, has Smell power. The wood, concrete, paint, glass and metal rise up into our nostrils and a video of our connections to those materials starts playing in our heads. Aromas are even a more potent in a house's interior. When you go inside architecture, the odors are

confined within spaces, hovering in rooms and taking over entire places. They are usually strong and personal. Often a time line of trapped odors is left from the people who live or have lived there before; animals, babies, food and waste add up. Teenagers' sneakers and smokers' clothes orchestrate their own symphonies. Think about all the air scent products marketed to hide the scents in your home. Turn them off, get rid of the candles and incense, and put away the infused soap. Dump whatever reeks. Sniff the real scents of your house and try to describe them.

Oddly, people aren't always aware of their own contributions to the strength of architecture odors. For example, where do you keep your trash containers? When I first moved into a dense city neighborhood, my house was sandwiched between other buildings without much room between them. I set my waste cans in the allotted space along the driveway. One windy day it occurred to me that the smells of my leftovers were wafting right into the open windows of the house next-door, probably directly into the neighbor's nose. I moved the cans closer to the side of my house nearer to the walls. That freed my neighbors from the gusting scents of the remnants of my wonderful, but stinky French cheese wrappers. I also planted jasmine next to the receptacles; not only were the neighbors protected from garlic, old fish and other wastes that intensified in the hot climate, but that wall of flowers also guarded my own house from odor attacks. The thick scent of jasmine created a barrier so the garbage scents couldn't turn back and penetrate their space, nor mine.

Drawing of ? cheese wrappers or garbage can?

Celebrate the Smell of buildings. It's the sweat and tears of architecture.



Chapter 14e

TASTE

"Architecture is the plant fertilizer of our lives; it is the way to be a big, great-tasting tomato." - Robert Sullivans

TASTE

Hunger is one of the most primal human instincts. Hunger alerts us to eat in order to survive. Once something goes into our mouths, the sense of Taste

filters and glorifies (or destroys) the experience of eating. Some Taste receptors intermix with Smell so about 80% of what we Taste is also related to Smell.

In general terminology, words related to Taste describe things we don't necessarily eat. Besides desiring food, we also "hunger" for intense experiences. Some folks have an "appetite" for pleasure. A person is noted for their good "taste." A beautiful car looks "tasty, or that new dress is "delicious." Applying food words to human activities is the best way to communicate how fundamental these actions are to us; it's because these things, just like food, sustain us.

If someone has a "developed palette" it means they have an understanding and appreciation of good edibles. They have superior "taste." This is also how Taste is used in archi-speak context. Someone who decorates their home with the most beautiful colors, clever forms and fantastic furniture has "good taste." Yet this phrase is problematic. There's discrimination against those who don't obsess over the latest trend, style or decoration. Anyone who's not "cool and new" or who doesn't follow historic or academic ideas about which "correct" design canon should be followed is mistakenly considered flawed. They are said to have "no taste" or worse, "bad taste". Many critics and self-styled gurus of design and architecture pontificate on what makes good Taste. The challenge is to develop and recognize your own taste in architecture (and all other endeavors.)

To develop a harmonious and beautiful home, you have to figure out what Taste means for you. If you consider your home as a dinner, think about how it

would Taste. Is it delicious? Is it healthy? Is it excessive, minimal, or junk food?

What's the main dish and is there dessert?

Do a design Taste check on your place. If you like a group of colors, lets say bright orange, and shimmering blue, but you suspect in your heart that they'll clash once put on your walls, will you still paint your house in those colors? Is a paint job in brilliant blue and highly saturated orange harmful to your place? Taste certainly goes beyond color. Will you hang up Aunt Sue's birthday gift - a revolting clown painting – even if you know it insults your home? Will there be a fight to the finish with other family members about placing Grandpa's ugly clock in the living room? Will you give in? If the color of the year is green, will you paint every piece of furniture green? The answer to developing Taste is to be conscious of the decisions you make and how those decisions play out in the house. Be mindful about your choices for your house. Become aware if any additions or design elements you add in are about yourself rather than the building, As you think more about what a house wants, your sensitivity to architecture will become more fine-tuned. Your own personal Taste starts to grow.

Taste is an area where people change; you probably don't hang up the same posters you loved as a teenager, or keep the old stuffed chair you found in the alley when you were in college. Taste evolves: it comes down to what you can live with, and how to respect your house at the same time.

Craving is a designation of hunger, so I sometimes think about both what my house and what I "crave". It needs a new driveway and I should replace the

garage. But maybe other nourishment is more important. My house indicated its hunger for a beautiful garden in the front yard. After listening to its pleas, I put the driveway and garage on hold; instead of fixing them, I planted a garden with local plants. Cacti and succulents show off the house's shapes and colors and unify the garden. The house looks "tastier" with the new garden. I'll get to the other problems soon enough, but so far with the garden, there's a lot of happiness spread between my home and me.

Drawing of cacti garden

As you rouse each of your senses, count on Taste to make the architecture experience more penetrating. But don't actually take a bite out of your house. We taste architecture in a different way than we eat food. But to some degree it feels similar. As you stand in front of your house, are you filled up, like you've eaten a wonderful dinner or nuzzled a loved one closely? Do you feel safe and happy? The longings, the urges to be satisfied both physically and mentally go back to a sense of Taste.

We've separated the five senses to focus on them individually. Now it's time to use them together as a guidepost to converse with your house. Since basic human perception works in tandem with all the senses, balance them as a total package when talking to houses.



Chapter 14f

BEAUTY

"You are so beautiful" - Joe Cocker

BEAUTY

You're probably saying to yourself, function and structure are important for buildings, but I just want a beautiful place to live and work. This is a valid reaction

because where we spend our time affects how we think and feel. Yet the meaning of beauty is so personal that for thousands of years, thinkers, philosophers and people in general can't agree on a definition. There are so many theories on what qualifies as "beautiful" that it seems impossible to figure out a good description. The study of beauty is called Aesthetics and even the word in English is spelled in different ways, esthetics or aesthetics. But no matter how you spell it, or how you react to beauty, it's an important aspect of decoding architecture. Ugly or gorgeous, at some point you may want to develop a relationship with a house that stretches your idea of what beauty can mean.

In many ways, the saying, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is true. We struggle with our culture, upbringing, experience and DNA - all of which prompt us to decide if a building looks good. So once again we react with a Subjective response. We've already discussed that it's important to use your subjective feelings as a first pass, but remember, put them on hold and go to an Objective response in order to establish a way to look at architecture with a balanced perspective. You should practice second-guessing your first reaction in order to be open to architecture.

We can't help stare when we see a good-looking person, but in that quick moment, we don't know their real character or inner spirit, only the eye-catching outer shell. Likewise, if a house is delightful to the eye, or is in some way "attractive," the tendency is to call that building beautiful. Alluring forms are magnetic. The exteriors of buildings with their masks and decorations tug at our heartstrings and make us ooh and ahh at their lovely appearances. To go beyond

those cheap thrills (we all fall for them) takes a conscious effort. Keep in mind, a house, person, or artwork need not be beautiful to be loved, respected or well designed. But thinking about beauty lets us consciously explore the forms and meanings of the architecture we live with every day.

In ancient times, the Greeks set out to make the most magnificent structures ever built. Their quest was to instill beauty into form. Starting with sculptures, they reproduced human figures, more or less life-size globs with smiling faces (the smile was to communicate that these statues were “alive.”) Those Archaic laughing statues seem silly today, but they reveal a commitment by the artists to find methods for creating perfection. To continue the evolution, sculptors exploited schemes of proportions. By taking one portion of human anatomy (no one seems to agree if it was an arm or finger) and multiplying that length, they built the human form as a series of mathematical intervals. The statue’s faces became symmetrical, each side a mirror of the other. This balance created an ideal representation of the human being - forever young, alive and real. The statues were beautiful because of their mathematical sequences.

The Greeks architects also applied mathematical systems to buildings. While the forms of architecture differ from the anatomy of humans, the principles worked the same for temples as it did for statues. Early temples were heavy and rough, fronted by bulging, fat columns that appeared squashed by the weight of the roofs. Eventually a harmony evolved. Architects retooled the proportions of their temples until an ideal was reached based on mathematical intervals. They first built ratios of columns, 1×3 (front to side,) then 1×5 , and finally $2Y \times X+1$

(the Parthenon.) Those temples were not only houses of worship; they were in fact large-scale sculptures. Now the Greek buildings were beautiful too.

The ancient Greeks realized that qualities like attractiveness or handsomeness are only eye candy. These qualities don't reveal depth, interior dimension or beauty. Those wise thinkers knew that to make something beautiful, it was imperative to search for perfection by setting up measurable systems that resulted in harmony and order. In defining beauty, instead of falling for something that looks good, we can go farther by looking for an arrangement of parts that produces a living whole.

Fast forward to our current times and look around to see how the concept of beauty constantly changes. Fashion is one example where trends have to be replaced every season and the "look" of the models must be updated as well. While we don't want to be tied to a system that is too trendy, nor one that instantly becomes outdated, the rush to make the new often sidesteps the issue of timelessness (hopefully, bell bottoms and Nehru jackets are never coming back.) As for architecture, obviously we don't want to live in a Greek temple or build a house that looks silly before it's even finished, but what do we demand in new constructions?

While idea, design and craft are the foundations that make architecture, balancing them together to be both functional and beautiful is the challenge. It's important that our places do more than just look pretty; they should be unified by whatever system works for each structure. They should feel alive both inside and outside. We can demand beauty in our architecture: we just need to define it.

We've all walked into magical interiors. Entering the Pantheon in Rome, (a hideous construction from the exterior) the effect is unbelievable; an immense glowing hole in the ceiling seems to swoop the visitor up into space. You get a sensation of floating upward through the magnificent dome propelled into the azure sky. Chartres Cathedral, illuminated by the sun pouring through the rich colors of its stained glass windows sends a tourist directly into a utopian version of heaven. Sometimes the way you feel in a building will indicate if it's beautiful. But respect your own taste peculiarities too.

Drawing of the Pantheon

Hopefully you've experienced the Stendhal Syndrome. This is a condition where you get dizzy, become confused, or suddenly start laughing or crying-all because the building you encounter is so beautiful that it moves you in a mysterious way. This is recognition of beauty. If you are still sorting out what beauty means to you, when coming upon a building, ask "Are you beautiful?" and see what the house says.

Chapter 15

CONVERSATIONS

“Let us make a special effort to stop communicating with each other, so we can have some conversation.”— Mark Twain

CONVERSATIONS

You've done it! You've amassed the tools needed to talk with houses! You know how to approach architecture with the Look-Search-Question-Analyze system. You learned archi-speak, respecting buildings as living entities, and decoding their ideas and structures. Now you can converse with architecture.

Maybe.

Concentrating on your own place and other buildings you use, you've made judgments about "good" and "bad" architecture, done research, picked up ways to identify Ideas, analyzed Design, pondered Craft, practiced verbal greetings and opened your senses. Maybe you've also cleaned out some junk from your home. But possibly talking to houses isn't going very smoothly. Even with all that preparation, the house stands in disinterested silence. You quickly realize that archi-speak functions as a way for humans to talk to other humans, but it's more difficult to use the vocabulary for humans to talk to houses.

Because we think of spoken speech as the dominant conversational medium, we expect to hear a loud, booming voice roaring out of a building; it's a big disappointment when nothing happens. But it's not the words of the home, nor your inadequate hearing that blocks discussions with houses, it's **that the language of architecture is not a spoken language**. Houses speak in ways that are much more subtle. The dialect is a combination of visual and sensual linguistics. It's a self-realization process of thoughts and sensations that bubble up when you engage architecture. This approach is the only way to develop interactions, because architecture refuses to converse in human tongue.

Think for a minute about what happens when you stop and get focused on a building. When you're in contact with architecture, acknowledge that you feel some sort of feedback. Don't presume that it's only your own feelings and ideas rising to the surface. You can't have reactions to the house, **if it weren't for the house**. The give and take of being present with buildings, opening your senses,

concentrating on your relationship, and asking the right questions are how you can get houses to talk back to you.

Start by asking your house simple questions. Keep them related to the particular structure. In other words, don't request that it tells you how to get to work, or if it knows the name of the 20th president of the United States. It can't and won't access those kinds of answers. A house is not a GPS, a psychic, the Magic 8-Ball, nor a computer. Maybe it won't tell you its designer's name, how much it cost, or its favorite movie, but as you sensitize yourself to house language and ask the right questions, eventually a shared understanding emerges. Keep your inquiry simple. "Hi, how are you?" is a good icebreaker. Immediately you'll notice a "Good" or "Not so Good" response popping into your head.

Try asking about its exterior such as, "Are your steps made of wood or concrete?" The answer will come up in your mind. Focus on areas across the walls, or sections around the building. Examples: "Why do you have two chimneys?" "Have you always been painted blue?" Answers emanate from the house. For example, if you ask the building "How tall are you?" A clear response emerges. Because you've practiced "reading" buildings, the answer is right there in front of you. You see the height; and the answer flows internally. Ask other related questions like, "Do you need a new paint job?" "What materials are you made of?" "Is your door plastic or wood?" As the house responds, listen carefully to a voice inside of yourself. It could say, "I'm made of bricks," or "I'm built of wood" or "My door is steel." The questions you ask let you "know" the answer.

Touching the building (hugging) also makes a direct connection so conversations start to flow.

Our inner consciousness is molded by experience and responds to the stimulation of the building. The voices you “hear” or reactions that you “feel” are the connections conjured up between the house and your perceptions. This mind state is similar to the way deep concentration works in other disciplines. Any artist or athlete can tell you about “being in the zone.” In essence, you enter the flow, a state characterized by complete absorption. In the zone we lose a sense of space and time. It’s the place within ourselves where we can speak with houses and receive what they say.

Because conversations are interchanges, buildings will also feed you questions. After some initial greetings (always say hi) you’ll hear the house begin its own inquiry. The first question is inevitably, “Do you like me?” or “Why are you here?” The house might request a reaction to its style, site, history, or neighborhood. The questions could relate to its Idea, Design and Craft, its function or any of the people involved in its history: “What do you think of my color palette?” “Aren’t the flowers looking good?” “Imagine who lives here?” “Do you want to come in?” Or the building could make demands, like, “Get out!” “Go away!” You don’t have to respond verbally, the building “hears” the answer as it forms inside you head.

We all pursue our own individual interests. You might direct house conversations towards architectural styles, ask buildings about security or craft issues, or squeeze out another topic that you’ve had on your mind.

After I greet buildings, I tend to pose questions about design, such as, “How do you reconcile function and aesthetics?” I debate color palettes and shapes with them. We discuss how architectural experiences make me think and feel about particular places, and I ask for clues on ways to remember them. My curiosity seems to meld with the structures. If there isn’t a definitive answer, it doesn’t matter; the process of conversing with houses fuels a desire to know more and more about architecture, and in turn to learn about how we all live with buildings.

Drawing of Talking to house

As you go deeper into the world of architecture, it’s easier to share a discussion about the style of a place, the quality of materials – any interest you’ve developed related to buildings. You’ll find some buildings are comfortable to talk with; others are stuck up and standoffish. Some make you feel at home, safe, happy, others terrorize you. Ask them why. Just because the voice of architecture seems to be filtered through your own interior voice, don’t dismiss it, value your viewpoint. Think of buildings as shape changers, animated beings reaching out within your own sensibilities.

Chapter 17

COLLECTING HOUSES

"It is good to collect things, but it is better to go on walks." — Anatole France

COLLECTING HOUSES

Humans are programmed to surround themselves with things that bring security and comfort. But there are other reasons we become collectors: ownership of numerous objects shows "connoisseurship." You earn status for your accumulation of things. Like-minded people are in awe if you collect piles of Dodger's baseball cards, every Star War action figure, hundreds of Renaissance

floor tiles, or every Time magazine published in the last century. Collecting is a hobby, pastime, sport and obsession. It's a club. Many of us suffer from the condition with no apologies. Think about your own acquisitions. Shoes? Music? Art? Cars? Video games? Why not collect houses?

Collecting buildings is more complicated than accumulating most other belongings. Houses are expensive, hard to move, take up space, and are difficult to maintain. You may desire your neighbor's home, want to buy the ancient Greek Parthenon, or move into Elvis Presley's Graceland. Good luck. These buildings aren't on the market. But there are other ways to "own" them. If you think about buildings, not only as our friends and protectors, but also as artworks, there are hassle free methodologies for putting together an architecture collection in your own art museum.

To begin your house collection, close your eyes and kick-start your visual imagination. Picture a huge space. Add an environment into this mental expanse such as a tropical Island, icy tundra, wild forest, or under water in the coral reefs – anywhere that works for your fantasy. This is the beginning of an Architecture Mind Museum.

To develop the structure of your Architecture Mind Museum, start imagining an exterior of a building in your chosen environment. Pick a style for the building. Simple brick, smooth glass, Art Deco, traditional colonial—whatever imaginary structure strikes you. Visualize the walls, create an entrance, and add a roof. You can base your building style on a real museum you've visited, or an office building, your favorite Starbucks, Grandpa's house or design the museum

from scratch. Erect signage and name the place, such as, *The Smith Collection*, *The Adam's Family Architecture Group*, *the Public House Gallery*, *The Victorian Style House Museum*, etc. Since it's a mental construction, anything can be changed, expanded or redecorated at any time so don't get stuck worrying about any decisions you make.

Start working on the interior. I personally like a path filled with plane trees (or maybe rows of Sphinx like the Egyptian set up for their temples.) I end at a stairway leading to a big entrance with massive window inviting the pedestrian into a light filled foyer. You can base your museum entrance on others you've enjoyed such The Louvre with its huge glass pyramid, The Getty with its white stone stairs leading into a shining marble complex, or the Metropolitan with lots of steps and guardian lions to protect your art. It can be very small and simple on the exterior and later open up to a bigger space like Dr. Who's Tardis ship. Or maybe a tent is more your style, or put your collection in the garage. Remember you can easily change your design.

If you have you have a particular preference for entering large spaces, by all means try it on your museum. Maybe a tunnel with a stained glass ceiling or a bright, neon light filled corridor. I prefer entering my large foyer, moving into an open courtyard then walking along a path surrounded by pools and a flowered landscape with the gallery rooms extending outward from the central axis. You don't even have to go to an interior; your Architecture Mind Museum can be placed outside, so you might choose an "open air" place,

Upon entering your Museum, make sure there are spaces for the architecture. These galleries are multiple exhibition spaces for the buildings you'll put into your museum, so make lots of them. After you project your gallery spaces, it's time to generate the look of those galleries. Once you position an assortment of rooms (or huge outdoor spaces) you have a structure in your head ready for your architecture installations. This is crucial: assign one special section of the Mind Museum - the Exceptionally Significant Gallery - for *very important houses*. This is where you'll store the houses you'll want to remember, talk with and think about over and over.

Filling up your Architecture Mind Museum is fun and free. Every time you identify or enter an interesting building, one that captures your attention, any that drive you crazy, and some that have become friends, makes a mental picture of the building. Next, in your imagination, move that building into one section of your Architecture Mind Museum. For example, if you love the Eiffel Tower, grab it in your head then put it into one of your spaces. Drag over as many places as you like since you can continually expand the space. Be specific about your focus. Find the buildings that best fit into your collection. You can put in all the places you've lived, every theatre or church you've encountered, houses in styles that interest you, places in particular colors or sizes, houses from movies, the ones in your neighborhood, or any architecture that catches your eye. You can organize the sections for buildings you visit regularly or use daily. Make sure to add special houses-any place that strongly connects with you-directly in the

Significant Gallery. If it helps, you can draw out a plan of the Mind Museum to use as a reference as you continue adding in more architecture.

The best part of making the Mind Museum is that you'll "own" the architecture without investing a penny. Your museum will not take visitors. (Unless you know a mind reader or a clairvoyant comes to visit.) And explaining the Mind Museum to friends is almost impossible. Until we can project our inner thoughts onto a visible surface, you'll have to visit your museum alone. But once there, the buildings will greet and speak with you. The Architecture Mind Museum is a shrine within your head, private and personal, deep and sensual. And though people can't enter your Mind Museum, there are other ways to share your collections of houses and knowledge about architecture both with friends and the houses you talk with. It's your Archive.

An Architecture Archive is another way for collecting Houses, and unlike the mental Museum, the Archive is physical. You can set up a dream-like database in your Architecture Mind Museum, but if you want more practical access to information, I suggest setting it up somewhere in reality. The Archive will hold notes, photos, sketches and anything you want to file from your house experiences. Since the Archive is real, a good box, or a computer file is a sufficient place to begin.

Your collection in the Archive should start with quick photos. Make snapshots of houses that interest you every day, everywhere you go. Make sure to grab a house when one "calls" to you. But when you're setting up the shot,

don't put yourself in front of the building. If the house isn't taking selfies, why should you?

Commented [14]: This paragraph is repeated in the Archive section

Collecting photographs works as long as you don't pile up pictures you'll never look at. (And don't pull out hundreds of bad phone photos to show off to friends if you want to keep them.) Being selective is important. No one can resist documenting the amazing places they visit. Anyone who sees the *Eiffel Tower*, *Sagrada Familia*, or *Falling Water* is compelled to snap a picture. Documentation of a place proves you've been there and preserves a lasting memory. On the other hand, when you're visiting "great architecture" it's easy to get caught up in documenting the structures to the detriment of the experience. You're better off purchasing postcards of architecture, or printing downloaded pictures done by professionals. At least they'll be in focus and it gives you more time to talk with buildings. Likewise, photos taken from the Internet are just imitations of real experiences, so they should be references of your physical connection to architecture, not an end in themselves.

Since you'll be on a continuing expedition to acquire architecture for both the Architecture Mind Museum and the Archive, be firm in your choices. Houses you find to be exceptional are the ones you'll want to "possess," remember, and keep. Your categories should reflect your viewpoint. Arrange the photos according to your chosen topics -- houses that touched you emotionally, grand houses, tiny houses, and sad or happy ones. You might put together all the monuments or parks, cabins or condos. Or group every house chronologically, the oldest to the newest. You could cluster the houses that speak to you versus.

Those that refuse to converse at all. Try areas of specific garden settings, or places with identical colors. When you approach your special places with curiosity, you'll have a chance to identify specific characteristics. These documentations verify your extraordinary engagements with architecture, rather than show off places you happened to visit.

Besides authenticating your visits to houses, use collections for exploratory projects. For example, pose as a curious anthropologist and photograph the activities going on in the background of places. Explore neighborhood ethnicity, find remnants of old trees, document collapsed brick walls, or excavate traces of the people that lived in houses long ago. Or think of yourself as a treasure hunter. Snap or draw close-ups of house segments, like the windows or doors. Become a collector of the hidden elements in architecture exteriors – little stained glass windows, intricate trimmings, gargoyles locked into the cement, quotes in the pediments, graffiti on the walls, and even silly garden gnomes. Shoot some portraits of buildings. Put some of these photos next to the pictures of friends and family displayed in your home. Hang them next to the photos of grandma and grandpa –architecture is part of your family. These collections will have personal meaning and give you the motivation to explore other architectural subjects that stoke your passion.

These thematic collections will eventually make you a critical authority on particular issues and types of architecture. Like a wine gourmet, your expertise will flourish and you'll find yourself sharing this knowledge with other interested people. Sharing your Archive will be fun. And when you're alone, you

can visit the houses in the collection by closing your eyes and going into the Architecture Mind Museum.

For my collections, I “stalk” architects. I search for ideas that repeat through their buildings, like historic references, use of light and shadow, modernist principles, or philosophic foundations. I’ve visited every existing Craftsman house by the Greene Brothers. I’ve photographed, printed and painted about two hundred Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. I’m still working on all of Le Corbusier’s designs. The architecture of Rudolf Schindler, Richard Neutra, Zaha Hadid, and Gregory Ain are on my destinations list. I use both photos and sketches to record the houses for my collections. I make notes about the buildings and if I can find any reoccurring concepts, I add them to my Archive. Then they are ready for my Mind Museum.

Falling Water Drawing

Chapter 18

ARCHIVES

[Share your knowledge. It's a way to achieve immortality. - Dalai Lama](#)

ARCHIVES

Another approach to Collecting Houses is an Architecture Archive. The Archive holds notes, photos, sketches and anything you want to file from your house experiences. Since the Archive is real and the Mind Museum is a mental

vision, a good box, or a computer file is a sufficient receptacle when gathering and sharing your knowledge about architecture.

Your collection in the Archive should begin with quick photos. Make snapshots of houses every day, everywhere you go. Make sure to grab a house when one “calls” to you. But when you’re setting up the shot, don’t put yourself in front of the building. If the house isn’t taking selfies, why should you? Move around to get interesting viewpoints. Don’t forget long shots and close-ups.

Commented [15]: This paragraph is repeated in the previous section

Collecting photographs works as long as you don’t pile up pictures you’ll never look at. (And don’t pull out hundreds of bad phone photos to show off to people if you want to keep your friends.) Being selective is important. No one can resist documenting the amazing places they visit. Anyone who sees the *Taj Mahal*, *Sagrada Familia*, or *Falling Water* is compelled to snap a picture. Documentation of a place proves you’ve been there and preserves a lasting memory. On the other hand, when you’re viewing “great architecture” it’s easy to get caught up in documenting the structures to the detriment of the architecture experience. You’re better off purchasing postcards of architecture, or printing downloaded pictures done by professionals. Obviously if your focus is small obscure buildings, you’ll have to rely on your own photos, but when it comes to travel photos, use the professional sources. At least they’ll be in focus and it gives you more time to talk with buildings. Remember any photos taken from the Internet are just imitations of real experiences, so they should be references of your physical connection to architecture, not be an end in themselves.

DRAWING OF FALLING WATER

Since you'll be on a continuing expedition to acquire architecture for both the Mind Museum and the Archive, be firm about your choices. Houses you'll find to be exceptional, are the ones you'll want to possess, remember, and keep. Your categories should reflect your viewpoint. Arrange the photos according to your chosen topics -- houses that touched you emotionally, grand houses, tiny houses, and sad or happy ones. You might put together all the monuments or parks, cabins or condos. Or group every house chronologically, the oldest to the newest. You could cluster the houses that speak to you vs. those refuse to converse at all. Try areas of specific garden settings, or places with identical colors. When you approach your special places with curiosity, you'll have a chance to identify specific characteristics. These documentations verify your extraordinary engagements with architecture, rather than show off places you happened to visit.

Besides authenticating your visits to houses, use collections for exploratory projects. For example, pose as a curious anthropologist and photograph the activities going on in the background of places. Explore neighborhood ethnicity, find remnants of old trees, document collapsed brick walls, or excavate traces of the people that lived in houses long ago. Or think of yourself as a treasure hunter. Snap or draw close-ups of house segments, like the windows or doors. Become a gatherer of the hidden elements in architecture exteriors – little glass windows, intricate trimmings, gargoyles locked into the cement, quotes in the pediments, graffiti on the walls, and even silly garden gnomes. Shoot some portraits of buildings. Put some of these photos next to the

pictures of friends and family displayed in your home. Hang them next to the photos of grandma and grandpa –architecture is part of your family. These collections will have personal meaning and give you the motivation to explore other architectural subjects that stoke your passion.

These thematic collections will eventually make you a critical authority on the styles and types of architecture and particular issues relating to buildings. Like a wine gourmet, your expertise will flourish and you'll find yourself sharing this knowledge with other interested people. And when you're alone, you can visit the houses either in the Archive or by closing your eyes and going into the Mind Museum.

For my collections, like a medieval monk's room of rare manuscripts, the Archive acts as a secret library, some parts very private, other areas I share. I search for ideas that repeat through their buildings, like historic references, use of light and shadow, modernist principles, or philosophic foundations. I also "stalk" architects, going to as many places designed by an architect whose work moves me. I've visited every existing Craftsman house by the Greene Brothers. I've photographed, printed and painted about two hundred Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. I'm still working on all of Le Corbusier's designs. The architecture of Rudolf Schindler, Richard Neutra, Zaha Hadid, and Gregory Ain are on my destination list. I use both photos and sketches to record the houses for my collections. I make notes about the buildings and if I can find any reoccurring concepts, I add them to my Archive. And I move many of the buildings into my Mind Museum.

The best results of building the Architecture Mind Museum and collecting information for the Archive are that the houses you talk to are now yours. And though people can't enter your Mind Museum, the Archive is physically available so you can share it with friends -- post or blog about the houses you've talked with. Have friends over to look at the fabulous collection you have in the Archive of buildings you've talked with and you'll find they will want to engage these places too.

Chapter 19

PRESERVATION

["How will we know it's us without our past?" - John Steinbeck](#)

PRESERVATION

Would you slash a Van Gogh painting? Dump diamonds in the garbage? Abandon your dog on the side of the road? Throw away a brand new car? I doubt it. Yet people kill and maim wonderful, beautiful architecture without a second thought. Buildings are abandoned, torn down, destroyed. The offenders come up with reasons from practical to pathetic: "The house is in a state of

decay.” The house is ugly,” “The house is old.” “It’s time to widen the freeway.” “We need huge apartment buildings.” “I want a place with a helicopter port on the roof” On and on they go with pitiful excuses. But they often get their way. Keep in mind that when the Eiffel Tower went up, many people demanded its destruction. It also happened when I.M. Pei presented his design for the Pyramide in the courtyard of the Louvre. “Authorities” were aghast and tried to stop the construction. How sad it would be to go to Paris today without being able to see those magnificent structures.

Commented [16]: Repeat from earlier in the book

Drawing of the Pyramide

Not all houses should be saved; some wrecks can no longer uphold their function to serve, or are far beyond salvaging. Yet too many houses are doomed on the whim of an owner, developer or government official. And while there are good reasons to dismantle some structures, money, power, and greed are the common, underlying motives for pulling down the “old building” and blowing up the “outdated structure.”

People adore the “new.” Significant houses have been knocked down for no other reason than replacing them with something more contemporary. This means builders dismantle standing architecture and fill the sites with their McMansions, multiplex edifices, condo projects, and shopping malls. Areas are gentrified, which translates to, “get rid of the old stuff.” Unless communities have a commitment to strong planning, anybody and his brother can grab a house, tear it to shreds and put up whatever cheap and ugly monster they want. What

about the neighbors, the town, the future? There's always somebody who believes their new building is superior, better, more important.

One common lament is that the costs are higher to restore a building than to knock it down and rebuild. Granted, it's often less expensive to start a house from scratch than it is to renovate a building. But if you think of houses as art works, their cultural contributions make up for those monetary concerns. It's probably a lot cheaper to hire a copyist to paint a clean, fresh version of Monet's *Waterlilies* than go through a preservation process on the real painting. But it's doubtful that anyone is going to destroy Monet's art and substitute it with "a better new one." Look at some of the replacement projects in your neighborhood and compare them to the original architecture. Some work well, but many are unbelievable vanity projects that might be functional, but at the lowest minimum level. The question emerges; does the new place work better or look better than the first? Beauty and craft are often the first things to go in new buildings.

Everyone should be aware of eminent domain. It's the law that gives government, county, neighborhood, companies and even individuals the right to expropriate private property for public and even private use. This means they can take your home. There is compensation awarded to the owner, but often it's not enough. Is a baseball stadium, freeway to nowhere, commercial mall, or a future school (never to be built) a good enough reason to destroy houses and neighborhoods? The politicians in your city have records of support or non-support on these issues. Be careful whom you vote for.

Once again, archi-speak phrases are worth reviewing regarding the preservation of old structures: *restoration* means refurbishing the original design of the building, *preservation* is saving a place from a death sentence. *Conservancy* means protection and conservancy groups in most towns and cities work to hold onto their architectural legacy. *Vernacular* architecture means the elements or a style particular to a specific place. To *repurpose* a building is to update it for a new function, like making an old factory into a café. *Designations* are multiple ways to highlight neighborhoods or buildings. *Historical designations* are sought after in order to preserve places, and more or less any group can bestow this honor. But there are some established licensed groups whose designation is more important. For example, if you get a building on The World Heritage list, it that means that architecture will get more notice and even some funds. But even with landmark status, buildings are still vulnerable to the chopping block. Groups that provide historical designations are local, national or international. We have the World Heritage, the National Heritage and thousands of like-minded people from all walks of life looking out for our architecture. Even the National Park Service helps protect our heritage.

Bravo to places that respect their architecture. Kudos to the towns and cities where buildings are brought back to the original appearance, or renovated and repurposed rather than demolished. Future generations will be able to witness samples of time and absorb the story of human thinking within these structures. One example is the Colosseum in Rome. Originally created to host ancient gladiator games, today's tourists and history buffs flock to the site for a

glimpse of the past. That stadium has gone through various periods of repurposing; it's been used as a public venue, open-air food market, storage space, housing site, ruin and historical monument. Technically the city hasn't rebuilt the edifice, but the decay and ruins are preserved to tell an important lesson. This repurposed structure illustrates how a world empire can eventually collapse and disappear. We pause and weigh our idea of entertainment against the games they once played in that space. Looking around old Rome from its beginnings to its contemporary life, we see not only ancient places, but also a timeline of how we are different and how we are the same as all the people who have resided in the "Eternal City."

In England across the Salisbury Plain, the magnificent Stonehenge and nearby Avesbury Henge share space with sheep grazing around the adjoining fields. Those places are part of the heritage of England, and protected for all of us. Walk the circles and you'll feel as if you are among the ancient Beaker People, gathering together to share common rituals. It's as if we move arm in arm with those forebears who built these sites for community.

Many towns collect their early dwellings or notable structures for "open air" museums. In Los Angeles, there's an outdoor gallery of Victorian houses, once doomed for destruction when their original sites became areas of re-development. By moving them to one space, visitors and school groups now have a chance to compare their own lives with the lives of the people who once inhabited them. Those houses act as Elders, instructing us to think about how people worked and lived in the late 1800's.

Since the middle of the twentieth century in Columbus, Indiana, noted architects who've proved that function and beauty go hand in hand have built public projects. I'M Pei's Library, Eliel Saarinen's Church and Fire Station No. 4, by Robert Venturi are a few of the many prestigious constructions. About 50.000 people visit Columbus yearly to see this exhilarating environment. The residents are proud of their town. It's clean, friendly, and everyone is happy to share information about the architecture. They've come together in civic pride fueled by their impressive buildings. They recognize that the work of gifted architects and innovative designers should be kept for upcoming generations. The people of Columbus know that preserved buildings hold ideas of the past that can be shared with visitors in the future.

California has saved ghost towns and Gold Rush settlements. Wisconsin preserves its Amish and Native American sites. Out East, some buildings are protected sites related to the Revolution, and down south and up north historical sites recount the Civil War. Many countries organize buildings to illustrate their national identities. Preserved architecture is exciting for the tales it tells. If you become interested in a particular style or cultural concept, you can locate a sanctuary of those places and go to see them in person.

To preserve your own house there are things you can do: Get a legal easement that protects your property after you sell it, or if it becomes part of an inheritance. Insurance companies and estate lawyers know helpful tricks for home preservation, so consult them. If your town grants overlays, work with your neighbors to get one in your area. (Overlays protect neighborhoods that have

similar architecture styles or history.) Work on architecture committees, or city planning boards so a pro-preservation voice is heard. Sign up for neighborhood alerts to keep up with events and laws that affect your place. Join a national or international group or one that deals with one building style or one architect's work.

One simple action for thinking about home preservation is to celebrate your house's birth year. I call this this *The Birthday Project*. Figure out the date your house was built. If you don't know the exact year, check your local Records Department, or take a guess. Or listen - your house might tell you. Make a sign or label and hang up your home's birth date on the front of your house. (Make sure you separate it from your address, so the take-out food is delivered to the right place.) If everyone puts a birthdate on their home, people walking by can play the guessing game to identify the house's delivery year. They'll think about the house as a living entity since it has its own birthday. (Pick a day and bake a birthday cake for your place each year too.) If a house is perceived as alive, it's harder to kill.

Chapter 20

ACTIONS

"Nothing happens until something moves." - Albert Einstein

ACTIONS

Since you now speak with houses, it's easier to go deeper into the world of architecture. There are many ways to participate in actions that will be entertaining, fun and educational. Below are some suggestions but there are certainly many more at your disposal.

Games to play:

- Board games (Monopoly, Clue, etc. any games that are about architecture)
- Hide and Seek (inside and outside of your house)
- Legos/ construction toys, or building sets (sand castles and gingerbread houses, etc.)
- Video games
- Pantomime (act out houses and monuments)
- Charades (use some famous structures)

Activities to attend:

- Open Houses
- Architecture events and conferences
- House tours
- Designer tours
- Music in Architectural Places
- Real Estate open houses
- Vacation visits to buildings
- Museum exhibitions
- Venice/Chicago Biennale, (there are numerous architecture "festivals")
- Palm Springs Modernist Week
- Craftsman Week
- Music, Art, Theatre, and Dance held in great spaces
- Triennial (Milan)
- Design Week (Many world-wide city venues)
- Watch movies

Classes from the pros (real time or on-line):

- Architecture Courses
- Design/Archeology/Anthropology Courses
- Photo Classes
- Drawing Classes
- Art History
- Any class held in an interesting building
- Lectures on art and architecture
- Many universities and colleges have on-line courses

Groups to join or support:

- House Museums
- Volunteer as a docent (house guide)
- Conservancy group

“Friends of...” groups that raise money for preservation
Architecture Boards
SAH (Society of Architectural Historians)
AIA (Association of Architecture)
Building Societies
World Heritage
Art Nouveau Society
Preservation groups
Neighborhood groups
Focus Groups
City or Town Architecture Committees
Help with Urban Surveys
Support businesses that care about architecture

Collections to research:

By Architect
By Builder
By Style
By Culture
By personal preferences

Books and Movies to read and see:

On the subject of houses, architects, biographies, etc.
Fairy tales
Buildings that are “stars”
Profiles on Architects, Designers

Travel tips:

Check out houses
Conferences
Festivals

Things to do for your house:

Maintain it
Add date of birth on front exterior
Take its portrait
Hold a party in its honor
TALK WITH IT

Chapter 21

How to Sketch

“In drawing, nothing is better than the first attempt” - [Pablo Picasso](#)

How To Sketch

Buildings are flattered if you take the time to do a quick sketch of them. Anyone can draw but this exercise is not about drawing, it's about getting more attuned to the house. Doing quick sketches first sets up a communication. Doing a more detailed sketch lets you look more closely at the house, details, environment etc. With practice you may want to draw pictures or make watercolors by adding some color to your drawings.

No matter what kind of images you make, it puts you into a mental time zone that you share with the architecture.

Doodle of House here

Sketch of House here

Drawing of House here

