

# C. Alexander, et al. A Pattern Language

1977

DEC 1 0 2001

## SUMMARY OF THE LANGUAGE

A pattern language has the structure of a network. This is explained fully in *The Timeless Way of Building*. However, when we use the network of a language, we always use it as a *sequence*, going through the patterns, moving always from the larger patterns to the smaller, always from the ones which create structures, to the ones which then embellish those structures, and then to those which embellish the embellishments. . . .

Since the language is in truth a network, there is no one sequence which perfectly captures it. But the sequence which follows, captures the broad sweep of the full network; in doing so, it follows a line, dips down, dips up again, and follows an irregular course, a little like a needle following a tapestry.

The sequence of patterns is both a summary of the language, and at the same time, an index to the patterns. If you read through the sentences which connect the groups of patterns to one another, you will get an overview of the whole language. And once you get this overview, you will then be able to find the patterns which are relevant to your own project.

And finally, as we shall explain in the next section, this sequence of patterns is also the "base map," from

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which you can make a language for your own project, by choosing the patterns which are most useful to you, and leaving them more or less in the order that you find them printed here.

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*We begin with that part of the language which defines a town or community. These patterns can never be "designed" or "built" in one fell swoop—but patient piecemeal growth, designed in such a way that every individual act is always helping to create or generate these larger global patterns, will, slowly and surely, over the years, make a community that has these global patterns in it.*

### 1. INDEPENDENT REGIONS

within each region work toward those regional policies which will protect the land and mark the limits of the cities;

### 2. THE DISTRIBUTION OF TOWNS

### 3. CITY COUNTRY FINGERS

### 4. AGRICULTURAL VALLEYS

### 5. LACE OF COUNTRY STREETS

### 6. COUNTRY TOWNS

### 7. THE COUNTRYSIDE

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through city policies, encourage the piecemeal formation of those major structures which define the city;

8. MOSAIC OF SUBCULTURES

9. SCATTERED WORK

10. MAGIC OF THE CITY

11. LOCAL TRANSPORT AREAS

build up these larger city patterns from the grass roots, through action essentially controlled by two levels of self-governing communities, which exist as physically identifiable places;

12. COMMUNITY OF 7000

13. SUBCULTURE BOUNDARY

14. IDENTIFIABLE NEIGHBORHOOD

15. NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARY

connect communities to one another by encouraging the growth of the following networks;

16. WEB OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

17. RING ROADS

18. NETWORK OF LEARNING

19. WEB OF SHOPPING

20. MINI-BUSES

establish community and neighborhood policy to control the character of the local environment according to the following fundamental principles;

21. FOUR-STORY LIMIT

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22. NINE PER CENT PARKING

23. PARALLEL ROADS

24. SACRED SITES

25. ACCESS TO WATER

26. LIFE CYCLE

27. MEN AND WOMEN

both in the neighborhoods and the communities, and in between them, in the boundaries, encourage the formation of local centers;

28. ECCENTRIC NUCLEUS

29. DENSITY RINGS

30. ACTIVITY NODES

31. PROMENADE

32. SHOPPING STREET

33. NIGHT LIFE

34. INTERCHANGE

around these centers, provide for the growth of housing in the form of clusters, based on face-to-face human groups;

35. HOUSEHOLD MIX

36. DEGREES OF PUBLICNESS

37. HOUSE CLUSTER

38. ROW HOUSES

39. HOUSING HILL

40. OLD PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

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between the house clusters, around the centers, and especially in the boundaries between neighborhoods, encourage the formation of work communities;

41. WORK COMMUNITY
42. INDUSTRIAL RIBBON
43. UNIVERSITY AS A MARKETPLACE
44. LOCAL TOWN HALL
45. NECKLACE OF COMMUNITY PROJECTS
46. MARKET OF MANY SHOPS
47. HEALTH CENTER
48. HOUSING IN BETWEEN

between the house clusters and work communities, allow the local road and path network to grow informally, piecemeal;

49. LOOPED LOCAL ROADS
50. T JUNCTIONS
51. GREEN STREETS
52. NETWORK OF PATHS AND CARS
53. MAIN GATEWAYS
54. ROAD CROSSING
55. RAISED WALK
56. BIKE PATHS AND RACKS
57. CHILDREN IN THE CITY

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in the communities and neighborhoods, provide public open land where people can relax, rub shoulders and renew themselves;

58. CARNIVAL
59. QUIET BACKS
60. ACCESSIBLE GREEN
61. SMALL PUBLIC SQUARES
62. HIGH PLACES
63. DANCING IN THE STREET
64. POOLS AND STREAMS
65. BIRTH PLACES
66. HOLY GROUND

in each house cluster and work community, provide the smaller bits of common land, to provide for local versions of the same needs;

67. COMMON LAND
68. CONNECTED PLAY
69. PUBLIC OUTDOOR ROOM
70. GRAVE SITES
71. STILL WATER
72. LOCAL SPORTS
73. ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND
74. ANIMALS

within the framework of the common land, the clusters, and the work communities encourage transformation of

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the smallest independent social institutions: the families, workgroups, and gathering places. The family, in all its forms;

- 75. THE FAMILY
- 76. HOUSE FOR A SMALL FAMILY
- 77. HOUSE FOR A COUPLE
- 78. HOUSE FOR ONE PERSON
- 79. YOUR OWN HOME

the workgroups, including all kinds of workshops and offices and even children's learning groups;

- 80. SELF-GOVERNING WORKSHOPS  
AND OFFICES
- 81. SMALL SERVICES WITHOUT RED TAPE
- 82. OFFICE CONNECTIONS
- 83. MASTER AND APPRENTICES
- 84. TEENAGE SOCIETY
- 85. SHOPFRONT SCHOOLS
- 86. CHILDREN'S HOME

the local shops and gathering places.

- 87. INDIVIDUALLY OWNED SHOPS
- 88. STREET CAFE
- 89. CORNER GROCERY
- 90. BEER HALL
- 91. TRAVELER'S INN
- 92. BUS STOP

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- 93. FOOD STANDS
- 94. SLEEPING IN PUBLIC

*This completes the global patterns which define a town or a community. We now start that part of the language which gives shape to groups of buildings, and individual buildings, on the land, in three dimensions. These are the patterns which can be "designed" or "built"—the patterns which define the individual buildings and the space between buildings; where we are dealing for the first time with patterns that are under the control of individuals or small groups of individuals, who are able to build the patterns all at once.*

The first group of patterns helps to lay out the overall arrangement of a group of buildings: the height and number of these buildings, the entrances to the site, main parking areas, and lines of movement through the complex;

- 95. BUILDING COMPLEX
- 96. NUMBER OF STORIES
- 97. SHIELDED PARKING
- 98. CIRCULATION REALMS
- 99. MAIN BUILDING
- 100. PEDESTRIAN STREET
- 101. BUILDING THOROUGHFARE
- 102. FAMILY OF ENTRANCES
- 103. SMALL PARKING LOTS

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fix the position of individual buildings on the site, within the complex, one by one, according to the nature of the site, the trees, the sun: this is one of the most important moments in the language;

- 104. SITE REPAIR
- 105. SOUTH FACING OUTDOORS
- 106. POSITIVE OUTDOOR SPACE
- 107. WINGS OF LIGHT
- 108. CONNECTED BUILDINGS
- 109. LONG THIN HOUSE

within the buildings' wings, lay out the entrances, the gardens, courtyards, roofs, and terraces: shape both the volume of the buildings and the volume of the space between the buildings at the same time—remembering that indoor space and outdoor space, yin and yang, must always get their shape together;

- 110. MAIN ENTRANCE
- 111. HALF-HIDDEN GARDEN
- 112. ENTRANCE TRANSITION
- 113. CAR CONNECTION
- 114. HIERARCHY OF OPEN SPACE
- 115. COURTYARDS WHICH LIVE
- 116. CASCADE OF ROOFS
- 117. SHELTERING ROOF
- 118. ROOF GARDEN

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when the major parts of buildings and the outdoor areas have been given their rough shape, it is the right time to give more detailed attention to the paths and squares between the buildings;

- 119. ARCADES
- 120. PATHS AND GOALS
- 121. PATH SHAPE
- 122. BUILDING FRONTS
- 123. PEDESTRIAN DENSITY
- 124. ACTIVITY POCKETS
- 125. STAIR SEATS
- 126. SOMETHING ROUGHLY IN THE MIDDLE

now, with the paths fixed, we come back to the buildings: within the various wings of any one building, work out the fundamental gradients of space, and decide how the movement will connect the spaces in the gradients;

- 127. INTIMACY GRADIENT
- 128. INDOOR SUNLIGHT
- 129. COMMON AREAS AT THE HEART
- 130. ENTRANCE ROOM
- 131. THE FLOW THROUGH ROOMS
- 132. SHORT PASSAGES
- 133. STAIRCASE AS A STAGE
- 134. ZEN VIEW
- 135. TAPESTRY OF LIGHT AND DARK

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within the framework of the wings and their internal gradients of space and movement, define the most important areas and rooms. First, for a house;

- 136. COUPLE'S REALM
- 137. CHILDREN'S REALM
- 138. SLEEPING TO THE EAST
- 139. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN
- 140. PRIVATE TERRACE ON THE STREET
- 141. A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN
- 142. SEQUENCE OF SITTING SPACES
- 143. BED CLUSTER
- 144. BATHING ROOM
- 145. BULK STORAGE

then the same for offices, workshops, and public buildings;

- 146. FLEXIBLE OFFICE SPACE
- 147. COMMUNAL EATING
- 148. SMALL WORK GROUPS
- 149. RECEPTION WELCOMES YOU
- 150. A PLACE TO WAIT
- 151. SMALL MEETING ROOMS
- 152. HALF-PRIVATE OFFICE

add those small outbuildings which must be slightly independent from the main structure, and put in the access from the upper stories to the street and gardens;

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- 153. ROOMS TO RENT
- 154. TEENAGER'S COTTAGE
- 155. OLD AGE COTTAGE
- 156. SETTLED WORK
- 157. HOME WORKSHOP
- 158. OPEN STAIRS

prepare to knit the inside of the building to the outside, by treating the edge between the two as a place in its own right, and making human details there;

- 159. LIGHT ON TWO SIDES OF EVERY ROOM
- 160. BUILDING EDGE
- 161. SUNNY PLACE
- 162. NORTH FACE
- 163. OUTDOOR ROOM
- 164. STREET WINDOWS
- 165. OPENING TO THE STREET
- 166. GALLERY SURROUND
- 167. SIX-FOOT BALCONY
- 168. CONNECTION TO THE EARTH

decide on the arrangement of the gardens, and the places in the gardens;

- 169. TERRACED SLOPE
- 170. FRUIT TREES
- 171. TREE PLACES

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- 172. GARDEN GROWING WILD
- 173. GARDEN WALL
- 174. TRELLISED WALK
- 175. GREENHOUSE
- 176. GARDEN SEAT
- 177. VEGETABLE GARDEN
- 178. COMPOST

go back to the inside of the building and attach the necessary minor rooms and alcoves to complete the main rooms;

- 179. ALCOVES
- 180. WINDOW PLACE
- 181. THE FIRE
- 182. EATING ATMOSPHERE
- 183. WORKSPACE ENCLOSURE
- 184. COOKING LAYOUT
- 185. SITTING CIRCLE
- 186. COMMUNAL SLEEPING
- 187. MARRIAGE BED
- 188. BED ALCOVE
- 189. DRESSING ROOM

fine tune the shape and size of rooms and alcoves to make them precise and buildable;

- 190. CEILING HEIGHT VARIETY

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- 191. THE SHAPE OF INDOOR SPACE
- 192. WINDOWS OVERLOOKING LIFE
- 193. HALF-OPEN WALL
- 194. INTERIOR WINDOWS
- 195. STAIRCASE VOLUME
- 196. CORNER DOORS

give all the walls some depth, wherever there are to be alcoves, windows, shelves, closets, or seats;

- 197. THICK WALLS
- 198. CLOSETS BETWEEN ROOMS
- 199. SUNNY COUNTER
- 200. OPEN SHELVES
- 201. WAIST-HIGH SHELF
- 202. BUILT-IN SEATS
- 203. CHILD CAVES
- 204. SECRET PLACE

*At this stage, you have a complete design for an individual building. If you have followed the patterns given, you have a scheme of spaces, either marked on the ground, with stakes, or on a piece of paper, accurate to the nearest foot or so. You know the height of rooms, the rough size and position of windows and doors, and you know roughly how the roofs of the building, and the gardens are laid out.*

*The next, and last part of the language, tells how to*

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*make a buildable building directly from this rough scheme of spaces, and tells you how to build it, in detail.*

Before you lay out structural details, establish a philosophy of structure which will let the structure grow directly from your plans and your conception of the buildings;

- 205. STRUCTURE FOLLOWS SOCIAL SPACES
- 206. EFFICIENT STRUCTURE
- 207. GOOD MATERIALS
- 208. GRADUAL STIFFENING

within this philosophy of structure, on the basis of the plans which you have made, work out the complete structural layout; this is the last thing you do on paper, before you actually start to build;

- 209. ROOF LAYOUT
- 210. FLOOR AND CEILING LAYOUT
- 211. THICKENING THE OUTER WALLS
- 212. COLUMNS AT THE CORNERS
- 213. FINAL COLUMN DISTRIBUTION

put stakes in the ground to mark the columns on the site, and start erecting the main frame of the building according to the layout of these stakes;

- 214. ROOT FOUNDATIONS
- 215. GROUND FLOOR SLAB
- 216. BOX COLUMNS

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- 217. PERIMETER BEAMS
- 218. WALL MEMBRANES
- 219. FLOOR-CEILING VAULTS
- 220. ROOF VAULTS

within the main frame of the building, fix the exact positions for openings—the doors and windows—and frame these openings;

- 221. NATURAL DOORS AND WINDOWS
- 222. LOW SILL
- 223. DEEP REVEALS
- 224. LOW DOORWAY
- 225. FRAMES AS THICKENED EDGES

as you build the main frame and its openings, put in the following subsidiary patterns where they are appropriate;

- 226. COLUMN PLACE
- 227. COLUMN CONNECTION
- 228. STAIR VAULT
- 229. DUCT SPACE
- 230. RADIANT HEAT
- 231. DORMER WINDOWS
- 232. ROOF CAPS

put in the surfaces and indoor details;

- 233. FLOOR SURFACE
- 234. LAPPED OUTSIDE WALLS



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- 235. SOFT INSIDE WALLS
- 236. WINDOWS WHICH OPEN WIDE
- 237. SOLID DOORS WITH GLASS
- 238. FILTERED LIGHT
- 239. SMALL PANES
- 240. HALF-INCH TRIM

build outdoor details to finish the outdoors as fully as the indoor spaces;

- 241. SEAT SPOTS
- 242. FRONT DOOR BENCH
- 243. SITTING WALL
- 244. CANVAS ROOFS
- 245. RAISED FLOWERS
- 246. CLIMBING PLANTS
- 247. PAVING WITH CRACKS BETWEEN  
THE STONES
- 248. SOFT TILE AND BRICK

complete the building with ornament and light and color and your own things;

- 249. ORNAMENT
- 250. WARM COLORS
- 251. DIFFERENT CHAIRS
- 252. POOLS OF LIGHT
- 253. THINGS FROM YOUR LIFE

## CHOOSING A LANGUAGE FOR YOUR PROJECT

All 253 patterns together form a language. They create a coherent picture of an entire region, with the power to generate such regions in a million forms, with infinite variety in all the details.

It is also true that any small sequence of patterns from this language is itself a language for a smaller part of the environment; and this small list of patterns is then capable of generating a million parks, paths, houses, workshops, or gardens.

For example, consider the following ten patterns:

- PRIVATE TERRACE ON THE STREET (140)
- SUNNY PLACE (161)
- OUTDOOR ROOM (163)
- SIX-FOOT BALCONY (167)
- PATHS AND GOALS (120)
- CEILING HEIGHT VARIETY (190)
- COLUMNS AT THE CORNERS (212)
- FRONT DOOR BENCH (242)
- RAISED FLOWERS (245)
- DIFFERENT CHAIRS (251)

This short list of patterns is itself a language: it is one of a thousand possible languages for a porch, at the front of a house. One of us chose this small language, to build