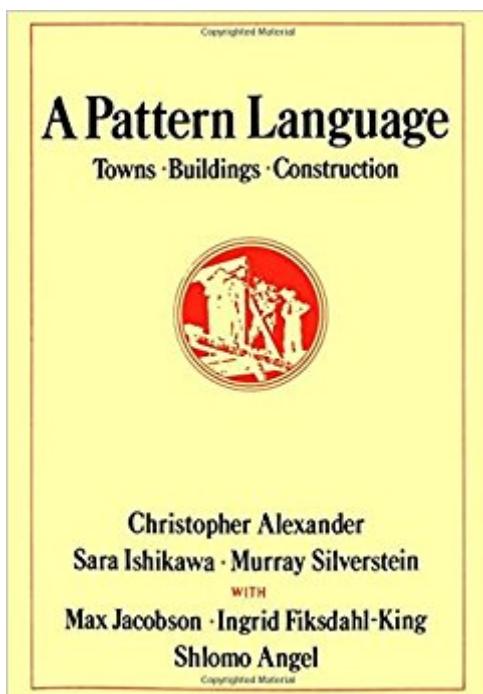


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# A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction (Center For Environmental Structure)



## Synopsis

You can use this book to design a house for yourself with your family; you can use it to work with your neighbors to improve your town and neighborhood; you can use it to design an office, or a workshop, or a public building. And you can use it to guide you in the actual process of construction. After a ten-year silence, Christopher Alexander and his colleagues at the Center for Environmental Structure are now publishing a major statement in the form of three books which will, in their words, "lay the basis for an entirely new approach to architecture, building and planning, which will we hope replace existing ideas and practices entirely." The three books are *The Timeless Way of Building*, *The Oregon Experiment*, and this book, *A Pattern Language*. At the core of these books is the idea that people should design for themselves their own houses, streets, and communities. This idea may be radical (it implies a radical transformation of the architectural profession) but it comes simply from the observation that most of the wonderful places of the world were not made by architects but by the people. At the core of the books, too, is the point that in designing their environments people always rely on certain "languages," which, like the languages we speak, allow them to articulate and communicate an infinite variety of designs within a forma system which gives them coherence. This book provides a language of this kind. It will enable a person to make a design for almost any kind of building, or any part of the built environment. "Patterns," the units of this language, are answers to design problems (How high should a window sill be? How many stories should a building have? How much space in a neighborhood should be devoted to grass and trees?). More than 250 of the patterns in this pattern language are given: each consists of a problem statement, a discussion of the problem with an illustration, and a solution. As the authors say in their introduction, many of the patterns are archetypal, so deeply rooted in the nature of things that it seemly likely that they will be a part of human nature, and human action, as much in five hundred years as they are today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The second of three books published by the Center for Environmental Structure to provide a "working alternative to our present ideas about architecture, building, and planning," A Pattern Language offers a practical language for building and planning based on natural considerations. The reader is given an overview of some 250 patterns that are the units of this language, each consisting of a design problem, discussion, illustration, and solution. By understanding recurrent design problems in our environment, readers can identify extant patterns in their own design projects and use these patterns to create a language of their own. Extraordinarily thorough, coherent, and accessible, this book has become a bible for homebuilders, contractors, and developers who care about creating healthy, high-level design.

"A wise old owl of a book, one to curl up with in an inglenook on a rainy day.... Alexander may be the closest thing home design has to a Zen master."--The New York Times "A classic. A must read!"--T. Colbert, University of Houston "The design student's bible for relativistic environmental design."--Melinda La Garce, Southern Illinois University "Brilliant....Here's how to design or redesign any space you're living or working in--from metropolis to room. Consider what you want to happen in the space, and then page through this book. Its radically conservative observations will spark, enhance, organize your best ideas, and a wondrous home, workplace, town will result."--San Francisco Chronicle "The most important book in architecture and planning for many decades, a landmark whose clarity and humanity give hope that our private and public spaces can yet be made gracefully habitable."--The Next Whole Earth Catalog

Classic book from the 1970's written by a Berkley, CA and Oregon of University Professor. It is for serious architects or engineers who wish to be challenged by values in the way things are built. This man is the Archimedes of city planning. It is a dense read but will fire you up with dreams of a better way to plan humans enjoying each other, living together in balance with resources. It is over 1,000 valuable pages of hope for city planners or individual architects. It is a priceless AND timeless book,

worthy to be preserved for 1,000's of years like Archimedes gifts to us. Also, see his more reader friendly "The Timeless Way of Building" only 550 pages long.

A must-read for anyone considering a remodel or busing a house or even re-landscaping. I am a huge fan if this book. It's broken up into individual concrete ideas, yet forms a holistic overview of why certain spaces work so well and others just feel unpleasant. It's not bogged down in opaque architectural theory, is always concise, and each "pattern" is a gem.

I like books that shake me up and make me think about new ideas or tip my ideas on their heads. This is that book. Made me think about things I had never thought about and relationships between ideas that changed my thinking totally. I am a teacher and I try to encourage my students to really think and stretch their minds. I want them to expand their minds and to find new and creative ways of interpreting information. I have not read all of this book but every time I dive in to the material, I am amused, challenged and my brain is tickled.

The first book, "The Timeless Way of Building," gives Mr. Alexander's philosophy. This second book looks at a large number of the patterns discovered by Christopher Alexander and his team that make a building or place alive. I have already begun putting some of his pattern ideas to work in and around the house. I was especially interested in using it to plan the landscaping around the house and to figure out how to fix things like a room with only one source of light. What I did was move the family member out of that room, into a better lighted room, and turned the darkish room into a storage room/library. I'm only part way through the book, but have already benefitted from the patterns described. Mr. Alexander seems to be a very honest man, in that he also shows examples of his failures. The plan was good, but the execution was flawed. I find that honesty refreshing.

Book condition corresponded to the description. Also, this book is a joy to browse. You can skip around (or go sequentially) and read the various guidelines that C. Alexander proposes would make a great place. After reading several, its easy to see his reasoning and you start to form a more cohesive idea of the type of world he is defining in this book. Explore the pages of this book and see what you think. What type of life would you have in his proposed urban landscape?

This book was a revelation to me, since I am not an architect or designer and I had never encountered it before. I am reading it in small chunks as part of an effort to create a harmonious

home on 37 acres in a very small town. But as a former English major and student of foreign languages, it is really the fundamental idea of a visual grammar that I find so fascinating. This book is crazily prescriptive, but also very perceptive about how we humans live and interact.

Most everyone already said what I also believe about this book. It is a fantastic read. It doesn't matter there are no color pictures - only crude drawings - because the book CONTENT is so fantastic. My original book was read so many times, it fell apart and I was happy to buy it again. The roof garden and cross ventilation won me and even years later I tend to look at homes or apartments in terms of how they could be made better based on this one book. Susan Susanka's books (I own most of them) are really just this author's ideas BUT with colored photos. The one thing I would add is SECURITY. NARROW high venting windows in all rooms (makes it difficult for burglars to get in and gives more wall space) and NO French doors but a single door (solid metal or wood) and a NARROW cannot crawl though venting window above the door AND a commercial grade security screen door so the door can be opened without a burglar pushing in a cheesy Lowe's screen door. Both my French doors were removed and replaced with exactly that PLUS now there are also no worries about hurricanes/tornados blowing in French doors.

I can't put into words what an excellent book I think this is -- oh wait, just did. Now what do I do? Should I continue? Well, if you really think so... C. Alexander and company did a fabulous job putting together a very interesting and well-researched book, with neat little sketches and very humanistic approaches to things. I often find many architects' work and interviews to be artistically-focused, they having arrived at their inspiration through personal, creative impulses. What I find so refreshing about this book that I think is so rare is the psychological, humanist dynamic that pervades it. You can't get around it. This book is much more about building healthy and happy communities than about anything else, in my opinion. Go out and get it, do yourself that favor.

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