



December, 2013

In Search of Sanctuary

Over time we sustain and preserve only what we love. True sustainability therefore depends on understanding how to design for positive emotional connection to place. In pursuit of this goal we conducted an experiment: Four groups consisting of scientists, designers, physicians, artists, mental health, business and physical therapy professionals gathered together on a Sunday evening in November.

Theme: the inherent connection between physiological well-being and the experience of beauty in human-made and natural spaces.

Each group was given the same choice of topics: exploring the sensory & emotional

experience of (natural or human-made) places and spaces...

- 1) where we feel energized/fully alive
- 2) which we experience as "Sanctuary"
- 3) which we experience as "Refuge"
- 4) which are conducive to establishing strong memory connection
- 5) which foster a sense of enticement, curiosity and play

Results: All break-out groups gravitated towards the same two topics: the experience of "Refuge" and "Sanctuary."

Fascinating!



Sanctuary: FRD Memorial DC, Photo by Helena van Vliet.

"Refuge" vs. "Sanctuary"

This gathering of individuals, in fact, took place in my home. It was a special evening, which evolved into a spirited conversation about what exactly constitutes the difference between "Refuge" and "Sanctuary," with "Sanctuary" quickly emerging as the aspect of greatest emotional connection for all.



Refuge and Sanctuary: Helena van Vliet projects.

We agreed that while “Refuge” and “Sanctuary” both provide a sense of safety, centering and relaxation, “Sanctuary” not only spells deep emotional involvement with a peaceful nurturing place, but also transcends our own personal selves and fosters connection with a larger context beyond, be it communal, natural and/or spiritual, or any combination thereof.



Sanctuary: Helena van Vliet Project. Dedicated to the arc of the sun (sunrise, high-noon, sunset).

Beauty: A key aspect of Sanctuary

The experience of beauty, as we explored together that evening, seems to be a key ingredient in our positive emotional connection to place, and therefore a key component designers, artists and those in the healing professions alike need to concern themselves with in buildings and spaces.

Discovering the primary aspects of emotionally nourishing human "habitat" is where the "cutting edge" of architecture and urban planning is currently located.

Incorporating the experience of "Sanctuary" into each and every space we design and build will ensure, that our built environment moves from contributing to stress and anxiety to contributing to relaxation, peace and ultimately healing. It will reconnect us with a context beyond ourselves, be it communal, natural and/or spiritual. Those are the places we love and cherish. Not every "green" building meets those criteria. Those that don't will not survive the test of time and are therefore not truly sustainable.



Sanctuary: Anasazi Kiva "Spruce Tree House" at Mesa Verde. Photo credit: Pixdaus.com.

Wishing You a Happy and Peaceful Holiday Season

As we head into 2014 and the possibilities that the New Year offers, that sense of purpose, renewed commitment to focus on each and every day, I leave you with this thought:

"Clearly the problem of man and nature is not one of providing a decorative

background for the human play, or even ameliorating the grim city: it is the necessity of sustaining nature as a source of life, milieu, teacher, sanctum, challenge and, most of all, of rediscovering nature's corollary of the unknown in the self, the source of meaning."

Ian McHarg (1969)

Nature-Inspired News

[TED Talk] Denis Dutton: A Darwinian theory of beauty

10 Landscape Design Projects That Turn Damaged and Neglected Spaces Into Healthy, Beautiful Environments

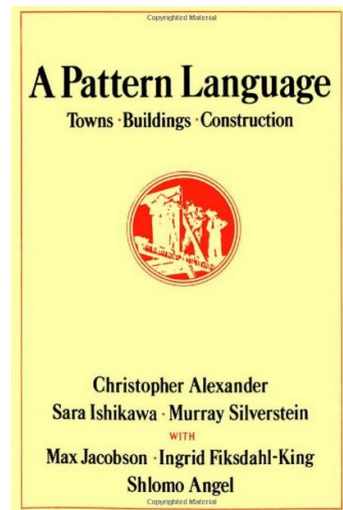
Biophilia Becomes a Design Standard

Recommended Reading

A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction
A Center for Environmental Structure Series

From The Book:

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.



Learn more about **Building Places that Re-Connect with the Natural World**. For Land Planning, Architecture and Collaborative Design, please email me or call me at: 610.935.3230 for more information.

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