

POSTSCRIPT ON COLOR



The way these buildings got their color, gives a final summary, in miniature, of the entire building process.

When we finished the first group of buildings—the builder's yard—it came time to paint them. Many of the students on the site wanted, at that stage, to paint them simply white and leave the wood natural . . . very architectural. But I had a vision of these buildings being somehow tinged with blue . . . almost ethereal . . . For many of the students building there, this seemed too strange. However, I insisted even though, finally, only I myself and Howard saw the beauty of this possibility.

So we began experiments, to find out exactly how to paint the color. These experiments took almost two weeks, of continuous work, painting one mock-up after another, slightly changing colors, until we finally discovered just exactly how it must be done.

To do these experiments, we nailed up boards, in the configuration of the cornice up on the wall, and painted them, time after time.

We began with the blue. It had seemed some kind of sky blue, a heavenly blue. . . . and it took a long time to find a blue which had the right amount of light in it.

The breakthrough came, when we realized the need for a hairline above the blue. At first we saw this hair-

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line as a golden one, a thin golden line. But as Howard tried to produce this color, it became obvious that the feeling of this golden line could be produced, not by a yellow, but by green. So we had a green hairline above the blue. But this green, it had immense amounts of yellow in it. I had no idea that one could add so much yellow pigment to a green, and still have it a golden green, not yellow at all. This color, finally, pale, golden yellow green, was the color which made the blue of the cornice shine.

And then, to make the blue right, the blue itself was faintly tinged with green . . . so small a quantity that it was still quite blue—not blue green, but just subtly shifted.

And finally, the white itself, of the wall needed to be changed. Although it was to be a whitewashed wall below the blue line of the cornice, it turned out that to make it comfortable and to reduce the brilliance, and make it soft, this whitewash too, had to be faintly tinged with green. So in the end the wall was a faint lime green, so lightly green that anyone who looks at it thinks it is white . . . but still it harmonizes softly with the blue and golden green above it.

Even when we had made these discoveries, after days of work, we still had to check them on fairly large areas of the building. We painted a whole wall of one building, about twelve feet long, two or three times . . . and finally, when we saw the whole thing in a large enough amount to see that it came out just right, then we were satisfied, and went ahead to paint the entire building complex.

Altogether, the amount of mixing, and painting, and

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making other mixes, and painting them, and looking at them . . . was enormous. It went on day after day, for almost the whole two weeks . . . in many cases, intensified by the lack of understanding of the people round about, who felt that it should all be white, or who simply could not understand how carefully, with what concentration, it is necessary to keep going through trial and error, over and again, to get a thing just right.

At one time, Howard's love of green became so strong that he wanted to change the whole thing from the blue line to a green . . . and we painted the inner courtyard with a lime green cornice just to try it. But this was less beautiful than the original blue cornice which was on the other buildings. Somehow the blue line caught the sky just right, and made these buildings almost perfect.

But it is amazing to record, even now to write it down, how much work went into that one thing, to get it right.

# THE PRODUCTION OF HOUSES

*Christopher Alexander*

*with*

*Howard Davis*

*Julio Martinez*

*Donald Corner*



*Written with affection and respect for  
our apprentices in Mexico*

*Ramiro Ortuño*

*Julio Chavez*

*Emma Rivera*

*Gloria Hernandez*

*Donato Rechy*

*Jorge Torres*

*Enrique Ramirez*

*Javier Toscano*

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