

that place (the mockup, I am talking about, as photographed above — not yet the real thing). People — people working in the office — sat there for hours. It was the heart of the office, even though only a temporary mockup, so long as it still existed there. It was a place where people could sit, and sit, and sit. No one wanted to get up and go away from it.

To reach that state, I had to work at the geometry. It was all empirical. I did not use

theory. I just kept on, by trial and error, till it had this effect — on me, and on the others. Then once we had it right, I transcribed all the dimensions — of seat, table, seat-back, angles, lengths, heights, window-sill position, entrance, entrance width, all that — to the nearest centimeter or two — and then used these dimensions in the actual building when it came time to build it.

In the finished building, the alcoves did work very well.



5 / THE FEELING-SYMMETRY PRINCIPLE
WITHIN THESE EXAMPLES

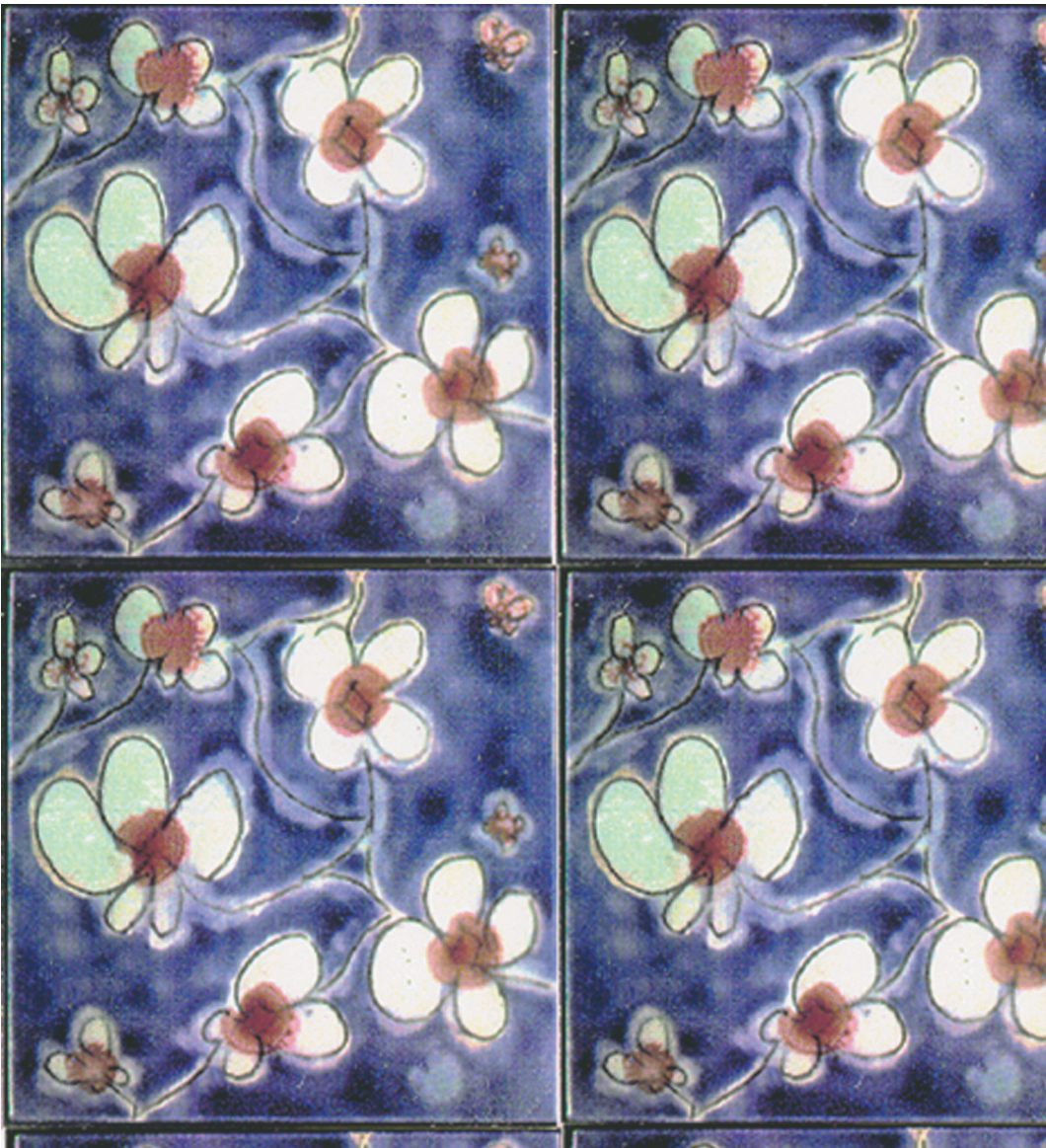


Buildings, layers of symmetry, the gray-roofed buildings of the Eishin campus, 1987.

Each of the four examples has a carefully worked geometry which creates a profound and subtle form of ease. And precisely that, too, is the morphological character of living structure — it

is always the simplest thing it can be. It is *that* which creates the ease.

Each of these four examples has at its core the creation of some degree of feeling. Each one



Hand-painted hand-glazed repeating tiles, Christopher Alexander

depends on a process which asks questions about the geometry, then establishes the geometry, step by step, in such a way as to intensify the feeling people experience from it.

It worked in each of these examples, because in each case I asked the questions in the right order. I got one symmetry after another from the emerging thing, from the building form itself as it was evolving. Each time the newly added symmetry made the feeling deeper.

Yet what I did in adding local centers and symmetries did not conform to a preconceived plan. I only asked *questions* about centers and symmetries, and so unfolded the form. What that means is that I made these symmetries appear in the right order to extend the wholeness which was visible at any given moment in the unfolding process—and what that meant, effectively, was choosing the ones which generated the most feeling. As a result the form which was created had the simplest and deepest feel-



Elegant and simple: the beauty of the alternating repetition. Classrooms, students, arcades and water on the Eishin Campus.

ing — and thus took on, one might almost say, the form of human life itself made manifest — the character of human experience and humanness made visible. This did not come from an idiosyncratic style. It came only from an attempt to do the simplest thing that could create true feeling.

Each time I worked at it to find what was the simplest new symmetry I could introduce

that was structure-preserving to the emerging whole, this had the effect of intensifying the feeling. In hundreds of examples (many shown throughout this book), I tried again and again and again to reach that goal. I did not always do it decisively. I did not always succeed. But still, that is what I was trying to do and that is the essence of the morphology which gradually emerged from my experiments.



Christopher Alexander and colleagues, 1985.

What the four examples cited just now have in common is their simplicity. *Each of the examples has the minimal structure for its situation that carries weight of feeling.* It has some sweetness. It is not costly. It is not complicated. It is simple. Sometimes it is crude. But in each of the examples I have given, it was calculated by experiment to be as intense as possible in its feeling (both in its sweetness and in its bitterness). That was

established, in each case, experimentally. And from that the building or made thing got its form. That is how the symmetries were judged.

It is this process which generates the class of living structures. It is this which generates the living, growling, archetype. It is this, when carried out fully, that leads to the emergence of the archetype which lies at the core of living form.