

repetitive structure is to be built — a group of houses, say, or a group of offices, a series of windows, even a series of similar office buildings, or a number of private offices — the living process that is used will make each version of the repeating structure *similar*, if that is appropriate — but each repeated unit, each time it occurs, *will be slightly different* according to the unique configuration of circumstances where it occurs.

In such a result, inevitably following from a living process, each place, each part has the chance of becoming loved — or anyway, at the least it is *possible* to love — because it is entire, particular.

This character is familiar and obvious in nature. It happens without effort from us. And in traditional towns and villages, too, it happened without effort because of the naturalness of the

unfolding. But in our era, we have yet to learn how to get this particularity, uniqueness, into every part of the built world.

If design and construction processes are living processes, as they are in my view of the world, we shall find ways of building that will allow each part to become itself, what it is, in relation to us, to who lives there, in relation to every hill, and every tree. In this chapter I give a few examples of the way that living process, properly understood, is so deeply structure-preserving that every house, every door, every apartment, each room, each corridor, becomes unique in its own terms, because it preserves the structure of the world (which is unique) at that place, and translates the uniqueness of the place into the uniqueness of the thing, the artefact.

That can be a world we love.



## 2 / THREE HOUSES BY TELEPHONE

In 1993 we began work on a community of houses in Austin, Texas.

Once we had the hull worked out — the overall formation of the common land and the position of individual houses in relation to this common land (see discussion on pages 82–85, and plan illustrated on page 366) — I began the design of the individual houses.

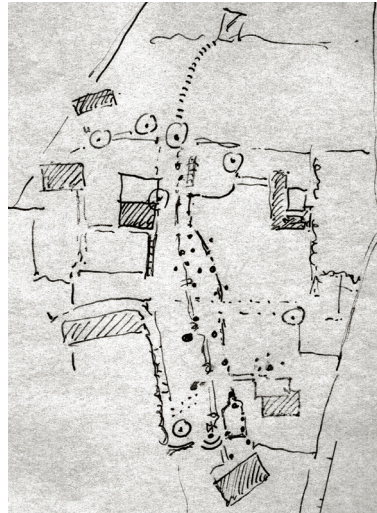
I had of course seen the site a number of times, helped each family choose their individual lots (since the land was held in common it was, more exactly, not a lot but a general area where each family was going to build) and we had, by then, a grasp of how the whole would fit together in relation to the beauty of the lake and the pattern of movement in the site.

I now asked each family to consider what they wanted in their house. Each family had already made a decision about the size of their house (governed essentially by cost). I gave them a copy of the pattern language, asked them to choose the patterns they were interested in,

asked them to read through these patterns and to discuss among themselves what was going to be in the house, what would be its character.

This discussion took place by telephone, and lasted about an hour for each family. We ran through the kinds of things they wanted, we talked about the overall vision of the house that each of them had. When we were done, each family had, in outline, a picture of the patterns (the generic centers) which their house was to contain. It was different, of course, for each family.

I asked each couple, then, to visit the site during the following week and that each couple should try, together, to visualize their house as a whole. I asked that they do this, on the land, by walking through the house in their imagination, pacing it out, imagining what they could of what they hoped to see there. On the following Sundays, I arranged another phone call with each of the families. Again, each call lasted about one hour.



Plan of the Back-of-the-Moon community, showing the three houses in position, top right the Gioja house, middle right the Heisey house, and bottom right the Goddu house. The lake is at the top of the drawing.

During this second phone call, I asked that they work, as far as possible, *with their eyes closed*, imagining themselves in the actual place that we were going to build *as if it already existed*. I told them I, too, would keep my eyes closed most of the time during our telephone discussion, and that, working in this way, we would be most likely to succeed in visualizing something good, and something real.

Now, to get things moving, I simply began asking them questions, one at a time. These questions were put to them in a certain order, and were a way of creating a sequence of unfolding. Each question, when answered,

would create a further unfolding of the house that had been generated up until then by the answers to the previous questions. As we went forward, we all three together built up, in our minds, a picture of the house they had in mind. Each of my questions was designed to bring forth a new feature of the emerging whole. I chose the order of the questions carefully, so as to cause the house to unfold as cleanly and smoothly as possible.

Although my questions, and the order in which I asked them, were largely the same for each family, each family gave entirely different answers to these questions.



### 3 / A HOUSE FOR GEOFFREY AND LINDA GIOJA

With the Gioja family, Geoffrey and Linda, I began by saying:

*Q: We are walking across the site, towards your house. Now, tell me, how do we come into the house, where are we coming from?*

They told me, in answer:

*A: The house is pressed over against the trees. We want to be far from the common land. The*

*feeling of the inside of our house is enclosed and private.*

When they had finished answering, and I was reasonably sure I understood what they meant, I asked

*Q: So now I come to the door. What happens as I go inside, what is the first thing I see, where are we, what are we looking at?*