



*The tile shop in our offices and workshop complex in Martinez, 1989*

as, and then finally, once you hit what you need, have control of mixing the final colors. Again, the pigment mixing with the pigment-based paint is OK — provided that you mix your own. Lime or cement based washes, with pigment mixed in, are OK. On furniture I use gouache on gesso. When it is finally OK, I varnish it with clear, glossy spar varnish. This gives you almost complete control.

Terrazzo is all right, too. Marble dust and chips mixed with pigments provides permanent color in a building. We have also used lime plaster in which pigments are mixed directly in the

same way. Tile glazes are all right, too — provided that you glaze your own tiles. Once again, you can't get it right if you buy pre-glazed tiles. We keep our own tile workshop, and glaze the materials we need for the building.

It is surprising to realize that in the present day even something as simple as painting materials are inadequate to support true unfolding well. The techniques and materials that are used by 95% of building industry painters today cannot attain the right color quality because they just do not allow the gradual fine-tuning of the colors to get them exactly right.



#### 4 / THE SURPRISING NATURE OF THE COLOR THAT UNFOLDS

In the search for color, when you really pay attention and try to find out what produces inner light, step by step, the result is often very surprising.

I will give three examples. In two of them, I started out expecting to find blue, but it turned out that something else — in both cases unexpected — was the right color.

The first happened during construction of André Sala's house. On the second floor there is

a children's room with two alcoves for the children. From the beginning, André had been telling me how he had been wanting to paint the room a beautiful light blue. He described it to me — a soft, milky blue, almost transparent, that he had once seen in a house in France.

I was worried. It sounded beautiful, but it had nothing to do with *this* room, in *this* house. I had lunch with André and told him that I

could only work well with him if we agreed that together we would pay attention, very honestly, to the color which came from that room. I told him, too, that I had no way of knowing if this milky blue would be the color which would arise naturally from the light in the room. We talked for two hours, a long lunch, complicated discussion, but very interesting. André is himself a painter. Finally he agreed.

What he agreed in essence, was that the room would be determined by the room itself, not by any *idea* — neither from him, nor from me.

We went back to the room, with paper, paints, and brushes, and began testing different colors. As it happens, that room has a lot of strong light. It is a small room with big windows that face south and west, and the light in the room bounces around and is startling in its brilliance.

We tried André's milky blue first. It looked strange, almost white, because the room itself is so bright. André, as much as I, recognized that it was hopeless in that place. Then we started trying

all kinds of things on bits of cardboard that we painted and pinned up as we went along. When we finally found the color that put the room in harmony, and made some kind of comfortable, natural feeling there, that arose from the room itself, it was entirely unexpected, a darkish red, almost one might call it an over-saturated darkening red with qualities of pink. When we found it, together, we agreed that that color was the one. André saw this as much as I did, but he was amazed. And I was, too. I would never have imagined that this room would be best in red, especially such a deep, strong red.

Then, when we began fine-tuning the harmony in the room, I discovered a purple with a touch of turquoise in it, connected with the red — and painted small diamond flowers of this color all over the red.

The harmony of the room became good, now. But, altogether, it was totally unexpected. One would never have guessed that these were the colors which were required to produce light in that room.



*Hand-painted children's bed alcoves at the Sala house, Berkeley, California. Christopher Alexander and André Sala, 1983*