



*Christopher Alexander, Caribbean light, oil on board, 1992.*



10 / PAINTINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS  
OF THE BLISSFUL STATE

Because the blissful state is so mysterious — and because the interaction of this state-in-a-person with this state-in-the-world, the co-dependence of the two is also so mysterious, so difficult to grasp — I have in recent years begun trying to

understand the co-dependence of the two through paintings.

In these paintings — paintings of rooms, places, which I imagine in something as near to the blissful state as I can manage — and in this



*The peacefulness of the library I built in our house. Christopher Alexander, private library, 1988.*

state which seems to shimmer, exist between the lines, within the strokes of paint, within the chairs and windows — I have tried to catch the ordinary blissful state in the most extreme, yet also the most ordinary form.

This is a tremendously difficult task. But these paintings — and occasional photographs, too — do shed light on what I mean.

I have spoken of the unfolding process, and the fundamental process, creating STRONG CENTERS. But the unfolding process that I am talking about now — the unfolding of the human spirit within the world, the creation of environment in which people feel free within themselves — is much more profound than that. To create that kind of process is a huge undertaking. After twenty years of building, even though I have achieved something, I feel I am

really now on the beginning of a new journey, one aimed at finding the ways that more conscious process might take place, to create this for everyone.

What appears in this chapter has been a set of pictures and photographs, very easy to describe. But there is almost nothing in our contemporary society that can produce this spiritual, ordinary world. I hope that in some fashion, even though you may not be a builder or an architect, this concern means something to you and may help you in whatever particular thing you are doing.

Part and parcel of the blissful state is the uniqueness of every people culturally, the uniqueness of every land, uniqueness of every corner of the earth, of every human group. In a happy world, it is inevitable that each group of



*Christopher Alexander, The Living Room, 38cm x 55 cm, oil on board, 1990.  
The kind of world in which this blissful state exists.*

people will experience, and make solid, their own way of life. The mosaic of subcultures, first described thirty years ago in the earliest versions of A PATTERN LANGUAGE, has since become more and more real all over the world in the growing tendency to protect local language, ancient craft and culture, and the division of hu-

man civilization into smaller, connected, units of local culture. This process will, I believe, continue in an environment which fosters such variety, and gives dignity to it.

In trying to understand — and reach — this blissful state, painting helps me a great deal. The paintings catch the feeling of these actual rooms



*Christopher Alexander, The blue cupboard, 45 cm x 65 cm, oil on wooden panel, 1993. A painting of our bedroom—pictures leaning against the closet, an easel in the background—in which the blissful character of easy comfort and disorder, as they marry in human life with profound order, and intense color, and feeling, are placed together.*

better than photographs. They have an ordinary quality, an ordinariness — luxury of color, soft cloth, paintings, books, flowers — but put together so that people are comfortable there. In the case of our living room (pictured in the painting on page 61) people who come into this room

say, “I am always comfortable here. Here, I can be myself.” The inside light comes from the fact that the windows and the fireplace and the walls seem almost like beings. Yet it is rather ordinary. And it is made quite roughly, out of very good materials. It is not expensive.