



3 / INTIMACY OF DESIGN WITHIN THE HUGE



The music school, attached to the Great Hall at Eishin, showing how a small simple volume, attached to a large simple volume, creates a complex asymmetry already beginning to have considerable feeling. Eishin Campus, Tokyo, Christopher Alexander.

Big buildings of the 20th century most often overwhelm us. We feel insignificant next to them, and unrelated. It is not because of their size. After all, when we are in a mountain valley, against a great rock-wall, say, the wall may be immense, the sheer wall might be thousands of feet high. Yet we do not feel it gross, or crude. It always preserves its scale in relation to ourselves. It feels human, even though it is gigantic.

That is because, quite simply, the LEVELS OF SCALE described in Book I are always present. There are planes, fissures, crevices, which bring the scale down, in easy jumps, from the gigantic wall of rock, all the way to small pieces, small clinging plants, and individual hanging boulders.

These two photographs show something of the way the mountain works, to preserve our humanity, in the case of the great hall at Eishin. In the upper photograph, the huge building of which we see only a fragment on the left, is given



A fraction of the massive Great Hall seen through a nearby arch

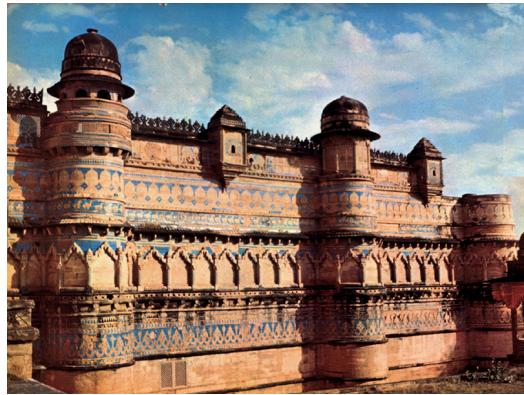
its scale by the small music school attached to it. It connects us to the larger building. And,



Columns of the Great Hall. The mirror surface of the columns is polished black plaster known as Shikkui, an ancient Japanese technique (Book 4 page 47 and Book 2 pages 378–83). If you look at the black space between two red chevrons on the face of the leftmost column, you see that this black space is a living center, which is itself composed of two black rhombuses leaning away from each other, themselves also living centers. There are living centers everywhere.

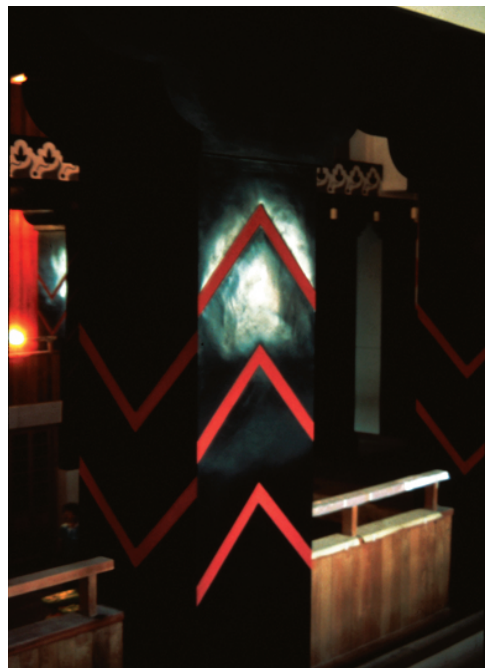


In this fashion, each of the six large buildings in this chapter has levels of detail, stepped down in easy jumps to the intricacy shown in chapters 14, 15, and 16 on fine structure.



The castle of Gwalior, India, also shows the principle.

again, in the lower photograph, we see the hall through a tiny archway from a building across the plaza. Again we see only a fragment of the massive hall, emphasizing its great size. Yet still, because of the relationship established by this archway, we are made comfortable, and feel related to the hall, even though it is so huge. It is because of the detailing, and the long hierarchy of scales in the living centers, ranging in comfortable steps from the great size of the building volume, to the smaller building next door, to the bays, then to the columns, and finally all the way down to the smallest ornaments. We feel it all to be related.



Smaller details, considered by themselves, reveal even more profuse levels of detail, not noticeable in the larger photo.