

# The Wondrous Insights of Christopher Alexander

## No. 1 Independent Regions

1000 regions



each region  
2 to 10 million  
population

Wherever possible, work toward the evolution of independent regions in the world; each with a population between 2 and 10 million; each with its own natural and geographic boundaries; each with its own economy; each one autonomous and self-governing; each with a seat in a world government, without the intervening power of larger states or countries.

Metropolitan regions will not come to balance until each one is small and autonomous enough to be an independent sphere of culture.

...just as there is a best size for every animal, so the same is true for every human institution. Greek philosophers held that a small city was the largest possible democratic state.

## No. 12 Community of 7,000

Individuals have no effective voice in any community of more than 5000-10,000 persons.

People can only have a genuine effect on local government when the units of local government are small enough to create the possibility of an immediate link between the man in the street and his local officials and elected representatives.

This is an old idea. It was the model for Athenian democracy in the third and fourth centuries B.C.; it was Jefferson's plan for American democracy; it was the tack Confucius took in his book on government, *The Great Digest*.

Therefore:

Decentralize city governments in a way that gives local control to communities of 5,000 to 10,000 persons. As nearly as possible, use natural geographic and historical boundaries to mark these communities.

## No. 21 Four-Story Limit

There is abundant evidence to show that high buildings make people crazy.

Therefore:

In any urban area, no matter how dense, keep the majority of buildings four stories high or less. It is possible that certain buildings should exceed this limit, but they should never be buildings for human habitation.



## No. 22 Nine Percent Parking

Very simply — when the area devoted to parking is too great, it destroys the land.

Very rough empirical observations lead us to believe that it is not possible to make an environment fit for human use when more than 9 per cent of it is given to parking.



*In downtown Los Angeles over 60 per cent of the land is given over to the automobile.*

## No. 25 Access to Water

People have a fundamental yearning for great bodies of water.

When natural bodies of water occur near human settlements, preserve a belt of common land immediately beside the water. Allow dense settlements to come right down to the water only at infrequent intervals.

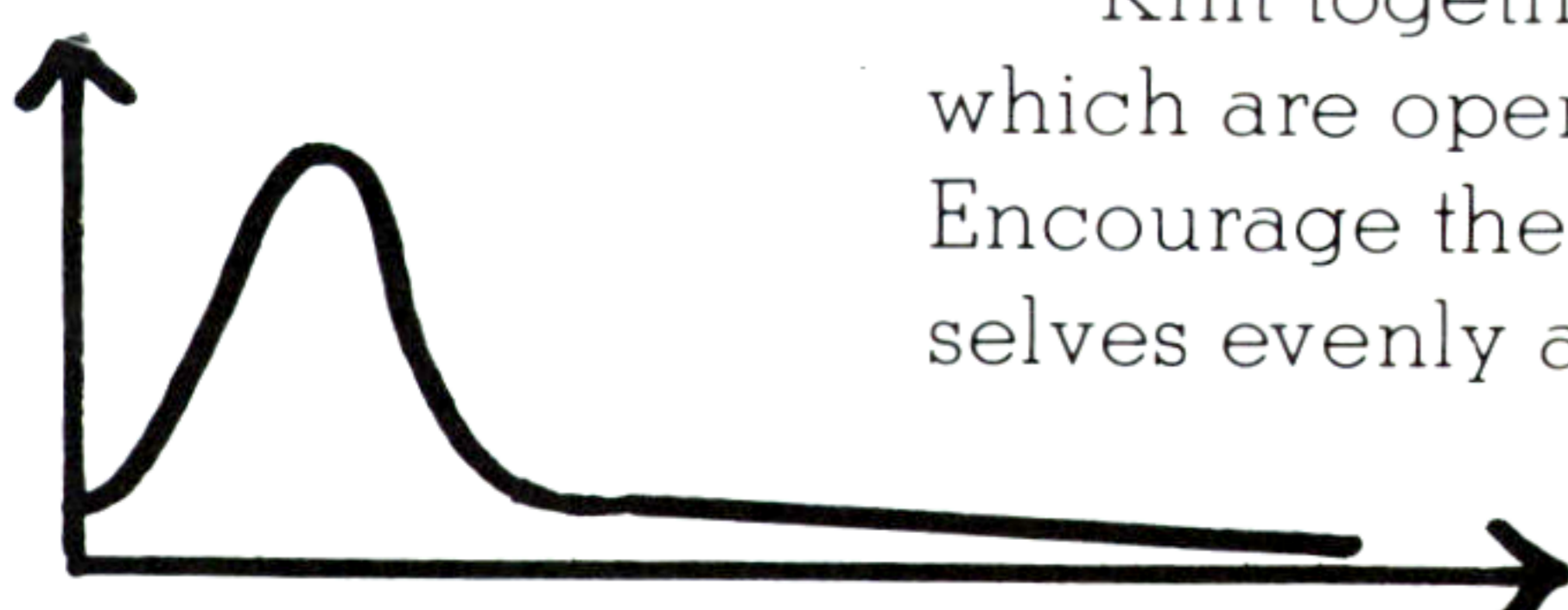
## No. 33 Night Life

Most of the city's activities close down at night; those which stay open won't do much for the night life of the city unless they are together.

Therefore:

Knit together shops, amusements, and services which are open at night to form centers of night life. Encourage these evening centers to distribute themselves evenly across the town.

No. of crimes



Pedestrian density

## No. 43 University as Marketplace

Concentrated, cloistered universities, with closed admission policies and rigid procedures kill opportunities for learning.

Therefore:

Establish the university as a marketplace of higher education. This means that the university is open to people of all ages, on a full-time, part-time, or course basis. Physically, the university marketplace has a central crossroads where it's at first concentrated in small buildings along pedestrian streets and then gradually becomes more dispersed and mixed with the town.

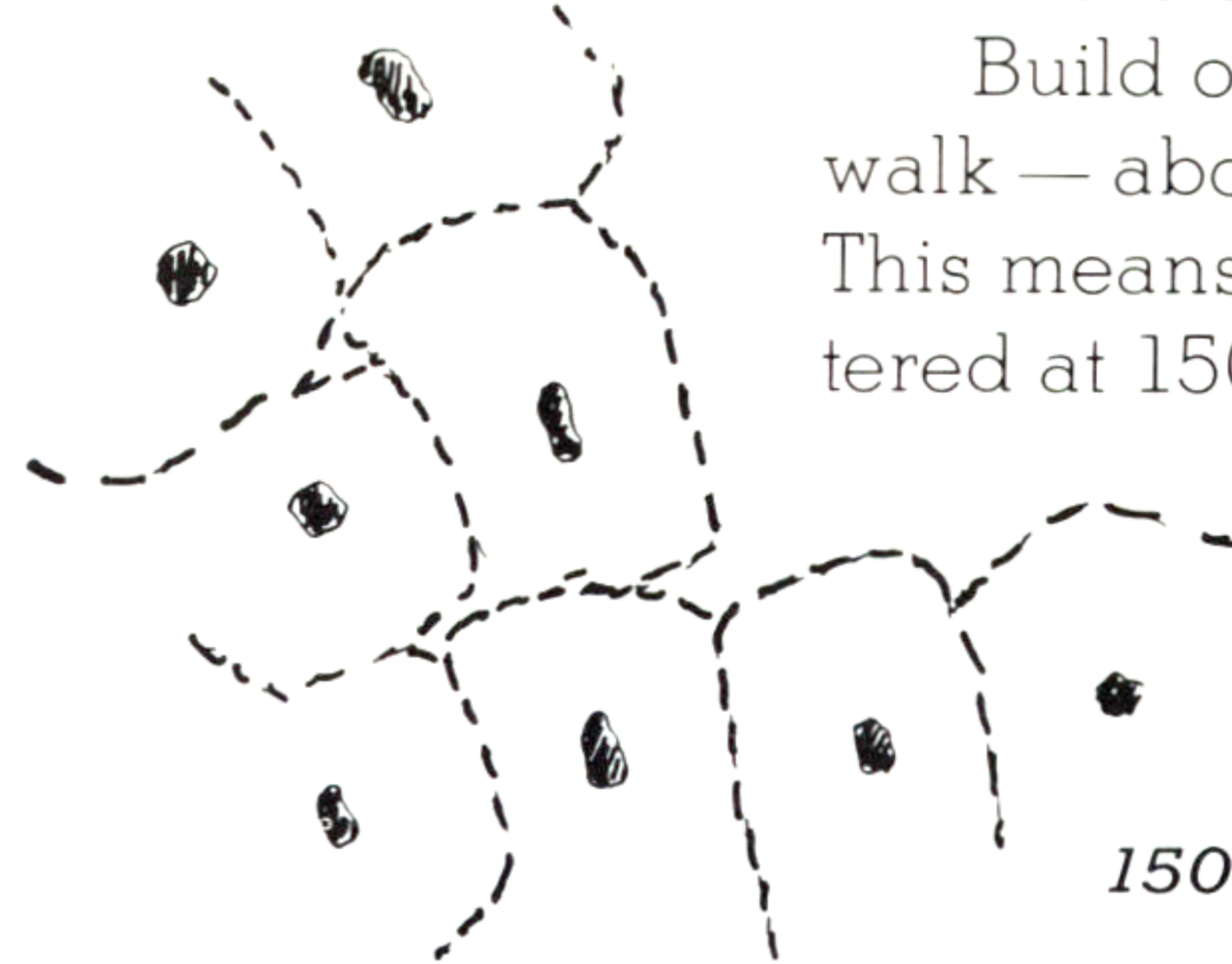
## No. 60 Accessible Green

People need green open places to go to but if the greens are more than three minutes away, the distance overwhelms the need.

Therefore:

Build one open public green within three minutes' walk — about 750 feet — of every house and workplace. This means that the greens need to be uniformly scattered at 1500-foot intervals, throughout the city.

greens



1500 feet across

## No. 104 Site Repair

Buildings must always be built on those parts of the land which are in the worst condition, not the best.

Therefore:

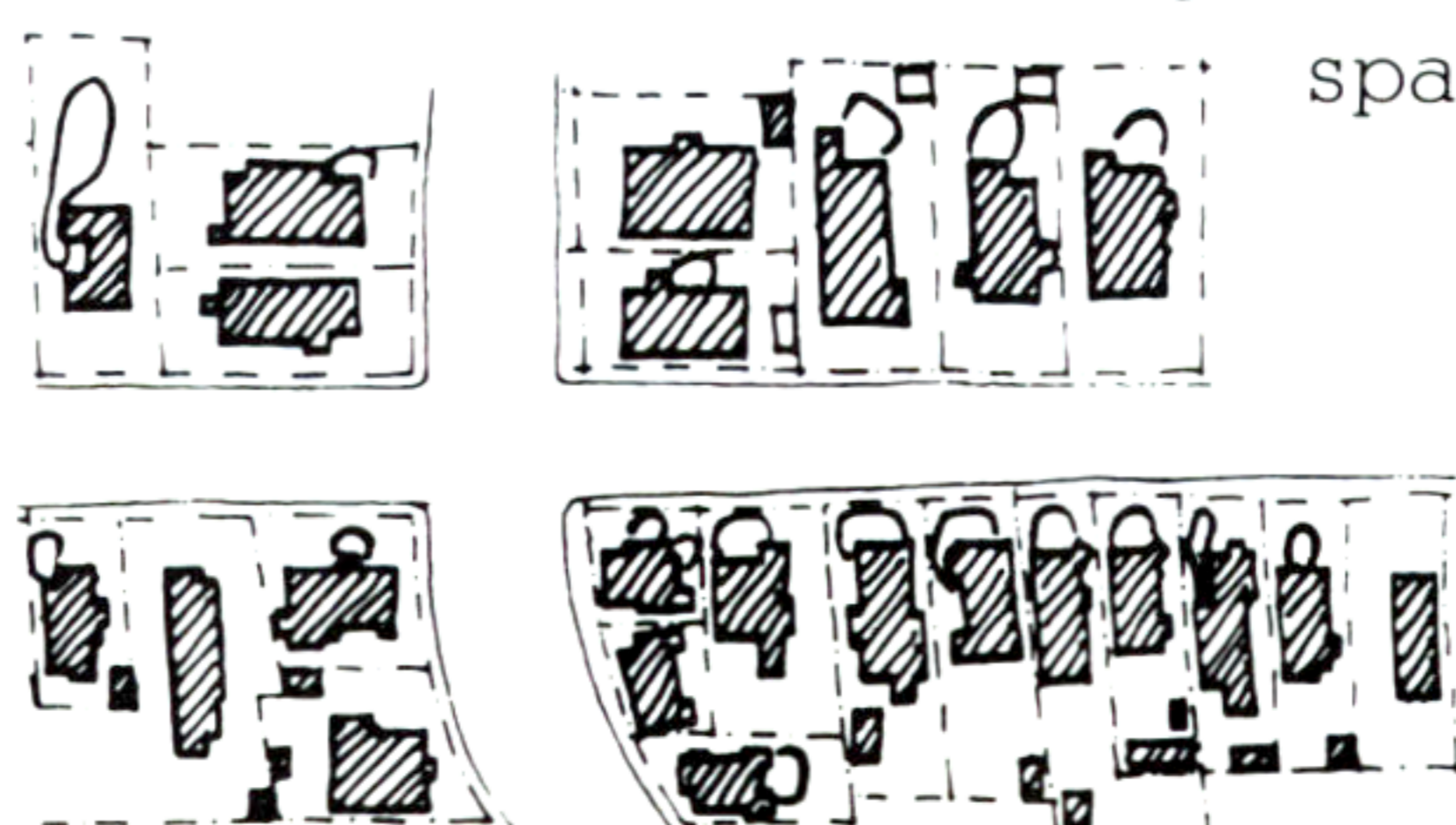
On no account place buildings in the places which are most beautiful. In fact, do the opposite. Consider the site and its buildings as a single living eco-system. Leave those areas that are the most precious, beautiful, comfortable, and healthy as they are, and build new structures in those parts of the site which are least pleasant now.

## No. 105 South Facing Outdoors

People use open space if it is sunny, and do not use it if it isn't.

Therefore:

Always place buildings to the north of the outdoor spaces that go with them, and keep the outdoor spaces to the south.



*Favorite outdoor places to the south.*

### No. 114 Hierarchy of Open Space

Outdoors, people always try to find a spot where they can have their backs protected, looking out toward some larger opening beyond the space immediately in front of them.

Therefore:

Whatever space you are shaping — whether it is a garden, park, or courtyard, make sure of two things. First, make at least one smaller space, which looks into it and forms a natural back for it. Second, place it, and its openings, so that it looks into at least one larger space.

When you have done this, every outdoor space will have a natural "back"; and every person who takes up the natural position, with his back to this "back," will be looking out toward some larger distant view.



seat and garden

### No. 116 Cascade of Roofs

Few buildings will be structurally and socially intact, unless the floors step down toward the ends of wings, and unless the roof, accordingly, forms a cascade.

Therefore:

Visualize the whole building, or building complex, as a system of roofs.



social entities

cascade

highest  
in the middle

Place the largest, highest, and widest roofs over those parts of the building which are most significant: when you come to lay the roofs out in detail, you will be able to make all lesser roofs cascade off these large roofs and form a stable self-buttressing system, which is congruent with the hierarchy of social spaces underneath the roofs.

### No. 136 Couple's Realm

The presence of children in a family often destroys the closeness and the special privacy which a man and wife need together.

Therefore:

Make a special part of the house distinct from the common areas and all the children's rooms, where the man and woman of the house can be together in private. Give this place a quick path to the children's rooms, but, at all costs, make it a distinctly separate realm.

### No. 137 Children's Realm

If children do not have space to release a tremendous amount of energy when they need to, they will drive themselves and everybody else in the family up the wall.

Therefore:

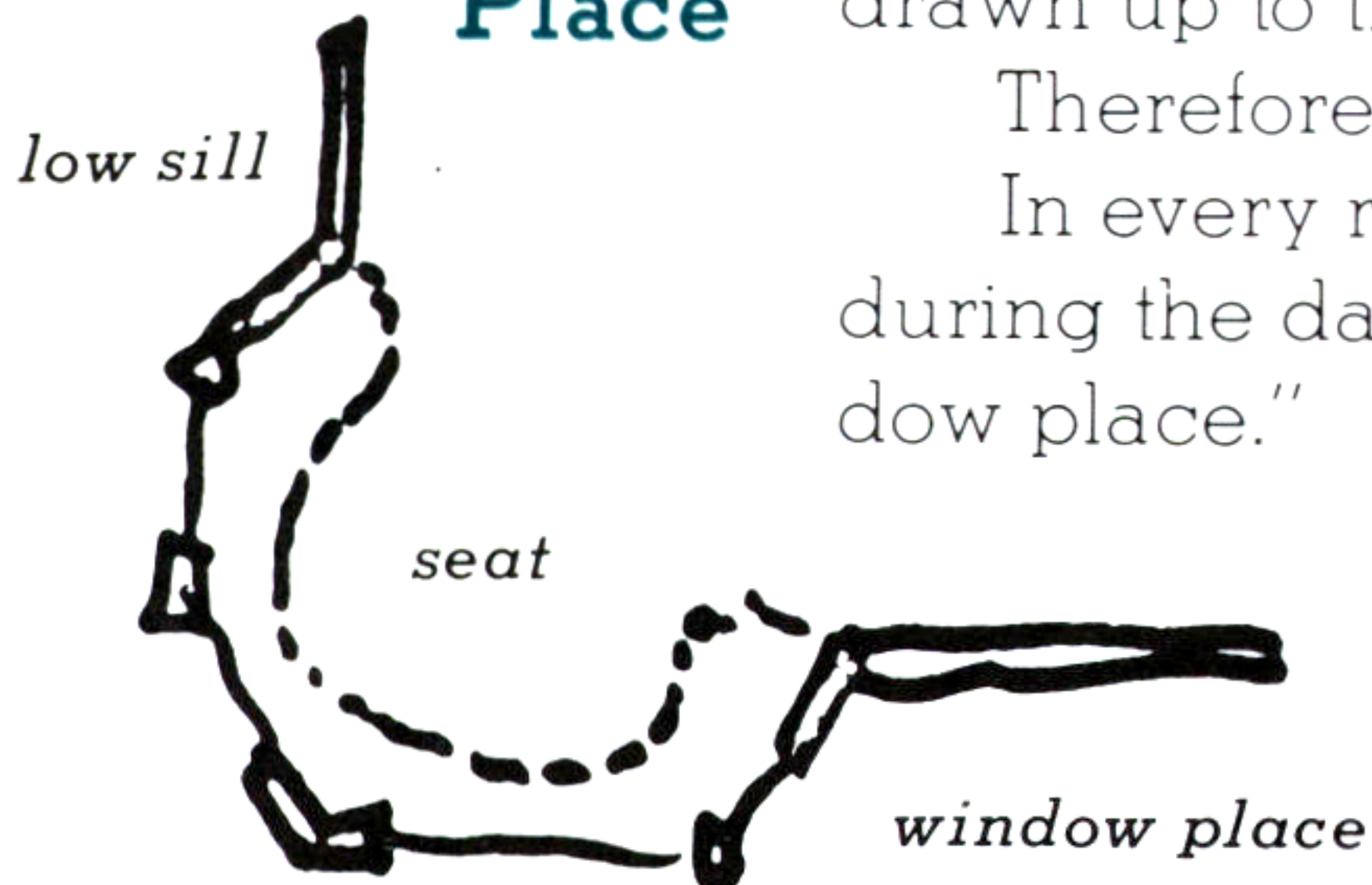
Start by creating a small area which will belong entirely to the children — the cluster of their beds. Place it in a separate position toward the back of the house, and in such a way that a continuous playspace can be made from this cluster to the street.

### No. 180 Window Place

Everybody loves window seats, bay windows, and big windows with low sills and comfortable chairs drawn up to them.

Therefore:

In every room where you spend any length of time during the day, make at least one window into a "window place."



### No. 203 Child Caves

Children love to be in tiny, cave-like places.

Therefore:

Wherever children play, around the house, in the neighborhood, in schools, make small "caves" for them. Tuck these caves away in natural left over spaces, under stairs, under kitchen counters. Keep the ceiling heights low — 2 feet 6 inches to 4 feet — and the entrance tiny.

