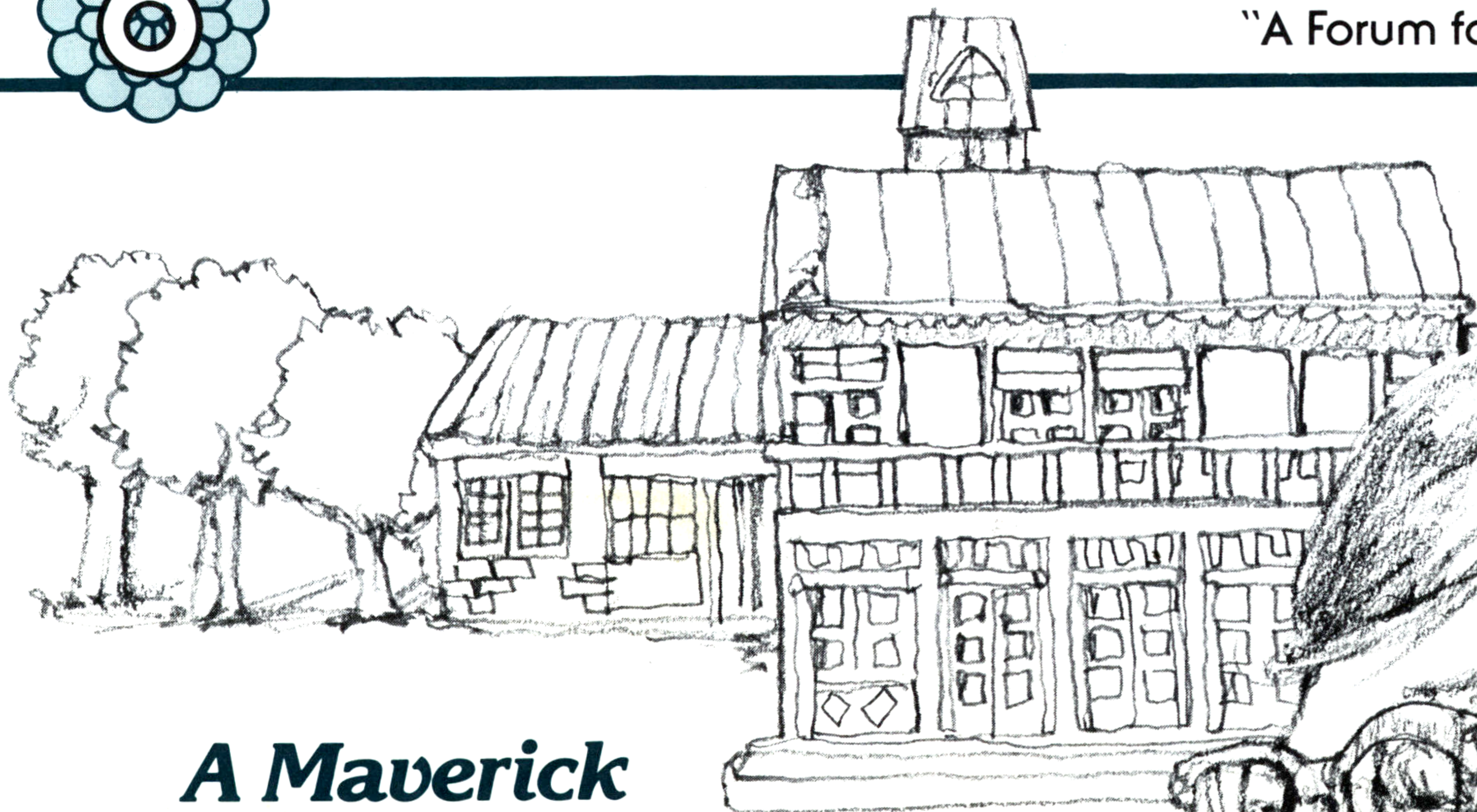


THE Tarrytown LETTER



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"A Forum for New Ideas"



A Maverick And A Model: Christopher Alexander

Architect's Philosophy Challenges All Professional Roles

One of the least-likely revolutionaries of our time is a young self-effacing Berkeley architectural professor named Christopher Alexander. A true straight-arrow, Alexander is so Establishment an architect that he won a \$10,000 research prize from the American Institute of Architects, so rigorous a student that he graduated from both Cambridge and Harvard, so zealous a worker that he is not only a registered architect in California but also a registered contractor who builds many of the structures he designs, and so low-keyed an innovator that his principal revolutionary document is a \$35-per-copy book that mostly lists tried-and-true building practices.

Nevertheless, Chris Alexander has quietly exposed the fact that most modern architecture is ignorant, arrogant, parochial, self-serving and so totally unrelated to the inner yearnings of both client and architect that the field is professionally and artistically bankrupt. Alexander is not raising the now-familiar cry against the coldness of box-like international-style architecture; his is the far deeper charge that modern architects have lost sight of the most central truth about architecture: we should fashion

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A Pattern Language

A brilliant theorist, Christopher Alexander has outlined in three books a new approach not only to human needs, structures and communities — he has illuminated a way of approaching the world that holds promise for other professions, other disciplines. In his own words (from the introduction to A Pattern Language):*

"Towns and buildings will not be able to become alive, unless they are made by all the people in society, and unless these people share a pattern language, within which to make these buildings, and unless this common pattern language is alive itself.

"This is a language you can use to work with your neighbors, to improve your town and neighborhood. You can use it to design a house for yourself, with your family; or to work with other people to design an office or a workshop or a public building like a school. And you can use it to guide you in the actual process of construction.

"We have presented the patterns so that you grasp the collection of all 253 patterns as a whole,

as a language, within which you can create an infinite variety of combinations. You can also see the problem and solution of each pattern in such a way that you can judge it for yourself, and modify it, without losing the essence that is central to it.

"No pattern is an isolated entity. Each pattern can exist in the world, only to the extent that it is supported by other patterns...

"This is a fundamental view of the world. It says that when you build a thing you cannot merely build that thing in isolation, but must also repair the world around it, and within it, so that the larger world at that one place becomes more coherent, and more whole; and the thing which you make takes its place in the web of nature, as you make it."

* Volume 1, *The Timeless Way of Building*, Christopher Alexander, 1979.
Volume 2, *A Pattern Language*, C. Alexander & associates, 1977.
Volume 3, *The Oregon Experiment*, C. Alexander & associates, 1975.
All three are published by Oxford University Press, New York.

INSIDE

1 New Model: Maverick architect Chris Alexander guides the way to commonsense with a rather uncommon design language — based on the silly idea that buildings should be built to serve people, rather than serving barren architectural dogma.

2 Observations: The Wondrous Insights of Chris Alexander. An architectural sampler of the possible, beginning with the very large — What should we have instead of nations? — to the every-day — Why can't we have bay windows with window seats like we all remember?

3 About Tom Wolfe and the Bauhaus and other matters: Where we learn about the peak experience of peak roofs and the flat experience of flat roofs.

4 Whither Goes America? Concerning the Tarrytown Weekend with the Hudson Institute's Herman Kahn and the *Economist's* Norman Macrae, in which their brains were thoroughly explored for insights on the economy, pollution, the 'Great Transition', the information culture, aging and the general problems of getting things done anymore.

6 Gleanings: Variety being the proverbial spice...from a spiritual super-hero for the eighties to the magic of pink decor; from the BBC in China and a used volcano for sale, to Russian centenarians and Crazy Horse Mountain. Not to overlook Mark Twain on censorship and the strange case of a missing lake.

7 Weekend Programs: The scheduled programs for the coming fall season — Film Weekends, Entrepreneurs' School and Tarrytown Group events.