# CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER

Christopher Alexander is a visionary, a scientist, a builder, a craftsman, a general contractor, an architect, a painter and a teacher. For 40 years he has challenged the architectural establishment, sometimes uncomfortably, to pay more attention to the human beings at the center of design.   To do so he has combined top-flight scientific training, award-winning architectural research, patient observation and testing throughout his building projects, and a radical but profoundly influential set of ideas that have extended far beyond the realm of architecture.

At times it seems architects may be the last to understand and to apply the benefits of his challenging work. But because he has dedicated his life to proving the idea that people can build environments in which they will thrive, lay people have adopted his philosophy and his building practices. Acting on his deeply-held conviction that, as a society, we must recover the means by which we can build and maintain healthy living environments, he has lived and worked in many cultures, and built buildings all over the world.

Alexander has written a series of groundbreaking works, including *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* (1964), *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (1977) and *The Timeless Way of Building* (1977). The four-volume series *The Nature of Order:  An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the Universe* (2002-5) distils his years of research, study, teaching and building into a work that is both philosophical treatise and a comprehensive methodology for living and building in the new century. The New York Times called it "the kind of book every serious reader should wrestle with once in a while: a fat, challenging, grandiose tract that encourages you to take apart the way you think and put it back together again." *The Battle for the Life and Beauty of the Earth: A Struggle Between Two World Systems* (2012) tells the story of building the Eishin campus near Tokyo, and dealing with the many confrontations that occurred. It demonstrates the systematic application of *The Nature of Order* principles.

Alexander was born in Vienna, Austria and raised in Oxford and Chichester, England. As a young man, he was awarded the top open scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1954, in chemistry and physics, and went on to read mathematics and architecture as well. He earned his doctorate in architecture at Harvard (the first awarded there), and was elected to the society of Fellows at Harvard University in 1961. During the same period he worked at MIT in transportation theory and computer science, and at Harvard in cognitive science.  His pioneering ideas in those fields were highly influential at that time, and continue to be so.

Alexander became Professor of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley in 1963, and taught there continuously for 38 years, becoming Professor Emeritus in 2001.

He founded the CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STRUCTURE in 1967, which provided staff and students with opportunities to participate in the development of new design and production systems and processes. CES promoted active experimentation on construction techniques, details, materials and color, as well as theoretical work on the structure of wholeness and the geometry of space. It fostered the involvement of communities and users in the process of designing and making, while contributing to the further development of pattern languages. CES was involved in the full spectrum of the design and construction process. The resulting buildings and open spaces have a palpable quality in their geometry, simplicity and grace; the structures are profoundly connected both with the natural environment and with the building site itself.

Alexander published hundreds of papers and several dozen books, and built more than 200 buildings around the world. In 2003 he moved back to England, where he now lives and works.

As the inventor of the "pattern language" concept, Alexander is widely recognized as the father of the pattern language movement in computer science, which has led to important innovations such as Wiki, and new kinds of Object-Oriented Programming. Many other scientific and social science disciplines have adopted the notion of pattern languages to support on-going investigations and best practices. A Google Scholar search for the term "pattern language" has recently shown 3,140,000 citations.

Professor Alexander is the recipient of the first medal for research given by the American Institute of Architects, and he has been honored repeatedly for his buildings in many parts of the world. He was elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1996 for his contributions to architecture, including his groundbreaking work on how the built environment affects the lives of people. In 2009, the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., awarded him the Vincent Scully Prize.

His unique combination of professional, scientific and hands-on disciplines, and penchant for practical application of theory have afforded the foundation for his evolving understanding of a new scientific and empirical basis for judging, building, and modifying the quality of our environment.