

HOW, wonders Christopher Alexander, can architects *not* deal with every aspect of *making* a thing? Having become a general contractor himself several years ago (in addition to being one of this country's most controversial theorists and educators), the California architect insists that the only way architects are ever going to produce buildings of beauty and integrity is if they are themselves actively involved in making those buildings.

Control of over the entire building process is, for him, the means to the ultimate goal: the creation of beautiful, timeless buildings, whose sense of wholeness unites thought and feeling and which are tiny but complete pieces of a larger, universal order.

Alexander's single-minded adherence to his principles is often interpreted as arrogance, in both architectural and academic circles, and his writings at times have a maddeningly mystical tone.

But whatever one thinks of Alexander's writings and teachings, his work must stand on its own, and it is compelling work indeed. The buildings share a timeless simplicity and an unpretentious warmth that are so often lacking in today's self-consciously historicist and "vernacular" styles, and their inexpensive materials manage to convey a sense of substance and sensuality that is missing from far more luxurious buildings. And while Alexander's work is seductive in photographs, its real magic must be experienced: if ever any work was *not* to be copied mindlessly, this is it. But then, Alexander's approach to architecture is self-insuring against theft: form and process are so inextricably united that any shortcuts would tell. That is a small reward for doing things the hard way, but in these expedient-minded times, it's also a large one.