



7 / HOW CAN IT REALLY BE THAT COLOR AND DESIGN
COME FROM UNFOLDING?

I finish with an example where the color of some part of a building is complex, something we would normally call a design.

Normally we ascribe this refinement of design and color to the artist. How then, can I really claim that this comes from “unfolding,” that is to say from autonomous acts within the object and not from the will of the creator.

You have seen the right-hand photograph before. In Book 2, I have described the capital of the Great Hall at Eishin, the red ornament on the blackish plaster, and the red chevron stripes (Book 2, pages 378–82). I explained there, how this too, though it has the quality of a vision and therefore is artistic (if one wants to use that word), really comes from a vision that arises in the mind’s eye as a result of painstaking, energetic, and unrelenting pursuit of the right feeling in the thing, the feeling which is there, then following and enlarging the thing, and the design coming solely from that activity.

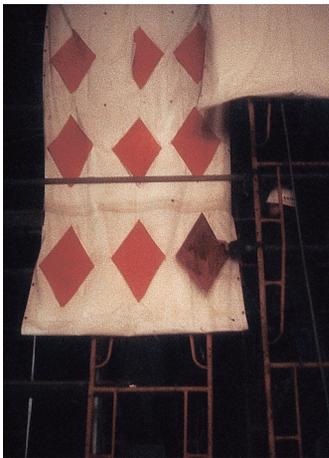
I first showed the right-hand photograph in Book 2. You may not have realized then that it is a mock-up. Many people think it is a photograph of the actual plaster taken while the column was



Pots of paint in the Great Hall, as we tried painting the grey frieze to test its effect above the columns.

being plastered in black and red. Actually, it is a mockup, three stories tall, with full scaffolding. But the black paper, and the red, are huge sheets of butcher’s paper, which I painted on the ground, and which my assistant then hung, clambering around in the scaffolding, while we tried to decide which color was best, how much of it there should be, how dark the red should be, and so on.

I asked myself what color, what design, could provide articulation of the bays and unification of the columns in the space. The black, heavily-drawn columns, formalized, seen massive, marked with red details, came directly from that question.



Mockup of plaster, made in paper, in the Great Hall

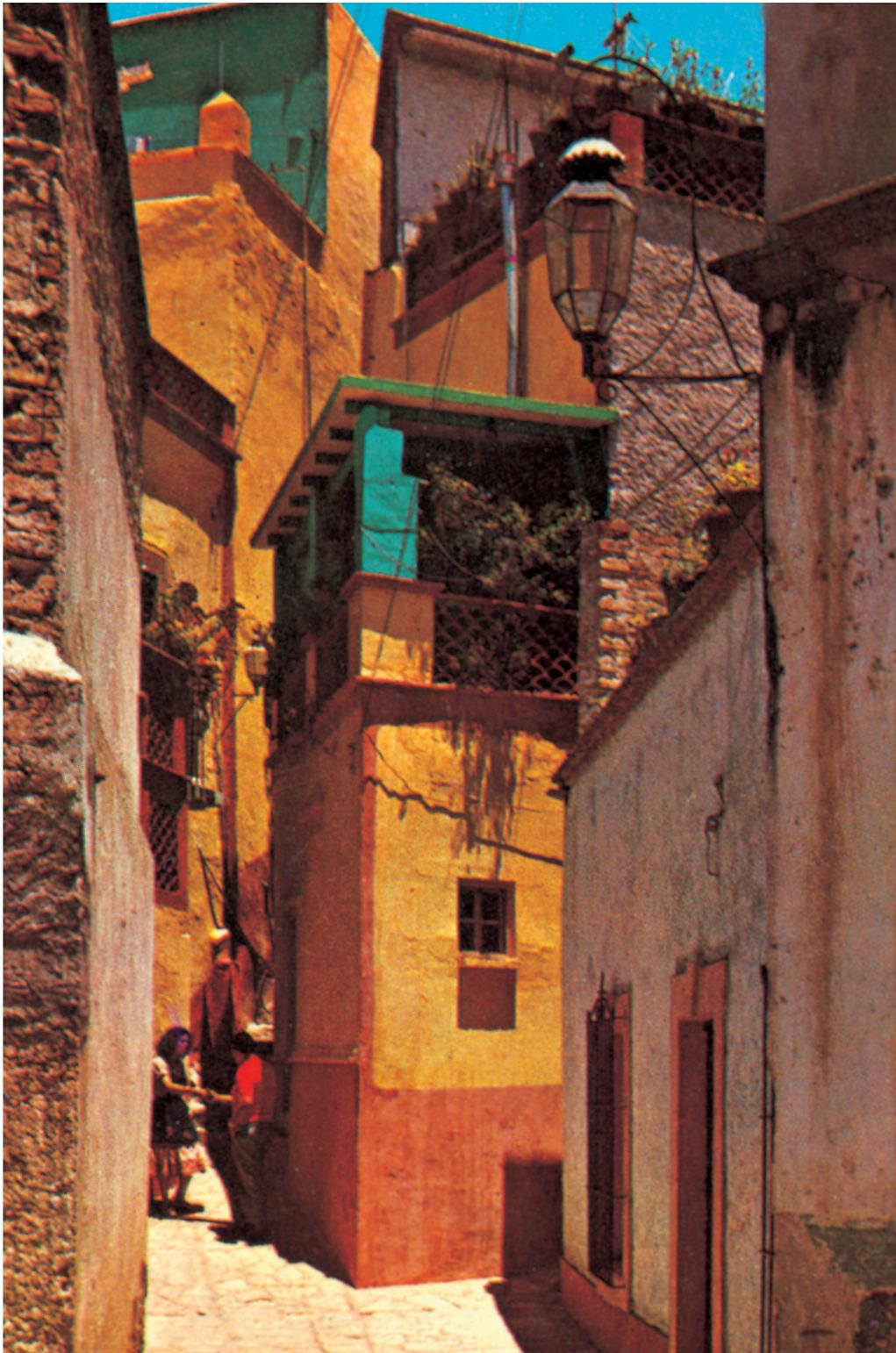


Mockup, looking for the right shade of red

COLOR WHICH UNFOLDS FROM THE CONFIGURATION



Painted mockup for the Eishin Great Hall columns, executed in gouache on butchers paper, draped inside the real building, three stories tall. Christopher Alexander and Miyoko Tsutsui, 1985.



*Color in Cuernavaca, autonomous, painted by people for themselves,
no special effort by architects . . . but what intensity.*

And then, within a black-and-white drawing of this structure, I asked what color qualities would bring this column to life.

First we got the reddish black of the columns themselves. And then, at that stage (with the blackish red in place), once again, I asked myself which red color would now create the most intense

and harmonious light. The rather deep red touched with lilac on the ornaments presented itself, then, as the color which would do this most.

What looks like a wilful or created design by the artist really just arises almost by itself from careful pursuit of that simple question, over and over again.



8 / COLOR IS SO EFFORTLESS

Color is a fundamental human experience. It is natural to put color on things, and to make things out of colored material. It is, for many people, the most natural thing: in Africa, in Turkey, in Greece, in Jordan, in Venezuela,

in Mexico. To emphasize the ordinary naturalness that comes from color, I show (opposite) an example of a building painted by someone (who knows who it was!) making a street beautiful.



9 / MORPHOLOGICAL INVARIANTS WHICH APPEAR AS LIVING COLOR UNFOLDS

What characterizes the color and color combinations which are created by the use of the fundamental process? More precisely, what typical structure follows from the continuous, step-by-step attempt to create life in the color of a building by unfolding it experimentally?

The experimental method — starting with a vision in the mind's eye, then creating color by conceiving and adding color in such a way as to create life in the centers — has certain predictable results. These results (eleven invariants which resemble the fifteen properties) are summarized briefly here. They are described fully in chapter 7 of Book 4, where the life that can happen, through color, is rather carefully analyzed as "inner light." The eleven are: 1. HIERARCHY OF COLORS, 2. COLORS CREATE LIGHT TOGETHER, 3. CONTRAST OF DARK AND LIGHT, 4. MUTUAL EMBEDDING, 5. BOUNDARIES AND HAIRLINES, 6. SEQUENCE OF LINKED COLOR PAIRS, 7. FAMILIES OF COLOR, 8. COLOR VARIATION, 9. CLARITY OF INDIVIDUAL COLOR, 10. SUBDUED BRILLIANCE, and 11. COLOR DEPENDS ON GEOMETRY