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## Places

### Title

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# With People in Mind

## Design and Management of Everyday Nature

### PLACE RESEARCH AWARD

Authors: Rachel Kaplan, Stephen Kaplan and Robert L. Ryan.

Publisher: Island Press

*Decades of research on the design of natural space is organized into a framework that designers, public officials and citizens can use to design or evaluate local open space.*

Considerable research over the last few decades has pointed to the surprisingly powerful role that natural environment experiences can play in fostering people's physical and mental health. This research, conducted by scholars and practitioners in a wide range of fields, has produced relatively consistent findings about the relationships between people and nature.

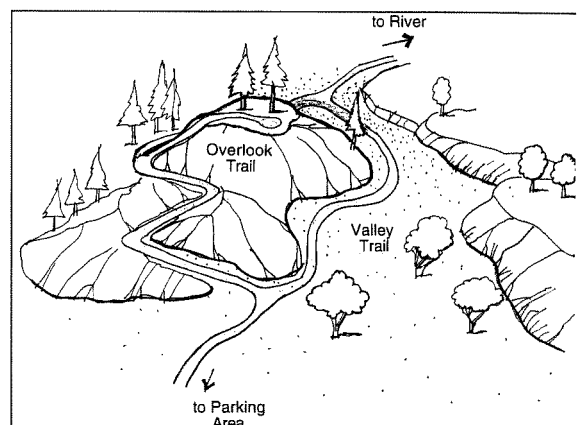
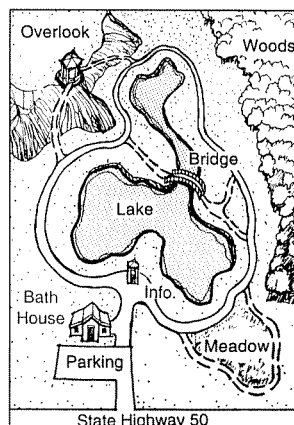
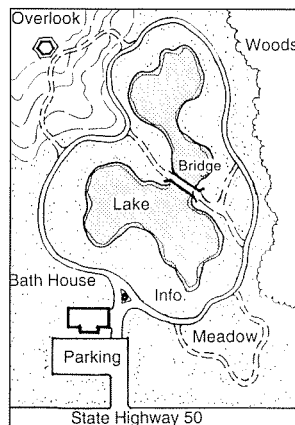
A particularly striking aspect of these findings has been that the natural environment experience does not require grand and remote places, nor even prolonged duration in a natural setting. Nearby areas, and natural landscapes experienced in everyday situations, can contribute powerfully to people's well being.

But designers' track record in turning this research into successful places is much less consistent, accord-

ing to the authors of *With People in Mind: Design and Management of Everyday Nature*. They argue that this has happened, in part, because the intuitions of designers, park managers and the public do not always work — and are not always in accord. Yet it has been difficult for people to access the more carefully considered experience embodied in research literature and translate it into recommendations they can use.

*With People in Mind*, authored by Rachel Kaplan, Stephen Kaplan and Robert L. Ryan, identifies and integrates research that addresses aspects of human perception and experience of natural environments. It compiles research on the design and management of everyday natural settings — such as parks and open spaces, corporate campuses and vacant lots, fields and

Several patterns consider the issue of making maps that can be easily understood. Graphics: Robert L. Ryan





forests — and presents it in a pattern-based format that distills essential lessons for a range of potential users.

The book is geared towards park designers, managers and the public. The authors argue that designers should be more aware of how their efforts can affect people's comfort in and enjoyment of natural settings, that park managers need a clear and readable translation of environmental design research, and that the public must see the role it can play as participants in the design and management process.

The project began by surveying the vast research literature that addresses the relationship between people and the natural environment — providing a bibliography of more than 300 citations on a wide range of research topics, such as landscape preferences, citizen participation, map design and defensible space.

The authors then organized the material into themes that are related to the ways in which people respond to spaces and nature — such as “fears and preferences,” “wayfinding” and “restorative environments.” Additional material is organized by landscape element, such as “gateways and partitions,” “trails and locomotion,” “views and vistas” and “places and their elements.”

Each theme and landscape element is explicated through patterns (there are forty-five in all) that are

based on common design issues and derived from research on that topic. The patterns are not meant to be formulas or recipes, but to suggest relationships between aspects of the natural environment and how people experience or react to them.

In a chapter on the design of trails, for example, the authors propose the pattern “Points of Interest,” explaining that: “Stopping points along the way can provide opportunities for resting and observing.” The pattern argues that trails should provide access to vista points or interesting features, or at least have comfortable stopping points.

The patterns are simple and focused, sufficiently concrete and intuitive that they can become part of the designer's way of analyzing problems and seeing possibilities. In explaining the use of patterns, the authors evoke Christopher Alexander's writings in *A Pattern Language*: “Each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again in our environment, and then describes the core of the solution to that problem, in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice.”<sup>1</sup>

The patterns also constitute hypotheses for future research. The final pattern, “Small Experiments,” encourages responses that are modest in scale, appro-

**The pattern “coherent areas” discusses how to make places whose scale and function are clear to people. Hedges, fences and ground covers create a small number of areas that define this casual picnic spot.**

**Photo: Rachel Kaplan**



Above: **One pattern, "view through the gateway,"** describes how to design views into a setting that encourage visitors to imagine what will unfold as they move ahead.

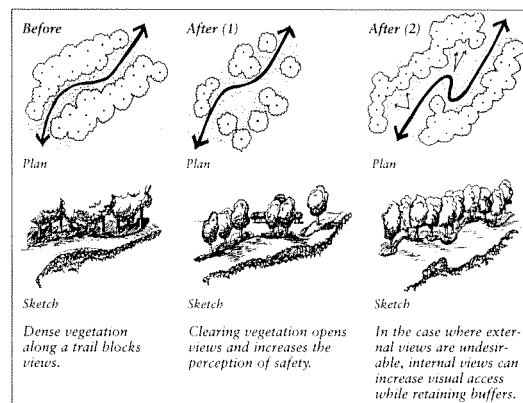
Below: **Another pattern, "visual access,"** discusses views and people's perception of safety.

Photos: **Rachel Kaplan**  
Graphics: **Robert L. Ryan**

appropriate to the location and informing; and that elicit useful input from people who use natural spaces and provides opportunities for citizens and experts to work together. Often such experiments are crafted to deal with a problem, rather than test a research hypothesis, but ultimately they may contribute to the growing body of environmental design knowledge.

The authors also acknowledge that there are some significant research questions that have not been addressed adequately, such as whether spending aimed at reducing crime be offset by increasing the attention to the design and management of everyday nature.

Finally, the authors propose four overarching themes that designers and managers might consider in making meaningful and satisfying natural environments: places should foster understanding of one's environment, they should invite exploration, they should be restful and enjoyable, and their design and management should involve meaningful participation.



### Jury Comments

**VERNEZ-MOUDON:** This is poetic and pedagogically nice, but it seems the material has already been written about. I would like someone to convince me.

**ZEISEL:** This is a well established book in this field. It is a generic book; it's not about a specific place. It's about how to do research. I don't know it well, but it's referred to in everything else. I think we need to decide whether or not we want to give prizes to textbooks.

**HALSBAND:** Is it really a textbook? I read it when it first came out, but discovered that I had read it all before. But maybe this is reaching a whole new body of people who haven't read it before.

**FRANCIS:** There is a body of research behind this that is huge and that has been well published in books and journals. The authors took the material they and others had done, but was buried in academic journals and only known by a few people, and organized it into an accessible volume that can be very easily used.

**ZEISEL:** It's a methodology.

**FRANCIS:** You can look at each principle and integrate it into your design.

**GANTT:** I liked it because it was very understandable and worth reading. But in some ways it got to be a little simplistic and recount principles that we already know.

**ZEISEL:** Did they just present research or did they say this is an important typology that we've invented?

**FRANCIS:** I would characterize this as a pattern language. It's modest, not a huge thing, but it is a contribution to designing for people and nature.

HALSBAND: I'm very interested that you are using this as a textbook already. There are plenty of books that you may not be using as textbooks.

FRANCIS: That's because it's easy for students to start doing things that they like thinking about rather than not thinking about it.

ZEISEL: I think it's useful as a teaching tool, but the question is are we giving it an award because they wrote a good book or because this is good place-related research work?

FRANCIS: It's a book trying to translate research into some guidelines that can be used by practitioners. They are very clear about that.

HALSBAND: The authors claim that this is a compendium of existing research but that they are putting it together in an accessible form so that park designers, managers and the public can make use of it.

**Note**

1. Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishakawa, Marc Silverstein et. al., *A Pattern Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).



The pattern "sense of enclosure" discusses how to make places distinct and comforting.

Photos: Rachel Kaplan

