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Caring About Places

The sense of place is not within the grasp of the architect alone.

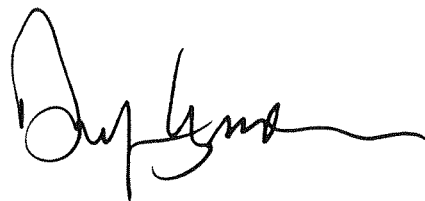
It is not the designer who creates the sense of place. It is the user or observer. The designer merely sets out opportunities for others to use—to make distinctions, to perceive connections and to take advantage (or not) of the structure of thought that is there.

Places enter into our lives in many ways: as a general surrounding for our acts, as a matrix of opportunities for social encounters, as a treasure-house of ideas and associations, as the recipient of our continuing attention and investment. We may at any time be conscious of none, all, or only some of these, but they are all of consequence. As environmental designers we must consider places in all these ways. We must also take into account the full range of scales. How does each of our works contribute to the larger place of which it is a part, how do our works achieve distinction within themselves as places of public encounter or private dwelling, and how does each work accommodate our primal need to see reflected in the work around us forms by means of which we may measure ourselves.

To be able to imagine places we must draw connections—and the deepest, most fundamental connection is to our own body, its forms, its stance, its way of moving.

An aedicula, the person-sized enclosure, the canopied, columned, platformed niche (home for a saint in medieval cathedrals) is a suggestive representation of the most intimate of places. It is most definitely inside, at once refuge and outlook, nest and perch, the four corners of the world brought close. We find it on buildings of all eras, in furniture of some, in paintings, in gardens, in windows, in parks. The root imagery is of the body—upright, feet below, a dome above. Through such surrogate devices (the column is another) the body infiltrates places and our minds chase after it, to seek lodging in the world at large.

We need to bring ourselves close to places. Even the most public places should embody private imaginings, secret ruminations that are there to be discovered if we will. Places that harbor no secrets whisper that none are allowed.



We owe Richard Fernau multiple apologies for mistakes in his article “Ramona’s Terrace” which we published in Volume 1, Number 4 (p. 64)—without benefit of either headline or byline. More grievously still two paragraphs from the succeeding article migrated into his article and appeared to form its conclusion. They do not; most especially the phrase “opening day was also closing day” could not be further from the truth. Ramona’s Terrace is more than fulfilling its promise as a sunny social center for the College of Environmental Design and its neighbors. The splendid drawings that accompanied the article were provided by Fernau & Hartman, and are further evidence of the skill and craft which they bring to their work.