

## Innovative Teaching Manual

### PROJECT TITLE

Reading & Writing Assignment for Lighting Design

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### PROJECT LEVEL

Third Year

### ABSTRACT

Third year interior design and architecture students in the Lighting and Acoustical Systems course were asked to read selected passages from three classic works/collection on design theory that relate to creating meaning and a sense of place in the built environment relative to creating meaning and a sense of place in the built environment relative to the quality of light. The students were then asked to respond to written questions by writing essay answers. Student responses, without exception, were filled with exceptional gratitude for being given this assignment. The students felt personally connected to the messages from these selected authors and were determined to quickly explore their newly found opportunities for designing with light.

### OBJECTIVES

Turn students on to the power of designing with light; enhance reading and written communication skills; and broaden students' interest in designing meaningful places.

### CRITERIA

Students at this level in the curriculum have good knowledge and application of the basic elements and principles of design and a cursory exposure to the application of design theory for the built environment. At this stage, the students have little, if any, understanding of the potential of lighting as a design tool. Exposing students to specific application techniques for accomplishing such illusive design qualities as creating meaning and a sense of place is tantamount to demonstrating tricks of magic.

### PROCESS

Make the following reading assignment the first day of class and listen to the moans. Announce that a quiz on the readings will be given in two weeks. Post the readings electronically on their course web site. This appears to be a more attractive and accessible format for students.

### **Reading Assignments:**

- from *A Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander:
  - Indoor Sunlight, pp. 615-617
  - Tapestry of Light & Dark, pp. 645-646
  - Light on Two Sides of Every Room, pp. 747-751
  - Sunny Place, pp. 758-760
  - North Face, pp. 761-763
  - Outdoor Room, pp. 756-768

- Window Place, pp. 834-837
  - Windows Overlooking Life, pp. 890-892
  - Natural Doors & Windows, pp. 1047-1049
  - Low Sill, pp. 1051-1052
  - Deep Reveals, pp. 1054-1055
  - Filtered Light, pp. 1106-1107
  - Small Panes, pp. 1109-1111
  - Pools of Light, pp. 1160-1163
- from *Chambers for a Memory Palace* by Charles Moore & Donlyn Lyndon:
- Openings that Frame/Portals that Bespeak, pp. 99-121
  - Light that Plays/Shadow that Haunts/Shade that Lulls, pp. 177-189
  - Rooms that Define/Space the Leaks up into the Light, pp. 193-212
- from *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought*, Farmer & Louw (Eds.):
- Building the Total System: The Integration of the Competing Demands of Modern Technology by John Martin, pp. 262-264
  - Architectural Form & Light by Pieter de Bruyne pp. 318-323
  - A 'Thick' Description of Windows by Herman Neuckermans pp. 362-367

### **Essay Questions:**

#### 1. *A Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander

In designing environments designers rely on certain "languages" which, like the languages we speak, allow us to articulate and communicate an infinite variety of designs within a formal system which gives coherence. "Patterns," units of this language, are answers to design problems (How high should a window sill be?) More than 250 of the patterns in this pattern language are presented in the book — each consists of a problem statement, a discussion of the problem with an illustration, and a solution. Many of the patterns are archetypal, so deeply rooted in the nature of things that it seems likely that they will be a part of human nature and human action, as much as five hundred years as they are now. Many critics feel this is the most important book on architectural design written in the 20th century.

Which of these patterns assigned for you to read may be useful to you in your design work this semester? Why?

#### 2. *Chambers for a Memory Palace* by Charles Moore and Donlyn Lyndon

This is a good introduction to the way designers look at, and think about, the world. The book is written as a dialog between the two authors exchanging letters in which they trade observations on the design of places they love and believe to be significant and instructive. The letters provide wise, understated, and carefully detailed descriptions of places that come from many years of designing, studying, and empathetically observing.

Two thousand years ago Cicero used to make two-hour speeches in the Roman Senate without notes by constructing in his mind a palace whose rooms and furnishings, as he imagined himself foaming through them, called up the ideas he wished to discuss: ideas were made memorable by locating them in a space.

Meaningful places bring emotions, recollections, people, and even ideas to mind; their qualities are a part of a culture's intellectual equipment. However, the scope of change in our everyday environments may outpace the accumulation of wisdom and craft that traditionally guided the making of places; indeed, much of what was

previously known has, in haste, been set aside, leaving a blank slate. As yet, there are some who would abandon the tangible world altogether in favor of a virtual reality assembled in computer networks.

Places are spaces that you can remember, that you can care about and make a part of your life. Much of what is built now is too tepid to be remembered. The spaces with which we are surrounded are so seldom memorable that they mean little to us. The world should be filled with places so vivid and distinct that they carry memorable significance. Places that are memorable are necessary to the good conduct of our lives; we need to think about where we are and what is unique and special about our surroundings so that we can better understand ourselves and how we relate to others. This mental intermingling of people, places, and ideas is what makes design of the build environment meaningful.

Which of the three sections from *Chambers for a Memory Palace* did you most relate to? Why?

3. *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought* is a compilation of 100 articles and case studies addressing the cultural significance, performance, and resource implications of buildings. A variety of perspectives are presented. Which of the three articles you were assigned to read from this collection do you think may have the greatest application for your design work this semester? Why?

#### PRESENTATION

concise, handwritten answers on notebook paper

#### EVALUATION

Specific examples from the readings were valued more than generalities.

Clear, specific, and well-expressed thoughts on application to studio projects were most highly valued.

Note: If the assignment should be given again, the instructor would as follow-up questions at the end of the semester as to the students' perceived success at manipulating lighting as a design tool to create meaningful spaces with a sense of place.

#### PROJECT LENGTH

Two Weeks

#### RESOURCES

Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., & Silverstein, M. (1977). Selected pages from *A Pattern Language*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Farmer, B. & Louw, H. (Eds.). (1993). Selected pages from *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought*. New York: Routledge.

Lyndon, D. & Moore, C. (1994). Selected pages from *Chambers for a Memory Palace*. Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press.

## DOCUMENTATION

Excerpts:

"This is some of the best reading I've ever had about what design and architecture are all about. I wish I had read this in my first year."

"Many part from A Pattern Language will help in placement of rooms on the site, letting light into each place, locating rooms, creating sun-gardens, the use of north facade windows, seating sills and places to just sit, half-walls, etc., etc. This reading is full of great design advice."

"I related to the 'Light that Play/Shadows that Haunt' piece. It emphasizes the emphasis of light and its importance in design. It says that space and form are understood in light, can clarify them...and light is very important throughout design."

"I believe that the greatest application for design is the creation of form with light. It states, 'Light is so fundamental that it has come to symbolize life itself just as its opposite, darkness symbolizes death. It shows how light patterns alter moods and create aesthetic response. It creates an atmosphere and generates emotions through the use of light as one of its fundamental elements.' This article shows how light is important to the human psychological response and how we each need the correct lighting in our everyday atmosphere."