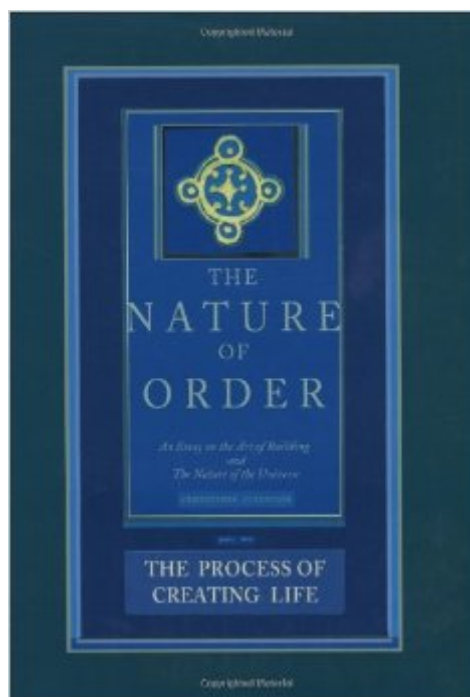


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The Process Of Creating Life: Nature Of Order, Book 2: An Essay On The Art Of Building And The Nature Of The Universe (The Nature Of Order)(Flexible)



Synopsis

Christopher Alexander's masterwork, the result of 27 years of research, considers three vital perspectives: a scientific perspective; a perspective based on beauty and grace; a commonsense perspective based on our intuitions and everyday life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Review by Nikos A. Salingaros. PART A. REVIEW FOR ARCHITECTS. Contemporary architecture is increasingly grounded in science and mathematics. Architectural discourse has shifted radically from the sometimes disorienting Derridean deconstruction, to engaging scientific terms such as fractals, chaos, complexity, nonlinearity, and evolving systems. That's where the architectural action is -- at least for cutting-edge architects and thinkers -- and every practicing architect and student needs to become conversant with these terms and know what they mean. Unfortunately, the vast majority of architecture faculty are unprepared to explain them to students, not having had a scientific education themselves. Here is an architecture book by an architect/scientist, just in time to help architects in the new millennium. Alexander discusses many of the scientific terms arising in cutting-edge architecture, and explains them to those who don't have scientific training or advanced mathematical knowledge. We find discussions of the evolution of forms; the importance of process in design; iteration; genetic algorithms; sequences of transformations; different levels of scale (i.e. fractals); etc. They are explained here by an architect who is also a scientist, because he wants to change the way architects think and build. Alexander is not merely popularizing other scientists'

results and making them accessible to architects: he is in fact presenting new and original scientific work that ties many of these concepts together in a way that will be useful to architects. Alexander spends many of the 636 pages of this book talking about PROCESS. He describes the sequence of steps leading to a built form, and how each step depends on all previous steps.

I first discovered Christopher Alexander's book "A Pattern Language" about eight years ago and it has been a treasured companion on my bedside table ever since. I would highly recommend it as an excellent introduction to the framework of design concepts proposed by Alexander in subsequent books. I decided to start with Book 2 in the "Nature of Order" series as one reviewer described it as the most "practical" of the four. I can best describe my overall reactions as excitement regarding the implications of Alexander's ideas, and disappointment that the text is so dense and repetitive that I fear that only the most committed of readers will persevere. I don't mean to dissuade other readers at all, but merely to warn you that Alexander's motto seems to be "why use one word when you can use ten, and then repeat yourself ten times." I believe a rigorous editing of the book would render it far more digestible without losing any of its inspirational magic. Alexander provides philosophical, logical and practical examples of concepts of wholeness and flow in design and how these lead to "living" end products, whether these products are buildings, interiors, works of art or simple household objects. I am currently using these ideas to renovate my home and I can now see why some rooms "work" and others don't and what I can do to improve them. There are many photos of "living design" scattered through the book, to reinforce the concepts. In addition, you don't need to be independently wealthy to apply the ideas - you just need to be willing to think about how you like to live, recognise what feels comfortable and "right" in your environment and experiment with small changes to see how they affect the "feel" of a room or space.

In Book 1 (The Phenomenon of Life) of this series, architectural theorist and practitioner Christopher Alexander introduced a highly organic view of a natural process of architectural design based on 15 principles that played off against each other. Book 2 continues the conversation by discussing examples of how each of these principles can be correctly applied, and what happens if they are not. It's a somewhat mystical approach that evolves not from abstract geometry but from a profound sense of place, one that completely negates cookie-cutter replication that characterizes suburbia and most of modern planned urban development. One begins with terrain, climate and the character of the surrounding structures, coaxing out the centres of interests, delineating boundaries and introducing strong focal centers and utilizing irregular almost fractal symmetries (fractals have

infinite depth, and there are limits as to what can be done) who's effect echoes on different scales. Rather than have an architect draft a building, then pass it on to the builder, the architect and client and contractors work together throughout the building process to dynamically evolve not just a machine for living, but spaces that are evoke life, a fundamental change in the way that buildings and communities are made. Unlike contemporary design, the technique integrates feedback between the stakeholders throughout, down to the placement of individual elements, allowing for experimentation and changing of mind. Alexander's design process is highly explorative where each step transforms into the possibilities of the next.

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