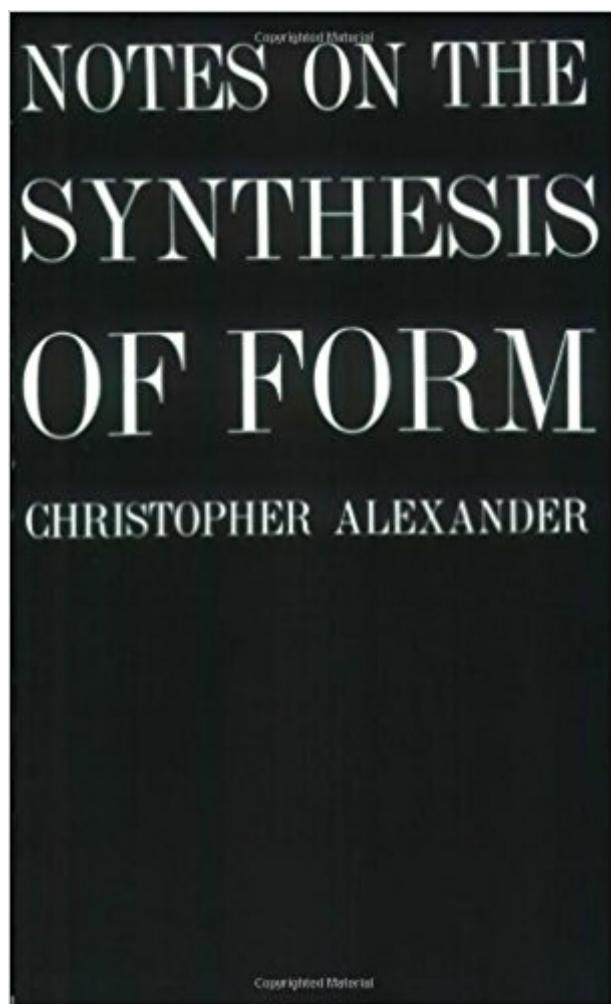


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# Notes On The Synthesis Of Form (Harvard Paperbacks)



## Synopsis

"These notes are about the process of design: the process of inventing things which display new physical order, organization, form, in response to function." This book, opening with these words, presents an entirely new theory of the process of design. In the first part of the book, Mr. Alexander discusses the process by which a form is adapted to the context of human needs and demands that has called it into being. He shows that such an adaptive process will be successful only if it proceeds piecemeal instead of all at once. It is for this reason that forms from traditional unselfconscious cultures, molded not by designers but by the slow pattern of changes within tradition, are so beautifully organized and adapted. When the designer, in our own self-conscious culture, is called on to create a form that is adapted to its context he is unsuccessful, because the preconceived categories out of which he builds his picture of the problem do not correspond to the inherent components of the problem, and therefore lead only to the arbitrariness, willfulness, and lack of understanding which plague the design of modern buildings and modern cities. In the second part, Mr. Alexander presents a method by which the designer may bring his full creative imagination into play, and yet avoid the traps of irrelevant preconception. He shows that, whenever a problem is stated, it is possible to ignore existing concepts and to create new concepts, out of the structure of the problem itself, which do correspond correctly to what he calls the subsystems of the adaptive process. By treating each of these subsystems as a separate subproblem, the designer can translate the new concepts into form. The form, because of the process, will be well-adapted to its context, non-arbitrary, and correct. The mathematics underlying this method, based mainly on set theory, is fully developed in a long appendix. Another appendix demonstrates the application of the method to the design of an Indian village.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Christopher Alexander has outlined an ambitious proposal that could revolutionize the approach to architectural design...His method cannot help but become "a very powerful tool indeed" for those who would deal with projects of the complex present and the growing complexity of the future. (Progressive Architecture) The success or failure of the designed environment will remain, as always, a human responsibility...Alexander's assertions are not only challenging and stimulating but informative. (American Institute of Architects Journal) One of the most important contemporary books about the art of design, what it is, and how to go about it. (Industrial Design) An important book for the urban designer and planner... stimulating and certainly controversial...It may one day prove to be a landmark in design methodology. (Journal of the American Institute of Planners)

CA knows his stuff, and this should be read by any designer in any field for to learn what design is, and how to go about achieving great design.

Anyone who designs things --even little things like where to put the chair by the bed, or slightly larger things like a skyscraper or the internet-- should read this book. It's architecture: the thought processes of moving through the phases of panic/ignorance to discovery/fascination to the magical moment when your design begins to talk back to you, and tell where YOU need to go, and when you've made a mistake, Or when your design shows you a brilliant idea that never would have occurred to you. I've designed little tools, rooms, houses, musical instruments and gigantic computer networks. It's scary. There are virtually no books on the joys and angst of the design thought process, so this book is priceless. Peripherally related are Malraux's "Voices of Silence" and Jacques Maritain's "Creative Intuition In Art And Poetry", both about thought processes/aesthetics across multiple disciplines.. Don Norman's "The psychology Of Everyday Things" is a wonderful exploration of the gut-level design disasters we all deal with all the time. Bottom line: IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.

A deep and nuanced analysis of patterns in design failures and successes - the author clearly has

astounding comprehension of the modern design situation. I found the "unselfconscious design" vs "selfconscious design" analysis fascinating (although to be politically correct it should be something like "self designer" and "delegated designer" instead). The determination and use of (relatively) independent sub-systems to prune the overall design space is profound. Part 2 (chapter 6, page 73) is a highly structured "program" for design. I found this section of the book much less compelling, and I'm not sure how it necessarily falls out from Part 1. For me, Alexander's biggest insight is that a good design process involves iterative periods of change and stasis - specifically, designing by modifying single (or small numbers of) factors individually and allowing the design to reach "equilibrium" before making additional changes. From this standpoint, designing a whole village at the beginning (as is started in appendix I) may not ever be a good design approach - even with Alexander's "program"

Design is a difficult process that is often associated more with art than science. With principles of style, concerns about how design works. While many wring their hands about this, Alexander breaks the problem down, organizes it and then provides a framework for design that is relatively design neutral. That is a feat in deed. By thinking about how one structures a problem space and the bias that creates -- Alexander gives the practitioner a powerful tool for setting up the design process and scope. He then goes on to discuss the design process and he makes important distinctions between conscious and unconscious design. Notes on Synthesis and Form are the foundation for Alexander's work on design patterns. This is the must read book before spending time on these other works. For the practitioner, this book provides a powerful and applicable framework for addressing problems in multiple disciplines.

This book is written in a clean, approachable style, absent the usual academic gobbledegook. It presents concepts that are still relevant across multiple disciplines.

Arriving at a suitable form for a design problem is a challenge even for design professionals. This book provides a clear process to approach this need.

I received my book very quickly! Completely new. I'm already in love with the cover (gorgeous) and ideas Christopher Alexander presents.

After reading this book, I went back to read the reviews, and was rather confused. This book has a

very narrow focus, and is not targeted at the typical person reading about design. Other reviews seem to suggest that this is a good book for people interested in design, but to put a different angle on it, it reads much more like a theoretical dissertation than a book on design. Unless that is what you are looking for, pass on this book. Unfortunately, I was forced to give this two stars due to the way it is presented on . If you are interested in highly abstract (as in analysis, not art) and theoretical design, then ignore my rating.

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