

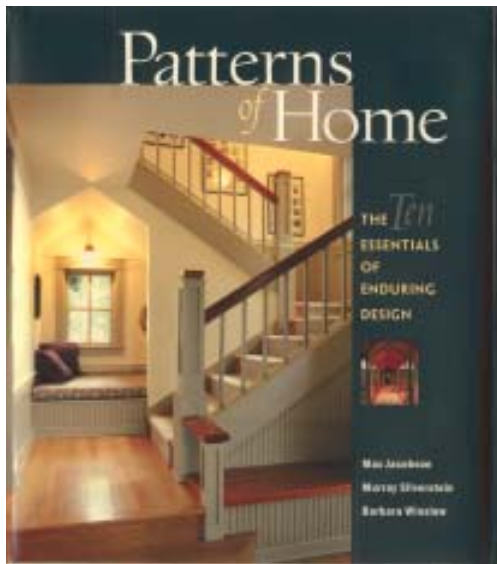
Resources

The Inner House

by Dave Holbrook

Naming the Essentials

I'm a builder myself, so don't take this the wrong way. But ask any three builders to describe the elements of a good house, and you'll probably hear something like the parable of three blind men describing an elephant. Our orientation tends more to plumb, level, and square, tight joinery, and durability — a commendable but nonetheless narrow focus, tending to overlook the bigger picture. Yet part of our sometimes grudging cooperation with architects and designers comes from the fact that they introduce ideas of form and space that we'd probably never pull out of our toolboxes.



When it comes to the five senses, there's an inherent difficulty of description: What does water feel like? What does a fire look like? Words fall short; we're reduced to similes. *Patterns of Home: The Ten Essentials of Enduring Design* (Taunton Press, 2002; 800/283-7252, www.taunton.com; \$35) is a book confined by those limitations, restricted by the murky realms of psychology and our inborn, sensory response to beauty, even if humanmade. But the secret the book reveals is that there are certain, specific elements of design, and combinations thereof, that please in both predictable and unexpected ways. The authors, architects Max Jacobson, Murray Silverstein, and Barbara Winslow, endeavor, with much success, to isolate and explain those elements, or "patterns." As they began making their separate notes in preparation for this book, they found, somewhat to their own surprise, that there were no more, and no less, than ten "critical patterns of home design that you must get right." If that sounds like an oversimplification or

a contrivance, judge for yourself. After briefly naming and summarizing the ten, the authors explore each in turn at greater length, chapter by chapter, using actual completed homes and settings to emphasize each concept. Reading this book gave me a feeling similar to one of visiting a museum whose exhibits offer intimacy, stimulation, information, and surprise.

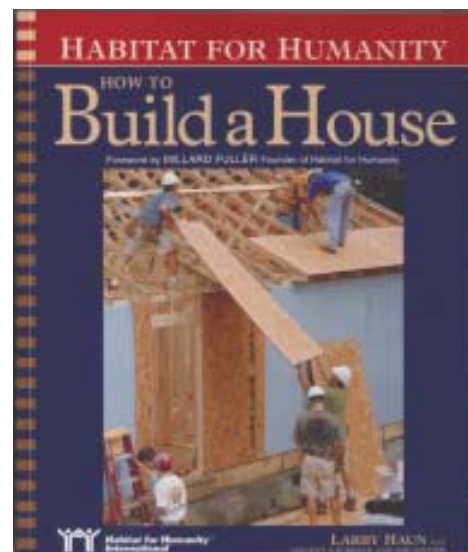
By exposing these patterns — almost subconscious consensual rules of response to our living environments — the authors have provided an unparalleled tool for raising awareness of the work we do to a higher level, thereby making an invaluable contribution to the art, as opposed to the science, of home building.

As much as this book presents its ideas in clear, thoughtful language and a progressive, logical sequence, it would be a failed effort without its arresting photography. None of the 280+ pages goes without a photo, frequently accompanied by a sketch or diagram. Each image is a resting place for the eye, and every page reminded me of why I love to build. *Patterns of Home* is a distillation of many lifetimes' experience of architecture and should find an enduring place in every serious builder's library.

The Bare Essentials

Did you know that one of the nation's largest builders, responsible for an output of roughly 4,000 homes per year, also experiences a workforce turnover that would ruin any other business? In fact, it relies on that phenomenon. Habitat for Humanity is that remarkable producer, bringing affordable housing to the U.S. as well as abroad.

You may not be that interested in putting your hard-



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won skills into the hands of amateurs, but two points bear considering: First, these homes are built for and by new owners unlikely ever to afford your services, let alone a home of their own, by any other means. And turning out homes in those numbers and at that pace suggests that there are highly effective training, scheduling, and people management skills at work, worthy of any service-oriented business owner's attention. Not to mention that, regardless of what your crew may say about you, if you get involved, you'll feel like a hero.

You probably already know the author of *Habitat for Humanity: How to Build a House* (Taunton Press, 2002; 800/283-7252, www.taunton.com; \$25). Larry Haun is a practical-minded, down-to-earth veteran builder, do-it-yourself video star, and frequent contributor to *Fine Homebuilding* magazine. From what I've seen, Larry's idea of home design is a rectangular box under a two-sided, sloped roof. Your kid could draw it. But so what? Even if you think you could put one of these tract houses together in your sleep, Haun's attention to quality, efficiency, line, and level sets an example worthy of emulation. A generous sprinkling of sage tips and pointers adds another degree of utility, even for know-it-alls like, uh, me.

If you're a little fried by constant contact with high-end, type-A clients whose custom McMansion seems designed to kill most of your enthusiasm and all your free time, maybe it's time to get back in touch with your community and your building roots. Take a look at the crews in the photos, lend this book to the new kid on your crew or the homeowner who wants to help, and follow Haun's example of sharing the wealth. This is building with heart. 