

# UC Berkeley

## Places

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# Profiles that Encourage

Washington State History  
Museum, Tacoma, Wash. The  
silhouette extends the rhythm  
of the vaults of an adjacent  
train station, but the profile  
also reaches downward into an  
amphitheater. (Timothy Hursley)

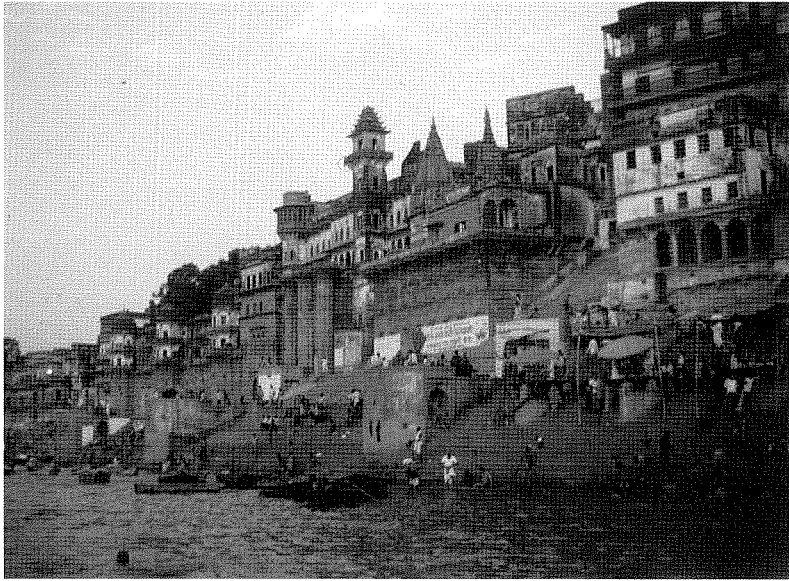


DEAR DONLYN

The idea that motivates us right now concerns the weight of materials. Or, I should say, the importance of the weight of materials with which we are building, both psychological weight and physical weight — how weight grounds, anchors, establishes and makes something permanent; how weight feels cool to the touch and timeless in smell; how it has a thickness that gives the passing light dimension, as if the light were coming from a deep center.

When I refer to weight, what I really mean is the contrast between heaviness and lightness — of buildings that are diaphanous and of a peripatetic character, always on the move as our eyes scan their layers. I mean structures that not only define but also implore; places that urge us to reach up with the lightness of movement and aspiration.

I remember a trip I took with Charles to India. We traveled to the ancient, sacred city of Benares, along the Ganges River. This place grows upward from the river edge along solid steps and ghats; the structures emerge and thin out to create a rich profile of intricately edged pavilions that aspire to the heavens.



Above: Benares, India.  
(Arthur Anderson)  
Below: Stone House, Tucson,  
Ariz. (Arthur Anderson)

This trip to India happened after Charles, Bill Turnbull and I finished our work at the New Orleans World's Fair, but somehow it foreshadowed that project. The base of our Wonderwall was not the sacred bank of the Ganges but a ten-foot-wide boulevard with nineteenth-century warehouses on one side and a very large convention center on the other. Within our ten feet, we presumed to invent an architectural world of fantasy, part sumptuous backdrop to the rest of the fair, part stage set for it.

From its precariously narrow base, the Wonderwall took shape with paper-thin layers. The composition of the half-mile-long Wonderwall — full of stacking, layering, resting, reaching and, sometimes, soaring — demonstrated the difference between the space we inhabit on the ground and the space above us, space that is in sight but out of reach. The profile created by the top of the Wonderwall served both as an edge and as the beginning of something beyond, a window to the sky. Could the sky be a room for us, or are those comfortable reclining shapes in the clouds solely for the Gods?

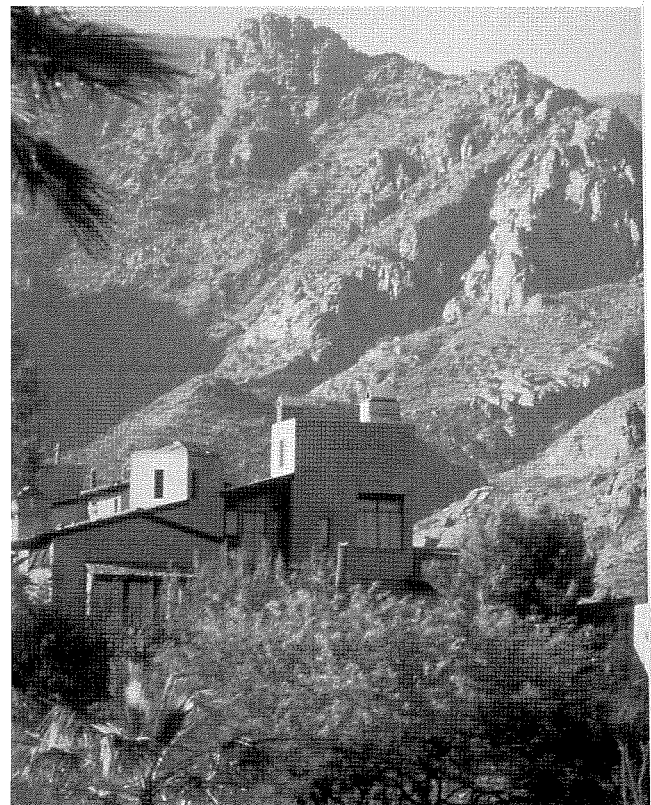
Like the steps and Ghats of Benares, the Wonderwall's heavy, concrete, columnar base was an armature built to accommodate the layers above. The lesson in profile was one of seeing and feeling the difference between heavy

simplicity on the ground with the soaring and shapely complexity of the upper reaches.

A house we recently built in Arizona desert also illustrates the ideas of aspiration and of making a connection to the landscape by the shape of a profile. In the desert, the mountains and the vegetation are hard edged. Even the light is hard. At night, the crisp air supports a sky the color of black onyx.

The Sabino Mountains comprise one of four ranges that surround Tucson. It is a dry, rocky, layered and tightly packed set of mountains distinguished by its buttes and small sharp peaks. The narrow canyons between the peaks are cool, sometimes green, and provide a shaded refuge from the Arizona sun.

Inhabiting this place involves two things, one is claiming territory, the other is protecting what you have claimed with shade. As with the Wonderwall, profiles can be made legible by emphasizing the relationship between the base of a building and what is above it. In Tucson, we made a profile





Carrillon, School of Engineering,  
University of Michigan, Ann  
Arbor, Mich. (Arthur Andersson)

by draping a roof between adobe towers as a kind of tent — albeit a wooden one, setting into and rising out of the desert rock.

Some of the rooms within are cooled by an evaporative cooling system; other rooms (living, dining and sitting) are protected by the shade but open to gardens on each side. The gardens, one of water and the other of fragrant plants, provide primitive but efficient cooling for these outdoor rooms.

At the North Campus of the University of Michigan, we faced the opposite situation. This final project with Charles, coincidentally at his alma mater, involved the same reactions that brought about the Sea Ranch condominium so many years ago. As the Sea Ranch responded (philosophically) to the scaleless order and generic imagery of the modern movement (while really responding to its rugged site), our charge from the engineering school at Michigan was to make a welcoming and memorable place within the context of the many generic modern buildings that had been built over the past thirty years, creating a campus that was more like an industrial park than an academic center.

While designing this new place it occurred to us that the idea of form following function could be reinterpreted to consider the rooms of the program as worthy of fantastic or even incredible form. Rather than organizing the disparate pro-

gram of admissions, faculty offices, counseling rooms and classrooms into a rationalized box, we irrationally pulled the program apart making distinct buildings for each use and, in the process, creating the kind of residual space of a scale and character we hoped to be memorable.

The resulting profile is complex, with a tower-ing structure open on three sides and roofed with a traditional four-sided hip shape. This tower encloses a large ballroom, elevated into the sky with views across the campus. Just as important are the small spaces close to these buildings, inviting one to look almost vertically along the edges of the towers and to feel their presence.

Charles was perennially fond of using food (mostly desserts) as analogies for buildings. He would say, I suppose, that we are in the realm of the chocolate sundae when speaking of a delight in profiles. But my colleagues and I see it somewhat differently. Delight is found both below and above in buildings: perhaps a hot apple pie with two scoops, the combination of the crusty base with the smooth dome of ice cream, is what we are about. Rhubarb may even be closer to the mark, for what is under the ice cream is possibly more tangy than apple.

— ARTHUR

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sity of Michigan, Ann Arbor,  
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