

# UC Berkeley

## Places

### Title

Villages [Images that Motivate]

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/20v1n127>

### Journal

Places, 11(3)

### ISSN

0731-0455

### Author

Riley, Jefferson B

### Publication Date

1998-01-15

Peer reviewed

## Images that Motivate:

# Villages

DEAR DONLYN

For me, the image that motivates is the image of a village, especially the wonderful sociability that a village can have. It is the image that wraps everything together. Villages have all of those good things that you and Charles write about in *Chambers for a Memory Palace*: “Walls that Layer,” “Paths that Wander,” “Markers that Command” and so on.

A good village responds to the full complexity of the humanity of its inhabitants, not just to a concern for looks and style. Charles started all of us thinking about the essential importance of understanding how humans inhabit a place, and the meaning that can be found in that.

So, I find myself looking at villages and, with a great deal of satisfaction, applying my observations to the single buildings I am designing, as the following photographs show.

— JEFF



Villages show us that many different images can be combined to make a single, cohesive whole. In my house in the woods of Guilford, Conn., I combined the images of my log cabin in Northern Maine, my favorite Parisian buildings along Rue St. Denis and the clapboard-sided colonial houses for which the town of Guilford is known. Left: Riley House, Guilford, Conn. (Norman McGrath) Below: Rue St. Denis, Paris. (Jeff Riley)



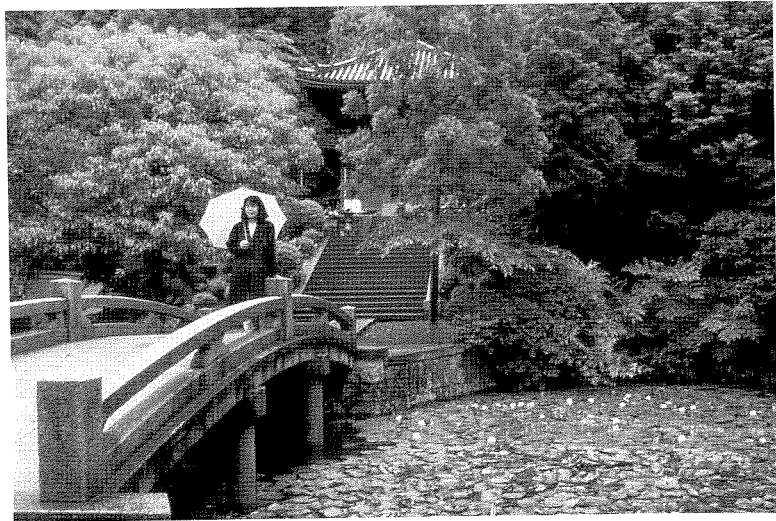


People like to feel oriented, to be able to find their way around. Paths can help them do that by providing a structure for organizing the various parts of a building. At the Lender Business School, we designed a very distinctive path. Along the path are small team-study rooms, like porches along a street. There are also little niches, each equipped with a blackboard and a bench where students exiting classrooms can ask the lingering questions they didn't have the nerve or time to ask during class. Above: Lender Business School, Quinnipiac College, Hamden, Conn. (© Jeff Goldberg/Esto) Left: Italian townscape. (Jeff Riley)

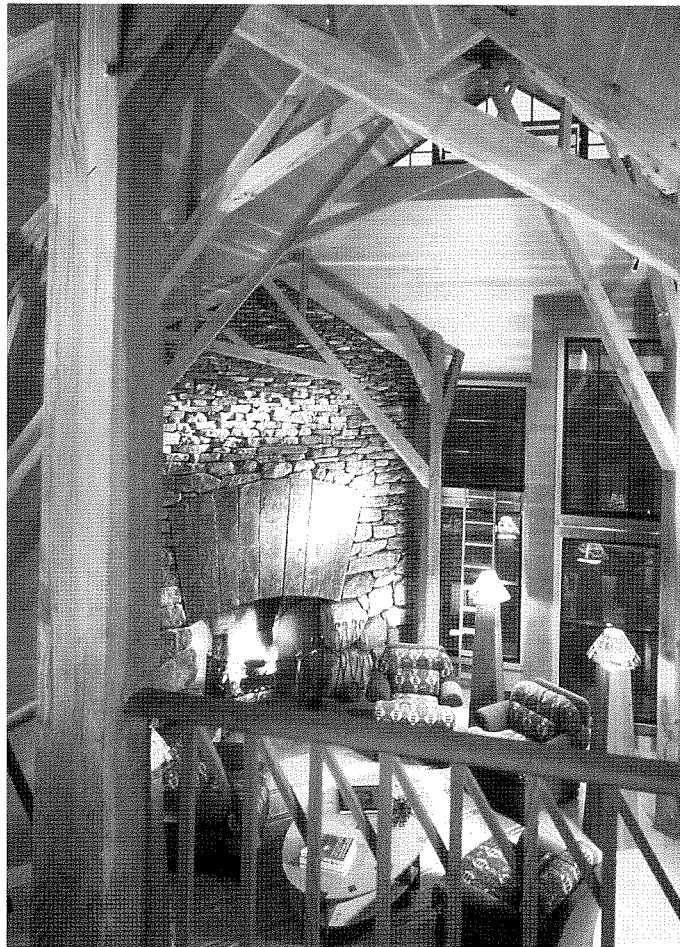


A place can become sociable when there is a sense that it has been built with human hands. We designed this house for an artist who made wonderful rice paper collages of Himalayan mountains and rivers. She etched swirling rivers into the wet cement plaster on a wall, and I collected oak and maple leaves and pressed them in.  
 Top: Elliot House, western Pennsylvania. (Jeff Riley)  
 Above: Madras, India. (Jeff Riley)

People love experiencing thresholds and the sense of leaving one world and passing to another, as the bridge and stairs in this Japanese garden suggest. The house pictured at the bottom is on a noisy, high-speed road and is surrounded by houses about twenty feet away on the other three sides. But when you walk through the gateway into the courtyard, you feel as if you've arrived in a far-off place. The birds chirp, the flowers smell good, the grass is wet and green. The passage through the gate offers a remarkable change.  
 Below: Kyoto, Japan. (Jeff Riley)  
 Bottom: Reid House. (Judith Watts. © 1989 *House Beautiful*/The Hearst Corporation.)







Districts are effective organizing elements. Charles talked about how districts are characterized by ambiances, qualities of space other than physical characteristics, such as the dappled green light under the trees of an oasis. He distinguished between ambiances that are collected in a place, like the morning sun filling an east facing courtyard, and ones that emanate from a source, like the cooling breezes from a fountain or the warmth from a fireplace.

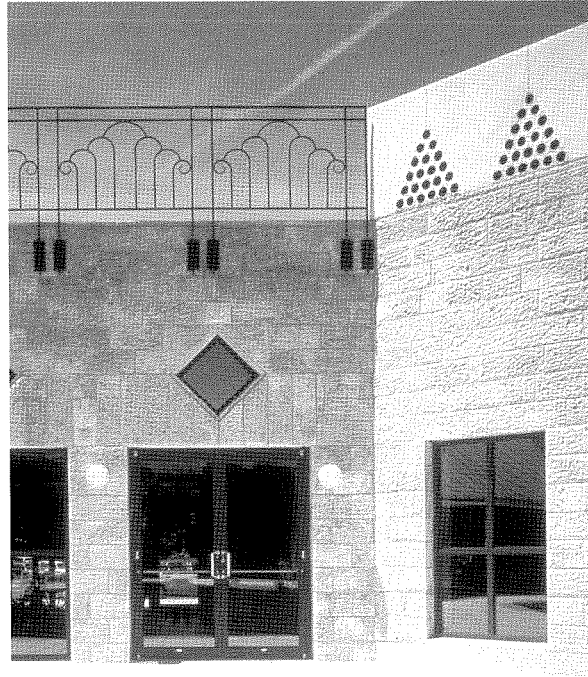
Above: House in the Hudson Valley, upstate New York. (Brian Vanden Brink)

Left: Ravenna, Italy. (Jeff Riley)

Opposite page, top: Piazzetta San Marco, Venice. (Jeff Riley)

Opposite page, right: Reid House. (© Peter Mauss/Esto)





A building's sociability is shaped by the materials from which it is built. We have strong emotional responses to materials that carry meaningful associations. At the Striar Jewish Community Center, our charge was to make a Jewish center without making it a religious center. We suggested quarrying the famous Jerusalem stone—the very same stone used to build the Herodian Jewish Temple, symbol of both the most sacred place on earth for Jews and the Zionist fight to gain statehood for Israel—and building the center's courtyard with it. Above: Striar Jewish Community Center. (Steve Rosenthal) Left: The Herodian Temple, Jerusalem. (Jeff Riley)

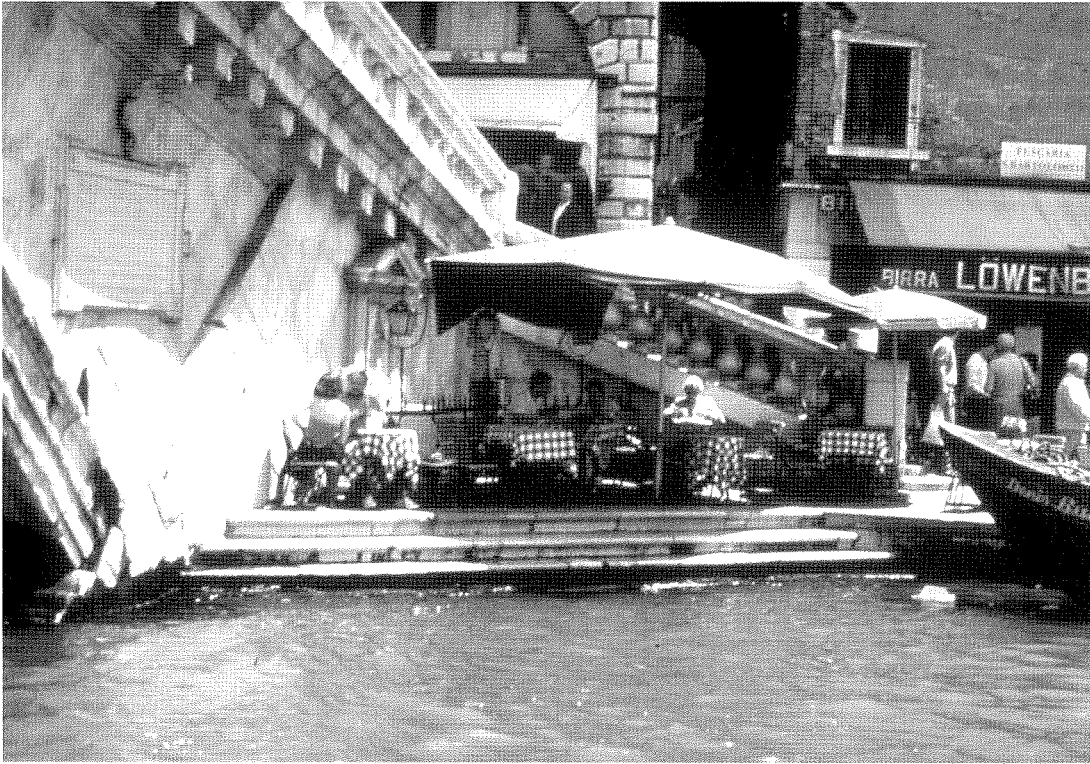






The image of a building can also derive from its climate. For example, the Shattuck House, on the Connecticut shore, responds to its New England climate with an active solar heat system housed on the roof of a small summer cottage. The cottage is separated from the main house at such an angle as to funnel the predominantly southwesterly breezes into the courtyard and house during the steamy hot summers. Above: Village in Switzerland. (Jeff Riley)  
Right: Shattuck House. (Norman McGrath)





Providing places for people to sit is essential. People especially like to sit on the edge of a path, where they can watch the world go by. This lounge at Colby College has double-hung windows that open onto the main pedestrian path, which links residential and academic areas; students sit here and watch their buddies go by. People also like to sit in sunshine. In many villages we have found both large and small sun traps, or places that protect you from the wind and trap the sun. People flock to them.

Above: Rialto Bridge, Venice.  
(Jeff Riley)

Right: Colby College student center, Waterville, Maine.  
(Norman McGrath)

