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Helena van Vliet, LLC
Restorative Biophilic Design

Above image: Kinya Maruyama

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Early Years: Recovering 'Modernist'

Emerging from a childhood where form equaled function, and efficiency meant being square, by the time I began studying architecture, I craved connection to surroundings. I longed for sensuous places that might engage me in the experience of moment and place, and not just through sight and visual emphasis.

I lived in Germany. My family's post-war 'Bauhaus' inspired house was concrete, cubicle-style efficient, and 'tasteful' in clean shades of white.

My room had plenty of daylight. A wall of glass. 'Window-wall,' mostly fixed with no detail to soften the glare. No light patterns created; no real sense of shelter, no sense of refuge. Nature was kept at safe, predictable distance. Viewed through an over-lit lens. I felt both confined and exposed at the same time, rather than tucked in and sheltered.

Tumbling down the terrace steps, however, was my real home: a beautiful garden. It was here that I spent most of my childhood. It was here that I could breathe. It was here that I could connect with nature's un-edited beauty, her scents, sounds and patterns...where I could feel the earth between my toes. Sitting in the old apple tree, I felt most at home.



My childhood gardens

Maybe all I ever want to do today I'd design buildings, which become gardens over time.



Helena van Vliet/Nature Center



Helena van Vliet/Nature Center



"...modernist design at large has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has left the body and other senses, as well as our memories, imaginations, and dreams, homeless."

Juhani Pallasmaa, Eyes of the Skin

Haptic Architecture: Please Touch

Early inspirations: I was drawn to the works of Frank Lloyd Wright and his "organic architecture." Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck, who called for a return to humanism in building design, was my teacher, as was eco-architect Kinya Maruyama from Japan. His freedom of form, experience in texture and movement continue to inspire me. Below his latest work.



Kinya Maruyama 'jardin étoile'

Crooked Timberness

"Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made."

~ Immanuel Kant

And then there are architects **Christopher Alexander**, who celebrates the timelessness of buildings and the beauty of gracious aging in structures, and **Christopher Day**, both so distinctly different from the unforgiving purity of 'modernist' architecture. "Modernist" versus archetypal.

I knew instinctively that the 'Crooked Timberness' of un-perfect architecture connected and rooted us best, made spaces livable, alive and comforting. The architecture of 'please touch,' 'please listen,' 'please inhale, deeply.'



Christopher Alexander



Christopher Day

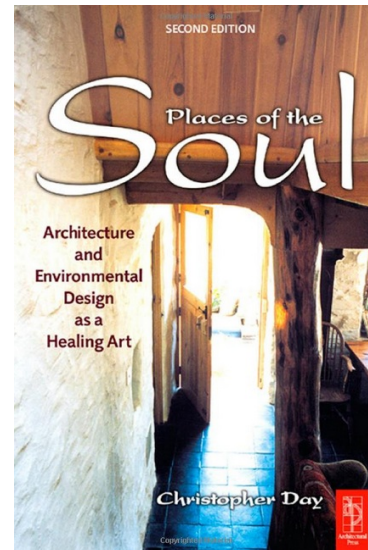


Recommended Reading

Places of the Soul: Architecture and Environmental Design as a Healing Art

From the book:

This new edition of the seminal text reminds us that true sustainable design does not simply mean energy efficient building. Sustainable buildings must provide for the 'soul'. For Christopher Day architecture is not just about a building's appearance, but how the building is experienced. 'Places of the Soul' presents buildings as environment, intrinsic to their surroundings, and offers design principles that will open the eyes of the architecture student and professional alike, presenting ideas quite different to the orthodoxy of modern architectural education.



Nature in the News

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One photographer's mission to document the remote, mysterious Alaskan Range

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