

Everything is Somewhere Podcast – Show Notes

#26 - David Seamon – January 13th, 2026

https://amerisurv.com/podcast_episode/26-david-seamon/

Core people mentioned in this episode:

- **Christopher Alexander** – Architect, builder, and cosmologist whose ideas on wholeness, centers, and life in the built environment are central throughout the conversation.
 - Author of *A Pattern Language*, *The Timeless Way of Building*, *The Nature of Order* (4 vols.), *The Production of Houses*, *A New Theory of Urban Design*, *The Battle for the Life and Beauty of the Earth*.
- **David Seamon** – Editor of *Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology* and professor of architecture at Kansas State University.
 - <http://newprairiepress.org/eap/>
 - <http://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/handle/2097/1522> (archive copies)
- **Henry Bortoft** – Philosopher of wholeness whom Seamon identifies as his key influence on understanding “the nature of wholeness.”

The Wholeness of Nature : Goethe's Way Toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature <https://www.amazon.com/Wholeness-Nature-Goethes-Conscious-Participation/dp/0940262797>

Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Bortoft
- **Edmund Husserl** – Founder of phenomenology; originator of “lifeworld” and “natural attitude,” both explicitly discussed.
- **Martin Heidegger** – Source for Seamon’s distinction between “belonging together” vs “belong together” in authentic wholeness.
- **Iain McGilchrist** – “Right brain–left brain” work cited when Seamon talks about analytic vs synergistic relationality.
 - <https://www.amazon.com/Master-His-Emissary-Divided-Western/dp/0300188374>

- **Henri Matisse** – His four self-drawings are Alexander’s exemplar for underlying presence and wholeness.
 - https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Above-Henri-Matisse-four-self-drawings-below-Photographs-of-Matisse-from-Alexander_fig1_329991218
- **Prince Charles / King Charles III** – Mentioned in relation to Alexander’s unbuilt Mary Rose Museum project and its cancellation.
 - <https://www.amazon.com/Mary-Museum-Center-Environmental-Structure/dp/0195210174>
- **Jenny (Quillien)** – Alexander’s editor and commentator on his work, discussed in relation to editing *The Nature of Order*.
 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/14-jenny-quillien/id1735409918?i=1000705585737>
 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/16-jenny-quillien-sample/id1735409918?i=1000710915477>
- **Ron Witte, Max Jacobson, Murray Silverstein** – Former close collaborators/students whose relationship to Alexander’s legacy is touched on.

Journals, projects, and media

- **Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology (EAP)** – David’s long-running journal on phenomenology of place, architecture, and environment.
 - Main site: <https://newprairiepress.org/eap/>
 - Open archive / indices at Kansas State: <https://krex.k-state.edu/collections/7a2a065d-3154-4e09-82ce-9c194150ca04>
- **Alexander projects and books referenced:**
 - **Mexicali housing / The Production of Houses** – Self-build, low-income housing project in Mexico that shifted Alexander toward process and construction sequences.
 - **Ishinomaki / Eishin School campus (Japan)** – Example of Alexandrian process working at scale, documented in *The Battle for the Life and Beauty of the Earth*.

- **Modesto Health Clinic** – Early disappointment that triggered his realization that pattern languages alone are not enough.
- **Mary Rose Museum (unbuilt)** – Example of a powerful but unrealized design and process conflict.
- **“Rug book” / *An Experiment in Architecture* / *The Nature of Order rug study*** – Where the 15 geometric properties and centers work were first systematized.
- **Film: “Places for the Soul” (Alexander documentary)** – Seamon mentions a film showing Alexander at the San Jose homeless shelter and at the Japanese school; a likely candidate is “Places for the Soul – Christopher Alexander.”
 - <https://tubitv.com/movies/642919/places-for-the-soul>

Books to link (Amazon or publisher)

These are explicitly recommended or central in the episode and are good candidates for show-note book links.++

Christopher Alexander (Amazon author page is also useful):

- *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* – <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0195019199>
- *The Timeless Way of Building* – <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0195024028>
- *The Nature of Order* (4 vols.; often sold individually or as a set, used / limited):
 - Vol. 1 *The Phenomenon of Life* – e.g., <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0972652914>
 - Vol. 4 *The Luminous Ground* – especially relevant to your discussion of inside/outside and bifurcation of nature.
- *The Production of Houses* – <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0195032233>
- *A New Theory of Urban Design* – <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0195037537>
- *The Battle for the Life and Beauty of the Earth* – <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0199898073>

Phenomenology, place, and wholeness:

- Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* – classic introduction to phenomenology of place that Seamon recommends.
 - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0850861093>
- Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (2nd ed., 2009) – phenomenological philosophy of place that Seamon recommends.
 - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0253213869>
- Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience* – philosophically heavier phenomenology of place.
 - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0521640075>
- Henry Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature* – Bortoft's main work on authentic wholeness.^[1]
 - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0940262797>
- Edward Relph video lecture “The Paradox of Place and the Evolution of Place and Placelessness” (for listeners who like talks):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gXqkq3zTzk>

Seamon's own books:

- David Seamon, *The Geography of the Lifeworld* – early “cult classic” in environment–behavior literature on lived place.
 - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0312215685>
- David Seamon, *Life Takes Place: Phenomenology, Lifeworlds, and Place Making* – newer work with substantial sections on Alexander and place processes.
 - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1138216387>

Related thinkers:

- Iain McGilchrist, e.g. *The Master and His Emissary* or *The Matter With Things*, on right-brain / left-brain and holistic vs analytic relationality.
 - *The Master and His Emissary* – <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0300188374>

Concepts and terms worth highlighting

- **Phenomenology** – As “description and interpretation of human experience,” especially as it unfolds in places, buildings, and environments.
- **Lifeworld and natural attitude** – Husserl’s terms for the taken-for-granted world of everyday life and our unquestioned stance toward it.
- **Wholeness and centers** – Alexander’s central concern; Seamon contrasts analytic (systems-theory) wholeness with synergistic relationality grounded in genuine belonging.
- **Belonging together vs belong together** – Seamon’s Heidegger-inspired way of distinguishing contrived vs authentic wholeness.
- **Fundamental process / stepwise making** – Alexander’s idea of iterative, center-strengthening sequences, likened in your exchange to DNA and origami.
- **Pattern language** – Both celebrated and critiqued in the episode as visionary yet insufficient by itself to guarantee living buildings.

Web presences for Seamon and EAP

- EAP homepage: <https://newprairiepress.org/eap/>
- EAP volumes/index at K-State (good entry to his memorial issues on Alexander): <https://krex.k-state.edu/collections/7a2a065d-3154-4e09-82ce-9c194150ca04>
- Seamon’s [Academia.edu](https://ksu.academia.edu/DavidSeamon) page with many of his articles uploaded: <https://ksu.academia.edu/DavidSeamon>