

From the Planners' Bookshelf...

The Character of Towns, An Approach to Conservation,

Roy Worskett ARIBA AMTPI, The Architectural Press, London, 271 pages, 1969.

Summary

The Character of Towns, though written nearly fifty years ago, offers many great ideas and examples for preserving and enhancing small cities and towns with prodigious sketches and photos. His examples and experience is British, but the lessons to be learned from his work are universal.

His work spans the spectrum of urban design from the town planning scale to the quality of detailing and materials. Of particular interest are three sections of his book in Chapter IV, Design.

First, from the section entitled "**Townscape Discipline**" [page 118]:

"It has been said that conservation is a double edged policy; it must preserve what is valuable and influence what must change. Much of the townscape can be preserved if the pressures for change are diverted. Where it must change in response to those pressures it should be rebuilt within the discipline of the local identity not reproducing the same thing again interpreting specific local qualities and learning from them, in order to continue what has been called 'the grain of the place'".

Second is a section on "**Organization of Spaces.**" [page 162] and the idea that a town's character is related to its organization and discernible qualities is a very useful concept when planning the town.

Third, his section "**Design of Infill**" [page 172] recognizes the difficulty of planting new development in the midst of established buildings and spaces. While he appreciates the role of an architect to control building design, he believes "No developer or architect has the right to destroy the quality of an ancient street or the setting of an historic building. This does not concern only the building next door and the need to design in sympathy with it.

The new building must be influenced by the qualities of the whole group of buildings into which it must fit."



Tribute to Roy Worskett

*Posted on 9th November 2014
by Malcolm Hankey*

**A Tribute to Roy Worskett,
former employee of the Civic
Trust who sadly passed away
in August 2014**

*by Victor Rose (Civic Trust
Awards National Panel)*

Born in Horsham West Sussex he studied architecture at the Portsmouth School of Architecture, going on to ground breaking work at the Civic Trust on conservation and later wrote the seminal work 'The Character of Towns: An Approach to Conservation' in 1969.

From the Planners' Bookshelf...

"The test of what comprises a group will be the degree to which the buildings combine to form a whole view. It will therefore include all those buildings which are seen together and which interact visually to create a single image or scene."

Infill and redevelopment in small cities and towns is a tricky business. Context, compatibility and appropriateness are important but hard to define and defend. The approach to "group" solves many issues when discussing context and the extent to which setting must be considered when introducing new building or spaces into an established place. The author's sensitivity to preservation and change makes his book a useful guide to proper thinking about urban design and infill development.