

embargo brought energy efficient design to the fore. His books became part of the required reading lists in architectural schools and professional practices devoted to energy and architecture. From this prodigal beginning, his studies have grown in breadth and depth—each layer of understanding has led to and revealed yet another level of understanding and insight. This book is testament and record of this understanding that results from a lifetime of study, reflection and inspiration.

This book is a great read on profoundly felt and clearly communicated ideas of life in society and on this planet. The writing carries the author’s own voice—conversational, entertaining, and to the point. It is thus heart felt. It is understandable. The writing is precise, that is, the words are carefully crafted, but always reaching beyond to larger interpretation, expanding one’s thought. Is that not the goal of all literature?

The subject is mundane, in the sense of “of this world” and apparent, but written so that the slightest detail of the observed environment is rendered inspirational and poetic. The reader is lead from appearance to deep and satisfying stories, metaphors that convey understanding of the author’s unique view of architecture and the world.

Ralph Knowles’s writing asks us to pay attention to detail, found by observation of the sun’s traces across a patio or plaza, and the response of leaf, flower, bird, animal, and humans to the gift of the sunrise and sunset. We may be attracted first to the grace of a particular detail, be it a flowering plant or tree, but then we are doubly rewarded when we look at it longer and study the logic of its making. With reflection and time, this can convey lessons larger than itself, connecting us to the beauty and wisdom of all of nature. A close reading of this book is equally rewarding.

Donald Watson

Preface

This book focuses on the maintenance of comfort and joy in our buildings through policies and designs that reconnect our lives to the rhythms of nature. It addresses the entire design community, including architects, planners, and landscape and interior designers. It is written, though, to be available to a general audience. No specialized knowledge is required for its understanding.

It addresses one of the gravest problems of our day: the lack of commitment to a sustainable relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Clearly not a new concern, it is one that has become critically multiplied by unprecedented, worldwide energy usage and urbanization.

I was reminded of the problem on a family trip to Phoenix, Arizona, some years ago. As we moved closer to the city, we saw from the highway a field of identical mobile housing units, each with a latticed air conditioner on its rooftop. Our youngest daughter, then barely big enough to see out the back window, quietly watched as we passed the scene. Then, no doubt with the