

Figure 5.16 Piazza
Obliqua, St Peter's, Rome
Figure 5.17 Floor
patterning to edge feature,
Portugal
Figure 5.18 Figurative
paving, Portugal



5.16



5.18



5.17

module of the car space is essential if they are to be humanized. Patterned paving accompanied by judicious tree planting can turn a desolate 'wasteland' into a pleasant environment.

The floorscape can be enriched in a similar fashion to the façade of a building by repeating and echoing the shape of any element set into or onto the floor plane, by emphasizing a change of material and by dramatizing the edge of a paved area. In a previous paragraph, the detailing of the junction between façade and pavement was described. A similar treatment is often given to the area immediately surrounding the plinth of a statue, the bowl of a fountain, opening for tree or soft landscaped area. Rows of cobbles, setts or coloured paving slabs run parallel to the element, offering the feature to the general mass of the floor plane (Figure 5.17).

By far the most difficult decorative effect to classify, analyse and suggest design principles for, is that type of patterning which appears to exist for its own, purely ornamental reasons: it is almost 'art for art's sake'. When there is some clearly symbolic reason for the motif employed, then interpretation is simplified. The theme of a cross on the pavement adjacent to the war memorial in Tavira or the depiction of sea creatures on the pavements of the fishing port of Villa Real de Saint Antonio, both in Portugal, are symbolic representations of this type (Figure 5.18). The decorative effects associated with towns in the Algarve are assisted by the nature of the flooring material - small black and white 5×5 cm granite tesserae. The small tesserae of mosaic floors in the ancient cities of Crete, Greece and Rome lend themselves to an elaborate patterning and indeed demand such treatment by the artist. The floors of the Ancient World of the Mediterranean included both geometric and naturalistic styles of patterning. Exuberance in decorative floor patterning should not be dismissed too readily by those with a functionalist turn of mind, for whom ornament smacks of effete self-indulgence. The floor plane, long neglected by designers, or sometimes timidly exploited, is an unexplored subject awaiting the artist to express the highest values of twentieth-century urban life.

CHANGING LEVEL

The Spanish Steps in Rome is a dramatic design for a staircase, an elegant solution to a change of level, transforming a necessity into a pleasurable experience. Its articulated stepped form, with rhythmic variations broken by platforms where curving stairs meet like dancers of some stately minuet, presents, to Roman and visitor alike, a stage set of magnificent proportions. It is a place for children to play, the young to court and the elderly to sit and stare. These and other activities are the by-product of a design that delights in vertical movement enhanced



Figure 5.19 The Spanish Steps, Rome

by continuous flights and counter-flights of flowing curves: this is its primary function, but how beautifully has the Spanish Steps achieved several different objectives (Figure 5.19).

Steps, ramps, platforms and long sloping planes contrast with the horizontal plaza, the place for rest, conversation and meditation. By that contrast the sense of drama is enhanced. Emphasizing the variation in level, using ornamental staircase and ramp, adds to the quality and grandeur of the urban scene so that it does indeed take on the qualities of dance and theatre. Steps have, in the past, been used to dramatize events, to create places from which to address the crowds. Steps are places where tourists, beggars and street traders gather to pause for breath or ply their trade, or, as in the Campidoglio, a lofty height from which to view the city (Figure 5.20).

The primary function of the floor plane is to accommodate changes of level using means which are easy to traverse by both able-bodied people and also by those who are handicapped. The old, the frail and less able-bodied would find the Spanish Steps and the Capitoline Hill a daunting prospect.