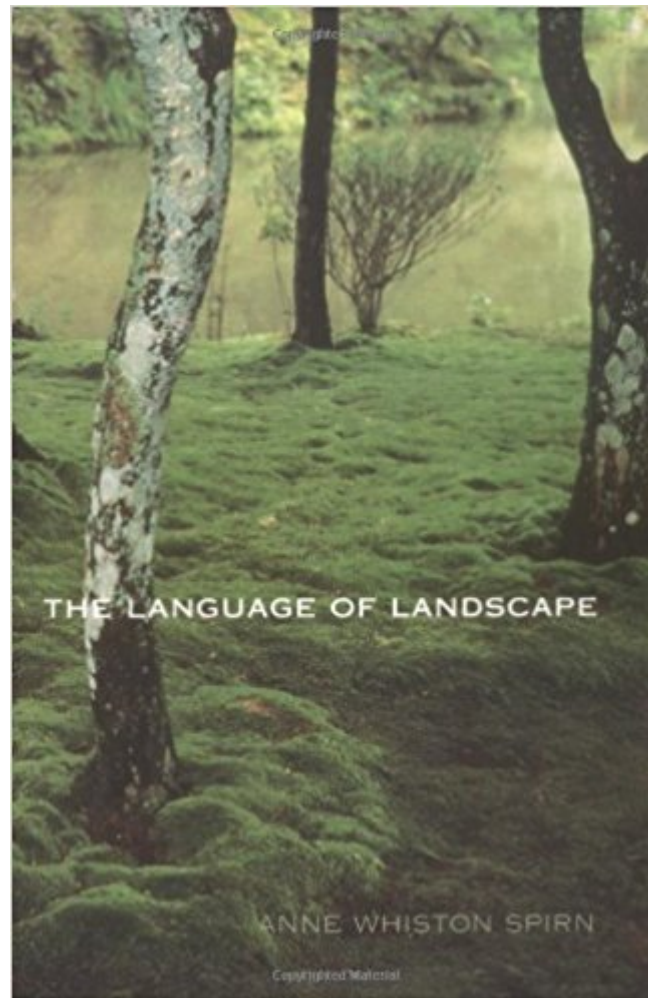




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# Language Of Landscape



## Synopsis

This eloquent and powerful book combines poetry and pragmatism to teach the language of landscape. Anne Whiston Spirn, author of the award-winning *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design*, argues that the language of landscape exists with its own syntax, grammar, and metaphors, and that we imperil ourselves by failing to learn to read and speak this language. To understand the meanings of landscape, our habitat, is to see the world differently and to enable ourselves to avoid profound aesthetic and environmental mistakes. Offering examples that range across thousands of years and five continents, Spirn examines urban, rural, and natural landscapes. She discusses the thought of renowned landscape authors—Thomas Jefferson, Frank Lloyd Wright, Frederick Law Olmsted, Lawrence Halprin—and of less well known pioneers, including Australian architect Glenn Murcutt and Danish landscape artist C. Th. Sørensen. She discusses instances of great landscape designers using landscape fluently, masterfully, and sometimes cynically. And, in a probing analysis of the many meanings of landscape, Spirn shows how one person's ideal landscape may be another's nightmare, how Utopian landscapes can be dark. There is danger when we lose the connection between a place and our understanding of it, Spirn warns, and she calls for change in the way we shape our environment, based on the notions of nature as a set of ideas and landscape as the expression of action and ideas in place.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The language of landscape," writes ecologist Anne Whiston Spirn, "is our native language." She elaborates: humans lived in natural landscapes well before they knew how to build houses; knew

how to read the movements of clouds and birds well before they developed grammars and symbols. Anyone with a keen sensibility can recover that language, she suggests: "A person literate in landscape sees significance where an illiterate person notes nothing. Past and future fires, floods, landslides, welcome or warning are visible to those who can read them in tree and slope, boundary and gate." Spirn goes on to discuss human interactions with the landscape, taking as cases in point such matters as the dolmens of prehistoric Europe, environmentally friendly houses in Denmark and Australia, fountains in Paris, and tree-lined city streets in Philadelphia. Along the way she cites scholars, architects, and artists, learning lessons in how to read place and built form from the likes of Christopher Alexander, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Rachel Carson. She closes with an appeal to landscape architects, builders, and designers to study the natural details of place more closely before they set about changing it: "In landscapes ... the key is to establish a framework that provides overall structure--a structure not arbitrary but congruent with the deep context of a place, to define a vocabulary of forms that expresses the natural and cultural processes of the place."

--Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Landscape speaks to us. But how? Anne Spirn's superb and unique achievement is to spell out the 'how' so that we can better understand landscape's variant dialects its distinctive personalities and respond intelligently, with appropriate emotion." Yi-Fu Tuan, emeritus professor of geography, University of Wisconsin-Madison "Anne Whiston Spirn brings to her reading of landscapes the eye of an artist, the mind of a scholar, and the pen of a gifted writer. There are a few books that have the power to change the way one sees the world. This is one of them." William Cronon, author of *Changes in the Land* "Spirn has thought deeply about landscape and human responses to it. Her new book...offers a myriad of stimulating impressions and suggestions and pursues a wide array of intellectual issues...All will appreciate Spirn's sensitive eye and her vivid descriptions." Choice

very fast ... great book

Anne Whiston Spirn has a lot of truly important and enlightening things to say in "The Language of Landscape". Unfortunately, she makes the reader slog through an indulgent and contrived writing style in order to understand her. At the end of the chapter, "Language of Landscape", she explained how a person fluent in its elements could "read" a landscape, and how this is crucial to understanding the world. Yet she never fully articulates this in the following chapter, "Elements of Landscape and Language", with anything more than impressionistic vignettes of places she has

visited. It was not at all what I was expecting, and left me frustrated and wondering what point she was trying (and failing) to make. I soldiered on, and found that there are flashes of clarity, specifically when writing about specific case studies and experiences with students. In these passages, the writing is more direct and very readable. The second half of the book was excellent, especially the study of landscape and memory in Berlin. These passages are what "saved" the book for me, kept me reading, and finally earned it 3 stars. For contrast, I think that JB Jackson does a better job of weaving his theory with his stories and experiences. Beginners to landscape studies may find him more accessible. Spurr's points are there for those who want to dig for them, but sometimes it's unclear if it's worth it.

I find this book to be truly inspired. It combines the ecological science and poetics of landscape design. Embedded within her book is a deeply sensitive understanding of the relationship between language and experience. Her exploration of language, both as a vehicle for communication, meaning and for an entry into the realm of the imagination, is powerful for artists in any field. When I am looking to share seminal books on the process of composition, I often tell them to get this book. I've read it and taught it many times, and it continues to inspire me and many others. Get this book if you are interested in the relationships between nature, design, form, function, meaning and imagination.

The Language of Landscape regards to a very important subject - the new values that has composed the urban drawing - which has contributed a lot for the environmental health of the nowadays cities. Finding new ways to focus on the physical environment of the urban areas, Spurr offers a philosophic and conceptual base for the Urban Drawing, while illustrates, with real examples, the practical application of the theory. It is a good masterpiece, reflecting the result of years of experience in treating the lack of attention with the environment nowadays, the lack of comprehension of the natural processes - which has contributed to the physical shapes of the cities, and has invaded virgin areas, as forests, making this areas sterile - the recuperation of landscapes, according to the natural regeneration, and also themes reflecting directly the urban processes, like water, energy, nutritive resources - which are subproducts of the urban draining - and other functions of the urban processes which has not received attention and has contributed a lot for the contamination of the overburden environment. It is a good tool for urban planners and environmental designers, while treating the esthetic values on which the formal landscape of the cities has based-developed. These values have a little connexion to the natural process dynamics and lead to

mistaken attitudes, if they are not well known. It is also rich in questions like values environmental perceptions and how we answer to the environment around us , if we can demonstrate that there are ways to adjust the urban landscapes in a very cheaper way, and with much more social value than the traditional ones.

This book is amazing. I use it in site assessments and to structure my projects. I take it into my fieldwork (cultural landscape preservation) to guide my process. It's beautifully written and important to the field of landscape architecture.

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