tools. Although we may all have our own personal preferences, there are fairly standard ways of providing spaces for cooking which are capable of commanding widespread approval. Relaxing is altogether another matter. We can begin to describe some of the needs, but we will soon find this becomes a very personal matter, and quite possibly capable of very wide ranges of interpretation. For example, one person may find it relaxing to look out over a panoramic landscape whereas another may prefer a more cosy small introverted space.

While all this may seem blindingly obvious, I find that architects are frequently confused about this when designing. Quite simply, it is no good assuming that our ability to predict human behaviour is uniform, since patently it is not. One way in which it varies is with this degree of purposefulness in the activity. We may be much more accurate and therefore more able to design precisely to fit form to function in the one case than the other. A common architectural mistake is to design assuming a uniform level of confidence. There are some spaces where the scenery of furniture, fittings and equipment must be left much more under the control of the user than others.

There is also a paradox here. Architects can easily make yet another mistake with this variation. In our search for meaningful ideas to use as generators of form, we often push the purposive activities even further up the scale of predictability than they deserve to be. It is also rather noticeable that highly specialized functions tend to dominate architects' thinking on these occasions. I described earlier how a lecture theatre that was thought very good by lecturers was not at all liked by students. This space was designed entirely functionally as a 'machine for learning in', to paraphrase a well-known saying! However, students do not stop living as ordinary human beings just because they are in a lecture theatre. The design was much less satisfactory as a container for the less focused and purposive behaviour of the real student, and was instead predicated on the notion that all students are simply automata for learning. This problem was probably also exacerbated by the way the architects concentrated on what was one end of a non-reciprocal transaction. In simple terms, they thought more about the space as a setting for teaching and not enough about it as a setting for learning.

Some research work we have been doing on hospital design gives an interesting clue to the way this works. We have evaluated new hospitals and compared them to the older ones they replaced. One study that is of particular interest here was of a new mental hospital replacing an old Victorian institutional building (Lawson and Phiri 2000). The patients clearly expressed their liking for the new place compared with the old (Fig. 8.2). It is not always easy to find out how people feel about places, and we shall discuss some of these methodological issues in the next chapter. However, if mental patients are asked the right questions in the right way by the right people they can be remark-