BIOPHILIC DESIGN

Does this growing trend have any relevance to the catering and hospitality industry?

BACKGROUND

It has long been understood that maintaining a connection with nature is good for our physical, psychological and emotional well-being. Edward O Wilson introduced the hypothesis in his book Biophilia (1985). It is suggested that as humans we subconsciously seek connections with the rest of life and that this is deeply rooted and has a profound effect on our quality of life and productivity. For example: depressed children can improve if given a pet.



THE HERE AND NOW

As a species we have moved from working the land and a more outdoors existence, to living and working in artificial environments. A greater proportion of our leisure time is likely to be spent interacting with electronic devices. Biologist Steven Boyden (1971) defines the optimum healthy environment as "the conditions which tend to promote or permit optimal physiological, mental and social performance". He raises concerns about the mismatch between humans' evolutionary environment and current industrialized settings and the fact that this does not support the full range of evolved survival and well-being needs. The majority of zoos have been adapted to better suit the emotional and physical health of the animals yet we lag behind regarding the design of environments for 'homo sapiens'. Whilst there are enlightened architects and designers out there who either understand and implement the principles or even have environmental psychologists as part of their teams, all too often the communication is poor and there is a general approach of 'if you can't give me hard evidence and exact guidelines I am not interested' or 'it is all a bit of tree hugging'.

IN SUMMARY

We feel most mentally and physically healthy when some of the features of our surroundings during early development are replicated. These include: distant views, organic shapes, areas where we can feel protected, areas where we can be alone, areas where we can interact, patterns from nature, natural daylight that varies through the day, multi sensory stimulation, not too much stimulation. All of these should be considered when designing a building or interior if we wish the users to feel happy, relaxed and most importantly wanting to return.

THE THEORY IN PRACTICE

Yes, this is one of the latest trends or buzz words within design (a trick to encourage greater spend, a means for designers to try to impress their clients with fancy terminology ?) and to that end should be considered with caution. However, the science is there to back it up, much is common sense and many of the principles are ones that we at Ferro Design have been using during our 30 years of designing. The skill of the designer is needed to seamless integrate and fully understand when and how to apply biophilic principles, rather than random application just because it is the latest craze. Biophilic Design does have relevance within Catering and Hospitality design and can influence users enjoyment of a facility and thus the likelihood they will return and ultimately operational success.

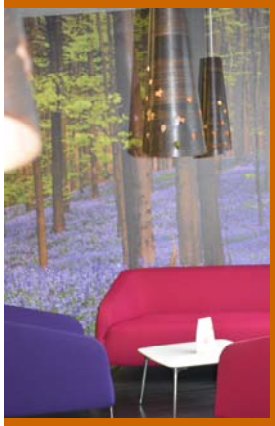
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BIOPHILIC DESIGN

In action at Ferro Design

THINGS TO CONSIDER

We have discussed that Biophilia can have an impact on productivity and thus it is foolish not to consider it with regard to office design. However, the considerations change and are arguably more complex for hospitality and catering environments. There is no longer a need for enhanced productivity but there is a need for relaxation and a sense of change, in order that users will feel refreshed. In a catering or hospitality context it is for example not so important to ensure that light levels vary through the day since users are not there for extended periods, the colour choices can also afford to be more stimulating. A good designer will use all of the tools available to maximise client and user satisfaction.















PRACTICAL APPLICATION

There are many ways that nature can be integrated into interior environments so they can better serve the individuals that use them. Light levels, finishes, texture, colour, spatial planning, customer flows, seating plans, noise levels, flooring and much more must all be considered. The natural world exhibits a wonderful array of texture and colour and this can be reflected through a multitude of available materials and finishes both real (living walls, timbers, granites) and artificial (high quality printed images from nature). A natural palette of colour works well with stimulating accents. Mixed seating allows users to choose whether they wish to be alone or in groups. Booth seating allows for a feeling of nurture and safety. Organic shapes can be incorporated into counter design, canopies, flooring layout ...

So, if you have a project in mind and have been inspired by our words or images, please do call. We are reaping the biophilic rewards of our own new working environment and are super productive, inspired and ready for any design challenge you may wish to present.

Fergus Stapleton T: 01494 677684. M: 07720 349487 e: Fergus@ferrodesign.co.uk

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