

# BIOPHILIC DESIGN:

## Reap the Benefits of Bringing Nature Indoors

Improve your health and spirit by acclimating yourself to Mother Nature from the comfort of your home.

BY HANNAH CHENOWETH



**THIS** summer, most of us are looking forward to flocking to the beach, the mountains, or a favorite camping spot. Chances are, you feel deeply restored in these natural settings, and that's not just in your imagination. As a growing body of research confirms, nature has remarkable effects on our mental, emotional, and physical well-being. So it's no surprise that there's a rising interest in the practice of biophilic design, which seeks to incorporate nature into the built environment.

Our society is starving for the lucid bliss we experience in nature, and biophilic design offers a sterling solution. As corporate offices are increasingly embracing biophilic principles to help people feel healthier, happier, and more focused in their home away from home, there's also a growing desire to weave Mother Nature's magic into our actual places of residence.

According to architect Helena van Vliet, biophilic design isn't a fleeting trend or an inconsequential, feel-good concept. She explains, "Biophilic design is an evidence-based paradigm shift toward designing physiologically restorative

experiences instead of [just] buildings." Further, van Vliet believes that biophilic design "responds to the way we are designed as biological organisms. We just have forgotten some of our innate preferences. In many ways, it's a process of remembering."

### Reconnecting with Our Oldest Friend

"Biophilia" literally translates to "the passionate love of life and all that is alive." This term was coined by social psychologist Erich Fromm in 1964, and popularized by famed biologist E.O. Wilson in the 1980s. The roots of this rapturous relationship between humans and nature developed through consistent contact for more than 99 percent of human evolution. During this











“Godfather of Biophilia,” identified more than 70 mechanisms for creating biophilic experiences. Kellert emphasized that biophilic design is less about checking off boxes for design elements and more about contextual and cultural design choices. In 2014, Terrapin Bright Green, an environmental consulting firm, distilled Kellert’s work into 14 patterns that are widely referenced today when discussing biophilic design. These patterns aren’t dogma, but rather a set of tools that offer a helpful framework for creating spaces that are in harmony with nature.

Ready to reap the restorative benefits of nature in your own home? Here’s some practical advice for getting started.

## Learn to Love Your Home Environment

“Spirit of place” is a concept that underscores the distinct connection between a place and its inhabitants. A strong identification with a region’s ecosystem makes us better stewards of the land and also satisfies our need for intimacy with the place we call home.

Amanda Sturgeon, CEO of the International Living Future Institute and author of *Creating Biophilic Buildings*, believes that building a relationship with your geographic area is an essential first step in biophilic design.

“In today’s global economy, where we can import products from across the world in days, our homes are no longer rooted in the materials of the region, or to reflect the local climate and culture,” Sturgeon says. She emphasizes that “when you understand the character of your place and use it to influence your home, you regain this spirit of place. Keep an eye out for plants or elements of your environment that call to you, and incorporate them into your home to deepen that connection.” Sturgeon



time, nature wasn’t a place we visited with sunglasses and cameras in tow; it was the place we called home. In *The Nature Fix*, author Florence Williams says that “certain habitats ... trigger a neural bath of happy hormones” because our brains are hard-wired to respond powerfully to natural stimuli — both the dangerous kind, such as snakes, and the comforting kind, such as sunsets.

Although we humans now spend 90 percent of our time contained by a roof and four walls, our stint as indoor animals has been a mere blip on the evolutionary timeline. Research on the connection between nature and our health is in its early stages, but studies show that this radical change in environment has negatively affected our health. A dose of nature acts as a possible antidote to modern grievances, such as isolation and the resulting loneliness and anxiety. Our ancestors were nourished by their connection with nature, and biophilic design honors these deeply ingrained responses by using the natural elements that soothe us.

Over a decade ago, Stephen Kellert, the late social ecologist known as the

Top: Decorating your home with plants, or even pictures of plants, engages your senses as if you were in nature.

Bottom: Breathe easier in your home with a green wall.



| TRY THIS |

## SPRUCE UP THE OFFICE

**Biophilic design is being celebrated as the future of the workplace. There are plenty of ways you can add natural elements to your office today!**

**COLOR:** Add a splash of earth-tone colors, such as green, blue, and brown, to feel more grounded in your office space.

**SOUNDS:** Play natural sounds, such as birdsong, rainfall, crickets, or other soothing sounds. Use headphones when necessary.

**SCENTS:** Use a diffuser to add scents from essential oils, if possible. You can also place sachets of all-natural potpourri on your desk for a fresh, earthy fragrance.

**FOUNTAIN:** A small fountain can be found for just \$20 and can do wonders for your focus at work.

**PLANT POWER:** Place a succulent, plant, or vase of fresh-cut flowers on your desk to lift your spirits.

**NATURE ELEMENTS AND VISUALS:** Incorporate seasonal elements, such as pine cones, shells, or stones. Add photos or artwork of nature scenes too. It can even be helpful to change your screen saver!

**LIGHTING:** If you're not lucky enough to sit by a window, invest in a desk lamp with a dimmer rather than flicking on the fluorescent lighting.







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Circle #7; see card pg 65



encourages people to use their regions for design inspiration.

Bill Browning, founder of Terrapin Bright Green, also believes it's important to determine the effect you're seeking from the living space you wish to design. "Different experiences in nature," says Browning, "will produce different outcomes: They can reduce stress, elevate your mood, or improve cognitive function, for example." Browning suggests that the effect you hope to achieve should determine which biophilic design pattern you choose.

### Create Multisensory Experiences

In nature, all our senses are fully engaged, and in this sensory-induced state, we're invigorated. We achieve peace and tranquility from the variability in nature: shifting light, sporadic shadows, the smell of plants and soil, and the sound of rustling leaves or coursing water. Yet, Sturgeon explains that the average home often fails to mirror this soothing and natural diversity.

Opening your windows whenever possible is the easiest way to invite a multisensory experience into your abode. This simple act provides

variability in airflow, temperature, and light, and invites the sounds of nature indoors. Indoor plants provide immediate sensory engagement, and help purify the air as an added bonus. There's been a recent uptick in the installation of green walls, also known as living walls, in both homes and offices.

In 1984, psychologist Roger Ulrich conducted a landmark study that found that patients in rooms with views of nature experienced expedited rates of healing and enhanced morale compared with their nature-starved counterparts.

Even if your own view is rather uninspiring, you can reconnect with the natural landscape by sprucing up your home with nature-inspired visuals. Though the brain knows the difference between an image of a garden and the real thing, a relaxation response still occurs. Look for artwork, photographs, sculptures, paintings, or any representation of nature that nourishes your soul. Keep in mind that thematic visuals help create a more cohesive feel to a space — a beach-inspired bathroom, for example, rather than a bathroom with several different climates and landscapes featured.

Biophilic design also lauds the calming effects of water elements. Aquariums and fountains are easy-to-install features that can turn your space into a true sanctuary. The presence of water has been found to lower blood pressure and heart rate, boost memory, and increase feelings of tranquility.

Straight lines and harsh aesthetics are in direct opposition to the curved shapes and complex patterns we find in nature. Humans are drawn to the curved shapes and forms of waves, whirlpools, flowers, and seashells, and benefit from their presence even when used decoratively as motifs.

Biophilic design advocates for softening up hard edges. You have plenty of opportunities to embrace natural patterns in your home, such as with fabrics, carpets, wallpaper designs, billowy curtains, and spiral accents (such as a braided rug). If the sight of a flowered comforter doesn't do it for you, consider natural fabrics, such as silk and cotton. Texture is also an essential part of the conversation, as it replicates nature. Simply include wood, stone, or cork in your design. Your space; your preference.

## Let There Be (Natural) Light

Physiologically, we're still in sync with Mother Nature's cycles. This connection causes a response to the changing sunlight: yellow light in the morning, blue at midday, and red in



the evening. A lack of exposure to the different cycles of light affects our energy levels and overall well-being.

To sync up with the natural cycle, consider changing the lighting in your home. One possibility is circadian lighting systems, which maintain alignment with the body's natural cycles. Philips SceneSwitch lighting, available at Home Depot or Amazon, is one of the cheapest options on the market at the moment. Start with small adjustments so as to not overwhelm yourself with this drastic change. In the morning, bright white LED lights are your best friend. In the evening, however, you may want to consider using softer amber night lights.

Natural lighting still has the most direct effect on our circadian rhythms, so maximizing daylight will help enhance visual comfort in your home while also reducing your heating bills. Mirrors can be another great help by strategically reflecting sunlight in small spaces. What you don't want, according to Browning, is uniform distribution of light or extreme differences that cause a glare or discomfort.

## Give It a Chance, It'll Grow on You

Just as nature is seasonal, forever changing, so too are our own preferences. Continue to let your natural environment inspire you. Remember, the goal of biophilic design is to refresh and restore us, not to add more stress to our lives! Start small, rather than feeling discouraged by the gap between where you are and where you want to be. Allow yourself to be creative choosing shapes, colors, and textures, says van Vliet. Biophilic design elements can help you feel happier inside your home. Just don't make your personal sanctuary so inviting that you forget to go outside! 🌿

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## Kind and Clean

**Don't wait until you see a bug or mouse in the house; prevent unwanted pests before they move in! Pest proof your home in 3 steps:**

**1 CLEAN UP** – get rid of clutter rodents and insects may hide behind or under like stacks of papers, boxes, etc.

**2 SEAL UP** – seal entry points like gaps around door and window frames. Check dryer vents, electric panels, and the building's foundation for cracks or openings.

**3 DETER** – place plant-based pest repellent in pest prone areas to drive them back outside and keep them out. Use in kitchens, pantries, closets, attics, basements, garages, and more.

Natural pest repellent may compliment your home design. Ideas and inspiration at [earthkind.com](http://earthkind.com).

