

Biophilia trend takes root in SA offices

Biophilia - humankind's innate connection with nature - is a trend growing more popular in South Africa's offices.



Image source: www.pexels.com

Richard Andrews, MD of Inspiration Office, an Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy, says biophilia helps explain why crackling fires and crashing waves captivate us, why a garden view can enhance our creativity and strolling through a park has restorative, even healing effects.

“Simply put, humans are programmed to feel good in nature. And nature has a powerfully positive effect on our wellbeing. Globally, urban designers and office designers are incorporating the phenomenon into their work. They want to bring it to where we spend about a third of our lives: the office.”

Said Andrews: “Natural light, wood grain, living walls, plants and outdoor seating are just a few ways to bring elements of nature to the workplace. We are increasingly being asked to incorporate nature into the work we do across South Africa.

“In the workplace, it is therefore about tricking our brains to feel like we’re in a natural environment by triggering underlying patterns that we’re programmed to recognise and feel good in.”

Linking improved environmental quality and worker productivity

With the emergence of the green building movement in the early 1990s, linkages were made between improved environmental quality and worker productivity in research by Browning & Room (1994). While the financial gains due to productivity improvements were considered significant, productivity was identified as a placeholder for health and well-being, which have even broader impact.

The healing power of a connection with nature was established by Roger Ulrich's 1984 landmark study comparing recovery rates of patients with and without a view to nature. Environment psychologist Stephen Kaplan noted that people with a view of natural elements, such as trees, water or countryside, report greater levels of wellbeing than those looking over more urban settings.

Andrews noted the last decade has seen a steady growth in work around and the intersections of neuroscience and architecture, both in research and in practice and that even green building standards have begun to incorporate biophilia, mostly for its contribution to indoor environmental quality.

Different hues, textures and colours

Andrews describes a biophilic design in the office: "Whether your preferred environment is the desert, forest or ocean, nuanced design can encourage recognisable connections to nature."

Biophilia is also about different hues, textures and colours Andrews added.

"People have this preconception that nature is green. But biophilia can also be inspired by say rich desert colours.

"If you design a space the right way, people will want to spend time there, engage more frequently with colleagues and then also be more engaged with their work," Andrews concluded.

The term 'biophilia' was first coined by social psychologist Eric Fromm in 1964 and later popularised by biologist Edward Wilson (Biophilia, 1984). The denotations have evolved from within the fields of biology and psychology, and been adapted to the fields of neuroscience, endocrinology, architecture and beyond.

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