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RETAIL

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THE BIOPHILIA EFFECT ~ A SENSE OF PLACE AND BELONGING

“Retail design needs a vision: a vision of place-based relationships. These relationships are rooted in a specific place, reflect its unique characteristics and values, and foster a sense of belonging and connection.”

Chintamani Bird

Coming into this life as newborns, there was one thing that we were born to do. We were born to have the instinct to survive, and our genetic makeup and brains’ mission is to find the best way to do this.

We are all complex, multifaceted individuals, and embracing our uniqueness and authenticity is immeasurably important. Despite being as unique as our fingerprints, profound similarities connect us in mysterious ways through evolution and survival.

What makes us different is often seen as a barrier to our connection with ourselves, our communities, and the world around us. Feeling like we belong is essential to our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. Our survival depends on finding our tribe and feeling a sense of belonging.

The celebration of our stories, filled with tears, regrets, hopes, and joy, should be shared. Despite our differences, there’s an undeniable similarity in our need to feel connected to something larger than ourselves, driven by survival, genetics, and evolution. This need for connection and belonging is not unique to me; it’s universal, and you are not alone in feeling it. You are understood.

In today’s world, characterised by disconnecting technology, the struggle to seek physical and emotional connections and celebrate our authenticity is real and relatable.

So, how does one go about this? Through my ups and downs, I’m on a quest for the one truth in my life, a place where fear doesn’t dominate my waking and sleeping moments. I’m seeking my identity, acceptance, connection, and belonging, a journey that is not always straightforward. But it’s a journey that has taught me so much and continues to inspire me every day.

How can I connect with the outside world? How can I connect with my inner self and what truly matters in my life? There is no trying to fit in; or hide in plain sight. Finding acceptance in the same

emptiness and measure my value as a human being is and unattainable, unrealistic goal.

Irrespective of the path life has taken me, I find myself seeking my identity and connection beyond my own self. Through desperation, dissociation, isolation, depression, and anxiety, my journey has been a relentless quest for self-soothing, self-discovery, acceptance, and love. It’s a journey that I believe many of us can relate to, a journey that inspires us in our shared human experience.

How can I satisfy these feelings, fears, frustrations, hopes, and wishes and give myself what I truly need?

I SHOP!

I shop for answers.

I shop for the meaning and purpose in life.

I shop to feel better.

When I engage in retail therapy, I’m not just purchasing items. I’m on a quest for my identity, searching for a connection, yearning to feel that I might one day belong to something greater than myself. This drive is ingrained in us. I am hoping to find my tribe and finally feel like I belong. It’s part of who we are as humans, our survival instinct, our genetic makeup, and our evolutionary history.

Going into retail stores I am hoping to connect to something bigger than myself, to find acceptance, be self-soothed, and shop for my identity. I hope to see my spirit of place in the nameless, faceless brands. But this was not where the answer existed for me. So, the search continued until something inside me changed, I wanted change.

Through trials and traumas, we need to celebrate that we are alive, and we can make a difference in every action that we make. It is now time that we not only survive! But thrive with a genuine connection with something greater than ourselves, the world around us. The communities the surround us and the environments that we live in.

Today sharing what biophilic design is, supports individuals mental health, biodiversity and the environment. Biophilic retail design is all about creativity and colour, finding uniqueness, and celebrating the difference between the retail environment and the natural world. I don’t want to be immersed in the same, same methodology that brands and retailers seem to design, which promotes placelessness. When I go into these shopping centres it feels like there is no pursuit to understand an individual’s needs, beyond the company’s spreadsheet and R.O.I. Never looking deeper or caring about the designing better for people and planet. Because without the planet, there will be no people, so change is the only option! Biophilic design is the solution.

There must be a willingness to change and make a difference. Make a difference for the world and for people.

I think having these massive shopping centres that you can get lost in is not as productive as the developer may think. The disconnect I feel intensifies because it denies me the very thing that I am looking for. A connection to something greater than myself. Evolution tells us what the missing link is. The something bigger than myself is, Mother Earth, and all of its complexities.

“Retail design should create spaces that call forth this innate knowledge that we belong to something greater than ourselves. It needs colour, sunlight, natural materials, fractals, dynamic balance and tension, attraction and beauty, contrast, somewhere a person can stay and be present for more than a moment.”

My planet. My home. My love.

It’s about the natural materials and textures and wanting to pause a while to get that uplifting sense of pure freedom. Gone are the days when I tried to walk around a place made of artificial materials and synthetic fabrics. Neon lights are great for five minutes. But give me life, something that inspires me to be more than I am today. One of my favourite things is to find artists who share their love for the environment and are quirky. You will never see me in a place that promotes the artificial because it is short-lived and easily dismissed, disregarded and given to landfill.

Retail design needs a vision: a vision of place-based relationships. These relationships are rooted in a specific place, reflect its unique characteristics and values, and foster a sense of belonging and connection. Retail design should create spaces that call forth this innate knowledge that we belong to something greater than ourselves. It needs colour, sunlight, natural materials, fractals, dynamic balance and tension, attraction and beauty, contrast, somewhere a person can stay and be present for more than a moment.

Finding a boutique that exudes a different approach by knowing who they are; and understanding who I am. By weaving place-based relationships within the fabric of the design gives me pleasure and fulfilment. Seeing the differences in colour, texture, organic forms, pattern, individuality, and beauty excites me. Creating a place where my curiosity is sparked, so I am inquisitive and wonder what is around the corner. With this intrigue I venture deeper into the store. I honour creativity and seek it out. I seek the wonder and awe in the natural textures and materials and see the opportunity for playfulness with what is, and what could be. My mind cannot understand clutter, and I am bored with bland environments, so blending spatial harmony with pools of light, allows my brain to rest on one thing at a time. Colour, texture, using local materials that are indigenous to place. I want to see and connect to the beautiful Black Butt timber, sandstone and granite from my home in the mountains.

I no longer feel a sense of shame and defectiveness when I align myself with my values of joy, playfulness, courage, and adventure. Being alive and connected to the very thing that sustains me is the ultimate joy and sincerely humbles my heart, mind, and soul.

Biophilic design is a sophisticated approach that encourages inspiring design through physical and emotional exploration to spark further curiosity for the inhabitants. It involves appreciating the intricate patterns and the effects of time on objects, such as potted plants, fresh or dried flowers. Rather than feeling crowded, the design creates positive and negative spaces, offering a sense of prospect and refuge.

Retail design shouldn’t be a sea of generic, unremarkable brands. It can honour the history of a location, whether it’s Edinburgh or Melbourne, by incorporating local materials and diverse sensory experiences through lighting and textures. Retail biophilic design provides an opportunity for innovation, supports mental wellbeing, and fosters the human and nature connection we all seek, but may be looking for in the wrong places.

Biophilic design allows you to connect and feel your heart, mind, body, and soul. The truth is that biophilic design heals. It’s time to heal. Heal ourselves, heal each other and heal the planet!

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