

# JOURNAL of BIOPHILIC DESIGN

ISSN 2976-9078  
ISSUE 14 / MARCH 2025



THIRD AGE



First published by The Journal of Biophilic Design 2024, London.  
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| Journal of biophilic design (Print)  | ISSN 2754-2815 |
| Journal of biophilic design (Online) | ISSN 2976-9078 |

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# DESIGN FOR LIFE – BIOPHILIC SPACES HEAL OUR BODIES, MINDS, AND PLANET

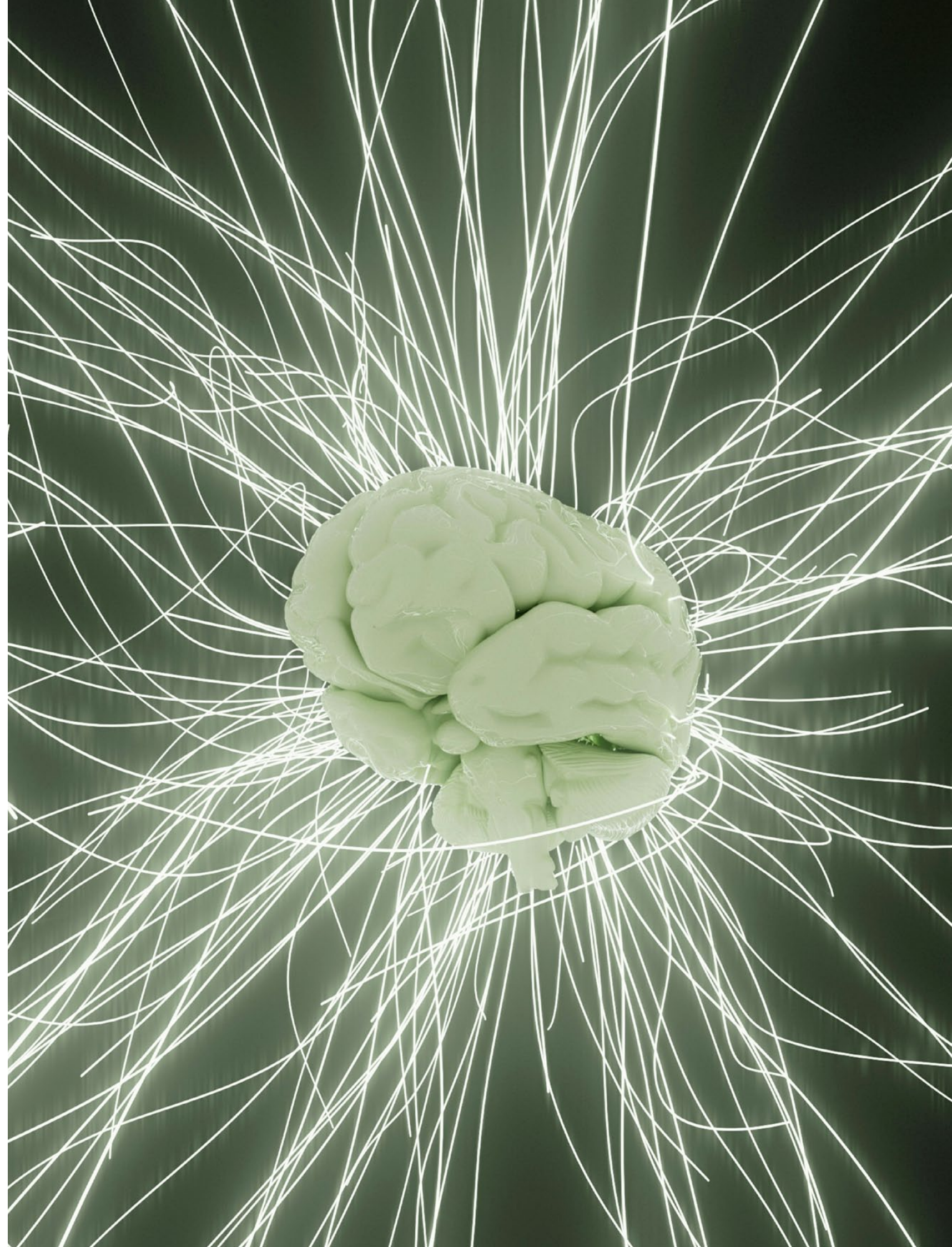
*“Biophilic design isn’t just a trend; it’s a vital blueprint for healing, offering the potential to reconnect our frazzled minds, aging bodies, and a fractured planet. By embracing the power of our senses, we can create environments that nourish the nervous system, promote well-being, and spark the life force necessary for both personal and planetary renewal.”*

## **Chintamani Bird**

**So, what’s the point of all this biophilic stuff! Why should the world care about plants, birds and insects? I am only going to die anyway. We are all going to die, and most of the time, we don’t have a choice in the matter. Why should I care when no one else seems too concerned about the world’s plight?**

I know an architect who is all about sustainability. He even has it on his logo and website. But he still specifies astroturf. When I talk to him, he

argues to keep the status quo and thinks that science is transient and will change back to current business practices. I fight back! I stand my ground, and his argument twists and turns. He says he is all about biophilic design but doesn’t agree with or know the science. He proclaims that he knows what he is talking about. Funny that. I know some things but would never proclaim that I know the most. To him, it’s all about the mighty dollar and how he can position himself.





So, why should I bother? When there are people who really don't care about the greater whole. The omnipresence of humanity and nature and the natural world combined. But then I listen to my heart. I look up at the sky, see the different shades of blue, and get mesmerised by the clouds, which sometimes look like an oil painting. I feel wonder inspired by the audacious awe that swells up within me.

So, why should I care? I will die one day, and everyone I know will, too! But I choose today to claim small and large victories. Sometimes, the victories are masked in trials and tribulations as I recover from Bell's palsy, and the sudden jolt of my humanness comes with a reality check. As I get older, as we all get older, things happen that are out of our control, including the left side of my face becoming paralysed, and I no longer can enjoy a hot cup of tea or drink my green smoothie out of a straw. Oh, my lord, the slurping sounds can be heard for miles. And trying to swoosh the toothpaste around my teeth and mouth comes with some comical relief.

But what happens when my body changes, including my mind, body and spirit? It is often said that biophilic design is based on how we survive, and anthropological studies support this. I want to push this further. Survival is fulfilling our most basic needs, and this is important. Thriving is when we surpass the survival mode of life and go beyond any barriers that would hold us

back. This sounds very cool and ideal, but the critical and most vital elements are missing in this equation. HEALING! Healing is the critical element that traverses the bridge between survival and thriving as we age. Design is amazing, and biophilic design has the incredible potential to heal the wounds and mend the stress that we have placed upon ourselves and on the planet. So, when we try to make changes to this world, we need to remember that there is light and there is darkness. The calm of the ocean is equally as important as the thunder and lightning over a storm-engulfed sea.

Our inner and outer worlds are filled with emotions driven by our senses, which influence our parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems. When we work out regularly or not so regularly at the gym or engage in any form of exercise or activity, as we age or at any age, our nervous system is the first thing that strengthens before our muscles. It makes sense that strengthening our nervous system as we age is vital to remember before we think about strengthening our muscles. It's like a dance with our body and mind, a push-and-pull dynamic influenced by our environment and how we engage with the world. We are a ball of energy in a constant flux of intensities. The brain's job is to decipher through our senses. Our brains and bodies change over time, and as we age, there is an incredible amount of work and research regarding centenarians and how our environment can significantly influence our quality of life.

Our brains can shrink from the age of 40, and if a person is under a significant amount of stress over a long period of time, an accelerated form of aging can happen to the brain. There is an increased risk of dementia and inflammation, which damages brain cells. The functionality of those cells and cortisol surges become toxic to the brain.

Whoa! There is much to consider (although my mouth can only express half of the sound: "Oa!").

There is only one primary function we need to remember of the brain; it exists to help us survive. But it is up to us whether we wish to thrive and potentially heal through the opportunities that are presented to us or audaciously pursue them through passion, connection, and purpose.

Biophilic design supports healing through our senses with the brain and autonomic nervous system. It is time to come out of the dark and see the light of possibilities to help the planet and humanity become one again. We can be wholistically unified and flourish without excluding the darker part of the whole. Looking at the thunder and lightning with awe and fear.

But let's look a little deeper.

As a species, we are constantly finding ways to react and adapt. Our brains are very flexible, so they are continually changing and adapting. The adult brain can rewire itself in ways that neuroscience never anticipated before. The corrosive forces of modernity impact life, so when we design and live in an environment that reduces our ability to connect to those living systems like our senses, community, passion or a sense of purpose, there is a decline in our well-being and quality of life.

The living systems in and outside our body are all connected to diverse environments. Biophilic design can extend our internal environment to the external, enlivening our senses and enriching our lives if we decide to make changes to improve the world around us so that people and the planet can thrive. Our nervous system allows us to interact with the environment and is highly adaptable. By understanding what is happening inside the body and managing what's happening on the outside, the nervous system is at the core of who we are.







My paralysed face is not who I am, although it is a bit frustrating that I can't cry, smile, or even laugh with 100% intensity. Slurping down the dumplings I love so much is not as satisfying but is quite hilarious when no one is watching. But the story I tell through my memories, senses, and life experiences is who I am. My autonomic nervous system, brain, and body have allowed me to survive. But the thriving part is up to me with self-awareness and the decisions I make through passion and conviction. The Japanese call it Ikigai. I prefer to think about it as my audacious, fun-loving, playful and fierce spirit.

So, what is the most important thing to remember when we wish to design as we age?

Our environment is essential. Loneliness can cost fifteen years off your life, and two to six years are lost if you are put into a nursing home or retirement village. Having a community and designing for a community must be a core value when designing biophilic design for the elderly. Oh hell! When you create anything, think community. We are social beings, not social media beings.

We have joints that need to be moved. The body will not create health for the hell of it. So, when designing for the elderly, we must keep things moving with storytelling on the walls, with fields of green or embossed stories that demonstrate the patina of time, birth, death, and rebirth of a tree or seed.

Joints can freeze with immobility. So design spaces that draw people in and create curiosity with textures that can feel cool to the touch, warmth with thermal massing, and colour variations. The amygdala is switched on when a memory is triggered through our senses. I remember watching a documentary about a woman who had severe dementia who listened to music that she knew when she was young and had her memory return for a few minutes after listening to her favourite music. Her son was brought to tears. Our senses are powerful tools to link our story and keep ourselves thriving. Can you imagine what we could do to help people thrive if we used this knowledge of biophilic design and supported the senses, which enriches the brain, strengthens our nervous system, and ultimately helps the body heal?

To answer the question that I asked earlier.

Biophilic design, environmental regeneration, and supporting humankind's condition of thriving and healing are my Ikigai. No matter what, my passion is to see people inspired and find their own passion and community. My life will end. But life is not about me. It is how I live my life. How I choose to make a difference, even through my mistakes I hope to learn and be a better person.

What's your Ikigai?

<https://studiochintamani.com>