



What the heck is biophilia?

YOU KNOW THAT feeling when you walk into a room with beautiful wood floors? Maybe the morning sunlight is pouring through a window, creating a golden glow on the floors. Perhaps the wood paneling is reflecting the light just right, lending a warm aura to the entire space.

Maybe you drive up to a mountain lodge rental and catch your breath at the gorgeous wood exposed beams supporting the roof? Or you might be watching *Maine Cabin Masters* on the DIY Network, and become transfixed with the beautiful eastern white pine they choose for almost every camp. Words might come to mind like comfortable. Charming. Warm. Natural. Believe it or not, there's a word for this magical phenomenon: biophilia.

Merriam-Webster defines biophilia as “a hypothetical human tendency to interact or be closely associated with other forms of life in nature; a desire or tendency to commune with nature.” The word itself was coined by Harvard naturalist Dr. Edward O. Wilson to describe humanity’s “innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes,” and to be drawn toward nature, to feel an affinity for it, a love, a craving. (Let’s be honest: is there a more natural, more green building product than wood? No. There isn’t.)

But is biophilia truly hypothetical, or does our positive reaction to nature and natural products run deeper? Let’s investigate. A 2020 white paper from Think Wood shares research discovering that wood contributes to the health and well-being of building occupants. Among the findings:

- Exposed wood can reduce stress. Humans automatically relax when they are surrounded by elements from the natural world.
- Wood can increase productivity. Wood not only offers diverse design styles, but the trend of biophilic design has been growing for years. Until recently, the link between wood interior has been anecdotal; research is beginning to show that wood does make a difference.
- Natural elements help people heal. A large and growing body of evidence attests to the fact that physical environment impacts healthcare patient stress, safety, staff effectiveness, and quality of care provided.

- Wood and nature support learning. The restorative benefits of nature on the mentally fatigued is being established through an increasing number of studies.

A 2018 report prepared for Forest & Wood Products Australia by Pollinate shares similar key findings:

- Office design: productivity can be increased by 8% and rates of well-being by 13%;
- Education spaces: higher rates of learning; improved test results, concentration levels, and attendance;
- Healthcare spaces: post-operative rates of recovery reduced by 8.5%, reduced pain medication by 22%;
- Retail: the presence of landscaping has been found to increase average rental rates on retail spaces; customers were willing to pay 8-12% more for goods and services;
- Homes: 7-8% less crime in areas with access to nature and can command 4-5% more in property process.

A few additional findings from the Australian report:

- Workers in workplaces with more wood have higher levels of satisfaction;
- Biophilic design elements (wood, plants, natural light) correlate with increased workplace satisfaction;
- Workers surrounded by exposed wood feel more connected to nature and have more positive associations with their workplace;
- Those in wooden working environments have higher levels of wellbeing and take less leave; and
- Wood is correlated with higher levels of concentration, improved mood, and personal productivity.

Well then! While many of these results focus on built environments such as healthcare facilities, businesses and schools, it makes sense that the same effects hold true for people within their homes. If wood makes them feel better at work or school, imagine what walking into a home filled with beautiful, natural wood will do for their well-being.

The next time a customer looks you in the eye and says, “I don’t know, wood just makes me *feel* better...,” now you know there’s a word for it... biophilia.

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