Designing for Well-Being and Harmony

Minimalism in design is far from a new concept. The “less is more” philosophy where forms are reduced down to only their necessary elements has been en vogue since the 1960’s.

But building the case for minimal, simplistic design isn’t always just about making an aesthetic statement. The intentional design approach for Helio was about creating a seating experience that would blend harmoniously with its surroundings.

Rather than framing the chair to be a focal point in a setting, it was designed to give people more unobstructed access to air and light, striking that perfect balance of visual continuity and personal comfort.

But why design a chair specifically to optimize its environment? Because when it comes to daylight, views of nature, and the color of your surroundings—all proven moderators of mood and performance—minimizing the visual disruption of these elements is essential for flow and well-being.

KEY FINDINGS

- Access to daylight has proven positive effects on alertness, regulating the body’s circadian rhythm, and minimizing eyestrain and headaches.
- Natural elements and sunlight exposure relate positively to job satisfaction, well-being, and productivity.
- The use of certain colors can impact factors such as productivity, creativity, and communication.
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It seems obvious to point out that people have an intuitive desire to experience daylight and that they feel more energized and positive when doing so. Lack of regular sunlight exposure and its negative effects were discovered in the early 1980s when Seasonal Affected Disorder (SAD) was first formally termed.¹

Those who suffer from SAD were shown to lack energy, have difficulty with concentrating and decision making, and exhibit signs of social withdrawal. Conversely, many studies since have affirmed the powerful health benefits of daylight.

Regular exposure to natural light serves to balance our circadian rhythms which dictate important bodily functions such as sleep regulation and hormonal release linked to mood.² When these rhythms and hormones are disrupted, people experience stress.³

The beneficial impact of daylight on people also extends to the workplace, which is well-supported by research substantiating the positive relationship between natural light and worker well-being, productivity and creativity.⁴ Not only has daylight exposure been connected to job satisfaction and increased organizational commitment, it has been found to be the number one wanted feature in the workplace even outranking other perks such as onsite cafeterias and fitness centers.⁵, ⁶

Reinforcing this connection to employee health, according to a recent study conducted by Cornell University Professor Dr. Alan Hedge, workers in daylit office environments reported a 51% percent drop in symptoms of eyestrain, a 63% drop in headaches, and a 56% reduction in drowsiness— all which can detract from workplace productivity and impact employee absenteeism.⁷
SECTION 2

Force of Nature

Beyond regular exposure to daylight, there is much evidence to support the proven benefits of biophilic or nature-inspired elements in interior spaces to worker well-being and productivity.\(^8\)

Biophilia is the school of thought that suggests there is an instinctive biological connection between human beings and nature which affects our personal well-being, productivity, and societal relationships.\(^9\)

Leading organizations such as the World Green Building Council, the International Well Building Institute, and Human Spaces each have published extensive reports providing well-documented research on how biophilia-based design principles featuring the presence of natural elements can promote health, well-being and productivity in the workplace.\(^{10}\)

Exposure, whether through window views of nature or through the use of plants and water features within the workplace, has been associated with decreased levels of depression and anxiety, lower blood pressure, enhanced mental stamina and focus, and improved cognitive functions.\(^{11, 12}\)

In contrast, workers in offices with poorer views and no contact with nature used significantly more sick leave.\(^{13}\) In addition, the presence of nature provides the much needed sensory change and visual stimulation for neurological micro-breaks which can affect a worker’s ability to stay alert and attentive.\(^{14}\)
SECTION 3
Color One’s View

Color is an essential component for how we, as humans, experience our immediate surroundings and the world at large. The vital link between color and human emotion was explored as early as the 19th century when the German poet Goethe published his treatise called *Theory of Colours*. 15 While not scientifically derived, it was the precursor to the modern day approach to color psychology which is the study of colors and their effect on people.

Studies have shown that the use of certain colors can impact factors such as productivity, creativity, and communication. 16 In Human Spaces’ global report, which surveyed 7,600 employees from 16 countries around the world, over two-thirds (67%) of respondents reported feeling happy when walking into bright office environments accented with green, yellow, or blue colors. 17 Architectural and design firms frequently use the language of color to drive purpose, culture, and brand and to create an atmosphere where work patterns can be informed within an environment. 18

SECTION 4
In Full Flow

Understanding the considerable impact that daylight, nature, and color have on worker performance and well-being, it was important for Kimball to develop a seating solution that provided unfettered access to these elements. Helio’s design features a light scale, neutral palette, and seamlessly integrated controls to provide less visual distraction and promote design harmony. And because Helio can be used in a variety of settings, it creates cohesion, flow, and unity throughout an entire workspace.

By allowing the focus to be on its surroundings, Helio strives to elevate comfort and well-being at work and enhance the employee experience. Ω


Terrapin Bright Green, The Economics of Biophilia, 2012, p.5


“Workplace Strategies that Enhance Performance, Health and Wellness workplace,”

Maria Popova, “19th-Century Insight Into the Psychology of Color and Emotion,”

