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“Biophilic Design: The Architecture of Life” – It’s a journey worth taking - by Steven Schleider

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We did not coin the headline of this article. It's the title of a documentary about the relationship between the natural world and built environment; how deprivation from being around nature negatively affects us; and how being around nature is beneficial to our health, state of mind and productivity.

As a real estate developer, property owner, facilities manager, corporate real estate executive or consultant, the more you know about biophilic design, the more conducive you may be to assimilate its principles, thereby enhancing the work environment, adding to productivity and cost savings, and increasing the value of properties.

Green buildings in and of themselves, are not biophilic. A green building will decrease its environmental impact but they do not necessarily reconnect the building's inhabitants to nature. To achieve that, a building must have a biophilic design that will enhance the well-being, health, productivity and peace of mind of the people within.

The concept of the Biophilia Hypothesis can get quite complicated, touching upon evolution, conservation, psychology and biology. Biophilic design is only one component, but the one currently generating the most interest with regard to real estate and that, as a commercial real estate appraiser and long-time advocate of green buildings, environmental preservation and conservation, attracts my full attention as a way to increase property value.

The latest U.S. Census figures say 81% of the population lives in cities and their suburbs where access to nature on a daily basis has been sacrificed to the built environment. One need only look around at the city's concrete canyons, steel skyscrapers and paved sidewalks to know the Census figures are correct. Most of us, especially those of us who live, work or do both in New York City, live, with rare exception, in a dissociated world of gray, glass and neon.

There is a burgeoning trend among architects and interior designers who are embracing biophilic design, and the results are extraordinarily beautiful and healthful.

The marriage of design and nature includes the popularity of freestanding, vertical, living green walls and gardens. The systems are available for commercial installations and are an easy, relatively inexpensive way to gloriously green a lobby, conference area, office or landscape.

Simply adding a liberal number of green plants within an existing office; having employees experience more natural light as well as views of nature; and improving ventilation, such as pumping in fresh air, will, according to the latest research, contribute to less absenteeism and more alert, focused, healthier and productive employees.

We have long been a proponent of green roofs, living architecture that are visible, beautiful, useable and valuable to tenants and building owners alike, as well as migratory wildlife. Committing to a green roof will change an ugly, underused part of a building's real estate into a major asset.

The benefits of green roofs – as with all biophilic design - are numerous and compelling. For one, they reduce the Urban Heat Island Effect. Green roofs act as building insulators, reducing energy usage and the extent and cost of air conditioning and heat as well as air pollution and greenhouse gasses.

Green roofs help control runoff as vegetation absorbs water that, as runoff, contains a high amount of pollution and contaminants.

Green roofs can also extend roof life, reduce AC and heating costs, serve as a storm water management tool and fire retardant, reduce noise, contribute to air quality and greatly enhance a property's marketability and value by providing viewable or useable garden and recreational space.

Need we say that tenants who experience the benefits of biophilic design are less likely to move, resulting in outstanding tenant retention that adds to property value.

The documentary, "Biophilic Design: The Architecture of Life" is a beautifully filmed and written journey where you will "encounter buildings that connect people and nature - hospitals where patients heal faster, schools where children's test scores are higher, offices where workers are more productive, and communities where people know more of their neighbors and families thrive." It's a journey worth taking.

Log onto <http://www.biophilicdesign.net>. You can rent or buy the film; find references for relevant books; and, at very least, view the trailer.

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