

I care (my home)

Chiara Marchetti

AIPAA, Associazione Italiana Psicologia Ambientale e Architettonica

Abstract

There are various schools of thought in environmental psychology as to what may constitute the effect of pro-environmental actions on the wellbeing of the individual. This paper focuses on design choices aimed at wellbeing in terms of the home environment. Much attention has been given to "green" design choices, moving from Passive Houses to Zero Impact, from Biomorphic Design to Feng Shui, and more recently to Biophilic Design, an approach based on a comprehensive exploration of the innate human affinity for Nature. This paper proposes a perspective based on the principle of "I Care (My Home)" in which each design choice is dictated by a different meaning that the subject attributes to it. In this way, one's home acquires the potential to become regenerative and create wellbeing. A domestic environment without subjective meaning risks becoming merely a beautiful environment. In order to generate wellbeing, there must be a reciprocal empathetic relationship between the inhabitant who cares for the house and the house which cares for the inhabitant.

ISSN 2384-8677

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13135/2384-8677/3203>

Article history: Submitted March 25, 2019. Accepted May 1, 2019. Published June 21, 2019

Citation: Marchetti, C. (2019). I care (my home). *Visions for Sustainability*, 11: 29-36.

Copyright: ©2019 Marchetti, C. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Competing Interests: The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Corresponding Author: Chiara Marchetti, chiamarchetti@libero.it

Introduction

This paper seeks to pose some questions and propose some hypotheses concerning the relationship between wellbeing and home, both of which can be considered in terms of a recent paradigm shift towards complexity. From this perspective, the *complexus*, the texture of complexity, “comes from different threads and becomes one. All the various complexities intertwine, therefore, and weave together, to form the unity of complexity; but the unity of the *complexus* is not eliminated by the variety and diversity of the complexities that have woven it” (Morin, 1995, p. 56). The eternal human search for wellbeing finds refuge in the home as a complex of physical elements: the architectural composition, the materials used, the forms and the shapes, the voids and

¹. This search for a dwelling may mean building your own home, choosing it, furnishing it, or customizing it and creates a personal dynamic in the quest for a place in which to shelter, rest and find wellbeing. This means that, within the perspective of complexity, architecture, psychology, sociology, biology and anthropology are all interrelated. Understanding complexity means reaching a synthesis of four dimensions – biological, cognitive, social and ecological – within a vision of life as a network of relationships (Capra, 2014).

From green housing to biophilic design

Since its advent, green housing has offered a number of ways of interpreting the relationship between places in which to live and wellbeing, with varying degrees of emphasis on the biological, cognitive, social and ecological dimensions. In the 1990s Passive Houses were developed in Sweden and became popular mainly in other Scandinavian countries, together with Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, reaching other countries such as Northern Italy only to a limited extent. Passive Houses are designed to maximize energy efficiency and are built from airtight construction material that must be high performing in terms of energy requirements but are not necessarily natural. Air recirculation, necessary both for reasons of health and hygiene, is controlled by a ventilation system with a high-performance motor-driven heat recovery system. The sole aim is that of reducing the building’s ecological footprint and other dimensions that determine various possible choices in terms of type and style of housing are not considered (Berto and Barbiero, 2017). Further developments led to Zero Energy Buildings (ZNE) and subsequently Zero Net Energy Buildings (NZEB).

A different school of thought regarding green housing stems from the emergence of the criterion of the sustainability of the materials used. Priority is given to natural materials, such as wood, straw and clay, that are both kilometer zero and renewable. A further alternative approach is that of building houses made from recycled materials, with particular importance given to the scenic

the solids. Each one of these elements is dynamic and personal. At the same time, all the psychological elements - the sense of refuge as a space for body and soul, the status symbol, the expectations, the social relations, the wellbeing that can derive if certain conditions are satisfied – are equally dynamic and personal. Many of the positive emotions we seek in our house have a long evolutionary history and are formed in the early stages of a child’s life (Barbiero and Marconato, 2016). The same is also true of the macro-relations such as the house in its context and in relation to Nature.

Renzo Piano defines the work of the architect as “an ancient profession such as hunting, fishing, farming and exploring. After the search for food comes the search for the dwelling. At a certain point, man, dissatisfied with the shelters offered by nature, became an architect...”

qualities of the dwelling and less emphasis placed on its being high performing and eco-friendly. Examples include the building made from second-hand containers in the London Container City (Greater London Residential area) or in the Johannesburg Mill Junction Project (a colorful four-floor student residence, built on two former wheat silos).

Biomorphic Design has introduced a concern for following the rules that determine growth in Nature. In this approach, engineering is concerned with redefining space in order to create evocative sceneries. The emphasis is on the shape of the building rather than the materials used. The visual impact created has indeed at times led to difficulty in achieving a full enjoyment of the internal environment, probably because the human brain tends to favor maps and pathways following straight lines.

Architectural research on wellbeing has not been limited to materials and shape. In recent years there has been a rediscovery of *Feng Shui*, an ancient oriental discipline, and *Vastu*, Indian version of the same discipline. Both of them start from the idea that space has its own energy and that this feature must be harnessed in order to achieve wellbeing and prosperity for the inhabitants of dwellings. While in part recalling ancient oriental tradition, contemporary western fashion tends to offer customers a simplistic and commercial version of it, completely void of its original meaning (Bonaiuto, 2010; Chan, 2015; Keun, 2017).

Biophilic design emerges as an endeavor to go beyond previous approaches to green housing, with their varying emphases on environmental impact or personal wellbeing, in order to introduce a scientific approach to understanding the innate human affinity for Nature (Wilson, 1984) and incorporating this into a paradigm shift in design buildings and communities. In this respect, spaces conceived and realized according to Restorative Design ideas can be effective as promoters of health and wellbeing, in terms of enhancing sensory perception and promoting positive feelings, stress recovery and psychological regeneration. The approach to Biophilic Design proposed by Terrapin Bright Green (Browning, 2014) is based on fourteen patterns divided into 3 macro

¹ <https://www.tosilab.it/en/trendwatching-at-traverso-le-archistar/>

areas: Nature in the Space (visual connection with Nature, non-visual connection with Nature, non-rhythmic sensual stimuli, thermal/airflow variability, presence of water, dynamic and diffused light, connection to natural systems); Natural Analogues (biomorphic forms and patterns, material connection to Nature, complexity and order); Nature of the Space (prospect, refuge, mystery, risk/peril).

Based on combinations of such patterns, biophilic design can be adapted to both the surrounding environment and the intended users of that space. Models can be applied at different scales from a micro-space (a room), a medium space (a building) up to a macro-scale (a neighborhood or a city). A biophilic project can be seen as promoting a fractal growth as a form of natural geometry creating patterns of variety and similarity (Kellert and Calabrese, 2015).

Care and Restorativeness

As Biology, Psychology and Architecture have become influenced by an increasing attention to issues such as ecology, consciousness building, respect for Nature and wellbeing, a range of both scientific and non-scientific literature has come to deal with topics such as dwelling, decluttering and spare cleaning, in terms of Eastern Philosophy, such as Zen practice. Moreover, in Europe two more trends have emerged, defined by the Scandinavian words: *hygge* and *lagom*. *Hygge* expresses the mental and emotional wellbeing coming from small, daily things. It is a lifestyle based on a sense of comfort, security and welcoming, a familiar atmosphere that makes people feel more peaceful (Wiking, 2017). *Lagom*, which literally means the “right quantity”, is a lifestyle based on the key concepts of reduce, reuse and recycle.

Such ideas and trends can be seen as part of collective unconscious projections which are necessarily influencing the development of architecture. On one hand, the focus is on the house, considered as a refuge, an oasis where people can regenerate from external environmental stress. On the other hand, the focus is on Nature and Earth protection. Together these produce a sort of New Renaissance, centered not only on Man but rather on the interaction Man-Nature. In this respect, we could produce an image of Leonardo’s “Homo Vitruviano” circumscribed within the globe, where the relationship is bijective and interchanging but not hierarchical. The focus is now on the relationship between subjects and not on the subjects themselves. As Mallgrave puts it: “in the greater social and cultural context, design is the playful and tangible self modification (of our physical and emotional reactions)

through our environments” (2013, p. 151). If we care about our environment, we care about ourselves.

We have to feel emphatic with our home, in terms of what Gallese calls “embodied simulation” (Gallese, Sinigaglia, 2011). Living in a physical environment, we simulate shapes and materials by using our body, we “feel” the naturalness of wood or the softness of velvet. We become aware of what we like or don’t like and what creates wellbeing for us. In this sense, choosing the ideal living room has no objective answer, but only a subjective one, and wellbeing depends on an attitude of “I care”, both in terms of a physical and a phenomenal home environment.

Care about and of the environment, both built and natural, is thus fundamental. Research has shown that if the urban green is well maintained and easily accessible then it represents an important component in residential satisfaction (Bonaiuto, 1999). In the same way, a house needs the same kind of care in order to achieve the same result of satisfaction and facilitate a process of regeneration. While certain kinds of specific design can provide a basis for restorative wellness, by themselves they are not enough. It is in the interaction Man-House that “something” actually happens, where the house welcomes, protects and defends because Man cares about House, a care that creates a reciprocal resonance effect. In this way, “I care” becomes the quid of Morin’s *complexus*. “I care” becomes personal and full of meaning, whereas a domestic environment with no personal meaning will simply be a nice place, perhaps even a sterile place.

Restorative Home Settings

What follows is a series of photographs I asked a number of people to send me of the place in their house they “use” for experiencing restoring and then the position they took the picture from. I also asked if they have some routine that enables them to be more relaxed. The photographs show how taking care of your environment is all about an order which is creative and lived in, but not maniacal. Personal objects and cultural references are clearly in evidence, not hidden. The relaxation routine is expressed through simple gestures: listening to one’s favorite music, reading a book, lighting a scented candle or incense, placing fresh flowers in a vase, each of which illustrates how taking care of your house is a part of the desire to take care of yourself.

Each photograph is considered first through a description of the physical environment and then through an analysis of correspondences with the 14 patterns of Biophilic Design proposed by Terrapin Bright Green, even though none of the examples used was originally designed according to biophilic premises².

² The photographs used have been authorized by the authors exclusively for this publication. For any other use, please contact: chiamarchetti@libero.it



1. Tuscany, Italy

Description. The restorative home spot is an armchair in natural fabric with footrest, from which can be seen a large window which opens towards the Tuscan hills. The ritual of relaxation is to put fresh flowers from the garden in a vase, sit in an armchair, light incense and read looking out the window.

Nature in the Space: visual connection with Nature is enhanced by virtue of a large French window overlooking the garden.

Natural Analogues: natural furnishings such as the wooden bookcase and elements of care such as flowers collected in the garden. The distribution of the furniture emphasizes the coexistence of complexity and order.

Nature of the Space: both prospect and refuge are clearly in evidence.



2. Udine, Italy

Description. The restorative home spot is a white sofa on which is placed a hand-painted linen sheet depicting leaves. The ritual of relaxation is to read a book, listen to music, light a scented candle.

Nature in the Space: non-visual connection with Nature.

Natural Analogues: material connection with Nature by materials and elements such a parquet and organic linens, that create a pleasurable sense of place. The emphasis is more on order than complexity.

Nature of the Space: the emphasis is more on prospect than on refuge.



3. Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy

Description. The restorative home spot is a large, dark, modular sofa, where all the family can sit together. The place is next to the fireplace. The ritual is to listen to good music, have a good glass of wine and chat.

Nature in the Space: non-visual connection with Nature.

Natural Analogues: material connection with Nature by materials and a toy monkey. The emphasis is more on order than complexity.

Nature of the Space: The emphasis is more on refuge, in the form of a dark-colored sofa, than on prospect.



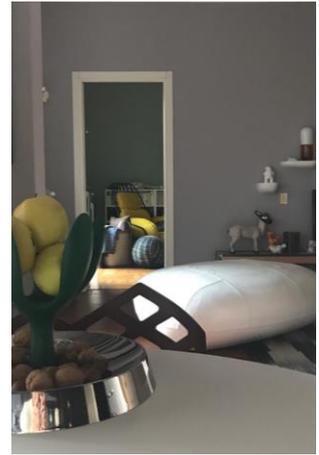
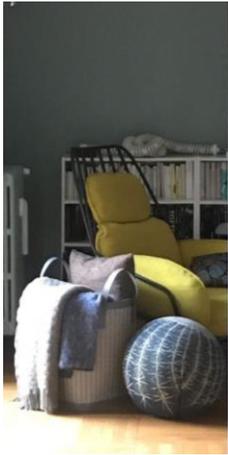
4. Iseo Lake, Lombardia, Italy.

Description. The restorative home spot is an armchair with a footrest. The ritual is to disconnect the phone, turn on a diffuser of essences and look out of the French window or at the picture that represents the lake.

Nature in the Space: visual connection with Nature is enhanced by a large French window overlooking the garden.

Natural Analogues: the choice and distribution of the furniture emphasize the coexistence of complexity and order.

Nature of the Space: both prospect and refuge are clearly in evidence.



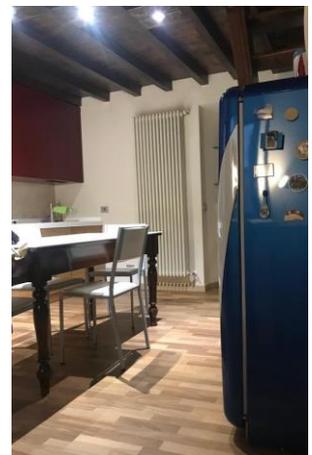
5. Milan, Italy.

Description. The restorative home spot is a yellow armchair together with a pouf made in the shape of a cactus. From this point can be seen the kitchen and a piece of furniture on which are placed souvenirs. The ritual of relaxation is to listen to music, light a scented candle and read design magazines.

Nature in the Space: non-visual Connection with Nature.

Natural Analogues: there is a balance between sophisticated design furniture and biomorphic design. The emphasis is more on order than complexity.

Nature of the Space: the emphasis is more on prospect - from a vibrant armchair - than on refuge.



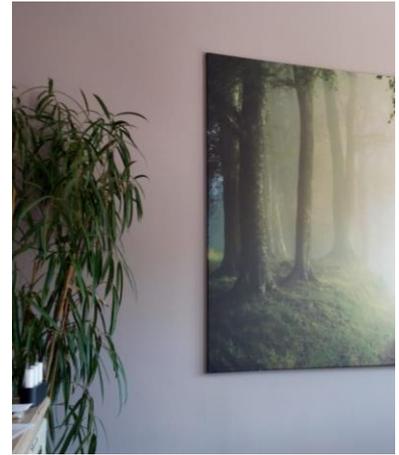
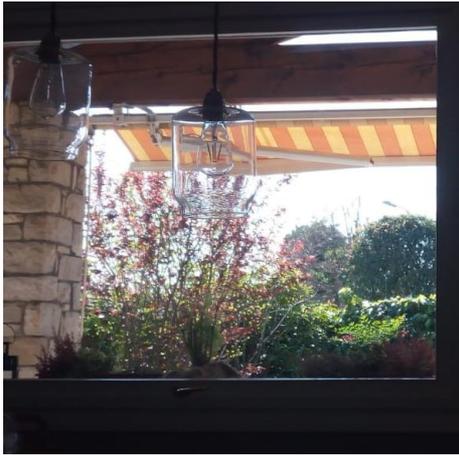
6. Cellatica (Gussago), Lombardia, Italy.

Description. The restorative home spot is a burgundy leather sofa from which can be seen the window overlooking the garden and the kitchen. The ritual of relaxation is drinking something, beer in summer and herbal tea in winter, silence the phone and sit silently reading a book.

Nature in the Space: visual connection with nature is enhanced by the window looking outside.

Natural Analogues: a large painting of a natural scene with a bridge is located behind the sofa. The parquet is made from material that connects with Nature. The emphasis is more on order than complexity.

Nature of the Space: Refuge and Prospect are balanced in the warm colors of the sofa.



7. Brescia, Italy.

Description. The restorative home spot is an armchair with a pattern of leaves from which you can see the large window overlooking the garden and a photograph of a forest. The ritual of relaxation is to take care of the plants at home, drink herbal tea and read a book.

Nature in the Space: visual connection with Nature is enhanced by a large window overlooking the garden and a real tree.

Natural Analogues: the choice and distribution of the furniture emphasize the coexistence of complexity and order. Nature is represented very clearly in a poster and in an armchair decoration as well as in natural wooden furniture and linen.

Nature of the Space: both prospect and refuge are clearly in evidence.



8. Castelmontecchio, Bergamo, Italy.

Description. The restorative home spot is an armchair in green leather, in front of a clearly visible private garden, with a sofa in purple leather opposite it. The ritual of relaxing is drinking herbal tea and listening to jazz music.

Nature in the Space: visual connection with Nature is enhanced by a large French window overlooking the garden.

Natural Analogues: natural furnishings such as the wooden cabinet. Complexity and order are balanced.

Nature of the Space: both prospect and refuge are clearly in evidence.



9. Franciacorta, Brescia, Italy.

Description. The restorative home place is the bedroom, from which there is a wide view of the landscape. The indoor ritual of relaxation is to play the piano and have a drink and, in the summer, to sit on the balcony and contemplate nature.

Nature in the Space: visual connection with Nature is enhanced by a large French window looking outside towards a natural hill.

Natural Analogues: the natural elements are white. Complexity and order are balanced.

Nature of the Space: both prospect and refuge are clearly in evidence.

CONCLUSIONS

Every design choice is driven by the different meaning that every person ascribes to a given Home-Space. This meaning then identifies the pathway to be taken. There is a current tendency to look towards a more conscious world, both in terms of life and architectural choices, a new empathetic way of living, largely made up of small connections to the real world. Within this perspective, house is not only a physical space but also an ancestral symbol, the place of personal identity. Taking care of one's house is taking care of oneself. In order to create a relationship of reciprocal empathy, the inhabitants of a dwelling must care for it so that it can care for them. Only in this way can a house be restorative and give rise to wellbeing.

References

- Barbiero G., Marconato, C. (2016). Biophilia as emotion. *Visions for Sustainability*, 6, 45-51. Disponibile in: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13135/2384-8677/1755>
- Berto, R., Barbiero, G. (2017). The Biophilic Quality Index: A Tool to Improve a Building from "Green" to Restorative. *Visions for Sustainability*, 8: 38-45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13135/2384-8677/2333>
- Bonaiuto, M., Aiello, A., Perugini, M., Bonnes, M., & Ercolani, A.P. (1999). Multidimensional perception of residential environment quality and neighbourhood attachment in the urban environment. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 19: 331-352.

- Bonaiuto, M., Bilotta, E., Stolfa, A. (2010). Feng Shui and environmental psychology: A critical comparison. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 27: 23-34.
- Browning, W.D., Ryan, C.O., Clancy, J.O. (2014). 14 Patterns of Biophilic Design. New York: Terrapin Bright Green, LLC.
- Capra, F. (2014). *The Systems View of Life. A Unifying Vision*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Chan, S. (2015) Green Building Design Related to Feng Shui Issues in Taiwan. *Journal of Engineering and Architecture June 2015, Vol. 3, No. 1*, pp. 19-27
- Gallese, V., Sinigaglia, C (2011). What is so special about embodied simulation? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 15 (11): 515. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2011.09.003>
- Kellert, S., Calabrese, E. (2015). *The Practice of Biophilic Design*. www.biophilic-design.com
- Keun, C.J., (2017) A Study on Feng Shui's Environmental Benefits in the Different Types of Housing in Hong Kong *Department of Architecture & Architectural Engineering Graduate School of Engineering Seoul National University*
- Mallgrave, H.F. (2013) *Architecture and Embodiment: The Implications of the New Sciences and Humanities for Design*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Morin E. (1995) *Il metodo. Ordine, disordine, organizzazione*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Wiking, M., (2017) *Hygge. La via danese alla felicità*. Mondadori, Milano.
- Wilson, E.O. (1984). *Biophilia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.