

SUSTAINABILITY

## Biophilic design uplifting branded luxury spaces

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*Tuning to nature for inspiration, prestige hotels, retail spaces and more are updating their architecture. Image credit: SHHotels & Resorts*

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By EMILY IRIS DEGN

An increasingly popular concept is taking over opulent interiors.

Finding its way into hotels, residences, retail openings, restaurants and beyond, biophilic design is becoming a new way of life for luxury. The nature-inspired architectural concept provides an opportunity for brands of all kinds to embrace sustainability as consumers around the world ask for it in droves.

"For high-end industries like luxury retail, hospitality and home design that aim to create an unmatched client experience, biophilic design elevates spaces to be uplifting, inspiring and rejuvenating," said Chelsea Richardson, principal and vice president at [Jeffrey DeMure + Associates Architects Planners, Inc.](#), Roseville.

"It provides a sense of warmth and vitality that resonates on a deeper human level," Ms. Richardson said. "Luxury is ultimately about crafting emotional experiences, and biophilic design taps into our core affinity for nature to forge deeper connections and craft unforgettable environments.

"The luxury market recognizes the impact of thoughtfully integrating nature into their spaces."

Inside, outside

Biophilic design, at its core, is a nurturing of humankind's relationship to the planet through building structure and decoration.

Indirect and direct nature are both utilized to bring Earth a little closer. Using elements like native plants, open-air layouts, untreated wood and skylights, those indoors can still feel connected to what is outside.



*Biophilic design can be employed via the construction of a building itself or through the use of plants and the four elements for decorations.  
Image credit: 1 Hotels*

"Biophilic design is centered around connecting people to the natural environment within built spaces," Ms. Richardson said.

"It incorporates elements like natural light, greenery, natural materials, and links to nature in order to create uplifting environments that nurture our inherent human bond with nature," she said. "Even choices of color, pattern and texture that are closely linked with the natural environment can provide a sense of well-being, calm, and rejuvenation within a space."

This type of architecture is especially useful in cities, where direct access to greenery is often limited depending on urban planning.

Many luxury establishments are tapping into the power of biophilic design for this purpose, including hospitality group 1 Hotels.

The brand's new Mayfair location in London is its United Kingdom flagship and first opening in Europe. The stay has nine stories that overlook the trees of Green Park, and is a reconstruction, rather than a new construction the company repurposed 80 percent of the structure that was already standing there in order to minimize the environmental impact.



*1 Hotel's Mayfair stay brings new life to a fallen oak tree from Sussex, which now serves as the reservations desk. Image credit: 1 Hotels*

This addition to the 1 Hotels portfolio is in line with building certification BREEAM's Excellent level, its exteriors turned into vertical landscapes alive with lush plants. The gesture can help lessen the urban heat island effect in London, a common environmental phenomenon that explains why cities tend to be warmer than rural locales.

Inside, the 181 rooms welcome guests with British moss-lined walls. Over 200 indigenous plant species grow throughout the hotel, complementing the nature art pieces made by locals that are installed around the interiors.

Salvaged wood, raw textiles and earth tones also assist with the overall effect.

*Marriott is providing education on biophilic design with architect Carlos Couturier in Oaxaca*

The same strategy can be found at Woodend, a Mayan restaurant owned by LVMH-owned hospitality group Belmond.

Located on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, the decor and building itself were inspired by the surrounding jungle ([see story](#)).

Luxury retail is getting on board as well, like British department store Fortnum & Mason, which recently teamed up with "Eco-Parametric" French architect Arthur Mamou-Mani to create a permanent art piece ([see story](#)).

For consumers wanting something even more immersive, hospitality group Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts has been advertising its Tented Camp Golden Triangle. The stay allows guests to travel comfortably while also enjoying an open-air arrangement.



*Nature's shapes and functions inform biophilic design, such as honeycomb shapes for communal spaces and branching patterns for optimum airflow. Image credit: Marriott*

Located at the crossroads of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, the Mekong River acts as the soundscape for the five-star retreat.

The space is visibly inspired by the rainforest around it. Dark wood, thatched roofs, canvas, netting and natural shades weave the landscape into every physical aspect of the venue.

Though expeditions on the water and treks through the trees are offered, even if customers stayed inside their rooms, they would still be immersed in the vibrant ecosystem thanks to the green planning.

The booking reads similar to Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita, an all-inclusive tent oasis in Mexico ([see story](#)) that upon opening this year has made quite the buzz in hospitality.



*The brand's newly-awarded hotel mimics the geological composition of the land around it. Image credit: Four Seasons*

Since this launch, the group has made waves in the country via another resort in Tamarindo, being one of *Architectural Digests* 2023 Great Design Hotel Award winners. The list features 21 new properties around the world that the publication labels as "must book" stays.

The accommodation was designed by Mexican architects Victor Legorreta and Mauricio Rocha, who formed the firm LegoRocha for the project. Working with local professionals, the duo blended the Four Season's famed comfort and the peninsula's topography in their designs.

Using nature as a common ground between pre-Hispanic culture and colonial heritage, the visionaries found a way to capture the wholeness of the region.



*Existing hotels and luxury stores can add biophilia to their spaces through the addition of plants, natural fibers, wood and even literature. Image credit: 1 Hotels*

This attitude of intersectionality often factors into luxury's approach to biophilic architecture, something that Swiss watchmaker Rolex is diving deeper into as it pushes to make the style more familiar to all ([see story](#)).

So as high-end retailers open new spaces that encapsulate the design concept ([see story](#)) and hospitality continues to show support for nature-forward layouts, it seems that this branch of building will keep fueling experiential luxury in all its forms.

Open to residents

Real estate is paying particular attention to biophilic design, as home buyers indicate a bolstered desire for sustainability and access to nature ([see story](#)).

"How we design our environments, our homes, has a measurably proven effect on our health and well-being," said

Stacey Lapuk, president of [Stacey Lapuk Interiors](#), Novato.

"Incorporated into the recent science of neuroaesthetics, biophilic interior design principles illustrate that when specific patterns found in nature are incorporated into our built environments, we experience happiness," Ms. Lapuk said. "The levels of our stress hormone, cortisol, along with our blood pressure and heart rate are lowered.

"Our serotonin, known as the 'feel-good' hormone, increases and so we feel more productive and creative."



*Natural textures are growing to be staples in the world of high-end interiors. Image credit: 1 Hotels*

Builders are taking note, turning to Scandinavian style ([see story](#)) and Earthships for inspiration, both longtime upholders of the architectural principle.

Of course, the land itself is also sparking a wealth of creativity.

"The simple fact is that we are genetically predisposed to connect to, and live in beauty and nature," Ms. Lapuk said.

"We have a biological need to surround ourselves with nature and the natural world," she said. "Across all cultures and throughout the world, we are innately wired physiologically, psychologically and spiritually to live in beauty, and we inherently understand that beauty is found in nature.

"We simply feel better when we're connected to nature."

Reflecting the shapes and textures found in Big Sky, Montana, U.A.E-based hospitality brand One&Only Resorts is opening the Moonlight Basin Resort and Private Homes. The move marks the first Alpine stay for the developer.

To celebrate the occasion, the company is putting architect Tom Kundig in the spotlight.

*Mr. Kundig, the principal of a Seattle firm, illustrates the way the land fuels his art*

In a new short film, the professional speaks about his ethos for the residences, sharing with viewers the ways that the mountains, valley, river, flowers, meadows, tree branches, colorful foliage and flourishing wildlife informed his designs.

Using the forms and hues of these characteristics as a baseline, his houses are meant to blend in with high-elevation nature.

At the top of the world in Montana, One&Only joins the rest of luxury in crafting a sense of place and earthly anchoring through biophilic architecture.

There are countless other real estate names enabling affluent clientele to live in a home that reflects their relationship with the planet back to them.



*Home buyers tend to lean toward purchases that bring the outside in. Image credit: 1 Hotels*

A concern for the planet runs deeper than aesthetics, as revealed by the latest in-home technology and fixtures, but this type of construction recognizes the human component of the visual.

The green design philosophy offers something hopeful because sustainable living is not just about daunting numbers and facts provided by lab coat wearers. The lifestyle is also about beauty, a value people are far from giving up on.

"Whether consciously or not, when we see natural geometric structures in our environment, we think and perform better, we feel better and stronger, and we're more anchored in our lives," Ms. Lapuk said.

"We're proactively living our lives, rather than simply reacting to the billions of bits of information with which we find ourselves constantly bombarded," she said. "Biophilic interiors reflect this human connection to nature, which has been integrated into our living spaces.

"We've always surrounded ourselves with the natural world, but now we have the science to help us understand how to deliberately implement these 'tools' the use and presence of water, natural light, air, mystery, rhythm, circadian color references and the like can be addressed and designed for our greatest joy."

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